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MANUSCRIPTOLOGY AND TEXTUAL CRITICISM
IN MEDIEVAL INDIA

Introductory: Descent of Mss. of old texts

The discipline of Critical Text-editing and Textual Criticism seeks to determine the text of an early work exactly as it was written by its author. The problem pertains primarily to early texts, which, on account of their popularity tend to become distorted from what had originally been composed by their authors. These texts which were studied in different regions of the country, handed down from generation to generation, copied and cross-copied successively by scribes of different grades of scholarly calibre, in the different local scripts and using different types of writing materials, naturally strayed from their pristine purity. Thus, a great work of a great poet like Kālidāsa or Bhavabhūti, which appeals to all students of Sanskrit, in all parts of India from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Gujarat to Assam, which is remembered, read or taught through successive generations, and copied directly from one script to the same script or inter-copied from one script to another, by learned, half-learned or indifferent scribes, each using the different writing materials like *bhūrjapatra*, palmleaf, tree-bark or paper with different types of pens or iron needles, can do a lot of havoc in the purity of a text through its descent through hundreds of years. It should also be remembered that all through these ages, there was no means of printing or of mass production of exact copies, thus necessitating each individual copy of a work being prepared laboriously, independent of each other. When one visualises the magnitude of such enormous manual work, executed by hundreds of persons at different places, one will also realise the possibility of errors of all sorts, both voluntary and

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involuntary, that might creep in the individual manuscripts. Inadequate familiarity of a script when a manuscript in one script is copied in another script, confusion of letters, misinterpretation of contractions, transposition, dislocation and skipping of words, expressions and even pages, cause involuntary corruptions, while voluntary corruptions get into copies when the scribe substitutes familiar words for non-familiar words and new spellings for old, fills up minor omissions, and incorporates marginal notes found in a manuscript into the text in the copy newly prepared. Then again, customs, manners and habits of the different regions induce scribes and even scholars, who study the texts, to alter, add or omit readings, and thus contribute minor or major changes to the original text, consciously. When each of these factors is capable of distorting a text, what would be the case when all these work simultaneously, and, that over centuries. As the great Sanskrit proseteur, Bāṇa says in an altogether different context:

garbheśvaratvam, abhinavayauvanatvam, apratimarūpatvam, amānuṣikaśaktitvaṃ ceti mahatīyam anarthaparamparā, sarvāvinayānām ekaikam apy eṣām āyatanam / kim uta samavāyaḥ /

(*Kādambarī*, I, Śukanāsopadeśa)

Need for critically editing texts

So, that is the state in which a student who wants to read the real Kālidāsa, Vālmīki or Vyāsa, finds himself. To the ordinary reader, who is satisfied with whatever passes for the works of these authors, any of the numerous manuscripts of the works of these authors, obtainable from any part of the country, would serve the purpose. But one who is intent to know what exatcly Kālidāsa or Vālmīki or Vyāsa wrote, has to churn out his butter from the curd of existing manuscripts through intense research work.

Growth of the discipline in modern times

It is here that the discipline of Text-editing and Textual criticism comes to one's succour. In modern times, the discipline rose to prominence in the wake of efforts in Europe to produce pure editions of the *Bible*, which, in its different versions and translations at different hands, had accumulated substantial encrustations and distortions. Later, it grew as a branch of classical scholarship, as a handmaid to bring out correct editions of the works of Homer, Dante and other authors of Greek and Latin. In essence, the discipline envisages a scientific study of ancient writings as available in their extant manuscripts handed down through generations, and determine, on the basis of the said manuscripts, the original author's text, as best as it could be reconstructed. This aspect

of the work is called *Lower Criticism*, as distinct from another aspect thereof, termed *Higher Criticism*. *Higher Criticism* extends to realms beyond the extant manuscripts and seeks to assess and improve upon the text arrived upon through *Lower Criticism*. This is achieved by means of internal evidence such as the author's literary acumen, the style of the author, the ideas likely to be expressed by him, historical allusions, anacronisms, if any, and external evidence such as the historical background, contemporary social conditions, the probable emendations effected by early redactors and the like. The ultimate aim of text-editing and textual criticism is, as indicated earlier, to arrive at the text that should have been composed by its original author.

Text-editing in ancient India

While this highly important discipline of critical text-editing and textual criticism is of recent growth in the West, it would be highly interesting to inquire into its prevalence in the East. Was the problem realised in early times? If so, to what extent and in what aspects? What methods did the critical text-editors of ancient times employ? What canons of textual criticism did they evolve? Was it of the Lower type or did it comprise also the High criticism type? And, how did they present the true readings that they arrived at? Did they present the readings silently or did they also discuss the readings and stated how and why they considered a reading preferable to another? This enquiry has led to very interesting results, some of which shall be set out here.

