



Manuscripts, Books, Archival and alike Material in India - Conservation Status and Needs



O.P. Agrawal
and
S.N. Sinha

INTRODUCTION

Old manuscripts, rare printed books, significant archival and alike material constitute our most precious national heritage. Besides providing information on a variety of subjects, some of these materials have unique artistic quality, craftsmanship, beautiful script and fine calligraphy. Such types of material are to be found all over India in Manuscript Libraries, Public Libraries, Archives, Museums, Universities, Academies, Oriental Research Institutes, Temples, *Mathas*, Mosques, Churches, Jain Bhandaras, etc., and also with private persons. Several collections of manuscripts and documents are still lying about in bundles in a neglected condition. It is thus not possible to know the precise number of such materials. Nevertheless it has been found that most of such materials are deteriorating fast due to climatic conditions, improper storage arrangements, injurious insects, growth of fungus, dust, acidity in paper, mishandling and neglect. The picture on the whole about the proper upkeep of such objects is gloomy and most of them are in dire need of conservation, but so far no worthwhile attempt has been made to study this problem. Proper preservation of these types of our cultural heritage is vital for their durability, but it is possible only if a proper survey of the state of conservation of such materials is made. The INTACH Indian Conservation Institute, Lucknow had, therefore, decided to observe 1990 as the year of Manuscripts and Documents. Shri O.P. Agrawal, Director General of this Institute made this statement at a meeting of INTACH Conveners held in August 1990 at Shanti Niketan, West Bengal. Realising the gravity of matter, the Indian Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, popularly known as INTACH sponsored a Project entitled

“Conservation Status of Manuscripts, Books, Archival and alike Material” and entrusted it to its unit INTACH Indian Conservation Institute, Lucknow to be launched under the direction of Shri O.P. Agrawal, Director General of the Institute. He himself surveyed and examined several collections. The coordinating work relating to the Project including most of the surveys and examination of collections has been done by Dr S.N. Sinha, former Director, U.P. State Archives, Lucknow who joined this Institute as Consultant. Collections have also been examined by other members of the staff of the Institute, viz, Shri Avinashi Lal, Consultant, Sarvashri Alok Kumar, Ghanshyam Lal, Rajendra Prasad, D.N. Srivastava, Sunil Laghate and Smt. Mamta Misra, Senior Conservators.

It was decided to give priority to the collections available in Uttar Pradesh but at the same time information was collected about the collections available in other states of the country and on getting an opportunity, some collections of these states were also examined.

The Present Report is based on the information that we received from various institutions as well as on the survey and inspection of different collections. Our findings, with slight variations, may be applicable to several other collections in the country about which we could receive no information.

We do not claim to have made a perfect survey of conservation status of manuscripts, rare books, significant archival and alike materials in this Report. We made an appeal to most of the institutions in the country for cooperation as well as for furnishing the requisite information in respect of their organisations but the response was not up to our expectations. We also tried to explore this problem with the collections in the custody of private individuals but majority of the owners did not evince much interest. Non-receipt of information from several institutions, lack of awareness among most of the owners and custodians about the significant role of scientific conservation of such materials and greater emphasis on accumulation of material rather than their conservation are the main reasons which precluded a complete survey.

The situation about the conservation status of such materials on the whole is a complex one. The institutions having such collections may be divided into three categories, viz; (a) Institutions with adequate conservation facilities and well skilled staff, (b) Institutions with meagre conservation

facilities and few trained personnel and (c) Institutions with neither conservation facilities nor separate staff for conservation. Adequate conservation facilities along with necessary expertise is, therefore, required in the last two categories for proper preservation of their holdings. For the collections in the custody of private individuals, an awareness for proper conservation of their material has to be created in the owners. However, the suggestions given in the Report, if followed, may lessen the problem to a considerable degree.

The Project was an humble attempt by INTACH Indian Conservation Institute, Lucknow to study this problem in detail. It has set the ball rolling in the hope that others may pursue it more vigorously.

AIMS & OBJECTS

The main aims and objects of the Project were :

- i) To survey the state of conservation of manuscripts, old and rare printed books, archival and alike material available in different institutions and organisations of the country and also with private persons.
- ii) To ascertain the nature of deterioration in such materials.
- iii) To acquaint with the conservation facilities and skilled personnel available in different institutions and organisations.
- iv) To know the nature of conservation work done.
- v) To advise about proper conservation of such materials.

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

To begin with a proforma with 21 columns was sent to various institutions and organisations of the country having such materials, with a request to furnish the desired information about their collections. The information desired included among others: Name of the Institution; Total Number of collections; Form and Nature of Collections; Conservation facilities available; Position of Trained Personnel ; Process of maintenance and conservation of the collections; Staff engaged in Conservation work;