CHAPTER-II

TRADITION OF WRITING AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY

A number of divergent and conflicting views are held regarding the history and tradition of the art of writing. Such a state of affairs is mainly due to many lacunae and

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1 Orienitalists like Burnell argue that whether the art of writing was imported into India or developed indigenously is by no means clear. A.C. Burnell, Elements of South Indian Palaeography, Indological Book House, New Delhi-1968, p.1; Diringer concurs that many passages of the Vedic literature show that recording by writing was not practised while there is pretty constant reference to the texts as writing, but existing only in the memory of those who learnt them by heart. Writing is never mentioned, he argues, as among the ancient Indian divinities there was no god of writing, but there was Sarasvati, the goddess of knowledge, learning and eloquence. David Diringer, The Alphabet, 3rd ed., Hutchinson & Co., London-1968, p.258; Winternitz postulates that the history of Indian literature does in no way commence with written literature and in the oldest periods of the history of Indian literature we find actually not written works, but only texts which were handed down by word-of-mouth. So he argues that we do not have sure proof of the existence of manuscripts or even authentic information about writing down texts from olden days and it has not been possible till now to find, in the whole Vedic literature any evidence of the knowledge of script. Again he added that there is no mention of manuscripts, in the Buddhist Canon, which was completed probably about 400 B.C., although there are numerous proof for the knowledge of the art of writing and of the widespread use of script in those days. So, writing is referred to as an excellent branch of knowledge and Buddhist nuns were expressly permitted to pursue the art of writing in those days. Maurice Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol.I, Motilal Banarsidass, rpt., New Delhi-1990, pp.26-28.

According to Max Muller Panini flourished in the fourth century B.C., thus the art of writing in his opinion started in India even later than the fourth century B.C. Max Muller, History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature, p.262. Seventy-five years ago Max Muller wrote his excursus on the introduction of writing in India, the oldest Brahminical works which he could quote as witnesses for the use of letters were Panini’s Grammar, Manu’s and Yajñavalkya’s Institutes of the Sacred Law, the Mahābhārata and Kalidasa’s Drāmās, and he had to declare that in the Vedas and in the later literature of the Vedic schools no certain trace of the use of writing could be found, while they contained very strong evidence for the prevalence of oral teaching and for their having been preserved by a purely oral tradition. Also see Georg Buhler’s On the Origin of the Indian Brahma Alphabet, 3rd ed., Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, Varanasi-1963, pp.5-6.

The above opinions are so because these orientalists were obsessed due to the paucity of early evidence and inclined to fix the beginning of the art of writing in India rather late, the first millennium B.C. Although their arguments hold no truth as we have evidence that the writing was extant in India at circa 1000-600 B.C. as per the archaeological evidence and carbon dating of the early historic data brought-out by Deraniyagala, Kenoyer and B.B.Lal.
the scarcity of materials on the subject. In addition most Indian as well as non-Indian historians have continuously bemoaned the fact that ancient Indians lacked a sense of history as they do not seem to have kept an accurate record of past events especially about the ancient period. Comparisons have been made between the ancient Indians and ancient Greeks, whose history was recorded by a series of historians, and the Chinese who have traditionally maintained chronicles of various dynasties and rulers. On account of the emphasis on oral-tradition compounded by the fact that scholars have traditionally focussed on stone and copper plate inscriptions as evidence for writing, it is generally argued that there is a lack of texts that can be specifically described as historical writing until the seventh century A.D. We cannot gainsay the fact that the real art of writing history or the professional way of historiography began with the Greeks. Early Greek historiography reached its flowering in the writings of Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius. The models of historiography worked by the Greek historians were followed by the Romans first in the Greek language and subsequently in Latin but they evolved their own distinctiveness. The
tradition of historical compositions in China is of remote antiquity. The office of Shih or archivist is almost as old as Chinese history. He was a keeper of detailed day-to-day chronicles. The composition of Shih-Chi (Historical Records) by Ssū-ma-Chi’en, the father of Chinese historiography around 100 B.C. is a major breakthrough. In Egypt history writing can be traced back to Manetho, the priest who composed in Greek the history of Egypt in the third century A.D. with a preference for narration and record of events, to historical analysis.

In view of the above observations, in India even after much empirical research the early history of writing remains problematic. It begins with the still undeciphered script found on seals and other relics of the Indus Valley Civilisation, which flourished around the second half of the third and first half of the second millennium B.C. The script of Indus Valley rapidly disappeared when the elite of the valley lost their dominance between 1900 and 1700 B.C. After its disappearance there was no reason to invent a new script until the rise of the new cities in the Ganga river valley around 600 B.C. Certain evidence has been proposed to provide the missing link between the proto-historic and historical writing. For example, graffiti found on megalithic and chalcolithic pottery from southern and western India was discussed by B.B. Lal who mentioned the resemblance of some of the shapes found in these graffiti to both Indus Valley script characters and letters of the Brāhmi

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Because of the absence of concrete documentary evidence for writing in the intervening period (roughly 1750-260 B.C.), many historians and epigraphists have addressed the question of the possibility of literacy in pre-Mauryan India through the examination of literary and other evidence. To begin with Vedic literature, some scholars notably G.H.Ojha, followed by R.B.Pande and others have claimed evidence for a literate culture in later Vedic texts on the basis of references therein to poetic meters, grammatical and phonetic terms and arithmetic calculations. Richard Salomon by no means certain about such claims argued that the absence of a single explicit and indisputable
reference to writing anywhere in early Vedic literature suggests that the Vedic culture was a preliterate one.\textsuperscript{18}

The practice of writing monumental inscriptions on stone was presumably an innovation of Aśoka himself. Before Aśoka, writing was probably used principally, if not exclusively, for economic and administrative requirements as opposed to literary and monumental purposes. Secondly, the testimony of travellers like Nearchos\textsuperscript{19}, Megasthenes\textsuperscript{20} and Strabo is contradictory in nature so far as writing in pre-Aśokan period is concerned. Thirdly, the Pāli Canon particularly the Jātakas and the Vinaya-Piṭaka contain many explicit references to writing and writing documents of early India. This is also not free from debate, as Buhler and others have claimed most of these to the later strata of the Canon. Barring the controversy pertaining to dating, the most authentic indication of writing before the Mauryan period is Panini’s Āṣṭādhyāyī, which has a clear reference to early writing in the term liṅga or libi ‘script’. It is probably the most cogent literary evidence for writing before the Mauryan period about the script (libi), which proves the existence of some form of writing in Panini’s home-region in or before the mid-fourth century B.C., although there is no explicit indication as to what type of script he is referring to.

This chapter addresses the issue from two perspectives: one it re-examines the antiquity of writing based on additional data provided by excavations in Sri Lanka; and


\textsuperscript{19} Nearchos visited north-western India around 325 B.C., explicitly mentions that Indian wrote letters on cotton cloth.

\textsuperscript{20} Megasthenes lived in north-eastern India some two decade after Nearchos, stated that the Indians did not know written character.
second, it analyses the oft-repeated lack of the tradition of writing history in early India. Both these issues are of importance to this study and will continue to be discussed in the subsequent chapters. The current chapter is broadly classified into various sections. The first three sections discuss the various scripts followed by an analysis of the literary evidence for the antiquity of writing in the subsequent sections.

**Indus Script**

The earliest script known in India was discovered in the Indus Valley at Harappa and Mohenjodaro and subsequently at other sites. It reflects a fundamental change in social and political organisation that accompanied the formation and consolidation of cities. The most noteworthy feature of the culture of the Indus Valley relates to the use of an indigenous script, which appears on a large number of beautiful cut seals of steatite from various sites. The script was used as an intrinsic part of Harappan culture. The early Indus script was probably distinct from the more widespread use of potter's mark, because such marks continued to be used even after the invention of the script. So this pattern of use suggests that their function was different and to some extent, independent of writing itself.

Numerous writing systems may have been invented by individual spiritual leaders to record myths or by merchants to keep track of their goods, but none could have survived

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until a large group of people, possibly even the community as a whole, developed the need for such a recording system. So the invention, acceptance and eventual adoption of the Indus script by all the regional settlements should be seen as a process stimulated primarily by local needs and fulfilled using a culturally meaningful set of signs. Numerous attempts have been made to relate the Indus script to other known scripts, but on the basis of computer-aided comparative analysis of symbol sequences, Asko Parpola has concluded that the Indus script is not directly related to any known writing system.

Although writing in the Indus valley is first found inscribed on pottery, no single site has been identified as the place at which the writing system was invented. The earliest example of writing on a seal was recovered from Harappa, dating to around 2600 B.C. Around 3,700 examples of Indus writing come from the excavations of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, but only sixty different sites throughout the Indus valley have contributed one or more objects with the script. On the basis of the present evidence, the Indus script, emerging as a fully formed system of abstract signs, called graphemes. Over 4200 objects bearing the Indus script have been discovered so far, but most inscriptions are extremely short. The average inscriptions contain five signs or graphemes; the longest series has twenty-six. Most scholars agree that there are between 400 and 450 different signs, because of handwriting differences or regional styles, graphemes were sometimes written in different ways.

Although it is generally agreed that the Indus script is not an alphabetic form of writing, it does not have enough different signs to be a logographic script. In between these two extremes is a type of writing system referred to as logosyllabic (morphemic) where a single sign can mean either a word, a syllable or a sound. So most scholars think the Indus inscriptions represent a logosyllabic writing system, where a sequence of two or more signs would represent either a complete word or a sentence of several words and grammatical indicators. However, some of the signs do look like pictographs. That is why many of the seals found from the Indus Valley Civilisation usually square in shape, carry inscriptions in pictographic characters. These are syllabic. The script runs from right to left, and the words are made up of two or more symbols according to a system not very different from that of modern Indian scripts. As mentioned earlier some signs do look like pictographs for example; a fish, or a man holding a bow. But when used individually, such signs may have represented ideas or words, or even entire stories.

**Style of Writing**

The Indus script was carved, incised, chiselled, inlaid, painted, moulded and embossed on terracotta and glazed ceramic, shell, bone and ivory rods, miniature sandstone, steatite and gypsum, copper and bronze, silver and gold. According to Kenoyer the script was woven into fabric and basketry, carved into wood, inscribed on to palmleaves and

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possibly painted on the human body, all perishable materials. As we have discussed the
direction of writing was right to left. The writing on sealing and on tablets and mirror
impressions of the script on seals should be read that way. Some Indus tablets show short
texts written in opposite directions. Longer texts that comprised more than one line were
sometimes written in alternating directions called boustrophedon, where the first line
proceeds from right to left and the next line reads from left to right. Also rectangular
copper tablets with incised writing and animal motifs are found at Mohenjodaro and only
eight inscribed copper tablets found at Harappa provide evidence for raised script, inscribed
on both the flat faces.

One of the most exciting discoveries for the use of script came from Mohenjodaro in
the 1920s. A large number of gold objects found together in a copper vessel included four
ornaments with minute inscriptions that probably represent the names of the owners
scratched on to the polished surface. All inscriptions appear to have been made by the same
sharp, pointed tool and probably by the same hand.

During the Indus Valley Civilisation, technology and crafts became essential
mechanism for creating unique objects. By this time specialised engravers made seals with
the writing in reverse so that when stamped on clay it formed a raised positive message.
Artisans used seals or wooden moulds to produce numerous copies of inscriptions on fired

32 Kenoyer, ibid., p.72
   pp.399-419; also see Shashi’s Enc. Ind., Vol.4, op.cit., p.134; Cultural Heritage India, Vol.1, op.cit., p.120.
35 Each distinct surface of an object bearing an inscription or a pictorial motif is regarded as a side of the
36 Although these tools do not look like the stylus but the sharpness of this pointed tool is like that of a stylus.
terracotta and glazed faience tablets. Potters used seals to impress the writing on pottery vessels, i.e. usually the disposable drinking cups. Many agree that the people who used these inscribed objects and read the messages encoded in the signs were the people who controlled the Indus cities. So, it has been argued that people from different sections must have felt comfortable enough with the writing to scribble messages to each other on pottery vessels (a black-slipped jar found from Harappa with both pre-firing and post-firing inscription). 37

Graphic variation in Indus script has many causes. A single object can be represented in different ways pictorially, depending on the viewpoint, and on the selection and emphasis of characteristic features. Then there are variations resulting from gradual historical development, typically involving the simplification of pictures; from regional styles; from the effect of the material and of the technique of inscribing; 38 from the type and use of the object and the status of its owner (elaborate and monumental versus simple and crude forms); from scarcity of writing space on small objects like seals (compact and turned variants); and from personal styles of handwriting. 39

Inscribed objects are found on all the sites. So, we assume that the script was generally used in a manner that was openly visible to the general public. Writing was used in everyday contexts as well as for religious purposes, but the presence of script on gold jewellery, copper tools and stoneware bangles suggests that only the rich and powerful wrote their names or attributions on personal objects. A large signboard from Dholavira

38 For instance wood and clay favour angular forms; while palmleaves, the traditional writing material that may well have been used by Indus people—favoured rounded forms.
shows large writing, but most inscriptions are small or miniature. Perhaps the most important recent discovery is that the style of writing and carving of seals changed over time; small tablets without animal motifs but with script, come from the middle to late part of the Harappan phase. These patterns indicate that writing was not static but a dynamic invention of that period. Land owners, merchants, religious leaders, administrators and professional artisans were probably the only people who owned or used inscribed seals. But everyone in the society understood the power and authority reflected in writing and its use throughout the Indus and Sarasvati regions reveals a period of cultural and economic integration. Before summing up we can say that writing and seals remained important to the political and ritual elites as long as the trade networks and cities continued to exist.

**Post-Indus Scenario**

After the decline of the Indus Valley Culture, the graphic record of India is virtually a total blank for over a thousand years until the time of the Aśokan inscriptions on stone; the earliest definitely datable written records of the historical period around the middle of the third century B.C. From this time on, written records become increasingly common and can be traced in considerable detail from Aśoka’s time to the present day. It is suggested that nothing is known of what might have happened in this intervening long period between roughly 1750 B.C. and 260 B.C. The lack of any concrete evidence in a vast gap of time makes it difficult to relate the Indus script with the Brāhmi. Recently new evidence has come to light, which supports the older theory that Brāhmi existed before Mauryan times, that is in the fourth century B.C. or possibly even earlier. A few potsherds bearing short

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inscriptions in Brāhmī were found in the excavations at Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka. Various dates have been proposed for these legends, ranging from the sixth to early fourth century B.C. Again excavations in Dwaraka have brought to light brown earthenware pottery of the post-Harappan period on which there are some letters, which resemble Aṣokan scripts. It may now be possible to propose intermediate evidence in the period between the Indus script and Brāhmī.

The earliest positive evidences available for a full-fledged script are the inscriptions of Aṣoka 3rd century B.C. found all over the country. The inscriptions are found to be written in different scripts like—Brāhmī, Kharoṣṭhī, Greek and Aramaic. While those in Brāhmī are distributed all over the country, those in Kharoṣṭhī are restricted to the north-western parts. Brāhmī, the more widespread script, shows local variations in the formation of letters. The language of the edicts also varies and shows regional differences.

