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Archival Libraries in Kerala: An Overview and Critical Analysis of Preservation, Digitisation, and Community Participation

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Abstract

Archival libraries play an important role in preserving the documentary, cultural, historical, and intellectual heritage of societies. India possesses a rich and diverse archival heritage comprising rare books, manuscripts, inscriptions, artefacts, photographs, and other historical records. Kerala, with its distinctive cultural and historical traditions, has a significant network of archival libraries and heritage institutions that preserve valuable materials related to the region's history and development. This study provides an overview and critical analysis of selected archival libraries and heritage institutions in Kerala, with particular emphasis on preservation and conservation practices, digitization, accessibility, institutional development, and community participation. The study draws upon visits to selected institutions, interactions with library and archival personnel, documentary sources, institutional websites, research literature, and other secondary sources. It examines the

nature of archival collections, preservation initiatives, adoption of modern technologies, public and research services, and the role of local communities in supporting archival heritage. The study also identifies major challenges related to professional staffing, financial resources, conservation infrastructure, technological adoption, digital preservation, public awareness, and community engagement. The paper argues that the sustainable preservation of Kerala's archival heritage requires an integrated approach that encompasses institutional support, professional expertise, systematic digitization, improved public access, heritage education, and meaningful community participation. The study concludes by suggesting measures to strengthen archival preservation and ensure that Kerala's documentary heritage remains accessible to future generations.

Keywords: Archival Libraries, Kerala, Archival Heritage, Preservation, Digitisation, Community Participation

Introduction

Archives and archival libraries constitute an important component of a society's documentary and cultural heritage. They preserve records, manuscripts, rare books, photographs, inscriptions, maps, institutional documents, and other materials that provide evidence of human activities, social institutions, cultural practices, administrative processes, and historical developments. The International Council on Archives defines archives as records created or received and accumulated in the course of activities and preserved because of their continuing value. Such records provide authentic evidence of human activity and contribute to the preservation and continued accessibility of reliable information. India possesses a rich and diverse archival heritage extending across different periods, regions, languages, scripts, institutions, and communities. Archival repositories in India preserve government records, private papers, manuscripts, rare books, cartographic materials, photographs, and other documentary resources that are valuable to historians, researchers, administrators, students, and the wider public. The National Archives of India (NAI), established in 1891 as the Imperial Records Department, serves as the custodian of the Government of India's records of enduring value. It also has responsibilities relating to the management, preservation, conservation, access, and digitization of archival records. The importance of archives has expanded beyond the traditional function of storing historical documents. Contemporary archival institutions are increasingly expected to provide broader access to collections, promote research, support heritage education, and leverage digital technologies to enhance preservation and accessibility. The National Archives of India, for example, has introduced systematic digitization and digital

access initiatives, including the Abhilekh-Patal portal, while also developing standards for the digitization of archival materials. These developments demonstrate the transition from conventional preservation towards integrated physical and digital preservation. Kerala has a distinctive and extensive cultural heritage represented through manuscripts, rare books, inscriptions, archaeological materials, museum collections, photographs, historical records, and other documentary resources. A number of governments, academic, archaeological, museum, and research institutions in the state maintain collections of historical and cultural significance. The Kerala State Archives Department, for instance, preserves palm-leaf records, paper records, microfilms, rare books, and other archival materials. The Department has also undertaken digitization of archival records and developed systems through which digitized materials can be accessed by authorized researchers. Preservation of such collections is particularly important because archival materials are vulnerable to physical, environmental, biological, and technological deterioration. Paper, palm-leaf manuscripts, photographs, maps, and other historical materials require appropriate storage, handling, conservation, environmental control, and preventive measures. At the same time, digitization has emerged as an important complementary strategy for reducing the handling of fragile originals and improving access to collections. However, digitization itself requires appropriate standards for image quality, metadata, storage, file formats, accessibility, and long-term digital preservation. The National Archives of India has noted the need for uniform standards in archival digitization, including metadata and storage practices.

