

Samshodhana Mandala: An Important 'Private Library' in Nepal

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Abstract:

The paper deals with the private library of Dr. Mahes Raj Pant. This study aims to explore his private library status and the reasons behind his enormous collections. Some reports have shown that private libraries in Nepal are expanding, and this paper explains on what kinds of collections they have in their collections, how they are organized, the future aim for their library and etc. In Nepalese history, private collectors have greatly aided in the growth of national collections. So, if the government is interested in preserving valuable documents of this library or allowing the authority to run it, this study gives light to such a potentiality.

Keywords: Private Library, Personal Library, Mahesh Raj Pant, Personal collections, Nepal.

Background:

Almost all early libraries were private and belonged to the rulers, temples, and other institutions, and usually limited facilities to nobility, aristocracy, scholars, or priests. The earliest known private libraries found in Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra near Latakia, Syria, dated to around 1200 B.C.E.) and the Library of Ashurbanipal, named after Ashurbanipal (ca.668-627 B.C.E.), the last great king of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, in Nineveh (near modern Mosul, Iraq), carries collection of thousands of clay tablets with cuneiform script. Up to the nineteenth century, private libraries predominated (Private Library - New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). The expansion of the book trade and the evolution of the private library were inextricably linked (Hughes, 2016).

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While the history of public libraries in Nepal was short, it had a good history for private ones. Private libraries prevailed in the early years after the then prime minister Shree Teen Chandra Shumsher's journey to England in 1908 A.D. Some bibliophiles instituted some major private libraries in Nepal, they are Kaiser Library from Kaiser Shumsher (In 1908, he traveled to London with his father Chandra Shumsher and he began building his personal library after his return from Britain) ('Kaiser Library', n.d.), Bharati Bhawan (Around 1910) from the Royal Priest Pt. Hem Raj Pandey, Singha Library (collections) from Singh Shumsher JBR, Dilliraman-Kalyani Regmi Library and Museum (1980), by Dr. Dilli Raman Regmi (*DRKRM Library*, n.d.). Bharati Bhawan's collection were purchased for the nations in 1956 (*Nepal National Library*, n.d.). Kaiser Library with thirty thousand collections and 31.5 ropanies of land with mansion was donated to the government in 1968 (अधिकारी, २०७८), Singh Library was handed to the Tribhuvan University Central Library in July, 1977 (*Tribhuvan University Central Library*, n.d.) and Dilliraman Regmi made a will in 1981 to transfer his entire property including the library and museum to the Ministry of Education after his death (*DRKRM Library*, n.d.). It shows that in Nepalese history, private collectors as well as private libraries have significantly contributed to the nation's intellectual heritage.

Stepping stone of the Samshodhana Mandala:

Samshodhana Mandala has a seven decades long history which begins from 2009 B.S. by publishing some articles of the students of Sanskrit Pathsala, which was established by late Prof. Nayraj Pant³ (1913-2002) after returning back by completing his education from the Banaras, India in 1995 B.S. (पन्त, २०७९) (Pant, 2019). Thus, in the year 2009, the work of pure history writing was started on the basis of one's own knowledge and ability, finding the mistakes in the books about the history of Nepal. Along with Nayraj Pant, his students Dhanvajra Vajracharya, Gyanmani Nepal, Bholanath Paudel, Ramji Tewari, Devi Prasad Bhandari, Shankarman Rajvanshi, Gautam Vajra Vajracharya, Mahesh Raj Pant, Nayanath Paudel, Dinesh Raj Pant and others were joined. In 2018 B.S., this group formally established the Samshodhana Mandala, Research Institute for Nepalese and Sanskrit Studies. However, some of them passed away, while others departed; as a result, only two sons of Nayraj Pant, viz. Dr. Mahesh Raj Pant and Prof. Dinesh Raj Pant remain among its members. Additionally, since his brother has a different residence, Dr. Mahesh Raj Pant is solely responsible for taking care of the Samshodhana Mandala.

