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Attn: Lisa Moore
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Subject: Assamese Writing System in the Unicode

Dear Lisa:

I am writing in reference to the Assamese writing system in the Unicode. As you know at present, there is no separate script for writing the Assamese language in the Unicode. Assamese are writing the language with a script that is being reserved as 'Bengali' script with the addition of two additional letters. This is creating lot of resentment among the Assamese people since historically Assamese is an older language with a separate independent script of its own. Since the nineteenth century, the Assamese and Bengalis both use almost the same script in printing press. It is like the case of the Roman script which is being used by many languages. The common Assamese-Bengali (as well as Maithili and Oriya) script is historically called 'Kamrupi' script which may be used for the present Assamese-Bengali Unicode script now. In this case, there are two options for us.

In view of above, we would request the Unicode, on behalf of the Assamese people, to do either of the following:

- (1) Rename the present Unicode Bengali script (with the addition to two letters) as the Kamrupi script.
- (2) Or, to kindly create a separate slot in the Unicode for the Assamese scripts.

In this regard, I am attaching some historical background writings on the scripts of the two languages for your kind information. We are also requesting the Govt of Assam to become a member of the Unicode if that will help the cause of the Assamese.

Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters (FASS) is an international think-tank non profit organization for the people of North East India.

Please let me know if you need any more clarification.

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Languages, Scripts and the Unicode

Rajen Barua

The Unicode is a global consortium of the computing industry standard. For the layman, it may be taken as the modern printing press in the Internet; through the Unicode one can write in different languages in the Internet. At present, a silent debate is going on in the use of the Unicode scripts for writing *Assamese* in the Internet because the script being offered for writing *Assamese* is called the 'Bengali' Script. This brings to the forefront the old sensitive question again, "Are *Assamese* using the *Bengali* script for writing? And if not, why the Unicode script is being called, the 'Bengali' script?" This article is written to address both these issues.

The answer to the first question is a big, *No*. *Assamese* has its own separate independent script, the paleography of which goes back to the 5th century AD which is much older than that of the *Bengali* script. While the developments of both these similar scripts occurred in parallel, the *Assamese* script has retained its own separate identity since the fifth century AD continuously down to the nineteenth century AD in various stone inscriptions, copper plates and manuscripts. After the nineteenth century AD, however, with the advent of modern printing press, both the languages are using exactly the same script except for two letters: the *Assamese* ঞ (r) and ঞ (v). In modern *Bengali* script, the ঞ (r) is written as ঞ (r) and the letter ঞ is absent in modern *Bengali*. A brief history of the developments of these two particular identifying letters in the two scripts would throw some interesting lights on many other aspects of the issues. Amongst others, it would be seen that the two letters, ঞ and ঞ, were also there in the *Bengali* script till recent times.

Basically, the East Indian languages i.e. *Assamese*, *Bengali*, *Maithili* and *Oriya*, all trace the origins of their scripts from the same common *Brahmi* script of *Ashokan* days. According to many scholars, at one time, these four languages and their scripts were more or less the same. There is much truth in the statement. The manuscript of the '*Caryagitikosa*' (also called '*Crayapada*') may be taken as a case in point. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Haraprasad Shastri, a *Bengali* scholar, discovered this manuscript of medieval *Buddhist* mystical songs in the Royal Library of Nepal, and he published these as "*The Buddhist Songs and Couplets in a thousand years old Bengali Language*". Since then, *Assamese*, *Oriya* and *Maithili* language also made claims these *Caryagitis* as their own. Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji rightly stated that this common claim simply indicate that at one time all these languages were more closely related. The *Caryagitis* were probably composed between the eighth and the twelfth century AD. Dr. Bani Kanta Kakaty, Dimbmeswar Neog and many other *Assamese* scholars have shown through detail analysis that the language of the *Caryagitis* resembles present *Assamese* more than any of the other three languages. It is more likely that the language of the *Caryagitis* was the old *Assamese* (*Kamrupi*) mixed with some *Maithili* words. The *Assamese* X sound is also present in the *Caryagitis*. So far as the script is concerned, the *Assamese* letter ঞ is visible in it although it was written as ঞ with the inside fully blackened which may be either the result of the pen style used or it may indicate that the *Assamese* ঞ was starting to form at that time. The *Assamese* letter ঞ was also there which was however written as similar to ঞ .

