CHAPTER V
THE SĀRADĀ ALPHABET. IN MANUSCRIPTS

We have seen above that the use of the Sāradā alphabet in the inscriptions dates from the later half of the 8th century A.D. The use of this alphabet in the manuscripts, however, is not known until the 12th century A.D., when we find it first used in a manuscript discovered from the village Bakhshali in the Peshawar district of West Pakistan. The manuscript bears no date but on certain palaeographic considerations to be discussed subsequently, it can be assigned to the 12th century A.D.

The Bakhshali manuscript is an important mathematical work dealing with a variety of subjects on mathematics. It contains the earliest treatment of certain topics on algebra, such as, simple algebraic equations, linear equations involving several unknowns and simultaneous indeterminate quadratic equations. The manuscript is written in incorrect Sanskrit and the rules of grammar have not been followed very strictly.

The manuscript is written in clear and bold Sāradā characters. The following peculiarities having some bearing on the probable age of the manuscript deserve notice.
1. The initial ग (see Table 5A, col. I) shows regularly a wedge at the foot of the vertical and displays two distinct forms, one with the open top and the other with the top closed. The former occurs regularly in the early Sāradā inscriptions (see Table 2A) but the latter does not appear before the 11th century A.D. It is found for the first time in some coins of Mahmud of Ghazni (see Table 3A col. I) and in the Thundu

1 The manuscript has been edited by G.K. Kaye, in ASI, New Imp. Series, Vol. XLIII, Parts I and II.
3 The examples of this form may be seen in folio 9 Recto, 1.6; 10 Verso 1.8; 11 Recto, 1.5; Verso, 1.7, etc.
4 CMI Pls. VII.
copper plate inscription of Ỉsāta dated 1075 A.D.6 (see Table 3A col. VI) where, however, it has been used only once.6 The earliest extant inscription in which the sign has been used with more regularity is the inscription of Shīhāb-ud-Dīn dated A.D. 1239.7 (See Table 4A, col. II).

2. The initial Ĺ (see Table 5A, col. I) shows a developed form with a long steamer hanging down from the right top of the letter. This evidently marks the development of the earlier form found in the Sarahan Prāṣasti5 6 7 8 (see Table 2A, col. III) and the Chamba copper plate grant (see Table 3A, col. V) where the steamer is shorter in length and attached to the middle of the letter instead of to the top.

3. The initial ĕ (see Table 5A, col. I) shows occasionally a much developed form which is not met with in the inscriptions and which resembles the modern ĕ of the Devanāgarī.

4. k (see Table 5B, col. I) occurs only in single looped form. The double looped form occasionally met with in the inscriptions of the 12th century (see Table 3B and above p.52) and more frequently in the inscriptions of the 14th and the subsequent centuries, (see Table 4B and above p.61) does not occur in the manuscript.

5. Antiquities., I, pp.197 ff.
6 In ato 1.21. 
7 Now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar.
8 Antiquities., I, pp.152 ff.
5. ṣ (see Table 5B, col. I) shows both the earlier rounded form found in the Sarahan Prāśasti¹⁰ (see Table 2B, col. III) and the later quadrangular form met with quite regularly in the inscriptions of 12th and the 13th centuries (see Table 3B and above p.53).

6. ḍ (see Table 5B, col.I) shows a loop in the middle and a wedge at the lower end. The development of the central loop is not traceable in the extant Sarada records before the 12th century A.D. It is found for the first time in the Salhi fountain inscription dated A.D. 1170¹¹ (see Table 3B, col. XII) and is also found in the Baijnath Prāśastis dated 1204 A.D.¹² (see Table 3B, col. XVI).

7. The cerebral nasal (see Table 5B, col. I) occurs in the same two forms as in the inscriptions of the 11th-13th centuries (see Table 3B and above p.54). The ancient form with a small horizontal base found in the Sarahan Prāśasti¹³ (see Table 2B)¹⁴ and the Bhakund fountain inscription¹⁴ (see Table 3B, col. III) does not occur.

8. Besides the ṣ with open top (see Table 5B, col. I), the manuscript shows the form of the letter with the top closed by means of a small horizontal bar (see Table 5B, col. I). The latter form is regularly met with in the Saradā inscriptions after the 13th century, is also found in the two epigraphic records of the 12th century, viz., the S.P.S. Museum stone slab inscription of the reign of Jayasimha dated A.D. 1149

¹⁰ See under fn.8.
¹¹ Antiquities., I, pp.216 ff.
¹³ See under fn.8.
¹⁴ Antiquities., I, pp.177 ff.
and the Arigom stone slab inscription dated A.D. 1197 (see Table 3B, cols. IX, XV).

