CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of writing in India has a history of its own. But despite several studies there still remain questions to be addressed. For one, we do not have any material record of this unbroken tradition of writing. Due to this discontinuous evidence for writing there is a lacuna in between the various historical periods. Literary sources nevertheless refer to the system of writing and its antiquity, but most of these are religious texts. Even prior to literary development the finds of various scripts push back the antiquity of writing to the Harappan civilisation. But there is a large gap of almost two thousand years in between the evidence of the non-deciphered Indus script and the appearance of stone inscriptions in the deciphered Brāhmi and other scripts. This gap is covered to some extent by evidence of graffiti, pictographs and other signs, symbols, seals and sealings. This is further complemented by finds from various excavations that do reveal the existence of writing materials and instruments used ever since the Harappan civilisation.

Therefore, the first question that confronts us whether the presence of writing materials or instruments that exist in the archaeological record could bear testimony to this sequence of writing. Further to analyse the theme comprehensively we have to look into a wide range of sources available such as of literary, sculptural and other data. The discussion is based not only on literary sources, but also through the examination of archaeological and ethnographical information. To indicate the process of writing, besides the available literature we also have potsherds, graffiti, seals and sealings. Certainly there must have
existed some kinds of writing materials and writing instruments for the purpose of lettering such signs or scripts on different materials. Thus, the evolution and growth of scripts and literature could be ascertained only through specific studies on writing materials and instruments. The finds of tools and artefacts at various sites in India support the utility and necessity of investing in these issues. There is no denying the fact that perishable material such as palmleaf, tree bark and cloth, which have little chance of surviving the rigours of the Indian climate were definitely used for writing purposes. Consequently, according to this observation, one need not be surprised that no early specimens of writing have survived, and their absence does not establish that they never existed.

Whenever we think of writing in ancient India, two materials stand out foremost: palmleaf and birch bark. Both of them were known since very early times. Though it is difficult to decide which of them is earlier, it may be possible to surmise that palmleaf or some kind of leaf was the first one. The word *patra*, which is used commonly for material means a leaf. So, after several attempts of experiment, perhaps, the palmleaf must have been arrived at as the most suitable material to write on, and it is called *patra* because it is also a leaf. The Buddhist canonical works employed the term *panna* (in Sanskrit *pana*) for this. Later the term was extended to include similar writing material such as birch bark and even a metal sheet (*tāmra-patra*). Of the available bulk of manuscripts, palmleaf very much outnumbers birch bark and others. A pile of palmyra folios laboriously engraved by hand

---

1The art of writing was known to the Sinhala from the earliest times; and as far back as the 2nd century B.C. the *Mahāvamsa* mentions that Prince Uttiya, brother of king Kāliṇī Tissa utilised a *patra* or leaf to write a message of intimate affection to his sister-in-law, the queen. And this incident bears the earliest reference to the use of leaf or *patra* as a medium for the art of writing in ancient Sri Lanka. C.M.Austin De Silva, Production of Books in Ancient Ceylon, in *Education in Ceylon: A Century*, Vol.1, Colombo: Cultural Affairs, 1969, p.227.
and strung together between boards was the standard type of book used in some parts of India. In Bengal, Orissa, south, and southeast of India some remain in use today; though the production of manuscripts is almost at an end. Besides its use as a writing material, palmleaf was also used as ornaments and household-materials in some parts of India.

Focus of the Study

Inception of the present work

The specific approach to the study of palm leaf manuscript follows from the present conception of writing as being a part of culture. Since the research seeks to discover a culture through the various traits seen in the available material contents, so it is also possible to search for the different writing materials and instruments, which can be inferred from the available specimens. Significantly, the present research approach moves from macro to micro level. For the macro level study the research focuses on the tradition of writing and its antiquity as well as finds of writing materials and writing instruments from both literary and

---

2 Among the ancient ornaments kamika was important. It is also called tālapatara, tārpatra or tālbar, an ornament in imitation of palmleaf (Borassus Flabelliformis). It is now not in use, but palmleaf covered with lac is still worn on the ear. The leaves are cut up onto neat bracelets and worn by Santhal girls. Lacquered palmleaf is worn as ear-ornaments in south India. T.N. Mukharji, Art Manufactures of India, 1st pub. 1888, Aryan Book International, reprinted, New Delhi-2000, p.102, 151.

3 Ornamental baskets and braids are made of palmyra leaves in Diamond Harbour near Calcutta. The palikat were made of the leaves of the palmyra palm and cigar cases are also made of the leaves of the date palm. Mats are made all over India of palmyra leaf and date leaf, which are used as beds by the poorer classes on which they sleep at night. Palmleaf fans are made all over Bengal and Madras, both large and small. The large ones are waved before or behind a rich man by his servant and formed the sole means of obtaining air in the hot season before the present pankhā was invented. The smaller ones are the usual hand fans. Both are often ornamented. In the Madras Presidency fans are made of painted palmleaves at Chivath in Cuddapah and elsewhere, but those made in Tanjore are better in quality. They have tala border and silk fringe and handles are ornamented with bits of coloured grass in imitation of precious stones. This industry has, however, been practically destroyed since the introduction of English umbrellas. Mukharji; ibid., p.307, 313, 314; Besides the fruit of the palm is employed for making wine by the Pathans as well as the Indians and indeed throughout all the countries of the east. The liquor is made from the fermented sap-called in India tāri. It is the juice of the Palmyra tree vulgarly called toddy. B.N.Puri, Indian in Classical Greek Writings, 1st ed., pub. by New Order Book Co., Ahmedabad-1963, pp.157-58.
archaeological sources. The forms in any particular writing material are not ends in themselves. They are the materials for proper study and analysis of one or other tradition following one or other technique. Tradition relates the palmleaf to one particular culture, and thus writing on it becomes a part of culture, and the use of technique accounts for the creation of new forms. So, research in quest of traditions and techniques can better explain the development of the characters in India, and thus pave the way to defining the particular cultures within which the different writing styles operate. The development of these writings is a part of the evolution of those cultures. Hence without making any formal comparison of the various writing materials, palmleaf has been made the basis of this preliminary study. However, the method demands that for purposes of comparison, one should take into account the various materials that existed earlier and study them in that context. Therefore, it is necessary to go beyond the form of palmleaf and look for other sources on the basis of technical analysis. Hence the study of palaeography with particular reference to writing materials is thus an attempt to discover the various writing materials in any particular culture as it evolved through the centuries. Palmleaf manuscripts could be vital in supplying chronological clues, genealogical evidence and above all historical data though of a later time period. This absence of palmleaf manuscripts of an earlier period is perhaps a limitation of the subject. Hence, we have tried here to discover various writing materials and link them with the continuing or surviving ones which establish between them the same principles as those which govern any trait of culture. As will be clear from the description of this method and procedure, some illustrations given at the end are not the exact copies of the originals, but they are the forms of the various materials and instruments. Indeed they are an inherent part of the writing system as the present research reconstructed them after examining the
different materials and sources. Secondly, for micro-level study the emphasis has been on the finds of palmleaf manuscripts and on people involved in the making and writing on palmleaves. So, the present approach to the question of the origin of the palmleaf manuscripts follows from this concept.

No study is more fascinating than the study of palmleaf manuscripts in its various forms. Writing on palmleaf has been popular in India since very early times. Even now, there are manuscripts in many villages in India, which people keep in their houses just to get religious merit. Traditionally the palmleaf manuscript was recopied and immersed in water after hundred years. Today it merely crumbles into dust unless carefully preserved. It is, therefore, time for us to scrutinise what still survives, documenting what we can and retrieving from this a picture of the past. Both the illustrated and non-illustrated palmleaf manuscripts of Orissa record not only what existed when they were made but also what interested people, their stories, ideals, and sense of humour. If we examine the texts and illustrations carefully, we no longer see a blur of uniform style but rather a wide range of concerns. Out of the prevalent stereotype of the anonymous Indian scribe artist, the makers of this literature and illustrations emerge as real individuals. So, in the present work an attempt has been made to bring together different sources of relevant materials bearing on

4The Indian province of Orissa, located on the coast of Bay of Bengal, is situated between 17° 49′N to 22° 34′N Latitude and from 81° 29′E to 87° 29′E Longitude. In the west Orissa borders to Chhatishgarh, in the north to West Bengal and Jharkhand, in the east to Bay of Bengal and in the south to Andhra Pradesh. Orissa became a separate province on 1st April 1936. Orissa has an area of about 155,707 sq km. The population of Orissa according to 1991 census is 31,659,736, which is 3.73% of the total population of India. Oriya is spoken not only in Orissa but also in some parts of the neighbouring states. For administrative convenience, Orissa is divided into thirty districts. The capital of the state is located at Bhubaneswar. Geographically, Orissa serves as a bridge between the northern and southern parts of India. Physically Orissa can be divided into four parts—(1) the coastal plains, (2) the middle mountain region, (3) the plateaus, (4) the rolling uplands. The coastal plain is largely the gift of the six major rivers, such as the Subarnarekha, the Budhabalanga, the Baitaran, the Brahman, the Mahanadi, and the Rūṣkūlyā. The coastline of Orissa is about 529 km.
the subject. A number of photographs mostly of preparing and writing on manuscripts have
been added to give a comprehensive idea of various types of representations in the
production of palmleaf manuscripts, which has been neglected in earlier works on the
subject. In this backdrop it is anticipated that this work will generate further research in this
field.

Distinctness

The practice of writing on palmleaves was widespread in this country and a pile of
palmyra folios laboriously engraved is used as books in some parts of India even today. As
palmleaves were found in plenty in several parts of India, it was very widely used in the
country. In the primary schools, temples and countryside shops palmleaves are still used due
to their sanctity and easy availability. A work of many stanzas was naturally written on a
number of leaves, which were perforated and wreathed together with a string. The Sanskrit
root for wreathing being grantha, all compositions in Sanskrit came to be called granthas, a
name universal in Sanskrit; the word pustaka more popular today is rarely met with in
earlier texts.

A manuscript is the human expression on a particular thing written by hand or typed
but not printed. The term manuscript is derived from the Latin word manu means 'by hand'
and scriptum or scribere means 'to write'. Hence it implies the fact that it is a thing written
by hand or hand written material. Palmleaves were used for writing with the help of stylus or

6 Akattiyar cuttiram gives the name 'pottakam', to the tied bundle of leaves. It is believed that the script
developed in the south (mainly in Tamil Nadu) to write Sanskrit is itself called the grantha script, to be used
in writing on palmleaves. Institute of Asian Studies, A Descriptive Catalogue of Palmleaf Manuscripts in
cenai yamainta katavan malai kampala manaiya: Akattiyarcuttiram.
stillus. As it is written on palm leaves by human hand, hence it was known as palmleaf manuscripts.

In Orissa, palmleaf manuscripts are better known as *pusthi* or *tālapatra pothi* (*pustaka*) and also called as *pāndulipi*. The word *pothi* is a derivative from the Sanskrit *pustaka* and denotes a pile of palm leaves with writing on them, which are strung on a cord through pre-bored holes in the centre and protected by a pair of wooden cover at the top and the bottom of the pile.

