



## TOOLS USED BY A MANUSCRIPT-WRITER: AN ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** India has a long tradition of manuscript writing. Science has developed but ancient writing has a role to play. In this connection, it is very much necessary to see whether the ancient Indians had any contribution in any of these fields. On this background, it is very much gratifying to know that the veritable and perennial store-house of knowledge in Sanskrit-especially, still lying in unpublished manuscripts - is supposed to be indispensable in almost all the spheres of learning. Many scholars-Indian as well as westerners think it worthwhile to trace the roots of their discoveries to the ancient Indian literature- Hindu- Sanskrit. *Jaina-Ardhamāgadhī* and *Buddhist- Pāli* tradition. The present paper traces the tools of ancient method of writing.

**Keywords:** Tools, Manuscript, Writer, Sanskrit, *Ardhamāgadhī*, *pāli*, *lipi*, *lekhaka*.

### I. INTRODUCTION

In many cases, the scientists are proud to admit that their discoveries are nothing but a new interpretation of the facts already existing in ancient Indian literatures, couched in Sanskrit, *Ardhamāgadhī* and *pāli* language, the basic principle behind this tendency is the desire to look back to our wealth of wisdom or the glorious past. With this idea in view, I desire to bring to the notice of the readers the contribution of ancient India in the field of calligraphy-the art of beautiful writing. In this small paper, I shall describe the tools or the means that were used by the writers/ scribes for writing manuscripts. This will cover the qualities of a writer, the inks and pens and the seats of script or writing, that is , the things on which we write or inscribe the letters.

### II. THE ART OF WRITING

There are many works in Sanskrit dealing with the art of writing. The *lekhapaddhati* describes the pre-requisites of a good writer and particularly a Royal Writer- *Rājalekhaka* as follows:<sup>1</sup>

A writer should be intelligent, sincere, good at conversation, having good speed in writing, self-controlled, so that he does not get either overjoyed or disgusted or disturbed while writing.(It is suggestive of his concentration). He should know the sciences such as systems of Philosophy. So that he may not commit any mistakes and he can correct, if necessary, any mistakes in the text by means of his knowledge of different subjects. A royal writer must know all the languages and scripts from all regions with their characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

After the writer, we turn our attention to the actual script, its beauty, neatness etc. There are many verses which clearly describe the qualities of the script (*lipi*) and writer (*lekhaka*). These are a floating mass of literature with the traditional writers and it is very difficult to trace their origin. There is repetition in these verses, as they are from different sources and hence only a very general translation is given here.<sup>3</sup>

The *akṣaras* or letters must be circular, compact, equal and symmetrical, well-defined, that is neatly written in suitable measurements, having equal tops, that is written in one straight line and quite unmixed with other letters, so that there can be no confusion in reading or deciphering them, the distance between the letters and lines must be equal and similar.

### III. TOOLS FOR WRITING

There is another interesting Sanskrit verse (4) that describes the essential tools with which a writer is supposed to be equipped. Surprisingly, the tools enumerated start with the letter ka. I give below their English meanings.

*Kuṃpī*-ink-pot; *Kajjala*-ink; *Keśa*-hair; *Kambala*-blanket; *Kuśa*- a kind of grass, indicative of auspiciousness; *Kāmbī*-Line –marker; *Kalama*-pen; *Kṛpāṇikā*-knife; *kataraṇī*- a pair of scissors; *Kāṣṭha*- a wooden plank to keep the written paper; *kāgalam*-paper; *koṭari*-a small cabin; *kīkī*-eyes; *kalamadāna* – a box to keep all the essential things such as knife, pair of scissors, pen, ruler etc.; *kramaṇa*-legs; *kaṭī* – waist and *kāṅkara*- a small pebble to sharpen the point of the pen of baru/boru.

It may be pointed out here that this verse reflects the care taken by the poet even of every minor article also. Out of these 17 things, I shall deal with a few such as the pen, different kinds of inks and the materials on which something is written or inscribed, which is generally termed as ‘seat of the script,’ that is, *lipyāsana*.

**The pen:** The most important material of the writer is the writing tool, that is the pen or the *Lekhanī*. In keeping with the usual tendency of the Sanskrit authors/writers to analyze all things, the pen also is divided into four classes or castes. There are verses which describe the colour of the pen, the way it is to be held, its dimensions, merits and demerits and its desirability or otherwise etc. These can be summarized as follows : The Brahmin type of pen with white colour gives happiness, the *ṣatriya* type with red colour leads to poverty, the yellow-coloured *Āsurī*, that is, *Śudra* type of pen deprives the writer of his wealth. The pen having nine *āṅgulas* less than eight be used. The styles of holding the pens are also described. In those days also, the pen was considered to be a very valuable possession by the writers and they believed in one –man handling of that writing machine. They, therefore, avoid the lending and borrowing of pens, as every person has a different way and habit of holding the pen.

There were different kinds of *lekhanī* used in olden days.

