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SARITA SOMARAJAN
saritha788@gmail.com

S Mohammed Esmail Dr
Annamalai University, smeelibau@gmail.com

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Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library, Kerala:

A Case Study



Abstract

The Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library, University of Kerala, houses the treasures of ancient knowledge in India. It has come into existence out of royal interest. The kings of Travancore, as a rule, were valorous as well as lovers of art and literature. Srimulam Thirunal was mainly responsible for the spread of Oriental literature throughout the world. It was he who instituted the department for the publication of manuscripts which in due course grew into the present institution. It is located at Kariavattom, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. Its origin goes back to the illustrious Maharaja of Travancore, Swati Tirunal (1829-1846). The institute carries out researches on Indian language manuscripts, major part of which are in Sanskrit. Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library has over 65,000 works mostly of palm leaf manuscripts. Currently the Oriental Institute and Manuscript Library is headed by Dr. R. B. Sreekala, Professor and Head of the Department, Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library, University of Kerala.

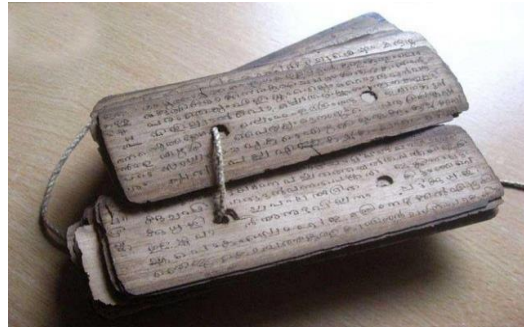
The paper highlights the techniques used for the conservation and preservation of the rare manuscript collection in Oriental Research & Manuscript Library, Thiruvananthapuram. It further investigates the hardware and software available for digitizing the invaluable collection of manuscripts for the future generation.

Keywords: Kerala University, Oriental Library, Manuscripts, Preservation, Digitization, Palm leaves.

Introduction

Oriental Research Institute and Manuscript Library occupies amidst the lush green campus of Kariavattom of University of Kerala. It houses the largest collection of Palm leaves manuscripts in the country. The library has a well preserved treasure of 65000 manuscripts. An internationally accredited research centre in Indological studies and has unique projects to its credit. The new majestic building was opened to public in 1982. The building easily blends with the surrounding landscape with its western and oriental architecture. The glorious legacies of this library dates back to 1903 when the rulers of Travancore royal family felt the need of preserving the rare and valuable manuscripts in their possession. The then Travancore King His Highness Sri Moolam Thirunal Maharaja entrusted Dr. T Ganapathy Satri to publish the manuscripts. During 1908 an independent institution named Sankrit Curator's Office was established with Dr. T Ganapathy Sastri as first Curator. He was a renowned scholar, poet and critic and instrumental in collection and preservation of many manuscripts which was in possession of the royal family.

He was also credited with the discovery of manuscripts of the **Bhasa Plays** which was unknown to the Sanskrit literary world till then. The same is preserved in the library. For his discovery of the original manuscripts of the **Bhasa Plays** he was awarded doctorate by Tubingen University, Germany. Eventually in 1924, a Malayalam Curator's office was established with Mahakavi Ulloor S Parameswarayyar as the first Malayalam Curator. The original manuscript of Mahakavi Ulloor S Parameswara aiyars Classic works Kerala Sahithya Charithram which depicts the history of Malayalam language , culture and literature is now among the prime position of theis library.In 1930 the Sanskrit and Malayalam curator's office were merged and the department for publication for oriental manuscripts were established. In 1938, University manuscript library was constituted and started functioning.



In 1949, the University manuscript library got National recognition on the visit of the then Vice President of India, Dr. S Radhakrishnan to unveil the portrait of the first curator Dr.Ganapthy Satri. In 1996 with the objectives to undertake the studies in Indological subjects, the University Manuscript Library was made a research centre and renamed as oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library. The department started functioning in the present building from 1982 headed by many eminent and distinguished scholars who made drastic contributions for the progress of the department.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are

- To explore the kinds of manuscripts available in the library
- To study the various techniques incorporated for preservation and conservation of manuscripts
- To identify the digitization process of manuscripts.
- To ascertain the present status of the building

Methodology

A questionnaire was given to the library staff in manuscript section of Oriental research Institute & Manuscripts Library. Another questionnaire was distributed randomly among research scholars and visitors from different departments of the University. Observation and interview methods were also entertained. The findings of the study are only limited to this library.

