

# OPINION ON THE USE AND ACCESSIBILITY OF MANUSCRIPTS IN RAMPUR RAZA LIBRARY AND MAULANA AZAD LIBRARY, AMU, ALIGARH

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**Abstract** Manuscripts are essential and precious resources of a library and lot of efforts are executed to handle and preserve them not only for the present generation but also for the future generations to come. The libraries selected for the study are famous for manuscript collection and have rare of the rarest manuscripts available. So, the present study was conducted to examine the use, frequency, accessibility, and overall management of manuscripts of these two libraries and a questionnaire was designed to survey the users of these libraries. It was found that majority of library users reported visiting the library on a daily basis, with a significant number also visiting weekly. Most of the users use the manuscripts primarily for research purposes, followed by a desire to enhance their knowledge contained in them. Some of users primarily use the author and title approach for manuscript searches, while others favour the subject approach. It also found that a limited number of manuscripts are utilized by users and several factors have been identified which contribute to less usage of manuscripts including difficulty in understanding the language and script, as well as a general lack of awareness regarding the manuscripts collection and types that are accessible in the libraries.

**Keywords:** Manuscripts, Preservation and Conservation, Usage of Manuscripts, Maulana Azad Library, Rampur Raza Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Access and Approaches of Search

## INTRODUCTION

Manuscripts are handwritten documents created before the printing press, valued for their artistic, historical, scientific, or spiritual significance, and typically over 75 years old. They are vital to a nation's cultural heritage and enhance our understanding of diverse civilizations and histories. Serving as credible sources of knowledge, manuscripts help interpret historical accounts and preserve important details about socio-cultural evolution of humankind (Panchamukhi, 2006). They transmit social and cultural values, connecting us to the unexplored history of our planet. These are vital repositories of historical, religious, cultural, political, linguistic, and economic narratives, preserving the writings of ancient intellectuals and safeguarding humanity's knowledge and progress. These resources are a precious heritage of a nation, essential for the advancement of current and future generations (Mazumdar, 2009). India is known as the 'memory of the world' for its vast collections of manuscripts that embody fundamental ideas. Every manuscript in India has its own history, having been composed in a variety of languages spanning thousands of years (Ministry of

Tourism and Culture, 2007). Recent recognition highlights that utilizing knowledge from manuscripts is important for understanding diverse traditions. To benefit current and future generations, preserving these manuscripts is essential (Sarasvathy, Giddaiah & Selvaraja, 2011). Digitization has made their images accessible online, while high-resolution master files are available for offline viewing (Ahmed, 2009). The present study has been conducted in keeping such importance of manuscripts in mind and tried to find the organisation and management of manuscripts from the user's perspectives of the two libraries famous for manuscripts in the country.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to know the methods of providing accessibility and the extent of use of manuscripts in two selected libraries, however, the specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To know the use of manuscripts and their purpose in the selected libraries.

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- To determine the retrieval tools consulted by users for searching the manuscripts.
- To find the level of satisfaction by the usage of manuscripts and different approaches of accessing the manuscript.
- To find the methods of providing awareness about the manuscripts collection.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

A well-structured questionnaire was designed to collect the data from users of the manuscripts of the selected libraries. There were open ended, optional based and five-point Likert scale were also used in fewer questions. The questions were related with the awareness of the manuscript collection, frequency, accessibility approaches provided by the libraries, usefulness of the manuscripts, purpose of use, retrieval tools, condition of manuscripts, and others which help in fulfilling the objectives of the study. The responses were cumulated, analysed and curated using MS excel.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Pander (2012) examined that the digitization provided long-term manuscript preservation and conservation and can increase accessibility to the collection of manuscripts. Digitising manuscripts can create several copies that can protect the educational and literary value of a library and affect user behaviour. The study provides a quick user behaviour, the use of the manuscript and its satisfaction. This study familiarises with the behaviour of users regarding the use of the manuscript and helps digitize these valuable resources. Gaur and Chakraborty (2009) explored modern preservation and accessibility concepts in India, while focusing on both individual and collective efforts. Their research included libraries, museums, universities, and temples with manuscripts, as well as initiatives by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM). They also examined the 21st-century landscape, highlighting digital access to manuscript information, advancements in digitization, and the publication of previously unpublished manuscripts. Mishra (2012) provides a concise summary of traditional techniques utilized for conservation and highlights various approaches, including turmeric, black cumin, cinnamon, neem leaves, and eucalyptus oil, emphasizing that

these indigenous resources are environmentally sustainable, safe, user-friendly, and cost-effective. Mahawar and Kuriya (2013) examined the condition of the oriental collection and its administration and found that there is a shortage of technical staff, including curators and conservators, and a lack of modern amenities like air conditioning and photocopiers. The library's collection is experiencing various forms of deterioration, including holes, outdated repairs, yellowing paper, and damage from termites and silverfish.

