

The Periodization of Prakrit Literature

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Outline

Periodization: the what

Periodization: the how

Vimalasūri as an example



Dundas, Paul (2022), “The Second Phase of Prakrit Kavva: Towards Contextualizing Pravarasena’s *Setubandha*,” in: *Bulletin d’Études Indiennes* 35, pp. 49–100.

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Periodization: the what

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What is to be periodized?

Middle Indic and/or Prakrit literature?

- ▶ we are inevitably going beyond the simple categories of language that inform and structure many attempts at periodization
- ▶ necessarily raises the question of how languages are related to each other

What is Middle Indic?

Languages clearly develop in relation to each other, with vocabulary, metrical forms, styles, etc. borrowed across languages.

You can't write a history of the earliest Italian literature without taking into account Occitan, etc.

What is Middle Indic?

A huge amount of conceptual and terminological **sloppiness** prevails:

- ▶ Conflation between “Prakrit” and “Middle Indic” (see the next slide)
- ▶ The idea that Prakrit represents “the common everyday speech of regular people”
- ▶ The singularity or plurality of the category (“Prakrit” vs. “Prakrits”)
- ▶ Anachronistic, reductive, confused, and artificial classification of language varieties

Stages of development

Even the terms we use for the languages are **implicitly periodizing**:

§ 1. Die indische Sprache hat drei Entwicklungsstufen durchlaufen:
1) Altindisch oder Sanskrit, vorliegend in drei Varietäten als vedisches, episches und classisches Sanskrit;
2) Mittelindisch oder Prākṛit, bekannt in vielen zeitlich und örtlich unterschiedenen Dialekten theils durch Denkmäler der Litteratur, theils durch Inschriften und Münzen;
3) Neuindisch oder Bhāṣhā, etwa neun Sprachen mit vielen Dialekten umfassend.

Jacobi (1886: 1)

Stages of attestation

The **implicit periodization** leads to (apparent) paradoxes:

On sait que le moyen-indien fait son apparition dans l'épigraphie antérieurement au sanskrit : c'est le grand paradoxe linguistique de l'Inde.

Renou (1956: 84)

The temporality of texts

- ▶ We might be inclined to think of texts as things created at a single point in time.
- ▶ But many Middle Indic texts are actually created at **multiple** points in time.

The temporality of texts

[...] [T]his literature [...] is [...] to be compared to an ancient city, in which some structures arise from the early period apparently undamaged, others revealing extensions and additions, whereas in some cases new walls are erected on the old foundation walls, and again other houses coming down to us only as an echo of their name and designation. Now, just as an expert of antiquity wanders through such a city and tries to determine for every part of the building its age, designation and relation to the rest by means of the transmitted plan of the place, or on the strength of his own experience, so too we might attempt to sketch the Śvetāmbara canon as what has been superimposed and has coexisted from different times.

Schubring (2004: 2)

The current state of affairs

In general, despite heroic efforts by much earlier generations of scholars (Jacobi, Schubring, Leumann, and Alsdorf; Puṇyavijayaḥ, Malvania, Chandra, and Dhaky), **almost the entire early history of Prakrit literature, and indeed Middle Indic literature more generally, remains without any generally convincing chronological framework.**

The current state of affairs

Every single work prior to the 7th c. CE is undated, and many after that are undated as well. The dates that have been proposed for the most important works usually fall within a window of at least five hundred years, sometimes much more than that. We might as well date texts to geological eras.

Some of the events that figure in the chronology of Middle Indic texts (e.g., the “closing of the canon” at the “council of Valabhī”) may not have even happened, and certainly didn’t happen in the way that is usually supposed.

The current state of affairs

The basis for the periodization that Dundas and I have both used is **dynastic**:

- ▶ First phase: Sātavāhanas (1st–3rd c. CE)
- ▶ Second phase: Vākāṭakas (4th–5th c. CE)

But this leaves out all of Jain literature, which is arguably the most important stream of Prakrit literature.

“Buchbindersynthese”

In fact this is a deeper problem: there has never been a **real attempt** to tell a synthetic history of literary expression in and across the Middle Indic languages, including “history of literature as social thought” (Veselovsky) or “history of literature as art” (Wellek).

