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Ayurveda

MANUSCRIPTOLOGY – A BIRD’S EYE VIEW

KEY WORDS:

Manuscriptology, Manuscripts, Critical edition, Lower criticism, Transcription

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ABSTRACT

Manuscript is a hand written document which has scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and is at least seventy-five years old. Manuscriptology is the scientific study of manuscripts. It covers a wide range of specializations including preparation of raw materials, study of development of scripts and alphabets, methodologies of higher and lower criticisms, translation, interpretation, reconstruction of texts, preservation, conservation and storage of manuscripts. Manuscripts are the primary data sources as they are closest to the original work. They need to be processed in order to draw the best out of them. NMM (National Mission for Manuscripts) study established the fact that, more than 20000 Ayurvedic manuscripts are identified but still unexplored and unpublished. Thus it is the need of the hour to digitise the ancient scriptures and documenting them from private and public collections. This paper is a humble approach on detailing the primary and secondary steps of Manuscriptology.

INTRODUCTION

A knowledge based hand written composition on paper, palm leaf, birch bark, cloth, metal, or any other material that has significant scientific, historical, philosophical or aesthetic value is called manuscript.^[1] The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 lays down the legal framework for custody of manuscripts.^[2] Antiquities, defined under the Act include “any manuscript, record or other document which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than seventy-five years.” If this definition is taken into consideration, a manuscript means a hand written document which has scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which is at least seventy-five years old.^[3] Manuscripts are primary data sources as they are closest to the original work. So they need to be processed in order to draw the best out of them. Manuscriptology is the scientific study of manuscripts. It covers a wide range of specializations - preparation of raw material (paper, birch bark, palm leaf, inks, and stylus), study of development of scripts and alphabets; methodologies of higher and lower criticisms, translation, interpretation, reconstruction of texts, preservation, conservation and storage of manuscripts.^[4]

Manuscript wealth of India

As per one of the surveys made by Dr S.C Biswas and Mr M K Prajapathi on behalf of INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) during 1988-90, the following estimates were made,

- Total number of manuscripts in India – 50,00,000
- Sanskrit manuscripts – 67%
- Other Indian languages – 25%
- Arabic/Persian/Tibetan – 8%

In the year 2003, our then prime minister Sri Atal Bihari Vajpeyi, understanding the immediate need of digitising the ancient scriptures and documenting them from private and public collections, established the National Mission for Manuscripts. Till date, the Mission is able to digitise around 43 lakhs of Manuscripts. Still the work is going on and it shows the strength of Indian knowledge sources and the picture of education in India.^[5]

Physical attributes of manuscript

Manuscript has got two components. They are:

1. *Adheya* (Scripts) - A script is a set of visual symbols representing language depending upon the public convention. *Brahmi* and *Kharoshtri* were the most ancient Indian scripts used by ancient scholars, from which most of the local scripts are developed.

2. *Adhara* (Writing apparatus) – Writing apparatus includes three components. They are:

- a) *Lekhya samagri* (Writing surface) – It includes talapatra (palm leaves), bhurja patra (birch bark), shila (rocks), paper, metal surfaces, wooden sheets etc.
- b) *Lekhana samagri* (Instruments used for writing) – Includes *kanta*, peacock feather, brush, stylus etc.
- c) *Rakshana samagri* (Materials used for binding) – Two types of manuscripts based on binding are stitched and unstitched. Palm leaf and birch bark cannot be stitched. So a cord is passed through them after creating holes for binding purpose.

Steps of Manuscriptology

Manuscriptology/Paleography/Codicology is the scientific and structural study of hand written document credited with fair antiquity. It consists of two steps. They are:

1. **Primary steps** - includes collection, conservation and cataloguing of manuscripts
2. **Secondary steps** - includes transcription, translation, critical edition and publication.

Primary steps

A. Collection of manuscripts

The first requisite in Manuscriptology is the collection of maximum number of manuscripts scattered all over the world. The dangers to a manuscript collection can be termed as factors of deterioration.

