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Manuscripts: Preservation in the Digital Age

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“The Endangered Archives captures forgotten and still not written histories, often suppressed or marginalized. It gives voice to the voiceless: it opens a dialogue with global humanity’s multiple pasts. It is a library of history still waiting to be written.” Lisbet Rausing

Abstract

Library is the indispensable part of educational institution designed to serve educational, cultural, research, recreational information to the users. . Libraries are the places wherever the complete information gathering takes place together with intellectual and our cultural heritage. The collections possessed by the library are affected by numerous environmental factors that ultimately results in irreparable harm to numerous collections. The information embodied in manuscripts is effective however materials used for this purpose cause a true challenge. These manuscripts have proof of facts, their accomplishments, thoughts, work they need done, theories then on, that are essential for human development. These guide the younger generations for ages and should be saved for each coming generations. This article provides a short define of preservation strategies adopted to protect the manuscripts. Preventive measures should be applied with caution and value effective manner.

Introduction

Libraries and archive collections are an unparalleled resource for our history and culture, containing the wealth of human knowledge and artistic expression. From illuminated medieval manuscripts and historical documents to some of the earliest writings ever recorded, the bulk of material held in most collections is made of paper. The digital preservation paves ways to access documents easily if available on the web from any part of the world.

Libraries, Archives and Museums are engaged in providing Library services to the academics, common citizen and also conserve and preserve the rare collections, manuscripts and Indigenous Traditional Knowledge System of India. Archives serve the purposes of preservation of important

Government documents, public records which reflects the working of an entire administration of a particular period of time. Preservation is the maintaining or restoring of artifacts, documents and records from getting damaged or decayed. The ancient and old cultural heritage of any nation can be searched from there liable sources available in library, archives and museums in the form of books and other reading materials.

Indian manuscripts are the richest collection of written documents that provide information on the existence of different civilizations and the cultural affluence of the nation. Written in different Indian languages; these manuscripts are spread all over the country in different monasteries, temples, libraries, museums, with individuals and in several private institutions. In fact, India has possibly the oldest and the largest collection of manuscripts in the world.

National Mission for Manuscripts

The National Mission for Manuscripts was established in February 2003, by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India. A unique project in its programme and mandate, the Mission seeks to unearth and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India. India possesses an estimate of ten million manuscripts, probably the largest collection in the world. These cover a variety of themes, textures and aesthetics, scripts, languages, calligraphies, illuminations and illustrations.

Objectives

- Locate manuscripts through national level Survey and Post-Survey.
- Document each and every manuscript and manuscript repository, for a National Electronic Database that currently contains information on four million manuscripts making this the largest database on Indian manuscripts in the world.
- Conserve manuscripts incorporating both modern and indigenous methods of conservation and training a new generation of manuscript conservators.
- To train the next generation of scholars in various aspects of Manuscript Studies like languages, scripts and critical editing and cataloguing of texts and conservation of manuscripts.
- To promote access to manuscripts by digitizing the rarest and most endangered manuscripts

- To promote access to manuscripts through publication of critical editions of unpublished manuscripts and catalogues.
- To facilitate public's engagement with manuscripts through lectures, seminars, publications and other outreach programmes.

Manuscripts

Manuscripts is the wealth and heritage of our culture, history, language, literature and of course civilization and; it could be the better source of knowledge. Manuscripts constitute an important part of the rich Indian Cultural Heritage. These are the major repositories of the contribution that our predecessors made in the diverse fields of religion, philosophy, astronomy, literature, history, medicine and science.

A **manuscript** is a written document that has been manually created as opposed to being printed or reproduced in some other way. The word '*manuscript*' is derived from the Medieval Latin term '*manuscriptum*' that means hand written documents (www.wikipedia.in). Manuscript is a hand written composition on bark, cloth, metal, palm leaf, paper or any other material that has significant scientific, historical or aesthetic value. Manuscripts are found in hundreds of different languages and scripts (www.indianetzone.com). Manuscripts of modern period also refer to autographs, correspondences and type written materials. The manuscripts have a long history of its existence. According to the Chambers Dictionary, "Manuscript is a book or document written by hand before the invention of printing" (Allied Chambers (India) Limited, 2000). So manuscripts include all types of early writing, which are not printed and published. In other words hand writings of any kind whether on paper or any other material in contradiction to printed materials are called manuscripts.

