CHAPTER III
THE ŚARADĀ ALPHABET
PERIOD OF ITS USE

The Upper Limit

Till recently it was not possible to arrive at some definite conclusion with regard to the upper limit of the use of the Śaradā alphabet. The paucity of material obliged the learned epigraphists like Bühler and Hoernle to make tentative suggestions which in the light of the latest discoveries are not wholly tenable. Thus Hoernle's suggestion that the "elaboration of the so-called Śaradā alphabet may be placed about 500 A.D.", is far from fact since the script used at this time in North-Western India was, as seen above, the so-called Gupta script and Śaradā had not yet appeared on the scene. Again Bühler's observation that the Śaradā script appears from about A.D. 800 is based on the erroneous reading of the dates of the two Baijnath Praśastis, as Śaka 726 or A.D. 804. As pointed out by Kielhorn and Vogel the correct reading of the date is Śaka 1126 or A.D. 1204 and as such, the Baijnath Praśastis cannot be regarded as the earliest known Śaradā inscriptions as suggested by Bühler.

The earliest known inscription in Śaradā characters is the stone inscription from Hund (District Attock, West Pakistan) dated sam 168-169 presumably of the Harṣa era and corresponding to A.D. 774-775. On the basis of

1 JASB., Vol. LX, p.90.
2 p.8ff. Also Cf. Coins of Pravarasena II and Toramāna of Kashmir, CMI., Pl. III, which show pure Gupta Characters.
3 Ind. Pal., p.76.
4 Ind. Ant. XX, p.154.
5 Antiquities I, pp.43, 44.
6 Ind. Pal., p. 76.
7 EII., XXII, pp.97 ff.
of this inscription, the upper limit of the use of the Śaradā alphabet may be fixed at c. 750 A.D. Unfortunately, we have no contemporary record from Kashmir or Chamba, which were the main centres of the Śaradā alphabet. This much is, however, certain that the Śaradā script had not appeared in Kashmir in the first half of the 8th century A.D., as is attested to by the evidence of the coins of the Lalitāditya Pratāpāditya, which bear the legends Śripatāpa, in what may be called the post-Gupta characters not developed enough to be classed as Śaradā. The earliest specimens of the Śaradā alphabet from the Valley are, as pointed out by Bühler, the coins of the rulers of the Utpala dynasty, (A.D. 855/6-939), In Chamba too, its use cannot be dated before the middle of the 8th century A.D. The Brahmo (Baramaor of the maps) and Chattrari (Chittrahi of the maps) inscriptions of Meru-varman, who is generally assigned to the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century A.D., cannot be claimed to be written in the Śaradā script, and the Svaim inscription of Rājānaka Bhogaṭa, the characters of which represent the transition between the post-Gupta and the Śaradā, has evidently to be assigned to a later date. The earliest Śaradā document from this ancient hill State is the Sarahan Prasasti, which, as suggested by Vogel, may on palaeographic grounds, be assigned to the 9th century A.D.

8 JNSI., X, pp.30-32, and plate.
9 Ind. Pal., p.76.
10 CMI, Pis. 4, 5; JASB., XLVIII, p.18, and Plate.
11 Antiquities., I, Nos.5-8, pp.138 ff. For Meru-varman's probable date see Ibid., p.46; 97; and History of Panjab Hill States Vol. I, p.279.
12 Ibid., No.12, pp.150-52.
13 Ibid., No.13, pp.152 ff.
14 Ibid., p.47.
The Lower Limit

Nothing definite can be said about the lower limit of the use of the Sarada script in Gandhāra. Its use in the 15th century is, however, attested to by the evidence of the Peshawar Museum inscription of Vanhaḍaka dated Laukika samvat 538 (A.D. 1461) which is written in the Sarada characters. Its use in Kashmir continues even to this day, though it is confined only to the older generation of the priestly class. Its use in inscriptions even as late as the 18th century is testified by the Digom (Kapal-mochan, district Shopian) inscription of (Vikrama) 1846 (A.D. 1789). In Chamba and Kangra, it remained a popular script till the 13th century A.D. when it was replaced by its descendant, the Devāseṣa.

15 EI., X, pp. 79 ff.
16 JASB, VII, pp. 87-89.
17 Cf. Vogel, Antiquities I, p. 43.