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978-1-108-04813-2 - Comparative Grammar of the Modern Aryan Languages of India: To Wit, Hindi, Panjabi, Sindhi, Gujarati, Marathi, Oriya, and Bangali: Volume 1: On Sounds  
John Beames

Excerpt

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# COMPARATIVE GRAMMAR OF THE MODERN ARYAN LANGUAGES OF INDIA.

## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

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§ 1. ON analyzing the vocabulary of the seven languages which form the subject of this work, we observe at the outset that a large number of words are common to them all. In all, with slight modifications, *ho* means be; *kar*, do; *â*, come; *jâ*, go; *khâ*, eat; *pî*, drink; *mar*, die; *mâr*, strike; *sun*, hear; *dekh*, see; and among nouns a still greater number is found

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with but minor differences in each member of the group. Inasmuch as it is also clear that all of these numerous words are found in Sanskrit, we are justified in accepting so far the native opinion that Sanskrit is the parent of the whole family. By the term Sanskrit is meant that language in which the whole of the religious, legendary, and philosophical literature of the Aryan Indians is written, from the ancient hymns of the Vedas down to the latest treatises on ceremonies or metaphysics. That this language was once the living mother-tongue of the Aryan tribes may safely be conceded; that it was ever spoken in the form in which it has been handed down by Brahmanical authors may as safely be denied. If then the word Sanskrit be, as in strictness it should be, applied only to the written language, the statement that Sanskrit is the parent of the modern vernaculars must be greatly modified, and we should have to substitute the term *Middle-Aryan* to indicate the spoken language of the contemporaries of Vālmīki and Vyāsa, the reputed authors of the two great Indian epics, Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata. To do this would, however, be to draw too fine a distinction, and might lead to confusion. We shall, therefore, use the word Sanskrit; but in order to make perfectly clear the sense in which it is used, and the exact relation which Sanskrit, both written and spoken, bears to the other languages, whether contemporaneous or subsequent to it, some further explanation is necessary.

Let it then be granted as a fact sufficiently proved in the following pages that the spoken Sanskrit is the fountain from which the languages of Aryan India originally sprung; the principal portion of their vocabulary and the whole of their inflectional system being derived from this source. Whatever may be the opinions held as to the subsequent influences which they underwent, no doubt can fairly be cast on this fundamental proposition. Sanskrit is to the Hindi and its brethren, what Latin is to Italian and Spanish.

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The next point, however, is that, even to a casual observer, it is clear that the seven languages as they stand at present contain materials not derived from Sanskrit, just as Italian and French, without ceasing to be modern dialects of Latin, contain many words of Teutonic origin. These materials may be classed under two heads. First, those which are Aryan, though not Sanskritic. Secondly, those which are neither Sanskritic nor Aryan, but something else. What this something else is, remains to be seen; it is, in fact, the great puzzle of the whole inquiry: it is the mathematician's  $x$ , an unknown quantity.

§ 2. First, then, we have to explain what is meant by the term, "Aryan, though not Sanskritic." It may be accepted as a well-established fact, that the Aryan race entered India not all at once, nor in one body, but in successive waves of immigration. The tribes of which the nation was composed must therefore have spoken many dialects of the common speech. I say "must," because it is contrary to all experience, and to all the discoveries hitherto made in the science of language, to suppose otherwise. All the races of the great Indo-European family, whether they migrated into India, Persia, or Europe, have been found, however far back they can be traced, to have spoken numerous dialects of a common language; but this common language itself only existed as one homogeneous speech, spoken without any differences of pronunciation or accent by the whole race, at a time far anterior to the earliest date to which they can be followed. Indeed, so much is this the case, that writers of high repute have not hesitated to declare that no such homogeneous speech ever existed at all; that, in fact, there never was one original Iranian, or one original Celtic or German language. I am inclined to give in my adhesion to this view, holding that the idea of one common language is the creation of modern times, and the effect of the spread

