CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Saurashtri is an Indo-Aryan language spoken within the area of Tamil speech community. It has been in contact with Tamil for nearly three and a half centuries. The main profession of the speakers of the community has been silk-weaving till recent times. The speakers are immigrants from an original Indo-Aryan speech area. Local tradition has it that on their way to Tamilnad Saurashtrians came into contact with at least two speech communities, viz., Marathi and Telugu. One of the marriage customs of the community enlightens us about their origin and the various stages of their migration from their original home. On the day previous to a Saurashtri wedding, the members of the bridegroom's party go to the house of the bride and ask formally for the hand of the girl. Her relations ask them who they are, where they come from, and the members of the bridegroom's party reply that they are from Saurashtra, they left their home for Devagiri so as to escape from the

1. Vide Text No. 7.

onslaughts of Mohammad Ghazni; they after staying for some time in Devagiri, they travelled farther south to Vijayanagar, and then, in response to the invitation of a Nayak king of Madurai, they came to Tamilnad, where they finally settled. The bridegroom’s party then ask the bride’s party the same question and receive the same reply.

3. Somnath (situated in Gujarat) was invaded by Mohammad Ghazni in 1025 A.D. (Ishwari Parmadh, A History of Medieval India (1952), p.93). But Devagiri, the capital of the Yadaves, was founded only in 1187 A.D. (Bhadurkar, B.D., A History of India from pre-historic times to the fall of Vijayanagar (1957), p.117). Therefore, we can only infer that the Saurashtrians left their home about 1025 A.D. We have no idea as to their habitat till 1187 A.D.

4. It is a Marathi speech area. It was brought under Muslim control by the Khaljis and Tughlaks in the early fourteenth century. Vijayanagar was founded in 1336 A.D. Therefore it can be surmised that the Saurashtrians must have lived in and around Devagiri (in other words, in Marathi speech areas) between the early eleventh and the early fourteenth centuries.

5. — a Telugu speech area.

6. The battle of Talikota took place in 1565 A.D. between Vijayanagar and the Muslim kingdoms. The Nayaks of Madurai and Tanjore seem to have become completely independent after this war (Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., A History of South India (1955), p.284). Every migration of the Saurashtrians seems to have had as its cause war and strife, particularly one that involved a Hindu kingdom against Muslims. As their main occupation was silk-weaving, an atmosphere of peace was very essential for them. The Yadaves and then the kings of Vijayanagar had given them shelter before. After Talikota, the Nayaks had come forward. Therefore, the date of the migration of the silk-weaving community from Vijayanagar to Tamilnad could be placed around 1565 A.D. This is testified to by the traditional beliefs of the Saurashtrians.
Thurston informs us that a Marathi manuscript prepared at Salem by Mr. Cockburn in 1822 A.D is found to contain the above tradition with remarkable similarity.

We have very few primary historical sources that may help in reconstructing exactly the history of this migrated community. We have no idea of the exact dates of their departure from and settlement in one place or another. It is also not clear whether they migrated from one place to another in one single mass movement or through successive waves of migrations. Even if their migration had taken place in waves, it can be surmised that the number in each wave of migration must have been quite large and that the time lag between one wave and another must have been quite insignificant. Otherwise, the lack of cohesion would have resulted in the cessation of the use of language. Furthermore, the local tradition gives no information (for the early history prior to the migration to Devagiri) beyond the statement that they came from Saurashtra at an unspecified date. Indeed, the Mandasor inscription of Kumāragupta (dated A.D. 473) speaks of a guild of silk weavers who came from the district of Lāṭa in Gujerat and settled at Dāsapura. It then proceeds to record

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7. op. cit.
that in the reign of Kumāragupta, of the early Gupta dynasty, this guild built a temple to the sun God. It is however difficult to identify the silk weavers' guild mentioned in the Mandasor inscription as the real ancestors of the present Saurashtrian community settled in many districts of Madras State.

