

RURAL ARCHIVES: NEGLECTED PART OF OUR CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract: Archives are the collection of documents or records which have been selected for permanent preservation because of their values as evidence or as a source of historical or other research purposes. Rural part of our country also contains such valuable and important documents related to several historical events happened in the past. Some of them are very important links of history but still apart from the historians. There are several factors due these documents lost its important in the dirt of the past. In Indian history most of the events related to our past started from the rural part of the country and later spread different parts related. A very small sparks always started from the rural areas and then turn in to big fire which creates history itself. Now the time we read about the fire in the history but forgot or neglect that spark that causes that fire. Sometime we are not aware about the root cause or spark that cause of that event because they are not searched or placed properly in the history. As town developed, slowly the gap between the town and rural areas increased as time passed. Some of the pages are still blank for the unwritten or unknown facts which are hidden in the rural parts of India. There is a need to illuminate these archives in the society which are treasure itself and enrich our documentary heritage.

Keywords: *Archives, Documentary, Heritage, Manuscripts, Rural,*

Introduction: According to T.R. Shellenberg, "All the books, paper, maps, photographs or other documentary materials regardless of physical forms, contain important or useful information of past in can be beneficial in the future also termed as Archives." All the handwritten or hand typed documents such as letters, Farmans, literary evidences are come under the categories of Archives. India passed through the several ages where different activities performed to the purpose of storing their culture in the different forms. These different ages are, ages of speaking, drawing and painting. Each of age extending over thousands of years, and forms a series of natural steps that writing grew out of drawing. The gradual enlargement of range of writing and its use, various types of writing materials were discovered and used that time such as leaves, barks, stones, metals, wood etc. According to the availability of materials as well as nature and the purpose of writing, the writing materials change from time to time. Archives in the form of Manuscripts are the original source of history of humans available in various kinds of media likes inscription on the stone, pillars, clay tablets and

written script on palm leaf, barks, animal skin, cloth, paper etc. thus we can say that the manuscripts are the life blood of history.

The study of Archives provides the information about the economic, historical, social, cultural, artistic and aesthetic changes that appeared in the development of our civilization. Thus we are able to say that the collecting and preserving these documentary heritages is preserving the intellectual heritage of mankind. These archives are available in different state and regional archives as well as National Archives, libraries, religion institution etc. some of them are preserve and a big part of collection is still in the deteriorating stage and in continuous process of deterioration day by day. They need special attention and care for the reason of their importance as well as fragile nature. If attention is not given for their conservation there is then very possibility that our cultural heritage and nations collective memory available in the form of archives may disappear very soon.

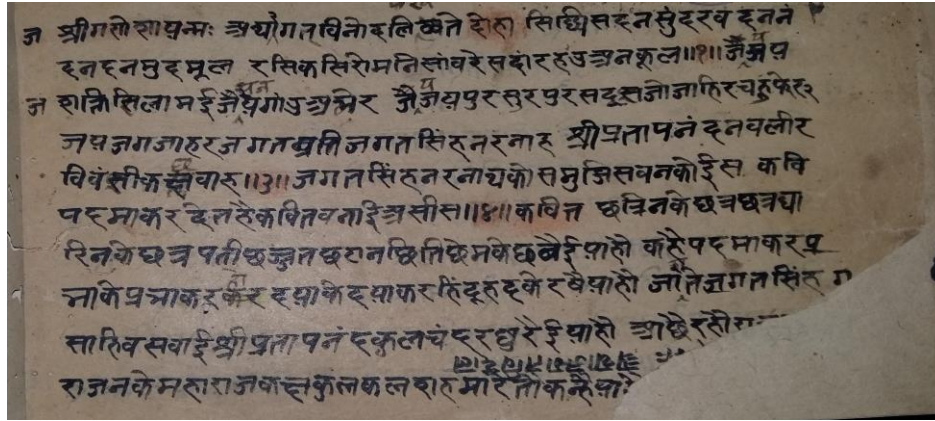


Fig.1: A manuscript folio in deteriorate condition.

