

Oriental Research Library of Kashmir: A Treasure Trove

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ABSTRACT

The study carries out subject and linguistic analysis of manuscript collection of Oriental Research library (Srinagar) through examining various hand lists to estimate contents and standardising subject terms employing international vocabulary tools. The findings reveal that majority of manuscripts belong to religious text or literary works. Few of the manuscripts deal with Pure or Applied Sciences. Meagre number is written in local languages and major portion of the collection is in West Asian languages.

KEYWORDS

Manuscripts, Oriental Libraries, Subject Analysis, Linguistic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The rich culture of the leading civilizations belongs to the East, popularly known as Orient. Stacks of manuscripts, as the manifestation of experience of generations at different times, were produced by these civilizations among which large number have lost with political instability, human actions or natural calamities.

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However, efforts have been made by many institutions and individuals to preserve the treasure for posterity in the form of oriental institutes and libraries with literature and documents in different subjects and languages. "Oriental" in this context refers to the ancient Near East, including India, Persia (Iran), and ancient Arabia. In India, many oriental institutes and libraries are located. A few are Asiatic society, Kolkata; IGNC, New Delhi; Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai; Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh; Arabic and Persian Research Institute (Tonk, Rajasthan) etc. J&K also share a number of Oriental libraries, especially in Srinagar housing Darul-Aloom Hanfia Arabic College (*Noor- Bagh*), Govt. Oriental College (*Baghi-Dilawar Khan*), *Jamia Madinatul- Aloom Oriental College* (Hazratbal), S. P.S Library, State Archives Department, Sri Rupa Devi Sharada Peeth, J&K Cultural Academy besides many private and public collections etc. However, the Oriental Research Library is the richest Library with largest number of manuscripts and rare books in the state.

ORIENTAL RESEARCH LIBRARY, KASHMIR

Oriental Research Library (Research and Publication Department., J&K Government), established in 1904, presently located in University of Kashmir (Allama Iqbal Library Building) since 1975 has centuries old rare manuscripts. Under the manuscript acquisition programme, I.G.N.C.A, it has digitized the manuscripts during 2005-2007 and made available in DVDs. The Library has **5,582** manuscripts in **17** languages in various scripts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A plethora of literature is available about manuscript description throughout globe and can't be reviewed exhaustively in the present paper. However, some select studies pertaining to Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian literature are reviewed briefly here. The description of six

Maghribi manuscripts from the collection of Leeds University, consisting 370 Arabic, 100 Persian and 7 Syriac including few in Urdu, Turkish and Samaritan is provided by **Young (1976)**. **Young (1980)** further presents a general survey of the Arabic and Turkish manuscripts and draws attention to the items of special interest. About 371 Arabic manuscripts in the Leeds collection cover almost the traditional Islamic literature and a good number also pertain to other religious fields, mainly Christian works. The strongest area being Islamic law, a category which covers 63 different works (or parts of works) in 59 manuscripts, originating from Morocco to Iran. A study by **Allan (1981)** describes the oriental collection of 'Welcome Institute' for the history of Medicine. It includes over 10,000 manuscripts, about 900 on palm leaves, and others on paper, metal, leather and ivory. It reveals that about 3,000 books printed in oriental scripts, prints, drawings, paintings, and items of photographic material in collection are written in over 30 languages. **Eme (2009)** analyses the collection in manuscripts library of Uzbekistan Science Academia, al-Birun and classifies them under Turkic, Arabic, Persian and Tajiki. **Nelson (N.D)** surveys the University of Pennsylvania and terms its Library the largest one in the Western hemisphere with about 3,300 Indic manuscripts besides documents from Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Tibet with majority of the Devanagari script on palm and paper.

