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The Kokborok Language of Tripura

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Tripura is one of the states of the North Eastern India. It is a home of several ethnic communities for which it has been proved as a very fertile land of anthropological and sociological survey and research. Because of its geographical location Tripura is significant too. It shares a total of 832 km international border with Bangladesh in three directions. The other two sides of the state are shared with its sister state Assam and Mizoram. With Assam it shares a boundary of total 51.52 km and With Mizoram it extends up to 62.14 km (Sen, 1993,4). From ancient time, Tripura was ruled by kings. For around 3000 years Tripura had been under the control of Kings. Tripura is one of the states of India which is included in the 6000 years of history of royal rule. From that time itself Tripura has become successful to sustain its peculiarity. Moreover, it is worthwhile to mention here in this regard that till the independence of India in 1947, Tripura was ruled by king. Only on the 15th of 1949 Tripura has become a part of India. During this period on behalf of Kirit Bikram, the son of the last great king of Tripura Maharaja Kishor Manikya Bahadur, queen Kanchanprabha transferred the governance of the state by signing a treaty. At the

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beginning, Tripura was not declared as a full grown state. It was included in the 'B' category of the states of India. In the year 1956, the territorial council of Tripura was formed and finally on 21 of January in 1972 it has got its status as a complete state. (Devray, 2010, p. 22). The state of Tripura mentioned in our study is a part of the state of India. Earlier Tripura was extended to Aracan except to several neighbouring states. Till the war of Palasi Tripura was extended to the Tripura of Today's Banglades (Now Kumilla), Silet, Dhaka, Chattagram and several other districts. According to the census report of 2011 Tripura now covers a geographical area of 10,491 sq miles and its population is 36,71,032. Among the inhabitants of Tripura, Bengali of Aryan origin and different sub-tribes of Mongolian origin are significant.

Several opinions regarding the name Tripura have come out. W. W. Hunter (1876) has opined that the name Tripura had been attributed to the state to pay respect and honour to the Udaypur Temple. Another opinion tells that Tripura is derived from the name "tripurasundari." "Tripurasundari" is the main deity of Land. Some others believe that Tripura has come from the words— "Tui" and 'Pra.' "Tui" means water and 'Pra' means 'near.' Another group believes that the word Tripura is a result of the process of Sanskritization, which is actually derived from the language "Tripuri" of Tipa tribes. Again, another opinion has come out which believes that Tripura has come from the word 'Tri Puram.' Again several others think that Tripura has come from the name of the king "Tripur." (Sen, 1993, p.8)

Bengali is the main language of Tripura. Except that Kokborok is recognized as the second language of Tripura. Kokborok is originally included among the languages of Bodo sub- category of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. The same has some users in the hill stations of Chattagam of Bangladesh and Kachar district of Assam. According to the Census report of 2011, a total of 9,70,000 people of Tripura speak Kokborok which forms 26.43 of the whole population.

Kokborok has its speakers among eight communities of Tripura. They are- Tripuri (Debbarma), Riang, Nooyatiya, Jamatia, Rupini, Kolo, Usoi, and Murasing. Apart from these eight

communities there are eleven sub tribes who use 'Kokborok. They are - Chakma, Mog, Kuki, Darlong, Garo, Lusai, Santal, Munda, Halam, Khasi, Orong. These sub -tribes of Tripura are commonly known as 'Tripuri'. Of all the eight main tribes have their own form of dialect. Still, from all the tribes Kokborok has got its recognition as a standard form of language as for all of them have Kokborok is a common spoken language. There are reasons behind that. This dialect has the most number of users and it is used even among the upper classes of the society. Most of the literary works of Tripura has been written in the Kokborok language. Moreover, around the capital Agartala, the Kokborok has maximum users. Most important in this regard to mention is that this ancient 'tripuri' language is understood well by the other seven tribes of Tripura. Becoming a common, language of eight tribes' Kokborok has given a new dimension to the linguistic scenario of Tripura.

