

# NEED TO ESTABLISH AN “OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY & INFORMATION NETWORK”

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**Abstract**

*Library networks have been evolved as a result of information and communication technology development through which a group of libraries and/or information centres decide to exchange information resources using their computers. The library networks use existing communication facilities to establish networks amongst libraries that agree to cooperate amongst themselves through more or less formal agreements with a view to pooling their resources and to offer better services to the users. This paper discusses the concept of library networking in the field of open university system in the country and proposes an “Open University Library & Information Network” in India for better services to their clients.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern education system in India can be traced back with the efforts of Lord Curzon in 1899 who was appointed Governor General of India. He paid his attention to each and every aspect of administration including university education. Another important land mark was the recommendations of universities commission (Sharma and Sharma, 2004), which forced to establish new universities in the country and make provisions for teaching in the universities. Thus, Indian Universities Act of 1904 was formulated on the basis of these recommendations. Later, Sadler Commission and Abbot-Wood Report in 1936-37 contributed well for the development of Indian education system during British period.

However, India achieved independence on 15th August, 1947 that has ended the period of modern Indian Education as distinguished from contemporary period. India after independence made concerted efforts to improve access to higher education and the system grew rapidly after independence. But with the globalization and impact of World Health Organization on the education system, privatization of the higher education was started (Dhiman, 2012) and as a result, many private universities have emerged in recent past all over the country. Nevertheless, the interest of common public has not ended from the government run universities in our country. There are millions of people who want to study in government run universities but they cannot do due to one or other reasons.

Thus, in order to meet challenges of access and equity to higher education for large segments of the population, and in particular, the disadvantaged groups such as those living in remote and rural areas including working people, housewives and other adults who wish to upgrade or acquire knowledge through studies in various fields, academic institutions and government sector were looking for an alternative system of education that can provide access to learning of information as well as a degree for recognition like traditional system of education (Kundu, 2014). This led to the formation of open and distance education system in India.

## 2. OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Open and distance learning in India started around 1960s in the form of distance education. By the 1980s, there were 34 Universities offering correspondence education through departments designed for that purpose. The first single mode Open University was established in Andhra Pradesh in 1982 as Andhra Pradesh Open University on 26 August 1982 through APOU Act 1982 (Ghosh et al., 2012). This University was renamed as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University on 7th December 1991 by the Government of Andhra Pradesh through APOU Act of 1992. Kundu (2014) adds that in 1985, the Union Government took initiative for establishment of a National Open University and on 20th September 1985, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) came into existence.

Today, there are 14 open universities including one national Open University that is Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi. These universities are single mode institutions means they are providing education only in the distance mode and are catering to the people who are unable to pursue regular courses due to various reasons. Besides, there are over 200 dual universities which offering programmes/courses through the distance mode. However, the UGC is a regulatory authority for higher education through open and distance learning mode (ODL) under its new name Distance Education Bureau (DEB).

## 3. LIBRARY NETWORKS AND THEIR OBJECTIVES

The library networks have evolved as a result of information and communication technology development through which a group of libraries and/or information centres decide to exchange information resources using their computers. The library networks use existing communication facilities to establish networks amongst libraries that agree to cooperate amongst themselves through more or less formal agreements with a view to pooling their resources and to offer better services to the users. As far as the major objectives for establishing a library network (<http://egyankosh.ac.in>) are concerned, they are established to:

- encourage inter-library cooperation and resource sharing at all levels amongst members of the network;
- help the member institutions in computerisation of their libraries, retro-conversion of bibliographic records and development of standardised databases for shared use;
- develop union catalogues of various resources so as to provide reliable access to document collection available in member libraries;
- rationalise the acquisition of information resources in member libraries and optimise their usage through resource sharing;
- evolve or adapt protocols and standards, guidelines, methods and procedures for bibliographic records, their storage, inter-library loan hardware and software;
- facilitate the communication amongst users of member institutions;
- guide member libraries in the effective implementation and utilisation of current and upcoming information technologies;
- provide effective access to combined holdings of library resources through computerised databases of various member institutions;
- provide training to members of library staff of participating libraries for effective use of libraries in the network;
- provide document delivery services to member libraries;

- provide access to information resources at reduced rates through consortium arrangements; and
- develop and promote collaborative digitisation projects.

#### **4. FUNCTIONS OF LIBRARY NETWORKS**

The library networks have been established with the main purpose of sharing resources so that unnecessary wastage of limited finance with them can be avoided. However, not all networks conform to the essential functions of library networks. It is noted that the essential functions should include the promotion of resource sharing, creation of resource sharing tools like union catalogues, rationalization of acquisitions and adoption of international standards for creation of records uniformly and delivery of documents. Keeping these things in view, functions of a typical library network might fall into the following three categories:

- (i) Information services to users
- (ii) Technical services to member libraries
- (iii) Management service to the network administration

So, above services are to be expected from any library network. It is noteworthy to mention that many of the library networks are working for the betterment of the users.

