

# Cataloguing and Digitization of Manuscripts in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Libraries: A Critical Study

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**ABSTRACT:** *There is a real need to study cataloguing and digitization of manuscripts (mss) to perceive the current situation of manuscripts collection in the two states of Tamil Nadu (TN) and Puducherry (PY). National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), and many institutions, societies, universities, mathas, play an important role in preserving the manuscripts for the future. The researchers have selected a sample of five important mss collections administered by different organization in TN PY in the diversity of knowledge and languages. The study founded that only one library has completed its cataloguing of mss, created online manuscript database and found that only two mss libraries have completed digitization, out of which only one library collection is available online.*

**Keywords:** Manuscripts, Palm Leaf Manuscripts, Cataloguing, Digitization, Tamil Nadu, Puducherry

**Received:** 10 June 2021, Revised 23 August 2021, Accepted 24 September 2021

**DOI:** 10.6025/ijis/2022/14/1/24-33

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## 1. Introduction

Manuscripts by derivation mean anything written by hand. In this sense there is no limitation to the materials on which the writing is done, nor does the term signify any particular instrument with which the work is undertaken. A manuscript must be written in a particular language to communicate or to preserve. In India manuscripts continue to be important even after the advent of the printing press. Manuscripts have some properties in common with printed books, but they also have some special characteristics of their own. These require them to be separately treated by the libraries. The word ‘manuscript’ has been derived from the Latin word ‘manuscriptus’. This Latin term has been used for “a document written with an own person’s hand”. Oxford English dictionary defines ‘manuscript’ as “a book, document, or the like, written by hand; a writing of any kind, as distinguished from printed matter”.

In India before the introduction of paper the majority of our vast ancient intellectuals found palm leaves (tala patra in south India or birch bark in North India) to be useful to write on, besides this there were birch park, papyrus, leather, silk, stones, wood... etc written materials in India (Agrawal, O.P.). It is observed that earliest manuscripts and scriptures are not older than the 10th cent. A.D. (Sharma, R.S). Investigations into the Indian treasure knowledge began with the work of the Indologists. They were mostly

European scholars and their main area of study was Indian language. The study of Sanskrit language rendered practically the main source material for the reconstruction of ancient Indian society (Thapar, R).

## 2. Manuscripts of Palm leaf and Paper

### 2.1 Palm leaf Manuscripts

Palm leaf is a natural material. It is known as tada patra, tala patra or panna. In ancient India palm leaves were commonly used for the purpose of writing as they were available abundantly throughout the nation. The palm leaf manuscript which is referred to as *olai cuvati* in Tamil is one of the oldest medium of writing in India especially in South India. Palm leaf manuscripts were written in two ways one was to inscribe with stylus on the leaves and the other way was with ink on leaves.

### 2.2. Paper Manuscripts

To overcome the difficulties related to palm leaf, paper was invented in China. Paper is a substance in the form of sheets of leaves made from rags, straw, bark, wood and other fibrous materials. In India, handmade paper was very popular during the 18th century. The paper manuscripts were written with permanent black ink. The pen used for writing manuscript was made of wood while vulture or goose quills were also used (Perumal, P. 1998). Some of the original manuscripts (mss) available in institutional/university libraries or archives, which were collected earlier or recently, may have been purchased or gifted. These mss lose their strength and become brittle day by day. As these are rare in nature and important for scholars who want to pursue studies, to edit mss is an indispensable aspect. In case of preservation care should be taken for two aspects:

- To save the original mss
- To keep ready mss in another format to serve the researchers.

Immediately after the compilation of accessioning, it is necessary to prepare list/Indexes/catalogues for the quick findings to facilitate usage of mss for researchers. The other important step is to take proper initiatives to preserve mss for current and future scholars in a widespread manner by adapting the latest ICT for digitization.

