

State of Manuscripts in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: Manuscripts are known as intellectual cultural heritage of a nation. Pakistan is enriched with this treasure left by Muslims antecedents of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent. A number of institutional and personal libraries hold a good number of manuscripts; especially on Islamic subjects and Quran collections. It is important to highlight the hidden and neglected state of these manuscripts for further research. This paper seeks to reveal the pervious and current status of the manuscripts in Pakistan. A broad picture of manuscripts in Pakistan will be presented through factual data (i.e., total number, languages, institutional/personal holdings, locations, age, writing styles and materials). Governmental and professional efforts, awareness programs, state of digitization and access issues will be highlighted. Recommendations are given for considerations.

I. Introduction

History is a continuous process. Culture is a dynamic social phenomenon. Civilization is a human channel of development. And texts and their constituent discourses are social reality and means of mobilization for intellectual contribution (Umar, 2007). Human beings learn through experiences and pass the skill so earned to their posterity. Manuscripts are the manifestation of such experiences into physical form recorded by hand at different times. Manuscripts represent the selected fragments of time, which help in recreating the past and deciphering the history of mankind (Ali, 2005).

II. Research Methodology and Scope

This is a documentary study based on the review of literature. The main source of literature was bibliographies, surveys, and articles. Librarians, experts and institutional websites were consulted for the confirmation of statistics. Suggestions and recommendations were made in light of discussions with librarians and experts and from the personal observation of the researcher in the national and international scenarios. Statistics presented in this paper cover the entire Pakistan except the Province of Balochistan due to the unavailability of data.

III. Literature Review

Nearly a decade ago, some case studies have been done on a few manuscript collections. Bibliographies are also available in Urdu, Persian, and Arabic of nearly all libraries and of few private collections. It is noteworthy that first Ph.D. degree was awarded in 1981 by the

University of Karachi to A. H. Chishti, who worked on Islami Kutubkhane from 779 AD-1258 AD (Haider & Mahmood, 2007). But there are no sufficient guides or comprehensive national bibliographies of manuscripts. Subject and annotated bibliographies are not available, either. On the other hand, some research theses were written on the evaluation of manuscripts. But these days, even this trend is neglected by young historians and librarians.

III. Governmental Efforts and Legislation

In Pakistan, the role of government for manuscripts collection, preservation and conservation has not been played in a satisfactory manner as a number of manuscripts have been sold by their owners to foreign libraries or smuggled out of the country by traders.

In 1948, the Government of Pakistan established the Historical Record and Archives Commission of Pakistan. This commission conducted five meetings till 1980 and was dissolved without any achievement (Khan, 1998).

In 1983, another institution called the National Archives of Pakistan started working for the same purposes and successfully collected private holdings, governmental documents and other materials in its building in Islamabad. This institute faced many problems, such as lack of funding and regulations to control manuscript smuggling from Pakistan.

The National Archives of Pakistan has passed two acts to stop smuggling (Khan, 1998):

1. The Act on Historical Documentary Conservation and Control in 1975
2. The Act on Acquiring the Government Records and Historical and National Old Documents and Their Preservation in 1993

In 1982, an important survey by the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Pakistan was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Zawar Hussain to estimate the status of manuscripts in Pakistan. That survey covered 20 Pakistani libraries, museums, and private collections and reported that there were 55,000 manuscripts in governmental institutions and nearly 20,000 manuscripts in private collections.

In 1992, the National Archives of Pakistan, with cooperation of the Netherlands Library Development Project (Pakistan), conducted another survey of selected libraries.

In 1993, a survey was published by the Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, London, titled *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*. That survey reported that there were 80,168 Islamic manuscripts in 283 personal and institutional libraries of Pakistan. According to that survey, the majority of manuscripts were in the libraries of Punjab while there was a great number in private collections.

IV. Conference and Workshops

An awareness campaign for the importance and care of manuscripts is highly needed on the national level.

In 1996, the first national workshop was conducted by Islamic Research Institute of the International Islamic University, Islamabad. In that workshop, experts presented research papers on different topics related to manuscripts and recommendations were finalized. A series of six lectures were arranged in Lahore by the Pakistan Library Association (Punjab) titled "Preservation, Conservation and Digitization of Manuscripts in Pakistan" during May to June 2008.

