

A Study on Sanskrit Puranic Manuscripts in Odisha From the Period of 1801–1950

Laxman Majhi

Ph.D. Research Scholar, Dept. of Sanskrit, Utkal University, Vani Vihar, Bhubaneswar, India.

Abstract – Odisha has a rich tradition of manuscripts writing the authors and poets root many original text of Sanskrit literature covering many branches of study out of which Purana heritage has a long tradition. As the scope of this present paper is limited to a particular period from 1801–1950, I have also concerted on such collection of manuscripts in Odisha preserved in Odisha State Museum. The aim and objective of this paper is to make survey regarding the available text on puranic literature. There are around 90 manuscripts recorded in the museum collection so far as the puranic manuscripts are conceded. This will help definitely to present a short survey of puranic text during the about period. To mention a few names such as - adbhutarāmāyaṇam, adhyātmārāmāyaṇa, ādipurāṇam, āṣarāmāyaṇam, itihāsasamuccayam, ekāmapurāṇam, kapilasamhitā, khilaharivaṃśam, gurugītā, gopīgītā, narasiṃhapurāṇam, padmapurāṇam, pāṇḍavagītā, brahmavaivarttapurāṇam, brahmāṇḍapurāṇa, bṛhannārādīyapurāṇam, etc.

Keywords: Manuscripts, Sanskrit Puranic Manuscript collection, Historical period 1801–1950, Cultural heritage, Preservation, Documentation, Literary traditions, Religious texts, Manuscript repositories, Epigraphical studies, Conservation, Linguistic analysis, Digital humanities.

1. INTRODUCTION

India was extraordinary advanced in intellectual activity during the Ancient and Medieval times. This country has the distinction of multiplicity of thoughts, languages, scientific, artistic, cultural, philosophical perceptions and knowledge system. For centuries, the Indian knowledge Systems have passed down from generation to generation through oral and written traditions.



Fig -1: Writing Materials

A variety of writing materials such as **stones, copper plates, birch bark, palm leaves, parchments** and **paper** had been in use to preserve the intellectual heritage. This treasure of wisdom containing the ancient knowledge systems has come down to us in the form of manuscripts.

Indian manuscripts are the richest collection of written documents that provide information on the existence of different civilizations and the cultural affluence of the nation. Written in different Indian

languages; these manuscripts are spread all over the country in different monasteries, temples, libraries, museums, with individuals and in several private institutions. In fact, India has possibly the oldest and the largest collection of manuscripts in the world.

A manuscript is a written document that has been manually created as opposed to being printed or reproduced in some other way. The word manuscript 'is derived from the Medieval Latin term **'manuscriptum'** that means hand written documents.

Manuscript is a hand written composition on bark, cloth, metal, palm leaf, paper or any other material that has significant scientific, historical or aesthetic value. Manuscripts are found in hundreds of different languages and scripts. Manuscripts of modern period also refer to autographs, correspondences and type written materials. The manuscripts have a long history of its existence. According to the Chambers Dictionary, Manuscript is a book or document written by hand before the invention of printing. So manuscripts include all types of early writing, which are not printed and published. In other words hand writings of any kind whether on paper or any other material in contradiction to printed materials are called manuscripts.

2. ORIGIN OF PALM LEAVES IN ODISHA

The ancient name of Orissa **"Utkal"** means the land of excellence in art. In every field of art whether it is sculpture, architecture, textiles, handicrafts, music, dance and paintings, Orissa has a rich legacy with a hoary beginning since ancient times. It is vibrant and living even today. Etching and painting on palm leaf is one of the most ancient art forms not only of Orissa but also of the whole country. The birth of this art form marks the beginning of the dissemination of written version and therefore it is closely inter-twined with the literary traditions of the country. While palm leaf inscriptions and paintings are available in several states of India, it is in Orissa that the art reached its perfection and culmination.

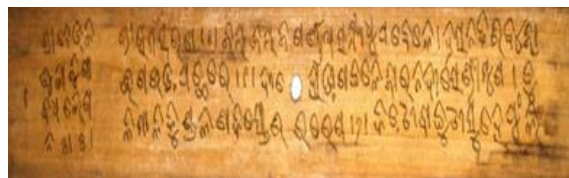


Fig -2: Palm leaf inscriptions and paintings

The word **"Tradition"** comes from the Latin word **"Traditio"** which means "to hand down" or "to hand over". In Archaeology a tradition is a set of cultures which appear too developed from one another over a period of time. Traditional knowledge is an authority system. It is dynamic, cumulative and stable. It is truth. Sometime tradition is preserved in artifacts handed over by father to son and mother to daughter. In indigenous knowledge systems, there is usually no real separation between secular and sacred knowledge and practice. They are one and the same. In virtually all of these systems, knowledge is transmitted directly from generation to generation.

