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## ARCHIVES KEEPING - DEFINITION AND SCOPE

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### **Introduction**

The value and importance of archives were realised since the later part of the 18th century when the writing of national and regional history developed. When historical research entered into different dimensions such as social history, political history, economic history, cultural history, religious history and history of organisations as well as movements, the importance of archives was seriously felt. Researchers began to consider archives as the main center of social scientific research and the records have become the authentic materials for substantiating their views. Hence the study of archives as an area of specialisation has gained importance.

The word Archives is commonly used for denoting the records and other documents as well as the institution which holds the records. A person engaged in the administration of archival materials is called an Archivist.

Archives is an organised body of records. It plays an important role in the exposition of real History. It is systematically used by the scholars. For writing modern history Archives is absolutely necessary. It is a good and useful dictum. Anyone who wishes to know the history of Archives should know its origin.

### **Archives – Origin :**

The word Archives is originated from the Greek word 'Archeion'. Its meaning is 'that belongs to an office'. This

Greek word 'Archeion' again has its origin in the word 'Archi', which has got hundred of meanings. These meanings are arranged in three sets or three divisions.

- a) Beginning, Origin, first cause.
- b) First place, power, sovereignty, empire, reason.
- c) Magistary Office.

The first set is derived from the Greek word 'Archives' which means old, ancient etc. From this we derive the word 'Archaeology'.

From the second set is derived the word 'Architekton' which means chief builder. From this we get architect, archbishop etc.

From the third set is derived the word 'Archeion' which in turn gives birth to 'Archives'. Though the word Archives gives different meanings, the real meaning is repository of records. The conception of Archives can be summarized as follows:

“That organised body of records created or received by a government agency, institution, organisation, family or individual, and preserved by the agency for its legitimate successors as an evidence of its organizations, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, co-operations or other activities, because of its informational data contained therein”.

### **Types of Archives:**

The records of Government agencies are known as 'Public Archives'. There are so many Archives such as 'Institutional Archives' (includes the records of institutions), business Archives (Corporation and business forms) and family and personal Archives. (Families and individuals) Papers of a family and individuals that lack the organic characters of true archives are called historical manuscripts.

The most important category of Archives is the Public Archives. They are termed as 'Government Documents' by the librarians. However such publications distributed to the public agency or in the files of other agencies they may be considered as part of their archives. In any case only a fraction of a Government Archives become accessible in printed or processed form as Government Publications. Historical manuscripts assembled as the result of collecting activities is entirely different from Archives. Public archives are of immense value to any one striving to understand the truth for key and noted for objectivity.

### **Definitions of Archives :**

We shall discuss at greater length the definitions of the terms 'records' and 'Archives' not only because they need special attention but also an analysis of the main characteristics of records and Archival materials is essential.

History is constantly in the making. An act of today becomes a historical fact of tomorrow. When two heads of state sit down to sign a treaty, when a bill even for minor change in some matter – political, social, economic, cultural – is represented in the parliament and discussed and passed or thrown out, when a small note by an administrative officer or a public figure sets rolling the machinery of government resulting in some project of public importance, the written records of these actions become in future the source material for the historian for compiling a history of the items of the people concerned.

All that is written thus about a matter grows in bulk, and at the moment that the particular matter comes to a certain finality, all the written records which trace the course of development of that matter to that conclusion become eligible for becoming archives. When the matter is important and the

records are on the decision of the authorities concerned, to be preserved, they become Archives.

