

Prakrit Versus Sanskrit: A Case Study of Pāli (Māgadhī) and Ardhamāgadhī

Sanghasen Singh

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At the very outset, I would like to preface my paper with a remark about the medium of my paper. I am supposed to present this paper on the controversy of languages—more so on Indian languages—in a language which is neither mine nor yours. The language originally belongs to the British who imposed it on our forefathers about more than a couple of centuries ago. We are carrying it year after year and century after century. With the recent installation of new governments at the centre (New Delhi) and in most of the states in our country, the age-old controversy of alien and/or indigenous has cropped up again in my own state of Uttar Pradesh (literally and geographically the northern state). The use of English as the official language is banned. Demonstrations in favour and agitation against are the order of the day.

The controversy between Prakrit<sup>(1)</sup> or Prakrits on the one hand and Sanskrit or Sanskrits on the other is neither new nor totally unconnected with the controversy today. Centuries ago, probably two thousand years<sup>(2)</sup> before the birth of Christ, when a group of Āryans migrated to India with their dialects and languages<sup>(3)</sup> (if the same had acquired that stage), they too had possibly to face the same problem. The controversy between Prakritism<sup>(4)</sup> and Sanskritism<sup>(5)</sup> was there too.

The form might have been different from what one finds today.

Now the question arises: what is Prakritism and what is Sanskritism? Prakritism is the natural form of a dialect or language which emerges through a continuous and unhindered process of spoken or written (in a limited sense) words, phrases and sentences of the people. It is a common knowledge that a dialect appears in a particular geographical region after a long and continuous process of spoken and to some extent written words. It takes, more or less, centuries for the formation of a dialect. To put it in other words, dialect is the natural form of the collective process that takes place over the centuries through the usage of spoken/written words which turn into the common medium of expression and intercourse of a given people. It does not tolerate any hindrance or interference from any outside or alien agency. If per chance or per force any hindrance or interference takes place, the whole process of dialect formation gets vitiated and distorted and thereby takes a longer time to crystallize and settle to the minimum conditions of dialect formation. If undisturbed, a dialect continues to grow and enrich itself for decades, nay centuries. It has the capacity, though limited, to absorb limited amount of outside or alien influence. That capacity depends upon the vitality and sagacity of a particular dialect. The same dialect assumes the form of a language over the years or centuries, if certain conditions are available or are made available to it. Among many conditions, though of minor nature, the most important ones are - (1) large-scale literary activities take place and the literature in the form of poems, novels, stories, plays, dramas, etc. is produced in a particular dialect; (2) secondly, that particular dialect becomes the vehicle of state administration for a pretty long time. After assuming the form of a language, the dialect

ceases to exist in its pure and simple form. This, in fact, happens to be the Prakrit state of a language, pure and simple, untouched, unalloyed and unmixed by any outside or alien influence. If per chance any such influence creeps in, it gets fully absorbed and assimilated without any inward or outward appearance of its alienness.

It is now an admitted fact that in course of the development of human civilization, newer and newer stages set in. One such stage in the past history of India was the pre-feudal stage which obviously was followed by the feudal stage. The dates of these stages do differ from societies to societies, but one factor remains very much embedded to all these societies. It is the process of the development of elitism (the concept of abhijātahood or śiṣṭahood, abhijātatva or śiṣṭatva to use purely Sanskrit phrases) which grows through urbanisation or through nearness with the ruling clique or group, or with both. Elitism, as is commonly known, has the tendency to keep the elite apart from the common folk. This process of keeping apart or drifting away heavily reflects upon the nature of the language of this period which has been commonly inherited by both the elite and the commoner. There too, in the process, the elite of a particular place or region, more often the one which assumes political power, say the capital region, plays a decisive role. The norms of the language set by that particular elite group becomes predominant over the years and gradually in the process that language assumes a glorified form. Thereafter the scholars of the science of language, say grammarians (as the word has been used for centuries) come forward either on their own (the chances of this having been less) or are commissioned by the powers-that-be or the state (if it has assumed that state or stage) to frame and formulate normative rules of grammar, so that one set of

