Among the ancient Indian scripts, the Sarada has a place of pride. Though evolved from the western branch of Brāhmī nearly twelve hundred years ago, it continues to be in use even to-day. It is an alphabet of Kashmir par excellence and has also remained a popular script of an extensive area of North Western India and is still represented in the Panjab and Himachal Pradesh by its descendants the Gurumukhī and the Tākrī. Nearly the entire extant Sanskrit literature of Kashmir is written in this script and as such, the importance of its study for the proper understanding and the decipherment of ancient Kashmirian texts can hardly be exaggerated.

The ancient Indian scripts and inscriptions have been a subject of study of scholars now for more than a hundred years and many a problem connected with the Indian palaeography and epigraphy have been unravelled. But it is rather unfortunate that the Sarada inscriptions, with the exception of those discovered in Chamba, have not received the attention they deserve. Many of them still remain undeciphered and unedited. Besides, no systematic effort has yet been made to explain in an exhaustive manner the origin and the development of the Sarada script. George Bühler in his monumental work Indian Palaeography has devoted one section (pp. 76-77) to the Sarada alphabet but the very scope of his work and the lack of material has obliged the learned scholar to treat the subject in a very brief and sketchy manner. Leeche's Grammar of the Cashmeere Language (Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal 1894, pp. 399 ff.) also does not give any details of this
Sir George Grierson's paper in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (1916, pp. 677 ff.), merely contains the tables of ligatures of modern Sāradā and in his note in the Linguistic Survey of India (Vol. VIII, page 254) he simply states that the Sāradā character is the indigenous character of Kashmir and that it is generally used by Hindus and is taught in their schools in that country. The most valuable contribution is that of Dr. Vogel who has discussed the development of the Sāradā script at some length in his famous work 'Antiquities of Chamba State' Part I, which must remain for ever an indispensable work of reference for a student of the Sāradā script. However, Vogel's researches on the subject too, cannot be said to be complete for his treatment is confined only to the inscriptions of Chamba. Since the publication of Vogel's work in 1911 a good number of Sāradā inscriptions have come to light in North Western Pakistan and Kashmir, which have necessitated a revised and the complete treatment of the subject. Besides, no attempt has yet been made to analyse the contents of the extant Sāradā inscriptions and find out what light they throw on the contemporary cultural conditions.

The present dissertation is an humble attempt in this direction. Besides discussing in detail the origin and the development of the Sāradā script, the thesis aims at giving an account of the political social and other aspects of the culture as gleaned from the

* Gaurishankar Mirchand Gora's brief treatment of the Sāradā script in Dhārātiya Prācīna Līnijā, is largely based on Vogel's work.
Sāradā inscriptions.

The Sāradā alphabet being descendant of the Western branch of the Brahmi alphabet, the first chapter of the present monograph contains a brief discussion on the various stages of development of the Brāhmī of North Western India from the 3rd century B.C. to which period the earliest definitely datable Brāhmī documents belong, up to the middle of the 8th century A.D. when the Sāradā alphabet makes its appearance. The study is based primarily on the inscriptions, occasionally supplemented by coins found in the north-western part of India. The description of the characters has been illustrated by examples drawn from the original facsimiles. A table has been given at the end of the chapter to give the reader a clear idea of the developments that the characters of the Brāhmī of North-Western India undergo through successive stages till they finally develop into the Sāradā.

The second chapter deals with the development of the Sāradā alphabet. It has been divided into three sections. Section A deals with the earliest phase of the Sāradā alphabet as represented by the coins and the inscriptions of 8th-10th centuries, found in North-Western Pakistan, Kashmir and Chamba. The earliest known inscription in which the Sāradā characters appear, is a stone inscription from Lund in the Peshawar district of West Pakistan, dated sam. 163. R.B. Deya Ram Sahni, who edited the epigraph, opines that the date refers to the Krsa era and corresponds to A.D. 774. The earliest specimens of Sāradā from Kashmir are the coins of the rulers of the Utpala dynasty which was established in the
middle of the 9th century A.D., and the two inscriptions of the reign of queen Diddā (A.D. 999-1003) dated (laukika) 65 or A.D. 999 and (laukika) 65 or A.D. 999. The earliest Śarada documents from Chamba include the Śarahan Prāśasti which belongs to 9th century and the two copper plate grants of Yugākara-varman and Vidagdha who ruled in the 10th century.

