

Abdul Rahman's *Sandēśarāsa*

Andrew Ollett ❀ June 24, 2026

Rajasthani Summer School

Outline

- Quick overview of Apabhramsha literature
- Overview of the *Sandēśarāsaka*
- Reading a few verses together

An overview of the Indic languages

- Several perspectives are possible:
 - **Linguistic development:**
 - Starting from (e.g.) Sanskrit, which **linguistic changes** take us progressively to (e.g.) Rajasthani?
 - This includes **stages** of the language that are **hypothetical**, i.e., not actually attested by literary or documentary evidence!
 - Conventional three-stage model:
 1. **Old Indic** ($\approx$ Sanskrit)
 2. **Middle Indic**
 3. **New Indic** ($\approx$ modern vernaculars)

An overview of the Indic languages

- Several perspectives are possible:
 - **Literary and documentary attestation:**
 - What forms of language are **actually attested** at a given time?
 - Again, a conventional three-stage model (Hermann Jacobi):
 1. Old Indic ($\approx$ **Sanskrit**)
 2. Middle Indic ($\approx$ **Prakrit**)
 3. New Indic ($\approx$ **Bhasha**)
 - Unlike the earlier model, this privileges the **names** and **forms** of language that are actually used.

A thought exercise

- Is “Old Indic” the same as “Sanskrit”?
- Technically **not**: “Old Indic” is the reconstructed phase of the language hypothesized to be ancestral to all of the subsequent phases of the language.
 - Sanskrit *kṣarati* “flows” ⇔ Prakrit *jharai*
 - Old Indic **yžarati* (Avestan *yžar-*) → *kṣarati*, *jharai*
- In other words, Sanskrit is like an “older sister” to most of the attested Middle Indic languages.

A thought exercise

- Is “Middle Indic” the same as “Prakrit”? **No.**
- “Prakrit” (*prākṛtam*) is a term that was applied to a variety of literary languages as a way of distinguishing them from Sanskrit.
- “Middle Indic” is a term that we scholars invented to apply to a more advanced phase of linguistic development than Sanskrit.

A thought exercise

- When people say “Prakrit” without qualification, they generally refer to a literary language, **notionally** associated with Maharashtra but used everywhere, that exhibits a number of “standard” Middle Indic features.
- **Step one** (Sanskrit to Prakrit) [mostly **phonological**]:
 - Reduction of consonant clusters
 - Lenition of intervocalic consonants
 - Loss of certain grammatical distinctions

A thought exercise

- It is a (bad) legacy of George Grierson to identify different regional “Prakrits” that are supposed to be ancestral to the modern languages of those regions.
- **Śaurasēnī** (for example) is a conventional language used by certain characters in Sanskrit–Prakrit plays, very similar to standard Prakrit but with a few telltale differences; it is **not** necessarily (and probably not even close to) the spoken language of Śūrasēna and ancestral to Braj Bhāṣā.

Apabhramsha

- Where does Apabhramsha fit in?
- It is a **literary language** that began to be attested around the 6th c. CE.
- Typically regarded as “late Middle Indic,” i.e., it includes **most** of the changes that differentiate Prakrit from Sanskrit (“step one”) as well as a **further** set of changes that differentiate it from Prakrit (“step two”).

Apabhramsha

- Shortening of final syllables
 - $-u \leftarrow -\bar{o}, -am, -\bar{u}$
 - $-a \leftarrow -\bar{a}, -\bar{a}h, -\bar{a}m$
 - $-i \leftarrow -\bar{e}$
- Restructuring of nominal and verbal endings
 - kavvu ~ kavva (nom./acc.); kavvi ~ kavvihĩ (loc./instr.); kavvaha ~ kavvahã (gen., w. vowel harmony) → direct, oblique, adnominal
 - acchaü, acchahi, acchahi; acchahũ, acchahu, acchahĩ

Apabhramsha

- But it's **slightly** inaccurate to think of Apabhramsha as just "Prakrit plus time."
- I think it originated as a language of communities in the **northwest**, which had certain features that Prakrit did **not** have.
- Over the course of time, however, it was "Prakritized," and these distinctive features were erased.

Apabhramsha

- Up until about the 6th c. CE, the Sanskrit word *apabhramśa* (literally “falling away”) always referred to **deviations** from grammatically correct Sanskrit (e.g., saying *gāvī* instead of *gauḥ*).
- But around this time the literary compositions, in a distinct language and set of meters, of certain northwestern communities began to be recognized under this name.

Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.36 (700 CE)

ābhīrādigiraḥ kāvyēṣv
apabhraṁśa iti smṛtāḥ ~
śāstrē tu saṁskṛtād anyad
apabhraṁśatayōditam ~ 36 ~

Apabhraṁśa in the context of literary texts (*kāvyēṣu*) refers to the language of the Ābhīras and so on. But in the context of scientific texts (*śāstrē*) it refers to anything that is not Sanskrit.

Apabhramsha

- Just as in the case of Prakrit, it is **too simplistic** to see Apabhramsha as a **direct ancestor** of any of the modern vernacular languages.
- Just as in the case of Prakrit, Apabhramsha very soon became a “transregional” literary language, with a relatively high degree of standardization, and poets from every religious tradition composed works in it.

Apabhramsha & Bhasha

- However, it appears that Apabhramsha was subject to more **regional** influence than Prakrit, and hence Apabhramsha texts, especially of the later period (1100 CE onwards), tend to incorporate forms and grammatical features of the regions in which they were composed.
- But it's often hard to determine which features are original to the texts and which are due to "linguistic modernization" in the course of transmission (which is very common).

Apabhramsha & Bhasha

- This “regionalization of Apabhramsha” is one major component (certainly not the only one) in the story of the emergence of the modern vernacular languages as literary languages.
- There is in any case a **close continuity** in language, meter, themes and genre between Apabhramsha literature and the earliest attested stages of the North Indian vernaculars, especially in Western India.

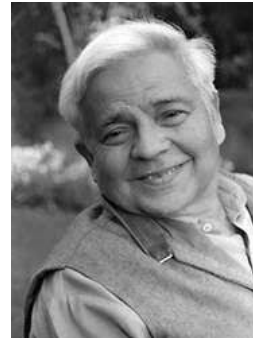
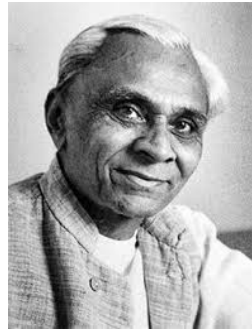
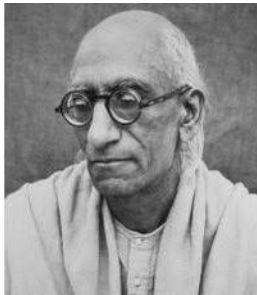
Apabhramsha & Bhasha

- Linguistically interesting developments to look for:
 - $N_{acc} + kar-$ “do N”
 - $V_{conv} + rah-$ “keep doing V”
 - Conflation of instrumental ($-\tilde{e}$) and locative case ($-i$)
 - Split ergativity (with instrumental case; no erg. postpositions)
 - Extension of nominal stems with *svārthē ka* suffix (esp. in predicates)

Sandēšarāsa

Sandēśarāśaka

- Discovered by **Jinavijaya Muni** in 1912
- Edited by him and **Harivallabh C. Bhayani** in 1945
- Edited by **Hazariprasad Dwivedi** and **Vishwanath Tripathi** in 1965 (?)



Sandēśarāśaka

- Author: Addahamāṇa (v. 4) $\approx$ ‘Abdul Raḥmān (?)
- Date: unknown, but before 1408 CE (Lakṣmīcandra’s commentary); I would say 1200–1300.
- Place: also unknown, but based on the places mentioned in the poem itself, a few candidates present themselves:
 - **Multan** (the messenger’s place of origin)
 - **Khambhat** (the messenger’s destination)
 - **Vijayanagara** (Jaisalmer? where the meeting takes place)

The itinerary

- An anonymous woman in “Vijayanagara” meets a traveler going from Multan to Khambhat.
- She asks him to take a message to her husband, who has gone to Khambhat.



The itinerary

- SPOILER: She asks the traveler to stay the night with him. He refuses, and her husband turns up the next minute.



Sandēśarāśaka

- There appear to be two “families” of **commentaries**. One probably goes back to the “notes” (*ṭippanī*) of Lakṣmīcandra, a Śvētāmbara Jain monk, who claims to have “written down whatever explanation [he] heard from the mouth of the Kṣatriya Gāhaḍa” in 1408 CE.
- The apology is necessary, since Lakṣmīcandra is often wrong about the grammar.
- The available translations are fine, but based too closely on Lakṣmīcandra’s commentary.

Sandēśarāśaka

- Genre:
 - 1) *Sandēśa*: “message poem,” for which the ultimate model is Kālidāsa’s *Mēghadūta*.
 - 2) *Rāśaka*: “dance poem,” a composition in Apabhramsha using many different meters, among which the *rāsaü* or *āhāṇaü* is common.

