ON BUDDHISTIC (HYBRID) SANSKRIT

SUKUMAR SEN

Before the publication of Franklin Edgerton’s *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* (1953) the language of the scriptures of the Northern Buddhists—such as the Mahàvàra, the Làttàvàra, the Dhàrávàda etc.—was known as Buddhist Sanskrit. The amended nomenclature seems to have been accepted by scholars without a demur. But is the insertion of the word ‘hybrid’ at all necessary or desirable?

The early Buddhist scriptural works that seem to have been produced in the northern half of the sub-continent of India, as known to us, are either in Middle Indo-Aryan (Prakrit) or in a style of Sanskrit more or less removed from the language to which Pàrâsi had set the standard. The Prakrit texts (mainly represented by the Kharoṣṭhī Dhammapada) are written in the current language in the North-Western mountainous region where Sanskrit did not appear to have been much cultivated before the Christian era progressed a few centuries. The Buddhist scriptural works in “Sanskrit” belonged to the plains of the Madhyâdesh and to the eastern region. No manuscript of the “Sanskrit” texts is written in Kharoṣṭhī, which lacked the long vowels and therefore was unsuitable for Sanskrit. The Gilgit Manuscripts of the *Viniyà Vats* (edited by N. Dutta) are written in the Brahmi script.

The northern Buddhist texts do not present an identical language or dialect but they do represent a language style where besides the pure (i.e. Pāṃśu) Sanskrit words are used along with Old Indo-Aryan words not formed according to Pànini, the words that are Prakritic (i.e. Middle Indo-Aryan) and the words that present an Old Indo-Aryan base and a middle Indo-Aryan suffix (ending or forming) and nava-varṇa. But the proportion of the three types of words are not the same in the texts. In some texts the first type of words preponderate, in some the second type and in some the third type—but all in different degrees. The three types may be thus illustrated.

(i) Old Indo-Aryan (not found in classical Sanskrit): *kampe* ‘it trembled’ (perfect ending but no reduplication of the root); *pechcha* ‘(she was) asked’ (the suffix -ia added to the present stem instead of the root); *imê* (neuter plural; Vedic); *pranapati* ‘having dropped down and forward for salvation’ (+ vi attached to a root compounded to prepositions), etc.

(ii) *râjana* ‘jewel’ (in as in *saptaratnamayam*); *dàni* (for ‘[dāni]’; *asti* (for ‘[asti]’); *yamnad* (Sanskrit; for *yemana*), etc.

(iii) *buddhâna* ‘of the Buddha’ (*buddha* + MIA gen. pl. ending), *narâvarjun* ‘in the superior man’ (*narâvra* + MIA loc. sg. ending); *purâ- matâtehi ‘with a hundred purâna coins’ (*purânapata* + MIA + ehi indec. pl. ending); *abhâ ṭet it occurred’ (*abha* + MIA ending, third pers. sg.); etc.

(iv) *bhr̥ṣyati* ‘it shall be’ (OIA *bhr̥ṣyati*); *dhyātai ‘they hold’ (MIA *dhyāra-|*dhyāya- + OIA*ta-); okasto ‘come down to’ (MIA
Sanskrit is not a hybrid language although its words are often not homogenous. The over-all pattern or structure of the language is an Old Indo-Aryan language that was much akin to Sanskrit but unlike it was not rigidly controlled by the grammarians. It was a free kind of language that was used by ordinary men, not aspiring for Brahmanal scholarship or elevation. It was what may be called Spoken Sanskrit. By its nature it was an unstable literary or business language varying according to time and place. To call such a language 'hybrid' is not correct. Buddhist Sanskrit was not an artificially made up language fashioned by fusing Sanskrit and the Prakrits. Any language whether spoken or written, including the Pitēgam and Creole etc has its distinct basic or seed language, however, inextinguishable it may be. As regards the vocabulary there is no language which is not more or less hierodox. There is bound to be some borrowed element. Is the case of Buddhist Sanskrit its indebtedness in this respect is heavy. But that is only natural. Both Sanskrit and the Prakrits were influential contemporary speech which controlled between then its career which ultimately vanished into Sanskrit.

Buddhist Sanskrit was not a hieretic language: it was a general language, the spoken Sanskrit of the few centuries before and after Christ. It was used as an administrative language in Madhyadasa by Kashiṅka and his successors. The Sarnath Buddhist Image Inscription of Kashiṅka (Epigrapha Indica VIII p.173 ff.), the Set-Mahat Image and Umbrella Staff Inscription of the same (Ep. Ind. VIII p. 180 f., p. 292), the Mathura Stone Inscription of Huvishka (Ep. Ind. XXI p. 60 f.) etc are written in almost the same language as Buddhist Sanskrit. It also appears in a few documents from Nāya region. I quote below the Inscription of Huvishka which refer to the establishment of an alms of charity house. The date of the inscription is the year 28, probably the Saka year (106 A.D.).