**Nature of palmleaf**

Due to its abundant availability this writing material was very common in ancient India. There are two species of palm tree botanically known as *Corypha umbraculifera* and *Borassus flabelliformis*/*flabellifera*, which are found in India. The first one grows widely in dry areas like Gujarat, Sindh and Rajasthan while the second one is plentiful in humid coastal areas of south India, particularly the west coast. The tree thrives for forty to hundred years and has long tapering leaves with a rib growing opposite to one another on a shaft attached to the head of the stem.

---

7 Palmleaf is not new to other countries of the world. In Portugal it is known as *palmeira*, the word *palmyra* is a Syrian term; in Sinhalese it is called *puskola* (The palmleaf, when it is treated and ready for writing, was in all probability the material on which books were written from very early days. The 'tāla' tree (talipot) from which this leaf is obtained was considered so valuable that it was prohibited, at least in the 10th century to cut down this tree, for its leaves were essential for the spread of learning and literature. *Epigraphia Zeylanica*, Vol.I, p.89 or 93 line 50, p.185 or 187 line 28; also see Rev. Walpola Rahula, *History of Buddhism in Ceylon*; *The Anuradhapura Period (3rd c.B.C.-10th A.D.),* 2nd edition, M.D.Gunasena & co. ltd., Colombo-1966, p.288; Kanailal Hazra, *Royal Patronage of Buddhism in Ancient India*, 1st pub., D.K.Publications, Delhi-1984, p.122), in Latin it is known as *jlabelliform* whereas an Afro-Asiatic palm means yielding joddy, jaggery etc. And in Greek it is called as *korephe*. Different connotation of palmleaf in various languages and countries reflects the availability and use of it in these countries.


9 ibid.
Traditionally two kinds of palmleaves\textsuperscript{10} are distinguished for use in manuscripts, the \textit{tāda} or \textit{tāli} (\textit{Borassus flabelliformis}) and the \textit{tādi} or \textit{tāli} (\textit{Corypha umbreculifera} or \textit{C. taliera}); or \textit{tāla} or \textit{khara} \textit{tāla} and \textit{tāli} or \textit{śrītāla} (\textit{Nunguppanai} and \textit{Tālippanai} respectively in Tamil). \textit{Tāla} leaves are narrow, thick and yellowish in colour. This variety is abundantly available but easily susceptible to pests. \textit{Śrītāla} leaves are broader, thin, and a little brown in colour and cracks develop in them easily. The term \textit{palmyra}\textsuperscript{11} or palmleaves is mentioned as \textit{tāla} or \textit{tāda-patra} and \textit{talipot} or \textit{tādi-patra} in Sanskrit. The \textit{Arthaśāstra} of Kautilya\textsuperscript{12} juxtaposes the words \textit{tāda} and \textit{tādi}, thus indicating a difference between them. Rajasekhara’s \textit{Kāvyamimāṃsā}\textsuperscript{13} suggests that \textit{tādipatra} and birch bark were used for writing with pen and ink, while the \textit{lohakanjaka}\textsuperscript{14} was used to write on \textit{tālaḍāla}.\textsuperscript{15} D.C. Sircar\textsuperscript{16} identifies \textit{tāla} or \textit{tāda} as \textit{Borassus (palmyra)} and \textit{tāli} or \textit{tādi} as \textit{Corypha (talipot)}. De Silva\textsuperscript{17} notes that \textit{palmyra} (\textit{Borassus}) was used mostly for letters, i.e. temporary purposes and \textit{talipot} (\textit{Corypha}) for writing books.

Both the \textit{palmyra} and \textit{talipot} are fan-palms, but the leaves of \textit{palmyra} are thick, of shorter length and difficult to write on, whereas those of \textit{talipot} are thinner, longer and delicate. The first variety is fragile and tends to weaken and rot quickly. The latter variety is

\textsuperscript{10}Ojha, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.142-43.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{tādi-tāla-bhūrjanām patriam. Arthaśāstra}, 2.17.
\textsuperscript{14}It means iron needle for writing on palmleaves also called stylus.
\textsuperscript{15}\textit{sa-lekhanikā-māśibhājmāni tāli-patrāṇi bhūrja-tvaco vā; sa-lohakanjokāni tāla-patrāṇi. Kāvyā-mimāṃsā}, Dalal and Sastry, \textit{op. cit.}, p.58. Rājasekhara mentions that \textit{tāla} and \textit{tādi} and his observation stylus is used for writing on \textit{tāla} while a pen is used for \textit{tādi}, endorses to an extent, he said description of \textit{khara-tāla} and \textit{śrītāla}.
flexible and has tensile-strength, which makes it more-durable. Palmyra manuscripts were written through incision with an iron stylus, whereas talipot manuscripts were written with reed pen and ink. In Orissa, palmyra leaves were used though in neighbouring Bengal and in western India talipot manuscripts were used. There is no evidence of the use of talipot in Orissa.\footnote{J.P.Das, Chitra Pothi, op.cit., p.51}

It should be observed here that the early manuscripts on palmleaves are found mostly in the cold and dry countries. Manuscripts of the 11\textsuperscript{th} and later centuries on palmyra leaves have been discovered in large numbers in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Nepal and other regions, while those written in south Indian style with sharp pointed needle are generally not earlier than the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. The hot climate of the south is likely to have led to the destruction of earlier manuscripts on palmyra-leaves.

**Scope of the Research**

This work aims at presenting a comprehensive and systematic study of the history of writing on palmleaf and its use till date. Its area of research however consists of from macro level to an in depth analyses at the micro-level, viz., collections in the Sambalpur and Bhubaneshwar Museums. At the macro level, it discusses archaeological data from the Indian subcontinent for the finds of stylus and writing materials. This data is then supplemented by information from inscriptions and sculptures as well as from textual accounts. The need for such a study has been felt rather essential in view of the fact that
palmleaf manuscripts have received scant treatment at the hands of scholars in their works on epigraphy and palaeography.

The fundamental aim of this work is to serve as a document to understand, appreciate and recognise the values and contributions of palmleaf manuscripts. Despite being fully conscious of the limitations of this work, it is hoped that future research would come up with new findings to supplement or even alter certain conclusions and concepts drawn in this work. So, it would be worthwhile if the present work awakens interest in the use of palmleaf manuscripts as a historical source material.

This study will present arguments about the antiquity of the tradition of writing on the basis of literary sources. The second phase of the argument emphasises writing materials and writing instruments with special focus on finds of stylus and ink or inkpots-based on excavation reports. Since no palmleaf manuscripts survive from the ancient and medieval periods, so the third segment of the debate is on the antiquity of the use of palmleaf manuscripts on the basis of inscriptional and sculptural sources besides Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical literary evidence. The colophon of palmleaf manuscript plays an indispensable role so far the historical and other related information is concerned. To analyse that argument, the fourth part is based on the colophon of selected original palmleaf manuscripts preserved in the Sambalpur and Bhubaneshwar Museums. And the last segment of this work lays stress on the ethno-historic study of the scribes-based on a selected sample survey carried out in scribes' vicinity with due emphasis on the preparation process of manuscripts and present status of the scribes in the community.
In this thesis, for the micro-level study, so far as finds of manuscripts and ethno-historic study is concerned we will limit ourselves to Orissa, which provides evidence to trace nearly 600 years of the history of palmleaf manuscripts. In contrast, the antiquity of writing, writing materials and instruments and the use of palmleaf manuscripts will be traced on the basis of data from the entire subcontinent. Thus the attempt is to proceed from macro to a micro level.

Issues

➢ The research examines the tradition of writing and its antiquity through literary sources as earlier works have ignored this theme. Further it identifies the terms and terminology used for different writing materials and instruments as referred in various religious and non-religious literatures.

➢ For the development of the concept of writing writing-instruments and materials play a significant role. The finds of these materials and instruments from various excavated sites will be taken into account. Further finds of stylus and ink/inkpots will be given prominence.

➢ Besides, this study seeks to analyse the antiquity of palmleaf manuscripts in both literary and archaeological sources with a special emphasis on inscriptions and sculptures, as it would convey the continuum in the use of palmleaf manuscripts.

➢ Most of the inscriptions or land grants and finds of archaeological materials found during the study are non-religious in nature whereas sculptures are religious. Similarly, the scribes are drawn from various strata of the society, from higher to lower castes.
As we do not have any surviving manuscripts from the ancient period, it is not possible to get any information either on the scribe or the process of making a manuscript. A comparative study of the extant manuscripts is, however, illuminating.

The colophon of manuscripts provides valuable historical information although only for the last six hundred years, so this research seeks to highlight the importance of colophon for providing information on the scribe. Though similar information is not available for the ancient period, the data from the colophons presents a complex picture of the scribes. There is mention of castes like barber, fisherman, and washerman, and of religions like Islam, and even convicted people who composed palm leaf manuscripts.

This is followed by a field study of groups involved in the production of palm leaf manuscripts for a comprehension of the process. The attempt is to find out about the people involved in this profession? How much they were paid for the writing of a manuscript? Are there any inheritors still continuing this profession? Is there any division of caste regarding the writing on palm leaf? What are the methods and devices used to write on it and the status in society of scribe-artist or lipikāra or lekhaka.

Sometimes the scribe prepares the manuscripts on his own and sometimes on the basis of commission. Even patrons drawn from diverse communities ask the scribes for a specific manuscript. The scribe prepares or writes texts as per the order. So the study also focuses on the relation between the patron and scribe, and process of commissioning a manuscript, price or financial transaction in a manuscript and attribution to the owner.
The scribe besides writing text on palmleaves also makes illustrations. The range of texts and illustrations are many from religious to secular, mathematics to literature, and history to astronomy.

The scribe does not contribute alone for making a manuscript but people from diverse caste groups like blacksmiths, carpenters, cobbleders, citrakāras, etc., are also involved in this occupation.

1. Analysis of the information from the colophon of palmleaf manuscript

Unlike Indian manuscripts the content of the Sinhalese manuscripts are divided into parts (khandhaka), divisions (vagga) and sections (nipāta). There has been in use from early times a method by which the extent of the contents of a book is approximately stated. In the case of the Buddhist texts and commentaries the number of letters and passages occurring in a work is usually indicated. Whereas the subject matter of an Indian particularly Oriya palmleaf manuscript is usually divided into four parts: maṅgalā carana or homage to god or goddess, main theme or body or text of the manuscript, conclusion or end, and puspikā or colophon. In some cases we find the contents in the beginning and the post colophon at the end of the writing.

19 At the termination of each of these it is indicated in writing, that the particular khandha or part is ended, giving the name of the book and the part as first, second, and so on. Vagga is a definite division, such as Sīla vagga, Mā vagga, Cūla vagga, and Nipāta (sections) are indicated as eka nipāta, dvi, tika, and c.Sūtra are separate discourses that go to form a nipāta or vagga.