Functions of the Library

The functions of this library are:

- Identification and acquisition of manuscripts
- Preserve the palm leaves manuscripts
- Preserve the paper manuscripts
- Classification and Cataloguing of manuscripts
- Publications of rare manuscripts in book format
- Convert the Manuscripts images into digital format
- Convert the Manuscripts images into Micro film format
- Dissemination of information about manuscripts
- Create the awareness about manuscriptology

It has published till now 200 works in the Trivandrum and Malayalam series. Special mention may be made of the publication of the 13 plays of Bhasa by Dr. T. Ganapathi Sastri, the first Curator of the Department of Publications. The Library has brought out numerous critical editions of classical works in Malayalam like Adhyatma Ramayanam, Nalacharitham Attakkatha, Ramayanam Attakkatha Kannassaramayanam and Ramacharitham.



Dr. T Ganapathy Sasthri

The academic activities relate to teaching research and publication. The library also houses well stocked rare books on indological studies. The department faculty regularly edits and publishes ancient works through Trivandrum Sanskrit Tamil and Malayalam serials. The department also

publishes two annual journals – The journal of Manuscript studies a biannual journal and Prachina Kairali a Malayalam journal.

Collection

The library has in its possession manuscripts of some rare publications. It is significant that the library has the largest collection of Palm leaf manuscripts in India. Currently the Library has a collection of 65,000 works. Among the palm leaves, 44,000 are in Sanskrit and about 10,000 in Malayalam. The rest are in Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, Kannada, Hindi, Burmese, Assamese, Oriya and Indonesian. The preserved manuscripts pertain to a wide array of subjects like Vedas, Upanishads, Purana, Jyothisha, Ganitha, History, Music, Vaidya, Vedantha and Science & Technology. The manuscripts are written in varied scripts like Vattezhuthu, Kolezhuthu, Malayanna, Devanagiri, Burmese, Indonesian and Arabic. The language used is English, Burmese, Malayalam, Tamil, Indonesian, Assamese, Kannada, Oriya, Marathi and Gujarathi.

The manuscripts in the library cover a wide variety of subjects such as Vedas, Upanishads, Tantra, Mantra, Itihasa, Purana, Grihya Karma Suthras, Vedangas, Vyakarana, Nirukta, Jyothisha, Vaidyam, Nyayam, Mimamsa, all branches of Literature, Sculpture Samudrika and so on. Some of the rare manuscripts in the library deserve special mention.



Colourful Manuscripts

There is wide variety in materials used like palm leaves, handmade papers, birch bark, copper plates and clothes. The significance and importance of this department is that it possesses some unique manuscripts which are not available elsewhere or preserved. Scholars from various centres and foreign universities utilize the manuscripts for research purposes.

1. Recent editions of specialized subject books in manuscripts and its related areas.
2. Recent editions of books in history, religion, philosophy, psychology and social science
3. Old & rarest collections in Sanskrit literature and language
4. Old & rare-book collections in Malayalam literature and language
5. Old & rare-book collections in Tamil literature and language (vols. 197)
6. Recent editions of books in English literature and language (vols. 2621)
7. Encyclopedias, dictionaries etc.

8. Periodicals (general & subject)

9. Newspapers

10. Government publications

11. University publications etc

The main source of collection of manuscripts is Palaces, Illams, Taravads, Manas and Individual who are in possession of manuscripts.

Rare Manuscripts of Oriental Research Institute and Manuscript Library

Srimad Bhagavatam (Reg.No.19218): Complete Bhagavata written in Malayalam Script. The planks have been made in ivory, with beautiful carving of the Tutelary diety on both sides and the inner side of the ivory plank has been beautifully coloured using natural colours, the technique is unknown to the present generation.

Samudrika Lakshanam (Reg.No.11247) This work is in Tamil, written by Kamalamuni very carefully. In most of the leaves upto 30-40 lines can be seen. Almost 300 years old.

