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Nandita Barman

University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, nanditabarman17@gmail.com

Aimy Tatuk

University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, aimytatuk@gmail.com

Amrita Devi

University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, amritadevi24@gmail.com

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Documentation and Preservation of Rare Manuscript Collections in Bomdila and Tawang Monasteries of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study

Nandita Barman*

**Assistant Professor, DLISc,
University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya**

Aimy Tatuk**

**MLISc Student, DLISc,
University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya**

Amrita Devi***

**Assistant Professor, DLISc,
University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya**

Abstract: *Cultural heritage reflects as an indispensable part of any country's identity and manuscripts uplift the entire picture. But it can be noticed that most of these manuscripts are in a state of damage and extinction due to various aspects related to it such as the prevailing climatic conditions, lack of preservation policies, lack of interest and initiatives, etc. The concept of preservation, conservation, restoration has not been able to be implemented soundly in many places so far due to a lack of technical knowledge and manpower. For this reason, there must be a proper action plan defined before taking up any preservation work in hand. However, North East India itself has thousands of both Vaishnava and Buddhist manuscripts containing ideas regarding the cultural interaction of North East India with Tibet and parts of South East Asia. Therefore, the present study is concerned with the Buddhist Libraries of Bomdila and Tawang monasteries located in Arunachal Pradesh. It reflects their position as centers of Buddhist learning and diffusion of Buddhist teachings and ideas. The paper tries to evaluate the number of manuscripts available in these two monastery libraries along with the different preservation policies adopted, how the monasteries are being managed, source of funds, etc.*

Keywords: Bomdila, Buddhism, Manuscript, Monasteries, Preservation, Tawang

1. Introduction

North East India is the meeting ground of various cultures and tribes since the prehistoric period. The Buddhist monasteries in the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh patronized the writing of manuscripts as well as manuscript painting. In the present scenario, it is estimated that only in Tawang monastery there are more than five thousand rare manuscripts that contain knowledge on religion, philosophy, medicine of Lord Gautam Buddha's original preaching, etc.

Preservation is a branch that is concerned with maintaining or restoring access to artifacts, documents, and records through the study, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention from decay and damage. Buddhist texts were preserved in manuscripts for several centuries in monasteries in different parts of Asia. Modern translations have been prepared from Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan texts. Even after that, the text was recorded in sacred writings in many ancient copies of the Buddhist Canon which were often kept in special storehouses on temple grounds to preserve it for a longer duration.

2. Background of the Study

Arunachal Pradesh is the abode of various colorful tribes containing a rich tribal history and cultural heritage which can be reflected in their social-cultural- religious activities. There are more than 26 major tribes and 100 sub-tribes. Out of which half a dozen of the tribes profess Buddhism both Theravada and Mahayana forms. Buddhism is a religion, embedding philosophical and spiritual practices based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama an Indian spiritual teacher from 5th century B.C.

3. Tawang Monastery

The name of the Tawang Monastery is Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, located in the Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The library was established and inaugurated by his Holiness the Dalai Lama on 8th November 2009. The books are usually read by the Monpa Lamas who refer to it for conducting religious rituals. The Monastery accommodates 500 to 800 Lamas and is the second largest in Asia and largest of its kind in India.

A three-stored building stands on the western side of the court, known as *Par-Khang* (Library), and is of (15.3m x 15m x 9m). The Tawang monastery library is housed in a big square hall, which

covers the entire first floor. The sacred manuscripts (*Pechas*) are kept on pigeonholed racks on both the sides of the altar as well as on the northern and southern sides of the hall. Many of these valuable manuscripts are brittle and edges are broken. Handwritten manuscripts are very fragile and some of them are almost in ramshackle conditions.

4. Bomdila Monastery

The name of the Bomdila Monastery is known as Gontse Gaden Rabgye –Ling Monastery which was built in 1965. The library in Bomdila Monastery which was initiated under the guidance of His Eminence the 13th Tsona Gontse Rinpoche was eventually started functioning in the year 2014. The library was named after the great Indian scholar Acharaya Ashva Ghosh of the ancient Nalanda University, to facilitate books on various subjects' interest to the researchers and readers, and also to treasures all ancient religious treasures and artifacts in the museum. The library also keeps plenty of books on Buddhist philosophy, culture, knowledge, and wisdom.

5. Review of Related Literature

Maltesh and Devi (2006) in their study discussed the method to restore rare Buddhist Manuscripts of Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur along with the problems associated with digitalization through scientific methods and electronic scanning, etc. **Senanayake (2006)** in his study discussed the problem of copying the manuscripts for preservation purposes which faced many hurdles due to ownership issues. It highlighted the need for legal clarification and creating awareness to allow the libraries to proceed with preservation. **Mazumdar (2009)** in his study discussed the use of Information Technology to facilitate the preservation of documents, i.e. digital preservation. As manuscripts are the primary sources of historic information the paper highlights some of the initiatives taken in Assam for the digital preservation of manuscripts.

