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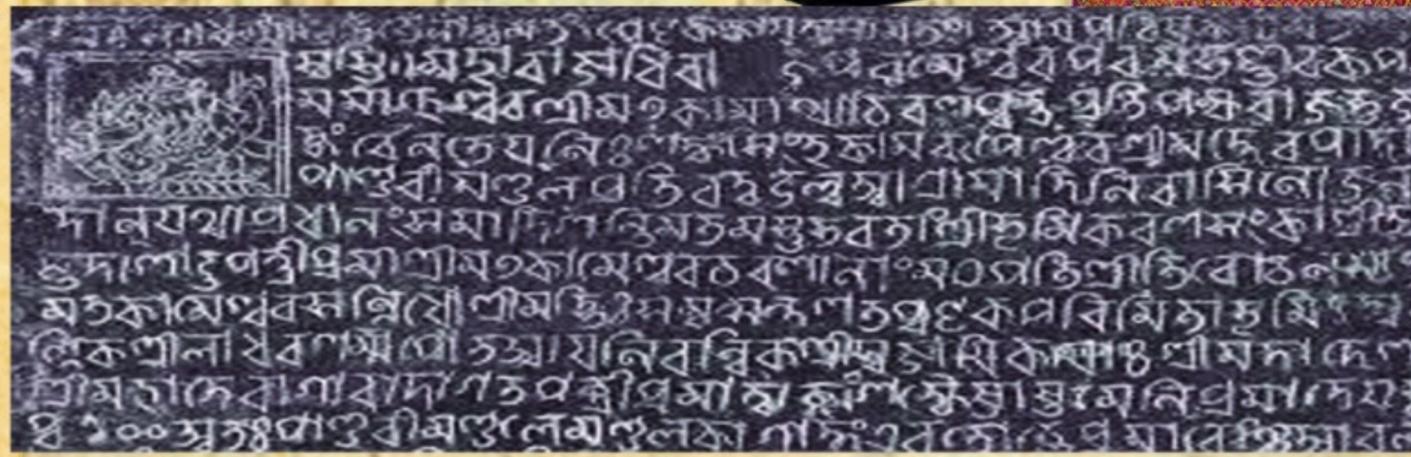
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Journal of Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art and Culture, Assam

A UGC CARE INDEXED JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

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(A UGC CARE Indexed Journal of Social Science and Humanities)

CHIEF EDITOR

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DR. BHASKARJYOTI SARMA



विद्ये वधे परापरे

**ANUNDORAM BOROOAH INSTITUTE OF
LANGUAGE, ART AND CULTURE, ASSAM**

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Words from the Chief Editor

Recently, *Anandam*, the journal of Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture (ABILAC) turned fourteen. The stories etched in its trajectory reflect endurance. To the amazement of many, a simple journal through intensive tenacity, utmost academic labour and commitment to its growth has created an indelible mark in the world of academia by enabling its inclusion in the UGC CARE. I take this opportunity to offer my sincere appreciation and gratitude to all the associates for this progression. This year's *Anandam* comes with a special enterprise. The date 4th October, 2024 was an extraordinary day for Assam and Bharat as Assamese language was adorned with classical status by the Central Government, sharing spaces with other languages like Sanskrit, etc . It was remarkable for the people of Assam as the language of the state had been officially established with a continuous history of past 1500 - 2000 years. Moreover, it was a moment of joy as this recognition reflected and reverberated the toil and turbulence of many. To mark this occasion as a prominent event, authorities of ABILAC decided to make the present issue of *Anandam* as a special one showcasing different linguistic arenas in general and emphasizing various traits of Assamese language in particular. As Assam is a state of various languages and dialects, the protection and preservation of the endangered linguistic species come as a challenge before the people of the state. Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture (ABILAC) had been established to take part in the process of protecting our own language, art and culture. The journal of ABILAC has also been doing tremendous work in this arena. This time also is not an exception.

Accordingly, an editorial team had been formed to monitor the whole process of the present issue. The lead role has been played by Dr. Bhaskarjyoti Sarma, Associate Professor, Dept. of Language and Linguistics, ABILAC. Other members also did their part and as a

result of their incessant perseverance subsequently, the subthemes were curved and research papers were sought for. This has been done with the goal of projecting various linguistic dimensions of Assamese language as research areas. Thus this issue of *Anandam* will act as a treasure trove in connection with any type of linguistic analysis of Assamese language. In this issue numerous papers reached us and after a preliminary review by a group of members of the Editorial Board, a good numbers of research articles which could not meet up the required criteria were discarded. The selected research papers then were sent to reviewers on the basis of the content and after receiving the comments from the reviewers the papers were considered for either direct selection or for required modification. The present issue of *Anandam* is a collection of sixteen papers of which two are invited papers from renowned scholars in the respective fields. I congratulate all of them whose research papers are published here. It is the time to remain thankful to each and every writer, concerned reviewers and the persons of the press. Adhering to the decision undertaken in the meeting of the Executive Council of ABILAC, the present issue of the journal will remain an online one. However, there will remain provision to procure the physical copy of the same by the contributors.

It is true that the process of publishing a journal cannot be an easy one. Neither the project remains a flawless endeavor. However, the labour undertaken by the Editor and the members of the Editorial Team really beckons commendation. We, as a team wish, to receive positive criticisms from the readers and the researchers. Your words will be our source of encouragement. Let us put together all our strength to eradicate false notions

तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

Sudeshna Bhattacharjya
Director, ABILAC

Words from the Editor

‘Anandam’ is a UGC CARE Indexed, blind peer-reviewed research journal that focuses on the fields of Social Science and Humanities. It is published annually by the **Anundoram Borooh Institute of Language, Art and Culture (ABILAC), Assam**. Established in 1989, the institute honors the renowned Sanskrit scholar and Indologist, Anundoram Borooh. This marks the 14th issue of the journal, which has previously been published exclusively in print and in English. Starting from this issue, the journal will be released as a bilingual edition, featuring research papers in both Assamese and English.

Language, art, and culture form the foundational pillars of the fields of social sciences and humanities. Within this framework, both the institute and the journal prioritize and promote in-depth research in these vital areas and their interconnected subjects. The Assamese language holds a significant place in this landscape, having been officially recognized as a Classical Language by the Government of India on October 3, 2024. This prestigious designation places Assamese alongside four other major languages—Pali, Prakrit, Marathi, and Bengali—all of which reflect the rich linguistic heritage of India. Understanding the Assamese language is not merely an academic pursuit; it is an exploration of its profound significance within the broader context of Indian languages and cultures. The status of a language transcends its lexical and grammatical components; it embodies the collective history, traditions, and values of its speakers. The Assamese language is intricately woven into the cultural fabric of the region, influencing various artistic expressions, historical narratives, and anthropological studies. It illuminates the connections between language and identity, highlighting how linguistics interplay with art forms, folklore, and societal norms. This exploration is crucial, as it offers insights into how languages can

shape and reflect the complexities of human society and its diverse cultural expressions.

In light of the considerable recognition that the Assamese language has garnered both nationally and internationally, we are committed to promoting research contributions that explore the intricacies of languages and their interconnected fields. This includes a focus on sociolinguistics, language preservation, and cultural impacts. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated scholars who contributed their work to this issue of the journal. Their commitment and hard work, especially in crafting their research papers within a remarkably short timeframe, are truly commendable. Their efforts not only enhance the academic discourse surrounding the Assamese language but also enrich our understanding of linguistic diversity as a whole.

Bhaskarjyoti Sarma
Editor, Ānandam

Ancient Indian Geography as Interpreted by Anundoram
Borooah in His *Jānakīrāmabhāṣya* on the *Mahāvīracarita* of
Bhavabhūti

Manjula Devi

The *Mahāvīracarita* is a play in seven acts, based on the well-known story of the Rāmāyaṇa, describing the events leading up to the accession of Rāma, to the throne of Ayodhyā, composed by Bhavabhūti, alias Śrīkaṇṭha, the great Sanskrit dramatist of seventh century A.D. He composed two other plays, viz. the *Mālatīmādhava* and the *Uttararāmacarita*, of which the *Mahāvīracarita* is evidently the oldest one, and the *Uttararāmacarita* is a sequel to the *Mahāvīracarita*.

The *Mahāvīracarita* was first edited and published, in England, in 1848, by Francis Henry Trithen, and in 1857, the well-known Sanskrit scholar Taranatha Tarkavachaspati edited the play for the second time in Calcutta.

Although the editions contained commentaries as well as interpretations of rare and archaic words, yet they could not meet the requirements of the ardent readers, as there was no exposition of the Prākṛta portions of the play.

Anundoram Borooah, ICS, the noted Sanskrit scholar, took the initiative to bring out the edition of the *Mahāvīracarita*, with a commentary, written in Sanskrit, viz. *Jānakīrāmabhāṣya*. In October, 1877, he first published an edition of the play with Sanskrit rendering of the *Prākṛta* portion of the play. Taranatha Tarkavachaspati, in the preface to his edition states, 'Many portions of this work are obscure and I have not ventured to write notes to them'.¹ But Borooah, deeply read in ancient Sanskrit texts and lexicographical literature, has presented learned explanation to the obscure passages of the play,

deducible to him with his extent study on the subject. He has, very appropriately, named the commentary as the *Jānakīrāmabhāṣya*, as the play is related to the legend of Rāma and Jānakī, i.e. Sītā. On the other hand, Janakirama was the elder brother of Anundoram Borooh, who died a premature death, and in his fond memory, he composed the commentary, which is expressly stated by Borooh in the colophon of his commentary, thus : *āsīnme dayito bhrātā jānakīrāmaviśruta /... yo yauvanam samāsādya jagāma tridaśālayam // tadīyasmarāṇāyaiva vyākhyā tannāmasanjñitā /²*

The edition of the *Mahāvīracarita* with the *Jānakīrāmabhāṣya* is published later by Publication Board, Assam, in 1969. Chandra Prasad Saikia, the then Secretary, Publication Board, Assam, has remarked, ‘The chief object of the Publication Board, Assam, established in 1959, has been to publish and reprint the best works in different languages and thus help the enrichment of our language, literature and culture through contact with all that is best in world literature. It is this object that has inspired this Board to reprint the works of Anundoram Borooh.’³ Anundoram Borooh’s commentary is widely acclaimed for its lucidity and profoundness. It also furnishes some ancient geographical information, which deserves attention of the modern scholars of geography.

The *Mahāvīracarita* is also very rich in presenting the precise data of ancient Indian geography, and these are inserted into the text, wherever considered relevant to the theme under discussion. While interpreting the passages of Bhavabhūti, Anundoram Borooh has shown his keen observation to indentify the exact location of the cities, territories, hills and rivers, etc., in modern India.

His erudition as a great scholar in geography as well, is already established from his earlier work called, *Ancient Geography of India*, which was incorporated by the author into the third volume of his *English-Sanskrit Dictionary*, published in 1880, as its long preface. The book was later reprinted by Publication Board, Assam, in 1971. S.K. Bhuyan, the eminent historian of Assam, wrote in his biography of Anundoram Borooh, in Assamese, about the book thus, ‘Along

with Sir Alexander Cunningham's monumental work on the subject, Anundoram's is regarded as the most valuable, and I have seen editors and commentators of Sanskrit texts quote Sri Borooah's authority in tracing the identity of places, mentioned in our ancient classics.⁴ While commenting on the *Mahāvīracarita*'s passages, related to the geographical aspects, like references to the territories, cities, rivers, hills, the tribes, trees and plants, and so on, Borooah has profusely quoted the relevant texts of the two great Epics, viz. the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Purāṇyas*, the works of Kālidāsa and other Sanskrit poets, and the lexicographical works like Yādavaprakāśa's *Vaijayantī*, Hemacandra's *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, Puruṣottama's *Trikāṇḍaśeṣa*, Amarasimha's *Amarakoṣa*, etc., which offer some valuable geographical information.

The *Mahāvīracarita*, in the very beginning, alludes to Dakṣiṇāpatha, while giving the introduction to the poet Bhavabhūti: *asti dakṣiṇāpathe padmapuram nāma nagaram*⁵ Dakṣiṇāpatha is one of the sevenfold divisions of the Janapadas of ancient India. The *Matsyapurāṇya* proposes these Janapadas thus : *madhyadeśā janapadāḥ, udīcyā janapadāḥ, prācyā janapadāḥ, dakṣiṇāpathavāsino janapadāḥ, aparāntā janapadāḥ, vindhyaprṣṭhanivāsino janapadāḥ,* and *parvatāśrayiṇo janapadāḥ*.⁶ Dakṣiṇāpatha is also known as Dākṣiṇātya, which lies to the south of the Vindhya or the Narmadā, holds D.C. Sircar, the noted Epigraphist, in his *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*.⁷ In his commentary to the relevant passage, Borooah has held : *dakṣiṇāpathe dakṣiṇadeśe vidarbheṣu*⁸, which is also rightly noted in the *Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhūti, thus : *asti dakṣiṇāpathe vidarbheṣu padmapuram nāma nagaram*⁹ The *Matsyapurāṇa* clearly cites that Vidarbha lies in Dakṣiṇāpatha.¹⁰ Vidarbha is presently known as Berar, a district in the Deccan between the Narmadā and the Godāvarī river.¹¹

The territories of Kosala and Videha are also referred to in the play. Kosala and Kośala, both the names could be spelt either with dental or with the palatal sibilant. The *Mahāvīracarita* retains the spelling with palatal sibilant, e.g., *kośalendra*, which refers to Daśaratha, the king of

Kośala.¹² Borooh has also cited the passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which speaks of the ancient territory Kośala and its capital Ayodhyā, thus : *kośalo nāma muditaḥ sphīto janapado mahān/ niviṣṭaḥ sarayūtīre paśudhānyadhanardhimān/ ayodhyā nāma tatrāsīnnagarī lokaviśrutā*¹³ In the text, Ayodhyā is cited as the headquarters of Kośala. In the seventh act of the play, Sītā asked Lakṣmaṇa on the moving chariot : *asmābhiḥ sāmpratam kutra prasthīyate?*¹⁴ Lakṣmaṇa replied : *raghukularājadhānīmayodhyām prati*¹⁵ The ancient city of Ayodhyā is still there in Fyzabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Sāketa is another name of Ayodhyā, which is noted in the play.¹⁶ The inhabitants of Ayodhyā were also known as Sāketa, which is interpreted by Borooh, citing the relevant text from Yādavaprakāśa's *Vaijayantī* : *sāketah syādayodhyāyāmiti yādavaḥ*¹⁷

The Videha territory was also called Mithilā, in ancient India, and therefore, Janaka, the king of Videha, is called *Maithila*, in the play.¹⁸ Mithilā was also the capital of Videha, and so it is cited as Videhanagarī in the play.¹⁹ The play refers to the great kings of Videha, Nimi and his descendents,²⁰ which is aptly supported by the passages of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, quoted by the commentator, in the relevant context, thus : *rājābhūt tr̥ṣu lokeṣu viśrutaḥ svena karmanā / nimiḥ paramadharmātmā sarvasattvavatām varaḥ* //²¹ Videha is identified as modern Tirhut in North Bihar²², and Mithilā, the ancient capital of Videha, stood on the site of modern Janakpur, in the Nepalese Tarai region.²³

The play also refers to some other cities of ancient India, like Sāṅkāśya, Laṅkā, Nandigrāma, etc. Sāṅkāśya is modern Sankisa in the Farrukhabad district in Uttar Pradesh.²⁴ The play refers to *Sāṅkāśyanātha* Kuśadhvaḥ²⁵, and the commentator has rightly mentioned the context from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which states that the city of Sāṅkāśya was on the bank of the river Ikṣumatī²⁶, which is a tributary of the Ganges, identified with modern Kālīnadī, joining the Ganges, near Kanauj in the Farrukhabad district in Uttar Pradesh.²⁷

The city of Laṅkā is cited in the play, as situated in the mountain Trikūṭa, also called Citrakūṭa.²⁸ Borooh also has traced the passage from the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Laṅkā is situated on the Trikūṭa mountain.²⁹

The castle of Lañkā, which is famous in Indian mythology, is referred to in this context.³⁰ It is stated in the *Rāmāyaṇa* that Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, built the dyke from the Indian continent to the castle of Lañkā.

When Rāma was banished, Bharata, his brother, deeply saddened, stayed in Nandigrāma, in Kośala, and ruled the kingdom there from. Bharata states: *nandigrāme jaṭām bibhradabhiṣicyāryapāduke/pālayiṣyāmi pṛthivīm yāvadāryo nivartate*!³¹ Nandigrāma is located, in the commentary of Borooh, as situated to the east of Ayodhyā : *nandigrāmo 'yodhyāyāḥ prāgavasthitah*!

The play also furnishes the pen-picture of the Daṇḍakā forest, where Rāma stayed for fourteen years, in exile.³² Janasthāna is stated in the play, to be located to the east of Daṇḍakā, and to the west of Daṇḍakā, lay Kuñjavat, haunted by headless giant Danu.³³ Borooh has cited the passages from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the relevant contexts, in order to confirm the location of Janasthāna and Kuñjavat in the vast forest tract of Daṇḍakā. The river Godāvarī flows through the Janasthāna of the Daṇḍakā forest. The forest tract Pañcavaṭī is located on the bank of the Godāvarī river in the same area : *asti janasthāne pañcavaṭī nāma godāvarītaṭodeśah*!³⁴

The localities in the Kāverī valley are also noted in the play. In his return journey from Lañkā to Ayodhyā, Rāma was told by Vibhīṣaṇa, thus : *deva rāmabhadra, dṛśyante kilaitāḥ kāverītrabhūmayah* /³⁵ The play also refers to the Kauśikī river.³⁶ The Kauśikī is modern Kośī, running from Nepal by the western borders of the Purnea district of Bihar.³⁷ Borooh has identified the Kauśikī river, running through Bhojakaṭa, as found in the *Skandapurāṇa*: *sthānam bhojakaṭam nāma prāpto gādhimahīpateḥ / yatra sā kauśikī nāma nadī trailokyaviśrutā* //³⁸ Bhojakaṭa is stated to be located in modern Berar in Maharashtra.³⁹ However, there are several rivers of the name Kauśikī, in different parts of India, as observed by D.C. Sircar.⁴⁰

The seven Kulaparvatas and seven island continents (saptadvīpas), known to the Epic and Purāṇic literature, are alluded to in the play⁴¹. The seven Kulaparvatas are Mahendra, Malaya, Sahya, Śakṭimat, Rkṣavat, Vindhya and Pāriyātra : *sapta cāsmin mahāvarṣe viśrutāḥ*

kulaparvatāḥ/ mahendro malayaḥ sahyaḥ śaktimān ṛkṣavānapi / vindhyaśca pāriyātraśca ityete kulaparvatāḥ//⁴² Of these Kulaparvatas, the Malaya, the Sahya and the Mahendra are clearly mentioned in the *Mahāvīracarita*. It is stated in the play that the valley of the Malaya mountain is encircled by the Kāverī river : *kāverīvalayitamekhalasya sānāvekasmin malayagirer divaḥ patāmi*/⁴³ From this description of the play, Borooh holds that the mountain Nīlagiri is the Malayācala noted here: *nīlagirireva malayācala ityasmāllabhyate*/⁴⁴ But the modern geographers hold that Malayācala is presently known as Travancore hills.⁴⁵

The Sahya mountain, which is referred to in the play,⁴⁶ is the name applied to that part of the Western Ghats, which lies to the north of the Travancore hills.⁴⁷ Borooh also has rightly identified the Sahya mountain with the Western Ghats mountain, from his Purāṇic knowledge of the rivers, flowing from the Sahya mountain, who has held thus : *godāvarī bhīmarathī kṛṣṇavenyādikastathā / sahyapādodbhavā nadyaḥ smṛtāḥ pāpabhayāpahāḥ*// iti vi. 2.3.12, *darśanāt paścimagaṭṭaḥ sahya ityanumīyate* /⁴⁸

In the *Mahāvīracarita*, Mahendradvīpa is alluded to,⁴⁹ which is cited as Indradvīpa in the Purāṇas, one of the nine divisions of ancient Bhāratavarṣa, and the relevant text from the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* is cited in the commentary of the play.⁵⁰ Borooh has also cited another passage from the *Raghuvamśa*⁵¹, which refers to Mahendranātha, and from this information, Borooh has arrived at the conclusion that the northern part of the Eastern Ghats, adjacent to the modern Vijayapattana is the Mahendraparvata, and Mahendradvīpa is that area which extends to the Mahendraparvata. He states: *ādhunikavijayapaṭṭanasannihitaḥ pūrvagaṭṭottarāṁśo mahendraparvata iti ca kālidāsavarṇanādevādhigamyate / etadeva lakṣīkr̥tya mahendradvīpaḥ śrīkaṇṭhenātroktaḥ*/⁵² Vīrarāghava, in his commentary on the *Mahāvīracarita*, also holds thus : *mahendradvīpān mahendraparvatopalakṣitadvīpe 'vas-thāya iti*/⁵³ D.C. Sircar also confirms that Mahendra was the name applied to the Eastern Ghats.⁵⁴

The people, settled in different regions are also referred to in the play. The Niṣādas, who were the dwellers of the Vindhya Mountain,

are duly referred to in the play. The Niṣādas, the non-Āryan tribe, are identified with the modern Bhils of Rajasthan.⁵⁵ The play categorically refers to Guha, the king of the Niṣādas, living in Śṛṅgaverapura⁵⁶, which is identified with the place, adjacent to modern Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh: *ādhunikamirjāpurāsannihitamupagaṅgām śṛṅgaverapuramāsīdityavagamyate*⁵⁷ D.C. Sircar also confirms that the Niṣādhas, also called Niṣadhas, were the mountain dwellers, who lived near the Western Vindhya and the Aravali range.⁵⁸

The Haihaya king Kārtavīrya, i.e. Arjuna, son of Kṛtavīrya, is also alluded to in the play.⁵⁹ The Haihayas were themselves a branch of the Yādavas and the Haihaya king Kārtavīrya ruled in Māhiṣmatī, i.e. modern Mandhata in the Nimar district in Madhya Pradesh.⁶⁰ The commentary clearly identifies *Haihayapati* as Kārtavīrya, alluded to in the ancient texts.⁶¹

Thus, it is derived that the geographical information, as delineated in the *Jānakīrāmabhāṣya*, throws prismatic light on many aspects of ancient Indian geography. Borooh has identified the ancient territories, cities, hills, rivers, etc., with references to the actual positions in modern India, with his keen observation, derived from his extensive and strenuous study of the Sanskrit texts. Thus, Anundoram Borooh's erudition as an ancient Indian geographer is well-grounded. He has displayed a firm acquaintance with the ancient scriptures and lexicons, in his commentary, which deal with the ancient Indian geography and there is no denying the fact that it would definitely help the modern geographers in the field of the intense research of the ancient Indian geography.

Referebnces :

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36. *dryśyate haritaparisarāran̐yaramanīyam̐ kauṣikīparikṣiptamāyatanam/*
Ibid., 1st Act, p. 7.

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Ibid., 2nd Act, p. 35.
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DEIFYING THE SNAKE: THE PADMĀ PURĀṆA AND MANASĀ WORSHIP IN ASSAM*

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Abstract

The worship of the snake deity Manasā is widespread in the eastern states of India, particularly in Bengal, Bihar and Assam. Although snake figures have appeared in Indian textual and sculptural traditions since the pre-Christian era, the rise of goddess Manasā as an independent cult figure is observed in later Puranic texts such as the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* and the *Devibhāgavata Purāna*. The glorification of the goddess with her multiple epithets like Padmāvati and Vishahariis extensively narrated in medieval regional texts of eastern India, particularly in the vernacular *Manasāmangalkavyas* and *Padmā Purānas*. In Assam, three prominent poets—Mankar, Durgavar, and Sukavi Narayandev—contributed to the composition of these vernacular texts. Their works not only shaped the worship practices of goddess Manasā but also contributed to the creation of sacred spaces associated with the goddess. The discovery of stone images of Manasā in various locations across Assam further attests to the popularity and reverence for the goddess in the region since ancient times. This paper aims to examine the worship practices of goddess Manasā in Assam, with a focus on the influence of vernacular Puranic narratives in establishing cult sites dedicated to her. Through an exploration of both textual traditions and archaeological evidence, the study seeks to shed light on how these narratives have shaped the religious landscape of Assam, contributing to the continued veneration of goddess Manasā across the region.

Keywords: Assam, Manasā, *PadmāPurāna*, snake deity, *Deodhvani*, *Ojāpali*

(*Invited research paper)

Introduction

The worship of snake deities holds an ancient and revered position in the spiritual landscape of the Indian subcontinent, intertwined with the region's animistic traditions and symbolic interpretation of nature. From early religious texts to folk narratives, snakes, particularly the nāgas (male serpents) and nāgīs (female serpents), have been depicted as both feared and revered entities, associated with fertility, protection, and the chthonic forces that bridge the human and divine realms. The earliest artistic representations of snake worship in India trace back to the 3rd century BCE, as seen in the gateways of the renowned Buddhist stupas at Sanchi and Barhut in Madhya Pradesh. These stupas bear images of nāga and nāgī figures, illustrating the prominent role snakes played in the religious imagination of early Indian society. However, beyond their visual representations in art, snakes also occupy a significant space in the religious and mythological texts of India, which have preserved and propagated their veneration over millennia. In the Vedic tradition, references to snakes and their deities appear in the *Rigveda*, where the serpent god Ahi is mentioned in the context of the god Indra slaying him with his thunderbolt, thus solidifying the theme of the serpent as both an adversary and an essential cosmic force.¹ Later, in the *Atharvaveda*² and *Yajurveda*³, the focus shifts to methods of appeasing snakes, reflecting an evolution in perception, where snakes were no longer mere antagonists but beings to be pacified and controlled. Additionally, *mantras* and rituals aimed at treating snakebites and ensuring protection from serpents became common in the religious texts, indicating the proximity in which humans and snakes coexisted in early Indian society.

This shift in attitude is further evidenced in the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtras*, where the snake is explicitly worshipped, marking a transition from fear and avoidance to reverence and ritual

¹*Rgveda*, I.32.2. Ahi means snake (M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, p. 125)

²*Atharvaveda*, 4.6, 4.7, 5.13, and 6.12

³*Yajurveda*, *Maitrāyaṇī-Saṁhitā*, 2.7.15

homage.⁴The worship of snakes extends beyond the Vedic corpus, reaching into the later epics and Puranic texts. The *Mahābhārata*, one of India's most important epic texts, narrates the birth stories of notable snake figures such as Jaratkāru and Vāsuki, the progeny of the sage Kaśyapa and his wife Kadru.⁵ These stories highlight the mythological significance of serpents within the broader Hindu cosmology. The Ādiparvan, the first book of the *Mahābhārata*, further explores the theme of snake sacrifice through the tale of King Janmejaya, who is said to have conducted a grand snake sacrifice, thus reinforcing the notion of snakes as powerful beings whose favour could be sought or wrath appeased through ritual. Despite these rich snake-related narratives, the epic does not directly mention Manasā, the goddess most commonly associated with snake worship in later centuries. The early Purānas also do not contain any references to the goddess Manasā. However, the earliest mention of Manasā as an independent goddess is found in the later Purānas like the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* and the *Devībhāgavatapurāna*, which offer profound narratives of Manasā, positioning her as an important snake deity in Hindu mythology. These texts recount the birth of Manasā as the daughter of the sage Kaśyapa, in parallel with the mythological origins of other significant snake figures. In the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna*, Manasā is identified with Jaratkāru, and her worship is outlined in chapters 45-46, which contain some of the earliest *mantras* dedicated to her veneration as an independent goddess.⁶ Similarly, the *Devībhāgavatapurāna* extols her virtues, emphasizing her role as the remover of snake-related fears and offering numerous epithets in her praise.⁷The most extensive and localised depictions of Manasā's worship, however, are found not in the classical Sanskrit texts but in the vernacular literature of eastern India, particularly Bengal, Bihar,

⁴Āśvalāyana-Gṛhyasutra, 2.1.9, 4.8.28

⁵harṣādpratimāṃpṛītiṃprāpatuḥsmavarastriyau/
vavrekadrūḥsutānnāgānsahastraṃtulyavaracasah//
Mahābhārata, Ādiparvan, 16.8

⁶aumhrīmśrīmklīmairmanasādevyaisvāhetikīrtitah/
pañcalakṣajapenai vamantrasiddhirbhavennṛṇām//
Brahmavaivartapurāna, Prakṛtikhaṇḍa, 46.6

⁷*Devi Bhāgavatapurāna*, 9.47.39-53

and Assam. Between the 13th and 15th centuries CE, a rich genre of texts dedicated to Manasā emerged in the form of *maṅgalkāvyas*, or auspicious poems.⁸ These compositions played a significant role in shaping the popular imagination and worship practices surrounding the goddess, blending religious devotion with regional folklore. Alongside these texts, several other vernacular works, often carrying the suffix ‘Purāna,’ were also composed, contributing to the formation of cult spots and ritual traditions associated with the goddess. In these regions, the worship of Manasā remains deeply embedded in the cultural and religious practices, influencing rituals that continue to this day. This paper seeks to explore the worship of goddess Manasā, particularly focusing on the impact of vernacular Puranic narratives on the creation of cult spots dedicated to her in Assam. Through a detailed examination of ritualistic performances and the local textual tradition, this study aims to shed light on how regional variations in the worship of Manasā have contributed to the formation of a distinct religious identity surrounding the goddess, highlighting her enduring significance in the religious landscape of eastern India.

Vernacular Texts on Goddess Manasā in Assam

By the medieval period, the vernacularization of Sanskrit texts and the establishment of local religious traditions had become a significant cultural phenomenon in the western part of present-day Assam. This process of vernacularization began under the patronage of the rulers of the Kamatā kingdom after the decline of the ancient Kamarupa kingdom around the 13th century CE. The Kamatā rulers, whose dominion extended from the northern parts of modern-day West Bengal to western Assam, initiated the translation and transcreation of the Sanskrit religious texts into vernacular languages, making religious knowledge more accessible to the common people.⁹

⁸Kumkum Chatterjee, 2013, *Goddess Encounters Mughals Monsters and Goddess in Bengal*, Modern Asian Studies, vol. 47, p.4

⁹ The Kamatā rulers Durlabhnarayan, Indranarayan and Tamradhvaj were patrons of the Assamese poets Ram Saraswati, Hem Saraswati and RudraKandali, known for their compositions of the *JayadhrathaVadha*, the *Prahladacharitra* and the *DronaParva* of the *Mahabharata* in Assamese, respectively. Simultaneously,

This trend continued under the Koch rulers, who ruled from the 15th to 19th centuries CE, further contributing to the popularization of local religious traditions and the spread of vernacular texts. During the reign of the Koch rulers, texts focused on the worship of the snake goddess Manasā—namely the *Padmā-Purāṇa* and *Manasākāvyas*—were composed. These works played a critical role in the dissemination of Manasā's cult throughout the region. Three Assamese poets, Manakara, Durgāvara, and Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva, are associated with the creation of vernacular texts on Manasā worship. Although the exact time and geographical origins of these poets remain uncertain, scholars agree that they likely lived between the 15th and 16th centuries CE. Their compositions mark an essential development in the evolution of Manasā's cult, particularly in Assam, where the worship of the goddess gained a significant foothold under the Koch rulers, whose dominions included parts of present-day eastern Bengal and western Assam.

A unique characteristic of these vernacular narratives is the synonymous use of the name Padmā or Padmāvati (locally referred to as Padumai) for the goddess Manasā. Unlike the Sanskrit texts, these Assamese texts also associate the goddess with the god Shiva, describing her as his daughter. In Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva's *Padmā-Purāṇa*, it is narrated that Manasā was born from Shiva's semen, which was placed on a lotus leaf (*Padmāpatra*).¹⁰ This origin story explains her name 'Padmā' and adds to her identity as a snake goddess, with another prominent epithet, *Viśahari* (the remover of poison), which resonates with Vedic traditions where snake deities were invoked to cure snakebites. The glorification of Manasā, or Padmā, is conveyed through the popular tale of the merchant Chand Sadāgar and his son Lakhindar. This story is a central narrative in the Assamese *Padmā-Purāṇa* and *Manasākāvyas*, highlighting the

MadhavKandali and AnantaKandali translated the epic Ramayana into vernacular language.

¹⁰Padmāpatrabīrjyamaithoilohodhāliyā/

paḥṣinīkarilāhāraPadmāpatrapāyā// DevachandraTalukdar, *SukanānīPadmāvati*, p.

goddess's power and influence. According to the narrative, Chand Sadāgar, a devoted worshipper of the goddess Chandi (the wife of Shiva), refuses to acknowledge Manasā's divinity. This refusal triggers a conflict between Chand and Manasā, leading to the tragic deaths of six of his seven sons from snake bites inflicted by Manasā. To protect his last son, Lakhindar, Chand constructs a barricade (referred to as *merghar* in Assamese) on his wedding night. Despite these efforts, Manasā manages to bite and kill Lakhindar, asserting her supremacy. The narrative then follows Lakhindar's widow, Beulā, who takes her husband's body to Kailāsa, the abode of Shiva, in the hope of bringing him back to life. Through a series of devotional acts, Beula pleases Shiva, who in turn requests Manasā to restore Lakhindar's life. Manasā agrees to do so on the condition that Chand Sadāgar worships her. Reluctantly, Chand agrees and performs the worship, but with his left hand, signifying his continued resistance to fully accepting her divinity.¹¹ This left-handed worship (*vāma-pūjā*) is indicative of a Tantric form of worship, which was popular among the masses at the time.

This vernacular version of Manasā's story shares many similarities with the *Maṅasāmangalakāvya*s of medieval Bengal, suggesting a shared cultural heritage between the two regions. The *Maṅasāmangalakāvya*s were composed between the 13th and 15th centuries CE and reflect the growing influence of non-Brahmanical cults, such as that of Manasā, in Bengal. According to scholar S.B. Dasgupta, these poems symbolize the conflict between established Puranic religion, particularly Shaivism, and the rising influence of Shaktism, represented by the cult of Manasā.¹² The animated struggle of Chand Sadāgar in the *Maṅsamangalakāvya*s, Dasgupta argues, is largely overshadowed by the broader religious conflict between

¹¹candobulecaṇḍīpūjākariāchujehāte/
heihātepūjivākanāhilaya cite//
diva phulajalabeṅkānīrsamukhe/
pācabhāgepujīmkanīmaibāmahāte// DevachandraTalukdar, *SukanānīPadmāvatī*,
p.716

¹²ShashibhushanDasgupta, *Obscure Religious Cults as a Background to Bengali Literature*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1946, pp. xxxi-xxxii.

Shaivism and Shaktism, marking a significant shift in religious dynamics during the period. The evolution of Manasā as a snake deity is evident in her transformation from a Vedic-era figure associated with curing snakebites to an independent goddess with a distinct cult in the medieval period. The vernacular texts further highlight her assimilation into the Brahmanical Hindu fold, despite her origins as a local tribal deity of eastern India. This is exemplified by Chand Sadāgar's initial rejection of her worship, as he prioritizes Chandi, a more established deity within the Hindu pantheon.¹³ Manasā's eventual acceptance, albeit reluctantly, suggests her rising importance and the growing influence of her cult during this period. Interestingly, Manasā's worship is also closely linked to women, both in the Assamese and Bengali narratives. In the *Padmā-Purāṇa*, Manasā initiates two fisherwomen, Jalo and Malo, into her cult, marking the first instance of her worship in the region. Saneka, Chand Sadāgar's wife, and his daughters-in-law also become devotees of Manasā, further indicating the goddess's association with women. Scholars such as A.K. Ramanujan and Edward C. Dimock have remarked on this association, noting that the exclusion of women from the rituals of the 'Great Tradition' deities, such as Chandi, may have contributed to their stronger identification with local goddesses like Manasā.¹⁴ In this way, the vernacular narratives position Manasā as a goddess deeply connected to the lives of women, particularly in rural and tribal communities, where her worship became integral to daily religious practices.

In addition to textual narrative, the discovery of some Manasā sculptures in various places of present Assam is indicative of the popularity of her cult in the region since the early medieval times. Depicted with snake canopies and holding snakes in their hands, the Manasā iconographies are stylistically belonging to the East Indian

¹³Hugh B. Urban, *Dancing for the Snake: Possession, Gender, and Identity in the Worship of Manasā in Assam*, p. 8,

¹⁴Edward C Dimock & A.K. Ramanujan, *The Goddess of Snakes in Medieval Bengali Literature Part II*, p.308

School of Medieval Art and dated to 9th century CE.¹⁵ In one of these iconographies, Manasā is depicted in seated posture on a lotus flower [Fig.1& 3] with a *kalaśa* (pot) beneath the pedestal, which resembles her story of birth from a lotus leaf (*Padmāpatra*) and worship of snake deity in the *Grhyasutra*, respectively. In another iconography [Fig.2], she is again shown standing on the lotus flower. Recently a Manasha sculpture belonging to early medieval period have been discovered near Maghnowadol, Lakhimpur [Fig.3].



Fig 1- Manasā Sculpture found in Jakhalabandha, Nagaon, Assam



Fig2- Manasā Sculpture found in Kaliabor Tea Estate, Nagaon district, Assam.

¹⁵Manoranjan Dutta, *Sculptures of Assam*, p.107



Fig.3 Manasā sculpture discovered recently near Maghnowadol, Lakhimpur

(Presently preserved at the temple complex)

ManasāCult and Worship in Assam

The worship of goddess Manasā is predominantly found in three districts of western Assam- undivided Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang. Different communities of the region, including Bodos, Rabhas, Nath-Yogis along with other sections of the society, are engaged with the celebration of Manasā worship which is popularly known as *Maroi Puja*. In the worship procedure of the goddess, the influence of the narratives found in the *Padmā-Purānas* composed by the vernacular poets-Durgāvara, Mankar and Sukavi Nārāyaṇadevais conspicuously visible. There are several temples in the lower Assam region dedicated to the goddess where the daily worship to the goddess is performed in regular basis. Inside the Manasā temples, the anthropomorphic image of the deity is placed [Fig.4]. However, the annual worship of the goddess is held on the fifth day of the month of *Śrāvaṇa* (July-August), known as Nāgapañcamī. Manasā poet Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva narrates the date as birth of the goddess—

śrāvaṇamāhatkṛṣṇāpañcamītithipāyā/

*padmārjanmatithituredilukaiyā*¹⁶
(The birth tithi of Padmā is *śrāvaṇakṛṣṇapañcamīthi*)

For the annual worship in the month of *Sravana*, earthen images of the goddess are temporarily made and worshipped by the followers. In these earthen images of the goddess, the iconography prescribed for the goddess in the *Padmā-Purāṇa* of Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva is followed. The *Padmā Purāṇa* of Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva states that Padmā has four hands and three eyes¹⁷. In the earthen images of Assam also the goddess is shown as four-handed, with three eyes and standing on swan [Fig4].



Fig. 4 Earthen Image of Manasā, Azara

¹⁶Devachandra Talukdar, *Sukanānī Padmāvati*, p.192

¹⁷cārikhan hasta dilātiniṭānayan/ *Ibid.*, p.125



Fig 5- Manasā Worship during Nagpanchami at Manasā temple, Ajara, Guwahati.



Fig 6- Manasā Temple in Rani Chapori, Azara

Sometimes, *kalasa* (pots) and *siju* plants are also venerated along with the image or in lieu of the images which indicates her connection with regenerative power of the goddess. The *Padmā Purāṇa* of Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva states that in the worship of Manasā lotus, *siju* plant, banana, sesame seed (*til*), rice (*tandul*) and coconut should be used.¹⁸ In the *Padmā Purāṇa* of Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva the offerings to the goddess Manasā which should be offered during the *pūjā* are also described. The offerings to be made to the goddess which are mentioned in the *Padmā Purāṇa* as such: goat, buffalo etc.¹⁹ Accordingly in the Manasā temples of Assam also in regular worship items are offered to the goddess Manasā. In the annual at the

¹⁸Padmāpuṣpasijudālkadalīrphala/

tīlataṇḍuladilārunārikala// DevachandraTalukdar, *SukanānīPadmāvati*, p. 202

¹⁹balidāne cedi merācodalmahiṣbhedā/ *Ibid.*, p.202

celebration of Nāgapañcamīn Assam two kinds of worship to the deity are performed- *Sātvik* and *Rajāsik*. In *Sātvik* worship a gourd is offered for sacrificial rituals, while in the *Rājasik* worship of Manasā buffalo, goat, swan, walking cat fish (*magur mas*) etc., are offered. There is not so much difference in between these two types of worshipping styles apart from the sacrificial items. As mentioned earlier, the womenfolk are associated with the worship of Manasā in the story which is also visible in present day worshipping procedure of the goddess. In Assam womenfolk help during the Manasā worship. They sing the songs of Manasā during the worship as well as they do the fasting during the worship and after the worship they end their fasting with food offerings of the worship.

The worship of the serpent goddess Manasā in Assam is steeped in rich cultural and spiritual traditions, two of which are the Deodhvani dance and the Ojāpāli performances. These two practices are integral to Manasā worship, with the Ojāpāli songs often providing the musical and ritualistic context for the Deodhvani dance. Both performances are deeply symbolic and reflect the complex interplay of divine possession, healing, and community involvement in Assam's religious practices.

Deodhvani: Divine Possession and Healing

Deodhvani is a powerful form of ritualistic dance that signifies divine possession, healing, and spiritual relief. This ancient practice is rooted in the belief that through dance, performers can invoke divine energies to alleviate suffering and afflictions. In the context of Manasā worship, the Deodhvani dance often represents the mythical dance of Beula, the wife of Lakhindar, as she pleads with Lord Siva to bring her husband back to life.²⁰ This story from the Manasā lore highlights the connection between the dance and themes of loss, struggle, and eventual healing.

²⁰Devachandra Talukdar, *Sukanānī Padmāvati*, pp. 686-687

Deodhvani is more than just a symbolic retelling of this myth; it is seen as a semi-shamanistic ritual where the performer acts as a medium, becoming possessed by a deity, typically for healing or providing spiritual solace to those in need. The performer, often male or female, enters a trance-like state, believed to be possessed by the goddess Manasā or other local deities such as Siva, Kali, or Kamakhya. During this ecstatic dance, the performers may exhibit unusual behaviors, such as biting into raw animal sacrifices, which further emphasizes their connection to divine forces. The Deodhvani performance varies in style and rituals across western Assam, reflecting the cultural diversity of the region. However, the common themes of divine possession, healing, and reverence for Manasā remain consistent. The practice is not exclusive to Manasā worship; it is also associated with the worship of other deities, including both male and female figures, in various communities. This includes the Rabhas, Bodo-Kacharis, Chutiyas, and Ahoms, who have incorporated Deodhvani into their indigenous traditions, demonstrating the ritual's deep roots in Assamese culture. Research suggests that Deodhvani is an inheritance from the indigenous dance traditions of Assam, particularly among the Kacharis, which later became assimilated into Hindu practices.²¹

Ojāpāli: Songs of the Manasā Lore

Ojāpāli is another important performance associated with Manasā worship, combining song, dance, and narrative in a dynamic and engaging form of storytelling. Led by a chief performer known as the Ojā, the group includes several assistants or Pāli, with the most senior aide being referred to as the Daina Pāli (right-hand aide). The Ojāpāli tradition is considered one of Assam's oldest performing arts, and its songs are broadly classified into two categories: epic-based (songs derived from the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*) and non-epic based, which draw on local folklore, including the Manasā stories.²² The non-epic-based songs related to Manasā worship are

²¹Sarma, HarinathDoloi, *AsamatŚaktiSādhanāāruŚaktaSāhitya*, p.207

²²Nabin Chandra Sarma, *AsamarOjāPāli*, Assam SahityaSabha: Jorhat, 1991, p.22

taken from vernacular texts, particularly the works of poets like Mankar, Durgāvara, and Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva. Among these, the verses composed by Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva, collectively known as Sukanāni Ojāpāli, are particularly popular in the Darrang and undivided Kamrup districts of Assam. The compositions of Mankar and Durgāvara, known as Vishahari Ojāpāli, are also popular in certain parts of Kamrup. These performances vividly depict the dramatic conflict between Chand Sadāgar and the goddess Manasā, the tragic death of Lakhindar, and Beula's determined effort to save her husband and her sons.

Although the Ojāpāli performers do not directly recite from the Manasā texts, their performances have been passed down orally through generations, allowing for a fluid and dynamic retelling of the Manasā saga. This highlights the resilience and flexibility of oral traditions, which adapt to changing contexts while maintaining the core elements of worship. The oral transmission of the Manasā lore through Ojāpāli underscores the importance of community participation in keeping these traditions alive, even as the written texts remain static. In Assam, Ojāpāli performances during Deodhvani dances are particularly common in the Darrang district, where the musical accompaniment enhances the spiritual intensity of the ritual. In other parts of Assam, Deodhvani is often accompanied by drum-beaters known as *dhuliās*, who add to the percussive and rhythmic elements of the performance. Together, the Deodhvani dance and Ojāpāli songs form a cohesive spiritual experience, blending dance, music, and storytelling to honor the goddess Manasā and invoke her divine protection. The Deodhvani and Ojāpāli are not merely ritualistic performances but are cultural practices deeply intertwined with the spiritual life of the people in Assam. Through these performances, the worship of Manasā is brought to life, offering healing, protection, and a sense of communal belonging. Both Deodhvani and Ojāpāli reflect the region's unique religious landscape, where indigenous traditions and Hindu practices converge to create a rich tapestry of culture.

Sacred Landscape and the Cult of Manasā in Assam

The popularity of the Manasā cult is reflected in the sacred landscape created after the Manasā lore in various places of western Assam. Folklore relates different places of the region with the characters of the *Padmā Purāna*, like Chand Sadāgar, Beula, Neta, etc., which resonates the predominance of the Manasā saga in Assam. As per the popular lore, Beulā was born in Mangaldoi in the Darrang district of Assam, presently located slightly south of the KundarBil tea garden in the Amba Gaon Mouza.²³ The place where the remnants of this city can be found is now overgrown with forests and wilderness. The city of King Shahei was named Ujani. Today, the people of Mangaldoi refer to a place in the AmbaGaon and Harisinga Mouza as Ujani. About two miles south of this city, within the AmbaGaon Mouza, there is a place known to the locals as *Beulā's Biyakhala* (Beulā's wedding site). Inside this *Biyakhala*, there still exists an array of twenty-nine stone slabs. According to local folklore, these stone slabs are believed to be the place where a grand feast (*Brahmabh Ojān*) was held during Beula Devi's wedding²⁴. There is a type of tree whose seeds resemble grains of rice. There is a legend that this tree grew from the beaten rice (*chira*) served at weddings²⁵.

According to the *Padmā Purāṇa* by Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva, Chandradhara was the king of Campaka Nagar. Popular lore identifies this as a place named Champak Nagar near Chaygaon in the Kamrup district of Assam. The *Padmā Purāṇa* also mentions that during his first trade expedition, the merchant Chand travelled from Kulaśī Mountain to Durjan, which is believed to correspond to DurjayGadh in North Guwahati. On this journey, Chand crossed the Gunjarī Sea, which is locally understood as the Brahmaputra River²⁶.

²³c.f., Talukdar, Devachandra, *Sukanānī Padmāvati*, Introduction, p. 5

²⁴c.f., Talukdar, Devachandra, *Sukanānī Padmāvati*, p. 7

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 7

²⁶*Ibid.*, p.360

The *Padmā Purāṇa* records that during Chand's second voyage, his ship was sunk in **Kālīdaha** due to the wrath of **Manasā**, the goddess of snakes. The *Padmā Purāṇa* of Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva narrates this such-

*“manatebiṣādabhāvicalesadāgar/
sattaremlitāgaiyālakḥīpurnagara//”²⁷*

(after getting hurt by Manasā, Chand was distressed and then he went to a place called Lakhipur)

This place named **Lakhipur**, is identified as a village of the same name presently located in **Goalpara district**. Later, the merchant is said to have visited the kingdom of **Kedār**, which is identified with present-day **Hajo in Kamrup district, where the temple of Kedarnath is located**. The *Padmā Purāṇa* mentions this incident-

*“kedārmānikyarājābaraiPrakhar/
bole cur niyādeuśālerupar//”²⁸*

(The king of Kedār has accounted Chand as a thief. Thus, the king has ordered to put Chand on a pedestal of death.)

In Champak Nagar near **Chaygaon**, archaeological and sculptural remains are preserved as remnants of the legends of **Mer Ghar** (the house of **Lakhindar**, a key character in the *Padmā Purāṇa*) alongside a temple of **Śiva**, believed to have been built by the merchant Chand. Statues representing Chand's six sons are also found there. These connections lead scholars to argue that **Chand** was originally from **Chaygaon**, Assam.

²⁷*Ibid.*,p.435

²⁸c.f., Talukdar, Devachandra, *SukanānīPadmāvati*,p.436



Fig 7: Remains of MerGhar, Chaygaon, preserved near Champak Nagar, Kamrup District, Assam

There is a place named Netāi DhubunīGhāt in Dhubri district of Assam, which is also identified with the story of the *Padmā Purāṇa*. As per the story, when Beulā was moving towards the abode of Śiva carrying the corpse of her husband in grief, she was shown the path by one woman named Netā who was washing the god's clothes. This place is named after the name of the woman as Netāi Dhubunī Ghāt (the riverfront of the washerwoman named Netā). This is interesting to note that another place in Hajo in the Kamrup district of Assam is also known by the same name. Here, a rocky outcrop is believed as 'Netāi Dhubunirghāt' where Beula met with the washerwoman who asked her to take them to the gods so that her husband could be resurrected. Nearby the rocky outcrop, a stone boulder with a reptile sign believed by the local people as 'snake path' resonates the popularity of the Manasā saga in the region. In Hajo and the surrounding areas, Manasā is currently worshipped as part of an annual festival that involves numerous animal and bird sacrifices.



Fig. 8: (a) NetaiDhubunirghat in Hajo (b) snake path

However, scholars from West Bengal have also claimed **Sukavi Nārāyaṇadeva** as a Bengali poet and argued that Chand hailed from Bengal. They have pointed to various locations associated with **Chand Sadāgar** from the *Padmā Purāṇa*, which highlights the contested nature of the geographical references in the *Padmā Purāṇa*. While some scholars maintain that these places are in Assam, others insist they are located in Bengal. There is no definitive answer, leaving the origins of **Chand Sadāgar** open to interpretation.

But The *Padmā Purāṇa* and **Manasā lore** draws an intriguing connection between ancient texts and the geography of Assam. The mention of **Chandradhara** as the king of **Campaka** and the identification of this state with **Chaygaon**—referred to as **Campaka Nagar** or **Campaka Town**—is in harmony with local traditions and scholarly interpretations of the region. This suggests that ancient mythological and historical references are deeply intertwined with the geographical landscape of modern-day Assam. This fusion of mythological narratives and actual geographical landmarks illustrates how the *Padmā Purāṇa* offers valuable insights into the historical and cultural landscape of ancient Assam.

Conclusion

The worship of goddess Manasā, particularly dominant in the eastern states of India and especially Assam, illustrates a fascinating blend of Puranic traditions and local, vernacular elements. Rooted in both ancient Hinduism and the indigenous cultures of Assam, Manasā's cult has transcended mere religious practice to shape cultural, social, and even geographical identities across the region. As this paper has explored, the evolution of Manasā worship is not merely the result of an imported religious practice but rather a dynamic, localised phenomenon reflecting the cultural and spiritual needs of Assam's diverse communities. The introduction of Manasā as an independent deity in later Puranic texts like the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* and the *Devibhāgavata Purāna* marks a significant development in the religious landscape. Despite the ancient association of snakes with fertility, protection, and danger in Indian traditions, Manasā's identity as a deity required further textual and cultural legitimisation, especially in regions like Assam, where tribal and indigenous religious practices held considerable sway. The vernacular narratives, particularly the *Manasākavyas* and *PadmāPurānas* composed by poets like Mankar, Durgavar, and SukaviNarayandev, played a crucial role in embedding Manasā within the broader cultural consciousness. These texts provided the mythological and theological foundation for Manasā's elevation to the status of a mainstream Hindu goddess while simultaneously blending

her worship with indigenous traditions. Central to these vernacular narratives is the tale of Chand Sadagor and BeulaLakhindar, which portrays Manasā as an "outsider" deity struggling to find acceptance in the Hindu pantheon. This struggle for legitimacy resonates with her broader cultural role as a deity who bridges the gaps between orthodox Hinduism and local tribal practices.

The inclusion of shamanistic rituals like *Deodhvani* and folk performances such as *Ojāpāli* further exemplifies the syncretic nature of Manasā worship in Assam. The integration of these indigenous elements highlights how religious practices in Assam, particularly in districts like Kamrup, Darrang, and Goalpara, have evolved into a unique blend of Brahmanical and tribal traditions, reflecting the region's pluralistic religious landscape. The worship of Manasā in Assam is not limited to the textual or mythological narrative but also manifests in physical and ritualistic practices. The regular worship in permanent temples, particularly on the fifth day of the month of *Sravana* (Nagpanchami), and the creation of earthen images for annual rituals, underscore the ongoing significance of her cult. Following the rituals outlined in SukaviNarayandev's *Padmā Purāna*, Manasā is worshipped through both *satvik* and *rajasik* modes, reflecting a duality in her character as both a benevolent and potentially wrathful goddess.

One of the most striking aspects of Manasā worship in Assam is the syncretism between Hindu and tribal traditions, as seen in the widespread use of *Deodhvani* among ethnic groups like the Bodo-Kachari, Ahom, Chutiya, and Rabha. The term *Deodhā/Deodhāi* itself, referring to non-Brahmin priests, suggests the deep interconnection between indigenous shamanistic practices and Hinduism. Likewise, the integration of *Ojāpāli*, a traditional folk performance, into the worship of Manasā reflects the goddess's incorporation into Assam's broader folk culture. Moreover, the creation of sacred spaces associated with Manasā further highlights her profound cultural impact. Numerous locations in western Assam have been sacralized in her name, demonstrating how religious and

mythological narratives can shape physical geographies and local identities. These sacred spaces serve not only as places of worship but also as focal points of communal identity, where local traditions and religious beliefs merge. The *Padmāpurāna* and other vernacular texts have played a crucial role in her widespread veneration, and the ongoing ritualistic and cultural practices surrounding her highlight the enduring significance of Manasā in Assam's religious landscape. The goddess's saga, as depicted in both texts and local practices, continues to shape and influence the cultural fabric of Assam, reflecting the region's rich religious and cultural diversity.

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দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ শিক্ষণ সমস্যা আৰু সম্ভাৱ্য

সমাধান

১জাহ্নৱী কলিতা

২পাপুমণি হাজৰিকা

সাৰাংশ

ভাষা হ'ল মানুহৰ মনৰ ভাব প্ৰকাশৰ বলিষ্ঠ মাধ্যম। ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা বুলিলে শিশুৱে মাতৃভাষা বা প্ৰথম ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা প্ৰক্ৰিয়াসমূহক বুজা হয়। আনহাতে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা বুলি ক'লে শিশু আৰু প্ৰাপ্তবয়স্ক উভয়ে মাতৃভাষাৰ উপৰি অতিৰিক্ত ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা প্ৰক্ৰিয়াক বুজায়। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আনুষ্ঠানিক আৰু অনানুষ্ঠানিক দুই ধৰণে আয়ত্ত কৰিব পাৰি। অনানুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে আহৰণ কৰা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা স্বাভাৱিক আৰু আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে শিকা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা এক বিদ্যায়তনিক পৰিৱেশৰ অন্তৰ্গত। আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে শিকা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ প্ৰক্ৰিয়াত বিভিন্ন কাৰকে বাধাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিব পাৰে। মাতৃভাষাৰ প্ৰভাৱ আৰু দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ গাঁথনিক দিশসমূহ শিক্ষণৰ অন্তৰায় হ'ব পাৰে। শিকাৰ বয়স, আগ্ৰহ, ভাষাজ্ঞান, কথা কোৱাৰ দ্বিধাবোধ আদি সমস্যায়ো দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণত অন্তৰায় হিচাপে দেখা দিব পাৰে।

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- ক) ধ্বনিগত স্তৰ (Phonetic Level).
- খ) ৰূপগত স্তৰ (Morphological Level).
- গ) বাক্য গঠনমূলক স্তৰ (Syntactical Level).
- ঘ) আখৰ জোঁটনিৰ সমস্যা (Writing System Issues).