The history of writing in Odisha is very old, maybe it is older than the script. The process of writing was started when figures, decoration and different types of letters were inscribed on the stone, soil, sand or imperishable material. As time passed, they were written on materials which were easily available and durable at the same time. In this process, sometimes the leaves of certain trees were also used. In Eastern

Orissa palm leaves and bamboo leaves were used as writing materials whereas in Western Orissa were used only palm leaves as a writing material. In North India, Birch bark or Bhuja patra was used as a writing element. Like many other eco-friendly inventions of ancient and medieval India, the discovery of palm leaf as a medium had far reaching consequences.

3. SOURCES OF PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPT

Before the advent of paper, palm leaf was one of the most important sources of writing element. This was used for writing and painting in South and Southeast Asian countries. Orissa is not an exception to it. Absolutely large collection of palm leaf manuscripts are preserved in the custody of many of the old libraries, temples, monasteries, learned institutions and in a few cases private individuals. They depict various aspects of ancient Orissa history and culture. Therefore, the preservation of palm leaf manuscripts is an obligation and a responsible duty.

4. PALM LEAF AS A WRITING ELEMENT

Palm leaf is an extent element for record. When compared with good quality handmade paper, it is found to be three times stronger than the handmade paper. Palm leaf having very good tensile strength, is even better than that of good quality ledger paper. Its folding endurance is almost nil in the case of very old and dry leaves.



Fig -3: Palm leaf Writing Element

It has poor resistance to wear and tear and hence it is not suitable element for histological study. The palm leaf consists of epidermis consisting of thick walled cells.

5. IMPORTANCE OF PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPTS

The palm leaf manuscripts are most important sources of the historical events. Many scholars refer the manuscripts for their research works. In the palm leaf manuscript, we find most important knowledge of our traditional life style. In Ayurvedic and medicinal manuscripts we can find the names of medicinal trees, which are available in our environment. Till now, we use these types of trees for medicinal purposes in our life. In "Bhagabata", "Ramayana", "Mahabharata" "Vayupurana", "Matsya purana" etc. we also do find evidences of certain historical events, which are very much helpful in our research work. It may be said that

without reference of the palm leaf manuscripts a research work is said to be incomplete. So, the palm leaf manuscripts are very important sources of our research works.

6. CHOICE OF LEAF IN ORISSA

People have chosen the palm leaves to prepare the manuscript which are just about to open. Tender green leaves of different varieties of palm trees are selected and cut. These cut leaves are then dried in a controlled manner and seasoned.

7. PROCESSING OF PALM LEAVES

For the preparation of palm leaf as writing material, it is processed in order to make the leaves suitable for writing. It is known as seasoning. Several methods of seasoning are applied to the palm leaves in various regions. In Western Orissa people hang their palm leaves in their kitchen, take them out and apply turmeric paste to them. In some parts, leaves are dried completely under the sun and are then kept under the mud or silt of a pond for 10–15 days. After this, they are removed cleaned and dried again under the sun for some time and finally a paste of turmeric is applied on the surface of the leaves. In some parts of Western Orissa, the palm leaves are allowed to boil with paddy husk and then they are cleaned with soft cloth and kept alternately under dew and sun for a few days. They are polished and cut into the required size.

8. SKILL OF WRITING ON PALM LEAVES OF ODISHA PEOPLE

The art of writing on these leaves was unique for which no ink or pen was required. The stylus (thick metal needle with a sharp point) was used to inscribe or engrave letters on the palm leaf. To write on the palm leaf, the leaf is to be supported by the fingers of the left hand.

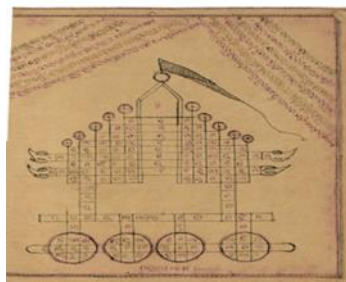


Fig -4: Skill of Writing on Palm Leaves

The stretched forefinger and the thumb pressed the palm leaf so that the leaf will not shake or move during the time of the writing. The thumb and the forefinger are kept on the leaf in a "V" shaped angle. The middle finger of the right hand moves the stylus, using the cut thumbnail as a lever, in smooth, light pressured, rounded movements to incise evenly sized writing in the leaf. It was expected that the stylus was to be held in proper position by its user and the right pressure to be applied so that the leaf would not be torn. Then lamp black is applied on the surface of the palm leaves. In doing so the letters became more conspicuous and they could be read more easily.



