

Storage and Handling of Manuscripts

Dr. Sarita Bhattacharjee

Librarian, Women's College, Silchar, Assam, India

ABSTRACT: *Manuscript is handwritten old document. This paper highlights the types of manuscripts that are usually found in India and also the different initiatives adopted for cataloguing the Indian manuscripts. It focuses on the guidelines for storing and also handling of the manuscripts.*

Keywords: *Manuscript, Cataloguing of Manuscripts, National Mission for Manuscripts, India, Storage, Handling*

I. INTRODUCTION

Manuscript means old document which is written by hand. The word 'Manuscript' is derived from the Latin phrase 'manu scriptum' means 'written by hand'. The Antiquities Art Treasures Act 1972 defines manuscript 'as a record of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than 75 years.' A manuscript is a handwritten composition on paper, cloth, metal, bark of tree, palm leaf or any other material. In India manuscripts are written in various languages and scripts. The major manuscripts are found in Sanskrit language. The Sanskrit collection of Sarasvai Mahal is the largest manuscripts of India which contain the major works of Sanskrit literature beginning with the Vedas. These manuscripts were written in palm leaf and papers.

II. MANUSCRIPTS IN INDIA

In the ancient times the earlier method of transferring knowledge to new generation was oral i.e. through schools called gurukulas. But it was quite difficult on the part of the learners to remember all the teachings of their Gurus. From then the writing for recording the knowledge were initiated. At the first step knowledge was expressed through symbolic drawings and then words and after that development of many languages took place.

In India it is estimated that there are 5 million manuscripts have been recorded in catalogues, 60,000 manuscripts are available in European countries. 1, 50,000 manuscripts are kept in South Asia and other Asian countries. For cataloguing the manuscripts many efforts have been made in India. In 2006 Satkari Mukhopadhyay has made an extensive survey of the cataloguing efforts of manuscripts in India. According to him the first effort was made by a Jain Monk who compiled "Brihattipanika" where he listed manuscripts of Patan, Cambey and Bharauch in 1383. The manuscript of this catalogue is still preserved in the Shantinatha Bhandara Patan. During 17th century Kavindracharya of Varanasi completed the subject wise catalogue of 2,192 manuscripts between 1629 and 1688. Emperor Tipu Sultan of Mysore had a library which was catalogued by General Charles Stewart after the defeat and death of the king. It was published in 1809. The Asiatic Society in Calcutta was established in 1785. The society took work on manuscripts collection and documentation. The first volume of the catalogue of manuscripts came in 1895-1909. The great Indian poet Rabindra Nath Tagore has rendered services for the preservation of manuscripts. In 1924 N. Aiyaswami was appointed director of manuscripts library in Tagore's university named Vishwa Bharati. He prepared a descriptive catalogue of the total collection. Tagore also had collected manuscripts from different parts of the world in 1927 and 1932. The Maharaja of Baroda contributed Rs. 66,000.00 and Nizam of Hyderabad contributed Rs. 1,00,000 to his library for conservation and preservation of manuscripts.

For preservation and conservation of Indian manuscripts Government of India under Ministry of Culture has established the 'National Mission for Manuscripts' in 2003. The aim of this mission is to create national resource base for manuscripts for enhancing their access, awareness and use for educational purposes. The National Mission for Manuscripts works with the help of 54 Manuscript Resource Centers and 49 conservation centers established across the country. The National Mission for Manuscripts has taken the initiative to nominate Indian Manuscripts for inclusion in UNESCO 'Memory of the World Register'. Under this programme UNESCO provides recognition to the most valuable documentary heritage of the world and facilitates its preservation and provides universal access to it. The Shaiva manuscripts in Pondicherry were awarded the status of UNESCO's Memory of the World in 2005 where as "Gita Govinda" and 'Chikitshamanjari' manuscripts from Odisha State Museum, Bhubaneswar.

III. TYPES OF MANUSCRIPT

In ancient times various surfaces were used by human being for writing purposes like stones, clay tablets, birch bark, palm leaf, papyrus, leather, bricks, wooden boards, paper, clay tablets and also various metals like gold, silver, copper, iron, bronze, ivory etc. But in India following types of manuscripts are generally found.

Palm leaf manuscripts: Palm leaf (Talpatra) is the oldest medium which are generally found in the form of bundles of 50 to 100 neatly shaped leaves of even size. Palm leaf manuscripts are usually wrapped in red or yellow colour clothes because it is believed that red is a repelling colour for the insects and yellow colour if produced by turmeric possess some germicidal power that repel the insects away from the manuscripts. Wooden pen was used for carving the words on palm leaves. It is said that the life of a palm leaf manuscript is far longer than a modern day device like CD or microfilm.

Birch bark manuscripts: Birch bark(Bhoja-patra) manuscripts are available in the form of a sheaf thin 'folios' of birch bark .

Hansi-pata Manuscripts: Hansi-pata manuscripts, also made from barks of the Agar 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. Hansi-pata manuscripts are found mainly in the North-Eastern State of Assam. Other than in that region, dispersion of hansi-pata manuscripts in other parts of India is very limited.

Eagle wood manuscripts: These are made from bark of the eagle tree cut to even size.

