



Assamese language and ethno dialect variety as Spoken by the Matak community of Assam

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ABSTRACT

The north-eastern part of India, Assam is the abode of various ethnic tribes with diverse colourful cultures. Since the pre-historic times various ethnic tribes have come to Assam to become permanent dwellers. People came in different times but they live here very peacefully and these ethnic tribes have so integrated themselves into the Assamese society and culture that it is often difficult to tell one from another. The Matak community is a specimen case who came to Assam long before the Tai Ahoms. After their assimilation into the greater Assamese nation and its culture, have almost lost their ethnic tribal identity, their language etc.. First, they have become mingled with the Tai Ahoms from the thirteenth century and then, in the Seventeenth century they embraced the Mayamoria religion preached by Sri Aniruddhadeva. Consequently, the post seventeenth century annals and history books contain confusing and misleading information in the context of the historical identify of the Matak ethnic tribe - which may be summed up as "the Matak community are none other than the Mayamoras", and so on. Before assimilation Matak community had their own language identity. But now all the Matak people talk in Assamese as their mother tongue. Through this paper we want to discuss the speaking language of Matak community and they are an ethnic tribe of Tai Mongolian origin, and not "a religious community" as held usually.

Key Words:

Introductions, Matak tribe, Historical prove, Speaking Language of Matak, Conclusion.

Introduction:

The best ways we need to expose our thoughts to others are language. Different people express their thought in different language. There are many more languages in among the people of the world. Some languages are safe, some languages are about to die & some languages are endangers position. Overall if we will see that there are two type of language in among the people of world. One is writing language and another is talking language or speaking language. All people of Assam talk in Assamese as their Mother tongue. Matak community are also the same; but the Matak people are talking a different language with their own people. The aim of this article to discuss the Phonology, Chronology and in their speaking language or talking language.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper has been developed by taking the following objectives-

1. To study the spoken language of the Matak people of Assam (Ethnic group of Assam)
2. To draw up the summary and suggestions that will help in the upliftment the spoken language of the group

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This paper is purely data base study of the Matak people. Randomly ten villages were taken as samples for the study from Dibrugarh district, 10 from Tinsukia District and 5 from Sibsagar District. Almost 100 persons were interviewed by way of giving a questionnaire and their replies were collected to draw up the composition of the paper. Some unstructured questions were also put and tap recording, telephonic conversation was also made with the sample respondents. Besides these, some history books were also studied for the purpose of the paper.

AREA OF THE STUDY

For conducting this research work upper Assam has been selected, as the maximum number of Matak people live in this places of Assam in India.

SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

In this era of globalisation, a systematic and scientific study of the smaller tribes and castes of Assam is quite considerable and essential. With this objective in mind, the paper attempts to present a study of the spoken language of the Matak people of Assam of India. Matak people live in thirteen century before the Ahoms people came to this land. They came to this land to church the land for cultivation. So they didn't bring any written documents. Slowly the Matas are assimilated other new comer people, but before assimilation Matak have their own language identity. But now all the Matak people talk in Assamese as their mother tong. Through this paper want to discuss the spoken language of Matak tribe and they are an ethnic tribe of Tai Mongolian origin, and not "a religious community" as held usually. In the Socio-cultural life of Matak people they have their own way to talk each other, which is different from the Assamese language in phonetics, So this paper will be prove that Matak have a spoken language in itself.

THE MATAK TRIBE AND ITS HISTORICAL PROVE:

