Akademi Digital Library: A Haven of Cultural Heritage in Local Languages and Scripts

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Introduction

Kerala Sahitya Akademi has been established for the promotion and development of Malayalam language and literature. The major activities the Akademi undertakes to achieve its objectives consist of collection, organization, conservation, preservation and dissemination of documents including manuscripts, printed books, journals, audio and video records, digitized data bases and other information sources. The collections and library and information services of the Akademi are spread over its two campuses. First is the library in the main campus of the Akademi at the heart of Thrissur city. Second is the Appan Thampuran Smarakam. Together they form the most important collection in the state on Kerala's literature and culture. This paper focuses on the application of Information Communication Technology for the modernization of library and information system of Kerala Sahitya Akademi Library.

I C T Application at Akademi

Libraries and Archives originated when people began to realize the importance of preserving knowledge and information for future use. The document and record keeping practice had been first developed by Sumerians and later by the Catholic Church, and later numerous similar organizations continued the practice. The Indus study reveals that Indians possessed the art of writing more than five thousand years ago. In South India, the Sangam period produced an ocean of literature or documents in palm leaves.

The princely state of Travancore used palm leaves as writing materials for administrative and other purpose till the middle of the 20th century. The writing materials evolved through *boorja patra* (bark of the Himalayan birch tree), stone, copper plates, cloths, palm leaf of manuscripts and paper. Now CD ROMs, hard disks and other digital storage media are the common devices for recording and conserving knowledge. Manuscripts, paper with printed text and images, audio, videocassettes, CDs and other analog and digital collections are commonly called documents. Now the libraries and archives collect such records to develop a store house of information relevant either to the area they serve or concerning all facts of human life. Historians, scientists, researchers and other writers are fully dependent upon the documents and records for their work. We are now witnessing revolutionary changes in all spheres of human activity especially in the Library and Information Centers due to the influence of information and communication technologies.

Library Scenario

Akademi libraries hold a major portion of published works in Malayalam and such a reliable collection is not available elsewhere in this specific area. It is unique in quantity and quality. Many documents in these collections are old and rare and have research value in addition to general interest. So Akademi's libraries have become the focal point of research on languages, literature and culture of the region. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Library resources provide support to education and research programmes on Malayalam language, literature and Kerala studies. The collections in the main campus of the Akademi contain one lakh and thirty thousand books. Its multimedia collection contains 1200 audio CD's, and 500 video CDs as well as 1500 microfilm reels of old and rare Malayalam books. The library is also a unique collection of manuscripts pictures and paintings. The

collection in the Appan Thampuran Smarakam mainly consists of bound volumes of journals published during the last quarter of 19th century. These contain 10000 bound volumes of periodicals, and they have archival value as well as research value. The preservation of these materials in the present form is risky, as the degradation of the paper will ultimately spoil all information contained in these documents. Transforming these documents into digital media is the only way to preserve these valuable materials. Formerly Akademi's education and research system failed to extract the full utility of the resources. Akademi finds it is very difficult to cope with the growing demand of the researchers and general public. To solve this problem Akademi started the modernization program in the Library and Information system.

Digital Archiving

The terms Digital Libraries, Digital Archives, Electronics Libraries and 'Virtual Libraries' denote almost the same system but with a little difference in their characteristics. Digital Libraries have the following facilities. Its resource can be searched and retrieved through an electronic catalogue and the digital resources may be distributed through a local area network or Internet. Kerala Sahitya Akademi has a well-established digital library. It has a digital lab also which has the capacity to undertake digitization of all rare materials available. Kerala Sahitya Akademi Digital Library is hosted in the web and can be used from distinct locations through Internet. Library's special and unique collections are digitized and kept in Servers, Hard disks, and CDs etc. to ensue conservation. Digitizing the rare collection in the library is very important for better preservation and content management. The Digital Library and information system of Akademi has already completed scanning and processing more than 12 lakhs of pages. At present Akademi has 6000 digitized books as well as the digital copies

of Malayalam journals published from the last quarter of 19th century and the early 20th century. Examples of some of the journals held by the digital collections are the following.

Mangalodayam, volumes published from the year   1877

Vidya Vinodhini   ''
 1889

Bhashaposhini ''
    1893

The collection includes almost the full sets of most of the old Malayalam journals published for short periods in the last quarter of 19th century and the first half of 20th century.

The books in the Digital Collections include *Samkshepavethartham,* the first Malayalam Book published in 1777, *Cheru Paithangalkku Upakarartham Englishil Ninnum Paribhashappeduthiya Kathakal*, the first Malayalam text printed in Kerala in 1824, *Seethankal Thullal* by Kunjan Nambiar published in 1853, *Ambareeshacharitham* published in 1897 etc. The collection includes most of the books published in 18th and 19th century. Manuscripts of eminent Malayalam writers, speeches of eminent personalities, photos, pictures etc are also included in the digital collections of Akademi. These digital documents are available to the researchers from the on line digital library of the Akademi.

Akademi provides more than 1000 copyright-free books, which are uploaded in the web. Users through the Digital Library of India (DLI) can also down load them. The meta-data was also prepared and published in the web. At present Akademi is the only contributor of Malayalam books to Digital Library of India. Now Kerala Sahitya Akademi is a major contributor to the Digital Library of India and its name is listed in the home page of DLI. From the links available with retrieved metadata any one can easily download the puff version of the document they want from the Akademi site. This fulfills Akademi's greatest ambition to provide copyright-free Malayalam content to the public. Akademi is trying to collect the digital versions of almost all known titles in Malayalam published between 1772 to 1900. Akademi has also initiated efforts to print and share limited copies of very old, rare and important Malayalam books and distribute them to various libraries in Kerala in order to make rare books available to the public.

