

## ACQUISITION POLICY AND PROVINCIAL ARCHIVES IN PAKISTAN

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### **Abstract**

*The acquisition is very important function for archives. By this process archives may grow their collection of significant value. An acquisition policy is the instrument which provides a guideline and defines the nature of the archives that will be acquired, what limits it will set on acquisition and what types of materials are of particular interest. The acquisition policy facilitates and guides staff of the archives and creative organization, department or personality in decision making for acquisition of material and offer for acquisition respectively. It is the backbone around which the archival institution can acquire comprehensive holdings in a planned, coordinated, and systematic manner. It delineates the parameters of what archival records the institution is permitted to acquire or required to preserve and becomes the foundation for the development of more detailed acquisition plans and strategies, appraisal criteria, and related procedures. The acquisition policy becomes a reference for staff when assessing potential acquisitions and for donors looking for a suitable repository for their records.*

*The main objective of this research paper is the comparative study of acquisition, acquisition policy and method applied by the four provincial archives of Pakistan. The core element of this article is a policy, which is formulated for all the four provincial archives as a guideline.*

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### **Research Methodology and Sources of Information**

The methodology involved is a survey research and data have been gathered by means of primary and secondary sources including questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire which was designed, and sent to the Provincial Archives before visiting them personally the questionnaire was filled by the heads of the Provincial Archives or their nominated officials. Interviews were taken from the heads of the Provincial Archives and other officials during a range of visits to each of the Provincial Archives. A

substantial number of the officials by referring to some of the official records created by the Provincial Archives during their administrative activities were referred. The data thus collected has been examined, analyzed, tabulated, compared and interpreted and evaluated to find out the results as to the status of acquisition relating to the Provincial Archives and the problems faced by them have also been evaluated. Finally, policy has been designed and recommended for implementation by the four provincial archives in Pakistan.

## **Introduction**

Judith Ellis (1993) states that acquisition is a process by which archives add to their holdings by accepting material as a transfer, donation, and purchase (p.460). The records are acquired after careful evaluation on the basis of continuing value that is why a small proportion of records is selected and then is accepted from government departments, donors and purchased. Carol Couture (1987) says evaluation of records does not imply monetary or material considerations. It refers to the archivist's judgment of the intellectual or research value that an item or a group of items, institutional or otherwise, possess at the present time, or will acquire in the future (p.169). Acquisition is to avoid uncontrolled and uncontrollable growth in the collection. Judith Ellis (1993) stressed that every acquisition is a commitment by the archives with government departments, donors or creators, to the researchers and to the item itself. It is a commitment to control and document it; to protect, store and conserve it; and to make it available to interested researchers (p.137).

## **Acquisitions Policy**

An acquisitions policy is an official statement which provides a guideline and defines the nature and types of the archives that will be acquired and what limits it will set on for acceptance and refusal. In 1993, Judith Ellis explained that "the acquisition policy facilitates and guides staff of the archives and creative organization, department or personality in decision making for acquisition of material and offer for acquisition respectively" (p.138). Canadian Council on Archives (1990) articulated in its

website that it delineates the parameters of what archival records the institution is permitted to acquire or required to preserve and becomes the foundation for the development of more detailed acquisition plans and strategies, appraisal criteria, and related procedures. The acquisition policy becomes a guiding tool for staff when assessing potential acquisitions and for donors looking for a suitable repository for their records. The acquisition policy must reflect the institution's legal authority and should outline the general role and mission of the archival institution. Some institutions have responsibility only for the records of their sponsoring body, some have major responsibility for other records, and some have responsibilities for both. However, in all instances the policy should address the archives' responsibility for the records of its sponsoring body. Judith Ellis (1993) has written that the acquisition policy must flow from either the legal mandate or the executive decision establishing the archives (p. 138). It is essential that in the acquisition policy the collecting fields and other all related elements be defined very clearly.

### **Situation in Provincial Archives: An Appraisal and Analysis**

The province-wise situation, as it prevails at the moment reflects the following picture.

#### ***a) Sindh***

The Sindh Archives acquires various types of archival material. It has received remarkable collection of old Commissioner's records from its parent department at the time of its inception but then no increase has been made in this collection. It has also failed to collect the records of the provincial departments after partition. However, the Sindh Archives has collected private collection from eminent personalities, reference material, manuscripts, rare books, by purchase and donation.

The Sindh Archives has not yet formulated its acquisition policy (Kaleemullah, personal interview, 2003), that is the reason the majority of the learned personalities and esteemed organizations and other resource persons whose records may be of significant nature and value for the Sindh Archives are not yet acquired.

