CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION ------- A GENERAL SURVEY

Language is a unique combination of sound and sense. It means that it is an expressed idea where speech sounds combined into words. Otherwise it can be said that language is a mode of speaking or writing common to a group of people. Therefore, the primary object of linguistic approach is language. India is a vast country and we have an amazing collection of languages and dialects, which enhanced our literature from ancient to modern. Before we go through the divisions or classifications of Indian languages, we have to see the origin of Indian languages. Actually, languages of the world are of two types --- classified and unclassified. The following chart shows the origin of Indian languages:

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Branches of Classified Languages of World

The linguistic history of India is great. The Indo-Aryan languages, which happened to be the mother of other Indian languages was initially, introduced in India by the intruding Aryans during 1500 B.C. Chronologically the Indo-Aryan languages are divided into three distinct categories and these are --- (1) Old-Indo-Aryan (1500B.C. to 600B.C.), (2) Middle-Indo-Aryan (600B.C. to 1200A.D.) and (3) New-Indo-Aryan (1200 A.D.). In each period there was literary 'standard' dialect, which constitute our main source of information regarding the phonetics and other details of the various spoken dialects also.

Actually, Language, the medium of communication, can not be bound by time. It is really difficult to say when the particular language is evolved. Its area can be described, its development can be examined, its grammar can be explained and its characteristics can be discussed. But the correct time of its evolution just is apprehended. It is important to say that we can discuss about its ranges (in respect of popular use). However, the object of this study is to see the historical development of Middle-Indo-Aryan Language with reference to Buddhist Literature and Epigraphy. So, we have to consider both languages of the inscription and literature.

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The total range of the development of Middle-Indo-Aryan language is vast. It plays a great part in the formation of modern Indian vernaculars. The probable date of the emergence of Buddhism in India is 6th century B.C. It is a noticeable factor that the formation and growth of the Classical (Sanskrit) stage synchronized with the time of the rise of Buddhism. Buddhism virtually disappeared from the land of its birth by 12th century A.D., but was established throughout the rest of Asia. Pali, Prakrit, Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit and Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit (formerly known as Epigraphal Hybrid Sanskrit and Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit respectively), belonging to the category of MIA languages contained vast amount of historical materials related to Buddhism. Pali is the language of the sthaviravāda (Theravāda). On the other hand, while the Sarvastivāda sect composed Tipiṭaka in Mixed Sanskrit (Sanskrit Buddhist literature), Sānmiṭṭikās composed the same in Apabhraṃśa and Mahāśāṅghikās composed the same in Prakrit.

As far as my observation is concerned, Middle-Indo-Aryan language can be divided into four stages from linguistic point of view. The first stage ranging from 600 B.C. to 100 B.C., consists of Pali and Prakrit. All the texts of Pali canonical literature Tipiṭaka were written within this period. The earliest written document of Prakrit is Piprahwa Buddhist Vase inscription (5th century B.C.). Later, all the Asokan inscriptions are included in this phase.

Again, Hāṭhigumpha Inscription of Kharavela of Kaliṅga is also belonged to this period because it has close resemblance with the Girnār version of Asoka and with Pali. The second stage is the transition period (100B.C. – 400A.D.). In this phase or period we have four languages, which are found in the records (epigraphs, manuscripts) related to Buddhism. The languages are --- (i) Prakrit, (ii) Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit, (iii) Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit, and (iv) Mixed Sanskrit.

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11. ibid., p-291.
Languages of the fragments of Aśvaghosa’s drama. It is important to say that the languages --- Prakrit and Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit are found both in epigraphs and manuscripts and the Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit are only found in epigraphs. Though Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit is found both in manuscripts and epigraphs, but as they do not deal with the Buddhism, so the manuscripts, i.e., literatures are taken for the study only. Although our discussion is about the development of Middle-Indo-Aryan languages, but Sanskrit literatures, mainly drama, are taken where we get the application of different dialects of Prakrit languages. It is important to mention that in the fragments of in Aśvaghosa’s drama (restored and edited by H. Lüders), we get three distinct dialects of Prakrit, viz., Old Māgadhī, Old Sauraseni and Old Ardha Māgadhī according to Lüders. He also claimed that those three dialects conform to the phonetic standard of Pali and has several similarities and dissimilarities with the Asokan Prakrit. However, it is really of great importance in case of the history of Indian languages as well as the development of Middle-Indo-Aryan language.

The period between 400 A.D. and 600 A.D. is a particular stage of development of literary Prakrits such as Māhārāṣṭrī, Sauraseni, Māgadhī, Ardha-Māgadhī and Paścāti. The aforesaid literary Prakrits have also several sub-dialects of them. Unfortunately we have not any Buddhist literature written in any of the literary Prakrits, still I have to consider those in my work because the development of the Middle-Indo-Aryan language will be incomplete until and unless I mention it.

