

Role of Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute Manuscripts Library in Preserving the Cultural Heritage of a Nation

Prasantha Kumari, M.
Department of Library and Information Science
Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, India
{Svu.prasanthi@gmail.com}



ABSTRACT: *Oriental Research Institutes are institutions especially devoted to Indological studies. Indology is the science of study of culture in all its aspects. With the disappearance of the Gurukula system and the ancient universities like those at Nalanda and Taksasila and also the gradual dissolution of the powerful kingdoms by conquests from outside, it became necessary to evolve a method by which the ancient knowledge and wisdom of the country could be revived and preserved. Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute was started in July, 1939 by the Management of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams with a vision that it should be a first-rate Research and Training Centre with appropriate divisions for the study of Sanskrit and other languages of the Hindu religion and Philosophy and of Hindu culture generally. The library has a rare and valuable collection of paper and palm leaves manuscripts in different languages. Paper manuscripts are scanned and/ stored in the Tiff and Palm leaves are stored in JPEG format. Later these will be written in CDs. These CDs are rewritten and has been given to students and scholars of different countries like USA, Australia, Germany and various North and South states of India who are visited this library for their research purpose.*

Keywords: Oriental Research Institute, Manuscripts Library, Digitization

Received: 1 December 2019, Revised 4 March 2020, Accepted 10 March 2020

DOI: 10.6025/ijis/2020/12/3/83-87

Copyright: with Authors

1. Introduction

In the early times the splendid past of Indian culture was carved in the manuscripts. These are the fundamental historical evidence and have enriched information value. It is estimated that India possesses more than five million manuscripts, making the largest repository of manuscript wealth in the world. Though our ancestors had strived to preserve these manuscripts, thousands of such valued unpublished Indian manuscripts on varied subjects are lying scattered or fragmented in India and foreign countries and some of these are no longer accessible to research scholars and for general public. These invaluable and unique pools of knowledge are under intimidation and manuscripts are vanishing at an alarming rate. Manuscripts are scattered in several places all over India and stored in academic and research Institutions, NGO's, public libraries, private organizations and few individual collections.

It is roughly estimated that over 3.5 million manuscripts might have been preserved but 30% of the remaining manuscripts are stored in temples, and in private hands. Oriental Research Institutes are institutions especially devoted to Indological studies. Indology is the science of study of culture in all its aspects. With the vanishing of the Gurukula system and the ancient universities like those at Nalanda and Taksasila and also the gradual dissolution of the powerful kingdoms by conquests from outside, the need of the hour is to develop a method by which the ancient valuable knowledge and wisdom of the country could be revived and preserved.

2. Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute Manuscripts Library

Prof.S.K. Belvalkar of Benaras Hindu University and Poona prepared a scheme for an Oriental Research Institute at Tirupati and submitted the report on 11th September 1937 at request of the then honourable minister of religious endowments, Madras Dr.Rajan and the then commissioner of Sri. A Ranganatha Mudaliyar of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. The TTD committee has sanctioned Sri Venkateswara Oriental Institute at Tirupati on April 1938. Thus Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute was started in July, 1939 by the Management of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams with a vision that it should be a first-rate Research and Training Centre with appropriate divisions for the study of Sanskrit and other languages of the Hindu religion and Philosophy and of Hindu culture generally. The TTD authorities handed over the institute to Sri Venkateswara University on the 1st November, 1956 with a view to promote its activities in a broader perspective with well qualified staff on modern research lines. In 1979, the Institute shifted to its own new building, which was named “Tiruppan Alvar Bhavan” in sacred memory of Saint Tiruppan alvar who sang in praise of Sri Vishnu in the ninth century A.D. The ORI library contains two major sections Manuscripts Library of palm leaf and paper and printed books library. Manuscripts library Collection details are given below:

Subject	Palm Leaf Manuscripts (TTD Collection)	Paper Manuscripts (TTD Collection)	Government Collection	Total
Sanskrit Manuscripts	8070	883	-	8953
Telugu Manuscripts	428	111	2815	3354
Tamil Manuscripts	1181	-	-	1181
Total				13,488

Manuscripts collected/added under National Mission for Manuscripts: 500 (both palm leaf and paper).

3. Objectives of Manuscript Library

- To prepare well-documented and authenticated reference works like historical dictionaries, encyclopaedic indexes, anthologies and chrestomathies.
- To publish rare manuscripts.
- To prepare critical editions with notes to promote higher textual criticism.
- To publish oriental journal with original research articles on topics like Indology relevant to modern society.
- To publish translations and monographs.

4. Reprographic Service

From 1990 onwards under restoration process of palm leaf manuscripts one extra Xerox copy of manuscript is taken as and when request from scholars for Xerox copies of manuscripts is entertained by the institute. Under this process so far four hundred manuscripts were xeroxed and these are preserved separately.

5. Developmental Activities

With the encouragement given by the ministry of tourism and culture Govt., of India the institute is planning to scan all the palm leaf manuscripts with the help of computers and also to publish some very rare palm leaf manuscripts under publication programme both Sanskrit and Telugu. Some rare manuscripts which are to be published were identified in the year 1940 itself. But due to scarcity of funds the work was not seriously undertaken. Now the publication programme of palm leaf manuscripts will come into reality with the financial help to be given by ministry of tourism and culture, government of India.