Ledesma (1994) analyses the Arabic manuscripts of Escorialense Library. The analysis is focused on three codices containing original medical works by *Hunayn* together with twenty-five containing *Hunayn's* translations of Hippocratic and Galenic texts. Some astrological texts are also treated. The study by **Gacek (2004)** reveals that Arabic script manuscripts in the libraries of McGill University consist of Arabic, Persian, Ottoman, Turkish and a few Urdu texts. In terms of physical form, these manuscripts represent codices, calligraphic pieces and fragments. The study further reveals that in

terms of subject coverage, these collections embrace all aspects of Islamic literature: Quranic exegesis, Tradition, Jurisprudence, Philosophy, Theology, Mysticism, History, Belles Letters, and Sciences. The well-represented among Science are Medicine and the Natural Sciences including works on hunting, falconry, and fariery. The majority of manuscripts are written in hands that exhibit many features common to *nastaliq* and *shikastah*. A small number is executed in *Naskh* and *Bihari* scripts. **Wetkam (2007)** worked on 1,000 oriental manuscripts available in the University of Leiden, Netherlands, compiled and published inventories of oriental Middle Eastern manuscripts- and categorized and classified these 1000 manuscripts into 27 different languages. A documented survey of the scientific texts in the oriental institutes in Sanskrit produced or preserved in the two states, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, is carried out by **(Sarma, 1997)**. The book by **(Siddiqui, 2000)** provides information about 500 Arabic manuscripts on the subjects of Literature, Grammar, History, Jurisprudence, Sufism, Mathematics, Astrology, Astronomy and Islamic studies acquired by a number of Indian scholars and notables and donated to the Maulana Azad Library, Aligrah Muslim University. The genesis of the Oriental manuscripts in the Institute for Balkan Studies, from 1904 to 1918, is reviewed by **(Bakarsic, 2000)**. The work by **Pingree (2004)** is the supplement to an immense project called *Census of the Exact Sciences in Sanskrit*. *The author has provided a preliminary explanation and organization of the vast Sanskrit and Sanskrit-influenced literature devoted to Astronomy, Mathematics, Astrology and Divination, together with brief bibliographical information concerning the treatises and their authors. The accounts of the Institute for the period 1907-1910 confirms a pattern of patient and continuous acquisition of rare, old Oriental manuscripts, archival documents, and codices in the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian languages. The detailed catalogue of manuscripts in scripts other than Latin or Greek, held at St John's*

College is presented by (Smith, 2005) reveal that Out of the 26 manuscripts, 21 are in Arabic or Persian, the others being in Hebrew, Syriac, Turkish and Ethiopic. The author has put efforts to provide a meticulous account of the provenance, physical appearance and content of each manuscript. A Survey of manuscripts of the *Süleymaniye Library* by (Memory of the world Programme, 2009) reveals that the library houses over 67,000 manuscripts, from the 8th to the early 20th century which include rare items relating to Islam, laws of the Ottoman times, Ottoman foreign policy, Science and Medicine, Literature and Culture, among others. The majority of the manuscripts are in Arabic, Turkish and Persian. **Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (2008)** annotates various facets of Shri Partap Singh Museum and refers to its manuscript section reporting that it contains a wide range of objects including books, royal edicts (farmans), deeds etc dating from the seventeen centuries old Gilgit Manuscripts to Persian, Kashmiri and Arabic works written as late as 19th century. These handwritten manuscripts are on a host of writing materials from the bark of the birch tree (*bhoj patra or burza*) to fine, Kashmiri handmade paper, known in local parlance as '*koshur kaghaz*'. No survey or documentation is reported in the literature about the Oriental Research Library. However, few hand lists and databases (offline) are available (Shafi, 2005).

OBJECTIVES

The study is initiated to achieve the following objectives:

- To carry out the subject assortment of manuscripts at micro stage and further analyze at unilingual and multilingual level.
- To find out the language and script diversity of the manuscripts.

SCOPE

The scope is confined to the manuscript collection of Oriental Research Library (Srinagar) J&K with an emphasis on the subject analysis of manuscripts written in '*Naskh, Nastaliq, Shikast, Sharada and Devnagri*' script.

METHODOLOGY

Various hand lists of the library were consulted. These handlists were arranged in the alphabetical order according to the title of a manuscript followed by other details (author, keyword, and language). These later were assorted in the subject and language assortment. The languages classes were later grouped on the basis of script. It helped to ascertain the collection strength in a particular language and broad subjects. The subject headings suggested by experts and later suggested subject headings were standardised according to Sears List of Subject Headings (11th edition) and later grouped and classified under broad disciplines guided by first and second summary of Dewey Decimal Classification (19th edition) for analysis and findings.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Language Diversity