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41 Are said to be assigned by radiocarbon dating to the pre-Mauryan period.
42 Salomon, Ind. Epig., op.cit., p.12.
43 A unique inscription on a red earthenware jar of the post-Harappan period, recently discovered in the intertidal zone of Dwaraka island has been deciphered. What is interesting is that it is written from left to right as in Aṣokan Brāhmī 3rd century B.C. and unlike in the Indus seals, where it is from right to left. Four letters are analogous to Brāhmī letters, forging a link between Indus and Brāhmī scripts. The inscription shows the evolution of Indus writing into a simple system and further establishes that writing was in use during the second half of the second millennium B.C. contrary to the belief that there was no writing in this period in India. Deccan Herald, dated 24.6.1985. S.R.Rao has tried to show that the Indus script was the forerunner of Brāhmī. The new discovery of post-Harappan scripts at Dwaraka has strengthened his propositions. It has narrowed the gap between the Indus script and the Brāhmī. S.R.Rao’s article “Methodology of Decipherment of the Indus Script”, Journal of Sri Venkateswara Oriental Research Institute; 1978, p.3ff.
44 “A” is said to have ten forms. Dani opines that these variations do not point to regional variations. A.H. Dani, Indian Palacography; Oxford University Press, London-1963; p.48.
The Beginning of Brāhmī 45

Brāhmī, the first indigenous form of writing to have developed in the Indian sub-

45 D.C. Sircar broadly categorizes the stages of development into early, middle and late Brāhmī periods respectively as 3rd to 1st century B.C., 1st century B.C. to 3rd century A.D. and 4th century to 6th century A.D. The Buddhist and Jaina Canons refer to Brāhmī script. Most important is the list in the tenth chapter of the Lātiavistāra (Līpiśālāsamādākānoparivarta). The date of the Lātiavistāra is uncertain and is believed to be of later date) of sixty-four scripts (līpi), beginning with Brāhmī and Kharosthī, which the future Buddha knew as a child. Similar kinds of lists of eighteen scripts are also preserved in several Jaina Canonical Prakrit texts. The oldest one appears in the Pannavātī-sutta and the Samāvāyānga-sutta, includes Bambhī and Kharosthī.(According to George Buhler, the Jaina list is probably independent from and in all probability is considerably older than that of the Buddhists). The list is presented with the introductory remark ‘bānvāha nam livie aṭṭhārasaṁvahlakavāhāne pāṇiṣate’ eighteen different forms of writing of the Brāhmī scripts are known. This evidently means that the term Brāhmī applies to writing as such referring to its legendary creation by God Brahmī and the script as well.

The origin of the Brāhmī script is one of the controversial problems in Indian history. But we really do not know precisely what form or derivative of the Brāhmī existed prior to this script, or what the term actually applied to the script used in the pre-Brahmi age. Secondly, there is difference of opinion among scholars about its origin. Some argue that it has an indigenous Indian origin for Brāhmī, while others see as a borrowing from some non-Indian prototype: Orientalists like Burnell, held the view that the Indian script Brāhmī was derived from the Phoenician script and it was introduced not earlier than the fourth or fifth century B.C. A.C. Burnell, Elements of South Indian Palaeography, Indological Book House, New Delhi, 1968, p.9; George Buhler, who was better equipped than the other scholars, tried to write on the history of Indian palaeography by tracing the origin of the Brāhmī scripts, he fixes the date of its introduction into India. On the basis of his research result he emphasised that, the elaboration of Brāhmī, was completed about 500 B.C. or even earlier, the terminus a quo, about 800 B.C., may be considered as the actual date of the introduction of the Semitic alphabet into India. He again opines that this estimate is, however, merely a provisional one, which may be modified by the discovery of new epigraphic documents in India or in the Semitic countries. So he assumes such a modification should become necessary the results of the recent finds and the date of introduction definitely will prove to fall earlier and he believes that then it will have to be fixed, perhaps in the tenth-century B.C. and even before that. Buhler, Ind. Pal., op.cit., pp.15-23; also T.W. Rhys Davids accepted it in his book Buddhist India (Chapters VII & VIII), Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1971; also see M. Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, Vol-I, Motilal Banarsidass, rpt., New Delhi, 1990, p.27.

Scholars like S. Langdon (S.Langdon, The Indus-Script, in John Marshall’s Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Valley Civilization, Vol.II, Arthur F. Probsthain, London-1931, chapter 23, pp.423-55), G.R.Hunter (The Script of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro and Its Connection with other Scripts, Studies in the History of Culture, No.1, London:Kegan Paul Trench, Trubner & Co., 1934), D.C.Sircar and others have proposed that the presumptive indigenous prototype of the Brāhmī script must have been the Indus Valley script or some unknown derivative thereof. However, one feature of the Indus script indicates a systemic connection with the historical scripts of India. The former script has a large number of what appear to be compounds and diacritically modified forms of the basic characters, which are reminiscent of the characteristic patterns of Indic scripts of the historical period. (G.R.Hunter hypothesized that this system-functioned to indicate, among other things, vowel variations, exactly as in Brāhmī, and ventured to directly derive some of the Brāhmī vowel diacritics from Indus Valley signs. He also pointed out a possible relationship with the Brāhmī system of conjunct consonant formation. The Script of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, ibid., pp.51-8). Even so, in view of the still undeciphered status of the Indus script and a big chronological gap between it and the earliest attested scripts of the historical period, it would be premature to explain and evaluate the significance of the apparent typological similarities.
continent\textsuperscript{46} is also ancestral to all the South Asian scripts in use today.\textsuperscript{47} It has long been suspected of having an antiquity beyond \textit{c.250 B.C.} Unlike Kharoṣṭhī which died out at a relatively early period, the \textit{Brāhmī} script appeared in the third century B.C. as a fully developed pan-Indian script and continued to play this role throughout history, becoming the parent of all of the modern Indic scripts both in India and beyond. Thus, with the exceptions of the Indus scripts in the proto-historic period, of Kharoṣṭhī in the northwest in the ancient period, the history of writing in India is virtually synonymous with the history of the Brāhmī script. Paranavitana\textsuperscript{48} argues that the “Brāhmī alphabet had several centuries of development behind it in the time of Aśoka…….” While taking this into consideration he argued that (a) the postulated evolution of the letter \textit{ma} into the north Indian Aśokan form a prototype akin to the southern variant\textsuperscript{49} and other examples of pre-Aśokan bifurcation as in the letter \textit{l} and, (b) the occurrence of letters devised to suit south Indian phonetic values already in the early Brāhmī.\textsuperscript{50} In Sri Lanka, Brāhmī has been dated back to the period of king Devanamapiya Tissa (\textit{c.250 B.C.}), who was a contemporary of Aśoka and his successor Uttiya (\textit{c.210-200 B.C.}).\textsuperscript{51} It is assumed that the earliest written records existing in Sri Lanka cannot be assigned to a period earlier than the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century B.C. So it is quite probable that when the first settlers migrated to this island from north India about the 6\textsuperscript{th} century B.C. they brought

\textsuperscript{46}Excluding from consideration the ‘script’ of the Indus Valley Civilisation.

\textsuperscript{47}Including the Devanagari, Sinhala and Tamil scripts.

\textsuperscript{48}S.Paranavitana, \textit{Inscriptions of Ceylon, I: Containing Cave Inscriptions from 3\textsuperscript{rd} Century B.C. to 1\textsuperscript{st} Century A.C. and Other Inscriptions in the Early Brāhmī Script}, Archaeological Survey Department, Sri Lanka-1970, p.xxii.

\textsuperscript{49}ibid., p.xx.


\textsuperscript{51}Fernando, \textit{ibid.}, p.20.
with them the knowledge of the system of writing. So, Paranavitana concurs and suggests it at least for a pre-Asokan date.

It is also accepted that by Asokan times (c. 250 B.C.), there was development of a distinctive southern tradition of writing, since all the earliest Brāhmī inscriptions in Tamil Nadu are concentrated in the Pandyan country, where the region around Madura appears to have been the epicentre for its spread. The Tamil rock inscription of Mankulam in Brāhmī dates back to the 3rd century B.C. and was made under the order of Paṇṭiyyan Valutti Neṭunjeliyan. The next in chronology comes the inscriptions from Cittannavacal, which were made about a hundred years later. Raman affirms that there is credibility to the “assumption that influences from Sri Lanka had played a vital role in the spread of these inscriptions to the Pandyan territory and that Sri Lanka must have received the Brāhmī influence through the sea route either from Gujarat or Kalinga”.

Besides these, the excavations at Anuradhapura (AG-69) in the year 1969 revealed the existence of a basal series of proto-historic Iron Age horizons succeeded by those of the Early-Historic and Middle-Historic periods to constitute a total of almost 10 m. of habitation deposits. Among the finds from the Mid-Early Historic levels [AG-69 (4a)] was a

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52 ibid., p.19. Fernando mentions that the Mahāvanīsa refers to Vijaya’s written missive to the ruler of Madura and vice versa.
distinctive category of bone points with a square base and a delicately rounded, minute knob for its tip. Deraniyagala observed and postulates that they had been used as writing 'styli'. These bone styli have been found elsewhere also in South Asia in Early Iron Age and Early Historic contexts for the function of writing, in contexts dated to c.1000-600 B.C. For instance we can cite the Painted Grey Ware levels at Hastinapura and the pre-Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) horizons at Ujjain and Nagada. On the basis of these data Deraniyagala suggests that writing was extant in India in c.1000-600 B.C. In 1984, the Archaeological Survey of Sri Lanka decided to resume Proto and Early Historic investigations to secure an absolute chronology for this period in Sri Lanka. According to the research strategy thirteen test pits, measuring ca.10m² each have been excavated. One of the thirteen sondages, AMP-88 was very much in conformity with that of the south-central part of the citadel. Context 75, comprising a clear-cut habitation deposit, could unequivocally be assigned to the Basal Early Historic period on the basis of its cultural contents. Secondly, what did come as a surprise, however, was the discovery in Context 75, of five potsherds bearing parts of an inscription in early Brāhmī. These, while being on pottery types typical of the Early Iron Age, stood out clearly from among the numerous sherds with non-Brāhmī symbols characteristic of the protohistoric Iron Age engraved upon them. On the other hand, the surprise was the presence of ‘bone styli’ in contemporaneous contexts as in northern India, which has substantiated the hypothesis that writing was then extant. Further, there are nine calibrated radiocarbon and five thermoluminescence dates

available for this sondage AMP-88 (75). AMP-88 (75) which yielded the sherds with Brāhmī on them has two C¹⁴ dates: 757-793 B.C. or 538-370 cal. B.C. (Beta-34392); and 807-763, 679-662 or 627-579 cal. B.C. (Beta-35715). These are corroborated by four TL dates of 649-305 (CCF-A3), 645-301 (CCF-B2), 641-297 (CCF-B4) and 562-390 (CCF-C2), averaging c.500 B.C.⁶¹ The above calculations suggest that AMP-88 (75) has a valid age range within the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., with a possibility of the earlier ranges of 807-763 and 679-662 cal. B.C.⁶² By considering the above facts Deraniyagala has postulated the existence of writing as early as 1000-600 B.C. in India, as per the indirect evidence from the bone styli from contexts such as in the Painted Grey Ware levels at Hastinapura and at Ujjain and other sites.⁶³

This is supported by data from another excavation conducted by the French at Arikamedu in the mid-forties prior to Wheeler’s (1946)³⁴ pioneering investigation (Casal-1949)⁶⁵. They assigned an Early Iron Age for Arikamedu (in the absence of a radiocarbon chronology) range-correlating with that of Anuradhapura III at c.900-600 B.C., which led to the discovery of a potsherd inscribed with early Brāhmī in one of the Megalithic (Early Iron Age) contexts at Arikamedu. This inscription is said to include a letter, which has defied identification, as does another in one of the inscriptions from AMP-88 (75). Finally, there seems to be further corroboration from the discovery of Brāhmī in most of the Early Iron

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⁶¹ibid.
⁶²ibid.
Age settlements of Tamil Nadu. As Kodumana has yielded the largest numbers of Brāhmī sherds (about two hundred) datable between circa 2nd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. Most of the writings are short containing personal names in Tamil and a few in Prakrt like Visaki and Varuni and also the word nikama (guild) once. The purpose of the writing of personal names on pottery may be just to indicate ownership. Mahadevan argues on the basis of the wide occurrence of Brāhmī writings in excavated sites that literacy was quite widespread even among ordinary people in Early Historic Tamil Nadu. These evidence seem to indicate that Brāhmī was indeed current in Sri Lanka as well as in the Pandyan sphere of influence in c.600-500 B.C. The occurrence of writing at c.600-500 B.C. establishes that the beginnings of the Brāhmī script may be dated to an earlier period than is generally assumed.

References in Literature

The dearth of true-historical literature in ancient India has given rise to diverse theories about early Indian knowledge of history. There are some scholars who suggest that the early Indians lacked correct appreciation of the true ideas and methods of history. This

67 where an inscribed sherd of Russet coated painted ware was found and excavated from Megalith III.
69 The Tamil names may give a clue as to the ethno-linguistic group associated with the Megalithic mortuary practices.
71 Iravathan Mahadevan, From Orality to Literacy: The Case of the Tamil Society, in *Studies in History*, 11.2, n.s., pp.173-88. Tamil is the only south Indian language next only to Prakrt, which has writing not only on pottery but also on rocks at such an early date.
proposition, however, has been strongly refuted by R.C. Majumdar.\(^{73}\) His view of historical knowledge by the ancient Indians was however, primarily based on the evidence of the Rājatarangini of Kalhana. But in view of the time (12\(^{th}\) c.A.D.) and place (Kashmir) of the composition of this chronicle, D.K. Ganguli suggests that some influence of Chinese and Arab historians on it cannot be brushed aside and as such the evidence of this text may not genuinely reflect the historical concept and methodology of early Indians.\(^{74}\) Discussions of the origin and history of writing, its varieties, styles and methods, and practical instruction therein are surprisingly meagre in Indic texts, though we find a few more or less incidental references in some relatively late texts to the invention of writing by the creator god Brahmā.\(^{75}\) This tradition is also reflected iconographically; Brahmā and Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, are regularly depicted in sculpture with a book in hand.

Before elucidating the reference to writing in literature and the purpose of writing, let us examine the tradition of both the orthodox and the heterodox sects of India. The invention of writing, or at least of the chief script—is generally attributed to the creator god, Brahmā and thereby it is claimed as the divine invention of the remotest antiquity.\(^{76}\) The former view is found in the Nārada-Smṛti,\(^{77}\) a redaction of the Manusanihitā (mentioned by Bana in about A.D.620), in Brhaspati Vārttika on Manu,\(^{78}\) as well as in the account of Hiuen Tsang\(^{79}\), and in the Jaina Samavāyāṅga-sūtra (traditional date 300 B.C.), the account of the

\(^{74}\) D.K. Ganguli, History and Historians in Ancient India, New Delhi-1984, p.7.
\(^{75}\) Salomon, Ind. Epig., op.cit., p.8.
\(^{76}\) G. Buhler, Indian Palaeography, Todays & Tomorrow’s Pub., 2nd rpt., New Delhi-1973, p.15.
\(^{78}\) ibid., p.304.
\(^{79}\) S. Beal (tr.), Si-Yu-Ki, No-1, p.77.
latter work is repeated in the Paññavasagga-sūta (traditional date 168 B.C.)
These two Jaina sūtras contain a list of 18 separate alphabets, and the Lalitavistara enumerates 64 scripts, which are said to have existed at the time of the Buddha. Several among the names of the two lists agree, and there are in particular four, which as may have been already recognised, have a claim to be considered authentic and historical.