royal or state command be circulated all over the territory (kingdom, if it has obtained that stage) and be fully understood by the officials and the people alike. This step was and continues to be necessary to overcome the effects of time and space, which change the shape and structure of the language sometimes beyond recognition. The geographical and developmental factors play a vital part in the fast or slow change of a language. The voluntary and the commissioned scholars develop their expertise in refining, cultivating, acculturating and embellishing a particular language. They develop their skill to such an extent that it assumes the form of a śāstra or learning in its own rights. In the process, the given language is made a tool of all experiments, so that it may suit to the taste and material requirements of the elite of the region. This refined or cultivated language which, in fact, is the Sanskrit of a particular period or region widens its area of influence in terms of time and space. It all depends upon the political power and influence over the people that the particular Sanskrit commands over a period of time. Under the circumstances and during the process, two contending and sometimes confronting groups emerge on the scene — one for the natural growth of the language and the other for refining and cultivating that language. This, in fact, is the fight between the forces of Prakrit on the one hand and those of Sanskrit on the other.

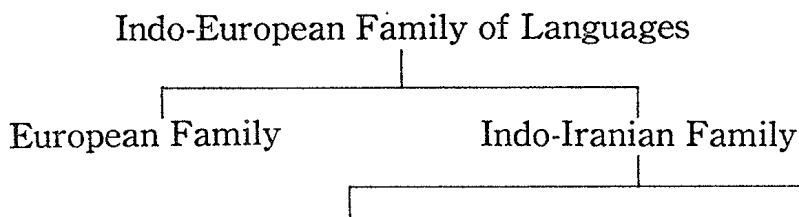
The application of the above analysis on the process of development of Prakritism and Sanskritism in the past history of the Indo-Āryan Family of languages in the Indian subcontinent requires volumes for its full description and exposure. But an attempt will be made here to delineate the same in a few pages.

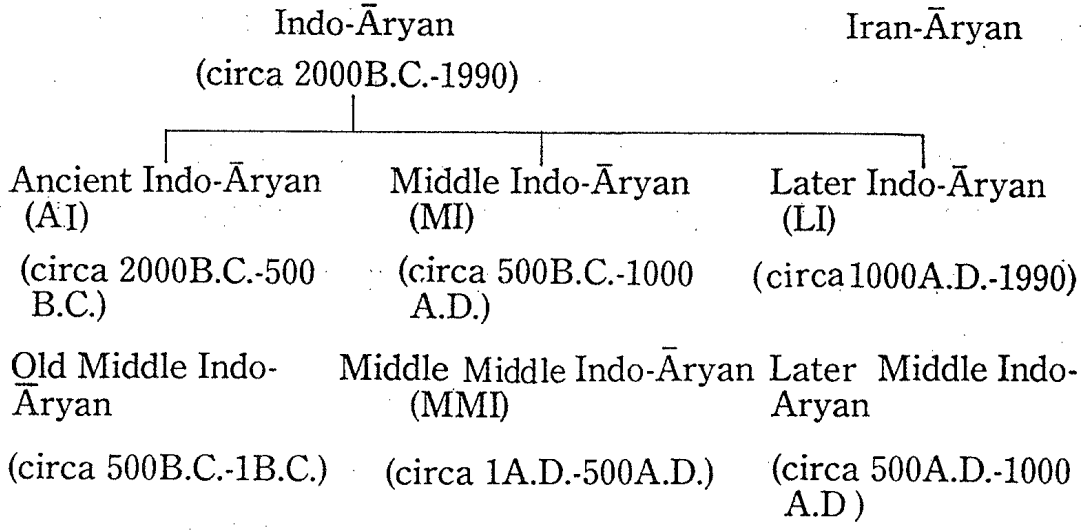
The advent of the Āryans in the Indian subcontinent is generally

