



**Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee
Research Foundation**



Indian History Awareness Research



IHAR SITE VISIT REPORT ON UTTARPARA JAIKRISHNA MUKHERJEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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ON

UTTARPARA JAIKRISHNA MUKHERJEE PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Prelude

In mid 2024 IHAR India Operations was contacted by the descendants & current generation of Shri Jaikrishna Mukherjee citing the precarious condition of the Manuscripts, precious books, reading materials & their Storage inside the library, so that IHAR can as an independent body who are into the Conservation, preservation & propagation of Bhartiya Cultural Heritage, assess & evaluate the situation & suggest steps suitable for the conservation & digitization of all archival records & resources apart, from suggesting long term measures for the robust protection & preservation of this legendary library which is a National Heritage loaded with priceless materials along with its esoteric value which the entire landscape of the Library brings to the table, considering the luminaries & greatest of scholars who have visited, stayed & worked from these premises thereby positioning this library worth tangibly, intangibly, spiritually & driving a rich tapestry of supreme consciousness through the presence of Rishi Shri Aurobindo when he delivered his epoch Uttarpara Speech on 30th May 1909, after his release by the British authorities, going on to remind the masses, of the immortal words from Srimad Bhagwat Gita through his own supreme realizations & visions imparted to him during his tenure in the Jail.

Acknowledgements

The IHAR team takes this opportunity to extend its heartfelt gratitude to the DLO Dr Indrajit Pan & his entire team, without whose most kind support & guidance this

detailed survey would not have been possible. IHAR team is also sincerely thankful to the current descendants of Shri Jaikrishna Mukherjee & their family members for inviting IHAR to have this survey done & providing the opportunity to contribute to the preservation of Bengal & Bharat's stupendous epigraphic, architectural & lithographic heritage to say the least. Finally, all these efforts will truly bear fruit if the library is declared a "National Heritage" & brought under the aegis of the National Manuscripts Mission & National Archives, apart from undertaking a Two-year-old turnkey project for the Conservation, Digitization, revamping of storage & reorganization of all resources (including manpower) for the benefit of India & its masses. A Thank You would be a very little gesture for Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Foundation, who have come forward for publishing this Survey report, in this hour & IHAR team profoundly acknowledges their monumental support in this endeavor.

Historical Background of the Library

The Uttarpara Jaikrishna Public Library located in Hooghly district's Uttarpara on the G.T. Road was inspired by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore and guided by the London Public Library Act of 1850CE. Zamindar Shri Jaikrishna Mukherjee began building the library on more than one acre of land in 1856CE for a total cost of Rs. 85,000. This was the First Free Public Library of not only India but also of Asia. Those were the days when in Bengal and India, public education was a far cry.

The average literacy rate had fallen to mere a 5% & average life expectancy to 32 years, such were the days in Bengal. The construction of the two storied library and flower garden was completed in 1859CE & was formally thrown opened to the public in April 15, 1859CE. Though it had started working for scholars and researchers as early as 1851CE. Sir William Hunter, the legendary Orientalist who stayed in this library building for almost three years for the compilation of his statistical accounts & imperial gazetteer of Bengal. The library is a Treasure trove & every wall & every stone is revibrating with stories of that glorious bygone era. The legendary Bengali poet Michael Madhusudan Dutta stayed here twice, including his last days & as such some his artefacts are also preserved & displayed in the second floor of the library. Rishi Sri Aurobindo expressed his realization of the supreme consciousness before the public in his famous Uttarpara Speech on May 30th, 1909CE in the filed in front of the library attended by a spectacular congregation of 10,000 people who listened to him with a pin drop silence, although there was no public addressal system installed on that day by the Organizers. Eminent personalities like Governor Sir Ashley Eden, Miss Mary Carpenter, Sir Edwin Arnold, Sir River Thomson, Marquis of Dufferin and Ava Dufferin, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Surendra Nath Bannerjee, Bipin Chandra Pal, Kesab Chandra Sen, Rishi Shri Aurobindo Ghose, Sir WW Hunter & legendary scholars & researchers from the Royal Asiatic Society of Calcutta along with many other distinguished personalities have visited the library & were associated with the said institution. Based on the data

