



VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF MANUSCRIPTS IN OLDEN TIMES

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In studying manuscripts our attention is mainly directed to the text and subject-matter of the work copied. Paleography and the material of writing have also received some consideration. But details about owners and copyists as well as any other information about the manuscripts do not so far appear to have been given the consideration they so richly deserve. It is, however, found that they occasionally contain valuable and interesting bits of information about social and cultural history.

It is from these sources that we may form an idea about the high esteem in which manuscripts were held—about attempts that were made for the dissemination of learning through the multiplication¹ and presentation of manuscripts and about the state of education and culture in the country in general.² Curious sidelights are also incidentally thrown on important historical facts.³ The purpose of the present paper is to draw attention to this neglected aspect of manuscript-study. It does not claim to give an exhaustive treatment of the subject but aims at giving illustrative notes on some of the points with the hope that fuller treatment will be made by some other scholar.

Books were a rather rare commodity before the introduction of printing. Clearly they were not as easily accessible even with money as now. Ordinary people with a love of learning but with limited financial resources experienced great difficulties in securing books, owners as a rule, being very unwilling to part with them lest they should be lost or damaged.⁴ The time required and the hard labour involved in copying books can be very well imagined. Hence manuscripts of books were regarded as valuable treasures. We have it on record that at the time of Marhatta depredations in Bengal in the middle of the 18th century the people were fleeing with their children, the images of their tutelary deities as well as loads of manuscripts—the things which they considered to be their most valued possessions.⁵

¹ Well-to-do persons often undertook to get many copies of important works prepared for the use of readers. It is reported that one had got hundreds of copies of the *Kalpikiraṇāvalīcīrti* made evidently for this purpose (*Prāśastisamgraha*, Ahmedabad, 1993 V.S., II, 879).

² Literacy and culture was not unknown among the masses. Manuscripts of popular works in the provincial languages copied by members of the lower classes are not rare. Female education does not seem to have been in as deplorable a condition as is generally supposed to be. Manuscripts of even Sanskrit works on different subjects are known to have been copied by and for ladies (R.A.S.B., i.e., Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit MSS. in the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, VIII, Introduction, p. xiii, *Prāśastisamgraha*, II, 697, 698, 702, 695 of p. 197, 709, 734, 742, etc.).

³ One manuscript recording its date of copying states that it was copied in 1687 V.S. at a time when Gujarat was passing through very bad days of famine and pestilence vividly described by the copyist in a few verses (*Prāśastisamgraha*, II, p. 198).

⁴ Cf. The popular adage *केवली पुस्तिका कान्ता परबलमता मता* | Of course, there were honourable exceptions and we have instances of manuscripts being copied for one's own use as well as for the use of others.

⁵ *Citracampū* of Bāṇeśvara Vidyālaṅkāra: धनजनभारमन्त्रस्यारविनिवहारैर्धावतां मदाधनानां मृहीतमृदुसाराभ्रधुवधामानाम् अह्वयसन्निवसन्नासकसोसकासकानां

