IMPACT OF ARCHIVES ON HISTORY, CULTURE AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES: PAKISTAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Archives as record of the nations are very important to be preserved. They are preserved as history of the nations which help the nations to trace their historical background as to where do we originated from, what was our past like, what battles were fought, what treaties were signed, what negotiations took place, where did we falter, where did our strength lay, all these can be made available to us and our posterity through our historical records preserved in archival sources. Similarly, we can get infinite information on our religious, geographical, and educational history. In fact any historical fact can be retrieved from our national / provincial and local archives. In addition to these, there are also archives of paramount importance, which includes private papers of eminent scholars and families, politicians, historians, organizations etc at various levels. These are of course preserved for the nations to know government activities and actions used for historical, cultural and research purposes too. These records are also significant for future generation to use and consult as guidelines; to avoid mistakes in the light of these guidelines; to use them in decision and policy making; to plan future governmental actions in the backdrop of past government records and to make sound plan and policies etc. Most countries have established their archives at national, provincial or state levels and preserving all evidences of the nations. In Pakistan, there are few archives at national and provincial level. Unfortunately, most of them are still far from their real objective that is why records are still not transferred properly for preservation and deteriorating in their parent departments. In this work, an attempt has been made to create awareness at public and government levels about the significance of archives for present and future generations and their impact on history, culture and research activities.

INTRODUCTION

Modern society depends a great deal upon information, because in the rapid and busy life, it is in great need of right and accurate kind of information at the right and proper time to improve its capability, experience and development. A manager of business firm should have to be able to take a right kind of decision. A businessman might need information to set up a new business. A teacher, scholar, and specialist might need information to keep themselves up-to-date and well informed in their fields of specialization. A historian might need information to open the door of the past and transmit the evidence and experiences of the nations, governments, and prominent personalities. All this goes to show the significance of information. In this information era various organizations in the form of institutions deal with information of any kind (of the past and the present), ***libraries*** and ***archives***, inter alia, being two of them.

Despite close and indispensable relationship of Archives with Libraries, it is a fact that these are two distinct disciplines. We all are well aware of the libraries and often use libraries for educational and informational needs, but one of the most curious and regrettable aspects of current Information Age is that the archives continue to be the least known, least understood and used in our society. The reasons for this may be many. One eminent international scholar gives the following statement about the inevitability of archives:

> "While one can conceive of a State without a navy, for example, it is impossible to imagine one without currency, without a treasury, without funds and without archives—which constitute – those kinds of State property which are most essential and most wide-spread – so much so that they can be said to derive from the very existence of the State" (Frank Evans, 1982).

The above statement is absolutely correct, that is the reason throughout the world that attempts are being made to establish archives as the state property and to provide them legislative protection. To avoid long discussion, in international society, archives are described by dual meaning and definitions. It is

considered as non-current public and other records of historical significance and same term is also used as a repository which acquires and preserves non-current records of continuing value, arranges them in a systematic manner and stores in good environmental conditions and provides services to the researchers, scholars, historians, lawyers, government officers, teachers, students etc. In this article we use the term of archives as a repository to deal archival material.

ARCHIVES IN PAKISTAN

Most countries have established their national, provincial or state archives. Moreover, most public and private institutions have also established their own archive centers. Contradistinction to western countries, in Pakistan, there are few archive centers at national and provincial level. Most of them are still in their initial stages and the need is being felt for their improvement and development. Due to the apathy and indifference of the government of Pakistan the nation is still not wholly aware of the importance of archives. As a country, the government of Pakistan is not giving adequate attention, which is required. That is the reason why significant records of the nation are being unattended to and in some cases are being lost and mutilated. The need is to establish the archival centres at all levels in public and private sectors all over the country.

At national level, there is a National Archives of Pakistan (located at Islamabad), which is performing well to a great extent. The provincial archives of the four provinces: 1) Sindh Archives, Karachi; 2) Baluchistan Archives, Quetta; 3) NWFP Archives, Peshawar; and 4) Punjab Archives, Lahore) should have been established on the same line and perspective. But, unfortunately the situation of the Provincial Archives pertaining to status, acquisition, collection, arrangement, services, and preservation is not satisfactory. It is strange to know that the number of research scholars using Sindh, Baluchistan, NWFP and Punjab Archives are 20, 60, 60, and 50 respectively in the year 2006. These figures were provided by the officials of the four Provincial Archives, which may be correct as no user was spotted by the writer of this

article when he visited the four Provincial Archives. At present the Provincial Archives may be considered as organizations which are not active and do not attract many users. The Provincial Archives have not been successful in making a real impact on our society.

IMPACT ON HISTORY AND CULTURE

Up till now, we have been failed to devise a system in the provinces to preserve our whole history i.e. administrative history and general history. In the provinces no authorized historical and cultural reservoirs exist with full mandate. The author is confident that if the Archives of various kinds including national, provincial, district, institutional (public, private, autonomous etc.) collect all significant records and historical material in a regular and systematic way, then undoubtedly our whole history and culture would be fully preserved and as a nation we may be able to transmit them to our posterity. Once we are successful in establishing such a system, the following impact may be observed:

- They will enable us to understand and identify our organizations, our society, our past and overall ourselves.
- The people will come to know about the decision and actions made by the government for any business transaction. Every citizen has a right to know the activities of the government. The government departments of the provinces from top to bottom run the government business and create records for all of their activities. These state papers are not only to record the functions of this machinery but also to assess the entire circumstances that led to a particular action and find a way of dealing with it by laying down a definite policy. The ultimate aim of these records is not just to help the government but also to enable generations to come to consult these records for their information and knowledge. The purpose is to maintain record of the past events, but to turn them into living archival materials that can play a constructive role in channeling the government machinery as well as the public to the discovery of a path along which the future of a nation can be built.
- They facilitate and enable better quality planning, decision making and action by providing for continuity, access to past experience, expertise and knowledge. Archival sources of government, intellectuals and creative human brains in all the human activities guide the nation to zenith, prosperity and

progress. Through archives man communicate his vision and experience from generation to generation. They are also stepping-stones to the future, as well as bridges of the past. They house the most explosive and dynamism of man's and organizations creations, activities, developments, ideas and planning.

