



**THE TANJORE MAHARAJA SARFOJI'S SARASVATI MAHAL  
LIBRARY, TANJORE**

**BY**

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This ancient and famous library which is described by Dr. Burnell “to be perhaps the largest and most important in the world” and which Dr.Buhler says “contains a great many useful and a number of very rare or nearly unique books many of which are quite unknown or procurable only which great trouble and expense” was till recently the private property of the Rajas of Tanjore.

The earliest beginnings of the library must have been about the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when Tanjore was under the rule of Telugu Nayaks who collected Sanskrit Manuscripts written in Telugu character. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Mahrattas conquered the country and since that date the library has been increasing. By far the greater portion of the collection was made by Sarfoji Raja during a visit to Benares during 1820-1830. Sivaji his successor added a few. There has practically been no addition of any value till very recent times. A good number of Sanakrit Manuscripts including rare and valuable manuscripts representing the collection of generations of a family of scholars, known as the “Jambhunatha Bhat Landagai collection” was added to the Library in 1921. In 1922, the Library received other valuable collections of rare interest; know as the “Kagalkar” and the “Patanga Avaduta” collection.

The attention of the Government of India and through it of the Government of Madras was directed in 1868 to the importance of the examination, purchase or transcription of Sanskrit Manuscripts in Indian Libraries and the framing of printed lists or catalogues of the same (proceedings of the Government of India in the Home Department (public), No. 4338-48, dated Simla, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1868). In respect on magnitude as well as the range of subjects dealt with, not to speak of the diversity of languages employed, the Tanjore Library is probably second to none among oriental Libraries in India.

In December of the same year, the Government of Madras asked Mr. Pickford, professor of Sanskrit to carry out the instructions of the Government of India. He commenced to catalogue the manuscripts at Tanjore but he fell seriously ill and had to return to Europe in March 1870. He never came back to India. It is not known how much he had done as his catalogues could not be found. (Letter from the professor of Sanskrit, Presidency college, Madras, to the chief secretary to the Government of Madras, dated Madras, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1876, and letter No.1560, dated Madras, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1876, from the Director of public instruction, to the chief secretary to the government of Madras.)

Thereupon Dr. Burnell, District and sessions Judge, was appointed in G.O. No.71, dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 1871, to catalogue the Sanskrit Library at Tanjore. That learned scholar devoted a great deal of research and labour to the task and his catalogue which he styled. "A classified Index to the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the palace at Tanjore," was published in three parts between 1878 and 1880 in London. This is now the chief key to the huge Sanskrit collection in this Library. But unfortunately a great many manuscripts, about 4000, seem to have been omitted and his catalogue cannot be said to be complete.

During the course of his preparation of the catalogue Dr. Burnell wrote to the chief secretary to the government of Madras from Bangalore on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1873 as follows:-

“It may perhaps be asked if the Library is worth the labour spent on it. I can answer unhesitatingly that it is. It is now a recognized fact that nearly all Sanskrit works of importance exist in different recessions. The Tanjore library is unrivalled in this respect: it contains several good manuscripts of all the most important ones known as yet, including a few that are new..... The Tanjore library, however, contains additional manuscripts of most of the works which I had discovered elsewhere, and this is a matter of great importance.

I believe that this library must, sooner or later escheat to the Government. The preparation of this catalogue will therefore protect property of enormous value. Sanskrit Manuscripts unscripted have long been very dear and the cost of making proper transcripts is now very heavy. As far as can judge, it would not be possible to form a collection like that at Tanjore at a less cost than £50,000 but many manuscripts are unquestionably unique.”

