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A REVIEW STUDY OF MANUSCRIPTOLOGY IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda's classical knowledge, preserved through Samhitas and ancient manuscripts written on palm leaves, Bhurj Patra, and other traditional materials, has deteriorated over time due to insufficient conservation. The Government of India's Gyan Bharatam Mission (2024–2031) aims to systematically collect, conserve, catalogue, translate, and publish these manuscripts. This initiative facilitates the retrieval of lost Ayurvedic concepts and highlights their scientific relevance for contemporary and future research. Strengthening manuscript preservation ensures that India's traditional medical heritage remains accessible to scholars, practitioners, and future generations.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Manuscriptology, Gyan Bharatam Mission, Preservation, Samhitas.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the ancient system of medicine, has been passed down through generations in a literary format. Its foundational knowledge is embedded in classical texts authored by ancient Acharyas in the form of Samhitas. this knowledge was preserved as handwriten documents known as manuscripts. These were inscribed on materials such as Bhurj Patra, palm leaves, wooden sheets etc. Among these, there are large numbers of unpublished manuscripts related to the field of ayurveda. Even the available manuscripts are not well preserved; hence there is a fear of losing some important facts hidden in these manuscripts.

DERIVATION

The term Manuscript is derived from Latin word Manu-scriptus which means writing by hand, whereas 'Manu' means hand and 'Scriptus' means to write.

SYNONYMS OF MANUSCRIPT

Pandulipi, hastpatri, hastlekha, hastkriti, granth, potha, pothi, ponthi, Pustaka, pratilipi, shastra, kosh patra, documrnt, text, codex, handwriting, script.

DEFINITION

According to Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 "Any manuscript which is original hand written document which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value and which has been in existence for not less than 75 years old.

MANUSCRIPTOLOGY

Manuscriptology is defined as that branch of science which imparts training in reading and understanding of ancient manuscripts. The science of classifying, collecting, preserving and editing of manuscript is known as manuscriptology.

PALEOGRAPHY

It means the science of deciphering ancient writing as evident in documents and inscriptions.

LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

Manuscript has got two components.

- **Adheya (scripts)-** Most common language used in ancient manuscripts is Sanskrit. There are various other regional languages used in the manuscripts throughout the world where it has been written. The most Ancient scripts used in the manuscripts are Brahmi. There are manuscripts available in other scripts such as Manipuri, Nandinagari Devanagari, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil.
- **Adhara (Writing apparatus)**- there are three component related to writing apparatus. Writing surface (ĕ`%) and instruments used for writing (ĕ`ùन) can be considered under the Writing

apparatus.

1. **लेख्य सामग्री** ***(Writing Surface)***- in ancient days various surfaces were used for documentation such as.

- Shilalekha (rock)
- Tamra patra (copper plate)
- Taada patra (palm leaf)
- Bhurja (birch bark)
- Wooden sheets Animal skin

2. **लेखन सामग्री** ***(Writing Instruments)***

- Stylus - hard and sharp
- Pens - soft and smooth tipped
- Brushes - for painting
- feathers of birds – quill
- Mashi / ink - dyes used to make leters darker

3. रक्षण सामग्री (Binding)

In order to preserve the manuscripts it has been either Stitched Or by passing a cord the folios has been kept together. Palm leaf and birch bark cannot be stitched thus a cord is passes through it in order to keep the folios together and preserve it.

RULES FOR USING COLOURS

Black ink- for book writing
Yellow ink- for correction
Red ink-to mark chapters and sections *Gold and silver ink*- for draw the borders.

Lipikara/lekhakha-there are 3 types

- pustaka lekhaka -copied manuscript
- shasana lekhaka-Royal scribes.
- Kayastha lekhaka-writers of account.

STEPS OF MANUSCRIPTOLOGY

There are two steps involved.

- Primary
- Secondary

Primary steps in manuscriptology

i. Collection: Collection of maximum number of manuscripts scatered all over the world. Manuscripts is a oceans of knowledge, principles and information. The dangers to a manuscript collection can be termed as factors of deterioration. These factors can be categorized as human factors and natural factor. the original copy of manuscript is to be done Manual duplication / photo copying / Digital photography / imaging.

1. Human factors

- Carelessness.
- Ignorance
- Public apathy

2. Natural factors

- Fire, water, natural climates, Insect atack, microbiological atack, dust, environmental pollution and light, fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity.

3. Inherent factors

- The ink or paint used to write may cause damage to the manuscripts.

ii Conservation

The methods used to save manuscripts or preservation is essential to prolong the life of manuscripts which termed as conservation. If not preserved properly they are subject to physical damage and decay. Every manuscripts have different style of preservation.

Preventive conservation: Reducing future risks of deterioration can be termed as preventive conservation there are Various methods like Regular inspection of the manuscripts, microfilming, photocopying, lamination, digitization etc.

- To save and enhancing the life of manuscripts it is necessary to preserve them in a proper manner.
- Threats in preserving manuscripts - various conditions can damage the manuscripts.

Climate

1. Dust, atmospheric pollution
2. Human carelessness
3. Poor storage condition
4. Pests - fungus, bookworms, termites, rats.

Preservation Traditional Method

- Use of cord and wooden board for binding
- Airtight wooden boxes
- Use of silk cloth
- Vacha, Karpoora, Ashwagandha kept in the boxes Latest Methods
- Air condition room, fresh air, low moisture.
- Place should be pest controlled, regular DDT spray, fumigation, nepthaline balls etc.
- Glass/aluminium racks.
- Latest modern techniques – Lamination

Curative conservation

stopping active deterioration in the manuscript can be termed as curative conservation. For example by Fumigation, apply lemon grass oil.