9. The upadhrtya (see Table 53, col.I) occurs in exactly the same form as found for the first time in the copper plate inscriptions of Chamba belonging to the 11th century (see Table 3B and above p.56) and later quite regularly in the inscriptions of the 12th and the subsequent centuries.

10. The medial o (see Table 5c, col. I) is more often expressed by the superscribed flourish and less frequently by the superscribed stroke combined with the sign for medial a. As we have seen above (p.57), the tendency to express the sign more frequently by the superscribed flourish becomes common only after the 11th century.

11. The subscribed t in the ligature sta (see Table 5D, col. I) characterised by a semicircular curve with a small slanting stroke to the right, resembles the form of the copper plate inscriptions of the 11th century (use Table 3D and above p.58).

12. The subscribed th (see Table 5D, col. I) occurs except in the ligature rth, only in the spiral form as is generally the case in the copper plate inscriptions of the 10th and the 11th centuries (see Table 5D, col. I). In the ligature rth it occasionally shows an advanced form resembling the initial y and agreeing closely with the form of the Salhī fountain inscription of A.D. 1170 noted above (see Table 3D, col. XII).
Thus it is clear from what has been noted above that the manuscript retains the earlier forms of several letters but shows in certain cases the forms which do not appear in the inscriptions before the 12th century A.D. Hence we will not be wrong if we assign the manuscript on palaeographic grounds to the 12th century A.D.

Another Śāradā manuscript of the 12th century, containing a commentary on Sanskrit grammar and discovered by Bhikkhu Rahul in Tibet, is referred to by R.S. Pandit in his River of Kings. But unfortunately no details are given and the manuscript is not accessible.

Our next accessible manuscript in point of time is an old birch bark manuscript of Muni-mata-mani-mālā. This manuscript bears no date, but on certain palaeographic considerations to be recounted below, it can be assigned to the 14th century A.D.

The manuscript is the earliest known Śāradā manuscript discovered so far in Kashmir where Śāradā has been the alphabet par excellence. The exact nature of the contents of the manuscript is not known. It is in an extremely worn out condition and the proper study of its contents is not possible in view of the extremely fragile and brittle condition of the leaves. However, leaving aside its contents, the manuscript is of great importance from palaeographic point of view. It is the only accessible manuscript which enables us to study the developments and changes that the Śāradā characters undergo in the manuscripts from 12th century A.D. to the 14th century A.D.

We shall now discuss below the forms of Śāradā characters used in the manuscript and see what developments do

17 The manuscript is now preserved in the Research Department of Kashmir Government. I owe the information of the title of the manuscript to the head Pandit of the said department.
they display when compared to those of the Bakhshali manuscript noted above.

I. The Initial Vowels (See Table 5A, col. II)

1. (a) The initial vowels a and a occur regularly with closed tops. The earlier forms with open tops found fairly commonly in the Bakhshali manuscript are conspicuous by their absence. As noted above, the practice of closing the tops of a and a by means of horizontal top bars becomes fairly regular and common in the inscriptions only after the 11th century A.D.

(b) The initial a shows occasionally a fork at the foot of the right hand vertical in place of the usual wedge.

2. In initial i the two upper dots are converted into a curve with small upward strokes attached to its both ends. The similar form has been noticed above in the Khonamuh stone slab inscription of 1428 A.D.18 (see Table 4A col. II).

3. The initial i, u and u do not manifest any spectacular change.

4. In initial e and o the wedges at the left top ends have been replaced by the vertical down-strokes and their forms closely with those of the Kotiher stone slab inscription dated 1369 A.D.19 (see Table 4A, col. I).

5. The initial au is formed like o with the addition of a wedge at the right top end.

18 Marshall, Note, pp.18 ff.
19 Now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar.
II. Consonants (see Table 5B col. II).

1. k occurs regularly in a double looped form, the form which becomes common in the inscriptions only after the 13th century A.D. A peculiarity worth noticing in the form of our manuscript is that it occurs regularly without the top bar and the curve forming the loop on the left side of the vertical shows a slight twist towards the left at the upper end.

2. The other gutterals, kh, gh, and n do not present anything remarkable.

3. c occurs often in quadrangular form through the ancient circular form also occurs occasionally.

