

Archives and Records: An Overview

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Abstract

Destruction and disintegration of archives in India used to be a natural and common phenomenon in the old days. Whatever sketchy information is available about the various systems of Archives keeping in India in earlier days has been collected, pieced together and presented in this paper. This information, as well as, that on the ancient writing materials may provide a scope for historical research in future. No critical study of origin, growth and development of official archives in India appears to have been attempted in the past. As no two centuries are identical, an Indian archive has a life-history of its own, peculiar to this country. The story seems to be most interesting. An archive in India is not a central subject, but the position may alter if and when parliament declares by law certain categories of records to be of national importance. At present, the Union and State Governments formulate their own archival policies. Official archives alone received consideration in the past. Times are changing fast. Business archives, Institutional archives and Private archives are receiving increased attention of specialists and scholars alike. India abounds with these types of archives. Without planning no organization can function freely. Planning not only adds to efficiency but proves economical at the end. Chronological table of archival events in India, some terms, terminology, notes, etc., and a list of selections from records and books will be useful to the students of archival history and practice.

Keywords: Muhafezkhana, Abhilekhyagar, Mughal Archives, National archives of India, West Bengal State Archives

Archives in Ancient India & Beyond

In ancient times, before the art of writing was introduced in India, record of thought or events was kept by memorizing. Generally record was kept by signs,

drawings, pictures or engravings on a variety of clay, wood, stone, rock-wall, caves, leaves or animal skins. The system of recording ideas and incidents changed with the progress of civilization as alphabets and writing materials were properly introduced. Engenio Casanova, an Italian archivist defines archives as, 'the orderly accumulation of documents 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 as institution or individual'¹. Dr. Purnendu Basu, an Indian Archivist, said 'archives are records of enduring value no longer required by the creating agency for frequent use'. According to the French definition of Archives, records become archival as soon as they are created or received. American federal records become archival as soon as they are formally offered by a federal agency and the National Archives signs a document accepting legal responsibilities for them. Although archives are records, but not all the records are archives. The records are selected for an archive because they have permanent value, either as evidence of transactions, or because of the information they contain about people, places and things. The decision of selecting records for archives is taken by the archivists. K. D. Bhargava, the then Director of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, in his forwarding note² has provided an outline of the origin and development of Archival institutions in India. Ghose mainly attempted to trace the origin and growth of archival institutions in India from the earliest times and for which he mainly relied on sources like the *Jatakas*, *Arthasastra* and *Sukranti* supplementing them by the accounts of Foreign travellers who visited India on so many occasions. The value of *Sukranti* as a source material is rather doubtful but the information gleaned from other sources throws new light on the growth of Archives in this country. Ghose also has made an attempt to show the Record Management policy and practices adopted by the Mughal Emperors, the Marathas, and the rulers of Vijaynagar and Mysore.

The concept of archives had its origin in the Greece where the Athenians kept their valuable documents in the temple of the mother of the God, which was popularly known as Metroon. The temple contained treaties, laws, minutes of the popular assembly and other documents, especially, the statement of Socrates wrote in his own defence, the manuscripts of model plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and the list of the victors in the Olympic Games. According to Ghose, 'these writings were preserved and transmitted from the earliest times until perhaps the third century after Christ in the form of Papyrus rolls'³.

¹ P S G Kumar, *Archival Librarianship*, WIPO, 2014, pp. 5-6.

² Sailen Ghose, *Archives in India*, Firma KLM, Calcutta, 1963, p. 1.

³ *Ibid.* p. 4.