## 3. Review of Literature

**Sarma, K.V. (1994)** in his article in the felicitation volume of N.R.Bhatt described the need for manuscripts catalogue and the types of catalogue. He also discussed descriptive catalogue users to be of three types: editors of texts, historians of literature and students of culture, of a descriptive catalogue of manuscripts. **Dilip Kumar (2006)** discussed the systematic arrangement of manuscripts in definite order and types of manuscripts catalogues; card index, accession register, triennial catalogue and descriptive catalogue. This study also said that a standard catalogue should possess 13 important fields with detailed explanation. **Ramesh Gaur (2006)** described in detail about six divisions of IGNCA and open access initiative (OAI). Finally, he pointed out the importance of national and international agencies active involvement to promote open source resources **Samuel, John G. (2007)** wrote about the importance of the Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) Tamil medical manuscript collection. This study found that at IAS, there are nearly 8 lakh surviving palm leaf manuscripts, about half of which were in Sanskrit and 25 percent in Tamil the study also found that and the remainder was disappearing due to ignorance. **Gaur, Ramesh C and Chakraborty, Mrinmoy (2009)** discussed the modern concept of initiation, preservation and access with an example of IGNCA, National Archives of India and NMM. **Nirmal Ranjan Mazumdar (2009)** recollected about the digital preservation of Assam manuscripts, particularly the initiatives in Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Guwahati. The Caliber conference paper tells that importance of features and contents of manuscripts to digitize and made available on web. **Londhe, Nagesh L., Desale, Sanjay K., Patil, Suresh K. (2011)** focused mainly on technical requirements and processing method for digitization of manuscripts adopted in Jayakar library, University of Pune. The Paper explained the various technical stages to adopt for digitization of manuscripts and metadata. The study found the importance of software for image capturing and process. **Narenthiran, R., Saravanan, G., Ramanujam, K. (2012)** presented the digital processing and the various methods and formats of digitization of manuscripts. They highlighted the factors relating to digitization, as also the advantages and disadvantages of palm leaf manuscripts digitization with reference to French Institute of Pondicherry. **Sahoo, Jyosana. etal (2013)** focused on the activities of National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) from 2003 to 2011 as regards to establishment of various centers through different parts of our country, Survey, Descriptive of Catalogue of Manuscripts (DCM) and digitization activities. **Rana, Anil Kumar Jain and others (2013)** discussed about Indian manuscripts resources, different types of manuscripts available in India. In addition to this they studied scattered five

million manuscripts in the world and the role played by NMM with its various centers, particularly manuscripts resource centre, Scindia Oriental Research Institute (SORI), Ujjain. (**Anil Kumar Jain and others**) described SORI manuscripts collection development in different phases and the importance of few selective manuscripts. **Mavali Rajan, K. and Kala, P. (2016)** this recent article is merely another essay on four manuscripts libraries of GOML, IAS, TMSSML and Department of Palm-leaf manuscript of Tamil University. Article is simply describing rich manuscripts collection of the above mentioned four libraries mss collection and it is neither talk about cataloguing or about digitization of mss.

#### 4. Manuscripts in Tamil Nadu (TN) & Puducherry (PY)

##### 4.1 Manuscripts in TN Libraries

Tamil Nadu has plenty of sources on the history of the Tamil Nadu in the ancient and medieval periods such as literary works, manuscripts, numismatics, epigraphy (inscriptions), folklore, legends and religious centers of ghatikas (groups of holy and learned brahmanas), [lairs (cente of learning in ancient Tamils), mat#has, agrahras and temples. Predominantly of the two most important sources are palm leaf manuscripts and temple inscriptions.

There are many manuscript libraries in Tamil Nadu, out of which Tamil collections from Government Oriental Manuscripts Library (GOML), Dr. U.V. Swaminatha Iyer Library and Adyar Library and Research Centre, Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) Chennai, Thiruvavaduthurai Adhnam Saravathi Mahal Library (TASML), Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswathi Mahal Library (TMSSML), Annamalai University Library, Tamil University are important as sources to know history of Tamil Nadu. It is evidence with temple inscriptions in the medieval periods in the Tamil Nadu their libraries with manuscripts for the use of scholars. There are five important inscriptions found at the larger temples of Tamil Nadu which mention the libraries: Among the inscriptions from Nataraja temple at Chidambaram (Cuddalore Dt.,) probably belong to 13th century A.D. of the reign of Jatavarman Sundara Pandiya I (1251-68 A.D.) there is a reference to the library (Sarasvati-bhandra). Another Pandiyan inscriptions of the 13th century A.D. found in the Dvrpati-Appan in Seranmadevi (Tirunelveli district) mentions the existence of Sarasvati-bhandra in the shrine.

