





# BRAHMI

## Rediscovering the Lost Script

Ankita Roy

## Why Brahmi ?

Attraction  
Translating Text to visuals  
Understanding the subject  
The indic scripts are an decendent of  
Brahmi.





## **Target Audience**

A person deeply interested in scripts  
Type enthusiasts,  
Font designers,

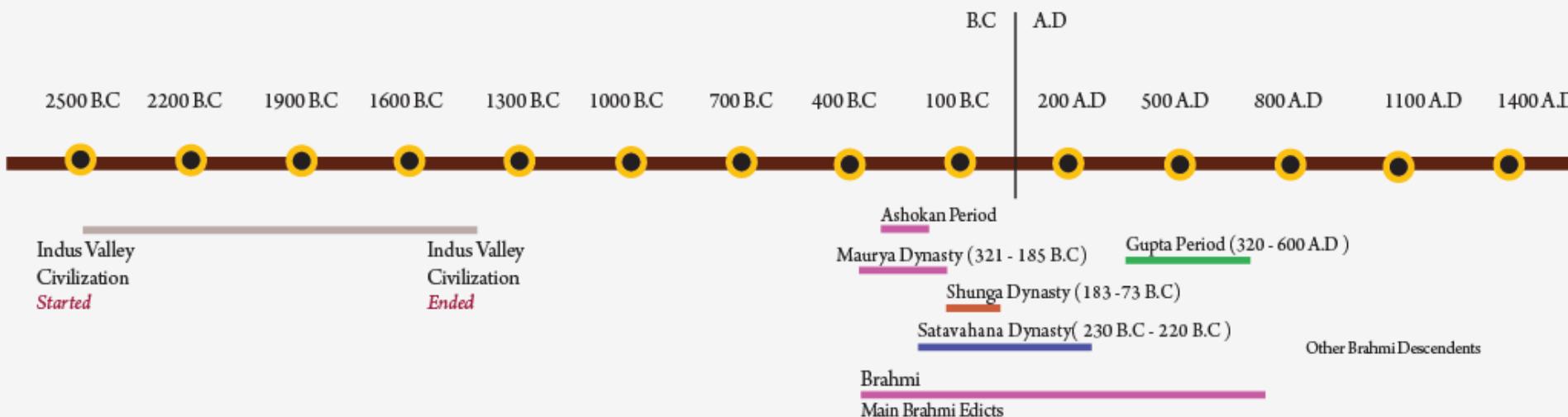
# **Research**

## **Information Available:**

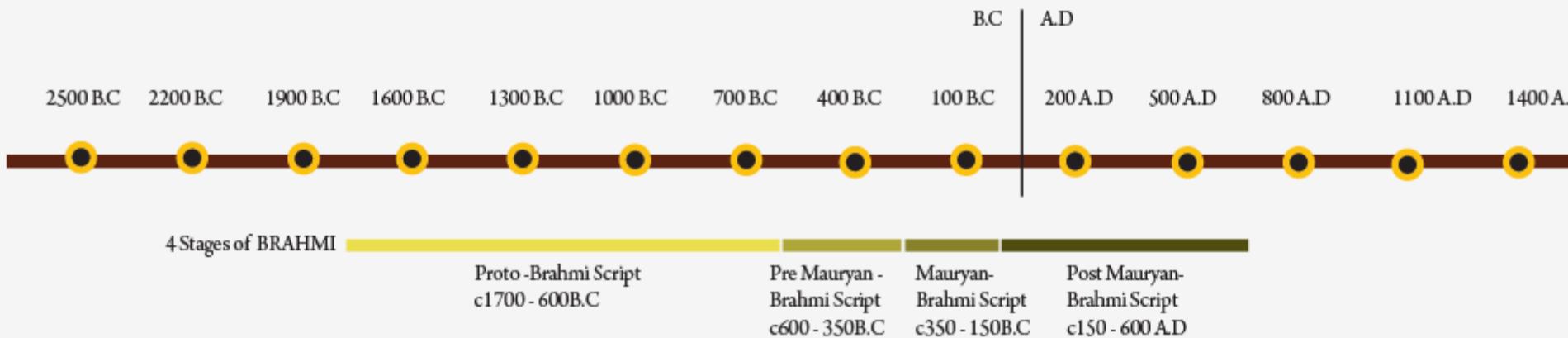
- Through Books,
- Visits,
- Websites.



