

KHUDA BAKHSH ORIENTAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, PATNA: A CASE STUDY OF RARE COLLECTIONS

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Abstract *A public library is an organization, which benefits the common people to a great extent, it provides facilities to pursue education, it offers access to a knowledge centre, it helps the people to cultivate the reading habits, provides reading premises and it also plays an important role in preserving culture. Rare collections are unique collections having heritage value and need to be preserved by the posterity. Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library (KBOPL), Patna (India) has extensive collections of manuscripts in the various language (Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Pashto, Sanskrit, Hindi, English), rare photographs, painting, eminent person's letter, coins, and scientific instruments and many more. The present study aims to present the statistical value of rare collections maintained by KBOPL Patna. The data collection has been attained by visiting the KBOPL, Patna and through personal interviews. The finding of the study uncovered the treasure of rare collection maintained by one of the oldest public libraries in India. It will aid the users to know the various types of historical resources of information and the preservation methods adopted by the library.*

Keywords: *Oriental Public Library, Public Library, Collection Development, Rare Collections, Manuscripts*

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are an educational spiral of every community. Society needs all kinds of libraries for preservation and dissemination of the information. The primary goal of any library is to provide the best place to its associated users where they can satisfy their desire to seek knowledge and information. Special, public and heritage library provides facilities to its members without any restriction; it is open for all irrespective of one's cast, religion, age, education and community. Public library acts as a place of learning and inquiry of new knowledge and it becomes a bridge between the knowledge seekers (the members of society) and knowledge. A public library engages itself with the public, it creates a feeling of belonging among the people, it makes people believe that it is their own library and the entire community can look up to the library to fulfil their informational requirement. A public library is also a repository of rare collections.

KHUDABAKSH ORIENTAL PUBLIC LIBRARY, PATNA

KBOPL is situated on the Ashok Raj path, Patna. Maulvi Muhammad Bakhsh, the father of KhudaBakhsh and the founder of this library, was a bibliophile, from Chhapra,

Bihar. He had collected about 1400 manuscripts during his lifetime, with which set up modest library the Khubkhana-i-Mohammadia. After the death of the Maulvi Muhammad Bakhsh, he left many rare collections. Khuda Bakhsh had a mission of life to make a public library and fulfil his father's last desire. KhudaBakhsh acquired rare manuscripts and rare books from Arab area and had also appointed a book-hunter to collect the rare materials from the Arab world. The library was inaugurated by sir Charles Elliot, the Governor of Bengal at that time. The present library building was built in 1888. Khuda Bakhsh opened KBOPL with a lot of rare collection materials, manuscripts and other resources. The library was officially inaugurated on 29 October 1891 with 4000 manuscripts. The Government of India in July 1969 declared the KBOPL as an 'Institute of National Importance' under the act of parliament and since July 1970, the library is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. KBOPL is designated a Manuscript Conservation Centre by India's National Mission for Manuscripts¹.

TYPES OF COLLECTIONS AT KBOPL

KBOPL has specific collection of Islamic studies like Tasawwuf (Islamic Mysticism), Tibb (Unani Medicine),

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Tazkira (Biography), Medieval History, South East Asian History, West Asian History, Central Asian History, Medieval Science, Literature on Freedom Movement and National Integration, Urdu, Persian and Arabic Literatures. Currently, the library has about 21000 manuscripts including eminent person's letter. Manuscripts written on palm leaf, bhojpatra, paper, deerskin, cloth and several other such material is the treasure of the library collection. Besides it 2.8 Lakhs printed books in the different languages and different subjects add value to KBOPL's rich collection. The National Mission for Manuscripts has declared four manuscripts of KBOPL as a part of Manuscripts Treasure of India. They are Kitab al-Hashaish (Arabic), Kitab al-Tasreef (Arabic), Diwan-I Hafiz (Persian) and Tarikh-I Khandan-I Timuria (Persian).