Place of commentaries in text-editing

It is to be noted that, in Indian tradition, it was the commentaries which tackled, among other things, the function of textual criticism. Today, following the modern Western practice, texts are critically edited by themselves. That is to say, volumes are produced by a critical editor solely to present a critical text. Thus, extant manuscripts of the text to be edited are collected from different regions, they are collated and the variants noted, scribal errors are corrected, real variants are assessed and the author's reading given in the body of the edition while the other variants are recorded in the footnotes. Thus, the present-day critical edition aims at producing a satisfactory text, and leaves it to the reader to understand the same. In early days, there was no question of a mere « text-edition with footnotes », the text was edited and expounded and not merely presented.

Procedure of a Critical Commentator

In Sanskrit most « good » commentators are also « critical » commentators, though all of them do not expressly state the fact. But from

those who speak about their preparation before launching upon their work, one can understand how they equipped themselves in their work of critical editing.

Thus Nīlakaṇṭha, the renowned commentator of the *Mahābhārata*, says, towards the beginning of the commentary:

bahūn samāhṛtya vibhinnadeśyān
kośān, viniścitya tu pāṭham agryam /
prācāṃ gurūṇām anusṛtya vācam
ārabhyate Bhārata-Bhāvadīpaḥ //

> (Com. on *Ādiparva*, 1.1. Chitrasala Press edn.,
> Poona, vol. I, 1929, p. 1)

« Having collected several manuscripts (of *Mahābhārata*) from different regions, and deciding upon the best readings, and also following the text of my teachers, the commentary *Bhārata-Bhāvadīpa* is commenced by me ».

Ānandatīrtha goes a step further and states the causes that contaminate a text, and the consequent necessity to go first into the purity of the text in hand. His *Mahābhārata-Tātparyanirṇaya* carries the following passage:

uktaḥ pūrvādhyāye śāstrāṇām nirṇayaḥ paro divyaḥ /
atha bhāratavākyāny etair evādhyavāsyante // Ch. II. 2
kvacid granthān prakṣipanti kvacid antantaritān api /
kuryuḥ kvacic ca vyatyāsaṃ pramādāt, kvacid anyathā // 3 //
anutsannā api granthā vyākulā iti sarvaśaḥ /
utsannāḥ prāyaśaḥ sarve koṭyaṃśo' pi na vartate // 4 //
grantho' pyevaṃ vilulitaḥ kintvartho devadurlabhaḥ // 5 //

« In the last chapter was stated the divine path for ascertaining the *Śāstras*. Here, the verses of the *Mahābhārata* are being ascertained on the basis of the above. Now, passages got added at places and dropped elsewhere. At places, variants are inserted out of ignorance, and elsewhere otherwise. Thus the existing text becomes disturbed and, of what is lost, not even one part in a crore can be resurrected. Thus the text becomes scattered and the meaning difficult even for the gods ».

I might extract a passage, which relates to a technical text, *viz.*, the *Nirukta* of Yāska. Towards the beginning of an elaborate commentary called *Nighaṇṭunirvacana* by Devarāja, the commentator says, *inter alia* (*Bibl. Indica*, No. 89, Calcutta, 1889-91, vol. I, pp. 2-4):

tataś ca kośa eva śaraṇam āsīt / teṣu ca keṣucid artheṣu lekhakapramādādibhiḥ kānicitpadāny adhikāny āsan anyeṣu ca kānicin nyūnāni / apareṣu ca kānicid apahāya kānicid viśrastāni akṣarāṇi ca viparyastāni /

« Hence, lexicons were the sole resort. Here, too, in the case of certain meanings, certain words had been added due to scribal and other errors, and in certain other cases, certain words had been omitted. In

still others, certain letters had been dropped and other letters added. Letters were also misplaced ».

