Kerala Libraries Network (KELNET) : A Proposal

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1.   INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we visualize the conceptual framework and propose the development of a Kerala Library Network (KELNET) by exploring and exploiting the available and the existing social infrastructures, social softwares, open standards and technologies. The philosophy, sprit, enthusiasm and encouragement of the present study has been, by and large, derived from the below given Singapore episode, wherein the public policy, technology lifestyle, social informatics and the public library systems have successfully synchronised in the nation's capacity building process. Through this paper we dream of a society, a knowledge society, capable of leveraging on appropriate technologies, in adding value and quality of life to its member citizens. Socially relevant public as well as academic libraries and proactive librarians could play a pivotal role in transforming our society into a learning or knowledge society.

"The library function has a national competitiveness dimension as well as a quality-of-life dimension" (Hallowell. 9-802-009). "We think of it in terms of purpose, process and people. The purpose is about making Singapore a learning nation and empowering people. The process is about the library function and providing customer-centric services. The people part is about making our citizenry information-literate"…. "Our purpose is to continuously expand the nation's capacity to learn through a national network of libraries and information resource centers providing services and learning opportunities to support the advancement of Singapore" (Library 2000-Investing in a learning nation).

A Harvard Business School case entitled "Transforming Singapore's public libraries" discusses the above success story of Singapore in crystal clear terms. Singapore is a field proven example to showcase the potential of libraries for national and social development, initiated during early 90s. Yes, they have achieved it with ambition, vision, goal, dedication, unity and hard work. It took around 10 solid years to achieve the laid down goals, to convert their objectives into reality. Internet Technology was the key enabler of this mass transformation which supported, supplemented and complemented a national level network of library resource sharing.

2.   LIBRARY NETWORK

A library network usually consists of a formal agreement/arrangement whereby materials, information and services provided by a variety of libraries and/or other organizations are made available to all potential users. Libraries may be at different places but agree to serve one another on the same basis as each serves its own users. The linking must include a communications mechanism, and in the library world, institutions form networks primarily to achieve better sharing of resources-resources consisting of bibliographic information and of collections- and better service to users.

3.   NEED FOR KELNET

Though Kerala ranks quite high in many areas of social structures such as literacy, education, primary health care, cleanliness etc., it has been strongly felt that there is a dire need for a robust library networking which can effectively back up the social fabric of the State of Kerala. The well built public library system in Kerala needs to be transformed along with the lines of development of ICT applications. The Web 2.0 services have already sown the seeds of social networks in the region even though they are not strong. The proposed network shall indeed uplift the information literacy, thinking process, citizen care and social awareness and eventually enhance the quality of life of the masses and the citizenry of Kerala.

4.   OBJECTIVES OF KELNET

4.1 To transform the public libraries into more relevant and citizen sensitive social institutions. Presently the public libraries in the state are used mainly as just reading rooms or pass time centers and not seriously as libraries where people frequent them for quenching their intellectual curiosity and for knowledge development. Some are of course exceptions having good reference materials and also lend useful books to the public but even in those libraries the currency and the strength of collections are very much doubtful. The objective of KELNET is therefore to help the libraries in their capacity building and enable them to strategically position these libraries among the social strata of the state of Kerala by deploying appropriate technologies, knowledge resources and the necessary infrastructure. Libraries should act as agents of pertinent knowledge carriers and resource repositories to systematically address the intellectual, professional, social and academic needs of almost all segments and age groups of the public.

4.2 To reinvent and reengineer the existing public libraries to act also as the Community Information Centers (CIC) of the region. And thereby become the hub of knowledge / information as relevant to the public of the locality and the region.

4.3 To maximize the use of low-cost / appropriate and yet latest Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the social good and benefit of the locality / region.

4.4 **To increase the availability and accessibility of resources available in different libraries in Kerala.** Users of each participating library should have access to resources available in all the member libraries. Resources can be moved from one library to another manually or through modern means. This provides an easy access to and free flow of information. Resource sharing should result in an increase in the range and depth of services offered by the member libraries.

4.5 **To diminish cost of purchasing resources in Libraries in Kerala**. Resource sharing helps in building specialized or local collection and all participating libraries need not duplicate the procurement of similar material. This facilitates availability of larger collection and even the basic material required by the users can be obtained without much delay from other members.

4.6 **To exploit resources and optimum use of available resources and services**: Resource sharing advocates that the reading material of one library should be made available to the clients of other libraries, thus exposing the reading materials to a wider group of users. Similarly the services of a library can be exploited by the users of other libraries.

4.7 To promote co-operative activities like acquisition, exchange, storage, binding, training, reference and documentation services, inter-library loans, online services etc**.**

4.8 **To prepare online union catalogue of Collection in individual libraries**, which will improve bibliographic control in Kerala state. This union catalogue can be accessed through a common website by using a common interface from anywhere in the world. Anyone looking for a particular document can find out its location library. An effective Inter-Library Loan agreement among participating libraries will supplement it and enable the users to get the documents at their individual location library.

4.9 **To achieve a regular document delivery system** inside the state, to supplement the present collection of each libraries.

4.10 To promote the exchange of information with other national and international co-operative networks, through which people from Kerala will be able to browse through the collection of libraries located anywhere in the globe.

4.11 To extend service to a wider user community and to promote programme for increased use of library resources and facilities, through which we can bring back the users to libraries.

4.12 As an end result, **promotion of research, development and innovation in information technology,** and most importantly, **continued life long education** will be available to the common public.