এই গৱেষণা পত্ৰত অসমীয়া ভাষা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে শিকাৰ সময়ত শিকাৰুৱে সন্মুখীন হোৱা সমস্যাসমূহৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰা হ'ব।

বীজ শব্দ: মাতৃভাষা, দ্বিতীয় ভাষা, অসমীয়া ভাষা, শিক্ষণ সমস্যা।

বিষয়ৰ পৰিচয়

ভাষা হৈছে মানুহে মনৰ ভাব প্ৰকাশ কৰাৰ বলিষ্ঠ মাধ্যম। বাক্যযন্ত্ৰৰ দ্বাৰা উচ্চাৰিত ধ্বনিসমষ্টিৰ প্ৰণালীবদ্ধ সংযোগৰ ফলত ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টি হয়। গোলোকচন্দ্ৰ গোস্বামীয়ে *অসমীয়া ব্যাকৰণ প্ৰবেশ* গ্ৰন্থত ভাষাৰ সংজ্ঞা এনেদৰে দাঙি ধৰিছে— “মনৰ ভাব মুখেৰে প্ৰকাশ কৰা ধ্বনিৰ মাধ্যমটোহে ভাষা। মুখেৰে কোৱা কথাই হ’ল মনৰ ভাব প্ৰকাশৰ এটা বাহন বা মাধ্যম ; আৰু সেয়ে ভাষা।” এটি শিশুৱে জন্মৰ ডেৰ বা দুবছৰ বয়সত কথা ক’বলৈ শিকে অৰ্থাৎ শিশুৱে ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰে। ভাষা দুই ধৰণে আয়ত্ত কৰিব পাৰি—ভাষা আহৰণ আৰু ভাষা শিক্ষণ। ভাষা বুলি ক’লে মাতৃভাষা বা প্ৰথম ভাষা, দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আৰু বিদেশী ভাষাক বুজায়। ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা বুলিলে শিশুৱে স্বতঃস্ফূৰ্তভাৱে মাতৃভাষা বা প্ৰথম ভাষাক’বলৈ শিকা প্ৰক্ৰিয়াসমূহক ধৰা হয়। আনহাতে, দ্বিতীয় ভাষাই শিশু আৰু প্ৰাপ্তবয়স্ক উভয়ৰে অতিৰিক্ত ভাষা আহৰণৰ আৰু ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰে। যিকোনো ব্যক্তিৰ মাতৃভাষা হ’ল তেওঁৰ প্ৰথম ভাষা আৰু সেই ব্যক্তিজনে শিকা অতিৰিক্ত ভাষা তেওঁৰ বাবে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা। যি ভাষা, কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠীৰ মাতৃভাষা নহয়, আৰু সেই ভাষাটো তেওঁলোকে বসবাস কৰা অঞ্চলত ব্যৱহৃত নহয়, সেই ভাষাক বিদেশী ভাষা বুলি কোৱা হয়।

অসম এখন বহুভাষিক ৰাজ্য। ইয়াৰ প্ৰধানভাষা অসমীয়া। অসমীয়া ভাষা ইণ্ডো-ইউৰোপীয় ভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ অন্তৰ্গত আৰ্যভাষা। অসমত প্ৰচলিত আন আন ভাষাসমূহ চীন-তিব্বতীয় ভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ অন্তৰ্গত। চীন-তিব্বতীয় ভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ লোকসকল পূৰ্বৰপৰা স্থায়ী বাসিন্দা হিচাপে অসমত বসবাস কৰি আহিছে। চীন-তিব্বতীয় ভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ ভাষাবোৰ দুৰ্বোধ্য হোৱাৰ বাবে সাধাৰণ লোকে বুজিব নোৱাৰে। বজাৰ-হাট কৰিবৰ বাবে, শিক্ষা গ্ৰহণৰ বাবে, সাংস্কৃতিক যোগাযোগৰ বাবে তেওঁলোকে ঘৰৰ বাহিৰৰ সমাজখনৰ লগত যোগাযোগ কৰিব লগা হয়।

তেনে পৰিপ্ৰেক্ষিতত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ সহায় ল'ব লগা হয়। তেওঁলোকে বাহিৰৰ সমাজখনত ভাব বিনিময় কৰিবৰ বাবে অসমীয়া ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰে আৰু ঘৰৰ ভিতৰত নিজৰ ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰে। এনে পৰিস্থিতিত অসমৰ দৰে এখন ভাষিক বৈচিত্ৰময় ৰাজ্যত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আছে।

অধ্যয়নৰ উদ্দেশ্য

- ১) দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ সময়ত দেখা দিয়া সমস্যাৱলী আলোচনা কৰা
আৰু
২) সমস্যা সমাধানৰ সম্ভাৱ্য উপায় বিচাৰ কৰা।

অধ্যয়নৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আৰু গুৰুত্ব

প্ৰয়োগ ভাষাবিজ্ঞানৰ এটা গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ বিষয় হৈছে— দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ(Second Language learning)। গোলকীয় পৃথিৱীত দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা সৰ্বাধিক চৰ্চিত বিষয়। ব্যৱসায়িক, শৈক্ষিক, বৈবাহিক আৰু চাকৰি সংক্ৰান্তীয় কাৰণত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰৱণতা বৃদ্ধি পাইছে। ভাৰত এখন বহুভাষিক ৰাষ্ট্ৰ। বহুভাষিক ৰাষ্ট্ৰখনৰ নাগৰিকে মাতৃভাষাৰ লগতে চুবুৰীয়া আন দুই-চাৰিটা ভাষা জনা প্ৰয়োজন। অসম উত্তৰ-পূৰ্বাঞ্চলৰ সৰ্ববৃহৎ ৰাজ্য। অসমৰ ৰাজ্যভাষা অসমীয়া। অসমীয়াৰ সমান্তৰালভাৱে অসমত প্ৰচলিত আন কিছুমান ভাষা হৈছে— বড়ো, মিচিং, দেউৰী, ৰাভা, কাৰ্বি, ডিমাছা, তিৱা আদি। গতিকে অসমৰ প্ৰেক্ষাপটত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা অধ্যয়নৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আছে। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ সমস্যাসমূহ আৱিষ্কাৰ কৰি তাৰ সমাধানসূত্ৰ বিচাৰি উলিওৱাৰ প্ৰয়োজনীয়তা আছে।

অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰ

আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিকাৰ সময়ত শ্ৰেণীকোঠাৰ ভিতৰৰ শিকাৰসকলে সন্মুখীন হোৱা সমস্যাসমূহক অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰৰ ভিতৰত অন্তৰ্ভুক্তকৰা হৈছে।

অধ্যয়নৰ পদ্ধতি

বৰ্ণনাত্মক পদ্ধতি আৰু বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰ সহায়ত গৱেষণা পত্ৰৰ বিষয় আলোচনা কৰা হৈছে।

তথ্য সংগ্ৰহৰ উৎস

মুখ্য উৎস হিচাপে পূৰ্বোত্তৰ ক্ষেত্ৰীয় ভাষাকেন্দ্ৰৰ দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ শ্ৰেণীকোঠাৰ শিক্ষার্থীসকলক লোৱা হৈছে। গৌণ উৎস হিচাপে গ্ৰন্থআৰু গৱেষণাপত্ৰৰ সহায় লোৱা হৈছে।

পূৰ্বকৃত অধ্যয়ন :

ফণীন্দ্র নাৰায়ণ দত্তবৰুৱাই দ্বিতীয় ভাষাসম্পৰ্কে অসমীয়া ভাষাত বহুখিনি আলোচনা আগবঢ়াইছে। তেওঁৰ গ্ৰন্থসমূহৰ ভিতৰত—

১. ভাষা আৰু ভাষা শিক্ষাৰ স্বৰূপ (১৯৮০)
২. An Intensive Course in Assamese (১৯৮০)
৩. অসমীয়া চিত্ৰ শব্দাৱলী (১৯৯৪)
৪. অসমীয়া ভাষা মুকুল, প্ৰথম ভাগ (১৯৯৬)
৫. অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ খেল (১৯৯৫)
৬. Assamese Phonetic Reader (1997)
৭. আধুনিক ভাষাবিজ্ঞান পৰিচয় (২০০৬)
৮. প্ৰয়োগ ভাষাবিজ্ঞানৰ ৰূপৰেখা (২০০৬)

অসমীয়া দ্বিতীয় ভাষা বা বিদেশী ভাষা হিচাপে শিকোৱাৰ উপযোগীকৈ কেইখনমান পাঠ্যপুথি প্ৰকাশ হৈছিল। তাৰে ভিতৰত—

৬. পৰেশ চন্দ্ৰ দেৱশৰ্মাৰ *Assamese Tutor* (১৯৬৭)
৭. নিৰ্মলেশ্বৰ শৰ্মাৰ *A guide to Assamese* (১৯৬৩), লয়াৰ্ছ বুকষ্টল
৮. বিধুভূষণ দাসগুপ্তাৰ *Assamese Self Taught*, দাসগুপ্তা প্ৰকাশন, ১৯৫৬
৯. মুকুন্দ মাধৱ শৰ্মাৰ *Assamese for All* অসম সাহিত্য সভা ১৯৬৩

Assamese Tutor, A guide to Assamese, Assamese Self Taught, Assamese for All গ্ৰন্থ কেইখন <https://archive.org> ইন্টাৰনেট আৰকাইভত উপলব্ধ আছিল যদিও বৰ্তমান উপলব্ধ নহয়।

বিষয়ৰ বিশ্লেষণ

শিশুৰ জন্মৰ ঠিক ডেৰ বা দুবছৰৰ ভিতৰত শিশুৱে ঘৰুৱা পৰিৱেশৰপৰা যি ভাষা শিকে সেই ভাষা শিশুটিৰ প্ৰথম ভাষা (First Language)। পিছত শিশুটিয়ে স্কুলতেই হওক বা পৰিৱেশৰপৰাই হওক যেতিয়া বেলেগ এটা ভাষা শিকে বা আহৰণ কৰে তেন্তে সেই ভাষাটো হ'ব শিশুটিৰ বাবে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা। দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ ইংৰাজী প্ৰতিশব্দ Second Language বা Language 2। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা এটি শিশু বা এগৰাকী ব্যক্তিয়ে আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে শিকিব পাৰে অথবা পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিকতাৰপৰা আহৰণ কৰিব পাৰে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে, আজিকালি হিন্দী ভাষাৰ কাৰ্টুন ছবি চাই সুন্দৰকৈ হিন্দী ক'ব পৰা শিশুসকলৰ কথা উল্লেখ কৰিব পাৰি। তেওঁলোকে স্কুললৈ নোযোৱাকৈ আৰু কোনো শিক্ষক নোহোৱাকৈ ঘৰতে বহি নিজে নিজে হিন্দী ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰে। তেওঁলোকে মাতৃভাষা অসমীয়াৰ লগতে আন এটা ভাষা সলসলীয়াকৈ ক'ব পাৰে আৰু বুজি পায়। এইসকল শিশুৰ কাৰণে হিন্দী দ্বিতীয় ভাষা। এই ক্ষেত্ৰত তেওঁলোকে দ্বিতীয় ভাষাটো আহৰণ কৰিছে। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা যেতিয়া আনুষ্ঠানিক পৰিৱেশত শিকে তেতিয়া তাক ভাষা শিক্ষণ বুলি কোৱা হয়। শিক্ষণ বুলি কোৱাৰ লগে লগে ভাষাৰ ব্যাকৰণগত বিধিসমূহ আৰু সঞ্জনে গ্ৰহণ কৰা অৰ্থাসমূহ সামৰি লয়। ভাষা আহৰণত ব্যাকৰণগত শিক্ষাৰ প্ৰয়োজন নহয়। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ এক জটিল প্ৰক্ৰিয়া। মাতৃভাষা আহৰণতকৈ দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ শিক্ষণ

বেলেগ। মাতৃভাষা আহৰণৰ পিছতহে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকে। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আহৰণ উদ্দেশ্যে প্ৰণোদিত। বিশেষ উদ্দেশ্যে আগত ৰাখিহে দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ শিকাকৰে ভাষা শিকে। যিহেতু দ্বিতীয় ভাষা অবিহনে প্ৰশিক্ষার্থীৰ জীৱন অচল নহয়। সেয়েহে শিকাকৰসকলে বহুত কষ্ট নকৰাকৈয়ে ভাষা এটা আয়ত্ত কৰিব বিচাৰে। পৰম্পৰাগত স্কুলীয়া শিক্ষা ব্যৱস্থাত একে শ্ৰেণীত একে বয়সৰ ল'ৰা-ছোৱালীয়ে পঢ়ে। কিন্তু দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ শ্ৰেণীকোঠা ইয়াৰ ওলোটাহে। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ বয়সৰ কোনো নিৰ্দিষ্ট সীমা নাথাকে। সেয়েহে শিক্ষার্থীৰ বয়সৰ ভিন্নতা থাকে। বয়সৰ তাৰতম্য অনুসৰি বুজাৰ ক্ষমতা সুকীয়া সুকীয়া। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকাবৰ বাবে ভাষা শিক্ষকসকলে বিভিন্ন পদ্ধতি আৰু কৌশল অৱলম্বন কৰিব লগা হয়। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকাৰ পদ্ধতিয়েই হৈছে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ। আনুষ্ঠানিক আৰু অনানুষ্ঠানিক দুই ধৰণেৰে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰিব পাৰি। এই আলোচনা পত্ৰত কেৱল দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ বিষয়ে আলোচনা আগবঢ়োৱা হৈছে।

আনুষ্ঠানিক পৰিৱেশ

আনুষ্ঠানিক পৰিৱেশত সম্পূৰ্ণ শৈক্ষিক ব্যৱস্থাবে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰিব পাৰি। এনেদৰে আয়ত্ত কৰা ভাষাক দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণ বুলি কোৱা হয়। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে, মহীশূৰস্থিত ভাৰতীয় ভাষা সংস্থানৰ অধীনত ভাৰতৰ ৭ টা কেন্দ্ৰত সৰ্বমুঠ ২০ টা ভাৰতীয় ভাষা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে শিকোৱা হয়। উত্তৰ-পূৰ্বাঞ্চলৰ বাবে থকা কেন্দ্ৰটো গুৱাহাটীৰ বেলতলাত অৱস্থিত। এই কেন্দ্ৰত চাৰিটা ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া হয়— অসমীয়া, বড়ো, মণিপুৰী আৰু নেপালী। ভাৰতৰ আন আন ঠাইত থকা কেন্দ্ৰকেইটা হৈছে —

ক্রমিক নং	ভাষা কেন্দ্ৰৰ নাম	প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া ভাষা
১	North Eastern Regional Language Centre (NERLC), Guwahati	অসমীয়া, বড়ো, মণিপুৰী, নেপালী

২	Eastern Regional Language Centre (ERLC), Bhubaneswar	বাংলা, উড়িয়া, মৈথেলী, চান্তালী
৩	Northern Regional Language Centre (NRLC), Patiala	ডোগ্রী, কাশ্মিৰী, পাঞ্জাবী
৪	Southern Regional Language Centre (SRLC), Mysuru	কানাড়া, মালায়ালম, তামিল, তেলেগু
৫	Urdu Teaching and Research Centre (UTRC), Luknow	উৰ্দু

প্ৰণালীবদ্ধভাৱে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ কথন, পঠন আৰু লেখনৰ শিক্ষা প্ৰদানৰ কাৰণে অসমৰ জাতীয় অনুষ্ঠান অসম সাহিত্য সভাৰ মুক্ত শিক্ষা সংসদৰ অধীনত ২০১৭ চনৰপৰা এবছৰীয়া ভাষাশিক্ষা পাঠ্যক্ৰম প্ৰৱৰ্তন কৰা হয়। এই সংসদৰ অধীনত অসমৰ বাহিৰেও অৰুণাচল প্ৰদেশৰ নাহৰলগুনত এটা কেন্দ্ৰ মুকলি কৰি ইচ্ছুক লোকে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষা গ্ৰহণ কৰিব পৰাকৈ তিনিমহীয়া পাঠ্যক্ৰম প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছে। বৰ্তমান অসমত ৬ টা কেন্দ্ৰত মুক্ত শিক্ষা সংসদৰ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ পাঠ্যক্ৰম সুকলমে চলি আছে।

অনানুষ্ঠানিক পৰিৱেশ

যদি কোনো এক ভাষিক পৰিমণ্ডলত এজন ব্যক্তি দীৰ্ঘদিন ধৰি বাস কৰি আহিছে, তেনে পৰিপ্ৰেক্ষিতত সেই ব্যক্তিজনে আপোনা-আপুনি পাৰিপাৰ্শ্বিক পৰিৱেশৰপৰা দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰে। তেতিয়া তাক দ্বিতীয় ভাষা আহৰণ কৰা বুলি কোৱা হয়।

দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ চমু ইতিহাস

১৮২৬ চনত ইয়াণ্ডাবু সন্ধিৰ চুক্তি হয়। এই চুক্তি অনুসৰি অসম ব্ৰিটিছৰ অধীনলৈ যায়। অসম ব্ৰিটিছৰ অধীনলৈ যোৱাৰ পৰৱৰ্তী কালত প্ৰশাসনিক সুবিধাৰ

বাবে বহুতো বাংলা ভাষী লোক অসমলৈ আনিছিল। বাংলা আৰু অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ যথেষ্ট মিল আছে। সেয়েহে ব্ৰিটিছসকলে অসমীয়া ভাষাক বাংলা ভাষাৰ উপভাষা বুলি কৈছিল আৰু অসমৰ কাৰ্যালয় আৰু ন্যায়ালয়সমূহত বাংলা ভাষা চৰকাৰী ভাষা হিচাপে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা হৈছিল। ১৮৪৬ চনত মিছনেৰীসকলৰ উদ্যোগত ‘অৰুণোদই’ নামৰ আলোচনী প্ৰকাশ পায়। ‘অৰুণোদই’ -ৰ পাততেই অসমীয়া ভাষা যে বাংলা ভাষাৰ উপভাষা নহয়, এটা স্বতন্ত্ৰ ভাষা সেই কথা প্ৰমাণিত হয়। অসমীয়া ভাষা পুনৰ উদ্ধাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ‘অৰুণোদই’ কাকতৰ অৱদান উল্লেখযোগ্য।

১৯৫২ চনৰপৰা অসমীয়া ভাষাক চৰকাৰী ভাষা হিচাপে স্বীকৃতি আৰু অসমৰ শিক্ষানুষ্ঠানসমূহত শিক্ষাৰ মাধ্যম হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰাৰ বাবে এক আন্দোলনৰ সূত্ৰপাত হৈছিল। ভাষাক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি ভাৰতৰ ৰাজ্য গঠন ‘ৰাজ্য পুনৰ গঠন আইন, ১৯৫৬’ বলবৎ হোৱাৰ পিছত এই আন্দোলন অধিক সবল হয়। অসম সাহিত্য সভাই অসমীয়া ভাষাক অসমৰ চৰকাৰী ভাষা হিচাপে স্বীকৃতি দিবলৈ দাবী জনায়। পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত ‘অসম চৰকাৰী ভাষা আইন, ১৯৬০’ প্ৰণয়ন কৰা হয় আৰু অসমীয়া ভাষাক চৰকাৰী ভাষা হিচাপে স্বীকৃতি প্ৰদান কৰা হয়। ভাষা আইন প্ৰণয়ন হোৱাৰ পিছত বৰাক উপত্যকাত এই আইনৰ বিৰোধিতা কৰা হৈছিল। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ এই দুৰ্যোগ কালৰ পিছত ১৯৬২ চনত অসম সাহিত্য সভায়ে অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষা পৰীক্ষা বুলি অসমীয়া নজনা লোকে শিকিবৰ বাবে এটি পাঠ্যক্ৰম আৰম্ভ কৰিছিল। এই পাঠ্যক্ৰম কিমান দিন চলিল তাৰ তথ্য পোৱা হোৱা নাই। পিছত অসমৰ জাতীয় অনুষ্ঠান অসম সাহিত্য সভাই সভাৰ সংবিধানৰ ৭ নং পৰিচ্ছেদৰ ৪২ নম্বৰ দফা অনুসৰি ২০০৯ চনত ‘অসম সাহিত্য সভা মুক্ত শিক্ষা পাঠ্যক্ৰম সংসদ’ গঠন কৰে। এই সংসদৰ মুখ্য উদ্দেশ্য আছিল—

- অসমৰ ভৌগোলিক চাৰিসীমাৰ ভিতৰত আৰু অসমৰ বাহিৰত বসবাস কৰি থকা অনা-অসমীয়া যিসকল লোকে অসমীয়া ভাষাটো ক’ব আৰু লিখিব নাজানে তেনে লোকক অসমীয়া ভাষা-শিক্ষা প্ৰদান কৰা।

- মাতৃভাষাৰ প্ৰচাৰ আৰু সংবৰ্ধন কৰা।
- প্ৰশাসনিক স্তৰত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰণয়ন সুচল কৰা।
- সামাজিকভাৱে অসমীয়া আৰু অনা-অসমীয়া লোকৰ মাজত সমন্বয় সেতু গঢ়ি তোলা। লগতে যিসকল অসমীয়া ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰীয়ে ইংৰাজী মাধ্যমত শিক্ষা গ্ৰহণ কৰি বিভিন্ন কাৰণত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ শিক্ষা গ্ৰহণৰপৰা বঞ্চিত হ'ল, সেই ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰীসকলক অসমীয়া ভাষাশিক্ষা দিয়াটো সংসদৰ জাতীয় দায়িত্ব বুলি ধৰা হৈছে।

১৯৮০ চনৰ জুলাই মাহৰ ৩১ তাৰিখে গুৱাহাটীৰ বি. বৰুৱা কলেজত Institute of North Eastern Languages নামৰ এটি অনুষ্ঠানৰ জন্ম হৈছিল। এই অনুষ্ঠানটো পৰিচালনা কৰিবৰ বাবে এখন পঞ্জীয়ন কমিটি গঠন কৰা হৈছিল। এই কমিটিখনৰ নাম দিয়া হৈছিল North Eastern Language Society. কমিটিখনৰ উপদেষ্টা হিচাপে আছিল ডক্টৰ সত্যেন্দ্ৰনাথ শৰ্মা। সভাপতি হিচাপে আছিল প্ৰফুল্ল দত্ত গোস্বামী আৰু সম্পাদক আছিল ডক্টৰ ভৱানী শৰ্মা। North Eastern Language Society ৰ মুখ্য উদ্দেশ্য আছিল কৰ্মসূত্ৰে বাহিৰৰপৰা অহা অনা অসমীয়া লোকসকলক অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া। ১৯৮৭ চনৰ শেষভাগলৈকে অনুষ্ঠানটি সুন্দৰৰূপে পৰিচালিত হৈ আছিল যদিও ১৯৮৮ চনত আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে অনুষ্ঠানটি বন্ধ হৈ যায়।

১৯৬৯ চনত কৰ্ণাটকৰ মহীশূৰত ভাৰত চৰকাৰৰ অধীনত **ভাৰতীয়ভাষা সংস্থান** স্থাপন হয়। ভাৰতীয় ভাষা সংস্থানৰ উদ্যোগত ১৯৭১ চনত উৰিষ্যাৰ ভূৱনেশ্বৰত Eastern Regional Language Centre স্থাপিত হয়। এই কেন্দ্ৰতে পোন প্ৰথমবাৰৰ বাবে ভাষা সংস্থানৰ উদ্যোগত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ আৰম্ভ হৈছিল। এই প্ৰশিক্ষণ দহমাহৰ বাবে দিয়া হৈছিল। তেতিয়া উৰিষ্যাৰ স্থানীয় লোকসকলে Eastern Regional Language Centre কেন্দ্ৰত অসমীয়া ভাষা শিকিছিল। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া প্ৰশিক্ষক দুজন আছিল

ফণীন্দ্র নাৰায়ণ দত্তবৰুৱা আৰু তাৰিণী কান্ত গোস্বামী। ১৯৭১ চনৰপৰা ২০০৫ চনৰ জুন মাহলৈকে সুদীৰ্ঘ ৩৪ বছৰ ভূনেশ্বৰ কেন্দ্ৰত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া হৈছিল। ২০০৫ চনৰ ১৭ জুলাই তাৰিখে এই কেন্দ্ৰটো ভূনেশ্বৰৰপৰা উঠাই আনি গুৱাহাটীৰ বেলতলাস্থিত ভাৰতীয় ভাষা সংস্থানৰ কাৰ্যালয়ত আৰম্ভ কৰা হয়। ইয়াৰ আগতে বেলতলাৰ কাৰ্যালয়টো গৱেষণা কেন্দ্ৰ হিচাপে পৰিচালিত হৈ আছিল। ইয়াৰপৰা গৱেষণাধৰ্মী কামকাজ চলি আছিল। পিছলৈ এই কেন্দ্ৰটো North-Eastern Regional Language Centre হিচাপে নামকৰণ কৰা হয়। ২০০৫ চনৰপৰা এতিয়ালৈকে কেন্দ্ৰটোত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ লগতে মণিপুৰী, বড়ো আৰু নেপালী ভাষাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণ দিয়া হয়।

দ্বিতীয়ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ সময়ত উদ্ভৱ হোৱা সমস্যা :

ভাষাৰ প্ৰধান চাৰিটা স্তৰ হৈছে ধ্বনি, ৰূপ, বাক্য আৰু অৰ্থ। ভাষাৰ গঠন প্ৰক্ৰিয়াত এই চাৰিটা স্তৰ অন্তৰ্নিহিত হৈ থাকে। এই স্তৰকেইটা লানি নিচিগাকৈ এটাৰ লগত আনটো সংপৃক্ত হৈ থাকে। ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ সমস্যাসমূহো এই চাৰিটা স্তৰতে হোৱা পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। প্ৰত্যেক ভাষাৰ ভাষিক স্তৰবোৰ একে হ'লেওকিন্তু ভাষাৰ গাঁথনিক বৈশিষ্ট্য সুকীয়া। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ সময়ত শিক্ষাৰ্থীসকলে সন্মুখীন হোৱা সমস্যাসমূহএনেধৰণৰ —

- ক) ধ্বনিগত স্তৰ (Phonetic Level).
- খ) ৰূপগতস্তৰ (Morphological Level).
- গ) বাক্য গঠনমূলক স্তৰ (Syntactical Level).
- ঘ) লেখন সমস্যা (Writing Issues)

উল্লিখিত প্ৰধান চাৰিটা কাৰণৰ পিছত আনুসংগিক আন কেতবোৰ সমস্যায়ো ভাষা শিক্ষণত বাধাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিব পাৰে। তেনেধৰণৰ সমস্যাৰ ভিতৰত—

ক) প্ৰথম ভাষাৰ প্ৰভাৱঃ যিকোনো লোকৰ প্ৰথম ভাষা হৈছে জীৱনৰ প্ৰাৰম্ভিক অৱস্থাত আহৰণ কৰা ভাষা। সেই ভাষাত ব্যক্তিৰ দক্ষতা বেছি থাকে।

ব্যক্তিৰ মন-মগজুত সঞ্চিত হৈ থকা প্ৰথম ভাষাৰ ভাষিক গঠনে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণত বাধাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিব পাৰে।

খ) **বয়সঃ** দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ বয়সৰ কোনো নিৰ্দিষ্ট সময়সীমা নাথাকে। ৪৫ বছৰলৈকে আনুষ্ঠানিকভাৱে ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ যোগ্যতা থাকে। বয়স হোৱাৰ লগে লগে ব্যক্তিৰ বুজন ক্ষমতা হ্রাস হ'ব পাৰে। বুজন ক্ষমতা হ্রাস হ'লে পাঠ্য বিষয় সহজে আয়ত্ত কৰিব নোৱাৰে।

গ) **শিকাৰুৰ উদ্দেশ্য আৰু আগ্ৰহঃ** দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ উদ্দেশ্য সকলোৰে বেলেগ বেলেগ হয়। সেই অনুসৰি আগ্ৰহো বেলেগ হয়। কোনোৱে যদি ভাষাটো গৱেষণামূলক উদ্দেশ্যৰে শিকিছে আন কোনোৱে ভাষাটো মাত্ৰ ক'ব পৰাৰ বাবে শিকিছে, কোনোৱে হাতত বহুত সময় আছে এনেই থকাতকৈ ভাষা এটাকে শিকিছে, কোনোৱে অতিৰিক্ত ভাষা জনাৰ বাবে শিকিছে। গতিকে শিকাৰুৰ উদ্দেশ্য অনুসৰি আগ্ৰহ বেলেগ বেলেগ হয়।

ঘ) **সময়ঃ** প্ৰথম ভাষা আহৰণৰ বাবে অফুৰন্ত সময় থাকে; কিন্তু দ্বিতীয় ভাষা নিৰ্দিষ্ট সময়ত শিকি শেষ কৰিব লাগে। কোনো শিকাৰুৰ বাবে সেই নিৰ্দিষ্ট সময়সীমাৰ ভিতৰত ভাষাটো আয়ত্ত কৰিব নোৱাৰিব পাৰে।

ঙ) **কথা কোৱাত দ্বিধাবোধঃ** ভাষাটো শিকাৰ পিছত শিকাৰুৱে ক'বলৈ লাজ কৰে। কওঁতে ভুল হ'লে আনে হাঁহিব, হাঁহিলে লাজ পাব এনেধৰণৰ এক মানসিকতাই শিকাৰুৰ মনত দোলা দি থাকে। ন-শিকাৰুৱে ভুলে-শুদ্ধই ভাষাটো ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিলেহে সোনকালে শিকিব। গতিকে শিকাৰুসকলে দ্বিধাহীনভাৱে শিকি থকা ভাষাত কথা পাতিব লাগে, তেতিয়া সলসলীয়াকৈ ভাষাটো আয়ত্ত কৰিব পাৰিব।

চ) **ভাষা কৌশলঃ** দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণত যোগাযোগৰ দক্ষতা আহৰণ কৰিবলৈ হ'লে শিক্ষাৰ্থীসকলে শুনা, কোৱা, পঢ়া আৰু লিখা এই চাৰিটা দক্ষতা

শিকিব লাগিব। বিভিন্ন শিক্ষার্থীৰ বৈচিত্ৰময় ভাষিক পটভূমি থকাৰ বাবে ভাষা শিকাৰুসকলৰ কাৰণেদ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ আহৰণ আৰু শিক্ষণ এক প্ৰকৃত প্ৰত্যাহ্বান হৈ পৰে।

ধ্বনিগত স্তৰ ((Phonetic Level)

১) ধ্বনিগত দিশটো দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ আটাইতকৈ গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ দিশ। ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰিবলৈ হ'লে শিক্ষার্থীসকলে লক্ষ্যভাষাত উচ্চাৰিত হোৱা ধ্বনিসমূহৰ উচ্চাৰণ শিকিব লাগিব। অন্যথা শিক্ষার্থীজনে শুদ্ধকৈ ভাষাটো ক'ব নোৱাৰিব। অসমীয়া ভাষা ভাৰতীয় আৰ্যভাষা পৰিয়ালৰ অন্তৰ্গত ভাষা। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ /স/ এটা বিশেষ ধ্বনি। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ এই পশ্চতালব্য আৰু উত্তৰধ্বনি শ, স, ষ ধ্বনিকেইটা অসমীয়া ভাষাত যিদৰে উচ্চাৰিত হয় আন ভাৰতীয় ভাষাত সেই ধৰণে উচ্চাৰণ নহয়। ধ্বনিকেইটা বেলেগ বেলেগ নামেৰে কোৱা হয় যদিও ইহঁতৰ উচ্চাৰণ একে। অসমীয়া ভাষাত /স/ উচ্চাৰণ একক বৈশিষ্ট্য। সেয়েহে আন ভাৰতীয় ভাষা-ভাষী লোকে এই ধ্বনি কেইটা উচ্চাৰণ কৰিবলৈ অসুবিধা পায়। অন্য ভাষাৰ শিকাৰুৱে এই ধ্বনি কেইটা দন্তমূলীয় অঘোষ /চ/ হিচাপেহে, আকৌ কণ্ঠধ্বনি /হ/ হিচাপে উচ্চাৰণ কৰে; কিন্তু অসমীয়া ভাষাত /চ/ আৰু /হ/ দুটা বেলেগ ধ্বনি। তেনেক্ষেত্ৰত শ, স, ষ থকা শব্দবোৰ যদি চ আৰু হ হিচাপে উচ্চাৰণ কৰে, তেতিয়া তাৰ অৰ্থ বিভ্ৰান্তি হোৱা পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। এটা উদাহৰণেৰে চালে কথাটো বেছি স্পষ্ট হ'ব—

মূল শব্দ শিকাৰুৰ উচ্চাৰণ

সাত	হাত/চাত
অসম	অহম/অচম
শাড়ী	চাড়ী

২) অসমৰ বৃহত্তম জনগোষ্ঠীয় ভাষা বড়োভাষাত অল্পপ্ৰাণ /প/ আৰু মহাপ্ৰাণ /ভ/ ধ্বনি নাই। সেইকাৰণে বড়ো ভাষাৰ শিকাৰুসকলে (কিছু কিছু

শিকাৰু) দ্বিতীয় ভাষা হিচাপে অসমীয়া ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰোঁতে প আৰু ভ ধ্বনিক ক্ৰমে ফ আৰু ব বুলি উচ্চাৰণ কৰে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে,

অসমীয়া শব্দ	বড়ো শিকাৰুসকলৰ উচ্চাৰণ
পাত (leaf)	ফাত
পানী (water)	ফানী
ভাত (rice)	বাত
ভাল (good)	বাল

৩) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ /অ’/ আৰু /এ’/ ধ্বনি দুটা অসমীয়া স্বৰবৰ্ণৰ আখৰমালাত নাই। /অ’/ আৰু /এ’/ ধ্বনিয়ে শব্দৰ অৰ্থ পাৰ্থক্য ঘটায় আৰু ইহঁত বিশিষ্ট ধ্বনিৰ অন্তৰ্গত। আখৰমালাত নথকাৰ বাবে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ন-শিকাৰুসকল এই ধ্বনি দুটাৰ ব্যৱহাৰৰ প্ৰতি সচেতন নহয়। এই ধ্বনিযুক্ত শব্দ পঢ়োঁতে বা লিখোঁতে তেওঁলোকে ভুল কৰে। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে,

ম’হ	মহ
ব’ল	বল
ব’দ	বদ
ক’ৰ	কৰ
য’ত	যত

ৰূপগত স্তৰ (Morphological Level)

ক) “ভাষা এটাৰ ৰূপ (Morpheme), ৰূপৰ সংযোগ আৰু তেনে সংযোগৰ ফলত সৃষ্ট নতুন অৰ্থবাচক শব্দ বা পদ গঠনৰ পৰ্যালোচনাই হৈছে সেই ভাষাটোৰ ৰূপতত্ত্ব।” অসমীয়া ভাষাটো প্ৰত্যয়বাচক ভাষা। বস্তুৰ আকাৰ, আকৃতি আৰু গঢ় অনুসৰি অসমীয়া ভাষাত বেলেগ বেলেগ নিৰ্দিষ্টতাৰ বাচক প্ৰত্যয় ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। তেনে কিছুমান প্ৰত্যয় হৈছে—টো, -খন, -ডাল, -পাত, -জোপা, -খিলা ইত্যাদি। সংখ্যাবাচক শব্দৰ লগতো এই নিৰ্দিষ্টতাৰ বাচক প্ৰত্যয়বোৰ যোগ কৰি সংখ্যা বুজাব পাৰি। -জন প্ৰত্যয়টো কেৱল পুৰুষবাচক মানুহৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতহে ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। স্ত্ৰীলিংগবাচক -জনী

প্রত্যয়টো মানুহ আৰু জন্তু উভয় ক্ষেত্ৰতে ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। -জোপা প্রত্যয়টো কেৱল গছৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতহে ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। ঠিক তেনেকৈ -খিলা প্রত্যয়টো কেৱল গছৰ পাত আৰু কাগজৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতহে ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। ওপৰত কোৱাৰ দৰে বেলেগ বেলেগ গঢ় বা আকাৰ অনুসৰি ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা প্রত্যয়বোৰ ভাষা শিকাৰুসকলে সহজে আয়ত্ত কৰিব নোৱাৰে। উত্তৰ-পূব ক্ষেত্ৰীয় ভাষা কেন্দ্ৰৰ শিকাৰুসকলে অসমীয়া ভাষাত কথা কওঁতে সহজতে চকুত পৰা কেইটামান ভুল এনেধৰণৰ—

<u>মাতৃভাষী</u>	<u>শিকাৰু</u>
গছজোপা	গছটো
ল'ৰাটো	ল'ৰাজনী
ফুলপাহ	ফুলটো
চুলিডাল	চুলিখন/চুলিটো
ছোৱালীজনী	ছোৱালীটো

খ) অসমীয়া ভাষাত পুৰুষ অনুসৰি ত্ৰিফাৰ ৰূপবোৰ বেলেগ বেলেগ হয়। প্ৰথম পুৰুষ (মই), দ্বিতীয় পুৰুষ (তই, তুমি, আপুনি) আৰু তৃতীয় পুৰুষ (সি, তাই, তেওঁ, তেখেত, এখেত) এই তিনিওটা পুৰুষৰ পুৰুষবাচক বিভক্তি বেলেগ বেলেগ। শিকাৰুসকলে প্ৰথম আৰু দ্বিতীয় দুয়োটা পুৰুষতে তৃতীয় পুৰুষৰ বিভক্তিতে প্ৰয়োগ কৰা দেখা যায়। উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে, প্ৰথম পুৰুষত বৰ্তমান কালত পুৰুষবাচক বিভক্তি -ওঁ যেনে—

মই বিহু নাচোঁ



(ধাতুৰূপ+ বৰ্তমানকালত প্ৰথম পুৰুষৰ পুৰুষবাচক বিভক্তি)

কিন্তু ন-শিকাৰু শিক্ষাৰ্থীজনে অশুদ্ধ প্ৰয়োগ কৰি কয়-

মই বিহু নাচে।



(ধাতুৰূপ+ বৰ্তমানকালত তৃতীয় পুৰুষৰ পুৰুষবাচক বিভক্তি)

মই বিহ্ন নাচে বুলি ক'লে ভুল হ'ব। কাৰণ এই নাচে (নাচ + এ) ক্ৰিয়াৰূপটো অসমীয়া ভাষাত তৃতীয় পুৰুষতহে ব্যৱহাৰ হয়। তেতিয়া হ'লে কৰ্তা আৰু ক্ৰিয়াৰ মাজত সম্পৰ্ক স্থাপন নহ'ল আৰু বাক্যটোৰ গঠন শুদ্ধ নহ'ল।

গ) আকৌ, আদেশসূচক বাক্যতো পুৰুষ অনুসৰি ক্ৰিয়াৰ গঠন সুকীয়া। দ্বিতীয় পুৰুষৰ মান্যার্থআপুনিৰ লগত ক্ৰিয়াৰ গঠন এনেধৰণৰ হয়—কওক, বহক, খাওক, যাওক, কৰক। যেনে—আপুনি কওক, আপুনি বহক, আপুনি খাওক, আপুনি যাওক ইত্যাদি। ভাষাৰ ব্যাকৰণগত দিশটোৰ প্ৰতি লক্ষ্য ৰাখি ভাষা কোৱা নহয়। সেয়েহে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকাৰুজনে ভাষাটো কোৱাৰ সময়ত সচেতন হৈ নকয় বা অজ্ঞাতে তেওঁ ভুলকৈ কয়—

• আপুনি ক' (you say)

• আপুনি বহ' (you sit)

অসমীয়া মাতৃভাষা কোৱাজনৰ এই ব্যাকৰণগত দিশবোৰ জ্ঞাত নহয় যদিও তেওঁ কেতিয়াও আপুনি ক বা আপুনি বহ বুলি নকয়। উত্তৰ-পূব ক্ষেত্ৰীয় ভাষা কেন্দ্ৰৰ যিসকল শিকাৰুৰ মাতৃভাষা বড়ো, তেওঁলোকে এই ভুলটো বেছিকৈ কৰা কৰা পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। কাৰণ তেওঁলোকৰ ভাষাত পুৰুষবাচক বিভক্তি নাই, সকলো পুৰুষতে ক্ৰিয়াৰ ৰূপ একেথাকে।

ওপৰৰ উদাহৰণ দুটাৰ প্ৰথম বাক্যত ক্ৰিয়াৰূপ ক' দ্বিতীয় পুৰুষৰ তুচ্ছার্থতহে (তই) ব্যৱহাৰ হয়।

ঘ) সম্বন্ধবাচক শব্দত দূতৰপীয়া বিভক্তি প্ৰয়োগ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ একক বৈশিষ্ট্য। হিন্দী, তামিল আৰু অসমৰ জনগোষ্ঠীয় ভাষাত এই বিশেষত্ব নাই। অসমীয়া ভাষাত প্ৰথম পুৰুষত সম্বন্ধবাচক বিভক্তি যোগ নহয়। দ্বিতীয় আৰু তৃতীয় পুৰুষত মান্যার্থ আৰু তুচ্ছার্থত বেলেগ বেলেগ বিভক্তি যোগ হয়। অৱশ্যে দ্বিতীয় পুৰুষৰ মান্যার্থৰ আপুনি আৰু তৃতীয় পুৰুষৰ সম্বন্ধবাচক বিভক্তিৰ চিন একেই। ন-শিকাৰুসকলে পুৰুষ অনুসৰি সম্বন্ধপদত যোগ হোৱা বিভক্তিৰ প্ৰয়োগৰ প্ৰতি

উদাসীন হৈ থাকে। তেওঁলোকে তলত উল্লেখ কৰা ধৰণৰ বাক্যত সম্বন্ধপদৰ
বিভক্তি ব্যৱহাৰ নকৰে। উল্লেখযোগ্য যে বৰ্তমান প্ৰজন্মৰ অসমীয়া
মাতৃভাষীসকলেও সম্বন্ধপদৰ বিভক্তি প্ৰয়োগ নকৰে।

উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে,

অসমীয়া ভাষাত,

প্ৰথম পুৰুষত

- মোৰ মাক মাতা (সম্বন্ধপদ মা + কৰ্মকাৰকৰ বিভক্তি)

দ্বিতীয় পুৰুষত,

- তোমাৰ (মান্যার্থ) মাৰাক মাতা।

(সম্বন্ধপদ মা + সম্বন্ধপদৰ বিভক্তি + কৰ্মকাৰকৰ বিভক্তি)

- তোৰ (তুচ্ছার্থ) মাৰক মাত।

(সম্বন্ধপদ মা + সম্বন্ধপদৰ বিভক্তি + কৰ্মকাৰকৰ বিভক্তি)

- আপোনাৰ (অধিক মান্যার্থ) মাকক মাতক।

(সম্বন্ধপদ মা + সম্বন্ধপদৰ বিভক্তি + কৰ্মকাৰকৰ বিভক্তি)

তৃতীয় পুৰুষত,

- তাৰ/তাই (তুচ্ছার্থ) মাকক মাতক

তেওঁৰ/এওঁৰ/এখেতৰ/তেখেতৰ (মান্যার্থ) মাকক মাতক।

বাক্য গঠনমূলক স্তৰ (Syntactical Level)

বাক্য গঠনৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত সাধাৰণতে কৰা ভুলবোৰ কাৰক আৰু বিভক্তিৰ
ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত হয়। বিভক্তি ব্যৱহাৰ নকৰাকৈয়ে বাক্য গঠন কৰে।

উদাহৰণস্বৰূপে,

- তোমালোকে বল খেলি আছে। (you are playing ball)

(কৰ্তা+কৰ্তাকারকৰ বিভক্তি)

বাক্যটোত কৰ্তা কাৰকৰ -এ বিভক্তি যোগ হৈছে। শিকাৰুৱে ক'ত, কেতিয়া, কেনেদৰে বিভক্তিৰ প্ৰয়োগ হয় সেই ক্ষেত্ৰত তেওঁলোক দোধোৰমোধোৰত পৰে। বিশেষকৈ লিখাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত এনেধৰণৰ বাক্যগত ভুলবোৰ দৃষ্টিগোচৰ হয়। ওপৰত দিয়া উদাহৰণটো যদি লওঁ তেওঁলোকে তলত উল্লেখ কৰাৰ ধৰণেৰে লিখে—

- তোমালোক বল খেলি আছা। (you are playing ball)
(কৰ্তা+ ?)

শিকাৰুৱে কোৱা কেইটামান ভুল বাক্য এনেধৰণৰ—

- ৰামে স্কুললৈ গ'ল (ৰাম কৰ্তাৰ লগত কৰ্তা বিভক্তি -এ যোগ কৰে)
- গৰু ঘাঁই খায়। (কৰ্তা বিভক্তি লোপ)
- দেউতায়ৈ আজি অফিচলৈ নাযায়। (দেউতা কৰ্তাৰ লগত কৰ্তা বিভক্তি -এ যোগ কৰে)

লিখন সমস্যা (Orthographic Level)

অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ আখৰ-জোঁটনি এটা ডাঙৰ সমস্যা। ১৮১৩ চনত আত্মাৰাম শৰ্মাই নতুন নিয়ম খণ্ডৰ আৰম্ভণিতে থকা 'নামোচাৰণৰ বৰ্ণ বিচাৰ' শিতানেৰে আখৰ-জোঁটনিৰ সমস্যা সম্পৰ্কে প্ৰথম আলোচনাৰ বাট মুকলি কৰিছিল। প্ৰথম অসমীয়া আলোচনী 'অৰুণোদই'ত মিছনেৰীসকলে 'আখৰৰ যিমান জাতি তিমানহে লিখিব লাগে, একে জাতিৰে দুই তিনি প্ৰভেদৰ সকাম নাই' বুলি আখৰ-জোঁটনিৰ সবলীকৰণৰ প্ৰচেষ্টা কৰিছিল। মাইলছ ব্ৰনছনে তেওঁৰ 'অসমীয়া ইংৰাজী অভিধান'ত আৰু নাথান ব্ৰাউনে তেওঁৰ ব্যাকৰণত অসমীয়া লোকৰ উচ্চাৰণ ৰীতিৰ ওপৰত ভিত্তি কৰি অসমীয়া শব্দৰ আখৰ-জোঁটনি নিৰ্ধাৰণ কৰিবলৈ যত্ন কৰিছিল। হেমচন্দ্ৰ বৰুৱাই তেওঁৰ ব্যাকৰণ আৰু অভিধানত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ আখৰ-জোঁটনিৰ আউল লগা জোঁট ভাঙিবৰ যত্ন কৰিছিল।

ক) আখৰ-জোঁটনিৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ শিকাৰুসকলে সততে কৰা কেইটামান ভুল হৈছে—

- হ্রস্ব স্বৰধ্বনি আৰু দীৰ্ঘ স্বৰধ্বনি ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- চ, ছ আৰু জ, য ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- দন্ত্য ন আৰু মূৰ্ধন্য ণ ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- ব আৰু ৰ ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- শ, ষ, স ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- চন্দ্ৰবিন্দু ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত
- ৰ আৰু ড় ৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত

খ) অসমীয়াত একেটা শব্দৰে কিছুমান ব্যঞ্জনত অ-স্বৰ উচ্চাৰিত হয়, কিছুমানত নহয়। অ-স্বৰ উচ্চাৰিত নোহোৱা ব্যঞ্জনক হলন্ত ব্যঞ্জন বোলে। এনে বৰ্ণ বুজাবলৈ বৰ্ণটোৰ তলত যিটো চিন দিয়া হয় তাক হলন্ত বোলে। কিন্তু বহুতো ব্যঞ্জনান্ত হ'লেও তলত হলন্ত চিনটো লিখা নহয়। সকলো শব্দতে ব্যঞ্জনৰ উচ্চাৰণ জনা সম্ভৱ নহয়। সেইকাৰণে ন-শিকাৰুসকলৰ উচ্চাৰণত খেলিমেলি লাগে; তেতিয়া অৰ্থৰ ভিন্নতা বুজা নাযায়। যেনে—

স্বৰান্ত

পাৰ্ (side)

বাৰ্ (day)

ব্যঞ্জনান্ত

পাৰ (pigeon)

বাৰ (twelve)

গ) অসমীয়া ভাষাত যুক্তাক্ষৰ বেছি। যুক্তাক্ষৰ থকা শব্দবোৰ পঢ়া আৰু লিখা দুয়োটা কাৰ্যতে শিকাৰুসকলে কঠিন পায়। পাঠ্যক্ৰমৰ নিৰ্দিষ্ট সমসসীমাৰ ভিতৰত আটাইখিনি যুক্তাক্ষৰ শিকি আয়ত্ত কৰা দুৰ্বিসহ হৈ পৰে।

ভাষাৰ প্ৰসাৰত আখৰ-জোঁটনিয়ৈ ব্যাঘাত জন্মায়। উচ্চাৰণৰ লগত আখৰ-জোঁটনিৰ সমন্বয় নহ'লে ন শিকাৰুৱে ভাষা আয়ত্ত কৰিবলৈ টান পায়। ফলত অন্য ভাষাৰ প্ৰভাৱ বেছিকৈ পৰে। প্ৰভাৱৰ ফলত যাতে ভাষাই নিজস্ব ৰূপটো হেৰুৱাই নেপেলায় সেই বিষয়েও চিন্তা কৰা প্ৰয়োজন। ভাষা উপযোগী আধুনিক যন্ত্ৰপাতি ব্যৱহাৰৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতো আখৰ-জোঁটনিয়ৈ সমস্যাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰে।

সমস্যাৰ সম্ভাৰ্য সমাধান

দ্বিতীয় ভাষাশিক্ষণৰ সময়ত বহু সমস্যাৰ সৃষ্টি হয়; কিন্তু সঠিক পদ্ধতি অনুসৰণ কৰিলে এই সমস্যাবোৰৰ সমাধান সম্ভৱ। তলত সমস্যা সমাধানৰ সম্ভাৰ্য উপায় কেইটামান দিয়া হৈছে—

১) ধ্বনিগত সমস্যাসমূহ নোহোৱা কৰিবলৈ হ'লে ভাষা শিক্ষণ কেন্দ্ৰসমূহত ধ্বনি গৱেষণাগাৰ (Speech Laboratory) থকা বাঞ্ছনীয়। প্ৰত্যেক ভাষাৰ ধ্বনিৰ উচ্চাৰণৰ স্থান আৰু ধৰণ বেলেগ বেলেগ। পৰীক্ষাগাৰত প্ৰতিটো ধ্বনিৰ উচ্চাৰণ শুনি আৰু ক'ত কেনেদৰে উচ্চাৰিত হৈছে তাক চকুৰে প্ৰত্যক্ষ কৰি শিকাবলৈ উচ্চাৰণৰ অভ্যাস কৰিব পাৰে।

২) ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ বাবে উপযুক্ত পৰিবেশ বচনা কৰিব লাগিব। অডিঅ'-ভিজুৱেল (audio-visual) পদ্ধতিৰে শিক্ষণৰ ব্যৱস্থা কৰিব লাগিব, যাতে শিক্ষাৰ্থীসকলে নিজ কাণেৰে শুনি বা দেখি বিষয়বস্তু আহৰণ কৰিব পাৰে। শ্ৰেণীকোঠাত প্ৰজেক্টৰৰ সুবিধা থাকিলে শিক্ষকজনে শিকাবলগীয়া বস্তুটো প্ৰজেক্টৰৰ সহায়ত ডাঙৰকৈ দেখুৱাব পাৰে।

৩) কি উদ্দেশ্য লৈ শিকাবলৈ ভাষা এটা শিকিব বিচাৰিছে তাৰ ওপৰত ভাষাৰ শিক্ষণ প্ৰণালী বহু পৰিমাণে নিৰ্ভৰ কৰে। নতুন ঠাই এখনত ফুৰিবলৈ গ'লে সেই ঠাইৰ স্থানীয় ভাষাৰ কিছু বাক্য শিকিব বিচৰা কথাটো ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ অন্তৰ্গত। তেনে ক্ষেত্ৰত শিকাবলৈ জনক কেইটামান বাক্য ক'ব পৰাকৈ শিকালেই হ'ব। অন্যহাতে ভাষা এটা খৰচি মাৰি শিকিবলৈ হ'লে দীঘলীয়া সময় অৰ্থাৎ ডেৰ-দুবছৰৰ প্ৰয়োজন হয়।

৪) কথা কোৱা, পঢ়া আৰু লিখা কাৰ্যবোৰ দৈনিক অভ্যাস কৰিব লাগিব। নতুন শব্দবোৰ লিখি ৰাখি ফ্লেচকাৰ্ড প্ৰস্তুত কৰি সেইবোৰেৰে বাক্য গঠন কৰিবলৈ যত্ন কৰিব লাগে।

৫) লক্ষ্যভাষাৰ গান শুনি, বাতৰি-কাকত, আলোচনী পঢ়ি আৰু চলচ্চিত্ৰ চাই ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ অভ্যাস কৰিব পাৰে।

৬) নতুন নতুন প্ৰযুক্তি যেনে- Bing, google translate, ChatGPT, deep Shik আৰু স্পীকিং এপবিলাকৰ সহায় লৈয়ো ভাষা শিক্ষণ প্ৰণালী সহজ কৰিব পাৰি।

৭) দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষণৰ পাঠ্যপুথি স্তৰীকৃত হোৱা প্ৰয়োজন।

৮) দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ ব্যাকৰণ কেতিয়াও পোনপটীয়াকৈ শিকাব নালাগে। ব্যাকৰণৰ জটিল বিষয়বোৰে শিকাৰুৰ বাবে শিক্ষণীয় বিষয় বেছি কঠিন কৰে। পাঠ্যপুথি প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতেই প্ৰতিটো পাঠৰ শেষত, সেই পাঠটোত পোৱা ব্যাকৰণগত বিষয়বোৰ সহজকৈ ব্যাখ্যা কৰি যাব লাগে।

সিদ্ধান্ত

- ১) শিকাৰুৰ মাতৃভাষাই অসমীয়া ভাষা শিক্ষণত প্ৰভাৱ পেলায়।
- ২) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ভাষিক বৈশিষ্ট্যই শিক্ষণত প্ৰভাৱ পেলায়।
- ৩) প্ৰচলিত বৰ্ণমালাৰ কিছু সংস্কাৰ ঘটাই আখৰ জোঁটনি অলপ পৰিমাণে হ'লেও উচ্চাৰণভিত্তিক হ'লে এনেধৰণ সমস্যা হ্রাস পাব।