Another study conducted by **Evens and Hauttekeete (2011)** in their article pointed out the issues that were hampering the sustainability of digital preservation within cultural heritage. Using a case study done in Belgium the authors tried to explain that digital preservation policies in most of the organizations are underdeveloped and even the archives suffer from deterioration and technological obsolescence. **Kaur (2015)** in her study discussed how the old methods of preservation are failing to save the manuscripts and pointed out that there is an urgent need for

digitalization of manuscripts to save them from further decay or damage. The paper also discussed the digitalization projects undertaken in Punjab. **Gandhi and Ponnaivaikko (2017)** in their article reflected about the importance of preservation of historical manuscripts that reveals the information related to the civilized past as all ancient manuscript are available in any one of the forms like stone and metal carvings, palm leaf manuscripts, paper manuscripts, etc. They discussed the need to restore and preserve the documents by researchers by using modern tools and techniques.

6. Objectives of the Study

The study focusses on the following objectives:

- i. To find out the present status of the Bomdila and Tawang monasteries.
- i. To study and know in detail about the different collections, preservation and conservation methods, and policies adopted for the longevity of the rare manuscripts.
- iii, To find out the object-de-arts of archeological and historical importance from the selected research region.

7. Area of the Study

This study is concerned with Buddhist Libraries of Bomdila and Tawang monasteries located in Arunachal Pradesh. It identifies libraries in Buddhist settings. It reflects their position as centers of Buddhist learning and diffusion of Buddhist teachings and ideas. It also explores their role as institutional repositories and archives. The study reveals the number of documented and preserved manuscripts in both libraries.

8. Methodology

For data collection, the survey method was adopted to gather necessary information about the topic by designing a structured questionnaire and distributed personally at both the monasteries. Followed by observation and personal interview was made to visualize the real-life situation of the two monastery libraries. The collected data have been tabulated and analyzed for interpretation and discussion.

9. Data Analysis and Interpretation

General information about the Surveyed Monasteries

In Table No.9.1 below, the general information related to the two monasteries are shown where their year of establishment, address, and pin code is being mentioned.

Table N. 9.1 General Information about the Monasteries

Name of the Monastery	Year of Estd.	Location
Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, Tawang	28/10/2014	Tawang
Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	2009	Bomdila

Types of Management

The surveyed Buddhist libraries had different sources of management like the library of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila is being managed through private aided management. Whereas the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, Tawang is managed through various bodies like Government, Religious, and Local.

Table No. 9.2 Types of Management

Name of the Monastery	Government	Private Aided	Self-Financing	Religious Body	Local Body Form
Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Tawang	✓	-	-	✓	✓
Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Bomdila	-	✓	-	-	-

Total Number of Documents

In the table below, it can be seen that Bomdila library has a total of 2555 numbers of printed collections, 590 nos. of Manuscript collection, and 2500 digital collection. In Tawang library, a total number of 8000 printed collections are available, 1200 numbers of Manuscript collection and 200 Digital collections, and about 450 numbers of other types of the collection which are not being specified by them.

Table No. 9.3 Total No. of Documents

Type of Documents	Number of Documents	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse, Tawang
Printed Collection	2555	8000
Manuscript Collection	590	1200
Digital collection	2500	200
Other(Please Specify)	-	450

Types of Manuscripts Available

The total number of manuscripts and its types of manuscripts that were present in both monasteries can be seen in the table below. In the Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery of Bomdila, it consists of 100 Palm Leaf Manuscripts, 100 Birch Bark Manuscripts, and 390 Paper Manuscripts. On the other hand, in the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery of Tawang, 200 Palm Leaf Manuscripts, 20 Birch Bark Manuscripts, and 200 Paper Manuscripts are available.

Table No. 9.4 Types of Manuscripts

Types of Manuscript	Number of Manuscripts	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse, Tawang
Palm Leaf Manuscript	100	200
Birch Bark Manuscript	100	20
Paper Manuscript	390	200

Number of Manuscripts Preserved

As per the survey it came to light that the Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery of Bomdila has not yet adopted any kind of preservation methods till the date of time. But the library in Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang was found to have adopted preservation methods which are shown below in the Table. It was found that the library has preserved 250 manuscripts by Digital Scanning and another 20 Digital Photography 250 and 100 through Chemical Treatment.

Table No.9.5 Number of Manuscripts Preserved

Types of Preservation Methods	Number of Manuscripts Preserved	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse, Tawang
Micro Filming of Manuscript	-	-
Digital Scanning	-	250
Digital photography	-	250

Chemical Treatment	-	100
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Manuscripts Acquired through Different Sources

As per the survey, the manuscript acquired by these two monasteries can be reflected below in the Table. The manuscripts acquired by Bomdila Monastery are from Local people is 1 and National Organization is 400. On the other side, the Tawang Monastery library has received the manuscript from Local people is 1500 and International Organization is 8400.

