

Opportunities for Libraries in Managing and Resource Sharing Through Consortia: A New Challenge for Indian Librarians

By

Bidhan Ch. Biswas

Head, Department. of Lib. & Inf. Sc.

University of Kalyani

Kalyani-741235

WB. India

Swapan K Dasgupta

In-charge, Internet Centre

University of Kalyani

Kalyani-741235

WB. India

E-mail: dasgupta_swapan@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Discusses briefly the concept and significance of resource sharing in Indian context with a view to justify on the basis of tremendous growth as well as diversity of explicit knowledge, increased users' demands, diminished budgets, galloping prices for subscribing periodicals and purchasing books, etc. Papers suggest that resource sharing is inevitable among libraries and mentions the concepts, the areas and modalities for cooperation through library consortia in the networked information environment. This paper also covers growth as well as points out merits and demerits of library consortia and the future prospect of consortia in Indian scenario.

KEY WORDS: Library Resource sharing, Consortia, Library consortium, Library co-operation.

0. INTRODUCTION

Information is considered as a vital resource for communication/ dissemination of knowledge of one individual to another from the very early stage of human civilization to till today and thereby has become an inevitable element of all human activities and developments. The rapid progress of information technology through R & D activities all over the world now tries to satisfy the information need of the human being in diverse manner. The explosion of information, in multidimensional form and voluminous development has urged the libraries to adopt new philosophies and technologies for collection development and reduce the costs of information. Today, most of the librarians are faced with economic problems, especially in developing countries to collect all the new generated information and to satisfy the high degree of aspiration for knowledge of the users. The main task of a librarian is to adjust the input resources with the desired output by adopting various alternatives for taking effective decisions and extending the services smoothly. As the information demand of the user to a greater extent is beyond the control of the capacity of librarians much of the exercise rests on the input resources.

1. CONCEPT & SIGNIFICANCE OF RESOURCE SHARING

Generally, the concept of 'Library Co-operation' emerged for rendering better services to users' community through borrowing & lending of documents in formal manner. 'Library Resources' is the term that applies to personnel, material, functions or activities available in a library for satisfying the human needs & demands to acquire their desired knowledge. Library co-operation is a very old concept and a form of resource sharing. The new object of resource sharing has changed the old concept due to multi-dimensional growth of published documents through R&D activities in recent past, cost of the information, advancement of newly invented technologies for information processing and dissemination, etc. Resource sharing entails apportioning, allocating, distributing or contributing something on a voluntary basis for mutual benefits among a group of libraries with a view to achieving best utilization of resources by the ultimate users at a wider level. For better utilization of resources, participating libraries should come together and co-operate in two broad areas: (a) developing the collection on shared basis; and (b) improving services for exploiting such collection. The conventional library is seriously affected by some barriers of information communication, such as indifference of the lending library, conservative attitude, distance, language, cost, time, etc. for inter-library loan. And there are also several constraints to resource sharing in the print environment as it existed till recently: (a) open access to shared resource is not possible; (b) service depends upon library performance; (c) access to shared resource at a cost; (d) access to shared resource by price hike and devaluation in rupee value; (e) availability of library financial resources not possible; and (f) authenticity of collected information resources on Internet. The development in information science and technology (i.e. computer technology and telecommunication technology) is the only panacea to overcome all the barriers of resource sharing programme.

2. LIBRARY CONSORTIUM

It is equally true, as well as applicable, for all types of libraries / information centers not to hold the full stock of information resources or to procure all information which may be in demand by its clientele. Even not a single library/information centre can meet the thrust of knowledge of all the readers from its stock of information up to the fullest extent. To solve this problem library co-operation started long ago, such as, library networks, ILL, document delivery, library consortium etc. which are internationally accepted, but at present the more accepted system of resource sharing is library consortia that has come into existence with a wide coverage. This concept is considered to be a metamorphosis brought by the fast changing information environment for supporting better library services through joint actions.

