

An Evaluation of the Role, Responsibility, and Significance of Library Professional Associations in India

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Abstract

The role of professional associations cannot be under-estimated. In any field, professional associations have been found to do remarkable jobs with great achievements. The present study endeavours to find out the role of professional associations in the development of the library profession and professionals. Any professional association forms the backbone of professional development, and library associations are powerful platforms to raise issues related to the profession at the national level. This paper presents a brief outline of the issues and problems of LIS professionals in the country, and the existing scenario of the Library Associations of India. The role of state and regional library associations is more visible in some parts of the country, and in recent years, the associations at the national level are striving hard to make their presence felt, and convincing the professionals that they have some role to play in the library development programmes. In this paper, some of the vital issues are proposed for consideration and discussion. As per the study, it is observed that in the present scenario all the library associations in India are not playing a proper significant role.

Keywords: LIS Professionals, LIS Associations, Professional Societies, Unemployment, Career Advancement, Promotional Avenues, Re-Designation

Introduction

The community of LIS professionals should pay homage to Padmashri Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, the father of library movement in India, for his valuable and important contributions towards Library Science, and in providing status, pay scales, and other benefits as per the teachers

in the society. Dr. S. R. Ranganathan did a lot for library and librarianship.

Being a member of the UGC Committee, Dr. Ranganathan did a splendid job for librarians. One may imagine his vision, as due to his herculean efforts, the posts of 'Reference Librarian', 'Information Scientist', and 'Cataloguer' may be created in higher education. He strongly raised the voice of library professionals through library associations at various national platforms. Today, we need another Dr. Ranganathan, who may be a torch bearer, to fight the challenging issues of librarianship and put forth all the facts at the national level.

Library associations are not recent developments. The American Library Association, the first of its kind, was formed in 1876, and the next year, the library association of Great Britain was established. Since then several library associations at the international, national, state, district, and city levels have been formed, each of them with definite aims and objectives. Nowadays, associations of special library and information centres are also formed.

Library associations are learned societies. They promote the development of the library movement in a country. They strive for better provision of library and information services. In this process, library associations also strive for the advancement of the profession and the professionals. Associations and professional societies are powerful forces representing the voice of the professional community, to solve the problems related to welfare, status, working conditions, physical facilities, education, and training, including research and development activities. Although the central purpose of

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the associations has always been to serve the needs and to protect the interests of the community, they strive to broaden the purpose and serve the overall needs of the nation. So, library associations are powerful platforms to raise the issues of any profession at the national level. At present, more than 20 state and local level library associations and two or three national level associations exist in India; however, none of them are working or playing their roles properly.

Review of Related Literature

As per the investigation of Srivastava (2010), "Library associations have been bringing to the notice of the concerned authorities from time to time problems connected with the improvement of service conditions of libraries. The annual general body meetings, conferences and seminars usually provide an opportunity to the members to discuss the matters concerning service conditions, employment, pay scales and cadre. Resolutions and recommendations passed at these meetings, the associations have been in a position to place before the Government the collective opinion of its members in the problems relating to service conditions."

Pan and Hovde (2010) opined that "the conferences and meetings sponsored by professional associations provide a forum not only for learning, but also for professional exchange. Presentations, posters, panel sessions, exhibition etc., all bring people in the profession together, keeping them abreast of current trends, problems, and solutions. Associations also sponsor single-subject sessions and courses."

As per the investigation by Kumar and Kumari (2019), "Libraries hold a special position in the development of a society. The objective for training of Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals is to promote library, to educate, to articulate and provide for the need of the clientele to increase productivity and economy of the society. The process of developing competent library and information science professionals is directly related to the quality of LIS education imparted to these professionals."

Pradhan (2018) stated, "The basic assignment of a library Association is to improve, expand and the professional knowledge in the library and information institutions and research centres, to provide leadership quality among the

library professions, promote and improvement of library services, to promote educational programs and other innovative programs and publications."