Dr. Pant is a founder editor of the quarterly journal 'Purnima' published by Samshodhana Mandala. According to him this library is a trinity of; his personal collections, collections of Samshodhana Mandala and collections of his father and ancestors

3 *Prof. Nayaraj Pant is a renowned historian who had made a pioneer contribution in mathematics, astronomy, history, culture etc. (Acharya, 2012). He has published dozens of books and hundreds of research articles.*

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(Laxmipati & Naya Raj Collections), which holds more than 16000 books and plus other documents. He received his PhD from Germany. He was awarded from "*Padmashree Sadhana Samman-2075*" (<https://ne.wikipedia.org>, 2020) and Samshodhana Mandala was awarded from "*Jagadamba Shree Puraskar-2068*" for the contribution of '*Iteration and Research in Nepali history*' (*Jagadamba Shree Puraskar*, 2023). He was nominated as a honorary member of Nepal Academy in 2077 ("Nepal Academy," 2023). He had published 14 books and more than 650 articles (Paudel, 2022). This study aims to explore his personal library status. Personal library has been growing in Nepal since people are aware of the importance of knowledge sources and their proper management. Personal libraries with abundant and important collection could serve for information seekers too. Since Dr. Pant is renown historian, scholar and researcher, his collections are worth to explore.

1. Collections: Archival documents, rare books, newspapers:

In total there are about 16,000 books and documents in his library. Collections are about different disciplines mainly covering of history, religion, astronomy, newspapers, patro (almanac), manuscripts and etc.

Table 1: *Samshodhana Mandala's Collections (upto 20th April 2023)*

S.N.	Category	Quantity	Remarks
1	Books		
a.	Nepal Sambandhi Devnagari Collections	5828	Books having in Indic Script
b.	Nepal Sambandhi Roman Collections	1733	Books having in Roman Script
c.	Bharat Sambandhi Devnagari Collections	320	
d.	Bharat Sambandhi Roman Collections	980	
e.	Sanskrit Belles-lettres	800	
f.	Purane Itihasa	350	
g.	Vedic Literature	135	
h.	Jyotish	250	
i.	Ayurveda	150	
j.	Sanskrit Polity (Prachin Arthasastra)	150	

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S.N.	Category	Quantity	Remarks
k.	Buddhism	350	
l.	Sanskrit Sexual Science (Kamsastra)	100	
m.	Nepali Literature	1000	
n.	Newari Literature	150	
o.	Indian Literature	500	
p.	Western Literature (mostly in English)	200	
q.	Western History & Philosophy	300	
r.	Indian historical journals	300	
s.	Dictionaries	1000	English, Nepali, Hindi, French, Urdu, German, Tibetan, Latin, Italian, Sanskrit, Pali. Prakrit, Newari, Chinese etc.
t.	Traditional Sanskrit Lexicons	200	
u.	Tantra	125	
v.	Linguistics	150	
w.	Sanskrit Grammar	700	
x.	Sanskrit Law	250	
y.	Sanskrit Art & Architecture	150	
z.	Sanskrit Philosophy	150	
2.	Newspapers		
a.	Gorkhapatra	-	1982-1985, 1987, 1989-2007, 2028-2042, 2044-2054, 2058 to till
b.	Kantipur	-	2058 to till
c.	Nagarik	-	2066 to till
d.	The Rising Nepal	-	1975-1983, 2002 to till
e.	The Kathmandu Post	-	2001 to till
f.	República	-	2009 to till
g.	Annapurna Post	-	2059 to till

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S.N.	Category	Quantity	Remarks
h.	Naya Patrika	-	2067 to now
i.	Awaj Daily	-	2007-2008
3.	Manuscripts	2500	
4.	Photo of palm leaf (Tadpatra) deeds	4000	
5.	Original photo of palm leaf	100	
6.	Maps	-	Counting in process
7.	Photos	-	Counting in process
8.	Coins & Bank Notes	-	Counting in process

Out of them there are several rare books which was not found its second copy in other libraries. Among them, a calendar dating back almost three hundred and fifty years (in the Newari script of 797-98 N.S.), a copy of the Treaty of Gorkha and Kumaon in 1848 B.S., 79 cubit long horoscope (*china*: the record of the birth) of King Grivanyuddha Vikram Shah, some papers from Hanumandhoka, documents related to the important expenses that are going to be sold have been kept under protection, around the year 2020 B.S. and some on Jyotish (astrology) books (Paudel, 2022).

