STUDY OF NATIONAL MISSION OF MANUSCRIPTS AND KRITISAMPADA DATABASE

Biranshu Suren Roy[1]
Student
Department of Library and Information Science
R T M Nagpur University

Ajay Tumdeo Dadmal[2]
Student
Department of Library and Information Science
R T M Nagpur University

Dr.Mangala A. Hirwade[3]
Professor & Head
Department of Library and Information science
R T M Nagpur University

Abstract :

India has over ten million manuscripts, the largest collection of ancient knowledge in the world, covering many languages, scripts, and subjects. The National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI), started in 2003, works to protect and digitize these treasures. This paper looks at NAMAMI's goals, structure, and successes, focusing on the Kriti Sampada database, which holds details of about 5.2 million manuscripts. Using official reports and recent updates, including the 2024 rebranding to Gyan Bharatam Mission, the study discusses challenges like limited funds and lack of skilled workers. It shows how NAMAMI connects India's past with modern research, preserving culture in the digital age.

Keywords: National Mission for Manuscripts, Kriti Sampada, manuscript digitization, cultural heritage, Gyan Bharatam Mission.

Introduction :

India's manuscripts, written on palm leaves, birch bark, and paper, hold centuries-old knowledge in areas like philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and literature. These documents are vital records of India's culture and history. With around 10 million manuscripts spread across institutions, temples, and homes, India has the world's largest collection. However, these treasures face risks from damage, neglect, and poor documentation.

The Government of India launched the National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI) in 2003 under the Ministry of Culture to protect these manuscripts (Ministry of Culture, 2023). Part of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), NAMAMI surveys, documents, conserves, and shares manuscript knowledge. Its key tool is the Kriti Sampada database, a digital archive with millions of entries accessible worldwide.

Fig. No. - 1

(Manuscripts, 2016)

This paper explores NAMAMI and Kriti Sampada, their growth, work, and challenges. It argues that while NAMAMI has made great progress, it needs more funding and technology to succeed fully, especially under the new Gyan Bharatam Mission (2024–2031).

- **Historical Background :**

Manuscript preservation in India began with British scholars like William Jones, who cataloged texts in the 1700s through groups like the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Jones, 2010). After independence, universities and institutes continued this work, but efforts were scattered due to the huge number of manuscripts.

NAMAMI, launched in 2003, was a major step forward, driven by growing interest in traditional knowledge like Ayurveda.It was the first national program globally focused on manuscripts, addressing issues like lack of trained staff and standard methods.It set up Manuscript Resource Centres (MRCs) and Conservation Centres (MCCs) across India.

In 2024, NAMAMI became the Gyan Bharatam Mission, with ₹482.85 crore allocated for 2024–2031 to digitize over 1 crore manuscripts using AI and Digital India tools.Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June 2025, it aims to preserve and share India's knowledge globally. (Manuscripts, 2016)

Methodology :

This study is based on secondary data sourced from the Kriti Sampada database of NAMAMI, Ministry of Culture reports, UNESCO documentation, IGNCA records, and scholarly literature. The data were descriptively classified by language, script, material, and preservation status, with percentages calculated from official totals. Descriptive analysis was

applied to interpret trends and compare NAMAMI's progress with Gyan Bharatam objectives. The APA Style Manual has been followed for formatting, presentation, and citation standards throughout the study.

Objectives and Structure :

NAMAMI's goals are to find manuscripts through surveys, document them in a database, preserve them using traditional and modern methods, and make them accessible through digitization and training (Singh, 2018). It aims to connect ancient wisdom with modern research (Chakrabarty, 2025).

NAMAMI works through :

- **Manuscript Resource Centres (MRCs)** : For cataloguing manuscripts (e.g., institutions with 5,000+ manuscripts).
- **Manuscript Conservation Centres (MCCs)**: 33 centres for protecting manuscripts.
- **Manuscript Partner Centres (MPCs) and Conservation Partner Centres (MCPCs)** : For outreach and training (Ministry of Culture, 2023).

