

The Prākṛta in Karnataka

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There is clear evidence to be pointed out that Prākṛta language was current in Karnātaka region as early as third century B. C. In several places of Karnātaka, about ten Minor inscriptions of Aśhoka, the famous Maurya king, have come to light. These could not have been here unless there were people who could read and understand the message contained in them. In addition to these inscriptions there are semi-historical stories, which indicate the prevalence of political contact between Southern and Northern regions of India even prior to the time of Aśhoka. Karakandu story narrated in *Bṛhatkathākośa* of Hariṣeṇa and also the Śreṇika story narrated in *Bṛhatkathākośa*, *Puṇyāśrava Kathākośa* and *Vaḍḍārādhane* are two such stories, which indirectly provide proof for the political contact that existed between Northern and Southern regions of India during Sixth Century B.C. This contact again establishes language-link between these two parts of India. Prākṛta was the spoken language that was current through out Northern India in those days and the same must have served as a link-language, rather than any other language. Further again the story of the migration of the huge *Munisāṅgha* under the leadership of Bhadrabāhu, the last *Dvādaśaṅga Caturdaśa pūrvin*, to south suggests a flow of religious people whose mother tongue was Prākṛta. According to the tradition.¹ Bhāskara undertook a journey with a big army and retinue to Kalbappu i.e., Chandragiri at Shravanabelagola to pay his obeisance to his grandfather Chandragupta, who, having taken *Munidikṣā*, had accompanied the *Munisāṅgha* Headed by Bhadrabāhu and was performing penance at the *Nisidhi* of his guru Bhadrabāhu Swāmi. Bhāskara stayed here for a few days and established a township and caused a temple to be constructed. After this *Munis* and *Śrāvakās* from north continued to visit this sacred place i. e., *Tirthakṣetra* the fact of which is indirectly attested by the statement '*Krameṇa Saptasatam ṛṣipāṇāṃ-rādhitamiti jayatu Jinaśāsanamiti*', i.e. And in course of time Ṛṣis numbering seven hundred

1. Rājāvalikatha of Devachandra Bhadrabāhubhattāraka Katha.

took the vow of Ārāḍhanā or Sallekhanā and died'. (Inscription No. 1 the earliest one.)

By about 2nd Century A.D., we can say with certainty, there were *Nirgrantha Munis* hailing from Southern Indian regions who were experts in the Jaina lore in Prākṛta that was handed down in the line of teacher and pupil from the time of the *Nirvāṇa* of Mahāvīra. Puṣpadanta and Bhūtabali are the two *Ācāryas* who lived in 2nd century A.D. and received the *Āgama* lore from Dharasena, who in his old age had taken residence in *Chandraguha* at *Ujjayantagiri*. Puṣpadanta after the completion of his studentship goes to Vanavāsīdeśa. There with a desire to save the *Āgama* lore, whatever he had received from his guru, plans to bring out an epitome of it and thus he composes *Jivasthāna-saṭprarūpaṇā* in 177 *suttas*. Then he sent those *suttas* to his fellow student Bhūtabali who was staying at Dakṣiṇa Mathurā with a view to ascertain his opinion regarding his plan of preparing the compendium of the *Āgama*.

Bhūtabali on seeing those *sūtras* could read the mind of his elderly fellow student, who was already aged, and so he himself continued further the composition of the *Āgama*. Thus finally the composition of *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* was completed and was sent to Puṣpadantācārya, who felt immensely happy in getting his desire fulfilled.

The literary history of Karnāṭaka opens its chapter with the composition of *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and its commentaries. Vanavāsīdeśa, where Puṣpadanta is said to have initiated the composition of *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* is, it is needless to say, the ancient kingdom in the Southern part of Karnāṭaka with Banavāsi as its capital. It is in this region that Puṣpadantācārya initiated the composition of *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and thus this forms the *Ādimāṅgala* of the history of contribution Karnāṭaka to Prākṛta literature. Further the traditional account in relation to the composition of commentaries on *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and also on *Kaṣāyapāhuda* of Guṇadhara, which is looked up on as the 2nd sacred *Āgama* of Digambara Jains, is in itself a history of Prākṛta literature relating how Prākṛta language continued to be cultivated at least in the Jaina religious sect of the Karnataka upto 9th century A. D. In the line of these commentators of *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* Kundakunda is mentioned as the first commentator. He is remembered by Digambara Jaina sect through out the