According to Oxford English Dictionary "Consortium means temporary cooperation of a number of powers, companies etc. for a common purpose. It is an association of similar type of organization / institution who are engaged for producing and servicing the common things / for providing services for a specific purpose of its users." Library consortium is a "community (a cooperative) of two or more information agencies which have formally agreed to coordinate, cooperate or consolidate certain function" to achieve mutual objectives. It is an association of a group of library to achieve mutually the joint benefits. Consortia may be formed on a local, regional, national, or international basis; on a functional or format basis; or on a subject basis.

3. GROWTH AND FEATURE OF LIBRARY CONSORTIUM

The tremendous information revolution and proliferation have brought about drastic changes to the function and service in all types of libraries in India during last two decades. Many libraries in India till today are not in a position to afford to procure all documents and subscribe to core journals in major disciplines or CD-ROM databases, due to their financial crunch. As a result, in India, library networks started with the initiatives of NISSAT in forming CALIBNET in 1986, DELNET in 1988 and other networks subsequently to promote resource sharing among libraries. The UGC (University Grant Commission, India) setup INFLIBNET in 1988. There are many libraries in India have setup consortia among themselves for resource sharing e.g. Astronomy libraries in India. These libraries jointly formed consortia for resource sharing amongst the libraries, such as, Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) Library, Inter-university Centre for Astronomy and Astrophysics (IUCAA) Library, National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA) Library, Nizamiah Observatory (NO) Library, Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) Library, Raman Research Institute (RRI) Library, Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) Library, Uttar Pradesh State Observatory (UPSO) Library. The main objectives of this consortia are for better resource sharing, to reduce information costs, for speedy delivery of documents, to keep abreast of new developments etc. All the libraries in India are not able to come under any consortia system and many information generated by Indian scholars in different

subject fields is not fully represented in the international scenario. That is why, there is a necessity to prepare Indian databases and link them up with consortium activities. Also, no efforts have been made in India to network public libraries. Networking is very much essential in this sector to cater to information need of the general public, where more than 70% of the total people are residing in rural areas. Much emphasis should be given at the national level in India for the development of documentary information resources, because it is considered as vital resources to promote the development of economy, science, technology and culture etc.

At the national level, INFLIBNET has taken initiation about a formidable change in developing adequate infrastructure in libraries (specially college & university library) to be a part in the networked environment. Fully utilising this infrastructure and quick access to information, coming together and forming a consortium would be a necessary step. Now INFLIBNET decides to provide more services through consortia with the help of following steps:

- **Inter Library Loan** - More awareness and frame standards and codes,
- **Access to Full Text of Publications** - Through international vendors,
- **Organisation and Access to Internet Resources** - Work already started,
- **Creation of Digital Libraries** - For print and non-print materials including theses and dissertation,
- **Cat-India** - A comprehensive national bibliographic database of the holdings of the academic libraries will be created while duly extending links to major disciplines like Agriculture, Medicine, Technology, etc.

The salient features for library consortium are:

- (a) To eliminate the different problems faced by the libraries to provide various services to the users,
- (b) To meet the thrust of information of the vast people due to rapid growth of population all over the world,
- (c) To cope up with the newly generated knowledge published in different forms, such as, printed and non-printed documents, electronic media on various disciplines, multi-disciplinary and new generated subject areas,
- (d) To collect all the documents published at the national and international level, because of the library financial crunch; and
- (e) To overcome to language barriers i.e. primary documents are being published by the developed countries like USA, UK, France, Japan etc. and among them the non-English speaking countries produce majority of scientific literatures in their mother languages.

4. FUNCTIONS OF LIBRARY CONSORTIUM

Every library differs from one another according to its collection, information needs of users, working method, sources of finance, processing of information, etc. The various steps of jobs/functions can be adopted by a consortium for functioning standing on a common platform, which are:

4.1 Agreement for establishment of a consortium:

A concrete agreement needed to be established for the participating libraries in consortia to achieve a common target. Every library will be able to work in such a manner that they are mutually exclusive, but they follow the common mission of a consortium as a whole. As a result, a managing committee should be formed.

