

The Criticism and Transmission of Texts in Classical India*

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Compared with the Greek and Latin fields, the systematic study of the concept of textual criticism in classical India has made little progress, despite the quality of work produced by specialists.¹ And yet research of this nature would probably lead, paradoxically, to a clearer formulation of the aims and methods of modern critical editions of Indian texts.

Did the traditional Indian world know the concept of critical edition? The question seems naïve, but modern scholars are not unanimous in the answer they give to it. There are three possible positions. The first, which is inclined to say no, holds that amendments made to texts in the transmission process are *a priori* contrary to the ideals of modern philology. We simply need to apply the methods currently in use for western literature. According to the second, which is not so sceptical, some Indian classical methods do mirror those of the western-style critical edition then considered as an honouring and flattering credential. The third view, which is more pragmatic, maintains that, if there was indeed a traditional Indian textual criticism, its basic aim was not to reconstruct the text in its original form as the author conceived it (despite his own possible copying mistakes), but to settle on the 'best' version or the one the author should have written.² This position appears the most promising, even if it requires some modification.

This article explores the more general question as to whether or not textual criticism existed in classical India. Without claiming to provide even the outlines of a definitive conclusion, it aims to discover the present state of knowledge and open a debate with a view to stimulating future research. With this in mind it will draw almost exclusively on Sanskrit texts and will not include the Islamic book, and this will of course limit the scope of its remarks.

Written transmission in India

Let us briefly review some of the conditions in which writings were transmitted in classical India. Compared with oral transmission, writing enjoyed relatively low prestige.³ In the chain running from the author to his audience, the manuscript was a much weaker link in India than in the western tradition. Two well known texts are a good illustration of this, each in its own way, since the forms of oral transmission that were the channel were of very different kinds. The first text is the *Rgveda*, which was transmitted orally without

alteration over 25 centuries thanks to a set of mnemonic techniques known only to certain groups of brahmins: and so the faithfulness of the spoken Vedic word far surpassed that of written transmission. By contrast, the other text, the epic of the *Mahâbhârata* (*Mbh*), which varied with the bards who recited it, is crammed with grammatical errors and defies modern methods of critical editing.⁴

It is true that the 'book' as object did sometimes take on a certain importance; Hindu and Buddhist texts prescribe the cult of the book.⁵ The concept of the precious book developed in particular in Jainism and Buddhism, even if the manuscript's beautiful calligraphy sometimes masked a text of deplorable philological quality. In the politico-legal field the written text had an important part to play as a witness. Indian law treatises assess the authenticity of documents by their state of preservation, their veracity and the authorities they quote.⁶ The existence of forged epigraphs (on stone and metal plaques) also confirms the legal role of the archive.⁷ Carved on temple walls, royal edicts are intended to last as long as the heavenly planets. But these, after all, are specific types of written text. As far as the bulk of Indian religious and profane literature is concerned, teaching and interpretation by the master and the scholar ran alongside written transmission. The voice of living authority was valued more highly than the written text. It was the basis on which the choice was made as to which teachings were chosen. We shall return to this point below.

Other factors, mentioned by Indian texts themselves (cf. *infra*), contributed materially to the corruption and rearrangement of texts received in manuscript form. The poor physical conditions in which manuscripts were kept required them to be copied quite frequently throughout most of the sub-continent: poplar bark was not very tolerant of excessive heat or humidity, and palm leaf did not resist humidity and insects.⁸ The use of insecticides somewhat prolonged the life of paper manuscripts. In general ancient Indian or Indian-type manuscripts are rare, despite the antiquity of Sanskrit literature. The oldest come from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Kashmir and go back to the first (perhaps)⁹ to fifth century. It is not until the tenth to eleventh century that the number of surviving manuscripts from the sub-continent becomes substantial. They come from the north (including Nepal). In the south of the sub-continent, as far as I am aware, the oldest manuscripts go back to the sixteenth century, except for a few from the twelfth century.¹⁰

Manuscript transmission was highly dependent on the cultural and religious situation. Rapid destruction of manuscripts had two possible outcomes, according to the vitality of the tradition to which the text belonged. If the tradition was stable or spreading, the fact that its texts were often copied increased the risk of alteration. If it was declining, all its written records went the same way. This is why we have very few Buddhist manuscripts from the sub-continent, apart from the Himalayan area: although Buddhism started in India, it had almost disappeared there by the fourteenth century. Similarly, the writings of certain sects are known to us only through quotations from them in the surviving texts of other philosophical or religious movements. Intellectual fashion also influenced the decline or alternatively the growth in the number of manuscripts of a text. This was the case when, within a single discipline, one text replaced another in the same role: in logic the *Tarkasamgraha* replaced the *Tarkabhâsâ*, which had been the most popular basic text previously, with the result that today we have few manuscripts of and commentaries on the latter.

The ideal of the faithful copy

Indian 'textual criticism' occurred at the copying stage itself and when the copy was revised, as we shall see below. But we shall look first at the most common situation, where the scribe prepared a copy with the intention of being as faithful as possible to the original. When the task was completed, he would protest, like his western counterpart, that he had copied the manuscript just as he had read it.¹¹ The reproduction of the received text consists in theory of two phases: copying and revision.

