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Significance of Conservation of Manuscripts w.s.r. to Ayurveda

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the medical system of India has developed from the ancient treasure of knowledge recorded thousands of years ago. Ancient medical manuscripts contain so many valuable information on various aspects of Indian systems of health care such as different branches in medicine, ethno-veterinary practices and *Vrikshayurveda* etc. Analysis of these oldest documents will help to acquire an in-depth knowledge about classical texts and open a new horizon of textual research. Exploration of manuscripts will extend a new arena for research in diverse fields like drug research, clinical research, folk literature etc. It also portrays historic events and changes in the culture pertaining to that period. The ancient medical literature presently available only represents 2% of total medical manuscripts. A lot of them are still under the custody of private repositories which are not accessible to others. Manuscripts are in the verge of deterioration with an alarming speed. So, it is the need of hour to conserve these ancient memories before it fades away. Systematic surveys on manuscripts can be done with the support of public, research scholars, universities etc. Awareness campaigns about the conservation of manuscripts should be regularly conducted at institutions with public participation. Other conservation methods are documentation, critical analysis and digitization. All these activities can be effectively done by co-ordination of experts in different fields. To conclude, the knowledge heritage of manuscripts should be properly conserved and handed over to future generation for the benefit of mankind.

Key words: *Ayurveda, manuscripts, critical analysis, digitization, conservation*

INTRODUCTION

India being one of the earliest civilizations possesses largest collection of manuscripts in the world. Nearly five million manuscripts are available in temples, *Gurudwaras*, *Monasteries*, libraries and private repositories. Manuscripts are the store house of our rich traditional knowledge. It is not only the store

house of information about bygone days, but also it is an embodiment of thoughts and imagination of our ancestors. These priceless gems are greatest means of portraying our heritage regarding literature, medicine, ethics, sociology, astrology, mathematics, architecture, and economics etc. The knowledge heritage of India contained in the manuscripts are vast and expansive in its foot prints. But manuscript reserve in India were deteriorated due to foreign invasions, change in dynasties, adverse climatic condition and ignorance. This knowledge treasure of past should be restored with urgency before it become irretrievably lost. *Ayurveda*, the medical system of India handed down orally from generation to generation. After the emergence of writing techniques, it becomes documented in the form of manuscripts. The knowledge of *Ayurveda* are documented in different manuscripts like palm leaf, birch bark, *Tamra Patra* etc. Data available in *Ayurvedic* text books are actually derived from manuscripts. *Ayurvedic* knowledge can be classified in to three dimensions viz *Tatvas* and

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Sidhanthas (unaltered principles described in the primary texts), *Sastra* (operational rules and laws derived by deletions and editions) and *Vyavahara* (applications). Theoretical and practical applications of medical knowledge described in different manuscripts are incorporated in *Ayurveda*. These manuscripts also represent a slice of culture and heritage. Unfortunately, there is no detailed and accurate data about medical manuscripts in India. Many medical manuscripts are unknown to *Ayurvedic* scholars due to the lack of knowledge about the scripts. Among the treasure of medical manuscripts only 1/10th are traced and among that, only 1/4th are published. It is an acknowledged fact that almost half of the medical manuscripts are lost or damaged. Therefore, the collection, documentation, conservation, digitization and publication of manuscripts are utmost important. One of the important means of conservation is the exploration of knowledge contained in them. This paper tries to brief about an overview of manuscripts, conservation methods of manuscripts and significance of manuscripts in *Ayurveda*.

Manuscripts - An overview

Manuscripts are considered as memories of past and also it constitutes one of the basic source materials for knowledge about diverse dimensions. The word Manuscript is made up of two words, *Manu* and *Script*. *Manu* means hand and script means writing.^[1] Thus according to antiquities and art treasures art (1972) the word manuscript refers to a hand written with scientific, historical, literary and aesthetic value which is at least seventy five years old.^[2] Scientific way of deciphering of these hand written materials is called manuscriptology. Manuscriptology deals with identification, cataloging, preservation, critical edition and publication of manuscripts. Manuscripts are collected from various sources like educational institutions, libraries, temples, museums, private repositories and from oriental manuscript libraries in different parts of India. Many of the manuscripts are lost forever due to carelessness in preservation and handling, adverse climatic condition and atmospheric pollution. It is also destructed by the attack of fungus, termites, rats etc.^[3] Manuscripts are also damaged by