As per Dowling and Fiels (2009), "Library associations are crucial to the development of libraries and the profession locally, nationally, and internationally. They represent libraries, the profession, and the needs of users to those outside the library community, advocating for and promoting positions on issues that impact everyone. It is important for those entering the profession to understand the value of library associations and the need to join and participate. Library associations need new members to provide energy and ideas, and future leadership to continue to succeed."

Prins and Gier (1995) concluded, on the basis of an international survey, that "the library profession has been facing image problems for a quite long time. Further they stated that there is no easy and fast solution to change the image of the library professionals. Librarians should find out new ways to sort out this very serious issue."

Franklin (2010) said, "As we are aware that 'Unity is strength', hence associations are formed to unite the professionals of a particular field of common interest areas. Professional associations are playing an important role in the development of a particular subject field. It is true for the library and information science profession as well. Library associations at different levels have been playing a significant role in the development and promotion of library systems. They are providing a platform to discuss various issues and problems regarding the libraries. Library Associations help in various ways. First of all, they unite the professionals and provide a common platform to raise their voice. Seminars, conferences, workshops, training programs, orientation courses, short-term training courses, ICT literacy awareness events are arranged from time to time by the library associations for keeping their members abreast of new developments in the field of library and information science/service."

The study conducted by Pachauri (2020) reveals that "the image of a profession is created in form of the judgment or perception of others by analysing the nature of work, type of work, customer satisfaction, quality and quantity of the performance etc. Study covers the image of library

professionals in cinema, commercial advertisement, comic books, and print media and in the society”.

Chikkamanju (2015) states, “Different forms of unemployment occur, few are not that harmful but few are very risky for the society as a whole. People waiting for their first job come under frictional unemployment. The study reveals that the Library Science trained professionals having the highest unemployment rates and facing low wages issues in India. The drop out rates of High school students are better than the unemployment growth of LIS professionals. So right about now you are thinking to yourself, ‘Why in the world would I want to become a librarian?’”

Rai (2017) stated in his research, “After 75 years of independence librarianship in India is not as strong as it must be, somehow or other these library associations are also responsible for the present poor condition of librarianship in India. These associations just give their comment on problems, but not take proper action to solve the problem, this is the reason that after 75 years of independence of India, public libraries could not be administered and managed with the clear mandate of law in many states of India. They also never raised the voice against unemployment, exploitation in private sector, designation, promotion, status, pay scales etc.”

Issues Regarding the Profession

The following factors call for a total re-look at and remedial measures in the field of Library and Information Science:

- Conventionally accepted importance of libraries and librarians.
- Changing scenario of our education system, with a major shift from teaching to teaching-learning process, and the consequential importance of modern library and information systems.
- Technological advancement and its high impact in the information handling processes in libraries, including the new gen resource development and user services.
- Enhanced knowledge, skill, and competence of library professionals, warranting better service conditions, including adequate career advancement.

- Unemployment, exploitation, better salaries, and assured job prospects to attract the best talents to the profession.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To discuss the role and responsibility of various library associations in India and to find the impact of library associations in the betterment of librarianship in India.
- To depict the status, functions, and significance of library associations in India.
- To know how much they are active and significant in playing their roles in LIS professional developments.
- To know about their activities, like organising seminars, conferences, workshops, training programmes, support to young professionals, publications, and so on.
- Representation on various issues at the national and regional platforms and the discussion of the issues with higher authorities and government officials, including public representative MPs and MLAs.

Methodology

Online survey method is the primary data collection instrument in this investigation. Google Forms was created and circulated among the students, teachers, research scholars, librarians, professors, and other library professionals via WhatsApp groups, email, and social media groups. Data was tabulated and analysed in the form of charts and tables. Various problems and issues were also discussed with the respondents. An online questionnaire was framed and a mix of close- and open-ended questions were included for the respondents. In the last question, suggestions, feedback, and opinions were also invited from the respondents.

