

# Assamese Language As A Medium Of Education: A Brief Analysis With Past, Present And Future Aspect Of Social Condition Of Assamese

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**Abstract:** Education is the primary source of acquiring knowledge. Language is the main medium for receiving education. It is a challenge to ascertain the position of regional languages as medium of learning. M. K Gandhi said that "acquiring knowledge in mother tongue is as necessary as for a child to have mother's milk for development. Assamese is the main language of the land of Assam. But due to some political or social reason t Assamese languages faced many challenges in every time. If Assamese becomes the learning medium it will not only enrich the language but also benefit its speakers. In this paper effort is made to discuss about the future of Assamese as a medium of learning.

**Index Terms:** Assamese language, medium, education, mother tongue, regional language etc.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Whenever there comes the future prospects of a language we need to look into the history of that particular language. In the case of Assamese language we have to go back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD , where we have found the inscription of 'Umachal' and 'Nagajari khanikar village' which give us glimpses of the origin of Assamese language. The language spoken by its common people and it's uses in the royal and administrative purpose provides evidence of its existence. From 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, various inscription, 'Charyapada' , 'Prahlaad Charit' of Hemswaraswati, 'Ramayana' translated by Madhav Kandali, notable creations of Sankardev and Madhavdev, 'Charit Puthis' , 'Buranji'(historical chronicles), books on practical knowledge etc reflect the traditional literary legacy of Assamese language. The advent of British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Assam added a new dimension to the language. Assamese was removed as a medium of language from schools, courts for official works by the British government in the year 1836. Only in 1872, Assamese language received a status as the official language of Assam.. During the period from 1836 to 1873, the language faced many challenges. In 1962 and 1972, the language movement of Assam also carried out much positive as well as negative impact. Assamese is taught in many Colleges and Universities within and outside Assam. Assamese is recognized as a medium of research work in the field of highest academic degrees like M.Phil and Ph.d in many institutions. The rise of globalization has also put forward many serious challenges before the Assamese language. We have tried to figure out the upcoming future of the Assamese language as a medium of education. Education is the primary source of acquiring knowledge. Language is the main medium for receiving education. It is a challenge to ascertain the position of regional languages as mediums of learning in India. M.K Gandhi asserted that acquiring

knowledge for a child in mother tongue is as necessary as to have his mother's milk. For development, The Kothari Commission also suggested that mother tongue should be made the medium of learning up to University level in their reported publication in 1967. Assam is a land of diverse languages, so it is important to know what should be the medium for learning. Globalization may have brought many positive gains but at the sometime, it has caused many hurdles too. Our main purpose is to study about the future of Assamese language as a medium of learning in the contemporary time.

## 2 PURPOSE

This paper aims to present a picture of the history, present status and the scopes for further studies of Assamese language as a medium of learning by giving example of numerous works done in this particular language.

## 3 IMPORTANCE

This paper aims to cast light on the future of Assamese language as medium of instruction by analyzing the data of past and present condition of Assamese language in various academic field of Assam.

## 4 METHOD

In the research methods mainly used in this study are analytical and descriptive methods. The necessary materials are collected from library and used, with proper observation and analysis, to justify the proposed ideas.

## 5 SCOPE

Besides getting a clear picture of the Assamese language as a medium of instructions in the past years, this paper seems to focus on the present situation of the Assamese language and the probable condition it might get in near future as a medium of education. The significance of this paper lies in its effort to give a critical look at the condition of the Assamese language from its beginning to the present situation and most importantly, the discussion of the lacks of its practice and various steps for the development of the language in various academic sectors will be relevant.

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## 6.0 HISTORY OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF EDUCATION

