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Collection and Preservation of Old and Rare Documents: A Case Study

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Abstract

Library is store house of books and any others documents from where information transfer to mass of people through different media. But now-a-days great challenges to librarian to collect and preserve the document/information in a proper way and it disseminate in future. Here we studies Sanskrit College and University Library (SCUL) documents, try to identify type of documents collect by the library, problem faced and action taken by library for preservation and lastly we have given some suggestion for preservation of documents for the library.

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1. Introduction

Libraries are the important part of any institutions from where transferred unique cultural heritage from past to present. In case of library the preservation of old and rare documents is essential for transmitting information regarding the books, manuscripts and documents which reflect near to the next generations in a healthy way. Many books, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, and any type of document have been published since the invention of printing. Only a few documents would be considered "rare" by rare book specialists or rare book experts. In simple terms, books achieve a degree of rarity only when demand of those books to the people exceeds supply. Old and rare documents include a wide range of materials such as manuscripts, letters, diaries, maps, official records, and rare books. They serve as primary sources for researchers, historians, and scholars, providing authentic evidence of past events, societal norms, and personal experiences. Old and rare documents are not just relics of the past; they are bridges to history, culture, and human experiences. Their preservation and study continue to be vital for understanding our world and cultural heritage. In India from ancient times knowledge systems were passed

down to the succeeding generations through a rich oral tradition. With the gradual deterioration of oral transmission and development of script and writing material these knowledge were converted to written form such as stone, papyrus, parchment, birch bark, palm leaves and paper. In a manuscript we found that a handwritten version of a book, article or other work prepared by a writer for a publisher or typesetter. Manuscript, the word may also mean any material written by hand before the invention of printing. Prior to the invention of the printing press the role of the *puthis* or the manuscripts was multi-dimensional. Human Knowledge was transmitted either orally or formally i.e. through written by tradition way from generation to generation.

2. Objective of the Study

Here we start to cover our studies in the following objectives:

- To ascertain the types of documents available in SCUL
- To identify the various criteria for preservation of document used by SCUL
- To find out the problems being faced by SCUL in preserving the precious documents

- To suggest cost-effective and user-friendly preservation techniques for small libraries and repositories on the basis of observations
- To find out and suggest solutions for the problems faced by Sanskrit College and University Library.

3. Limitation of the Study

The study has been covered only Sanskrit College and University Library (SCUL). In our studies we can't include others college and university in West Bengal. Here we covered only rare collection and manuscripts collection.

4. Literature Review

Chakravarty (2023) has discussed that antique books, old and rare documents are fragile and vulnerable to different hazards. Preserving them for an extended period is a real challenge. Rajan and Esmail (2021) studied that the collection processed by the library are affected by numerous environmental factors that ultimately results in irreparable harm to numerous collections. Researchers also told that a short define of preservation strategies adopted to protect the manuscripts. Sutar and Chile (2021) have discussed about the conservation process for rare documents and manuscripts. Many LIS professional are not aware about the systematic process to conserve and preserve this cultural heritage of a nation. Yadagiri (2017) studied that a library is an indispensable centre of civilized society and digital libraries are evolving area of research and development. He studied that the Osmania university library has a collection of 6,825 manuscripts including those on palm leaves, in Arabic, Hebrew, Kannada, Marathi, Persian, Sanskrit, Tamil etc. Digitization is the solution to preserve them and to provide access to the users. Zubair and Rahman (2017) have discussed the manuscripts are handwritten and unpublished documents. These are available in different forms, languages, scripts and cover a wide range of subject. In his studies he discussed digital preservation of knowledge in different formats and initiatives taken in this regard. The study highlights the collection and examines the methods used in digital preservation of manuscripts in Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public library, Patna. Kaur (2015) has observed that the developments of digital technology libraries are changing their roles from book providers to e-information providers. He also describe that, it is difficult to save manuscripts restores it from damage, larceny and decay. Need of digitization of manuscripts, digitization initiatives in India, benefits and threats of digital preservation, process of digitization and guiding principles are the key issues which he also discussed. Majumdar (2005) has discussed that the Indian culture and civilization dates back to 2300–1750 B.C. when the Indus Valley civilization, also known as the Harappan culture. The past literary heritage of India is in the form of manuscripts available in palm leaves, cotton, silk, wood, bamboo, and copper plates. Kumar and Shah (2004) have discussed in his studies the present situation of manuscripts and preservation steps, which has to be taken; to save the heritages the paper proposes a plan for digitization of this cultural heritage of India.