Besides these *Caryagitis*, there are some other old manuscripts which both the *Assamese* and the *Bengali* claim to be their own. These include, the '*Gopi Chandrer Gan*', the '*Krishna Kirtan*' and the '*Sunya Puran*'. For the purpose of analyzing the script, we will take the manuscript of the '*Krishna Kirtan*' of the fourteenth century which is being shown as a valued specimen of *Bengali* literature in the mediaeval period. The '*Krishna Kirtan*' shows its influence from an earlier work namely the '*Gita Govinda*' of Jayadeva of *Maithili* language, and is a compilation of love songs of Radha and Krishna with some erotic touch. The manuscript was discovered in 1919 in the Bakura district of Bengal. In

this manuscript also the *Assamese* ব is very prominently visible. Late Dimbeswar Neog, the Assamese scholar, has shown through analysis that the language of the *Krishna Kirtan* was nearer to modern *Assamese* than to modern *Bengali*, a fact that was admitted by many *Bengali* scholars. To quote Neog, one *Bengali* scholar was so much impressed that he commented in *Bangiya Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, “This proves that either (1) the *Krishna Kirtan* has travelled through the land of the *Assamese* language or (2) that the two languages were at one time the same in the past”. Needless to say that the former was the correct conclusion. Anyhow the manuscript of the *Krishna Kirtan* clearly shows that the *Assamese* ব was being used in *Bengali* till the 14th century. It is sometimes only later that the *Assamese* ব changed to the present ব in the *Bengali* language. Although details are sketchy, this development seems interesting.

First let us see how long the *Assamese* ব prevailed in the *Bengali* script after the fourteenth century. According to a paper written by Dr. Mitali Chatterji of Bengal, (as quoted by Dr Upendranath Goswami in his *Asomiya Lipi*), in some inscriptions of Bengal the ব was written with a dot inside the ব. Then again from seventeen century, the *Assamese* ব was seen in various *Bengali* inscriptions in Bengal. According to Narayan Das, an *Assamese* scholar (ref his *Biswalipir Bhumika*), even in the Gazette of Bengal of 1786 published in Calcutta, the *Assamese* ব was used. During the eighteenth century, various Portuguese and Dutch missionaries published various samples of *Bengali* writings in London, Lisbon and other cities abroad. In all these, normally the *Assamese* ব was written. We also find a ‘*Bengali-Sanskrit Dictionary*’ written by Graves Haughton in 1833 (courtesy of Azizul Hauque of Guwahati) where also the *Assamese* ব is used. All these shows that the *Assamese* ব was the standard letter in *Bengali* language instead of the present ব till the nineteenth century.

Compared to ব, the history of the ব is not very clear. It has been stated earlier, that *Assamese* paleographic records show the ব in fifth century AD stone inscription. During the time of the *Caryagitis* and the medieval time, the ব seems to be mixed with ব . At times, it was also seen that the letter ব was written with a dot below the ব i.e. like the present *Bengali* ব . Notably, we see this in the a inscription of 1744 AD of Kamakhya of *Ahom* King *Promotto Singho*. This is also seen in the silver coin of *Ahom* king *Rudro Singho* in 1700 AD. Except for such exceptions, the *Assamese* maintained the ব in various *Assamese* literature of later period. Compared to this, the history of the ব in *Bengali* seems to be a bit chaotic. This may probably be due to the fact *Bengal* was under the *Muslim* occupation, completely cut off from *Assam* during the medieval period. Anyhow, it is interesting to see a *Bengali-Sanskrit Dictionary* published in 1876 edited by John Mendies where besides the *Bengali* ব, the *Assamese* ব was used to represent the letter ব. Thus the dictionary spells word the word ‘*porvana*’ (warrant) as পরবানা , and ‘*palovan*’ (a strong guy) as পালোবান etc. From this it is seen that the history of the ব is a bit chaotic in *Bengali*, and it seems that in the nineteenth century different people were using the letters ব, ব and ব differently. Eventually however, the *Bengali* lost the ব letter completely.