Sanskrit Literature

Scholars like Altekar argue that the art of writing was probably unknown during the Vedic age (c.2000 to 1000 B.C.) and many of the hymns have been lost in the course of time and only those exist today which happened to be included in the compilations made in a later age. During the Upaniṣadic period (c.1000 to 300 B.C.) the art of writing was certainly well known in India by c.800 B.C. but could not be used in general instruction because of the fragility and prohibitive cost of books, which were made from birch leaves and written in hand. To present a sense of writing in ancient texts, this section surveys Sanskrit literature. Firstly, there is the literature of the Vedic Sanhitās and the Brāhmaṇas

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83) The Upaniṣads (secret or esoteric doctrines: Upa-ni-sad means ‘to sit down near some one’), furnish references to aksaras or letters (Himkāra iti tryaṃśaram prastāva iti tryaṃśaram tattvamam—Chhandogya Upanishad, II, 10.) and these letters are mentioned not only as pronounced but also as written since they were associated with suffix kārā (something to be made) and with varṇa (something to be coloured and painted), ibid., I.13; II, 22.3. Some of the Upaniṣads mention varṇa (written letters) and mātras (medical signs) together (Varnāḥ svaratāḥ māraḥ balam sanhitā samhitaḥ sanhitāḥ—Taittirīya Upaniṣhad, 1.1.). The Āranyakas (forest texts, books of instruction to be given in the forest or writing meant for wood-dwelling hermits) also mention about samādi (joining of letters) and formation of aksara (letters) (om) or combination of letters (a, u and m), Aitareya, III, 2.1; II, 2.4; III, 2.6; III, 1.5. They refer to aksara, the written symbol, so named, because a mark made on wood, stone or any such material was indelible. The morpheme kāra (e.g. himkāra) is employed to denote a speech sound, svaraḥ -usmānaḥ ... sparśāḥ... ...— Chhandogya Upaniṣhad, 2.22.3,5.

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(c.1500 –1800 B.C.), that of early Buddhism (post-500 B.C.), the extant Purāṇas (post-300 A.D.) and that of the extant chronicles of kings and dynasties (post-600 A.D.). The Vedas can be distinguished by three types of historical or quasi-historical compositions. These consist of:

- **Vaniśas** (genealogical succession of Vedic teachers and their pupils) as well as list of Gotras and Pravaras (which may be rendered as family genealogies and as the illustrious ancestors who contributed to the credit of the same).
- **Gāthās** and Nārāsāṃsīs (which may be freely translated as ‘epic-song-verses’ and as ‘songs’ in praise of heroes) as well as itihāsa-purāṇas (legends of gods and heroes).
- **Historical Narratives.**

In spite of the contradictory views of early Orientalists, Indian traditions of both the orthodox and heterodox sects indicate antiquity for the art of writing in India. The Vedāṅgas, Siksā (the science of correct pronunciation), Kalpa (ritual, procedure or litany), Nirukta (etymology), Vyākaraṇa (grammar), Chandas (prosody) and Jyotiṣa (astronomy), all of which constitute ancient branches of the technical literature of India, also lead one to think that the art of writing was not unknown in India in ancient times.

The Sūtra literature also yields evidence for the wide circulation of writing, i.e. the

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85 U.N. Ghoshal, Some important Landmarks in Ancient Indian Historiography, in *ibid.*, p.271.
86 Members or limbs of Veda. They constitute the most ancient technical literature of India.
87 It consists of the Srauta, the Gṛahya and the Dharma Sūtras, has been assigned to period between the eighth century and second B.C.
Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra\textsuperscript{88} and Visṇu Dharmasūtra\textsuperscript{89} mention written document (\textit{likhita}) as one of legal evidence. Again the Gautama Dharmasūtra\textsuperscript{90} refers to a witness signing himself as such on a document. The earlier works on Sanskrit grammar, which belong to the \textit{Vedāṅga} class of Sanskrit literature and can be assigned to the early \textit{Sūtra} period, not only presuppose the existence of writing but also contain terms, which indicate the existence of writing during their age. The Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra, which according to Kumarila (A.D. 750) originally belonged to a school of the \textit{Ṛg Veda} and which is younger than the Māṇava Dharmasūtra but older than the Manusamhitā, mentions that material on which the ancient Hindus wrote, included the birch bark or palmleaves.\textsuperscript{91} In his English introduction to the edition of the Māṇava Kalpasūtra\textsuperscript{92} Goldstucker says that, though writing was not used for the propagation of literature, it was employed at the time of composing new works. Roth\textsuperscript{93} was of a definite opinion that the art of writing must have existed very early in India.

\textsuperscript{88}In general mentions written documents (\textit{lekhya}) as a proof of ownership (XVI,10) and enjoins in particular (XVI, 14-15) that in disputes about houses and fields the judicial decisions shall be given in accordance with the documents if the evidence of the neighbours disagrees, and that they shall be based on the statements of the old men and of the gilds, in case conflicting documents are produced. \textit{Sacred Books of the East,} Vol.XIV, pp.XXXVI and 10. Regarding the age of Vasiṣṭha's \textit{Institutes of the Sacred Law} nothing definite is known. It is only possible to say that this work is a real Dharmasūtra, that it was originally composed for the use of the students of a northern school connected with the Veda and was considered to be of general authority before the eighth century A.D. (Banaras Edition of the Kumarila's \textit{Tantra-vārttika}, p.179): With respect to its relative position among the works on the sacred law, it is possible to assert that it is older than the famous Manusamhitā, where one of its rules is quoted and the name of its supposed author is mentioned. It is also later than Gautama's Dharmasūtra and probably belongs to the period, when special law schools had come into existence and taught the sacred and civil law in rivalry with the teachers of the Vedic schools.


\textsuperscript{90}XIII.4.

\textsuperscript{91}Max Muller (Ed.), \textit{The Sacred Books of the East (SBE)}, Vol.14 (Sacred law of the Aryas), Part-H, Ṭṛ. by G.Buher, Motilal Banarsidass, rpt., Delhi-1991, pp.XIV-XIX. (The author of the Vasiṣṭha-Dharma-sūtra knew a treatise attributed to a teacher called Manu, which like other Dharma-sūtra, was partly written in aphoristic prose and partly in verse).

\textsuperscript{92}Goldstucker, \textit{Māṇava Kalpasūtra}, p.69.

\textsuperscript{93}Quoted by G.H Ojha, \textit{Bhāratiya Prāchīna Lipimālī}, Munshiram Manoharlal, New-Delhi-1971, p.15.
because works like the Pratisākhyanas (indices) of the Vedas could not be composed without its help.

The Nārada Smṛti94, a redaction of the Manu Samhitā, while dealing with the importance of writing in connection with documentary evidence in legal procedure, states:

Nākarisyadhyidi Brahmā likhitam caksuruttamam I

Tatreyamasya lokasya nā bhabisyat śubhā gaitih II. IV.70.

(Had not Brahmā, the creator, created the written (literature), the best of eyes, this world could have never attained to its happy condition).95

We can assume from this tradition that Indians in the fifth century A.D. believed that the art of writing was invented with the early development of literature and it was regarded essential for the progress of the world.

Bṛhaspati96 in his Vārttikā on Manu referring to the same tradition states:

Sāmnāsitke tu samaye bhrāntiḥ-samjāyate yataḥ

Dhātrākṣārani sruṣṭāni patrārdhānyataḥ purā.97

94 A work on ancient Hindu law and it is assigned to the 5th Century A.D. (referred to by Bana, the court poet of Harsha of Kanauj). It gives great importance to the written documents as evidence in the court of law, enjoins that the incidental statements of the plaintiff (vādin) should be immediately written down by the court scribe on a phālaka or other material for writing.

95 SBE, XXXIII, pp.58ff.; also see Bṛhaspati’s Vārttikā on Manu, SBE, XXXIII, p.304.

96 An ancient law giver of India and author of the Bṛhaspati Smṛti, Bṛhaspati’s connection with Manu is nearer than Narada. In fact Bṛhaspati’s work has been proved to be a Vārttikā on the Manusmṛti. The Smṛti of Bṛhaspati was composed between A.D. 400 and 500. Bṛhaspati surpasses Manu and Yājñavalkya in the richness and complexity of his rules of judicial procedure and approaches the level of Narada and Katyayana. N.N. Bhattacharya (Ed.), Encyclopaedia of Ancient Indian Culture, 1st pub., Manohar, New Delhi-1998, p.74; also see Sachchidananda Bhattacharyya, A Dictionary of Indian History, Vol.I, Cosmo pub., 1st ed., New Delhi-1994, p.160.

97 Quoted in the Vyasahāramīrṇaya, p.81 and Vyasahāraparkāśa of Mitra Mishra, p.141.
(Because in a period of six months memory is confused regarding a particular thing, in very early times the creator produced letters depicted on leaves)\(^98\)

This statement reveals that the art of writing evolved very early in the history of the Indians to help their memory and for the conservation of literature. It also maintains that the earliest and the most common writing material in India consisted of leaves available in abundance. The \(Yājñavalakya-Śīkṣā\) decrees a person, who reads a written text as such,

\[ Yathālikhita-pāṭhaka.\(^99\)\]

On the utility of learning the art of writing, the Sanskrit poet Kalidasa mentions that:

\[ Līpeyarthā vad grahaṇena vāṃmayam nadimukheneba samudramāviṣat.\(^100\)\]

It means that by proper grasp of the art of writing one reaches the vast treasure of literature, as one approaches the ocean through the mouth of a river.\(^101\) Kalidasa regarded that the oral transmission of the early Indian literature without the help of writing was an art and it is essential for the proper study of literature. He also refers to texts written on bhurja patra or leaves and royal seals and keeping of files.

There are also definite references to the art of writing in other ancient Sanskrit works. Bhasa in his \(Avimāraka\) makes the Vidusaka hide his inability to read the writing on

\(^{98}\)ibid.

\(^{99}\)A similar statement is found in the \(Śukraniśāra\).

\[ Bhṛṅgīeṇh puruṣādharmaḥvāt lekhyaṃ nīmāyakam param. II.291\]

\[ Anubhūtasya smṛtyartham līkhitam nirmāṇam pura.\]

\[ Yatmā ca brahmaṇā vāṃ vāṃsvara-vicīnḥitam. II.297.\]

\[ Gītī sīghrī sīrākkampi yathā-līkhitāpāṭhah \]

\[ Anartha-jīhāo ipakaṃtinā ca sad eṣe pāṭhakādhamah -- Yājñavalakya-Śīkṣā, Pāṇiniya Śīkṣā. 32.\]

\(^{100}\)Raghuvamśa, Canto-III, p.28.

the ring by saying that it was not in his *pustaka*. Yaugandharayana intends sending a written message to Udayana in *Pratijnā-Yaugandharāyana*.

The existence of books at the time of Panini is indisputable. The *Āṣṭādhyāyi* of Panini contains certain terms denoting the existence of the art of writing, for instance, *lipi* and *libi* (script), *lipikāra* (a writer or scribe), *yavanāni* (Greek script), *grantha* (a book), *svarita* (a mark in writing). The term *likha* is taken up for the analysis in 3.1.135. Scholars are of the opinion that the *Mahābhārata* was also known to Panini as a *grantha* (6.2.38). Similarly, according to Goldstucker Vedic literature was also available to Panini even in a manuscript form. Panini further refers to the practice of the marking of...
the ears of cattle with the signs of figures 5 and 8 as also religious symbols\textsuperscript{111} like the svastika.\textsuperscript{112} Further he refers to a number of earlier writers on Sanskrit grammar, which shows that writing on grammar had already begun before Panini.

The Nāṭyaśāstra suggests that the heads of the drama troupes should seek the aid of a lekhaka and gaṇaka to record the points of success of a stage performance,\textsuperscript{113} while the Kāmasūtra includes aksarakalā (calligraphy) as one of the 64 arts.\textsuperscript{114}

The two epics, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata contain a number of terms relating to writing, such as likh, lekha, lekhana and lekhaka, etc. These two works are usually assigned to a period before the Maurya age and Buhler opines that these terms regarding writing and writers are archaic.\textsuperscript{115} Vyasa, the author of the epic Mahābhārata mentioned in its introduction that he used Gaṇesa (a human being expert in writing) as his scribe.\textsuperscript{116} We can cite an instance from the Rāmāyaṇa, which refers to a written name that

\textsuperscript{111}Svasti\k{a} or fylot, the sacred and music symbol, consists of a cross of equal arms but at the end of the arms there is a line drawn at right angles on the same relative side showing a common rotary direction in relation to the centre. It is also interpreted as symbol of Sun. Its arms show the principle of life that transforms the dwarf into the giant or the microcosm into microcosm or the centre into the diameter. It is also named as Rakvan, the rhythmic movement. It is also marked along with the Nabagrasas. The words Sanskrit gives the credit to Sanskrit language for its literal origin. It is derived from su- 'well', a\textit{i} is, ka- a noun ending, i.e., svasti- 'it is well'. Acharya, P.K. (Ed.), \textit{An Encyclopaedia of Hindu Architecture}, Manasara Series, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., New Delhi-1979, p.599; Svasti means benediction and blessing. In Sanskrit language the word Svasti\k{a} is used for many auspicious objects svastiko mangala dravye, especially for a mystical cross, of which the extremities of the four arms are bent around in the same direction. M.M.William, \textit{A Sanskrit English Dictionary}, Delhi-1972, p.1283; for more about Indian symbols see Savita Sharma, \textit{Early Indian Symbols}, 1\textsuperscript{st} pub., Agama Kala Prakashan, Delhi-1990-(pp.60-61).

\textsuperscript{112}Kame lokāṇayaḥbhūtāṁ pacamaniṁbhinaṁ cīna chidrastrabhavaṁ stikṣyaḥ, 6.3.115: Panini, \textit{Aṣṭādhyāyi}.

\textsuperscript{113}Lekhaka-gaṇaka-sūrayaṁ siddhēḥ ghaṁbh saṁabhāḥ lekāyaḥ—Nāṭyaśāstra, 27.23.

\textsuperscript{114}Kāmasūtra: 3.15 mentions only the number of kalōs. The commentaries give details. Yassodhara in his commentary Jayamangalapar\k{a} speaks of lipi-mānam as one of them.