উপসংহাৰ

ওপৰৰ আলোচনাপৰাএটা কথা বুজা যে বিভিন্ন ভাষিক পটভূমিৰপৰা অহা দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ শিকাৰুসকলৰ সকলো ভুল মাতৃভাষাৰ প্ৰভাৱত নহয়। “ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰীয়ে নিজে মগজু খটুৱাই দ্বিতীয় ভাষাৰ প্ৰাপ্ত জ্ঞানৰ ভিত্তিত কিছুমান সাধাৰণীকৰণ (generalization) কৰে আৰু তাৰ প্ৰয়োগ কৰি নতুন নতুন ৰূপ সৃষ্টি কৰে। কেতিয়াবা এনে প্ৰয়াস অতি-সাধাৰণীকৰণত পৰিণত হয়; তাৰ ফলতো ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰীয়ে ভুল কৰে”। অসমীয়া শিকি থকা বিভিন্ন শিক্ষাৰ্থীয়ে একে ধৰণৰ ভুলৰ পুনৰাবৃত্তি নকৰিবৰ বাবে ভাষা শিক্ষকসকলে প্ৰতিৰোধমূলক ব্যৱস্থা ল'ব লাগিব। ভাষা শিক্ষকসকলে সাধাৰণতে ভুলৰ উৎসৰ প্ৰতি বিশেষ গুৰুত্ব নিদিয়াকৈ দ্বিতীয়

শিকাৰুৱে কৰা ভুলবোৰ শুধৰোৱাত ব্যস্ত হৈ থাকিলে নহ'ব। ভাষা শিক্ষকসকলে প্ৰথমে ভুলৰ কাৰণবোৰ বিচাৰ কৰি চাব লাগিব। সম্ভৱ হ'লে ভেদাত্মক বিশ্লেষণৰ নীতি আৰু পদ্ধতি ব্যৱহাৰ কৰি শিক্ষার্থীৰ মাতৃভাষা আৰু লক্ষ্য ভাষাৰ তুলনামূলক অধ্যয়ন কৰি মাতৃভাষা আৰু লক্ষ্য ভাষাৰ মাজত পোৱা পাৰ্থক্যৰ তালিকা প্ৰস্তুত কৰিব লাগে। এনেদৰে তালিকা প্ৰস্তুত কৰি লোৱাৰ পিছত শিকাৰুসকলক সচেতন কৰিবলৈ আৰু লেখন আৰু কথন কৌশল উন্নত কৰিবলৈ ড্ৰিলিং, সম্প্ৰসাৰণ, পুনৰাবৃত্তি আদিৰ দৰে প্ৰতিকাৰমূলক ব্যৱস্থা গ্ৰহণ কৰিব পাৰে। ভেদাত্মক ভাষাবিজ্ঞানে দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিক্ষাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত শিক্ষক আৰু শিকাৰুৰ উভয়ৰে সুবিধাৰ্থে দুটা ভাষাৰ মাজত থকা ভেদসমূহ বিতংভাৱে বিশ্লেষণ কৰাৰ পোষকতা কৰে। শিক্ষণৰ আসোঁৱাহবোৰ আঁতৰাবৰ বাবে শিক্ষণ সামগ্ৰী ইমান গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ নহয়। গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ কথাটো হ'ল ভাষাটো শিকাৰৰ বাবে কেনে ধৰণৰ আঁচনি প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছে। দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকাৰ বয়সৰ কোনো সময়সীমা নাথাকে। বিভিন্ন প্ৰয়োজনতহে প্ৰাপ্তবয়স্ক ব্যক্তি এজনে বয়সত দ্বিতীয় ভাষা শিকে। বয়স বেছি হোৱাৰ হেতু তেওঁৰ বুজন ক্ষমতা কম হ'ব পাৰে। সেই অনুপাতে আগ্ৰহো কমি যায়। পাঠ্যবস্তুৰ বিষয়জ্ঞান পূৰ্বপৰিচিত নোহোৱাৰ বাবেও ভাষা আহৰণত কঠিনতা আহে। আকৌ ভাষাটো শিকাৰ পিছতো শিকাৰুৱে ক'বলৈ লাজ কৰে। তেওঁলোকৰ মনত দ্বিধাবোধ থাকে, যদি ভাষাটো ব্যৱহাৰ কৰোতে কৰবাত ভুল হয়, শব্দৰ অশুদ্ধ প্ৰয়োগ হ'ব পাৰে বুলি মনত সংকোচ থাকে। গতিকে ভাষা এটা শুদ্ধকৈ শিকিবলৈ হ'লে শিকাৰুৰ আগ্ৰহৰ লগতে ভাষা শিক্ষকৰ বুদ্ধিদীপ্ত আঁচনিৰ প্ৰয়োজন।

সহায়ক গ্ৰন্থপঞ্জী :

অসমীয়া

কাকতী, গৌতম. তামূলী যোগেন (সম্পা.) (২০১১) অসমীয়া ভাষা আৰু ইয়াৰ প্ৰয়োগ, বিদ্যামন্দিৰ, লখিমপুৰ

গোস্বামী, গোলোক. (২০০৯) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উচ্চাৰণ, বনলতা, গুৱাহাটী

- - -, (২০০৩) অসমীয়া ব্যাকৰণ প্ৰৱেশ, বীণা লাইব্ৰেৰী, গুৱাহাটী
- দত্তবৰুৱা, ফণীন্দ্ৰ নাৰায়ণ. (২০১৭) প্ৰয়োগ ভাষা-বিজ্ঞানৰ ৰূপৰেখা, বিশাল
প্ৰকাশন, গুৱাহাটী
- - -, (২০১৬) আধুনিক ভাষা বিজ্ঞান পৰিচয়, বাণী প্ৰকাশ, গুৱাহাটী
- বৰুৱা, ভীমকান্ত. (২০০৩) অসমৰ ভাষা, বনলতা, ডিব্ৰুগড়
- - -, (২০১৭) অসমীয়া ভাষা, বনলতা, ডিব্ৰুগড়
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শব্দকোষ, ভাৰতীয় ভাষা সংস্থান, মহীশূৰ
- শইকীয়া বৰা, লীলাৱতী. (২০০৬) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ৰূপতত্ত্ব, বনলতা, গুৱাহাটী
- শৰ্মা, মদন. (১৯৯৫) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ শিক্ষণ পদ্ধতি, ষ্টুডেনটচ্ ষ্ট'ৰ্ভ্, গুৱাহাটী
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শ্ৰেণীকোঠা।

অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা

মিতুশ্ৰী বৰ্মন

সংক্ষিপ্তসাৰ

ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্ম হৈছে সমাজৰ দুটা প্ৰধান উপাদান। সমাজৰ লগত ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্ম ওতপ্ৰোতভাৱে জড়িত হোৱা হেতুকে উভয়ে পৰস্পৰে পৰস্পৰক প্ৰভাৱিত কৰে। ভাষাৰ উত্থানত সদায় ধৰ্মই ক্ৰিয়া কৰি আহিছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্থান তথা বিকাশতো বিভিন্ন সময়ত বিভিন্ন ধৰ্মই প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণতো শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মই পালন কৰা ভূমিকা বিশেষভাৱে উল্লেখনীয়। একেশ্বৰবাদী ধ্যান ধাৰণা তথা বিষ্ণু বা কৃষ্ণভক্তিৰ মাহাত্ম্য প্ৰতিষ্ঠা কৰাৰ লগতে জাতীয় জীৱনৰ স্থবিৰতা আঁতৰাই সঞ্জীৱনী সুধা ঢালি প্ৰাণ সঞ্চাৰ কৰা শংকৰদেৱৰ ভূমিকা জাতীয় জীৱনত একক আৰু অনন্য। শংকৰদেৱে সমগ্ৰ ভাৰতকে ধুই যোৱা বৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ পবিত্ৰ বাৰিধাৰাক অসমীয়া জনগণৰ হৃদয়চিন্তলৈ নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম নামেৰে বোৱাই আনি সকলোৰে হৃদয়ত জগাই তুলিছিল আধ্যাত্মিক চেতনা, নৈতিকতাবোধ তথা মানৱীয়তা। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ আৰু প্ৰসাৰৰ নিমিত্তে মূল বাহক হিচাপে লোৱা তেওঁৰ সৃষ্টিৰাজিয়ে অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনৰ বৌদ্ধিক, আধ্যাত্মিক, সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক ক্ষেত্ৰতেই নহয়, তাৎপৰ্যপূৰ্ণভাৱে ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। শংকৰদেৱে ভক্তিধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰৰ উদ্দেশ্যে সাহিত্য সৃষ্টি কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে লোকভাষাৰ প্ৰয়োগ কৰি জনগণক আকৃষ্ট কৰা, নতুন নতুন শব্দৰ প্ৰয়োগ কৰি অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ শব্দভাণ্ডাৰ বৃদ্ধি কৰা, নতুন ভাষা (ব্ৰজাৱলী)ৰ সৃষ্টি কৰা কথাই তেওঁৰ ভাষিক সচেতনতাকে দাঙি ধৰিছে। নতুন ভাষা সৃষ্টি কৰি আঞ্চলিকতাৰ পৰিধি ভাঙি বিশ্বজনীন ৰূপ দিয়াৰ প্ৰচেষ্টাও মনকৰিবলগীয়া। গতিকে উপেক্ষিত হৈ অহা শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষাচৰ্চাৰ দিশটোৰ লগতে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মই কিদৰে প্ৰভাৱিত কৰি আহিছে সেই বিষয়ে আলোচনা কৰাই পত্ৰখনৰ মূল উদ্দেশ্য।

বীজ শব্দ- শংকৰদেৱ, ভাষাৰ উত্থান, নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম, সাহিত্য, সমাজ

অৱতৰণিকা

কোনো এখন সমাজত অংগাঙ্গীভাৱে জড়িত দুটা উপাদান হৈছে ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্ম। সমাজ পাতি বাস কৰা মানুহৰ মাজৰ যোগাযোগৰ মাধ্যম হৈছে ভাষা, ই ব্যক্তিৰ চিন্তা-ভাৱনা জনাৰ মুখ্য সাধন। তদুপ সমাজখনক শৃংখলাবদ্ধভাৱে পৰিচালিত কৰিবলৈ প্ৰয়োজন হয় ধৰ্মৰ। ভাষাই সমাজ আৰু জাতিৰ উত্থান-পতন, সভ্যতা-সংস্কৃতিৰ স্বৰূপ ধৰি ৰাখে। সেয়ে একোটা জাতি বা সমাজ এখনৰ কথা জানিবৰ বাবে ওচৰ চাপিবলগীয়া হয় জাতিটোৱে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা ভাষাৰ। ঠিক সেইদৰে ধৰ্মও সমাজৰ অন্তৰ্ভুক্ত হোৱা হেতুকে ধৰ্মীয় দিশবোৰ জানিবলৈ কাষ চাপিবলগীয়া হয় সমাজখনত প্ৰচলিত ভাষাটোৰ। যিহেতু সমাজৰ লগত ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্ম ওতপ্ৰোতভাৱে জড়িত, সেয়ে পৰস্পৰে পৰস্পৰক প্ৰভাৱিত কৰে। ভাষাই ধৰ্মৰ কথা সংৰক্ষণ কৰে; ধৰ্মৰ স্বৰূপ, বৈশিষ্ট্য, ধৰ্মীয় বাণী আদি প্ৰচাৰ কৰিবলৈ প্ৰয়োজন হয় ভাষাৰ। একেদৰে ধৰ্ম বা ধাৰ্মিক অনুষ্ঠানৰ সত্তাৰ আলোকে ভাষাক নৱগতি প্ৰদান কৰে। ভাষা মানুহৰ চিন্তা, ধাৰণা তথা প্ৰজ্ঞাৰ মূৰ্ত প্ৰকাশ, তেনে চিন্তাক ধৰ্মই প্ৰভাৱিত কৰিলে ভাষা, ধৰ্মৰ লগত সমন্বিত হৈ এক স্বকীয় ৰূপত উদ্ভাসি উঠে। “ধৰ্মই মানুহৰ চিন্তা শক্তিত প্ৰত্যক্ষ প্ৰভাৱ পেলায়। লোক বিশ্বাসৰ মূল ভেটিও ধৰ্মীয় ধ্যান ধাৰণা। স্বাভাৱিকতে প্ৰকাশ ভঙ্গীৰ ওপৰত এইবোৰৰ প্ৰত্যক্ষ প্ৰভাৱ পৰে। পৃথিৱীৰ বিকশিত এনে এটা ভাষা নাই, য’ত ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰত্যক্ষ প্ৰভাৱ নাই। গ্ৰীক, লেটিন, সংস্কৃত, আৰবী আদি প্ৰত্যেক ভাষাতে এনে প্ৰভাৱ আছে।” (পাঠক, ৭১)।

ভাষাৰ উত্থানত সদায় ধৰ্মই ক্ৰিয়াকৰি আহিছে। নব্য ভাৰতীয় আৰ্য ভাষাসমূহৰ ভিতৰত উত্তৰ-পূব ভাৰতত প্ৰচলিত অন্যতম ভাষা অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্থান আৰু বিকাশতো সময়ে সময়ে বিভিন্ন ধৰ্মই প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। বৌদ্ধ সহজযানসকলৰ ধৰ্ম সাধনাৰ গীত চৰ্যাসমূহে পুৰণি অসমীয়াৰ স্বৰূপ ধৰি ৰাখিছে আৰু ইয়ে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ পূৰ্বৰূপ হিচাপে স্বীকৃত হৈছে। ইয়াৰ পৰা অনুমেয় যে বৌদ্ধ মহাযান শাখাই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ভেঁটি প্ৰতিষ্ঠাতাৰিহণা

যোগাইছে। মাধৱ কন্দলিৰ *ৰামায়ণ* আৰু তেওঁৰ উত্তৰসূৰী শংকৰ-মাধৱৰ চেষ্ঠাত অসমীয়া ভাষা-সাহিত্য আৰু এচাপ ওপৰলৈ উঠি অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ অনন্য ৰূপৰ সৃষ্টি কৰে। তেওঁলোকৰ সাহিত্য সৃষ্টিৰ গুৰিতে আছিল নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম। সমগ্ৰ ভাৰতবৰ্ষকে প্লাৱিত কৰা ভক্তিধৰ্মৰ এই বাৰিধাৰাক শংকৰদেৱে ন সাজেৰে সজাই নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধাৰাণাৰে অসমীয়া জনসমাজলৈ বোৱাই আনে। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ আৰু প্ৰসাৰৰ উদ্দেশ্যে শংকৰদেৱে সাহিত্যিক বাহন হিচাপে লোৱা যাত্ৰাত অসমীয়া ভাষা আছিল তাৰ চকৰি। যিমানেই ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰচাৰ কৰিলে সিমানেই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণ হ'ল। ফলস্বৰূপে অসমীয়া ভাষা ৰজাঘৰীয়া ভাষা হৈ পৰিল। ক'বলৈ গ'লে নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ জৰিয়তে অসমীয়া ভাষা ৰজা-প্ৰজা সকলোৰে ভাষা হৈ বৰ অসমত পৰিচিত হৈ পৰিল। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মই পূৰ্বৰ পৰা প্ৰচলিত অসমীয়া ভাষাটোৰ উত্তৰণৰ লগতে এক অভূতপূৰ্ব বৰঙণি যোগাইছিল ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টিৰে। একশৰণ নামধৰ্মক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি অসমীয়া ব্ৰজবুলিৰ সৃষ্টি হ'ল, ইয়াৰ গুৰিতে আছিল আঞ্চলিকতাৰ পৰিধি ভাঙি বিশ্বজনীনতাৰ পৰিচয় দিয়া। শংকৰদেৱে তথা তেওঁৰ সৃষ্টিৰাজিয়ে অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনত প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰাৰ সমান্তৰালভাৱে ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত গ্ৰহণ কৰা ভূমিকা বিশেষভাৱে দ্ৰষ্টব্য।

অধ্যয়নৰ গুৰুত্ব আৰু উদ্দেশ্য

সমাজৰ অবিচ্ছেদ্য অংশ ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্ম এটা আনটোৰ সৈতে সংপৃক্ত হৈ আছে। মানুহৰ মনৰ ভাৱ বিনিময়ৰ মাধ্যম হৈছে ভাষা আৰু মানুহৰ দ্বাৰা সৃষ্টসমাজৰ এক নৈতিক আচাৰ হৈছে ধৰ্ম। গতিকে মানুহৰ লগত জড়িত সমাজৰ এই দুয়োটা উপাদানে পৰস্পৰে পৰস্পৰক প্ৰভাৱিত কৰে। ধৰ্মৰ উত্থান মানেই ধৰ্মীয় বাণীসমূহ লিপিবদ্ধ হোৱা ভাষাটোৰ উত্থান তথা ধৰ্মৰ পতন মানে ধৰ্মৰ বাণী সংৰক্ষিত ভাষাটোৰ পতন। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্থানৰ গুৰিতে আছে সময়ে সময়ে উদ্ভৱ হোৱা বিভিন্ন ধৰ্ম। শংকৰদেৱৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মইও অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত অগ্ৰণী ভূমিকা গ্ৰহণ কৰি আহিছে। লগতে গীত আৰু নাটৰ

ৰচনাৰ বাবে এক নতুন ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰি অসমীয়া ভাষা-সাহিত্যক এক অনন্য মাত্ৰা প্ৰদান কৰে। শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰৱৰ্তিত ধৰ্মই আধ্যাত্মিক, সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক জগতক আলোড়িত কৰি তোলাৰ লগতে ভাষিক দিশটোতো এক অভূতপূৰ্ব বৰঙণি আগবঢ়াইছে। গতিকে শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা-চৰ্চা তথা নামধৰ্মৰ অসমীয়া ভাষালৈ আগবঢ়োৱা অৱদানৰ অধ্যয়নৰ যথেষ্ট তাৎপৰ্য্য আছে। গতিকে ‘অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা’ শীৰ্ষক বিষয়ৰ অধ্যয়ন অধিক গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ।

শংকৰদেৱৰ অসমত প্ৰচাৰিত নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মই আধ্যাত্মিক, সামাজিক, সাংস্কৃতিক তথা জাতীয় জীৱনত অভূতপূৰ্ব বৰঙণি আগবঢ়াই আহিছে যদিও তেওঁৰ এক অৱদান প্ৰায় চৰ্চাৰ পৰা উপেক্ষিত হৈ থাকে সেয়া হৈছে ভাষিক অৱদান। শংকৰদেৱৰ লোকভাষা প্ৰয়োগেই হওক, নতুন নতুন শব্দসৃষ্টিৰে শব্দভাণ্ডাৰ সংবৰ্দ্ধনেই হওক বা নতুন একোটা ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টিতেই হওক, তেওঁৰ ভূমিকা অনন্য। লগতে আঞ্চলিকতাৰ গণ্ডীৰ পৰা ওলাই ভাষা-সাহিত্যক বিশ্বজনীনতা প্ৰদানৰ যি উদ্দেশ্য সি শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষিক সচেতনতাকে দাঙি ধৰে। সেয়ে শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মই ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত কিদৰে প্ৰভাৱিত কৰিব তাৰ অধ্যয়ন কৰাই এই পত্ৰখনৰ উদ্দেশ্য। শংকৰদেৱৰ সাহিত্যত ব্যৱহৃত প্ৰাচীন অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ৰূপটোৰ অধ্যয়ন আৰু নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ উত্থানৰ লগে লগে সৃষ্ট ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ অধ্যয়নেৰে ভাষাৰ উত্থানত ধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা বিশেষকৈ শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা সম্পৰ্কে অধ্যয়ন কৰাই পত্ৰখনৰ মূল উদ্দেশ্য। ইতিমধ্যে শংকৰদেৱ তথা তেওঁৰ অৱদানক লৈ বহুতো চৰ্চা হৈছে যদিও শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্ম, ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষা তথা ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ ভূমিকা আদি বিষয়ৰ অধ্যয়নৰ প্ৰাসংগিকতা আছে। সেয়েহে আমাৰ সীমিত জ্ঞানেৰে ‘অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা’ শীৰ্ষক গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন বিন্দুমাত্ৰ প্ৰচেষ্টাৰে যুগুত কৰিছোঁ।

পদ্ধতি

‘অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা’ শীৰ্ষক গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনি বৰ্ণনাত্মক আৰু বিশ্লেষণাত্মক দুয়োটা পদ্ধতিৰে প্ৰস্তুত কৰা হৈছে। এই পত্ৰখনি প্ৰস্তুত কৰোঁতে মুখ্য আৰু গৌণ দুয়োটা উৎসৰ পৰা সমল গ্ৰহণ কৰা হৈছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকাৰ আলোচনা কৰোঁতে গৌণ উৎসৰ ভিতৰত বিষয়টোৰ সৈতে প্ৰাসংগিক কিতাপ-পত্ৰ, আলোচনী আদিৰ সহায় লোৱা হৈছে।

বিষয় অধ্যয়নৰ পৰিসৰ

‘অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা’ শীৰ্ষক পত্ৰখনত ধৰ্মৰ উত্থানে ভাষা একোটাৰ বিকাশত আগবঢ়োৱা অৱদান, বিশেষকৈ শংকৰদেৱৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা সম্পৰ্কে আলোচনা কৰা হৈছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ পুৰণি ৰূপটোৰ লগতে ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টিত নামধৰ্মৰ ভূমিকা এই আলোচনাৰ অন্তৰ্গত। এই দিশবোৰৰ কথা আলোচনা কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে শংকৰদেৱৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ লগতে শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত পৰিলক্ষিত ভাষিক সমলসমূহৰ বিশ্লেষণৰ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হৈছে। অৱশ্যে শংকৰদেৱৰ অনুগামী অন্যান্য বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলৰ প্ৰসংগ কোনো কোনো ক্ষেত্ৰত উত্থাপিত হৈছে যদিও তেওঁলোকৰ সাহিত্যৰাজিক আলোচনাৰ আওতালৈ অনা হোৱা নাই। গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনৰ পৰিসৰত কেবল শংকৰদেৱৰ নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰচাৰৰ বাবে বাহন হিচাপে লোৱা সাহিত্যৰাজিৰ জৰিয়তে হোৱা অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণৰ দিশটোত আলোকপাত কৰা হৈছে।

বিষয়বস্তুৰ বিশ্লেষণ

মানুহৰ বাগিত্ৰিয়ৰ দ্বাৰা সৃষ্ট ধ্বনি, শব্দ, মাত আদিৰ প্ৰণালীবদ্ধ সাজোনেৰে মানুহে এনে এটা মাধ্যম সৃষ্টি কৰে যাৰ সহায়ত পাৰস্পৰিক ভাৱ বিনিময় কৰিব পাৰি, সেই মাধ্যমটোৰ নামেই ভাষা। কোনো একোটা জনসমষ্টিৰ একত্ৰিত আচাৰ-

নীতিৰ বৈশিষ্ট্য যিয়ে সমষ্টিটোক শৃংখলাবদ্ধভাৱে পৰিচালিত কৰে সেয়াই ধৰ্ম। ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্মৰ মাজত সম্বন্ধৰ এনাজৰীডালৰ বাবে এটা আনটোৰ ওপৰত প্ৰত্যক্ষ বা পৰোক্ষভাৱে নিৰ্ভৰশীল। অতীজৰ পৰা ধৰ্ম একোটাৰ উত্থানৰ লগে লগে ভাষা একোটাই মৰ্যাদা লাভ কৰি আহিছে। ধৰ্মই যে ভাষাৰ বিকাশত এক গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা বহন কৰে সেই কথা পৃথিৱীৰ বিখ্যাত সাহিত্যসমূহে আঙুলিয়ায়। ইহুদি ধৰ্মৰ মাজেদি হিব্ৰু ভাষা, ইছলাম ধৰ্মৰ মাজেৰে আৰবী ভাষা, খ্ৰীষ্টান ধৰ্মৰ মাজেদি ইংৰাজী ভাষা, হিন্দু ধৰ্মৰ মাজেদি সংস্কৃত ভাষা আৰু বৌদ্ধ ধৰ্মৰ মাজেদি পালি ভাষাৰ উত্থান তথা বিকাশ পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। ইণ্ডো-ইউৰোপীয় শাখাৰ আৰ্য ভাষাৰ ক্ৰমবিকাশতো ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰভাৱ পোনপটীয়াকৈ পৰা লক্ষ্য কৰা যায়। হিন্দু ধৰ্মই যেতিয়া সমাজত প্ৰতিপত্তি লাভ কৰি আছিল সংস্কৃত ভাষাৰো ক্ৰমান্বয়ে উত্থান তথা উন্নতি হৈছিল। হিন্দু ধৰ্মৰ ঠাইত যেতিয়া বৌদ্ধ ধৰ্মই গা কৰি উঠিল লগে লগে বৌদ্ধ ধৰ্মৰ সাহিত্যৰ ভাষা পালিয়ে ঠন ধৰি উঠিল। সংস্কৃত ভাষাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কমি আহিল আৰু বৌদ্ধ ধৰ্মৰ উত্থানত পালি ভাষাৰ উত্থান হ'ল। গতিকে ধৰ্মৰ উত্থান-পতনৰ লগত ভাষাৰ উত্থান-পতন জড়িত হৈ থাকে।

নব্য ভাৰতীয় আৰ্য ভাষাসমূহৰ ভিতৰত উত্তৰ-পূব ভাৰতত প্ৰচলিত অন্যতম ভাষা হৈছে অসমীয়া। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্থানতো ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰভাৱ আছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ স্বতন্ত্ৰ লিখিত সাহিত্যৰ নিদৰ্শন খ্ৰীষ্টীয় চতুৰ্দশ শতিকাত পোৱা গ'লেও দশম শতিকাৰ চৰ্যাপদসমূহতে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উপাদান পোৱা যায়। এই চৰ্যাবোৰ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰাচীনতম সাহিত্যিক নিদৰ্শন। চৰ্যাপদসমূহ সহজযানসকলৰ ধৰ্ম সাধনাৰ গীত, ইয়ে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ পূৰ্বৰূপ ৰূপে স্বীকৃত হৈছে। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ স্বৰূপ, বৈশিষ্ট্য প্ৰসাৰত চৰ্যাপদৰ ভূমিকা অনস্বীকাৰ্য। ইয়াৰ পৰা অনুমান কৰিব পাৰি যে বৌদ্ধ মহাযান শাখাই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ভেঁটি প্ৰতিষ্ঠাৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা বহন কৰিছে। চৰ্যাব পিছত *শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণ কীৰ্তন*, *কাণখোৱা*, *ঘনুচা* পুথিয়ে বৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ ভেঁটি ৰোপণ কৰাৰ লগতে অসমীয়া ভাষাক আৰু এচাপ ওপৰলৈ তুলি

নিলে। মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ সপ্তকাণ্ড বামায়াণ আৰু তেওঁৰ উত্তৰসূৰী শংকৰ-মাধৱৰ চেষ্টাত অসমীয়া ভাষা-সাহিত্যই অন্য এক স্তৰলৈ গতি কৰে। এই সাহিত্যৰ মূলতে আছিল নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম। সমগ্ৰ ভাৰতবৰ্ষকে প্লাৱিত কৰা ভক্তিধৰ্মৰ এই পবিত্ৰ বাৰিধাৰাক শংকৰদেৱে ন সাজেৰে সজাই নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধাৰণাৰে অসমীয়া জন সমাজলৈ বোৱাই আনে। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰচাৰ আৰু প্ৰসাৰৰ উদ্দেশ্যে তেওঁ সাহিত্যিক বাহন হিচাপে লোৱা যাত্ৰাত অসমীয়া ভাষা আছিল তাৰ চকৰিস্বৰূপ। অসমীয়া ভাষাতে তেওঁলোকে বিভিন্ন গীত, পদ, ভটিমা, তত্বকথা আদি ৰচনা কৰিলে। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ প্ৰসাৰতাই অসমীয়া ভাষাটোৰ উত্তৰণ কৰিলে। অসমীয়া ভাষা ৰজাঘৰীয়া ভাষা হৈ পৰিল। সত্ৰসমূহৰ জৰিয়তে প্ৰচাৰ আৰু প্ৰসাৰ লাভ কৰি ৰজাঘৰীয়া ভাষা হৈ পৰাত ই ৰজাঘৰীয়া সাহিত্য বুৰঞ্জীৰো ভাষা হৈ পৰিল। ফলস্বৰূপে অসমীয়া ভাষা-সাহিত্যলৈ দুই শ্ৰেণীৰ সাহিত্যৰ আগমন ঘটে।

১) সত্ৰ সাহিত্য- চৰিত পুথি

২) ৰজাঘৰীয়া সাহিত্য- বুৰঞ্জী পুথি

অসমীয়া ভাষা ৰজা প্ৰজা সকলোৰে উমৈহতীয়া ভাষা হৈ পৰে। আহোম ৰাজ্য, কোচ ৰাজ্য আদি কেইবাখনো ৰাজ্যৰ ভাষা হৈ পৰাটোৱে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উন্নতিৰ ইংগিত সূচায়। ৰমেশপাঠকৰমতে অসমৰ একে আৰ্য ভাষাৰ পৰাই দুই ধৰণৰ লিখিত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ বিকাশ ঘটিছিল। পুৰণি অসমীয়া সাহিত্যত দুটা ধাৰা স্পষ্ট-

১) পৰিশীলিত ভাষাৰ ধাৰা

২) কথিত বাকভংগীৰ ধাৰা (সংযোগী ভাষা অসমীয়া)

প্ৰথম ধাৰাটোৰ স্বৰূপমাধৱ কন্দলী, হৰিবৰ বিপ্ৰ, ৰুদ্ৰ কন্দলী, কবিৰত্ন সৰস্বতী, শংকৰদেৱ, মাধৱদেৱ, ৰাম সৰস্বতী, অনন্ত কন্দলী, শ্ৰীধৰ কন্দলী, ভট্টদেৱ আদিৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। আনহাতে দ্বিতীয় ধাৰাটোৰ স্বৰূপ হেম সৰস্বতীৰ প্ৰহ্লাদ চৰিত, মনকৰৰ 'মনসা কাব্য' আদিত দেখিবলৈ পোৱা যায়।

শংকৰদেৱ তথা তেওঁৰ সৃষ্টিৰাজিয়ে অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনত প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰাৰ সমান্তৰালভাৱে ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। সেয়ে শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত গ্ৰহণ কৰা ভূমিকা বিশেষভাৱে দৃষ্টব্য। গতিকে উপেক্ষিত হৈ অহা শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষাচৰ্চাৰ দিশটোৰ লগতে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত শংকৰদেৱৰ প্ৰচাৰিত নামধৰ্মই কিদৰে প্ৰভাৱাধিত কৰি আহিছে সেই বিষয়ে বিচাৰ কৰিবলৈ হ'লে কেতবোৰ দিশ আলোচনাৰ আওতালৈ আহে। সেই দিশবোৰ ফাঁহিয়াই চাব পাৰি এনেদৰে-

ইতিপূৰ্বে উল্লেখ কৰা হৈছে প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী যুগতে স্বতন্ত্ৰ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ সাহিত্যিক নিদৰ্শন পোৱা যায়। কিন্তু প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী যুগৰ অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ সাহিত্যিক নিদৰ্শন আছিল অত্যন্ত সীমিত। কেইগৰাকীমান কবিৰ কাব্যকৃতিতে সেই সময়ৰ ভাষাৰ নিদৰ্শন আৱদ্ধ আছিল। বৈষ্ণৱ যুগত সাহিত্যৰ শাখাবোৰ বিশাল আৰু বৈচিত্ৰ্যপূৰ্ণ হৈ পৰে। ই কাব্যতে সীমাবদ্ধ নাথাকি গীত, পদ, নাট, ভটিমা, তাত্ত্বিক গ্ৰন্থ আদিলৈ বিস্তৃত হয়। সাহিত্যৰ বিষয়বস্তুৰ বৈচিত্ৰ্যই ভাষাতো বৈচিত্ৰতা আনে। যিহেতু সাহিত্যিক ৰূপভেদে ভাষাৰ ব্যৱহাৰো ভিন ভিন হয়, বৈষ্ণৱ যুগত সাহিত্যৰ শাখাবোৰৰ সংবৰ্দ্ধনে ভাষাটোৰ সমৃদ্ধি সাধনত অবিহণা যোগায়। ঠিক সেইদৰে প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী যুগতকৈ শংকৰী যুগত সাহিত্যৰ উৎসবোৰৰ বিস্তৃতিয়ে ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ বৈচিত্ৰপূৰ্ণ কৰি তোলে।

শংকৰদেৱে যিহেতু প্ৰত্যক্ষভাৱে ধৰ্মীয় আন্দোলন এটাক নেতৃত্ব দিবলগীয়া হৈছিল সেয়ে অসম তথা উত্তৰ-পূৱভাৰতৰ আঞ্চলিক পৰিৱেশ পৰিস্থিতিৰ ওপৰতো গুৰুত্ব দিবলগা হৈছিল। শংকৰদেৱে সৰ্বভাৰতীয় ভক্তি ধৰ্মৰ দ্বাৰা অনুপ্ৰাণিত হ'লেও অসমৰ পৰিৱেশ পৰিস্থিতি ভিন্ন হোৱা হেতুকে হুবহু ৰূপ এটা প্ৰচাৰ নকৰি আঞ্চলিকতাৰ ৰহণ সানিছিল। তাকে কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে অসমীয়া সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতি তথা ভাষাই স্বকীয় ৰূপ লাভ কৰিছিল। অসম তথা উত্তৰ-পূৱ ভাৰত আছিল অনাৰ্য অধুষিত অঞ্চল। শংকৰদেৱৰ সময়ত আৰ্য বৰ্ণ-হিন্দু সমাজখন ক্ষুদ্ৰ আছিল।

শংকৰদেৱে আৰ্য বৰ্ণ-হিন্দু সমাজখনৰ মাজতে ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ কৰা নাছিল, তেওঁ বিশাল জনসমাজৰ মাজত বিয়পি পৰিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰিছিল। সৰ্বসাধাৰণৰ মন শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণৰ প্ৰতি অনুৰক্ত কৰাৰ লগতে ভক্তিধৰ্মৰ গুঢ়াৰ্থ জনগণৰ মাজলৈ বোৱাই আনিবলৈ ভাষাৰ সৰ্বজন গ্ৰহণযোগ্য ৰূপ এটা নিৰ্মাণৰ চেষ্টা কৰিব লগা হৈছিল।

সৰ্বভাৰতীয় ভক্তি ধৰ্মৰ অন্যতম বৈশিষ্ট্য আছিল আঞ্চলিক ভাষাক গুৰুত্ব দিয়া। সেয়ে ভাৰতৰ বিভিন্ন প্ৰান্তত আঞ্চলিক ভাষাসমূহৰ বিকাশ হৈছিল। কথিত ভাষাৰ গুৰুত্ব সম্পৰ্কে কবীৰেকোৱা কথা এইক্ষেত্ৰত প্ৰণিধানযোগ্য-সংস্কৃত কূপজল, ভাষা বেহতা নীৰ। গতিকে বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলে সৰ্বসাধাৰণৰ ভাষাক শ্ৰদ্ধা জনাই ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছিল, এইক্ষেত্ৰত শংকৰদেৱ ভিন্ন নাছিল। এইখিনিতে বিশেষভাৱে দ্ৰষ্টব্য যে ভক্তি পৰিৱেশনৰ লগে লগে শাস্ত্ৰৰ তত্ত্ব প্ৰাঞ্জলকৈ ব্যাখ্যা আৰু নৈতিক আদৰ্শ দাঙি ধৰি জনসমাজক শিক্ষা দিয়া বৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্যৰ অন্যতম লক্ষ্য হোৱা হেতুকে সহজ সৰল ৰূপত সাহিত্যিক উপস্থাপন কৰাৰ প্ৰয়াসৰ বাবেও অসমীয়া ভাষা সৰলতাৰ দিশে গতি কৰে। অনন্ত কন্দলীয়ে সেয়ে এঠাইত লিখিছে- “শ্লোক সংস্কৃত আমি লিখিবাক ভাল জানি, তথাপি কৰিলো পদবন্ধ। স্ত্ৰী শূদ্ৰ আদি যত জানোক পৰম তত্ত্ব, শ্ৰৱণত মিলোক আনন্দ।” দামোদৰদেৱে তেওঁৰ প্ৰিয় শিষ্য ভট্টদেৱক কথাকপত ভাগৱত ৰচনা কৰিবলৈ উপদেশ দি কৈছিল-

আৰু এক জগত ঈশ্বৰ আজ্ঞা ধৰা।

কথা বন্ধে একখণ্ড ভাগৱত কৰা।।

পূৰ্বে মহাপুৰুষে কৰিলা দশস্কন্ধ।

কীৰ্তন ভটিমা ছবি দুলাড়ী সুছন্দ।।

তাত কৰি সুগম কৰিও ভাগৱত।

স্ত্ৰী শূদ্ৰ সৰ্বলোকে বুজে যেন মত।। (কথা ভাগৱত)

গতিকে ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰৰ বাবে জনগণৰ উদ্দেশ্যে শংকৰদেৱৰ আদৰ্শক অনুসৰণ কৰি শংকৰী যুগৰ কবিসকলেও সহজ ভাষাত সাহিত্য ৰচনা কৰাটোতে গুৰুত্ব

দিছিল। শ্ৰৱণ-কীৰ্তনৰ যোগে ভগবানৰ উপাসনা কৰা নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ অন্যতম লক্ষণ হোৱা হেতুকে ভাষাটোৰ সৰলীকৰণ আৱশ্যকীয় হৈ পৰিছিল। সাক্ষৰ-নিৰক্ষৰ, ব্ৰাহ্মণ-চণ্ডাল সকলোৰে ভক্তিধৰ্মত সম অধিকাৰ থকা বাবে সকলোৰে বোধগম্য ভাষা একোটাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰাটো প্ৰয়োজনীয় হৈ পৰিছিল। আনকি অনুদিত সাহিত্যসমূহতো মূলৰ পৰা জুমুঠিটো ৰাখি নিজৰ ৰুচি অনুযায়ী স্থানীয় পৰিৱেশৰ সংযোগ ঘটাই সৰল কৰি তুলিছিল। ভক্তিৰ মাহাত্ম্য আৰু নৈতিকভাৱ কাহিনীৰে বুজিবলৈ সকলোৰে বাবে সহজসাধ্য হৈছিল বাবে কাহিনী কথনৰ ওপৰত বিশেষ গুৰুত্ব আৰোপ কৰা হৈছিল। যিহেতু কাহিনী শুনি ভাল পোৱাটো মানুহৰ সহজাত প্ৰবৃত্তি, গতিকে বৈষ্ণৱ কাব্যই সেই অভিলাষ পূৰণ কৰিছিল আৰু তাকে কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে কবিসকলে অসমীয়া ভাষাটোক সৰলীকৃত কৰিছিল। এনেধৰণৰ বিভিন্ন কাৰণতে শংকৰদেৱ আৰু শংকৰী যুগ তথা ইয়াৰ পৰৱৰ্তী সময়তো নামধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ তথা প্ৰসাৰৰ বাবে বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলে ভাষাটোৰ প্ৰত্যক্ষ বা পৰোক্ষভাৱে উত্তৰণ ঘটাইছিল। শংকৰী যুগ তথা ইয়াৰ পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত ৰচিত সাহিত্যসমূহে পদ্য-গদ্য দুয়োটাৰ মাজেৰে অসমীয়া ভাষাটোক বিকাশৰ দিশে আগবঢ়াই নিয়ে।

শংকৰদেৱে তিনিখন ৰাজ্য (আহোম, কামৰূপ আৰু কোচবিহাৰ)ত ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ কৰিছিল। সেই কথাটোৱেও তেওঁৰ দ্বাৰাব্যৱহৃত ভাষাটোত যথেষ্ট বৈচিত্ৰতা আনিছে। এই বিশাল ভূ-খণ্ডৰ ভাষাৰ আঞ্চলিক বৈচিত্ৰই তেওঁৰ ৰচনাৰাজি তথা ভাষাক প্ৰভাৱিত কৰিছিল। বিভিন্ন উপভাষাৰ সমল আহি তেওঁৰ ভাষাত সোমাই পৰিছিল। সেয়ে প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী যুগতকৈ ভাষাটো গতিশীল, উদাৰ আৰু সাৰ্বজনীন হৈছিল।

শংকৰদেৱে ব্যাপক পৰিমাণে সাহিত্যৰ শাখাবোৰ ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ কাৰ্যত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছে। সৰ্বসাধাৰণৰ মন শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণৰ প্ৰতি অনুৰক্ত কৰাৰ লগতে ভক্তিধৰ্মৰ গুঢ়াৰ্থজনগণৰ মাজলৈ বোৱাই আনিছিল গীত, পদ, নাট, ভটিমা আদিৰ মাজেৰে। তেওঁৰ পাছতো মাধৱদেৱকে আদি কৰি শিষ্য-প্ৰশিষ্যসকলে গীত, পদ, নাট ৰচনা

কৰে। কিন্তু কীৰ্তনঘোষা, গুণমালা, বামায়ণ, ৰুক্মিণীহৰণ কাব্য, হৰিশ্চন্দ্ৰ উপাখ্যান, ভক্তি প্ৰদীপ তথা ভাগৱতৰ দশম স্কন্ধ আদিত পুৰণি অসমীয়া ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছে। “শংকৰদেৱৰ বিশাল সাহিত্যৰাজিৰ জৰিয়তে তিনিটা শৈলীৰ ভাষাৰ নিদৰ্শন পোৱা যায়- সংস্কৃত শৈলী, পুৰণি অসমীয়া ভাষা শৈলী আৰু ব্ৰজবুলি শৈলী”। (শইকীয়া, ২৫)।

অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণৰ বিষয়ে গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত আলোকপাত কৰা বাবে শংকৰদেৱৰ সাহিত্যৰাজিৰ সংস্কৃত শৈলীক বাদ দি পুৰণি অসমীয়া ভাষা শৈলী আৰু ব্ৰজবুলি শৈলীহে দাঙি ধৰিবলৈ চেষ্টা কৰা হৈছে। এটা কৃত্ৰিম সাহিত্যিক ঠাঁচত বৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্য ৰচিত হৈছে। এই বিষয়ত বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলে প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী কবি মাধৱ কন্দলী আদিয়ে প্ৰবৰ্তন কৰি যোৱা ঠাঁচকেই গ্ৰহণ কৰিছে। সম্প্ৰসাৰিত ধাতু প্ৰত্যয় ‘লাহা’, ‘বাহা’, ‘লাহি’, ‘বিহি’, ‘লন্ত’, ‘বন্ত’ আদি আৰু হা (তোহোৰ, আমহাৰ, সা (আমসাৰ) আদি সৰ্বনামৰ সম্প্ৰসাৰিত প্ৰত্যয়ৰ অধিক প্ৰয়োগ এই যুগৰ ৰচনাৰ অন্যতম লক্ষণ। কথিত আৰু কৃত্ৰিম দুয়ো শ্ৰেণীৰ বৈয়াকৰণিক ৰূপ প্ৰাক্ শংকৰী, শংকৰী আৰু উত্তৰ শংকৰী যুগৰ বৈষ্ণৱ কবিৰ ভাষাত পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। তোমাৰ, তোমাসাৰ, কৰিলো, কৰিলোহো, দেখিয়া, দেখি ইত্যাদি সমান্তৰাল ৰূপ সঘনে দৃষ্টিগোচৰ হয়। গ্ৰাম্য জীৱনৰ ঘৰুৱা চিত্ৰ দাঙি ধৰিব পৰা শব্দ, জতুৱা শব্দ আৰু বচনৰ প্ৰয়োগ মন কৰিবলগীয়া বিশেষত্ব। অপ্ৰয়োজনীয় নাসিক্য ধ্বনিৰ প্ৰয়োগ, বিপ্ৰকৰ্ষৰ দ্বাৰা শব্দৰ মাজৰ সংযুক্ত বৰ্ণ ভাঙি উচ্চাৰণ কোমল কৰাৰ ৰীতি, স্বৰসংগতিৰ দ্বাৰা শ্ৰুতিসাম্যৰ প্ৰচেষ্টা, তদ্ভৱ অৰ্থতৎসমৰ মাত্ৰাধিক্য ব্যৱহাৰ বিশেষভাৱে দেখা যায়। শংকৰদেৱৰ অংকীয়া নাট আৰু বৰগীতসমূহক বাদ দি আন ৰচনা (কীৰ্তন, দশম, ৰুক্মিণী হৰণ কাব্য আদি) ত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা ভাষাটো মাধৱ কন্দলীয়ে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা ভাষাটোৰ পৰম্পৰাত গঢ় লোৱা ভাষা। মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাৰ সৈতে শংকৰদেৱৰ অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী ৰচনাৰাজিৰ কেইটামান দৃষ্টান্ত দাঙি ধৰা হ’ল-

ক) শব্দ-বিভক্তি এ, ক, ব, ত আদিৰ প্ৰয়োগ একেদৰে বক্ষিত হৈছে-

- এ- কন্দলীৰ ভাষা- দশৰথে বোলন্ত
শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা- শংকৰে নিগদতি
ই- কন্দলীৰ ভাষা- ৰামক ৰথত তুলি
শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা- হৰিক স্মৰণে

খ) মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাৰ সৈতে শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিৰ অপাদান আৰু নিমিত্ত কাৰকৰ প্ৰয়োগ একে-

- অপাদান কাৰক - কন্দলীৰ ভাষা-স্বৰ্গে হন্তে
শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা- যশোদাত হন্তে
নিমিত্ত কাৰক- কন্দলীৰ ভাষা- ভৰত কাচক লাগি
শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা-পাঞ্চালক লাগি

গ) মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাত ব্যৱহৃত ক্ৰিয়াৰূপৰ সৈতে শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত ব্যৱহৃত ক্ৰিয়াৰূপৰ মিল লক্ষণীয়-

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

বৰ্তমান -কৰে, যাওঁ, নুবুজোহো, আছন্ত
অতীত -কৰিলা, গৈল, ভৈলন্ত, লৈলেক
ভৱিষ্যত-দিবো, যাইবো, পৰিব
অনুগ্ৰহ -কহিয়ো, চাৰা, দেওক
অসমাপিকা-ধৰিয়া, বসি
তুমুনন্ত-দিবাক, বুলিতে, খুজিত
কৃদন্ত-যুজন্তে, গাৰন্তে, আসিবাৰ, মৰিবাৰ
নাস্ত্যৰ্থক-নলাগে, নাজানস, নিদিল, নোশোভে

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

কৰে, কহোঁ, শুনোহো, মাতন্ত
সাধিলা, ভৈল, থৈলন্ত,
সুনিলেক
লুকাইব, পাইবো, খাইবো
কহিয়ো, কহা, শুনিয়োক
জিনিয়া, ডাকি, উপেখি
শুনিবাক, আসিতে, আৰাধিত
ফুৰন্তে, ফুৰন্তে, আসিবাৰ
নলাগয়, নেদে, নোবোলে

ঘ) মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাত ব্যৱহৃত প্ৰত্যয়ৰ সৈতে শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত ব্যৱহৃত প্ৰত্যয়ৰ মিল লক্ষণীয়-

নির্দিষ্টতাবাচক প্রত্যয় (গোট, খান, পাট, গোটা)

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

বাত্ৰিগোট, বথখান, শূলপাট, আঠগোটা

স্বার্থিক প্রত্যয়-(হো, হা)

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

জানিলোহো, দিবাহা, কবাহা

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

দিনগোট, কুৰিপাট, দোগোটা

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

থাকিবোহো, থাপিবাহা,

ভৈলোহো

সম্বন্ধবাচক-

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

বাপেৰ, মাৰেৰ

বহুবচনৰ প্রত্যয়- (সব, গণ, জাক, সা, ঠেৰ)

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

মাণিকসব, তাৰাগণ, সাধুজাক, তোমাসা, আমাথেৰ

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

ভায়েৰ

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

গৃহসব, ৰাজাগণ, দেৱজাক,

আমাসাক

ঙ) মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষাত ব্যৱহৃত সৰ্বনামৰ সৈতে শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত

ব্যৱহৃত সৰ্বনামৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতো সামঞ্জস্য লক্ষণীয়-

মাধৱ কন্দলীৰ ভাষা

তুমি, তয়ু, মোৰ, মোহোৰ

তোমাৰ, কেহো, তাক

শংকৰদেৱৰ ভাষা

তুমি, তয়ু, মোৰ, তোহোৰ

তোমাৰ, কেহো, তাক

এইবোৰ দিশৰ আলোচনাৰ পৰাই শংকৰদেৱৰ ৰচনাৰাজিত পুৰণি
অসমীয়া ভাষা শৈলীৰ প্ৰয়োগ মন কৰিব পাৰি।

শংকৰী সাহিত্যৰ অন্য এক শৈলী হৈছে ব্ৰজবুলি শৈলী যি সমগ্ৰ উত্তৰ-পূব
ভাৰতৰ মধ্যযুগৰ ভক্তিধৰ্মীয় সাহিত্যৰ ভাষা আছিল। এই ব্ৰজবুলি ভাষাক
শংকৰদেৱে অংকীয়া নাট আৰু বৰগীতসমূহৰ জৰিয়তে অসমত এক নতুন ৰূপত

গঢ় দিয়ে। এই ৰূপক ‘অসমৰ ব্ৰজবুলি’ বা ব্ৰজাৱলী কোৱা হয়। সৰ্বভাৰতীয় ভক্তি আন্দোলনৰ সৈতে একাত্মীয়তা প্ৰকাশ কৰিবলৈ শংকৰদেৱে আৰু মাধৱদেৱে অংকীয়াসমূহত এই ভাষাটো ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছে। শংকৰদেৱৰ নাটত ব্যৱহৃত ব্ৰজাৱলী সম্পৰ্কত কেশৱানন্দ দেৱগোস্বামীয়ে তিনিটা কথা উল্লেখ কৰিছে। (দেৱগোস্বামী, ৯)

১) ভগৱান শ্ৰীকৃষ্ণৰ দৰে অলৌকিক চৰিত্ৰৰ মুখত সৰ্বসাধাৰণৰ কথিত ভাষা দিলে চৰিত্ৰৰ গৌৰৱ হ্রাস আৰু মৰ্যাদা হানি হোৱাৰ আশংকা হয়তো কৰিছিল। আনহাতে কৃষ্ণ, গোপ-গোপী, নন্দ-যশোদা আদি চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ মুখত ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষা দিলে সাধাৰণ মানুহৰ সততে ব্ৰজধামলৈ মনত পৰিব।

২) ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাটো আছিল শক্তিশালী, শুৱলা আৰু মিঠা। বহুতো লোকৰ মাজত সুৰ লগাই মাতি দৰ্শকক আকৃষ্ট কৰিবলৈ এনে ভাষাই উপযুক্ত হ’ব বুলি ভাবিছিল।

৩) তদানীন্তন অসমৰ ভূখণ্ডত বসবাস কৰি থকা কিৰাত, কছাৰী, খাচী, গাৰো, মিৰি, যৱন, কংক, গোৱাল আদি বিভিন্ন গোষ্ঠীৰ ভাষা-ভাষীয়ে সহজে বুজিব পৰাকৈ আৰু অসমৰ চাৰিসীমা অতিক্ৰম কৰিও ওচৰ-পাজৰৰ বংগ, বিহাৰ, উৰিষ্যা, নেপাল আদিৰ লোকে সহজতে বুজিব পৰাকৈ এনে এটা উমৈহতীয়া ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টি কৰাও বোধকৰো শংকৰদেৱৰ উদ্দেশ্য আছিল।

উক্ত মতৰ ওপৰত ভিত্তি কৰি ক’ব পাৰি জনসাধাৰণৰ মাজত প্ৰচলিত কথ্য ৰূপৰ পৰিৱৰ্তে ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাই মধ্যযুগত সংস্কৃতৰ ঠাইত দেৱভাষা ৰূপ পাইছিল। ব্ৰজবুলি ভাষাৰ লগত কৃষ্ণৰ জন্মস্থান জড়িত আছিল। ভাষাটো সহজ-সৰল, আকৰ্ষিত হোৱাৰ লগতে ব্ৰজবুলিয়ে সৰ্বভাৰতীয় বৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্যৰ মাজৰ সম্পৰ্কটোও অধিক সুদৃঢ় কৰি তোলাত সহায় কৰিলে। ইয়াৰোপৰি ক’ব পাৰি যে শংকৰদেৱে বিভিন্ন ঠাইত তীৰ্থভ্ৰমণ কৰোঁতে বিভিন্ন সন্ত-মহন্তসকলক লগ পায়। ফলস্বৰূপে এক ভাৰতীয় চেতনা তেওঁৰ মনত জাগ্ৰত হোৱাত সহায়ক হৈছিল।

ইয়াৰ কাৰণে ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষা প্ৰয়োগ হোৱাত সহায়ক হৈছিল। ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাক সাধাৰণ লোকৰ বুজিব পৰা ভাষা হিচাপে সন্তাৱলীত লিখিছে এনেদৰে-

পাণ্ডিতে বুজিবে শ্লোক কৰিল বচন।

গীত অৰ্থ বুজিবেক দ্বিজ সভ্যগণ।।

ব্ৰজাবাসী ভাষাক বুজিবে গ্ৰামীলোক।

চো মুখা দেখিবেক অজ্ঞ মুঢ় লোক।।

ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় সংহতি বা আৱেগিক ঐক্য ৰক্ষা কৰি ভাৰতীয় জনসাধাৰণৰ মাজত প্ৰচলিত ভাষাৰ পৰা উন্নত তথা সংস্কৃত ভাষাতকৈ সহজ ৰূপত ব্ৰজবুলি বা ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষা সৃষ্টি কৰে। মধ্যযুগীয় বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলে ভৌগোলিক সীমাবদ্ধতাৰ পৰা আঁতৰি আহি এই ভাষাত বিপুল সঁহাৰি লাভ কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হয়। অসম, বংগ, উৰিষ্যা, নেপাল ৰাজ্যকেইখনত ভাষাটোৱে বিশেষ প্ৰসাৰতা লাভ কৰে। বিশেষকৈ এই ভাষাৰ জৰিয়তে নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰ কৰি এক জাগৰণ সৃষ্টি কৰিবলৈ সক্ষম হোৱাৰ লগতে ইয়াৰ পৰিসৰো বৃদ্ধি পায়। ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্মই পৰস্পৰ নিৰ্ভৰশীল হোৱাৰ ই এক জ্বলন্ত উদাহৰণ। বৰগীত, অংকীয়া নাট আৰু ভক্তিমূলক গীত-পদ কিছুমানত এই ভাষাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা হৈছিল। শংকৰদেৱৰ দ্বাৰা বদৰিকাশ্ৰমত ৰচিত 'মন মেৰি ৰাম চৰণেহি লাগু' বৰগীতটি অসমীয়া ব্ৰজাৱলীৰ প্ৰথম ৰচনা। অসমীয়া ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাত পৰিলক্ষিত কেতবোৰ বৈশিষ্ট্য এনেধৰণৰ-

ক) ধ্বনিগত

হ্ৰস্ব আৰু দীৰ্ঘ স্বৰৰ পাৰ্থক্যহীনতা, দীৰ্ঘস্বৰ হ্ৰস্বলৈ ৰূপান্তৰিত হয়। আ, ঙ, উ ঙ্ৰমে অ, ই, উ লৈ পৰিৱৰ্তন

