

# Digitization of Manuscript in the Perspective of Sustainability Development Goal: A Study of College Libraries of Kamrup & Kamrup (M) District in Assam

Nabajyoti Das

Nirmal Ranjan Mazumdar

Kishore Kalita

## Abstract

*Purpose:* As digitization is a measure for sustainability of manuscript collection, this study aims to identify whether the manuscript collection available in college libraries of Kamrup and Kamrup (M) are digitized or not and thereby open the door to contribute towards the achievement of the concerned sustainable development goals of the UN.

*Design and Methodology:* For this study, the libraries of provincialised colleges situated in Kamrup and Kamrup (M) districts are surveyed using an online questionnaire. A purposive sampling method is used for selecting the sample. The collected relevant data are tabulated and analyzed accordingly.

*Findings:* Out of 47 only 9 college libraries have manuscript collections. The research reveals that the college libraries have a total of 128 manuscripts out of which 58 i.e. 45.31% are Sanchipat manuscripts and 70 i.e. 54.69% are paper manuscripts. Out of 9 college libraries 5 libraries have digitized their manuscripts and only 3 libraries have given access to the digitized manuscript through their digital library. However, the College libraries are to initiate significant steps towards digitization of manuscripts and to provide their access to the world community to contribute towards achievement of sustainable development goals for preservation and conservation of Cultural and intellectual heritage of the state.

*Value:* Though the study is confined to a specific geographical area, it may reflect significance of digitization of manuscript for achievement of specified SDGs. The paper may be a reference for those who are engaged themselves in further study in this specific area.

**Keywords:** Digitization, Digitized manuscript, Sustainability, SDGs, College library, Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro)



## **1. Introduction**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a set of 17 objectives for 2030 defined by the United Nations in 2015. The entire world community has been involved in achieving these goals for the betterment of the world as a whole. Preservation and conservation of rare manuscripts and documentary heritage has a strong impact on achieving the UN's SDGs. The SDGs related to Quality Education (SDG 4), Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure (SDG 9) and Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (SDG 16) have a strong connection with the preservation, conservation and access to the rare documentary heritage of the world. Besides, the SDG 11 has a sub goal to protect the cultural and natural heritage of the world which has a strong linkage with the preservation and conservation of manuscripts because the rare manuscripts are treated as one of the sources of cultural heritage. Thus, the preservation and access to the rare manuscripts and documentary heritage can play a vital role in advancing multiple Sustainable Development Goals of the UN.

Manuscripts with their invaluable historical, cultural and academic significance have long been preserved in libraries, museums, and archives around the world. However, their fragile nature, susceptibility to degradation and limited accessibility has posed significant challenges to researchers, scholars and enthusiasts alike. In this modern age, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is revolutionizing every aspect of our lives and the preservation, conservation and dissemination of cultural and intellectual heritage are also no exceptions. Today, digitization of manuscripts is considered as a profound testament to our commitment to safeguarding our past while making it accessible to future generations.

Digitization preserves the contents of the manuscripts for posterity and helps in expanding their reach beyond the confined niche of traditional repositories. Through high-resolution scanning techniques, meticulous metadata creation, digitization has made it possible to explore manuscripts with unprecedented ease and depth. One of the most compelling advantages of digitization is its potential to democratize access to cultural heritage regardless of geographical location or institutional affiliation, which empowers researchers, students and the general public to engage directly with primary sources. This will definitely help in fostering a deeper understanding of history, language and culture and hence will open the door of heritage tourism.

## **2. Literature Review**

In a literature published by IFLA (2018) and titled as 'Libraries and sustainable development goals: A storytelling manual', it is explained how the libraries are associated with the various SDGs of the UN.

For sustainability, digitalization is one of the core issues, as mentioned by Dasgupta (2005). In a paper, 'Digitization, sustainability and access in the Indian context', she wrote, "Sustainability is a broad term which refers to many factors starting from technological issues of preserving digital data to social and economic questions for long term accessibility of information to the people."

In another paper, it is explained how digitization is a means for cultural heritage preservation for long term sustainability. In a paper, 'The challenges of reconstructing cultural heritage: An international digital

collaboration', Heuberge, Leone and Evers (2015) explained "Adhering to best practices in both digitization and accessibility plays a vital role in sustainability for the long term."