dated an approximate period of two thousand years before the birth of Christ. The composition of the Ṛgvedic hymns and other Vedic literature might have taken a few centuries more. In spite of this safest view, the linguistic position of the Vedic Āryans is not fully clear today. But most of the researches done in the field till now indicate that the Āryans in the Saptasindhu region and during the period later were speaking as many as seven <sup>(6)</sup> dialects of their own. <sup>(7)</sup> The literary activities and the political power wielded by one or a couple of other tribes of the Āryans might have qualified an equal number of dialects among them to assume the form of a language or languages, but due to lack of adequate evidences today it is difficult to say whether this linguistic process had definitely taken place and if so, what course it had taken during the long and chequered history of the Vedic Āryans. Some scholars have hazarded to peep through the history and literature of the period, but have not succeeded in the re-constructing a detailed, reliable and authentic account. For our limited purpose, the earliest figure that appears before our eyes is that of Pāṇini, the celebrated grammarian of Sanskrit language. Some grammarians of repute, it appears, appeared before him and attempted to refine and cultivate the most populous and strongest among the dialects/languages of the period which contended for supremacy over each other, but their identity is shrouded in the darkness of the past history. In the garb of the mythological details, Pāṇini probably mentions <sup>(8)</sup> the names of some of them. Thus Pāṇini appears to be one of the most successful earliest language cultivators or tamers, who systematized the grammatical rules and sub-rules and became effective enough to put the language (which for the sake of convenience may be termed as language A here) in the steel

frame of its own. But at the same time, it should be clearly borne in mind that all those language-cultivators who tried their hands for centuries but failed to stem the on-rushing flow of various Prakrits (Vedic dialects/languages here), did not die in vain, but wittingly or unwittingly created a sum total of language-cultivation which culminated in the form of Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini and a little later resulted in the form of the Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali. At this stage this should also be taken in view that language-cultivation is not done as a matter of joy, play or pastime, but as a necessity arising out of the realization at least among the managers of the state to have a language which has the stability and vitality to serve the people of larger areas and for longer time. Sanskrit which was being developed had those qualities.

The historians are almost certain about the date of Patañjali who flourished necessarily in the middle of the second century B.C. and almost completed the process of language-taming in respect of language A as noted above. But the date of Pāṇini still remains controversial. But at the same time, it may be said with certain degree of certainty that he did not flourish prior to the 4th century B.C. Thus language A transforms itself into Sanskrit.<sup>(11)</sup> To put the same in mathematical formulation, it may come to dialect-languages—dialect/language<sup>x</sup>=language A > Sanskrit. This may be treated as the first and the foremost landmark in the recorded history of Indian languages. The same may be shown in the following chart —





### Explanations :

(1) Vedic and Upaniṣadic dialects and languages belong to AI Branch of the Indo-Āryan Family of languages.

(2) Pali, <sup>(12)</sup>Sanskrit (Pāṇinian), Asokan Prakrits, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit(BHS), Ardha-māgadhī, Māgadhī, Śaurasenī, Mahārāṣṭrī, Paiśācī, and many so-called Apabhraṃśas belong to the MI.

(3) Remnants of Apabhraṃśas, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Uria, Assami, Kashmira, Punjabi, Rajasthani, Haryani, Braja, Avadhi, Bundelakhandi, Bhojapuri, Maithili, Nepali, Chattisagarhi, Majahi, etc. belong to LI.

(4) Pali, Sanskrit, Asokan Prakrits, Old BHS, Old Ardha-māgadhī, etc. belong to OMI.

(5) Late BHS, Late Ardha-māgadhī, Māgadhī, Śaurasenī, Mahārāṣṭrī, Paiśācī, etc. belong to MMI.

(6) Remnants of the Prakrits and Old Forms of Apabhraṃśas belong to LMI.



