

FROM LUNCH MONEY TO LITERARY MOVEMENT: EVOLUTION OF MADAN PURASKAR LIBRARY

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Abstract

Nepal's leading literary archive in the present day, the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP), has humble origins in a minor act of selflessness of a schoolboy, Kamal Mani Dixit, in the late 1930s. In this research, the transformation of a grassroots initiative into a national literary institution and its profound cultural, historical, and intellectual significance are traced. A qualitative research design was employed, leveraging archival documents kept at the MPP, including manuscripts, personal files, and rare materials. Secondary literature, biographies, and semi-structured interviews among scholars, employees, and literary writers were employed to gather supporting data. The theoretical perspective combines institutional theory and cultural memory studies to assess the development, legitimacy, and function of the library as a cultural institution. Findings indicate that Kamal Mani Dixit's initial collection of books was formalized by the establishment of the Madan Puraskar Library and its associated Guthi, with significant assistance from Queen Jagadamba Kumari Devi. Over the decades, the library became a center of intellectual activity that preserves Nepal's literary heritage, promotes language development, and provides for public discourse. Important initiatives such as the institution of Madan Puraskar and Jagadamba Shree Puraskar, the computerization of far-flung archives, and the creation of Nepali Unicode font demonstrate the library's dynamic role in maintaining culture and advancing innovation. From an institutional theory perspective, the library demonstrates how casual individual values and activities mature into formal, respected institutions by means of cultural congruence and ongoing dedication. Cultural memory theory highlights its role of preserving collective identity and histories. The trajectory of the MPP highlights the revolutionary potential of private passion when combined with social vision, as a replicable model for memory institutions of developing societies.

Keywords: *Cultural Preservation, Library Evolution, Literary Archives, Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Nepali Literature,*

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Introduction

A great deal of the Madan Puraskar Library's establishment and success is owed to Kamal Mani Dixit's love for literature and that of Queen Jagadamba Kumari Devi. The library has a permanent place in the Nepali language, literature, and intellectual heritage. Dixit was a student who loved books since childhood. Throughout his school days at Durbar High School, he would take money from the lunch allowance and buy books - a habit not just out of child curiosity but out of an inner, inner compulsion to read. The interest drove him, step by step, to be a collector of antiquarian books, an activity which eventually found institutional expression as the MPP.

Nepal's first school, Durbar High School, was where Kamal Dixit studied. He would get eight paisa per day from his family to spend on snacks. Saving so little money, he began to buy books. He even had a rubber stamp made which read "Kamal's Nepali Collection²." Most of the books he gathered were bought from Mandas (Chittadhar) Manandhar's bookshop in Asan, Kathmandu. To build his library, he bought, borrowed, requested, even stole and sometimes never returned books of all kinds (Acharya, 2017).

The library officially came into being in 1955 (B.S. 2012). It was in remembrance of Madan Shamsher, a Rana statesman and a bookworm. His wife, Queen Jagadamba Devi, was grief-stricken at his untimely death. Converting that grief into a productive social cause, she went ahead to create the Madan Memorial Girls School and later led the formation of the Madan Puraskar Guthi. The library was established to provide a tangible form to the objectives of this Guthi.

Kamal Mani Dixit's intellectual passion, deep scholarship, and vision helped create the library. The rare books, manuscripts, periodicals, and archives he acquired have transformed the library into a repository as well as a source of living knowledge. Today, the institution stands as a center for the study, research, and dissemination of Nepali literature, history, and culture.

Yearly, the Madan Puraskar is awarded to the Nepali language best literary piece published. The Jagadamba-Shree Puraskar, which this organization also awards, recognizes those who have dedicated their lifetime to the cause of Nepali language, literature, and social service. Renowned Nepali literary personalities such as Parijat, Satya Mohan Joshi, and Bhupi Sherchan, etc. are recipients of the honors and this further adds to the prestige of the awards.

The library conducts frequent thematic seminars, workshops, symposiums, and interactive sessions. For readers, writers, students, and researchers, it is an effective medium to share knowledge. To match the speed of technological advancement, the library has also initiated digitizing its rare manuscripts to share with the world. As of 2025, the chairman of the library is Kanak Mani Dixit³. The organization is charitable, and additional information can be found

² कमलको नेपाली संग्रह' in Nepali.

³ He is a famous journalist in Nepal libraries.

at mpp.org.np. Something that began with a schoolboy's love affair with books has grown into a vital center of Nepali scholarship, literature, and language conservation. The Madan Puraskar Library, therefore, is not just a place of scholarship; it is an expression of Nepali pride in civilization, imagination, and intellectual energy.

METHODOLOGY

The MPP is referred to as a historical institution in Nepali library contexts. The current study takes a historical perspective in tracing the history of the library from its inception up to the present. The research primarily relies on secondary sources in gathering required information. Furthermore, direct interviews and discussions were conducted with the employees who are currently working at the library.

Qualitative research forms the foundation of the study, with scrutiny of records maintained in the Madan Puraskar Library. The records include manuscripts, personal diaries, newspapers, and publications related to Kamal Mani Dixit and the library's evolution. Further information was gathered through literature reviews in available studies, biographies, and articles documenting the historical process and influence of the library.