\textsuperscript{116}Mahābhārata, Adiparva, 1.112.
may be quoted here: Hanumān shows the ring to Sītā asking her to see the name of Rāma engraved on it.\textsuperscript{117}

We also get information on writing and the purpose for which writing was used in the \textit{Arthaśāstra} of Kautilya.\textsuperscript{118} He gives evidence to confirm that writing was a well-established factor in human life during his time: Learning of the alphabet and numerals (\textit{sārkhyāna}) began at the age of four.\textsuperscript{119} A time was set apart in the daily routine of a king for attending to correspondence (\textit{patrasampreṣaṇa}).\textsuperscript{120} It was mandatory to maintain varieties of records. There were professional scribes whose qualifications were set forth. In the royal courts, they were employed to write the royal edicts and charters. Their services were also utilised in the law courts in writing down the complaint, etc.\textsuperscript{121} It is ordained that a well-partitioned ‘Record Room’, \textit{Nibandha-Pustaka-Sthāna} shall be built where records of information regarding assets, earning, etc., of all the officials including the prince and queen and other government records were to be maintained. Secret codes (\textit{samijā-lipi}) were developed for the use of the intelligence department.\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Aksara-kalā} (calligraphy), \textit{pathyakalā} (art of recitation) were among the arts to be learnt by gaṇikas, their maidservants and stage actors.\textsuperscript{123}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{117} \textit{rāmamāṇāṅkātam cedam paśyam deva-arūguliyakam} - \textit{Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa}, Sudara, 36.2.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Kautilya alias Chanakya was the Chancellor of Chandragupta Maurya. His \textit{Arthaśāstra} contain fifteen books. For detail of his composition, date and various parts of the book see R. Shamasastry (trans.), \textit{Kautilya’s Arthaśāstra}, 8th ed., Mysore Pub. House, Mysore-1967.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Kautilya, \textit{Arthaśāstra}, 1.5.2. ‘\textit{Brutta chulakarmā lipi sārkhyānam chaupayujjita}’ - Having gone through the tonsure ceremony, one should learn writing and counting.
\item\textsuperscript{120} \textit{ibid.}, 1.19.6. ‘\textit{Panchame mantripariśadā patrasampreṣaṇa mantrayet}’ - In the fifth the king should consult his council of ministers through letters.
\item\textsuperscript{121} \textit{ibid.}, 2.9.28; 2.10.4-9. ‘\textit{amāyasampadopetāh sarbasamayabidāṣu granthishārvakaścro lekhavachanaśaro yatho lekhakaḥ svari}’ - The writer should be prompt in composing, elegant in writing and able in reading documents. 11.2.28.
\item\textsuperscript{122} \textit{ibid.}, 1.12.8. ‘\textit{Sajñālipi hīśchāra sachhāma kuryah}’ - with signs and writings he should send his spies.
\item\textsuperscript{123} \textit{ibid.}, 2.27.
\end{itemize}
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So, it is quite evident from Sanskrit literature consisting of epics, काव्याः, श्रम्तिः, works on polity and morals, stories, philosophy and works on technical subjects, that there are specific references to writing in India.¹²⁴

The picture is somewhat different in the heterodox traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, which exhibit a higher esteem for the written word. It is thus the art of calligraphy that is more-developed in Buddhist and Jaina-manuscript traditions than in Brahmanical circles. Moreover, it is only in the texts of these traditions that we find lists of Indic scripts and writing materials. The historical value of this texts and lists, however, is limited by several factors, i.e. the date, different versions of the texts that existed at various times, and certain geographical and textual names. In this regard the purpose of this research is not to fix the dates or to get involved in controversial issues like the dates associated with these texts but solely to highlight their perspectives on writing.¹²⁵

Pāli¹²⁶ Literature

In contrast with Sanskrit literature Pāli literature is quite distinctive in this regard, because it provides data of writing utilized in the day-to-day life of the people. Besides this many other related writing materials might be added. They make it at least probable that the mention of writing as common in the daily life of people is not an addition rather it is a part

¹²⁴Pandey, Ind. Pal., op. cit., p.9.
¹²⁵Scholars are not certain about the correct chronology of Buddha, i.e. the date of the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa had been calculated to c.480 B.C., 400 B.C., 386 B.C. or 368 B.C. So the divergent theories of scholars challenged the reliability of the various chronological calculations. For the controversy on the dating of the historical Buddha see the series of arguments published in Heinz Bechtel (ed.), When Did the Buddha Live?, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica series No.-165, Sri Satguru Publications, 1st ed., Delhi-1995.
¹²⁶The dialect of the middle Indo-Aryan, which is found in the texts of the Theravādin Buddhists and usually called Pāli by European scholars, is nowhere, so called in the Theravādin Canon. The word Pāli is found in the chronicles and commentaries upon the Canon, but there it has the meaning ‘Canon’ and is used in the sense of a Canonical text or phrase as opposed to the commentary (āṭṭakathā) upon it.
of life. Secondly, more instructive are the numerous passages in the canonical works of the southern Buddhists, which testify to an extensive use of writing in very early times. All those sections of the *Tripiṭaka*, which contain descriptions of life of ancient Indian people, furnish some contribution to the subject. Thirdly, it is conceived that *Pāli* literature was collected and composed before Alexander's invasion of India and it records the aspects of contemporary history and reflects even the history of times before the second century B.C. So this literature contains definite references to the existence of the art of writing, the profession of writing and above all the methods and material used for it.

It is believed that the composition of *Pāli* *Tripiṭaka*¹²⁷ has taken place soon after the death of the Buddha at Rājagriha, under the royal patronage of king Ajatasattu, which gives indication of writing in those days. The final compilation of these texts is said to have been completed during the reign of Aśoka, when the third Great Buddhist Council took place. In these *Pāli* texts, we find a number of references to writing and the material used for it. In this respect, the word *piṭaka*-itself is of some significance. *Piṭaka*-means 'basket' which implies something to contain a written document. It is hardly likely that this term was used before the texts were committed to writing. The words of the Buddha were remembered by his fellow *Bhikkhus* during his lifetime and so a *Sangāyanā* or recitation was made soon

¹²⁷The Canon is called in *Pāli* the *Tripiṭaka*, because it consists of three *piṭakas* (baskets'): the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (monastic rules), *Sutta Piṭaka* (sermons consisting in turn of five Nikāyas, of which the first four contain the sermons and the last miscellaneous texts, many of them in verse), and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* (systematic philosophy). Buddhists believe a passage at the end of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* (*Cullavagga* 11 and 12), which says that two councils of monks were held, one just after the Buddha's death and one a hundred years later, and that at the first council were composed the *Vinaya* and *Sutta Piṭakas*, in their final form. Part of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* is said by Theravādin tradition to have been compiled at the third council, held c.247 B.C. under the auspices of Aśoka, and whether or not such a council took place scholars agree with this relative chronology, and go further by assigning to the whole *Abhidhamma* a date when Buddhism was already organised and scholastic. Richard F.Gombrich, *Buddhist Precept and Practice, 2nd* ed., Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi-1991, pp.48-49.
after his death to give them a permanent and correct shape. The commentaries state that the
language spoken by the Buddha, which is the language of the Canon, is Māgadhi.¹²⁸ The
teachings of the Master were divided into three broad sections according to their contents.
These sections got their names according to the pīṭaka or basket in which they were
assembled.¹²⁹ The earliest epigraphic reference to the word pīṭaka is to be found in Srāvasti,
Sāmath and Bhārhut inscriptions of the 1st century B.C. or 1st century A.D.¹³⁰

It is a well known fact that the sculptures on the Sanchi and Bharhut Stūpas contain
representations of various Jātakas. On the Sanchi Stūpa the Sāma Jātaka has been
identified.¹³¹ On the Bharhut Stūpa twenty-one sculptured scenes, to which the titles are
mostly added, have been found to correspond with the Buddha’s previous birth stories. Both
on the Sanchi and Bharhut Stūpas we read of monks who had the title pacanekāyika
(pāñcanaikāyika),¹³² i.e. ‘teacher of the five Nikāyas’. At Bharhut mention is also made to
peṭaki, i.e. ‘a person who knew or taught the pīṭaka or pīṭakas’. In the Punṇanadi and
Asadisa Jātakas writing is not merely an ornamental accessory, but a most essential point,
without which the stories would have no meaning, and the Asadisa Jātaka is depicted on the
Stūpa of Bharhut.

An additional argument for the antiquity of the writing, mentioned in the Pāli Canon,
is furnished by the technical terms, which they employ. They exclusively use for writing,

¹²⁸This is referred to as the mūlabhāṣā the root language of all languages. K.R. Norman, Pāli Literature, Otto
¹²⁹C.S. Upasak, The History and Palaeography of Mauryan Brāhmī Script, Pub. by Nava Nalanda Mahavihara,
¹³⁰E.J. Vol. VIII, p.179; JASB, Vol. LXVII (1898), p.278; Cunningham, The Stūpa of Bharhut, p.141, Plate-
LV, No.41.

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writers and letters words which mean ‘to cut’ chind, ‘to scratch’ likh, ‘the scratcher’ lekhaka, ‘scratching’ or ‘scratches’ lekha, and ‘the indelible’ akkha. References to writing occur in the Vinaya Pitaka at many places. The term lekhaka (Vin.IV-8) and likhāpeti (Vin.II-110) are used for ‘writer’ and ‘caused to be written’ respectively. A game called Akkhari (lettering) is mentioned repeatedly in the Vinaya Pitaka and Nikāyas.\(^{133}\) In this game one had to recognise letters written with figures either on one’s own back or in the air or in the sky.\(^{134}\) Lettering shows that the knowledge of an alphabet was fairly prevalent at the time. Vinaya Pitaka also praises the art of writing (lekhana) as innocent and commendable for monks.\(^{135}\) For householders and their sons the profession of a writer was regarded as a good means of livelihood.\(^{136}\) The Pārājika section of the Vinaya Pitaka declares (3.4.4) that Buddhist monks shall not incise (chind) the rules, which induce people to gain heaven, riches and fame in the life after death through self-mortification.\(^{137}\) Majjima-Nikāya speaks of eight professions for householders of which mudda (conveyancing), gañana (accountancy) and sarīkha (appraising) – point to use of writing. Cullavagga deals

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\(^{133}\)Suttānta (The conversational discourses of the Buddha) (also a book of sermon on the conduct of the Bhikkhus), I.1; BIS, III, 2, 16; also see Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, op. cit., p.108; Diringer, Alphabet, op. cit., p.258; The akkharikā game is also mentioned in the Dīgha Nikāya (I-7). The word akkha occurs in the Anguttara Nikāya (1-72, III-107), the Samyutta Nikāya (II-267, I-38) and the Dhammapada (Tanbhavagga-19).

\(^{134}\)Brahmajīla-Sutta, 14; Sāmanappala Sutta, 49; Rhys Davids, ibid., p.108.

\(^{135}\)Vinaya Pitaka, Pārājika section (3.4.4).

\(^{136}\)Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, op. cit., p.108.

\(^{137}\)In the Pārājika section a curious practice is forbidden to the Buddhist monks, in which writing plays an important part. “(if one) cuts (chindait), the text says, an inscription (lekham) to this effect, he who dies in this manner, will obtain wealth, or will obtain fame, or will go the heaven, (the cutter) is guilty of a duṣkara (dukkata) sin for each single letter (akkharakkhariya). (If anybody) sees the inscription, the forms the painful resolution to die, (the engraver will be guilty) of a thutthaccaya (sthilātyaya) sin; (in case the reader actually) dies, (the engraver will be guilty) of a Pārājika offence.” The passage indicates that it was the practice of religious teachers to incite their lay-hearers by the promise of rewards in the next birth to commit suicide, and that they distributed tablets of wood or bamboo with inscriptions specifying the manner of the death and the rewards to be gained. See Oldenberg’s remarks in Sacred Books of the East, Vol.XIII, p.XXXIII.
with various methods of voting one of which at least needs writing.\textsuperscript{138} In the Udāna, the lekhasippa or the writing-craft is said to be the best among all the crafts (Nandavagga-9).

The Mahāvagga refers not only to the existence of writing and elementary schools but also the method of teaching, material used for it and the matter taught. There are two remarkable passages in the Mahāvagga I, 43 and 49, which are also of considerable importance for the present study. The first tells us that a likhitako coro, a thief whose name had been received placarded or proclaimed in writing in the king’s palace had been received into the Order of the Buddhist monks. The people murmured against this and Buddha, of course, forbade for the future the admission of proclaimed thieves. The story confirms the hints, to be gathered from the Jātakas, regarding written royal proclamations. The second passage, which is literally reproduced in Bhikkhu Pācittiya, 65.1, hence must be very ancient, describes in detail the deliberations of the parents of a boy of Rājagriha, called Upāli, about their son’s education. They agreed that it would be beneficial for his future, if he learnt lekhā ‘writing’, gananā ‘arithmetic’ and rūpa ‘forms’. But they find that the first art might injure his hands, the second his chest and the third his eyes. Hence they finally resolve to permit him to enter the Order of the Buddhist monks, who are of good moral conduct, dine well and sleep in well sheltered beds. So it seems probable that these three subjects were taught in the elementary schools of ancient India, when the Mahāvagga was composed. Also lekhā, (writing) and lekhaka (a writer) are mentioned in the Bhikkhu-

Pācittya II.2 and in the Bhikkhunī-Pācittya, 49.2, and the former work praises writing as a branch of knowledge that is honoured in all countries.\

This conjecture was confirmed by a remark, which king Khāravela makes about his own education in the Ĥāthigumphā inscription, dated in the year 165 of the Maurya era. He says concerning himself:

(Endowed with the body of a glorious prince, he played during fifteen years children’s games. Then, being expert in writing, rūpa, arithmetic and legal rules and excelling in all sciences, he ruled during nine years as statesman).

The prose-Jātakas, which are admittedly later in their compilation, possess a number of references to writing, writing material and several kinds of written documents. The word potthaka is explicitly meant for book. The ledger is called aya-potthaka (J.I-2). The words lekha, likha, lekhani occur at several places in the Jātakas (J.VI-595; IV-7; I-2, 30). The Jātakas, particularly Mahāsutasoma, Kāma, Puṇṇanadi, Ruru, Kānha, Cullakālini, Cullakālini,

139The Vibharīṇa makes an exception in favour of learning to write: anāpatti lekham pariāpunāti. Bhikkhuṇī Pātimokkha, Pācittya, 49.
140In the former passage writing is enumerated among “the excellent branches of learning, which are not blamed, nor despised, nor condemned, nor disregarded, but esteemed in the various countries”.
141Mentions a correspondence by means of letters (paṃa) between a teacher of Takkasilā and his former pupils. Fausboll, Jātakas, Vol.V, p.458.
142Narrates how a prince, who had renounced the throne and lived in a village, was asked to write and actually wrote a letter (paṃa) to his brother, the reigning king, requesting a remission of the royal taxes for the people who had hospitably received him. Fausboll, Jātakas, Vol.IV, op.cit., p.169.
143An official letter is mentioned and its preparation is described here, which gives an account of the manner, in which the future Buddha was re-installed in his position as Purohita of the king of Banaras, after having been banished in consequence of the intrigues of his enemies. “Afterwards the king remembered his (the Bodhisattva’s) virtues, and reflected thus, it is not proper to send somebody in order to call any teacher; but I will compose a verse, write a letter (paṃa), order-crow’s flesh to be cooked, tie up the letter (paṃa) and the flesh in white cloth, seal it with the royal seal (rājamuddikā) and send it to him. If he is clever, he will come after reading the letter and recognising the-crow’s flesh; if he is not clever, he won’t come–He then wrote the verse, which begins with the words puṇṇam nadim; on a sheet.” Fausboll, Jātakas, Vol.II, p.173f. (of course the future Buddha was clever, and came back to Banaras).
Asadisa, Katahaka, and Kurudharma Jātakas, however provide us with a lot of information about writing. They refer to writing of private letters (eva lekham ā dāye) and official letters {paṇṇam (letter) and pahi (send)}. They also know about royal proclamations (rājā katihi and rājā anāpesi), of which Mahāvagga 1.43 likewise mentions an instance. 

They narrate that important family affairs or moral and political

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144 According to which seven kings besieged the town of Banaras and sent to Brahmadatta, its ruler, a letter (pañña), asking him either to give up his kingdom or to fight. The future Buddha, who was then Prince Asadisa, king Brahmadatta’s elder brother, came to the assistance of the latter. He cut (achindi) on an arrow the following letters (akkhariini):

“I, Prince Asadisa, have come, and shall destroy with one arrow the lives of all of you; let those fly who wish to live,” and, being unrivalled in the archer’s craft, he shot his arrow on the knob of the golden dinner-vessel of the besiegers. The latter, who where just sitting at dinner, read the letters and, of course, speedily raised the siege. Fausboll, Jātakas, No.181, Vol. II, p.89ff.

145 Here we are told how Katahaka, a slave of the Sheth, or great banker and merchant of Banaras, by means of a forged letter passed himself off as the son of his master and obtained the daughter of the Sheth of another town: ‘He (Katahaka) who performed in the Sheth’s house the work of a store-keeper and treat me as a slave, striking, imprisoning and branding me, if they find fault with me. In a neighbouring kingdom there is a Sheth, a friend of our Sheth. If I take to him a letter (lekhya) written in our Sheth’s name, and if I go to him and say that I am the Sheth’s son, I may deceive him, obtain his daughter and live comfortably’. He himself took a leaf (pañña), wrote as follows, ‘I have sent my son N. N. to thee; mutual connexion by marriage is suitable for us; give, therefore, thy daughter to this boy and let him live there; when I have time, I will also come’, and he sealed the letter with the Sheth’s seal. Then he took money for the journey, perfumes, clothes, and so forth according to his pleasure, travelled to the neighbouring kingdom and stood before the Sheth there, respectfully saluting him. Then the Sheth asked him, ‘Friend, whence hast thou come?’ ‘From Banaras’. ‘Whose son art thou?’ ‘The Benaras Sheth’s’. ‘For what purpose hast thou come?’ Thereupon Katahaka handed over the letter, saying, ‘You will know it, when you have read this. The Sheth read the letter, and exclaiming, ‘Now I live indeed!’, he gave him joyfully his daughter and established him there’. Fausboll, Jātakas, Vol.I, p.451, 1.22ff.