The Kriti Sampada Database :

a. Language-wise Distribution of Manuscripts (Total-375)

Table no.-1 Language-wise Distribution of Manuscripts

Sr.no	Language	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
1	**Arabic**	92,616	**2.87**
2	**Ahirani**	23	0
3	**Bengali**	39,919	**1.24**
4	**Gujarati**	52,223	**1.62**
5	**Hindi**	3,32,254	**10.29**
6	**Marathi**	44,941	**1.39**
7	**Malayalam**	1,42,818	**4.42**
8	**Sanskrit**	24,27,081	**75.15**
9	**Telugu**	26,343	**0.82**
10	**Urdu**	71,568	**2.22**

The data represents the distribution of manuscripts across ten major languages. Sanskrit overwhelmingly dominates the collection with 24,27,081 manuscripts, accounting for 75.15% of the total. This clearly indicates that the majority of preserved manuscripts are

rooted in traditional Indic knowledge systems, where Sanskrit served as the principal scholarly and liturgical language.

The second-highest contribution comes from Hindi, with 3,32,254 manuscripts (10.29%), followed by Malayalam with 1,42,818 manuscripts (4.42%). These three languages together make up nearly 90% of all recorded manuscripts.

b. Script-wise Distribution of Manuscripts

Table no. 2 Script-wise Distribution of Manuscripts **(Total-91)**

Sr. No	Script	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
1	Devnagari	20,28,440	47.64
2	Oriya	7,31,304	17.17
3	Tibetan	2,70,611	6.35
4	Malayalam	2,59,494	6.09
5	Kanada	2,09,325	4.91
6	Tamil	1,83,757	4.31
7	Nastaya	1,72,039	4.04
8	Bengali	1,62,149	3.80
9	Telugu	1,12,926	2.65
10	Grantha	1,27,079	2.98

The analysis of script-wise manuscript distribution indicates that Devnagari accounts for nearly half of the total manuscripts (47.64%), making it the most dominant script in the collection. Oriya represents the second-largest share at 17.17%, whereas all other scripts individually contribute less than 10 percent. Specifically, Tibetan (6.35%), Malayalam (6.09%), and Kanada (4.91%) form the mid-range group, followed by Tamil (4.31%), Nastaya (4.04%), Bengali (3.80%), Grantha (2.98%), and Telugu (2.65%). These findings suggest a substantial skew toward Devnagari and Oriya, indicating that manuscript preservation efforts may historically have been more concentrated in regions or traditions associated with these scripts. Conversely, scripts with lower representation may require greater attention in future conservation initiatives to ensure balanced preservation across linguistic traditions.

c. Material-wise Classification of Manuscripts

Table no. 3 Material-wise Classification of Manuscripts **(Total-22)**

Sr. No	Material Type	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
1	Animal Product	442	**0.00**
2	Leaf (Banana/Bamboo/Birch/Palm)	15,54,445	**16.22**
3	Plate (Metal/Silver/Gold/Copper/Iron)	103	**0.00**
4	Parchment	437	**0.00**
5	Paper	32,27,110	**33.70**
6	Plant Product	47,92,873	**50.04**
7	Textile / Cotton	16	**0.00**
8	Other	869	**0.00**

The majority of manuscripts in the collection are made from Plant Products, which account for 47,92,873 manuscripts (50.05%). This indicates that plant-based materials—likely including bark, fibers, or other organic sheets—were the most commonly used writing medium in traditional manuscript culture.

The second most prevalent medium is Paper, contributing 32,27,110 manuscripts (33.70%), showing a significant transition toward paper-based documentation over time.

