

## A View on *Ozhuku*: Manuscripts on Land Records

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Manuscripts are accessible in almost every written language in the world. There are thousands of manuscripts of historical significance in ancient languages such as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Persian (Maheswaran Nair, K. *Manuscriptology*). Manuscriptology is relevant worldwide. It is an essential part of today's cultural study. Manuscripts are an essential part of the study of the cultural history of human race. Manuscripts represent an advanced stage in the history of language. From the origin of language, the human race has progressed rapidly.

### Manuscripts

There is a Sanskrit saying, “manuscript says, ‘protect me from the oil (fire), protect from the water, and protect from being loosely tied. Please do not hand me over to the careless-fools’,” (Sanskrit says p .197. Maheswaran Nair, K. *Manuscriptology*) Manuscripts enrich of sage-quality passed from generation to generation. A written document dated back at least seventy-five years archive the status of a rare manuscript. L M Harrod defines manuscript as “a document of any kind which is written by hand, or the text of a music or literary composition in handwritten or typescript form and which, in that form, has not been reproduced in multiple copies.” (Maheswaran Nair, K. *Manuscriptology*)

There are different types of manuscripts available. They are

1. Palm leaves
2. Birch bark (bhurj patra)
3. Kumbhi bark
4. Agarutvak
5. Leather
6. Cloth
7. Tulapat
8. Paper

1. Palm leaves

In South Asian countries, including Sri Lanka and India, palm leaves were the most common writing material. Palm trees were abundant in South India, therefore the use of palm

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leaf as a writing material may have started there and expanded to other parts of India. A palm-leaf manuscript's lifespan is usually around 500 years, because the conditions are favourable for palm leaves and they can be maintained for much longer period.

Taliyola is the name given to the leaves of the *talipat* or fan-palm in Kerala. Palmyra (tala, karimpana) is found in every part of India, while talipat or sritala (taliyolappana) is primarily found in South India, with its most lush growth around the Malabar coast. the available variety of palm leaf used for writing was named śṛītāḷas.

All essential documents, including literary and scientific works, were written on specially processed palm leaves.

In order to prepare for the writing process first they cut leaves and remove the midrib and are dried. Then boiled in turmeric mixed water solution and dried again. For smoothing, the leaves are rubbed with a piece of rock or stone. Finally cut in to required size.

Palm leaves were written in ink in northern India and with narayam (stylus) in southern India. After using stylus carbon is smeared over the letters to make it clear In northern region of India, they use pen for writing with natural colors and in south India especially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala they use Nārāyam for writing. Palm leaves were mainly used throughout Kerala and Tamilnadu.

There are three different types of palm leaf documents are available. They are:

- 1.1 Granthas
- 1.2 Churunas
- 1.3 Loose Leaves

### **1.1 Granthas**

Granthas are collection of palm leaf manuscripts preserved in wooden flaps. The Oriental Research Institute & Manuscripts Library of the University of Kerala is the largest library in Asia, with approximately 65,000 granthas. First published grantha was named Daivam (god). The two most important granthas are Arya Sri Manju Kalpa (400 Years Old, Buddhist Tantric Text, Newari script, written in ink) and Bhasanataka. Apart from this, there are other granthas on Chitra Ramayana, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Devi Mahatmyam, Vyakaras and Jyotisham, etc.

In order to prepare for the writing process of grantha, the palm leaves were cut into required size, then wrote on it with stylus. When there is more than one palm leaf one or two holes were made and tied with string.

### **1.2 Churunas**

The rolls of palm leaves are kept in a bundle. The Thiruvananthapuram Central Archives has a collection of 10,000 churunas, with an average of 1000 leaves. This collection of scrolls is probably the largest collection of palm leaf manuscripts in the world. An average of 1000 palm leaves 90 cm long and 2.5 cm wide can be found in a fold, and both sides of the leaf are used to record events. They were written with various ancient scripts of Kerala such as Vattezhuthu, Kolezhuthu, Malayanma, Tamil and Malayalam. Each bundle of churunas deals with different topics and may not be related to each other. They are:

- 1.2.1 Ozhukus
- 1.2.2 Mathilakam records
- 1.2.3 High Court records
- 1.2.4 Vilangipper records
- 1.2.5 Huzur Khajana Eredavu
- 1.2.6 Boundary disputes
- 1.2.7 Records of the office of the Head Sirker Vakkeel
- 1.2.8 Neettus

### **1.3 Loose Leaves**

In addition to churunas and grandhas, single-leaf documents are also available. Each leaf contains a single subject and can be viewed as a single document. The procedure for preparing a leaf for writing is the same as previously explained. Palmyra and talipot palm are the two types of cadjan leaves used for writing. Palmyra leaves are thick and coarse, making them difficult to work with, whereas talipot palm leaves are thin, flexible, and may be handled like paper. Typically, characters on palm leaves are not written with a pen or pencil, but with a stylus (Guide to Archives series 1)

