

Full Length Research Article

Manuscripts in the Museum of Shri Partap Singh (SPS) Kashmir (India): A Survey

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In this paper, an attempt has been made to survey the SPS museum (Kashmir) possessing manuscripts of 15th to 18th century in oriental language and provide a general introduction to these rare collections. The paper will be especially useful for researchers in oriental disciplines and history, students of library and information science, library professionals and all those who have interest in rare and invaluable manuscripts available in Kashmir (India).

Key words: Manuscripts of Kashmir, Oriental Manuscripts.

INTRODUCTION

Manuscripts have always played a pivotal role in throwing the light not only on the literary development but also hold an important place as they preserve the development of culture, tradition, of a nation or a civilization through ages within themselves. A hand written document is said to be manuscript only if its age is more than 75 years and the author of which is no more. Manuscripts are the linking mechanism of past with the present and Oriental manuscripts are said to be those manuscripts in which literature pertaining to Oriental studies and languages had been penned down. "Oriental" in this context refers to the ancient Near East, including India, Persia (Iran), and ancient Arabia, among other places, and the languages and literatures of those places and peoples. (Gul & Khan (2008)

HISTORY OF THE WRITING MATERIAL

We know that before the introduction of paper various materials were used for writing materials like animal skin, birch bark (Burza or Bhoj Patra), palm leaf, stones, cloth, clay tablets etc. Hand made Paper began to be used as a writing material around second century C.E in China and this invention helped in the production of documents on large scale than that of earlier period Reid, (1994). In Kashmir the hand made paper was introduced in the late 14th century by Sultan Zain-ul-Abideen who sent local artisans of Kashmir to Samarkand where the method of paper making had reached 1300 years ago. kamran khan * The author is has done PhD in library and information science and is presently working as library assistant in Islamic university of science and technology, Awantipora, Kashmir The art of paper making and the establishment of paper industry in Kashmir made its demand from India for manuscript writing material, and it was used by all who wished to import dignity to their correspondence. The material during such period was processed at *Dachigam* stream, today the same stream finds its place in an animal sanctuary known as *Dachigam* animal sanctuary. Then the raw paper was shifted to to the present

city at nowshera Srinagar for its final processing. In addition to this paper making the calligraphists of Kashmir also invented an ink which could not be washed with the water from these manuscripts. Sofi (1974)

SPS museum and its oriental manuscript collection

It was in 3rd march 1898 that 2nd European scholar, captain S.H Godmerry and Raja Amar Singh proposed that there should be a museum in Srinagar to collect, preserve and conserve and exhibit antiquities of Jammu and Kashmir and met with magnificent responses from Maharaja Pratap, for this purpose the palatinate building, summer resort of Maharaja was temporarily selected for the museum built in, 1872 C.E on the left bank of Jehlum at Lal Mandi and still stands there. A small collection of specimen of objects which also included manuscripts in oriental languages was received by museum through donations and by the transfer from the state *Toshkhana* in Jammu and Srinagar The museum was opened in the middle of 1898 C.E under the title of "Shri Pratap Museum Srinagar" (Shri Partap Singh Museum)

The Oriental Manuscripts section in the museum, is a radically a distinctive which consists of a rich heritage of manuscripts works on religion, literature, history, philosophy and science, written in oriental Languages, and a distinguished literary genre and inscriptions found in the museum belonging to different periods of history. The journey from birch bark to the hand made paper in Kashmir can traced by having an overview on the oriental manuscript collection in the SPS (Shri Partap Singh) museum The manuscript section of SPS museum contains a wide range of objects including books, royal edicts (farmaans), deeds etc dating from the 6-7 century to the 19th century These hand written manuscripts are penned on a host of writing material ranging from the bark of birch tree (Bhoj Patra or Burza), leather to fine kashmiri hand made paper, known as '*koshur kagaz*' The museum has traced a long journey in the collection of oriental manuscripts through gifts, purchase, donations etc The survey in the manuscript section of SPS museum shows that at present it