Jain’s *History of Development of Prakrit Literature*) and Warder’s *Indian Kāvya Literature* are the best general references, but they mostly offer summaries without much of an attempt at synthesis.

Hāla's *Sattasāī*

Terminus ad quem is apparently Bāṇa, ca. 610 CE (but with anthologies people can always claim that individual verses are later).

- ▶ 1st–3rd c. CE: Ollett, Dundas, etc. (= Sātavāhana kingdom)
- ▶ 4th–6th c. CE: Bhandarkar

Vimalasūri's *Paūmacariyaṃ*

Terminus ad quem is apparently Raviṣēṇa's *Padmapurāṇa*, 676 CE, but Dhruva disagrees.

- ▶ 1st c.: traditional, based on 530 V.N. date
- ▶ 3rd c.: Jacobi, Kulkarni
- ▶ 5th c.: Chandra, Dundas
- ▶ 8th c.: Dhruva

Haribhadra

Traditionally said to have died 529 CE, but it is now generally accepted that there were several authors with this name.

- ▶ Haribhadra I: 529 CE (Williams 1963)
- ▶ Haribhadra II: 750 CE (Jinavijaya 1988 [1919])

Dundas (2002) suggested that this solution is not very convincing. At the moment we can only give *termini* for individual works.

Bhadrabāhu and the *niryukti* literature

Termini seem to have no real significance, given that the *niryuktis* were obviously expanded and reused over many centuries.

- ▶ 3rd c. BCE: Dhaky (2004), Kapadia (2000 [1941]: 158) (= last *pūrvadhara*)
- ▶ 1st–2nd c. CE: Leumann (2010 [1934]: 78) (“80 A.D.”), Balbir (1993)
- ▶ 4th c. CE: Vidyābhūṣaṇa, Ghatage
- ▶ 6th c.: Puṇyavijaya, Malvania (= brother of Varāhamihira)

Saṅghadāsa's *Vasudēvahiṇḍī*

Terminus ad quem: *Āvaśyakacūrṇi* of Jinabhadra (610 CE).

- ▶ 2nd or 3rd c. CE: Chandra (1984) (and Alsdorf 1936? “centuries older” than Jinabhadra)
- ▶ 400 CE: Esposito (2011)
- ▶ 6th c. CE: Jamkhedkar (1965), Dundas (2002 [1992])

Dharasēna's *Ṣaṭkhaṇḍāgama* and Guṇadhara's *Kaṣāyaprābhṛta*

Their *termini ad quem* are the commentaries written by
Vīrasēna and Jinasēna in the 8th and 9th c. CE.

We have absolutely no evidence for their date except by
working back from *paṭṭāvalī*s, an inherently unreliable
exercise, but on this basis they are often put around the
1st to 3rd c. CE.

Kundakunda

- ▶ 1st c. BCE to 9th c. CE!!!

Balcerowicz (2023) convincingly argues that “Kundakunda” refers to a collectively authored textual corpus that mostly took shape between the 6th and the 9th centuries CE.

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Linguistic evidence

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On the whole, these attempts have not been convincing.

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- ▶ The scholarly discussion has largely focused on trivial and non-diagnostic changes.

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- ▶ Middle Indic did **not** develop linearly.
- ▶ Linguistic changes have been introduced in the course of (oral and written) textual transmission.
- ▶ The scholarly discussion has largely focused on trivial and non-diagnostic changes.
- ▶ The understanding of Middle Indic languages with which many scholars operate is a confused and anachronistic jumble of emic and etic terms.

Linguistic evidence: non-linear development

There are some *a priori* reasons to think, as a **starting hypothesis**, that texts in one variety of Middle Indic might be, **on the whole**, earlier than texts in another variety.

- ▶ the linguistic development itself (to which Jacobi's "Entwicklungsstufen" refers) is, at least in principle, linear;
- ▶ some textual corpora, such as the Śvētāmbara **commentarial** literature in Prakrit, obviously depends, in general, on earlier **canonical** literature in Ardhamāgadhī
- ▶ we might think that some linguistically-defined corpora were "closed" at a certain point in time (e.g., Ardhamāgadhī after the "Council of Valabhī," or Gāndhārī after the shift to Sanskrit).

