Preservation and Conservation of Manuscripts at Oriental Research Institute Library in Karnataka: A Case Study

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Abstract

Karnataka is rich in terms of its cultural heritage. The glorious past of our ancestors lies in the ancient manuscripts, these historical documents have great research value therefore it's important to preserve and conserve these manuscripts to access more efficiently. The current study presents a brief over view of preservation and conservation of manuscripts at Oriental Research Institute (ORI) Library in Mysore, Karnataka. It presents ORI library collection, different languages and scripts of the manuscripts, subject areas, and method of storage at ORI, factors of deterioration, preservation techniques used by the institute and problems faced in preserving the manuscripts etc.

Keywords: *Manuscripts, Oriental Research Institute, Karnataka, Preservation, History.*

Introduction :

Manuscripts are one of the oldest medium of writing in India especially in southern part of the India which reflect our ancient past and enlighten the story of our forefathers. In manuscripts palm leaves are the major source for writing in South and Southeast Asian countries including India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia. Palm leaves were used as writing materials dating back to the 5th century BCE and possibly much earlier in the Indian subcontinent region. The oldest surviving palm leaves Indian manuscripts have been found in cold and dry climates as well. Manuscripts are the basic and primary sources of information of our ancient past. Due to different reasons, these manuscripts are now in poor and fragile conditions and for its proper preservation at present stage for the future; many institutions are now taking initiatives for preservation and conservation of these valuable manuscripts through adopting the ICT (Information, Communication and Technology) enabled services.

Hence the present study has been undertaken to identify the preservation and conservation techniques used in ORI, and to identify the factors of deterioration of manuscripts and problems faced by the ORI in the process of preserving the valuable manuscripts.

Review of Literature :

There are several studies have been conducted on preservation and conservation of manuscripts, those studies arranged here according to the year of publication in descending order.

Sarita & Esmail (2021) discussed about the type of manuscripts, responsible factors for the deterioration, various conservation practices, issues and challenges faced by the archival libraries and discussed about the need of the digitization and also briefed the government initiatives to preserve the valuable manuscripts.

Patidar & Soni (2016) conducted a study on the manuscripts collection are important to the human society, researcher, scholar can measure the value of valuable collection, which they are able to access them. Highlight different types of indigenous material to preserving the manuscripts.

Kumar, Kamble & Hans (2014) highlighted the significance of preservation of rare documents and services in All India Radio (AIR) Libraries providing the concept of preservation and provides an overview of sound archives and rare documents in AIR and its technicalities involved and concludes with suggestions to earmark the professionals in building vibrant Air Libraries.

Narang & Singh (2014) in their study have analysed the factors for deterioration of the rare manuscripts in Sikh Reference Library at Golden Temple in Amritsar. Preservation techniques being employed to curb further damage to these rare documents have also been discussed in the article. The study has made a sincere effort to investigate the present location and status of the building and the way it is serving the purpose of preservation of the precious and manuscripts.

Qutab (2014) study is aimed to investigate the conservation, restoration and preservation state of manuscripts in Pakistan. The study was conducted on 13 selective institutions of Pakistan, holding manuscript collections. Through the proper interviews and documentary research the preservation and conservation situations were inquired.

Thiyam (2013) throws light on role of Manipuri manuscripts in Manipur. The study suggests that manuscripts of Manipur are in the hands of private custodians so they should be preserved because they contain the forgotten speeches and writings of native founding. Preserving the rich cultural heritage of a society constitute a basic component of the UNESCO's memory of the World Programme.



Ghosh (2012) in her paper titled Palm leaf Manuscripts Conservation: A Case Study has described about palm leaf manuscripts, which were used in India as one of the common material for writing and has mentioned about different types of damages generally noticed in valuable palm leaf manuscripts.

Bhat & Kumar (2011) discuss about the concept of digital preservation, its objectives, strategies and storage media used in digital preservation. The paper also explores the need of digital preservation along with the future prospects of digital preservation in Indian environment.

Seifi & Nikam (2011) discuss the importance of manuscripts and digital preservation of manuscripts. Chronology and universal initiatives in digital preservation of manuscripts have also been discussed. Details on how manuscripts are digitized in Central Library and Documentation Centre of University of Tehran have been provided in their study.

Varatharajan & Chandrashekara (2007) in India, Digital library activities have been initiated by many libraries, it has helped to preserve the cultural heritage and traditional resources in many ways, a lot of manuscripts and rare books still remain on palm leaves which needs urgent digitization.

