

Oriental Collection in the Punjab University Library A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the status of oriental collection of the Punjab University Library, (Lahore) having the largest and precious manuscript and rare resources. Different data collection tools like interview, observation and document analysis were used, besides getting opinions of the users and staff. The data collected is analyzed about collection, acquisition, technical process, automation, environment, preservation and conservation and other conveniences and also put forth suggestions for strengthening the facilities and services.

KEYWORDS

Oriental Collection, Preservation & Conservation, Manuscripts, oriental resources-Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Humans, from the beginning, want to personify their ideas, beliefs, fantasies and other intellectual products and consequently developed images, symbols and writings. This ever-increasing need and requirements of the society for knowledge and development also underpin the demand for creation, use and preservation of the

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information and Knowledge. It has resulted in the overwhelming publishing of information and knowledge resources in various forms. The literature on the history of libraries indicates that the mechanism of recording the human communication and its preservation was the first step towards the manifestation of libraries. The collections consisting of clay tablets, papyrus roll, and codices were created and housed with great care in accommodation adjacent to temples. The aim of writing was to preserve sacred human communication and knowledge (**Ameen, 2005**). Thus libraries as social institutions not only serve the society by fulfilling its present information needs but also preserve the knowledge for future generations. Keeping this role of libraries in view, **Harvey (1993)** points out that preservation of the library and archival material is essential politically, for the well-being of societies which, depend on knowledge, its distribution and sharing. It is vital for scholars and educators, who rely on the availability of primary source materials as the basis for quality research. Therefore, it is mandatory for teachers, scholars and the citizens to preserve the past for present and future generations.

PRESERVATION & CONSERVATION

The art of preservation and conservation of library materials is as old as human civilization. It is the social responsibility of the librarian to keep all kind of library material physically fit for use. **Feather, Matthews and Eden (1996)** have described the *conservation* as the repair of individual items to prevent their further damage and deterioration. They refer *preservation* with a broader connotation than conservation. It encompasses **all** the managerial, financial and technical issues involved in preserving library materials in all formats and their information content- so as to maximize their usage. **Lydenberg (1960)** reports that manuscripts and donated material often arrive in poor condition and inadequate storage and poor environment causes more deterioration to them. In recent years

fumigation with thymol has proven a satisfactory measure, both as a preventive and as a remedy for molds and mildew. Some libraries are seriously looking at electronic image creation as a means of preservation and for increasing access to its collection (**Feather, Matthews & Eden, 1996**). **Mahapatra (2003)** has emphasized that a large or a medium sized library having a good collection of old and rare collection should have a preservation and conservation unit. The primary job of this unit should be to take care of the library collection and all restoration measures for damaged materials. The unit may look after the housekeeping operations as well to preserve the rich content. All preventive measures for all kinds of materials need to be taken on regular basis, especially for the rare collection - susceptible to physical and chemical deterioration and biological damage easily. The physical collections face serious preservation threats especially in Asian Countries as the climate is tropical, severe and secondly, resources for preservation (such as experts, funds, knowledge etc) are either scare or not available.

THE PUNJAB UNIVERSITY ORIENTAL COLLECTION

Many Pakistani libraries have unique collection of rare material and manuscripts, which needs special care and preservation for their longer usability. Of them, Punjab University Library (PUL) holds the prominent place. It maintains a special section of rare material named as "*The Oriental Section (OS)*". PUL is the central library of University of the Punjab, Lahore, established in 1873. At present its collection of books, journals, manuscripts and other reading material have 4, 43,000 items approximately which include some very precious personal and special collections. Ten service units/sections take care of the library viz. Acquisition, Cataloguing, Circulation, Multimedia and Microfilming/ IT, Manuscripts, Oriental, Information Resource Centre (formerly Reference Section), Periodical, Serial and U.N. Reports. Each section/unit is under the

administrative control of Deputy Chief Librarian when Internet Lab. is supervised by Lab. Network Administrator (**Punjab University Library, 2008**).