The important manuscripts available in the section is given below in Table 1

S.no	Manuscript	Period	Language
1	holy koran	17 th century	Arabic
2	Holy koran	17 th century	Persian
3	holy koran	17 th century	Translated into persian in 1112 a.h (c.e)
4	holy koran	1207 a.h (18 th century)	Arabic
5	Kulyaat romi	17 th century	Persian
6	Haft pakir and makhazan asrar	17 th century	Kashmiri
7	Bagwath gita	17 th century	Translated into persian
8	Bagwath gita	17 th century	Translated into persian
9	Bagwath gita	18 th century	Translated into persian
10	Aatiqad nama	1253 A.h 1833 century	Persian
11	Land document of jahangir (mughal king)	16 th century	Persian
12	Nalandman	15 th century	Persian
13	Makashful ul asrar	n.a	Persian
14	Reshi nama	(1191 a.h) 1671 century	Persian
15	Dewani hafiz	18 th century	persian

A.H (AL- HIJRI) ISLAMIC CALENDER.
THE PRESENT ISLAMIC CALENDER YEAR IS 1431 A.H

has a collection of 100 manuscripts in various languages like, Arabic, Persian, Bodhi, and Sanskrit, and Kashmiri .The important among them are Gilgit manuscripts of 6-7 th century A.C. The manuscripts reveal that during the Sultanate period (1320-1585) A.C, Sharda script was extensively used along side Persian in all decrees, court papers, wills etc both religious and secular . Also the section houses a bilingual birch bark manuscript written in two scripts (Sharda and Persian_). The most prominent manuscript written by Mogul emperor Jehangir (1605-28) is also the part of this collection in museum. In addition to this there are also stone inscriptions on which quranic verses in Arabic script is engraved. The analysis of manuscripts shows that most of them are in Persian language and mostly having an average area of 1 feet * 8 inches. The manuscripts include mostly religious texts on Islam and Hinduism .it also shows that most of the oriental manuscripts are in Persian Language and most of the manuscripts had been penned down on Kashmiri hand made paper. The documents are classified on the basis of accession numbers, date, and language and almost all the manuscripts are written with black ink.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Apart from functioning as a reference repositories and conserving and preserving manuscripts, it keeps the manuscripts open to all the visitors bearing the information on the literature, religion, history, manners and customs of the people not only of Kashmir but of Ladakh, Jammu, Gilgit Tibet and the Central Asia .The manuscripts had been collected from the parts of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Gilgat .

Selection of manuscripts

The SPS museum has a panel of experts who collects the panoramic information about the document like age, material, ink used, script and various other manuscripts standards while making its purchase. The main objective of the manuscript section of the museum is to acquire and preserve manuscripts which display the development of literary and cultural heritage of a place. The museum has got a well trained staff which accelerates the supply of authentic information in respect to

manuscripts to the scholars, visitors, students etc. who visit from time to time.

Age of the manuscripts

Among 15 manuscripts only 14 display their age. The oldest manuscript belongs to 15th century where as 7 manuscripts belong to 17th century era, 4 manuscript belong to 18th and 2 manuscript belong to 16th century

Language Diversity

Out of 15 manuscripts 80% of the documents are written in Persian language, 13.3% possess Arabic script and 6.6% are penned down in Kashmiri language

Subjective Distribution

So far as the subject distribution is concerned, 46.6% manuscripts are on religion, in which 26.6% involves Muslim religion and 20% is on Hindu religion. The rest of subjects are spirituality, mythology, land record, philosophy.

Preservation

The preservation of oriental manuscripts - a rare literary heritage available is of utmost importance. The preservation of oriental manuscripts available in SPS museum is done by keeping manuscripts in fumigation chambers use of chemicals like sprit, thymol, naphthalene, silica gel and above all the natural climate of Kashmir favours its preservation .The rare and valuable birch bark manuscripts are carefully preserved by adopting manual and chemical methods. The injured and damaged paper manuscripts are preserved by mending with (Chiffon cloth.) and cotton cloth.

Role of present government

The museum is a managed by the Curator under the Director of Archeology, Government of Jammu & Kashmir While interviewing (Beigh 2009) the curator of museum about role played by the present government, he reveals that with the financial support of earlier government (2002-2008) ,a new building is under construction which is sophisticated in its facilities and having greater space than the existing one in

which we are facing various problems like space, light, preservation etc.

Conclusion

The preservation of oriental manuscripts - a rare literary heritage available in SPS museum is of utmost importance. Here we see that the lack of manuscript expert in the museum keeps the students, scholars, public and foreigners etc away from rich heritage and antique knowledge sources of our state. Experts should be employed who could provide the exact information hidden in these age old documents Apart from functioning as a reference institution, the manuscripts should be digitized so that users can use such literary heritage in an easy manner .The digitized documents should be available over computer communication network to make remote access possible .This technique could help in saving the original manuscripts from rough handling.

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