

**ASSAMESE
LANGUAGE :**

**ORIGIN
AND
DEVELOPMENT**

BISWESWAR HAZARIKA



ASSAMESE LANGUAGE : ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

—Bisweswar Hazarika



JOYA PRAKASHAN : GUWAHATI

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Publisher's Note.

It is a matter of great pleasure for us that we have been able to present to our scholars and students of linguistic studies in particular the work 'Assamese Language : Origin and Development' by Prof. Bisweswar Hazarika who has presented a new and logical line of study and enthusiasm among the scholars and students of language and literature. We are not required here to express any word regarding the antecedents of the author, as his performance of the task itself fulfil that proof.

We must express here our sense of appreciation for the service rendered by Shri Jatin Goswami who also took great interest in presenting this title to the scholars and the students of linguistic studies in particular and to the general readers as well and thanks to the printer Joya Press, Guwahati who took keen interest in matters of printing, and designing of the book.



Preface

Before going to read the monograph, the reader must throw off the notion that Assamese originated from Māgadhi. For, it is not only untrue, but also based on erroneous logic. This has been forwarded by different authorities for merely explaining the hitherto unexplained linguistic phenomenon. I have tried in the following to show how this notion becomes untenable provided we apply rigorous scientific method in ascertaining the origin of Assamese.

Dr S.K. Chattarjee has shown in the tabulation on page 140 of the ODBL that from the "Forms of Māgadhi Prakrit as brought to Bengal, Assam and Orissa" has sprung four dialects Rāḍha, Vārendra, Kāmarūpa and Vaṅga, and from the Kāmarūpa sprung Assamese. He has not mentioned whether he has obtained any specimen of Māgadhi language spoken in Assam during the period from first to the fifth century A.D., nor has he shown any specimen of Rāḍha Vārendra, Kāmarūpa and Vaṅga (Apabhraṃśa) dialect spoken in the period from the sixth to the tenth century A.D. His conclusion about the Māgadhi origin of Assamese is consequently not based on facts. Without any specimen of the Rāḍha, Vārendra, Kāmarūpa and Vaṅga (Apabhraṃśa) dialect, these divisions are imaginary. An arbitrary conclusion like this, howmuchever

desirable, cannot be accepted as a scientific conclusion.

Moreover, Dr Chatterjee's Māgadhi is a conjectural Prakrit, not the Prakrit of the same name spoken of by the grammarians, nor the Prakrit found in the contemporary inscriptions and literature. He has spoken of his Māgadhi Prakrit thus :

“Common forms and inflections, as well as common habits of phonetics and syntax show that the dialects of Bengali, as well as Assamese and Oriyā on the one hand, and dialects of the Bihārī group on the other, must have originated from some early form of I.A. current in the eastern part of Northern India. To this mother-dialect, the name ‘Māgadhi’ has been given.” (ODBL, P. 21).

According to his admission, there is no Prakrit called Māgadhi from which Assamese has originated. He has in hand some forms, inflections, habits of phonetics and syntax common among the dialects of Bengali, Assamese, Oriyā and Bihārī group. Having observed these common forms, inflections etc. he has jumped to conclusion. that they, including Assamese, have come from some early form of Indo-Aryan language. This “early form of I.A.” has been named by him as Māgadhi.

In this argument Dr Chatterjee has committed the fallacy of *Petitio Principii* which is the “fallacy of assuming as a premise in some form or other, the very proposition to be proved.” (*Text-book of Inductive Logic*, 1953, by Bhola Noth Roy, P. 320). He wants to prove that Assamese has come from Māgadhi Prakrit. To prove this he has no data except some peculiarities

of forms, inflections, habits of phonetics and syntax which are found in Assamese. So he has named these peculiarities as Māgadhism without showing any reason why they should not be called otherwise. Then, he argues, as Māgadhism is present in Assamese, it has originated from Māgadhī Prakrit. Thus he has assumed the very proposition which he is going to prove. This is fallacious.

He could have called the peculiarities of Assamese as Śaurasenism or so. But he has refrained from doing so with a purpose. For he knows that there was a Māgadhī Prakrit spoken in Magadha, that is, South Bihar. Again, he can show some peculiarities of Māgadhī in the dialects of Bihārī and perhaps also in the dialects of Oriyā. In such a situation the only possible origin of Bengali and Assamese would be Māgadhī Prakrit. So he has added Bengali and Assamese to the list of Māgadhan languages. His only argument of enlisting Assamese in the Magadhan language is that "some of the phonetic characteristics of Māgadhī, eg. ś for śśś" and "l for r" "are preserved or can be traced in its descendants" (ODBL, P.21). This argument is not valid in the case of Assamese. There arises no question of OIA, śśś > ś; for Assamese has not retained the palatal pronunciation at all. I have quoted from "*Assamese, Its Formation and Development*," 1941, by Dr Banikanta Kakati about the treatment of OIA sibilants in Assamese :

"The O.I.A. sibilants have lost their distinctive sounds in Assamese. They are all pronounced as guttural spirants both in initial and medial positions, even though, in medial positions, a soft *kh* sound is heard. The distinction, however, is so slight that their sounds

in all positions in a word may be represented by (x). Thus *tss*, *sakala*, *saru*, are as. *xakal*, *xaru*; *tbhs*, *šikali*, *šol*, are As. *xikali*, *xol*, etc.

"In the compounds in *tss*, the sibilants are pronounced as dental (s); eg. *šāstra*, *kṛṣṇa*, *dusta*, etc., would be pronounced as *xāstra*, *kṛṣṇa*, *dusta*, etc.