Rudrakshamala (Reg.No.11104) Palm-leaf has been cut in round and strung like beads (Rudraksha). Very rare work.

Sivalingangasasanam (Reg.No.L 622) Tantra work, written in Kannada Script, contains pictures also.

Ramacaritam (Reg.No.19005) Only one Ramacarita work which is in vattezhuthu Script and a very old work.

Lakshnamritam (Reg.No.15124) Very rare work on toxicology. Medicines for almost every kind of toxins and treatment has also been dealt within the work. 300 years old.

Navaratnamalika (Reg.No.T.1950) It is written by H.H.Swati Tirunal and is the description of festival of the Tutelary Diety Lord Sri Padmanabha.

Oohaganam (Reg.No.T.1750) Rare work on Samaveda. This Sanskrit work, which is very old is believed to be written in North India.

Anumodana patrika (Reg.No. 6122) At the Temple Proclamation by Amma Maharani, this work has been written & submitted in praise of Her Highness by Prof. Balarama Panicker.

Kautaliya Arthasastra (Reg.No.C.1874) Contains Bhasha Vyakhyanam or interpretation. This work was recovered & printed by Mahamahopadhyaya Shri.T.Ganapati Sastri, the first Curator of this Library.

Mayoora sandesam (Reg.No.4504) A famous Sandesa kavya in Malayalam, submitted before H.H. the Maharaja of Travancore by the author Kerala Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran himself, on 1894.

SyanandurapuraVarnana Prabandham (Reg.No.1062) Very rare work which has been written in the glory of Trivandrum city the then Capital of the Kingdom of Travancore by H.H.Swati Tirunal, the King of Travancore, In Malayalam script.

Geernasreya vakyangal (Reg.No.22976) The 'Samkhyadyodaka' methods of Jyotisa has been written in Devanagari Script in this small work.

Cheppedu (copper plate) Written in AD 1820 (ME 945). Letters are engraved using chisel, in Malayalam script. A very rare work, obtained from Munchira Madhom Palace.

Daivagamom Bhasha (Reg.No.C.1703) Tantrik work written in Malayalam Script in 1521 AD (ME 696).

Aryamanjusrimoolakalpa (Reg.No.C.2388) A tantrik work written in Newari Script of Nepal which deals with Mahayana Buddhism. Declared as 'Vijnana Nidhi' by Ministry of Culture, Government of India as one of the Manuscript Treasures of India.

Narayaneeyam (Reg.No.21093) Written in praise of Lord Vishnu by Melputtur Narayana Bhattathiri. Received as a gift from the granthapura attached to the Royal Palace of the King. Written in AD 1738 (ME 913). Pictorial Paper Manuscripts Recovered from North India. Very rare work where pictures can be seen drawn using leaf extracts & natural colours. Almost 200 years old. Even gold powder has been used for painting.

Citraramayana (Reg.No.12308) A rare & prestigious possession, where the whole story of Adhyatma Ramayana is conceived into 318 pictorial sequences in 98 leaves which is a true example of the perfect mastery of the artist since nowhere in the work is seen a line left unwanted & it is impossible to alter, erase or correct even a line. This work is 555 years old.

The library has a substantial collection of original handwritten manuscripts from eminent personalities like Dr. T Ganapathy Sastri, Ulloor S Parameswarair, Vallathol Narayana Menon, Kuttikrishna Marar, P. Govinda Pillai, Kerala Varma Valiakoi Thampuran and Sardar K M Panicker.

Preservation cum Conservation of Manuscripts and Rare books

The department uses traditional and modern methods for preservation of manuscripts. In traditional way the manuscripts are preserved in dusting and oiling method. In this method the manuscripts are made dust free and oiled in lemon grass by isopropyl alcohol in a defined proportion. In modern method manuscripts are preserved by digitization.

Periodic fumigation is done to protect the manuscripts from fungus and insects. The application of lemon grass oil keeps the palm leaves supple and prevents them from crumbling. In olden days, in the absence of such modern methods of care, the palm leaf manuscripts had a life scale. "They lasted for about 300 years or so, during which time scribes would copy them on fresh material.