4. The conservative characters ch and j display no change.

5. No instance of jh could be traced in a few folios of the manuscript that were examined for palaeographic study.

6. In n the earlier wedge at the left top end is changed into a vertical stroke. The same development was noticed above in the form of the Khonamuh inscription (see Table 4B, col. II).

7. t shows a form at the right top end in place of the usual wedge or serif.

8. The letters th and d remain constant.

9. In dh the curve at the right end forms a circular loop with the base stroke.

10. n occurs both with and without the left hand tail. When without the tail, it does not present anything remarkable. But in the tailed form, a significant peculiarity is

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20 Marshall, Note, pp.18 ff.
noticed in the treatment of the tail which is represented by the vertical stroke instead of the usual long drawn slanting stroke.

11. Nothing noteworthy is presented by the dental group.

12. p also remains unchanged.

13. ph is highly cursive in shape and resembles the letter h.

14. A distinction appears to be made in the formation of b and x. The former is made more cursive and the latter angular. Moreover, the right hand vertical is lengthened downwards in case of x while in b it retains the same level as the left hand loop.

15. In bh the curve at the lower end is sometimes drawn upwards to touch the loop in the middle. This circular form of bh is commonly met with in the later Sāradā manuscripts of the 17th and the subsequent centuries.

16. y occurs in both the forms with the closed or open top. It besides shows an inverted stroke like that found in the forms of Kotiber and Khonamuh inscriptions noted above (see Table 48, cols. I and II).

17. The consonants r, l, t, s, s, s and h do not materially differ from those of the Bakhshali manuscript except that the curve forming the loop on the left side of the vertical in y shows a twist to the left at the upper end as in the case of k noted above.

18. Nothing is particularly remarkable about the jīhvāmūliya, the upadhmāniya and the virāma which occur in the same forms as in the Bakhshali manuscript save that upadhmāniya shows a small upward stroke at the left end.
III. The Medial Vowels (see Table 5C, col. II)

1. The medial $\ddot{a}$ is expressed as in the Bakhshali manuscript, by a wedge, serif or a hook. The hook sometimes develops into a loop in case of $\dot{a}$. Peculiarity is noticed in $\ddot{j}a$ where the vowel is expressed by a small triangle suspended from the right end of the top horizontal bar. This method of expressing medial $\ddot{a}$ in $\ddot{j}a$ is noticed only in one case in the Baijnath Prasātis (see Table 3B, col. XVI) but becomes fairly common both in the inscriptions and the manuscripts after the 13th century.

2. The medial $i$ and $i$ are formed by long curves drawn to the left and the right of the consonant respectively. The small and sickle shaped curves found sometimes in the Bakhshali manuscript (see col. I) are rare.

3. The medial $u$ and $u$ continue to be rendered in the older fashion, the former by a wedge, a curve or a downstroke (in case of $ru$) and the latter by a flag like line or by the sign of subscribed initial $u$.

4. The medial $r$ does not materially differ in shape from that of the Bakhshali manuscript. It occurs both in the angular and the cursive forms. A peculiar form of the sign is noticed in $\dddot{kr}$.

5. The medial $e$ is expressed either by the pristhamatrah or by the superscribed stroke above the consonant. The former is important as it constitutes an important proof of the age of the manuscript. The practice of forming the medial $e$ by the pristhamatrah became obsolete in Kashmir in the 15th century as is attested to by the evidence of Jonarāja$^{22}$ who while recounting an anecdote

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22 Dvitiyā Rājatarāgini, 1025-37.
regarding a forgery in a deed of sale (vikraya-pattraka) remarks, "In order to express the e following a consonant, the clerks formerly used to write a stroke behind the consonants. But as in course of time the script (lipi) became changed, the writers of to-day 23 write the stroke expressing e over the consonent." 24 This would show that our manuscript where the earlier method is frequently employed must belong to a period earlier than the 15th century. The above evidence of Jonarāja is corroborated by the rare use of pristhamātrā in forming the medial e in the later Sāradā manuscripts where the pristhamātrā, as will be subsequently shown, is resorted to only occasionally to denote the medial ai.

6. The medial ai is likewise expressed either by the two superscribed horizontal strokes placed over the top of the consonant or by a pristhamātrā combined with the superscribed e stroke.

7. The medial o is expressed as in the Bakhshali manuscript (see col. I) and in the earlier Sāradā inscriptions of the 10th and the 11th centuries (see Table 2C) in three different ways: (i) by a pristhamātrā combined with the sign for medial á (ii) by the superscribed e stroke combined with the symbol for medial á (iii) by the superscribed flourish. The first two methods are rarely employed in the inscriptions after the 13th century. In the manuscripts of the 16th and the subsequent centuries also, the two methods become obsolete and it is only the third method that is frequently employed.