Data Analysis

Data analysed is presented in the form of tables and charts. From the Google Forms, data is exported to the MS Word format and tabulated in a meaningful order. Library and Information Science professionals are facing a number

of issues and problems related to the status, profession, working conditions, basic infrastructure, unemployment, and exploitation. Let us understand every aspect, one by one.

Sample Size

As per the data collected from the respondents, a total of 150 respondents share their views and responses on the questionnaire. We may clearly observe in Fig. 1 that a majority of the respondents (39.3%) are school librarians, followed by college and university librarians (30%), students (9.3%), LIS professionals (9.3%), LIS teachers (5.3%), research scholars (5.3%), and other respondents (1.3%).

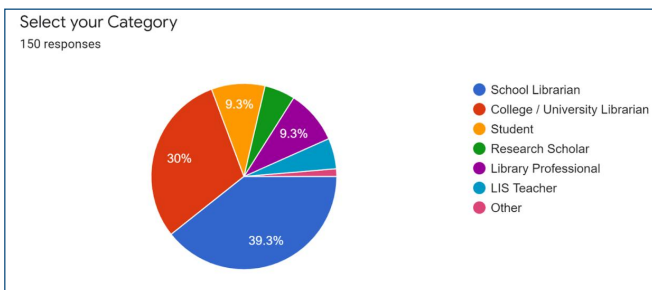


Fig. 1

- A Google Form was created for collecting the responses and a total of 150 responses were recorded. The first question was related to membership in any association or society.

Are you a member of any library association or society?

Table 1

Total Response = 150	Yes	No
	99	51
Percentage	66.00	34.00

It is clearly observed that out of 150 respondents, only 99 (66%) LIS professionals are members of any library association/society in India. It is shocking to observe that approx. one-third (34%) of the LIS professionals are not members of any national or regional association or society. How can we think about professional development when more than 34% (51) LIS professionals are not members of any association or society?

- *Membership in an Association/Society:* In response to this, we observe that 47.3% (71) of the respondents are members of the Indian Library Association

(ILA); 16 (10.70%) respondents are members of the Uttar Pradesh Library Association; 14 (9.30%) are members of the IASLIC; and 10 (6.70%) are members of the United Progressive Library Association. A majority of the LIS professionals are not members of any association or society.

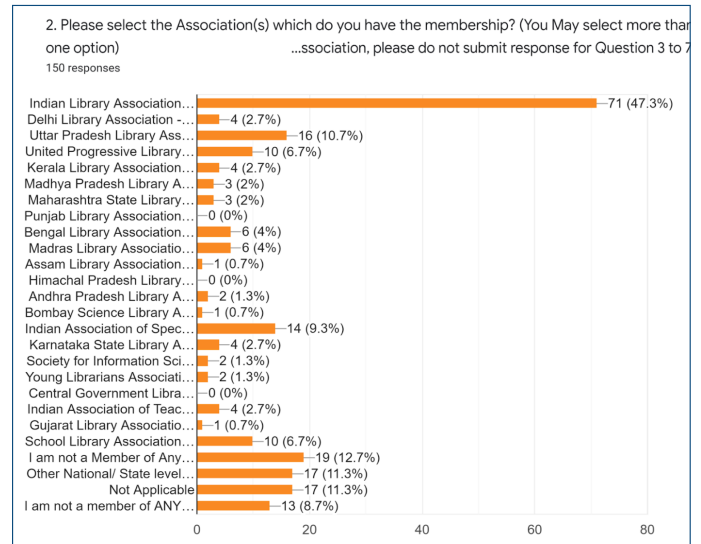


Fig. 2

- *Democratic Environment in Professional Associations:* The third question was related to the democratic procedures followed by the professional associations. It was asked whether the respondents think that their professional association/society conducts regular elections for electing people as presidents, secretary, and to other important posts.

Only 64 (42.70%) LIS professionals think that their associations regularly conduct elections for presidents, secretary, and other important posts. Around 86 (57.30%) do not have information about and awareness of the election procedures of their association.