On the matter of arriving at the correct text in the case of all-proof readings, he says:

idaṃ ca svamanīṣikayā na kriyate, kintu Naighaṇṭvāgateṣveva padeṣu ardhaśatatrayamātrāṇi padāni bhāṣyakāreṇa tatra tatra nigameṣu prasaṅgān niruktāni, Skandasvāminā tu nigamavyākhyāneṣu anyāni ca padāni śatadvayamātrāṇy upāttāni / tena ca samāmnāyapaṭhitānāṃ padānām anyebhyo vyāvṛttyarthaṃ kiñcic cihnaṃ kṛtam / atas teṣāṃ pāṭhaśuddhis tatraiva śuddhā / anyeṣaṃ ca padānām asmatkule samāmnāyādhyayanasyāvicchedāt, śrī-Veṅkaṭācārya-tanayasya Mādhavasya Bhāṣyakṛtau, Nāmānukramaṇyāḥ, Ākhyātānukramaṇyāḥ, Svarānukramaṇyāḥ, Nipātānukramaṇyāḥ, Nibandhānukramaṇyāḥ, tadīyasya bhāṣyasya ca bahuśaḥ paryālocanāt, bahudeśasamānītād bahukośanirīkṣaṇāc ca pāṭhaḥ saṃśodhitaḥ /

« " For the above reasons " verification and correction are being done, but they are not being done as I please. Now, about 350 words occurring in the *Nighaṇṭu* happen to be cited by the Bhāṣya-kāra in his Vedic quotations. About 250 words have been cited by Skandasvāmī in his comments on the Vedic passages. He has also differentiated by a special mark the words of the *Samāmnāya* (*Nighaṇṭu*) from other words. Now, the correctness of the other words has been settled through (1) my own studies, since the study of the *Samāmnāya* is still continuing in my family; (2) the repeated study of the *Bhāṣya* of Mādhava, son of Veṅkaṭācārya on the *Nāmānukramaṇī*, *Ākhyātānukramaṇī*, *Svarānukramaṇī*, *Nipātānukramaṇī*, and *Nibandhānukramaṇī* and also of his *Bhāṣya* (on the *Ṛgveda*) and (3) also on an examination of the manuscripts collected from several places ».

Thus, having verified the correctness of the textual passages, or, to put in modern phraseology, having critically edited the text, the commentator explains how he had prepared himself to comment upon the *Nighaṇṭu*. He says:

nirvacanaṃ ca — Niruktaṃ (1), Skandasvāmikṛtāṃ Niruktaṭīkām (2), Skandasvāmi — Bhavasvāmi — Rāhadeva — Śrīnivāsa — Mādhavadeva — Uvaṭabhaṭṭa — Bhāskaramiśra — Bharatasvāmyādi — viracitāni Vedabhāṣyāṇi (3), Pāṇinīyaṃ vyākaraṇam (4), viśeṣata Uṇādi, tadvṛttim, Kṣīrasvāmy — Anantācāryādikṛtāṃ Nighaṇṭuvyākhyāṃ, Bhojarājīyaṃ vyākaraṇam (6), Kamalanayanīya — Nikhilapadasaṃskāraṃ ca (7) nirīkṣya kriyate /
tatra ca asmadvyākhyeyānāṃ tatra dṛṣṭānāṃ padānāṃ tattatkṛtaṃ ca nirvacanam upādāya tadeva asmatprakaraṇānurūpaṃ ced ullikhyate, ananurūpaṃ tu kiñcid vipariṇamayya, anyeṣāṃ ca katipayānāṃ Niruktakārokтanirvacanasāmānyalakṣaṇam anusṛtya niruktiḥ kriyate /

« The etymology of the words is being expounded here after stu-

dying the *Nirukta*, the *Nirukta-ṭīkā* of Skandasvāmī, Rāhadeva, Śrīnivāsa, Mādhavadeva, Uvaṭabhaṭṭa, Bhāskara-miśra, Bharata-svāmī and others, the Vyākaraṇa (*Aṣṭādhyāyī*) of Pāṇini, especially Uṇādi and its commentary, *Nighaṇṭu-vyākhyā* of Kṣīrasvāmī, Anantācārya etc., the Vyākaraṇa (*Sarasvatīkaṇṭhābharaṇa*) of Bhojarāja, and the *Nikhilapadasaṁskāra* of Kamalanayana. Having examined the etymology of all words (which occur in the *Nighaṇṭu* and so have) to be discussed by me as given in the above sources, I cite them if they pertain to the context in hand; if not they are cited in a modified manner. For the other words (*i.e.*, those which are not discussed in the above-cited works), I discuss the etymology in pursuance of the lines indicated by (*Yāska*), the author of the *Nirukta* ».

Thus, having stated as to how he would « critically » edit the text and how he would comment on it, commentator Devarāja states that the quotations he would be giving would be from the Vedas and the Bhāṣyas thereon, as current in South India, to which region he belonged. It may be noted that Devarāja belonged to Śrīraṅgam in South India and lived towards A.D. 1300:

*nigamas tu dakṣiṇāpathanivāsibhir adhītesu vedeṣu paridṛśyamānas
tadbhāṣyāṇi nirīkṣya tatra tatra pradarśyate / adṛṣṭanigamānāṁ ca
padānāṁ nigamā anveṣyāḥ /*

« As far as the Vedic passages are concerned, they would be cited, appropriately, as found in the Vedas and *Bhāṣyas* studied in South India. In the case of (a few) words for which Vedic sources could, still, not be found, the search will have to be (continued to be) made ».

