RE-EVALUATION AND RESTRUCTURING OF LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS IN INDIA: A PROPOSAL TO BE MOOTED BY INDIAN LIS PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT

Library Associations are generally formed to look after the service conditions of librarians and their professional development. They also seek to serve the people by promoting the culture of library services and uses in the country. Library Associations have their own share of problems and difficulties. In India, library associations are many and exist since pre-independence but the plurality of library associations has itself created many problems. Split by causes, sometimes, the associations fail to yield desired responses from the governments. It is therefore proposed to have a well-defined, well-knitted hierarchy of library associations working at different levels (state and national levels). Even the different types of library associations can be formed but they should follow hierarchy. Governments should patronise library associations to bring out the best from the profession nurturing the development of society and building the nation at large.

Keywords: Advisory Committee for Libraries, Association, Central Library Association, CONPOLIS, Library Movement, LIS Professional, NKC.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Association’ is defined as a formal body comprising of a group of persons working towards some common purpose. Depending on the nature of purpose, associations may be broadly classified as Professional and non-Professional associations. Professional
associations are made by and for the professionals in the field concerned. Professional associations are powerful forces representing the voice of the professional community to solve the problems related to the welfare, status, working conditions, physical facilities, education and training including the research and developmental activities. On the other hand non-professional associations may have political, cultural, and economic objectives. B. P. Barua (1992) mentioned that a library association is both a professional and non-professional association. As a professional association it seeks to safeguard the professional interests of its members, and as a non-professional association it seeks to serve the people by promoting the culture of library services and uses in the country. In this process, library associations also strive for advancement of the library movement, profession and the professionals. The development of library and librarianship depends on proper planning, foresight, understanding and involvement. These issues are better managed by library associations rather than by individuals or institutions in isolation. A library association can also function as a learned society.

The Advisory Committee for Libraries set up by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, in 1955, suggested five objectives for library associations:

(i) to build up a sense of brotherhood among librarians and thereby raise the morale of individual librarians and braces them up to their task;
(ii) to build up and instil into the minds of individual librarians a code of conduct vis-a-vis their communities;
(iii) to raise the standard of training of librarians or their competence for the larger benefit of society;
(iv) to fight for better service conditions of librarians;
(v) to promote the library movement in the country.

According to the Committee, these objectives can be fulfilled effectively by pursuing the following functions:

(i) by holding library conferences, seminars, lectures and meetings;
(ii) by organising workshops and training courses;
(iii) by publishing library journals;
(iv) by publicity, exhibition and propaganda;
(v) by bringing out basic library literature, and
(vi) by organising deputations and adopting other well-known pressure tactics.

The committee also suggested that the task of training librarians should be left to special agencies. To make the library associations more healthy and strong they should bring into their fold not only working librarians, but persons from other occupations and spheres of life who appreciate the benefits of library service. Especially valuable in this respect is the association with their work of politicians, teachers, social workers and social education workers. Library associations in India owe a great deal to these “lay” brethren.¹¹

Committee on National Policy on Library and Information System(CONPOLIS) (1985–86) also accepted the importance of library associations and recommended that library associations at the national level and the state level play important roles in promoting and strengthening library movement in the country. They may be given necessary patronage and encouragement for their effective functioning.¹²

the formation of Indian Institute of Library and Information Science (IILIS) of national importance along with other nine major recommendations on libraries. It was thought that the IILIS, as a nodal body, would give a vital direction to LIS education, research and practice for both high speed generation and use of knowledge needed for bringing structural change in Indian economy. In pursuance of this, a high level committee National Mission on Libraries (NML) had been set up by the Government of India. But unfortunately NML has not taken yet any positive step to this effect. In 2013 IASLIC approached to the Hon’ble Prime minister of India expressing the grievance in this regard and demanded for setting up IILIS. Needless to say, this is a very good initiative from the part of IASLIC. But the functions of IILIS very precisely mentioned in the recommendations of NKC indicate broadly the three aspects, viz., LIS education, research and practice. It is not clear whether the said nodal body will also look into the vital problems the LIS professionals of India are suffering in pertaining to specially the welfare, status and working condition.

2. OBJECTIVES

Objectives of this paper set forth have been mentioned below:

(i) to identify the functions of library associations
(ii) to depict the picture of library associations in India
(iii) to discuss the problems confronting library associations in India
(iv) to provide suggestions to solve long pending problems of LIS professionals by forming a unique hierarchical structure of library associations in India

3. METHODOLOGY

The related literatures were studied for this paper. The several grievances of Indian LIS professionals collected from face to face communication in seminars, conferences, professional meetings and opinions from LIS links (India’s first and largest social network for Library professionals) were also taken into consideration.

4. LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS IN INDIA

History tells, in India, library associations at the state levels were formed prior to the national level library associations. The scenario is strikingly different in case of developed countries like US and UK, where national level library associations emerged first. Andhra Desa Library Association (1914), Maharastra Library Association (1921), Bengal Library Association (1925), Madras Library Association (1928) and Punjab Library Association (1929) were the pioneers, which were founded before the formation of Indian Library Association (1933). These library associations are still functioning actively and playing pivotal role along with other state and national level library associations that had emerged post-independence.

4.1 Pre-Independence era of Library Associations in India

4.1.1 State Level Library Association
The State level Library Associations founded pre-Independence are as follows:

1. Andhra Desa Library Association 1914
2. Maharashtra Library Association 1921
3. Gujarat Pustaklaya Mandal 1923
4. Bengal Library Association 1925
5. Baroda State Library Association 1926
6. Madras Library Association 1928
7. Punjab Library Association 1929
8. Karnataka Library Association 1929
9. Samastha Kerala Pustakalaya Samiti 1931
10. United Provinces Library Association 1935
12. Bihar Rajya Granthalaya Sangha 1936
13. Malabar Library Association 1937
14. Assam Library Association 1938
15. Delhi Library Association 1938
16. Utkal Library Association 1944
17. Travancore Library Association 1945
18. Central Provinces and Berar Library Association 1945

4.1.2 National Level Library Associations
The national level Library Associations founded pre-Independence are as follows:
1. All India Public Library Association 1919
2. Indian Library Association 1933
3. Government of India Library Association 1933
4. All India Rural Library Services Association 1933
5. All India Manuscript Library Association 1944

4.2 Post-Independence era of Library Associations in India

4.2.1 State Level Library Associations
The state level Library Associations founded after Independence are as follows:
1. Hyderabad Library Association 1951
2. Delhi Library Association 1953
4. Uttar Pradesh Library Association 1956
5. Madhya Pradesh Library Association 1957
7. Karnataka Library Association 1961
8. M. P. Library Association 1962
9. Rajasthan Library Association 1962
10. Gujarat Granthalaya Sangh 1964
12. Haryana Library Association 1969
13. Kerala Library Association 1971

4.2.2 National level Library Associations
The National level Library Associations founded after Independence are as follows:
1. Library Field Workers Association 1951
2. Indian Associations of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC) 1955
3. Academy of Library Science and Documentation 1956
4. Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists in India (AALDI) 1966
5. All India College Library Association 1966
6. Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS) 1969
7. Indian Association of Academic Librarians (INDAAL) 1973
8. Society for Information Science (SIS) 1976
9. Indian Archivists 1977
10. Medical Library associations of India (MALI) 1981
11. Micrographic Congress of India (MCI) 1982

Evidently, state level library associations are present in almost every state. Besides, there are also several state level professional associations like School Librarians’ Associations, College Librarians’ Associations, Public Librarians’ Association etc.

5. PROBLEMS CONFRONTING LIBRARY ASSOCIATIONS

Although two national level library associations, viz, IASLIC and ILA are playing their role quite well, they still need to be strong enough to be the representative of the LIS professionals of India at the national level. Library associations in India find it very difficult to fulfil their stated objectives because of the several problems confronting them.

The multiplicity of associations stands to be a major problem perplexing LIS professionals and making them dubious about the need and value of their membership. They fail to distinguish the actual benefit of choosing the right association which would serve their professional interests in the long run. As things stand today, a librarian in India has to become a member of at least three professional associations: an association of the group to which he belongs, the state level association, and one national level library association.

Political parties often take the upper hand and regulate the various activities of the professional associations in order to seek advantages. Due to these interferences, associations fail to live up to their objectives and aspirations. Therefore, formation of associations seldom functions by the consideration of the welfare of the members rather is impelled by the self-centred individuals who seek to feather their own nests. Such extraneous factors affect a library association considerably compelling its functions to bring to a standstill.

