ON BUDDHISTIC (HYBRID) SANSKRIT

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I

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 Mahāvaddana, the Lalitavistara the Divyavadana etc.—was known as Buddhistic 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 Pāli had set the standard. The Prakrit texts (mainly represented by the Kharaṣṭra Dhammapadas) 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 Madhyādese and to the eastern region. No manuscript of the “Sanskrit” texts is written in Kharaṣṭra, which lacked the long vowels and therefore was unsuitable for Sanskrit. The Gilgit Manuscripts of the Vīṇaṁ Vēru (edited by N. Daul) 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 beside the pure (i.e. Pāli) Sanskrit words are used along with Old Indo-Aryan words not formed according to Pāli, the words that are Prakrit (i.e. Middle Indo-Aryan) and the words that present an Old Indo-Aryan base and a middle Indo-Aryan suffix (ending or formative) and vice-versa. But the proportions of the three types of words are not the same in the texts. In some texts the first type of words preponderates, 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): kumpe ‘it trembled’ (perfect ending but no reduplication of the root); prakūtya ‘(the) wax’ (the suffix -ya added to the present stem instead of the root); ām (nomier plural; Vedīc); pāntapa ‘having dropped down and forward for assistance’ (ād attached to a root compounded to prepositions); etc.

(ii) ratiyā ‘jewel’ (as in sapatratnamayam); dāni (for dāpaim); āy (for ādi); ym (Sandhi form; for yemī); etc.

(iii) a) Buddhik ‘of the Buddha’ (budhī+MIA gen. pl. ending), noruruṣin ‘in the superior man’ (noruṣa+MIA loc. sg. ending); purd- nātāt (‘with a hundred purasa coins’ (purdnapāta+MIA+ēhi instr. pl. ending); abhā ‘it occurred’ (ē-bhā+MIA ending, third per. sg.); etc.

(b) bhṛṣāy ‘it shall be’ (OIA bhṛ+OIA-ya); dhārenti ‘they hold’ (MIA dhā+ē/dhārēya+OIA-unit); okasto ‘come down to’ (MIA
Buddhistic Sanskrit is not a hybrid language although its words are often not homogeneous. 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 Brahmanical scholarship or veneration. 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. Buddhistic Sanskrit was not an artificially made up language fashioned by borrowing Sanskrit and the Prakrits. Any language whether spoken or literary, including the Pidgin and Creole etc, has its distinct basic or seed language, however, ineretant its may be. As regards the vocabulary there is no language which is not more or less borrowed. There is bound to be some borrowed element. In the case of Buddhistic Sanskrit its indebtedness in this respect is heavy. But that is only natural. Both Sanskrit and the Prakrits were influential contemporary speeches which controlled between them its career which ultimately vanished into Sanskrit.

Buddhistic 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 Madhyadisha by Kamashka and his successors. The Surath Buddhist Image Inscription of Kamashka (Epigrapha Indica VIII p.173 ff) the Set-Mahat Image and Umbrella Staff Inscription of the same (Ep. Ind. VIII p. 180 f; p. 291), the Mathura Stone Inscription of Huvishka (Ep. Ind. XCVI p. 60 f) etc are written in almost the same language as Buddhistic Sanskrit. It also appears in a few documents from Nisa region. I quote below the Inscription of Huvishka which refers to the establishment of an alms or charity house. The date of the inscription is the year 24, probably the Saka year (=106 A.D).

"This hall of piety (i.e. charity house) is estabblished as a perpetual endowment by Prakrtaka the Lord of the Khurasala the governor of charitable institutions, son of Sarakamaka. For the purpose of this deposit (pradhana), the interest (uddhar) Bengali sufi should be spent month by month for the maintenance of Brahman (who came) from the four quarters to the hall of piety. Day by day at the gate of the hall of piety should be stockes freshly made (nitra; Bengali ari) barley meal 3 Adhakas, 1 Pratha of salt, 1 Pratha of tamarind (literally, acid stuff), 3 pieces of green peas, and 3 earthenware bowls. These are for charity to the destitutes and also for the hungry and the thirsty. Whatever merit there is goes to the Siva of Divinity, Sahi"
Huvishka. May there be merit also for those who are dear to his majesty. May there be merit for the entire earth. The perpetual good is made......

II

Spoken Sanskrit, the basic language of the typical Buddhist Sanskrit, as for instance in the Mahāvamsa, has the following characteristics in general:

1. The phonological pattern is almost the same as that of classical Sanskrit. These 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 sīrṣaḥ after a vowel other than a is more often dropped than retained. The final -ah becomes more often -a than not; e.g. nemiḥ ca bhūkṣṣya, vanasa śantraḥ.; etc.

   c. The final -a generally becomes -dr. e.g. bhagavatya, dolavaya, sahastīraḥ (acc. pl. masc.); etc.

   d. The length of the stem vowel is as often retained as not; e.g. sāvittuhāha 'All overcome'(nom. sg.); sāvittuhāhām (acc. sg.); sāvittuhāhām (gen. sg.)). There is always verbal shortening when necessary.

   e. There is often sūmyavāna of 3a and 1a. e.g. tīrṣyati (tīrṣyati).

2. Morphological characteristics are as follows:

   a. The dual number is replaced by the plural as in MIA e.g. dvīte gandha-mahātātarākṣaḥ 'the two leading wine merchants' (acc.); dvīte asthānu 'the two stayed'.

   b. The noun stems ending in consonants are lost as in MIA, leaving a few fossils such as ṛṣhayāḥ, bhāguvān bhūṣyavatā, arhan, arthaḥ, etc. The gender remains unchanged. Thus: parta (for parta).

   c. The -a declension influences all other non-feminine declensions. Thus: parta (gen. sg.); bhūṣyavatā (gen. sg.); bhūṣyavatā (acc. pl.).

   d. The ablative singular is formed with the adverbial suffix -aš; e.g. vanato (for vanato).

   e. The regular locative singular ending for the non-feminine is -aṃ. But the regular form for the a-stems is also current; e.g. lokām as well as lokā.

   f. The ending for the instrumental, dative, genitive and locative singular fem. is -(i)hi (-hī), the OIA dative singular.

   g. The ending for the instrumental, dative, ablative and locative plural for all stems is -dhī (-bhī)
h. The personal pronouns have developed some additional forms such as mamam (acc. sg.), maye, traye (inst. sg.) etc.

i. In the conjugation of the verb the Atrimayapa forms are replaced by the Paramayapa, even in the passive voice. A few Atrimayapa forms survive in the verses mostly.

j. The -ye (and -aya) conjugation predominates. The -ya conjugation survives in the passive. The other conjugations survive sporadically.

k. The root bhū (bhenw) generally becomes bhū-(ha)- and bh-, e.g. bhō, bhōyai, bhōyari; etc.

l. 1. The gerundial suffix - Ivanka generally stands for -ya also, e.g. pratitivā. Sporadically -ya stands for -iva, e.g. bandhiva (bandhva, for bandāvā).

There is an additional suffix -tvā, e.g. karitvāna, kṣerivā, datrāvā, vijaltarāvā, 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. abhāpi (3, sg. pl.); asī (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: bhogastā (inst. of the cause) te aumayyakā pahād 'on account of the Lord the non-humans find'; kalena dālam 'from time to time'; imaya jatahdarwarah (gen. of exchange) karora 'the perfume bought by hundred thousand coins'; etc.

b. The compound verb also presents fresh idioms. Thus: abhāya karitvā 'I shall eat (it)'; prabhūm dasāvā 'having beaten up,'