Generally the colophon comes at the end of the manuscript and only in rare cases it is not found. It provides information regarding the name of the scribe and the date of copying, just as we have today the name of the author and publisher and the date of the publication of a printed book on the title page. Due to its importance it is called as ‘content of the manuscript’. We can argue that it is only in the colophons and introductions of these literary works that dates are given to accompany historical details. Scholars like Fleet stressed that the dates are useful enough. Although the historical matter is introduced here only incidentally to magnify the importance of the authors themselves rather than of their patrons, it is not handled with any particular care and fullness, he added.

The colophon also provides information where the scribes often described themselves as wicked, ignorant, wretched, lowly and unlettered. The scribe often writes my back is broken, so are my waist and neck. My eyes are impaired and my head is bending low. I wrote the book with much suffering, in the colophon.

Besides mentioning the name of the scribe and the date of copying, colophons sometimes provide a lot of other interesting information. Sometimes, they mention the exact place of writing the pothi, the name of the pothi’s owner and describe the process of commissioning the book. Even the scribe’s religious belief, his economic condition, social issues like his festivity and family problems, etc. are also mentioned in the colophon.

---

23 Ibid.
25 Godakumbura, *Catalogue of Ceylonese Manuscripts*, op.cit., p.intr.LII.
colophon not only gives information about a particular topic but also provides valuable historical information, which is useful to researchers. Further, the scribe’s autobiography mentioned in the colophon is helpful for study the humanistic approach of the scribe. Moreover, sometimes information pertaining to the status of the manuscript in the society, attitude of the people towards the preservation of the manuscript, faith of people on different gods and goddesses, and the development of various scripts and languages are contained in the colophon.

The above discussion reveals that 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 would like to expand the importance of colophon and compare these findings with those obtained for an earlier period from literary sources and inscriptions.

2-The position of the scribe in history

As we know epigraphy is the study of inscriptions. ‘Inscription’ literary means any writing engraved on some object. Thus, epigraphic records may be broadly classified under two groups: (i) those engraved by or on behalf of the ruling authority; (ii) those incised on behalf of private individuals or organisations. The largest number of epigraphs of the second category record donations made in favour of religious establishments. The common expression for the writer of a document or the copyist of a manuscript was lekhaka, which

also indicated a professional clerk. Initially, people of the Brahmin or brāhmaṇa community adopted this profession. Buddhist and Jain monks are known to have copied works of religious literature. These instances are found in Nepal where Bhikkhus, Vajracāryas and nuns copied Buddhist manuscripts.

Some scholars like D.C. Sircar argue that the writer is generally called kāyastha and karāni kal in copper plate grants. The epigraphic records sometimes mention the karāni brāhmaṇa and karana kāyasthasa. While early legal authorities Manusmṛti (X-20) and Yājñavalkyaśāstra (I-92) mention karana as a tribe, medieval lexicons (Vaijayantī, p.78, 1, 147) recognise kāyastha and karana as synonymous terms meaning a ‘scribe’ or a member of the writing class. The word kāyastha occurs in the Damodarpur Copper Plate Inscription of the time of Buddhagupta (c.A.D.476-495). The word is also found in the Kanaswa inscription of 738-39 AD. discovered in Rajasthan. Later the kāyasthas are mentioned very often in the inscriptions found in Gujarat and Kalinga. In the Rājatarangini of Kalhana and the Lokaprakāsa of Kshemendra the

---

29 Sircar, Ind. Epig., op.cit., p.84.
30 Kāyasthas first occur in the inscriptions of Gupta age (Select Inscriptions, p.284). Karana is the synonym of kāyastha; it is as one of the mixed castes. I.A., Vol.XVI, p.175.
31 E.I., Vol.I, pp.81,129,166. Kielhorn explains karani as ‘a writer of a karana (a legal document)’. The karani is the same as karanatān of Tamil inscription (E.I., Vol.XXV, p.132), mentioned along with kanokkā (Sanskrit Gaṇaka), i.e. the present day karanam (accountant-scribe) of south India.
34 The karana community of Orissa similar to the kāyastha of Bengal and else where in north India. See E.I., Vol.XXIV, p.175, text line 15.
35 E.I., Vol.XV, p.138 (Prathama kāyastha biprapāla)
37 Ibid. VI, p.192.
kāyasthas are mentioned frequently, which shows that the role of the kāyasthas in Kashmir was very prominent up to the 13th century A.D.

Epigraphical evidence regarding the profession of writing and the use of term the lekhaka, an early reference to it is found in one of the Sanchi inscriptions which was later on translated as 'copyist of mss, 'writer', 'clerk' by Buhler. In other later inscriptions like, the Pallava grant lekhaka denotes the person who prepared the documents to be incised on copper or stone; but in the present day a lekhaka is always a man who copies manuscripts. In a large number of later inscriptions the word lekhaka was used to denote a person who prepared the documents to be incised on stone or metal. Therefore, in still later times a lekhaka was one who mainly did the work of copying manuscripts. Some scholars argued that generally, devoted and pious brāhmaṇas and in some cases, poor and worn-out kāyasthas were engaged in this work. Particularly temples and libraries employed such people.

Besides the term lekhaka another term lipikāra, libikara or dipikara was used in the sense of a writer in the fourth century B.C. It occurs many times in the edicts of Aśoka. Aśoka uses it in the 14th Rock Edict as a designation for his clerks. Similarly, Paḍa, who copied the Siddapura edicts, calls himself lipikara, and in the Sanchi inscription, Stūpa I,

---

41 also called as lipikara or libikara
43 Paden likhitam lipikarena —— Brahmagiri Minor R.E, No.2.
   Dipikara—— R.E. No.14, Shahbazgarhi version.
44 In earlier times lipikara was probably was an equivalent for 'clerk'.
No. 49, the donor Subahita-Gotiputa takes the higher title rājalipikara, ‘a writer of the king’. It is believed that the term lipikara was less frequently used than the term lekhaka and it was employed more in the sense of ‘a copyist’ and an engraver than in the sense of ‘a writer’. The Sanskrit lexicons (Amara II. 8.15) regard the term lipikāra as a synonym of lekhaka. In Sanskrit literature Vāsavadatta the word lipikāra means writer in general. Royal writers were sometimes designated as rāja lipikāra, meaning ‘a writer of the king’. Further Sircar argues that the Persian word debir ‘writer’ is found in Indian epigraphs as dibira or divira. It was first occurred in a central Indian inscription of A.D. 521-22. Later on it was found in a number of Valabhi inscriptions of the 7th and 8th centuries, where the writer of the documents, who is usually ‘the minister for alliances and war’ receives the title divirapati.

46 Hall’s Ed. Vāsavadattā, p.239.
49 Sāndhivigrāhādhiṃśa was responsible for the preparation of the draft of documents, is called divirapati or the lord of the diviras under whom there were a number of diviras who prepared the documents. The Valabhi copper plate inscription of Dharasena (Valabhi E.269=588 A.D.) is concluded as ‘my own signature of Mahārājādhirāja Śridharasena. Dūtaka Sāmanta Śīlāditya, written by Sāndhivigrāhādhiṃśa Sāndhivigrāhādhiṃśa-divirapati Skandabhata’, so it is evident that at the end of the document the signature of the king was affixed, a dūtaka (representative) of the king was present when the royal document was executed and the document was written by an officer who was the supreme head of the diviras. Ind. Ant., Vol.VI, p.9.
50 Divira is the Persian debir ‘writer’ which probably became domesticated in Western India during the time of the Sassanians, when the trade between Persia and India was greatly developed. Divira also appears in the Rājatarangini. Kshemendra’s Lokapakṣa mentions even various sub-divisions; gaṇijādīvira: bazaar-writers, grāma-divira or village-writers and nagara-divira or town-writers. I.A., Vol.VI, p.10; The word divira seems to be originated from the dipikara used in the Aśokan edicts. It could easily be Prakritised into divikara=divāra=divira. The use of the term divira continued up to the 11th and 12th centuries A.D. It occurs in the Rājatarangini and other works of this period.
In the copper plate inscriptions generally the ruling authority or dynasty asked their subordinate staffs to carry on their order in the form of inscriptions. Then these staffs approached the persons having literal knowledge of writing inscriptions to write the matter. After getting the write-ups from the lekhaka or writer it was passed on to the engravers who finally executed the order on various objects. Usually the engravers engraved or incised the prefabricated matters on objects like stone, copper and etc. The engravers were normally drawn from the lower strata of the society. They were basically from illiterate or semiliterate background without any obviously language or writing proficiency; it required some knowledge of linguistics and phonetics and such it could be undertaken only by experts educated and cultured. That’s why, for a long time, the art of writing remained a special preserve of literary and priestly experts, mainly belonging to the kāyastha and brāhmaṇa class. So long as the extent and use of literacy was limited, there was no need of a class of professional writers, who would write for the sake of earning their livelihood. With the

As the remarks at the end of many inscriptions show, it was customary to make over a prāṣasti or kāvya, which was to be incised on stone, to a professional writer, who prepared a fair copy, and to set the mason (śūradhāra, rāpokāra, śilpin, śilākāra) to work (E.I., Vol.I, p.45, 49, 81, 129, 139, 211, 279). Usually, the inscriptions mention only the person who drew up or wrote the document. They mostly name as such either a high official (amātya, sāndhīvikara) or a general (sena-pati, balādhiṣṭa). Occasionally, they assert that the drafting was done by a stonemason, a śūradhāra, who, however, in reality merely engraved the grant. As regards private records on stone, a professional writer usually prepared their text and a copy of it was given to the engraver who was generally a mason called a śūradhāra or śulākāra. The mason at first dressed the stone and drew the letters on it with ink, etc., under the supervision and guidance of the writer and then engraved the letters. Sometimes the professional writer himself copied the text of the document on the stone for the guidance of the engraver. For royal records, a learned man of the court was engaged to prepare a fair copy of the text on a sheet of birch bark or palmleaf or to write it on the stone slabs or copper plates with ink or a pointed instrument. The copy of the document was written on a sheet of the size of the stone on which it had to be engraved. A high officer of the king generally prepared the text of a copper plate grant, although the enigmatic poems appearing in medieval grants were composed by the court poets. The practice of writing the text of a document on the plates first in ink is clearly indicated by a copper plate discovered at Kasī in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh. This was meant to facilitate the work of engraving and also to ensure the correctness of the inscription. In many of the cases, a professional scribe of the court did the writing and the engraver incised the letters according to the drawing, although some times, especially in the case of minor ruling families, the engravers themselves wrote the text on the plates or engraved the text on the plates without previously drawing the letters on them.