Thus the chart indicates the process of growth of sister dialects and languages with the tendencies of collision and collusion side by side between Prakritism and Sanskritism, which continued unabated for centuries until the process culminated in the form of the rise of Sanskrit (Pāṇinian) at the stage of OMI, when collision (in a limited sense) between the two became pivotal. Pali (Māgadhī of the Theravādic scripture) and Old Ardha-Māgadhī happened to be the important components of the language structure of the period on the one hand and Sanskrit (Pāṇinian) on the other. In case of the former, Pali represented one set of languages and literatures, while Ardha-Māgadhī represented the other. The earliest Pali literature was well preserved in the form of the texts of the Tipiṭaka carried through oral transmission and recitations during the first three Councils and finally committed to writing in the Fourth Buddhist Council held in Sri Lanka under the patronage of king Vaṭṭagāmaṇi Abhaya in 29-28 B.C. There is some degree of vagueness in the matter of preservation and transmission of the words of Mahāvīra, the Founder of the Jaina religion (the last Tirthānkara according to Jaina traditions). His words were recited, compiled and probably committed to writing for the first time in the Valabhī Council of the Jainas held probably in the 4th-5th century A.D. Some older parts of the Aṅga literature (the Śvetāmbara Jaina Āgama) like Āyāraṅga (older portions alone), Uttarajjhayana Sutta, etc. may be cited here for our purpose. As regards the Sanskrit literature, it too was not extensively represented during this period (i.e. the period of OMI). Secondly, all the texts of the period do not fully conform to the norms set by Pāṇini and his predecessors. Parts of the major Upaniṣadic texts like Kaṭha, Śvetāśvatara, etc., some Smṛti texts like Yājñavalkya, Manu (older parts), etc., some Dharma-sūtras

like Āpastamba, etc. may be cited in this respect. At this stage one point should clearly be borne in mind that in spite of the pivotal role of Pali, Old Ardha-Māgadhī and Sanskrit, the other dialects and languages of the period also played their respective roles in their own way.

The process of simplification of dialects/languages through of efforts (prayatna-lāghava, to put it in Sanskrit) is the hallmark of the development of every dialect/language. Every dialect/language which opts for development has to obey the principles of dialect/language development. However, if a dialect/language or a group of dialects/languages refuse to obey the dictates of development, the same get stagnated, their growth stilted and finally they die of their own death. Kabir, a saint-poet of mediaeval India has put the same fact with a very apt illustration—'Sanskrit jāniya kūpa-jala, bhāsā bahatā nira' (know Sanskrit as the well-water, while the vernacular is like the running water of a river). The OMI period witnesses both these trends side by side. Pali, Old Ardha-Māgadhī and other dialects/languages were developing as per norms of language development, while Sanskrit remained confined to its own framework. It is also to be noted here that Sanskrit had the vitality and strength to survive and remain in usage side by side, though in a very limited circle and there too under very hard stresses and strains. However, the reason or the reasons for its survival in the older times and till this day to be sought not in the principles of Science of languages, but in the polity<sup>(13)</sup> of the succeeding generations of the Indian people.

The linguistic changes as a consequence of the development that continued to take place during the OMI period or even slightly earlier and which accordingly culminated in the form of Pali (older phase of Pali

representing the language of the Tipiṭaka) are worthy of citation here for a better appraisal of the linguistic picture and the problems of the period. Their presentation in relation to the somewhat static nature of Sanskrit may lead to a deeper and clearer understanding and perusal of the issues involved. The main features, distinguishing Pali from Sanskrit of OMI period, are as under —

