

Recovering and ‘Re’constituting the Mahābhārata V S Sukthankar, Colonial Philology and the Authority of the Critical Edition

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the Mahābhārata Critical Edition as both a reconstruction of manuscript transmission and an intervention in the modern constitution of textual authority. It situates V. S. Sukthankar within colonial education, European philology and Indian scholarly institution building, while distinguishing his editorial practice from nineteenth-century attempts to recover a pristine heroic epic. His recognition of textual fluidity, preservation of variant readings and rejection of an unattainable original complicate the claim that he simply fixed a changing tradition. Nevertheless, the separation of a constituted text from its apparatus created a hierarchy that could acquire authority beyond its methodological limits. Reading Sukthankar alongside Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai’s *Many Mahābhāratas*, the article argues that manuscript reconstruction and the study of plural epic traditions are complementary undertakings. Its central question is whether the edition recovered a historical Mahābhārata while also helping to create the modern academic idea of what the Mahābhārata is.

KEYWORDS: *Mahābhārata; Sukthankar; critical edition; philology; textual authority; epic plurality*

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF AN AUTHORITATIVE EPIC

Was the Critical Edition an attempt to recover the historical Mahābhārata, or did it also help create the modern academic idea of what the Mahābhārata is? This question moves the discussion beyond the opposition between a reliable edition and an irreducibly fluid tradition. The edition was a monumental achievement of comparative scholarship, but its achievement must be defined carefully. It established a reasoned Sanskrit text from manuscript evidence; it did not establish the exclusive identity of an epic whose existence extends across languages, religious communities, performances and historical periods.¹

The distinction matters because the expression “the Mahābhārata” can refer to several different objects. It may designate a Sanskrit narrative and its embedded discourses, a particular manuscript, a modern scholarly reconstruction, or a wider constellation of tellings. These objects overlap without being interchangeable. A claim about the ancestry of Sanskrit readings cannot automatically settle the cultural authority of a Tamil performance. Equally, the existence of regional tellings does not make comparison between Sanskrit manuscripts meaningless. The problem begins when the authority appropriate to one undertaking is extended to every other.

Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai’s edited collection *Many Mahābhāratas* provides a productive starting point. Its organisation places plurality within the Sanskrit epic itself before moving through classical literary transformations, premodern regional works and modern reinterpretations. The volume thus invites consideration of multiplicity as a constitutive feature of the tradition, rather than a collection of departures from an otherwise self-sufficient original. The Primus edition makes this intervention particularly accessible within Indian scholarship.²

The argument developed here is that Sukthankar’s enterprise simultaneously recovered and constituted its object. “Constituted” does not mean invented without evidence. It means that the arrangement of evidence, the choice of readings and the institutional presentation of a scholarly text

helped define a new object of reference. His editorial caution remains indispensable to assessing that process. The strongest criticism of the edition concerns neither an alleged denial of variation nor the mere act of printing. It concerns how a provisional reconstruction can become a seemingly definitive cultural authority.

COLONIAL EDUCATION AND THE INTELLECTUAL LOCATION OF SUKTHANKAR

Vishnu Sitaram Sukthankar's educational trajectory crossed distinct intellectual environments. After schooling and college study in Bombay, he studied mathematics at St John's College, Cambridge, during 1903–1906. His subsequent doctoral training in Berlin culminated in 1914 under Heinrich Lüders; his dissertation concerned Śākaṭāyana's grammar and Yakṣavarman's commentary. His career therefore combined the opportunities of colonial higher education with specialised training in a major centre of European Sanskrit scholarship.³

These circumstances explain his access to particular scholarly techniques, but they do not establish intellectual dependence in every respect. Mathematical education should not be converted into a speculative explanation of all his editorial decisions. Nor should German training be treated as proof that he accepted every German interpretation of the epic. His acknowledgement of Lüders's exacting philological instruction establishes a real methodological debt; his disagreements with speculative reconstructions establish his capacity to interrogate the tradition in which he was trained.⁴

Colonial education is best understood here as an institutional setting that distributed access to knowledge and professional authority unevenly. European universities, learned societies and manuscript repositories had acquired considerable power to define recognised scholarship about India. An Indian scholar entering these networks encountered standards presented as scientific and internationally authoritative. Yet the acquisition of those standards also made it possible to contest European judgements in terms that their proponents could not easily dismiss.

