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DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRONICS & COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING

III YEAR/ VI SEMESTER

19HST105 ESSENCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIT 2 INDIAN LITERATURE, CULTURE, TRADITION, AND PRACTICES
Evolution of script and languages in India: Harappan Script and Brahmi
Script.



EVOLUTION OF SCRIPT AND LANGUAGES IN INDIA: HARAPPAN SCRIPT AND BRAHMI SCRIPT

Difference between Language and Script

A language usually refers to the spoken language, a method of communication. A script refers to a collection of characters used to write one or more languages. A language is a method of communication. Scripts are writing systems that allow the transcription of a language, via alphabet sets.

Indus script (Harappan script)

After the pictographic and petroglyph representations of early man, the first evidence of a writing system can be seen in the Indus valley civilization. The earliest evidence of which is found on the pottery and pot shreds of Rahman Dheri and these potter's marks, engraved or painted, are strikingly similar to those appearing in the Mature Indus symbol system.

Later the writing system can be seen on the seals and sealings of Harappan period. Most inscriptions containing these symbols are extremely short (5 symbols), making it difficult to judge whether or not these symbols constituted a script used to record a language, or even symbolize a writing system.



The long inscriptions are found in Gujarat particularly Dholavira where we find slabs of stone inscribed with inscriptions which might represent name plates of the houses with 24 to 34 symbols.

The characters are largely pictorial but include many abstract signs. The inscriptions are thought to have been written mostly from right-to-left (because there are several instances of the symbols being compressed on the left side, as if the writer is running out of space at the end of the row there), but they sometimes follow a boustrophedonic (sarphalekhana) style. The number of principal signs is about 400. Since that is considered too large a number for each character to be a phonogram, the script is generally believed to instead be logo-syllabic.

There were arguments that the Indus script is nonlinguistic, which symbolise families, clans, gods, and religious concepts and are similar to totem poles. Based on the extreme brevity of the inscriptions, the existence of too many rare signs and the lack of the random-looking sign repetition that is typical of language.

But others have argued that it is a linguistic system and the debate shifted to whether it is the predecessor of Dravidian script or the Brahmi script.

Some scholars have argued that the Brahmi script has some connection with the Indus system, but others, such as Iravatham Mahadevan, have argued that the script had a relation to a Dravidian language. This debate has been further fuelled by the arguments of who were the initial and original inhabitants of India the Aryan's or the Dravidian's.



Brahmi script

Brahmi is the originator of most of the present Indian scripts, including Devanagari, Bengali, Tamil, and Malayalam etc. It developed into two broad types in Northern and Southern India, in the Northern one being more angular and the Southern one being more circular. It was deciphered in 1838 by James Prinsep. The best-known Brahmi inscriptions are the rock-cut edicts of Ashoka in north-central India, dated to 250–232 BCE.

Many scholars support that Brahmi probably derives from Aramaic influence and others support that the Brahmi language can have some Indus script influence.

The Brahmi script confirms to the syllabic writing system and was used more for writing Prakrit, the language spoken by ordinary people initially and later Sanskrit also was written in this script.

According to the epigraphers- All Indian scripts are derived from Brahmi. There are two main families of scripts:

- 1) **Devanagari**, which is the basis of the languages of northern and western India: Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Dogri, Panjabi, etc.
- 2) **Dravidian**, which shows the formats of Grantha and Vatteluttu.



The evolution of various scripts of India from Brahmi Script

Kharosthi Script

It is the sister script and contemporary of Brahmi. It was written from right to left. It was used in the Gandhara culture of North-Western India and is sometimes also called the Gandhari Script. Its inscriptions have been found in the form of Buddhist Texts from present day Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Gupta Script

It is also known as the Late Brahmi script. It was used for writing Sanskrit in the Gupta period. It gave rise to the Nagari, Sarada and Siddhamatrika scripts which in turn gave rise to the most important scripts of India such as Devanagari, Bengali etc.

Nagari Script

It was an Eastern variant of the Gupta script. It is an early form of the Devanagari script. It branched off into many other scripts such as Devanagari. It was used to write both Prakrit and Sanskrit.

It is the main script at present to write standard Hindi and Nepali. It is also used presently to write Sanskrit and is one of the most used writing systems in the world. It is composed of Deva meaning, God and Nagari meaning city, which meant that it, was both religious and urbane or sophisticated.



It is written from left to right, has a strong preference for symmetrical rounded shapes within squared outlines, and is recognisable by a horizontal line that runs along the top of full letters. In a cursory look, the Devanagari script appears different from other Indic scripts such as Bangla, Oriya or Gurmukhi, but a closer examination reveals they are very similar except for angles and structural emphasis.

Sarada Script

The Sarada or Sharada script of the Brahmic family of scripts, developed around the 8th century. It was used for writing Sanskrit and Kashmiri. Originally more widespread, its use became later restricted to Kashmir, and it is now rarely used except by the Kashmiri Pandit community for ceremonial purposes. Sarada is another name for Saraswati, the goddess of learning.

Siddhamatrika script (Kutila)

This script was prominent in eastern India in 6th century AD leading to subsequent evolution of Gaudi script. This Eastern Nagari script or Bengali-Assamese script defines the unified usage of Bengali script and Assamese script though minor variations within. Its usage is associated with the two main languages Bengali and Assamese.



THANK YOU