# Chronology



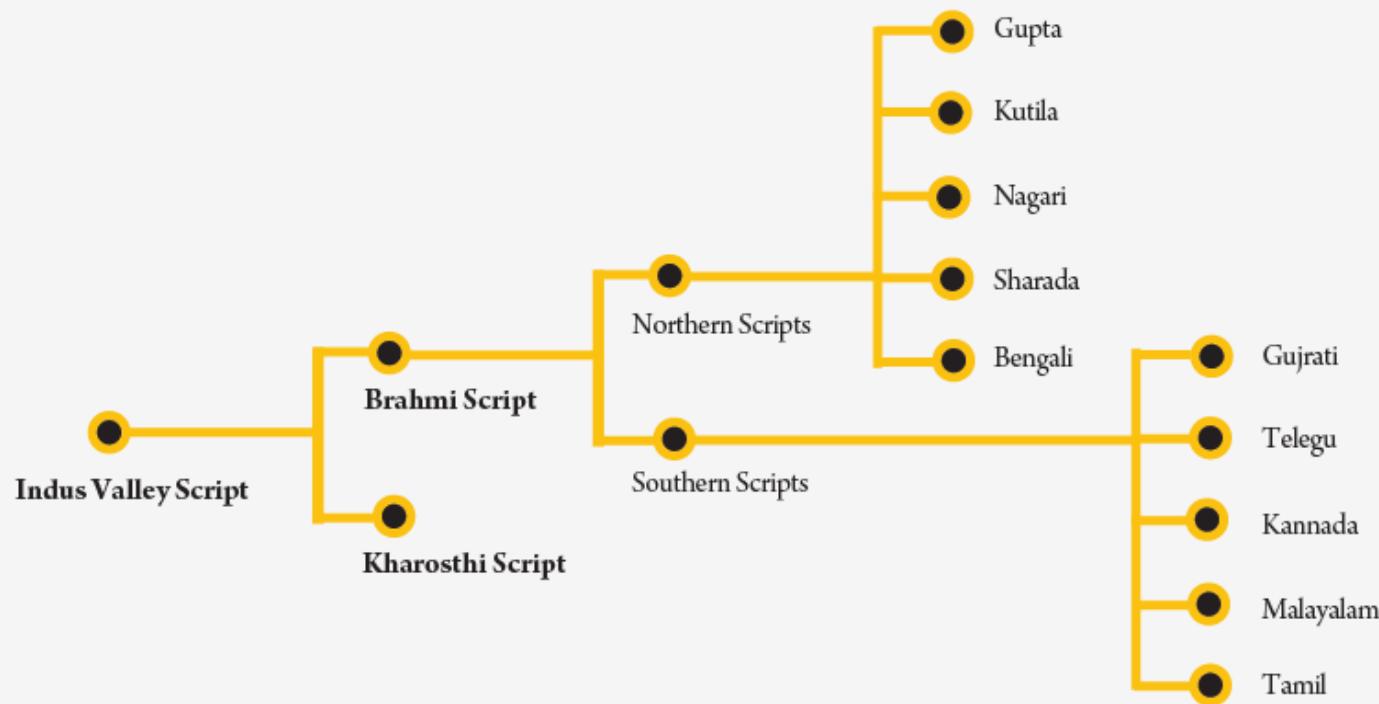
## Chronology



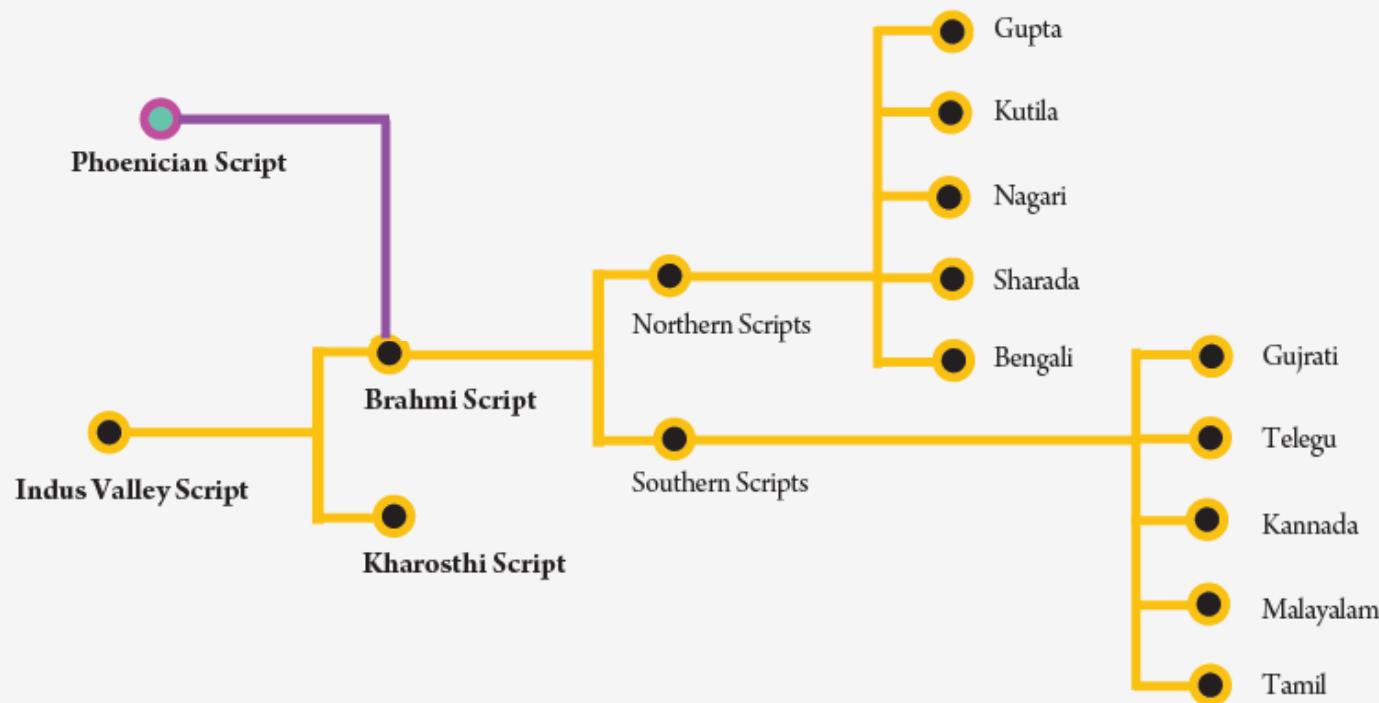
**Origin of Brahmi**



## Origin of Brahmi



# Origin of Brahmi



## Indus Valley Civilization



One of the highly developed and cultured civilization. The earliest scripts in India so far is the Indus Valley pictographic script. Two great cities of over 5000 yrs old have been discovered in the excavation of Harappa and Mohenjodaro. Over 3000 seals have been discovered in the Indus Valley.

## Indus Valley Seals



**Pashupati seal :** This seal shows a three headed deity, many have identified it with Bhagwan Shiva also known as Pashupati, seated in an advanced yogic position of Mul Bandhana Asana

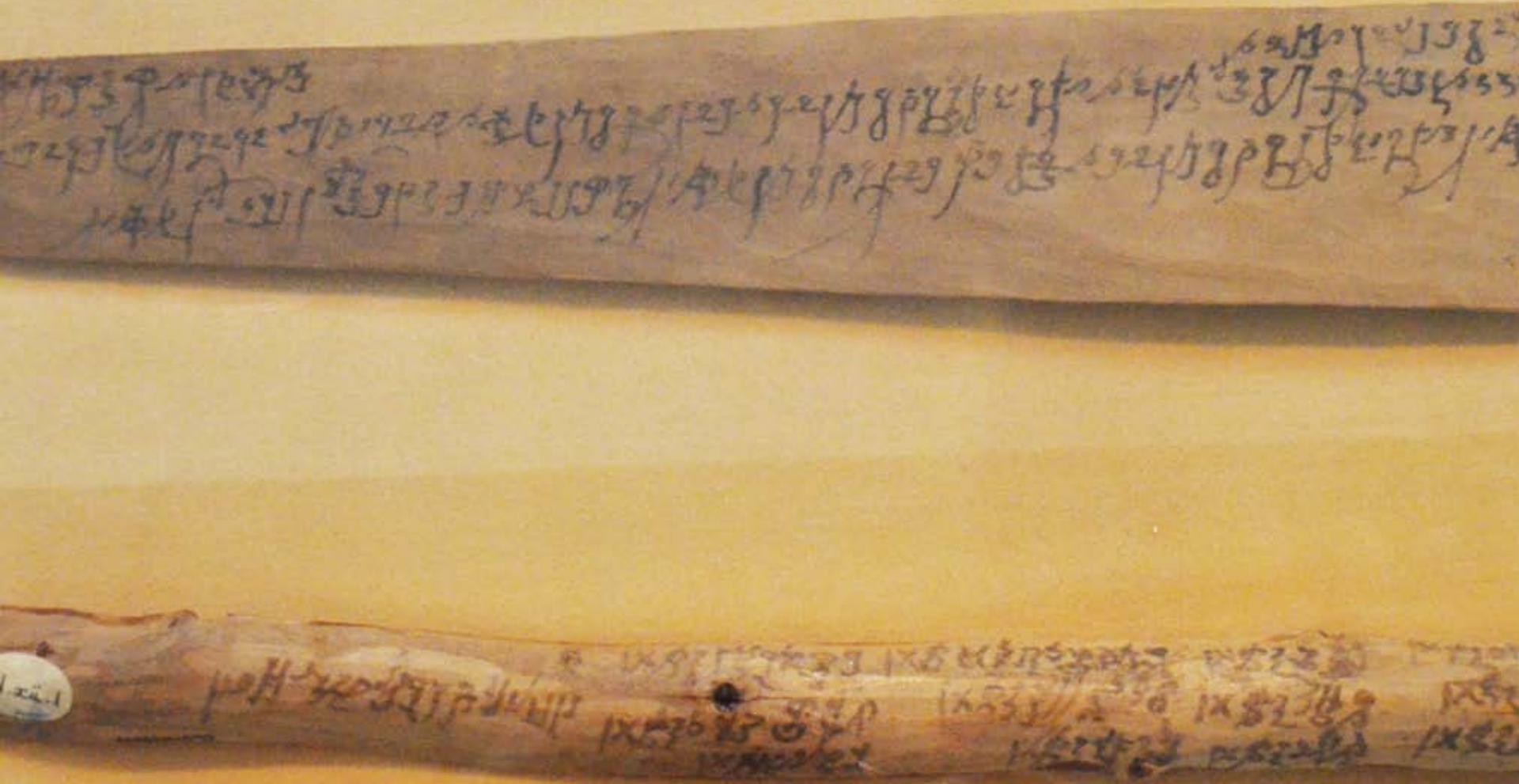


**Gilgamesh seal :** This seal shows a man with two tigers. Many scholars say that this is the Mesopotamian priest king Gilgamesh who was 16ft tall and could fight two tigers all alone.

## Indus Valley Script



## Kharosthi Script



## Brahmi Script



ા	ા	િ	િ	ં	ં
એ	ાઈ	ଓ		ઉ	ઉ
કા	કહા	ગા	ગહા	ના	
ચા	ચહા	જા	જહા	ન્હા	
તા	ઠહા	દા	દહા	ના	
થા	થહા	ડા	ધહા	ના	
પા	ફહા	બા	ભહા	મા	
યા	રા	લા	લા	વા	
શા	સા	સા	હા		



+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
ka	kā	ki	kī	ku	kū	ke	ko	kam̐
J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J	J.
la	lā	li	lī	lu	lū	le	lo	lam̐

Strokes added to indicate different vowels  
following the consonants

## Brahmi

Brahmi script is one of the earliest scripts known to India. It came into existence in the form of stone inscriptions during the reign of Asoka, in 4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C



Pillar showing Suvanna Kartaka Jataka Story,  
Sunga 2<sup>nd</sup> Century B.C, Bharhut M.P

## **Maurya Dynasty**



The 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C witnessed the rise of Magadha Empire ( present day Bihar ) under the rule of Chandragupta Maurya in 323 B.C.

The empire later expanded under Asoka the Great.

## Buddhism



**Asoka** embraced **Buddhism** and was later dedicated to the propagation of Buddhism across Asia making several stupas , rock edicts, pillars.

This change in King Asoka's life came after witnessing the mass deaths which was the result of Kalinga War.