2. Origin of the Kokborok Language:

2.1. The meaning of 'Kokborok' and its Naming:

The word 'Kokborok' is a result of compounding. It is formed by joining the two words 'Kok' and 'Borok.' 'Kok' means 'language' and 'borok' means 'People.' The word 'Kokborok' therefore rightly means 'language of people.' Another meaning to this word is attributed by the Kokborok speakers itself. According to them, 'Kokborok' refers to the 'language of the Kokborok tribe.' When it is specified to the 'Borok', it refers to the 'Bodo' sub-tribe. 'Language of own people' is another meaning of the word 'Kokborok'. In this regard the meaning of the word 'Borok' is 'people of own tribe.' (Kundu Choudhury, 2012, p. 9)

Although, 'Kokborok' is used now a day, earlier the word 'Tripuri' was used to refer the same. Different linguists have used different terms to refer the 'Kokborok' language. Suniti Kumar Chatterji used 'Tripura' and 'Mrung' to refer to 'Kokborok': "To the North- East and East, Bengali meets dialects of the Bodo group: Bodo (Boro) or Kachari (also known as Koc, Mec, and Rabha), Garo and Dima-sa, as well as Mrung or Tripura." (Chatterji, 1979, p. 3). But the same linguist in his book "Kirat-Jana-Kriti", referred 'Kokborok' as 'Tipra'. George Abraham Grierson also used the

word 'Murung' to refer to the Kokborok Language. (Grierson, 1903, p. 110). W. W. Hunter in his book "A Statistical Account of Bengal" wrote: "The whole of the Tipperah tribe known to the khyoungtha of the Chittagong Hill Tract by the name of Mrung and the Arklanese apply the same name to the descendents of Tipperah found in the Akyab District." Lord Captain Lewin termed this language as 'Tipperah.' We find similarity of the lexicon 'Mrung' between Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Hunter. Regarding 'Kokborok', though both have similarities still we perceive an important difference between their usages of the term. In his usage of the word 'Mrung', Hunter referred 'the Kokborok tribes' while Chatterji referred to the 'Kokborok language' with the same term. Moreover, in the Political report of Tripura 'Tripera' is used in lieu of 'Kokborok.' It is significant that no linguist till date has used the term 'Kokborok.' Only Radhamohon Tagore, a Kokborok speaker has used the term 'Kokborok'. Apart from him others have used the term 'Tipera' or 'Tipra.' The term 'Kokborok' in written form for the first time, is found in the book "Kok-Borok-Ma" (Tripuri Grammar) by Radhamohon Tagore. This book was first published in the year 1900 (Kundu Choudhury, 2001, P. 15). This proves that the word 'Kokborok' has been used for the last hundred years.

Another important thing is that documents have also shown that Tagore used the term 'Kokborok' in 1900. But no example of usage of the term is found in the publications of Grierson in 1909, Suniti Kumar Chatterji in 1926 and 1950. It might be because of the name of the state (mainly the usage of the Kokborok language) 'Tripura' and the absence of the term 'Kokborok' in the earlier documents or probably Tagore's unrecognized term 'Kokbork' till the time of the data collection of Chatterji and Grierson. In this sense, we are compelled to think that the acceptance of the term 'Kokbork' is a post-independent thought. Kumud Kundu Choudhury also supported the use of the term 'Kokborok' by proving its importance. The term 'Tripuri', 'Tripura' or 'Tipra' refers to the ancient 'speakers of the tripuri language' and this 'ancient Tripuri' belongs to the sub-tribe of 'debbarma' or 'debbarman'. And then this term will have no reason for acceptance for all the

other seven tribes. Therefore, to maintain uniformity Radhamohon Tagore emphasized in the usage of the term 'Kokborok' (Kundu Choudhury, 2001, p.17). Indeed, Tagore preferred the term 'Kokborok' by observing the acceptance of the dialects. In the language of Kundu Choudhury, "The Kokborok language has all the dialects and they are- Puran Tripuri, (spoken language of the Debbarma), Riyang, Jamatia, Kolo, Rupini, Murasing, Noyatiya (New Tripuri), and Ulsoi (Usoi). And all these dialects are unitedly termed as 'Kokborok'." (Kundu Choudhury, 2012, p. 10).