6. Major Research Projects Undertaken

- 10 books were published under TTD Rare Printed Books Reprints Project.
- UGC Major research project of Vaishnava Bhakti literature in telugu, tamil and kannada by Dr.C.Govinda RAju – 2007-10.
- UGC Major research project on Ramayana in Telugu, tamil kannada and Malayalam by Dr.M.Prabhakara Rao 2007-10.
- UGC Major research project on comprehensive catalogue of telugu manuscripts by Dr.M. Prabhakara rao 2010-12.
- UGC Major research project on the family system in Indian society with special reference to telugu classical and modern literature by Dr.P.C Venkateswarulu 2011-13.
- UGC Major research project on the descriptive catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts deposited in SVU ORI and RSVP Tirupati by Prof, V.Venkata Ramana Reddy 2013-15.
- An Encyclopaedic Dictionary on Ancient Women.
- Alphabetical index of quotations given by the various commentators on the prasthanatraya, called Vednta- bhcyodharaGako[a; PurGako[a (in Telugu).
- VeEkame[vara Temples-A Study (in English).
- Bibliography on the Bhagavadg+t (in English) and descriptive catalogues of Sanskrit manuscripts.

7. Vignana Nidhi

The National Mission for Manuscripts under the Ministry of Cultural affairs, Government of India, New Delhi has recognised the institute as a Nodal Agency for Andhra Pradesh and awarded the title “Vignana Nidhi” in 2007.

8. Research Consultancy and Extension

Research counselling regarding Manuscriptlogy and Palaeography is provided to various research scholars of different universities and foreign scholars visiting the Library. Scanned images of manuscripts on CDs are also provided.

Katamaraju Kathalu’ Adds Value to Svu’s Manuscripts Collection



Y. Shanmugam Yadav (right), state President of Akhila Bharata Yadava Mahasabha, presenting palm leaf manuscripts on Katamaraju kathalu to SVU Oriental Research Institute Director Damodar Naidu in Tirupati.

The Library became richer with the inclusion of 63 manuscripts on 'Katamaraju Kathalu', considered a great value addition in terms of folklore research. Katamaraju was a 13th century Yadava king of Kanigiri area in the present Prakasam district, who had fought a fierce battle with Nalama Siddhi, king of Nellore, over the right of cattle grazing in the fertile meadows. The battle and the related events became collectively known as the 'Katamaraju Kathalu', a collection of valorous folk stories. The 62 palm leaf manuscripts were meticulously collected by Prof. Tangirala Venkata Subba Rao during his research study in the SVU taken up in the eighties, when he had toured Srikakulam, Prakasam, Chittoor and Nellore districts. Later, he intended to hand over the collection to the Akhila Bharata Yadava Mahasabha, as it was about the Yadava king. Mahasabha State president Y. Shanmugam Yadav however thought it fit to preserve the treasured manuscripts in the ORI Manuscript library for the benefit of posterity and also offered to get them cleaned, scanned, digitised and saved in DVD format. The proposal to present the manuscripts was initially made way back in 2012 during the World Telugu Conference (WTC) held in Tirupati which however materialised during the next WTC under way in Hyderabad. ORI Director Prof. Damodar Naidu, who received the manuscripts stacked in a rack made of teak wood, appreciated the noble intention of the donors in promoting ancient stories of Andhra Pradesh, thus preserving its rich heritage and culture. While 56 sets of manuscripts are of Katamaraju Kathalu, the remaining seven pertain to Rukmini Kalyanam, Palnati Yuddham (2 volumes), Narakasura Vadha, Kamsuni Katha, Battu Rayabaram and Tarkavedam. The 62 volumes are being made available on the web portal www.katamarajukathalu.com.

9. Digitization

The library has started to digitize a rare and valuable collection of paper and palm leaves manuscripts in different languages. Paper manuscripts are scanned and/ stored in the Tiff and Palm leaves are stored in JPEG format. Later these will be written in CDs. These CDs are rewritten and has been given to students and scholars of different countries like USA, Australia, Germany and various North and South states of India who are visited this library for their research purpose.

10. Conclusion

Sri Venkateswara University's Oriental Research Institute (ORI) Manuscripts Library considered one of the treasure troves of rare manuscripts in South India, turned 79 years. It is estimated that India possesses more than five million manuscripts, making the largest repository of manuscript wealth in the world. Manuscripts are scattered in several places all over India and stored in academic and research Institutions, NGO's, public libraries, private organizations and few individual collections. It is roughly estimated that over 3.5 million manuscripts might have been preserved but 30% of the remaining manuscripts are stored in temples, and in private hands. Keeping this in view the ORI Manuscript Library has appealed to the public to hand over age-old manuscripts, palm leaves, copperplates etc., if any, in their possession in order to preserve and propagate traditional knowledge. The need of the hour is people need to understand the value of manuscripts and they should try to hand over manuscripts to the library which are under their custody as the New Delhi-based National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), working under the Ministry of Culture, recognised this library as the resource centre for the entire Andhra Pradesh in collecting, preserving and aiding in digitisation of manuscripts.

References

- [1] http://www.hindupedia.com/en/Oriental_Research_Institutes_of_India
- [2] <http://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Vijayawada/katamaraju-kathalu-adds-value-to-svus-manuscripts-collection/article21860867.ece>
- [3] <https://www.keralauniversity.ac.in/dept/deptHome.php?deptID=24>
- [4] <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/SVU-institutes-drive-to-save-manuscripts/article15736628.ece>
- [5] <http://rkmathbangalore.org/Books/OrientalResearchInstitutesOfINDIA.pdf>
- [6] <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/andhra-pradesh/oriental-research-institute-turns-75/article7634810.ece>
- [7] Devika, S. S., Vijaya Kumar, K. (2016). Digitization of palm leaf manuscripts in Tamil Nadu, India: A Study, *Journal of*

Library Science and Research, 2 (1) 1-10.

[8] <https://www.svuniversity.edu.in/centres/ori>