gathered from this library, renowned Rev. Sir James Long's catalogue was released in 1855CE. In 1866CE Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar visited this library with the English educationist Mary Carpenter. Today, near the library's main entrance, you can see the names of dignitaries who have visited the library over the years — Sir Edwin Arnold, the Marquis of Dufferin, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Bipin Pal, Kesab Sen and so on. As a result, this building has a history of its own and merits heritage designation. Unconfirmed reports & as per claims by the current descendants of Shri Jaikrishna Mukherjee points to The Buddha's relics which are currently kept in Sarnath, where handed over to the Mahabodhi Society in 1928CE by legendary Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee after repeated theft attempts were made on the Golden Casket holding the relics. However more research needs to be undertaken to firmly establish this linkage by relevant authorities & Buddhist scholars. The presence of 300 plus ancient Buddhist manuscripts whose ageing has not yet been established properly as on date & as claimed by the current descendants of linkages to famous Chinese traveller & pilgrim Huen Tsang needs to be validated through scientific research & testing as well. But undoubtedly there is for sure a critical connection of this Library to the entire gamut of Buddhist Literature & The Buddhas relics which is now an integral part of the oral traditions & legends associated with this Epic Institution of knowledge & culture.

The Directorate of Library Services of the West Bengal Government currently manages this library & has designated it as the Only **"Special Library"** as per enactment defined in

the West Bengal Public Libraries Act of 1979 (re-constituted vide G.O.No 909-MEE/Sectt. Dated 28th December 2011). This itself is a huge indicator of the primaeval significance this institution has in the annals of Bengal & India's cultural heritage encompassing epigraphy, history, architecture & off course the unforgettable enigma of Bengal Renaissance whose epicentre was this library. This library is immensely rich in primarily printed materials essential for 17th to 19th-century studies and has a collection of about 50 to 60 thousand rarest of the rare books currently apart from the fascinating collection of priceless manuscripts of various era's. Some unconfirmed reports even claim some of the manuscripts to be of the Mauryan Era. The collection in this library contains very rare and old defunct periodicals both in Bengali and English such as Dig Darson (1818CE) the first Bengali periodical Bengal Chronicle (1821CE), Calcutta Monthly Journal (1798CE) to name a few. The library's collection also features 2,500 old periodicals, 20,000 bound new periodicals, and 450 priceless manuscripts. One can find the copy of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's book "Hectorbadh Kavya". The Telegraph reported on 11th Apr 2023 that "Some of the periodicals and letters at UJPL would be hard to find elsewhere, even in the British Museum. For many, the UJPL catalogue is richer than London's India Office Library. From Digdarshan, the first Bengali periodical, the Bengal Chronicle of 1821CE and the Calcutta Monthly Journal of 1798CE to books by William Carey, John Clark Marshman, Walter Walsh, Nathaniel Brassey Halhade, Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Mohanprasad Tagore, UJP, it would seem, has it all. Here you can also

find a Sanskrit translation of the Holy Bible, the letters of Max Muller, as well as rare government reports, charters, treaties and confidential state secrets. Added to this, UJPL also houses more than 200 leaf and paper manuscripts that have been collected from places like Varanasi and Kashmir, and even far-off Tibetan monasteries. Many renowned personalities, including Jaykrishna Mukherjee, have donated their life's collections to this library."

Dr. S. R. Ranganathan, National Professor in Library Science paid a visit to this library in 1952C & even remarked that major portion of the collection of this library could not be found even in the largest library of the country or even in Asia pacific region. The supreme importance of this library is further corroborated by the fact that, it was also discussed in the Parliament of Bharat along with the iconic National Library, however while the National Library came under the direct control & management of the GOI, Jaykrishna Library was dropped for reasons unknown.