So far the records goes on it is found that the first Archivist was appointed in Bologna for weeding of papers. The concept of formation of Archives and its administration began to travel from Italy to England and the first attempt was made in England by creating a Record Office under the supervision of Edward I. It was he who practically started preserving the exchequer records in a part of the tower of London. In 1578, a State Paper Office was established by Queen Elizabeth. Germany, Italy, Spain, France and other countries were not lagging behind the creation of Record Office. It was just after the French Rebellion in 1789, Napoleon Bonaparte thought to establish the National Assembly in France in the form of Archives. By a decree of 12 September 1790, this institution was named the *Archives Nationales* of Paris. On 14 August 1838, a Central Archival institution was established in England which was commonly known as Public Record Office. The United States Government established a National Archives by the act of 19 June 1934. In fact, the modern concept of Archives was transmitted from England to India during the time of the East India Company. In ancient period, the *Arthashastra* mentions the *Akshapatala* meaning 'Office of Accountants' or 'General Record Room' which is supported by Ramchandran Dikshitar.⁴

The Record office, known as *Akshapatala* mainly contains the details of profit, loss and expenditure, the status of the Government Agency employed the amount of wages paid which were regularly entered in the prescribed Registers.⁵ The Records were arranged according to groups which may be called *Respect de Fonds*. The records of the ancient period comprised various activities of the Government, mainly, public expenditure on departments like State Manufactories, their outlay, profit, loss, expenditure etc.⁶

It was during the period of Samudragupta, the concept of Archives is derived from the Gaya Plate and a charter was written according to the orders of an Akshapataladhikarta.⁷ Sir Aurel Stein has proved from his excavations in Central Asia that the Ancient Indian Envelop consisted of two boards tight together with a string or wire, to the knot of which a lump of clay was attached. The seal of the person sending a letter was attached or impressed to this lump of clay.⁸ This type of record office was also found at Vaishali. Even in North India, administrative

⁴ V. R. Ramchandran Dikshitar, *Hindu Administrative Institutions*, University of Madras, Madras, 1929, pp. 203-204.

⁵ Kautilya's *Arthashastra* translated by R. Shamasastri, Book ii, Chapter VII, Mysore Publishing and Printing House, Mysore, 1967, pp. 61-62.

⁶ Dikshitar, *op.cit.*, pp.205-207.

⁷ R. D. Banerji, *The Age of the Imperial Guptas*, Benares Hindu University, Varanasi, 1933, p.70; John Faithfull Fleet, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol.iii., Indological Book House, Varanasi (Rpt.)p. 255.

⁸ *Ibid.* P. 70.

organisations of the Kalachuri, Gaharwal and the Sen dynasties reveal references to the *Akshapatalika* and *Mahakshapatalika*.⁹

The *Sukranti* gives an idea about the conception of records in medieval times. The *Sukranti* deals with the classes and sub-classes of records, constitution of records, creation of records,¹⁰ and, the record offices and the officer-in-Charge of records. But the Record office existed in India during Buddhist times. The “*Arthasastra of Kautilya* (cir.300B.C.), which may be called the Imperial Code of Governance of the Early Mauryas, is such a remnant”.

Empire and Archives: Mughal and British

The present part seeks to explore the definition of archives through the ages, viz., Ancient, Medieval and Modern. The main focus would be on the evolution of Archives in Mughal and British periods. Did the Colonial Raj follow the principles and practices in maintaining the Archives of the Mughal period as and when the East India Company established their stronghold in the soil of Bengal or the entire Archival system, its principles (particularly in terms of provenance) and preservation were completely different. It is no doubt that there were existence of record keeping both in the Ancient and Mughal times, but the term 'Archives' was first coined and used by the British Raj. The British inherited the system of record keeping from the French but did not follow the usual practices and norms in keeping records. The basic argument of the present paper is that the British not only created a new set of archival principles but made the records easy and accessible to the researchers for their own research works. During the middle ages, the Muslim rulers in India used to have record repositories. The royal household establishment was divided into thirty-six Departments known as *Kar-khana*. The *Akbernama* gives a description as to how Akbar had established a Record Office in 1574 on the advice of Abul Fazl who himself made use of the records preserved there for writing his book *Akbernama*. Maintenance of records also may be gathered from *Ain-I Akbari*.

