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Marathas of Thanjavur: Preserver of the Ancient Manuscripts

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Abstract

Tanjoure Maharaja Saraboji Saraswathi Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.) Library has the richest collection of Manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu that reflect the history, economy and culture of South India. The Manuscripts are taken care of by the language the Pandits and it is the primary sources to reconstruct the history of South India more particularly above the Marathas of Thanjavur. The Pandits undertake the following works for the preservation of Manuscripts and development of this Tanjoure Maharaja Saraboji Saraswathi Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.) Library. This paper focus on the liberal endowments to preserve the manuscripts of Marathas.

Keywords: Manuscript, Palm Leaf, Encompass, Gum of Acacia, Goose Quill and Domicil.

Introduction

Tanjoure Maharaja Saraboji Saraswathi Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.) Library has the richest collection of Manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Marathi and Telugu that reflect the history, economy and culture of South India. The Manuscripts are

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taken care of by the language the Pandits and it is the primary sources to reconstruct the history of South India more particularly above the Marathas of Thanjavur. The Pandits undertake the following works for the preservation of Manuscripts and development of this Tanjoure Maharaja Saraboji Saraswathi Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.) Library. In addition to the existing stack of Manuscripts, this Library (T.M.S.S.M.) also came in possession of private Libraries of Pandits and their Patrons who were living in Thanjavur and neighborhood. Even now this Library is receiving. Manuscripts and Books as donation from people who are not in a position to preserve the Manuscripts. This paper focus on the liberal endowments to preserve the Manuscripts of Marathas.

1.1 Manuscripts Collection

The Library (T.M.S.S.M.) has the richest collection of Manuscripts, which are truly reflective of the liberal endowments and donation of the Marathas. In addition to the central collections, the Library (T.M.S.S.M.) was able to procure books and scripts from the private libraries of several Pandits and patrons living in and around Thanjavur. The Manuscripts are available both in palm-leaf and paper on different forms on different subjects in Tamil, Telugu, Marathi¹ and Sanskrit languages. The Major parts of the Manuscripts are in Sanskrit language, which exceed 39,300 and written in Grantha, Devanagari, Nandinagari, Telugu scripts etc. The total number of Tamil Manuscripts² is 3780 comprising titles of literature and medicine. This Library (T.M.S.S.M.) has a collection of 3076 Marathi Manuscripts³ of South Indian Maharastrian of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and the hierarchy of the Saints of Maharashtra belonging to Sri Ramadasi and Dattatreya Mutts. The Marathi Manuscripts⁴ are mostly on paper and a few in palm-leaf, written in Telugu script. There are 846 Telugu Manuscripts⁵ in this Library (T.M.S.S.M.), which are mostly on palm leaf and a few in papers. Apart from these Manuscripts there are 1342 bundles of Maratha Raj records available at the Library (T.M.S.S.M.). The Raj records were written in the Modi script⁶ (fast script for Devanagari) of the Marathi language. These records encompass the information of the political, cultural and social administration of the Maratha Kings of Thanjavur.

1.2 Nature of Manuscripts

Manuscripts on paper or palm leaf carry post-scripts containing historical, biographical and other information regarding owners, copyist, date of copying, etc. The Manuscripts have been classified as Palm Leaf Manuscripts.⁷ Palm leaves were commonly used as writing material in ancient India and were known as tada patra, tala patra or panna.⁸ The leaves of the palm tree, available all over India, were collected and dried and cut into the same convenient length. Two holes were made to pass a string, which tied the leaves together.