"When, however, *r* precedes, the *x* sound is retained; Cf. *darśana*, pron. *darxan*; *harṣa*, pron. *harxa*. When compounded with -y, their sound approximates that of *š*; Cf. *śiṣya*, pron. *xīṣya*; *śasya*, pron. *xaśya*.

"In *tbh* words in modern Assamese, the sibilants whether original, or resultant from the simplification of consonant groups are generally reduced to (h) intervocally and finally, e.g.

śih, lead, (*śisa-*).

mḍh, gnat, (*maśa-*).

bih, poison, (*viśa-*).

śāh, kernel, (*śasya*),

aḥat, a kind of tree, (*aśvattha-*).

"This wholesale change of non-initial sibilants to (h) belongs to modern times.

"In early Assamese, they often appeared as (s); Cf. *kaisāni*, when; Mod. As. *kāhāni*; *kisa*, why; Mid. As. *kiha*; Mod. As. *kiya*; *śasur*, father-in-law; *śāsu*, mother-in-law; Mod. As. *śahur*, *śāhu*.

"In initial positions, the sibilants hardly change to *h*. In the plural affix -*hat* (*santa*), the change was due to the position of the suffix in early Assamese after numerals and oblique forms of pronouns, which position was interior one: *dui-hanta*, *tini-hanta*, (Sec. 624).

"Thus, it would appear, that the original Māgadhī

value f of the sibilants is not retained in Assamese." (PP. 223 - 4).

The instances of $r > l$ is very insignificant in Assamese. Dr Kakati has analysed in the "*Assamese Its Formation and Development*" 244 words where r was present in the OIA. In only 18 words of them r has turned into l , and in the rest 226 words the r has been retained in Assamese. The percentage of $r > l$ is 7.37, while that of $r > r$ is 92.63 in Assamese,

The characteristic of $r > l$ is also found in other languages which are not of Māgadhī origin. In this case we can take the example of Mārāthī which is accepted by all to be of Māhārāṣṭrī origin. In Mārāthī also $r > l$, but their quantity is small as in Assamese; eg.

OIA. raṇḍa > NIA (Mārāthī) laṇḍa. "a cunning schemer";

OIA. roman > NIA (Mār.) lom, "a hair of the body";

OIA. haridrā > NIA (Mār.) halad, "turmeric";

OIA. paryasta > NIA (Mār.) pālat, "a change, a turn";

OIA. garhā— > NIA (Mār.) gālī, "abuse", etc.

If $r > l$ indicates the Māgadhī origin of a language, Mārāthī should have been also a Māgadhan language. But Mārāthī, in spite of having the $r > l$ characteristics, is considered by the linguists to be of Māhārāṣṭrī origin. It must, therefore, be concluded that, in spite of having $r > l$ characteristics in a small quantity, Assamese may be, like Mārāthī, of different origin. Few instances of $r > l$ should not be accepted as a conclusive proof of the Māgadhī origin of Assamese.

Besides, he should have explained how and when

the Māgadhi speakers entered Assam. He has conveniently forgotten or thought unnecessary to throw light on this point. His Māgadhi origin of Assamese is untenable without some concrete proof of this historic migration. For, we cannot and must not postulate a theory on mere assumptions,

I am grateful to the Secretary of the Souvenir Committee of Indian Federation of Working Journalists, National Council Session, 1985, Guwahati, who asked me to write a paper on the "Origin and Development of Assamese Language" which was published in the Souvenir. That paper has been enlarged and improved into this monograph, I also thank Sri Nagen Baruah, G M C, Guwahati, for his lending of books for my use. I am indebted to Sri Jatin Goswami, Guwahati, for taking interest to get the book published and Sri Sagar Goswami of Joya Prakashan for taking up publication of this monograph. I request the learned readers to point out any mistake that might have crept into this and forward their suggestions, if any, for the improvement of the monograph. Their help will be gratefully acknowledged.

Nizarapar,
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—Bisweswar Hazarika.
6.12.85



In memory
of my father
Late Khageswar Hazarika

Assamese Language :

Origin

And

Development

The origin of a language pre-supposes a speech-community and the speech-community in turn pre-supposes a territory where they live in. So, before going to study the origin and development of the Assamese language, we must know the history of the territory where it originated. Assamese is one of the ten modern Indo-Aryan languages, the other nine being Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sindhi and Urdu. As Assamese has originated from the Old Indo-Aryan languages, so endeavours are to be made to show how the O.I.A.-speakers migrated to Assam and when they did it.

The O.I.A. languages flourished from the fifteenth century B.C. to the sixth century B.C. It would have been easier to study their migration had there been an authentic map of the eastern India of the fifteenth century B.C. or at least of the sixth century B.C. In the absence of such a map, we are to base our conclusions on the findings of the competent au-

thorities. Geologists like Sir Charles Lyell (1797-1875) has opined that in ancient times there was no Bengal ; the sea was extended upto the foot of the Himalayas. Babu S. N. Bhadra opines in his 'History of North Eastern India' : (translated from Bengali) "The eastern part (of India) was Aryanised in the days of the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata. But most of the regions of Bengal (of modern age) were under the sea even after that period. The foot of the Himalayas was washed by the sea even in the sixth century A.D," Panini has never referred to Bengal in his Aṣṭādhyāyī (5th century B. C.)