In the administrative system of the Delhi Sultanate, we find that the Sultan administered all the departments and was assisted by a body of ministers.¹¹ The

⁹ R. C. Majumdar, *The Struggle for Empire, The History and Culture of the Indian People*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 2001 (5th Edition) Vol. V., pp. 274,276, 277; K. A. Nilkantha Sastri, *Studies in the Cola History and Administration*, University of Madras, Madras, 1932, pp. 114, 142.

¹⁰ R. D. Banerji, *op. cit.* pp. 87-88; *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. VI. P. 200.

¹¹ U. N. Day, *Administrative System of the Delhi Sultanate, 1206-1413 A. D.*, Kitab Mahal, Delhi, pp. 52, 60.

royal household was divided into thirty-six departments known as *kar-khana*¹². They had their separate offices and regular staff of officers to superintend their business. Each *Kar-Khana* had a separate financial department where accounts were kept and these were finally submitted to the *Dewan-e-Wizarat*, the Royal Exchequer.¹³ The Finance Minister was known as *Daftardar*.¹⁴ The ministry called *Diwan-i-Insha* looked after local governments and managed royal correspondence. The head of the ministry was the *Dabir-i-Mumalik*. All the *farmans* or letters were drafted by him. There was a large number of *Dabirs* or clerks in this ministry.¹⁵ *Ain-i-Akbari* has explained the role of *daftar-khana* in this way ‘English writers of the last century often refer to this system of keeping all documents in loose sheets instead of bound books. The sheets were kept together by a string drawn through them’¹⁶. According to Abul Fazl, it was Akbar’s custom to make him thoroughly to be acquainted with the affairs of his empire. ‘He has appointed clever, honest, incorruptible, experienced writers, and entrusts *daftar* to impartial officers who are under his control’.¹⁷ The Mughal Emperor Akbar established a Record Office in 1574 A. D.¹⁸ It is also said that the Emperor had established the Record Office on the advice of Abul Fazl who himself made use of the records preserved there for writing his book *Akbarnama*. The Mughal Record Office was situated close to the Emperor’s palace (*Mahal-i-Khas*) at Fatehpur Sikri. This *daftarkhana* had only one room and was surrounded by a pillared *verandah*.¹⁹ *Ain-i-Akbari* says about the importance of the records ‘keeping records is an excellent thing for a Government: it is even necessary for every rank of society...’²⁰. Practically, all official records had to be sent to the office of the *Dewan* for his inspection and storage. It was the main responsibility of the Public Records Office.²¹ The Mughal Emperors like

¹² .Ibid., p. 57; H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, *History of India as Told By Its Own Historians, The Muhammedan Period*, Trubner & Co., London, 1871, Vol. III, pp. 356-357.

¹³ Ishwari Prasad, *History of Medieval India*, The Indian Press, Allahabad, 1933, p. 326.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 281.

¹⁵ Day, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁶ Abul Fazl Allami, *The Ain – i- Akbari*, Trans. H. Blochmann Vol. I., The Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1873, pp. 259-60.

¹⁷ J. N. Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, M. C. Sarkar, Calcutta, 1952, p. 68; *Ain –i- Akbari*, pp. 258-259.

¹⁸ *The Akbarnama of Abul Fazl (History of the Reign of Akbar including An Account of His Predecessors)*, Trans. From the Persian by H. Beveridge, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1907, Vol. I p. 31, fn. 1.

¹⁹ Edward W. Smith, *The Mughal architecture of Fatepur Sikri*, Archaeological Survey of India, New Imperial series, L. w. Smith, Vol. XVIII, Part 3, Allahabad, 1896, Chapter 9, pp. 41-43.

²⁰ *Ain- i- Akbari*, *op. cit.* Blochmann Vol. I. pp.258-59.

²¹ J. N. Sarkar, *op. cit.* PP. 249-250.

Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb he had issued official handbooks or *Dastur-ul-amal* which besides other rules and regulations also contained rules for sending official papers to Court, the records that should come to the different Dewan's offices etc.²² A Persian book named *Hedayet-ul- Qawaid* (Manual of Officer's Duties) written by Hedayetullah Bihari provides a graphic description on Mughal administration. It gives 'minute directions as to how the different officials of the Mughal Government should conduct themselves, what functions they were expected to discharge, what precautions they should take, and what records they should draw up and keep in duplicate'.²³

The information collected, though, stray, has been arranged and pieced together indicate the line of development from age to age. It may establish a claim that Archives organization existed in this country since ancient times and that they had their regional, provincial and central units.

