

LIBRARY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE PUNJAB PROVINCE OF PAKISTAN: AN APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

Library is a growing organism and librarianship is an expanding multidimensional profession. Librarianship connects people and ideas. Library organisations connect library profession and professionals. These organisations include associations, groups, and forums, whether registered or unregistered. Pakistan was born on 14 August 1947. Punjab is the largest province in Pakistan in terms of population, libraries and library schools. Punjab Library Association is the first library association in Pakistan. At present there are 11 such organisations in the Punjab province of Pakistan. This appraisal, founded upon literature review, personal communications, observation and authors' experiences of dealing with these associations, introduces these organizations and their contribution to the cause of librarianship in the province and the country.

Keywords: Library associations; Library organizations; Library groups; Library forums; Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Reitz (2005) defines library association as:

A membership organization consisting of a group of librarians, library directors, and other persons involved with libraries who meet periodically to discuss matters of professional interest. Library associations represent the interests of their members, sponsor conferences, elect officers, select committees to address specific issues, publish newsletters and professional journals, and charge dues to support the organization's activities.

The function of the library association is twofold. On the one hand it constitutes a corporate personality for the whole profession. On the other, it provides a channel

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through which individual members can draw attention to matters of professional concern. It speaks with one voice for all librarians working in all types of libraries.

In general, the roles of library associations worldwide are as follows:

- a) To work for the advancement of the profession and welfare of the professionals.
- b) To develop library standards.
- c) To formulate library legislation.
- d) To arrange seminars, conferences and training workshops.
- e) To act as supervisory and advisory body.
- f) To publish professional literature.
- g) To promote study and research in library science and dissemination of information about current trends, theories and practices in the field of librarianship.

Among international library associations, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) is the most popular. IFLA is an independent international non-governmental association of library associations, libraries and related institutions, sponsors, and individuals. Fifteen countries as the International Library and Bibliographical Committee to promote worldwide cooperation, communication, and research in library and information science (LIS) founded IFLA in 1927. With association and institutional members in over 130 countries, IFLA has a general assembly of members (the Council) as the highest governing organ. The organisation maintains a Secretariat in The Hague and sponsors an annual conference in a different member country each year (Reitz, 2005).

The first library association of the world of national level is the American Library Association (ALA) formed in 1876. Its membership is about 66,000 and the headquarters is in Chicago, Illinois, USA. Among other important world library associations of national level are Canadian Library Association (CLA) and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). The CLA founded in 1946 has now about 57, 000 memberships. The Library Association (LA) was renamed as CILIP in 2002 with the merger of the Institute of Information Scientists (IIS). It is the main professional organisation in the UK for librarians, knowledge management personnel and information professionals. There are up to 23,000 CILIP members operating in all quarters (Reitz, 2005).

Pakistan came into being as independent country in 1947 due to the partition of the Subcontinent. Pakistan is a democratic federation situated in South Asia comprising four provinces – Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and North West Frontier Province (NWFP). The

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Punjab province is the largest in terms of general population, libraries and library schools. The Punjab Library Association is the first library association established in Pakistan. The library association at the national level in Pakistan is Pakistan Library Association (PLA) established in 1957.

This paper focuses on library organisations in the Punjab province only. The word “organisation” has been used in the broader sense as it includes associations, groups, and forums, whether formally registered or not. At present there are 11 such organisations in the Punjab province of Pakistan. The following multi-method data gathering techniques were used to collect data for this appraisal: literature review; personal communications; observation; and authors’ experiences of dealing with these organisations. The description of these organisations and their contribution for the profession are presented below, individually under the name of each organisation.

PUNJAB LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

Punjab Library Association was founded in Lahore in 1916, first as a library club. The association held a number of conferences and issued its first professional journal, *The Modern Librarian*, in 1930. In 1933 Punjab Library Association organised the *All India Library Conference* at Lahore. It was renamed as the West Pakistan Library Association after the emergence of Pakistan in 1947. The West Pakistan Library Association was again renamed as Punjab Library Association in 1949.

The Association started a course ‘Certificate in Librarianship’ (CLS) in 1962 at Lahore and Rawalpindi under the supervision of Altaf Shaukat. Mian Altaf Shoukat has been the director of this training course, which is still in vogue, for over 35 years (Punjab Library Association, 2000). Since 1962, more than three thousand paraprofessionals have earned this certificate.