Some academic libraries in India have taken initiative for preservation of their manuscript through digitization. In the paper 'Digital Preservation of Rare Books & Manuscripts: A Case Study of Aligarh Muslim University', Hasan, Azim and Bedar (2016) explored this area with a case study of Aligarh Muslim University's Central Library known as Maulana Azad Library. This study reveals how a particular library with a vast collection of 16000 manuscripts should start such a digitization project in a very systematic and step by step manner.

In the paper "Contribution of academic libraries towards sustainable development goals" M.M. Mashroofa (2022) depicts an exploratory investigation about the contribution of libraries in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study focuses on how libraries could formulate plans to integrate the SDGs into all its programmes and projects. The study identifies nine SDGs that require the direct involvement of libraries as well as some successful activities carried out by certain libraries for this purpose. The paper, after exploring the situation of academic libraries in Sri Lanka, found that eight universities in Sri Lanka have included 'sustainable development' in their strategic plans and academic libraries integrate them in library resources, services and programmes. However, these libraries are lacking in mapping their activities with SDGs. The study recommends that academic libraries should map SDGs to the libraries' programmes, services, and resources

In a recent study 'Integration of Sustainable Development by Digital Documentary Heritage Industry: A New Synthetic Model of Integration as Learning and Potential Research Direction', it is mentioned, "Documentary heritage represents a huge proportion of the world's cultural heritage. Many of these resources have lasting value and significance, and therefore constitute a heritage that should be protected and preserved for current and future generations. Manuscript can be categorized as one of valuable assets and historical documentary heritage." Hassan, Saman and Shaifuddin (2022) explained this with supporting data about how some of the greatest libraries of the world had been destroyed in war, flood and fire.

In the study "Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Social Sustainability for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): An Exploratory Study" Smitanjali Panda and Subarna Kumar Das (2022) described that libraries are in an excellent position to promote and encourage sustainability research within their campuses. They often act as a central hub for many faculties, ensuring connections across a variety of academic disciplines. Libraries need peace. They originated in settled, peaceful societies; when peace is broken, libraries are threatened. Librarians have long been associated with peace movements and organizations devoted to making peace. They also distinguished between "negative" and "positive" peace. It is the process of cultivating peace, making peace, and keeping and restoring peace. All this leads to the realization that peace-building is not simply about preventing and ending conflict, but about creating conditions that are conducive to peace. This has important implications for the role of librarians. The author stated the seven roles for librarians: informing, promoting, educating, creating resources, empowering, healing and advocating.

Khalfan Zahan Al Hijji & Samiya Al Hinaai in their paper “The Role of Libraries in Achieving the United Nations Goals of Sustainable Development 2030” presented at 48th Kuala Lumpur International Conference on Social Sciences, Humanities & Management during May 31-June 2, 2023, highlights the most important contents of the United Nations goals for sustainable development and the role of libraries in achieving them. The study initiated from the fact that libraries are professional institutions that participate in scientific and intellectual aspects of societies. Taking into consideration that libraries are social organizations that play important roles in innovation and development, the international organizations have involved them in their activities. Thus, when the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 were announced, professional associations of libraries have developed various plans to achieve them. One of the first organizations was the IFLA, which was involved from the beginning in creating the United Nations 2030 Agenda. They also mentioned that at the local level, the Oman Libraries and Information Association contributed to IFLA’s efforts by participating in its workshops that were dedicated to this purpose, and holding a number of supportive workshops in the Sultanate.

From this literature review, it is found that for ensuring sustainability, digitization is a significant kind of process followed by various institutions.

### **3. Sustainability Development Goal and Preservation of Manuscript**

The manuscript collection is recognized as an invaluable cultural and historical heritage of a nation. Among 17 Sustainable Development Goals, the following goal has a direct link with preservation of manuscripts (IFLA, 2018).

The Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Within this goal, there is a sub-goal, i.e. 11.4, which aims to “strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”.

The UNESCO defines cultural heritage as, “Cultural heritage includes artefacts, monuments, a group of buildings and sites, museums that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic and aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance. It includes tangible heritage (movable, immobile and underwater), intangible cultural heritage (ICH) embedded into cultural, and natural heritage artefacts, sites or monuments. The definition excludes ICH related to other cultural domains such as festivals, celebration etc. It covers industrial heritage and cave paintings.”