Probably Radhamohon Tagore faced a lot of hurdles in his endeavour to enliven this term to an accepted one as because the word 'Kokborok' itself is related with the royal family of Tripura. For the royal family of Tripura the terms such as 'Tripuri', 'Tripura', and 'Tipra' are relatively more acceptable and associative than the term 'Kokbork'. For this reason it is known that his relation with the royal family became hostile. This also proves that Tagore emphasized on the acceptance of the term 'Kokborok' as a common term for all the dialect speakers more than the praise and prize of the royal family. As a result of his hard labour now the 'Kokborok' is accepted by all.

2.2. The Lexicon 'Kokborok':

Controversy had built up regarding the term 'Kokborok'. Question arose whether to accept the spelling 'Kogborok' or 'Kokborok'. Researchers and linguists have given different opinions regarding the spelling. Officially and publicly the controversy turned out with the publication of the written form of 'Kokborok' in 'Uttaran'. In the endeavour of Suhash Chattopadhyay this book was published in the year 1972. After this Dasarath Debbarma published his 'Kog-Borog-Souboung (Educating Kogborog)'. In the subsequent period Kumud Kundu Choudhury published his "Kogborok Lipi Bitarka Banan Bitarka" (1995).

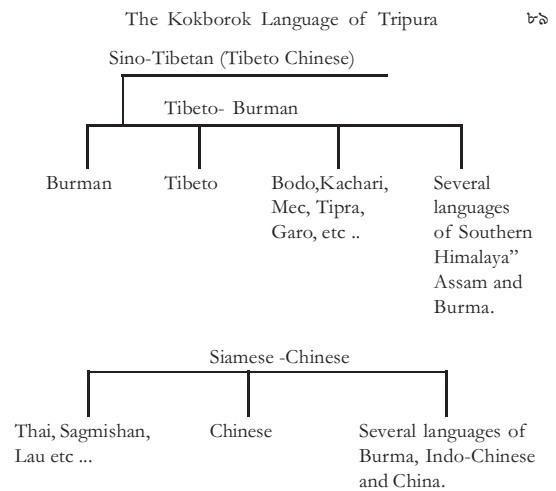
On the basis of the linguistic analysis Kumud Kundu Choudhury added his view that 'Kogborok' is more scientific than the word 'Kokborok'. He based his linguistic analysis on the language behavior of the sub-tribes of Tripura. By the way, this discussion on spelling has grown up on the basis of the "Kok-Borok-Ma"

(Troipur Grammar) by Radhamohon Tagore. Tagore used hyphen in the spelling of the book “Kok-Borok-Ma” to make it divisions into three separate words. It is because, all the three words have their individual meanings. The word ‘Kok’ means ‘language’, ‘Borok’ means ‘people or the Borok tribe’ and ‘Ma’ means ‘Mother’. If on the basis of these meanings ‘Kok-Borok’ is written then it means ‘language of the borok tribe or people.’ By following the “Kok-Borok-Ma” books like “Kok-Kului”(Children book Kokborok), “Kok-Boiam”, “Kok- Thum”(language Collection or lexion), “Kok-Borok- Soubong”(Kokborok Education) have been published. Another spelling ‘Kokbordok’ also appeared apart from the other two terms ‘kokborok’ and ‘Bogborok.’ Similarity with the ‘Bodo’ sub-tribe of the other tribes of Tripura is the reason behind the rise these spellings. But the ‘Kokbork’ speakers of Tripura have accepted the term ‘Kokborok.’ Those researchers and linguists who supported the use of the term ‘Kogborok’ ultimately have accepted the term ‘Kokborok’ by looking at the sentiment of the people.

2.3 Origin of the Kokborok language:

In the discussion of language it is important to investigate about the origin of the language. If we can appear in the origin of the language correctly, the subsequent study and research get a smooth run. That is why it is necessary to enquire the origin of the ‘Kokborok’ language. The researchers have already reached the ‘Chino-Tibetan’ origin of the languages as an origin of Kokborok in their course of study. Still the matter is not out of controversy. The reason behind is that there is no end of the curiosity regarding the ‘Tibeto-Burman’ languages of the North- East of India. Therefore famous linguist like H.A. Gleason became astonished by studying this ‘Tibeto-Burman’ region and languages.

