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Role of library associations towards professional identity in India

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ROLE OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS TOWARDS PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY IN INDIA

Abstract: *Present study deals with some prominent issues to the library profession in India in parlance to role of associations to combat the problems arisen effectively. It includes wage issues to the professionals, quality assurance in LIS education, funding provisions in library legislations to support public libraries, and devising a strong platform for better presentations of problems to the government and society. The study is limited and delimited to India. The study is based on literature search and followed by an online survey on the issues mentioned earlier. The respondents did not satisfy with the associations on the pay equity issues. The respondents were satisfied with the association on the issue of quality assurance in LIS education; however it was strongly suggested by them to set an apex body in the LIS field for accreditation of courses. It was suggested for setting minimum wages for the LIS professionals at each level in the country. The most important finding of this study is strengthening Indian Library Association for better communication with the government.*

Key Words

Associations, educational effectiveness, public library services, professional identity, wage inequality

1. **Introduction:** Professional associations play an important role in recognition and improvement of a profession and to achieve common goals of the professionals to better serve to the society. There are a number of library associations in India with multi-faceted objectives at national and regional levels. Libraries and workers within it are silently working to achieve goals of a democratic and pluralistic society by dissemination of information in online and conventional modes. However it is very disappointing that LIS education is not considered for a bright future in India since large component of our professionals are underpaid and underutilized, especially professionals in private organizations (**Ranjan & Singh, 2013**). It proves that there is a need of upliftment of the profession and seek a common but effective platform for strengthening the profession. Large numbers of library schools in India are devoid of basic facilities which tarnish the professional efficiencies in future. It is very disappointing that high scoring students from some universities are not possessing basic skills of classification and cataloguing too which weakens a profession.

Public libraries are symbols of democratic culture in a society due to its concerns to avail the information to all irrespective to class and creed differences. However, it is shocking that one

third of Indian states have no library legislation. There is ample number of public libraries in India, but with insufficient funding. Libraries in India have multi-faceted problems some of which directly associated to the users and society also. There are numerous issues and challenges in front of library professionals' community including issues of public libraries, protecting user rights, standard library services and quality education etc. Professional associations combine voices of its members and can play better roles in this regard. Present paper is an attempt to trace some basic problems of the profession and seek ways to rectify the same.

1.1. Main issues to library associations in India: Large number of library associations has been established since 1914 in different parts of India. Most of library associations are based on regional states and some on subject areas. State level library associations are working as registered societies in the majority of states in India. The states without registered state level library associations are smaller states or newly constituted states. Publications of some of these associations are very important including the journals published by IASLIC, ILA, SALIS, AALDI, IATLIS, DLA which are well known in the LIS community in India. Indian Library Science Abstracts (ILSA) is an important publication by IASLIC. Gujarat Granthalaya Seva Sangh has prepared union catalogue of periodicals in Gujarat (**Gujarat Granthalay Seva Sangh**, 2014). Literacy program organised by Bengal Library Association with a project name "Come to your Library" to encourage reading in the state of West Bengal is remarkable in library awareness programs (**Bandyopadhyay et al.**, 2010).

1.2. Objectives of the Study: The main objective of this study is to search the roles of associations to create a better professional environment to serve to the society better. Main objectives of the study can be enumerated in following points:

1. To study the roles of library associations in library legislations especially assuring funding provisions to run public libraries.

2. To study the roles of library associations in pay-equity issues at regional and national levels.
3. To observe the need of quality assurance in LIS education and role of associations in present scenario.
4. To find out a single strong platform to all library professionals for a strong voice of the profession to solve the issues effectively.

1.3. Scope and Limitations of the Study: The study has concerns to seek the ways to escort and escalate the status of LIS profession and professionals ensuring quality services to the users. The geographical boundary of the study limits and delimits to national level of India. The study is limited to some issues described in the objectives. A main part of the study is based on literature search; however with a limitation to literature available in English language only. Information available on websites, social media profiles and World Wide Web were considered for the study. A questionnaire was framed to know the opinion of the LIS people which was sent and collected online only prominently using email services.