Types of Manuscripts

- Palm leaf
- Birch Bark Sanchi Pat
- Bamboo Leaf
- Banana Leaf
- Bhoj Patra

- Cloth
- Parchment
- Ivory
- Metal (Bronze, Copper, Gold etc.)
- Paper

Factors Responsible for Deterioration of Archival Materials

Environmental Factors : Temperature; Relative Humidity, Sunlight, Darkness and moisture;

Biological Factors : Insects like cockroaches, silverfish, lice fungus, moulds, rat etc.

Natural Factors : Natural disaster, flood, earthquake, fire etc.;

Human Being : Invasion at the time of war, terrorist attack etc.

Practices for Conservation of Manuscripts

- **Care and Handling**

Documents should be properly cared and handled while conserving and preserving the manuscripts and printed documents

- **Environmental Controls**

Environmental controls are necessary to facilitate the preservation of organic library materials with respect to temperature, humidity, sunlight, dust, acidity, pollutants etc.

- **Biological Factors**

The archives and manuscripts get affected by fungi, moulds, silverfish, beetles, bookworms, termites, rodents and other biological agents when they are moist and hot.

Preservation of Manuscripts

An ancient manuscript paper of the past is the value of a nation's civilization. Preservation of manuscripts generally means managing collections from deterioration and ensuring continuous availability. Preservation can help keeping the artifacts long lasting without damage and ensure the digital recording and collection of artifacts in the rapidly changing technological era. Damages due to natural agents will continue but can be minimized by controlling the external agents.

Preservation aims:

- ✓ To reduce the effect of deteriorating factors such as temperature, light, moisture, flood, fire, Biological factors (pest, fungus, insects), pollution, dust etc.
- ✓ To maintain the historical value of information;
- ✓ To make it easy to use and handle;
- ✓ To make information to survive for longer duration;
- ✓ To provide worldwide accessibility and 24X7 access.
- ✓ Preservation Strategies
- ✓ Refreshing
- ✓ Migration
- ✓ Replication
- ✓ Emulation
- ✓ Metadata Attachment
- ✓ Trustworthy Digital Objects
- ✓ Digital Sustainability

Methods of Preservation and Conservation

- ✓ *Documentation of Traditional Knowledge;*

- ✓ *Captured and Recording Traditional Knowledge;*
- ✓ *Microfilming of Traditional Knowledge;*
- ✓ *Digitalization and Digital Preservation.*
- ✓ *Centrally Air –Conditioned building of Libraries, Archives and Museums conducive for the documents and manuscripts, artifacts etc.*

Indigenous Material of Preserving Manuscripts

- Along with bundles of manuscripts pieces of Vasambu or dried ginger are kept to save these from insect attack.
- Dried and powdered leaves of *Aswagandha* in small packets are kept with the manuscripts covered in clothes to repel insect attack..
- Coatings of lemon-grass oil are given to strengthen the leaves of manuscripts and destroy the growths of micro-organisms.
- In some repositories people use vermilion or kumkum fruit powder (which is red in colour) that act as a very good insect repellent.
- Oil extracts of some natural products like black pepper, sandal wood or clove facilitate in the restoration of flexibility to the palm leaf manuscripts.
- The mixture of neem leaves, karanja, nirgundi and citronella are known to have insecticidal properties for which it could be used in the manuscript libraries
- Mint leaves also repel ants and cockroaches.
- Sandal wood dust is commonly used by many libraries to ward off insects.
- Application of turmeric paste to the seasoned palm leaves is well known for its disinfecting effect.
- Black-Cumin (Kala Jeera) which gives a strong aromatic smell also used as an insect repellent. Scattering of the seeds at the manuscript storage keeps away insects.