Sukthankar's work consequently occupies a position more complex than that of either a colonial imitator or an untouched representative of indigenous learning. His expertise emerged through travel, disciplinary training and engagement with Sanskrit materials. The relevant historical question is how he used this position: which assumptions he retained, which he modified, and which he rejected. Reading his educational background through his actual methodological statements is more revealing than assuming that the place of his education predetermined the conclusions of his scholarship.

NINETEENTH CENTURY PHILOLOGY AND THE SEARCH FOR ORIGINS

The late nineteenth-century demand for a critical Mahābhārata arose from a philological environment concerned with origins, historical development and the relationships between surviving witnesses. Moriz Winternitz urged the preparation of a critical edition at the Paris International Congress of Orientalists in 1897 and renewed the proposal at subsequent congresses. Lüders's 1908 specimen demonstrated one possible editorial arrangement, but the European project failed to develop into a complete edition.⁵

The attraction of origins was not simply chronological curiosity. An early text could be imagined as the privileged source of later meanings, with subsequent elaborations classified as departures from it. When applied to the Mahābhārata, this model encouraged separation of an allegedly original heroic narrative from religious teaching, ethical argument and extensive subordinate stories. The resulting question was often not how these elements functioned together, but how they could be removed to recover something supposedly more authentic.

Adluri and Bagchee's *The Nay Science* places such interpretative practices within the intellectual and theological history of German Indology. Their critique warns against treating nineteenth-century claims to scientific method as free from religious and cultural commitments. That warning is valuable, although it should guide investigation of particular arguments rather than become a substitute for it. European philology was not a single doctrine, and technical manuscript comparison cannot be equated automatically with every speculative history advanced by its practitioners.⁶

Sukthankar himself challenged the assumption that the epic's philosophical and religious materials were merely obstacles to its intelligibility. In *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, his discussion of earlier critics exposes the weakness of reconstructing a primitive poem by excising whatever appears aesthetically inconvenient or ideologically unwelcome. He objected to conjectural narratives of growth that lacked sufficient evidential control. Recovering a defensible reading from manuscripts and imagining a lost heroic original were, for him, different scholarly operations.⁷

This distinction prevents a misleading genealogy in which nineteenth-century origin seeking leads without interruption to the Critical Edition. The edition inherited the problem of textual uncertainty, but it also imposed limits on proposed solutions. Its relationship to European scholarship involved both transmission and criticism. A history attentive to colonial power should preserve this difference, because the capacity to revise inherited methods is itself part of the history of Indian scholarly agency.

AN INDIAN INSTITUTION AND A COLLECTIVE UNDERTAKING

The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute transformed the proposed edition into a sustained Indian undertaking. Work was inaugurated in April 1919, and Sukthankar became General Editor in August 1925. The first fascicule appeared in 1927, and the Ādiparvan volume with its Prolegomena in 1933. The edition of the eighteen principal books was completed in 1966, well after Sukthankar's death in January 1943.⁸

These dates matter because the edition cannot be reduced to the intentions of one man. Its preparation depended upon successive editors, collators, manuscript custodians, financial supporters and printing arrangements. Sukthankar supplied a foundational methodological discussion, but the complete edition was the product of an institution working across several decades. Assessing its authority therefore requires attention to collective scholarly labour as well as to the individual associated most closely with its beginnings.