আ>অ-আভৰণ>অভৰণ

নয়না>নয়ন

ঙ>ই- হীন >হিন; পানী >পানি; নাৰী>নাৰি

দন্ত্য-মূৰ্ধন্যৰ পাৰ্থক্যহীনতা; ধ্বনি-প্ৰবৃত্তি দন্ত্যৰ ফালে।

যেনে-প্ৰাণ>প্ৰান; গণ>গন

শ,ষ, স ঋনি ব্যবহাৰৰ যথোচিত নিয়ম দেখা নাযায়।

শিশুপাল >সিসুপাল; প্ৰকাশ>প্ৰকাস; বিষ>বিস

ম -ৰ বাহিৰে স্পৰ্শ বৰ্ণৰ আগত যুক্ত থকা শ, ষ, স -ৰ আগৰ স নাইকিয়া

হয়।

স্থিত >থিত; ঋক্ষ >কক্ষ

স্বৰৰ মাজৰ মহাপ্ৰাণ হ -লৈ পৰিৱৰ্তন হয়।

মুখ >মুহ

স্বৰভক্তিৰ সঘন ব্যৱহাৰ ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ অন্যতম বৈশিষ্ট্য।

অগ্নি>অগনি; স্ত্ৰী>তিবী; ভক্ত>ভকত

খ) ৰূপতাত্ত্বিক বৈশিষ্ট্য

ব্ৰজবুলিত স্বতন্ত্র বহুবচনাত্মক প্ৰত্যয় পোৱা নাযায়। সেয়েহে পূৰ্ব প্ৰচলিত অনেক, সকল, গণ, সব, কুল আদি বহুবচনাত্মক প্ৰত্যয়ৰ প্ৰয়োগ হয়।

যেনে- সভাসদলোক, সখিগণ, সিসুসব

বহুবচন বুজাবলৈ একেটা শব্দৰে পুনৰাবৃত্তি কৰা পৰিলক্ষিত হয়।

যেনে-ঘৰে ঘৰে ফেৰুৱা আৰৱ কৰে।

বিভক্তিৰ প্ৰয়োগত দ্বিতীয়া আৰু চতুৰ্থী ভিন্ন আনবোৰৰ প্ৰয়োগ একে।

দ্বিতীয়াঃ কু- নন্দকু নন্দন

চতুৰ্থীঃ তে, ইতে- কান্দিত্তে লাগিল

দ্ৰিগ্যপদৰ তিনিও কালৰ প্ৰয়োগ মনকৰিবলগীয়া।

অতীত-আৱলু, মিলল, কয়ল, বহল

বৰ্তমান - কৰতু, চৰহ, কৰো, দেখহ

ভৱিষ্যত- কহব, দেৱব

ব্ৰজবুলিত সৰ্বনামৰ প্ৰয়োগ মন কৰিবলগীয়া।

যেনে-হামাৰ, হামি, তোহাৰি, হামু, তুহু, তুআ, তাহো, মেৰি

শব্দ প্ৰয়োগৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত তৎসম, অৰ্ধতৎসম, তদ্ভব শব্দৰ উপৰিও অনেক ঘৰুৱা শব্দ, প্ৰাকৃত ৰূপৰ শব্দ, সংযুক্ত শব্দ, সংস্কৃত ৰূপৰ প্ৰয়োগ অন্যতম।

সংস্কৃত- জগজন জীৱন অজন জনাৰ্দন দনুজ দমন দুখহাৰী

অৰ্ধ-তৎসম-পৰণাম, সৰপ, দৰপ, নিৰজান

শংকৰদেৱৰ বচনাৰাজিত ব্যৱহৃত ব্ৰজাৱলী আৰু অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ মাজতো কেতবোৰ দিশত সাদৃশ্য পৰিলক্ষিত হয়-

ব্ৰজাৱলী আৰু অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ ক্ৰিয়া ৰূপ কিছুমান একে।

যেনে-অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী : কৰোঁ, কৰে, মৰয়, ভূজন্ত, ভৈল, আসিল, ধৰিলেক, হৈবে, সাধিবাকপ্ৰতি,আসি, জিনিয়া আদি।

ব্ৰজাৱলী : কৰোঁ, পৰে, দহয়, নপান্ত, ভৈল, পৰল, পাইলেক, বজাইবে, নিবাক প্ৰতি, পেখি, উপেখিয়া আদি।

অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাত ব্যৱহৃত বহুবচনৰ প্ৰত্যয় সব, চয়, বা, সম্বাআদি ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাতো আছে।

যেনে- বৃক্ষসব, প্ৰাণীচয়, তোৰা, তাসম্বাৰ

ঠিক সেইদৰে বিভক্তি প্ৰয়োগ, অপাদান কাৰক বুজাবলৈ হন্তে -ৰ প্ৰয়োগ আদিত মিল দেখা যায়।

গতিকে দেখা যায় যে শংকৰদেৱে নামধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰৰ উদ্দেশ্যে সাহিত্য বচনা কৰিবলৈ যাওঁতে যি ভাষা ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিছে সি ব্ৰজাৱলীয়েই হওক বা অনা ব্ৰজাৱলী অৰ্থাৎ পুৰণি অসমীয়া ভাষাই হওক, বিভিন্ন উপাদানেৰে সমৃদ্ধ হৈ স্বকীয়তা লাভ কৰিছে। নামধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰৰ উদ্দেশ্যে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা অসমীয়া ভাষাটোত কিছু পূৰ্ব ব্যৱহৃত নিয়ম বিকশিত হৈ, কিছু নতুনত্বৰ সংযোজন ঘটি উত্তৰণৰ দিশে গতি কৰে। বৰ্তমান মান্য অসমীয়াত ব্যৱহৃত ভাষিক ৰূপ কিছুমানৰ বিকাশো শংকৰী সাহিত্যতে পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। অক্ষীয়াৰ ভাষাতে বৰ্তমান মান্য অসমীয়াত ব্যৱহৃত

প্ৰায়বোৰ স্বৰ আৰু ব্যঞ্জন লিখিত ৰূপত বন্ধিত হৈছে। মান্য অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ঙ্গি আৰু নী সংযোগ কৰি লিংগ পৰিবৰ্তন কৰাৰ নিয়ম অক্ষীয়াৰ ভাষাতে পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। যেনেঃ কুমাৰ- কুমাৰী, অনাথ-অনাথিনী আদি। অক্ষীয়াৰ ভাষাতে ছয় প্ৰকাৰৰ কাৰকৰ ব্যৱহাৰ পোৱা যায়। বৰ্তমান মান্য অসমীয়াত ব্যৱহৃত প্ৰায়বোৰ কাৰক নিৰ্ণায়ক শব্দ-বিভক্তি শংকৰী সাহিত্যতে পোৱা যায়, অৱশ্যে দুই এক ব্যতিক্ৰমো পৰিলক্ষিত হয়। ঠিক সেইদৰে বৰ্তমান কালৰ ত্ৰিণা-ৰূপৰ লগত ওঁ ত্ৰিণা বিভক্তিৰ প্ৰয়োগ অন্যতম। যেনে- কৰোঁ, কৰোহোঁ, ধৰোঁ আদি।

সিদ্ধান্ত

পঞ্চদশ শতিকাৰ আশে পাশে বৈষ্ণৱ আন্দোলন আৰু ভক্তিধৰ্মক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি ভাৰতত সাংস্কৃতিক অভ্যুদয় ঘটিছিল। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ আন্দোলনে বেছিভাগ ক্ষেত্ৰত প্ৰান্তীয় ভাষাক প্ৰচাৰৰ মাধ্যম ৰূপে লোৱাত বিভিন্ন পুৰাণ, ইতিহাস প্ৰান্তীয় ভাষালৈ অনূদিত হ'বলৈ ধৰে আৰু ফলস্বৰূপে প্ৰান্তীয় ভাষাসমূহৰ শ্ৰীবৃদ্ধি হয়। অসমীয়া ভাষাও ইয়াৰ ব্যতিক্ৰম নহয়। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মৰ উত্থানে অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ ভূমিকা লৈছে। নৱবৈষ্ণৱ ধৰ্মই পূৰ্বৰ পৰা প্ৰচলিত অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণৰ লগতে এক অভূতপূৰ্ব বৰঙণি যোগাইছিল ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ সৃষ্টিৰে। একশৰণ নামধৰ্মক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি অসমীয়া ব্ৰজবুলিৰ সৃষ্টি হ'ল, ইয়াৰ গুৰিতে আছিল আঞ্চলিকতাৰ পৰিধি ভাঙি বিশ্বজনীনতাৰ পৰিচয় দিয়া। শংকৰদেৱ তথা তেওঁৰ সৃষ্টিৰাজিয়ে অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনত প্ৰভাব বিস্তাৰ কৰাৰ সমান্তৰালভাৱে ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত যি অৱদান আগবঢ়াইছে সি অভূতপূৰ্ব। অতীজৰে পৰা ভাৰতীয় সাহিত্যত ৰচিত হৈ অহা সাহিত্য কৰ্মসমূহ বিচাৰ কৰি চালেও দেখা যায় যে এই সাহিত্য কৰ্মসমূহৰ সৃষ্টি হৈছিল প্ৰধানকৈ ধৰ্মক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি। এই সাহিত্যসমূহৰ সৃষ্টিৰ বাবে একো একোটা ভাষাৰ শিষ্ট ৰূপৰ সৃষ্টি কৰি লোৱা হৈছিল। গতিকে ক'ব পাৰি সাহিত্যৰ ক্ষেত্ৰখনত ভাষা আৰু ধৰ্মৰ ওতপ্ৰোত সম্পৰ্ক আছে। ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰৰ বাবে

উৎকৃষ্ট ভাষা হ'ল মানুহৰ মুখৰ ভাষা বা স্থানীয় ভাষা। ধৰ্মীয় ক্ষেত্ৰত একোটা বিশেষ ভাষা বিশেষ ৰূপে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা দেখা যায়। ধৰ্মীয় মৰ্যাদা ৰাখিবলৈ মৌলিক ভাষা এটাত ধৰ্মীয় প্ৰলেপ দিয়া দেখা যায়। শংকৰদেৱেও ধৰ্ম প্ৰচাৰত ব্যৱহাৰ কৰা ভাষাটোত নতুনত্বৰ সঞ্চাৰ কৰি অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণ ঘটায়। পূৰ্বৰ পৰা প্ৰচলিত প্ৰাচীন অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ বিকাশ সাধনৰ লগতে ব্ৰজাৱলীৰ দৰে ভাষা একোটাৰ সৃষ্টিৰে অসমীয়া ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰখনত অনবদ্য অৱদান আগবঢ়াই বিচক্ষণতাৰ পৰিচয় দিয়ে।

উপসংহাৰ:

পূব ভাৰতৰ মধ্যযুগীয় বৈষ্ণৱ কবিসকলে ৰাষ্ট্ৰীয় সংহতি আৰু আৱেগিক ঐক্যৰ দৃষ্টি আগত ৰাখি যি এক আদৰ্শ ভাষাক কাব্য ৰচনাৰ মাধ্যমৰূপে গ্ৰহণ কৰিছিল সি ব্ৰজবুলি বা ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষা ৰূপে সমাদৃত। ভৌগোলিক সীমাবদ্ধতাক অতিক্ৰমি এই ভাষাই বিপুল জনসমাজৰ মাজত স্বকীয় গৰিমাৰে মহিমামণ্ডিত হ'বলৈ সক্ষম হৈছিল। ভক্তি সাহিত্যৰ বাৰিধাৰাত বিধৌত বৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্য আজিও ভক্ত হৃদয়ৰ মাজত প্ৰবাহমান। অসম, বঙ্গ, উৰিষ্যা আৰু নেপালৰ ভক্ত কবিসকলৰ ঐকান্তিক প্ৰচেষ্টাত বিশেষকৈ পদাৱলী সাহিত্যই ব্ৰজবুলি ভাষাৰ সাজ পিন্ধি বৃহৎ ভূ-খণ্ডৰ সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতিত এক নৱজাগৰণৰ সৃষ্টি কৰিবলৈ সমৰ্থ হৈছিল। কৃষ্ণভক্তিৰ বস মাধুৰীৰে বৈষ্ণৱ সাহিত্যক পৰিপ্লাৱিত কৰি তোলা ব্ৰজবুলি সাহিত্যই প্ৰায়োগিক ভাষাৰ সংকীৰ্ণতাৰ বেছ ভেদ কৰি এক বহল পটভূমি লাভ কৰিছিল। একশৰণ নামধৰ্মক কেন্দ্ৰ কৰি অসমীয়া ব্ৰজবুলিৰ সৃষ্টি হ'ল, ইয়াৰ গুৰিতে আছিল আঞ্চলিকতাৰ পৰিধি ভাঙি বিশ্বজনীনতাৰ পৰিচয় দিয়া। শংকৰদেৱ তথা তেওঁৰ সৃষ্টিৰাজিয়ে অসমীয়া জাতীয় জীৱনত প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰাৰ সমান্তৰালভাবে ভাষিক ক্ষেত্ৰতো প্ৰভাৱ বিস্তাৰ কৰি আহিছে। শংকৰদেৱ এজন ভাষাৰ সুদক্ষ কাৰিকৰ, সেই কথা তেওঁৰ সাহিত্যৰাজিৰ মাজত প্ৰকাশিত দক্ষতাই স্পষ্ট কৰে। সংস্কৃত ভাষা, প্ৰাচীন অসমীয়া ভাষা, ব্ৰজাৱলী ভাষাৰ ব্যৱহাৰ কৰি যি

ভক্তধৰ্মৰ নৈ বোৱাই গ'ল, সেই টোৱে অসম তথা অসমীয়া জাতিৰ ভাষা-সাহিত্য-
সংস্কৃতিত পলস পেলালে। সেয়ে শংকৰদেৱৰ নামধৰ্মই অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ উত্তৰণত
আগবঢ়োৱা অৱদান লেখতলবলগীয়া।

প্ৰসংগ সূত্ৰ:

দেৱগোস্বামী, কেশবানন্দ (১৯৯৯)। অঙ্কমালা। বনলতা।

পাঠক, ৰমেশ (২০১৫)। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ইতিহাস। অশোক বুকষ্টল।

বৰা, লীলাৱতী শইকীয়া (২০০৭)। সাহিত্য আৰু সাহিত্যিকৰ ভাষা। ষ্টুডেণ্ট ষ্ট'ৰ।

গ্ৰন্থপঞ্জী :

গোস্বামী, উপেন্দ্ৰনাথ(২০১৪)। অসমীয়া ভাষা উত্তৰ সমৃদ্ধি আৰু বিকাশ। মণি মানিক
প্ৰকাশ।

দাস, নাৰায়ণ(২০০১)। ব্ৰজাবুলি ভাষা আৰু সাহিত্যবীণা লাইব্ৰেৰী।

দেৱগোস্বামী, কেশবানন্দ(১৯৯৯)। অঙ্কমালা। বনলতা।

পাঠক, ৰমেশ(২০১৫)। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ ইতিহাস। অশোক বুকষ্টল।

মহন্ত, সুবাসনা(২০০৩)। উত্তৰকালীন অসমীয়া ভাষা। বনলতা।

ৰায়চৌধুৰী, ভূপেন্দ্ৰ(২০১৫)। ব্ৰজাবুলি সাহিত্য মুকুৰানিউ বুকষ্টল।

বৰা, লীলাৱতী শইকীয়া(২০০৭)। সাহিত্য আৰু সাহিত্যিকৰ ভাষা। ষ্টুডেণ্ট ষ্ট'ৰ।

শইকীয়া, অজিৎ, বৰঠাকুৰ, সত্যকাম (সম্পা) (২০১০)। অসমৰ লোকনাট্য আৰু
অংকীয়া ভাঙনা। অসম সাহিত্য সভা।

শৰ্মা, দিব্যজ্যোতি(২০২১)। অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ প্ৰবাহপূৰ্বায়ণ।

শৰ্মা, সত্যেন্দ্ৰনাথ(২০১৩)। অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ সমীক্ষাত্মক ইতিবৃত্ত। সৌমাৰ প্ৰকাশ।

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TRENDS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN SANSKRIT EDUCATION OF ASSAM: AN ANALYSIS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEP 2020

Alaka Das

Abstract

To make a connection between the ancient and modern knowledge, to explore the ancient Indian knowledge base contained in the ancient texts, to protect our own heritage and intellectual property, to create new avenues of innovation and to lead India towards Viśvaguru, the need of learning ‘Sanskrit’ becomes more crucial than ever before. Keeping this in view, the National Education policy, 2020 visioned ‘Sanskrit’ as an enriching option and also in the three-language formula mentioned in the eight schedules of the constitution of India, at all levels of school and higher education. Assam, which was known as ‘Prāgjyotiṣa’ or ‘Kāmarūpa’ in ancient and medieval period, was also known for its endeavour to study Sanskrit(Saṃskṛta).Sanskrit education in Assam has been imparted basically through two modes-the traditional system known as Pāṭhaśālā or ṭols and the general education system, through high school, higher secondary, college and university.Recently, in a move to provide secular education, Sanskrit ṭols has been closed and Sanskritṭols are brought under Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University and renamed as Sanskrit study centres for studying Indian history and civilization. Thus, Sanskrit education in Assam with its own trend of development as well as transformations is also underway keeping in view the implementation of policy recommendation. The study is an attempt to trace the evolution and transformation of Sanskrit educationparticularly in Assam.

Key Words: Transformation, Sanskrit Education, NEP 2020, Assam

Introduction

In the evolution and development of any nation, language remains a powerful tool and identity of an individual. Sanskrit, originated in the third millennium B C belongs to Indo-Aryan group which is considered as the root of many Indian languages that contains great knowledge and wisdom. Sanskrit literature is the vast repository of Indian knowledge of philosophy, science and technology, astronomy and architecture, medicine and metallurgy, agriculture and scripture, mathematics and management, economics and ecology, religion and spirituality, painting and theatre, dance and music. To make a connection between the ancient and modern knowledge, to explore the ancient Indian knowledge base contained in the ancient texts, to protect our own heritage and intellectual property, to create new avenues of innovation and to lead India in progress, the need of learning 'Sanskrit' becomes more crucial than ever before (D A, 2021). 'Sanskrit', the 'Devabhāṣā', once pride of our nation, is in a state of survival, whereas no other Indian classical language is in the threat of extinct (Bagai, 2021). Only 24,821,(.00198)% speakers are left of Sanskrit language out of 121 crores population of India as reported in census 2011. However, efforts are being made to preserve and promote 'Sanskrit' from pre independence period through different policy formulations.

The National Education Policy, 2020 states that the guiding force of Indian Education system is the rich legacy of ancient Indian knowledge and thought, a system rooted with Indian knowledge, wisdom and truth (NEP, 2020 p 4). The policy visioned 'Sanskrit' as an enriching option and also in the three-language formula mentioned in the eight schedules of the constitution of India, at all levels of school and higher education that possesses galore of classical literature known as 'Sanskrit Knowledge Systems'. The policy statement is expected to create a conducive environment for Sanskrit. The policy also recommends providing option to learn two classical languages in middle and secondary school (NEP 2020 4.19). Sanskrit language education needs to be planned for reviving and promoting in a multilingual country like India and effective implementation of NEP

2020 is seen as a challenge given the diversity of curriculum planning for school and higher education. The teaching of Sanskrit however, is considered important for the cultural unity of the country.

Learning Sanskrit as a language as well as a subject of study faces lots of challenges due to many reasons. In schools Sanskrit is offered as an elective subject, with most students preferring to choose French, German, Hindi or any language other than Sanskrit. Here too, most students' aim is only to secure good marks. Sanskrit as a language of study is not seen as lucrative for students as other foreign language. Because of the presence of other new subjects like computer science, vocational courses as an option to Sanskrit, slowly it is losing its position (A D, 2021). Along with this, Sanskrit language teaching is very often criticized as being content loaded and not pedagogically appropriate. In the verge of effective implementation of NEP 2020 recommendations on language learning, we need to understand the trends and practices that is going on at present.

Objectives of the Study

The study is an endeavour in this journey of promoting Sanskrit leaning by its effort to understand the trend and transformations of Sanskrit education, particularly in Assam, which is one of the premier states of North-East India having rich connection with 'Sanskrit Knowledge System' from the very ancient period. Besides, attempt has also been made to discuss on issues and concerns in effective implementation of NEP 2020 recommendations related to Sanskrit education.

Method

The study is qualitative in its approach and content analysis has been made to explore the evolution of Sanskrit education and its transformation that took place specially in Assam. The observations are expected to be helpful in effective implementation of the policy recommendations on language learning, particularly, 'Sanskrit'.

Result & Discussion

Sanskrit & Sanskrit Teaching

The higher order thinking and wisdom and enriched ideas contains in Sanskrit literature gained Sanskrit unique place in the scenario of world literature, education and culture. It was the medium of instruction in ancient India. In the medieval period, however, use of Sanskrit gradually started to decline. During the British rule, introduction of English as medium of instruction in the formal schools as per Macaulay's minute, 1835, and given priority to job opportunity to them adversely affect the status of Sanskrit as a medium of instruction as well as a language. Macaulay, the 'Secretary to the Board of control' advocated for withdrawing the financial support for publication of books in Sanskrit and support for traditional educational institutions were stopped, that caused irreparable damage to indigenous education system as well as to Sanskrit as language of learning (Das. A. 2021). After independence, the first Sanskrit Commission of 1956-57 was formed by Ministry of Education and Culture under the chairmanship of academician and linguist Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, and the commission strongly pitched for education of Sanskrit at the school level. It suggests for development of Sanskrit pedagogy courses for training of Sanskrit teachers in the high Schools and recognized Pāṭhaśālās, Pundit training, establishment of Sanskrit universities, establishment of central Sanskrit Board etc (Mohanti, B S, 2018). Accordingly, the first national Sanskrit institution 'Rastriya Sanskrit Vidyapeeth' was established in 1961 in Tirupati with a purpose to impart and improve Sanskrit pedagogy as well as to enrich traditional Sanskrit learning through modern innovation. Sanskrit Universities were being established for learning Sanskrit through Sanskrit, and also school Boards are being established for conducting Sanskrit examination. In 1970, Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan was set up for promotion of Sanskrit. As an apex body, the Sansthan is assisting the government in policy formation and implementation of the same. In 2013, second Sanskrit Commission was formed for upgrading the status of Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan to an institution of national importance. In 2015, N Gopalswami committee was formed for

promotion of Sanskrit that strongly suggest for integrating Sanskrit with other discipline i.e., mathematics, medical science, laws etc.

As the committee (2016) observed, Sanskrit is taught in schools from 1st to 12th standard as one of the optional languages in different states. As part of Three Language Formula Sanskrit is offered by most State Secondary Education Boards from class VI/VIII/IX/X. Some states offer Sanskrit as a composite course along with the mother tongue that covers approximately five crore students who study Sanskrit at school level (Bagai U M, 2021). The state of Kerala offers Sanskrit as second language from class 1 itself. In schools under Vidya Bharati Akhil Bharatiya Shiksha Sanstha, Sanskrit is taught from 1st/2nd/3rd standard across different states of India. In Kendriya Vidyalayas, Sanskrit is taught as third language from class VI-VIII and as Second language in class IX and X (Mahanti, 2021). Sanskrit is offered at class XI and XII at higher secondary level for arts stream students in most states of India. The CBSE, NIOS and ICSE boards followed three language formula till class VIII and teach two languages (English and regional) in class IX and X and one language, English is taught at XI and XII.

There is also a separate system of Sanskrit education in India through traditional Pāṭhaśālās'. There are nearly 5000 Sanskrit Pāṭhaśālās and 1000 Veda Pāṭhaśālās. in India (Gopalswami N, 2016). Eight states have state Sanskrit Secondary Education Board or Directorate of Sanskrit Education, i. e. Maharshi Patanjali Sanskrit Sansthan, Bhopal, Chhattisgarh Sanskrit Board, Raipur, Bihar Sanskrit Shiksha Board, Patna and Assam Sanskrit Board, Guwahati etc. These Boards conduct class VIII, IX, X, and XIIth school examination, Diploma in Education and Diploma in Sanskrit language (Mahanti, B. S. 2018).

Veda Vidyālaya is established and supported by the Human Resource Development, for preservation, conservation and development of Vedic studies where students have to attain proficiency in oral tradition of Vedic studies, besides studying subjects like Sanskrit, English, Maths and Social Science. Veda

Vidyālaya is affiliated to Maharshi Sandipani Rastriya Veda Vidya Pratisthan, Ujjain. Earlier, it was known as Rastriya Ved Vidya Pratisthan, which was established in January, 1987 by HRDC, Govt of India. The Board of Ved Vidyalaya is also known as Saint Sandipani National Vedic Sanskrit Education Board or Maharshi Sandipani Rastriya Veda Sanskrit Shiksha Board. The national level school education board provides Veda Bhūṣaṇa, equivalent to class X and Veda Vibhūṣaṇacertificate in class XII. The year 2000-2001 was declared as ‘Sanskrit Year by the government to draw attention towards learning of Sanskrit. Similarly, Gopaldaswami N (2016) in his report ‘Vision and Roadmap for development of Sanskrit suggested for observing the year 2017-18 as ‘Sanskrit Shiksha Varsham’ for encouraging teaching Sanskrit through Sanskrit and creating a conducive environment all around to speak Sanskrit.

To encourage modern institutions for learning Sanskrit, since 1987, Vidyapeethas are also being established that functions under Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan, New Delhi. Sanskrit is also taught in schools as well as colleges, as a language subject. Initiatives are also made to encourage learners to appear examinations in Sanskrit, i.e Prathama(General school class VIII), Pūrva-Madhyama(General School Class IX and X), Uttara-Madhyama/Prak-shastri (General School Class XI and XII), Shastri (General Degree), Ācārya (General PG), Vidyāvaridhi(General Ph D), Śikṣā-Śāstrī,(B. Ed) and Śikṣā-Ācārya(M. Ed) are the professional courses for teacher. Efforts are being made to improve the teaching-learning strategies in Sanskrit time to time. Till 2023, 15 Sanskrit Universities in India and nearly 120 general Universities of India offer Sanskrit at UG and PG level covering more than 10,00000 students (Bhattyacharya & Guha, 2019). Besides these, 10 Sanskrit academies, 16 oriental research institutes and ‘Sanskrit Bharati’, ‘Lokabhasa Prachar Samiti’ and other NGOs are there for promotion of Sanskrit in their best possible ways.

Sanskrit Education in Assam

Assam, which was known as ‘Prāggyotiṣa, or ‘Kāmarūpa’ in ancient times also known for its endeavour to study Sanskrit. The earliest inhabitants of Assam were non-Aryans and their language

belongs to extra Aryan families of language. With the process of Aryan inclusion in ancient Assam, Aryan culture along with language had been ingrained and used 'Sanskrit' as court language up to the beginning of the 13th century (Das R, 2015). Basically, three types of language were dominant in ancient Assam, mainly Sanskrit as the official language and the language of the learned, non-Aryan tribal languages of the Austric and Tibeto-Barman families and of local variety wherefrom Assamese language emerged, the script of which was derived initially from Brahmi and Devanagari (Das R, 2015). Sanskrit was used for literary work, administrative and religious activities and also become the lingua-Franka of the people (Shastri, 1998). Under the aegis of Koch king Naranarayan and Chilarai, Sanskrit studies have got an impetus in Assam. Ahom rulers also encouraged Sanskrit studies creating an environment for the same.

Though ancient Assam produced literature both in Assamese and Sanskrit, very few specimens of writings are available. The Sanskrit compositions included works relating to astrology, astronomy, Epigraphy, palmistry, arithmetic, medicine and tantrik works. 'Kāmarūpa Nibandhanīya-Khaṇḍasādhyā' is one of the earlier Sanskrit works written in and around 665 A. D., that deals with planetary worship. Besides this, 'Mudrārākṣasa of Viśākhadatta', 'Tantra Sāra', 'Hastividyārṇava', 'Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta', 'Kālikā Purāṇa', 'Dharma Purāṇa',

'Yoginī Tantra', 'Har-Gaurī Saṃvāda', were some of the earlier creations written in Sanskrit. Along with these, different tantraputhies, Grammer, prosody, Smriti, Astrology, Astronomy, Palmistry, Ayurveda, Veterinary Science, and Mantra Puthies were also written in ancient Assam (Das R, 2015).

Education, in ancient Assam, was basically centred around hereditary professional learning, and formal education was presumed to be introduced by the migrated Aryans in an around 5th century A. D. Early rulers of Kāmarūpa, i. e. Bhaskarvarmana, Ratnapala, Vanamalavarmadeva and others patronized the learned pundits well versed in Vedas, with agraharas (land grants) and treated Sanskrit' as a

medium of literary expressions (S. D. 2012). Noteworthy among them was king Kumar Bhaskarvarmana who was fond of learning and also encouraged learning in ancient Kāmarūpa. Bhaskarvarman granted lands (agraharas) to Brahmins for spreading education and financial grants to maintain Pāṭhaśālās. Under his patronage, scholars from the region went to study in the universities of Nalanda, Vikramsila and Odantpuri with a purpose of establishing cultural and educational link with the other states. Bhaskaravarmā's initiatives were followed by the other rulers and ancient Kāmārūpa become a noted centre of learning of that time as reported by Hieun Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim who came to Kāmārūpa in 6th century A D (Das R, 2015). Hieun Tsiang also stated that people came here to study from outside Assam and some well-known scholars of India, Shankaracharya (788-820 A D), Nanaka (1549-1649 A. D.) and Guru Tag bahadur (17th century) came here to hold discussion with the scholars. Education of ancient Assam is indebted to this great ruler of ancient Kāmārūpa. From fifth century, documentary evidences of Sanskrit writing and well-developed Sanskrit study can be observed in ancient Kāmārūpa. Progress of Sanskrit learning can be understood in the statement made by Shastri M (1998) 'The ornamental style of Sanskrit composition in prose and poetry full with allusion to the mythologies of the Puranas and references to the philosophical systems in the Bhaskara's and the succeeding kings of Prāgijyotiṣa support the theory of Sanskrit learning commenced at the beginning of the Christian era or even before' (Shastri B 1998). During ruling of Koch king Nara-Nārāyaṇa (1540-84) A. D. Sanskrit learning was encouraged. Sanskrit epics and Puranas were attempted to simplify in Assamese and Puruṣottama Vidyāvāgīśa composed a new Sanskrit Grammar called 'Prayōgaratnamālā, known as Ratnamālā-Vyākaraṇa, during this period. Sanskrit poems and dramas (Nāṭaka) were also written in this period.

Aim of education in ancient Kāmārūpa. or Assam was based on individual attainment, state service and preparation for the realization of the higher ends in life. Accordingly, curriculum was basically centred round Dharmaśāstra, Schools or Guru Grihas where education

was imparted were maintained individually by the Gurus or Agraharas. As the time passed by, the priests and pundits of different religious sects used to expand the principles and ideals of their own faith in the temple or Nāmgharpremises. Both Vidyā, the literary study and Kāla, professional training was included in the curricula. Vedā, Vedāṅgas, Vyākaraṇa, Smṛti, Jyotiṣa, Sāhitya, Itihāsa, Purānas, Smṛtis, Arthaśāstra, Kāvya, Kośa, Samhitā, Śilpaśāstra, Jyotiṣaśāstra, Āyurveda, Paśuśāstra, Yogaśāstrawere extensively studied under Vidyā in traditional Ṭols. Philosophical studies and contributions were also made during Vaishnava movement in Assam though not written in Sanskrit. Aryan culture and education influenced the people of Assam that was move forward under the leadership of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhavdeva through the introduction and propagation of Vaishnava education in the 15th -16th century A D.

As a result of Iyandabu Sandhi (treaty), Assam came under British rule (24th Feb, 1826) that adversely affects the traditional learning of Sanskrit. Along with end of royal patronage for Sanskrit study, financial assistance from government also stoppedlike other areas of the country. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, in his memorandum to Sadar Court of Calcutta stated “in every important village, there existed public schools to train up the youths in the knowledge of Sanskrit literature and science ...since the annexation of the province to the British empire, Sanskrit education, owing to the want of encouragement, has gradually been abolished’ (Shastri B 1998). As follow up of Macaulay Minute of 1835, schools were also established in Assam and Sanskrit as an examination subject was allowed to be taught in the schools. Thus, Sanskrit education in Assam has been imparted basically through two modes-the traditional system known as Pāṭhaśālā, or Ṭols and the general education system, through high school, higher secondary, college and university.

Though study of Sanskrit was neglected by the government, public as well as individual endeavour of traditional Sanskrit learning through Ṭols was there. The indigenous educational institutions i. e. Pāṭhaśālā, and Ṭols were the centre of education at the primary level at that time. Among these educational institutions, Ṭolsare established to

impart education traditionally in Sanskrit. In Gauhati Seminary schools established in 1835, and Cotton College established in 1901, Sanskrit as subject of study were there (G. M 1998). Two Non-Govt Boards namely Surama Valley Boards and Assam Valley Boards were established for promotion of Sanskrit studies. Assam Sanskrit Board of Education was formed in 1926 by the Government of Assam for conducting examination and conferring 'Shastri' title to the successful students. Thus, Sanskrit education has been introduced formally in the state under Assam Sanskrit Education Act in 1957. A Sanskrit college was established at Nalbari in 1938 to promote higher education in Sanskrit though examination was conducted by Assam Sanskrit Board. In 1966, the Assam Sanskrit Education Committee was formed to study about the status of Sanskrit education in Assam and eventually, Govt. of Assam established Govt. Sanskrit College, presently known as K. K. Handique Govt. Sanskrit College which is affiliated to Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University, Assam. Though, a gradual decay in in-depth study of Sanskrit has been observed, pandits well versed in all branches of learning came out with their original contributions in late 19th century. In 2011, Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University has been established after the name of king Kumar Bhaskarvarmana, the great enthusiast of education and patron of Sanskrit studies.

Right from ancient to modern period, many ancient and modern time scholars contributed in Sanskrit, few of which were Satkavī Viśveśvara Dhavaleśvara, before 12th century, Devabodha (before 13th Century), Āndhrakabhaṭṭa, (before 14th century) Sāṅkhadhara Yuglokācārya (before the 14th century) were well known. Kālikāpurāṇa, Svalpamatsya, Dharma Purāṇa, and Yoginītantra were written in ancient Kāmārūpa between the 9th and 11th centuries (Rajkhowa B, 2020). During 17th to 19th century, Holiram Dhekial Phukan, Ripunjoy Bhattyacharya, Pandit Nilamarcharya, Vedacharya, Damodar Mishra, Pitambara Siddhantavagisa, Sambhunath Mishra, Baikunthanath Bhattyacharjee, Karnapur, Dina-Dwija, Gaurikanta Dwija, Kovichandra Dwija,

Mahamahopdhya Dhireswaracharya, Chakreshwar Bhattayacharya, Bhavadev Bhagawati, Chandrakanta Vidyalankar, Jibeswar Goswami, Baikunthanath Chakravarti, Manoranjan Sastri, Anundoram Borooah, Krishnakanta Handique, Mukunda Madhav Sarma, Kaliprashad Sinha, Dr. Rajendranath Sarma, Dr. Yogiraj Basu, Dr. Priyansupraval Upadhaya, Biswanarayan Sastri, Radhanath Phukan, Dr. Thaneswar Sarma and Dr. Dipak Kr. Sharma are few names who were prominent scholars in pioneering Sanskrit Study in Assam. Along with these scholars, persons dedicated to explore and contribute in Sanskrit, continued the journey of promoting Sanskrit study in Assam. Anundoram Borooah, a renowned Sanskrit scholar from Assam, India, made significant contributions to Sanskrit studies. He authored Mahāvāracaritam, Sarasvatī-Kaṇṭhābharāṇa, Nāmalingānuśāsana and Higher Sanskrit Grammar, which enriched the fields of grammar, vocabulary, and literary analysis. Through his in-depth study of Sanskrit texts, including plays and poetry, he provided valuable knowledge for learners and scholars, leaving a lasting impact on the Sanskrit language study.

Beyond these personal contributions, government and non-government initiatives are also being taken by different organizations like, ‘Sanskrit Sanjeevani Sabha’, ‘Kamrup Anusandhan Committee’, ‘Anundoram Borooah Bhasa Kala Sanskriti Kendra (ABILAC)’ ‘Sanskrit Bharati’, ‘Rastriya Sanskrit Sansthan’ ‘Bajali Sanskrit Parishad’ are involved in promotion of Sanskrit in Assam.

Sanskrit Ṭol

Ṭols are the traditional educational institutions in which special emphasis has been given on imparting knowledge in Sanskrit. The general administration of the Ṭols is run by Government of Assam while, academic activities including conduction of examination are presently controlled by Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University. Education in these Sanskrit Ṭols were imparted at four level-

Pravesika (02years), Madhyama (02) years, Shastri (02) years and Acharya (02) years. Along with Sanskrit, other general subjects

like English, Social Science, General Mathematics, General Science were included in it. Vyākaraṇa(Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī, Ratnamālā) Sāhitya, Veda, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Smṛti Jyotiṣa are treated as special subjects for Madhyama and Shastri courses. Qualified Shastri students are allowed to be admitted in to the Acharya course. It is reported that there were 82 upgraded and non-upgraded Sanskrit and Pali Ṭols in Assam (S D. 2012). However, in a move to provide secular education, Sanskrit Ṭols has been closed and Sanskrit Ṭols are brought under Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit & Ancient Studies University and renamed as Sanskrit study centres for studying Indian history and civilization. Recently, proposal has been mooted to convert these study centres to Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit Vidyalaya with NCERT approved curriculum where Sanskrit will be compulsory subject.

In an initiative to promote Sanskrit, then Govt. of Assam, decided to make Sanskrit a compulsory language subject of study up to 8th standard (Indian Express, March 3, 2017), though three language formula is being adopted in the schools. However, as stated, due to severe scarcity of Sanskrit teachers and insufficient infrastructure, it is not possible to be implemented. In most of the states of our country, three language formula has been adopted (MIL, a regional language, usually Hindi and English). In Assam too, Sanskrit is offered in class IX and X as an elective subject of 100 marks and as a part of MILs (25 marks) at Secondary level. The syllabus for the same has been prepared by Secondary Board of Education, Assam (SEBA) on the basis of NCF2005 and presently effort is being made to construct curriculum and textbooks on Sanskrit as per NCF 2023. As per available sources, at present, in class X, nearly 24,673 students are studying Sanskrit as an elective subject and Riju Bharati as a part of MIL, there are 5269 students in 2023. In higher secondary schools as well as in Junior colleges also Sanskrit has been offered as an elective subject. As Sanskrit is not yet possible to be treated as a compulsory subject, number of students opting Sanskrit in the higher education level got adversely influenced. Sanskrit is being offered at the degree level at 31 colleges under

Gauhati University, 11 colleges under Dibrugarh University and 7 colleges under Assam University (S D. 2012). Sanskrit is also offered at Post Graduate, M. Phil and Ph D level in few Universities of Assam. In this regard, the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Sanskrit and Ancient Studies University, established for the promotion of Sanskrit has been playing a significant role. Presently, the University is offering 5 years integrated master programme in Sanskrit, Master of Arts in Sanskrit Sahitya, Sanskrit Vedic Studies, Sanskrit Sarvadarshana, Sanskrit Nyaya, Sanskrit Vyakarana, Jyotisha etc. M Phil level research studies were also offered in few departments and currently Ph. D. level research works are going on under the School of Sanskrit Studies.

Sanskrit Education & NEP 2020

Right from pre independence period of India, voluntary initiatives for preservation and promotion were there in India. In the post independent India too, different policies have pitched for learning Sanskrit. The Sanskrit Commission of 1956-57 had suggested learning Sanskrit compulsorily in schools barring certain exceptions. The National Education Policy, 1986, and 1992 also admit the importance of Sanskrit as one of the classical languages. The Supreme Court of India, in 1994 stated Sanskrit to be part of School college and University education. In 2015, The N Gopalswami Committee report entitled 'Vision and Roadmap' suggest ways and means for promoting Sanskrit through education. The National Education Policy 2020, attempted to check the earlier limitations and recommended for integrating Indian Knowledge system in curriculum and suggested for introduction of Sanskrit from the primary to university level of education-as one of the language options in the three-language formula as well as in higher education (NEP 2020, 22.15). It suggests for writing Sanskrit textbooks at the foundational and middle school level in Simple Sanskrit to teach Sanskrit through Sanskrit. It also suggests for professionalization of Sanskrit teachers through teacher education programme. Sanskrit universities are also recommended to become large multi-disciplinary institutions of higher learning. All these recommendations if properly implemented will surely help in

preservation and promotion of Sanskrit. However, several critical challenges may arise when implementing policy recommendations for Sanskrit education. Many students struggle to pursue learning and careers in this field due to a lack of awareness about its significance and available job opportunities, leading to low enrolment rates. The shortage of qualified Sanskrit teachers and inadequate teacher training facilities further affect the quality of education. Additionally, vacant teaching positions in schools often remain unfulfilled, limiting student's access to Sanskrit learning. Outdated and unscientific teaching methods make the language difficult to grasp, adding to the struggle. Delays in the timely supply of textbooks create additional obstacles in the learning process. Overcoming these barriers is essential to ensuring the growth and preservation of Sanskrit education for future generations.

Conclusion

NEP 2020 has retained the three-language formula and has not prescribed Sanskrit language to be taught compulsorily. However, it emphasized on making Sanskrit available as an enriching option so that it can be chosen as second or third language. For realising this, priority is necessary in generating awareness and developing attitude on the importance of learning Sanskrit. Besides, employment opportunities need to be made clear cut and effort for the same need to be made. To deal with the severe shortage of qualified teachers, teacher training facilities on Sanskrit need to be made available. Preparation of textbooks, supply of study materials, scholarships for students, above all applying enjoyable teaching pedagogies are of utmost important. All these may enhance the enrolment in Sanskrit subject. Altogether, it can be observed that NEP 2020 has ushered an optimism on multilingualism. However, it should also be kept in mind that amidst roar of striving to prove worth of Sanskrit, it does not become more critical to retain its crowning glory.

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**EXPLORING 19TH-CENTURY ASSAM THROUGH GERMAN
EYES: EVERYDAY AESTHETICS IN OSCAR FLEX'S
PFLANZERLEBEN IN *INDIEN-KULTURGESCHICHTLICHE
BILDER AUS ASSAM***

Ashutosh Kuma Tripathi

Abstract:

In 1873, a retired tea planter associated with East India Tea Company, Oscar Flex, published his book *Pflanzerleben in Indien – Kulturgeschichtliche Bilder aus Assam*. This book offers a rare, German perspective on 19th-century Assamese culture and society. Flex arrived in Assam in 1864. This time was marked by profound socio-economic transformations in the wake of expanding plantation economies and influx of migrant labor. Flex presents a rich description of rural everyday life, interpersonal relation, cultural interaction, and human-environment relations. The form of his work oscillates between memoir and cultural history, which gives it a distinct texture. This paper explores Flex's account through two interrelated aspects: the intricate relationship between nature and culture, and the aesthetic and social dimensions of everyday life of tea estate in Assam.

Keywords: Assam, Everyday Aesthetics, Oscar Flex, German travel writing, Indienbild, India in German literature

Introduction

In 1873, a unique and insightful document was published in Berlin: *Pflanzerleben in Indien – Kulturgeschichtliche Bilder aus Assam* ("Planter's life in India: Cultural-Historical Images from Assam"). The author Oscar Flex was a German national and belonged to the small group of non-British Europeans associated with the East India Tea Company. This little-known but significant text offers a rare, non-Anglophone perspective on 19th century Assam, and portrays the cultural, social, and natural landscapes of the region. Flex's detailed observations extend beyond the economic dimensions of tea

cultivation, and includes in-depth reflections on the society and culture of the region. This text is therefore particularly significant in understanding the 19th-century Assamese society and culture in the German literary tradition. It differs distinctly from typical colonial planter memoirs. The reason lies in Flex's ability to linguistically engage with the local people, an immersion in local culture, and attentiveness to both natural and human environments.

Following the discovery of tea in Assam by Robert Bruce in 1823 and the successful establishment of the first experimental tea estate at Chabua in Dibrugarh, the region witnessed a rapid expansion of its tea industry in the 19th century. Tea emerged as a commercially viable crop during the tenure of Commissioner Francis Jenkins' administration (1834–1866). This period was marked by several structural and economic shifts that contributed to this growth (Siddique 1990: 11). These included a steady influx of inexpensive migrant labor, increasing British demand for Indian tea, the availability of vast tracts of uncultivated land, and the establishment of auction centers across India (Magar & Kar 2016: 27).

During 1860s, the growth of tea cultivation, seasonal availability of local labor and increasing wage demands prompted the migration of workers from outside Assam (Siddique 1990: 124–125). The British employed large numbers of impoverished and illiterate workers. They belonged mostly to the marginalized groups such as Santhal, Munda, Oraon, and Khond, and were predominantly from poor and famine-affected regions of Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal. Thus, the incoming group was diverse in language, tradition, religion, and social structures. Many were enticed under misleading promises of higher wages, improved living conditions, and the freedom to return home at the end of their contracts (Magar & Kar 2016: 26). Assam experienced significant socio-cultural changes as a result of this. It was influenced both by internal migration as well as recurring influx of outsiders, consisting of European migrants engaged in tea plantation.

Amidst this complex socio-economic transformation, Flex arrived in Assam in 1864, having moved from Central India and began his journey as a tea planter with the East India Tea Company. Like many of his contemporaries, he was drawn by the growing fame of Assam's tea industry. In his words, he "hastened there to offer [his] services to this new *Abundantia*, the *Thea viridis* (the botanical name of tea)" (Flex 1873: 11). However, unlike many planters of the time, Flex did not merely perceive Assam as a commercial frontier. He wrote: "Assam was largely unknown to the European public, its hidden treasures remained unexploited, and its incomparable landscapes, for the most part, unseen by the outside world, as modern scientific exploration had yet to reach this remote corner of India" (Flex 1873: 1). On the one hand, from the perspective of native Indians, Flex belonged to the European elite group of tea planters. On the other hand, from his perspective, he belonged to the small group, as the composition of the European tea planters was overwhelmingly British (Panayi 2017: 168). Flex remained in Assam, and rose to key positions in the tea estate of *Tingamonar* (Tingrai), until late 1867, when the East India Tea Company was sold due to persistent financial losses. Upon his return to Germany, he documented his experiences in a work that continued to be cited in German encyclopedias on Assam until the end of the 19th century.

What distinguishes Flex's narrative from many other planter accounts is his sustained effort to engage with the languages, cultures, and communities of Assam. In contrast to many contemporaries who, as he critically observes, "just arrived from Europe and [knowing] neither the country nor the language" (Flex 1873: 11), Flex possessed working proficiency in Urdu and Hindi and actively pursued to learn Assamese. This linguistic proficiency enabled him not only to navigate the region more effectively but also to interact effectively with both the local Assamese population and the migrant laborers employed on the tea plantations. A particularly revealing episode early in his account illustrates this relational approach. While waiting at the banks of the Brahmaputra for an elephant to take him to the plantation, Flex describes mingling with a group of migrant workers

who, like himself, were “foreign in this country.” Seeking to ease their anxieties, he initiated a conversation about Assam. He learnt about “their homeland, their status and the reason for their emigration” (Flex 1873: 19). For Flex, this kind of mutual exchange was both personally and culturally significant. As he observes, “the natives like it when Europeans talk to them, ask them questions and take an interest in their lives, especially when they realise that you speak their language correctly” (Flex 1873: 19).

Flex’s disposition toward relational dialogue extended beyond passing encounters. He “shed [his] *Sahib* persona” and actively cultivated contact with the workers in everyday life, often visiting the residential quarters in the evenings, having conversations, and organising games for the workers (Flex 1873: 169). “Cut off from all society,” he writes, “I found a special pleasure in spending time informally with the workers once the day’s heat and burdens had passed.” He would sit with the men in their verandas, listen to folktales, invite boys and girls to sing their favorite songs, and take part in “all the small sorrows and joys” of everyday life. These moments of informal interaction enabled him to build trust and gain insights into the domestic and emotional worlds of the workers (Flex 1873: 102–103).

Language learning became a method of cultural immersion. Interestingly, over the time, the initially reserved *Catscharies* became more comfortable as his Assamese improved. He would actively seek to learn new words while gaining “many insights into their emotional and family life” (Flex 1873: 103). This proximity and participatory method of perception allows Flex to pay close attention to the emotional and cultural ebb and flow of Assamese society, where the gaze oscillates between that of the native and the foreigner. Flex’s prior experience and engagement in various regions of India allowed for comparative reflection, not only between Europe and India, but also between Assam and other parts of India, in particular, Bengal. Two aspects are particularly interesting in this regard: the description of nature and the aesthetics of everyday life of Assam.

Nature and Aesthetics of Everyday Life in Assam

In *Pflanzerleben in Indien*, Flex provides a richly layered account of colonial life in Assam that is inextricably bound to the natural world. The intimate, coexistent relationship between humans and nature is in the focus. The book opens not with a direct narration, but with an evocative sketch of his residence in Tingamonar. This visual overture immediately situates the reader within the lush, riverine landscape of Assam. Boats, bamboo bridges, and mingling figures of European officials in hats and coats, and local laborers and tea planters in traditional attire convey a world where human habitation appears gently embedded within nature. His hut is surrounded by banana plants, trees, and bamboo fences. A temporary bamboo-and-trunk bridge provides access across a small river. The river is a recurring motif in the narrative. In the sketch too, it flows quietly in front of the house, with a small boat moored nearby. The scene is not just descriptive but symbolic: it introduces a world where rivers shape the physical environment, and also the rhythm of daily life and cultural experience.

Nature in Flex's writing is both a setting and a protagonist, a dynamic and ever-present force that coexists with human activity. Nowhere is this more evident than in the early chapters, particularly "Das Lager am Kokilah Mukh" (The Camp at Kokilah Mukh) and "Der Ritt nach Lambating" (The Ride to Lumding/Lambating). Here, Flex paints a vivid picture of Assam as a land in constant dialogue with its rivers. The aqueous geography is the product of 'sixty-one rivers'. The Brahmaputra and its network of tributaries form what he describes as an "inextricable network," endowing the land with exceptional fertility and an overabundance of water. This richness in water, however, comes at a price. Long monsoons, stifling humidity, and a proliferation of diseases disrupt the daily life. The region's sultry, oppressive air is depicted as being "filled with miasma," a byproduct of the slow evaporation from the rivers, contributing to widespread fevers and dysentery (Flex 1873: 2–3). Thus, nature is ambivalently portrayed, at once bountiful and hostile, nurturing and dangerous.

Despite such challenges, Flex observes how the people of Assam, both local communities, migrants and colonial settlers, have adapted to this unique ecosystem. Nature is not separate from human existence. He instead portrays a world, in which the boundaries between nature and culture are permeable. The river is not just a natural entity; it is a site of daily life and cultural integration. Flex describes scenes where villagers, local workers and European staff all engage with the river in different ways. Fishing, for example, is described not merely as a subsistence activity, but as a deeply cultural practice.

In one vivid passage, Flex observes a group of ‘Dums’, a marginalized fishing caste, creating barriers across the river with bound reeds to trap fish. This is accompanied by women standing waist-deep in the water, using hand-woven cylindrical traps. The fishermen’s intuitive, inherited understanding of river behavior, aquatic movement, and timing catches the attention of the author. The tableau of interspecies coexistence is completed by the domesticated buffaloes grazing in the field alongside herons and crows. The attention to vivid ecological details here is meticulous. Flex describes a plethora of native vegetation: mango, kadam, tamarind, bamboo, betel nut, and a variety of vegetables and fruits like oranges, tobacco, melons, arrowroot, and chili.

His journey to Lumding/Lambating provides glances of intimate cohabitation and moments of serene beauty. It is however interspersed with unsettling reminders of nature’s capriciousness. During the rainy season, rivers swell uncontrollably, flooding lower plains for over eight months and rendering the region semi-aquatic. In daylight, the rivers shimmer and teem with activity; at night, they become sites of haunting quietude and potential danger. Devastating storms routinely destroy plantations, while earthquakes add to the region’s environmental unpredictability. These natural phenomena are fundamental to the lived experience of the land. The Assamese people, as portrayed by Flex, live with a constant awareness of these environmental rhythms, adapting their lifestyles accordingly.

In Flex's description, the environment is not a mere backdrop, it is cultivated, inhabited, modified, and yet still resists total domestication. What makes his account particularly compelling is the permeability between nature and culture. The porous boundaries between domestic and the wild allow their seamless blending into each other. Rats, frogs, and mosquitoes are frequent guests in human dwellings, while herons, kingfishers, and wild pigeons populate the banks of the rivers. This cohabitation is not romanticized but presented as a reality of daily life in Assam. Mere survival in this region requires a mutual coexistence, an intimate negotiation with the natural elements. The Assamese built environment, too, reflects this closeness to nature. Homes are crafted from bamboo and thatch, surrounded by gardens and often accompanied by granaries constructed on stilts. The houses, clean and orderly compared to those in Bengal according to Flex, are described not just in terms of architecture but also in their embeddedness within an ecological system. Cow dung and earth plastered on walls illustrate a practical reuse of natural materials.

The Assamese Culture and the Everyday Life

One of the most distinctive features of Flex's narrative is his engagement with the aesthetics of everyday life in Assam. The narrative draws attention to the visual and aural aspects of life on the tea estates, and how they are interlinked with the cultural fabric of the people of Assam. His fascination with Assamese culture begins with the appreciation of their courage and physical appearance. He describes them as "beautiful, fair-skinned, strongly built, and highly intelligent people"(Flex 1873: 6). Their physical strength and cultural sophistication make the people of Ahom, as it was earlier called, "warlike and powerful nation", who were capable of maintaining their independence despite repeated invasions by the Mughal princes. Simultaneously, the literature and remnants of "ancient temples and palaces" reveal a society consisting of not only physically formidable people, but a group which is philosophically grounded and culturally refined (Flex 1873: 6).

The physical strength and cultural sophistication of Assamese people are best described in his portrayals of women, whose presence marks a central theme in his narrative. Flex sees a parallel between “vegetation of almost unimaginable lushness” and the “abundance and productive vitality in the physique of its inhabitants”, in particular, Assamese women. In terms of physical appearance, Assamese women are distinctly different from other groups such as the women of Bengal. The “pleasant orange-yellow” skin tone adds to their beauty (Flex 1873: 6). The usage of jewelry and ornamentation in everyday life is vividly expressed: “All the women wore gold, silver, and amber jewelry; so did the men, though in lesser quantity. Many wore polished amber pieces or gold rings in their earlobes” (Flex 1873: 38). Jewelry and adornment emerged as markers of cultural identity and abundance. It also adds colors to the broader cultural landscape of Assamese culture. Interesting to note is the presence of “one, often two goldsmiths” in every village, crafting jewelry in verandas (Flex 1873: 38). Apart from that, the presence of businesses of clothing, foodstuffs and European luxury goods in villages underline not only bustling trade culture, but also a cultural exchange between two ancient civilizations. Flex’s account sketches a highly affluent and culturally sophisticated society of 19th century Assam.

