



## The Treasures of Knowledge -Manuscript Libraries in India

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### Abstract

The glorious past of Indian culture lies in the ancient manuscripts. These are the basic historical evidence and have great research value. It is estimated that India possesses more than five million manuscripts, making her the largest repository of manuscript wealth in the world. A large number of manuscripts are also housed in University libraries in India manuscripts, then, to put it very plainly, to take care of the manuscripts is what we are paid for. As scholars and students also, it is our duty to take care of manuscripts as they are a source of knowledge. For the common man to the Constitution of India states, under Fundamental Duties in Article 5 1A, "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture. In this paper the topics of manuscript library, tradition of preservation and access in India, institutional and individual efforts in the fields of preservation and access in India in the 21st Century Digital Library prospects and challenges.

**Keywords:** National Mission, Library, Digital, Access, Challenges

### Introduction

Manuscripts are found in hundreds of different languages and scripts. Often, one language is written in a number of different scripts. For example, Sanskrit is written in Oriya script, Grantha script, Devanagari script and many other scripts. Manuscripts are distinct from historical records such as epigraphs on rocks, firmans, revenue records which provide direct information on events or processes in history. Manuscripts have knowledge content. Hundreds of museums, libraries, research institutions, archives, conservation centers and individuals in various parts of India have been doing exemplary service for the conservation of India's manuscript

heritage. They have often voiced the need to have a set of guidelines in a comprehensive tongue that can help individuals and institutions to achieve their objective to conserve their collections in a systematic manner. It has been suggested that manuals be written laying down steps to achieve the task of maintaining a healthy collection of manuscripts.

So the Library's responsibility is to collect, disseminate and preserve the printed heritage of the country. It's also one of the oldest institutions of the country focused on the conservation and maintenance of the bibliographic documents in various fields of knowledge. The National Library of India is celebrating its centenary year with some new



initiatives and challenges. Digitization of manuscripts is one such initiative the library has taken up responding to the growing use and adaptability of information technology to library-related activities. The ongoing research on indigenous methods of conservation in Regional Conservation Laboratory, Mysore, a regional branch of the National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property(NRLC), Lucknow will, throw some light on the merits and demerits of various Indigenous practices followed in various parts of India

#### **History of Manuscript Library:**

HH Sayaji Rao Gaekwad III, Maharaja of Baroda, pioneered the development of Public Library System in India as early as 1910. The Maharaja insisted that "libraries should not limit their benefits to the few English knowing readers, but should see to it that their good work permeates through to the many", and that "the vernacular libraries should be encouraged" so that every citizen of the State "may enroll himself as a pupil in the peoples' university-the library. He established a Library Department with Mr. W. A. Borden as the first full time Director of State Libraries. A Central Library at Baroda with a nucleus collection of 88,764 volumes including the Maharaja's private collection of 20,000 books was established with a full time Curator. The Maharaja also established an Oriental Institute and

Library with 6,846 printed books and 1,420 manuscripts in Sanskrit, Gujarati and other languages. He was the first to initiate the publication of Gaekwad's Oriental Series in 1915.

#### **Restoration Efforts with Various Libraries In India :**

Any direct or indirect action on a damaged or undamaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts, for increasing their life is conservation. This can be Preventive or Curative.

Preventive conservation seeks to reduce the future risk of deterioration. It includes measures such as controlling the temperature and humidity of the storage area of manuscripts and regular inspection of the condition of the manuscript/collection.

Curative conservation is any direct action on the manuscript(s) to prevent active deterioration. For instance, fumigation of manuscript(s) infested with insects.

Manuscripts are sometimes subjected to restoration. This is different from conservation as the former aims at make the manuscript(s) look as close as possible to their original form. This is mainly to enhance their visual appeal. This may involve steps like repainting illustrations and removing pencil marks from a folio.

The Mission undertakes basic conservation and reorganization of manuscript collections of individuals and institutions upon request. The Mission provides the expertise and also bears all the costs for the exercise. Some collections where the



Mission provided conservation support are-

**Initiatives in digital preservation of manuscripts in Indian Libraries:**

Thinking the importance of digital preservation, in India too, numbers of projects are taken by different organizations for the preservation of these valuable manuscripts in digital format.

