

Early Indian Languages: An Evolution Perspective

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Abstract - Sound, signs or signals, gestures, urge of transferring higher levels of thinking and feelings and also exchange of ideas were the beginning of the formulation of languages despite the controversies in the origin of languages through the Speculative Theory, Signaling Theory, Mother tongue Hypothesis and so on. Civilization and progress have paved the origin of languages for communication and vice versa. Whatever been the reason and whenever been the time of development of language in this subcontinent or in the Earth, India always possesses a rich linguistic heritage. The Proto-Indo-Aryan language is the prime language of India followed by Old Indo-Aryan covering Vedic-Sanskrit, Classical-Sanskrit; Middle Indo-Aryans of Prakrit, Pali and Modern Indo-Aryan language. This analysis is an attempt to point out the origin of Vedic, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Dravidian languages and also these roles in the formulation of other languages and enrichment of in this subcontinent.

Keywords: Rigvedic, Aryan, Sanskrit, Prakrit, Dravidian

I. INTRODUCTION

India has a rich linguistic heritage. Physiographically, less inhospitable terrains in the north-west have favoured the entrance of alien languages and culture with the advent of the Aryans in the manner of semi-nomadic pastoral community. They had enriched the language through thousands of years, although many languages have retained their original trait for a long period of time. The Proto-Indo-Aryan language is the prime language of India followed by Old Indo-Aryan covering Vedic Sanskrit, Classical Sanskrit, Middle Indo-Aryan of Prakrit, Pali and Dravidian.

Language, be it in the form of pictographic design, alphabets or words, the medium of expression of sense and enrichment played a predominating role to bring out cultural essence. Inheritance, rejection, modification and adaptation of both colloquial and religious speeches have enriched the Indian languages from time immemorial. Later, the deep involvement of the *Rishis* or able literates has helped to adorn the Sanskrit and related languages to be adopted with many modifications. The ancient Indo-European language and the language of elite and upper caste character had remarkable share in generating all the languages in the Indian sub-continent. It is worthwhile to mention that in almost all ages of education was it in the Vedic or Brahmanic or Buddhist, medium of mother tongue cultures were privileged.

The Sanskrit, which is a 'fine language' transcended the barriers been it regional or international in nature. At the same time, Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions constituted one of the oldest languages as it prevailed in the age of 300 BCE -300

CE through the Sangam Ages in the ancient southern India. Vedic language is not alike but very much akin to that of the Sanskrit that gave rebirths many languages not only in the orient but also in the occident. The Vedic language, Classical Sanskrit and Prakrit are not identical but in some way connected. Vedic language is closely linked with the Prakrit than the Sanskrit but one may prove that Prakrit was not the direct lineal descended of the Vedic language. There might have two separate languages in the Vedic days i.e. the 'sacred', refined, priestly and elite class language of the Veda and the colloquial language of Prakrit and Pali.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In 1926, Childe, V.G. has done a splendid works on the Indo-European origins of the Aryans. Assertions were given on the advent of the Aryans and the associated culture. Noted historian, Piggott, S. (1950) in his 'Prehistoric India 1000 BC' has furnished the Indian history starting from before the advent of the Aryans unto the excavation in the last century. He has unearthed the realm of language, material culture and associated eventful events of the past. In their deeds, Key, F.E., Karve, D.D. (1964) have recalled the ancient glorious past of this subcontinent in language, education and culture. Basham, A.L. (1967) work 'The Wonder That Was India: A Survey of the history and culture of the Indian sub-continent before the coming of the Muslims' is really a wonder in covering the pros and cons of the then India. Language, Culture, Education and the intimate physiographic settings have taken importance in this study. Sen, S. (1971) in his Bhasar Itibritta (In Bengali) has provided the minute details of the origin and branching details of the languages of India. It is the utmost relevant to study the language. Mookerji, R.K. (1991) in his 'Ancient Indian Education: Brahmanical and Buddhist' book has done an ever precious job to represent this as milestone in releasing the details of language, education and the associated phenomena of the glorious India. Mukherjee, K.N. (2004) 'Prithibir Adi Gyanrantha: Rig Veda' (in Bengali) has asserted the root of the modern language and education in the Vedas and thereafter.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The present study seeks

1. To highlight the evolution of prime Language in the Indian subcontinent
2. To point out its glorious role in literature
3. To make a comparison with the Vedic, Classical Sanskrit, and Prakrit