Manuscript deteriorating factors

General kinds of deterioration are:

1. **Physical damage** – Some of the physical factors and their respective damages to manuscript includes:

- Wrapping of leaves takes place when leaves are not kept tightly between wooden boards and due to uncontrolled exposure to the sunlight.
- The manuscripts become stuck due to oils, varnish etc.
- Extremely dry atmosphere made brittle leaves break.
- Lighting unit inside showcases too close to manuscripts dries up the leaves and makes them brittle.
- Flaking of paint occurs due to rubbing of the palm leaves against each other, when they are loosely bound.
- Absence of air conditioning in the area where manuscripts are stored results in the fluctuation of temperature and relative humidity which cause expansion and contraction of the manuscript making them weak and breakable.
- Damages due to human factor include theft, vandalism, staff mishandling and irresponsible users.

2. Chemical damage - Manuscripts may be stained in presence of various chemicals especially the palm leaf. For example, there may be fungal stains, sandal wood paste stains, vermilion stains, ink stains or simply dirt stains due to carelessness of custodians.

3. Biological damage - The manuscripts are affected by insects such as termites, silver fish, cockroaches, crickets, book-lice etc. Pests such as mice, rats or other rodents may also menace collections. These foraging animals live in both old and new buildings and may bite, eat or stain manuscripts. The microbial agents causing deterioration of manuscripts includes fungi like *Aspergillus niger*, *Aspergillus glaucus*, *Aspergillus flavus*, *Aspergillus restrictus*, *Altemaria humicola*, *Altemaria malvae*, *Penicillium rubrum*, etc.^[6]

B. Conservation of manuscripts

Any direct or indirect action on a damaged or undamaged manuscript or collection of manuscripts aimed at enhancing the life of manuscripts can be termed as conservation. National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) of India is the first national level comprehensive initiative in the world which caters to the need of conserving manuscripts and disseminating knowledge contained therein. Conservation of manuscript is done through preventive and curative methods.

1. Preventive conservation

The concept of preventive conservation measure is to prolong the life cycle of the object concern by reduce its rate of decay by external ways. Examples for preventive conservation include,

- The library building should be built in such a way to protect manuscripts from light, heat, fire, etc.
- Maintain relative humidity as 50%, temperature at 25°C and Light as 50 Lux inside the storage room. LED lighting is recommended.
- Proper maintenance, periodical housekeeping and cleaning inside library is necessary in order to control of dust, air, dirt and moisture.
- If any tear is noticed on the leaves of the documents or books, only acid free tissue papers should be used instead of cello tapes.

2. Curative conservation

The curative conservation measure is meant for prolonging the life cycle of the concerned object by reducing its rate of decay by direct action on the objects.

Examples for curative conservation include:

- Washing and Cleaning
- De-acidification
- Fumigation
- Encapsulation
- Lamination
- Binding & Filing.

C. Cataloguing of manuscripts

It is the process of classifying and arranging objects in a particular order. A catalog helps the reader to locate the manuscript easily in a short time. Cataloguing is an important method of making the manuscripts easily accessible for the research community. Catalog of Catalogues or New Catalogues Catalogorum (NCC) is a comprehensive compendium of all the manuscripts that are available all over the world that lists the manuscripts under name of the author and title of work.

Secondary steps

A. Transcription

Transcription means to write the text as it is to a plain paper. Direct reading of a manuscript is very difficult. So it helps the person to read it in a better way. Manuscripts are available in different languages and one can copy it in the same language.

B. Translation

It is the process of converting the words of one language to

another. The need for translation in present day life is more emphasized in the country and one should keep in pace with time by keeping the developments in the world around. Due to this step, the person who is from another place and culture can easily understand our ancient systems and knowledge.

