CHAPTER VI
THE SĀRADĀ ALPHABET

VARIATIONS IN FORMS IN THE INSCRIPTIONS AND THE MANUSCRIPTS.

We have studied above the use of the Sāradā alphabet both in the inscriptions and the manuscripts. In this chapter we shall note the variations in forms that the Sāradā characters display in the inscriptions on the one hand and the manuscripts on the other.

As pointed out above, we have no Sāradā manuscript contemporaneous with the early Sāradā inscriptions of the 8th-10th centuries A.D. Our earliest Sāradā manuscript, viz., the Bakhshali manuscript\(^1\) belongs, as seen above, to the 12th century A.D. We shall, as such, discuss below the variations that the characters of this manuscript exhibit in their forms when compared with those of the following contemporary inscriptions:

(1) The Luj (Chamba) fountain inscription of the 1st year of Jāṣaṭa dated Śāstra (41) 31 (A.D.1105-6).\(^2\)

(2) The S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar Inscription of the reign of Jayasimha (Laukika) saṃ 25 (A.D. 1149).

(3) The Tapar (Kashmir) inscription of the reign of Para­mandadeva (Laukika) saṃ 33 (A.D. 1157).\(^3\)

(4) The Devi-ri-Kothi (Chamba) fountain inscription of Rājānaka Māgapāla of the 17th year of Lalita-varman (A.D. 1153-60).\(^4\)

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1 Edited by Kaye, ASI, New Imp. Ser., Vol. XLIII.
2 Antiquities., I, No.28, pp.202 ff., Pl. XXVIII.
3 Now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar.
4 Antiquities., I, No.32, pp. 209 ff., Pl. XXX.
(5) The Salhi (Chamba) fountain inscription of Rajanaka Ludrapāla of the 27th year of Lalita-varman, Sāstra 5 (42) 46 (A.D.1170).

(6) The Arigom (Kashmir) stone slab inscription (Laukika) 6 sam 73 (A.D.1197).

I. The Initial Vowels (See Table 6A).

Among the vowels, the variations are noticeable in the forms of the following letters.

1. The initial $\ddot{u}$.

This vowel shows an unusual form in the Bakhshali manuscript with a long steamer-marking the length of the vowel-hanging down from the top of the letter to its right. In the contemporary inscriptions the vowel does not occur. But in the Thundu copper plate grant of Āsata-varman, (11th century) and the Baijnath Praśastis (A.D.1204) it occurs in more common form with the length of the vowel marked by a curve attached to the back of the letter in the middle.

2. The initial $\ddot{a}$

It shows sometimes a much developed form in the Bakhshali manuscript, resembling the Devanāgarī $\ddot{a}$. Among contemporary inscriptions it occurs only in the Devi-ri-Kothi inscription (col.V) where, however, it retains its ancient triangular form.

II. Consonants (See Table 6A).

The following variations are noticed in the consonants.

1. The right limb of $\text{kh}$ in the Bakhshali manuscript is always cursive unlike the angular one of the inscriptions.

2. The Bakhshali manuscript presents an instance of the rare

5 Antiquities., I, No.33, pp. 216 ff. Pl. XXXII.
6 EL., IX, pp. 290 ff., Pl.
7 Antiquities., I, No.26, pp. 196 ff., Pl. XXVI and supra (Table 3A, col. VI).
8 EL., I, pp. 97 ff. and supra (Table 3A, col. XVI).
character \( \text{th} \) not found in the contemporary inscriptions. Its form differs from an instance of it found in the Sarahan Prâsasti (9th century) by the replacement of the wedge at the foot of the vertical by an upward stroke to the left.

3. The letter \( \text{t} \) occurs frequently in its ancient circular form in the Bakhshali manuscript. In the inscriptions, however, the letter occurs mostly in its later form with a well developed top bar. Besides, the letter shows a knob at the right top end in the Bakhshali manuscript in place of the wedge or a serif found in the inscriptions.

4. The letter \( \text{d} \) shows invariably a loop in the middle and a wedge at the end in the Bakhshali manuscript which, however, is not always the case in the inscriptions where either of the two are occasionally absent.

The Medial Vowels (see Table 6A).

1. The curves of medial \( \text{i} \) and \( \text{i} \) are occasionally sickle shaped in the Bakhshali manuscript. In the inscriptions they retain their full length.

2. The medial \( \text{u} \) in \( \text{ru} \) is formed in the Bakhshali manuscript by a downward steamer similar to one as noted above in \( \text{u} \) and attached to \( \text{r} \) near the top. In the inscriptions it is expressed by a downward curve attached to the foot of \( \text{r} \) on the right side.

3. The flag like line of medial \( \text{u} \) attached to the bottom of the consonants is usually longer in the Bakhshali manuscript than in the inscriptions.

IV. Ligatures (see Table 6A).

1. The subscribed \( \text{th} \) is always spiral in shape in the Bakhshali manuscript. In the inscriptions, it usually shows the advanced S like form.

9 Antiquities, I, No.13, p.156, text line 11, Pl.XV, and supra (Table 2B, col.III).
2. r as the final element in the ligatures is represented in the Bakhshali manuscript by a long slanting stroke attached to the bottom of the upper consonant and drawn from left to right. In the inscriptions the stroke is short and is drawn only to the left.