Tradition of Textual Criticism

As indicated above, ancient India had a fairly developed tradition of textual criticism. A « good » commentator was almost always a competent « text-critic » also. It would seem that his forte was silent correction, which is employed in modern critical text-editing also in case of obvious errors and misreadings. Still one finds numerous references to *pāṭhāntaras* (variant readings), *prakṣiptas* (interpolations), *apapāṭhas* (wrong readings) etc. Sometimes emendations are also suggested with such expressions as *iti pāṭhaḥ, ityeva pāṭhaḥ* etc. Readings of other redactions, which the commentator does not accept as the correct readings, are often supplied with such indications as *Prācāṁ ācāryāḥ, Pāścātyāḥ, Dākṣinātyāḥ, Prācīnaḥ pāṭhaḥ*. Even scribal errors due to similarity of letters are pointed out. See, for instance: Vallabhadeva's observation on the verse *āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase* etc. in Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* (I.2);

āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase... kecittu « śa »kāra-« tha »kārayorlipisā-
rūpyamohāt « praśama » ityūcuḥ / katham katham api caitam evār-
tham pratipannāḥ /

Higher Criticism in Indian Tradition

In order to illustrate how commentators and critics tried even to probe the thinking of the original authors, in the face of contrary readings recorded in manuscripts, an instance or two might be cited.

Oṇ Kālidāsa's verse:

jātāṃ manye śiśiramathitāṃ padminīṃ vānyarūpāṃ /

(*Meghadūta*, II.23)

Mahimabhaṭṭa observes in his *Vyaktiviveka*:

vyākhyātāro 'līkavidvanmānitayā prāyeṇāpavyākhyānaiḥ na kevalaṃ
ātmānaṃ yāvat tatra bhavato mahākaver nāma hrepayanto dṛśyante...
nāpi mahākaveḥ Kālidāsasyāvagatir iyaṃ kvacanāpi prabandho 'va-
dhāritapūrvā yad ayaṃ rasanidhāne kāvye vyādhim iva « vā » śabdam
« ivā »rthe prayuñjīteti /

Here, Mahimabhaṭṭa takes to task some commentators who read the expression as *padminīvānyarūpā /*

Again, take, for instance, Hemādri, the prolific and versatile author and commentator of the latter half of the 13th cent. Commenting on verse 105 of ch. VI of the *Sūtrasthāna* of the *Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya* of Vāgbhaṭa, where two variant readings *piṇḍālu* and *vāgbhālu* (a kind of edible root) occurs, he discusses the two readings in detail and ultimately justifies the reading *piṇḍālu*. Thus he concludes:

bahubhiḥ paṭhyamānasya pāṭhasyaivaṃ samarthanā /
Hemādriṇā kṛtā kintu piṇḍālur iti kathyatām //

Deficient editors decried

It would be interesting to note that in line with the comments of Mahimabhaṭṭa quoted above, one can find several observations by standard writers decrying wrong readings accepted by incompetent editors. See what Mallinātha says on *āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase* (*Meghadūta* I:2):

kecittu «āṣāḍhasya prathamadivase» ityatra «pratyāsanne nabhasi»
iti vakṣyamāṇanabhomāsapratyāsattyarthaṃ « praśamadivase » iti
pāṭhaṃ kalpayanti / tadasāram, kāraṇābhāvāt /

For a more scathing remark, see the anonymous author of the commentary *Sarasvatī* on the same verse:

sukavivacasi pāṭhān anyathākṛtya mohād
rasagatim avadhūya prauḍham arthaṃ vihāya /
vibudhavarasamāje vyākriyākāmukānāṃ
gurukulavimukhānāṃ dhṛṣṭatāyai namo 'stu //

Prominent text-critics

Prominent Sanskrit rhetoricians are all text-critics. Bhāmaha, Ānandavardhana, Mahimabhaṭṭa, Bhoja, Hemacandra, Mammaṭa, Viśvanātha, are all such. But that is their function and they are more text-critics than text-editors. The latter function is mainly performed, as indicated earlier, by commentators. Among these, special mention has to be made of Vallabha, Hemādri, Mallinātha, Cāritravardhana, Rāghavabhaṭṭa and Pūrṇasarasvatī.