In the next phase, between 600 A.D. and 1200 A.D, the later development of MIA (Apabhramśa and avahaṭṭha) will be discussed. Dr. Sukumar Sen also given a chart of the Apabhramśa where shows the time of Apabhramsa is between 350 A.D. and 650 A.D. Again, Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee shows Apabhraṃśa of different dialects of Prakrits like Māhārāṣṭrī Apabhraṃśa, Sauraseni Apabhraṃśa, Māgadhī Apabhraṃśa etc. But,

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13. ibid.
14. ibid., p-4.
S.M. Katre claimed that Apabhraṃśa was used in the East of India by the Northern Buddhists. It is important to mention here that according to Viṁṭadeva (8th century A.D.) Apabhraṃśa used by the Sāmmitiya sect of Buddhists, Prakrit by the Mahāsaṅghikas and Paiśācī by the Sthaviravādins in their religious literature. However, Apabhraṃśa is basically the late form of Prakrit. It may be put in other way that the Prakrit language due to its locational variation, assumed some phonological and morphological changes, which ultimately had come to be known as Apabhraṃśa.

The ultimate form of Apabhraṃśa is known as Avahāṭṭha or Apabhraṣṭa, which in other way is the ruin of Prakrit language. Abhibhraṣṭa is a synonym of MIA Avahāṭṭha('fallen down'). Mahāmahopāddhyaya, Dr. H.P. Shastri used the special terminology regarding the language of the Dohās is ‘Sandhya-Bhāṣā’ (twilight language). But Pandit Bidhusekhara Bhattacharya corrected it as Sandhābhāṣā (intentional speech). Tibetan translators and commentators also confirm that the meaning of the term ‘Sandhī-Bhāṣā’ is ‘intentional speech’. However, the Buddhist Dohās are written in a late or simplified form of Apabhraṃśa. It is important to note that the literary evidence of Avahāṭṭha language is of two types geographically --- (i) Western and (ii) Eastern. Western Avahāṭṭha prevalent in Sauraseni Prakrit region was full of linguistic material. Eastern Avahāṭṭha correspond the works of Kāśyapa, Saraha and Tillo (Buddhist Siddhas). In this period erotic Buddhism of Eastern India, was called Sahaja. It reflects in the Avahāṭṭha literature.

17. Majumdar, P.C., Saṁskṛta O Prākṛti Bhāṣā Kramavikāś, op.cit. p-335.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.
The total range is shown in the following chart——

**INDO-ARYAN**

- Old-Indo-Aryan (1500 B.C.-600 B.C.)
- Middle-Indo-Aryan (600 B.C.-1200 A.D.)
- New-Indo-Aryan (After 1000 A.D.)

**1st MIA (600 B.C.-100 B.C.)**

- Pali
- Asokan Prakrit

**Transitional Stage (100 B.C.-400 A.D.)**

- Prakrit influenced by Sanskrit
- Sanskrit influenced by Prakrit
- Languages of the fragments of Asvaghoṣa's drama

**2nd MIA (400 A.D.-600 A.D.)**

- Literary Prakrits / Dialects of Prakrit

- Maharāṣṭrī
- Māgadhī
- Saurasenī
- Ardha-Māgadhī
- Pāśācī

**3rd MIA (600 A.D.-1200 A.D.)**

- Apabhraṃśa
- Avahatthā
Phonology of each and language of each state will be discussed only in my paper. Therefore, the development of the total range of MIA will be shown from the phonological point of view.

The work also contains the palaeographic records of MIA languages. As regards the palaeographic records of MIA language it may be mentioned that the Mahenjadaro and Harappan scripts represented the oldest form of writing. 24 These scripts are not basically the Aryan in origin but can be considered as the primitive form of Dravidian script. 25 On the other hand, the Brāhmī was the oldest script, which was introduced to write the Aryan language in India. Mauryan period onwards many old Prakrit inscriptions were found written in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts. Subsequently, more developed Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts were found to be used in inscriptions of Kuśāpa kings and scriptures is Sanskrit Buddhist (100 A.D.-400 A.D.). Between 400 A.D. and 600 A.D., the scriptures and Sanskrit and Sanskrit dramas were written in developed Brāhmī with its regional variety. The period between 600 A.D. and 1200 A.D. witnessed the development and use of the Brāhmī belonging to Northern and Southern classes in different religious scriptures and use of Apabhraṃśa and Avahattha in Saradā and Newari scripts respectively. 26

25. ibid.
26. ibid.