2. Research methodology: The study is based on information available on the websites of different library associations in India and abroad, related government bodies and relevant literatures available online, followed by a survey on the issues mentioned in the objectives. An online questionnaire was framed in Google Forms and distributed to around 1500 LIS professionals by emails who were members of any library association. Email IDs were collected from the websites of the library associations. The questionnaire had option-based and open ended questions. Names, designations and affiliations were optionally asked. Total 328 questionnaires were received. The respondents were asked about memberships of them also with multiple choice options. 288 (87.8%) respondents had memberships of Indian Library Association. 268 (81.7%) respondents had memberships of other associations

including IASLIC (58 respondents) and CGLA (18 respondents). Mode and margin of error were used for statistical calculations.

3. Lack of public libraries and library legislation: India has large number of public libraries as compared to developed nations in the world, but per capita expenditure on it is very less. India has 46,746 public libraries (**RRRLF**, 2019) as compared to 9057 public libraries in USA (**ALA**, 2019). **Balaji et al** (2018) noted less per capita expenditure despite large number of public libraries in following words:

“In the US,...the public library system provides services to 95.6% of the total population and spends \$35.96 per capita annually, whereas in India, the per capita expenditure on the development of public libraries translates to 7 paise.”

Many states in India have library laws with or without cess provisions. In five states of Southern India i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Goa and Tamil Nadu, there is provision of library cess up to 10% (**Balaji et al**, 2018). Some other states have such legislation but without cess provisions. Maharashtra and Kerala have systematically distributed library associations throughout the state up to district and taluka (sub-divisions of a district) levels and provide funds to it (**Government of Maharashtra State Library Council**, 2019; **Government of Maharashtra**, 1985; **Kerala State Council Library**, 2019). Library associations in Gujarat also get incentives from the state government (**Gazette of Gujarat**, 2001). There is no library legislation in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, Punjab, Sikkim, Telangana, Tripura and the union territories except Lakshadweep. These states have 11.53% population (2011 census) and 19.81 % of area of the nation (**Ranjan & Singh**, 2020) which is worrying conditions in India. It has been observed that states with legislation and cess provisions have healthier public library system than the others states.

ILA published ‘**Model Public Libraries Bill**’ in 1991 which was product of discussions and meetings after several seminars on the issue in 1964, 1978 and 1981 (**Ram**, 2019). Madhya Pradesh Library Association was recommended to put library bill and it has presented a bill to the assembly, but finally it has not been enacted (**RRRLF**, 2019). Assam Library Association has presented its draft to the state government which is in process (**Assam Library Association**, 2019). ILA specially organised a seminar on the Delhi Library Legislation in 1996, but finally it is on the table of the state government (**RRRLF**, 2019).

3.1. Satisfaction of professionals with associations on cess provisions in library legislation: A question was asked from the respondents to know their opinions if they consider the steps as adequate that are taken on the issue of cess provisions in the different library legislations in India. The results are availed in the Table 3.1.

Table 1: Satisfaction of Professionals with Associations on Cess Provisions in Library Legislation

Option	Number	Percentage	Margin of error
Yes	104	31.7%	± 2.707
May Be	116	35.4%	(On Confidence Level 70%)
No	108	32.9%	
Total	328	100%	

It was found that the opinion is moderately divided since the difference of number of the respondents selecting ‘yes’ (31.7% of respondents) and ‘no’ (32.9% of respondents) is not enough even at confidence level of 70 percent (Table 1).

3.2. Suggestions from respondents: Fewer suggestions were received from the respondents on the given matter. It was expressed that being non-profits organizations, public libraries face difficulty for getting funds. Some respondents suggested that budget to the public libraries should be availed from education budget. It was suggested for implementing a

uniform policy for fund raising all over the country so that public library system can be strengthened in the country.

3.3. Conclusive remarks: The respondents' satisfaction was moderate on the issue of cess provisions in the library legislation. However, national policy on fund raising for public libraries is an important suggestion from the side of the respondents.

4. Pay equity and working conditions of professionals: The librarian community in India are facing several problems in terms of professional status and improper salary etc. In 'Advocating for Better Salaries and Pay Equity Toolkit' (2003), American Library Association clearly stated that LIS profession is underpaid profession as compared to other professions bearing similar complexity. ALA-APA could be able to make fixing of minimum wages for professional librarians in 2016 on the basis of resolution passed by it in 2008 (**ALA Toolkit**, 2017, page 11). Library professionals in Australia could be able to achieve pay hikes by attempts of library association there in 2002 (**Burnham**, 2004). Association of Research Libraries takes pay survey within its member libraries (**ARL**, 2020).

