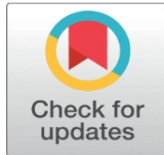


## COMPARATIVE STUDY ON SOME PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES OF STANDARD ASSAMESE AND NALBARIA DIALECT

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### ABSTRACT

Up to 17th century the Kamrupi dialect had special influence on the field of literature and culture of Assam. Subsequently, the influence of Kamrupi language decreased due to the political and social factors. Before the coming of the British, the lower Assam region, especially undivided Kamrup district was the centre of literary exercises and scholarly activities. But a new literary language originated in the middle of the 19th century when the American Baptist Missionaries started publishing 'Arunodoi' using the local dialects of Sibsagar region. Consequently dialect of Sibsagar was standardized as standard Assamese and the Assamese language of Kamrupa becomes lesser known dialect and it has been confined to the spoken language of the greater Kamrup region. The spoken language of Kamrup, Nalbari, Baksa and Barpeta districts of undivided Kamrup district is regarded as Kamrupi dialect. The spoken variety of Nalbari region called as Nalbaria dialect is a branch of Kamrupi dialect. Nalbaria dialect exhibits certain homogeneity like, use of triphthong, frequent use of apenthetic vowel etc. which are not found in standard Assamese. The final diphthongs /oi/ and /ou/ of standard Assamese generally appear as /e/ and /o/ in Nalbaria dialect. This paper attempts to highlight some phonological differences between standard Assamese and Nalbaria dialect and it attempts to describe some phonological features of standard Assamese and Nalbaria dialect in comparative terms.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Assamese is the principal vernacular and official language of Assam, a northeastern state and it is spoken there. The native people call it Asomiya. It is a descendant of Magadhan group of the Indo-Aryan family of languages. The word Assamese is an English one, built on the same principle as Shinghalese, Japanese etc.

Assamese is one among the New Indo-Aryan languages. The Modern Indo-Aryan languages prevalent in India have evolved in to a form of today by evolution through Pali, Prakrit and Apabhramsa level. Assamese, Bengali Oriya etc are among the languages that have crossed different levels like Pali, Prakrit and Apabhramsa dialect.

Though there are controversies regarding the origin of Assamese language, it is widely accepted view that Assamese is a descendant of Indo-Aryan language. "It is supposed that Assamese is developed from Magadhi prakrit of Eastern group of Sanskrit language. The Magadhi prakrit gave rise to four Apabhramsa dialect viz. Radha, Vagna, Varendra and Kamrupa. Out of these four the last one Kamrupa Dialect spread to east keeping north of the Ganges river and it is spoken in North Bengal and in Assam". (Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, 1926) G.A. Grierson, Dr. B.K. Kakati and many other Assamese linguists are the supporters of this view. Dr. Golok Chandra Goswami (1982) says, "It is supposed that like other Aryan languages Assamese was also born from Apabhramsa dialect developed from Magadhi prakrit of the eastern group of Sanskrit language"

Among the controversial view regarding the origin of Assamese language the view that it is developed from Magadhi prakrit is widely accepted view. Around 13th century Assamese language started taking the form. During this period two great literary works were created such as Dronaparba by Rudra Kandali and Ramayana by Madhab Kandli. Though they were basically translation from original Sanskrit it also had some local touch with description. So the earliest literary works, which maybe claimed distinctly Assamese commence from the late thirteenth century, though there are some linguists who trace the beginning from an earlier period. Golok Chandra Goswami for instance mentions the remark of Hiuen Tsang, a great Chinese traveler of the seventh century about the language of Kamrupa when he visited this place in 643 AD during the reign of Kumara Bhaskara Varman. He recorded that the language of Kamrupa different a little from that of mid-India. It should be noted that the present day standard literary language, based on the eastern dialect of Sibsagar did not evolve from the early Assamese literary standard. A new literary language originated in the middle of the 19th century when the missionaries established the first printing press in 1836. In a broader sense before the coming of the British the lower Assam (undivided Kamrupa and Goalpara District) was the centre of literary exercises and scholarly activities.