The 'Nagajari khanikar village' inscription of 5<sup>th</sup> century is considered as the oldest evidence of Assamese language. Mukunda Madhav Sharma said, "we can speculate that Nagajari Khanikar village inscription dated easily 5<sup>th</sup> century by observing the Umachal inscription and other evidences." It is obvious that in order to inscribe the language on edict that language must have been prevalent at point of time. People used Assamese Language as a medium of expressing their feelings and also for administrative and political works. The Chinese traveler, Hiuen Tsang, also narrated that Assamese language was prevalent in the ancient Kamrupa. He travelled kamrupa during the reign of Kumar Vaskarvarman during 7<sup>th</sup> century. But the language was not termed as Assamese till 18<sup>th</sup> century. It was probably called as 'Desi Bhasa'. Pitambar Kavi in his writing mentioned about 'Desi Bhasa' Thus, it proves that Assamese is the connecting language among various tribes of Assam and north east. We get many details of Assamese language in many edicts, inscriptions, Xasipatia puthis (manuscripts). In the 10<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> century, many Buddhist Sidhacharyas (philosophic writer) wrote '*Charjyageet*' depicting the essence of Buddhism. The language used in those mystical songs clearly proves the existence of Assamese language. The translation of Valmiki's Ramayana into Assamese in 14<sup>th</sup> century showed about the authenticity of the language. The language had public appeal and depth that made possible of translation of Ramayana. The duo of Sankaradeva and Madhavdeva started the golden period of Assamese language. The literary work produced during their time building a strong foundation of the language. The *Borgeet*, *Ankiya Nat*, *sacred texts*, *translations of 'Bhagawat Puran'*, *Krishna stories* enriched the Assamese literature to a massive extent. The creation of *Ankiya Nat* is very unique invention of Sankardeva in medieval history. Sankardeva, through all his life strived for binding the Assamese society with love, compassion and peace and the language provided the medium for the same. Apart from *Vaishnavite literature*, *Charit puthis* (biographies of Vaishnava gurus) and *Buranji* (chronicles of Ahom Monarchs) also published in Assamese language. Works on practical literature were also written in Assamese language like *Ghora-nidana* and *hastividyarnava*. But in the year 1836, British government removed Assamese language as the medium for official works for 36 years. Later in 1873, Assamese was re-established as the official language of the province. Those 37 years of gap was the darkest phase in the history of Assamese language. Assamese gained its identity only due to the endeavors of Baptist Missionaries and some educated Assamese youths. After the independence in 1947, Indian states were recognized on the basis of language. The language Act of 1960 and language Movement in Assam established the Assamese language in a prestigious form. In 1948, University Grants Commission was established and they suggested providing education in mother tongue in the schools of India. In 1967, the Education Minister of India Dr. Triguna Sen implemented the suggestion of the Commission. Out of 75 universities, 37 universities have mother tongue as imparting medium apart from English. Many steps have been taken by the Central government as well as state government to emphasis on Assamese language as a medium of learning.

### 6.1 Present condition of Assamese language as a medium

#### of education

Assamese is a medium of learning in Brahmaputra valley and Bengali is that of Barak valley. Bodo is the learning medium in Bodoland area. English is used simultaneously. The rise of private schools across the state mostly prefer English language as a medium of education which suppress the Assamese language and its value to the users. Rather their status is worsening day by day due to multiple reasons. The government policies are mostly criticized for the state of government schools. Parents are also attracted towards private schools avoiding enrolling their children in government schools only those who can't afford fees of private schools have to opt for government schools. Even in universities, the higher study of any language has been taught in the medium of English language. Competitive examinations like UPSC, APSC etc. can be written in Assamese, but there is a lack of study materials in Assamese language. It is very disheartening to see that English is widely promoted to acquire knowledge rather than knowing in Assamese. Assamese is recognized as a constitutional language in the 5<sup>th</sup> schedule of Indian Constitution. The government and official works in Assam are done in Assamese but the use has reduced considerably over the years. The public, pressure groups like Assam Sahitya Sabha raise their voice for correct use and promotion of Assamese in public domain. But somehow, the awareness has not yet developed that was expected.

### 6.2 FUTURE OF ASSAMESE LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF EDUCATION

To discuss the topic further, we need to look what thinkers, scholars, associations and intellectual said about providing education in regional language rather English Language - Voicing own's opinion Mahatma Gandhi said, "I must cling to my mother tongue as to my mother's breast, in spite of its short comings. It alone can give me the life-giving milk" (Harijan, 1946). According to Rabindranath Tagore, "In learning a language, when from mere words we reach the laws of words, we have gained a great deal. But if we stop at that point and concern ourselves only with the marvels of the formation of a language, seeking the hidden reason of all its apparent caprices, we do not reach that end, for grammar is not literature ....when we come to literature, we find that, though it conforms to the rules of grammar, it is yet a thing of joy; it is freedom itself. The beauty of a poem is bound by strict laws, yet it transcends them. The laws are its wings. They do not keep it weighed down. They carry it to freedom. Its form is in law, but its spirit is in beauty. Law is the first step towards freedom, and beauty is the complete liberation which stands on the pedestal of law. Beauty harmonizes in itself the limit and he beyond - the law and the liberty". According to Satyen Bose, 'The medium of language in education should be the mother tongue of the students in university level'. Sarbapali Radhakrishnan said, 'Higher studies should be taught in regional languages'. According to Kothari Ayog (1964-65), 'The medium of language in education should be in regional language instead of English language'.