Table No.9.6 Acquiring of Manuscripts

Types of Acquiring Methods	Acquiring of Manuscripts	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse Tawang
Local People	1	1500
National organization	400	-
International organization	-	8400

Funding Source of Income for the Two Monastery Libraries

The funding for Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery comes from private sources and is undefined whereas the funding for Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery comes from various sources most likely from the local authority, State Government and Central Government. Below are the given numbers of amounts funded by different sources.

Table No. 9.7 Funding Sources of Income

Funding Sources	Funding/Source of Income	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse Tawang
Local Authority	Did Not Mention	✓
State Government	-do-	✓
Central Government	-do-	✓

Areas of Document Collections

The areas of collection of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery includes 3336 copies related to Religion and Philosophy, 130 copies related to Science and Technology, and 135 copies related to History, Art, and Culture. On the other hand, the areas of collection of Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang includes 1400 copies related to Religion and Philosophy, 600 copies related to Science and Technology, 350 copies related to Health and Medical, and 1050 copies related to History, Art, and Culture.

Table No. 9.8 Areas of Document Collections

Areas	Areas of Document Collections	
	Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling, Bomdila	Gaden Namgyal Latse Tawang
Religious & Philosophy	3336	1400
Science & Technology	130	600
Health & Medical	-	350
History, Art & Culture	135	1050

Findings of the Study

The various finding of the study is being highlighted below:

- The Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang is funded by Government, Religious body, and Local body whereas the Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila is solely funded by Government.
- It was found both the persons deployed in the monasteries were non-professional.
- The seating capacity of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila is around 50-100. On the other hand, the seating capacity of Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang is 100-150.
- The total number of documents in Bomdila Monastery for printed collections is 2555, the Manuscript collection is 590, the digital collection is 2500 and in Tawang Monastery library a total number of document and printed collection is 8000, Manuscript collection is 1200, and Digital collection is 200, others collection is 450.
- The Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery of Bomdila consist of 100 Palm Leaf Manuscripts, 100 Birch Bark Manuscripts, and 390 Paper Manuscripts whereas the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery in Tawang consist of 200 Palm Leaf Manuscripts, 20 Birch Bark Manuscripts, and 200 Paper Manuscripts
- For the preservation methods in the Tawang monastery library, they used some digital techniques which include Digital Scanning where 250 documents are scanned followed by 250 no. of documents are Digitally Photographed 250 and 100 are done Chemical Treatment.
- The Bomdila Monastery library acquires manuscripts through local people contribution and National Organization (400) and the Tawang Monastery library also acquire through local people (500) and International Organization (8400).
- The total collection of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery includes 3336 copies related to Religion and Philosophy, 130 copies related to Science and Technology, and 135 copies related to History, Art, and Culture and on the other side Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang includes 1400 copies related to Religion and Philosophy, 600 copies related to Science and Technology, 350 copies related to Health and Medical and 1050 copies related to History, Art and Culture.

- Both Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery and Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery have Library Committees to look after their libraries. From acquiring of new books to looking after the staffs to the managing of funds all the works were done by them.
- It came to light that the Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila, and Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang does not co-operate with other organizations or agencies to develop their digitalization program.
- Both the libraries of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila, and Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang use other scripts too for digitalizing the documents which are Bhoti and Devanagari scripts.
- Both the libraries of Gontse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila, and Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang used the special software called Monlam Bodyig to digitalize non-Latin alphabet scripts.
- It was found that the Gonyse Gaden Rabgye Ling Monastery, Bomdila does not have an independent or separate library building of its own but the Gaden Namgyal Lhatse Monastery, Tawang do have a separate building for its library.

Suggestions

- All the major heritage resources should be digitized. After digitization, the digital surrogate will be preserved and protected as well as the original will also remain safe. The digitized resources may be more easily available for access to the users within and outside the premises of the center through internet connectivity.
- A major hurdle in digital preservation is the provisions of Intellectual Property Rights. In the Indian Copyright Act, 1957 and IT Act, 2000, there is no provision for the digitization of cultural heritage. There is a need to revise these acts to deal with the IPR and other Copyright issues for the digitization of cultural heritage resources.
- A qualified and trained professional librarian should be deployed in both the Monastery Libraries for all the digitization projects and to come up with concrete plans and policies.

Conclusion

Preservation of heritage resources is a must. Digital and Multimedia technologies have opened up new opportunities for heritage institutions to preserve as well as to show-case their

collection beautifully. Much has been initiated by both the surveyed Monasteries through various projects, but the Centre is yet to draft proper policy guidelines for preservation, digitization, and provisions for access to the heritage resources available to them. There is a need for a thorough policy for the preservation of cultural heritage in India and a collaborative approach is strongly recommended for this purpose. Digitization of library materials has quickly become common practice in a great many institutions. It provides an excellent opportunity to widely disseminate our documentary heritage and greatly increases access to library collections of rare documents as well as current research literature.

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