## Child learning Brahmi Vernmala



Found from Sugh, Haryana,  
ht: 5.4 cm\_ in stone, 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C



Girnar, Gujarat, 3<sup>rd</sup> c B.C

## Brahmi Edicts

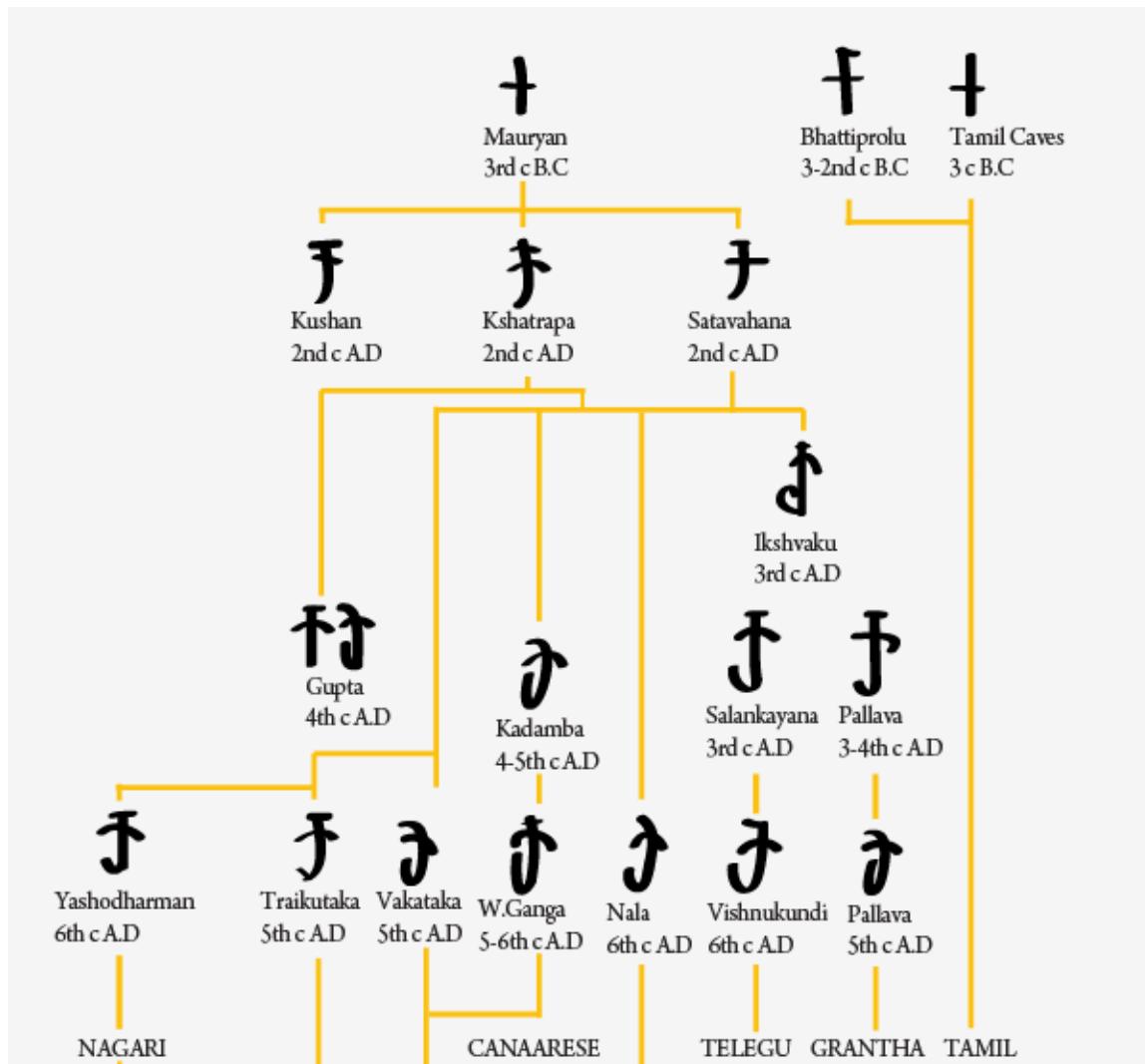


# Developmental Stages of Brahmi

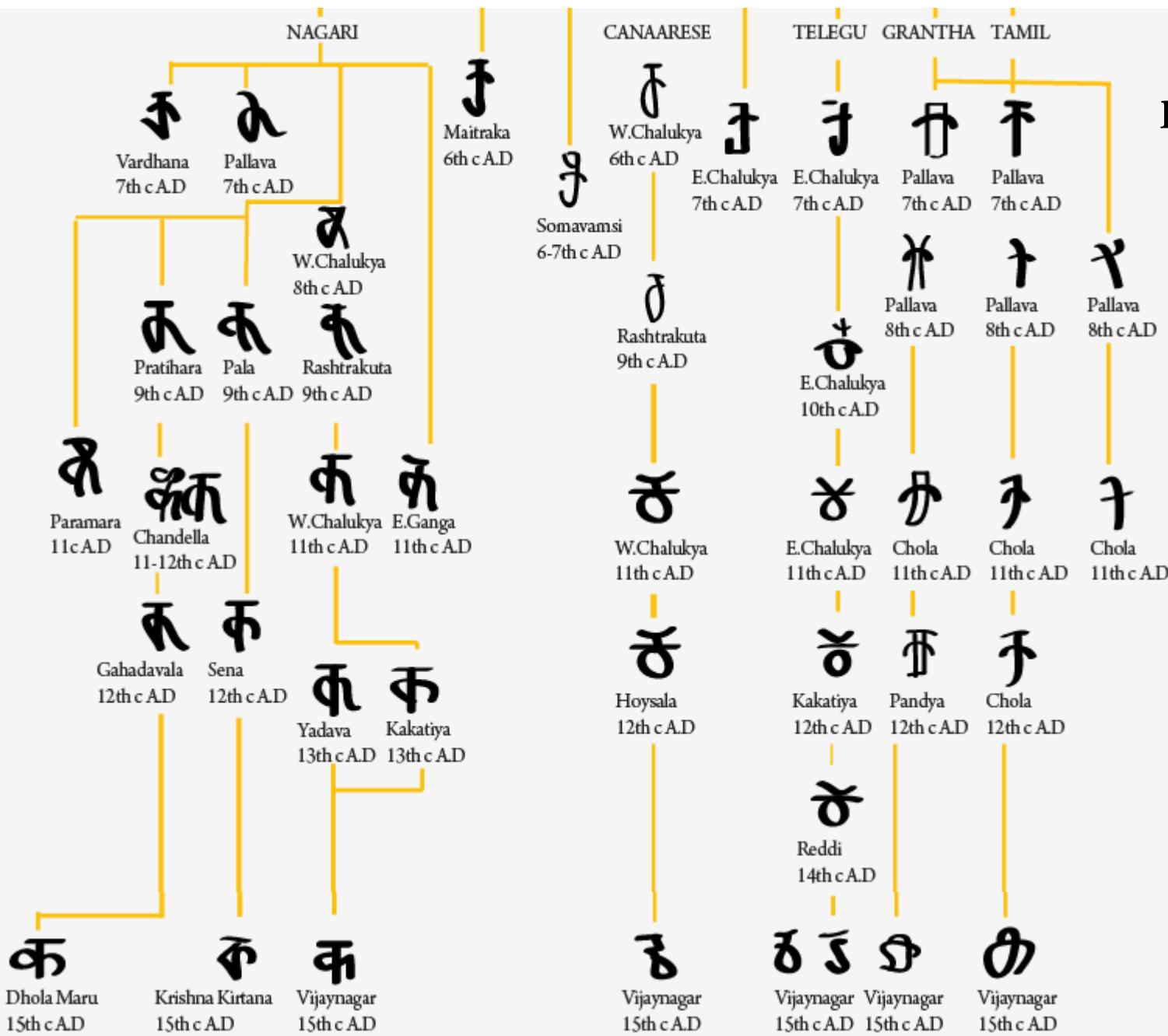
KEY	ASOKAN 3rdCentBC	BHATTIPROLU 3rdCentBC	TAMIL-CAVES 3rdCentBC	SUNGA 2ndCentBC	SĀTAVĀHANA 2ndCentBC	KALIṄGA 2ndCentBC	KUŚANA 2ndCentAD	KSATRAPA 2ndCentAD	SĀTAVĀHANA 2ndCentAD	IKSVĀKU 3rdCentAD	PALLAVA 3rd-4thCentAD	GUPTA 4thCentAD	VĀKĀTAKA 5thCentAD	
A	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ
Ā	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ
I	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି	ି
U	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ	ୁ
E	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ	େ
O	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦	୦
KA	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ	ତ
KHA	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ	ତ୍ତ
GA	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ

M. HABIB TO THOMSON  
INSTITUTE OF ANTIQUITIES

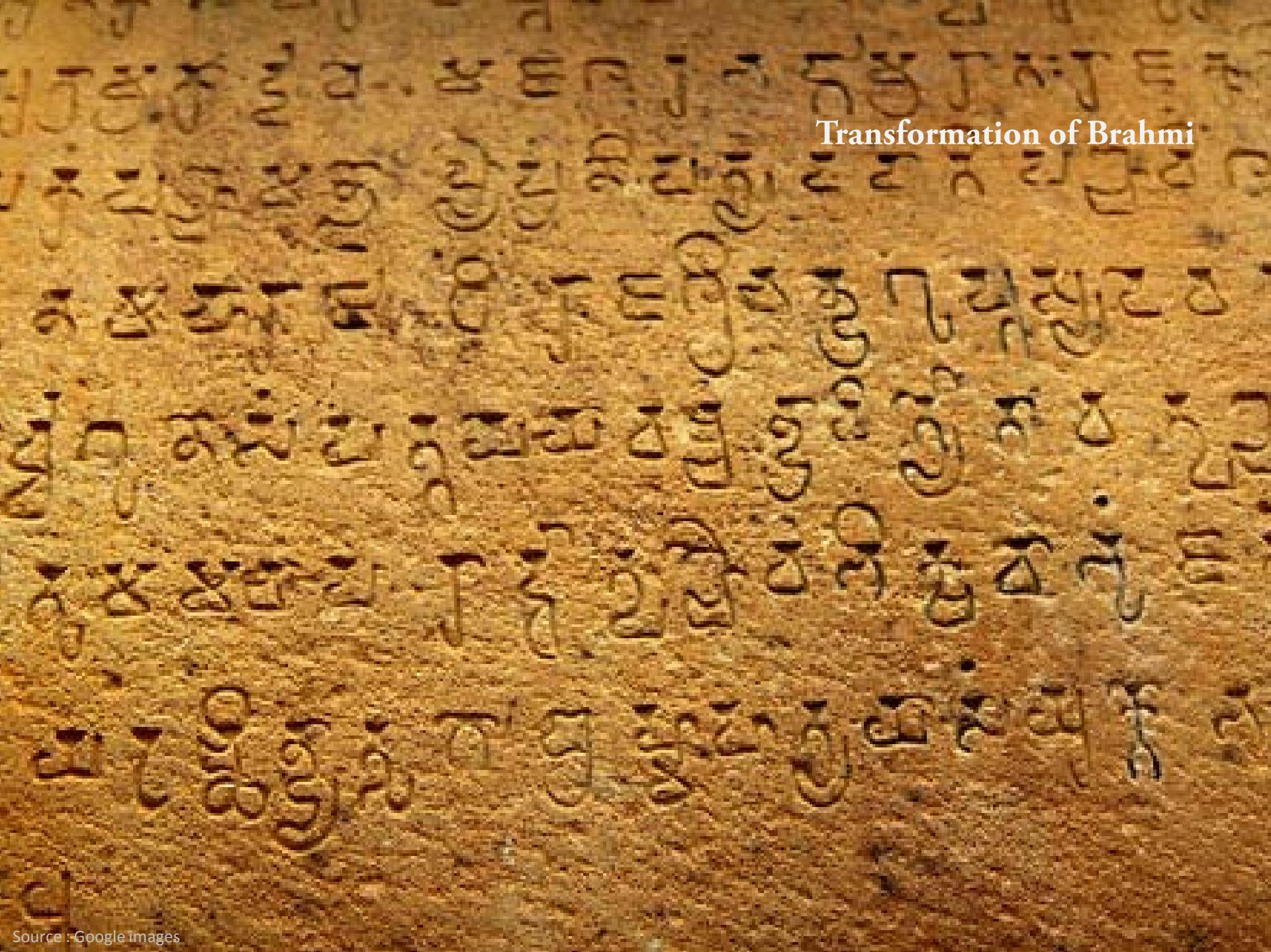
## Development of letter 'K'



## Development of letter 'K'



Transformation of Brahmi





**Mauryan Brahmi**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> c B.C**

Naga Muchalinda, Sunga,  
2<sup>nd</sup> c B.C, Pauni, Maharashtra



**Mauryan Brahmi**  
3-5<sup>th</sup> c B.C

**Post Mauryan Brahmi**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> c A.D**



Jain Votive Plaque, Kushan  
Kankali Tila, Mathura, U.P

**Post Mauryan Brahmi**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> c A.D**



Jain Votive Plaque, Kushan  
Kankali Tila, Mathura, U.P

**Brahmi - Nagari**  
**11<sup>th</sup> c A.D**



Buddhist Preist, Pala  
Eastern India

**Nagari**  
**12<sup>th</sup> c A.D**

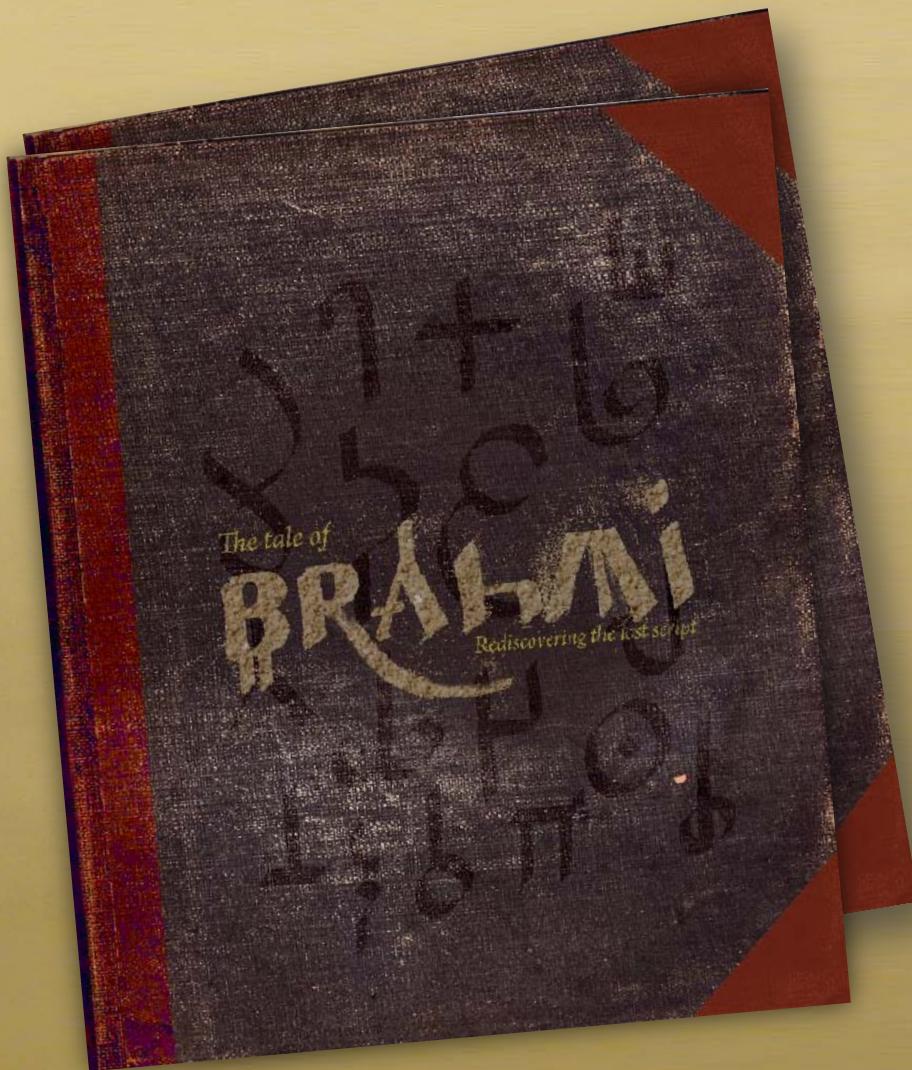


King Prativideva & Queen Kelachchadevi  
Gahadavala, Alwar, Rajasthan

Nagari  
12<sup>th</sup> c A.D



## What the Book consists of ?



It is a brief introduction about the ancient Script Brahmi.

This book talks about ancient writing styles and how it further developed into its other various descendants.

Brief Historical documentation of various scattered form of information, put together in one book format.

Translating Text to visuals.

More on interaction with Brahmi

# Content Structuring

## Writing Antiquity

- Indus Valley Civilization
- Inscriptions & Manuscripts

## Early Scripts of India

- Indus Script
- Brahmi Script
- Kharosthi Script
- Writing Materials

## Brahmi

## Chronology

## Maurya Dynasty

- Edicts describing the Kalinga War

## Brahmi Decipherment

## Origin of Brahmi

- Brahmi as a Hieroglyph
- Descendants of Brahmi
- Developmental Stages of Brahmi

## Nagari

- Bengali
- Indic Scripts
- Brahmi numerals and Matras in Comparison with Devnagri
- Ancient Symbols
- Construction of Om
- Deciphering a symbol.



## Brahmi

Many examples of Brahmi are found during the period of 3rd or 4th century BC, but Brahmi lipi had a long history in India even before king Piyadas Ashoka caused his edicts to be inscribed in the various provinces of his large empire. Brahmi letters were found inscribed from right to left (Boustrophedon style) in a seal from Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization which was older than 3400 BC.

