

A REPORT ON KAMATAPURI LANGUAGE

KAMATAPURI LANGUAGE IS QUALIFIED TO BE RECOGNIZED UNDER 8TH SCHEDULE

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Kamatapuri Language is the lingua franca in the region of the historical Kamatapur and Koch Rajbanshi areas of South Asia for last 800 years. This area includes parts of present Nepal, North Bengal, Lower Assam, parts of Bangladesh and Bhutan. (See Map of Kamata during 16th Century in annexure I).

The language had been flourished and patronized by the royal courts of Kamatapur and Koch Kings since 13th Century onward. One of the earliest examples of Kamatapuri literary work is **Prahlad Charit** written by Poet Hemswaraswati in the last of the 13th century during the rule of Durlavnaraynan. Another marvelous work of the same century is the **Jayadrath Badh** by Kabiranta Swaraswati verses. The most famous work in Kamatapuri language in the court of Kamatapur is the “Ramayana” composed by famous Kamatapuri poet Madhav Kandali. These are only few examples of the 13th -14th century work of Kamatapuri literature.

In the 15th century under the royal patronage of Koch King of Biswasingha, a new line of poets known as Panchali Kabi created some of the famous Kamatapuri literatures. Among them were **Manasakabya** by Mankar, **Padma Puran** by Saukabi Narayandev are the most famous. These traditions continued to the next centuries and many works including translation of great sankrit literatures into Kamatapuri language were done during that time. Ten chapters of Mahabharata was translated (from Adi Parva to Santi Parva) into Kamatapuri language including **Geet Govinda** during these centuries. Even during the colonial period this tradition did not stopped. During the rule of Maharaja Haredna Narayan (1783-1839) of Cooch Behar, some of the valuable Kamatapuri literatures were created. One of them is the **Gosani Mangal** by Krishnadas Boiragi, which was written in the late of 18th century.

The trend of writing in Kamatapuri language continued to the present time, but due to the disappearance of Kamatapur as political and territorial identity, the language is no more recognized as independent one and has been termed as a dialect of Bengali in West Bengal and as an Assamese dialect of Assam by some Assamese and Bengali nationalists. It is surprising that same Kamatapuri language has been termed as dialect of two different languages. Moreover, Due to disappearance of Kamatapuri area in the modern political identity of the Indian sub-continent the rich literature have been claimed either by the Bengalis or by the Assamese. It

should be noted that during the period of 16th and 17th Century, the language was written in its own Kamatapuri/ Rajbanshi scripts. (See Annexure II for the script).

However, foreign scholars have recognized the authenticity of the language. Scholars like Mathew Toulmin of Australian National University have opined that the language is of 800 years old and not a dialect Assamese and Bengali. He says, “ The linguistic history reconstructed (here) shows that all KRDS (Kamata-Rajbanshi-Deshi-Suryapuri) lects-whether the Rajbanshi of Morang district of Nepal, the Sthaniyo Bhasa (local language)of Rangpur in Bangladesh, or the Kamta (kamatapuri) of cooch Behar in India- share a common ancestor, which for historical reason may be termed as Proto Kamata. This common linguistic ancestor is not a fantasy created to justify a contemporary political positions, but historical entity reconstructed by the best historical linguistic methodology available to us”. He further states that “Kamata/Rajbanshi/Deshi Bhasa is not corrupt Bangla. Statements to this effect by numerous 19th and early 20th century researchers are simply a distortion of the historical reality”.¹

Further recognizing the value of the Kamatapuri language, **Christopher P. Wilde** from University of Helsinki Department of General Linguistics, Finland has done a huge work of 581 pages on the phonology and grammar of the Rajbanshi languages titled “**A Sketch of the Phonology and Grammar of Rājbanshi**” in 2008.

Despite neglect towards the Kamatapuri language by the Indian Scholars, some foreign scholars and some Kamatapuri scholars have come up with some important work particularly dictionaries of the Kamatapuri language. Sujan Barman has written a huge dictionary of 961 pages of Kamatapuri language title “Kamatapuri Abhidhan”. Rajbanshi Nepali Sobdokosh (A concise Lexicon of Rajbanshi-Rajbanshi-Nepali) is another such dictionary, which was published from Nepal by Tribhuvan University. Besides, such major works, books for Primary Education, Grammar of the Rajbanshi language and thousands of literatures are already published from North Bengal, Assam and Nepal.²

It should be noted that according to the data of Linguistic survey of India in 1903 the speaker of Kamatapuri language was 3, 509,171 (Excluding Nepal).³ Another government source reveals that in 1991, percentage of Kamatapuri speaker in Cooch Behar was 50% , in Darjeeling 30%, in Jalpaiguri 60%, in Malda 40%, in West Dinajpur 60%,in Dhubri 60%, in Bongaigaon 70% and 35% in Kokrajhar district.⁴ **This means, 57% of these 7 Districts are speaker of Kamatapuri language in 1991.** (See Annexure III for 1991 Kamatapuri speaking people). Now, Interpretation