6.2.1 Types of Manuscripts

5. Methodology of the Study

It is a qualitative and quantitative survey of SCUL about the manuscripts and rare documents. The study has been conducted through the questionnaire method, personal interview of the librarian, observation method and the literature search method. The total collection of manuscripts of the SCUL came to the after the content analysis of National Manuscripts Mission (NMM) website and there is also an old published catalogue of SCUL which also provides some information about the rare books of SCUL.

6. Data Collection and Analysis

Most significant part of this research is data collection, as this research followed various sources of information for data collection. Primarily, for the data collection we sent questionnaires to the librarian of SCUL institution. Then we also covered personal interview and observation of the SCUL. Here we give the big coverage of the rare books collection and manuscript collection.

6.1 Rare Books Coverage

The exact number of rare books housed of The Sanskrit College and University library has published approx 10,000 copies officially determined by the authorities. However, it is estimated that the library holds so many rare books, which span across various fields of study including Sanskrit, Pali, and Bengali etc. These books represent a treasure trove of knowledge, the rich literary and cultural heritage of the above said languages. Here we gave the following example of rare books subjective collection:

- Nyaya (Logic and Reasoning)
- Vedanta (Philosophical teachings based on the Upanishads)
- Mimamsa (ritual exegesis and interpretation)
- Alamkar (rhetoric and poetics)
- Smriti (Traditional law and ethics)
- Natak
- Purana (Ancient texts)
- Mathematics,
- Law
- Sociology
- Political Science
- Library and Information Science

6.2 Manuscripts Collection

The library's collection is not only vast in quantity but also profound in its depth and variety, encompassing numerous fields of ancient and classical learning. In our studies we found that in the Sanskrit College and University houses a remarkable collection of 18,551 where including digitized manuscripts and physical manuscripts which showcasing its rich repository of historical and cultural knowledge. These digitized documents are valuable resources for researchers, scholars, and students.

Table 1: Manuscripts Collection

Name of Manuscript	No of Collection	Name of Manuscript	No of Collection
Kosha	285	Veda	766
Vedanta	416	Purana	1382
Smriti	3932	Vidyak	294

Jyotish	747	Kavya	1111
Stotra	277	Sahitya	132
Sangit	4	Natak	196
Chhanda	98	Vaishnay	449
Alankar	145	Niti	18
Kama Shastra	7	Tantra	1866
Jaina	223	Samkhya	24
Mimamsa	101	Nyaya	3386
Patanjali	30	Tibetan	2
Vividha	2660		

From the above table we find that under the manuscripts of Kosha, there are 285 manuscripts. In 'Vedanta' are 416, in 'Smriti' are 3932, In 'Jyotish' are 747, in 'Stotra' are 277, in 'Sangit' are 4, in 'Chhanda' are 98, in 'Alankar' are 145, in 'Kama Shastra' are 7, in 'Jaina' are 223, in 'Mimamsa' are 101, in 'Patanjali' are 30, in 'veda' are 766, in 'Purana' are 1382, in 'Vidyak' are 294, in 'Kavya' are 1111, in 'Sahitya' are 132, in 'Natak' are 196, in 'Vaishnay' are 449, in 'Niti' are 18, in 'Tantra' are 1866, in 'Samkhya' are 24, in 'Nyaya' are 3386, in 'Tibetan' are 2, in 'Vividha' are 2660. We have not found and Deshvali Manuscripts.

7. Preservation & Conservation Procedure

7.1 Ways of Preservation and Conservation Work

Here we find from the table -2 the following ways preservation and conservation work done by the SCUL:

Table 2: Ways of Preservation and Conservation

The way preservation done	Yes/No
Fumigation	No
Naphthalene	Yes
Acid-Free paper	No
Polyester Film (Mylar)	No
Silica Gel	No
UV-Filtering covers and films	No
Microfilm and digital storage	Yes

From the above table-2 we find SCUL only two methods follow i.e. Preservation done by Naphthalene and another method is Microfilm and digital storage. They did not use any fumigation, acid-free paper, Polyester Film, Silica gel, UV-Filtering covers and films, Microfilm and digital storage.

7.2 Preservation Strategies

Here we find from the table-3 the following strategies for preservation:

Table 3: Preservation strategies

Preservation Strategies	Yes/No
Refreshing	No
Technological Preservation	Yes
Migration	No
Emulation	No

From the above table-3 we find only one strategy taken by libraries i.e. technological preservation. They did not use the method like refreshing, migration, emulation.

