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On the Southern Recension of the Mahābhārata, Brahman Migrations, and Brahmi Paleography

The paper is important in several respects. It provides evidence for the early (Sangam period) movement of Northern (Madhyadesha) Vedic Brahmins into the peninsula and of that of their later successors in Pallava and Cola time. The first group includes among others, the rare schools of the Taittiriya (Vadhula, etc.), the Kaushitaki Rgvedins and the Jaiminiya Samavedins.

The first group wears the traditional tuft—shikha in Sanskrit and kutumi in Tamil—toward the front of the head and is known thus as the Purvashikha Brahmins; the second group wears it to the back of the head, and thus are called Aparashikha Brahmins.

The Purvashikha group brought the archetype of the Mahabharata or its *Sharada version to the peninsula, where it evolved into the Southern Recension (SR), written in Southern Brāhmi script by the beginning of the Common Era. It was taken, in Kalabhra times, to Malabar by the historical Nambudiris.

The SR text initially also remained behind in the Tamil country with the historical Sholiya Purvashikhas. The Aparashikha Brahmins arriving during the Pallava period brought along a Northern Recension (NR) text giving rise to the much inflated Grantha-Telugu versions of the SR text.

This scenario explains the anomalous situation that the Malayalam version of the SR is the shortest of the SR texts and that it is closely aligned to the Sharada text of Kashmir. It also explains the influence of another NR text on the Grantha-Telugu versions of the SR text.

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