deterioration of its own inherent factors like writing and binding materials. Manuscripts are usually recorded in *Talapatra* (palm leaf), *Bhurjapatra*, *Karpasapatra* (cotton cloth), wooden planks (*Kashtaphalaka*), *Tamrapatra* (copper plates), stone plates (*Silapatra*), *Mrittika* (brick plates), *Agaru* tree bark (*Sanchipatra*), rock edicts (*Silalekha*) and skin (*Charma*). Inks, vegetables, dyes of painting, scribbling with metallic stylus, brushes, reeds, pencils and wooden pens were used for writing information. Scripts found in manuscripts are *Brahmi* and *Kharoshti*.^[4] *Brahmi* is again divided in to northern and southern *Brahmi* and *Nagari*. Northern *Brahmi* includes *Devanagari* and *Gujarati*. Southern *Brahmi* include *Kannada*, *Tamil*, *Telugu* and *Malayalam*. *Nagari* again classified in to *Purva Nagari*, *Ardha Nagari*, *Nandi Nagri* and *Devanagari*. Usually, a manuscript begins with *Mangala Sloka* and it will have a main body. The special markings are written on the left side. In the concluding part there will be the description of title, name of the author and the period of writing. In some manuscripts, there will be religious symbols, floral, geometrical symbols and other decorative designs.

Conservation of manuscripts

Deterioration of manuscripts can be prevented by proper preservation methods, microfilming and digitization. Physical methods of preservation of manuscripts include proper storage in glass racks and wooden boards, exposure to proper sunlight and air circulation and various methods to prevent sticking of pages.^[5] Chemical preservation methods include fumigation, pest control by using different chemicals such as thymol acid chloromate solution, DDT and mercuric chloride solution etc.

Microfilming is the process of turning a document in to microfilm. In this method, photograph of the manuscript is taken first and the images obtained are captured on roll of microfilms and it is kept in individual containers after labeling. Along with proper preservation methods, it should be documented, digitized, translated, critically edited and published, so that this treasure of knowledge can be used for further

research.^[6] Collected manuscripts may be written in different languages. Therefore, proper translation should be done to an understandable language which is necessary for understanding and exploring the knowledge in them. Digital edition of manuscript is done by using different techniques like scanning, optical character recognition^[7] (OCR) and by different photo manipulation softwares. For easy accessibility of manuscripts it should be critically edited. Critical edition of manuscripts helps in highlighting historical dimension of text and it also help to tease out inter textual aspects of the text in ways that far exceed simple transcription. In addition to that, the critical edition will help to drill down the original text and to identify the errors in transmission. Being an authoritative version of original work, the critical edition become more accepted by the scholarly community as an authoritative version of text. Critical edition is done in two main ways namely lower criticism and higher criticism. Lower criticism is done by four steps heuristics, collation, emendation and recension. Heuristics is the collection; analysis of all available evidences related to the original text. Collation is the comparison of two or more texts which gives a set of variant readings for the text under consideration. Emendation is the suggestion by the researcher for reading as more possible to be close to the original text on the basis of internal and external evidences. Recension is the process of choosing best among the variants. Higher criticism is the assessment of author's original work. It includes analysis of writing style, language, equipment used for writing, situation in which work was composed, life circumstances of author and source of work.^[8] After the critical edition, publication should be done. A critically edited and digitized form of manuscript will be more useful for script analysis, structural analysis, water mark analysis of a single manuscript via metadata for another digital object and it also help to gain new information by the incorporation of other source of knowledge. For the conservation of manuscripts, Govt. of India established National mission for manuscripts in February 2003. So many valuable manuscripts are unearthed and preserved by the mission during the past years. Under this mission various manuscript resource centres and

manuscripts partner centers are working. It also set up a web based national database of manuscripts. Manuscript mission conducted national surveys for manuscripts and conducted many outreach programs. By the effort of this mission, nearly 3.3 lakhs manuscripts were digitized and 55 unpublished manuscripts were published.^[9]

Some manuscript conservation centre are:

- Central institute of *Buddhist* studies
- Himalayan society for heritage and arts conservation
- Indira Gandhi national centre for arts
- Oriental research institute, Thirupathi
- Saraswathy mahal library, Thanjavur
- Centre for heritage studies hill palace museum, Thrippunithura
- Manuscript library, Calcutta
- Central library, Banaras
- Manipur state archive, Imphal
- Asiatic society Calcutta and Bombay.
- Salar Jung museum Hyderabad
- Department of Language and culture, Shimla
- Nagarjuna Buddhist foundation, Gorakhpur
- Bhandarkar oriental research institute, Pune
- Rajasthan oriental research institute
- Oriental research institute, Trivandrum
- Khudabhakha Oriental public library, Patna
- Sambalpur University, Orissa^[10]

Significance of conservation of manuscripts in Ayurveda

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life is transmitted orally through the generations. The documentation in *Ayurveda* started individually and by the encouragement of various rulers. Later these documents are preserved traditionally by certain families and also under the custody of certain rulers. Most of the hands written documents are lost due to the lack of proper preservation and handling.

Collection, preservation and publication are the only ways to conserve this ancient source of wisdom. Conservation of manuscripts will help to enrich the existing knowledge treasure. Manuscript study is helpful for understanding the chronological flow of transmission of knowledge in *Ayurveda*. It will explore the past knowledge in the purview of current advancement of scientific knowledge for the benefit of future generation. Researches in manuscripts help to improve the intellectual status of *Ayurvedic* scholars and aspire them for further advancement of science. Manuscript study help to acquire an in-depth knowledge of classical texts of ayurveda and open a new horizon of textual research. It enshrines researches in the field of fundamentals of *Ayurveda*. It will also promote researches in the field of history of medicine in India during ancient, medieval and modern period and elucidation of inter-relations between the evolution of medicine in India and other centers of civilizations. Medical manuscripts also throw light on historic events and changing ideas of Indian culture. Most of the disease etiologies and treatment methods are related to socio-cultural context. Medicines and therapeutic procedures related to *Ashtangas* of *Ayurveda*, ethno veterinary practices (*Pashu Ayurveda*) and *Vrikshayurveda* are contained in the vast knowledge treasure of manuscripts. Most of the medicinal plants mentioned in the manuscripts are still to be identified and this will definitely help in the treatment of emerging new diseases. Exploration of manuscripts open a new arena for research in diverse fields like individual drug research, native drug formulations, clinical research, folk literature, astrological facts, veterinary diseases etc. So many medical manuscripts brought in to lime light by the efforts of national manuscript mission, IPGT&RA and CCRAS. According to the studies of national manuscript mission only 20000 *Ayurvedic* manuscripts are identified.^[11] The presently available medical texts represents only 2% of ancient medical literature. A lot of medical manuscripts which are unknown to *Ayurvedic* scholars are still in the custody of traditional families, monasteries, temples etc. There is no separate catalogue for ancient medical manuscripts in oriental libraries and private custodies. Most of the

medical manuscripts in different parts our country are damaged or lost due to adverse climatic condition. So, it is the need of hour to conserve this valuable treasure before they get extinct. Collection, preservation, documentation, publication and digitization of manuscripts can be done by the coordination work of *Ayurvedic* medical experts, language experts and technical staffs. Medical manuscripts written in regional languages like *Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu* etc. are not accessible to everyone. The whole *Ayurveda* community will be benefitted by the translation of these regional medical manuscripts. Therefore the documentation and publication of manuscripts^[12] are utmost important for the revival of our traditional knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Traditional knowledge of medicine contained in the manuscripts is the foundational stone of healing practices in Indian medicine. Most of the medical manuscripts scattered in various parts of India are yet in unrevealed form. This invaluable and unique pool of knowledge is under threat of destruction at alarming rate due to the lack of proper preservation, documentation and ignorance. Only the cataloguing is not sufficient for conservation of manuscripts. The knowledge contained in them should be propagated by critical analysis and digitization. Systematic survey of manuscripts should be conducted with the help of research scholars, universities, *Pathasalas* etc. Medical knowledge hidden in the manuscripts can be analyzed propagated with the help of linguistic experts and research scholars. It is very essential to preserve this national wealth of manuscripts before it is lost forever.

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