IV. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Literary information has helped to form this qualitative approach covering a wide range of Prehistoric and Historic language types. The contribution of Indian and foreign authors and researchers in the form of books or articles on language, and culture provided the basic input to write down such an article on Vedic and Post Vedic Ancient Indian languages. Books on Education and literature and these critical reviews played much in this regard. Inscriptions and these later explanations and constant findings through archaeological excavations report and revealing through daily newspaper provided much of the data. These inscriptions have provided valuable hints of the then nature of pronunciation. Interpretation of past events with non-numeric data and proper studying and understanding for reconstruction played a unique role in this respect. External and internal criticisms have helped to modify the materials received from various sources to be used for this study. The author is almost bound to rely on secondary sources owing to the paucity of primary or firsthand information.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Pre-Vedic Language

Order comes out of the event of disorder. Chaos often leads to the appeal of solution. “Man’s progress from savagery to civilization is intimately bound up with the advance of abstract thinking, which enables him to rise above the chaos of particular sensations and to fashion there from an ordered cosmos. The growth of reasoning in its turn goes hand in hand with the development of language” (Childe, V.G. 1926). These “Civilizations may be characterized with large settlements, written scripts, high art and architecture ...”(Ghosh, A.K. 2017). Such civilization in the Indian sub-continent had deep rooted cultural onset in the once, flourished Harappa Civilization. Riverine locations of Harappa, Mohenjo-daro have mooted the proliferations of settlement and prosperity attainments (Ghosh, A.K. 2017). Although we know a very little from the brief inscription of the seals as the Harappa, people did not engrave long inscriptions on stone or papyrus but written materials of the Indus and the Mesopotamia Civilizations did play a great deal (Basham, A.L. 1967). The language spoken in Harappa civilization is not properly deciphered yet unlike the Egyptian hieroglyphics or Mesopotamian cuneiform, despite the utmost endeavour by a Tamil Scholar, I. Mahadevan (1998) and Prof. Michael Witzel (2000) of Sanskrit of Harvard University.

The Harappan language (c.3300-1800 BCE) on the inscriptions been these were linguistic or non-linguistic types, yet to assure us with due indecipherability. The short-sighted Harappan scripts with around 250 symbolic items and altogether 400 characters make hardly feasible to come into a conclusion. This right to left readable unique scripts is pictographic in nature akin to that of the Egyptian hieroglyphics. There might have many more possibilities in the opinions of noted historian Piggott, S.1950) as here in

under. “The type of language likely to have been spoken within the Harappā kingdom is as uncertain as the details of the script, except that we can fairly definitely rule out any of the Indo-European languages. The persistence of a Dravidian type of language ‘islanded’ in Baluchistan among the Brahuīs has given rise to the supposition that the Harappā language also belong to this group, but the Munda group now largely spoken by Proto-Australoids in India is another claimant.”

B. Rigvedic Language and Sanskrit

The hymns of the Rigveda might have composed after the decline of the Harappa Civilization. But the recitation of the Vedic hymns is still in vogue today in some rituals which eventually proves its post Harappa origin. Although, few believed that the Vedic Society might have been earlier than that of the town based Harappa civilization as “God made the country and manmade the town”. That is why Professor K.N. Mukherjee (2004) wrote “Vedic period was much earlier than the Mohenjo-daro-Harappa age as Vedic Civilization was basically rural, while Mohenjo-daro was highly city based civilization.” Tilak pointed out 4000 BCE and Radhakrishnan mentioned a probable period of 6000-2500BCE to as the time of compose of the Rigveda (Chand, J.2007). Whenever been the time of development of the Rigveda, its composition had paved the development of Sanskrit with many reformations. “After the extinction of the Harappa civilization there are no inscriptions or manuscripts known in India until the middle of the third century B.C. To this date belong the famous inscriptions cut at the command of Asoka on surfaces of natural rocks or on pillar to propagate Buddhism, in the Brahmi scripts ...” (Piggott, 1950).

The Rigvedic education was transmitted from generation to generation through regular and systematic recitation through prescribed format of pronunciation and memorization and so the Veda was known as *Sruti* (memorizing by hearing). The Rigveda is established itself as the primitive and ancient most religious book. This oldest Indo-Aryan text of Indo-European family has similarity with the Latin and Greek and also with Avestan or Eastern -Iranian language.