Before he even began copying, the good scribe, according to the *Dānasagāra*, should choose the 'best' manuscript and read it through several times.¹² The copyist (*lekhaka*) was either the future reader of the new copy or a professional scribe. The future reader might be a student producing a trial copy (with the risk of error that implied) or a master who would occasionally amend the text as he was copying (but this is a case we shall examine later). As far as professional scribes were concerned, they sometimes belonged to the *kāyastha* caste (who were very frequently employed by the state administration). According to the *Kāvyaśikṣā*, a manual on how to write poetry, the author employed professional scribes to reproduce his work.¹³ Sometimes the copy was not made from a manuscript but from dictation; this alone may explain the recurring errors in certain manuscripts: if he suffered from defective hearing or was unable to distinguish certain phonemes, the copyist would systematically transcribe one sound as another.

To the extent that the scribe was trying to produce as faithful a copy as possible, the changes he introduced into the text were accidental: haplographs, transposed or repeated words or syllables, letters or syllables confused with others that were pronounced or written similarly, words or phrases incorrectly split. His mistakes sometimes arose from linguistic ignorance. They were also due in some cases to the poor physical quality of the original manuscript. When he could not read it, the copyist left a gap (expecting to fill it later) or put in some horizontal dashes one after the other. Or else, if he was less conscientious, he did neither and simply left out the illegible text. The script used was occasionally conducive to confusion; in *nāgarī* the shape of *ta* and *na* are quite similar, as are *va* and *ba*. Local language peculiarities affected the copying of Sanskrit texts too. Thus Sanskrit manuscripts from Bengal often confuse the three sibilants *ṣa*, *śa*, and *sa*, and even more often *va* and *ba*. Transliteration from one script to another caused some problems: similar or identical written symbols had a phonetic value in *ṣaradā* script different from what they had in *nāgarī* script.¹⁴

The phase after copying proper was theoretically revision, but this was often omitted in practice. According to the *Dānasagāra*, the scribe was supposed to compare his finished version with the original, particularly for conjunct consonants, vowel length, nasalizations shown as dots (*bindu*), and voiceless spirant called *visarga*.¹⁵ According to another text, the copyist carried out the revision with the assistance of a reader who read aloud (*vācaka*, *pāthaka*, *kathaka*).¹⁶ Thakur says a reviser, called *grantha-dhāraka*, corrected the mistakes made by those declaiming the texts either as they recited or on their manuscripts.¹⁷

Corrections made on sheets of paper manuscripts¹⁸ are easy to spot. The revision is often in a different handwriting from the copyist's. We shall not linger over the detail of this work: syllables, words or sentences taken out (with crossing out, circling, bracketing or underlining with dashes) and, if necessary, the correct form written in; often a marker

in the main text and a correction sometimes added between the lines, but more frequently in the margin or on extra sheets.¹⁹ These are only a few of the techniques used.

Even the revision of a copy claiming to be faithful to an original occasionally makes an attempt at textual criticism, and consciously departs from the received manuscript. Thus, on some manuscripts, passages can be found that have been crossed out and replaced even though *a priori* they do not contain any philological error or any failure of semantic coherence. In fact these interventions are the expression of a wish to modify directly the very meaning of the text.

Intentional alteration of the text: general remarks

The practice of traditional Indian textual criticism contrasts with the ideal of the faithful copy. The principle of absolute respect for the text as received gives way to the intention to examine it and to alter it if that seems necessary. All texts, be they from the field of belles-lettres, religion or technical matters, underwent intentional modifications of varying numbers in the course of their transmission.²⁰ What are the characteristic features of ancient Indian textual criticism? Some of its methods occasionally come close to modern techniques, for instance when they emphasize the need to consider the context of the passage, as well as the economy and overall shape of the work in the choice of readings, as the *Nandipurâna* instructs should be done.²¹ But the search for the original text is not its primary aim. When ancient Indian scholars chose a reading from among those that had been handed down, their purpose was not so much to rediscover what the author wrote or meant to write as to get a 'correct' text. Even if they sometimes claimed the reverse, they most often idealized the original author and rejected as inauthentic a phrase or passage that did not conform to the standards in vogue, or they justified defective readings by using convoluted erudite arguments.

The scholars of classical India took up two positions, the first in favour of preserving readings as received, the second in favour of altering them where there was good reason. The topical maxim: 'It is necessary to consider the situation of what is there' (*sthitasya gatiç cintanîyâ*) led to a preference for interpretation over alteration. It exhorts the reader or commentator to explain the reading as received, rather than correct it. This was a double-edged sword which, although it meant that justified *lectio difficilior* were preserved, also perpetuated recent errors and lent them the lustre of ancient readings.

A different, but not completely contradictory, approach was the readiness to modify when the power of meaning prevailed over the reading as received.²² The culture of the readers or audience determined how this maxim should be applied. Where it was purist but open to the possibility of change, it would preserve *lectio difficilior* as far as possible, using scholarly exegesis, other examples, comparisons, little known rules of grammar. Where it was popular, it tended to leave out all the phrases that were a little difficult.²³ But in general, apart from certain sacred texts, whose rigorous modes of delivery contributed to better preservation, the frequency with which copies were made promoted 'correction' of corruptions and the transformation of a *lectio difficilior* into a *lectio facilior*. Unlike the case of Greek, these two positions, the concern to preserve and the desire to standardize, as they became stronger, did not crystallize into two schools, one of them more 'Pergamene' and the other more 'Alexandrian'.²⁴

The choice of readings was very seldom based on the ideals of modern textual criticism. It was sometimes justified by aesthetic, philosophical, literary or other arguments, a few examples of which are given below. However, even when objective criteria were invoked, the choice followed the scribe's or the commentator's own wishes.