9. PRESERVATION OF MANUSCRIPTS IN STATE OF ODISHA

In Odisha palm leaf manuscripts were in use at large till the reign of Rama Chandra Deva, Mukunda Deva, Divyasimha Deva, etc. Foreigners (whether travelers or ambassadors) were very much impressed with the tradition of writing and copying on palm leaf manuscripts in India. In Orissa also palm leaves were being used as writing materials since very early period. A large number of palm leaf manuscripts are also available in these parts. It is time now to preserve and save valuable treasures of our nation.

The numbers of large collection of rare manuscripts including more than 37,000 palm leaf manuscripts is a unique treasure of the Odisha State Museum. These are grouped into 27 subjects which provide source materials to researchers and scholars. These manuscripts are in Oriya, Telugu, Bengali, Persian, Nepalese and Sanskrit. There are writings on bambooleaf, Bhurja bark, Kumbhi bark, and handmade paper. The earliest manuscripts Abhinava Gita Govinda by Kavichandra Ray Divakar Mishra dedicated in the name of Gajapati Purushottam Deva, Bhakti Bhagavata, Paipallada Samhita, AtharvaVeda, Vedartha Prakash Tika on Kanva Samhita, Jnanavali Tantra, Angirasakalapa and Sangila Narayan are some rare acquisitions available in this section. Illustrated palm leaf manuscripts with typical Odishan style paintings, Ganjapas, beautiful calligraphic and medieval miniatures and Gopalila paintings provide a useful record of ancient Odishan painting tradition. Parrot shaped, fish shaped, fan shaped, sword shaped & beaded mala along with ivory manuscripts are some other exquisite collections of the Museum.

The illustrated palm leaf manuscripts stored in Orissa State Museum are Gita Govinda, Usha Vilasha, Usha harana, Bidagdha Madhava, Amaru Sataka etc., which provide for us a living record of the sartorial styles, cosmetics and coiffure, dance forms, myths and legends, and above all our efflorescent heritage of socio-cultural traditions.

It may be mentioned that Orissa is exceedingly rich in manuscripts heritage. Every household in every village has such manuscripts. For this, the recent survey has brought to light 3, 50,000 manuscripts out of which 1, 5,000 have already been documented. Two rare manuscripts of State museum namely Ivory Gita Govinda and Palm leaf Chikistcha Manjari have been declared as National Treasure. There are many more such manuscripts of National and International importance. They need to be properly studied, researched and presented for their recognition as manuscripts of global importance.

Others places in odisha.

- Parija Library Utkal University , Vani Vihar - 6000
- P.G Dept. of History , Brahmapur University, Bhanja Vihar - 989
- Puri bada odia Matha - 450
- P.G Dept. of Odia Sambalpur University -315
- Kedarnath Gabesana Pratistana , Bhubaneswar - 265
- Raghunandana Library. Puri - 250
- Utkal Sanskruti viswavidyala - 95
- P.G Dept. of History, Sambalpur University- 1480

Provides Manuscripts services on the following subjects:



- Vedas
- Tantras
- Sanskrit Purana
- Dharma sastra
- Jyotisha
- Ganita
- Ayurveda
- Avidhan
- Vyakarana
- Darsan

10. SANSKRIT PURANA

Odisha State Museum has different types of manuscripts collections. Out of which the important Collections are Vedas, Tantra, Sanskrit Puran, Dharma Sastra, Darshana, Jyotisha, Ganita, Ayurveda, Avidan, Vyakaran, Sankrit Kavya, Gita Govinda, Alankar, Sangita, Silpa and Oriya Puran. A large number of Puranic manuscripts are available in Odisha State Museum.

The Puranas are ancient Hindu texts eulogizing various deities, primarily the divine Trimurti God in Hinduism through divine stories. Puranas may also be described as a genre of important Hindu religious texts alongside some Jain and Buddhist religious texts, notably consisting of narratives of the history of the universe from creation to destruction, genealogies of kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, and descriptions of Hindu cosmology, philosophy, and geography. The Puranas are frequently classified according to the Trimurti (Trinity or the three aspects of the divine). The Padma Purana classifies them in accordance with the three gunas or qualities as Sattva (Truth and Purity), Rajas (Dimness and Passion) and Tamas (Darkness and Ignorance). Puranas usually give prominence to a particular deity, employing an abundance of religious and philosophical concepts. They are usually written in the form of stories related by one person to another. The Puranas are available in vernacular translations and are disseminated by Brahmin scholars, who read from them and tell their stories, usually in Katha sessions (in which a traveling Brahmin settles for a few weeks in a temple and narrates parts of a Purana, usually with a Bhakti perspective).

