Cataloguing and Digitization of Multilingual Manuscript Libraries in Tamil Nadu: An Evaluative Study

R. Narenthiran
Research Scholar, DLIS, Annamalai University
& Librarian, IFP,
Pondicherry, narenthiran.r@ifpindia.org

P. Ravichandran
Preofessor & Head
Dept.of Library and Information Science, DDE Wing
Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar

Abstract

In ancient India various systems of knowledge were recorded through palm leaf manuscripts. The wisdom was mainly transmitted using the classical language of Sanskrit in various scripts of Brahmi, Devanagari, Grantha, Telugu etc. The present study is based on five manuscript libraries in Tamil Nadu that is mixture of libraries with different statuses having good number of manuscripts. The present work has mainly focused on the manuscript cataloguing and digitization activities of these libraries. The study has also explored collection recognition and the role of National Mission for Manuscripts.

Keywords

Manuscript Libraries; Cataloguing; Digitization; Tamil Nadu; NMM

.

Electronic access

The journal is available at www.jalis.in

Journal of Advances in Library and Information Science
ISSN: 2277-2219 Vol. 5. No.3. 2016. pp.248-253

Introduction

The introduction of printing press and the eventual printing of books in paper in the modern period almost completely put an end to the ancient tradition of writing in palm-leaf and the techniques of their preservation. At the beginning of the 20th century some important institutions were founded in different parts of the country which housed the manuscripts collected from various parts of India from individuals and religious institutions. Manuscripts are handwritten documents of yesteryears. Manuscripts displayed the signature of the *scribe* on lithic records, epigraphs, copper plates and stones. Whenever we fill up a form, we generate some manuscript. (Gros, 1995). Palm leaf is a natural material. It is known as tada patra, tala patra or panna. In ancient India, as palm leaves were available abundantly throughout the nation, they commonly used for the purpose of writing. The palm leaf manuscript which is referred to *olai cuvati* in Tamil is one of the oldest mediums of writing in India, especially in South India. Tal-patra manuscripts are usually found in the form of bundles of a few or more than hundred of them, strung together with a cord and pressed between two ends with wooden/bamboo boards and tied together in a cotton thread with yellow powder. Palm leaf manuscripts are very common with different shapes and sizes.

Review of Literature

NMM: (National Mission for Manuscripts, 2003) guidelines for digitization of library materials of manuscripts, books, photos, maps etc is available in both Hindi and English languages. It raises certain points like "why digitize?" with the Process of digitization. More importantly guidelines are provided for handling/treatment of materials, selection of equipment, image capture, digital conversion, quality control, storage and management of digitized images and also on calculation of the cost of the proposed project. Panda, (2006) made an attempt to study on *'Kritisampada'* of NMM. Data collections from all over India were made possible through Manuscript Resource Centres or Manuscript Preservation Centres of NMM, National Informatics Centre and IGNCA. Data were collected through printed structure questionnaire, CAT-CAT of IGNCA. To integrate the collected data, 'e-granthavli' software was used, based on Dublin Core Metadata. Samuel, (2007) published on the importance of Tamil medical manuscript collection of the Institute of Asian Studies (IAS), Chennai. He

found through survey that there were nearly 8 lakh surviving palm leaf manuscripts, of which 50% were in Sanskrit and 25% in Tamil. He has mentioned how his institute's Tamil medical manuscripts collection got included in the UNESCO Memory of the world. Another serious note is the ten descriptive catalogue publication of IAS. In South Asia, the largest digitization initiative was launched in India with the biggest coverage of twenty one scanning centres, inaugurated by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. It is a part of Million Book Project. Along with this; digitization of thesis and dissertations, Indian Journals, digitization activities of NMM & IGNCA were evaluated by Anup Kumar Das for his dissertation in 2008. He observed that all these mega programs should be evaluated at regular intervals, with appropriate training and awareness must be provided to Indian researchers and scholars. He critically appraised NMM and IGNCA in conserving documentary heritage collection. The enormous output of research findings in Indian journals covering all the fields of knowledge should be made available at the international level with strong visibility. Gaur, Ramesh C. discussed the modern concept of initiation, preservation and access with an example of IGNCA, National Archives of India and NMM. This article stated that manuscript collection possessed in India is 5 million, which is the biggest collection in the world. The good number of manuscripts in various languages and subjects are dispersed in and around India without any care, without proper cataloguing and digitizing. The authors felt that focus should be on the list of manuscripts, digital copies, and their conservation treatments as areas of priority.