147 Kāma Jātaka, No.467, ed. original Pāli by V.Fausboll, Vol.IV, op.cit., p.169; BIS, III, 2, 8f.120.


149 Mahāvagga 1.43 tells us that a likhitakocaro, a chief whose name had been placarded or proclaimed in writing in the king’s palace had been received into the order of the Buddhist monks. The people murmured against this and Buddha, of course, forbade for the future the admission of proclaimed thieves. The story conforms the hints, to be gathered from the Jātakas, regarding written royal proclamation. See the remarks on this story by Oldenberg in Sacred Book of the East, Vol.XIII, p.XXXIII.
maxims were engraved on gold plates.\textsuperscript{150} Twice there is mention of debtor's bond (\textit{\textit{inapāṇāṇī}), (asakkaonto \textit{\textit{ināyikehi codiyamano cintes})\textsuperscript{151} and twice even of manuscripts (\textit{\textit{potthaka})\textsuperscript{152}. The \textit{\textit{Katāhaka Jātaka} mentions \textit{\textit{phalaka} (wooden writing board)\textsuperscript{153} as writing material. Also \textit{\textit{Katāhaka Jātaka} speaks of an officer- \textit{\textit{bhāndagārika}, storekeeper a designation that necessarily presupposes a regular system of keeping accounts as well as writing and they could not have evolved all of a sudden.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150}Santike \textit{\textit{silam} grahitvāsva varmapattaka likhima. He caused them to write upon the plate of gold. \textit{\textit{Kānha Jātaka}, Jātaka No.29, Cowell Vol.I, op. cit., pp.73-75; Fausboll, Vol.I, op. cit., pp.194-196; Also \textit{\textit{Ruru Jātaka} mentions further the custom of inscribing particular important records or compositions on gold plates. Khennā, the queen of Banaras, had dreamt of a gold-colour deer and had notified to her husband that she must die, if the deer was not found. The luxurious king composed this verse “To whom shall I give a rich village and women decked with ornaments? Who will tell me of that deer, the best deer among deer?” which he caused to be engraved on a gold-plate. The plate he made over to the townspeople. \textit{\textit{Ruru Jātaka}, The Jātaka No.482, Fausboll, Vol.IV, op. cit., p.257.

\textsuperscript{151}Three other cases, mentioned respectively in the \textit{\textit{Kurudhamma Jātaka}, the \textit{\textit{Tesakuna Jātaka} and the \textit{\textit{Sambhava Jātaka} are again different. All three stories narrate, how particularly valued moral maxims were engraved on gold plates apparently in order that they might not be forgotten. In the first the inscription records at the king’s command the \textit{\textit{Kurudhamma}, the law of the Kurus, which is identical with the five great precepts, ‘Not to slay, not to steal, not to commit adultery; not to lie, not to drink intoxicating drinks’. \textit{\textit{Kurudhamma Jātaka}, No.276, Fausboll, Vol.II, 1963, op. cit., pp.371 & 381; “write upon a gold plate the Kuru righteousness which he observes” \textit{\textit{Kurudhamma Jātaka}, No:276, Cowell, Vol.II, op. cit.: p.254; Jātaka No.522, Fausboll, Vol.V, op. cit., p.125; \textit{\textit{Jātaka} No.515, Fausboll, Vol.V, op. cit., p.59; also see BJS, III, 2.10f.}

\textsuperscript{152}According to the second story the future Buddha caused the \textit{\textit{vinicchayendhamma “the maxims concerning righteous judgment and the behaviour of kings”, which he had preached, to be perpetuated in the same way. According to \textit{\textit{Jātaka} No.505, Fausboll, Vol.IV, op. cit., p.488f., information about hidden treasure was written on gold plates.

\textsuperscript{153}\textit{\textit{Ruru Jātaka} a debtor invites his creditors to come with the bonds (\textit{\textit{inapāṇāṇī}), which he had given to them, to the banks of the Ganges in order to receive payment. \textit{\textit{Ruru Jātaka}, The Jātaka No.482, Fausboll, Vol.IV, op. cit., p.256; BJS, III, 2.10,120.

\textsuperscript{154}\textit{\textit{Katāhaka Jātaka} a debtor invites his creditors to come with the bonds (\textit{\textit{inapāṇāṇī}), which he had given to them, to the banks of the Ganges in order to receive payment. \textit{\textit{Ruru Jātaka}, The Jātaka No.482, Fausboll, Vol.IV, op. cit., p.256; BJS, III, 2.10,120.

\textsuperscript{155}\textit{\textit{Phalaka} the wooden tablet or board is a well attested writing medium in ancient India, used by school children and adults for writing what is not meant to be a permanent record or what can be copied out later on a permanent medium. To site a few early references in literature, the \textit{\textit{Katāhaka Jātaka} (No.125) speaks of a servant boy or slave (\textit{\textit{Katāhaka}) who carried his Sheth’s son writing board to school everyday and thus learnt to read and write himself. The sentence indicates that the Sheth’s son did not receive instruction at home, but went to a master or teacher, who presumably kept a school.


\textsuperscript{157}Setṭhi-putte lekham sikkham eva dāsa pi’ssa phālakam vahamano gantvā tenev saddhim lekham sikkhi gānant sikkhi... .. .katāhakonāma... .. bhāndagārikakkamma... .. . Katāhaka Jātaka, Jātakaṭṭha-kathā, Vol.I, p.330.
A later work Lalitavistara\textsuperscript{155}, a work in Sanskrit on the life of the Buddha,\textsuperscript{156} which was translated into Chinese in A.D.308, relates that the Buddha studied writing in his childhood (he went to the lipisāla\textsuperscript{157}) and how his teacher Viśvamitra taught him letters on a writing board of sandal wood with a golden pen\textsuperscript{158}. It indicates the use of board or wooden tablet for the first instruction in writing in the early period. This book further states that sixty-four kinds of scripts were in use in the country and gives their names.\textsuperscript{159} The numbers eighteen, thirty, sixty-four, etc., are considered auspicious and some scholars hold the view that these numbers should not be taken seriously. Anyhow, these clearly show that many varieties of scripts were in use in the country even in those days:

In Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese commentaries in book form on the Tripitaka seem to have been in use soon after Buddhism was introduced into the island in the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century B.C., though, in fact, the writing down of the Tripitaka itself took place only in the first century B.C.\textsuperscript{160} These books were handwritten, most probably on palm leaves.\textsuperscript{161} In the Ceylonese Tripitaka numerous passages bear witness not only to an acquaintance with writing, but also to its extensive use at the time when the Buddhist Canon was composed. The oldest reference to writing is in a tract called the silas, embodied in each of the thirteen dialogues

\textsuperscript{155}It was written a few centuries after the Buddha. A work in Sanskrit dealing with the life of Buddha.

\textsuperscript{156}Diringer, Alphabet, op.cit., p.259.

\textsuperscript{157}The school where writing was taught.

\textsuperscript{158}Chapter-X, Lalitavistara (the pencil had golden cover).

\textsuperscript{159}ibid.; T.V.Mahalingam, Early South Indian Palaeography, University of Madras-1967, p.102.

\textsuperscript{160}The tradition recorded in the Sinhalese chronicles states that the Theravādin Canon was written down during the 1\textsuperscript{st} century B.C. as a result of threats to the Sarīgha from famine, war and the growing power of the Abhayagiri Vihāra, to which the king was more favourably disposed. There is no reason to reject this tradition, because there are indications that texts were already being written down before this date.

\textsuperscript{161}Walpola Rahula, History of Buddhism in Ceylon; The Anuradhapura Period (3\textsuperscript{rd} c.B.C.-10\textsuperscript{th} c.A.D.), 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., M.D. Gunasena & co. ltd., Colombo-1960, p.288.
which form the first chapter of the first division of the Suttantas (Conversational discourses of the Buddha) called Sila Sutta. 162

In Sri Lanka during king Vattagamini’s reign an event took place, which marked an epoch in the history of Páli literature not only in Sri Lanka but of the whole region. 163 The Mahāvamsa has a brief reference to it:

The text of the three Pitakas and the Atthakathā there on did the most wise Bhikkhus hand down in former times orally; but since they saw the people were falling way (from religion) the Bhikkhus came together and in order that the true doctrine might endure, they wrote them down in books. 164

163 G.P. Malalasekara, The Páli Literature of Ceylon, M.D. Gunasena & Co., rpt, Colombo-1958, p.43; Buddhism came to Sri Lanka in the days of the Indian emperor Asoka, about 243 B.C. This was Theravāda Buddhism. Gombrich, Buddhist Precept, op.cit., p.47.
164 ibid.; Mahāvamsa, XXXIII, VV.100-1; The Dipavamsa states that during the reign of Vattagamini Abhaya (29-17 B.C.) the monks who had previously remembered the Tripitaka and its commentary orally now wrote them down in books, because of the threat posed by famine, war, and the growing power of the newly established Abhayagiri Vihāra, which enjoyed the king’s favour. Dipavamsa, XX, 20-21. According to Dipavamsa (IV, 18-20) that at the first council the 500 theras who had it divided up the Buddha’s nine-fold teachings into chapter (vagga), collection of 50 (paññāsaka), connected collection (samyutta) and section (nipātaka). The division of the Canon as it exists today is that into pitakas. The only reference to someone knowing the three pitakas which we find in the Canon is in the later Parivāra section of the Vimavāra Pitaka (Vin.V.3, 14), but the occurrence of the word pepakī ‘knowing the pitakas’ in inscriptions at Bharhut indicates that in the centuries immediately after the time of Asoka the word pitaka had gain sufficiently wide range of it to be used in this public way. Although Buddhaghosa uses the word nikāya in such a way that the term pañca nikāya can be used to include the whole Canon, the word is used in modern times only of the five nikāyas of the Sutta Pitaka. The Sarvāstivādins also divided their Canon into three pitakas. They had certainly done this by the time of Kaniska (For Hsien-Tsiang reports see S.Beal (tr), Buddhist record of the western world. London-1884, 1, p.155), that at the council held during his reign commentaries were composed upon the three pitakas. For details of Sarvāstivādin-see J.Takakusu, “On the Abhidharma Literature of the Sarvāstivādins” in Journal the of the Pāli Text Society, London-1904-5; p.73; also see Norman, Pāli Lit., op.cit., p.5,10,11,16,17.
Another scholar Wickremasinghe argues that a written literature existed in Sri Lanka at least a century earlier than the Alu-Vihara council. He cites many incidents from the Mahāvanīṣa to prove that writing was common long before Vattagamini’s period. Books are mentioned as early as 150 B.C. in the reign of Gamini. The Sīhalatthā kathā Mahāvanīṣa, often referred to in the Mahāvanīṣatikā, must have been he says a written document. With reference to the Vessagiri inscription (Ep. Zey., i, p.14) (which he fixes at 161-137 B.C.) he asserts that the Sinhalese at that time were acquainted with the Brahmī alphabet in a form complete enough even for written Sanskrit. At Alu-Vihara the text was rehearsed and commentaries revised and distributed.

From the Buddhist evidence we find that the art of writing was well known and widely spread in India and it is believed that it must have been preceded by a long period.

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165 Alu-Vihara is located in the central province of Sri Lanka.
166 D.M. de Z. Wickremasinghe, Catalogue of the Colombo Museum, Government Oriental Library, Colombo-1896, p.xi; Malalasekara, Pāli Lit., op.cit., pp.44-45; The Pūjāvaliya and Nikāyasangraha, however written in Sri Lanka in 13th and 14th centuries respectively, state that the writing down was a result of the holding of a council of 500 bhikkhus at the Alu-Vihara, although neither of source gives a number to the council. During his reign 500 Rahats resided in Alulena caves and rehearsed the sacred books. B.Gunasekera(tr.), Pūjāvaliya, Colombo-1895, ch.34. At that time 500 Rahats who assembled at Alulena in the country Mātale, under the patronage of a certain chief, recited and reduced to writing the text of the three pīṭakas. C.M.Fernando(tr.), Nikāyasangraha, Colombo-1908; Saint Hilare mentions that under the monarch Watta-Gamini’s reign in the year 89 B.C. the sacred texts of the Pīṭakattava (Pāṭ, the three baskets); which till then had been orally preserved by the priests, as well as the orthodox commentary on the Aṭṭhakathā, were for the first time put into writing. J.Barthelemy Saint-Hilare, Buddhism in India and Sri Lanka, Chêna publication, 1975, pp.130-31; Oldenberg also opines that writing was known even in the lifetime of the Buddha (Mahāvagga, 1.43, 49) Sace kho upali lekham sikkhissati. Hermann Oldenberg, The Vinaya Piṭakam, Vol.I, William and Northgate, London-1879-83; There is also the well-known commentary story of king Pukkusāti, to whom the king of Kosala sent a letter containing an exposition of Dhamma. Malalasekara, Pāli Lit., op.cit., p.45. Rhys Davids argues that it is the Buddhist who first made use of writing to record their Canonical books and that the earliest mentions of writing occurs in the voluminous priestly literature is in the Vāsīṣṭha Dharma Sūtra (XVI.10.14), one of the later law books and long posterior to the numerous references quoted from the Buddhist Canon. Again he mentions that the oldest manuscripts on barks or palmleaf known in India are Buddhist and that the earliest written records on stone and metal are Buddhist. T.W. Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, op.cit., p.119.
We can trace the argument of Buhler\textsuperscript{167} that the terms used for writing in the Buddhist literature—chindati, likhati, lekha, lekhaka, akkhera—and also all the writing materials—wood, bamboo, pañño (leaves), suvannapatta\textsuperscript{168}—refer to the primitive character of writing, that is incision of the signs on hard materials—is not tenable. Only one word—chindati (scratches a writing), which can suggest incision that was mostly done in monumental writing on stone. The statements of Nearchus and Q. Curtius regarding the writing materials used at the time of Alexander’s invasion make it very probable that ink was known in the fourth century B.C.\textsuperscript{169} So, the art of writing during this period undoubtedly had passed beyond its primitive character and was practised with ease and fluency on suitable materials.

\textbf{Jaina Canonical Literature}

Besides early Sanskrit and Pāli literature, early Jaina literature also bears testimony to the knowledge of writing in India from very early times. The early Jaina works, such as the \textit{Samavāyānga Sūtra},\textsuperscript{170} the traditional date of which is considered to be about 300 B.C. and the \textit{Paṇṇavānā Sūtra} traditionally ascribed to about 168 B.C. mention eighteen kinds of scripts among which Brāhma and Kharosthi are found. The latter work divides the Aryas into nine classes, the sixth of which is the bhāṣāriya—Āryan by language—who speak the \textit{Ardhamāgadhi} (the Prākrit in which Mahavira is said to have preached the Jaina religion).\textsuperscript{171} The \textit{Bhagavati Sūtra} (5\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.), another Jain text begins with a

\textsuperscript{167}Buhler, \textit{Ind Pal., op.cit.}, p.5.
\textsuperscript{168}Means gold plates.
\textsuperscript{169}Buhler, \textit{Ind Pal., op.cit.}, p.20.
\textsuperscript{167}A passage of it makes it possible to show how the popular Brāhma alphabet looked about 300 B.C. The \textit{Samavāyānga} includes a detailed abstract of the lost \textit{Drṣṭivāda}, the twelfth of the Jaina Ariga, and asserts that according to this work, the \textit{Bambhī livi} or Brāhma alphabet consisted of 46 māyakkhara or radical signs. see Weber, \textit{Indische Studien}, Vol.XVI, p.281f.
salutation to the Bambhi libi or Brähmi script (namo bambahyey libiye; namo suássya). It is significant to note the Pañnavanná-Sutta describes the 18 scripts as varieties of Brähmi.

