

Professional Associations and Academic Librarianship in Kerala



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1. Introduction

The library professional in an academic institution has to anticipate the changing expectations of the users, and be flexible in adopting new skills and levels of awareness. Technology has drastically changed the way librarians define themselves and the way they think about their profession and the institutions they serve. In addition to the technical and professional skills, commitment to user centred services and skills for effective oral and written communication; they must have other skills, including business and management, teaching, leadership, etc. Eventually, library and information professionals in academic libraries need to update their knowledge and skills in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as they play the role of key success factor in enabling the library to perform its role as an information support system for the society.

2. Significance of Professional Associations

Professional associations have a major role in supporting and raising awareness in professional development at the national level and within the profession and providing opportunities to gain practical skill through active participation in professional activities. An effective national association is expected to influence the development of professional manpower in a variety of ways by enforcing standards for library and information education programmes, provision of better salary and service structure and developing a positive image about the profession and professionals in the society.¹ Library Associations provide a common forum to

bring together all persons engaged in library activities or interested in library development.² Just as a library professional is concerned with a user's quest for knowledge, the professional association must provide a support network for its members. The professional associations have an important role in developing and marketing distance education courses to library staff.³ A librarian's network of contacts can be cultivated and refined at the conferences sponsored by professional associations. Participating actively in professional associations exposes one to a variety of perspectives and viewpoints. Librarians who are active in professional associations have realistic opportunities to improve or enhance their leadership skills. Participating in professional associations also provides opportunities to become familiar with the processes of research and publication. These important processes contribute to the librarian's professional development.⁴

3. Professional Associations: An Overview

Some of the important Professional associations and organizations in India are Indian Library Association (ILA), Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC), Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS), Society for Information Science (SIS), Indian Academic Library Association (IALA), Society for the Advancement of Library and Information Science (SALIS) and at the state level: Kerala Library Association (KLA) and Kerala Library Professionals Organisation (KELPRO). Most of these Library Associations organize yearly conferences, which encourage the professionals to participate in conferences and to publish their research output. Most of the Professional Associations in India also conduct workshops once a year in conjunction with the annual conference. Professional associations and organizations such as ILA, IASLIC, IATLIS, and SIS are also helping to revise curricula to meet current demands. ILA organized the 22nd All India conference, Library and Information Science curriculum for 3rd World Countries, in 1987. IASLIC organized a conference on LIS Profession in India: Vision 2010. IATLIS organized a national seminar in 2000, Infrastructure Facility for LIS Education and Research in India. SIS also organized a

conference in 2000, *Accepting the Challenges of IT Re-inventing the LIS Profession in the New Millennium*.⁵

3.1 Professional Associations: National Level

Indian Library Association (ILA) was formed in 1933 with the aim of developing library movement and library science education in India. Its publications include ILA Bulletin, ILA Newsletter and proceedings of the seminars and conferences conducted at different parts of the country. Its membership is open to individuals and institutions that fulfill the prescribed conditions.⁶

Another important national level association is Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centres (IASLIC) which has also contributed a lot to promote the professional development of Academic Librarians by conducting regular conferences and workshops throughout the country. IASLIC was established in 1955 as a non-profit professional body to coordinate the activities among the special libraries, scientific, technological and research institutions, and other information centres.⁷ IASLIC Bulletin is published quarterly and other publications include IASLIC newsletter, conference proceedings, etc. Different categories of membership are open to library professionals and institutions across the country.

Indian Association of Teachers of Library and Information Science (IATLIS) was formed in 1969 to further the cause of library education in India. Its membership is open to teachers of library and information science, staff of libraries, researchers, students and others interested in library and information science education and research. As part of the continuing education programme the association holds periodic seminars on various aspects in LIS teaching. Its publications include IATLIS communications and conference proceedings.

Society for Information Science (SIS) is an all India professional body devoted to encouraging interaction among information professionals, and users, established in 1975. One of the important aims of the society is to encourage the professionals to maintain their professional competence. Society for the Advancement of Library and Information Science (SALIS)

is another library association catering to the needs of library professionals and was established as a professional association in 2002. The primary focus was to provide need-based service to the profession and to work for the advancement of Library and Information Science. Its membership is open to library professionals and institutions all over India. Its publications include quarterly newsletter and free e-journal called *SALIS Journal of Library and Information Science*. Its activities include periodical lectures on emerging trends and special programs to impart soft skills essential for library professionals. Indian Academic Library Association (IALA) is another active library association established to serve the university and college librarians of the country.

Majority of the states in India have their own library associations supporting continuing education programmes in their respective states. In addition to library science education, short-term training programmes are offered by professional associations of librarians in different states. The professional associations such as Delhi Library Association (DLA) and Kerala Granthasala Sanghom are also imparting LIS education at lower level such as Certificate/Diploma in Library and Information Science.