In another publication of the UNESCO, cultural heritage explains as, “immovables and movables, together with a including monuments of architecture, art or history, archaeological sites, works Protocol which of art, manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, as well as scientific collections of all kinds.”

From the above two statements, it is clear that the manuscript collections are also treated as a cultural heritage. Thus, there is a connection between preservation of manuscripts and United Nations Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Through preservation of manuscripts, one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be achieved. Manuscripts provide invaluable insights into history, culture, and knowledge that are essential for sustainable development. By safeguarding these collections, the cultural heritage of the world can be protected, preserved and promoted for the greater understanding of global history.

It can be stated that the conservation and preservation of manuscripts is not only a matter of cultural importance but also a strategic step towards advancing sustainable development goals.

#### **4. Statement of the Problem**

The statement of the problem of the study is entitled as 'Digitization of Manuscript in the light of Sustainability Development Goal: A study of College Libraries of Kamrup & Kamrup (M) District in Assam'. This study aims to find out the status of digitization of the manuscript collection of college libraries of Kamrup and Kamrup (M) district of Assam, which is one of the major steps towards achieving the SDGs of the United Nations.

#### **5. Objective of the study**

Two very basic objectives of this study are:

- i) To find out the availability of manuscript collections in college libraries of Kamrup and Kamrup (M) district of Assam.
- ii) To reveal the status of digitization of those manuscripts available in the surveyed college libraries of Kamrup and Kamrup (M) district of Assam.

#### **6. Scope and Limitation**

This study is confined among the college libraries in Kamrup and Kamrup(M) districts of Assam that are recognized under the Assam College Employee (Provincialization) Act, 2005.

#### **7. Methodology**

A preliminary survey was conducted regarding the availability of manuscripts in the college libraries in these two districts through the data available on the colleges' website, IQAC SSR and telephonic discussions with the librarians of the respective colleges. After the preliminary survey, a purposive sampling method is used for selecting the sample for this research study. The libraries of provincialised colleges situated in Kamrup and Kamrup (M) districts are surveyed using an online questionnaire. The relevant data related to this study are collected accordingly.

#### **8. Digitization of manuscript**

Digitization is a very common process that ensures manuscripts' long-term viability. In order to preserve the manuscript as well as to make it available and accessible to a larger audience, transformation of manuscripts

from its original format into digital format has been given emphasis. It is noteworthy that firstly microfilming and then digitizing the rare documents gives a longer life span to both the original form of physical manuscripts and the content by facilitating to avoid multiple handling of the physical manuscripts by the users for their contents.

#### **9. Digitization of Manuscript as an approach towards sustainability:**

The following are some of the points that indicate how digitalization encourages sustainability of manuscript collection:

- i) Preservation and conservation: The manuscripts can be preserved through the digitization process. Digitization ensures long-term preservation by removing the possibility of physical harm from handling, transit, or natural disasters.
- ii) Accessible and inclusive: Digitization and online access makes manuscripts readily available worldwide. The digitized manuscripts can be made accessible online and it will help in overcoming all barriers of physical access to manuscript for sure. Thus, it promotes inclusivity by allowing a wider audience to interact and gain knowledge from this valuable knowledge treasure.
- iii) Minimize loss and damage: Damages of manuscripts due to the threats such as fire, theft, or natural disasters are always possible. Besides, climate change is now a bigger threat for manuscript preservation. In such a worst-case scenario, having digital copies guarantees that the priceless content is saved and can be restored or recreated.
- iv) Economical solution: Preservation and conservation of manuscript in its original form is a very challenging task. Besides adopting various measures for preservation, it needs proper storage, security, and preservation methods in order to maintain the manuscripts in their original form. Thus it requires recurring expenses. Digitization of manuscript can lower these recurring expenses of an organization.
- v) Multipurpose use: Multipurpose use is an additional benefit of digitization of manuscript. Manuscripts in digital format can be put to use for purposes other than reading. These can be used in multimedia presentations, interactive displays, exhibitions etc. Thus, this adaptability improves readers' interest and comprehension of the manuscript over a larger spectrum, including academics, students and the general public.

