

Five laws of library science

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THE FIRST LAW

THE first law of Library Science, like the first law of any other science, embodies an elemental truth. In fact, it is so self-evident that one may be inclined to say that it is trivial. But, that is an invariable characteristic of all first laws. Take, for example, the first Upanishadic law of conduct (*Satyam Vada*—speak the truth), or the first law of motion.

The first law of Library Science is: BOOKS ARE FOR USE. No one will question the correctness of this law. But, in actual practice, the story is different. The law is seldom borne in mind by library authorities. “We may, examine the history of any aspect of library practice and we shall find ample evidence of a deplorable neglect of this law.

Let us take, in the first place, the way in which books were kept in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was not uncommon in those days to have books actually chained to the shelves. The hooks were fitted with brass - frames and rings, which were tied to iron chains, whose other ends were safely fastened

to the shelves. Such chained hooks could not migrate from the shelves beyond the length of the chain. Their freedom was confined to the sphere determined by their chains. Certainly, such chaining was more conducive to the preservation than to the use of the books. In fact, libraries were then regarded, not as organisations for furthering the USE of books, but as institutions for preserving them.

It may be of interest to reflect for a while on this elaborate process of preservation. What must have been the purpose of such preservation? It is difficult to think of any purpose except that of preserving for the use of posterity. No doubt, it is a healthy, or at any rate, an unavoidable trait of human nature, that we think of our children—of our posterity—and that we are even prepared to deny ourselves many things, in order to hand them over unimpaired to posterity. But an inevitable deduction emanates from this practice. Even as we are anxious to hand over our books to posterity, every succeeding generation may be actuated by an exactly similar altruistic motive and in consequence books may have to be for ever in chains and may never be released for use. This aspect of the question seems to have escaped notice for a long time and, BOOKS ABE FOE PRESERVATION’ had usurped the place of , BOOKS ARE FOR USE’.

This tendency to hoard books must have originated at a time when books were rare and difficult to produce. Before the invention of printing, it took years to copy a book. It is said that the copying of the *Mahabharata* was work for a whole life- time. Under such conditions, there was justification for forgetting that BOOKS ARE FOR USE and for overdoing the act of preserving them. But this tendency appears to have unfortunately developed into a regular instinct, as a result of long practice.

Although the situation was thoroughly altered by the invention of printing, it took centuries to overcome this long-inherited habit. The first step was to declare an amnesty for the books and set them free from their chains. But, even after they were unchained and were permitted to be taken out for use and handled by readers, there was not, for a long time, a generous recognition, on the part of those that maintained and managed libraries, of the right of readers to an unhampered use of books. The restrictions that were placed in the way of books being freely used were many and it is only in recent years that a vigorous movement seems to have set in to eliminate all such handicaps. Such a movement has by no means become universal as yet. There are several countries—and our land seems to have a fair claim to be classed with them—which are still hardly affected by this new movement.

I have heard of a Professor in a College, who ruled over his department for nearly a quarter of a century. The pursuit of his subject slowly narrowed the range of his vision and he became mechanically minded. Trivial details began to loom large for him. Hence he came to attend personally to the meticulous discharge of every item of routine, from the opening of the doors and windows to the periodical emptying of waste-paper baskets. He was given to getting into a rage if everything was not in its place. Unfortunately, under the force of this inherited tendency, he came to regard the shelves rather than the hands of readers as the proper place for books. The assistants, whose advance in their cadre depended on the good will of the Professor, would rather forego the use of books than run the risk of exciting his rage by drawing the books from the shelves. The students of the first year course, who alone were strangers to his idiosyncrasies, would occasionally ask for the books of the departmental library. He used to dispose of them with this dilemma: "Have you followed the class lectures? If so, you do not want these books". "Were you unable to follow the class lectures? If so, - you cannot profit by reading these books." The senior students would not

approach him at all, since they had had painful experiences of the futility of such attempts. The result was that, when he retired at long last, his successor had to cut open the pages of several of the books bequeathed to him. In some cases, it was even found that it was not worth while to waste time in cutting them open, since they had gone entirely out of date and had to be discarded. Would such a professorial career have been possible if the College had acted on the law—, BOOKS ARE FOR USE'?