In one of the inscriptions - Ashoka has

justified, the engravings on stone, last longer in comparison with the writing on other perishable mediums such as cloth, leather, wood etc.

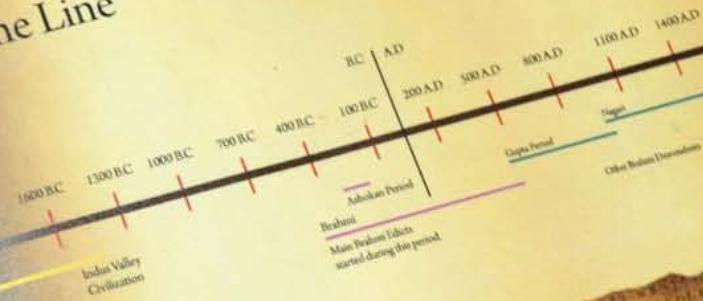
The Brahmi letters are given in comparison with the devanagri forms in the bottom figure.



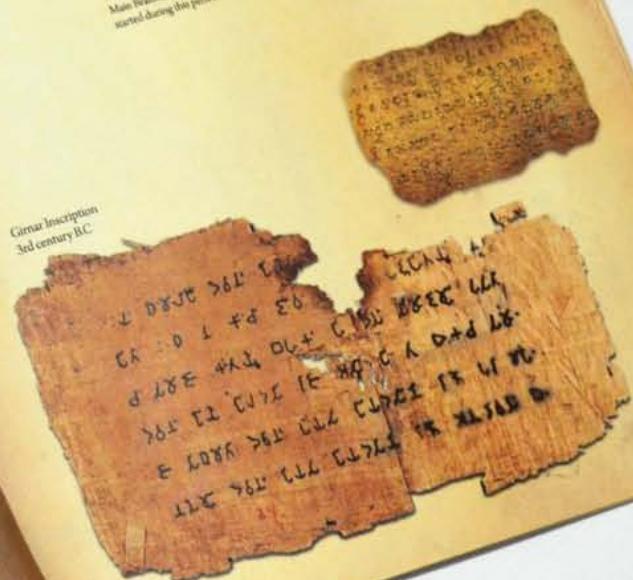
The top page in black is Brahmi, and the one in pink is Dvyasapati. (Shown for comparison.)



## Time Line



Girnar Inscription  
3rd century BC



**Descendants of Brahmi**  
are used throughout India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and in scattered enclaves in China, Vietnam and the Philippines. As the script of the original Brahmi alphabets are used for religious purposes in Tibet and Vietnam.

**Descendants of Brahma**

They are used throughout India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and in scattered enclaves in Indonesia, southern China, Vietnam and the Philippines. As the script of Buddhist scripture, Brahmic alphabets are used for religious purposes throughout China, Korea, Japan and Vietnam.

Asian continent is the main holder of all the Brahmi descendants. Scripts of India are divided in two main parts.

Andhra & Bengal  
Telugu, Kannada

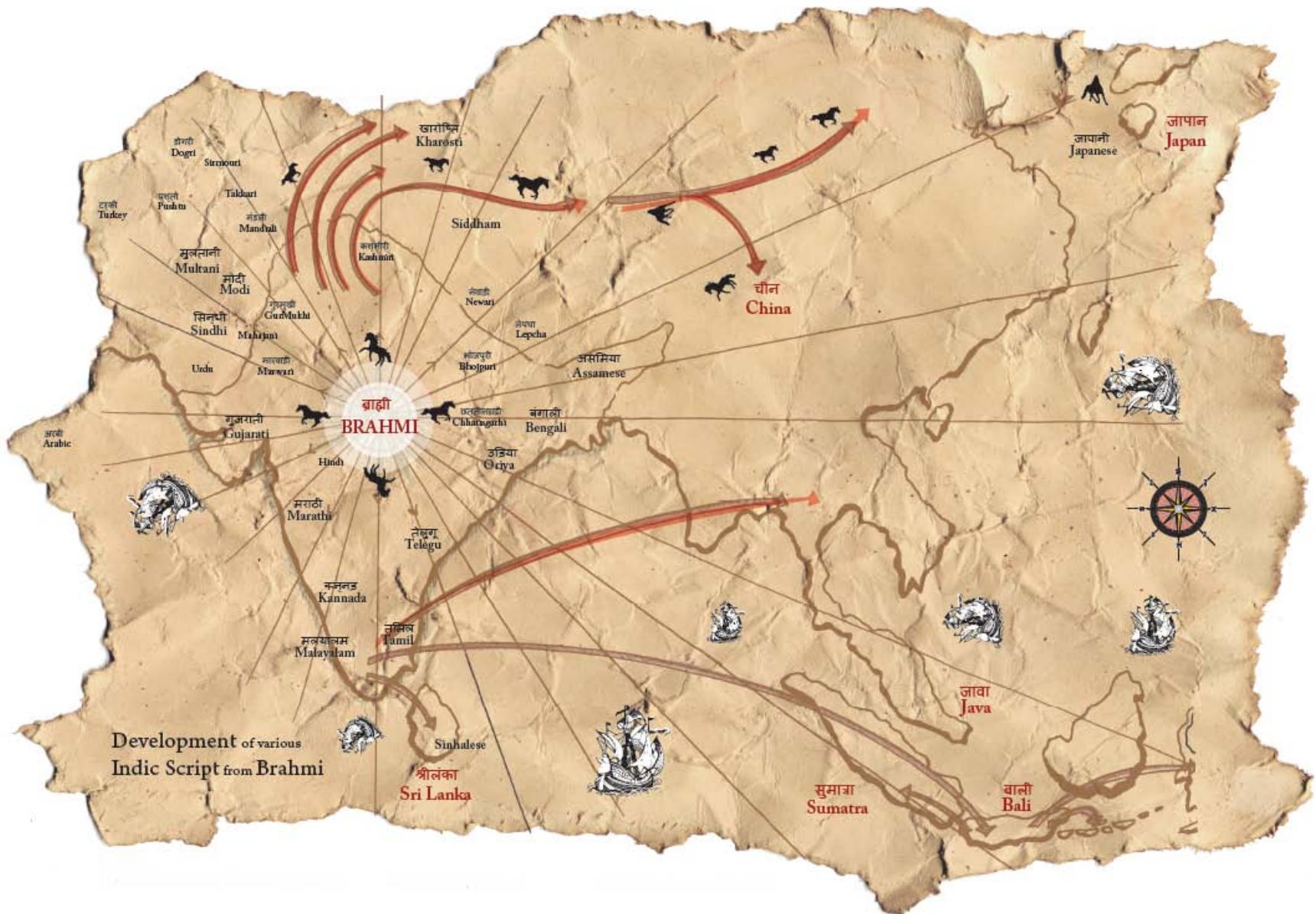
**Northern Group :**  
Kunja, Nagar, Sharada &  
**Group :**  
Modi), Madhya Prade  
Jamilia (Tan

**Gupta, Kunja,  
Southern Group**

The Asian continent is the  
in India, the scripts of India are in  
**Northern Group :**  
Gupta, Kuttia, Nagari, Sharada & Bengali.  
**Southern Group :**  
Western (Gupta, Modi), Madhya Pradesh, Telugu, Kannada,  
Vattezhuthu (Malayalam) & Tamil.

A Map of the Descendants of Brahmi Script





# Early Scripts of India

India Valley  
Brahmi  
Kharosthi

**India Valley Script:**  
The oldest script in India is known as the Indus Valley Script.  
Two great cities of over 5,000 years old have been discovered on the  
eastern banks of the Indus River, which stretches from Sril. Over 700 seals  
have been discovered in the Indus Valley.

**Brahmi Script:**  
Appeared by the 5th century BC during the reign of the first  
Indo-Greek King, Menander I. It was used in the Greco-Buddhist culture.  
It can also be seen in the Kharosthi script.

**Kharosthi Script:**  
A Brahmi script and was a secondary script, starting along  
the Silk Route. It was used in Central Asia, which spread all over India and is also  
considered to be descended from Brahmi.

Gold Coins with figures of Kanishka II & Shiva  
with bull nandi in Brahmi Script



Clay Tablet with Indus  
Valley Script



Wooden Tablet with  
Kharosthi Script



Clay Tablet depicting Shiva from Indus Valley.



Metal Tablets with Indus Valley Script



An example of palm Leaf Manuscript.

## Writing materials

Stone  
Metal  
Palm Leaf / Tada patra  
Birch Bark / Barpa Patra  
Wood  
Bamboo  
Bricks  
Clay Tablets  
Cotton cloth  
Paper

## Brahmi

Many examples of Brahmi are found during the period of 3rd or 4th century BC, but Brahmi script had a long history in India even before King Piyadasi Ashoka caused his edicts to be inscribed in the various provinces of his large empire.

