

“Conservation of Manuscript”

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Abstract - The vast manuscript wealth of India contains the ‘memory of the world’. Featuring hundreds of themes, India’s manuscripts represent sophisticated ideas and the most timeless of pursuits – capturing ideas through language. It is said that people’s spoken, and written language is their most important cultural attribute. In India, over thousands of years, manuscripts have been written in a vast number of languages and each in itself embodies their history. Today, thousands of manuscripts lie neglected in institutions and homes around the country, in urgent need of conservation. India possesses more than an estimated five million manuscripts, making them disappear at an alarming rate. They are found on materials such as birch, palm leaf, handmade paper and cloth that require specialized care and conservation.

Key Words: conservation, preservation, restoration, Heritage. Curative Conservation

1. Introduction

It is necessary to build up basic infrastructure and a resource bank of trained conservation personnel. Hundreds of museums, libraries, research institutions, archives, conservation centers and individuals in various parts of India have been doing exemplary service for the conservation of India's manuscript heritage. They have often voiced the need to have a set of guidelines in a comprehensive tongue that can help individuals and institutions to achieve their objective to conserve their collections in a systematic manner.

2. what is manuscript

What are Manuscripts: In the classical sense, the term ‘Manuscripts’ refers to a document handwritten by an author. Manuscripts are found in every part of the world where human beings put their thoughts and experiences into a written form. Though human beings over the ages have also used stone, metal and parchment as writing supports, we shall limit our reference in this booklet to those Manuscripts that have been written on a support made principally of plant material.

3. Types of manuscripts found in India

3.1 Tal-patra manuscripts:

Tal-patra manuscripts are usually seen in the form of bundles of 50 to 100 neatly shaped leaves of even size strung together with a cord and pressed between two wooden boards. Some collections also have metre-long uncut leaves, with midribs intact, rolled like a carpet. Hundreds of museums, libraries, research institutions, archives, conservation centres and individuals in various

parts of India have been doing exemplary service for the conservation of India's manuscript heritage.

3.2 Bhoja -patra trees and manuscripts:

Bhoja-patra manuscripts are usually seen in the form of a sheaf of paper thin ‘folios’ cut to an even size. These are sometimes bound together with cord on the sides, though usually they are kept piled up together between two wooden boards and then wrapped in cloth.

3.3 Hansi-pata Manuscripts

Hansi-pata manuscripts, also made from bast of the Agaru tree, are usually seen in the form of a sheaf of ‘folios’ cut to an even size. These are rarely bound together and are usually kept piled up together between wooden boards and covered with cloth.

4 Definitions related to conservation of Manuscripts

4.1 Conservation

Any direct or indirect action on a damaged or undamaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at enhancing the life of the manuscript(s) can be termed as conservation.

4.2 Preventive Conservation

Any direct or indirect action on a damaged or undamaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at enhancing the life of the manuscript(s) by reducing future risks of deterioration can be termed as preventive conservation. For e.g. Regular inspection of the condition of the collection for e.g. Deputing staff for training in preventive conservation techniques

4.3 Curative Conservation

Any direct action on a damaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at stopping active deterioration in the manuscript(s) can be termed as curative conservation. For e.g. Fumigation of a manuscript collection that has live insects in it.

4.4 Restoration

Any direct action on a damaged manuscript aimed at improving the visual aspect of the manuscript can be termed as restoration. For e.g. Removing pencil marks from a manuscript folio.

5 Why should we take care of our manuscripts

5.1 Duty

If we have taken on the role of custodians, curators, conservators or employees of an institution which deals with manuscripts, then, to put it very plainly, to take care of the manuscripts is what we are paid for. As scholars and students also, it is our duty to take care of manuscripts as they are a source of knowledge. For the common man too, the Constitution of India states, under Fundamental Duties in Article 51A, "It shall be the duty of every citizen

of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture".

5.2 Respect

One of the values that finds presence in almost all Indians is that of respect for that which provides us knowledge. This is a good reason to take care of our manuscripts with sincerity.

5.3 Knowledge

Manuscripts contain knowledge and wisdom that have developed over millennia through the efforts and experiences of generations of families. Much of this knowledge may not have been recorded or known and if such

knowledge disappears through the loss of the manuscript, then it will be very unfortunate to have lost this memory of human progress.

5.4 Historical significance

Many manuscripts contain references to events of the past. At the same time, those manuscripts which have survived for centuries, themselves have significance of antiquity. Many of the manuscripts have been written by eminent personalities of their times, or contain their thoughts. The material of the manuscripts, the methods and techniques with which the leaf, the bark or the paper was processed and the manners in which the inks were prepared also have great historical significance as most of these practices have fallen to disuse and the manuscripts are the only unique surviving examples of these practices.

5.5 Artistic value

Many of these manuscripts have beautiful illustrations, exquisitely formed letters, and show a fine sense of composition in the layout of the text. The leaf, the paper or the bark itself has been produced by master craftsmen in many cases. The artistic value of the manuscript sometimes also manifests in the form of a high monetary value of the manuscript and therefore most custodians and owners take even more care of such manuscripts.

