

# MIGRATION FROM SOUL TO KOHA:

## A Learning Experience

**Vimal Kumar V.**

Technical Assistant, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala-686 560

E-mail: vimalibre@gmail.com

**K.C. Abdul Majeed**

Associate Professor, Farook College, Kozhikode-673 632

E-mail: kcamajeedfc@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Migration from legacy library automation systems to Koha is a challenging task and requires good homework and teamwork. The migration process and management of Open Source library management system offer a good learning experience for library professionals. The article goes through the challenges and learning opportunities offered by the migration process to Koha by utilizing the expertise of in-house library staff at Mahatma Gandhi University Library.

**Keywords:** Koha, Data migration, SOUL, FOSS, Integrated Library Management System

### Introduction:

Proprietary library automation solutions are still dominant in the Indian market. Many of the locally made library automation solutions do not follow library standards. They restrict exporting of bibliographic, user and transaction details. So libraries face difficulties while trying to migrate from legacy systems to Open Source software (Kumar & Jasimudeen, 2012). Open Source library management systems have been increasing its market size in the global level. The advent of Koha in India opened up a new vista for all types of libraries. Libraries liberated to the new generation of the integrated library management system. Free and Open Source library management systems introduced new business models in the library automation market. Libraries can enjoy more conveniences with Koha regarding copyright, software service support, integration with other services, and vendor support (Breeding, 2017). Koha became popular among Indian libraries after the successful implementation at Delhi Public Library in 2008 (Talikota, 2008). After it, more libraries came forward to adopt Koha.

Koha at Mahatma Gandhi University goes live in 2013. SOUL was the legacy automation system. SOUL implemented at Mahatma Gandhi University in 1998. The library had to wait for another ten years to get a new version of SOUL. Irregular

updates, faceoff with cutting-edge technologies, weak technical platform, no capacity to handle regional languages, and poor search capability are the weakness of SOUL version 1.

Mahatma Gandhi University Library is one of the first universities in Kerala state implemented Koha. The library could successfully implement Koha by utilizing the expertise of library staff and community support. Leading Koha team members at Mahatma Gandhi University Library share their knowledge with community members. The procedures and challenges faced during the migration process documented and have shared with the community through various platforms like blogs, discussion forums, workshops, and seminars.

### **Legacy Automation System:**

Mahatma Gandhi University Library system implemented SOUL software in 1998. At that time very few choices to automate libraries. SOUL was the affordable software for academic libraries concerning price and support. SOUL built for the requirements of the Indian academic environment. Workflow of many tasks and activities in the SOUL was not designed to save the time of library users and staff. For example, issue and return process takes time and does not meet Ranganathan's Fourth Law 'Save the time of the reader.' SOUL version one was not able to represent and search bibliographic details in Indian regional languages in Unicode script. The specific version of the SOUL software has no provision to attach digital objects. SOUL had no plan to release regular updates and bug fixes. SOUL platform was not strong enough to hold a significant number of bibliographic details.

### **Migration to Koha:**

Exporting of bibliographic, user and circulation data from SOUL was a challenging task. SOUL allows exporting of bibliographic details to MARC and CCF format. The MARC format in SOUL software is not in proper structure. Corrupted records in the database create problem while exporting data. User details exported to spreadsheet format with the help of MS SQL front-end tools. Transaction details exported to CSV.

MARC file from SOUL not able to directly open with editors like MARCEdit software. So we had to export bibliographic details into CCF format. Then import the CCF file into CDS/ISIS and exported it as an iso file suitable to edit with MARCEdit software. MARCEdit has an option to import records from CDS/ISIS. Mapping of bibliographic elements done with the help of MARCEdit software. Item information MARC tags (e.g., accession number) added to the records to match with Koha.

Circulation details exported to the spreadsheet and converted to Koha offline circulation (.koc) file format. The provision of importing circulation details with the help of Koha specific file format is a great option to reduce the migration time.

The migration process successfully is done with the help of Koha Community resources. Email discussion forum of Koha was very much useful to get instant help while migration process.

### **Human Resources Management:**

Mahatma Gandhi University Library has a good team of tech-savvy staff. The senior library professionals supervised the entire migration process. Workflow and database structure of SOUL software introduced by the senior library professionals. Young library professionals with expertise on Linux operating systems and Koha took a lead role in installation and data import.

Library staff has faced familiarity problems with Koha in the initial stages of implementation. Various rounds of orientation and hands-on training required for the library staff. RFID devices integrated with Koha with the assistance of an experienced vendor.