Newspaper was archived by compiling several issues into a single book, called bond volume. Even now 10-15 newspapers are collected daily.

His collections are rich in subject content, and rare of their availability in market. So, they are worth to preserve. Moreover, his collections tend to increase more in future, since he loved to acquire documents that he requires for his research, and his experience convinced him that there is not a single good library in Nepal that could help him for his information needs, and research needs (Mahes Raj Pant, Personal communication, January 4, 2023).

2. Organization of the documents:

a. Building/Area: library is a growing organism:

Dr. Pant's library covers 20 rooms. At Dallu, Kathmandu he has a big building with 4.5 stories, of which 2.5 stories having 15 rooms are occupied by library purpose. Except that he has rented 5 rooms nearby his home from the year 2079 B.S). It is a huge coverage. A person who is investing lots of money for the adequate space of those important documents is remarkable. Has he thought of its alternatives? According to him, his love for those documents did not permit of thinking the alternative for it. Having and

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reading physical documents is the preferable choice, however, the growing need of space could be costly and out of control at any moment. Digitization could be one solution, still, the initial cost of digitization needs higher cost, skill, and effort too.

b. Staffs/Manpower:

The 79 Years young scholar Dr. Panta himself is not sufficient to manage those huge collections. He has been hiring seven staffs to organize his library; five staffs are cataloguing the documents in excel (two for manuscript cataloguing and three for other documents), one staff is for digital preservation of manuscripts and one works as an administrator.

c. Classification System:

Documents are listed into Excel sheet with bibliographical details into different titles like "Nepal Sambandhi Nepali Collections' for Nepali title of the books about Nepal, 'Nepal

Sambandhi Roman Collections' for English title of the books about Nepal and etc.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	विवरण	लेखक	संस्करण	संपादक/अनुवादक	प्रकाशक	स्थान	वर्ष
5796	हेछाकृपा (किरात लोककथा)	वर्तमान		वर्तमान	नेपाल राजकीय प्रज्ञा-प्रतिष्ठान	काठमाडौं	२०५७
5797	हेटौडा भीमसेन मन्दिर स्मारिका			सं. छत्रबहादुर कायस्थ, भीमहरि जोशी	भीमसेन मन्दिर पुनर्निर्माण समिति	हेटौडा	२०६७
5798	हे, दत्तात्रेय ! [कुमाऊं की लोक संस्कृति और साहित्य]	शिवानी			हिन्द पब्लिक बुक	दिल्ली	ई. १९९६
5799	हेमराज भित्तुना-देछा अभिनन्दन-ग्रन्थ			सत्यमोहन जोशी	बोध परिषद्	ललितपुर	२०४९
5800	हेमराजया हस्तलिपिकला			सत्यमोहन जोशी	लोकसाहित्यपरिषद्	ललितपुर	ने.सं. ११२१
5801	हे.मा. ईश्वरराज अर्याल स्मृतिग्रन्थ				ईश्वरराज अर्याल स्मृति प्रतिष्ठान	काठमाडौं	२०७१
5802	होचो कदको श्रलो मान्छे			शेषराज सिवाकोटी	ज्ञानगुन साहित्य प्रतिष्ठान	काठमाडौं	२०६७
5803	होचो खोका	शिवहरि घिमिरे			स्वदेश प्रकाशन प्रा.लि.	काठमाडौं	२०७५
5804	होम-निर्देश	नरेशमान बज्राचार्य			विरल प्रकाशन	काठमाडौं	२०६३
5805	होरी देउडा				टीकापुर सांस्कृतिक समाज	कैलाली	२०६१
5806	ह्याडला दौखाड				नेपाल तामाङ राष्ट्रिय मुक्ति मोर्चा नेपाल केन्द्रीय प्रकाशन विभाग	काठमाडौं	२०६२
5807	ह्याडला डाजाड स्मारिका				ह्याडला डाजाड र होभीस्टर		२०६२

Figure 1: List of 'Nepal Sambandhi Nepali Collection'

Sambandhi Roman Collections' for English title of the books about Nepal and etc.