Multilingual Multi Script Manuscripts

Language basically is an oral communication system. Writing a language is its graphic representation based on a script specially invented for the same. The antiquity of writing in India can be seen by studying the evolution of Brahmi script. Josep Prinsep was the first person decipher the early Brahmi (Burnell, 1968). Sanskrit was the most popular language and Brahmi was the script of ancient India. The Brahmi script later developed into two faces, one of which used Nagari scripts in parts of North India. The other developed in southern parts of India such as Grantha, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Grantha was the most used script for writing Sanskrit language in south India, mainly in Tamil Nadu. In ancient and medieval India, rulers used to patronize multilingual pundits to write drama, literature, encomiums etc. and copyists to copy from one language into another, from one script into another

Manuscript Libraries in Tamil Nadu

In ancient Tamil Nadu, the three Sangams and Academies of Tamil scholars created innumerable manuscript bundles in Tamil script. Several agraharas or places where Sanskrit was encouraged were houses of Sanskrit manuscripts. Tamil Nadu was the richest state for Sanskrit manuscripts during the British rule in India. In the latter half of the 19th century collection of manuscripts was accelerated through government oriental libraries, museums, archives, universities, research institutions and mutts while Sanskrit scholars were deputed to search and find the manuscripts. These collected manuscripts were housed in different places.
There are many sources for studying about the history of the Tamil Nadu in the ancient and medieval periods such as literary works, manuscripts, numismatics, epigraphy (inscriptions), folklore, legends and religious centers of ghaṭikas (groups of holy and learned brahamanas), śālais (cente of learning in ancient Tamils), mutts, agrahāras and temples. Predominantly two most important sources are highly interesting and useful they are palm leaf manuscripts and temple inscriptions.

There are many manuscript libraries in Tamil Nadu, out of which Tamil collections from Government Oriental Manuscripts Library and Research Centre (GOMLRC), The Swaminatha Iyer Library and Adyar Library and Research Centre, International Institute of Asian Studies, Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) Chennai, Thiruvavaduthurai Adhinam Sarasvathi Mahal Library and Rsearch Center (TASMLRC), Thirupananthal Kasi Math, Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji Saraswathi Mahal Library and Research Center (TMSSMLRC), Tamil University and Annamalai University are important institutions in Tamil Nadu. For exhaustive list of manuscript collections in Tamil Nadu please see Table-1.

Table 1: List of important manuscript libraries in Tamil Nadu

Year of Founda-tion	Manuscript Libraries in Tamil Nadu	No. of MSS
1600	Tarumapura Adhinam	481
1600	Thiruvavduthurai Adhinam,	267

	Thiruvavaduthurai	1
1800	Kovilur Mutt, Karaikkudi	250
1869	Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai	72314
1886	Adyar Library, Chennai	21136
1900	R.M.K. Vaidya Salai, Palani	150
1901	Tamil Sangham, Madurai	389
1918	Thanjavur Maharaja Sarfoji Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur	47424
1939	Annamalai University, Chidambaram	895
1943	U.V. Saminatha Iyer Library, Chennai	2398
1945	Kalaimakal Kalvi Nilayam, Erode	133
1947	Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Chennai	1550
1950	Santhalinga Adigalar Arts&Tamil college, Coimmbatore	337
1965	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai	300
1970	International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai	465
1971	Centre for Traditional Medicine and Research, Chennai	300
1981	Tamil University, Thanjavur	8000
1982	Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai	750
1985	Govt. Siddha College, Chennai	1526
1994	Sri Chandrasekharendra Viswa Mahavidyalaya, Kanchipuram	6000
1996	Pulippani Asram, Palani	40
1997	Govt. Museum, Palanni	30
	Total	167539

Manuscript Cataloguing and Digitization

Manuscript catalogue is a detailed "proper list" of manuscripts belonging to particular libraries/Universities/Special Research Institutions at national and international levels. Indologists generally Sanskritists, begin their researches with manuscript catalogues to compare texts in a critical manner, to find variation, style and paraphrasing of a particular text by different authors. To compile manuscript catalogues, one has to be well versed in many languages and scripts, ancient knowledge system and the cultural affluence of the region, and finally master in Sanskrit. Critical editions of many texts were undertaken on the basis of these manuscript catalogues. It will be interesting to note that at the beginning of the 19th century many editions of Puranas, Vedas, Agamas, Sanskrit Vyakaranas (Panini), Jyotisa, Indian philosophies, Traditional medicine system in Sanskrit and in the regional languages of India were assembled into this type of catalogue or hand list of the manuscripts housed in different parts of India.

Digitization can help enormously in preserving documents and texts in their original format without the need for physical handling, which is prone to damage. Digitization is not merely taking photographs by digital camera, it is more than scanning. It is a comprehensive technology whereby rare manuscripts and art objects are preserved and made available to wider audience/scholars in a digital format. Many of the institutions in Tamil Nadu have embarked on an important programme to photograph and digitize all their manuscripts and make them available online for the research community and ultimately to preserve manuscripts for posterity and to create digital database of manuscripts.