3.2 Professional Associations: State Level

In Kerala, professional associations were late to materialize due to the shortage of qualified librarians. The Kerala Library Association (KLA) was formed in 1972 to strive for the development of libraries in the state, to represent the interests of the qualified librarians working in different libraries and provide proper library services. KLA has played a major role in developing proper library and information system in the state. Membership of the association is open to all library professionals who satisfy the required minimum qualifications.⁸ The publications include KLA Newsletter published quarterly and distributed freely to its members, various books and souvenirs. The association organizes through its study circles at regional levels, various workshops and seminars to keep the professionals abreast of the latest developments in the field of library and information science. Kerala Library Professionals' Organization, popularly known as

KELPRO, is another active library association in Kerala started in 1992 with the joint effort of a group of young, energetic and enthusiastic practicing librarians and information scientists. Publication programme is one of the important objectives of KELPRO. It has been publishing its official journal *KELPRO BULLETIN* (half-yearly) from 1997 onwards encouraging research publications from the professionals, teachers and students in LIS.

3.3 Professional Associations: International

At the international level IFLA, ALA, SLA and CILIP are some of the associations actively involved in the training and continuing education of library professionals. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. Founded in 1927 it serves the library professionals all around the world. IFLA provides institutional membership and personal membership to individuals. A range of professional meetings, seminars and workshops are held around the world by IFLA professional groups and Core Activities. The website of IFLA⁹ and IFLA journal provide all the required details regarding its activities and professional development programmes.

The American Library Association (ALA), the oldest library association in the world was founded in 1876. Its aim is to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. ALA through its membership and various conferences, training, workshops, online learning modules, etc. promote library education and continuous learning for LIS professionals.¹⁰

Membership in Special Libraries Association (SLA) also provides opportunity to numerous professional development activities to its members in the form of webinars, and online portals to world of learning opportunities to information professionals. Information outlook published eight times a year

is the authoritative source for information on the profession and its online version is available exclusively to its members.

Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) was formed in 2002 following the unification of the Institute of Information Scientists and the Library Association, London.¹¹ Membership in CILIP helps to keep the skills and knowledge up-to-date through member-only content on the CILIP website, CILIP Update magazine, the latest titles from Facet Publishing and CILIP Training and Development courses. All these international associations provide a wide range of online courses which, if properly utilized, will help in self-education and thereby improve the professional development of information professionals. The professional associations are thus accessible by library professionals within the country and across international boundaries.

4. Membership in Professional Associations

As part of a survey of library professionals employed in the major universities of Kerala viz. University of Kerala (UOK), Mahatma Gandhi University (MGU), Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT), University of Calicut (UOC), Kannur University (KAN), Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit (SSU), and Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), to evaluate their Professional activities, their membership in regional, national and international associations was also studied. The study found that library professionals in the universities in Kerala are aware of the importance of library associations in the development of the profession.

Of the total 185 library professionals surveyed, 128 (69.2%) of the library professionals have membership in one or two library associations. None has membership in library associations at the International level during the period of study. National level associations like IASLIC (3.1%) and ILA (7.3%) have very few members from the Universities of Kerala as evident from the Fig. 11.1 and SALIS has 1.7% members. Majority of the professionals of Kerala Agricultural University, Sree Sankaracharya University and Kannur University who have membership in library associations, have membership in KLA,

and in general, 63.8 per cent of the library professionals have membership in the state library associations as KLA and 19.5 per cent in KELPRO. The library professionals are to be made aware of the importance of professional associations in career development and encourage them to enroll in more library associations at national as well as international levels.

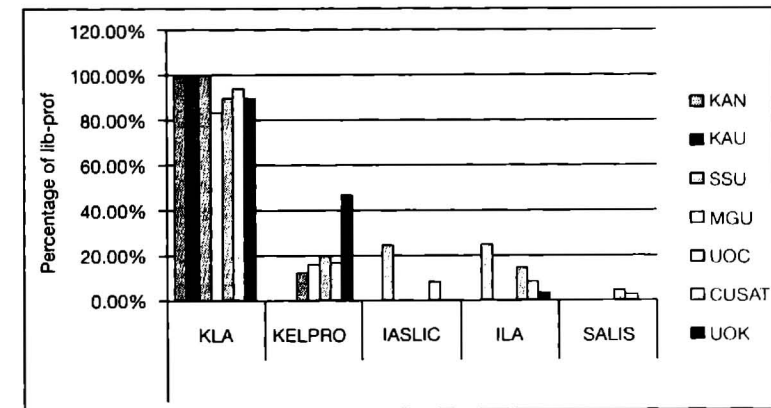


Fig. 11.1: Membership In Professional Associations

5. Conclusion

Though University Grants Commission (UGC) conducts refresher courses regularly, it benefits only a very small percentage of qualified senior library professionals. DRTC, NISCAIR, DELNET and INFLIBNET conduct workshops and training programmes in ICT applications relevant to library profession. But India lacks an institution to provide regular training programmes for the continuing professional development of academic librarians. Associations can play an active part in improving the standards of library profession and thereby improve the standards of library service. The conferences and meetings sponsored by professional associations provide a forum not only for learning, but also for professional exchange, keeping them abreast of current trends, problems, and solutions. Professional Associations have to take more initiatives to conduct regular continuing education programmes for library professionals at all levels of the profession. Lack of active participation by the

members and inadequate funds are some of the problems faced by the Professional Associations in conducting various programmes.

NOTES

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