

When talking about writing, we see absence of writing in early India or we can say traditional India. There were many reservations about writing in early India. On the whole, traditional India was much less oriented toward the written word than many other ancient and traditional cultures such as those of classical China and Japan or of the Islamic world. Brahma and also his wife (or daughter) Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, being regularly depicted in sculpture with a book in hand. But in contrast written knowledge was referred to as money in someone else's hand in early times. But we do get many inscriptions from Indian subcontinent and they pose a serious proof that writing do existed. **Panini used the word LIPI to denote the script.** Jatakas and Vinaya-Pitaka of Buddhist text refers to numerous explicit references to writing. Megasthenes suggested that Indians knew writing but his contemporary nearchos said that Indians do not know writing. Some scholars have proposed a connection with the proto-historic Harappan script. Mahasthan and Sohgaure inscriptions have been proposed as precursor. Recent claim of '**pre-Asokan Brahmi**' on the basis of evidence from **Anuradhapura**. B.B. Lal proposed that the 'script' on the pottery from Vikramkhola (Odisha) is a 'missing link' between historical Brahmi and the proto-historic script of Harappa. But this theory is generally not accepted. **Richard Salomon** argued that these are 'pseudo-inscriptions' or 'Graffiti'.

Ahmed Hasan Dani later proved that inscriptions of Mahasthan and Sohgaure were either contemporary to or later than Asokan inscriptions.

F.R. Allchin and Robin Coningham excavated the famous site of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka and suggested an early date on the basis of stratigraphic evidence. From stratigraphic layers of that site they came across some sherds and they suggested that these sherds should be taken as evidence of pre Asokan Brahmi because the layer to which they hailed was dated prior to 3rd century BCE.

After more than a century of study, the early history of writing in India remains problematic. It begins with the still un deciphered script found on the seals and other relics of the Indus Valley civilization, which flourished, according to recent estimates, around the second half of the third and first half of the second millennium B.C. **after the decline of Harappa we see a creation of vacuum of writing**

roughly from 1750s to 260 B.C.E. many historians and epigraphists have addressed the question of the possibility of literacy in pre-Mauryan India through the examination of literary and other evidence. This vacuum was later replaced by Brahmi and kharosthi scripts in which Brahmi had pan India appearance. Here we will talk about the origin and development of Brahmi. Unlike Kharosthi, which was always geographically limited and died out at a relatively early the Brahmi script appeared in the third century B.C. as a fully developed pan-Indian national script (sometimes used as a second script even within the proper territory of Kharosthi in the northwest) and continued to play this role throughout history, becoming the parent of all of the modern Indian scripts both within India and beyond. The name Brahmi seems apt for the script. Let's talk about its nomenclature in brief. Brahmi is principle script of all the four scripts used in Ashokan inscriptions i.e. Brahmi kharosthi Greek and Aramaic. Brahmi used to write Prakrit language, kharosthi used to write Gandhari Prakrit. But Brahmi most widely used. According to brahmanical thinkers brahmi was the tongue of brahma. Sarasvati is associated with writing and Brahmi – depicted in sculptures. Buddhist text Lalitavistara gives the name brahmi. **Jain texts Pannavanasutta and Samavayangasutta records the use of brahmi script.**

10th chapter of Lalitavistara has list of 64 scripts in which major ones are brahmi kharosthi, Puskarasari and Angalipi. Chinese Buddhist text "fa yuan chu lin" has a list of scripts but it doesn't records the name, it tells us that one is left to right and second is rights to left. After their decipherment we came to know that Brahmi is left to write and kharosthi is right to left.so we can clearly corroborate the evidences of Lalitavistara and Chinese texts. That's how we came to know the name of the scripts in precise terms. **E.J.T Hultzsch** and other scholars termed the script Asokan/Maurya brahmi. Middle phase was termed Kushana brahmi, later phase was termed Gupta brahmi, because at that point of time the scholars were looking for the dynastic attributions of scripts.in late 20th century D.C. Sircar wrote a pioneering article 'an introduction to Indian epigraphy, and he preferred the term 'Early Brahmi'

Sircar suggested that we should not analyse brahmi dynastically because from 3rd century BCE to 1st century BCE brahmi appeared not only on Asokan inscriptions but also on various contemporary inscriptions.

The origin of Brahmi script is most controversial problem in Indian epigraphy. Ever since its decipherment by James Prinsep it is major debate in scholarly circles. Different scholars have different views upon this but we can classify their theories in basically two groups. One is **indigenous theory** and the other **extraneous derivation/ foreign derivation.**

One of the early theories suggesting the origin is by **Alexander Cunningham** who said that Brahmi had its root from a pictographic-logographic script. The brahmi letter 'kha' he suggested that kha has

developed with a picture of mattock which is used to dig up the soil, also called 'khan'. But Cunningham wasn't able to derive the whole set of letters of Brahmi with the help of this theory.