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Madden and Seifi² (2011) Iran is the oldest and the richest country of manuscripts revealing the civilization and cultures of Iran. The in depth study and research on the Iran heritage and culture is based on the Persian manuscripts. Jain et.al³ (2013) discussed the manuscript in India and according to them there are 5 million manuscripts in India. They also mentioned that KBOPL is manuscript's resources center and a Manuscript conservation centre. Shafi & Lone⁴ (2012) has also investigated manuscripts available in overall institutions in India, with a specific focus on the oriental manuscripts and they found out that KBOPL has 21,000 manuscripts in different languages. The history of KBOPL can also be traced in an article by Gul and Sumir⁵ (2008) where they have described the growth and eventual development of oriental libraries in India with an emphasis on KBOPL. The next step in maintaining the rare collections is their preservation. Line⁶ (2008) throws light on the issues and difficulties in preserving the rare collections. For example, being in a fragile condition, tight binding, photocopying, digitization sometimes cause damage to the manuscripts and therefore they present a challenge, it becomes very difficult to handle them. Londhe and Patil⁷ (2011) has also described the fundamental problems of manuscripts preservation and focused on the technical issues of digitization of manuscripts. Pooter and Holley⁸ (2010) compiled a list of the rare collection of academic library and stated the important role of ICT department for the preservation of rare collections. They discussed how the preservation of rare collections can be achieved in the digital age.

The above mentioned literature review helps one to understand the KBOPL, the plenty of resourceful materials. It has various types of preservation methodologies which can be used to protect and preserve the rare collections. In spite of the rich collections of the KBOPL the review of

literature showed a deep gap in documented work about the library collections. The present study aims to fulfill this gap and has attempted to present a comprehensive coverage of the total rare collections preserved by KBOPL.

SIGNIFICANCE

The present study was initiated with an aim to present the historical development of KBOPL with a focus on identifying the variety of rare collections it has. Therefore, the study has identified different kinds of rare materials, their statistical value and preservation methods used by the KBOPL. The rare collection present at KBOPL helps people to know and understand different concepts, subject from hundreds of resources and also appreciate the efforts of the library in maintaining our country's treasure.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The study was conducted with the following objectives

- To give an overview of historical development of the KBOPL, Patna.
- To identify the different types of rare collection at KBOPL, Patna.
- To find out the methods adopted for the preservation of rare collections by the KBOPL, Patna.

LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to the KhudaBakhsh Oriental Public Library, Patna. The library has extensive collection of information including books, periodical, newspaper including the rare collections. However, in this study, only the rare collections housed in the KBOPL, have been studied.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the interview method for the data collection. A semi-structured personal interview with open and closed questions scheduled with prior permission was taken from the KBOPL Librarian of Manuscripts and rare collection In-charge. The researcher has visited the library and consulted the librarian for data collection.

THE RARE COLLECTION

Manuscripts

KBOPL has 21000+ manuscripts in many languages like Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Sanskrit, Hindi, Pastho, Turkish,

Punjabi, English, Kaithi (used widely in north India). Library provides users an access to certain manuscripts written on different materials like Palm Leaf, Cloth, Animal Skin, Stone, and Bricks. Below Graph shows that most of the manuscripts are in the Persian Language (48%), Arabic Language (36%), Urdu Language (15%) and 1% manuscripts in Hindi, English, Sanskrit, Turkish, Punjabi, Kaithi, Pushto.

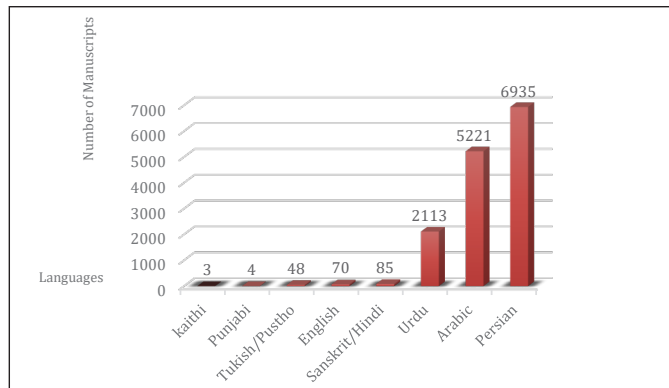


Fig. 1: Language Wise Manuscripts of KBOPL, Patna

Gold Materials

KBOPL holds significance collections of gold enamelled including manuscripts and painting. However, due to the security reasons, the number of gold materials has not been disclosed. Hisab-e-Fauji of Mahraja Ranjit Singh is an example of gold enamelled material available at the library.