George Abraham Grierson, Suniti Kumar Chatterji etc linguists have shown ‘Kokborok’ as a ‘Sino-Tibetan’ variety of languages. According to them ‘Kokborok’ has descended from the languages of “Tibeto-Burman” sub-group of the ‘Sino-Tibetan’ family. Suniti Kumar Chatterji has shown the origin of the ‘Kokborok’ language by the following diagram—



As and when Chatterji mentioned a letter of ‘Bodo’ he has shown the migration and establishing inhabitants of the tribe to this geographical land. He wrote, “The Bodo section of the Tibeto - Burman brunch of Tibeto- Chinese people (Bodo, Mac, Koc, Kacari, rabha, Garo, Tipura) came to Assam and East and North Bengal is not known, but it could not have been long before the beginning of the Christian era, at the earliest.”(Chatterji, 1970, p. 69)

Radhamohon Tagore did not try to find the origin of the ‘Kokborok’ language by investigating the lineage of the ‘Tibeto-Burman’ source. Rather Tagore believed that ‘Kokborok’ has come from the languages of the ‘Aryan family of Languages.’ On the basis of the “Kok- Borok-Ma (Troipur Grammar)” and “Troipur Bhasavidhan “ Tagore opined that the origin of Kokbork lies in the Aryan languages. It is has descended from Sanskrit by the resuly of corruption of the original language. If we believe the opinion of Radhamohon Tagore we shall carry some doubt regarding the origin of other Tibeto-Burmese languages such as - Bodo, Garo, Dimasa, Koch, Sutia, Rabha etc ... Till date the researchers have

tried to find the origin of these languages in Tibeto-Burman source. But Kundu Choudhury has tried to oppose the opinion laid by Tagore. Choudhury has proved that the words such as 'Tui (water)', 'Ba (Sister)', 'Ma (Mother)', 'Ebongbokha (Heart)' etc ... some words originally belong to the Kokborok language, which Tagore believed to be descended from Sanskrit. Kundu Choudhury opined that we could not judge the origin of a language on the basis of the similarity of some words with another language.

Another researcher of 'Kokborok', Sudhangshu Bikash Saha opined: "Some scholars identified Kokborok as a branch from the Tibeto-Burmese section of the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. The Bodos have been regarded as a group of Tibeto-Burmese speakers originally coming from Tien-shan valley of Mongolia thousands of years ago. The Tripuris are commonly considered as a sub-branch of the Bodos. The dialect they use is called Tipra or murang which belongs to the Bodo group of tibeto-burman sub-family-of the great Tibeto-chinese family of languages." (Saha, 1988, P. 4)

In our study of the origin of the 'Kokborok' language the opinions of researchers like Grierson, Chatterji, etc seem to be very relevant and important. From the point of view of the lineage their opinions seem to be relevant. A language may change its characteristics in its course of journey by getting influenced by the other languages surrounding it. This is not new in the study of language. We should not encourage the endeavour to see the origin of a language by viewing its present state of characteristics. We therefore can speak that the 'Kokborok' language of Tripura has descended from the Bodo sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. It has no relationship with the Aryan Sanskrit from the point of view of its origin.

3. Development of Kokborok :

3.1 The First Stage of Development in the Bengali Scripts:

In connection with the discussion of the development of Kokborok language we must not forget that nobody can determine the age and life of a language. Kokborok is also no exception to this. It is imagined that the beginning of the Kokborok

language happened around 1200-1400 years ago. Kokborok has got the status of a standard language around 1200-1400 years ago (Kundu Choudhury, 2001, p. 232). The development of a language can be clearly traced by examining its written form of literature. It is definite that before the existence of written literature in Kokborok, it must have had oral literature from much ancient time. But the Kokborok language in its first documentation is found from the year 1703. A biography of King Mahendra Manikya by Durgaprasad Narayan is found to be written in the year 1703 in Kokborok. But this biography was written in Bangla script. This becomes, here, clear that kokborok has started its journey of development with the help of Bengali script. This might be termed as the first stage of development of the Kokborok language. Proof has been found that the manuscripts of this version of the language had a collection in a museum in Agartala but today it's very rare to find. In this regard Mohan Choudhury wrote in his book "Tripuri Vasar Likhito Ruper Utso Sandhan O Lipi Bitorko": "The documents discovered till now regarding the Kokborok language of Tripura we find that some Narayan wrote the biography of King Mahendra Manikya in Bengali scripts. The manuscript of the same is safely preserved by Sri K.P Dutta the personal secretary of the former Chief Minister of Sukhmoy Sen. Although written in large fonts still I found difficulty in understanding the text. With a great difficulty I understood some portion of the text. Probably the Kokborok language of that time was not like that of Today (Kundu Choudhury, 2006, p. 63)." From the opinion of Mohan Choudhury it becomes clear that the Kokborok language does not remain the same from the beginning till today. The Kokborok language of today has reached its present stage by passing through different stages of development.