The project's funding also complicates a simple opposition between colonial knowledge and national recovery. Its published acknowledgements record support from governments, princely states, universities and individual patrons. These intersecting networks made scholarship possible under colonial conditions. They did not share a single political identity or necessarily an identical understanding of the epic. The edition emerged through negotiated institutional cooperation rather than from an isolated act of either imperial appropriation or national emancipation.⁹

Sukthankar nevertheless presented support for the undertaking as a matter of Indian scholarly prestige. His early appeal linked the epic with the history of India and called for assistance from Indian patrons. This language gave textual scholarship a public significance beyond the collation room. A critical edition could demonstrate that Indian institutions possessed the expertise and endurance to produce work recognised internationally. National investment did not necessarily dictate individual readings, but it helped shape the monumental status of the completed enterprise.¹⁰

WHAT COULD THE EDITION RECONSTRUCT

The central methodological distinction is between a reconstructed state of transmission and the first composition of the epic. Sukthankar explicitly denied that his constituted text recovered Vyāsa's autograph or an original Ur-Mahābhārata. His objective was limited by the surviving manuscript evidence. This disclaimer is not incidental: it determines what kinds of historical claims the edition can reasonably support. The earliest recoverable form is not necessarily the earliest form that ever existed.¹¹

Manuscript comparison operates through relationships between witnesses. Agreement among relatively independent groups can support the inference that a reading precedes their differentiation. Yet a reading's position in transmission does not by itself disclose the date of its composition or identify the person responsible for it. The surviving witnesses may preserve an already complex work. A critically established passage can therefore be secure within recoverable transmission while belonging to a much older history that remains difficult to reconstruct.

Sukthankar's recognition of fluidity makes the problem sharper. The Mahābhārata's witnesses did not descend through wholly insulated lines of copying. Versions could borrow from one another, and oral and written circulation could interact. Such crossing complicates the construction of a manuscript family tree. He consequently acknowledged the inadequacy of applying a rigid genealogical procedure to every feature of the epic and advocated cautious comparison suited to the particular material.¹²

His statements are more radical than a routine disclaimer about editorial error. He described the Mahābhārata as a changing tradition and questioned whether a fixed archetype adequately represented its history. Nevertheless, he still judged some readings earlier or better supported than others. The resulting position combines recognition of variability with a practical commitment to reconstruction. It cannot be compressed into either confidence in a pristine original or abandonment of all textual discrimination.¹³

The constituted text should accordingly be understood as an argued result. Its readings depend on available witnesses, assessments of their relationships and editorial judgement. Such a result is neither arbitrary nor immune to revision. Treating it as an hypothesis supported by explicit evidence preserves its scholarly value. Treating it as the transparent recovery of a single ancient moment conceals the uncertainty and interpretative work that made it possible.

PRESERVATION AND HIERARCHY IN THE PRINTED EDITION

The Critical Edition did not consist only of its constituted text. Variant readings, additional passages and editorial explanations formed an essential part of its design. Sukthankar emphasised that this arrangement enabled readers to examine the evidence behind decisions and to challenge those decisions where necessary. The apparatus was therefore a means of scholarly accountability as well as a repository of textual diversity.¹⁴

This design directly qualifies the charge that he simply suppressed fluidity. He made variation unusually visible within a systematic scholarly publication. His account of the relation between text and apparatus insists that their separation offers a static representation of a changing tradition. The editor recognised the representational limitation of the printed page. Fixing readings for a particular edition was, in his formulation, compatible with preserving the evidence that prevented those readings from becoming absolute.¹⁵

Nevertheless, preservation and equality are different matters. The page assigns positions: a continuous text occupies the main reading space, while alternatives appear below it or elsewhere. Even when this arrangement is technically necessary, it creates a hierarchy of attention. Readers can follow the constituted text without consulting the apparatus; they cannot reconstruct the rationale for an excluded passage as readily. Editorial form thus helps organise what becomes familiar and what requires additional scholarly effort.

