

Analysis of Oriental Treasure in Select Libraries of Srinagar: A Survey

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Abstract

The study focuses on the cultural wealth of the select oriental libraries of Srinagar District of Jammu and Kashmir State. The study represents several aspects of oriental collection surveyed on the basis of certain set parameters, archived in various institutions under sizeable amounts. The study highlights the potential heritage wealth that has flourished for many centuries in different forms and from diverse subjects and languages, has enriched the oriental libraries of Srinagar. The study can be used as a base for the Ministry of Culture to take proper management steps in preserving the culture and heritage in the Oriental Libraries of Srinagar.

Keywords: Oriental, Libraries, Heritage

Introduction

The Asiatic countries comprise the world's largest, most comprehensive and varied stock of languages, cultures and people. Because of their immense multinational composition, the part of the globe was magnificently advanced in the intellectual activities during the medieval time. Oriental collection thus represents a segment of these intellectual activities of past.

The word "*Orient*" is derived from a Latin word "*Oriens*" referring simply to the rising of the sun, implying East in a relative sense. Oxford English Dictionary also comments on "*oriental*" as, belonging to or found in or characteristics of the countries or regions lying in the east of the Mediterranean or the Ancient Roman Empire, belonging to South-West Asia or Asiatic countries (Catherine, 2001).

The oriental subjects have their origin in the East, dealing with the Classical languages of the area, Customs, Philosophy and Religion. A part of this heritage is documented and distributed in different Institutions known by Oriental Libraries in a variety of medium (i.e.; parchment, vellum, palm leaves, paper etc) languages, subjects, and in different conditions.

India has been one of the vast repository of different cultures and a major seat of learning for thousands of years, dating back to ancient seat, University of Nalanda preserve thousands of manuscripts of which oriental manuscript is a part. The phase of Oriental Libraries started with the Jain and Buddhist era, followed by Mughals and Britishers and a number of special libraries were devoted to Oriental and Indological collections in the various parts of the country covering: Rampur Raza Library, Asiatic Society, Khuda Baksh Oriental Public Library, Maulana Azad Library and many more. These Oriental Libraries are controlled by the government or by the private trusts and originated as philanthropic gestures or patronising attempts of the heirs of the erstwhile princely states (**Gul & Khan, 2008**).

J & K also preserves a share of the treasure of Oriental collection and result is in the form of heritage libraries found in the state namely: Oriental Research Library, Directorate of Library, Museum and Research, The J & K Academy of Arts, Culture and Languages, Shri Pratap Singh Museum, Shri Pratap Singh Central Public Library, Allama Iqbal Library (University of Kashmir), Sanskrit Department Library (University of Kashmir), Persian Department Library (University of Kashmir), Govt Oriental College Library, Central Asian Museum, including some Oriental colleges viz; Jamiya-tul-Banat Library, Darul-uloom Qasmia Library, Darul-uloom Furqania Library, Darul-uloom Naqshbandi Library, Darul-uloom Dawoodia Library, Darul-uloom Hanfia Arabia College Library, Darul-uloom Ilahiya Library, Darul-uloom Bilalia Library.

Purpose

J&K is although rich in Oriental collection and a number of libraries preserve the cultural heritage but these libraries are candidate of least administrative and academic attention. There has not been any significant study to understand the nature of collection of Oriental Libraries in the state. The study at hand has been initiated with the aim to explore the collection strength, language diversity, subject diversity, preservation-conservation, format and procurement procedures undertaken by these libraries since years. The study can prove valuable to literary, religious and scientific scholars.

Objectives

The study revolves around following objectives:

- To understand size of collection under following parameters:

- ❖ Subject distribution
- ❖ Language distribution
- ❖ Formats of Material
 - To understand various processes of Preservation- Conservation methods used.
 - To know procurement procedure of the collection.

