Suddhamāgadhī: The Language of Buddhavacana

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Abstract

Scholars have different opinions about the origin of the Pāḷi, that we recognize as a language today. Different scholars have tried to make the origination of the word Pāḷi with different words like- Pariyāya, Pāṭha, Paṁkti, Pāṭali, Palli, Prāleyaka, etc. Similarly, there is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the origin-places of the Pāḷi language. Different scholars consider it as a language of different ancient territories like- Kaliṅga, Kosala, Ujjayinī, Vindhya-Pradeśa, Magadha, etc. However, from the viewpoint of the literal and regional roots of the Pāḷi language, the Magadha region seems to be more logical and prominent as origin-place of the Pāḷi. Thus, Māgadhī is the more appropriate denotement for the Pāḷi and it is widely accepted by many scholars of Pāḷi, Buddhology, Linguistics and other allied disciplines.

But there is a big confusion among students, researchers, and scholars somehow associated with linguistics, ancient languages, Buddhist literature, Jaina literature, or Vaidika literature. Although some of them consider Pāḷi as an independent language, they may not be aware that Pāḷi could be the modern denotement of the ancient language Māgadhī. On the other hand, many others know this fact, but they become confused with the Māgadhī-Prākṛta.

Thus, through this research paper I have attempted to discuss and introduce both Māgadhī-Pāḷi and Māgadhī-Prākṛta comparatively and tried to discuss and point-out those features that have established Pāḷi as an independent language and differentiate it from Prākṛta. And while doing all this, an attempt has been made to discuss whether the word Suddhamāgadhī used by Sri Lankan scholar Sūriyagoḍa Thera for the Māgadhī-Pāḷi is appropriate or not.

Keywords: Pāḷi, Māgadhī, Addhamāgadhī, Suddhamāgadhī, Buddhavacana.

Introduction

      After attaining enlightenment under the Bodhi-Tree in *Uruveḷā*[1] (now Bodha-Gayā, Bihar), Buddha preached the *Dhamma*[2] for 45 years during his *cārikā*[3]. The teachings or the Dhamma preached by the Buddha are called *Buddhavacana* (Davids & Stede, 1952, Vol. 6, p. 113). The entire Buddhavacana are compiled under these three texts: *Vinaya-Piṭaka*, *Sutta-Piṭaka* and *Abhidhamma-Piṭaka*. These three texts are collectively called *Tipiṭaka*. The language in which Tipiṭaka has been compiled is *Pāḷi*[4]. Later on, many commentaries, sub-commentaries and other texts were also written in Pāḷi language. On the basis of various literary sources, it can be said that the practice of the word Pāḷi started from the beginning of the 4th century AD when the word Pāḷi was used as the discourse of the Buddha in the Sri Lankan chronicle *Dīpavaṃsa*[5]. In some other Buddhist texts also (like- commentaries of *Buddhaghosācariya*[6], *Mahāvaṃsa*, *Paramatthadīpanī*, *Culavaṃsa*, *Saddhammasaṅgaha* etc.), the word Pāḷi represents the Buddhavacana or discourse of

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[1] A locality on the banks of the Nerañjarā river, in the neighbourhood of the Bodhi-tree at Buddhagayā. Here, after leaving his teachers Aḷāra and Uddaka, the Bodhisatta practised during six years the most severe penances. His companions were the Pañcavaggiya-monks, who, however, left him when he relaxed the severity of his austerities. {Malalasekera, G. P. (1938). *Dictionary of Pali proper names*. (Vol. 2, p. 969). London: John Murray.}

[2] Ācārya Buddhaghosa gives a fourfold meaning of the word Dhamma – (1) guṇe (saddo) : applied to good conduct; (2) desanāyaṃ : to preaching & moral instruction; (3) pariyattiyaṃ : to the nine-fold collection of the Buddha's teachings, Scriptures; (4) nissatte (-nijjivate) : to cosmic (non-animistic) law. {Davids, R., & Stede, W. (Eds.). (1952). *The Pali text society's Pali-English dictionary*. (Vol. 4, p. 171). London: Pali Text Society.}

[3] To go on alms-pilgrimage. {Ibid. Vol. 3, p. 95.}

[4] Literary language of the early Buddhists, closely related to Māgadhī. {Ibid. Vol. 5, p. 78.}

[5] 'Piṭakattayapāḷiṃ ca tassā aṭṭhakathaṃ pi ca,

mukhapāṭhena ānesuṃ pubbe bhikkhu mahāmati'.