The Association arranged various library visits, practical internships, and extension lectures back in the good old days. At present the association has no activities other than the CLS programme, which is also conducted on an irregular basis. The institutions employing paraprofessionals from this programme in the past had granted two advance increments on the basis of the CLS, however the institutions have now ceased this practice. The Association has neither issued any journal nor has any significant achievement in the last ten years. The lack of funds and leadership are major setbacks to the professional development of this association.

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LYALLPUR LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (LLA)

The Lyallpur Library Association (LLA) was established in 1958 for the welfare and promotion of the library professionals of Faisalabad region. It includes all the librarians graduated from private and public colleges of the region. It is a registered association having 65 members (Muhammad Saleem Malik, Secretary LLA, personal communication, March 13, 2007).

The LLA helps professionals in problematic matters such as write-off and stocktaking. It has prepared a compact document aimed at standardizing practices and procedures at various college libraries of the region. The divisional director of education has duly approved and notified the same document (Siddique, 1990a). The LLA has conducted some conference and seminars on library automation. However, there is a dire need for the association to arrange continuing education programmes and initiate resource sharing and networking projects. The association also needs to update and expand its membership including all types of libraries and publish professional literature on librarianship.

PUNJAB COLLEGE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (PCLA)

The West Pakistan College Library Association was renamed the Punjab College Library Association (PCLA) in 1970 and it was then registered in 1974. It deals with general college libraries in the Punjab Province. Its last general election was held in May 2006. Qarshi and Iqbal (1993) highlighted the following aims and objectives of PCLA:

- a) To improve the condition of libraries and librarians working in the educational institutions;
- b) To promote better organisation and administration of the libraries;
- c) To improve the status of libraries and safeguard the rights and interests of the library staff;
- d) To promote and encourage study and research in the professional field and publish literature on the subjects that may tend to promote objective of the association.

In 1995, PCLA succeeded in getting approval for librarians to teach library science subjects at the intermediate and bachelor levels along with teaching allowance. It struggled for the issuance of notifications regarding library weeding policy (Punjab, Education Department, 1999a), library committee, write off losses of books (Punjab, Education Department, 1999b), recovery of books from transferred or retired teachers

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and other staff, and upgrade of service structure for college librarians (from level B-16 to B-19). PCLA also arranged seminars and lectures, started the A.M.K. Sajid Gold Medal for LIS position holders at the intermediate level in Multan Board, and helped in introducing MLIS at Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), Multan, Pakistan. The proposed and revised service structure from BPS-17 to 20 is still under negotiation with the Punjab government (Asif Khan, Secretary General PCLA, personal communication, February 25, 2007). However, it is felt that PCLA should contribute more in terms of the followings:

- (a) conduct long awaited seminars, conferences, and workshops.
- (b) publish any piece of professional literature.
- (c) update its membership with the issuance of directory.
- (d) endeavor to fill more than 150 professional vacant posts in general colleges of Punjab Education Department.
- (e) create professional administrative positions in controlling offices at district, divisional and provincial levels.
- (f) get approvals for separate positions of lecturers teaching library science subjects at the intermediate and bachelor levels.

PUNJAB UNIVERSITY LIBRARIANS' ORGANISATION (PULO)

PULO was established in 1975 at Punjab University (PU), Lahore. It has at present 60 members. The PU library is the largest university library network in Pakistan having more than 50 libraries and 100 librarians approximately (University of the Punjab, 2006). Punjab University Librarians Organisation (1990) laid down the following aims and objectives of the organisation:

- a) To develop and improve the organisation and administration of PU libraries.
- b) To struggle for better status of PU librarians.
- c) To promote the reading habits among the PU faculties and students.
- d) To conduct and publish research about libraries.
- e) To provide technical advice and guidance to PU authorities for the improvement of libraries.

PULO helped in getting approved PU librarians' move-over in BPS-18 in 1988 and service structure from BS-16 to BS-19 in 2006 (University of the Punjab, 2002). It organised professional courses and promoted literacy campaign by coordinating adult education programmes the university from 1985 to 2004. More than 470 employees have completed this literacy course to earn two increments in advance (Ch. Muhammad Hanif, Secretary PULO, personal communication, January 22, 2007). Improvement of library

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physical facilities such as in terms of air conditioning and carpeting in the main library and some branch libraries are also on its credit (Bhutta, 1990). The last elections were held in 1995-96. However, there have been no meetings, no activities and no coordination work in the past few years.

