A particular approach to the study of Indian palaeography follows from the conception of writing as being part of culture. And to discover various traits of culture one has to search for different writing materials or styles, which can be inferred from the available specimens. The forms in any particular inscription are not ends in themselves. They are the materials for proper study and analysis into one or other tradition following one or other technique. The tradition relates the various materials and instruments to one particular culture, and thus writing becomes a part of that culture. The use of different writing materials and instruments accounts for differences in technique for the creation of a distinct form. In this backdrop the development of palmleaf writing is a part of the evolution of those cultures. Without making any formal comparison with other writing materials and in the absence of any other traditional writing patterns much importance has been given to palmleaf writing, which still survives, and hence it has been made the basis of preliminary study. The study of writing on palmleaf is thus an attempt to discover its importance and usefulness, as historical source material in the Indian context in general to Orissan context in particular. Even after fully realising the limitation of the subject, utmost care has been taken to discover and identify the problems associated with it. But the objectives of the research have largely been fulfilled. When we go beyond for the quest of data both from literary and archaeological sources we find some astounding evidence to prove our arguments. So the approach to the subject matter of research has been constructed after examining diverse sources.
An endeavour has been made in the foregoing research to trace in outline the evolution of palmleaf manuscript from its early beginnings up to modern times, with a view to introducing the stylus which was used in the writing of manuscripts, and setting them in historical, archaeo logical and ethno-historical perspective. In the first part of the study, the question of when writing was first introduced in India was taken up and its purposes and the materials used were discussed. It was noted that writing was introduced relatively late, long after the use of seals, sealings and graffiti on potsherds. Later on writing got a formative stage but we are yet to decipher that. There is evidence to show that the scripts and literatures indeed was an indigenous creation. Although some scholars do not accept this argument. The Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit and other literary sources focus on the emergence of a developed writing culture, and efforts have been made through out centuries to maintain its efficacy. In India the historical tradition and literature, which is interpreted as itihaśa-purāṇa has been placed in an essentially socio-religious context by priestly authors. But their sources are no longer available to us. Later on historical biographies, family chronicles, genealogies and regional histories are the extension of this tradition and form the main corpus of historical writing. Further the continuity of itihaśa-purāṇa tradition through folklores and proverbs in remote villages of India still replicate its ancient tradition. Even if it is debatable in which material this vast literary output was written on, its association with palmleaves cannot be ignored. Since decades a new phenomenon has emerged in the scene of palmleaf writing. This is the contemporary school of writing that developed along with other materials, not only in Orissa but also throughout India and even in some neighbouring countries. The scribes have been trained by local teachers and have roots in indigenous
culture. Now effort has been made to determine the date for the use of palmleaf manuscript as writing material. Some¹ argue about its origin from the Harappan civilisation and they presume that this process began from the time of this civilisation i.e. 2500 BC. Hence it is most probable that writing on palmleaf started by this time and attained perfection by the time of 1st century A.D. when it appears in almost a complete and finished form.

II

The palmleaf manuscripts, as we have seen, are considered to be one of the earlier epigraphic records in India other than a few which are believed to be anterior to this material. Before dealing with the palmleaf manuscript in its fullest detail, it was relevant to discuss its origin, though very briefly. While tackling this problem we were confronted with numerous theories that have been propounded by many scholars. But one fact is generally accepted that the writing on palmleaf was perfected by Buddhist scholars to suit Pali literature and later on adopted by Hindu, Jaina and non-religious literatures. This general view gave us a lead to make further investigations of the problem. Proceeding further we have found that the writing on palmleaf was considerably influenced by the use of different types of writing instruments. Consequently, we have been able to show the basic or primary forms of the writing instrument i.e. stylus and their developed forms. The probable evolution of the stylus has been indicated as far as possible. While showing the different types of writing materials and instruments, we have also pointed out the use of ink, which plays an important part for clear visibility of manuscript letters. It is noteworthy that the traditional

method of ink preparation for use on palmleaf is still followed. It is not that palmleaf was the only writing material used but other kinds of writing materials were also known. But the vast corpus of literatures on palmleaf preserved today in various libraries of all over India and abroad certainly indicates that its use dominated all other materials in terms of numbers and quality.