V. Bibliographies, Surveys, and Journals

Manuscript researchers conducted an intensive study to prepare bibliographies of manuscripts. Arabic manuscript collections of Pakistan were covered by Dr. Ahmad Khan. But his work was incomplete.

Bibliographies of institutional collections were prepared, such as Punjab University Library, Dayal Singh Library, Lahore, Punjab Public Library (Lahore), Hamdard University library (Karachi), Ganjbakhsh Library of Iran Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies (Islamabad), and the National Museum of Pakistan (Karachi). These bibliographies are in Persian, Arabic, English, Urdu, and Punjab languages. A few of them are annotated and the rest only provides bibliographical information.

A complete bibliography of Persian manuscripts in Pakistan is being published in 14 volumes by Iran-Pakistan Research Institute, Islamabad.

There is no significant book written on manuscripts or its related topics in Pakistan. However, articles on special collections were also published in Urdu and Punjabi magazines such as *Fark-o-Nazar*, *Kojah*, *Al-Maarif*, *Mah-i Naw*, *Oriental College Magazines*, and *Journal of Punjab University Historical Society* (Manzawi, 1979).

VI. Findings

1. Total number of manuscripts

In 1998, the proceedings of a national workshop reported the existence of 150,000 manuscripts in Pakistan.

In 2008, an expert stated during a series of six lectures that approximately there were 200,000 manuscripts, including ancient manuscripts of literally letters, in Pakistan.

According to the review of literature, there were approximately 300 manuscript holdings in Pakistan. Of those, 180 collections were personal in nature and the remaining 103 were institutional (Roper, 1991). Table 1 presents a quick view of large public and private manuscript collections in different parts of Pakistan.

Table 1: Featured Manuscript Collections in Pakistan

Province	Institution	City	# of Manuscripts	Type
Punjab	Punjab University library	Lahore	24,000	Academic
	Sardar Tandair collection	Mailsi	4,000	Private
	Kutub-khanah-yi Muhammadiyyah-yi Mujaddidiyyah	Kasur	1,200	Private
	Museum Lahore	Lahore	1,200	Public
	Punjab Public Library	Lahore	1,200	Public
	Mihr Ali Shah Library	Golra Sharif	1,100	Private
	Dayal Singh Trust library	Lahore	1,100	Public
	Makhadi collection	Makhad Sharif	1,000	Private
	Mahmuddiyyah collection	Taunsa	700	Private
	Kutub-khanah-yi ahmadiyyah-yi Saidiyyah	Dera Ismail Khan	500	Private
Sindh	National museum of Pakistan	Karachi	9,861	Public
	Kutub-khanah-yi Aliyyah Iimiyyah	Pir Jhando	1,300	Private
	Khairpur Mirus Public Library	Khairpur	1,200	Private
	Hamdard library	Karachi	1,629	Academic
	Sindh Archives	Karachi	850	Public
	Faruqi (M. H. Jan) collection	Tando Sain Dad	500	Private
	Sind University Library	Hyderabad	680	Academic
	Anjuman-i- Isma iliyyah	Karachi	650	Academic
NWFP (North-West Frontier Province)	Pashto Academy	Peshawar	1,680	Academic
	Islamia college collection	Peshawar	1,259	Academic
	Peshawar University Library	Peshawar	800	Academic
	Mazhabi Kutub-khanah	Peshawar	350	Private
Islamabad	Iran-Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies	Islamabad	13,972	Academic
	National Library of Pakistan	Islamabad	1,700	Public
	Quaid-e-Azam University library	Islamabad	700	Academic

2. Subject classification

A large number of manuscripts are of Quran, Islam and related topics. The subject areas are mostly in law, Tajwid, commentaries, ethics, literature, Sufism, life of prophet, lexicography, exegesis, medicine, prose literature, letters, poetry, biographies, maps, etc.

3. Age

The printing of Arabic and Persian books was started by the East Indian Company in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent. However, this technology was not highly adopted by Indians, who kept producing hand-written manuscripts until late 19th century. So manuscripts in Pakistan and India may be as old as 900 years to 75 years. Most manuscripts in Pakistan were inscribed during 11th to 14th century. The oldest manuscripts in Pakistan are from 5th century A.D.

