



## **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ASSAMESE AND KHASI LANGUAGES ON THE BASIS OF SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KINSHIP TERMS**

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### **Introduction:**

Sociolinguistics refers as one of the major important branches of Linguistics studies. The concept of language and society are related with each other. Therefore, in the field of linguistics studies, all the aspects of language and its usages in the society is discussed. In other words, sociolinguistics deals in detail with all the aspects of languages focusing on the customs, rituals, social classes, gender differences of different communities (Konwar 2012:108. It also deals with the different forms of languages according to the speaker and the way it is spoken to communicate with one another.

The Study of the sources and applications of words used in the language of a society recognized as a study of different contexts of the society. For example: social - system, folklore, culture, are come to light. In such words, the relational words or the kinship terms are among those words that describe the different language relationship in a society. In other words, the linguistics reactions within a particular culture of a society are expressed through the uses of various referential terms of that society and it can give a clear idea about the relationship between people, society, gender and different groups (Sarma 2016: 26). For example: the concept of social control in marital relationship, the different relationship between the individuals, the recognition of each individual as a unique, and the beautiful reflection of the cultural system of a society (Pathak 2021: 2-3). Furthermore, to the formation of those referential terms the culture of a society contributes a lot.

### **Importance of the Subject:**

The land which is known as today's Assam is the recognized land after 1963. During the period of 1947-1963, Assam was a constituency of five north-eastern states including (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram) and known as undivided Assam. At that duration till 1964, Shillong (the present capital of the State of Meghalaya) was the capital of undivided Assam. After the year 1971, the capital of Assam was shifted to present Dispur, Guwahati. Assam has developed a mixed culture resulting out of the assimilation and combination of the various cultures and languages of diverse ethnic groups inhabiting of the undivided state. Therefore, it is a great importance to study the culture, society, language of contemporary Assam in the context of older undivided Assam (Kakati 1972: 10)

### **Scope of the Research:**

There are many elements of Austrian language have been found in the formation and development of the vocabulary of Assamese language. Therefore, in this paper, the area of research the both Austrian origin language groups Assamese of Assam and Khasi language of Meghalaya (basically the Sohra area of the State) through the terms of reference or kinship terms.

### **Aims and Objectives of the Research:**

The aims and objectives of the subject is to study the modern Indian languages on the basis of Sociolinguistics perspective; for the convenience of the study, the subject of the research has been limited to the reference or kinship terms of two languages ie. Assamese and the Khasi. The main objectives of the research to study the societal values of both the language groups including marriage system of patriarchal and matrilineal social groups etc. The purpose of this study is to find out the formation, origin and uses of reference of Kinship terms in both the societies.

### **Methods and Methodology:**

The data has been collected through first hand fieldwork from selected informants and some resource persons. For secondary data collection some books and related articles, journals have also been used. The analytical, descriptive and comparative approaches have been also used for the study.

### **Findings and Discussion:**

Assamese which is locally known as Asamiyā is a major and official language of the Brahmaputra valley in North-Eastern part of India. The language belongs to the Indo Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. The Khasi language of Meghalaya belongs to the Austronesian language family and it is a high spoken language of the land (Ehrenfels 1953:397). The Khasi community of Meghalaya are followers of matrilineal societal system; therefore, their language has a major difference with the Assamese society. Almost all the languages of the world have different use of reference terms in different aspects of the societies. Linguists and many researchers have argued that some elements of Assamese language come from the Austrian language family. There are significant differences in the use of reference terms or kinship terms between the two language groups in different societies and it is discussed in details in this study on the basis of sociolinguistics perspective. The reference terms used to communicate in a society can be divided as follows: -

- Relationship with the family members and lineage-family members by birth.
- Relationship through marriage
- Socially established relationships.
- Relationship by the rights of inheritance.

The above classifications of kinship terms words are the overall classifications for all the languages. But only the first three (a, b, c) classifications apply into the formation of kinship terms in Assamese language and the number 'd' classification apply into the only matrilineal societies. In terms of applications these classifications can be divided into two specific categories (ibid 1953: 398): -

- Terms of Reference
- Terms for address or vocative.

