Our cataloguing principles

The value of this catalogue lies in how consistent entries are across time and manuscripts, and how easy it is for a user to find texts relevant to them. To ensure we deliver these key results, we use the following principles:

What we can and can't include:

Only manuscripts where the images and the library's unique identification match correctly is taken up for cataloguing. We provide each manuscript a unique identifier within our catalogue and both the library's and Sangraha's unique identities are available to the user. We also do not include manuscripts that not mostly in Sanskrit.

An important thing to note is that we are cataloguing manuscript images and not manuscripts. While at a superficial level there may seem to be no difference, in reality the differences in the cataloguing process are profound.

Users' needs come first

The first and most important principle underlying our work is to help users find manuscripts relevant to their work quickly and effectively. Because Sanskrit manuscripts display such a high degree of variability, we are frequently faced with unusual situations that do not directly 'fit' the structure that a digital catalogue requires. Such situations are resolved by thinking about how the user would like this situation handled.

Fidelity to the manuscript (as it is)

The second inviolable principle is that we are faithful to the manuscript as seen. In doing this we transcribe all errors faithfully and do not fill in the blanks caused by smudges and tears even though such missing letters may be obvious.

Following past tradition, each catalogue entry comprises fields that are filled in Sanskrit or English. Where Sanskrit is used, all nouns and written in प्रथमान्त form.

Titles and classification structures

The most significant decision we make relates to the title of a manuscript. While we are guided by titles given by the library and obtained from the manuscript, a title is given only after a thorough reading of the text. Frequently titles given by the scribe or the library are incorrect or misleading.

Where a manuscript is a collection of many texts, e.g. उपनिषद् or प्रायश्चित्त, the term सङ्ग्रह is appended to the subject matter in the title (e.g. उपनिषदसङ्ग्रह). If the texts in the manuscript are unrelated, the title विविधग्रन्थसङ्ग्रह is used. In both cases the titles of individual texts in the manuscript are listed and are searchable.

Where a manuscript contains a text and its commentary, a title that includes the name of the commentary is given (e.g. भागवतं भावार्थदीपिका च, भगवद्गीता यथार्थदीपिका च). Where the title of the commentary is not known, the term टीका is used einstead. This makes the commentary searchable by its title.

Where known, each title is associated with the name of its author and if applicable, its commentator. Vedic texts are given वैदिकः as their author. Where the author / commentator is not known, अज्ञातः is used.

We use a hierarchial subject structure covering the complete gamut of Sanskrit literature. A manuscript can be assigned more than one subject if appropriate (e.g. गीतगोविन्दम् is both a लघुकाव्य and a गीतिकाव्य). This is also applied to manuscripts given the विविधग्रन्थसङ्ग्रह title.

In addition to the subject, a number of keywords, depending on its contents, may be associated with a manuscript. Names of chapters of large texts are also used as keywords (e.g. for a महाभारत manuscript शान्तिपर्व may be used as a keyword).

We classify eighteen महापुराण as per the following श्लोक from देवीभागवतपुराणम्:

मद्वयं भद्वयं चैव ब्रत्रयं वचतुष्टयम्।
अनापलिङ्गकूस्कानि पुराणानि पृथक् पृथक्॥ (०१.०३.०२)

Transcriptions

We transcribe the cover pages, flyleafs, and colophons of all manuscripts. We also transcribe the incipit and the explicit in two forms – one as found in the manuscript (usually without spaces between words) and the second in an easily readable form. To produce the second form, the required paragraph marks and spaces are introduced but the errors and blanks in the original are left as they were.

Illegible and missing text is replaced by a ¯ (शिरोरेखा) for a single letter and ¯ … ¯ (ellipses preceded and succeeded by शिरोरेखा) for a sequence of missing characters.

Other fields

An important descriptor in a catalogue entry is the contents of the manuscript. Here we relate the text in the manuscript with the published or known texts of the same title. In so doing we can describe the parts of the text that the manuscript contains. For example an entry such as "कवचार्गलाकीलकानि प्रथमाध्यायस्य आदिमषट्श्लोकांश्च विहाय रहस्यत्रयसहिता सम्पूर्णा दुर्गासप्तशती" would be found as descriptors where parts of a text are contained in the manuscript.

Where the text is derived from another, larger text (e.g. a मामहात्म्य from a पुराण), the parent text is identified in the description.

Where a reading of the manuscript yields data on persons such as its scribe, owner, editor, etc. such information is recorded in प्रथमान्त Sanskrit else अज्ञातः is used.

Where it is possible to date a manuscript from its contents, that date is recorded. Where no date is available, अनुपलब्धः is recorded. Where there is more than one date on a manuscript, the latest date is recorded. The Gregorian year is assigned based on this date. If there is an uncertainty on whether a year quoted in the manuscript is in शकः or विक्रम संवत, the numerical date is recorded (dating the manuscript as more recent) and the Gregorian date converted using विक्रमी conversion. All date related data available,

including when given as भूतसङ्ख्या, is turned into a standardised for and recorded in प्रथमान्त Sanskrit.

Data relating to the physical condition of a manuscript is provided to the extent available from the library. We catalogue images and not manuscripts and making good judgements about the physical condition on a manuscript from images is nearly impossible. Data about page layouts, quality of writing, folio numbering etc. is entered as observed.

We also provide infromation about the images of the manuscript including acknowledging the person / party that performed the imaging used by us for producing the catalogue. Other information includes information about image quality and imaging history.

Quality assurance

Lastly, no catalogue entry is placed on this website before it has been reviewed by at least two peers of the original editor. Thus, the entire content of a catalogue entry would have been reviewed by at least two persons other than one who created it in the first place.