

National Archives of India and it's Conservation Process

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I. INTRODUCTION

The National Archives of India (NAI) is a repository of the non-current records of the Government of India and holds them in trust for the use of administrators and scholars. Originally established as the Imperial Record Department in 1891, in Calcutta, then capital of British India, the NAI is situated at the intersection of Janpath and Rajpath, in Delhi. It functions as an attached office of the Department of Culture under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. Records Management encompasses the entire gamut of activities in the lifecycle of records from their creation to final disposition. Records are the building blocks of information. Records Management today is seen as not only as a part of office management, but overall part of information management system. National Archives of India is the nodal agency of Government of India for the implementation of the Public Records Act, 1993 and the Public Records Rules, 1997 made under the Act. The Act regulates the management, administration and preservation of all Public Records of the Central Government and the Union Territory administrations. The National Archives of India is responsible for not only keeping in safe custody, the records of the various Ministries or Departments of the Government of India, but is also engaged in devising suitable mechanism to streamline the management of their records in a systematic manner so that they can be used by administrators and scholars at ease. It also advises the State Governments, Custodial Institutions etc., in proper upkeep and management of their records.

II. BACKGROUND HISTORY

The Imperial Record Department was set up on 11 March 1891 in Calcutta (Kolkata). G.W. Forrest was named as department head. In 1911 it was transferred to the new capital, New Delhi, and in

1926 it was shifted into its new building. This was one of four museum and archive buildings planned by its architect Edwin Lutyens around 'Point B' in the city plan, the intersection of King's Way and Queen's Way. However, only this one was built. It is a building in late neo-classical style, and originally known as the Imperial Record Office.

Sri K.R.Narayanan, then President of India, declared the 'Museum of the National Archives " open to the general public on 6 July 1998. This museum provides a representative overview of the multifarious holdings of the National Archives, and promotes a common man's interest in archival holdings. The NAI has a Regional Office at Bhopal and three Record Centres at Bhubaneswar, Jaipur and Pondicherry.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

- To help in spreading a feeling of national pride in our documentary cultural heritage and ensuring its preservation for the posterity.
- To encourage the Scientific Management, Administration and Conservation of records all over the country.
- To foster close relations between archivists and archival institutions both at the national and international levels.
- To encourage greater liberalization of access to archival holdings.
- To help in developing greater professionalism and a scientific temper among creators, custodians and users of records for proper care and use of our documentary heritage.

Services

- Providing facilities for the public use of reference media, records and publications available among the holdings.

- Searching and issuing of certified extracts of documents to the public for their use in accordance with rules laid down for the purpose.
- Providing assistance to documentary film makers and other professionals in locating, selecting and filming material of their interest.
- Organizing conducted tours to the various Sections for the benefit of officials/ trainees for education and professional Institutes, as well as groups of individuals, with a view to apprising them with the different activities of the Department.
- Extending professional expertise to Institutions by deputing officers to deliver lectures, conduct workshops on management, administration and preservation of records.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF RECORD MANAGEMENT

Records Management encompasses the entire gamut of activities in the lifecycle of records from their creation to final disposition. Records are the building blocks of information. Records Management today is seen as not only part of office management, but overall part of information management system. The National Archives of India is responsible for not only keeping in safe custody, the records of the various Ministries/Departments of the Government of India, but is also engaged in devising suitable mechanism to streamline the management of their records in a systematic manner so that they can be used by administrators and scholars at ease. It also advises the State Governments, Custodial Institutions etc., in proper upkeep and management of their records.

V. THE TECHNIQUES OF CONSERVATION

The National Archives is making earnest efforts to ensure longevity to documents in its custody through preventive, curative and restorative processes. The Department has Conservation Research Laboratory which was setup in 1941. Since its inception, it is engaged in research and development work like developing indigenous technique for restoration, testing of materials required for restoration and storage. The Laboratory is equipped with latest models of paper testing machines viz. tensile tester, folding endurance tester and bursting endurance

tester etc to facilitate examination of various kinds of preservative material.

- A unique process of repairing and rejuvenating documents with the help of cellulose acetate foil and tissue paper which is known the world over as Solvent or Hand Lamination process has been invented by the Department.
- The Laboratory has been successful in formalizing a process for rejuvenating palm leave that have gone dry and cracking because of age or loss of flexibility.
- Another very significant achievement has been fabrication of a portable thermostatically controller airtight vault which is a multifunctional chamber and could be used for sterilization, vapour phase de-acidification and drying of documents, books and other material

Before Conservation After conservation

- Using Reprography Techniques
- The National Archives is as well trying to ensure longevity to documents in its custody through an elaborate Microfilming Programme which is being practiced by it for over three decades now.
- Microfilming is being used as a measure for preservation of records against deterioration from use or loss due to natural ageing and fading of inks.
- The Reprography Division equipped with modern machines not only attends to the needs of scholars apart from its normal function but is also engaged in the gigantic task of preparing security microfilm of valuable records as a precautionary measure against loss by fire, flood, war and sabotage.
- This set of negative copies of microfilm rolls is being kept in the Regional Office at Bhopal. The Division is also converting the analogue microfilm images to digital images to incorporate the same with the specially tailored, Archival Information Management System Software.
- The Reprography Wing has also a mobile Microfilming Unit which visits various parts of the country to Microfilm documents that cannot be brought over to the National Archives in New Delhi or its Regional Office/ Records Centers in Bhopal, Jaipur, Pondicherry and Bhubaneswar.

VI. CONCLUSION

Materials are the heart of libraries. They are vital access to learning and information, and in the future sustain knowledge and allow interpretation of the past. Every library, large or small should have a well defined programme for preserving the materials which it houses. In planning for preventive preservation, users and staff should be aware of their roles in the preservation

programme. S.R. Ranganathan in one of his five law of library science postulates that, “books are for use”. If the materials are not well kept, they cannot provide that function because the most effective way to establish longevity of books/ materials is to prevent or retard deterioration.

Information is as old as the age of humanity, hence it is highly vital that information sources should be adequately preserved and conserved for all spheres of human development- intellectual, political, social, cultural development, etc, and for posterity. Digital copying and storage remain the only viable preservation option for conservation in present days. Conservation and preservation in the digital domain has matured into a trusted procedure. This study outlines the various strategies and best practices for the conservation and long term preservation techniques. Preservation and conservation of the library materials are vital therefore, there should be mastery of the ways to protect, handle and organize those materials.

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