### ***b) Baluchistan***

At the time of establishment of the Baluchistan Archives in 1977 the higher authorities (Secretary of the Department of Culture) transferred the public records and rare books of the British Period lying in their custody. As the Baluchistan Archives does not have proper accommodation to store the records therefore it has not collected the records of the provincial agencies. Recently, the Baluchistan Archives has purchased and received approx. 400 books on various disciplines (this is entire book collection). This collection is insufficient for the research scholars. There are neither government publications and nor private collections, manuscripts, electronic records, newspapers and periodicals. At this time a Departmental Committee, comprising the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of the Department of Culture and Tourism has the authority to decide whatever is to be purchased for the Baluchistan Archives (Habib, personal interview, 2004). The absence of the Acquisition Policy has rendered the acquisition process inactive since the inception of the Baluchistan Archives.

### ***c) NWFP***

"The NWFP Archives actually is a Directorate of Archives and Libraries and has to perform dual functions" (Archi-Lib.News, 1991). In this capacity the NWFP Archives collects both library and archival materials. For library, the NWFP Archives has enough infrastructure while in case of archives, the same is badly lacking.

The NWFP Archives has not designed its Acquisition Policy. Therefore, acquisition of archival records has yet to commence on a regular and proper way. The NWFP Archives has acquired enough pre-partition records but there are no exceptional records of the provincial departments after partition except for some provincial departments etc. The private collections are scattered throughout the length and the breadth of the province. This dismal position is the outcome of the fact that the Director has exercised his authority of purchasing books for the public library, but unfortunately at the archival side his authority is totally dormant. The NWFP Archives has acquired a good number of rare books,



manuscripts and newspaper and periodical collection (Muqrab, personal interview, 2004).

#### d) Punjab

The Punjab Archives has not formulated its acquisition policy for its entire material (Muhammad Abbass, personal interview, 2004). In spite of that Punjab Archives has acquired a great collection in comparison with the other provincial archives of Pakistan. "The Punjab Archives has got a huge historical collection from government, which was stored in Anarkali Tomb at the time of its establishment" (Nazir, n.d., p.3). Moreover, "it has also collected an enormous collection of the post-partition public records of the Punjab Government. These records are acquired by the help of the Secretariat Instructions under which all government departments are bound to transfer the records after 10 years of the creation. By these instructions the Punjab Archives was enabled to acquire the records of a range of government departments. Punjab Archives also purchases the current books for their libraries to facilitate users in their research" (Muhammad Abbass, personal interview, 2004).

The acquisition is very important function for archives. By this process archives may grow their collection of significant value. The acquisition of all the Provincial Archives is compared below:

Name of Provincial Archives	Acquisition Policy	Acquisition Method	Nature of Transferred Material	Nature of Purchased Material	Nature of Donated Material
Sindh Archives	None	P, D	None	RM, PC, MSS, N, PE	PC, GP
Balochistan Archives	None	P	None	RM	None
NWFP Archives	None	T, P, D	PR	RM, N	GP
Punjab Archives	None	T, P, D	PR	RM, N	GP

P = Purchased  
 RM = Reference Material  
 GP = Govt. Publications  
 N = Newspapers

D = Donation  
 PC = Private Collection  
 MSS = Manuscripts  
 PE = Periodicals  
 T = Transferred

By above given facts, it is true, that the Provincial Archives have neither designed nor formulated their acquisition policy in proper way. In spite of that, the Provincial Archives acquire some records of significant value with respect to their provinces. In the absence of such policy in written form the successors of the Provincial Archives do not know about the nature of acquisition and its limitations.

The Provincial Archives may grow their large portion of collection by transferring / deposit from the government departments but the transferring method is not fully designed and applied except NWFP and Punjab Archives where this method is partially applied at some extent. The Provincial Archives also use the other acquisition methods by which they purchase the historical records and receive donation from eminent personalities.

The Sindh Archives has received a huge collection of the Commissioners records at the time of its establishment from its parent department. After receiving that collection no other collection has been received by transfer from the government departments. The same situation is with the Baluchistan Archives which received in its custody a huge collection of the public records and rare books of British Period. After that no accession has been found in public records. The situation of the NWFP Archives and the Punjab Archives is better than the other Provincial Archives. They have received remarkable records from government departments by transfer method under Secretariat Instructions, which include a large collection in their custody at the time of their establishment. But it is regrettable to say that there is no involvement of archivist in the transferring process.

Moreover, the Provincial Archives also acquire records by purchase and donation. The Sindh Archives has purchased various types of material such as reference material, private collections, and rare books, manuscripts in book form, newspapers and periodicals. The Baluchistan Archives has only purchased the reference books in small number. Whereas, the NWFP and Punjab Archives have purchased the reference books, and newspapers only In Provincial Archives it has been observed that the Secretary of the Department under which the Provincial Archives are working often involve himself in the purchase. In donation, the

Sindh Archives has received the donation of one private collection, Baluchistan and Punjab Archives have received no donation of any kind. Whereas the NWFP Archives often receive the rare books and manuscripts by donation.