In fact, a sort of sanctity came to be associated with manuscripts. On occasions like the Sarasvati Pūjā or Vasanta Pañcamī day they are still ceremonially worshipped especially in Bengal. Worship is also offered to sacred books before they are recited on particular occasions. It may be mentioned that in these matters more sanctity is attached to manuscripts than to printed books. Making gifts of manuscripts was regarded as highly meritorious. Ballāla Sena (12th century) in the Purāṇadāna and Vidyādāna sections of his famous *Dānasāgara* as well as other later compilers of similar treatises quotes elaborate extracts from the śāstras referring to the great merits accruing from the gifting of copies of Purāṇas, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Dharmasamhitās and the Vedāṅgas. Regular ceremonies are prescribed for copying and presenting manuscripts to temples as well as to pandits. The Jains laid special stress on the importance, from a religious standpoint, of copying and making gifts of manuscripts—gifts that were regarded as most efficacious of all religious acts (*Prāśastisamgraha*, I, pp. 19, 27, 31, 38, 43, 46, 71).¹ Consequently numerous libraries or bhāṇḍāras sprang up containing valuable stocks of manuscripts. Building up such libraries was considered to be conducive to religious merit (*Prāśastisamgraha*, II, MS. No. 373) and many people presented manuscripts to them (*Ibid.*, No. 375, 380, 737.) The practice of giving away sacred books is known to this day.² It is gathered from statements recorded in a number of manuscripts that people with a religious bent of mind would get copies of works, generally religious texts, made by professional copyists and make gifts of them to monasteries and religious teachers with a view to earn spiritual blessings for themselves or for their relatives. The act of copying itself was regarded as a work capable of winning religious merit. We have reference to a number of amateur copyists, including several ladies, who took upon themselves the task of copying books with this end in view (*Prāśastisamgraha*, II, MS. No. 91, 213, 812). The necessity of multiplying copies of works from the mundane point of view is emphasized by Rājasekhara (10th century) in his *Kāvya-Mīmāṃsā* (Chapter X). He instructs poets to make many copies of their works as soon as they are finished; for a solitary manuscript may be lost or damaged through one or other of many causes like water, fire, sale and even gift. If, however, different copies are in the hands of different learned men there is every likelihood of their being carefully preserved and studied. It is for this reason that a Bengali scholar, Gaṅgādhara, who composed a commentary on the *Mugdhabodha*, notified in the press in July, 1838, offering a reward of five rupees to any scholar who would make out

श्रीवाचस्पतिप्रसादप्रामाणिकानां दुर्बलमहाभारतविशेषज्ञानपुस्तकसद्योपचयचिन्तासनापजर्जराणां भूमिनिर्जराणाम्... विविधातन्नादेन निचोऽनुवादेन च सुभितमिव चनामसकलमभवत् १॥

- 1 विषयज्ञानसुखमिच्छोर्जितिनः कालि शौकं करष्वग्रमतस्य स्थापयो वापि कौटुक ।
चनवरतमद्वारचिन्तयो भावना का तदिह नियतमेकं दानमेवासा धर्मः ।
ज्ञानाभयोपपद्यदानभेदात्तत्र चिन्ता सर्वविदो वदन्ति ।
तत्रापि निर्वाचयथैकदोषं सज्ज्ञानदानं प्रवरं वदन्ति ।
कालानुभावान्मतिमान्द्यतत्र तत्राधुना पुस्तकमन्तरेण ।
न स्यादतः पुस्तकलोकनं हि त्रादस्य युक्तं नितरां विधातुम् ।
न ते नरा दुर्जतिमाप्रवन्ति न युक्ततां नैव जडसंभावम् ।
भवाञ्चतां वदिविचौनतां च ये लेखयन्ति हि जिनस्य वाक्यम् ।

² The Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal possesses a manuscript of the *Agnipurāna* which was presented after recital to a Brahmin Nārāyaṇa by name in the year 1865 V.S. (R.A.S.B., V, 3735).

a copy of his work and take it. The author hoped that if the work would thus come to the notice of the scholars all errors and inaccuracies would be detected and corrected.¹

Of course, professional copyists were given remuneration for their work and regular sale of manuscripts was also not unknown. It is interesting to study the rates of remuneration and the prices charged for particular manuscripts. Information available in this connection is scanty very few manuscripts giving necessary details in the matter. And I have not come across any very old manuscript containing any indication of its actual price or fee for copying. There are of course some old manuscripts referring to the existence of professional copyists who had occasionally to be paid large sums of money.² It would, however, appear that there was no fixed rate which was determined as usual by the degree of demand. Ward has noted the price and rate of copying as current in Calcutta in the beginning of the 19th century. According to him the price of written copies of the *Mugdhabodha*, if written with care, was about Rs.3. Inferior copies were sold at one rupee and a half. A written copy of the *Amarakośa* sold for Rupees three (*A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, Vol. I, p. 574, 577 f.n.). It is known that a copy of Pūjāri Goswamin's commentary on the *Gitagovinda* was sold for ten annas only in 1812 (R.A.S.B., VII, p. 134). It was in the first half of the 19th century that Pandit Isvara Chandra Vidyāsāgara acquired the following manuscripts at the prices noted against each:—

Kāvya-darśa (2,000 letters)	Rupee one and a quarter.
Māghatikā of Kavivallabha Cakravartī ³	Rupees five.
Rasamañjariprakāśa of Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa (900 letters)	Annas eight.
Kirātaṭikā of Mallinātha ⁴	Rupees two and a half.

