



RELEVANCE OF SCRIBAL ERROR IN AYURVEDA MANUSCRIPTS

¹Dr Nandeesh J

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Samhita-Siddhanta,
Shri Dhanwantry Ayurveda College and Hospital, Chandigarh, India

Abstract: Documentation is one of the key tools in present era especially in the field of medicine. Lack of technical advancements forced the ancient seers to record and document their preaching on surfaces such as inscriptions over stone, *talapatra*, *bhurjapatra*, etc. Since the materials would deteriorate and lose the writings over a period of time, it was necessary to constantly make copies of the same. A group of people made this as a profession and called as scribe. Sometimes on account of lesser subject expertise along with other manual limitations, original manuscripts were slightly altered during the process of copying. These are called as scribal errors. Thus, the reader may not be able to connect with the ideas of the original author. Ayurveda is one such field where the available manuscripts are old and scribal errors is inevitable. Knowledge of scribal errors helps the reader to differentiate the original and distorted content in a manuscript which indirectly helps in the application of principles of Ayurveda known as *siddhanta*. An overview of scribal error and its relevance in present era is presented in this work.

Index Terms - LEKHAKA, MANUSCRIPT, TEXTUAL CRITICISM, EDITING, REDACTION

BACKGROUND:

India is known for the rich tradition of knowledge and values in life. In the olden days, *gurukula* were the places of transmission of knowledge. Eligible students were accepted by teachers known as *guru*, and taught in a *gurukula*. Knowledge was transferred solely on oral tradition in the initial days. It is clear that even in the transmission of texts having strong oral tradition, there seems to have been a realization of the fact that orality is not enough and it has to be supported by written texts. This was necessitated by the emergence of a huge bulk of secondary literature. The late Post-vedic period witnessed the production of innumerable texts related to various schools of philosophy, epics, *purana* texts and bulky commentaries. All these could not be, of course, committed to memory and the necessity of preserving them in written form must have dawned on people.[1] With the advent of time, paper based writings came into existence and today, digital mode has taken over as the prime and effective way of preservation. A clear distinction between the manuscripts in this modern age of printing and the manuscripts of ancient times lies in the fact that in modern times the manuscript-form of a particular text is not further copied by hand, it is printed following all the technical procedure. In other words, many more manuscripts are not produced from one manuscript, which was the case in ancient and mediaeval times [2]

SCRIBE:

Scribe is a writer, whether professional or amateur, of a text in manuscript. The scribe may or may not be the author or composer of the text in question; often used to describe a writer who prepares texts as an amanuensis for others or who produces copies of texts for further distribution [3]. In the epics like Mahabharata, “*lekhaka*” is used to denote a scribe. [4] The scribe need not be an expert in the field of the manuscript. The one with basic knowledge of *lipi* and having a legible handwriting were assigned by the kings as scribes. The purpose of hiring a scribe were as follows:

- 1) To preserve the knowledge for future generation.
- 2) To produce copies to compensate the loss due to damage of surface material and or ink with time.
- 3) To make multiple copies of the manuscript to give access to the subject experts living in other places.
- 4) Lack of digital technology left with no option but to choose manual reproduction of manuscripts.

SCRIBAL ERRORS:

Any variation in the content of original author and the reproduced content is called as scribal error. Expertise in the field was not the criteria for choosing a scribe. Legible handwriting and the ability to understand different *lipi* were considered important features of a scribe. All types of scribal errors creep in to the texts when they are copied, either inadvertently or deliberately, when the original readings become unintelligible to succeeding generations. Again, a lot of interpolations also creep into the texts in direct proportion to the popularity of the text. [6] Scribal errors can be broadly classified as omission, addition, substitution and transposition.

Omission:

Omission refers to the deletion of a certain letter/word/line or a paragraph during the process of scribing. This is usually unintentional and occurs due to lapse in concentration and mental fatigue. For example, the accidental omission of a letter or letter group that should be repeated in writing, as in *vatakalaliya* in place of *vatakalakaliya* [7]. At times, there can be omission of proper vowel signs and headlines due to fast writing. An eye skipping due to words or phrases having the same beginning is a variant called as homeoarchy [8]

Table 1: Examples for Omission error from classics:

- द्वितीयोऽध्याय in place of द्वितीयोऽध्यायः
- शब्दादीनामशस्तानाम स्त्रीविवर्जिताम् in place of शब्दादीनामशस्तानामगम्यं स्त्रीविवर्जिताम् ।
- मलानमूर्द्धाधः प्रवृत्तिः । in place of मलानामूर्द्धाधः प्रवृत्तिः ।
- हृदुण्डपुफुसश्च कोष्ठ इत्यभिधीयते । in place of हृदुण्डकपुफुसश्च कोष्ठ इत्यभिधीयते ।

Addition:

Addition refers to the insertion of a new word/ paragraph in a phrase by the scribe. This can be intentional or unintentional. Learned scribes are responsible for intentional additions. [9] Unintentional addition can take place by repeating a whole line or paragraph. Three types of additions may be found: dittography - writing a syllable, word or phrase unnecessarily twice, contamination - inserting extraneous material from elsewhere on the page and insertion -

which reflects scribes' attempts to improve what they believed to be a defective text —although this does not mean that they were necessarily right[10]. A spiritual scribe may add devotional words like *sri*, *om* to begin a page or a chapter which is originally missing.