Often illiterate and semi-literate stone cutters or goldsmiths were entrusted with the task of engraving records on stone or copper plates, and this fact accounts for the numerous errors noticed in a large number of epigraphs, especially those engraved on behalf of private individuals.
evolution and expansion of society and the bifurcation of professions—both writing and engraving also developed as profession. There are ample indications that at an early period there existed a class or caste of professional writers and engravers. Different caste or class terminology has been used for the people involved in engraving on different objects or materials, i.e., person involved with stone was known as stonemason or sutradhāra\textsuperscript{53}, a coppersmith as pitakāra, kānisyakāra or tāmrakāra, blacksmith as lohakāra or ayaskāra\textsuperscript{54}, goldsmith as hemakāra or sunāra\textsuperscript{55} and an artisan as silpin\textsuperscript{56} or vijnānika\textsuperscript{57}. In Orissa the technical terms used for engravers are akṣaśālin and akṣaśālika\textsuperscript{58}.

Normally, from the pre-prepared text the engravers illustrated or inscribed the letters on the writing materials. We have no evidence that the ruling dynasties were themselves involved in engraving on stone, coppers, etc. However, the case is quite different with regard to palmleaf manuscripts. Here we have specific evidence, which testify to the fact that even the kings, princes and high-class priests themselves wrote on palmleaves. Secondly, the possibility of errors in writing on inscriptions is more than the palmleaves, as the person involved in engraving was not a writer. Thirdly, as far as writing is concerned there is no caste or creed barrier to write on palmleaf, as was the case with regard to inscriptions. Fourthly, in palmleaf manuscripts one can find proper attribution to the writer or copier whereas in inscription it was almost negligible and the entire credit of writing on...

the inscriptions goes to the person who ordered for it or the person who executed the order; there was no place for the people who actually engraved the matter.

Besides, several scholars' debate that in eight out of ten cases brahmānas have transcribed the palmleaves and in the other two cases vaiśyas have provided the illustrations as the scribe mentions clearly in the colophons that he has done both the text and illustrations. Apart from brahmānas and vaiśyas, people of other castes like śūdras and those belonging to other religions like Muslims also wrote on palmleaves.

Brāhmaṇa scribes usually copied Sanskrit manuscripts relating to the Veda, Tantra, Ayurveda and Jyotisha texts. Scribes belonging to karaṇa or kāyastha caste also copied Sanskrit kāvyas. At least a woman copied one among the forty thousand pothis in Orissa State Museum Library. A Muslim Naseeb Khan copied Mathurā Marigala a kāvyā based on Kṛṣṇā in the year 1938. There is even an instance of a manuscript having been copied by convicts while serving a sentence. The scribe Banamali, a brāhmaṇa and Ramakrishna a karaṇa copied the pōthi while they were convicts in the Cuttack Jail.

It is evident that various literate individuals took up the task of copying and illustrating of palmleaf manuscripts not as an inherited profession but rather as an avocation. It is thus possible that the talented son of a poor vendor, who might have used writing to

---

60Laxnipriya Jemadei; see OSMPML Cat. No.-OL.1917.
61Naseeb Khan, son of Dhani Khan of Khurda in the year 1938.
62For Mathurā Marigala manuscript see OSMPML Cat. No.-OL.1862.
63J.P. Das, *Chitra Pothi*, op.cit, p.41.
keep accounts, could have blossomed into a skilled artist. This situation differs in the case of some kinds of painting that were clearly the work of particular castes, for instance the citrakāras of Orissa.\textsuperscript{64} In Rajasthan and the Pahari areas families of painters can likewise be traced, often from jātis that began as sūdras and were later Sanskritised to quasi-brāhmaṇa status.\textsuperscript{65}

Though there were many scribes copying manuscripts, there were not many who did citrapothis or illustrated manuscripts. These manuscripts had to be carefully prepared, with proper space left for illustrations when the text had been written. Therefore most often the scribe and the artist of illustrated palmleaf manuscripts were one and the same person, termed as scribe artists.\textsuperscript{66} The great poet of (Dhenkanal) Orissa Brajanatha Badajena and his son Ghanashyama Badajena were scribe artists and they together did the illustrated palmleaf manuscript Bhāgavata\textsuperscript{67} Skanda-VIII and IX. Another important artist was Raghunath Prusty belonging to the caste of oilmen from Munḍamarāi in Ganjam district of Orissa. He copied and did the illustrations too, of Sangīta Dāmodara\textsuperscript{68} and Krupāśindhu Janaṇa.\textsuperscript{69} From the same district of Orissa another scribe artist was Sarathi Madala Patnaik. Rasāpooi was one of the important illustrated manuscripts done by him in 1878 AD.\textsuperscript{70} A Brahmin Dhananjaya by name was an author-scribe artist, who wrote and illustrated the Sarvāṅga Sundari\textsuperscript{71} commentary of Gīta Govinda. The most prominent scribe-artists of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{65} ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} J.P. Das, *Chitra Pothi*, op.cit., p.37.
\textsuperscript{67} Bhāgavata VIII and IX Skanda, dated 20\textsuperscript{th} Nov. 1799; see SUPML's ACC. No.66, Sambalpur, Orissa.
\textsuperscript{68} OSMPML, Ext. Cat. No.-38, Bhubaneswar; Orissa
\textsuperscript{69} Aurobindo Sangrahalaya, Udayapur, No.-1100.
\textsuperscript{70} J.P. Das, *Chitra Pothi*, op.cit., p.37.
\textsuperscript{71} OSMPML Ext. No. 166, Bhubaneswar.
centuries are Gokula Patnaik, Ramachandra Sahu, Rabindranath Sahu, Dilip Sahu and Nilakantha Sahu.\textsuperscript{72} Among all the names Nilakantha Sahu of Kendupalli village of Cuttack district as a scribe-artist is most prominent.\textsuperscript{73} He sold many illustrated manuscripts to the Orissa State Museum.

Many colophons clearly mention the commissioning of a manuscript and its execution by the scribe. Sometimes the scribe physically sat on the veranda of the patron and wrote the book.\textsuperscript{74} They were paid for their work. The businessmen, \textit{vaîśyas}, \textit{rājās} and \textit{brāhmaṇas} commissioned the works of illustrators. The price of an illustrated manuscript occurs in the writing of the poet Brajanatha Badajena, who roughly a hundred years earlier indicated to the Rājā of Dhenkanal that he should be paid a hundred rupees to produce a \textit{Gītā Govinda}\textsuperscript{75} with illustrations. In a rare case the price was mentioned in the manuscript. There were also professional scribes who earned their livelihood by copying manuscripts. Generally the scribe was just another craftsman in the society who eeked out a living copying manuscript.

So the proposed research proposal seeks to elaborate the relation between the patron and the scribe. Did the production of palmleaf manuscripts involve mere copying or were these authored by the scribes? We would like to find out who were these people? Why they chose this profession? How much money they were paid for it? What were the subjects or themes chosen for writing? Were these largely religious texts or were local histories also

\textsuperscript{72}The \textit{Samāj}, Oriya daily news paper, Cuttack, 10\textsuperscript{th} March, Sunday, 1996, p. 4 (A)
\textsuperscript{73}ibid.
\textsuperscript{74}J.P. Das, \textit{Chitra Pothi}, op.cit., p.35.
\textsuperscript{75}Sudhakara Patnaik (ed.) \textit{Brajanātha Badajena's Brajanātha Granṭhāvali}, Pub. by Orissa Sahitya Academy, Bhubaneswar-1975, p.9.
written by these scribes? The larger question that this micro study of colophons poses relates to the diverse uses of writing as well as writing materials in the ancient period. Simply because we do not possess palmleaf manuscripts for an earlier period, it does not mean that they were not used or that writing was restricted to the production of religious texts or stone and copper plate inscriptions.

The study also investigates whether the present group of scribes is only copying earlier texts or if they themselves were involved in composing and writing religious and historical texts. If they are only copying the earlier or older texts then what is the reason behind it? Why did they leave the tradition of composing religious and historical texts? Are there any differences between copying and composing texts while writing on palmleaves? Did only copying the texts influence the colophons of the manuscripts?

**Historiography**

The history of the study of the tradition of writing has largely focussed on palaeography and may be divided into three specific phases. The first covers the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was the period of the discovery of the inscriptions and decipherment of the scripts used in them. In this venture the works of Charles Wilkins, Pandit Radhakant Sharma, James Tod, Babington, Walter Elliot.

---

76 In the year 1785 Wilkins read the Badal pillar inscription (Dinajpur district, Bangladesh) of the Pala King Narayanapala. Later, the discovery of the Maukhari inscriptions from the Barabar Hill caves in Bihar enabled him to tackle the inscriptions of the Gupta rulers.

77 In 1785 Sharma read the Delhi-Topra pillar inscription of the Chahamana king Visaladeva.
and Captain H. Harkness\textsuperscript{81} are quite astounding. During these years the inscriptions of the Guptas of northern India and those of the Maitrakas of Valabhi were completely deciphered. Later on the contribution of James Prinsep in the decipherment of the \textit{Brāhmi} script was remarkable.

From the efforts of these early scholars we inherited knowledge of two main writing systems in India the \textit{Brāhmi} and \textit{Kharoṣṭhī}. Later on Sir William Jones and James Burgess studied its connection with Semitic writing and gradual variation of alphabets in course of time. As mentioned earlier, Prinsep laid the foundation of the second phase, and subsequently scholars like A.C. Burnell got the credit of producing his scholarly work in 1874 on the subject \textit{Elements of South Indian Palaeography (from the 4th to the 7th century A.D.)}, being an introduction to the study of south Indian inscriptions and manuscripts. His arguments for the use of \textit{bhrja} bark and palmleaves for writing books in India is somewhat significant here. He asserts that \textit{bhrja} bark was used only in the north while palmleaves have always been and still are the chief writing material for books not only in south India, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, the Malaya archipelago and Myanmar, but also even in Bengal and other parts of north India.\textsuperscript{82} This use was common from the period of the introduction of writing into eastern and southern India. Although Burnell was not quite sure about the exact

\textsuperscript{81}Collected a large number of inscriptions in Rajasthan, central India, and Gujarat between 1818 and 1823. These inscriptions, which ranged from the seventh to the fifteenth century A.D. were partially read with the help of Yato Jnanachandra.

\textsuperscript{82}In 1834 Babington prepared a table of letters on the basis of the Sanskrit and Tamil inscriptions discovered at Mamallapuram. \textit{J.A.S.B.}, 1837, pp.219-20, pl.XIII.

\textsuperscript{84}In 1833 Elliot published an elaborate comparative table of the older forms of the Kannada alphabet.

\textsuperscript{82}In 1837 Harkness compiled his \textit{Ancient and Modern Alphabets of the Popular Hindu Languages of the Southern Peninsula of India}.

\textsuperscript{82}A.C. Burnell, \textit{Elements of South Indian Palaeography (4th to 7th century A.D.)}, Indological Book House, New Delhi-1968, pp.84-86.
date of it, but still considers that it is certainly of considerable age in India, and from thence it spread to Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia.