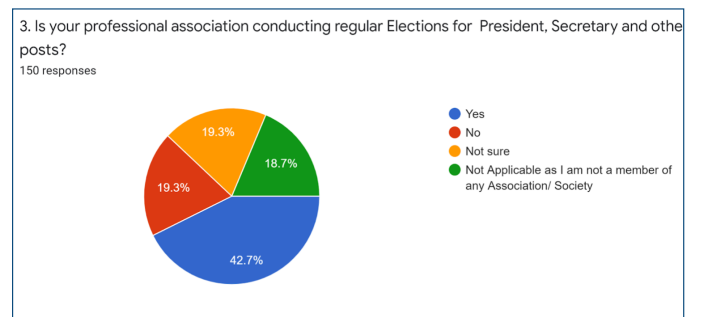


Fig. 3

- **Training and Workshop for Professional Development:** To organise short-term training and workshop programmes must be a feature of any professional association or society, for the professional growth and development of their fraternity. When we analysed the responses showed in Fig. 4 regarding the short-term workshops and training programmes, we clearly observed that only 64 (42.70%) respondents agree that their professional association regularly conducts workshops and training programmes for the LIS professionals; however, a majority (86, 57.30%) of the respondents denied this.

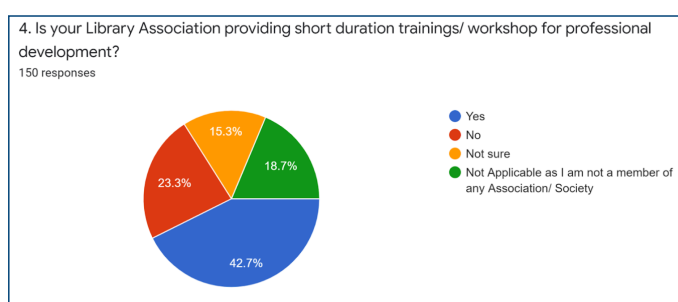


Fig. 4

- **Seminars and Conferences:** It is a regular feature of any professional association/society to organise conferences, seminars, symposiums, and annual meetings for professional communication and to discuss various important professional issues. Fig. 5 indicates that 88 (58.70%) respondents agree that their professional association organises conferences and seminars at regular intervals; 33 (22%) do not agree with the statement; and 29 (19.30%) LIS professionals could not the answer the question because they are not members of any library association or society.

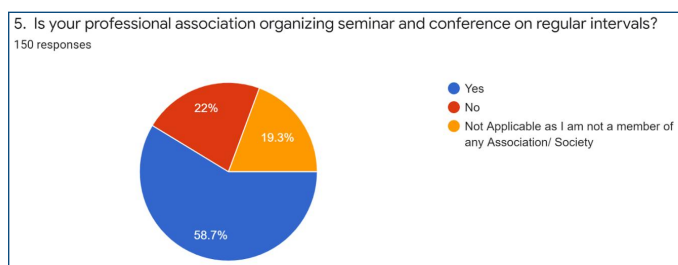


Fig. 5

- **Publication of Newsletter and Journals:** Publication is an intellectual and scholarly communication activity in which the professional associations publish their newsletters and journals, to keep their members updated, so that they may be aware of the recent trends and developments in the subjects. A newsletter is the most predominant resource to inform the professionals about welfare activities, like union activity, protests, agitations, professional issues, professional representations, and correspondence with government officials. We analyse (Fig. 6) that only 72 (48%) professionals think that their professional association/society regularly publishes journals and newsletters, and the remaining 78 (52%) respondents are not aware and do not think that their professional bodies regularly communicate with the members and publish journals and newsletters regularly.