- 1) The Oxford English Dictionary defines Archives as (a) 'a place in which public records or other important documents are kept' and (b) 'a historical record of documents, also preserved'. This definition is troublesome because of its double meaning. Moreover it does not make it clear the essential nature of Archives.
- 2) The Dutch Archivists, S.Muller, J.A.Feith and S.Fruin define the Dutch word 'Archief' as the whole of the written documents, drawings and printed matter, officially received or produced by an administrative body, or one of its officials, in so far as these documents were intended to remain in the custody of that body or that official'. Here they mean the records of a particular administrative body that were maintained in a registry office.
- 3) Sir.Hilary Jankinson in his monumental work 'A manual of Archives Administration' puts that; a document which may be said to belong to the class of Archives is one which was drawn up or used in the course of an administrative or executive transactions (whether public or private) and subsequently preserved in their own custody for their own information by the person or persons responsible for those transaction and their legitimate successors'.
- 4) Eugenia Esanova, an Italian archivist defines Archives as 'the orderly accumulation of records which were created in the course of its activity by an institution or an individual and which are preserved for the accomplishment of its political, legal or cultural purposes by such an institution or individual.

- 5) Wolfgang Leesch defines Archives as “the whole of the papers and documents growing out of legal or business activities of a physical or legal body which are intended for permanent preservation at a particular place as the source and the evidence of the past”.

Thus archivists of various countries have defined the term ‘Archives’ differently. It is obvious, therefore, that there is no final or ultimate definition of the term ‘Archives’ that must be accepted, without change and in preference to all. A definition should not be accepted that will vitiate their effectiveness.

Here the definition given by T.R.Schellenberg is worth studying. He defines Archives in his famous book ‘Modern Archives - Principles and Techniques’ as follows:

“All books, papers, maps, photographs or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by any public or private institutions in pursuance of its legal obligations or in connection with the transaction of its proper business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that institution or its legitimate successor as evidence of its functions, policies, decision, procedures, operations or other activities or because of the informational value of the data contained therein’.

The scope of the term 'Archives' has further been widened with the rapid growth of electronic systems and the introduction of computers in the communication and informations systems in the later half of the twentieth century. It has changed the old mode of recording information from manuscripts into a machine readable form.

These machine readable materials became specially important in the day today administration of the communication and information network.

Preservation of these materials paved the way for the establishment of film archives, radio archives, sound archives, and archives in computerised form as disks, tapes, and other Microfilms. Thus separate Archives repositories for films, video cassettes, audio cassettes and computer disks have been started at regional, national and international levels. In India All India radio sound Archives (1954) and National Film Archives of India (1964 at pune) were established for the preservation of electronic media materials for future use.

After the introduction of media documents preserved in machine readable material into the archival field the term Archives could be defined as 'a place where information is preserved in manuscripts (both printed and script) and machine readable form for future reference by both the administration and administered'.

### **Records :**

The term record originated from Latin term 'recordari' which is derived from another Latin term 'cor' which means heart. As the heart is conveniently believed to be the control of action, creative thinking, memory etc. the term record conclusively means 'all written facts or events worthy of memory' It includes all manuscripts produced by writing machines and all scripts mechanically produced. As rightly observed by Philip C. Brooks, 'Records are accountable to people. They are the tools of administration, the memory of organisation, the embodiment of experience, the protector of legal rights and sources of many kinds of information'.

### **Archivist**

A person engaged in the administration of Archival materials is called an Archivist. The Archivists play a vital

role in the day - to - day administration of the government. Since they are well - versed in the content of the records, they could supply the needed informations to the administrators. The Archivist is the most competent person to trace, collect, study and furnish readily all the available information in a proper digestible form to the administrators and the researchers.

Sir Hilary Jenkinsan call the Archivist 'The moral and physical defence of the archives'. Infact there are two functions of the Archivist. The Archivist has a tremendous responsibility vested in him. He is responsible primarily for the authenticity of the documents entrusted to him, for keeping them safe from being tampered with. It is a weighty task that calls for the highest moral integrity.

It is necessary for him also to see that what have been kept in his custody do not suffer physical damage. All the materials with which documents are prepared are of a perishable nature and easily liable to deterioration and damage. So the archivist is also responsible for taking such measures as are necessary for protecting documents from the physical peril to them. Jenkinson calls this task the physical defence of the archives.

### **Characteristics of Archives:**

The following are some of the special characteristics of Archives.