The Tanjore Maharaja Sarfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library is now a public library in the full sense of that term, the Government of Madras through the Treasurer of charitable endowments, being responsible for its administration. The collection belonged to the reigning princes of Tanjore-the Mahratta Maharajas. When the last of them died leaving no direct male heir and after the death of the last surviving Rani this collection together with the other properties formed the subject of litigation in civil courts. There was a rumor a few years ago that the collection had attracted the attention of some wealthy patrons of learning from overseas. And it would appear that arrangements were very nearly ready to sell the whole collection outright at an assessed value, when public attention was

focused on certain remarks of Dr. Burnell to the effect that “it would not be possible to form collection like that at Tanjore at a less cost than £50000”. The parties concerned had perforce to wake up and the deal was not immediately concluded. The public of Tanjore also began to interest themselves in the affair adequately. It was rightly considered as a question of National pride. The parties in O.S. No. 26 of 1912 on the file of the subordinate judge of Tanjore agreed that it was eminently fit that the Library should be preserved and maintained as a public Library in trust for the public and removed the Library and one lakh of rupees to provide for its upkeep, from the subject-matter of the suit. The Government of Madras in G.O. No, 1306 Home (Education), dated 5<sup>th</sup> October 1918, accordingly took possession of the same under the Charitable Endowments Act and have framed a scheme for the management of the same.

Since the Library became a public trust there has been a marked improvement in the reception accorded to it by the public. Various liberal and generous-minded benefactors have come forward with magnanimous offers. The Library has been enriched with three very fine collections of manuscripts, every one of them rare, valuable and very interesting. The Kagalkar collection, Jambunatha Bhat Landagai collection and the Patanga Avadhuta collection- all these three alone number 2,181 manuscripts.

The manuscripts are either on palm leaf or on paper. They are of very different value and come from very different sources. A large collection of these are recent Nagari copies of Manuscripts in south Indian characters and are at least a century old.

These manuscripts are in more than eleven distinct alphabets being from all parts of India. On the whole, one may easily say that the total number of manuscripts now in this Library is likely to exceed 25,000.

Besides these manuscripts there are also a number of books and Manuscripts in almost all the Indian and European language and on almost all branches of human knowledge. Special mention may here be made of the books and manuscripts in Telugu, Tamil, Marathi and English on account of their number and importance.

Dr. Burnell issued what he modestly styled “A classified index to the Sanskrit manuscripts in the palace at Tanjore,” between 1878 and 1880. Between 1880 and 1918 for very nearly forty years, the library has been the victim of many an outrage. Those who were in possession gave out on loan very many manuscripts which were never returned. And many more somehow or other, found themselves into libraries other than at Tanjore Dr. Burnell’s catalogues is very useful to us to trace out lost manuscripts, which are never likely to come back to us. Our losses are probably far more; for even Dr. Burnell’s admirable catalogue was by no means a complete catalogue of all that existed. His cataloguing must have been done in haste and with unreliable assistants.

For where he mentions a single work in a bundle, we are able to- day to trace two or more works in the same bundle.

The committee appointed by the government of madras took charge early in 1919. Since then they have been busily pushing forward the work of revising and preparing a fresh catalogue of all the works now in the library according to the latest scientific methods. Each work is described in detail in a card index – from which contains all the necessary particulars.

In 1920 a catalogue of printed books in French, Latin, Italian and Greek was published. In 1925 the first two volumes of a catalogue of Tamil manuscripts

in the library were published. These are now on sale and can be had from the secretary of the library. As regards the Sanskrit manuscripts 12,000 slips have been prepared. The work of preparing slips for the other manuscripts is going on the cataloguing of Marathi manuscripts and books are also in progress.

From an academic point of view the library possesses some very interesting specimens of literary and artistic importance.

There have been roughly classified as.....

1. objects of interest on paper
2. Illustrated paper manuscripts.
3. Oldest paper manuscripts.
4. Drawings and pictures believed to be Indian.
5. Palm leaf manuscripts.

Shorn notes under each of the above items are appended herewith

From this short survey, it would be clear that this library is probably one of the best preserved among oriental libraries in India. To oriental scholars in particular the library is of inestimable value in that it contains the richest collection of south Indian Sanskrit manuscripts.

