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The influence of ancient writing materials on Sinhala script shapes

Kithmi Perera^{1*}

¹Department of Sinhala Studies, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

Abstract

The nature of written work belonging to different countries provides evidence for uniqueness of writing methods. Further, the written work differs according to the contemporary social situation and circumstances, even in the same geographical region. Written material is the tangible factor that can be used to study the nature of written work. Since the beginning of writing various materials have been used in Sri Lanka. Both perishable and durable materials can be found among them. The primary writing materials used by ancient Sri Lankans were clay, stone, gold plates, copper plates, palm leaves, and pieces of cloth, which were used as a surface for writing. To write on them, mattocks, brushes (Pali: tulika) with *manosila* and *hingul* instead of paint, and wooden chippings or a similar material had been used. Accordingly, the aim of this research is to identify the nature of the material factors that influenced the development of the Sinhala script. This study explores the influence of material factors on the alteration of the Brahmi script, which was used to write the Sinhala language. There are two main factors that resulted in the alteration of the basic shape of the scripts which are the development of shapes and the emergence of unique shapes. One is the influence of social status in terms of culture and religion. The other factor is the raw materials and equipment that were used to write. Many studies reveal that social factors significantly impact the alteration of a letter. However, the impact of the writing material on the development of a letter remains significantly understudied. From the 3rd Century BC to the 8th Century AD, factors were insufficient to identify the script changes because of the writing materials. However, as writing became a social need after the 8th Century AD, manifold writing materials came into use and slight changes can be witnessed in Sinhala script.

Keywords: Sinhala script, Script design, Script development, Script shapes, Writing materials

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ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-5632-6647>

*Corresponding author:

E-mail address: kithmip@kln.ac.lk (Kithmi Perera)

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