

Report on two-day Workshop on “Digital Archiving for Endangered Cultures”

30-31 May, 2025

Darjeeling Government College

The Department of English at Darjeeling Government College invited Dr. Anirudra Gurung, IQAC Coordinator of St. Joseph’s College, Darjeeling and Dr. Samir Sharma, Member IQAC to participate in the two-day Workshop on "Digital Archiving for Endangered Cultures" held on 30-31 May, 2025. The program was jointly organised with the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University and Wikimedia Foundation. This report summarizes the workshop’s proceedings, key insights, and the critical role of archiving in cultural preservation.

The Workshop was preceded by a One-Day State Level Seminar on Indian Knowledge System organized by Department of English at Darjeeling Government College on 28th May, 2025. The aim of the Seminar was to inculcate immediate intervention by the academia in particular and the communities in general to preserve the diverse knowledge and culture of the region and make it available to the wider world with the aim of sustainable development. The One Day State Level Seminar on Indian/Indigenous Knowledge System: Exploring Darjeeling Knowledge System attempted to sensitize the faculty, students and community leaders on the necessity and methods for preserving and scientifically recording the Knowledge System(s) produced in and around Darjeeling.

The Community Workshop on "Archiving," held on 30-31 May, 2025 brought together archivists, librarians, community representatives, academicians, students and heritage enthusiasts to discuss and practice the archiving and digitization of books, cultural artefacts, and visual/oral media. The workshop aimed to highlight the significance of preserving cultural heritage and provide hands-on training in modern archiving techniques.

Workshop Overview

The two-day event was structured into four sessions: Welcome Address by the Joint DPI which talked about preserving our past for the future and the role of digital archiving. The 2nd Session was a Hands-On Training: Practical sessions on digitizing various materials, photography, materials, lighting and encoding metadata of the records. There was also a Panel Discussion on the various modes and manners of funding the entire exercise including Networking and Action Planning consisting of Collaborative strategies for future projects.



In particular the Hands-On Training sessions covered:

- **Books and Manuscripts:** Participants used high-resolution scanners and OCR software to digitize rare manuscripts, learning metadata standards like Dublin Core for cataloging.
- **Cultural Artefacts:** Techniques like photogrammetry were demonstrated for 3D digitization of temple sculptures, with a focus on non-invasive methods to protect fragile items.
- **Visual/Oral Media:** Attendees practiced converting oral history recordings and 1980s VHS tapes into digital formats, addressing challenges like signal degradation and copyright compliance.
- **Ethical Archiving:** Respecting community consent and copyright and cultural sensitivities, especially for sacred artefacts or oral traditions.
- **Community Involvement:** Engaging local communities ensures archives reflect authentic narratives, as seen in the Oral History Project.
- **Inclusivity:** Digitization can amplify underrepresented voices, countering historical biases in traditional archives.

The panel highlighted the need for participatory archiving models to empower communities as co-creators.

Conclusion

The Community Workshop on Archiving underscored the transformative power of digitizing books, cultural artefacts, and visual/oral media. By preserving heritage, enhancing accessibility, and amplifying diverse voices, these efforts strengthen cultural identity and knowledge-sharing. Participants left with practical skills and a renewed commitment to collaborative archiving, paving the way for inclusive and sustainable preservation initiatives across India.