The concern becomes particularly acute when the constituted text circulates independently. A translation or teaching extract may reproduce selected readings while leaving their alternatives inaccessible. The original edition's provisions for uncertainty then become detached from its most widely encountered text. This is a foreseeable consequence of selective circulation, not proof that every translator or teacher treats the edition uncritically. It identifies a mechanism through which a limited scholarly reconstruction can acquire broader authority.¹⁶

GAṆEŚA AND THE MEANINGS OF EXCLUSION

The account of Gaṇeśa serving as Vyāsa's scribe illustrates the difference between editorial status and cultural importance. Sukthankar treated the Brahmā-Gaṇeśa material as secondary within the manuscript transmission and placed it outside the constituted opening, while preserving the relevant material in the appendix. Its absence from particular witnesses and differences between versions supplied reasons for that decision.¹⁷

The decision answers a specific question: whether this passage belongs in the reconstructed form supported by the witnesses. It does not establish that the story is unworthy of study, insignificant to the epic's reception or incapable of bearing philosophical meaning. A secondary passage may

become central to how later readers understand authorship and writing. Its significance need not depend upon an antiquity that textual criticism cannot demonstrate.

The example also exposes the ambiguity of saying that a story is “not in the Mahābhārata.” Such a statement might mean that it is absent from the constituted text, absent from a particular manuscript, or unattested throughout the epic tradition. These propositions require different evidence. A responsible use of the edition should specify which is intended. Otherwise, a limited editorial conclusion becomes a general cultural exclusion through an unnoticed change in the meaning of the epic’s name.

This is especially pertinent to the present inquiry because the Gaṇeśa narrative concerns the passage from spoken composition to writing. Yet it should not be treated as a documentary account of the moment when the historical epic first became written. Narratives about writing can authorise a tradition without recording its material history. Neither the legend nor its editorial classification justifies imagining a single occasion on which an entirely oral Mahābhārata was definitively fixed by Brahmins.

BRAHMANICAL REDACTION AND THE PROPOSED PARALLEL

The question whether Sukthankar repeated what he accused Brahmins of doing requires a precise statement of his accusation. In “The Bhṛguś and the Bhārata,” he proposed that Bhārgava Brahmins had played a substantial role in reshaping the epic. He drew attention to the concentration of Bhārgava stories, the framing of its opening and what he interpreted as deliberate incorporation of materials promoting the lineage. His argument concerned a particular proposed redactional history, not merely the fact that Brahmins wrote down a previously unwritten text.¹⁸

The inference must remain distinguishable from its evidence. The presence of stories about a lineage does not by itself prove that members of that lineage controlled the entire text. Their prominence can support a historical hypothesis, but identifying agents and reconstructing an institutional transfer require further argument. Sukthankar’s account should therefore be discussed as an influential interpretation, not as established history against which modern editorial behaviour can simply be measured.

His concluding discussion also resists the assumption that redaction produced final closure. He envisaged continued additions and alterations after a major Bhārgava intervention. Indeed, he could admire the transformation of the Bhārata into a broader vehicle of instruction even while using strongly evaluative language about particular additions. The supposed opposition between corrupting Brahmins and a restoring modern editor is therefore too simple even as a description of his own position.¹⁹

There is nonetheless an illuminating structural parallel. Both a redactor and a modern editor can determine relationships between a received narrative and material surrounding it. Both can establish arrangements that subsequent readers inherit as authoritative. Their interventions make particular forms available and may render alternatives less prominent. The comparison directs attention to the social production of textual authority: who selects, whose decisions endure, and which communities acquire the power to define a recognised text.

The differences are equally consequential. A critical editor openly identifies an intervention as editorial, explains its rationale and preserves rejected evidence for inspection. A proposed ancient redactor belongs to a different historical situation, reconstructed through indirect testimony. The modern apparatus makes decisions unusually reversible at the level of scholarly argument. These differences prevent the analogy from becoming an accusation of identical conduct, while allowing it to remain a useful question about the effects of selection.²⁰

UNITY, PLURALITY AND INTERPRETATIVE METHOD

Two opposite assumptions must be resisted. The first treats every tension in the epic as evidence of incompatible layers requiring dissection. The second treats any interpretation of unity as proof that historical change was insignificant. Literary coherence and textual development can coexist. A

received work can organise materials from different histories into a meaningful arrangement; an organised work can also undergo later revision.

