

COUNTRY REPORT

21ST CONFERENCE OF DIRECTORS OF NATIONAL LIBRARIES IN ASIA AND OCEANIA (CDNLAO) 2013

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The National Library and Archives of Bhutan was established in the year 1967 under the aegis of His Majesty the Third King with the policy to preserve and promote culture and religion of Bhutan in the face of modernization process. It was housed in the *Utse* (central tower) of Tashichhodzong the central secretariat building in the national capital, Thimphu. The then Queen Mother, Her Majesty Ashi Phuntsho Choden Wangchuck donated about 140 religious texts mainly in Sakya tradition as seed collection. Geshey Tshewang, a highly learned scholar monk was appointed the founding director.

The location of the library was shifted several times and as the collection of texts, titles and staff increased for which space with appropriate and larger capacity was required. It was finally moved to the present purpose- built building in the year 1984.

Although the initial objective of establishing the library was to collect and preserve religious texts on Buddhism in their various forms, over the years the stock came to include a substantial collections of foreign books, mainly in English with emphasis on Buddhism and Himalayan studies. Therefore, the library has a section for foreign language collection. In the year 1996, Bhutan entered into a long- term twinning project with the Royal Library, Denmark funded by the Danish International Development Assistant (DANIDA) to establish an online database of the collections, classification of religious literature and set up a library network. The project also had a component of capacity building of the staff.

A two storied building for the archives section is equipped with modern security and fire alarm system as well as temperature and humidity control. As a national memory bank, the depository rooms of the archives have collection of documents including old records, letters, manuscripts, edicts and photographs of historical and research importance.

Microfilming Services are provided to individuals and institutions for important rare texts and documents free of cost and this is encouraged to ensure long-term preservation. While one microfilm copy is retained for archival purpose, the original is returned to the owners. This section has microfilmed 1,250 volumes of rare and old manuscripts borrowed from monasteries. These can be scanned and used by any visitor or put on the net for outside users.

The Library possesses 10,000 wooden blocks and 7000 metal blocks for publication on demand. These are fumigated and stored in air-tight boxes and stacked in sandal wood shelves to ensure durability. The **Choekey** (Dharma Language/Classical Language) section has a collection of more than 13,000 volumes of classical texts containing around 1, 55, 000 subtitles on history, mythology, painting, astrology and culture.

In the foreign language section, there are more than 8,800 English titles mainly on Buddhism, Himalayan studies, Bhutan and the neighbouring countries. Besides, there are periodicals, magazines, news bulletins and two sets of *Pali Tiptika*. The bibliography data are recorded on computer database.

It is realized that strict implementation of the legal Deposit Act is resented by publishers and producers of audio-visual materials mainly because of the financial implication and the probable issue of piracy. However, collection and deposit are perused with personal initiative and mutual relationship. The need for amendment to this Act is genuinely felt.

Unlike in many other countries, the functions of archiving in Bhutan are also under the National Library. In the absence of a legal framework, the archival collection has not been very forthcoming. Therefore, the Archives Act is in at its advanced draft stage. Upon its ratification, it is optimistically foreseeable that the collection of archival materials can be perused vigorously and meaningfully.

An additional responsibility of inventorying Intangible Cultural Heritage in Bhutan is being carried out by the National Library & Archives which is to fulfil the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The National Library & Archives is a government organization under the Department of Culture/Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. It obtained the status of official depository after the enactment of the Legal Deposit Act in the year 1999 thereby formalizing the mandate and functions which are to collect, preserve and manage Bhutan's documentary heritage.