The appreciation of women however is not solely aesthetic; it is deeply entwined with their strong presence in every walk of the society. In the household, they are engaged in daily activities such as spinning, cleaning cotton, and other household tasks (Flex 1873: 38). They nurture their children with utmost love and affection. “The motherly instinct blooms in native women with the utmost grace; mother and child are inseparable”, remarks Flex (Flex 1873: 104). He admires “the tenderness with which they tend and guard their little heart’s blossoms (*Herzblättchen*),” a metaphor for their children. “Amār Deo, amār Deotah, toi amār chōru Deotah” is another expression, commonly used by mothers for their children (Flex 1873: 104 f). Nevertheless, Flex is caught by the distinct confidence of Assamese women in their social behaviour. He observes:

Striking was the unembarrassed behavior of the women. While in Bengal, respectable women turn their faces away from Europeans or hide behind doors and window grilles to observe them without being seen themselves, the women here were not in the least disturbed in their work by our presence. They sat on the verandas, waiting with their children or occupied with cleaning cotton, spinning, and other domestic tasks. (Flex 1873: 38)

The Assamese women move through their day with a sense of freedom, openness and confidence. Women's labor is not confined to domestic spaces but is integrated into communal and economic structures. They are active participants and equal partners in fishing, agricultural works and tea plantations. On his way to Tingamonar, Flex sees women harvesting rice with sickle-like knives (*kassis*), while men bundle the stalks for transport. The engagement of women is seen across all castes. Women's economic contributions were no less significant. Flex documents that a standard contract required women to pluck "sixteen pounds of tea leaves daily or clean ten pounds of tea," for which they were paid "four rupees," a fraction of the men's wage (Flex 1873: 67). Children were similarly contracted, with their labor calibrated to their age. Despite lower pay, the participation of women in the plantation economy was both essential and normalized.

Celebration and constant evocation of finding beauty in the daily and mundane activities of rural everyday life characterise the everyday life. Flex is caught by the beauty of Assamese culture, in particular, the passion of people to find moments of celebration in the tedium of work. Outside the factory walls, the rhythms of the plantation continued to shape the everyday. The sound of the "evening gong," which "called the workers in from the plantation," marked the daily transitions from field labor to domestic tasks (Flex 1873: 59). Flex writes of men streaming back with their farming tools over their shoulders, and of women and children balancing leaf-filled baskets on their hips and heads. These movements and rituals structured daily life as much as economic routines did. The landscape of the plantation

was charming, especially on Sundays and festive occasions. Colourful dresses and ornamentation add colors to the aesthetics of everyday life. On one particular Sunday, during his stroll through the residence of workers (Lines), he is amazed to see the colour pallet splattered all across the living space. Men in “white *dhoti*, colorful *kurta*, or a *pagri*” and women in “new *chaddars* and *sam*” “were hardly recognizable; they gleamed and sparkled in all colors” (Flex 1873: 116).

Conclusion

A cultural-historical reading of Flex’s *Pflanzerleben in Indien* reveals that his life in Assam as a tea planter was a palimpsestic reality, layered with a mix of admiration and control, familiarity and hierarchy. The text offers a nuanced perspective on colonial Assam, and details the region’s natural setting as well as socio-cultural dynamics at play. What is remarkable in his account is the vividness of his descriptions and his engagement with the ebb and flow of Assamese everyday life, both of locals and of migrants. The narrative combines objective observation and documentation, cultural immersion, and personal reflection to provide a nuanced representation of the colonial plantation system and its impact on land and people alike. Rather than being fixated on the narrow scope of economic issues, or the impressions of passing European tourists to India’s shores, in a haste, this text reflects Flex’s sustained engagement with Assamese society and culture. His training in Indian languages and culture and his openness towards new cultural experiences shape his understanding of the everyday realities of Assam and the remarkable complex of migrant workers. It is thus surprising that such a detailed, compelling and multifaceted account has yet to receive significant attention in secondary literature, particularly in the fields of colonial studies, or representation of India in German and Western literary traditions.

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THE ROLE OF ASSAM SAHITYA SABHA AND ALL ASSAM STUDENT'S UNION IN THE PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article explores the important place of Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS) and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) as guardians of Assamese language. As the challenges of globalization, migration, and the dominance of English and Hindi increase in Assam, ASS (established in 1917) and AASU are firmly committed to safeguarding Assam's literary and cultural identity by promoting the language and literature through digital initiatives and awareness programs that involve young people, like the Swadesh Swabhimani. In particular, AASU led the Assam Movement (1979–1985), reaching out to assert linguistic rights in government policy initiatives like an all-Assam strategy for education in Assamese, or opposing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act. ASS and AASU are aware of the historical and contemporary challenges facing the Assamese language, and are pulling Assam back to the centre stage, working together to ensure that Assamese is well established in the education system, public services, media and culture. By understanding and mediating colonialism, demography, and language, ASS and AASU are fostering vitality in the language, and pride in the community. This article showcases their respective and hybrid roles in stabilizing and securing the use of the Assamese language as a vehicle of identity and continuity.

Keywords: Assam Sahitya Sabha, AASU, Assamese, Language Politics, Indigeneity and Assam.

Introduction

Language, according to Fishman (1991), is more than a means of communication; it is the keeper of a people's spirit, the living store of memory, meaning, and worldview. The Assamese language in Assam has acted as a form of civilized expression when it helped shape its literature, political ethos, spirituality, and daily life (Baruah, 2005). But in an era defined by globalization, urbanization, and the pressing demands of dominant languages, the state of Assamese is vulnerable. Through the rise of educational institutions, media, and public discourse across various spaces, there is a clear trend towards the adoption of English or Hindi. This is more than a change in languages; it represents cultural dislocation (Annamalai, 2001). At the same time, the impact of movement and migration persists and is continuously shaping Assam's cities in ways that diminish the place of the Assamese language (Hazarika, 2019). All of these internal and external pressures represent more than just the threat of language; they represent a threat to identity and the erasure of cultural memory.

Amalendu Guha (1977) evaluates the continued explanation of this trajectory from a critical economic point of view. He classifies Assam's immigrants into four broad categories: tea garden labour, East Bengali migrants pre-independence, the Partition's Hindu refugees, and migrants from Nepal seeking work. Although Nepalis and labourers of the tea garden did not pose a direct threat to the Assamese because they were historically the least employed and marginal, hence, were easier for the Assamese to accept, Bengali Hindus were positioned differently. They were also marginalized and disadvantaged, but comparatively were more advanced than the indigenous communities, they had to compete with the Assamese middle class for resources (land, jobs, political capital). In the heightened conditions of unavailability of jobs and competition, cultural and identity anxieties merged with economic grievances and fears of irrelevance, often resulting in a combustible combination of hostility and defensiveness.

Assamese language, identity, culture. Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), an increasingly irrelevant socio-cultural organization since the

inception of Assamese literature in 1917, has not only contributed to the promotion of Assamese literature, but also contributed to language based research and festivals celebrating cultures (Gohain 1998). ASS has been a leading societal organization and played important role in developing the Assamese identity with an emphasis on language, literature, and culture. Similarly AASU has been an immensely successful political organization, known for leading socio-political movements like the Assam Movement (1979 - 1985) among many, not only on behalf of students' rights but especially on behalf of indigenous people and of course the Assamese language in education, administration and identity politics (Baruah 1999; Misra 2000). These institutions have played a dynamic role in forming the modern Assamese nationalism and the language and culture debate over preservation. This paper highlights the various ways that these two institutions have contributed to the preservation of the Assamese language. These ways include how their work in literature, culture, and politics has affected language policy, consolidated identity and their feeling of importance, and involved the community and youth in the process of preservation.

Challenges to Assamese Language and Culture:

According to Hiren Gohain (1985), the political environment of colonial rule had ameliorated in the genesis of Assamese community consciousness, because a colonial administrative system guided by bureaucratic decorum could not help but instill in the Assamese a fear of their own erasure from their very own land. This fear is something the Assamese began to feel not so much as an outright threat of expulsion from their land, but an insidious threat to their very existence. While this fear permeated their consciousness through various expressions of anxiety about the future, it reached its most insistent articulation in connection with the growing arrogance of a completely different emerging elite class of Bengali people. Many scholars point to "Bengali chauvinism" as the archetypal motive force for antagonistic cultural tensions and an Assamese awakening. Sajal Nag (1990) describes the Bengali officials of the colonial bureaucracy as somehow removed from their administrative work and vaguely

arrogant, as they viewed their Assamese counterparts as subjects of a lesser order, as opposed to colleagues on the same level. A tipping point came in 1836 when the colony declared Bengali to be the official language of Assam. The imposition of Bengali did more than simply replace Assamese as the official language. It established the authentic use of Assamese as outside of being accepted as merely 'legitimate' use. Bengali clerks were likely happy to lend credence to the idea of Assamese as a 'provincial' variety of Bengali (Nag, 1990). Not only was this linguistic reclassification an action that could be classified as administrative formalism, it was also existential formalism, a refusal of identity couched as policy. These ramifications were echoed in a pessimistic forecast made, unsurprisingly, by colonial demographer C. S. Mullan, who predicted in his 1931 census report that Sibsagar would remain the only place where the Assamese remain (Sengupta, 2006).

The Assamese language movement has been vital in reshaping the cultural and political landscape of Assam, as it has also had its troubles. The movement has helped to reestablish Assamese cultural traditions and has reawakened a sense of pride in the Assamese language. Efforts to promote the language also fostered the growth of Assamese literature, music, and the arts. Culturally-based festivals, events, and media in Assamese also emphasized language while helping to shape community and identity. Nevertheless, the movement still faces ongoing challenges. Globalization, competition from the dominance of other languages, and various social and economic issues continue to jeopardize the survival of Assamese as a built-in part of Assamese identity. Moreover, difficulties with language instruction models, the language in media, and with the dynamic use of Assamese in a modern technology and digital realm remain critical. Addressing these shortfalls is vital for sustaining the long-term health of Assamese as sociocultural and technological changes continue to take over.

Role of Assam Sahitya Sabha to Protect and Preserve Assamese

Founded in 1917 to promote the Assamese language, literature, and culture, the Asam Sahitya Sabha has been an integral part of the

construction of socio-cultural identity in Assam. As we move into the 21st century, the Assam Sahitya Sabha remains linked with the Indian independence movement throughout the twentieth century, with significant involvement in many of the events that have shaped postcolonial Assamese history. Now over a hundred years old and representative of the oldest literary and cultural institution in Assam, the Sabha is confronted with the likes and dislikes of newer generations of Assamese-speaking people. In response to the shifting foundational origins of certain members and criticisms of elitism, the Sabha is attempting to embrace and include younger members of Assamese-speaking communities. Aiming to address changing socio-cultural dynamics and enhance youth inclusion, under the leadership of *Sahitya Academy* Award-winning author Kuladhar Saikia, the organisation released the *Swadesh Swabhiman* series in 2022. This activity is an opportunity for youth to engage in thoughtful conversations about contemporary issues, led by the respected academicians and intellectuals of Assam. Alas, the people of Assam criticised the Assam Sahitya Sabha for being detached from society in recent years. Critics assert it has become an insular group of writers, scholars, and engaged citizens who lack concern for the everyday cultural life of the region. The *Swadesh Swabhiman* programme has been a deliberate attempt on behalf of the Sabha to remediate these criticisms and to reclaim a position of influence and a dynamic presence in Assam's culture.

According to Kuladhar Saikia, president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, “*The basic reason behind starting the programme was to encourage the young generation to debate, discourse, and study, and give them a platform. They are asked to choose a topic related to Assam, research on it, and speak about it within five minutes.*”

Since the start of the *Assam Sahitya Sabha*, they have completed three *Swadesh Swabhiman* editions to unite youth in conversations about Assam's culture and history. The editions have included a variety of themes, some of which include Ahom naval strategies, Assamese textiles and jewelry, life in mobile theatres, and changing food habits. The variety of themes demonstrates the organization's

engagement in sharing Assam's cultural heritage in a way that connects with the younger generation. The main purpose of *Swadesh Swabhiman* has been to create a platform for greater accessibility to the Asam Sahitya Sabha for the younger generation, by presenting new ways of thinking about the past and using technology. As Kuladhar Saikia shared, the possibilities for language and literature depend on youth, the organization must open its windows and doors for youth to come in and lead. Historically, the Sabha was founded with a young and astute vision, and within this spirit, it is trying to reach out again. The programme is intended not just as a literary genre, but as a shared experience for all those who love the heritage of Assam. For student participants, the Sabha utilizes resource persons, including distinguished academic scholars, who serve as mentors for students by assisting them in the selection of topics as well as how to enhance the substance and presentation of their speeches.

Over the years, accusations have surfaced over the Sabha's perceived disconnection from the general public, with some people suggesting it was now a purely insular group of intellectuals. *Swadesh Swabhiman* is an intentional effort to counter this. It is a revival and a bridge to rekindling the Sabha's relevance and opening it up to newer voices. The involvement of students from some of the top colleges in Assam and students studying from outside the state is perhaps indicative of the inclusive and collaborative character of the effort. The students give speeches and help to organize the events. Going forward, Asam Sahitya Sabha plans to publish a collection of the speeches made during *Swadesh Swabhiman* to legitimise the authorship of the ideas in those moments. The Sabha has also started some other projects to support popularising storytelling with children; it recognizes the importance of storytelling as the vehicle for the transmission of culture. A significant example is the bi-weekly from All India Radio (AIR), both disseminating the stories told in Assam, and staging storytelling workshops. Collectively, this effort represents a wider cultural awakening alongside a reaffirmed view of the Sabha not only as a literary entity but as a living, breathing institution that

nurtures identity, imagination, and intergenerational discussion in Assam (Hindustan Times, 2022).

During the Assam Sahitya Sabha's 10th annual special session held in Raha, Nagaon, the organization reaffirmed its commitment to preserving indigenous languages. The body passed an important resolution that called attention to the need for strict monitoring of educational institutions, specifically CBSE-affiliated English-medium schools that do not teach the mother tongue up to Class X level and in violation of the *Assam Official Language Act, 1960* and which grants official status to Assamese in the *Brahmaputra Valley*, and to Bengali in the Barak Valley. "*We will really have to act if they continue being invalid and don't monitor the educational institutes,*" said Padum Rajkhuwa, the Principal Secretary of the Sabha. The organisation is adamant about the fact that language is not only a cultural right, but also a mandate in law. With this resolution, the Sabha intends to re-empower native languages in education, but wants to promote a balanced, inclusive, and culturally relevant educational space (Times of India, 2019).

On February 13th 2022, the Asam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), Assam's oldest literary and cultural organization, took a major leap towards modernization with the launch of its digital platform at Guwahati. With its digital platform, Sabah has launched a digital archive that compiles historic and rare books, It also said it would make Assamese folk tales available on multiple audio streaming services. The digital archive uploaded approximately 500 old and valuable books and journals. This archive is an attempt not only to preserve literature from the state of Assam but to make it available to a wider population of Assam, particularly younger generations. In an address moments before the launch, ASS President Kuladhar Saikia highlighted youth engagement and participation as key steps towards relevance of the organization in future. He indicated that leaders of the organization do not want the Assam Sahitya Sabha to be viewed as solely a group of elderly writers collecting. They want to start, including younger generations, to keep this organization's relevance into this century and take advantage of the digital age.

The state government and machinery have provided technical assistance in the digitization of documents, which will gradually increase. The digitization plan of the *Assam Sahitya Sabha* (ASS) involved many colleges and universities in the region. Furthermore, many individuals scanned and sent rare and old books from their own personal collections, which demonstrates a strong community-based approach to cultural preservation. The broad engagement of many people in this initiative highlights the Sabha's commitment to engaging with Assamese literary heritage. ASS programmes are now streamed live on YouTube and, recently, folk tales from various indigenous communities of Northeast India are being uploaded to mainstream audio platforms like Spotify, Gaana, and Amazon Music. All of the digital outreach work which ASS have planned aims to make greater involvement from the younger generation. As ASS leaders have stressed, advocacy for the Assamese language and literature cannot happen only through the organisation, it requires concerted action from the people of Assam. Established in 1917 with the purpose of promoting the Assamese language, literature, and culture, the *Asam Sahitya Sabha* is a descendant of two prior organizations from Kolkata, '*AsamiyaBhasa Unnati Sadhini Sabha*' and '*the Assamese Literary Society*', both of which were the work of Assamese students. The Sabha exists today to honour that history by transferring those objectives to new platforms and making sure that their work is relevant, representative, and part of the digital landscape (The Print, 2022).

The issues on the way of schooling in the Assamese language are due to the significant decline in student enrollment, and many government schools in Assam have closed and merged with nearby schools. Private schools have drawn students and parents away from government institutions. As schools close across the state, and especially the growing role of private schools in doing so, the Assam Sahitya Sabha is responding. They are striving to establish a school system specifically meant for preserving the Assamese language and culture. In a recent meeting of the steering committee, held on the Dr. Mahendranath Baruah Conference Hall, Bhagwati Prasad Baruah

Bhavan, the Sabha was discussing the decline of Assamese-medium education. To establish that resolution, the committee has now officially begun the Jatiya Prak-Prarthomik Adarsha Vidyalaya project under the Sabha mechanism. To begin, the Sabha is going to find 100 sites to set up model schools. The Sabha is going to enter discussions with the Assam Government to obtain general provincial support for these model Assamese medium schools. In a press release, the Sabha indicated it would move to action once governmental buy-in for the project was achieved and stated that this was in the general interest of the Assamese language, culture, and identity. The Sabha has a social media page for public engagement (Pratidin Time, 2018).

Initiatives Taken by the AASU to Safeguard Assamese

Student activism has been an important part of the socio-political history of Assam, pre and post-independence, India. Before independence in India, that is the All India Students Federation (AISF) was active and effective in the freedom struggle in Assam. After independence, students have been active at the forefront of major movements in Assam, like the Refinery Movement (1956), the '*Language Movement*' (1960s), the advocacy for Assamese language as a medium of instruction (1972), etc. This period also marked the beginning of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), which was established in 1967 against a backdrop of political unrest and economic instability. AASU was also a large part of the Assam People's Council (All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP)), and together they led the Assam Movement (1979–1985) - a mass struggle against illegal immigration to Assam from Bangladesh. This movement involved identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants, largely Bangladeshi immigrants, and identifying constitutional and administrative safeguards for indigenous groups. This movement was mostly peaceful, but there were some tragic events - for example, an incident at Nellie where a great number of people were killed. It concluded with the signing of the Assam Accord on 15 August 1985, a Memorandum of Settlement between AASU-AAGSP leaders and the Government of India, formally ending six

years of protest and laying the foundation for future immigration policy in the state.²⁹

The Assam government, in collaboration with the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), has made notable strides toward implementing Clause 6 of the Assam Accord. In a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, discussions focused on 38 key recommendations from the Biplab Sharma Commission report, aimed at safeguarding the rights of indigenous Assamese people. The meeting resulted in important decisions on land rights, language policies, cultural protection, and administrative reforms. One significant outcome was the creation of new revenue circles, modeled after tribal belt blocks, ensuring land rights exclusively for Assamese people in these areas. The government also confirmed that Assamese will become mandatory in all English-medium schools across the Brahmaputra Valley, with both Assamese and Bodo required in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Furthermore, the history of Assamese people will be incorporated into school curricula up to the 8th standard by 2026. To further promote Assamese culture and language, official Assam government notifications will be published in both Assamese and English starting April 14. Additionally, the establishment of a Directorate of State Languages and initiatives to bolster Assamese literature and cultural heritage, including expanding university departments and establishing new academic chairs, were announced.³⁰ Approximately 30 ethnic organisations, spearheaded by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), are mobilising against the recently enacted Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), claiming the CAA endangers the interests of indigenous Assamese. This widespread concern and outcry over the CAA, with critics claiming the CAA exacerbates the existential threat to indigenous communities. AASU has initiated legal action, filing a writ petition at the Supreme Court of India against the Citizenship Amendment Rules, 2024, which it argues

²⁹ Assam History. Government of Assam. Retrieved from: [Assam History | Assam State Portal](#).

³⁰ The Assam Tribune. (Feb, 16, 2025). Assam Government, AASU Discuss Clause 6 Implementation. Retrieved from: [Assam govt, AASU discuss clause 6 implementation](#).

violate the Assam Accord and Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955. AASU claims the CAA undermines the aim of the National Register of Citizens (NRC). While AASU led a torch march and filed a petition with the Supreme Court, the public response has not been as solid as in earlier such movements by the AASU, like the Assam Movement of the early 1980s or the anti-CAA protests of 2019-2020. Some commentators argue AASU has not been able to adjust its plans and tactics to a shifted political landscape, undermining its relevance to student politics. Despite this, AASU is committed to working with other ideologically relevant organisations on certain issues, especially where it concerns the protection of indigenous Assamese. The protests led by AASU in 2019 had significant urban traction but not as much strength in the rural areas, revealing a disconnect that weakened the movement's wider significance. With diminishing political space for indigenous communities, there are worries of possible long-term consequences for the federalism of Assam. While the effect of the AASU strategy has developed over time, the underlying issue is that the CAA is still considered unconstitutional, communal, and fundamentally against the interests of the Assamese (Krishna Hasnat, 2024).

The leadership of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) has expressed opposition to the implementation of the three-language formula proposed in the draft National Education Policy by the Union Government. The AASU argues that two languages are sufficient for students in Assam. According to their perspective, students should have the option to choose one regional language alongside either English or Hindi, should they wish. The imposition of Hindi as a mandatory language, they contend, is inappropriate for Assam's educational context.

In a comparable fashion, the Assam Sahitya Sabha has also supported the option of teaching regional language alternatives in central schools in Assam. The Sabha called for recognized regional languages to be taught in the formal curriculum up to the twelfth grade. In 2019, the Sabha moved to respond to the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) through its regional office in Guwahati,

and requested the KVS's controversial instruction that subsequently this identified Regional Languages would now be classified as "additional languages" that would be taught outside of school hours starting with the 2019-2020 academic session to be revoked. The Assam Sahitya Sabha was successful in persuading KVS to include Regional Language instruction during school hours in the academic year (Kangkan Kalita, 2019).

Conclusion

The Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS) and the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) have been essential in supporting the Assamese language, providing distinct yet complementary styles of ensuring the survival of linguistic and cultural identity in the face of serious challenges. Both organizations have facilitated initiatives and taken actions to bring attention to the major existential threats posed by globalization, migration and the power of dominant relational languages, such as English and Hindi, to minimize Assamese in social, educational, and professional contexts, to help keep Assamese as a cultural heritage and civic pride pillar. Their work shows the relation not only between language and identity and self-determination, but that the continuity of Assamese lives is not only a language but is a continuity of culture and political identity.

Since its inception in 1917, Assam Sahitya Sabha has been a foundation of Assamese literary and cultural life, by developing the language through literature, research, and local engagement. For instance, their new series, '*Swadesh Swabhimān*', shows their interest in sustaining future generations by integrating their education into the evolution of Assamese culture, rather than relying only on traditional scholarship. Because the Sabha provides opportunities for youth to learn about the past, traditions, and struggles of Assam, they will also learn about current issues, which make the language relevant to their generation. The Sabha has also emphasized Assamese-medium education, digital archives, and storytelling, which suggests that there is a strategic shift to undertake the ongoing relevance of Assamese culture and to meaningfully engage young people's education in the language in schools, media, and online spaces. While promoting a

shift or evolution in the language may incur stereotypes of elitism, more importantly, it situates the Sabha as an influential entity that preserves and, more importantly, reinforces and propels Assamese cultural representations.

Likewise, the All Assam Students' Union has vigorously espoused the case for Assamese rights. This advocacy appears in the organisation's leadership of the Assam Movement and its grievance with the implementation of the Assam Accord. While the AASU is recognized for its advocacy that mandates Assamese in the educational institutions, opposition to the citizenship (amendment) Act, and opposition to the three-language formula (as well as a much-provoking relationship with the Hindi language) affirm its position as a guardian and protector of indigenous issues. The AASU has also achieved a policy success that secured Assamese in school curricula, and appropriately situated land rights for indigenous communities, while constantly challenging or resisting attempts to omit Assamese from social and cultural discourses. While there have been obvious limitations and challenges in expanding their organized capacity over recent years, both their legal and civic engagements continue to locate themselves in various apparatuses of cultural, social, and political discourse on linguistic and cultural justice in the region.

ASS and AASU have also had to navigate the complicated and dynamic socio-political and demographic landscape of Assam, addressing historical injustices rooted in colonial policies and contemporary transnational pressures from globalization. Their joint efforts have bolstered the Assamese identity through the promotion of the healthy use of the Assamese language in educational, political, and social life, along with the cultivation of youth pride. While meaningful progress has been made, it must be acknowledged that this work is ongoing and will require sustained vigilance. The ongoing growth of English-medium education in India, the prevalence of languages other than Assamese that are not related to the geography, culture, and people of Assam, and the rise of Assamese language in digital spaces are immediate and important challenges. Both ASS and AASU must continue to innovate, work with communities, and interact with

policymakers to ensure the presence of Assamese language continues in a globalizing world. Ultimately, ASS and AASU's legacy is to ground the Assamese language as a living site for the tenacity, innovative possibilities, and intercultural connections of the Assamese people to secure identity for the generations to come.

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*** **

THE ŚRĪMADBHĀGAVATAPURĀṆA AS THE SOURCE OF THE NIMINAVASIDDHASAMVĀDA OF ŚAṆKARADEVA– AN APPRAISAL

Binima Buzarbaruah

Abstract

Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, a multifaceted personality of 15th century A.D. was the pioneer of the Bhakti movement in medieval Assam. He was a great saint who, through the medium of literature, music, art and drama spread the message of his cult *Eka Śaraṇa Harinamadharma*. The *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* is a poetic composition of Śaṅkaradeva based on the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Here, nine different saints solved the nine questions of the king Nimi. The assertions of the nine saints bear great philosophical significance. The matters described in the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* are not just a literal rendering of the original source. Śaṅkaradeva with his extraordinary poetic talent has delineated those portions in a very befitting manner. Showing the path of spirituality in accordance with the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* can also play a significant role for the moral up gradation of the people of the present society.

Keywords: Śaṅkaradeva, *Niminavasiddhasamvāda*,
Bhāgavatapurāṇa, Devotion Liberation.

Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva, a versatile personality of extraordinary caliber, was a great spiritual leader and social reformer of medieval Assam. The pioneer of the Neo Vaisnavite Bhakti movement in Assam, Śaṅkaradeva with the composition of numerous songs, verses, poetry, drama etc. established a very rich literary tradition. The *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* is a poetic composition of Śaṅkaradeva based on the 2nd to 5th chapters of the 11th *skandha* of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. (Neog,1998). The story of Nimi has been told by Nārada to Vasudeva as the later wants to know about the devotional service of the living entity which gives pleasure to Supreme Lord.

Moreover, he also asks for some instructions so that he can make himself free from material existence which is full of troubles. Nārada at first tells that simply by hearing, by chanting, by meditating, by accepting and by praising the devotional service of others one can immediately be purified. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.2.7,12). To discuss the matter a bit extensively Nārada, in this context, refers to the story of the king Nimi. Certain questions arose in the mind of the king and those have been solved by nine different saints. The assertions of the nine saints bear great philosophical significance.

The first question of the king Nimi is about the *bhāgavatadharmā* i.e. duties of a devotee towards Lord. In reply to this question, Kavi, who is one of the nine saints, tells that for the association of the temporal material world one's mind remains disturbed. According to him, one can achieve real freedom from fear by worshipping the lotus feet of the Lord.

*manye 'kutaścidbhayamacyutasya
pādāmbujopāsanāmātra nityam/*

(*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.2.33).

The state of real freedom from fear as found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* has been described by Śaṅkaradeva as *ātyantika sukha* i.e., supreme happiness. It means that when all the fear and mental disturbances are removed then real happiness can be gained. According to him, when one can remove his all kinds of sorrows by worshipping the feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, that is the state of *ātyantika sukha*.

*kṛṣṇa pada sevātesa hare save dukha/
tāhāke bolaya rājā ātyantika sukha//*

(*Niminasiddhasamvāda*, 2014, Pada, 45).

Moreover, in this context the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also states that one should offer everything done by his body, words, mind, senses, intelligence etc. to the Supreme for His pleasure. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.2.36). It is very significant here that nowhere in this verse the term *bhāgavatadharmā* is specifically mentioned. In the Assamese rendering of this verse, Śaṅkaradeva very explicitly mentions the

whole thing as the *bhāgavatadharmā* for which the idea becomes more comprehensible.

*Kāya vākya mane yateka ācare laukika vaidika karma.../
...kṛṣṇata arpile jānā siyo howe mahābhāgavatadharmā//
(Niminasiddhasamvāda, 2014, Pada, 53, 54).*

In the context of the question of Nimi in regard to the qualities of a devotee, various categories of devotees have been mentioned in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. At first, three types of devotees are shown viz., the *uttama*, *madhyama* and *prākṛta*. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.2.45-47). Śāṅkaradeva also shows mainly three types of devotees as found in the original text. However, he has used the term *mahābhāgavata* instead of *uttamabhāgavata* found in the original source. It is stated that one who sees all creatures in God and experiences God in every creature he is the *mahābhāgavata*, i.e. the highest kind of devotee. He who loves God and also has friendly behaviour with the devotees of God is the *madhyama* or middle kind of devotee. However, he is said as the *prākṛta* or an ordinary devotee, who worships the idol of Hari but does not have respect to other creatures. These three kinds of devotees are described by Śāṅkaradeva as found in the original text in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

*Īśvarata dekhe yito samaste prāñīka/
prāñī samastato dekhe Īśvaramūrtika//
samaste aiśvarya vyāpi ache jagatata/
hena yito dekhe sito mahābhāgavata//
ekānte karaya prema yito Īśvarata/
mitrata ācare haribhakata savata//
ajñaka karuṇā kṣamā kare vipakṣata/
sehi jana jāniba madhyama bhāgavata//
nupuje bhaktaka mānya nakare prāñīka/
eke pratimāta mātra arādhe harika/
sehi jana janibāhā prakṛta bhakata/
āruḍha haiyāche teho bhaktira pathata//
(Niminasiddhasamvāda, 2014, Pada, 80-82)*

There are certain other types of devotees mentioned in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* like *bhāgavatottama*, *bhāgavatapradhāna*, *Hareḥ*

Priya and *vaiṣṇavāgrya*.(*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.2.48-53). The names of different devotees have been termed by Śaṅkaradeva in his own way keeping the sense intact, like *uttamabhāgavata*, *uttamabhakata*, *Harira parama priya*, *bhakata uttama*, *pradhāna bhakata*, *vaiṣṇvara agragaṇya* and *uttamato uttama bhāgavata*. The *vaiṣṇavāgrya* who is said as the best among all devotees according to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, Śaṅkaradeva states *uttamato uttama* as the best devotee. This type of devotee has been said to be he who keeps God's name all the time in his mind. The Assamese poet has made some detailed discussion of the original text in this regard. (*Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda*, 2014, *Pada*, 85-103). Feeling it necessary for every individual to be devoted to God, Śaṅkaradeva might have done more elaboration regarding the nature of devotees than it is found in the original text of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*.

The king Nimi also wishes to know about the illusory potency of God. The thirst of Nimi in this case has been satiated by the saint Antariṅka. In this connection he states that by activating the material elements God has evolved all creatures, high and low. The supreme soul enters into the created beings, and activates the mind and senses. The being, because of the sense motivated actions, is driven by the desires and engaged in different activities from which he reaps different fruits. The living entity experiences the results of his material actions by wandering in happiness and distress. In this way, he has to experience repeated birth and death. One has to suffer from the moment of creation to the time of cosmic annihilation by the reaction of his own activities. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009,11.3.1-16). Such philosophical matters are not so easy to be grasped by the common people. So, for the sake of the common mass, Śaṅkaradeva, in his *Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda* has expressed these difficult philosophical matters in a simple and easy way. As mentioned by Śaṅkaradeva, after birth the created beings have to suffer a lot. The main cause of suffering is the attachment of the body with the worldly objects. He does not have control over his senses and for this he turns towards the evil actions. As a result, until the occurrence of the dissolution of the world, one has to face the journey of birth and

death. Even sometimes he has to take the form of some lower types of creations like animals, trees and other insects.

*indriyara saṅge jive bhuñje viṣayaka/
 ātmā buli māne māyāmaya śarīraka//
 dhare mahā mohe āti howe jñānaśunya/
 sakāme aneka karma kare pāpa puṇya//
 jave sṛsti thāke mahā nimile pralaya/
 janama maraṇa tāve nerai mṛtyu bhaya//
 paśupakṣi vrkṣa kīta pataṅga jonita/
 upaji yātanā ādi bhuñje viparīta//*

(*Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda*, 2014, *Pada*, 107-127)

So that the people can be able to keep themselves away from the worldly desires by controlling their senses, Śaṅkaradeva has delineated the whole thing in a smooth and easy flowing manner.

The fourth question of Nimi is about the way of crossing over the illusory energy. In this connection it is stated that first of the entire devotee must have the feeling of detachment for the near and dear ones as well as for wealth. Moreover, one has to associate themselves with the righteous people and acquire certain good qualities like control of senses, kindness etc. The divine birth, his qualities and divine actions should be always in the minds of the devotees. Devotion is very essential for the attainment of Lord. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009, 11.3.17-33). All these are nicely presented both in the original *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and Śaṅkaradeva's *Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda*. However, in the *Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda* of Śaṅkaradeva this is not a word by word translation of the original. Śaṅkaradeva states that one should have association with the Lord and consider Him as his friend. Moreover, one should have a contented mind and he should be always devoted to the Lord. Then only it is possible to keep oneself free from grief. In this context, the divine actions of Lord Kṛṣṇa which he showed in his childhood days have been mentioned by Śaṅkaradeva though those are not found in the original *Bhāgavata*. The main intention of the Assamese poet in this regard is to attract the people more towards the Lord so that they can have sincere devotion to Him. (*Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda*, 2014, *Pada*, 158-172). Devotion is that

which can establish a link between God and the human being. Through the attachment to God, surrender is possible which the basis of devotion is. (Baruah,2014). Actually, it is the power of devotion to Lord that one can be able to cross the illusory energy. In this way, Śaṅkaradeva tries to keep the real sense same as its original with a nice elaborative presentation of the whole idea.

The thirst of Nimi to have the knowledge of the Supreme lord i.e. the Absolute Truth who is called as the Brahman has been quenched by the sage Pippalāyana in six verses. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* at first describes the nature of Brahman. Here, it is stated that the Supreme Lord is the cause of creation, maintenance and destruction of the world. He is pervading the states of being awaking, dreaming and deep sleep. As he enlivens the body and senses, all the organs of the body are able to function. It is not so easy to comprehend the Supreme Truth with the help of mind, or the faculties of speech, sight, intelligence etc. This whole idea is kept intact by the Assamese poet as the original. The fact that the Parmātman can not be realized by the senses has been explained in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* in this way that as the sparks of fire cannot manifest or destroy the fire, the mind, intelligence and other senses also cannot realise Him though born from Him. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, 2009,11.3.35-36). However, this idea has been presented by the Assamese poet in a short but interesting way, keeping the real sense intact.

*jena phiriṅgaticaya bahnira bajai/
nakare prakāśa sito bahnika dunai//
sehimate mana ādi tānte huyā jāta/
māyāta thākiyā tāṅka najāne sākṣāta//*

(*Niminavasiddhasamvāda*, 2014,*Pada*,183)

While delineating the idea of Brahman Śaṅkaradeva with an easy illustration states how one can realise the Ultimate Reality in his mind. This illustration is completely absent in the original text.

*gucaileka auśadhe cakṣura jeve mala/
sijane sākṣāte dekhe suryara maṅḍala//
sehimate kṛṣṇa kathā śravaṇa kirtane/
guṇara karmara mala tejetāra mane//*

*nirmala manata howe ātmaparicaya/
tevese kṛṣṇata dr̥ḍhabhakti upajaya//
karmayogatase howe bhaktira udaya/*

(Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda, 2014, Pada,203,204).

Here, Śaṅkaradeva explains the whole idea in this way that as the medicine removes the dirt in eyes and the eyes become able to see the shining light of the Sun, likewise when one's mind is purified with the hearing of the glory of Lord then he can have an experience of the Supreme soul. So, one's heart must be filled with purity to realise Brahman. This *Purāṇa* also states that only in a pure heart devotion manifests and the devotion arises through *karmayoga*.

The king Nimi also asks about the *karmayoga*, being purified by which a person achieves the Supreme soul. In this regard, the sage Āvihotra enlightens the king and says that through the study of the Vedas one can understand the *karma* i.e., prescribed duties, *akarma* i.e., forbidden activities and *vikarma* i.e., non performance. These three terms are not explained in the original text and so the nature of these three has not been revealed. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*,2009, 11.3.43). But, Śaṅkaradeva in the Assamese version with his own explanation has made the terms clear for the benefit of the people. He states that *karma* is that activity prescribed in the Vedas. *Akarma* is that activity which is not prescribed by Vedas and so, that is not to be done. *Vikarma* is that which is not done but actually prescribed to be done by the Vedas.

*vede yāka bihiyāche tāke buli karma/
vede yāka niṣedhile sehito akarma//
bihita nacāri hoy vikarma pāteka/
ehi tinibidha koilo tomāta pratyekal//*

(Niminavasiddhasaṁvāda,2014,Pada,208).

The foolish people are attached to materialistic i.e. fruitive activities. Actually, by prescribing fruitive activities, the Vedic injunctions at first, in directly try to lead the people to the path of liberation. It is just like a father who first gives his child a candy so that the child will not refuse the medicine. All these are kept intact in

the Assamese rendering of the original work. However, in certain places Śāṅkaradeva has elaborated the things for the better understanding of the people. While the king asks about the *karmayoga* there is another question which is also attached to it. Nimi tells that earlier also, he wanted to know about *Karmayoga* from the sages like Sanaka etc., but the reply to his question was not given to him. So, now, Nimi asks to the saints why he was not answered about *karmayoga* during that time.

*evam praśnamṛṣin pūrvamapṛccham piturantike/
nābruvan brahmaṇaḥ putrāstatra kāraṇamucyatām//
(Bhāgavatapurāṇa, 2009,11.3.42).*

The reply of this question of Nimi is not found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the commentaries are also silent in this regard. But, Śāṅkaradeva with his extraordinary genius has made the reply of the second question also. Śāṅkaradeva from his own idea has presented the reply in this way that *karmayoga* is not a simple matter. As during that time, Nimi was a small boy, so, earlier sages must have not replied this to him thinking that being a small boy he would not be able to grasp such a complex philosophical matter.

*parama duṣkara karmayoga ātisaya/
tumiyo taisani śīṣu ikṣvaku tanaya//
thi bhāvi nakahilā sikathā tomāt/*

(Niminasiddhasaṁvāda, 2014,Pada,211).

By His internal potency and according to his own will the Lord descends into the material world. In this regard, Nimi wants to have some idea about the different incarnations of Lord and also about His immense glory. It has been replied by the sage Drumila that it would be a matter of foolish person to try to make effort to enumerate fully the unlimited qualities of the Supreme Lord. It may be possible to count the particles of dust in this world, but it is quite impossible to know about the qualities of the Lord which can never be counted. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa, 2009,11.4.1-2*). To make people know about the greatness of power of Lord in a more clear way, Śāṅkaradeva takes shelter of an illustration in this regard where he states that the desire to

count the qualities of Lord is just like measuring the water of the ocean with a tiny stick.

*Napāibe guṇara tathāpito parimita/
tāka gaṇibāka lāgi jito dei citta//...
...sito mandamati jñanaśunya samudaya/
sāgaraka kāthi diyā jukhibāka cāya//*

(Niminasiddhasamvāda, 2014, Pada, 234)

However, the concept of Puruṣa is depicted in Śaṅkaradeva's writing as it is found in the original text. In the description of the Puruṣa it is stated that out of the five elements, the Lord Nārāyaṇa created his universal body and entered within that form and thus he was known as the Puruṣa. His transcendental senses produced the active senses of all the beings. Through the qualities called *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* the Universe is created, maintained and destroyed. In the very beginning, through the material mode of passion the Supreme personality manifested the form of Brahmā to create the universe. To maintain the universe, the Lord manifested himself as Viṣṇu and the Supreme Lord manifested the form of Rudra when the universe is to be annihilated. *(Niminasiddhasamvāda, 2014, Pada, 242)*.

The curiosity of Nimi regarding the destination of those who never worship God and also are unable to control their own selves has been removed by the sage called Camasa. In reply to this question the sage states about the nature of such excessively materialistic persons who never worship Lord. Such people are ignorant about the real goal of life but proudly consider them as very learned. The result of not worshipping Lord is also mentioned in this way that such people ultimately have to fall in the nether world. *(Bhāgavatapurāṇa, 2009, 11.5.2-11)*. All these are clearly narrated by the Assamese poet. To make people a bit more aware regarding the worship of Lord, Śaṅkaradeva states that Mādhava is the father, Lord and Preceptor. One who disrespects the Lord he would be regarded as a sinner equal to him who dishonours his father and the preceptor. *(Niminasiddhasamvāda, 2014, Pada, 328-336)*. The last question of

Nimi was regarding the form and colour of God and also the type of worship at a particular age. In reply to this it was stated that in the *Satya yuga* the Lord was having four arms and of white colour. During that time, the people were calm and self-controlled. In *Treta yuga* God was fire coloured and four armed. He then was in the form of sacrifice. People of that age were very dedicated and expert in Vedas. In the Age of *Dvāpara*, the Lord was of dark colour, dressed in yellow and was holding conch shell, wheel, mace and lotus. The people of that time were worshippers of God. In the *Kali* age the Lord is found as dark coloured and very lustrous. (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa*,2009,11.5.19). This whole episode of the description of God is kept intact in the work of Śaṅkaradeva. Regarding the appearances of God in different ages, the different names of those incarnations like Paramātmā, Avyakta, Īśvara, Yogeśvara, Vāsudeva, Saṅkarśana, Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa etc. are described in the same manner by the Assamese poet. In the *Kali* age, the process of worship is prescribed as the chanting of the name of God. With this, one can get highest kind of peace and also can gain liberation. The greatness of chanting of the name of God is delineated by Śaṅkaradeva very elaborately. (*Niminavasiddhasamvāda*, 2014,*Pada*,367-398). For the propagation of the *Eka Śaraṇa Harinamadharma* Śaṅkaradeva laid stress on the chanting of God's name.

The content of the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* bears great significance and it is relevant even in the present day society. By the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* which is an Assamese rendering of a particular part of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the people of modern society can be made aware regarding the path of spirituality which is essential not for a particular age but for every time to come. To achieve the real goal of life every human being should make a great effort and in this regard the knowledge of *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* can be a great tool. It teaches people how one can lead a pure and sacred life. In today's globalised world serious moral degradation of the society has been seen due to the materialistic outlook and consumerism of the people. People try to earn money by any means

without caring for honesty and integrity. In today's society, violence in the family as well as in the public life is very frequent. To eradicate such evils it is necessary to control the senses and follow the path of spirituality. So, the work like the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* which is a reflection of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, can play a significant role for the spiritual and moral up gradation of the people for leading a pure and sacred life so that peace can be established in the modern society.

The matters described in the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda* are not just a literal rendering of the original source i.e., the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Śaṅkaradeva with his extraordinary poetic talent has delineated those portions in a very befitting manner. Certain matters have been found intact as those are in the original *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*. Certain matters are elaborated by the Assamese poet and certain matters are newly incorporated by him. With this, Śaṅkaradeva has tried to remove the complexities of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and has also made it possible for the common people to grasp its meanings in a simple and easy way. The teachings of the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* as reflected in the *Niminavasiddhasamvāda*, regarding the qualities and nature of a devotee, the way of crossing over illusory energy, control of senses, the nature of Supreme Lord, *karmayoga* etc., are very much essential for all times to come, for an individual to lead a sacred life and gain salvation.

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*** **

**A CONSTRAINT-BASED ACCOUNT OF SYNCOPE IN
NALBARIA ASSAMESE**

Bipasha Patgiri

Abstract

The paper intends to explore prosody related phenomena such as syllable structure, foot formation, syncope, stress shift, vowel coalescence and diphthong formation in the Nalbaria variety of Assamese, an Eastern Indic language spoken in Assam, India (hereafter, NA) and their interactive consequences. The analysis will be done using the constraint-based framework of Optimality Theory. NA is syllable-timed and lacks phonemic vowel length. It is a quantity-sensitive language. The reason for vowel syncope in NA is ‘stress’ as evidenced by processes like diphthong formation in initial syllables and vowel coalescence in final syllable. Stressed syllables are always heavy or made heavy by adding a moraic coda or by diphthong formation in the initial syllable. The language has a tendency for rhythmic categorical vowel deletion. However, in the syncope pattern in NA, FT-TRO is a high-ranked constraint but PARSE- σ is not undominated because it allows occasional occurrences of non-initial unparsed syllables. A markedness constraint *STRUCTURE may also be invoked to deal with the rhythmic categorical vowel deletion in NA. In NA, stem-initial vowels are never deleted in compound word formations. NA rhythmic vowel deletion does not affect disyllabic words as it is a language-specific requirement to form an initial trochaic foot. NA prefers a disyllabic CVC.CV sequence which results post-medial (unstressed) vowel deletion both in lexical roots as well as in derived environment.

Keywords: Syncope, Vowel Coalescence, Syllable Structure, Optimality Theory, Assamese

Introduction

The serial interaction between phonological processes can be adequately analyzed within a parallel model of phonology, i.e., the non-derivational version of Optimality Theory. Syncope, or deletion of vowels in (unstressed) medial position is often viewed a process with striking economy effects (as it makes the output shorter) motivated by language-specific economy principles. In fact, deletion is a preferred process even language universally if not blocked by syllable structure constraints or OCP³¹ (Kisseberth 1970, McCarthy 1986). However, though preferred across languages, economy does not result in the shortest pronounceable word, (or to say a single light syllable) only in the lexicon. But languages prefer prosodic well-formedness over small sized structures. Syncope, the loss of certain unstressed word-medial vowels has a profound effect on the phonotactics of languages as well. Often, syncope results in adjacency of consonants which eventually undergo various processes. Gouskova (2003: 8) states that “the only thing all vowel deletion phenomena have in common is that a mapping has occurred that violates MAX-V. There is no anti-vowel constraint *V or anti-syllable constraint *STRUC(σ)”. The famous paradox given by McCarthy (2002), based on Kisseberth (1970)’s ‘conspiracies’ is that ‘homogeneity of process and heterogeneity of target’ can be invoked to explain the cross-linguistic nature of syncope which cannot be given a unified theory. This property of OT grammars states that every marked configuration is avoided in variety of ways.

Both lexical and derived words in Nalbaria Assamese (NA) undergo systematic medial vowel deletion, or syncope. Consequently, word-level foot structure is affected. A discussion follows in the sections below. Though Assamese and its major dialects do not have any phonemic vowel length, vowels are realized as long in

³¹ There are many ways in which OCP is satisfied such as dissimilation, allomorphy, lexical gaps, suppletion, syncope and consonant deletion etc.

monosyllabic open lexical roots.³² Assamese and its varieties are syllable-timed, and Assamese is a quantity sensitive language.

Unlike other Indo Aryan languages, where deletion is never associated with initial trochaic foot formation, NA shows a tendency for rhythmic categorical vowel deletion which is motivated by two prosodic factors – (i) a prohibition for complex structure and (ii) a preference for forming initial trochaic foot³³ at the prosodic level. In the NA syncope pattern, FT-TRO is a high-ranked constraint but PARSE- σ is not undominated as NA allows occasional occurrences of non-initial unparsed syllables. A markedness constraint *STRUCTURE may be invoked to deal with the rhythmic categorical vowel deletion in NA. Therefore, Kager (1997)'s analysis of rhythmic categorical vowel deletion (for languages such Southern Tepehuan) is apparently inadequate for analysing the pattern of deletion in NA. In NA, stem-initial vowels are never deleted in derived compounds. NA rhythmic vowel deletion does not affect disyllabic words because of its language-specific requirement to form an initial trochaic foot. Therefore, apocope is not encountered in the language. Processes like deletion and epenthesis are essential in 'coercing' segment strings to get adapted into the given language's sound system as well as its syllable structure. NA prefers a disyllabic CVC.CV sequence which is often resulted by deleting the medial (unstressed) vowel from an underlying trisyllabic CV.CV.CV sequence.

Syncope often occurs between two consonants (C_1VC_2) creating a CC sequence at the site of deletion. In NA, these word-medial CC sequences are heterosyllabic in nature and are syllabified as

³²The non-distinctive length is lost when they morphologically derive a CVC or CV.CV structure from the underlying CV: structure.

(1) Loss of vowel length

a.	CV: → CVC	<i>ma:</i> 'mother'	<i>mar</i>	'mother.GEN'
		<i>ga:</i> 'body'	<i>gat</i>	'body.LOC'
b.	CV: → CV.CV	<i>za:</i> 'go'	<i>za.bo</i>	'go.fut.3P'
		<i>sa:</i> 'shadow'	<i>sa.re</i>	'shadow. INSTR'

³³Due to initial stress the medial vowels are deleted to shorten a trisyllabic word to a disyllabic one and a polysyllabic word to a trisyllabic one.

(C)VC.CV(C). NA does not allow any complex margin in the syllable onset as well as coda position. Therefore, all such sequences are heterosyllabic in nature, irrespective of the sources (derived, lexical and *tatsama*³⁴ words). Some examples showing a comparison between the SCA and NA forms are presented in (2) below. They exhibit a deletion in (C)V.CV.CV structure which result in a contracted (C)VC.CV structure.

(2) Inflectionally derived forms

a.	/ene-koi/	ɛŋ.ke ³⁵	‘in this manner’
b.	/k ^h osvɔr-a/	k ^h ɔs.ra	‘search-PRES/IMP-2P-MH’
c.	/asor-a/	as.ra	‘scratch-PRES/IMP-2P-MH’
d.	/kamor-a/	kam.ra	‘bite-PRES/IMP-2P-MH’
e.	/mohvɔr-a/	mɔh.ra	‘smash-PRES/IMP-2P-MH’

Some of these examples above have undergone multiple phonological processes – syncope followed by nasal place assimilation, vowel lowering and vowel coalescence word finally often resulting in marked structure which is cross-linguistically uncommon.

Morphological Structure of the Verb

Most common syllable shape of the verb roots in NA is aCV template, followed by CVC³⁶. The CVC verb roots combine with the

³⁴Inherited through Prakrit, *tatsama* words are unmodified Sanskrit loans in all Indic (Indo Aryan) languages including Nalbaria Assamese.

³⁵Nasal place assimilation follows syncope in many such words which is beyond the scope of the current discussion.

³⁶ Out of the 48 basic verbs listed in the Swadesh 200 wordlist, all the varieties of Assamese (including SCA and NA) has 44 verb roots. These roots have the following syllable shapes – (i) 7 monosyllabic (CV), (ii) 27 monosyllabic (CVC), (iii) 5 disyllabic (CVCV), and (iv) 4 disyllabic ((C)VCVC).

suffixes /-a/ (for 2nd person, middle honorificity and present perfect), /-o/ (for 1st person present perfect form), /-ɒ/ (for 3rd person future tense) and /-e/ (for present tense marker) to form a CVCV structure. After prefixing such derived forms with the negative morpheme /nV-/³⁷, the form takes a derived CV.CV.CV structure which is a potential site for medial vowel deletion. NA has a complete set of negative conjugation with the negative particle *nɔ*, *na-* placed before the verb root unlike other close genetic relatives such as Bengali and Oriya.

(3) Affixation in NA verb roots³⁸

a.	<i>kɔr</i>	/nV- kɔr-a/	<i>nɔkɔra</i> [nɔk.ra]	‘NEG-do-PRES-2P-MH.’
b.	<i>mɔt</i>	/nV- mat-o/	<i>namatu</i> [nam.tu]	‘NEG-call-PRES-1P’
c.	<i>lag</i>	/nV- lag-e/	<i>nalage</i> [nal.ge]	‘NEG-require-PRES-3P’
d.	<i>g^hur</i>	/nV- g ^h ur-i/	<i>nug^huri</i> [nug ^h .ri]	‘NEG-turn-NF’

The negative morpheme which contains a placeless vowel, i.e., /nV-/ is prefixed with the verb, where the first vowel of the root verb is copied to the negative prefix. For the present purpose, /nV-/ is the underlying form of negative prefix. Another less productive phonological process affects some verbs during inflection - a future tense marker /-m/ is added to a monosyllabic verb root of CV structure root finally and consequently, the addition of the negative morpheme /nV-/ is added to form a negative form of a verb stem, a resultant

³⁷ Wiese (1996) argues that affixes which start with a consonant can be considered as independent prosodic words. Pandey (1990) also supports this view for Indo-Aryan languages. Extending this view, the NA negative prefix /nV/ can be regarded as an independent prosodic word.

³⁸ In Assamese, the negative form of a verb is derived when the negative morpheme *n-* prefixes to the verbal root. The negative morpheme *n-* copies the vowel of the root verb for syllabification. This negative particle in Assamese can alternatively be regarded as a clitic with the representation /NEG /+V/, as it copies the vowel of the verbal base and although initial it is never the stress bearing element.

CVCVC structure is formed. In some of such cases, the bilabial nasal changes to a velar nasal by changing its place feature specifications.

(4) Alternation due to Featural change

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| a. | <i>d^hu</i> | <i>/nV-d^hu-m/</i> | <i>[nud^hɔm ~ nud^hɔŋ]</i> | ‘NEG-wash-FUT-1P’ |
| b. | <i>rua</i> | <i>/nV-ru-m/</i> | <i>[nurɔm ~ nurɔŋ]</i> | ‘NEG-reap-FUT-1P’ |
| c. | <i>sa</i> | <i>/nV-sa-m/</i> | <i>[nasɔm ~ nasɔŋ]</i> | ‘NEG-see-FUT-1P’ |

However, this word-final featural change is outside the scope of discussion of this thesis as it results in alternative forms only and does not alter the syllable structure. In NA, verb roots combine with several suffixes which express intricate information about tense, aspect and honorificity. Such verb forms in NA undergo systematic vowel deletion resulting in lesser number of syllables.

(5) Affixation in CV verb roots: /CVCVCV/ → [CVC.CV]

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| a. | <i>za</i> | <i>/nV-za-b-a/</i> | <i>[naz.bi]</i> | ‘NEG-go-IMP-2P-MH’ |
| b. | <i>k^ha</i> | <i>/nV-k^ha-b-o/</i> | <i>[nak^h.po]</i> | ‘NEG-eat-FUT-3P’ |

(6) Affixation in CVC verb roots: /CVCVCV/ → [CVC.CV]

- | | | | | |
|----|------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| a. | <i>kɔr</i> | <i>/nV-kɔr-a/</i> | <i>[nɔk.ra]</i> | ‘NEG-do-PRES/IMP-2P-MH’ |
| b. | <i>gil</i> | <i>/nV-gil-e/</i> | <i>[nig.le]</i> | ‘NEG-swallow-PRES-3P’ |
| c. | <i>xun</i> | <i>/nV-xun-e/</i> | <i>[nux.ne]</i> | ‘NEG-listen-PRES-3P’ |

Addition of inflectional morphemes in this highly inflecting language turns CVC verb roots to longer underlying structure such as CVCVCVCV etc (the data in (6) above shows that vowels from even syllables delete but never from initial or final syllable). At the end of allpost-lexical derivations, NA deletes the underlying medial vowel. Subsequently, adjacent consonants in the resultant heterosyllabic cluster assimilate in terms of voicing and coronality. This is because

syncope creates favourable conditions for both voicing and coronal assimilation in NA. The former feeds the latter two.

(7) Affixation in CVC verb roots: /CV.CV.CV.CV/ → [CVC.CV.CV]

- a. /nV- t^hel-il-a/ nɛt^helila [nɛt^h.li.la] ‘NEG-push-PRES PERF-2P-MH’
- b. /nV- buz-il-a/ nubuzila [nub.zi.la] ‘NEG-understand-PRES PERF-2P-MH’
- c. /nV-kɔr-ib-ɔ/ nɔkɔribɔ [nɔkɔribo] ‘NEG-do-FUTURE-3P’³⁹
- d. /nV- gil-is-a/ nigilisa [nig.li.sa] ‘NEG-swallow-PRESINGRPROG-2P’⁴⁰
- e. /nV- mat-is-a/ namatisa [nam.ti.sa] ‘NEG-call-PRESINGRPROG-2P’

As evident from the above examples, all derived forms of an underlying CVCVCVCV structure get shortened to CVC.CV.CV on the surface due to non-iterative syncope.