Archives are the original source of human history available in different forms such as leaves (palm leaves, bamboo leaves), Barks (birch barks), animal skin (parchment and vellum), clothes (cotton, silk) paper etc. in ancient days, knowledge and experience were recorded and preserved for the benefits for future generations. In rural India writing was done on walls, footsteps, pillars of temples, stone, bricks, bamboo chips, metal sheets, wooden boards, terracotta boards, birch barks leaves of palm trees etc.

Causes of Deterioration

Deterioration of Archives caused by natural phenomenon, such as humidity, light, temperature, air-borne pollutants, molds, pests and microorganisms, is generally gradual and cumulative and usually irreversible. The undesirable changes in the manuscripts caused due to the action of the organisms termed as Biodeterioration. It is observed that some manuscripts deteriorate more quickly than others because they are made by the materials that are inherently unstable such as acidic paper. The materials of manuscripts are composed mainly paper, parchment, palm leaf, birch bark, leather and adhesive used for pasting and book binding these are prone to two types of deterioration, Biological and Environmental. These two forms of deterioration are interlinked. Most of time Environmental factors are associated with the cause and growth of biological agents,

which damage the manuscripts. When humid condition increase, favours the growth of fungi and fungi attract rodents and insects. Accumulation of dust and dirt also attract insects.

The main factor is the nature of archival materials themselves is acidity. Acidity is the quality of being acidic or sour. Acidity is the opposite of alkalinity or sweet. Acids contain high levels of positively charged hydrogen ions that can make paper fragile. These hydrogen ions can be introduced in the archival material during the paper manufacturing process, inks used to writing purpose or the main cause of acidity of archival material developed due to poor storage. Atmospheric pollutants such as SO_x and NO_x also increase acidity of the archival material.

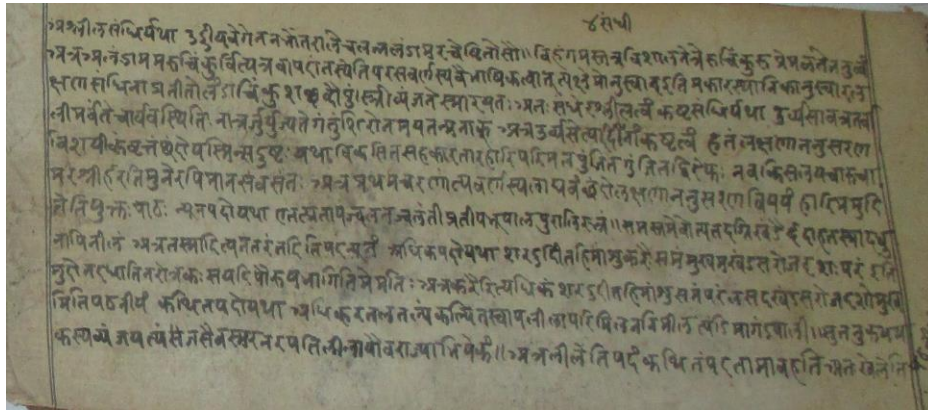


Fig. 2: Showing Acidity in Archival Material (Paper)

Mahapatra (2003) goes on to add that "the most common acid deterioration is caused by sulphur- dioxide present in small amount in the atmosphere. The amount of sulphur dioxide is larger in industrial environment. The sulphuric acid, when it reaches to about one percent accumulated in paper and moisture. The traces of iron and copper present in paper or leather binding act as a catalytic agent to change sulphur dioxide gas into sulphuric acid. It causes degradation of cellulose fibers of paper by breaking down the molecular structure.

Light can affect the stability of archival materials. Light speeds up the oxidation of paper records causing materials to deteriorate faster. Light also develop a bleaching action causing coloring papers and inks to whiten or fade. At the same time light can increase the chemical reaction which causes causing changes in color. Light also generate heat which speed up the chemical reaction which also cause of degradation of materials. Ultra-violet light is the most harmful light because the wave length of ultra-violet is very active generating more radiation it penetrate in the archival material and break the bonds of the materials. Ultra-violet light is found in sunlight and florescent light, so both types of light need to be controlled in the archival institution.