### 6.3 Positive Aspect

1. There is a widespread use of Assamese for writing. Today, nearly 10 to 12 Assamese newspapers are in circulation. Every year many monthly, fortnightly, annually magazines came to light and they have huge numbers of readers as well.

2. Still large section of lower middle class section opts for Assam government schools. Though the number has decreased over the years but still many students still go for study in the medium of Assamese.
3. Developed nations such as Japan, China, and Russia laid emphasis on their mother tongue. We have seen that many Assamese personalities have made contribution to the country in various fields and them all hail from vernacular medium.
4. Universities such as Dibrugarh University, Gauhati University, KKHSO University, Sankardev University provide Ph.D course for the language, literature and cultural fields in Assamese language.
5. In our daily lives and personal space, Assamese is widely used to communicate our feeling. Language always has a sentiment with humans.
6. These aspects show us that Assamese language might have faced many challenges but it still possesses its sanctity and authenticity for Assamese people.

#### 6.4 Challenges before Assamese Language

1. According to 2011 census, the member of Assamese speaking in Assam is 48.38%. The decreasing members are clear indication of challenges before Assamese language.
2. The performance of government students in HSLC and HS level is far behind in comparison with the private English medium schools. It is also a matter of concern.
3. One of the barriers of learning in the medium of Assamese language is that in higher studies there are negligible amount of study related books to be found in this Assamese language.
4. All major higher education is imparted in English; therefore many students do not give much importance towards learning.
5. The lack of job opportunities in the state also compels students to learn English for better job opportunities.

#### 6.5 Suggestions for future development of Assamese language as a medium of education

- i. If the authorities and public jointly tries to preserve and promote the Assamese Language among the masses then there is some possibilities for the sustainability of the language.. At one point of time Hebrew lost its glory but after formatizer of instead, Hebrew became its national language.
- ii. More formulating policies on languages won't help. Strict implementation is required for the same.
- iii. The Assam state government should make a rule on learning Assamese is compulsory for any kind of government jobs, than it may leave a positive impact.
- iv. All the private and government sector interviews should take place in Assamese medium.
- v. Government should aid funds for translation work in Assamese for enriching the literacy legacy.
- vi. A strong public opinion should be formed for the preservation, promotion and protection of Assamese language. Every citizen needs to take responsibility in his own hand to protect the language in its purest form and promote as much as possible.

#### 7.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many discussions, deliberations have taken place in various seminars about the future of Assamese language as a medium of learning. But we have not come across detailed

and scientific study about the topic till now. The Christian Missionaries initiated many works for the growth and development of the language during the British rule, like publishing dictionary, grammar, magazine, phrases and proverbs, 'Report on the province of Assam' (1835-54) by Mofat Mills etc. In a penname called 'A Native', Anandaram Dhekial Phukan wrote 'A few Remarks on the Assamese language, and vernacular Education in Assam'. After that, Many literary magazines published for developing the language literature. 'Jonaki', 'Bahi', 'Bijuli', 'Chetona', 'Abahan', etc. played a vital role in that period of time. The Assam Sahitya Sabha recently published 'shiksha Madhyam', 'Adhunik bhasha Axmiya' (1969) edited by Hari Prasad Neog, 'Astittar Xonkat Axomiya Bhasha' written by Raja Chakraborty and 'Bharatar Uttar-Purbanchalt Axomiya Bhasha gurutta' by Ramesh Pathak are some notable work in this area. But these works seems insufficient to come to a conclusion. So, it's important to carry out more research based study in the above mentioned topic.

#### 8.0 CONCLUSION

This paper aims to cast light on the future of Assamese language as medium of instruction by analyzing the data of past and present condition of Assamese language in various academic field of Assam. After analyzing the data we can conclude as follows –

1. There is a widespread use of Assamese for writing. Today, nearby 10 to 12 Assamese newspapers are in circulation. Every year many monthly, fortnightly, annually magazines came to light and they have huge numbers of readers as well.
2. Still large section of lower middle class section opts for Assam government schools. Though the number has decreased over the years but still many students still go for study in the medium of Assamese.
3. These aspects show us that Assamese language might have faced many challenges but it still possesses its sanctity and authenticity for Assamese people. Government should aid funds for translation work in Assamese for enriching the literacy legacy.

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