

## A Study of Government Initiatives of Digitizing Manuscripts in Punjab (India)

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### Abstract

*"The communication of the dead is tongued with a fire beyond the language of the living."*

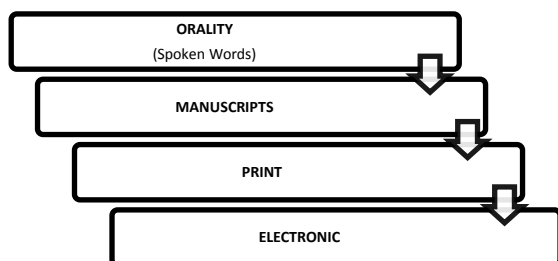
-T. S. Eliot

Manuscripts are such primary sources which reflect the social-cultural-historical-religious-political-economic-scientific-educational-medical-technological information of specific times beyond common tools of information. This paper deals with the initiatives taken by Punjab Government in preserving the rarest of ancient cultural treasures of the times in the form of manuscripts by means of digitizing them and making them accessible for the researchers of art and history in particular and for universal education and common information use in general, particularly by the Punjab State Archives Department, Languages Department of Punjab and Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums, Punjab (India). Types, material and size of manuscripts available with these government departments are also broadly discussed.

**Keywords:** Manuscripts, Digitization of manuscripts, Punjab State Archives Department, Languages Department of Punjab, Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums, Punjab

### Introduction

The literal meaning of **Manuscript** is '*hand written*' and this term has been derived from Latin "*Manu Scriptus*". Information is being generated since the existence of man and it is a continuous process that involves its passing over from one generation to other generations in several forms. Initially it was passed on orally and much later it took the scribal shape, i.e., hand written or inscribed or images or maps or pictures or symbols text or scratching etc. The distribution of information gained momentum only after the advent of print technology which eventually paved way to more technological advancements in the form of present day modern techniques of information distribution and transmission precisely and purely based on Information and Communication technology.



The manuscripts act as tools of transmitting a civilization and the transition of information from one period to

other is depicted in the following figure as suggested by David Foster of Georgia Institute of Technology

"Shifts in Communication Technology" ..... David Foster

### Significance of Manuscripts

Manuscripts to a greater extent are the rich repositories of images of an age which show history, religion, culture, society, economy, polity, art, script, language and state of technology of the time beyond routine and usual textual records. The manuscripts help to promote and expand the socio-cultural values encompassed within them from one civilization to other civilizations of the world. The significance of the manuscripts can also be gauged and expressed in the words of T.S. Eliot inscribed on his tomb in Westminster Abbey, "The communication of the dead is tongued with a fire beyond the language of the living."

### Digitization and Preservation

A majority of manuscripts are paper and leaf based which have a limited life. More so their ageing, deterioration, mishandling, direct human access and intervention, weather, fire and bugs put them to the greatest risk of permanent extinction. These cultural assets and treasures of information can best be replicated, reproduced, preserved and transmitted for free information use by

way of digitization. Digitization will ensure the security and safety of manuscripts from further deterioration and damage and their multiple accesses by users' world over at any period of time.

**Digitization** in simpler term means acquiring, converting, storing and providing information in a standardised and organised format that is accessible through computers. The digitization is done with an aim to increase the accessibility of rare artefacts such as manuscripts, to provide better and enhanced life-long services, to reduce the risk of further damage to the already fragile original sources which are high in demand. The digitized copy in-fact is the back-up for the original material that has the minimal shelf life.

**The Process of digitization** involves the handling and preparation of manuscripts with utmost care under the expert guidance of language experts, curators and custodians who before digitising the original source takes into account- the standard conservation norms for manuscripts, wearing of surgical gloves by the scanner or camera operators, generally not allowing to unbind the source document unless it is worth doing and paging or naming the loose sheets to maintain the completeness and connectivity of the information.

Once the source material is unearthed, collected, assessed, and handled for preparation for digitization they are captured through scanners or digital cameras of highest quality and resolution to reproduce the near originality image. The images are then compressed to reduce the file size for processing, storage and transmission of digital images. These images undergo the standards of quality control and then organised in the way they need to be stored before naming or numbering them. Finally subject metadata (manuscript number, title, author, organisation, language, script, commentary, remarks, completeness, subject, pages, material, manuscript date etc.) and technical metadata (date created, image format) and many more parameters are added to the digitised work for its easy access and understanding.

Tomalak (2013) in Medieval Manuscripts blog at the British Library laid the emphasis on the assessment of the condition before sending it to the imaging section. The document is scrutinised to see whether it needs initial repairs and an assessment is also made for its binding, size, brittleness, inks used, symbols and pigments if any to save it from further fading away if exposed to photography before digitization.

