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Vedic, Sanskrit, and Middle Indic.—By TRUMAN MICHELson. Ethnologist in the Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D. C.¹

In an interesting paper (JAOS. 32, pp. 414—428) Mr. W. Petersen has discussed the general interrelations of Vedic, Sanskrit, and Middle Indic. It may be noted that he uses 'Prakrit' in the sense of 'Mittelindisch'. The following criticism is presented by the writer as he believes that Petersen has overlooked the evidence of the Asokan dialects in a number of cases.

In the discussion as to whether Prākrit is derived from Vedic or Sanskrit, it should have been mentioned that it has been demonstrated that not a single dialect of the Asokan inscriptions can be derived from either the literary Vedic or Sanskrit. See Johansson, Shb. ii, § 88; Michelson, JAOS. 31, pp. 232, 241; IF. 24, p. 54; TAPA. 40, p. 26.

The position taken, that during the period of the composition of the Vedic hymns two distinct groups of Indic dialects were developed and separated by an uncrossable gulf does not seem probable by the analogy of the Asokan dialects. Johansson and the writer have made it clear that the dialect of the Shāhbazgarhi and Mansehra versions of the Fourteen Edicts (for their speech is essentially one) is far closer to Vedic or Sanskrit than the other dialects are. There is no uncrossable bridge. It can be confidently asserted that this dialect, though it has certain ear-marks of the Middle Indic stage of development, such as the assimilation of stops of one order to those of another order, yet as a whole belongs to an earlier stage of development. Now if it is not feasible to draw hard and fast lines in the time of Asoka, what right have we to assume such lines in earlier times unless some definite proof be given?

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Petersen has allowed traces of Middle Indic in the Rig Veda so far as phonetics are concerned. But Epic Sanskrit teems with Middle-Indicisms morphologically; and it should be especially noted that such forms phonetically do not present the same aspect as the later dialects (e.g. Epic Sanskrit kurmi, dadmi = Pali kummli, damni respectively). Such forms are usually due to metrical considerations, and are borrowed from dialects. Are such dialects also to be classed as Middle Indic? Again I do not think a hard and fast line can be drawn.

The point made that Vedic and Middle Indic cannot have been contemporaneous dialects which arose in different localities, by the argument that it is highly improbable that one section of the country should have been so conservative and another so prone to innovation, is not in accordance with the evidence of the Asokan dialects: the Shāhbazgarhi and Manshehra dialect is highly conservative while the ‘Māgadhan’ dialects show numerous phonetic changes; the Girnār dialect as a whole is not phonetically as archaic as the first dialect nor has it suffered as many phonetic changes as the second dialects.

The assumption that the sound-changes in Middle Indic were due not to gradual changes, but to the fact that the aborigines differed anatomically from the Aryans, and had linguistic traits widely different from them; and that it was owing to this that they were unable to speak the language as the Aryans, and so modified it to suit their own characteristics, is a point to be proved. Granting anatomical differences in the vocal apparatus, no such direct influence can be maintained until it has been shown that the non-Aryan languages of India possess the characteristic sounds of Middle Indic languages, that the groups of consonants which suffer assimilation in these languages are not tolerated in the non-Aryan languages and show the same assimilations, that the same loss of intervocalic consonants occurs in them.

An indirect influence can be maintained if it be shown that the non-Aryan languages do not possess the groups of consonants which suffer assimilation nor such consonants as are lost when intervocalic, even if the non-Aryan languages do not agree precisely with the Middle Indic languages. In the same way the change (or substitution) of one sound for another such as $s$ for $\dot{s}$ cannot be charged directly or indirectly to the
influence of non-Aryan languages unless there be positive evidence. Similarly certain morphological characteristics of Middle Indic languages such as the almost complete loss of the perfect tense, the formation of other tenses on the present stem, extensive levelling of distinctions between singular and plural (e.g. Pāli brūmī, levelled by brūmā), and the like cannot be charged to the direct or indirect influence of the non-Aryan languages unless it be demonstrated that the same or like phenomena respectively occur in them.

But again the evidence of the Asokan inscriptions indicates that the changes were gradual. Thus though the Girnār dialect possesses but one sibilant, it can be shown that this is a late development (see JĀOS. 31, pp. 236, 246 and the literature cited there). Again the treatment of r in consonant groups is a case in point (ibidem, pp. 236, 246); it is clear that the assimilation in certain cases is recent. From the state of affairs in the Girnār dialect, it might well be argued that the assimilation of r in consonant groups (which assimilation is not connected with those in the Girnār dialect, and is merely a parallel development) in the ‘Māgadhan’ dialects is the result of gradual changes.