Scope

The scope is limited to the select libraries of Srinagar District. The selection criteria are based on the collection strength of the library. The work is confined to study the collection of the library and its various parameters in detail.

Methodology

The exploratory study is undertaken by means of literature survey including identification of the select Oriental Institutions for further study. A personal visit is paid to the select libraries. Besides, the instrument in form of questionnaire is distributed to ascertain various facts regarding collection of the libraries. Further, hand lists and catalogues where ever available are consulted, accompanied by face-to-face interaction with the employees which helped in mining of data more coherently.

Literature Review

Number of studies has been carried out on the Oriental literature all around the world. These studies help us in understanding the various facets of Oriental Collection.

Samarri (2000) analyses the Arabic catalogue manuscripts at Maulana Azad library, and found 500 Arabic manuscripts on subjects of Literature, Grammar, History, Jurisprudence, Sufism, Mathematics, Astrology, Astronomy, and Islamic sciences. Among the oldest manuscripts is a rare autograph by Al-Qushayri-Uyun, Al-Aj Wibah. The supplementary catalogue of Turkish manuscripts compiled by **Kut (2004)** in the Boodleian library contains 636 entries. The entries are classified under subjects such as Quran, sufism, Islamic history and legends, Jurisprudence, Biography, History, Medicine, Botany, Geography, Encyclopedias, Divans and Mesnevis, Grammar, Dictionaries. The catalogue throws light on all scholarly aspects of Turkish world. According to the study carried out by **Iranian Studies (2005)**, the Minasian Collection of Islamic manuscripts is one of the most extensive and precious collections of its kind in the Americas, consists of over 720 Persian, and over 2120 Arabic, manuscripts. The approximate breakdown of the collection is as follows: 600 Persian manuscripts in disciplines other than medicine; 120 Persian- medical manuscripts; 120 Arabic medical manuscripts; 2000 Arabic manuscripts in

disciplines other than medicine; 500 Turkish and 5 Urdu manuscripts; and 1000 Arabic and Persian bound collections. **Bonfield (2008)** reveals the collection of Irish music in the library of Royal Irish Academy. The library comprises of 19 manuscripts consisting entirely of Irish music & 7 manuscripts which consist chiefly of material in Irish & English including some Irish airs & articles on Irish music. **Pingree (2009)** surveyed the catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts at Columbia university library, comprising of 400 Sanskrit manuscripts. The collection is especially strong in works on Mathematics and Astronomy. The volume has numerous indices covering the persons, places, titles, and dates associated with the manuscripts. The catalogue of Arabic manuscripts of the National library of Czech Republic contains 200 entries, especially in Persian, Turkish, and Indian Oriental manuscript collection. The whole collection of Arabic manuscripts has been catalogued into 1200 volumes of which Indian manuscripts cover various branches of human activity viz; logic, maths, religion, politics, law, astronomy, medicine, science of nature and literature (**National Library of Czech Republic, 2009**).

Rieu (1888) reveals that the catalogue in British Museum embraces all the Turkish Manuscripts. They are 483 in number, viz., 444 in Western, or Osmanli, Turkish and 39 in Eastern Turkish or Chagbatai including some of the private collections covering notices of contemporary poets, a hitherto unnoticed, Turkish history, and the authentic record of the great Sulemean's reign. **Young (1980)** presents the Arabic & Turkish manuscripts in the Leeds University & found that the collection consists of Islamic manuscripts including Arabic, Turkish, Persian & Urdu, the largest number being in Arabic. The 371 Arabic manuscripts in Leeds collection cover almost the whole field of traditional Islamic literature. The strongest area is Islamic law, a category which covers 63 different works in 59 manuscripts. **Birnbaum (1984)** recorded that among 5000 manuscripts in the collection of University of Toronto, there are 596 Turkish manuscripts, totalling 638 volumes. Most of the manuscripts are literary works, of which two-thirds are the poetry and the remainder prose. The 31 linguistic works include 25 dictionaries and 73 historical works. Genizah collections recorded by **Khan (1986)** in the Cambridge University Library constitute about two-thirds of the contents in Cario-Genizah. The vast majority of the manuscript fragments are written in Hebrew characters. The language of well over half of them, however, is Judaeo-Arabic. In addition to the many Judaeo-Arabic manuscripts the Cambridge Genizah collection also contains fair number of Arabic fragments written in Arabic script. **Nelson (1992)** reviews the Sanskrit manuscript collection in the University of Pennsylvania Library. The collection of almost 3, 300 Indic manuscripts is seen, the largest such collection being in the Western hemisphere. Although the majority of the manuscripts are in the Devanagari script, the collection contains manuscripts written in Jainanagari, Grantha (the Tamil script used for Sanskrit), Kaithi, Sharada (from Kashmir), Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Sinhalese, and Tibetan scripts. In the St.

