In any democracy, people’s participation is of sublime importance. Since archives are the by-products of organized human activities, they do protect the rights of citizens.

The National Archives of India was established as the Imperial Record Department in 1891 in Calcutta (Kolkata), the erstwhile seat of the British imperial power. It is one of the buildings designed in late neo-Classical style by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the architect of New Delhi Capital constructions, when the capital got shifted to New Delhi in 1911.

Situated at the crossing of Kartavya Path (Rajpath) and Janpath, (formerly Kingsway and Queensway), the National Archives is the largest archival repository in South Asia, the custodian of over six million files and records, running over 60 linear kms of shelf-space, dating back to early part of the British colonial rule, the regular series of records starting from 1748 CE.

It holds the largest collection of the rare Gilgit manuscripts, 5-6 century CE. These manuscripts relate to Buddhist philosophy and religion.

As the seat of world’s largest democracy, the administrative set up of India has expanded manifold since it gained independence from the British on 15 August, 1947. From barely two dozen ministries at the time of Independence, today, the Government of India functions with over 85 major ministries and departments in New Delhi.

A few recent highlights of the Department:

- The transfer of approx. 1.2 million records from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Interior Ministry) in 2016 pertaining to the rehabilitation of refugees, displaced during the Partition of India in August, 1947.
- The portal of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose of Indian National Army (INA)-www.netajipapers.gov.in provides public access to nearly 40,000 pages of 303 declassified files of the life and times of the stalwart of India’s freedom movement launched in 2016.
- Approx. one million files of the Post Independence era added to the collection in the last decade.
- Online access of records through the search portal www.abhilekh-patal.in launched in 2015.

II. Archives of India’s North Eastern States- much more is desired:

- Not much attention of scholars and the administrators have been drawn to the archives of the India’s sensitive North Eastern states, comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.
- The British occupation of Assam and their administration, after the Treaty of Yandaboo on 26th February, 1826 has left behind a vast volume of materials scattered in various archival repositories of the North-East India.
- Because of the unique geographical location and difficulty of accessibility, the scholars from other parts of India and the world do not find the desired congenial atmosphere to conduct research.
- A broad survey of the archives of the North East India reveal that they have not received due recognition. Many of the archives are clubbed with the museums and other cultural institutions.
- The main archives of the region the Assam State Archives was set up in 1980 holds approximately half a million files. It has its Public Record Office started in 1993, and its web portal launched in 2011. It has left behind a vast volume of materials scattered in various archival repositories of the North-East India.
- The main archives of the region the Assam State Archives was set up in 1980 holds approximately half a million files. It has its Public Record Office started in 1993, and its web portal launched in 2011.
- The holdings of Arunachal Pradesh State Archives include records of Tibetan rehabilitation and Sino-India War 1962.

The challenges before the National Archives and the States (provincial) archives of North Eastern States Region:

- More financial assistance from the Government. (Budget of National Archives Rupees 3760 Million= US $ 47 Million in 2021-22).
- The digitization of the reference media of the remaining records (other than 2.7 million records) of National Archives needs to be taken up on priority.
- Preparation of Reference media and creation of data base of the North East Archives is a must.
- Acquisition of records: District records of the region, particularly the land revenue and judicial records, should be archived and be made more accessible.
- More professionals should be engaged in the affairs of Archival institutions.

These challenges, when met adequately, would help in bridging the democratic gap. Development of archives, as harbinger of democratic values, is a collective responsibility of all the stakeholders in India and all efforts should go in this direction.

TASSADUQUE HUSSAIN
Deputy Director of Archives (Retired)
National Archives of India, New Delhi
Mobile No.: +91 9810630075
E-mail: thussain2011@gmail.com, tassaduque@yahoo.com

The search portal: www.abhilekh-patal.in On 8 August 2022
Records on portal-85080, Digitized pages-3755805
Unique visitors to the site-149487, Website hits-270772
Reference media (catalogue) of records -27,71,457
Registered users-19,769, Scholars across countries -195
Revenue generated -6.6 million Indian rupees