

# PRESERVATION AND ACCESSIBILITY OF MANUSCRIPTS IN UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES AND INSTITUTIONS OF UTTAR PRADESH: A STUDY

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Submitted By

***Suraj Kumar Dwivedi***

Enrollment No. 562/20

Under the Supervision of

***Dr. Shilpi Verma***

Professor

DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY & INFORMATION SCIENCE  
SCHOOL OF INFORMATION SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
BABASAHEB BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR UNIVERSITY

(A Central University) (NAAC A++ ACCREDITED)  
VIDYA VIHAR, RAEBARELI ROAD, LUCKNOW-226 025  
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# ABSTRACT

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## Overview

Manuscripts have been pivotal in documenting human civilization's progress, from ancient Egypt's papyrus scrolls to Mesopotamia's clay tablets. These handwritten or typewritten documents hold significant historical, cultural, or literary value. Across various cultures, including Indian and Islamic traditions, manuscripts have been instrumental in preserving religious texts, literature, historical records, and scientific knowledge. Their evolution reflects the diverse materials and methods used for writing throughout history, showcasing humanity's intellectual and spiritual heritage.

## Definitions and Perspectives

**General Definition:** Manuscripts are primary sources that offer a tangible connection to the past, embodying the thoughts, ideas, and creations of their times.

**Indian Context:** Indian manuscripts, known by various names like pandulipi and pothi, are considered repositories of historical, cultural, and philosophical heritage, often handwritten on materials like palm leaves, paper, and metals.

**Global View:** Globally, manuscripts are recognized as handwritten documents before the advent of printing, encompassing a wide range of contents and forms, including illuminated manuscripts.

## Writing Materials in Ancient India

Ancient India utilized a diverse array of writing materials, reflecting its rich cultural and environmental diversity. These included palm leaves, birch bark, metals like gold and silver, and organic materials like cotton and leather. This variety ensured the preservation of knowledge across generations.

### **Need for Manuscript Preservation**

University libraries serve as guardians of ancient manuscripts, preserving them for future generations. These writings act as time capsules, offering insights into the past and aiding historical research. Manuscripts contribute to cultural heritage, providing a link to traditions and stories passed down through generations. They are valuable sources for linguistic and scientific research, and their preservation ensures the transmission of knowledge for educational purposes.

### **National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)**

Initiated in 2003 by the Government of India, the NMM plays a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of India's manuscript heritage. Its efforts include surveying, documenting, conserving manuscripts, promoting research, and educational outreach to ensure these cultural treasures continue to inspire future generations.

### **Significance in Indian Culture**

Manuscripts are integral to understanding India's diverse cultural tapestry, offering insights into its ancient civilizations, religions, philosophies, and intellectual achievements. They serve as links to the past, reflecting the wisdom and contributions of India to world civilization.

### **Manuscript Tradition in Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh has a rich tradition of manuscript preservation, with a collection that spans various subjects and languages. These manuscripts offer a window into the region's cultural, religious, and intellectual history, emphasizing the importance of preservation efforts to keep this heritage accessible for future research and education.

## **Role of University Libraries in Manuscript Preservation**

Manuscripts in university libraries are crucial for academic exploration and heritage preservation. These original primary sources grant researchers direct access to historical records, fostering profound insights. Beyond academic value, manuscripts play a pivotal role in preserving cultural heritage, reflecting the values and aspirations of past generations. They serve as conduits connecting the contemporary world with the past, offering invaluable resources for understanding our collective history and human experiences.

### **Statements of problem**

The research underscores the inadequate preservation of old manuscripts in libraries, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, posing a risk of potential loss. These manuscripts, rich in cultural and historical significance, are essential for understanding the past. While the state boasts a significant collection, the organic materials used in manuscripts make them susceptible to deterioration. Public access accelerates their decay, prompting the need for preservation strategies. Digitization emerges as a viable solution, enabling wider access without compromising the originals.

### **Objectives of the Study**

In the light of theme of the problem under investigation, the study aims to focus on the following objectives and is attempt:

- i.** To find out the available manuscript collection in the libraries.
- ii.** To determine the media, script, languages, subjects and complete or incomplete of manuscripts collection in libraries.
- iii.** To determine the condition of storage and place of manuscript in libraries.
- iv.** To examine the maintenance status of manuscript in libraries.