The Rigvedic language (c.1500-900 BCE) is not purely Aryan or Indo-European in structure, form or spirit, although its phonetics is affected by Dravidian. The Vedic hymns are also predominated with the ancient bardic dialect of chāndasa (Chatterji, S.K. 1975). Again, “The Rigveda is a curious document...The language is elaborate and self-consciously literary, and the metrical composition, based on syllabic verse-forms, is often extremely complicated. In a word, however barbarous and archaic may be the life and thought reflected in the Rigveda, it is a laborious and sophisticated anthology, put together with conscious artifice by professional hymnologists at a relatively late stage of the culture of those people, who in it are called the Aryans (*Ārya*) and who figure as conquerors in a newly own land” (Piggott, 1950). “In the Vedic verses, we find constant mention of

conflicts between the original inhabitants of Ancient India and the colonists” (Tagore, R. 2005).

The Rigvedic language had a well-connected root of origin with Northern Syria, although there are also many imprints of its origin in the Punjab Region. The Hurrian language speaking Mitannian Dynasty (c.1500-1300 BCE) of the Upper Tigris and Euphrates basin covering the present day Syria, Iraq and Turkey often used near Sanskrit words and those probably came to India with the advent of semi-nomadic pastoral tribal *Aryas* or Aryans. The used words cover *aikavartanna* (one), *teravartanna* (three), *panzavartanna* (five) and *shattavartanna* (seven). The differences between the Vedic and Sanskrit languages are in terms of chronological as well as dialectal. The vocabulary of Vedic literature shows many words akin to that of the Old Indo-Iranian types (Majumdar, P.C. 1971). The Indo-Iranian or Aryan languages came with the advent of the Indo-European speaking branch of Aryan in India and Iran-Persia. Older Vedic texts were transformed by allowing even Non-Aryan words with due marital relationships and rejecting many less used and old types. Basham (1967) had aptly undermined us as “Vedic is a fine language, capable of vigorous and noble expression”, so it has widespread appeal and lasted long for many thousands of years with temporal modifications.

Sanskrit language in some way holds the cultural pillar and transcends cultural essence of a country. That is why, N. Singhania (2016) coined “... the diversity and richness of our culture has been possible all because of the development of Sanskrit language during those times.” The Vedic language gradually led to the formation of Middle-Indo-Aryan languages. One may ascertain that the Indian languages from the Vedic to Modern are in many ways closely related to Sanskrit excepting Dravidian language. Vedic language is often considered as the sacred language and has gained Sanskrit shape with many transformations through constant discussion among the educated, as Jackendoff, R. (2006) stated “Languages change gradually over time, sometimes due to changes in culture and fashion, sometimes in response to contact with other languages. But the basic architecture and expressive power of language stays the same.”

The great grammar of Sanskrit of Panini i.e. the *Astadhyayi* was probably composed in between c.600-400 BCE and laid foundation stone in the field of Sanskrit language and literature. It has shaped the language and provided a framework of rules for standardization of Sanskrit. Paninian Sanskrit is also very much complex, although it is somewhat easier than the Vedic. Basham (1967) has rightly observed about the greatest ever milestone of this work as “...Pānini’s grammar is one of the greatest intellectual achievements of any ancient civilization, and the most detailed and scientific grammar composed before the 19th century in any part of the world... Later Indian grammars are mostly commentaries on Pānini, the chief being the “Great Commentary” (Mahābhāṣya) of Patañjali (2nd century B.C.) and the “Bānāras Commentary” (*KāśikāVṛtti*) of Jayāditya and Vāmana 7th century A.D.). Again this grammar was so

widely accepted that “...no writer or speaker of Sanskrit in courtly or brāhmanic circles dared seriously infringe it.” Bloomfield, L. (1963) also echoed the same as Panini’s grammar is “one of greatest monuments of human intelligence...It describes, with minutest detail, every inflection, derivation, and composition, and every syntactic usage of its author’s speech. No other language, to this day, has been so perfectly described.” The aftermath of the inclusion of the Panini’s, the language was known as *Samśkrta* (perfected or refined) which was the opposite of naturally developed popular language of *Prākṛtas* (natural).

The Sakas of Ujjain was the first notable dynasty to use Sanskrit and the earliest written Sanskrit document was the Girnar Inscription of King Rudradāman in Saurashtra. The urge of restoring the purity and sanctity of the Vedas, manifold development took place in the field of grammar and phonetics. The 19th century had witnessed the development of this language in a more organized way.

