

Nature and Scope of Archives a Study

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'Archives' is commonly used for denoting the records and other documents as well as the institution which holds the records. Archives is a store house of information concerning all factors of human life. Since it is the emporium of all the activities of mankind from time immemorial to the present, it depicts the customs, conventions and usage of people. Historians and writers are fully dependent upon the documents and records of the archives for portraits of the life and activities of their predecessors. The British Government is popularly called the paper Government because they recorded all matters on paper and preserved them for future reference.

Their preservation of records in India and England benefited the histories and gave new enlightenment to the subject on Indian study. They paid special attention for preserving their records by establishing archives both in national and regional level in the western model. The increasing mass of record and a better appreciation of their value as public Archives led the Government to establish an independent Record Department in 1909. Therefore, the Madras Record office was built in Egmore area of Chennai. This neo – Gothic building (Indo – British Architecture) was planned with open spaces for future expansion and constructed to provide maximum protection to the records. It is still occupied by the Tamil Nadu Archives today, after India's Independence, the institution was named as Madras State Archives in 1969. It acquired its present name in 1973, following the renaming of Madras State Archives in to Tamil Nadu State Archives and Historical Research. An archive is one of the biggest Archives and Research Institution in South East Asia. The Prime function of these Archives in the past was generally to supply records to the Departments of Secretariat for reference to run the day – to – day administration of Government.

NATURE OF ARCHIVES

Generally the nature of Archives records are classified in to the following categories.

- i. Official records.
- ii. Non – official records.

OFFICIAL RECORDS

The official records are older and more populous. The records created by semi public bodies like corporations, insurance offices, Universities, Industrial and commercial undertakings, shipping companies, Airlines, Institutes etc., are treated as public records. After the Second World War, the Nations and archival engaged in documentary the old original records to their country in their country record offices.

NON – OFFICIAL RECORDS

The records related to the activities of individuals, families, private institutions or business houses are treated as non – official records. This type of records, make a helpful contribution to understand the public. It also reflects the impact of national events upon ordinary people.² Archives continue to play a conspicuous role in the sphere of historical research in regional, national and international level depends upon its uniqueness; Archives are classified into the following categories.

- ❖ Academic Archives.
- ❖ Business Archives.
- ❖ Government Archives.
- ❖ Non- Profit Archives.
- ❖ Film Archives.
- ❖ Private Archives.
- ❖ Digital Archives.

ACADEMIC ARCHIVES

Archives existing in colleges, Universities, and other Educational Institution are usually grouped as academic Archives. Academic Archives may exist within a Library, and duties may be carried out by an archivist or a librarian. Occasionally, history professors may run smaller academic archives. Academic Archives exist to

² Bhaskarraor Thorat, Principles of Museology, Archacology, Archival Library Science, Mumbai: Himalaya Publishing House-2000, P.127.

celebrate and preserve the history of a school and academic community. The Academic Archive may contain items such as papers of former professors and presidents, memorable documents related to school organization and activities, rare books or thesis copies.³

BUSINESS (PROFIT) ARCHIVES

Business Archives serves the purpose of helping their corporations and to maintain, control over their brand by retaining memories of the companies past. Workers in these types of Archives may have any combination of training and degrees, from either history or library science. These Archives are normally not open to the public and only used by the workers of the owner company, sometime approved visitors may be allowed by appointment.

GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES

The category of Government Archives includes the local and state level institutions run by the National government. The frequent users of the Government archives are reporters, genealogists, writers, historians, students and anyone who were in need of more information on the history of their home or region. Many Government archives are open to the public.⁴

NON – PROFIT ARCHIVES

Non profit businesses such as hospitals, historical societies are called Non – Profit Archives. Often these institutions rely on the grant from the Government and private funds from the donors.

FILM ARCHIVES

The introduction of film as an important media of communication necessitated for the establishment of Film Archives in national and international level. During the second half of the 20th century film industry grew rapidly because film was considered as a chief and cheap media of entertainment by all sets of people. This resulted that Government and private organizations began to collect and organize films for establishing repositories in the form of Archives and other means for future use. At the outset the conscience of establishing International Film Archives was felt by the European countries and USA. As a result of it, the International Federation of Film Archives (IFFA) that was founded in 1938 under the auspices of the Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art (New York) the National Film Library of the British Film Institute (London) the Cine Matheque Francaise (paris) and the former Richs Filmarchiv (Berlin) with 21 full members and 6 provisional or corresponding members.⁵

ACTIVITIES

The federation deals, on the International level, with all questions concerning. The Collection, preservation, classification and circulation of films. Thus, it endeavours to co – ordinate research on the history of the cinema, facilitate and control the loan and exchange of films and documents among it's members and in particular, establish during its congress general rules determining the relations of film libraries with the various bodies concerned with the production and distribution of films.⁶