4. Language

Two frequently used languages by Muslims in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent are Persian and Arabic respectively. At present, approximately 60% of manuscripts in Pakistan are in the Persian language, 30% in Arabic, and the remaining 10% are in Urdu, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Hindi, Pashto, Sindhi, Turkish, Saraiki, Bengali, Khojki, Kashmiri, Baluchi, Balti, and other regional languages.

5. Writing materials

Most Pakistani manuscripts are written on paper. Very few are on date palm leaves, parchment, and vellum, etc. Paper was the preferred mean of transferring ideas in the Indo-Pak Subcontinent because papermaking mills were established in early days. Paper from every mill was considered unique due to its composition (e.g., cotton, rice, grass, pulp, and rugs) and durability. Paper of Sialkot was famous for its whiteness and Kashmiri paper was known for its delicate fineness for special writings and drawings.

6. Writing styles

Most prominent writing styles in Pakistani manuscripts are Naskh, Isphanai, Gulzar, Bahar, Nastaliq, Mohaqiq, Afghani, Qadeem, Irani, Rehan, Iman, Bukharai in Arabic language, especially in Quranic manuscripts. Nastaliq is a famous writing style of Persian and Urdu manuscripts in Pakistan. The Quran manuscripts are mostly in Naskh.

7. Condition of manuscripts

Institutional collections are often well cared for, but not in all cases, as some libraries do not have enough budget or expertise to look after the delicate nature of manuscripts. Private collections, except a few, are more in grave danger, as their owners are unaware of the techniques of conservation and preservation. In general, the following reasons are behind the poor condition of manuscripts in Pakistan:

- Dampness in dark places, pest, and other insects cause damage to manuscripts.
- Lack of environmental control of acidity and humidity affects manuscripts badly.
- Expertise is lacking on repairing the damage manuscripts.
- Traditional binders are disappearing.
- Direct photocopying hurts the delicate paper fibers and binding.
- Library staff or owners of collections do not know how to handle manuscripts properly.
- Special shelves for manuscripts are not available.
- Lack of security poses theft threat.

8. State of digitization

The electronic environment of the 21st century is leading a major shift to digitization. Many major manuscript collections in the world are being digitized or going to be digitized.

In Pakistan, a few organizations are digitizing manuscripts. The main library of the Punjab University, Lahore has digitized about 5,000 manuscripts. Punjab Public library, Lahore, the National Library of Pakistan, Islamabad, Sindh Archives, Karachi, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Government College University, Lahore, and few other institutions claimed to have completed digitizing their manuscript collections. The digitization of any private collections has not been reported to date.

Unfortunately, technical work of digitization is being done by non-professionals. Proper planning, advocacy, expert opinion, international standards, metadata, and use of interoperable digital library software are not considered by library management for digitization.

9. Suggestions

The following are some recommendations:

- Identification of all manuscripts, especially those hidden in personal holdings
- Cataloguing of manuscripts, especially those in private collection
- Development of a national bibliographical database of manuscripts
- Establishment of local common facility centers for conservation and preservation of manuscripts
- Development of a national level digitization plan with assistance from LIS schools and professional associations on training
- Training of young library professionals on manuscript conservation and preservation
- International recognition of intellectual heritage of Pakistan in the form of the UNESCO's Memory of the World Registry, the World Digital Library, etc.
- Development of interdisciplinary collaboration for research, conservation and preservation
- Awareness program for LIS students, professionals, private collection holders, government, media and other concerned institutions
- Embarkment on academic research works (editing, textual analysis and translation)

V. Conclusion

Pakistan is rich with precious intellectual heritage of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent as well as Islamic literature. A great number of manuscripts are held in institutional collections. However, there are a lot more hidden in private ownership.

Statistically, it is difficult to claim any accurate number of manuscripts in Pakistan, as there are large gaps in identifying the existence of all manuscripts.

On the international level, latest technologies and standards are being applied to the access and preservation of manuscripts. However, none of such technologies are being used in Pakistan. Moreover, only a few collections are looked after and the rest are in grave danger. Therefore, national level efforts led by government, institutions, and librarians are needed to conserve and preserve this cultural heritage of Pakistan as embedded in manuscripts for research and for the benefits of all human beings.

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