23 Evidently refers to the 15th century. Jonarāja was a contemporary of Zain-ul-Abidin.

8. The medial au is expressed as usual by a superscribed flourish combined with the sign for medial 主力军.

IV. Ligatures (see Table 5D, col. II)

Among the ligatures, the following deserve notice:

1. ry where the right half of the subscribed y is suppressed.

2. rth which closely agrees with the form of the Bakhshali manuscript noted above.

3. rn where the small vertical representing the superscribed р is missing and the n sign is attached directly to the top bar. A peculiar form of the subscribed н with a long drawn curve to the left and a loop to the right is specially noteworthy.

4. rgh where the small vertical for superscribed р suspended from the horizontal top bar is blended with the central stroke of subscribed gh.

5. ks where the superscribed k consists of a small curve to the left and a long drawn cursive stroke to the right reaching the level of the bottom of the subscribed s.

6. sth in which the subscribed th is always 5 like in shape as is usually the case in the inscriptions of the 12th and the later centuries. The spiral form found in the earlier inscriptions of the 10th and the 11th centuries and quite frequently in the Bakhshali manuscript (see col. I) is rare.

7. jн where the subscribed н has an unusual looped form.

8. tn where the subscribed n is represented by a small downstroke attached to the bottom of т.

We have studied above in detail the forms of the Šāradā characters employed in the manuscript. We have seen that the manuscript displays further development in the forms of a, ā, i, e, o, k, ĕ, n, bh, v and jā. These developments, as seen above, are noticed in the inscriptions only after the
13th century. We have also noted that the manuscript employs in certain cases older methods of forming the medial e and o which became obsolete in Kashmir after the 15th century. This would show that the manuscript must belong to a period which is later than the 13th century and earlier than the 15th century. We may, as such, assign the manuscript on paleographic grounds to the 14th century A.D.

We have no literary specimen to study the development of the Śāradā alphabet in the manuscripts in the 15th century. In the 16th century, the Śāradā alphabet reaches the final stage of its development as is illustrated by the following manuscripts discovered from Kashmir which though bearing no date can be, as will be subsequently shown, assigned to the 16th century on the paleographic grounds.

1. The birch-bark manuscript of Śākuntalam.
2. The birch-bark manuscript of the Ādi and the Sabhā-parvan of Mahābhārata.
3. The birch-bark manuscript of Kathāsaritasāgara.

The characters used in these manuscripts agree closely in the majority of cases with those of the birch bark manuscript of Muni-mata-māṇī-mālā noted above. A few

25 The manuscript represents the Kashmirian recension of Kalidāsa's Abhīṣaka-Śākuntalam. It was purchased by Bühler in 1875 A.D. in Kashmir and is mentioned in the Deccan college collection under No.192. It has been described by Bühler in his Kashmir Report, p.62. The forms of the letters in the table below have been taken from Bühler's Ind. Pal. Plate vi, col. viii, and Anecdotata Oxonancia, Arrian Series, 1, 3, pl.6.

26 This manuscript was purchased by Bühler in Kashmir and has been described by him in his Kashmir report, p.64. It is mentioned in the Deccan college collection of 1873/76 under No.169, and has been utilised for the critical edition of the Mahābhārata (edited by Dr. V.S. Sukhtankar) and its siglum is S1 in the critical apparatus of the said edition.
characters, however, display some significant changes. We shall study below these changes in detail.

I. Vowels (see Table 5a, cols. III-V).

1. In the initial \( a \) and \( ã \), the earlier left hand lower curve below the connecting horizontal line is suppressed and the upper one is attached to the top horizontal bar by means of a small slanting stroke.

2. The initial \( i \) occurs in its earlier form with the two dots above and a curve below in the manuscript of \( Śākuntala \) (col. III). In the other two manuscripts (cols. IV, V) the vowel occurs in its later form as found in the manuscript of the \( Muni-mata-manj-mālā \) noted above (see. col. II). In the manuscript of the \( Mahābhārata \) (col. IV), the lower curve is very small and usually consists of a semi-circle or a small circle.

3. The initial \( ī \) resembles the forms of the Baijnath Prasastis (see Table 3A, col. XVI) and the Khonamuh stone inscription of A.D. 1428 (see Table 4A, col. II).