The Library has 5,582 manuscripts. Out of them 5,440 are unilingual forming 97.45% of the collection. Besides, 136 manuscripts being bilingual (2.43%) while six (0.10%) manuscripts are multilingual. The maximum number of manuscripts (39.01%) is in Persian followed by Sanskrit (38.33%). A good number of manuscripts are in other languages like Arabic, Kashmiri. A few are in other languages like Balti, Punjabi, and Pashto etc. Among bilingual manuscripts, Arabic-Persian form maximum (1.68%) followed by Persian-Kashmiri (0.44%) and multilingual manuscript relate to different languages. This language diversity of the collection is a

witness to the rich linguistic culture of the people in learning and imparting various facets of Knowledge at medieval times. The full account is in the table below (Table 1)

Table 1: Language Diversity of Manuscripts
N=5582

Language		No. of Manuscripts
Unilingual.	Arabic	669 (11.98)
	Balti	1 (0.01)
	Bakha	5 (0.08)
	Brijbhasha	2 (0.03)
	Dogri	9 (0.16)
	English	7 (0.12)
	Gojri	1 (0.01)
	Gurmukhi	4 (0.07)
	Hindi	157 (2.8)
	Kashmiri	181 (3.24)
	Pastu	1 (0.01)
	Persian	2178 (39.01)
	Punjabi	9 (0.16)
	Sanskrit	2140 (38.33)
	Tibetan	5 (0.09)
	Turkish	8 (0.14)
	Urdu	63 (1.13)
	Total	5440 (97.45)
Bilingual	Arabic-Hindi	1 (0.01)
	Arabic-Kashmiri	1 (0.01)
	Arabic-Persian	94 (1.68)
	Kashmiri-Sanskrit	1 (0.01)
	Persian-Bakha	1 (0.01)
	Persian-Hindi	2 (0.03)
	Persian-Kashmiri	25 (0.44)
	Persian-Turkish	2 (0.03)
	Persian-Urdu	8 (0.14)
	Urdu-Kashmiri	1 (0.01)
	Total	136 (2.43)

Multilingual.	Persian-Arabic-Kashmiri	1 (0.01)
	Persian-Arabic-Urdu	2 (0.03)
	Persian-Urdu-kashmiri	1 (0.01)
	Persian-Kashmiri-Hindi-Afghani	1 (0.01)
	Persian-Kashmiri-Pastu-Dogri-English	1 (0.01)
	Total	6 (0.10)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate %age

➤ Subject Analysis

Majority of manuscripts concern to *Religion* (45.12%) followed by the *Arts* (16.14%). Besides five manuscripts relate to *Social Sciences* (0.09%) and other subjects share 2-10%. History, Literature, Technology, Philosophy and Languages form a sizeable part of the collection. The collection depicts the interest of natives in Technology, religion and philosophy to a large extent and importance given to the scholarship by the kings and elites. The detailed description of all disciplines is given in the table 2.

Table 2: Subject Assortment of Manuscripts

SUBJECT	No. of Manuscripts
Generalities	251 (4.50)
Philosophy	294 (5.27)
Religion	2518 (45.12)
Social Sciences	5 (0.09)
Languages	146 (2.61)
Pure Sciences	95 (1.70)
Technology	502 (8.99)
Arts	901 (16.14)
Literature	372 (6.66)
History	498 (8.92)
Total	5582 (100)

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate %age

➤ **Subject Distribution (Unilingual Manuscripts)**

The manuscripts of 'Literature' (27.08%) has highest number with 'Islam'(20.27%) and 'Sufism' (8.90%) ranking second and third , and putting other fields between 0.03-5.57%. These are mainly written in Persian language (20.04%) and none found in Dogri, Pashto and Gojri languages. The detailed analysis is available in **Table 3** , throwing light to varied tastes of scholars from philosophy to soft and hard sciences . These resources indicate a vast mine of indigenous knowledge deposited in the repository.

