



ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SCRIPTS OF ODISIA AND BENGALI LANGUAGE IN RELATION TO BRAHMI

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ABSTRACT

India is a multilingual country with eleven Classical languages. Tamil(2004), Sanskrit(2005), Telugu and Kannada(2008), Malayalam(2013), Odia(2014) and Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Pali, Prakrit(2024) are Classical Languages of India. Scripts of such languages are unique in characteristics. Each classical language with its script is having long heritage. Devnagari is the script of Sanskrit language, while Assamese and Bengali languages use one script. Similarly script of Tamil is Tamil, Telugu is Telugu, Kannada is Kannada, Malayalam is Malayalam and Odia is Odia. But the fact is that such scripts have originated from some other script and got shaped in the course of time with a lot of changes, especially Bengali and Odia scripts got enriched through Brahmi script. In this joint paper both the scholars trying to highlight the features of Odia and Bengali languages along with their scripts in relation to Brahmi.

KEYWORDS : Archaeology, Classical, Doctrine, Solace, Conviction, Symbolic, Indus, Linguistics, Anthropology, Eastern

Origin and development of Indian scripts fascinated scholars across the world, especially from the field of Linguistics, Anthropology, and Archaeology. Script gives identity to a language. It shapes characteristics of that particular language. Because of script that language shapes the way of thinking of speech community and determines what they can think about. Script converts spoken to written form of a language. So script is an asset of a language. In this context if we analyse journey of scripts in India, we can notice Brahmi was the major script of India. Most of Indian scripts got their shape and feature from Brahmi. Historically speaking Brahmi was popularly known as Ashokakhyara, Ashokan Script. Indian scripts mostly derived and developed on the basis of Brahmi script it seems. As we all know Lord Buddha gave to the whole world his message of peace, love, unity and understanding years ago in a simple manner, which carried faith and conviction not only to the learned but also what is more which carried hope and inspiration to the people of the world. Both Brahmi script and Pali language played vital role for this journey. It gave solace and strength to millions throughout the world, no arms and ammunition helped in spreading of the doctrine to countries far and near, rather script and language were two instruments. So, an eminent personality R. F. Kuang rightly observed that languages are not just made of words, they are modes of looking at the world, and they are keys to civilisation. The Brahmi script is the earliest known alphabetic writing system in India. An aspect of the matter that is referred to, in such a script analysis is that between the Indus script and the advent of Ashokan Brahmi. Prakrit is a group of vernacular Classical Middle Indo Aryan languages that were used in the Indian Sub-continent from around 5th century B. C to 12th century B. C. Apabhramsa, Ardhamagadhi, Dramili, Elu, Gandhari, Gaudi, Kamarupi, Magadhi, Maharashtrai, Paisachi, Pali, Shauraseni, Khasa etc. were some names to be cited here as examples. Script in Buddhist texts can be of Thai script, Burmese script, Sinhalese script, Romanize script which is developed from Buda or Aksara Buda or Gunung script which is an archaic script of Lord Buddha it seems. Both Odia and Bengali languages are having their own scripts which are developed through Brahmi script. Devanagari script is used in languages like Hindi, Marathi, Nepali, Sanskrit. Bengali script is the only classical script used by two classical languages i.e. Assamese and Bengali, similarly Punjabi language is having Gurumukhi script, Santali language is having Olchiki script, Manipuri language is having Meitei script and Urdu language is having Perso- Arabic script. Scripts like Indus, Gupta, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Brahmi, Kalinga, Kharosthi, Kadamba and

Grantha played vital role in Indian languages. As we know script is a particular system or style of writing, it can be comprehended as symbolic representation of sounds of a particular language.

There are eleven Classical Languages in India like Tamil (2004), Sanskrit (2005), Telugu (2008), Kannada (2008), Malayalam (2013), Odia (2014) and Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Pali and Prakrit in 2024. All such languages developed through their original scripts, especially scripts of Odia and Bengali shaped with influence of Pali and Prakrit languages in general, Brahmi script in particular. Rock edicts, Copper plates, palm leaves and travel documents of many foreign scholars are sources of classical languages as well as their scripts. Origin and development of scripts can be analysed on the basis of such sources. Scholars like Herman Koolke, R. D. Banerjee, James Prinsep, Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Satyanarayan Rajguru, Kedarnath Mohapatra and Kunja Bihari Tripathy have emphasized on how Brahmi script influenced in the origin and development of both Odia and Bengali scripts. The script of Bengali language is known as Banga Lipi got developed through Brahmi script of 3rd Century B. C, then Gupta Script of 3rd-4th Century A. D, then got separated into two divisions like Eastern and Western.

