



INDUS SCRIPT AND BRAHMI

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ABSTRACT

The oldest script of India is known as 'Indus script' or Indus script. The symbols of this script are imprinted on many seals which have been found from the ruins of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. This script is as controversial as it is important. More or less all its aspects are entangled. It is given the name Indus script only for the convenience of description. To what extent such naming is appropriate cannot be said with certainty. Generally this script is given this name. Pointing towards the significance of the given name, Dani says that although this script did not actually originate in the Indus valley, yet this script was mainly used in this region. But this statement of Dani seems bold. It does not seem relevant to raise the question of origin here. Until supporting evidence is found in favor or against, no suggestion can be made on the basis of this. Apart from this, it also seems disturbing that its main usage area was the Indus region. The signs of this script found in the excavation of Kalibangan make it possible that this script was not limited to the Indus region only. In fact, the correct naming of a script is based on the structure and form of its inscriptions. According to the predominance of religious, commercial or secular elements, the script is given a corresponding name. For example, the names of the Hieroglyphic, Hieratic and Demotic scripts prevalent in Egypt have been decided keeping these elements in mind. Therefore, it is necessary to note that a name like Indus script is not meaningful. Until the structure of its inscriptions is decided, the name proposed and used for it cannot be recognized as final. Till now all the efforts made to read the Indus script have not been able to proceed beyond the primary level. Therefore, in such a situation, a name like Indus script can be considered only a matter of convenience.

KEYWORDS: *Indus script, Brahmi, Hieroglyphic script, Hieratic script, Demotic scripts, Cretan script, Syllabic Audiographic, ideographic script, pre-historical, modern Dravidian language.*

ORIGIN OF INDUS SCRIPT

Among the scholars who have tried to solve the question of the origin of Indus script, Dani's opinion is the first to be mentioned. He has considered it as a secondary aspect of the fundamental question related to the origin of the first universal script. According to him, it has not yet been proved in which geographical area the art of writing first originated in the world. Until the final answer to this question is found, the question of the origin of Indus script cannot be solved. It appears that Dani has not adopted the right criteria to solve this question. The question can be raised as to in which geographical area some special types of scripts; for example, phonetic, word-oriented or alphabetic scripts first originated. Scholars have solved this too in their own way. But generally the process of the origin of the art of writing cannot be tied to a geographical area. In fact, the primary examples of writing are those pictorial signs which are found on prehistoric cave walls or stone blocks. Due to this, similarity is also seen in their shapes. They can be considered as the basic symbols of the primary foundation of civilization. It does not seem appropriate to determine their relation with the scripts which came to light on the basis of the rise of civilization. The truth is that the contribution of these pictorial markings can be considered in almost all the scripts of the world, but they cannot be accepted as the sole basis for the emergence of any one script among them.

CAN THE INDUS SCRIPT BE CONSIDERED THE SOURCE OF BRAHMI?

Critics who do not consider the Brahmi script to be indigenous have repeatedly emphasized that there is no example of any such primary script in India with which Brahmi can be related, and thus the possibility of its Indian origin is hampered. After the discovery of the Indus script, their insistence could have been resolved. But the reality is that the scholars of the above category are not ready to accept the relationship between the Indus script and Brahmi script as indicative of origin and development. The aspect worth considering in the presented discussion is that if many other elements of the Indus civilization could have merged in the subsequent Indian life, then in such a situation why the Indus script should be considered discardable. It has become clear from archaeological research that the construction method of many cities of ancient India, especially the covering of city walls for city security, is considered to be influenced by the city-building method of the Indus civilization. Similarly, elements of the Indus civilization seem to be threaded in many ways in the ancient Indian pot-making art. The influence of religious elements of the Indus civilization like Pashupati-worship, worship of Mother Goddess, Linga-worship has been accepted in ancient Indian religion. Thus, if there was dynamism in the Indus civilization and if its other elements could be adopted in the culture of later times, then its letter-symbols could also be adopted easily and naturally by the creators of the later culture. If there is no clear similarity between the Indus and Brahmi scripts, then it is only because the form of one is very primitive



and the letter-shapes have been developed in the other. In one, the letter-shapes are mostly at the pictorial level, but in the other, the letter-symbols are imbued with the expected features of a developed alphabet.

DIRINGER'S ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE RELATION BETWEEN THE TWO SCRIPTS

First aspect: Scholars who believe that the origin of Brahmi is related to the Indus script have the belief that the existence of a primary script and a developed script in a particular country can be considered meaningful only when it is accepted that one of them is the source and the other is its result. Diringe does not accept this view. According to him, it is not necessary that such scripts are related to each other. To support his opinion, he has given the evidence of Cretan script and Greek script. The Daesik script of the Cretan civilization was the old script. Later on, the Cretans adopted the Greek script in its place.

