

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enlisting Manuscripts and Ancient Texts Related to Ayurveda Available in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Manuscripts are handwritten documents that preserve the rich heritage of the country. Nepal has a rich collection of manuscripts in both public and private collections. They are mainly stored in the National Archive, Kaiser Library, and Asa Library and have been digitized with the help of the German government. The manuscripts related to Ayurveda have hardly been explored, with only a few manuscripts edited and published. This research work enlists the manuscripts stored in Nepal and makes an attempt to group them into various branches of Ayurveda.

Methods: The details of the manuscripts available in Nepal in the National Archive, Government of Nepal, various libraries and in personal possessions were recorded according to the manuscript detail form of the National Mission for Manuscripts, Government of India.

Result and Conclusion: They were then analyzed based on language, script, materials, and subject or branches of Ayurveda. During the study, a total of 2324 manuscripts were studied and they were written in seven different languages, eleven different scripts, in eight different materials and were related to eighteen different branches of subjects of Ayurveda. These manuscripts need to be explored to enhance our understanding of Ayurveda.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Manuscripts are ancient, unique, valuable, and rare documents preserved by our ancestors, and they play a significant role in documenting the heritage of the people in the country. Nepal has been a safe place for storing and preserving these manuscripts, especially during the Mughal and British rule when the rich cultural heritages and treasures were under threat. Moreover, Ayurveda was no exception to these atrocities. Apart from that, Nepal has been a place to learn and explore for many learned scholars such as Vyasa and Panini. During the Lichchhavi and Malla rule, manuscripts were stored and copies of ancient texts were also made by the direct order of the King. One such example is the *Sushruta Samhita* available in Kaiser Library. *Ayurveda* flourished under the patronage of these kings and so did the

scholarly activities. They have been stored and preserved under the direct supervision of the kings. In present Nepal, the manuscripts and ancient texts related to Ayurveda are stored as national treasures in the National Archive and some libraries and many are still in the personal possession. To uplift the knowledge and to explore the potential of *Ayurveda*, it is very necessary that these manuscripts should be studied and explored. But though Nepal being rich in this heritage and treasure, very less work has been done. It is the need of the hour to explore and bring into light the hidden knowledge of Ayurveda and allied sciences to address the growing health problems. Thus, it is essential to make a record of the available manuscripts and texts and enlist and categorize them for further research.

1.2. Rational/Justification

There has been very less work done in the field of manuscripts of Ayurveda. The national archive holds a great collection of manuscripts and ancient texts but they have not been categorized or studied.

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Furthermore, they have been stored in libraries around the country and many are still in personal possessions. There is no data about what these manuscripts and texts are and to which field of Ayurveda they are related. It is sad to say that the governing body of Ayurveda, Department of Ayurveda and Alternative medicine does not have any record or list of the available manuscripts. Hence, this study will be helpful in making a list and catalog of the manuscripts related to Ayurveda and will form the base for further research in the future.

1.3. Objectives

1.3.1. General objective

To create a list or index of Ayurveda manuscripts and ancient texts available in Nepal.

1.3.2. Specific objective

1. To enlist the available Ayurveda manuscripts and ancient texts
2. To categorise the available manuscripts according to the branches of Ayurveda.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Methodology of the Study

- Collect and collate the list of available Ayurvedic manuscripts from the National Archive and other libraries of Nepal.
- Collect and enlist the Ayurvedic manuscripts in personal possession and with traditional practitioners.

2.1.1. Ethics statement

Ethical clearance and permission were taken from the Nepal Health Research Council to conduct the study. In case of the research participants who wanted to be a part of the research, prior informed consent was taken for their participation or non-participation in the study.

2.2. Variables

1. Language - Sanskrit, Nepali, Newari, Maithili, Singhalese, Hindi, Avadhi
2. Script - Devnagari, Newari, Maithili, Bhujimola
3. Material - Tadapatra, Bhurjapatra, Thyasaphu, Nepali paper
4. Subject - Kayachikitsa, Shalya tantra, Rasayana, Vajikarana, Shalakya tantra, Kaumaryavritta, Vikruti vigyana, Dravyaguna, Rasashastra and Bhaishajyakalpana, Stri-Prasuti, Bhutacidya, Agadatantra.

2.3. Research Method

Qualitative.

2.3.1. Data collection technique

- Institutional: Analysis of the catalog of the respective institutions
- Individuals: Data collection through the manuscript details form.