The National film Library (London) has undertaken the preparation of a union catalogue of selected films of International film libraries. It prepared a report on the technical methods of preserving films and on card – index catalogue system used in film libraries. The federation has concluded agreements with the following International organizations. The International Federation of Cine Cubs (IFCC) the International Art Film Federation (IAFF) the International Scientific Film Association (ISFA) union international de cinema 'amoterus' the International Committee for Ethnographic Films (ICEF).⁷

NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVES OF INDIA

It was established in February 1964 in Pune as a media unit of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The primary objective of the National Film Archives of India (NFAI) is to acquire and preserve the heritage of national cinema and the best of world cinema. The Archives has made considerable progress in the preservation of films, audio, video material, documentation, research and dissemination of film culture in the country. The Archives functions as the main repository for Indian and foreign research workers for viewing film classics in connection with their research projects. The Archives Distribution Library with a representative collection of

³ H.Vandana, History of the Tamil Nadu Archives 1902 to the Present Day, Madras-Un Published under graduate project work, Women's Christian Collage, P-9

⁴ Ibid, P-13.

⁵ en.wikipedia.org.

⁶ G.O.No.7, Public, 3 January,1917. P-21.

⁷ T.R. Schellenberg, Op.Cit, P-11.

Indian and foreign film classics cater to over 300 film societies and film study groups in education institutions in the country.

The Archives also sponsors research projects pertaining to the study of various aspects of the Indian cinema. It has helped NFAI in establishing fruitful contacts with film Archives abroad and besides provides expert guidance on problems related to film preservation, restoration, computerization and retrieval of archival data. With headquarters at Pune, NFAI has at present three regional offices functioning at Bangalore, Calcutta and Thiruvananthapuram.⁸

PRIVATE ARCHIVES

Defining “private Archives” is difficult because it is not feasible to lay down any strict demarcation line between public documents and private records due to their mutual relationship, but still some records are considered as private documents owing to their character and function. Private Archives can be defined as documents and records which accumulate through the activities of individuals, families, institutions, business and industrial undertakings etc. The Indian Historical Records Commission started to make a survey on the availability and condition of the private records in 1919. The opening of public Archives for historical research and the collection of data from private records by research scholars fostered awareness on private records. Since, 1919 historical research has developed rapidly. The value of private Archives as source material for the studies of history was keenly recognized by historians.

The Universities in India also played an important role in safeguarding private Archives and making them available for research. Their libraries provided facilities for collecting and maintaining such collections. The history faculties of the universities, particularly individuals engaged in research on modern Indian history played in active to be in building up such collections pertaining to their respective regions. The Financial assistance given by the University Grants Commission for organizing collections of private papers and historical manuscripts also played a vital role in boosting up the historical research.

For the collection and proper preservation of the scattered private records and documents the I.H.R.C. insisted the Government of India to constitute the Regional Records Survey Committees. Accordingly in 1941 the Government of India asked the provincial Governments and Indian States to set up local committees in consultation with ordinary members and associate members and corresponding members of the I.H.R.C. in their areas to conduct a regional survey with a view to bringing to light records in private custody and providing for their preservation and publication. Procurement and preservation of private records and documents reviewed a new enlightenment in 1960, when the Government of India appointed the National Register of private and semi private Archives.⁹

DIGITAL ARCHIVES

Digital Archives may use any or all of these methods. The most sophisticated systems combine the resources so that objects in use or recent use are stored on – line and as they age from the time of most recent use, they move to near – line storage and then eventually off – line. Another important storage consideration is redundancy. In a system that is completely dependent on the interaction of various kinds and levels of hardware and software, failure in any one of the sub system could mean the loss or corruption of the information object. Digital Archives will benefit from the widespread adoption of data and communication standards that facilitate reference to digital information objects and enable their interchange among systems. Business needs in many institutions are driving the development and adoption of data standards, organization that create, use and maintain Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for example, are trying to reduce data conversion and maintenance costs by creating data that conform to widely accepted standards so that they can be exchange, resued or sold. Digital Archives must keep abreast of standards developments and make sure that there own technological infrastructure conforms to widely adopted standards. Planning for long term preservation is a critical element of Digital preservation.¹⁰

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARCHIVES

The characteristics of archives are as follows:

- i. The first characteristic is that the Archives of a particular agency are intended to reflect the policies, functions, organizations and transaction of that agency alone.
- ii. The second characteristic is the official character of Archives. Archives must remain in the custody of the creator or the legitimate successor.

⁸ M. Sundararajan, Op.Cit, P-35.

⁹ B.Natarajapillai, Economic Depression in the Madras Presidency, Madras: Government of Madras-1933, P-14.