- v. To find out the preservation technique adopted by the libraries.
- vi. To assess the status of cataloguing of manuscripts in libraries.
- vii. To examine in the role of an NMM in Libraries.
- viii. To ascertain the staff structure and financial support for management of preservation of manuscripts in libraries.
- ix. To assess the present status of dissemination of thought content of manuscript to scholars.

### **Hypothesis of the Study**

**H1:** Maximum collection of Manuscripts is in the form of Paper.

**H2:** Majority of Manuscripts are in Sanskrit Language.

**H3:** The library of Uttar Pradesh has yet to develop a system for preservation of manuscript

**H4:** There is awareness of traditional methods to preserve and conserve the manuscript.

**H5:** There is a lack of online Accessibility of Manuscripts

### **Population, Scope, and limitation of Study**

The scope of the proposed study is restricted to university libraries and some prominent institutions of Uttar Pradesh. The scholar had studied the collection, Preservation and Accessibility of Manuscripts of the both central and state universities of Uttar Pradesh and some prominent institutions those who are collaboration with ministry of culture; and manuscripts partner center of NMM (National Mission for Manuscripts) which is situated in Uttar Pradesh.

**Table: 1.1 Population, Scope, and limitation of Study**

<b>S. NO.</b>	<b>University/Institution</b>	<b>Place</b>
1	Aligarh Muslim University	Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh
2	Amir-ud-Daula Public Library	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
3	B.R.Ambedkar University	Agra, Uttar Pradesh
4	Banaras Hindu University	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
5	Central institute of higher Tibetan studies	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
6	Central Sanskrit University(Ganganatha Jha Campus)	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
7	Central Sanskrit University (Lucknow Campus)	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
8	Digambar Jain Trilok Shoda Sansthan	Meerut, Uttar Pradesh
9	Government Manuscripts Library	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
10	Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
11	Mazahar Memorial Museum,	Ghazipur, Uttar Pradesh
12	Nagarjuna Buddhist Foundation,	Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh
13	Rampur Raza Library	Rampur, Uttar Pradesh
14	Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya	Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh
15	University of Allahabad	Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh
16	University of Lucknow	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
17	Vrindavan Research Institute	Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh

**Data Collection**

Data for this study was meticulously collected through in-person visits to all 17 universities and institutions, where the researcher personally engaged with key personnel, including librarians, directors, manuscripts pandits , and staff members. During these visits, structured questionnaire was administered to gather comprehensive insights into the manuscript collections, preservation methods, and cataloging practices which are used by them.

It is worth noting that, due to various circumstances, data was not obtained from three (3) of the institutions. Despite multiple visits to Digambar Jain Trilok Shoda Sansthan, Meerut they did not provide any data. Similarly, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Varanasi reported having only one manuscript in paper format, written in Bengali language, and declined to complete the questionnaire. Furthermore, Central Sanskrit University, Lucknow Campus library had relocated its manuscript collection to the Ganganath Jha Campus, Prayagraj rendering that the librarian unable to provide data for the institution.

Throughout the data collection process, almost care was taken to assure the confidentiality of the respondents. All participants were informed that the information they shared would be used exclusively for research purpose. Data collection occurred between January 2023 and July 2023, ensuring a thorough and up-to-date representation of the manuscript landscape in university libraries and institutions of Uttar Pradesh.

**Table: 1.2 Questionnaire statistics**

Total Number of University and Institution visited by Researcher	17 (100%)
Number of questionnaires got filled by visiting	14 (82.35%)
Number of questionnaires not filled by respondents after researcher's repeated visits and efforts to collect the necessary data.	1 (5.88%)
Number of University and Institution who declined to complete the questionnaire	1 (5.88%)
Number of University and Institution was unable to provide data due to relocation of manuscripts	1 (5.88%)

**Pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted in May 2022 to test the questionnaire related to manuscript collection and preservation. The questionnaire was pre-tested at the Manuscripts Library, at Saraswati Bhawan Library, of Sampurnanand Sanskrit Vishwavidyalaya in Varanasi. This pre-test aimed to gather insights and feedback from the librarian at that institution.

Based on the results and feedback from the pilot survey, we made necessary adjustments to the questionnaire. Some questions were removed, and others were refined and improved. These modifications were made to ensure that the final questionnaire used in the main study was clear, effective, and relevant. The valuable input received during the pilot study helped us enhance the quality and suitability of our questionnaire for the subsequent data collection phase.

