

**Giorgio Milanetti**  
**Foreword**

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# Foreword

Many original suggestions can be drawn from the extraordinary life and work of Shyali Ramamrita Ranganathan. Some of them, such as the possibility of collecting information “of a trans-rational nature” – to quote his own words – for a biographical book, could appear particularly unconventional (to say the least) if not properly contextualized within his unifying epistemological “vision”. As a matter of fact, key concepts of Ranganathan’s peculiar methodology – like facet analysis, the “Universe of knowledge”, or conceptual tools as “seminal mnemonics” and “absolute syntax” – are intimately connected with elements belonging to the Hindu Brahmanical tradition, from the Vedic principle of *eka-vākyatā* (“syntactic unity”) to the description of the cognitive process on the backdrop of the state of *samādhi* (deep meditative absorption).

Indeed, as Fausto Freschi and Andrea Cuna appropriately point out in their extremely documented and accurate Introduction, Ranganathan’s work cannot be understood without taking into account the “crucial function of the Hindu tradition that played a key role in the formulation of the principles of his knowledge organisation; and also to investigate some fundamental aspects of his systematic approach to knowledge and its forms of acquisition. In other words, in order to fully understand the sense and meaning of Ranganathan’s proposal, it is necessary to widen the field of research to issues that fall within the area of competence of Indology”, and particularly “to the premises and background that oriented, also in a methodological and technical sense, his education” (see *infra*, 21).

The present volume aims specifically at exploring this enlarged area of investigation, also to show how Ranganathan’s “intuitions” – to quote again one of his key-terms – and methodological tools still inspire researchers in a wide range of disciplinary fields, from today’s IT ecosystem to digital Indology. Yet, although the volume is meant to be located within that wide, transversal and interdisciplinary field, which is known as “digital humanities”, it must be noted that in the scientific perspective that has guided the volume’s editors, digital humanities are not simply humanistic content represented digitally. Rather, they are seen as

providing a common outlook that has a markedly methodological nature and an interdisciplinary focus. In it, the digital application is just one of the many elements determined by the role that the different types of information content and the tools used for the production, processing and management of information play in the construction of our knowledge and skills. As will be shown, these elements are directly or indirectly illustrated in the various contributions that are collected in the second part of the volume, entitled *Digital Indology*.

The first part of the volume, *The Universe of Knowledge*, explores Ranganathan's thought with reference to the influence that the Hindu cultural and philosophical tradition had on the entirety of his scientific production and, more specifically, on his studies on the classification of knowledge. It opens with the mentioned contribution by Fausto Freschi and Andrea Cuna, *Shiyali Ramamrita Ranganathan (1892-1972): An Introduction*, that – though not engaging in a full presentation or critical analysis of specific issues related to the library and information science field – explores the educational background, cultural ties, and social context that may have influenced Ranganathan's activities as a scholar and library scientist. It thus represents an attempt to contextualize Ranganathan's scientific legacy within the framework of his cultural roots. On the one hand, this perspective of research can bring about a broader understanding of his ideas, notions, methodologies, and theories about knowledge. On the other, it can also lead to insights on the methodological implications involved in designing faceted information systems.

The article by Antonio Rigopoulos, *S. Kuppuswami Sastri and the Exegetical Principles of eka-vākyatā and samanvaya: Their Influence on S.R. Ranganathan's Epistemology*, focuses on the influence that the Sanskrit scholar Kuppuswami Sastri (1880-1943) exercised on Ranganathan and on the exegetical principles of *eka-vākyatā* ("syntactic unity") and *samanvaya* ("agreement", "consistency") in their respective philosophical contexts, Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta. On the assumption that these principles along with other basic ideas of Indian philosophy played a major role in shaping Ranganathan's epistemology, it contends that even Ranganathan's "discovery" of the five fundamental categories of personality, matter, energy, space and time (PMEST) was inspired by Indian concepts, starting with the seminal principles (*tattva*) of *puruṣa* ("pure consciousness") and *prakṛti* ("materiality") of the Sāṃkhya dualist tradition. As shown by the author, Kuppuswami Sastri and Ranganathan were in an ongoing dialogue with one another, both being eager to share their profound knowledge and sophisticated methodological perspectives.

The paper *S.R. Ranganathan: Brief Note on "Intuition"* by Giuliano Boccali completes the first part of the volume. It aims at highlighting one of the fundamental aspects of the vast cultural background of Ranganathan's work, which represents also a main element of the traditional Indian culture: i.e. the relation-

ship between intellection and intuition. The theme is investigated here mainly through the distinction between classificatory language and the language of literary exchange – to use Ranganathan’s terminology. The article examines also the “mystic communion” – that according to Ranganathan stands as the further level of communication – and investigates the extension and fulfilment of the poetics of *dhvani* according to the philosopher Abhinavagupta (10th-11th century).