The extraordinary strength and inexorability of this inherited-tendency which stands between the books and their users, is brought out by the case of another Professor—this time a Professor of Philosophy. The Professor was a philosopher not only by profession but also by practice and temperament. He was also one of those that felt an urge for social service. One form of social service that our Professor of Philosophy decided to render was to give a chance for his neighbours to become learned. To this end, he used to invest most of his savings in books. When he had made up a good collection, he built a nice little reading hut to house the books. He used to spend most of his spare time in this reading hut, so that he may serve out the books personally. He was, however, very disappointed at the ultimate indifference of his neighbours. So, one day he took an enthusiastic librarian-friend of his to his reading hut to take his advice. On his way he was waxing eloquent over the excellent books he had bought for the library, the depressing indifference of the people of his locality to the use of books and so on. The conversation that ensued as soon as they entered the charming but desolate reading hut threw a flood of light on the persistence of the long-inherited preserving instinct which could smother even the sincere resolve and the good intentions of an honest philosopher.

"Where are your books, my friend?"

"All these ten almirahs are full of them. I spent a hundred rupees on each of these almirahs. I had them specially made, etc., etc., etc."

“But, my dear Professor, why have you lined their lovely transparent glass doors with these ugly sheets of brown paper?”

“You don’t know how these visitors bother me. If I don’t stick up this brown paper, they look at the books through the glass door. They ask for this book and that and I have to pull out all the books.”

Poor vanquished philosopher! Comment is needless.

“While such things are common with us in the twentieth century, we have only to go a century back to find the iron sway of this hoarding instinct over American Libraries. T. W. Koch of the Northwestern University records a significant but typical story¹ of a librarian of Harvard. The Harvard University Librarian “once completed an inventory of the library and was seen crossing the yard with a particularly happy smile”. When he was asked the reason for his exceptionally pleasant mood, he exclaimed with pride “All the books are in excepting two. Agassiz has those and I am going after them”.

On the other hand a modern librarian, who has faith in the law that ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE, is happy only when his readers make his shelves constantly empty. It is not the books that go out that worry him. It is the stay-at-home volumes that perplex and depress him. He too, will constantly cross the yard to meet his Agassizes. But he will go to them, not to snatch away the books they are using, but to distribute the new arrivals that need to be introduced to them as rapidly as possible.

The different stages by which the force of the law, “BOOKS ARE FOR USE,” worked out the gradual removal of the restrictions induced by the aforesaid inherited instinct may be summarised as follows:—The chains were first removed and sold as old iron; but access was limited to the chosen few. Then those that could pay were allowed the use of the books. Then came the further step of making them free to all, but only for use in the premises

of the library. Then, lending to the favoured few; then, to all who paid the fee; and at last, lending free to all. Perhaps we are just reaching this stage in our land. But this was by no means the end elsewhere, where the first law had been familiar sufficiently long to lay bare all the implications embedded deep in its bosom. In such places, aggressive methods, which have made other enterprises successful, came to be employed to push forward the use of books. Then branch libraries were opened in the larger cities in order, to provide a fair collection of books and an inviting reading room within a few minutes’ walk from each home. Then books were sent out for a nominal fee to those who could not conveniently come after them. The latest is that boxes of books are sent free to the homes of those that would offer to get them introduced in their neighbourhood. What further triumph is in store for the first law, it is difficult to guess. But as stated by J. P. Quincy, one is tempted to adapt a well-known Celtic paradox by saying that a public library is as good as a private one and, for the effective study of books, has decided advantages over it.¹

LIBRARY LOCATION

The location of a library may, in general, be taken as an index of the degree of faith that the authorities of the library have in the law, BOOKS ARE FOR USE. When I happened to visit a municipal town in the south, the city fathers of the place invited me for a discussion about building a library for the town. The question of site turned up at a very early stage. Practically all of them suggested a place on the outskirts of the town. One of their reasons for suggesting such a remote site was that there was too much dust in the centre and that the books would be spoiled. Another reason adduced was that, otherwise, “all sorts of fellows” would get into the library. It never struck them that the function of the library was to make “all sorts of fellows” use its books and that the dust problem should not be allowed to drive away

(1) KOCH (Theodore Wesley): *On University Libraries*, page 27.