Moreover, it has been shown that some of the most characteristic assimilations in consonantal groups in the Middle Indic dialects had their beginning in even earlier times: see Wackernagel, AiGr. i. § 98 (and the literature cited there); Whitney, Skt. Gr.³ §§ 228, 232; Whitney-Lanman, Atharva Veda, p. lxvii and on i. 22. 1, iv. 19. 6, v. 20. 12. This is against any theory of direct influence on the part of the non-Aryan languages; and it supports the view that the phonetic changes were gradual and not due to mere substitution of sounds. And it may be noted that in part parallel assimilations are found in other Indo-European languages. Thus for example popular Latin tt from ct and pt (Italian otto, sette = Latin octō, septem respectively), Cretan Greek ττ from κτ and πτ (Δόττιοι, νυτί for Λόκτιοι, νυκτί; Buck, Greek Dialects, p. 68, § 86. 1, 2) are parallel to tt from kt and pt in Middle Indic (Pāli satta, sitta- = Skt. sapta, sikta- respectively); similarly Ionic-Attic Greek λλ from ly (άλλος) is parallel to Pāli, Girnār, Shāhbazgarhi, Manshara ll (written l on inscriptions) from ly (kallāna- Skt. kalyāna-). Even Cretan Greek νν from ρν (όνιθα for ὀνιθα, Buck, Greek Dialects, p. 69,
§ 86, 5) may be compared to a certain extent with Middle Indic \( mn \) from \( rv \). These facts make it likely that at any rate certain typical Middle Indic assimilations of consonants are due to spontaneous change; and puts the burden of proof on those who maintain the changes are due directly to the influence of the non-Aryan languages. The same applies to the levellings in Middle Indic noted above.

The analogy of the English of the American Negro to Prákrit is not happy, except as a parallel in the indirect influence mentioned above: there is no proof that the peculiarities of his speech are due to his anatomy nor to the influence of his forgotten African language. Educated American negroes speak English faultlessly. The English of such negroes of Nassau (Bahama Islands), that I have heard, as far as pronunciation is concerned, is close to the British one. It is likely that the faulty English of the American negro is due to his wrong perception of the sounds\(^1\) and his unfamiliarity with the English of cultivated society.\(^2\) In the same way to the untrained ear of an American, there are sounds in the American Indian languages of the Northwest coast that are wrongly perceived, and hence wrongly imitated. (The sounds in question are various \( l \) sounds.) Similarly American Indian children at governmental schools at first mispronounce English and make havoc of English grammatical categories, but on becoming familiar with the spoken language they learn to speak English correctly. Again American Indian pupils after a more or less protracted stay at the schools lose the characteristic pronunciation of their own native languages owing to the fact that they hear English constantly spoken, and rarely (comparatively speaking) have occasion to use their


\(^2\) M. Fishberg, Die Rassenmerkmale der Juden, München, 1913, maintains (pp. 75—80) "daß die Aussprache in erster Linie von der sozialen Berührung abhängig ist", and instances Jewish and Negro pronunciation.
own languages. I admit I have never yet found a case where it can be proved that English has influenced the grammatical categories of the native languages of American Indian pupils. It may be noted, however, that in the drama of "The Little Clay Cart", ascribed to King Śūdraka, Candanaka tries to excuse his slip in Prākrit (which nearly cost Āryaka his life) by appealing to the grammatical categories of non-Aryan languages. As I am ignorant of these I cannot say whether his plea is well-founded.

In discussing the differences between the accentuation of Vedic and Classical Sanskrit, it would have been well to mention that certain Asokan dialects had a system identical with or very similar to the latter: see IF. 23, p. 231.

In conclusion the writer agrees with the thesis that Sanskrit, "though not in the very form in which it occurs in literature" was a truly spoken vernacular. Even the late Classical Sanskrit cannot have been wholly artificial; the existence of such an enormous literature necessarily presupposes a large audience who normally spoke a language that did not differ from the written one too violently. That the audience belonged to cultivated circles of society goes without saying. Petersen has done well to emphasize this aspect of the problem, as against Pischel, Gr. d. Pkt. Sprachen, § 6, note 2. But other phases such as the question as the genetic relationship of the Middle Indic dialects require more protracted and more intensive study before satisfactory answers can be given.