

Rescue and Conservation of Manuscripts damaged by flood in Assam

A devastating flood in six districts of Upper Assam in July 2026 affected more than 600,000 people. More than hundred persons died. It affected homes, Sattras, Buddhist monasteries and repositories of cultural heritage. Among the most vulnerable were the Sanchipat manuscripts, a distinctive variety of Assamese manuscript prepared from *Aquilaria* bark and written with durable indigenous ink known as *Mahi*. Centuries old manuscripts written in the tradition of Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhavadevas were on the verge of extinction due to damage from flood and fungus. These manuscripts preserved generations of knowledge. Floodwater, mud and prolonged moisture caused fungal and bacterial deterioration to these heritages.

North East Zone of ICOMOS India supported its eminent partner Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva to initiate a community-based emergency first-aid measures, including retrieval, controlled drying, segregation and documentation work with. The campaign took place in Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Golaghat districts. 102 manuscripts were rescued. Emergency preservation care was provided. This mission was led by Mridu Moucham Bora. Conservation work was started in the Cultural Heritage Centre of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva. The initiative was financially supported by Royal Global University, Dr Binoy K Bordoloi, and Cotton Collegiate Ex-Students' Group 1976.

In order to share this field experiences and seek international expertise, North East Zone of ICOMOS India organized an international webinar on 29th September in collaboration with Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva, ICICH–ICOMOS, ICOMOS India, and Cotton Collegiate Ex-Students' Group 1976.

In the opening address of webinar, Dr Rima Hooja, President, ICOMOS India reflected upon her experience of dealing with heritage-related disasters and highlighted the need for appropriate strategies for responding to the present situation.

Dr Sanjib Kumar Borkakoti, President of Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva as well as expert member of ICICH briefly presented the aims and objectives of the Society for Srimanta Sankaradeva. He explained the circumstances and rationale behind the initiative undertaken for the rescue and safeguarding of Sanchipat manuscripts and other endangered heritage materials. He said that a digital archive was being made of the manuscripts in the website www.sankaradeva.com.

Dr Ángel Cabeza Monteiro, President, ICICH–ICOMOS proposed the possibility of developing a wider international campaign to mobilize resources for the restoration, registration, and copying of manuscripts. He encouraged sharing of the experience, commitment, and conservation work undertaken in Assam with the wider international heritage community.

The principal presentation was delivered by Mridu Moucham Bora, manuscript conservation specialist from Assam. he presented a detailed account of the various stages of the rescue and safeguarding initiative. His presentation documented the processes, practical challenges, and conservation considerations involved in responding to heritage materials affected by the flood, thereby providing valuable field-based insights into emergency heritage conservation.

The concluding address was delivered by Dr Mrinalini Atrey, Secretary General, ICICH–ICOMOS. She acknowledged the efforts of the North East Zone of ICOMOS India and expressed appreciation for the overall initiative and the collaborative process through which the experience of Assam's heritage conservation community was brought to an international professional forum.

The webinar reaffirmed the importance of an integrated, community-oriented and internationally collaborative approach to disaster-risk management for cultural heritage. The discussions also underscored the need to move beyond emergency rescue towards systematic documentation, conservation, registration, reproduction, knowledge-sharing, and long-term safeguarding of Assam's vulnerable manuscript and heritage traditions. It concluded with vote of thanks by Dilip Changkakoty, Coordinator, North East Zone and Treasurer, ICOMOS India.