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# Conservation and Preservation of Manuscripts at National Library of India and Rampur Raza Library: A Study

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## **Abstract**

*Manuscripts are the major source of information to know about the historical facts, cultural and old traditions of the past. They are scattered all over the world and in India about six million manuscripts are present in different languages and scripts. Therefore, steps have been taken to conserve and preserve the available manuscripts by every possible technique in the libraries. The present study examined the process of conservation and preservation of manuscripts adopted at National Library of India (NL) and Rampur Raza Library (RRL) along with the present conditions of manuscripts using the questionnaire and personal visit as the sources of data collection. The study revealed that both the libraries are adopting different techniques for the conservation of manuscripts and in some way they are successful in protecting the manuscripts.*

**Keywords:** Manuscripts, National Library of India, Rampur Raza Library, Conservation, Preservation, Special Library

## **1.0 Introduction:**

The brain is an exceptional gift of nature to the human being because it stores numerous amount of information. When there was no writing material available, human beings used their brain to store a lot of information and in fact the priceless old knowledge was kept in human mind. Before the discovery of proper writing medium, scholars verbally transmit knowledge to their learners. Writing traditions were started in India as early as 5th century B.C. The first reference to writing in India was found in a Pali Buddhists Canon of the 5th century B.C. After the discovery of writing materials such as metal, leather, stone, etc. the scholars accumulate their knowledge in or on the palm leaf, vellum, birch bark, papyrus in the form of manuscripts which are considered as the main source of knowledge for the present generation and it is an essential source of the history of India or any other country. They are found in all over the world where human beings put their views and knowledge into a written form. Manuscripts are precious due to their historic values and rareness. They are the cultural heritage of our country (Kesavan, 1985 as cited in Sageer & Francis, 2014). A manuscript is mainly first hand-written information in contradiction of printing created by one or more people in varied languages and scripts on paper, cloth, bark, metal, leaf or on any other stuff in any work of art. The manuscripts are invaluable legacy of mankind. Intellectual value of manuscripts cannot be under estimated. Until the advent of the printing press in the mid fifteenth century, each manuscript was unique. Even a manuscript copied by the same hand would vary from the other copies or the originals through such variants as spelling mistakes, word displacement, ink spots, minor handwriting changes, etc. Thus, every manuscript from the middle ages constitutes a special collection item (Slowik, 2009). They relate us with the social, political, traditional and cultural aspect of a nation by containing reliable information. Indisputably they are priceless sources for the reformation of history and culture of a country. This may be amalgamation of letters, pictures, symbols, maps, figures

etc. with information content about the science, art, culture, and history of a nation. The manuscripts are the basic and primary source of information for the researchers as they portray the glorious past and reflect the earlier traditions and stories of our civilization. These were regarded as rare commodities that were produced with firm determination and efforts. They were worshipped like holy relics as a sense of religious holiness and respect were associated with them (Mazumdar, 2009).

Our nation has the foremost collected works of manuscripts on multiplicity of thoughts, languages, scientific, artistic, cultural, philosophical perceptions and knowledge system. We are holding extremely old traditions and knowledge that representing the record of thousands of years of back that are the key resource for developmental activities (Sahoo, Sahoo, Mohanty & Dash, 2013). This traditional collection or knowledge is organic in nature that undergoes a frequent and predictable natural ageing procedure. Some steps have to be taken for their conservation and preservation by applying techniques which may be indigenous or scientific in nature. While it is impossible to stop the process of deterioration altogether but by using natural techniques or chemical treatments the process of deterioration can be slow down.

### **1.1 A brief overview of the collection of the libraries under study:**

#### **1) National Library of India (NL), Kolkata**

The National Library of India is the largest library in the country. The collection of the library includes 26, 41,615 books, 88,162 maps, 905 newspaper titles, about 1,04,331 microfilm rolls, 125,000 online book titles in English all in digital facsimile published between 1475 to 1700, 3.8 million full texts dissertation and thesis, 10,000 titles of e-books, about 10,000 online journals and above 5744 manuscripts (National Library of India, 2019).

#### **2) Rampur Raza Library (RRL), Rampur**

Rampur Raza library is famous for its noteworthy collection. It includes approximately 17000 manuscripts which include 150 illustrated ones, manuscripts are related to a variety of subjects like history, philosophy, religions, physical sciences, art, literature, medicine, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, sufism etc., it also includes 205 hand-written palm-leaves, miniature paintings. The library also has a collection of about 75000 rare printed books in Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Urdu and English language (Rampur Raza Library, 2019).