I am noting here the price of another manuscript in the Vangiya Sahitya Parishat which quotes its price:—

Bengali version of the Rāmāyaṇa by Kṛttivāsa, dated 1218 B.S. (1817 A.D.) (VSP manuscript No. 2574) .. Rupees five.

There are some manuscripts which do not record the exact prices but only refer to the transactions of sale or exchange. Thus we are told how even a vedic manuscript was purchased by one Vaidyanātha on payment of money and that one Upādhyāya was witness in the matter.⁵ A manuscript of the *Prabodhacandrodaya* was exchanged for a copy of a work presumably of the name of *Rasāmṛtasindhu*.⁶ The acquisition by money of two Jain manuscripts in 1343 and 1351 V.S. is referred to in the *Prāśastisamgraha* (I, 161, 153).

¹ B. N. Banerji, *Samvādpatre Sekhler Kathā*, Vol. II (2nd edition), p. 164.

² पुस्तकानि तु लिख्यन्ते लेखकैर्लब्धवेतनेः ।

(MS. dated 1352 V.S.—*Prāśastisamgraha*, I, 32.)

शौमत् पद्मचरितं बडना द्विविधेन लेखयित्तेदम् । (*Ibid.*, I, 63.)

³ The MS. of 10,000 letters was copied in 1218 B.S. (1817 A.D.) for rupees fifteen.

⁴ The manuscript was copied in 1736 S.E. (1814 A.D.) at a cost of rupees seven. The Vidyāsāgara Collection of Manuscripts is now deposited in the Vangiya Sahitya Parishat of Calcutta.

⁵ R.A.S.B., II, 514.

⁶ R.A.S.B., VII, p. 254.

As regards the rate of copying, Ward gives it as one rupee or twelve annas for every 32,000 letters in the beginning of the 19th century (*op. cit.*, p. 599). In his opinion the rate was very high as the charges for copying big works like the Mahābhārata would be exorbitant. R. L. Mitra puts it at rupees four for 1,000 ślokas in the sixties of the last century (*Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1869, p. 133).

I quote below the rates of copying as found in some manuscripts:—

Padmapurāṇa (Pātālakhaṇḍa) (R.A.S.B., V, 3474) .. Rupees seven.
Kulārnavatantra (R.A.S.B., VII, p. 48) Rupee one.

Kālikāmaṅgala, a Bengali work, by Kṛṣṇarāma Dāsa, was copied in 1159 B.S. (1752 A.D.) for rupees two and two pieces of cloth.—(R.A.S.B., IX, 322.)

In 1714 a copy of Bengali Mahābhārata was made on condition that the copyist would be honourably maintained for life with food. He was also given some fee in cash and an annual grant.—(S. Sen, *Baṅgla Sāhityer Itihāsa*, Vol. I, 2nd edition, p. 465, f.n. 4.)

A Bengali version of the Rāmāyaṇa (four Kāṇḍas) was copied for rupees seven in cash together with a promised presentation of cloth, napkin and sweets.—(VSP, MS. No. 303, Chittaranjan Collection.)

Bengali version of the Mahābhārata (Virāṭaparva) was copied for one rupee in 1110 B.S. (1703 A.D.).—(Descr. Cat. Beng. MSS. Cal. Univ., Vol. III, p. 572.)

Bengali version of the Mahābhārata (Śāntiparva) was copied for only thirteen annas in 1253 B.S. (1846 A.D.).—(*Ibid.*, p. 717.)

It must, however, be confessed that the profession of a copyist was never considered to be honourable in society. The sale of learning in every form was deprecated at all times. There are definite records to show that when the printing press came to be introduced it was not deemed proper to get books printed and sell them. As a matter of fact copies of costly publications like the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, the Śabdakalpadruma and the Bhāgavata were distributed free among learned pandits by a number of wealthy landlords of Bengal who published the works at considerable expense in the 19th century.

