

# NE India Library Network (NEILIBNET): A Feasibility Proposal

Professor A S Chandel

## Abstract

*The paper discusses about the feasibility for setting up of a library network in the North East Region of India. In relation to this context some guidelines have been proposed along with some suggestions.*

**Keywords:** Resource sharing, Library Network, INFLIBNET, Institutional Repository.

## 1. Introduction

Library cooperation, resource sharing are near synonymous terms which have been in use in LIS literature since more than a century. However, network which also conveys the same meaning is comparatively a new term which is not as old as other two terms and was not in the vocabulary of our pioneer professionals. History of inter-lending or inter library loan is quite old. Samuel Sweet Green had written a letter to the editor of the *Library Journal* in its first issue of September 1876 stating that 'it would add greatly to the usefulness of our reference libraries, if an agreement should be made to lend books to each other for short period of time'. There had been also inter-library loan schemes in many countries in seventeenth century as pointed out by Gravit in *Library Quarterly* in 1946 (Joginder Singh). Realizing the importance of inter-dependence of libraries and making it mandatory to exchange reading material, Inter-Library Lending Codes were formulated to make Inter-library service feasible to serve the users with the reading material, which are not available in their local libraries with more flexibility and creativity. The code aims at entering in cooperation and form a group

of libraries/ consortium with common objective of allowing users to use resources available in any of the libraries. *ALA Inter-library Loan Code* was first published in 1916 and adopted in 1919. *IFLA also framed International Lending Principles and Guidelines* in 1954 and revised subsequently. IFLA Document Delivery and Resource Sharing Section revised their *Guidelines for Best Practices* only last year (IFLANET, 2007). Guidelines have to be changed according to the changing needs of the time.

## 2. Emerging Areas of Networking and Resource Sharing

ALA has created a new resource sharing section in which practitioners and vendors discuss issues and collaborate on projects of mutual interest across the full range of resource sharing activities, including inter-library loan, document delivery, remote circulation, cooperative reference, and cooperative collection development. The said forum met first time in 2005 to discuss new emerging issues. It would be worth to reproduce here the work plan of the resource sharing section to have a broader vision of objectives of networking as a project, which could be undertaken in the present new environment:

- Develop web-based ILL courses.
- Develop a model curriculum for library schools.
- Produce conference programs on copyright and licensing issues affecting resource sharing.
- Instruct resource-sharing practitioners on lobbying techniques for important legislation.
- Establish a forum for providing vendors with feedback on resource sharing products.
- Sponsor international resource sharing efforts, research projects, and exchange programs.
- Develop and publish finding aids for locating international materials.
- Develop national monitoring program for ILL librarians.
- Develop a clearinghouse of papers given at ILL conference/meeting.

In the present knowledge or information society, whatever we may call it, is dominated by the largest global network offered by

Internet technology. Networking is the pre-requisite of the present society to be member of it. Therefore, to become the member of the library network has become essential without any scope for any option or alternatives. Inadequacy of resources of even biggest library of the world is the main feature of any library or resource center. Self-sufficiency is the characteristics of every library and concept of self-sufficiency gets abandoned even at the stage of the inception of any library. Therefore, augmentation of resources at the minimum cost is the aim not only by adding your own resources but use resources of other libraries. The present professional challenge is that resources may not be available in your own collection, but are to be made accessible wherever these are available. Librarians are not expected to say 'sorry that we can not provide this information, since we don't have the source of information in our collection'. Information has to be discovered and provided irrespective of location. As such dependence on external resources is increasing day by day. We have to borrow what we don't have or develop a common repository by collective efforts, which requires not only willingness to begin the process but mission to achieve the objectives.

I feel happy to know that topic of networking at regional level has been reiterated, since it is not new topic which have been discussed thoroughly at many platforms and forums with partial or no success. We could not make the beginning even by compiling union catalogue of 2-3 libraries. Nevertheless, there is a need for rethinking and taking initiatives for sustainability in the present society. Networking now is for survival in the present system. We should be aware that libraries have competition with *Google* and *Yahoo* and service expectations of users have multiplied. Users expect to search information from a single access point rather searching at various places and points. Further federated search has become the requirement. Libraries should have an agenda of applying web.2.0 applications in the light of rising expectations of users of desktop information delivery and other services.

We have success stories of various international and national networks like OCLC and many other which had been operational since 1960's. Compilation of *World Catalog* by any agency was impossibility for any agency but is becoming reality. OCLC catalog may not be *World Cat* as such but it is heading towards this direction

by cooperative efforts, immensely useful not only participating libraries but to the whole world. However, we don't have such stories in our country *but shows that even the largest database can be created with joint efforts*. It is not that the importance and need for library network was not realized. Its need was emphasized in various committees and commissions, seminars and conferences. We never lack in planning but fail at implementation stage.

### 3. Networks in India

Some of the library networks which have been operational in the country with which all of you are well familiar are given below:

Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET)

Delhi Library Network (DELNET)

Calcutta Library Network (CALIBNET)

Madras Library Network (MALIBNET)

Bombay Library Network (BONET)

Mysore Library Network (MYLIBNET)

Pune Library Network (PUNENET)

There are many more which such networks in the country with little success. What is important is to study these already established networks along with their problems in order to plan our own.

