POETS OF KASHMIR: A DIGITAL LIBRARY

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Abstract

Kashmir has remained a seat of learning and knowledge, religious and philosophical discourses since centuries. Kashmir has a rich and vibrant cultural history and a tradition of learning and scholarly pursuit since times immemorial. Through the ages, it has been a melting pot of ideas, which have been distilled into the finest traditions of learning, tolerance and cultural cohesion. These ideas have been portrayed by different writers, Poets and historians from time to time. Unfortunately, very less information pertaining to these cultural icons is available. The main aim of this work is to build a Digital collection of biographies of eminent poets of Kashmir using Green Stone Digital Library Software. The collection can be browsed and Search by Name, Pen Name, Place of Birth, Year of Birth, Year of Death, Preferred Language, Form of Poetry and Important Works.

INTRODUCTION

Information explosion, literature flood, publication deluge, mushroom growth of computer and communication technologies and networks worldwide not only made the task of bibliographical control difficult, but also forced the contemporary librarians to make a paradigm shift from the age old traditional library operation to automation with the help of latest technology (Thapa, 2007). The idea of easy, finger-tip access to information—what we conceptualize as digital libraries today—began with Vennuear Bush’s Memex machine and has continued to evolve with an advancement in information technology. With the arrival of computers, the concept centered on large bibliographic databases, the now familiar online retrieval and public access systems that are part of any contemporary library. When computers were connected into large networks forming the Internet, the concept evolved again, and research turned to create libraries of digital information that could be accessed by anyone from anywhere in the world. Phrases like “virtual library,” “electronic library,” library without walls” and, most recently, “digital library,” all have been used interchangeably to describe this broad concept (Bearman, 2007).
Digital library is "the collection of services and the collection of information objects and their organization, structure, and presentation that support users in dealing with information objects available directly or indirectly via electronic/digital means." The impact of Information and Communication Technology on library and information centres is profound. Libraries are facing tremendous challenges in all dimensions and it has become imperative for information professionals to redefine their role in disseminating information to the users (Koohang & Ondracek, 2005). The development of information technology in the field of digital libraries has attracted many research efforts during the last years. Members of the library and information profession have become acutely aware in recent years. One area receiving significant attention is the development of access to information through digital libraries. Much of the existing research in the digital library field is concerned with the practical application or implementation of digital libraries. There are many thousands of digital library projects currently underway in all sectors of the library community. The approach towards setting up the digital library standards, software technologies and best practices is definitely taking a shape. To cope up with the information needs with speed and relative accuracy and reliability, the digital library has emerged as the most important and reliable resort, and so knowledge discovery in these type of libraries becomes a predominant factor (Sonkar, Makhija, Kumar & Singh, 2005).

Digital content is today being produced in quantities that are deeply transforming the enterprise and the creative media industries. Conditions for production and consumption are also rapidly changing as more and more content is produced by users. New ways of expressing and representing cultural and scientific content in digital form are creating new opportunities for people to experience and share assets. Digital libraries are playing great role in highlighting the unexplored literature and also helps in giving credibility to the writers or the contributors. Open source software’s incorporate an interface that makes it easy for people to create their own library collections.

Kashmir has remained a seat of learning and knowledge, religious and philosophical discourses since centuries. Kashmir has a rich and vibrant cultural history and a tradition of learning and scholarly pursuit since times immemorial. Through the ages, it has been a melting pot of ideas, which have been distilled into the finest traditions of
learning, tolerance and cultural cohesion. It reflects the contributions made by thinkers and men of letters like Charak, Bhartrihari, Bilhana, Kalhana and saints and sages called Rishis and Sufis. Their legacy, over a period of time has etched itself so much into the collective consciousness of the region, that it cannot be eroded.

Kashmiri literature is not as rich and potent in other genres as in poetry. History of Kashmiri poetry can conveniently be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase begins with Habba Khatoon and extends up to the poets of the early twentieth century while the second and still-continuing phase consists of the modern poetry. The first of the above–mentioned two phases extends over a long period of time in which numerous poets contributed to the growth and enrichment of Kashmiri poetry. The most outstanding of these, in chronological order, were Habba Khatoon, Mahmud Gami, Rasul Mir, Swami Parmanand, and Maqbool Kralawari. The modern era in Kashmiri poetry begins with Mahjoor and Abdul Ahad Azad both of whom were well-versed with Kashmiri poetic tradition even as they were adequately exposed to the new developments in thought and literature. Together they became the leaders of the new literary renaissance in Kashmiri. It has withstood the test of time, and it is now for us to continue to nurture it so that it is preserved for future generations.