Like the imprecatory verses in land grants there were imprecatory verses at the end of manuscripts throwing interesting light on the value and importance of manuscripts. The date and authorship of the verses are not known. Some of them occur in fairly old manuscripts. The first half of the most popular of these verses यथावृष्टं तथा लिखितं लेखको नास्ति दोषकः occurs in a manuscript from Nepal stated to have been copied in N.S. 217 (1097 A.D.). The expression लेखको नास्ति दोषकः is quoted by Puruṣottamadeva (*circa* 10th–12th century) in his Bhāṣāvṛtti (II.2.24). Only a very few of these verses, presumably the older ones, have attained celebrity being found in manuscripts of different parts of the country—in some cases in translated versions in later Indian languages. They were specially composed for the purpose at different times by different people including not unlikely some of the copyists themselves. It may, however, be noted that the main themes of the verses are identical, their principal object is laying emphasis on the importance of manuscripts. It will be interesting to collect the verses from manuscripts scattered over various places. They have so far received scant attention at the hands of scholars engaged in the study of MSS. I am placing before the world of scholars a bird's-eye

view of the verses. It is expected that this will be followed by a thorough and systematic study by other workers.

The verses may be divided into four classes in view of the subject-matter of their contents. One class of these verses speaks very harsh words about people who would feel tempted to steal books. All sorts of curses are heaped on them. Vulgar insinuations are made about their birth and parentage. A few verses falling under this class are quoted below. Prose lines are found in Bengali MSS. containing various curses and vulgar insinuations.

पुस्तकं हरते यस्तु काको दुःखी भवेन्नरः ।

मृतः स्वर्गं न गच्छेत्तु पितरं नरकं नयेत् ॥

(MS. dated 1689 Ś.E.—Calcutta Sans. Coll. Cat., V, 76.)

अर्जितं भूरिकष्टेन पुस्तकं यच्च मेऽनघ ।

हर्तुमिच्छति यः पापो तस्य वंशक्षयो भवेत् ॥

(Tanjore Catalogue, XVIII, 14585, R.A.S.B., VIII, 6062 where the second foot runs पुस्तकं लिखितं मया.)

चौर्येण नीत्वा विषमेव मुक्त्वा ।

पित्रा च गूणं सच्च नारको स्यात् ॥ (R.A.S.B., VII, 5589.)

आत्मनो ह्युपकारायोपकाराय परस्य च ।

इदं हरति यो मूढस्तस्य तातः पशुध्रुवम् ॥ (R.A.S.B., VII, 4975.)

यत्नेन लिखितं चेदं यश्चोरयति पुस्तकम् ।

शूकरो तस्य माता च पिता तस्य च गर्दभः ॥

(R.A.S.B. MS. No. 5204.)

The second class of verses contains appeals for the proper preservation of these fragile objects. MSS. were required to be carefully looked after like one's own children though they were to be tightly bound up like enemies. Incidental reference is made in these verses to the hard labour involved in the work of copying. A general appeal in prose is found recorded in an old MS. of the 12th century in the following words:—

पुस्तकमिदं रक्षणीयं पश्यद्भिर्जनैः संग्रहीतनीयं रक्षणीयं च सर्वप्रमादेभ्यः ।

(MS. dated 1145 A.D.—R.A.S.B., III, 1924.)

A few verses of this class are noted below:—

उदकानलचौर्येभ्यो मूषकेभ्यस्तथैव च ।

रक्षणीया प्रयत्नेन यस्मात् कष्टेन लिख्यते ॥

(*Prasastisaṃgraha*, I, MS. No. 142—MS. dated 1293 V.S., 108—MS. dated 1384 V.S.)

तेनादरक्षेज्जनादरक्षेद् रक्षेच्छिष्यकवन्मगात् ।

मुखं हस्ते न दातव्यमेवं वदति पुस्तकम् ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, II, MS. No. 740.
It also occurs in MSS. No. 154, 200,
637, 666.)

भद्रपृष्ठकटिग्रोवः स्तम्बवृष्टिरघोमुखः ।

कष्टेन लिखितं ग्रन्थं यत्नेन प्रतिपालय ॥

Variants:—^०ग्रोवं, ^०मुखं, लिखति, शास्त्रं, परिपालयेत् ।

(R.A.S.B., VIII, 6114, *Praśastisamgraha* I, MS. No. 111 (dated 1306 V.S.); II, MS. No. 666, Lakshman Svarup's Introduction to Nighanṭu, p. 33; Descr. Cat. Tanjore Library, I, p. 270.)

