

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER
Rigvedasamhita, Rigvedasamhita-Padapatha and Rigvedasamhitabhashya

Ref N° 2006-58

Part A – Essential Information

1. SUMMARY

The *Vedas* are generally known as the scriptures of the Hindu community. However, being among the first literary documents in the history of humankind, they transcend far beyond their identity as scriptures. The *Rigveda*, the oldest among the four *Vedas*, is the fountain source of the so-called Aryan culture in all its manifestations that spread beyond the Indian subcontinent to large parts of South and South East Asia, as well as parts of Central Asia. This valuable treasure of the ancient world has been preserved in the form of manuscripts in India, and handed down over centuries from generation to generation.

Out of the total number of 28,000 Manuscripts housed at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, the 30 manuscripts of the *Rigveda* form a valuable part of the collection. These manuscripts evince several unique features in terms of scripts, accentuation marks and support material used, among others. Even the pioneering Indologist, Prof. F. Max Müller, used one of the *Rigveda* manuscripts currently at the Institute to prepare his famous critical edition of the *Rigveda*, complete with a translation of one of the earliest known commentaries¹ – that of Sayana. The material in this collection of *Rigveda* manuscripts was also used to prepare the well known Critical Edition of the *Rigveda* by the Vaidika Samshodhana Mandala, a premier institute in Pune for Vedic Studies. These manuscripts are of a high value as unique examples of the intellectual and cultural heritage not only of India, but of the world.

2. DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1. Name

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2.2. Relationship to the Documentary Heritage Nominated

¹ In the very diverse Indian literary tradition, commentaries were written by scholars as aids in interpreting a variety of texts, often esoteric in nature. Therefore, most major texts to have been written in the Indian subcontinent have inspired a number of often equally learned commentaries.

Prof. M. G. Dhadphale is the Honorary Secretary of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute where this collection is housed, and is therefore responsible for its maintenance, cataloguing and preservation. Dr. Sudha Gopalakrishnan is Mission Director of the National Mission for Manuscripts, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India, which funds a Manuscript Resource Centre at the Institute for the purpose of documenting manuscripts and manuscript collections in surrounding areas, and a Manuscript Conservation Centre at the Institute for the conservation of manuscripts. She is also therefore, responsible for cataloguing and conserving manuscripts at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, besides a vast number of other institutions in India.

2.3. Contact Person

Both the above are in charge of the nomination process.

2.4. Contact Details:

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3. IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION

3.1. Name and Identification Details

The chief features of the Collection may be summarized as follows:

1. **Titles:**
Rigvedasamhita, Rigvedasamhita-Padapatha and Rigvedasamhitabhashya
2. **Total Number of Manuscripts:**
30
3. **Writing/Support Material:**
One manuscript is written on birch bark and the remaining 29 are written on paper.
4. **Script(s):**
One manuscript written on birch bark is in the ancient *Sharada* script and the remaining 29 manuscripts are written in the *Devanagari* script. All the manuscripts are in Sanskrit language.
5. **Oldest Dated Manuscript:**

No. 5/1882-83 (1464 AD)

6. Other Details:

Sixteen of the manuscripts contain the *Sayanabhashya*². Five of the manuscripts contain the *Padapatha*³.

A particularly important manuscript in this collection is the one from Kashmir, written on birch bark, in the *Sharada* script (No. 5/1875-76). It is significant in terms of its historical, intellectual and aesthetic value. The importance of this manuscript is paramount given the unfortunate turbulent situation in Kashmir, where many manuscripts have been lost forever.

3.2 Description of the Manuscript Collection

Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, is renowned all over the world for its very fine collection of Indian manuscripts. The collection of *Rigveda* manuscripts in its care is especially rich given the historicity of the work itself and the fact that the Institute has five extremely rare, complete *Rigveda* manuscripts. The *Rigveda* itself, besides being of great literary value, preserves in itself one of the earliest and oldest memories of the world from a time close to as early as three millennia ago. A complete manuscript of the work contains the fullest expression of one of humankind's earliest achievements in the area of the formation of a worldview and the connection between nature and life.