## 2. DIALECT OF ASSAM: THE NALBARIA DIALECT AND ITS LANGUAGE AREA

The Assamese language prevalent in Assam which extends from Sadiya of Eastern part to Dhubri in the West, is not the same everywhere. Assamese language originated from Magadhi Prakrit and entered Assam through western side and formed a distinct language in the western region. At that time the western region of Assam was politically strong, so lower Assam or Western Assam was the centre of literature and culture. Later on the centre of Assamese language and literature shifted from the western part to the Eastern part. From 1228CE to 1826CE, for about six hundred years upper Assam remained under the rule of Ahom dynasty. As a result the language of Upper Assam becomes almost the same everywhere in upper Assam region. Before the coming of the British the lower Assam region was the centre of literary exercises and scholarly activities. But a new literary language originated in the middle of the 19th Century when the American Baptist Missionaries started publishing Arunodoi, the first Assamese periodical paper using local dialect of Sibsagar region. Consequently the dialect of Sibsagar was standardized as standard Assamese and the Assamese language of Kamrupa becomes lesser known dialect of the greater Kamrup region. The spoken language of Kamrup, Nalbari, Baksa and Barpeta districts of undivided kamrup district is regarded as Kamrupi dialect in broader sense

Assamese has been divided dialectically in to eastern Assamese and western Assamese by Dr. Bani Kanta Kakati. Some other classify into three kinds of dialects like Ujani, Kamrupi and Goalpariya. These dialects are also having various sub-dialects or different distinct colloquial varieties.

The spoken language prevalent in undivided kamrup district is said as Kamrupi dialect. There are also some other dialects within this kamrupi dialect. Barpetia Nalbaria, Pati-Darrangia, Palashbaria and Sagaya are the other dialects which are also said by some linguists like Dr. Ramesh Pathak as sub-dialects of Kamrupi. Anyway the undivided

Kamrup district is not a homogenous dialectal area. There are different dialects in different localities. It has been noticed that the points of differences amongst the dialect of Kamrup are mostly confined to details of phonetics and spread over to morphology and vocabulary. Nalbariya dialect is a branch of Kamrupi dialect. The Nalbariya dialect exhibits certain homogeneity and identified itself as one of the notable dialects in Assamese. Since Nalbariya dialect is an important branch of Kamrupi dialect it resembles the other Kamrupi dialects in many cases. Dr. Upendra Nath Goswami shows three different colloquial forms of Kamrupi dialect of which the Nalbari region including its nearer places shows a distinct form of its own and that is regarded at present as Nalbariya Assamese. or Nalbariya dialect. Goswami UN (1970) says, "The sub-dialectal varieties of kamrupi may be grouped mainly into three divisions - Western, Central and Southern. The variety spoken in the area comprising Barpeta, Sundaridiya, Patbausi, Bhabanipur etc. is western, that of Nalbari and its surrounding areas is central and that of Palasbari, Chaygaon, Boko etc. is Southern. The Central dialect is the most wide spread one. Among these varieties some divergence exist particularly in phonology. It can be understood from Goswami's statement that the Assamese language has its own local varieties in the three regions of Kamrupa - West, central and south. So it can be said that the dialects spoken in and around Nalbari region in the central part of Kamrup (Kamrupi dialect) has its own characteristics so far as phonology is concerned Baksa district in the North side; Kamrup district on the South, a part of the Kamrup district and the Darrang district are on the Eastern side and the Barpeta district on the West are situated as the boundary of Nalbari region, Nalbari is the homeland of various castes and communities like Assamese Hindu, Assamese Muslim, Bodo Nepali etc. The differences between the standard Assamese and the Nalbariya dialect are found over the field of Phonology, morphology and vocabulary. But our main concern is with the Comparative study of phonology of Standard Assamese and Nalbaria dialect.

### 3. SOME PHONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STANDARD ASSAMESE AND NALBARIA DIALECT ARE AS FOLLOWS.

i) Medieval vowels of standard Assamese are rarely pronounced or mostly slurred over in Nalbaria dialect e.g.

St Ass	Nalb D.	Eng
/ bisðni /	/bisni/	a hand made fan
/m ðkðrɑ /	/ məkrɑ /	spider
/ kðtari/	/katri/	knife
/komorɑ/	/kumrɑ/	Gourd

ii. Apenthesis is the notable characteristic of Nalbaria dialect. Eg.

