

AYURVEDIC MANUSCRIPTS – A REVIEW

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Abstract

The treasure of knowledge is still hidden in manuscripts in India. It is shocking that not even 5% of available manuscripts are brought into light till date. It is interesting to know the varieties of topics that are described in these manuscripts. Among this, Ayurvedic manuscripts are also available in a considerable amount. It is very important for any Ayurvedic fellow to preserve and publish such classics to revive the golden era of Ayurvedic system, till it is brought to the status of main stream of medicine. The institutionalised Ayurvedic study entirely depends on important classical books published by spectacular efforts of Ayurvedic and Sanskrit experts during pre and past independence time. This is an analytical review to explore the herculean task of reviving gigantic collection of Ayurvedic classics and explore it to global community so that the power of this knowledge system is used fruitfully to serve humanity. Only through enriching the source of knowledge and converting it into an implacable form as per present social life that the students and practitioners of Ayurvedic fraternity can be made confident and successful in their own field. This will open up different viewpoints and practical approaches about the medical system and resolve confusions and misunderstandings.

Key words: Ayurveda; Manuscript; Sanskrit; Manuscriptology.

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INTRODUCTION

The word manuscript is made up of two words, manus means hand and script means script i.e. whatever written by hand. According to “Antiquities and Art Treasures Act”- 1972 the word manuscript refers to a hand written document with scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value which is at least 75 years old.

Manuscriptology is the exploration of the past in the purview of present knowledge for the future research. The study of manuscripts dealing with different subjects like nāṭyaśāstra (science of dancing and acting), kāvya (poetical composition), nāṭaka (drama) jyotiṣya (astrology), gaṇita (mathematics) etc can add up the existing knowledge. There are many manuscripts available which are yet to be explored. The only way to preserve the knowledge is by editing and publishing the matters present in the manuscripts. Digitizing the manuscript copies is also a type of conservation and preservation. But for the transmission of knowledge, theoretical and practical utility is very much required. Critical edition is done to get the actual meaning which is intended by the original author. A number of manuscript copies on a single text or a single copy has to be critically revised before publication. Various accidental or motivated corruptions seen in the manuscript copies are to be corrected before forming a single text. The study of Manuscript is very much needed in the field of Ayurveda, to get the hidden knowledge and for the improvisation of the current knowledge.

Indian manuscripts

There are innumerable ancient manuscripts available in India which deals with a variety of topics. (Table 1)^[1]

Language and scripts

Sanskrit is the most common language used in majority of manuscripts found in India.

The oldest form is considered as vedic Sanskrit used in veda (sacred knowledge). In ancient time most of the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist literature were written in Sanskrit language, suggests its easy accessibility. The word itself indicates that the language is heavily formalised and standardised. Nevertheless, we get manuscripts in local languages also, which are developed from Sanskrit. Prakrut, Pali, Tamil, Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Odiya, Bengali etc are diverse languages that enrich the manuscript collections. In the same way, the diversity in the scripts used also makes the task of decoding them more difficult. Below given is the list of few scripts repeatedly found in manuscript study, with their details. (Table 2)^[2]

Available manuscripts - A statistical note

NMM study established the fact that, more than 20000 Ayurvedic manuscripts are identified but still unexplored and unpublished. There are about 1, 00000 manuscripts which are unidentified. The survey done on the basis of scrutiny of about 1100 printed catalogues and hand lists belonging to 70 libraries, institutions and individuals, made by Biswas SC and Prajapati MK on behalf of INTACH during 1988-90, the following estimates were made:

Total number of manuscripts in India - 5,000,000

Indian manuscripts available in European countries - 60,000

Indian manuscripts in South Asia and Asian countries - 150,000

Number of manuscripts recorded in catalogues - 1,000,000

Percentage of manuscripts language wise, Sanskrit - 67%, Other Indian languages - 25%,