The same type of criterion might be used to justify preservation or change, depending on the context. Thus the argument consisting in the notion of traditional transmission (*paramparâ*), for example, sometimes supported a reading considered to be ancient (even if it was in fact recent) and sometimes legitimated an alteration that was endorsed by the living master's teaching (*guru, âcârya, upâdhyâyâ*)²⁵, whether he was religious or profane, since his word carried more weight even than the manuscript.

Intentional changes to a new copy

Scholars of classical India modified a received text on two occasions: when it was copied and when a commentary was produced. We shall disregard the case of the bad copy, which was quite frequent: accidentally or half intentionally the scribe introduced alterations, as Indian commentators note (cf. *infra*). We shall refer here only to intentional alterations. Rather than the scribe's ideal, the faithful copy, the Indian scholar preferred the ideal of the correct text. It is true that the distinction is not always as clear in practice: even when the scribe claimed to be seeking the ideal of the faithful copy, he often considered himself erudite enough to make any changes that seemed necessary to him (cf. *supra*). But we shall not discuss these nuances.

A faithfully copied manuscript did not always satisfy the Indian scholar. When he prepared or had someone prepare a new copy of a text, he was able to carry out an intellectual exercise that we could call textual criticism, during which the text as received partially disappeared, becoming in fact a new edition. No literary genre was protected from these alterations. Collections of legends, manuals of behaviour, philosophical treatises, devotional literature, gnomic and didactic works were particular targets. The changes cannot be identified physically, only by critical study, this time in the modern sense of the term.

We shall briefly point to just a few aspects of the topic. Scholars, who were sometimes scribes, omitted the readings that they considered grammatically or stylistically defective, but that in fact were likely to be original or close to the originals, in favour of readings they considered correct and sensible. Sometimes they also substituted certain words for others in order to avoid a hypermetrism, a solecism, unusual or archaic terms or turns of phrase, or else with an eye to improving a complex construction or making a passage easier to follow.

With their successive copies, scholar scribes normally developed works from the *textus simplicior* into the *ornatior*. Classical India preferred the inclusive to the exclusive text, even if the coherence of the work suffered.²⁶ During the copying process, the scribe occasionally or frequently included marginalia in the text proper: glosses, variants, additions. He sometimes incorporated the actors' didascalie into the main text, or else reading from another recension, especially when a well-known commentator approved it.²⁷ This occurs quite often in the *Mbh* and gives rise to contradictions in the narrative. Thus in *Mbh* 1, 116, 31, when king Pându, who has died in the forest, is being cremated, his wife

Mâdrî climbs on to the funeral pyre; but later, at 1, 117, 30, it says that the bodies are brought back to the Kuru capital before the funeral.²⁸ Indeed the presence of contradictory passages in the same text may be the inspiration for interpolations whose purpose is to reduce too glaring contradictions.²⁹

When they are added skilfully, interpolations are hard to spot. They often occur in varying guises, adding terms that complete a list, or moral maxims, repeating earlier stories or speeches, etc. Philosophical or religious movements incorporated doctrinal interpolations into literary texts, as the Râmânuja school did into the epic of *Râmâyana*.³⁰

At the far end of the spectrum is the creation of a fake: the rewriting of a text or the composition of a pastiche. There are many instances. A substantial number of texts were incorrectly attributed to famous authors. Pundits did not hesitate to rewrite works that were thought to have disappeared: when E. Hultzsch, a western Indianist, was looking for the manuscript of a commentary by Sâyana (fourteenth century) referred to by tradition, an Indian scholar suggested he might write the commentary. Another well-known India specialist, Bühler, mentions the partial rewriting of the *Nîlamata*. The mahârâja of Kashmir had asked the pundit Sâhebrâm to prepare a fair copy of the text. As the beginning was missing from all the manuscripts he consulted, the pundit rewrote it, thus supplying the sole complete text. This version nearly got away with being recognized as the only acceptable one, since all the other pundits in the region considered it much better than the versions in the existing manuscripts!³¹

The use of manuscripts by commentators

However, it is only modern research that has shed light on these intentional interventions in the manuscript transmission. By comparison the commentary, the second important source of information on textual criticism in classical India, has the advantage of expressing directly Indian ideas on this subject. Interpreters often justified the readings they preferred and mentioned, in the main text or their own commentary, the readings they rejected, thus assisting considerably in the preservation of texts: the more a work was commented on, the more this limited the number of alterations made to it. But this apparent advantage had a downside: readings that were neither retained nor rejected and that the commentary did not discuss were often forgotten. Furthermore, because the practice of commentary was a selective one (that is, affecting certain texts or genres more than others), it had uneven consequences for the pace of development of texts.

The commentaries' frequent remarks about the diversity of readings prove that their authors were in the habit of consulting several manuscripts or talking to other scholars. Quite often commentators make critical observations about the manuscripts before them. They say they have made comparisons in order to 'improve' the text. Thus Ânandatîrtha, a commentator on the *Mbh*, emphasizes³² the fact that scribes and other commentators have added or removed passages, or else have replaced one line with another, depending on their school of thought or out of ignorance. He adds that, having examined manuscripts from different regions, he will say (that is, write) exactly what the original author, Vyâsa, wrote. A *Mbh* commentator and 'editor', Nîlakantha (seventeenth century), claimed to have compared manuscripts of the epic from different regions of India in order to get what he thought were the best readings.³³ Using the northern version of the epic, he also

incorporated many passages from the southern version into the section entitled *Ādiparvan*.³⁴

Commentators assess the age of manuscripts, as 'ancient', 'too ancient' (*purātana, prâcîna*), 'contemporary' (*sâmprata*) or a manuscript whose text is 'in vogue' (*vartamâna*). They make observations about their country of origin, indicating the region they come from or noting less precisely something like 'from another region' (*deçântara*). They express an opinion on their authenticity: 'authentic' (*satpustaka*) or traditionally accepted (*cirantana*, literally 'for a long time').

