National Policy on Digital Preservation for India: A Basic Framework

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Extended Abstract

The digital technology offers several advantages over their print counter-part, however, preservation is not one of them since associated technologies are in a continuous flux of change. There is a constant threat of backward compatibility for digital contents that were created using older versions of software. The digital content face constant threat of "techno-obsolescence" and transitory standards for file formats, compression techniques, hardware components and network interfaces. Digital preservation is a cost-intensive process and requires continuing attention and monitoring well after the analogue materials have been digitized and ingested into a collection. The national digital preservation policy should highlight country's ongoing commitment to its digitally preserved valuable collections. Although digital preservation and digitization are related, they are two distinct activities. While digitization is one-time activity, digital preservation is an ongoing process. Preservation of digital resources continues long after completion of digitization of analogue materials. However, since parameters used in the process of digitization can adversely affect preservation and access of digital objects created in the process of digitization, policy for capturing content (born digital or scanned from analogue media) is prerequisite to the policy on digital preservation.

The Indian Subcontinent is very rich in (invaluable) cultural heritage resources that include tangible resources as well. A number of organizations possess such resources, as such the mission for India and Indian organizations is to ensure the preservation of valuable information and cultural heritage. The rationale behind the preservation of information is to shield it for stable access for the current usage as well as for posterity. For effective long term digital preservation systems, very high reliability requirements are necessitated.   There is a yawning gap between our ability to create digital information and our infrastructure and capacity to manage and preserve it over time. The preservation programs are very complex and involve both administrative and technical charter. Thus the escalating scale and complexity of digital resources to be curated and preserved, and the subsequent urgency of developing a critical mass of expertise, shared services and tools for long-term digital preservation, required a step change in developing strategies and approaches. Unless significant effort is put urgently into digital preservation and securing long-term access to the digital resources, uncertainties over archiving will continue to impede the growth and take-up of digital services and new working practices. And unless digital assets can be preserved over time, current investment in digitization and digital content will only secure short-term rather than lasting benefits.   To this effect a National Digital imitation Preservation Policy needs to be in place.

To address these pressing issues Department of Information Technology (DIT)has embarked on the ambitious National Digital Preservation Programme (NDPP) with participation of whole lot of stakeholders and researchers. Although a National Digital Preservation Programme (NDPP) of India has been launched, trying to settle the scores by conceptualizing it properly through interactions and development of tools for digital preservation management of Heritage Archives (executed by C-DAC, Pune), (Long term) *Digital Preservation* (DP) in India is a recent concept and thus *National Digital Preservation Policy* is yet to surf to top. Several activities have been initiated under the project . Two workshops (International and National) have since been organized in March 2009 and May 2010 to take a stock of best practices world over; and subsequently focus on various preservation issues taking India Centric cases into consideration.

The present paper is an offshoot of the first International workshop organized under NDPP project. An attempt has been made to identify, enumerate and highlight the broad framework for the national digital preservation policy, which was first presented in March 2009 . Endeavours has been made to address wide range of issues that are centric to the national policy formulation ranging from challenges , goals and scope of Digital Preservation to access & digital asset management system including channels for acquisition of digital materials; metadata, persistent identifiers / handles; secured storage (back-up, maintenance strategies, storage and disaster recovery digital preservation strategies) and monitoring/evaluation; training and awareness   roles and responsibilities of the organizations The paper also identifies the role of NDPP beyond the policy formulation to help and facilitate the imitation and thereafter spurt in (long term) DP activities in the country.

The authors were the invited speakers involved in both the workshops to address core issues regarding DP activities in the country