**PROBLEM**

Kashmir has always remained a symbol of esteem for great scholars and writers, who came here and preached religious and other allied fields of knowledge. Enormous contributions in terms of historical, social, economical and religious writings can be found everywhere in the valley with contributions from great writers and thinkers. Less information is available about most of such writers especially Poets. Therefore, the present work will be an attempt to create a digital collection of biographies of selected Poets of Kashmir using an Open Source Software (OSS).

**SCOPE**

The scope of the present paper is confined to the documentation and digitization of biographies of eminent poets of Kashmir by way of identifying and exploring information pertaining to the Poets from varied sources available.
OBJECTIVES
The objectives of the study are as under:

1. To identify information about the selected poets of Kashmir.
2. To translate the biographies of the identified Poets into English from Urdu and Kashmiri languages.
3. To document the biographical details of each writer.
4. To assign metadata for each biographical record.
5. To build the collection using Greenstone Digital Library Software.
6. To search and browse the collection for efficient and timely retrieval.

METHODOLOGY
In order to fulfill objectives, descriptive methodology is adopted. Personal visits to eminent personalities, Urdu and Kashmiri Department of University of Kashmir and Art and Culture Academy were carried out. Besides, various tacit sources have been consulted in order to collect the information regarding the problem. Information related to many Poets was translated from Kashmiri and Urdu Languages to English. Biographical details of each writer were documented using MS-Word. Greenstone software is employed to achieve the specified objectives. In addition, web resources were also consulted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
A vast amount of literature has been published discussing the topic of the digital libraries and Open Source Software's (OSS). Digital libraries are managed collection of information, with associated services, where the information is stored in digital formats and accessible over a network. The Digital Library Federation (1999) representing the practical community, defines digital library as follows: Digital libraries are organizations that provide the resources, including the specialized staff, to select, structure, offer intellectual access to, interpret, distribute, preserve the integrity of, and ensure the persistence over time of collections of digital works so that they are readily and economically available for use by a defined community or set of communities. In addition, digital libraries may be seen as new forms of information institutions,
multimedia information retrieval systems, or information systems that support the
creation, use, and searching of digital content (Arms, 2000). Some key applications
identified for digital libraries included (i) archival preservation such as manuscripts,
ancient literary works, cultural artifacts, community identities, (ii) legal documentation
such as government documentation of plans and policies, history of legal cases, census
and statistical data, spatial data and other relevant information that can be brought into
the public domain, and (iii) educational and research purposes such as scholarly
publishing, theses, research work, hosting reference material (Koohang & Ondracek
2005).

