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An overview of Literary Research with reference to Manuscriptology

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ABSTRACT

Research is a part and parcel of today's medical field. Evidence-based medicine is the key to global acceptance. With the advent of new diseases and incurability through contemporary medicine, the world is looking at the traditional system with optimism. Proper documentation and preparation of standard protocol are the key factors in carrying out any research. Health professionals have a special interest in clinical research when compared to basic research. But, the present situation has demanded health professionals to focus on basic research to throw light on the hidden principles of Ayurveda. Apart from the available literature, there are many unpublished manuscripts in Ayurveda. It is the need of the hour to publish and bring out such manuscripts to the public domain to benefit the general public through the medical fraternity. An overview of manuscriptology is given in this work covering the basic information such as the need, pre-requisites, scribal error, editing, storage, repair and reproduction. More the manuscripts getting published better will be the understanding of Ayurveda, in accordance to changing times.

Key words: Basic research, Manuscriptology, Literary Research, Traditional medicine, AYUSH.

INTRODUCTION

"Necessity is the mother of invention." With the progress of time, the methodology of learning is changed. Focus on research is increasing specially in medical field due to the worldwide acceptance of evidence based research. When most of the contemporary sciences are busy with applied research, Ayurveda has a need to explore basic or fundamental research. Basic research differs from other types of research in being totally unpredictable,

and often there is no initial connection between the research and its medical application.^[1] The application of Ayurveda *Siddhanta* in clinical practice is only a small proportion when compared to the total *Siddhanta* available in classical texts. Lack of Sanskrit base among the peer coupled with coded message through *Shloka* form are the important factors for the same. One way of overcoming this insufficiency is by referring the available commentaries and books of other classical authors which may bridge the gap in analyzing the concept. Since all the manuscripts of Ayurveda are not in published form, all the Ayurveda fraternity does not have the access to the precious information available in them. Thus, basic knowledge of manuscriptology becomes the need of the hour especially for the traditional medicine like Ayurveda.

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MANUSCRIPTOLOGY

The manuscript is derived from two words - "manu/manus" and "script" which means "hand" and "written" respectively.^[1] So, all the written material which has relevance to Ayurveda can be taken under Ayurveda manuscripts. Since ages, the enlightened

sages used to transmit the knowledge through the oral transmission method. As time passed, people felt the need to document the preaching for the future generation. Initially, they found different methods of documentation scribbling over the stone, clay and later, portable methods came into existence by writing over leaves such as palm, etc. With the progress in time, paper-based writings-books developed, and presently, we can appreciate the digitization.

Pre-requisites for a Manuscript

There are minimum requirements for preparing a manuscript. They include the base on which matter is written, the material used for writing and then, binding material to hold them intact.

Writing surfaces include.^[2]

- Palm leaf (*Sritala* and *Kharatala* variety)
- Rock edits (*Shilalekha*)
- Inscriptions (*Tamrapatra* - copper plate)
- Conch shell (mother of pearls)
- *Phalaka* (wooden planks)
- Skin of bamboo and
- Papers

Writing equipments are called *Lekhana Sadhana / Lipi Sadhana / Lipi Sambhara / Lipi Sajja / Lekhana Samagri*. They are:

- *Lekhani*
- *Lohakantaka* (stylus)
- *Jujavala* (compass)
- *Balu* (reed pen made up of bamboo)
- *Prakara* (compass box)
- *Shalaka*

Colored markings^[3] were also utilized for specific purpose like the border of the page, corrections and to mark the beginning of a new topic. Once the manuscript was completed, they were either kept separately - unstitched or tied using a cord.

Concept of Scribal Error^[4]

A scribe is an individual who copies a manuscript so that other people can access the information. During the process, there are possibilities of the scribe to make few mistakes, intentional or non-intentional, called as scribal errors. Non-intentional are attributed to be caused due to sight, faulty hearing, and memory lapse. They can be classified as Omission, Addition, transposition, substitution, and orthographic confusion. As the name indicates, addition refers to the extra word being inserted and omission refers to missing a word/sentence while copying. Transposition refers to the interchanged order of words. Substitution refers to the replacement of a word with the other and this is usually intentional. Orthographic confusion refers to the error due to the inability of the scribe to identify a particular *Lipi*.

Editing of Manuscripts^[5]

The intention behind manuscript editing through textual criticism is to present the most accurate information to keep the original word and sentence of the author. In textual criticism, collation is the process of comparing differing manuscripts or editions of the same work to establish a corrected text. A new edition of the work may be also be described as a collation, if it results from such a comparative exercise. Emendation refers to improvement by critical editing.

Major drawbacks for storage of manuscripts:

- The level of humidity in the place of storage
- Low humidity with heat is not desirable
- Pests
- Fungus
- Cockroaches
- Book worm
- Termites and wasps
- Rats

Method of Storage

The manuscript should be stored in a place with sufficient light and air circulation. Direct sunlight or artificial light should not fall on them. The best way to

store the Manuscript is in an air-conditioner room that has moderate humidity. Naphthalene balls kept between the manuscript serve as an insect repellent. The shelves in which Manuscripts should be kept away from walls and raised from the floor.

Repair of Manuscripts^[6]

- Palm leaf Manuscript can also be restored with the help of tissue paper.
- Manuscript drenched under water can be dried under fan.
- Lamination is another way of protecting the Manuscript.
- Manuscript should be thoroughly cleaned before lamination and the letters must be darkened with appropriate ink.

Mechanical reproduction of Manuscript

Paper Manuscript lasts for 400 years while the palm leaf Manuscript can last a maximum for 700 years. The traditional method of preserving the Manuscript was to copy them every 200 years. With the advent of British rule, the process was discontinued that led to the loss of many valuable manuscripts. Some of the advanced methods are microfilming, photocopying and digitization that offers excellent accessibility to the content. Publication of translation or transliteration is another important medium that ensures preservation. Scanning the Manuscript with 600 dpi scanner and storing them in CD-ROM is another approach for preserving them. The fragile leaves are retained between 2 transparent sheets and scanned with high-resolution scanner images and later enhanced by techniques such as adobe photoshop.

CONCLUSION

There exists a wide scope in exploring literary research, specially manuscriptology. The amount of manpower in Ayurveda involved in the field of manuscriptology is marginal. Thus, it becomes the need of the hour to introduce the basic subject matter to the concerned. By amalgamation of ancient knowledge with advanced technology, it is possible to bring out more of classical literature to the public domain and explore the *Siddhanta*.

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