Conservation techniques in different types of manuscripts

Palm leaf manuscripts

Palm leaves of talipot or talipat (Corypha umbraculifera, C. taliera) and palmyra (Borassus flabellifer) were common writing surfaces in ancient India. The Buddhist Canon was written on palm-leaves. The oldest palm-leaf manuscript was found in Sikiang, China.

Traditional Asian techniques.

Use lemon grass oil, citronella oil for clearing words and then we can read it easily. Apply lampblack and it also helpful for easy reading. Usually to fasten the manuscripts, holes are punched on the leaves and cords are passed through them. These are then placed in between two stiff flat wooden boards having the same

type of holes for passing the cords. The wooden boards press the leaves from both the sides, prevent curling at the edges and chipping by abrasion. The manuscripts were wrapped in yellow or red cotton cloth.
Western techniques
Use of A.C. rooms to preserve the palm leaf manuscripts.

Paper manuscripts
The word 'paper' comes from the Latin word Papyrus, invented in 109 A.D.by China. In India, handmade paper manuscripts were used commonly in the 18th century.

Papers help us to keep the knowledge in book form. Traditional Asian techniques.
Clean the paper with soft brush then apply pesticides to all sides of paper use tress paper (Japani tissue paper) and transparent cloth (Irani cloth) for lamination.

Concept of Modern preservation.
Awakened by the alarming rate of destruction of manuscripts, modern devices and techniques are being developed and utilized. The World Wide Web holds millions of websites and the Internet is the market place for research, teaching, expression, publication and communication of information.

iii. Cataloguing
cataloguing facilitates systematic access and research .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 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, serial number, manuscript size, script, content type.

Cataloging helps researchers and viewer for Easy search in short period Ex. Nighantu. One can search all available manuscripts.

Catalog can be prepared in 3 types.
- Card
- Book
- Sheet

Information included in catalog is.
- Serial number
- Date
- Accession no.
- Title
- Author etc.
- Arranged and stored according to nature size etc.

Secondary Steps in manuscriptology
Transcription - it is writing the text as it is to a plain paper in same script. This helps the person to read in a better way and so also there will be conservation of knowledge. Later it can be converted to desired script.

Critical edition - is the close reading and detail analysis of manuscript on the basis of evidences. Textual criticism is a branch of textual scholarship, philology, and of literary criticism that is concerned with the identification of textual variants, or different versions, of either manuscripts or of printed books. Critical edition provides a better understanding of the creation and historical transmission of the text and its variants.

There are methods includes in critical edition.
1) Lower criticism
2) Higher criticism
3) Translation - Translation is a process of converting the words from one language to the another, which provides easy and better understanding of the ancient knowledge.
4) Publication - Publication is the last step in manuscriptology. After detail study of any manuscript it is made available in the easily understandable script and languages. This provides transfer and preservation of ancient knowledge.

Critical Edition
Lower criticism is selection of original reading based on evidences. Lower criticism includes - 3 stages of lower criticism.
1. Heuristics
a. Siglum
b. Collation
c. Secondary sources of evidences
2. Recension
3. Emendation

❖ ***Heuristics***
Heuristics literally means to find or to discover. It is the process of methodological collection, analysis and study of evidences. This includes three steps.

Siglum
Siglum is the special iden fica on mark given to each selected copy of manuscript. This is given based on script or age of copy or name of author e.g. – K12 – Kashmir, 12th century.

Collation
Collation is collection of all information concerning the text in one document. It is done on special sheet or an excel sheet. The specific order is followed to record the information as the most trust worthy codex is recorded in the first row of a sheet. Left side siglum of compared codex is mentioned. This provides the easy view to compare between various copies of the manuscript.

Secondary sources of evidences
At this step all works directly related to the manuscript are collected and refered for the detail study of manuscript. e.g. – commentaries.

❖ ***Recension***

Recension is the process of choosing among the variants of a reading. Such a recension that is formulated after elaborate examination is called a critical recension.

❖ **Emendation**

Emendation is the suggestions or comments given by the editor. By which the text presented may be understood properly and easily. Utmost care should be excised while resorting to emendant.

Instutional Initiatives

Manuscript conservation centers The National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) was established in February 2003, by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture, connect India's past with its future. At present the Mission has a network of 34 MCCs across the country.

- India possesses more than 5 million manuscripts.
- Estimated 1 lakh manuscripts have been produced from 1500BC-1900AD out of which only 1/10th are traced.
- Among the available manuscripts only 2% are published. Availability
- Sanskrit manuscripts are collected from more than 100 years in various institutions by Government and individual efforts.
- Many have published their descriptive catalogues.
- Check list of Sanskrit medical manuscripts by CCRAS-Revised Edition 2005. Sources There are various centers across the world which preserves the manuscripts and make it available for the researchers. Various institutions, State libraries, museums have their own projects under which they collect, preserve and study on manuscripts. Around 31 universities and research organizations; 17 private organizations; 22 institutions out of India; temples, ashrams, individuals have collected and preserve the manuscripts.

Ministry of AYUSH govt. of India has initiated the" Gyan Bharatanam Mission" under the national mission for manuscripts (2024_2031) for 5 year as a central sector scheme.

DISCUSSION

Not every handwritten document qualifies as a manuscript. Authentic manuscripts hold historical, literary, or scientific value and are typically over 75 years old. Material and medium—such as palm leaf, bark, or skin—signify their authentcity. Reading manuscripts is often difficult due to script variability, deterioration, and unfamiliar languages.

CONCLUSION

Ancient manuscripts are invaluable sources of traditional knowledge. With only 2% of existing manuscripts published, a massive scope remains for revival. Manuscriptology not only preserves heritage but also aids in rediscovering the richness of Ayurveda. Establishing conservation centers, raising public awareness, and training scholars are essential steps toward globalizing ancient Indian wisdom.

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