#### **10. Digitization of Manuscript as an approach towards sustainability: A study of College Libraries of Kamrup & Kamrup (M) District**

As per the Govt. of Assam official record there are 21 colleges in Kamrup(M) district and 26 colleges in Kamrup district ([https://highereducation.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf\\_utility\\_folder/departments/highere\\_medhassu\\_in\\_oid\\_3/do\\_u\\_want\\_2\\_know/337\\_stream\\_wise\\_colleges.pdf](https://highereducation.assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/swf_utility_folder/departments/highere_medhassu_in_oid_3/do_u_want_2_know/337_stream_wise_colleges.pdf)). The websites and IQAC SSR of the colleges of these two districts under the purview of the study have been explored to gather the

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data regarding availability of manuscripts in the college libraries. Telephonic discussions with the librarian of respective colleges were also conducted. From the preliminary survey it was found that only two college libraries in Kamrup(M) district and seven college libraries in Kamrup district have manuscripts in their collection. Therefore, purposely the nine college libraries, which have manuscripts in their collections have been surveyed through a questionnaire designed in Google form. The number of these college libraries is only 19.15% of the total colleges in Kamrup and Kamrup(M) district. The table 1 depicts the status of manuscript collection in the college libraries of Kamrup and Kamrup(M) districts in Assam.

**Table 1. College Library having Manuscript**

SI No	Area of Colleges	Number of College	Number of College having Manuscript	Percentage of College having Manuscript
1	Kamrup	26	7	14.89
2	Kamrup(M)	21	2	4.26
3	<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19.15</b>

**Table 2. Surveyed College Library having Manuscript (Response Received 100%)**

SI No	Name of the College	Name of the Library	Year of Establishment
1	North Gauhati College	North Gauhati College Library	1962
2	Rangia College	Rangia College Library	1963
3	Jawaharlal Nehru College	Jawaharlal Nehru College Library	1964
4	LCB College	LCB College Library	1971
5	Pub Kamrup College	Pub Kamrup College Library	1972
6	Suren Das College	Suren Das College Library	1979
7	Saraighat College	Saraighat College Library	1981
8	KC Das Commerce College	KC Das Commerce College Library	1983
9	Paschim Barigog Anchalik Mahavidyalaya	Paschim Barigog Anchalik Mahavidyalaya Library	1984

Table 2 shows the name of the colleges and their respective libraries which have manuscripts in their collection. The libraries are arranged in chronological order of the year of establishment.

**Table 3: Manuscripts Collection in College Libraries**

SI No	Name of Library	Type of Manuscript			No. of manuscript
		Sanchipat	Tulapat	Paper	
1	North Gauhati College Library	0	0	12	12
2	Rangia College Library	4	0	0	4
3	JN College Library	4	0	3	7
4	LCB College Library	1	0	0	1
5	Pub Kamrup College Library	14	0	42	56
6	Suren Das College Library	0	0	13	13
7	Saraighat College Library	1	0	0	1
8	KC Das Commerce College Library	5	0	0	5
9	P.B. Anchalik Mahavidyalaya Library	29	0	0	29
<b>Total</b>		<b>58 (45.31%)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70 (54.69%)</b>	<b>128</b>

From table 3, it can be stated that the college libraries have a total of 128 manuscripts out of which 58 (45.31%) are Sanchipat manuscripts and 70 (54.69%) are paper manuscripts. Pub Kamrup College Library has the highest number of manuscripts sharing 43.75% of the total out of which 25% are Sanchipat Manuscripts and 75% are Paper Manuscripts. LCB College Library and Saraighat College Library have the least number of manuscripts sharing only 0.78% each of the total and both the library has Sanchipat Manuscript. It is also observed that the surveyed college libraries have two types of manuscripts, that are Sanchipat manuscript and Paper manuscript. However no record has been found regarding availability of Tulapat manuscript. The shares of Sanchipat and Paper manuscripts are 45.31% and 54.69% respectively.

**Table 4: Status of Digitization of Manuscript**

SI No	Name of Library	Digitized the Manuscript (Yes/No)	Digital Access of Manuscript (Yes/No)
1	North Gauhati College Library	No	No
2	Rangia College Library	No	No
3	Jawaharlal Nehru College Library	Yes	Yes
4	LCB College Library	Yes	Yes
5	Pub Kamrup College Library	Yes	No
6	Suren Das College Library	Yes	Yes
7	Saraighat College Library	No	No
8	KC Das Commerce College Library	Yes	No
9	P.B. Anchalik Mahavidyalaya Library	No	No
<b>Total Count of Yes</b>		<b>5 (55.56%)</b>	<b>3 (33.33%)</b>



From table 4 it is found that 5 (55.56%) libraries out of the 9 have digitized their manuscript collection; on the contrary, it means 44.44% libraries have yet to take initiative regarding digitization of their manuscript collection. The librarian of Pub Kamrup College has also informed that they have completed the digitization process of twelve (12) manuscripts and the digitization process is going on. It is also found that only 3 (33.33%) out of 9 libraries have given access to the digitized manuscript i.e. contents of the manuscripts.