It was practically after the battle of Buxar (1764) the present day Archival system came into being but with major changes both in structure, technology, management and system of record keeping. A General Record Office was established at Fort William. The East India Company records were divided into pre- Mutiny and post Mutiny records with some modifications. Another major break through was noticed in the system of record keeping when the H. L. Smith Committee placed some proposals. The system of record keeping and its management is being followed even during the post-colonial period but the scope of the users for consultation of records has been increased.

The National Archives of India is the custodian of the records of enduring value of the Government of India. Established on 11 March, 1891 at Calcutta (Kolkata) as the Imperial Record Department, it is the biggest archival repository in South Asia. It has a vast corpus of records viz., public records, private papers, oriental records, cartographic records and microfilms, which constitute an invaluable source of information for scholars-administrators and users of archives. In 1891 when the Imperial Record Department (renamed National Archives of India) began to function as a custody of keeping all non-current records it was not quite clear in the minds of officials ' themselves what exactly were going to be the functions of this new office'.²⁴ In order to resolve these questions it was in 1914, the Royal Commission on the Public Records of England and Wales commented on the chaotic condition of the Indian Records that gave a rude shock and thus, as a consequence, the Government of India decided to set up the Indian Historical

²² *Ibid.*, p. 248.

²³ Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 250-51

²⁴ Purnendu Basu, 'Records and the Public' in K. D. Bhargava, *op. cit.* p. 26.

Records Commission in 1919 for making inquiry and following recommendations were taken up:

1. The treatment of Archives for the purposes of historical study in all provinces of India.
2. Plans for cataloguing, calendaring and reprinting documents.
3. Financial requirements for encouraging research and publishing unpublished historical materials and
4. last but not least to train up the students in the methods of historical research and selection of editors for publication of documents.

It was in 1939, the Government of India agreed to throw open all its records up to 1880 to *bona fide* research students and this was soon followed by drawing up a manual of rational rules regulating access to Archives. Side by side, compilation of publication of certain series of records in languages other than English, Bengali, Marathi, Persian, Hindi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Kanada and so on went on full swing. It includes both the revenue records and the records of foreign and political department, selections from official papers of Lord Minto, Earl of Moira, Lord Bentinck, Lord Auckland, Lord Hardinge and Lord Dalhousie covering the period between 1807-1856. In this context, Bentinck's Madras papers (1803-1807) and the Macaulay papers and some selections on Miscellaneous topics like on the Indian travels of Thevenot and Carery, the Correspondence of Major James Brown, the Shore papers and so on began to be followed.

It was long before the creation of the Imperial Record Department, it was Mr. Sandeman, the Civil Auditor, who in his report of 1860 stresses the need for relieving the offices of congestion by destruction of papers of routine nature and minor interest and advocated 'transfer of all valuable records to a Grant Central Archives'.²⁵ Accordingly, a Record Committee was set up in 1861 to study the implementation of the auditor's Report. This committee completely overlooked its real task of supervising, weeding and organization of official records. Moreover, this committee also abandoned the idea of a Central Records Repository and instead engaged itself in a Records' publication programme. The result was the publication of James Long's work,²⁶ two reports of J. Talbot's Wheeler²⁷ and Scott Smith's work.²⁸ These publications provided in their own way, justification for the

²⁵ *Archives in India*, a Souvenir Published on the occasion of International Archives Week, 23rd to 29th October, 1979, National Archives of India, New Delhi, p. 5.

²⁶ *Selections From unpublished Records (1748-1767)*, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, New Delhi, 1869.

²⁷ *On the records of the Home and Foreign Department and his Early records of British India*.

²⁸ *Calender of Indian State Papers , Secret Series (1774-1775)*, Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta, 1864.