1. Baru or boru –the red-pen: There are many types of these red-pens, such as white-baru, black-baru etc.
2. Stylus: A pointed iron instrument which was mainly used for engraving letters on the palm-leaves.
3. Jujaval: It was used to draw lines on the manuscripts and diagrams and colours on the *yantras* and *paṭas*-charts. The jujaval was made of iron and has a pair like the forceps of modern times. These were dipped in inks and then borders on the manuscripts and columns in the charts *yantras* etc. were drawn.
4. *Prākāra*- A Compass with a bow-pen: It was used to draw round figures on the *citrapaṭas*-charts or boards of pictures and *yantrapāṭas*- that is, boards of mystical diagrams. It was made of iron and was mainly used for drawing big and round figures.
5. Vataṛaḍu of ivory: It was used for making letters on the charts etc.
6. Inks- many kinds of inks were used in the writing of manuscripts. Some of them are as follows:
  - a) Golden and Silver inks : These inks were costly in those days also, hence, they were generally used in writing important religious/ scriptural manuscripts, especially, by the *jainas* and the *Bauddhas* and rarely by the Hindus. They were indicative of pomp, show, affluence and the royal patronage accorded to the artist-scribes.
  - b) Black-inks: These were used to write on paper hand cloth Ms
  - c) Red ink or *Hīṅgolaka*: This was used for red paints, writing colophons of manuscripts. Drawing border-lines on the sides of the folios and for drawing circular figures and straight lines in geometrical figures. It was also used for preparing colours like pink, orange etc.
  - d) Yellow ink or *Haratāla*: This yellow *sulphate* of arsenic was mainly used for erasing the unwanted letters/ wrongly written letters from writing on paper and cloth manuscripts. It was the correcting fluid of the olden days. It was also used for decorating and painting in manuscripts after mixing it with *Hīṅgolaka* etc.

After the inks, we turn to the actual *lipi-āsana*-the surfaces used for writing or engraving. I shall describe only three most important ones.

1. *Tāḍa*(la) *patra* or Palm- leaves: This was the oldest and widely used substratum for carving or engraving letters. These were durable and easily available with the advent of paper, this material almost lost its way in India, except the South India, where these trees grow in plenty and still it reigns supreme.
2. *Bhūrja*-*patra* or Birch-bark: This is the famous *lipyāsana* frequently referred to in Sanskrit literature. Its use was limited to the Northern parts of India, since, these trees grow in Himalayas. Still, it is used by drawing figures, *yantras* on it and wearing it as a talisman- *tāvīza* in Gujarati and *tāita* in Marathi.
3. Paper: This was the most widely used surface after the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The main reason for its wide- spread use was /is the easy way of writing on it as the plentiful quantity available at very cheaper cost.

Other skins of the trees like the *Agarutvak*, *Śolapatra* were also used.

After these important materials that were used by the scribes.

- 1) Ink-pots of brass with pen-holders: There were many varieties of inkpots of many artistic shapes.
- 2) Line-markers: These were used for making lines on the manuscripts by pressing them hard on the surface of the paper manuscripts.
- 3) Copper-blocks: These were used for different designs to decorate the blank spaces in centers as well as on the margins of the manuscripts.
- 4) Opaṇī: Burnisher for gold and silver writing on paper Mss.
- 5) A paper Glazer of Agate: Used for getting shine or gloss on the paper manuscripts by rubbing it, i.e. opaṇī, on the mss.
- 6) *Kataraṇī*: Iron scissors used for cutting paper etc.
- 7) Papier-Mache Box : Used for keeping writing materials.
- 8) Big Cowrie: Used as a cup or breaker for preparing red or yellow pigments. This cowrie is held on a box made of paper Mache.

We can restrict this paper by quoting a verse<sup>5</sup> which describes the difficulties suffered by the scribes.

*bhagnapṛṣṭikaṭigrīvā mandā(varkra) dṛṣṭiradhomukham/*

*kaṣṭhena likhyate śāstram yatnena paripālayet//*

Since the writers or scribes are faced with much difficulty in writing down the manuscripts, they give a piece of advice to all the concerned persons to be very careful in handling the manuscripts and to protect them from oil, water, loose-binding and they should not be given in the hands of the fools.

*tailāt rakṣet jalāt rakṣet rakṣet śītilabandhanāt/*

*mūrkhahaste na dātavyam etat vadati pustakam//<sup>6</sup>*

## CONCLUSION

The manuscripts were written documents handed down since long time. Various instruments were used for documentation. Those tools were recorded and feelings were also expressed through descriptions in various texts while writing the manuscript. The psychological status and physical illness were also recorded with humility at different cases with little variation. No doubt it was a very heavy task to write down on stylus also, the task of multiplication was extremely painstaking. These feelings create a human appeal to the readers for preservation as manuscripts are the real treasures of wisdom.

## REFERENCES

1. *medhāvī vākpaṭudhīrro laghuhasto jitendriyaḥ/ paraśāstraparijñātā eṣa lekhaka ucyate// Verse 1*
2. *sarvadeśākṣarābhijñāḥ sarvabhāṣāviśāradaḥ/ lekhakaḥ kathito rājñāḥ sarvādhikaraṇeṣu vai// Verse 2*
3. *lipisauṣṭhava or excellence or elegance of the script: akṣarāṇi samaśīrṣāṇi vartulāni dhanāni ca/ parasparamalagnāni yo likhet sa hi lekhakaḥ/ samāni samaśīrṣāṇi vartulāni dhanāni ca/ mātrāsu pratibandhāni yo jānāti sa lekhakaḥ // Verse 21*
4. *śīrṣo petān susampūrṇān śubhraśreṇigatān samān/ akṣarān vai likhet yastu lekhakaḥ sa varaḥ smṛtaḥ// Verse 30*
5. *kumpī kajjalakeśakambalamaho madhye ca śubhram kuṣam kāmbī kalma kṛpāṇikā kataraṇī kāṣṭham tathā kāgalam/ kīkī koṭari kalmadāna kramaṇe kaṭṭiḥ tathā kāmīkaro etai ramyakakākṣaraiśca sahitaḥ śāstram ca nityam likhet// Verse 41*
6. *bhagnapṛṣṭikaṭigrīvā mandā (bakra) dṛṣṭiradhomukham/ kaṣṭhena likhyate śāstram yatnena paripālayet// Verse 45*
6. ( Annonymous)

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