Those palmleaf manuscripts, which have been said to be earlier, demanded a thorough examination through literature, inscriptions and sculptures. Since none of the earlier manuscripts survived or provide any date, or the name of any known king or gives any other relevant clue to determine their dates of origin, it has been a most difficult task to fix their time decisively. Palaeography alone is too fragile a basis to determine the date of an inscription unless it is supported by other facts, however remote they may be. In view of this fact, it is not possible to say anything definitely about the exact beginning of palmleaf writing. However, opinion has been expressed while examining all sources, allowing full consideration to the data available. The origin of palmleaf inscriptions may belong to the Indus civilisation or may be anterior to this, and this argument can be decisively said once we get substantial other data from Harappan period to sixth or seventh century B.C., because at present our presumption is totally on the basis of stylus rather than of palmleaf. Secondly, this argument will be more credible if we get a reference on palmleaf writing in the Indus script. The effort in this regard is to determine the sequence of literary texts with that of archaeological sources.
The second part of argument is an intermediary concern involving tracking down of the direct and indirect sources- literary, inscriptions and iconography. Epigraphy is not primarily concerned with the attribution and writing of works or with their dating. While an epigraphic analysis facilitates a precise dating or an attribution, epigraphists usually leave other problems to historians. Some of the earliest copper plate inscriptions resemble palmleaf folios in form and shape. However, sometimes the current meanings of things and situations also correspond to those of previous centuries and it is not always clear to which material inscription- engravers have imitated. Therefore, it is very important to examine an inscription carefully while enumerating its format and content. We have some inscriptive specimens, which testify such kinds of imitation or replication. That means inscriptions were formatted corresponding to palmleaf folios. Hence, use of palmleaf writing prior to inscriptive writing on copper plates was not uncommon. But for iconography description is the prerequisite of every subsequent step towards a correct interpretation. Artists have often portrayed the same subjects in many manifestations of most themes. For this reason, portrayals of themes with executions of the pustaka often resemble one another. If we say that a representation of pustaka has a deeper meaning, which means that it conveys an underlying idea that cannot be determined immediately. Thus, substantial evidence has been together about the object i.e. pustaka under investigation. Many scholars incorporate only those elements of a representation that support their interpretations, ignoring other, and perhaps conflicting details within the same work. However, in this section all visible aspects are considered and used. An effective argument has been made by using literary sources in comparison with that of sculptures. This iconological investigation concentrated on both
socio-historical and art-historical influences and values that the artist might have consciously brought this feature of 'pustaka or manuscript or book' into play.

From the point of view of the visual image, the moment the transformation takes place from the narrative reliefs to images to the multiplicity of deities, and the emergence of a vast Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina pantheon, the area of iconography widens to include central Asia, Tibet and Bhutan on the one hand and Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, on the other. The spectrum is so wide that it leaves one baffled with amazement. This brings one to the need for comparative work on iconography as a cooperative effort rather than single studies in particular areas confined to specific periods. The iconic representations of Mañjuśrī, Sarasvatī, Brahmā, Siddhāyikā, Yaksī, etc. provide parallel data (holding pustaka) of these deities along with textual details in both religious and non-religious literatures. Therefore, on that basis chapter IV is pertinently constructive while dealing with iconography, textual evidence and parallels. Some of the iconographical representations, which are presented in this paper, will enable us to identify the contours of this broader context. The micro level studies on deities holding pustaka have more meaning and network of communication between and amongst palmleaf writing, and antiquity of writing in different regions is comprehensible. It is this pan-Asian tradition of manuscript writing, which naturally is of the greatest interest.

IV

Large numbers of palmleaf manuscripts had come to light when collections of manuscripts were made in many rural villages in the houses of its medicine man, astrologer, propitiator of gods, performer of charms and ceremonies connected with good and evil
Most of the books are kept as a necessary part of their work. These collections go in the family from father to son. The son adds more to it by copying books obtained from his friends. A man would travel long distances and spend much time and labour to get a copy of a book, which he might not possess in his own collection. Usually manuscripts written in Oriya scripts are found in four languages, viz. Oriya, Bengali, Sanskrit and Hindi. The Oriya language having been in common and daily use by the people, has lived, grown and changed showing a vitality extending for over hundreds of years. It has adjusted itself to changes in the life of the people and expressed new cults and new ideas introduced from time to time.