When Su-Ka-pha came to this land, he met a Matak Family at Tipam. The head man of the family supply the Brinjal and other crops. So the king Su-Ka-Pha and Kang-Ganan Borgohain named the head man of the Matak family is 'Lan-makhru'-the grandson of Brinjal. 'Lan' means-grandson and 'makhru' means-Brinjl. At the very beginning of the Matak people live this land as a cultivator of different 'Ahukheti' (Rabi crops). At first they have their own language to speak each other. But after their assimilation into the greater Assamese nation and its culture, they have almost lost their ethnic tribal identity, their language etc.. First, they have become mingled with the Tai Ahoms from the thirteenth century and then, in the Seventeenth century they embraced the Mayamoria religion preached by Sri Aniruddhadeva. Consequently, the post seventeenth century annals and history books contain confusing and misleading information in the context of the historical identify of the Matak ethnic tribe -which may be summed up as "the Matak are none other than the Mayamoras", and so on. But the History Books And some Manuscripts of Tai language prove that the Matak are the tribe of Assam firstly Ahom Buranji¹¹, Which is editing and translated by in Rai Sahab Golap Chandra Barua. In this book, according to which, Sukapha initially made arrangements for founding a kingdom at Tipam and stayed there for some time. The Sorgadeo Sukapha defeated the Nagas with the help of the Matak Chief whom he met at Tipam. This very headman of the Matak supplied aubergine (brinjal or egg-plant) to the king - for which Kang-gnan Borgohain - the Ahom Minister, named him Lanmakhr -- literally, "Grandson of the Aubergine (Brinjal - egg-plant) 'Lanmakhr' is a Tai word in which 'Lan' (means Grandson) and 'Makhru' (means Aubergine / Brinjal / Egg-plant). After that, the Ahom Buranji contain the sentence -- "myunam tun phan maan phukhao cham wa Matak" - which has been translated into English by Rai Sahab Golap Chandra Barua from Tai as "The Matak descended from Phukhao family (a family originated from seed sewn)". This sentence in Tai language is explained thus -- myu nan (olden times), tun phan (sowing seed), maan phukhao (goodman, man of decent lineage or fair-skinned man) and cham wa (considered as or called). This sentence may be rendered into English as "In olden times, good men or men of decent lineage belonging to the seed sowing origin means the Matak." Ahom King Sukapha appointed three persons to collect tribes from the subordinated kingdoms and one among these three was a Matak Chieftain. Another Matak headman that Sukapha came across was Mimun Matak. He desired to pay tributes to and stay with Sukapha. Sukhapha liked him and later designated him as Mimun Patar. Another Tai family was also designated as Matak Patar by the King. This information is found in the book written in the Tai Language --- "Phukhao cham wa ryun Tai mbaw bao changkhao cham wa Matak Patar". In this manner, Sukapha took into his team several Matak Chieftain and ruled his kingdom. Likewise other Tai family were also connected with the Matak. From the *Ahom Buranji*, it may be surmised that Sukapha came to know that the Matak belong to the Tai group and incorporated them in his team. The Matak are a tribe of Tai origin who were the inhabitants of Assam for quite some time even before the advent of Tai Ahoms under the leadership of Sukapha. The term around "Phukhao" found in the *Ahom Buranji* is from Tai Language. 'Phu' - means "Esteemed Person" or "Owner" and "Khao" means 'white' or "Fair skinned man." In the *Ahom Buranji*, the Phukhaos of earlier times are called the Matak. "Phukhao" is a branch of the Tais.

The two Tai manuscripts wear also proved that Matak is an ethnic tribes of Assam and they wear from Tai mongoloid origin. *Nang Hun Pha*¹² is such a book in the Tai language which is an ancient marriage rites and rituals. The books contains the details of the "Chaklong" system of marriage of the Tai Ahoms. This book says that in the marriage ceremony Nang Hun Pha-- the bride from Myungphi the Matak, and the Morans played the horn and drums. The Matak and Morans are sons of Ngibor. The bride Nang Hun Pha was the daughter of the Tao religions saint Akkai Mohan. This information in this book despite its mythological nature, clearly establishes that the Matak are of Tai-Mongoloid origin coming from Yunan area of China. Two things are to be underlined in this descriptions (a) that the Matak had a specific identify in those ancient times in China and (b) the Matak are an old ethnic tribe -- culturally rich.

*Aijong Lou*³ⁱⁱⁱ is a scripture of the Tai Ahoms which contain various rites and rituals of worshipping the Goddess Lakhmi. She is the Goddess of Money, riches and prosperity. In the prayer to the Goddess one finds the origin of the Matak ethnic tribe. In the prayers to Phi Gods -- the Goddess of riches and prosperity is also involved. The prayer contains the names of the seven generations of the Matak and the Morans -- i.e. their forefathers. The prayer goes like this -

Cho nu ru cho kow oi

Aijong lao nijong kham

Khankhorai khonkha nai

Tai ru rai tadunai

Cha ru rai cha du nai

Aibar phura phukhru

Ngi bora phura phumeo

Ckao nu ru cho kow oi

Husung khura bodo khura eaar lukman (son)

Matak moran

Chit hang chit khun

Akbor cheng tila

Cho nu ru chao kao oi.