Many Indian dialects along with the Sanskrit have changed due to inclusion with time. It is noteworthy to mention that owing to the treasure trove of Sanskrit language and to harvest the antique resources, this classical language has helped to unveil the rich glory of India and “It has long been universally accepted that Sanskrit is a remote cousin of all the languages of Europe, with the exception of Finnish, Estonian, Hungarian, Turkish and Basque” (Basham, 1967). The antiquity of the Rigveda is again manifested by “The language of the Rigvedic hymns represents the earliest stage of a literary language of which the latest stage is classical Sanskrit as stereotyped and standardized in the epoch making work, the grammar of Panini who had flourished earlier than 500 B.C.” (Mookerji, R.K. 1951). Sir William Jones (1746-1794), the then judge of the Calcutta High Court, a proficient of linguistics, translated *Sakuntala*, *Gita-Govinda* etc. Charles Wilkins (1749-1836), the father of Indology had learnt Sanskrit and translated *Bhagavad Gita* and *Hitopadesa* in 1787 and 1789 respectively into English. Interest in Sanskrit language and literature among the European has gained momentum with these translations.

C. Prakrit Languages

The term Prakrit (Sanskrit *prākṛta*) is a derivative from ‘*prakṛti*’ (‘original, nature’). Prakrit languages were the colloquial languages of the Indian subcontinent of many kinds such as *Magadhi*, *Gandhari*, *Ardhamagadhi* etc. These are much easier and simpler than Sanskrit and were in practice in India in between 600 BCE to 1000 CE among the lower castes before the inception of Sanskrit. The inscription of Asoka the Great (268-232 BCE), the Sermons or Teachings of Buddha were in Prakrit for greater accessibility among the disciples. It is assumed that Buddha taught his followers in *Magadhi*, an official Indo-Aryan language of Maurian Empire.

Pali and other local as well as other regional languages were the means of spreading up of the Sermons of Buddha. Pali, the religious languages of the Buddhist’s is often considered

as the form of Prakrits of the earlier days. It might be derived from Vedic Sanskrit as many words are common in both the languages. Pali is known as Comprising Speech as it has developed through the coordination processes by comprising all the materials of Prakrit based on the Prakrit of the Central (Shaw, R.1996). The purpose of the Chinese Buddhist scholars, who visited India in the 5th and 7th BCE, was “to study Pāli and Sanskrit and secure copies of sacred books of Buddhism to take back with them to their own land” (Keay *et al.* 1964). Pali, the admixture of Prakrits and other descendants of Sanskrit is one of the enduring languages is persistent till date and is often closely related with the Sanskrit. Pali has lost its ancient glory in between 14 to 18th century. Pali language centres of today act as the survival endeavour of this age-old language to unveil the treasures of Buddhist’s scripts.

Middle Indo-Aryan languages of Prakrit have enriched the past Brahmanical and Buddhist literature. Later, the Jain religious groups have used the Prakrit language of the commoners to ease the spreading of their teachings among the masses. This language might have originated either from Vedic or Classical language. The very pertinent proposition is “The number of phonetic as well as morphological peculiarities which are common to the Vedic and Prakrit but unknown to Sanskrit, prove definitely that Prakrit is much nearer to Vedic than to the Classical Sanskrit...” (Petersen, W. 1912).

Singhania, N. (2016) coined “An important stage in the development of Prakrit was *Paishachi* and the last stage of the development of Prakrit laid to the development of *Apabhramsha*. Some of the important literary works in Prakrit language are *Gathasaptasatiby* Hala and *Parishishtaravan* by Hemchandra. Secular texts were written in Prakrit language and are ethical in nature.” The Prakrit languages of Ardhamagadhi, Sauraseni, Maharastri, Apabhramsha, Gandhari are closely linked which enlighten the lamp of glorious Prakrit. Apabhramsha (deviance) was the variations of Prakrits during its final shaping. Many inscriptions reveal the simultaneous use of Prakrit and Sanskrit e.g. the Nasik Inscription, although many historians and academicians opined that the Sanskrit language was the language of the upper caste (high *varna*) while the Prakrits were the common dialects of the *dysas* (Shudras). The rigidly framed Panini’s *Astadyayi* have pushed the Sanskrit into an optional stage and geared the adoption of the Middle Indo-Aryan language of Prakrit thereafter.

