



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2016; 2(6): 184-186

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 17-09-2016

Accepted: 18-10-2016

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Reflections on conservation of manuscripts –Role of a conservator

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Abstract

Conservation of historical past whether through manuscripts or historical artifacts or documents, hand written letters, etc has become a integral part of a nation's march towards promoting continuity in inheritance & historical legacy. Countries across the globe pay higher attention & concern towards conserving their historical past. Growing awareness about historical knowledge & amplification of activities related to heritage conservation, knowledge storing through digital media has helped the process of conservation. A conservator is often considered as a heritage diplomat as he shoulders the responsibilities of securing old documents & conserving them in proper profile, showcasing in proper time etc. He has acquired key significance in heritage guarding. This paper examines the roles responsibilities of a conservator & throws light on the challenges faced by him during conservation of manuscripts.

Keywords: Manuscript conservation, responsibilities of a conservator, challenges, government initiatives, awareness activities, careers in conservation

Introduction

Conservation of manuscripts is not a new concept in India as there are countless examples kings & c royal courts acting as conservation repositories. Annals of Indian history is replete with references to exchange of heritage envoys with techniques of conservation of manuscripts. The carrying the messages of heritage values as embodiment of a nation's inheritance was perceived by ancient Indians. This was widely seen all through the phases of history where envoys of heritage visited several places broadening Indian cultural treasure & its deep rooted ethical backdrop. India had relations of good will & cultural exchange since time immemorial. With the dawn of 20th century, India which was under the colonial rule, it came interface with its own historical past through the initiatives of East India Company. The Indian historical past was rediscovered through the magnificent works of Max Muller, William Jones, Alexander Cunningham, Rev. F. Kettle, B. L. Rice, E.P. Rice & such other luminaries. Conservation of historical past through Archival preservation was streamlined through the establishment of record offices, museums, archives, epigraphic offices & archaeology departments. Long term preservation of artistic & cultural artifacts became the responsibility of each state. The states were given little autonomy

1. Analyzing & assess the condition of cultural property acquired, rediscovered or transferred
2. Understanding the process of conservation,
3. Evidence of deterioration of the historical documents,
4. Planning collections of historical documents,
5. Care or site management strategies that prevent damage,
6. Carrying out conservation treatments,
7. Conducting research in all of the areas previously indicated

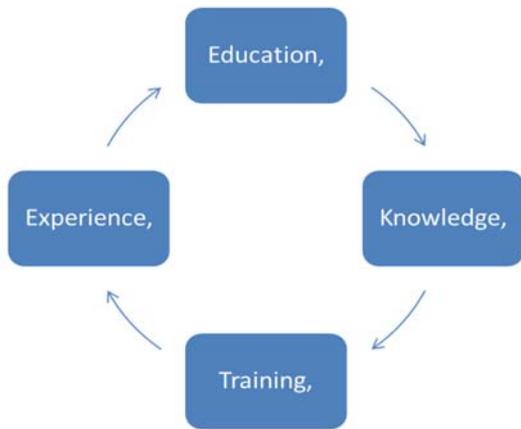
Challenges of conservation: Conserving historical records is an interdisciplinary research area involving practices sciences & humanities. A conservator often faces the challenges of collecting, safeguarding & conserving the document.

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But conservation demands several dimensional approaches as it demands inter disciplinary support. An integrated strategy towards making conservation simpler, hassle free & complication free is needed to understand & identify the problems of conservation & a conservator has to play the roles of a specialist, technician & an expert besides being a heritage lover.



Professional challenges: A conservator is a professional, whose primary occupation is the practice of conservation and who, through specialized education, knowledge, training, and experience, formulates and implements all the activities of conservation in accordance with regulatory guidelines for practice. There are several options for a conservator. He can become an administrator, educator, scientist, technician, researcher, or a specialist.

A conservator has several roles to play. At the same time he has several responsibilities. (The proceedings of the national library of India 2014). A Conservator needs an intensive fast paced learning experience along with lots of patience It is an ever changing & ever evolving discipline which needs peoples who love this profession This also needs persons to be in touch with technology as well as their advancement in technical inputs.(National mission for manuscripts - Government of India - official website 2014). Support in restoration to bring a deteriorated or damaged objector structure of materials closer to a previous or assumed appearance or function needs great determined action. (The proceedings of the national library of India 2014).