A later record datable to 1359 A.D. from the Varadarsvami temple in Kanchipuram mentions that there was a Vaishnava matha at Kanchi which had numerous manuscripts and other accessories of a library which probably included racks, leaves and writing materials.

##### 4.2 Manuscripts in PY Libraries

The Union Territory of Pondicherry comprises four regions viz., Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and yanam. Pondicherry and Karaikkal located on the east coast of Tamil Nadu have an area of 293 sq. kms and 160 sq. kms. Mahe, situated on the west coast, four miles south of Tellicherry, has an area of 9 sq. kms. Yanam lies on the eastern coast in the East Godavari district of Andhra State, and has an area of 30 sq. kms. Among the languages spoken in Pondicherry, the Dravidian languages are the dominant; Tamil is the major language in all the parts of Pondicherry. The French were the last to come to India.

In PY there are two premier research institutions in the field of indology, viz French Institute of Pondicherry (FIP) and Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). These two research centers are administered by Government of France comes under Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Education. There is rich collection of 'Shaiva manuscripts' in FIP and Vaishnava texts in the languages of the Sanskrit, Tamil and Manipravalam in EFEO. These two collections are recognized by UNESCO in the "Memory of the World" collection.

Table-1 shows twenty-three important libraries in TN administered by Govt. of TN, **Universities**, Research institutions, societies, Trusts and colleges in different parts of TN from 16th to 20th century. One lakh eighty-seven thousand three hundred and sixty mss are found in 23 libraries in TN under different subjects and languages. Out of these, three libraries viz Chennai Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Thanjavur Maharaja Sarfoji Saraswati Mahal Library and Adyar library possesses major collections in TN. These three collections are exceedingly rich, since ancient times with palm leaf manuscripts having textual and illustrative eminence. This corpus represents a significant portion of the distilled experience of Tamil speaking civilization transmitted from generation to generation over two millennia preserved either through oral tradition or written form as palm leaf mss.

#### 5. Manuscripts Cataloguing

Manuscript catalogue is a detailed "proper list" of manuscripts belonging to particular libraries/Universities/Special Research

Serial No.	Year	Name of the Libraries	Number of MSS
1	1869	Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai	72314
2	1886	Adyar Library, Chennai	21136
3	1900	R.M.K. Vaidya Salai, Palani	150
4	1901	Tamil Sangham, Madurai	389
5	1918	Thanjavur Maharaja Sarfoji Saraswati Mahal Library, Thanjavur	47424A
6	1939	Annamalai University, Chidambaram	932
7	1943	U.V. Saminatha Iyer Library, Chennai	2398
8	1945	Kalaimakal Kalvi Nilayam, Erode	133
9	1947	Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Chennai	1550
10	1950	Santhalinga Adigalar Arts&Tamil college, Coimbatore	337
11	1995	French Institute of Pondicherry	9651
12	1965	Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai	300
13	1970	International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai	465
14	1971	Centre for Traditional Medicine and Research, Chennai	300
15	1981	Tamil University, Thanjavur	8511
16	1982	Institute of Asian Studies, Chennai	750
17	1985	Govt. Siddha College, Chennai	1526
18	1994	Sri Chandrasekharendra Viswa Mahavidyalaya, Kanchipuram	6000
19	1996	Pulippani Asram, Palani	40
20	1997	Govt. Museum, Palanni	30
21	16th cent	Tarumapura Adhinam	481
22	16th cent	Thiruvavduthurai Adhinam, Thiruvavduthurai	2279
23	18th cent	Kovilur Mutt, Karaikkudi	250
Total	187368		

Table 1. List of MSS libraries in Tamil Nadu

Institutions at national and international levels. Indologists generally Sanskritist, scholars begin their researches with manuscripts catalogues to compare texts in a critical manner, to find variation, style and paraphrasing of a particular text by different authors. To compile manuscript catalogues, one has to be well versed in many languages and scripts, ancient knowledge system and the cultural affluence of the region, and finally master in the “God language”- Sanskrit.