But earliest reference to Assam is found there in the Sūtra : "dyañmagadhakaliṅgasūramasādaṇ." 4.1.170. "Śrīśa Chandra Vasu in *The Aṣṭādhyāyī of Pāṇini* (1952) has translated it thus, "The affix an comes, in the sense of a descendant, after dissyllabic words, and the words Magadha, Kaliṅga and Sūramasa, when they are the names of countries as well as of Kshatriyas." (P. 692). Dr Vasudev Sharan Agrawal in the "*Pāṇini Kālin Bhāratavarṣa*" (2012 Samvat) identifies it thus, "This name is found in the Aṣṭādhyāyī only. It is known that the ancient name of the valley and hilly tracts of famous Suramā river was Sūramasa," (P. 75). In the days of Pāṇini it was an ekarāja janapada, an empire with a king.

Dr. Agrawal has based on phonology only while identifying Sūramasa. There is similarity of sounds between Sūramasa and Suramā. But we must not forget that Sūramasa is a name of a kingdom, while the Suramā is a name of a river. Moreover, the Suramā is not a big river, but a branch of the Barak, which is a tributary of the Brahmaputra. It is unlikely that

Pāṇini should know the Suramā, but not know the Brahmaputra. Therefore, the phonological similarity is misleading in identifying Sūramasa.

Sūramasa must be a kingdom beyond Magadha and Kalinga in the east. If we consider the meaning of the word we find that 'sūra' means the sun and 'masa' means measurement. Therefore, Sūramasa must be a name of a country where the sun was measured in the ancient times. Prāgjyotiṣa, the ancient Assam, is credited with the measuring of the stars. The *Kālikā Purāṇa* of the tenth century A. D. has recorded this tradition thus :

asya madhye sthito brahmā prāṇnakṣatram sasaja ha /
tataḥ prāgjyotiṣākhyam puri śakrapuri samā //

—KP. 38/123.

The root √ sṛj meant in the R̥g Veda "to cast a measuring line." So the translation of the above sloka will be :

"In the ancient days Brahmā cast a measuring line staying in the middle of this country. So this country Prāgjyotiṣa by name is equal to the city of Śakra (Indra)."

From the above we come to conclusion that the Sūramasa of the Aṣṭādhyāyī is identical to the Prāgjyotiṣa of the epics.

Assam was known as Pāra Lauhitya in the Arthaśāstra of Kauṭilya of the fourth century B. C. In the map of India as revealed by the Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra, Charles Lesley Ames of Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA, has located Pāra Lauhitya in the Assam valley.

That Prāgjyotiṣa was a prehistoric Aryan kingdom and that it was the only Aryan kingdom among the

non-Aryan kingdoms in the eastern India are believed by competent authorities like Dr D.C. Sen and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Dr. sen writes in his '*History of Bengali Language and Literature*': "The pre-historic kingdom of Prāgjyotiṣa which extended from modern Jalpaiguri to the backwoods of Assam, was one of the earliest Aryan colonies in this country." (P. 1.)

Dr Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in his '*Bhīṣmār Itihāser Bhagnāmśa*' incorporated in the "Bankim Racanāvali" Vol. II (B.S. 1380) writes as follows : (translated from Bengali) "In the more ancient time, there was an Aryan kingdom called Prāgjyotiṣa where Kāmarūpa (Assam) stands now-a-days. Perhaps, as it was alone diffusing Aryan light among the ancient non-Aryan countries, it was known as such (Eastern Light). Bhagadatta the king of Prāgjyotiṣa went to assist Duryodhana in the Mahābhārata war. Inhabitants of Tamralipta, Paundra, Matsya, that is, the (ancient) inhabitants of (modern) Bengal went there. They were counted as non-Aryans, " (P. 341).

Arthur A. Macdonell considers the Rāmāyaṇa to have been composed before the fifth century B.C. where the more recent portions added till the second century B.C. So, the inclusion of the name Prāgjyotiṣa in the Rāmāyaṇa proves that it was a flourishing Aryan kingdom during the fifth to the second century B.C. Again, Macdonell considers the compilation of the Mahābhārata was complete before the beginning of the Christian era. From the occurrence of the name of Prāgjyotiṣa kingdom in the same work we can come to conclusion that Prāgjyotiṣa flourished to the first century B.C.

The Aryan migrators entered Prāgjyotiṣa by the

north bank of the Gaṅgā and crossing the Brahmaputra established a kingdom in the fifth century B.C. They carried with them the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects prevalent in this period. The Naraka legend in all the ancient copperplate inscriptions of Assam including that of Bhaskarvarman (594-650) confirms that they have come from Videha the homeland of Maithili. The Middle Indo-Aryan dialects carried by the Aryan migrators must have been some dialects which two century later turned into the Eastern Asokan group of dialects. The Eastern Asokan dialect-group includes the inscriptions of the Dhauli and Jaugoda Rock Edicts, all the Minor Rock Edicts and Pillar Edicts and the cave Inscriptions of Asoka. Some of the phonetic tendencies found in them, specially in the Dhauli and Jaugada Rock Edicts, are also noticed in Assamese :

1. —kṣ— > —kkh— > —kh ; eg. vr̥kṣa > lukha ; —Dh-auli and Jaugada ; This tendency is also found in Assamese ; e.g. O.I.A. makṣikā > As. mākhi, "fly" ;
2. —k— > —g— ; e.g. paralokam > palalogam, —Dh-auli ; Assamese has inherited this tendency ; e.g. O.I.A. śakuna > As. sagun, "vulture" ;

3. —y— > —j— ; e.g. mayūrāḥ > majulā ; Jaugada ;

We find this tendency in Assamese also ; e.g. O.I.A. yajña > As. jāg, "fire made before a cow-shed to drive out mosquitoes etc." ;

4. —ś— > —s— ; e.g. parikleśa > palikileśa ; —Dh-auli and Jaugada.