4.2 Administration of library consortium:

To run the total functions of a consortium smoothly a statutory body is very much essential to be formed taking Chief Librarian / Chief Information Manager from every library / Information Centre and one of them will act as a Chief Coordinator on rotation basis. Each library will inform about their collection, databases, user service, training of human resource for handling new equipment, etc. to the Chief Coordinator through hierarchical management level.

4.3 Financial Control:

Due to financial crisis, libraries form a consortium for providing better service to the users. The crucial activities of the members of management committee is to take action on the following financial points like:

- Whether a consortium fund be created to subscribe the core journals in different subjects in multiple copies at a discount rate;
- How to manage the fund of a consortium and how much money is to be collected from each library as a contribution;
- Whether the participating libraries to whom the responsibility to negotiate with some publishes are vested by the managing committee, will send remittance to the publishers for multiple copies from its own fund and adjust fund subsequently among the participating libraries;
- What method of accounting standard is to be maintained to avoid any pilferage?

4.4 Joint work

As per guideline of a consortium, individual library will prepare a list of titles for resource sharing among participating libraries looking into the user demand and may also initiate to contact with different publishers for negotiation. All the participating libraries under library consortia must work jointly just like a joint venture in business sector to make the consortia a total success. Each library will subscribe the core journals and prepare the union list of titles to be covered under resource sharing programme and the member libraries may also send full content page service of all issues of the title to another library.

4.5 Evaluation:

After a certain period, the whole activities of a consortium (i.e. individual as well as co-operative) must be evaluated on the basis of the pre-determined objective. If there is any lacuna in between the work performed and to be performed should be adjusted by taking corrective measures in activities in future. If there is a need for any change in the path of action, it should be changed immediately to achieve the objectives of a consortium.

5. MERITS & DEMERITS

Every activity poses some merits and demerits. Here are a few merits related to library consortium:

- A comprehensive collection is possible.
- Avoidance of duplication of core collection specially for core journals.
- Resource sharing will reduce the cost of collection development among the participating library.
- Users' demand is considered for collection development.
- Every library is liable to send their respective holding to other libraries under resource sharing programme.

- **Easy access to resource sharing on Internet by creating databases among the libraries;**

Few demerits in organising a consortium are:

- **Organising body may charge excessive contribution fees as per their will;**
- **There is a great chance of manipulation of fund.**
- **Since, there is no competition, bureaucracy may arise in a consortium.**

6. CONCLUSION

The unending responsibility of libraries are collection development, preservation, retrieval of information for providing users service. These responsibilities have become more complex with the introduction of computer and communication technologies in libraries. In a developing country like India, different steps are being taken to disseminate information more or less in all subject areas, specially in science and technology and Any set of objectives will only be achieved, if there is a willingness to join together and to believe that more will be achieved through the efforts of the whole than at the individual level. According to Allen Kent "*the success and survival of libraries will much depend on how much and to what extent the libraries cooperate with each other in future*". **So cooperation is an essential facet of modern library management in most developed countries of the world, but in our country is still in the normative stage.** Tremendous explosion of information, financial constraints, information in different forms etc., the resource sharing networking has emerged as important alternatives. In the light of the above discussion, establishment of better consortium, integrating intellectual access are all the distinct steps moving towards the 21st century libraries. Indian librarians should seriously rethink and reinstitute consortium movement like western countries for maximum utilization of resources at a reduced cost, time and space.

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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHORS



Mr. Bidhan Ch. Biswas is a Senior Lecturer and currently Head of the Department of Library and Information Science at Kalyani University, Kalyani, West Bengal. He has over 12 years of experience in teaching library science and has number of papers to his credit



Mr. Swapan K Dasgupta is with the Central Library, University of Kalyani, Kalyani as In-Charge, Internet Centre. He has over 30 years of rich experience of working in the same library in the different positions