Petersburg branch of Oriental studies manuscript collection, there are 3 Turkish mss so far identified. Turkish mss collection present the work translated into German. The text of manuscript is richly decorated with headings and separate geographical as well as administrative names written in red and gold (**Petrosyan, 1995**). **Khalidi (2003)** estimates that India possesses nearly one hundred thousand manuscripts in Arabic script spread over a number of libraries in various parts of the country. Moreover, manuscripts are available in Persian, Urdu in the various state archives, majority of which is in Persian followed by Arabic and Urdu. A small number of manuscripts are in Pushtu, Sindhi and Turkish. **Gacek (2004)** focuses on the collection of Persian-Arabic manuscripts in the libraries of McGill's university which consists of Arabic; 220, Persian; 338, Turkish; 180 and a few Urdu texts. **Edinburgh University (2009)** reveals having over 650 manuscripts in Oriental languages, originating from the countries of the Middle East, South Asia, and South East Asia. The collection consists of Arabic and a Persian manuscript, which illustrates the life of **Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)**. **Muhlhausler (2009)** while reviewing the work of Smith, a descriptive catalogue of Oriental manuscripts at St. John's College, Oxford, found that it is a comprehensive catalogue of manuscripts in Latin or Greek. Other than that, 21 mss are in Arabic or Persian, the remaining 5 mss being in Hebrew, Syriac, Turkish and Ethiopic. **Allen (1981)** describes the collection of Wellcome Institute which includes 10,000 manuscripts about 900 on palm leaves and rest on paper, metal, leather and ivory. The simplified catalogue of palm leaf & paper manuscripts presented by **Babu (1983)**, preserved in Dr V.S Krishna Memorial Library Andhra University cover 2663 manuscripts, out of which 2101 are palm leaf manuscripts & 582 are paper manuscripts. Further manuscripts are classified under 50 subject headings & more than 300 authors are identified. **Deroche (1991)** during the first investigation of the collection of Turk ve Islam in Istanbul found the manuscript written on parchment in oblong format, having three lines to the page and in the upper margin of each rectango a note is attached to it. **Roper (1992)** analyses the Stan-I-Quids-I-Razavi Library, Mashhad holding 29,000 manuscripts and 11,000 among them are manuscripts of the Quran. It contains a large numbe of illuminated Quranic Manuscripts including several old Kufic Quranic manuscripts written on deer-skin by famous calligraphers. **Uspensky (1998)** mentions the Turfin collection consisting of about 8,000 fragments of various sizes. These fragments are parts of scrolls, leporellos (folded books), Pustaka-books and block prints. Most of them are written in the so-called Uigur script, which was developed from the Sogdian. **Iakerson (2000)** describes the Hebrew incunabula collection covering 70 different texts in around 150 editions which may currently be regarded as incurables. Most are in Hebrew and Aramaic but a number also contain passages in Judaeo-Spanish, Judaeo-Arabic, and languages written in Hebrew characters. **Ekadjati (2003)** found the manuscripts and inscriptions written in Sundanese. The former were written on stone and metal,

