APABHRAMSHA: THE EVOLUTION OF PRAKRIT

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Abstract

Apabhramsha, a transitional linguistic form between Prakrit and early modern Indo-Aryan languages, holds profound grammatical and historical significance in the evolution of Indian linguistic traditions. This research paper explores the grammatical structure of Apabhramsha, highlighting its role in shaping vernacular syntax, morphology, and phonetics. The paper examines the historical context of Apabhramsha literature, tracing its emergence from the 6th to the 13th century CE. By analyzing its linguistic features, poetic contributions, and historical relevance, this study underscores Apabhramsha's enduring legacy in the tapestry of medieval Indian literature and language development.

Introduction

The language flows in such a way that it is extremely difficult to determine when and where it first originated. Similarly, it is challenging to pinpoint the beginning of the use of Prakrit dialects. However, according to the evidence, some linguists believe that Prakrit has been in use since the Vedic era or earlier. Hardev Bahri says that "the literary language of the Vedas developed from Prakrit, Sanskrit developed from Prakrit, and their own literary forms also developed from Prakrit" (Bahri 13). Prakrit is mostly discovered in inscriptions, sermons of Buddha and Mahāvīra, and plays of Aśvaghoṣa during the mediaeval Aryan languages era, which is considered to have occurred between 200 BCE and 200 CE. Mediaeval Aryan languages are found in many forms as Ardhamāgadhī Prakrit of Śvetāmbara Jain *āgamas*, Śaurasenī Prakrit of Digambara Jain *āgama* texts, Prakrit of Jain religious and secular stories, Prakrit of inscriptions, Niyā Prakrit, Prakrit of *Dhammapada* and Śaurasenī, Māgadhī, Gāndhārī, Paiśācī, Avantijā, Prācyā, Ḍhakki, Cāṇḍālī etc. used in Sanskrit dramas.

Apabhramsha has been a prosperous language as a unique folk language of its period, through which rich literature on a variety of subjects was created in that era. In Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, the word "Apabhramsha" appears for the first time[3]. There are also Prakrit versions of this word, such as *Avahaṁsa, Avabbhaṁsa, Avahaṭṭa, Avahattha*, etc. The late stage of the mediaeval Indian Aryan language, known as Apabhramsha, was dated by linguists between 500 and 1000 CE. However, there is also cause for concern because there is presently literature in the Apabhramsha language that was written between the 8th and the 17th centuries.

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[3] "*ekaikasya hi śabdasya bahavo'pabhraṁśāḥ | tadyathā gaurityasya śabdasya gāvī goṇī gotā gopotaliketyevamādayo'pabhraṁśāḥ…*" (Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya 1.1.1/9)

Apabhramsha's historical development should therefore be regarded as occurring between 500 and 1300 AD. Grammarians who thought Sanskrit was a pure language also referred to it as *bhraṣṭa*, *apabhraṣṭa*, or deformed[4]. Apabhramsha has been identified as the *deśī* language by poets like Svayambhu, Pushpadant, Padmakirti, Lakshman, Lakhu, Vagbhatta, and Padalipta, etc.

There are 27 different varieties of Apabhramsha described in this classical grammar *Prākṛta Candrikā*[5]. These variations are also described by Markandeya in his *Prākṛta Sarvasva*, they are:[6] *Vrācada, Lātī, Vaidarbhī, Upanāgara, Nāgara, Bārbara, Avantī, Pāñcālī, ṭākka, Mālavī, Kaikeyī, Gauḍī, Kauntalī, Aunḍrī, Paścātyā, Pāṇḍyā, Kauntalī, Saiṁhalī, Kaliṅgī, Prācyā, Karṇāṭī, kāñcī, drāviḍī, Gaurjarī, Ābhīri, Madhyadeśīyā* and *Vaitālikī*.

Ābhīrī, Bhāṣā, Deśī, Avahaṭṭha names have occasionally been given to Apabhramsha indicating its evolution. The unique *Ābhīrī* dialect of Western India is thought to have influenced Apabhramsha.[7] It is referred to as *Bhāṣā* because it is widely spoken. It was originally called *Avahaṭṭha* by locals because it is a spoken language and then as Apabhramsha, which serves as the bridge between the Prakrit and Hindi. The Apabhramsha was spoken all over India during the Middle Ages and represents Indian culture, spirituality and history via diverse literary works. Some poets and poetry and grammatical significance are discussed in detail in this paper:

Grammatical significance of Apabhramsha

Ācārya Hemacandra (12th Century CE) has given rules for Apabhramsha in his work *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, from *sūtras* 4.329 to 4.448, which explain the grammatical characteristics of this language. In a nutshell, the following attributes of Apabhramsha are stated:

- Apabhramsha is *ukāra bahulā* (Shastri 98). The singular 'a' ending word in the nominative and accusative declension is changed to 'u'.[8]
- It has 42 sounds – 10 vowels and 32 consonants (Mishra 10).