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

Agarwal (2000) pointed out the problems related to the preservation of manuscripts in Southeast Asia like lack of awareness of the importance of manuscripts, lack of technical knowledge, lack of facilities, lack of funding, etc. Kumar & Shah (2004) & Ramana (2005) discussed various efforts took in preserving manuscript in digital format and preservation techniques which are currently in use. In their paper, Gaur & Chakaborty (2009) not only discussed the modern concept of preservation and access but also the institutional and individual efforts in the field of preservation. Mazumdar (2009) highlighted the initiatives took by U.S. in India for digital preservation of manuscripts. He also discussed about the emphasis given by different professional bodies on digital preservation by organising seminars and conference by taking it as a theme or sub theme. Warraich and Tahira (2010) focused on the issues of conservation and preservation of the rare manuscript collection. Mishra (2012) has given a brief overview of indigenous methods used for conservation of manuscripts. The author has mentioned some methods like the use of turmeric, black cumin, cinnamon, neem leaves, eucalyptus oil, etc. The author also mentioned that use of these indigenous materials was eco friendly, no side effects may occur by these materials and the same time these are not so costly. Devanathan, R. (2013) gave in detail the information about the herbals and natural products such as some of the plants and their products, which have been acknowledged from the ancient times for their germicidal properties and insect

repellence potentialities, used for the conservation of manuscripts. Mahawar and Kuriya (2013) investigated the policy for the conservation and preservation of the oriental collection in Saulat Public Library (SPL), Rampur. It was recommended by the author that new tools and technique related to ICT should be implemented in the library. Sahoo & Mohanty (n.d) attempted to summarize the effectiveness of various traditional practices like Indian herbal pesticides and insect repellents which are being used by different organizations or could be used by the organizations to seize the growth of insect infestation in the manuscript repositories. In spite of the advent of technology has also given rise to greater concerns of preservation of manuscripts by adopting modern technologies but still the traditional methods of preservation are in vogue.

### **3. Objectives of the study:**

- To know the current status of manuscripts in the libraries.
- To know the status of conservation and preservation of manuscripts available in the selected libraries.
- To know about the techniques used for conservation and preservation of manuscripts.

### **4. Research Methodology adopted:**

The investigator along with the personal visits of the selected libraries, used questionnaire based on the objectives of the study for collecting the necessary data. It included a set of questions that were asked to the staff of the manuscript section for getting information regarding the manuscripts and the processes and procedures adopted by the concerned libraries. Besides, the investigator conducted a structured interview of the conservators and technicians who were directly involved with the preservation and conservation work to get a realistic account of the ground situation. The data was supplicated with the information available on the library websites of the selected libraries along with the information brochures and newsletters published by the concerned libraries.

### **5. Data Analysis and Interpretation of the study:**

The collection is held to be the first insight to know about the strength of a library. The investigator asked the question to know actually the collection of manuscripts in the libraries which revealed that RRL is having approximately 17,000 manuscripts while NL possessing only 5,744 manuscripts. Other than manuscripts, these libraries also possess books, journals, maps, newspapers, theses and dissertations, etc.

#### **5.1 Current status of deterioration of Manuscripts**

On account of deterioration factors such as physical, chemical, biological and sometime because of human error, manuscripts are deteriorating in many ways. Even though libraries are using every possibility to preserve manuscripts from further deterioration but still manuscripts with time shows the symptoms of deterioration in the form of wear and tear, yellowing, embrittlement, water stains, etc. cannot be fugitive. Table 1 give an idea about the deterioration in different forms and it is found that, the manuscripts in NL have water stains, they are yellowing, embrittlement, the ink is deteriorated and there is also an evidence of insect infestation. Similarly, in RRL the manuscripts are showing the problem of water stains, yellowing, embrittlement, and deteriorated ink, proof of insect infestation and also proof of poor handling.

**Table 1 - Deterioration of Manuscripts**

S. No	Condition of Manuscripts	NL	RRL
1.	Wear and tear	✗	✗
2.	Soil and surface dirt	✗	✗
3.	Water stains	✓	✓
4.	Yellowing	✓	✓
5.	Embrittlement	✓	✓
6.	Deteriorated ink	✓	✓
7.	Evidence of insect infestation	✓	✓
8.	Evidence of poor handling	✗	✓

### 5.2 Techniques of Conservation

Conservation of manuscript is done through preventive and curative methods. For that purpose, a standard methodology comprising the positive aspects of both traditional Indian practices and modern scientific methods has been formulated and followed (NMM, 2020). Table 2 reveals that both the libraries along with scientific techniques are also adopting traditional techniques for conserving and preserving manuscripts. Scientific techniques are further divided into preventive and curative conservation for take care of manuscripts.

**Table 2 - Techniques of Conservation**

S. No	Libraries	Traditional	Scientific	
			Preventive	Curative
1.	NL	✓	✓	✓
2.	RRL	✓	✓	✓

### 5.3 Preventive Conservation Techniques

Preventive conservation is indirect measures that are used to evade, obstruct, or diminish the means of future deterioration that occurs on a daily basis and the occasional catastrophic damage can be limited. Table 3 shows that NL and RRL performed all the given techniques i.e. they are planning anti-light strategies, making strategies for fire detection and control, pest control against biological factors, storage conditions, they kept manuscripts covered with clothes.

**Table 3 - Preventive Conservation Techniques**

S. No	Preventive Conservation	NL	RRL
1.	Planning anti-light strategies	✓	✓
2.	Strategies for fire detection and control	✗	✓
3.	Pest control against biological factors	✓	✓
4.	Storage conditions	✓	✓

### 5.4 Curative Conservation Treatments

Unlike preventive treatments, curative conservation treatments are directly apply on manuscripts and is aimed at striking damaging processes and, when possible, stabilizing condition of manuscripts from further deterioration (UNESCO, 2019). Table 4 illustrates some of the attempts taken by the libraries to preserve the invaluable wealth of our country. It was found that except mass deacidification, flattening and relining, NL is practicing all the

above given techniques on the manuscripts whereas RRL also except flattening and fumigation, is applying all the above give techniques.

**Table 4 - Curative Conservation Treatments**

S. No	Treatments	NL	RRL
1.	Oiling	✓	✓
2.	Washing & cleaning	✓	✓
3.	Aqueous de-acidification	✓	✓
4.	Non-aqueous de-acidification	✓	✓
5.	Vapour phase de-acidification	✓	✓
6.	Mass de-acidification	✗	✓
7.	Fumigation	✓	✗
8.	Flattening	✗	✗
9.	Resizing	✓	✓
10.	Minor repairs	✓	✓
11.	Filling holes	✓	✓
12.	Relining	✗	✓
13.	Encapsulation	✓	✓
14.	Lamination	✓	✓
15.	Mending	✓	✓

### 5.5 Pest Control Management

Pests are the nastiest enemies of manuscripts. Table 5 provides information regarding the pest control measures taken by the libraries. Table shows that NL is adopting all the pest control measures to control the damage caused by pests. Except paradichlorobenzene and neem leaves, RRL is also using all the measures to control pests to safeguard manuscripts from pests.

**Table 5 - Pest Control Management**

S. No	Pest Control Measures	NL	RRL
1.	Napthalene	✓	✓
2.	Paradichlorobenzene	✓	✗
3.	Neem leaves	✓	✗
4.	Thymol crystals	✓	✓
5.	Habitat Modification	✓	✓
6.	Insect Growth Regulators	✓	✓
7.	Freezing	✓	✓

### 5.6 Digital Preservation

After providing preventive and curative treatment to the manuscripts, the very next step is to digitally preserve the manuscripts for protecting them from natural calamity, natural ageing and other reasons of physical and biological deterioration. Digital preservation played an extremely important function in the procedure of conservation of manuscripts (Abduraheem K. & Zarrin, n.d). Table 6 illustrates the list of these methods and it was found that NL has

adopted migration, replication, scanning and metadata creation for digital preservation of manuscripts while RRL is doing only the replication of manuscripts.

**Table 6 - Digital Preservation**

S. No.	Digital Preservation	NL	RRL
1.	Migration	✓	✗
2.	Replication	✓	✓
3.	Scanning	✓	✗
4.	Metadata creation	✓	✗
5.	No preservation strategy	✗	✗

## 6. Conclusion

Manuscripts are the cultural heritage of any country and are considered as the invaluable legacy of mankind. They are very precious in the respect that they possess unique historical value and rareness. India enjoys the largest collection of manuscripts in comparison to other countries and it is being said that about six million manuscripts are available in our country. This vast treasure of knowledge is stored at different places and in different institutes including the libraries, which are the main custodian of manuscripts in the country. The present study identified the two libraries important with respect to the manuscripts and their treatment at the national level. It was found that the selected libraries are using many modern and traditional methods of conserving and preserving the manuscripts. The storage conditions of the libraries are separated in both the libraries and are having proper care for temperature, humidity, cold, pollutants from air, water, etc. They have an appropriate mechanism of protecting the manuscripts from pests by using various pesticides and chemicals including some age old treatments. The libraries have also undertaken the digital preservation of the manuscripts to provide easy and quick access to the users. It seems that much has been done to take care of the manuscript wealth in the libraries but the modern and scientific methods used in other countries for the protection of rare books and manuscripts are lacking in these libraries and hence seeks to adopt and implement the new and modern gadgets for the sophisticated preservation and conservation of the manuscripts and other rare documents in these libraries.

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