

Facelift to Saraswathi Mahal Library Proposed (Hindu 19 Oct, 2012)

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The Hindu GOOD NEWS: A view of Saraswathi Mahal Library. Photo: B. Velankanni Raj

TOPICS

Proposals to the tune of Rs.1.65 crore have been submitted to Union Ministry of Culture for giving a facelift to Saraswathi Mahal Library here. The proposals were handed over by K. Baskaran, Collector and Director of the Library, to Kumari Selja, Union Minister of Housing, Urban Poverty Alleviation and Culture when she visited the library recently. The proposals include digitisation of manuscripts and books in the library (at a cost of Rs. 50 lakhs), computerisation of the books and manuscripts (Rs. 30 lakhs), improvement of museum (Rs. 20 lakhs), improvement of readers section (Rs. 5 lakhs), translation of Sanskrit books (Rs. 20 lakhs), conservation of rare books and paintings (Rs. 20 lakhs) and improvement of storage facility (Rs. 20 lakhs).

The library which houses 70,000 books uses 'autolib', software to facilitate online cataloguing facility. Due to lack of trained staff, the work could not be continued. The computerisation work needs to be continued to help researchers and to facilitate online cataloguing, the proposal said. Similarly the library has published 62 volumes of catalogues for library manuscripts. To take them online, cataloguing details should also be computerised.

The library museum also needs to be modernised with provision for new showcases and lighting facility. Readers section needs to be improved with separate seating facility, air conditioning, and OPAC (online public access catalogue). The library has quite a number of illustrated manuscripts, drawings and rare books which need curative conservation. The work can be done with the help of National Research Laboratory for Conservation of Cultural Property, Lucknow, the proposal said. The library, one among the few medieval libraries that exist in the world, is a repository of culture and is a treasure house of knowledge built by the successive dynasties of Nayaks and Marattas of Thanjavur. The Encyclopaedia of Britannica in its survey of Libraries of World mentions the library as "the most remarkable library in India".

During the reigns of Nayaks of Thanjavur (1535-1675 A.D), the library was formed and developed in the name of "Sarasvati Bhandar" (Collection place of manuscripts). The Maratta Kings later developed the library into a Royal Palace Library till 1855. Rajah Serfoji II, Maratta king can be rightly called the architect of the library as he enriched the library with his personal collection of books and manuscripts and developed it.
