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Speak Up

LANGUAGE SUBORDINATION AND LINGUISTIC DECLINE IN THE PĪṬHIKĀ TO ṬOḌARAMAL'S SAMYAGJÑĀNACANDRIKĀ

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Linguistic communication is a fundamental and near-universal aspect of human experience. Across the globe, we use language to share information, collaborate and convince. The spread and survival of Jainism are due to the expression of the Jinās' teachings in words. The role of language in society goes beyond mere communication, however. The way we speak sends messages about our identities, and the way we think about others whose speech we hear is affected by our own language attitudes. These aspects are of interest to sociolinguists – scholars concerned with the relationship between language and society. In a paper I presented this spring at a conference at California State University, Long Beach, I explored part of an eighteenth-century Jain text, the *pīṭhikā* (preface) to Paṇḍit Ṭoḍaramal's *Samyagjñānacandrikā*, from a sociolinguistic perspective. My presentation discussed statements Ṭoḍaramal makes about changing language usage in the broader context of Jain and non-Jain metalinguistic discourse.

Ṭoḍaramal (1719-1766), a Digambara Terāpanthī (Terahapanthī) leader, wrote multiple Hindi commentaries on philosophical texts, at a time when using vernacular languages in such a context was not yet uncontroversial. The *Samyagjñānacandrikā* is one such text, a commentary on Nemicandra Siddhānta's *Gommaṭasāra*. In the *pīṭhikā*, written in the form of a dialogue with an imaginary critical interlocutor, Ṭoḍaramal defends his choice to write his commentary in Hindi rather than Sanskrit. Even though the *Gommaṭasāra* itself is a Prakrit text, the association of Sanskrit with scholarship is so strong that the interlocutor views Sanskrit as the obvious and only correct language



for a commentary on it. Ṭoḍaramal rejects this, pointing to the needs of readers who don't know Sanskrit or lack relevant technical knowledge, and tells the following story:

*pūrvai ardhamāgadhī ādi bhāṣāmay mahān graṁth the | bahuri buddhi kī maṁdatā
jīvani ke bhaī, tab saṁskṛtādi bhāṣāmay graṁth bane | ab viśeṣ buddhi kī maṁdatā
jīvani kaim bhaī tātaiṁ deś bhāṣāmay graṁth karane kā vicār bhayā |*

‘In earlier times, great scriptures were composed in Ardhamāgadhī and other regional languages. Later, as intellectual decline set in, Sanskrit texts were composed.

Now, with further decline, vernacular commentaries are being written’

(*Samyagjñānacandrikā Pīṭhikā: Sāmānya Prakaraṇ*, 2000: 4).¹

These three sentences sketch out a brief history of Jain language usage, a history shaped by both Ṭoḍaramal's language attitudes and the Jain belief that intellect is declining in the current *avasarpinī*. It is true that Jain works were composed in Prakrit speech varieties, including Ardhamāgadhī, earlier than in Sanskrit. The earliest known Jain text in Sanskrit, Umāsvāti's *Tattvārthasūtra*, dates only to the mid-first millennium CE. However, Ṭoḍaramal's linkage of this objective fact (which modern scholars have connected to Jain authors' desire to engage in intellectual debates conducted in Sanskrit and to the pursuit of royal patronage) to dwindling cognitive capacities takes the text into the zone of language myth.

Ṭoḍaramal is just one of a number of Jain authors who have made great claims for Prakrit. Consider, for example, the eleventh-century Śvetāmbara Namisādhu, who advances the etymological claim that *prākṛta*- ‘Prakrit’ derives from *prāk kṛta*- ‘made first’ and regards Prakrit as the primal speech form from which Sanskrit is derived (*Kāvyālaṅkāraṭippaṇam* on 2.12), or the statements by Dhanadeva, a fictional character in the eighth-century Śvetāmbara Udyotanasūri's *Kuvalayamālā*, that Sanskrit is *duggamaṁ dujjaṇa-hiyayaṁ piva visamaṁ* ‘difficult to understand and as hard as the heart of a wicked man’ and Prakrit *sajjaṇa-vayaṇaṁ piva suhasaṁgayam* ‘full of pleasantness like the speech of persons of position’ (*Kuvalayamālā* 137; translations by Master, ‘An Unpublished Fragment of Paisācī’, 1948: 663).