The name of the Purana Manuscripts of Odisha from the period of 1801-1950

adbhutarāmāyaṇam, ādipurāṇam, ārṣarāmāyaṇam (ādyakāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (ayodhyākāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (āraṇyakakāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (āraṇyakakāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (āraṇyakakāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (kiṣkindhākāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (sundarākāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (laṅkākāṇḍa), ārṣarāmāyaṇam (uttarākāṇḍa), itihāsasamuccayam, ekāmrapurāṇam, kapilasamhitā, khilaharivaṃśam (prathama khaṇḍam), gurugītā, gopīgītā, jaiminīyabhāgavatam, daśaślokī, nārasimhapurāṇa, padmapurāṇam, pāṇḍavagītā, pāṇḍavagītāstotram, brahmavaivarttapurāṇam (prakṛtikhaṇḍam), brahmavaivarttapurāṇam (gaṇeśakhaṇḍam), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (sṛṣṭitativakhaṇḍam), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (udrakhaṇḍam, prathama bhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (udrakhaṇḍam , dvitīya bhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (utkala pratnatatva khaṇḍam , prathamabhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam



(utkala pratnatatva khaṇḍam , dvitīya bhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (kaliṅkotkalakhaṇḍam), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (bhañjavamaṣakhaṇḍam, prathamabhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (bhañjavamaṣakhaṇḍam, dvitīyabhāga) brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (magadhakhaṇḍam , prathama o dvitīya bhāga), brahmāṇḍapurāṇam (khaṇḍācala mähātmyam), bṛhannāradīyapurāṇam, bhāratasāvitrī, bhāratasārasamaṅgrahah, mathurāmähātmyam, mahābhāratam, mahābhārata - rahasyakalpdrumah, māghamähātmyam, māgaśīrṣamähātmyam, rāmāyaṇīyaratnaśatakam, bratakathā, birajāmähātmyam, viṣṇusahasranāma aigūh ṭīkā, śivanāmārasāmṛtasindhuh, śivapurāṇam (pūrvakhaṇḍam), śivapurāṇam (uttarakhaṇḍam), śrīmadbhagavatagītā, śrīmadbhagavatagītā, śrīmad bhagavatagītā, śrīmadbhagavatam, śrīmadbhagavatam (navama skandha), śrīmadbhagavatam, śrīmadbhagavatam, śrīmadbhagavatam, śrīmadbhagavatam (daśamaskandha dahatb ūpa Raea jdarūgdaha aigūh dhgba jrdeā ūrahetaūgdaha)śrīmadbhagavatam (daśamaskandha aigūh dhgba ūrahetaūgdaha mb jagannātha dāsa), śrīmadbhagavatam (dvādaśaskandha aigūh nāndīpadavyākhyā), śrīmadbhagavatāmṛtam, śrīmad bhagavatāmṛtam, śrīmadbhagavatāmṛtakanīkā, śrīmad bhagavataṭīkā, śrīmad bhagavatasandarbhah, saptaśatī caṇḍī, harivamaṣah (khila harivamaṣah), harivamaṣasārasamaṅgrahah (khila harivamaṣa), harivamaṣa purāṇam, satyanārāyaṇa bratakathā, mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇam, adhyātmarāmāyaṇam, saurasamuccaya:

11. CONCLUSIONS

From the survey made above the puranic literature in Odisha has a long tradition following the method of writing or coping the Sanskrit manuscripts, Odisha has not fallen behind the manuscripts heritage. It has a definite way of coping in Odia scripts and Sanskrit language sometimes Odia translations are also available. In the manuscripts from the above list some important manuscripts have been published so far and some have not. This survey will be a guideline for future research.

REFERENCES

- [1] Handiqui, Krishna Kanta, Naiṣadhacarita of Śrīharṣa, Deccan College, Poona, 1956.
- [2] Jani, Dr. A.N., A Critical Study of Naisadhiyacharitam, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1957.
- [3] Krishnamachari. M., History of Classical Sanskrit Literature, Tirupati Devasthanams Press, Madras 1957.
- [4] Mahapatra, Sri Kedarnath, A Descriptive Catalogue Sanskrit Manuscripts of Orissa, Volume-II, Orissa Sahitya Ekademi, 1960.
- [5] Pandit, Sivadatta, Naisadhiyacharitam, Satyabhamabai Pandurang, Bombay, 1942.
- [6] Raja, Dr. Kunjunni, New Catalogus Catalogorum, Volume – X, University of Madras, 1978.
- [7] Shastri, Pandit Ravidatt, Amarakosha (With Hindi Translation), Shri Venketeshver Press Kalyanu, Mumbai, 1964.