(1) JANZOW (Laura M.): *The Library Without the Walls*, page 19.

the library beyond the zone of accessibility and usefulness. On the other hand, they were shocked to hear me suggest a site on the bazaar street running through the heart of the town. I had to cite the example of several of the cities of the West and expound elaborately the gospel of library organisation before they would concede that there was at least something to be said in favour of my suggestion.

In a Kellett Hall lecture of not long ago—before the bus service came into being—a talented speaker humorously fixed the co-ordinates of one of our big libraries as follows:—”Find a place in the city which is at least a mile from any tram-line or any railway station, which has not even a rickshaw-stand within a radius of half a mile, which has the nearest college or students’ hostel at a distance of three miles. There, is perhaps only one place in the city answering such a description and that is the place chosen for our library.” And yet nobody grumbled; because a library was regarded more as an ornament to the city than as an institution whose primary function was to spread the use of books.

On the other hand, in all western cities which have a living faith in the First Law of Library Science, and which vote for and maintain libraries, because they are anxious that books should be used, the main library is usually housed in the centre of the city—at a place to which most of the citizens will be obliged to go daily on some business or other. It also works through several branches and delivery stations in different parts of the city, so that distance may not stand in the way of the free and full use of books. Dublin, for example, has *five* such district libraries for her population of 3,24,000. Even thrifty Edinburgh, with its population of 4,20,000, has already established seven branch libraries. Manchester has found the need for thirty branches to get her books fully used by her people, who number 7,44,000. Birmingham with her population of 9,19,000, does not find her twenty-four branch libraries adequate to spread the use of her books. Toronto, which has only a population of 5,50,000, has already established fifteen branches and intends to

build more of them. Cleveland, which is the home of about eight hundred thousand people, distributes her book collection through 25 branches and 108 delivery stations, while 46 branches and 275 delivery stations are found too inadequate for the 3,000,000 people of Chicago.

Once the idea that ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE’ is firmly established, once the libraries realise that their existence is justified only by the extent to which their books are used by readers, there will be no difference of opinion about their location. A location, such as the one described by our Kellett Hall lecturer, would never be thought of. A shrewd shopkeeper, who wants his wares to sell, puts up his shop in the *Sannidhi* of a popular temple. A coffee-house owner, who wants his business to thrive, establishes his *cafe* near a big students’ hostel like the Victoria Hostel. A betel-vendor, keen on his daily turn-over, pitches his tent opposite to a big and popular hotel. So also a library which is keen about its books being fully used will plant itself in Conversely, the *Sanni dhi* of no popular temple is without a shop and the vicinity of all Victoria hostels invariably gets studded with coffee-hotels and betel-shops. The same is the case with libraries. Wherever people habitually congregate, that is a potential site for a library. An extreme but a happy illustration of this deduction from the First Law of Library Science is afforded by the “Garden Library” of Lisbon.¹

Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, built on Seven Hills like our Tiruppati and comparable to our Madura in size and population, has gained a unique place in the library world. A Portuguese proverb claims “Who has not seen Lisbon has not seen a thing of beauty”.² Whether such a claim is valid or not, Lisbon has certainly excelled all other cities in her unique Garden Library which is certainly a thing of beauty.

On the flank of one of its Seven Hills, over-

(1) *Wilson Bulletin*, Volume 4> page 65.

(2) RECLXJS (Elisee): *Universal Geography*, edited by E. G. 3Saven8tein, V. I, p. 484.

looking the blue surface of the Tagus, there is a sunny little public garden with a marble basin in the centre round which flowers riot in rainbow tints and children shout and run in joyous ecstasy.

