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Importance of Ethno Library as Historical Resource and World Heritage

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Abstract

Ethno Library is a kind of library that collect and manages traditional knowledge. Ethno library also preserves heritage and identify of a place and 'Jati'. The knowledge hidden in these scriptures is very important for sustainable development of mankind and other habitats. Ethno Libraries are very important for documenting and preserving the rituals, customs, histories, folklores, astronomy, astrology, mathematics, science etc. Moreover the scholars can acquire knowledge and idea about the society of that period of time. From the manuscripts of these libraries one can learn about the base of a subject. For example, it can be said that many modern medicines are made from different kinds of plants and herbs. The manuscripts stored in these Ethno Libraries provide information to make the modern medicines. Thus it can be said that Ethno Library resources are very important for well-being of everyone.

Keywords: Ethno-Library, Medicine, Manuscript.

Introduction

A library is a place where books on different subjects, periodicals, manuscripts, records etc. are preserved for use and not for sale. Libraries are also regarded as cultural institutions or organisations that give access to knowledge and information towards the interested people. Libraries are also known as the preservers of the cultural heritage and identity of the communities they serve. Cultural heritage is based on the aspects of past that people cherish and want to pass to the future.

In ancient Indian civilisation libraries played very important role in providing knowledge towards the people who wished to have the essence of knowledge. For example, the universities of Nalanda, Takshasila, Shridhanyakuta etc. had libraries with very rich collection of books (manuscripts). These libraries were the source of information for the Acharyas and the disciples of the then society and they also contributed a lot towards the development of the subjects they concerned.

Traditional libraries are the collectors and conservers of the traditional knowledge system. From time immemorial they have been working to preserve the manuscripts written on different subjects. These libraries are the ethno-libraries. They provide the scholars adequate source of information about their concerned subjects which were preserved according to the traditional technology. So in order to know about the information preserved in the manuscripts one should know about the traditional conservation method of the manuscripts, for example it can be said that most of the manuscripts were kept very carefully so that moisture could not affect them. They were wrapped up with cotton-cloths. Many other

preventive measures were also taken for this purpose.

In India, Sanchipat, Tulapat, Palm-leaf, Bhurja-patra etc. were used to write the manuscripts. Many manuscripts are still preserved in the ethno-libraries. Different kinds of manuscripts made up of Papyrus are conserved in different countries of the world. In China hand-made paper manuscripts are also preserved. All these are conserved using the traditional method because it is necessary to learn and apply the methods used in the then period to keep the originality of the document. Ethno-libraries are the sources of knowledge of the past society. The scholars can learn about the history, literature, politics, geography, science, mathematics etc. based on the documents preserved in these libraries. For example, it can be said that Bhasa, a renowned dramatist who was said to be flourished in the third century B.C. was mentioned by later poets like Kalidasa, Bana, Rajashekhar etc. But his works were not found for a long time. At last MM G. Shastri discovered these valuable manuscripts of the thirteen dramas of Bhasa in a temple (*math*) in South India. It can be said that the temples also serve as preservers of the manuscripts. These thirteen dramas of Bhasa are called Bhasa Nataka Chakram where the evidences of the society and literature of the then period of time are reflected. In his *Harshacharitam*, Banabhatta describes the genealogy of the poet himself and the biography of Emperor Harshavardhana. The work consists of eight chapters. In the seventh chapter of the work Bana has described about the friendly alliance between Harshavardhana and Bhaskaravarman, king of Pragjyotishpur. Bhaskaravarman presented Harshavardhana a white silk umbrella named Abhoga, which was an ancient heirloom of

the family of Bhaskaravarman-

चतुरभोधिभोगभूतिभाजनभूतस्य देवस्य सन्दावगर्भमपहाय
हृदयमेकमन्यदनुरूपं प्रभृतमेव दुर्लभं लोके... पूर्वजोपार्जितं वरुणआतपत्रम्
आभीगच्छामनुरूपस्थानन्यासेन कृतार्थकृतमेतत्। [1]

He also presented different kinds of ornaments, gems, silken towels, soft loin-cloth smooth as birch – bark, carved boxes of panels for painting, with gourds, holding bamboo brushes etc. He also presented pustakas (books) with subhashitas written on them-

भूर्जत्वककोमलः स्पर्शवतीजातिपट्टिकाः, चित्रपटानां च भ्रादीयसां
समूरुकुपधानादीन् विकारान्, प्रियङ्गुप्रसवपिञ्जलत्वञ्चि चासनानि...
सुभाषितभञ्जीपुस्तकानि... च दन्तकाण्डकुण्डलानि। [2]

The *Harshacharitam* of Bana is one of the earliest reliable references of the use of manuscripts in Assam. Thus it can be said that manuscripts of Assam acquired high esteem among the people of other states also. However in the later period also manuscripts on different subjects opened up newer sources of information for the people of different period of time. In the past these resources were kept as sacred *pustaka* in Satras, Namghars etc. These organisations also worked as publishers of the pustakas because the scribes used to copy the original manuscripts. The scribes were professionals who worked on this area. In the *Mahabharata* also mention of scribe is found. In Assam *Kalikapurana*, *Yogini Tantra*, *Hastayurveda* etc were composed and now a days also the manuscripts can be seen though the printed form of these books are available. Manuscripts are the base of ancient knowledge. *Kalikapurana* and *Yogini Tantra* are works on tantra. It is to be noted that Ahom king Rudrasingha composed a *Shivapurana* offering prayer towards Lord Shiva. The manuscript of this Purana is found. However it is different from the voluminous *Shivapurana*.

Though some of the manuscripts are edited and published, many remain unpublished and undiscovered. If these manuscripts are kept with proper care they can open a new door of knowledge towards mankind. Because of their contribution they are regarded as the world heritage.

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