The funds at the disposal of the committee are not adequate to meet the necessary demand of printing and publishing the various catalogues that are now in course of preparation. The Government of madras and the madras university as well as all oriental scholars have a duty to discharge, to wit- to see proper and adequate arrangements made at an early date for the necessary publication of the various catalogues.

## **I. OBJECTS OF INTEREST ON PAPER**

1. Ramayana. Pictorial with letter press in Telugu. 3 old sheets and one renewed sheet. Each sheet illustrates a Kanda. The first three kandas Balakanda, Ayodhyakanda, and Aranyakanda illustrated.
2. Purusasukta. White letters on black ground, page 1 (b) of the Index. No.2363. Purusasukta D. ff. 4. White letters on a black ground.
3. Bharata. Vana parva. Fine Indian paper. Page 181 (a) of the Index. No.1102 D. ff.445. Vana parva (3) Dr. Burnell does not give the date but the manuscript purports to be written in samvat 1667 which corresponds to 1610 A.D
4. Letters formed solely with microscopic letters of the word "Siva". A paper manuscript in Marathi. The words of the text and all ornamentations are formed with the word Siva written in microscopically small letters.
5. Paper manuscript made up in the shape of palm-leaf manuscript Aloka, a Commentary on the Cintamani of Jayadeva Misra. Page 117 (a) of the Index.No.10865. Kashmere leaves 220 on long slips of think paper, with a string passed through a hole in the middle.
6. Paper cut into ornamental shapes and mounted on violet paper.

## **II. ILLUSTRATED PAPER MANUSCRIPTS.**

### **VEDA.**

1. RG. VEDA. Samhitapatha. Illuminated borders and pictures. Page 1 (a) of the Index. No.2341 to 2348 D. Astakas I to VIII The manuscript (Written about 1830) is accented throughout in red. The borders are illuminated with gold and flowers:- on the first page of each chapter is a picture from modern Hindu Mythology is in veda section, All these ornaments are

beautifully executed this manuscripts is in the veda section, Bundles 1 and 2.

2. ASVA SASTRA. The science of the Horse- this illustrated book embodies the teachings of sages Salihotra, Dinapati, Garga, Nakula, Gana and others.

Horses originally are said to have had wings which at Indra's request Salihotra cut off and made them serviceable to God and man.

Eight chief characteristics of horses are described under the following heads:-

- (1) The cast of the body. 82 parts of the body are described at page 24
- (2) The natural dispositions. Satva.
- (3) The colour.
- (4) The motion or gait.
- (5) The voice. The neighing.
- (6) The smell.
- (7) The brilliance or luster.
- (8) The curl or knot of hair.

The life of a horse is said to be 32 years. It is divided into 10 periods, each of 3 years 2 months and 12 days. Ten chief parts of the body are then described and then follows in extenso a description of the various marks on the body. At page 8, the eight chief marks are illustrated: at page 48, twenty other marks are illustrated. Illustrations of the colour of horses are given at pages 54 to 78 at seq. Horses that neigh at sight of particular objects are classed as lucky or unlucky. Pages 86 – 89 .

The smell of horses is then described. Pages 80-90. Then follows a description of the gaits of horses. Pages 105-119 describe and illustrate unlucky horses, first in respects of their physical features, such as having a horn, three ears, two hoofs to a foot etc. then in respect of the shape or form of their eyes such as those resembling the eyes of a mongoose, buffalo, vulture, cat etc, and thirdly in respect of the hair, such as the hair being matted, grass like or having dividing lines, etc. Pages 119-133 describe about 54 families or stocks, those that come from different countries The age of horses is said to be ascertained with reference to their hoofs, hair, teeth, movements of the limbs, neighing excretes, urine, etc. Pages 134-137. There is at page 137 a Sanskrit verse stating the ripe and full age for:

(1) Man	....	.....120 years
(2) The elephant	...	100 years
(3) The cow	....	24
(4) The ass or camel	....	25
(5) The dog		16
(6) The fox		25
(7) The worm		7 days
(8) The fly		14 years
(9) The horse		32 years.