Linguistic evidence: non-linear development

But the variety of language itself is **never** a sufficient reason for concluding that one text is relatively early or late. (Dundas has done more than perhaps anyone else to show that Ardhamāgadhī texts continued to be composed right up to, and probably even after, the “closing” of the Śvētāmbara canon.)

One example: **Prakrit** texts like the *Taraṅgavatī* and *Āvaśyakaniryukti* are referred to in the *Anuyōgadvāra* and *Nandīsūtra* (**Ardhamāgadhī** texts, although obviously among the last texts to be composed and included in the canon).

Linguistic evidence: intervocalic stops

One example: the “textbook” understanding of “the Prakrits” says that single intervocalic dental stops are **lost** in “Māhārāṣṭrī” and **voiced** in “Śaurasēnī,” the latter outcome being more “archaic” than the former.

Sanskrit	Śaurasēnī	Māhārāṣṭrī	Jain Māhārāṣṭrī
<i>śrutam</i>	<i>sudam</i>	<i>suam</i>	<i>suyam</i>

On this basis, one might think:

- ▶ texts with voiced stops are written in “Śaurasēnī” and texts with lenition are written in “Māhārāṣṭrī”; and/or
- ▶ the more voiced forms a text has, the older it is.

Linguistic evidence: intervocalic stops

The **linguistic** problem with this view is that they **simply represent three conventional spellings/pronunciations** for the same underlying form.

The **conceptual** problem is that the language varieties to which these conventions are attributed are **almost always applied anachronistically**. The distinction between Māhārāṣṭrī and Śaurasēnī is found in late Prakrit grammars, and **had no synchronic validity for anyone in the first millennium**. (Not that these terms were not used, but they were used in very specific ways that do not remotely resemble the classificatory use to which modern scholars have put them.)

Linguistic evidence: intervocalic stops

Śaurasēnī is particularly problematic. It is properly applied to a form of language used in plays, and described in later Prakrit grammars (probably not before Namisādhu in 1068). But Pischel, following Jacobi's coinage of "Jaina Māhārāṣṭrī" to describe the language of Śvētāmbara commentary, coined "Jaina Śaurasēnī" to describe the language of Digambara texts. Then Lüders coined "Old Śaurasēnī" to describe the language used in Aśvaghōṣa's plays.

Just like there is an **implicit periodization** involved in terms like "Middle Indic," there is an **implicit localization** involved in terms like "Śaurasēnī," which in most cases turns out to be nothing more than an artefact of scholarship from more than a century ago.

Linguistic evidence: non-diagnostic forms

- ▶ the fact that Middle Indic texts are in close intertextual relations with a wide range of other Sanskrit and Middle Indic texts;
- ▶ the fact that **composers** of those texts could avail themselves of forms from those texts (including Sanskritisms, Prakritisms, Gandharisms, Ardhamagadhisms, etc.);
- ▶ the fact that **transmitters** of those texts could always consciously or unconsciously replace one form with another;
- ▶ the fact that most Middle Indic languages contain many different options for the same form (“doublets” as Nitti-Dolci called them);

Linguistic evidence: diagnostic forms

... mean that it is always possible for a text composed at time t_1 to include, or come to include in its manuscript transmission, forms which give the impression of either an earlier time (t_0) or a later time (t_2).

e.g. the judgment of Williams (1963) that works ascribed to Virahāṅka Haribhadra are written in a “rather archaic Māhārāṣṭrī Prakrit,” which Dundas 2002: 8 politely criticizes.

Diagnostic forms are those that, we have some reason to believe, are less likely to “time travel” in this way.