5.6 Emotional value

Often even a rough piece of paper with the simplest of scrawls, written by our child or our grandparents or a loved one, holds immense emotional significance for us and we take care of it as one of our personal treasures. Manuscripts under our care may have held such significance for the owner who donated it to us or to our institution.

5.7 Link in human progress

Be it for reasons of technology or for the transmission of knowledge, these manuscripts are links in the progress of people of a region and of humanity. Even physically most of these manuscripts have been copied by scribes when the original had degraded, and in turn the copied manuscript

was recopied before reaching us. When people took such effort to keep the text alive, we cannot possibly just let it go to waste.

5.8 Faith

When a person, a community or another institution donates, sells or refers a manuscript to us or to our institution, there is hope that the manuscript will be taken

care of and faith is placed on us that we will be honest in the way we look after it and as genuine as we appeared when we 'collected' the manuscript. Many such persons and communities have passed away leaving with us their manuscripts. We must take care of what they gave us, incomplete faith, to take care of.

6. Minimum Standards for a Manuscripts Conservator

In greater depth all that is expected from the conservator

Assistant. Chemistry and behavior of the various materials used for conservation. The significance of the collection that is being treated. Various materials/markets that can be sourced to conserve collection. Principles of conservation. Arrive at correct conservation decisions. Work with one's own hands and thus be able to direct work by example. Execute the variety of conservation treatments required for manuscripts such as documentation, preparation of treatment records, aqueous and non-aqueous acidification, tear repairs, mending, filling of losses in paper, lining – full, strip, single and double side, removal of old repairs, resizing, cleaning of manuscripts with water soluble inks and paints, stain removal, mounting, binding, etc. Direct the above mentioned conservation treatment and manage the conservation team.

7 Minimum Requirements for a Manuscripts Conservator Unit

7.1 Collection to be conserved

Details of the number of manuscripts, type of manuscripts, condition reports and prioritization of the preventive and curative conservation steps

7.2 Space

- A floor area of at least 500 sq ft. with a water connection and outlet
- The room should be well lighted
- 5 amp electric points including one 15 amp power point

7.3 Trained Staff

- At least one staff trained in curative and preventive conservation
- One assistant trained in preventive conservation and with manual skills and knowledge to be able to follow instructions from the conservator

7.4 Furniture

- Tables with matt finish sun mica top preferably of an off-white color.
- One light table.
- One cupboard with adjustable shelves. Keep additional shelves
- Work chairs for staff
- Drying rack
- Chemical rack
- Tools cabinet
- Furniture for administration, keeping records etc.
- Other items as per requirement

7.5 Tools and Equipment

- Flat and round brushes: sable hair, hog hair, synthetic, of various sizes
- Electric heater
- Double boiler pan
- Distillation plant

- Kipps apparatus or carbon dioxide cylinders
- Enamel and plastic trays for different sizes of manuscripts and documents
- Glass or polycarbonate beakers of different sizes
- Glass rods
- Test tubes and holders
- Vacuum cleaner including a small portable one
- Conservation tool kit with scalpels, cutters, swab sticks etc.
- pH indicator materials
- Other items as per requirement
- Dry and wet bulb thermometer

7.6 Conservation Materials

- Handmade paper of various thickness, textures and colors as required for the respective collections
- Lens tissue, Nepalese tissue, Banana tissue etc.
- Binding materials.
- Acid free mount board
- Flour, gelatin, eraser powders,
- Melinex, polythene
- Pigments
- Paraloid B-72 granules
- Seashell lime
- Other items as per requirement

7.7 Chemicals

- Anti-fungal agents such as thymol, orthophenylphenol etc.
- Solvents such as trichloroethylene, toluene, methanol, ethanol etc.
- Insecticidal powders such as borax etc.
- Other items as per requirement

7.8 Documentation

- Receipt return registers
- Conservation file
- Treatment record
- Camera for photographic documentation
- Other items as per requirement

3. CONCLUSION

Manuscripts form an invaluable part of India's documentary heritage which capture our thoughts, achievements, experience, and lessons learnt from history.

The efforts needed to undertake this task need to be taken up on immediately because of the fragile nature of these manuscripts and the cost of digitizing a massive collection. Their relevance and significance need to be first made known to the present generation through various outreach programs and incentives such as scholarships and fellowships. Unless this generation is drawn into protecting these collections of manuscripts, the mission to digitize them will end up on the shelf, forgotten.

The publication of these rare manuscripts will undoubtedly be a welcome contribution in India, Asia and worldwide. If we all work together to maintain and improve the materials entrusted to our care, we can ensure that many generations of students and researchers have access to our unique and wonderful collection.

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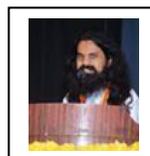
Conservation, preservation & restoration of manuscript

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BIOGRAPHY

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