## 6. Manuscript Digitization

Digitization can help enormously in preserving documents and texts in their original format without the need for physical handling, which is prone to damage. Digitization is not merely taking photographs by digital camera, it is more than scanning. It is a comprehensive technology whereby rare manuscripts and art objects are preserved and made available to a wider audience/scholars through digital format. The advancement of ICT has presented innumerable ways for conserving our rich manuscripts, which are known to be knowledge repositories. Through digitization, the dissemination and promotion of standards and processes must be improved. Many of the institutions in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry have embarked on an important program to photograph and digitize all their manuscripts and make them available in online for the research community. Also with the help of networking, one can have access to resources round the clock and data transmission in minimal duration.

## 7. Scope, Limitations and Methodology

The scope of this article is confined to five selective manuscript collections in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry; Adyar Library and Research Centre (ALRC), Kuppuswami Research Institute (KSRI), Institute of Asian Studies (IAS), Tamil University (TU) and French Institute of Pondicherry (FIP). This study is with an emphasis on cataloguing and digitization of mss from selected libraries only. This research study was completed with survey research method using self-administered structured questionnaire. This data was collected in March-April 2016. The questionnaires were distributed in person to the librarians of the selected five libraries.

## 8. Objectives

- To create awareness on the importance of cataloguing and digitization of mss
- To find total mss of palm leaf and paper
- To ascertain categories of mss collection
- To survey the current status of mss cataloguing
- To find mss digitization tendency in mss libraries
- To find out which are the libraries having completed mss cataloguing and digitization

## 9. Findings and Discussion

Keeping an idea of the objective of the study, the data has been collected and analyzed and interpreted with the help of MS-Excel.

Name of the libraries	Number of palm leaf MSS	Number of paper MSS	Total Number of MSS	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
ALRC	18000	3136	21136	50.81	56.11
KSRI	1500	50	1550	3.73	87.68
FIP	8187	1464	9651	23.20	93.47
IAS	750	0	750	1.80	94.89
TU	8000	511	8511	20.46	100.00
	36437	5161	41598	100.00	

Table 2. Source: Primary survey during April 2016

Manuscript libraries have been comparatively improved in all the activities in comparison with last few decades. Libraries are equipped well in terms of skill, financial and ICT...etc. All five selected mss libraries for the study are in different status of administration and functionalities.

### 9.1. Types of MSS Collection

Table-2 and corresponding figure-1 show that, in the five libraries, mss collection is 41598, ALRC was found to be the biggest collection of palm leaf and paper mss, secured with 21136 mss (50%) and the least collection found in IAS with 750 mss (1.8%) and further that it had no paper mss. Figure 1 is clearly marking total number of palm leaf mss is 36437.