In Assamese language, there are nine different forms of kinship terms are available to describe the relationship by birth. These terms of words are changed only in the fourth classification in congenital paternal and maternal relationships. For instance: Both the mother's elder and younger brother are called as Māmā (uncle), but there are some separate words to mention father's elder brother and younger brother as Bordeutā (uncle) and Khurā (uncle) and their wives called as Bormā (Aunty) and Khuri (Aunty). In other way, father's elder sister and mother's elder sister called as Jethāi<sup>1</sup> and her husband called as Jethu<sup>2</sup>, and accordingly, the younger sister called as Pehi<sup>3</sup>, and Māhi<sup>4</sup> etc. In Assamese society the children's of father's and mother's brothers called as bhotijā (nephew), and bhotiji (niece), in other way, the children's of father's and mother's sisters called as bhāgin(niece) and bhāgini (nephew). However, these terms of words are only used to give examples and to addresses only affectionate names are used like dear, sweetheart, sweetie pie etc (bābu, mainā, xun in Assamese). In Khasi language there are eight different forms of kinship terms are used to describe the relationship.

The words to describe the terms of reference and terms of addresses are different in Assamese language. The words to describe in various relationship of paternal and maternal lineage through the 4<sup>th</sup> no of classification (relationship by the rights of inheritance). For instance: Khurā(paternal uncle), Māmā (maternal uncle), Māhi( maternal aunty), Pehi (paternal aunty) etc are determined by adding in laws. For example: Māmā- Śhahur(paternal uncle in law), Māmi -Śhāhu (maternal aunty in law), Māhi - Śhāhu (maternal aunty in law), Khurā- Śhahur (paternal uncle in law), Khuri -Śhāhu (paternal aunty in law), Pehi -Śhāhu (paternal aunty in law)<sup>5</sup>. However, these relationship terms are applied to instruct only, to address that person the word in law is not used, instead of that the relations terms are pronounced simply such as Maa(mother), Deutā(father), Pehi(aunty) etc. To address the different persons from husband side, have some distinct and proper address terms or words.

Although the Assamese language is a part of the Indo-Aryan language family, there has been found a lot of elements of non-Indo-Aryan languages also. Because, in the presence of various Indo-Aryan and non-Indo-Aryan languages in Assam, it is very natural that the elements of those languages are present in the Assamese languages. In this present discussion, the social status and use of relational terms in both Assamese and Khasi societies is as follows:

- The use of various kinship terms of paternal and maternal lineages established by birth, ie the use of the same reference terms for both male and female.
- The reference terms relating to the paternal lineage by birth.
- The reference terms relating to the maternal lineage by birth.
- The reference terms applied to both men and women by terms marriage.
- The reference terms only applied to women by marriage.
- The reference terms only applied to men by marriage.
- Socially established reference terms.

In Assamese and Khasi societies, the reference terms of both parents' descendants are as follows: -

Table 1: The kinship terms of both parents' descendants of Assamese and Khasi Societies.

S.No	Assamese terms	English terms	Khasi terms (address & reference)
1	Pitāmoh (masculine)	Paternal great grandfather	Thawlang/ Pa-kha
2	Pitāmohi(feminine)	Paternal great grandmother	Iyawbei / kmei- kha
3	AājuKokā (m)	Mothers Great grand father	Pa-buh
4	AājuAāita (f)	Mothers Great grand mother	Mei- buh
5	Koka (m)	Parents grand father	U Kprad/ Parad
6	Aāita (f)	Parents grand mother	Ka Kmierad/ Meirad
7	Nāti (m)	Grandson	U Ksiew
8	Nātini (f)	Grand daughter	Ka Ksiew
9	NātiJuwāi (m)	Granddaughters husband	U PyrsaKsiew
10	Nāti- Buwāri (f)	Grandsons' wife	Ka PyrsaKsiew
11	Aāju -Nāti (m)	Great grandson	Siewtunsiewjap/Ksiewmiaw
12	Aāju -Nātini (f)	Great granddaughter	Siewtun-siewjap/ <sup>6</sup> Ksiewmiaw

There are lot of kinship terms in Khasi languages for both grandson (masculine) and granddaughter {feminine (Rabel 1989:53)} as like in Assamese languages. Various kinship terms have been found in both societies to refer to such relationships.

<sup>1</sup> Father's/Mother elder sister

<sup>2</sup> Father's/Mother's elder sister's husband.

<sup>3</sup> Father's Younger sister.

<sup>4</sup> Mother's Younger sister.

<sup>5</sup> Translated from Assamese origin.