British rule in India, but purpose for which the committee had been set up was not served. Meanwhile G.W.Forrest, Professor of English History, Elphinstone College Bombay, had already earned reputation as an archivist by his personal interest and work in the Bombay Records Office. Consequently he was invited in 1889 for special duty to examine the records of the Foreign Department of the Government of India.

The Director General of Archives, heading the Department has been given the mandate for the implementation of the Public Records Act, 1993 and the rules made there under, the Public Records Rules, 1997 for the management, administration and preservation of public records in the Ministries, Departments, Public Sector undertakings etc. of the Central Government. Located at the heart of New Delhi, the Department functions as an Attached Office of the Ministry of Culture and have one Regional Office at Bhopal and three Records Centres at Bhubaneswar, Jaipur and Puducherry. The Department celebrated its 125th year of the foundation during 2015-16.

The archival records are essential to the smooth working of the country's administration in the same way as memory is essential to a man's day to day life. According to Tapan Raychaudhury 'Public Records are, in fact, the collective memory of a government carefully preserved for its own information. Indirectly, they constitute the most objective source material of history, for they reflect very truthfully the working of an entire administration and the nearly every important aspect of a country's life in any given period'.²⁹ Before explaining the basic features of Archives and Records and their system of Record Keeping, let me first define what is meant by the term 'Archives' and 'Records'. The word Archives is a Greeco-Latin word, implying *arche* means which holds something. Naturally, the pertinent question comes what is meant by the word something. It means that Archives must have three components, namely, records, buildings and administration. These three components are interlinked with each other. Naturally related questions haunt our mind how and in what way it is related. All these aspects will be explained in detail in my complete paper or during the time of my presentation. One thing should be mentioned in this context that these three components are interlinked with each other in such a way that Archives cannot run without these two other aspects. Another scope of the present Research is to define what is the difference between the 'Archives' and '*Mahafezkhana*'. It is clear that the Archives is a colonial term, whereas, the word *Mahafezkhana* implies that it was a Persian word and the basic concept of *Mahafezkhana* was as like as colonial Archives. *Mahafezkhana* is also usually was known as *Abhilekhyagar* implying

²⁹ Tapan Raychaudhury, 'Repository of the of the National Records' in *An Introduction to the National Archives* ed. K. D. Bhargava, New Delhi, National Archives of India, 1958, p. 7.

that this term 'Abhilekhyagar' is derived from the Sanskrit word. If we come across the Archives in a wider perspective that in Allahabad there is a nameplate in the front of the Archives Allahabad *Kshetriya Abhilekhyagar*. Similarly, The National Archives of India, New Delhi, in their Online Portal it is mentioned *Abhilekh Patal*. In view of the above, three words are perambulating in our mind viz., Archives, *Mahafezkhana* and *Abhilekhyagar*. Another related question is to be explained what is the difference between the words Archives and Records. Should we consider all the Records are Archives or all the Archives are Records? There is a basic difference between Records and Archives as it will be explained in my complete paper.

In view of the above it may be said that there had been a basic concept of preservation of Records kept either in the custody of *Mahafezkhana*, *Lekhyagar* or in Archives. Naturally, it is pertinent to mention how did the Archives grow and develop in the colonial period? Did the British follow the Mughal legacy and other princely states either for preservation of Record and system of Record Keeping? Was there any basic difference between the concept of Mughal Archives and British Archives? There is a basic difference between the Archival Records of the pre-colonial period with the British period in terms of its system of Record Keeping and in the process of preservation.