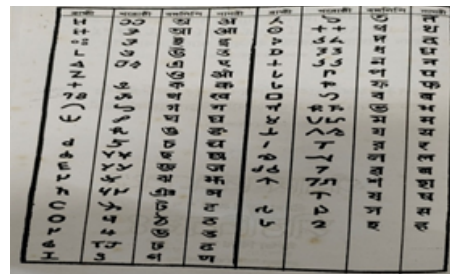


Fig. 1 Development of Bengali script

From Eastern part Bengali script originated since 6th Century A. D from scripts like Siddha Matrika, Kutil script of 7th century A. D, Nagari/ Devanagari of 7th-11th Century A. D, Eastern Part 9th -10th Century A. D. Historically speaking Bengali script got developed through Northern branch of Brahmi script it seems. The first reference of Proto Bengali script was Narayan Pal's Copper Plate of 9th Century A. D. and Mahi Pal's Bangarh Copper plate. After this except the use of letters like Ch, Chha, Jha discovered during the age of Sen Era. One idol excavated in Dhaka of Bangladesh dating 12th Century A. D is considered as the example of full-fledged Bengali script. A Grammar of

the Bengal Language by noted scholar Nathaniel Brassy Halhet is an example of full-fledged Bengali script.

In this context if we see chronological development of Indian scripts in general and Odia script in particular clearly we can notice the influence of Brahmi script. In those days Pali was an official language with Brahmi as its script, whereas Prakrit was spoken varieties of language. Two deciphered rock edicts of Ashokan era of 3rd century B.C i.e. Dhauli and Jaugada clearly showed us the footprints of Brahmi script and Pali language. Chronologically the script was developed and formed to Odia script. Eminent epigraphists and archaeologists like Rakhal Das Banerjee, Dinesh Chandra Sircar, Paramanand Acharya, Kedarnath Mohapatra, Kunja Bihari Tripathy and some veteran Bengali scholars like Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Sukumar Sen and many more in their research work clearly mentioned that Pali and Prakrit languages have influenced the formation of Odia and Bengali languages as well as their script, in this context Brahmi or the Ashokakhyara played a vital role. The features or characteristics of Odia script in its proto form what we see in rock edicts are foot prints of the same. If we consider scripts of both Odia and Bengali language we may cite here the right observation of a great Linguist and former Professor of IIT, Kanpur Prof. B. N. Patnaik. In an article entitled "Some Reflections on Odia Language" he says, "There are some phonological differences between the two languages. For instance, Odia had retroflex sounds, which Bengali did not have. Odia had the dental sibilant "s" alone, whereas Bengali had the palatal "sh" alone. Despite years of contact between these languages, these differences are still there. But Bengali advocates considered the phonological differences inconsequential. They argued the script difference was the major problem."

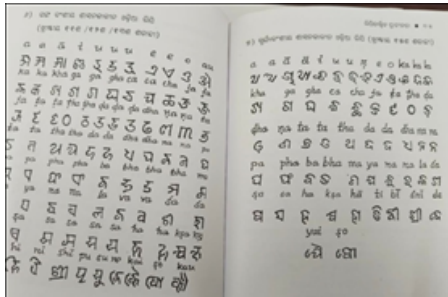


Fig. 2. Development of Odia Script

Odia and Bengali were granted classical language status by the Government of India. The recommendation was based on Odia and Bengali's long history and a rich literary heritage. Both languages have produced a vast body of literature including epics, poetry, novels, plays and religious texts. Aside from these, they have their own scripts and grammar. Historically, culturally and sociologically both Odia and Bengali languages continue to thrive as language of expression, identity, and unity. So we may conclude that scripts of Odia and Bengali though originated and developed with the influence of Brahmi, but features of both these scripts especially form and function proved their own uniqueness in the course of time. The impact of Brahmi script in origin and development of both Odia and Bengali scripts are noticeable. Classical languages like Assamese, Bengali, Odia, Pali and Prakrit influenced each other during their journey because of the relation and impact of Brahmi script. Though Brahmi was used in rock edicts in earlier days but later on it influenced many Indian scripts in their origin and development in general and Odia and Bengali in particular. National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has vast scope for Classical languages, especially for their patronage and preservation. The preservation and promotion of such languages is considered as cultural wealth of India. Scripts of classical languages have long tradition and heritage, on which

languages got own identities. The importance of script in formation and function of language given due weightage by scholars always. We may conclude that origin and development of scripts of classical languages like Odia and Bengali in relation to Brahmi may be highlighted in future by scholars of various fields i.e. Language, Linguistics, Anthropology, History and Archaeology in depth. This paper is just a beginning in this field of research we may say.

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