Moreover, interviews with writers, workers, and scholar's familiar with the institution yielded rich data. This triangulation yielded raw and significant data on the cultural and technological influences of the library. Through the application of this triangulated research method, the significance of the Madan Puraskar Library to Nepalese literary and language history has come into sharper focus.

Theoretical Framework

This research is informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical lens drawn from institutional theory and cultural memory studies. It provides a comprehensive perspective with which to see the development of the MPP from a single initiative to a national cultural repository.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory explains how individual actions—such as Kamal Mani Dixit's childhood library collection, can be developed into formal, enduring institutions such as the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP). The theory explains how social arrangements come into being, get institutionalized, and legitimized in the long term. It is possible to see how the library achieved social legitimacy, recognition, and authority in the Nepalese literary sphere using this theoretical lens. The history of an institution's success and development cannot be measured by its current achievements.

It must be viewed in the context of its history, social legitimacy, cultural norms, structural patterns, and functional processes. Institutional theory provides a very robust model that encompasses all these factors. Though it initially came to be utilized in fields such as politics, sociology, and administrative science, the theory is now widely used to examine educational,

cultural, economic, and social institutions. Using this model, we can understand the evolution of a respected institution such as the MPP. Guy P. Peters is one of the leading interpreters of institutional theory.

In his book *Political Institutions: Old and New Institutionalism*, Peters offers an in-depth analysis of the role institutions play in influencing policymaking, social action, and development processes. According to him, institutions are not merely formal organizations; they are dynamic processes that shape behaviors, norms, and priorities. To this end, the four pillars of the long-term sustainability of an institution are social legitimacy, cultural norms, historical norms, and responsiveness.

The MPP was established in 1956 (2012 B.S.). Its name and organizational mission were set forth in the memory of the late Madan Shamsher. After his untimely death, his wife, Queen Jagadamba Kumari Devi, set up the Madan Puraskar Guthi with the aim of promoting education, literature, and social service. The mission to establish the library went beyond just warehousing information or making it a center of study—it was attached to a grander vision of serving as a hub of cultural awareness. As put forward by institutional theory, an institution acquires legitimacy if it acts in response to its society's cultural requirements and demands.

The MPP set out to institutionalize the keeping of the Nepali language intact, literature building up, and intellectual discussion. Behind its formation lay the vision and long-term dedication of an individual like Kamal Mani Dixit. Since childhood, Dixit was extremely book-loving, which subsequently turned into an institutional effort. His personal library gradually took on an institutional form and grew into a library. Hence, the institution was not only legitimized by social opinion but also by historical convention and long-term dedication. The other fundamental characteristic of institutional theory is the distinction between formal and informal structures.

Policies, rules, and administrative systems come under formal structures, while traditions, values, behaviors, and social practices come under informal structures.

It appears that the MPP has been maintained in balance. It developed a neutral system of awarding literary honors, organized research seminars, computerized historical data, and organized programs that allowed public debate. This ensures that the library has evolved from being a passive repository to an active center of intelligence. Peters emphasizes that institutions are not static but dynamic entities. He explains that institutions evolve with the changing times because of social forces, technological change, and changing needs. This is also evident in the context of the MPP. The library, until the year 2025, had introduced a system of digitalization to offer books, pictures, and papers over the internet. This illustrates how the institution has adapted itself to the times.

One of the key principles of institutional theory is that of path dependence—the idea that the position an institution finds itself in today is largely the result of previous practices and

decisions. The MPP's present status is made possible by the maintenance of its early values: love for knowledge, love for literature, commitment to freedom, and guarding the national language. These have been preserved as part of its institutional memory and inform future choice and action.

According to Peters, an institution does not survive by being efficient or accountable only. It also depends on social recognition, legitimacy, customary practices, and interaction with external environments (Peters, 2019). All these characteristics are evident in the development of the MPP. The institution has maintained clarity of purpose while embracing necessary changes over time. By awarding literary awards that encourage writers, providing research materials from the archives, offering access to books for the public, and sponsoring readings of language and culture, the library has become a friendly and living institution. Lastly, from the perspective of institutional theory, the MPP is more than a study center. It is an institutional symbol of Nepalese civilization's intellectual heritage, social identity, and cultural pride. Its journey from the beginning until today is an outstanding mixture of institutional development, social dedication, and cultural mission-one that other institutions can learn a great deal from.

Cultural Memory & Archival Theory

Libraries are guardians of Nepal's cultural and literary memory. Based on the theoretical exploration of cultural memory and archival theory, this framework explores how institutions like the Madan Puraskar Library contribute to collective identity, national heritage preservation, and the shaping of history-making. Projects like Jagdamba Brihat Sahityako Itihas (Jagdamba's Comprehensive Nepali Literary History) show the role of the library in building cultural consciousness by referencing historical material.