The Samavāyāniga Sutta frequently mentions seventy-two kalās (arts) and the list begins with lekha (writing) and ganiya (arithmetic). So-reading and writing-comprised of writing and arithmetic. Also alphabets and counting were taught while playing. The teacher is called kalācārya. We also came across the word pūthaya (pustaka, book). Also the commentary on the Samavāyāniga refers to writing, engraving, sewing and weaving of letters on materials such as leaves- bhūjja patra.

The Rāyapaseniya Sutta refers to various kinds of writing material and accessories used at that time. It also describes a book of scripture and speaks of its leaves (pattagāim), the supporting wooden-boards (kambiyā), the cord or thread (dorā), ink (masi), pen (lekhani), the scripts (akkharāim), knots (gānṭhi), inkpot (lippāsana), lid (chandana), chain (sanikalā), letters (aṅvara) and book (pōthaya). Kudaleha (codes) is referred to by Uvāśaga-dasāo and we also know about ‘love’ letters and ‘sealed’ letters. It also describes five types

175 Learning alphabet is included in kakāgrahāna and is one of the 72 kalās: the teacher is called kalācārya (Samavāyāniga 11.11.429). We also came across pōthaya meaning book. bhavattari-kalāvo pannattā tam jahā- lekham ganiṭam rāvam nāṭam giyam vāiyām saragayam pukkharagayam samatālam... Samavāyā, 62, Sutra 6, p.93.
176 Jaina Mahāpurāṇas relate that Ṛśabhadeva taught first the art of writing masi. Brāhmi is spoken of as daughter of Ṛśabhadeva............

**Foreign Sources**

Foreign tradition and writers concur with Indian tradition as to the antiquity of writing. The earliest of them were the Greeks, who either accompanied Alexander in his invasion of India or visited it afterwards and have recorded their observations regarding the art of writing and material used for it in India of the fourth and third century B.C. One of them was Nearchus, who records that the people of Punjab knew the art of manufacturing paper out of cotton and tattered cloths and the Hindus wrote letters on them. We can assume that it was certainly for writing purposes, although he expressly states that the Brāhmaṇa laws were not written.

Another writer Q.Curtius refers to the inner tender bark of certain trees used for writing. This clearly indicates the early utilisation of the well-known bhurja patra or birch bark. The fact that, according to these two (Nearchus and Curtius) writers, two different materials were used in 327-325 B.C. shows that the art of writing was then generally known for.

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178 One of the generals of Alexander, who accompanied him in the Punjab and led his retreating army up to the mouth of the Indus.

179 Strabo (Geographia), Eng. trans. by H.C. Hamilton and W. Falconer, XV, London-1854-7, p. 717. (Strabo’s Geography is the most important and most comprehensive work on that science which has come down from the ancient world. The author himself described it as a colossal work meant for such as took a permanent part in public affairs). Bühler takes this to mean that they wrote letters on well-beaten cotton cloth — *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XXXIII, Appendix, p. 6.


and was nothing new. To a slightly later time Megasthenes, the ambassador of Seleukos Niketer at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, writes in his Indica that, for the convenience of travellers (who were expected to be literate) milestones were fixed on the roads at intervals of ten stadia so that they could know the distance between rest houses. In another often discussed passage, he says that Indians decide judicial cases according to unwritten laws as they had no written books and that they did not know letters or use of seals. Megasthenes also refers to the custom of relating varṣaphala (good or evil prospects of the year) according to an almanac (which could be prepared only with the help of writing), preparing of the horoscopes of individuals and delivering of judgement on the basis of (written) smṛtis. Unfortunately Megasthenes used the word ‘memory’ for smṛti, which has been misconstrued by some to indicate that the smṛtis were only remembered and not written. Although this view has been, refuted by Buhler, who maintains that by ‘memory’ Megasthenes meant smṛti literature and not remembrance.

A Chinese encyclopaedia of extracts from the Tripiṭaka, Fa-wan-shu-lin (A.D.668) records that three divine powers invented writing: (1) Fan or Brahmā invented Brāhmi,
written from left to right, (2) Kia-Lu (or Kia-lu-she-ti) invented Kharosthi, written from right to left and (3) Tsanghich invented Chinese which runs from top to bottom. Of these three, two were born in India and the third in China and the first is the best of the scripts, the last one is the least important.

Hiuen Tsang, the celebrated Chinese pilgrim also refers to the very early invention of writing in India (first half of the 7th century). It is also on record that he got copied 657 Sanskrit books in all and that about twenty scribes worked for him in Kashmir palace library. Hiuen Tsang mentions that 'during the rest of the three months having finished the collection of the three Pitakas and inscribed them on leaf of the peito (that is palmleaf), they (monk) then distributed them everywhere for use, Monk Hui-Li by supporting this view argues that after Buddha entered mahāparinirvāna, during the three months of summer retirement, the Tripitaka was collected and written on palmleaves for circulation. From these two observations it was believed that the art of writing in India was quite prevalent. Another traveller I-tsing, who stayed in Nalanda (A.D.657-685) collected around 400 texts consisting of 500,000 ślokas. Such a large number of books could not have come into existence in just a few centuries.

189 Samuel Beal (tr.), SI-YU-KI, I, op.cit., p.77.
192 A Chinese monk and pilgrim visited India in A.D. 675 by sea route via Sumatra. He stayed at the university of Nalanda for the next ten years, studied under the greatest teachers of the day and became a soundest scholar of Sanskrit and Buddhist learning. In A.D. 691 he composed his famous work, A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago, which contributes little to our knowledge of the political history of India but is invaluable for the history of Buddhism and Sanskrit literature.
Alberuni\textsuperscript{193}, the Arabian scholar, records a slightly different and curious account. By referring to the antiquity of writing in India, he states:

As to the writing of alphabet of the Hindus, we have mentioned that it had been lost and forgotten; that nobody cared for it and that in consequence people became illiterate sunk into gross ignorance and entirely estranged from science. But then Vyasa, the son of Parasara, rediscovered their alphabet of fifty letters by an inspiration of God.\textsuperscript{194}

According to him the history of Indian alphabets could begin with the commencement of the \textit{kaliyuga} in 3101 B.C. This tradition got currency evidently due to the fact that Vyasa is believed to have collected the Vedas and classified them into four and composed the eighteen \textit{Purāṇas} and the \textit{Mahābhārata}.\textsuperscript{195} In a nutshell we can say that Megasthenes and Hiuen-Tsang were minute observers of the customs and manners of the people and recorded their observations.

\textbf{Use of stylus or lekhani in literature}

Stylus or lekhani, the instrument for writing, is used variously in the sense of a pen, a stylus, a pencil or a brush made of reed, wood, iron, fibres or hairs. The rationale behind this wide use of this term is that writing implied both engraving and painting. There are also some other words denoting writing instruments, viz., \textit{varnaka}; the literal meaning of this term is ‘maker of a letter’ as it was used in the sense of a pen. The \textit{Kaṭāhaka-Jātaka}

\textsuperscript{193}Alberuni, or Abu Raihan (A.D.973- A.D.1048) composed his work \textit{Tahkik-I-Hind or Reality of Hindustan} in the first part of the 11\textsuperscript{th} century A.D., where he discussed about the then writing systems in India.


\textsuperscript{195}ibid.
mentions varṇaka (wooden pen) as a writing instrument. The lekhaṇi or pen is mentioned in the Āniguttara Nikāya (II-200). In Lalitavistara it is referred to as a small stick without a slit, which was used by school children to draw letters on the writing board. As it mentioned that how Buddha’s teacher Viśvamitra taught him letters on a writing board of sandalwood with a ‘golden pen’. The Rāyapaseṇīya–Sutta also describes a lekhaṇi as pen. Varnikā is a variant of varṇaka generally found in Sanskrit lexicons like Amarakośa (III.5.38). The varṇa-vartikā was a colour pencil, as mentioned in the Dasakumāra-carita (Ucchvāsa II), as according to other passage, the vartikā was used for drawing or painting. Tulī or tulikā probably denoted originally a brush, though it is explained also by modern salai, graver, a stylus.

The most usual name of the reed-pen is the word kalama, calamus, which occurs in all eastern languages; the rare indigenous Indian name is ḍishīka or ḍishīka literally reed. So the word kalama may have been adopted in Sanskrit from Greek through Arabic. But it is recognised as a Sanskrit term in the Sanskrit Chinese lexicons of the 8th century A.D.

Pieces of reed, bamboo or wood, cut after the manner of our pens, are used in all parts of India where the use of ink prevails and all the existing ancient manuscripts on palmleaves and bhurja probably have been written with such pens. The prevalent Sanskrit name for the instrument (stylus) used in southern India is śalākā, in Marathi salai. Rājaśekhara’s

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197 The pencil had golden cover. Chapter-X, Lalitavistara.
200 Bühler, Ind. Pal., op.cit., p.118.
202 Anecdota Oxoniensia, Aryan Series, 1,3,66.
Kāvyamimārīsa\footnote{C.D. Dalal and R.A. Sastry (ed.), Kāvyamimārīsa of Rājaśekhara, GOS-No.1, Central Library, Baroda-1924, p.50.} refers to it as loha-kaṇṭaka or iron needle used to write on tāładāla where as lekhani or masi-bhājana are mentioned in connection with writing on tāḍipatra or birch bark. The work also mentions other writing materials as phalaka (a board) and khaṭikā (a piece of chalk), both preserved in a small box, and refers to the practice of writing on well-cleaned bhittis meaning floors or walls.

The stylus for incising on palmleaves is called kaṇṭaka, loha-kaṇṭaka\footnote{Rajasekhara in his Kāvyamimārīsa (p.58) writes about the kit of an author: "…………..cārvakaśarah nānālipīnāh, tasya sampuṭika- (1) as-phalaka-khaṭikā-samudgakah (2) as-lekhonika-masibhājanāni tāḍipatranī bhūṛjatvaco vā, (3) as-loha-kaṇṭakāni tāḷadālāni, (4) susammatābhittā-yah satatasamūhitāh".} or salāka\footnote{Salakā, also called sūcī may be of copper, gold, silver or bronze; length being 8.10 or 4 arigulas. Jivananda Vidya Sagar (Ed.), Yogini-tantra, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed.,Calcutta-1987, pp.183-4. \ldots lekhanya sumanoharam svarṇa-vastya aṣṭigulaḥ kaniṣṭhyāḥ pramāṇatāh. ibid., p.15cf.}. It is a rod made of iron about 10.30cms in length and with the thickness of a pencil. It tapers to one end and has a sharp tip. The other end is made flat and sometimes decorated with jingles. W.H. De Silva in his work Catalogue of Palmleaf Manuscripts in the Library of Colombo Museum mentions that the stylus was made of gold, silver, copper or brass and was plain or ornamented. It was tipped with a steel point, which was sharpened from time to time on an oiled stone. The point was of four varieties beside the fine point and the length of the styli also varied. The four points were: chatra (sunshade), patra (leaf), nala (tube) and ganđa (ball).\footnote{W.H. De Silva, A Catalogue of Palmleaf Manuscripts in the Library of Colombo Museum; Vol.1, Colombo-1938, Intro.-p.xiv.}
The quill of porcupine or bamboo twig or lalada kaddi—a kind of reed (thin bamboo) is used as pen to write on birch bark. It is called kunea or vartika. R.L. Mitra writes that rich householders in Bengal employ the vṛnāla or khakra reed while in the northwest provinces the reed or lalamus (kalam) is generally used. Varnaka or varnika is a small colour stick, usually white—a pencil—to draw letters on a board. Subandhu, Harisena and Sriharsha employ a term kṣatani in the sense of chalk and manhśilā for naturally available soft stones like the potstone for writing.

Beside these there were some other materials indicated by different terms for writing purpose, viz., (a) aksara-tulikā (reed/pen), aksara-bhumikā (tablet/board), (b) kācana/kācanaka (string/bundle of papers/leaves of manuscripts), kācanakin (manuscript writing), kacela (storing) cover keeping together leaves of manuscript, duṣika (brush), pratipustaka (copy of an original manuscript), (c) khaṭidala, khaṭimdala, (d) kuci (citralekhanika).

207 R.L. Mitra also notes that crow quills were used for writing very small characters for amulets but never for ordinary manuscripts, see A.E. Gough Paper Relating to the Collection and Preservation of the Records of Ancient Sanskrit Literature in India, Govt. of India: Calcutta-1878, p. 18; Sircar observes that a pen made of reed or bamboo is called išūkā. D.C. Sircar, Indian Epigraphy, Motilal Banarsidass, 1st ed., New Delhi-1965, p. 82.
208 Yiivallikhati tiim bhiimau klza(ikayii ghanam’, Harisena: Brhatkathākōsa, 57.452.
(Ed. A.N. Upadhye, Bharatiya Vidyā Bhavan, Bombay-1943).
209 Jayamangal’s commentary on Kāmasūtra, 3.15.
211 Pravāvaka-carita, p. 273.
212 Uṃādisūtra, 5.31.
Ink/Inkpot in Literature

The statements of the Greek writers Nearchus and Q.Curtius according to which the Hindus wrote on cotton cloth and on the inner bark of trees, i.e. bhurja, make it very probable that they used ink already in the 4th century B.C. Some of the earliest epigraphic records too point to the same fact. The earliest reference to ink is found in the Grhyasūtras where in the word maksi occurs frequently. The term maksi is derived from the Sanskrit root mas (hinisāyām), meaning crushing or pounding. Because in the preparation of ink its ingredients were pounded and mixed, the term maksi was used for it. In Hindi the word mascalā (crushing) the original sense of the term is still preserved. Burnell is mistaken when he asserts that in classical Sanskrit literature maksi, 'ink' occurs only in the later works; it was known to Bana (about A.D.620) and to his predecessor Subandhu. In some parts of India the word used for ink is melā. But the early orientalists, Benfey, Hincks and Weber tried to derive the melā from the Greek word melas thereby showing that ink was borrowed from the Greeks. Buhler suggested that the word melā is derived from the vernacular maila (dirty or black), but its more plausible derivation is from the Sanskrit root me (to mix). Sanskrit writers used the word melā in the sense of ink also. Melā, likewise was known to Subandhu, who uses the denominative melanandayate (becomes an ink-stand). In Sanskrit lexicons the words used for inkstand are melananda, melandhu, and

214 It is believed that Grhyasūtras were written before the Christian Era.
216 See R.B.Pandey, Ind. Pal., op.cit., p.83, F.N.4; Buhler, Ind. Pal., op.cit., p.117, F.N.536. The Sanskrit terms for ink (maksi or melā) refers to the powdering and mixing of colour giving objects. Woods for containers (pātra, bhāngā, kupika, etc.) were suffixed to those for ink to signify inkpots.
217 See Hall (Ed.), Vāsavadattā of Subandhu, p.187; Harsha-Carita of Bana, p.95.
219 Buhler, Ind. Pal., op.cit, p.117. F.N.540.
melandhuka, etc. That shows its wide use by the Sanskrit writers. The word *masi* was, however, more frequently used and the words for inkstand very often employed, were *masipātra, masibhāṇḍa* and *masikupikā*.  