Table 1: Description of available subjects in various manuscripts

Topic	Description
Veda, Veda laksana, Upanisat, Srautasutra, Srautaprayoga	Related to Veda (sacred knowledge)
Grhyasutra, Grhyaprayoga	Directions for domestic rites and ceremonies with rituals
Dharmasutra, Dhramaprayoga, Dharmasastra Smrti	Religious rites and ceremonies Codes of law
Advaita, Visistadvaita, Paramadvaita, Suddhadvaita, Dvaitadvaita, Dvaita, Saiva, Samanyadarsana, Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Mimamsa, Jaina, Bouddha, Shaiva	Philosophy
Itihasa	History
Gita	Related to advices of gurus for spiritual and mental maturity.
Purana, Mahatmya, Vrata, Bhakti, Stotra, Tantra, Vaisnavitantra, Devitantra	Devotional and religious related.
Jyotiṣa	Astrology
Kavya, Ramayaṇa, Mahabharata, Alankara, Chanda, Nataka	Literature
Śilpa	Architecture
Koṣa	Dictionary
Katha, Niti	Stories

Table 2: Details of various scripts available in the manuscripts

Sl.No.	Script	Region	Time period	Description
1	Devanagari	It is not confined to any region.	10-11 th centuries A.D.	Nāgari denotes cultured or sophisticated. Palm leaf in devanāgarī are very rare, one in ten thousand. This script is called Bālabodha in Maharashtra and Karnataka. 2 varieties
2.	Grantha	Tamilnadu	7 th cent AD	a. Square hand founds around Tanjore b. Round hand of mostly Jains around arcot and Madras.
3.	Kannada	Karnataka	450AD	Used to write Sanskrit only Sanskrits in Kannada small in no when compared to Grantha, Nandināgarī and Telugu
4.	Maithili	Bihar and West Bengal	15 th Cent	
5.	Malayālam	Kerala	Late 15 th Cent	Many books in Sanskrit and Malayalam language is available in old houses of Kerala, even now in this script.
6.	Moḍi	Maharashtra	13 th Cent	Used for non literary work but thought to be influenced Devanāgarī
7	Nandināgarī	Abundant in west half of Karnataka	13 th Cent	Absence of horizontal top line is suitable to write on palmleaf, otherwise leaf splitting due to the line.
8.	Nepali/Newari	Nepal	12 th Cent	Vast collection of manuscripts available, in Nepal region.
9.	Oriya	Vanga/Bengali	Late in history	2 types Brāhmaṇi- used on PL, Karaṇi – used for non literary purpose
10.	Śāradā	Jammu and Kashmir, North-Eastern Punjab	8 th Cent AD	Major scripts used by Kashmiri Pandits.
11	Sinhalese	Srilanka		Most of them Buddhist works
12.	Telugu	Andhra Pradesh	14 th Cent	Difficult to differentiate from Kannada
13.	Tigalāri	Coastal Karnataka – Karawar to Kasargod	12 th Cent	Mixture of Malayālam, Grantha and Kannada
14.	Vaṅga	Bengal	15 th Cent	Many nighantus and Ayurveda books are preserved in this script.

Arabic/Persian/Tibetan - 8%.

Survey conducted by Prof. V. Raghavan, Manuscripts catalogues, editions, Bangalore, 1963 shows the magnitude of manuscript wealth in India. (Table 3)^[3]

Ayurvedic manuscripts

The number of unpublished and unexplored Ayurvedic manuscripts reveals the truth that, the present Ayurvedic literature is very minimal. Several manuscripts are yet to be explored. It is believed that, tantras were written pertaining to astangas of Ayurveda. The book 'Pratyakshasharīra' mentions a number of names of tantras as mentioned by various authors and commentators (table 4).^[4] It is infact only a brief list of possible collection. A thorough survey including the old houses may reveal a number many times more to this list. People of villages still misbelieved that it is inauspicious to touch or hand over old manuscripts they possess at home. The rule might have been made to preserve them from mishandling but it is the greatest challenge that researchers in the field of manuscript study face now.

Importance of medical manuscripts and need of the study

The Table 4 shows the need of research in the field of Manuscriptology as only few works are explored at present pertaining to astangas of Ayurveda. A checklist of Sanskrit medical manuscripts by Rama Rao, gives the details regarding available Ayurvedic manuscripts, pertaining to various branches such as roganidana, bhaisajyakalpana, rasasastra, dravyagūṇa etc. It is the work of Ayurvedic researcher to identify the manuscripts and publish them by following the method of critical edition. An unexplored manuscript may add up the existing knowledge or it may explore the hidden knowledge. For instance, a critical study of paryayamuktavali, a nighantu of odisha has explored many new drugs and

synonyms which are not mentioned in other nighantus.^[5] The manuscript named Jirnakalaprmana, which is not yet, published is available in the government Oriental Manuscript Library Madras. It reveals the new knowledge which was not found in any published books on similar contents. The time required for the digestion of different eatables including different formulations mentioned in this manuscript, can be considered as an example to new areas exploration through manuscript study. (Table 5)

Ayurvedic manuscript study – challenges and short comings

Procuring a manuscript copy is really challenge for a scholar who is really interested in the manuscriptological studies. Some of the repositories may easily grant the copies without any cost whereas some of the libraries have uploaded digitized copies of each and every manuscripts available in their collections and made it easily accessible to a scholar through online. For example accessibility of Ayurvedic manuscripts available in I.P.G.T. & R.A. can be done through the website www.ayurvedamanuscripts.com.

