

Speech of His Excellency, Shri Viren J. Shah, the Governor of West Bengal, at the inauguration of **National Workshop on Manuscriptology and Palaeography** at Jñāna Pravāha, Varanasi on December 20, 2000 at 11.00 a.m.

### **Ladies and gentlemen!**

I am very happy to be associated with the commencement of the National Workshop on Manuscriptology and Palaeography. I am glad to note that both Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and the Jñāna Pravāha, Centre for Cultural Studies, are committed to this important task and this Workshop is a joint venture to train young scholars in the science and methodology of textual criticism and the reading of all the ancient and medieval scripts. Eminent scholars are invited as resource persons and trainee participants from various universities. Seven workshops have been organised in the past: one in New Delhi, three in Pune, one in Trivandrum, one in Calcutta and one in Mysore. In these workshops all aspects of manuscriptology, textual criticism and old scripts such as *Śāradā*, *Grantha*, *Newarī*, *Nandī-Nāgarī*, *Gauḍī*, *Oriya* etc. are taught. Therefore, the purpose for holding the Workshop on Manuscriptology and Palaeography is to train the young Sanskrit scholars in the methodology of using first-hand manuscripts material for the preparation of critical editions of the old (traditional) Sanskrit texts. It is an added advantage that the workshop is being held in the pleasant environment and peaceful setting of Jñāna Pravāha which is becoming a landmark in cultural spectrum of Varanasi.

The Indian civilization has two contemporary streams popular and cultivated: *lokaparamparā* and *śiṣṭaparamparā*. According to Indian tradition, Brahmā, the god of creation invented the system of writing. The ancient treatise **Nāradyasmṛti** elucidates the statement as saying "had not Brahmā created the alphabet, the world around us would not have progressed so much" :

यदि नाकरिष्यद्ब्रह्मा लिखितं चक्षुरुत्तमम् ।  
तत्रेयमस्य लोकस्य नाभविष्यद् शुभा गतिः ।।

In a country where *Śruti* and *Smṛti* the process of oral communication and memorisation are the oldest traditions of transmission of knowledge, invention of script is a significant step forward for the advantage of wisdom. We have evidences in literature, paintings and sculptures that Buddha learnt alphabet in school from a *brāhmaṇa* teacher named Viśvāmitra and Lord Kṛṣṇa began his acquaintance with letters in the *pāṭhaśālā* of *guru* Sāndīpani. A number of sculptures from Gandhāra art depict Siddhārtha writing on a board. In India lithic, metallic, earthen or wooden pillars, tablets, plates, pots as also bricks, shells, ivory plaques were generally used for incising inscriptions. Study of the contents of these materials

is known as epigraphy; while that of science and technique of the style of writing employed therein is called palaeography. The knowledge of the latter needs a proper understanding of methodology and technical skill adopted by the *lipikāras* of the period.

Compared to those durable materials as stated earlier there are some perishable materials such as bark of tree, palm leaves, parchment, papers which were also used by people for writing. A close examination of these two sets of writing materials i.e. the durable hard substance and the perishable documentary heritage such as *pustikā* and *punthi* brings to us the topic of this National Workshop on Palaeography and Manuscriptology. Preservation of lithic and metallic document is easier than hand-written records on perishable materials. The word manuscript is derived from Latin *manuscriptus*. The study of manuscripts also requires some orientation such as understanding of nature of calligraphy or style of writing, technicalities of the characters or the script and signs, identification of letter chronogram, etc. The manuscriptology also encompasses the editing of texts along with the comparison of different versions etc. The traditional scholarship in reading manuscripts and inscriptions is fast declining. The Brāhmī, Kharoṣṭī, Grantha, Tamil of the classical times and the regional scripts of the middle ages like *Śāradā*, *Newarī*, *Gauḍī* and *Nāgarī* which help to retain the vast treasures of wisdom in India during the past two thousand years or more should be studied by the younger generations.

It is a laudable effort on the part of Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Jñāna Pravāha, Centre for Cultural Studies, to plan a National Workshop in different places of our country including Kāśī where tradition maintains that Vyāsa, the compiler of the *Mahābhārata* had lived. I am glad that the Workshop is being participated by delegates from different parts of the country and several resource scholars have arrived to guide the proceedings of the two-week activities. I wish all success to the event and hope the mission of manuscripts and scripts learning and editing would be successful.

Thank you!