It is sometimes difficult to decide whether these different remarks refer to what the text is written on or the text itself. The note 'worn' (*jîrna*) of course means the material alone. But the commentators' assessment sometimes seems to refer to both the text and the manuscript: some observe that the manuscript is so corrupted that its text cannot be corrected or that, because of the poor quality of the manuscript, only the original author could say what the true reading was, an admission of impotence.³⁵

The notion of *pâtha*, 'reading', which is more limited but more precise, refers only to the text. Commentators quote 'other readings' (*pâthântara*), 'variants' (*pâtha-bheda*). Their remarks concern whether readings are common or rare: 'occasionally found reading' (*kvâcītkah pâthah*), 'seen in some manuscripts' (*kesucit koçesu drstam*).³⁶ They are also about their age, and the fact that they are recent does not necessarily mean they are rejected. Some readings only appear 'here and there and in old manuscripts' (*kvacit kvacit prâcīnakoçesuca*),³⁷ some 'in contemporary manuscripts' (*idânîntanakoçesu*). The latter would therefore be readings in vogue, a concept that seems to differ from 'new' (*âdhunika*) reading (or 'new invention', *âdhunikakalpita*).³⁸ Should we understand this new reading as a conjecture of relative value as an authority, although unsupported by any manuscript? Finally mention must be made of the distinction drawn between traditional readings (*pâmka, sâmpradâyika*) and non-traditional ones (*apâmka*).³⁹

The appeal to the usage most commonly found in manuscripts often favours change at the expense of preservation. According to Abhinavagupta commenting on the *Nâtyaçâstra*, a certain passage is placed later in some manuscripts, but he opts to put it earlier, following the usage manuscripts more generally adopt.⁴⁰ This type of editorial choice certainly encourages the dismissal of older lessons. Commentators sometimes mention, without criticizing them, readings that differ from the one selected, or even contradict it, which is often equivalent to acknowledging implicitly that they have a certain validity or finding the difference in reading of secondary importance. Commentators frequently report the existence of a reading that must be rejected (*ksantavya*) as erroneous: they talk of 'faulty readings' (*apapâtha*), 'interpolations' (*praksipta*), transposed words.⁴¹ Then they sometimes use philosophical, grammatical and other arguments, applied to variants, or even to the organization of the text that is the subject of their commentary: for instance the philosophical schools break up certain aphorisms of the *Brâhmasûtra* differently. In these situations the unacceptability of the readings has less to do with mechanical causes, so to speak, than with doctrinal reasons or diverging approaches.

The 'copyist's mistake' (*lekhakadosa*) or, less frequently, the 'copy's mistake' (*lekhanadosa*) is one of the main reasons invoked by commentators to justify altering a text. In their view the error arises from the 'carelessness' (*pramâda*) or 'ignorance' (*bhrama*) of the scribe, who is sometimes called a 'bad copyist' (*kulekhaka*, more often than *asallekhaka*). According to commentators, it stems from the autograph manuscript, or else from the ones we might

call apographs, or even from recent copies. Indeed, it is said, occasionally the author himself or the first scribe added a useless reading (*sampâtâyâta*). Subsequent copyists perpetuated the first scribe's error (*prathamalekhakabhrama*). Or else contemporary copyists (*âdhunika, idânîntana*) are responsible for the mistake.⁴²

The 'mistakes' attributed to scribes are considered as either intentional interventions in the text or unintentional errors. It may be a case of a correction (which the manuscript being copied requires) incorporated in the wrong place, or an omission (the text omitted is said to have 'disappeared', *nasta, bhrasta*). Interpolations are of several types: either the inclusion of an extra passage (*adhika*) which is not in the original, or else the introduction of a marginal gloss or a comment in the main text.⁴³

Commentators also point out misprints due to misreading, in particular of similar letters (*aksarasâmyât*) which are in fact distinct.⁴⁴ Indeed Kśīrasvāmin makes an interesting remark about the *Lexicon of Amara*. The author of this work, Amara, is supposed to have made the term *bāla-tanaya*, which literally means 'young son', synonymous with *khadira*, the name for a species of tree. According to Kśīrasvāmin, *bāla-tanaya* comes from the misreading *bāla-putra*, 'young son', for *bāla-pattra*, which means 'small-leaved', one of the characteristics of the tree *khadira*.⁴⁵

The scholars of classical India also observe that local palaeographic traditions tend to give rise to errors. For example, in Malayalam manuscripts in the Prakrit language they point out the possibility of confusion related to the bindu, a circular graphic sign. When it comes before a consonant the bindu makes it double; when it is placed in a higher position, it marks a nasalization which should be pronounced before the consonant. A slight difference in its position (in the position of the bindu) alters the text: *amka* and *akka* are often indistinguishable in manuscripts of this type.⁴⁶

Towards a study of Indian textual criticism by literary genre?

The conscious inclination to change or preserve also varies according to the types of text studied. Traditional scholars were less restrained in criticizing works in the belles lettres genre, which had a restricted social influence, than religious works. The range of criteria governing choice of readings and their relative hierarchical position depended on the discipline at issue: although grammatical criteria were applied to both philosophy and poetry, the criterion of logical coherence was more important in the former field, for example. Is it necessary then to distinguish between several Indian textual criticisms according to literary genre?