while the latter on palm leaf, bamboo and paper. Sundanese manuscripts in Old Sundanese and Old Javanese scripts and languages are written on five kinds of palm leaves were used for the production of Sundanese manuscripts lontar (palmyra), daun nau (sugar palm), daun kelapa (coconut palm), nipah (thatch palm) and pandan (pandanus). **Samuel & Gottesman (2005)** casts light on the middle ages & Renaissance manuscript collection fashioned from costly materials (membranes made from animal hides, precious minerals including real gold, pigments made from rare animal and botanical substances). Finished manuscripts were enclosed in bindings that ranged from plain boards through leather coverings to the ultimate in metalwork and jewellery. **The Harvard University art Museum (2006)** highlights the collection of Islamic and later Indian art, comprising of broad range of works holding strong collection of paintings like Fragment of a Velvet Yastik Paintings and drawings from the Arab. **Desyakovskaya & Tyomkin (2007)** focuses on the study undertaken during late nineties, which witnessed a remarkable series of discoveries of Kharosthi manuscripts. It was found to be written in more than 600 lines on a large composite birch-bark scroll, bearing different characters written by one and same scribe forming coherent collection of canonical texts. **Kratli (2004)** analyses the desert Libraries of Mauritania which represent several thousand manuscripts and printed books that document the evolution of Islamic thought in western Africa. While providing important insights in the preservation of the materials considered, some distinctive characteristics of Arab bookbinding include the cover boards made of several leaves of paper pasted together to increase the flexibility of the cover, the flat spine, the quires sewn without support, usually with linen or flax thread on two or four stations and a basic link stitch, to make richly decorated sleeve cases to protect the books from the sand.

Findings & Discussion

There exist an adequate number of Oriental Libraries in Kashmir Valley. However, in this sample study only 18 vital libraries were chosen for survey, assessing the present collection and its various characteristics.

Collection Strength

Survey undertaken reveals the collection strength of materials, representing the various branches of Indology. As it is evident from Fig. 1, Oriental Libraries stock valuable collection of rare books, coins, paintings, manuscripts and others (i.e.; Certificates, Telegram Stamps and Currency notes), However, books represent the best example of their collection.

