

AREA OF META DATA	CONTENT
THEME	Palm Leaf Manuscripts – Art of Writing And Preserving our Heritage
SUBJECT	History
LINKAGE OF THEME WITH CHAPTERS(NAME)	How, When, Where
CLASS/LEVEL	Class VI Our Past I
Target Audience	Students
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To acquaint students with the art and technique of writing palm leaf manuscripts.</li> <li>• To understand the importance of palm leaf manuscripts as an important source of studying the past.</li> </ul>
DESCRIPTION	<p>The knowledge of writing and the material used for writing have played a significant role in the development of civilizations right from pre-historic times. Before the introduction and widespread use of paper, palm leaves continued to be one of the most important materials that were used for writing manuscripts. The Tailpot palm leaf which is the most flexible, smooth and durable amongst other varieties of palm leaves was commonly used in the writing of the earliest manuscripts. Preparing the palm leaf and writing on the leaf required a lot of skill and precision and training. Scribes or professional writers repeatedly made copies of manuscripts, thus keeping alive the tradition of writing palm leaf manuscripts. In south India temples served as centers where ancient manuscripts on grammar, philosophy and poetry were written and preserved. With the coming of the printing press in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. this tradition began to witness a decline.</p>

<b>Key Words</b>	<b>Palm leaf, stylus, paper, tailpot palm, palmyra, preservation</b>
<b>Content Developer</b>	<b>Mily Roy</b>
<b>Subject Coordinator</b>	<b>Mily Roy</b>
<b>CIET Coordinator</b>	<b>Indu Kumar</b>



# MATERIALS USED FOR WRITING IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES



Pen and Paper



Typewriter

**The knowledge of writing and the material used for writing have played a significant role in the development of civilizations right from pre-historic times. In present times pen and paper are the most common materials used for writing. Other than pen and paper the typewriter was also widely used until the arrival of the computer which has more or less replaced the traditional method of writing using paper and pen.**

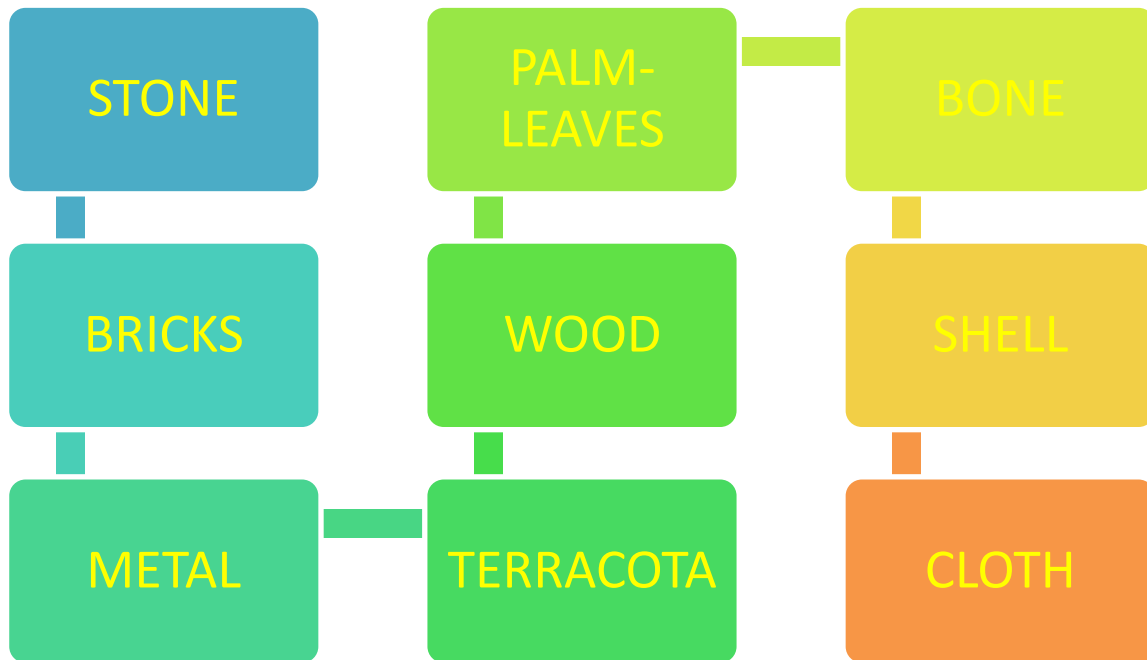


## **HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED!**



- 
- **WHAT MATERIALS WERE USED FOR WRITING IN ANCIENT TIMES?**
- **DID PEOPLE USE A PEN OR PENCIL JUST AS YOU USE ONE TODAY IN YOUR CLASS?**
- **WHAT DID PEOPLE WRITE ON BEFORE THE INVENTION OF PAPER?**
- **HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT WHAT WAS USED FOR WRITING?**
- **HAVE WE PRESERVED THESE MATERIALS?**
- **HOW DID PEOPLE WRITE ON PALM LEAVES?**

