

AN OUTLINE OF COURSE IN KHAROṢṬĪ

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The objective of the lecture delivered on the script camp on Kharoṣṭī at Jñāna-Pravāha, Varanasi in the last week of November, 1999 was to train young epigraphists in the techniques of reading and interpreting records written in the Kharoṣṭī script. The study of early and obscure scripts is of vital significance for proper reconstruction of cultural history of early India. The Institute (Jñāna-Pravāha) deserves all appreciation for taking initiative in this regard. The four lectures illustrated with slides and transparencies shed light on different aspects of Kharoṣṭī script.

The first lecture discussed the discovery, decipherment, the actual spelling of the name of the script, the origin of the scripts, the main area (from the Hindu-Kush to the Himachal Pradesh) of its use, and the age of its regular use (from c. 6th or at least from c. 3rd century B.C. to c. 4th or 5th century A. D. and sporadically up to c. 7th century A.D.) The lecture also dealt with the forms of the letters, and their origins, and paleographic developments. The style of writing Kharoṣṭī was also demonstrated.

The second lecture was devoted to the discussion on the materials engraved or written in Kharoṣṭī script, the language (North-Western) of the Kharoṣṭī record, and the nature and the subject of the documents. Great stress was laid on the historical importance of the Kharoṣṭī records of the main area.

The third lecture was devoted to Central Asian Kharoṣṭī. The lecture commenced with a discussion on the Kharoṣṭī inscriptions of early centuries A. D. found in Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan in Western Asia, the contents of the inscription and their palaeographic features were analysed. The data including the use of the script in Khotan (c. 1st century B. C. and also in c. 3rd-4th century A.D.), and the Niya and Lop-nor areas (ancient kingdom of Shan-Shan) in the 3rd-4th century A. D. were dealt with in detail. These areas are now in the southern section of the Xin-Jiang province of China. The language of the Shan-Shan documents and their nature and contents, were covered at length. The sign for indicating the sound of long vowel and the letters conveying local phonetic values, as devised in Shan-Shan, were pointed out. The historical value of these records was assessed. Finally the evidence of the use of Kharostī even in c. 7th century A. D. in the Kuchi region in the northern side of Xin-Jiang was placed before the trainees.

The fourth lecture treaded into a new field of Kharoṣṭī studies. It relates to a variety of the script now called Eastern Kharoṣṭī. This variety was in use in lower west Bengal from c. 1st century B. C. to early 5th century A. D. The area was then included in ancient Vanga. A mixed script, consisting of Kharoṣṭī and Brāhmī letters also evolved in this

territory by c. early 1st century A. D. It was probably referred to as *vimiśrita-lipi* or mixed script in the Lalitavistara. The records in Kharoṣṭī and Kharoṣṭī-Brāhmī, found on rock, vessels, plaques, and seal-matrices, furnish new data for the political, economic, social, religious and cultural history of pre-Gupta Bengal and its connection with the north-west. Some inscriptions in Kharoṣṭī and Kharoṣṭī-Brāhmī (from c. 1st century B.C. to c. 3rd century A.D.) have been found in caves in the Nawada district of Bihar. Kharoṣṭī and Kharoṣṭī-Brāhmī inscriptions of the Kusana age dealing with the fashioning and transportation of stone slabs raised from the quarries in the Chunar area of U.P., from a unique class of epigraphs Kharoṣṭī and Kharoṣṭī-Brāhmī inscriptions have also been discovered in Thailand, south Vietnam and Bali (Indonesia). They indicate early Bengal's commercial and cultural contacts with south-east Asia. The Eastern Kharoṣṭī inscriptions and the epigraphs in the Mixed script form a major source of knowledge of history of early eastern India and its relations with south-east Asia. All these points were discussed in the fourth lecture.

Thus the four lectures on Kharoṣṭī dealt with the origin, and development of the script, the historical importance of the Kharoṣṭī records of the (a) main area, (b) Central Asia, and (c) Eastern India (mainly lower West Bengal). The trainees were provided with Xerox-copies of paleographic charts. The lectures and the charts indicated clearly the urgency of the study of Kharoṣṭī by young promising scholars.