3.2.1. Description, Inventory and Catalogue

Please see attached list of manuscripts and cataloguing details as Annexure 1.

3.2.2 History of the Collection

In 1868, the then Government of the Bombay Presidency appointed Drs. George Bühler and F. Kielhorn to search for and collect manuscripts from the Presidency and other areas of the country. Subsequently other scholars were also entrusted with the work. The details of the collection work are summarised as follows:

Years	Name of the Scholar	No. of Manuscripts Collected
1868-1881	George Bühler	3,118
1868-1882	F. Kielhorn	970
1879-1895	R. G. Bhandarkar	6,681
1882-1899	Peter Peterson	4,606
1895-1902	Kathawate	176
1900-1915	S. R. Bhandarkar	834
1902-1907	K. B. Pathak	239
1907-1915	V. S. Ghate	95

² The *Sayanabhashya* is one of the earliest commentaries on the *Rigveda* and was written by the sage Sayana.

³ *Padpatha* means that the main text is broken up into separate *padas* or words as opposed to being in the form of continuous, unbroken lines.

The manuscripts were initially deposited at Elphinstone College, Mumbai (then Bombay). However, it was felt that the climate of Mumbai was not suitable for the preservation of manuscripts. So in 1878, the manuscripts were transferred to Deccan College, Pune. As the establishment of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute was already underway, its founders met the then Governor of the Presidency, Lord Willingdon, who on their request ordered to transfer the manuscripts to the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. The collection of about 20,000 manuscripts was placed under the supervision of the eminent scholar Prof. P. K. Gode, the first Curator of the Institute. In the course of time about 8,000 manuscripts were added to this "Government Collection" of manuscripts as it came to be known.

These manuscripts are written in different languages, in different scripts, on different materials and belong to different periods. They deal with a variety of topics such as religion, philosophy, logic, linguistics, drama, poetry, arts and science. Considering the value and great cultural importance of this collection and of the Institute itself, the National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi, has identified the Institute as one of its Manuscript Resource Centres as well as a Manuscript Conservation Centre.

All the manuscripts of the *Rigveda* being nominated for 'Memory of the World Register' are from the Government Collection.

3.2.3 History of Cataloguing and Some Bibliographic References

Twenty six manuscripts have been described in detail as entries 1 to 26 of the first part of the first volume of the Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts, compiled by the Assistant to the Professor of Sanskrit, Deccan College, Pune, forwarded by Prof. S. K. Belvalkar and published by the Government of Bombay in 1916.

Further, 13 of the manuscripts have been taken notice of by Theodore Aufrecht in his *Catalogus Catalogorum*. The manuscripts have also been included in the *New Catalogus Catalogorum*, Vol. III, pp. 14, 17 and 21, compiled by the University of Madras with support from the National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi.

The manuscripts can be referred to through the card catalogue of manuscripts maintained by the Institute. The computerization of the card catalogue is also underway.

The Collection has also been catalogued for the National Electronic Database created by the National Mission for Manuscripts. This Database that seeks to register and collate information on manuscripts and manuscript repositories on standard basic and descriptive formats will shortly available on the Mission's website.

Twenty eight of the thirty manuscripts have been microfilmed by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi.

In 2006-2007, 500 of the Institute's most valuable and rare manuscripts, including the Rig Veda collection, will be digitized by the National Mission for Manuscripts. In 2006-2007, the *Rigveda* collection and 470 other precious and unique manuscripts in the Institute's collection will be digitized.

3.2.4 Condition and Storage:

(1) Material

One manuscript is written on Birch Bark.

Twenty nine manuscripts are written on Paper.

(2) Condition

(a) Birch Bark Manuscript

The manuscript suffers from inherent brittleness.

The edges of some of the folios are worn out.

It is free from dust and is kept away from atmospheric pollutants.

(b) Paper Manuscripts

Overall, the condition of these manuscripts is good.

They are free from dust and kept away from atmospheric pollutants.

