

The Commentators' Editions of the Mahābhārata

C. Minkowski
Oriental Institute, Oxford

V.S. Sukthankar and the other editors of the Poona edition of the Mahābhārata generally assumed that Nīlakaṇṭha, Arjunamiśra, Devabodha, and other commentators created their own editions of the epic, at least in some sense. Although Sukthankar identified Nīlakaṇṭha's text as the "Vulgate", he also noticed that it was common in Devanāgarī manuscripts containing both epic and commentary for the epic text to differ from the commentary's lemmata; and this was noticed for other commentators as well. From this some questions arise: to what extent did the commentators establish a text on which to comment, and to what extent is that text, or the impact that it had on the textual tradition of the epic, recoverable? Is Nīlakaṇṭha's text in fact the same as the "Vulgate"?

As there is still no critical edition of Nīlakaṇṭha's commentary, and no complete edition of any kind of Arjunamiśra's, I will make a report based on soundings taken in manuscripts of these two commentaries which are held in the Bodleian library. One set of manuscripts, from the Chandra Shum Shere collection, were copied during Nīlakaṇṭha's lifetime by his son, Govinda. I will conclude with some remarks about the desirability of reliable editions of both commentaries, weighed against the feasibility of producing of such editions.