Section 8 of this chapter deals with the development of the Śarada alphabet in 11-13th centuries. Since the bulk of the extant Śarada records belongs to this period, only those inscriptions have been used for the palaeographic study which are well preserved and of certain date.

For these two sections Vogel's Antiquities of Chamba State Part I has been of substantial help though some of the observations made by that scholar regarding the development of the Śarada characters had to be modified, in so far as they were not relevant to the development of Śarada in the different geographical regions.

Section 6 deals with the final development of the Śarada alphabet as represented by the Śarada records of 14th-16th centuries. The Śarada alphabet was displaced by its descendant, the levāśa, in Chamba and Kangra after the 13th century and, as such, the study of the final development of the alphabet has been confined to the inscriptions of Kashmir and North-Western Pakistan only.

The tables illustrating the forms of characters described in the body of the chapter have been given at the end of each section. The forms have been drawn from the facsimilies and in some cases from the originals. For the two Sārijātā Prāśastis, the earliest known Śarada records from Kangra, Sühler's table VII col. 1 (Indian Palaeography) has been utilized.
The chapters 3 and 4 deal with the period and the area of the use of Saradā alphabet. It has been shown on the basis of the epigraphic evidence that this alphabet was extensively used in North Western Pakistan, Ladakh, Kashmir, Jammu, Chamba, Kangra and even Haryana.

The 5th chapter deals with the use and the development of the Saradā alphabet in manuscripts. In the absence of any earlier manuscript, the study had to be started with the Bakshali Manuscript which has been assigned by Dr. Saye to the 12th century A.D. The observations of Dr. Saye on the age of this manuscript based on palaeographic considerations have generally been found to be based on fact. An attempt has however been made to bring to light some more peculiarities of the characters used in that manuscript that have some bearing on its probable age. Among the extant and the accessible Saradā manuscripts I could find only four that could be assigned to the period between 12th and the 16th centuries. The palaeography of these manuscripts has been discussed in detail and the forms of characters drawn from the facsimilies or the original folios of the manuscripts, have been given in the tables appended to the chapter.

In the 6th chapter has been discussed with illustrative tables the variations that the Saradā characters display in their forms in the manuscripts on the one hand and in the contemporary inscriptions on the other.

The 7th chapter contains a brief account of the Saradā inscriptions discovered so far. These include, besides those already edited, the records that are lying in the museums about which very little has been written so far. The list has been augmented by the records that have come to light only recently.

In chapter VIII has been discussed the cultural
data as found in the Sāradā inscriptions, under the following heads:-

A. Society.
B. Economic Conditions.
C. Administration.
D. Religion.
E. Literature.

The Sāradā inscriptions often brief, sketchy and fragmentary as they are furnish very meagre information about the social, economic and religious conditions of ancient North Western Pakistan, Kashmir, Chamba and Kangra. Attempt, however, has been made to collect the scraps of information wherever available and knit them in a way as to present more less a coherent study.

The chapter IX deals with the political history. In this chapter the historical information gleaned from the Sāradā inscriptions has been analysed and discussed in detail in the background of the early history of North Western Pakistan, Kashmir, Chamba and Kangra. The inscriptions of Chamba have been found particularly useful in writing the history of this ancient hill State from 8th century onwards in an almost continuous strain, while some unedited Sāradā records of Kashmir sometimes furnish very interesting historical information not known from the literary sources. The Baijnath Prasastis acquaint us with a family of Rajas that ruled for eight generations at Kiragrāma modern Baijnath and owed allegiance to the kings of Trigarta. Attempt has been made to trace in outline the history of this ancient kingdom from the earliest times down to the 13th century when the two Prasastis were composed.

* In the present dissertation, this region has been mentioned throughout under its ancient name Gandhāra.
The last chapter contains the Geographical data, such as names of villages, districts, kingdoms and rivers as mentioned in the Sarada inscriptions. In the case of the inscriptions of Chamba, it has not been possible to improve upon the identifications of places, so admirably given by Dr. Vogel, and his account has been supplemented.

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