The libraries are always open for the scholars who want just to refer the copies. Some libraries may take minimal handling charges. Some of the libraries like MS Library Baroda corresponds the soft copies of required manuscript online. Procuring the copies through online is the easiest way for working in this field as it saves a lot of time. Visiting each and every library is not possible for every scholar due to lack of leaves and shortage of money. After the selection of specific manuscript, one can get the reference regarding the libraries where other copies are available by using "Sanskrit Medical Manuscripts in India" published for CCRAS, compiled by Dr. B. Rama Rao in the year 2005.

Table 3: Estimation of available manuscripts in various repositories across India

Sl.No.	Major categories of Manuscript Repositories	Number of Manuscripts (Approx)
1	Universities in India	1,00,000 (40,000 in Kerala University only)
2	Kashi Sanskrit Vishwa Vidyalaya, Varanasi	90,000
3	Museum/State Archives/Public Libraries	1,00,000
4	Oriental Research Institutes and Learned Societies	2,00,000
5	Pathashalas & Madarasas	1,00,000
6	Hindu Temples	25,000
7	Jain Temples in Rajasthan	2,00,000
8	Jain Temples in Ahmedabad alone	60,000
9	Collections of Princely States of India before independence	25,000

Table 4: Reference of names of various text books available in the published Ayurvedic books

Sl.No.	Subjects	Books
1.	Kāyacikitsā (General medicine)	Agniveśasaṃhitā, Bhelasāṃhitā, Jatūkarṇasaṃhitā, Parāśarasaṃhitā, kṣārapāṇisaṃhitā, Hārītsaṃhitā, Kharanādasāṃhitā, Viśvāmitrasāṃhitā, Agastyasaṃhitā, Atrisaṃhitā.
2.	Śalyatantra (surgery)	Oupadhenavatantra, Ourabhṛatantra, Pouṣkalāvatantra, Vaitaraṇatantra, Bhojasaṃhitā, Karavīryatantram, Gopurarakṣitantram, Bhalukitantram, Kapilatantram, Goutamatantram.
3.	Śālākyaatantra (treatments of diseases of the head and sensory organs)	Videhatantram, Nimitatantram, Kāṅkāyanatantram, Gārgyatantram, Gālavatantram, Sātyakītantram, Śounakatantram, Karālatantram, cakṣuṣyatantram, Kṛṣṇātreyatantram.
4.	Koumārabhṛtya (paediatrics)	Jivakatantram, Pārvatakatantram, Bandhakatantram, Hiranyākṣatantram
5.	Agadatantra (toxicology)	Kāśyapasaṃhitā, Alambāyanasaṃhitā, Uśanaḥsaṃhitā.
6.	Rasāyana (geriatrics)	Pātañjalasaṃhitā, Vyāḍitantram, Vśiṣṭhatantram, Māṇḍavyatantram, Nāgārjunatantram, Kakṣapuṭatantram, Ārogyamañjarī.
7.	Vājīkaraṇa (virilification therapy)	Kucumārantram.

Table 5: Time required for the digestion of consumed article as explained in the Jirṇakālapramāṇa

Forms of consumed article	Time required for digestion	Time convention (1 ghaṭī = 24 minutes)
Āhāra rasa (Food)	Saptaḡhaṭī	148 min
Swarasa (Fresh juice)	Aṣṭaḡhaṭī	192 min
Kaṣāya (Decoction)	Caturthāḡhaṭī	96 min
Kalka (Wet pills/Bolus)	Dvīḡhaṭī	48 min
Cūrṇa (Pulvis, Powders)	Dvīḡhaṭī	72 min
Uṣṇāmbu (Hot water)	Trayaḡhaṭī	72 min
Piṣṭa (Preparation made by using flour)	Daśāḡhaṭī	240 min
Kṣīra (Milk)	Trayodaśāḡhaṭī	312 min
Dadhyāṇna (Curd- rice)	Caturdaśāḡhaṭī	336 min
Salila (Cold water)	Aṣṭādaśāḡhaṭī	432 min
Ghṛtāṇna (Ghee -rice)	Yāmayugmakam	360 min
Leha (Confections)	Pañcāḡhaṭī	120 min