(Before this time, the wise Bhikkhus had orally handed down the text of the three Piṭakas and also the Aṭṭhakathā.) {Oldenberg, H. (1879). *Dīpavaṁsa*. p .103. London: Williams and Norgate.}

[6] The greatest of Commentators on the Tipiṭaka. He was a brāhmin, born in a village near Buddhagayā and became proficient in the Vedas and allied branches of knowledge. One day he met a monk, named Revata, and on being defeated by him in controversy, entered the Order to learn the Buddha's teachings. Because his speech was profound, like that of the Buddha, and because his words spread throughout the world (like those of the Buddha), he came to be called Buddhaghosa. {Malalasekera, G. P. (1938). *Dictionary of Pali proper names*. (Vol. 2, p. 969). London: John Murray.}

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the Buddha (Upādhyāya, 1952, pp. 26-27). But till now the word Pāḷi was being used not as a language but for entire teachings of the Buddha. The use of the word Pāḷi as a language begins with the text like *Abhidhānappadīpikā* and *Sāsanavaṁsa*[7] of the 19th century AD. After that, the term Pāḷi was being widely used as a language.

Scholars have different opinions about the origin of the Pāḷi language, that we recognize as a language today. Different scholars have tried to make the origination of the word Pāḷi with different words like- *Pariyāya*, *Pāṭha*, *Paṁkti*, *Pāṭali*, *Palli*, *Prāleyaka* etc. (Upādhyāya, 1952, pp. 32-33). Similarly, there is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding the origin-places of the Pāḷi language. Different scholars consider it as a language of different ancient territories like- *Kaliṅga*, *Kosala*, *Ujjayinī*, *Vindhya-Pradeśa*, *Magadha*, etc. (Upādhyāya, 1952, pp. 40-44). However, from the viewpoint of the literal and regional roots of the Pāḷi language, the Magadha region seem to be more logical and prominent as origin-place of the Pāḷi. Thus, *Māgadhī* is the more appropriate denotement for the Pāḷi and it is widely accepted by different scholars of Pāḷi, Buddhology, Linguistics and other allied disciplines (Kassapa, 1940, p. 5).

But there is a big confusion among students, researchers and scholars somehow associated or working with linguistics, ancient languages, Buddhist literature, Jaina literature, or Vaidika literature. Although some of them consider Pāḷi an independent language, they may not be aware that Pāḷi is the modern denotement of the ancient language Māgadhī. On the other hand, many others know this fact but they become confused with the *Māgadhī-Prākṛta*. And in such a situation, the following questions arise in the mind of most of the people:

1. In ancient time Pāḷi was known as Māgadhī, so why Pāḷi is not considered as a dialect of *Prākṛta* language? Is it entirely different from Māgadhī-Prākṛta?
2. If Pāḷi is different from Māgadhī-Prākṛta, which term would be appropriate to use for it so that it retains the relevance of its antiquity & specialty?