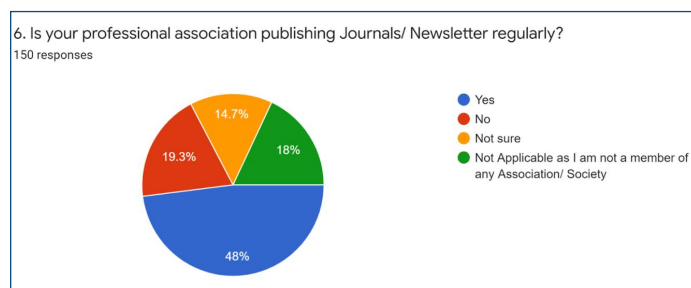


Fig. 6

- **Apprenticeship for BLISc and MLISc Students:** Apprenticeships are an excellent way to encourage young people and allow them to learn a wide range of skills in many different environments pertaining to their interests and career choices. So it is a technique which offers a solution to help young people into any profession, by equipping them with the technical and core skills needed to take on new jobs, both today and in the future. When we asked if the respondents thought that their professional association/society was working towards providing apprenticeships to the MLISc and BLISc students, the data was shocking (Fig. 7). Only 13 (8.7%) respondents agreed that their professional association provides apprenticeship programmes for the young professionals; 73 (48.70%) denied the statement; 36 (24%) were not sure; and 28 (18.70%) respondents could not give their opinion.

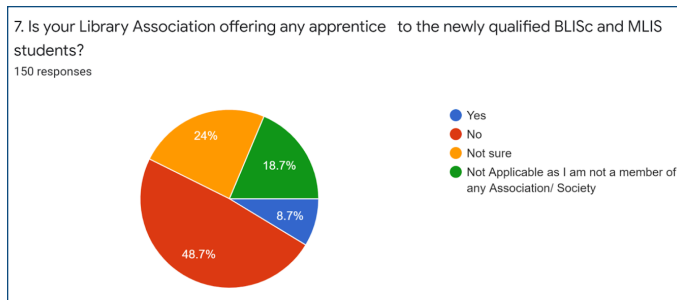


Fig. 7

- *Issues of LIS Professionals:* There are various burning issues faced by LIS professionals in the present era. Career advancement, exploitation of youth in the private sector, impact of ICT on the profession, chaos in scholarly communication, promotional avenues, unemployment, support for young professionals, and issues related to pay scales, cadre, re-designation, and so on, are some important issues faced by LIS professionals.

After analysis (Fig. 8), we observe that 68% of the respondents agree that unemployment is a big issue for them; 62.7% think that career advancement is also a burning issue; while 50% believe that exploitation in the private sector is a challenging issue for LIS professionals.

Re-designation, promotional issues, and pay scales and cadre are serious issues of the profession as well, and 58%, 46.70%, and 40.70% of the respondents agreed, respectively. The impact of ICT is an influencing factor and 32% of the LIS professionals accepted that it is a major issue for them. Some other issues like chaos in scholarly communication, support to young professionals, role of professional bodies, and so on are some big issues faced by the LIS professionals.

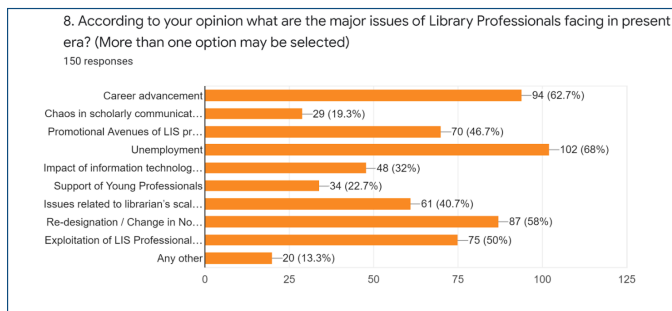


Fig. 8

- *Are the Professional Issues Being Addressed by the LIS Associations at Various National/Regional Platforms?*

We have already discussed various contemporary issues and challenges in point number 8, and those are very influencing factors for the professional growth of the LIS professionals. When we analysed the data (Fig. 9), it was found that 96 (64%) respondents were not satisfied with the role of LIS professional associations or societies. The unions and associations are not representing their issues, on the national platforms, to the government authorities, ministries, Honourable Members of Parliament (MPs), and Assemblies (MLAs). They are also not raising the issues in front of regulatory bodies like the AICTE, CBSE, UGC, education boards, MCI, NCTE, and so on. The LIS professionals are facing various problems like unemployment, promotional avenues, scale, cadre, re-designation, exploitation, career advancement, and some other issues.