Assamese has further advanced this tendency by s > h ; e.g. O.I.A. yaśaḥ > As. yah, "fame" ; and

5. —ny— > [nn— ; e.g. manyate > manadi ; —Dh-auli

and Jauḡaḡa ;

This tendency is prevalent in Assamese language ; e.g. O.I.A. *anya* > As. *ān*, "other" etc.

The Aryan dialect prevalent during the fifth century B.C. to the first century B.C. can be termed as the *Prāgiyaotiṣa* Prakrit, as during this period the country was known as *Prāgiyotiṣa* (Eastern-Light). Bhaskarvarman (594-650) informs us that the descendants of Vajradatta ruled *Prāgiyotiṣa* in this period. The language of this period is represented by the Dhauli and Jauḡaḡa Rock Edicts, all the Minor Rock Edicts, and Pillar Edicts, the Cave Inscriptions of Asoka, the Mahasthan Stone Plaque Inscription, the *Sahgaurā* Copperplate Inscription and the *Hathi-gumphā* Inscriptions of Kharavela and his queen outside Assam. We have shown in the above, how Assamese has inherited phonetic tendencies found in these edicts. This clearly proves that a language akin to the Eastern Asokan must have been current in Assam during the fifth to the first century B.C.

From the beginning of the Christian era to the fifth century A.D., is the period of the second stage of Middle Indo-Aryan. During this period *Prāgiyotiṣa*, now also known as *Kāmarūpa*, was ruled by the later descendants of the Vajradatta family at the end of which Puṣyavarman's (355-80) family began their rule. At the end of the fifth century A.D., *Nārāyaṇavarman* was on the throne. We have two rock inscription of this period: One of them is the *Nagājari-Khani-kargāon* fragmentary Stone Inscription and the other the *Umācal* Cave Inscription of *Surendravarman*, alias *Mahendravarman* (450-85). The language of the inscriptions is Sanskrit and the script Brahmi of the later

period.

The early Aryan settlers of Prāggyotiṣa must have brought with them the Brahmi scripts which have undergone changes resulting in the scripts of the above inscriptions. The scripts of the Nagājari-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription are considered by the Chief Epigraphist of the Government of India to be of about 500 A.D. Unlike other scripts of the inscriptions found in Kāmarūpa, the scripts of the Nagājari-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription has preserved the Brahmi b and v. From this we conclude it to be the earliest of all. Moreover, letters of this epigraph resemble to those of the Prayāga Praśasti of Samudra Gupta who "came to the throne sometime after A.D. 320 and died before A.D. 380." (An Advanced History of India, 1967, by Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta, P. 138). The *ca* of *nanacarā* of the Nagājari-Khanikargāon Fragmentary Stone Inscription (NK) resembles to the *ca* of *ghaṭotkaca* of the Prayāga Praśasti (PP); the *ma* of *paścimato* of NK to that of *mahārāja* of PP ; the *mā* of *māhattaro* of NK to that of *kumāradevyāmutpannasya* of PP ; the *mu* of *dibrumukhadah* of NK to that of the previous word of PP ; the *rā* of *nanacarā* of NK to that of *mahārāja* of PP ; and the *hā* of *vājīścehābhi* of NK to that of *mahārāja* of PP. Not only that, almost all the letters of NK resemble to those of PP. This clearly proves that the time of NK must be the same as that of PP., that is, the NK must have been engraved during the fourth century A.D.

We have a cave inscription on the north-eastern slope of the Kamakhya hill known as Umācal. Out of the 17 letters of the inscription, 9 are similar to

those of Gupta scripts of the fifth century A.D. and the rest 8 seems to be earlier forms. Prakritism noticed in this inscription is only one; we find *svāmināya* where it should have been *svāmine* (line 4).

The Prāggyotiṣa Prakrit of the pre-Christian era has undergone changes during this period and has resulted into the Kāmarūpī Prakrit. We know that the dative —āya, ending of the O.I.A. masculine a— declension has been extended to the ā-declension in Pali; e.g. *kaṇṇāya*, *vijjāya*, *taṇhāya* etc. But it has been extended to the ī-declension of *sāmī* (*svāmin*). In the Kāmarūpī Prakrit it has been extended to the ā-declension also. Due to want of Prakrit documents of this period, we cannot ascertain the nature of the language of this period.

The late Middle Indo-Aryan period begins from the sixth century to the end of the tenth century A.D. During this period Kāmarūpa, formerly known as Prāggyotiṣa, was ruled by Bhūti-varman (510-55) of the Puṣyavarman line and his descendants and at the end of this period by Tyāgasimha (970—90) of the Śāla-stambha (650—75) line.

This period is most eventful in the history of Kāmarūpa. Bhūti-varman is described as an *aśvamedhayāyin*, a performer of the aśvamedha sacrifice, in his Bargangā rock Inscription. His kingdom extended beyond the Teesta in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal and he donated lands to 208 Brahmin families to the west of this river. After the burning of the charter Bhaskarvarman (594-650) reissued it. The Teesta as the western frontier of Kāmarūpa continued to the days of Śālastambha who pushed it further west. His successors preserved the boundary intact. (R.D. Banerji

concludes that Gauḍa, Kalinga, Oḍra, etc. were under Harṣadeva (725-50) of this line for a long time before 748 A.D. (HCPA, P, 204)

