

Thursday, July 21, 2011 8:25 AM

To
Ms. Magda Danish
Unicode Consortium Inc. USA

Dear Madam

Greetings from Guwahati, Assam, India. I am grieved to know that the Assamese writing system has been kept as a sub-class of Bengali in Unicode.

In 1836 the British rulers imposed Bengali in Assam thinking that it was a patois or colloquial dialect or distortion of Bengali. It took about 37 years of struggle which was spearheaded by the American Baptist Missionaries led by Dr. Miles Bronson in convincing the British administration that Assamese was a distinct language. Assamese was finally reinstated in 1873.

The origin of Assamese script can be traced back to as early as 300 B.C., found in inscription on stones during the reign of Ashoka the Great. Thus, it has a long history and it developed through the ages. The ancient name of Assam was Kamrup and for a considerable period its territory was extended to the Mithila area of Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. There are sure proofs of distinct Kamrupi script which was written in the 8th century. The people of those areas came under the influence of culture and language of Kamrup. Moreover, there had been cordial relations of Kamrup with the neighboring kingdoms. The people of those areas either used this ancient Assamese script or borrowed the idea of this script. That is why there is a close affinity of Assamese with Bengali, Maithili, Oriya (pronunciation) and Manipuri. There are many historical and documentary evidences to show that Assamese is a distinct language from Bengali.

Therefore, Madam, we feel that a separate slot be given to Assamese or rename the script as Kamrupi. A third option can be to rename the script as AMBM for Assamese-Maithili-Bengali-Manipuri basing on the chronological development and use of the script in the ancient times.

Please let me know if I need to suffice with documentary evidences.

Hope you will look into the matter and do the needful.

With regards.
Yours sincerely

A. Haque
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To
Ms Magda Danish
Unicode Consortium/Inc
USA

Madam,

There has been considerable displeasure over the naming of writing system of the Assamese language as a subclass of Bengali .

The fact needs to be cleared up regarding the nomenclature of the similar alphabets used by the Assamese, Maithili, Bengali and Manipuri languages. This script is actually the “KAMRUPI” script, it developed in the ancient kingdom of Kamrup, the precursor or the older name of Assam. Kamrup had fixed boundaries from east to west. In east it ended in present eastern border of India and in the west it extended up to the river Korotoya now in the areas of so-called north Bengal. The indigenous people of this area of so-called north Bengal still differentiate themselves from the Bengalis and a movement for a separate state of Kamatapur spearheaded by extremist organisations like KLO (Kamatapur Liberation Organisation) with close links with extremist ULFA is there.

From time to time the ancient kingdom of Kamrup in pre-Muslim era used to make conquering forays into adjacent areas of mainland India and had ruled many areas of mainland India. Consequently whole of Bengal, eastern part of Bihar mainly the Mithila area and Orissa were under rule of Kamrup for considerable period of time. The KAMRUPI SCRIPT is used only in areas which were part of ancient kingdom of Kamrup or were under the rule of Kamrup. So in Bihar this script is used only in Mithila area which was once under Kamrup rule but not in areas of Bihar to the west of it which were never under Kamrup rule. The similarities of these languages are also due to this fact of the Kamrup rule in all these areas.

Currently the Maithilis ie. the indigenous people of Mithila use the Devnagari script for most purposes but they still retain the use of the Kamrupi script for religious purposes. But there is a move by several of the Maithili scholars to revive the Mithilakshar script, the name with which this form of Kamrupi script is known there.

The alphabets of the Assamese and the Maithili versions are almost same and these scripts are phonetically complete. Whereas the form used by the Bengali is phonetically lacking because they do not have any alphabet to represent the sound “wa”. This is because the Bengali was using the same script as is used by the Assamese till the coming of the British. Notable example is the alphabet for the sound “ra”, they

were using the same alphabet the Assamese and the Maithili uses till the British period. Then they started using the alphabet the Maithili uses for denoting “wa” for representing the sound “ra” and in the process ended up having no alphabet for representing “wa”. The sound “wa” in the present Bengali is represented on assumption by the alphabet used to denote the sound “ya”.

The largest in number and oldest in time of the literatures in this system of writing belong exclusively to the Assamese language. Maithili is the second oldest in terms of time of writing and literary history of Bengali in the pre-British era comes much later than the other two.

In the British period due to unscrupulous manipulation by a section of Bengali scholars and intelligentsia, the British rulers were manipulated in believing that the Assamese is just a peasant form or patois of the Bengali language. Thus started more than seventy years of Bengali imposition as the official and educational language in Assam. It was due to the struggle of the American Baptist Missionaries complemented with the effort of the budding Assamese intelligentsia and right thinking Bengali intellectuals who opposed their parochial compatriots, that Assamese was given back its rightful place in Assam.

There is now a move by a section of intellectuals to rename the writing system as “EASTERN NAGARI”, this is far more erroneous because this script has nothing to do with Nagari form of writing except a common source of borrowing of the schema or concept but not the alphabets from the Brahmi script.

The script with which the Kamrupi script share the highest similarity is the Tibetan script. The major similarities of the Kamrupi and the Tibetan system of writing is the use of angular or triangular form or shapes in the alphabets. I have mapped out the alphabets in the attached pdf file. The Kamrupi-Tibetan linkages which are quite obvious even to a laymen have been overlooked and not thought of by other scholars who had written on the subject. The Unicode has therefore wrongly written about the Bengali(???) / Assamese script as being very similar with Devnagari.

We are in the process of making a website on the issue of wrong nomenclature of this writing system, which will be in the form of a memorandum with provisions for obtaining signatures online and send to the Unicode Consortium for rectification of the injustice. The proposal for the same has three options for the rectification :

FIRST : Give a separate slot to the Assamese writing system / fonts

SECOND : Rename the script as KAMRUPI

THIRD : Rename the script as AMBM (Assamese-Maithili-Bengali-Manipuri)

The third option is given on the basis of chronological basis of the use of this script in the ancient and pre-British era.

Lets hope Unicode Consortium will take steps in the right direction, please inform us whether it will be necessary us to go ahead with the proposed Website for the purpose of rectifying the mistake/injustice or sendingthe required information or documents by E-mail will suffice.

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The links below will give more information first on the controversy and the second on the roots and connections of the Assamese language.
<http://rajivkonwar100.blogspot.com/2011/07/assamese-experts-question-sahitya-sabha.html>

Roots and Strings of the Assamese
Language<<http://drsatyakamphukan.wordpress.com/roots-and-strings-of-the-assamese-language/>>