Handmade paper manuscripts: Manuscripts made of handmade paper can be found either as bundles and sheaf of folios kept between wooden boards and wrapped in cloth, or they are often also bound as books. Manuscripts on handmade paper are found all over the country.

Manuscripts on manufactured paper: A large number of manuscripts are also found on folios of modern manufactured paper. These again are either kept loose or bound together. Manuscripts on machine-made paper are found in all parts of India, especially in the various archives and museums related to modern litterateurs and other historic personalities. Various plant products are cut to small size and then made into a light coloured pulp with the help of chemicals. The paper is sized⁹ in the pulp stage, earlier with rosin(which resulted in acidic paper), and now with synthetic resin emulsions. Fine powders are added to make the pulp whiter while pigments and now dyes are added to colour it

IV. HANDLING OF MANUSCRIPTS

Storage and handling methods have a direct impact on the useful life of collections and the accessibility of information. Normal use causes wear, but inexpert and rough handling can quickly lead to extensive damage to collections. The longevity of collections can be extended significantly by putting into practice the guidelines for handling and storing of manuscripts.

- Wash hands with soap and dry them completely before handling the manuscripts.
- Turn the pages of a bound manuscript as little as possible. Turn the pages slowly and gently from the middle of the edge. If a binding is difficult to open handle it carefully and do not force it to open.
- Open the manuscript gradually. Lay it on a table.
- Avoid touching text with fingers or any other materials.
- Always use pencils to make notes. Pens should not be used while consulting the manuscripts as the ink if fallen may damage the manuscripts leaving permanent mark in it.
- Do not touch illuminations/illustrations and printed area of the manuscripts.
- Do not lean on manuscripts while reading them or taking notes.
- Do no tear or cut pages.
- Book snakes and book supports must be made available. While studying a page in a bound manuscript hold the book open with book snakes rather than fingers.
- Do not keep food and drink near the manuscript.
- Do not use rubber bands, self adhesive tape and glue on paper.
- Do not use paper clips, other fasteners, dog-ear folding to mark or organize leaves.
- Manuscripts should be placed on supportive book rest/cradles while being read.

V. STORAGE OF MANUSCRIPTS

- Clean and tidy room is necessary for the storage of manuscripts.
- Good lighting and good ventilation in the storage area.
- The storage area must be inspected at regular intervals. Train personnel to inspect reserve rooms and manuscripts regularly for mould, dust, insects and rodents. A quarantine room where recently acquired or donated manuscripts should be examined for insect or fungus attack and kept under observation before being documented and brought into the storage area.
- Use blinds screens and shutters to protect documents against sunlight. Do not expose manuscripts to direct sunlight as this may cause pages and inks to discolour and breakdown.
- Provide fire extinguishers and also define measures be taken at outbreak of fire be defined.
- Pipes and ducts should not pass through the library or reserve rooms. Provide and emergency evacuation plan to be applied in the event of flooding.
- Clean library regularly and for removing dust vacuum cleaners must be used.
- Spacing of shelves should be sufficient to allow proper circulation of air. The lower shelf should be at least 15 cm above floor level for protecting the books from dampness and rodents.
- Display the manuscripts in safe showcases and place light source outside showcase.
- Never store manuscripts on the floor. Manuscripts that are rare and in deteriorated condition should be kept in suitable boxes laying them flat.

VI. CONCLUSION

Manuscripts and archival materials are the primary sources of information which have significant value. These are unique, irreplaceable, and often fragile. Manuscripts provide information on the existence of different civilizations and emphasize the importance of their survival. The glorious past of Indian culture lies in the ancient manuscripts. These are the basic historical evidence and have great research value. In order to ensure that these manuscripts will be available for future generations we need to prevent the damages that are usually caused due to mishandling the documents.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Care and Handling of Manuscripts. In: Cultural Heritage Protection Handbook. UNESCO 2006. Accessed from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001484/148463e.pdf>
- [2]. Gaur, Ramesh C., Chakraborty, Mrinmoy, "Preservation access to Indian Manuscripts: A Knowledge base of Indian Cultural Heritage Resources for Academic Libraries". Proceedings of the International Conference on Academic Libraries. Accessed from http://crl.du.ac.in/ical09/papers/index_files/ical_14_227_489_2_RV.pdf
- [3]. Jain, Amit Kumar, Sudhir Kumar, Choudhury, Subhajit, Jain, Keertibala, and Sharma, Balkrishna. "Rare Handwritten Manuscript collection in Indic Languages at Scindia Oriental Research Institute (SORI)". IFLA WLIC 2013. Accessed from <http://library.ifla.org/17/1/095-jain-en.pdf>
- [5]. Karakas, Sekine. A New Approach to Handling Manuscripts. Accessed from <http://dergiler.ankara.edu.tr/dergiler/19/1268/14601.pdf>
- [6]. Manuscripts and Archives: Care and Handling Guidelines. Accessed from: <http://www.usc.edu/libraries/archives/arc/libraries/rarebooks/caremanu.htm>
- [7]. Safe Handling of Medieval and Early Modern Manuscripts. Accessed from http://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/pubnmem/MEM_RR_Handling_8_10%20rev.pdf
- [8]. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/4.-storage-and-handling/4.1-storage-methods-and-handling-practices>
- [9]. <http://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservation/19-17.pdf>