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**PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY THE ASSAMESE
LANGUAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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Abstract:

In the 21st century, the minds and thought processes of people all over the world are changing rapidly due to the powerful wave of globalization. This is also affecting the linguistic structure of many communities worldwide. Science and technology is making everything easy for people but threatening the existence of the Assamese language. In the 21st century, the Assamese language is facing many problems. Some of them are- negligence towards one's mother tongue, the ignorance of the middle class Assamese, the adverse effects of electronic media, immigration, globalization etc.

0.1 Introduction:

Towards the end of the 20th century, globalization and liberalization of the economy turned the whole world into a global village. It affected our clothing, lifestyle, and also our language, resulting in various challenges and difficulties for the Assamese language in the 21st century. The cultural and literary structures of the society also started changing and the much beloved language of the people of Assam began to face lots of problems with the passage of time. At present, Assamese language is facing various problems and number of people speaking the language is reducing day by day, hence the scope of the language is shrinking. Presently some people speak in a language which is a mixture of English and Assamese, ruining the authenticity of both the languages. They do not speak correctly either language, which is posing a threat to the future of the Assamese language and community.

0.2 Purpose and Method of Study:

It is evident that the Assamese language is presently facing existential crisis. Although Assamese is predominantly spoken in Assam but it has been slowly being consumed by other languages like Hindi, English and Bangla etc. Once upon a time, Assamese was being used as a lingua franca in Assam but it is being ruined by the mixture of many other languages. Assamese is most widely spoken in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam, but still it is facing threats here. Currently there are various problems and challenges faced by the language. This

research paper aims at making an analysis of the different challenges faced by the Assamese language and the ways to tackle them.

This research paper is prepared using analytical method.

0.3 Area of Study:

Presently, the minds and thought processes of people all over the world are changing rapidly due to the powerful wave of globalization. Lifestyles of people are also changing globally. This also affects the Assamese language. With the passage of time, the speaking style of the Assamese people is also changing which results in a strange mixed language, which cannot be classified as either correct Assamese, or correct English, or correct Hindi. This research paper includes some important topics related to the problems faced by the Assamese language, such as Assamese people boycotting Assamese medium in schools, increased use of English and Hindi, problems caused by uncontrollable immigration, excessive use of English and Hindi words in electronic media advertisements, problems caused by social media, lack of awareness among the middle class Assamese people, challenges brought in by globalization etc.

1.0 Core Discussion:

If we closely study the various problems of the Assamese language, it becomes clear that some Assamese people are not very patriotic about their mother tongue, and fail to take a stand for the language. Hindi and English are gradually consuming the language. Also, the negligence of some middle class Assamese people towards their own language is posing threats to the existence of the same. The foreign immigrants have also caused harm to the language by not fully adapting to it. If we carefully observe the advertisements on electronic media, we will notice a certain mixture of Assamese, English, Hindi and Bangla being used for these adverts. Apart from these, globalization has turned the world into a global village and slowly and steadily people from all around the globe are adapting to similar types of culture, language, and food habits. This is affecting the uniqueness and authenticity of native languages spoken in small regions in every part of the world, including Assam.

1.1 Boycotting the Assamese Medium and Predominance of English, Hindi and Bangla:

One of the most prominent problems of the Assamese language is that most middle and upper class Assamese people are neglecting the Assamese medium and preferring English medium schools over Assamese medium schools, regarding the education of their children. People tend to have an opinion that one can fulfill one's dreams and ambitions only through the English medium. With the advent of the 21st century, due to globalization and predominance of the English language, people began to get more attracted to the English medium schools because Assamese/ other native languages do not seem to be the ideal medium for education, especially the government schools, which is not true. Due to this mindset of the common people, various private schools have been established, fostering the English language as a result. Some schools even restrict their students from speaking their mother tongue inside the school campus. The present scenario is quite worrisome. However, it does not mean that learning the English language is not important, rather one should try to learn their mother tongue as well as English. Presently most Assamese people are of the opinion that a man is only as educated as his fluency in English. This mindset is harmful to the Assamese language. English is a language; it is not a standard to measure one's level of knowledge. Learning a foreign language is appreciable, if one also knows how to respect their mother tongue. We should always be careful not to ruin the beauty of our mother tongue by mixing it with Hindi and English. The Assamese language is mostly facing challenges because of