Difference between Records and Archives

Purnendu Basu³⁰ has a small monograph in identifying the difference between Archives and Records. If our common sense applied it may be said that all the archives are records but all the records are not archives. It implies that any piece of document may be called records, whatever may be its importance. If it is an application of casual leave it may also be treated as a record but that cannot be categorized as archives. An archive means the Archival Records which ought to have some cultural and historical values. But it has to be born in mind that any record is created initially for the administrative convenience but when that piece of paper does not have any administrative value that record or the piece of paper is kept for the administrative convenience. If that record does not have any administrative convenience that record has to be kept for 25 years but the record bearing routine matter that can be destroyed easily after the end of the calendar year. Thus it brings to the mind that the archival records should have not only administrative requirement but also historical and cultural values that help the social scientists including the men of literature to write down their dissertation, research papers and historical writings. The trend of historical writings based on archival records is not only found among the Nationalist historians but also among the subaltern and post-modernist. Even Ranjit Guha, being the founder and father

³⁰ *Archives and Records: What are They ?*, National Archives of India, New Delhi, 1962.

of subaltern school started his academic career and historical writings mainly based on the archival records preserved not only in the archives but also in collectorates. In this context, it is to be mentioned that the compilation of archival records either in the form of District Gazetteer, District Records but also in historical analysis. One related question is arisen that how can we trust the archival records in writing a balanced and non-partial history since all these records were mostly the day-to-day correspondences of the colonial administrators. It was due to the reason there is a trend found among the historians to utilize the non-official sources, particularly, the private records and oral sources.

Role of Archives:

- To safeguard the national, regional, traditional culture of the society,
- To spread awareness among the people to respect and value their culture and also changes happening in the society. For example an Ethnomusicology archive provides some of the rare and oldest recordings of folk/popular/classical forms, which will be beneficial for any current research scholar or individual to observe the similarity/changes of the performance in present contest;
- Making people to think about their past and its related history;
- Preserving important recorded documents for future reference.

Organization of Archives:

Academic Archives: Archives created to preserve these archives are found in colleges, universities or any other academic institution.

Business Archives:

Archives located in institutions, which are owned by a private business house. The corporate archives maintain historic documents and item related to the history of their companies, viz., and world of coca- cola, Levi Straus & Co, Motorola Heritage services and Archives.

Government Archives:

These Archives include those institutions run on a local level as well as those by the Central Government.

Non-Profit Archives:

These archives include archives for non-profit businesses viz., hospitals, and the repositories with the foundations, viz., hospitals and the repositories with the foundations. They are usually set up with private funds from donors to preserve the papers and history of specific persons or place.

Special Archives:

They include tribal archives, folklore archives, archives within museums and archives that exist the papers of private individuals.

System of Record Keeping:

In view of the above, a clear picture is revealed about the differences between records and archives. But it is surprising to note that the correspondences of the East India Company were preserved till 1858 and this pattern was followed in all India level. But a striking change had taken place since 1859 onwards when the categorization or classification of records began in all India perspective. Lord Canning introduced the system of printing the records meant for permanent preservation and so the bulk of the post-mutiny records stored not only in the National Archives of India but also in the Archives of various provinces including West Bengal. In order to peep into the records different forms of reference media like handbook, press-lists, indexes and calendars were printed. It was before 1859 all the correspondences were placed before the Governor-General and the councillors for approval and also for taking future course of action. There was no categorization of records in the pre-mutiny period. All the records were written in calligraphic style in the form of the weekly consultation and minutes. It is striking to note that no single records since the period of early British rule down to 1859 were destroyed. These weekly consultations or minutes were commonly known as Original Consultations which were commonly called O.C. but after the gradual expansion of British power from East India Company to British crown, the latter began to copy all those consultations as a duplicate one and it was mainly started in Writer's Buildings, Calcutta. Since Calcutta was the capital of the British Raj since the early decades of twentieth century the copying of such documents in the form of the proceedings' volume centering on Calcutta. It was due to the appointment of so many writers for copying such documents; a building was constructed in red colour which is known as Writers' Buildings. Thus we find that up to 1858 there was neither classification nor categorization of records and even a single file or a consultation or it may be broadly defined as day-to-day proceedings were even printed. It may be said that all these records were kept in manuscript form. These consultations since the correspondences would take place usually in every meeting.