In July 2000, a pilot project for digitization of rare manuscripts had been initiated by National Archives of India, collaboration with Department of Science and Technology and National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore. Under this project, rare manuscripts, viz. Bhagwadgita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc. have been digitized and stored in CD medium. One of the major functions of the National Library of a country is to collect and preserve nation's intellectual and cultural heritage.

Therefore National Library has taken several steps to preserve this heritage as well as to increase the accessibility and awareness of these records. National Library of India, Kolkata is the apex body of library services India. This National Library has about 3600 rare and historically important manuscripts in different languages. These manuscripts are preserved separately in the Rare Books Division. This library has initiated a digitization programme, known as 'Down the Memory Lane', to digitize these manuscripts along with other rare books and documents,

from its collection. These scanned documents are archiving on CDs. Between the year 1999 and 2001 approximately 6601 books and manuscripts containing 2.5 million pages were scanned and archived in 548 CD-ROMs.

Established in 2001, Nanakshahi is a registered trust at Punjab for creating a comprehensive Digital Sikh Reference Library. This trust introduced a Project named Virsa under which one hundred fifty manuscripts of Sri Guru Granth Sahib and other manuscripts available in the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh and Kurukshetra University are digitized. In February 2003, the Department of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Culture,

Government of India lunched a national level mission for the preservation of the manuscripts; India's real treasure of culture. The Mission has laid emphasis on digital preservation of rare manuscripts all over India and already completed a numbers of manuscripts are captured in digital form. Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) was launched on 19th November, 1985 by the late Prime Minister of India Shri Rajiv Gandhi and registered at New Delhi on 24th March 1987. This Center has taken a nationwide project for digital preservation of manuscripts .This Center is digitizing a number of manuscripts in Assam also.

Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library located in Patna, Bihar has



taken a Pilot Project of Digitization of manuscripts in October, 2005, which has a mighty collection of about 21,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Hindi and Sanskrit written on Palm-Leaves.

The following is the language-wise break-up of the manuscripts:

Arabic: 681

Persian: 955

Urdu: 21

Bengali: 162

English: 255

Hindi: 5

Tamil: 370

Sanskrit: 790

**Digitization and the National Library**  
The National Library undertook a pilot project entitled "Down Memory Lane" to digitize its rare and brittle books in late 90's. The English books that were published prior to 1900 and Indian books published before 1920 were taken into consideration. A local private agency was given the responsibility to scan and clean the documents. The library professionals were given the task of checking the scanned data to prepare citation cards for indexing in order to meet retrieval and reference need. From February 1999 to June 2001, a total of 6601 books containing more than 2.5 million pages were scanned and archived in 548 CD-ROMs (in duplicate).

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Carnegie Mellon University (CMU), the International Institute of Information Technology, Hyderabad (IIITH) and many other academic,

religious and government organizations, totaling about 21 "Content Creation Centres", have become partners in the Digital Library of India (DLI) initiative for the digitization and preservation of Indian heritage present in the form of books, manuscripts, art and music. Each centre brings its own unique collection of literature into the digital library. Many authors have cooperated by contributing their books to the digital library and making them available free of charge to anyone. This digital library is also intended to be a tested for Indian language Research. DLI is intended to be a leading and contributing partner in worldwide efforts toward making knowledge free. A pilot project to scan around 10,000 books was initiated at CMU and then followed up at IISc, IIITH and other organizations; all the processes involved have been perfected. The vision is to use the disruptive technologies like the ICT to preserve all the knowledge of the human race in digital form and make that content searchable, independent of language and location, and to ensure that the rich cultural heritage of countries like India is not lost during the transition from paper to bits and bytes, as they were lost during a former transition of cultural content from palm leaves to paper.

Digital libraries have three principal advantages over conventional ones: they are easier to access remotely, they offer more powerful searching and browsing facilities, and they



serve as a foundation for new value added services. In context where the collections are rare and unique, the digitization also serves as a preservation tool. The case of the National Library falls mainly under the last category.