Firstly, Archives have organic relationship to the creating agency. For example Madurai Kamaraj University is a creating agency. It creates records like V.C.'s Orders, transfer certificate, mark sheet, degree etc. If we want to get the degree or other documents we have to come to Madurai. Because it is the creating agency. It has got the relationship with the documents it produced.

Secondly, records are created for some special purpose. The records created by the official agencies are valid in any-where. So the Archives is official in nature. It can stand before any court of law. (Eg) Collector office records, University records, Government orders etc. Library books are not official in character.

Thirdly, Archives is unique in character. If we lost the original document we can get only it's duplicate. The original one cannot be restored. Eg. Victory charter, Collector's order, Government's Order. So the original documents are unique.

Fourthly, Archives is organic in character. Each record is a consequence of some earlier proceedings. Records are the culmination of so many steps. These records were not created in a single stroke. (Eg) "A Panchayat order for sanitation". It is a single event. But the order is the result of so many earlier proceedings.

The essential characteristics of Archives, give us reasons why records came into being and to the reasons why they were preserved. We now accept that to be Archives, records must have been received and produced to accomplish a specific purpose and must have values for purposes, other than those for which they were produced or accumulated.

### **Nature of Modern Archives :**

Modern archives have certain characteristics because of the way they come into being. They are dealt with after they have served their immediate purposes. They are produced by all kinds of modern duplicating devices, and hence they are in various physical forms, such as books, papers, maps and photographs. They are derived from many sources though they may all emanate from a single government.



- 1) Modern archives are often difficult to identify. They are not created, as are books, by one person or group of persons in consequence of an interest in some subject but are byproduct of an activity of a government unit. They are not therefore readily identifiable by author and title.
- 2) Modern archives are often indeterminate in their contents. They present themselves as a body of material that has grown organically out of a government activity. Because of their organic growth, they are not organised primarily on a survey matter basis. Their subject matter is not reflected in a title.
- 3) Modern archives are variously arranged. The several groups or archives with which an archivist deals may be arranged under all kinds of system numerical, alphabetical, or classified; or by physical types. They may simply be accumulations without perceptible order.
- 4) Modern archives are unique in character. They do not exist in large and widespread editions as is often the case with publications of various kinds.
- 5) Modern archives are selected materials. They are chosen because of their evidential or informational values from a great mass of records produced by a government. They are chosen because of their significance in the entire documentation of a particular subject of activity.
- 6) Modern archives are valuable records. Public archives are defined as "public records that are judged worthy of preservation for reference and research purposes and which have been deposited or have been selected for deposit in appropriate institution".

## Archives and Library :

The basic function of archives and libraries is the storing and processing of information to be furnished for needed organisations and persons. But archives by nature are different from Libraries.

Archival materials are produced during the course of administration of a government or organisation. The significance of materials is determined by the creators who use the records. Their cultural value is only incidental. But library materials are produced for cultural purposes. Thus archives are used primarily for administrative purpose and books for cultural matters.

Archival institutions are receiving agencies, where as libraries are collecting agencies. A Government Archival Institution should receive our materials (documents) produced by its creator and not those produced by other governments. For instance, the National Archives of India receives documents and records produced or managed by central government and the Tamilnadu Archives receives records from the Tamilnadu government. Libraries on the other hand derive their materials from all over the world.

- An important difference between Archives and Library is that Archival materials have one copy each. The government order and its related documents are one entry and there is no copy. If the G.O. is missed or destroyed, it is impossible to get back the same thing because it has no copy anywhere. But the books, on the other hand, have many copies and it is easy to replace the same when a book is missed from the Library.

The major collections in the library are books and journals. The books have been written with the help of Archival sources, which are primary in nature. Hence the books and journals form secondary sources.

At last, while the libraries concentrate on supplying information to the common public, the Archives deal with the administration on one hand and research scholars and historians on the other.

The archives have administrative, historical and intellectual values. For the reconstruction of the past in an authentic way the archival material is of immense value. The administrative records preserved and maintained assist the administrator in sorting out intellectual policies, determining programme priorities and informing the unity of purpose into the whole organisation.