That the modern Bengal was under the Kāmarūpa kings, from the emergence of the sea called Pūrvasāgara by the ancients, is also supported by other evidences. Dr S.K. Chatterjee in 'The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language,' 1975, (ODBL) writes, "Pali Jātaka and Tri-piṭaka literature which gives a faithful account of Aryandom in the centuries immediately before the Maurya period, mentions 16 great nations, among which Pundra, Vaṅga, Rāḍha or Suhma have no place." (P.70-71). In ancient times, the Gaṅgā and the Brahmaputra joined the sea called Pūrvasāgara where the present Bengal stands. According to the Greek accounts of the fourth century B.C., this sea was dotted with islands called Dvīpas. This is the reason why "a great deal of the delta was marshy and uninhabitable in the early period of Bengal history." (Ibid, P.67) Naturally such a marshy and uninhabitable place not only unfit to be the seat of a kingdom, but also quite unfit to be a part of a kingdom. That is why "there is nothing known definitely about Bengal till the time of the Guptas in the 4th. century A.C." (Ibid, P.74). "South Bengal (the lower reaches of the Ganges delta) does not seem to have been very much habitable below the 23rd degree of latitude, perhaps not much below the Tropic of Cancer, at the period we are speaking of (some four hundred years B.C.) : it seems to have been marshy and jungly track, infected by tigers, in which settlements were made from Pundra, Rāḍha, and Vaṅga latter (ODBL, P.74). As a nation

is a historically formed community of people, so "Bengal originally did not form one country and one nation." (Ibid, P. 67). No scholar so far has been able to name any king, let alone a dynasty of rulers, of Bengal from the fifth to the emergence of Gopāla in the middle of the eighth century A.D. The only name of ruler of this period is Śaśāṅka who, at first, was a local chief owing allegiance to Mahāsenā Gupta. The Kāmarūpa kings had extended their sway over northern and central Bengal after the decline of the Gupta power, when, about the last quarter of the sixth century, Mahāsenā Gupta tried to check the growing aggressions of the Kāmarūpa kings. Śaśāṅka Deva gave powerful aid to Mahāsenā Gupta who inflicted a defeat on Susthitavarman (585-93) of Kāmarūpa. The Gupta king thus recovered the northern and central Bengal over which Śaśāṅka was appointed as Mahāsāmanta or governor. Taking advantage of the death of Mahāsenā Gupta and the weakness of his minor son Mādhava Gupta, he proclaimed himself as independent king of the central and northern Bengal and struck coins. He attained to such power that he not only challenged the feeble Mādhava Gupta and the Kāmarūpa power, but also subjugated the lower Bengal, Chota Nagpur and Orissa. In about 600 A.D., after the death of Mahāsenā Gupta, he invaded the kingdom of Madhava Gupta, uprooted the sacred Bodhi tree in Gayā and threw into the river the sacred stone bearing the foot-prints of Gautama Buddha. Śaśāṅka held possession of that portion of territory which included the lands granted by Bhūtiavarman to a large number of Brahmins. Bhaskarvarman has been waiting for a favourable opportunity to regain the lost dominions and to retalliate the defeat inflicted on his father. As

has been evidenced by the Ganjam inscription of 619 A.D., Śaśāṅka had been defeated by Bhāskarvarman before this date and ousted from Bengal. But this inscription proves that he remained as a Sāmanta of Orissa under Mādhava Gupta. Barring the short period from 593 A.D. when Susthitavarman was defeated by Mahāsena Gupta with the aid of Śaśāṅka Deva and in acknowledgment of this the latter was appointed Mahāsāmanta of the north and central Bengal, to 618 A.D., when Śaśāṅka was defeated by Bhāskarvarman, the whole of the present Bengal remained under the Kāmarūpa kings. Dr. Chatterjee writes with much reluctance, "During the first decades of the 7th century, Bengal seems to have been conquered by Bhāskarvarman of Kāmarūpa, Harṣa's contemporary. After the death of Harṣa (646/7) there was a period of confusion and internecine warfare, accompanied by attacks by kings from other parts of India, and..... Bengal suffered from anarchy.....Barring the short period of Harṣa's rule, for about a century and a half (600-740 A.C.), there was no stable Government in Bengal." (ODBL p.79-80). But Dr. Chatterjee has not shown anywhere in the said treatise that there was at all any government in Bengal before that.

We have seen that after the defeat of Susthitavarman in 593 by Mahāsena Gupta, the lower, the central and the northern Bengal were ruled by Śaśāṅka Deva, the Mahāsāmanta appointed by the Gupta king, till 618 A.D., when Bhaskarvarman recovered his lost territory from him and ruled them up to 650 when he died. After him Śālastambha (650-675), Pālaka, Kumāra and Vajradeva continued when Harṣadeva (725-50) came to the throne. The "anarchy" referred to by Dr

Chatterjee must have been the rule of Bhaskarvarman, Śaṣastambha, Vijaya, Pālaka, Kumāra, Vajradeva and Harṣadeva of Kāmarūpa over Bengal. Incidentally, it can be pointed out that, to commemorate the ascending the throne, Bhaskarvarman started an era in 594 A.D. called Bhāskarābda which is still current in Bengal as Vaṅgābda.

There must have been some sort of chaos in the Kāmarūpa's colony of Bengal after the death of Harṣadeva. "Out of this chaos, the people of Bengal at last elected a strong man to be king over them—Gopāla, the son of Vapyata began a line of kings—the Pāla dynasty—which ruled Bengal for over 350 years." (ODBL, P.80). In the opinion of Dr Chatterjee, Bengal emerged as a nation about the eleventh century A.D. "When the Pāla power waned, C. 1100 A.C.,.....the people of Bengal had probably formed their separate individuality," (Ibid, P. 81).

The Pāla dynasty ruled over the west and the east Bengal but not over the north Bengal. "Under Pāla rule Bengal was to enjoy a period of prosperity undreamt of in her early annals. In contemporary records the earliest kings of the line are called Vaṅgapati and Guṇḍesvara, showing that they ruled over the twine kingdoms of Eastern and Western Bengal," (An Advanced History of India, P. 157). The north Bengal was under the Kāmarūpa kings even after the tenth century A.D.