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4 *śabdaḥ saṁskārahīno yo gauriti prayuyukṣite |*
tamaprabhaṁśamicchanti viśiṣṭārthaniveśinam || (Vākyapadīya-Brahma Kāṇḍa 148)

5 "*saptaviṁśatyapabhraṁśā vaiḍālādiprabhedataḥ…*" (Prākṛta-Candrika 9.20-22)

6 *vrācaḍo lāṭavaidarbhāvupanāgaranagarau* | b*arabarāvantyapāñcālaṭākkamālavakaikayāḥ* ||
gauḍoḍrahaivapāścātyapāṇḍyakauntalasaiṁhalāḥ | kāliṅgyaprācyakārṇāṭakāñcyadrāviḍgaurjarāḥ ||
ābhīro madhyadeśīyaḥ sūkṣmabhedavyavasthitāḥ | saptaviṁśatyapabhraṁśā vaitālādiprabhedataḥ ||
(Commentary on Prākṛta-Sarvasvam 1.2)

7 *ābhīrādigiraḥ kāvyeṣvapabhraṁśa iti smṛtāḥ |*
śāstreṣu saṁskṛtādanyadapabhraṁśatayoditam || (Kāvyādarśa 1.36)

8 *syamorasyot | apabraṁśe akārasya syamoḥ parayoḥ ukāro bhavati…* ||
(Prakrit Grammar of Hemacandra 4.331)

- Apart from the other changes to vowel 'ऱ्'[9], the vowel itself is also found unchanged[10] (Kumar 111).
- In declensions, in place of instrumental singular, the ending 'a' is replaced by 'e'.[11]
- Suffixes 'he' and 'hu' are added to ablative singular for a-ending words[12] and suffix – 'huṁ' is added to its plural[13].
- The suffixes 'su', 'ho' and 'ssu' are used in genitive singular, and the suffix 'haṁ' is used in its plural.[14]
- There are lesser pronouns in Apabhramsha.
- There are lesser variations in the forms of tenses in Apabhramsha.
- The *ātmanepada* root words completely disappear (Shastri 106).

Poets of the Apabhramsha literature

Svayambhū is said to be the first poet of Apabhramsha. His following compositions are available: *Paümacariu*, *Riṭṭhanemicariu*, and *Svayambhūchanda* (Bhayani III). It is possible that northwestern Karnataka was the home state of Svayambhū. He mentions earlier poets such as Caturmukha, Īśāna, and Govinda, but due to the unavailability of their works, no evaluation of their contributions can be made. The narratives of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa became central themes in the poetry of Svayambhū (Jain 49). He was a householder rather than a saint, and is said to belong to the *yāpanīya* tradition (Bhayani III).

Puṣpadanta is regarded as the second most important poet of Apabhramsha. He was a Brahmin by caste and belonged to Kaśyapa *gotra*. His father's name was Keśavabhaṭṭa and mother's name was Mugdhādevī. Initially a follower of Śaivism, he later converted to Jainism. Puṣpadanta wrote three texts – *Mahāpurāṇa, Nāyakumāracariu* and *Jasaharacariu*. His poetic brilliance earned him several titles and *virudas* (an honorific epithet that highlights a person's achievements, qualities, or status), including *abhimāṇameru*, *abhimānāṅka*, *kāvya-piśāca*, *sarasvatī-bāndhava*, *vāgeśvarī-niketa* and others. (Vaidya 20-21)

Raidhu is very popular among the later Apabhramsha poets. His position is first in terms of the quantity of Apabhramsha compositions. Rajaram Jain has mentioned 35 known and unknown Apabhramsha works of Raidhu. Among these, the names of *Mahesara Cariu, Ṇemiṇāha Cariu, Pāsaṇāha Cariu Sammaïjiṇa Cariu, Balahadda Cariu, Pajjuṇṇa Cariu, Dhaakṇṇumāra Cariu, Jasahara Cariu, Sudaṁsaṇa Cariu* etc. are notable. (R. Jain 72) Raidhu's works are significant in terms of language and poetic style.

