



The Scholastic Contributions of Oriental Research Library of Mysore towards Collection & Preservation of Manuscripts

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Abstract: This paper examines the scholastic contributions of Oriental Research Institute which is a premier research institute dedicated to collection & conservation of manuscripts. The Oriental Research Institute is a treasure repository of documents than 33,000 palm leaf manuscripts opened for academicians & scholars. These extraordinary manuscripts open an unusual source of knowledge for understanding & conceptualizing the literature, philosophy, astrology, language and religious practices of India. The enrichment of the cultural inheritance of India has been the academic agenda of this premier institution. But the institution is facing several challenges.

Key Words: Oriental research Institute, collection world, cataloguing, scholastic contributions

Introduction: The Oriental Research Institute (ORI), Mysore is an establishment dedicated to collection, exhibition, edition and publishing of rare manuscripts in both Sanskrit and Kannada languages. (The ORI annual report- 2013)

Initial beginning - It was Formerly called as Oriental Library, this institute was established in the year 1891 under the guidance of Chamaraja Wodeyar, King of the erstwhile Mysore State. It is located on the Krishnaraja Boulevard road of Mysore in the historic Jubilee Hall constructed in 1887 to commemorate the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria's succession to the British monarchy the foundation was laid by 1887 by Maharaja Chamarajendra Wodeyar. The building took was formally

inaugurated in 1891. The Oriental Library functioned under the Department of Education of the former Mysore State till 1916. In the same year the University of Mysore started functioning and the Oriental Library became a part of the newly formed university. The Oriental Library was renamed in 1943 as the Oriental Research Institute. (Times of India article on ORI 2014).

Works of Oriental Research Institute

1. It is the primary institution which was heralded as a destination to collect publish & edit manuscripts.
2. It has a great collection of rare documents , nearly one lakh documents including books catering to various subjects



3. Though it has Sanskrit & kannada scripted manuscripts it has more than 200 titles to its credit

4. It's rare collections are the Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics by James Hastings, a Vedic Concordance by Maurice Bloomfield, and critical editions of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

5. The institute has a systematic & easy access to the books and documents.

6. The annual journal of the institute, named Mysore Orientalist, is a highly valued publication.

7. The most famous publication of the journal is the Kautilya's Arthashastra, written in the 4th century B.C. and edited by Dr. R. Shamashastri. This significant work was discovered in the institute by scholar R. Shamashastri in the year 1902. It was published in the year 1909 and had brought international fame to the institute. The publication is particularly valued as it throws light on the economic and political situation in ancient India.

8. Various other famous works of ancient India is being preserved and published by the institute.

9. Among them are Sritattvanidhi, is a compilation of verses by the former Mysore King, Krishnaraja Wodeyar III. Three edited manuscripts Navaratnamani-Mahatmyam (a classic work on gemology), Tantrasara-Sangraha which is considered as a highly valued work on sculptures and architecture, and Vaidashastra-Dipika an Ayurvedic text, are in

advanced stages of printing. All of these books are being printed with English and Kannada translation so that they can attain a wider readership.

10. There are some books that have already been edited and are waiting to be published. Two such important books are Rasa-kaumudi this is a book on on mercurial medicine and Paryayapadamanjari Ayurvedic medicine.

Preservation of palm leaf manuscripts: The Oriental Research Institute is a treasure repository of documents having more than 33,000 palm leaf manuscripts. These extraordinary manuscripts open an unusual window to the literature, philosophy, astrology, language and religious practices prevalent during the ancient times. (The ORI annual report. 2013). These are preserved with utmost care at the institute.

The process of writing: These manuscripts are written on palm leaves and have a standard size of 15 cm by 3.5 cm. As the palm leaves tend to be brittle, they had to be handled with exceptional care by the people of ancient ages in order to write on them. To soften the brittle leaves they were sometimes scrubbed with a paste of ragi and then utilized for the writing purpose. (the Times of India article on ORI 2014). The process is similar to the traditional use of papyrus in Egypt. These tender palm leaf manuscripts are organic



materials and they carry a high risk of decaying or being destroyed by silverfish, a small insect that is often found inside old books. In order to preserve these rare and priceless manuscripts the institute applies lemon grass oil on the manuscripts. The lemon grass oil carries properties to act like a pesticide. This particular oil also adds natural fluidity to the brittle palm leaves. The best advantage of using the lemon grass oil is that it is hydrophobic in nature and hence keeps the manuscripts dry. This helps in preserving the text and not losing them to decay due to humidity.(The ORI annual report. 2013).

Methods of preservation -The Oriental Research Institute follow the conventional method of preserving the manuscripts by capturing them in microfilm. The use of this technique requires a microfilm reader for viewing or studying the manuscripts. Once the task of digitizing a manuscript is completed by the Oriental Research Institute, the text can be viewed, manipulated and edited by a computer.

The use of technology -The technology of software is then utilized to bring together disjointed portions of the manuscript and to correct or fill in any missing text. This is the procedure followed by the institute to preserve, restore and enhance the ancient and priceless manuscripts. The institute also stores the original

palm leaf manuscripts for reference at the institute for research scholars.

Future plans of the Oriental Research Institute

The Oriental Research Institute carries out extensive surveys to locate ancient manuscripts. The institute is involved with cataloging a national electronic database for these manuscripts with the intention to preserve them. The institute not only preserves these manuscripts, it also undertakes efforts to encourage the use of these exceptional materials for research. Some of the manuscripts have been published on the internet to benefit a wider range of interested scholars and people.

Conclusion: Thus Oriental research Institute is working towards enrichment of local antiquity & historical research. The Institution has been a great influence on researchers & scholars who are working towards unfolding the multi-disciplinary research relationship. There have been several reflections on the scholastic contributions of other such repositories elsewhere in Karnataka in particular & India in general. But the role of an institutional augmenting research has been phenomenal.



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