Cultural memory is a fundamental part of the soul of any people or nation. A library is not just a collection of books-it is a living institution that holds collective memory. Libraries in third-world nations, especially oral tradition-oriented societies such as Nepal, can sustain oral histories, folklore, ethnic traditions, ballads, languages, and old records. This is evidently realized to some extent in the Madan Puraskar Library.

For example, when oral tales, religious ceremonies, and cultural traditions of groups like the Tharu, Limbu, Gurung, or Newar are recorded and maintained, it is not merely a gesture of bringing the past into the present, but a gesture of passing down cultural heritage to future generations. The Madan Puraskar Library retains such works in the form of pamphlets and palm-leaf manuscripts.

The central problem of archival theory is which accounts are put in the archives, and which disappear? Libraries must genuinely confront this issue as they shift. Which languages are on the shelves? Where are resources emphasized? Such decisions determine power relationships.

While developing a collection policy for a library, literature of every language, gender, caste, and region should be included equally. For instance, apart from Nepali-language books,

publication of original works, songs, and tales in Maithili, Tamang, Doteli, and Magar languages would be an attempt towards cultural justice. Though Nepali-language publications dominate the Madan Puraskar Library, works in other languages and hand-written gazettes have also been incorporated.

One-way cultural memory can be achieved in contemporary times through digital archives. The younger generation is also more comfortable in cyberspace. Therefore, in the process of creating libraries, digital archives, online catalogs, virtual exhibitions, and interactive portals, they must be created.

An integrated digital library system can be established by digitizing Nepal's scarce manuscripts, photos, and audiovisual records. This would make Nepali memory resources available not just to the national public but also to international researchers.

A library institution is not only a repository of the past but also a place for creating new memories. To that extent, a library must be a creative platform producing new debates and visions in society via seminars, readings, oral history projects, and writing workshops. The Madan Puraskar Library has attempted to do so to some extent.

How Kamal Mani Dixit's personal fondness for books and memory translated into an institutional library, Madan Puraskar Library—is a timeless example. It is not merely a stack of stuff; it is a memory bank of Nepali literature, language, journalism, and social consciousness.

"Initially, my urge to collect and save Nepali language material was somewhat spontaneous. Later, I started thinking of it as service. Now, however, it seems to have become a career. I believe that not only Nepali, but any language and culture should have its material collected and saved. But I can't do everything. I don't have the ability to do all of it. I am a man of the Nepali language—I knew how to read and write it, so I chose this work and this language (Aryal, 2017)."

In library development, cultural memory must have a physical presence in its structural form with theoretical and technical elements like access policy, preservation policy, and metadata standardization. It transforms the library from a passive service provider to a guardian of ideas and a force behind national memory.

When archival theory and cultural memory are applied to library development, they reinforce one another. This produces multilayered possibilities for knowledge preservation, social justice, and cultural thriving. A library can be more than a place to read books—it can be a sanctuary for safeguarding the soul of society.

In the history of Nepali literature, MPP is a treasure house of historical value; its establishment was heavily influenced by Kamal Mani Dixit's vision and effort. Based on quality, the library has also always provided valuable and constructive services to readers, demonstrating Dixit's huge contribution not only historically but also in terms of quality. Thus, both in its historical importance and in the depth of its service, this institution is one of Nepal's strongest libraries.

Even today, anyone seeking to access uncommon Nepali materials before 2000 BS has no alternative but to depend on the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya. The library has preserved books, periodicals, and manuscripts of the time with great care through microfilming and computer scanning. It is indeed a pioneering archival center in the Nepali context.

Conclusion

The development of the Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya (MPP) is an inspiring illustration of how one person's interest has become a national institution of lasting cultural value. A schoolboy's constant passion for reading—Kamal Mani Dixit dipping into his lunch allowance to spend on books—comes ultimately to blossom into a trailblazing institution preserving and furthering Nepal's intellectual and literary heritage. Supported by Queen Jagadamba Kumari Devi's vision and patronage, the establishment of the Madan Puraskar Guthi in 1955 formalized Dixit's individual endeavor into a powerful collective mission. Today, the MPP stands not just as a repository of rare manuscripts and books but as a vibrant engine of Nepali literary and cultural consciousness. In a qualitative and historically grounded study, this research has highlighted the dual role of the library as memory keeper and force of innovation. Grounded in institutional theory, MPP's trajectory is one instance of how cultural values developed informally can gain legitimacy through long commitment and alignment with society. The inclusion of cultural memory theory further serves to emphasize its relevance in the formation of national identity, historical narratives, and inclusive literary representation. Initiatives like digital archiving, multilingual collection carnation, and public outreach programs reflect the library's adaptive evolution. The MPP's experience also offers a model that can be replicated by cultural institutions across the developing world. It shows that literary institutions do not need to begin with massive funding or formal planning but can evolve out of sincerity, scholarship, and shared purpose. In a world where intangible heritage is more under threat, MPP shows how libraries can be havens of language, history, and imagination. Ultimately, this research confirms that the MPP is much more than a library—it is a living institution that is the embodiment of Nepal's soul, founded on the pillars of individual commitment, cultural obligation, and intellectual liberty.

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