Hiltebeitel's *Rethinking the Mahābhārata* offers an important counterweight to approaches that fragment the epic before interpreting it. His attention to Yudhiṣṭhira's education and the relationships connecting characters, frames and embedded stories makes coherence an object of investigation. This encourages readers to ask what the transmitted epic accomplishes, rather than assume that its scale renders it artistically unintelligible. It does not require denying that different witnesses or later tellings deserve independent historical attention.²¹

Adluri and Bagchee's *Philology and Criticism* similarly challenges the use of the edition to authenticate speculative reconstructions of a lost heroic poem. Its defence of disciplined textual comparison is especially relevant to Sukthankar's methodological limits. Yet recognising these limits need not establish that every larger question about composition has been answered. A critical edition can restrain unsupported histories without exhausting the possible histories of the work.²²

The singular and plural should therefore identify different scales of enquiry. The singular remains useful for the substantial Sanskrit work whose narrative connections can be studied together. The plural acknowledges differing witnesses and creative engagements whose meanings cannot all be reduced to that work. Historical precision depends less on choosing one expression permanently than on identifying the object under discussion whenever an argument moves between these scales. Fluidity itself also needs definition. Variation in the wording of a line, the addition of an episode, the reorganisation of a narrative and the transformation of a character in performance are different kinds of change. They may occur together, but their relationship cannot be assumed. A tradition can preserve a recognisable narrative while permitting considerable variation in its expression. Conversely, a stable written text can generate radically different interpretations. Calling everything fluid risks concealing precisely the historical processes that the term is intended to illuminate.

Nor should oral transmission be made synonymous with unrestricted improvisation, or writing with complete stability. These equations turn material forms into explanations before their actual use has been investigated. What matters is how particular communities transmit, authorise and interpret their materials. In Sukthankar's case, the evidence of manuscript crossing already shows that writing did not eliminate change. The critical edition introduces a further arrangement of this evidence, with a distinctive scholarly procedure for distinguishing and documenting readings.

The question of authority can therefore be separated from a presumed progression from speech to manuscript to print. Each medium permits selection and renewal, though under different conditions. The issue is whether an intervention makes its choices accessible and recognises the existence of other historically meaningful forms. This criterion allows a sharper evaluation of modern philology than the general accusation that it necessarily arrests the life of every tradition it edits.

READING WITH MANY MAHĀBHĀRATAS

Many Mahābhāratas enables such movement without making the Critical Edition obsolete. Its opening group of essays considers multiplicity within the Sanskrit epic, while subsequent groups examine transformations across genres and languages. This structure changes the question from how far a telling departs from an authoritative source to what that telling does in its own setting. The methodological consequence developed here is that ancestry and cultural significance must be investigated separately before their relationship is explained.²³

David Gitomer's "The Invention of Irāvān" is especially suggestive for this discussion because its opening characterises the edition, including apparatus and supplements, as a library of Sanskrit Mahābhāratas. This formulation directs attention to what the editorial monument contains rather than only to the continuous text that readers extract from it. The possibility of plurality within the edition offers a route beyond the assumption that manuscript scholarship necessarily serves a singular canon.²⁴

Sally J. Sutherland Goldman's chapter on Sulabhā foregrounds a female ascetic's challenge to Janaka's claims about liberation. Its subject alone reminds us that identifying a work as Brahmanical cannot determine the position of every voice within it. The lesson for this article is methodological:

a tradition's broad social location and the arguments articulated by particular speakers require distinct levels of analysis. The constituted text can itself supply material that complicates simplified accounts of its ideological uniformity.²⁵

Hawley's discussion of Arjuna as Brhannalā in the Pañcarātra brings another Sanskrit genre into the field of epic enquiry. Here the object is a dramatic work engaging epic characters and situations, rather than an alternative manuscript reading. Treating such a work solely as evidence for reconstructing an earlier epic would miss the distinct questions raised by dramatic form. The wider field of Mahābhārata literature consequently requires methods beyond those designed for constituting a Sanskrit manuscript text.²⁶