Through this prove that Matak is a Tai mongoloid tribe of Assam, Who lived in this land before the Tai Ahoms.

SPEAKING LANGUAGE OF MATAK:

Language is the best medium to express our thoughts, feelings and ideas and hence, there has been studies and research on it. Differences in language can be observed as a means of communication according to place, region and ethnicity. Within the same language, too, differences can be noticed. Again, language has different forms as a written language and as a spoken language, While in the written form usually the “standard” version is used, in the spoken form it tends often to vary again according to place, region and ethnicity. A very large section of the populace of Assam- a North East Indian State- use the Assamese language as a medium of expression and the Matak community of Assam is also no exception. However, the people belonging to this community use a somewhat different version instead of the standard or the conventional Assamese while conversing in their day to day life. As interesting variety of the Assamese language, the spoken language prevalent among the Matak community becomes essential.^{4iv}

Phonetic Features:

a) In the variety of the standard/written Assamese spoken in the Matak society by the uneducated/ unsophisticated people the letters ‘শ’ and ‘স’ (voiceless post- glottal fricatives) are pronounced as ‘হ’(-voiceless glottal fricative /h/. For instance, (‘শগুণ’) ‘xagun’- meaning ‘ a Vulture’ > (‘হগুণ’) hagun ; (সত্য) ‘Xatya’- meaning ‘Truth’> (হত্যা) hatya ; (সস্তা) ‘Xasta’ – meaning “cheap”> (হস্তা) hasta ; (সোধ) ‘Xodh’- meaning “ask”> (হুদ) hod ; (সুবিধা) ‘xubidha’- meaning ‘advantage > (হুবিদা) hubida; (সাহিত্য) ‘Xāhitya’-meaning literature>(হাহিত্য) hāhitya etc.

b) The nasal velar ঙ (ng) is used in all the places after verbs in first person except in the future tense. For example-(খালোং) Khālong- “have eaten ; (গইচোং) Gasong –“am/are going ; (চাইচোং) Sāisong – in the sense ‘to have seen ; (কৰিছোং) karisong- in the sense ‘have done ; (নকং) Nakang-in the sense “ wont say/ wont tell); (দিলোং) Dilong – in the sense of taking/ accepting); (কং) kang – in the sense to tell ; (যাং) Jāng- in the sense to go etc.

c) (‘ঐ’) oi often becomes shortened to (এ) a (‘e’>‘a’ sound) – for example- (যাগৈ) Jāgoi- the imperative ‘You go’> (যাগে) Jāge; (কালিলৈ) kāliloi>Kāliloi- in the sense Tomorrow); (আজিলৈ) ājiloi>ājile –means- for today/ till today); Similarly (কামলে) kāmole-for work ; (চাবলে) Sābole- to see ; ‘Jābole’-to go etc.

d) The middle letter (‘ল’- ‘L’-sound) of a word becomes lost at times- for instance- (কালিলৈ) kāliloi> kāiloi- means – tomorrow.

e) The sound (‘ৰ’- r) gets lost often- for example,- (খৰকৈ) kharkoi> Khoke- meaning- quickly/ speedly; (পৰহিলৈ) Porohiloi>Pohile- meaning- the day after tomorrow; (কৰিবলৈ) Koriboloi>Koibole-meaning- have/has done; (পাৰিলৈ) Pārile> Pāile, Meaning- if you can/ in the sense if possible; (ঘৰ) Ghor> Gho, meaning- A house/ home ; (এফেৰি) Epheri> ephei- meanings- a little ; (এগৰাহ) Egarāh>Egaāh, meaning- a mouthful; (পৰুৱা) Paruwā> Pauwā- meaning- ‘Ant’; (বৰুৱা) Baruwā> Bauwā-meaning- ‘ an Assamese surname/ family name; (উৰুৱা) Uruwā> U.uwā, Meaning- ‘ to make something fly/ to throw/ to bring to an end) Sentence like- (তহঁত তাত বিহু উউৱালিনে কি বাউ ?)- Tahata tāt bihu u-uwāline ki bāu ?- Have you brought the bihu to an end in your place? etc.