Besides inscriptions there were other scholars who carried out the study of writing materials and instruments. All the materials were utilised for the purpose and for the first time in 1894 a comprehensive book on Indian palaeography, called Bhāratiya Prācīna Lipimāla, was brought out in Hindi by Gaurishankar Hirachand Ojha. On the basis of finds of Aśokan stone inscriptions from Peshawar to Mysore and Kathiawad to Orissa it was argued that writing was well known to Indians in the 3rd century B.C. Further, unlike stone or metal inscriptions birch bark and palmleaf could not survive for thousand years due to delicacy in nature and Indian climatic condition. That is the reason why we do not have early evidence of palmleaf manuscripts. Usually the palm trees are seen in the southern provinces or along the seashore and are very rarely found in the states of Rajputana, Punjab and Kashmir. So except these areas it was widely used all over India. This volume also states that due to the (tikāo) flexibility and easy availability of palmleaf and since its price was cheaper than that of other writing materials, it was used widely as a writing material in the form of a book. In his volume even Ojha has presented a comprehensive description of the preparation process of palmleaf manuscript. As he mentions that generally palmleaves are bigger in size. So it is prepared by cutting it into various sizes and forms, then finishing touch is given to make these into a manuscript. The size (length and breadth) of leaf was prepared according to the demand or need of the patron. The necessary leaves, which are to be used, were first sundried; then these were boiled in warm water. After some time these

---

84 ibid.
85 Ojha, op.cit., pp.142-43.
were again sundried and then polished by a conchshell, stone or konde. The people of northern and western provinces of India used ink to write on the palmleaves, but the southern people wrote on it through a sharp pointed iron needle by pressing or engraving it on the leaves. They used kajjal over the written script for easy readability. Only one perforation was made on the small size leaves and two on the long sized ones at the left and right sides. After that a wooden cover was added on both ends of the manuscript. To hold it properly a thread was stringed through the perforation of the manuscript.

Subsequently, Georg Buhler followed up the same (Ojha’s) line by utilising all the available materials and produced in 1896 the standard work on the subject, *Indische Palaeographie*. Just as Prinsep in the first phase laid the foundation of second phase, so Buhler, at the end of the second, summed up the views of the scholars in his monumental work, which has remained to this day the standard book on Indian palaeography. Buhler further worked and accepted the evolutionary character of Indian scripts and analysed their regional and chronological variations. But his main contribution lay in realising the influence of the pen and stylus, though unfortunately he could not work this out in detail. For the regional scripts Ojha adopted modern names, while Buhler worked out his own system. Alberuni’s description of the several Indian writings in the tenth century A.D. was also analysed, but Buhler found it difficult to reconcile the various systems given by Alberuni with his own classification. He also quotes from *Lalitavistāra* and from two Jaina works, *Samavāyānga Sūtra* and *Paññāvanā Sūtra*, and questioned the consistency of descriptions given by them with the available evidence. However, Ojha analysed the literary sources and tried to establish the concepts of vowels and consonants in the written records.

86 *ibid.*, p.142.
now available to us. He maintained that this system was the invention of the Aryans in India and that Brāhmī is the outward expression of this system. This view of Ojha was later on summarised by Raj Bali Pandey, who explained the absence of specimens of writing before the fifth century B.C. in India by maintaining that 'early Brahmanical literature and books were written on palmleaves and birch bark, and such frail and perishable materials could not be preserved for a long time'. But this statement was refuted by A.H. Dani through his argument that the sacred literature of the Aryans was not committed to writing but passed on by word of mouth (orally) from generation to generation.

Whilst examining the origin of Brāhmī script it was contended that writing was prevalent in this country prior to the development of the Buddhist and Jaina tradition. On the basis of the palaeographic examination of the most ancient Indian inscriptions with the support of literary evidence, the view of Buhler is worth mentioning, as he argues that writing was widely used during the fifth-sixth century B.C. While considering the characters of the Aśokan edicts he conceived that writing was no recent invention in the third century B.C. But so far as the evidence for the use of palmleaf is concerned he linked it with that of the canon of the southern Buddhists (5th-6th c.B.C.) where leaves (panṇa) were considered to be the most common writing material. While going through the canon of the southern Buddhists, Buhler pointed out that leaves (panṇa) were in ancient times the most

---

90ibid., pp.20-21.
91ibid., p.113. According to Buhler Hiuen Tsiang (7th century A.D.) is the earliest witness for the general use of palmleaves as a writing material in India.
92Georg Buhler, *Indian Palaeography*. Published by Indian Studies; Past & Present, Calcutta-1962, p.141; also see Buhler’s Indian Studies III, 2, 7 ff., p. 120.
common writing material. These leaves are nothing else but chiefly from the large-leaved palm trees, the tāḍa or tāla (Borassus flabelliformis) and the tāḍi or tāli (Corypha umbraculifera or corypha taliera). These are originally indigenous to the Deccan and are also found at present even in the Punjab. Furthermore he assumed that the bhujapatra of the Bower manuscripts are cut according to the size of palmleaves and the case was the same with the Taxila Copper Plate 94 of 1st century A.D. As the coppersmith then chose a palmleaf for his model, it shows that palmleaves must have been commonly used for writing, even in the Punjab. Through the Horuzi manuscript and the fragments in the Godfrey collection as well as the numerous palmleaf manuscripts of the 9th and later centuries from Nepal, Bengal, Rajputana, Gujarat and northern Deccan Buhler tries to establish that since ancient times the palmleaves were written on with ink all over northern, eastern, central and western India. 95

The Bower manuscript has proved to us that, under favourable conditions a document written on even so frail a material as birch-bark can survive for fourteen centuries. This manuscript was obtained from Kashgar, to the north of Kashmir, through excavations at the foot of one of the curious old erections, of which several are to be found in the Kuchar district. It was secured and brought to notice by Lieutenant Bower 96 from whom it derives its name. Hoernle 97 has shown by a comparison of its characters with those of epigraphic records, that in it we have a veritable original document, which is a relic that has come down to us from the period A.D.400 to 450.

95 Buhler, op. cit., p.142 (Horuzi palmleaf Mss belong to 6th century A.D. and fragments of Godfrey collection from Kashgar (north of Kashmir) belong to 4th century A.D. - Hoernle has shown on the palaeographical evidence J.A., Vol.21, p.37); also see V.A. Smith and others, India its., op. cit., p.10.
96 J.A.S.B., Vol.59, 1890 proceedings, p.221.
Further, the efforts of Raj Bali Pandey’s *Indian Palaeography* added a significant input to the theory, in which in addition to the general chapters on the antiquity and origin of Indian writing and the history of its decipherment, also contains specific chapters on writing material, and the profession of writing and engraving. Here, it is argued that people used pliable, soft and perishable materials like birch bark or palmleaf for long books and ordinary correspondence whereas religious edicts, eulogy of kings, legal documents, etc., were engraved or incised on durable materials like stone, copper, iron, silver, etc. Secondly, the use of palmleaves for writing, in certain parts of India, was earlier than the use of birch bark is proved as the latter was cut into pieces corresponding to the former in shape and size. The *tāda-patra* as a writing material was very common in ancient India and it was palmleaf of the *borassus flehelliiformis, corypha umbraculifera* and *e.tariera*. Even the Buddhist *Jātakas* refer to leaves (*panna*) as writing materials, which most probably were palmleaves. In fact palm was originally indigenous to southern India; so we can infer that in the beginning its use for writing became common in the south and then gradually it spread to other parts of India, though in Kashmir and parts of the Punjab and Rajputana its use was negligible. Therefore, the use of palmleaves for writing, in certain parts of India, was earlier than the use of birch bark and this is proved by the fact that the latter was cut into pieces to the shape of the former. According to Pandey palmleaves separated length wise were joined in the middle and cut at both ends according to the required size and these were used for writing letters as well as for manuscripts in Sanskrit and other languages.

---

99 *ibid.*, p.69.
100 *ibid.* (Kaṭāhaka Jātaka; Mahāsutasoma Jātaka; Kāma Jātaka; Chullokalinga Jātaka, Ruru Jātaka etc.)
Among the second generation scholars of this phase, *Indian Epigraphy* and other works of D.C. Sircar are significant. He propounded the reason for the non-existence of earlier manuscripts as the hot climate of the south, which is likely to have led to the destruction of earlier manuscripts on palmyra leaves. Manuscripts of the 11th and later centuries on palmyra leaves have been discovered in large numbers in Gujarat, Rajasthan, Nepal and other regions, while those written in the south Indian style with sharp-pointed needle are generally not earlier than the 15th century. Both D.C. Sircar and R.B. Pandey mention that copper plates of small size resembling palmyra leaves were originally employed in writing royal documents and recording grants of land. The argument of Sircar was quite significant as he referred to the Kanas plate of Lokavigraha and the Kesharibeda plates of Arthapati, which are resemble sheets cut out of palmyra leaves.

The third phase in the study of Indian palaeography and epigraphy begins from the close of the nineteenth century, when the Archaeological Survey of India started to issue regular volumes of *Epigraphia Indica*. Here a vast amount of comparative materials like stone and copper plates are thus available for different periods of writing. M.G. Dikshit's study on the basis of epigraphic evidence of the sixth century A.D. is reasonably remarkable as the Kurud Charter was earlier granted in a palmleaf but later on reissued on a copper plate as the palmleaf was destroyed in fire.

---

102 *ibid.*, pp.120-21.
103 M.G. Dikshit, Kuruda Plates of Narendra, year 24, in *E.I.*, Part-VI, Vol.XXXI, April 1956, Delhi-1957, pp.263-266); also see *ibid*, p.267 written by D. C. Sircar. For detail analysis see chapter-IV, sub-section inscription of this thesis.
Another recent attempt that has been made in this arena is Richard Salomon’s *Indian Epigraphy*. The volume mentions that traditional India was much less-oriented towards the written word than any other ancient and traditional culture like China and Japan or those of the Islamic world. This is because of lack of attention paid to the aesthetic aspects of the written documents both epigraphic and non-epigraphic in traditional India. While making this observation even Salomon ignored the usefulness of palmleaf as a writing material in his work. His second chapter on writing and scripts in India, contains the efficacy of all other writing materials like stone, copper, bronze, iron, wood, pottery, ivory, cloth, etc., the only exception being palmleaf and birch bark. Again, although there are some other notable works in the field of epigraphy and palaeography like, *Indian Palaeography* by A.H. Dani, *Early South Indian Palaeography* of T.V. Mahalingam, *India ‘Its Epigraphy, Antiquities, Archaeology, Numismatic and Architecture’* by Vincent A. Smith, James Burgess and J.F. Fleet, *Indian Epigraphy* by K.V. Ramesh, F.M. Asher and G.S. Gai edited *Indian Epigraphy* and G.S. Gai’s *Introduction to Indian Epigraphy*, but these volumes have altogether ignored the efficacy of palmleaf for writing like that of Salomon. It reveals that the non-existence of earlier specimens of these materials led them to ignore its antiquity. In this regard the observation of Asko Parpola is worth mentioning here, where

---

105 *ibid.*, pp. 7-21.
108 V.A. Smith and others, *India Its.., op.cit.*, p.10. Here Fleet argues for an exploration of some buried city or even of one or other of the numerous private collections of ancient manuscripts that still have to be examined. He asserts that it may some day result in the discovery of some of the early and authentic vamśīdīvalīśī.
it is argued that Harappans might have had scribes for different branch of knowledge, but as
we do not possess any kind of historical record of the activities of the Harappan scribes and
scholars, so we can only speculate on what has been lost from the Indus valley. Thus, he
assumed that the normal writing material is likely to have been the perishable palmleaf, as it
was in India until this century. Subsequently, J.M.Kenoyer while endorsing the view of
Parpola opined that the discovery of longer texts, with many sentences would be the next
best thing to finding a bilingual text in the Indus culture. Grammatical structure and repeated
sign sequences could be isolated and compared with the thousands of shorter inscriptions on
seals and tablets. Unfortunately, no longer texts have been found. If they were written on
palmleaf manuscripts or parchment, they would not have been preserved in the humid
climate of the Indus valley.