- They help and use as the instruments of accountability of the peoples and organizations.
- For academicians (teachers and students) the historical records can be an integral part of the learning process where discussion, analyses and research can be conducted.
- The records of the cultural heritage such as record of places (cities, towns and villages), monuments, amusement places, ponds, lakes, mosques, temples, bridges, and other man-made structures etc. would develop understanding of cultural heritage. These physical objects do not talk to us but the records of these objects (which are created by the government departments concerned) talk to us and tell their stories in historical perspective with authenticity.

IMPACT ON RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Archives open the doors for historians and research scholars also because of the evidential, historical, cultural, administrative, informational, legal and financial value they possess. A number of participants at the 9th International Council on Archives (ICA's) Convention in London in 1980 pointed out that record have become indispensable for an ever-increasing number of researchers with diverse goals. This evolution is due to certain democratization in the use of archives, as well as to a greater diversity in the type of information contained in archives repositories. Other factors cited in this evolution were liberalized laws governing access to archives and a greater openness by archivists and groups of researchers.

Research is an effort to find something. The research we are interested in covers a wide variety of things, from the knowledge of concrete events to that of an entire civilization, including people and personalities, their organizations, institutions,

etc. The researcher will use archives in an effort to reconstruct, rebuild and reshape a physical and temporal unit of meaning, such as an event, a person, building, an administrative structure, an organization, a custom, treaty, etc., or a more complex unit such as an era, a field of activity, or a general theme. Reconstruction can have different objectives. For example, the administrators of an institution may employ historical reconstruction to better understand the origins of a field of activity, using retrospective elements to make a judgment about it. Architecture, in this case, using a great number of archival records to accomplish a top quality reconstruction. Medicine also uses historical reconstruction to study the hereditary factors in certain diseases. These cases demonstrate how reconstruction, for which archives are indispensable, is necessary to a variety of disciplines. When making a case for the retention and management of historical archives, these examples should be cited. Many research areas need the sources which can be supplied by archival records, turn archival repository into a laboratory for different scientific disciplines. The physician, the chemist, biologist, genealogist, and historian all use their laboratories to carry out their research. The engineer, architect, urban planner, historian, sociologist, filmmaker, administrator, and others can also use the archival laboratories to bring research to worthwhile conclusion.

In the present situation of archives in Pakistan, research scholars and historians face great difficulty in pursuit of their research due to inaccessible and scattered authentic historical evidence. If all the sources are regularly and efficiently preserved and inventoried and circulated then they facilitate and enable the research scholars to do research in all facets. The following impacts on research activities may be highlighted:

- Archives help in research on any historical and cultural research of any specific area and time.
- Archives help in evidential research of the persons and organizations.

- Archives facilitate in past and current administrative research of any department, organization, agency etc on general and specific activities.
- Archives assist in information and fact-finding research on any specific subject.
- Archives help in the research on financial and fiscal business of any organization.
- Archives help in the research in legal business transactions of any organization.
- Archives help in research on religious activities of various factions, sects and groups.
- Archives help in research to disclose the corruption, crime and accountability of people (bureaucrats, head of the departments, and other officials) and organizations.
- Archives support the genealogists in hierarchal and family research.
- Archives help in the research of political activities of any party, party members and the government's involvement.
- Archives support academic research. They help in writing M.A., M.Phil and Ph.D thesis on various disciplines. They stimulate and guide academicians, research scholars, teachers, and students to find increasing satisfaction by browsing and reading a variety of archival material. They also help in forming independent opinion and clear thinking by consultation of various primary sources. They enable students and research scholars to travel in the past and learn about peoples and society and provide easy approach to go in the past and study the heroic deeds of their ancestors and take good lessons from their chivalry and bravery. They also encourage students and teachers to write excellent articles, assignments and debate literature on various subjects.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that Archives are treasures of the nations and most significant source material for administrative, historical, cultural and research purpose. The records of the government functionaries are very important to preserve for nation. These of course should be preserved for future generations to understand and identify our organizations, our society, our past and overall ourselves.

In developed countries archives are better treated as very important institutions and they are carefully maintained, organized and preserved for the posterity. Moreover, archival centers are established from top to bottom in the form of national archives / state archives, provincial archives / regional archives, judiciary archives, institutional archives, business archives, museum archives, hospital archives, family and personal archives etc. In Pakistan, archives are not so formally organized. At present the archival centers have been established at the national and provincial levels and are not working according to archive principles.

Today, research scholars and historians are facing difficulties in their research work due to non-availability of the historical sources. The archives are considered the reservoir and central organization of the country, provinces, institutions etc. to preserve all significant sources. The government should take notice of the present situation of archives and establish a system to strengthen such organizations in a way that these repositories are able to receive all necessary historical public and private records and preserve in good environmental conditions for their longevity and provide accessibility to research scholars. By this way all necessary sources of the nation will be tapped / preserved and disseminated and leave possible above-mentioned impact on the history, culture and research activities.

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