Palm Leaf

Palf Leaf has also been used for the writing purpose seen in the form of bundles. KBOPL, Patna has about 600 palm leaves on which manuscripts are written in different languages.

Paintings

KBOPL holds a total of 2000 original painting of the historical era out of which 231 are rare paintings.

Photographs

2732 rare photograph of the greatest personalities of India are available at KBOPL.

Instruments

KBOPL, Patna has rare surgical instrument. It has about 250 rare instrument collections. These instrument are glass, metal, stone, clay, porcelain, shell, mechanical clocks, weapons, medallions, commemorative gifts, badges, ring-seals, decorative boxes, pottery, crockery inscribed with Quranic verses of decorated with Chinese and Japanese art, engraved pen-holders and ink pots. Some astronomical instruments like mechanical clock, ring-seals, decorative boxes, badges, sundial, a celestial globe, a quadrant-cum-nocturnal or Razmuma-o-shabuma and surgical forceps, poison test plate are also available in the library's rare collection. These instruments have been mentioned in the register of National Manuscript Mission to offer a complete overview.

Non-Book Materials of Rare Collection

It is the responsibility of our generation to preserve the rare collections for the next generations to make them aware about out past civilizations and culture. KBOPL adopted various types of tools for the preservation of rare collection. The library has created microfilm of manuscripts, microfiches, slides, audio, and video cassettes- the below column graph provides the details of total number of non-books materials of rare collection available at KBOPL.

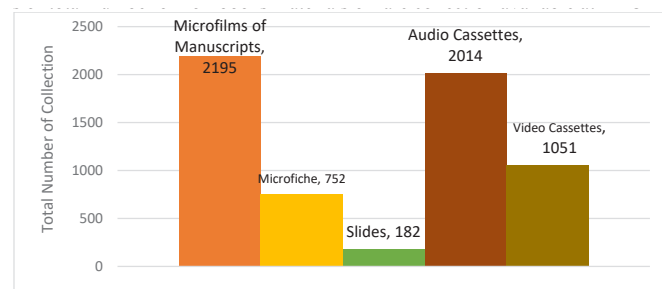


Fig. 2: Detail of Non-Book Materials

Other Rare Collections

Other than the above mentioned rare materials at KBOPL it also has rare collection of clay tablets, stones, coins, atlases, and a Quran on a longest scroll and six very small Qurans, ancient surgical instruments, poison proof plates, a dagger belonging to Bairam Khan.

The Table 1 describes the overall total rare collection of KBOPL available in the library.

Table 1

Sr. No.	Types of Rare Collections	Total (In Numbers)
1	Manuscripts	21000+
2	Rare Printed Books	1625
3	Rare Journals	2243
4	Rare Letters	4086
5	Gold Materials	Yes, but not declared
6	Rare Instruments	250
7	Photographs	2732
8	Palm Leaves	600
9	Paintings	231
10	Coins	600
11	Globes	(1 Rare Globe) Celestial Globe by Qa'am Muhammad (1047/1637)
12	Astro Compass	04
13	Longest Scroll(cloth)	01
14	Non-Books Materials	2195 Microfilms of Manuscripts 752 Microfiches 182 Slide 2041 Audio 1051eo

Preservation and Conservation of Rare Collection

The library had adopted many techniques for the preservation of its rare collections for long times. It has a preservation and conservation lab in its campus with a chemist, computer operator and digitization specialist.