At the far end, there is a giant Cedar-Tree spreading like an umbrella defying sun and rain. Inside its intense shadow deep silence prevails; and you find a line of chairs encircling an enchanting collection of volumes in a lovely bookcase. Students in their flowing cloaks, workmen white with lime-dust, raw rustics with timid and listless eyes, office and shop employees munching their-lunch, soldiers, printers, electricians, sailors and dock-hands, all share the contents of this unique Library, unhampered by any formality but aided by the nimble, sweetfaced Librarian who flutters from end to end with her beaming smiles.

“Who conceived this idea? It was a private Educational Society known as the “Free University”. Hoping to foster a love of reading among all classes, the Free University founded this Garden Library, supplying the books and the furniture. The Lisbon city-fathers, who were themselves believers in the First Law of Library Science, warmly approved of this venture and lent the services of a Librarian.

There are only less than a 1,000 volumes but they are changed from time to time. They have a little of everything—Classics, Living Authors, Travels, History, Electricity, Chemistry, Shorthand, Book-keeping, Building, Smithy, Navigation and so on. And these are eagerly sought by all the visitors to the Garden. The Library is open daily from 10 to 6. Statistics show that during the first year there were no less than 25,000 readers using this Library. May the shadow of the ancient cedar in the public garden of the city of the Seven Hills never grow less! May it long provide shelter for this patriotic enterprise, in the service of the gospel, ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE’!. In schools and colleges also, the location of their libraries may be taken as a reliable index of the degree of faith which the authorities have in the law, ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE’. The evolution of ideas regarding

the location and the size of school and college libraries has been closely parallel to the gradual growth of the belief in that law. In a school, which I knew intimately, the library consisted of a few hundred books made up mostly of specimen copies of text-books given away by the teachers of the school as not worth private appropriation. These few hundreds of books were carefully locked up in a wooden book-case, which was itself locked in a room, ten feet square, and ventilated by a single small window. But the tragic feature of it was that the headmaster invariably held his classes—including his innumerable special classes—in the hall leading to that room, almost blocking the entrance to it. Those that know the mortal dread in which headmasters were held in such schools, twenty-five or thirty years ago, will realise what this meant for the books of the library. For those who do not know, it may be said that the appearance of the headmaster’s figure at the street-corner was enough to make a group of schoolboys, playing at marbles in the evening sun, fly for their life and take shelter in the darkest corners of the kitchens of the nearest houses, where their timid tell-tale eyes and ways would make the mothers exclaims the headmaster going to the temple?’ Hardly any of the boys would dare to come out of his hole, until the greatest dare-devil among them made bold to peep out stealthily and announce, in a cheering tone, that the line was clear. With this information, it may be easy to realise how effective such a location for the school library should have been in preventing the library books from being used. Certainly, that school did not believe, in those days, that ‘BOOKS WERE FOR USE’ and that school was by no means an exception.

Not long ago, the Principal of a big college invited a librarian to pay a visit to his college library and to suggest some improvements. He gladly went. He was received with great kindness and taken through a maze of narrow, dark, ill-ventilated rooms or corridors, which had almirahs along the walls. When the other end was nearing, he asked the Principal where

his library was and when he would take him to it. To his surprise he was told that they had all along been passing only through the library. Wondering at this queer provision, in a college, of a place for the boys to play hide and seek during their lunch-interval, the librarian asked the Principal why such an unhappy situation was selected for the College library. The prompt and innocent reply of the Principal was, "These rooms are unfit for anything else and they have to be put to some sort of use." Would such a naive reply have come forward, if the First Law of Library Science had any hold on the authorities of that college?

What now prevails in our schools and colleges obtained some sixty or seventy years ago in the schools and colleges of the West. Speaking at the dedication of the Library of the Colorado College, in March 1894, Mr. Harper, the first President of the Chicago University, said 'A quarter of a century ago, the library in most of our institutions, even the oldest, was scarcely large enough ... to deserve the name of library.. I know of a college, having an enrolment of one hundred and fifty students. ..and yet in a room *ten* by twelve having the name of library has not two hundred and fifty volumes ... So far as it had location, it was the place to which the Professor was accustomed to make his way occasionally, the student never. The place, seldom frequented, was some out of the way room which could serve no other purpose'¹. Almost the very words of the Principal mentioned in the last paragraph!