(3) Storage

(a) The Storage Space

The Manuscripts are stored in the southern wing of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in a hall measuring 16.46 metres by 7.93 metres with an extension to the south measuring 9.15 metres by 6.1 metres. The temperature and humidity are well controlled by the thick walls of dressed stone and a high tiled roof. The dry weather of the city of Pune is also conducive for manuscripts storage. There is, thus, hardly any threat from insects and fungi. Rodents, found rarely, are controlled with appropriate measures. The hall has doors and windows on the north and south walls. The cupboards are arranged back to back, facing east and west to minimize the exposure of manuscripts to dust and atmospheric pollutants.

(b) The Cupboards

The cupboards in which the manuscripts are stored are made of well seasoned Burma Teak, reportedly a hundred years old.

These cupboards are placed on uniform blocks of dressed stone with an elevation of 15 centimetres from the floor.

(c) The Birch Bark Manuscript

This special manuscript is stored in a cushioned box of hard cardboard, lined with Rexene on the outside. The box is kept in a wooden drawer of a wooden cupboard specially designed for the manuscript.

(d) The Paper Manuscripts

Each of these manuscripts is supported on both faces by cardboard and then wrapped in appropriately sized sheets of destarched red cotton cloth, tied tightly with strong string. Each is placed erect on their broader edges in wooden cupboards at the places assigned to them according their accession numbers.

(4) Preventive Measures of Conservation Adopted

(a) Birch Bark Manuscript

Its edges are lined with paper.

Sheets of soft and thin tissue paper have been inserted between every two folios.

Handling of the manuscript is restricted.

(b) Paper Manuscripts

These are dusted regularly by a full time employee of the Institute.

Handling of the manuscripts is restricted.

(5) Curative Measures of Conservation:

Curative treatment may be considered if and when necessary for the survival of the *Rigveda* manuscripts.

3.2.6 Referees

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4. JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION

Uniqueness and Significance:

The *Rigveda* is considered to be the earliest literary document in the world. It is a collection of poems, prayers and songs sung by the Aryans mainly in praise of nature and its bounty, in all its various manifestations. Nature forms, in fact, the canvas for the portrayal of the play of human emotions and feelings. It is highly praised by scholars as a genuine work of art and not a mere conglomerate of poetry. This collection of poems, composed in Sanskrit, one of the world's oldest languages, is one of the wonders of the world because it has preserved for us intact, not only a vibrant expression of human imagination, aspiration, ambition and ideology more than three thousand years old, but also the aesthetics of expression in terms of sound, intonation and accent. *Rigveda*, which is described by F. Max Müller as "the earliest record of the religious institutes of the natives of India" has been orally transmitted through the ages with little change in its language and intonation. It is generally accepted that the *Rigveda* is one of the four *Vedas* traditionally regarded as the pillars of Indian Culture.

In Europe, philological investigation of the *Vedas* began in 1838 with the publication of an edition of the first portion of the *Rigveda* by Friedrich Rosen in London. But it was the French Orientalist Eugene Burnouf, who taught at the College of France in the 1840s, who gathered around him a circle of pupils who later became prominent Vedic scholars. Among them were Rudolph Roth, who wrote a book on the history of *Veda*, and F. Max Müller, who edited the *Rigveda* along with the commentary of Sayana which first appeared in 1849. Theodore Aufrecht published a complete translation of the text of the hymns of the *Rigveda* in 1861-1863. Max Müller remarked that with the introduction of *Rigveda* to the West, "a new world was opened up".

Out of the different recensions of the *Rigvedasamhita* only a single one from *Shakala Shakha*⁴ has come down to us, the text consisting of 1028 hymns. These hymns (*Suktas*) are divided into 10 books called *Mandalas* (which means 'circles').

The language of parts of the *Rigveda* proves indisputably that the *Rigveda* is the oldest text available to us in any part of the world. The language of the *Rigveda* also proves that it is not a single, unitary work but comprises of older and later elements. The majority of the hymns are found in books 2 to 7 which are generally called 'family books' as each one of them is ascribed traditionally to a particular family of sages. The Sanskrit word *rishi* meaning 'sage' is often understood in the sense of a 'seer' because according to the legend, the hymns in the *Rigveda* were not composed but rather, seen by the sages. Thus according to tradition, the *Rigveda* is a revealed text.