**Development of the Concept of Writing of History**

After this discussion of the antiquity of writing in India for non-religious purposes, we now move to the second issue, viz., trends in the production of historical literature. In India the slow emergence of the concept of history-writing (in a true sense and in an organized manner) is most closely connected with the inherent traits of Indian thought and culture and it would be impractical to assess the Indian craft of history writing against alien models. Such slow development of history writing in early India has also been attributed to the legacy of *Sruti* – *Smṛti*. Tales of past events were orally transmitted and were retained in memory instead of preserving them in writing. In India many religious legends and anecdotes have been incorporated in the process of the writing of history. It is noteworthy to mention Alberuni’s remarks that “they differ from us in everything which other nations have in common.” This difference notwithstanding it has to be admitted that the history of *itiḥāsa* though without a definite connotation finds its mention as early as the

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220 Melī masyālam patraṇjanam cha syanmasirdvayoh iti. *Trikāṇḍaśeṣah* quoted on the *Amarakośa*, III, 5,10, Prasaranga, University of Mysore, Mysore-1970.

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Vedas. So it can be assumed that the history of itihāsa began from the Vedic period. We also come across the word itihāsa veda in the Brahmanical literature and the Upaniṣads. The early version of the past, which has been transmitted, has a significant experience for the present and this accounts for its legitimacy and its continuity. The record may be one in which historical consciousness is embedded, i.e. myth, epic, and genealogy; or alternatively it may refer to the more-external forms: chronicles of families, institutions, and regions and biographies of persons in authority. Some forms of embedded history, i.e. the prevalent myth in the itihāsa-purāṇa tradition encapsulate features of what might be seen as historical experience like that of the eulogies and hero-lauds which were gradually expanded into epic literature and the genealogical sections or vamśānucaśita of the Puranic texts,

225 Atharva Veda, 15.6.4.; Grammarian Yāska, who flourished earlier than Panini, wrote the Nirukta, an etymology of Vedic words. In his work, Yāska has been mentioned seventeen names of earlier linguists or grammarians, i.e. Agrayana, Arunabhava, Gargya, Galava, Kathakya, Kautsa, Taitiki, etc. Also it refers to the use of technical works on language to a higher antiquity and reveals to the very early period of the antiquity of writing. The date of the Yāska is not definitely known, but he may be placed sometime in or before the 6th or 7th century B.C. B. Bhattacharya, Yāska's Nirukta, Calcutta-1958, 2.10.24, 10.26,12.10.; also see M. Winternitz, A History of Sanskrit Literature, Vol.I, pp.69-70.

226 Satapatha Brāhmaṇa, 13.4.3.12; Chhāndogya Upaniṣhad, 7.12.7.11.4.8!1.7. 227 Romila Thapar, Interpreting Early India, Oxford Univ. Press, New Delhi-1992, p.138.

228 The itihāsa-purāṇa is referred to in the Arthasastra, 1.5. Its literal meaning is 'thus it was'. The events of the past were to be so related as to link them with the goals and purposes of the Brahmanical tradition.

229 One of the most important sources of Indian history is the genealogical section (vamśānucaśita) of the Purāṇas. Even while these sections were sometimes misleading but according to their undoubted usefulness they remain similar to the inscriptions. The text transmitted by several of the Purāṇas is not a uniform one and is in part, severely distorted, making the task of the working with this material particularly difficult. Ever since F.E.Pargiter published The Purana Text of the Dynasties of the Kali Age in 1913, followed by his Ancient Indian Historical Tradition in 1922, and following him, Willibald Kiefer in his Das Purana Pāṇḍalakṣaṇa in 1927 have attempted to produce a basic text and determine the variant readings. It was utilised by several scholars. But the obscurities in the text, the contradictions it posed to the subject-matter of the Buddhist and Jain tradition and particularly to that of the Sanskrit kāvyas and ākhāñas as well could not be ignored. This led to a certain scepticism regarding the credibility of the Puranic transmission, since these were relatively later compilations. Although some critics do not classify them as history despite the occurrence of the names of certain historical personages: Heinz Boeckert(ed.), When Did the Buddha Live?, Bibliotheca Indo-Buddhica series No.-165, Sri Satguru Publications, 1st ed., Delhi-1995, p.222. So, it is necessary to identify the structure and intention of the text and from which point of view it originated. The purpose of the construction of genealogy does not necessarily lie in providing a faithful reproduction of the passage of time in the past. Second, the motivations of the compilers, is as much as they are firmly located in the social conditions and the legitimising interests of their own times. ibid, p.224; also see Romila Thapar, Genealogy as a Source for Social History, in Indian Historical Review, 2, 1975-76, p.259f.

In our case both aspects, the historical and legitimacy, are of significance. In addition some questions of textual history need to be clarified. Does the Vamśānucaśita section comprise a homogenous text or

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which carry a commentary on the social status of ruling families.  

**Itiḥāsa Tradition**

Almost the equivalent term for history used in Sanskrit literature is *itiḥāsa*, etymologically the word denotes *iti-ha-āsa* or 'thus it was' or 'so it has been' or 'so it was'. Monier Williams interprets the word as traditional account of former events and heroic history. Thus the word *itiḥāsa* had a remote antiquity but it is rather difficult to determine its actual meaning and scope. The concept of *itiḥāsa* in early Indian historiography is mentioned as the 'the mixture of mythology and folklore'. This relates to the events of the past with the goals and purposes of Indian tradition. The *itiḥāsa* tradition grew out of a variety of Vedic literary forms, i.e. *gāthā* (songs), *nāraśāṃsi* (eulogies of heroes), *ākhyaṇa* (dramatic narratives) and *purāṇa* (ancient lore). These were very often the compositions of the priest-poets attached to the various tribes. The original tradition was oral and the compositions were recited at gatherings. So the Vedic words *gāthā* and *nāraśāṃsi* are of great significance in this context as they are classed with *itiḥāsa*. They imply songs in praise of human beings and are sharply distinguished from religious songs and hymns.

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231 The term came to refer to legend, history and accounts of the past events. R. Thapar, *Anc. Ind. Soc. Hist.*, op. cit., p.270.
235 Rg Veda, 10. 85. 6.
236 *ibid*. 10.86.42, 10.64.3.
237 *Akrāvra Veda*, 15.5.11-12; *Satapatha Brahmana*, 10.5.6.8; *Taittirīya Áranyaka*, 2.9.11.
The work of collecting information and composing it in a literary form was the function of the *sūtas*[^238] and the *māgadhas*[^239], the bards[^240] and the chroniclers. They were drawn from the priest-poet-families of the Vedic period and were at this time accorded an important status[^241]. Their work was to preserve the genealogies of the gods, the kings, the *ṛṣis* and the heroes, and to compose the royal panegyric and eulogies as the occasion demanded, like during the contest for new settlements and inter-tribal warfare. So we can assume that the *sūtas* and the *māgadhas*, the material that they collected and put into literary form is incorporated in the Puranic texts that were compiled and rewritten from the time of the Gupta period (4th century AD). The authorising of the rewriting of the *Purāṇa* was now ascribed from the *sūtas* and the *māgadhas* to a variety of ancient legendary sages. In fact, the texts were compiled by various Brahman families. The social status of the *sūtas* and the *māgadhas* had been considerably reduced as the offspring of a mixed-caste marriage and

[^238]: Atharva Veda, 3.5.7.; is the name of a court official who is often mentioned with the Grāmaṇi. Appears in the Atharva Veda among the king makers and in the *Satārṣudriya* (Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, IV,5,2,1) of the Yajur Veda; in the Epic the *sūta* serves as a royal herald and bard. It may be that the curious words *ahanti* (Vājasaneyi Samhitā, XVI, 18. This word means ‘non fighter’ according to Weber’s *Indische Studien*, 17,200), *ahantya* (Taittirīya Samhitā, IV, 5,2,1) or *ahantya* (Kathaka Samhitā, XVII, 2; Maitrayini Samhitā, ii, 9,3.) applied to him (the last two forms appear to be equivalent in sense to *ahantya* ‘not to be slain’, ‘inviolable’) in the *Satārṣudriya* denote his sacred character at once as minstrel and as herald - a combination of functions not unknown elsewhere. *Vaiṣṇava Purāṇa*, 1.31-2 says the *sūtas* special duty as perceived by good men of old was to preserve the genealogies of gods, *ṛṣis* and most glorious of *ṛṣis* and tradition of great men, which are displayed by those who declare sacred store in the *śāhāsas* and *Purāṇas*; also see *Pādma Purāṇa*, V,1,27-28, cf: Mahābhārata, XIII, 104, 5104.


[^239]: A genealogist (*vamsī-samsakā*), is the name of the people appeared throughout the Vedic literature as of little repute, nor in the *Ṛg Veda* but occurs in the *Atharva Veda*, V,22,14. So the *māgadhas* men of Magadha is included as dedicated to *atī krṣṇa* ‘loud noise’. Also see *Ṛg Veda*, 30,5-6.; R.Thapar’s *Int. Ear. Ind.*, op.cit., p.151; Pargiter, *Anc. Ind. Hist. Trad.*, op.cit., p.15; Macdonell and Keith, *Vedic Index*, op.cit., p.116.


therefore they are deemed very low in the social scale. On the basis of the above arguments we can postulate that there was a notion of history in the form of itihāsa tradition as early as the Rg Vedic hymns.

The etymology and connotation of itihāsa acquired a new dimension in the Arthaśāstra of Kautilya. His purview of itihāsa is thus described like this:

1. *Purāṇa* (which had existed from the past)
2. *Itiśṛta* (past occurrence of events)
3. *Ākhyāyikā* (historical tale-rooted in authentic tradition)
4. *Udāharan* (example)
5. *Dharmaśāstra* (legal literature) and
6. *Arthaśāstra* (work on polity)

Thus, Kautilya's comprehensive concept of history incorporated besides historical chronicles, realms like law, legal institutions, social, moral and economic theory and practice. He highlighted the need for regular study of history by the kings. At least from

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242 Cf. *Atharva Veda*, V.III, 5.7 and *Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa*, II, 4.1 with the later texts of *Gautama*, IV,15; *Manu*, X, 11 and *Narada*, 110. In the Vedic texts the sūta has a close relation with the rajas and was of high status. But by the time of the Manu *Dharmaśāstra* the sūta had been reduced to the level of a *sankīma jāti* or mixed caste.

243 Also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, as the political advisor or Prime Minister of Chandragupta Maurya, flourished in the fourth century B.C. His *Arthaśāstra* is the collection of all the preceding *Arthasāstras*. it is the most important work on politics and administration. Kautilya here has dealt with the problems, which are faced by the men in this world. Among the great writers on politics, he is the only one who has written independently on the subject on politics separated fro religion. He gave to the Mauryas a strong and centralised administration, as had not been known to India before.


244 R. Shamasastry (trans.), *Kautilya's Arthaśāstra*, Mysore Pub: House, Mysore-1929, 1.5.

the age of the Mauryas, royal archives were organised and maintained.\textsuperscript{246} This trend persisted over a long period and the Gupta inscriptions allude to the office of akṣapatañādikṛta or the imperial record keeper.\textsuperscript{247} Hiuen Tsang also noted the existence of archives and records during the time of his visit to the sub-continent in the seventh-century A.D.\textsuperscript{248}

\textit{Iittihaśa-Purāṇa Tradition}

The gradual prising of historical consciousness becomes visible in the compilation of what came to be called the \textit{itihaśa-purāṇa}\textsuperscript{249}. It is described as the fifth Veda but was an oral tradition for many centuries and later on it was compiled in the form of the \textit{Purāṇas}.\textsuperscript{250} The literature consisting of the \textit{itihaśa-purāṇa} tradition was scattered and largely undocumented in the pre-Gupta period, but was rewritten, modified and enlarged in the post-Gupta period. The \textit{itihaśa-purāṇa} tradition had three main constituents: myth, genealogy and historical narrative\textsuperscript{251}. The remote past was described in the form of myths and probably fabricated genealogies. The more immediate past was recorded almost entirely in the form of genealogies; while the post-Gupta period is almost exclusively historical narrative. But the authors of this literature show their familiarity with the \textit{itihaśa-purāṇa} tradition that can be assumed to be the source for references to myths and genealogies.\textsuperscript{252} The \textit{itihaśa-purāṇa}

\textsuperscript{246}ibid., 2.7.
\textsuperscript{249}Atharva Veda, 1.5. Literary means ‘thus it was’; Although it was unsolidified still it left some valuable information, as Collingwood rightly said, there are certain residue of elements, which we outright dismiss as non-historical also have elements of history. R.G.Collingwood, \textit{The Idea of History}, London-1961, p.18.
\textsuperscript{250}R.Thapar, \textit{Int. Ear. Ind.}, op.cit., p.151.
\textsuperscript{252}ibid.
embodies a mass of genuine historical tradition containing royal and dynastic chronicles developed by professional skilled memorisers and systematically enhanced by later authors. The gāthās and nārasaṃsīs are to be viewed in this perspective and can be considered as the nucleus stage of the concept of history or rudimentary specimens of history.  

Apart from myth, other embedded forms are associated with various fragments of literature moving towards the emergence of the Epics, i.e. the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. The evolution is traceable via the dāna-stuti (eulogies on gift giving), gāthā, nārasaṃsi to the ākhyāna and kathā (cycles of stories generally involving heroes). The ākhyānas, commemorating rājās and heroes, were the cycle of stories recited at the time of yajñas (sacrificial rituals). So the historical epicentre of the iitḥāsa tradition was the vanśānucarita, which as the name suggests, was the genealogy of all the known lineages and dynasty up to the first millennium A.D. It was not a parallel tradition to the earlier kathās and ākhyānas since it incorporated many of these in the form of embedded history. The historical tradition, which is called iitḥāsa-purāṇa is later on available in the Purāṇas and has been placed in an essentially socio-religious context by priestly authors. The historical biographies, family chronicles and regional histories at a later date are the more secular extension of this tradition and form the main component of historical writing.

The genealogical sections of the Purāṇas were a reordering of the earlier material in a new format. The Purāṇa was to become a recognised literary form. To the extent that it

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254 Both the terms ākhyāna and kathā have the meaning of recitation or oral narration, and the purpose of the form is clear from these words. Some of the bardic fragments in the form of stories are also to be found in the Jātaka literature.
recorded history, it was initially transitional from embedded to externalised history. It was linked to the bardic tradition, where the sūtas and māgadhas are said to be have been its earliest authors.\textsuperscript{256} The word Purāṇa literally means ‘old’ and was used for a body of literature consisting largely of traditional history and aspects of social and religious life.

In the Purāṇas the most commonly used word for time is kāla. This is derived from the root kal (to calculate) and was therefore originally used in the sense of a means of measurement. Thus, according to their standard definition, the Purāṇas have five characteristics of which the last two with which we are concerned in the present context, consist of vanśas (ancient genealogies) and vanśānucartīta (accounts of persons mentioned in the genealogies).\textsuperscript{257} The Purāṇic lists of the royal dynasties cover a broad field, from the beginning of the Mahābhārata war, and thereafter (in the form of prophecies in accordance with the Purāṇic chronological scheme) down to the beginning of the Gupta period in the first quarter of the fourth century A.D.\textsuperscript{258} Moreover, European scholars have presented two different estimates of the Purāṇic historical material based upon its conflict with the older Vedic tradition. One involving disbelief in the historicity of any event not expressly mentioned in the Veda and the other affirming the absolute superiority of the Purāṇic and Epic (kṣatriya) over the Vedic (Brahmanical) tradition.\textsuperscript{259}

\textsuperscript{256} The sūta and māgadhā are said to have arisen from the sacrifice of Pruthu and immediately on appearing began a praśasti of the Rājā. Atharva Veda, V.3.5.7; Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa, II,4.1. In the texts such as Gaṇatama, IV.15; Manus, X.11, 26; Narada, XI, 10, the status of sūta has changed. This change is made explicit in the Mahābhārata, Adi Parvan, 122.4ff and 126.15ff, in which the sūta is inferior to the kṣatriya.