Indeed, as the late Professor Weinreich has pointed out, a linguistic study, particularly of a contact situation as the one at hand, can be utilised to shed some more light on the history of the immigrant Saurashtrian community. However, this does not come under the scope of the present work.

1.2. DISTRIBUTION OF SPEAKERS:

According to the 1961 census reports, the Saurashtri speakers number nearly two lakhs. Most of these speakers are bilinguals, having a native-like control over two languages - Saurashtri and Tamil.

The Saurashtri speech community is found to be distributed in various districts of Madras State as shown.

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3. The number of Saurashtri speakers in the present Madras State is 16592 (1961 census reports: language tables, p. 37).
in the map below.

1. North Arcot : 3.5 p.c.
2. Chingleput : 2 p.c.
4. Tiruchirapalli : 8 p.c.
5. Tanjore : 13.5 p.c.
7. Ramanathapuram : 9.5 p.c.
8. Tirunelveli : 2.5 p.c.
Others : 0.5 p.c.

N.B: This is an outline map of present Madras State. Each numeral represents the district where the Saurashtrians have settled, and the accompanying circle with dots inside indicates the percentage strength of the speakers distributed in that district. Each dot stands for 0.5 p.c. of the total number of Saurashtri speakers.

As the 1961 census reports have not given the details regarding the number of speakers in each district, the details given in the 1951 census reports have been used to calculate the distribution of the speakers in the various districts mentioned above.

1.3. SOCIO-LINGUISTIC BACKGROUND:

Saurashtri is the language of a minority community.
The need-filling motive is responsible for this community's attaining command over Tamil, the local language, and becoming bilinguals. Constant contact for centuries with Tamil has Tamilised its structure. It is useful to have an idea of the socio-linguistic background of the community to understand the product at this stage of the unilateral chain reaction that has started long back.

The Saurashtrians, even though they have lived together with speakers of Tamil for a number of centuries, are conscious of their linguistic identity. Their customs, manners and dress (particularly of women) add to their identity as a separate community. They do not enter into marriage relationships with the Tamilians. This factor directly enables them to preserve their culture to a great extent and make active use of their language for purposes of communication in their homes. As they speak in their homes only their mother tongue, a child, at least upto the school-going age, gets the opportunity of living in a relatively monolingual environment. Consequently, most of the children upto the age of five are monolinguals. The monolingualism of the child is also promoted by the pattern of habitation. Saurashtra families do not live isolated 

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9. The Socio-linguistic aspects have been surveyed mainly from the perspective of factors which promote and those which prevent the active usage of the language.
from one another; mostly they are found to live in streets predominantly inhabited by Saurashtri families. This adds to their opportunities to communicate in their own tongue. The friendship patterns of Saurashtri youths also reflect the same tendency: even though the Saurashtri youths and adults attain native-like control over Tamil, they develop intimate friendships only with some of the members of their own community. This social factor promotes the active usage of the language for intimate communication beyond the home. The community tries to preserve its identity through organised efforts also; they run social, religious, cultural, educational and economic institutions of their own. They have also made efforts to produce literature in Saurashtri; the efforts of Venkatasuri, Rama Rai and Padmanabhayyar deserve notice in this context.

There are certain factors which work against the preservation of the language and thus catalyse the reaction. These factors are as follows:

(1) The language is used and preserved only at the oral level. The speech community does not use any script of its own. Indeed, many Saurashtri publications that have

10. Vide also Section 1.4 of this Chapter.
come out about the beginning of this century have used no less than four different scripts. They are Saurashtri, Nagari, Tamil and Telugu. We can cite as examples, 'Saurashtra First Reader' of Rama Rayi (published in 1903 A.D.) for the use of the Saurashtri script; 'Saurashtra Balaramayanu' of Venkatasuri (1904) for Telugu; 'Navina Saurashtra Balabodhini' of K.V. Padmanabhayyar (1936) for Nagari; and 'The compositions of Natanagopala Nayaki Swami' published by C.M.V. Krishnamachariyar (1962) for Tamil.

