

**Conference of Directors of National Libraries in Asia and Oceania
Annual meeting of 2018 – at the National Library of Myanmar (Naypyitaw),
Myanmar**

Annual report of National Library & Archives of Bhutan

Period covered by this report: 2017- till date

Name of country: BHUTAN

Name of library: National Library & Archives of Bhutan

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Annual meeting of 2018 at Naypyitaw, Myanmar

1. RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT:

The National Library & Archives of Bhutan (NLAB) is a governmental entity which operates under the administrative management of the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs. One of its primary functions is to collect, preserve and archive printed and non-printed publication materials. While doing so it is within the Legal Deposit Act 1999 which states that all publishers, producers and authors of books, printed materials and other audio/visual materials are required to deposit copies of their publications or production free of cost to the National Library & Archives of Bhutan for the purpose of preserving, archiving and management. This Act applies to the entire Kingdom of Bhutan as well as citizens living outside Bhutan.

The Royal Government of Bhutan releases annual budget which is allocated for different functions of the NLAB. Out of the many activities, the most important are the library collection development, research activities, fumigation, documentation, translation and archiving of different topics relating to Bhutanese historical, cultural and religious aspects. The NLAB aims to provide as a resource centre for users around the world who will have access to any kind of information regarding Bhutan.

The NLAB also donated several books to schools around the country to motivate students and promote reading. It also collaborates with Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, one of the prominent research institutes in the field of researching core culture and history in the deeper pockets of the country.

2. FACTS AND FIGURES:

The National Library & Archives of Bhutan was first established in 1967 under the patronage of Her Majesty the Late Great Royal Grandmother Ashi Phuntsho Choden (1911-2003) with a small collection of ancient texts. It basically started in a room located at the central tower of the Tashichhodzong before moving to a new location due to its increasing number of collection. Later, a permanent structure was instructed to be constructed by the Home Minister at a suitable location (presently location) to hold the sacred religious texts in the collection. The four-storied and eight cornered traditional building was designed to replicate the central tower where it was first born. It was also consecrated as a temple to encompass the premises with spiritual contentment for the precious religious texts.

The National Library & Archives of Bhutan is staffed in hierarchical order headed by the Director General. There are two professional trained librarians, who have Masters of Science in Information and Library Science from UK in the Library Division. NLAB also have skilled and well-trained conservators who meticulously carry out conservation process of ancient paper-based texts and scripts. The research section is headed by the chief researcher and assisted by associate researchers with some who have studied Masters Degree in Buddhist Philosophy constantly touring the country in an effort to collect information and data related to the history and untapped and vulnerable cultural practices in the country. The Archive section is responsible for collection and preservation of old documents. The Archive at the NLAB acts as a memory bank which consists of repository rooms housing old records, old letters and photographs besides microfilms and other important documents in a controlled facility. Presently, the Information Technology section is looked after by a Japanese volunteer who is assisting in enhancing the research database and helping installation of a heavy duty server which will ease the usage of memory. The IT helps provide information technology support. The IT also updates news and information on the NLAB website.

The National Library & Archives of Bhutan holds about 338,950 in total number of collections consisting manuscripts, Mahayana Buddhist literatures, books, scriptures and wooden blocks for printing traditional religious books. NLAB also have the copy of the world's largest published book "Bhutan: A Visual Odyssey across the Last Himalayan Kingdom", which contains spectacular photographs of Bhutan. It weighs more than 60kg and is about 152x213cm in size. On the other hand, the archive building houses the most precious manuscripts and ancient woodblocks along with rare photographs and other important documents of national importance. The archive is restricted to the general public but genuine researchers can make appointments to view particular item for their study.

During the peak tourist seasons, we often record more than a thousand visitors in a month visiting the library section from regional to international tourists. There are also numerous local and international researchers who normally visit for consolidating research materials.