### **Acquisition Policy**

The Provincial Archives Legislation (which should be enacted and passed from the Provincial Assemblies respectively) should lay down clear instructions for the Provincial Archivists to formulate acquisition policies with the consultation of the Advisory Committee and get approval (passed) from the Head of the Province.

Recommended below is an Acquisitions Policy, which has been devised by the author for the Provincial Archives in Pakistan.

### **Acquisition Policy Proposed for the Provincial Archives in Pakistan**

#### ***Objectives***

This Acquisition Policy is designed to articulate the acquisition of material for the Provincial Archives in Pakistan in the context of its legislative and traditional mandates.

#### ***Definitions***

**Acquisition:** The act or process by which archives add to their holding by accepting material.

**Acquisition Methods:** The methods of acquiring archival material such as transfer, donation, gift, purchase etc.

**Public Record:** All documentary material, regardless of physical form, made or received by any provincial department in connection with the transaction of public business, and preserved or appropriated for preservation as evidence of departments functions, organization and activities or because of the value of the information they contain.

**Private Records:** Records lying in the possession of a private individual or with any non-governmental organization.

## **Mandate**

### ***Scope of Mandate***

- The Provincial Archives has a mandate by law to deposit the five-year-old records of the provincial government departments, courts and commission (from provincial level to district level) regardless of physical form. This is for the safekeeping of essential primary records of the province in order to preserve historical and cultural heritage for posterity.
- The Provincial Archives has also a mandate by law to deposit government publications, which are published by various departments of the provincial government and preserved as a source material.
- The Provincial Archives also has a mandate by law to acquire (by donation and purchase) private collections, family records and oral archives, reference material, etc which have any bearing on the history and culture of the province and of reference value which it decides to possess and gets approval by the Advisory Committee.
- The Provincial Archives also has a mandate to exchange the records in reproduced form and make agreements with the other Archives in the country and abroad (such as National Archives of Pakistan, National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, Oriental India Office Collection (OIOC) (Formerly India Office Library and Records, London), Public Records Office, London, National and Provincial Archives of India etc. in receiving records of mutual interest in reproduced format.

### ***Limitation of Mandate***

- The Provincial Archives will only accept those records of government departments, which have a permanent value. All temporary records will not be transferred in the Provincial Archives and will be retained in the record rooms of the creating departments.
- The Provincial Archives will not accept non-public records of any autonomous and private organizations, institutions and departments.



- The Provincial Archives shall not accept those private collections and other discrete items, which have no significant historical value.

## Principles

In order to acquire various types of the material the following principles need to be followed:

To deposit the non-current records of the provincial departments, the provincial archive legislation will be applied. Every acquisition may be appraised by the assigned personnel of the government department under close collaboration of the representative of the archive department. In the case of negative evaluation, the Archives Department may transfer the documents to another institution or dispose them if they do not have any historical value. Any transfer or disposal of documents needs to be approved by the Provincial Archives.

The Provincial Archives must have the financial, human and material resources to acquire, keep and make available the archives it wants to acquire.

To acquire government publications, the Provincial Archives be authorized by law to deposit two copies of the government publications.

The Provincial Archives acquires private collections and family records but the decision for their purchase or acceptance as a donation or gift should be made by the Advisory Committee. Without the approval of the Advisory Committee, no purchase or other transactions be made for any kind of material.

## Types of Acquisitions

The Provincial Archives will acquire all non-current public records from all the government departments, courts and commissions by deposit. All these records be transferred after five years with careful appraisal and only permanent records be transferred in the archives while all temporary records be retained in the record rooms of the creating department.

The Provincial Archives would receive the historical records of significant value through donation or gift. The decision for their acceptance is given to the Advisory Committee.

In some cases, the Advisory Committee should have the authority to purchase some kind of documents such as reference material, manuscripts and rare books.

### **Responsibilities**

The archivist reviews and updates the acquisition policy with the consultation of Advisory Committee, which must be approved by the Governor. The archivist plans and makes the acquisitions jointly with the help of the Advisory Committee.

### **Approval**

The present acquisition policy is recommended for the approval of the Advisory Committee of the Provincial Archives and then accorded consent of the Governor.

### **Enforcement of Policy**

After final approval this policy will be considered a part of Provincial Archives Legislation and strictly be enforced by law.

### **Conclusion**

The Provincial Archives are the depository Centers of the Provinces and established with the intention to preserve all public records created by the government departments as well as historical material regardless physical form related with their provinces. But the present picture shows that these organizations have failed to meet their real objectives. They neither deposit nor transfer the public records properly and regularly. People do not know for what material these repositories are looking for preservation. It is a fact that the immeasurable historical material is scattered throughout provinces possessed by the peoples and organizations. There is a need to devise an Acquisition Policy and disseminate it as the people may know and be award about the interest of the Provincial Archives.

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