Objectives

The main objectives of the study are

- To identify the preservation and conservation techniques used in ORI
- To identify the different language and script used in the manuscripts
- To identify the factors of deterioration of manuscripts
- To find out the problems faced in preserving manuscripts

Limitations of the Study

The present study has been strictly limited to preservation and conservation of manuscripts at Oriental Research Institute (ORI) Library, Mysore Karnataka.

About Oriental Research Institute (ORI)

The institute established by the orders of Sri Chamaraja Wodeyar the then Maharaja of the erstwhile State of Mysore as the Government Oriental Library in the year 1891. The purpose of the establishment of the library was to collect, edit and publish rare palm leaf and paper manuscripts both Kannada and Sanskrit works. ORI has the collections of very rare palm leaf manuscripts and paper manuscripts. Right from the inception ORI has been housed in the premises of the Jubilee Hall built in 1887 to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of the Queen Victoria to the British throne.

Initially, the library was independent and aided by the Education department. Sri A. Mahadeva Shastri was the first Curator of the Library and was the chief of the institution. Sri S.G. Narasimhacharya, an eminent scholar both in Kannada and Sanskrit was appointed for the collection work. Manuscripts collected by the Department of Archaeology were transferred to the oriental library. Oriental Library was the first public library in the Mysore city. Relentless efforts from the scholars many publications were brought out under the heading "Bibliotheca Samskrita" and "Bibliotheca Karnatica". In 1893 the first Sanskrit publication "Apastamba Grithyasutra" came out with commentary by Sudarsanacharya. In the year 1900 the first Kannada publication "Adipurana" of Pampa was published. In the year 1908 the famous work "Arthashastra by Kautilya" was edited by Dr. R Shamashastri and published for the first time. This work marked an important milestone in the history of oriental library.



In 1916, the University of Mysore was established and the Institute became an integral part of the University of Mysore. A committee was formed in order to give suggestions for the growth of the oriental library. Eminent personalities like B.M. Srikanthaiah, C.R. Reddy, M. Hiriyanna and Navinam Ramanujacharya were the members of the committee. Sri R.Raghavendrachar became the Chief Officer of the Oriental library and R. Shyamashastri became Curator of the library in the year 1918 and thousands of palm leaf and other manuscripts were collected and sixty works were critically edited and published. Even Descriptive Catalogues of the accumulated manuscripts and an alphabetical list of the words occurring in the Arthashastra were published at the same time.

In the year 1946 the name of the institute was changed to "The Oriental Research Institute". The institute have the land mark contributions like Arthasastra of Kautilya, Sritattvanidhi of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, and other scientific works i.e. Navarathnamani Mahatmya, Tantrasara Sangraha, Vaidyashastradipika etc. ORI also publish a Journal by name "The Mysore Orientalist" to create awareness regarding the activities and progress of the institute.

The main users of this library are scholars of the institute and other oriental colleges' scholars and students of M.A. in Sanskrit. Eminent scholars throughout India utilize the institute library for their research work. Even from abroad many scholars have been visiting the institute regularly for research purposes. Scholars and others interested in Indology and allied subjects have been utilizing the Institute's collection of books on religious matters, philosophy etc.

Some of the original manuscripts housed in ORI Library are listed from the descriptive catalogues of the institute.



SL. No.	Author	Title	Paper/Palm leaf	Script
1	Bhaskarayah	Ganapatisahasranama	Paper	Devanagari
2	Bhavani	Avimuktiksetrataltvam	Paper	Devanagari
3	Jaiminih	Jaiminiyabharatam	Palm leaf	Granth
4	Kasmiri Panditah (Commentator)	Jnanavasisthasara samullayah	Palm leaf	Grantha
5	Nannayyabhattah	Mahabharatam	Palm leaf	Telugu
6	Ramabrahmanandasarasvati	Tatvasangraharamayanam	Palm leaf	Kannada
7	Ramachandra Saravati	Tatvasangraha remayanam	Palm leaf	Nandinagari
8	Ramavarma (Commentator)	Adhyatmaramayna vyakhya (Setuh)	Palm leaf	Nandinagari
9	Ramavarma (Commentator)	Adhyatmaramayna Mahatmyavyakhya	Palm leaf	Nandinagari
10	Sankaracharya (Commentator)	Bhagavadgitabhasyam	Palm leaf	Telugu
11	Sankarananda (Commentator)	Sivagitabhasyam	Palm leaf	Grantha
12	Sankaranandah	Atmapuranam	Paper	Devanagari
13	Sayanah	Purusarathasudhanidhin	Palm leaf	Nandinagari
14	Tikanasomayaji	Mahabharatam	Palm leaf	Telugu
15	Valmiki	Mairavanacaritani	Paper	Kannada
16	Valmiki (Itihasah)	Adbhutaramayanam	Paper	Devanagari
17	Vidyanandasarasvath(Setibandhah)	Kasirahasyatika	Paper	Telugu
18	Vyasah	Padmapuranam	Paper	Kannada
19	Vyasah	Bhagavadgita	Palm leaf	Grantha