2.3.2. Data collection tool

- Institutional: Catalog and index of the respective institutions.
- Individual: Manuscripts detail form prepared as per the norms of the National Mission for Manuscripts, Government of India.

2.3.3. Criteria for sample selection

2.3.3.1. Inclusion criteria

1. Manuscripts and ancient texts stored and possessed in Nepal.
2. Manuscripts and ancient texts related to Ayurveda.

3. Manuscripts and ancient texts enlisted in the catalog of the institutions in case of institutional possession.
4. Manuscripts and ancient texts in personal possessions that are more than 75 years old from the implementation of Archive Protection Act 2046.

2.3.3.2. Exclusion criteria

1. Manuscripts not related to Ayurveda
2. Manuscripts <75 years old from the implementation of Archive Protection Act 2046.

2.4. Literary Review

Nepal has been at the forefront of Ayurveda since ages and has carried the legacy of Ayurveda which is more than three millennia old. An estimated 10000 manuscripts have been produced over a period of 1500 BC to 1900 AD, covering different aspects of positive health, medicine, and surgery.^[1] Manuscript is derived from the Latin word “Manu scriptus” meaning “written by hand”^[2] and is a recording of information created by someone at some time. No clear definition of manuscripts according to the Government of Nepal has been available but according to the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of Government of India, a manuscript is a “hand written document of scientific, historical, literary or of esthetic value which is at least 75 years old.”^[3] The Government of India has been working in the preservation and documentation of the manuscripts through the National Mission for Manuscripts, started from 2003 with the mandate to unearth and preserve the vast manuscript wealth of India.^[4] No such institutional mission or work has been undertaken in Nepal.

National Archive, established under the Archive Preservation Act 2046, is the authorized body for the preservation of manuscripts. In the case of Ayurvedic manuscripts, it stores 881 manuscripts.^[5] However, it has been mainly involved in the preservation and storage of the manuscripts. Recently, it has published the translated version of two Ayurveda manuscripts, Ajrnamanjarī and Anupnamanjarī. Apart from the National Archives, manuscripts have been stored in Nepal in many libraries, notably the Kaiser Library, Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Asa Archives, and Tribhuvan University Central Library. Apart from these, many manuscripts are still preserved by individuals as personal treasures.

Very less work has been done in the field of manuscripts. The most notable and important work is the Nepal German Manuscript Cataloguing Project. The Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project (NGMPP) was founded in 1970 under an agreement between the then His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the German Oriental Society and was financed by the German Research Council (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). The project was established to preserve Nepal's extraordinary wealth of old manuscripts, blockprints, and historical documents on microfilm.^[6] Under this project, a comprehensive descriptive catalog of more than 180000 manuscripts was prepared.^[7] Among the manuscripts that have been microfilmed by the NGMPP are found the oldest preserved manuscript of a Vedic text (dating from the 11th century), the oldest preserved Pali manuscript, and a manuscript of the Skanda Purana, which is possibly the oldest dated Nepalese manuscript (810 AD).^[5] Few more studies were conducted by individual scholars, like the “Preservation of historic ephemera manuscripts of Nepal” by Kanak Mani Dixit and “Case study of four libraries in Nepal” by Bina Vaidya.^[8,9]

Nepal has an immense scope in the field of Ayurveda and can be a

frontrunner in this field if these manuscripts are explored and the knowledge is disseminated and utilized.

3. RESULTS

The total number of manuscripts included in this study is 2324. Most of the manuscripts included are those which are stored in the national library and archive of Nepal. They were assessed from the Indic Manuscript catalog of Nepal German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NGMCP), University of Hamburg, Online Catalogues, National Archives of Nepal of National Archive, Government of Nepal,^[10] and DRKRM Library Online Catalogue of Nepal Knowledge Center Services.^[11] The enlisted manuscripts were analyzed on the basis of their language, script, materials, and branches of Ayurveda.

3.1. Language

Of the 2324 manuscripts studied, 1574 were in Sanskrit, 307 in Newari, 260 in Nepali, 61 in Sanskrit and Newari, 43 in Sanskrit and Nepali, 23 in Hindi, 10 in Sanskrit and Hindi, 9 in Nepali and Hindi, 7 in Newari and Nepali, 4 in Newari and Hindi, 4 in Sanskrit, Nepali and Newari, 13 in Maithili, 1 in Avadhi, 1 in Singhalese, 1 in Newari, Nepali and Hindi, 1 in Sanskrit, Nepali and Hindi. The catalog did not mention the language in 12 manuscripts whereas has mentioned it as unknown in 3 manuscripts.