In fact the usefulness of such a distinction is relative. The same commentator, especially when he specialized in several disciplines, made use of very different arguments from one page to another; he used whatever occurred to him. Furthermore, in each field the hierarchy of criteria varied according to the work. If grammatical standardization was often less strict in the tantric or âgamic genre, which gave it the reputation of being 'ungrammatical', the Sanskrit of several works in this genre, such as the *Tantrasamuccaya*, for instance, is in a highly literary style.

Let us look at a few concrete examples. Texts of a technical nature, treatises on the fine arts, for example, were very often subject to interpolation under the influence of local practices. First an attempt was made to interpret the text rather than modify it: a term

that normally meant 'saffron' would refer to a different plant that gave colour in a region where saffron did not grow. But this method had its limits. So when the stock of possible explanations was exhausted, the scribe or reviser replaced the original term with another that was closer to local conditions and was commonly used, by reworking the sentence if necessary.

Religious texts reveal both conservatism and change. Conservatism managed deliberately to resist the application of the grammatical rules most in use, as the example of the sacred formulae called mantra demonstrates. A good pronunciation of the mantra often over-rides its meaning. Thus we find the commentator Haradatta, who is glossing a text from the âpastambîya school to which he belonged, intentionally maintaining grammatically defective forms of certain mantras because it was the very forms he heard recited that he considered standard.⁴⁷

Many ritual works of the âgama and tantra type contain archaic readings that the most common classical grammatical usage would consider incorrect. But the most erudite commentators maintained these readings without the slightest hesitation. They felt that because it was the god himself who had uttered the text, his words must obey special grammatical rules.⁴⁸ According to them, the apparently 'incorrect' form was in fact *chândasa*, that is, 'archaic', and as such fell outside ordinary rules.⁴⁹ Or else, they said, ungrammatical readings were intended to confound pedants.⁵⁰ This tendency to preserve archaic readings accords with the criteria used by western critical editing which, as a matter of principle, gives the original text priority, even if it appears faulty, compared to what is grammatically correct when the text's logic and general composition require it.⁵¹

However, in religious texts, change often prevailed over conservatism, under the influence of various factors: linguistic standardization, a master's interpretation, social pressure, sectarian attitude. Examples are legion.

So these religious text were often amended according to the average level of grammatical knowledge of the time, which is why archaic lessons have been lost. This attitude is the reverse of the one we have just mentioned with reference to âgama and tantra, but is also to be found in those texts. Masters and religious authorities revised and set ritual rules. A work dating from earlier than the tenth century mentions that there are experts who are both scribes and revisers of old manuscripts: 'They make conjectures about the correct meaning (*vastuvicârana*) of corrupted passages.'⁵²

The social or ritual environment frequently determined changes in the texts. According to whether or not the region practised a certain rite, manuscripts of the same text may contain or not contain a chapter describing it. Or, and this is a well-known example, a mantra of the *Rgveda* was altered to legitimate *satî*, the self-immolation of widows on a pyre: the falsification rests on the common graphical confusion between the ligatures *gn* and *gr*: *agneh* replaced *agre* in the original phrase *â rohantu janayo yonim agre*, changing the meaning of 'Let the women mount upon the (proper) place in the beginning' into 'Let the women mount into the seat of fire', that is, on to a pyre.⁵³

Sects and religious schools altered texts to adapt them to their articles of faith or practices. Vedânta Deçika (thirteenth to fourteenth century) criticized priests who introduced passages denigrating an opposing sect into ancient works.⁵⁴ Vâdirâjatîrtha (sixteenth century) protested against changes to texts, whether additions or omissions, which were intentionally made to adapt the text to a sectarian ideology.⁵⁵ Buddhism provides a large number of similar examples. Interpolations into some of its texts bear witness to the

appropriation of one tradition's (the Hinâyana tradition) literature by another later one (the Mahâyâna tradition): *mahâyâna* passages were added to the *Divyâvadâna* as it was handed down. This phenomenon is sometimes evident in the heterogeneity of the language used. Indeed, the individuals who transmitted certain Buddhist texts gradually substituted Prakrit terms for Sanskrit terms, or the reverse, depending on the period.⁵⁶ The same question of prakritization or hypersanskritization arises with some Vedic and Hindu texts, for instance, in collections of sacred formulae.⁵⁷ So it is often difficult for the modern editor to decide whether a certain form is an unintentional corruption of the original (or the text as it was at a particular period) or the result of a deliberate emendation.⁵⁸

The religious adaptation of earlier texts is sometimes based on techniques which are common in belles-lettres. The *Pârçvâbhyudaya* by the Jain Jinasena (ninth century) borrowed sections of verses from the *Meghadûta* by Kâlidâsa (fourth or fifth century) and transformed this famous poem into a hagiography of Pârçvanâtha, a Jain saint. This method resembles a test which is familiar from poetry contests: 'completion of the unfinished verse' (*samasyâpûrana*), where the poet has to complete a fragment of a verse of poetry.

Standardizing disciplines (*çâstra*) – so-called pâninian grammar, rhetoric, poetics, dramaturgy – set parameters for the choice of readings in belles-lettres, but also in other fields, and although they were fairly objective, these parameters are not the ones used by modern textual criticism. And even then their objectivity is somewhat relative. It was dependent partly on the state of the discipline at a particular period and partly on the critic's level of education.

