CHAPTER IV
THE ŚĀRADĀ ALPHABET
AREA OF ITS USE

Bühler\(^1\) observes that the Śāradā alphabet appears from about A.D. 800 in Kashmir and in the north-eastern Punjab (Kangra and Chamba). Since the publication of Bhūler's 'Indian Palaeography', number of Śāradā inscriptions have come to light and we are now in a position to say that Śāradā as an epigraphic alphabet was extensively used not only in Kashmir, Kangra and Chamba but also in Gandhāra, Ladakh, Jammu and even Haryana. The important inscriptions of each region are briefly noted below.

**Gandhāra**

A good number of Śāradā inscriptions have been discovered in Gandhāra but most of these are either fragmentary or defaced and now lying in the Lahore and Peshawar museums. The earliest known inscription is the stone inscription from Hund in the Attock district, dated (Harsa) \textit{samvat} 168-169 corresponding to A.D. 774, 775.\(^2\)

The other important inscriptions are those of the Shāhī kings Bhima-dava and Jayapāla discovered at Dewai in the Gadun territory\(^3\) and Barikot in Upper Swat.\(^4\) The last known inscription from this region is the stone inscription of certain Vañhadaka, now preserved in the Peshawar museum and dated Laukika 538 or A.D. 1461.\(^5\)

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1 *Ind. Pal.*, p.76
2 *El.*, XXII, pp.97 ff.
3 *El.*, XXI, pp.298-300.
5 *El.* X, pp.79-81.
Kashmir

Considering the fact that the Śāradā alphabet has been in use in Kashmir from the 9th century A.D. to this day, the number of Śāradā epigraphic records discovered so far in the Valley is by no means large and surprisingly enough not a single copper plate grant in Śāradā has been discovered so far. The earliest specimens are the legends on the coins of the Utpala (or Varman) dynasty, (A.D. 855/56-939).6 The earliest inscriptions discovered so far are the two inscriptions of the reign of queen Diddā (A.D. 980/1-1003), one incised on a stone slab, discovered from a private house at Srinagar7 and the second engraved on the pedestal of an image of Bodhisattva Padmapāṇī and preserved in the S.P.S. Museum Srinagar. The other important inscriptions are: (1) the Arigom stone slab inscription of Laukika 73 or A.D. 11938, (2) the Kotiher inscription of the reign of Shihab-ud-din, dated (Laukika) 45 or A.D. 1369,9 (3) the Khonamuh stone slab inscription of the reign of Zain-ul-Abidin, dated Kali 4530 or A.D. 1428.10 The last known inscription from Kashmir belongs to the end of the 18th century. It has been discovered at Digom or Kapal Mochan in the Shopian district and is dated (Vikrama) 1846 or A.D. 1789.11

Ladakh

A few inscriptions in Śāradā characters were noticed in the Ladakh area by Vigne,12 Cunningham13 and

6 CMI, Pls. 4,5; JASB., XLVIII, p.18.
7 El., XXVII, pp.34 ff.
8 El., IX, pp. 300-302.
9 Now preserved in the S.P.S. Museum Srinagar.
10 Marshall, Note. pp.18 ff.
11 JASB, VII, pp.87-89.
13 Ladakh, p.31.
Francke. Two of them mention the Bodhisattva Maitveya. One of them is dated in the 7th year, probably of the Laukika era.

Jammu

In the Jammu province, a few inscriptions in Śāradā have come to light. Two of them were discovered at Dacchan and Zaji-Nai in the Doda district. That of Dacchan is dated in the reign of Śrī Nanta-deva, who may be identified with the king Ananta of Kashmir. It is dated in the year 12 presumably of the Laukika era and corresponds to A.D. 1036. The other is comparatively of a late period and on palaeographic grounds can be assigned to the 16th century A.D. Two more inscriptions were noticed by Vogel, one in a ruined temple on the ancient site of Babor, ancient Baāpur, 17 miles east of Jammu and the other on a stone linga at Kshtawar. Both the inscriptions are now too much defaced to be deciphered.

Chamba

The number of Śāradā inscriptions discovered from Chamba is considerable. They include inscriptions on stone, copper plate grants and votive inscriptions on images. The earliest known Śāradā inscription from this erstwhile hill State is the Sarahan Prasasti which is undated but on palaeographic grounds can be assigned to

14 **History of Western Tibet**, p.52.
17 **Antiquities.**, I, p.18.
18 These have been edited and published by Vogel in his **Antiquities of Chamba State**, Part I. A brief account of them has been given below in Chapter VII.
19 *op. cit.*, pp.152 ff.
the 9th century A.D.

Kangra

Only a limited number of Sarada records have come to light in Kangra so far. The most important and the well preserved inscriptions are the well known Baijnath Prasastis dated Saka 1126 or A.D. 1204, and a brief inscription engraved on the pedestal of a statuette of Jain Tirthankara Parsvanath, dated (Laukika) saṃvat 30 corresponding to A.D. 1254.

Haryana

The use of the Sarada alphabet in the modern State of Haryana is attested to by a stone slab inscription discovered at Palam, 12 miles south-west of Delhi. Only the concluding one and a half lines are in Sarada and the rest is in Nāgarī. The inscription is dated in the reign of Balban, Vikrama, 1337 or A.D. 1281.

20 El., I, pp. 97 ff.
21 Ibid., p.120
22 JASB., XLIII, pp.104 ff.