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Problems of critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra

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Abstract

The Nāṭyaśāstra is a unique work of Indian literature written by Bharat an eminent scholar of India. This research paper is based on first critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra edited by M. Ramakrishna kavi. In this paper I have primarily focused on the problems faced by editors in collection and reconciliation of Manuscript, reconstruction of the text and procedure followed by them to prepare a critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra.

Keywords: Nāṭyaśāstra, Manuscript, Bharat, Critical edition, M. Ramakrishna Kavi

Introduction

The Nāṭyaśāstra is a unique work of Indian literature. It is written more than two millenniums ago by Bharat an eminent scholar of India. Nāṭyaśāstra is an Encyclopaedia dealing with all subjects related to theatre. It is divided into 37 chapters according to northern recension but only 36 chapters according to southern text. It contains the history of ancient Indian culture, mythical origin of theatre, construction of a playhouse, choreographic elements, classification of plays, theory of music, role and characters in plays, their classification and qualification of an ideal stage manager.

History of publication of Nāṭyaśāstra

Before 19th century, when William Jones translated abhijñānaśākuntalam, Nāṭyaśāstra was not available. H.H Wilson, who published the first volume of his famous work in 1826 on theatre said that the Nāṭyaśāstra mentioned and quoted in several old commentaries and other works, had been lost forever^[1]

First time F. Hall published four chapters of Nāṭyaśāstra as an appendix to his edition of Daśrūpaka in 1865. In 1874 W. Heymann a German scholar published an article on the content of the Nāṭyaśāstra on the basis of south Indian manuscript. A French scholar Paul Regnaud published 17th chapter of Nāṭyaśāstra in 1880, and 15th and 16th chapter in 1884. J Grosset, another French scholar published its 18th chapter with translation in 1888. In 1890 Sylvain Levi had access to 3 manuscripts of Nāṭyaśāstra. He made a close study of chapter 17 to 20. Simultaneously two scholars of India were planning about publication of Nāṭyaśāstra.

In 1894 pandit Shiv Datta and Kashi Nath Pandurang published the original Sanskrit text of Nāṭyaśāstra in Kavyamala no 42. But so many deficiencies were available in the edition. Both editors acknowledged in their preface that they were not satisfied with the adequacy of the manuscript materials used by them. There still remained many inaccurate portions requiring future emendation in the light of new manuscripts of the Nāṭyaśāstra^[2].

This work was followed by Grosset's critical edition of first 14th chapters. This critical edition was based on all manuscripts available till that time.

In the beginning of 20th century Sanskrit scholars got a manuscript which contains a major portion of Abhinava Bharati, a commentary of Nāṭyaśāstra written by Abhinava Gupta. It gave a new stimulus to study of Nāṭyaśāstra, and the first critical edition was published in 1926 to 1954 from G.O.S. the editor of this edition was M. Ram Krishna Kavi.

Collection of manuscripts

This edition was based on 40 manuscripts obtained from different parts of India. They used edition of Kavyamala and French edition of Nāṭyaśāstra as manuscript.

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They got manuscripts from Bikaner, Ujjain, palace library of Tanjor, Mysore library, government library of Madras, Adyar library, Almora and Malabar. Some manuscripts were very

old and in critical condition. Here is a list of some important manuscripts used by editor of Nāṭyaśāstra.

No. of MS. In the library of the oriental institute of Baroda	Obtained from	Condition	Contains
14044	Almora, Uttarakhand	500yr old. 105 folios with many missing leaves.	Up to 23 chapters
4629	Ujjain	300yr old.	Complete manuscript. 52verses of beginning are missing.
14041	Poona	Transcribed copy of a palm leave manuscript	Additional verses at the end of the chapter 5 are recorded as a genuine part of the text.
14042	Palace library Travancore	Transcribed copy of the original manuscript of palace library.	Up to 32chapters
1405	Trivandrum	400yr old. It contains 154 leaves with 10 lines on each leaf written in old Malayalam.	Up to 32chapters

The editor did not described that how he used manuscripts in the work. In the preparation of second critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra prof. G.H Bhatt, the director of BORI, found a manuscript of Nāṭyaśāstra in Bir library at Kathmandu. He got permission to prepare a Devnagari transcript of that very old Nevari Manuscript for II edition of Natyasastra, but due to political disturbance in Nepal India had informed that even a transcript of any manuscript will not be supplied by the BIR Library under the order of Nepal Government [3].

Reconciliation of manuscripts

After collection of manuscripts it was a difficult task to compare all the recension. According to the text scholars divided all manuscripts in two sets A and B. A recension seems to be followed by Abhinavagupta and his preceptors, but B recension is earlier followed by The Mimamsa and Nyaya represented by Shankuka, Lollata, Udbhata [4]. Comparison between recension A and B was tried by the owner of Ujjain manuscript, but after 13th chapter when he found great divergence between two recensions, he quit. The same difficulty was faced by the French editor, that's why he broke the volume at the end of the 13th chapter.

In the reconciliation of manuscripts scholars found so many differences between A and B.

1. The 9th chapter of set B was divided into two chapters 9th and 10th in set A.
2. The definition in the sixteenth chapter were given in Upajati chanda, but they were given in Anustupa in a reverse order in the 17th chapter of set B.
3. In A set subject matter of 26th chapter was found in chapter 35 in set B.
4. 26th chapter of set B was divided into two chapters 36 and 37 in A set.