Table 3 Subject Distribution in Nastaliq, Naskh and Shikasth Scripts (unilingual)
n=3087

		General titles		Philosophy		Religion		Social Science		Languages		Pure sciences		Technology		Arts		Literature		History										
Language	Count	Arabic	Urdu	Persian	Kashmiri	Punjabi	Dogri	Pashto	Sufism	Sikhism	Islam	Hinduism	Sex	Grammar	Dictionary	Astronomy	Geometry	Math	Medicine	Music	Calligraphy	Literary forms	Poetics	Letters & Documents	Biography	Geography	Genealogical tree	History of tribes/areas (Kashmir)	total	
																														Percentage
X	391	391(1.26)	510	852	1210	X	X	X	33	X	331	X	X	55	12	8	3	10	43	X	X	42	86	X	15	X	X	X	X	668
X	10	10(0.32)	10	32	X	X	X	X	33	X	70	X	X	55	12	8	3	10	43	X	X	42	86	X	15	X	X	X	X	
X	50	50(1.62)	X	120	X	X	X	X	50	X	200	X	X	55	12	8	3	10	43	X	X	42	86	X	15	X	X	X	X	
X	5	5(0.16)	X	32	X	X	X	X	5	X	20	X	X	55	12	8	3	10	43	X	X	42	86	X	15	X	X	X	X	
X	X	X	X	80	X	X	X	X	80	X	280	X	X	80	12	8	3	10	43	X	X	42	86	X	15	X	X	X	X	
X	33	33(1.06)	300	236	300	X	X	X	33	X	275	X	X	200	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
X	110	110(3.5)	700	275	110	X	X	X	110	X	700	X	X	700	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	600	600(1.9)	200	98	600	X	X	X	600	X	980	X	X	600	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	100	100(0.3)	100	100	100	X	X	X	100	X	100	X	X	100	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	200	200(0.6)	200	200	200	X	X	X	200	X	200	X	X	200	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	280	X	X	X	X	280	X	280	X	X	280	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	270	X	X	X	X	270	X	270	X	X	270	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	50	X	X	X	X	50	X	50	X	X	50	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	60	X	X	X	X	60	X	60	X	X	60	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	120	X	X	X	X	120	X	120	X	X	120	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	250	X	X	X	X	250	X	250	X	X	250	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	300	X	X	X	X	300	X	300	X	X	300	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	300	X	X	X	X	300	X	300	X	X	300	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	631	X	X	X	X	631	X	631	X	X	631	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	842	X	X	X	X	842	X	842	X	X	842	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	571	X	X	X	X	571	X	571	X	X	571	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	1685	X	X	X	X	1685	X	1685	X	X	1685	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	250	X	X	X	X	250	X	250	X	X	250	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	X	X	X	50	X	X	X	X	50	X	50	X	X	50	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
X	100	100(0.3)	200	1685	100	200	100	1685	100	200	1685	200	100	1685	12	27	50	60	120	250	300	631	842	571	1685	250	50	1685	2160	
1	2	2	4	181	4	4	2	181	4	4	181	4	4	181	4	4	4	4	181	4	4	181	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

Total	Brjfbasha	Bakha	Turkish	Bafri	Gopri
141(4.56)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
43(1.39)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62(2.00)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37(1.19)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8(0.25)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
275(8.90)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1(0.03)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
626(20.27)	✓	✓	✓	✓	1(0.03)
108(3.49)	✓	1(0.03)	✓	✓	✓
3(0.09)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
86(2.78)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46(1.49)	✓	✓	2(0.06)	✓	✓
35(1.13)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8(0.25)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18(0.58)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
172(5.57)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27(0.87)	✓	2(0.06)	✓	✓	✓
3(0.09)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
83(2.70)	2(0.06)	2(0.06)	6(0.19)	1(0.03)	✓
92(2.98)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
68(2.20)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
188(6.09)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27(0.87)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5(0.16)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
172(5.57)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3087(100)	2	5	8	1	1

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicate %age

➤ **Subject distribution (Bilingual Manuscripts)**

The bilingual manuscripts (Naskh, Nastaliq and Shikast scripts) show that largest number are in Arabic-Persian (69.11%), out of

them 20.58% & 10.29% relate to Sufism & Poetry respectively, while as PersianKashmiri constitute 18.23%, The other bilingual manuscripts are between 0.73%-5.88% . Translated manuscripts are not available in Science and Technology and sounds mysterious to be looked into but translation activities being the frontier areas of the Medieval times and this part of the country has not lagged behind in this endeavour (Table 4)

Table 4: Subject Distribution in Nastaliq, Naskh and Shikasth Scripts (Bilingual)
N=136