It is to be mentioned that there are two other colleges in Kamrup Rural district, that are Sonapur College and Dakshin Kamrup Girls' College, which have manuscripts in their college and those are kept in their college museum but not in the library. Dakshin Kamrup Girls' College has 24 Sanchipat Manuscripts and Sonapur College has one Sanchipat manuscript. Both the colleges have not taken any initiative for digitization of the manuscripts.

## 11. Findings

The following can be noted as findings of the study –

- i) Only 19.15% colleges have manuscript collections in their library and manuscript collection is much higher in the college libraries situated in rural areas than metro areas.
- ii) The total collection of manuscripts is 128 only out of which 122 (95.31%) are in the libraries in Kamrup district and 6 (4.69%) are in Kamrup(M) district.
- iii) The college libraries have two types of manuscripts that are Sanchipat manuscript and Paper manuscript. The shares of Sanchipat and Paper manuscripts are 45.31% and 54.69% respectively.
- iv) The status of digitization of manuscripts is not encouraging; only 55.56% libraries out of the 9 have digitized their manuscript collection. It indicates that 44.44% of libraries have yet to take initiative regarding digitization of their manuscript collection. Again, only 3 (33.33%) college libraries have given access to their digitized manuscripts through their digital library.
- v) The College libraries are yet to provide significant contribution to achieve sustainable development goals for preservation and conservation of cultural and intellectual heritage of the state.
- vi) The library professionals in college libraries have faced challenges in generating Metadata of manuscript which is a prime issue related to digitization of manuscript. It is well-known that metadata plays a vital role in organizing and providing contextual information about manuscripts. This helps in their searchability and accessibility. The challenges are-
  - a) The script and language of age-old manuscripts are very difficult to read, which needs specific skill.
  - b) As such, the specific metadata elements including authorship, title, subject, date etc are essential for a metadata but in case of manuscripts available in the college libraries these elements could not be identified properly.

- c) Another challenge is incompleteness. Generally a manuscript is a collection of numbers of folios. Missing folios from a particular manuscript creates problems in generating metadata.

## 12. Conclusion

Digitization and giving access to the knowledge contents of the manuscripts available in college libraries is a challenging task which needs special skill and care. Though at individual level the college librarians have been facing challenges for digitization of manuscripts and generation of metadata. For that, college librarians may take help from the working model of the National Mission for Manuscripts. It is to be mentioned that it is a moral responsibility of the library professionals to actively take part to achieve the concerned sustainable development goals of the United Nations. It is also to be noted that the National Mission for Manuscripts had played the role of torch bearer in India in this aspect. The National Mission for Manuscripts is a Government of India project. This Mission is treated as an apex body in India to look after our manuscript treasure in a scientific way. This Mission has been working for the indexing of the manuscripts in digital form.

In conclusion, it can be stated that digitization of manuscripts not only helps in preservation but also boosts sustainability through its increased accessibility, research facilitation, potential damage mitigation, cost reduction and innovative uses beyond its conventional use. We can preserve our priceless treasure trove of our cultural legacy and make it more sustainable and accessible for upcoming generations to enjoy and learn by embracing digitization.

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#### **About Authors**

**Dr. Nabajyoti Das**, Librarian, Handique Girls' College, Guwahati, Assam

Email: [nabajyotidaslib@gmail.com](mailto:nabajyotidaslib@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3212-3040>

**Dr. Nirmal Ranjan Mazumdar**, Librarian, Pub Kamrup College, Kamrup, Assam

Email: [nrmazumdar@gmail.com](mailto:nrmazumdar@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3805-2952>

**Dr. Kishore Kalita**, Librarian, Barbhag College, Nalbari, Assam

Email: [kklibsc@gmail.com](mailto:kklibsc@gmail.com)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7988-2592>