CHAPTER - 7
CONCLUSION

The seventh chapter is the concluding portion of the thesis. A historical review of the entire period with reference to Buddhist literature and epigraphy will thus reveal that right from the birth of Prakrit language-group, the original form of Sanskrit had undergone almost decadent, although the later Sanskrit works also exist simultaneously with the Prakrit works. It is noteworthy that grammar of the Prakrit languages was written in Sanskrit. On the other hand, in the Sanskrit dramas the low-cast people and ladies used to speak in Prakrit. Regarding the treatment of vowels, Middle-Indic languages show the absence of vowels ‘ai’ and ‘au’. But the Gīrnat version of Aśoka’s Prakrit, which belongs to the first stage of MIA, bears the vowel ‘ai’ only in three forms, viz., ‘thaira’, ‘traidasa’ and ‘samacaira’.\(^{190}\) The vowel ‘ai’ is also found in the inscriptions written in Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit and in the literature written in Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit, viz., Mahāvastu Avadāna, Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, Lalitavistara etc. It is very astounding that even in the Avahattha, the last stage of Prakrit group, the vowel ‘ai’ is also found. The vowel ‘i’ is generally absent in the Middle-Indic languages. Its substitutes, i.e., ‘a’, ‘i’, ‘u’, ‘e’ etc. are found all over the period. But the vowel ‘i’ and its substitutes are all found in the literature written in Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit.

\(^{190}\) Hultzsch, E., Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, v.1, Inscriptions of Aśoka, p.lvi, op.cit.
The consonant 'ḷ' is found in Pali (a language of the 1st stage of MIA), which is also found in Old Sauraseni & Old-Ardha-Magadhī (belongs to the transitional period), Paisācī (belongs to the 2nd stage of MIA) and in Apabhraṃśa (belongs to the last stage of MIA). Regarding the use of sibilants, the general characteristic of Middle-Indic group of languages is the use of dental 's' only. But, in Asokan Prakrit, palatal 'ś', cerebral 'ṣ' and dental 's' — all are found. These are also found in the languages, like, Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit and Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit. It can be mentioned here that Māgadhī dialect of Prakrit (belongs to 2nd stage of MIA) bears only palatal 'ś'. Again, palatal 'ś' and cerebral 'ṣ' becomes dental 's' in Nāgara Apabhraṃśa, but in Vṛacaṇa Apabhraṃśa, cerebral 'ṣ' and dental 's' becomes palatal 'ś'.

The dialects (Old Sauraseni, Old Magadhī and Old-Ardha-Magadhī) of Asvaghoṣa's drama have some similarities with the several dialects of Asokan Prakrit, e.g., Old-Māgadhī with Eastern version of Asokan Prakrit, Old Sauraseni with North-Western version of Asokan Prakrit and Old-Ardha-Māgadhī with Middle Eastern version of Asokan Prakrit.

The non-initial and single consonants, if unaspirate, are dropped and if aspirate, then changed to 'h'. This feature is found in later Prakrit, but in earlier Prakrit (e.g., Prakrit Dhammapada etc.), it is absent. As a matter of fact, even in the Apabhraṃśa stage the process of decadence did not come to an end and as a result, Avahattha is found which again paved the way of New-Indo-Aryan.
Palaeographic records of Middle-Indo-Aryan languages, also given in this thesis which actually shows the changes in ancient writing covering the total period. It is started from Early Brahmi, then Middle Brahmi, Nagari, Newari etc. and Asokan Kharoṣṭhī. then Kharoṣṭhī of the 2nd century A.D. also found which preserves the Buddhist literature.

However, as an intermediary stage between Old-Indo-Aryan and New-Indo-Aryan, the importance of Pali and Prakrit with its dialects and degenerated forms can never be missed and it is essential to have a knowledge of the same to understand the evolution of Indian languages. Above all, it will not be possible to understand Buddhism unless Pali and Prakrit are given proper importance.