The Oriental Section (OS) housed in the first floor of the library possess resources on major disciplines in Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Sanskrit and Hindi languages. The collection, old and rare material, comprises more than 150,000 titles (including manuscripts). The manuscript collection being the largest and unique collection amongst the country's university libraries hold great value for researchers, scholars and students.

OBJECTIVES

Acknowledging the importance of OS, a study was carried out to explore its status with following objectives:

- To get familiarity with the status of the collection and broad management
- To assess the human resources status and services offered
- To review preservation and conservation facilities
- To study the user satisfaction
- To project future-plans for the development and get suggestions to initiate improvement of OS facilities and services

METHODOLOGY

A multi-method design of research based on interviews, observation and document analysis (both internal analysis i.e., rules, procedures etc. and external analysis i.e., condition of the rare books collection etc.) was used to obtain the data. The views of the users about the staff, services, collection and environment were acquired through semi-structured interviews. Twenty users of the section at various timings, were interviewed, the staff of OS for getting the detailed information about the section.

ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the data acquired about collection, acquisition, technical processes, automation, environment and other facilities, preservation and conservation methods and user perception about staff, services and collection etc is analyzed under following parameters:

COLLECTION & RELATED OPERATIONS: STATUS

The Oriental Section has personal and special collections of published and unpublished reading material, and rare books. The collection in Arabic, Persian & other languages run to 60,000 volumes (approx) while the Urdu collection make about 71,000 volumes.

■ Rare books

The books published during 19th century (most of which are now out of print) are treated as rare books collection. These books are kept in the special rooms, on different subjects, with limited access to the researchers. Besides, books on Pakistan's history published prior to 1950 are categorized and stamped as '*not to be issued*'. However, these are housed in the main reading hall for use within the library.

■ Personal Collections

During the tenure of Dr. A. C. Woolner from 1905 to 1936, a number of personal collections were either purchased by the University Library or donated by renowned scholars (Rizvi, 2004). The collections of oriental languages are kept in OS of the library, while English material i.e. the collections of H. M. Perceival, Ch. Shahab-Ud-Din and English books of Maulvi Mahbub Alam are placed in the basement area. The personal collection can be divided into two categories; the first *category* consisting of books, which are processed and are retrievable through library's catalogue *while*

second category presents those personal collections, which are not retrievable through library's catalog for non-listing in book catalog.

■ ***Newspapers and Periodicals***

The section showcases bound volumes of periodical publications with many rare newspapers and periodicals such as the first issue of Urdu newspaper "Kohinoor"- published from Lahore on 14th January 1850. More than ten thousand periodical volumes are in the collection of the library.

■ ***Thesis/Dissertations***

PUL is a depository of theses/dissertations approved by University of the Punjab. The 4100 theses, in Urdu, Arabic, Persian and local languages, are available within the library premises as a reference source. The lists of theses (Ph.D) submitted can be accessed from <http://www.pulibrary.edu.pk/>.

■ ***Manuscripts***

The Manuscript Section set up on 31st July 1920 has the largest manuscript collection in Pakistan, functioning under the OS. It has antique and rare manuscripts in *Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Hindi* and other local languages. These (25,000 manuscripts approximately) are growing steadily. The manuscripts are used within the premises of OS and the permission for their photocopy/digital copy is provided only in rare cases to the teachers, students and researchers with the recommendation and permission of the chairman of concerned department.

■ ***Sanskrit Manuscripts:*** Woolner Collection of Sanskrit had a very humble beginning. About half a dozen manuscripts were acquired in the 1880's but the score has now reached to 9,075. The catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts is available on www.pulibrary.edu.pk/.

■ ***Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Punjabi Manuscripts:*** Kaukab (1982) has listed about 1,123 manuscripts in this category. He has mentioned important manuscripts under various subject areas like: *Quran, Quran Indices, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Tasawwuf, Philosophy, Logic and Medicine.*

■ ***Persian Manuscripts:*** Abdullah (n.d.) has listed more than 7,000 Persian manuscripts in the library. Some important manuscripts are mentioned under the subject areas: *History, Biographies of Saints, Mysticism, Poetry, Prosody and Rhyme.*

ACQUISITION

Different kinds of material are acquired by different sections and the purchase of material for OS is under the general acquisition section of PUL. The staff of the OS recommends material to the acquisition section. User's requests for new material are also considered in acquiring materials for OS.