Leaf manuscripts (such as those written on banana, birch, bamboo, or palm leaves) also form a considerable share, with 15,54,445 manuscripts (16.23%), reflecting the ancient tradition of *palm-leaf manuscripts*, especially prevalent in South and Southeast Asia.

d. Condition-wise Preservation Status of Manuscripts

Table no. 4- Condition-wise Preservation Status of Manuscripts **(Total-11)**

Sr.No	Condition	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
1	Acidic	15,696	**0.46**
2	Binding Loss	1,486	**0.04**
3	Bad	19,21,233	**57.05**
4	Brittle	4,38,003	**13.00**
5	Broken	1,96,583	**5.84**

Sr.No	Condition	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
6	Fungal Infected	6,040	**0.17**
7	Good	88,778	**2.63**
8	Ink Loosed	17,045	**0.50**
9	Stained	49,085	**1.45**
10	Stuck	45,396	**1.34**
11	Worm Eaten	5,88,141	**17.45**

This dataset categorizes manuscripts based on their physical condition, revealing a serious preservation challenge.

A majority of manuscripts — 19,21,233 (57.06%) — are classified as *Bad*, indicating severe deterioration. This suggests that over half of the collection is in urgent need of conservation efforts.

The second most common issue is Worm Damage, with 5,88,141 manuscripts (17.46%) affected. This reflects long-term exposure to biological threats due to inadequate storage conditions.

Brittleness affects 4,38,003 manuscripts (13.01%), likely due to aging, dryness, or material decay.

Over 94% of manuscripts show some form of deterioration, with Bad, Worm-Eaten, and Brittle accounting for the most significant threats.

Biological damage (worms and fungi) is widespread, suggesting urgent need for controlled environments.

Chemical and structural issues (acidic decay, binding loss, ink loosening) indicate long-term neglect or improper materials used historically.

Achievements :

NAMAMI has documented 5.2 million manuscripts, digitized over 300,000 titles, and made 76,000 available online.UNESCO recognized the Rigveda manuscript (2007) and Shiva manuscripts from Puducherry (2005) (UNESCO, 2005, 2007). Training programs have created experts, and events like exhibitions have increased public interest.

The Gyan Bharatam Mission has introduced AI for script reading and plans to digitize 5 million+ folios in five years.It has also sparked global research partnerships, like with Japan.

Challenges :

NAMAMI faces issues like scattered manuscripts in private collections, limited funding (₹3.5 crore before 2024), environmental damage, legal disputes over ownership, and a shortage of experts in 100 scripts.Digitizing fragile manuscripts is slow, and public awareness is low.

Conclusion :

The National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI), now re-envisioned as the Gyan Bharatam Mission (2024–2031), represents India's most significant initiative for preserving its vast and diverse manuscript heritage, encompassing over 10 million texts. The Kriti Sampada database, documenting 5.2 million entries, has been instrumental in cataloguing, digitizing, and improving access to this invaluable cultural legacy. Linguistically, Sanskrit dominates with 75.15% of manuscripts, highlighting the historical centrality of classical scholarship, while script analysis shows Malayalam (44.48%) and Bengali (27.79%) leading, reflecting extensive transcription practices across regional scripts. Material classification indicates a transition from plant-based and leaf manuscripts to paper, tracing the evolution of documentation techniques over centuries.

Despite progress in documentation and digitization, preservation remains a critical challenge: over 57% of manuscripts are in "Bad" condition, 17.46% are worm-eaten, and 13.01% are brittle, meaning more than 94% of manuscripts are at risk. The Gyan Bharatam Mission, with increased funding, AI-driven cataloguing, and digitization strategies, offers significant potential to safeguard this heritage. Yet, long-term success depends on addressing challenges such as inadequate trained manpower, access to private collections, consistent funding, and standardized preservation practices.

To ensure sustainability, the mission must adopt a collaborative approach, integrating universities, monastic repositories, private collectors, and international research institutions. By combining technology, community engagement, and inclusive policies, India can transform its manuscript wealth into a living, accessible knowledge system for present and future generations.

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