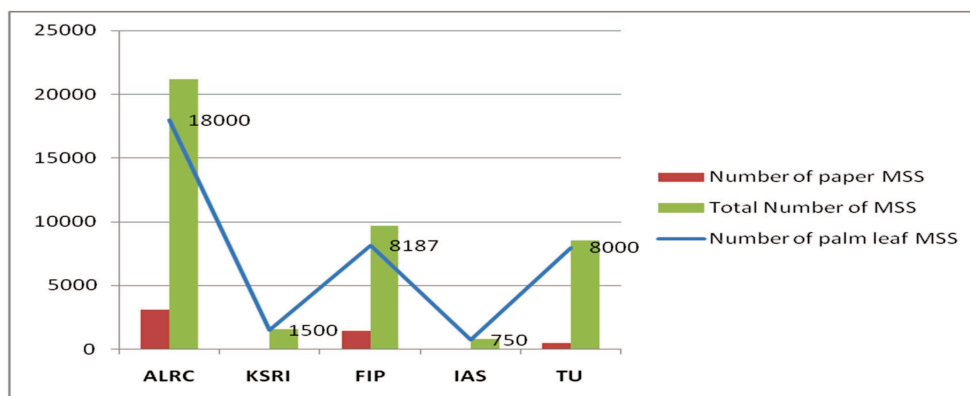


Figure 1. Collection status

### 9.2. Different Categories of MSS

The data about the important categories of mss collections of libraries (Table-3 and Fig-2) revealed 5286 literature manuscripts forming the major contributor. In this data ALRC stood first in all ten categories of mss collection because of its rich collection. The least collection was in th category of folk mss; however, IAS is strong in this category with 362 out of its overall collection of 750. FIP occupied 'Agama' category as strong collection with 1269 and the least in this category is IAS with only 5mss.

Categories of MSS	ALRC	KSRI	FIP	IAS	TU	Total
Puranas	1268	359	678	58	568	2931
Epics	2064	128	347	46	776	3361
Literature	3648	122	568	66	882	5286
Grammar	882	88	448	32	578	2028
Jyotisa	364	77	578	45	321	1385
Vedas	652	66	679	68	462	1927
Agama	266	18	1269	5	256	2114
Medicine	446	38	326	226	249	1285
Folk	236	42	68	152	362	860
Miscellaneous	11310	612	4390	52	4057	20421
Total	21136	1550	9651	750	8511	41598

Table 3. Important mss categories in subject wise

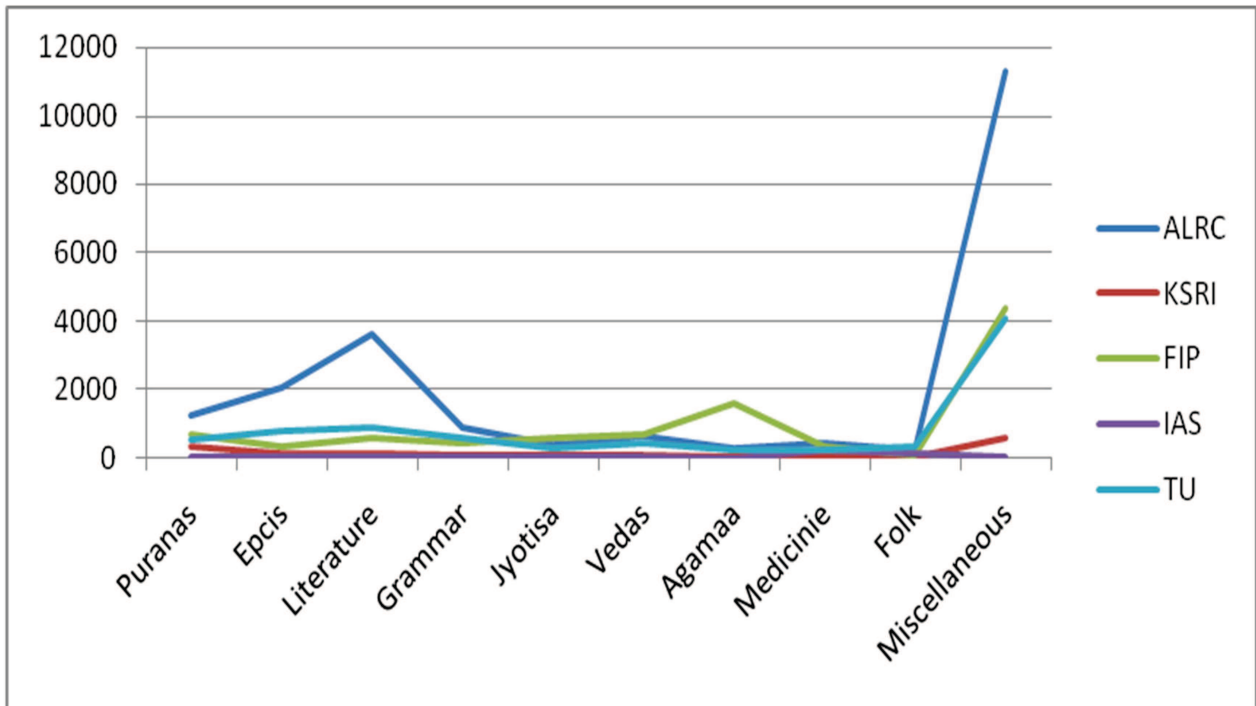


Figure 2. Position of various subject category of mss collection 11.3 Cataloguing Activities