5. PREREQUISITES OF KELNET

The essential prerequisites and conditions for a successful library network are as under:
- Agreements and MoUs related to objectives for implementing co-operation.
- Establishment of facilities for sharing materials
- Schemes for intelligent organization of data/documents and databases
- Method of adequate delivery of resources to users (the output media)
- Compatibility and interoperability between the computing systems available with the organizations to be netted.
- Ensuring the ability of network among the resource sharing libraries, a compatible catalogue record format/standard is highly desirable.
- Standardization of policies and procedures across the network and adhered to by all participants, in order that these tasks could be performed in shared and efficient manner
- Adequate means of information dissemination and communication (ICT facilities etc)
- Formal established parent organizational level co-operation through Government systems.

6. MEMBERS OF KELNET

Public Libraries such as the State Central Library, District Libraries, Taluk Libraries, Corporation and Municipal Libraries, Village level libraries and Private Libraries who wish to join.

University Libraries and Libraries of the institutions of higher learning in Kerala

College Libraries. All college libraries affiliated to various universities, Engineering, Medical, Agriculture and all specialized colleges

Special Libraries such as the Sree Chitra Thirunal Institute of Medical Sciences (SCTIMS&T), Regional Cancer Centre (RCC), the Indian Institute of Information Technology and Management Kerala (IIITM-K), Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIMK) etc and Libraries attached to all Government of India and Government of Kerala and R&D Institutes such as CSIR, ICAR, ICSSR, CESS, CWRDM, TBGRI, NATPAC, KFRI etc.

7.   PARTNERS OF KELNET

Government of Kerala, Department of Culture

Government of Kerala, Department t of Education

Government of Kerala, Department of IT (Technical help- Infrastructure)

Universities in Kerala

Kerala State Library Council

Kerala Library Association

INFLIBNET Centre-UGC (Technical help- Library Network)

Institutions / Centers of Excellence in Information / Library Networking (State/National)

Funding Agencies (to be identified)

8.   ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF KELNET

For the successful coordination and implementation, there should be a KELNET main centre located in Thiruvananthapuram, may be attached to kerala State Library Council or State Central Library. It has to be operated under the leadership of a "Director" who should have proven experience in Library Networking and Management and Library Resource Sharing. Overall functioning of the Network shall be governed by a "Governing Council" of eminent personalities and experts from administrators, academia, IT experts, researchers, professionals, librarians etc. This council will function in advisory capacity to implement and maintain the activities of the network. For a better and successful operation, KELNET should be decentralized at 2 Regional Centers at Kozhikode and Kochi, in addition to the 14 District Centers.

9. INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED OF KELNET

9.1 Main centre

➢ High-End server with latest configuration for holding the database of member libraries. Huge amount of data from participating libraries will be uploaded to this server for accessing from any part of the world. This server will be used for future content creation initiatives like Digital Libraries, Internet accessible Institutional Repositories etc.

➢ Web server to host the website of the network. People will access this website for searching and downloading data and other content uploaded time to time.

➢ Required number of systems for the staff for developing and managing the quality database.

➢ A training Lab with latest systems and internet connectivity for providing training to librarians and others involved in the process.

9.2 Member Libraries

➢ Required number of systems for the staff for preparing the quality database at member library level.

➢ High speed Internet connectivity for the users for searching the database and other Net based resources.

9.3 Connectivity

Internet can be used as the communication / connecting medium between member libraries. Member libraries can logon to KELNET web site and search, download, order for document, referencing or any kind of service. The Internet is formed by the interconnection of thousands of separate networks in different management domains. Within a single management domain there may be several networks, and the management domains cover both private and public network services. The component networks exploit numerous telecommunication technologies, ranging from the dial-up telephone network to state-of-the-art broadband switching technologies. Type of

connectivity to each library can be decided based on number of users, collection and physical location of the libraries.

The proposed model for networking the libraries in Kerala has two levels:

a. The provision of local networks to interconnect the libraries associated with each library authority;

b. The interconnection of the library authority networks and their connection to the Internet and to other Indian and international networks.

10.   IMPLEMENTATION STEPS OF KELNET

Providing Finance to purchase Computer System and Internet Connectivity

Providing Training
             Online Catalogue Creation and resource sharing
             Creation of Digital content
             Digital Content management
             Web resources cataloguing
             Subject Gateways

Providing Software
             Online Catalogue Creation
             Resource sharing (ILL)
             Digital Library Software
             Open Resources and Freeware

Standards identification
             Database Format
             Interlibrary Loan

Creation of Union Catalogue

Member libraries have to get access to union catalogue management system and they can enter catalogue online to the main database. Editing and uploading of records will be online. When one user enters a new record, the system will automatically check whether the same record is available in the database. If it is available it can be downloaded to the local server and location will be added to the main database. All member libraries will follow a common format and structure for database creation and rendering of bibliographic information (metadata). This can be best implemented by providing common software for database creation, where members will have only to render the information.

Cooperation with other networks

KELNET will work in close cooperation and collaboration with other state level as well as national level library networks in the country. It will also be open to adopting the successful methods and strategies deployed by other international networks such as the appreciated Singapore Library Network and numerous many others.

11.   CONCLUSION

Most of the Academic and Special Libraries in Kerala have sufficient IT infrastructure compared to Public Libraries. The main challenge will be to uplift the Public Libraries to that level and integrate the resources in to a shared platform. Language problem, especially Malayalam computing and integrating resources in Malayalam to the common platform will also be a major challenge. In terms of Finance, there will be a huge amount of money needed for Public Libraries to implement IT infrastructure, which already started in several Libraries through Government agencies. But we should have a clear plan and standardization at this very early stage to achieve the goal of a successful Library Network for Kerala State.

References

Hallowell, Roger, Carin-Isabel Knoop and Neo Boon Siong. "Transforming Singapore's public libraries". <u>Harvard Business School Case No. 9-802- 009</u>. 2001.

"Library 2000-Investing in a learning nation". <u>Report of the Library 2000 Review Committee</u>. Singapore. 1994.