<sup>6</sup> The use of both kinship terms depends on the geographical background of the speakers and users of Khasi Society. (Recorded from Dr. Davidson Diengdoh , a linguist and former professor of east Jaintia college, Meghalaya)

Table 2: The kinship terms to describe father's lineage are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms (address & reference)
1	Deutā (masculine)	Father	Kpa/ pa
2	Bordeutā (m)	Father's elder brother	Pa san
3	Jethāi (f)	Father's elder sister	San
4	Jethu (m)	Father's elder sister's husband	Pakha
5	Pehi (f)	Father's younger sister	Nia-kha
6	Pehā (m)	Father's younger sister husband	Kni
7	Bormā (f)	Father's elder brother's wife	Mei san
8	Khurā (m)	Paternal uncle	Kni
9	Khuri (f)	Paternal Uncle's Wife	Kmie/nia
10	Dādā/ Kokāideu (m)	Elder Brother	HynmenShynrang
11	Nobow (f)	Elder brother's wife	
12	Bāideu (f)	Elder sister	HynmenKynthei
13	Bhindew (m)	Elder sister's husband	U Kynum
14	Bhoni (f)	Younger sister	Khun Khatduh
15	BhoniJuwāi (m)	Younger sister's husband	Kynum
16	Bhāitee (m)	Younger brother	Para Shynrang
17	Bhāi- buwāri (f)	Younger brother's wife	Mei-nah
18	Bhāgin / Bhotijā(m)	Nephew	Pyrsa
19	Bhagini / Bhotiji(f)	Niece	Pyrsa
20	Putra (m)	Son	Khun
21	Buwāri (f)	Daughter- in- law	PyrsaKurim
22	Jiyori (f)	Daughter	Ka Khun
23	Juwāi (m)	Son-in-law	PyrsaKurim

Table 3: The kinship terms to describe mother's lineage are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms	
			Address	Reference
1	Maa (feminine)	Mother	Mei	Ka Kmei
2	Māmā (masculine)	Maternal Uncle	Mama	Ki Kñii
3	Māmi (f)	Maternal Uncle's Wife	ñia	ñia
4	Māhi (f)	Mother's Younger sister	Meiduh	Ka KmeiKhatduh
5	Mohā (m)	Mother's younger sister's husband	Paduh	Paduh
6	Jethāi (f)	Mother's elder sister	Mei-san	Ka kmei San
7	Jethu (m)	Mother's elder sister husband	Pa-san	Pa-san

Table 4: The kinship terms applied to both men and women by marriage are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms	
			Address	Reference
1	Shahur (masculine)	Father -in -law	Kthaw	U Kthaw
2	Sāhu (f)	Mother- in- law	Kiaw	Ka Kiaw
3	Bioi (m)	Child's Father -in-law	Ka Kthaw	Kthaw
4	Bioni (f)	Child's Mother -in-law	Ka Kiaw	Kiaw

There are particular kinship terms in Assamese society that refer to parents -in- laws, but these words are considered as relationship reference terms, to address the word used as parents. Khasi society is generally considered to be the matrilineal society the reference terms for parents for both men and women. Basically, they used the Kiaw for mother- in -law and Kthaw for father- in- law and do not distinguish the maternal and paternal lineages<sup>7</sup>. Even, the reference terms Kiaw and Kthaw used by parents of both men and women to address each other. On other way, in Assamese society, the words Bioi<sup>8</sup> and Bioni<sup>9</sup> are used to refer each other for such relationship.

Khasis are a matrilineal people and multiple marriages are common in their society, therefore according to the tradition, only the youngest daughter has the proper right to inherit the family property and under any circumstances that daughter can't be deprived of any property.

In Khasi language, the first wife or the chief wife refers as Ka Tnga Trai and others wives are referred as Ka Tnga Kliar.

Table 5: The kinship terms used by men after marriage are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms	
			Address	Reference
1	Patni (feminine)	Wife	i Lok	Ka Tnga
2	Prothom Patni (f)	1 <sup>st</sup> wife	i Lok	Ka Tnga Trai
3	Ditiyo Patni (f)	2 <sup>nd</sup> wife	i Lok	Ka TngaKliar

<sup>7</sup> Translated from Assamese origin.

<sup>8</sup> The word Bioi refer to daughter or son father -in -law.

<sup>9</sup> The word Bioni refer to daughter or son mother in law.

4	Tritiyo Patni (f)	3 <sup>rd</sup> wife	i Lok	Ka TngaKliar
5	Jetheri/ Dādā (m)	Brother -in- law	um	kynhum
6	Nobow (f)	Wife's elder brother's wife	kong	Para Songkha
7	Baideu (f)	Wife's elder sister	kong	Hynmenkynsi
8	Jetheri (m)	Wife's elder sister's husband	Bah	Para shonngkha
9	Khulkhāli (m)	Wife's younger brother	um	Kynum vit
10	Khulkhāli (f)	Wife's younger sister	Hep	Para kynsi
11	Shālpoti	Wife's younger sister's husband	-	Para songkha

The kinship terms used in Assamese language refers to the various relationships by marriage. There are different forms in terms of address the relationships, except for the forms of Assamese terms Jetheri and Shālpoti .Khasis are the mainly matrilineal society and therefore, most of the address words are not available in their languages.