ILA has submitted various memorandums to various pay committees for appropriate salary and status to library professionals. Recently ILA requested UGC to maintain similarity of post of librarians with teaching in 2016 (**ILA**, 2016). All Bengal School Librarians' Association contributed in improvement of pay scales and status of library workers (**All Bengal School Librarians Association**, 2009). Kerala Library Association sent proposals and memorandum for proper pay scales to Kerala State Pay Revision Commission in 2010, 2014 and 2019. It has also requested UGC to consider librarians for PhD research guide in 2017 (**Kerala Library Association**, 2019). The most recognized work by Kerala Library Association is VP Joy Committee Report on College Libraries and School Libraries which supported the view of college and school librarians prominently and recommended better salaries and fulfilment of requirements of libraries for its effective performance (**Department**

of Collegiate Education, 1994). **Academic Library Association** (2014) also gave memorandum to Kerala State Pay Revision Commission 2014.

Punjab Library Association has put several demands to competent authorities including class II status to college librarians in Punjab in 1994-95, enhancing grade of several assistant librarians in Punjabi University Library in 1995, availing holidays to school librarians equal to teachers, CAS for college librarians in 2007 etc. (**Punjab Library Association**, 2019).

Due to such attempts by ILA and some other associations, librarians have started to get pay scales similar to other posts with similar complexity in government organizations. However, there are many more issues left to library professionals due to organizational structures. The situations of library workers in private fields are worst and exploiting (**Ranjan & Singh**, 2013). Temporary and ad hoc library professionals in government organisations are also getting inappropriate wages and salaries.

4.1. Satisfaction of professionals with associations on pay equity and working conditions: In the survey organised for this study, a questions was asked to know satisfaction of the respondents on the issues of pay equity with other professions and working conditions of the LIS people. An open-ended question was also asked for suggestions from the side of the respondents. Larger numbers of the respondents were unsatisfied (38.4%) than the satisfied respondents (31.1%). On confidence level of 80%, such difference exists (margin of error on confidence level of 80% is ± 3.337) (see Table 2).

Table 2: Satisfaction of Professionals with Associations on Pay Equity and Working Conditions

Option	Number	Percentage	Margin of error
Yes	102	31.1%	± 3.337
May Be	100	30.5%	(On Confidence Level 80%)
No	126	38.4%	

very less employability (**Aspiring Minds**, 2019) including LIS. Quality assurance in LIS education is essential for quality library services.

5.1. Satisfaction of professionals with associations on quality assurance of LIS courses:

A question was framed in the questionnaire on satisfaction of the respondents with the library associations on the issue mentioned as above. The results are shown in the Table 3.

Table 3: Satisfaction of Professionals with Associations on Quality Assurance of LIS Courses

Option	Number	Percentage	Margin of error
Yes	126	38.4%	±4.282
May Be	105	32.0%	(On Confidence Level 90%)
No	97	29.6%	
Total	328	100%	

Larger number of respondents was seemed satisfied (38.4%) with performance of associations on the matter above described. 29.6% of them were not satisfied with the associations on this issue. On confidence level of 90%, such difference exists (Table 3).

5.2. Suggestions from respondents: The respondents seemed satisfied with the associations on the present issue; however some important suggestions were also received from the respondents. It was noticed that large numbers of faculty positions are vacant under state and central governments in India. Some respondents wrote that a national association should accredit the LIS courses in India like ALA. Some respondents suggested to frame a national association on the pattern of bar councils which may be impractical as librarianship is not a license-based individual service. Some respondents remarked on education imparted by private institutions to be inappropriate in quality. Abundance of passed out students in respect to vacancies create problems to the professionals. Some respondents were satisfied with the associations in the sense that they organise numerous training courses and workshops.

5.3. Conclusive remarks: The respondents were found satisfied with associations on the issue, however it was felt that they are very keen on quality of LIS education to strengthen the profession. Need of an apex body was recommended to maintain the same.