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[9] "*śaurasenīvat*" (Prakrit Grammar of Hemacandra 4.446)

[10] *svarāṇāṁ svarāḥ prāyopabhraṁśe | apabhraṁśe svarāṇāṁ sthāne prāyaḥ svarā bhavanti |* (ibid 4.329)

[11] *eṭṭi | apabhraṁśe akārasya ṭāyāmekāro bhavati |* (ibid 4.333)

[12] *ṅaserhe-hū | asyeti pañcamyantaṁ vipariṇamyate | apabhraṁśe akārātparasya ṅaserhe-hu ityādeśau bhavataḥ |* (ibid 4.336)

[13] *bhyaso huṁ | apabraṁśe akārātparasya bhyasaḥ pañcamībahuvacanasya huṁ ityādeśau bhavati |* (ibid 4.337)

[14] *ṅasaḥ su-ho-ssavaḥ | apabraṁśe akārātparasya ṅasaḥ sthāne su ho ssu iti traya ādeśā bhavanti | … āmo haṁ | apabraṁśe akārātparasyāmo hamityādeśo bhavati |* (ibid 4.338-339)

Yogindu, Rāmasiṁha, and Devasena are popular to create their compositions for the *muktaka* poetry of Apabhramsha in *dohā chanda*. In addition to the poets mentioned above, other well-known Apabhramsha poets include Haricanda (the author of *Puṣpāñjalīkathā* and *Pañca Kalyāṇaka*), Nayanandī (the author of *Sudaṁsaṇa Cariu*), Dāmodara (the author of *Siripāla Cariu, Candappaha Cariu*, and *Ṇemiṇāha Cariu*), and Tejapāla (the author of *Saṁbhavanāha Cariu*, *Varāṅga Cariu* and *Pāsaṇāha Cariu*).

About 150 works of Apabhramsha literature have so far been made available, and work is still being done on their editing and publication. The available literature reveals that Apabhramsha literature comes in a wide variety. Scholars have made many distinctions, like *prabandha kāvya, khanḍa kāvya, muktaka kāvya, sandhi kāvya, rāso, carcarī*, etc., but on the basis of the subject matter of Apabhramsha compositions, they are included under *prabandha kāvya* and *muktaka kāvya*. The majority of Apabhramsha literature is narrative and character-based. The narrative poems are related to the lives of ordinary people, but *caritakāvyas* are related to the biographies of exceptional individuals like *triśaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣas* or 63 illustrious persons (Kochhad 37).

Historical significance of the Apabhramsha literature

In the sixth century AD, the Guptas ruled over Magadha following the collapse of the Gupta Empire, while the Maukharis took control of Madhya Pradesh. Gurjars expanded over Punjab, Gujarat, and Kathiawar in the same century. Beginning in the first decade of the seventh century, Prabhakar Vardhan established Uttarapatha in Thanesar (Kurukshetra) and expanded his dominance. His son Harsha was the sole strong monarch in this century to uphold the fragile royal authority of North India. The attacks on Saurashtra and Bhinamal State by the Arabs persisted till the middle of the eighth century. Hindu and Arab cultures converged as a result of the Arab immigration to India. To study, many Arab students travelled to India. As a result, Arabic translations of several Indian writings were made. (Vidyalankar 178)

From the description above, it is obvious that in addition to Buddhism, Jainism, and Brahmin religion, Islam was also spread throughout the Apabhramsha period. Because of this, the poets of this religion also wrote in Apabhramsha, just like the adherents of the faith mentioned above. Each class had a large number of castes and sub castes throughout the Apabhramsha period. Untouchability, inter-caste marriage, and other customs started to take on a fanatical nature. According to Apabhramsha works, child marriage and polygamy among wealthy people and kings had become common. Sanskrit was not much popular during the Apabhramsha period but its glory remained the same. In addition to Sanskrit, the authors of Prakrit and Apabhramsha were used to write in abundance. In Bengal, 84 *siddhas* composed their works in Apabhramsha. The Pal dynasty of Buddhists encouraged the folk language. Svayambhū and Puṣpadanta enriched Apabhramsha literature under the patronage of the Rashtrakuta kings. Muñja and Bhoja were lovers of Apabhramsha along with Prakrit. (Kochhad 33) Therefore, the 9th to 13th centuries are considered to be a prosperous period for Apabhramsha literature.

Conclusion

Apabhramsha language is the later stage of the Prakrit linguistic tradition, functioning as a bridge between Middle Indo-Aryan languages and the New Indo-Aryan languages. Without Prakrit, the Apabhramsha language would not exist, and without Apabhramsha, modern languages would not have been evolved. Hence, for understanding of Apabhramsha, the study of Prakrit dialects is crucial. The poets and authors of Apabhramsha created a vast treasure of literature. The history of the end of the mediaeval period can be found in the Apabhramsha language, which is a more evolved form of Prakrit. Prakrit and Apabhramsha literature elevate a person from the depths of worldliness and everyday life to the pinnacles of spirituality. We learn about the ideology, political structure, and social system of that era. Apabhramsha is a large area of linguistic study that enables the exploration of many topics, including linguistics, grammar, philosophy, politics, sociology, history, and cosmology.

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