The library offers free service for the preservation of manuscripts, which is funded by the National Mission for Manuscripts, where the library offers preservation and restoration care for manuscripts which are with private individuals..

The Library has a separate conservation lab with experienced staff who are engaged in the preservation of manuscripts.

Digitization

The Library is continuously scanning the manuscripts and rare books which are in poor condition. Being rare & precious items, library preferred to digitize the manuscripts in house. The IT and experienced Library staff members are responsible for this kind of work. In recent years, the Library has speeded up its work for the digitization of manuscripts. All the digitized manuscripts are preserved in computer system along with the External Hard Disk. The Library has two high resolution digital cameras for the purpose of digitization. Both Camera & Scanners are being used for the same.

&the Digitization process

The basic steps in digital imaging are as follows

Capturing of Image - The documents and other materials are digitized with the help of high quality scanner and digital camera. A standard quality image has to be adopted.

Processing of Image - Processing of image involves editing, compression of files and images, sharpening or coloring, metadata creation. Metadata is very helpful in creation of indexing and describing of scanned materials.

Image delivery- Image delivery is associated with saving of scanned materials, sharing the documents through computer networks, monitors and printers.

Quality control - Quality control defines outcome of digitized document or materials meet the technical requirement that is capturing, processing and delivering.

Storage and Maintenance - After capturing and processing of image, it must be stored online or offline. The library must ensure that the data is safe and stored for many years. Upgrading of software and hardware is very expensive and same time migrating of digital data is also a big challenge. So library must ensure that data is stored for long period and for maintenance of data is also done.

Since OCR is not possible for manuscripts, the files are kept in the image format and to make PDFs from original TIFF files.



The Steps include:

- (1) Creation of a directory with the name of the manuscript to be scanned.
- (2) Creating TIFF and PDF subdirectory within the directory.
- (3) Setting up of scanner properties: i.e. size of the document, resolution, contrast, exposure etc in “scanner setting” menu.
- (4) Setting of image processing properties like barcode diction, crop, deskew, erode, dilate hole removal etc.
- (5) The next step is to create a scan batch file. Different file formats are available in this software. One can select from TIFF, PDF, JPEG, PNG, etc. and save the files in any of these formats.

The detailed specifications of scanned image are:

File format: TIFF.

Colour format: binary.

Compression: CCITT Group 4.

Resolution: 300dpi/400dpi.



The digitization process of heritage documents, especially manuscripts, is a difficult task mainly because of the following reasons:

- ❖ fragility of manuscripts;
- ❖ non-availability of OCR for manuscripts;
- ❖ more storage space required for digitization of “yellowish” images; and
- ❖ non-availability of options for using different metadata standards in D Space

Physical facility

The present library building of 1982 owes its fine vintage architecture to the aesthetics of Dr. Karan Singh. Complementing the uniqueness of the collections, Karan Singh, who was the then Minister of Education and Culture, Government of India, wanted the “valuable national heritage” to be housed in “an old palace or a building with traditional features.” At present the Library is housed in a two storied building. The manuscripts are preserved in a spacious air conditioned room with utmost care and preservation. A new spacious manuscript Library building is coming up which will house this prestigious rare collection which will increase the reputation of the library and usability of the manuscripts and rare collections.

Former Directors of the Manuscript Library

- Dr.T Ganapathy Sasthri,
- Ullor S parameswara Iyer,
- Kolatheri Sankara Menon,
- K. Samba Siva Sasthri,
- Mahadeva Sasthri,
- Dr. L.A. .Ravivarma,
- Prof. V.A. Ramaswami Sasthri,
- Dr. P.K. Narayana Pillai,
- K.S Mahadeva Sasthri,
- Sooranad P.N. Kunjan Pillai,
- Dr. K. Raghava Pillai,
- Dr. K. Appukuttan Nair,
- Dr. T. Bhaskaran
- Dr. K Vijayan.
- Dr. P. Visalakshi

MAJOR WORKS AVAILABLE IN THE MANUSCRIPTS LIBRARY

-13 Sanskrit plays of Bhasa

-Aryamanju Sreemula Kalpa (Buddhist work)

-Kautilya’s Arthasasthra (Malayalam Commentary)