#### **1.2.1 Ozhukus (Land Records)**

Preparation of Ozhuku is the Preliminary work in connection with a revenue Settlement. In 1738, under the reign of Marthanda Varma (1729-58), the first settlement was created. From 913 to 922 M.E., the First Revenue Settlement lasted around ten years (1738-1747 A.D) There were also other preliminary steps associated with settlement, the most important of which was the preparation of Ozhukus for all landed properties. Each division or district in the state was divided into Taluks named Mandapathumvathukkals and villages called pravruthi during the time of the first settlement. A *proverthikar* was in charge of the village (proverthi), which was the smallest administrative entity. There were Accountants, Thantakars, Torakars, Kelvikars, and other proverthikars. (Guide to Archives series 1, p.14)

An Ozhuku contains detailed information in respect of landed properties. It contains the following information.

1. Lakkom No. (This is nothing, but serial No. allotted to each property in lieu of the present day Survey No.)
2. Name and extent of property indicating details of the boundaries.

3. Number of yielding trees in the property and the amount of tax assessed.
4. Name and address of the assignee etc.

The earliest Ozhuku records belong to the time of Maharaja Bala Rama (1798-1810) but the major collections belong to the period of Maharaja Swati Thirunal (1829-1847). These Ozhuku records are classified into four as follows: Huzur Ozhuku, Taluk Ozhuku, Nilam Ozhuku, Puthuval Ozhuku (Guide to Archives series 1, p.18).

### **Huzur Ozhuku**

Ozhuku records which were originally preserved in the "Huzur Cutcherry" are termed as "Huzur Ozhukus". These are in fact copies of Taluk Ozhukus. The Huzur Ozhuku/Taluk Ozhuku records were prepared Adhikaram or Proverthi (village) wise which was then the smallest unit of administration. Huzur Ozhukus give details regarding dry lands (Guide to Archives series 1).

### **Taluk Ozhuku**

A Copy each of Ozhuku records was kept in the concerned Taluk Offices also. Later, these were transferred to the Central Repository. They are kept under the head Taluk Ozhukus'. Records belonging to 24 Taluks are available under this series. There are 813 Churunas in this collection covering the period from 1837-1839(Guide to Archives series 1).

### **Nilam Ozhuku**

This collection consists of information relating to wet-lands (paddy fields). In the Nilam Ozhukus, the extent, boundaries, and other allied information in respect of each property are indicated. Generally, these records belong to the period from 1802-1814 A.D. However, in the case of Chengannur Taluk some earlier and later records are also available (Guide to Archives series 1).

### **Puthuval Ozhuku**

All lands, waste and unoccupied at the time of Survey but occupied and brought under cultivation since 1837, are known in the accounts as Puthuval and Ozhuku records of Puthuval land are known as Puthuval Ozhuku. The land, if planted with trees, dimensions alone were given, and the trees by reckoning; if cultivated with ordinary crops, areas were made out and assessed on the extent. Much land has been assigned to individuals as Puthuval. There is a collection of 250 churunas relating to the assignment of land pertaining to the period from 1844-1873 A.D. These Puthuval Ozhukus came into being during the periods of Maharaja Swati Thirunal, Utram Thirunal Marthanda Varma and Ayiliam Thirunal Rama Varma (Guide to Archives series 1).

### **Vilangipper Ozhuku**

This collection is considered to be the most important item of records among the land records. These records have much resemblance to Ozhuku records. The only difference is that

in Vilangipper records, prominence is given to the name of the person to whom the property stands assigned. It is an elaborate account prepared at the time of the old Settlement showing the history of each land, what changes of hand it had undergone and consequent changes of tenure, what deductions were to be allowed, what net rent was payable, how title was derived or changed hands, and finally, to whom the tenures vested and what net taxes and extra taxes were payable by the holder. It largely gives additional information to Taluk Ozhukus (Guide to Archives series 1).

Vilangipper records are classified into two, viz., Purayidam Vilakkam and Nilam Vilakkam. While in Purayidam Vilakkam, details regarding dry lands are given, in Nilam Vilakkam, details regarding wetlands are mentioned. The Purayidam vilakkams were prepared during 1012-1014 M.E. (1837-1839 A.D) and consist of 635 Churunas and Nilam Vilakkams were prepared during 977-989 M.E. (1802-1814 A.D) and they consist of 227 churunas. Like the Ozhuku records, Vilangipper records also have been prepared taluk wise. Records of 21 taluks are available under this collection (Guide to Archives series 1).

These records provide a detailed picture of Travancore's culture, history, geography, socioeconomic and linguistic history of that period. The language of these records is Malayalam, but its script is Tamil.

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