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of literature.<sup>1</sup> But leaving this on one side, the most probable hypothesis is, that the Aryans from the earliest times spoke many dialects, all closely akin, all having the same family likeness and tendencies common to all, perhaps in every case mutually intelligible, but still distinct and co-existent. One only of these dialects, however, became at an early period the vehicle of religious sentiment, and the hymns called the Vedas were transmitted orally for centuries, in all probability with the strictest accuracy. After a time the Brahmans consciously and intentionally set themselves to the task of constructing a sacred language, by preserving and reducing to rule the grammatical elements of this Vedic tongue. We cannot tell whether in carrying out this task they availed themselves of the stores of one dialect alone: probably they did not; but with that rare power of analysis for which they have ever been distinguished, they seized on the salient features of Aryan speech as contained in all the dialects, and moulded them into one harmonious whole; thus, for the first time in their history, giving to the Aryan tribes one common language, designed to be used as the instrument for expressing thoughts of such a nature as should be deemed worthy of preservation to all time.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is strenuously denied by many that Sanskrit ever had any dialects, but it seems to me that their arguments refer only to the written language. In Vedic, or even pre-Vedic, times it is probable that dialects existed, though of course there is nothing that can be called proof of this supposition.

<sup>2</sup> I have explained my views more concisely in another place as follows: "It is a highly probable theory that the old Aryan, like all other languages, began to be modified in the mouths of the people as early as the Vedic period, and that the Brahmans at a subsequent date, in order to prevent the further degeneration of their language, polished, elaborated, and stiffened it into the classical Sanskrit. We cannot, however, suppose that they brought any new material into the language, but simply that they reduced to rule what was till then vague and irregular, that they extended to the whole of the language euphonic laws which had previously been only of partial application, and so forth; all the while, however, only working on already existing materials."—From a paper on the Treatment of the Nexus, Journ. Royal Asiatic Society, vol. v., p. 151.

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All this was anterior to the introduction of the art of writing; but when that art was introduced, it was largely used by the Brahmans for the reproduction of works in the sacred Sanskrit, that is, the purified quintessence and fullest development of the principles of Aryan speech.

But though Sanskrit had, by the labours of Pânini and others, become an historical fact, so that now at length there existed a standard, and purists might condemn, as in fact they did, all departures from it as vulgar errors and corruptions, it is beyond a doubt that the local dialects continued to live on. Sanskrit was not intended for the people; it was not to be endured that the holy language, offspring of the gods, should be defiled by issuing from plebeian lips; it kept its place apart, as the appropriate speech of pure Brahmans and mighty kings. But the local dialects held their own; they were anterior to Sanskrit, contemporary with it, and they finally survived it. Nevertheless, Sanskrit is older than the dialects. This sounds like a paradox, but it is true in two senses: first, that as the ages rolled on the vulgar dialects developed into new forms ("corrupted" is the common way of putting it), whereas Sanskrit remained fixed and fossilized for ever, so that now, if we wish to find the earliest extant form of any Aryan word, we must, in the great majority of instances, look for it not in the writings in the popular dialects which have come down to us, but in Sanskrit; and secondly, that although Pânini lived in an age when the early Aryan dialects had already undergone much change from their pristine condition, yet among the Brahmans for whom alone he laboured there existed a traditional memory of the ancient, and then obsolete, form of many words. They would remember these archaic forms, because their religious and professional duties required them constantly to recite formulæ of great antiquity, and of such sacredness that every letter in them was supposed to be a divinity in itself, and which had consequently been handed down from primeval

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times absolutely unchanged. In teaching his pupils the true principles of speech, Pāṇini would naturally use these archaic words in preference to the corruptions current around him, and thus the language which he to a certain extent created was in great part a resuscitation of antiquated terms, and thus literally older than the popular dialects which in point of time preceded its creation.<sup>1</sup>

Still there are words, and those not a few, which can be traced back to the Prakrits, as these popular forms of speech are called, though no signs of them exist in Sanskrit, and this is especially the case where two words of like meaning were current in the mouths of the people; one of which, from the accident of its being a popular form of some word in use in the Vedas, or from some other cause, was selected for refined and scholarly use, while the other was branded as vulgar, rejected, and left for the service of the masses. This class of words it is which I have classed as Aryan, though not Sanskritic.

