

Preservation of Reading Materials in Libraries : A Practical Approach

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States that there is an alarming increase in deterioration of reading materials in libraries. Library staff and readers are not careful in handling documents. Suggests that careful handling, proper shelving, binding at appropriate time can check the future damage. Describes also some important preventive measures for environmental and insect control.

Preservation of reading materials is most serious problem in libraries today. Libraries are concentrating more on dissemination of information, with little care for preservation. There is an alarming increase in the deterioration of reading materials.

Techniques for organising and disseminating information are developing fast, but conservation field is still neglected and under-developed in our country. "The future will judge us by how wisely we have conserved the research treasure which we inherited, increased and willed to our successor"¹. If due attention is not paid for conservation there is every possibility that our cultural heritage and 'nation's collective memory' may disappear in libraries only. Our libraries are without trained personnel in conservation. In this context E. W. Browning says, "Libraries have asked for and library schools have trained assistant in book selection and in cataloguing and classification. But of what availed are well selected books made easily available through well organised catalogue if when found they are not in usable condition"².

The conservation is a term which embraces three closely related ideas: "preservation, protection and maintenance"³ "Area of conservation commences with the creation of text, extends onward to publication, thence to acquisition, and storage in libraries, and finally through bibliographic structures to access and use"⁴. This means that conservation concerns authors, publishers, librarians and readers. But librarians have comparatively more responsibility for conservation of reading materials available in their libraries. Conservation is two folded, i.e. preservation and restoration. In preservation, preventive measures are taken to stop or check or retard deterioration and in restoration, special treatment is to be given to the reading materials in order to bring them back to their original shape. Restoration is a technical area and needs special skill which may not be possible for every librarian to possess. The urgent need is to take preventive measures to check deterioration. Though deterioration is inevitable, yet this process can be retarded if some of the fundamentals of preservation are known to the library staff, which are briefly discussed in this paper.

1. Handling by Library Staff

(a) If proper care is taken in handling documents by the library staff the life expectancy of reading materials can be increased. The library staff come in close physical contact with reading materials and they generally handle them negligently and mercilessly. The reason for this negligence is given by Pamela W. Darling when she says, 'If you handle hundred books every day it is easy to forget that each one must be treated with care if it is to survive'⁵. It has been noticed that library staff and readers pick up a book by its head-top which is a wrong way of picking book. This puts pressure on the binding, resulting in the loss of its strength. During transportation, shelving and circulation, the books are to be handled with care.

(b) Special care is required during *photocopying* process. Face-down copying which is common in libraries weakens the spine of the book which has inflexible binding. The staff doing photocopying should be careful and trained to minimise the damage.

2. Handling by Library Users

- (i) The library users are also negligent in using reading materials. They touch books with dirty hands which may have oil, perspiration etc., having deteriorating effects.
- (ii) The pages are also turned over in a wrong way from the bottom of page instead of top.
- (iii) Dog earing of pages is very common among readers.
- (iv) The research scholars while consulting several books simultaneously pile up open books one upon another which causes damage to the binding.
- (v) Marking with ink and pencil is harmful to the paper,

3. Cleaning and Dusting

The books which are not in frequent use remain covered with dust in libraries where dusting and cleaning are not done regularly. The dust favours the growth of fungus on the book.

4. Binding

Preservation function starts as soon as books are received in the library. Certain books having permanent value are with weak original binding which are to be given sturdy binding before processing. Trained staff is needed to supervise the binding work. Necessary instructions are to be given to the binder to use appropriate materials. It is also important to select and send the documents for binding at an appropriate time to avoid further deterioration.

5. Shelving

Tight shelving damages the binding of the books. Some space between the books is to be left. Shelving books on their fore-edge and allowing them to lean diagonally puts stress on hinge area of the book. Upright shelving is the correct way with the help of book supporters.

6. Labelling and Pasting

During labelling and pasting of books, if some traces of glue are left on various parts, it catches up the dirt and dust which not only damage the particular book but also muck up the neighbouring volumes.

7. Functional Building

Installation of the air conditioning has become necessary in the modern libraries. Termite proof buildings should be constructed by giving suitable insecticide treatment during construction time to avoid damage caused by insects. There should be sufficient provision of natural light and ventilation in the library building. Library building should not be constructed in an industrial area, where atmosphere gets polluted which accelerates the growth of mildew. The polluted atmosphere contains sulphur dioxide which gets converted into sulphuric acid which is harmful to the paper.

8. Environmental Control

The term environment denotes atmospheric surrounding which include climate, light and other pollutants. It is believed that the environment which is comfortable for people is also good for books. Books are to be kept as cool as possible.

(a) **Heat and Humidity**

High temperature deteriorates library materials. Warmer the books faster they deteriorate. Temperature is to be kept constant 24 hours a day. Fluctuation in temperature is again deteriorating factor. Air conditioning has adverse effect if it does not function continuously. By more heat paper also becomes yellow and brittle, constant temperature between 68°-74°F and relative humidity between 50-60% have been recommended by several authors. Humidity gives rise to growth of fungi. Higher humidity leads to more growth of fungi. In humid conditions, there is water formation which accelerates chemical reactions and weakens the durability of the paper. Dry atmosphere also causes damage to the paper.

High humidity also attracts insects which cause desiccation. The only good solution for the atmospheric control is air conditioning but every library cannot afford this due to financial difficulties and we have to find out some other alternatives to avoid humidity.

9. **Light**

Light is composed of different components like infra-red radiation and ultraviolet radiation, etc. U. V. radiation have short wave length but are more potent. Longer wave lengths have lesser energy and lesser energy cannot damage the paper. Wave lengths shorter than 500 nanometers is sufficient to cause damage. The intensity of light is to be minimised which can be done by plastic screening. U. V. absorbing filters should be used to absorb U. V. radiation from light. Zinc Oxide and Titanium Trioxide have the capacity to absorb the U. V. radiation, so the surface on which light falls can be painted with these chemicals.

10. **Insects**

The insects are considered the worst enemies, which grow very fast in certain conditions. More than seventy varieties of insects have been identified which cause damage to the library material. The favourite conditions for their growth is the presence of high humidity, darkness, high temperature. If the library staff is watchful, the necessary measures can be taken to control the insect growth, by having cleanliness, ventilation, control of temperature and use of insect proof materials during the course of construction of library buildings. If insects have started damaging the materials, it is advisable to go immediately for chemical control methods, some of which are as under :—

Fumigation is an immediate cure to kill insects. Fumigation chamber is used for this process in which different fumigants are used such as Hydrogen Cyanide gas, carbon disulphide, carbon Tetra-Chloride Methyl bromide and para dichlorobenzene. In India it

is not possible for every library to purchase the fumigation chamber. However, it can be purchased on co-operative basis in a particular town or city and used by all libraries. Another method of controlling insects is by drilling small holes in wood i.e. on bookshelves and basement and insecticide is injected in them. These both methods are not permanent ones, the operations are to be repeated periodically. Insect and pests control departments in India provide this service.

The common insects which cause damage to the books and other reading materials are silverfish, cockroaches, bookworms, termites and book lice which are controlled by using appropriate insecticides such as D. D. T., Bagon Spray, Methyl Bromide, etc.

Deterioration is slow process and can be checked if damaging factors are identified well in time and proper treatment given immediately.

Library staff can minimise the damage if a programme of proper care is planned in the library. The attitude of carefulness and awareness of fundamental deteriorating factors on the part of library staff and users may result in proper maintenance and care of library materials which would support the old proverb 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'.

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