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DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRONICS & COMMUNICATION ENGINEERING

III YEAR/ VI SEMESTER

19HST105 ESSENCE OF INDIAN TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE

UNIT 2 INDIAN LITERATURE, CULTURE, TRADITION, AND PRACTICES

Buddhist And Jain Literature in Pali, Prakrit And Sanskrit



Buddhist Literature

The earliest **Buddhist** works were written in Pali, which was spoken in Magadha and South Bihar. The Buddhist works can be divided into the canonical and the non-canonical.

The **canonical literature** is best represented by the – Tripitakas, that is, three baskets - **Vinaya Pitaka**, **Sutta Pitaka** and **Abhidhamma Pitaka**. **Vinaya Pitaka** deals with rules and regulations of daily life. **Sutta Pitaka** contains dialogues and discourses on morality and deals with Dharma while **Abhidhamma Pitaka** deals with philosophy and metaphysics. It includes discourses on various subjects such as ethics, psychology, theories of knowledge and metaphysical problems.

The **non-canonical literature** is best represented by the **Jatakas**. Jatakas are the most interesting stories on the previous births of the Buddha. It was believed that before he was finally born as Gautama, the Buddha practising Dharma passed through more than 550 births, in many cases even in the form of animals. Each political events in the age of the Buddha.

Sanskrit Buddhist literature

It refers to Buddhist texts composed either in classical Sanskrit, in a register that has been called "Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit" (BHS), or a mixture of the two. Several non-Mahayana Nikayas appear to have kept their canons in Sanskrit, most prominent among which was the Sarvastivada. The Mahayana Sutras are also in Sanskrit, with less classical registers prevalent in the gatha portions. Buddhist Tantras too are written in Sanskrit, sometimes interspersed with Apabhramsa, and often containing notable irregularities in grammar and meter (traditionally ascribed to the esoteric nature of the texts)



Before the modern derivatives of Sanskrit existed, a group of languages known as the Prakrits or Middle Indo Aryan languages evolved from India's classical language. These were the vernacular dialects of ancient times, and several of them became important literary vehicles in their own right. The best known of this group is Pali, which still serves as the canonical language of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Other Prakrit languages such as Sauraseni, Maharastri, Magadhi and Gandhari embody various facets of the literatures of both the Brahmanical/Hindu and Buddhist traditions.

Besides texts considered "Word of the Buddha" (Buddhavaçana) by the traditions that transmitted them, Buddhist authors have composed treatises and literary works in Sanskrit dealing with Buddhist philosophy, logic, etc., but also with more worldly topics such as gemology, erotics, literary aesthetics, etc. Sanskrit Buddhist literature is therefore vast and varied, despite the loss of a significant amount of texts. A large number of works survive only in Tibetan and Chinese translations.



Hypotheses for original language of Buddha

Traditional accounts vary vastly in identifying the language in which the Buddha taught, as well as in respect to the history of the non-Mahayana Nikayas. While the Theravada tradition usually upholds that the Buddha taught exclusively in the language of Magadha, other accounts offer a very different perspective on the languages of the early non-Mahayana schools, and in these accounts Sanskrit plays a central role.

According to some contemporary hypotheses, the earliest Buddhist texts were orally composed and transmitted in Middle Indo-Aryan languages called Prakrits.

The term *Pali*, used today in both Buddhist and Western cultures as a designation of a language, is a relatively modern coinage, not traceable before the seventeenth century. An earlier name given to this language in Buddhist literature is Magadhi, the language of the province Magadha in Eastern India that roughly corresponds to the modern Indian state Bihar. The only Buddhist school using this language is the Theravada in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. Theravadins erroneously consider Pali to be the language spoken by the Buddha himself.

During the nineteenth century, Western scholarship discovered that Pali is not an eastern Middle Indic language and has little relationship to Magadhi, which is known from other sources.

Even though Pali, as an artificial language, was never actually a vernacular of any part of India, it was by no means a "dead" language. Changes in the phonetic shape of Pali, most likely introduced by Buddhist grammarians at various times, can be observed, although dating them is problematic. None of these changes were far-reaching, although they seem to have continued well into the sixteenth century, if not later.

The oldest literature preserved in Pali is the canon of the Theravada Buddhists, the only Buddhist canon extant in its entirety in an Indian language. Consequently, it is linguistically the oldest form of Buddhist scriptures known.