The following objections can be presented against Diringe's suggestion

Objection 1: There is no doubt that the Cretan script was old, and later on the Cretans used the Greek script in its place. But it is worth remembering that there is clear evidence of mutual transmission and influence between Cretan civilization and Greek civilization. Apart from this, it is also proved that there is no relation between Greek script and Cretan script. But there is no clear and reliable evidence for this that Western Asian elements were adopted in Indian civilization at any level. Apart from this, there is no difficulty in proving that Cretan script and Greek script are not related to each other, but it cannot be proved finally that Indus script and Brahmi script are unrelated in terms of origin and development.

Objection 2: The creators of Cretan civilization adopted the Greek script without any change. But we do not have any evidence to prove that Indians adopted the script of Western Asia. Unless it is accepted unanimously, supported by reliable historical evidence, and accepted with certainty that Brahmi is the result of some script of West Asia, the above suggestion of Diringe will be considered to be mere conjecture.

Objection 3: It is also worth noting that sometimes, due to some special cultural or political circumstances, so much change takes place suddenly, and the letters become so well-formed and well-developed that it becomes a problem to determine their relation with the original and primary script. For example, the evidence of the Hieroglyphic script of Min can be given. Its letter shapes are so developed that it becomes difficult to solve the question of their origin. In this context, paleographers sometimes refer to some primary inscriptions of Min. Suddenly, no relation is seen between their letters and the letters of the Hieroglyphic script. But the reality is that scholars have considered these to be the origin of the Hieroglyphic script. The same situation can be true in the context of Indus script and Brahmi script. Although there is no apparent similarity between the two, yet being the primary and developed scripts of the same country, it is not impossible for them to be related in the form of origin and development.

Second Aspect: In an effort to substantiate his opinion, Mr. Diringe has also said that the relationship between Indus and Brahmi scripts cannot be considered as the source and developed scripts, because the form and structure of both are different from each other. The letter symbols of Indus script can be kept under the definition of that script, which is called 'Syllabic Audiographic' script. On the contrary, the letter shapes of Brahmi are indicative of the definition of 'Semi-Alphabet'.

The nature of both of them is different from each other. The letter shapes of the 'Syllabic Audiographic' script cannot be developed into a 'Semi-Alphabet'. In such a situation, the Brahmi script cannot be considered a development of the Indus script. Before criticizing the above arguments of Diringe and the conclusions reached on the basis of these, it seems necessary to pay attention to the following points. Firstly, whether it should be accepted finally that the 'syllabic' and 'ideographic' scripts cannot develop into 'alphabetic' scripts. If elsewhere in the ancient levels of world civilization, 'syllabic' and 'audiographic' scripts developed into 'alphabetic' scripts, then why cannot the same situation be true in the context of Indian scripts.

Secondly, whether the letters of the Indus script can be completely and without any doubt included in the definition of syllabic and audiographic scripts or not. The other scripts of world civilization, which are sometimes considered to be of the same level or basically similar; were they 'syllabic-audiographic' in nature or not; and whether 'alphabetic' scripts ever developed at subsequent levels under their inspiration or not.

Solution of Queries

1. In answer to the first query, it is worth mentioning that there are no examples available which make it clear that the 'audiographic' and 'syllabic' scripts have been transformed into 'alphabetic' scripts under the inspiration of special circumstances. The example of cuneiform script can be given in view of the suitability of the present context. At one stage of its development, this script was audiographic. At the phonetic level, this script had almost reached perfection. But when this script was made the medium of writing in the Assyrian civilization, its form was syllabic. This script could become a semi-alphabet in the Persian civilization. In such a situation, if for a while it is accepted that the Indus script was audiographic syllabic, then there is no hindrance to the possibility of its developing into a semi-alphabet.

2. In solving the second question, it is worth considering that it is difficult to finally decide whether the Indus script is audiographic syllabic. Until this script is read correctly, it cannot be placed under the definition of any specific script. In the light of the latest research, the most we can say is that most of the letters of the Indus script are indicative of pictorial script. Pictorial script has been the origin of all scripts. Semitic alphabet cannot be considered an exception to this.

3. The third question can be solved in the light of cuneiform, hieroglyphic and Cretan scripts. These scripts are considered to be at the same level and similar to the Indus script in terms of



antiquity and sometimes even in terms of form and structure. The Northern Semitic script was developed under the inspiration of these three scripts, which is often considered to be the first alphabetic script of world civilization. If such a statement is believed to contain some truth, then it should also be accepted that the development of Brahmi was possible under the inspiration of the Indus script, which is undoubtedly placed in the category of alphabet or semi-alphabet.

Third Aspect: Mr. Dirijar is troubled by the fact that if Indians were familiar with the art of writing in the distant past, then its evidence would definitely be found in the Vedic literature. But according to his review, the Vedic texts are silent about the art of writing. Whether evidence of the art of writing is found in the Vedic literature or not, this question has been discussed in the context. In the present context, it would be enough to say that most archaeologists believe that the Vedic Aryans definitely had knowledge of the art of writing, it is another matter that it was probably not used much. If any particular fact is to be considered in the context of the art of writing related to Vedic culture, then it is only this that what would have been the form and type of the possible script used by its creators? The biggest difficulty faced by scholars in deciding this question is that epigraphic evidence demonstrating the Vedic script has not been found yet. Indian scholars who have tried to solve this question suggest that the possible Vedic script must have been used on birch bark or palm leaves, which have been crushed under the rigours of time due to the specific Indian climate.

