



Review Article

A REVIEW ON CRITICAL EDITION OF AYURVEDA MANUSCRIPTS

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is an ancient science dealing with health care. In the ancient period, the knowledge was passed down from mouth to ear in an oral tradition. Later on, the *Acharyas* began to record these knowledge by writing it down on different materials like palm leaves, birch bark, copper plates.etc. Thus, Ayurveda began to be codified through centuries in written documents called Manuscripts. India is rich in its collection of medical as well as other manuscripts. Most of these remain unpublished. As such, several unique disease conditions and medical formulations contained in these texts are being lost by decaying. Many versions of the same text can be obtained from different places and therefore different readings about the same subject are seen. Ayurveda being mostly presented in Sanskrit language, a slight difference in reading makes a lot of difference in the interpretation of its meaning. Critical edition of a manuscript deals with the analysis of various versions of a text, to find out which is more meaningful and closer to the original text. It conveys many unique ideas; clarify the existing confusions and misinterpretations. Thus critical edition of all Ayurveda manuscripts is necessary. In the recent times a lot of Ayurveda scholars are coming up with the aim of bringing out the knowledge hidden inside these manuscripts through their critical edition. The aim of this paper is to review the various steps involved in the critical edition of a manuscript through examples.

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda being a health science deals with certain guidelines to lead a healthy life, free of diseases of both *Sareera* and *Manas* and also to cure any disease affecting both of these. For centuries, the knowledge of Ayurveda was passed down from mouth to ear in an unbroken oral tradition through '*Gurukulas*'. Gradually, they came to be written down on different materials such as stones, copper plates, birch bark, palm leaves, parchments and paper. The treasure of the wisdom containing the ancient knowledge came down to us in the form of manuscripts. Manuscript is any document which is handwritten or typewritten as opposed to being mechanically printed. Composed in different languages, these manuscripts are spread all over the world, in different institutions, libraries, mutts, monasteries, temples, mosques and in several private collections.

A very few of these texts have been published during the past decades and many of the published works are unfortunately not available today. As such, several treatment methods and medical formulations contained in these texts which are likely to exist in palm leaf manuscripts are being lost by decaying. Manuscripts are the proof of our well-developed ancient science. There are various versions of the same text at different places and accordingly different readings about the same topic are seen. Even a slight difference in reading makes its interpretation of meaning difficult. Thus, critical edition of all old Ayurveda texts with different manuscripts is necessary. In the critical edition process, all the copies of the text for its availability are identified through various methods. Then, these manuscripts are collected and analyzed for their mutual relationship. Then, the critical edition of the text is carried out considering omissions, substitutions/repetitions, additions etc.

Etymology and Definition of Manuscript

The word Manuscript is originated from two Latin words, 'Manu' and 'scriptus', which means written by hand. Here, the word 'Manu' means hand

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and 'scriptus' means to write^[1]. A handwritten document which has scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value can be considered as a manuscript^[2].

Adhara/writing Apparatus of Manuscripts^[3]

The writing apparatus of manuscripts include,

1. *Lekhyasamagri* or the writing surface
Shilalekha (rock edits), *Tamrapatra* (inscriptions in copper plates), *Taalipatragrantha* (palm leaf), *Bhurjapatra* (birch bark), *Sanchapat* (Aloe wood bark) and paper are the different *Lekhyasamagris*.
2. *Lekhanasamagri* or the instruments used for writing.

Stylus is the hard and sharp instrument used to incise manuscript. Dyes are used to make the letters on a palm leaf darker. After incising palm leaf with stylus; the dye is smeared over the letters to make it clearer. After using stylus, carbon powder with gum and sugar is smeared over the manuscript. Soft and smooth tipped instruments used with ink act as pen for writing the manuscript. Black ink was used for writing books, yellow ink (*Haratala*) for corrections, red ink to mark chapters and sections, and gold and silver to draw borders. Various brushes were used for painting. *Rakshanasamagri* or the materials for binding.

Palm leaf and birch bark cannot be stitched, so a cord is passed through them.

Lipikara/Lekhaka (scribe)

Lipikara is a professional who copies manuscripts or documents for others. He should take utmost care to reproduce what is there in the original text. There are mainly three kinds of *Lekhaka*. They are *Pustaka lekhaka* who copies manuscripts, *Kayastha lekhaka* who are writers of accounts and *Shasana lekhaka* who are the royal scribes. The scribes, while copying the manuscripts make certain errors which are called as the scribal errors. The common scribal errors include deletion, addition, substitution, orthographic confusion and transposition.

Manuscriptology

Manuscriptology means the science of collecting, classifying, preserving and editing of manuscripts. There are two steps involved in it: primary and secondary steps.

Primary Steps

i. Collection

The collection of maximum number of manuscripts scattered all over, forms the primary requisite in manuscriptology. Manuscripts are huge oceans of knowledge containing innumerable pearls of principles and information. These are available in personal possessions of some people who are even unaware of its importance^[4]. There are various dangers to the collection of manuscripts. These factors can be categorized as human factors and natural factors. The biggest danger to collections is the human

factor, as humans can destroy entire collections by their inaction as well as by their wrong actions. Alternatively, humans can also become the biggest protectors of manuscripts if they take proper action to preserve them. The natural factors include, fire, water, natural calamities, insect and worm attack, microbiological attack, dust, environmental pollutions, fluctuations in temperature and relative humidity^[5].

The availability of particular Ayurveda manuscript can be single many a times. Hence, if the available manuscript is not in good condition, the critical edition could be difficult, so proper preservation of manuscript is very important to protect it from damage. A few years ago procuring a manuscript was really challenging. But now, this has changed for good. Now, procuring the copies through online is the easiest way and does not consume much time. For example, the accessibility of Ayurvedic manuscripts available in I.P.G.T & R.A may be done through the website-www.ayurvedamanuscripts.com. Digitization of manuscript copies is also included as a type of conservation and preservation. But for transmission of knowledge, both theoretical and practical utility is very much essential. So, beyond mere digitization, critical edition should also be done.^[6]

ii. Conservation

The methods used to save manuscripts or enhancing the life of the manuscript can be termed as conservation. If not preserved properly they are subjected to physical damage and decay. Every manuscript has its own style of preservation based on its material, ink etc.

Preventive Conservation: Reducing future risks of deterioration can be termed as preventive conservation. Various methods including regular inspection of the manuscripts, microfilming, photocopying, lamination, digitization etc. can be used.

Curative Conservation: Stopping active deterioration in the manuscript(s) can be termed as curative conservation. For example, fumigation, application of lemon grass oil etc.

iii. Cataloguing

It is the process of classifying and arranging manuscripts in a particular order. A catalogue helps the reader to locate the manuscript easily in a short time. Cataloguing is the method of making the manuscripts easily accessible for the research community. Catalog of Catalogues or New Catalogues Catalogorum (NCC) is a comprehensive collection of information about all the manuscripts that are available all over the world that lists the manuscripts under name of the author and title of work. One of the greatest drawbacks of the old and new Catalogus Catalogorum is that the information is not widely

available. A descriptive catalogue gives a clear idea of the exact location of the manuscript [7].

Secondary steps

- i. Transcription:** Transcription means to write or to type the text as it is. So it helps the person to read in a better way. Manuscripts are copied in the same language.
- ii. Translation:** Translation is the process of converting the words of one language to another. So, a person from another place and culture can easily understand our ancient systems and knowledge.
- iii. Critical Edition:** Editing of the work means reconstructing the text, nearest to the author’s autograph work on the basis of evidences. The term Critical edition means close reading and detail analysis of a particular text [6].

Publication: It is the final step in manuscriptology. It is a very sad fact that only a few of the available material from medical manuscripts are in the printed form. The National Mission for Manuscript's most ambitious project is to create a database of all Indian manuscripts in the country and abroad. The National Database of Manuscripts, *Kriti Sampada* is also available on the internet through the Mission's website.[8]

Critical Edition of a Medical Manuscript

The critical edition is done to reconstruct the text nearest to the author’s autograph work on the basis of evidences. The edition is done considering the scribal errors. The main scribal errors include,

- **Deletions or omissions:** The scribes accidentally leave materials between two occurrences of the word.
- **Addition:** Sometimes the scribe cannot differentiate the synonymous words and adds it as a part of the main text.
- **Substitution:** This is an intentional error. This occurs when the scribe thinks that the original text is wrong and substitutes it with his own text.
- **Orthographic confusion:** When a scribe copies information from one script to another, certain errors are introduced due to confusion of letters.
- **Transposition:** This is an involuntary positional variation of script.

While constituting a text, only one reading is accepted while others are rejected. Those that are rejected without accepting, forms the critical apparatus. They also need to be presented as foot notes on the same page on which the related text appears. If the editor comes across a new manuscript of the text, after the completion of the edition, he should mention the new reading at the end for the benefit of others. The text part from which various readings are considered is marked with continually running numbers as super script. If there are many readings considered, then the word or the *Pada*, the critical apparatus has separate paragraphs with their own numbers given at the beginning.

V.S.Suktankar (1993) has given a list of accepted symbols that can be used for critical edition of a manuscript.[9]

Table1: List of Accepted Symbols that can be used for Critical Edition of a Manuscript.[7]

S.No	Symbol	Correction
1	[]	Editorial completion- damaged- edition to manuscript reading
2	< >	Editorial completion of a surmised lacuna
3	{[]}	Conjectural authentication
4	{ }	Parts deleted conjecturally
5	()	Text which may not have been in the original
6	†	(dragger) Irremediable or false localized corruption
7	*	Conjectural emendation
8	~	(below the text) Text is less than certain
9	**	Loss due to injury to manuscript
10	□ □	Citation from commentary.

Methods of Critical Edition

The actual process of editing depends on the work that is under examination. Broadly dividing, there are two methods of critical edition.

They are:

Lower criticism: Presenting the text as close as possible to the original work on the basis of available material.

Higher criticism: Editing the text taking into consideration the question of authorship, date of author, influence of other works in the field that could have influenced the author etc.

Lower criticism

This process goes towards the selection of original reading based on evidences. It goes through three stages- Heuristics, Recension and Emendation.

Heuristics: This includes the methodological collection, analysis and study of evidences with respect to the text^[7]. Heuristics include 3 stages-

- **Siglum:** It is the identification mark given to the various manuscripts taken for critical edition using numbers, letters.etc. The siglum could be based on the script, the source of the codex, age of the copy or a combination of any of these.

For example, A manuscript collected from Oriental Research Institute & Manuscript Library, Kariavattom, University of Kerala, Trivandrum (TVM) with the manuscript number 9650 may be given a siglum, TVM9650

- **Collation-** collation is the process of collecting all the information concerning the text in one document. It should be done in a special collation sheet. Now a days, one can use the excel sheets. In this sheet, the letters should be written in each block. A most trustworthy codex is taken as the base and that is written in the first row of squares, one letter in each square. On the left side and against a row, the siglum of the codex compared is written. By this method, the relationship between the different codices could be identified.
- **Secondary Sources of Evidences-** All works that are directly and closely related to the text on hand but not the source manuscripts are the secondary sources of evidence. They are the commentaries, translations.etc.

Recension: Recension means the critical revision of the text. It is the process of choosing among the variants of the reading, which one is closer to the author's intension.

Emendation: The word meaning is 'correct the text'. They are the valid suggestions given by the editor himself, if he is not satisfied with the evidence available to prove that the text was originally written by the author.

Higher Criticism

After lower criticism, one can go for higher criticism. Here we are assessing the period and peculiarities of the author. Higher criticism probes the following: the style, the language, the literary aspects, sources of the work, life of the author, the circumstances that made the author to compose the work, the situation at which the work was composed, influence of other writers in the field, the popularity of the work.etc.

Higher criticism follows 5 steps

- 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.^[10]

By doing critical edition of manuscripts many new formulations and drugs can be recognized based on the place and time of author. For instance, a critical study of *Paryayamuktavali*, a *Nighantu* of Odisha has explored many new drugs and synonyms which were not mentioned in other *Nighantus* which existed prior to *Paryayamuktavali*.^[11]

Manuscript 'Chikitsasara'

A manuscript *Chikitsasara* was taken up as an endeavour to initiate a research inquisition of edition of medical manuscripts for contributing to the literature of the science of Ayurveda.

Table2: Details of Manuscript Taken for Critical Edition

Manuscript Number	50047
Script	Devanagari
Measurement	12'x4'
Folios	1-92
Lines per folio	9
Complete/incomplete	Complete
Condition	Normal
Author	Gopaladasa
Source	Unmesha Research Institute of Indology, Mysore

Further, the following steps are adopted

- Collection of data- Here, all the copies of the text for its availability are identified using, New Catalogous Catalogorum (NCC), online catalogue of Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, visitation, E mail and telephone correspondence carried out with various manuscript preservation centers and Oriental research institutes for availability of copies of the manuscript with similar title, content, author. etc.
- Analysis of mutual relationship among the collected manuscripts.
- Critical edition of the text considering omissions, substitutions/repetitions, additions etc.

Summary of the Conclusions Drawn after Critical Edition of the Text

The readings that were taken into consideration (accepted reading) were more from the one obtained from Govt. Oriental Research Institute, Kariavatom, Trivandrum. The name of the author is mentioned as Gopala at the beginning and Gopaladasa vadindra at the end of the treatise. The text was translated to Telugu and Marathi languages in 1877 and 1881 respectively, which are not widely available today. The time period of the text by considering the

internal and external evidences, influence of the text on other medieval texts can be placed as late seventeenth century. The *Chikitsasara* is a medical treatise on material medica and pathology, containing also, a section on the purification and processing of mercury. *Chikitsasara* is found to be belonging to the *Kayachikitsa* because it is more related with pacifying treatments as in *Caraka Samhitha* rather than surgical procedures as in *Susrutha Samhitha*^[12]. The content of the text is also very much similar to the seventeenth century work *Yogaratanakara*.

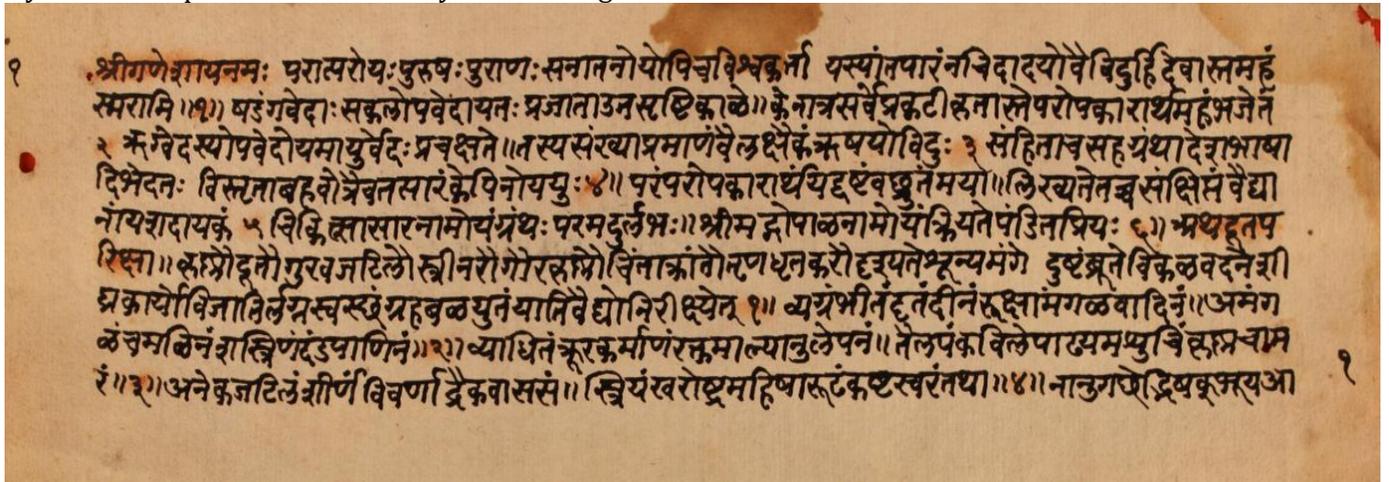


Figure 1: Folio 1 of the manuscript 'Chikitsasara' taken for critical edition



Figure 2: Kairava grama. Example of a *Taalipatragrandha* (palm leaf manuscript)

In the recent years many researchers have taken up the critical edition of Ayurveda manuscripts. For example.

- **Aswini Samhite**- Critical edition of manuscript with English translation by Sriharsha K V. Dissertation submitted to the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Karnataka in 2014.
- Critical edition of Krishna Pandita commentary on Lolimbaraja's *vaidyajivana* by Divya Jyoti. Dissertation submitted to the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Karnataka in 2015.

- **Sutrasthana sanjivini**- Critical edition of manuscript with English translation by Revilekha R S. Dissertation submitted to the Kerala University of Health Sciences, Kerala. 2018.
- **Chikitsasara**- Critical edition of manuscript with English translation by Anjana R S Dissertation submitted to the Kerala University of Health Sciences, Kerala. 2018.
- **Govinda dasolsavam**- Critical edition of manuscript by Anusha Baburaj. Dissertation submitted to the Kerala University of Health Sciences, Kerala. 2021

- Upakrama khandam of bshesaja padhathi-critical edition of manuscript by Adarsh KR. Dissertation submitted to the Kerala University of Health Sciences, Kerala. 2021

CONCLUSION

Manuscripts are the unique proof of our well-developed ancient science of health. There are various versions of the same text at different places and the language being primarily Sanskrit different readings about the same topic are seen. Even a slight difference in reading makes the interpretation of its meaning difficult and confusing. Thus, critical edition of all old Ayurvedic texts with different manuscripts is necessary by adopting the systematic way of critical edition of manuscript. Apart from manuscript studies on individual level, it should be well organized at institutional level, involving experts. It is the need of the hour to transform the knowledge of manuscript into forms that can easily be conveyed to the global community. As a part of the propagation, general awareness on manuscript can be given to the public and also effective research projects can be launched which will help to preserve the knowledge in manuscript for the upcoming generation.

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