### 9.3. Cataloging Activities

The graph 3 and table 4 depict the manuscript cataloguing status of ALRC, KSRI, FIP, IAS, and TU. ALRC has so far published 16 volumes amounting to 14838 mss. KSRI has not attempted probably because of very less collection and added in the early 20th centu. FIP has attempted with four volumes of 475 mss, however it has all the detail in an online database called “IFP Manuscript Database” with complete digital manuscript resources. One can access this database in the following link <http://www.ifpindia.org/digitaldb/online/manuscripts/>. The IAS and TU each published eight volumes. It is to be noted that IAS not only covered its own collection of mss, but was also able to publish DCM for Thiruvavaduthurai Adhinam Mutt collection and Dr. U.V. Swaminathaiyar Library. Out of all five libraries four libraries have brought out DCM, KSRI not shown any attempt, all these DCM were published in English language except TU that brought out in Tamil language.

Name of the Libraries	Number of palm leaf MSS	Number of MSS covered for DCM	Number of DCM Volumes	Status	Languages
ALRC	21136	14838	16	Not completed	English
KSRI	1550	0		No Plan	
FIP	9651	475	4	Not completed	English
IAS	750	750	8	Completed	English
TU	8511	2500	8	Completed	Tamil

Table 4. Manuscripts cataloguing status

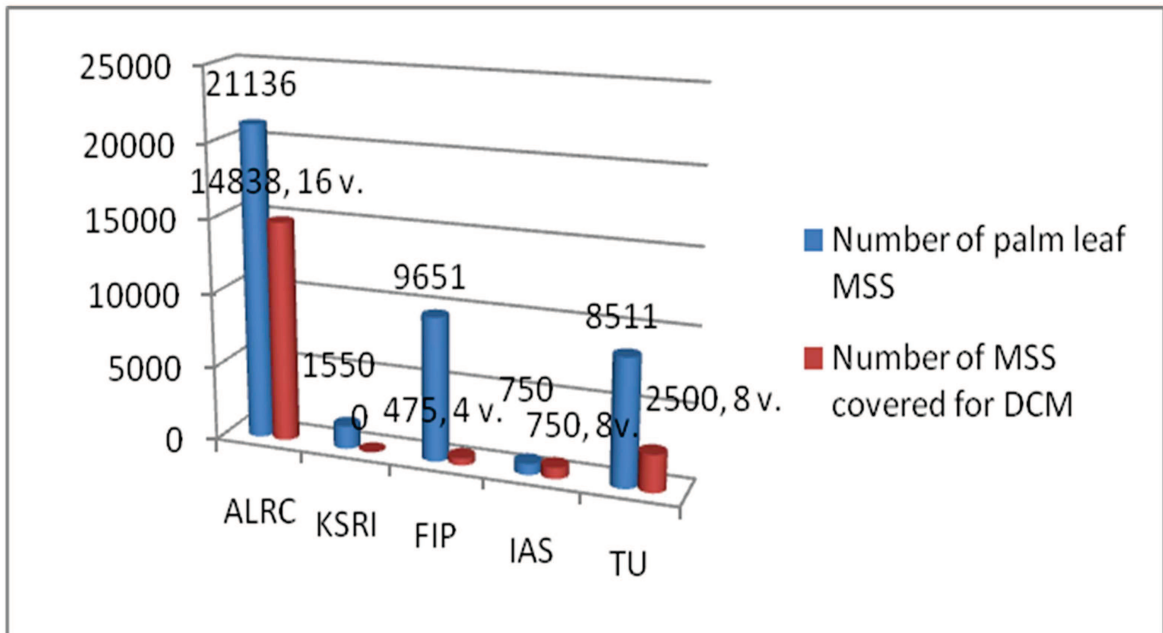


Figure 3. Status of manuscripts cataloguing