In the analysis of the relation or difference between Indus script and Brahmi, the suggestions proposed by the scholars of Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies can be mentioned. They have tried to make the symbols inscribed on the seals of Indus Valley clear and understandable with the help of computing devices. Some Russian scholars have also done similar research under the guidance of Knorozov. Generally, their conclusions could be considered praiseworthy. But the fundamental misconception has been due to their prejudice that the archaic form of modern Dravidian languages is established in the script of Indus-Paati. If their above opinion is accepted as final, then the mutual relation between Indus and Brahmi scripts is not only doubtful but also nullified. But the reality is that it is not appropriate to quote the language of Indus script as the archaic form of modern Dravidian languages. The reason is that there is a limit to the dynamism of the life of a language. On the basis of mere possibilities, the language related to the Indian pre-historical level cannot be considered the basis of an absolutely modern language. To make the presented argument more clear, the opinion of Sunitikumar Chatterjee is particularly noteworthy. Like Scandinavian scholars, Father Heras had earlier concluded that the language of the script inscribed on the Indus seals has the ancient prestige of the modern Dravidian languages. On the basis of this well-founded insistence, he had also tried to explain the seal symbols. In the context of his discussion, he had also criticized the suggestions of Langdon and Hunter, who believed that Brahmi originated from the symbols of the Indus script. Chatterjee had explained the inconsistency of the relationship between the two languages in terms of the time gap. The time of the letters of the Indus script and its possible language is the third millennium BC. On the contrary, the antiquity of modern Dravidian languages can be

considered to be at most 500 AD. In such a situation, the possibility of a relation between the two becomes doubtful. Neelkant Shastri can also be mentioned among the scholars who criticized the opinion of Mr. Heras. According to his review, a relation between the two languages cannot be assumed until the linguistic, cultural and historical relation between them is not established. B.M. Barua also tried to analyze the question presented. In his analysis, Barua emphasized on two fundamental facts. He accepted the consistency of the fact that the Dravidian race existed as a separate entity in ancient India. But along with this, he also accepted the fact that there is no solid evidence to prove such a conclusion that the seals of the Indus Valley have the influence of Dravidian elements. Dinesh Chandra Sarkar has also presented his scholarly review on the suggestions of Scandinavian scholars. He has considered the suggestions of the above scholars to be mere conjectures. There seems to be difficulty in accepting the fact that the language used in the seals of the Indus civilization must have been the one that should be given a name like modern Dravidian language. Sarkar has pointed out that the prehistoric form of the modern Dravidian language cannot be considered as old as the Scandinavian scholars have believed. These scholars have considered its antiquity to be from about four thousand years to two thousand years. According to Sarkar, such a view cannot be indicative of reality. After presenting his arguments, Sarkar reaches the conclusion that the ancient script of the Indus civilization can be considered to be the origin of Brahmi. To solve the question of how the alphabet can emerge from a pictorial script, the scholar has given the evidence of the Japanese alphabet. The Chinese script, which is pictorial, has contributed to the emergence of the Japanese alphabet. In such a situation, the emergence of the Brahmi alphabet under the inspiration of the pictorial Indus script is not improbable.

Along with this, it becomes a simple and natural question whether the script used by the Vedic Aryans had any relation with the Indus script or not. In answer to this question, it can be said that the available Indus script and the possible Vedic script, both must have been established as two branches of the same script. The form of the Indus script is extremely 'manumental', the possible Vedic script must have been 'cursive'. There must not have been any external similarity between the two, although there was a mutual relationship between the two. The Brahmi script whose evidence is available in Ashoka's inscriptions, or whose examples are found in some isolated inscriptions before Ashoka, can be considered as the remains of the possible Vedic script.

CONCLUSION

It is also worth remembering that it is not necessary to see elements of similarity in the letter-symbols of the Brahmi script and the letter-symbols of the Indus script. To illustrate this, the example of the scripts used and developed in Egyptian civilization can be given. The three major scripts of Egypt - Hieroglyphic, Hieratic and Demotic are interrelated, but there is no sign of similarity in their external structure. Evidence of the first script is found on stone and other heavy tools. The shape of the letters related to it is 'manumental'. Examples of the second and third scripts have also been found on 'papyrus'.



The shape of their letters is 'cursive'. There is no relation in the external shape of these three scripts. But, their interrelationship from other perspectives is indisputable. In such a situation, if seen from the point of view of use, emergence and development, then the Indus script, like the Hieroglyphic script, is extremely 'manumental'. The possible Vedic script would have been a 'cursive' version of this script, just as the 'cursive' form of the hieroglyphic script is considered to have originated in the Hieratic script. The Brahmi script is even more 'cursive' than the Indus script. Its relation with the Indus script cannot be denied. But its direct source can only be considered to be the Vedic script, just as the Demotic script is considered to have originated directly from the Hieratic script.

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