From what we know, the turn of events probably occurred in the following manner. In the nineteenth century there was a renaissance in Bengal. One of the cultural leaders of this renaissance was the *Bengali* scholar Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar who was also a social reformer. Around 1850, he published a reformed *Bengali* alphabet (*Bornomala*) that contained 12 vowels and 40 consonants. This alphabet shows the *Bengali* ব. This *Vidyasagar* alphabet has since become the ideal alphabet of the modern *Bengali* language all over. If that is so, it may be said that the present ব got its firm footing in *Bengali* alphabet only during mid or late nineteenth century. It is also probable that it was due to this

Vidyasagar alphabet that the *Bengali* lost the ঞ completely from the language, because this *Vidyasagar* alphabet did not show the ঞ letter.

The following may be said of the ঞ. Although from the point of pronunciation, there are is not much difference between ব and ঞ, the ঞ however carries a long tradition of thousand of years starting from the *Brahmi* script. The *Sanskrit* language also has the ঞ letter. In *Assamese* it serves a great purpose and help in writing such *Assamese* words as যোৰা, খোৰা, খোৰা, পৰুৰা etc. Besides, ঞ is very much needed in writing words like ৱাছিংটন (Washington). It is not that a section of *Bengalis* don't feel the need of the letter. Late Dimbeswar Neog at one time suggested that the *Bengali* may still incorporate this traditional ঞ letter its language. We may also suggest that *Bengali* may pick up this old letter that was lost during the confusion in the nineteenth century. It is said that late Dr Suniti Kumar Chatterji was in favor of adopting this ঞ letter, and he even used the ঞ in some of his *Bengali* writings.

It is clear from the above discussions that the scripts of *Assamese* and *Bengali* and as well as of *Maithili* and *Oriya* all originated from a common eastern source and all developed independently. This common eastern source is rightly be called the *Kamrupi* script because when the this common script originated in Kamrup in the 5th / 7th century AD, the kingdom of Kamrup not only covered present Assam but extended all over North Bengal and included parts of Mithila upto the present Koshi river on the west. This *Kamrupi* script did not originate from *Nagari* or *Devanagari* script as some scholars would like to opine. It is from this common *Kamrupi* script that later the scripts of the four eastern languages developed in parallel. The *Assamese* script shows a continuous development from the early 5th century upto the nineteenth century. During the middle ages, three different styles of *Assamese* scripts developed in Assam namely, *Gorgoyan*, *Bamunia* and *Kaitheli* on which various manuscripts are available. The *Assamese* script retained much of the original *Kamrupi* script including the ব and the ঞ letter. The *Bengali* script also developed, partly in isolation from others due to the Muhmmadan rule, and emerged in nineteenth century with changing the ব to ব and losing the ঞ letter. The *Oriya* script was later much influenced by the *Tamil* due to which it has acquired a circular shape, underneath which however the original *Kamrupi* script is still much visible. The *Maithili* also retained much of the original *Kamrupi* script including the ব.

In the nineteenth century, with the advent of the printing press, *Assamese* and *Benglies* are using the same scripts except for the two identifying letters. Since the modern script of both these languages are exactly the same, many people confuse the script to be *Bengali* script due to broader publicity of the later language. There was a time when in the nineteenth century *Assamese* language had to fight for its own separate identity as a separate language which, thanks mainly to the Christian in Assam of the time, was now well established. However, due to general ignorance even amongst the scholars, the identity of the *Assamese* script as a separate and independent script was not properly recognized for a long time. Out of ignorance or self-pride, the *Bengali* scholars generally used to call this common script the *Bengali* script. In 1919, the *Bengali* scholar, R. D. Banerji wrote his essay, '*The Origin of the Bengali Script*' where he gave a history of the development of the script through the *Caryapada* and *Krishna Kirtan* and other inscriptions. As a specimen of the modern *Bengali* writing, he actually presented an inscription of 1744 AD of King *Promotto Singha in Kamakhya* hill which is however a specimen of the *Assamese* script. However he not only called the script a *Bengali* script but also made a derogatory remark that *Assamese* does not have separate script of its own and are adopting this *Bengali* script in its language. That shows the complete ignorance of history of the scripts of the two languages. Unfortunately, at that time, there were no proper criticism from the *Assamese* scholars against his remarks, and this false impression was carried to the national level. For instance, we find