The second *Mandala* is traditionally ascribed to the family of Gritsamada, the third to that of Vishwamitra, the fourth to Vamadeva, the fifth to Atri, the sixth to that of Bharadvaja, the seventh to that of Vashistha and the eighth book is considered to belong to the family of Kanya. While the principle of collection of hymns in the first eight *Mandalas* is authorship, the principle of

⁴ The *Rigveda* has two main *Shakhas* or branches of learning – *Bashkala* and *Shakala*

collection of hymns in the ninth *Mandala* is that of a deity. Thus the hymns in the ninth *Mandala* belong to a particular deity, namely, Soma. The first and the tenth *Mandalas* are also based on the principle of authorship but here authorship is ascribed to numerous sages. The sages in the first *Mandala* are referred to as *Satarcinam* which means those who have written a hundred verses. The sages of the tenth *Mandala* are divided into *Shudrasuktas* and *Mahasuktas* i.e. sages who have composed 'small hymns' or 'big hymns'.

Another method of dividing *Rigveda* is purely external and mechanical. The entire *Rigveda* is divided into 8 *Ashtakas*. Each *Ashtaka* consists of 8 *Adhyayas*. Each *Adhyaya* contains 33 *Vargas* and each *Varga* contains 5 verses. This division is practically useful for memorizing the text while the division based on *Mandala* has more resonance with the meaning of the *Rigveda*. The method based on *Ashtakas* has no reference to the text's meaning at all.

It can generally be said that the family books are older than the other books. There are also some hymns which are called *Khila* that are supplementary to the main text.

Regarding the original nature of the contents of the *Rigveda* two opposite views were expressed by two different scholars. Kaegi⁵ was of the opinion that most of the hymns are a simple outpouring of the hearts of poets and therefore the *Rigvedic* hymns are poetic in their nature. On the other hand, H. Oldenberg considered *Rigvedic* hymns as sacrificial songs and litanies with which the priests worshipped the gods and offered sacrifices. Thus according to Oldenberg the composers of the *Rigveda* were priests and sacrificial ritual experts. M. Winternitz brought together both the theories in pointing out that the *Rigvedic* hymns were of different types belonging also to different periods with some hymns being more poetic in nature and others being used in sacrificial rituals. He quoted M. Bloomfield, "In *Rigveda* we find mythology in the making and therefore the hymns are important for being studied in order to understand Vedic mythology".

There are thus a variety of *Rigvedic* hymns. The majority are in praise of different gods like Indra, Agni and Varuna in which they are implored to favour their devotees. There are also some hymns which can be described as pieces of poetry. The hymns addressed to the gods Ushas, Parjanya, Surya or Maruts can be included in this category. There are some hymns which are specifically connected with sacrificial rituals. The so-called *apri* (or 'propitiation') hymns belong to this class and are used to propitiate the deities believed to be different forms of Agni⁶. The hymns in the ninth *Mandala* are connected with Soma ritual⁷. Some verses in the tenth *Mandala* are connected with marriage ritual while some others are connected with the funeral ritual. In the tenth *Mandala* we also get philosophical hymns such as hymns describing the creation of the world like *Purushasukta* (10.90) and *Nasadiyasukta* (10.129). Another type of *Sukta* (verses), called *Samvadasuktas*, are important from the point of view of the history of Sanskrit drama for example, the hymn of the dialogue of Pururavas and Urvashi (10.95) or the dialogue of Yama and Yami (10.10). There are some hymns which are described as secular hymns. In this category we can mention the Frog-hymn (7.103) as well as the Dice-hymn (10.34). Lastly, there are some hymns containing praise of generosity like 10.117 which are interesting from the point of view of history of ancient royal and priestly families and endowments.

There are 30 manuscripts of *Rigveda* at the Institute, collected from different parts of India like Kashmir, Gujarat, the then Rajaputana, Central Provinces etc. They are written in *Sharada*, *Devanagari* and *Devanagari* with *Prishthamatra* and the material used for writing is birch bark as well as paper. The oldest of these manuscripts is dated 1464 A. D. It may be pointed out that manuscript no. 5/1875-76 was used by Prof. Max Müller for his edition of the *Rigveda* with Sayana's commentary.