The preservation of archival heritage cannot, however, be considered solely an institutional or governmental responsibility. Archives acquire meaning and social value through their use by researchers, students, local communities, cultural organizations, educational institutions, and the wider public. Community participation can contribute to the identification, documentation, interpretation, preservation, and dissemination of local historical resources. Community members may also contribute family records, photographs, oral histories, local knowledge, and other materials that can enrich institutional collections. Greater public engagement can therefore strengthen awareness of archival heritage and encourage a sense of shared responsibility for its preservation. The relationship between preservation, digitization, access, and community participation is consequently becoming increasingly important in the management of archival heritage. The vision and mission of the National Archives of India emphasize preservation for posterity, scientific management and conservation, greater access to archival holdings, and the development of professionalism among creators, custodians, and users of records. These principles are also relevant to archival institutions operating at the state and local levels.

Against this background, the present study provides an overview and critical analysis of selected archival libraries and heritage institutions in Kerala, with particular attention to their historical development, collections, preservation and conservation practices, adoption of digital technologies, accessibility, and community participation. The study also considers the institutional and practical challenges associated with the sustainable preservation of archival

resources and identifies measures to strengthen digitization, public access, professional capacity, heritage awareness, and community engagement. By examining these dimensions together, the study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of how Kerala's archival heritage can be preserved, made accessible, and transmitted effectively to future generations.

Research Problem and Rationale of the Study

Kerala possesses a rich and diverse archival heritage preserved through government departments, archaeological institutions, museums, universities, research organizations, and other academic and cultural institutions. These institutions hold rare books, manuscripts, palm-leaf records, inscriptions, photographs, archaeological materials, historical documents, and other resources that provide valuable evidence of the region's social, cultural, administrative, and intellectual history. However, the existence of valuable archival collections does not by itself ensure their long-term preservation, accessibility, or effective use. Archival materials are vulnerable to deterioration caused by environmental conditions, improper storage and handling, biological agents, material aging, and other physical factors. In addition, the increasing volume of digital information has created new challenges related to digitization, metadata creation, digital storage, preservation, accessibility, and long-term management of digital records. Although several archival and heritage institutions in Kerala have adopted modern technologies and undertaken digitization initiatives, the extent and effectiveness of these practices may vary between institutions. Differences in infrastructure, financial resources, professional expertise, technological facilities, and institutional priorities can influence the quality and sustainability of archival preservation.

Another important concern is the relationship between archival institutions and the communities they serve. Archival heritage is not only a resource for professional researchers but also an important component of local identity, collective memory, heritage education, and cultural awareness. Community members can contribute to archival preservation through the identification and documentation of local historical resources, donation of family records and photographs, participation in oral-history initiatives, educational programs, exhibitions, heritage activities, and other forms of engagement. However, community participation and public awareness need to be considered alongside institutional responsibilities for systematic preservation and access. Existing literature has examined aspects of archaeological and archival libraries in Kerala, including their collections, facilities, and information services. However, there is scope for a broader examination that brings together preservation and conservation, digitization, accessibility, institutional practices, challenges, and community participation. The present study, therefore, attempts to examine selected archival libraries and heritage institutions in Kerala from these interconnected perspectives.

The rationale for the study lies in the need to understand how to preserve Kerala's archival heritage while making it accessible and meaningful to present and future generations. By examining institutional practices together with technological developments and community involvement, the study seeks to identify existing strengths, challenges,

and areas requiring further attention. The findings may contribute to the development of more effective preservation strategies, systematic digitization, improved public access, professional capacity building, heritage education, and stronger community engagement in the sustainable management of Kerala's archival heritage.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and exploratory case-study approach to examine selected archival libraries and heritage institutions in Kerala, with particular attention to their historical development, collections, preservation practices, adoption of modern technologies, library services, and community involvement. Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through visits to selected archival libraries and heritage institutions, direct observation of their collections and facilities, and telephone interviews with selected library or institutional personnel. These interactions provided information relating to the nature of collections, preservation activities, technological applications, services, and institutional practices. Secondary data were collected from official government and institutional websites, published research articles, books, reports, and relevant newspaper sources. Particular emphasis was placed on information obtained from official institutional and government sources, where available. The literature was also reviewed to understand the historical development of archival libraries and prior research on archival and archaeological libraries in Kerala.

The institutions considered in the study differ in their historical background, the nature and rarity of their collections, building and storage facilities, institutional administration, technological infrastructure, and services offered to users. The collected information was organized thematically and analyzed descriptively to identify common practices, differences, technological developments, preservation measures, community-oriented activities, and major challenges. The study, therefore, combines institutional observation, interview-based information, and documentary analysis to provide an overview and critical understanding of archival libraries in Kerala.