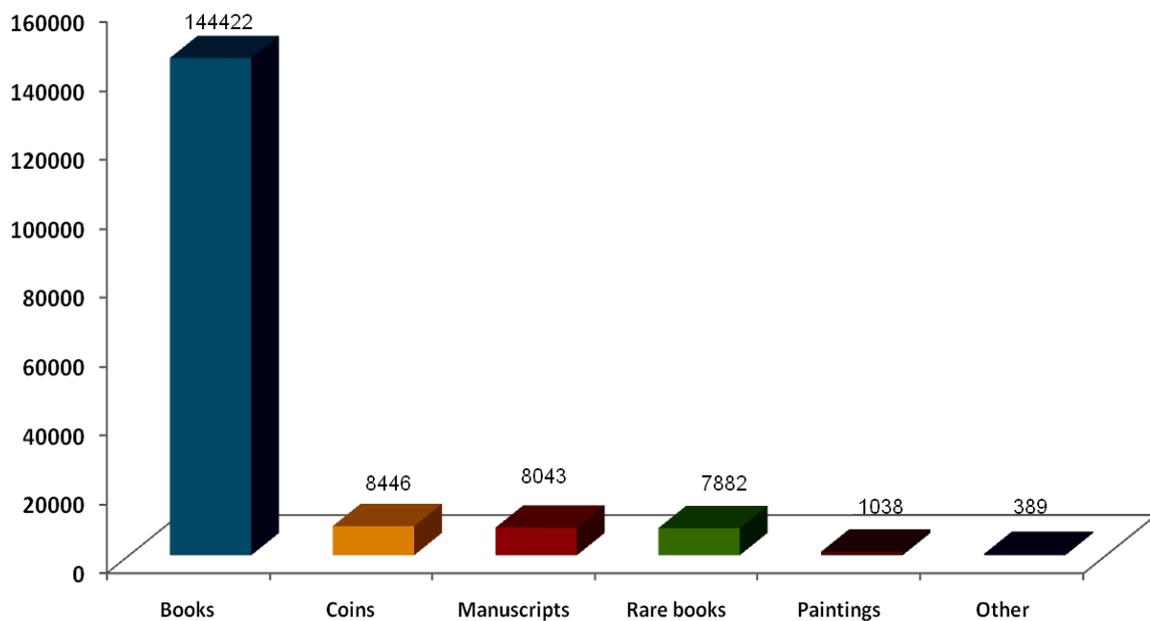


Fig 1: Collection Diversity

Subject Diversity

The Study ascertains the libraries and their collection on Books, Rare books and Manuscripts in various subject areas. As for the Books, 15 libraries occupy the prime position in subject Religion, while minimum collection is found on Pure Science. The situation with Rare books is not that encouraging as most of the libraries hold the collection majorly on Religion and a negligible amount of collection is found on Pure Science. Manuscripts provide mine of Information where 10 libraries occupy the unenviable position in subject Religion, however, Philosophy amounts the least, housed in just 1 library as illustrated in Fig 2.

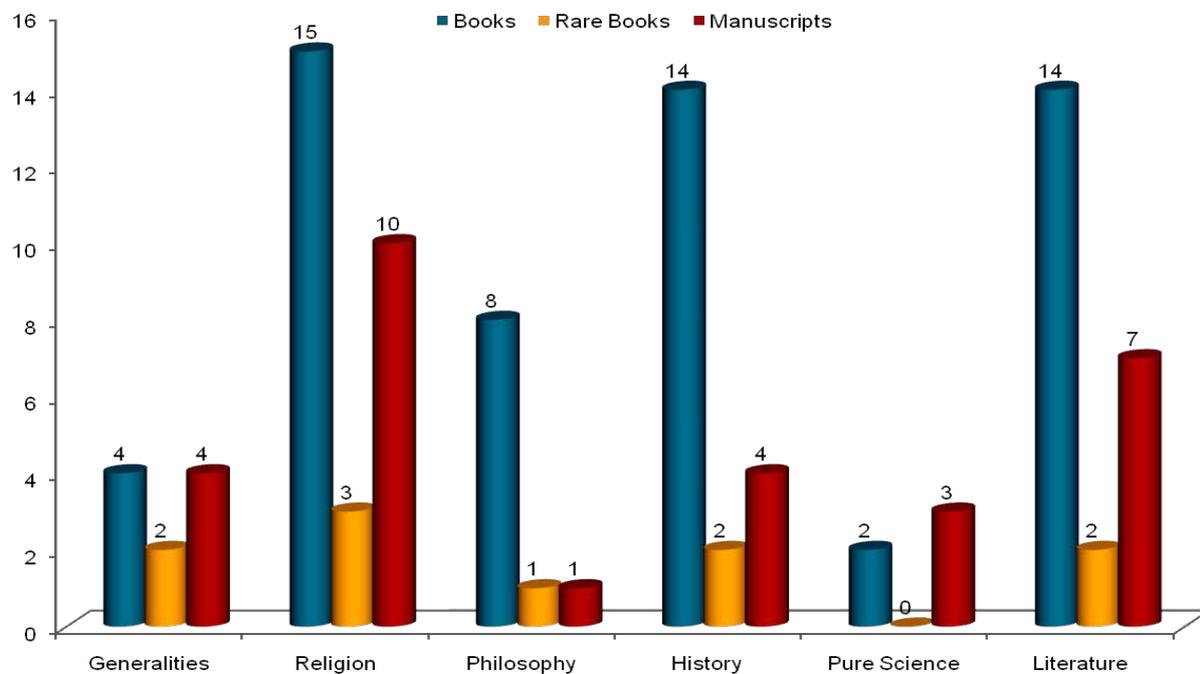


Fig 2: Subject Diversity

Language Diversity

In terms of Language diversity, the survey reveals that 14 libraries constitute major collection on Books in language Urdu, and a very less in Sanskrit. The collection on Rare books in Urdu is considerably occupied by 4 libraries. Manuscript materials also represent a sound collection and are occupied by 9 and 8 libraries, which have stated their material in significant amounts in