Then, one can collect the copies in person or through various methods as mentioned above. Though one can get the information regarding availability of other copies in different libraries, deciphering is must before procurement. This step cannot be done online. Direct visit to library and including the copy for the study after deciphering and thorough observation is always advisable.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi and Bengaluru have the collections of microfilms of digitized copies of manuscripts collected from around 44 different libraries of India is the best option for referring a number of required manuscripts at one place.

Method of Scientific study on Ayurvedic manuscripts

It includes the following steps^[6]

- 1. Deciphering** - After collecting manuscripts, it is the first step to identify the script and language. It is always good to select a manuscript available in known script. One can take the help from Sanskrit scholars who know about various scripts if other copies are in unknown script. The scholar should be well versed in Sanskrit language as most of the manuscripts are available in Sanskrit. Interest and patience are the keys while deciphering a manuscript as it takes lots of time to understand the handwriting of a scribe.
- 2. Transliteration** - After deciphering, an identification mark is given to each manuscript copies. The term Siglum is used to indicate the specific codex such as A, B, C, D etc. Then transliteration of a copy which seems to be more reliable has to be converted into a common script which is convenient to the scholar. Usually

Sanskrit language written in various scripts is converted into Devanagari script. While transliterating, it is required to make a note about scribal errors, omissions, deletions, additions, scribal corrections and scribal styles. It can be presented by putting the superscript above the text and giving a description in the foot notes.

- 3. Collation** - This can be done by comparing the other copies with transliterated one. The variant readings are noted as superscript and described as footnotes according to the particular copy which is compared and indicated by siglum.
- 4. Recension** - The method of choosing a most appropriate reading among variant readings is considered as recension. This can be done by proper analysis and with grammatical knowledge.
- 5. Emendation** - This is required when recension cannot be done among variant readings. The scholar has to emend the reading with the help of any other literary sources.
- 6. Higher Criticism** - Assessment of authors work, time period, influence of the present work on other authors, references of other authors or literature in the work all constitute the higher criticism. Knowing about the circumstances which made the author to write a treatise, can make a scholar to understand the intention of the author and interpret the matters in a better way.

Critical editions works done

In the history, there is a reference regarding two eminent scholars who worked in the field of Manuscriptology.

Shri Yadavji Trikamji Acharya edited and published Charaka Samhita along with the commentary Ayurveda Dipika, Sushruta Samhita along with Nibandha sangraha, Rasa Hridaya Tantra, Rasa Prakashasudhakara, Gada Nigraha, Gaja Martanda, Nadi Pariksha, Vaidya Manorama, Dhara Paddhati, Rasayana Khanda, Rasa Paddhati, Louha Sarvaswa, Rasasanketa Kalika, Rasa Kamadhenu, Kshemakutuhala etc.^[7] Acharya PV Sharma also worked in the field of Manuscriptology by editing and publishing the old manuscripts like Hradaya Deepika Nighantu by Bopadeva, Ashtanga Nighantu by Bhattacharya, Dravyaguna by Madhava, Yogaratnamala by Nagarjuna, Sodhala Nighantu, Siddhamantra Prakasha.^[8]

Of late, it is observed that, some of the Ayurvedic scholars are involving in manuscriptology and some of Ayurvedic institutions are supporting the preservation of ancient knowledge. Several works are going on in institutional level due to the changes.

CONCLUSION

It is the high time to enter into the world of Ayurvedic manuscripts as most of them are not in a condition to be handled. Mere digitalisation is not an answer to preserve them. But it is the commitment of every skilful scholar to convert them into such a form that can be conveyed to the global community. Most of the researchers in this field have bitter experiences when they take all the pain of

travelling across the villages and libraries in search of manuscripts and still do not succeed in obtaining them due to bitter experiences from care takers and owners. Tremendous effort required in this field along with special interest, skill, and patience. Encouragement from the authorities can only pave the way to unveil the hidden wealth of the manuscripts.

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