### **Digitization Initiatives of Manuscripts In Punjab**

Gaur and Chakraborty (2009) in their paper on Preservation and Access to Indian Manuscripts: A Knowledge Base of Indian Cultural Heritage Resources for Academic Libraries has specifically highlighted the importance and status of digitization of manuscripts in India. The authors have outlined the policies, focus and

role played by agencies of national repute like Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (INGCA), National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), National Archives of India, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage in identifying, deciphering and digitising the hidden information scattered across India.

Besides these agencies Museums and Libraries, National Digital Library, State Archives and State Libraries, Universities, Voluntary and Private Bodies have also initiated the process of digitization with the help of financial and technical support from the National agencies.

Unfortunately the government efforts in Punjab for digitising manuscripts till date have been very slow for many reasons but of late by understanding the value and importance of richness of information of manuscripts and other historical rare informative records, the government through its department of Punjab State Archives, Chandigarh has floated an open tender (August 2013) for the digitization of manuscripts, rare books and other records.

The State Archives Department has already started the process of digitisation of their records and Languages Department at Patiala has completed the digitization of their manuscripts with the help and expertise of Panjab Digital Library, Chandigarh which started its operations as NGO in the year 2003 as a small organisation but is now providing services to majority of government, religious, private institutions and individuals for digitization of rare records pertaining to Punjab by finding, collecting, even funding, preserving on its own resources.

The Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums has also taken the initiatives of preserving the manuscripts, paintings, treaties, historical maps and other records of cultural and national importance.

### **History Flashback of Punjab State Archives**

The records at Punjab State Archives can be traced back to 1804 which cover socio-cultural, political and administrative history of the province. The records consist of the *Delhi Residency and the Agencies'* which were transferred to Lahore after the war of independence in 1857. The records of North West Frontier Province, Balochistan, Dera Ismail Khan were part of Punjab Archives until they became independent provinces. The records of Sindh province including 850 manuscripts on 38 subjects written in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sindhi and Saraiki Languages from 737 A.D. to 971 A.D. were also part of Punjab Archives until Sindh became a part of Bombay Residency.

Punjab Archives was housed in Tomb of Anarkali, a monument that was built by Mughals in 1615 A.D. at Lahore (Pakistan). This earlier record office is today's Punjab Archives which came into existence in the year 1925. It was re-established and reorganised at Simla in 1948 after the partition of India with a record of 21,000 files.

The department of Archives, Punjab, is an amalgamation of Punjab Records Office (Simla) and 'MunshiKhanna' of Patiala State that was again reorganised as Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), at Patiala in 1948. Since the merger of PEPSU with Punjab in 1956, the records of departments of Home, Education, Finance, Political and Law etc. of 8 states namely Patiala, Kapurthala, Nabha, Jind, Faridkot, Malerkotla, Kalsian and Nalagarh were made part of Punjab State Archives. At present there are about 10 lakh records with Punjab State Archives, at Chandigarh and Patiala.

Records related to eight princely states of Patiala for the period (1708-1947A.D.), Nabha (1862-1947A.D.), Jind (1809-1947A.D.), Kapurthala (1809-1947A.D.), Faridkot (1876-1947A.D.), Malerkotla (1860-1947), Kalsian (1817-1947) and Nalagarh (1873-1947) are preserved at Parekh Bhavan, the Mall, Patiala. Records related to Punjab from 1803-1959 are part of Chandigarh office which came into existence in the year 1995 at plot no. 3, Sector 38, Chandigarh.

### The Records at Punjab State Archives

The records of Punjab State Archives include 658 manuscripts, 371 maps and 37,000 books, paintings and other documents of history, religion and socio-cultural life of the times from 1804-1959. The prized possession of **658 Manuscripts** are mostly illustrated in Mughal and Pahari styles of painting that are related to history of Mughals of 17-18<sup>th</sup> century, Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sikh Gurus (approx. 2,50,000 pages), travel accounts and reports of 19-20<sup>th</sup> century (10,000 pages) and 5000 rare books. The worth mentioning manuscripts with the state archives include:

- *Ain-e-Akbari*, 1834 A.D. Illustrated Persian manuscript is the Constitution of Emperor Akbar;
- *Zaffarnama*, 1872 letter of Guru Gobind Singh ji to Aurangzeb;
- *Shahnama* of Firdausi is about history of Persian Empire;
- *Adi Granth*, 1666 A.D. is a compilation of early Sikh Scriptures by Sri Guru Arjan Dev;
- *Padampuran*, on palm leaves, 6<sup>th</sup> century in Sharda script is a Hindu religious text;
- *Makke di Gosht* of Guru Nanak Devji with Qazi of Mecca
- *Akbarnama* Vol.1, 2 & 3 by Abu Fazal is chronicle of historical events of reign of Akbar;
- *Hukumnama*, Sri Guru Gobind Singh, 1707 in Gurmukhi, letter to Sangat to muster in Arms;
- *Tales of Laila-Majnu*;
- Rare *Tibetan Palm Leaf manuscripts*, apart from others.