3.2. Scripts

In total, 12 different scripts were found to be used in the manuscripts. The majority of the manuscripts, 1302 had Devanagari as the script, Newari was used in 947, Maithili in 29, Ancient Newari in 12, Bhujimola in 11, Devanagari and Newari in 2, Bhujimola and Newari in 1, Ancient Devanagari in 1, Gujarati in 1, Guptakshara in 1, Singhalese in 1, and Utkirnakshara in 1. The name of scripts in 15 manuscripts are not available.

3.3. Materials

Different kinds of materials have been used to write manuscripts. The materials used in 916 manuscripts were not available in the catalog. Nepali kagaj, traditional handmade paper, was used in 485 manuscripts, Madhyakalina kagaj in 261 manuscripts, Tadapatra or palm-leaves in 138 manuscripts, Thyasaphu or leporello in 510. 9 manuscripts were in the form of printed books and 2 in the form of book, and 1 was in the form of lithograph.

3.4. Branch of Ayurveda

Out of the 2324 manuscripts, 872 manuscripts belonged to Kayachikitsa, 461 to Rasashastra and Bhaishajyakalpana, 277 to Dravyaguna vigyana, 208 to Mantrachikitsa, 191 to Roga tatha Vikritivigyana, 102 to Ashvayurveda, 36 to Pakashastra, 21 to Kaumaryavritta, 19 to Gajayurveda, 17 to Svathavritta, 16 to Bhutavidya, 14 to Shalya, 13 to Agadatantra, 13 to Rasayana, 11 to Stri-prasuti vigyan, 9 to Shyenayurveda, 8 each to Vajikarana and Shalakya, and 1 to literature (Amarakosha). 27 manuscripts could not be categorized.

4. DISCUSSION

Ayurveda is an age-old science that has been tested time and again throughout its existence. The knowledge of Ayurveda was passed from generation to generation in oral tradition. When the need arose for the

preservation and transmission of knowledge to populations separated by place and time, the art of writing emerged. Through the recording of thoughts and ideas, it became possible to transmit knowledge not only to future generations but also to distant lands. Writing created a permanent record of an idea or information. A manuscript is a written record of information created by someone at some time. Manuscripts of Ayurveda are handwritten records of scholars, their findings, understanding, and interpretations of the knowledge and texts. It is believed that only 10% of the knowledge of the Ayurveda manuscripts has been explored.

Nepal, situated between the Gangetic plains and the Tibetan plateau, has been a place for meditation and solace for the scholars of these two places to pursue their works. It has also served as a place for the preservation and storage of their works, especially due to regular regime change and political unrest in the neighboring. Manuscripts related to Ayurveda have been stored in Nepal, especially in the Kathmandu valley. They have been stored in especially in the National Archive, the Kaiser Library, and in other private libraries and as personal collections.

During the course of study, the published catalog and the online catalog of the National Archive were analyzed and studied. The catalog of manuscripts of the Kaiser Library could not be obtained as the library was closed for renovation and also due to the ongoing lockdown. Asa Archive was also closed due to the ongoing lockdown. However, all the stored and preserved manuscripts in all three institutions were photographed and microfilmed under the Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project (NMMPP), and a detailed catalog of these manuscripts was prepared under the Nepal German Manuscript Cataloguing Project (NMMCP). The catalog was searched and screened for the subject “Ayurveda” and analyzed, and a detailed list was prepared. Madan Puraskar Library did not store any manuscript related to Ayurveda but stored works of other streams. Similarly, no manuscripts related to Ayurveda were found in the Tribhuvan University Central Library. The online digital catalog of Nepal National Library and Dilliraman-Kalyani Regmi Memorial Library did not show any manuscripts related to Ayurveda. Many manuscripts are still stored in places outside the Kathmandu valley and they could not be accessed due to the limited resources and budget and also due to the ongoing lockdown.

The data thus collected were analyzed under the variables: Language, script, materials, and subject.

On observation of the result thus obtained, it was found that the manuscripts were written in seven different languages, with Sanskrit being the major one with 1574 manuscripts [Table 1]. The Newari language, 307 manuscripts and the Nepali language, 260 manuscripts, formed another two major languages. 23 manuscripts were in the Hindi language. One manuscript was written in each Avadhi and Singhalese language and 3 in Maithili language. 134 manuscripts were written in two languages and 6 were written in three languages. Out of 134 manuscripts, four manuscripts were written in Newari and Hindi, 7 were written in Newari and Nepali, 43 were written in Sanskrit and Nepali, 61 were written in Sanskrit and Newari, and 10 were written in Sanskrit and Hindi. Four manuscripts were written in Sanskrit, Nepali, and Newari; 1 in Sanskrit, Nepali, and Hindi; and 1 manuscript in Newari, Hindi, and Nepali. The catalog did not mention the language in 12 manuscripts whereas mentioned as unknown language in 3 manuscripts.

Materials on which the manuscripts were written were analyzed and it was found that eight different kinds of materials were used [Table

2]. The type of materials of 916 manuscripts was not mentioned. 510 manuscripts were written in the form of Thyasaphu or Leporello, 485 were written on Nepali Kagaj, 261 on Madhyakalina Kagaj, 138 on Tadapatra or Palm-leaves. Nine manuscripts were in the form of printed books and 2 in the form of book. One was in the form of lithograph and two manuscripts were written on Madhyakalina Kagaj and Nepali Kagaj.

11 Scripts on which were manuscripts were written were analyzed and it was found that ten different scripts were used [Table 3]. Scripts of 15 manuscripts were not available. 1302 manuscripts were written in Devanagari script, 947 were written in Newari script, and 29 were written in Maithili letter. Ancient Newari script was used in 12 manuscripts, ancient Devanagari in 1 manuscript, and Bhujimola script was used in 11 manuscripts. Gujarati, Guptakshara, Singhalese, and Utkirnakshara were used individually in one manuscript. A combination of Bhujimola and Newari script was used in 1 and a combination of Devanagari and Newari script was used in two manuscripts.

The manuscripts included in the study comprised 18 different subjects and branches of Ayurveda [Table 4]. One belonged to Sanskrit literature and it has been included in the list as it was classified as an Ayurveda manuscript in the catalog. The subject of 27 manuscripts could not be established. Of the remaining manuscripts, 872 belonged to Kayachikitsa, 461 belonged to Rasashastra and Bhaishajyakalpana, 277 belonged to Dravyaguna vigyana, 208 belonged to Mantrachikitsa, 191 belonged to Roga tatha Vrikriti Vigyana, 102 belonged to Ashvayurveda, 36 belonged to Pakashastra, 21 belonged to Kaumaryavritta Shastra, 19 belonged to Gajayurveda, 17 belonged to Svasthavritta, 16 belonged to Bhutavidya, 14 belonged to Shalya, 13 belonged to Rasayana, 13 belonged to Agadatantra, 11 belonged to Stri and Prasutitantra, 9 belonged to Shyenayurveda, and 8 belonged to Vajikarana and Shalakyatantra each.

4.1. Limitations of the Study

There were many hindrances experienced during the course of study. The main being the ongoing global pandemic of COVID-19 disease and the consequences developed thereafter.

1. Delay in ethical clearance: The enforcement of the lockdown by the Government of Nepal to tackle the crisis delayed the process of ethical clearance of the research from the Nepal Health Research Council as a result of which the duration of the study was shortened.
2. Limitation in data collections: The lockdown had forced the government and public libraries and archives, mainly National Archive, Kaiser Library, Asa Archive to shut down. Furthermore, the restriction on travelling was one of the main reasons that limited the number of responses and data from individuals 12 and traditional practitioners. They were difficult to approach and many do not have access to information technology and the internets. Therefore, it led into limitations in data collection.
3. Reluctance of traditional practitioners to participate in the study: The traditional practitioners and individuals who were believed to have possession of manuscripts were reluctant to participate in the study.
4. Classification of manuscripts: There may still be some errors in the classification of the manuscripts as the classification has been done on the basis of beginning and end line.

5. CONCLUSION

Nepal has a huge collection of manuscripts related to Ayurveda but

most of them have been taken away by foreign researchers and scholars and have been stored in various museums and as personal collections abroad. Many manuscripts are still available in Nepal, mostly stored in the Nepal Archives and Kaiser Library and many other governmental and personal libraries. Apart from that, it is believed that many manuscripts are stored by individuals as their personal possessions and cultural and familial heritages.

The manuscripts stored in government institutions were easily accessible. Those in the personal possessions were extremely difficult to access. One of the many reasons for this may be due to the fear of exploitation of their heritage and knowledge. Another reason could be their reluctance to share their knowledge with people outside their communities. Therefore, manuscripts in personal possession could not be included in the list.

Overall, 2324 manuscripts have been enlisted and analyzed. It was found that the enlisted manuscripts were written in seven different languages and ten different scripts. They were written on eight different materials and composed of eighteen different subjects of Ayurveda.

This list does not contain all the manuscripts related to Ayurveda available in Nepal. It is essential to make a comprehensive, detailed, and descriptive catalog of the manuscripts that are available in Nepal. There is an urgent need to initiate a program similar to the National Mission for Manuscripts (NAMAMI) started by the Government of India for the preservation and exploration of manuscripts. In case 13 of Ayurveda, this can be achieved by the establishment of a section for manuscripts and manuscriptology under the Department of Ayurveda and Alternative Medicine or a separate joint project under the Department of Ayurveda and Alternative Medicine and the National Archive can be started. The exploration of these manuscripts can be helpful in understanding Ayurveda better and bring to light the hidden knowledge of Ayurveda and allied sciences to address the growing health problems.

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4. Madan Puraskar Pustakalaya, Lalitpur, Nepal.

7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have contributed equally to conception, design, data collection, analysis, drafting, and final approval of the manuscript.

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9. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study does not require ethical clearance as it is a literature review.

10. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

11. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for review purposes only from the principal investigators.

12. PUBLISHERS NOTE

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Table 1: Language of manuscripts

Language	Number of manuscripts
<i>Avadhi</i>	1
<i>Hindi</i>	23
<i>Maithili</i>	3
<i>Nepali</i>	260
<i>Nepali+Hindi</i>	9
<i>Newari</i>	307
<i>Newari+Hindi</i>	4
<i>Newari+Nepali</i>	7
<i>Newari+Nepali+Hindi</i>	1
<i>Sanskrit</i>	1574
<i>Sanskrit+Nepali</i>	43
<i>Sanskrit+Newari</i>	61
<i>Sanskrit+Hindi</i>	10
<i>Sanskrit+Nepali+Newari</i>	4
<i>Sanskrit+Nepali+Hindi</i>	1
<i>Singhalese</i>	1
<i>Unknown</i>	3
<i>Not Mentioned</i>	12

Table 2: Scripts used in manuscript

Materials used	No. of manuscripts
Book	2
Lithograph	1
Madhyakalina Kagaj	261
Madhyakalina Kagaj+Nepali Kagaj	2
Not Available	916
Nepali Kagaj	485
Printed Book	9
Tadapatra	138
Thyasaphu	510

Table 3: Scripts of manuscripts

Scripts	No. of manuscripts
<i>Ancient Devanagari</i>	1
<i>Ancient Newari</i>	12
<i>Bhujimola</i>	11
<i>Bhujimola+Newari</i>	1
<i>Devanagari+Newari</i>	2
<i>Devanagari</i>	1302
<i>Gujarati</i>	1
<i>Guptakshara</i>	1
<i>Maithili</i>	29
<i>Newari</i>	947
<i>Singhalese</i>	1
<i>Utkirnakhshara</i>	1
<i>Not Available</i>	15

Table 4: Manuscripts according to branches of Ayurveda

Branch of Ayurveda	No. of manuscripts
<i>Not Mentioned</i>	27
<i>Agadatantra</i>	13
<i>Ashvayurveda</i>	102
<i>Bhutavidya</i>	16
<i>Dravyaguna</i>	277
<i>Gajayurveda</i>	19
<i>Kaumaryavritta</i>	21
<i>Kayachikitsa</i>	872
<i>Literature</i>	1
<i>Mantrachikitsa</i>	208
<i>Pakashashtra</i>	36
<i>Rasashastra</i>	461
<i>Rasayana</i>	13
<i>Roga Tatha Vikriti</i>	191
<i>Shalakya</i>	8
<i>Shalya</i>	14
<i>Shyenayurveda</i>	9
<i>Stri-Prasuti</i>	11
<i>Svasthavritta</i>	17
<i>Vajikarana</i>	8