### **Research Methodology**

Well-structured questionnaires have designed for the Librarian. A schedule of questionnaire was developed based on the objective of the study and questions to be addressed. But, whenever necessary, observation and interview methods also be utilized. The data for study is collected from Central and state University libraries situated in Uttar Pradesh and some prominent institutions of Uttar Pradesh those who are collaboration with ministry of culture; and manuscripts partner center of NMM.

### **Relevance of Study**

The literature survey reveals that several researches been conducted in this direction. But, it appears, that their number is not so much which justify for not carrying further research in this area. The present research, suppose to supplicate the earlier researches. Nevertheless, the literature survey also reveals that exactly the similar type of work has not been done earlier in context of Uttar Pradesh

### **Outline Of Chapters**

The research is structured into six chapters, focusing on the comprehensive study of manuscripts in Uttar Pradesh libraries:

**1. Introduction:** This chapter lays the groundwork by introducing manuscripts, their types, history, and significance in Indian culture, specifically in Uttar Pradesh. It defines the research topic, problem statement, aims, scope, and methodology, providing a clear overview and organizational structure of the study.

**2. Literature Review:** An extensive review of existing research, covering aspects of manuscript collection, organization, preservation, and accessibility, drawing from a wide range of sources to establish the academic context for the study.

**3. Preservation and Accessibility:** Examines traditional and modern methods for manuscript preservation and accessibility, including storage, transport, disaster preparedness, and digitization standards, highlighting the challenges and effectiveness of these approaches.

**4. Library Profiles:** Offers detailed profiles of the university and institution libraries involved in the study, setting the stage for a deeper investigation into their manuscript collections and management practices.

**5. Data Analysis and Interpretation:** Analyses collected data through observation and questionnaires, presenting findings on library collections, organization, preservation practices, accessibility, cataloguing, budgeting, and the impact of the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM). Visual aids are employed for clarity.

**6. Conclusions and Suggestions:** Outlines the research findings, offers suggestions for improvement, and proposes a model for optimal manuscript library management, highlighting potential areas for future research.

### **Major findings of study**

- The study found a rich and diverse collection of manuscripts across the surveyed libraries. These collections span a wide range of historical periods, regions, and cultural contexts, reflecting the vast literary heritage preserved within these institutions. Some libraries specialize in certain types of manuscripts, such as religious texts, scientific treatises, or literary works, indicating a specialization based on historical acquisitions and donations.
- Manuscripts were found in various media, including palm leaves, parchment, and paper, with scripts ranging from Brahmi to Devanagari and languages including Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, and several others. Subjects covered are vast,

from astronomy and mathematics to philosophy and the arts. The collections' completeness varies, with some libraries housing fragmented texts while others possess complete works.

- Storage conditions varied significantly among the libraries. Some institutions have implemented climate-controlled environments, acid-free storage materials, and secure display cases. However, others struggle with inadequate facilities, leading to potential damage from environmental factors. The placement of manuscripts within the libraries often depended on their significance, usage frequency, and fragility.
- Maintenance practices ranged from basic dusting to more sophisticated conservation methods. A few libraries have dedicated conservation staff and regularly conduct restoration workshops, whereas others rely on periodic external expert interventions.
- The preservation techniques adopted by libraries include both traditional methods, such as the application of lemon grass oil for palm leaf manuscripts, and modern techniques, like digitization and the use of inert gases to prevent decay. The approach depends greatly on the library's resources and the manuscript's condition and material.
- Cataloguing practices vary, with some libraries having fully digitized and searchable catalogues, while others are still in the process of digitizing their collections. The level of detail in catalogues also differs, impacting the ease with which researchers can find specific manuscripts.
- The National Mission for Manuscripts has played a pivotal role in augmenting the efforts of libraries in manuscript preservation by providing guidelines,

financial assistance, and training for staff. Its initiatives have enhanced awareness and technical know-how among library personnel.

- The libraries with dedicated staff for manuscript conservation and a clear allocation of financial resources tend to have better-preserved collections. Funding, often a mix of government grants, donations, and international aid, is crucial for ongoing preservation efforts.
- Dissemination to scholars varies widely, with some libraries offering extensive digital access, reproduction services, and on-site study facilities, while others are limited in their outreach capabilities. The accessibility of manuscripts significantly impacts the scholarly use and public awareness of these collections.