### Material

The manuscripts available with state archives are in Punjabi, Hindi, Sanskrit, Sharda, Persian, Urdu and English languages are mostly on paper, birch bark and palm leaves.

### Size

The sizes of the manuscripts range from A1- A4, where the sizes have following dimensions-

A1 = 24 x 36 inch; A2 = 18 x 24 inch; A3 = 12 x 18 inch; and A4 = 8 x 12 inch.

The British era paintings, paintings of Maharaja Ranjit Singh' period and miniature paintings/ Records related to Nankana Sahib tragedy, blowing of Kukas at Malerkotla, JallianwalaBagh tragedy and Punjab Government's gazettes since 1857 are also treasures of Punjab Archives.

### Recent Initiatives of State Archives for Digitisation of Manuscripts and Other Records

Out of 658 manuscript records about 70% of the manuscripts have been digitised at a budget of INR 12 Lakh. The funds are provided in a fixed proportion of 25% and 75% by the State Government and Government of India respectively. As mentioned earlier the state government has floated a tender based on the parameters and norms of digitisation as prescribed by National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi for which an estimated budget of INR 50 lakh has been sanctioned to digitize all the records (12,50,000 pages) available with Punjab State Archives.

The state archives department has specifically asked for digitizing of manuscripts and other records in a non editable web enabled print ready formats by way of images in tiff, Jpeg and PDF in different sizes of manuscripts available with it.

### Preservation

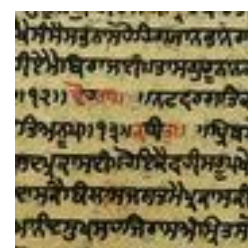
Although the Archives with state archives lack in modern preservation equipment but these valuable records which are brittle in nature are being preserved by modern methods and scientific techniques including lamination of the records with tissue papers, acetate foil and chiffoing.

### The Punjab Languages Department, Patiala

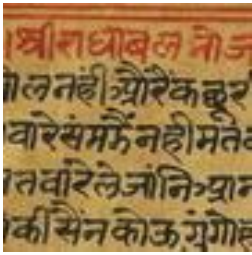
Punjab Languages Department at Patiala also has a rich collection of around 593 manuscripts of which the Department has digitised all the manuscripts which has been done by Panjab Digital Library, Chandigarh with the efforts of state government.



Sri Bhagvad Gita



Mahapurana Mahabharat

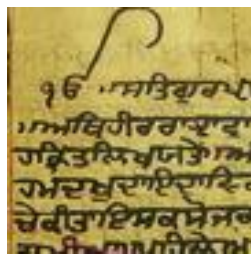


Raag, Doha, Chaupai

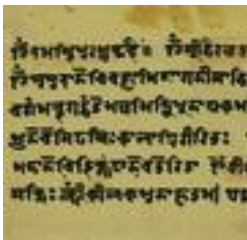
The languages department has a collection on religion, culture, history a tales mostly in Gurmukhi and Devnagri scripts. Some of the collections are shown above.



Sri Guru Granth Sahib



Heer-Ranjha



Saloka Sheikh Faridji ke & Others

**Museums of Punjab**

The Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums takes care of 9 museums of Punjab for preserving the heritage and the state government and centre government provides the necessary funds in a ratio of 20:80 respectively for it. The nine museums are- Archaeological Site Survey Museum at Sanghol, Lala Lajpat Rai Museum cum Library at Jagraon, Archaeological Museum Sadhu Ashram at Hoshiarpur, Anglo-Sikh War Memorial Museum (Ferozeshah Memorial) at Ferozepur, District Museum, Banasar Bagh, Sangrur, Sheesh Mahal Museum at Patiala, Sri Guru TegBahadur Museum at Anandpur Sahib, Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum at Amritsar and Sheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh Museum at Khatkar Kalan.

**Digitization Initiatives by the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, Archaeology and Museums, Punjab**

A Detailed Project Report (DPR) of about INR 9Crore with the help of a consultant for the up-gradation of Sheesh

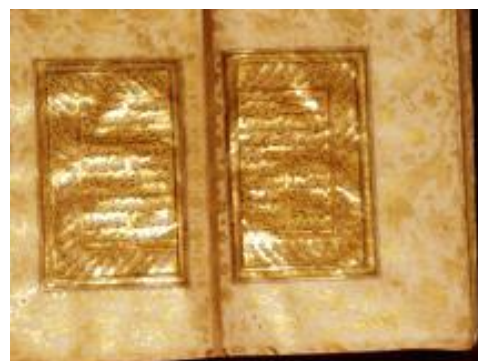
Mahal Museum, Patiala was prepared and sent for Central Government approval recently and an amount of INR 5Crore has been approved by the Central Government of India in which the state government shall contribute its share of 20%. A similar detailed project report for the up-gradation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar has also been submitted for approval from central government of India.