This hall of piety (i.e. charity house) is established as a perpetual endowment to Pracinaka the Lord of the Kbrasalseka the governor of charitable institutions, son of Sarukamāna. From out of that deposit (vydhāth) the interest (lokhā; Bengali: iid) should be spent month by month for the maintenance of Brahman (who come) from the four quarters to the hall of piety. Day by day at the gate of hall of piety should be stocked freshly made (sūrya; Bengali: diye) barley meal 3 Adhakas, 1 Prastha of salt, 1 Prastha of tamarind (literally, acid stuff), 3 jars of green peas, and 5 earthenware bowls. These are for charity to the destitutes and also for the hungry and the thirsty. Whatever merit there is goes to the Son of Divinity, Sahī
Huvishka. May there be merit also for those who are dear to his majesty, May there be merit for the entire earth. The perpetual gift is made .......

II

Spoken Sanskrit, the basic language of the typical Buddhistic Sanskrit, as for instance in the Mahavastu, has the following characteristics in general.

1. The phonological pattern is almost the same as that of classical Sanskrit. There are, however, exceptions.
   a. There are Middle Indo-Aryan vocables which show the expected simplification.
   b. There is no rigidity of Sandhi rules. It follows the Sandhi rules of MIA. The final *aḥ becomes more often -ō than not; e.g. ṇanda ca bhikkhoh; yanato uccvā; etc.
   c. The final *a generally becomes -m. e.g. bhagyam, balavam, mahātarakaṃ (acc. pl., msc.; etc).
   d. The length of the stem vowel is as often retained as not; e.g. sarvabhīhīh ‘All overcome’ (nom. sg.); sarvabhīhīhān (acc. sg.); sarvabhīhīhyān/ -bhīyān (gen. sg.). There is always metrical shortening when necessary.
   e. There is often samprapradāṇa of ya and na: e.g. vitiyān (vīyān).

2. Morphological characteristics are as follows.
   a. The dative number is replaced by the plural as in MIA e.g. dure gandharvamahatāraṃ ‘the two leading spice merchants’ (acc.); dave asthāṃsa ‘the two stayed’.
   b. The noun stems ending in consonants are lost as in MIA, leaving a few fossils such as rajāh, bhagyāna, bhagyāna, arham, arhatām, etc. The gender remains unchanged. Thus: pariṣā (par pariṣānt).
   c. The a- declension influences all other non-feminine declensions. Thus: pitaya (gen. sg.), bhikṣaya (gen. sg.), bhikṣāraṃ (acc. pl.).
   d. The ablative singular is formed with the adverbial suffix -tos; e.g. vanato (for santā). The regular locative singular ending for the non-feminine is -yan. But the regular form for the a-stems is also current; e.g. lokam in as well as like.
   e. The ending for the instrumental, dative, ablative, genitive and locative singular fem. is -a(y)e/-ya, the OIA dative singular.
   f. The ending for the instrumental, dative, ablative and locative plural for all stems is -bhī (-bhī).
h. The personal pronouns have developed some additional forms such as mamam (acc. sg.), maa, maae (inst. sg.) etc.

i. In the conjugation of the veo the Armanepada forms are replaced by the Varmanepada, even in the passive voice. A few Armanepada forms survive in the verses mainly.

j. The -sa (and -saa-) conjugation predominates. The -yu- conjugation survives in the passive. The other conjugations survive sporadically.

k. The root bū- (bhu- or bhun-) generally becomes bhur-(baru-) and bhu-; e.g. bhoi, bhaati, bheyaati; etc.

l. The gerundial suffix -trā generally stands for -yu also, e.g. pratītrātva. Sporadically -trā stands for -trā, e.g. bandhāya (bandhāya, for badhrā).

There is an additional suffix -trāna, e.g. karitrāna, kṛitrāna, dattvāna, vājitrāna, etc.

m. There is only one form of the finite past tense. It is a mixture of the perfect, the aorist and the imperfect. There are also relics from the old, e.g. abhāya (3, sg. pr.); abhi (1, 3 sg.); etc.

3. The more important syntactical characteristics are as follows.

a. There are many new idioms in the use of the cases. Thus: bhagavatuā (infr. of the cause) te amanavāyā yathā on account of the Lord the non-humans fled; kālāna kālam 'from time to time'; imas na tattvasvārtha (goa. of exchange) kustaraṃ 'the perfume bought by hundred thousand coins'; etc.

b. The compound verb also presents fresh idioms. Thus: abhrāmaṃ kareṇā 'I shall eat (it)'; prabhāmaṃ dattvā 'having thrown up.'