people's lack of enthusiasm towards their own language, feeble condition of the Assamese medium, lack of scientific and technical methods in Assamese medium schools etc. This problem has to be resolved as soon as possible or it will endanger the Assamese language. Similarly, the predominance of languages like Hindi, Bangla etc. is shrinking the reach of the Assamese language. It is okay to borrow words from other languages for daily use but too much use of words of foreign origin is not ideal, especially if similar words are already existent in the Assamese language. Assamese people are basically job-seekers. Therefore, Assamese are more inclined towards getting a degree and acquiring a job, and since good education is provided by private institutions, they give more importance to learning English. This opinion of the people is also a catalyst in endangering the Assamese language. Currently it is not possible to fully free ourselves of the affects of other languages such as English, Hindi and Bangla. These languages have become an integral part of our day to day life. On one hand, these languages have contributed to the richness of our language and on the other hand, they are posing various threats to the very existence of our language.

There are many English words used frequently by Assamese speaking people, both educated and non-educated. Some of these words are even used in writing. Some of them are mentioned below:

- a) Education related: school, college, desk-bench, pen, copy, arts, and science.
- b) Health related: operation, accident, nurse, prescription.
- c) Clothing related: cap, shirt, skirt, jacket etc.
- d) Sports related: table tennis, football, cricket, badminton etc.
- e) Fine arts and literature related: theatre, tragedy, comedy, novel, sonnet etc.
- f) Jewellery: earring, necklace, bracelet.

Words borrowed from Bangla are 'rosogolla', 'sandesh', 'batasha', 'gonda', 'kuri', 'kori', 'sorbohara', 'bastuhara' etc.

Words borrowed from Hindi are 'sona', 'loha', 'ulta-palta', 'khorsa', 'gaata', 'saavdhan', 'loksabha', 'doordarshan' etc.

It can be derived from the above discussion that Assamese is greatly influenced by English, Hindi and Bangla. We should be careful as to accepting only the necessary words; otherwise these languages will start affecting our own language. Due to this nature of English, it has been termed as "killer language". This is the biggest problem of the Assamese language in the current scenario.

1.2 Negligence by the Assamese Middle Class:

The biggest challenge of the Assamese language is the negligence of middle class Assamese people. Whether it is business or higher education, the middle class has always been prioritising the English language in every aspect. Some people do not even hold the minimum level of respect for the Assamese language. Most middle class people prefer English medium schools for the education of their children, but only a few are able to teach their children the value of their mother tongue. Apart from this, even the name plates or signboards of schools, colleges and universities are mostly written in English. These signboards should be written in both English and Assamese. Nowadays most students are able to speak Assamese, although not perfectly, but many of them do not know how to properly read or write Assamese. Modern day students speak in a language that is, in reality, neither proper Assamese nor

proper English. For example: "Tomar dress tu iman pretty lagise" (your dress is looking so pretty). These types of sentences in a mixed language are harming the Assamese language every day.

1.3 Negative impacts of Electronic Media on the Assamese Language:

The different types of electronic media platforms are also affecting the Assamese language in different ways. Although electronic media and print media have largely contributed towards the growth of the language but they are not free of flaws. Due to the negligence of people working in the media, the sentence structure in many Assamese news reports, whether in newspapers or news channels, are found to be wrong. Especially electronic media has mixed a lot of Hindi, English and Bangla words with Assamese. News headlines can be seen as - "Brahmaputrat dui satrar xalil xamadhi" (Two Students Drown in Brahmaputra". Here, the sentence is incomplete without a verb according to the rules of Assamese grammar. This style of news reporting has been borrowed from Bangla news channels. English words are often used in the TV advertisements such - "Amul Taaza Xodaye Fresh" (Amul Taaza Always Fresh) or "Daator xurokhyat jidore toothpaste, liveror xurakhyat Livsav" (the way toothpaste protects our teeth, similarly Livsav protects our liver). An Assamese tagline having Hindi word is- "Aahe aahe kesharar dum" (the power of saffron in every bite). Here, the word "dum" is borrowed from Hindi. We can also see the predominance of English words in news headlines such as - "Saboloi napahoribo xaat bojar prime time." (Do not forget to watch Prime Time at 7), "Opoja matir poroxere prothom tu satellite channel" (the first ever satellite channel with the touch of our motherland). We get to hear lines such as "Ajir Midday Masala R.J Pahir xoite" (today's Midday Masala with RJ Pahi), "Hello everybody super hit 93.5 Red FM-ot moi RJ Pahi. Of course Red FM-ot soli thake eti story. Apuni jodi lucky winner amar xoite bohobo paribo" (Hello everybody I am RJ Pahi in super hit 93.5 Red FM. Of course we tell you stories on Red FM. If you are our lucky winner you can take the hot seat with us), etc. These types of sentences are harmful for the Assamese language. Even Assamese newspapers print headlines such as "ketiaba target hoi bisarok" (sometimes judges are the target). Private TV channels, FM radio, mobile phones, newspapers etc. use this mixed language. Therefore, the social media platforms should take the lead in reviving the Assamese language and controlling the damage caused by electronic and print media.

