SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF OLD INDO—ARYAN SPIRANT+NASAL CLUSTERS INTO PĀLI

W. S. KARUNATILLAKE

.0 The Development of the OLD Indo-Aryan (OIA.) spirants /s ṣ ś/ into Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) had been one of the factors kept responsible for the subgrouping of MIA into two linguistic areas, the Dardic area and the rest of MIA[1] speech area. In the Dardic area (included here are the Shābāzgarhi and Mansehrā versions of the Aśoka Inscriptions and the Dardic Languages) the three sibilants were retained whereas in the rest of the MIA dialects, these three merged into a single sibilant (which was phonetically [ś] in the East MIA., and alveolar [s] in the west and central MIA areas, phonemically nevertheless constituting a single sibilant representable as /s/[2]). The general assumption regarding the development of the OIA sibilants into Pāli as an unconditioned merger holds true, when one considers their development in non-combinatory occurrences. However in combinatory occurrences, specially with a nasal, this change seems to have been conditioned and undergone two stages before their final coalescence. It is the purpose of this paper to spotlight the salient aspects of this change and to ascertain the relative chronology of these changes pointing out its underlying phonological relevance as compared with an MIA language like Ardha Māgadhi.

1. spirants and nasals in OIA and Pāli

    1.1 There are four spirants in OIA /s/, /ṣ/, /ś/ and /h/ of which /s/ and /h/ show up with a fairly wide distributional pattern. These occur word initially and medially and also in cluster formation in these environments subject to certain phonological constraints.[3]

    1.11 In Pāli there are two spirants : /s/ and /h/. Of these /s/ shows up with a higher text and list frequency which may be partly attributed to the complex origion of /s/ in Pāli. Consequently it also shows up with a wider range of morphophonemic alternations as compared with /h/.

    1.2 OIA has four nasal phonemes /m/, /n/. /ṇ/ and /ṅ/ of which /ṇ/ and /ṅ/ are of highly restricted distribution[4]

1. Misra, Historical Phonology of Hindi, pp. 124-125, sec. 4.6
2. ibid,
3. Karunatillake, Historical Phonology of Sinhalese - pp. 7-8, secs. 1.5. 3A.1.5.4
4. Allen, Sandhi, pp. 54-55