The state of the discipline might cause certain rules to be applied anachronistically. Because old pronunciation rules had been forgotten, expressions were 'corrected' that were in fact not corrupted. In the *Rgveda* the term *çrestha* used to be pronounced as three syllables (**çray-istha*). As this particular pronunciation disappeared, verse passages that required it were later considered metrically faulty and a filler syllable was added.⁵⁹ It is common to find such fillers inserted or to see a term substituted for another to make a metre which was considered regular.

The scholar's level of education was crucially important. In belles-lettres the author's prestige did not prevent his 'errors' (*dosa*) from being criticized. Some works on poetics did not hesitate to assert that the judgement of the enlightened amateur, the *sahrdaya*, was more valid than that of the poet himself. As far as textual criticism is concerned, the choice of a good reading will also depend on the reader's literary sensitivity. Take for example the notion of 'suggested sense' (*dhvani*), which is basic to Sanskrit poetics from Ânandavardhana (ninth century?). *Dhvani* means that the idea, the poetic sentiment should not be expressed directly but suggested. This notion, which was cultivated in high literary tradition, meant that certain *lectio difficilior* were chosen over *lectio faciliior*. So a passage from the *Râmâyana* (*Sundarakânda*, 1, 165)⁶⁰ gives two readings, the first: *çrîmân idam*, the second: *prahasann idam*. In fact it is the first reading that is the correct one, as the second (*prahasan*, 'laughing') directly stresses the irony of the main protagonist, an obviously clumsy feature in a passage that suggests this idea throughout. If this passage belonged to a text such as the *Mbh*, which is not very literary, one might hesitate. But it comes from the *Râmâyana*, the first great poetic work of classical Sanskrit literature. Here ancient literary criteria partly accord with those of modern textual criticism: the choice of reading is made not in relation to general criteria of correctness, but according to the characteristics of the text.

Conclusion

Corruption and alteration of texts, these were the general trends. Alteration arose almost mechanically from the rapid rate at which texts were recopied. But two factors slowed it down: commentary and, only in the case of certain Vedic texts, the power and precision of oral transmission, which was then more reliable than written. Two opposite effects stem from confidence in the tradition: preservation of even erroneous readings and intentional changes made by commentator or scribe, acting on their own authority as individuals considered qualified or believing themselves to be so. Alteration reveals ideologies and knowledge specific to a certain time.

Indian textual criticism of the classical period did not aim at retrieving the original work (except as an idealized text), but aimed to provide a 'good' text. Its criteria depended on the audience and the textual field under consideration. Their use was variable, often arbitrary. Even when commentators occasionally mentioned the age of manuscripts or readings, they never attempted to establish precise chronologies for the history of the texts' transmission. The lack of a real historical perspective and a shared approach to questions to be resolved, but also the relatively low prestige of manuscripts for the transmission of texts, constituted major obstacles in classical India to the creation of a textual criticism with methods similar to ours.

The rules for establishing the many so-called critical editions that were prepared in India and the west from the nineteenth century were often implicit. One might wonder how far Indian literary practice influenced this work. An in-depth examination of textual criticism in classical India will no doubt help to clarify the criteria used for the choice of readings and to identify how far Indian concepts are useful to us and when the modern editor should part company with them. In addition a history, even just an outline, of Indian textual criticism, perhaps by literary genre, would be especially welcome. The greatest obstacle is that it is frequently impossible to date texts precisely. Nevertheless we hope to be able to contribute to this history in subsequent publications.

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(translated from the French by Jean Burrell)

Notes

- * Since it was not possible to give international scientific transcription here, we are using the transcription widely adopted by L. Renou *et al.* pp. 120 *et seq.* of vol. 2 of *L'Inde classique* (reissued 1985); in addition the velar nasal is transcribed here as an anusvâra.
1. This article originates in an exchange of views organized by Christan Jacob, with the book *Tradition et critique des textes grecs* as its focus and its author Jean Irigoien present. I am grateful to those who took part in the discussion for their observations and take this opportunity also to express my admiration and gratitude to Jean Irigoien.
 2. See K.K. Raja (1982), Textual studies and editorial problems, in The Dr Kunjunni Raja Shashtyabdapurti Celebrations Committee (eds), *Râjasudhâ* (Madras), p. 3.
 3. C. Malamoud (1997), Noirceur de l'écriture. Remarques sur un thème littéraire de l'Inde ancienne, in V. Alleton (ed.), *Paroles à dire, paroles à écrire. Inde, Chine, Japon* (Paris, Éditions de l'EHESS), p. 186; G. Colas (1997), *L'écriture, visage de la parole: la tradition indienne*, in A. Zali and A. Berthier, *L'Aventure des écritures. Naissance* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France), p. 127.