language Arabic and Persian respectively. Moreover, just 2 libraries are sharing their collection in other languages namely; English, Punjabi, Balti, Prakrit, Hindi, Pali. The details are depicted in Fig 3.

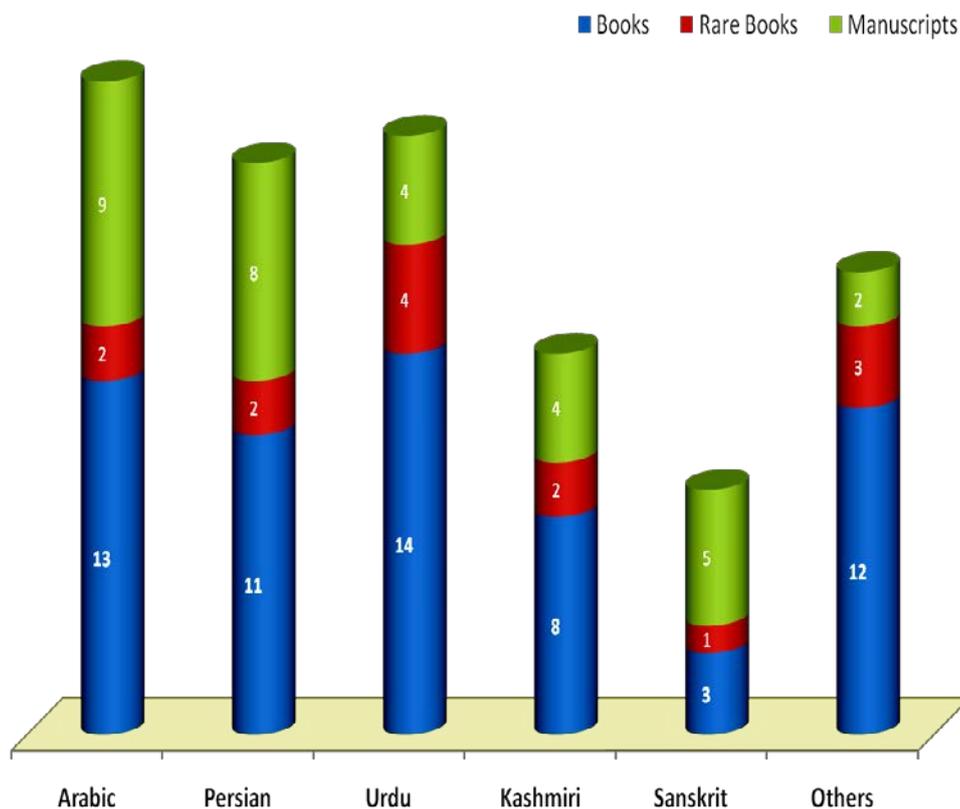


Figure 3: Language Delivery

Preservation & conservation

Preservation and conservation policies go a long way in conserving and preserving significant materials like books, rare books, manuscripts, painting, coins; etc. The study reveals that majority of libraries conduct basic preventive preservation procedures to safe guard their priceless collection such as dusting. Only 10 libraries undergo pest control. Except few (5 & 2 respectively), majority of the libraries do not have fumigation & microfilming facility. Lamination is being carried out only in 4 libraries. De-acidification of individual items is carried

out only in 1 library. One of the positive aspects of the study is that majority of libraries (15) carry out the work of binding of their oriental content as shown in Fig 4.