Brahmi letters were found inscribed from right to left (Boustrophedon style) on a seal from Mohenjodaro and the Indus Civilization which was older than 2600 BC.

In one of the inscriptions - Ashoka has justified the engraving on stone, but longer in comparison

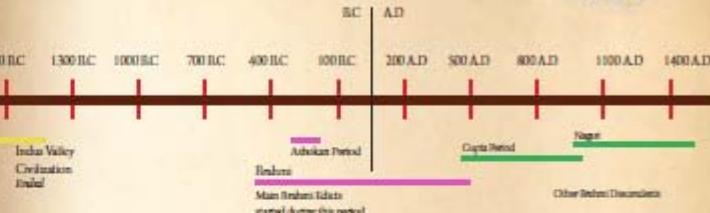
with the writing on other perishable mediums such as cloth, leather, wood etc.

The Brahmi letters are given in comparison with the straight form in the bottom figure.



## Time Line

BC AD



Gurur Inscription:  
3rd century BC



# Other Explorations



## Other Explorations



## Asoka's edicts

ତେବାନପିଯେନ ପିଯଦାସିନ ଲାଜିନ  
ବୀସତିଵସାଭିନିତେନ ଅତନ ଆଗଚ  
ମହିଯିନେ ହିନ୍ଦୁକୁଦୀ ଜାନେ ସକ୍ଷୟ  
ମୁନିତି ମିଳା କିଂଗଠ ଭିଚାକାପିତ  
ଉତ୍ତିହାଥୀ ଚ ଉତ୍ସପାପିନେ ହିନ୍ଦୁ  
ମିନିଗାମେ ଉତ୍ସାଳକେକଟେ

Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, has caused this Dhamma edict to be written. Here (in my domain) no living beings are to be slaughtered or offered in sacrifice. Nor should festivals be held, for Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, sees much to object to in such festivals, although there are some festivals that Beloved-of-the-Gods, King Piyadasi, does approve of.

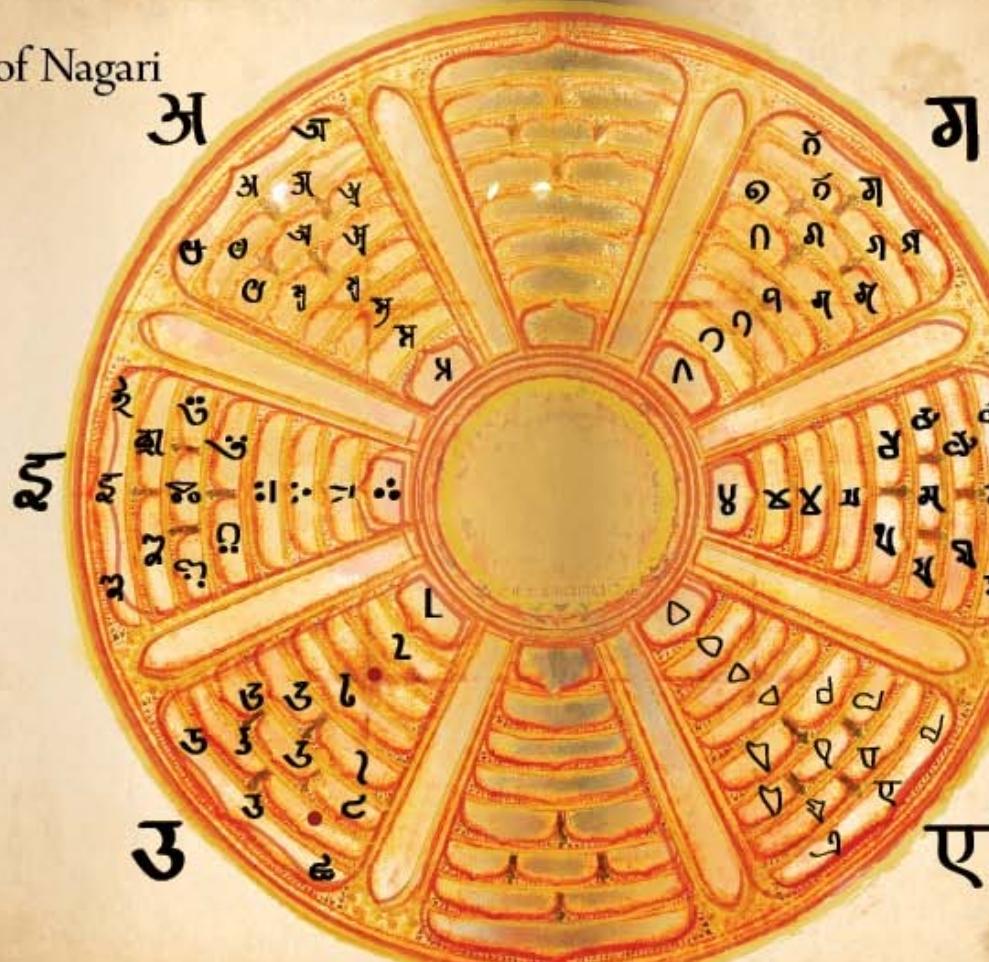
अशोक के राज  
आदेश। अशोक  
के व्यज आदेश।  
अशोक के राज  
आदेश। अशोक  
के राज आदेश।  
अशोक के राज  
आदेश। अशोक  
के राज आदेश।  
अशोक के राज  
आदेश।

## अशोक के राजआदेश

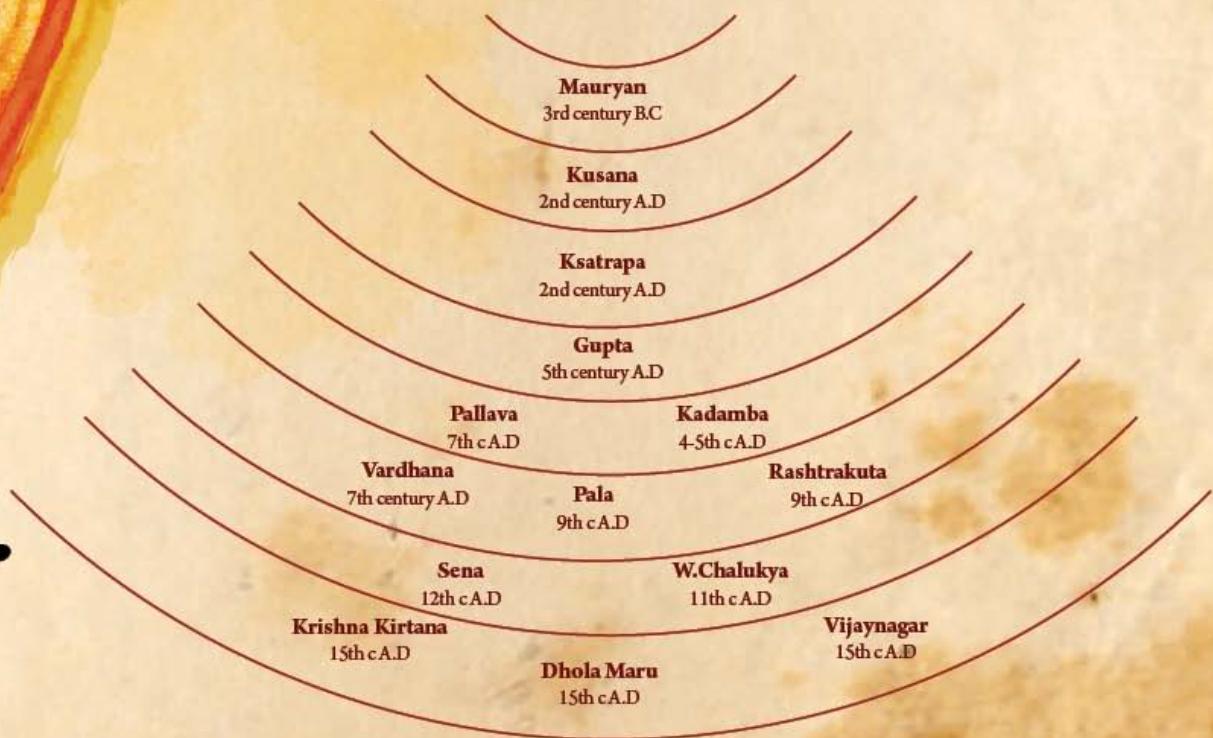
दେଵାନପିଯେନ ପିଯଦାସିନ ଲାଜିନ  
ବୀସତିଵସାଭିନିତେନ ଅତନ ଆଗଚ  
ମହିଯିନେ ହିନ୍ଦୁକୁଦୀ ଜାନେ ସକ୍ଷୟ  
ମୁନିତି ମିଳା କିଂଗଠ ଭିଚାକାପିତ  
ଉତ୍ତିହାଥୀ ଚ ଉତ୍ସପାପିନେ ହିନ୍ଦୁ  
ମିନିଗାମେ ଉତ୍ସାଳକେକଟେ

Piyadasi, hundreds of thousands of animals were killed every day to make curry. But now with the writing of this Dhamma edict only three creatures, two peacocks and a deer are killed, and the deer not always. And in time, not even these three creatures will be killed.