Table 2: Examples for Addition error from classics:

- Addition of contraindications during *shishira ritu* in Caraka Samhita.

कटुतिक्तकषायाणि वातलानि लघूनि च | वर्जयेदन्नपानानि शिशिरे शीतलानि च||

Commentator Cakrapani mentioned that the verse is not accepted as original.

(केचिदत्रासेव्यप्रतिपादकं ग्रन्थं पठन्ति, स त्वनार्षः)[11]

- Features suggesting *samyak vyayama* is seen in Caraka Samhita.

स्वेदागमः श्वासवृद्धिर्गात्राणां लाघवं तथा | हृदयाद्युपरोधश्च इति व्यायामलक्षणम्||

This verse is found only in Yogendranath Sen's commentary.

(योगीन्द्रनाथसेनसम्मतोऽयं पाठः)[12]

- In the context of eligibility for *kutipraveshika rasayana*, there is no mentioning of the words such as *prishna*. But, explanation of the word *prishna* is found in the commentary of Yogendranath Sen. (पृष्णः सूर्यस्य)
- In *Ayushkamiyamadhyaya* of Ashtanga Hridaya, classification of *vyadhi* is mentioned in few manuscripts, probably due to addition error.[13]

(साध्योऽसाध्य इति व्याधिर्द्विधा, तौ तु पुनर्द्विधा।
सुसाध्यः कृच्छ्रसाध्यश्च, याप्यो यश्चानुपक्रमः||)

Substitution:

Substitution refers to the replacement of a word with another word. It can be both intentional and unintentional. Intentional substitution occurs when scribe has sound knowledge of the subject. From the moment a scribe read or heard the phrase he was to copy until he finished writing it out, there was a danger that what he held in memory could become distorted in some way. One way seems to have been writing down a synonym for a word that he was supposed to copy. In this case, perhaps the scribe was more conscious of the sense of what he was writing than the exact words themselves [14]. The wording of a particular phrase or sentence was sometimes altered to reflect the wording of another similar but more familiar one is termed as Harmonization. Unintentional substitution can occur when the scribe fails to recollect the long sentence while copying or hearing. At times, the scribe may perceive a letter as different due to the similarity in the *lipi*.

Eg: Shri Hari Charana Sena, redactor of *Paryaya Ratnamala*, has confessed that he has presented original work in systematic manner. In many of such manuscripts available at Orissa, local names have been mentioned after each *Shloka* which is convenient for identification of the drugs. Some nomenclatures of drugs mentioned in these manuscripts do not tally with those mentioned in other texts [15] :

Table 3: Common substitute error in classics:

- Conjuncts are written in wrong sequential order in majority of the cases, like वहि – वहि
- ण, कृ is written in different way
- क् scribed as ह
- Majority of the instances only 'छ' is scribed in place of 'च्छ' like गछति- गच्छति
- थ्य' is scribed in place of 'त्य' like त्रिदोषोत्थ-त्रिदोषोत्थ
- प्रगं is written in place of प्रसङ्गः चतुः is written in place of च्युतः
- व is written in place of ब , like वलं-बलं
- अग्लानि in place of ग्लानि
- शिता is written in place of सिता
- ध्य is written in place of द्ध

Transposition:

Transposition refers to the change in the relative order or sequence of group of words. [16] Usually, interchange of adjacent words is observed. Though transposition is a part of scribal error, the meaning of the sentence does not change in Sanskrit.

Table 4: Common transposition error in classics:

- यच्च नावनिकं याश्च तैलं प्राग्धूमवर्तयः । in place of यच्च नावनिकं तैलं याश्च प्राग्धूमवर्तयः ।
- श्वदंष्ट्रायाश्च निष्काथनत्वणेषु च पृथक् पृथक् ॥

In this verse, *anushtup chandas* is not justified.

- सान्द्रीभूतं च कुर्यात् प्रभूतमधुशर्करम् ।

In this verse, *anushtup chandas* is not justified.