#### **Data management Across Libraries:**

##### ***Scalable and sustainable architecture***

Assembling the data and making it available for easy access is one of the most important phases of any digitization project [1]. Each Mega scanning centre is responsible for gathering the metadata and the scanned content from the contractors operating at the scanning locations. This data is to be enabled on the web and also preserved for future. Enabling many tera-bytes of data for access to everyone in a highly reliable manner is needed for the success of the efforts put into the digitization process. Also data synchronization and management across centers needs to be done to reduce duplication and ensure reliable high availability and immediate recovery in the event of storage media failures and server failures. Finally, digital preservation of the collections for a long time into the future remains a very significant problem faced by any digital library [2].

##### **Preservation management**

The books scanned for the DLI project are for the use of everyone for the foreseeable future. Hence preserving the content of these books is important. In addition, the data being frequently commuted between

the centers needs to be preserved uniquely to ensure easy workflow management. Every book that is scanned and stored is associated with a unique barcode and descriptive metadata for identification, search and retrieval.

##### **Synchronization across different centers**

Because the books to be scanned come from various sources – like libraries, government organizations, institutions and personal collections – that are distributed across the country, there could be duplicates among scanning locations maintained by a Regional Mega Scanning Centre (RMSC) and also across different RMSCs. However, the project cannot afford the extra cost of scanning these duplicate books, processing their images, and performing quality assurance on them. Thus, communicating metadata across centers and within scanning locations is important. The duplicate books can be identified only by using metadata of a book like the title, author, publishing year, edition, etc. However, if the metadata is incorrect, missing or incomplete, as discussed in the previous section, it makes the duplicate detection all the more difficult.

The following manuscripts have been selected as 'Vijñānanidhi – Manuscript Treasures of India':  
Kubjikamata (The Asiatic Society, Kolkata)  
Maiteryavyakaranam (The Asiatic Society, Kolkata)



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Samputatika(The Asiatic Society, Kolkata)	Chitra Bhagavat (Krishna Kanta Handiqui Library, Guwahati)
Kalachakravatara (The Asiatic Society, Kolkata)	Ratnamalavyakarana (Krishna Kanta Handiqui Library, Guwahati)
Rigvedasamhita (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)	Uttaradhyanasutra (Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad)
Chikitsasarasangraha (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)	Shantinatha Charita (Lalbhai Dalpatbhai Institute of Indology, Ahmedabad)
Upmitibhavaprapanchakatha (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)	Aryabhadra-kalapika-nama-mahayana-sutra (Library of Tibetan Works, Dharamsala)
Bhagavatpurana (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)	Yumbanlol (Manipur State Archives)
Mahabhashya (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune)	Subika (Manipur State Archives)
Shaivagamatantra (Calcutta University, Kolkata)	Gilgit Manuscripts (The National Archives of India, New Delhi and Sri Pratap Singh Museum, Jammu and Kashmir State Government Department of State Archaeology, Archives and Museums, Srinagar)
Astasahasrikaprajnaparamita (Calcutta University, Kolkata)	Baburnama (National Museum, New Delhi)
Krittivasaramayana (Calcutta University, Kolkata)	Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri (National Museum, New Delhi)
Shaivagama (Institut Francais de Pondichéry, Pondicherry)	Arthashastra (Oriental Research Institute, Mysore)
Shunya Sampadane (Kannada University, Hampi)	Natyashastra (Oriental Research Institute, Mysore)
Kurbararattamala (Kannada University, Hampi)	Sharadatilaka(Oriental Research Institute, Mysore)
Basavapurana (Kannada University, Hampi)	Saubhagyaratnakara (Oriental Research Institute, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati)
Dhul wa (Kargon Gompa, Igoo, Ladakh)	Aryamanjushreemulakalpam (Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library, Thiruvananthapuram)
Gyad Stongpa (Kargon Gompa, Igoo, Ladakh)	Gitagovinda (Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar)
Diwan-i-Hafiz (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna)	Chikitsa Manjiri, (Orissa State Museum, Bhubaneswar)
Tarikh-i-Khandan-i-Timuria (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna)	
Kitab al-Hashaish (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna)	
Kitab al-Tasrif (Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna)	