Linguistic evidence: diagnostic forms

Best example is the *-īa* aorist in relatively archaic Prakrit texts (*Vasudēvahiṇḍī*, *Taraṅgalōlā*; see Alsdorf 1936; Bhayani 1979; Esposito 2011)

- ▶ Conjugated past tenses in general disappear from Middle Indic (we see them progressively eliminated from texts within the same tradition)
- ▶ Doesn't exist in Sanskrit and hence can't be a "Sanskritism"

Lexical evidence: the *dēśī* vocabulary

No serious work has been done on the historical implications of the *dēśī* (non-Sanskrit-derived) vocabulary of Prakrit, including the overall percentages and the histories of individual lexical items.

However, impressionistically, the percentage of *dēśī* words correlates highly with language (low in Ardhamagadhi and Pali, high in Prakrit) and probably with time period as well.

Metrical criteria

- 1 the oldest stratum consists of Trīṣṭubh, Jagatī, Vaitāliya, Aupacchandasaṅkha, Śloka, and Āryā (or Gāthā, of the old form),
2. the second stratum consists of those texts in which the Śloka predominates,
- 3 the third stratum consists of those texts in which the Vedha predominates,
- 4 the last stratum consists of those texts in which Gāthā or Āryā of the common form predominates

Sen (1936: 10) (of the Śvētāmbara canon)

Metrical criteria

Scholarship has uncovered a few metrical forms that can potentially serve as “index fossils”: they are only really used in literature from a particular time. These include:

- ▶ The “Old Āryā”
- ▶ The Vēḍha

I might add:

- ▶ The Galitaka
- ▶ The Dvipadī

These arguably belong to a single history of metrical practice across the Middle Indic languages.

The Old Āryā

Discovered by Jacobi (1884: 596); the most extensive and accessible discussion is Alsdorf (2006 [1965]: 75–100) (see also Norman 1987). Basically it is found only in the very oldest layers of the Pali and Ardhamagadhi canons.

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... and also the *Rāṣṭrapālāparipṛcchā* (!? Klaus 2008)

The Vēḍha

Again, discovered by Jacobi (n.d.); see especially Dundas (2022: 55–56). This is used for long descriptive passages, and remarkably it is found in:

- ▶ Ardhamagadhi (esp. *Aupapātikasūtra*)
- ▶ Pali (*Kuṇālaajāṭaka*)
- ▶ Prakrit (*Vasudēvahiṇḍī*)
- ▶ (“Buddhist Hybrid”) Sanskrit (*Lalitavistara*)

If you put a gun to my head, I would say that “vēḍha epoch” might have been from 0–200 CE.

Galitaka

This refers to:

- ▶ a four-line verse regulated by groups of moras,
- ▶ which contains *yamakas*, usually between line-ending segments

Whether verses without *yamaka* can count as *galitaka* is controversial. It seems that verses with the same metrical structure, but without *yamaka*, were not considered *galitakas*, but they are sometimes labeled as such in manuscripts (e.g., *Vikramōrvaśīya* 4.56 and 4.59).

Galitaka

Although they are described in metrical handbooks, most (all?) of the surviving *galitaka* verses are found in Pravarasēna's *Sētubandha* (Handiqui 1976; Dundas 2022: 32–33).

However, we know from Bhōja and Hēmacandra that they are also found in the *Rāvaṇavijaya* and the *Harivijaya*. (Bhōja reports the view that the *galitaka* verses in these poems are interpolations.)

While some questions remain, the *galitaka* appears to be an “index fossil” of the second phase of Prakrit *kavva*, i.e., the poetry of the Vākāṭaka court (4th–5th c.).

Dvipadī

I use this to refer to “strophic” compositions in Prakrit, as well as the meters used in those compositions (typically called *vastukas* or *khañjakas*).

I would put Vimala’s *narkuṭaka* and Kālidāsa’s so-called *galitaka* in this category. Those would be some of the earliest surviving examples; later it is found in Harṣa, Uddyōtana, and Śīlāṅka, but appears to die out after the 9th c.

