

Manuscripts in NAI

The National Archives of India (NAI) houses one of the most extensive and diverse collections of manuscripts in the country. These include the Gilgit Manuscripts, Fort William College manuscripts, Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, palm-leaf, French manuscripts, and a large body of paper manuscripts. These invaluable holdings are preserved at NAI Headquarters, its Regional Office at Bhopal, and Records Centres at Jaipur, Bhubaneswar, and Puducherry.

Researchers and scholars interested in manuscript studies across a wide range of disciplines may explore India's rich intellectual, cultural, social, and administrative history through these collections. An overview of some of the major manuscript holdings is given below.

(A) NAI, Headquarters, New Delhi.

(1) Gilgit Manuscripts (6th C).

The Gilgit Manuscripts are among the earliest surviving collections of Buddhist texts in the world, discovered in 1931 during the excavation of a stupa mound in the Gilgit region (now part of Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan) and dated by scholars to the 6th centuries CE. Inscribed on highly fragile birch-bark folios in Sanskrit, and written in the early medieval Sharada script, the collection—presently preserved at the National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi—includes rare Mahayana Buddhist works such as the Lotus Sutra (Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra) and the Samādhirāja Sūtra, along with fragments of Vinaya, Avadanas, and other philosophical and scholastic treatises, as well as texts on medicine, astronomy, grammar, and allied sciences, reflecting the broader intellectual traditions of early medieval South and Central Asia. Due to the extreme fragility of the original folios, physical access is strictly restricted, and the NAI ensures their long-term survival through specialized conservation, controlled storage, digitization programmes, and scholarly collaborations including facsimile editions produced with institutions such as Soka University, Japan, reinforcing the collection's outstanding significance for the study and transmission of Buddhist thought along the ancient Silk Road and its enduring national and global research value.

(2) Fort William College & Other Manuscripts.

NAI also preserves the Fort William College collection, inherited from the British East India Company through its prestigious College of Fort William at Calcutta. The collection includes Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit manuscripts, valuable for linguistic, literary, administrative, and cultural studies.

(B) NAI Regional Office, Bhopal.

Bhopal State Oriental Records (1843–1950).

Following the merger of the erstwhile Princely State of Bhopal with the Union of India, its public records were transferred to the newly established Regional Office of the National Archives of India (NAI), Bhopal, in 1953. The collection, largely

consisting of hand-written manuscripts in Persian and Urdu Shikasta script, spans 1843–1950 and was created across multiple departments during the successive regimes of the four female Nawabs—Qudsia Begum, Sikandar Begum, Shahjahan Begum, and Sultan Jahan Begum—followed by the final Nawab, Hamidullah Khan. The records form a crucial primary source for studying Bhopal and the wider Malwa region, notably including the 1857 Mutiny Papers, Chamber of Princes files on inter-state negotiations, Land Revenue Settlement records on agrarian reforms, and the Daftar-e-Insha series reflecting the evolution of governance and administrative correspondence. Collectively, they testify to Bhopal's transformation from a medieval principality to a modern administrative State and, preserved at NAI, RO Bhopal, remain a documentary heritage of national and international scholarly significance.

(C) NAI Records Centre, Puducherry

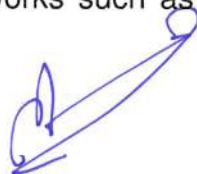
French Archival & Manuscript Records (1701–1947)

The NAI Puducherry Records Centre preserves invaluable manuscript collections representing the administrative, legal, cultural, and genealogical history of French India. Its most notable holding, the French paper manuscripts (1701–1860), was originally maintained under the archival practice of *Archives Sous Verres* (sealed between glass plates) and later re-preserved in stitched folders for accessibility, containing multilingual correspondence in French, Tamil, Telugu, and Hindustani, including intelligence-linked letters between Ananda Ranga Pillai and merchant-informant Sambudas Sankardass that provide rare evidence of colonial trade and geopolitics. Other key collections include the diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai and Tiruvengadam Pillai documenting 18th-century banking and ruler correspondence, the *État Civil* registry (1676–1885) of high genealogical importance, the *Tribunal de la Chaudrie* records (1703–1889) reflecting native justice under local laws and customs with their legacy preserved in place names ending with “Chavadi,” *Depêches Ministérielles* (1814–1947) from the French Ministry to the Governor covering revolutionary and nationalist movements and extradition matters, and rare palm-leaf manuscripts including *Nādīśāstra* of Tirumūlar, *Yāperungalam*, *Vaithya Śāstram*, and *Agasthiar Nooru*, collectively forming a documentary resource of enduring scholarly value..

(D) NAI Regional Office, Bhubaneswar

Palm-Leaf Manuscripts (16th–20th C.)

The NAI Regional Office, Bhubaneswar Records Centre is a major repository of Odisha's rare and fragile palm-leaf manuscript heritage, acquired chiefly through institutional and individual donations to support scholarly research. Its key collections include the Orissa Research Project Collection (231 volumes, 28,615 folios, 16th–20th century) received from the Department of South Asian Studies, University of Heidelberg, documenting the Jagannath Temple, Puri, temple rituals, and feudatory state shrines, along with seminal works such as *Amarakosa*, *Puja*



Vidhi, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harivamsa Purana, Kanva Samhita, Srimad Bhagavata, and the temple's administrative *Chhamu-Chitau* records; the Gopinath Mohanty Collection (43 volumes, ~10,334 folios) featuring *Aranyaka Ramayana* and *Śrī Krishna Rasa-Krida*; the D. N. Das Mahapatra Collection (132 volumes, 16,699 folios) comprising *Bhagavata* and multiple *Mahabharata* Parvas; the Sudarshan Mahapatra Collection (22 volumes, 4,293 folios) including *Virata Parva, Puranas*, and medical texts (*Ousadha*); and the Kailash Chandra Dash Collection (5 volumes, 421 folios) on Odisha's religious and cultural traditions. Owing to the high fragility of original folios, access is strictly regulated and increasingly facilitated through digitized surrogates, making the collection a vital primary source for the study of Odisha's temple administration, ritual practices, religious literature, and indigenous knowledge systems, reflecting over four centuries of cultural and spiritual continuity.

(E) NAI Records Centre, Jaipur

Paper Manuscript Records (1802–1925)

The manuscript holdings at RC Jaipur comprise historically significant record series from key institutions of British India, led by the CRO Gujarat collection (1802–1925, 146,264 files) acquired in 2000 from the Kathiawar Agency at Rajkot, documenting land and revenue matters (notably Rajkot and Sanand), boundary issues, civil and criminal cases, government resolutions, political and passport records, and financial ledgers with periodic accounts, alongside major series such as Central Railway, Mumbai (1855–1925, 441 files) reflecting the origins of India's early railway network under GIPR and the country's socio-economic, industrial, and cultural transformation, Salt Commissioner's Office (1860–1925, 64 files) capturing colonial regulation of salt production, land leasing, worker welfare, quality control, and infrastructure for salt manufacture, Master of the Mint, Mumbai (1919–1925, 10 files) containing establishment records on coinage administration at the historic Bombay Mint under Government of India control, and Customs Department, Mumbai (1855–1925, 97 files) originating from the Bombay Custom House, providing valuable evidence on trade regulation, customs duties, maritime activity, and anti-smuggling enforcement, collectively forming an important source for India's economic and administrative history.


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