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Arsharamayana (Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur)  
Dhvanyalokalochana (Rajasthan Oriental Research Institute, Jodhpur)  
Al-Quran-al-Majid (Rampur Raza Library, Rampur)  
Ramayana (Rampur Raza Library, Rampur)  
Kalila-wa-Dimna (Rampur Raza Library, Rampur)  
Sarvarogaharanagunagambhirata or Ashvaphala Prakash (Visweshvarananda Biswabandhu Institute of Sanskrit and Ideological Studies, Hoshiarpur)  
The National Mission on Libraries (NML):

The National Mission on Libraries (NML) was launched by the Hon.'ble President of India on 3rd February, 2014. NML has a budget allocation of Rs. 400 Crores with the objective of establishing a National Virtual Library of India, establishment of Model Libraries, quantitative/qualitative survey of Libraries and capacity building. Under the scheme, 6 libraries under the Culture Ministry, 35 Central Libraries in states and 35 District Libraries are to be developed as model libraries, with emphasis on developing these libraries in economically backward districts. Further, 629 district libraries across the states would be provided network connectivity.

#### **Collaboration with International & National Institutions.**

On the International scenario, Ministry of Culture has an agreement

with more than 100 Libraries in the world for exchange of resources and personnel. The International Book Fair is held every year at New Delhi in the month of February World Book Day (23rd April) is celebrated as Vishva Pustak Diwas in India. The Jaipur Literature Festival, the biggest literary festival in Asia which attracts thousands of writers and visitors from all over the world is held in Jaipur every year in the month of January. One of the unique attractions of this festival is the live performances given by famous musicians. Jaipur Literature Festival has been taking place in Jaipur since the year 2006

#### **Various Manuscript libraries In India:**

##### **Rampur Raza Library, Rampur**

The MCC at Rampur Raza has been functioning since September 2003. Rampur Raza Library, housed in the Rampur Fort was established by Nawab Faizu'llah Khan, a remarkably gifted and far-sighted ruler conversant in a number of languages. The library is a rich storehouse of 50,000 books and 15,000 manuscripts in Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Turkish. It also houses Mughal miniature paintings from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. The Library has the status of a National Institution and now functions under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Rampur Raza Library has a collection of 150 illustrated manuscripts and 11 Descriptive Catalogues of



manuscripts in various languages and subjects. The library has published 12 manuscripts dealing with history and is preparing a critical edition of Tarikh-e-Baburi, a manuscript of immense historical value. The book is a contemporary Persian translation by the courtier Zain-e-Khanafi. Tarikh-e-Mohammadi, another important text, is being transcribed from the original for publication. It has so far taken preventive care of 13,081 manuscripts and given curative conservation treatment to 3933 manuscripts.

#### **Central Library, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi**

The Central Library, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi MCC began functioning from November 2006. It has so far taken preventive care of 4,446 manuscripts.

#### **Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur**

An MCC was established at the world famous medieval library, the Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswati Mahal Library in Thanjavur in October 2003. Renowned for its own outstanding collection of manuscripts, particularly on palm leaf, the Library's collection belonged to the Thanjavur princely family. The Library employs indigenous methods of conservation and manuscript storage. It has so far taken preventive care of 494 manuscripts and given curative conservation treatment to 427 manuscripts.

#### **Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library, Patna**

The Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library has been part of the Mission's MCC network since September 2003. It has so far taken preventive care of 8,468 manuscripts and given curative conservation treatment to 247 manuscripts.

#### **Manuscript Library, University of Calcutta, Kolkata**

Manuscript Library at University of Calcutta joined hands with Mission as an MCC since May 2005. The Manuscript Library MCC has evolved a good system of storage of their collection. It has so far taken preventive care of 6,865 manuscripts and given curative conservation treatment to 100 manuscripts.