6. Restructuring associations: Strong library associations are need of the time. It may be better to structure a strong association or federation of associations to keep the voice effectively to the government. A strong association or similar structure is essential to frame policies at national level. Indian Library Association is the largest association in India with six regional divisions. Therefore its strengthening and reshaping may enhance representation of professionals to the government and society. The alternatives include establishing a federation of association, organizing joint meetings of the associations, or strengthening another association than ILA etc.

6.1. Opinion of professionals on merging of associations: In a question, the respondents were asked about their opinion if all the associations be merged into a larger association or replaced by a federation of associations. The respondents responded with their own opinions also.

Table 4: Opinion of Professionals on Merging of Associations

Option	Number	Percentage	Margin of error
Indian Library Association (ILA) should be strengthened for better communication with government	232	73.4%	±10.1 (On Confidence Level 99.99%)
Library Federation of Library Associations' should be constituted for better representation	63	19.9%	
No such move is necessary	13	4.1%	
Others	8	2.5%	
Total	316	100%	

The respondents clearly stated to strengthen ILA to communicate better with the government. 73.4% of respondents were agreeing with this option where some (19.9%) liked to frame a federation at national level. The question had 'others' option which was chosen by 2.5% respondents only. 4.1% of respondents were satisfied with present condition and selected the option 'no such move is necessary'. At confidence level of 99.99% also, the difference in favour of ILA exists. It is a clear message from this study that mostly most of people are in favour of strengthening of ILA.

6.2. Suggestions from respondents: Some respondents stated that they were very satisfied with the associations; however some other assessed associations' activities are limited to organising seminars and paper works. An important objection was from a respondent that issues of North-East states libraries are less raised in the associations which may be subject of study. An important suggestion from a respondent was emphasis on "one nation one association" theory where state chapters may be founded at state levels. Joint Council of Library Association in India (JOCLAI) was also mentioned in the suggestion box. JOCLAI is an umbrella of organisations in India where meetings are held during ILA conferences. JOCLAI was proposed in IASLIC seminar 1980 and was framed in 1982 at ILA in New Delhi. It has framed code of ethics for library services. It is not active today adequately.

6.3 Conclusive remarks: "One nation one association" is a clear finding from this study where around three fourths (73.4%) of respondents have selected the same option. JOCLAI is an umbrella of organisations and ILA can move in this direction also.

7. Suggestions and recommendations: There is requirement of a national level plan to improve library profession in India where quality assurance of LIS education as well as pay protection policies should be in its central point. It is recommended to

1. Develop ILA as more representing to the professionals (73.4% of respondents agree with option). An association representing the all professionals with a strong voice of professionals to the government is need of time.
2. The public libraries are performing better in the states with cess provisions in library laws. Fund raising provisions for public libraries is necessary in all states and uniform provisions at national level may enhance the public library system in India.
3. ILA should be as an accreditation agency for LIS courses in India.
4. Minimum wages for library professionals should be fixed in India. Private organisations should follow such policies and enhance transparency in their functions.
5. National level pay surveys are essential in the country.

8. Conclusions: Library associations are working for achieving different goals in India and members of such associations are also satisfied with its performance. There is strong need of quality assurance in LIS education in India, national level funding provisions in library legislations, fixation of minimum wages etc. Strengthening ILA is need of the profession and better communication with the government with a notion of “One nation one association”. ILA should be empowered with accreditation rights for LIS courses. Library associations should be free of nepotism and real works are more needful at the place of paper works.

Further study

The role of national associations towards solving the regional issues may be a subject of further study.

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Abbreviations Used:

AALDI: Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists in India

AICTE: All India Council of Technical Education

ALA: American Library Association

ALIA: Australian Library and Information Association

ARL: Association of Research Libraries

BLISc: Bachelor of Library and Information Science

DLA: Delhi Library Association

IASLIC: Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres

IATLIS: Indian Association of the Teachers of Library and Information Science

IFLA: International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

ILA: Indian Library Association

INFLIBNET: Information and Library Network

JOCLAI: Joint Council of Library Associations in India

LIS: Library & Information Science

MCA: Medical Council of India

MLISc: Master of Library and Information Science

NCERT: National Council of Educational Research & Training

NET: National Eligibility Test

NIEPA: National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

RRRLF: Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation

SALIS: Society for the Advancement of Library and Information Science

SCERT: State Council of Educational Research & Training

T&C: Terms and Conditions

UGC: University Grants Commission, New Delhi