3. A BRIEF GENERAL OVERVIEW OF RECENT MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The National Library and Archives of Bhutan is using web-based KOHA integrated Library Management System and its users have access to Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC). Further, the National Library and Archives of Bhutan have a huge role on safeguarding and preserving cultural heritage and research output in the country. NLAB with the generous help of the International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO collaborated in establishing ICH information system with generous support from Cultural Heritage Administration, South Korea.

A major database has been developed and it is fed with research data which will be of utmost importance to users in the general public and enthusiastic individual researchers, students and scholars. The researchers at the National Library & Archives of Bhutan are mostly in the field collecting information and data in the country. This database will hold important culture-related information from around the country accessible to the general public and preserve it for future reference.

The Department of Culture with efficient financial and technical support from UNESCO accentuate on developing national legal framework in the area of heritage of Bhutan. It emphasized particularly on development of Archives Bill, Heritage Sites Bill and Cultural Heritage Bill.

A project on the Preservation of Bhutan's traditional Calligraphic, Xylographic and Print Culture was started in 2015 with support from German Bhutan Himalaya Society (GBHS) co-ordinated by NLAB. The objective of this project is to identify, inventory, and document the calligraphic, xylographic and print culture with appropriate research on its historical development and significance.

4. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN BUILDING AND MANAGING COLLECTIONS:

The library has a collection of materials on diverse subjects with an emphasis on published works and manuscripts produced in Bhutan or written on Bhutan. In addition to books or materials received through legal deposit act, NLAB has received through donation or purchased all such national and foreign works which are essential for its scholars, students and public, and its users.

In the English/Foreign Library Section, the NLAB has a collection of over 10,000 books related to Himalaya, Bhutan and Buddhism and newspaper collections collected through Legal Deposit Act, donations or purchased from the authors or publishers. The National Library & Archives of Bhutan is also currently carrying out Literary Survey and Documentation of old and rare records of manuscripts of national importance in temples, monasteries and private homes throughout the country. The surveyor registers the condition, shape and forms of these records and recommends the owner and custodians of these records to ensure proper preservation. The team also carries out preservation process on rare records which are damaged due to natural causes after asking permission from its owners and custodians.

There are also plans to construct modern library with modern library amenities but the plan is still in the pipeline due to budget constraints and still seeking financial support from external donors.

The Director General along with the two officials from the NLAB visited the National Library Board and Libraries of Singapore during a study visit from 24-27 January 2018 upon the invitation of the National Library Board of Singapore and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore.

5. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN PROVIDING ACCESS TO COLLECTIONS:

In order to safeguard and promote intangible cultural heritage of Bhutan, the NLAB has developed an ICH database with an objective of making the researched and documented heritage easily accessible to the public. The data are made online in various forms such as document, image, and audio format to make people aware, to learn, and understand the culture better. The National Library and Archives of Bhutan has also initiated conducting an annual in country Library Workshop – an interactive workshop that provides an opportunity to the librarian participants to voice out their opinion and contribute in shaping the libraries in Bhutan, in general.

6. NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN OTHER SERVICES:

Apart from reference services, NLAB is also actively involved in mentoring the library assistants from schools, organisations and agencies in the country. NLAB has recently helped in setting up the National Assembly of Bhutan Library from the scratch. The NLAB has initiated in providing bibliographic services and has published its 1st volume of the National Bibliography of Bhutan.

7. NOTES ON YOUR COLLABORATION WITH OTHER LIBRARIES, ARCHIVES AND MUSEUMS IN YOUR COUNTRY:

NLAB is in the process of initiating to establish a Bhutan Library Consortium to standardise the library system in the country, to ensure efficient and effective use of resources and creating next generation library. It conducted its first ever Librarian Symposium at a national level very recently (March 2017) with the theme ‘Good Libraries for a Strong Society.’ It was organised by NLAB with the objective to improve the library system in the country and standardise library procedures among different libraries. It is planned as an annual event of the NLAB.

8. NOTES ON INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION:

NLAB is an official member of International Federation of Library Association from last November 2017. NLAB is looking forward to collaborating with the National Libraries from other countries.