that later, Dr. Ahmed Hasan Dany in his '*Indian Paleography*' published in 1961, made a careless remark without any proper study that the script of east India is the '*Bengali*' script and that *Assamese* is using the *Bengali* script. This view was however later properly criticized by the *Assamese* scholar Dimbeswar Neog who showed with scholarly analysis that *Assamese* and *Bengali* are two independent scripts and what the *Bengali* scholars were calling the *Bengali* script is actually the common script which should rightly be called the *Kamrupi* script. Since then several *Assamese* scholars has discussed the subject of the history of the *Assamese* script and have established its position solidly. However on national and international level, the case is yet to be fully recognized.

This brings us to the question as to why the Unicode is calling this common *Assamese-Bengali* script, the *Bengali* script. It is probable that Unicode is ignorant of the issue. The *Assamese* are also to be blamed for not pursuing the subject forcefully and establishing the separate identity of its script properly. In any case, the situation need to be corrected. There are two options which Unicode may do to rectify the situation. (1) Rename the existing '*Bengali*' script of the common script as '*Kamrupi*' script. Or (2) Make a separate provision for the *Assamese* script in the Unicode.

Assam Sahitya Sabha and other *Assamese* literary organizations and individuals should contact Unicode and should request to rectify the position explaining the situation. It may be noted that at present both *Govt of India* as well as *Govt of West Bengal*, *Govt of Andhra Pradesh* etc are members of Unicode. It makes sense for the *Govt of Assam* also become a member of Unicode so that it can play an active role by giving its due voice. Let us hope that the present issue would encourage the youths to do some more serious research on scripts of the *Kamrupi* script which is badly needed.

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- 12) অসমীয়া ভাষাৰ মৌলিক কাৰ - দেৱানন্দ ভৰালি
- 13) Evolution of Assamese Script – Dr Mahendra Bora
- 14) Development of Scripts in Ancient Kamrupa- Dr. T.P. Verma
- 15) চৰ্যাপদ - পৰীক্ষিত স্বৰ্জবিৰ

- 16) Kamrup Sasanawali – Edited by Dr. Dimbeswar Sarma
- 17) A History of the Civilization of the People of Assam- P.C. Chaudhury.
- 18) Bengali-Sanskrit Dictionary – 1833 – Edited by Graves Haughton
- 19) Bengali-Sanskrit Dictionary – 1876 – Edited by by John Mendies
- 20) etc

by. Dr. Upendranath Goswami

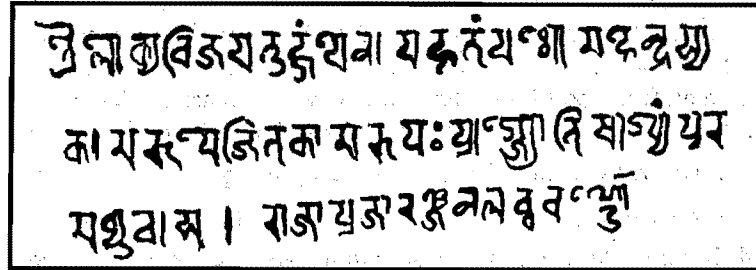
THE ASSAMESE SCRIPT

The Assamese Script occupies an important place among the scripts of eastern India. Assam is very fortunate in having inscriptions, both stone and copper-plate, from the fifth century A.D. to the beginning of the nineteenth century A.D. A close study of these inscriptions show that the Assamese script has developed out of these inscriptions and has taken its modern shape. Many writers have written about this script, but nobody has tried to analyse its development through these inscriptions. T. P. Verma in his book, "Development of Script in Ancient Kamrupa", has made the significant remark that since Assam has a separate culture of its own and also since the beginning of the fifth century A.D. right up to the eighteenth century A.D., the Kings of Assam have issued their own records, the development of Assamese script can be studied on its own. Tracing back the history of the Assamese Script we come to the Umacal Rock-Inscription of Surendravarman of the fifth century A.D. Another inscription of an earlier date is the Nagajari-Khanikargaon stone-inscription. Of all the inscriptions of ancient Assam only this one has the distinction of maintaining a difference between b and v.