Yaqub, Onibon and Olagunju (2013) examined the management and condition of the manuscripts, revealing that they are not well organized and there is a lack in managing them. The study emphasized the need for proper documentation and information and a designated seating area for users. There are insufficient preservation resources and no specialised Information Communication Technology (ICT) and digitization techniques available for manuscripts. Narang and Singh (2014) conducted a study on the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) and the National Archives of India (NAI). This study explores the factors causing manuscript deterioration at 13 Manuscript Resource Centers (MRCs) linked to NMM and NAI, and discussed preservation methods to ensure the longevity and integrity of these important documents. Anuradha (2015) focused on the roles of governmental and non-governmental organizations in promoting manuscript conservation awareness, covering both traditional preservation methods and modern scientific techniques. Singh and Parabhoi (2016) in their paper not only addresses the techniques and instruments employed in the digitization process but also highlights the Indian Institute of Advanced Study library's efforts in digitizing monographs, rare books, and photographs. Furthermore, it examines the objectives of digitization, the technical challenges encountered, and the errors identified throughout the process.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

All the libraries opined that the manuscripts are mostly used by research scholars and faculty members and few users from other fields who need some specific reference or consultation of manuscripts. So, the present study surveyed the library users of manuscripts in Maulana Azad Library (MAL), AMU, and Rampur Raza Library (RRL), Rampur to find the access, use, search approaches, and overall management of manuscripts. Table 1 outlines the questionnaire distribution and the response rate of the present study.

**Table 1: Questionnaire Response Rate**

Sr. No.	Name of the Libraries	Questionnaire Administered	Questionnaire Received	
			Complete	Incomplete
1.	RRL	37	34 (92%)	3
2.	MAL	73	66 (90%)	7

It is found that in MAL, the 73 questionnaires were distributed among the users and of which 66 returned the completely filled and 7 incompletely filled questionnaires. While as in case of RRL, 37 questionnaires were distributed and got 34 completely filled and 3 incompletely filled questionnaires. The highest response rate of answering the questions was that of RRL users followed by users of MAL.

**Table 2: Frequency of Visiting the Library**

Sr. No.	Frequency of Visit	RRL	MAL
1.	Daily	18	38
2.	Twice a week	–	2
3.	Weekly	5	8
4.	Monthly	2	2
5.	Whenever needed	9	16

The frequency of user visits is given in Table 2 and it signifies a prominent method in the evaluation of the libraries and their services. When asked how often they visit the library, the majority of library patrons indicated that they come everyday, followed by weekly visits. Additionally, it was found that several RRL and MAL users have stated that they only visit the library when they need its services.

**Table 3: Purpose of using Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Main Purpose	RRL	MAL
1.	For research work	12	61
2.	To update knowledge	14	7
3.	For references	15	3

\*Multiple answers were permitted

Users were asked to explain why they were using the manuscripts, and the results showed that the majority of them used the library's manuscripts for research, followed by updating their knowledge of the information contained in the manuscripts (see Table 3). It was also found that very few users are interested in accessing the manuscripts for reading and reference purposes alone.

**Table 4: Access to Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Access to Manuscripts	RRL	MAL
1.	Reference material	18	54
2.	Photographs	10	7
3.	Microforms	4	-
4.	Xerox copies	8	14
5.	CD-ROM's	3	9
6.	Computer Terminals	5	10

\*Multiple answers were permitted.

As indicated in Table 4, the libraries make the manuscripts available not just in hard copy but also in digital, photocopy, and photograph formats. When the question was posed to library patrons, it was found that they were using the manuscripts as reference material, followed by xerox copies, microfilms, and photographs. Two of the less well-known methods of accessing the manuscripts were CD-ROM and computer terminal access. In MAL, xeroxing manuscripts is found to be a more practical way to provide access to the manuscripts after reference material, whereas in RRL, pictures and xerox copies are employed as common ways to access the manuscript content after reference material.