Rise of Sanskrit in Buddhism

While some hypotheses say that Buddhism was originally written in Prakrits, Sanskrit gradually became the main language of Buddhist scriptures and scholasticism in India mirroring its rise as political and literary lingua franca of the Indian subcontinent, perhaps reflecting an increased need for elite patronage. This process, it is proposed, began with the north-western Indian Buddhists of the Kushan empire (CE 30-375). The Sarvastivadin Pīakas were mostly transmitted in Sanskrit and many Mahayana sutras such as the Prajnaparamita sutra were composed in different registers of Sanskrit. The Buddhist use of classical Sanskrit for literary purposes possibly began with Asvaghōṣa (c. 100 CE), author of the Buddhacarita and one of the earliest Sanskrit dramatists. Buddhist thinkers like Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga, Vasubandhu, Dignaga, Sthiramati, Dharmakīrti, Bhaviveka, Candrakīrti, etc., also wrote in Sanskrit.



Jainism Literature

The **Jain** texts were written in Prakrit and were finally compiled in the sixth century AD in Valabhi in Gujarat. The important works are known as Angas, Upangas, Prakirnas, Chhedab Sutrās and Malasutrās. Among the important Jain scholars, reference may be made to Haribhadra Suri, (eighth century AD) and Hemchandra Suri, (twelfth century AD). Jainism helped in the growth of a rich literature comprising poetry, philosophy and grammar. These works contain many passages which help us to reconstruct the political history of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The Jain texts refer repeatedly to trade and traders.

Jain literature begins with the last of the Tirthankarasi, Mahavir, who reorganized the old Nirgrantha sect and revitalized its moral and religious zeal and activities. He preached his faith of *ahimsa* (non-violence or harmlessness) and self-purification to the people in their own language which was not Sanskrit, but Prakrit. The form of Prakrit which he is said to have used was Ardha-Magadhi, by which was meant a language that was not pure Magadhi but partook of its nature.





Twelve Angas

Mahavira's teachings were arranged in twelve Angas (parts) by his disciples. These Angas formed the earliest literature on Jainism

- 1) *Acaranga* laid down rules of discipline for the monks
- 2) *Sutrakrtanga* contained further injunctions for the monks regarding what was suitable or unsuitable for them and how they should safeguard their vows. It also gave an exposition of the tenets and dogmas of other faiths
- 3) *Sthananga* listed in numerical order, categories of knowledge pertaining to the realities of nature
- 4) *Samavayanga* classified objects in accordance with similarities of time, place, number, and so on
- 5) *Vyakhya-prajnapti* or *Bhagavat* explained the realities of life and nature in the form of a catechism
- 6) *Jnatrdhamakatha* contained hints regarding religious preaching as well as stories and anecdotes calculated to carry moral conviction
- 7) *Upasakadhyayana* or *Upasaka-dasaka* was meant to serve as a religious code for householders
- 8) *Antakrddasaka* gave accounts of ten saints who attained salvation after immense suffering
- 9) *Anuttaraupapatika* contained accounts of ten saints who had gone to the highest heaven after
- 10) *Prsnna-vyakarana* contained accounts and episodes for the refutation of opposite views, establishment of one's own faith, promotion of holy deeds, and prevention of evil
- 11) *Vipaka-Sutra* explained how virtue was rewarded and evil punished



- 12) *Drstivada* included the five sections namely *Parikarmani* contained tracts describing the moon, the sun, *Jambudvipa*, other islands and seas, as well as living beings and nonliving matter, *Sutra* gave an account of various tenets and philosophies numbering no less than 363, *Prathamanyoga* recounted ancient history and narrated the lives of great kings and saints. *Purvagata* dealt with the problems of birth, death, and continuity.

Jain literature in Sanskrit

The language of Jain literature was primarily the Prakrits which were prevalent amongst the people at one time or the other in different parts of the country. But Sanskrit was not altogether shunned. Amongst the Jains, the earliest work in Sanskrit devoted to religious writing is the *Tattvarthadhigama- Sutra* of Umasvamin which epitomizes the whole Jaina creed in about 375 *sutras* arranged in ten chapters. The work occupies a unique position in Jaina literature as it is recognized as authoritative equally by the Digambaras and the Svetambaras with a few variations in the readings, and is very widely studied by both. It has been commented upon by the most eminent authors of both the sects.



Prakrit language and literature

Broadly speaking, Indo-Aryan speech has flowed in two streams: Samskrta and Prakrta (which will be spelt hereafter as Sanskrit and Prakrit) and, at various stages, these two streams have constantly influenced each other. Prakrit, which means -natural or -commonl primarily indicates the uncultivated popular dialects which existed side by side with Sanskrit, the -accurately made, -polished and -refined speech.

The Prakrits, then, are the dialects of the unlettered masses, which they used for secular communication in their day-to-day life, while Sanskrit is the language of the intellectual aristocrat, the priest, pundit, or prince, who used it for religious and learned purposes. Yet the language of every-day conversation even of these people must have been nearer to the popular Prakrits than to literary Sanskrit. The former was a natural acquisition; while the latter, the principal literary form of speech, required training in grammatical and phonetic niceties.



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