

SANSKRIT AND THE ROMANI LANGUAGE

Romani, the language of the Gypsies in Europe was identified in the second half of the 18th century as an Indo-Aryan language. As the knowledge of Indian languages in Europe increased, attempts were made to localize also the Gypsy language in some Indian region and to prove its affinity with some Indo-Aryan dialectic group. Its structure was parallel to New Indo-Aryan languages, but no such Indian language was found from which all features of Romani could be derived. Although for the New Indian languages we have no full records of their historical evolution either, nevertheless there are sufficient texts from various historical periods to reconstruct the development of these languages and to fill the philological lacunae with hypotheses. For the Romani language such intermediate links are wanting. We have only the earliest historical texts in this language from the 16th century. We infer therefore that as for contemporary Indo-Aryan languages the oldest shape is Sanskrit, so also for the Romani language, the whole structure of which is parallel to New Indian languages, its oldest evolutionary state must be the Old Indian language and its representative is the same Sanskrit.

There is an opinion very often repeated among the Gypsiologists as well as among the Indianists also, that the original language of the Gypsies was Dravidian and it was replaced by them with some Aryan language owing to their wanderings among the Aryan tribes of India.

It is a fact, that all Indo-Aryan languages have developed assimilating Dravidian elements and therefore they are all the result of the fusion of various elements in their structure. Romani is also the result of such evolution, but we have neither historical data on any arrivals of the ancestors of the Gypsies from Dravidian territories nor on any noticeable change of their language. Therefore the Gypsies are in respect of their language such Aryans, as the inhabitants of Hindustan, who use Indo-Aryan languages. No anthropological data contradict it. Special difficulty in the reconstruction of their proto-language lies in the fact that we have no documents about the state of their language in the

period when they left India. We do not know when it happened and from what Indian region they emigrated to the West.

There have been various attempts of a more exact localization of Romani among the Aryan languages. Apart from the older supposition of Beames, that Romani is nearest to Panjabi, we have the first hypothesis of Miklosich that Romani belongs to the North-West Indian languages, because it shares with them such characteristic features as the retention of the initial groups of consonants *dr-* *tr-* and of medial ones *-st-*, *-ṣṭ-*.

Another theory was worked out by R. L. Turner who having made a distinction among various features of Romani i.e. on the one hand conservations and on the other innovations, came to the conclusion, that Romani was formerly a central Indo-Aryan language, but afterwards it was transferred to the North-West of India. Romani treats the Sanskrit groups of consonants *ṛt*, *kṣ*, *tv*, initial *y-* and intervocalic *-m-* as all central Indian languages do. On the North-Western territory of India it maintained the groups *br-*, *dr-*, *tr-*, *-st-* and *-ṣṭ-* like the so called Kafiri and Dardic languages.

Besides Turner nobody has worked out this problem until now and his point of view has been generally accepted. In the investigation of the Romani language the grammatical facts of Hindi can be taken as representative for the Central Indian languages.

When we confront the morphologic structure of Romani with that of New Indian languages we state a surprising fact, that Romani is more conservative in maintaining the older structure than the languages of India and it is nearer to Sanskrit. Its cause is quite natural, namely the so called « colonial languages » i.e. transferred into new territories, develop more slowly than the languages which remained in their own lands. Taking this fact into consideration we can state that the opinion that Romani is a « degenerate relative of the venerated Sanskrit »¹, is not logical.

In the phonological system Romani has maintained the difference between intervocalic cerebral and dental consonants. The first ones are represented by *-r-*, the other by *-l-*. Old Indian consonantal groups which in the Middle Indian languages generally have been assimilated and afterwards simplified, in Romani have been maintained in some positions. These are the above mentioned groups *dr-*, *tr-*, *bhr-*. Some examples: *Skr. trīni*, *Pkr. tiṇni*, *Hi tīn*, *Romani trin* « three »; *Skr. drākṣā* « grape », *Hi. dākh*, *Rom. drakh*; *Skr. bhrātar*, *Pkr. bhāda*, *H. bhāl*, *Rom. phral* « brother ».

Old Indian groups *-st-*, *-ṣṭ-* also have been maintained in Romani medially, *Skr. anguṣṭhā* « thumb », *Pkr. anguttha*, *Rom. angušt*; *Skr. hasta*, *Pkr. hattha*, *Hi. hāth*, *Rom. vast* « hand ». Old Indian intervocalic dentals

1. EDUARD HRKAL, *Einführung in die mitteleuropäische Zigeunersprache*, Leipzig, 1940. « es ist eine entartete Verwandte des ehrwürdigen Sanskrit ».

which have disappeared from New Indian dialects, remained in Romani as *-l-*: Skr. *mṛta*, Pkr. *muda*, Hi. *muā*, Rom. *mulo* « a dead », « ghost ».

A characteristic feature of Romani that the aspirated plosives shift the aspiration on the Anlaut, is only a continuation of the Grassmann's law; Skr. *dugdha*, Pkr. *duddha*, Hi. *dūdh*, Rom. *thud* « milk ».