To complete this branch of the subject, it is next necessary to describe briefly the position and relations of the Prakrits.

The Prakrit dialects are theoretically supposed to be those forms of the speech of the Aryans which were commonly used by the masses. In the earliest records we have, they are grouped under five heads, representing the local peculiarities of five provinces. First is the “lingua præcipua,” or Mahârâshtrî, spoken in the country round the ancient city of Ujjayini, or Avanti, in Malwa. How far this language ex-

<sup>1</sup> Many words occur in the Vedas in a Prakrit rather than a Sanskrit form. I quote at second-hand a remark of Weber's which summarizes the whole matter neatly: “The principal laws of Prakrit speech, viz., assimilation, hiatus, and a fondness for cerebrals and aspirates, are prominent in the Vedas, of which the following are examples; kuṭa=kṛita; kâta=karta; geha=griha; guggulu=gungulu; vivitṭyai=vivishtyai; kṛikalâsa=kṛikadâsu; purodâsa=purolâsa (comp. das'ru=lacryma); paḍbbih=padbbih; kshullaka=kshudraka; etc.”—Muir's *Sanskrit Texts*, vol. ii., p. 139. (1st Edition.)

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tended is not clear, but it may be assumed roughly to have included the south of Rajputana, and a considerable portion of the present northern Maratha country. Next the Saurasenî, spoken in Surasena, in modern times the country round Mathura. Thirdly, the Mâgadhî, the vernacular of Behar. Fourthly, the Paisâchî or dialect of the Pisâchas, whose exact locality is not defined. And fifthly, the Apabhraṇśa, or “corrupt” dialect, which is perhaps to be found in Sindh and western Rajputana. That this division is artificial, and a mere grouping together of a mass of local dialects, is apparent from the fact that no two writers agree in their arrangement, and the total number of Prakrits is by some authors put as high as twenty or twenty-two. Be this as it may, it is sufficient for our present purpose to note that these dialects were numerous, and that they were in most cases designated by the name of the province where they were spoken. In the Sanskrit dramas, however, a still more artificial distinction prevails, a different dialect being attributed to each class of characters. Thus kings and Brahmans speak Sanskrit, ladies of high rank Maharashtri, servants, soldiers, buffoons, and the like use one or other of the inferior dialects. That this custom represents any state of things that ever existed is highly improbable. The ordinary business of life could not have been carried on amidst such a Babel of conflicting tongues. Perhaps the best solution of the difficulty is to suppose that the play-writers mimicked the local peculiarities of the various provinces, and as in India in the present day great men fill their palaces with servants drawn from all parts of the country, so it may have been then. A Bengali Zemindar employs men from the Panjab and Hindustan as guards and doorkeepers; his palanqueen-bearers come from Orissa, his coachmen and water-carriers from Northern Bengal, and so on. Similarly an ancient Indian king drew, we may suppose, his soldiers from one province, his porters and attendants from another, his dancers and buffoons from a third.

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These all when assembled at the capital would doubtless strike out some common language by which they could communicate with each other, just as in the present day Urdu is used all over India.<sup>1</sup> But just as this Urdu is spoken incorrectly by those whose mother-tongue it is not, so that the Bengali corrupts it by an admixture of Bengali words and forms, and speaks it with a strong Bengali accent; so in ancient times these servants and artificers, collected from all corners of a vast empire, would speak the common *lingua franca* each with his own country twang; and the Prakrit of the plays would appear to be an exaggerated representation, or caricature, of these provincial brogues.

But there are works of a more serious character to which we can refer for a solution of the problem of the real nature of the Prakrits. In the sixth century before Christ there arose in Behar the great reformer Sakyamuni, surnamed Buddha, or "the wise," who founded a religion which for ten centuries drove Brahmanism into obscurity, and was the prevailing creed of almost all India. The religious works of the Buddhist faith, which are extremely numerous and voluminous, have been the means of preserving to us the Magadhi Prakrit of those days. Buddhism was imported into Ceylon in 307 B.C., and the Magadhi dialect under the name of Pali has become the sacred language of that island.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It is a characteristic peculiarity of India, arising from want of means of communication, that trades and professions are still confined to particular localities; one town produces swords, and nothing else; another is entirely devoted to silk-weaving, and no other town but that one presumes to rival it.