#### 9.4. Digitization Activities

In order to find the number of digitized mss in the libraries holding, the data figured in the table-5 and figure-5 show that FIP and KSRI collections of 9651 and 1500 have been successfully digitized with one lakh and 20000 images respectively. Figure 5 shows out of total 41598 mss collections of five libraries only five percent have been digitized.



Figure 4. IFP manuscript Database main menu



Name of the Libraries	Number of palm leaf MSS	Numbr of MSS Digitized	Number of digital images	Digitization status
ALRC	21136	5000	13000	Partly micorfilmed/Digitized
KSRI	1550	1550	20000	Digitized
FIP	9651	9651	100000	Digitized
IAS	750	200	4500	Partly microfilmed/Digitized
TU	8511	4000	100000	Partly Digit.
Total	41598	20401	237500	

Table 5. Manuscripts digitization data

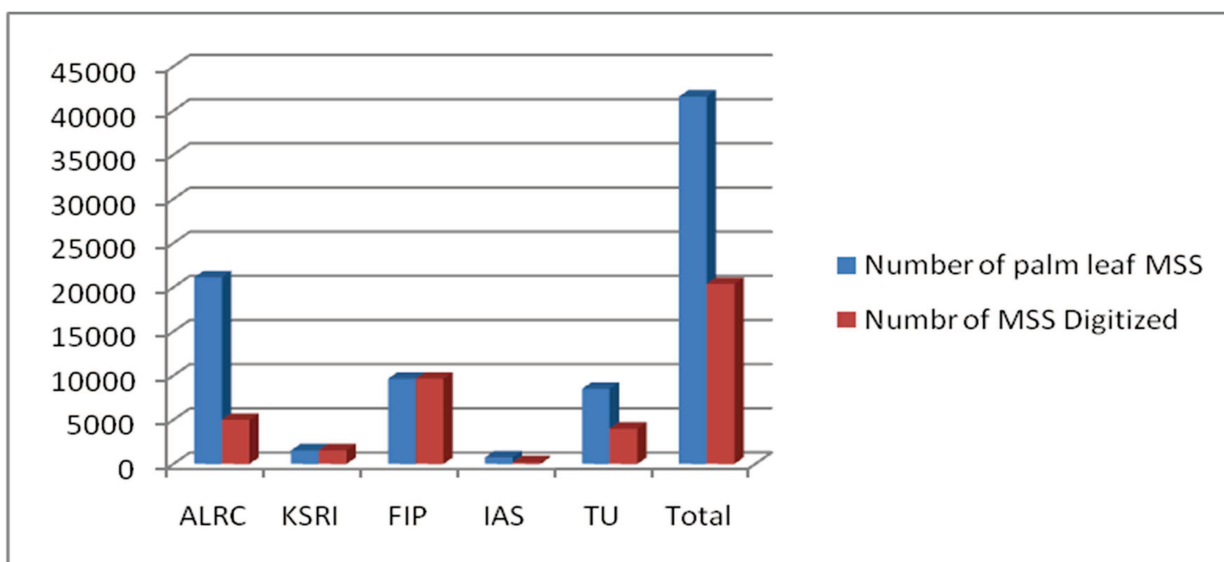


Figure 5. Total mss and digitized

## 10. Conclusion

Recent ICT trends all over the world revolving with digital technology in all aspects of library activities hence researchers wanted to find current trend towards mss libraries activities of cataloguing and digitization of mss in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry. The outlook of researchers survey found not very promising outcome: cataloguing of five selected mss collection was completed only in one library of IAS. Found digitization activities are also not encouraging as only two libraries have completed digitization, some of the libraries have not even reached fifty percent of the task. This study leads further to investigate to find where things are not correct to lead the dream of digital India.

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