The origin of the Assamese script is Brahmi and its developed form namely the Gupta script. Almost all the writers on Assamese script have remarked that it has developed out of 'the Kutila variation of the Gupta script of eastern India.' The existence of the Kutila variety has been stated to be from the sixth to the ninth century A.D. But Assam has possessed the stone-inscription beginning from the fifth century A.D. If we compare the letters of the two inscriptions mentioned above with the letters of the Gupta script, we will find that the letters i k kh g c j, ḍ ṇ, t d dh n, p b bh m, y r l v, ś ṣ s h, rā, jā, nā, dhi, kī, gu, kṛ, of the Umacal and Nagajari-Khanikargaon inscriptions are identical with the letters of the Gupta script. The copper-plate inscriptions of Bhaskaravarman of the seventh century maintain the tradition of the Brahmi and Gupta scripts used in the earlier stone-inscriptions mentioned above. Among the copper-plate inscriptions of Bhaskaravarman the letters of the Nidhanpur inscriptions show a marked difference from those of the Dubi inscriptions. In this

connection the forms of the letters specially k r y s l b ā tu deserve mention. The letters k b l of the Nidhanpur inscriptions and the present-day k b l are exactly the same. Upto this time the medial vowel signs have retained the earlier forms.

As we proceed from the seventh to the ninth century a remarkable change in the letters of the copper-plate inscriptions is noticed. The letters of the copper-plates of the ninth and the early tenth century appear to have begun to take the modern Assamese forms. By this time a complete change in the use of the medial vowel signs has taken place and this change is towards the direction of the modern forms. Many single and conjunct consonants also appeared in their present shapes. The Parvatia inscriptions of Vanamalavarmadeva, the Uttarbarbil, Ulubari, and Nowgong copper-plate inscriptions of Valavarman III bear testimony to this. In these inscriptions the letters a ā u ū e au ; kh g gh j ñ ; dh, t th d n ; ph b m ; y l ; ś s ; ṁ h ; ndr, tr, mb, sm, ñ j, gn, ll, and rmm have acquired the present-day Assamese forms. Thus it may safely be said that the Assamese script took a definite shape in the ninth and early part of the tenth century A.D. Here is a specimen from the Nowgong copper-plate inscriptions of Valavarman III (885-910) showing a number of letters having exactly the modern Assamese forms :



(trailokya vijaya tunga yenapahrtam yaso mahendrasya Kamarupe jitakamaruph pragjyotisakhyam puramadhyuvasa rajaprajaranjana labdhavarnno)

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The history of the Assamese script may be studied in three stages. The Assamese script of the period ranging from the fifth to the thirteenth century may be termed as the ancient Assamese

script or the Kamarupi script. The Assamese script of the period beginning from the fourteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century (just up to the publication of Arunodaya) is the mediaeval Assamese script. The Assamese script from the date of publication of Arunodaya (1846 A.D.) to the present time may be called the modern Assamese script. If the letters of the stone and copper-plate inscriptions from the fifth to the thirteenth century are minutely observed, one can clearly see how the Assamese letters gradually developed and took their modern forms. Apart from the medial vowels signs other vowels and consonants also developed. The developed letters are namely a ā e o au ; k kh g gh j ñ ; ḍ ḍh t th d n ; ph b bh m, y l ś s s kṣ. The development of these letters may be shown without the help of any hypothetical forms. Some letters have developed later on and their developments are preserved in the stone and copper-plate inscriptions from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. In the Nilacala stone-inscription of Kamakhya (1565) the letters r and v are preserved in the modern Assamese forms. The other developed letters are namely i u ū ai ṁ c ch jh ṭ ṭh ṇ dh p r v h.