The Digital Information given by Akademi is in a readily accessible manner. The Information can be made available to maximum number of users at any time. The search engine meant for search and retrieval of information from the metadata was developed by Akademi itself. Depending on the fields of the bibliography such as subject, author, title, file numbers etc information can be retrieved using Malayalam script from the database through the search engine software. The features available in the software are; module for capturing images and module for entering data from the datasheet provided and linking the images with this data.

Malayala Grandhasooji

Malayala Granthasooji is a unique initiative of Kerala Sahitya Akademi to find an effective solution to the growing demand of the researchers and general public interested in texts in Malayalam language and other source materials. Implementation of information and communication technology to *Malayala Grandhasooji* was the first step in the modernization project of Kerala Sahitya Akademi. Kerala Sahitya Akademi prepared a complete bibliography of published books in Malayalam in 7 volumes till the year 1995. Sri. K. M. Govi , the earliest of professional librarians in Kerala and renowned Bibliographer was the editor of these volumes. Akademi has developed a software for the Digital Management of the complete Bibliography of published works in Malayalam compiled by K M Govi.

Model ICT Project for Local Scripts

The Malayala Grandhasooji converted into electronic format was a project that initiated revolutionary change in application of ICT for managing local content in regional scripts . Full data of Malayalam books up to 2000 was fed in to the data base management system in Malayalam scripts itself and the data base can be searched by Malayalam script in subject, place of publication, publisher, title, author, co-authors, pen name, compiler, editor, translator, series name etc. We can search and retrieve information on a specific author's total contribution to Malayalam, the forewards an author has written, books published on a specific topic and the like. This automated bibliography included all the books published from 1772 to 2000 continued in the compilation of K M Govi. The present electronic version of *Grandhasooji i*s an updated one in excel format and uses Unicode compliant font. Development of this database management software for Malayalam has benefited the library and the public as well as the ICT research and development. The software is capable of managing catalogue database in the web as well as internal catalogue management in libraries. If modules for other housekeeping operations can be developed it can function as an integrated library management package using Malayalam script. The standards adopted by Sri.K.M.Govi in the *Grandhasooji* were used for records in the database. *Grandhasooji* software can be updated as a fully functional web based package and also provision can be given to authors, publishers and other N.G.O's to contribute data which can be incorporated after approved by the authorized editor of *Malayala Grandhasooji*. If a library is interested in building a catalogue of its Malayalam books, they can do it easily by just selecting the titles they have from the complete list of Malayalam books available in the Akademi *Grandhasooji*.

Audio – Video Collections

Kerala Sahitya Akademi Digital collection contains a large number of audio files of numerous Malayalam writers. It is the audio collections of literary programmes organized mainly by Kerala Sahitya Akademi during the last five decades. Kerala Sahitya Akademi has also numerous video files of literary events. Akademi has declared open the audio-video library to the researchers from November 1st 2015 during the Kerala day celebration. This collection includes the recitations, story- telling, literacy discussions and speeches of eminent writers cultural leaders and also those of many prominent social and political leaders and artists. Kerala Sahitya. The audio-video files can be made available to the researchers and the general public through the online digital library of the Akademi.

Writers of the Bygone era

Kerala Sahitya Akademi has developed a database of *Malayalam Sahitya Parambara,* an interactive multimedia on writers of the bygone era, which is distributed as a C.D Rom publication. It is an archive of Malayalam Authors. Most of the prominent Malayalam authors of the bygone era are covered in this database. It contains files related to 255 eminent Malayalam writers of the last two centuries. It contains photos, speeches, biographical sketches, handwritings, list of books written by the writer, cover page of the major works and other data. This database in the digital format has the capability to search the writers through alphabetized lists in Malayalam and English as well as by their year of birth or period of life. This database is also available to the public through Kerala Sahitya Akademi website.

Possibilities of Akademi Digital Initiatives

The various initiatives of Akademi harnessing digital technology can help the Akademi and other otganizations in the region supporting research in regional history, liteature etc:

- To continuously assess the information requirements of the writers, researchers and institutions engaged in promoting Malayalam Literature and Kerala culture and to create necessary infrastructure to provide information support to them.

- To co-ordinate efforts to collect and disseminate information on Kerala culture and Malayalam literature worldwide and to serve as a central hub of such activities.

- To provide an active network mode in which writers get access to the world community of writers, in an interactive and discursive mode and actively initiate dialogue on the fields of poetry, novel, literary criticism and related areas.

- To implement user education programmes for writers and artists on subjects like information sources, literature search, indexing and abstracting procedures etc.

- To start Print on demand service to produce limited copies of printed books on demand from ancient books, manuscripts and journals available at the Akademi. Even a single copy can be produced through this system. Such print on demand service is an essential part of the modern libraries.

With the establishment of hosted software for managing Grandhasooji - the online catalogue of Malayalam books Akademi can render different web based services as a part of its extension activities. Akademi can also extend the web-based services for submission of books for Akademi Awards.

Conclusion

Kerala Sahitya Akademi Digital Library is the epitome of our cultural heritage and it endeavors for the cultural enlistment of the people of Kerala. As a state level Digitization Hub and a Resource center in Malayalam language, literature and culture Akademi Digital Library can cultivate creative spirit in the minds of research scholars and thereby contribute to the production of valuable works in concerned fields. In the case of rare books, periodicals, audio-video documents, pictures, charts, manuscripts and palm leaf manuscripts, Akademi Digital Library can do a laudable service in procuring, preserving and disseminating them for the posterity. In short Kerala Sahitya Akademi Digital Library is a haven of cultural heritage and knowledgebase for regional studies.

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