Archives are utilised for statistical data of the past. History being the record of the human past is authentic when supported by reliable primary sources which are usually deposited in the archives. Hence the study of Archives keeping has gained importance.



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## USES OF ARCHIVES

An archives is a charitable mine of information and a repository of records. The records and documents kept in the archives eloquently exposes the past experience, give evidence of progress and protect legal rights. Records are therefore the evidence by which a government is accountable to people.

We need not necessarily come to the conclusion that archives is the final result for historical research. A best scholar may corroborate the archival information with the other available sources. Historical research essentially is a blend between the sources available and its objective interpretation. Archives offers a vast scope for historical research. It ameliorates and answers many problems of research in modern period. Archives supplies facts to historians. The facts are woven like a web though which one can peep into the past. A well preserved archives is an asset to the nation.

### Uses of Archives

#### 1. Source Materials:

Modern archives are valuable for a number of purposes. Archives serve as 'Source Materials' in the sense of providing basic information for various forms of study, research, or inquiry. Among the fields enumerated are.

a) Public administration, in which are available records and documents of organisation and functions of each government agency, and records of special bodies.

b) Diplomatic history, in which are available the diplomatic and consular dispatches, instructions etc. relating to foreign activities of the government.

c) Economic history and theory, in which are available data gathered by regulatory and labour agencies showing the concentrating of industry; labour dispute, employment service transportation, maritime, rail-road and transportation development etc.,

d) National history, in which are available records from many sources related to government, records on various wars, on particular historical events or episodes etc.,

e) Demography, in which are available passenger lists, census and schedules, and records of a number of special agencies, records of agricultural, labour and transportation etc. Records are also available to study biography and generalogy, technology and physical science. Further, archives are also used as source materials in establishing various rights, privileges, duties, immunities and the like that derive from or are connected with the citizens relationship to the Federal government, and in regulating the activity of government officials and agencies. The following are few examples of ways in which holdings of archives serve as source materials.

f) In citizen-government relations, to provide evidence of entitlement to lands (land grant records); to pensions (Service records); to citizenship (naturalization records); to legal residence (Census-records);

g) In relation between citizen's that are affected by relations with the government, to determine royalty rights (patent records, contract records), to settle wage disputes (labour relations case files, cost of living studies); to give evidence of job experience (Service records).

h) In official activity, to deal with the general Accounting office (fiscal and budgetary records); to answer claims (contact and employment records), to find precedents for policy or acting (conference minutes, administrative histories); to determine employability (investigation and service records).

Thus, "Archives, as the materials in which the archivist works, considered as a whole are a principle category of source material, documenting all government activities, valuable for a wide range of studies, fundamental for all civic rights of the individual and for many matters of equity as between individuals, and important in regulating government activity itself, unique, and presenting themselves as bodies of documents reflecting the functions and structure of government agencies".

## **2) Evidential value and informational value:**

Public records have two types of value; evidential value and informational value.

a. Generally public records contain evidence of the organisation, functions, policies, decision, procedures operations, and other activities of the government. Materials containing evidence on the organisation and functioning of an agency have value for the public administrator to the extent that they are needed for the current or future functioning of the agency. The records of an agency that contain evidential value, are necessary to provide an authentic and adequate documentation of its organizational functioning.

b. Records containing information on organization, functioning, activities and methods of procedure are indispensable to the government itself and to students of public administration. For the government they are the store

house of administrative wisdom and experience. They are needed to give consistency and continuity to its actions. They contain precedents for policies, procedures, and the like, and can be used as a guide to public administrators in solving problems of the present that the similar to others deal within the past. They contain the proof of each agency's faithful stewardship of the responsibilities delegated to it and the accounting that every public official owes to the people whom he serves. For students of public administration who wish to analyze the experiences of an agency in dealing with organization all, procedural, and policy matters they provide the only reliable source.