4. V.S. Sukthankar (1944), in *V.S. Sukthanthar memorial edition*, P.K. Gode (ed.), vol. I: *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata* (Poona), pp. 108–130; p. 128: 'The *Mahābhārata* is not and never was a fixed rigid text, but is a fluctuating epic tradition, a *thème avec variations*, not unlike a popular Indian melody.'
5. For Hinduism see the *tantra* and *purāna* texts: T. Goudriaan (1996), Speech of the Gurus: Instances of Treatment of Sanskrit in Tantric literature, in Jan E.M. Houben (ed.), *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language* (Leiden, E.J. Brill), p. 272; Nīlakantha Çivācārya, *Kriyāsāra*, vol. II, edited by S. Narayanaswamy Sastry (1957) (Mysore), Upadeça 5, pp. 305–306; K.K. Dutta Çāstrī (1971), The Ritual of Manuscripts, *Our heritage* XIX, Part I (Jan–June), pp. 17–44; M.M. Chakravarti, Notes on the Language and Literature of Orissa, Parts I and II, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* LXVI, p. 330. For Buddhism, cf. Y. Bentor (1995), On the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and Dhāranīs in Stūpas and Images, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115 (2) (April–June), pp. 248–261; G. Schopen, The Phrase 'sa prthivīpradeçaç caityabhūto bhavet' in the *Vajracchedikā*: Notes on the Cult of the Book in *Mahāyāna*, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 17, pp. 147–181.
6. On the role of the written text in Indian law, see P.V. Kane (1946), *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol. III (Poona), pp. 306–316.
7. J.F. Fleet (1901), Spurious Indian Records, *The Indian Antiquary* XXX, pp. 201–233.
8. Particularly in southern India, where paper was used. According to Chakravarti, Notes, p. 330, the life expectancy of a palm-leaf manuscript in Orissa (east coast of the sub-continent, south of Bengal) was 30 or 40 years.
9. R. Salomon's (1997) provisional estimate of the date of certain manuscripts in the British Library (see his A Preliminary Survey of Some Early Buddhist Manuscripts Recently Acquired by the British Library, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 117 (2), p. 355).
10. According to J.P. Losty (1982), *The Arts of the Book in India* (London, British Library), p. 6.
11. See the standard phrase copyists add after the manuscripts' final colophons: 'As I read the written book, so I have copied it. Correct or not, I am not responsible for it' (quotation and French translation in J. Filliozat (1941), *Catalogue du fonds sanscrit* [in the Bibliothèque Nationale], Fasc. I (Paris), p. xviii). Compare A. Dain (1997), *Les manuscrits* (Paris, Diderot Éditeurs), Collection Pergame 1, p. 17 (reissue of the 1975 edition; previous editions 1949, 1964).
12. Following A.L. Thakur (1987), Manuscriptology from Indian Sources, *Journal of the Ganganatha Jha Kendriya Sanskrita Vidyapeetha* XLIII (January–December), p. 95.
13. N. Stchoupak and L. Renou (1946), *La Kāvyaṁimāmsā de Rājaçekhara traduite du sanskrit* (Paris, Imprimerie nationale), Cahiers de la Société Asiatique VIII, pp. 146, 155.
14. For further details, see S.M. Katre (1954), *Introduction to Indian Textual Criticism* (Bombay, Karnatak Publishing House), pp. 55–57; Raja (1982), p. 10; K.V. Sarma (1990), Variant Readings and Text Reconstruction in Indian Manuscriptology, in V. Dvivedī and J. Pāndeya (eds.) *Sampādana ke siddhānta aur upādāna* (Sarnath, Varanasi, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies), Samyak-Vāk Series V, p. 140.
15. According to Thakur (1987), p. 95.
16. Dutta Çāstrī (1971), p. 30.
17. Thakur (1987), p. 90.
18. Observations made in particular in the case of the manuscripts in the Chandra Shum Shere holding (Bodleian Library).
19. For further details, see Katre (1954), p. 11.
20. For this and the following paragraph, see Raja (1982), p. 3.
21. *Nandipurāna* quoted by Hemādri, *Caturvargacintāmaṇi*, vol. I: *Dānakhandā*, edited by Bharatacandra Çiromani (1873), (Calcutta), Biblioteca Indica, chap. 7, p. 550; passage adapted into English by Dutta Çāstrī, (1971), pp. 31–32.
22. *Pāthakramād arthakramo baliyān*, literally 'the strength of the meaning is more powerful than the strength of the reading (transmitted)'.
23. Manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* that preserve *lectio difficilior* are rare: see Sukthankar (1944), p. 101.
24. Compare Dain (1997), pp. 110–111.
25. See Goudriaan (1996), pp. 266, 267; Abhinavagupta, who, in his commentary on the *Nāṭyaçāstra* 16, 4, opts for a lesson that he says has been 'followed by the traditional transmission of our masters' (see M. Ramakrishnakavi's (1934) edition, vol. II (Baroda): Gaekwad's Oriental Series no. LXVIII, p. 295.