The dearth of resources is another alarming factor that makes the library associations in India flimsy. Financial sources are too limited to make them viable. Very few state level associations get financial support from the government. Negligible amount is saved from the workshops and training programmes so arranged. Moreover each and every association is not capable of earning enough from the sale of publications. Besides, insignificant amount of subscription and thin membership count result in lack of funds. Absence of sound governmental aids and reasonable monetary support restrict the authorities to recruit salaried employees. This consequently leads to poor quality of daily services and other promotional activities of the organisation.[5, 6, 7]

Unlike the national level associations the state ones cannot operate equally in all respects because of the existing differences in standard of education, finance and political environment. Furthermore, these associations are incapable of providing standard services. Considering the difference in strength, national level associations should place greater
emphasis on informal knowledge sharing (e.g. sharing private and interpersonal channels, particularly telephone and face to face communication) while regional or local associations could place more emphasis on formal and codified information.\[8\]

The representation of library professionals regarding the service condition, status, long pending vacancies of libraries and information centres, creating more job opportunities for LIS professionals, underemployment etc. to the Government of India has not been given due importance. The sole reason behind such apathy is the strength of the representing library associations especially in terms of their members. Most of the time Government has ignored the demands of library associations by pointing out the inadequate number of members and hence questioning their credibility to represent the entire community. As a result, Government of India has been quite reluctant to announce plans, policies and programmes to address issues and long-time legitimate demands of library professionals. It frustrates library professionals and cast a detrimental effect on the library movement.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the discussions made about the problems impeding optimum functioning of library associations and intending to provide solutions to them, some recommendations are given below.

(i) There should be a unique hierarchical structure of library association from national to local level in India. Each library association should be affiliated to its higher body according to the hierarchical structure of library association.

(ii) There may be sectoral library associations at the national level representing different types of libraries or LIS professionals. These sectoral associations should be affiliated to the national central library association.

(iii) The sectoral associations at the state level should be affiliated to the central library association of the state.

(iv) The national central library association should thus function as a federal organization with individual members, association members and institutional members. Membership of this association should remain open to all who are engaged or interested in library service.

(v) The IASLIC and ILA may be merged and developed as the central library association of the country on the models of LA, ALA or IFLA with branches, divisions, sections, and so on to look after local interest and specialised services.

(vi) Sectoral associations can be formed under the national central library association to look after the specific problems.

(vii) Effective constitutions both for the national central library association and state central library association should be formed reflecting the federal structure and other
necessary elements like objectives, activities, formation of executive body, membership etc.

(viii) Sources of finance for the central library association should have to be generated by motivating each and every Indian LIS professional to take its membership, arranging regular workshops and short-term training programmes. All these sources may not be sufficient enough to make the central library association financially strong. As such the Government of India should provide financial assistance considering the vital role the association can play in the national development.

(ix) Ensuring the steady flow of finance the central library association should employ the whole time office-bearers to look after all the functions of the association with help of enthusiastic voluntary workers.

(x) The central library association should get necessary recognition from the Government of India as the sole representative body of LIS professionals in India.

(xi) Both the central library association and Government of India should work hand in hand for making any national policy for the development of library and information system in India and its proper implementation.

(xii) The state central library association should work as the subordinate body of Central Library association and ensure the process of developing library and information system in the respective state involving the state government.

(xiii) The central library association can also work as an accreditation agency for LIS education in India in the absence of the accreditation agency of LIS education in India. It will help to check the mushrooming growth of LIS schools in India ensuring the proper standard. This activity of the central library association will add to its credit a colossal impression in the eye of every LIS professional in India.

(xiv) The central library association should build partnership with international library associations like LA, ALA or IFLA. It would help Indian LIS professionals improve their credibility of Indian LIS professionals at the international level.

(xv) Finally, meeting should be called inviting representation from all level of library associations in India under the leadership of IASLIC, ILA and SIS to discuss the formation of a committee to survey the viewpoints of LIS professionals on the formation of central library association and also the pros and cons associated with the formation of such association. All the existing library associations should help financially to manage the cost for completing the task assigned to the proposed committee. The leading library associations should also try to motivate Government of India to sponsor the task partially if not fully.

It is hoped that the formation of a strong library association at the national level as recommended would help to solve several problems of LIS professionals and provide a better playing field while pursuing professional matters with the central and state governments in India. It would also help the library movement in India.

7. CONCLUSION

Library associations have had a bigger and wiser role to play for the development of the LIS profession and the professionals. Divided we fall, united we stand! Through library associations, professionals in the field get a platform to come together and persuade their cause and also the cause influencing this profession and services at large. The associations can pursue causes which can uplift the status of the profession and the professionals. A well defined and closely knitted structure of library associations would add more weight to the
efforts, activities and roles of the library professionals. Libraries and the library professionals have a larger role to play in the development of society and nation. Library Associations facilitate the realisation of this goal.

REFERENCES