-Chithra Bharatham (Indonesian)

Chithra Ramayanam (Malayalam)

-Krishnan Sthuthi (Assamese)

-Bhagavadgita (Telungu)

-Mahabharatha (Maratti)

-Saraswathi Kantha Bharana (Interpretation of Panini's work)

-Brhadjjatakavivaranam

-Attiyaramatham Granthavari

-Daivagamam Bhasha

-Mahabharatha

Jatakaphalavisesanirupanam

-Bhagavatastotrasamuccaya

-Kandapuramam

-Rupaprasna

-Ramayanachitra (in book form)

-Aksaraprasna

- Marakaprakarana

-Devimahatmyam

FUTURE PLANS

1. **DIGITIZATION:** The library will complete the digitization process so that the databases of these digitized documents can be shared via Internet or by CDs. The prime efforts should be in this direction to convince the importance of the digitization of such collection before the University authority as well as the external funding agencies and launching of website.

2. **CAS (Computer Assisted Learning):** To equip each member in the department to get familiar in using the computers. It will provide valuable IT experiences to our students and users. This will help the students to learn, to use the computer and its accessories for their own benefits and to find the 'real' information for them-selves.

3. **NON-BOOK MATERIALS:** The relevant texts, reference books (i.e., encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, manuals, yearbooks etc.) and searchable full-text databases in our

4. **NET WORKING:** Searches from any angles like author/s, editor/s, title, subtitle, series, keyword/s, accession numbers, publisher etc. are efficiently entertained. And also these searches (OPAC) will be made possible even through the PCs at the teachers' room or at the labs and computer room through a LAN system and complete the process of designing our website to

5. **DIGITAL LIBRARY:** Digital library can be housed in a very small room and can house a large amount of data. One CD can store 600-700MB data and a DVD 4 to 6 GB. It means the complete collection in this library can be placed on 20-25 DVDs and can kept in a small cupboard, and it will be much more maintained in days to come. The future of this library is also closely linked to the electronic age, and we will have to prepare for a step forward and make our information access systems fully capable of functioning as technological gateways. The new technologies will create, collect, store, process and retrieve information and deliver across the globe.

6. **PRESERVATION OF MATERIALS:** The destructive agencies or enemies of library materials are (a) Dust and dirt (b) Bacteria and fungi (c) Insects (d) moisture (e) climate (f) atmospheric conditions (g) sunlight (h) white ants/ termites (i) rats (j) mice (k) moths (l) cockroaches and (m) silver fishes etc. Protective measures will be taken against these enemies. The Curable methods for the affected books or the whole collections are to be treated with insecticides, chemicals and fumigation.

Conclusion

The in-depth case study of the Oriental Manuscript Library reveals that it has the antique collection of manuscripts and rare books in India. Digitisation of manuscripts is a difficult process because of the fragility and discoloration (yellowishness) of manuscripts. Creation of metadata and especially subject headings for manuscripts is difficult and time consuming.

The library has always visitors from academic as well as from non academic areas. Such high profile visits include Central and State Ministers, Nobel Laurets, Foreign diplomats, academicians and researchers who are impressed by the immense rich priceless collection of the manuscripts.

The vision of the library is to protect the centuries of wisdom and create awareness on the importance of these resources.

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. R. B. Sreekala (Professor and Head of the Department) for allowing me to carry out this study in Oriental Institute & Manuscript Library, Thiruvananthapuram. I would like to convey my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Shaji, Senior Conservator who is in-charge of Manuscript Section, for his kind cooperation and sparing his valuable time detailing the various manuscripts housed in the library and the techniques and methods of preservation and conservation of the manuscripts. I am very thankful to Dr. Remya, who gave me an idea of the whole building, different sections, the history and development of oriental institute & manuscript library. I would like to express my special thanks to my guide and my family with whom I made the study successful.

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About Authors

Sarita S Rajan¹

Research Scholar,
Department of Library & Information Science
Annamalai University, Chidambaram.
Saritha788@gmail.com

Dr. S Mohammed Esmail²

Professor,
Department of Library & Information Science,
Annamalai University,
Chidambaram.
smeelibau@gmail.com