Pages 154-159 describe the feature which indicate longevity or otherwise of horses.

Directions as to the posture to be adopted by the rider are given at page 165.

At the end of this book illustrations apparently unconnected with the horse are given of a bird called Sarika. The figure of an elephant composed by 9 women. The figure of a horse composed by 5 women, and a bird called Cakora.

III GAJA SASTRA. The science of the Elephan:- the authorship of this work is attributed to Palakatyamuni who is said to be the offspring of Samagayanamuni and a female elephant. The Sanskrit text is given on the upper halves of pages and on the lower halves, a metrical translation in Marathi of the text above.

Most part of the work is mythological but the following matters may be noted:

Pages 96-127. The growth of the infant elephant from its first to the eleventh month is described. It is said that in the first month he infant cannot suck its mother's milk. Then the development from the first to the tenth year is described. The animal is said to attain maturity in the tenth year.

The age of the elephant is given as 120 years which is divided into 12 periods of ten years each, each period being called a "dasa" the condition in each dasa is described. Pages 128-135.

Then follows a long description of the elephants of each of the old divisions of India, Kambhoja, Pulinda, etc. The names of the countries are given at page135. Five modes of capturing elephants are then described from pages 136-145:-

1. Varibandha- penning the animals in an enclosure about a square mile in area planted round with trees and round which a moat is dug up. The enclosure should be planted with sugarcane and other vegetation to attract the beasts.
2. Vasabandha- Capture with the help of 7 or 8 female elephants. The riders cover themselves with foliage and carry ropes with nooses and the animals are securely fastened with the assistance of the trained animals.
3. Anugatabandha- Capture by enticing the male elephant with the help of a trained female elephant which leads the former into captivity.

These three modes of capture are recommended while the two following methods are deprecated.

4. Apathabandha- Capture by making the elephant fall into a shallow pit covered over with foliage, etc.

5. The same method as the above but the pits being very deep- Elephants are classified according to their colour. A number of colours and the combinations are illustrated. While, Black, Red, white and black, White and Red, Black and Red, etc.

The smell of elephants, their cries, their marks, and stature, etc, are then described. The illustrated book is apparently incomplete as will be seen from the last pages, some of which contain pictures only without the text, and some contain only the preliminary pencil sketches.

**IV A book on omens** in the Nagari character (manuscript in big bold letters) on divination by animals, etc with pictures of the objects. Page 80(a) of Burnell's Index No. 4246. D.

**V. Balabodha Muktavali.** A marathi translation of Esop's fables with beautiful illustrations in colours. The book was composed under the orders of Maharaja Sarfoji in saka 1728 which corresponds to 1806 A.D after each fable, is added a note in Marathi on the obvious purport of the fable and one or two verses in Sanskrit about the fable and its lesson.

The translation is by one Subaji sesho and the sanakrit verses by Sivarama sastri. The name of the artist who drew the pictures is not given.

**VI. A highly valued specimen of moghul art.** A book in the Persian language on Mahammad of Gazni..... with illustrations.

**VII. Science of birds.** In Marathi, A bound foolscap size manuscript with a beautiful illustration of Baja, a bird which was purchased from the Nawab of Udayagiri for Rs.1233 for Maharaja Sarfoji by Bhujangarow Harirow when he was sent to Hyderabad (Deccan) for the purchase of horses. This bird was brought to Tanjore on 29<sup>th</sup> January 1803.

### **III –oldest paper manuscripts.**

There are paper manuscripts written in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and later.

### 15<sup>th</sup> century

The oldest paper manuscript in this library more than 450 years old is in Sanskrit

Bhamati or a commentary on Sankaracharya's Bhasya by Vacaspati Misra-page 87 (a) of the Index No. 6298 D.ff 28 (a) written Samvat 1525 (which corresponds to 1468 A.D) in N. India. The manuscript says it was written in Kasi (Benares). Though more than 450 years old, the paper continues to be in fairly good condition. This manuscript is in the Vedanta section bundle No.8.

