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### **The influence of Dravidian on Indo-Aryan phonetics**

It is now a widely accepted opinion that Dravidian languages had an important effect on the development of Sanskrit. Most frequently mentioned aspects of this influence are loan-words, the appearance of retroflexion, the extensive use of gerunds and the *iti* construction. Perhaps the complete loss of old syntax (notably of subordinative sentences) and the appearance of a completely new syntactical structure, generally but misleadingly called ‘compounds’ might be considered even more important.

In this paper only one aspect, phonetics will be investigated, but in a wider context: from the earliest Vedic up to late Middle Indic. It will appear that all the important developments in Indo-Aryan phonetics during these some twenty centuries could be interpreted as due to a single constant and strong influence – that of a language with a phonetic structure similar to Tamil.

The following features will be considered:

- The appearance of retroflex pronunciation and also of retroflex phonemes already in the Ṛgveda (e.g. *gaṇa*), becoming more and more widespread later. (The retroflex–dental opposition is very strong in Dravidian languages.)
- The convergence of the vowel system – first the replacement of the short diphthongs *āi* and *āu* (and also of *āi-a* and *āu-a*) with *ē* and *ō* at the earliest times, then *āi* and *āu* (and also of *aya* and *ava*) with *ē* and *ō*; the disappearance of vocalic *r*, *r̄* and *l*; the appearance of short *e* and *o* – all these changes complete by the age of Pali, resulting in the old Dravidian vocalic structure (*a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ē, o, ō*).
- The loss of word-final consonants. Already quite marked in Vedic – normally only a single consonant can remain at the end of a word, and that without most of its attributes: aspiration and voicedness completely lost, position of articulation very weak (completely lost in the case of *m* and *s*). In the Prakrits final consonants completely disappear, only nasals leave a trace as nasalisation of the final vowel. In Old Dravidian the only allowed word-finals possible also in Indo-Aryan were *n* and *m*.
- The gradual loss of sibilants: first the voiced sibilants disappear (and the peculiar sandhi resulting in *r* [for retroflex *z*] can be seen as sanskritization of the Dravidian pronunciation of *z* [also transcribed as *l* or *r̄*]); then only one remains (in most dialects *s*), and even that weakens into an aspiration in clusters. As in Tamil: no separate sibilant phoneme, but the letter *c* is pronounced as *s* initially and intervocally.
- the loss of consonant clusters in initial and medial position in Prakrits follows the pattern of Tamil.
- The loss of the voiced/unvoiced phonemic opposition in middle Prakritic dialects corresponds to the situation in Tamil.

The only major phonetic aspect not definitely approaching Dravidian pronunciation is aspiration, although intervocalic single aspirates tend to disappear, but this can be due to other factors.