Since the launch of the Digital Library Initiative (DLI) projects in 1996, there
has been substantial attention accorded to digital libraries research and development.
Concurrent with this interest has been a significant emphasis on the digital library (DL)
phenomenon in academic research. Over the past 15 years, there has been a
tremendous growth in the number of journals dedicated to discussion of digital libraries
(Pomerantz & Marchionini, 2007). Cronin (1997) has pointed out that digital libraries
(DLs) have in a sense, brought together the convergence of librarians and information
scientists, computer scientists, cognitive scientists, cultural anthropologists, electrical
engineers and many other professions who share the common desire for a better
understanding of the nature of distributed information systems and of knowledge access
in a digital environment (Liew, 2009). Currently, digital libraries acquire content through
deposit, obtain access to it under subscription, or acquire it through harvesting (it or its
metadata) from distributed resources. Since 2001, OAI-PMH is increasingly being used
(Bearman, 2008). According to Lyman and Varian (2003), digital materials saw an 87
percent increase and paper a 36 percent increase between 1999 and 2002. Storage,
organization, and preservation of physical materials will continue to be important, but as
the quantity of digital materials in the world continues to increase, storage, organization,
and preservation of digital materials will be increasingly important. This paper further
argues that in many ways digital libraries really are places in the conceptual sense, and
will continue to broaden and enrich the roles that libraries play in people’s lives and in
the larger social milieu.
Krishnamurthy (2008) in his article concludes that the open source movement has produced vast quantities of valuable software, as well as raised public awareness of issues like open access and open content. Digital libraries, open access and OS software are a natural outgrowth of the open models of exchange that help societies grow and prosper. Das (2003) presents and analyses the development of open source software and the building of digital library with reference to the GSDL software. It is predicted that GSDL is becoming popular digital library software because of its flexibility and low cost of ownership. The author conclude that because of its cost effectiveness and flexibility GSDL can be a powerful tool in bridging the gap of digital divide in India. According to (Witten, Bainbridge, 2005) the Greenstone Digital Library (GSDL) software was developed by the New Zealand digital library project at the University of Waikato in the early 2000s, and provides a suite of open source software for building and distributing digital library collections. The Greenstone Digital Library Software provides a way of building and distributing digital library collections, opening up new possibilities for organizing information and making it available over the Internet or on CD-ROM (Witten and Bainbridge, 2003). Witten & Bainbridge (2005) reveal in their paper that Greenstone incorporates an interface that makes it easy for people to create their own library collections. Collections may be built and served locally from the user's own web server, or (given appropriate permissions) remotely on a shared digital library host. End users can easily build new collections styled after existing ones from material on the Web or from their local files (or both), and collections can be updated and new ones brought on-line at any time. The use of Greenstone internationally is growing rapidly, and several web sites show collections created by external users. Most contain unusual and interesting material, presented in novel and imaginative ways. The paper briefly reviews a selection of Greenstone digital library sites to give a feeling for how Greenstone is being used for public digital libraries throughout the world.. Tansley, Huang, Witten, Bainbridge & Don (2005) discuss in a paper that Greenstone and DSpace are widely used software systems for digital libraries and tried to describe the two systems and identify their similarities and differences. Besides, they presented StoneD as a bridge between the production versions of Greenstone and DSpace that allows users of either system to easily migrate to the other, or continue with a
combination of both. Hasan, Takeuchi, Isahara & Sornlertlambanich (2003) at the Thai Computational Linguistic (TCL) Laboratory of CRL Asia Research Center, planned to implement and host digital libraries in several major Asian languages and described their experiences in implementing Thai and Japanese digital libraries using Greenstone. Kennedy (2008) conducted a survey to gather feedback from Greenstone users and developers about the adequacy of current support structures and mechanisms and how support for users might be improved or augmented in the future to guide the collection developers at the point of considering a metadata schema for their digital collection. Marianne (2009) in his research concludes that the relationship between collections and digital techniques has now entered a new phase in which the most important issue is not one of having access to the catalogues by means of digital communication, but rather one of making the content of the collections available to users over the Internet. Witten (2003) in a paper of his own discuss that the collection that was created by the Chinese Department at Peking University with the assistance of a New Zealand Digital Library project members. The collection contains rubbings of Tang Dynasty poetry, whose originals were carved into wood or stone. These are collections of images, but the text has been hand-entered into electronic form. The entire interface is in Chinese, and, like all Greenstone collections, is fully searchable. Thomas, Ahmad & Karen (2001) in their research discuss project ENRICH as a pioneering work in the field of digital libraries. The aim of the ENRICH project is the creation of a base for the European digital library research environment for study of specific historical cultural heritage consisting of manuscripts, incunabula, early printed books, historical archival materials, etc. (Witten, 2003) reviewing the eminent digital online libraries points out that Digital libraries research site at Texas A&M University has laid emphasis on digital flora collections of digital images of plants. There are several prototype Greenstone collections containing numerous plant images, classified according to a family tree, and a separate collection with detailed biological descriptions of plants. Good use is made of Greenstone's hierarchical browsing facilities to allow access through standard biological taxonomic structures. (Iqbal, 2008) in his research discuss the creation of an information system; Floral Potential of Jammu & Kashmir (FPOK), a project to digitize the indigenous knowledge of flora of J&K. The project
developed at DLISc in collaboration with DSIR, which provide detailed information about herbs and shrubs. The project portrays botanical, chemical information and indigenous knowledge about the flora of J&K while as each record provides links and active buttons for retrieving images.

