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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Prahar, a non- governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Identity crisis of language & script of Indigenous Assamese people of India

Ashok Sarma, Researcher of Ancient Kamrup and Bhaskar Bordoloi, Researcher of Assamese Script are saying about indigenous identity crisis. How ancient is the land of Assam, or ancient Kamrup or present Northeast region of India? According to the book “The Great Corridor in the East” edited by Dr. Phani Deka the land of Assam or ancient Kamrup or North-East India is a part of old Gondwana land. It means it took its form 750 million years ago. Now the natural question to be asked is since when life started on this land? In the same book it is established that life started here not less than 50,00,00,000 years ago. Regarding existence evolution of early men in this region, though there is no direct evidence, but findings of fossils of Vanamanuh (apes), Jivanjvakas, Mainakno (Monkey man), various tools in late Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic periods make us presume that at least 40,000 years ago early men were here.

Famous historian Icchamuddin Sarkar in his book “Aspects of Historical Geographical of Pragjyotisa Kamrupa” (p-11) wrote, “.long before the advent of Rigvedic Aryans in the Indian subcontinent the area (Kamrup) under study were humming with busy life and human activities. The aspirations and cultural attainments of the people who lived there have been nicely reflected in the various objects from the different cultural levels of a number of sites” From this statement we are clear that before the composition of Rig-Veda, people were in Assam and busied with their activities along with cultural activities. On the other hand, in the book “Sustainability, Participation and culture in communication: Theory and Praxis” (p-61) written by Jan Servaes, it is stated “.the history of human civilization is a history of technology. Technology shapes society, culture, nature and every scientific and socio-economic revolution of human histories. Kirkpatrick (2008) asserts that technology to human is synonymous to language, since there is no human civilization without language, human society without technology is as inconceivable as on without language” From both statement it can be easily surmised that language was in Assam before the composition of Rig-Veda. It is interesting to note that Linguist G N Devy confirmed that the letter “Rhi” used to write the spelling “Rig-Veda” was borrowed from the mother of Assamese Language to the Sanskrit Language. The pronunciation of Assamese letter “s” (x) was same as that of Rig-Veda. There are more proofs to show that the ancient Assamese language was in vogue before the Rig-Veda.

Dorian Fuller and David Comrie observed that the Indo-European language could have originated in such places where agriculture had already started because cognate words relating to agriculture were similar in all languages. From the research paper “Neolithic culture of northeast India: A recent perspective on the origin of pottery and Agriculture”, the opinion of Jerold Edmondson, linguist of Texas University, the book “Mango through Millennia”, and different DNA studies, we may surely say that the Kamrup (old Assam) is the place where first agriculture started. If it is so then Assam is the homeland of Indo-European language. Therefore the Assamese language has developed here from such antique language which is earlier than the language of Rig-Veda. On the other hand, the Sanskrit language evolved from the Rig-Vedic Language only. Therefore it is crystal clear that the Assamese language can’t evolve from the Sanskrit language.

The oldest archaeological proof of Assamese language and script was found in Dinajpur stone Inscription. It is to be noted that during the period of 4th century B.C. or later time this Dinajpur area (now in Bangladesh) was belonging to Ancient Kamrup. The language of this inscription was Prakrit and the script was Brahmi. The first Sanskrit language’s inscription was found at Girner in Gujrat state of India. It is dated to be 2nd century A.D. Within the area of ancient Kamrup we have 200 plus epigraphical evidences from 4th century BC to 19th century AD, other than Sanchipaath Puthi (books). Formation and development of Assamese script found from 4th to 16th century AD.

If we notice the script of the Ashokan edicts, from where the most of Indic script had developed, and compare it with the script of Dinajpur stone inscription, it is clearly seen that before Ashok, the same script was used in ancient Kamrup. If we again compare the “Allahabad Pillar inscription of Samudragupta (4th century A.D.) with the inscription found in Golaghat district of Assam (4th century A.D.), then the inscription of Assam is more

archaic than Samudragupta Inscription. Even the language of the inscription found in Golaghat district is not the Sanskrit language. Similarly in case of other inscriptions found in Assam, we observe it attentively that the language and the script of these inscriptions developed here spontaneously. So, the Assamese language and script is the fundamental identity of the indigenous Assamese people of India and derive the right to be protected.

The British when colonized India established their capital in Kolkata. Then the language and the territory were known as Bangla or Bengali. When the printing technology was introduced in Kolkata to publish Bangla books, the British then needed 'Type-set' for the script. One will get amazed while see the script of the 'Type-set', because all are the Assamese script used in those days or before in Assam to write the Assamese language. But the British coined this script to be Bengali script. During that period Assam was an Independent country. But in accordance with the Yandaboo treaty, Assam went under the British and lost its independency forever. When India got independence, Government of India has not given much attention on Assamese language and script; till now it remains unchanged. What the British said is the present version of Government of India. The history of Assamese language and script is not studied on the basis of its epigraphic evidence, but it is fused with the history of other Indic language and script. Now the most unfortunate matter is that Government of India has distorted the originality of the Assamese language and script. The Human resource Development Department of India has not mentioned the Assamese script in their website. The official Language Department of India in a reply to a complaint (The registration no. of the complaint: JSOLD/E/2020/00141) wrote that the Bengali script is used to write the Assamese language. Before putting such opinion they have to compare the available archaeological (epigraphical) and historical evidences of language and script of both Bengali and Assamese. But they never did it. With the study of hardly 1 or 2 epigraphical evidences of Assam it is concluded, Assam has no separate script of its own. In UNICODE consortium, India government has not included the Assamese script; rather they introduced the Assamese script to be the Bengali script. The Government of India has been doing injustice to the Indigenous Assamese people. If we complain against such injustice and enquire reason thereof, it never answered properly. 95 percent letters of the alphabet is Assamese script but it is not recognized as Assamese Script. Therefore it is presumed that Govt of India has done against the identity of Assamese script with vested interest, willingly.

In case of the history of the Assamese language, the books published in Assam (except one or two) and India throughout, it is written and taught that the Assamese Language has evolved from the Sanskrit language. We don't have any hatred towards any language in the world; rather we have equal respect to all the languages. The Sanskrit may be the old language, but it doesn't mean that it becomes the mother of the Assamese Language. Are there any proofs to establish this? What is the base of such opinion? Does it base on historical, archaeological (epigraphical), geographical, or genetic studies facts? Nothing. It is also done just to distort the originality of the Assamese Language. The way of distorting and destroying the Assamese script was started with the distorting the original history of the Assamese script. Similarly the history of Assamese language is also adulterated by the hypothesis that the Assamese Language has evolved from the Sanskrit language. By reiterating this hypothesis again and again and teaching in all colleges and Universities, the day to come it will be established that the Assamese language is comparatively newly born language and it evolved from the Sanskrit language or Aryan Language Bengali. So, we are fearful and perhaps the day will come when the Government of India will make our Assamese language extinct like Assamese script in the National as well as in International scenario.

So, we need protection for our Assamese Language and script with its own identity in National and International platform. We never want our language and script or culture to be distorted by the Government of India. We are Indian, but were independent before. We are now part of India, but it doesn't mean that we have to forfeit our own identity of language, script, culture and heritage.