Roles of a conservator

1. A conservator will act as a professional curator who can acquire, store, and exhibit rare & general collections
2. A conservator can Select the theme and design of exhibits
3. A conservator can Design, organize, and conduct tours and workshops for the public
4. A conservator can Attend civic events to promote their institution
5. A conservator can Clean objects such as ancient tools, coins, and statues
6. A conservator can Direct and supervise curatorial, technical, and student staff
7. A conservator can Plan and conduct special research projects

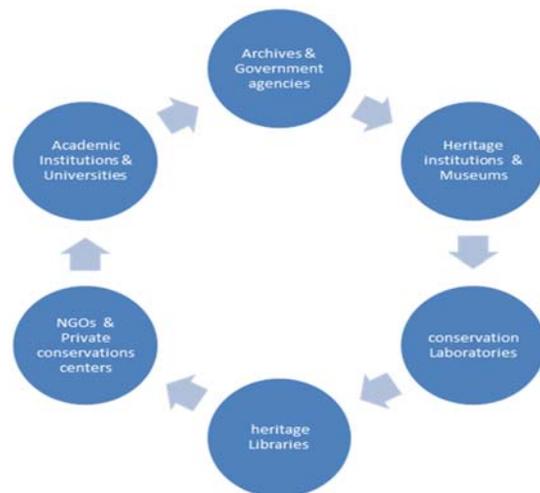
Responsibilities of a conservator: A conservator has the great job of preserving & continuing a heritage. His responsibilities include

1. A conservator has to examine the procedures to determine the materials & methods of manufacture properties of objects or structures & the causes & extent of deterioration & alteration. (The proceedings of the national library of India 2014).
2. A conservator has to take up scientific analysis & research to identify historic & artistic methods & materials of fabrication.
3. A conservator has to evaluate the efficacy of materials to be conserved
4. A conservator has to help documentation process to record the condition of an object or site at a specific time of treatment or after & before treatment
5. A conservator has to choose methods to stop deterioration of the materials further
6. A conservator has to support in restoration to bring a deteriorated or damaged objector structure of materials closer to a previous or assumed appearance or function
7. A conservator has to find ways for safe exhibition of saved materials
8. A Conservator needs an intensive fast paced learning experience along with lots of patience. It is an ever changing & ever evolving discipline which needs peoples who love this profession This also needs persons to be in touch with technology as well as their advancement in technical inputs

Professional support: A conservator’s profession needs specialization in several disciplines (The report of the National Manuscript library 2012). This includes

1. Archaeology,
2. Architecture,
3. Archives, books,
4. Art on paper, textiles,
5. Built environments,
6. Decorative arts,
7. Electronic,
8. Ethnographic materials,
9. Media,
10. Natural science,
11. Photographs,
12. Sculpture,
13. Specialization in paintings,

Agencies of conservation: There are several government funded & Non governmental agencies which are active in the process of conservation



The procedural phases of conservation: The process of examining the procedures to determine the materials & methods of manufacture, properties of objects or structures & the causes & extent of deterioration & alteration is a very delicate work which needs meticulous screening. (The proceedings of the national library of India 2014).

Career in conservation: There are several related jobs related to this such as

1. Conservation administrator,
2. Conservation educator,
3. Conservation scientist,
4. Conservation technician,
5. Conservation of collections head
6. Conservation care/preservation specialist.

The challenges faced by conservator: A conservator has the following challenges

1. Authenticating and appraising historical documents and archival materials
2. Preserving and maintaining documents and objects
3. Creating and maintaining computer archives and databases
4. Organizing and classifying archival records to make them easy to search through
5. Safeguarding records by creating film and digital copies of documents
6. Directing workers who help arrange, exhibit, and maintain collections
7. Setting and administer policy guidelines concerning public access to materials
8. Providing help to manuscript library users
9. Finding and acquiring new materials for their archives

Evolving an integrated conservation strategy: An integrated strategy towards making conservation simpler, hassle free & complication free is needed to understand & identify the problems of conservation & a conservator has to play the roles of a specialist, technician & an expert besides being a heritage lover. Conservator needs an intensive fast paced learning experience along with lots of patience It is an ever changing ever evolving discipline which needs peoples who love this profession This also needs persons to be in touch with technology as well as their advancement in technical inputs. (The proceedings of the national library 2014)

Various types of education & trainings: There are various types of training available in this conservation related jobs.

1. Apprenticeship as the primary method of training. Internships include good source of training in conservation. As an alternate to graduate system students can opt for apprenticeships with practical training course work & research methodologies
2. Students internships in conservation can help the conservation process Introductory levels of workshops & orientation refer to internships in these professions. (The proceedings of the national library 2014).

The role of government: Governments both state & central can initiate several activities & capacity building programs such as

1. providing specialized education in conservation,
2. provide capacity building programs in conservation knowledge,

3. training,
4. orientation sessions in providing complete knowledge about formulation of conservation policy
5. Creating awareness on procedural implementation of integrated strategy.

Conclusion: Thus a manuscript conservator often faces the challenges of collecting, safeguarding & conserving rare document. But conservation demands several dimensional approaches as it is an inter disciplinary bearing. An integrated stratagem towards making conservation simpler, hassle free & complication free is needed to understand & identify the problems of conservation. A conservator has to play the roles of a specialist technician & an expert heritage activist to guards the country's historical assets. Besides being a heritage lover. Conservator needs an intensive fast paced learning experience along with lots of patience It is an ever changing ever evolving discipline which needs peoples who love this profession This also needs persons to be in touch with technology as well as their advancement in technical inputs.

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