However, the ex-President of India **Shrimati Pratibha Devisingh Patil had visited on 24th Aug 2008, to commemorate 150 years of Jaykrishna Library & her speech is presented herein which clearly speaks of the Library critical importance in the history & heritage of Bharat:**

"Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to participate in the celebrations to commemorate 150 years of the Uttarpara Jaikrishna Public Library. I congratulate Shri Santasri Chatterjee President of the Celebration Committee and its Members for organizing this event.

The library was established by

the Late Babu Jaikrishna Mukherjee for the intellectual advancement of the people and opened to the public in 1859 as a free reading centre, which I am informed, was the first of its kind in Asia. Babu Jaikrishna not only set up the library and donated his own collection of books but

when the President of Chile quoted from "Gitanjali", while welcoming me. Gurudev's message, that humanity is one and the people of the world must live harmoniously, is true for all times and all ages. I will quote a couple of lines from his poem, "Prabhat Utsav", which express this sentiment:

সদয়ঃ সবার জগৎ, জগৎ জগৎ সবার
সবার সবার জগৎ, জগৎ জগৎ সবার।

systematically enriched the collection with English, Bengali and Sanskrit books, documents, manuscripts and periodicals.

I am told that the library is immensely rich in primary printed materials of the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth century with a collection of about fifty-five thousand rare books. In addition, it has a thousand manuscripts on palm leaf, plantain leaf and handmade paper collected from Banaras, Kashmir and monasteries from Tibet. It is, therefore, not without good reason that this Library has been described as a valuable treasure house, acclaimed by scholars as a good research library and considered as a living history of the literature and culture of Bengal.

Bengal is renowned for its intellectual and academic contributions to India. Its literature is rich and variegated. The writings of Gurudev Thakur reflect the thinking and philosophy of India. His works touched the hearts and minds of people across many continents, making him a poet of the world. During my visit to Latin America in April this year, I was particularly pleased

This feeling of universal unity can only be possible when knowledge is acquired by people and societies are enlightened. In fact, libraries are known as the repositories of our knowledge. From ancient times, the building and setting up of libraries have been a measure of civilisational progress. In fact, it was said that a library constituted the soul of a city and the development of a town or a city was not complete till it had a library. Across the world, libraries have contributed to improving the quality of life of its citizens and providing them many opportunities for gaining knowledge and for intellectual advancement.

India is known for having a tradition of libraries. Nalanda University was a renowned seat of learning in India and housed one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world. Its collection was so extensive that when the University was ransacked in the 12th century, the burning of the manuscripts of the library continued for several months. Just as destruction of libraries, the store houses of information, is inexcusable, their preservation is important for future posterity. As

mankind progresses, its culture is nurtured and preserved in different ways. While the institutions devoted to the performing arts keep alive traditions, it is museums and libraries that act as the archival memories of our collective consciousness. Libraries are the common heritage of mankind as they preserve documents that contain information about human development and diversity. However, conservation is both an art and a science. It requires a constant upgradation of systems to ensure that various environmental, biological and human factors do not result in destroying collections.

For an institution to survive and to be relevant, it also needs to change with changing times. In this age of technological progress, all sectors are seeking to take advantage of new techniques and methods. In the library field also, we see the impact of technology. From the manner in which the databases of acquisitions and references are maintained to the actual lending of books and keeping of records, all can be accomplished with software operating on computers. Digitization and micro-films have proved to be useful for preservation of ancient books. With ICT we see the dawn of a new age when libraries, while maintaining physical stores of books are also converting their collections into electronic form, allowing users to access and download entire volumes straight onto their computers.

Library professionals and librarians can benefit immensely from keeping themselves abreast of new technologies in library usage. I would encourage libraries to also develop partnerships with other libraries, a concept which is very easy and

simple with modern technology. The exchange of information between libraries would not only enrich them, but would help in exchange of experiences which can help in adopting better practices for libraries like cataloguing and preservation of records.

