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REPORT ON A PROJECT BASED ON TANJORE MARĀṬHĪ DOCUMENTS 1725-1844

The Tanjore Marāṭhī material, which is the object of my research, consists of some 70 original letters from the Maratha kings of Tanjore to the governors of the Danish colony Tranquebar on the Coromandel Coast. The Maratha dynasty was in power in the South Indian kingdom of Tanjore from 1674 until 1855; the letters in Danish possession cover two thirds of that period, namely the years 1725 to 1844.

Not only are these documents fairly old in Indian terms, they seem also to be unique in Western collections. Unlike the Danish authorities in Tranquebar, the French, Dutch and English colonial administrations left their correspondence with local princes in India. There a great deal of it has perished; some letters are supposed to be still in the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Madras, but it is very unlikely that they will ever be available for presentation.

The main reason is that the Maratha authorities of Tanjore (as also the Poona authorities in Maharashtra) did not write in Nāgarī script but in a shorthand variety of it, called Moḍī. Moḍī script had the advantage that it could be written fast, but the disadvantage that, at times, it is very difficult to read. Only very few and very old Marathas are able to do that nowadays. Nevertheless, it is possible even for a Westerner to learn it and, as I will try to show, worth while publishing the historical Marāṭhī material of Tanjore.

The particular point of interest which these documents in Danish possession feature is that they are written in the Indo-Aryan Marāṭhī language imposed as a court language on the Dravidian, that is Tamil, speaking area of Tanjore. As a basis for a description of the development of Tanjore Marāṭhī, the collection is all the more

suited as the documents have now been precisely dated, thanks to the contemporary Tranquebar records written in Danish.

The physical state of preservation of the Moḍī documents is very good indeed. The parchment type of paper used by the Tanjore kings is often as good as new, the 'ink' is in no case diluted - even the gold-dust lavishly spread on the king's letters has remained untarnished in the course of 200 years of storage.

At this stage of my work, all the documents have been read, provided with a literal translation into English and precisely dated. I will now present a few observations on the particularities of the Tanjore Marāṭhī language. For this type of work, it would have been good to have a similar collection of Poona Marāṭhī documents for comparison. No such possibility exists so far, since the National Archives of India's plans to publish representative Moḍī records have not yet materialized. Therefore, my observations are based almost exclusively on my own material, which has been compared with the trends of Marāṭhī and Dravidian according to standard grammars and a few monographical studies. Fortunately, my own material contains one letter from the Peshwa of Poona to the governor of Tranquebar; some comparisons will be made on that basis, however limited it is. The earliest of the documents, dated 1725, is a receipt for the payment of the annual rent from Tranquebar. We have several such documents in the collection. The receipts prove to be the only type of evidence which remains virtually unchanged throughout the entire period of 120 years. The vocabulary is almost exclusively Persian and no need has obviously been felt to change either administrative terms or the titles of the administrative staff signing the receipts. The modes of address constitute another sphere where Persian is widely used. A comparison between our Poona letter and contemporary letters from Tanjore is very illustrative: Sanskrit *श्री* heads the Poona letter: the Danish governor is addressed in Sanskrit terms just as the Peshwa of Poona presents himself with Sanskrit titles. The contemporary Tanjore letters are not headed by *श्री* but by the Arabic equivalent of *श्री*, and Persian titles are used throughout. This probably means that the Tanjore administration preserved the terminology of the Poona counterpart before Śivājī's sanskritizing language reforms came into force. These were carried

through and confined to Maharashtra alone. Another explanation could be that the Danes were treated on a par with Muslims as non-Hindus and therefore addressed in Persian terms. Tanjore would then reserve the Sanskrit titles for correspondence with Hindus.

Now, if we limit our observations to the Tanjore Marāṭhī documents, we notice many variations within the more or less persianized phrases of introductory greetings. In course of time some Sanskrit and Marāṭhī terms supplanted the Persian ones; the most remarkable feature, however, is that variations ceased to occur around 1800. From then onwards one standard phrase has been repeatedly used up to the last document. The most likely cause seems to be the British takeover of administration in 1799, when only a small amount of formal, non-political correspondence was left in charge of the Maratha king, who was, by then, not more than a puppet. Even English crept into his correspondence. In his Marāṭhī letters he adds his new title of *hisa hainesā* to the Sanskrit ones and mentions the British as *hanarabiḷa britīsa gaunaramēnta*. When Persian, Sanskrit and even a few English terms were so easily tolerated side by side with more genuine Marāṭhī vocabulary, one would have expected that Tamil terms would have been accepted as well, at least in particular spheres. That is, however, *not* the case. The only Tamil words occurring are place names and words for 'Northern part of' and the like. Sociolinguistically speaking, Persian, Sanskrit and English words were considered to be high class whereas Tamil vocabulary was felt to be low class.

Whereas we can safely state that the Tamil influence on the vocabulary of Tanjore Marāṭhī is virtually imperceptible, its influence is more obvious in the sentence structure.

Dravidian structure is, among other things, characterized by the absence of subordinate clauses with the exception of a specific relative type. Instead, the main sentence makes use of gerunds in order to express a sort of subordination. Gerunds are a well-known syntactical phenomenon already in Poona Marāṭhī - actually they are supposed to have been borrowed from Dravidian at a certain stage. Poona Marāṭhī also makes use of *kiṃ* in order to express 'that' which introduces a genuine subordinate clause. But in Tanjore Marāṭhī this *kiṃ* is found in a handful of instances. A natural deduction is that the gerund construction congenial to Tamil syntax prevented *kiṃ* from spreading in this southern Marāṭhī.

Another feature which Marāṭhī shares with Dravidian is the use of postpositions to express relations between words. Here we may observe that Tanjore Marāṭhī preserves some such postpositions longer than is the case in Poona Marāṭhī; in the late stages of Tanjore Marāṭhī we may even come upon the introduction of a new sort of postpositions, intelligible in Poona Marāṭhī but not in actual use there.

Yet another Dravidian feature, this one not shared by Poona Marāṭhī, is the use of words meaning 'group and the like' to express plural. In Tanjore Marāṭhī I have found one such case, namely the peculiar way in which the plurality of caste members is expressed. It is done by affixing to the name of the caste the word *vagaire* which in Poona Marāṭhī means 'and the rest'.

Among other matters for investigation which are particularly pertinent to Marāṭhī and Dravidian I would like to mention the inflection or lack of inflection of adjectives and the use of inclusive/exclusive pronouns.

My edition of the Tanjore Marāṭhī correspondence with Tranquebar will also comprise notes on the four sorts of chronological Eras in use, on the sociolinguistic conditions of Tanjore Marāṭhī, as well as on the general background of these diplomatic documents.

If I said at the outset that my material seems to be rare this does not imply that it illustrates a sole contact between Marāṭhī and Dravidian. In fact it is now a generally accepted theory that several of the features of Poona Marāṭhī which are not typically Indo-Aryan can be best explained via early Dravidian influence. In case the results which my investigation will produce can be used by other scholars to throw new light on the supposed earlier contact between the two groups of languages as well, it will enhance the usefulness of my present project.