Recension of Abhinavabharati

A great difficulty was felt in fixing the recension used by the commentator. The commentary was found in the different parts of India. No complete copy of commentary was discovered. All discovered manuscripts were highly imperfect and fully corrupted and some portions were moth eaten. Scholars made up two sets of commentary. Those sets were different in readings due to scribble errors. The commentary of chapter 7th and 8th was not available. Forth chapter of set A was badly blundered because leaves copied by scribe were arranged in incorrect sequence. In Malabar Manuscript they got an old text of Abhinavavharati, but because of unnumbered and misplaced leaves it was a difficult task to rearrange them.

The commentator gave only words as pratikas, and no single manuscript fully followed the commentary according to pratikas. Here is a list of manuscripts which followed the commentator's pratikas.

Name of the manuscript	
A recension	Till the end of 13 th chapter
Ma·	Till the end of 20 th chapter
Ta·	Till 23 rd chapter
Ma& Na·	24 th to 27 th
Ja·	28 th to 30 th
Bha& Ma·	31 & 32
Ca·	33 to 37

[5] Thus the commentary was break down in sixteen places. Many eminent scholars tried their best to improve the commentary. With the help of Natyaratnāvalī and Saṅgītaratnākara which follow Abhinavagupta, the proper connection of the missing links in the commentary was traced. Some lacunas were filled by editor's commentary. For example -[chapter IV page 133, from yogattanam to prayogah., (ii) page 143 line 24 to page 152 line 20]

Interpolation and omission

In reconciliation of manuscripts they found interpolations and omissions in so many places. In the end of 5th chapter there was a sat of 40 verses in set B, which was omitted in set A. according to editor that portion indicates kohala's or Nandin's additional mode of purvaraṅga, which probably did not recognised by Barat [6]. Baroda edition printed this set of verses in brackets.

After verses 24 in same chapter, there was a prose passage which was defiantly part of a commentary, mixed with text by mistake. This portion is not found in many manuscripts. But Baroda edition printed this portion as a genuine part of the text.

At the end of the 6th chapter there was a section of śānta rasa. This portion was fully doubtful. In the beginning of 6th chapter śānta rasa was not included in the list of rasa by Bharat. The section of rasa was only found in trivendrum manuscript. But the commentary of Abhinavagupta was available on this portion; therefore the portion was published as a genuine part of edition.

Similarly, at the end of the 7th chapter there was a sat of 10 verses (120-130) which was omitted in some manuscripts. Baroda edition printed this portion as a genuine text.

Difficulties in reconstruction of the text

With so many involuntary and voluntary corruption in manuscripts, it was a very difficult task to re construct the text of Nāṭyaśāstra. For example, the second chapter of the text and commentary presented many omissions and incorrect readings. This chapter was related to the construction of the theatre. Subject matter of this chapter was highly scientific and technical. The construction of ancient Indian theatre was a very interesting subject. Many scholars tried to make a sketch of theatre according to Nāṭyaśāstra and Abhinavabharati. It created many unsolved problems of this chapter like the shape and dimensions of theatre, parts of theatre indicated by Madhyama, Mattavarani, Rangapitha, Rangasirsha etc. some scholars deeply studied this subject and found solutions for the problems. But they were not satisfied with their own decisions. Many technical terms used by Bharata related to construction of theatre have not been correctly understood by editors. At last with the help of a civil engineer D. Subba Rao the reconstruction of second chapter had took place.

Similarly in 4th chapter where 108 dancing poses were described by Bharata was heavily damaged and fully corrupted. Fortunately in the temple of Nataraja at Chidambaram, 93 postures were cut on rocks with verses of Nāṭyaśāstra beneath each posture. Remaining fifteen were either damaged or transformed during repairs.

In spite of all difficulties the first full edition of Nāṭyaśāstra was published from Gaekwad Oriental Series. This edition was mainly guided by the commentary of Abhinavagupta, because many verses which were supported by manuscripts but not commented by Abhinavagupta, had been taken under the brackets to show that they are not genuine parts of the text according to Abhinavagupta. This method was not satisfactory. The commentary of 7th and 8th chapter was missing and editor gave his own commentary on this portion.

Principles of preparing the edition of Nāṭyaśāstra

Dealing with all these problems editor made some principles for making a critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra.

1. In the reconstruction of the text, readings accepted by the commentator were given the first preference. The variants of the manuscripts were given only in footnote.
2. The reading of one manuscript agreeing with the view of the commentator selected as a genuine part of the text.
3. The portion which were inconsistent with other text of Nāṭyaśāstra, and the commentary of abhinavagupta was not available on that were put in semi-circular brackets.
4. Wherever manuscripts presented different readings, only those recensions were taken which were more suitable to the context. Other readings were given in the footnotes.
5. Those variants, which were neither supported by the commentator nor suitable for the context were put in footnote.
6. Where ever commentary was not available, the editor gave his own commentary.

Thus it was a difficult task to re construct a critical edition of Nāṭyaśāstra because the original manuscripts were so incorrect. That's why a scholar said that even if Abhinavagupta descended from heaven and saw the manuscripts, he would not easily restore his original readings. It is in fact an impenetrable jungle through which a rough path now has been traced ^[7].

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