Table 6: The kinship terms used by women after marriage are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms	
			Address	Reference
1	Swāmi (masculine)	Husband	ilok	U Tnga
2	Borjonā (m)	Husband's elder brother	Kong	U Kong Kynsi
3	Jā (f)	Husband's elder & younger brother's wife	Kong	Para Shongkha
4	Dewor (m)	Husband's younger brother	Hep	U Para Kynsi
5	Nanad (f)	Husband's younger sister	Hep	Ka Para Kynsi
6	Jeshāsu (f)	Husband's elder sister	Kong	Ka HynmenKynsi
7	Vindew (m)	Elder sister's Husband	Bah	Para Shongkha
8	BhoniJuwāi (m)	Younger sister's husband	---	Para Shongkha

Table 7: Kinship terms formed by social relationships are as follows

S.No	Assamese Terms	English Terms	Khasi Terms	
			Address	Reference
1	Sokhi (m)	Friend	Name	U Paralok
2	Sokhi (f)	Friend	Name	Ka Paralok
3	Mitini (f)	Friend's Wife	Name	Ka Loku Paralok
4	Tawoi (m)	Father's friend	Bah	Paraloki pa
5	Amoi (f)	Father's friend's wife	Kong	Paralokime
6	Māhi/ ShotiyāMā (f)	Stepmother	Mei nah	Kmei nah
7	Shotiyābāpek (m)	Stepfather	Pa Nah	Kpa Nah
8	DhāiMā (f)	Foster mother	Mei	Ka Nong Sumar
9	TuloniāPutro (m)	Adopted son	Name	U Khun Ting
10	Tuloniā Putri (f)	Adopted daughter	Name	Ka Khun Ting
11	ShotiyāShantān (m/f)	Step-son/daughter	Name	U Khun Kliar

There are three special adjective terms used in Assamese society to refer to family members according to seniority<sup>10</sup>. For example: Dāngor (elder), Māju( middle), Xoru (younger). These forms are used only to indicate relationships. For example: Dāngordādā/ bhaiti( elder brother),Dāngorbāideu/ bhonti (elder sister); Mājudādā/ bhaiti (middle brother), Mājubāideu/ bhonti (middle sister); Xorudādā/ bhaiti (younger brother), Xorubāideu/bhonti(younger sister) etc. Sometimes only address terms are used as dādā (brother), Bāideu (sister), bhaiti (brother), bhonti (sister) without using the adjective forms. These characteristics can be the influence of the Tibeto -Burman dialects on Assamese languages. Apart from that, there are five different forms of adjectives used in Khasi society based on age factor. For instance:

**Address Terms**

- Bah (Eldest brother)
- Bah Deng (second elder/younger brother)
- Bah Rit (third elder/younger brother)
- Bah Hep (fourth elder/younger brother)
- Bah Nah (fifth elder/younger brother)
- Bah Duh (youngest brother)

**Reference Terms**

- U HynmenRangba
- U Hynmen Pdeng
- U Hynmen
- U Hynmen
- U Hynmen
- U Bakhatduh

In terms of address, the adjectives indicating the age differences are also used separately. For example: Deng, Rit, Hep,Nah, Duh etc. These forms are used in a gender-neutral manner. Mostly they use the term Bah(brother), that reflects a position of respect occupied by the elder siblings of a family. In such way the term Kong is used to address the female members of the family. In Assamese language, there are different forms of suffixes in kinship address words according to the masculinity are as follows: -

Table 8: Suffixes in kinship address words in Assamese language

Kinship Address Words	Person	Application
Father (i)	1 <sup>st</sup> person	My Father
	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Your Father Yours' Father
	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	His Father

<sup>10</sup> Translated from Assamese origin

Mother	1 <sup>st</sup> person	My Mother
	2 <sup>nd</sup> person	Your Mother Yours' Mother
	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	His Mother

Table 9: Suffixes used in kinship address words in Khasi language

Address terms	Person	Reference
<b>Pa (Father)</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Person (Nga)	iPajong Nga
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person (phi, pha, me)	iPajong phi/pha/me
	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person ( u,ka,i,ki)	iPajong u/ka/i/ki

In the above table Pa refers to father and Jong used in honour. In such way Nga in 1<sup>st</sup> Person, Phi, Pha, Me in 2<sup>nd</sup> person and U, Ka, i, ki etc a total no of eight masculine suffixes have been found in the address terms. These suffixes are used separately and are added as affix terms after the main kinship term<sup>11</sup>. These methods are similar to the masculine inflection in the kinship words used in Assamese language. The Kinship terms are generally assumed to be as native stock. Therefore, it can be assumed that these characteristics belong to the languages (Khasi) of Astro -Asiatic language family and it has an impact on the Assamese language.

