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# MODERNISATION OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN KERALA USING KOHA :

## A Progress Report

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**Abstract :** *Modernisation of Kerala Public Libraries is a massive project of Kerala State Library Council. The project aims to connect all public libraries of Kerala into a single network. It also includes training on modern library management to village librarians. Koha facilitates the platform to connect with the entire public library system. The project is a challenging task and at the same time it opens up a big opportunity for libraries to regain its glory in the networked Kerala society.*

**Keywords:** *Library Network, Public Library, Kerala, Koha, Library Automation*

### Introduction:

Kerala public library movement is considered as a model public library system among Indian states. Public libraries had already well established in all Kerala villages before the enactment of Public Library Legislation. Kerala public libraries had actively participated in the public movements and projects like literacy mission, continuing education and education for senior citizens (Kerala State Literacy Mission, 2017).

Over 8000 public libraries throughout the Kerala state as per the statistics of Kerala State Library Council. Therefore public libraries services are available at the nook and corner of every Kerala villages. According to Kerala State Library Council, the distance between two libraries should be two kilometres. Kerala people can enjoy the public library services very close to their vicinity. Kerala State Library Council facilitates the fund for public library infrastructure development. The majority of the public libraries have their own building. Reading room, library, career guidance centre, reference library, arts and cultural centre, groups for women and children are the common facilities and services available from public libraries in Kerala (Kerala State Library Council, 2017).

Changes made by economic liberalisation, computerisation, the Internet, mobile phone and social media have made alterations to the social life of Kerala people. The changes in the social life also reflected in the usage and popularity of public libraries as information, social and cultural centre (Jayakrishnan, 2013). The tendency of visiting public libraries by people for information and engagement has

decreased. Public libraries in Kerala have all the resources to cater the social, cultural and information needs. High time to deliver the public library services to the fingertips of each segment of the society with the help of Information and Communication Technology. Public library volunteers need intensive training to deliver novel library services to always keep in touch with mobile-driven Kerala society. Kerala State Library Council has envisioned the plan for modernisation of Kerala public libraries. It includes the training for library volunteers and computerisation of library services (Kerala State Library Council, 2014).

### **History of Kerala Public Library Movement:**

Social and cultural aspects of Kerala society was suitable for the development of public library movement. Renaissance and independence movements had encouraged the establishment of public libraries throughout Kerala. In 1827, Trivandrum Public Library established by erstwhile Travancore King Swathi Thirunal. Trivandrum Public Library is considered as one of the first Public Library in India. The library was declared as 'State Central Library of Kerala' in 1958. Public libraries in North (Malabar) and South (Travancore) Kerala had well established before the Indian Independence. Public library movement became more unified after the Ampalappuzha Conference on 14 September 1945. The conference formed a committee to formulate an action plan to encourage public library movement in Travancore. P.N. Panicker was the convener of the action committee. Public library movement in Kerala officially started with the formation of Travancore Granthasala Sangham. The formation of Kerala State in 1956 and 'Kerala Granthasala Sangham' came into existence in 1958 as an apex body for the entire public library system in the state. Kerala Public Libraries Act passed in 1989 and Kerala State Library Council, the elected governing body for the public library system started working in 1994. Kerala Library Council is responsible for monitoring the activities of the public libraries in the state. It also ensures funding for the development and day to day activities of public libraries. The grant from State Government and the library cess are the main source for the development of public libraries in Kerala (Raman Nair, 1993).

### **Kerala State Library Council:**

Kerala State Library Council is an autonomous body and it maintains a three-tier governing system for public libraries; State, District and Taluk Councils. Members of each tier elected in a democratic way and it ensures representation from village library level.

As per the records, 8182 public libraries have affiliated with Kerala State Library Council. On the basis of the collection, libraries have classified into six grades; A, B, C, D, E, F. Yearly grant and librarian allowance distribution based on the grades. Grades

revise every year after the inspection by Taluk and District Library Council (Kerala State Library Council, 2017).

Kerala State Library Council has introduced and organise various novel programs for the popularity of library services and attract users. Survey of reading habit, career guidance centres, reading competition, Certificate course in Library Science, Taluk Reference Libraries, training for librarians, jail library, tribal libraries are the examples of various initiatives and services introduced by Kerala State Library Council for the promotion of public library services. Each program and activities designed to cater the information needs and ensure the participation of various segments of the society.

### **Challenges Facing by Public Libraries:**

Public libraries had established its role as the main centre of social, culture and leisure activities in Kerala society before the advent of television and mobile phone. Public libraries in Kerala combines both reading room and library. Reading rooms open in the day time and it facilitates the public to read newspapers and magazines. Most of the libraries offer lending facility in the evening time. Separate wings are available with the libraries for the development of arts and sports skills of library users. Forums for women and children also work with libraries. Kerala State Library Council organise competitions in taluk and district and state level to encourage and display talents of library members.

Economy liberalisation, the popularity of satellite television, Information Technology, the Internet, mobile phone, and social media have changed the lifestyle of common people of Kerala. These transformations have also changed the attitude of people towards the public library as a place for social, leisure and information gathering. It's true that traditional public library services can't attract people living in a networked society.

Young people had the lead role in public library activities. Librarians have been serving on voluntary basis by receiving a nominal allowance. New generation youngsters are reluctant to associate with public library activities due to plenty of job opportunities offered by economic liberalisation. Lack of training on modern librarianship is visible in the library management and services. Public libraries are not in a position to get the service of professional librarians. Libraries have not classified the collection in a scientific way using any classification system. Voluntary librarians have no facility to receive training on modern librarianship to meet the requirements of Kerala society. Meagre women representation in public library activities.