Libraries should, through outreach programmes, make people aware of the resources available with them and through innovation make access to these resources easier. For any library to be successful, it requires the involvement of people and their active participation. I would urge the public to look at libraries as centres of learning and contribute to their success by ensuring that they spend some time there. Libraries, on their part, should ensure that their collections remain forward looking and diversified and of renowned quality.

A Librarian has traditionally been an intellectual friend, who guided readers towards books in their areas of interest and to bringing to their notice new publications. It is for this reason that libraries are considered social institutions, as they played a role in the dissemination of information to the public. This role continues even today. Libraries have a responsibility to inculcate, particularly among the youth, an interest in reading, including of books which have great social and historical relevance which would help them in understanding the evolution of mankind and the values of which have guided human beings to become good individuals, who contribute to create an enlightened society.

I wish to emphasize that while technology can make knowledge available at the click of a button, healthy reading habits are also equally

important. Reading books helps us imagine what is written, which helps develop mental ability and sharpness of an individual. I would urge all of you, in particular the youth, to develop healthy reading habits and would like to remind you of an old proverb that, "good books serve as your best friends." They are like your philosopher and guide. They speak of the past, keep you aware about the present and give guidance about the future, as well as do the important work of transmitting collective wisdom and thoughts from one generation to the next.

I conclude with best wishes to

the library and all its readers. The commendable efforts made by Babu Jaikrishna to set it up and of those who in the last 150 years have contributed to nurturing and maintaining it, deserve praise. The good work must continue. Your request for support for the library has been forwarded to the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India for extending assistance for modernisation. However, as a token, I have already handed over a cheque of Rs. 10 lakh for the library for the preservation of its rich and priceless collection of books.

Thank You.
Jai Hind"

The serendipity of the library along with its opulent architecture can be observed through the double-story building's front side faces west, and a portico with rooms on top is held up by six Doric pillars and six Pilasters. The second story above the portico is covered by a pediment. At the rear of the building is a lovely grassy space. The Ganges River added to the area's beauty and tranquillity. On the backside of the structure, a marble bust of Shri Jaikrishna Mukherjee is placed between the two central pillars.



Portrait of Sri Jaikrishna Mukherjee



Marble bust of Sri Jaikrishna Mukherjee

Some magnificent architectural view of the building:





The New Library Building:

On August 24, 2008, the new library building was officially opened by then-President of India Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil. There are two conference halls and a library in this building. The library even has a kid-friendly section for young students, which is fantastic. The sheer volume of readers at this well-kept institution is remarkable.

View of the New Library Building:



Read Your Own Book Section building:

This facility provides a relaxing environment for their readers, who bring their own books. There are no library books permitted in this building. Readers must bring their own books and other reading materials to the library, and by following the regulations, they can enjoy the quiet environment for comfortable reading.

View of the Read Your Own Book Section building:



Books:

The library houses an extensive collection of literature, ranging from rare to contemporary. The current collection of over 55,000 rare books and journals is as enviable as it is precious. The collection includes volumes of Michael Madhusudan Dutta's work, Hector-badh Kavya, as well as Dikdarshan, one of India's first magazines. The first Bengali printed books were published in Serampore and it can be found here also. This collection of publications from the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries is a treasure trove for book lovers. Some of the publications and letters at the Uttarpara Jaikrishna Public Library would be difficult to find elsewhere, including the British Museum. For many, this library's catalogue is more extensive than London's India Office Library.

The main building contains a reading room as well as an administrative section. Currently, a total of 27 staff (5 permanent employees and 22 formal outsourced employees) work with the library and strive to keep it running smoothly. There are three additional annex buildings for readers positioned adjacent to the main library building which we described earlier. This library is a treasure trove of rare books and a heritage of Bengal's legacy and it should be accessible, flexible and welcoming to all who seek space for research and study.



