

## ARTICLE

Published in Vihangama 2002 Vol. I (January - February)

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### RARE ATHARVAVEDA MANUSCRIPT RETURNS HOME IN CD-ROM

One of the rarest of rate *Atharvaveda* manuscript that went out of India centuries ago in palm leaf has come back to India, in CD-ROM. The story of its travel is absorbing. This manuscript in Sharda script is one of the two *Atharvaveda* recensions that have survived. Originally, nine recensions existed. But only the recensions of Pipalada and Shaunaka survived. This manuscript, in CD-ROM is now with IGNCA and is available for scholars for reference. The story of how the manuscript reached Germany was narrated by Mr. Gunthard Mueller, the man who brought the digitized form home.

The manuscript is dated ca. 9000 BC, when Greece had not developed the writing system yet. It was in the custody of the Maharajah of Kashmir. In the 1870, Prof. Rudolph von Roth, a German Indologist searching for Atharvaveda manuscripts wrote to the Maharajah asking for the manuscript. He however, declined, Prof. Roth then wrote to him asking for a Devnagari version of the manuscript.

The Maharajah then employed some scholars to write the manuscript in duplicate. He sent one copy to Prof. Roth. When Prof. Roth scanned through the contents, he realized that this was one of the rarest manuscripts he had come across and set his heart upon getting it. He approached a senior British official who was the Lt. Gen. of Allahabad then. He in turn entered into a long negotiation with the Maharajah of Kashmir. After several rounds of discussions and offers, the Maharajah parted with the manuscript.

It is now housed in Tübingen University Library, Germany. It is a huge manuscript, taking the space of 154 CD-ROMs. Mr. Mueller has used special equipment with near-microscopic quality and minimal light intensity and temperature properties. He heads a software company called e-ternals.com which is involved in the task of digitizing endangered heritage material. The copy of the manuscript presented to IGNCA is on the best data carrier available in the world, based on Pure Gold Technology, with a warranty of 200 years.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Singhvi, President IGNCA Trust said the coming back of the manuscript in CD-ROM was a civilizational story. Praising the study of Indology in Germany, Dr. Singhvi said this moment was the beginning of a journey. German Ambassador Mr. Hiemo Richter, who presented the CD-ROMs to Dr. Singhvi said he was very enthused by the moment, as in Germany, manuscripts are valued highly and preserved excellently. He was happy that a technology has been evolved which allows access to these precious manuscripts without damaging them.

Mr. Gunthard Mueller said he wanted to present the CD-ROM version of the manuscript to India, where it belongs, IGNCA was chosen as the recipient of the gift as the Centre has been declared the nodal agency under the National Manuscript Mission. IGNCA which has been involved in the task of microfilming manuscripts for the past decade has in its collection 1.25 manuscripts from various libraries in India and abroad, copied from materials ranging from palm leaf, birch bark to paper.

Prof. N.R. Shetty, Member Secretary, speaking on the occasion said the Cultural Informatics Lab of IGNCa has worldclass expertise in digital technology. He said the Center is collaborating with various institutions in India and abroad in digitization programmes. He mentioned the Carnegie Mellon University, the Mellon foundation. The Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, The Department of Space, Government of India and the Ministry of Information Technology in this connection. He said IGNCa has an ambitious programme to digitize all its academic resources.

**- Mangalam Swaminathan**