Informational value is ordinarily called research value – the value that inheres in public records because of the information they contain that may be useful in research of various kinds. Informational value refers to the information that is in public records on persons, places, subjects, and the like with which public agencies deal. In appraising the value of such information in public records, we are not concerned with the sources of the records-what agency created them, or what activities resulted in their creation. The only thing that matters is the information that is in them. Thus records are judged solely on the basis of their content and not on their relation to other records produced by an agency.

In appraising the informational value of record various research uses may be taken into account. These uses may be made by scholars in all kinds of disciplines, by historians, economists, sociologists and geographers, by scientists interested in purely physical matters, and by generalogists interested in purely personal matters.

### **3) Useful for research purposes:**

In fact we know the records have been used either by the creating agencies or the research scholars. One who doe

research on modern history know the value of Archives. Easy access to records depends upon many factors. The preservation and organisation of records help the research scholars to lessen their task. We know how the records, of the East India Company were made use of the scholars. There was a time when these records have no access either by the common man or a scholar. The first effort in this regard was taken by Samuel Jones in 1797, for the publication of a Bengal annual register. Jones sought the permission of the government to consult the records for getting the correct information.

In 1798, J.T. Brown made a request for the preparation of his statistical report. The government was unaware of the contents and the nature of records. Hence the government could not open for research all in a sudden, without proper appraisal of the records. More over many of the company authorities did not know the value of those works. Not much time is wasted to know that importance of records and documents.

As a scholar we may just discard 'The History' of Herodotus as a narrative and less authentic. At the same time we praise it as a monumental work in Historiography as a result of its importance as the first attempt in making of proper history.

We know the existence of Archives in Ancient Greece and Rome. The use of it was not felt as it is now. We have to thank the effort of Ranke of making use of the Archives of different countries. It was he who applied Scientific methodology for historical research. This he could achieve because of Archives. The task of historian is to show what happened actually. The narration of what actually happened is not the imagination of the author, not a prophesy or



guessing of the historian. But it is authentic explanation of the facts which are considered as the relics of man.

Among the relics that man left are the records, documents and letters that form bulk of the materials in the Archives. Archives materials are more dependable. A passive reference to the various works of modern history, primarily written due to archives materials, may not be a super-flow one. 'The south Indian rebellion' by Dr.K.Rajaiyan, 'History of Mysore' by Sheik Ali, 'the History of Malabar' by T.K.Ravindran and the Freedom Struggle by Tarachand are best to be noted.

#### **4) Records are useful to the creative agency:**

How they are useful? Are they created for preservation? Are they reveal the real fact? The records are created in the course of administration. Systematic planning is the essential part of administration. The plan is to act with a purpose. We know the present is the child of the past. All the new things are due to the synthesis of the previous phenomenon.

In 1798, J.T.Brown, Reporter of external commerce, applied to the government for permission to consult the records for the preparation of his statistical report. Progress of the state from age to age can be measured through the statistical reports. The old reports and records will speak for themselves what are the measures taken to tackle the situation and what is to be taken to solve a more complex problem than the previous one.

Lord Dalhousie who understood the use of Archives to the government says, "The collection of records showing the state and progress of the country and it's people with all statistics bearer on the subject which might be procurable. It consider this work as one of great utility to the government and the public". The inactive

records come to the Archives. But it is of also having a great value for reference to the government and of what kind of action is to be taken.

#### **5) Useful for Administrative purpose:**

The records of importance will be kept for ever for administrative reference. Some of the records are secret and may be for available for scrutiny. The records are enacted with the purpose of permanent value. The publication of official papers must invariably be made with the caution and under proper regulations and the previous sanction of each government must be obtained for publication in every case.

Joseph Cunningham while in the political service of the company wrote a book called "History of the Sikhs". He was removed from service, since he used the documents without the permission of the government. Misuse of official documents for personnel ends is considered as a serious offence. Some of the information furnished by the records may be faulty or it may be silent regarding some points. But the task of the research scholar is to find out the credibility of the documents in the light of the other available evidences.