■ ***Periodicals and Newspapers***

The serial section acquires periodicals in Urdu and other oriental languages. When the volumes of journals are completed after one year, these are sent to the OS in bound form.

■ ***Rare books***

The rare books are acquired from the rare books dealers and antiquarians. When a book is claimed to be rare by the dealer or supplier, its rarity is verified by the acquisition staff from different sources through e-mail or telephonic communication.

■ ***Manuscripts***

The acquisition process of the manuscripts vary to that of other materials. On receiving information about the availability of certain

manuscript(s) from the suppliers, the chief librarian prepares a descriptive statement about the manuscript and forwards it to the head of the concerned department for advice regarding its rarity/academic value and acceptable price. On head's recommendation, the purchase of the said manuscript is processed by the chief librarian. The in-charge, acquisition section verifies and certifies that the manuscript received is in accordance with the order placed by the library and is being accessioned. Cataloguing, classification and all other technical processes i.e., keyword assigning, preparation of barcode and spine labels etc., are performed in OS. Availability of the digital copy (CDs) of any manuscript is mentioned in the catalog. The software used by the Section is "*Multilingual Library Information and Management System*".

Besides purchase, the staff works on to solicit the personal collections through personal meetings with their owners. The staff briefs them about the proper care and handling of the existing personal collections. Such activities are effective for encouraging the attainment of personal collections as gift for the library. The library web site is also helpful in promoting its collection and services at national as well as international level.

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION

The PUL has no preservation unit for its precious and unique collection in the Section. However, following methods are adopted for the preservation and conservation of the collection:

■ *Fumigation*

The OS has only one locally prepared fumigation cupboard which is not sufficient as it can treat only few manuscripts or books at a time.

■ *Microfilming and digitization*

The digitization of manuscripts and rare books is done by the

multimedia and microfilming/IT section. The microfilms of precious and rare manuscripts in Arabic, Persian and Urdu are also available. A large number of microfilms of rare material are available to assist the local researchers. The library is also digitizing its manuscripts and rare collection for preservation and distribution on request to the international researchers. The digitized collection includes Punjabi, Urdu, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit and English material. A digitized manuscript can also be purchased through library website. Photocopying machines are available to provide researchers with the copies of rare material and for preservation of the material as well.

■ *Other Methods*

Regular dusting and cleaning of the material help to prevent the termite and other insects. Books with damaged bindings are rebound for their safety. Sufficient arrangement for ventilation and daylight into the storage area is made. Medicated sprays and tablets etc. are used to prevent the insects. However, no advance methods for the maintenance of individual items are used due to the lack of trained staff and resources.

■ *Safety and Security*

Restricted access is available to rare collection for security reasons and kept under lock with a few staff members responsible for its care and handling. The cupboards and manuscript rooms are kept locked but large glass windows pose serious threat to their security. Due to the weak security measures, some rare manuscripts are reported to have been stolen in the past. Besides it lacks proper arrangements for the safety of the building and collection against the natural hazards such as earthquakes, fire etc. except large and handy cylinders. No smoke alarming system available as a precautionary measure.

■ *Physical facilities*

A large main reading hall houses books and bound volumes for use. Three adjacent air conditioned reading rooms are meant for faculty members and students and other rooms for Deputy Chief Librarians (morning & evening shifts) and technical functions. Besides, two large rooms possess close access materials i.e., rare and personal collections, while one room exclusively accommodates manuscripts. Exhibition cases in the main hall display the rare materials which are changed after every three or four months.