### **Phonological**

1. Ṛ and Ṍ of Vedic vowel-system disappear. Ṛ is represented by a, i or u and Ṍ becomes u.
2. The diphthongs ai and au change respectably to e and o.
3. Long vowels preceding a conjunct consonant are usually shortened.
4. Visarga (: ) disappears in Pali and is normally replaced by vowel o.
5. Intervocalic mutes are often dropped.
6. Surds are softened and sonants are hardened.
7. Aspirates are replaced by h. Medial ḍa and ḍha change to L and Lh respectively.
8. S (dental) remains and replaces Ś (palatal) and Ṣ (cerebral).
9. N (dental) is sometimes cerebralised, but not always.
10. A consonant at the end of a word disappears.
11. The initial conjunct consonants are not found. Of the two, one is either dropped or the two are separated by insertion of a vowel (svarabhakti); the vowels usually inserted are a, i, u.
12. Medial conjunct consonants undergo assimilation, progressive or regressive.
13. Medial Kṣ generally changes to KKh.
14. In euphonic combination of two vowels, sometimes one

remains; at times, however, of the two vowels, only the latter remains and is lengthened and again sometimes the process is reversed and the earlier one remains and is lengthened.

### **Morphological**

1. In both declension and conjugation, the dual number disappears.

### **Declension**

2. In the plural of Instrumental and Ablative, hi and bhi are used at the end.
3. Forms in Dative and Genitive Plural are similar, while in case of the singular the Genitive form is often used for Dative.

### **Conjugation**

4. Both Parasmaipada and Ātmanepada occur, but the latter is comparatively fewer.
5. The Parasmaipadī roots of Pāṇinian Dhātupāṭha sometimes change to Ātmanepadī and the latter mostly into the former.

### **Miscellaneous**

6. The prefixes apa and ava are replaced by o.
7. Medial -aya and -ava change to e and o respectively.
8. Besides the Gerund affixes lyap and ktvā, three more (five out of the seven of the Vedic dialects/languages) are found. Lyap and ktvā are very liberally used in Pali, sometimes both in one single word.
9. Besides infinitives in tum̐ (tumunanta of the Vedic), in Pali four more are found -tave, tuye, tāye, and tase.

As regards Ardha-Māghadhī, the general characteristics of Pali, as cited above, both phonological and morphological, are, by and large, applicable to it except a few, for instance Visarga is replaced by e in Ardha-Māghadhī. The following salient phonetic peculiari-

ties may also be cited which distinguish Ardha-Māghadhī from Pali

- (1) y is replaced by j.
- (2) The dental n invariably changes to cerebral ṅ.
- (3) The medial sonants have the tendency to drop out.

Lastly, the author of the paper in question owes an explanation to the world of scholarship as to why he has put Sanskrit (Pāṇinian) under OMI instead of following the norm set by almost all scholars in the field who have placed Sanskrit under Ancient Indo-Āryan grouping. It is because of the fact that they have followed such early dates of Pāṇini which do not conform to the facts and evidences. They have, by and large, ignored the linguistic evidence of Pali on the one hand and Sanskrit on the other. There are evidences to suggest that Pali positively represents an earlier phase of linguistic development and Sanskrit a later. This fact is borne by the archaic nature of the Pali language (at least its early phase, representing early texts of the Tripiṭaka, esp. the Suttanipāta, Dhammapada, Theragāthā, Therīgāthā and so on) as compared to Sanskrit. To state a few instances, (1) Pali retains the Vedic form of Instrumental case plural number (devebhi, devehi), while Sanskrit received a later developed form as devaiḥ.

	<u>Pali</u>	<u>Sanskrit</u>
(2) Ablative case (Singular number)	devasmā, devamhā	devāt
(3) Locative case (sing. number)	devasmim, devamhi	deve
(4) Genitive case (sing. number)	mātussa, mātuno	mātuḥ
(5)	5 kinds of Gerund Af- fixes in Pali (out of the	2 kinds (ktvā, lyap)

- (6) Vedas)  
 Besides infinitives ending in tumunanta alone  
 ing in tum, those in  
 tave, tuye, tāye and  
 tase

On analysis of the facts cited above, one comes to the conclusion that the dialect/language from which Pāṇini derived his grammatical formulations was linguistically much advanced than Pali. Thus taking the first Buddhist Council as the basis, when the Pail texts were compiled, the date of Pāṇini's compilation of the Aṣṭādhyāyī might have taken place a century or a couple of centuries later. Thus the middle of the 4th century B.C. may be the safest date of the Aṣṭādhyāyī. Moreover, at the same time, this view does not curtail the period of collision and collusion between Prakritism represented by Prakrits like Pali, old Ardha-Māgadhī and so on and Sanskritism represented by the predecessors of Pāṇini, Pāṇini himself and his successors, the foremost among whom was Patañjali, the author of the Mahābhāṣya.