Morphological Structure of the Noun

The accusative morpheme [-ok] ~ [-k] is suffixed to nouns and pronouns to form an accusative construction in NA (in SCA, this variation is between [-ɔk] ~ [-k]).⁴¹ In NA, the underlying construction of adding the [-ok] morpheme to the nominal – CVCVC + VC undergoes in a loss of the medial vowel resulting in a surface

³⁹ An affix-final /ɔ/ is realized as /o/ in NA if it occurs word-finally.

⁴⁰ In addition to a usual progressive aspect which focuses on the progression of an action, Assamese also has an aspect to focus on the beginning of an action that is going to continue. An Assamese sentence /teo tennis k^hel-is-e/ can be glossed as ‘he tennis play.Prog(Ingressive).3P’ where the non-periphrastic morpheme ‘-is-’ expresses ingressive actions.

⁴¹ The [-k] allomorph is not considered here as it does not produce a possible environment for syncope. The allomorphy here depends on the preceding context – if the root ends in a consonant, then [-ɔk] is chosen while for a vowel-ending root, [-k] is chosen. Same is true for the genitive [-ɔr] ~ [-r] and locative [-ɔt] ~ [-t]. While we do consider the [-ɔk], [-ɔr] and [-ɔt] allomorphs for the present analysis, we restrain from discussing [-k], [-r] and [-t] for accusative, genitive, and locative respectively.

CVC.CVC structure during post-lexical derivations. See examples in (8) below.

(8) Syncope in CV.CVC nominal + accusative [-ok]

- a. /*tv-hvt - ok*/ *tvhvtok* [*tvh.tok*] ‘you-NH-PL’
- b. /*pvt^har - ok*/ *pvt^harok* [*pvt^h.rok*] ‘paddy field’

The examples in (9) below present instances of syncope when NA roots add the genitive suffix [-or] ~ [-r]. This suffix gets attached to nouns and pronouns to form a genitive construction. Most nominal roots in SCA and NA are disyllabic in nature with a (C)VCVC structure. When such a root is attached to a genitive suffix [-or], an underlying (C)VCVCVC structure is formed. At the end of the derivation, the medial vowel gets deleted and a surface CVC.CVC structure is formed.

(9) Syncope in CV.CVC nominal + genitive [-or]

- a. /*kakal - or*/ *kakalor* [*kɔk.lor*] ‘waist’
- b. /*pvt^har - or*/ *pvt^haror* [*pvt^h.ror*] ‘paddy field’

When a lexical root with an underlying CV.CVC structure undergoes affixation with the suffix for genitive marking /-or/, it forms a CV.CV.CVC structure. Due to syncope, the medial vowel gets deleted irrespective of its featural composition. The lexical roots of CVCVC structure attaches the locative suffix [-ot] ~ [-t] to form a locative construction. Subsequently due to syncope, the medial vowel gets deleted.

(10) Syncope in CV.CVC nominal + locative [-ot]

- a. /*upar - ot*/ *uparot* [*up.rot*] ‘up’
- b. /*pvt^har - ot*/ *pvt^harot* [*pvt^h.rot*] ‘paddy field, farm’

As evident in the examples above, we can conclude that longer strings of trisyllabic CV.CV.CV are reduced to disyllabic CVC.CV while CV.CV.CVC are reduced to CVC.CVC. Similarly, quadrisyllabic CV.CV.CV.CV are reduced to trisyllabic CVC.CV.CV due to application of non-iterative vowel deletion. This section

discussed the phenomenon of syncope within NA in both inflectional and derivationally derived words.

A Constraint-based Account of NA Syncope

It is a well-known cross-linguistic tendency to delete unstressed vowels. In fact, many languages respect the generalization that some oral unstressed vowels are deleted from within a prosodic word. Therefore, many studies on languages with this phenomenon are available and several theoretical frameworks have been developed to analyse the cross-linguistic variations and language-specific nature of syncope. This section provides a comprehensive account of NA syncope using Optimality theoretic explanation. As already discussed, SCA prefers a basic CV.CV.CV sequence while NA prefers CVC.CV sequence for such words which is often resulted by deleting the medial (unstressed) vowel of the word due to differential prosodic requirements of SCA and NA.⁴² However, within the framework of Optimality Theory, the stipulation that the medial vowel is unstressed in NA assumes that stress assignment precedes syncope, an ordered relationship which is inconsistent with the non-serial framework of OT. Also, the formation of trochaic feet in NA is evident from the earlier discussion and this foot structure is hugely responsible for several phonological processes that are discussed in the following chapters.⁴³ Pater (1997) argues that the foot-sized size maximum emerges from the interaction of ALL-FT-LEFT, PARSESYLL, and MAX.⁴⁴ These constraints are discussed in the following sections.

OT is a grammar of language-particular ranking of universal constraints where any ranking of constraints must produce an actual or

⁴² To account for the dialectal variation, the basic constraint ranking that seems to be operative is DEP » ONS » —CODA » MAX to obtain the NA CVC.CV output form optimal with word-initial closed syllable.

⁴³ Like Maori [Austronesian, New Zealand], as pointed out by de Lacy (2002), NA can contain unfitted syllables, trisyllabic words are acceptable but quadrisyllabic words are not.

⁴⁴ Disyllabic words that already have trochaic stress do not undergo deletion, reduction or truncation. Disyllabic words that are stressed on the last syllable must be shortened so they are exhaustively parsed.

at least a plausible grammar (Gouskova, 2003: 70). Prince and Smolensky (1993: 64) state that OT's EVAL component does not really count but compares the magnitude of violation of a constraint by different candidates. OT also assumes that the left edge of a trochaic foot must align with the left edge of a stem. Therefore, syllables are parsed iteratively from the left edge in a polysyllabic word in a system with trochaic foot. Kager (1999) notes that CVC.CV is the least harmonic foot shape. The following constraint FT-TRO accounts for the prosodic requirement of foot head location in NA that is left/initial.⁴⁵

(11) FT-TRO (Prince
and Smolensky, 1993)

Feet have initial stress.

Trochaic foot formation is regularly aligned with the edge of the stem. Kager's alignment constraint ALIGNLEFT is invoked here. NA has a highly ranked ALIGNLEFT at work which is ranked together with FT-TRO.

(12) ALIGN-L
(McCarthy and Prince, 1993)

The left edge of the grammatical word aligns with the left edge of the prosodic word.

(13) ALL-FT-LEFT
(Kager,1999) Every foot stands at the left edge of the prosodic word.

Again, within the two types of moraic trochees, NA has a language-specific preference for a heavy syllable (**H**) of the CVC or CVV shape over a CV.CV (**LL**).⁴⁶ In NA, monosyllabic open

⁴⁵ Languages of this kind requires another requirement to account for primary stress to be essentially placed on the leftmost foot of a prosodic word that is, End Stress (left).

⁴⁶ If available within the same word, a foot (**LL**) has an initial prominence too, with the first CV syllable bearing the secondary stress. If there is no (**H**) in a word, then (**LL**) bears the secondary stress which is true for NA

syllables containing diphthongs are bimoraic thereby fulfilling bimoraic word minimality along with mora bearing closed syllables. Another metrical constraint FT-CVC can be invoked to account for this language-specific preference for a CVC syllable to be parsed as (CVC).

(14) FT-CVC

Feet must have CVC shape.

On the other hand, the metrical constraint FT-CV.CV requires that parsing of two light syllables into one foot. However, this constraint is not undominated. As mentioned above, NA does not allow CVC.CV to be parsed as (CVC.CV) but as (CVC).CV thereby showing a strong prohibition on (CVC).CV. This strong metrical prohibition is encoded in the constraint FT-CVC.CV.

(15) FT-CV.CV

Feet must have CV.CV shape.

(16) *FT-CVC.CV

Feet must not have CVC.CV shape.⁴⁷

Among these metrical constraints, which are all violable, FT-CVC dominates the other two constraints - FT-CV.CV and FT-CVC.CV. Though FT-CV.CV is allowed in NA, it is still dominated by the highly preferred FT-CVC which is undominated. Therefore, a preliminary ranking can be obtained - FT-CVC » FT-CV.CV » FT-CVC.CV. Some other relevant constraints accounting for the preferences in syllable structure and higher-level prosodic organization include *COMPLEX and *CLASH both of which are markedness constraint. *CLASH must be invoked to account for some examples which exhibit stress clash.

(17) *COMPLEX-C

Complex consonant clusters are prohibited.

disyllabic words with two consecutive open syllables in words like *nala* 'drain'. NA leaves a single light syllable unparsed as a foot if it does not get another syllable to form a (LL) foot.

⁴⁷ Avoidance of a possible uneven trochee is encoded in this constraint.

- (18) *CLASH
Adjacent syllables must not be stressed.
- (19) *V-PLACE_{unstressed}
(McCarthy, 2008)
Unstressed vowels are prohibited in the head position of a foot.

An important metrical constraint to account for the extrametricality in NA is PARSE-SYL which requires that every syllable must be parsed into feet. It is countered by a conflicting constraint NONFINALITY which requires that no foot is in the final position of a prosodic word. We have ignored PARSESEG, another important constraint which requires that every underlying segment is parsed into syllable and no segments is left unsyllabified. considering that every segment in NA is associated with syllable node.

- (20) PARSE-SYL
(Kager, 1999)
Syllables are parsed by feet.
- (21) NONFINALITY
(Kager, 1999)
No foot is final in PrWd.

Interestingly, in the metrical theories of Prince (1990) and Hayes (1995), (**H**) and (**LL**) trochees are treated equivalently: they are both binary at the moraic level and they are both even in terms of weight⁴⁸. For Prince (1990), both (**H**) and (**LL**) feet are equally unmarked with respect to FTBIN⁴⁹. But, it is not the case that no metrical constraint distinguishes between (**H**) and (**LL**) trochees. The STRESS-TO-WEIGHT principle does. The foot type (**H**) satisfies the requirement for foot heads to be heavy. Also, it is a foot which consists of a single heavy syllable but that it is monosyllabic is not its

⁴⁸ In case of Iambic foot systems, (**H**) and (**LH**) are equally preferred as both foot types satisfy the requirement of foot heads to be heavy.

⁴⁹ This constraint maintains that languages prefer rhythmically alternating strings of stressed and unstressed syllables. It requires a foot to be maximally bimoraic.

inherent choice, but it is heavy due to its weight distribution at the prosodic level. FTBIN is apparently undominated in NA as no forms contain light stressed syllables and no forms contain (L). This constraint encodes the fundamental rhythmic requirement of feet that they need to be binary.⁵⁰

(22) FTBIN

(Kager, 1999)

Feet are binary under moraic and syllabic analysis

Let us try to find whether these constraints are adequate to account for the derivation from a /CV.CV.CV/ → [CVC.CV] revoking the example in (3a). We will also try to account for the extrametrical final syllable.

(23) /*nd-kɔr-a*/ → [(*'nɔk*).*ra*] 'NEG-do-PRES-3P-MH'

Input: / <i>nd-kɔr-a</i> /	FT-TRO	FT-BIN	*V-PLACE unstressed	ALIGN-L	ALL-FT-L	FT-CVC.CV	FT-CVC	FT-CV.CV	PARSESYLL	NONFIN
a. (<i>nd</i> .' <i>kɔ</i>). <i>ra</i>	*!		*				*		*	
b. (' <i>nd</i> .' <i>kɔ</i>). <i>ra</i>			*!				*		*	
c. <i>nd</i> .('' <i>kɔ</i>). <i>ra</i>			*!	*	*		*		*	*
d. <i>nd</i> .'(<i>nɔk</i>). <i>ra</i>								*	*	

All candidates except (23d) have violated some higher ranked constraint. Therefore, (23d) becomes the optimal candidate. Now, we turn into another derivation - /CV.CV.CVC/ → [CVC.CVC] revoking the example in (23e). FT-TRO is ranked at the highest level as the language has a high preference for trochaic feet. Candidate (a) violates this constraint because of which it gets eliminated. FT-BIN is another undominated constraint at work in NA which is why violation of this constraint help eliminating (e) and (f). A markedness constraint *V-

⁵⁰ Along with FT-BIN, PARSESYLL, ALL-FT(X) and *CLASH are also constraints which defines the rhythmic metrical structure of stress languages.

PLACE unstressed is ranked with these two metrical constraints which ensures that there is no vocalic segment in an unstressed position. Violation of this constraint eliminates (b) and (c). All other constraints are violated at some point of this derivation, but candidate (d) incurs the least serious as well as minimum violation. Therefore, this derivation selects (23d) as the optimal candidate. There are two possible explanations for why [ra] remains unfooted and unstressed - FTBIN or NONFIN. FTBIN is violated by monomoraic feet like the degenerate (L) [(ˈra)]. Also, NONFIN requires that no foot is posited in the final position within a PrWd.

The constraint ranking of (23) is FT-TRO, FT-BIN, *V-PLACE_{unstressed} » ALIGN-L, ALL-FT-L » FT-CVC.CV » FT-CVC » FT-CV.CV » PARSESYLL » NONFIN

Now, let us turn to another derivation from a morphologically derived word from (9a).

(24) /kə.ka.lər/ → [(ˈkək).(,lɔr)] ‘waist.GEN’

Input: /kəkəl - ɔr/	FT-TRO	FT-BIN	*COMPLEX	*V-PLACE _{unstressed}	ALIGN-L	ALL-FT-L	FT-CVC	FT-CV.CV	PARSESYLL	*CLASH	NONFIN
a. (kə.ˈka).lɔr	*!			*			*	*	*		
b. (kka).lɔr	*!	*	*				*	*	*		
c. (kək.ˈlɔr)	*!				*		*	*			*
d. ɹ(ˈkək).(,lɔr)								**		*	*
e. (kə.ka).lɔr				*!			*		*		
f. kək. (ˈlɔr)					*!	*					

NA does not allow complex onsets, therefore, *COMPLEX is undominated. Therefore, candidate (b) has been cancelled from the competition. Candidate (a) has violated the highest-ranked constraint FT-BIN, and therefore, is ruled out. Candidate (c) has also violated FT-TRO. Candidates (a-b) and (e-f) are quantity-disrespecting because heavy syllables have not been parsed into feet. All candidates except

(24d) have violated some higher ranked constraint. Therefore, (d) becomes the optimal candidate.

The constraint ranking for (24) is FT-TRO, FT-BIN, *COMPLEX, *V-PLACE_{unstressed} » ALIGN-L, ALL-FT-L » FT-CVC » FT-CV.CV » PARSESYLL » *CLASH » NONFIN

Considering the same set of constraints that were discussed above, let us now turn to another derivation from a morphologically derived word. This form undergoes vowel deletion and a /CV.CV.CV.CV/ becomes [CVC.CV.CV].

(25) /*nv.d^hv.ri.la*/ → [(*'nv.d^h*). (*ri.la*)] ‘NEG-catch-PRES PERF-2P-MH’

Input: <i>/nv-d^hvr-i-l-a/</i>	FT-TRO	FT-BIN	*V-PLACE _{unstressed}	ALIGN-L	ALL-FT-L	PARSESYLL	FT-CVC.CV	FT-CVC	FT-CV.CV	*CLASH	NONFIN
a. <i>nv.d^hv.ri.la</i>	*!		*		*	****					
b. <i>nv.d^h.ri.la</i>	*!				*	***					
c. (<i>'nɔd^h</i>).(<i>ri</i>).(<i>la</i>)		***!					**	**	***	**	*
d. <i>nv('nɔd^h).ri.la</i>							*	*	*	*	*
e. <i>nv.(^hd^hvr.la)</i>		*!	*	*	*	*		*	*		*
f. (<i>nv.</i> ' <i>d^hvr</i>). <i>la</i>	*!	*	*			*	*	*	*		
g. (<i>nv.</i> ' <i>d^hvr</i>).(<i>la</i>)	*!	*	*				**	*	*		*

As we can see from tableau in (25), candidate (d) is the optimal output. It incurs the least number of violations, and these violations are of the lower ranked constraints such as FT-CVC.CV, FT-CVC, FT-CV.CV, *CLASH and NONFIN. Candidate (d) violates FT-CVC.CV for once as it forms a final foot of the form (CV.CV) and violates FT-CVC for once as it includes an initial foot of the form (CVC). It also violates FT-CVC.CV once as it does not allow a foot of this form which is a violation of foot binarity by itself. NA has a strict requirement for foot to be bimoraic. Candidate (d) also violates two

lower ranked constraints - *CLASH, allowing adjacent stressed syllables and NONFIN, allowing final foot in a well-formed prosodic word. This form also requires that every syllable is parsed into feet, and this is a preference over extrametrical final syllable.

The constraint ranking of (25) is FT-TRO, FT-BIN, *V-PLACE_{unstressed} » ALIGN-L, ALL-FT-L » PARSESYLL » FT-CVC.CV » FT-CVC, FT-CV.CV » *CLASH » NONFIN

From the discussions from (23), (24) and (25), we may conclude that NA has a prosodic requirement for feet to be binary but allows stress clash and final foot within a prosodic domain. If a syllable cannot be accommodated within a binary foot, then it is left unfooted and behaves as extrametrical rather than forming degenerate foot. As NA has a trochaic system, therefore, it also respects two higher ranked metrical constraints - ALIGN-L and ALL-FT-L.

Conclusion

Syncope and stress often interact in an intricate manner. According to the assumptions made by rule-based metrical phonology, the rules that assign metrical structure are extrinsically ordered before the syncope rule, which targets unstressed syllables. This gives rise to the idea that these two phonological operations involve a serial derivation. On the other hand, formulations within the classic OT, syncope and metrical-structure assignment occur in a parallel manner. Classic OT assumes that syncope essentially improves the harmony of metrical structure. The proposal developed in this paper is a blending of these two approaches. Even a constraint-based analysis of syncope cannot be devoid of the assumptions and formulations made by metrical analysis.

Some generalizations about NA prosodic structure have been obtained from the analysis presented in this paper are – (i) Syncope in NA is attested in both derived and non-derived words. However, inflectionally derived forms are prone to syncope while derivative compounds do not undergo vowel deletion. (Inflectionally derived forms are prosodified at the end of the derivation while forms derived

by derivational affixation are prosodified prior to derivation process.) NA has moraic trochee with left to right parsing. It allows extrametricality but disfavors degenerate foot within its prosodic words. Foot structure is strictly binary conforming to the language's bimoraic requirement for rhythmic structure. NA syncope has an intricate relationship with its foot structure and results in a trochaic foot word-initially. It also allows stress clash due to certain prosodic requirements. This is, however, stress driven. However, not all words in NA can be accommodated within this type of moraic trochee. It is an interesting observation to make at this point because NA metrical structure might be an unusual case. It is a kind of language with apparent exceptions to the dominant type of prosodic word.

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LANGUAGE, CULTURE, AND IDENTITY: PROTECTING THE LINGUISTIC HERITAGE OF NRTH EAST INDIA

Deva Kumar Das

Abstract

North East India shows cultural and linguistic diversity since its people use over 200 languages among many indigenous communities. The peoples of North East India connect their cultural heritage and identity through these languages which function beyond basic communication. The survival of this linguistic richness faces danger because globalisation, urbanisation, migration and educational policies that prioritise Hindi and English as dominant languages endanger numerous languages to possible extinction. North East India requires immediate action to save its indigenous languages because the relationship between language, culture and identity is complex and sensitive to extinction threats. A research study implemented extensive literature reviews together with multiple case studies and qualitative evidence to find out language community challenges before developing a full framework for revitalization. The framework unites government guidelines and educational adjustments with community activist systems and makes use of technological solutions. The paper establishes that safeguarding linguistic heritage serves dual purposes which contribute both to cultural safeguarding and societal group resilience in advancing multiculturalism during global transformations. The analysis ends by advocating for partnership between government institutions and grassroots communities to save the endangered linguistic heritage of North East India.

Keywords: Linguistic Heritage, Identity, Language Preservation, North East India, Cultural Diversity, Revitalization Strategies

Introduction

North East India displays itself as a linguistic and cultural mosaic that hosts more than 200 languages alongside 45 distinct ethnic groups according to Grimes (2000). The eight states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura demonstrate the enduring strength of indigenous groups through their languages that preserve their historical heritage, cultural backgrounds and deeply rooted worldviews. Every language within the region exhibits distinct tonal patterns of Tibeto-Burman languages and rhythmic Austroasiatic languages which function as cultural records linking people to their ancestral heritage and territorial roots.

The abundance of languages that exist in this area faces an active threat. The rise of globalisation has brought forward widespread homogenization that enables English and Hindi to dominate native languages especially, throughout urban areas and educational facilities. The movement of people within and beyond the region results in diminishing linguistic practices and national integration policies which governments prioritise national unity above local heritage. The decreasing usage of multiple languages stands as a serious concern because these languages survive only in the speaking communities of elderly people which risks disappearing at an unpredictable scale.

The study investigates linguistic elements and cultural values in North East India since linguistic preservation protects the distinctive cultural heritage of the region. Multiple threats which endanger these languages are analysed in the document alongside recommendations for their protection. The paper advocates language revitalization by combining historical insights with contemporary obstacles and vision-based solutions that need government support along with educational reform, community empowerment and technological advancements.

Overview of North East India's Linguistic Diversity

The linguistic variety of North East India developed because of historical events combined with geographical factors. The region

located between the Himalayas and Bay of Bengal serves as a historical migration path because cultural exchanges through this route led to the development of many different languages. These belong primarily to 3 language families: Tibeto-Burman (e.g., Bodo, Mizo, Naga languages), Indo-Aryan (e.g., Assamese), and Austroasiatic (e.g., Khasi). The diversity of languages in the region expands through the presence of smaller groups including Tai-Kadai (with Ahom as an example).

The region's 8 states host a unique linguistic profile. Assamese language rules Assam but the state also maintains two lesser-known languages Bodo and Karbi. The languages Khasi and Garo flourish throughout Meghalaya along with other minor dialects while Nagaland displays linguistic diversity with its 16 major tribes speaking unique languages and dialects including Ao, Angami and Sema. Arunachal Pradesh contains more than 90 languages with numerous unknown languages that exist among its remote communities.

The wide range of languages creates a vulnerable situation. The Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger published by UNESCO identifies Lepcha (Sikkim) and Tai Phake (Assam) as well as many tribal dialects in Arunachal Pradesh as endangered languages. The disappearance of these languages endangers two essential aspects: communication methods alongside cultural elements that include traditional knowledge and folklore and the facts of their native speakers.

Review of Literature

Language, culture and identity serve as major subjects of study in linguistic and anthropological research about North East India. Existing scholarship demonstrates total findings which focus on both the importance of linguistic heritage and various causes of language endangerment and innovative approaches to revitalization.

Linguistic Diversity and Identity

The linguistic system extends beyond basic communication as it creates the foundations of cultural groups while sustaining their

traditions through time. Hazarika (2011) explains how North East India uses language to reinforce ethnic unity because language functions as a tribal identity marker in this region of diverse cultures. Through the Mizo language, all Mizos in Mizoram maintain their Christian faith as well as their folklore traditions and communal values. The Khasi language in Meghalaya contains matrilineal traditions which combine with oral histories to establish Khasi society.

According to Joshi (2006), languages function as systems that store traditional knowledge. The Bodo language protects both farming methods and sacred rituals connected to the Brahmaputra Valley area and Naga language enables clan ancestral stories and traditional legal systems to be passed down. These communities will lose their connection to their historical heritage if their languages vanish which would break down their cultural support systems.

Language Endangerment in North East India

North East India experiences language endangerment which follows global patterns yet faces intensified threats from regional aspects. According to Bhatia and Ritchie (2008), globalisation functions as the central factor which draws people to English because it serves as a path to economic potential and social status. Younger urban residents in Guwahati and Shillong are choosing English or Hindi as their primary languages which results in the limited use of native languages only within the home or ceremonial events.

Educational policies exacerbate this shift. The language-in-education framework of India analysed by Lepcha (2015) adopts Hindi and English as main languages through the Three Language Formula but undermines regional languages' status. The educational system in Assam teaches Assamese to students but marginalises smaller languages such as Rabha and Mising so they become increasingly endangered. The process of migration results in tribal youth relocating to cities or other states for work and this leads to their acceptance of dominant linguistic cultures that weakens their native languages.

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Preservation Efforts and Revitalization Strategies

Efforts to protect North East India's languages show signs of increasing momentum despite the obstacles. According to Kachru (2006), documentation serves as the essential starting point while author references the People's Linguistic Survey of India which has documented hundreds of dialects. The digital age provides fresh language learning potentials which include apps for language acquisition, podcasts and archives available through the internet. Pigg (2001) emphasizes efficacy of grassroots movements. The Meitei community in Manipur brought back the suppressed Meitei Mayek script by hosting workshops and cultural festivals after colonial rule ended. According to Sharma (2014), bilingual education works well because Mizoram successfully teaches Mizo language in schools together with English while preserving cultural heritage.

Research Methodology

The research explores North East Indian language, cultural and identity connections through qualitative methods while focusing on preservation obstacles and possible solutions. The research design incorporates multiple viewpoints to build an analysis which relies on actual observations.

Data Collection

The research collects primary data by conducting semi-structured interviews along with focus group discussions that include stakeholders from various age groups including language scholars,

community elders, educators and youth. The research uses interviews to study how people view language usage patterns and cultural value alongside their evaluations of endangerment threats yet focus groups create spaces for stakeholders to share revitalization solutions. The study relies on secondary data from academic literature and government reports including Census of India 2011 along with case studies of preservation success stories.

Sample Selection

The research uses purposive sampling to recruit participants from Nagaland, Assam and Meghalaya to capture the full linguistic spectrum of the region. The tribal communities in Nagaland compose the linguistic variety whereas Assam displays both mainstream and marginalized language clusters and Meghalaya exhibits Austroasiatic language speakers. Researchers have selected individuals who serve as language activists such as Khasi Language Research Institute along with educators who use bilingual education programmes.

Data Analysis

The research utilizes thematic analysis for data processing to recognize main themes in the collected data including language loss perspectives alongside policy effects on communities and their resilience alongside technology transformation. The manual coding process of transcripts follows double-checking against secondary resources to validate analysis strength. The research results drive a detailed assessment which creates specialised preservation approaches for North East India.

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

Analysis highlights 3 core areas: threats to linguistic heritage, preservation strategies, and transformative potential of education. Research investigates 3 core aspects through specific examples and their resulting implications.

Threats to Linguistic Heritage in North East India
Globalization and the Rise of Dominant Languages

Globalisation has restructured the linguistic order which exists in North East India. English functions as a key to international markets and leads the higher education field and professional world yet Hindi spreads through media channels and national policies throughout urban areas. The Assamese language in Assam competes against English and Assamese because young city residents prefer to use English to demonstrate their modernity. The lack of adequate resources in Tiwa and Deori prevents their survival as their speakers decrease.

Educational Policies and the Marginalization of Indigenous Languages

The educational system of India upholds English and Hindi as dominant languages while neglecting native languages that exist in the country. The educational institutions of Arunachal Pradesh do not teach the local languages Nyishi or Adi therefore students become proficient in national languages while losing their cultural roots. The divide between private education in urban areas and tribal dialects becomes particularly pronounced because these schools aim to serve cosmopolitan students.

Language Preservation Strategies

Community Initiatives and Grassroots Movements: The preservation effort leads from communities first. The Ao tribe in Nagaland operates language nests as informal spaces for elders to instruct children about traditional songs and stories in Ao Naga. The Seng Khasi movement in Meghalaya organises cultural celebrations and publication activities to strengthen Khasi language while fighting against population movement to urban areas. Local communities show great agency in their successful efforts to keep their languages alive.

Role of Technology in Language Preservation: Technology provides scalable solutions. Bodo Sahitya Sabha took action to digitise Bodo literature and made the "Learn Khasi" app available for teaching Khasi language to the diaspora youth. The Lepcha community of Sikkim works with linguists to build online dictionaries to preserve their language which exists among 50,000 people. Heritage becomes

accessible to diverse communities of people through digital tools established in the new digital era.

The Role of Education in Language Revitalization: Education serves as the base mechanism which defends the survival of languages. Mizoram demonstrates effective language protection by using Mizo and English as bilingual educational languages. The official status of Kokborok language in Tripura primary education was achieved through teacher training and textbook development. These programmes require policy changes and funding along with community support to expand successfully but they demonstrate their ability to develop multilingual skills.

Conclusion

The linguistic heritage of North East India operates as a valuable cultural symbol that faces extinction risks from globalisation, policy discriminatory practices and societal changes. The research showed positive interactions between languages and cultures as well as showcased that abandonment creates difficulties but change provides possibilities for revitalization. Three key components form the basis for linguistic preservation: governments must support positive policies; people need to lead from the local level and technology must expand its reach. Such educational environments which embrace linguistic diversity will function as home bases for passing ancestral voices to forthcoming generations.

Stakes are high. The extinction of indigenous languages leads to the permanent loss of human understanding which cannot be duplicated as well as natural knowledge and cultural practices. Unified method will help North East India protect its linguistic heritage as it contributes to global cultural sustainability. The current situation requires multiple organisations to work together to build a successful multilingual environment.

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ADVENT OF BODO PRINT MEDIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND MIDDLE CLASS: A HISTORICAL STUDY

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Abstract

The twentieth century marks the beginning of print media among the Bodos. This century also shows the rise of middle class in Bodo society. The rise of middle class and advent of print media among the Bodos are interdependent on each other. The rise of middle class expedited the process of publication of print media smoothly and on the hand, print media facilitated the middle class to express their views and opinions on any socio-economic, political and other issues, leading to identity awareness among the community. This paper explores the interdependent relationship between the advent of Bodo print media and the ascendance of the Bodo middle class in the 20th century. Moreover, it also attempts to study how print media contributed to the emergence and solidification of a Bodo middle class. While writing this paper qualitative and historical approach has been adopted drawing on interviews and textual analysis of some magazines, chronicles and newspaper.

Keywords: Bodo, Magazines, Middle class, Nationalism, Print media

Introduction

The advent of the printing press, which produces printing materials in the form of books, pamphlets, and newspapers, gradually led to the growth of print media. In India, Goa witnessed the first arrival of the printing press in the middle of the sixteenth century. (Chatterjee, 2023) Subsequently, the British introduced printing technology in Bengal, significantly expanding the scope of publication and consumption of books (Roy, 2018). The advent of printing press coincided with the growth of educated intelligentsia in India. Moreover, along with the growth of educated intelligentsia, there was emergence of new social and political ideas. These new ideas filtered

down to the masses through print medias. Indeed, print media worked as a catalyst for debate among the educated intelligentsia.

In similar way, the advent of print media and emergence of middle class among the Bodos are dependent on each other. The print media that evolved among the Bodos in the twentieth century contributed towards the emergence of middle class. In fact, evolution of print media led to the dissemination of knowledge among the community through print media. On the other hand, evolution of print media is also dependent on middle class. The formation of middle class during the period among the community constituted educated elite class. This class of people contributed towards the advent of print media among the community. The arrival of printing press in Assam led to the beginning of print media in colonial Assam. The pioneers of the printing press were the American Baptist Missionaries particularly in Assam. They set up the Baptist Mission Press at Sibsagar specifically for Christian literature. In 1846, *Orunodoi*, the first Assamese news magazine was published. However, it took more than another fifty years to witness print media among the Bodos of Assam.

The Bodos are one of the indigenous tribes of the region. They are the largest plain tribe in Assam. They speak a language of Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodo tribe is a principal ethnic group in northeastern India and is the dominant ethnic community in the state of Assam. They are the recorded indigenous inhabitants of Assam and they are the native inhabitants of Assam. (Endle, 1995). They are known by several names throughout different areas and periods in the northeastern parts of the Indian subcontinent. They are identical to the individuals designated as Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. In the Brahmaputra Valley, they are recognized as Bodo or Bodo fisa (descendants of the Bodo). In the North Kachar Hills, they refer to themselves as Dimasa, derived from Dima fisa, signifying 'sons of the great river.' The Ahoms referred to them as Timisa, a clear deformation of Dimasa, suggesting that this term was utilized throughout their presence in the Dhansiri valley. (Gait, 1984) G.A. Grierson has indicated that the Bodo population located to the west of the Kamrup District is designated as Mech by their Hindu

counterparts. This term is perhaps a corruption of the Sanskrit word *mleccha*. The inhabitants in and east of Kamrup are designated as Kacharis, pronounced *Kosāri* by Hindus. (Grierson, 1967). P.C. Bhattacharya asserts that "Kachari" is simply the Assamese term for "Boro." (Bhattacharya, 2003). The terms Bara, Boro, Bodo, Kachari, Boro-Kacharis, Plain-Kacharis, and Mech all denote the same Bodo community, irrespective of the classification used. The Boros and Boro-Kacharis are classified as a unified community, identified as a Plains Tribe of Assam, (Goswami, 1988) within the six schedules of the Indian Constitution.

There have been many studies on middle class and print media. The middle class is perceived through the lenses of Marxist, Weberian and other non-Marxist framework. Formation of class in a particular society is perceived in a conventional way of either Marxist or Weberian. In the context of India also, emergence of middle class is portrayed through the lenses of either Marxist or Weberian theories. However, there are scholars who argue that those theories were formulated situating the western societies, e.g., advent of capitalism, industrialisation etc. In the context of marginalised communities or ethnic communities, implication of western theories does not seem justifiable. The societies of the marginalised communities are different from other societies. Due to the failure of western theories to contextualise the complexities of marginalised groups, Dipesh Chakrabarty devised a new framework for post-colonial studies. This framework foregrounds the differences in culture, heterogeneity and vernacular modernities providing a perception to understand how marginalised communities form class identities. Thus, advent of print media can be considered as one of the vernacular modernities that led to emergence middle class in Bodo society and intersection between the print media and middle class. Dipesh Chakrabarty's critical observations in *Provincializing Europe* (Chakrabarty, 2000) help us to contextualize this. Chakrabarty critiques on the universality of European historical categories and suggests the acceptance of other modernities based on local histories. Instead of looking into modernity as a teleological trend emerging from Europe, he asks academics to see how non-Western societies create their own vernacular

modernities. Considering this perspective, Bodo print media becomes an important context for creating a particularly local modernity that questions western narratives and reframes ideas of rationality, reform, and identity.

Print media among the Bodos

The print media that emerged in the early twentieth century in Bodo society helped them to develop consciousness, nationality, language and literature. Thus, in the second decade of the twentieth century, the Bodo literature began to emerge. *Bibar* is the first magazine in the Bodo language that marked the beginning of an era in Bodo literature and this continued till 1940. Its publication began in 1924, under the banner of the Bodo ChattraSanmilani. (Brahma, 2022) Prior to this *BoroniPhisa O Aiyen*, a book on tradition and customary laws was written in 1915. An issue of this magazine could leave a strong mark in time and help build a new band of Bodo writers. Published by Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani, this treatise on Bodo customary law does not deal directly with creative literature. The maiden publication of this ethnic group from the southern bank of the Brahmaputra must be attributed to the historical necessity of ushering in a writing culture. The influence of western education and the enthusiasm of organisations like Bodo ChattraSanmilani and Habraghat Bodo Sanmilani gradually developed. (Boro, 1990)

In spite of its rich and ancient heritage, the Bodo language lacks written literature. In Bodo-speaking areas, Christian missionaries preached their religion through books on religion, tales, rhymes, and songs. Additionally, they published grammar and dictionary books. Kachari Grammar was compiled by Sidney Endle in 1884, based on the Darrang dialect. Endle wrote a monograph on the Bodos, called *The Kacharis* in 1911. The book contains chapters on social customs, agricultural practices, festivities, food habits, life-cycle rituals, crafts and textiles of the Bodos. In this article, the author discusses the language of related tribes such as the Garo, Dimasa, Rabha, Deuri, Koch, etc. (Endle, 2010) The book includes examples of Bodo folktales, rhymes and grammar. In the present context, these living

examples of the Bodo language spoken at that time provide illuminating examples. These original versions are significant because they provide specimens of the Bodo language spoken in Assam. Besides oral tales, the collection contains a number of interesting rhyming songs in Bodo language.(Boro, 2014)

With the Christian missionaries' contribution to education among the Bodo tribes of Assam, significant changes had been brought about. Consequently, with the spread of western education in Assam, the Bodo printing press developed among the Bodo people. (Sarmah, 2017) With the emergence of printing presses, magazines, books, news etc, have been started to be published.

Bodo students studying at Dhubri took initiative to form a student's association. The "Bodo ChatraSanmilani(*Bodo Students conference*) was formed in 1919. As a result, these students took initiative to contribute to the development of their own language and literature. With a view to propagating their language and literature they ventured to publish a quarterly magazine in Bodo. The name of this first magazine in Bodo was "BIBAR",and Satish Chandra Basumatary was its first editor. It was learnt that first it was published in the form of a wall magazine, and then in 1924 it was given a printed form. (Mwshahary, 2010)

The period following the publication of the 'Jenthokha' of the Bibar Age saw a silent period for literary works. A young enthusiast, Pramod Chandra Brahma, edited a magazine entitled "SansiriarwMushri". But the venture ended with just one adventure. There is no record of this magazine's publication time. In most cases, this magazine was published in 1935. (Mwshahary, 2010)

In Cotton College, Bodo students took a major initiative to revive Bodo literature. For that they published a magazine under the name and style '*Nayak*'. It was bilingual containing Bodo and Assamese articles. Mohini Mohan Brahma was the first editor of the magazine which was first published in 1943. The period saw a constant attempt to free Bodo Literature from the clutches of Bengali

language influence and used local Assamese to communicate with non-Bodo speaking Bodo's. (Mwshahary, 2010)

Following the birth of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, in 1953, a magazine named 'Okhaphwr' (The Moon) came out with new promise and prospects. The students at cotton college published this magazine. It was edited by Ronendra Narayan Basumatary. It was a trilingual magazine and accommodated Bodo, Assamese and Dimasa languages in it. From the date proceeding two years of Bodo Sahitya Sabha formation upto 1960 when the conservative Assamese section started the "language Movement" this decade period has been named "Okhaphwr Muga". (Mwshahary, 2010)

In 1970, the Kokrajhar district Bodo Sahitya Sabha published "BardwiSikhla" (*Maiden of the wind and water*). Daniram Basumatary was its first editor. The Kokrajhar District Bodo Teachers' Association published "PhwrwnggiriniMushri" (*Mirror of teacher*). In the same vein, Ranjit Kumar Borgoyary edited a teacher magazine with the name and style "PhwrwnggiriniThandwi" (*Representative of Teacher*). (Mwshahary, 2010)

Another notable monthly news magazine Aabir was brought out in the year 1977 under the editorship of Navin Wary. However, this news magazine was short lived and lasted till 1980. The magazine contained regular articles of short stories, poetries, novels in series and translated articles. The main focus of the magazine happened to be societal issues and activities of the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam during the period and tribal politics. (Wary, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980) It is also noteworthy to mention that the issues of the magazine were written in both the Devnagari and the Assamese scripts.

Moreover, a Bodo monthly Songali was published from Kokrajhar in the year 1982. (Wary, 1982) Along with regular articles of short stories, poetries, issues of the Bodo society, tribal politics had a prominent place in the magazine. Yet another quarterly magazine GwdanThandwi was published in the second half of the 1970s with the contents of societal issues of the Bodos. The year 1970s also

marked the annual magazine of Kokrajhar College Bodo Students annually.

In 1980, the news magazine “Orkhi” (Fire) was published in Kokrajhar. It was edited by Upendra Nath Brahma for years. This news magazine created a new wave in Bodo news media. The ‘Aronai’ monthly should have been classified as an independent period in Bodo literature within the period 1980-90 itself as it started publishing since 1986. It contributed to the development of the Bodo news magazine in particular and the Bodo literature as a whole. But as the “Orkhi” preceded the “Aronai” in publication and contribution, the period under mention had been left for the “Orkhi” as a mark of respect to the senior. Since the Aronai was revived in 1990 and continued to be published at intervals throughout the 1990s, the following decade has been named after it. The “Aronai” monthly was out under Nilkamal Brahma's editorship. This news magazine later could leave its imprint on the sand of time. In the upcoming year of the ABSU's pursuit of a separate state movement, it could provide an avenue for groundwork. In the following years of the revolution, it got published regularly and enabled the agitating Bodos to know about plans and programmes by providing news in this regard.

Rakhao Basumatary edited the ‘Phirphila’ (*Flag*) news magazine from Bongaigaon. Badal Basumatary edited the “Anthwr” (*Track*) quarterly from Dhaligaon. Manikpur Naigami Anchalik Yuva Sangha published “Siphungni Dengkhw” (*The tune of the Flute*) magazine under Bankim Basumatary's editorship. The All-Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation published “Songdan” (*The Search*) under Romela Islary's editorship.

Laithun a literary publication of the Bodo authors' Akademi was published in 1985 and that enhanced Bodo prose writing. This is achieved by including important pieces of articles on many aspects of the Bodo language, literature, and culture. It established the standard for critical Bodo language prose writing. The mouthpiece of Bodo Sahitya Sabha *the Bodo* has been published routinely since 1955. It gives authors an opportunity to convey their opinions on society,

literature, and culture. Although most of them are short lived, several news publications and periodicals are published. Literary journals and periodicals on socio-literary aspects provide a rallying point for like-minded authors to write to meet growing interest in literature. (Lahary, 2004)

With the congenial atmosphere created by *ChatraSanmilani*, *Bodo* literature got fresh lease on life. The Sanmilani wrote all kinds of creative literature in the Bodo language in order to preserve their language. The Sanmilani's objective was to offer a shared platform for the revelation of hidden faculties and to highlight their talents in all the aspects. The Sanmilani encouraged the young generation of writers of the Bodos. Bodo literature included some masterpieces of poetry, tales, and dramas added at that period. Thus, the student community laid the foundation for Bodo language and literature. On this foundation the demand for the introduction of the Bodo medium as a medium of instruction was raised in the post-independence period.

Newspaper

The history of the Boro newspaper goes back to 1971 A.D. All newspapers published from 1971 to the present are weekly, except for one that is biweekly. 'Halali' (The Land of Light, 1971) was the first newspaper in the Boro language, published from Kokrajhar. It was a weekly publication co-edited by Nilkamal Brahma and Surath Narzary. (Narzary). Prominent personalities like Late Satish Chandra Basumatary used to write elaborately on the issue of scripts of the Bodos. Followed by 'Halali,' another weekly publication titled 'Bonzar' (Fire, ignited in the Bundle of Wood) was released in 1972 from Udalguri, under the editorial leadership of Bihuram Boro. Consequently, the number of Boro newspapers began to increase sequentially. In 1974, 'Orgeng' (volcano) was published in Barama under the editorship of Sukumar Basumatary. In the same year, an additional newspaper titled 'San' (The Sun) was launched in Udalguri under the editorship of Sailendra Nath Brahma. ([Boro Language Use](#))

In 1978, two other newspapers were launched in Kokrajhar and Udalguri. The newspaper published in Kokrajhar was 'Radab' (The News), and the one from Udalguri was 'Bibungsar' (Lecture). Radab was first published in the year 1978 as weekly under the editorship of Benudhar Basumatary and he continued till October 1982. Thereafter, a group of editors looked after the weekly newspaper and this lasted for a decade. (Basumatary). Along with regular items of news and other articles, thought provoking articles on the societal issues of the Bodos have been reflected in its issues. Moreover, debates and critiques on societal issues have also been raised by the then intellectuals of the Bodos.

In 1985, a bilingual (Boro-Assamese) weekly newspaper titled 'GwdanKhourang' (The New News) was launched in Guwahati. It was published under the co-editorship of Phukan Chandra Boro and Ratneswar Basumatary. ([Boro Language Use](#))

A bilingual (Boro-Assamese) weekly newspaper titled 'Phanzamuthi' was produced from Gossaigaon under the editorship of Rupnath Muchahary in 1986. The newspaper 'Thunggri' (The Sword) was published in 1987 under the editorship of Durjay Narzary. In 1988, a weekly newspaper titled 'Raphwdai' (Representative of God) was launched in Guwahati, under the editorship of Gajen Hazowary.

In 1991 the 'Bodosa' weekly began to be published in Kokrajhar. Chino Basumatary was editor of this weekly. In 1992, Zanalī (Snow) was published in Kokrajhar under the editorship of Jayanta Kumar Mahilary. ([Boro Language Use](#)) Consequently, the periodicals Zwngphrud (Match) from Udalguri, Agan (Footstep) from Goreswar, Kamrup, and Bathwu (Bathwu Shrine) from Bijni are published sequentially under the editorial leadership of Pradip Kumar Daimary, Baneswar Swargiary, and Rajen Basumatary. ([Boro Language Use](#)) In 1993, three additional weekly newspapers were published concurrently. Phungkha (Source) from Khoirabari, edited by Rishi Boro; Khwurang Bilai (newspaper) from Dotoma; and Bodoland Radab (Bodoland News) from Kokrajhar, edited by Swmbla Basumatary. ([Boro Language Use](#))

The “Bodo Accord” was signed on 10th February 1993. Following this, the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) emerged as an autonomous political structure for the Bodos. (George, 1994) Consequently, young and old Bodo writers were inspired to create with new vigour. The Bodoland Radab (The Bodoland News), edited by Swmbra Basumatary, is published weekly from Kokrajhar. Krishna Gopal Basumatary continued to work as an editor following his untimely death. From Kwirabari in the former Darrang District Bishiram Boro edited the “Phungkha” (The Source) weekly. There was a weekly newspaper published in Dotma, Kokrajhar district, known as the "Khourang Bilai" (Newspaper). "Jangkhri" (The Awakening) was published by the Dhubri District Bodo Student's Union under the editorship of Shijoulai Narzary.

In 1994, a weekly newspaper called Bodoland Khourang (*The Bodoland Herald*) was published in Kokrajhar under the editorship of Sonaram Basumatary. In later years, Adrasing Basumatary became its editor and continued the publication. Ranjit Boro edited the “Athikal” (*The Present*) news magazine in Tangla. It is to be mentioned that this is the first magazine printed completely in Devnagri script. Debargaon Primary Bodo Sahitya Sabha under Kokrajhar district published the “Phua” (*Spantaneous*) magazine under the editorship of Anchu Basumatary.

In 1994, three newspapers were published from different places. These were Athikhhal (Present) from Tangla; GwdanBonzar (New Fire, Ignited on the Bundle of Wood) from Udalguri; and Bodoland Khourang (Bodoland Message) from Kokrajhar. These were edited by Ranjeet Boro, Rupnath Muchahary, and Adrasing Basumatary, respectively.

Naren Basumatary edited a newspaper titled Bibungthi (Opinion) in 1995. Later, it was edited by Ratneswar Basumatary and published in Guwahati. In 1996, another two newspapers were published from Guwahati, viz., Thlungga (Inspiration) and Dahal (Shield). These were edited by KatindraSwargiary and Ranendra Brahma.

All the above-mentioned publications were weekly newspapers, and currently, all are out of print except the weekly BODOSA. This newspaper operates in a minimum scale and it has a low circulation due to its insufficient readers.

The newspapers and news magazines of the period carried different types of writings. Before the beginning of the Bodoland movement in 1987, most of the articles were written on social issues of the Bodos and trying to bring about consciousness. However, with the beginning of Bodoland movement, writings in newspapers and news magazines turned to be more critical on the then political issues.

Intersections of print media and middle class

The Bodo print media plays an important role in the cultural, social, political, and literary life of the Bodos as the printing determines the existence of language and how the community came to accept the standards of language. Indeed, in a democratic country, the print media provides a forum where people may raise their voice, opinions, pinpoint their rights and freedom of expression. This gradually contributed to the emergence of nationalism among the Bodos. The educated Bodo intellectuals have the opportunity to improve their rights perspective. Articles about their political rights began to find their way. The young intellectuals began to emphasise modernism of the society and began to talk about tribal alienation. This period also shows flourish of many revolutionary texts. Indeed, one of the elements responsible for the development of nationalism among the Bodos is the arrival of print media in Bodo society.

This study looks into the relationship between print media and the creation of the middle class among the Bodos through the lens of Dipesh Chakrabarty's criticism of historicism and his call to provincialize Europe. Chakrabarty views modernity in postcolonial countries through the lens of local histories that challenge the developmental logic of the European Enlightenment. (Majumdar et al., 2016) Print media played a major role for the Bodos in reinterpreting, negotiating, and localizing modernism. Periodicals such as Bibar, Jenthoka, and eventually The Bodo served as venues of political subjectivity and cultural articulation in addition to being

information carriers. These sites let local religious reform, linguistic identity, and moral self-fashioning show a clear Bodo modernism ingrained in them.

Print media gave Bodo intellectuals—often schoolteachers, clerks, students, and religious reformers—a stage on which to express a vision of development anchored in education, moral reform, and cultural rebirth. These numbers were the centre of a growing middle class moulded by missionary influence and colonial schooling. Inspired by Chakrabarty's criticism, this colloquial modernism localized Western ideas in ways that responded to particular historical and cultural circumstances rather than merely reflected them. Print culture evolved as a means of envisioning futures anchored in indigenous values and ambitions rather than bound by European historicist time. (Steele, 2016)

For the Bodos, the print media was crucial in helping to politicize language and script. Within the pages of community newspapers, arguments raged over the usage of Roman or Devanagari scripts. These conversations reflected a growing class consciousness as middle-class people fought hegemony and sought to exercise cultural autonomy. From Chakrabarty's perspective, language politics also show a yearning to create alternative histories—ones that question accepted narratives and claim the validity of subaltern voices inside the national framework. (Schendel, 2022)

Building the "Ideal Bodo" using print media helped to produce a normative Bodo subject: educated, temperate, disciplined, and reform minded. Deeply ingrained in a Weberian rationality, these moral discourses also speak to Chakrabarty's observation that even rationalist changes in postcolonial nations are filtered through culturally unique idioms. Thus, the "ideal Bodo" emerges as a composite figure that is both modern and deeply rooted in indigenous conceptions.

Following Habermas, the Bodo-language press can be considered a vernacular public sphere where intellectuals addressed problems ranging from education and religion to politics and

development. (Basumatary & Mushahary, 2023) Chakrabarty cautions us, though, that in postcolonial settings, these public spaces are uneven and broken, frequently ingrained in social hierarchies and various modern experiences. Still, Bodo print media helped to create a unified cultural and intellectual environment that allowed middle-class individuals to view themselves as political agents.

Often found in transitional areas including Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, and Udalgiri, the middle-class Bodo straddled rural and urban life. Print media translated the ideas of modernism into easily available forms, thereby guiding this shift. Reformist and nationalist ideas were spread to a larger public by essays, editorials, short stories, and poetry, therefore tying village readers to more general political imaginations. This mediating role captures Chakrabarty's idea of "time-knots," in which several temporalities live within one historical moment.

Conclusion

Print media among the Bodos served not only as a tool for spreading knowledge but also as a vital venue for building a contemporary ethnic identity. It facilitated the expression of middle-class beliefs, the politicization of language, and the achievement of moral control over community life. Foregrounding Chakrabarty's perspective, we find that Bodo modernity was a vernacular modernity grounded in particular histories, aspirations, and cultural logics rather than a derivative discourse. Print culture among the Bodos thus both re-centered the local as a valid foundation for theorizing modernity and helped to provincialize Europe.

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BIKALI COLLEGE MANUSCRIPTS: PRESERVING THE LITERARY LEGACY OF ASSAM

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Abstract

The Central Library of Bikali College, Assam, holds 39 rare manuscripts, primarily in Old Assamese, preserved in traditional formats such as Sanchipat and Paper Pat. This study investigates the library's preservation and conservation strategies, usage patterns, and the potential for promoting the manuscript collection as an academic and cultural asset. Analysis reveals active use by students, researchers, and faculty, alongside challenges like staff and space shortages. Although digital preservation efforts have begun, signs of physical deterioration—including ink damage and insect infestation—highlight the need for improved conservation practices. Despite limited resources, structured policies and external collaborations have supported the preservation process. This article emphasizes the importance of localized manuscript conservation and positions Bikali College as a vital custodian of cultural heritage.

Keywords-Manuscript; collection management; preservation; conservation; cultural heritage; Bikali College; college library; library management

Introduction

The preservation of cultural heritage, including rare manuscripts, has gained significance in recent years, as these resources are not only valuable for academic research but also crucial to understanding our historical and cultural past. India is home to one of the richest manuscript traditions in the world, with millions of handwritten texts preserved across the country in various languages

and scripts. Librarians and libraries hold a pivotal responsibility in collecting, preserving, and conserving manuscripts, thereby safeguarding their accessibility for future generations. A manuscript, as defined by the National Mission for Manuscripts, is “a handwritten composition on paper, bark, cloth, metal, palm leaf, Sanchipat, or any other material dating back at least 75 years that has significant scientific, historical, or aesthetic value.” These manuscripts, considered national treasures, include notable works such as *Natyashastra*, *Gitagovinda*, *Arthashastra*, *Ramayana*, and *Baburnama*. Preservation of these manuscripts can be done by adopting traditional and modern methods (Sutar & Chile, 2021). In current times, the digitization of manuscripts in the ICT environment has introduced new ways of storage, dissemination, and retrieval.

Manuscript preservation and conservation is a science and an art of librarianship that integrates principles from conservation science, material science, and archival science. Manuscripts in academic libraries make way for accessibility to wisdom for future generations. Manuscripts are vulnerable due to their buildup from organic materials such as palm leaves, papyrus, parchments, or handmade paper and metallic plates; thus, considering this, they require careful handling, controlled environments, and preventive conservation strategies.

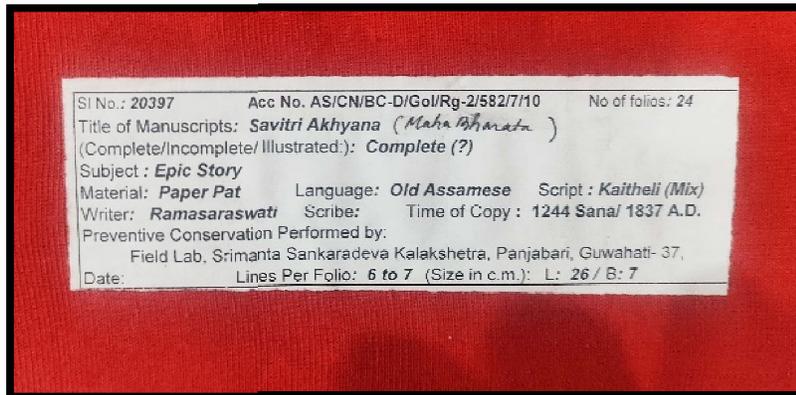
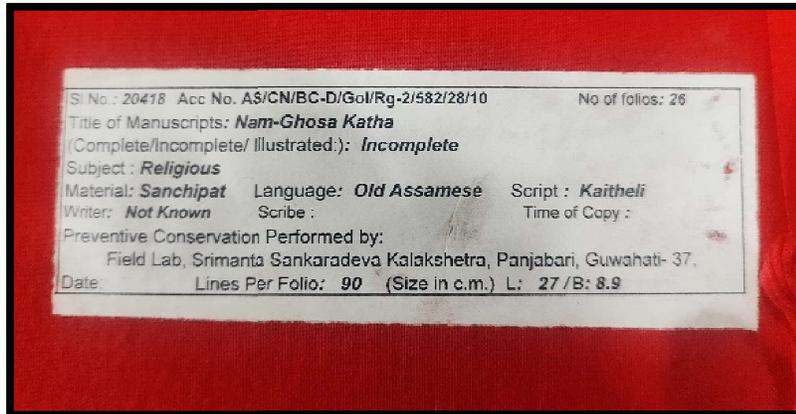
In Assam, the role of Sankardeva and his successors who used manuscripts as vital tools for transmitting religious and cultural knowledge through compositions like Ghosas, Borgeets, Nats, etc. (Borthakur, 2021). Traditionally, manuscripts were made in Assam from Sanchi bark, Sanchi pat, Tulapat, and palm leaves.