- “विलेपी बहुसिक्था स्याद्यवागूर्विरलद्रवा” in place of “यवागूर्बहुसिक्था स्याद्विलेपी विरलद्रवा” in Sushruta Samhita. [17]

CAUSES FOR SCRIBAL ERRORS:

Scribal error may be intentional or unintentional. [18] An intentional error is caused by the ego of the scribe in modifying the content of the original author. Though it may have novel intention, the reader will not be able to relate to the thought process of the original author. Unintentional scribal errors can occur due to multiple reasons. To name a few, Lack of the knowledge of *lipi*, visual or hearing defect, forced writing, disinterest in the work, prolonged writing and so on.

SCRIBAL ERROR AND PRESENT ERA:

Classical literature of ayurveda are mostly written in Sanskrit language. Many of them have undergone various redactions and thus, original form altered. Availability of multiple manuscripts of the same book adds on to the confusions. Thus, the published versions of classical literature may have scribal errors unnoticed or overlooked by the editors. This will impede the thought process of the reader in sync with the objective of original authors. With

the knowledge of scribal error along with grammatical considerations, it is possible to identify the actual version of the text and thus, justification can be done to the original author. Apart from published works, Ayurveda has plenty of manuscripts to be brought out in the public domain. This can only be possible by a researcher who has sound knowledge of scribal error followed by editing.

CONCLUSION:

Preservation of the manuscripts was the only way of transferring knowledge to the next generation. Scribe played an important role in this process. Errors while documentation is inevitable, called as scribal errors. Knowledge of scribal errors helps in analyzing the principles laid down by the original author. Unpublished Ayurveda manuscripts also require sound knowledge of scribal error in carrying out literary research. The magnitude of the contribution made by Sanskrit to world civilization can be gauged from the statement of Arthur A. Macdonell, who in his History of Sanskrit Literature maintained that since renaissance, there has been no event of such world-wide significance in the history of culture as the discovery of Sanskrit literature in the latter part of the 18th century[19].

REFERENCES:

- [1] Sanskrit Tradition in Manuscripts Dr.C.Rajendran University of Calicut The magnitude of the contribution made by Sanskrit
- [2] <https://www.sanchiuniv.edu.in/granthsandhanam/Manuscripts&Manuscriptology.pdf>
- [3] https://folgerpedia.folger.edu/Glossary_of_manuscript_terms
- [4] Srimat Mahabharata –adiparva- Sri Krishnacarya & Sri Vyasacarya, Nirayagasara, Page 5.
- [5] https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/162316/8/08_chapter%205.pdf
- [6] Sanskrit Tradition in Manuscripts Dr.C.Rajendran University of Calicut The magnitude of the contribution made by Sanskrit available at [https://www.academia.edu/12346148/Sanskrit Tradition in Manuscripts](https://www.academia.edu/12346148/Sanskrit_Tradition_in_Manuscripts)
- [7] <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/haplography>
- [8] <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~sreimer/ms-course/course/scbl-err.htm>
- [9] S. Jagannatha, Manuscriptology: An entrance, 2007 Edition, Parimal Publications, Delhi, pp.65.
- [10] Errors, Corrections and other Textual Problems in Three Copies of a Middle English Antidotary¹ Teresa Marqués-Aguado, University of Murcia. Available at <https://njes-journal.com/articles/10.35360/njes.293/galley/293/download/>
- [11] Agnivesha. Caraka-Samhita Elaborated by Caraka & Drudhabala With the Ayurvedadipika Commentary by Sri Cakrapanidatta. Ed. Vaidya Yadavji Trikamji Acharya. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, 2002.Pg.45
- [12] Agnivesha. Caraka-Samhita Elaborated by Caraka & Drudhabala With the Ayurvedadipika Commentary by Sri Cakrapanidatta. Ed. Vaidya Yadavji Trikamji Acharya. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan, 2002.Pg.51
- [13] Vagbhata. Ashtanga Hridaya With the Commentaries: Sarvangasundara of Arunadatta & Ayurvedarasayana of Hemadri. Ed. Pt. Hari Sadasgiva Shastri Paradakara. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2010.Pp-956, Pg. no 18.
- [14] <https://tetragrammaton.org/tcglossary.html>

[15] Padhi, Madan & Meda, Mruthyumjaya & Sharma, Madan & Hota, N. (2007). A critical study of the manuscripts of Paryaya Muktaavali available at Orissa. Bulletin of the Indian Institute of History of Medicine (Hyderabad). 37. 81-6.

[16] <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/transpose>

[17] Sushruta. Sushruta Samhita With the Nibandhasangraha Commentary of Sri Dalhanacharya and the Nyayachandrika Panjika of Sri Gayadasacharya on Nidanasthana. Ed. Vaidya Yadavji Trikamji Acharya. Varanasi: Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan, 2010.Pg.238.

[18] <https://zooniverseancientlives.wordpress.com/2013/05/06/scrabal-error-in-biblical-manuscripts/>

[19] Macdonell, A.A A History of Sanskrit Literature,p.1