अनिलसलिलतैलश्लिष्टबन्धान्यहस्ता-

नववसननिवासाददन्तरायाददोष्यम् ॥

(*New Indian Antiquary*, July 1938, p. 250, f.n. 4.)

सम्भूष्यं सदपत्यवत् परकराद् रक्ष्यश्च सुक्षेत्रवत्

संशोध्यं त्रयिताङ्गवत् प्रतिदिनं वीक्ष्यश्च सन्मित्रवत् ।

वध्यं (न्य ?) वध्यवदश्लथं वृद्धगुणैः स्मर्यं हरेर्नामवत्

नैवं सोदति पुस्तकं किल कदाप्येतद् गुरुणां वचः ॥

(R.A.S.B., II, 306, Descr. Cat. Tanjore Library, I, p. 255, II, p. 22, N.I.A., July 1938, p. 250, f.n. 4.)

In this connection reference may be made to the prayers for the long life of the manuscripts.

अर्केन्दुमण्डले यावद् व्योमश्रीकर्णकुण्डले ।

राजतस्तावदेवास्तु पुस्तिका स्वस्तिप्रालिनी ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, 13 (1498 V.S.))

यावद् व्योमसरोवरे विलसतो विश्वोपकारेच्छया

सद्गच्छसिताम्बजौषकलिते श्रीराजहंसाविह ।

अज्ञानप्रसरान्धकारविधुरे विश्वप्रदीपोपम-

स्तावन्नन्दतु पुस्तकोऽयमनिष्टं संवाच्यमानो बुधैः ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, 24, 4.)

Variants:—^०तः पद्मदयालङ्कृतौ ज्योतिर्जालजटालनिर्मलजले, ^०निकरप्रध्वंस-
दीपोपम^०, आस्थायमानो ।

यावत्सवणसमुद्रो यावन्नक्षत्रमखिलतो मेहः ।

यावच्चन्द्रादित्यौ तावदिदं पुस्तकं जयतु ॥

(R.A.S.B., VIII, 6140, *Praśastisamgraha*, II, 1082.)

यावन्मेखकरे गभस्तिकटके ध्वस्तेऽय पिण्याङ्गना ।

तावन्नन्दतु पुस्तकः सुगुरुभिर्व्याख्यायमानो बुधैः ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, 14 (1308 V.S.))

यावन्मेवं प्रतपति रविर्द्योतते यावदिन्दु-

र्थावद्वायुः स्फुरति गगने तारकाः सन्ति यावत् ।

यावद् भूमिः प्रवहति पयः सागरे यावदेतत्

तावन्नन्द्याद् गुणिभिरनिष्टं पुस्तकं वाच्यमानम् ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, 16.)

The third class of verses containing apologetic statements regarding errors of copying is perhaps the oldest and most popular.

यथा दृष्टं तथा लिखितं लेखके नास्ति दूषणम् ।

भौमस्यापि रणे भङ्गो मुनीनाञ्च मतिभ्रमः ॥

(R.A.S.B., VIII, 6110)

Variant:—लेखको नास्तिदोषकः ।

यादृष्टं पुस्तके दृष्टं तादृष्टं लिखितं मया ।

यदि शुद्धमशुद्धं वा मम दोषो न दीयते ॥

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, MS. No. 17 (dated 1306 V.S.), 18 (1383 V.S.), 20 (1480 V.S.), 22 (1318 V.S.), 92 (1306 V.S.), 111 (1306 V.S.))

करहृतमपराधं क्षन्तुमर्हन्ति सन्तः

(R.A.S.B., II, 318, *Praśastisamgraha*, II, No. 746.)