CONTRIBUTION OF KASHMIRI POETS TO LITERATURE

Kashmir is supposed to be the originating center of human culture, and it is popularly known as the Paradise on Earth. Kashmiri is one of the Aryan languages of India, and it is an interesting and important language in many ways, although the number of people speaking it is not very large. In the first instance, Kashmiri has a fine literature, particularly rich in lyrics of life and nature, besides compositions in the mystic vein both Brahmanical (Sivite) and Islamic (Sufi). It has got a large number of long poems, both of Sanskrit and of Persian inspiration, and there is in present-day Kashmiri quite a note worthy literary upsurge.

The history of Kashmiri literature may be divided into the following three periods, paralleling what we have in most other languages of India, both Aryan and Dravidian:

(1) Old Kashmiri, from 1200 to 1500 A.D.
(2) Middle Kashmiri, from 1500 to 1800 A.D.
(3) New or Modern Kashmiri, after 1800 A.D.

The earliest compositions so far available in Kashmiri would appear to be the 94 four-line stanzas found in a Sanskrit work called the Mahanaya-praka'sa ('Illumination of the Highest Attainment or Discipline') by Sitikantha Acarya. Grierson, following a Kashmiri scholar, thought that this work belonged to the fourth quarter of the 15th century; but a closer study of the subject-matter as well as the language, with some internal evidence from the name and the title of the author, will go to show that the work is much older. Prof. Pushp, has discovered another work of unknown date, the Chumma-Sampradaya, giving 74 verses, which in their language and in their subject-matter also belong to the age of the Mahanaya prakasa (Culturopedia, 2012).

Indian Literature without the contribution of Kashmir would be hollow. Kashmir has produced scholars of Sanskrit Kavya Shastra: Vamana, the founder of the Riti School and Udbhatta, the teacher of different theories of Riti; Rudratta, Ananda Vardhana,
Mamatta and Abhinavgupta, Kayyatta, Ruyyaka and Mahima Batta-all were Kashmiris. Anand Vardhana is the founder of Dhvani School and Mammatta of Rasa School. Abhinavgupta’s doctrine is that Rasadhvani is the soul of Literature. Patanjali was also a Kashmiri. Thus Kashmir has given a lot to the Indian Poetics and Literature. Kashmir has produced many Sanskrit scholars and mystics. Kashmiri poetry begins with the works of great mystic poetess Lalleshwari of 14th century. The 14th century Saiva woman-saint Lal Ded or Lalla Ded has written many compositions in Kashmiri which are still very popular, both among Hindus and Muslims. Lal Ded propounded the yoga philosophy and high moral truths in Kashmiri verse. These are called Lala Vakh or sayings of Lal Ded. These sayings are the gems of Kashmiri poetry and true knowledge of yoga. These are deep and sublime. She was influenced by Kashmir Shaivism and Shankracharya’s Advaita Philosophy. The period 1500-1800 AD witnessed the continuous development of Kashmiri literature. Hubba Khatun (1551-1606 AD) was a very remarkable poetess, whose lyrics on love and romance called lol still captivate the Kashmiri people. Rupabhavani and Aranimal were other great poetesses of Kashmir. Sahib Kaul, a Hindu poet who lived during the time of Jehangir, wrote Krishnaavatara and Jananmcharita. The Ramayana was adapted into Kashmiri by Prakasarama (or Divakaraprakasa Bhatta) in his Ramavatarcharita in the late 18th century. He later wrote its sequel the Lavakusacharita. Mir Abdullah Baihaqi’s Koshir-Aqaid and Mukhtasar Waqayah also belong to this period, which saw many Persian works like Laila-Majnu and Shirin-Khusro being adapted in Kashmiri. Like Lal Ded, another mystic poet of Kashmiri language is Nunda Rishi, who is known as Sheikh Nur-ed-Din alias Sahajanand. Nunda Rishi is the great founder of Rishi line of Kashmir. Jonaraja refers to him as Maha Nurdin-the chief guru of Muslims—but the saint poet always refers to himself only as Nunda. He preached to subdue the five senses and control Kama (Raina, 1995).