Harshita Mruthinti Kamath's treatment of the Telugu Mahābhāratamu considers the work associated with Nannaya, Tikkana and Ēṛṇapragāḍa. The chapter's account of its emergence across centuries places epic making within the formation of a regional literary sphere. For the present argument, this offers a clear reason to avoid treating every non-Sanskrit work as a transparent conduit to Sanskrit readings. A regional epic possesses a history of composition, literary authority and reception that merits investigation on its own terms.²⁷

Hiltebeitel's work on the Draupadī cult extends this issue to ritual and performance. Its combination of oral and written materials with local devotional practices demonstrates the inadequacy of defining the epic's cultural existence through printed words alone. A manuscript edition cannot reconstruct an entire performance environment. Recognising this limitation does not diminish its achievement; it prevents a valuable instrument from becoming the measure of every historical manifestation of the tradition.²⁸

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF TEXTUAL AUTHORITY

The proposed critique should now be stated in a form that remains open to evidence. The Critical Edition created conditions under which a constituted Sanskrit text could become the default academic reference. Whether and where this occurred must be established through the histories of translations, teaching, citation and publishing. The arrangement of the edition suggests a mechanism of authority; demonstrating its full consequences requires investigation of how readers actually used it.²⁹

Such investigation should ask whether scholarly users preserve the distinction between constituted text and apparatus, how they describe excluded passages, and whether regional tellings are introduced as derivative versions or independent works. It should also examine situations in which the edition's apparatus has enabled plural histories rather than obstructed them. An account that selects only evidence of standardisation would reproduce the very narrowing of the archive that it seeks to criticise.

The resulting method is straightforward but demanding. Manuscript ancestry requires comparative evidence; compositional history requires arguments extending beyond that ancestry; reception requires attention to historical communities and media. Later textuality is not automatically inferior textuality. Conversely, acknowledging the legitimacy of later tellings does not erase chronological differences. These distinctions allow the edition and the many Mahābhāratas to inhabit the same scholarly field without being forced into a contest for exclusive authenticity.

CONCLUSION

Sukthankar did fix a text in the limited sense that every edition must settle on readings for presentation. He did not claim that this settlement reproduced the epic's first composition or enclosed its entire tradition. His recognition of variability and preservation of alternatives prevent an adequate critique from identifying him simply with the suppression of textual plurality. His hypotheses about Bhārgava redaction likewise require scrutiny without being confused with a general accusation that Brahmins permanently closed the epic by writing it down.

The deeper issue is the relation between editorial caution and subsequent authority. The edition can be read as a reasoned reconstruction embedded within an archive, or its constituted text can be detached and treated as the epic's definitive identity. The central question therefore admits a

qualified answer: the project recovered historically transmitted evidence while also establishing a powerful modern form through which the Mahābhārata became academically knowable. Its authority is strongest when accompanied by an account of its limits. *Many Mahābhāratas* helps make those limits productive by locating the edition within a tradition whose continuity has depended upon renewed acts of interpretation and creation.³⁰

Endnotes

¹ V. S. Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," in *The Ādiparvan*, vol. 1 of *The Mahābhārata* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933), cii–cii, especially the sections "The Critical Apparatus" and "What Is the Constituted Text?"

² Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai, eds., *Many Mahābhāratas* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2023), introduction and parts I–IV. Originally published by SUNY Press in 2021.

³ V. S. Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata* (Bombay: Asiatic Society of Bombay, 1957); biographical details are corroborated by the publisher's author account for the Motilal Banarsidass reprint, "On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata," <https://www.motilalbanarsidass.com/products/on-the-meaning-of-the-mahabharata-v-k-sukthankar>.

⁴ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," concluding acknowledgements, especially the acknowledgement of Heinrich Lüders. Reprinted in V. S. Sukthankar, *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, vol. 1 of *V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition*, ed. P. K. Gode (Bombay: V. S. Sukthankar Memorial Edition Committee, 1944).

⁵ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," i–iii, "Introduction."

⁶ Vishwa Adluri and Joydeep Bagchee, *The Nay Science: A History of German Indology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). The present discussion draws on the authors' stated critique of method and theological assumptions, rather than treating their interpretation as an uncontested history of all European philology.