20	Vyasah	Uttaraglta	Palm leaf	Nandinagari
21	Vyasah	Kurukamahatmyam	Palm leaf	Kannada
22	Vyasah	Gajendropakhyanam	Palm leaf	Kannada
23	Vyasah	Devibhavagatam (Purana)	Paper	Malayalam
24	Vyasah	Agneyapuranam (Agnipuranam)	Palm leaf	Telugu
25	Vyasah	Mahabharatam	Palm leaf	Grantha
26	Vyasah	Dharmasarah	Palm leaf	Telugu

Data Analysis and Discussion

1. Library Collection

The collection sources of manuscripts in Oriental Research Institute (ORI) are under four heads.

a. **Palm leafs:** Palm leaf manuscript collection in ORI is about 70000 containing various works. The palm leaf is the leaf of Tala or Palmyra Palm. The material is one foot to two foot long and from one inch to one and half inch wide.

b. **Paper manuscripts:** About 5000 valuable paper manuscripts in various languages have been discovered and housed in the Oriental Research Library.

c. **Print Books:** There are about 40000 printed books related to manuscripts are available in ORI.

d. **Microfilm:** In the form of microfilm there are about 2000 documents are lodged in ORI.

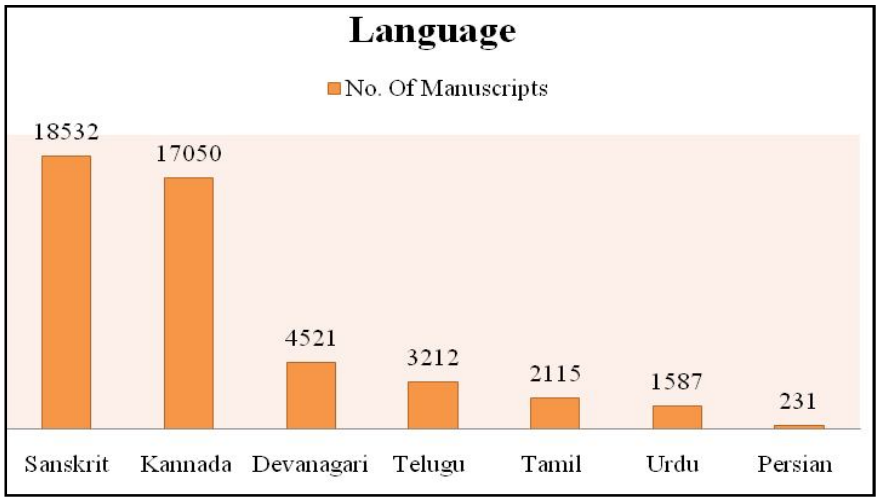
2. Manuscripts in Different Languages

There are mainly 7 major language manuscripts are housed in ORI library. The below Chart 1 show the detail about the collection with number of manuscripts in various languages. The list is arranged in the descending



order. According to the available resources Sanskrit is the major language which is having 18532 numbers of manuscripts following Kannada 17050 manuscripts. Persian has the 231 manuscripts.

