

II-19. The Moodbidri Pandulipis

Imagine, how much has disappeared and lost for ever.
Paper has been proven to last through the centuries.
Computers have no such track record.

- Alan AtKisson

The Moodbidri pandulipis (scribed around 1060 CE) represent the oldest known written material of the tradition going back to Mahaveer. This *pandulipi* copy contains the original Prakrit text of the Dhavla scribed in old Kannad. The Digambar tradition regards this material to be the only authentic remnant of the literature traceable to Mahaveer and his predecessors.

The original written material of Pushpdant and Bhutbali has not survived. This oldest known copy of The Dhavla pandulipi is now preserved in a temple in Moodbidri, a town nestled in the hills of North-Western Karnatak (India). It is in hale-Kannad script on the leaves of *tal* (or *tad*) palm. The characters are scratched with a sharp stylus, not unlike the brail writing for the blind. Possibly the original writing with sharp stylus is done with ink. As the ink began to fade, the scratching can be made visible by rubbing soot. The naturally dried leaves for the *talpatra* medium of writing were extensively process as evidenced by the fact that it has not significantly deteriorated over a period of 1000 years.

The Dhavla and 4000 other pandulipi are in the Siddhant Basadi temple and adjoining structure in Moodbidri. The name refers to the place where the works of founding principles (*Siddhant*) are preserved. The Dhavla pandulipi was apparently scribed in Shravanbelgola (Jainbidri), about 200 miles east of

Moodbidri. Shravanbelgola has been the site of learning and *sadhna* since Vishakhacharya arrived there ca. 335 BCE (II-9). It maintained a continuous and thriving tradition of scholarship. With the onslaught of the Moguls, Mongols and Turks, sometimes around 1700 CE the pandulipi collection, and possibly some of the precious stone statuettes, was moved from Shravanbelgola to Moodbidri. Its geographical location nestled in hills, stands in contrast with the history of upheavals and intolerance of zealots and invaders marauding through much of India including Mysore near Shravanbelgola. The transfer was undertaken for the safety. Indeed, the material has been preserved, without ending up in the storage at the British Museum or with some private collector.

When "rediscovered" in mid-1800s, the pandulipis were regularly worshipped. Over the years even the temple guardians could not read the script, let alone understand the content. Probably it was a successful strategy for safekeeping of the material written down on the fragile aged leaves of palm. The content of The Dhavla, mostly in Prakrit language, is scribed in ancient hale-Kannad on 592 strips (27w x 3 inches) of leaves of tal palm. Content of the pandulipi tell that the original pandulipi of Shatkhandagam by Pushpdant and Bhutbali was also on tal palm leaves that had dried on the tree. After all it is unacceptable to damage a tree even for a book on principles. Now the pandulipi has been engraved on copper plates, and possibly microfilmed. Hopefully, the digital version would become available in due course.

Meanwhile. The last millennia marked a period of major upheavals in the History of India under the external influences, if not subjugation. By 900 CE a virulent form of the cast system was in place. Its un-motivating influence was set in motion 1700 years

earlier by a system invented by the Ary migrants. It promoted the birth and trade based social hierarchy headed by rituals of priests and princes. It facilitated Mogul expansion justified with a newly discovered violent brand of "truth." Resulting chaos and arbitrariness was not conducive to exploration of the alternatives through subtleties of thoughts and imagination.

Little changed during the next Raj. Economic and political hold of the Moguls was replaced in the late 18th century by the British Raj accompanied by another brand of truth perpetuated by the missionaries who upheld the colonial interests. To support the Industrial revolution in Europe it became necessary to introduce rails and roads to move raw materials one way and the finished goods the other way. It necessitated a need for the consumers culture of the imported industrial products. The missionary and educational network reinforced it. It happened in unimaginable guises and disguises, much of which remains to be uncovered and brought into the Western history books. In effect, everything Indian took a second tier.

A degree of interest and pride in things Indian was always there at the grass roots. Although economically and politically marginalized, such groups retained integrity and continuity of traditions. From time to time they were reinvigorated by curiosity. One such event was the interest in the contents of the 'bundle' of the Moodbidri pandulipi by a visitor in 1887. Deciphering of the material took five decades. The period also paralleled the growth of the independence movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Events leading to the publication of the printed form of Shatkhandagam with Dhavla based on the Moodbidri pandulipi are remarkable. My perspective on what transpired is outlined below. It provides insights into the forces

that helped in keeping the continuity of the tradition of thought with remarkable integrity and intellectual honesty.

Disciplining the meaning. At this stage it is probably useful to have an appreciation of how a line of thought from 2600 years ago came to be rendered into steps reproduced in Chapters A through H. It is clear that Mahaveer used the everyday language of the common people. At least towards the end he also had a large number of disciples and colleagues, with whom he had more pithy discourses. The content of discourses was organized within 15 years after the death of Mahaveer. As the original group began to disperse (II-9), around 365 CE it was deemed necessary to reorganize the material so that it can be transmitted by those who may not be familiar with the subtleties of the arguments. I believe it was formulated in the form of *gatha* or two liner poetic forms with the hope that the underlying thought process may be reconstituted later at some other place.