C. Critical edition

Any edition that attempts to construct a text of a work using all the available evidence is termed as critical edition. Critical edition require collation of different versions of same manuscript. Most critical editions use a base manuscript. Critical editions are more informative on the sources, historical context, form, style and other literary matters related to the manuscript. It includes two methods. They are lower criticism and higher criticism.

a) Lower criticism

It is a process that goes towards the selection of original reading based on evidences. It goes through 3 stages - Heuristics, Recension and Emendation.

1. Heuristics - The word meaning of Heuristics is to find or to discover. It is a process of methodological collection, analysis and study of evidences with respect to the text. Heuristics includes 3 stages:

1.1. Siglum - It is the special identification mark given to the manuscript. The siglum could be based on the script, the source of the codex, age of the copy, or a combination of any of these.

1.2. Collation - Collation is the process of collecting all the information concerning the text in one document. It should be done in a specially prepared collation sheet. Nowadays excel sheets are used. In this sheet one can write the letters in each block. A most trustworthy codex is taken as the base and that is written in the first row of squares with single letter in each square. On the left side and against a row the siglum of the codex compared is written. By this method the relationship between the different codices could be identified.

1.3. Secondary sources of evidences - All works that are directly and closely related to the text on hand but not the source manuscripts are secondary sources of evidence. They are commentaries, translations etc.

2. Recension - Recension means critical revision of the text. It is the process of choosing among the variants of a reading which is closer to the author's intension.

3. Emendation - Once the text has been established, it may require emendation in places where a scribe or series of scribes have made a mistake. Manuscripts were either copied from other manuscripts or frequently, written down from dictation. For original works, an author often wrote his draft on wax tablets, which he might either copy out himself or give to a scribe. In all these processes mistakes can readily occur. As anyone will understand who has tried to copy a text himself, texts are easily miscopied. They were even more easily misheard, and a dictator was likely to introduce glosses into the text. In such cases, emendation becomes necessary, the grounds for it are those of grammar and sense, and their justifications are paleographical, grammatical, and literary. Traditional emendation results mainly in the removal of expansions, interpolations, and corruptions.^[7]

3.1 Expansion - It is very common for explanatory or additional remarks of one kind or another to come into texts, not necessarily for any reason of bias.

3.2 Interpolation - Interpolation means deliberate alteration by expansion (or deliberate omission).

3.3 Corruptions - Scribal errors are included under corruptions. A Scribe is a person who serves as a professional

copyist, especially one who made copies of manuscripts before the invention of automatic printing. The errors made by scribes while copying manuscripts are termed as scribal errors.

It includes:

- Deletion/Omission - Unintentional omission of words occur when the texts are re-written.
- Addition - Some words gets added to the text when the marginalia is not differentiated properly.
- Substitution - This unlike other errors occur intentionally where the scribe substitutes the original text with his own text. This mostly happens with synonyms.
- Orthographic confusion - This is an error that occurs when a scribe copies a manuscript from one script to another.
- Transposition - Involuntary transposition of phonemes can happen between sentences.

b) Higher criticism

Higher criticism deals with contents of a text and studies its special characteristics including the methods and motives of author. At this stage, it concentrates on the particular nature of the one source under review. Scholars scrutinize texts for the author's educational background, political loyalty, handling of the traditions, the purpose of writing, influence of other writers in the field, popularity of the work etc.

D. Publication

It is the last step of Manuscriptology. It is a very sad fact that only 2% of the available material from medical manuscripts are in the printed form.

CONCLUSION

Manuscriptology is the scientific study of manuscripts. Manuscripts are primary data sources as they are closest to the original work. So they need to be processed in order to draw the best out of them. It is a very sad fact that only 2% of the available material from medical manuscripts are in the printed form. NMM (National Mission for Manuscripts) study established the fact that, more than 20000 Ayurvedic manuscripts are identified but still unexplored and unpublished. Thus it is the immediate need of hour to digitise the ancient scriptures and documenting them from private and public collections.

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