An appeal to spread awareness and importance of ancient cultural antiques under the Antiques and Art Treasures Act, 1972 for registration of ancient artefacts is issued through pamphlets by the Directorate for the general public to register their paintings, pictures, idols and manuscripts which are at least 75 years old and which are on leaves, paper, cloth or other material with Chandigarh office for Chandigarh, Rupnagar, Hoshiarpur and Ludhiana; for Amritsar, Jalandhar, Kapurthala and Gurdaspur districts at Ram Bagh Office Amritsar and for the districts of Faridkot, Sangrur, Bathinda and Ferozepur at Sadhu Cottage, Harindra Nagar Faridkot.

**Sheesh Mahal, Museum, Patiala** has illustrated manuscript on 'JanamSakhi of Guru Nanak Devji' in Gurmukhi of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the other one is fully illustrated with literary and art work of fauna and Gold is 'GulistanBostan' of 16-17 century written as prose and poetry by Sheikh Sadi which is regarded as words of wisdom and this manuscript was acquired by Shahjhan, a Mughal Empror.

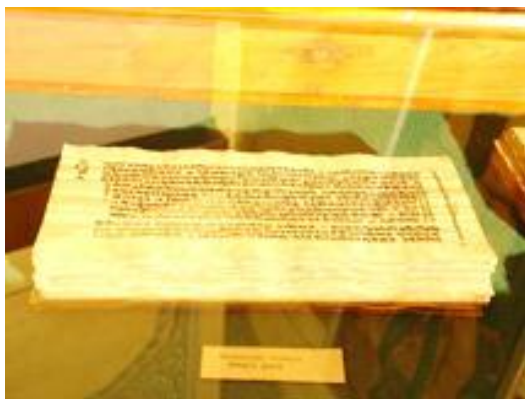


Janam Sakhi of Guru Nanak Dev ji "Gulistan Bostan" by Sheikh Shadi (16-17 Century)

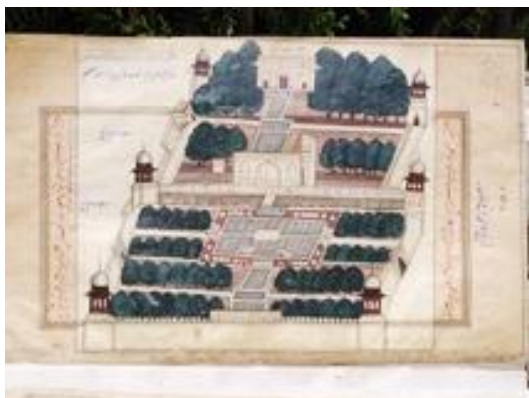


Gulistan Bostan by Sheikh Shadi (16-17 Century) (Acquired by Mughal Empror Shahjhan)





*Bhagwat Puran*, Sangrur Museum



*Gulgasht-I-Punjab*(1469-1849), Paintings showing general history of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar

The **Maharaja Ranjit Singh Museum, Amritsar** holds the manuscript on *Military Manual of Maharaja Ranjit Singh* of 1822 which has the French words of command in red ink and their explanations in Persian in black ink. Illustrations are provided for ease of reading.



*Military Manual of Maharaja Ranjit Singh* with Illustrations

The *Friendship Treaty between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Raja Fateh Singh of Kapurthala* in Persian and bearing

palm impression of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in saffron and also has seal of Maharaja in Gurmukhi.



*Friendship Treaty between Maharaja Ranjit Singh and Raja Fateh Singh of Kapurthala*

A news item in Times of India (September 2,2014) from Allahabad highlighted the lack lustre attitude of the Regional Archives Office, Allahabad which after 60 years of its existence could not find a subject expert and is still struggling to translate the 1000 years old palm leaf manuscripts related to the life of GautamBudhha. Around 200 paper manuscripts are also awaiting experts to decipher 180 years old history of erstwhile Rampur State.

**Conclusion**

The manuscripts undoubtedly are the matchless possessions of ancient information which normally remains unscrutinised by the information seekers mainly because these invaluable rare pieces of information are seldom allowed a free access by its keepers. The government efforts must provide a much needed support in terms of providing adequate funds for their maintenance and upkeep, technical and infrastructure support for their preservation, digitization and access, skilled human resource for their careful handling, space for their proper display and use of these artefacts. National Mission for Manuscripts and the state governments should join hands and involve all stake holders to unearth the hidden wealth of manuscripts. An effort should also be made to provide training to scholars, researchers, information seekers and keepers of manuscripts for their handling and usage through lectures, seminars, workshops, exhibitions and programmes that would cover educational institutions.

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