Sandēśarāśaka

- Structure: Three “steps” (*prakramah*), 223 verses in total
 - 1) Introduction (23 verses)
 - 2) Story: a woman wants to convey a message to her husband in Khambhat through a messenger (105 verses)
 - 3) *Ṣaḍṛtu*: the woman’s description of the seasons in the year that has passed since her husband left (67 verses)

Introduction

- The beginning (vv. 1–17) is in **Prakrit**, consisting of an invocation, an introduction to the author, and a conventional expression of humility
- This is followed by a number of verses in **Apabhramsha** continuing to introduce the text and its author (vv. 18–23).
- For these first few verses, I put Apabhramsha forms, or otherwise difficult forms, put in red.

rayaṇāyara-dhara-giri-taru-
varāĩ gayaṇaṅgaṇammi rikkhāim
jēṇa 'jja sayala siriyaṁ
sō buhayaṇa vō sivaṁ dēu ~ 1 ~

rayaṇāyara-dhara-giri-taru-
varāĩ gayaṇaṅgaṇammi rikkhāim
jēṇa 'jja sayala **siriya**m
sō buhayaṇa vō sivaṁ dēu ~ 1 ~

ratnākara-dharā-giri-taru-
varāṇi gagaṇa-aṅganē ṛkṣāṇi
yēna adya sakalam sṛṣṭam
saḥ budhajanāḥ vaḥ śivaṁ dadātu

rayaṇāyara-dhara-giri-taru-
varāĩ gayaṇaṅgaṇammi rikkhāim
jēṇa 'jja sayala siriyaṁ
sō buhayaṇa vō sivaṁ dēu ~ 1 ~

O learned person(s), the one by whom everything was created — the oceans, earth, mountains, trees, and the stars in the sky — may he grant you what is auspicious.

māṇussadivvavijjā-

harēhī ṇahamaggi sūra-sasibimbē ~

āēhī jō ṇamijjaī

taṃ ṇayarē ṇamaha kattāraṃ ~ 2 ~

mānuṣya-divya-vidyā-

dharaiḥ nabhaḥ-mārgē sūrya-śaśibimb[ak]ē

āditaḥ (~ āihī?) yaḥ namyatē

tam ādarēṇa (~ tam āyarē?) namata kartāram

māṇuṣṣaḍivvavijjā-

harēhī ṇaḥamaggi sūra-sasibimbē ~

āēhī jō ṇamijjaī

taṃ ṇayarē ṇamaha kattāraṃ ~ 2 ~

The one who is bowed to at the beginning by men, celestials, vidyādharaḥ, in the sky [with?] the sun and the moon — bow to that one, the creator, with reverence.

paccāēsi pahūō

puvvasiddhō ya micchadēsō tthi ~

taha visaē sambhūō

āraddō mīrasēṇassa ~ 3 ~

paccāēsiⁱ pahūō

puvvasiddhō ya micchadēsō tthi ~

tah^a visaē sambhūō

āraddō mīrasēṇassa ~ 3 ~

paścāddēśē prabhūtaḥ

pūrvaprasiddhaḥ ca mlēcchadēśaḥ asti

tasmin (tahī?) viṣayē sambhūtaḥ

āraddō (?) mīrasēnasya

paccāēsī pahūō

puvvasiddhō ya micchadēsō tthi ~

tahā visaē sambhūō

āraddō mīrasēṇassa ~ 3 ~

In the western regions there is a wealthy “land of the Mlēcchas,” as it is known in the east (or: as it has been known since time immemorial). In that region was born Āradda of Mīrasēṇa (?).

taha taṇaō kula-kamalō

pāiya-kavvēsu gīyavisayēsu ~

addahamāṇa-pasiddhō

saṁnēhayarāsayam raīyam ~ 4 ~

taha taṇaō kula-kamalō

pāiya-kavvēsu gīyavisayēsu ~
addahamāṇa-pasiddhō

saṁnēhayarāsayam raīyam ~ 4 ~

tasya tanayaḥ kula-kamalaḥ

prākṛta-kāvyēṣu gīta-viṣayēṣu
addahamāṇa-prasiddhaḥ

sandēśaka-rāsakayam racitam

taha taṇaō kula-kamalō

pāiya-kavvēsu gīyavisayēsu ~

addahamāṇa-pasiddhō

saṁnēhayarāsayam raīyam ~ 4 ~

His son, the lotus of his family in Prakrit poetry and song, is known by the name Addahamāṇa. [He] composed [this] Sandēśarāsaka.