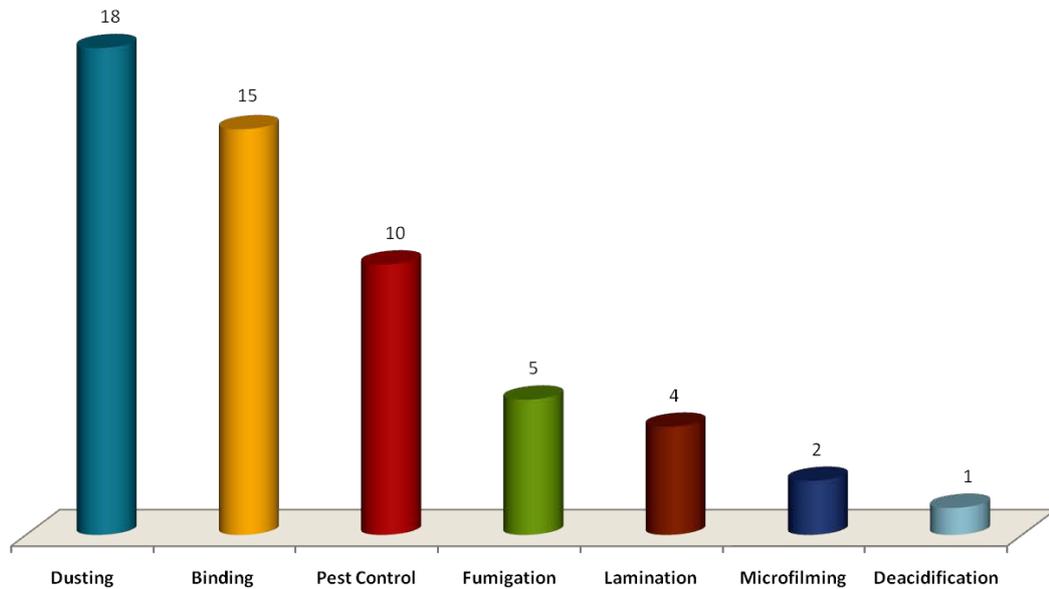


Fig 4: Preservation & Conservation

Format:

The study reveals, Material in various formats like Leaf, Birch Bark, Parchment, Cloth, Paper and Others (DVD's & CD's') are present in the respective libraries out of which Paper is the main possession covered by majority of libraries (18) where as minimum collection is seen in libraries on Parchment, Cloth and almost modicum collection on other namely: CD's & DVD's as illustrated in Fig 5.