G.H. Ojha and later, following him **R.B. Pandey** and **T.P. Verma** suggested that brahmi of course had an indigenous genesis. The Brahmi characters were invented by the genius of the Indian people who were far ahead of other peoples of ancient times in linguistics and who evolved vast Vedic literature involving a definite knowledge of alphabet.

Some scholars tried to prove the connection of brahmi with Harappan script. This possibility was first proposed by **S. Langdon** in 1931, supported by **G.R. Hunter**, and endorsed by several later authorities, including **D.C. Sircar**. Their theory was based on two ground. One is Diacritical modification and the other is subjoined symbols of scripts. Diacritical modification means adding some lines or strokes to already available symbol to give it a different meaning, which is present in both Harappan script and brahmi. While subjoining symbols means that there are two sets of symbols when joined together create a new symbol with entirely different meaning.

such a connection between the proto-historic Indus writing and the later Brahmi script should not be taken for granted, that is, it should not be assumed a priori that two scripts of the same cultural area but different periods must be historically or genetically connected. It is all too easy, given the large number of characters in the Indus script (over four hundred), to find superficial connections between similar shapes of some characters in the two scripts, but these are of little value unless and until the Indus script itself is convincingly deciphered and the alleged graphic similarities can be correlated to phonetic values.

Now if we turn to foreign origin we find that **Princep** suggest Greek origin of brahmi while **Falk** suggested that brahmi was originated from Greek but based on Kharoshti. **K. Ottfried Miller**, who proposed that Brahmi was derived from Greek after the invasion of Alexander the Great.

A modified version of the Greek theory was proposed by **J. Halevy**, who derived six of the Brahmi characters (a, ba, ga, dha, tha, and na) from the corresponding Greek letters, and the rest of the characters from **Kharosthi** and **Aramaic**. Some scholars suggested that Brahmi originated from South Semitic group of scripts while others tend to believe that it originated from North Semitic group of scripts. Talking of South Semitic scripts, some scholars say that south **Arabic Himyaritic** is responsible for origin of Brahmi but they could not offer systematic order of derivation for this. Later in 1875 **Francois Lenormant** argued that Brahmi originated from a different south Semitic script that is 'Sabaean'. There are some problems with the south Semitic point of derivation. One is that it cannot explain the entire structure on Brahmi script. Only some letters of brahmi like 'ba, ya, va' can be derived directly. Another problem is that instead of looking at technicalities of the script, these scholars emphasized more on the direction of writing that is left to right. So these were the few

concerns of south Semitic derivation which were later questioned by the scholars who proposed an alternative mode of derivation known as North Semitic. Here also scholars are divided into two groups. One group is supporting 'Phoenician' as being the actual progenitor supported by scholars such as **Friedrich Kopp** and **Albert Weber** and by **Georg Buhler**. But none of these scholars could provide a complete comparative list of Phoenician and Brahmi letters. And thus they could not demonstrate that each of the letter was a derived from the Phoenician precursor.

And other group talking about Aramaic being the inspiration for Brahmi. Aramaic was supported by A.C. Burnell in 1874 and then by D. Diringer in 1948. Richard Saloman says that "if the hypothesis of the invention of Brahmi under Asoka's sponsorship is correct, this re-creation may be attributed to the emperor's desire to invent a distinct imperial script, perhaps under the inspiration of old Persian cuneiform, which would be suited to the promulgation of edicts in written form". This is a reasonable argument as we know that Mauryan Empire had relations with Persian Empire and Mauryan writing could be influenced with Persian Cuneiform.

Buhler's North Semitic hypothesis has much merit, it is far from perfect, and has not surprisingly been subjected to extensive criticism on various methodological, procedural, and historical grounds. Ojha, for example), was strongly critical of Buhler's manipulations of the forms of the supposed Phoenician prototypes, alleging that by such methods one could "derive" virtually any script from any other.

In particular, the possibility that there is ultimately some historical connection between the Indus Valley script and Brahmi cannot be decisively ruled out, but unless and until some significant progress toward the decipherment of the former is achieved, we can only treat the matter as an unproven hypothesis.

But in South Asia, as we have the Semitic hypothesis is not widely accepted, though there too some scholars, notably **A. H. Dani** in his influential work on Indian palaeography have cautiously supported some form of Semitic derivation. Part of the problem is that, despite the defects in **Buhler's** methodology and data, no one since him has undertaken a comprehensive and careful palaeographic re-examination of the Semitic hypothesis.