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	TITLE	AUTHOR	EDITION	Editor / Translator	PUBLISHER	PLACE	YEAR
1716	Western Himalayas and Tibet	Thomas Thomson	Reprint		Cosmo Publications	New Delhi	1978
1717	What Did Amśuvarman Write Rhetoric or Grammar ?	Mahes Raj Pant			Mahes Raj Pant	Kathmandu	1985
1718	What Led to the 2006 Democratic Revolution in Nepal ?	Chaitanya Mishra			Social Science Baha	Kathmandu	2015
1719	The Wheel of Communication--Himawatkhandana and Neighbourhood	P. Kharel			Kamala Kharel	Kathmandu	2015
1720	Whither Nepal	D.R. Regmi				Kathmandu	1952
1721	Who's Who of Participants in the Symposium on Buddhism's Contribution to Art, Letters and Philosophy					New Delhi	1956
1722	With a King in the Clouds	Erika Leuchtag			Hutchinson of London	London	1978
1723	Women and Polyandry in Rawain-Jaunpur	G.S. Bhatt			Rawat Publications	Jaipur	1991
1724	Wonders of Lo: The Aristic Heritage of Mustang			Ererto Lo Bue	The Mark Foundation	Mumbai	2010
1725	Woodcarving in the Himalayan Region	O.C. Handa			Indus Publishing Company	New Delhi	2006
1726	Words and Deeds: Hindu and Buddhist Rituals in South Asia			Ed. Jorg Gengnagel, Ute Husken, Srilata Raman	Harrassowitz Verlag	Wiesbaden	2005
1727	Written in Stone: Inscriptions of the Kathmandu Valley's Three Kingdoms, vol.1	Bronwen Bledsoe			Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations		2004

Figure 2: List of 'Nepal Sambandhi Roman Collections'

d. Furniture:

Every library needs furniture to keep records organized and safe, as well as for security reasons. Moreover, attractive furniture contributes to the library's aesthetic appeal, which can be seen in this library.

This library's bookracks were prettier than those at other libraries. They were constructed using sturdy wood or plywood, which indicates that they will last for a very long time. These bookracks are extra from others because most bookracks have panels; we cannot see inner books until we open them. There are more than 2 dozen bookracks in the library. According to him, he just spent 96,000 Nepalese Rupees on a bookrack that measured 7 feet by 8 feet. The one and only example of how much he has invested in the furniture is sufficient.



Some of the books are kept horizontally, and some are kept vertically piled. These books do not bear any information for the

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shelving purpose. There are no guiding notices pasted on the shelves. It is only known for the library arranger or the familiar for Dr. Pant only. However, they were kept as per broad subject, and as per the language. It was explored through observation of his personal library.

e. Security System:

Most of the books were locked on the bookracks. Dr. Pant told that 'he used to lock those books for the purpose of security from the dust, insects, rodents and from the people too'. He also used to keep Sichuan Pepper (Timur) to protect from insects in need. He is also using ex-libris⁴ system in his most of the books by signing with purchase date for his personal collections and stamping of Samshodhana Mandala's logo in Samshodhana Mandala's collections.

Dr. Pant explained that he wouldn't have a huge collection if he was not interested in reading. He loves to write too and writing demands lots of readings; his collections grew up and automatically turned into personal library.

Dr. Pant is using different digital technologies like computers, DSL cameras, scanners, printers, and etc. in his library. He states that 'implication of digital technology in library is a regular process of development. He also mentions that in past there were books in the racks but in present in the computer. He accepts that because of digital technology, converting his manuscripts for digital preservation is becoming easier. In near future he is going to launch digital database for public access.