Manuscripts:

This library features a vibrant collection of Indian manuscripts, including those in Bengali and Sanskrit script, in addition to a sizable collection of rare books. Traditionally, a manuscript is a handwritten or printed document. Manuscripts come in a variety of forms and are typically composed of handmade paper, palm leaves, birch bark, and paper (parchment or papyrus). Prior to the large manufacturing of paper, they were widely used for writing, particularly in Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent. The majority of the manuscripts in this library are composed of handmade paper and palm leaf. The source claims that every text was obtained as a gift from private collectors.

Six Bengali manuscripts and numerous Sanskrit manuscripts are listed in the library's catalogue. The oldest manuscript dates to the 1646th century (Śākābda). As stated by the official record from the accession register the total number of manuscripts is 521.



Number of Manuscripts written in Sanskrit script- 508
Number of Manuscripts



Written in Bengali script-13

i) Current condition of the Manuscripts:

Since the authority did not supply gloves or a mask to touch the extremely fragile artifacts, we have not viewed every manuscript. We therefore decided to look at a few of the manuscripts from their collection while maintaining the artefacts' safety and security. We took great care when handling the

manuscripts, and with the authority's permission, we removed a few from the three cabinets/almirahs and took pictures of the corresponding artefacts. We returned the manuscripts to their original locations following the careful examination.

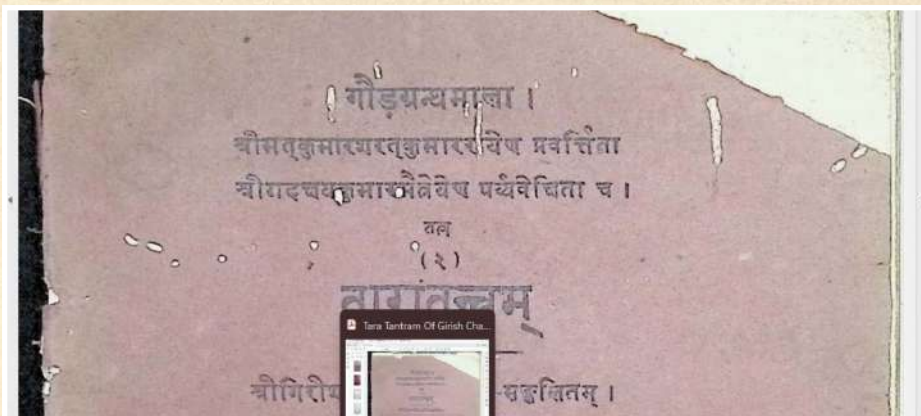
- Most of the Manuscripts are in fragile condition.
- The serial numbering is not maintained in a proper way.
- The palm leaf manuscripts are in very terrible condition. Some palm leaf manuscripts are severely torn and broken.
- Insect infestation is visible in the manuscripts, resulting in numerous holes.
- Some handmade paper/paper manuscripts are covered in dust and dirt, indicating that regular maintenance is not performed effectively.
- Because of the locked cabinets/almirahs, the manuscripts do not receive any natural light and air, resulting in fungus attacks on the manuscripts.
- Basic natural conservation methods are not used appropriately.

II) Current Storage condition of the Manuscripts:

The overall storage condition of the manuscripts is not up to the mark. It could have been better by expert supervision/guidance. The storage condition must be changed promptly or there will be a significant loss because most of the manuscripts are rare, uncommon and irreplaceable from a historical perspective.

Except for a few shelves, manuscripts are piled high and poorly stored. Only one closet is appropriately wrapped in red fabric, as per the guidelines, but the manuscripts are stored one on top of the other, causing harm to the manuscripts. The remaining manuscripts are wrapped in brown paper.

