

Palm Leaf Manuscript Editing

Dr. Monali Chang

Guest Faculty, Odia University, Satyabadi, Odisha, India

ABSTRACT

At present, editing work has become very popular in literature and many other fields. Whether it is books or newspapers and magazines, mass media or social media, a picture or a film-everything remains incomplete without editing. So, what is meant by this work of editing?

Almanacs - a book published every year that contains information about the movements of the planets.

Scribe - a person whose job was to write copies of documents, especially before printing was invented.

Mandalas - a geometric and often, intricate configuration of symbols used in Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and Sinto traditions to represent the cosmos, unity and the path to enlightenment.

We can observe the multifaceted effectiveness of editing. In the English dictionary the real meaning of edit is V- Assemble, prepare or modify written material for publication act as an editor (of a newspaper etc.) prepare (data) for processing by computer, take extracts from and collate (a film etc.) or connect the shots to form a united sequence.

In the field of editing, the editing of palm-leaf manuscripts is an important branch. In Odisha, ancient palm-leaf texts are called manuscript or pothi. But what exactly are these palm-leaf manuscripts or pothis? When and how were they created and developed? What is their usefulness, and how is the editing of palm-leaf manuscripts carried out? Let us briefly discuss about it.

Subject matter - Around 3000 BC, in Egypt, people used the stem of a marshy aquatic plant called Papyrus (*Cyperus papyrus*) as a writing material. For about 3500 years, it was used for reading and writing in the civilizations of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. From 1500 BC to 400 BC, bamboo slips were used in China as writing materials. Later, in different parts of the world, scribes and writers used the leaves, bark, wood, and wax available in their regions as writing materials.

It is believed that in various parts of Asia, the leaves of the talipot palm (*Corypha umbraculifera*) and palmyra palm (*Borassus flabellifera*) were used as writing materials from around 1500 BC. Indian mythological and religious scriptures are also believed to have been written on palm leaves from that period. Therefore, a large number of palm-leaf

manuscripts are found in India. These palm-leaf manuscripts were engraved by scribes. In Odisha, such scribes were known as “Karana.”

About one million manuscripts are preserved in nearly 250 museums in India, and around two lakh manuscripts have been transferred to countries such as Germany, France, Great Britain, Japan, and Sri Lanka. Odisha is an ancient seat of learning and literature. Since palm leaves were easily available throughout Odisha, people in ancient times widely used them as writing materials. Even today, palm-leaf manuscripts can be seen in the God room of many households in Odisha. The rows of letters, illustrations, mandalas, and mystical diagrams engraved by scribes on these manuscripts create a deep sense of admiration. The Odia people possessed remarkable skills in writing letters, drawing pictures, and engraving mandalas and designs on palm leaves, through which many unknown facts and traditions have been preserved. Unfortunately, a complete account or detailed research study regarding this ancient literary heritage of Odisha has not yet been fully published.

Not only literary works were written on palm leaves, but also letters, proclamations, agreements,

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horoscopes, certificates, marriage approvals, wedding invitations, and similar documents. In ancient times, annual almanacs were also written on palm leaves. Kings and landlords used palm leaves to record land documents, official orders, accounts of income and expenditure, lists of names, village records, and related matters.

Generally editing means correction and refinement of a work. However, in the context of palm-leaf manuscripts, editing refers to the recovery of the authentic or original text. In ancient times, there were no facilities for book printing as exist today. If we turn the pages of the history of writing, we find that human beings first wrote with their fingers on sand, then on burnt clay tablets, wooden boards, copper plates, cotton cloth, leather, and eventually on palm leaves and birch bark. Large literary works were commonly written on palm leaves and birch bark. These palm-leaf manuscripts could generally be preserved for only about 300 to 400 years. Therefore, to preserve the text permanently or to promote and circulate it, copies of the manuscripts were prepared.

During the process of copying or transcription, scribes knowingly or unknowingly introduced various distortions, omissions, and additions into the original manuscripts. As a result, the text composed by the author underwent changes in later copies. The editor, through the process of editing, attempts to correct these later alterations and recover the original writing.

Manuscript editing proceeds through several methods or stages. First, multiple copies of the manuscript selected for editing must be collected from different places. If more than one copy cannot be obtained, then the available manuscript alone is examined carefully for authenticity and edited accordingly. Second, to make the manuscripts easier and quicker to read, copies are transcribed from palm leaves onto paper. Third, the colophons of the manuscripts are examined, and they are arranged chronologically and assigned names or symbols such as Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha, or A, B, C, D, etc. Fourth, the manuscripts are studied and classified according to similarities by the text. Through this process, manuscripts having similarities are grouped into the same category. In the fifth stage, among the manuscripts belonging to one group, the oldest and best-preserved manuscript is accepted as the standard manuscript. A genealogy tree is then prepared based on these standard manuscripts.

In the sixth stage, the standard manuscripts are studied thoroughly through close reading. Every single word of the text is examined deeply because each word itself is a carrier of meaning and emotion.

Therefore, it is the editor's primary task to determine how and through what process a word was formed, what its grammatical structure is, and where its origin lies. A word is also a cultural element. Hence, to determine its origin, the culture associated with that word must also be studied carefully.

Although the stories and subject matter remain the same in different manuscripts of a single text, variations are often found in the insertion of events, words, lines, verses, metrical arrangements, and the sequence of expressions. These are called textual variations and textual corruptions. From among all these differences, the editor has to recover the authentic text. It should be generally understood that determining the authentic text in manuscript editing does not mean changing the language or correcting the grammar of a text; rather, it means restoring the original composition written by the author. If the author has written "Eat" the editor cannot change it into "Take food".

In the seventh stage, the common text found in the manuscripts are restored, while blank spaces are left where seeing variation or where the text has been damaged or lost. In the eighth stage, these blank spaces are corrected through critical analysis and emendation (the removal of unreliable elements present in the manuscript). In this manner, palm-leaf manuscripts are edited to recover a pure and reliable text.

Conclusion

Finally, it may be said that manuscript editing is essential for preserving the original form and identity of ancient texts. Through editing, the most authentic possible reading of a work or manuscript is established. Even today, many manuscripts in Odisha remain unrecovered and unedited. Many unedited manuscript texts are being printed and sold in book form. Sadly, the younger generation today is not showing much interest in the editing of palm-leaf manuscripts.

Reference Book

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