7.3 Preservation policy

Here we find from the table-4 the following preservation policy:

Table 4: Preservation policy

Preservation policy provisions	Yes /No
Security of library materials	Yes
Handling of library materials	Yes
Use of library materials	Yes
Training of staff on preservation of library materials	No
Recovery Procedure	Yes

From the above table-4 we find that they take policy for security, handling of library materials, use of library materials, recovery procedure and significantly absent of staff training programme for preservation of library materials.

8. Findings

- **Diverse Collection of Documents:** The materials cover a wide range of subjects, including Nyaya, Kavya, Smriti, Vedanta, Mathematics, Sociology, Sanskrit, Pali, and Bengali, supporting academic and research activities.
- **Digitization Status of Rare Books:** The library has 10,000 approx rare books, particularly in Philosophy, Buddhism, Ayurveda, and History. However, only 407 rare books have been digitized, leaving the majority of these valuable materials vulnerable to physical deterioration.
- **Special type of Manuscript and Conservation Challenges:** The manuscripts in the collection are diverse, with some being handwritten on handmade paper and a few preserved on wooden folios, showcasing historical craftsmanship and traditional document preservation techniques.
- **Criteria for Identifying Rare Books:** The library identifies rare books based on multiple factors, including age, subject significance, limited availability, and physical fragility.
- **Preservation Methods:** Current preservation efforts primarily rely on separating rare books from the general collection, digitizing them into PDF and JPEG formats, and restricting physical handling. However, key techniques such as fumigation, acid-free paper, polyester film (Mylar), silica gel, and UV-filtering covers are not implemented.
- **Environmental Challenges and Their Impact:** The library faces several environmental challenges, including the lack of air conditioning, air purifiers, and proper humidity control. Fluctuating temperature and moisture levels accelerate paper degradation, ink fading, and fungal growth, making effective climate control a necessity for long-term preservation.
- **Pest Infestation and Material Deterioration:** The library suffers from pest infestations, with silverfish, worms, and mold causing significant damage to old and fragile documents. The absence of fumigation and proper pest management allows these destructive elements to

spread, leading to worm-eaten pages, discoloration, and text loss in manuscripts and books.

- **Dust Accumulation and its Effects:** Dust accumulation is a major issue, causing abrasion, moisture retention, and chemical deterioration of documents. The lack of regular cleaning and preventive conservation strategies further aggravates the condition of old and rare materials, accelerating their decay.
- **Shortage of Trained Staff and Infrastructure:** the library lacks trained personnel who specialize in manuscript preservation, archival science, and digital conservation. Additionally, the absence of a dedicated preservation infrastructure restricts the adoption of advanced conservation techniques, making it difficult to safeguard rare materials effectively.
- **Financial Constraints and Limited use of Conservation Materials:** the preservation and conservation of old and rare documents face numerous challenges, with financial constraints. Without adequate funding and resources, the sustainability of preservation efforts remains uncertain, putting the entire collection at risk.

9. Suggestion

- Include more subjective areas for supporting academic and research purpose
- Required very urgent digitization of all collected materials
- Despite their cultural and academic importance, poor conservation efforts have led to the loss so, the urgent need for improved preservation measures
- For increase the value need more criteria for collection development
- Used more methods of preservation like Encapsulation, Lamination etc
- The library must implement climate control measures, including air conditioning, air purifiers, and humidity regulation, to prevent paper degradation, ink fading and fungal growth
- Required pest control section very actively for maintain materials
- For dust cleaning required to like HEPA vacuum with soft brush, mopping floors, dust cloths etc
- Immediate required trained staff for every section for proper maintaining
- Arrangement or support the financial condition for preservation and conservation

Conclusion

The Sanskrit College and University is one of the oldest higher educational institutions in West Bengal, which is the rich collection of rare and historically significant documents. Given the immense value of these materials, there is a pressing need for their preservation and conservation. Historically, the library was well-equipped with preservation resources and did not face financial constraints. However, recent budgetary issues and a shortage of skilled personnel have created significant challenges. Despite these difficulties, the authorities have made considerable efforts to preserve and conserve the library's treasures. It is anticipated that with future improvements in funding and resources, the gaps in the preservation and conservation policies will be addressed, ensuring that these invaluable documents are safeguarded for future generations to appreciate and understand our rich heritage.

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