It is felt that PULO should go all-out for solving issues such as revision of service structure, write off matters, in-time promotion of librarians, filling of vacant professional posts, continuing education programmes, uniform policies for all PU libraries, inclusion of information literacy course in the Bachelor of Arts curriculum, odd practice of having faculty to head over the departmental librarians, publication of literature, study scholarships for librarians and image building of libraries and librarians. It should have representatives in various committees regarding libraries and coordinate with all organisational members as well.

PUNJAB LIBRARY FOUNDATION (PLF)

PLF was established in 1985 in Lahore as an autonomous body. It was primarily setup to improve the public libraries in Punjab. It is functioning under a board of governors headed by the Punjab Ministry of Education. The Director General of the Public Libraries Punjab is its principal officer and secretary (Punjab, Education Department, 1999c). PLF provides grant-in-aid to the public libraries and other libraries for the purchase of books, furniture and library equipment. The Punjab Ministry of Education formulated the following objectives of PLF (Punjab, Education Department, 1985):

- a) To operate a library service throughout the Punjab by providing books, equipment and other assistance as approved by the board.
- b) To frame a policy for the development and promotion of libraries in the province.
- c) To preserve the rare material and manuscripts.
- d) To encourage activities for the promotion of libraries, advancement of library science and cooperation among libraries.
- e) To arrange and conduct courses for training of library staff.
- f) To advise the government on legislation and other actions for the promotion of library services in the province.
- g) To create standards for library services, book stocks, building and equipment.

The Foundation has organised more than 14 short courses and workshops for librarians with the collaboration of other organisations. The PLA computer training centre in Lahore is being run with the financial aid of the Foundation. Four major public libraries

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in Punjab have been partially computerized with the monetary help of PLF. PLF also donated two computers and a laser printer to each of the nine public libraries at ex-divisional headquarters. Among other notable achievements are awards and prizes for research articles, publication of books, free textbook service, donations, mobile library service and distribution of non-textbooks to public libraries.

The Foundation does not have its own building, and it is felt that it should have one considering that it has an important role to play to improve public libraries in Punjab. Its top management should comprise people from the library profession. It should also establish electronic wide area network of all public libraries of Punjab. The scope of grants and financial assistance provided should be broadened to other libraries and library schools. The mobile library service ceased recently should be restored.

PUNJAB UNIVERSITY LIBRARY SCIENCE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION (PULSAA)

PULSAA was formed in 1988 at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. Dr Sajjad-ur-Rehman was its first president. The association conducted a number of short courses, seminars, lectures, workshops, conferences, and get-together programmes (Qarshi, 1992). Its last election was held in 1993. It remained active till 1997.

PULSAA published a quarterly newsletter "PULSAA News" from 1989 to 1997. As an academic LIS association, it published the following valued books on Pakistani's LIS literature:

- a) A treatise on library & information science in Pakistan (1990).
- b) Library education in Pakistan: Past, present and future (1992).
- c) Hallmarks of library and information services in Pakistan (1993).
- d) Role of professional associations in development of librarianship in Pakistan (1993).

PULSAA should be revived through regular elections. It should update its membership and publish a directory of its members and publications. It should show its zeal as reflected in the association's previous practices through the running of courses, seminars and conferences. A permanent office, website and publications of PULSAA on the Internet are direly needed.

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PUNJAB MEDICAL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION (PMLA)

PMLA was established in 1990. It is continuously making efforts for service structure of medical librarians in the province. PMLA has a written constitution and formal office bearing setup with 15 members. Its last election was held in 2002. Its meetings are conducted from time to time. Resource sharing is being done informally by the member libraries.

PMLA should play an active role to help revision of the service structure of medical librarians from BPS-17 to 20. It should help in automating and networking of medical libraries. Union lists of holdings or OPAC should be prepared for better, formal resource sharing, as it is felt that medical librarians need training in this regard. It should also publish professional literature and update the directory of its members which includes all types of health sector libraries in the province.

PAKISTAN LIBRARY AUTOMATION GROUP (PAKLAG)

PAKLAG (formerly PLAG) was established in 2000 in Lahore by library professionals. PAKLAG has been divided into five chapters (regions), namely Islamabad, NWFP, Balochistan, Sindh and Punjab. It is basically a filtered listserv type discussion forum on the Internet using email addresses of its members. As of February 2007, the group has 961 registered members. The exchange of information on this electronic communication platform is based on multi-subject, from personal to professional. Anyone can subscribe to the Group free of charge by sending a blank email to <subscribe-plagpk@yahoo.com>. PAKLAG is accessible at www.paklag.org. and the group link is <<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/plagpk>>. The Group posted 3177 messages up to November 2007.