From the sixth century to the tenth century A.D., the Kāmarūpī Prakrit developed into the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa. As there was no Apabhraṃśa literature cultivated in the eastern India, we have no specimen to show. But the instances of Prakritism, crept in the

Sanskrit language of the Kāmarūpa kings as found in their copper-plate inscriptions from the sixth century to the tenth century A.D., prove the existence of the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa. B.M. Barua, in his paper "The Scribe-engravers of Indrapāla's second Copper-plate and Prakrit of Pre-Ahom Times", published in the Indian Historical Quarterly, September, 1947, has believed that those Prakritisms have indicated "the nature and form of the (Apabhraṃśa) dialect as current in those times." Hiuen Tsang who arrived in Kāmarūpa in the early part of 643 A.D. and stayed here for a month and a half, has recorded about the Apabhraṃśa thus, "Their (Apabhraṃśa) language differs a little from that of mid-India." This re-affirms the claim made by B.M. Barua that the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa not identical to the Māgadhī Apabhraṃśa, was prevalent throughout the entire Kāmarūpa kingdom with her colonies in the seventh century A.D.

Dr Chatterjee has expressed his pain that "Hiuen Tsang is silent about the (Apabhraṃśa) language of Pundra-vardhana (north-central Bengal) or Karnaśuvārṇa (Kān-sonā in Murshidabad, central Bengal)." (ODBL, P. 78). But he has forgotten to mention that the Chinese traveller is also silent about the language of Samatāṭa (East Bengal bordering on the sea) and Tāmralipti (Tumlook, West Bengal) which he has visited during the same course of his journey. Hiuen Tsang's silence about the language of these tracts does not prove that their inhabitants are people without any language. He must have found the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa current among the inhabitants of Pundravardhana, Karnaśuvārṇa, Samatāṭa and Tāmralipti. This explains why he has been silent about the language

of these tracts. Rightly Dr. Chatterjee expects "one and identical language to have been current in North Central Bengal (Puṇḍravardhana) and North Bengal and West Assam (Kāmarūpa) in the 7th century, since these tracts, and other parts of Bengal had almost the same speech, at least in morphology, in the 15th and 16th centuries, as can be seen from the extant remains in Bengali and Assamese." (ODBL, P.79).

Supporting the Kāmarūpī origin of the Bengali language Dr. Chatterjee writes, "Perhaps this 'differing a little' of the Kāmarūpa speech from the speech of 'Mid-India' (and presumably also from those of Puṇḍravardhana and other places in Bengal) refers to those of Aryan sounds, which now characterise Assamese as well as North and East Bengali dialects.....and these phonetic modifications very likely were first brought about in the.....Prakrit or Apabhraṃśa dialect current in Kāmarūpa.....as noticed by the observant Hiuen Tshang; and from Kāmarūpa the.....pronunciations might have spread into the contiguous tracts of Bengal." (*Ibid*, P. 79)

To sum up : the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa was current in Kāmarūpa and her colonies in Bengal from the sixth to the tenth century A.D. The colonies in the east and west Bengal separated from Kāmarūpa in the middle of the eighth century A.D. under the Pālas and developed independently. The colony of the north Bengal remained with Kāmarūpa even after the tenth century A.D. and her language developed along with Kāmarūpa.

The following characteristics, culled at random, may be shown as the common characteristics of the

Kāmarūpa speech :

1. Genitive in - r : e.g.

mānuhar, "of a man," (Assamese),
mānšir, "of a man," (Rangpur),
jhan-kār, "of a man," (Jalpaiguri),
mānšir, "of a man," (Cooch Behar),
janer, "of a man," (Mymensing),
śakser, "of a man," (Noakhali),
mānšer, "of a man," (Bakharganj),
mānasyer, "of a man," (Chattagram),
mānuhar, "of a man," (Srihatta),
mānuhar, "of a man," (Cachar),
betār, "of a man," (Tripura),
janer, "of a man," (Dacca),
jhan-kār, "of a man," (Darjeeling),
joner, "of a man," (Jashohar),
mānsir, "of a man," (Khulna),
manușyer, "of a man," (Bengali), etc.

2. Past tense in —l : e.g.

kaile, "told," (Assamese),
kaile, "told," (Rangpur),
kahil, "told," (Jalpaiguri),
kail, "told," (Cooch Behar),
kailo, "told," (Mymensing),
kaila, "told," (Noakhali),
kaila, "told," (Bakharganj),
kail, "told," (Chattagram),
kahila, "told," (Srihatta),
kaila, "told," (Cachar),
kail, "told," (Tripura),
kailo, "told," (Dacca),
kohol, "told," (Darjeeling),

kafo, "told," (Jashohar),
 kale, "told," (Khulna),
 balla, "told," (Bengali), etc.

3. Oblique form of 3rd person

Pronoun in t—: e.g.,

tāk, "him," (Assamese),
 tār, "his," (Rangpur),
 tā, "him," (Jalpaiguri),
 tāk, "him," (Cooch Behar),
 tā, "him," (Mymensing),
 tā "him," (Noakhali),
 tā, "him," (Bakharganj),
 tār, "his," (Chattagram),
 tāder, "their," (Srihatta),
 tār, "his," (Cachar),
 tārār, "his," (Tripura),
 tā, "him," (Dacca),
 tyā, "him," (Darjeeling),
 tā, "him," (Jashohar),
 tā, "him," (Khulna),
 tī hāke, "him," (Bengali), et ,

The Kāmarūpa speech can be classified into the following three groups;

1. *South Western Kāmarūpa Speech* (includes the dialects of Mymensing, Noakhali, Bakharganj, Chattagram, Dacca, Jashohar, Khulna, Santipur, etc.);

2. *Western Kāmarūpa Speech* (includes the dialects of Rangpur, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, etc.); and

3. *Eastern Kāmarūpa Speech* (includes the dialects of Srihatta, Cachar, Goalpara, Barpeta, Palasbari, Ea ali,

Dharmapur, Patidarang, Sibsagar, etc.)