**Table 5: Retrieval Tools Consulted for Searching the Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Reference Media	RRL	MAL
1.	Shelf List	11	5
2.	Index	9	12
3.	Card catalogue	17	43
4.	OPAC	20	26

\*Multiple answers were permitted.

The question was posed to users to gain insight into the accessibility tools they use to search and retrieve the manuscripts in the library. The results showed in Table 5 reveals that the majority of users utilize the card catalogue and OPAC to search for and locate the manuscripts in the library. The index and shelf listing that the libraries

gave came next. For finding and retrieving manuscripts in the library, the majority of users in MAL prefer the card catalogue and OPAC, whereas in RRL, the majority of users reacted roughly equally to the shelf list, card catalogue, and OPAC and less to the index.

**Table 6: Helpful Form of Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Form of Manuscripts	RRL	MAL
1.	Microfilms	2	14
2.	Digitized records	12	36
3.	Photographic records	5	18
4.	CD-ROM	8	18
5.	Xerox Copies	17	27

\*Multiple answers were permitted

From Table 6, it is found that digital records are the most helpful forms of manuscripts for users of select libraries due to their ease of access and electronic availability. CD-ROM and photographic records are less sought after. In the case of MAL, digital records followed by Xerox copies, while in the case of RRL, digital records and Xerox copies were the most sought forms.

**Table 7: Helpfulness of Digitized Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Extent	RRL	MAL
1.	Not helpful	-	-
2.	Less Helpful	3	2
3.	Not any Effect	-	2
4.	Helpful	23	43
5.	Most Helpful	8	19

Table 7 reveals that digital manuscripts are the most helpful forms for libraries, with most users expressing positive feedback on their usefulness. Some users even ranked digitized manuscripts as the most helpful option on a five-point scale. This suggests that libraries should prioritize digitizing rare documents, including manuscripts, to regain their importance in the digital world and enhance user satisfaction.

**Table 8: Satisfaction by the Usage of Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Use of Manuscripts	RRL	MAL
1.	Not satisfied	1	-
2.	Less satisfied	8	2
3.	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	5	5
4.	Satisfied	5	43
5.	Completely satisfied	15	16

Library users were asked to mention their satisfaction level on a five-point scale, revealing that users of MAL expressed

higher satisfaction with the library's services related to manuscripts and accessibility, followed by those at RRL as represented in Table 8. A very less number of users have mentioned completely satisfied and less satisfied with the usage of manuscripts.

**Table 9: Environmental Condition of Collection Room**

Sr. No.	Environmental Condition	RRL	MAL
1.	Not suitable	-	3
2.	Less suitable	7	4
3.	Neutral	11	14
4.	Suitable	15	40
5.	More suitable	1	5

The majority of users expressed satisfaction with the suitability of the conditions in the collection room, while only a small number indicated concerns about the environmental conditions of the manuscript collection room, as shown in Table 9. For MAL, the largest group of users believes that the library offers a better and more suitable environment for manuscripts, whereas in the case of RRL, some users feel neutral and perceive the conditions of the collection room as less suitable.

**Table 10: Approach of Accessing the Manuscript**

Sr. No.	Approach of Accessing	Library	
		RRL	MAL
1.	Author	5	50
2.	Title	7	49
3.	Subject	17	26
4.	Keyword	5	17

In Table 10, an inquiry about the methods utilized by library patrons for locating manuscripts revealed that in MAL library, users predominantly rely on the author and title methods, whereas in RRL, the subject approach is the most effective search strategy for retrieving manuscript information.

**Table 11: Reasons for Less Use of Manuscripts**

Sr. No.	Less Use of Manuscripts	Library	
		RRL	MAL
1.	Not easy to use	6	14
2.	Unorganized collection	-	-
3.	Lack of infrastructure	-	3
4.	Unaware of the collection	11	12
5.	Language of manuscripts	9	31

Sr. No.	Less Use of Manuscripts	Library	
		RRL	MAL
6.	Inability to understand the script	6	17
7.	Poor Physical condition of manuscripts	3	5
8.	Inadequate knowledge of staff regarding the collection	3	7

\*Multiple answers were permitted

Table 11 shows the reasons for less use of manuscripts and in the context of MAL, language and script are identified as the primary obstacles to utilizing the manuscript collection, while the challenging nature of the manuscripts, insufficient staff expertise, and their poor physical condition significantly contribute to their limited use. In contrast, for RRL, the primary reason for the low usage of manuscripts is a lack of awareness, followed by a limited comprehension of the manuscript language.

