

Influences,” *Journal of Vaishnava Studies* 15 [2007], 2: 81–93) and Gauḍīya Vedānta (Ravi Gupta, *The Caitanya Vaiṣṇava Vedānta of Jīva Gosvāmī: When Knowledge Meets Devotion*, Routledge, 2007). It promises relevance for all who investigate the politics of self-identification and *sampradāya*-making in South Asia, where several religious communities have gained prominence over the last three centuries, carving out an intellectual and a theological space for themselves during their formative period.

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Andrew Ollett, *Language of the Snakes: Prakrit, Sanskrit, and the Language Order of Premodern India*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2017. 320 pages.

This is a landmark book for the fields of classical South Asian literature and the history of languages. Despite the main title, it is not a book about snakes; Andrew Ollett uses the remark of seventeenth-century writer Mīrzā Khān—which characterizes Prakrit as a lowly language of reptiles—as a bookend for his fascinating biography of the Prakrit language. Prakrit began, Ollett maintains, as the preferred language of the high literary culture of the Sātavāhana dynasty (*ca.* 50 BCE–250 CE).

Readers of the *International Journal for Hindu Studies* should understand that this is a book primarily about language and literature. It involves discussion of religion—such as the central role of Prakrit in Jain scriptural and commentarial traditions, the use of Prakrit by Muslim authors, and the existence of Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava scriptures in Prakrit—but it does so in the service of the larger story of Prakrit’s nature and position in the history of Indian languages and literature. That being said, the book is as much about the history and position of Sanskrit as it is about Prakrit, and given the stature of Sanskrit in Hinduism, it is certainly of interest to scholars of Hindu Studies.

The first chapter takes up the central concept of language orders, which is to say the ways a language is represented within a culture, including its appropriate uses and its relationships with other languages. Since Prakrit was a member of a very limited set of languages in which literature could be written, its story is essential for understanding the language orders of premodern India in general. The section “Defining Prakrit” is of critical importance, given the plethora of misconceptions about the language still current among most scholars. Ollett disentangles Prakrit from the category “Middle Indic” and argues against applying the label “Prakrit” to languages that were never called Prakrit in their day. This reviewer would have liked a more robust discussion of the specific differences between the languages Ollett prefers to call Middle Indic—such as Aśoka’s inscriptions and the Pali language—and the literary language of Prakrit. Ollett calls these “near-Prakrits” (23) and provides evidence that there were some in late classical India who considered the language of Buddhist scriptures to be Prakrit (14). To what extent is Prakrit (in Ollett’s narrow literary definition) a refinement of these closely related

Middle Indic dialects? This question seems central to any biography of Prakrit, yet it is not tackled with sufficient clarity in the book. Ollett's focus is on the *idea* of Prakrit, therefore the prehistory of related languages was given far less attention than the effects of Prakrit's (re-)invention as a language of power under the Sātavāhanas.

Chapter Two, "Inventing Prakrit" takes up this (re-)invention episode in detail. This chapter, paired with the Appendices A and B, examines the inscriptional practices of the Sātavāhanas, scrutinizing the significance of their unmistakably literary discourse. His most important finding, which he argues for with impressive erudition and attention to detail, is that Sanskrit only became a language of politics and literature on the model of the Sātavāhana's Prakrit. Chapter Three shares its title "Inventing Prakrit" with the previous chapter, but focuses on the story of the origin of Prakrit literature and its influence on Sanskrit literary practices. The author contends that "the emergence of Sanskrit *kāvya* cannot be separated from the emergence of Prakrit *kavva*, that the two are linked in a strong sense" (52). The discourse of Hāla's *Seven Centuries* is central to this chapter, as is Pālitṭa's *Taraṅgavatī*, which Ollett calls the missing link between the bifurcated histories of courtly Prakrit poetry and the Jain narrative tradition.

The fourth chapter examines the qualities of literary Prakrit that the Indian tradition has used to define it. Chief among these qualities is the perceived "sweetness" of the language, which Ollett analyzes through various linguistic features that contribute to this quality and instances from a wide variety of works. The role of meter and the genre of the anthology in Prakrit literature are also well covered in this chapter. Chapter Five challenges traditional Indological understandings of Sanskrit and Prakrit as inherently linked to social register, resulting in what Ollett calls "facile equations between Brahmins and Sanskrit, or between Jains and Prakrit" (113); rather, he argues for a schema of co-figuration where ideas about the two languages are mutually constituted. This chapter also addresses additional languages added on to the Sanskrit-Prakrit schema, such as Apabhramsha and Paishachi. Given the survival of short passages in the latter (138), a description of its character is a small omission in this section.

The final two chapters, "Knowing Prakrit" and "Forgetting Prakrit" wrap up the story of Prakrit's trajectory up to the seventeenth century, linking back to the opening remark by Mīrzā Khān. The former shows how the construction of systematic knowledge of Prakrit grammars, among other genres, worked to constitute the concept of the regional and informed subsequent construction of vernacular grammars. In the latter, Ollett elucidates what it meant to write in Prakrit in late medieval India, and the way vernacular languages displaced Prakrit in India's language order.

Throughout the book, Ollett takes on the roles of many different types of scholars: theorist, philologist, aesthetician, and historian; he not only writes in these roles with impressive competence, but demonstrates excellence in all of them.

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