Further, other important contributors to this field are not many. Amongst the other
scholars the work *Palm leaf and Paper* by John Guy is notable. It observes that the Indians
thought the manuscript itself was the object of worship and the essence of the texts were
personified in the name of a goddess. Secondly, the antiquity of palmleaf manuscript is
unknown although its date extends back almost as far as the art of writing itself in India. So,
in spite of considerable visual, archaeological and textual evidence for the early existence of
the palmleaf manuscript, no illustrated texts have survived earlier than the 10th century. In
his second work *Arts of India* John Guy brings up an archaic style of manuscript in which
the design was incised on palmleaf folios, a technique largely abandoned in the fourteenth

---

century with the widespread availability of paper, though it persisted late in Orissa. Paper appears not to have been widely used in Orissa before the eighteenth century, and palm leaf was still in use for manuscripts early this century. The earliest surviving palm leaf manuscript paintings in the Hindu-Jain tradition date from around the twelfth century. In the course of the thirteenth century paper was introduced into northern India and the Deccan by the newly established Muslim courts and gradually displaced palm leaf as the principal manuscript medium. Palm leaf manuscripts continue to be produced in western India up to and including the fourteenth century, though they are rare after that. Guy further supplemented the arguments of Pandey, Sircar and Ojha that the engraved copper plates retrieved from the ancient city of Taxila are of a narrow landscape format, presumably already emulating the palm leaf folio. This work also refers to the Buddhist tradition that the scriptures were first committed to writing after the first Buddhist council of 483 B.C. and it is assumed that Jain scriptures must have been similarly committed to writing as late as the 5th century A.D. prompted by a severe famine that threatened to break the chain of oral transmission. So it is understood that such text would almost certainly have been executed on palm leaf or on another ancient writing material called birch bark.

Another work *The Art of the Book in India* by J.P. Losty provides the evidence of first reference to writing in India found in the earliest layers of the Pali Buddhist canon of about the 5th century B.C. and speaks of various types of materials used for writing, such as leaves,

---

116 ibid., p.28.
117 ibid.
wood and *salākā* and metals. The type of leaves is unspecified, but there is no reason to believe that it is as yet actually the usual writing palm of ancient India. But according to Rhys Davids there is an absolute silence about books in the Buddhist canon, despite long inventories of what monks are and are not committed to writing, with the repeated assertion that *suttas* could be lost through a monk's having no disciple to teach them to, argues very strongly that the mere possibility of writing down the Buddhist sacred texts could not be entertained. Here Losty argues that this is not only the Indian aversion to written as opposed to the oral tradition rather the real problem was that no-writing material was known in the 6th and 5th century B.C. that was usable for writing connected with religious texts, as opposed to records, letters, or accounts. So, the use of the *talipot* must have been unknown in north India at this time, and seems still to have been unknown by the late 4th century B.C., since it is not included in the writing materials noted by the Greek companions of Alexander. It can only have been with the expansion of the Mauryan empire into the south of India in the 3rd century B.C. that the *talipot* could have become known to the northern Indians, and its possibilities exploited for the writing of literary and religious texts.

The observations of some alien travellers and writers regarding the use and efficacy of palm leaf manuscripts in India is worth mentioning. In this regard Edward Sachau's English edition of *Alberuni’s India* records the Arabian writer Alberuni's statement that in

120 Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, op. cit., p.5.
121 *ibid.*
122 Labarum or Abu Raihan (A.D.973-1048) composed his work *Tahrik-i-Hind* or Reality of Hindustan in the 1st part of 11th century A.D. where he discussed about the then writing systems in India.)
the eleventh century the Hindus in south India used a slender tree like date and coconut palms. They call these leaves as tar and write on them. They bind a book of these leaves together by a cord on which they are arranged, the cord going through all the leaves via a hole in the middle of each. Another scholar Samuel Beal in his work Si-Yu-Ki quoted the sources of the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang in the seventh century A.D. who referred to the general use of palmleaves throughout the whole of India.

Except for these works on Indian epigraphy and palaeography with particular reference to palmleaf manuscript there is hardly any works, which specifically mentions about it as a historical source, and even this information is imprecise. So palaeographical questions when raised have often been answered by quotations from other authors; the special problems relating to the palmleaf manuscript are hardly touched.

II:

With easy availability and employment of palmleaf as a writing material, demand for it grew on a large scale, and since long it has created significant impact on the writing tradition vis-à-vis the development of the script and regional history and culture. In the process of writing the utility of this writing material changed the shape of regional scripts in some states. Secondly, its profound influence can also be seen in the writing of regional history and religious texts.

123 bearing edible fruits and leaves of the length of one yard and as broad as three fingers one put besides the other.
124 Tari or tala or tar (palmleaves) Borassus Flabelliformis.
126 Samuel Beal, Tr. Si-yu-ki, Book-ii, p.225.
Influence on the Script

A progression can be noticed in the structure of letters in the two-thousand years of the history of writing. Man has a fundamental aesthetic sense, which stimulates him to go in for geometrical shapes, for the symmetry of pattern and form. So even after the need for distinguishing letters had been fulfilled, man went about redesigning them so as to improve their appearance. For example, what the letters look now days were not in the same form in ancient days. One of the factors for this progression in the character of the scripts is the utilisation of diverse writing materials and instruments. That is the reason that even when a written script was invented, the medium of writing determined its nature, and when the medium changed the script had to change too. So it became progressively necessary to find the complexities involved in the characters so as to distinguish them from others. As no Oriya palmleaf manuscripts survive prior to 15th century, it is quite difficult to draw a conclusion about the antiquity of Oriya script on palmleaves. It is generally accepted that the cursive nature of Oriya script is due to the use of palmleaves and pointed stylus. First, there is no evidence of palmleaves written in proto-Oriya character and second, the absence of the finds of any flat edged stylus have reinforced the arguments of David Diringer, D.P.Patnaik, J.P.Das and Binayaka Mishra in this regard. Thus, the debate here is totally based on extant manuscripts and their written script and not the earlier ones.

It is argued that Oriyas most probably developed their own written characters under the influence of their neighbours, the Telugus and the Tamils.127 The talipot palmleaves, which are long and narrow, were the only writing material in ancient Odra (Orissa), as in

other parts of the south-coast provinces of south India.\textsuperscript{128} Local scribes employing an iron stylus to scratch the letters were compelled to avoid straight lines, and particularly the characteristic horizontal \textit{mātrā} of Devanagari and of similar scripts. Any scratch in the direction of the longitudinal fibre, running in the palmleaves from the stalk to the point, would split the palmleaf, which is excessively fragile. Thus, this probably gave rise to the rounded shapes of the Oriya letters.\textsuperscript{129} Moreover, in order to make the signs prominent, ink is rubbed over the surface of the leaf and it fills up the scratches that form the letters. The curves, which take the place of the horizontal top lines of Devanagari, form the greater part of the single signs and are the same in nearly all letters, while the central part of the letter, by which one is distinguished from another, has been so reduced inside that it is difficult to see, and therefore at first glance the majority of the letters appear to look alike.

Patnaik suggests that the Oriya script developed from the proto-Oriya script after coming in contact with the southern-north Indian scripts and it took a formalised shape in a later period (15\textsuperscript{th} century).\textsuperscript{130} The reason is that the script was bound to change in the palmleaf medium taking a cursive shape. Prior to that, cursive scripts were in vogue in Tamil and Telugu regions,\textsuperscript{131} as they used to write on palmleaves and adjusted the scripts to the nature of the palmleaf and the stylus with which the etching was done. Thus, due to Orissa’s constant contact with the south—politically, socially and culturally—since first century A.D.,

\textsuperscript{128}ibid.
\textsuperscript{129}Diringer distinguished the Oriya writing into three main varieties. One called \textit{brahmani} used mainly in palmleaf manuscripts, it owes its name to the Brahmans of Orissa, who are generally the writers of the \textit{Sāstras} or religious works; another called \textit{karanī}, having originated among the \textit{karanās}, is now generally used in writing out documents; the third one is used in parts of Gajjām, on the eastern coast of India; to the south of Orissa, the Oriya characters have become more rounded than in Orissa proper, owing to the greater influence of the Telugu script, used by neighbouring people: \textit{ibid.}, p.288.
\textsuperscript{131}Binayaka Mishra, \textit{History of Oriya Language}, The Utkal Sahitya Press, Cuttack-1927, p.49.
it was quite natural that the cursive south Indian scripts influenced the shape of the Oriya script. The proto-Oriya script was used from the eleventh to the fourteenth century in Assam, Bengal and Orissa.\(^\text{132}\) It is from this script that modern Oriya script evolved. Whereas the Bengali script retained the horizontal top line of the original script, it is Oriya script that changed them to curves due to the exigencies of the writing material, the palmleaf. The incision of a long, straight, horizontal line with an iron stylus would have split the leaf, because palmleaf has a longitudinal fibre going from the stalk to the point.\(^\text{133}\) The normal way of writing on the palmleaf was for the scribe to sit on the floor and write with the stylus, holding the palmleaf on the knee. Moreover, the stylus being held in the right hand and leaf in the left, the thumb of the left hand served as a fulcrum on which the stylus moved and this naturally imparted a circular form to the letters.\(^\text{134}\) The palmleaf is thus said to have decided the shape of the Oriya script. It is postulated that the date of a particular palmleaf manuscript be determined on the basis of the development of the Oriya script.\(^\text{135}\)

But the arguments of the above scholars that the Oriya script took a formalised shape in 15\(^{th}\) century onwards after the constant touch with south Indian scripts are not justifiable. In Orissa we have both archaeological as well as literary evidence that suggest the existence of writing on palmleaves since first century A.D. So the question arises whether the extinct manuscripts were written in angular or cursive letters. Second, if Orissa was constantly in touch with south since 1\(^{st}\) century than why did it take so many years (almost 1500 to 1700) to influence its script? Non-availability of palmleaf manuscripts in the proto-Oriya script

\(^{132}\)Above scholars argued that the prototype Oriya script was in vogue from the 15\(^{th}\) to the 17\(^{th}\) centuries and gradually this type of script took a different shape when used on palmleaf, from the 15\(^{th}\) to 19\(^{th}\) centuries.


\(^{134}\)Binayaka Mishra, *op.cit.*, p.49.

\(^{135}\)D.P.Patnaik, *op.cit.*, p.11.
cannot justify that it was influence by the scripts of neighbouring states. Again, if the pointed writing instrument and fragile nature of palmleaf in Indian peninsula does not support the angular shape of the script then how the people since two thousand years used the same material and instrument for their writing purposes; and in those times what was the shape or character of the scripts on palmleaves. Moreover, the above arguments of various scholars are intrinsically based on existing palmleaf manuscripts not on earlier ones, so their arguments in this regard do not reflect the antiquity of writing on palmleaves and its influence on scripts prior to 15th century. The purpose of present research is not to focus on the above arguments, since this hypothesis about the relation of scripts with that of writing material and instrument is debatable and requires further comprehensive research on this theme.

Relevance for regional history

The palmleaf was considered so-sacred that even after the printing press came to Orissa, important texts continued to be written on palmleaf in preference to paper. In 1925, when a memorandum containing the demands of Oriyas was to be submitted to Henry Wheeler, the then Governor of Bihar and Orissa, the Oriya People’s Association got it written on palmleaves.\textsuperscript{136} So far the earliest evidence of a pothi dates to A.D.795, when the Chinese emperor Te-Tsang received as a token of homage an autographed manuscript of

Avatamsakasutra addressed to him by king Subhakara^ of Wu-cha (Orissa).^8

A great hoard of pothis came to the notice of English scholars almost immediately after the British occupation of Orissa in 1803. Andrew Stirling, the then secretary to the Government refers to his collection of pothis in 1804. In 1859, Rev. J. Long published his Notes and Queries after a visit to Orissa in January 1859 as described in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Here he mentioned that Sanskrit and Oriya manuscripts were available in Bhubaneswar and its suburbs and drew attention to them. Colonel Mackenzi collected some pothis from Ganjam-and-Koraput districts and these were preserved in the Oriental Manuscripts library in Madras. When John Beams was the Collector of Balasore and later Commissioner, Orissa Division, he wrote an article on Oriya kāvyā Rasa Kallola in Indian Antiquary, Vol-1, 1871, based on a palmleaf manuscript and this was the first publication to introduce the English readers to Oriya literature. W.W. Hunter was the first to bring the illustration of Oriya citra-pothi to public notice when he reproduced Three Pages of an Illustrated Palmleaf Book in the Oriya Character in his Orissa in 1872. These pages were from a Gītā-Govinda in his personal collection.

^138The manuscript presented to the Chinese emperor contained the last section of the Avatamsaka, the section treating of the practice and the vow of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. The whole of the Avatamsaka had already been translated twice into Chinese, first by Buddhhabhadra, between 398 and 421, then by Śikshāmandu, between 695 and 699. The new text as well as the accompanying letter was entrusted to the monk Prājñā, who was instructed to supply a translation. Prājñā was native of the country of Kapisa. After eighteen years of learning in Northern India, mid-India, Nalanda, etc. places, Prājñā had settled in the monastery of the king of Wu-ch’a (Uḍā, Orissa) to study yoga there. He had next move to China, and made his debut there in 788 by a translation of the (Mahāyāna-buddha) Shat-pāramitā-sutra. Whether Prājñā’s journey to China after his stay in the monastery of the king of Orissa and the despatch of the Buddhist manuscript autographed by the king are two directly connected occurrences, these express the continuity of a religious policy pursued by the Orissan king. ibid.
A list of 107 Oriya writers and their works and 47 manuscripts of undetermined authorship, prepared on the basis of palmleaf manuscripts was appended to Hunter’s *Orissa* Vol-II published in 1872. Rajendra Lal Mitra published *Notices of (palmleaf) Manuscripts Preserved in the Asiatic Society, Bengal Before 1898 A.D*, where he referred to many manuscripts collected from Orissa. As a result of this collection, both Hunter and Mitra sought to write the history of Orissa on the basis of *Mādalāpāñji*, the palmleaf manuscripts from the Jagannāth temple in Purī. M.M.Chakravarty also collected a number of *pothis* and his study of these manuscripts was published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* in 1897-98 under the title *Notes on the language and Literature of Orissa*.

Besides the above efforts by various non-Oriya scholars, Oriya intellectuals also formulated the history of Orissa based on numerous manuscripts from the various sites of Orissa and its suburbs. Among them the endeavours of N.K.Sahu, Nilamani Sahu, Siva Prasad Das, P.C.Rath, G.S.Das, J.K.Sahu, K.N.Mahaputra and others is quite commendable.

The Sanskrit palmleaf manuscript *Kosalānanda Kāvyā* written by Gangadhar Mishra in A.D.1664 depicts the history of Chauhān rule in western Orissa particularly the political conditions of Pāṭnā and Sambalpur kingdom, the Muslim conquest of Orissa

---

139Gangadhar Mishra, son of Sambhu Mishra of Sambalpur, was the court poet of Sambalpur King Baliar Sing (1617-57), who expertise on Sanskrit literature and composed *Kosalānanda Kāvyā*. 

42
and the rule of Bhoi dynasty of Khurdā. Sivaprasad Das compiled his *Sambalpur Itiḥāsa* particularly from the 11th century onwards on the basis of *Kośalānanda Kāvyā* and *Jayacandrīkā* manuscripts. According to him, Gangadhar Mishra compiled his Sanskrit work *Kośalānanda Kāvyā* on the basis of the *Sambalpur Rāja Vaniśāvalī*. Another manuscript *Jayacandrīkā* by Prahlad Dubey (A.D.1781) deals with the history of Chauhān rule in western Orissa from the birth of Ramai Deva to the coronation of Jayanta Singh. The main object of writing this manuscript seems to be depicts the celebration of the victory of (Jaya) Jayanta Singh over his rebellious Dewān Akbar Raj. P.C.Rath on the basis of the text of *Kośalānanda Mahākāvyā* provides a graphic description of the geography of Paṭnā kingdom during the reign of Ramai Deo. *Probodha Candrīkā*, a work on Sanskrit grammar written by king Vaijala Deva of Paṭnā kingdom was very popular in Orissa. The manuscript speaks about the genealogy of the author Vaijala Deva.

---

142 Palm leaf manuscript composed in A.D.1781, is written in a Rajasthani dialect of Hindi called *Dingal*. As a historical *kāvyā* it is a mixture of both facts and fiction.
143 Court poet of Sratagangarh was one of the main feudatory state of Sambalpur kingdom during 17th and 18th century A.D., now it is in Madhya Pradesh.
147 Composed in the first quarter of the 16th century A.D. Also see *Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the collection of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol.VI, *Vyakaranan Manuscripts*, No. 4570 to 4572.
A well known Sanskrit work *Garigavanisānu Caritam* is a campu kāvyam composed by Rājaguru kavi Vasudev Ratha Somayaji at the end of the A.D.1760. The kāvyam describes the rājās and zamindars of Purī, Khalikot, Āṭhagarh, Dharākot, etc., and how they exercised considerable powers and influence in their respective kingdoms. Brajanatha Badajena’s *Samaratarāṅga* manuscript is a heroic poetry that carries the history of the princely state of Dhenkānāl particularly of the 18th and 19th centuries and provides ample information regarding the geographical location of the state as well as the heroic war at Dhenkānāl, and Dhenkānāl’s relations with the Marathas and Britishers.

**Mādalāpāṇji and the Jagannāth cult**

The temples of India have been the centres of education for centuries and most of them, particularly of the south, contain large numbers of inscriptions that are important for literary and historical purposes. Especially important in this regard is the Jagannāth temple of Purī, which has been associated with a chronicle of its own called *Mādalāpāṇji*.

In the year 1825, for the first time Andrew Stirling in his paper ‘An account, Geographical, Statistical and Historical of Orissa Proper or Cuttack’ published in *Asiatic Researches* mentioned that the chapters of the *Mādalāpāṇji* or records preserved in the

---

151 *Mādalāpāṇji* consists of a number of pairs of palmleaves that are not separated from each other and leaves that are tied at one end by a string. These manuscripts are written or rather scratched on palmleaves using an archaic form of Oriya character and the language is colloquial Oriya. The text begins with a list of kings of the of the Satya Yuga and ends with the eighth arka (A.D.1872) of Raja Virakeshari Deva. R.P.Chanda, *Notes from the Mādalāpāṇji*, in *JBORS*, XIII, Part-I, 1927, BORS, Patna, pp.10-27.
temple of Jagannāth, called as the Rāj Carita or ‘Annals of the Kings’ in the Oriya language. Here the records are stated to have commenced more than six centuries back and to have since been regularly kept up. Further, in his account Sterling dealt with thirty-six generations of the Kesari kings beginning with Yayati Kesari. As the date of the Yayati Kesari was given in the Saka era, Stirling placed the beginning of the Kesari rule in A.D. 473, from which he counted the commencement of the real history of the province. In 1843, Bhabani Charan Bandopadhyaya published his Puruşottama Candrikā, which is a poetical work in Bengali based on the Mādalāpāṇji and in 1872, W.W.Hunter in his History of Orissa (Vol. I, pp.198-99) paid high tribute to Bandopadhyaya for his researches.

While examining the Nepalese vamsāvalī and also some vamśāvalis from Orissa, Fleet argues that these do not pretend to date from a fabulous antiquity. From the finds of palmleaf archives of the Jagannāth temple at Puri, it was revealed that there are certain definite and reliable landmarks in the medieval history of Orissa. But an examination of palmleaf archives has shown that for at least the period after A.D. 1100 these provide faithful and leading information regarding the history of Orissa, although Fleet did not agree with the information of the period anterior to about A.D. 1100. According to him prior to A.D. 1100 the information laid down in the temple chronicles was utterly fanciful and

154 ibid.
155 V.A.Smith and others, India Its., op.cit., p.10.
156 Mādalāpāṇji, (the temple chronicle of Puri) which presents an unbroken list of the kings of Orissa province (Kalinga) back from A.D. 1871 to the commencement of the Kali age in 3102 B.C.;Also see K.B. Tripathy, Chronicle of Jagannāth Temple Puri, in proceedings of Indian History Congress, Vol.XX, Vidyanagar, 1957, pp.204-207; Paramananda Acharya, Historical study of Mādalāpāṇji, in Aśāntakali (Oriya monthly), XII, No.1, 1962, pp.13-15.
misleading.\textsuperscript{157} This argument of Fleet was substantiated by A.B. Mohanty’s \textit{Mādalāpāṇji} in 1969 and K.C. Panigrahi’s \textit{History of Orissa} in 1981.\textsuperscript{158} As per Panigrahi the ancient history of Orissa as mentioned in the temple-chronicles was well-devised chiefly from imagination and simply to magnify the antiquity and importance of the temple of Jagannātha, but the information of medieval and modern history of Orissa is useful.