several countries with high veneration. His name is mentioned as a 'Mangala' in association with the names of Bhagavan Vira Tirthankara and Gautama Gaṇin. It is true that his commentary on *Ṣaṭkhandāgama*, like those of his many successors, has not come down to us. But his twelve or thirteen *Pahuda*s, which have come down to us, are the gems of the *Ādhyātmika* sacred works which are in Prākṛta language. *Mūlacāra* which is in the name of Vaṭṭakera also has been attributed to Kundakunda. It is true that this question of authorship of this work is yet to be decided conclusively, and therefore it cannot be claimed for definite as the contribution of Karnāṭaka.

Next to Kundakunda Shyamakunda is mentioned to have written commentary in Prākṛta, Saṃskṛta and also in Kannada. Here is an important record in relation to the writing in Kannada language as this commentary of Shyāmakunda happens to be the earliest Kannada piece of writing. Further again the commentary *Cūdāmaṇi* of the extent of 84000 *granthas* and the *Panjikā* of the extent of 7000 *grathas* by Tumbalurācārya are to find a merited place of recognition in the history of both Prākṛta and Kannada languages. It is true that these commentaries have not come down to us. But the traditional account, maintained in *Śrutāvatāra*, is accepted by scholars as authentic. The next commentator to write commentary in Prākṛta is Bappadevaguru. Finally the series of Commentaries came to a close with the famous commentary 'Dhavalā' by name in *Maṇi Pravāla* style on *Ṣaṭkhandāgama* by Virasenācārya and *Jaya Dhavalā* on *Kaṣāyapāhuda* by Virasena and his disciple Jinasena. Thus the history of the composition of *Ṣaṭkhandāgama* and of its commentary and also of the commentary on *Kaṣāyapāhuda* forms the main part of the contribution of Karnāṭaka to Prākṛta literature.

It is a well established fact that Karnāṭaka was the main centre of the activities of Yāpaniya sect of the Jaina monks. Contribution to literature from this sect of the Jaina monks has been applauded even by early Ācāryās of high reputation. Śivakoti is one such name which has been respectfully mentioned by Jinasenācārya in his *pūrvapurāṇa*² *Mūlārādhana* is his work which it is needless to say, is in Prākṛta.

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2. Śitibhūtaṃ Jagadyasya Vācārādhya Catuṣṭayaṃ/
Mokṣamārgaṃ sa Pāyānaḥ Śivakotīrmuṇiśvaraḥ // 49 //
Pūrvapurāṇa-Parva-1

परिसंवाद-४

Karnāṭaka mentions proudly the names of Pampa, Ranna, Janna and many others as its great poets. But if it were to extend its consideration beyond the range of Kannada literature and look upon Sanskrit and Prākṛita poets as its own then Puspadanta will find a place of an equal rank, if not more, with the Kannada poets of the best order. His works *Tisaṭṭi Mahāpurisa-Guṇāṅkārū*, *Jasaharacariu* and *N. yaku-māracariu* in *apabhraṃśa-Prākṛita* stand on par with any one of the best Kāvya in Sanskrit and Prākṛita.

Gommatasāra of Nemichandra Siddhānta-Chakravarti, because of its popularity, is worth mentioning as the contribution of Karnāṭaka to Prākṛita literature, though it is only a compendium of early literature on Jiva and Karma and not an original contribution.

In the field of Vyākaraṇa literature also Karnāṭaka has its own contribution through Trivikramas *Prākṛita Śabdānuśāsana*. It is true that this work lacks originality and is only a reproduction of Hemachandras Prākṛita Grammar. But its popularity in South India cannot be ignored while considering its place in the history of Prākṛita literature.

Not that Prākṛita was cultivated in the circle of Jains only. Sanskrit play writers, following the rules of Dramaturgy, have given place for Prākṛita in their plays. Similarly in other literary works also, though very rarely, Prākṛita has found place. For instance in *Basavarajiyā* of Palkurike Somanatha (12th century A. D.), we find about twenty five Prākṛita stanzas. However, it should be noted that in Karnāṭaka gradually Sanskrit gained prominence and Prākṛita lost its place of being a literary language even in the circle of Jaina monks.

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