

Indian Pandits would prefer to designate the immense series of their sacred books by such words as **Veda**, or **Vidyā** (from *vid*, 'to know'), **Śruti** (from *śru*, 'to hear'), **Śāstra** (from *śās*, 'to teach'), **Smṛiti** (from *smṛi*, 'to remember'); the reason being that, like Papias, Bishop of Hierapolis (whose date, according to Dean Farrar, is 140 A.D.), they consider 'that the things from books are not so advantageous as things from the living and abiding voice.' Nor must we forget that the climate of India was unfavourable to the preservation of such writing material as existed in ancient times.

And besides this may it not be conjectured that the invention and general diffusion of alphabetic writing was to Indian learned men, gifted with prodigious powers of memory, and equipped with laboriously acquired stores of knowledge, very much what the invention and general use of machinery was to European handicraftsmen? It seemed to deprive them of the advantage and privilege of exercising their craft. It had to be acquiesced in, and was no doubt prevalent for centuries before the Christian era, but it was not really much encouraged. And even to this day in India the man whose learning is treasured up in his own memory is more honoured than the man of far larger acquirements, whose knowledge is either wholly or partially derived from books, and dependent on their aid for its communication to others<sup>1</sup>.

It seems, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that, when the idea of the necessity for inventing alphabetic signs began to impress itself on the minds of Semitic races, it had not taken such deep root among the inhabitants of India as to lead to the invention or general adoption of any one fixed system of writing of their own. It seems, indeed, more probable that learned men in that country viewed the art of writing too apathetically to make a stand against the introduction of alphabetical ideas from foreign sources.

At all events there can be no antecedent improbability in the theory propounded by German Sanskritists that an early passage of phonographic symbols took place from a Phœnician centre eastward towards Mesopotamia and India, at about the same period as their passage westward towards Europe, namely, about 800 B.C.

It is not asserted that the exact channel by which they were transmitted has been satisfactorily demonstrated. Some think—and, as it seems to me, with much plausibility—that they may have been introduced through contact with the Greeks<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps a more likely conjecture is that Hindū traders, passing up the Persian Gulf, had commercial dealings with Aramæan traders in Mesopotamia, and, becoming acquainted with their graphic methods, imported the knowledge and use of some of their phonetic signs into India.

This view was first propounded in the writings of the learned Professor A. Weber of Berlin, and has recently been ably argued in a work on 'Indische Palæographie,' by the late Professor Bühler of Vienna (published in 1896). If Indian Pandits will consult that most interesting standard work, they will there find a table exhibiting the most ancient of known Phœnician letters side by side with the kindred symbols used in the Moabite inscriptions of King Mesha—which, as before intimated, is known to be as old as about 850 B.C.—while in parallel columns, and in a series of other excellent tables, are given the corresponding phonographic symbols from the numerous inscriptions of King Aśoka scattered everywhere throughout Central and Northern India<sup>3</sup>.

These inscription-alphabets are of two principal kinds:—

The first kind is now called Kharoshthī (or 'Ass's lip' form of writing, *lipi* being understood)<sup>4</sup>. This belongs to the North-west corner of the Panjāb and Eastern Afghānistān. It was used by King Aśoka for a few of his rock and stone inscriptions, and is a kind of writing the prototype of which was probably introduced into Persia about 500 B.C., and brought by Persian rulers into Northern India in the fourth

<sup>1</sup> Pandit Śyāmajī in his second paper, read at the Leyden Congress, said: 'We in India believe even at the present day that oral instruction is far superior to book-learning in maturing the mind and developing its powers.'

<sup>2</sup> Certainly, as I think, the change of direction in the writing may have been due to Greek influence. Pāṇini, who probably lived about 400 B.C., gives as an example of feminine nouns the word *Yavanānī*, which Kātyāyana interprets to mean 'the Greek alphabet;' and we know that Greek coins and imitations of Greek coins, unearthed in North-western India, prove the existence of that alphabet there before Alexander the Great's time. Hindū receptivity of Greek influences is illustrated by the number of astronomical words derived directly from the Greeks to be found scattered throughout the pages of the present Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Aśoka, who called himself Priya-darsin, and was the grandson of Candra-gupta, did for Buddhism what Constantine did for Christianity, by adopting it as his own creed. Buddhism then became the religion of the whole kingdom of Magadha, and therefore of a great portion of India; and Aśoka's edicts, inscribed on rocks and pillars (about the middle of the third century B.C.),

furnish the first authentic records of Indian history. Yet the language of these inscriptions cannot be said to be exactly identical with so-called Māgadhī Prākṛit, nor with the Pāli of the Buddhist sacred scriptures, although those forms of Prākṛit may be loosely called either Māgadhī or Pāli. Nor was the name Pāli originally applied to the *language* of the Buddhist Canon, but rather to the *line or series of passages* constituting a text (cf. the use of *tantra*). According to Professor Oldenberg the Vinaya portion of the texts existed in its present form as early as 400 B.C. The later Buddhist texts were written down not long after, and commentaries have since been compiled in Pāli and the languages of Ceylon, Siam, and Burma; the Pāli of Ceylon being affected by intercourse with Kalinga (Orissa).

<sup>4</sup> See this Kharoshthī fully described in Professor Bühler's book. The first names given to it were Ariano-Pāli, Bactro-Pāli, Indo-Bactrian, North Aśoka &c. Sir A. Cunningham called it Gāndhārian. Pandit Gaurī-Śaṃkar, in his interesting work *Prācīna-lipi-mālā* written in Hindī, calls it *Gāndhāra-lipi*. Some think that Kharoshthī is derived from the name of the inventor.