- The three cabinets/almirahs (total of 3) are located on the second story of the main building and are loaded with manuscripts.
- Most of the manuscripts are stored and preserved in a mound.
***This is obviously a no-no for manuscripts. Manuscripts are fragile and prone to damage; thus, they should always be maintained individually.
- The manuscripts in cabinets/almirahs-1 are not properly wrapped, and the majority of them are left unprotected. In cabinets/almirahs-2 brown wrapping is used and in cabinets/almirahs-3, manuscripts are wrapped in red cloth/fabric.
***Wrapping the document with adequate material is an important task since it can reduce the harm caused by the text's exposure to the external environment.
- We did not find any natural pesticide in the cabinets/almirahs.
***Using natural insecticides is the greatest option because they have no toxic side effects on the manuscripts and also work as a natural bug deterrent.
- We discovered a packet of Naphthalene balls in the cabinets/almirahs-3.
***According to recent conservation research, Naphthalene balls are not a safe solution for organic materials.





Current Storage Condition





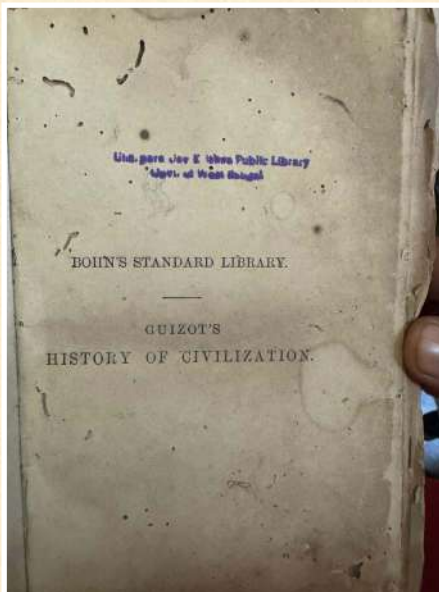






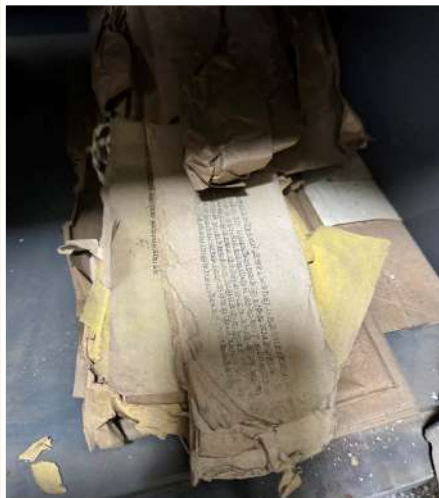
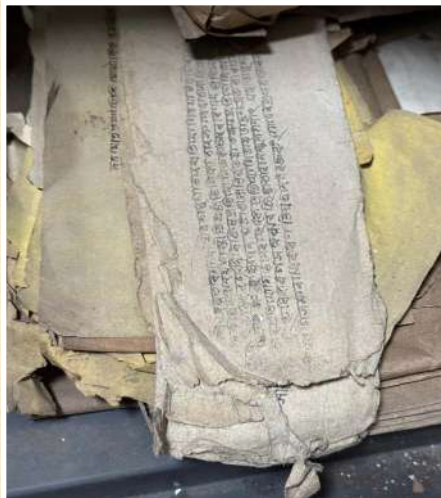












Conclusion:

The IHAR Team had visited the Uttarpara Jaikrishna Mukherjee Public Library building including the annex buildings on 03rd May 2025 & 24th July 2025. We tried our utmost to observe every aspect of the site. We would like to express our gratitude to the administrative authority for their assistance. Everything about this library is overpowering, including the building's position, the surrounding landscape, and of course the calm ambiance of the place. We were pleased to get the chance to inspect the entire library, with a focus on the manuscript area, on behalf of IHAR.