# MATERIALS USED FOR WRITING BEFORE THE USE OF PAPER IN THE ANCIENT PAST



# INVENTION OF PAPER IN CHINA



**Hemp wrapping paper, of China**  
**100B.C.E**



**Oldest Paper Book, 256 C.E.**

**Paper is an invention of ancient China. It was invented in the 3<sup>rd</sup> c. BCE and it began to be increasingly used by the 4<sup>th</sup> c. BCE replacing other writing materials such as bamboo strips and wood. Before the introduction of paper in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E and its widespread use in the 12<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.E, traditional writing materials continued to be used for many centuries. Palm leaves continued to be one of the most important materials that were used for writing manuscripts.**

# LETS US TAKE A LOOK AT HOW PALM LEAVES WERE USED FOR WRITING AND HOW THEY WERE PRESERVED



## TYPES OF PALM LEAVES

### PALMYRA PALM

- Leaves are thick, fibrous, flexible initially strong. Generally grow in dry climates and are prone to insect attacks.

### TAILPOT PALM

- Leaves are larger, thinner and more flexible and durable than the palmyra. They require wet climates and grow in coastal areas.

### CORYPHA TALIERA

- Leaves are brown in colour, thick, non-flexible and prone to insect attacks.



**The Tailpot palm leaf is very flexible, smooth, supple and durable as its fibers do not damage easily. This species of palm is found in coastal areas such as the Malabar coast, in Bengal, Myanmar and Ceylon. Earliest manuscripts were written on these leaves.**

### **Preparation of the Palm Leaves**



A palm leaf manuscript in Nandinagari script.

**The selected palm leaves were cut into required sizes and then boiled in water to soften the leaves. The softened leaves were the dried in the shade. The middle ridge on the leaf is removed and the rest of the leaf is smoothened and polished. They were the pierced on either side so that a string could be woven through these holes and then wound around the leaves secured with a knot to hold them together. The knot is known as *granth* and this explains why the completed manuscripts are known as *granths*.**





Once the string was woven, one end of the string was fastened to a small object like a shell or a button to prevent it from slipping. Palm leaves could not be bound like a book, so two wooden panels were placed between on top and below which the manuscript. They were sometimes painted or decorated and formed the cover of the manuscript.

## WRITING ON THE PALM LEAF

Writing on a palm leaf involved skill, precision, patience and training on the part of the writer. In earlier times those who specialized in writing palm leaf manuscripts were known as *lipikaras*. Writing on the leaf was mainly done by either using a brush or a reed pen called *kalama* using ink and the other technique involved the use of a metal stylus (a pointed pen-like object) to make incisions. The former technique was prevalent in northern India where ink was used for writing but went out of use after the introduction of paper. In southern India it has always been the practice of using a stylus to scratch the writing on palm leaves and have continued to be used despite the use of paper.

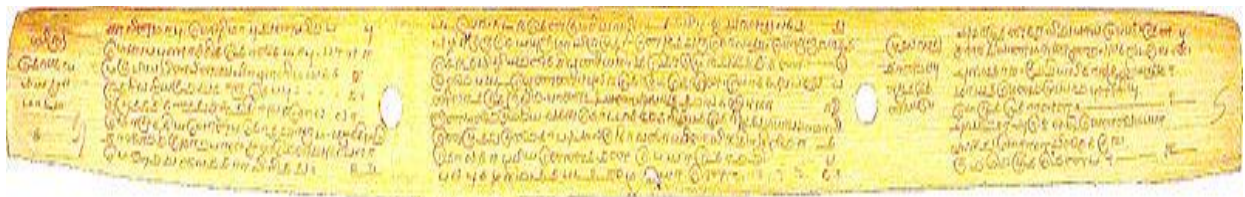


**Varieties of metal stylus**

**A 16thc. Tamil manuscript**

## **The Skill of Using the Stylus**

**First the writer engraved the letters on the leaf with the stylus. The leaf was then smeared with powdered charcoal mixed with vegetable juice. This was done to fill the grooves with the black mixture after which the writing became legible. The letters ran parallel to the length of the leaves and sometimes were written in two columns. Some manuscripts contained illustrations which were either incised or painted with a brush.**