Chart 1. No. Of Manuscripts in different languages



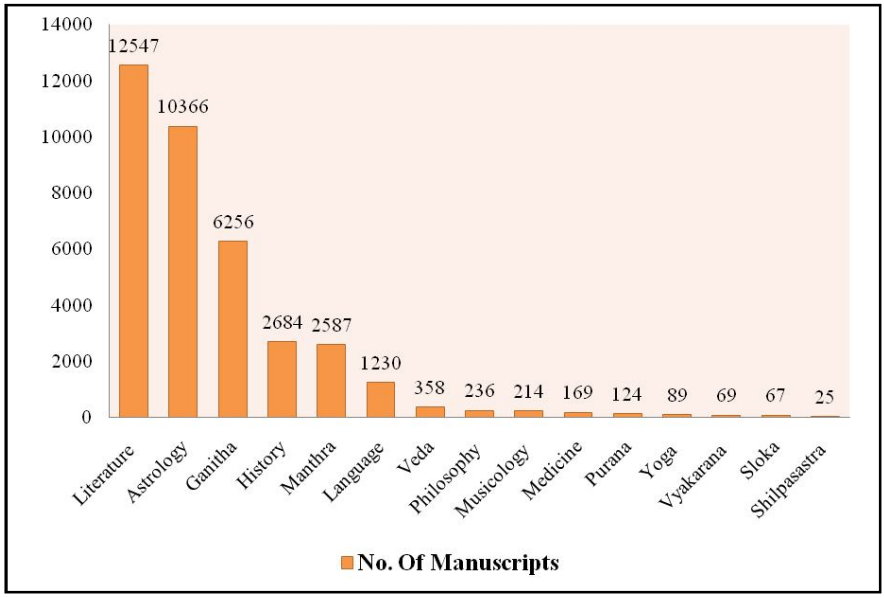
1. Manuscripts in Different Scripts

The script used in the available manuscripts in ORI is Kannada, Telugu, Nandinagari, Devanagari, Malayalam, Brahmic, Tigalari and Grantha. These are the most used scripts in the available manuscripts.

2. Different Subjects of Manuscripts

The available manuscripts are related to different subjects, mainly there are 15 various subject manuscripts are housed in ORI. The below Table 2 represents the subject wise number of manuscripts, the list is topped with 12547 manuscripts related to literature and 10366 related to astrology etc. The list is arranged on the descending order of the available number of resources.

Chart 2. Subject wise No. Of Manuscripts







Some of the important manuscripts

1. Storage of Manuscripts

The manuscripts are stored in wooden racks and glass racks and also used lemon grass oil on the manuscripts to control pest. Lemon grass oil will acts as a pesticide due to that reason it has been used on the manuscripts.



Manuscripts Stored in Racks

1. Factors of Deterioration of Manuscripts

There are many factors of deterioration identified, which are

- Human Factors – Professional apathy and carelessness is one of the factors of deterioration.
- Natural Factor – Insect attack, dust, environmental pollution, light fluctuation in temperature and relative humidity
- Inherent factors – Flaking and fading of ink and paint

2. Preservation Techniques Used

There are several techniques have been used to preserve the manuscripts in ORI.

- Used lemon grass oil to control the pesticide on manuscripts.
- Microfilming of the manuscripts is in the process
- Digital HDR Scanning



Cleaning the Manuscripts before Digitisation

3. Problems Faced in Preserving the Manuscripts

- Financial Problems: The institute is facing the financial problems in collecting and maintaining the manuscripts.
- Shortage of facilities: Facilities like digitisation process are reported shortage.
- There is no manpower shortage in the institute

4. Other Questions asked by the Researcher to the ORI Respondent (Only the answers provided below)

- The institute have a adequate Manuscript storage area according to NAMAMI
- The institute appointed qualified Manuscript Conservation Assistant according to NAMAMI guidelines but there is no qualified manuscript conservator according to NAMAMI guidelines.
- The institute provide the access to their digital materials through the library website.
- The adequate manpower is available in the library
- There more than 5 skilled professionals are working in the library

Findings and Conclusion

The major findings of the study are as follows

- ORI is housed with 70000 palm leaf manuscript
- 7 major language manuscripts are housed in the library
- Kannada, Telugu, Nandinagari, Devanagari, Malayalam, Brahmic, Tigalari and Grantha some of the scripts used in the manuscripts
- 15 various subjects manuscripts are housed in ORI in that literature is topped with 12547 manuscripts
- Manuscripts are stored in wooden and glass racks
- Lemon grass oil is used to preserve and control pest on manuscripts
- Microfilming of manuscripts is undertaken by the institute.
- Need some more budgetary support to the institute.
- The institute provide the access to their digital materials through the library website.
- There more than 5 skilled professionals are working in the library



In today's digital world information has become the basic need of our life. If we equipped the manuscript libraries with the modern information technology our cultural heritage would be saved and used for years. The libraries should take up the responsibility for the development of library activities with the modern information technology techniques. Manuscripts are the important primary sources of historic information of our ancestors we have to save those for the future generations too. The Oriental Research Institute (ORI) library is doing a commendable job to preserve and conserve those valuable documents to our future generations.

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