Intertextual relations

e.g., Vasudēvahiṇḍī referred to by Jinabhadraṇi in 610 in *Āvaśyakacūrṇi* (Jain 1973 1974: 27) Jain suggests Vasudēvahiṇḍī preceded Paūmacariam Jain (n.d.: 28–29)

Processes

- ▶ Literarization
- ▶ Sanskritization (attested especially in the Buddhist world, esp. the work of Seishi Karashima)
- ▶ Prakritization

Outline

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In a footnote (2022: n. 33) Dundas suggests that Vimalasūri's *Paūmacariyam* belongs to, or rather postdates, the “second phase” of Prakrit *kavva*, approvingly citing the conclusions of K. R. Chandra (1970).

This is an instructive example, because the dates of Vimala have varied widely.

Vimala's dates in scholarship

A window of about 800 years:

- ▶ 1st c.: traditional date (530 V.S. ~ 6 BCE or 4 CE!)
- ▶ 3rd c.: H. Jacobi
- ▶ 5th c.: K. R. Chandra (1970)
- ▶ 8th c.: K. H. Dhruva (1925-1926)

Vimala's language

Doesn't seem to use forms **diagnostic** of early Prakrit:

- ▶ e.g., past tense in *īa* (found in *Taraṅgavaī* and *Vasudēvahiṇḍī*)

Most archaisms can be seen as “Ardhamagadhisms” found in later authors:

- ▶ e.g., dative in *āe*

But certain forms are diagnostic of Apabhramsha influence:

- ▶ e.g., converb in *ēvi* (though it is rare)

Vimala's meters

- ▶ Most of the work is written in the *gāthā* of the “classical” form, as the author himself says (*raīyaṃ gāhāhi*, 1.31)
- ▶ However, the final verse of each chapter is written in a different, “fancier” meter.
- ▶ There are also a handful of “intra-texts” in different meters (like the *stōtra* discussed later).

The work can be said to be old enough... the peculiar Gīti varieties and one or two old metres which are governed by Mātrās and not by Gaṇas show that the work belongs to a period immediately after the period of the Āgama works. (Abhyankar)

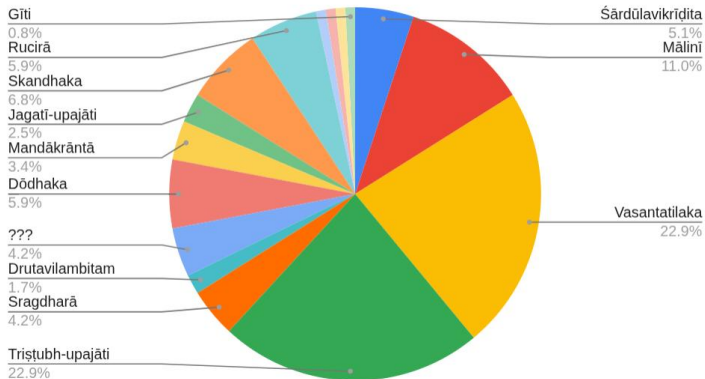
Vimala's meters: the carrying meter

- ▶ Several scholars have claimed to have detected “rare varieties” of the *gāthā* in the main body of the text (Chandra 1970: 581–582).
- ▶ These are likely **all mistakes**.
 - ▶ 106.1 (allegedly *gāthā*): doesn't scan
 - ▶ 17.107 (allegedly *gāthāskandhaka*): doesn't scan

It is just possible that they were composed in Gāthā-proper but have got corrupted in the hands of the scribes. (Chandra 1970: 578)

Vimala's meters: the final meter

Chapter-final meters



Vimala's meters: the final meter

Here, too, scholars claim to have identified “rare varieties” of the *gāthā*, but these, too are likely **all mistakes**, either for the *gīti* or the *skandhaka*.

- ▶ This includes chapters 16, 102, and 114–116
- ▶ This seems more likely than Vimala using forms of the *gāthā* that are never attested in literature and only mentioned in relatively late metrical handbooks (*gāthinī*, *simhīnī*, *gātha*, *udgātha*, etc.)

Vimala's meters: the mystery meter

One meter, occurring at the end of a chapter (52.29) as well as in an embedded *stōtra* (28.47), was identified by K. H. Dhruva as a *galitaka*.

If Dhruva is right, then this would almost certainly make it contemporary with the *Harivijaya* and the *Sētubandha*, because those are the only works in which the *galitaka* was actually used.