St Ass	Nalb D.	Eng
/ kɑziɑ /	/ kɑiza /	quarrel
/ pð niɑ /	/ pɑinɑ /	liquid
/zulia/	/zuila/	liquid
/mekuri/	/meukri/	Cat

iii) The final diphthong /oi/ and /ou/ of standard Assamese generally appear as / e/ and / o/ in Nalbaria dialect e.g

St Ass	Nalb D.	Eng
/ zɑkoi / -	/ zɑkhe/ -	a fish capturing device

/t̪ə kou/ -	/t̪ ə ko/	one kind of tree becomes
/kəoi/ -	/kəe/	a fish
/g̪əroi/	/g̪əre/	a fish

iv) The tendency of aspiration is charctistic in the Nalbaria dialect.

St Ass	Eng	Nalb D.
/s̪ə ku /	eye	/sokhu /
/sok̪ə /	sharp	/s̪ə kh̪ə /
/xuk̪ən /	dry	/xukhn̪ə /
/thot/	horny mouth of bird	/th̪əth/

v) Haplology is noticed in Nalbaria dialect. As tendency of shortening the common name exists the instances are found mostly in case of common names and in relationship terms. eg.

St Ass	Eng	Nalb D.
/d̪əd̪ə/	/elder brother/	/d̪ə/
/kok̪əideo/	elder brother	/k̪ə/
/əb̪əhel̪ə/	neglect	/hel̪ə/
/n̪əɾ̪ək̪ənt̪ə/	a name	/n̪əɾ̪ə/

vi) In a disyllabic word the second vowel /ə / of Assamese becomes /̪ə / in Nalbaria dialect e.g.

St Ass	Eng	Nalb D.
/t̪ə p̪ə t̪ /	hot	/t̪ ə p̪ət /
/bhit̪əɾ̪/	interior	/bhit̪əɾ̪/
/m̪ ə ɾ̪ ə m̪/	love	/m̪ ə ɾ̪əm /
/k̪əg̪əz̪/	paper	/k̪əg̪əz̪/

vii) In Nalbaria dialect two /̪ə/ sounds are situated closely but in ST. Assamese the first /̪ə/ of N.D. be comes /ə/, /o/ or /e/ e.g

St Ass	Eng	Nalb D.
/r̪əz̪ə/	king	/r̪əz̪ə/
/s̪ək̪ə/	wheel	/s̪ək̪ə/
/ed̪ə/	ginger	/əd̪ə/
/t̪ək̪ə/	money	/t̪ək̪ə/

viii) One notable difference between Nalbaria dialect and St. Assamese is the interchange of the consonant sounds /r/, /l/ and /n/.e.g

**St Ass**

/ nom /

/xɔ̃ rir /

/nez/

**Eng**

hair of body becomes

body „

tail

**Nalb D.**

/ lum / in N.D.

/ x oril /

/lez/

ix) Use of triphthong is not found in st Asamese but in Nalbaria dialect use of triphthong is found e.g.

**St Ass**/bh $\alpha$ oria/

/keolia/

/dourise/

**Eng**

actor

young devotee

has run

**Nalb D.**/bh $\alpha$ uir $\alpha$ //keuil $\alpha$ //d $\alpha$ uissi/

When in Standard Assamese /r/ is preceded by / ɔ̃ / The /r/ gets dropped in Nalbaria dialect and the following consonant becomes geminated. eg.

**St Ass**/d $\partial$ rz $\alpha$ //k $\partial$ rdoi//S $\partial$ rdi// p $\partial$ rd $\alpha$ /**Eng**

door

a fruit

cold

screen / veil

**Nalb D.**/d $\partial$ zz $\alpha$ //k $\partial$ dde// s $\partial$ ddi// p $\partial$ dd $\alpha$ /**4. CONCLUSION**

At one time though the Kamrupi language was the language of literary exercise and scholarly activity in Assam, later on it remained the only spoken language of a particular region due to political factors. One of the branches of this kamrupi language, the Nalbaria dialect has some similarities and still bear many features of it. The study of phonology of Standard Assamese and Nalbaria dialect in comparative terms serves significant purpose. Many features of Nalbaria dialect seems to be strange to the speakers of the Standard Assamese. But after knowing the particular features of the dialect and the reasons of the peculiarities a better understanding among the speakers of both the dialects will prevail. Some knowledge of the Nalbaria dialect will be helpful in the proper study of early Assamese literature which is mainly written in Kamrupi dialect.

**CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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None.

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