CHAPTER V

BIRTH OF CLASSICAL DRAMA IN THE PANJAB.
with the Mauryan Dynasty coming to an abrupt end after the murder of the last Mauryan emperor by his commander in-chief (or Prime Minister) Pushya Mitra Sunga in 180 B.C. the course of Indian History was vitally affected and new trends in the religious, political, social and cultural fields began to take shape diverging widely from the immediate past. The Sungas were Brahmanas and the founder of the dynasty who turned out to be a Champion of the orthodox Brahmanism is known to have clashed with the Panjab which by then had fallen apart from the Maurya empire and was mostly ruled by Indo-Greek rulers. Thus it was that Northern India got broken into two political divisions, and may be partly because of this, into religious divisions as well. Indo-Greek held their sway over Panjab territories while the rest of the Northern India had Sungas as their overlords. While, therefore Buddhism remained the main religion of Panjab, the rest of the country started on a Brahmanical Hindu revival mainly under the jealous patronage of the new fanatical post-Mauryan rulers. The Buddhist texts have ainted Pusha a Mitra black. 2. Kali Dass's drama Malvikagnimitra narrates the episode of a conflict of arms between the forces of Pushya Mitra and the Indo-Greeks as a result of the latter capturing the sacrificial horses and a cow at will by Pushya Mitra who held the 2nd Asva Medha Yagya to proclaim his paramountty over four corners. This battle is shown to have been fought on the bank of Sindh, possibly a tributary of Chambal or of Yamuna. Patanjali's Mahabhashya refers to the siege of Mathurika an Sakat by the Greeks while Gargi Samhita of the Yuga Puran calls them 'vicious and Valiant Greeks' who invaded Saketa, Panchala, Mathura etc. C.S.
an arch persecutor of the Buddhist faith who attempted to destroy the Buddhist centre of Sakla in the Panjub and massacred wholesale the Buddhist missionaries.

Shunga dynasty ended by 75 B.C. and was succeeded by Kanvao, this time again Brahminas, their rule lasting over 40 years. The following two centuries may be called centuries of imperial decadence till by 250 A.D. we find Andhras, the non-Aryans of the south, establishing their powerful rule over a great part of India. Meanwhile the north-west of India, the territory we now call Panjab, was ruled by Greeks, Sakas, Pehlava and Kushan rulers. A references to these facts of history is found necessary in order to ascertain the causes and the circumstances that went into the blossoming forth of regular drama, the earliest we know of in-India in the Panjub, during the rule of Kanishka.

REVIVAL OF SANSKRIT.

The Andhara imperialism received a severe set back at the hands of foreign Saka invaders, led by Nahapans who snatched Maharashtra from them and started extending their sway over Western India, reaching as far as the Gandhara in the Panjub. In course of time Sakas began to rule from Ujjain, the whole of western India was occupied and dominated by these fierce people while the rule of Andhras receded south-wards. All this, brought about tremendous accompanying changes of far reaching import, on the linguistic and cultural situation of the country so that by the 3rd century A.D. India presented a picture totally different in every way from the Mauryan times.

With the revival of Brahmánism in the Sunga era, Prakritas of the times of Mauryas and associated with
Buddhism and Jainism were replaced by Sanskrit and later centuries too witnessed a glorious period of the renais- sance of this classical language. It seems that Sanskrit was not altogether given up by the priestly class of Hindus of the days of Pali and Artha-Maghi and they doggedly cultivate Sanskrit so that in spite of the temporary loss of state patronage and general unpopularity, refused to be liquated as a class and were always on the look out to reassert their supremacy and reclaim the lost ground, at the first opportunity that offered itself. It is the curious fact, almost paradoxical that the period when the Buddhist canon was being evolved, the Brahmanical literat developed in refinement and assumed a classical character like the Sanskrit, in which it was expressed. It is from 5th century B.C. to the 1st century A.D. that we find a subterranean process at work which turned Brahminism into Hinduism and the two becoming synonymous. The consensus of agreement exists that the Mahabharata, Ramayana, Manu's Dharam Sutras, Upanishads of medium antiquity and the older parts of Puranas belong to this period.

**Classical Sanskrit was founded in the 3rd century B.C.** It was in these times that Sanskrit prose came to be used for dialectical and scholastic purposes and one may vouch with good certainty that the seat of Sanskrit learning and its cultivation was the north west of India, more exactly the Taxila University of Gandhara in the Panjab, during all these times. It was precisely because of this patent fact that when Mahayana Buddhism.