A major breakthrough came into existence in the system of record keeping. Firstly, instead of weekly consultations, monthly proceedings were found in a quarterly form. Even the categorization of records was also noticeable. Generally the records are classified as A and B proceedings. Proceeding A denotes it was permanent in nature and could not be downgraded in any way. It is to be mentioned in context that so far the A proceedings are concerned there were multiple printed copies whereas, the B proceedings could not be printed and all the B proceedings were generally kept in the manuscript forms and this tradition of system of record

keeping continued till 1923 as and when H.L.Smith Committee recommended a new formula in the system of record keeping, viz., note sheets and correspondences form, simply for one reason that the older systems did not reflect in any way the content of file. This system of maintaining correspondences and note sheets is still followed even today.

The record-keeping systems for departmental correspondence recommended by the Bagot Commission were more or less adopted between 1844 and 1872. In this records universe, incoming and outgoing correspondence were filed separately. Incoming correspondence was entered sequentially by number at the front of the letter register. The docket was given the same number. Another entry was made in the same register in a section arranged alphabetically by correspondent, which was in turn sub-divided by year. This portion of the register recorded the registration number (file number); the name of the correspondent; date sent; date received; action taken; and the "subject of letter" – a synopsis of its contents. Interestingly, the registers show that files were sometimes placed on earlier or later files, not simply filed away numerically. Since the handwriting appears to be different from that of the records clerk who entered the original material, one can only assume this was done at a later date, perhaps post-1873. Nevertheless, the registers are invaluable tools for tracing the incoming correspondence, which was folded and filed separately. Copies of the outgoing correspondence were bound together chronologically in letter books containing an alphabetical index at the beginning of each letter book.

The records series of Central Provinces pertains to the period 1798 to 1919. The subsequent series of records from 1920 to 1956 is in the possession of the General Administration Department, Secretariat, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal.

The record series begins from 1798 when H.D. Colebrooke a British Agent arrived at Nagpur, in the Court of Bhonsla Raja, Raghuji II. It was the beginning of the Nagpur Residency Records, the series lasted up to 1854 when on the death of Bhonsla Raja Raghuji III on 11 December 1853, Nagpur Kingdom was annexed by the East India Company on 4 March, 1854.

Later Nagpur Province and parts of North East Provinces including Jabalpur Division and Saugor, Nerbuda Territories were amalgamated to form a New Province in 1861 and was named as Central Provinces. The Province of Berar was added to it in 1903. The record series subsequent to the annexation of Nagpur Kingdom in 1854 is mainly covered in "Proceedings" from the year 1855 to 1919. The records series from 1798 to 1919 came into the possession of the Directorate of Madhya Pradesh State Archives on its formation in 1974.

Archival Records and writing of Social Sciences

It is true that all the records transferred to the National Archives of India or other Provincial Archives are mostly useful not only as non-current records but also appear to be a source material for writing the various aspects of social sciences as it has been told by Narendra Krishna Sinha³¹ and later on by Lenart Bes³² and Ananda Bhattacharyya³³. But it should be borne in mind that Archives is simply the custodian of records and the ownership of those records belong to respective departments what Raychaudhuri says that ‘ the records remain the property of the creating agencies’³⁴. The various ministries and departments in all India perspective are generally transferred to the Archives after the expiry of thirty years from the creation of a file provided that file does not have any sensitive issues or does not relate to any living person. Here lies the difference between Records and Archives for which Purnendu Basu used to call ‘all Archives are records but all records are not archives’. Grant Duff, the doyen of the Maratha history evaluated the archival records’ probably the best historical material in the world ‘. So far, the records of the National Archives of India are concerned, the main archival series begins from 1748 A. D., but copies of interesting collections relating to earlier years have been acquired from the Commonwealth Relations Office, London. Among these are the volumes containing abstracts of correspondence between the Company and their servants in India between 1707 and 1748 A. D. The records of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, in those periods are available in an unbroken series, and it constitutes a unique source for the history of British India. Equally important are the original consultations which include the minutes, memoranda and proposals drawn up by the East Indian administrators, and their correspondence with their agents all over the country.