The second part of the volume is dedicated to Digital Indology in the wake of Ranganathan’s theories. While exploring the relevance of facet analysis as a key approach for designing cultural heritage information systems within the realm of digital humanities, it also casts a glance beyond Ranganathan’s legacy, with reference to some scientific projects that lie at the most advanced intersection between Indian studies and digital humanities. It opens with *Developing a Pilot Faceted Indexing Matrix to Provide Exploratory Subject Access to the Luigi Pio Tessitori Photographic Collection* by Andrea Cuna and Gabriele Angeli. This paper discusses the development of a pilot faceted indexing matrix to provide exploratory subject access to the collection of black-and-white glass plate negatives gathered by the Italian Indologist Luigi Pio Tessitori (1887-1919) during his stay in India. The matrix has a twofold purpose: to walk the indexer through the subject indexing process to assure that it is conducted systematically and methodically; and to help the information architect design and build multiple faceted interface structures – from flat to hierarchical – that would support users’ exploration and navigation tasks based on the subject facets identified in the photographs by the indexer.

The article by Giovanni Ciotti and Marco Franceschini *Experimenting with Digital Palaeography: The First Application of the Handwriting Software Tool (HAT 3.5) to Indian Scripts* presents the results of the first attempt at applying HAT (Handwriting Analysis Tool) – a software tool developed by H.A. Mohammed at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (Universität Hamburg) – to two Indian scripts, namely the Tamil and the Tamilian Grantha, in the form in which they are attested in palm-leaf manuscripts from Tamil Nadu. It describes the six tests that have been carried out by the authors, the first four of which are aimed at verifying the ability of HAT to assess the similarity between writing styles and to use such an ability to establish or verify the identity of a particular scribe, while the last two tests explore the possibility of exploiting HAT’s potential for studying the diachronic development of the two scripts in question.

In *Designing the Complexity of Scholarly Digital Editions. The Śivadharma Project Case Study*, Martina Dello Buono and Chiara Livio explore the process for creating a conceptual model for the digital edition of texts and inscriptions in Sanskrit and other South Asian languages. Taking as a case study a section from the *Śivadharmottara*, a text investigated within the framework of the Śivadharma Project in the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, this research focuses on the

analysis of complex textual phenomena – such as non-linear overlapping hierarchies – and the data structure that could best represent them. Interestingly, the authors describe the advantages of a graph over a tree representation of a text, discussing the project choice of the graph database Neo4j to store the textual annotations in a stand-off graph structure – a solution that to date has never been proposed to the scholarly community of digital humanists working with texts or corpora in Sanskrit and other South Asian languages. The outcome of this research is a CRUD web application which consists of user-friendly tools to create, publish, catalogue, visualize, and browse the Śivadharma Scholarly Digital Editions online.

The last contribution collected in the second part of the volume, *JAINpedia: An Inclusive Website and Some Recent Initiatives in Digital Jainology* by Nalini Balbir, aims mainly at informing the readers about the JAINpedia website, from the perspective of both the scholarly content producer and of the users. The site – which is the original result of the efforts of academics associated with librarians and members of the Jain diaspora community in the UK – aims at bringing to the fore the rich heritage of Jain manuscripts held in the main London libraries (British Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, Wellcome Collection) through a significant selection of digitised images. In this way, it also provides a standard of comparison for the creation of new websites combining images of manuscripts, description of manuscripts, and allied contents for contextualising the ideological or religious backgrounds of the items digitised. In the final section of the article, Balbir illustrates also some recent initiatives in digital Jainology.

Overall, this volume represents a timely attempt to trace the transition to the new methodologies of Indological research. In fact, innovative tools and an original scientific approach are capable of creating or developing digital applications that can lead to new analyses of already existing materials – texts, images, or entire collections, such as the Peano archive that is the focus of research of the Indological Society “Luigi Pio Tessitori” in Udine, from which materials described in some of the above-mentioned contributions have been taken.

In this dialogue between digital tools and traditional research practices, an increasingly decisive role will obviously be played by artificial intelligence. In this regard, it is significant that as early as the late 1950s, Ranganathan participated in international conferences focusing on information retrieval and machine translation (see *infra*, 55-56). Today, it might be essential to know how he would develop strategies to best address this new challenge.

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