The Saurashtri alphabet is given on the next page. The illustrations on the usage of the Saurashtri script is given below:

A) (i) ворота говату кхайи
gāyi gōvatu khāyi
'Cow eats grass'.

(ii) қәәр иәңәр?
enu kōnu
'who is he?'

(iii) enu kāyi kērē si
'what does he do?'

11. For an exhaustive list of the publications available in various scripts, refer 'A bibliography of Saurashtri literature' (in Tamil), compiled by Viprabhandhun K.V. Padmanabhayyar and published in the year 1964 by Govinda-dasa Sona Samañ, Madurai.

12. The sentences used for illustrations are from 'Saurashtra First Reader, Part I - Sri Ramarai Publishers, Madura, 1948.'
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<th>VOWELS</th>
<th>LETTER</th>
<th>MATRA</th>
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B) There are variations in the Saurashtri script. To illustrate a variety, the 12th sloka of the Saurashtra Niti-Sambhu, given in the Saurashtri script by Dr. H. N. Randle in the booklet in which he has translated the Niti-Sambhu, is given below. The transcription in the Roman script and the translation of the stanza are also taken from the same booklet.

\[ \text{Settuk samān dhorum junṇa} \\
\text{settu sommaru srēṭu nī} \\
\text{settu nhīnum bhovē pāpun} \\
\text{settu sēṭṭeko sē garan} \]

'There is no virtue like truth, nothing better than truth. In him in whom truth is not there are many evils; worth is his in whom is truth.'

The Nagari and Tamil systems of writing, as such, do not meet the requirements of Saurashtri. Therefore, they have been adjusted to meet the demands of the language.
as mentioned below

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<tr>
<th>letter</th>
<th>matra</th>
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with the inherent vowel | without the inherent vowel

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<th>Tamil</th>
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<td>anus</td>
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and so on for other stops.

13. Only the letter is different from Nagari, and not the matra.
Telugu poses no problems of adjustment as it provides in its system not only for short e and o, but also for the aspirated stops.

However, none of the four scripts mentioned above has been in active usage. From the school-going child to the adult, all carry out their official and even unofficial written work only in Tamil, the local and state language.

(11) Despite their efforts to preserve identity, the Saurashtrarians have been influenced considerably by the culture of the Tamilians, particularly in regard to the matters connected with day-to-day life, personal names, family names, etc. The effect of this process of acculturation on their language is quite obvious.

(111) The determination to improve its own literature and keep its language aloof from the influence of Tamil is diluted by the absence of any need-filling motive. To have education or to make social and business contacts what one needs is the command over Tamil, and of late, over other languages like English and Hindi.

1.4. LITERARY WORKS IN SAURASHTRI:

Even though the present generation of the Saurashtraian community does not possess a literature of its own, it cannot be denied that the Saurashtrarians have a literary tradition of their own. There is a considerable distance between written Saurashtra and spoken Saurashtra.

Viprabhandhu K.V. Padmanabhayyar has brought to light a number of literary works, available in Saurashtra in
various scripts, in his recently published bibliography on Saurashtri literature. In this bibliography, he has mentioned not only the printed works published from the year 1868 onwards to 1964, but also those works which are available only in the manuscript form. The author of the earliest available manuscript belongs to the sixteenth century.

1.5. GRAMMATICAL WORKS IN SAURASHTRI:

Towards the beginning of this century, many Saurashtrian scholars like Alagarayar and Rama Rayi seem to have taken keen interest in preparing the grammar of Saurashtri. The Linguistic Survey of India only took note of Saurashtri under the name Patnāli in Vol. IX, part II, pp. 447-8, but did not describe it.

The first major attempt to describe the language was made by H.N. Randle. In his articles on Saurashtri (appeared in the 'Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London', Vol. XI 1943-46, two articles), Randle has described the grammar of the written language as revealed through the literary works of Venkatsuri Rama Rayi, Rangadhamaryan, etc.

The present study aims at describing the structure of the language as it is spoken today at Madurai, one of the main speech areas.

14. op. cit.

15. The songs of Kurukku Supparya Swamigal have been published in 1965 at Madurai.