4. The initial \( ū \) shows an unusual form in the manuscript of \( Śākuntala \) (col. III) in as much as the curve marking the length of the vowel is attached to the bottom of \( ū \) instead of to its back.

5. The initial \( ũ \) occurs in exactly the same form as in the Bakhshali manuscript (col. I).

6. The initial \( é \) with a vertical to the left agrees closely with the form of the \( Muni-mata-manj-mālā \) (col. II).

27 It is now preserved in the Research department of the Kashmir Government, Srinagar.
The left hand vertical is straight in the manuscript of the *Sākuntala* (col. III) but shows a slight twist to the right at the lower end in the manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* (col. IV) and the *Kathāsaritasūgara* (col. V).

7. The initial o resembles the form of the *Munī-maṇi-mālā* (col. II). In the manuscript of *Sākuntala* (col. III) the vertical is drawn close in front of u with the result that the letter looks like the Roman capital B.

8. In the initial au the earlier wedge at the right top end is replaced by a small triangle.

II. Consonants (see Table 5B, Cols. III-V).

Among the consonants the developments are noticed only in the following letters.

1. ā where the earlier wedge at the right top end is sometimes replaced by a semi-circle, e.g., in the manuscript of the *Sākuntala* (col. III) and sometimes by a small circle, e.g., in the manuscript of the *Mahābhārata* (col. IV).

2. j which retained its conservative character from the ancient Brahmi to the 15th century A.D. now undergoes significant change and can be fairly regarded as a reliable criterion for age. The letter drops the central stroke and the top stroke is replaced by two small interlaced curves with a small upward stroke attached to them at the right end.

3. In jh, the left half consisting of a vertical with a wedge attached to its lower end remains unchanged. The right half, however, is replaced by the sign which resembles the letter dh in shape.

4. Clear distinction is made between b and v. The former bears a distinctive sign consisting of a horizontal top bar, a downstroke suspended from it and a big cursive loop attached to the downstroke on the left side. The
latter is distinguishable by the downward prolongation of the vertical downstroke and by a comparative smaller loop on the left.

5. bh has a well pronounced wedge or a solid loop in the middle. The circular form of the letter noticed above in the manuscript of the Ṛuni-mata-mani-mālā (col. II) occurs occasionally in the manuscript of the Mahābhārata (col. III). In our other two manuscripts, the earlier form with a semi circular curve prevails.

6. v occurs exclusively with its top closed by means of a horizontal stroke. The form with an open top found occasionally in the manuscript of the Muni-mata-mani-mālā (col. II) is rare.

III. The Medial Vowels (see Table 5C, Cols. III-V)

As regards the medial vowels, the following peculiarities and developments deserve notice:

1. The medial a in ja is expressed by a small circular loop attached to the right end of the top horizontal bar, in the manuscript of the Mahābhārata (col. IV) and the Kathāsari-tasāgar (col. V). In the manuscript of the Śākuntala (col. III) it is denoted by a curve which issuing from the right end of the top horizontal bar touches the left hand vertical in the middle. The similar method of expressing the medial a in ja is followed in the later Śaradā manuscripts with the only difference that the curve touches the left hand vertical at its upper end instead of in the middle. It needs to be pointed out here, that in the letter j when accompanied by medial ā, the two newly developed curves at the upper end are regularly replaced by the older horizontal bar.

2. The medial ṛ is expressed, besides the usual flag like line attached to the lower end of the consonant, by the
combination of the two curves of initial \( \ddot{u} \). These curves are attached to the bottom of the consonant, sometimes one below the other, sometimes back to back and occasionally they form very peculiar combinations, e.g., in bh\( \ddot{u} \) and s\( \ddot{u} \) in the manuscript of the \( \ddot{\text{S}}\ddot{\text{k}}\ddot{\text{u}}\ddot{\text{n}}\ddot{\text{t}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{l}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) (col. III).

3. The medial \( \ddot{r} \) is expressed generally by a semicircular curve facing upwards. The peculiar forms are noticed in kr in the manuscript of the \( \text{M}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{h}\ddot{\ddot{\text{a}}}\ddot{\text{b}}\ddot{\ddot{\text{h}}\ddot{\ddot{\text{a}}}\ddot{\text{r}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{t}} \) (col. IV) where it consists of a mere curve attached to the left limb of \( k \) and sm\( \ddot{r} \) in the manuscript of the \( \text{K}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{h}\ddot{\ddot{\text{a}}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{r}}\ddot{\text{i}}\ddot{\text{t}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}\ddot{\text{g}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) (col. V) where the curve has been drawn high above to touch the right end of the top bar.