<sup>2</sup> It must however be stated that there are reasons for doubting whether the Pali of Ceylon is really the same as the Magadhi. Some authors are inclined to doubt this, and state that the Pali corresponds more closely with forms of Prakrit spoken in Western India. It matters little or nothing to the present inquiry whether this be so or not. We are only indirectly concerned with Prakrit in this work. It is sufficient to say that the Pandits of Ceylon use the words Pali and Magadhi as convertible terms. Pali in fact means only "writing."



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Similarly another religious sect, the Jains, have used the Maharashtri Prakrit as the medium for expressing the tenets of their belief. There are also some poems in other Prakrit dialects.

Without going into details, which would be out of place here, it may be stated in a general way that the scenic Prakrit and that of the poems differ from Sanskrit more particularly in the omission of single consonants, and that this omission is carried to such an extent as to render one half or more of the words used unintelligible and unrecognizable; whereas in the religious works this practice, although it exists, is not allowed to run to such an extreme. As this subject will be reverted to further on, it need not be more than touched on here. It may be added that all the Prakrits are, like the Sanskrit, synthetical or inflectional languages.<sup>1</sup>

§ 3. Next comes the class of words described as neither Sanskritic nor Aryan, but *x*. It is known that on entering India the Aryans found that country occupied by races of a different family from their own. With these races they waged a long and chequered warfare, gradually pushing on after each fresh victory, till at the end of many centuries they obtained possession of the greater part of the territories they now enjoy. Through these long ages, periods of peace alternated with those of war, and the contact between the two races may have been as often friendly as hostile. The Aryans exercised a powerful influence upon their opponents, and we cannot doubt but that they themselves were also, but in a less degree, subject to some influence from them. There are consequently to be found even in Sanskrit some words which have a very un-Aryan look, and

<sup>1</sup> Lest it should be objected that this description of the Prakrits is too brief and scanty, I must remind the reader again that our business is with the modern languages only, and that the subject of Prakrit, though frequently introduced for the sake of completing the range of view, is after all quite secondary throughout.

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the number of such words is much greater still in the modern languages, and there exists therefore a temptation to attribute to non-Aryan sources any words whose origin it is difficult to trace from Aryan beginnings.

It may be as well here to point out certain simple and almost obvious limitations to the application of the theory that the Aryans borrowed from their alien predecessors. Verbal resemblance is, unless supported by other arguments, the most unsafe of all grounds on which to base an induction in philology. Too many writers, in other respects meritorious, seem to proceed on Fluellen's process, "There is a river in Macedon, and there is also moreover a river in Monmouth, and there is salmons in both." A certain Tamil word contains a P, so does a certain Sanskrit word, and *ergo*, the latter is derived from the former! Now, I would urge that, in the first place, the Aryans were superior morally as well as physically to the aborigines, and probably therefore imparted to them more than they received from them. Moreover, the Aryans were in possession of a copious language before they came into India; they would therefore not be likely to borrow words of an ordinary usual description, such as names for their clothing, weapons, and utensils, or for their cattle and tools, or for the parts of their bodies, or for the various relations in which they stood to each other. The words they would be likely to borrow would be names for the new plants, animals, and natural objects which they had not seen in their former abodes, and even this necessity would be reduced by the tendency inherent in all races to invent descriptive names for new objects. Thus they called the elephant *hastin*, or the "beast with a hand," and *gaja*, or the "roarer"; the monkey *kapi*, or the "restless beast," and *vânara*, or the "forest-man"; the peacock *mayûra*, in imitation of its cry. A third limitation is afforded by geographical considerations. Which were the tribes whom the Aryans mixed with, either as friends or foes? Could the bulk of them have