Thus to conclude, both tendencies contended for supremacy for centuries and ultimately ended in two sets of courses ordained by the principles of the Science of Languages. That is to say Pali, Ardha-Māgadhī, etc. developed into newer and newer forms of dialects and languages till they reached the present stage of vernaculars of northern and western India, while Sanskrit on the other hand remains alive like a barren woman (vandhyā strī) cursing the children of others, like a museum piece for most of the Indians today and at the same time like a beautiful toy-dog for a handful who use it to entice as well as to frighten the innocent.

**Addenda**

- (1) The spelling in Roman of the word 'Prakrit' and 'Sanskrit' is not according to the internationally accepted norm of Romanisation. It should run as under —Prākṛta and Saṃskṛta. But the spelling used in the title and the text of the paper is common and universally accepted. Both words are in Sanskrit. The Prakrit authors have called their language or languages Pāia, Pāua, Pāiḍa, Pāuḍa and so on.
- (2) The theory of the advent of Āryans in India (as one political entity) and in the adjoining regions about two thousand years ago had been under attack since its inception. But with the emergence of a new wave of Hindu Chauvinism in our country today, the controversy has become very sharp. There are groups and individuals who are trying to dig out a new history of India. Their main contention is that the current text-book history of India was concocted, distorted and constructed by the British historians and their lackeys. Accordingly, the element of alienness of the Āryans was knowingly, rather cunningly, inflicted in Indian history in order to sow the seed of divisiveness among various sections of the Indian people. The fact is that the British India was divided into two parts in 1947 on the question of two-nation theory. In fact, the theory of uni-nationalism and multinationalism is very much complicated in our country today. India i.e. Bhārata is undoubtedly a country of many nations and nationalities. But the distortion caused at the religious level — the Muslims, the Sikhs and in future may be others wrongly identified themselves with the nation of their own conception — is the fact of life and hence the unending trouble.

There are many theories about the date of the arrival of the Āryans into the land of the Sapta-sindhus, but I have opted for the safest and the most convincing. For details, please see *The History of Indian Literature* by M. Winternitz, Vol. One, (reprint of English translation), Munshi Ram Manohar Lal, New Delhi 1978.

- (3) The Indian authors are prone to make mistakes regarding political and geographical identity of India. In their writings sometimes they mean the whole of the Indian subcontinent including Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. But here, the author of the present paper has taken India, i.e. Bhārata as a political entity carved out from the British India in 1947.
- (4) Many derivations and definitions of *Prakrit* have been offered by the authors, past and present. But the one that I have accepted and made the basis of my observations in the present paper is based upon two sources — one from Namisādhu, the famous commentator of Rudraṭa's *Kāvya-lāṅkāra* and the other from the modern researches in the field of linguistics.

Three etimologies of the term *Prākṛta* merit mention here. These are —

- (1) From the original word *prakṛti* or 'basis' through the modification of which one gets the derivative *Prākṛta* or 'one which has come from or arisen out of the basis.' Here the *prakṛti* is considered to be the *Devavāṇī* (the language of the gods), i.e. *Sanskrit*. Accordingly, Prakrit languages are taken to be the lineal descendants of Sanskrit as modified in their regional and temporal evolution. This derivation, in fact, is based upon the belief, as noted above, that the gods had created a language and that happened to be *Devavāṇī* or *Devabhāṣā*. Since the 'language



of gods' is supposed to be perfect in all respects, the other language which originated in course of time, must have got their origination due to lapses on the part of the humans, in other words, through the process of Apabhramṣification (to coin a word to denote the sense).