1.3 Paper Manuscripts

Paper was introduced quite late in India, but had appeared by the time Ekoji I took over Thanjavur. It was made by hand from cellulose vegetable material; masi or mela was the ink used for writing, available in red, black, gold and silver. The permanent black ink was prepared by mixing the lamp soot of sesame (*Sesamum indicum*) oil with the gum of acacia and rainwater. The pens were made of either wood, bamboo or goose quill. The papers were dipped in turmeric water for protection from insects.⁹

1.4 Sanskrit Manuscripts

The Sanskrit Collection of the Thanjavur Maharaja Saraboji Sarasvati Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.), which is largest in the collection, contains not only the major works of Sanskrit literature beginning with the Vedas but is also especially noteworthy for the history of later Sanskrit literature and copies of works which were produced directly under the patronage of the Telugu and Maratha Rajas of Thanjavur. The Manuscripts are in palm leaf and paper form which are written in Devanagari, Nandinagari, Grantha¹⁰ and Telugu scripts. Mention may be made of a few outstanding works whose Manuscripts are unique to the Thanjavur Maharaja Saraboji Sarasvati Mahal (T.M.S.S.M.). Rare and short lexicons, the grammar of the rare dialect called Bhandira-bhasha, the play Jambavatiparinaya of King Krishnadevaraya, Vivaranadarpana of Rangaraja, father of the great Appayya Dikshita, the prose work of KrishnaCharita of Agastyapandita, the allegorical play Bhavanapurushottama of Ratnakheta Srinivasa Dikshitar, some

rare works of the great Appayya Dikshitar, Tattvachintamanivyakhya (logic) by Dharmarajadhvarin, poetess Ramabhadramba's biographical poem on her patron King Raghunatha Nayak, Vatttikabharana (mimamsa) of Venkatamakhin and works of Ramabhadra Dikshita and Sadasiva Brahmendra Sarasvati.¹¹ Short Advaita-Prakaranas in large number are also available in Sarasvati Mahal. One branch of literature in which the Sarasvati Mahal is especially rich in namely the Puranic accounts of the sanctity and legends of the great shrines and sacred villages and towns in which the Cauvery delta abounds. The oldest Manuscripts in the Library are perhaps the Adwaita work, Bhamati of Vachaspatimisra, which was copied in Banaras in 1468 A.D. There is also a Manuscript, attributed to the great Appayya Dikshitar. The postscripts in several Manuscripts carry very interesting historical, biographical and other information relating to owners, copyists, date of copying etc.¹² One of these contains precious information about the great Sadasiva Brahmendra Sarasvati and his blessings to the King of Thanjavur. The Sanskrit Manuscript Collection of this Library dates back to 16th century A.D. The Manuscripts used by the Poets and Kings during the Nayak and Maratha period are preserved even today.

1.5 Marathi Manuscripts

The Marathi Paper Manuscripts collected during the reign of Marathas of Thanjavur i.e., from 1676 to 1855 A.D. are preserved in this Library. They are 1856 in number. They are all the works of the saint poets of Ramadas and Dattatreya Mutts. Later on, when the Library was opened for public in 1919 A.D., Marathi Manuscripts from Pandits and Scholars besides those of the Mutts,¹³ were received as donation and even now preserved well. They are 1220 in number. The total number of 3076 Marathi Paper Manuscripts are compiled in 6 volumes of catalogues called "The Descriptive Catalogue of Marathi Manuscripts" and classified into many subjects like Philosophy, Literature, Drama, Music, Lexicon, Medicine, Science etc.¹⁴ The Marathi Manuscripts in palm leaf are written in Telugu script. They deal with Marathi musical dance dramas. The works composed by the poets of Thanjavur are not available in Maharashtra. So they are rare Manuscripts. "The Ramayana" and "Mahabharata" by Madhava Swami, "Avadhuta GitaTika" and "Ramasohala" by Meru Swami, "Sri Ramakrupa vilas" by

Mukunda Swami "Aatmabodha" by Raghava Swami and "Bhagvat Gita" by Ananta Mouni are some of the note worthy works.¹⁵