Ācārya *Buddhaghosa*, in his commentaries, considers Māgadhī as *mūlabhāsā*[8] (principal dialect), in which the Buddha preached his sermons. Buddhaghosa uses the word Pāḷi to represent

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[7] Iccevaṃ pāḷibhāsāya pariyattiṃ parivattitvā pacchā ācariyaparamparasissānusissavasena sīhaḷadīpe jinacakkaṃ majjhanti kaṃsumāsī viya atidibbati ... {Paññāsāmī, Bhikkhu. *Sāsanavaṃsa*. Bode, M. (Ed.). (1897). p. 31. London: The Pāḷi Text Society.}

[8] '... māgadhikāya sabbasattānaṃ mūlabhāsāya ...' {Buddhaghosācariya. *Visuddhimagga*. Warren, H.C. (Ed.). (1950). p. 373. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.}

the Buddhavacana or Tipiṭaka[9]. Ācārya *Moggallāna*, at starting of his grammar book, says – "now I am going to tell the rules for Māgadhī dialect"[10]. Here *Moggallānācariya* is also talking about the same Māgadhī, which Buddhaghosācariya was talking about. Ācārya *Hemacandra*, in his book *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*, has given many rules for Māgadhī-Prākṛta which are different from the rules of *Māgadhī-Pāḷi*[11]. So now, I will discuss both Māgadhī-Prākṛta and Māgadhī-Pāḷi respectively. But before that we will see the *Thera*[12] Sūriyagoḍa's perspective about unique identification and recognition of the Māgadhī language in which the Buddhist canons have been preserved and which was used by the Buddha as communicating dialect also. In fact, this was the Thera Sūriyagoḍa's interpretation that inspired me to write this paper.

Thera *Sūriyagoḍa* of Sri Lanka has used the word *Suddhamāgadhī* to differentiate the Māgadhī of Theravada Buddhist Canon from Māgadhī-Prākṛta. By the term Suddhamāgadhī Thera Sūriyagoḍa means the purest form of Māgadhī dialect. However, almost in every religion the language used by its founder or the language of its scriptures is considered the purest. Language of Vedas (*Vaidika Saṃskṛta* or *Chāndasa*) is considered pious. Even at the time of the Buddha, two Brāhmin monks requested the Buddha to make Chāndasa as the primary language of Buddhavacana[13] but the Buddha refused their proposal by allowing monks to learn or deliver

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[9] '... neva pāḷiyaṃ na aṭṭhakathāyaṃ āgataṃ ...' {Ibid. p. 87}; '...neva pāḷiyaṃ, na aṭṭhakathāyaṃ dissati'. {Buddhaghosācariya. *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*. Tiwary, M. (Ed.). (1974). p. 188. Nālandā: Nava Nālandā Mahāvihāra.}

[10] "Siddhamiddhaguṇaṃ sādhu, namassitvā tathāgataṃ,

sadhammasaṅghaṃ bhāsissaṃ, māgadhaṃ saddalakkhaṇaṃ".

{Moggallānācārya. *Moggallāna Pāḷi-vyākaraṇa*. Kausalyāyana, B. A. (Trans.). Vimalakīrti, Prof. (Dr.). (Ed.). (2013). p. 21. New Delhi: Samyaka Prakāśana.}

[11] Māgadhī-Pāḷi is not a technically appropriate term but I am using this term here to differentiate the Māgadhī of Buddhist canons from the Māgadhī-Prākṛta only.

[12] Used with reference to the bhikkhus of Buddhist Order. {Davids, R., & Stede, W. (Eds.). (1952). *The Pali text society's Pali-English dictionary*. (Vol. 4, p. 144). London: Pali Text Society.}

[13] "Etarahi, bhante, bhikkhū nānānāmā nānāgottā nānājaccā nānākulā pabbajitā. Te sakāya niruttiyā buddhavacanaṃ dūsenti. Handa mayaṃ, bhante, buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropemā"ti. {*Cullavaggapāḷi*. Kassapa, J. (Ed.). (2017). (pp. 228-9) Nālandā: Nava Nālandā Mahāvihāra.}

Buddhavacana in their own dialects[14]. Similarly, Prākṛta, in which the *Mahāvīra Swāmī*[15] preached his discourses, is considered natural & purest language (Pragyāsāgara, 2015, p. IX). Therefore, naming the Pāḷi language (in which the Buddha delivered his discourses) as Suddhamāgadhī may be an attempt to show this language purest and it may be also like showing reverence to the Buddha. But that is neither my concern nor the point of discussion. Purpose of this study is very clear and mainly based upon the two questions which are mentioned in the previous page.

Before proceeding further, it is appropriate to discuss the methodology, significance & scope of this study. Mainly two methods of research have been applied throughout this study – 1. Literary method– the study is based on different relevant primary and secondary literary sources related to Pāḷi and Prākṛta languages available in printed and electronic form; 2. Analytical method– it has been tried to collect sufficient materials, facts or information related to the topic and has been analyzed to make a critical evaluation of the materials. If we talk about the significance of this study, since the study has been done mainly on account of primary sources, the facts or findings obtained after this study will be more precise and reliable. Researchers and scholars associated with linguistic and historical studies will be attracted to the adequate amount of primary sources available in Pāḷi and Prākṛta languages. Some popular and controversial questions related to Prākṛta and Pāḷi language have been considered without any prejudice, so that other future researchers and scholars may also be interested to think over those questions. Future researchers working on similar topics may also be benefited.

It is also necessary to point here that this study is limited to the two grammar texts– *Moggallāna Pāḷi Vyākaraṇa* and *Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana Prākṛta Vyākaraṇa* to make comparison regarding similarities or differences between the two languages, i.e., Māgadhī (Prākṛta) and Suddhamāgadhī (Pāḷi).

Thera Sūriyagoḍa's View
At starting of the introduction of his book, Rev. *Sūriyagoḍa Sumaṅgala* admits– "Pāḷi was the language spoken in the sixth century B.C. in Magadha, a country in Northern India. At that time, it was called Māgadhī and the term Pāḷi was then unknown. The Buddha, whose teaching

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[14] "Na, bhikkhave, buddhavacanaṃ chandaso āropetabbaṃ. Yo āropeyya, āpatti dukkaṭassa. Anujānāmi, bhikkhave, sakāya niruttiyā buddhavacanaṃ pariyāpuṇitu"nti. {Ibid.}

[15] Jainism is believed to have come down from unknown antiquity through 24 teachers, called *Tīrthaṃkaras* (founders of the faith). Rishabha stands first in the list of teachers. However, the first 22 Tirthankaras seem to be mythical and the last two historical persons. 23rd Tīrthaṃkara was Lord Pārśvanātha. Mahāvīra Swāmī was the last and 24th Tīrthaṃkara. {Chanchreek, K.L., & Jain, M.K. (Eds.). (2005). *Encyclopedia of Jaina Religion*. (vol. 1, pp. 64-112). New Delhi: Shree Publishers & Distributors.}

was addressed to all classes of humanity regardless of rank and colour, used this language for His discourses. These discourses have from that day been handed down first orally and later in writing in the same identical language, although the language of the country of Magadha in course of time underwent a great many changes. At first, these changes resulted in a division into three forms –

1. Māgadhī – the language of the court and cultured people,
2. Addhamāgadhī – the language of the merchants and common people and
3. Suddhamāgadhī – the pure Māgadhī which came to be called Pāḷi and which was, as stated above, the language in which the Buddha preached His doctrine and in which the Buddhist Scriptures have been preserved" (Sūriyagoḍa, 1953, p. 10).

Māgadhī-Prākṛta

Prākṛta is a bunch of languages. There are many dialects of Prākṛta language, and Māgadhī is one of them. However, there is a difference of opinion among scholars, linguists, and grammarians regarding the types of Prākṛta. Where *Vararuci* tells us about four types of Prākṛta, *Lakśhamīdhara* informs us about six. *Hemacandra* and *Bharatamuni* both mention seven types of Prākṛta. By dividing Prākṛta into four categories (i.e., *Bhāṣā*, *Vibhāṣā*, *Apabhraṃśa* and *Paiśāca*), *Markaṇḍeya* talks about total sixteen types of Prākṛta[16]. But despite having so many types of Prākṛta, only three types of Prākṛta are considered important by most of the scholars – 1. *Śaurasenī*, 2. *Māgadhī* and 3. *Paiśācī*. And among these three, Śaurasenī is considered to be the most important. Māgadhī and Paiśācī are considered to be regional dialects of Śaurasenī only (Pragyāsāgara, 2015, p. X).

Māgadhī is considered the dialect of ancient Magadha. From some famous and important Saṃskṛta plays like *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* of Kālidāsa and *Mṛcchakaṭikam* of Śūdraka, we get to know that Māgadhī was a dialect of common people, King's men, servants and demon-like characters. Māgadhī can also be traced in Asokan inscriptions. Many ancient Prākṛta scholars have given grammar rules for Māgadhī.

I have selected Ācārya Hemacandra's Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana for this paper because Ācārya Hemacandra himself has given explanations or comments (*vutti*) to all the suttas written by him. This book is considered as a complete and prominent grammar book of Prākṛta language by many scholars; so this is another reason to select this book for this study. Let us see some examples of Māgadhī from this book.

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[16] Hemacandra, Ācārya. *Prākṛta-vyākaraṇa: 8th chapter of Siddhahemaśabdānuśāsana*. Āpṭe, K. V. (Ed.). (1996). p. 4. Vārāṇasī: Caukhambā Saṃskṛta Series Bhawana.

1. If '*si*' suffix comes after a masculine noun, the last vowel '*a*' converts into '*e*'[17] –
   > es**a** + si > eś**e**
   > meṣ**a** + si > meś**e**

   (Note that here '*ṣ*' also converts into '*ś*')

2. '*r*' letter of nouns and adjectives usually converts into '*l*'[18] –
   > **r**ājā > **l**ājā
   > na**r**a > na**l**e {nara + si = nare; r>l; nare>nale}
   > ka**r**a > ka**l**e

3. Dental '*s*' & cerebral '*ṣ*' convert into palatal '*ś*'[19] –
   > haṃ**s**a > haṃ**ś**e
   > **s**āra**s**a > **ś**āla**ś**e
   > puru**ṣ**a > puli**ś**e

4. '*ja*' and '*dya*' convert into '*ya*'[20] –
   > **jā**nāti > **yā**ṇadi
   > ma**dya** > ma**yya**ṃ

5. '*t*' (which is non-conjoint and does not occur in starting of a word) converts into '*d*'[21] –
   > jānā**t**i > yāṇa**d**i
   > upasthi**t**a > uvasti**d**e
   > arthapa**t**i > astava**d**ī
   > ucchala**t**i > uścala**d**i

Māgadhī-Pāḷi

Although this is a controversial topic so far and different scholars have different views on this, most scholars agree that Māgadhī was the dialect in which the Buddha preached his sermons.

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[17] Ata et sau puṃsi māgadhyām – "māgadhyāṃ bhaṣāyāṃ sau pare akārasya ekāro bhavati puṃsi pulliṅge". {Ibid. p. 242.}

[18] Rasorlaśau – "māgadhyāṃ refasya dantyasakārasya ca sthāne yathāsaṃkhyaṃ lakārastālavyaśakāraśca bhavati". {Ibid. pp. 242-243.}

[19] Ibid.

[20] Jadyāṃ yaḥ – "māgadhyāṃ jadhyaṃ sthāne yo bhavati. {Ibid. p. 244.}

[21] To donādau śaurasenyāmayuktasya – "śaurasenyaṃ bhāṣāyāmanāsdāvapadādau vartamānasya takārasya dakāro bhavati, na cedasau varṇāntareṇa saṃyukto bhavati. {Ibid. p. 234.}; Seṣaṃ śaurasenīvat – "magdhyaṃ yaduktaṃ tatonyacchaurasenīvat draṣṭvyam". {Ibid. p. 247.}

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Later on, this Māgadhī came to be known as Pāḷi. Scholars such as Ācārya Buddhaghosa, Geiger and Bhikkhu[22] Siddhārtha believe that Māgadhī was the language of the Buddhavacana. Bhikkhu Jagadīsa Kassapa also strongly supports this view, as well as many modern scholars of Pāḷi and Buddhology also have the same view (Upādhyāya, 1952, p. 43).

There are many such problems associated with the Language of Buddhavacana. Even if we assume that Māgadhī was the language of Buddhavacana, then another question arises, which Māgadhī? A variant of Māgadhī is also found in Asokan inscriptions and ancient Saṃskṛta plays, which is different from Māgadhī of Buddhavacana or Pāḷi in many aspects. We have just seen above a glimpse of Māgadhī used in Asokan inscriptions and ancient Saṃskṛta plays. Now let us see some rules and characteristics of the Māgadhī of Buddhavacana. Then we will come to the conclusion whether it is different from Māgadhī-Prākṛta or not and if it is different, then we should identify or recognise it by a specific denotement or not.

1. If '*si*' suffix comes after a masculine noun ending in '*a*', this '*a*' converts into '*o*'[23] –
   nara + si > naro
   dhamma + si > dhammo

2. '*r*' converts into '*l*' here also, but this conversion takes place in a very special case when letter '*r*' comes after '*pa*' –
   pa**r**i + gha > pa**l**igha[24]
   pa**r**i + patha > pa**l**ipatha (Vyāsa, 2019, vol. 2, part. 3, p. 3708)

3. There is only one '*s*' (dental-s) used in Pāḷi, palatal '*ś*' & cerebral '*ṣ*' are not used here (Dhammarakkhita, 1957, p. 3) –
   avakā**ś**a > okā**s**a
   kṛ**ṣ**aka > kas**s**aka

4. In Māgadhī-Pāḷi '*dya*' usually converts into '*jja*' –
   vi**dyā** > vi**jjā**
   ma**dya** > ma**jja**

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[22] An almsman, a mendicant, a Buddhist monk or priest. {Davids, R., & Stede, W. (Eds.). (1952). *The Pali text society's Pali-English dictionary*. (Vol. 6, p. 128). London: Pali Text Society.}

[23] Sisso – "akārantato nāmasmā sissa o hoti". {*Moggallāna, Ācārya. Moggallāna Pāḷi-vyākaraṇa*. Kausalyāyana, B. A. (Trans.). Vimalakīrti, Prof. (Dr.). (Ed.). (2013). p. 82. New Delhi: Samyaka Prakāśana.}

[24] Tathānarānaṃ ṭaṭhaṇalā – "tathanarānaṃ ṭaṭhaṇalā honti vā". {Ibid. p. 36.}

5. Here '*t*' sometimes converts into '*ṭ*' but not usually into '*d*'[25] –

       dukka**t**aṃ > dukka**ṭ**aṃ

       a**t**thakathā > a**ṭ**ṭhakathā

Conclusion

      As we have observed above, there are differences between Māgadhī-Prākṛta and Māgadhī-Pāḷi. In Māgadhī-Prākṛta, there are more vowels and consonants than Māgadhī-Pāḷi which make this dialect more complex and somehow of hybridized nature. Tendencies like – changing *r* into *l*, *s* & *ṣ* into *ś*, *ja* & *dya* into *ya*, *ta* into *da*, last vowel '*a*' (of nominative singular noun) into '*e*' – can be seen usually in Māgadhī-Prākṛta but these characteristics are generally not found in Māgadhī-Pāḷi, even if found anywhere, it is a very rare case. Thus, ***Suddhamāgadhī*** is an appropriate and relevant nomenclature for the Māgadhī language of Buddhist canon from the perspective of both perspicuity and disparity from Māgadhī-Prākṛta.

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[25] ibid.

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