Development of Nagari



● Information is not available



**Mauryan**  
3rd century BC

**Kusana**  
2nd century A.D

**Ksatrapa**  
2nd century A.D

**Gupta**  
5th century A.D

**Pallava**  
7th c A.D

**Kadamba**  
4-5th c A.D

**Vardhana**  
7th century A.D

**Pala**  
9th c A.D

**Rashtrakuta**  
9th c A.D

**Sena**  
12th c A.D

**W.Chalukya**  
11th c A.D

**Krishna Kirtana**  
15th c A.D

**Dhola Maru**  
15th c A.D

**Vijaynagar**  
15th c A.D

● This part is not available

# Development of Nagari Script



Mauryan 3rd century B.C.	Kushan 2nd century A.D.	Gupta 5th century A.D.	Yashodharman 6th c.A.D.	Vardhana 7th century A.D.	Pratihara 10th c.A.D.	Pallava 7th century A.D.	Rashtrakuta 9th c.A.D.	Yadava 13th c.A.D.	Vijaynagar 15th c.A.D.	Nagari Script
अ	क	८	९	अ	अ	अ	अ	श	श	अ
आ	॥	॥	॥	●	॥	॥	●	॥	॥	आ
इ	०	०	०	०	०	०	०	०	०	इ
उ	८	८	८	८	८	८	८	८	८	उ
ঠ	L	ৈ	ৈ	ঠ	ঠ	ঠ	ঠ	ঠ	ঠ	ঠ
এ	D	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	ঁ	এ
ক	+	ট	ট	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ	କ
খ	୨	୧	୧	ଖ	ଖ	ଖ	ଖ	ଖ	ଖ	ଖ
গ	୧	୧	୧	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ	ଗ
ଘ	୧	୧	୧	●	ଘ	ଘ	ଘ	ଘ	●	ଘ

# Development of Bengali Script



## Development of Nagari Script



## Development of Bengali Script



कु कु के  
की कि को  
कि का कं  
का + कं +  
+ + +

कु कु के को कं

की कि + + + + +

का + + + + +

कु + + + + +

के + + + + +

को + + + + +

कं + + + + +

## Developmental Stages of Brahmi

The journey of how the type travelled from 3rd century B.C., Asokan period to Gahadwala of the 12th century A.D. This shows the developmental stages of letter "Ka". The last "Ka" is today's Devanagari script which is the descendent of the Brahmi script.



+ ତ ର ଳ ଟ କ ର କ କ

Canarese Script  
Kannada,  
Southern Group.

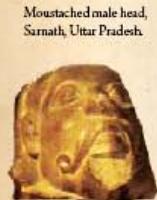
Nagari Script  
Devnagari,  
Northern Group.

The above display also shows how the earlier sculptures were just a simple human form and slowly the detailing is seen in the later stages.

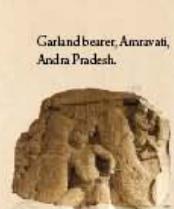
The change in design that came over a period of time was due to the base and tools used to write or inscribe. While writing, scribes tend not to lift their hand for writing faster. This brought in a different look altogether.

# Developmental Stages of Brahmi

The journey of how the type travelled from 3rd century B.C., Asokan period to Gahadavala of the 12th century A.D. This shows the developmental stages of letter 'Ka'. The last 'Ka' is today's Devnagari script which is the descendent of the Brahmi script.



Moustached male head,  
Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh.



Garland bearer, Amaravati,  
Andhra Pradesh.



Dvarapala (Door keeper),  
Nachana Kuthura,  
Madhya Pradesh.



Vishnu (Preserver God),  
Kanchipuram, Tamil  
Nadu.



Female bust, Gwalior,  
Madhya Pradesh.



Vishnu (Mythical bird  
and mount of Vishnu),  
Pallu, Rajasthan.



Vishnu (Preserver God),  
Bengal.



Mohini (A female  
representation of  
Vishnu), Gadag,  
Karnataka.



Laxmi-Narayana on  
Garuda, Halebid, Mysore.



King Pratihadeva &  
Queen Kelachchhadevi,  
Alwar, Rajasthan.

Mauryan

3rd century B.C.

+

Satavahana

2nd century A.D.

ନ

Gupta

5th century A.D.

ଡ

Pallava

6th-7th century A.D.

ରୁ

Vardhana

7th century A.D.

ମୁ

Pratihara

10th c A.D.

ବୁ

Pala

11th century A.D.

କୁ

W.Chalukya

11th c A.D.

କୁ

Hoysala

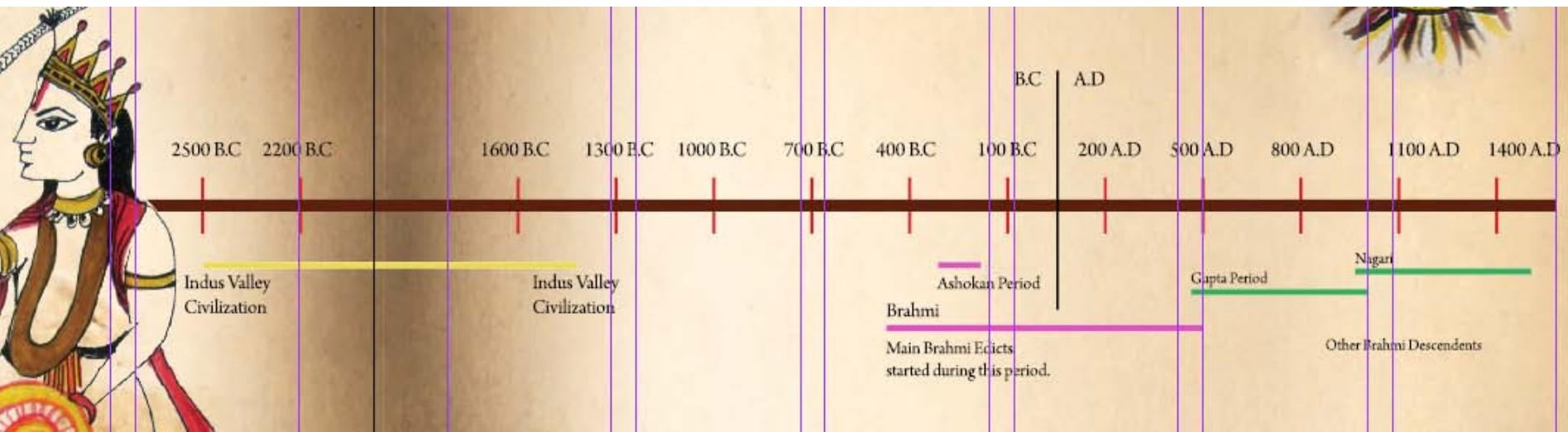
12th c A.D.