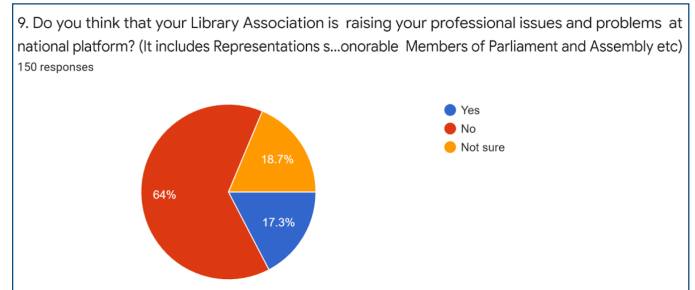


Fig. 9

- *Role and Responsibility of Professional Library Associations:*

In this section, the question was raised about the role, responsibility, significance, and moral duty of LIS professional associations and societies.

The following suggestions and views were received from the respondents:

- *Support to Young Professionals:* Librarianship is an ever-changing field. Therefore, the things that we learn in the time span of two years of the Master's degree becomes obsolete very fast. At times, it even happens that what we learn as students is totally different from what we experience as library professionals. So, it can be rightly said that the actual learning process begins when an LIS student starts

working as a library professional. Therefore, senior professionals must help and support the youth.

- *Regular Elections of LIS Professional Bodies:* It is important to have elections at regular intervals for any association or union to ensure the proper functioning of the executive body. Elections provide an opportunity to the members of the associations to assert their voice and opinion, and choose the person whose priorities and ideas match with them the most. The election process must be on time, so that a democratic environment may be setup.
- *Unemployment:* Trained library and information science professionals are not getting jobs. The government is not planning for the development of the libraries, so the job opportunities are reducing day by day. Our professional unions should raise their voice at the national and state-level platforms, and should make dialogue and communication with the government representatives, by fixing meetings, and sending demands and reminders.
- *Exploitation in the Private Sector:* Every school, college, and institution is given an affiliation by various regulatory bodies like the CBSE, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, DEC, MCI, and so on. All the regulatory bodies formulate certain rules and regulations for the smooth and effective functioning of the institution. In the present scenario, a number of institutions are running under self-financing schemes. In such types of institutes, the management of the school, college, or university is the supreme authority for recruitment, salary, pay structure, and working and service conditions of the employees. All of these regulatory bodies emphasise only on the recruitment, qualification, salary, and the working conditions of the teachers of the institutions, and give approval to the teaching faculties only. So, the management of the institution provides a proper salary and healthy working atmosphere for the teachers and not for the librarians. These regulatory bodies do not bother about the librarians, so the management offers only 2,500 to 5,000 rupees to the librarians as there is no strict policy from the concerned regulatory bodies of the organisation. The respondents think that the only solution to the problem is that these bodies should also look at the recruitment, pay and salary, and service and working conditions of the LIS pro-

fessionals, and approval must be given for the same.

