



MANUSCRIPT KNOWLEDGE REPOSITORIES IN INDIA

Prince Ajaykumar T. Agashe

Librarian, Matru Seva Sangh Institute of
Social Science, Nagpur

Email: princeagashe@gmail.com

Mob.No - 9665656228

Priyanka M. Chavhan

Ph. D. Scholar, Department of Library and
Information Science RTMNU, Nagpur

Maya Sunil Rambhale

Jr. College Teacher, R.S. Mundle

Dharampeth Arts & Commerce college,

Nagpur

Abstract :

Many ancient manuscripts written on various materials have been misplaced or lost due to improper preservation. Creating surrogate copies of these ancient manuscripts improves their shelf life. Nevertheless, to preserve this knowledge, a knowledge repository is essential. AMAR is a dedicated institute for preserving and showcasing 'Indian medical heritage' in all forms through India's National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI). The NAMAMI has already identified many repository institutes across India along with collected manuscripts to identify, locate and preserve these documents. Efforts should be made to create a new generation of manuscript conservators to preserve this heritage knowledge using these repository institutes of the country.

Keywords: Manuscript, preservation, repositories, heritage

Introduction:

India has the largest and most varied collection of manuscripts in the world. As per the National Institute of Indian Medical Heritage, "The term 'manuscript' in broader sense means any document written or incised by hand such as documents or texts written on materials like Tala Patra (Palm-Leaf), Bhurja Patra (Birch-Bark), Kumbhi-Bark, Sacipat (Agarutwak), Leather (Animal skin), Cloth, Tulapat (a type of paper made out of cotton), paper and inscriptions on rocks, pillars, potteries, copper plates etc" (<http://niimh.nic.in>). These manuscripts are commonly found in places like traditional architects, temples, palaces, residences of zamindars, monasteries and families of priests, astrologers, and traditional vaidyas. Unfortunately, many of these manuscripts have been misplaced, lost, or unidentified due to ignorance of importance, improper preservation and unorganized documentation. However, due to a lack of awareness, a vast amount of literature has already been lost, and the rest available is mainly in a state of decay. There were no efforts to document, preserve, or even explore these rare manuscripts in personal possession (Tripathi and Mishra, 2010).

The 'manuscripts':

A manuscript is a handwritten composition of various materials in hundreds of languages and scripts. Manuscripts having knowledge content are distinct from "historical records, such as revenue records and epigraphs on rocks and firmans, which provide direct information on historical events or processes" (<http://namami.gov.in>). The most ancient manuscript collections of India and the forms and the places of their availability have been



elaborated by Ramana (2005), who described some indigenous methods of preserving palm leaf manuscripts like wrapping, applying extracts of some natural products and other chemical treatments along with the benefits of digital preservation of this national heritage. This palm-leaf manuscript are produced from palmyra (thick and inflexible, inclined towards brittleness overtime) and talipot (thinner and more flexible, with excellent lasting qualities) types of palms wherein the talipot has reportedly been around for as long as 600 years (Agarwal, 1982). However, these rare manuscripts deteriorated due to improper care and repeatedly rough handling (Chopra, 1994). Therefore, Chopra (1994) recommends the creation of surrogate copies of these sources such as microfilming, scanning and reprography, which helps improve the shelf life of fragile old records as the readers get the information they require from the reproduced copies, nullifying or almost reducing the load on the originals. Gaur et al. (2009) discussed the National Manuscripts Mission that seeks to unearth and preserve the vast manuscripts wealth of India in their paper “Preservation and Access to Indian Manuscripts: A Knowledge Base of Indian Culture Heritage Resources for Academic Libraries”. Further, Gaur et al. (2009) reiterated that the life of a palm-leaf manuscript is far longer than that of a modern-day device like a CD or microfilm. With the increasing popularity of printed books, the interest in collecting and preserving manuscripts gained ground in India. The ‘Digital District Repository’ is an attempt to discover and document the memory of these countless stories, events, sites and individuals (<http://indiaculture.gov.in>).

National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI):

In the Indian knowledge system, a knowledge repository is essential; it is a way to store and retrieve traditional data. Traditional knowledge is a national asset given to us by our ancestors. Knowledge repositories store and preserve knowledge as an asset, including grey or published literature. Indian Traditional Knowledge is a treasure of Ayurveda, Ashvayurveda, Siddha, Yoga, Shilpashastra, Gajayurveda, Vrikshayurveda, Dhanurveda, Natya, Sangita etc., in millions of manuscripts in private or institutional repositories across length of breadth India (<http://namami.gov.in>). The IKS repository contains Indian knowledge centres, research Projects, IKS institutional internships, book lists, manuscripts and course lists available on the IKS platform (<http://iksindia.org>). The Government of India, through the ‘National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI)’ and the Ministry of AYUSH through the Central Scheme “Acquisition, Cataloging, Digitization and Publication of Text Book and Manuscripts of AYUSH” successfully digitized manuscripts and are working relentlessly to bring out this treasure to the utility of ordinary people through ‘AYUSH Medical Advances Repository (AMAR)’. ‘AMAR’ is developed by ‘The National Centre of Indian Medical Heritage, Hyderabad’ under ‘the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences, Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India. It is a unique and dedicated institute for preserving and showcasing “Indian Medical Heritage” in all possible forms and worked extensively on the collection, digitization and cataloguing of manuscripts of medical importance, primarily related to Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Yog (<http://niimh.nic.in>).

The National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI) was established in February 2003 by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India. With an aim to locate, document, preserve and render these accessible to connect India's past with its future and its memory with its aspirants (<http://namami.gov.in>).

The “NAMAMI has the following objectives

1. To locate manuscripts by national level survey and post-survey

2. To document every manuscript and manuscript repository for a national electronic database
3. To conserve manuscripts and to train a new generation of manuscript conservators
4. To digitizing the endangered manuscripts
5. To publish critical editions of unpublished manuscripts and catalogues
6. To engage the public with manuscripts by organizing seminars, outreach programs and lectures” (<http://namami.gov.in>).

Repositories in India:

Some repositories which were established many years ago and have worked diligently towards collecting and preserving manuscripts, has already been identified by the NAMAMI with a vast collection of manuscripts. These institutes have a vast corpus of manuscript collection in different languages and scripts in different materials like palm leaf, cloth, wood, etc. (<http://namami.gov.in>).

In India, there are a total of 3840 significant repository institutes available, which are listed in the table below:

Sr. No.	Name of the state	No. of Repository Institutes
1	Andhra Pradesh	35
2	Assam	911
3	Bihar	128
4	Chandigarh	06
5.	Delhi	25
6.	Gujrat	13
7.	Haryana	26
8.	Himachal Pradesh	81
9.	Jammu Kashmir	29
10.	Jharkhand	19
11	Karnataka	02
12	Kerala	02
13	Madhya Pradesh	403
14	MAHARASHTRA	295
15	Orrisa	1041
16	Punjab	16
17	Rajasthan	310
18	Tamil Nadu	5
19	Uttar Pradesh	365
20	Uttarakhand	4
21	Uttaranchal	16
22	West Bengal	108

Source: <https://iksindia.org/institutions.php>

Conclusion:

Awareness regarding the availability of Indian traditional knowledge and ancient manuscripts is of utmost importance in preserving and disseminating the heritage using the repository institutes of the country. With the help of NAMAMI, effort should be made to create



a new generation of manuscript conservators.

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