

IMPORTANCE OF AND DIFFICULTIES IN THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPTS

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ABSTRACT

A complete picture of scientific heritage of India requires a survey and study of manuscripts. There are several libraries of manuscripts in India but many are unexplored or even not preserved properly. The lists or catalogues prepared may not be correct or may not give full information of the actual content of the manuscript. Sometimes the subject or title or the author may be mistakenly listed. cursory study or editing of manuscripts by persons who are not experts in concerned branch of learning may lead not only to incomplete and erroneous edition but to substitution of correct words or letters by incorrect ones due to lack of expertise in that branch. Proper preservation of manuscripts and proper maintenance is also stressed.

Ancient Indian literature is mostly preserved in the form of manuscripts. In South India the practice of preserving the knowledge by writing on palm leaves continued even upto the beginning of the last century. From the medieval period onwards the tradition of oral transmission of knowledge of sciences was supplemented by written material. The practice of compilation or composing even subtle and scientific ideas in verses, which were easy to be remembered was reduced and more attention was given to the compilations and commentaries of already

existing classics or treatises by preservation of the original material in the form of script. The change in the preservation and transmission of knowledge may be due to the frequent onslaughts of foreign invasions and rule which hampered the system of age old practice of transmission of knowledge in the form of *gurukula* system. Scholars started devoting to preserve the knowledge in manuscripts.

A complete picture of ancient scientific heritage of India can be fully achieved only when a survey

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and study of all existing manuscripts is taken up and completed. Since the last one to two centuries many scholars and institutions devoted themselves to the collection, preservation and study of the manuscripts. In spite of such untiring efforts by devoted and brilliant scholars, it is unfortunate to note that innumerable manuscripts are left untouched or lost or destroyed or still lying unattended to in some private, individual and public collections. A complete door to door survey of all villages and towns may yield still very valuable and rare treatises in any branch of knowledge.

There are several libraries of manuscripts in India. Some are well maintained, catalogued and preserved with due precautions. There are some other manuscript libraries where there are no catalogues or even any lists of manuscripts-classified or unclassified. There are no preservative measures to protect the manuscripts from damage due to passage of time, pests, white ants etc. I had the experience of seeing some manuscripts in deplorably decaying condition even in Government collections. I could not open some manuscripts as they were fused together and any attempt to separate the leaves would transform the leaves into powder form. I could only look at the manuscripts without opening them. The Government or concerned offices should rise to the occasion and see

that the manuscripts are preserved at all costs.

There are lists, catalogues or printed descriptive catalogues of some manuscript libraries. It may not always be proper for a research scholar to depend on these lists, catalogues or notes supplied by the curators or librarians. The scholars who did the classification, cataloguing or descriptions were not experts in all or concerned branches and many might have completed the prescribed work in a hurry, though the scholars are generally experts in the common branches of Sanskrit learning like Vyākaraṇa, Nyāya and Sāhitya. They were not experts in Scientific subjects like Ayurveda. This is evident in the publication of *Bhelasāhītā* based on a single manuscript in Telugu script and published by the University of Calcutta in 1928 by no less a great scholar than Mahamahopadhyaya late Anantakrishna Sastry.

The lists or descriptive catalogues of manuscripts of libraries are not always accurate. Sometimes a bundle of manuscripts listed as one work may contain more than one work either complete or incomplete. Once I noted a work by a famous sage Bharadvāja mentioned in Ayurvedic literature. Since works written by or attributed to Bharadvāja were not seen previously. I got interested and went to study that

palm leaf manuscript. When I made a detailed survey of the manuscript, I found to my surprise, leaves from another treatise by a scholar whose name has not been known to the Ayurvedic world till then.

Similarly some books may be different from what is mentioned in the list or catalogue. I again got interested in a title “Śatavidhvamsī” in a manuscript library. I thought it may be a compilation by a new author dealing with the treatment of 100 diseases or by 100 prescriptions (yogas). When I examined the manuscript, I found it was a book of collection of prescriptions but I could find neither the name of the author nor the book. When I reexamined carefully there were at the end of a yoga, words ‘iti.. tavidhvamsī’—one letter before ‘ta’ was missing. The scholar thought that it might be ‘śa’ and gave the title as Śatavidhvamsī thinking that to be a colophon, while the word was only to indicate the end of that prescription. In fact it was vātavidhvamsī as is known from the lines of the prescription which preceded. The word ‘Vātavidhvamsī’ were mistaken as ‘Śatavidhvamsī’ and taken to be title of the manuscript.

While editing several books of scientific nature much disservice has also been done to the works by the scholars, with all respects to their scholarship and efforts and interest.

In the early days of the organisation of the manuscript libraries, only Sanskrit scholars were given the work of the editing of even scientific treatises and due to their non-acquaintance with the ‘paribhāṣa’ several mistakes occurred. Bhelasamhitā is a very valuable ancient classic of Ayurveda and this has come down in a fragmentary state to us in the form of only single palm leaf manuscript in Thanjavur. This was first edited and published by no less a great scholar than Mahamahopadyaya Anantakrishna Sastry from University of Calcutta. When the Central Council for Research in Ayurveda & Siddha took up the work of a critical edition of Bhelasamhitā, it was astonishingly found that the first edition was not properly edited due to the non Ayurvedic scholars editing it. Not only several missing words or letters were not substituted by proper substitutes but even correct readings in the original manuscript were replaced by some other substitutes mistakenly due to lack of background of Ayurvedic knowledge.

Another important aspect is the maintenance of manuscript libraries. Unless devoted and competent scholars are posted there is always the possibility of loosing or misplacing or clubbing together of manuscripts. A manuscript misplaced is a manuscript lost. Proper amenities are also required to the workers. I would like to quote one example. I copied a ma-

nuscript from a Govt. Institution and it was published after a comparative study of other manuscripts and printed versions. On the basis of this printed work one scholar interested in the work wrote to the library for a

copy of the manuscript. But the manuscript was not traceable when he requested for it. The scholar had to be satisfied with the copy with me only.

पाण्डुलिपियों के अध्ययन की कठिनाइयां तथा महत्त्व

बी. रामाराव

सारांश

भारत के वैज्ञानिक परम्परा के सम्पूर्ण चित्र को प्रकट करने के लिए पाण्डुलिपियों के सर्वेक्षण तथा अध्ययन की आवश्यकता है। भारत में पाण्डुलिपियों के अनेक पुस्तकालय हैं किन्तु कई अनन्वेषित हैं या उन्हें ठीक ढंग से सुरक्षित नहीं रखा गया। सूचियाँ या तालिका (सारणी) जो तैयार की गई हैं, ठीक नहीं हो सकती या पाण्डुलिपि की वास्तविक जानकारी नहीं दे सकती। कभी-कभी विषय या शीर्ष या लेखक का नाम गलती से सूची-बद्ध किया गया। सम्बन्धित ज्ञान की शाखा में प्रवीणता न रखने वाले व्यक्तियों द्वारा सरसरी अध्ययन या पाण्डुलिपियों का सम्पादन न केवल अपूर्ण व अशुद्ध (भ्रंतिपूर्ण) सम्पादन की ओर प्रवृत्त होगा अपितु उस शाखा में प्रवीणता के अभाव में सही शब्दों के स्थान पर गलत शब्दों के प्रतिस्थापन में सहयोग प्रदान करेगा। पाण्डुलिपियों की उचित सुरक्षा तथा सही रख रखाव पर भी बल दिया गया है।