

BEST PRACTICE-II

1. Title of the Practice

“Manuscript Conservation Programme” (Under the National Mission for Manuscripts(NMM), Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Govt. of India)

2. Objectives of the Practice

Sambalpur University has been working on Manuscript Conservation Programme for the past 14 years. This programme is one of the most significant archive initiatives. It has been run by the Manuscript Conservation Centre (MCC) in the Department of History, since 2004 with funding from the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, New Delhi. In view of the fact manuscripts document different aspects of Odisha’s pre-modern socio-cultural life, folklore, and indigenous systems of knowledge, through said programme MCC has been engaged in archiving and documenting manuscripts from throughout the state of Odisha. The Sambalpur Manuscript Conservation Center has been modernized and changed to a Manuscript Resource Center. For MRC purposes, the NMM has approved a sum of Rs. 15 lakhs at a rate of Rs. 5 lakhs annually. Now the Manuscript Conservation Center has been upgraded and Converted into a Manuscript Resource Center. The MCC programme funding ended in the year 2017 and the MRC recognition started in the year 2018. The NMM has sanctioned an amount of Rs.15 lakhs @ Rs. 5 lakhs per annum for MRC activities.

The MCC/MRC has been pursuing the following objectives:

- To conduct curative conservation of manuscripts in the Department of History, different other institutions, and private repositories
- To impart training to students and researchers in the conservation of manuscripts
- To arrange workshops on preventive conservation
- To organise campaigns for spreading awareness amongst the public about the importance of manuscript conservation
- To network with repositories and labs engaged in conservation work and to introduce emerging and appropriate techniques in the field of manuscript conservation

3. The Context

Since the beginning of time, Indian culture and knowledge have been derived from palm-leaf manuscripts. These have played a crucial role in the indigenous

intellectual, cultural, and artistic traditions' survival over the years. These priceless manuscripts have occasionally also served as transcriptions of a lively oral culture that was rich in both cultural and intellectual treasures.

The problem with palm-leaf manuscripts is that, in tropical climates, they can survive the ravages of time for no more than 350 to 400 years. These are likely to be lost and become useless if they are not preserved. Manuscripts are frequently regarded as sacred objects that should only be worshipped rather than preserved scientifically and deciphered as intellectual tools.

Against the above background NMM has endeavoured to retrieve and archive the palm-leaf manuscripts, and Sambalpur University has been running the MRC (earlier named MCC) at the local level to save the heritage of the local resources of culture and knowledge from extinction.

4. The Practice

India has the biggest manuscript reserve in the world. Unlike the western countries, manuscripts in India are scattered not only in institutional repositories but also in private collections, temples, monasteries, libraries, and private households. National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) was established by Dept. of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India, through a gazette notification in 2003, and it came into existence on the 7th of February 2003. Since then, NMM has been engaged in the documentation, conservation, digitization, publication, and dissemination of manuscripts. It pursues the goals of identifying, preserving, conserving, and making accessible to researchers and antiquarians the scriptural heritage of the country, creating awareness about manuscripts among scholars and the public at large, publishing unpublished manuscripts, and building a National Manuscript Library. It is a national-level unified initiative that strives to conserve and disseminate the manuscripts available across the length and breadth of the country. Since its inception, NMM has been working at multiple levels and has been involved in diverse activities. It has under its jurisdiction more than 50 centers (MRCs) and also 50 MCCs throughout the country that are engaged in the survey and post-survey activities for the purpose. The MCC at the Department of History, Sambalpur University is one of them.

The MRC is the only unit operative under the umbrella of University System in Odisha state. In MRC, information about the manuscripts is collected through survey and post-survey activities, conservation projects, awareness campaigns, preventive measures-related workshops, and curative workshops conducted by the MCC/MRC.

5. Evidence of Success

Since its inception, the Manuscript Conservation Centre at the P.G. Department of History has been engaged in identifying, preserving, conserving, and creating awareness about manuscripts among scholars and the public at large.

- It has already organized 09 awareness camps in different parts of western Odisha regarding the importance of manuscript preservation. There are four technically trained persons engaged in MRC for preventive and curative works, and they have completed 891830 preventive works and 25480 curative works of palm-leaf manuscripts.
- The MRC has also 07 nos. of MCPC (Manuscripts Conservation Partner Centres) in different areas for the extension works.
- It has also a conservation laboratory.

The above measures have produced the combined effects of the spread of awareness of the importance of cultural antiquities, the building up of conservation capacity through the creation of skilled personnel, and above all the promotion of historical consciousness among the populace at large.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The MRC in P.G. Department of History, has plans to preserve and conserve manuscripts in digitized form, although there is a resource crunch to build the infrastructure for this. A separate building and a well-equipped laboratory are to be part of such infrastructure. The MRC also needs more personnel to expand its volume and range of activities.

Manuscript Conservation Laboratory of Department of History, SU