Cover Materials and Spine Conditions

After the chemical-acidification of rare physical documents, binding is a necessity for rare collections because manuscripts written on different materials like palm leaf, bhojpatra, deerskin, cloth, and sundry materials need to be bound for the better protection and an easy use. To make binding sturdy and attractive library has used leather and cotton

Digitization of Rare Collections

The library has digitized the rare collection using both outsources vendors and to a small extent in-house. Most of the rare collections are digitized through an outsources project but sometimes for a specific request digitization has also been undertaken within the library. whenever needed by a scholar, student, faculty researcher, a bound manuscript is scanned in-house and delivered to the user. One should

appreciate library's efforts in also making rare collections available in digital form, so that the maximum utilization of rare information and collections would take place. The total number of manuscripts is 21000+ but currently, only 3076 manuscripts are available in the digital format. A pilot project was conducted covering only 10,00,000 folio of manuscripts for digitization, which was 12% of total rare manuscripts, 88% digitization work is still left. National Information Centre developed e-manuscripts software for manuscripts management and services. It's collections are very rare and splendid. So much time has passed and a maximum number of rare item in the collection are still not digitized. Only 12% got digitized and 88% are remaining to be got digitized.

FUTURE PLANS OF KBOPL

The library has following plans to provide better services related to its rare collection-

- Digitization of remaining manuscripts, which is 88% of its total collection of the manuscript.
- Creation of a descriptive catalogue for manuscripts.
- After digitization the library would provide its manuscripts through online mode form their library website.
- The National Informatics Centre has created software for manuscripts services, i.e. e-manuscripts. The library is in the process of its implementation.
- Scheduling of workshops on preservation and conservation techniques.

FINDING

KBOPL is a unique repository of rare manuscripts, instruments, eminent personality letters, surgical instruments and sundry collections. Data collection helped to formulate the finding and suggestions for better services regarding rare collections.

- KBOPL holds very significant rare collections of cultural and historical heritage.
- KBOPL has organized various workshops, exhibitions, seminar, conference on rare collections, but they were not followed up by any calendar.
- Library is in the process of creating the descriptive catalogue for its rare collection section.
- KBOPL is offering certain services to researcher, scholars, other users aiding them to use its permitted rare collection. At times they digitize the content and make it available to the researcher.
- KBOPL has taken the step of digitizing its rare collection and has achieved 12% of its whole where as a large amount of digitizing of rare resources is yet to be achieved.

- The KBOPL has provided the link to its digitized resources from their library webpage but is not using any digital library software for online services.
- The study found the lack of internet facility hindering the retrieval of its digital materials.

SUGGESTIONS

- The study reveals that the library has achieved only 12% of digitization of rare collection. A lot of more is still pending. It should start the digitization works of remaining rare materials.
- Once the resources come into the digital world after the digitization process, the library should initiate digital library services of its rare collection.
- KBOPL used to run a course related to preservations and conservations. Currently, this course has gone into its dark days. The library should restart the course whereby it will increase the skill of the staff and course attendees.
- There is not internet facility for registered users. In the tech savvy environment access to digital information is the primary service a library could offer to its users. It suggests that as the KBOPL is in the process of digitization of its rare materials, the library can think in the line providing the internet facility aiding it's users to access the same.
- The library should organize workshop, seminar and exhibitions for disseminating the information related to its rare collection for the researcher, students and teachers and common people. The library can plan such events on yearly basis, treating them as their best practice methods for the promotion of its services of rare collection.

CONCLUSION

KBOPL is playing a very significant role in the preservation of past knowledge available in the traditional format for the next generation. From the interview it has been revealed that the library uses to conduct the course on preservation, it is believed that the relaunching of the same will benefit not only its staff members but even the people who are interested in such fields. The library holds the extensive collections of manuscripts and other materials passing of them through

many hands can damage/destroy them and hence the library has realised the importance of the digitization. The National Missions of Manuscript (2003), a project under the ministry of culture (Government of India) helped KBOPL to preserve the rare collections. KBOPL is an institution, and use of ICT and digitization of rare collection and to provide better services of cataloguing will aid the library to become a well known institute of our country.

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