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Review on importance of Textual Criticism in Ayurveda Manuscriptology

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ABSTRACT

Ayurved, the ancient Indian system of medicine, developed as a result of the accumulated wisdom and practical experiences of many generations. The knowledge gained by ancient seers of *Ayurved* was meticulously recorded and passed down primarily through Oral medium and then through manuscripts. Manuscripts hold the new, previously unknown and rare knowledge. Concurrently, further advancement to the existing knowledge is possible through some rare and hitherto unknown manuscripts. Indian Digital sources such as Namami, Niimh-Amar have collected approximately 4249 *Ayurved* manuscripts from which only few are published.^[1] Manuscripts preserved in libraries have limited accessibility. To reach a wider audience, they should be published. The most important scholarly aspect of manuscriptology is Textual Criticism and edition of the manuscripts for publication. The vast knowledge available in manuscripts should be evaluated by using the stepwise methods of Textual Criticism. The present study gives the brief information about Textual criticism and provide the importance of the same in *Ayurved* manuscripts. Textual criticism deals with studying the first formal documents of the writing, authenticating them, and identifying their variants. The objective is to recover the text from a manuscript to its earliest form and preserve its original meaning. Critical editions of *Ayurvedic* texts, based on multiple manuscripts, secure the heritage of this valuable knowledge, which can be published and used by *Ayurved* students and physicians in today's era.

Key words: Manuscriptology, Ayurveda, Namami, Niimh-Amar, Indian Digital sources, Textual criticism

INTRODUCTION

In Ancient India, the art of writing emerged as a way of preserving knowledge that was previously transmitted orally from one generation to the next. *Ayurved*, the ancient Indian system of medicine, developed as a result of the accumulated wisdom and practical experiences of many generations. The knowledge gained

by ancient seers of *Ayurved* was meticulously recorded and passed down through manuscripts. 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 which must be at least seventy-five years old (According to The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972) is called manuscript.^[2] A conservative estimate states that there are approximately five million manuscripts in India in various forms and scripts; 60,000 in European countries and 1.5 million in South Asia and Asian countries. Sanskrit manuscripts form 67 per cent of the total number.^[3] Most of the *Ayurved* related Manuscripts are mainly written in Sanskrit language. The *Ayurved* Manuscripts preserved in libraries have limited accessibility. To reach a wider audience, they should be published. Each manuscript undergoes a rigorous process of critical evaluation known as Textual criticism, before getting published. Textual criticism

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involves restoring a body of work as close to its original form as possible. It is essential for understanding the creation, historical transmission, and variants of manuscripts, leading to scholarly curated editions. The critical edition and publication of *Ayurved* manuscripts gives accessibility to valuable yet previously unknown Knowledge of *Ayurved*. Additionally, transferring their content to print media ensures preservation for future generations.

Textual Criticism

Textual criticism deals with studying the first formal documents of the writing, authenticating them, and identifying their variants. The objective is to recover the text from a manuscript to its earliest form and preserve its original meaning. The most important scholarly aspect of Manuscriptology is Textual Criticism and edition of the manuscripts for publication.^[4] The process of Textual Criticism has mainly two stages, Lower Criticism and Higher Criticism.

1. Lower Criticism

It can be distinguished into three stages 1. Heuristics, 2. Restoration or Recension, 3. Emendation or Emendation.

1.1 Heuristics

All the available variants of a manuscript are needed to be examined to create a critical edition. Heuristic involves comparing and contrasting methods by which a manuscript can be critically evaluated. The process begins with comparing the titles and examining descriptive catalogues of works with similar titles, which helps to identify potential variations and similarities. After the collection of all available copies of the manuscripts, including the originals, each copy will be scrutinized for orthographic peculiarities and scribal stylistics. Thorough study of each copy is done to evaluate the fidelity of the codices based on their content. Evidences from all extant copies are combined to form the text, considering evidences from commentaries, anthologies, and related works. The manuscript which appears more trustworthy than others is to be taken as the basis and the readings of this copy should be collated with the readings of others.

It mainly comprises of three steps,

- a) **Siglum:** A siglum is the identification mark assigned to various manuscripts used for critical editions. These marks may consist of numbers, letters, or other symbols. The basis for creating a siglum can be the script, the source of the codex, the age of the copy, or a combination of these factors.

Eg. D(Devanāgarī), G(Grantha), O(Oriya) etc. Sigla may refer to the source of the codex. Eg. M(Madras), Ar(Arah), My(Mysore), B(Baroda) etc. If more than one codex are to be identified in the above scheme, then numerical figures inferior or normal could be used.

- b) **Collation:** The process of gathering all relevant information about a text into a single document, often involves using a collation sheet. When dealing with three codices, a common method is to select the text from one of the codices (considered superior) and transcribe it onto paper. Adequate margins are left on both sides of the page, or sufficient space is maintained between lines. This transcribed copy is then meticulously compared word for word with the other two manuscripts.