Very few public libraries in Kerala are fully computerised. Kerala State Library

Council could provide computer and peripherals to selected centres like Taluk Reference libraries. Most of the libraries are make using register books to manage the day to day activities like issue and return of books.

### **Project of Public Library Modernization:**

Kerala state has received much appreciation for e-governance and the use of Free Software in the education sector. The state government is successfully delivering various public services through the IT-enabled platform as part of e-governance. Students are receiving Free Software based IT education in state-controlled schools (Staff Reporter, 2017). Kerala Government has already put forwarded many drives to fill the remaining gap in digital divide (Special Correspondent, 2017). Most of the university and college libraries have computerised using Koha Open Source Library Management System. Public libraries could not achieve computerisation of public library services make using the IT-friendly atmosphere in Kerala. In this situation, Kerala State Library Council launched a project for the modernisation of public libraries. Facilitate IT infrastructure, training for librarians, development of library management system, make available bibliographic details from all libraries in the software are the various stages of the project.

Kerala State Library Council constituted a committee in 2012 to develop a blueprint for the modernisation project. Representatives from Kerala State Library Council, library professionals and IT experts were the members of the Committee. The Committee decided to select Koha for the networking of public libraries.

The first phase of the project started with the implementation of Koha software. Kerala State Library Council selected a Koha service provider through open tender in 2014. The Koha instance is hosted in the cloud platform offered by the software service provider. Kerala State Library Council has selected six hundred libraries with bibliographic details to add in the Koha platform (Sriram, 2015). The online catalogue of public libraries now available at <http://kslc.in>. Workshop for resource persons and district level training for librarians completed in the period of 2016-2017 years.

### **Training Period:**

Kerala State Library Council had arranged resources for massive training in all districts of Kerala. Workshop for resource persons held in Thiruvananthapuram during the period of 4-8 August 2016. The team of resource person consists of leading public library volunteers, district level library council authorities, library professionals from universities and colleges. The sessions on the history of Kerala Public Library movement, Library Management, Cataloguing, Classification, Information Technology, Library Automation lead by Doyens of public library movement and Library Science faculty members.

Kerala State Library Council has arranged 21 days training at the district level. District Library Council selected candidates for the training and batches for each Taluk. Each batch consists of fifty librarians and an average of five batches of classes have conducted in every district. Participants have received limited Koha training along with the theoretical classes. The participants have received in-depth training on library classification and cataloguing. The collection of public libraries has not classified using standard bibliographic classification scheme. The well-classified collection is a prerequisite for union catalogue building. An abridged classification scheme based on Dewey Decimal Classification has prepared by Kerala State Library Council and useful for public libraries with a small collection. This classification scheme made use for practical training on library classification.

The majority of the participants had long experience in the day to day public library activities. So they could grab library management, classification and cataloguing classes very well. Lack of technology literacy and familiarity with computer operations made the problem for the participants during the training. Anyway, participants have the confidence to grab computer skills. They need more opportunities to get hands-on training in Internet and computer skills.

#### **Towards the Second Phase of Modernisation Project:**

The training received at the first phase of the project could enhance the confidence level of librarians. A lot of preparations from village library level are necessary for the second phase of the project. Availability of computer, Internet and the facility for ongoing training are the prerequisites. In the present situation, computer and Internet facilities are available only at Taluk Reference libraries. IT infrastructure should be made available even at all A grade libraries for the project success. Hope that Kerala State Library Council help to facilitate funding for IT infrastructure; e.g. MLA fund. More Koha training is necessary to enhance the knowledge level of librarians. Then only they can add bibliographic details to the union catalogue and switch the day to activities into Koha.

#### **Suitability of Koha in Public Libraries:**

Initially Koha developed for Horowhenua Library Trust, they maintain multi-library branches. Delhi Public Library is one of the large instances of Koha implementation in terms of the number of branches, books and users. The library has 35 plus branches and the stock of 1.6 million books (Breeding, 2008).

A user can find a lot of features suitable for public libraries with Koha. Management of multi branches of libraries, branch transfer, offline circulation, multi-format notices, multilingual etc. are the examples of features match with the

requirements of public libraries. Koha can represent bibliographic records in regional languages due to its compatibility with Unicode encoding standard. The Unicode facility is helpful for public libraries in Kerala to add and search the collection details in Malayalam script. The challenging task is that maintain a big number of libraries in a single instance of Koha.

### **Conclusion:**

Modernisation of public libraries in Kerala is a challenging task. Networking of a huge number of public libraries would be the first of its kind. Similar kind of a project was completed in Turkey by connecting 1136 public libraries using Koha (Breeding, 2014).

District level centres with resource persons are necessary for the ongoing training for librarians. Kerala Library Council should take initiative to attract young generation to participate in the public library activities and the modernisation project. Need special initiatives to ensure more women participation in the public library sector.

Computer infrastructure and relentless Internet connection should be made available in every public library. Working committees in district and taluk level are necessary to supervise and monitor the progress of modernisation activities. Kerala State Library Council should make sure the presence of professional librarians in the committees. The committee can invite professional librarians working in academic libraries to participate in the project. The service of Library Science students and graduates can make available in the modernisation project to ensure quality.

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