Following the observation, our team concluded that this library is a gold mine for academics, scholars, and historians, and everyone with an inquisitive mind can benefit from it. In addition to its unique book collection, this library has historical

significance because of the presence of notable historical figures. From a historical perspective, the rare and unique collection of manuscripts of this library is astounding. In the future, these unique relics should be handled with the highest care, which includes proper storage and preservation. It is important to preserve history for the next generation because without it, they would not be able to predict the future. We can preserve the history of the past by properly maintaining, storing, and displaying the manuscripts and archival documents that tell the stories of the past. Thus, Uttarpara Jaikrishna Mukherjee Public Library is a legacy and merits a national title from a historical standpoint. We can preserve this national property and educate the next generation about their rich cultural heritage if it is well maintained and runs smoothly.

Proposed modernization techniques to ensure safeguarding of the Collection of Uttarpara Jaikrishna Mukherjee Public Library

All the manuscripts and archival documents we have seen in the library premises are priceless and invaluable artefacts. These are the national property and carrying the historical evidence. Therefore, it's our duty to ensure its safety to the fullest so that the next generation can be the witness of historical facts through these priceless treasures.

1.The Manuscripts:

Many manuscripts are not

properly conserved or preserved. These rare artifacts deserve to be treated with the utmost care in the future, which includes proper storage. After observing the manuscripts, we came to the decision that we need to mention some points that will help the authority for the safety of these manuscripts. Carefully chosen methods and techniques of active and preventive conservation can both reverse the damage of the manuscripts including archival

documents.

The following measures are:

- Manuscripts, as we all know, are the most fragile and delicate organic artefacts and are quite sensitive to touch. Touching the fragile texts simply causes damage. In this instance, digitalization is also required for conservation purposes. So, the first and most significant step for the manuscript is to digitalize the whole collection in order to prevent further harm/damage.
- The manuscript must be stored in a room that is neat and orderly. The storage space needs to be regularly vacuumed and checked for dust, insects, rodents, and the formation of Mold and fungus.
- The storage space should have adequate lighting and ventilation. It is not advised to expose manuscripts to direct sunlight; instead, use blinds, screens, or shutters.
- Manuscripts are rare and valuable antiquities. We should never keep them piled. It should be stored individually in appropriate cases/boxes.
- Manuscripts are fragile; thus, we need to take precautions. Always use protective gloves when handling manuscripts.
- Every manuscript is organic material; they are vulnerable and very prone to damage. They generally have the least resistance to insect and fungus damage. So, the authority should take special measures to repel and kill insects and protect its collection. In that case Fumigation Chamber is must require where the manuscripts treated with chemical insecticides and germicides.
- Immediate restoration of the damaged manuscripts by the professional Manuscript Conservators-Restorers (MCR).
- Walk-in Treatment Chamber treatment is an expensive method but to enhance insecticidal efficiency and better protected artefacts from insect damage in a unique way. High/low temperature walk-in treatment chamber can be installed to protect the manuscript from insect damage.
- Installation of smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for security and safety in the event of a fire.

2. The Library/Archival documents:

A Library/Archival documents modernization is must for a library for upgrading, improving the infrastructure, service and systematic alignment with the help of modern standards and technologies. Most of the storage, handling and safety measures are same as the manuscripts. We are putting a few additional points here, such as

- Encouraging educational, community engagement and research activities.
- For easy access to the appropriate volumes and records, an archival or library map is required.
- Urging the public to peruse the library's catalogue via the online database.
- Develop the condition of archival sources and digitalize inventory list with the aim of making them

- open to the public.
- The library catalogue should be open to the public and can be searched by anyone, anywhere from a personal computer or mobile phone.

NB : It is to be noted that this report is prepared out of love, passion & utmost dedication by the concerned team members & office bearers of

IHAR towards the conservation & cultural heritage of Bharat & IHAR or any of its team members/office bearers, have not received any monetary compensation whatsoever, in lieu of the services rendered which are purely on voluntary basis strictly. The IHAR team remains committed to the cause of the Cultural Heritage of Bharat & its propagation through every possible efforts & means.

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