We have made an exhaustive survey on these collected manuscripts preserved in different museums. From this survey arguments have been constructed about the importance of colophon in a palmleaf manuscript. This has yielded significant conclusions. The importance of the colophon in a manuscript is immense as far as keeping the records or historical information is concerned. So the present research was successful in drawing data and constructing a coherent argument, which not only enhances the importance of colophon but also compares these findings with data obtained from literary sources and inscriptions of earlier period. A noteworthy theme is the commissioning and execution of copies of sacred and other texts, which was seen as a meritorious act for both patron and scribe. It is not uncommon for a colophon to record the name of the donor and the scribe, sometimes together with the place and year of execution. The second aspect is maintaining of genealogy of scribe; patron- and even ruling dynasties in some manuscripts, which strengthens our argument that it could indeed be used as a source. Further, texts of some of manuscripts are lying uncared for in the villages of Orissa. They are left to decay and destruction at the hands of insects, fire and floods. Still people lack promptness either to donate or even to sell these rare treasures of literatures and art to universities, museum or other institutions.
the manuscripts provide in-detail descriptions of various temples of Orissa and their rituals, regional history of Sambalpur, Pāṭa, Dhenkānāl; war history of two neighbouring states like Khallikot and Āṭhagarh and so on. Here we may draw inference that palmleaf manuscripts contain a great deal of information from genealogy to local history, geography to economics, temple-architecture to temple maintenance, king-to-scribe-profile and other related aspects, which are evidence of its worthiness as a source for the writing of history specifically regional history.

V

Earlier writing on palmleaves was the responsibility of a certain group of people who influenced the course of palmleaf writing. These were the Brāhmanical teachers, litterateurs and priests. Although instruction in writing has remained chiefly in the hands of Brāhmans for a longer period, yet there are indications that professional writers, and perhaps even castes of professional writers existed already at an early period.\(^3\) At present people from diverse social groups-inspite of their divergent caste structure are involved in the making and preparing of palmleaf folios. Even people from lower strata adopted the profession and gave new orientations to the very nature of this material. Now we have amongst us scribe-artists who are still continuing this tradition. The experience of watching these scribe-artists who are totally dedicated, and identified themselves in manuscripts, should be an example for others who have looked at them and their works only from the outside as an intellectual endeavour and not as an inner experience. Watching them at work will be convincing proof that the process of creating text and image is complete and full only when a total merging

\(^3\)This process was later on facilitated by the Buddhist and Jaina monks and nuns, who assiduously devoted themselves to the task of writing and copying sacred texts.
takes place between various social groups i.e. Brahmins to cobblers. Despite adverse conditions these scribes and artists involved in it use the age old method and instrument i.e. iron stylus for creating text, art and paintings on palm leaf. So the tradition of writing is still carried on inspite of the changing scenario and coming up of other suitable materials like paper, pen, etc. Further while pursuing the occupation of writing they are also engaged in other activities like cultivation and industrial works just to improve their livelihood. This reflects the secular tradition of this art culture, which is still alive.

**VI**

In the ethno-historic survey, the scribe emerges as a creator by preparing and processing the palm leaf manuscripts, as a composer writes text on it and as an artist produces excellent painting on the leaves. There is adequate evidence in various sources and ethnographic study on scribe, which has established that the position of the scribe indeed was that of a creator not just a copier. Although at times they did work for the ruling dynasty, rich men and some other patrons, but simultaneously they also produced art and paintings through their own imagination. Now they compose and copy their own and candidly approach the patron. Even some scribes work as authors, painters and copiers of the manuscripts. There is no hard and fast rule that the scribe cannot be an author, in fact the scribe works both as a copier and a prolific composer of texts. Also we see a scribe whose style changed from ineptitude, guided by various predecessors and quite distinctive from his contemporaries.
Three kinds of documentary evidence is relevant to find the absolute chronology of a scribe i.e. the dates given in the manuscripts themselves, the dates of the literature that is copied, and the dates of a few objects depicted in the illustrations. The artist himself was not an artist by inheritance, nor does he appear to have had more than the patronage of local men of money. Generally the scribe grew from the position of an apprentice to an independent writer who later on turned into a prolific composer of texts, deciding what to compose and how to treat his subjects. And the works ranged from historical literature to Oriya romances. One such author-scribe was Brajanath Badajena of Dherikanal. Like him there were hundreds of composers who besides copying had pursued their literary genius by creating innumerable works in various languages. The ethnographic study in the field unfolds the talents of such scribes. So, the producer or the creator of an extinct tradition cannot be generalised as a mere copier. Besides generating manuscripts they also produce other crafts like cloth paintings, woodcarving, paper masks, sculpture on stone and so on. Many details throughout the manuscripts show the scribe’s wit and interest in meticulous description.

VII

Except palmleaf other traditional materials have been abandoned for writing purposes. No doubt palmleaf is still used for writing and illustrations, but the basic purpose has undergone a complete change. The scribes’ pattern has also changed, making room for only *citrakaras* who only make illustrations. Even one can notice the difference of palmleaf writing of earlier period with that of the present. Although the scribes are following this traditional writing system but the purpose is somehow commercial. The numbers of contemporary poets and writers who are composing texts on palmleaves have declined and
so the system has taken a complete turn, only the scribes are left for copying the earlier texts. In the most recent, again casual attempts are being made to popularise illustrated works rather than the works of literature. Further the illustration style also has undergone complete change from traditional to modern ones. The only original-textual kind of work a scribe does on the palmleaf today is the horoscope.

Currently the NGO's and other organisations have been formed in the state for the promotion of this traditional writing system. It is an acceptable fact that they have been able to generate interest among the scribes. More and more scribes are attracted to palmleaf writing because they are assured better economic prospects through the sale of their products. Due to these efforts palmleaf writing has come out of the limits of the local people and travelled into far off places. This is a completely new dimension, which has been created in recent years to meet the demand of the new social set-up. But this has adversely affected the quality, and the style is deteriorating day by day. As it was discussed in the section on ethno-graphic studies, the scribes have changed their earlier traditional rigorous pattern of processing palmleaf instead they are now following a somewhat easy procedure to make such manuscript. To enhance production intelligent scribes employ novices or beginners or learners in the profession who are unable to meet the quality and almost repeat in a morbid method. The writing has become more stereotyped, stale and more-ornamental. There are also difficulties in the learning of palmleaf writing. For learning one has to travel to those far-flung villages daily. It is quite difficult for interested people belonging to far off places. In this way the art of palmleaf etching breathing its last beats, and along with it the scribes, artists and all their genius are gradually being pushed out of sight. Nevertheless, the
heritage, in the form of old examples, survives to justify the verve, the naive expression and the scribe's involvement.

VIII

In a nutshell we can say writing on palmleaf still takes place although the purpose, context and content of writing on palmleaf are drastically changed. We have found that there existed imperial standard forms of palmleaf manuscripts with certain regional influence. All those peculiarities or variations that happen to occur are either due to the style of the engraver or scribe or are inadvertently engraved. The standard shape is most frequently employed and often the most artistic in design. But the tradition of writing and nature of material, its preparation process and the writing instruments used can provide useful information for comparing more recent specimens with archaeological material found in excavations. The continuity in the tradition of writing since early times has been highlighted in this thesis. It is important, however, that adequate attention be paid to the reporting of writing instruments in archaeological reports for a comprehensive understanding of the subject. Any categorization of palmleaf manuscript writing as merely copying of religious texts is not supported by the available evidence instead a far more complex picture emerges by a comparison of information from surviving manuscripts with the archaeological record.

IX

By its very diverse nature the palmleaf cannot be preserved over a long period and for this very reason there is a tradition of copying manuscripts, which reach an irreparable condition and after copying, the older manuscripts were either dropped in a river or dipped
in ghee and consigned to the fire, depriving one of an opportunity to compare the original text and its copy. After the death of grandfather or father usually the family members burnt their manuscripts along with the dead bodies, as they burnt other articles of use such as the bed, clothes, walking sticks and wooden sandals of the deceased.\(^4\) A custom was followed regarding manuscripts, which is also responsible for the non-availability of many old manuscripts. According to this after a hundred years had elapsed manuscripts were to be immersed in water (jalaśri).\(^5\)

Invitation to marriages, birth ceremonies etc. are even issued on palmleaf cards. That custom still prevails but it has almost come to an end, as it cannot compete with the printing press and the modern book. In Bengal, few people are even using palmleaf as a writing material for ‘Durgāpath’ and in southern temples particularly at Rameswār, Jagdish etc. palmleaves are used as a token of money receipt.\(^6\) Even in Sri Lanka Buddhist monks are writing on palmleaf as a part of their daily ritual. Now the issue arises up whether one should totally forget such a glorious school of writing and allow us to be swayed by the contemporary trends, or find out a new vocabulary of patterns to translate the needs of contemporary society in the palmleaf writing.


\(^5\) The practice among possessors of palmleaf manuscripts in Orissa is to have a fresh copy made about every hundred years and then to consign the older one to the waters of a river. This usage known as Jalasāyi, is meant to prolong the life of a text, obviously also submits it to various hazards at the hands of successive copyists. The intervening period would invariably bring about changes in writing, style and language. A later copyist not conversant with the earlier forms might introduce his own. This may result in various distortions and confusions. Thus copies made of one original text made at various times and places, may always present considerable variations or even discrepancies. Alice Boner and Sadasiva Ratha Sarma, *New Light on the Sun temple of Konarka*, 1st ed., Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, Varanasi-1972, p.Intr.

\(^6\) G.H. Ojha, *Bhāratīya Prāchīna Lipīmāla* (Hindi), 1st pub. 1918, revised ed., Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi-1971, *op.cit.* p.143. The MSS prior to 15th C.A.D. of southern pattern pressed by iron needle are not available due to warm weather of south India. Large scale of manuscripts is preserved in the various temples mentioned above of south India.
Problems

Coming to the problem of text and illustrations of the manuscript, there are resources on textual material. However, the problems cannot be restricted to an exercise of the identification of an illustration with literary text. The process is indeed far more complex. This exercise of correlating the text and image has so far been largely restricted to an identification problem or at best a descriptive and narrative account. Besides the question of the correlation of the text, whether of the sūtras or of the sāstras, there is the question of the proper editing of the unpublished texts. There is a vast amount of unpublished material available in manuscript form in libraries—both in India and abroad. The preparation of a catalogue of these manuscripts and the publication of these texts could be taken up as a better endeavours. This might well be tantamount to drawing up an encyclopaedia of primary textual material relating to palmleaf manuscripts. No doubt, the identification of primary material, its bibliography, its editing and translation, will prove to be a monumental task, but at some point this has to be undertaken.

In the foregoing research there are certain grey areas that still need to be looked into:

- Traditional literatures do not amply focus on palmleaf writing
- Nonconformity of certain archaeological data with literary source: especially writing materials and instruments
- Difficulties in the identifications of writing instruments and scholars’ arguments not compatible to each other
- Relation between stylus and ink and inkpots
Finding of earlier specimens on palmleaf manuscripts: prior to 7th century

Not enough inscriptive evidence to support the writing on palmleaf

Lack of iconographical evidence prior to 1st century AD: does not support our arguments of evidence of palmleaf writing prior to that period

Issues that remain to be taken up

The main line of investigation ought to concentrate on authenticity of palmleaf writing, which most likely yields the historical significance of palmleaf manuscript from a much earlier context. This requires to be performed on a much more extensive scale than has hitherto been attempted, so as to secure adequacy. It is proposed that an extensive study of the stylus and its varied uses along with other pointed instruments could solve any ambiguity there might be regarding the validity of the chronology of early use of palmleaf as set out in this thesis. There are certain other issues, which remain unanswered and this research theme could be further expanded:

An extensive survey on the use and importance of palmleaf writing in early literatures could resolve the certainty of its extensive use.

Further research could clarify the periodisation of palmleaf writing through which one would set in motion a whole chain of hypothesis formulation relating to the dating of manuscripts.
After studying the locational analysis of various writing instruments, a geo-specific approach can be achieved with regard to writing practices of a specific historical period.

Focus on historical significance of vamśāvallī or genealogies could constitute a major step towards resolving age-old controversies, which can only be cleared by extracting manuscript related evidence.

Broader concept of the evolution of scribes and their pattern: particularly about the caste or class concept.

Scribes and their patronage in history: difference of patronage in inscription and palmleaf manuscript.