

e-library of rare books launched in Pune

BORI houses one of South Asia's largest collection of rare manuscripts

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The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI), which houses one of South Asia's largest and most invaluable agglomeration of rare manuscripts, opened its treasure vault digitally by launching an e-library of ancient religious and historical works on Wednesday.

Nearly 1,000 rare books and manuscripts in Sanskrit and its related languages are presently available for readers worldwide to savour in this first phase of digitisation.

The institute, named after legendary Indologist Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, was set up in 1917 and has in



The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

its possession nearly two-and-a-half-lakh rare books and manuscripts, some of them in an extremely brittle state. "The rationale behind the e-library is to preserve at least some of these books. Hence, we chose to digitise 20,000 among the rarest-of-the rare books and four to five thousand will be availa-

ble for readers to read them online for free," said noted Indologist Prof. Shrikant Bahulkar.

Three fully-automated Zeutschel high-resolution German scanners were specially procured by the institute at a cost of ₹15 lakh each.

"We began with screening the two lakh-plus manuscripts to zero down on the ones we would digitise," said Mithilesh Kulkarni of Nyansa, a firm specialising in heritage digitisation.

Chinmay Bhandari of Nyansa said that the entire process was one of 'non-destructive' digitising, which ensured that even books in decrepit condition were preserved while scanning.

"For the past two years, our 15-member team was working in three shifts every day and we digitised more than 3 lakh pages each month," Mr. Bhandari said.

Among the BORI's notable publications are a 19-volume edition of *The Mahabharata*, collated with copious critical material, and legendary Sanskrit scholar P.V. Kane's five-volume *History of Dharmashastra* (1930). "The work on the *Mahabharata*, universally acknowledged by scholars and researchers the world, is still on with the Cultural Index to the *Mahabharata* still being prepared under the guidance of scholar Dr. Ganesh Umakant Thite," said Prof. Bahulkar.