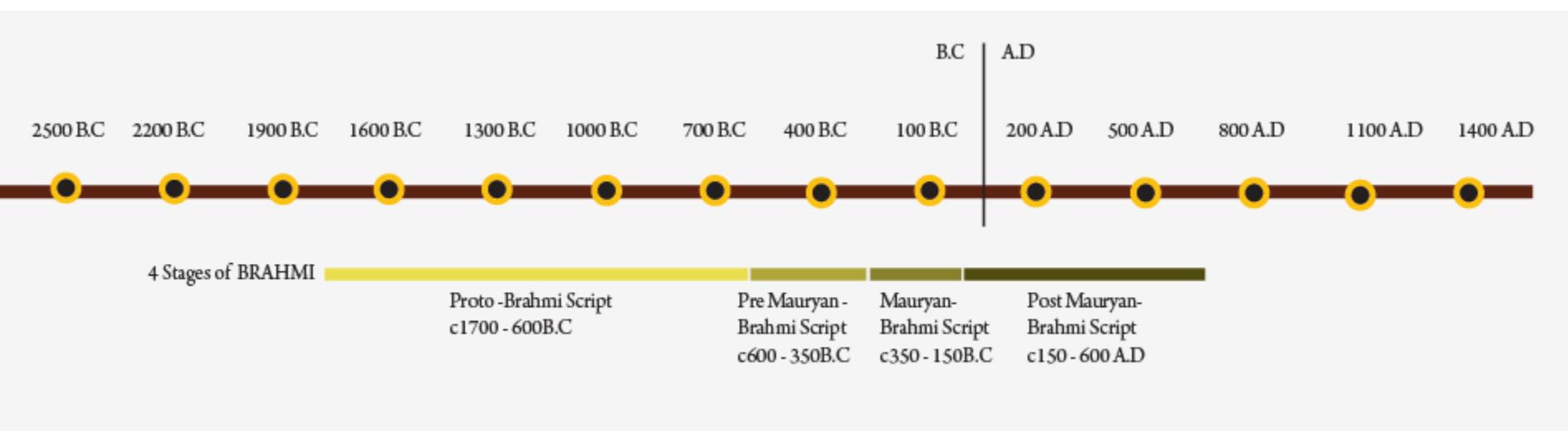
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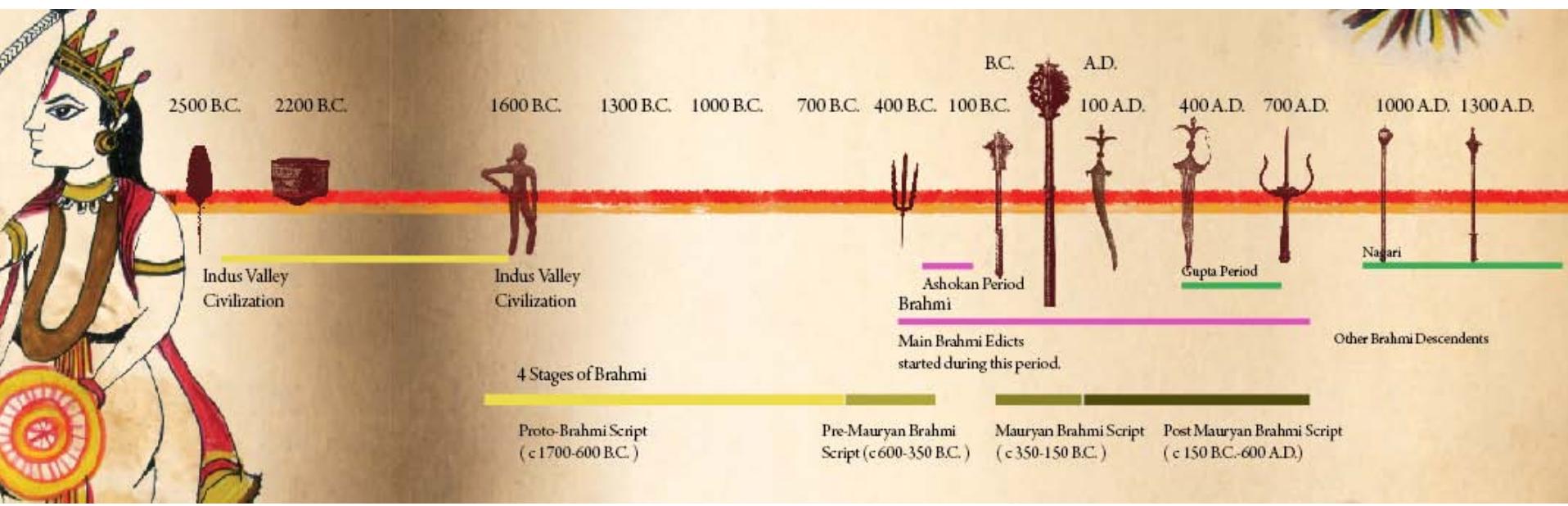
Gahadavala

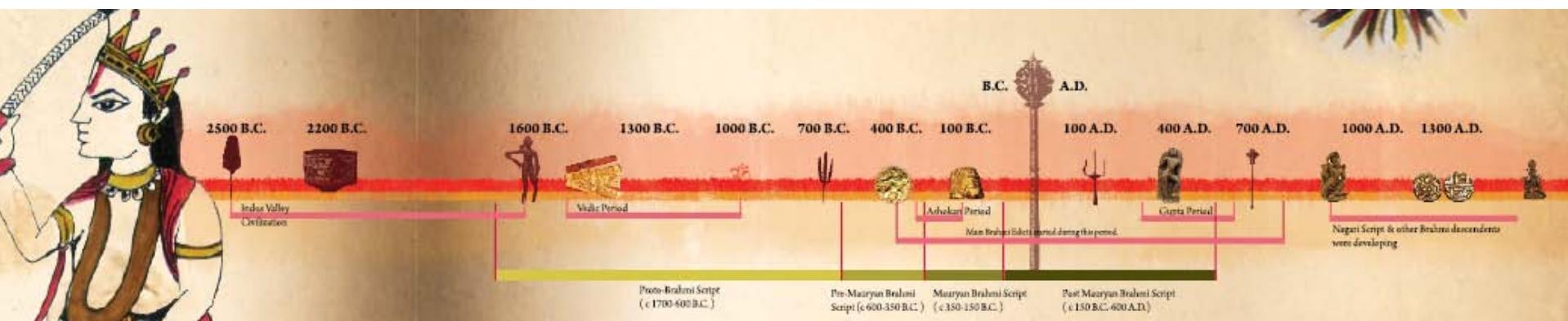
12th c A.D.

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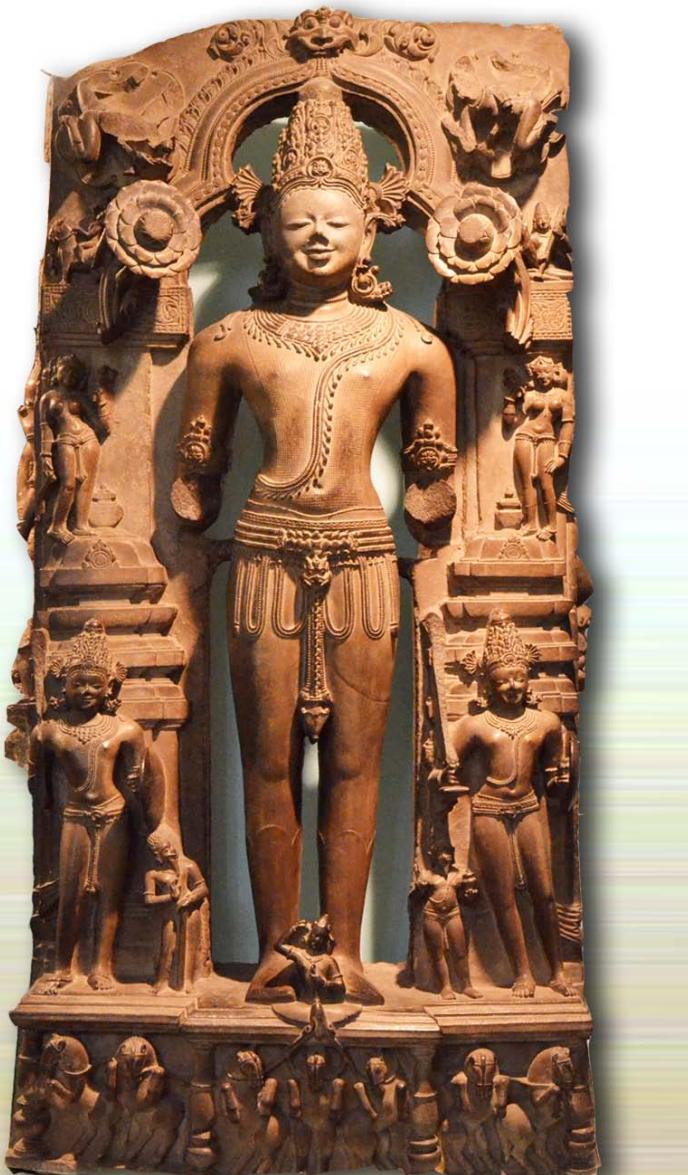






Categorization of the data collected  
Content structuring  
Graphical representation of the data  
Writing the content  
Working on illustration

# Bibliography



## Books :

- Hidden Horizons
- Typography of Devnagari
- A history of Ancient and Early Medieval India
- Understanding India : The Culture of India
- The Indo – Aryan Languages
- Elephant in Indian Art and Mythology
- Unknown masterpieces of Indian Folk and Tribal Art
- Palo linguistic Profile of Brahmi Script.
- An invention of the early Mauryan Period.
- Development of Nagari Script
- Origin of Brahmi Script
- Brahmi Script its Paleography

## Websites :

- [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)
- [www.ancientscripts.com](http://www.ancientscripts.com)
- [www.chinese-school.netfirms.com/Tibet/brahmi.html](http://www.chinese-school.netfirms.com/Tibet/brahmi.html)

## Visits:

- National Museum - New Delhi
- National Library – New Delhi
- National Museum – Kolkata
- Prince of Wales - Mumbai