Eg.

C for commentary

w for worm-eaten

m for mutilated

b for blank space

a for addition in the text part

Collating the evidence of manuscripts in this way makes it possible to arrive at fixing the mutual relationship of the codices consulted. The relationship between two codices can be in two ways: they may either be exemplar and copy or sister copies i.e. copies of one and the same exemplar. This helps in tracing the genealogy of the codices of a work. Such a chart wherein we can show the relation of the codices of a work is called stemma codicum, tree of codices. Chalking out the pedigree of codices aid in determine the possible earlier reading.

- c) **Secondary sources of evidence:** These encompass works that are closely related to the text at hand

but are not the original source manuscripts. Secondary evidence, also known as external or indirect evidence, including various types of works related to the text at hand. This consist of not only those directly and closely related to the text but also those containing quotations from it. Secondary sources encompass a wide range of materials, such as commentaries, translations, anthologies, quotations, obvious imitations, epitomes, adaptations, and parallel versions.

1.2. Recension

It involves carefully examining all collected variants to arrive at a version of the original text that is closer to its initial form. Each reading undergoes thorough scrutiny and debate before being accepted. This rigorous process is why the formulated recension is referred to as the critical recension.

1.3. Emendation

It becomes an important factor when, despite thorough scrutiny of the variants, the editor remains dissatisfied with the available texts. In such cases, the editor can make valid corrections to the text, a practice known as emendation.

2. Higher Criticism

Higher criticism follows lower criticism and involves a deeper assessment of the text. Higher criticism is an aspect of textual study that goes beyond the mere selection of readings. It delves into the text as a whole, considering the author's sources and influences. Unlike lower criticism, which focuses on the authenticity of specific texts, higher criticism examines broader aspects. Interestingly, higher criticism isn't strictly a separate stage; it begins alongside text selection and continues throughout the editorial process. In fact, it forms the foundation for the entire editorial endeavour. Its completion typically aligns with the finalization of the recension, making it a crucial fourth stage in the process. It involves various aspects related to the author, including their style, language, literary elements, sources of the work, the author's life, the circumstances that led to composing the work, the context in which it was written, the influence of other

writers in the field, and the overall popularity of the work.

Higher criticism follows 5 steps:^[5]

- a) Source criticism - A document, a person, a speech, an observation used to obtain knowledge.
- b) Form criticism - Method that classifies units of scripts by literary pattern and that attempts to trace each type.
- c) Redaction criticism - Analysis of the purpose of text, commonly repeating themes, vocabulary and style of writer.
- d) History/tradition criticism - The tradition passed through various stages to their final stage.
- e) Radical criticism - Concerned with the literature and religious system of the old script.

Need of Textual Criticism

1. Publication of critical edition

Manuscriptology provides authentic records for tracing the cultural, social, political and economic history of the people of a region or a country. Similarly, the wide range of available Ayurved manuscripts may contain the information about various diseases, medicines, treatments which are useful but yet to be known. All these manuscripts are older than about 600 years thus needed to be published in print form soon after the critical evaluation. Thus, preserving the valuable ancient knowledge in the form of critical edition.

2. Management of errors

Authors typically don't create multiple copies of their own work. Instead, they may hire scribes to copy their writings. Even scholars sometimes make copies. However, errors can occur during this process. Even the most reliable scribe may introduce differences compared to the original. These variations depend on factors like the scribe's fidelity, the distance from the archetype, and the work's popularity. However, it must be accepted that the scribes may not be responsible for all the variants. It is possible that authors may have revised their work after sometime. Since neither the revision nor the original is dated, there is no way to

differentiate when the copy is separated from the author in space or time. Broadly, there can be only four major types of errors due to multiple causes with reference to a letter, a word, a line/sentence or a paragraph in a manuscript^[4]: (a) Deletion (b) Addition (c) Substitution (d) Orthographic confusion (d) Transposition

All the manuscripts should undergo the process of textual criticism to manage these errors during the process.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda Manuscripts, found in various versions across different locations, present different readings on the same topic. Even a small difference in text (*Pathbeda*) may lead to different meaning or opinion of a concept. Textual criticism is a rigorous but needed method used for critical evaluation of the all available Ayurved manuscript. Many new formulations and types of managements can be recognized by critical edition of manuscripts based on the place and time of author. Indian Digital sources such as NAMAMI, NIIMH-AMAR have collected approximately 4249 manuscripts from which only few are published. Critical editions of Ayurvedic texts, based on multiple manuscripts, secure the heritage of this valuable knowledge. This rigorous process ensures that Ayurvedic wisdom is safeguarded and available for upcoming generations.

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