But all this changed, the moment the First Law of Library Science came to establish itself in the minds of people. At present, several of the colleges in the West, which believe that 'BOOKS ARE FOR USE' and feel that one of their primary duties is to develop the book-habit in their undergraduates, assign their very best room for library purposes. Not only do they give their best room, they allot quite a number of such rooms for the library. At least in one college of the West, whose "books were placed in corridors, cellars and attics"

(1) HARPER (William Bainy).: *The Trend of Higher Education*, pp. 120-121.

till this law weighed with it, the floor area of the libraries of the college is now nearly half the floor area of the whole college. To quote Harper again", To day the chief building of a college, the building in which is taken greatest pride, is the library. With the stack for storage purposes, the reading-room for reference books, the offices of delivery, the rooms for seminar purposes, it is the center of the institutional activity...A greater change from the old can hardly be conceived. The time is near when the student will do little of his work in the study; he must be in the midst of books. As the scholar, though having thousands of volumes in his own library, must find his way to the great libraries of the Old World when he wishes to do the work of highest character, so the University student, though having hundreds of volumes in his own room, must do his work in the library of the institution. His table must be where, without a moment's delay, without the mediation of a zealous librarian, who perhaps thinks more of the book than of its use, he may place his hand upon that one of ten or twenty thousand books which he desires to use...That factor of our college and University work, the library, fifty years ago almost unknown, to-day already the center of the institution's intellectual activity, half a century hence will, by absorbing all else, have become the institution itself."¹

Library Hours

The influence of the law 'BOOKS ARE FOR USE' has been no less profound on the Library Hours. So long as the inherited notion about preservation had the upper hand and the concept .

'BOOKS ARE FOR USE' had not fully asserted itself, the library was more often closed than kept open. Perhaps it was more frequently opened for the book-worms to be chased out and the books to be dusted than for the readers to enter or for the books to be issued for use. The registers of books borrowed for the decade 1730-40 from the Bodleian library of Oxford are said to show that only rarely were

(1>-HyAHKER (William Rainy): *The Trend of Higher Education*, pp. 121-125.

more than one or two books issued in a day. Sometimes a whole week is said to have passed over without a single entry being made. An interesting memento said to be preserved by that library dates from 1806. Finding the library closed, a scholar, angry with disappointment, affixed to the door of the library a scrap of paper containing words which the Muse of Greece supplied him with for the relief of his feelings:—"Woe unto you who have taken the key of knowledge I Ye enter not yourself and hinder those who come". In his *Story of the University of Edinburgh*, Sir Alexander Grant deplores how, in the early nineteenth century, the hours of the University Library restricted the facilities afforded to the students for making rise of the library. Books might be taken out only during two hours on two days of the week. According to Koch, the library of the Amherst College was open, in 1850, only once a week from one to three in the after noon. The students of the Princeton University could use its library only for one hour twice a week, while their contemporaries at Missouri were allowed only one hour for two weeks. In the Columbia college, which was started in 1859, for many years, "freshmen and sophomores were allowed to visit the library only once a month to gaze at the backs of books, the juniors were taken there once a week by a tutor who gave verbal information about the contents of the books, but only seniors... could draw from the library during one hour on Wednesday afternoons".

If the library hours were, till late in the last century, of such small magnitude in the land of libraries, one can easily imagine the conditions that obtain at present in our school and college libraries, of course, wherever they exist! The practice of one big college may serve as an illustration. Theoretically, it has 'two issue-days' per week. But, let not the occurrence of the word 'day' by any means mislead one to multiply the 'two, by twenty-four or even by twelve to arrive at the number of library hours per week. In practice, the professor-in-charge, whose displeasure no discreet boy would dare incur, had conveniently interpreted the "two issue-days" as two quarter-hours. One might

