

Guardian of Cultural Heritage - Role of the Asiatic Society of Mumbai towards Manuscript Conservation

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Abstract -- The Asiatic society of Mumbai is a premier scholastic institution in India since colonial British rule. This institution is contributing to the extension of historical knowledge since its inception in 1804. The scientific conservation of old books and invaluable manuscripts is a herculean task for any conservation centre. This institution is a repository of very useful volumes of books and exceptional manuscripts. It is well known that rare books and manuscripts conservation is a great task which needs greater delicacy and accuracy. It is the responsibility of all stake holders to extend helping hand in managing this great scholastic institution. This heritage institution is a mark of academics, historical investigation and conservation and is considered as a milestone in Indian historical research. This library has housed rarest of the manuscripts which are helpful in the reconstruction national cultural heritage. Besides these collections of old and rare books /manuscripts, the library has been conserving lakhs of old & rare journals and old manuscripts through scientific conservation methods. This institution has helped the preservation of such delicate artefacts with greater subtlety & refinement. A need to provide awareness to all stake holders about preventive and curative conservation is being launched through this Institution. The challenges faced by conservation are innovatively met by this institution. Protecting the knowledge content in digital version is also necessary besides enhancing funding to research on manuscripts and critical editions is conducted by public private participation proposals.

Indexed Terms: Asiatic Society of Mumbai, Guardian of cultural heritage, manuscript conservation

I. INTRODUCTION

- Listed as heritage building:

This building is listed as a heritage building. The building was built during 1804. It is a great combination of Greek and Roman architecture. The gigantic Doric columns cover the massive portico with style. All these eight pillars are very reminiscent of Roman columns. There is a flight of eight steps which lead to the inside hall looks very elegant and sophisticated. The further entrance to hall is

submitted by wrought iron steps which further enhance the architectural beauty of the building.

- List of stalwart Directors of Asiatic society of Mumbai:

The Asiatic society of Mumbai boasts of a galaxy of stalwart academicians who steered the institution towards academic excellence and research pursuit. It was guided to excellence achievements in academics and scholarship through great stalwart directors including

1. St. James Mackintosh,
2. Dr .Stewart,
3. M .William Taylor,
4. O. Woodhouse,
5. Mountstuart Elphistone,
6. John Malcolm,
7. John Romer,
8. Venny Kennedy & such others

II. CONSERVATION OF DOCUMENTS IN ASIATIC SOCIETY OF MUMBAI LIBRARY

The Asiatic society of Mumbai is helping the conservation of rarest manuscripts through

1. Regular cleaning with citrus liquid
2. Removing the acid layer of the old and rare books / manuscripts through fumigation
3. Chemical treatment for old and rare books / manuscripts
4. Covering old and rare books / manuscripts with tissue paper
5. Rebinding old and rare books / manuscripts
6. Priority for preserving damaged books / manuscripts or fragile books

III. RAREST OF THE RARE DOCUMENT LISTED IN THE LIBRARY

This library has housed rarest of the manuscripts which are helpful in the reconstruction national cultural heritage. The following are the some of the important collections in this library

Sr. no	Name of the document	Period of the document
1	Dictionary Of Malayalam & English	1846
2	Voyages Of François Bernier	1710
3	Bhaghavatha Purana	1840
4	Dictionary Of The World	1772
5	Captain Cook Voyages To The South Pole	1777
6	The Birds Of Asia	1850
7	Fatwa I Alamgiri Translation	1829
8	Benares Illustrated By James Princep	1831
9	Rig Veda Translation By Grossmann	1876
10	Langles' Monuments Of Hindusthan	1821

Besides these collections of old and rare books /manuscripts, the library has been conserving lakhs of old & rare journals and old manuscripts through scientific conservation methods.

IV. MANUSCRIPT CONSERVATION THROUGH PUBLIC FUNDING

The old and rare books / manuscripts which are invaluable sources of historical knowledge are conserved through public private participation. The following table shows the private organizations supporting the upkeep of the library.

1	ICICI group & ICICI Bank	Microfilming laboratory
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2	Municipal corporation of Mumbai	Micro film lab shelves
3	Government of Maharashtra	Micro film lab shelves (basement)
4	Sir Dorab Tata trust , Mumbai	Conservation laboratory
5	Tata group of companies &TCS	Fumigation Chamber for manuscripts
6	Mumbai port trust corner	Financing micro filming of manuscripts and conservation of books on ports , maritime history and maritime trade .
7	Mumbai branch State bank of India , Associated Cement companies , IDBI Bank	Special shelving system & renovation Block
8	Mumbai Hindustan lever ltd	Air conditioning of the Special collections room basement
9	Mumbai port trust terminal	Construction of special rooms
10	Mumbai cultural association	Adopt a book Scheme

All these organizations have joined hands with Asiatic society of Mumbai library in conserving rarest documents.

V. THE PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTICIPATION

The public private participation in the conservation of the books / manuscripts is supported by the stake holders as well as they rarest collections are further conserved through construction of fumigation chamber, acid free compartments, rebinding for very

old books and retooling of the library with mobile stacks , shelves , racks and compartments.

1. Ancient Manuscripts
2. Art Detailing,
3. Artefacts,
4. Atlas pages
5. Book leaf
6. Charts of Greek line
7. Coins,
8. Drawings,
9. Folio texture cloth
10. Manuscript leaf
11. Maps,
12. Painted Folios,
13. Prints,
14. Relic drawings,
15. Stamps,
16. Surfaces,
17. Textures,

All of these points are very important indications to be noted in preservation process. PPP has helped the preservation of such delicate artefacts with greater subtlety & refinement.

VI. SCHEMES TO SAFEGUARD THE RESOURCES OF THE LIBRARY

There are several schemes for safeguarding the precious collections in the library. Such as

1. Adopt a book scheme is an innovative scheme which provides chances for the reader / visitor to adopt book and support in its conservation through individual funding.
2. Micro-filming of the rare document/ manuscript leaf
3. Digital restoration of the manuscripts and pages of the old books through digital media. Each document sheet is copied through scanning and is restored digitally.
4. Introduction of Compact book shelving system where books are preserved in a mobile steel racks and books are stored in a dust free pilfer free environment\
5. Aid conditioning of rooms - to conserve books and rare documents this library has shifted to air conditioning the hall.

6. It has mobile racks as well as special cupboards which are shiftable.

VII. ROLE OF THE STAKE HOLDERS

Role of the stake holders is also very significant as the oldest library is considered as a heritage building it needs further intricate support in conserving old documents. Further scientific detailing is needed in shelving system, air conditioning, fumigation, acid cleaning and chemical treatment. All stake holders need to address the issues relating to funding and priority utilization of funded allocations.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus in conclusion it is understood that there is a need to provide adequate space and infrastructure by reorganizing storage space. There is a immediate need to provide awareness to all stake holders about preventive and curative conservation. Protecting the knowledge content in digital version is also necessary enhancing funding to research on manuscripts and critical editions is also necessary.

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