"Digitizing Assam," a community-driven initiative by the Nanda Talukdar Foundation (NTF) in collaboration with the Assam Jatiya Bidyalay Educational and Socio-Economic Trust, has made remarkable progress in digitalizing 26,000 Xasipats covering subjects like Vaishnavism, Buddhism, and traditional Assamese practices (The Assam Tribune, 2025). The digitized materials are publicly available through the platform assamarchive.org.

It is a moment of pride and cultural affirmation that Majuli's traditional crafts- Mukha Shilpa (Mask Making) and Manuscript Painting- have been awarded the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the Government of India. This recognition, following rigorous scrutiny, not only safeguards the authenticity of these indigenous art forms but also highlights their cultural and historical significance. The GI tag elevates Majuli's heritage to a national platform, ensuring protection, promotion, and sustainable livelihood for its traditional artisans.

Despite growing national recognition of Assam's rich cultural heritage, such as the recent GI tag awarded to Majuli's Mukha Shilpa and Manuscript Painting, there remains a noticeable gap in scholarly attention toward smaller, rural academic institutions that also serve as custodians of valuable manuscript collections. While major institutions and heritage bodies receive resources and visibility, libraries like that of Bikali College operate with limited funding, minimal technical support, and insufficient documentation. This imbalance raises critical concerns about the sustainability of preservation efforts in peripheral regions, where traditional knowledge may be at greater risk of deterioration or loss. A focused examination of these underrepresented repositories is, therefore, not only timely but necessary to broaden the scope of manuscript conservation discourse in Assam and ensure inclusive cultural preservation strategies.

This study is essential to assess and document the preservation and conservation practices of the Central Library of Bikali College, Assam, as it houses a rare and vulnerable manuscript collection. Despite the limited quantity, these manuscripts represent valuable cultural and intellectual heritage, and understanding how a rural academic institution manages such resources can contribute to a broader discourse on localized conservation efforts and inform best practices in similar contexts.



Literature Review

The preservation of manuscripts in Assam represents a crucial area of cultural heritage studies, yet scholarly attention remains limited. Existing literature and institutional records reveal scattered efforts in documenting and safeguarding these rare manuscripts. It also reveals major gaps in systematic documentation, regional inclusivity, and critical analysis.

For instance, Barman and Narzary (2016) offer a quantitative account of manuscript collection in various Satras of Bongaigain, Assam- highlighting 520 in Dharmapur, 650 in Bisnupur, and 220 in Rangapani. These manuscripts were found to be stored in basic containers such as wooden boxes and steel almirahs, using preservation methods like naphthalene balls and citronella oil. While

informative, the study stops short of evaluating the long-term efficacy of these preservation techniques or their alignment with conservation standards.

Building on institutional roles, Borthakur (2021) highlighted the efforts of local institutes in various parts of Assam like Institute of Tai Studies and Research, Moranhat; Manuscript Conservation Centre, Department of Cultural Studies, and Tezpur University; Satras of Majuli; Uttaran museum, Sivasagar; Museum of Anthropological Department of Dibrugarh University; Manuscript Conservation Center, Government Sanskrit College, Guwahati; and Krishna Kanta Handique Library of Guwahati University and the Government of Assam. Although this mapping is valuable, the review lacks a critical assessment of how effective or consistent these institutional efforts have been across regions over time.

Laskar and Ansari (2021) delve deeper into illustrated manuscripts and indigenous knowledge systems of the Auniati Satra of Majuli Island, Assam. The study sheds light on the indigenous knowledge systems associated with the preparation of these manuscripts, including the materials used and the traditional techniques followed. Their work is instrumental in understanding traditional manuscript production but does not address contemporary conservation challenges or the sustainability of such indigenous methods in modern archival practices.

Buragohain et al. (2022) commendably draw attention to international involvement, particularly the British Library's role in digitizing 100 manuscript collections from Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Sikkim. However, this raises concerns about external dependency, the long-term accessibility of digital archives, and the lack of local capacity-building efforts that should ideally accompany such projects.

Several other studies- such as those by Ali and Dutta (2023) and Moid et al. (2023) – shed light on traditional methods and institutional practices in manuscript care, including critiques of modern chemical treatments and the documentation on non-Indian

manuscripts in national repositories. Although informative, these studies tend to focus on prominent institutions and overlook rural or community-level preservation environments.

Similarly, general studies like Sutar and Chile (2021), Vasudevan and Amrutha (2011), and Tyagi (2023) emphasize the theoretical aspects of preservation and conservation, identifying causes of damage and detailing required tools and methods. Yet, the practical application of these recommendations in under-resourced institutions remains underexplored. Financial and infrastructural constraints, for example, are acknowledged but not critically analyzed in terms of their systemic causes and implications.

Chakraborty et al. (2024) and Das et al. (2024) focus on college libraries across Assam, reporting the presence of manuscripts and early digitization efforts. Despite this, their findings expose the limited reach and inconsistent execution of digital preservation initiatives, with only a handful of institutions having commenced digitization or offering digital access.

Saikia and Sarma (2024) provide a broader view through their evaluation of the National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM) in Assam. They assess the mission's effectiveness and catalog various manuscript types and their conservation statuses. However, the paper underscores a persistent disconnect between state-level interventions and grassroots realities, particularly regarding public awareness, resource allocation, and local participation.

While several studies have explored the collection, preservation, and conservation of manuscripts in various parts of Assam, there is a notable absence of focused research on the district of Goalpara. Despite its rich cultural and literary heritage, the documentation and conservation practices specific to Goalpara's manuscript tradition remain largely unexplored. This gap in the literature highlights the need for localized studies to assess the condition of manuscripts, understand traditional conservation methods, and evaluate institutional or community-level efforts in this particular region. Additionally, while previous research has examined

manuscript conservation in larger institutions, museums, and Satras, there is a noticeable gap in studies focusing on rural academic institutions. The unique challenges faced by such colleges—particularly in terms of funding, awareness, infrastructure, and conservation expertise—remain largely undocumented and merit further investigation. Addressing these gaps—especially through a localized lens focusing on areas like Goalpara and rural colleges—can offer critical insights into neglected repositories of indigenous knowledge and inform more inclusive preservation strategies going forward.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the collection, preservation, and conservation practices of the Central Library of Bikali College. Bikali College, located in Dhupdhara, Goalpara district of Assam, was established in 1982. Bikali College has been affiliated with Gauhati University since the 1988-89 academic session, ensuring that its programs align with the university's academic standards and guidelines. In 1992, the college was brought under the Deficit Grants-in-Aid System, which provided crucial financial support from the government. Subsequently, under the Assam College Provincialization Act, 2005, the institution transitioned to the provincialized system, securing full financial backing from the Government of Assam. Additionally, the college has been registered under UGC 12(B) since the 10th Five-Year Plan, enabling it to receive development grants and participate in various UGC-sponsored schemes aimed at improving the quality of higher education. The College has been re-accredited (Fourth cycle) by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 2024-25 and was awarded a “B+” grade. The Central Library of Bikali College has been an integral part of the institution since its early days, evolving alongside the college. The library was set up to support the academic needs of students and faculty, offering access to a range of books, journals, and other learning materials.

The Central Library of Bikali College currently houses a valuable collection of 39 manuscripts, generously donated by Dr. Alpana Sarkar, Associate Professor (Retired) from the Department

of Assamese. The first manuscript in this collection originally belonged to the Ambari NaukataSatra in Goalpara and was handed over to Dr. Sarkar in 2002. Following this, she placed the manuscript in the custody of the Department of Assamese at Bikali College for academic and preservation purposes.

In 2010, recognizing their historical and cultural significance, the manuscripts were submitted to the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society in Guwahati, where they were scientifically conserved, preserved, and digitalized. After the conservation process, the manuscripts were returned and kept in the Department of Assamese at Bikali College until 2018. Upon her retirement in 2018, Dr. Sarkar formally donated the entire collection to Swarnalata Devi, the then Librarian (Retired), who was designated as the official custodian of these valuable resources.

Swarnalata Devi has since played an instrumental role in the preservation and conservation of these rare materials, despite limited infrastructural and technical resources. Her efforts include organizing the manuscripts, implementing basic preventive conservation measures, and raising awareness among students and faculty about their historical value. This act of donation and subsequent custodianship not only underscores the collaborative role of educators and librarians in heritage preservation but also exemplifies the localized efforts being made within rural academic institutions. As such, this case forms a critical foundation for examining grassroots-level manuscript conservation practices and the challenges faced by smaller colleges in safeguarding Assam's literary heritage.

Objective of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To document and categorize the manuscript collection of the Central Library, Bikali College, based on language, material type, and form.
2. To analyze the demographic and academic profile of the users and visitors accessing the manuscript section.

3. To examine the current preservation and conservation techniques adopted by the library and assess their effectiveness.
4. To evaluate the physical condition and deterioration status of the manuscripts to determine their preservation needs.
5. To identify the major challenges faced by the library in preserving, conserving, and promoting its manuscript collection.
6. To explore the existing institutional policies, guidelines, and strategic frameworks for manuscript management and propose marketing and outreach strategies to enhance visibility and access.

Research Methodology

The research follows a descriptive case study design to understand the existing preservation methods, challenges, and potential improvements in manuscript conservation at Bikali College's Central Library. The scope of the study is limited to the manuscript collection of the Bikali College Library, located in Dhupdhara, Goalpara district of Assam. All available manuscripts (n=39) were included in the study. This purposive sampling approach ensures comprehensive coverage of the materials, respecting the small and manageable size of the collection.

A content analysis technique was used to categorize the manuscripts based on type, material, and condition. Challenges, gaps, and areas for improvement were critically evaluated and contextualized within institutional limitations such as funding, technical expertise, and infrastructure.

Data were collected through library records, direct observation, and structured analysis of preservation techniques. The study seeks to document the library's policies, preservation practices, and resources available for maintaining rare manuscripts.

Due to the historical and cultural sensitivity of the manuscript content, no part of the manuscript text was publicly reproduced without permission. All data was collected with respect for the intellectual and cultural integrity of the artifacts.

While the insider position enabled deeper access, it may also introduce bias. Steps were taken to maintain objectivity by validating findings with multiple sources and consulting external experts when needed. The study is confined to one institution, and thus, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all colleges in Assam.

Results and Discussion

Manuscript Collection

Table 1 shows the total collection of manuscripts available in Central Library Bikali College, i.e., 39.

Table 1: Distribution by type of resource

Sl. No	Type of resource	No. of items	Percentage
1	Manuscripts	39	100
Total		39	100

Manuscripts in different languages

Table 2 shows the collection is overwhelmingly composed of Old Assamese texts (94.87%), with smaller contributions from Vrajawali (2.56%) and Old Assamese &Pseudo-Sanskrit (2.56%). This suggests a rich dominance of Old Assamese in the corpus, with minor linguistic variations present.

Table 2: Manuscript Distribution by Language

Sl. No	Language	No. of Manuscripts	Percentage
1	Old Assamese	37	94.87
2	Vrajawali	1	2.56
3	Old Assamese &Pseudo-Sanskrit	1	2.56
Total		39	100

Manuscripts in different

Table 3 indicates that most of the manuscripts are composed in Sanchipat form (69.23%), followed by Paper (15.38%). Smaller proportions are found in Paper Pat, Tula Pat, and Paper Pulp (5.13% each), indicating a predominance of traditional manuscript formats.

Table 3: Distribution of manuscripts by Material Format

Sl. No	Format Type	Quantity	Percentage
1	Sanchipat	27	69.23
2	Paper Pat	2	5.13
3	Paper	6	15.38
4	Tula Pat	2	5.13
5	Paper Pulp	2	5.13
Total		39	100

Visitors' type

The data presented in Table 4 indicates that the manuscript section of the Central Library, Bikali College, is accessed by a diverse spectrum of visitors, including students (at Higher Secondary, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels), research scholars, faculty members, and external individuals. This wide-ranging visitor base reflects the relevance and utility of the manuscript collection across multiple tiers of academic and cultural engagement.

Sl. No	Visitor Type (Outside the Institution)	Accessible	Not Accessible
1	Student (Higher Secondary, Bachelors', Masters')	Yes	-
2	Research Scholar	Yes	-

3	Faculty Members	Yes	-
4	External Members/ Visitors	Yes	-

Table 4: Categories of Visitors to the Manuscript Section**Users' type**

It is evident from Table 5 that the resource is actively used by Higher Secondary Students, undergraduates, postgraduates, researchers, faculty members, and external members highlighting its wide accessibility and significance across different academic levels. This suggests its importance in supporting diverse educational and research activities.

Table 5: Manuscript users

Sl. No.	User Types	Yes	No
1	Higher Secondary Students	Yes	-
2	Undergraduates	Yes	-
3	Postgraduates	Yes	-
4	Researchers	Yes	-
5	Faculty Members	Yes	-
6	External members	Yes	-

Preservation and conservation methods

The data in Table 6 reveals that the Central Library of Bikali College has adopted a selective yet strategic approach to manuscript preservation and conservation. The implementation of preventive and curative measures, along with digitization, reflects a commitment to safeguarding the physical and intellectual content of the collection through both traditional and modern techniques. Preventive measures help protect the manuscripts from potential damage, while curative measures address existing deterioration. Digitization serves the dual purpose of preservation and wider accessibility, enabling the long-term survival of fragile documents.

However, a significant number of advanced or specialized conservation techniques—such as microfilm and microfiche, washing,

pH testing, fumigation, de-acidification, lamination, encapsulation, and restoration—have not yet been implemented. The absence of these methods may indicate constraints related to technical expertise or infrastructure. These gaps highlight the need for capacity building, external collaborations, and institutional support to strengthen the preservation framework and ensure the longevity of these valuable cultural resources.

Table 6: Methods employed for the preservation and conservation of manuscripts

Sl. No.	Method	Implemented	Not Implemented
1	Preventive Measures	Yes	-
2	Curative Measures	Yes	-
3	Microfilm and Microfiche	-	No
4	Digitization	Yes	-
5	Washing	-	No
6	pH testing	-	No
7	Fumigation	-	No
8	De-acidification	-	No
9	Lamination	-	No
10	Encapsulation	-	No
11	Restoration	-	No

Usage frequency of insecticides

Table 7 shows that Insecticides are applied occasionally, with no usage in the "Almost Always," "To a Considerable Degree," or "Seldom" categories. This indicates a cautious and infrequent use of pest control measures, likely aiming to minimize damage while preserving manuscripts.

Table 7: Usage Frequency of Insecticides

Sl. No.	Usage Frequency	Applied	Not Applied
1	Almost Always	-	No

2	To a Considerable degree	-	No
3	Occasionally	Yes	-
4	Seldom	-	No

Key challenges in manuscript preservation and conservation

Table 8 shows that the primary challenges identified are staff and space shortages, with no financial constraints reported. These issues may hinder optimal manuscript preservation and accessibility, requiring targeted solutions to improve efficiency and space management.

Table 8: Key Challenges in Manuscript Preservation and Conservation

Sl. No.	Type of Challenge	Exists	Not Applicable
1	Financial constraints	-	No
2	Staff Shortage	Yes	-
3	Inadequate Space	Yes	-

Guideline and policy for manuscript management

The findings presented in Table 9 highlight the presence of comprehensive policies and guidelines that govern the preservation, conservation, and usage of manuscripts in the Central Library of Bikali College. The existence of formal preservation and conservation techniques and a well-defined preservation policy reflects a proactive approach to safeguarding the collection. These structured efforts ensure that manuscripts are not only physically preserved but also managed in accordance with best practices.

Moreover, the availability of security guidelines and usage protocols demonstrates the library's commitment to maintaining the integrity and accessibility of its rare resources. These measures help minimize risks related to theft, mishandling, or degradation due to frequent use. Additionally, the fact that all manuscript resources are catalogued signifies a high level of organizational efficiency, which facilitates both access and accountability. Overall, the presence of

these policies reflects a mature and responsible manuscript management system that can serve as a model for similar institutions.

Table 9: Availability of Guidelines and Policies for Manuscript Management

Sl. No.	Guidelines and Policy	Available	Not Available
1	Implementation of Preservation and Conservation Techniques	Yes	-
2	Formal preservation Policy	Yes	-
3	Security protocols for safeguarding manuscripts	Yes	-
4	Usage guidelines for accessing library manuscripts	Yes	-
5	Complete cataloguing of all manuscript resources	Yes	-

Current status of deterioration of manuscripts

Table 10 provides an assessment of the physical condition of manuscripts in the Central Library of Bikali College, highlighting various forms of deterioration. The analysis indicates that certain types of damage, such as wear and tear and surface dirt, are absent, suggesting that the manuscripts have not been excessively handled or exposed to unclean environments. This could be due to careful storage practices or limited access to the documents. However, other forms of damage, such as water stains, yellowing, and embrittlement, are evident, indicating the effects of aging and environmental exposure on the manuscripts.

One of the significant concerns revealed in the analysis is the presence of deteriorated ink. This suggests that the manuscripts may have been affected by chemical reactions, humidity, or poor-quality ink, leading to fading and potential loss of textual content. Additionally, evidence of insect infestation raises concerns about biological deterioration, which can result in irreparable damage if not

controlled. The presence of signs of poor handling further suggests that users may not be following proper procedures while accessing these materials, leading to gradual physical degradation.

Based on these findings, it is evident that while external damage such as wear and dirt is well-managed, internal factors like paper aging, ink deterioration, and insect infestation pose serious threats to the longevity of the manuscripts.

Table 10: Physical State of Manuscripts

S. No	Indicators of Deterioration	Central Library Bikali College
1	Wear and tear	x
2	Soil and surface dirt	x
3	Water stains	✓
4	Yellowing	✓
5	Embrittlement	✓
6	Deteriorated ink	✓
7	Evidence of insect infestation	✓
8	Evidence of poor handling	✓

Discussion

The current study reaffirms the importance of rural academic institutions like Bikali College in preserving Assam's manuscript heritage, a focus rarely seen in existing literature. While Borthakur (2021), Laskar and Ansari (2021), and Buragohain et al. (2022) documented preservation practices in established institutions like Satras, museums, and universities, this study brings attention to a smaller yet significant repository: the Central Library of Bikali College. The collection, though modest in number (39 manuscripts), contributes meaningfully to cultural conservation—especially given the predominance of Old Assamese texts (94.87%) and the high representation of traditional Sanchipat formats (69.23%).

Unlike larger institutes that benefit from institutional funding and dedicated conservation labs (Moid et al., 2023; Tyagi, 2023),

Bikali College operates within infrastructural and staffing constraints, as evidenced by the reported staff and space shortages. Yet, it follows a structured and policy-driven approach to preservation and access. The existence of comprehensive guidelines, cataloging, and preservation protocols—such as preventive and digitization measures—mirrors best practices suggested by Sutar & Chile (2021), who emphasized the need for proper conservation policies and trained staff. However, the lack of curative treatments like pH testing, de-acidification, and restoration, as well as the absence of microfilming, reflects the challenges faced by smaller institutions in accessing technical resources.

Interestingly, the infrequent use of insecticides (applied only occasionally) suggests a conscious effort to balance preservation and caution—avoiding over-treatment with harmful chemicals, a concern raised by Ali and Dutta (2023) in their critique of modern chemical methods. This cautious approach aligns with traditional Assamese conservation values and indicates a blend of indigenous and modern practices.

Furthermore, the study highlights wide usage across various academic groups—from higher secondary students to external researchers—indicating the manuscripts' educational relevance. This contradicts the limited access patterns observed in some prior studies where such collections were often restricted to scholars or faculty (Vasudevan & Amrutha, 2011). The active involvement of users at different levels supports Das et al. (2024) and Chakraborty et al. (2024), who noted the emerging trend of utilizing indigenous knowledge resources in college libraries.

Despite the successful prevention of wear and dirt, internal deterioration—such as yellowing, embrittlement, deteriorated ink, and insect infestation—raises alarms about environmental threats and long-term sustainability. The findings validate concerns expressed in studies by Saikia & Sarma (2024), where climate, handling practices, and ink quality were cited as common causes of manuscript damage. While the absence of major funding constraints may seem surprising,

the lack of restoration capacity and skilled conservators implies that financial allocations may be inadequate or unevenly distributed.

Most critically, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature: the near-total absence of focused scholarship on manuscript conservation in the Goalpara district. By situating the Bikali College library within this overlooked geographical context, the study extends the regional scope of manuscript studies beyond better-documented areas like Majuli, Sivasagar, and Kamrup. Moreover, it sheds light on how localized academic actors—like Dr. Alpana Sarkar and Swarnalata Devi—can play a transformative role in heritage preservation at the grassroots level.

Conclusion

The study of manuscript preservation and conservation practices at the Central Library of Bikali College reveals both the potential and challenges of safeguarding cultural heritage within a rural academic setting. Despite limited infrastructure and human resources, the library has made commendable strides in documenting, preserving, and providing access to its modest but culturally rich manuscript collection. The strong representation of Old Assamese texts and traditional forms like Sanchipat signifies the collection's historical and linguistic value. The structured preservation policy, inclusive user accessibility, and cautious use of preservation techniques reflect a sincere commitment to conservation, even without advanced restoration technologies. The contribution of individuals such as Dr. Alpana Sarkar and librarian Swarnalata Devi further underlines the importance of institutional dedication and individual agency in heritage management.

However, the study also identifies critical areas requiring intervention. To ensure long-term sustainability, investments in training library staff in curative conservation methods—such as pH testing, fumigation, de-acidification, and encapsulation—are essential. Establishing collaborations with regional conservation centers and digitization hubs could help enhance preservation without compromising physical integrity. Environmental control measures,

pest management systems, and proper handling protocols must be reinforced through regular workshops and awareness drives. As manuscripts continue to serve as primary sources for linguistic, religious, and historical research, future interventions should focus on integrating this repository into a larger network of digital archives and educational platforms. Doing so would not only preserve these artifacts for future generations but also elevate Bikali College's role in Assam's cultural and academic landscape.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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PEDAGOGIC MATERIAL PRODUCTION IN MOTHER TONGUE BASED MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION - INSIGHTS FROM THE SINGPHO MTB-MLE PROGRAMME

Palash Kumar Nath

Abstract

Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB MLE) has increasingly been recognized as a fundamental strategy for achieving effective and inclusive literacy education, especially in multilingual societies. A central component of MTB MLE is the production of pedagogic materials that are appropriate, culturally resonant, and linguistically accessible to young learners. This paper explores the philosophy, principles, processes, and challenges of pedagogic material production in the context of MTB MLE programs. Drawing on the author's practical experiences in the planning and development of Singpho Mother tongue based Multilingual Education in Assam this paper outlines methods for developing graded, culturally appropriate, and linguistically relevant learning materials for diverse learner groups.

Keywords: MTB-MLE, Minority language, Language revitalization, Singpho

Introduction

The issue of providing quality and inclusive education for various sections of young learners, especially those from linguistic minority groups, has been at the center stage for almost two decades now. Research such as Benson (2005), Benson (2009), Cummins (2000), Cummins (2001), Dekker & Young (2005), Dekker (2009), Malone, (2003), Malone (2007), Mishra, (2005), Mohanty, (2006), Mohanty, Panda, Phillipson, & Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) has exhibited the benefits of mother tongue education for the young members of linguistic minority groups around the world. It also exemplifies

various initiatives that are being taken in different parts of the world to provide quality education to these groups of children. The model for providing such inclusive and quality education has been popularly known as Mother tongue-based Multilingual Education (hereafter MTB-MLE). National Education Policy 2020 of India, proposed and being implemented by the Government of India, has placed utmost importance on providing education in the learner's mother tongue. It categorically emphasizes the need to use learners' mother tongue in the early years of education, which is evident in the following lines.

'Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible.' (NEP 2020 Page 13)

One of the most important aspects of MTB-MLE is the production of learner-centered pedagogic teaching and learning materials that may be used to leverage the prior knowledge of young learners in classroom interaction. The following sections and subsections focus on this aspect, exemplifying the materials produced for the Singpho MTB-MLE programme.

Understanding Material Production for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

Acquisition of basic literacy skills for young learners can be scaffolded with the use of various teaching and learning tools. Books, charts, pictures, and any other resources comprise the set of tools that the teacher can use to make learning effective and enjoyable for young learners through their mother tongue. These various types of teaching and learning tools are known as 'Pedagogic Materials' in the context of literacy programmes.

Need and Role of Reading Materials in Learners' Mother Tongue In the context of MTB-MLE, the primary objective remains the facilitation of children hailing from minority language communities in learning basic literacy skills that are - to listen, speak, read, and write in their native tongue. One of the approaches

employed by MTB-MLE model for achieving such goals, is known as the Multi-Strategy Approach (MSM) (Stringer, 2001). This approach encompasses two distinct tracks: a story-building track and a word-building track. Both of these avenues are meticulously crafted to enable learners to acquire specific literacy skills within a non-threatening environment.

Multi-Strategy Method uses appropriate teaching and learning materials tailored for both learners and educators. These resources—comprising stories, songs, picture books, alphabet charts, and more—play an indispensable role in the dynamics of classroom interaction. Such materials not only assist young learners in recognizing that written language conveys meaning and can furnish them with information, but they also empower them to articulate their thoughts, opinions, and desires in a systematic and organized manner through written expression.

Moreover, these resources aid learners in developing the ability to identify relevant graphemes and establish a proper correspondence between the sounds in their language and the specific graphemes designated to represent them.

One of the most important aspects of these materials is that they reflect the culture, tradition, historical anecdotes, narratives, etc., which are characteristic of that particular community. This encourages the young learners to actively participate in the classroom transaction, which leads to effective learning.

Characteristics of Good Pedagogical Material

Appropriate teaching learning materials for young learners in a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education programme are generally produced on the basis of pedagogical principles and sociocultural backgrounds. It is imperative for these materials to incorporate existing knowledge of learners rooted in their cultural and environmental contexts. This helps learners comprehend text and validate their experiences. This recognition builds confidence in the young learners and encourages them to participate in classroom

transactions, building the foundation for them to acquire new knowledge. It is important that these materials are age-appropriate. Simple, relatable, and engaging materials such as Stories about animals, family members, or village life resonate well with the young learners. The structure of materials is critical for graded literacy development in an MTB-MLE programme. Level 1 materials are generally short stories or songs with simple sentence structures. Level 2 materials can be longer and contain more complex sentence structures.

The flow of the story is crucial for engaging young learners and supporting language acquisition. A good story must have a clear structure with a beginning, climax, and conclusion. Predictability in the storyline enhances cognitive engagement and reasoning skills. Maintaining narrative coherence and predictability is essential for making reading materials educational and enjoyable in MTB-MLE programmes.

Contents of the Materials

In an MTB-MLE program, diverse teaching-learning materials are developed to engage young learners culturally and informatively. Different content types support literacy and cognitive skills in learners' linguistic and cultural environments. **Original stories** by local community members are engaging and age-appropriate, connecting learners with creative narratives. **Personal experiences** shaped into stories resonate with learners, enhancing interest and comprehension. **Songs and poetry** in the mother tongue support phonological awareness and vocabulary development. **Traditional folktales** captivate learners and foster cultural pride and reading interest. **Biographies and historical accounts** promote identity and respect for the past. Humorous and interactive materials encourage critical thinking and creativity. **Travel and geography** descriptions expand learners' horizons. Information-based content on health and environmental care empowers learners with life skills. **Instructional texts** on practical activities help learners connect literacy with real-life applications. **Religious and ethical teachings** in the mother tongue

instil moral values and enhance literacy. Materials for life-long learning bridge school-based learning and real-world knowledge. Translated and adapted materials provide access to global knowledge while maintaining linguistic clarity and contextual relevance. MTB-MLE programmes are holistic, culturally rooted, and pedagogically effective.

Formats of reading materials

In an MTB-MLE program, the effectiveness of language learning is not only dependent on the content but also on how that content is presented. Various formats help transform culturally relevant and linguistically appropriate content into accessible reading materials for learners at different stages of literacy development. These formats support both cognitive and linguistic development by making the learning process engaging and interactive.

One of the foundational tools for organizing content is the Cultural Calendar. Developed during initial material production workshops, the Cultural Calendar helps identify child-friendly and culturally specific themes for each month.

Following the Cultural Calendar, materials like the Pre-Reader introduce young children to the basic skills of literacy—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The Pre-Reader helps learners recognize shapes and letters, develop sound-symbol correspondence, and improve fine motor skills necessary for writing. It also encourages oral fluency and interaction in the mother tongue, making early literacy development smooth and meaningful.

The next step is the Primer, which builds on Pre-Reader skills by introducing word parts, syllables, and sentence structures. It emphasizes the understanding of how words are formed and provides foundational grammar and spelling instruction.

Story Books serve as a crucial element of reading materials in an MTB-MLE programme. They are designed to be short (8–10 lines), with engaging content and vivid illustrations that reflect the learners' cultural environment. These stories aid in vocabulary building,

sentence structure recognition, and overall comprehension. The stories are accompanied by appropriate visuals that support meaning-making, helping children develop both visual and linguistic literacy. Various formats of storybooks are used aiming at helping learners achieve diverse literacy and cognitive skills. Some of these materials are known as Bigbooks, Listening Stories, Small Books, picture posters, etc.

The use of these diverse formats—anchored in cultural context and adapted to developmental needs—is essential for successful MTB-MLE programmes. Each format contributes uniquely to the linguistic, cognitive, and emotional development of learners, ensuring that language learning is deeply rooted in the child’s own environment and experiences.

Insights from the Field

Having discussed the importance and need for pedagogical teaching and learning materials for MTB-MLE programmes in the next sections, this paper provides a glimpse of some of the important aspects, challenges involved in the pedagogic teaching learning material production for the Singpho MTB-MLE programme which started in the year 2009.

The Singpho MTB-MLE programme

The Singphos are a vibrant indigenous community living in the neighbouring districts of Assam- Arunachal Pradesh border areas. The total population of Singpho community is less than 10,000 in India. Linguistically, the Singpho language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is a matter of concern that number of the speakers of the Singpho language is dwindling day by day. The main objectives behind the Singpho MTB-MLE programme were, firstly, to provide their children the opportunity to acquire basic literacy skills through their mother tongue and secondly, to keep their children connected to their language, culture and tradition through this programme. Hence from 2006, continuous engagement with the various sections of the community resulted in the hosting of various workshops on Mobilization, Baseline Survey, Material Production, Teaching

Training, Curriculum development, etc. Eventually, in 2009 the community set up the school at Ketetong village in Margherita subdivision under Tinsukia district, Assam.

Production of Pedagogic Materials for the Singpho MTB -MLE programme

The development of teaching-learning materials, particularly for young children, necessitates extensive planning with regard to its objectives and strategies. However, in the case of the Singphos, where writing in their mother tongue is not a common practice, material production requires extensive planning and techniques. In order for the community and the program to get the most out of it, some of these ideas and techniques were occasionally changed. Numerous material production workshops produced the majority of the materials used in the Singpho MTB-MLE program.

Types of Workshops Conducted

The first series of workshops that were held served the purpose of sensitizing potential community writers about the need for such activities and also the processes involved in them. In these workshops, the writers were introduced to the theoretical underpinnings involved in the production of learner-centered teaching-learning materials.

The second series of workshops aimed at production of materials which are appropriate to the story track. The objectives of these workshops were to produce various materials in the form of stories, songs, narratives, rhymes as well as riddles etc. These materials were used later to assist the learners in acquiring the skills of listening, reading, and comprehension through their own language.

The third series of workshops focused on producing the Pre-Reader and the Primer in the Singpho language. Both these materials were later used to assist the young learners in establishing sound and symbol correspondences, recognizing letters, and also in the formation of words in the Singpho language in a playful method.

The fourth kind of workshop aimed at producing teaching and learning materials on various simple aspects of the environment.

Later, these were named the Environmental Science Information booklet. These small booklets were written by the community members during a series of workshops. These small booklets contain simple but valuable information about the local nature and its elements. These were very much appreciated by the young learners later on, as they could see the pictures of their familiar elements in nature and also could read and discuss these in their mother tongue.

The team for Material production

Production of teaching-learning materials for children involves a concerted effort from different individuals or groups of individuals with varied skill sets. Among the important members are the storytellers, writers, editors, and illustrators. In the case of the Singpho, in every workshop, there were community resource people who narrated beautiful stories reflecting their own folklore, culture, and tradition. These were written down by competent writers. All those written stories were edited by competent editors for grammatical mistakes, for the suitability of the story for younger learners etc. Once the final version of the story is ready, the illustrators draw pictures to reflect the story. Each of the illustrations is bound to be culture-specific. In the context of Singpho, since there were not many people who could fit into the role of language editors, it took longer to produce final versions of stories in each of the workshops.

Selection of Content

One of the important considerations in the production of reading materials is to choose suitable contents for the children. In the context of MTB-MLE, there are a number of aspects that need to be kept in mind. The most important of those are listed below.

For a stage 1 storybook, it should be

- About people, activities, and places that are very familiar to them
- Interesting to the readers
- Written by L1 speakers
- About 4-8 sentences long—one sentence on each page
- - Use vocabulary that is very familiar to the readers

- Every page has an image that aids readers in understanding the sentence on that page.

In order to make this happen, the production of the Cultural Calendar proves to be a very useful tool. One of the most crucial tools for guiding community writers' cognitive processes towards choosing culturally relevant subjects or themes for creating stories and texts in various media for young readers is this one. This 1st but crucial step for the Singpho MTB-MLE program was made at the material production workshop, which was hosted locally in Ketetong, the village where the MT school is planned to be built in September 2008. The Singpho community members who took part in this workshop received guidance on how to create the initial version of the community's cultural calendar. For the participants, the entire process of creating the cultural calendar served as an icebreaker. As far as the method was concerned, the participants were divided into groups of four or five and then they were assigned to take up one or two months of the traditional Singpho year. It is noteworthy here that there is a difference of time frame between the Roman and the Singpho year calendar. One Singpho calendar month covers fifteen days of each of the two adjacent Roman months. The Singpho calendar has different names for each of these months. The months are shown in Table 1 in accordance with Singpho custom.

Table 1: Months in the Singpho tradition

Name of the Singpho Month	1 st week	2 nd week	3 rd week	4 th week
Rata (March-April)	March (3 rd week)	March (4 th week)	April (1 st week)	April (2 nd week)
Wut ta (April-May)	April (3 rd week)	April (4 th week)	May (1 st week)	May (2 nd week)
Shāla ta (May-June)	May (3 rd week)	May (4 th week)	June (1 st week)	June (2 nd week)

Each group was assigned to think and list anything from the following categories that caught the attention of the children in their locality.

- Any religious festival observed by the community within that period
- Any particular phenomenon in nature
- Social gatherings that might happen in that period etc.
- Activities relating to agriculture during that month

At first, practically every member of the various groups appeared perplexed and unable to locate any resources that would be of interest to the kids. As a result, the participants were given some oral questions to consider in order to aid in their thought process. The potential topics and enquiries that elicited several child-centred subjects from the participants are shown in Table2.

Table 2: Enquiries to assist in creating a cultural calendar

No	Areas	Possible questions
1	Nature	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there new leaves in the trees? 2. Which natural phenomena are the most remarkable right now? 3. Are ripe fruits in season? What kinds of fruits are ripe right now? 4. Are there butterflies around during this time? 5. Which flowers, fruits have been prevalent during this month? 6. Is it a rainy season? 7. Do youngsters frequently listen to frogs? 8. If yes, are there frogs around? 9. What different animals have been around at this time?
2	Agriculture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is this the right time for any particular agricultural tasks, such as paddy thrashing, harvesting, or seed planting? Youngsters might witness their parents as well as other adults at work in the backyard or in the field. Is there paddy in the field during this time? 2. Do youngsters assist in the field? What do they do? If they do, how do they help with the family work? 3. Is this appropriate time to cultivate any specific vegetables that the children may be well-versed in?

These sets of questions served as an inspiration to get the participants talking about potential answers in a very fascinating and captivating way. Following this discussion, each participant group came up with a number of culturally distinct themes that were repeatedly discussed by the entire group.

This deliberation resulted in the listing of some important topics for the community storytellers and writers to work on. Table 3 presents the topics for the first month of Singpho year.

Table 3: Singpho Cultural Calendar

Name of the month	Topics/Themes (In Singpho)	English translation	Significance
R A	Lāning Ningnan*	New year	This is New Year's time. Community engages in a variety of traditions during this time, such as individuals visiting elders to ask for blessings. Children typically participate in this.
T A	Lap mātsun	New Leaves	The trees start to sprout new leaves at this season which has been something which kids are interested in and frequently discuss. As a result, any song/story based on this concept will appeal to the children.
	Pru yan tutep*	Flower and Butterfly	Children frequently chase after the butterflies, which are a common sight during this time of year as they glide over the lovely flowers. As a result, during this time, kids will like reading or hearing stories, poems, or rhymes about this subject.
	U mānam	Guest birds	During this season, a variety of migratory bird species visit this location. The kids frequently get to observe as well as talk about such vibrant birds. Therefore, any kind of reading material about these birds would appeal to kids.

These topics resulted in generation of various teaching learning materials in form of stories, songs written in the Singpho language. Below is an image of a couple of pages from one of the Singpho storybooks.



Fig. 1 Image of a couple of pages of one Singpho Story book

Material Production for the word building tracks

Similar to the workshop to develop stories and other reading materials, the goal of the word-building track's material production workshop was to teach community writers how to create books that would genuinely assist students in becoming precise and methodical writers, readers, and communicators. The learners' ability to comprehend and identify letters, syllables, and entire words in their mother tongue is anticipated to grow during this phase.

Two books were produced as a result of the word-building track's material generation in Singpho. The primer and the pre-reader are the two.

Under the direction of the MLE specialists, the community members worked methodically and cooperatively to produce these two significant publications for the Singpho youngsters. The primer production workshop at Ketetong in February and March of 2009 generated both of these volumes.

It was emphasized during the pre-reader and primer's creation that the first lessons in both volumes should focus on teaching the kids the letters and sounds they use most frequently in daily conversation. The participants were instructed to perform a frequency count in an attempt to identify these sounds and the letters that represent them.

Production of materials for Environmental Studies

Research materials on learners' environments in the Singpho MTB-MLE programme aim to enhance literacy skills by observing, thinking, and discussing surroundings. A workshop was held to produce EVS fact sheets with young community members. Fact sheets contain 4-6 simple sentences with illustrations. Participants are taken to a forest to observe nature and create fact sheets. This method, called Language Experience Activity (LEA), is used in classrooms. Singpho EVS factsheets are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: EVS factsheets in Singpho

Sl no	Name of Factsheets (Singpho)	Meaning	Brief description of the content
1	Jigrawng	Mosquito	Factsheet discusses the diseases that mosquitoes can spread, where they breed, and how to prevent getting bitten by one.
2	Lăpu re	Snake	Consists of data regarding snake size. It also discusses the need to exercise vigilance in order to prevent any unfavourable incidents.
3	Mălang si	Jackfruit	Such factsheet offers basic details on the jackfruit tree. It discusses the fruit's size and flavour.

Issues and Challenges in Singpho Material Production

The production of educational and literary materials in the Singpho language, particularly within the framework of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), has encountered several persistent and interlinked challenges. These issues span the entire material development process—from conceptualization and writing to editing and illustration—and pose significant hurdles to the preservation and pedagogical promotion of the Singpho language.

Lack of Previous Writing Practice

A primary challenge in Singpho material production is the general absence of a writing tradition among community members. Historically, the Singpho people have relied heavily on oral storytelling, with limited emphasis on written expression. This lack of familiarity with writing has led to a psychological barrier, wherein even fluent speakers struggle to conceptualize their oral narratives in a written format. The first material production workshop held in Shillong in May 2007 brought this issue to light when participants were asked to write about their journey to the venue. The task, seemingly simple, proved extremely difficult for many, underlining the deep-rooted mental block. The transition from spoken fluency to written fluency required an entirely new cognitive approach, and most participants took an inordinate amount of time to draft even a single narrative. This challenge underscores the need for foundational writing training within the community before expecting sustainable outputs in the form of educational texts.

Lack of Uniformity in Writing Conventions

Another critical barrier in the production process is the absence of standardization in writing conventions. The Singpho community's connection with the broader Kachin Jinghpaw orthographic tradition has led to confusion, as this system does not adequately represent the phonological features of Singpho. In practice, this has resulted in inconsistencies at all levels—spelling, sentence structure, grammar, and vocabulary usage. The issue is compounded by a generational divide: older community members tend to use the Assamese script,

influenced by regional linguistic dominance, while younger writers gravitate toward Roman script based on Jinghpaw orthography. However, due to a lack of thorough knowledge and training in either system, writers often mix conventions within a single text. During workshops, participants were found using different spellings and even scripts for the same objects or concepts. This lack of orthographic cohesion severely hampers readability, mutual intelligibility, and the creation of standardized educational resources.

Shortage of Trained Editors

A significant challenge in the Singpho material development process is the shortage of competent editors. The entire burden of editorial oversight has fallen on a single individual, Slg. Manje La Singpho, who possesses in-depth knowledge of the Jinghpaw orthography and its modifications tailored for Singpho learners. Given the volume of stories and other texts generated across multiple workshops, expecting one person to handle all editorial responsibilities is both unrealistic and unsustainable. The root of this issue lies in the overall lack of trained individuals proficient in the writing system. Until a broader pool of community members is trained in editing and writing conventions, material production will continue to face bottlenecks at the editorial stage.

Lack of Illustrators

Illustrations are a crucial component of early-grade learning materials. They make stories, rhymes, and riddles more engaging and accessible to young learners. In the case of the Singpho community, however, the lack of skilled illustrators presents a major obstacle. Although an illustrator is sometimes brought in during workshops, the short duration of these sessions makes it difficult to complete illustrations for all texts. As a result, many otherwise effective stories remain without visual aids, diminishing their pedagogical value. The unavailability of a consistent, culturally sensitive illustrator further delays the finalization and dissemination of these materials.

Conclusion

The challenges in Singpho material production are multifaceted and deeply interconnected. From the foundational issues of writing practice and orthographic inconsistency to the logistical hurdles of editorial and illustrative support, each obstacle hinders the effective development of culturally rooted, pedagogically sound materials. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach—investing in community training, developing a standardized writing system, building editorial capacity, and engaging local artists. While some of these were handled in an appropriate manner during the programme, yet there are issues and challenges which could be resolved only through sustained, community-driven efforts. Such an effort will enable the Singpho language thrive in educational contexts and ensure its transmission to future generations.

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**BRIDGING ERAS ON THE PLAYING FIELD: SPORTS
CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN COLONIAL AND POST-
COLONIAL ASSAM**

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Abstract

This paper explores the transformation of games and sports in Assam, tracing its trajectory from the colonial to the post-colonial periods. The colonial era saw the introduction of structured Western sports, which initially contrasted with and overshadowed indigenous games focused on physical strength and endurance. Post-independence, Assam witnessed a revival of traditional sports alongside the continued development of modern sports, driven by government policies and infrastructure growth. This period also saw increased success of Assamese youth in national and international competitions, particularly by women athletes, and the gradual commercialization of sports. Despite these changes, traditional sports remain integral to Assam's cultural identity.

Keywords: Assam, colonial & post-colonial, traditional & modern games, sports development, commercialization, cultural identity, women athletes

Introduction

The title of his article explores the dynamic evolution of sports culture in Assam, from its colonial introduction to its post-colonial manifestations. During the colonial period, the British initiated organized sports, primarily for their own leisure, which gradually influenced the social fabric of Assam. Clubs and sporting activities became spaces where colonial power intersected with local society, introducing new forms of recreation and social interaction. As historian Boria Majumdar notes, sports in the colonial context often served as a tool for disseminating British values and norms, yet also provided a platform for local populations to engage with and, at times,

challenge colonial structures (Majumdar, 2004). The post-colonial era witnessed a transformation, with Assam's sporting identity evolving to reflect a blend of these introduced sports and the region's indigenous sporting traditions. This period saw the rise of local sporting associations and the increasing participation of Assamese individuals in national and international arenas, shaping a unique sporting culture that contributes significantly to the social and cultural identity of the region. This transition highlights how sports in Assam have been both a reflection of and a force in shaping societal changes, bridging historical eras and influencing community dynamics.

Scope

The study will primarily focus on the socio-historical aspects, analyzing how sports have been influenced by and have, in turn, influenced the socio-cultural landscape of the region. This research mainly deals with the standardize games and sports where Assamese youth have been taking participation.

Methodology

This research is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data includes records obtained directly from sports clubs and concerning official government websites. Secondary data encompasses information gathered from books, journals, and online website data. To comprehensively analyze this information, the study employs a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Objectives

- A. To analyze the evolution of the sporting landscape in Assam, highlighting the key differences in the nature, purpose, equipment.
- B. To examine the historical trends in sports participation from the colonial era to the present day.
- C. Evaluate the impact of post-independence government policies on sports infrastructure and talent development in Assam.

- D. Examine the evolving influence of sports on social identity and the integration of modern sports with Assamese cultural values.

Nature of Sports in Colonial and Post-Colonial period

The Colonial Assam had significant traditional game culture where nature of the sports was basically physical strength and endurance (i.e: Hui-Gudu and kho-kho, Khomlainai etc). The purpose of playing such sports was not only amusement but also survival of life (Saikia, 2005). The colonial's regime had brought modern sports like cricket, football, hockey, badminton, tennis, and athletics with structured rules, customs and tradition than native traditional games which hindered local Assamese people to adopt it. These sports demands separate dress code and dimensions of field and equipments however traditional sports had required very marginal equipments which could made easily (Strege, 2018). Cricket has required turf pitches with heavy rollers and engineering concept which was very rare in colonial society. However Post-independence period witnessed the revival and standardization of indigenous games like Kabaddi and Kho-Kho alongside the continued popularity of modern sports with special focuses on Olympic, Asian and National games. During post-colonial period, use of artificial and mechanical gadget in sports field made sports more advance and result oriented which encouraged makers to bring sports law, ethics and broadcasting rules. The sporting landscape of Assam bears the distinct marks of both its colonial and post-colonial history. The colonial era introduced structured Western sports like cricket and football alongside the continuation of indigenous games rooted in physical strength and simple means, creating a dichotomy of play (Sharma, & Sonowal. 2017). Post-independence witnessed a conscious effort to revive and standardize these traditional sports, emphasizing cultural preservation alongside amusement and competition, while the introduced sports continued to flourish, evolving towards greater professionalism, technological advancement, and a heightened focus on achievement through commercialization and entertainment, ultimately shaping a

diverse and dynamic sporting culture that blends heritage with modern influences.

Table-01 Comparison of key changes in sports between colonial and post colonial period.

Table-01 Comparison of key changes in sports between colonial and post colonial period.

Period & Focus	Nature of Sport	Primary Purpose	Key Changes/Trends	Equipment	Examples
Colonial (Traditional sports)	Physical Strength & Endurance	Amusement, Survival, warfare	Limited Colonial Impact	Marginal, Easily Made	Hui-Gudu, Kho-Kho, Khomlainai
Colonial (British Introduced sports)	Structured Rules, Customs, Tradition	Amusement, recreation,	Introduction of New Sports & Structures	Specific Dress, Field, Gear	Cricket, Football, Hockey...
Post-Ind (Revived)	Strength & Endurance / Standards	Amusement, Competition, Preservation	Revival & Standardization	Minimal to Moderate, Standard	Kabaddi, Kho-Kho
Post-Ind (Advanced)	Result-Oriented, Advanced	Competition, Achievement, Entert.	Continued Popularity, Advancements	Specialized, High-Tech	Individual games, Team games.

Historical Overview of Sports participation

Colonial legacy - Traditional Assamese sports served as recreation and leisure within the local society, contrasting with the British approach to sports, which often functioned as amusement and a display of their distinct identity and power. Native boys generally participated during festivals like Bihu or Doul Utsav in traditional sports events like *Nao khel* (boat race), *Moh Juj* (Buffalo fight) (Sharma, & Sonowal 2017). However, among the locals of Assam,

these traditional sports and amusements were carrying on with minor adaptations over time. On the other hand, mirroring global trends, British India introduced the Durand Cup football tournament in 1888 which is the oldest tournament in India, (Sen, 2015) with the Royal Scots Fusiliers winning the inaugural title (1888) and North East United FC (2024) the most recent. Despite the early establishment of prominent clubs like Town Club (1906) and Maharana Club (1907) under the initiative of Assamese people, their involvement in such leagues or tournaments during the colonial period remained minimal. The Jorhat Gymkhana Club golf course notably introduced the prestigious Beg Dunlop Cup, a 2.5kg silver trophy with engraved winner names from 1903 to 1965 and intermittently thereafter. Other significant tournaments established there include the Ruston Cup (1954), Craig Cup, and Lamprell Cup (1945), attracting golfers from across the World. (Dutta, 2013). Before India gained independence in 1947, Assam was a province within British India. Pre-1947, Assamese athletes represented British India, not a unified "Assam," in major events.

Post Colonial Legacy:-Later, after India gained independence, tournaments like the Independence Cup in 1947 and the Bordoloi Trophy (named in 1952 after Assam's first Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi) sparked a significant surge in Assam's football culture. Dr. Talimeran Ao, from the Maharana Club established in 1907, etched his name in history as the first captain of the Indian football team that competed in the 1948 London Olympics. This legacy of talent from the region continued with players like Toshen Bora, Gilbertson Sangma, and Baul Phukan, who proudly represented the nation in the mid-1960s and 1980s (Malla Barua, 2022).

Assam's sporting spirit extended beyond football. Following the establishment of the Assam Cricket Association (ACA) in 1948, Assam made its debut in the Ranji Trophy during the 1948-49 seasons. Their first match was held at the Jorhat Stadium against the United Provinces, now known as Uttar Pradesh, with an Englishman, Rupert Francis Kettle, leading the Assam team as captain. Later, the Nehru Stadium, established in 1962, became the home ground for the

ACA and hosted numerous international cricket matches. Currently, the ACA, in collaboration with the BCCI, has developed a state-of-the-art cricket complex in Guwahati. This facility has hosted franchise leagues like the IPL, various domestic leagues, One Day International matches, and is even set to host its first-ever International Test match in 2025.

The legacy of sporting excellence in Assam didn't end there. Following New Delhi's hosting of the Asian Games in 1951, a renewed enthusiasm ignited the Assamese athletic scene. Carrying forward the inspiration of Milkha Singh (Punjab), Bhogeswar Baruah made history by clinching a gold medal in the 400 meters track and field event at the 1966 Bangkok Asian Games. This was Assam's first-ever international medal on such a grand stage. Later, Tayabun Nisha, a talented thrower, broke national records in discus throw with a distance of 29.32 meters (1972). Unfortunately she became fourth position in her throwing events at the 1982 Asian Games held in New Delhi. In 1972, Susan Das Choudhuri from Tezpur won the National Championship in Tennis in 1973-74 (Malla Barua, 2022).

From the very beginning of the National Games (1985), Assam's accomplishments have been remarkable. Hosting the 2007 National Games in its capital city, Assam showcased its sporting prowess by securing the third position in the medal tally. With an impressive haul of 38 gold, 53 silver, and 57 bronze medals (a total of 148) (**NENA, 2008**), Assam finished behind only Services and Manipur. Since then, Assam's participation and achievements in the National Games have continued to be significant.

While Assam has made significant strides in national sports, the representation and achievements in major international games are areas for growth. So far, only five athletes from Assam have represented India at the Olympics, with Lovlina Borgohain securing a bronze medal in boxing (2022) at the Olympic Games. However, Assam's record in the Asian Games is more noteworthy, with athletes bagging two gold and two silver medals. This includes the memorable 400-meter gold medal won by the Hima Das at the 2018 Jakarta

Palembang Asian Games. Athletes like Lovlina Borgohain, Hima Das, and Ankushita Boro (the junior world champion boxer of 2017) have emerged from rural backgrounds with limited facilities. The proactive initiatives of the government and policymakers have played a crucial role in nurturing this young talent through various programs, such as khelo-India (central govt. program), Khel- Maharan 2023.

Over the past two decades, Assamese athletes have showcased their talent by securing an impressive 79 gold medals, (total -336 medals) (Malla Barua, 2022). propelling the state into the top 10 rankings on several occasions. The successful hosting of the 33rd National Games in Guwahati (2007) acted as a pivotal catalyst, inspiring numerous young individuals to pursue sports as a viable and promising profession. This collective evidence paints a vibrant picture of a state where sports are not just a pastime but a passion and a burgeoning career path for its energetic youth.

Table- 02 Post colonial –sports participation ratio and achievements in major games

Game	Total Participation	Male Participation	Female Participation	Medal Achievements	Male : Female Ratio
Olympic Games (1947-2004)	05	04	01	❖ Bronze-01	4 : 1
Asian Games (1951-2024)	12	04	07	❖ Gold-02 ❖ Silver-02	4 : 7
National games (2002-2025) (As per new position format)	110 (32 nd)	1546	1000	❖ Gold- 79 ❖ Silver-120 ❖ Bronze-137	773: 500.
	908 (33 rd)				
	337 (34 th)				
	270 (35 th)				
	270 (36 th)			Total-336	
350 (37 th)					
301 (38 th)					
2546 (total)					

The Dominant Role of Assamese Women in Major International Sports: While Assam's overall medal tally in major international sports like the Olympics, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games, and World Championships might appear modest, a closer look reveals a distinct and impressive dominance of Assamese women athletes. Notably, out of the five medals secured by Assam in the Olympic and Asian Games combined, a remarkable four have been

clinched by female athletes (*Lovlina Borgohain- G-1 & S-01, Tokyo2022 & Hangzhou, 2023, Hima Das G-1 & S-1, Jakarta 2018*). Hima Das is the **first Indian woman to clinch a gold medal (2018) at the IAAF World Under-20 Athletics Championships** Tampere, Finland. Her remarkable victory came in the 400-meter race, which she completed in 51.46 seconds (Singh, 2018). This strong representation and success of women in these prestigious events becomes even more evident when examining Table-03, which clearly illustrates their significant achievements and leadership across various global sporting competitions. This highlights a compelling trend where Assamese women are making a powerful impact and achieving notable success on the international sporting stage.

Table- 03 Post colonial prominent women sportspersons in major games

Name	Game	Participation	Position/Achievement
<u>Susan Das Choudhuri</u>	Tennis	National Championship(1973-74)	Champion
<u>Tayabun Nisha</u>	Athletics	Asian Games 1982	4th & National Rec (1972)
<u>Monalisha Mehta Barua</u>	Table Tennis	National Games 1987	Gold Medalist
<u>Anu Chutia</u>	Cycling	Asian Championship 2015	Gold Medalist
<u>Jamuna Boro</u>	Boxing	World Championship 2019	Bronze Medal
<u>Ankushita Boro</u>	Boxing	World Junior Champ. 2019	Gold Medal
<u>Hima Das</u>	Athletics	World Junior Champ. 2018	Gold Medal
<u>Lovlina Borgohain</u>	Boxing	Olympic 2022	Bronze Medal
<u>Nanayan Moni Saikia</u>	Lawn ball	Commonwealth 2022	Gold Medal
<u>Uma Chetree</u>	Cricket	Asian Games 2023	Gold Medal

Government Initiatives

Colonial Infrastructure and club culture: British colonial initiatives were pivotal in shaping Assam's early modern sporting landscape, introducing team sports like Polo and establishing clubs with grounds between 1834 and 1915 for their leisure. These clubs were exclusively associated with British Tea Estates in colonial Assam. These clubs, located in areas like Silchar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Moran, Digboi, Guwahati and so on, focused on British sports such as

polo, horse racing, tennis, rugby, football and cricket and other recreational activities like dancing, drinking and passing leisure time with family and friends. Under these clubs, some notable sports infrastructure had developed. In Digboi, the Digboi Golf Course, at Jorhat, the Jorhat Golf Course, JDSA, at Dibrugarh, the MMGC ground etc had developed (Charlier, 2007).