- (2) The second derivation is from pra + √kṛ (to do) + kta, where praupasarga (prefix) stands for 'prokarṣeṇa' or excessively. Thereafter from the word *prakṛta*, a noun or adjectival phrase is derived and that comes to '*Prākṛta*' or 'one which has been done or worked out excessively or in a most exquisite manner'.
- (3) The third derivation roots out from the combination of the words prāk + √kṛ (to do) + kta. That means 'one which has been done or worked out previously.'
- (5) One and the only etymology of the term *Samskṛta* universally accepted by the scholars is from the words sam + √kṛ (to do) + kta. That means 'one which is refined, cultivated by the learned.' In case of the Hindu orthodoxy, it means 'one refined, cultivated by the gods.' In other words, it is a language which has crossed the stage of being a natural unrefined dialect of the common people and their descendants. Thus by implication it means a language or languages (in case of the plurality of Sanskrit) controlled by the normative rules of grammarians and thereby tamed in all respects for all times to come.
- (6) It is an approximate period in the real sense of the word. The dates in the pre-history of India cannot be taken for granted. A marginal period of five hundred years in remote antiquity may not be too large a period to be adjusted upward or downward.

- (7) Cf. J. Kashyap, *Pali Mahāvyaākaraṇa (introduction)*, Reprint, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Bungalow Road, Delhi 1980.
- (8) 'aiuṅ ṛḷk.....', the most pivotal sūtra of Pāṇini, is regarded as Śaṅkara Sūtra and is believed to have emanated from Lord Śaṅkara's instrument. Cf. Siddhānta Kaumudī of Bhaṭṭojī Dikṣita. It is quite possible that Pāṇini borrowed this sūtra from his predecessor whose name was Śaṅkara.
- (9) Cf. M. Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. One.
- (10) There is a tendency among some historians of India to push back the dates of ancient authors to as early a period or periods as could fancifully be done. This may be interpreted as an over-reaction to what some western scholars like Keith did. But the strongest wave of glorification of India's past which pervades at least the northern part of the country is in a way the most important factor for this state of affairs. So much so, that even attempts are afoot to publicly denounce and discard the theory of Āryan invasion of India and their advent from outside India. This is being interpreted by some as 'the legacy of the British historians who were biased against everything Indian.' But this tendency does not end here. It does not spare even non-Hindu Indian traditions and institutions. For instance, the orthodox Hindu scholarship is not prepared till this day to believe that Aśvaghoṣa appeared prior to Kālidāsa, lest the latter is painted as a borrower from the former's poems. The same tendency works in respect of the date of Pāṇini as well. On being told that the Buddha was a predecessor of Pāṇini, which certainly he was, the orthodox Hindu scholars, by and large, either get offended or depressed.
- (11) The western authors generally designate the language as classical Sanskrit or Pāṇinian Sanskrit. On the other hand, in the absence of

any suitable expression, they call the dialects/ languages of the Vedas as Vedic Sanskrit (the original word being Chāndasa). But, in fact, the term is totally a misnomer. The Vedic dialects/languages were in the form of Prakrits.

- (12) In the title of the paper, Pali language has been put along with Māgadhī which was the old name of Pali language. The language which we call Pali today was known as Māgadhī Bhāsā till the middle of the 14th century A.D., when the Cūlavaṃsa, an appendix to the Mahāvaṃsa was added. Buddhaghosa, the celebrated commentator is recorded to have claimed that Māgadhī language was the root of all languages — ‘Sā Māgadhī mūla-bhāsā.’ The Cūlavaṃsa gives the revealing information that the Māgadhī language of earlier generations of the Theravādīs got redesignated during this period as Pali. Since then the word pali is current all over the world as the only name of the language representing the words of the Buddha (as enshrined in Pali Tipiṭaka) and the Buddhists of the Theravāda sect expressed through that language.

The confusion arises when the old name of Pali, i.e. Māgadhī is mixed with Māgadhī which is one of the Prakrits of the MMI. Both are two all-together different languages with different tendencies of their own.