### **Suggestions**

Manuscripts are like treasure troves of knowledge from the past. The survey highlights that libraries are putting in considerable effort to preserve these valuable writings through modern techniques like digitization and microfilming. However, it underscores the importance of not neglecting the physical copies of manuscripts and emphasizes the need for their proper utilization. The major challenges faced by libraries are financial constraints, lack of suitable infrastructure, insufficient training in manuscript conservation, limited knowledge about the collections, and difficulties in understanding the languages and scripts. Overcoming these challenges will not happen overnight, but the researcher has proposed some meaningful suggestions based on the findings.

Based on the findings of the study, several suggestions can be proposed to address areas that require attention and improvement in the management and preservation of manuscripts in the libraries of Uttar Pradesh:

- Enhancing staff expertise in manuscript preservation and digitalization

techniques will be key to maintaining and expanding access to these valuable collections. Address the shortage of skilled staff reported by institutions such as CSU (GJC), GML, SSVV, and VRI by investing in training programs and skill enhancement initiatives. This will enable staff members to effectively handle preservation techniques, digital initiatives, and modern cataloging methods. Organize training programs or workshops to enhance the capabilities of existing staff in manuscript preservation and conservation, ensuring they can effectively treat mutilated, damaged, or infested manuscripts.

- Institutions facing financial constraints, such as CSU (GJC), GML, and SSVV, should seek additional funding through grants, collaborations, or partnerships. This funding can support preservation and conservation activities, ensuring the longevity of the manuscript collections.
- Institutions like AMU, ADPL, BRAU, BHU, CSU (GJC), MGKVP, RRL, AU, and LU, which lack separate buildings for their libraries, should invest in dedicated storage areas with suitable shelving and environmental controls. This is crucial for the physical well-being of manuscript collections.
- Institutions such as BRAU, GML, MGKVP, MMML, NBF, SSVV, and LU that lack in preservation and conservation policies which should develop with comprehensive guidelines. These policies and strategies can serve as a framework for systematic approaches to preservation, including preventive and curative techniques.
- Institutions without digitized collections, like MMML and NBF, should embark on digitization projects to enhance the accessibility of manuscripts and contribute to their long-term preservation. Developing comprehensive digital platforms, including the use of OCR for searchable texts, can significantly

improve accessibility for a wider user.

- Recognizing the insufficiency of equipment for manuscript preservation in institutions like GML and SSVV, it is advisable to allocate funds for the acquisition of necessary equipment, including tools for cleaning, restoration, and environmental monitoring.
- Emphasize the positive impact of workshops conducted by NMM on preventive conservation, curative conservation, rare support materials, and manuscript conservation. Encourage continuous participation in such programs to help staff stay updated on best practices and innovative techniques in manuscript preservation.
- Institutions should actively engage with NMM for collaborative initiatives, workshops, and knowledge-sharing programs. This can contribute to the development of best practices and standards in manuscript preservation.
- Establish a routine maintenance schedule to monitor the condition of manuscripts, storage facilities, and preservation equipment. Regular assessments are crucial for identifying potential issues and preventing deterioration.
- Conduct programs to promote the cultural and historical significance of manuscripts, raising awareness about the importance of preserving these valuable documents and garnering community support.

By focusing on these suggestions, institutions can take significant strides toward enhancing the overall preservation, accessibility, and management of manuscript collections in Uttar Pradesh libraries. One important suggestion is to invest in training personnel who can effectively treat mutilated, damaged, or infested manuscripts. These efforts, combined with strategic planning and resource allocation, can contribute to the

long-term preservation and meaningful use of these invaluable cultural artifacts.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the comprehensive analysis of manuscript collections and preservation practices across various universities and institutions in Uttar Pradesh underscores the rich diversity and commitment to safeguarding cultural heritage. The findings, which encompass aspects ranging from acquisition strengths, linguistic representations, and subject diversity to the condition of bindings and physical status, reveal a mosaic of strengths and areas for improvement. The study highlights the need for collaborative efforts to standardize preservation practices, acknowledging the unique challenges and strengths of each institution. This collaborative approach, coupled with targeted strategies, is crucial for the sustained preservation of these invaluable cultural artifacts. The examination not only provides insights into diverse preservation methods, including cleaning equipment, disaster planning, and digitization initiatives but also sheds light on common challenges such as financial constraints, staffing shortages, and infrastructure limitations. Despite these hurdles, the unwavering commitment to cataloging, classification, and organization of manuscript collections is evident, reflecting the dedication of these institutions to making these cultural treasures accessible to future generations. Thus, the study underscores the importance of continued collaboration, resource allocation, and skill development to ensure the enduring legacy of manuscripts in Uttar Pradesh.