⁵ Kaegi, Hermann Oldenberg, Moriz Winternitz and M. Bloomfield were all Indologists in the late nineteenth century and worked on translating and interpreting the *Rigveda*. Their work is still considered to be authoritative today.

⁶ Agni was believed to be the all powerful god and element.

⁷ Soma was an intoxicating drink considered to be sacred that was created from a kind of creeper and had ritual uses.

Out of these 30 manuscripts, 9 contain only the basic text. There are 5 manuscripts which contain the text along with *Padapathas* in which each meaningful unit of the words is separated from euphonic combination. The text of the *Padapatha* helps us in identifying every word separately and this ultimately helps us understand the meaning of the words to some extent.

All these manuscripts form a very important part of the cultural and social heritage, not only of India but of the entire world.

These manuscripts have been carefully preserved in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute for the last 88 years and must be preserved in future, too.

4.1 Authenticity

The manuscripts were collected by a team of eminent scholars such as George Bühler and F. Kielhorn and were carefully deposited in the custody of the Government of Bombay, from where they were transferred to Pune (Deccan College) for better care and preservation in late nineteenth century. The quality of the paper and birch bark clearly shows that their authenticity cannot be doubted. It has not been doubted hitherto by any scholar who handled and used them.

4.2 World Significance, Uniqueness and Irreplaceability

Vedic Culture, which spread far and wide over Central and South Asia in the first millennium of C. E. contributed significantly to the development of the Asian civilization. The history of many nations in this part of the world has been shaped by ancient Vedic Culture. According to some scholars traces of the history of communities occupying parts of Europe in the prehistoric period can also be found in this culture and its remnants. The world significance of literary documents such as the manuscripts described above is beyond doubt. The *Rigveda* is one of the knowledge pillars on which the superstructure of Asian culture is built.

This collection of *Rigveda* manuscripts is unique owing to the fact that it contains at least 5 manuscripts (Ms. No. 1/A1879-80, 1/A1881-82, 331/1883-84 and 5/Viś I) which have preserved the complete text of the *Rigveda* which belongs to antiquity and certainly not later than the second millennium B. C. E. In the history of manuscript collections the availability of a complete and intact text is a rare achievement. Second, 13 manuscripts in this collection contain one of the oldest available commentaries on the text, a valuable aid to interpret the *Rigveda*. Another equally valuable aid in interpreting the text is provided in 5 other manuscripts which contain the traditional word analysis of the text i.e. *Padapatha*. But for these aids in this collection, understanding the text of the *Rigveda* would have been quite difficult.

So important was this collection in interpreting and understanding the ancient literary work the *Rigveda* that the great Indologist Prof. F. Max Müller himself used one of the complete *Rigveda* manuscripts in this collection for his pioneering translation of the complete text and commentary in 1849.

These manuscripts are, indeed, irreplaceable mainly because the tradition of copying manuscripts is virtually extinct and secondly, because they represent beautiful specimens of old manuscripts from different parts of India including Kashmir. The manuscript 5/1875-76 is, for example, written on the birch bark. It is written in bold *Sharada* script which was in vogue during mediaeval period in Kashmir. The world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability of these manuscripts thus cannot be questioned.

5. The Criteria of (a) Time, (b) Place, (c) People, (d) Subject and Theme (e) Form and Style

(a) Time: The manuscripts contain a text that was composed not at a fixed point but over a period of centuries but whose oldest portions are perhaps three millennia old. It is a composition by several generations of poet-priests.

(b) Place: Similarly the songs and prayers were composed by poet-priests belonging to different regions, largely on the Indian sub continent, as the variety of natural phenomena described reveal.

(c) People: The composers of the songs represent the origin of different families, which are considered, even today, as the ancestors of the Hindus spread all over the world.

(d) Subject and Theme, and (e) Form and Style: These songs are, mainly, prayers to different deities. We do, however, come across a good number of poems discussing philosophical issues such as the origin of creation. The text of the *Rigveda* is further, interspersed with beautiful descriptions of nature on the one hand and various shades of human behaviour on the other. *Rigveda* is, thus, an important text for the scholars of Comparative Religion, Comparative Mythology, Ritual, Anthropology, prehistory of the humankind and Poetics. The hymns of the *Rigveda* are composed in a variety of metres, which will interest a modern student of poetry in general and classical poetry in particular.