26. For this paragraph, see Katre (1954), pp. 61–2, 101, 110.
27. Sukthankar (1944), p. 101.
28. V.S. Sukthankar (1933 ed.), vol. I (Poona, Âdiparvan).
29. Sukthankar (1944), p. 110.
30. On the sectarian interpolations in the *Râmâyana*; see S. I. Pollock (1984), *The Râmâyana Text and the Critical Edition*, in *The Râmâyana of Vâlmiki: An Epic of Ancient India*, vol. I, *Bâlakânda*, Introduction and translation by R. P. Goldman (Princeton), p. 88, note 18.
31. M. Winternitz (1897), *The Mantrapâtha or the Prayer Book of the Âpastambins, edited together with the commentary of Haradatta and translated by M. Winternitz*, First part: *Introduction, Sanskrit text, Varietas lectionis, and Appendices* (Oxford, Clarendon Press), *Anecdota Oxoniensia*, p. xiv; G. Bühler (1877), *Detailed Report of a Tour in Search of Sanskrit Mss. Made in Kaçmir, Rajputana and Central India* (Bombay), Extra number of the *Journal of the Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, p. 33; see also the expression *lipijâla*, which refers to the fabrication of forged manuscripts, according to M. Banerjee (1987), *On Some Interesting Post-colophon Statements of Sanskrit Manuscripts Preserved in the Asiatic Society Library*, in S.K. Maity and U. Thakur (eds.), *Indological Studies, Prof. D.C. Sircar Commemoration Volume* (New Delhi), p. 78.
32. In his *Mahâbhâratatâtparyanirnaya*, II, 3, in *Sarvamûlagranthâh*, vol. II, ed. by Bannanje Govindacharya (1917, Udipi), p. 13.
33. See his commentary *Bhâratabhâvadîpa* on the beginning of the Âdiparvan, vol. I (Poona, Citrashala Press, 1929), p. 1.
34. Sukthankar (1944), p. 101.
35. For this and the preceding paragraph, see the many quotations in R.S. Bhattacharya (1990), *Use of manuscripts in textual criticism by our commentators*, in V. Dvivedî and Janârdana Pândeya (eds.) *Sampâdana ke siddhânta aur upâdâna* (Sarnath, Varanasi, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies), *Samyak-Vâk Series V*, pp. 220–221.
36. Examples and quotations in Sukthankar (1944), p. 101; Bhattacharya (1990), p. 223, notes 2 and 3; see also note 5: ‘One does not see this *çloka* verse in all manuscripts’, Nilakantha’s commentary on *Harivamça* 2, 48, 12, vol. VII (Poona, Citrashala Press, 1936), p. 270.
37. See Bhattacharya (1990), p. 223.
38. See H. Jacobi (1893), *Das Râmâyana. Geschichte und Inhalt nebst Concordanz der gedruckten Recensionen* (Bonn), p. 10; Bhattacharya (1990), pp. 219–220.
39. See Jacobi (1893), pp. 8–9.
40. See the commentary by Abhinavagupta on the *Nâtyaçâstra* 16, 87, vol. II, p. 331; see also the commentary *Vâisnavatosinî* on the *Bhâgavatapurâna* 10, 12, 1 which Bhattacharya (1990) quotes, p. 224, note 3: ‘Because [this reading] is seen in many manuscripts’ (*bahupustakesu drçyamânatvât*).
41. For this and the following paragraph, see Raja (1982), p. 3; Bhattacharya (1990), pp. 224–225; Sukthankar (1944), p. 101.
42. See Bhattacharya (1990), pp. 224–225 (especially p. 225, notes 1 and 4).
43. See Bhattacharya (1990), pp. 225–226.
44. See Bhattacharya (1990), p. 227.
45. Commentary *Amarakoçodghâtana* on the *Nâmalimgânuçâsana* (also entitled *Amarakoça*) 2, 4, 50 (edited, with the *Tikâsarvasva* of Vandyaghafiyasarvânanda, by T. Ganapati Çâstri (1919), Part II, *Khanda* 2, *Varga* 1–5 (Trivandrum), *Trivandrum Sanskrit Series XLIII*), p. 105.
46. Raja (1982), p. 9.
47. Winternitz (1897), pp. xv–xxxi.
48. See Goudriaan (1996), p. 267.
49. See Goudriaan (1996), p. 267. In grammar books the term *chândasa* indicates a form’s ‘vedic’ nature: on this subject (and on the connected term *ârsa*, more used in literary commentaries), see L. Renou (1940), *La Durghatavrtti de Çaranadeva, Traité grammatical sanskrit du XIIe siècle*, vol. I, Fasc. I: *Introduction* (Paris), pp. 126–129 (*ârsa*, p. 126, n. 2).
50. Goudriaan (1996), p. 269.
51. Winternitz (1897), p. xv: ‘There are numerous cases in these Mantras where every editor would be tempted to have recourse to conjectural emendations. But on closer examination he will remember that he has to

- edit, and not to correct his text, and that even a grammatically impossible reading has to be retained, if it is warranted by the best authority' (in this case the authority is the commentator Haradatta).
52. See G. Colas (1995), Cultes et courants du Vishnouisme en Inde du Sud. Quelques observations à partir des textes, in M.-L. Reiniche and H. Stern, *Les ruses du salut. Religion et politique dans le monde indien* (Paris, Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales), Collection Purusârtha no. 17, p. 131, n. 37.
 53. Translations and explanations in M. Bloomfield and F. Edgerton (1932), *Vedic Variants: A Study of the Variant Readings in the Repeated Mantras of the Veda*, Volume II: *Phonetics* (Philadelphia, Linguistic Society of America, University of Pennsylvania), p. 402.
 54. See G. Colas (1995), p. 117.
 55. P.K. Gode (1940), Textual Criticism in the Thirteenth Century, in Mohammad Shafi (ed.) *Woolner Commemoration Volume (in memory of the late Dr A.C. Woolner)* (Lahore, Mehar Chand Lachhman Das), pp. 106–107.
 56. On the Buddhist examples, see N.H. Samtani (1990), Some Problems in Editing Buddhist Texts, in V. Dvivedî and J. Pândeya (eds) *Sampâdana ke siddhânta aur upâdâna* (Samath, Varanasi, Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies), Samyak-Vâk Series V, pp. 243, 248–250.
 57. M. Bloomfield and F. Edgerton (1932), pp. 20–25.
 58. N.H. Samtani (1990), pp. 248–250.
 59. M. Bloomfield and F. Edgerton (1932), #843, p. 391 (on this topic in general, see also ch. Xviii); J. Wackernagel (1975), *Altindische Grammatik*, vol. I, new edition (Göttingen), pp. 51–52.
 60. S. Kuppaswami *et al.* (eds.), 2nd edition 1958, revised by K. Chinnaswami Sastrigal and V.H. Subrahmanya Sastri (Madras).