Introduction

- Let's now look at some of the **Apabhramsha** verses in the introduction (18–19).
- These are in the *raḍḍa* meter, a combination of the *matta* and *dōha*.
 - *Matta*: 5 lines (15–11–15–11–15, unrhymed)
 - *Dōha*: 2 lines (13–11–13–11, rhymed)

ṇatthi tihuyaṇi jaṃ ca ṇahu diṭṭhu
tumhēhī vi jaṃ na suu
viaḍabandhu succhandu sarasaū
ṇisuṇēviṇu kō rahaī
laliya-hīṇu mukkhāha pharasaū ~
tō duggacciya chēarihī
pattahi alahantēhī
āsāsijjaī kaha kaha vi
saīvattī rasiēhī ~ 18 ~

ṇatthi tihuyaṇi jaṃ ca ṇahu diṭṭhu
tumhēhī vi jaṃ na suu
viaḍabandhu succhandu sarasaū
ṇisuṇēviṇu kō rahaī
laliya-hīṇu mukkhāha pharasaū ~

nāsti tribhuvanē yat ca na khalu dṛṣṭam
yuṣmābhiḥ api yat na śrutam
vikaṭa-bandham succhanda[skā]m sarasakam
niśrutya kaḥ *rahatī
lalita-hīnaṃ mūrkhānām pharuṣakam

ṇatthi tihuyaṇi jaṃ ca ṇahu diṭṭhu
tumhēhī vi jaṃ na suu
viaḍabandhu succhandu sarasaū
ṇisuṇēviṇu kō rahaī
laliya-hīṇu mukkhāha pharasaū ~

There is nothing in the world that you haven't seen or heard, with a complex construction, good meters, and full of *rasa*. Who could stand to listen to the harsh and graceless [poem] of fools?

tō duggacciya chēarihī
pattahi alahantē**hī**
āsāijjaī kaha kaha vi
saīvattī rasi**ēhī** ~ 18 ~

[ta]taḥ durgatyā [?] chēkaiḥ
patrāṇi (= pattaī?) alabhamānaiḥ
āsvādyatē (= āsāijjaī?) katham katham api
śatapattrikā rasikaiḥ

tō duggacciya chēarihī
pattahi alahantēhī
āsāsijjāī kaha kaha vi
saīvattī rasiēhī ~ 18 ~

Then again, don't clever *rasikas*, if they are in a hard spot and can't find betel leaves, get some kind of enjoyment out of the *śatapattrikā*?

ṇia-kavittaha vijja-māhappa-
paṇḍitta-pavittharaṇu
maṇu-jaṇammi kōliya-payāsiu
kōūhali bhāsiaū
saralabhāi sannēharāsaū ~
taṁ jāṇivi ṇimisiddhu khaṇu
buhayaṇa karavi saṇēhu
pāmara-jaṇa-thūlakkharahi
jaṁ raīyaū ṇisuṇēhu ~ 19 ~

ṇia-kavittaha vijja-māhappa-
paṇḍitta-pavittharaṇu
maṇu-jaṇammi kōliya-payāsiu
kōūhali bhāsiaü
saralabhāi sannēharāsaü ~

nija-kavitvasya vidyā-mahātmyam
pāṇḍitya-pravistaraṇam
manu-janē kōliya-prakāśitam
kautūhalē(na) bhāṣita[ka]m
sarala-bhāvē(na) sandēśarāsakam

ṇia-kavittaha vijja-māhappa-
paṇḍitta-pavittharaṇu
maṇu-jaṇammi kōliya-payāsiu
kōūhali bhāsiaū
saralabhāi sannēharāsaū ~

In order to spread the great erudition and skill of his own poetry, this Sandēśarāsaka, made to appear in the world of men by a weaver, has been spoken earnestly, with straightforward feelings.

taṁ jāṇivi ṇimisiddhu khaṇu
buhayaṇa karavi saṇēhu
pāmara-jaṇa-thūlakkharahi
jaṁ raīyaü ṇisuṇēhu ~ 19 ~

tat jñātvā nimiṣārdham kṣaṇam
budhajana! kṛtvā snēham
pāmara-jana-sthūlākṣaraiḥ
yad racita[ka]m niśrṇuta

taṁ jāṇivi ṇimisiddhu khaṇu
buhayaṇa karavi saṇēhu
pāmara-jaṇa-thūlakkharahi
jaṁ raīyaū ṇisuṇēhu ~ 19 ~

— which [Sandēśarāsaka] you learned people
should listen to, composed in the rough letters of a
peasant, bearing all this in mind for half a second
and feeling affection [for it].

Thank you!