We can not avoid the discussion of the development of the Bengali language while studying the Kokborok language. Bengali falls in the big family of Indo-European languages; still the relationship created by the similarity of the geographical area should get some place in our discussion. This can be cleared by this, "Very important is also the linguistic context. In Assam, the Assamese language became prominent during the 2nd millennium

A.D. Consequently, many Bodo, Rabha, Tiwa speakers can also speak Assamese, and many Assamese words have found their way into these languages. In the Southern region, Bengali is much spoken, and for this reason many or most speakers of Dimas and Kokborok also speak Bengali words when speaking their languages. Assamese and Bengali are not Tibeto- Burmese languages: they both belong to the Indo-Aryan sub-group of the Indo-European group of languages (Jacquesson, 2003, p. 109-122). This quotation has been cited because Kokborok started its journey with the help of the Alphabet of the neighbouring Tripura The Bengali language. In the hilly area of Tripura, the Bengali language was practiced and expanded the use during the reign of King Dharma Manikya (1431-1462). Ratnapa, another King of Tripura before king Manikya allowed living Bengali family among the people of sub-tribes of Tripura. During the reign of Ratnapa in the 14th century and Manikya in the 15th century a close relationship was established between the speakers of the Kokborok language and the Bengali speakers: That means from this time of the middle age the Kokborok speakers became acquainted with the Bengali language and its alphabet. As a result they started their education with the help of Bengali medium. Naturally they got inspiration to practice their mother tongue from the literature of Bengali and they took the Bengali alphabet as a medium of expression.

As a result the creation of the first written document of Kokborok that we mentioned above happened.

3.2 The Second Stage of Development in' the Bengali script:

The second stage of the development of Kokborok began with the Bengali script at the end of the 19th century. Around two hundred years after the publication of the biography of King Mahendra Manikya, that means in the year 1897, Daulot Ahmed published a grammar related book "Kok-Bor-Ma." Almost with the same time he completed another book with his friend Mohomad Umer. It was "Kok-Ma -Kalai." Both of the books used Bengali scripts as a medium of expression. Documents has proved that prince Radhakishor Manikya tried to publish "Tipra-Bangla" in the year 1876-77, but no source has complete

information about the completion of the book. At the beginning of the second stage we have clear documents of the language practice of the Ahmed Umer.

The second part of the second stage of development began in the year 1900. Radhamohon Tagore published his "Kok-Borok-Ma", published in the Bengali scripts. After that we have evidence publishing the, "Toipur-Kathamala" and "Triopur-Bhasavidhan" by Debburma in the Bengali scripts. It is worthwhile to mention here is that "Thoipur-Bhasavidhan" is the first dictionary of the Kokborok language (Kundu Choudhury,2010, p.14). Under the editorship of Sudhanva' Debburma the first literary journal "Katal Kathama" in the Kokborok language published in the year 1954.

The third phase of the second stage was the time of demand of supporting the Roman scripts. Subhash Chattopodhy started the tradition of scientific research to amend the Bengali and roman scripts in the year 1972. But even after that the practice in the Bengali scripts continued. In this regard we can take the name of "Kok-Borok-Saurang" published in the year 1977. Publication of Dictionary, grammar and literary journal helped in the development of the Kokborok language.

Likewise, from 1703 onwards with the help of the Bengali scripts 'Kokborok' language was practiced.