¹ Translations of quotes from the *pīṭhikā* are by Pragya Jain.



Such statements need to be understood in the broader sociolinguistic context of premodern and early modern India. Brahmin authors exalted Sanskrit to the skies at the expense of other speech varieties. The grammarian Patañjali, for example, goes so far as to claim that Sanskrit alone was truly capable of expressing meaning, which other speech forms could do in only a derivative fashion. Such assertions were not socially neutral, but acted to reinforce the orthodox social hierarchy that positioned Brahmins, the paradigmatic users of Sanskrit, as the highest class.

Across cultural and historical contexts, metalinguistic discourse tends to exalt certain speech forms and subordinate others. The sociolinguist Rosina Lipi-Green has created a model of the language subordination process that involves eight components: mystification of language, claiming of authority, generation of misinformation, trivialization of targeted languages, vilification/marginalization of non-conformers, promises and threats (*English with an Accent*, 2012: 69-71). I argued in my presentation that, although created for the context of the contemporary US, this model is strikingly applicable to premodern and early modern Indian discourse. I pointed to Sanskrit works subordinating non-Sanskrit speech varieties that represent all but the last two of Lipi-Green's components. For example, Patañjali's assertion that no language other than Sanskrit can truly convey meaning arguably accomplishes mystification and is also an example of both misinformation and trivialization.

The voices reinforcing Brahminical hegemony, however, are not the only ones that survive for us from premodern and early modern India, and non-Brahmin voices – including Jain ones – may and do promote competing ideologies of their own. In passages like those discussed above, Jain authors such as Ṭoḍaramal, Namisādhu and Udyotanasūri apply tactics of language subordination *to Sanskrit itself*, in its place exalting Prakrit. Ṭoḍaramal links Ardhamāgadhī with a vanished intellectual golden age. Later authors abandoned this challenging language for Sanskrit because their audiences were no longer able to tackle it. I see this as a case of language mystification. From the perspective of a modern linguist, Ṭoḍaramal's language myth can also be regarded as misinformation, since it is not really the case that Ardhamāgadhī is intrinsically more intellectually challenging than Sanskrit. Namisādhu portrays Prakrit as primary, Sanskrit secondary; this is a way of claiming authority for the Jain tradition associated with Prakrit via metalinguistic discourse. Udyotana makes Dhanadeva compare Prakrit to the speech of *sajjana*- 'good people', thus elevating Prakrit speakers (conformers)

at the expense of Sanskrit speakers (non-conformers). Ṭoḍaramal's metalinguistic remarks in the *pīṭhikā* are situated within a long history of Jain discourse that effects Sanskrit's subordination to Prakrit, in a reversal of the subordination of non-Sanskrit language enforced by Brahmin authors such as Patañjali.

A possibly unique feature of Ṭoḍaramal's language myth is the linkage of changes in linguistic usage by Jain authors to cosmic decline and its effect on cognitive capacities. For Jains, it is axiomatic that the Tīrthaṅkaras and other enlightened ones attained omniscience during their human lifetimes and continue to enjoy it, but in our own degraded era we can only achieve partial and limited knowledge. The fact that readers of his own time are just not intellectually equal to the people of earlier times motivates Ṭoḍaramal's choice to write in the vernacular rather than Sanskrit, which itself replaced Ardhamāgadhī for the same reason. Ṭoḍaramal admits that he himself shares the general limitations of his age, for example describing himself as *maṃḍabuddhi* 'of limited intellect'. Nonetheless, in the spirit of *anekāntavāda*, he remains committed to spreading whatever partial illumination he can in a linguistic medium with the potential to reach readers without Sanskrit learning.