Cook (1999) says it's possible to measure light if there is a serious concern about the level of light, particularly in an archival repository. Light is measured in 'lux' a unit of light intensity. If the room or repository received more light than is required, it is necessary to control it. The effects of light can be reduced by keeping all materials

covered boxed when not in use and by providing only the minimum amount of light. Curtains can be placed on windows to control natural light. Fluorescent lights should be avoided in records storage areas and replaced by incandescent light which don't generate the same level of radiation.

Temperature can be to a great extent affect the stability of records and archives. Excessive heat can increase the deterioration. Bajpai (1999) argues that "The rate of increase in the deterioration of paper is even faster, doubling, for every increase of approximately 4 degrees Celsius"

Rapid fluctuation of temperatures can be more harmful than a consistently high temperature says Bajpai (1999). The oscillating temperature stress paper which will result in paper damages. When books or paper is exposed to heat, materials become brittle and crack easily "It causes dehydration and paper loses its usual strength".

Temperature and Relative humidity work hand in glove in the deterioration of records. Relative humidity is defined by Cook (1999) as "The ration of the amount of water vapor in the air to the amount that would be present at the same temperature were the atmosphere to be fully saturated. Relative humidity is expressed as a percentage of water present in the atmosphere".

"Paper materials swell or shrink as relative humidity changes as organic materials are hygroscopic in nature. They may cause water soluble inks to ran and paper which is coated with china clay or chalk to stick" Bajpai (1999).

Biological agents can also affect the records and archives media. Paper which is organic is subjected to biological infestation by mould spores, insects, rodents and mice. Insects such as silverfish and cockroaches and others, these biological agents are attracted by glues, paper itself, binding adhesives and even sewing thread.

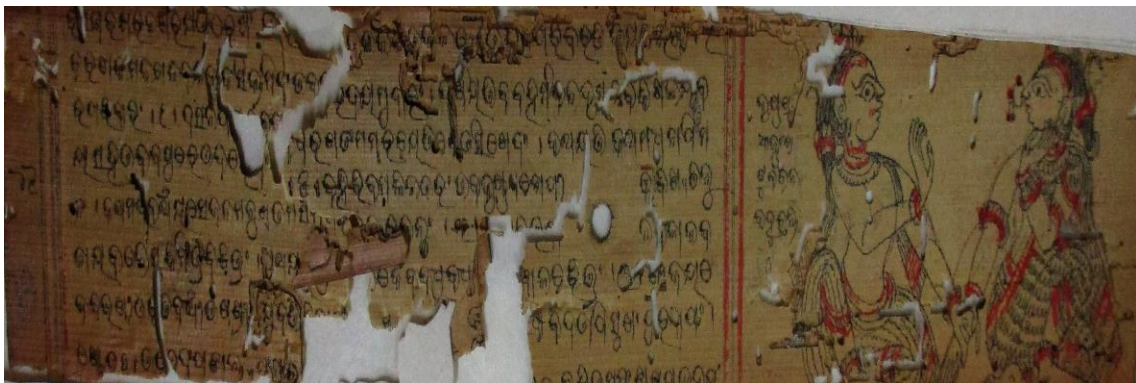


Fig. 3: Deterioration by Insects

Feather (1996) says "The elimination of insect infestation is an expensive undertaking for which specialists would normally have to be employed---The elimination of vegetable matter from the (records and archives) institution and its outer walls is one factor. Planters and flower displays inside, and creepers growing on the outside wall, may be

aesthetically pleasing, but can encourage insects---The proper care of all the wooden parts of...(records and archives building) whether structural or in the form of furniture or shelving, is also critical, since termites breed in wood"



Fig. 4: Deterioration by Termites and Bookworms

There are microorganisms which are also cause great loss of archival materials. These microorganisms present in the atmosphere but grew faster when suitable and favorable condition are provided. These microorganisms once grew on archival material. The fungal spores present in the earth, water and air. They will be dormant at any environment. Moulds grow best in an relative humidity exceeds 70% and the temperature reaches 25⁰C or more mould growth speed up considerably.