3.3 Development of Kokborok language and Roman Scripts:

In the year 1967 a new dimension emerged in the practice of the Kokborok language. In the that year "Kokborok Development Council was formed with a view to analyzing and studying the Kokborok language scientifically and in the same year Tripura Sub-Tribes Youth Committee raised their voice in favour of the Roman scripts (Kundu Choudhury, 2006, p.64). This political group supports the Roman scripts in the development of the Kokborok language. For their effort the second stage of the Kokborok language began. After the journey of around three hundred years from 1703 to 1967, Kokborok met a change. Political and religious voices rose in favour of the roman scripts. An educated group of the Kokborok language speakers even opined in support of the Roman scripts. In this first phase the journey was accelerated by the publication of

English textbooks and religious books published in the Roman scripts. With the sponsorship of Baptist Mission the Bible was translated and sayings of Jesus Christ were published. The British officials, moreover, began the process with their own effort before the Baptist Mission of Arundhati Nagar started the same. In this connection we must take the name of Captain Lewin. He compiled "Vocabulary of Tripperah." Hunter and Grierson etc scholar also used the Roman scripts in their research papers while writing the name of the 'Kokborok' language. In its second phase Kokborok literature and research were also come out. This process began at the end of the 6th decade of 20th century. In this regard we can cite the name of "Anglo-Kokborok Dictionary" by Binoy Debburma. In this way, with the acceptance of the Roman scripts Kokborok got a new trend of development. In the recent decades the English Medium schools have inspired a lot in the use of the Roman Scripts.

3.4 Role of Government and the development of Kokborok:

The leftist government has given a special importance in the development of the Kokborok language. Government of Tripura has helped to create an environment to spread the practice and usage of Kokborok language. That is why in the year 1979 the Tripura government has amended the "Tripura official Language Act of 1964" and published, in section 2 of the Tripura official language Act 1964 (herein after referred to as the principal Act.) for the words 'The Bengali Language', wherever they occur, the words the Bengali Language and the Kok-Borok language shall be substituted." (Mur Singh, 2004, p.16-17) by accepting it as an official language and giving it the status as the second language of the state is enough to prove its importance curve of development. With the help of this act Kokborok has got the chance to be used as an official language and it was begun to be implemented as a medium of instruction in the primary education.

3.5 Development of Kokborok through Literature:

We have seen that Bengali and Roman, both the scripts are used nowadays in Kokborok language. But the Bengali script has been still popular and used extensively. It is because of the

environment and the geographical location where Bengali is mostly used by the people. On the other hand the government now has faith in the Bengali script.

In Kokborok various literary works of variety and quality have been produced. These literary trend and publications has also enriched the language and helped in its development. Kumud Kundu Choudhury has divided the literary history of the Kokborok language in different stages. These are as follows:

1. Age of Radhamohon Tagore and Doulot Ahmed (1900-1917)
2. The age of Bongshi Tagore Prabhat Ray, Ajitbandhu Debburma, Jiten Tagore and Sudhir Krishna Debburma.
3. The age "Katal-Kathama" (1954-57)
4. Age of Periodicals and Literary Journals published in the 6th and 7th decade.
5. Role of Kokbork Development Council.
6. Role of Tripura Rajya Sahitya Sabha.
7. Contribution of Akashbani Agartala.
8. Role of Kokborok Sahitya and Sanskriti Sangsad.

Recently we have seen different writers working in different fields of literature in Kokborok. Newspapers, periodicals, journals, magazines have been regularly published in the Kokborok language which show its growth and development.

4. Conclusion:

Descending from the Bodo sub group of Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan family now Kokborok has ascended to the status of the second language of Tripura. Among the eight dialect speaking tribes the 'Purani Tripuri' (Debburma) was accepted as a standard language on the basis of its simplicity for all. It carries several characteristics of the Aryan languages as it has been used in the same geographical area of speakers. Passing through several debates and controversies still Kokborok uses both Roman and Bengali scripts as a medium of expression. But now the use of Bengali scripts is seen more than the other one. From the first evidence of written documents of 1703 the language till date has completed a long journey of ups and downs and in due course it has changed

its several characteristics for the growth and development. Several grammars and dictionaries have been produced and published for the betterment of the language.

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