1.6 Tamil Manuscripts

The Tamil Manuscript Section comprises of 3780 Manuscripts of which 2083 are Literary and the rest are Medical. All these are in palm leaf and are of the following categories: Rare Works like Kambaramayana, Kalingathu Bharani, Moovarula etc., are available in palm leaf Manuscripts. Unpublished portions of classics. Saiva, Vaishnava and Jain works. Later poetry of all descriptions. So far, 20 volumes of Descriptive Catalogues are published. Some of the rare works belonging to the Imperial Chola period are written in manipravala style.¹⁶ The medical Manuscripts written by the Tamil scholars like Kottaiyur Sivakolundu Desikar were based on the process made in the Dhanvantri Mahal Hospital. Sivarahasyam, which was written during Sarafoji I, is one of the oldest Tamil Manuscripts, Kumbakona-p-puranam, Sarabhendra Bhoopala Kuravanchi are the notable Manuscripts. The 18th century "Kambaramayana" palm leaf Manuscript with 537 leaves and seven Khandas is also a typical one. In Thiruvaimozhi vacaka malai' the line drawing of Lord Renganatha with his consorts can be seen.¹⁷

1.7 Telugu Manuscripts

The Thanjavur Telugu Manuscripts collection is unique and it represented the home productions of royal patrons of art, their court Pandits and other scholars domiciled in the Thanjavur country. It may be said that the collection represents the southern school of Telugu literature. The Telugu Manuscript section deal with Padya Kavyas, Dvipada Kavyas, Satakas, Yakshaganas, Astrology, Medical etc., are there in this section. The works of Nannaiya, Tikkanna, Bodanna, Krishnadevaraya, and Vijayaraghava Nayak are also available. These are the most valuable collection of Manuscripts particularly relating to the Southern School of Telugu Literature. These Manuscripts are catalogued in two volumes. The Bhagavata mela tradition of dramas was first written in Telugu language and lot of dramas is available in palm leaf Manuscripts.

1.8 Modi Documents (Marathi Raj Records)

Modi is a type of script used for writing the Marathi court language during the Maratha rulers of Maharashtra as well as Thanjavur. The court records are called Modi documents and they are all Paper Manuscripts. Letter correspondences, Orders, Daily accounts, Diaries, Petitions etc., were written only in Modi script. Documents related to French-Maratha correspondence and Royal correspondences during 18th century are available in polished handmade papers with gold and silver spray works. These are the rare and important documents. Selected Modi documents are transcribed and translated for publication. These are the only indigenous source materials for the history of the Marathas of Thanjavur.

Other Manuscripts

Along with the Manuscripts in Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi languages written in various scripts like Grantha, Devanagari, Nandinagari, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, Burmese this Library also have few Manuscripts in Persian, Urdu and Hindi languages.

- *Persian and Urdu:* This Library has 22 Persian and Urdu Manuscripts mostly of 19th century. Some of the Manuscripts have illustrations. Important Manuscripts in this collection are :
 - 1) Firdausi's Shahnamah,
 - 2) Life of Gajni Mohammed.
- *Hindi Manuscripts:* This Library also has more than 100 Hindi Manuscripts, which deal with dramatic and historical subjects.
- *Medicine:* Sage Dhanvantri was the Father of Indian medicine. To honour the memory of Dhanvantri Raja Serfoji ran a medical institution called "Dhanvantri Mahal" besides research on many ailments, excellent work was done on diseases like cancer, polio, diabetes and tuberculosis by the Institution of Ayurvedic and Siddha medicines. Raja devoted himself to the progress of research in Dhanvantri Mahal by bringing together Siddha, Ayurveda and Unani physicians of repute. As a result of physicians discussion, the best among tried and effective remedies are embodied in

the series of works named Sarabhendra Vaidhya Muraigal. These works are composed in lucid Tamil verse form to facilitate easy memorisation. This Library has published many of them. The Dhanvantri Mahal also had a wing of research for animal husbandry. Many prescriptions for the disease of domestic as well as wild animals and birds show the broad scope of interests supported by the Rajah and implemented by the Dhanvantri Mahal. The concept of research, especially of a clinical nature is comparatively modern. Some modern systems carry out research only on rabbits and other animals. But at a comparatively early period Rajah Serfoji's doctors were confident enough to use their drugs on human beings.

Conclusion

The Forgoing study reveals the fact the Marathas rulers contributed lot for the development and preservation of manuscripts. It also shows their magnanimity, endowments and caretaking of manuscripts in historical sense. Thus this paper clearly shows their, economic charity, endowment nature and liberal cultural contribution for the development of society on education, research and health.

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