Over and above the conjunct consonants that have been found in the copper-plate inscriptions and have already been mentioned, a large number of other conjunct consonants are met with in the inscriptions beginning from the fifth to the thirteenth century. Some of these conjuncts have acquired the present-day forms and others have preserved the stages of developments towards the modern shapes. Thus a strong foundation of the Assamese script has been laid by the ancient Assamese script or the Kamarupi script. In this connection the remarks of Dimbeswar Neog deserve special mention. He writes : 'The so-called Bengali script and Maithili alphabet are really one and the same with the old Kamarupa script from which Bengali and Maithili have separated and started independent careers so-called.' Because of this reason probably R. D. Banerji, the author of *The Origin of the Bengali Script*, had to claim the copper-plate inscription (1744 A.D.) recording the dedication of the image of Amratakeshvara at Kamakhya near Guwahati in Assam as the 'modern Bengali inscription' and found the final development of Bengali script in it. It is also worth

mentioning here that many of the letters that have developed up to the thirteenth century in the inscriptions of Assam are found identical in the Bhubaneswar stone-inscription of Orissa of the thirteenth century A.D. As mentioned by Sukumar Sen "the fully articulated Bengali alphabet appears in the twelfth century, for instance in the Tarpandighi grant of Laksmanasena." Many letters of this inscription bear similarity with the letters of the Kamarupi script. At present the Assamese script differs with the Bengali script in the case of two letters namely r and v. In the manuscript of Srikrishnakirtana (copied in the seventeenth or the eighteenth century)¹ the modern Assamese form of r is preserved. Dr Mitālī Chatterji in her paper "Development of 'r' in the Bengali script as found in Inscription" writes that perhaps towards the end of 10th century Bengali alphabet emerged as a full-fledged distinct script. In the same paper she has mentioned that 'r' was written with a dot inside the letter 'b' in many inscriptions beginning from 1545 A.D. Again this 'r' was written like the present day 'r' in Assamese in many inscriptions scattered all over Bengal beginning from 1625 A.D. In her own words "during the period of 17th to 18th century, inscriptions bearing 'r' (of the present day Assamese) were very common." On the other hand the modern Oriya and Maithili scripts have embraced a good number of the ancient, mediaeval, and modern Assamese letters.

The Assamese script has developed gradually out of the letters of the stone and copper-plate inscriptions beginning from the fifth to the nineteenth century. During this period not only the medial vowel signs but also the letters a ā i u e ai o au ; k kh g gh ṅ, c ch j jh ṅ, ṭ ṭh ḍ ḍh ṇ, t th d dh n, p ph b bh m, y r l v, ś ṣ s h, kṣ ṁ ḥ, tr, dr, ndr, ṇḍ, ṅc, ṅj, gn, ll, gj, db, sm, rmm, ṅk, ṅg kr gr, bj, str, tt, cc, stu, dru, ru, rū kṛ, tu etc. acquired the forms of the letters of the modern Assamese script. To speak in a different way it may be stated that in the stone and copper-plate inscriptions of Assam the Assamese script originated and developed. In the development of a script three factors namely 'the technical development, a desire for speed and simplification, and the taste for better or ornamental forms' are generally thought to be responsible.

1. Sen, S. : History of Bengali Literature, 1960 p. 10.

In the case of the development of the Assamese script too these tendencies have worked.

There is a different picture of the Assamese script also. Assam possesses a mass of Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts written in the Assamese script, covering several centuries of the mediaeval period of its history. "The extant manuscripts show that *sācipāt* from aloe wood and *tulāpāt* (Cotton Leaves) constituted the main writing materials the ink that was used in writing was invariably prepared from *silikha* (*terminalia citrina*) and bull's urine. The durability of the ink and its glossy character are evidenced by the fact that we have manuscripts of the 14th century A.D., if not earlier, in a very good condition."² Writing on the cannons, bricks, and coins in the Assamese script is also available. In all these and in the innumerable manuscripts the tradition of the writing as found in the stone and copper-plate inscriptions has been followed. The use of the Assamese script (as developed in the writings of the inscriptions) in writing the Sanskrit and Assamese manuscripts has proved its intrinsic strength.