Records are kept and published not only for Historical Research but also to make people to know the administration of the country. On 22 August 1856, M.W.Townfind, editor of the 'Friends India' newspaper, addressed from Serempore, a very interesting letter to the Supreme Government proposing to undertake the preparation of a digest of all reports of the various governments as to make it available for the public. Because of this people may come to know that administrative change in various times. It also helps the people to offer constructive criticism to the government policies and the attitudes. Most of the people do not know the departmental rules and subsequent changes. All these are possible only through having a touch with the Archival materials.

**6) Useful for the collection of statistical data:**

It has been referred already that Archives are used for the statistical data collection. The census report of 1871 may be a better example in this regard. We know the Hunder commission report regarding education which furnishes a lot of statistical data. The input and output of the industrial economy and its growth can be known such records connected with statistics. A well written economic history of a particular period is possible only through the interpretation of the available datas.

**7) Archives materials are useful for publication:**

Some of the Historians are of the view that it is the responsibility of the records to issue critical publications based on the original records. Some others insist of the preservation of the original records. Any way the supreme government of India had to their credit a number of publication as given below:

- 1) Selection of Home records of government.
- 2) Annual reports of the revenue administration.
- 3) Annual Judicial report of the Supreme Court.
- 4) Annual report of the legal remembrance.
- 5) Annual report of the police lower provinces.
- 6) Annual report of the Calcutta police.
- 7) Annual educational report.
- 8) Annual commercial and shipping reports of the states.
- 9) Half yearly report of the government.
- 10) Half yearly report of the government dispensaries.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1853, a request was made by the Secretary, Bengal Chamber of Commerce, Calcutta, to the effect that government publications from the records and other reports on subject of public interest should be supplied to his office for the use of the chamber. The above request

led the governor to arrive at a positive decision. The government decided to place the official publications on sale to the public at a fixed rate. Since then a lot of research work has come out on the basis of reports and publications.

Now a days the areas which have not been considered for research are given due consideration by the archives. Those untouched records are published and attention is sought towards those aspects among the historians and researchers.

### **8. Authenticity in History:**

Historical research works depend upon its authenticity. Each statement should be supported by source materials. The Historian uses foot notes to express his indebtedness to those who saw, heard a document or any other sources. The data collected from records and documents form the primary sources. Hence archives help the research scholars to write with authenticity and accuracy.

### **9. Archives is the store house of the past:**

Archives supply materials in connection with the government dealings. Here one has the chances to know the interaction between the government and the people. The past that is not clear but the records make it clear and bright. Archives is veritable mine of information. History is the record of the past. Archives is an official place where the records are stored. It is a pool of written sources. Historian judges the past from the facts he derives from sources, especially from the Archival sources.

### **10. Useful for the reconstruction of the past:**

We can reconstruct the past in the light of new evidences. Now local history gets more importance and all the available sources have been exploited to write the history of the local areas. The evidences pertain to the peculiar

area may be available only in the archives. Archival materials give fresh huts and scores to the frame by local history.

### **Conclusion:**

Until the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries most of the historical works were based upon book materials. Inscription and other Archaeological sources were not used extensively. There were official records in early times but not serious efforts were made either to preserve them or to bring them together in any central archives. Generally they were left under the private custody of public servants.

This situation changed since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The administration in different countries gave attention to the collection and preservation of records. More than any other nation, Great Britain introduced measures aimed at collecting and arrange the documents and placing them at the disposal of the scholars for research.

History has become-very largely dependent on archives. Because it supplies records for their research. It furnishes information in the political, economic and cultural development of the past. A well preserved archives is an asset to the nation.

Thus the uses of archives are manifold. They are the edifices on which rests the historical writings. They furnish details of information with adequate data on the working of the departments of government semi public agencies, religious organisations and private individuals. The present day administrators can acquire knowledge of information about the pros and cons of various schemes of his predecessors of the remote past. Moreover the researchers owe allegiance to them as they provide the primary sources for their subject study. Both public and private archives do their best in enumerating historical facts.