#### **Krishna Kanta Handiqui Library, Gauhati University, Guwahati**

The MCC signed an MOU with the Mission on November 2003. A conservation laboratory has been set up with basic infrastructure and chemicals. It has so far taken preventive care of 8179 manuscripts and given curative conservation treatment to 504 manuscripts.

#### **Scope and Challenges of Digitization of Manuscripts:**

India has one of the largest and oldest collections of manuscripts in the world. Today the Palm leaf books, paper manuscripts, birch bark texts, drawings, paintings, art and sculpture etc. are either scanned or converted into analogue material and are preserved on long lasting digital media for the use of future generations.



Transcend Originals: Digital imaging promises to generate a product that can be used for purposes that are impossible to achieve with original resources. It uses special lighting to draw out details obscured by aging, use, and environmental damage. Imaging, this makes use of specialized photographic intermediaries or by imaging at high resolution the study of art factual characteristics has become possible.

Collection Management: Digital preservation provides assistance in retrospective cataloguing, researching, assistance with curatorial functions, managing material movement etc.

New Revenue Streams: By making available the digital reproductions at lower resolution to Scholars as a paid service, sale of high quality posters to art patrons around the world via an ecommerce web site it is possible to generate some revenue.

Digitization: In 2004, the Mission had initiated a Pilot Project of Digitization, which was completed in 2006, setting standards and guidelines for digitization. In the second phase, the Mission selected important collections from a wider range of institutions. They have been compiled in book form as Guidelines for Digitization of Manuscripts<sup>28</sup>. So far 2,6 million pages of 14,798 manuscripts have been digitized in phase I and 4. million pages of 41,863 manuscripts have been digitized in phase II.

These conservation services are mainly preventive in nature. The

manuscripts are treated in the repositories itself and the storage is reorganized to ensure their maintenance. However, manuscripts requiring curative treatment may be taken to a local Manuscript Conservation Centre (MCC) or to the Mission's laboratory at New Delhi, only with permission of the respective authorities.

The National Mission for Manuscripts has identified manuscripts with unique heritage value and designated them as Manuscript Treasures of India. Manuscripts are selected for their outstanding value to humanity and also for their contribution to Indian life, development of Indian thought and culture or simply for the history they may represent (local history of a region, perhaps).

The recognition seeks to sensitize archivists and collectors on the value of these resources and the need to preserve them.

Excellence as heritage

Contribution to India's intellectual history

Vulnerability

**Conclusion:**

To achieve various challenges as mentioned above Indian National Manuscripts Library at IGNCA has been proposed. With all manuscript resources compiled at IGNCA under Kala Nidhi and NMM projects, a centralized repository of manuscripts will be available to the users worldwide. This is going to be the first such library in the world, and of



course the foremost, to among all other institutions to fulfill the twin objectives of preservation and access to Indian manuscripts. The National Manuscript Library is being designed to inspire research on and ensure recycling of the knowledge content in the manuscripts. Indeed a revolutionary concept.

The project for digitization of library would need a server administered hard disk based storage system with fault tolerance and disaster recovery provision along with CD-ROM based storage for archival. The reason being, it's difficult for a CD-ROM to contain images of a document or an E-book in its entirety. For random access by viewers, hard-disk based storage is more reliable option.

It was observed for the images of document pages containing the illustrations, there were undesirable and unavoidable but minute tonal variations. This is because the illustration contains any shade of color, which can lie in the spectrum of millions of color. The CCD unit of the digital camera captures a limited band of the spectrum of colours. To circumvent this limitation, white light can be used. The digital restoration of the images of the manuscript was done using the state-of-art image editing software, Adobe Photoshop Version 6, which is in itself very resource consuming on the processing workstation.

OCR for Indian languages  
OM transliteration, which is an integral component of all the other systems

a text editor for Indian languages that is available for everyone  
the book-reader interface that extends the availability of the Digital Library from "anyone, anytime, anywhere" to "any- language"  
a machine translation system that we call Good-Enough Translation (GET-across) and  
a search engine for Indian language texts

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