INFORMATION RESOURCES ACCESS

The library possess a number of tools to access to the information resources such as hand/book lists of rare materials and manuscripts, website, card catalogs, Web-OPAC etc. The library website provides information about its different sections including OS and its collection i.e., rare books, theses and manuscripts etc. The OS has automated most of its catalog, which is accessible through library website. However, computerized circulation is not yet in vogue.

PERSONNEL AND SERVICES

The staff comprising 18 members, both professional and non professional work in the OS in two shifts (**Table 1**). Different workshops and seminars are being conducted by the library to upgrade their skills with current technological trends in their respective fields.

Table 1 Professional and Paraprofessional Staff in Oriental Section

| <i>The Staff of the Oriental Section</i> | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Professional Staff</i> | No. |
| Deputy Chief Librarian | 2 |
| Senior Librarian | 1 |
| Librarian | 1 |
| <i>Para Professional Staff</i> | |
| Clerks | 4 |
| Attendants | 5 |
| Assistant | 2 |
| Sweeper and Cleaner | 3 |
| Total | 18 |

➤ *Services*

The section maintains card catalogue of Urdu, Arabic, Sanskrit and Persian books, housed in its reading hall. The catalogue is arranged alphabetically, besides the librarian on duty provides guidance. Following common services are available to users: circulation of material (the material is issued and returned by the Circulation Section); photocopying; assistance in searching and browsing; OPAC/Web-OPAC and card catalog.

However, M Phil & PhD scholars, faculty members, visitors and foreign researchers are provided special library services, such as Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI); Document Delivery Service; soft copy (CDs) of relevant material and scanning. The staff provides the photocopy of the material on request, to the researchers, scholars and faculty members. The rare and old collection is not photocopied but scanned and digitized and its print copy is provided to users.

➤ User View

Different users (n= 21) interviewed to ascertain their perception about staff, collection and services, using sampling technique for the selection of the interviewees from different departments of University of the Punjab. Most of them were M. Phil, PhD and Masters students (final semester) students. Detailed description is tabulated below(Table 2.)

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of User's Opinion about Oriental Section N=21

| Sr. | Users Opinion | Frequency of users |
|-----|--|--------------------|
| 1 | The collection fulfills our information needs. | 10 |
| 2 | The staff is cooperative and helpful in finding the material from the catalog and shelves. | 09 |
| 3 | Services are good. | 06 |
| 4 | The collection is unique. We get the material from this section, which we cannot get from our departmental or any other library. | 03 |
| 5 | The library timings are suitable for users. | 02 |
| 6 | It is easy to find out the information from the catalog and shelves. | 02 |

PROBLEMS AND SUGESTIONS

The respondents have put forwarded many problems and suggestions (Table 3.) illustrating the weaker areas and suggestions to improve it.

Table 3: Problems and Suggestions Mentioned by the Users

| Sr. | Problems and Suggestions | Frequency |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 1 | The seating arrangement is inadequate and environment is not user friendly. There should be proper furniture in the main reading hall. | 11 |
| 2 | Due to poor shelf arrangement, the material mentioned in the catalogue is difficult to trace on the shelves. The shelf arrangement should be checked daily and multiple copies of the material should be acquired. | 9 |
| 3 | The collection is insufficient for our information needs. It should be enhanced. (More material is needed on Pakistan and History). | 8 |
| 4 | Some staff members are not cooperative. The paraprofessional staff needs special training. | 6 |
| 5 | There should be special programs for user orientation, as it would decrease the users dependence on the staff and will save their time. | 6 |
| 6 | Manual catalogue is difficult to search. It should be user friendly | 5 |
| 7 | Books are poorly maintained. Their special care and binding is required | 4 |
| 8 | The collection is unique but its retrieval is not good. It should be systematic and efficient | 4 |
| 9 | Classics and rare books should also be issued | 4 |
| 10 | The reading environment is not suitable for readers and researchers who need silence | 3 |
| 11 | The instructions about the catalogue and collection use should be displayed in the library on different places. | 3 |
| 12 | This Section should have its own OPAC as early as possible. | 3 |
| 13 | Book labels are not appropriate, which makes the searching process difficult. These should be more user friendly. | 2 |
| 14 | Arabic titles are Romanized in English, which is difficult to search from catalogue. | 1 |