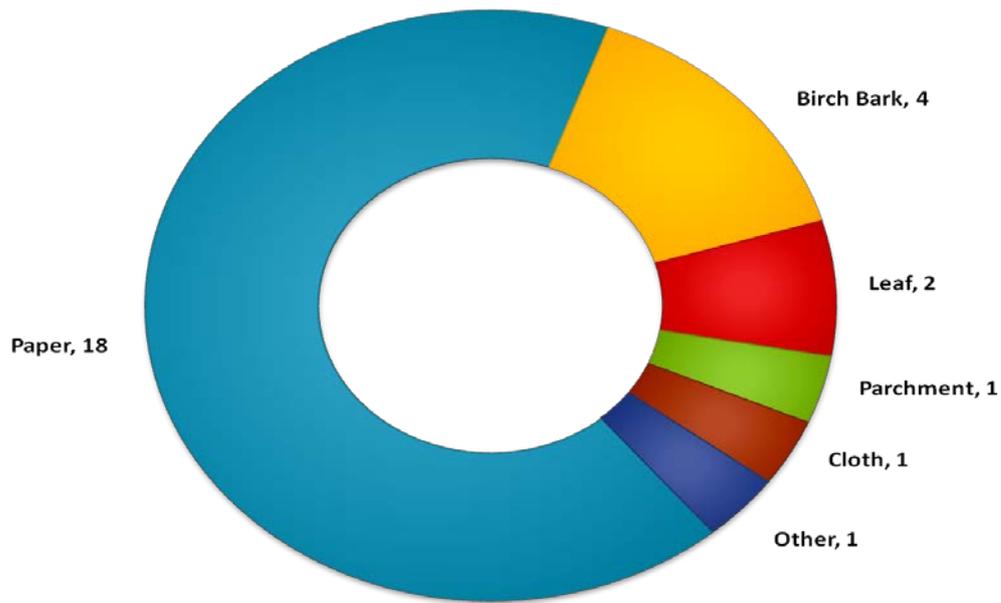


Fig 5: Formats of Material

Procurement

Procurement processes such as gifts or purchase reflects the mode of acquiring the collection by libraries. This fact has been reflected by 18 libraries which undergo purchase (100%), and 10 libraries house the collection acquired from both purchase and gifts (55.55%), where as none of the library has collection acquired entirely by gifts. The fact is well illustrated in Fig 6.

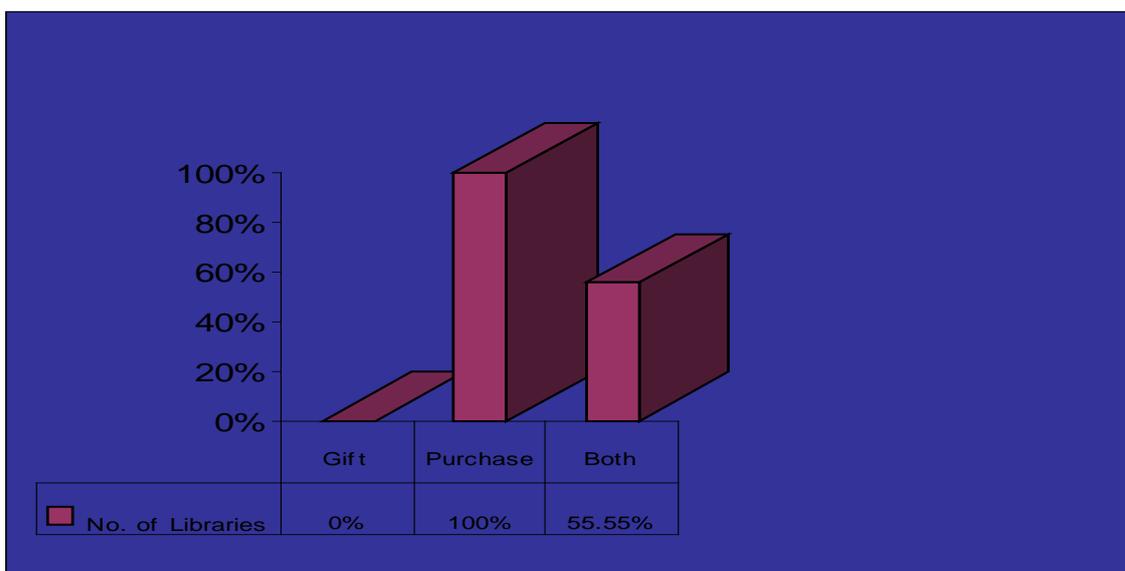


Fig 6: Procurement

Conclusion:

The World's Greatest civilizations has developed libraries of some sort as holding place for the collective memory of man. It stands as a matter of course that Kashmir also played a long and honourable role in the history of this kind of endeavour and the fact is well exemplified by the existence of prominent oriental libraries possessing very rare and valuable literary sources, fonds which have intentionally or unintentionally been retained in various forms of writing. The multifarious and multidimensional contribution made by oriental libraries represent a wide spectrum of rich wealth and there exists a need to preserve and offer sufficient grounds for promoting this treasure trove for its easy accessibility or else it will be at risk of being lost to posterity.

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