1. Besides these, Mahayana Buddhism Sarva Sutras are believed to be the earliest to be compiled and are considered to belong to the 5th or 6th century B.C. Patangali probably wrote his 'Maha Bhasha' in the 2nd century A.D. B.C.
took its birth in the Panjab, Sanskrit and not the
rakrītī became the vehicle of the new thought and
philosophy.

There are cogent reasons why Sanskrit language
should have maintained itself in the north west, more than
the North or East of India. The most important factor for
this phenomenon was the most ignored one that Panjab
generally and the Gandhara area specially was from the very
beginning the principal seat of Ayas and their language
so that people of these parts had for their spoken tongue
even in these centuries a language nearest to the Sanskrit
which was nothing but the literary form of the former. In
a way we can say that the territory of Gandhara had near
Sanskrit for its native language and there was nothing
strange if Tamil University had Sanskrit for its medium of
studies and retained it throughout its course of existence.
Another factor is history, which in the case of Panjab
continued to be radically different over long periods than

the rest of the country. The Panjab fell ro hit in the
1. There is an enclose in the hills of Rawalp in
(Pakistan) and the adjacent parts of Kashmir(Ancient Abhisa
which has preserved this language in a great degree and the
rustics from this tract will startle you by speaking his
mother tongue which is almost Sanskrit in Character. This
I assert on the basis of personal knowledge. G.S.

2. Your forefathers had a system of dividing the country into
five zones and for an ethnic, linguistic culture and even
political-historical study of India, that classification is
very useful. The five zones are: Madhyladideh (the middle
country) Purvadesha or Praqya (the East) Dakshinapatha (the
South) and Upadipath or Udāya (the North) Upadipatha is
defined as the country to the North which is 29.30 N. This
should roughly mean that the regions to the west of 75°
E if they are to be North of 30° N. will be included in
Upadipatha. The regions which we now call North-Western
were thus styled as Northern by our forefathers.

Jai Chandra Nallor: Vidyalankara: Cultural Heritage of India
North Zone out of the traditional five zones in which India used to be divided since the days of Dharam Sutras, the Buddhist Vinaya and the Pauranas. This testified to the fact that Panjab developed zonal character almost from the ancient historical times. Part of this history has been traced in the beginning of this chapter. It is obvious that it was Panjab, unlike the rest of India, including its north, east and centre, that experienced a prolonged history of contact with Iranian, Greek, Pahlava, Saka and Kushan people and received the most powerful impact of foreign cultures as well as absorbed the largest number of multiracial immigrants with the result that Panjab became peculiar and different from the rest of India in its racial complexity and popular psychology as well as cultural aspect and characteristics. The long history of political segregation from the rest of India reinforced this separatist trend with the result that even in the days of Prakrit ascendency the rise of Sanskrit by Dr. A. L. Wright has suggested as opposed to the more popular religious Prakrit drama is to be attributed to the Sakas. The theory is based on the view that Sanskrit was elevated to the status of the language of literature in their times. He holds that western Kshatrapas of Shaka origin were the first to bring Sanskrit down to earth while not vulgarising it. Keith has disputed this theory that sounds very much near truth, G.S. 2. And just as the first public proclamation addressed in regular Sanskrit to the public was written at the court of a foreign king, the Scythian Kshatrapa at Sului, so it would be consistent with all our other information if one of the 1st, if not the first literary work addressed in regular Sanskrit to the laity, should have been written of the court of a foreign king, the Tatar sovereign of the Kushan realm.

Rhys Davids: Buddhist India p.209.
in the rest of Northern India, Panjab generally speaking, was a votary of Sanskrit. When it embraced Buddhism the religion itself underwent a metamorphosis and in form and spirit was different from the original, almost out of recognition. The Mahayana Buddhism discarded Pali Prakrit in favour of Sanskrit, firstly because it was the area of near-Sanskrit in which it took birth and secondly because Sanskrit alone could have been the medium for the mutual intercourse of foreign settlers in the region. They spoke different tongues and could not follow even each other except through the medium of literary language of the soil of their common adoption. From the evidence of coins which have dual legends on them, it is almost certain that the foreign rulers were on the look out for a satisfactory solution to the standing language problem that must have been faced by all of them till, due mainly to the existence of the Taxila University in the heart of the Gandhara (the city which was not only the capital of Gandhara but that of the whole of Panjab during the reign of Kanishka), Sanskrit came to be supreme in the court and was extended state patronage. Great Sanskrit Pandits of their time, "Through both normal development and t. influence of the languages of the pre-Aryan people on it, the Aryan speech underwent a rapid modification and by 600 B.C. particularly in the eastern Ganga valley which was furthest away from the Aryan hordes in the Northern Panjab it entered into the 2nd phase of its history, the Middle Indic-Aryan phase which continued right down to about A.D.1000 when the present 'Aryan' phase came into being."

Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay. The Cultural Heritage of India (Linguistic Survey of Indian Languages and Scripts) 22, 56-57

A subsidiary cause which also deserves consideration is the influence of their intercourse with foreigners and especially with the socially powerful Greeks, Scythians and Tartars. The teaching of grammar, the spread of the ideas of the learned diction among the more educated people would be greatly strengthened by the necessity of explaining linguistic forms to the people of this sort who so likely to have been asked to do this as those who were known to have already devoted attention to the subject and had a well earned reputation, that is, the Brahmins? And why, otherwise, should it precisely on these border districts on the extra North-West frontier(not looked upon in other matters as he of orthodox teaching) that were the home of the most developed and most authoritative grammatical teaching and the place of residence of the most distinguished grammarians, Agya Daveds; Buddha
time like Ashwini, Ashava Gosha, Vasumitra, Nagarjun and medical savant Charak were drawn to the court of Kanishka.

TEMPLE DRAMA AND ASHVA GOSHA.

The Gandhara School of sculpture and Mahayana Buddhism are related phenomenon. While Gandhara School of sculpture was of Greek inspiration and would not have flourished had there been no Greek gods and no Greek sculpture to inspire and instruct, the raising of temples in which these statues were installed and worshipped by Mahayani Buddhism was also in great probability, a recipient of inspiration from the same direction. Temple came with the Mahayana branch of Buddhism, I.e. of all in the Panjab, the territory of its foundation and with the temple came what now goes with the name of Temple in India.

"The Vedica religion has not scope for the worshipping of images and idols and there is considerable substance and truth in the contention of the Arya Samajists that image worship was only a latter day innovation. Whatever may have been the position in the Vedica period worship, if god and construction of temples have become widespread from the 1st century of the Christian era, scholars have found in this change over the influence of Buddhist art and architecture, which may have derived the original inspiration from the Greeks who adopted the god of the Buddha."

Mookerjee: The Cultural Heritage of India vol. I (Buddhism in Indian Life and Thought) P. 591.

2. The Natya Shastra describes various types of play houses and their different parts have been mentioned to some extent in detail, but in the absence of evidence the like of which has been copiously available in case of the Greek theatre, it cannot be said how far the ancient Indi plays were performed in specially constructed theatres. It may be possible that only king and very wealthy people owned play houses constructed according to the Natya Shast while dramatic spectacles meant for the common people were held in the open halls called the Nat Mandirs (Natya Mandiras) in front of the temples or in a temporarily devised theatre, under the cover of a canopy, as in the case of modern Bengali Yatra which seem to have some resemblances and connection with the ancient Indian Natya described in the Shastra.

Manomohan Ghosh: Introduction to his translation of Natya Shastra (1950) P. IVII.
It is very obvious that temple drama could only be possible when temples came to be built and we also know that it was the Mahayana School of Buddhism which created temples and installed images to be worshipped in them. It was, therefore in the Panjab that temple drama struck its first roots.

The picture as laid down before us is now very clear. The Panjab, more specially its North-western frontie called Gandhara was a meeting spot of many cultures. The idea of the literary drama came from the Indo Greek contact. Sanskrit was not very much foreign to the area. It was not as that employed in the later drama of the Gupta period but was the literary language of all the literates in the Panjab and not for removed from the spoken language of the area as well. Taxila was the highest seat of Sanskrit studies and culture and the language became the lingua franca of the times of Kanishka regime and the medium of philosophical treatises on Mahayana Buddhism. This Mahayana school of Buddhism gave birth to Gandhara school of sculpture (which again was of Greek inspiration) with the result that temples came into being when images were installed and congregational worship was conducted. Thus it was that in the Gandhara area in times of Kanishka there came about a confluence of the idea of a developed literary play from Greek source, Sanskrit language from Taxila University, the temples and temple worship from the Mahayana cult and greatest of all, 1.

1. "The architecture and sculpture were probably not much known in India until the times of the Greeks. Prior to their coming the Indians usually built and buildings and stone buildings of a Primitive character only."
the Sanskrit Buddhist scholar of this school Ashva Goshha;
the product of this extraordinary conjunction was the
1st Sanskrit drama known to history.