Naturally, the question remains how the materials of foreign interest abound among the records preserved in the National Archives of India. For instance, the Foreign Miscellaneous Series contains highly interesting reports and journals in our neighbours of Central Asia and the Middle East, which often owed their origin to British fears about Russian intentions in the nineteenth century. Similarly, the Veterinary Surgeon, William Moorcraft ‘s report on the Russian trade on the North-Western Frontiers of India and Henry Willcock’s account of state of Persia , 1825. In 1833, Alexandar Burnes Report containing near about 1,000 pages relate to the countries between India and Asian Russia covering commercial, political and military matters. Documents relating to Further India, Indonesia and China are

³¹ *The Historian as an Archivist*, Vidyasagar University Press, Midnapore, 1999.

³² *Dutch Sources in south Asia, C. 1600-1825*, Vol. II, New Delhi, Manohar, 2008.

³³ An Archivist's Peep into the World of History’ in *125 Years of National Archives of India*, 2018.

³⁴ Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.* p. 8.

available in equal abundance. A separate section known as China Papers, tacked in twelve bundles, relates to the Opium War and its aftermath. The story of Indian emigration to colonial plantations and that of slave trade in the Indian Ocean can be studied in vivid details in the records of the Home and Foreign Series.

The magnificent collection of oriental letters ranging from 1764 to 1873 are mostly written in Persian but a great many are also available in Sanskrit, Hindi, Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Tamil, Telegu, Punjabi, Burmese, and even in Chinese, Siamese and Tibetan. After the transfer of power the records of the British Residencies in the various Princely States have been taken over and centralised in the National Archives. The National Archives of India took an ambitious project for calendaring all the Persian records in that department and in this context the series of Calendar of Persian Correspondence have been printed for the use of the scholars, though the original Persian records are neither available in the National Archives of India or in any other Provincial Archives including West Bengal, Nagpur, Uttar Pradesh and Bikaner. Besides, the National Archives of India decided in publishing *in extenso* certain important groups of records, like the correspondence between the authorities at Fort William and those at India House and the product of such attempt has been initiated by a galaxy of historians that culminated in the publication of *Fort-William – India House Correspondences*. Similar attempts have been taken over by West Bengal State Archives and they have already brought out select documents on Calcutta,³⁵ the Mutiny Records,³⁶ the Records of North-East³⁷ in two volumes, Meerut Conspiracy Case³⁸, Select Documents on Rabindranath Tagore³⁹ and Municipal Maps of Calcutta,⁴⁰ North Division (part I) for the period 1887-1893. Besides, The Directorate of State Archives, Kolkata has published a series of compilations⁴¹ for the use of researchers in the field of social sciences. These compilations were published during 1988 to 2023.

³⁵ *List of Documents on Calcutta, 1764-1800*, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta, 1990; *Select Documents on Calcutta, 1800-1900*, Calcutta, 2011.

³⁶ *Revolt in the Periphery: Bengal and the North-East*, Calcutta, 2013.

³⁷ *North-East Select Documents 1830-1873 (Part I)*, Kolkata, 2018 & *North-East Select Documents 1830-1873 (Part II)*, Kolkata, 2019.

³⁸ *Judgment of the Meerut Conspiracy Case*, Calcutta, 1991.

³⁹ *A Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore Glimpses from Archival Records*, Calcutta, 2011.

⁴⁰ *Calcutta Municipal Maps 1887-1893*, Kolkata, 2017.

⁴¹ *Midnapore Tryst With Struggle (Select Documents on Records)*, 2004; *Bengal Partitioned (Selections from Confidential Records, 2007: Evolution of State Archives, 1910-2010)*, Calcutta, 2014; *Aftermath of the 1947 Partition, Select Documents (Vol I)*, Kolkata, 2022 & *Aftermath of the 1947 Partition, Select Documents (Vol II)*, Kolkata, 2023.

Conclusion

It may be said that the records are tools of administration and memory of an organization, a family or an individual. Records embody past experiences, give evidences of progress and protect legal rights. The administrator create records neither for the Archivist nor for the historians, but entirely for administrative purpose.