Scope and Limitations

This research study is based on a survey of five manuscript libraries from Tamil Nadu founded in different periods from ancient to modern, different sizes of collection and in different places as listed in table-2

Table 2: List of selected sample libraries

Year of Foundation	Name of the libraries	No. of MSS
1600	Thiruvavduthurai Adhinam Sarasvathi Mahal Library and Research Center, (TASMLRC)	2671
1939	Annamalai University, Chidambaram (AU)	895
1947	Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Chennai (KSRI)	1550
1970	Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai (IAS)	750
1981	Tamil University, Thanjavur (TU)	8511
	Total	14377

In these samples two university libraries are directly managed by government of Tamil Nadu and other three libraries are nongovernmental libraries run as research centers managed by trust/society/with foreign aid. The study mainly examines five manuscript library collections with an evaluative study on manuscript cataloguing and digitization. The study also attempts library status, collection details, financial sources, publications.

Objectives

- To find collection details in terms of recognitions
- To find manuscript cataloguing procedures, difficulties and importance
- To know the role of national agencies like NMM, IGNCA.
- To evaluate digitization for preservation
- To know the preventive and curative methods adopted for manuscripts

Findings and Discussion

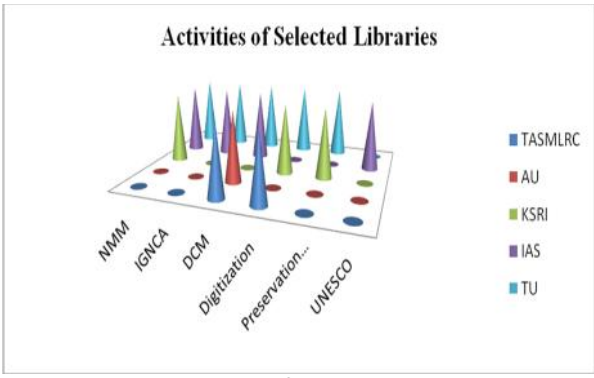


Fig -1 Activities of Selected samples

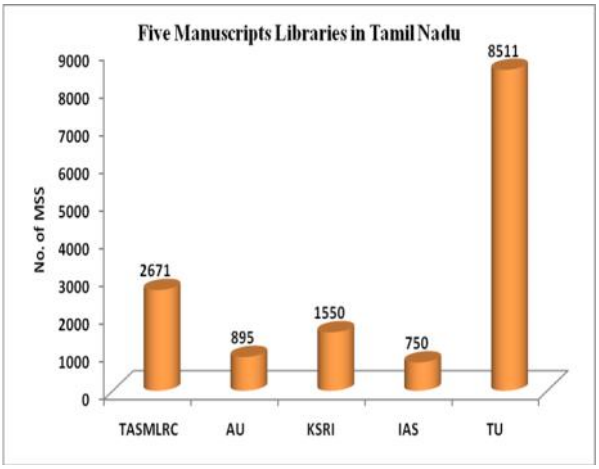


Fig-2 Manuscript libraries in Tamil Nadu.

1. A survey made by the authors in April 2016 found that the total manuscript collection of the five selected libraries was 14377. Fig-2 indicates that the largest (8511) manuscript collection was found in Tamil University, Thanjavur and the least found in the Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai.

2. Dr. G. John Samuel, Director of the Institute of Asian Studies has served in the capacity of an expert on palm leaf manuscript from India in the World Expert committee of the UNESCO. He was the one instrumental in adding rare manuscripts, palm leaf manuscripts and oral traditions in the first meeting of the World Expert Committee was held in Warsaw (Poland) in 1993. He also pointed out the importance of recording and cataloguing all the manuscripts which was unanimously accepted. He was again invited to the meeting of the Advisory Committee in Oslo (Norwary), 1996. Following the recognition of Palm leaf manuscripts as memorable relics of the world, IAS was the first institution from India to get this significant recognition for IAS Tamil medical manuscripts in 1997.

