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Problems and Solutions in Manuscript Editing

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Abstract: Manuscript editing is increasingly becoming a popular and prioritized field of research across various universities. However, novice researchers often face significant hurdles at the beginning of their journey. Common challenges include understanding how to search for manuscripts (Puthis), identifying reliable archives, and verifying whether a particular work has been previously edited or published. Having personally experienced these difficulties and witnessed my peers and juniors struggle with the same, I noted a significant lack of research papers addressing these practical concerns. Driven by this gap and a desire to assist future scholars, this paper serves as a comprehensive guide. It details the potential obstacles one might encounter before commencing manuscript editing and provides practical solutions to overcome them. Through this study, I aim to provide a clear roadmap for researchers to navigate the complexities of manuscript editing with confidence.

Keywords: Matrika, Manuscript, Manuscript editing, Novice researchers.

Manuscript — What is a Manuscript?

What is a Pāṇḍulipi or Manuscript?

Generally, a handwritten book is called a manuscript. A manuscript is also called Mātrikā; in Bengali it is called Puthi, and in English it is called Manuscript.

Let us understand this in more detail.

The word Pāṇḍu means grey or yellowish-white, that is, a document written in a pale or faded colour. Naturally, very old writings do not remain as fresh as newly written texts; they become faded or greyish over time.

The word Mātrikā is a Sanskrit term meaning letters or a collection of letters, and in a broader sense it means a handwritten book.

The English word Manuscript comes from Latin:

- Manus = hand
- Scriber = to scratch or write

Thus, manuscript literally means something written or inscribed by hand.

Ancient texts written on palm leaves, birch bark, paper, or cloth are called manuscripts, mātrikā, puthi, or manuscripts.

Problems in Manuscript Editing

Every task has challenges, and the joy lies in solving them and completing the work. Manuscript editing is no exception. Problems will arise, and our goal is to solve them and complete the editing process.

New researchers should know what problems may arise in manuscript editing:

1. Searching for manuscripts
2. Difficulty in knowing whether the manuscript is unpublished
3. Lack of knowledge of scripts (palaeography)
4. Determining correct readings in damaged or incomplete manuscripts
5. Finding information about the author

Problems and Solutions

1. Problems in Manuscript Search and Their Solutions

The first problem for new researchers is **how to search for manuscripts**.

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Many universities give only a basic idea during preliminary research training, but that is not enough.

Should researchers visit many libraries physically?

Not necessarily.

The first step should be **searching from home**.

How can this be done?

Researchers should first consult the **New Catalogus Catalogorum (NCC)**, published by the University of Madras.

Currently it has **42 volumes**.

Since it is difficult to purchase all volumes, researchers should:

- Visit nearby libraries where NCC is available, or
- Search online.

However, all 42 volumes are not available as PDFs everywhere.

They are available on the **Vandemataram Library Trust website**.

Researchers can search the NCC by:

- Author name
- Title of the work
- Browsing volumes individually

What information does NCC provide?

It contains:

- Author's name
- Titles of works
- Location of manuscripts (libraries/collections)
- Brief description of the work
- Brief author information (if known)
- Publication details (rarely available)

Researchers must select texts according to their topic.

Next step:

After listing manuscripts, researchers should consult the **catalogues of the libraries** where they are preserved to learn:

- Writing material (paper/palm leaf etc.)
- Script used
- Number of folios

The first volume of NCC provides details of library catalogues.

Researchers can also use:

- IGNCA website for digital manuscript catalogues across India
- National Mission for Manuscripts website for detailed manuscript data

2. Problem of Knowing Whether a Text is Published

This is one of the biggest problems.

There is **no complete book** listing which texts are published or unpublished.

NCC provides limited publication details.

Researchers must:

- Search libraries and publishers
- Search online
- Consult supervisors and scholars working on manuscripts

3. Problems in Script Knowledge (Palaeography)

Researchers should choose manuscripts written in scripts they can read.

Sometimes they must learn new scripts.

Important note:

Scripts such as **Grantha, Malayalam, Telugu, and Devanagari** contain many similar-looking letters, so researchers must be careful.

4. Editing Single or Damaged Manuscripts

If multiple copies exist → collect as many as possible.

If only one copy exists → problems increase:

- Illegible text
- Torn pages
- Insect damage

Solutions:

- Collect other copies if available
- If it is a commentary, collect the main text and published commentaries
- Reconstruct missing readings through comparison and inference

5. Problem of Identifying the Author

It is common that manuscripts **do not mention the author clearly**.

Texts were written for preserving knowledge, not for fame.

Sometimes only the name is mentioned or not mentioned at all.

How to identify the author?

Check:

- **Mangala-charana (invocation)** at the beginning
- **Colophon (Pushpika)** at the end or middle, which may include:

- Author's name
- Scribe's name
- Date

If only the author's name is known:

- Find all authors with that name
- Collect information about them
- Use logical arguments to identify the correct author.

Endnotes

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