### **Koha Experience:**

Koha library management system opened up many opportunities to the Mahatma Gandhi University Library system. Following are the main advantages with Koha:

- ❖ Representation and search of bibliographical records in regional languages.
- ❖ Capacity to handle multiple library branches using a single installation.
- ❖ Maintenance of union catalogue without any hassle.
- ❖ Availability of vendor support and community support.
- ❖ Integration of innovative technologies to Koha (e.g. RFID).
- ❖ Availability of various platforms for collaboration for library professionals with software community.
- ❖ Development of unique collection with a link to digital objects.

Mahatma Gandhi University main campus situated 12 km away from Kottayam town. The affiliated colleges of the university located in five districts. The user community was faced many difficulties including union catalogue and related services. The user community of Mahatma Gandhi University Library has been

enjoying following conveniences after the implementation of Koha library management system.

- ❖ Union catalogue which consists bibliographic details including the collection of central library and departmental libraries.
- ❖ SMS and email notifications regarding transactions.
- ❖ Online reservation and renewal of documents.
- ❖ Book purchase suggestions through OPAC save the time of faculty members, research scholars and students.

The periodical section of Mahatma Gandhi University has created two digital collections of documents on Social Sciences and Humanities. The databases "Kerala Studies" and "Journal Article" are useful for research scholars which consist of journal articles, digital books, articles from old magazines such as Mangalodayam, PhD thesis, various types of reports, discussion papers and websites. The academic community can access these two databases through Koha OPAC (Unnikrishnan & Pillai, 2018).

### **Learning Experience:**

Learning and update with Free and Open Source Software can give a new experience for library professionals. Earlier days library people depend on the proprietary vendor for problem-solving. Free and Open Source Software projects endorse Open Culture. Accountability, collaboration, community contributions, consistency, passion, and shared responsibility are the critical qualities can be nurtured while works with Free Software projects (Cannon, 2018). Free and Open Source Software projects encourage the participation of end user, developers, organisations and service providers. An Open Source Software project is like a village or a living organism and moves while engages with community members (Kane, 2016).

Koha Free software project has given many platforms for collaboration and learning. Koha project encourages library professionals to report bugs, give new ideas for development and participate in translating. Learning in an enterprise level is also required to manage Koha. Mahatma Gandhi University Library has adopted Ubuntu operating system for all desktop computers. All staff now familiar with Ubuntu Linux. They have acquired expertise on basic Linux commands to troubleshoot while day to day activities. The library staff communicates with Koha community members for doubt clearing and problem-solving. We also share our knowledge and expertise with budding library professionals, and other libraries wish to implement Koha. Library Science students receive Koha training during their internship at Mahatma Gandhi

University Library. Library professionals from other colleges and public libraries visit the library for learning Koha.

### **Conclusion:**

Implementation of Koha is a challenging task for libraries those wish to migrate from legacy software. The difficulties mainly due to the data export problems with the legacy software. All processes of the migration process should be preplanned well and develop a blueprint of the process. Libraries without in-house technical support need to find the expertise of an experienced service provider. Library staff should be ready to prepare for the learning process to acquire new skills to manage the Koha system. Sharing knowledge with other members is one of the best ways to engage with the Koha community. An active member in the Free and Open Source community get instant help from others when they are in trouble.

### **References:**

- Breeding, M. (2017). Library Systems Report 2017. *American Libraries Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2017/05/01/library-systems-report-2017/>
- Cannon, M. (2018). 7 Ways to a Thriving Open Source Organization Culture. Retrieved December 20, 2018, from <https://www.axelerant.com/resources/articles/7-ways-thriving-open-source-organization-culture>
- Kane, A. (2016). What is Open Source culture? What does it mean to me? Retrieved December 20, 2018, from <https://bombaypirate.com/love-open-source/>
- Kumar, V., & Jasimudeen, S. (2012). Adoption and user perceptions of Koha library management system in India. Retrieved from <http://nopr.niscair.res.in/handle/123456789/15700>
- Talikoti, B. (2008). Delhi Public Library Catalogue Goes Live with Koha 3.0. Retrieved December 21, 2018, from <https://lists.katipo.co.nz/public/koha/2008-October/015483.html>
- Unnikrishnan, S., & Pillai, M. G. (2018). Literature for Research through the creation of two in-house databases: a case study of Mahatma Gandhi University Library. Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Library Association.