FUTURE PLANS

The staff suggested to provide better environment and facilities to the readers/users. The section is in renovation process now-a-days, so most of the user complaints will be solved once the renovation process reaches its end. Besides some plans are to be executed in near future:

- Online circulation and Section's own website (coordinated with library website).
- Revision will be made in the subject headings and key words to make the system more user-friendly.
- Thesaurus publishing is planned for user's guidance.
- The library is trying to connect all the departmental libraries through networking and use of unanimous software in order to promote the benefits of union catalog and resource sharing.
- '*Online Manuscript Digital Gallery of illuminated and illustrated manuscripts*' is a project which will be executed in collaboration with Kung University of Korea and Vienna University.
- Fee based access to the '*Manuscript Digital Gallery*' will be provided for fund raising.
- The OS has prepared the database of manuscripts which will be uploaded on its website.
- Research cells will be provided to the researchers where they will be able to study and reserve their material.
- The establishment of *Oriental Languages Teaching Centre* is also being planned in collaboration with Khan-e-Farhang, Iran and the Oriental College of University of the Punjab.

The analysis of data reveals that the section is unique in its nature and services. It attracts the attention of international scholars, but the

section lacks human ware, financial and material resources to keep the collection intact, and provide enough special services to learned scholars and researchers.

SUGGESTIONS

The staff makes efforts to achieve its organizational goals. Nevertheless, the section faces some serious problems, which require attention of the higher authorities to enable it, provide efficient, effective and user-centered services. Keeping those problems in view revealed by staff and users, following recommendations are made for the overall improvement of the library:

Staff

- Professional development, specifically of the non-professionals, in behaviour development towards users need to be upgraded and infused through scientific methods.
- More professional and well-trained staff needed to assist the users.
- Special incentives need to be announced for motivation to work with high dedication.
- The staff with proficiency in diverse languages need to be recruited for handling oriental materials or appropriate arrangement be made for teaching of oriental languages to the staff.

Preservation and Conservation

- Cooperation can be sought from the Lahore Museum for the restoration of the precious but damaged material.
- Advanced training in preservation and records management is needed for the long-term preservation of the rare materials. Different foreign programs could be helpful

to train the staff members in preserving the brittle and fragile documents in the collection.

- Quality binding material, which can be imported from United Kingdom and Germany, is required for the better preservation of rare material.
- A preservation unit needs to be established in the library.
- Advanced arrangements should be made for the security of the collection and safety of the building against the natural hazards i.e., fire, smoke, humidity etc.
- Special equipments for digitization and microfilming of the rare material and manuscripts i.e., micro filming camera, laser cameras and high-speed scanners etc. need to be acquired on priority basis.

Finance

- The budget allocation need enhancement to help the library to purchase better equipment and make air condition space for storage and the maintenance of the collection, besides to materialize acquisition of private collections of eminent personalities and their preservation on scientific lines on priority basis.

Promotion

- Exhibitions should be arranged at the library for introducing the rare collections to the present and potential users and public.
- More effective marketing policy and strategy need to be framed by the administration for attracting the personal collection donors. Library website can prove an effective tool for such activities.

CONCLUSION

The in-depth case study of the oriental section reveals that it has the

richest collection of manuscripts and rare books in Pakistan. A dedicated team of library staff is working hard despite all the problems and lack of resources for the development of the section, which may result in the over all development of the library. It is required to preserve this treasure of knowledge for the future generations and to adopt the marketing approach, which demands user-centered activities i.e., all the services and collections should be aimed to serve users well while taking really good care for its preservation, conservation and security. This implies that continuing education must be considered as a standard practice for library staff at every level of library operations i.e., from a director/chief librarian to the part-time shelper and library doorkeeper. A liberal funding as the library investment on employees should be measured against their work flow for a bright future of the OS.

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