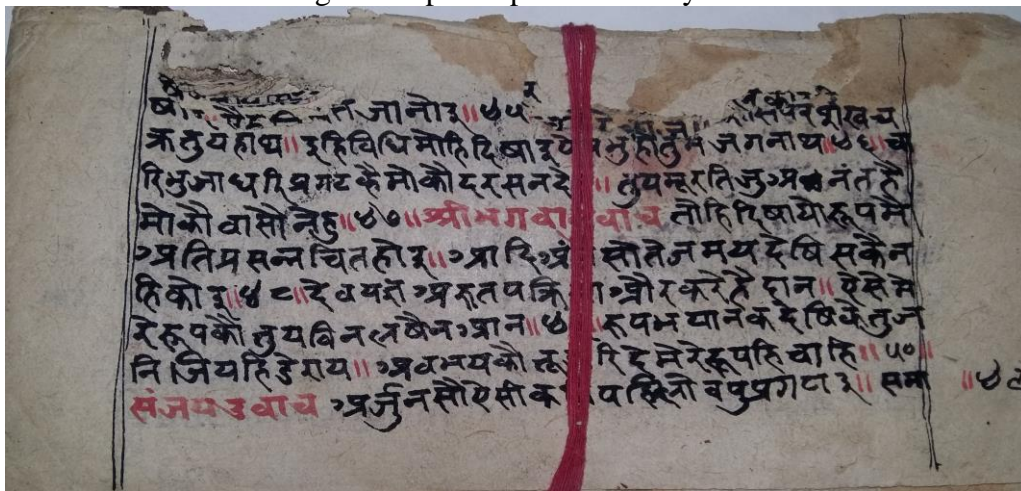


Fig5: Deterioration by fungal growth and insect

Lastly, a large amount of records and archives can deteriorate through abuse and mishandling. Activities that may damage records are, rough handling of paper, poor photocopying practices, excessive use of materials, handling fingers with dirty hands, deliberate acts of vandalism, theft of material, inadequate security, etc.

Problem of conservation Rural Archives

The problem of protecting these value start from local and goes up to globe. Most of Rural Archives are unknown documentary heritage of the country. People of rural area are not aware about the importance of this documentary heritage. The very reason for the negations is that the archival materials are not in the custody of right people. As the time changes the people who kept these records, they may be shifted to other areas. May be their next generation moved to the other places for their livelihood or some are now not interested to conserve these. The conservation of this documentary heritage needs a huge amount of money, time and knowledge, which is lacking in rural part of the country. No proper store house to preserve this heritage is available. As time changes the need of these documents also reduced and at present no need so these are neglected by the people of rural part. No any support system is available to conserve this documentary heritage is provided by the related offices in the rural areas. No proper store houses, temperature maintenance, humidity management systems are available in the rural part where these are kept.

Another main reason is fund, there do not have proper fund to protect these documents. In Uttar Pradesh there is a State Archives in Lucknow and two regional archives they hardly preserve the documents available in the Archives. So the Archival materials in the rural areas are always a neglected part of the cultural heritage by the government as well as people also. Each and every part of the rural areas facing the similar problem.

Cook (1999) says, "Steps should be taken not only to protect materials in archival storage but also to ensure staff, researchers and office personnel understand the need to handle records and archives carefully... Specifically, it is important to consider the following, make security copies of valuable materials, particularly if originals are being used a great deal. If possible, do not put original materials on display at all but use copies a surrogates. Store fragile or oversized materials appropriately,, ensure there is close supervision of the research area. Screen potential users of records for security concerns Issue guide-lines for the appropriate use of the materials.

To protect these important and valuable documents the most important thing is to aware the people about the importance of cultural heritage, how these are important to us. Why we should conserve these. Time to time seminar and workshops organized by the government, related department and NGOs to aware the people and students to preservation of these documentary heritages.

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