Disciplining thought for the linearity of the language. It is the limitation of the language that no two people see exactly the same "meaning" in the same sequence of words they hear. The problem is compounded further as words for discussions and discourses are rendered into the more formal forms of presentations. Something is inevitably lost in disciplining (*anushashan*) thought in words. In good writing one hopes to retain key elements of thought from which others can reconstruct arguments, if not the nuances. The Jeevatthan text is such a reconstruction by Pushpdant and Bhutbali. It includes the following criteria and rule-based disciplined changes necessitated by the use of the source material that was orally transmitted for 500 years.

Gatha-anushashan: In all likelihood the orally transmitted ancient material was arranged in lyrical two-liner forms (*Gatha*). Such constructs are easier to memorize and recite. Also Dharsen knew some of the gatha that he taught to Pushpdant and Bhutbali. The available Jeev Samas gatha (Essay II-26) also bear a remarkable resemblance to the content and organization of Jeevatthan.

Pad-anushashan: Pushpdant and Bhutbali were given the responsibility of organizing the orally transmitted gatha material in a written text form. It took them more than a decade to complete Jeevatthan. It took another 4 decades to complete the other parts of Shatkhandagam. They organized the text in the form of steps (*pad*).

Tika: Review and interpretations. The Dhavlas by Virsen and Jinsen are advanced monographs where the contributions of the predecessors are clearly acknowledged and demarcated. It retains integrity and continuity of the content. In the ancient tradition, it develops a template for discussion and exchange of ideas. Scrutiny reflected in some of the questions is refreshing. The text is amplified with hypothetical examples. The text references other thoughts, beliefs, arguments, and texts. Many of which are still available.

Bhasha-anushashan: Recall that the language of the Moodbidri pandulipi is Prakrit scribed in ancient hale-Kannad. From the footnotes in the printed edition (1939-1944) it is clear that the Prakrit text is "tweaked" at very few places to assign, fix, ascertain, and render it readable in the modern form in the Nagari script as reproduced here in Chapters A to H of Jeevatthan.

As developed in the remainder of this volume, about 60 years of effort by several dedicated scholars was needed to bring the text in a modern form. It requires not only peering into the 2500 year

old thought process but also an understanding of the language usage, syntax, grammar, context, and above all a grasp of logic that permeates and binds the arguments. An appreciation of some of the difficulties is critical to understand the magnitude of the task. The first difficulty was to bring the text from an extinct *hale-Kannad* script to the Nagari script. During 1894 to 1916 Loknath transcribed the text to modern Kannad. Then, mostly from an unauthorized copy of the Kannad version smuggled out of Moodbidri to Saharanpur, Sitaram transcribed the text in Nagari.

The content of the text is in ancient Prakrit, which neither of the two transcribers understood. The original text in the pandulipi did not use punctuations (commas, stops, paragraphs, chapter breaks). Some of these were introduced by the transcribers, which created considerable confusion later. There are other indications of the beginning of major sections and chapters. By comparing the text to other secondary material, Heera Lal Jain (Chapter I-20) developed rules and guidelines to discipline the ancient text to a modern form while retaining its integrity. With this achieved he and two other scholars (Phool Chand and Bal Chand) were able to complete the Dhavla-translation into Nagari.

My interpretive translation of the content of Jeevatthan and Nay works into English builds on certain features of the ancient texts:

- (a) Simplicity of the original language with economy of words.
- (b) Strategy of placing an abstract up front.
- (c) Organization of the entire material as a matrix that is built into the tradition of analysis by organization and categorization.

(d) The derived texts and traditions provide yet another level of insights into the meaning and intentions as perceived through centuries of evolution of thought.

(e) Based on my understanding I have divided the text into paragraphs and sections separated by asterisks. It brings together the steps with short range continuity of a thought. It also emphasizes the algorithmic way of exploring a theme within the defined parameters.

Interpretive translation with Bhav-Anushashan. Quite early into this work it became clear to my father and also to others that the task of exploring the pithy issues is for the future generations. One of their limitations was that the material was deciphered and then printed in parts. They did not have the advantage of looking at the whole text before the final form was printed. Even in the numerous reprints and plagiarized form of this work, no attempt has been made to elaborate the content to get to the thought processes. Admittedly it is a difficult task that requires peering into the 2500 year old tradition thought process without deeper understanding of the language usage, syntax, grammar, context, and above all the conceptual parameters that bind the arguments.

In an attempt to peer into the minds of those who gave and continued this tradition of thought, the current interpretive translation in English is amplified with essays on themes and concepts relevant in the context of new millennium. Brevity, continuity and integrity of the ancient text is retained by placing my interpretations and thoughts in separate essays and notes. While retaining the terseness of the original text I also draw on modern examples in the context of the Western Thought. I hope that on their own readers will find additional insights and subtleties.

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