Prof. Ludes was able to discover three dramas
of great antiquity at Turfan in the form of fragments of
manuscripts on palm-leaf in the years 1911 and these are
now believed to be the creations of Ashva Goshha. These
are Shariputra-prakrama and two others in even smaller
fragments.

The most remarkable thing regarding Shariputra
Prakrama is its close correspondence to the classical type
as laid down in the Natya Shastra. The other remarkable
feature of these plays is their common theme, i.e., Buddhism.
Out of the two other fragmentary plays found along with this
more complete manuscript there is one with allegorical
figures such as Buddha, Kirti and Dhariti for its
characters. In the third play a hetawara named Magadhavati
a Vidushaka named Komuda-gaudha, a hero styled only
Mayak, a Dushita, a certain Dhananjaya, a maid servant
and Shariputra and Mandgolyayana figure as characters.

The important thing about this discovery is that
these dramas are the earliest known to history and are
1. The excavations at Taxasun by archaeologists have
yielded to us with the materials relating to the development of architecture
between 70 and 300 A.D. The architectural style in the
monasteries is fundamentally Indian but numerous motifs, for
instance, the Corinthian capital pediments, entablatures,
mouldings, etc., are of debased classical order. A typical
Gandharan monastery consists mainly of two structures, the
stupa and the monastery with the aggregate of other building
5,000 years of Indian architecture (Pub. Div). 1954.

The earliest available dramatic works are the thirteen
plays ascribed to Bhawa (circa 200-300 A.D.) Ashva Goshha
came earlier and has also a play Shariputra-prakrama to his
credit, but it has come down to us in fragments. G. I. Dashepan
on Sanskrit Drama in Indian Drama.

(Pub. Div.) P. 10

1. Ashva Goshha is the celebrated author of our epic
Bhavacarita. His Sutralankar is also known through the
medium of a Tibetan translation. He was also the founder
of a school of Mahayana Buddhism and is known to have
belonged to the court of Kanishka and the Taxila University;
by Ashwva Goshha who belonged to the court of Ranishka and the Taxila University in the Panjab. These are written for the edification of Buddhism and must have been performed most probably in the Mahayan temples of the Panjab.

Regarding the employment of language by the characters Natya Shastras rules have been generally followed. The Buddha, his disciple, the hero of the hetaera play and Dhamanajaya speak Sanskrit, the allegorical characters in the other play also speak Sanskrit while others of more feminine appeal and character speak Prakrit, one Shrama speaks Sanskrit, another conceivably an Ajivika a Prakrit.

Keith says that in these plays three different forms of Prakrit may be distinguished, the first spoken by the Dushta, the second by the mysterious Gebain and third by the hetaera and vidushaka but a detailed discussion of the form of these dialects shows that none belongs strictly to Magdhi, Ardha Magdhi or ShauraSeni as defined by the grammarians and on the whole have been found more near to Sanskrit than the Prakrit of the later drama.

Prakrit of the later classical drama belonged to the much later stage of development which may mean that the Prakrit's used by Ashvva Goshha were neither Magdhi, nor Ardha- Magdhi, nor even ShauraSeni but those belonging to the Panjab region in which Ashvva Goshha wrote his plays and in which, these were being staged in his times.

2. Keith: The Sanskrit Drama p. 67-68
3. The stage reached by the Prakrit of Ashvva Goshha shows clearly how late are the Prakrit of the orthodox classical drama and reminds us no much more closely akin to Sanskrit must have been the Prakrit of the drama of the time of , or shortly after 'Manjunlji.'
   Keith: The Sanskrit Drama. p. 76.
The Prakrits used, therefore, need to be studied from this point of view. We have already pointed out the fact that the spoken language of Panjab, more specially in the Sandhara districts, was near Sanskrit and differed greatly from the languages used in the rest of India in the matter of its closeness to Sanskrit and since all agree that the Prakrits of the Ashva Ghosha plays sound older than the later Prakrits of the classical plays, and they also do not fall into categories of well known Prakrits, the correctness of our postulate that Ashva Ghosha used Panjabi dialects in his plays is strongly suggested and reinforced.

1. Moreover it is perfectly clear that Bhasa's Prakrits, as revealed by the Manuscripts of his plays, occupy a position intermediate between the Prakrits of Ashva ghosha and of Kalidasa as shown by European critical editions. "Keith: A History of Sanskrit Literature, Preface P.xii (1946) reprint)