But he isn't.

Vimala's meters: the mystery meter

52.29 is printed as follows:

ēvaṃ imaṃ tu pecchaha kammavicittayāe
sayalajasaṃ uvēi piyasaṅgamabhattāe
laṅkāśundarīe haṇuvassa virōhāe
vavahariyaṃ siṇēhavimalaraiviccittāe

This has roughly 21 moras per line (counting the last as short), which probably misled Dhruva to identify it with the (*sampiṇḍita*) *galitaka*.

Vimala's meters: the mystery meter

But apart from the first line, it is an exact match for a meter that Svayambhū and Hēmacandra (4.71) call *māgahaṇakkuḍī*, but *ṇakkuḍaa* by Virahāṅka (4.25):

$$[(\mu\mu)(\mu\mu)(\mu\mu)][\mu(\mu\mu)\mu][(\mu\mu)(\mu\mu)][\mu\mu]sss$$

i.e., 6 moras, then 3 groups of 4 moras, with ISI in positions 7–10, and sss at the end.

In fact, the author of Svayambhū's example is none other than **Vimala** (although the verse, describing a female boar, is not from the *Paūmacariyam*).

Vimala's meters: the mystery meter

Even more interesting, Virahāṅka's commentator notes a feature shared by this verse, the example quoted by Svayambhū, and the example given by Virahāṅka: all *pādas* must end in **āe**.

This makes it almost certain that 52.29 was intended as a *narkuṭaka* / *māgadhanarkuṭaka* meter, which Vimala seems to have specialized in, in other compositions.

The Sanskrit *narkuṭaka* is a “frozen” variety of the Prakrit *nakkuḍaa* (IIIIIS + ISI + IIS + IIS + IIS).

Vimala's meters: the embedded *stōtra*

The *stōtra* to Ādinātha contained in 28.47–50 contains four verses, with the following meters:

- ▶ 47 (???): *galitaka* according to Dhruva and Chandra
- ▶ 48 (ISISSIISISIS): *varṁśastha*
- ▶ 49 (IIIIIIIIIIIIIS): *maṇiguṇanikara*
- ▶ 50 (IISIISIISIIS): *tōṭaka*

Vimala's meters: the embedded *stōtra*

There are metrical and grammatical problems with 28.47, but we can safely conclude that it is **not** a *galitaka*, despite having roughly 21 moras per line:

- ▶ It appears to have the fixed pattern SIISISIIISISIS, another “frozen” variety of the *nakkuḍaa*
- ▶ All lines end in *aē*, curiously similar to the (*māgadha*)*narkuṭaka*...
- ▶ But no *yamaka*, as would be required by a *galitaka*

Vimala's meters: overview

Hence there are no **particularly archaic** meters in the *Paūmacariyaṃ*, and in particular, no *vēḍhas* of the type that have been discovered in pre-5th literature.

The use of some meters, like *mandākrānta*, *drutavilambita*, and *skandhaka* suggest (very impressionistically) the influence of Kālidāsa and Vākāṭaka-period Prakrit *kāvya*.

Vimala appears to make use of relatively monotonous meters like the *dōdhaka* that are not found, to my knowledge, before, say, Māgha.

Vimala's *nāmāṅka*

- ▶ Vimala incorporates his name as a keyword (*aṅka*-) in the last verse of every canto.
- ▶ The technique of using a keyword is characteristic of Sarvasēṇa (*ucchāha*) and Pravarasēṇa (*aṇurāa*).

Vimala's intertextual, historical and cultural references

Very hard to find convincing references to historical events or persons/dynasties, or to other texts/genres (rather unconvincing attempts are made by Chandra 1970), but to my view nothing speaks against a 5th c. date.

Jagdish Chandra Jain thought that Vimala was influenced by the Rāma story in the *Vasudēvahiṇḍī*.

Dundas (2022: 59 fn. 33) suggests the text is aware of the transformation of Vārāṇasī into a Śaiva city by Pāśupata ascetics, which happened between the 4th and 6th c. CE.

Thank you!

॥ కులకరు స్తు ॥

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