- It is the duty of the library associations to take feedback and put pressure on all the above-mentioned regulatory bodies for the effective implementation of recruitment, pay, salary, working conditions, and approvals of LIS professionals in their affiliated institutes and organisations.
- *Organise Seminars and Workshops:* Professional associations can be said to be those associations which are formed by a specific group of professionals to achieve some common goals, like an association of teachers, doctors, lawyers, and so on. Similarly, in the field of library science, many library associations and societies are formed. These associations are important because they indulge in many activities which can develop the skills of the professionals to bring them at par with the growing demand of time. These associations conduct seminars, conferences, refresher courses, short-term courses, and training programmes, to make the professionals aware of the current trends in their field.
- *Cadre and Promotional Avenues:* The UGC categorised the librarian as a non-vocational teaching staff or academic staff; however, the librarian is not given the teaching cadre. They are not entitled to avail the winter and summer vacations. They also do not have promotion opportunities, although all the recruitment conditions, minimum eligibility, qualifications, and cadre are the same as assistant professors. So, why are library professionals not eligible for promotion as a principal in degree colleges? In polytechnic colleges, librarians face a lot of problems to get scales and cadre. Similarly, there is also an urgent need to review the promotional avenues, cadre, and pay scales of the librarian in school libraries. All the state- and national-level professional associations should discuss the above-mentioned issues with higher government authorities, regulatory bodies, and policy makers as soon as possible.
- *Re-Designation:* For attracting efficient and hard-working people towards this profession, it is necessary that sufficient changes in the promotion opportunities and progress are made. A highly qualified librarian retires at the same designation at which they were initially recruited, after putting in about 30 years' service. So, an enlightened promotion

policy must be evolved by the administrators. It is high time for the authorities to follow suit, and even go one step further by re-designating the post of the librarian as TGT/PGT (Library & Information Services: LIS) in the school libraries and Assistant Professor (Library & Information Science) at the degree colleges and universities. Once they are re-designated as teachers, the channel of promotion opens automatically for them, the same way that it does for the other teachers. Moreover, membership of a larger community creates a sense of security and satisfaction among the librarians, and the feelings of mutual brotherhood and fraternity are strengthened.

- Overall, it is observed that the designation of a Librarian is not appropriate in the present-changing ICT era, as the roles and responsibilities of librarians have completely changed since the last two decades. Change of designation will improve and boost the responsibility, image, status, and cadre of the librarians.
- *Representation at National Platforms:* Associations should write regularly to put pressure on the central and state governments to make a common policy for the implementation of library legislation in the country. At present, only 19 Indian states have passed the library legislation in their states; however, the conditions of the public libraries are still as before. These bills are similar to other bills – once passed, they are forgotten in red-tape of the country. The chain of libraries (state, district, taluka, and village) could not be developed till now. The central government should have the provision of levy for the libraries, so that the working conditions, infrastructure, and literacy could be strengthened for the benefit of the public of the country.
- *Joint Federation of LIS Associations:* Library associations of various states and other library teachers associations must jointly form a new federation, i.e. the Federation of India Library Associations, to fight for the rights of the library professionals. This federation may communicate at least twice a year to discuss various issues, challenges, and problems faced by the LIS professionals. The responsibility to form the Federation of LIS Associations of India must be taken by ILA, because ILA is the pioneer and leading library association in India.
- *Publication of Literature:* Journals and newsletters are important sources of information for academic study, research, and development activities. The article published or information published in these sources often provide more up-to-date or detailed information about the concerned subject and professional development. All the LIS associations and societies must publish their newsletters and journals periodically, to provide up-to-date information and news to their fellow professionals.

Conclusion

One voice is easily lost, but an organisation representing hundreds or thousands provides a unified voice representing all – a voice that can be heard. It is the prime role and responsibility of library associations to raise the voice about unemployment, promotion, re-designation, pay scales, cadre, and status of library professionals. Library associations should write to the higher authorities regarding the above serious issues of the profession. There are a number of learned professors, librarians, and information scientists who are a member of various high-level commissions and committees, and they should come forward and put forth these serious issues at a national level. ILA is the biggest and pioneer national association; therefore, ILA should come out in a leading role and the debates must be open at the regional and national levels for the same. It is high time for submitting strong representations, recommendations, and follows-ups by the library association to regulatory bodies like the UGC, AICTE, NCTE, CBSE, MCI, NCERT, universities and government representatives, and the policy makers.

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