

*A Malayalam weekly that was digitally archived online as part of Shiju Alex's Grandhapura mission to digitise old and rare Malayalam documents and journals.*

When Shiju Alex announced in December last that he was suspending his more-than-a-decade-old passion of digitising rare and historical documents related to Kerala, it evoked an outcry from a large community that had either benefited from his work or had realised its significance.

For, by then, Grandhapura, one of the biggest free digital archives in Malayalam, that he founded had more than 2,000 Kerala-related documents running into around 1.2 lakh pages.

In his blog announcing his decision, Mr. Alex, who works with an engineering firm in Bengaluru, cited eight reasons, especially physical exertion and disappointment over not being able to scale up the initiative beyond a one-man army, for giving it up.

“Collective brainstorming with like-minded people ensued in the 10 months since then. That the project should continue somehow was a unanimous decision. Thus, it was agreed to form a not-for-profit organisation and buy equipment for the digitisation process. Besides, employees will be engaged for the drive,” he said.

It has now become a reality with Indic Digital Archive Foundation and the web portal for free publishing of digitised documents set to be inaugurated in Bengaluru on October 30.

The project will resume with the digitisation of 500-odd documents that Mr. Alex has received since he suspended his work. This will be followed by the digitisation of Kerala-related documents being preserved in some Bengaluru-based institutions. Everything from books, handwritten notes, palm leaf manuscripts, and audio-video records connected to Kerala dated 1950 or before and thus free of copyright issues will be digitised under the project irrespective of language and script.

“The purchase of new equipment and enlisting employees will help scale up the project and ensure high-quality digital documents. Our primary objective is to publicise the project and create awareness about it before approaching government or institutions to take it further. We are also looking for maximum support and funding for the project, which is basically a public service,” said Mr. Alex.

Personally, this is a watershed moment for Mr. Alex who had devoted all his free time, which he should have ideally spent with his family, for 12 years for a passion that had benefited thousands. He had a dedicated Facebook group with over 15,000 followers.

“I always had a passion for research and historical documents. But then I realised that it wasn't easy for people, especially those without research-