- (13) It is a common fact that the Brahmins of India, particularly that of the *Āryavarta*, the adopted homeland of the Āryans espoused the cause of Sanskrit all through the recorded history of India. Though ousted from power at certain stages of time, they managed to retain the hold of Sanskrit through various ways and devices. Though very few historical records are available today, yet it is a common fact that during the Mauryan period Sanskrit and the Vedic religion suf-

ferred a severe set-back. Another period when such a set-back (may be of less intensity) took place was during the reign of the Sātavāhanas of the Deccan and further south regions. Hāla, one of the Sātavāhana rulers, who is credited with the authorship of the Gāhāsattasāi (Gāthāsaptaśatī) is reported to have been the strongest protagonist of Prakrit-languages. One of the introductory verses of the text amply reflects the type of rivalry or confrontation that developed between Prakrits on the one hand and Sanskrit on the other. The verse runs as under —

Pharusā Sakkaya-bondhā Pāia-bandho vi hoi suumāro,  
Purisa-mahilāṇaṃ jettiyamihautaraṃ tettiyaṃimāṇaṃ.

(The Sanskrit poetic compositions are indeed very harsh, whereas those of Prakrits are very soft. The measurement of softness between harshness and the two is as much as between the men and women.)

It is quite possible that there might have been many more of the type, but their records are not available. On the other hand, many kings and rulers have been described as the protagonists of Sanskrit. The reason for this glaring disparity is that the kings, by and large, tilt towards the one who is more assertive and effective in the society. That assertive and effective section may or may not represent the majority. The rulers look for the support of those whose association is more beneficial in running the administration. The name of King Bhoja merits mention here. It is said, he had made conversation in Sanskrit compulsory for his subjects. The story of his weaver-subject is very common with the following verse — 'Kāvyaṃ karomi na hi cārutaraṃ karomi..... He Sāhasāṅka kavayāmi, vayāmi, yāmi.'

(14) This fact is very well reflected in the composition of the Sanskrit Departments of almost all the Universities of India. The majority of the members of these Departments hail from orthodox Brahmin communities. The percentage varies from University to University. Generally it ranges from 70% to 100%. The result is that the contributions of the Buddhists and Jains to the enrichment of Sanskrit language and literature are almost totally ignored. The literary and philosophical texts on Buddhist and Jaina themes rarely find any representation in the syllabi of these Departments. Some of the Departments are designated as 'Departments of Sanskrit and Prakrits' but in effect they remain the Department of Sanskrit alone. This is the sorry state of affairs of Prakrits (including Pali) in India. Some institutions run by the Government and private agencies are the only sources of inspiration. But even their condition is not up to the mark, due to step-motherly treatment at every stage. Immediately after the transfer of power by the British to the new rulers of New Delhi, a Constituent Assembly was constituted to chafe a new Constitution for the emergent Government of the Indian union. Sanskrit got a place in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution along with fifteen vernaculars of the country. It was all due to the vocal advocacy and support of the Sanskritists and their fellow-travellers, though Sanskrit had no claim whatsoever to be included in the said Schedule as it does not belong to the category of the spoken languages of India. This gate-crashing on the part of Sanskrit was for Sanskrit (Pāṇinian) alone. Its sister languages like Pali, Prakrits, etc. were left in the lurch. Again the Sahitya Academy of India (a Governmental Body according recognition to languages and literary figures) accorded recognition to Sanskrit alone

from amongst the classical languages of India, and left Pali and Prakrits to their doomed fate. The President of India awards honour every year to as many as ten eminent teachers of classical languages, i.e. Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic (the award to Persian and Arabic scholars is just nominal, one each). There too Pali and Prakrit teachers are ignored as Pali and Prakrits are not recognised as classical languages of India. In fact, there is no end to the discriminations being heaped upon Pali and Prakrits and those who have taken up the task of keeping Pali and Prakrit Studies alive in the land of their very birth.