**Table 12: Condition of Manuscript Collection**

Sr. No	Condition of Manuscript	RRL	MAL
1.	Poor	8	3
2.	Fair	5	24
3.	Good	12	30
4.	Very good	8	7
5.	Excellent	1	2

Table 12 shows the condition of manuscript collection and the library users were surveyed on a five-point scale regarding the overall quality of the manuscripts held in the libraries, and it was discovered that the majority believe that the state of the manuscripts and their maintenance is satisfactory in both libraries. Specifically, for MAL, 30 users rated the condition of the manuscripts as good, while 24 users deemed it fair. In contrast, for RRL, 12 users considered the condition to be good, and 8 users each rated it as very good and poor, respectively.

**Table 13: Methods of Providing Awareness About the Library**

Sr. No.	Methods Adopted for Awareness	Library	
		RRL	MAL
1.	Library orientation	9	7
2.	Library bulletins	12	5
3.	Special lectures	19	19
4.	Library information brochures	19	9
5.	Outreach programmes	15	3
6.	Information on website	17	19
7.	Organizing exhibitions	9	21

\*Multiple answers were permitted

Table 13 represents the methods of providing awareness and it was found that users favour special lectures, organizing exhibitions, providing information on the website, and library information brochures as the most effective methods. In the case of MAL, organizing exhibitions is the most favoured method of user awareness, followed by information on the website and special lectures. Conversely, for RRL, special lectures and library information brochures are the leading methods, with information on the website also gaining popularity among library users.

**Table 14: Satisfied with the Library Facilities**

Sr. No.	Satisfied with the Library Facilities	RRL	MAL
1.	Not satisfied	2	-
2.	Less satisfied	-	4
3.	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	6	12
4.	Satisfied	18	45
5.	Completely satisfied	8	5

Table 14 shows the satisfaction level with the facilities provided by libraries and when asked how satisfied they were with the facilities offered by the libraries, the majority of users gave positive answers, and some even said they were entirely satisfied, as shown in Table 14. While the majority of users (45 in the case of MAL) believe that the library offers better resources and a conducive environment for easy research and reading, the majority of users (in the case of RRL) are satisfied with the library's facilities, though some users are naturally ambivalent about them.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Manuscripts are invaluable contributions to society, but they face daily deterioration. Safeguarding these resources is a significant challenge. By combining traditional preservation methods with modern technology, we can protect and enhance access to this precious heritage. Libraries, research institutions, and museums in India are making commendable efforts to conserve these resources, but more work is needed to ensure their preservation for future generations. The study revealed that the majority of library users reported visiting the library on a daily basis, with a significant number also visiting weekly. Additionally, it was noted that some users of RRL and MAL indicated they only visit the library when they have a specific need. Regarding the purpose of utilizing the manuscripts, the study found that most users engage with the manuscripts primarily for research purposes, followed by a desire to enhance their knowledge of the information contained within them. Furthermore, it was observed that only a small fraction of users expressed interest in accessing the manuscripts solely for reference and reading. Libraries

offer various accessibility tools for accessing resources like manuscripts. It also shows that most users prefer the card catalogue and Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) for searching manuscripts, followed by the index and shelf listing. In MAL library, the card catalogue and OPAC are the most popular methods. In RRL library, users show equal preference for the shelf list, card catalogue, and OPAC, while the index is used less often.

The analysis showed that MAL users primarily use the author and title approach for manuscript searches, while RRL users favour the subject approach. So far as the use is concerned, the study indicated that a minimal number of manuscripts are utilized by users. The study identified several factors contributing to this limited usage, including difficulties in comprehending the language and script, as well as a general lack of awareness regarding the manuscripts that are accessible in the libraries. When it comes to satisfaction, it was found that the users have largely a positive response. At MAL, most users feel the library provides excellent facilities and a conducive environment for research and reading, along with effective manuscript services. In contrast, while RRL users are generally satisfied with the facilities and manuscript access, a few expressed neutral feelings, and some suggested improvements.

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