**A very good example of palm leaf manuscripts is a Tamil grammar book named Tolkāppiyam which was written around 3rd century BCE.**

## Drawings and Images



MS 2174 Devimahatmya, Praise of the great goddess. Bihar or Nepal, 11th c.

### Manuscript In Sanskrit

Many manuscripts included drawings and images which were mainly animal motifs, floral designs and sometimes images of birds. Elements of nature were depicted in various ways and these are evident in Vaishnava and Saiva manuscripts while Buddhist manuscripts contained images of the Buddha and his incarnations. Vaishnava manuscripts use symbols like the *shankha* (conch) and *chakra* (wheel) while Shaiva manuscripts contained the *nandi* (bull).



**Gita Govinda, Early 18thc. Orissa**



**Illustrated manuscript belonging to the Pala period, 12thc.**

## Preserving and Treating Old Manuscripts

In early times there were no special techniques for treating and preserving manuscripts. Most manuscripts were stored in temples and in the place of worship in the house. Yet they had to be stored very carefully as they could be damaged by insects, water, dust, fire or by humans. Indigenous substances like neem leaves powder, cinamon powder, black pepper powder, pipali powder, etc. were kept beside the manuscripts for better protection. Scribes or professional writers repeatedly made copies of manuscripts, thus keeping alive the tradition of writing palm leaf manuscripts. In south India temples served as centers where ancient manuscripts on grammar, philosophy and poetry were written and preserved. With the coming of the printing press in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. this tradition began to witness a decline. Today there are specialized techniques for treating and preserving old manuscripts which involve fumigation, use of insecticides, water, detergents, oil, etc. The repaired manuscript is then stored carefully.

### ACTIVITY 1

Choose Whether True or False

**CIET: The correct answer should show a smile and the wrong answer with a thumbs down**

**The correct answer is highlighted in green.**

1. Paper is an invention of India.

True      **False**

2. Tailpot Palm trees require wet climates and grow in coastal areas.

**True**      False

3. In south India, ancient palm leaf manuscripts were written using a reed pen.

True

False

4. The Tolkappiyam was an ancient Tamil manuscript on grammar.

True

False

5. In early times professional writers made multiple copies of manuscripts

True

False

## ACTIVITY 2

### MATCH THE FOLLOWING

**CIET : PLEASE CREATE ARROWS FOR MATCHING CORRECTLY.**

Lipikaras	A modern technique for preserving manuscripts
Printing Press	Metal object used for writing on palm leaves
Palmyra Palm	Those who specialized in writing on palm leaf manuscripts
Stylus	They grow in dry climates and are prone to insect attacks.
Fumigation	Its advent led to decline of writing palm leaf manuscripts

## **Correct Answers**

<b>Lipikaras</b>	<b>Those who specialized in writing on palm leaf manuscripts</b>
<b>Printing Press</b>	<b>Its advent led to decline of writing palm leaf manuscripts.</b>
<b>Palmyra Palm</b>	<b>They grow in dry climates and are prone to insect attacks.</b>
<b>Stylus</b>	<b>Metal object used for writing on palm leaves</b>
<b>Fumigation</b>	<b>A modern technique for preserving manuscripts.</b>

### **ACTIVITY 3**

**CIET The sentences have to be organized in order.**

**Arrange the following sentences in order so as to explain the process of preparing palm leaves**

- **Leaves were boiled in water to soften them.**
- **Leaves were pierced on either side and a string was woven through**
- **The selected leaves were cut into required sizes**
- **One end of the string was fastened to a small object**
- **Leaves were dried in the shade.**
- **Leaves were smoothened and polished.**

## **Correct Answer**

- 1. The selected leaves were cut into required sizes**
- 2. Leaves were then boiled in water to soften them.**
- 3. Leaves were then dried in the shade.**
- 4. Leaves were then smoothened and polished.**
- 5. Leaves were pierced on either side and a string was woven through**
- 6. One end of the string was fastened to a small object**

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