D. Dravidian Languages

Dravidian languages, the widespread and native languages have few similarities with some East Asian and East European languages. These languages have considerable influence in the grammar of Sanskrit and Prakrit (Sen, S. 1971). It also demands some possibility of linkages with the form of languages of the Harappa Civilization. A form of Dravidian language might have been in practice before the arrival of the Aryan (c.2000-1500 BCE). It is evident that Dravidian languages were more widely spread to the Western

India (hindustantimes, May, 13, 2018). The Indo-European languages of Marathi has substantially input from the Dravidian languages. Dravidian loanwords are present into Old Indo-Aryan (1750BCE-250BCE) dating back to the Rigvedic period. Dravidian languages might have connected with all the modern Indo-Aryan languages including Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi and Hindi (Kolipakam, V. *et al.* 2018). The *Brahuis* or the Dravidian speaking tribes in outside India proved its prior existence before the Aryans which has enriched the Aryan vocabulary.

Dravidian languages are characteristically practice in Indian southern states and also in eastern and central part of India along with Afghanistan, Nepal, Srilanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. These languages may be classified in four groups according to its spatial dominance in zones, apart from the huge number of language speaking people of Telegu, Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam respectively.

North Dravidian languages of Brahui are in Afghanistan, Iran, Baluchistan and Pakistan; Malto of tribal areas of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal and neighbouring Nepal.

Central Dravidian groups of Duruwa are in Chattishgarh, Odisha; Kolami and Naiki in Maharastra, Telangana and Ollari in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Southern Dravidian types consists of four major types of Tamil, one of the classical, oldest, purest and deep rooted form is in Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Puducherry, Karnataka, Kerala and in few foreign nations; Kannada in Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana; Malayalam in Kerala, parts of Puducherry, Karnataka, Lakshadweep etc. and a number of other types in Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

South Central Dravidian forms of Telegu is in Andhra Pradesh, Chattishgarh, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Odisha, Karnataka; Gondi in Chattishgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Telangana along with other types.

Dravidian Languages in the form of Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Kannada have dominated the South Indian Parts for centuries even before the entrance of the Aryans. This may have rooted in the Harappa Civilization. Englishman, Francis Whyte Ellis introduces the Dravidian Languages in a dissertation in 1816. A Scottish missionary and bishop, “Robert Caldwell (1814-91) brought out the first edition of his *Comparative Grammar* in 1856, which marked the first, pioneering breakthrough in comparative Dravidian studies” (Krishnamurti, B. 2003). He was opined that, these languages were not inherited from the Sanskrit. British Linguist Thomas Burrow and Canadian Linguist M.B. Emeneau have completed *A Dravidian Etymological Dictionary* in 1961 which was later revised in 1984. Dravidian Languages have different groups and subgroups and are also spread in many forms in the South Asian nations such as Pakistan, Nepal etc.

E. Evolution of Language at a Glance

It is highly mysterious that the Harappan language remained unchanged for centuries as there was no other alternative evidence, although other languages are otherwise indicative in this respect. Historians did point out various language types prevailed in the Harappan civilization, such as Proto-Dravidian, 'para-Munda' and so on. Mingling of Aryans with the Non-Aryans in relationship bonding and the onset of Vedic ages and thereafter the origin of commoners' languages had generated the multitudes of languages with the passage of time with many modifications in due course of time through thousands of years.

A simplified hierarchical order of the evolution of languages from the Aryan is given here in under

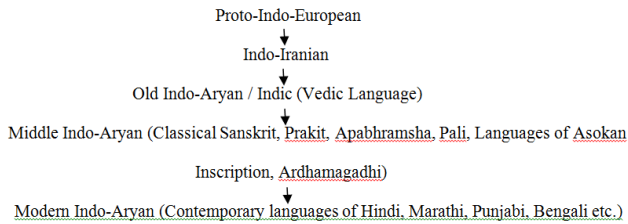


Fig. 1 Evolution of languages from the Aryan

VI. CONCLUSION

The ancient most ever available Indian text, the Rigveda, its language and Sanskrit always deserve a sincere gratitude in the field of generation of language and education in Indian sub-continent. Out of the originated, some are dissimilar with the parent language as these were sensible with changing fashion and culture with the passage of time. All these languages constitute the career of unveiling the secret treasures in science, literature, art and culture. The presence of Dravidian words among the Aryan's and in other dialects even in outside India proves the prior existence of the Dravidian language. The bilingual prevalence for colloquial or for popular education and gaining of high level knowledge were in vogue in almost all the ages of education which registered the sincerity of spreading education irrespective of the then prevailing local or regional language.

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