4.4.1 Rarity:

The collection consists of a manuscript written in *Sharada* and birch bark procured from Kashmir where at present, no such manuscript is available. Further, as mentioned earlier, the collection contains at least 5 complete manuscripts of the *Rigveda* which is extremely rare for a text of such antiquity. Also, Prof. F. Max Müller used a manuscript in this collection for his edition of the *Rigveda*, first published in 1849.

4.4.2 Integrity:

A good number of manuscripts in this collection contain complete text intact, which is a rare phenomenon.

4.4.3 Threat:

The manuscripts are worn out by human handling, besides other factors like aging, climatic changes, and are susceptible to attacks from vandals.

4.4.4 Management:

Although all care is taken at the Institute to preserve these manuscripts, it is always necessary to take special steps for their conservation. Thanks to the National Mission for Manuscripts, New Delhi, the work of conservation of the collection has started.

5. LEGAL INFORMATION

5.1. Owner of the Documentary Heritage (Name and Contact Details)

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Phone and Fax No.: +91(20)25656932
Email: boril@vsnl.net

5.2. Custodian of the Documentary Heritage

Honorary Secretary, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune

5.3. Legal Status

(a) Category of Ownership:

Public Trust. The manuscripts are owned by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

(b) Accessibility:

The manuscripts are accessible on request for consultation during the office hours of the Institute (Monday to Friday, and on the first and the third Saturday of every month, from 1100 to

1730 hrs except on holidays). Due formalities completed, photocopying, acquiring copies of microfilms from IGNCA, New Delhi and photography without flash are permitted.

(c) Copyright Status:

The authors of the work are long deceased. The copyright of the catalogues, the images etc., however, is vested in the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

(d) Responsible Administration:

Care is being taken to keep the manuscripts safe (in lock and key) and to safeguard them from all possible factors that could contribute to their deterioration. The Honorary Secretary of BORI is legally responsible for safekeeping of the material. The responsibility is being exercised by keeping all the manuscripts under lock and key and making them available to students and scholars only under strict supervision of the Curator and his staff and under stringent conditions.

6. MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1. Current Storage and Custody:

The manuscripts are in the custody of Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. All of them are deposited in cupboards of well-seasoned Burma teakwood placed in the Manuscripts Hall (16.46 m X 7.93 m) and its extension being (9.15 m X 6.1 m), in the southern wing of the main building of the Institute.

Each folio of the rare birch bark manuscript is separated with tissue paper, is placed in a hard cardboard box lined with Rexene. This box is placed carefully in a special wooden drawer of a wooden cupboard specially meant for the manuscript. The other manuscripts, all written on paper, are supported with hard cardboards on both sides, wrapped in red cloth and are placed carefully in the Burma teak cupboards of the Manuscripts Library. Cleaning and insecticidal treatment is regularly carried out. Since the dry climate of Pune does not encourage growth of fungus and insects, the manuscripts are usually free from both these factors of deterioration. Curative treatment will be carried out as and when so felt necessary.

Part B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION

7. ASSESSMENT OF RISK

The manuscript collection at Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute has in the recent past been subjected to threat under public vandalism, provoked by some political organisations. In some instances the physical condition of the manuscripts is already poor or brittleness with the edges of pages cracking and these can be counted among the possible risks. Finally the Institute being a charitable trust has to manage a large collection of 28,000 manuscripts with limited funds available for preservation.

8. ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION

The manuscripts are given preventive conservation treatment regularly by way of dusting, cleaning and airing. They are kept in good climatic conditions and handling is limited as much as possible. A Manuscript Conservation Centre set up at the Institute by the National Mission for Manuscripts is providing extra support in the area of manuscript conservation.

LODGEMENT

This nomination is lodged by Dr. Sudha Gopalakrishnan, Mission Director, National Mission for Manuscripts, Ministry of Tourism and Culture, Government of India.

Signature

Date