A complete verse with this as the fourth foot is found in the Tanjore Catalogue (Vol. I, p. 464). It runs:—

सरभसकरवेगभ्रष्टवर्णातिदोषे यदिह भवति शास्त्रे पुस्तके हस्तदोषात् ।

सकलमपि क्षतान्तं सदगुणयाहिकामाः करहृतमपराधं क्षन्तुमर्हन्ति सन्तः ॥

इह लिखितमशुद्धं शुद्धमेवं न दूष्यं

निजहृतमपराधं क्षन्तुमर्हन्ति सन्तः ।

(N.I.A., July 1938, p. 250, f.n. 4.)

यदक्षरं परिभ्रष्टं मात्राहीनञ्च यद्भवेत् ।

क्षन्तयं तद् बुधैः सर्वं कस्य न स्थलते मनः ।

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, No. 4 (dated 1334 V.S.).)

अवृष्टदोषाद् स्मृतिविभ्रमाद् वा यदर्थहीनं लिखितं मयात्र ।

तदार्यवर्यैः परिशोभनीयं कोपो न कार्यः खलु लेखकाय ।

Variants:—इहस्य दोषाद् मतिविभ्रमाच्च यत्किञ्चिद्गूढं लिखितं मयेह,

न्यूनातिरिक्तं, तत्सर्वमार्यैः, दोषो न देयः खलु लेखकस्य, प्रायेण मुह्यन्ति हि ये

लिखन्ति ।

(*Praśastisamgraha*, II, No. 525, 1261, Descr. Cat. Tanjore Library, I, p. 22; IV, p. 2368.)

Several more verses of a similar type are found in MSS. described in the Tanjore Catalogue (I, p. 22; V, p. 2554) as also in a MS. of the *Subhāṣitasuradruma* a verse from the colophon of which is quoted on the last page of Prof. Kosambi's edition of *Śatakṛayādi-subhāṣitasamgraha* in the Singhi Jain Series. I am indebted to Dr. V. Raghavan of the Madras University for drawing my attention to these verses along with some other verses found in the Tanjore Catalogue.

The fourth class of verses seeks the well-being of all including readers, copyists and owners of MSS.

शिवमस्तु सर्वजगतः परहितनिरता भवन्तु भूतगणाः ।

दोषाः प्रयान्तु नाशं सर्वत्र सुखीभवतु लोकः ।

(*Praśastisamgraha*, I, No. 15 (dated 1221 V.S.), 23 (1299 V.S.), 154 (1326 V.S.).)

मङ्गलं लेखकानां च पाठकानां च मङ्गलम् ।

मङ्गलं सर्वलोकानां भूमिभूपतिमङ्गलम् ।

Variant:—मङ्गलं सर्वजन्तूनां मङ्गलं सर्वमङ्गलम् ।

(*Praśastisamgraha*, II, No. 1118, 1137, 1228, 1255, Lakshman Svarup's Introduction to Nighaṇṭu, p. 37.)

श्रीरस्तु सर्वजगतां श्रीरस्तु लेखके मयि ।

श्रीरस्तु लिखितं यस्य तस्य ज्ञानप्रसादतः ।

(*Sāhitya Pariṣat Patrikā*, 34, 162-3.)

The great importance attached to MSS., particularly the sanctity associated with them, had one baneful effect in adversely affecting the critical spirit of the people. The people at large would blindly accept as infallible whatever was found in MSS. They would be reluctant to question their

veracity and instances are not lacking where inaccurate readings, evidently due to copyist's error, have been accepted resulting in curiously wrong interpretations. An *ā* of *akṣārāḥavanāśinah syuh* in a sūtra of the *Āśvalāyanagṛhyasūtra* (IV. 5. 2) was somehow missed in the text of the *Suddhitattva* of Raghunandana and commentators had not the least hesitation in accepting *akṣārāḥavana* as the correct reading and endowing it with a special sense. It is indeed a relief in these circumstances to meet with cases where copyist's errors are recognized and propriety of readings found in MSS. discussed on strictly logical grounds. Instances are met with in different works though they have not as yet been collected and properly studied. Prof. P. K. Gode referred to a number of them from the works of Hemādri and Ānandā-tīrtha¹. I have come upon a good number in a Smṛti work of Govindānanda of Bengal (15th century) which I propose to deal with in a separate paper.

¹ Textual criticism in the Thirteenth Century, *A. C. Woolner Commemoration Volume*, pp. 106-08.