3. Manuscript cataloguing and digitization are two important functionalities of any library. Output of these activities is the most important research tool for Indologists / Sanskritists. Without a proper Descriptive Catalogue of Manuscript of libraries, no Sanskrit scholar can forward his research. Here in this study we have found IAS, Chennai as the only library to have successfully completed cataloguing of entire manuscripts. TASMLRC has published two volumes of its 1960 Tamil manuscripts only, and the remaining 711 manuscripts are yet to be catalogued. Deparment of Manuscriptology of Tamil University has began its DCM volumes with 'Catalogue of Tamil Palm leaf manuscripts in the Tamil University, compiled by K.C. Chellamuthu, T. Padmanaban and P.V. Nagarajan in the year1985 as TU publication no. 31. This was the output of the project of Union catalogue of Tamil palm leaf manuscripts available in Tamil Nadu, which significantly created data in a database titled "TAMILLARS/PALMLEAF LINE" (Tamil Literature Analysis and Retrieval Services/Palmleaf Line). From 1987 onwards with the financial assistance from National

Archives of India, TU was published eight volumes of DCM in Tamil titled as ‘ ’ (Tamil Manuscripts Descriptive).Each volume has the details of 500 manuscripts covering various subjects. Annamalai University published only one volume of its 182 Tamil manuscript collections from 895 bundles. Contrary to all these four libraries, KSRI is yet to begin its manuscript cataloguing.

4. IAS, TU are the two selected libraries are doing very good effort as far as manuscript cataloguing of their manuscripts and as well as covering other institution manuscripts also. IAS not only completed its library manuscript cataloguing but extended support for TASMLRC, Dr. U.V. Swaminathaiayar Library and Central Research Institute of Siddha Medicine.

5. In the current digital world, to preserve contents of manuscripts, digitization is the best solution. It is very disappointing that among the five libraries KSRI is the one to have completed digitization of manuscripts. TSMLRC is not having financial sources to digitize manuscripts, but however time to time permits other institutions to digitize some manuscript bundles. Tamil University is comfortable with financial grants from Government Tamil Nadu and has started digitization with the help of ELCOT. The IAS and AU are yet to begin digitization.

6. Most of these libraries have made attempt to catalogue and digitization of their manuscript collection and services, but their attempt was not completed and progress is also very slow.

7. Preservation and conservation of manuscripts is an essential act for all manuscript libraries. Very sadly none of the selected libraries has qualified professional conservator. However KSRI and TU are managing with semi-qualified persons where as other three libraries are not having any skilled persons.

8. National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) are the two expertise giants playing vital role in manuscripts survey, cataloguing and digitization through their various centers across the country. IAS, KSRI and TU libraries are having important roles as resources centre, conservation centre and partner centre. IGNCA is also a national apex body for preservation and conservation of manuscript resources in the country. NMM has developed a nationwide online database for manuscripts known as ‘Kritisampada’ which is holding manuscripts details available across in India.

9. NMM should come forward to include AU and TASMLRC in its different centers activities.

Conclusion

Indian multilingual multi script manuscript collection is spread all over the world. In Tamil Nadu majority of available manuscripts are in Grantha, Devanagari and Tamil scripts. Table-1 indicates the main manuscript collections available in Tamil Nadu. Since there were many studies in the past about major manuscript libraries of Tamil Nadu, we have selected the libraries which are not so far in the debate and also to create an awareness of the activities of these selected five libraries in Tamil Nadu. Table-2 indicates that the selected five manuscript libraries total collection is 14377. Tamil University is found to possess the highest number of 8511 manuscripts. It shows that the Tamil University faculties ability in field work of collecting manuscripts from various parts of Tamil Nadu. The least collection is 750 of manuscripts of IAS. Manuscript cataloguing was completed by IAS, but not digitized. KSRI has completed digitization of entire manuscripts but not catalogued them. All the five libraries evaluated in this study were mainly based on their collection, cataloguing and digitization. From this study we have found that out of five selected libraries none has completed both cataloguing and digitization also they have not employed professional conservators to take care of manuscripts. It is the right time for NMM to coordinate and to initiate these important left out activities to gear up. For all the manuscript libraries should be provided grants by governments for infrastructures for cataloguing and digitization.

References

[1]. Burnell, A.C. (1968). Elements of South Indian paleography. New Delhi : Indological Book House

[2]. Das, Anup Kumar (2008). An evaluative study of some selected libraries in India undergoing the process of digitization. Ph.D. Thesis. Jadavpur University

[3]. Gaur, Ramesh C. Digital Libraries in India with special reference to experiences at IGNCA, retrieved August 13, 2016 from http://www.academia.edu/1201569/Digital_libraries_in_India_with_special_reference_to_experiences_at_IGNCA_New_Delhi_India

[4]. Gros. F. (1995). Keynote Address. Palm-leaf and other manuscripts in Indian languages : Proceedings of the National Seminar. Madras : Institute of Asian Studies

[5]. NMM (2003). Can be accessed from: http://www.namami.org/digitization.pdf

[6]. Panda, Ganesh Prasad (2006). Kritisampada: the national database of manuscripts. Kritti Rakshana, 2 (3) p. 2-3

[7]. Samuel, John G. (2007). Preservation of Tamil Palm leaf medical manuscripts at the IAS, Journal of the IAS Vol. 24, no. 2, (March 2007)