\textsuperscript{258} ibid.

\textsuperscript{259} ibid.
The earliest surviving written evidence of at least a part of the *itihāsa* tradition such as is found in the *Purānas* therefore dates to the fourth century A.D.\(^{260}\) This is a period much later than that of the original composition and the original material must have undergone considerable modification in the process of being incorporated into the *Purānas*. As Pargiter suggests, the genealogies were preserved originally in Prakrit and when rewritten in the *Purānas* were translated into Sanskrit with occasional metrical and grammatical lapses.\(^{261}\)

The historical value of the *Purāṇa* as records of the past is limited by the fact that they were consciously and deliberately rewritten at a particular period subsequent to the events described. The geographical location of the *Purāṇas* was largely focussed on the Ganga valley and with the central point of the fringe areas of this valley being the kingdom of Magadha. The aim of the *Purāṇa* was to consider subjects relevant to the nature of creation; the relationship between men and God, the maintenance of social institutions, the genealogies of kings and heroes and also legends related to the brahmanical perspective. Conceptually the *Purāṇas* belong to the ancient *purāṇa-itihāsa* tradition, which can be classified into three groups\(^ {262}\):

- *Itihāsa* or Epic history
- *Kāvya* or Epic poetry
- *Purāṇas* or Epic legends

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\(^{261}\)Ibid., Evidence suggest that the *Purānic* texts were transmitted from the oral Prakrit to the literate Sanskrit.

Apart from their mytho-religious and cultural significance, the Purāṇas also contain genealogical accounts, but these ended with the period of the Guptas in fifth century A.D., probably on account of proper organisation of royal archives, which rendered these lists unnecessary. In fact, the Purāṇic genealogies stimulated the trend of genealogical recordings of the subsequent phase in the form of vanśāvālist, and this led to a consolidation of history writing.

The next phase of historical tradition blossomed in the milieu of the royal court under the designation of Carīta literature. The Carīta literature found its initial expression in the Buddhacarīta of Ashvaghosa (contemporary of Kusāṇa king Kaniska). It is written in epic style and the text narrates the life history of the Buddha where influence of the Rāmāyaṇa is unmistakable. Buddhabhakti was a popular cult and it received support under the patronage of the Kusāṇas.

The seventh century A.D. witnessed the initiated writing of biographies of contemporary monarchs. The Carīta literature trend attained a new dimension in the Harṣacarīta of Bāṇabhaṭṭa. The Harṣacarīta called ākhyāyika or historical tale rooted in

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265 ibid., p.285.
268 He was the court poet of king Harshavardhana (AD 606-47 AD) of the Pushyabhuti dynasty of Thaneswar and Kanauj. His work Harṣacarīta was written about A.D. 620, is a contemporary account of the deeds of Harṣa during the earlier years of his reign. Sachchidananda Bhattacharyya, A Dictionary of Indian History, Vol.I, Cosmo pub., 1st ed., New Delhi-1994, p.106; His Harṣacarīta and Kādambarī are respectively an ākhyāyikā and a kathā. In his Harṣacarīta, Bāṇa glorifies his patron, king Harṣa. Notwithstanding numerous dramatic sequences, evidently created from a literary point of view, the Harṣacarīta contains some historical data, which have been utilised by the historians. In the first and second chapters of this book, Bāṇa gives his genealogy and an account of the early life of Harṣa, which reveals him as a great soul. Bāṇa makes lavish
authentic tradition thus has the distinction of being the first attempt of writing a prose kavya on an historical theme. Bana evolved a new ornate poetic prose style, which was characteristic of Bana in form and content. The *Harsacarita* is a notable exception as compared to other earlier and contemporary literature because the first two and half chapters of the work is considered to be, to a certain extent, autobiography of the celebrated author, which we have not found in any other ancient literary work prior to Bana.

Bana was repeatedly criticised by scholars due to his over-embellished, difficult and pompous style at the cost of the chronological sequence. Moreover Bana indicates that he would devote his attention to the partial projection of Harsha’s attainment instead of a full biography. Consequently, the historical focus is confined to certain events only, making the work rather fragmentary. A critical analysis of the *Harsacarita* is historically noteworthy if we could overcome our prejudices against Bānabhāṭa. *Harsacarita* is very rich in its social content. Bana vividly describes the tyranny and oppression of the royal officers, apathy of the monarch and discontent of the common people.

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*Ibid.*, pp.208-209; It is the independency of the author and his strength of thought to the ridicule monarch’s surrender to sycophancy. D. Devahuti, *Harsha A Political Study*, Oxford-1970, p.12; The glaring contrast between affluence and poverty is so convincingly portrayed in his narration that this fundamental realism gives *Harsacarita* a new contour. It provides Bana’s social attitude by his intense sympathy and concern for the helpless and deprived that was never been before and deviated from the then accepted social norms. In fact, this is the area he dared to walk where the traditional sāstrakaras feared to tread. *Journal of Asiatic Society*, Vol.32, No.1-2, 1990, op. cit., p.69.
A number of historical biographies of royalty were written in the period from A.D.600 to A.D.1200. These works focussed attention on a particular person or a single dynasty and the court poets used the earlier texts as a source material by associating the subject of the biography with the earlier heroes and legends. The authors of these biographies were familiar with the historical tradition and the heroic tradition gave way to the courtly one but it did not die. Modern historians have tended to dismiss the historicity of these biographies largely because of the literary ornamentation. The wandering sūta-māgadhas gave way to paid court poets or panegyrists. But the genesis of the Carita literature can be traced to the praśastis or eulogies, the main aim of which was to create a piece of aesthetic literature with a harmonious blending of historical facts.

Inscriptions written in Prakrit and Sanskrit like the Hatigumpha inscription of Kharavela, Nanaghat inscription of Satakarni-I, Nasik inscription of Pulumayi, Junagarh inscription of Rudradaman, Allahabad praśasti of Samudragupta (written by Harisena), Mandaśor stone pillar inscription of Yasodharman (written by Vatsabhatti), or Aihole praśasti of Pulakesin II (written by Ravikirtti) may be treated as miniature historical works (kāvyas) in their narrow canvas or segment. A significant turn found in the style, diction, language and thought emerged which influenced inscriptions of the subsequent periods like Badal pillar inscription of the times of Narayana Pala (9th century...
A.D.) composed by Bhatta Gaurava Mishra in the Vasantatilaka metre\textsuperscript{285} or Deopara prāṣasti of Vijayasena (11\textsuperscript{th}-12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.) written by poet Umapatidhara.\textsuperscript{286}

From the seventh century A.D. onwards the historical tradition of \textit{itihāsa} and Purāṇa underwent a process of enlargement. The genealogical aspects of the tradition was not only maintained but also intensified in the various \textit{vamśāvalis} or family chronicles maintained in many kingdoms.\textsuperscript{287} The link with the \textit{itihāsa} and Purāṇa tradition was maintained both indirectly when the court poets used these earlier texts as source material and more directly by associating the subject of biography with the earlier heroes and legends. This was an attempt at the literary ornamentation of the \textit{itihāsa} tradition. In the first part of the twelfth century A.D. Kalhana’s historical writing the \textit{Rājatarāginī}\textsuperscript{288}(the famous history of Kashmir), owes a great deal to the \textit{itihāsa} and Purāṇa tradition. It covers the history of Kashmir from the mythical past to the twelfth century A.D. and borrows heavily from the \textit{itihāsa-purāṇa} tradition.\textsuperscript{289}

It is noteworthy to mention that the formal structure of the Purāṇas appears to have been maintained in modern Indian genealogies such as the \textit{vahivamśas} and the \textit{pōthis} or the caste-Purāṇas maintained in many parts of India today, by both bards and family priests. These generally consist of two sections: the factual, where the genealogies are recorded and

\textsuperscript{287}R.Thapar, \textit{A.I.S.H.}, op.cit., p.274.

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brought up-to-date at regular intervals, and the mythical.\(^{290}\) The latter consists partly of traditional mythology drawn from the classical Purāṇas and partly of what has been called the ‘mythical-historical section’, where the bard tries to relate his patron to the heroes and historical events of the past. Whereas the mythical section is kept fairly intact, the genealogical section is continually compressed in order to make its preservation more manageable. As a whole we can conclude that, the Purāṇas came to be regarded both as historical records preserving information on the continuity of dynasties, and as socially necessary documents establishing a community’s roots in the past.

In addition to the Purāṇas, the Pāli chronicles also contain important historical information. The genealogical\(^ {291}\) information in the Mahāvamsa can be divided into two parts. The early genealogies up to the period of king Devanampiyatissa in the third century B.C. appear to be the fabricated. The second characteristic of the early Indian historical tradition was the inclusion of myths. Unlike the Viṣṇu Purāṇa\(^ {292}\), which contains limited amount of historical narrative, the Mahāvamsa\(^ {293}\) provides a reasonably equitable balance between myth, genealogy and historical narrative. The narrative is partly fanciful and partly factual.

In the twelfth-century A.D. India witnessed a remarkable literary genius in the tradition of history writing. Production of uninterrupted series of written records of its

\(^{291}\)Genealogies could also be useful for historical information. The span of time can be calculated through the generations in the genealogies. Generally a record of regnal years can indicate the time span of a dynasty. So it is obvious that in cases where the regnal years of succession of kings are mentioned, as is often the case in the purāṇas, the genealogy becomes the basis of the dating system as well.
\(^{293}\)Mahāvamsa, IX and X (Buddhist monks were not only familiar with the northern Buddhist literature but also with the legends of Hindu cult.)
history seems to be an outstanding phenomenon of Kashmir and in this century Kashmir produced the famous chronicle of Kalhana, the *Rajatarangini* a work of quality that displays a remarkable maturity in historical analysis. The *Rajatarangini* written in Sanskrit verse in A.D.1148-49 contains eight *tararigas* (Books) covering various dynasties from the earliest period down to the time of the author. The name of the author occurs in the colophon of each *taranga* along with the name of his father Canpaka who was a minister of king Harsha. The dynastic war cost Harsha's life and throne and Canpaka lost limelight. It appears that Kalhana himself held no state office and enjoyed no favour from the royal court.

*druṣṭaischha purbabhutaritupraisthābastaḥ sāsanaiḥ.....
Paraśastipataih śastraishcha śāṅtho śesabhrāmaklamah – I.15*

Kalhana himself testified to the existence of at least eleven earlier compositions on the history of Kashmir that he consulted to write his chronicle. It is also learnt from him that there have been extensive works of ancient date containing the royal chronicles of Kashmir, which were reported to be lost. The writing of history has been a traditional art...

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298 By looking at the inscriptions regarding the consecration of temples and grants by former kings, at the laudatory inscriptions and at written works, the trouble arising from many errors has been overcome'. M.A. Stein, *Kalhana’s Rajatarangini*, Motilal Banarsidass, Vol.III, rpt., Delhi-1988, Taranga-I.15; *ibid.*, Vol.I, I.15, p.3.
299 Pandit, *Kalhana’s Rajatarangini*, *op.cit.*, Taranga-I.15
of Kashmir and in Kalhana's chronicle the craft attained a high watermark. The evidence of this text does not reflect the historical concept and methodology of the earlier works of India for Kalhana, as he was not a mere reporter but a critical narrator.

For collecting materials he not only consulted literary sources but also handled archaeological sources like inscriptions, coins, monuments and buildings. He also utilised oral history and eyewitness accounts.

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301 Role of geography in history writing finds its proper significance in the Rājatarangini. His knowledge of accurate topography of Kashmir reveals about his wide travels i.e. numerous references made by him regarding the origin of towns, villages, estates, shrines and their exact location. Although he belonged to the Brāhmaṇa group but attached to Śaiva creed, was singularly free from narrow sectarianism and this eclectic mental make up stands out prominently in his writing. Kalhana wrote Rājatarangini in the milieu of a feudal social framework. He chronicles everything i.e. court intrigue, war of succession, domination of the (Dāmaras) feudal landlords, tyranny of the Kṣayasthas etc. All round corruption, fallen standard of morality and erosion of royal authority and allied feudal traits are well documented by him.301

Stein, Kalhana's Rājatarangini, op.cit., Vol.I & Ill, p.75.

It is interesting to note that in the political organization of the state the Kshatriyas and the Brahmans were the two dominant classes. The Kshatriyas were the feudatories of the Chauhan kings and their social position was more refined than those of the other two classes. The Brahmans were the priests and the Brahmaṇa-s they served were the feudal barons. They were almost in the same position as the Kshatriyas. To this feudal structure Kalhana's chronicle provides a vivid account.


304 S.C. Roy, Early Hist., op.cit., pp.xxii-xxiii; A perusal of the text indicates that Kalhana initiated the line of historical research. The method of (historical) data collection is an unique feature in Indian tradition of history writing. All the discussed features exhibit his sharp departure from the conventional concepts of chroniclers. Kalhana's impartiality as a historian and honesty of purpose are remarkable. He admits that having read the opinion of the Pāṣupata brāhmaṇa Helāraja who formerly composed a list of kings (Pārthivēvali) in twelve thousand slokas, Padmāniḥaṇa entered in his work the eight kings beginning with Lava, who preceded Aśoka and his successors"— Stein, Vol.I, op.cit., p.4, I.17-18.

305 History is not confined the rigid framework of political and dynasties studies. In this respect Kalhana's qualities as a historian are unsurpassed. He portrayed both sides of all issues and pointed out the failings of the virtuous and virtues of the faulty monarch. Though the author of a regional history, Kalhana was free from narrow regionalism and sectarianism. His chronicle is a rich storehouse of information, political, social and to some extent economic. The Rājatarangini also suffers from some sort of shortcomings in chronology. In spite of these flaws, it has to be admitted that Rājatarangini bears a remarkable historical individuality and in this chronicle tradition of historical writing in India surpassed a long way to attain its maturity. Pandit, Kalhana's Rājatarangini, op.cit.
The historical biographies in Sanskrit declined after the conquest of northern India by the Turks and Afgans.\textsuperscript{306} The majority of the court poets were Muslims who wrote in Persian. Nevertheless, even in these areas poets continued to write biographies of the sultans in Sanskrit. In other parts of the country the historical tradition was continued in Sanskrit. But the most impressive work of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries' were those of the Jain literature, i.e. \textit{Prabandhas} of western India.\textsuperscript{307}

\textbf{Inference:}

Thus, summing up, our estimate 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. The tradition of writing in India has a history of its own which is yet to be explored completely. But from the aforesaid discussion it is found that we have continuity in the system of writing that prevailed in ancient times and this sequence of writing has persisted since the beginning of this tradition. While tracing the antiquity of writing the development of potsherds, graffiti, seals and sealings cannot be ignored. Certainly there must have existed some kinds of writing materials and writing instruments for the purpose of lettering such scripts and literatures. Thus, the evolution and growth of scripts and literature could be ascertained only through specific studies on writing materials and instruments. The large finds of tools and artefacts at various sites of India attest the utility and necessity of analysing the archaeological data. There is no denying the fact that perishable material such as palmleaves, tree bark and cloth, which have little

\textsuperscript{306}R. Thapar, \textit{AISH}, op. cit., p. 276.

\textsuperscript{307}\textit{Pariśīta Parvan} of Hemachandra; \textit{Prabandha Chintāmani} of Matunga and the \textit{Hammira-Mahākāvya} of Nayachandra Suri.
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 did not even exist. The presence of these materials and instruments in the creation of scripts and the vast literary output is the subject matter of the subsequent chapter.