¹⁰ Vijayalakshmi and, S.C.Jindal, Digital Libraries & Digital Library Principals and Practices Vol.1, New Delhi: S.C.Jindal Isha Books – 2004, P-56.

- iii. The third characteristic, of Archives, is their uniqueness. A record is created for one specific purpose may not be repeated any where else.
- iv. The fourth characteristics are the organic character of Archives. As a transaction progresses records relating to it grow naturally. Each piece in a file, is a consequence of some preceding piece or pieces and the former is explained and elaborated by the later for the maintenance of Archives. The value of records depends upon the historical references of that documents.¹¹

ARCHIVAL SCIENCE

The study and practice of organizing preserving, and providing access to information and materials in Archives is called Archival Science or the study of Archives is known as “Archival science”. In past ages Archives were often kept for safety in treasure chests or deed boxes. Science of Archives deals with problem connected with documents records and Archives, all these documents are interrelated they cannot be kept in watertight compartment.¹²

ARCHIVISTS

A person administered archival material is called an Archivist. A person whose job is to developed manages an Archive. The duties of Archivist are as follows:-

1. To collect, preserve and make accessible materials for research.
2. To supply the needed information to the administrators.
3. To assign University students to carry out their research on subjects related to unemployment problems, labour problems, poverty, industrial and other economic matters and social problems.¹³

The custodial responsibilities of Archivist are:

An Archivist should have custody of records that are physically in his possession in the following respects; fist, he should have the same rights and privileges with respect to the records that the creating agency. These pertain to such matters as reproducing and authenticating copies. He should have certain additional rights and privileges with respect to the record that are not commonly exercised by the creating agency. These pertain to their arrangement, description and publication for purposes other than those for which they were originally created for the purposes of serving the secondary users of the government agencies and private individual. These rights and privileges are needed by the Archivist if he has to discharge his duties efficiently. The Archivist is guided by law to stipulate the condition under which he can make the record accessible to public.¹⁴

Dr.Surendranath Sen, for example as the Director of National Archives of India in 1947 successfully introduced the art and craft of preservation of British records. As the keeper of records in the Imperial Record Department (National Archives of India) and secretary of Indian Historical Records Commission, initiated in 1941 to groom Archives professionals in India through theoretical discussion and practical work. He also acknowledged that the existence of Archives is interlinked with its task of arranging, preserving and servicing records, and this task may not be archived without deploying trained Archivists.¹⁵

SCOPE AND OBJECTS IN ARCHIVES

Archives is useful in the following field.

- i. Help in reading and interpreting difficult documents.
- ii. Advice on secondary works of reference of local significance.
- iii. Advice on the local context of problems.

TODAY THE SCOPE OF AN ARCHIVAL ARE AS FOLLOWS

- i. To classify, arrange the documentary material and establish standard of good management with respect to creation, organization and maintenance.
- ii. To preserve the documentary material against physical damage and safe guard it from being tampered.
- iii. To make it available for research work.¹⁶

¹¹ National Archives of India Annual report (1998), New Delhi: National Archives of India – 1998, P-23.

¹² .Kamalashinha, Access to Information Technology in Modern Libraries, New Delhi: Vista International Publishing House-2005, P-5.

¹³ S.P. Agrawal, Library and information services in India the Current Scenario, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company-1987, P-26.

¹⁴ Syamalendu Sengupta, Experiments History through Archives Restoration of Memory and Repair of Records, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Published, Pvt.Ltd., -2004, P-22.

¹⁶ Hilary Jenkinson, A Manual of Archives Administration, London: Humphries & Co.Ptd.,-1973, P-124.

IMPORTANCE OF ARCHIVES AND VALUE OF RECORDS AS SOURCES OF HISTORY

Archival institutions are essential from various purposes. Records preserved are valuable for the following reasons:

Valuable for administrative, legal uses of the Government.

- i. Valuable for protection of legal civil property and the rights of the citizens.
- iii. Valuable for functional documentation purposes.
- iv. Valuable for the purpose of research work.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Archives plays a vital role in the administration of a country or a region. Archives is the mirror of society. It is a store house of the heritage of human beings. It holds the records of events of various social formations and the evolution of human civilization. People must know the past in order to understand the present and to face the future.

The documents of the archives are the authentic source materials. Archives continues to play a conspicuous role in the sphere of historical research in regional, national and international level. Though the archives was originally established for administrative purpose, its historical value was gradually recognized. The part played by the archivists for historical research was highly commendable. Since they are well-versed with the contents of the records they could supply the needed information to the administrators. The archivists are the most competent persons to trace, collect study and furnish readily available information to the public. Many Asian, African and European countries in the world have realized the importance of establishing archives. The countries are Sri Lanka, China, Japan, U.S.A., France, England, Spain, U.S.S.R, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa etc....,

¹⁷ Free India, 15 March, 1970, P-5.

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