PAKLAG has the following objectives (Pakistan Library Automation Group, 2007):

- a) To provide technical/professional consultancy and training to librarians in their automation projects.
- b) To develop library automation software packages.
- c) To coordinate library automation activities in the country and abroad.
- d) To provide information and conduct research on library automation.

The Group has prepared a useful web directory of librarians accessible via its website. It provides free library software named Library Information and Management Systems

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(LIMS) along with the technical support to all libraries across Pakistan. More than 60 libraries are using this software at present. It also has conducted some workshops on advanced library automation. The Group has published a doctoral thesis entitled “Alternative funding model for libraries in Pakistan” by Khalid Mahmood in book form. It is also issuing an e-newsletter on quarterly basis.

The Group has no written constitution and formal registration. Coordination among headquarter and chapters, and other national or foreign associations is sporadic. It should have a permanent office, funding source, and formal selection criteria of office bearers. The e-Newsletter is also published irregularly. The web directory does have a comprehensive list of its members. It is surprising that the existing library automation group members and the LIMS users have never been able to meet together. PAKLAG should consider conducting the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities regularly. Discouragement of unidentified and pseudonymous membership in this electronic group is very necessary.

PAKISTAN LIBRARY COOPERATION GROUP (LIBCOOP)

This Group was established in 2004 in Faisalabad. It had a total of 458 memberships in November 2007. It posted 1760 messages up to November 2007. The e-mail address is <subscribe-libcoop@yahoogroups.com> (Pakistan Library Cooperation Group, 2007).

This group is developed to provide a forum to the library and other information professionals who are interested to share information and experiences about library projects, library administration and management, library cooperation, and other broader areas of librarianship. In order to be more visible to librarians, LIBCOOP should increase its membership, develop website, and publish newsletter as well as members’ directory. The group should broaden its service scope from email to other services. It should also have a formal setup and organisational structure.

LIBRARIAN WELFARE GROUP (LWG)

LWG was established in 2006 in Lahore by library professionals. It has a total of 590 memberships. This group is a replication of PAKLAG and has similar limitations as those of the other two electronic groups mentioned earlier, especially in terms of organisational structure and publications. Its e-mail address is <subscribe-

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librarianwelfare@yahoogroups.com>. The number of unfiltered posted messages is 3213 in November 2007 (Librarian Welfare Group, 2007).

The objective of LWG is to provide library professionals a collective platform to interact with each other in order to facilitate solving their profession related problems. The group helps to promote librarianship by (a) helping the new LIS graduates in securing good working positions; (b) providing them the required information base to facilitate their working; and (c) creating conducive environment for research in library science by identifying the new areas and exploring the new avenues for development of the profession and professionals.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the appraisal that the situation of library organisations in Pakistan is not encouraging. Not a single association or group has a track record of holding regular elections, where applicable. Their aims and objectives set forth have never been achieved. In the beginning, all the organisations seemed to be active due to sincerity, visions, innovation, commitment, dynamism, and devoted leadership. These organisations have played their due role effectively to some extent and have worked for the development of the library profession in the country. However, after 1997 most library associations were not functioning professionally. It is a high time for PLA and other related library organisations to assume the responsibility of the development of the library profession in Pakistan. The major constraints in this regard are due to finance, lack of volunteering culture and non-availability of visionary leadership. These organisations should explore various avenues to enlist sponsors' and donor agencies's help for these purposes.

Sabzwari (1988), Siddique (1990b), and Anwar (1992) remarked that although there were fifteen professional library associations in the country including PLA, but their publications of professional literature in LIS have been scanty. These library associations organised several conferences, passed many resolutions, constituted many committees but no solid result could be achieved from these activities. There are thousands of librarians in the country but the majority are either non-members of any library association, or do not play their active role in library organisations. Newsletters and journals were earlier published several times but the publications stopped after a few issues. Elections were never held after the stipulated time. In the last 50 years, PLA and the Society for the Promotion and Improvement of Libraries (SPIL) of Sindh province

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drafted and presented a number of legislations in their various conferences but there was no implementation of the legislative measures.

PLA and other library associations in Pakistan need to learn from the experiences of other international library associations such as ALA and CILIP. There is a dire need of sincere efforts, absolute devotion and firm determination from the library and information professionals to strengthen library organisations in order to better serve the cause of librarianship in Pakistan. There was a time when many Pakistani library professionals strived hard to establish a national body for recognition of the profession and get respectable status in the country. As time rolled on, the library associations should continue the tempo to provide guidance to their members in their professional pursuits.

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