

Date of Second Middle Indo-Aryan A Fresh Chronological Estimate

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Linguists have divided Indo-Aryan under three stages from the point of view of their historical development. These are Old Indo-Aryan, Middle Indo-Aryan, New Indo-Aryan. Each of these three stages of Indo-Aryan show several sub-stages. Linguistically dates have also been assigned to these various stages and sub-stages.

For Indo-Aryan linguistic chronology the dates assigned to different periods of Indo-Aryan, by Prof. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, has been widely accepted. In a recent work, I have proposed other dates, for various stages of Indo-European, Indo-Iranian and Indo-Aryan, which totally differ from Prof. Chatterji's chronology. Since in the said work of mine all the stages from Indo-European upto Indo-Aryan have been dealt with, within a limited space, all evidences could not be included in that. But in that work also the whole chronological structure rests on some important and solid chronological evidence, which also need not be repeated here.

Since this conference is one of Prakrit and Jainology, I limit the scope of my paper to chronological discussions of Second MIA or Prakrit, although this has a link with the other stages of Indo-Aryan and therefore my chronological discussion of any one stage presupposes the other stages and rests upon the chronological evidence of the other stages.

Chatterji (Origin and Development of the Bengali Language p. 14), presents his chronological approach to Indo-Aryan with the following words : "Definite dates cannot be laid down in language history, but the period from the time of the composition of the vedic hymns (? 1500, ? 1200 BC) to the times immediately preceding Gautama Buddha (557-477 BC) may be regarded as the OIA period. The MIA period may be said to have extended from 600 BC to about 1000 AD; of which 600 BC to 200 BC could be early or first MIA stage; 200 BC to 200 AD, the transitional MIA stage; 200 AD to 500 or 600 AD the 2nd MIA stage and 600 AD to 1000 AD the 3rd or late MIA stage.

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To summarise Chatterji's Chronology.

OIA	1500	(or 1200) BC	—	600 BC
1st MIA	600	BC	—	200 BC
Transitional MIA	200	BC	—	200 AD
2nd MIA	200	AD	— (500 or)	600 AD
3rd MIA	600	AD	—	1000 AD
MIA	1000	AD	— onwards.	

Chatterji, as is obvious from his expositions, has just made a rough and tentative remark on Indo-Aryan chronology, he has not presented any basis of evidence for his assumptions. But this is the accepted date at present, by linguists in India and abroad.

I have proposed a much different picture of Indo-Aryan chronology in my above mentioned recently published work, viz., *Fresh Light on Indo-European Classification and Chronology*, where I have produced evidence for my assumptions. I quote below the relevant¹, for Indo-Aryan (vide p. 98).

Old Indo-Aryan	—	2000 BC	—	1000 BC
1st Middle Indo-Aryan	—	1000 BC	—	600 BC
2nd Middle Indo-Aryan	—	600 BC	—	300 BC
3rd Middle Indo-Aryan	—	300 BC	—	001 BC
New Indo-Aryan		001 AD	—	onwards.

Without going into the details of each stage I will now take up the Second Middle Indo-Aryan stage only, where *Ardha-Māgadhī*, *Saurasēnī*, *Māgadhī*, *Mahārāṣṭrī* etc. are included. Prof. Chatterji considers *Ardha-Māgadhī* of Second MIA stage to have 2nd century AD as the starting point. But according to my linguistic chronology 2nd MIA (Amg) starts from 6th century BC. Chatterji's presentation does not claim his chronology to be final and he has not shown any evidence to justify his propositions. He has simply made a casual statement just to link up his material with the historical development. On the other hand

1. The summary of the chronological estimate from IE to Indo-Aryan is as follows (p. 98)

Indo-European	5000 BC	—	3500 BC
Satəm	3500 BC	—	2500 BC
Indo-Iranian	2500 BC	—	2000 BC
Indo-Aryan	2000 BC	—	onwards.

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I have presented archaeological evidence in favour of my chronology of New Indo-Aryan in the book referred above, and I have judged the chronology of Middle Indo-Aryan by allowing some approximate time gap for each stage of development although the period assumed as gap between one stage and another stage is tentative and subject to correction. But there can never be any doubt that a gap must be allowed between one stage and another stage. The assumption of the gap period as 300 or 400 years is not purely arbitrary. These assumptions are based taking into consideration of the amount of linguistic change operated in each period. Thus the period assigned may be an underestimate but not at all an overestimate of the length of time.

Traditionally *Ardha-Māgadhī* is believed to be the language of Mahāvira and linguists have no material to challenge this belief and there is nothing wrong in accepting this traditional idea as a fulfilled fact. From this point of view also *Ardha-Māgadhī* may safely be placed in the 6th century BC as the starting point.

Prof. Chatterji, however, thinks that the *Ardha-Māgadhī* spoken by Māhāvira was Old *Ardha-Māgadhī*. But there is no such tradition of any Old *Ardha-Māgadhī*. Chatterji had to use a vague name Old *Ardha-Māgadhī* simply to maintain his chronology that Amg belongs to 2nd century AD (ODBL, p. 55).

For the date of MIA the date of Kalidas is quite pertinent. He uses Classical Sanskrit, 2nd MIA and a little bit of *Apabhraṃśa* in his dramas. The style of his Sanskrit is so natural that he cannot be much later than Paṇini and he is not much influenced by Pāṇini. A few words like *prabhraṃśayām yo naḥṣan cakāra* etc. prove it. Out of several controversies scholars mainly accept two dates for Kalidas : 1st century BC and 4th century AD. If any one of these be accepted the *Apabhraṃśa* verses in Kalidas will have to be taken as interpolation on the basis of Chatterji's Chronological estimate of *Apabhraṃśa* as 6th century AD. But Kalidas is beyond any artificiality and his style is his style. His *Apabhraṃśa* verses also are his, from a stylistic point of view. I have proved with further evidences in details that Kalidas belongs to 1st century BC and not 4th century AD. I have also shown that Kalidas belongs to the last phase of *Apabhraṃśa* and thus he is the first poet of *Apabhraṃśa* as traditionally accepted.

Thus from this point of view also my Chronological estimate of 2nd MIA is preferable as second MIA precedes *Apabhramśa* and thus my assumption 2nd MIA starts from 6th century BC and ended as a natural speech in 4th century BC is quite reasonable. Of course, the language of each stage of Indo-Aryan continued as an artificial literary speech for centuries.

Bibliography

1. Chatterji, S. K. : Origin & Development of the Bengali Language (Reissued London 1970).
2. Misra, SS. : Fresh Light on IE Classification & Chronology (Varanasi 1980).

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