An attempt has been made to describe the nature of each group along with their individual historical background and examples.

I. South-Western Kāmarūpa Speech.

These dialect-groups politically constituted a separate entity in the middle of the eighth century A.D. The territory of this group is the Pāla kingdom of the eighth century A.D., that is, the modern Bengal excluding the northern, but including Bangladesh. It includes the dialects of Mymensing, Noakhali, Bakhar-ganj, Chattagram, Dacca, Jashohar, Khulna, Santipur, etc. The following are its common characteristics :

(a) Accusative in -ere : e.g.

bāpere, "(to) the father," (Mymensing),

bāpere, "(to) the father," (Noakhali),

more, "me", (Bakhar-ganj),

bāyare, "(to) the father" (Chattagram)

bāpere, "(to) the father," (Dacca),

bāpere, "(to) the father," (Jashohar),

bāpare, "(to) the father," (Khulna),

bāpare, "(to) the father." (Santipur) etc.

(b) Oblique form of 1st Person Singular Pronoun

in āmā—: e.g.

āmāre, "me" (Mymensing),

āmāke, "me," (Noakhali),

āre, "me", (Chattagram),

āmāre, "me," (Dacca).

āmāre, "me," (Jashohar),

āmāre, "me" (Khulna),

āmāke, "me" (Santipur), etc.

(c) Enclitic definitive —jan/jon: e.g.

ek janer, "of one," (Mymensing),

ek jan, "one," (Bakharganj),

yyākjaner, "of one," (Dacca),

ek joner, "of one," (Jashohar),

yāk jon, "one," (Khulna),

ek jan, "one," (Santipur), etc.

2. *Western Kāmarūpa Speech :*

When the west and the east Bengal formed a separate political entity under the Pālas in the middle of the eighth century A.D., modern north Bengal was a part of the Kāmarūpa kingdom ruled over by Harṣadeva and his descendants of the Śālastambha family. After the fall of this dynasty in 990 A.D., the family of Jitari (990—1138) and after that the family of Ārimatta (1138—1228) ruled over this kingdom.

In 1228, Prithu the last king of the Ārimatta family was killed by Malik-us-said Nasir-ud-din Mahmud Shah, who placed Sandhyā, the son of the deceased king on the throne on condition of tribute. From this time the kingdom was also known as Kamatā. The Kamatā kingdom was destroyed by Alauddin Hussain, the sultan of Gaur (1493—1519) in 1498. After a while the Bhuyan chiefs combined under the leadership of the most powerful against the Muslim hegemony and defeating Daniyal, the viceroy of Hussain, established

small principalities there. By conquering them in 1515, Bisvasimpha (1515-40) established the Koch kingdom which extended as far as the Karatoya in the west and the Barnadi, the eastern border of the present Kāmārūp district in the east, Naranārāyaṇa (1540-86), his son, extended the kingdom to the east upto the Bharali river of the Mangaldai sub-division and dividing the kingdom between him and his nephew Raghudeva made him the king to the east of the Sonkoṣ, the western border of the present Goalpara district. At the death of Naranārāyaṇa in 1586, his son Lakshmi Nārāyaṇa succeeded to the throne when Raghudeva declared himself independent. Making alliance with Isa Khan, the powerful Zamindar of the East Bengal, Raghudeva attacked Lakshmi Nārāyaṇa in 1596. Lakshmi Nārāyaṇa sought protection of the Mughal emperor Akbar the great (1556-1605). It was in 1596, when the Koch kingdom to the west of the Sonkoṣ separated forever from the eastern part, that the western Kāmārūpa group of speech began to grow independently.

This group of dialects comprises the dialects of Darjeeling Jalpaiguri. Cooch Behar the formerly western Koch kingdom, Rangpur, etc. Dr Chatterjee has remarked on this group of dialects, "The common dialect current in North Bengal (of today) and Assam continued as one speech." (ODBL, P. 98-99). After the battle of Plassey in 1757, the entire east India to the west of the Sonkoṣ came under the East India Company. The Company established their head-quarter in a small village, Sutanuti, which later on became known as Calcutta. In 1836, the Company decided to run the administration of Bengal, including the former west

Kāmarūpa, in Bengali and as a result this group of dialects came under the Bengali influence.

The common characteristics of this group of dialects are as follows :

(a) Accusative of 1st Person Singular Pronoun *mok*: eg.
mok, "me", (Jalpaiguri),
mok, "me", (Cooch Behar),
mok, "me", (Darjeeling),
mok, "me", (Rangpur), etc.

(b) First Person Future in —m : eg.
pām, "I shall get", (Jalpaiguri),
pāim, "I shall get", (Cooch Behar),
pām "I shall get", (Darjeeling), etc.

(c) First Person Singular Pronoun *mui*/*mūi* : e.g.,
mui, "I", (Jalpaiguri)
mūi, "I", (Cooch Behar),
mui, "I", (Darjeeling), etc.