1.4 Challenges Faced by the Assamese Language because of Immigration:

Some of the threats being faced by the Assamese language are posed by the relentless immigration to the state. Immigration is the movement of people from one place to another during a given time period. Immigration is a natural process. Excessive immigration causes unemployment, communal violence and also damages the structure of the native language. Immigration brings about certain changes regarding the culture, religion, societal behavior, language etc. People primarily migrate to Assam from two neighbouring countries- Nepal and Bangladesh. Too much immigration from Bangladesh is causing problems to the native languages of Assam. It is obvious that immigrants carry their own language, culture, religion etc. with them wherever they go. They change the demographic structure of Assam and simultaneously keep speaking their own language, thus reducing the number of people speaking Assamese. Due to the laziness of the native people of Assam, immigration is taking place every day to this land because certain jobs are not suitable for Assamese people. This is a huge threat to both the demography of Assam and its language.

1.5 Negative Affect of Globalization on the Assamese language:

Globalization is a huge factor in the changing scenario of the Assamese language. Globalization facilitates the concept of "one language, one culture, and free commerce". Globalization has harmed the native languages and cultures to a great extent. It is challenging the very existence of different languages. Globalization is slowly engulfing the words of native languages. Assamese words such as "Aamoi (female friend of parents), Tawoi (male friend of parents), Xokhi (friend), and Mita (friend)" are hardly used anymore by Assamese people. The world is now using a universal language that can be called "global English". Some people in Assam are now starting to talk in a mixed language which is causing problems in maintaining the uniqueness of the Assamese language. Number of people speaking Assamese is decreasing and the social media are also ruining the beauty of the language. Recently, a trend of writing in Assamese alphabet has been started online in the social media platforms, which is beneficial for the language, but various mistakes also occur in such online posts and status updates. Globalization has included many words in the Assamese language, such as-

- a) Borrowed words- mummy, daddy, papa, brother, sister etc.
- b) Phrases borrowed from the Hindi language- "fokatiya kotha nokobi" (do not say baseless things), "bakwas bandha kar" (stop blabbering), "zindagi barbad kori dim" (I will destroy your life), etc.
- c) Sentences without preposition- "tumi amar ghor ahiba" (come our home), "tumi school jaba" (you will go school), "Sombare amar ghor ahibi" (come our home on Monday).
- d) Mixed language- "if you don't mind, one minute eifale ahoksun" (if you don't mind, come here for a minute), "next mahot tair wedding" (her wedding is in next month).
- e) Change of adverbs due to the impact of Hindi. For example, "jur-se" (-se being a Hindi adverb) instead of "jur-koi" (-koi being an Assamese adverb) meaning "loudly".
- f) Changed sentence structures.
- g) Creation of new words: the pronunciations for many words have been changed. Unique Assamese pronunciation for the phonetic 'X' has been replaced by 'S', such as-

/Xarma/- Sharma

/Xaikiya/- Saikia

/Dax/- Das

2.0 Decision:

If we study thoroughly the various challenges and problems faced by the Assamese language, it can be summed up that more or less, no one but the Assamese people are responsible for such degradation of the language. Therefore, Assamese themselves have to come forward to fight these challenges and secure the future of this beautiful language. Only then will these problems subside and Assamese will keep shining as a language in the pages of world history.

3.0 Conclusion:

Presently a tendency to not feel attached to their own mother tongue can be seen among the Assamese people. With the advent of the 21st century, globalization has turned the whole world into a global village. A new mixed language has been created because of the lack of respect of people towards the Assamese language. An initiative should be taken to re-write all the name plates of different roads and streets of Assam in Assamese. We should only borrow words from other languages when there is no appropriate word in Assamese. Unnecessary use of words from different languages in Assamese can destroy the beauty of the language. We should take necessary measures to protect the language while there is still time.

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