There is some gender-neutral kinship terms in Assamese language, for example: Khulkhāli (wife's younger brother/sister), Bhotijā (nephew), Sokhi (friend), Shontān (Children) etc. Some Singular suffixes such as (to, jon, joni) are used to apply to address those relationship terms.

Similarly, the gender -neutral forms found in Khasi languages are: Khun (Child), Pyrsa (niece/nephew), Hynmen (elder), Para (younger), Ksiew ( grandchild) etc. These forms are determined by adding forms of feminine Ka and masculine U (Heymann 1989: 50-52). For instance:

Khun	Ka, u,	: Child, girl, boy, baby.
Pyrsa	Ka, u,	: Niece, nephew.
Hynman	Ka, u,	: Referring to elder sister/ brother.
Para	Ka, u	: Younger brother/ sister.
Ksiew	Ka, u	: Grandchild.

From the above classifications of singular suffixes, it is to be generalised that some definite singular suffixes have been used in the Assamese language. But there is no use of suffixes in reference terms in Khasi language.

As mentioned above Khasis mainly belongs to a matrilineal society therefore address words for men after marriage are more common instead of women. Parents refer to and address their children's spouses (daughter -in -law, son-in -law) as pirsakurim (kurim 'wife') and this particular term used in both bride and groom as gender neutrally. The word kong is used to address the women in Khasi society. The same word is used by a man to address his wife's female relatives. Instead of that the word kongdeng is used by a woman to address the husband of middle sister ie brother in law (ibid 1989: 53-55). Therefore, it has to be asserted that the address form kong is used in a gender -neutral manner in Khasi language family.

Following the names of some particular places some reference words are found in the Assamese society (ibid 1972:24). For example: Sivasagar (ia, āni), Dhramtul ( ia, āni), Lakhimpur (ia, āni), Guwahati ( ia, āni), Phulguri ( ia, āni), Nalbari (ia, āni), Barpeta ( ia, āni), Goalpara (ia, āni) etc. These words are used in both terms of reference and terms of address.

In Assamese society, feminine reference words are also formed by adding gender suffixes ( ñi, añi) to surnames. For example: Bora (m)/ Borani (f), Baruah (m)/ Baruani (f), Gogoi (m)/ Gogoani (f), Sharma(m)/ Sharmani(f), Pathak (m)/ Pathakani(f), Hazarika (m)/ Hazarikani(f), Patar (m)/ Parani(f), Chakrabarty(m)/ Chakrabartiani(f) etc.

Similarly, in Assamese society, reference words are also formed by adding feminine suffixes to caste and occupation. For example: Kumar (m)/ Kumarani (f), Komar(m)/ Komarani(f), Napit(m)/ Napitani(f), Hira(m)/ Hirani(f) etc.

The kinship forms mentioned above are used in both terms of address and terms of reference. According to age factors, two types of address terms are formed by adding some others reference terms such as Bhaiti (younger brother), Dādā (elder brother), Bāideu (elder sister), Bhonti (younger sister) etc. Some of these kinship terms are established by marriage and some others by birth. For instance: Po-nāti (grandchild of son), ji-nāti (grandchild of daughter), Jetheri (wife's elder brother, bother -in-law), nonod (Husband's younger sister, sister-in law) etc. The words formed by after marriage used only for reference, instead of that only address forms are use in societal norms. These forms apply to both husband and wife. For example: Deutā: Father -in-law), (Mā, Mother-in -law), (Pehi, Aunty-in -law) etc. There are some kinship terms in Assamese language that are used only to indicate the relationship terms. In other way, the use of such kinship terms is very rare in Khasi society.

### Concluding Remarks:

One important note that can be concluded from the above discussion is that, the Khasi language, which belongs to the Austronesian language family, has several features in common in the formation and development of various kinship terms in the Assamese language. However, there are also some significant differences in the use of kinship terms in both societies governed by two different social systems.

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