3. *Eastern Kāmarūpa Speech* :

The Eastern Kāmarūpa group of dialects are spoken in the region to the east of Sonkoṣ now known as Asam. This is the eastern part of the Prāgjsotiṣa kingdom of the pre-Christian era. Later known as Kāmarūpa, it was ruled by the Varman dynasty (355—650), the Śālastambha family (650—990), the family of Jitari (990—1138) and the family of Arimatta (1138-1228).

About 1228, the Kāmarūpa kingdom disintegrated into six small kingdoms—(1) the Kamata kingdom (1228—1515) (2) the Koch kingdom (1515—1581),

(3) the Bhuyan principalities (1498—1515), (4) the Kachari kingdom (1228—1832), (5) the Chutiya kingdom (1189—1523) and (6) the Ahom kingdom (1228—1824).

In the first decades of the thirteenth century, the Ahom kingdom was bound by the river Dichang on the east, by the river Dikhau on the west, by the Brahmaputra on the north and the Patkai mountain on the south, all within the Sibsagar sub-division of the Sibsagar district. To the east of the Ahoms, the Chutiyas had their kingdom. Established in 1189, the Chutiya kingdom extended upto the Subansiri river in the north bank and upto the Dichang in the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Modern Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh district comprised their kingdom. The Ahoms defeated the Chutiya king in 1522 and extended their kingdom upto the Subansiri river. They occupied the Kachari kingdom upto the Dhansiri river in 1526 and upto Dimapur in 1536. Being driven out of the Brahmaputra valley the Kachari king established a new kingdom at Cachar. In 1571, the Ahom kingdom extended upto the Bharali river of the Mangaldai sub-division. Thus the Ahoms annexed the territory of the Chutiyas, the Bhuyans and the Kacharis. We have seen how out of the Kamata kingdom grew the Koch and how it was divided making the Sonkos river the divider. In 1615, during the reign of Parikshit Nārāyaṇa of the Raghudeva's line, the Mughals occupied Hajo and captured Parikshit who later on died. His younger brother Balinārāyaṇa sought the protection of the Ahoms, who, clearing off the Mughals, reinstated him as the king under them in 1616. Balinārāyaṇa died in 1637, when his son Mahendranārāyaṇa was installed as a vassal king. In 1657 the Ahom kingdom extended upto the

Sonkoṣ on both sides of the Brahmaputra. The kingdom of the Ahoms, then known as Asamas, became known as Asamar rājya, the kingdom of the Asama, later Asama rājya, and Asam.

The language of this region comprises the dialects of Goalpara, Barpeta, Palasbari, Bajali, Dharmapur, Patidarang, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Darang, Dibrugarh, Cachar and Srihatta. Dialects of Cachar and Srihatta were politically isolated, not only from the rest of the dialects, but also from each other. As the dialect areas of Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Dibrugarh and Darang were under the political rule of the Ahoms, who had their headquarter in Sibsagar for a longer period, their developments became identical. But the dialect areas of Goalpara, Barpeta, Palasbari, Bajali, Dharmapur, Patidarang came to the Ahom rule much later and as a result, their identical developments were hampered.

The following are the common characteristics of the eastern Kāmarūpa speech :

- (a) Nominative in -e : e.g.
 bābue, "the babu," (Srihatta);
 c'huṭa'āy, "the younger," (Cachar);
 chata'āye, "the younger," (Goalpara);
 puteke, "the son," (Barpeta);
 putāke, "the son," (Palasbari);
 xaruṭui, "the younger," (Bajali);
 xaruṭui, "the younger," (Dharmapur);
 xaruṭui "the younger," (Patidarang);
 xaruṭowe, "the younger," (Sibsagar), etc.
- (b) Locative in -ta : e.g.
 jilāt, "in the district," (Srihatta);
 hisyāt, "in the shire," (Cachar);

deśat, "in the country," (Goalpara),
 dekhkhenot, "in the country," (Barpeta),
 dekhhot, "in the country," (Palasbari),
 dexato, "in the country," (Bajali),
 dexot, "in the country," (Patidarang),
 dexat, "in the country," (Sibsagar), etc.

(c) genitive in -ar ~~deśar~~ :

bişayar, "of the property," (Srihatta),
 sāmānar, "of the property," (Cachar),
 mānhor, "of a man," (Barpeta),
 mānhur, "of a man," (Palasbari),
 māhnot, "of a man," (Bajali),
 mānuhor, "of a man," (Dharmapur),
 mānhur, "of a man," (Patidarang),
 mānuhar, "of a man," (Sibsagar), etc.

The following summary gives a complete picture of the origin and development of the Assamese language from the fifth century B.C. to the present day.

The Aryans who migrated to the ancient Prāgjyotiṣa around the fifth century B.C. carried with them the Middle Indo-Aryan dialects, earlier forms of the eastern Asokan. This gave rise to the Prāgjyotiṣa Prakrit of the pre-Christian era. From the beginning of the Christian era, the Prāgjyotiṣa Prakrit underwent changes to become the Kāmarūpī Prakrit. By the beginning of the sixth century A.D., the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa grew out of the Kāmarūpī Prakrit. In the middle of the eighth century A.D., the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa split into two groups. One group of dialects flourished under the newly constituted Pāla kingdom and became the mother of the modern Bengali. This group of dialects is termed the South Western

Kāmarūpa Speech. The rest developed together, and from the beginning of the eleventh century A.D., the Kāmarūpī Apabhraṃśa turned into Kāmarūpī or early Assamese. In the sixteenth century A.D., a group of the early Assamese speakers separated politically. This gave rise to the Western Kāmarūpa Speeches. The remaining group of dialects grew independently as the Eastern Kāmarūpa Speeches. Later on, this group of language became known as Asamīyā or Assamese.

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