Table- 04 Sports infrastructure in during colonial Assam before 1947

Developer	Initiative	Objectives	Years	Place
British tea planting officers.	Silchar Polo Club	Encouraged The Team Sports	1834	Silchar
D. Slimmon British Officers	Jorhat Gymkhana Club	horse races, lawn tennis grass courts, swimming pool, billiards, polo, golf, cricket etc.	1876	Khalmati Jorhat.
British tea planting officers.	Madden Memorial Gymkhana Club	Football, Rugby, Polo,	1878	Dibrugarh.
European Tea Planters	Misa Polo Club	Team Sports	1888	Kallyden Nogaon
British tea planting officers	Moran Polo Club	Tennis Court(S), Swimming Pool, Polo Ground, Polo Club	1894	Thovrah T.E, Dibrugarh
A group of tea planters	Dhunsri Polo Club	Amusement with team sports	(Early 20 th Century)	Bahora T E Near Present Day Golaghat
Captain L. B. Scott, and Groups of Assamese	Guwahati Town Club Ground, Often Known As Judges Field	Multipurpose Ground	1906	Guwahati Panbazar
British Indian government	J.D.S.A. Field,	Multipurpose Playground	1915	Jorhat

In contrast, the modern era in Assam showcases a significant expansion of sports infrastructure, categorized by type and scale. Since the late 20th and early 21st centuries, government bodies, sports authorities, and educational institutions have been the primary developers. The focus has shifted towards creating dedicated facilities for a diverse range of sports, from athletics and football to indoor games, cricket, and even traditional sports like boat racing and Kabaddi/Kho-Kho. These facilities are located across Assam, with a

concentration in major cities like Guwahati, and include specialized training academies and educational institutions. Detailed information on stadium capacities and key features, such as multi-purpose design or specific sporting focuses, is also provided.

Table- 05 Post-Colonial Sports Infrastructure in Assam after 1947-2024

Category	Examples of Infrastructure	Capacity	Key Features/Focus
Major Stadiums & Complexes	Nehru Stadium, International (Guwahati, 1962)	25000	Multi-purpose facilities for athletics,
	Indira Gandhi Athletic Stadium, International (Guwahati), 2007	30000	
Specialized Academies	Rajiv Gandhi Indoor Stadium, Badminton International, (Amingaon, 2007)	5000	Badminton
	Assam Cricket Association (ACA) Stadium & Academies, International (Guwahati, 2017)	40000	Cricket
Traditional Sports Infra.	Charan Beel, Morigaon, (International, 2007)		Provisions for Boat Racing,
Educational Institutions	Lakshmibai National Institute of Physical Education, YAS Government of India, UGC Approved (Sonapur Assam, 2010)		infrastructure for physical education and intramural sports;
	Sri Sri Aniruddhadeva Sports University, UGC Approved (Chabua in Dibrugarh, 2022)		

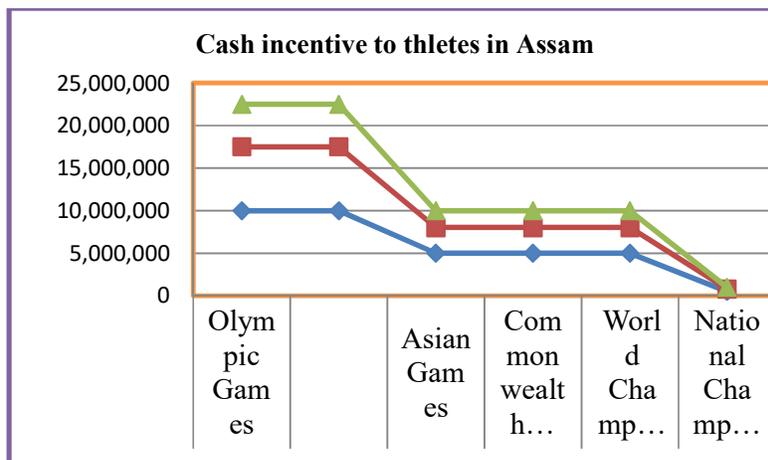
Sports Development Polices in post-independence period-

Post-independence, Assam has strategically developed sports through key policies. The 2017 Assam Sports Policy offers scholarships, insurance, and job prospects. The Mission Talent Hunt, also in 2017, identifies and supports young athletes. Participation in the Khelo India Program enhances infrastructure and talent. The 2022 Assam Youth Olympics provides a state-level platform. Indigenous sports are promoted via initiatives like Vibrant Village Sports. A 2022 cash incentive policy rewards high-achieving athletes. These post-independence initiatives highlight Assam's strong commitment to fostering sports at all levels, a dedication notably absent during the colonial period.

Table-06 Major Sport's Development Policies after 1947-

Policy/Initiative	Year	Key Features	Specific Goal	Impact/Benefit for Athletes
Assam Sports Policy	2017	Comprehensive framework for sports development; includes scholarships, insurance, and job opportunities for athletes.	Create 1,000 jobs in government departments for sportspersons.	Encourages youth to consider sports as a career; provides economic security through scholarships, insurance, and jobs.
Mission Talent Hunt	2017	Program under the Assam Sports Policy focused on identifying and nurturing young sporting talent through scouting, coaching, equipment, and financial assistance.	Identify and nurture young sporting talent across the state.	Scouting athletes, providing coaching, equipment, and financial assistance.
Khelo India Program	2020	Developing sports infrastructure and identifying/nurturing talent nationally	Active participant; collaborated to establish State Sports Academies for archery, athletics, and boxing.	Development of sports infrastructure; nurturing of talent; provides role models to inspire young athletes.
Assam	2022	Promote grassroots	Badminton,	Offers exposure to

Figure-01 Cash incentive to sports players in Assam at current budgets 2022



Khel Maharan - (State Sports Policy)

Khel Maharan serves as a transformative grassroots sporting platform in Assam, designed to unearth and nurture the exceptional raw talent residing in every village, block, and district, providing a healthy environment for their development. Envisioned by the current Chief Minister, Mr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, this initiative, launched in 2023, embodies a grand vision to establish Assam as a prominent talent-sourcing hub for India. In terms of sheer mass participation, Khel Maharan is considered one of the most significant sporting events in Assam since independence, reflecting a deep-rooted commitment to fostering sports from the ground up. The phenomenal registration numbers exceeding 100 lakhs in Khel Maharan seasons 01 and 02 serve as a powerful testament to the fervent sports culture deeply ingrained in the state's youth. Significant Growth could be seen in Female Participation with substantial increase of 11.42% from the first to the second edition. In contrast to the rise in female participation, male registrations decreased by 5.51% between the two editions of Khel Maharan.

Table- 07 Participation Ratio in Khel Maharans 1.0 and 2.0

Feature	Khel Maharan 1.0 (Year 2023)	Khel Maharan 2.0 (This Year - as of Nov 1, 2024)	Change Ratio
Total Registrations	52,76,481	53,58,661	+ 82,180 (+1.56%)
Female Registrations	22,02,812	24,54,376	+ 2,51,564 (+11.42%)
Male Registrations	30,73,669	29,04,285	- 1,69,384 (-5.51%)
Female Participation (%)	41.75%	45.80%	+ 4.05 percentage points
Male Participation (%)	58.25%	54.20%	- 4.05 percentage points

Commercialization of Sports Culture

The concept of sports as a business venture arrived rather late in Assam. However, various stakeholders have since made efforts to transform sports into a viable livelihood opportunity for aspiring athletes. A notable early initiative was the Williamson Magor Academy, a football club established by the Mohaonbari Tea Estate in the early 1990s (Malla Barua, 2022). This academy recruited young players and coaches, providing them with financial support. Even earlier, the Oil India Football Club in Digboi (established in 1964) had been offering significant opportunities to players. They would recruit talented players, coaches into the company, often with provisions for continued playing while in service or after retirement. Another prominent organization in Assam, the **Assam State Electricity Board (ASEB)**, also established its own club with the same name in 1975. This club became another significant avenue for recruiting talented players who would later contribute to the organization through their sporting abilities.

In more recent times in Assam, particularly in the post-independence era, the trend of sports sponsorships has become increasingly visible. Several popular sports leagues in the state, such as the Assam State Premier Football League (ASPL), the Guwahati Premier Football League, and clubs like Oil India Limited FC, now benefit from corporate backing. Prominent companies such as ONGC, OIL, Coal India Ltd., and Numaligarh Oil Refinery are actively sponsoring sporting squads and events. A significant instance of this occurred in March 2004 when Williamson Tea Assam Ltd. sponsored the Assam Cricket Association (ACA). This partnership involved a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) where the company provided sponsorship ranging from ₹8 lakh to ₹10 lakh. This support covered on-field and off-field cricket apparel, gear, and boots for the state Ranji players, as well as their coaching expenses. This growing commercialization of sports not only offers lucrative career paths but also attracts more young people to focus on sports as a profession. As a result of their exceptional performances, a significant number of

Assamese youth are now playing in India's top sports leagues. Notable examples include Riyan Parag (Indian Premier League - IPL), Gaurav Bora (Indian Super League - ISL), Vinit Rai (ISL), and Rakesh Pradhan (FC Bengaluru United) (Rokozelie, 2023) Indeed, Assam and the other northeastern states are becoming key suppliers of sporting talent to the broader Indian sports industry.

Besides sponsorship, the commercialization of sport is greatly influenced by the role of media. For broadcasting rights media houses have to pay huge amounts to the sporting squad. Besides, supporters of a team or any player want to wear t shirts, jackets, hats etc. from that particular brand, which the player or the team follows. Thus merchandising also help in revenue generation. Likewise ticket selling also help in earning profit. Major sporting events and leagues attract tourists, increasing revenue for accommodation, transportation and entertainment services. The Barshapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati is hosting IPL matches since 2023. A survey done in the locality of Barshapara Stadium (Itabhata road) reveal that due to IPL matches, native shopkeepers are earning a good profit by selling various food stuffs. Besides, due to IPL matches stadium and connecting roads are kept well maintained.

In colonial times commercialization of sports did not occurred. Though several sports club emerged in Assam yet they played only for entertainment or refreshment. But post colonial Assam s experiencing commercialization of sports. In Assam sports are now showing potentiality for economic development.

Impact of Sports on Social Identity

Sports are an institution which reflects the reality of a society in which it is exercised. Hence, in the fragmented society of colonial period of Assam in the name of class, caste and gender, the organization of sports is different than in post independence period, where development of education, feelings of nationalism had overshadowed the fragmentations of society in terms of sports. Actually, since early 20th century, a section of Assamese boys gathered in their locality for physical workout and physical activity. Thus, some native club houses

were formed in different localities of Assam as the European Clubs were very rude in nature towards native people. Their membership was very limited in terms of race and class (Cohen, 2015). Assamese boys viewed British clubs' reservation of sports grounds, including judges' field of Gauhati, as colonial exploitation and sought to address discrimination against native boys who wanted to play there. **One of such incident occurred in Gauhati in 1896, where** Ambikagiri Raychoudhuri opposed the discriminatory behavior of British officers of a exclusively European Club of Gauhati . Local youths, angered by the club's authoritarian use of Judges' Field, dug up the cricket pitches before a Christmas party, forcing a postponement. Later, in the early 20th century, the Assam Anarchist Party, led by Ambikagiri Raychoudhury, set fire to the club house, causing significant damage (**Roychowdhury, 1973**). This act marked a strong protest against the club's discriminatory attitude. In response, the rise of sports organizations by Assamese youth mirrored growing nationalism in mid of 20th century. Forming clubs like Union Club (1903) and Maharana Club (1907) created independent spaces, countering the exclusivity of British clubs and fostering identity. The existence of clubs like "Club of Black Sahib" (Malla Barua, 2022) highlighted racial segregation, making Assamese-led clubs a subtle act of resistance and self-determination. Ultimately, these organizations were a manifestation of nationalist sentiment, providing spaces to organize, resist colonial norms, and embrace modern sports within their own cultural context. Following independence, numerous professional and amateur sports organizations have emerged. Current sporting trends in Assam are significantly shaped by these associations, often in collaboration with governmental bodies such as District Sports Offices, University Sports Boards, and the Directorate of Youth Affairs and Sports.

Impact of Sports on Cultural Values: Traditional sports of Assam were closely related with Assamese culture. Many folk songs are also associated with these traditional games. Haugudu, dhop khel, kori khel, buffalo fight, cock fight, egg tussle, nao khel etc. sports are integral part of national festival "Bihu". It is very interesting that

though colonial and post colonial Assam experienced modern games like football, golf, cricket, tennis etc. yet during the celebration of any festivals of Assam, traditional sports obtain priority. Till today Assamese people prefer to play egg tussle, Tekeli bhanga, cock fights, kori khel etc. on their festivals. From this analysis it can be assumed that Assamese people have accepted the changes in the field of sports which is occurring since colonial times.

Assam, football, badminton, cricket, tennis etc. are played and sport leagues related to these sports are commercialized. Even in schools, colleges and universities importance is paid specially on these modern sports so that national level players can be created. The state Government as well as Assamese people make proud of Assamese players who have showed excellent performance in various national and international competitions. Parents also inspire their children to play such modern games as such games offer lucrative career. Actually people are taking these games as professional games. As festivals means enjoyment, so people find real enjoyment only on traditional games where there is no limit of players, any hard and fast rules and regulations. Whatever modern games are also gradually incorporated into Assamese culture. National players like Hima Das, LovlinaBorgohain, Riyan Parag, Shiva Thapa etc. contributed to Assamese culture by becoming global icon and inspiring young people in the state.

Conclusions

1. **Redefining "Progress"**: The conventional idea of progress in post-colonial Assam's sports, which often equates to the adoption of Western sports, needs to be redefined. A more nuanced approach would prioritize the preservation and promotion of indigenous sports, recognizing their cultural value and potential for fostering inclusive development.

2. **Gender Equity as a Model**: Assam's relative success in producing women athletes on the national and international stage offers a compelling model for other states. Further research should explore the socio-cultural factors contributing to this success, allowing

for the development of targeted interventions to promote gender equity in sports across India.

3. Grassroots Investment is Paramount: The data strongly suggests that focusing on grassroots development is crucial for long-term sporting success in Assam. Future policies should prioritize investment in basic infrastructure, training facilities, and coaching in rural areas, where a significant portion of the state's talent resides.

4. Sports as a Tool for Social Integration: Assam's diverse cultural landscape presents an opportunity to use sports as a tool for social integration. Promoting traditional sports can foster a sense of shared identity and community cohesion, particularly among different ethnic groups.

5. Sustainable Sports Economy: The increasing commercialization of sports in Assam holds the potential for economic growth, but it needs to be managed sustainably. Policies should aim to create a sports economy that benefits athletes, local communities, and the state, while also preserving the cultural and ethical values associated with sports.

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THE TIMELESS ALLURE OF SHAKUNTALA: A STUDY OF ITS OPERATIC RENDITIONS IN FRENCH

Rounak Mahtab

Abstract

The confluence of Shakuntala with French literature and theater is a clear manifestation of cultural exchange, emphasizing the ways in which Eastern stories can be relatable within the Western set-up. Based on the well-known Sanskrit play by the Classical Sanskrit author Kalidasa, Shakuntala is a tale about love, loss and relationships which is not only confined to the Indian population. France of the 18th and 19th centuries had an increasing quest for the exoticism of other cultures which made it conducive for the importation of foreign stories. This interest in turn led to the wide spread representation of Shakuntala, expressing more than just the love to create something new artistically, but also a thirst for understanding from an Indian perspective and approach to storytelling. In this context, the reception and transformation of Shakuntala in France illustrate the stunning ability to narrate and stimulate imagination, promoting a discussion about cross-cultural communication and human experience through art.

Key words: Shakuntala , theatre, cultural exchange, reception.

Introduction

The operatic retellings of Indian epics, especially the one surrounding the narrative of Shakuntala, are a historical and creative openness of diverse cultures. Derived from Kalidasa's famous Sanskrit drama, it centers on the love tale of Shakuntala and king Dushyanta's marriage, his auspicious earlier marriage, fate, and other feelings. Seeing the unexplained beauty and complexity of emotions in this ancient tale, the late 18th-century French composers turned to this opera and adapted it to its rich cultural background, thus offering to

the audience contents that extend beyond physical boundaries. These versions, as well as the original story, serve as a reaffirmation of the omnipresence of love and abandonment and, on the other hand, the merging of European interest in the Eastern themes of the 18th and 19th centuries. The succeeding operas constitute an integration of Eastern legends and Western music, hence causing the work Shakuntala to be more than just a work of art but a cultural exchange of different artistic traditions.

Raymond Schwab, in his monumental work "The Eastern Renaissance" hailed the 19th century as the "Śakuntalā era". In the context of a triumphant orientalism, Kālidāsa's play indeed played a major role in the discovery of ancient India by Europe and in the fascination it aroused. It was the second Sanskrit work translated into a European language, by William Jones in 1789. Immediately hailed by the entire European intelligentsia, it caused a real shock wave.

In 1803, Antoine Bruguière de Sorsum published in turn a translation, this time in French, of William Jones' text, and then Antoine-Léonard Chézy proposed, in 1830, the first edition of Shakuntala, from a manuscript in Bengali characters preserved at the Royal Library, with his own translation, enriched by that of the episode from the Mahābhārata.

Translations followed one after another throughout the century, in most European languages, all the Indologists wanting to propose their version of a work considered a monument of universal literature. Among the French translations, we can mention those of Hippolyte Fauche (1865), Édouard Foucaux (1867), Abel Bergaigne and Paul Lehugeur (1883).

Many adaptations were also written for the stage, that of the theater and that of the opera - which, in a certain way, seemed to be able to better accomplish the total artistic dimension of Indian theater. The history of stage adaptations, however, begins under bad auspices: Goethe, in a letter to Chézy, admits to being powerless to adapt it to the German stage. It was performed, however, not without having undergone significant modifications intended to adjust it to the taste of

the European public. A famous performance was that given in 1858, in the form of a ballet-pantomime, on a text by Théophile Gautier, accompanied by music by Ernest Reyer and choreographed by Lucien Petipa. The Théâtre de l'œuvre performed it in 1895 in a five-act adaptation by V. Barrucand, this time again with musical accompaniment, after *Le Petit chariot de terre cuite* by Śūdraka, another Sanskrit play. For the 20th century, we can mention the adaptation by Maurice Pottecher, performed – again accompanied by music – at the Théâtre du peuple de Bussang, and the performance given in Opole, Poland, within the framework of the “poor theatre” of Jerzy Grotowski, with additions taken from other Sanskrit works, such as the *Kāmasūtra*. Dorothy Matilda Figueira points out that the original, in these adaptations, appears more as a source of inspiration than as the object to be represented, only the love story being preserved, to which India simply provides an exotic and colorful setting. Simplification is essential, even if real quotes from a translation of the text are sometimes included, which has retained all its power of fascination.

Thematic Resonance of 'Shakuntala' in French Culture

The thematic resonance of ‘Shakuntala’ within French culture illustrates a compelling intersection of East and West, particularly evident in the realm of theater and artistic expression. The play's exploration of love, loss, and identity resonates profoundly with French dramatic traditions, where emotional depth and the nuances of human relationships are paramount. Beginning with its first French translation in the early 19th century, ‘Shakuntala’ captured the imaginations of various artists, notably inspiring intrigue among symbolist playwrights such as Théophile Gautier, who recognized its rich emotional tapestry and philosophical underpinnings. Moreover, the performance history of ‘Shakuntala’ in French theater highlights the challenges of cultural representation, urging audiences to confront their preconceptions about the authentic Other and engage with the play's universal themes. As noted in comprehensive studies, this intercultural exchange not only enriches French artistic discourse but

also transforms how global narratives are perceived and celebrated within specific cultural contexts.

The interest of the French towards 'Shakuntala' displays a striking presence of the East and the West, especially in theatrical and artistic matters. Moreover, the play's concern with love, loss and the question of self is intimately familiar to French takes on gendered drama, which emphasizes the importance of a broad emotional palette and the complexity of interpersonal connections. From the mid-March 18 century when it was first translated into French, 'Shakuntala' was a source of inspiration to several creative minds including many artists and playwrights' within the symbolist movement, among them Théophile Gautier who showed keen interest in Shakuntala as he saw the elaborate emotional and philosophical content that it possessed. Moreover, the performance history of 'Shakuntala' in France poses dilemmas regarding cultural politics and policies; it gives direction to the viewers to their biases about the Other and motivates them to witness specific issues that are threaded throughout the play. This perspective has been well highlighted in many theorists such as Culp et al. Specifically, this cultural communication deepens the French artistic conversation but also changes the vision of the Western audience of how the Eastern narratives are constructed and valued in the particular culture.

Analysis of themes such as love, destiny, and nature in the context of French artistic expressions

In exploring the themes of love, destiny, and nature within the context of French artistic expressions, Shakuntala resonates profoundly due to its universal motifs that transcend cultural boundaries. The portrayal of love in Kalidasas work, which illustrates the complexities of affection caught between divine intervention and human emotions, finds parallels in French literature and art, notably in Romanticism, where passionate love and tragic fate are often intertwined. This intertwining mirrors the emphasis on nature as a backdrop for the unfolding drama, signaling the emotional states of the characters and their destinies. As evidenced by adaptations in French theater, such as those influenced by the aesthetic theories of

the symbolist movement, Shakuntala invites audiences to consider not only the characters personal struggles but also the broader implications of fate and natural beauty that define human experience. Such thematic explorations reinforce the plays enduring significance in both Eastern and Western artistic traditions, enriching the discourse surrounding intercultural exchanges in performance history (Culp et al.).

Musical Interpretations of Shakuntala

The musical interpretations of Shakuntala in French operas show a mix of Eastern stories and Western music styles, highlighting the complex themes of the original story. French composers focus on romanticism and deep emotions, often making Shakuntala's character richer through elaborate orchestration and complex vocal lines that show her desires and strength. This mirrors a wider trend in opera where cultural portrayals are used to explore shared human experiences; operas like Shakuntala prompt audiences to think about themes of love, identity, and loss. These interpretations not only place Shakuntala's story within a European setting but also question existing views on femininity and power, moving between traditional images and more modern, detailed views of women's roles in opera storytelling (Kemiche et al.), (Mitchell et al.).

This judgment applies perfectly to the lyrical works inspired by Śakuntalā, which radicalized the observed tendency to resort to music: the play inspired a dozen operas between 1820 and 1930. This is not surprising, since opera is a total art form, combining words, melody and dance, and the art par excellence devoted to the expression of feelings. However, these lyrical adaptations were not very successful: most of them either remained unfinished – like Franz Schubert's Sakontala, on a libretto by Johann-Philipp Neumann, in the sketch stage or were never performed, or very quickly left the stage and were not revived. There is, however, one exception: *La Leggenda di Sakuntala* by Franco Alfano, who wrote both the libretto and the score, premiered with considerable success in 1922, then rewritten under the simpler title of *Sakuntala* in 1951 (as if India had then lost

its legendary character). It is a symbolist opera that combines a Debussy inspiration, perceptible in the luxuriant orchestration and the type of sung declamation initiated by *Pelleas et Mélisande*, with the prestige of bel canto vocality, inherited from the Italian lyrical tradition. The libretto, in three acts, considerably simplifies the plot and radically alters its meaning: if the first two acts, set in a hermitage where a temple reminiscent of ancient Greece stands, unfold a love story quite close to Acts I to IV of Kālidāsa's play, with a few quasi-quotations, on the other hand the third condenses the last three, since immediately after having been rejected by the king and taken up into the sky, the princess, from up there, signifies her forgiveness and the gift she is giving him of a son destined to become "the beginning of a great lineage: ours". The climate of this third act is clearly messianic and the heroine appears in the role of a sort of Indian Virgin, as the preface specifies.

Analysis of key operatic compositions that depict the story of Shakuntala and their musical styles

The operatic takes on the Shakuntala story in French music show a blend of emotional singing and complicated musical layers. Notably, composers like Maurice Ravel and Gabriel Fauré have included aspects of Indian music within their pieces, which adds to the story by creating vivid sound environments. These operas often use rich orchestration and deep harmonies to express Shakuntala's feelings and cultural background. A key part of this discussion is the look at singing styles that go from high soprano solos to close duets, showing the complex interactions between characters—especially the coming together and parting of Shakuntala and Dushyanta. Moreover, the use of traditional Indian instruments and themes highlights the flexibility of the operatic form, promoting a special connection between Western classical music and Eastern influences. This combination not only enhances the storytelling but also clarifies the larger ideas of love and fate present throughout the operas (Marchiafava et al.), (Quah et al.).

Although later, the symbolist opera by Franco Alfano, , perfectly, and even radically, illustrates the thematic alteration of the original story to adapt to the demand of operatic renditions. Another

symbolist work, a plastic work this time, also proves symptomatic: *Sacountalaoul'abandon*, a group sculpted in terracotta by Camille Claudel in 1886. It shows a woman leaning over a kneeling man whom she embraces, while he seems to slide infallibly backwards. The group is supposed to represent the happy reunion of the two characters, at the end of the play, but the title and the position of the man suggest otherwise. The paradox, underlined by the contrast of the titles (“abandonment” versus “recognition”), reveals the ambiguity of the European reception of Śakuntalā: while in the Indian play the painful separation is only a prelude to the happy reunion of the lovers, the obligatory outcome, in the European vision, on the contrary, the emphasis is placed on the denial and the irremediable loss. And recognition, when it persists, no longer has Śakuntalā as its object, but forgetting itself, the fault, the source of guilt and suffering. Its function is not to correct the evil, as in India, but to reveal to the subject the lack in order to precipitate him into melancholy. For Indian recognition, a happy illumination of the soul, Europe tends to substitute the recognition of the tragic hero.

Reflection on the impact of Shakuntala in French operas and its relevance in contemporary culture

The impact of Shakuntala on French operas goes far beyond the time it was created, deeply affecting today's culture. Composers like Alfano's *La Leggenda di Shakuntala* (1921) though radically different from the original story still connects with many different audiences today. Current versions of the opera often emphasize the emotional struggles of Shakuntala, addressing modern topics like gender identity and personal freedom, which are increasingly important in discussions about women's rights. As these operas are updated for new viewers, they create conversations that cross cultural and time barriers, encouraging audiences to think about the complexities of human feelings and social norms. Therefore, Shakuntala is an important cultural symbol, showing how powerful storytelling can be in shaping and reflecting modern values, while also maintaining the rich diversity of artistic exchange across cultures.

Conclusion

To sum up, how Shakuntala is shown in French operas shows how cultural views and artistic ideas work together. The operas keep the original Sanskrit play's spirit but add Western elements, making a story that connects to main ideas of love, identity, and fate. The changes seen in these shows highlight the challenges of cultural mixing, showing how Shakuntala's character changes to fit new social ideas and standards in France. Also, the different portrayals start more conversations about the effects of using Eastern stories in Western art, encouraging discussions on how representation and appropriation work. In the end, this study confirms that Shakuntala remains an important figure, linking different cultures while encouraging audiences to think deeply about tradition and modernity in opera literature.

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QUEER RHETORIC IN ANCIENT CLASSICAL INDIAN TEXTS: A CRITICAL EXPLORATION

Shantanu Parashar

Abstract:

In this paper, the ancient classical texts of India have been analysed through the scope of queer rhetoric and the othering standpoint. Indian literature, especially the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, serves as a cornerstone in the development of Indian culture and its values. Notably, the treatment of queer characters and themes within these epics has yet to receive sufficient scholarly attention. Employing qualitative research methods and guided by queer theory, this study analyses excerpts from ancient epics using textual analysis. This research highlights the rhetoric that goes against the restrictive gender and sexuality norms of ancient Indian society and shows how queer figures defy those structures and norms. Following the tenets of thematic analysis, the recurring patterns of rhetoric became visible, which provided evidence of the reversal of subordinate queer identity narratives. These narratives deconstructed dominant frameworks of love, identity, and human relationships by presenting non-normative gender expression and queerness in stark contrast to the confining narratives of the texts. The analyses not only illuminate the puzzle of queerness in Indian literature but also highlight how the epics tried to shape social perception toward queerness.

Keywords: Third Gender, Tradition, Ancient Text, Sacred Narrative, Queer Rhetoric.

Introduction:

The general meaning of the term 'Queer' represents 'Strange' or 'Odd', while in terms of gender perspective, the Cambridge English Dictionary has defined 'Queer' as 'having or relating to a gender identity or a sexuality that does not fit society's traditional ideas about

gender or sexuality'. Though Queer is an umbrella term, it means a person who is not heterosexual. Although the concept of the third gender has long resided among cultures around the world, legal recognition of the third gender has not seen many days. Many cultures around the world recognised non-binary gender identities like the *Hijras* in India, the *Two-Spirit* in North America, and the *Fa'afafine* in Samoa, among others like *Sekhet* in Egypt, which refers to a third gender identity, the goddess Sekhmet, and the concept of the '*Field of Reeds*', a paradise in the afterlife. The Indonesian ethnic group the *Bugis*, recognise more than two genders. Modern examples of third gender markers, like in Argentina, allow individuals to use the letter 'X' on their ID cards to indicate a non-binary gender. Germany offers a third gender option on birth certificates for intersex infants.

In the early 16th century, 'Queer' entered the English language with meanings like 'strange, odd, or peculiar'. It could describe anything that deviated from the norm, including behaviours, expressions, or even a feeling of being unwell. Over time, the word's connotations evolved, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it began to be used to describe individuals with same-sex attractions, often pejoratively. During the 1960s and 70s, LGBTQ+ liberation movements began to reclaim the term 'Queer' as a positive identifier, challenging the negative stigma attached to it. Today, Queer is often used as an umbrella term for anyone who does not identify as heterosexual or cisgender, encompassing a wide range of sexual and gender identities. The term 'Queer' is also used in a broader sense to challenge the notion of fixed identities and norms, particularly in academic contexts like *The Queer theory*. According to another narrative, until 1894 the term 'Queer' is thought to have been used about a person's identity. During the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895, a letter from the Marquis of Queensberry revealing his disgust at Wilde's relationship with his son Lord Alfred Douglas was read aloud in court, in which he refers to Wilde and other homosexual men of the time as '*Snob Queers*'. The letter in question, along with transcripts from the trial, has sadly not survived, but The National Archives has

several records relating to the trials, imprisonment and death of Oscar Wilde. In Indian epics, Queer can be understood through the concept of *Tritiya Prakriti* or thirdgender, which acknowledges the existence of individuals and deities who do not fit into strictly male or female categories.

Theorising Queer:

Queer theory, which emerged in the late 20th century, provides a valuable framework for understanding queerness in literature. It challenges conventional notions of gender and sexuality, emphasising fluidity and diversity. Scholars like Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick have pioneered this field, encouraging the exploration of non-normative identities and desires in literary texts. Judith Butler's *Gender Performativity theory* posits that gender is not an inherent identity but is performed based on societal expectations. Applying this framework to ancient Indian texts reveals that characters often embody multiple gender roles, emphasising the constructed nature of gender. Devdutt Pattanaik's interpretations emphasise the fluidity of gender and sexuality in Indian mythology, arguing that ancient narratives often embrace non-binary identities. His works highlight the cultural acceptance of diverse gender expressions in historical contexts. Ruth Vanita's historical analysis research portrays instances of same-sex love and gender variance in Indian literature, demonstrating that such themes were integral to cultural narratives long before colonial influences introduced rigid norms. Michel Foucault's sexuality as a social construct, in *The History of Sexuality*, suggests that categories like 'homosexual', 'heterosexual', or 'third gender' are historical constructions rather than biological truths. Power structures produce and regulate gender categories through discourse.

A critical examination of gender and third-gender historiography, with a special focus on the Indian context, begins by challenging the binary model of sex and gender imposed by modernity and colonial rule, which marginalised those who did not conform to male or female categories. These individuals, often grouped as 'third gender', represent diverse identities such as *Hijra*, *Aravani*, *Jogappa*, *Kinnar*, and others. The author wishes to argue that this group has

long faced socio-economic exclusion, cultural marginalisation, and identity erasure, despite historically occupying recognised roles in society. Critiques of traditional historiography for its masculinist orientation, which focused predominantly on male political figures and events, thereby excluding not only women but also other gender identities. Feminist historiography attempted to correct this bias, beginning with compensatory and contributory models that acknowledged women's presence and contributions. However, these early feminist efforts, while significant, largely ignored the experiences of gender-nonconforming individuals. The emergence of gender history, informed by post-structuralist theories and thinkers like Joan Scott and Judith Butler, sought to interrogate how societies construct and assign meaning to gender. Nevertheless, these Western theories have been critiqued for their limited applicability to non-Western contexts and their tendency to abstract away from lived trans experiences.

Studies which explore the multifaceted theoretical and terminological landscape of third gender identity, with particular emphasis on sociological, psychological, feminist, and cross-cultural discourses, are out to disentangle the historical conflation between 'sex' and 'gender' and to map the evolution of gender theory, ultimately highlighting the diverse expressions and realities that challenge binary gender systems. Here, it begins by tracing the sociological origins of gender as a concept, referencing Talcott Parsons' functionalist theory of sex roles, where men and women were assigned instrumental and expressive roles, respectively. This biological determinism was later critiqued by Margaret Mead, who emphasised the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity. Sex denotes biological characteristics, while gender reflects socially constructed roles, identities, and expectations. Scholars such as Robert Stoller and Ann Oakley further solidified this distinction, with Oakley asserting that gender is not a natural extension of sex but a product of societal conditioning. Influential theorists like Simone de Beauvoir, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, and Catharine MacKinnon are engaged to show the trajectory of gender as a social construct. Rubin's *sex/gender*

system conceptualises gender as a societal transformation of biological sex, while Butler introduces the performativity thesis, arguing that gender is a set of repeated acts shaped by cultural norms. MacKinnon critiques the patriarchal construction of gender through the sexual objectification of women. These arguments converge to frame gender as mutable and socially imposed, though varying in methodology and political intent. Gender socialisation contributes to the persistence of gender binaries. Through theorists like Nancy Chodorow and Kate Millett's work, the text discusses how childhood experiences, parenting practices, and societal expectations deeply embed masculine and feminine traits. Stereotypes and roles are described as culturally conditioned, maintained through social reinforcement, and are often hierarchical, privileging masculinity over femininity. A comprehensive array of terminology related to gender and third-gender identities is defined. These include distinctions among gender identity, gender roles, gender expression, and sexuality. The introduction of sexual orientations: heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality, demonstrates their cultural variability and historical pathologisation, especially in the West. It tracks the gradual depathologisation of homosexuality by psychiatric and global health bodies from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Ancient texts like the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Dharmaśāstra*, and *Arthaśāstra* acknowledge and sometimes venerate non-binary identities. Figures such as *Shikhandi*, *Aravan*, and deities like *Ardhanārīśwara* reflect gender diversity within the Hindu tradition. However, the colonial era redefined *Hijras* as criminal and deviant under laws like the Criminal Tribes Act (1871), erasing centuries of cultural legitimacy. Historiographical trends in India, from colonial, nationalist, and Marxist to Subaltern Studies, all fail to adequately address the histories of the third gender. While legal developments like the 2014 NALSA judgment marked a step toward recognition, structural discrimination persists. Ancient Hindu texts like the *Manusmṛiti*, *Kama Sutra*, and various *Puranas* mention people who are *tritiya prakṛiti* (third nature). *Tritiya prakṛiti* includes those who are not exclusively male or female, often associated with ascetic,

artistic, or ritualistic roles. The iconography of *Ardhanarishvara* (Shiva and Parvati fused as half-male, half-female) symbolises the essential unity and complementarity of genders. This theological concept embraces androgyny and third-gender identity as divine. Among the Postcolonial Theorists, scholars like Gayatri Spivak argue that colonialism imposed Western binary gender norms onto colonised societies. The pre-colonial recognition of a third gender in South Asia, Africa, and Indigenous Americas was suppressed by Victorian moral codes. *The Yogyakarta Principles* (2006) and subsequent UN policies advocate for the legal recognition and protection of third gender individuals under international human rights law. This includes the right to legal self-identification beyond male/female categories. Historically, third-gender or non-binary identities were pathologised in psychiatric literature. Modern revisions like ICD-11 (2022) have declassified transgender and non-binary identities from mental disorders, recognising them as part of human diversity. Some researchers explore the intersex spectrum, hormonal diversity, and neurological variances to argue that sex and gender are not binary but exist on a continuum. The Intersectional analysis of Kimberlé Crenshaw examines how gender identity interacts with caste, race, class, and religion. For example, a hijra from a lower caste may experience compounded marginalisation differently than a non-binary individual from a dominant social group.

Queer in Ancient Texts:

The concept of a third gender, encompassing individuals who do not conform to traditional male or female identities, is deeply embedded in ancient Indian texts, including the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, Puranas, *Manusmriti*, *Upanishads*, *Vedas*, and the *Bhagavad Gita*. These texts reflect a nuanced understanding of gender fluidity and non-binary identities, illustrating the complexity of gender roles in ancient Indian society. On Indian contexts and ancient textual references to third gender identities, concepts such as *tr̥t̥iya prakṛti*, *napuṃsaka*, and *ṣaṇḍa* are drawn from classical texts like the *Kāmasūtra* and the *Mahābhārata*, illustrating the presence of third gender categories in pre-modern Hindu thought. There are

contemporary Indian third gender communities including *Hijras*, *Kinnars*, *Arāvanis*, *Kothis*, *Jogti hijras*, and *Shiva-Shaktis*, demonstrating the regional and ritualistic variations of gender diversity. The intersection of myth, narrative, and gender variance in ancient Indian epics emphasises how mythological and religious texts preserve and transmit transgender identities. The representation of third-gender figures in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and various *Purāṇas*, presenting mythology as both a cultural archive and a tool of identity formation for marginalised gender expressions, is evident. It positions myth not only as symbolic and sacred but also as a vehicle for understanding historical gender variance.

Beginning with theoretical framing, the dual perception of myths, as sacred truth upheld through ritual and faith, and as irrational or fantastical narratives in opposition to rational discourse, comes in the course of the discussion. Myth is shown to operate beyond the limits of historical empiricism, deriving legitimacy from cultural belief systems and serving as repositories of communal identity. In this light, the author here advocates for reading mythology as a crucial lens to reconstruct the obscured histories of the third gender in pre-modern India. Among the divine figures discussed, *Ardhanārīśvara*—an androgynous composite of *Śiva* and *Pārvatī*, emerges as a powerful symbol of gender fluidity and metaphysical unity. Rooted in *Sāṃkhya* philosophy and developed across various *Upaniṣadic* and *Purāṇic* traditions, *Ardhanārīśvara* symbolises the co-dependence of masculine (*Puruṣa*) and feminine (*Prakṛti*) forces in cosmic creation. Its iconography, blending male and female anatomical traits, disrupts the rigid binary framework and reinforces divine sanction for gender variance. The tale of *Aravāṇ* from the *Mahābhārata*—a warrior son of Arjuna who marries Lord Kṛṣṇa (as Mohinī) before being sacrificed—is central to the ritual identity of Hijra communities in South India. Similarly, *Ayyappā*, born of the union between *Śiva* and Viṣṇu (as Mohinī), is another example of gender hybridity sanctified in mythology and worshipped widely in the south. Multiple goddesses associated with third-gender communities, including *Bahucharā Mātā* and *Yellamā (Renukā)*, are examined. *Bahucharā Mātā*, venerated by

Hijra communities, is portrayed as a divine enforcer of gender transformation through emasculation rituals (*nirvāṇam*), symbolising empowerment through bodily transformation. *Yellamā*, meanwhile, emerges from complex mythic cycles involving caste, body transmutation, and gender identity.

The depiction and treatment of third gender individuals is found in classical Sanskrit normative texts such as the *Manusmṛti*, *Nārada Smṛti*, *Arthaśāstra*, and *Kāmasūtra*. These texts, which correspond to the traditional puruṣārthas—dharma, artha, and kāma, offer insight into ancient Indian legal, moral, and social attitudes toward non-binary gender identities, particularly those classified as *ṣaṇḍa*, *napuṃsaka*, or third gender. These prescriptive texts viewed third-gender individuals with inheritance, reproduction, social participation, and criminal justice. In the *Arthaśāstra*, attributed to Kauṭilya, the emphasis is pragmatic and state-centric. Third gender individuals (*klība*) are grouped with outcasts and persons with disabilities, and were denied inheritance rights. Their inclusion in legal discourse primarily reinforces the patriarchal emphasis on virility and progeny. While the *Arthaśāstra* occasionally provides protections against defamation for such individuals, it also reflects a utilitarian logic that marginalises them based on perceived reproductive unproductivity and social utility. Castration was prescribed for certain sexual offences, further associating gender variance with punishment and stigma. The *Manusmṛti*, an authoritative Dharmaśāstra, expresses profound discomfort with non-normative genders. It defines masculinity and femininity in terms of fertility and capacity to produce male heirs, thereby excluding those outside binary sex roles from meaningful participation in ritual and familial life. Eunuchs and impotent individuals are denied sacred food, visual proximity to rituals, and the right to partake in ancestral offerings. Their very presence is seen as polluting. Importantly, Manu equates the productivity of gender roles with their spiritual and social worth, making clear the exclusionary logic embedded in caste and gender hierarchies. The *Nārada Smṛti*, primarily focused on judicial procedures, provides a more detailed typology of third-gender

individuals, classifying fourteen distinct types of impotence, such as those caused by nature, curses, illness, psychological factors, or sexual preferences. Although more analytically advanced, the text continues to marginalise third gender persons by disqualifying them from serving as witnesses, undergoing ritual ordeals, or receiving equitable treatment in legal and social contexts. Interestingly, Nārada uniquely argues that a woman should not be bound in marriage to an impotent man, suggesting a departure from the dominant patriarchal assumption of male entitlement and reproductive control. The *Kāmasūtra* presents the third gender as part of the broader sexual and aesthetic spectrum. While recognising their existence and even assigning them roles in intimate and sensual contexts, the third gender is primarily associated with servile or ornamental functions, such as shampooing the master's body, again reinforcing marginalisation within domestic and sexual economies. Collectively, these texts reflect a highly stratified understanding of gender in ancient India, where third gender identities were tolerated but systematically subordinated. Reproduction, caste purity, and patriarchal control over female sexuality constituted the central tenets of societal regulation. Gender variance was often interpreted through a moral lens of deviation and was consequently excluded from dharmic roles and ritual agency. The final assertion is that the ancient normative order positioned the third gender at the lowest rung of the gender hierarchy, legitimising their social invisibility and legal exclusion.

The *Mahābhārata* features *Śikhaṇḍi*, born female but transformed into a male warrior through divine and mystical interventions, who ultimately becomes pivotal in the death of *Bhīṣma*. Bhishma's refusal to fight Shikhandi, recognising her original female identity, underscores the significance of gender perception in warfare and honour. Her/his fluid identity is not only acknowledged but strategically utilised in war, illustrating the practical acknowledgement of gender variance in epic ethics. Similarly, Arjuna's one-year exile as *Brihannalā*, a eunuch dance teacher, results from a curse by the celestial nymph *Urvaśī* and demonstrates voluntary gender fluidity for strategic survival and disguise. This

period of gender non-conformity is not only strategic but also reflects the acceptance of fluid gender roles within the epic's narrative. Through these narratives, arguments that ancient Indian epics encoded diverse gender expressions and roles, offering religious and social legitimacy to non-binary identities, are put forward. These stories remain significant for third-gender individuals, who trace cultural ancestry and social rights to them. It is therefore emerge that myth is a meaningful source in recovering transgender histories and identities erased from conventional historiography.

The *Ramayana* presents a poignant episode, the Ayodhya Kanda, highlighting the recognition of non-binary individuals. When Rama embarks on his exile, he instructs all 'men and women' to return to Ayodhya. Those who identify as neither male nor female remain, demonstrating their devotion. Upon his return, Rama acknowledges their loyalty and grants them the boon to bless auspicious occasions, institutionalising their societal role. This is seen by some as an origin story for the Hijra community's sacred function at weddings and births.

The *Puranas* offer further insights into gender diversity. The story of *Ila*, who alternates between male and female forms due to a divine curse, explores the fluidity of gender and its implications on personal identity and relationships. Ila's union with Budha results in progeny, challenging conventional notions of gender and reproduction. Similar themes arise in the tale of Vishnu's Mohini form, where Vishnu transforms into a woman to distribute amrita and later enchants Shiva. Their union, in some versions, results in the birth of the God Ayyappa. These stories not only depict fluid gender identities but also divine approval of such transformations.

The *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, while primarily focused on cosmology and metaphysics, also allude to gender fluidity. Some hymns and philosophical discourses explore the unity of male and female principles within creation. The concept of *Ardhanarishvara*, the composite form of Shiva and Parvati, symbolises the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies, suggesting a deeper philosophical

acknowledgement of gender as a spectrum rather than a binary. Some scholars interpret references to '*tritiyaprakriti*' (third nature) as early recognition of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities.

While the *Bhagavad Gita* does not explicitly address gender identity, its emphasis on the eternal nature of the soul beyond the body resonates with queer interpretations. The Gita's core philosophy, that the self (atman) is distinct from the body and does not perish, can be seen as a foundation for understanding and validating identities that transcend physical or social gender constructs.

Taken together, these ancient texts demonstrate that non-binary and gender-diverse individuals were not only recognised but also featured in religious, social, and mythological contexts. Their roles were varied, from warriors and ascetics to divine figures, reflecting a complex and multifaceted understanding of gender in ancient Indian civilisation. Rather than strictly enforcing a gender binary, these texts reveal a culture that accommodated a range of identities, often linking them to spiritual and cosmic principles. In modern scholarship, these narratives provide valuable historical context for understanding contemporary gender diversity in South Asia and challenge the assumption that queerness is a recent or Western concept. They also serve as a reminder of the plurality and richness of gender expressions within Indic traditions.

Cross-Cultural Analysis:

To talk about the representation of queer identities from classical Hindu mythology to modern Indian cinema, culminating in Rituparno Ghosh's *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish*. Beginning with ancient epics like the *Mahabharata*, the author argues that Hindu mythology has long harboured fluid conceptions of gender and sexuality, embodied in figures such as *Brihannala*, *Shikhandi*, *Mohini*, and *Chitrangada*. These depictions, however, have historically been enclosed within divine or ritualistic parameters, rendering them socially tolerable but not liberatory. Rabindranath Tagore's *Chitrangada* reinterprets the original *Mahabharata* narrative by emphasising the conflict between outward appearance and inner

identity. Tagore's protagonist is caught between masculine conditioning and feminine desire, ultimately aspiring for recognition as an equal partner rather than a gendered ideal. Nonetheless, Tagore's version remains bound by binaries, often portraying masculinity and femininity through stereotypical attributes. In contrast, Rituparno Ghosh's film provides a radical reworking by intertwining the classical narrative with the life of Rudra, a gender-nonconforming artist grappling with love, identity, and societal validation. Through his character's decision to undergo sex reassignment surgery to legitimise his relationship, Ghosh presents gender as performative, transitional, and deeply personal, echoing Judith Butler's theory. The film critiques the heteronormative framework by exposing its failure to comprehend or accept queer subjectivities. While mythology and literature have accommodated queer figures, societal recognition remains elusive. Ghosh's cinematic intervention disrupts binary constraints and opens a space for alternative gender narratives. However, public reception to his work reflects persistent discomfort with non-binary identities. The article concludes that queer journeys in India must contend not only with tradition but with the dominant cultural reluctance to embrace gender variance as legitimate and human.

Ruth Vanita's article *Born to Two Mothers: The Hero Bhagiratha* offers a groundbreaking exploration of same-sex female relationships and queer reproduction in pre-modern Hindu texts. Focusing on fourteenth-century Bengali narratives of Bhagiratha's miraculous birth to two co-wives, she argues that these texts accommodate and even sanctify same-sex love and parenting within sacred paradigms. By tracing versions of Bhagiratha's story in texts such as the *Padma Purana* and the *Krittivasa Ramayana*, Vanita reveals how religious literature legitimises same-sex sexual relations by aligning them with divine will and cosmic purpose. She situates these narratives in contrast to both ancient Hindu medical texts, such as the *Sushruta Samhita*, which pathologise female-female reproduction, and to Christian traditions, which rigidly condemn same-sex acts. In Vanita's analysis, the Bengali texts rework earlier

medical and theological ideas, transforming what was once seen as monstrous (a boneless child) into a divine miracle. The widowed co-wives engage in sexual union either by divine instruction or spontaneous passion, resulting in the birth of Bhagiratha, a child initially malformed but later cured or born healthy by divine intervention. Vanita emphasises the symbolic richness of same-sex parenting, invoking broader traditions of miraculous births, female reproductive autonomy, and goddesses' creative power. Importantly, she resists heteronormative interpretations by showing how desire, fertility, and sanctity intersect in queer contexts. Bhagiratha's dual maternity becomes not only a symbol of gender diversity but also a theological assertion of love, kinship, and community that challenges rigid sexual norms. Through this analysis, Vanita reclaims queer genealogies within sacred Hindu traditions and highlights their radical potential for rethinking family, legitimacy, and divinity.

Devdutt Pattanaik's *The Man Who Was a Woman and Other Queer Tales from Hindu Lore* is a groundbreaking collection of narratives from Hindu mythology that explore themes of gender fluidity, sexual transformation, and non-normative desire. Drawing from Sanskrit scriptures and vernacular traditions, Pattanaik presents a counter-narrative to heteronormative interpretations of Hindu lore by foregrounding stories of queerness embedded within India's cultural and religious fabric. The work contrasts Hindu cosmology with biblical monotheism, emphasising the philosophical fluidity inherent in Hinduism, where the divine is often represented in androgynous or multiform avatars. Hindu narratives often portray gender and sexuality as mutable and cyclic, reflecting broader metaphysical ideas of karma, rebirth, and the impermanence of worldly identities. Pattanaik also examines the historical presence of third-gender individuals in Indian society, connecting their ritual and social roles to ancient understandings of non-binary identities. He critiques colonial and modern nationalist erasures of these narratives and challenges conservative and academic discomfort with queer readings of sacred texts. Pattanaik's work serves as a cultural and theological reclamation

project, revealing a queerness that has always existed in Hindu thought but has often been neglected or obscured.

Esha Tiwari's article *Distortion of Tṛitiya Prakṛiti (Third Nature) by Colonial Ideology in India* explores how colonial ideologies fundamentally distorted indigenous understandings of gender and sexuality in India, specifically the concept of *Tṛitiya Prakṛiti* (Third Nature). Drawing on mythology, Sanskrit texts, and contemporary Hijra narratives, especially A. Revathi's autobiography, *The Truth About Me*, Tiwari, demonstrates that pre-colonial Indian society recognised and often celebrated gender non-conformity, which was later pathologised and marginalised under British colonial rule. In pre-colonial India, religious and classical texts such as the *Kāmasūtra*, *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and mythological epics frequently referenced third-gender figures using terms like *napuṃsaka* and *stripuṃsa*. Figures like *Ardhanārīśvara* and narratives involving Krishna or Rama affirm divine sanction for gender variance. These traditions fostered social inclusion of Hijras, evident in their respected ritual roles. However, colonial imposition of Victorian morality manifested in the Indian Penal Code of 1860 criminalised non-heteronormative expressions, reclassifying Hijras as deviants. Tiwari's article critically examines the performativity of gender, referencing theorists such as Judith Butler and Sarah Kaye Lewis. Tiwari argues that Hijras, instead of subverting binary norms, are compelled by socio-cultural forces to overperform one gender, often femininity, thereby reinforcing a dualistic model. A. Revathi's lived experience reveals this internalized conformity: long hair, saris, and gendered behavior are required for recognition and acceptance in Hijra communities, paradoxically mirroring heteronormative expectations. Tiwari further contrasts the empowered mythic depictions of Hijra-associated goddesses like *Bahuchara Mata* with the stigmatisation and marginalisation of Hijras today. She concludes that colonial epistemologies shifted *Tṛitiya Prakṛiti* from a symbolic and sacred presence to a social imaginary marked by repression and exclusion.

Nidhi Jaiswal's paper, published in the *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, explores the representation of queerness

in Indian mythology through Devdutt Pattanaik's *Shikhandi: And Other Queer Tales They Don't Tell You* (2014). The study argues that ancient Indian texts validate queer identities, such as cross-dressing, homosexuality, and transgenderism, as normative and socially significant. Jaiswal argues that these mythological narratives challenge contemporary heteronormative constructs and reveal a more inclusive historical perspective. The study highlights key themes such as queerness as a challenge to patriarchy, identity negotiation, and the noble purposes behind queer transformations. Meanwhile, the transgender community faced exclusion from marriage rights, welfare schemes, and anti-discrimination protections due to laws like the Hindu Marriage Act and Special Marriage Act failing to recognise non-binary identities. *The 2014 NALSA v. Union of India* judgment recognised a third gender category, affirming their rights under Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21 of the Constitution. However, the judgment faced criticism for conflating hijras with broader transgender identities and for ambiguous directives. *Transgenderism*, coined by Virginia Prince, encompasses transsexualism and transvestism, with early classifications by Magnus Hirschfeld and Harry Benjamin laying groundwork for modern understandings. Ancient Indian literature, such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, features transgender narratives, such as the warrior Shikhandi and Arjuna's cross-dressing as *Brihannala*. The Aravan legend underscores the cultural reverence for transgender identities, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Despite historical recognition, contemporary transgender communities face systemic marginalisation, leading to high morbidity and risky behaviours. The author critiques the depathologisation of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association and emphasises the need for specialised medical care, legal protections, and societal integration to mitigate stigma.

Conclusion:

This study critically engages with ancient Indian epics and classical texts through the lens of queer rhetoric, revealing a profound and complex engagement with gender and sexual diversity that has been largely underexplored in mainstream scholarship. These

representations challenge the prevalent assumption that queerness is a modern or Western import, instead locating it firmly within the philosophical and narrative traditions of pre-colonial South Asia.

The emergence of characters such as *Shikhandi*, *Brihannala*, *Mohini*, and *Ila* serves as compelling evidence of gender and sexual fluidity embedded in epic storytelling. These figures, transcending binary classifications, occupy positions of power, reverence, and narrative importance. Through their presence and actions, they subvert rigid gender hierarchies and offer alternative paradigms of identity and agency. The inclusion of such characters in revered scriptures underlines the fluid and performative nature of gender as theorized by contemporary queer theorists like Judith Butler. Moreover, the conceptual frameworks of *tritiyaprakriti* (third nature) and deific androgyny, such as in the iconography of *Ardhanarishvara*, provide a metaphysical foundation for understanding queerness as both sacred and integral to the cosmic order.

Ultimately, the recovery and interpretation of queer rhetoric in ancient Indian literature underscore the importance of re-reading classical texts through inclusive and critical lenses. Doing so not only enriches our understanding of the past but also provides vital historical validation and cultural resonance for contemporary queer communities in South Asia and beyond. As India and other societies navigate evolving understandings of gender and sexuality, these ancient narratives serve not merely as relics of the past but as active, dialogic texts that continue to inform, challenge, and expand the possibilities of human identity.

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