Morphological Features :

a) In the spoken variety of Assamese among the Matakas, the words “ motā –the mail; māiki –the female are used. For example – ‘Matā lora’ (boy child/male child)> ‘Maiki lora’(girl child/ female child). In the standard parlance ‘lorā’ means a boy but in this spoken variety ‘lorā’ means a child rather. It is worth nothing that the word ‘Xi’ –used as a derogatory pronoun for the English “he” is used to indicate both the male as well as the female, instead of ‘Tai’-meaning she (Xi>he). Similarly ‘Ta’, ‘Iyak’, ‘Tak’ are used instead of ‘Eik’- pointing to the female near and ‘Taik’- pointing the female at a distance. Moreover the words ‘heti’ and ‘tahati’ are used instead of hihate-meaning they. Interestingly, the word ‘Tahati’ – meaning the plural form of ‘You’-or “you people” is used to mean one’s wife, for instance – ‘tahati kale gali O?’- meaning that- ‘Where have you people gone?’ Here the husband is actually asking his wife where she is rather, If she is home/ inside.

b) Certain suffixes used in Assamese as emphatic/polite markers such as soon (চোন), dekhun (দেখোন), ākau (আকৌ), exār (এষাৰ) are also used in by the Matakas in a changed form. Eg- ākau> a’ka (অ’ক), exār> x/kh etc.

1) a’ka (অ’ক)- “Jote tote jābor pelāi an nakaribā akou”.(in standard Assamese, meaning – kindly don’t add to the troubles littering wastes carelessly), - “Jote tote Jābo pelai an nakoibika”-Colloquial form.

2) X/ kha (খা/ ষা): “huwaxar hai, kintu rāje mānibane ?”-(standard Assamese, meaning No doubt what’s right is right, but will the public agree?) - “ huwāxā hai, kintu āje mānibane?” –Colloquial form.

3) The Matakas is colloquial parlances use the suffix /he/ like the standard Assamese in the emphatic sense- Example- “Xi rātipuāhe āhibo”(standard language)-meaning He will come in the morning.- “hi ātipuāhe āhibo”- Colloquial form.

4) The word ‘Pelāni’ in the sense only after or having been/dare is used by the Matakas in common Colloquial as an auxiliary verb. Example- “tāloi goiye khobar dimbāru” -standard Assamese-meaning I’ll surly inform you having reached there .- “tāloi goi pelāni khabo dim bāu”- Colloquial form.

Lexical Features:

The Matakas have been using the Assamese language as their mother tongue since centuries. However, there are some words used in their colloquial language not found or heard in standard Assamese. The sources of such words are extremely difficult to trace. At times, phonetic or morphological features characteristic of their colloquial form give stand Assamese words different forms altogether. Some such words connected with various social activities are shown below.-

a) Words related to Agricultural Activities:

- /Māti hamuwā/ : The activity of harrowing after ploughing and breaking the clods of soil.
 /Hendāhi/: The practice of collective work in the field by women folk or work exchange by turn in every family
 /munihmorā/: A type of barter system in which a total of eighteen units of rice saplings to be planted in exchange of a basketful of rice later. Every unit contains seven or eight tufts of saplings, six tufts together is called “etā”.
 /Nangalo khut dhoiba paā/: A boy who can plough /adolescent boys between age of 10-15 years who can work as cowherds.
 /Jurani/ : Jahā rice paddy tied in a cloth and kept soaking in the water of a well for about three days which are pulverised and eaten with molasses as anti-dote to heat.
 /makowā pithā/: Rice pulverised in wooden rice pound ‘dheki’ and steamed in to a cake.
 /Goiyā khundā/: Not fully pulverised in wooden rice pounder.
 /katakā/: The pedestal/frame on which the wooden rice pounder stands.
 /khum/: A packet of betel nut and leaf tied in by leaves of a betel nut for a palm tree.
 /duhuti/: An implement for throwing out/ draining out water

b) Words related Tools and Equipments

- /hulāng/: A pointed stick used to dig out tubers for soil.
 /Taomāi/: A ladle
 /touxhuti/: Sticks hammered into earth/ ground for the purpose of keeping utensils during cooking.
 /hutā/: a broom made of stubble used specifically in the kitchen.
 /dongajai/: a type of rope used in weaving.
 /sungali/: a small tube
 /kakilā/: a particular type of long piece cut out from bamboo used for making walls and roof of huts.
 /jokā/: A tuft of small branches of leaves of a tree.
 /dakalāi/: a frame of bamboo over the fireplace in the village households.
 /katāi/: a type of lamp.
 /Thengenāmoni/: That part of the bed where legs are kept.