#### **5. SOME CURRENT & IMPORTANT LIBRARY NETWORKS**

Various library networks were developed and flourished well in the last 50 years. For example, in 1977 NICNET of NIC; in 1986 the CALIBNET, Kolkata; MALIBNET, Chennai in 1993; MYLIBNET, Mysore in 1994 and BALNET, Bangalore in 1995. But with the cheap availability of ICT (Dhiman and Rani, 2012) many of them, especially those are regional ones are dysfunctional now. However, some major followings are active and being used heavily:

- Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) 1991,
- Developing Library Network (DELNET) 1992
- Ahmedabad Library Network (ADINET), 1994

But above library networks are more or less for the traditional university system. However, the education system and requirements for open university system are different. Thus, a separate library network is required for open university education system.

#### **6. LIBRARY SERVICES IN OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

The sole aim of an education system is to promote learning and extend the boundaries of knowledge. Thus, to satisfy these demands of readers a university and higher educational institution has to depend upon its library. But a university library is not merely storage of books and other reading and non-reading materials and preservation of them, but is a dynamic instrument of education (Sri Phadya, 1969). Dongerkery (1973) also mentions that “a well-stocked and up-to-date library is a sine qua non for every modern university. It is the central workshop of the university which provides the student, the teacher, the scholar and the research worker with the tools require for the advancement as well as acquisition of the knowledge. [It is

equivalent to] what the laboratory is to the workers in the field of the humanities and the social sciences”.

But Open University Library System is somewhat different from the Traditional University Library System because the users in Open University system do not come regularly and most of them are distance users. The provision of library and information services is one of the essential support systems involved in any distance education programme. Further, the quality of distance education programs is enhanced by its library that is one key indicator in quality assurance because it is important that their students be supplied with the tools necessary to ensure them the potential for success as universities establish higher education centers in communities around the country (Bibb, 2003).

Open learning library services refers to those library services in support of college, university, or other post-secondary courses and programs offered away from a main campus, or in the absence of a traditional campus. These courses may be taught in traditional or non-traditional formats or media, may or may not require physical facilities, and may or may not involve live interaction of teachers and students. Thus, issue – return is the main services being provided by the Open University libraries. Guidelines for Distance Learning Library Services issued by the Association of College & Research Libraries, USA (ACRL, 2004) prescribes the following essential services:

- Reference assistance.
- Computer-based bibliographic and informational services.
- Reliable, rapid, secure access to institutional and other networks, including the Internet.
- Consultation services.
- library user instruction designed to instil independent and effective information
- Literacy skills biased the learner-support needs of the distance learning community.
- Assistance with and instruction in the use of non-print media and equipment.
- Interlibrary loan services using broadest application of fair use of copyrighted materials.
- Prompt document delivery, such as a courier system and/or electronic transmission.
- Access to reserve materials in accordance with copyright fair use policies.
- Adequate service hours for optimum access by users’ promotion of library services to the distance learning community, including documented and updated policies, regulations and procedures for systematic development, and management of information resources.

So, an open university library & information network is needed in the country.

## **7. PROPOSED MODEL FOR OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY & INFORMATION NETWORK**

It is seen – traditional library services are being organized and provided by all the libraries well but ICT based services are lacking. Thus, there are some suggestions which may be used to improve the present conditions of the libraries and also to improve the level of users’ satisfaction. A networking of all Open University Libraries is needed for leading university libraries of open education in the system. It is seen that at present various library networks are working in the country, but no one

fulfils the requirement of the Open University system because the demand and nature of Open University system is different.

So, an “OPEN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY & INFORMATION NETWORK” of all open university is proposed for acquiring electronic resources and sharing their services. MOOCs which are the massive online open courseware (Dhiman, 2015) should be uploaded by the libraries for the benefits of its students can also be shared in this initiative. Last years, questions-papers, dissertations, and theses etc. could also be placed on that network site. IGNOU, being the national university may take the lead for establishing and developing this network for all other universities in the country.

## 8. CONCLUSION

So, it is seen higher education in our country has taken great strides to support, spread and practice “Sustainable Development” to encourage wholesome development of the country but more steps are needed to strengthen the concept of “Sustainable Development” (Bhagwat and Abhyankar, 2016). As such, the Open University system is also contributing towards sustainability.

However, it is equally important to mention that the libraries in open university education system are also providing their best to educate the people who could not afford regular costly education or who are in service. The libraires are also contributing towards sustainability in open education system in the country by serving to a mass of public who are studying in ODE mode (Dhiman and Nandwana, 2019). So, this is the right time we should think to form a library network for all open university libraries in India.

**Note:** The paper is based on the Unpublished PhD Thesis entitled “Comparative Study of Selected Open University Libraries of India” awarded to author by the University of Kota, Kota (Rajasthan).

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