The mediaeval Assamese script, especially the script used in writing the manuscripts, has been classified in several styles and are designated as Gaḍgana, Bāmunīyā, Kāithelī, and Lahkarī. It has been said that there is very little difference between the Kāithelī and Lahkarī styles. In the ordinary eye, three styles of writing are quite distinct. They are Gaḍgañā, Bāmunīyā, and Kāithelī. In the words of Maheswar Neog "the most widely used type was known as Gaḍgañā ākhar possibly because it has its main centre of culture the Ahom capital, Gaḍgāon. The traditional Sanskrit scholars had their own style, Bāmunīyā, generally used in the preparation of Sanskrit texts. The writer caste, Kayasthas, again, stuck to their own method of writing. Their system became known as Kāithelī or sometimes Lahkarī."³ Most of the historical

2. Choudhury, P. C. : Education in Ancient Assam and the extent of Royal patronage : The Cotton College Diamond Jubilee Commemoration Volume.
3. Neog, M. : Origin and Development of Eastern Indian Script : Prof. S. K. Bhuyan Commemoration Volume, 1966.

chronicles (buranjīs) are written in the Gaḍgañā style. The Kāithelī style is more prevalent in Lower Assam. Practically the difference among these three styles in formation of the letters are not wide.

The Assamese letters, employed in writing the manuscripts, appeared in printed forms due to the efforts of missionaries. The first printed Assamese book is the translation of the Bible by Atmaram Sharma, named Dharmapustak in 1813. This was first printed at Srirampur after the model of the letters of the Assamese manuscripts. As stated by Nanda Talukdar "the forms of the letters of Dharmapustak and other Bengali books printed at that time are not the same. To a great extent the forms of the letters of Dharmapustak are similar with the letters employed in the manuscripts. The letters kṛ, ku, hu etc are completely of the Kāithelī style of the Assamese manuscripts."⁴ According to Sukumar Sen "The Bengali alphabet in its printed form took shape in 1778 when printing types were first cast by Charles Wilkins. There still remained a few archaic forms and these were finally replaced in the middle of the nineteenth century."⁵ In 1839 in the Srirampur press the Assamese Grammar by Robinson was printed. Robinson "used the letter v and followed the writing tradition of the Assamese manuscripts."⁶ At the time of the publication of Arunodaya from Assam, the American Missionaries at the beginning brought the types cast on the model of the Assamese types used in Srirampur. They also brought the Assamese r. The use of the letter v has been found in the issues of the first year of Arunodaya. Hemchandra Barua had to fight for its extensive use and ultimately he succeeded. Later on the missionaries arranged the casting of types in Assamese within Assam. With the introduction of the printed types the letters of the various styles of writing became unified. Although printed books were available, the tradition of writing used in the manuscripts continued up to the twentieth century in the hands of Sanskrit scholars, especially in the preparation of horoscope written in the Sanskrit language. The changes of the modern techniques of printing at the present time are shaping the printing types differently at different times and

4. Talukdar, N. : Assam Bani : Bihu Special, 1980.

5. Sen, S. : History of Bengali Literature, 1960 p. 10

6. Neog, M. : Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha, 1974.

thus we are having different styles of printing.

The discussion above leads us to the conclusion that the Assamese script is an independent script of eastern India. Its origin is Brahmi and its developed form, the Gupta script. The Assamese script has developed and acquired the modern form gradually through the letters in the stone and copper-plate inscriptions available continuously from the fifth to the nineteenth century and its tradition has been maintained in the Assamese and Sanskrit manuscripts. The Missionaries printed the first Assamese Bible at Srirampur after the model of the writing as found in the manuscripts. Later on the model of writing kṛ, ku, hṛ, hu, of the manuscripts were changed and the entire alphabet emerged as the modern Assamese alphabet. Thus the statements that "the present Assamese script was introduced by Christian missionary writers and the modern Assamese script is not a natural development of the script used in the manuscripts by the writers of the early nineteenth century and earlier" do not carry any logic. The Kamarupi script developed into the medieval Assamese script and the latter into the modern Assamese script.

The Assamese script maintains some relationship with the Bengali, Oriya and the Maitheli scripts. This relationship is continuing from the early period. From this relationship it may be said that the origin of the eastern India scripts, namely Assamese, Bengali, Oriya and Maitheli is the Kamarupi script which is a developed form of the Gupta script. In the words of T.P. Verma "at least upto the eighth century the flow of the political and cultural current was from Assam towards northern Bengal".⁷ Again "there was very close connection between Mithila and Kamarupa. A part of Mithila was within Kamarupa."⁸ A close connection also existed between Orissa and Kamarupa. Ancient Kamarupa "comprised the whole of North Bengal including Cooch-Bihar and Rongpur and Jalpaiguri Districts of Bengal."⁹ Under the circumstances the Assamese script played a significant role in the cultural sphere of eastern India. Like the history of the Assamese script, the history of the Assamese language too, reminds us one eastern Indian cultural unit.