wonder what takes place in the library during the remaining hours of the week. Well, the books enjoy their eternal undisturbed repose behind locked doors, in a dark, closed room. Another of our libraries experimented for a long time with its hours. Those people in its locality, who were literate enough to use its books, had their office-hours between 11 A.M. and 5 P.M. on week-days. Saturdays and Sundays were usually holidays with them. During such days, they were accustomed to devote the morning hours to social visits, household-purchases, and such other weekend business. After the luxury of a late meal, and a midday nap, they would find themselves fit for study or for a serious visit to the library only in the after-noon. The hours finally arrived at by the library, after its endless experiments and investigations, fitted in with this habit of its *clientele* in an ideally wrong way. It actually decided to keep itself open between 10 A.M. and 5 P.M. on week-days and from 7 A.M. to 2 P.M. on Saturdays and Sundays. Can a more effective decision be imagined for a place where the First Law of Library Science was almost a heresy? In another place, when the authorities of a library were solemnly discussing ways and means to meet a great increase in the issue of books, a veritable Daniel came "to judgment".

"When do you have the greatest rush in the day?" asked the Daniel.

"In the evening, between 4 and 6", somebody said.

"There you are, came forth the solution, "Close the library at four instead of at six. That will end the bother".

Some weak member meekly murmured, "They are the only hours when most of the students and teachers can use the Library".

"Too much reading is no good, you know", retorted the strong-willed Daniel.

Poor First Law! So summarily and unceremoniously thrown overboard! But you must not refuse your clemency to South India; for, all climes and times have an equal claim on you. South India is not alone in showing you disrespect at this late hour. Remember the recent lamentations of a Parisian librarian:

“Generally speaking, a school library in France was a closed cupboard opened once a fortnight or once a month”;

But the magic of the *Mantra* ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE’ has made marvellous changes in the library hours in the other places of the West. Even the Bodleian, groaning under the indiscriminating weight of medieval tradition, has, we are told, recently broken the shackles of an old injunction about lights, which had till now made its hours keep pace with the erratic sun of the north. The long prohibited electric light is now making its hours not only uniform but also fairly long. Other libraries had surrendered to the dictates of the First Law even earlier. According to the recent American Library Association’s survey of the libraries,¹ ‘the hours, during which the libraries are open daily, vary from ten to fourteen’. The Amherst college which, eighty years ago, was keeping its library open for bare three hours in a week, now keeps it open for nearly a hundred hours in a week. In fact its daily hours are said to be 8 A.M. to 10-30 P.M. The Cornell University does similarly. The Oregon University opens the library daily at 7-30 A.M. and closes it only at 10 P.M. Even the Madras University Library has fixed 7 A.M. and 6 P.M. as its hours of opening and closing, for every day in the year. God willing, it may soon emulate the Western Universities even in their nocturnal vigils. It is not only the college and University libraries that have responded to the call of the First Law of Library Science. The response of the Public Libraries has been no less eager. The majority

of them, which keep BOOKS FOR USE, are open daily from 9 A.M. to 9 P.M., while some, as in San Francisco and Seattle, work even till 10 P.M.

There is no need to multiply statistics. It may be asserted boldly that the *a priori* reasoning about library hours leads only to results that are consistent with practice in the West. In no country, where the concept, ‘BOOKS ARE FOR USE’, has taken root in the Public Mind, will any library be allowed to close till the majority of humanity go to bed and so cannot use it. Nor can it be kept closed after they rise from bed. Nor will any library be allowed to close on any day of the year,— not even on Sundays, even in Christian Countries. The Public demand long hours and the library authorities appreciate the soundness of this demand. It is indeed considered criminal to close a library at any time when people can conveniently use it. One might ask, what about the cost of establishment, if it is to be kept open for long hours and on all days. Modern society maintains that any extra money spent on library establishment is legitimately spent and is well spent. After all, what is the proportion of the extra cost of establishment to the enormous benefit that will flow from a wider use of the library. What a large sum of money is locked up in the books of libraries Is it not penny-wise and pound-foolish to grudge a few rupees more on the establishment and to restrict the full use of such a treasure? Sometimes, wisdom consists in throwing good money after better.

(va urma)

(1) AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION: *A Survey of the Libraries in the United States*, Volume 2, pp. 94-95 & 159-160.

Sursa:

http://www.cro.sanita.fvg.it/reposCRO/Biblioteca/5_leggi_ranganathan.pdf