	Arabic-Persian	Arabic-Hindi	Arabic-Kashmiri	Kashmiri-Sanskrit	Persian-Bakha	Persian-Hindi	Persian-Kashmiri	Persian-Turkish	Persian-Urdu	Urdu-Kashmiri
Generalities	12(8.82)	x	x	x	x	x	3(2.20)	x	1(0.73)	x
Logic	x	1(0.73)	x	x	x	2(1.47)	x	x	x	x
Islamic Studies	2(1.47)	x	x	x	x	x	3(2.20)	x	1(0.73)	x
Sufism	28(20.58)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Social Sciences	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sci	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1(0.73)	x
Grammar	x	x	1(0.73)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Dictionaries	11(8.08)	x	x	x	x	x	3(2.20)	1(0.73)	x	x
Medicine	3(2.20)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	1(0.73)	x
Poetry	14(10.29)	x	x	1(0.73)	1(0.73)	x	14(10.29)	1(0.73)	2(1.47)	1(0.73)
Letters	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	2(1.47)	x
History	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	2(1.47)	x	x
Total	94(69.11)	1(0.73)	1(0.73)	1(0.73)	1(0.73)	2(1.47)	25(18.38)	2(1.47)	8(5.88)	1(0.73)

Note Figures in parenthesis indicate %age

➤ **Multilingual Distribution**

Meagre Multilingual manuscripts represent the integrity of languages in single text. Two manuscripts are trilingual in nature and one dictionary covers five languages, which is a notable feature of translation activity of the subcontinent and their affection for learning languages and culture of different people. (Table 5)

Table 5: Multilingual manuscripts
N=6

	Persian-Arabic Kashmiri	Persian-Arabic- Urdu	Persian-Urdu- Kashmiri	Persian-Kashmiri Hindi-Arabic	Persian-Kashmiri Pastu-Dogri- English
Social Sciences	1	x	x	x	x
Medicine	x	1	x	x	x
Generalities	x	1	x	x	x
Poetry	x	x	1	x	x
Dictionary	x	x	x	1	1
Total	1	2	1	1	1

➤ **Subject coverage(Sharda and Devnagiri)**

Sharada and Devnagiri script adopted for writing Sanskrit and other related languages has majority of manuscripts on 'Hinduism' (54.22%) and less on 'General Literature' (7.26%). A good number relate to Philosophy, Kashmir Saivism, Medicine, History and Biography . (Table 6)

Table 6 Subject Coverage of Sharda and Devnagiri Script Manuscripts																
Generalities	Philosophy		Religion				Pure Sciences	Tech.	Literatu re	History	Total					
	Gen. Philosophy	Palmistry	Kashmir Saivism	Hinduism	Buddhism	Jainism	Astronomy	Maths	Geometry	Medicine	Vet. Science	Gen. Lit.	Literary Forms	History	Biography	
93(3.95)	138(5.86)	2(0.08)	169(7.18)	1276(54.22)	40(1.6)	1(0.04)	21(0.89)	12(0.50)	1(0.04)	324(13.76)	1(0.04)	171(7.26)	40(1.69)	21(0.89)	79(3.35)	2353

Figures in parenthesis indicate %age.

CONCLUSION

The manuscript collection of ORL(Srinagar) J&K is plethora of religious, philosophical, historical, literary and scientific writings. The library preserving the oriental languages and literature is a unique representation of cultural and literary heritage of Kashmir. The collection is rich in classical languages like Persian (39.01%), Sanskrit (38.33%) and Arabic (11.98%). These languages have left deep impression on Kashmiri language by conditioning its growth in terms of forms and scope. Sanskrit, language of court and culture in 9th and beginning of 10th century in Kashmir contributes number of religious (54.22%), Aesthetic and poetic (7.26%) articulations and are preserved in the ORL . Library preserves significant works on Philosophy, Kashmir Saivism, Medicine, History and Biography in Sharada and Devnagri and Indo persina scripts. The collection can prove valuable to the literary, religious and scientific scholars to outgrow from small circles into wider circumferences of socio-cultural interaction. Few manuscript on Geometry and Medicine could also help to reveal the unfold truth and discoveries. Hence, the major steps need to be taken by the 'State Government' to preserve the treasure and disseminate valuable indigenous knowledge through various means especially exploring dynamism and magic of ICT.

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