In conclusion, there are strong systemic and palaeographic indications that the Brahmi script derived from a Semitic prototype, which, mainly on historical grounds, is most likely to have been Aramaic.

However, the details of this problem remain to be worked out, and in any case it is unlikely that a complete letter-by-letter derivation will ever be possible; for Brahmi may have been more of an adaptation and remodelling, rather than a direct derivation.

Let us now have a look on the development and changes in Brahmi after the Mauryan period. Mauryan Brahmi had pan India significance and it is a category of its own.

But after the decline of the Mauryas, Brahmi went some changes across the region. Brahmi has developed in north Indian and south Indian variety. In about the first three centuries of the Christian era, the gradual geographical differentiation of the Brahmi script continued to the point that we begin to discern several distinct regional varieties. Dani has argued that it is misleading to trace the development of the script in dynastic terms. *. Thus, for the period in question, he discerns several local varieties, among which the Kausambi, Mathura, western Deccan, and eastern Deccan styles are of particular importance. The forms of the basic characters as well underwent significant modifications, such that for the first time in this period (especially in the latter half thereof) the script began to differ markedly in its overall appearance and ductus from the early forms of Brahmi.* Among the new developments in this period, several characters such as **r (both initial and post consonantal), au, Na, h (visarga), and halanta (vowel less consonants) first came into common use. These are, of course, the result of the growing popularity in this period of Sanskrit or "Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit".**

Also in this period there first emerged a tendency toward **calligraphic elaboration**. Thus characters such as a, ka, and ra, which end with verticals at the bottom, developed ornamental loops to the lower left. During 4th to 6th century CE in gupta period various regional connotations started appearing in regional brahmi script. during this era the degree of regional differentiation continued to increase. The northern and southern groups were by now clearly differentiated, and other distinct regional scripts made their appearance, for instance, in central India. In the north, the inscriptions of the Guptas and their contemporaries were written in regional varieties of the northern script, which may be called, following Sircar's terminology "**late Brahmi**".

In general, the northern scripts of the Gupta era are characterized by the continued extension of various forms of the head mark or, as it now can be called, the top line. The shapes of the individual characters also continued to develop; among the changes which prefigure important characteristics of later scripts are the prolongation of the right arm in ga, ta, bha, and sa, the looped form of na and the development of the dot inside tha into a horizontal line.

In central India the peculiar "**box-headed script**" began to develop during this period. The principal characteristic of this script, namely, the square head mark, is noted in some northern Gupta inscriptions, but its full development, with the letters themselves moulded into characteristically square, angular forms, first appeared in the inscriptions of **the Vakatakas**. This highly stylized script enjoyed a long period of popularity in central India, where it continued to be used into the seventh century, and also spread to the south, where it appears in some **Kadamba and Pallava inscriptions**. In the south, we now begin to see clearly, for instance, in the inscriptions of the Kadambas and early

Chalukyas, the strong preference for rounded forms and wavy lines which is to characterize most of the southern scripts of subsequent centuries up to modern times.

Around the late sixth century, the so-called Gupta script of northern India evolved into a distinct new script for which the preferred name is Siddhamatrka, which was to have a profound effect on the subsequent development of the northern scripts. Early specimens of this script include the Bodh-Gaya inscription of Mahanaman and the Lakkha Mandal prasasti. It continued to be used into the tenth century, undergoing a gradual transformation into Devanagari during the latter part of this period. The Siddhamatrka script is principally characterized by a strongly angular aspect, with a sharp angle (whence the term "acute-angled script") at the lower right corner of each letter, reflecting the influence of pen-and-ink writing on the epigraphic script.

We cannot say that all these variations were caused deliberately to Brahmi, there were some other factors involved like the instruments involved in the writing and the material on which the inscriptions were written. The circumstances in which inscriptions were made and the change of hands. All these factors also contribute to the changes in writing and in strokes.

Thus we saw the issues behind the nomenclature of Brahmi script and its importance in Indian subcontinent and dealt with the issue with its origin. We came to know that there are two theories behind its origin. One is of indigenous origin and other is related to foreign derivation. While talking of Indian origin we see that there are two camps, one is Dravid group and other is North-India. And in foreign derivation theory we have two groups. One is Egyptian which talks about Greek influence and other is Semitic which is further divided into North and South Semitic scripts. But still we don't have any concrete proof as to how and when did Brahmi originate and whether it existed before Mauryas also or was it an invention of Mauryas? There are still many unanswered questions to which scholars are working hard to find the answers.