⁷ Sukthankar, *On the Meaning of the Mahābhārata*, lecture 1, "The Mahābhārata and Its Critics."

⁸ Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, "History," <https://bori.ac.in/about/history/>; and "The Mahābhārata," <https://bori.ac.in/departments/mahabharata/>. The dates refer to the principal eighteen-parvan edition; the Harivamśa edition was a separate subsequent undertaking.

⁹ Sukthankar, *The Ādiparvan*, title-page acknowledgements; Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," "Introduction."

¹⁰ Sukthankar, foreword to *Ādiparvan*, fascicule 1 (1927), concluding appeal; reprinted in *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, "Foreword."

¹¹ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," lxxxvi and ciii.

¹² Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," "The Principles of Textual Criticism" and "What Is Then Possible?"; see also his 1927 foreword, "General Observations."

¹³ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," cii–cii, "The Critical Apparatus" and "What Is the Constituted Text?"

¹⁴ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," cii–cii; and "Introduction," account of the scope of the edition and its apparatus.

¹⁵ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," cii–cii. The distinction between the changing tradition and its static representation is Sukthankar's own; the argument about later hierarchies of attention is developed here.

¹⁶ Adluri and Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism: A Guide to Mahābhārata Textual Criticism* (London: Anthem Press, 2018). For the narrower claim that the critical text has become a standard scholarly reference, see the publisher's description, <https://anthempublish.com/books/philology-and-criticism-pdf>. The analysis of selective circulation is the present article's inference.

¹⁷ Sukthankar, editorial introduction to *Ādiparvan*, fascicule 1 (1927), "General Characteristics of the Manuscripts and Their Mutual Relationship," discussion of the Brahmā–Gaṇeśa episode; reprinted in *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, "Introduction." See also Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," accounts of the Bengali and Devanāgarī versions.

¹⁸ V. S. Sukthankar, "Epic Studies VI: The Bhṛgu and the Bhārata: A Text-Historical Study," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 18, no. 1 (1936): 1–76, especially 67–70. Reprinted in *Critical Studies in the Mahābhārata*, 278–337.

¹⁹ Sukthankar, "The Bhṛgu and the Bhārata," 75–76.

²⁰ Sukthankar, "Prolegomena," cii–cii. The redactor–editor comparison is an analytical analogy proposed in this article, not a claim by Sukthankar that ancient and modern interventions were identical.

²¹ Alf Hiltebeitel, *Rethinking the Mahābhārata: A Reader's Guide to the Education of the Dharma King* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

²² Adluri and Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism*.

²³ Hawley and Pillai, *Many Mahābhāratas*, “An Introduction to the Literature of the Mahābhārata” and the organisation of parts I–IV.

²⁴ David Gitomer, “The Invention of Irāvān,” in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Nell Shapiro Hawley and Sohini Sarah Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 53–68, opening paragraph.

²⁵ Sally J. Sutherland Goldman, “Bodies That Don't Matter: Gender, Body, and Discourse in the Narrative of Sulabhā,” in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Hawley and Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 69–88, opening paragraph.

²⁶ Nell Shapiro Hawley, “The Remembered Self: Arjuna as Bṛhannalā in the Pañcarātra,” in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Hawley and Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 91–116, opening discussion.

²⁷ Harshita Mruthinti Kamath, “Three Poets, Two Languages, One Translation: The Evolution of the Telugu Mahābhāratamu,” in *Many Mahābhāratas*, ed. Hawley and Pillai (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2021), 191–212, opening discussion.

²⁸ Alf Hiltebeitel, *The Cult of Draupadi*, vol. 1, *Mythologies: From Gingee to Kurukṣetra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

²⁹ Adluri and Bagchee, *Philology and Criticism*; Sukthankar, “Prolegomena,” cii–ciii. A comprehensive history of classroom, publishing and translation practices is proposed here as further empirical research, not claimed as an already completed survey.

³⁰ Sukthankar, “Prolegomena,” lxxxvi and cii–ciii; Hawley and Pillai, eds., *Many Mahābhāratas*.