ABSTRACT

‘Oriental Library’ is the library which contains collection of precious information and knowledge about the oriental languages, literature and/or culture or it belongs to eastern world either in manuscript or print form. Any kind of library having vast collections of oriental documents is known as an Oriental Library. The major activities of oriental libraries are to preserve handwritten/inscribed/printed documents and manuscripts of the earlier periods for future use and to provide access to researchers or readers. Many popular oriental libraries in India have been developed for taking care of rare literature works like Khuda Baksha Oriental Library, Patna.

Oriental libraries are in limelight for their collections viz. Collection of ancient manuscripts from different sources in the areas of oriental languages, literature and culture; Preservation using technologies for oriental collections to preserve the history, culture and civilization particularly of ancient and medieval period of India in the form of primary and secondary sources of information. There is strong demand for primary literature for fundamental research in history, language and culture and there comes the importance of oriental libraries. Treasures of rare manuscripts and old printed documents having valuable knowledge are diminishing day by day; hence oriental libraries play an important role in protecting this invaluable wealth.

Oriental libraries are spread all over the world as every country and nation has its own culture and rare manuscripts, these are to be preserved for the future generation and hence oriental collections have their own identity in special libraries. This collection is different than other libraries and generally contains: manuscripts, rare printed books, letters, archival materials, photographs, drawings and maps, rubbings and estampages from the orient. This heritage collection is very important for historians, demographers, geologists, archivists, geographers etc.

The present researcher had planned to undertake the study of oriental manuscript libraries spread over the Deccan region to assess the status as well as management of collections. Having 20 years of experience in managing a rich manuscript collection in Deccan College the researcher objectives for conducting this study have been: to study in detail oriental libraries for analyzing the status and their organization; to understand historical perspectives and development of the oriental libraries with
special reference to Deccan and Manuscripts; to study the contents of the oriental libraries and its organization; to conduct a survey of the oriental libraries and analyze present status in Deccan (collection, processing and library services to users, use of ICT); to study the problems of users while consulting libraries; and to formulate an appropriate model and suggest measures to improve oriental libraries in Deccan to meet the present-day-challenges.

For this study the researcher has studied in detail all the aspects of oriental libraries in Deccan region covering states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra from ancient to contemporary period holding mainly manuscripts. The research methods used for conducting this study are based on: library historiography which is a branch of historiography. The same research methodology that history utilizes is also appropriate to library historiography i.e. historical method of research. Prior to the 18th century library history existed only as reference to libraries within literary texts. Therefore, in addition to this, historical research method is also used to find out the views regarding oriental libraries based on historical development. In combination with this, survey is undertaken of the oriental libraries using questionnaire and data is collected from librarians to assess the status of the oriental libraries. The researcher gathered various published literature related to the topic and analyzed it to find the gaps.

The research study is completed in six chapters covering different aspects of oriental manuscript libraries. Chapter I is Introduction. It gives introductory information about oriental libraries as special kind of libraries, Deccan region, library history and historiography, reason for selection of topic, statement of the problem, need of the present study, aims, objectives, scope and limitations of the study etc. This chapter also explains the research methodology adopted for the present study and finally gives the conspectus about organization of the present research study.

In Chapter II gives a review of literature and presents the synopsis of various related research studies which are available in the form of research reports, articles, books, online databases and in other resources.

Role of Oriental Libraries in the Organization of Manuscripts forms the subject of Chapter III. It presents a detailed study of oriental libraries covering definition and
concept of oriental library, manuscripts and its important features like types of manuscripts; languages and scripts in the manuscripts; subject areas of manuscripts, importance of manuscripts like historical; literary; as well as importance as a national and cultural heritage, problems with manuscripts, manuscript libraries, functions and objectives of the oriental manuscript library like identification; collection or acquisition; organization of manuscripts including cataloguing and descriptive catalogue of manuscripts; publication of rare manuscripts; services rendered to the researchers by the library; conservation, preservation and restoration along with digitization of manuscripts as a preservation technique, and important initiatives towards the documentation and preservation of manuscripts heritage in India by National Archives of India (NAI); Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH); Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA); and National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM).

Chapter IV (Review of Oriental Libraries in Deccan) takes a review of the growth of libraries at various centres of learning in India in ancient period (up to 12th century); in medieval period (up to 19th century); and in modern period (up to 20th century), organization and administration of those libraries in India, cultural history and geography of the Deccan Region, history and development of libraries in Deccan including details about early monastic and other institutional libraries in Deccan; libraries in Western Deccan (Jnan Bhandars); libraries in Southern Deccan (Saraswati Bhandars); royal and important private libraries of Sultanate period and Muslim kingdoms in Deccan; libraries of the Marathas and the Hindu centers of learning at Maharashtra in Deccan; library of Kadmi Zoroastrian Parsis in Deccan; and contributions of the European settlers towards the development of libraries in Deccan. Moreover it gives a profile of present-day libraries in Deccan with oriental literature.

Chapter V (Data Analysis and Presentation) presents analysis of data collected through questionnaire from oriental libraries in Deccan and interprets it with the help of tables, graphs, charts and maps etc.

The last chapter (VI) deals with conclusions and suggestions derived from the findings of present research work, after fulfilling the objectives of the study.
The major findings and suggestions arising from this research are as follows:

Major Findings of Study: A very rich religious and cultural heritage is depicted through the manuscripts treasure available in Deccan. Every religious sect and the then various dynasties in Deccan have contributed immensely in collecting and preserving the manuscripts. Total 75 oriental libraries in Deccan region have contributed their data of manuscripts collection. Out of these, 12 libraries are from Telangana, 7 are from Andhra Pradesh, 23 are from Karnataka, and 33 are from Maharashtra. It is observed that all these libraries in Deccan have rich collection of manuscripts in variety of forms, languages, scripts, and covering various areas of knowledge. The majority oriental libraries in Deccan do not have separate budgetary provision for purchasing and maintenance of manuscripts. Many oriental libraries have published descriptive catalogues of their manuscripts. This way the bibliographic control over the manuscript collection is growing strong. It is traced that some libraries are using authentic methods of preservation in routine like fumigation, de-acidification, and lamination etc. It is found that still majority of libraries are using organic methods of preservation and using natural products in this process. Digitization of manuscripts is a must for saving this treasure and few libraries have already scanned their manuscripts.

Major Suggestions of the Study: There should be separate provision in budget for maintenance of manuscripts and for modernization and digitization of libraries. Separate skilled staff should be appointed in manuscripts section, who are well versed with the techniques of conservation as well as classification and cataloguing. The institutions should depute their working personnel for training the short term course of conservation of manuscripts. There is a need to publish the descriptive catalogue of manuscripts covering the whole collection. That catalogue should also be in computerized form and should be made available on web for public. Digitization of manuscripts should be done and it should be made available on web, for increasing its accessibility. Computerized cataloguing of manuscripts should be done and its OPAC should be made available on Internet. Air Conditioners should be installed in the stack areas of manuscripts to control temperature and humidity.

Finally, the thesis concludes with indicating scope for future researchers and a model with best practices to manage oriental manuscript libraries.