4. The medial \( \ddot{a} \) is expressed exclusively by a horizontal stroke placed above the consonant.

5. The medial \( \ddot{a}i \) is formed throughout by the superscribed strokes except in the manuscript of the \( \text{K}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{h}\ddot{\ddot{\text{a}}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{r}}\ddot{\text{i}}\ddot{\text{t}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}\ddot{\text{g}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) (col. V) where the older method consisting of a pristha-m\( \ddot{a}tr\ddot{a} \) combined with the superscribed stroke is also employed occasionally.

6. The medial \( \ddot{o} \) is also expressed generally by a superscribed flourish save in a very few cases in the manuscript of the \( \text{K}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{h}\ddot{\ddot{\text{a}}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{r}}\ddot{\text{i}}\ddot{\text{t}}\ddot{\text{s}}\ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}\ddot{\text{g}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) (col. V) where it has been expressed in the older fashion, viz., by a pristha-m\( \ddot{a}tr\ddot{a} \) combined with the sign of medial \( \ddot{\ddot{a}} \).

Vir\( \ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}} \)ma

The long drawn streamer which represents the vir\( \ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}} \)ma in the earlier records becomes a long vertical in the manuscript of the \( \ddot{\text{S}}\ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}}\ddot{\text{k}}\ddot{\text{u}}\ddot{\text{n}}\ddot{\text{t}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{l}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) (col. III) and occurs in the same form in the later \( \ddot{\text{S}}\ddot{\text{\ddot{a}}}\ddot{\text{r}}\ddot{\text{a}}\ddot{\text{d}}\ddot{\text{a}} \) manuscripts.

IV. Ligatures (see Table 5D, cols. III-V).

Nothing is specially remarkable about the ligatures
except what has already been stated above while discussing the ligatures of the manuscript of the *Muni-mata-mani-mālā*. Mention may, however, be made of the ligatures where *k* forms the first member. The shape of *k* in such cases continues to be the same as in that of the manuscript of the *Muni-mata-mani-mālā* (col. II) except the long drawn curve to the right is now made comparatively thinner than the smaller one to the left. Also worthy of note are the ligatures where *r* forms the second member. In such cases, *r* is represented by a cursive down-stroke attached to the upper consonant on the right side.

As has been pointed out above, none of our manuscripts bears any date. But our detailed study of the forms used in them would show that they belong to a period which is later than the 15th century and earlier than the 17th century A.D. They show the developed forms of *ā, ā, ī, īh* and *Ī* which are not traced in the manuscript of the *Muni-mata-mani-mālā* or in the Khonamuh stone inscription of 1428 A.D. or the Peshawar Museum inscription of 1461 A.D. Besides, the form of *bh* which is often semi-circular in shape, the top bars which are comparatively shorter in length and the use of *prīśthamātrā* for the formation of medial *āi* and *ō* point to a period, earlier than the 17th century A.D.

Again from what has been noted above, it is clear that our manuscripts represent the last phase of the development of the Śāradā alphabet. In the manuscripts of the subsequent centuries, the Śāradā characters occur in the same forms except showing minor changes here and there. The difference is noticed in the formation of the top bars which are comparatively longer in the later manuscripts, in the form of *bh* which is exclusively circular in shape and in the rare use of *prīśthamātrā* in the formation of medial *āi* and *ō*.

Our above study of the use of Śāradā alphabet in
the manuscripts will not be complete without studying the forms of the rarely occurring vowels \( \tilde{r} \), \( \tilde{l} \), \( \tilde{1} \). The forms of these letters are noticed among others, in the birch bark manuscript of the 'Balabodhini', \(^{28}\) which contains a small treatise on grammar, and in the paper manuscript of the same work, dated \(^{29}\) Hijri 1158 (A.D. 1745) which contains a complete list of all the characters.

The initial \( \tilde{r} \) is formed like \( r \) with the addition of a small triangle at the right top end.

\( \tilde{l} \) is similar to \( \tilde{h} \) in shape but has in addition the curve of medial \( r \) attached to the right limb at the lower end.

\( \tilde{1} \) is formed like \( l \) with the addition of a small triangle at the right top end as in case of \( \tilde{r} \).

These forms are illustrated in the accompanying Table 5A, col. VII.

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\(^{28}\) It is preserved in the MSS. Library of the Research Department, Srinagar.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.