c) Related to Birth:

- /hudi/: meaning –act purification/ to purify
 /Gat howā/: To be in the family way.
 /Bhitor homowā/: To give birth, to deliver.

d) **Related to marriage:**

/kaniyā/:	the bride
/daā/:	the bride groom
/kajā/:	To be paid by the groom's family.
/kanāi kolā/:	A ritual in which the bride after the ceremonial bath is given a doll made of cloth- a symbol of a child.
/kāpu lowā/:	To attain or about to attain puberty.
/manuh howā/:	To be considered a women after attainment of puberty.
/bhojā khowā/:	a pre-marriage feast offered to the 'bhakat's (Vaisnavite devotees who perform religious rituals in the village prayer hall) in the house of the bridegroom or the bride.
/Jagarmarā/:	The ritual to be performed at the bride's house after eloping boy and girl are formally accepted declared as man and wife-by the bridegroom's family.
/mitu khuā/:	Accepting hearty a meal in the house of the new relatives through marriage.

e) **Related to death:**

/OO pawā/:	Colloquial for – a phrase which mean death of some one.
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f) **Related to Parts of the human Body:**

/Mu-oā/:	Colloquial for –head
/Muatoo/:	head
/Muā āsuwā/:	a comb or combing hair
/Jibā/:	the tongue
/Buā āngali/:	the thumb finger

g) **Related to Animals:**

/bānda/:	a Monkey
/bhakali/:	a toad
/jeluk/:	a leed
/sāksani/:	an insect with ghrill voice
/kakaā/:	a crab

h) **Realted to time:**

The Matak in their common parlance use words which are different form standard Assamese that are related to time such as /athoni/; /ibeli/; /hibeli/; /āubeli/ etc. to mean "quite some time back"; 'this time' or 'this tura'; 'that time' or "that period"; 'time', 'then', 'now' etc..

CONCLUSION:

In this manner, we can see a different form of the standard Assamese language if we analyse the various aspects such as phonetic, morphological and lexical of the language spoken by the Matak community among their own people in day to day life. It may lead one to surmise that they might have had a language of their own while they came to Assam and as a sub-group of the Tai race the possibility of their speaking the Tai language cannot ruled out. There are words used to imply various family relations such -/enāideu/- one's mother; mother, /puthādeu/-one's mother's father; /Nisādeu/-one's mother's or father's elder brother; /āpādeu/-one's mother's or father's brother's wife; /Dadādeu/- one's father's younger brother etc. Used by Tai Ahom community of Assam. In the state of Assam some other groups of people also speak words ending with /ng/. So that there is scope for extensive study and research on the Colloquial language of the Matak.

ⁱ1) Ahom Buronji: (With Parallel English Translation) Calcutta 1930 by Rai Sahib Golap Ch. Barua. Page no 38.

ⁱⁱ2) This book was collected from Tai pondit- Biswa Changbun Phukon, Chepon, Moran, Assam and this is a Tai language Manuscript , which was bring when king Su-Ka-Pha was came to Assam.

ⁱⁱⁱ3) This book was collected from Tai pondit- Biswa Changbun Phukon, Chepon, Moran, Assam and this is a Tai language Manuscript , which was bring when king Su-Ka-Pha was came to Assam.

^{iv}4) While writing the Assamese words/ sentences to give examples, the English alphabet is used instead of the I.P.A. which might be unfamiliar to some readers. Moreover, the following signs are used.

a) 𑜀 = a ; 𑜁 = ā ;

b) 𑜃𑜂𑜆/𑜃𑜂𑜆 are unique sounds in Assamese which cannot be shown with IPA. Used in initial position, these three produce a sound between /h/ and /soft kh/- some what like the 'ch' sound in German. Here this is represented by /X/