### 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

I. *Vamanapurana*- page 192 (b) of the Index No. 1584. D. ff.262. Written Samvat 1578 (which corresponds to 1521 A.D) this manuscript is in the Purana section, bundle no . 21

II. *Tattvodyatavivarana*, by Jayatirtha - page 106 (a) of the Index No. 5938. devnagari if 51 complete, but a little injured by damp at the beginning. The date is not noticed by Dr. Burnell but it is found in the colophon that it was written in Saka 1479 which corresponds to 1557 A.D. This manuscript is in the Madhvamata section, bundle no. 22.

III. *Kalanirnaya* from Hemadris parisesakhanda- page 129 (a) of the Index no 508 D.ff 147 of which 1 and 19 are wanting written in saka 1497 which corresponds to 1575 A.D About 4,820 granthas. This manuscript is in the Dharmasastra section, bundle no 101.

IV *Bharata- Bhisma parva*- page 182 (B) of the index no 1274 D.ff 155 Dr.Burnell does not give the date but the colophon says that the manuscript was written in Benares in Samvat 1642 which corresponds to 1585 A.D this manuscript is in the Bharata section bundle. No. 49.

V. *Bharata-Guda parva*-page 181 (b) of the Index no. 1185 D. ff. 86. written samvat 1646 ( which corresponds to 1589 A.D) this manuscript is in the Bharata section, bundle No.24.

#### **IV –DRAWINGS AND PICTURES, BELIEVED TO BE INDIAN.**

1. THREE volumes. Indian plants. South Indian.

Vol.1 begins with *Mamantharai* and ends with *Seemai pulicha keerai*(Hemp) 21 plates.

Vol2. Begins with *Jathikai*(Nutmeg), and ends with *Periathumbai* (pholomes indica), 61 plates.

Vol3. Begins with *Valai poo* (flower of the plantain) and ends with ..... (name not known) 10 plates.

2. Pictures of Birds 26 sheets. On the last sheet and pictures of 4 butterflies and a bat.
3. Pictures of certain palace Horses. 30 plates.
4. Ethnological drawings and sketches in colour. 14 sheets.
5. Pictures of Tanjore Military costumes. 17 plates.
6. Pictures of palanquins. 5 plates.

#### **V- PALM LEAF MANUSCRIPTS**

It is only a very few palm leaf manuscripts that bear any date or that are assigned any date. The oldest palm- leaf manuscripts in this library, according to Dr.Burnell are:

#### **IN SANSKRIT**

1. Gadyacintamani by Vadibhasihma a Jain, page 157 (b) of the Index no 10,200 Gr. Tal. LL 106 Written about 1550 ends with lambda 11. Much injured Gr. 3500 The Manuscript itself does not bear any date.
2. Phalabati, a vrtti to Jaimini sutra page 82 (a) of the Index, No. 9594 Gr. Leaves 97-216 a few leaves are missing but as most of the leaves have the numbers broken off and are much injured, it would take a very minute examination to decide which are lost. This manuscript contains a VI- X 4. At page 41 of his South Indian palasography Dr. Burnell says “ the oldest manuscript I have been able to discover is Tanjore 9594 which must be about 1600 A.D”. The manuscript itself does not bear any date.
3. An interesting palm leaf manuscript. A marvel of scrip Tory art Ramayana: Lines 24 to 29 to a leaf in grandba character. Page 178 (a) of the Index. No 11,678 Gr. Leaves 239 1-6 Kandas very minute hand.

### **In Tamil**

1. *Jivakacintamani*. Tamil Kavya No. 145, by Tiruttaka tevar.(A jain) with a commentary by Naccinarkkiniyar (A Brahmin) The copy purports to be made in saka year 1625 which corresponds to 1703 A.D. from an original which was itself copied in Saka year 1550 which corresponds to 1628 A.D.