¹ Mathew Toulmin, Language History of Kamta and Cooch Behar Region, Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asia Studies, The Australian National University, Australia, 2009, Page 246

² For more information see: A Documentation of Rajbanshi Language Resource: Volume 1, NLP Publication, Siliguri

³ Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol-V, Part-I, P.163

⁴ Do. No.212/97 B (D) dt 1997 From Shri. C.M. Ibrahim, Minister of Civil Aviation information & Broad Casting, India

of this date with the 1991 population of district of North Bengal reveals that there **were 49,40,012** Kamatapuri speaker in North Bengal itself excluding Assam and Bihar. This is 5 times higher than Manipuri language, which is also a officially recognized language in India.

According to Mathew Toulmin, who personally collected data on the Kamatapuri Language, the area (Districts) of South Asia where this language is spoken are below:⁵

India:

Bihar: Kishanganj, Araria, Purnia, Katihar

West Bengal: Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur

Assam: Kokrajahr, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Goalpara

Bangladesh: Panchagar, Thakurgram, Nilphamari, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Kurigram, Gaibandha

Nepal: Morang, Jhapa

(See Language Map at Annexure IV)

The Kamtapuri Language should be recognized for the following reason:

- Kamatapuri language qualifies to be included in the 8th Schedule of the constitution by applying any conceivable yardstick used so far for the purpose and, therefore, non-inclusion of Kamatapuri in the 8th Schedule is totally inconformity with the provisions of the Constitution and the denial of the rights of Kamatapuri/Rajbanshi people which is provided by the constitution of India.
- The Sahitya Academi has already recognized the individual identity of the Kamatapuri language by conferring Girijasankar Ray with Bhasha Sanman in recognition for his outstanding contribution in Rajbanshi language on 28th October , 2010 at Bibekananda Kendra, Guwahati. In a letter dated 11 May, 2009, (Memo No. SA/16/14) A. K. Murthy, Secretary of Sahitya Akademi has mentioned Rajbanshi as language, not a dialect.
- India should take example of smaller countries like Nepal, which has introduced Kamatapuri language in primary education in Rajbanshi areas. (See attached document). Moreover,

⁵ Mathew Toulmin, Language History of Kamta and Cooch Behar Region, Pacific Linguistics, Research School of Pacific and Asia Studies, The Australian National University, Australia, 2009, Page 3

Tribhuvan University has come forward to published Rajbanshi Dictionary. Sadly, no university of a great country like India has done this for the Kamatapuri/ Rajbanshi language⁶

- The denial of the cultural rights of Kamatapuri by not recognition the their language has created a feeling of alienation among the greater Koch Rajbanshi people and they feel that are treated as step children by the Government compared to their Bengali and Assamese counter parts.
- The recognition of the language will bring peace to the Kamatapuri region, which includes North Bengal and Lower Assam.

⁶ For more information kindly contact concerned department of Nepal Government

Annexure-I



Source: Koch Biharer Itihas

Annexure-II

স্বরবর্ণ ———					
অ	আ	ই	ঊ	ঋ	ঌ
ঐ	ফ	খ	গ	এ	ক
ও	ভ	অ°	অঃ		
ব্যঞ্জন বর্ণ ———					
ক	খ	গ	ঘ	ঙ	
চ	ছ	জ	ঝ	ঞ	
ট	ঠ	ড	ঢ	ণ	
ত	থ	দ	ধ	ন	
প	ফ	ব	ভ	ম	
য	ষ	ল	ল্	স (ন)	
শ	স	হ	ক্ষ	ড়	
ড	য়	ৎ	০	ঃ	ঔ

Source: Dharmanarayan Barma

Annexure -III

Kamatapuri speaking Population in West Bengal in 1991

Name of the District	Total Population	Kamatapuri /Rajbanshi speaker
Cooch Behar	2165000	108200
Jalpaiguri	2655000	1593000
Darjeeling	1072000	321600
West Dinajpur	3104000	1862400
Maldah	2,637,032	1054812
Total	11,63,3032	49,40,012

Population Source: A Study by South Asia Research Society, Calcutta

Kamatapuri speaking population is interpreted by using the % provided by Do. No.212/97 B (D) dt 1997 From Shri. C.M. Ibrahim, Minister of Civil Aviation information & Broad Casting, India

Annexure-IV



Source: Mathew Toulmin, 2009

This report was prepared by Arup Jyoti Das on the request of **Kamatapur Progressive Party** as a background document in support of Kamatapuri language. Which was eventually submitted to both Central and State Govt.(West Bengal) as the main document for recognition of the Kamatapuri language.

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