Institutional Mission and Functions of Archival Libraries

The preservation and management of archival heritage constitute important components of cultural and knowledge preservation in India. Government archival institutions, academic institutions, museums, research organizations, and other custodial bodies are responsible for preserving records and materials of enduring historical, cultural, administrative, and research value. Their activities generally include the identification, collection, preservation, conservation, documentation, digitization, and provision of access to archival resources. In the context of Kerala, these functions are particularly significant because archival and heritage institutions preserve materials related to the state's social, cultural, administrative, archaeological, and intellectual history.

For the purpose of this study, archival institutions may be broadly grouped into the following three categories:

Table 1: Types of Archival Institutions

Type of archival institution	Major examples / context	Principal archival role
Academic and Educational Archives	Colleges, universities, libraries, research centres and academic institutions	Preserve institutional records, rare books, manuscripts, research materials, photographs, publications and other resources supporting teaching and research
Corporate and Organisational Archives	Companies, business organisations, financial institutions and other private organisations	Preserve organisational records, historical documents, photographs, reports, publications and materials documenting institutional development
Government and National Archives	Central and state government departments, National Archives, State Archives and related public institutions	Preserve official records, administrative documents, historical records and materials of enduring evidential, legal and historical value

Sources: National archive of India, website

Aim and objective of the archival libraries:

The aims and objectives of the archival libraries are as follows:

- To spread our ancient cultural richness to the society.
- Antiquities and heritage; preservation and provision of records for administration and historical research.
- Conducting vocational training and reorientation programmes for the preservation of ancient materials by using chemical and traditional methods.
- Technical Services enhances the archival library through various measures and workshops.
- To digitising the library. Taking photos of various items and collecting them on the computer. And protecting it.
- To create public awareness about the history for the future generation through school students and researchers.
- To promote cultural development through the archival libraries and spread knowledge all over the globe.
- To organise seminars, discussions, and archival preservation training programmes from time to time.

Committees, Commissions, and National Initiatives for Library Development in India

The development of library and information services in India has been influenced by a series of committees, commissions, policies, and national programs established at different stages after independence. These initiatives addressed key areas, including public library development, library legislation, professional education, modernization, information technology, digitization, accessibility, and community participation. Their recommendations contributed to the gradual transition of libraries from traditional book repositories towards broader knowledge and information centers.

Table 2: Major Committees, Policies and National Initiatives Related to Library Development in India

Year	Committee / Policy / Initiative	Major focus	Significance for library development
1957	Advisory Committee for Libraries (K. P. Sinha Committee)	Development of public libraries, library legislation, financing, extension of library services and library education	Recommended a systematic public library network, including extension of services to blocks, panchayats and villages, and proposed measures for strengthening public library development.
1957	Library Committee to advise the UGC	Development and organisation of university and higher-education libraries	Addressed the development of libraries associated with higher education and their organisational and service requirements.
1965	Review Committee on Library Science Education	Library and information science education and professional training	Focused attention on strengthening professional education and preparing qualified personnel for the developing library sector.
1985–1986	Committee on National Policy on Library and Information Systems (CONPOLIS) / National Policy on Library and Information Systems	National planning for library and information services	Provided a policy-oriented framework for the development of library and information services and considered the need for a coordinated national approach.
1990 & 2001	Curriculum Development initiatives in Library and Information Science	Curriculum revision and professional education	Reflected the changing requirements of library education and the growing importance of information technology and professional competencies.
2005–2008	National Knowledge Commission (NKC)	Libraries as gateways to knowledge, modernisation, ICT, professional education and public access	Recommended major reforms in the Library and Information Service sector, including modernisation, ICT applications, improved professional education, library census, community participation and support for private collections.
2012	National Mission on Libraries (NML)	Modernisation, digitisation, infrastructure, surveys and capacity building	Established by the Ministry of Culture in pursuance of National Knowledge Commission recommendations. Its major components include the National Virtual Library of India, model libraries, quantitative and qualitative surveys, and capacity building.
2014	Launch of the National Mission on Libraries	Implementation of national library modernisation initiatives	The NML was formally launched on 3 February 2014 and placed emphasis on modernising library infrastructure, digitisation, developing libraries as knowledge centres and making services more inclusive.

Sources: Compiled by the authors based on reports, recommendations, and policy documents of various Library Committees, Commissions, and educational bodies in India.

Table 3: Development of the archival libraries in India from ancient times until the information technology era

Year / Period	Major Development	Key Person / Institution	Significance
1889	G. W. Forrest was entrusted with examining the records of the Foreign Department of the Government of India. He recommended systematic preservation and centralisation of historically valuable records.	Prof. G. W. Forrest	Provided the foundation for establishing a central archival repository in India.
11 March 1891	Imperial Records Department (IRD) was established at Calcutta (present-day Kolkata).	Government of India; G. W. Forrest	Marked a major milestone in the systematic custody, arrangement and preservation of government records.
1900–1938	Successive scholars and records officers contributed to the development of the central archival repository and its library collections.	Imperial Records Department	Expanded the organisation, preservation and scholarly use of archival records.
1926	The Imperial Records Department moved to its present building in New Delhi.	Imperial Records Department	Strengthened the institutional infrastructure for the preservation and management of archival records.
1937	Transfer of records from Calcutta to New Delhi was completed.	Imperial Records Department	Consolidated the central archival holdings at New Delhi.
1939	Archival records were opened to bona fide scholars for research.	Imperial Records Department	Marked an important development in providing research access to historical records.
1940	Conservation Research Laboratory (CRL) was established.	Imperial Records Department	Introduced scientific research and methods for the conservation of archival materials.
1941	Formal training in archival keeping was introduced.	Imperial Records Department	Strengthened professional archival education and capacity building.
1947	The Indian Archives was established as a departmental journal.	National Archives / Government of India	Promoted archival scholarship, research, conservation studies and professional communication.
1947	Following Indian independence, the Imperial Records Department became the National Archives of India (NAI).	Government of India	Established the national archival institution of independent India.
1990	The designation Director of Archives was changed to Director General of Archives.	Government of India	Reflected the expanding administrative and professional responsibilities of the National Archives.

1998	Computerisation and digitisation activities were strengthened through the Archival Information Management System (AIMS).	National Archives of India	Marked the transition from predominantly manual archival management towards computer-supported archival services.
11 March 2015	Abhilekh Patal, an online archival access portal, was launched.	National Archives of India	Expanded online discovery and access to archival holdings for researchers and the wider public.
2015–2016	The National Archives of India observed its 125th year with nationwide programmes and activities.	National Archives of India	Increased public awareness of India's archival heritage and the importance of preservation.
Present	NAI functions under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, with regional and records-centre infrastructure.	National Archives of India	Continues preservation, conservation, records management, research services, digitisation, training and public outreach.

Source: Compiled from the historical development and milestone information provided by the National Archives of India.

Kerala and archival library history and development:

Kerala has been an advanced state since ancient times. Importantly, India's first Trivandrum public library is the State Central Library of Kerala, formerly known as the Trivandrum People's Library, which was started in 1829 by King Swati Thirunal. And it would not be an exaggeration to say that this library started a series of libraries in Kerala. Libraries in Kerala were run by the king earlier, and after independence by the central government and the state government, the government is taking care of them. And citizens are valued by the government. Archival libraries are very important, and the objects and books in those libraries

give a glimpse of the ancient culture of Kerala.

Selected Archival and Archaeological Libraries in Kerala

Kerala has a number of specialised archival, archaeological, historical, and heritage-oriented libraries associated with museums, universities, government departments, research institutions, and cultural organisations. These institutions preserve and provide access to rare books, manuscripts, historical documents, archaeological literature, research publications, and other materials of cultural and historical significance. The selected institutions considered in this study are presented below.

Table 4: Selected Archival and Archaeological Libraries in Kerala

S. No	Name of the Institution / Library	Year of Establishment	Institutional Association	Major Significance
1	Krishnapuram Palace Library	1950	Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala	Associated with the historic Krishnapuram Palace and its archaeological museum collections; the palace preserves numerous historical and archaeological objects.
2	Thrissur Archaeological Museum Library	1975	Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala	Supports the study and documentation of archaeological and historical materials associated with the Thrissur Archaeological Museum. The museum contains collections ranging from prehistoric and protohistoric to historic periods.
3	Kerala State Archaeology Department Library	1978	Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala	Provides documentary and research support for archaeological studies and the preservation of Kerala's archaeological heritage.
4	Hill Palace Archaeological Library	1986	Department of Archaeology, Government of Kerala	Associated with Hill Palace and its museum and heritage collections, supporting research relating to Kerala's royal, archaeological, and cultural heritage.
5	Department of Archaeology Library, University of Kerala	1997	University of Kerala	Provides academic and research resources relating to archaeology, history, heritage and allied disciplines.
6	Archaeological Survey of India Library, Thrissur	1997	Archaeological Survey of India	Provides specialised resources supporting archaeological research, conservation and heritage studies.
7	Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR) Library	2004	Kerala Council for Historical Research	Supports historical research through books, research publications, archival resources and other scholarly materials.
8	Keralam Museum Library	2011	Keralam – Museum of History and Heritage	Supports research and documentation relating to Kerala's history, culture and heritage.
9	Rajagiri Museum and Library	2022	Rajagiri institutional/heritage initiative	Provides resources associated with Trade, Commerce, business and heritage, history and museum-related studies.

Sources: Compiled by the authors based on official institutional sources.

Krishnapuram Palace Library

There is a palace and museum located at Kayamkulam in Alappuzha district. And this palace was built in the 18th century by Travancore Kingdom's Ananth Thirunal Martanda Varma (1729–1758 CE). There is a very beautiful Srikrishna Swamy temple near this palace. It is a historically important palace. After independence, this building was converted into a historical archive museum. Many rare

paintings, weapons, the double-edged sword (Kayamkulam Val), and other valuables are kept in the museum and library. We can see the custom of the Sanskrit Bible being printed in Calcutta (Kolkata) in 1886. The great attraction of this archival library is Budhha Hall for meditation. A very beautiful lake is near the library. There are five people working there. Now a days modern technology is used in this library.

Thrissur Archaeological Museum Library

The Museum of Art and Archeology in the city of Thrissur, in the state of Kerala, is known as Sri Mulam Chitrashala. In 1938, this library was known as the Art Gallery. It was expanded in 1948, after independence. Later in 1975, the museum and library shifted to Chembukkavu. All the land surveying and work here is done through the State Archeology Department. Famous old monuments and temples, Plaster of Paris statues and murals, and effigies of famous personalities, Olagrandhangals of ancient times, palm leaf manuscripts, Veerakallu, and megaliths have been carefully preserved in the Library and Sagarhalaya. From 7th to 18th century weapons, megaliths include everything from pottery to urns, stone age tools, and black and red objects, these objects are associated with the Indus civilization and Harappa. All these ancient objects have been collected from the areas of Thrissur, Wayanad, and Palakkad. Efforts have been made to preserve all these items using modern technology.

Kerala State Archaeology Department Library

In 1962, the State Archaeological Department was established in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. The publication of volumes of stone inscriptions found at various places in the state of Kerala, the copying, excavation, and discovery of copper-plate inscriptions, and B.C. This includes taking measures to protect historical buildings dating back to the 2000s. Other activities of the department include chemical preservation, script studies, folk art studies, and numismatic studies. There are 12 museums in Kerala under this archaeology department. such as Pazhahassi Tomb, Kunjali Marakkar Memorial Museum, Pazhahassi Raja Museum, Archaeological Museum of Thrissur, Mural Paintings Museum, Chendamangalam Synagogue, Hill Palace Museum, Krishnapuram Palace, Kottarakkara Thampuran Memorial Classical Arts Museum, Kottarakkara Thampuran Memorial Museum, Palakampuram Pallas Museum. The remarkable work of this library is the preservation and care of ancient books.

Hill Palace Archaeological Library, Ernakulam

It is said that this building was the residence of the erstwhile rulers of Kochi. And this structure was built in 1865; inside it is the Ethno-Archaeological Museum and Kerala's first Heritage Museum. The palace consists of 49 buildings and is built in the traditional architectural style of Kerala. It has more than 52 acres of land around it. Frescoes, sculptures, oil paintings, manuscripts, artifacts, and items from the royal family of Kochi can be seen. Here we can also see ancient pottery from the Far East, Kudakkallu (tomb stone), Thopikallu (hood stone), and laterite and wooden monuments from ancient civilizations like the Indus Valley and Harappa. It also houses a gallery of contemporary art. This museum of highly valuable objects stands proudly alongside the library and is the pride of Kochi.

Department of Archeology Library, Kerala University Library, Thiruvanthapuram

Kerala University Library (Thiruvanthapuram) was actually founded in 1937 by the Maharaja of Travancore and Chithira Thirunal Balaram Varma. This library was the

personal library of the royal family. It was the first university in the country and the first university in Kerala. King Swati Thirunal of Travancore entrusted this work to the British. Only a special class was allowed to enter this library at that time. This library houses a large number of works. 1942 The library was taken over by the government of India through a resolution and opened to the public. The Royal Library in Kerala serves as a depository of World Bank and United Nations publications. Digitization work has been done in this library using modern computer systems. A collection of over 50,000 rare books and other books is a delight for readers. Bibliography and other materials. The collection is growing by more than 5,000 titles every year. Library More than 500 journals, magazines, and books are available for men, women, children, and scholars of every age group. The library also offers digital information services like UGC Info Net. This is a special library. This library has many sections, The feature of this library is that in 1959, Prof. S.R. Ranganathan, then a student, was appointed as the full-time librarian of this library. After that, many librarians served here. Kerala University Library Prof. Ranganathan's effective use of the colon system of cataloguing continues to this day. It was known as the "Trivandrum People's Library." This very famous library is increasing the prestige of the country.

Archaeological Survey of India, Library Thrissur

The Archaeological Survey of India has its main office in Delhi and 34 branches in major cities in India. The Archaeological Survey of India is tasked with the study and conservation of the ancient culture of the country. One of the same is in Thrissur, and the library there is providing its services using modern technology. ASI was founded by Alexander Cunningham in Calcutta in 1861 under British rule, the Asiatic Society in India was started on January 15, 1784, by British ideologist William Jones to conduct the first systematic research in history. The Asiatic Society promoted the study of ancient Sanskrit, Persian texts, and other subjects and, for the first time, published an annual journal of the same title. The work of Charles Wilkins Hay, along with other members, was notable as he published the first English translation of the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita in 1785 with the help of the then Governor-General of Bengal, Warren Hastings. But in 1837, James Prinsep's work on the Brahmin script was highly appreciated. Such an important work was done by the Archaeological Survey of India. After independence, many sections of the country underwent changes. The Ram Niwas Mirdha Committee was set up in 1983, The committee prepared an action plan for the protection of historical monuments and submitted its report in 1984. The objective of this committee was the conservation and protection of the museum. Some laws and rules were made for every region of India. In order to promote Archaeological Survey of India research, the government established the ASI in each state and the capital city of the country. In April 1997, the Thrissur Circle of the Archaeological Survey of India was established. ASI Thrissur and other branches have specialised wings for activities like excavation, prehistory, building surveys, epigraphy, temple surveys, science, and underwater

archaeology. The wings and library is the most important parts of the Archaeological Survey of India. ASI manages all of India's archival libraries.

Kerala Council for Historical Research Library Nalanda Thiruvananthapuram Kerala

Nalanda University in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, houses this library. The library has a state-of-the-art library with the latest books, publications, journals, research papers, and other reference materials on the history and society of Kerala. The Council for Historical Research Library provides its services regularly. Along with many books, journals, magazines, content alert services, newspapers, photocopying services, and other services, this library. This library hosts a variety of events and programmes for its readers, including webinars, workshops, lectures, and other activities. Higher internships, fellowships, and short-term courses are conducted at KCHR. And it is getting a good response. KCHR also offers higher-level internships, fellowships, and short term courses. KCHR institutes and administers several fellowships and sponsorships for historical research. Seminars, workshops, and conferences are organised under the auspices of KCHR in multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas of research. The institute also undertakes government commissioned projects and has published about 34 volumes of its research. Currently, the KCHR library has databases on the history of Malayali migration and migrant communities, biographical documentation of women, Dalits, and tribals, and social reformers in Kerala. Digitizing the past, Pattanam archaeological research, biographical research tour, Malayali family history and biographies, Pannanan project, oral history, archaeology. High-profile projects such as Archives for History are underway. The entire KCHR team is working hard to achieve its goals.

Keralam Museum Library

The Interactive Museum of Cultural History of Kerala (IMCK) Thiruvananthapuram, known as the "Kerala Museum," is the first thematic and interactive museum in Kerala, an international standard museum and library, and the museum exhibits various aspects of the state's culture and heritage. We can read books and a lot of archival things here. Kerala Museum and Library is using modern technology. This library is an example of the rich heritage of Kerala.

Rajagiri Finance Museum and Library: Preserving the History of Trade and Commerce

The Rajagiri Finance Museum and Library, housed within the Fr. Moses Library at Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kerala, represents a distinctive integration of financial history, cultural heritage, library resources, and higher education. The museum and library provide an educational environment where students, teachers, researchers, and visitors can explore historical artifacts and documentary resources related to finance, trade, commerce, and economic life. The collection includes a valuable range of coins and historical financial artifacts associated with different periods and regions. These include coins associated with the period of Magadha and the economic ideas discussed in the *Arthashastra*; coins associated with the period of Christ; ancient Greece; the Chera, Chola, and Pandya dynasties; the Cochin and Travancore States; and British India. Together,

these materials provide an opportunity to understand the development of monetary systems and the evolution of trade and commerce across different historical periods.

In addition to coins, the museum and library preserve artifacts and documentary materials associated with finance, measurement systems, slavery, trade, and commerce. Traditional writing instruments, ink pots, and historical sculptures further enrich the collection and provide a broader cultural context for understanding economic and social life in earlier periods. These materials have considerable educational value because they allow learners to connect documentary knowledge with tangible historical evidence. The Rajagiri Finance Museum and Library, therefore, functions not merely as a repository of historical objects but also as a learning and research space. Its location within an educational institution enables students and teachers to engage directly with historical materials and to develop a deeper understanding of the relationships among finance, commerce, society, and cultural development. The collection can support interdisciplinary learning involving history, economics, commerce, management, archaeology, museology, and library and information studies.

An important feature of the institution is the integration of technology with heritage interpretation and access. The use of QR-code-enabled resources, virtual tours, and interactive displays can enhance the accessibility and educational value of the collection, particularly for students and digitally oriented learners. Such technological applications demonstrate how traditional museum and library resources can be complemented by digital tools to provide more engaging learning experiences. From the perspective of archival and heritage preservation, the Rajagiri Finance Museum and Library demonstrates the potential of educational institutions to preserve and interpret historical resources within an academic environment. At the same time, the long-term preservation of coins, documents, writing materials, sculptures, and other artifacts requires appropriate conservation measures, documentation, environmental management, professional expertise, and adequate financial resources. Systematic cataloguing and digitization of the collections could further improve access to research and contribute to their long-term preservation.

Thus, the Rajagiri Finance Museum and Library can be viewed as an example of how library resources, museum collections, historical artifacts, technology, and experiential learning can be brought together within a higher-education institution. Its collections provide valuable insights into Kerala's commercial and financial history while creating opportunities for students, researchers, and the wider community to engage with tangible cultural heritage. The institution consequently contributes both to the preservation of historical knowledge and to the educational use of archival and heritage resources (<https://museum.rajagiri.edu>).

Other Heritage Museums and Library-Related Institutions in Kerala

Kerala's archival and heritage landscape extends beyond dedicated archival libraries to include museums, folklore centers, archaeological institutions, and specialized heritage repositories. These institutions preserve and interpret a wide range of historical, cultural, archaeological, ethnological, medical, numismatic, and artistic materials. Although their primary functions may differ, many provide valuable

documentary, reference, and research resources that complement the work of archival libraries. The following institutions are therefore considered as part of the broader heritage and information-resource environment of Kerala.

Table 5: Selected Heritage Museums and Library-Related Institutions in Kerala

S. No	Institution / Museum	Location	Major Heritage / Research Focus
1	Vaidyaratnam Ayurveda Museum and Library	Thrissur	Ayurveda, traditional medical knowledge, manuscripts, historical documents, and related cultural heritage
2	Wayanad Heritage Museum	Ambalavayal, Wayanad	Archaeological and tribal heritage, historical artefacts, inscriptions, and materials relating to the cultural history of Wayanad
3	Koyikkal Palace Folklore and Numismatics Museum	Nedumangad, Thiruvananthapuram	Kerala folklore, traditional culture, musical instruments, household objects, and numismatic collections
4	Napier Museum and Library	Thiruvananthapuram	Art, archaeology, cultural heritage, sculptures, historical objects, and supporting research resources
5	Indo-Portuguese Museum	Fort Kochi, Ernakulam	Indo-Portuguese cultural heritage, ecclesiastical objects, historical artefacts, and records associated with Portuguese influence in Kerala
6	Kerala Folklore and Cultural Museum / Library	Kochi	Kerala's folklore, traditional arts, cultural practices, artefacts, and heritage documentation
7	Arakkal Museum	Kannur	History and heritage of the Arakkal royal family and the Muslim royal tradition of North Malabar
8	Ethnological Museum	Kozhikode	Ethnological and cultural heritage, traditional communities, material culture, and related historical resources
9	Kuthiramalika Palace Museum	Thiruvananthapuram	Travancore royal heritage, traditional architecture, paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, and historical artefacts

Sources: Compiled by the authors from institutional information and secondary sources consulted for the study.

Training and Capacity Building of Archival Staff

Training and capacity building are essential for the effective preservation, conservation, management, and digitization of archival library and museum collections. Archival staff are trained in the proper handling, storage, preservation, and conservation of rare books, manuscripts, documents, photographs, and museum objects. Such training may include both preventive and remedial conservation

techniques, such as appropriate environmental conditions, safe handling procedures, cleaning methods, pest management, and the careful use of chemical and natural conservation methods where required. Staff are also trained in the use of computers and digital technologies for scanning, digitizing, cataloguing, storing, and retrieving archival materials, as well as for creating and managing digital images and other forms of electronic records. Continuous professional development is particularly important because archival institutions increasingly combine traditional preservation practices with digital technologies and online information services. In addition to internal staff training, archival institutions can strengthen public awareness by providing information about their collections, preservation activities, exhibitions, services, and recent developments through their official websites and other digital platforms. Such initiatives improve accessibility, encourage research and public participation, and contribute to the long-term preservation and dissemination of Kerala's archival and cultural heritage.

Community Involvement and Support

Community participation and public support are essential for the sustainable development of libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural institutions. The history of library development in India indicates that the preservation and dissemination of knowledge have been supported by different sections of society, including royal families, scholars, religious institutions, local communities, philanthropists, and, subsequently, government agencies. During the pre-colonial period, royal and institutional patronage played an important role in preserving manuscripts, books, and other forms of knowledge. During the colonial period, the nature of library development gradually changed with the introduction of more organized systems of collection, preservation, and public access. After independence, government initiatives, library legislation, institutional development, and community participation further contributed to the expansion and modernisation of library services. In Kerala, public participation has been particularly significant in the development of the library movement, with communities contributing to the establishment, maintenance, and use of local libraries. The establishment of early public libraries and reading institutions demonstrates the combined importance of community initiative and institutional or government support in creating sustainable library services. In the contemporary context, community involvement has become even more important for archival libraries because public participation can contribute to heritage awareness, collection identification, documentation, fundraising, volunteering, oral-history projects, exhibitions, digitization initiatives, and the wider use of archival resources. Thus, the continued preservation of Kerala's archival heritage depends not only on institutional and governmental responsibility but also on the active interest, participation, and support of the communities whose history and cultural memory these collections represent.

Conclusion

Museums and archival libraries serve as custodians of collective memory, preserving the historical evidence, cultural traditions, knowledge, and material heritage through which societies understand their past and interpret their

present. The study highlights that archival libraries are not merely repositories of rare books, manuscripts, documents, artefacts, and other valuable materials; they are important centres for research, education, cultural awareness, and the transmission of heritage to future generations. In a culturally diverse country such as India, where each region possesses distinctive languages, scripts, traditions, and historical experiences, the preservation of regional archival collections is particularly significant. The archival and heritage institutions of Kerala similarly represent the state's rich historical, archaeological, literary, and cultural legacy. Their long-term preservation requires a balanced approach combining scientific conservation, professional staff training, systematic documentation, digitization, technological innovation, and wider public access. At the same time, the sustainability of archival heritage cannot depend solely on government and institutional initiatives; active participation and support from local communities, researchers, educational institutions, and the wider public are equally important. Greater awareness, regular engagement, and responsible use of these resources can help ensure that Kerala's rare books, manuscripts, historical records, sculptures, artifacts, and other cultural materials remain accessible to future generations. Therefore, the preservation and development of archival libraries in Kerala should be regarded as a shared cultural responsibility, and continued research and documentation are necessary to reveal and protect the state's rich yet underexplored archival heritage.

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