While comparing the account of the \textit{Mādalāpāṇji} with that of contemporary writings G.N. Das\textsuperscript{159} argues that the facts and figures described in the \textit{pāṇji} are much more useful and authentic than others. It is also assumed that Bhoja Rājā of \textit{Mādalāpāṇji} is none other than King Kharavela of ancient Utkal,\textsuperscript{160} and Sterling corroborates this fact in the \textit{History of Orissa}. By this, he tries to prove that the facts described in the \textit{pāṇji} prior to 15\textsuperscript{th} century A.D. are also reliable and authentic.

The \textit{Mādalāpāṇji}\textsuperscript{161} is still being written and preserved by particular families in Purī whose ancestors were assigned the task of writing the same long time ago. These writers are a class of attendants of the Purī temple. The \textit{Mādalāpāṇji} particularly deals with topics that pertain to the religious rites of Lord Jagannātha and to the dynastic history of the Mahārājās

\textsuperscript{157}V.A. Smith and others, \textit{India Its., op. cit.}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{158}K.C. Panigrahi, \textit{History of Orissa} (Hindu Period), 1\textsuperscript{st} ed., Kitab Mahal, Cuttack-1981, pp. 122-129; also see A.B. Mohanty’s \textit{Mādalāpāṇji}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., Utkal University, Bhubaneswar-1969.
of Puri and contemporary political events\textsuperscript{162} Some even believe that the Madalapāṇji only records the daily important events of the temple as well as of the kings of the royal household.\textsuperscript{163} Unfortunately, the recording has been discontinued for the last 20 years due to the apathy of the temple-servants. This has perhaps led some scholars to suggest that the pāṇji is not so very old as it is claimed to be. One view believes that the recording commenced when Rājā Mansingh, the General of Emperor Akbar, conquered Orissa in the sixteenth century A.D.\textsuperscript{164}

A record, which is being maintained regularly at least for six centuries, should not be discarded wholly because our present imperfect knowledge of past historical events cannot reconcile it with that knowledge derived from other sources.\textsuperscript{165} The Puri chronicles and their constant rewriting can only to a certain extent be considered as works of genuine historical writing with the intention of transmitting objective historical knowledge.\textsuperscript{166} Secondly, the lack of historicity of Puri’s chronicles is by no means only based on a lack of knowledge of the past but in many cases is a consequence of the chronicle’s social and political function.\textsuperscript{167} So it becomes obvious that the chronicles of Puri developed from a constant process of reconstruction of the past with the purpose of safeguarding or even renewing the present. Thus we find that the secondary literature on palmleaf manuscript deals either with its utility as a writing material or as a source for the reconstruction of regional history.

\textsuperscript{164}\textit{ibid.}
\textsuperscript{165}\textit{JBORS}, XVI, Part II, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.211-215.
\textsuperscript{166}Hermann Kulke, \textit{Kings and Cults}, Manohar Publishers, 1\textsuperscript{st} ed., New Delhi-1993, p.189.
\textsuperscript{167}\textit{ibid.}
Sources and Research Methodology

This study is based on the sources available primarily from the palmleaf manuscripts libraries of Orissa State Museum and Utkal University (Bhubaneswar), and Sambalpur University Museum. The Orissa State Museum has a separate section for manuscripts and its collection today exceeds seventy thousand\footnote{\textit{Prajñatātra}, ODNP, Saturday, 18\textsuperscript{th} Feb. 1995, Pub. in Cuttack, p.6.} in number covering about 15,000 titles and is of thirty-two types. Out of which the illustrated manuscripts number around five hundred.\footnote{ibid.} The concerned area of research is basically on the manuscripts related to historical and other related literature, which are sixty-nine in number and one from Utkal University manuscript library. The Sambalpur university museum has preserved more than fourteen hundred manuscripts and they are placed into eight sections. Out of fourteen hundred manuscripts forty-five relating to historical significance have been chosen for the empirical work. From the texts and colophons of these manuscripts some interesting historical information has been gleaned.

This research involves historical investigative and descriptive methods based on both primary and secondary sources. It would be descriptive in terms of giving an account of the tradition of writing in India with specific reference to Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain literature. It would be analytical in terms of investigating the very premise of the study of writing instruments and writing materials based on archaeology, i.e. excavation reports published so far, and also evidence of palmleaf manuscripts through inscriptional and sculptural sources. It also highlights a hitherto neglected feature of research relating to the
colophon of the selected palm leaf manuscripts and analysing varied aspects and position of scribes.

The study is also based on a broad field survey covering ethnographic investigation of the scribe-artists - visiting them and studying their specialised works. In addition empirical data was obtained from the following libraries and regions:

⇒ Orissa State Museum Palmleaf Manuscript library and Utkal University (Parija Central library) Palmleaf Manuscript library, Bhubaneswar, for the study of colophon of seventy selected manuscripts.

⇒ Sambalpur University Palmleaf Manuscripts library, Sambalpur, for the study of colophon of forty-five selected manuscripts.

⇒ Fifty interviewees (scribe-artists) of Raghurajpur and its suburb villages in Puri sadar tehsil in Orissa for the ethnographic study.

**Different Sections of the Theme or Chapterisation**

In view of the hazards involved in dealing with a subject as complex and as vast as Indian manuscripts, the thesis contains five major-heads with sub-heads these are: Writing Tradition, Writing Materials and Writing Instruments, Antiquity of the use of Palmleaf Manuscripts, Colophon of the Manuscripts and Ethno-historic Studies.
I. Introduction:

This chapter already dealt with a general description about use of palmleaf manuscripts in India with specific reference to Orissa. Generally this section has surveyed the literature on writing on palmleaf and how it has nurtured a place in Indian society as a writing material. Secondly it has focused on the issues of its diversified use and its ethno-historic linkages till date.

II. Tradition of Writing and the Writing of History:

This section will trace the tradition of writing in India and its history. An analysis of all the evidence, traditional, literary, circumstantial and inferential points to the antiquity of the art of writing in India from the remote past and its indigenous evolution. This chapter focuses on various aspects like the Indus and Brāhmi scripts, tradition of writing as referred to in Sanskrit, Pali, Jain-canonical and foreign sources, and development of the concept of writing along with the rise of itihāsa and itihāsa-purāṇa tradition.

III. Writing Instruments and Writing Materials:

While tracing the history of writing the data from potsherds, graffiti, seals and sealings cannot be ignored. Certainly there must be the existence of some kinds of writing materials and writing instruments for the purpose of lettering such scripts and literatures. So, the evolution and growth of scripts and literature could be ascertained only through specific studies on writing materials and instruments. Large finds of tools and artefacts from various sites of India indicate the utility and necessity of these implements. Even there is no denying the fact that perishable material such as palmleaves, tree bark and cloth, which have little chance of surviving the rigours of the Indian climate were
definitely used for writing purpose. Consequently, according to this observation, one need not be amazed that no early specimens of Indian writing have survived, and their absence does not establish that they never existed. Then the efficacy and inference of these materials and instruments for the creation of such scripts and the vast literary output is the subject matter of this chapter. It includes different types of writing materials and instruments used for the purpose, and finds of large numbers of ink or inkpots, stylus or lekhanis from the excavation reports published so far.

IV. Antiquity of the use of Palmleaf Manuscripts:

Old palmleaf manuscripts are hard to come by due to the perishable nature of the leaves. So there is no way to find earlier manuscripts. But it cannot be assumed that palmleaf manuscripts did not exist prior to 15th century A.D. The finds of numerous literary, inscriptional and sculptural evidence suggests the existence of writing on palmleaf prior to this date. The stylus, which was the common writing instrument in the earlier period, is still in use today on palmleaves. It is the only connecting instrument that speaks about the existence of writing on various materials. The basis and development of the concept of manuscript, when and how it came to the light as a material for writing, the hard evidence about its origin as writing material, finds of early manuscripts, specimens of extant manuscripts, etc. are the subject matter of this chapter.

V. The Colophon of Palmleaf Manuscripts:

Present day scholars estimate that hardly 10 percent of the manuscripts in existence today, have been even looked at, much less transcribed, interpreted and printed. These manuscripts constitute a vital source of information on several subjects. Primarily the
palmleaf manuscripts, which almost come to us only after being copied and recopied through the years, are inherently datable, either by an explicit date or by palaeographic estimate. A reference to a particular legal principle, religious sect, philosophy, scribe or artist and so on, in a manuscript thus gives at least an approximate terminus for a person or event whose date might otherwise be impossible to determine even in the broadest estimate. It is mainly for this reason that palmleaf manuscript is a primary rather than a secondary sub-field within Indology. Secondly, in a palmleaf manuscript the colophon plays an essential part as far as the historical information is concerned. It throws light on different features relating to the writing of the manuscripts. It not only provides information on the date of the manuscript, the reigning king, the author, the scribe or the copier, the treatise owner, the contemporary socio-cultural life but also the geographical entity of the prevailing time. Besides, the colophon of the manuscript provides us information regarding the interest of the people, their beliefs, faith in different gods and goddesses, the prestige and dignity of their family and dynasty, description regarding the author, the scribe and their identity, etc.

VI. Ethno-Historic Studies:

Ethnographic studies are concerned with life and material culture and provide scientific descriptions of individual human societies living today and the objects they use. There is, then the question of the living tradition of palmleaf manuscripts. We have amongst us scribe-artists who are still continuing the tradition both in material ephemeral and as also permanent. The utility of studying these scribes, artists or craftsmen totally dedicated to and identified in manuscripts and their works is the subject of discussion of this chapter. Watching them at work will be convincing proof that the process of creating palmleaf
manuscript is complete and full only as a result of the combined effort of various social
groups. In short production of palmleaf manuscript is a world unto itself. Its various
methods or procedures for preparation and writing or etching on palmleaves, the making
of stylus and ink, the writing technique and illustrations, position of scribe-artists
including their socio-economic structure, and finally the feedback of the survey are the
major thrust of this chapter.

VII. Epilogue:
In a nutshell we can say that 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 people from diverse communities perfected writing on
palmleaves. Second, the antiquity of palmleaf manuscripts dates back its origin at least
for two thousand years. Third, the texts and colophons of palmleaf manuscripts provide
adequate data for the reconstruction of regional history as discussed by scholars. 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 do play an important part for clear visibility of manuscript
letters. It is noteworthy that the preparation of ink for the use on palmleaf the traditional
method is still followed.
The subsequent chapter will follow up on the preceding issue of the tradition of writing and its antiquity, and how it could be understood through traditional literary sources. Second, the growth of various scripts vis a vis the *itiḥāsa-purāṇa* tradition indicates the existence of the custom of writing in various ways and means. Third, the observations and opinions of orientalists and other scholars cannot be ascertained unless one carefully analyses Sanskrit, Pāli, Prākrit and other literatures. Along with these three focal points, the use of stylus or *lekhani* and ink or inkpots in literature will be the subject of discussion in the next chapter.