Issues and Challenges faced by Archives and Libraries for Preserving and Conserving Traditional Knowledge System

The vital problems include:

- Inadequate funding,

- Lack of technical knowhow
- Inadequate infrastructure. *Lack of Established System for Recording and Documentation of Oral Traditions, Customs and Indigenous Knowledge System*
- *Issues for Obtaining Copyright for Digitization*
- *Lack of Experienced and Trained LIS Professionals*

Digitization

Digitization is a process through which extension and enhancement of information storage and retrieval systems that manipulates text, images, sounds, static or dynamic images. Digitization is necessitated for both accessibility and preservation. In this sense, we can say that, digitization of manuscripts is the only way to exchange cultural heritage to the communities. Internet has emerged the best medium for digitization and through the provision of web; manuscripts may be made available to the outside world without compromising on their safety. The main tools for digitization are Hardware and Software. Digitalizing helps:

- a) Improving access.
- b) Preventing damage caused by frequent handling.
- c) Examining possibilities of preparing e-books.
- d) Resource-sharing with other institutions.
- e) Future use and Storage

Digital Preservation Initiatives in India

- **Role of IGNCA, New Delhi:** The **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts**, established in memory of Smt. Indira Gandhi, is visualized as a centre encompassing the study and experience of Indian art and culture.
- **National Archives of India (NAI):** is the biggest archival repository in South Asia. It has a vast corpus of records viz., public records, private papers, oriental records, cartographic records and microfilms, which constitute an invaluable source of information for scholars-administrators and users of archives.

- **National Library of India, Kolkata:** National Library has about 3600 rare and historically important manuscripts in different languages. These manuscripts are preserved separately along with other important and rare books in the Rare Books division. The xylographs presented by H. E. the Dalai Lama are also preserved in this collection.

- **Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna :** Library has emerged as an outstanding research Library embracing a large number of rare manuscripts, some of them richly illuminated viz. "Tarik-e-Khandan-e-Timuriya", the only copy in the world, contains 132 beautiful paintings by the famous court artists of Akbar the Great and a writing of Jehangir.

- **Rampur Raza Library:** The Rampur Raza Library is one of the world's magnificent, unparalleled repository of cultural heritage and treasure-house of knowledge built up by successive Nawabs of Rampur State. It contains very rare and valuable collection of manuscripts, historical documents, specimens of Islamic calligraphy, miniature paintings, astronomical instruments and rare illustrated works in Arabic and Persian languages besides 60,000 printed books.

- **The Asiatic Society of Bengal :** The scholarly society founded on Jan. 15, 1784, by **Sir William Jones**, a British lawyer and Orientalist, to encourage Oriental studies. Apart from in-house digitization of books, journals, manuscripts, '**Digitization and Archiving of the journals and books of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata**', a project of the society has been initiated in December 2016. Complete sets of Asiatic Researches (1788-1842), Memoirs of the Asiatic Society journals of the Asiatic Society (1832-2016), Bibliotheca Indica Series have been scanned.

- **Nehru Memorial Museum & Library :** The Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), a memorial to Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, is housed with research library on modern and contemporary Indian history and social sciences. Its published resources acquired for the Library include books, pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals and other documentary materials. The Library has a rich collection of material on microfilms and microfiche. The NMML

Archives, besides the Jawaharlal Nehru family papers, has acquired papers of nationalist leaders of Modern India and other eminent Indians who distinguished themselves in any field. Also records of non-official organizations, associations and societies which played an important role in the development of modern India are also acquired by the NMML.

Conclusion

Many Indian Universities and Institutions have establishing Institutional Repositories for making valuable resources available to the academic community for research and development. There is an urgent need for people's participation in the mission to preserve and conserve the manuscripts and rare documents which are still available with the private collections of village people, Mathas, Madarasa, Private libraries, monasteries etc. The preservation and conservation of rare manuscripts, rare books, documents, government records, and digital resources is one of the most important areas where we should pay more attention to preserve the national heritage and resources for the future generations to come. The rare materials should be universally accessible to all through information networks, providing access to and promoting knowledge of Indian civilization at the national and international levels. The cultural heritage materials should emerge to constitute an important resource for research, education and content creation.

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