Mahmud Gami (1765-1855) was a prolific writer who used with equal competence almost all forms of poetry in Kashmiri — mathnavi, vatsun, ghazal, rouf, na’t — although his greatest contribution is in the area of mathnavi. Rasul Mir was a younger contemporary of Gami but his poetry, far less in volume and variety than that of Gami, is much more chiselled and artistically consummate. He is perhaps the greatest and most
immaculate master of the ghazal in our tradition. Parmanand (1789-1885) was a Hindu devotional poet and, thematically, his poetry is mainly concerned with mystical themes. Maqbool Kralawari (1820-1877) wrote both in Persian and Kashmiri, and in Kashmiri he made use of most of the poetic forms — devotional poems, satirical pieces and ghazals — but his reputation rests on his great mathnavi, Gulrez, which is a free rendering of a Persian romance by Zia-ud-Din Nakhshabi. The Earliest use of Kashmiri in literature is found in Kalhana’s Rajatarangini (12th century AD) in which a three-word phrase of Kashmiri Apabhramsa is used. However, the earliest composition in Kashmiri appears to be the Mahanayaparakasa of Sitikantha Acharya, which belong to the period 1200-1500 AD. Another work of unknown date called Chumma-sampradaya also provides the oldest specimen of Kashmiri literature. The 14th century Saiva woman-saint Lal Ded or Lalla Ded has written many compositions in Kashmiri which are still very popular, both among Hindus and Muslims. The sayings or shruks of another mystic poet Sheikh Nuruddin (1377-1440 AD) have been collected in the book Nurnama or Rshinama. Utthasoma, Yodhabhatta and Bhatta Avatara were the important Kashmiri poets in the court of Zainul Abidin (1420-1470 AD). Utthasoma’s treatise on music called Manaka, Yodhabhatta’s Jainacharita and Jainaparakasa and Avatara’s Jainavilasa were important works of this period. Banasuravadha is considered as the earliest epic poem in Kashmir. The period 1500-1800 AD witnessed the continuous development of Kashmiri literature. Hubba Khatun (1551-1606 AD) was a very remarkable poetess, whose lyrics on love and romance called lol still captivate the Kashmiri people. Rupabhavani and Aranimal were other great poetesses of Kashmir. Sahib Kaul, a Hindu poet who lived during the time of Jehangir, wrote Krishnaavatara and Jananmcharita. The Ramayana was adapted into Kashmiri by Prakasarama (or Divakaraparakasa Bhatta) in his Ramavatarcharita in the late 18th century. He later wrote its sequel the Lavakusacharita. Mir Abdullah Baihaqi’s Koshir-Aqaid and Mukhtasar Waqayah also belong to this period, which saw many Persian works like Laila-Majnu and Shirin-Khusro being adapted in Kashmiri.

In the period after 1800 AD, Kashmiri literature came under the influence of Urdu and English, apart from Sanskrit and Persian giving rise to new ideas and styles. Mahmud Gami, Maqbool Shah, Paramanand and Wahhab Pare were some of the early poets of
this period. Mahmud Gami produced note-worthy works like Yusuf-Zulaikha, Laila-Majnu and Shirin-Khusro. He also wrote a large number of ghazals. Paramanand wrote many narrative poems like Radhaswaymvara, Sudamcharita and Sivalagan based on Sanskrit Puranas. Abdul Wahab Pare (1845-1913) adapted Firdausi’s Shahnama into Kashmiri and also translated the Akbarnama. Another competent period of the same period was Lakshman Ju who authored Nala-Damayati and a number of ghazals and short poems in Kashmiri. The Sikandarnama of the 12th century poet Nizami was translated into Kashmiri by Maulavi Siddiquullah. K.F.Burkhard and G.A.Grierson were the two European scholars who promoted Kashmiri literature during this period. The other important works of this period include Krishna Razdan’s Sivaparinaya; Dinanath’s Krishnavataralila; Waliullah Mattu’s Himal Ta Nagaraya, Azizullah Haqqani’s Gazliyat-i-Haqqani and Ramzan Bath’s Akhndanana. Pirzada Ghulam Ahmad Mahjur (1885-1952) was one of the earliest nationalistic poets of Kashmir who wrote several lyrical and patriotic poems with political themes. Nandalal Kaul was a famous poet and dramatist of Kashmiri. He wrote noteworthy dramas like Satach Kahwath, Ramun Raj, Dayalal and Prahlada Bhagat. The Bhagwad Gita was rendered into Kashmiri by Pandit Narayan Khar (Culturopedia, 2012).