In morphology the Sanskritic type of inflexion has been maintained in Romani to a greater extent than in New Indian languages. In the Indo-Aryan languages the form of casus rectus is opposed to casus obliqui; however, the Romani form of casus obliquus is a real case with the function of the accusative or dative, whereas the oblique form in Hindi does not express any relation and must have a postposition; Romani: *baro raklo* « a big boy ». Hindi: *barā larḳā*.

Objective case in Romani: *bare rakles* — is the accusative or dative, whereas in Hindi the form *barē larḳe* as the accusative or dative must have the postposition *ko*: *barē larḳe ko*.

In the comparison the majority of Romani dialects has maintained the Old Aryan exponent of the comparative *-tara*, changed to *-der*, whereas Hindi expresses it through a syntactic construction *se barā*, probably under the influence of a Dravidian type.

The Romani form of the personal pronoun *ame* « we » is a continuation of the Vedic form *asme*, in Hindi we have an innovation *ham*. In the conjugation of Romani the inflexion of present tense is a continuation of the Old Indian form, whereas all New Indian languages have introduced here periphrastic innovations. Sanskrit endings: *-āmi*, *-asi*, *-ati*, Romani endings *-av*, *-es*, *-el*, e.g. *kerav* « I do », *keres*, *kerel*. The past participle in Romani is a continuation of the Sanskrit forms: *mulo* « dead », Skr. *mṛta*, *suto* « one who was sleeping », Skr. *supta*, *tato* « warm », Skr. *tapta*, *mato* « drunk », Skr. *matia*.

Many Romani particles can also be derived from Old Indian shapes:

- ma* « lest », Skr. *mā*
- vi* « also », Hi. *bhī*
- the* « and », Skr. *atha*
- dur* « far », Skr. *dūra* « remote »
- keci* « how much », Skr. *kati*
- sigo* « swiftly », Skr. *śighra*
- opre* « above », Skr. *upari*.

The vocabulary of any language is subject to foreign influences, the Romani language even more so. Nevertheless the language of the Gypsies has retained many Old Indian words, especially in its basic vocabulary:

- anro* « egg », Skr. *aṇḍa*
- aver* « other », Skr. *apara*
- bay* « sleeve », Skr. *bāhu* « arm »
- bakro* « ram », Skr. *barkara* « goat »
- bango* « crooked », Skr. *vakra*

- berg* « devil », Skr. *vyāṅga* « snake » / change of meaning under
 the influence of Christian conceptions /
berš « year », Skr. *varṣa* « rainy season »
beš « to sit », Skr. *upaviś*
biš « twenty », Skr. *viṃśati*, Hi. *bīś*
buti « work », Skr. *vṛtti*, Pkr. *vutti*
čang « leg », Skr. *jaṅgha* « thigh »
čuča « woman's breast », Skr. *cuci*
čhib « tongue », Skr. *jihvā*, Hi. *jībh*
da « to give », Skr. *dā*
dand « tooth », Skr. *danta*
deš « ten », Skr. *daśa*
doš « fault », Skr. *doṣa*
gelo « gone », Skr. *gata*, Hi. *gayā*
gono « bag », Skr. *goṇa*
kalo « black », Skr. *kāla*
kan « ear », Skr. *kaṛṇa*, Hi. *kān*
kašt « wood », Skr. *kaṣṭha*, Hi. *kāṭh*
kovlo « soft », Skr. *komala*
khas « hay », Skr. *ghāsa* « fodder »
lajo « shame », Skr. *lajj*
lindra « dream », Skr. *nidrā*
mačho « fish », Skr. *matsya*, Pkr. *maccha*
manuš « man », Skr. *manuṣa*
nak « nose », Hi. *nāk*
nango « naked », Skr. *nagna*
nevo « new », Skr. *nava*, Hi. *nayā*
nilay « summer », Skr. *nidāgha* « heat »
pani « water », Skr. *pānīya*, Hi. *pānī*
patrin « leaf », Skr. *pattra*
pi « to drink », Skr. *pā*
purano « old /thing/ », Skr. *purāṇa*
phand « to shut », Skr. *bandh*
phuč « to ask », Skr. *ṛcchati*, Hi. *pūchmā*
phuro « old /person/ », Skr. *vṛddha*, Pkr. *vuddha*, Hi. *burhā*
rašay « priest », Vedic *ṛṣi*
rat « blood », Skr. *rakta*, Pkr. *ratta*
rati « night », Skr. *ratrī*, Hi. *rāt*
ray « master », Skr. *rājan*, Hi. *rāi*
rom « Gypsy », « husband », Skr. *ḍoma* « an Indian caste »
rup « silver », Skr. *rūpya*, Hi. *rupayā*
sap « snake », Skr. *sarpa*, Pkr. *sappa*, Hi. *sāṃp*
savoro « all », Skr. *sarva*
sov « to sleep », Skr. *svap*, Hi. *sonā*
šing « horn », Skr. *śṛṅga*, Pkr. *siṅga*
šuko « dry », Skr. *śuśka*, Pkr. *sukka*
tele « below », Skr. *tale*, Hi. *tale* « beneath »

truš « thirst », Skr. *tr̥ṣā*
yag « fire », Skr. *agni*, Pkr. *aggi*, Hi. *āg*
yevend « winter », Skr. *hemanta*.

This short outline shows that Romani is no degenerate jargon, but an ordinary Indo-Aryan language which has developed under special circumstances.