It is time to think together and aloud and find out the reasons as to why we could not make even inter-lending of material popular, not to talk of other areas of resource sharing. Don't you think that NEILBNET should have been conceived much earlier, though never too late to initiate and plan even now. Today we have many consortia in the country which have been proved useful and cost effective but hardly find any local and regional network except a few which are operational and achieving their objectives. Inter-lending within the same city is also almost absent, when there could be no problems in implementation the same. Perhaps, we lack liberal attitude and remain rigid governed by old rules of libraries. To my knowledge, there is no such agreement among libraries for exchange of material. All of us are willing to accept the idea of having a proposed regional network, even then not easy to take off. The mutual benefits which all participating libraries are going to get can not be doubted. Even then **there** are many bottlenecks in planning as well as in implementation.

Since this topic has been discussed in detail at national and international levels and the participants of this seminar are also quite familiar with the concept, therefore there is hardly any need to repeat and reiterate these points here. Nevertheless, I would like to raise certain vital issues for discussion so that we could arrive at certain conclusions, in spite of the fact that there would be hardly anything new which I could cover in this paper.

Present society is network based and all of us are dependant on it for almost every activity. Therefore, it hardly needs any explanation. Whole range of collection or information should be made available without any barriers and restriction; this is what is expected from knowledge society. I am bringing certain issues to explore feasibility of proposed network to generate discussion in order to initiate and activate the planning process based upon collective wisdom:

#### **4. What should be the main objectives of the present network?**

At the outset, I propose sharing of existing resources of one another available in the region, which basically requires union catalogue and inter-lending code with mutual agreement. Even the present digital era has not obviated the need for union catalogue and similar form of sharing including e-print holdings. Document delivery service of physical documents is still important and useful but may not be more useful than desktop delivery. However, old and new both services are to be continued. Let us make the beginning wherever could be feasible taking following areas into account:

##### **4.1 Union Catalogue**

First step should be compilation of union catalogue of resources to promote exchange of material among local libraries. This would be more feasible and useful among college libraries which have more financial constrain to build their collection due to financial constrains.

##### **4.2 Collection Development**

Discipline-wise distribution for collection development and services can be thought of and planned by way of concentrating on developing core collection and depending for periphery collection on other libraries. Of course, such areas are to be identified for respective participating libraries.

### **4.3 Compilation of Theses Database**

Most of the Universities of the region don't have complete theses database even now. Reality is that even the departments don't know the detail of research output of their respective department, resulting in duplication of research and non-utilization of existing collection. Priority of all the universities of the region is to conduct research on NE region. But all universities are not aware of the fact that what areas have been already covered and what topics are yet to be unexplored. Next is the question of utilization or implementation of the findings of research output wherever required. What is the status of use of research output is known to all of us. This scenario could be changed by making research output more accessible at least in the region under the proposed network. Even software like CDS/ISIS or WINISIS can be used to compile digital resource of theses by attaching full text or abstract by using Link Command. Only requirement is to take lead and initiative.

### **4.4 Compile Area Bibliography of NE Region**

A lot of literature has been generated on the region but such literature and the information contained therein, is mostly hidden. There is no such compilation with comprehensive coverage. If every state takes up the project to make such computerized compilation on a common format/standard of its own state which could be merged on completion in a common database could be one of the useful beginning.

### **4.5 Compile Statistical Data (Reference Directory on the Region)**

Statistical information on the region is often required for research and administration, which are scattered in different sources. Some of the vital statistics remain unrecorded and even unprinted. Compilation of such directory could be taken up jointly under the network. Similarly other reference material on the region could be compiled in digital form which is also the common need.

### **4.6 Compile of Institutional Repository of the Region**

Every institution has a priority of compiling a digital repository of their publications. Its usefulness can not be doubted, provided some other resource contents are not more useful than the institutional repository. However, these decisions are to be taken by the respective

institution. What is important here is that why can't we think of joint compilation of institutional repository or any other resource contents of the region as a whole and make larger digital repository so that larger database is created for common use.

We can also identify and create need-based new resource contents, which may be useful to the region as a whole. It may involve administrative and technical bottlenecks, which could be removed by jointly by common efforts.

## 5. Sub-system of INFLIBNET

The proposed network could also be thought of as a part of INFLIBNET, cooperating in its programmes in such areas, which could be useful to the region.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of such platform is to generate discussion and activate certain actions. But reality is different. We discuss, conclude make resolutions and forget. But this seminar should bring some results by not only conceiving NEILIBNET but make it operational, may be at a small scale in the beginning. How should we make the beginning is the main issue. Network Model need extensive academic exercise, which need more spade work by way of conducting feasibility study.

My point of view on the subject is as under:

- i) Formation of Network Committees at regional and state level to workout the feasibility and make action plan.
- ii) Network may be planned at two levels state and regional on the analogy of NISSAT.
- iii) Various funding agencies should be approached like; NEC, ICSSR, NE Regional centre, UGC etc. with the project proposal.
- iv) All central and state university librarians should form main forum or component of the network.
- v) Should identify such areas of resource sharing which should interest all the participating institutions.
- vi) Common Digitization Labs should be established in one of the institutions in every state, where digitization projects could be taken up jointly as per requirement of each participating library.

- vii) Document delivery service of printed or electronic resources should be encouraged after preparing proper guidelines.
- viii) Committees should workout the model with the assistance of technical expertise and adopt common standards for interoperability.

If we all realize that we need Library Network for the region, then why to delay. We don't realize the loss of late take off. We are already very late to begin sharing our resources among ourselves and build a common repository, which could have benefited all of us.