Important Kashmiri poets of the post-Independence period include Abdul Ahmad Azad, Dinanath Nadim, Amin Kamil, Ghulam Rasul Nazki, Rahman Rahi, Abdul Haqq Barq and Nur Mohammed Roshan. Dinanath Nadim’s poems like Yirada, Ba Gyavna Az and Zindabad Shyamji brought new vigour into Kashmiri verse. He also wrote an opera called Bambur Yambarzal in 1953, for which he won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967. Nadim joined hands with Roshan and produced another opera, Himal ta Nagaraya in 1956. Rahman Rahi is also a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1962) for his Nauroz-i-Saba. Another writer, Akthar Mahiuddin also won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958 for his collection of short stories Sathsangar. He also has to his credit two novels, Dod Dag and Zuv ta Zolana, and another collection of poems called Swanzal (Koul, 2001).

**Collection Building**

The Digital Library of Eminent Poets of Kashmir has been created using Greenstone 2.80. The collection can be browsed and searched through various
approaches like Name, Pen Name, Place of Birth, Year of Birth, Year of Death, Preferred Language and Form of Poetry. The Collection Building Process has been started as:

Greenstone Librarian Interface 2.83 was used for building the digital library of eminent Kashmiri Poets.

Fig1 Showing the main screen of Greenstone Librarian Interface.
Fig 2. Assigning Collection title and brief description for the new Collection

Fig 3. Gathering files for building the Collection.
Fig 4 Managing new metadata set for the collection.

Fig 5. Adding metadata elements to new metadata set.
Fig 6. Enriching the Collection by adding values to metadata elements.

Fig 7. Assigning search indexes to the collection
Fig 8. Assigning Browsing Classifiers for the Collection.

Fig 9. Building the Collection.
Sample Snap shots of Digital Library of Kashmir Poets

Fig 1. Main Page of the digital library “Digitising the Kashmiri Poets”

Fig 1.1
Fig. 1.1 & 1.2 Displays the biography of Poet Pirzada Ghulam Ahmad Mehjoor.

**LIFE SKETCH**

Born on August 11, 1887, at Mirgani, a picturesque hamlet 40 km south-west of Srinagar, Mehjoor received his early education from his father, Pir Abdulhadi Shafi, a Persian and Arabic scholar and a village preacher by profession. His mother having died when he was only two years old, Mehjoor was brought up by his grandmother who was well-versed in Arabic and Persian lore. Later he was sent to a madrasha (religious school) in the neighbouring township of Tral where his association with Abdal Gau Ashaq, a reputed Kashmiri poet and Persian scholar, fired his imagination and produced in him a burning passion for writing poetry. Mehjoor, the immortal poet of Kashmir, represents the peak of the romantic era of the literature of the valley. His songs and poems, rich with native imagery and remarkable rhythm, delighted and moved the common people of Kashmir to national awareness. He sung of the ideal and the actual, of love and nature, of aspiration and beauty. His command of glance and sense still remains unexceeded in Kashmiri literature.

**LITERARY CONTRIBUTION**

Mehjoor began writing Kashmiri poetry in earnest from 1914. In 1927, *Poshe-man-e-Janamo* (My beloved, Founded after flowers), became popular overnight. In 1935 he published his poem *Baiger Nishat Ke Gule* (Flower of Nishat Garden), a masterpiece in nature poetry, at all India High symposium organised by a literary association in Srinagar. When a poem of his, the "*Country Lane*", was shown to Rabindranath Tagore, he was so impressed by it that he unhesitatingly called Mehjoor "the Wordsworth of Kashmir" with the poem itself being comparable to the English poet's "*Solitary Reaper*". Poets like Tagore and Iqbal who were his contemporaries acknowledged his greatness as a poet and his role in enriching the Kashmiri language.

While in the earlier stage of his literary career, Mehjoor concentrated on love poems in the backdrop of rhythm seen in nature. during the nineteen-forties he was attracted by the freedom movement and gave a new direction and tilt to his thought and expression, rising the common

![Digitising the Kashmiri Poets](image_url)

Fig 2. Screen displays the filenames of the Kashmiri Poets
REFERENCES