4. *Ex-libris (Bookplates) is a mark of ownership used to identify the owner with his books. Its form generally falls into one of three categories: Typographical, Heraldic, or Pictorial. The earliest known example of a graphic bookplate was produced in Germany in the year 1480. Basically, it was popular in the European country. The 'Golden Age' of the ex-libris was from about 1875 to the nineteen twenties; from this date the decline began (Beddingham, 1958). In Nepal Rajguru Hemraj Pandit's books were found embossed, which can be taken as a good example of ex-libris (bookplate) system used in Nepal at the 20th century.*

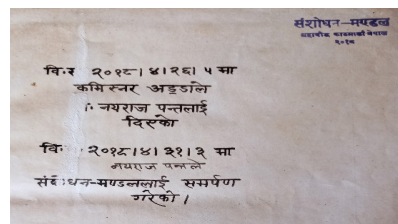


Figure 8

Stamp of Samsodhan Mandala on the top of the right side

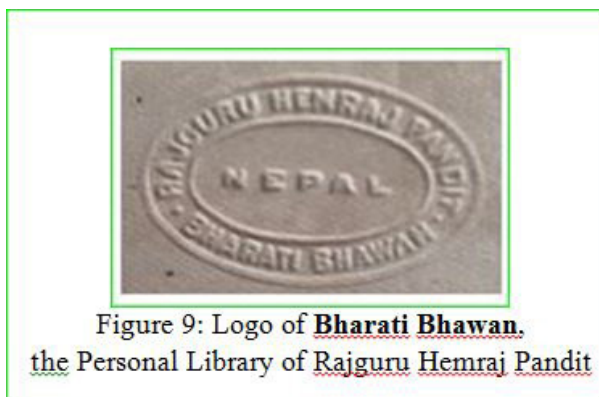


Figure 9: Logo of **Bharati Bhawan**, the Personal Library of **Rajguru Hemraj Pandit**

3. Sustainability of the library:

The former president of Nepal, Mrs. Bidhya Devi Bhandari, made a visit to his library on 2077 BS Chaitra (Nepal Press, 2021), and the Nepal Government also donated fifty lakh rupees to run the library (Paudel, 2022), demonstrating that this library was in the concern of the government. Mary Slusser used the word 'Impeccable Historians' to praise the contribution of Samshodhana Mandala's members in Nepalese history re-writing (खतिवडा, २०७४), also shows that it was popular with foreigners too. However, Dr. Pant is worried about the library's long-term viability. Right now, he is processing to digitize his manuscripts with the help of the staffs even in the 78th years old age. Out of 77,000 folios only 23,626 manuscript folios have been converted into digital from up to the Chaitra end of 2079, which is only 24% of the documents (भेटवाल, २०८०).

He told that 'My son is out of the country and he is out of this profession, so I will be nostalgic if I thought its future after my death.' He continued that 'I know that there are several libraries which were handed to the government or other libraries according to the will of collectors but worried after seeing the worst conditions of those libraries such as Kaiser Library, Dilliraman Kalyani Memorial Library and etc.' He disclosed that one of the officers of Nepal Government's made approach to handover his collections to that library where they will preserve his documents in separate sections in his name but he denied and said 'I won't handover my documents, until I am active'.

4. Conclusions:

A person is able enough to have good number of document collections, rare documents, and important documents, if he/she desires for them. The family legacy of scholarly activities boosts for having such enriched personal library, as Dr. Pant has. However, it is uncertain that the future generation would carry such legacy with them. Dr. Pant and his collections are the wealth of nation. His worry for the sustainability of his personal library should be one of the important agenda of the local government, and the central government too. It would be the golden chance for the government, if they were permitted for the authority to run it. But there is a big question of effective handling, responsibility and accountability performed by government in previous cases. Yet, who will be responsible for these precious collections? Hope for the answer of this serious question.

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