The characters of our next manuscript, the birch bark manuscript of Muni-mata-mani-mala (c. 14th century) differ materially in the general appearance from those of the only contemporary inscription, the Kotiher stone slab inscription of Shihab-ud-Din dated (laukika) saññi 45 (A.D.1369). The latter is written in very crude form of Sarada and presents a number of variations in forms which, however, appear to be mainly due to the lack of skill on the part of the engraver. Among the good number of variations, the following deserve notice.

The Initial Vowels and Consonants (see Table 633).

1. The initial a occurs invariably with its top closed by means of a horizontal top bar in the manuscript of the Muni-mata-mani-mala. In the contemporary inscription, the letter occurs only with an open top.

2. The initial e shows a developed form in the manuscript with the wedge at the left top end converted into a vertical. In the inscription the letter does not occur. But in the Baijnath Prasastis which are nearer in date, the letter occurs in its earlier form and retains the wedge (see col.III).

3. p shows both the forms, with or without the left hand downstroke in the manuscript. In the inscription, it always occurs without the left hand downstroke or tail.

4. Clear distinction is made in the formation of b and v in the manuscript. In the inscription, however, little distinction is made between the two and they bear similar forms often heard to distinguish.

10 Preserved in the MSS. Library of the Research Department of Kashmir Government.

11 Now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum, Srinagar.
5. The letter bh occurs also in the developed circular form in the manuscript. In the inscription it occurs only in the older semi-circular form.

6. In the manuscript v occurs in both the forms with its top closed or open. In the inscription it occurs exclusively with a closed top.

7. The wedges in the left limbs of m, s and s are well defined in the manuscript than in the inscription. In the latter, wedges are sometimes left open on one side.

The Medial Vowels (see Table 6B).

1. The medial a in ja is formed by a small triangle suspended from the top horizontal bar in the manuscript. In the inscription, it is expressed in the older fashion by an upward stroke attached to the right end of the central stroke.

2. The older methods of forming the medial vowels, e, ai, o by the prsthamaatra are frequently employed in the manuscript. In the inscription, the prsthamaatra is rarely used and the vowels are generally expressed by the superscribed strokes.

In the following manuscripts and the inscriptions which on palaeographic grounds can be assigned to the 16th century, and which represents the last stage of the development of the Sarada alphabet, we notice striking differences in the formation of the following characters which show final developments in their form only in the manuscripts but retain their earlier characteristics in the inscriptions:

Inscriptions

1. S.P.S. Museum storage vessel Inscription dated (Vikrama?) 1583 (A.D.1526?)

2. The Nular-bama bath inscription.

3. The Zaji-mai stone inscription.

4. The Uskur (Baramulla) relief inscription.

12 It has not been edited so far.

13 Antiquities of Baray-Wadwan, p.12 ff.

14 Now preserved in the Pennsylvania University Museum, Philadelphia, U.S.A.
Manuscripts

1. The birch-bark manuscript of Śākuntala.

2. The birch-bark manuscript of the Adi and Sabhā Parvan of Mahābhārata.

3. The birch-bark manuscript of the Kathāsaritasāgara.

Variations in the forms of letters (See Table 6C)

1. The manuscripts show developed forms of the vowels e, ai, o and au with well developed verticals on the left, not traceable in the contemporary inscriptions.

2. The letter ķ retains its conservative character in the inscriptions. In the manuscripts it displays marked development with the upper horizontal stroke replaced by two interlaced curves.

3. The manuscripts show the advanced forms of jh, not traceable in the inscriptions.

Besides, we notice the following variations.

1. The forms of the initial a and ã as found in the manuscripts differ from those of the inscriptions by the placing of both the curves of the left limb above the connecting horizontal line.

2. The form of a with a big rounded loop in the left limb found in the Wular-hama and Ushkur inscriptions is only occasionally met with in the manuscripts of Śākuntala and Mahābhārata where, however, the loops are comparatively smaller.

3. The loops and wedges in case of ò, dh, m, ñ, s are always solid and filled up in ink in the manuscripts while in the inscriptions they are often left blank.

4. The pristhamātra is occasionally used in the manuscripts, e.g., in the manuscript of the Kathāsaritasāgara for expressing the medial vowels e, ai and o. In the inscriptions it is rarely employed and the vowels are always denoted by the superscribed strokes. As pointed out above, the last instance of the use of the pristhamātra in the inscriptions, is provided by the

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15 See above p.88, fn. 25.
17 See above, p.89, fn. 27.
Peshawar Museum inscription of A.D. 1461 where it has been resorted to only once to denote the medial ai in kai.

5. K as the first member of ligatures assumes a peculiar shape both in the manuscripts and the inscriptions. In both, the right limb is far greater in length than the former. In the manuscripts, however, the right limb is generally thinner than the left.

6. The manuscripts, owing to the largeness of their content, present a wide variety of ligatures and a good number of digraphs and trigraphs. In the inscriptions which are generally smaller in extent, such a variety is but rarely found.

We have thus studied the variations in the forms of the Sarada characters in the inscriptions and manuscripts. We have also seen that the manuscripts illustrate the final developments in the forms of a, e, i, u, not traceable in the contemporary inscriptions. This corroborates the generally accepted principle that the characters of the manuscripts are generally more advanced in forms than those of the contemporary inscriptions.