7 Verma, T. P. : Development of script in Ancient Kamarupa, 1976 , pp. 29,- 30.

8 Barua, K. L. : Early History of Kamarupa, pp. 92,- 93, 324

9 Kakati, B. (ed.) : Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, p. 2

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অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদৰ আগতীয়া লিখিত অনুমতি অবিহনে এই গ্ৰন্থ বা ইয়াৰ কোনো অংশ, ফটোকপি, ৰেকৰ্ডিং আদিৰ দৰে কোনো ইলেকট্ৰনিক বা যান্ত্ৰিক উপায়েৰে, অথবা কোনো তথ্য সংগ্ৰহ-পুনৰ ব্যৱহাৰ প্ৰণালীৰে পুনৰ প্ৰকাশ কৰিব নোৱাৰিব বা আন কোনো ৰূপতে ব্যৱহাৰ কৰিব নোৱাৰিব।

প্ৰকাশক

লক্ষ্মীনাথ তামুলী আই-এ-এছ

সচিব

অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদ

গুৱাহাটী-৭৮১০২১

পূৰ্বৰ সংস্কৰণসমূহ ১৯৮৭, ১৯৮৮, ১৯৯৮, ২০০০

পঞ্চম সংস্কৰণ আগষ্ট ২০০৩

মূল্য : ৪০.০০ টকা

মুদ্ৰক

পূৰ্বদেশ মুদ্ৰণ

বিহাবাৰী, গুৱাহাটী-৭৮১ ০০৮

প্ৰকাশকৰ টোকা

বিষয়-বস্তু বৈভৱ আৰু সুনিৰ্দিষ্ট উদ্দেশ্যেৰে অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদে অসমৰ জাতীয় জীৱন তথা ভাষা-সাহিত্য-সংস্কৃতিত এক বুজন সংখ্যক মূল্যবান আৰু দুষ্প্ৰাপ্য গ্ৰন্থ আগবঢ়াই আহিছে। ভাৰতীয় ঐতিহ্যৰ আদিকাব্য ৰামায়ণ, মহাভাৰত, পঞ্চতন্ত্ৰ আৰু কথা-সাহিত্য, অসম-উত্তৰ-পূৰ্বাঞ্চলৰ গীত-মাত, সাধুকথা, প্ৰখ্যাত চিন্তাবিদ-মনীষীসকলৰ লেখা, প্ৰতীচ্যৰ মহাকাব্য আৰু শ্ৰেষ্ঠ সাহিত্য-কৃতিৰ অনুবাদ আৰু জ্ঞান-বিজ্ঞান বিষয়ক গ্ৰন্থৰ যোগেদি অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদে অসমৰ বৌদ্ধিক জগতলৈ অপৰিসীম বৰঙণি যোগাই আহিছে।

আমি অতিশয় আনন্দিত যে পৰিষদৰ সমস্ত গ্ৰন্থকেই পাঠক সমাজে অতি আগ্ৰহেৰে আঁকোৱালি লৈছে। বৰ্তমানলৈ অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদে প্ৰকাশ কৰা তিনি শতাধিক গ্ৰন্থৰ অধিক সংখ্যকৰে কপি ভালেমান বছৰ ধৰি দুষ্প্ৰাপ্য হৈ আছে। সেয়েহে আমি পোনছাটেই পাঠকে সততে বিচৰা কেইখনমান আৱশ্যকীয় আৰু জনপ্ৰিয় গ্ৰন্থ প্ৰকাশ কৰিবলৈ লৈছোঁ।

বৰ্তমান গ্ৰন্থখিনিয়ে পাঠক সমাজৰ চাহিদা পূৰণ কৰাৰ লগতে মনোযোগ আকৰ্ষণো কৰিব পাৰিব বুলি আমাৰ বিশ্বাস।

গুৱাহাটী

ছেপ্টেম্বৰ, ২০০৩

লক্ষ্মীনাথ তামুলী আই-এ-এছ

সচিব

অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদ