ISSN : 2393-9443

JOURNAL
of
MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

U.G.C-CARE Listed Journal
Vol. 51, January - December 2023

Oriental Research Institute and Manuscripts Library
University of Kerala, Kariavattom
Thiruvananthapuram

Journal *of* Manuscript Studies

U.G.C-CARE Listed Journal
Vol. 51, January-December 2023

General Editor
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Dr. Rejani R.S.

Oriental Research Institute &
Manuscritps Library
University of Kerala
Kariavattom

Journal *of* Manuscript Studies
U.G.C-Care Listed Journal
(Yearly Journal in Sanskrit & English)
Vol. 51, January - December 2023

Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library
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Cover Design
Ancyl Computers,
Vazhuthacaud, Thiruvananthapuram

Printed at
Kerala University Press
Palayam
Thiruvananthapuram

Price : **Rs. 200/-**

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TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO MANUSCRIPT CATALOGUING: BRIDGING THE GAPS

Dr. Anandaraj G

Abstract

Cataloguers serve as the foundation of all library services, with catalogues acting as the eyes of the library, facilitating access to manuscripts, books, and documents. This article highlights the importance of focusing on the use of these materials rather than solely prioritizing their preservation. In the context of Indian manuscript collections, which amount to approximately 3.71 million, with a significant portion (67%) being in Sanskrit, there is a pressing need to address the lacunae in current cataloguing practices. The neglect of provenance and original order within these collections diminishes their usefulness. Furthermore, the prevailing "Indian mentality of scant regard for individual and historical distinctions" hampers effective cataloguing efforts. This study critically examines the shortcomings of existing cataloguing methods for Indic manuscripts and discusses the challenges associated with loose bibliographic control. It also explores the ongoing cataloguing initiatives of the National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI) and identifies current needs in the field. To address these challenges, recommendations are made for the development of a National Catalogue Code (NC Code), the implementation of Unique Identification Numbers (UI Number), and the creation of topographical mapping systems. By adopting an integrated approach that incorporates newly introduced disciplines of Scriptography and Scribology in conjunction with Palaeography and Codicology, we can bridge the gaps in manuscript cataloguing, ensure better preservation and access, and safeguard our rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords

Provenance, Integrated Cataloguing, Bibliographic control, Catalogue Code, manuscript cataloguing, Palaeography, Codicology, Scriptography, Scribology.

Introduction

Cataloguers are the backbone of library services, providing the foundation for organizing and facilitating access to resources. Catalogues, in turn, act as the vital 'eye' of the library, enabling users to navigate and locate materials effectively within the collections.

1.1 Manuscript cataloguing: Shift towards prioritizing 'use' over 'preservation'

Cataloguing in manuscript libraries represents a shift in modern library practices. It goes beyond mere naming or listing. While preserving the physical condition remains important, the emphasis is now on facilitating meaningful engagement with the content by capturing detailed information about the intellectual content, subject matter, and historical context in cataloguing. This approach enables users to locate relevant resources for their research needs, fostering a deeper understanding of the cultural and historical heritage represented by the manuscripts.

1.2 Overview of Indian manuscript collections and cataloguing

1.2.1 The need for improved cataloguing practices

India possesses an extensive and diverse collection of manuscripts, than any other country in the world, with approximately 3.71 million identified in a comprehensive survey conducted between 1989-1991 by Biswas et al. Out of these, only about one million have been recorded in published catalogues or hand lists brought out by libraries and institutions. The survey further revealed that a large part of these manuscripts remains uncatalogued, and there is a lack of systematic cataloguing in most cases, with only basic data provided, such as author, title, language, and script.

In 1965, Janert listed 375 manuscript catalogues, while Biswas et al. identified over 1100 titles, accounting for more than 2000 volumes. The total number of Manuscript Catalogues (MCs) stands at 1,058,424. Among these, Malayalam MCs make up 1.15% (11,815), Tamil MCs account for 3.75% (39,666), and Sanskrit-Prakrit-Apabhramsa MCs represent the majority at 78.39% (829,653). These statistics highlight the extensive manuscript collections in India, with a significant portion comprising manuscripts in Sanskrit, including Sanskrit related Prakrit and Apabhramsa texts.

1.2.2 The Indic Nature of the matter and its relation with Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Even then, the content of Indian manuscripts (as is accessible now) showcases the depth and breadth of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), encompassing various disciplines such as philosophy, literature, science, medicine, astronomy, astrology, linguistics, music, and more. Hence, Indian Manuscript Cataloguing should not only involve capturing their

bibliographic details but also recognize their Indic nature and their relationship with IKS.

1.2.3 Indian Manuscripts' Specialty: Long Chain of Commentarial Texts

Indian manuscripts exhibit a unique characteristic: a long chain of commentarial texts associated with core philosophical and literary works. These commentaries, including Sūtram, Bhāṣyam, Vārtikam, Tīkā, and Pañcikā, provide extensive analysis and elucidation, enriching the understanding of the original texts and displaying the depth of Indian intellectual traditions. Cataloguing should enable researchers to access and explore this rich tapestry of commentarial traditions, fostering a deeper engagement with the philosophical, literary, and cultural aspects of Indian Knowledge Systems.

Challenges in Contemporary Manuscript Cataloguing: Addressing the Issues

2.1 The problem with worldwide manuscript cataloguing

The worldwide manuscript cataloguing field faces a significant challenge related to the lack of a systematic history of cataloguing rules. Barring a few historical accounts here and there of catalogues and cataloguing, comprehensive, cohesive and thoroughly written accounts of the history and development of library catalogue codes do not exist. For instance, the history of catalogues in India and many other parts of the world is yet to be attempted. This lacuna is a major constraint. Sheila Bair's article [2005] highlights this constraint, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and cohesive accounts of the history and development of library catalogue codes.

2.2 The problem with Indic manuscript cataloguing:

The cataloguing of Indic manuscripts faces several challenges that are specific to this region and its unique manuscript traditions.

i. Extremely active traffic of manuscript copies all over India: Manuscripts have moved between different regions, libraries, and collectors, making it difficult to track their provenance and establish a definitive history of their ownership.

ii. Uncertainty of authorship: Lack of clear authorship information hinders accurate attribution and linking to intellectual traditions.

iii. Rare autograph (handwritten by original author) manuscripts: Indic manuscripts are mostly copies, making their genealogy and status unclear.

iv. Anonymous titles: Multiple anonymous titles make identifying works difficult based solely on titles.

v. Lack of unequivocal titles: Some works lack unequivocal titles, complicating identification and classification.

vi. Growth of variants with different scripts: Multilingual and multiscript manuscripts require specialized knowledge to catalog and interpret.

vii. Loss of first and last folios: Loose-leaf arrangement can result in missing vital information from the manuscript's beginning and end.

These challenges necessitate specialized approaches and expertise in Indic manuscript cataloguing.

2.3 The problem of widespread neglect of two principles in Indian manuscript libraries

The neglect of provenance and original order in Indian Manuscript libraries is a pressing issue, impacting the organization and accessibility of collections. Provenance, documenting the origin and ownership history of manuscripts, is often overlooked due to lack of proper documentation systems, emphasis on textual content over historical context, and limited resources for research. Similarly, original order, the intended arrangement of manuscripts, is neglected due to disrupted context, fragmented collections, and practical considerations of ease of access and physical preservation.

The neglect of provenance and original order has adverse effects, including the loss of historical context, limited research opportunities, and challenges in ownership and repatriation of cultural heritage items. Recognizing the importance of these cataloguing principles and implementing strategies for their integration is crucial for preserving, accessing, and exploring India's valuable manuscript heritage.

2.4 The infamous Indian mentality on archiving

There is no need to justify the importance of manuscript catalogues. But, the notion of the "Indian mentality of scant regard for individual and historical distinctions" is evident in the observation made by S.C. Biswas in

1998: "We have observed that adequate attention was not being paid by major Indian academic and research libraries in collecting and maintaining Indian manuscript catalogues. It is sad to record that not a single library in India possesses even 50% of the total number of catalogues published in this country. Very few institutions are acquiring systematically catalogues of manuscripts." This quote highlights the lack of emphasis placed on collecting and preserving manuscript catalogues in Indian libraries.

The perception of a disregard for individual and historical distinctions may contribute to this neglect, affecting important cataloguing principles like provenance and original order. Moreover, this mindset might hinder the prioritization of resources and efforts needed for comprehensive cataloguing practices, including digitization, collaboration, and standardization. An illustrative example could be the purported existence of unpublished handlists stored in the Sanskrit department of the University of Madras. These handlists were believed to encompass approximately 5000 manuscripts collected from various sources across Kerala, including palaces, pathasalas, madoms, manas, variyams, private houses, and individuals. However, their current accessibility or existence remains uncertain.

3. Integrated Manuscript Cataloguing: Proposals and Recommendations

3.1 The chain of textual varieties and integrated manuscript cataloguing

To initiate an integrated manuscript cataloguing approach for the diverse chain of textual varieties found in Indian manuscripts, consider the following ideas:

i. Comprehensive Metadata: Develop metadata standards capturing key information about each manuscript and its associated commentaries.

ii. Cross-Referencing: Implement a robust cross-referencing system to establish links between the original text and its commentaries.

iii. Annotation and Marginalia Documentation: Document annotations, marginalia, or added notes found in manuscripts to enhance research potential and understand the commentarial tradition.

iv. Multilingual and Script Support: Ensure the cataloguing system can handle diverse languages and scripts to accurately represent Indian manuscripts.

v. Subject and Keyword Indexing: Create a robust subject and keyword indexing system for efficient searching and retrieval based on specific topics or themes.

vi. Hierarchical Structure: Establish a hierarchical structure within the cataloguing system to represent different layers of commentarial texts, aiding navigation and access to specific commentaries in the chain. This structure can include categories such as "Original Text," "Commentary Level 1," "Commentary Level 2," and so on, enabling users to navigate and access specific commentaries within the chain.

In addition to the abovesaid, it is also imperative vii) to foster collaboration and standardization, viii) embrace digital preservation and access initiatives, xi) engage the scholarly community, and x) prioritize continuous updating and enrichment, thereby ensuring consistency, global accessibility, community involvement etc., to achieve an integrated manuscript cataloguing system.

3.2. Bibliographic Control: A Philosophical Basis

3.2.1 Definition of bibliographic control and its significance in cataloguing

Bibliographic control encompasses rules and standards guiding the systematic management of bibliographic information in libraries, ensuring consistency and usability. In the context of cataloguing manuscripts, it establishes the philosophical basis and principles governing the process, capturing essential information like title, author, date, provenance, and annotations.

The preface to the editio princeps of the Abhinavabhāratī presents an example of inadequate bibliographic control. M.R. Kavi collected forty manuscripts for editing the Nāṭyaśāstram but failed to describe them or explain their use in collation, neglecting crucial details about provenance and relationships.

By adhering to bibliographic control principles, manuscript cataloguing can effectively document essential manuscript details, ensuring a comprehensive and well-organized approach to preserving cultural heritage.

3.2.2 Importance of establishing a systematic and standardized approach to bibliographic control

As demonstrated by the case mentioned, the absence of detailed manuscript descriptions and collation procedures hinders further research and comparative analysis of the Nāṭyaśāstram text. Adhering to bibliographic control principles would enable robust documentation, facilitating access and evaluation of sources used in the editio princeps and enhancing our understanding of the text's variations across different manuscripts. Bibliographic control ensures comprehensive records for accurate identification, access, and utilization of manuscripts within library collections.

3.3 UN Sustainable Development Goals: Target 11.4

The achievement of Target 11.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on safeguarding cultural heritage, necessitates significant advancements. In response, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) organized a workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 6-7 July, where global experts shared their experiences in manuscript preservation. The workshop's key outcome was the establishment of a common metadata scheme, providing a standardized framework for manuscript cataloguing and documentation, fostering effective collaboration among conservation and archiving stakeholders.

3.4 Cataloguing enterprise and current needs

Albrecht Weber's "Index of the Sanskrit and Prākrit manuscripts in the Royal Library of Berlin" in 1853 and Rajendralala Mitra's "Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office" in 1891 marked significant early cataloguing efforts for Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts.

Despite these early contributions, there remains an urgent need for further cataloguing in this field, as existing handlists and unrevised catalogues offer limited value. Applying the geographical principle for arranging catalogues, as emphasized by scholars like Janert [1965] and Biswas [1998] and the topographical mapping as suggested by Vielle [2006], would improve accessibility and research opportunities. Government support is crucial for sponsoring and advancing cataloguing enterprises focused on Sanskrit and Prakrit manuscripts, enhancing their descriptions, capturing details about beginnings and endings, and enabling proper subject access.

3.5 The current document representation and proposed changes

3.5.1 Challenges posed by non-traditional materials like palm leaf manuscripts

The current representation of cultural heritage materials, particularly palm leaf manuscripts, poses challenges for libraries in fulfilling their public interest missions. These unique materials require specialized approaches for their preservation, cataloguing, and accessibility, making it more difficult for libraries to effectively serve their communities.

3.5.2 NAMAMI's objective of documenting and cataloguing Indian manuscripts

NAMAMI (National Mission for Manuscripts) or NMM has set an objective to document and catalogue Indian manuscripts, regardless of their location, and to maintain accurate and updated information about them. This initiative aims to ensure comprehensive information about manuscripts and the conditions under which they can be accessed, contributing to their preservation and wider dissemination.

3.5.3 Descriptive and subject cataloguing approaches to enhance accessibility

Descriptive and subject cataloguing play crucial roles in manuscript cataloguing. Manuscript catalogues differ from the commonly accepted types of catalogues for books, microforms, and online resources. The unique nature of manuscripts necessitates specific cataloguing practices that address their distinct features, such as material composition, script types, and other manuscript-specific elements.

4. Future Directions: Bridging the Gaps

4.1 Strategies to bridge the gaps in manuscript cataloguing practices: an alphabetical subject catalogue

To establish a more comprehensive manuscript cataloguing system, it is essential to consider different inner forms of catalogues. One such form is the alphabetical subject catalogue. This type of catalogue organizes manuscripts alphabetically based on subject headings, allowing users to easily locate manuscripts related to specific topics. By implementing an alphabetical subject catalogue, researchers and scholars can navigate through the vast collection of manuscripts more efficiently and access relevant materials based on their subject of interest.

4.2 Recommendations for the development of a national catalogue code and unique identification numbers

4.2.1 The need for a national catalogue code specifically for manuscript cataloguing

The need for a national catalogue code for manuscript cataloguing in India is apparent due to the limitations of existing codes, like the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR), the International Standard Bibliographic Description (ISBD) and Classified Catalogue Code (CCC), which were primarily developed for printed books and lack specific guidelines for ancient manuscripts. India's unique conditions and challenges in this domain call for a dedicated code to accurately represent and capture the complexities of ancient manuscripts, following the example of other countries like Germany and Italy with their specific catalogue codes for manuscripts.

4.2.2 Insights from historical cataloguing codes and international standards such as ISBD

To develop a national catalogue code for Indian manuscript cataloguing, insights from historical cataloguing codes and international standards like ISBD should be combined with the unique characteristics of Indian manuscripts. The comprehensive code should encompass guidelines for paleography, codicology, authorship attribution, fragmentary manuscripts, and subject headings. This approach will ensure accurate descriptions, preservation, and accessibility of ancient manuscripts, fostering scholarly research and safeguarding our global heritage for future generations.

4.2.3 Unique/Permanent Identification Number

To ensure accurate identification of manuscripts and prevent confusion with similar items, it is crucial to assign a unique and permanent identification/registration number to each manuscript. This registration number serves as a distinctive identifier for the manuscript and allows for precise tracking and retrieval. By implementing a standardized registration system, libraries and institutions can maintain accurate records of their manuscript holdings, facilitate efficient cataloguing, and ensure the integrity of their collections.

4.3 Proposing two potential subsets, Scriptography and Scribology, for Integrated Cataloguing of Manuscript Collections

Introducing 'Scriptography' and 'Scribology' as additional disciplines alongside Palaeography and Codicology in Indian Manuscriptology can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of manuscripts. Scriptography focuses on the characteristics and regional variations of scripts, shedding light on textual transmission and linguistic traditions. Scribology delves into scribes' practices, exploring handwriting styles, notations, and educational backgrounds, providing valuable insights into regional manuscript production. By integrating these disciplines, the process of manuscript cataloguing is enhanced, leading to improved accuracy, accessibility, and insights. This integration not only enriches research possibilities but also contributes to the preservation of India's diverse cultural and historical heritage contained within its manuscripts.

5. Conclusion

The article emphasizes the neglected principles of provenance and original order in Indian manuscript cataloguing, advocating for an integrated approach that incorporates emerging disciplines like Scriptography and Scribology alongside Palaeography and Codicology. It underscores the significance of catalogues as the 'eye' of the library, promoting effective resource access. The call to action involves collaborative efforts to establish common standards, digitization initiatives, community engagement, and continuous updating to ensure a comprehensive and accessible cataloguing system. The proposed national catalogue code, UI Number, and digital preservation initiatives are crucial in preserving India's cultural heritage. Overall, the article highlights the importance of integrated cataloguing for Indian manuscript collections.

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