



Kaithi Script And Surjapuri Language : A Case Study In Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur District

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Abstract : "Language is a social institution"-(W.D. Whitney). Language creates social bonds and serves as a medium for sharing human feelings and experiences. Script is a powerful way to store and convey the information of a language. In various parts of the country, Kaithi Script was a traditional medium of writing. The use of Kaithi Script has a very old history. The North-Eastern part of the undivided Purnea district in Bihar was included in the Surjapur Pargana (Purnea, Kathihar, Kishanganj, Araria, and Islampur Subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district). There are various opinions regarding the origin of the word Surjapur, which has sparked discussions among researchers. The Surjapuri language originated from this Surjapur Pargana, which is a testament to a distinctive culture. This Surjapuri language is a form of Kamtapuri or Rajbanshi language, which is generally used according to the region. The Surjapuri language was written in the Kaithi Script. Currently, the usage of this Surjapuri language can be seen in some parts of Bihar, Bangladesh, and Nepal. This language contains a combination of Hindi, Maithili, and Bengali language.

Keywords: Purnea, Kishanganj, Islampur, Kaithi, Surjapuri etc.

Introduction

The Islampur subdivision of Uttar Dinajpur district was included in the undivided Purnea district of Bihar before 1956 AD. This Subdivision was a part of Surjapur Pargana during the Mughal periods, which is notable in history. The ancient script that was in this Subdivision was Kaithi Script and the ancient language was Surjapuri, which is an important part of history. All the documents of this Subdivision were written in kaithi script. Also, the Surjapuri language was written in the Kaithi script and played an important role in local traditions. This script and language were used not only in Islampur Subdivision but also in the undivided Purnea district of Bihar and still almost. The popularity of Kaithi script is not what it used to be now. However, the widespread use of the Surjapuri language is still seen, especially among local communities. It cannot be denied that many people from Surjapuri today feel ashamed to speak they are mother tongue, Surjapuri.

History Of Kaithi Script

Kaithi Script is a historical script. This script reveals a special chapter of history that has influenced contemporary history. The name Kaithi originates from the Sanskrit word Kayastha, which refers to the business writing community in North India. Also, this script was used from ancient times until 1970 AD. Dr. Grierson wrote an important Book on Kaithi Script in 1881 AD (A Handbook to the Kaithi Character). Dr. Grierson stated that the Kaithi Script is a Bihari Script. During ancient and medieval Times, Kaithi Script was popular and widely used in the Western regions of Bengal, including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, and Mewar.¹ This script made writing easy, allowing for many things to be written in a short amount of time. The use of this script was widespread. The term Kaithi derives from the word Kaithi, which was a social Organisation in North India. Traditionally, writers, scribes, and clerks have been included. The nation of Kaithi was associated with the royal rule of the Mughal and English rulers in Northern India, where they used to write legal papers, accounts and correspondence in the court. The script they used was named Kaithi because it was related to their ethnic community.²

The script has been improving since the time of Harappa, which has initiated their social life. Although, the Indus script has still not been deciphered, researchers are continuing to work on this matter. Over time, many scripts have developed, serving as vessels of vast cultures.

The usage of ancient Brahmi script in India lasted from the 5th century BC to approximately 350 AD. After that, its two styles develop properly. For example - the first north style and the second Southern style. Influenced by the northern style, the Gupta script developed in the 4th century and lasted until the 5th century. The Kutil script originated from the Gupta script in the 6th century and was used until the 8th century. The development of the Ancient Nagari script occurs through this Kutil script of the 9th century. The ancient Nagari script is found in Northern India but also in some parts of Southern India, which is known as Nandanagari in Southern India. Various script including modern Nagari, Gujarati, Mahajani, Rajasthani, Kaithi, Maithili, Assamese, Bengali have originated from the ancient Nagari. This Nagari script is called Nagari or Devanagari Script.³

From the Mughal period until the British era, languages in Northern India were generally written in Kaithi script. In ancient India, the primary scripts of literature were Sanskrit and Pali, but the Kaithi script was also used for some activities.⁴ While the use of Kaithi script in literary compositions was quite limited, it was prevalent in land records until 1970 AD. On December 19, 1540 AD, Shershah Suri passed an edict that marked an important time in history. It was the use of Persian and Kaithi Scripts must be ensured in land documents.⁵ In 1875 AD, the modern development of the Kaithi script took place. In 1880 AD, the British government granted Kaithi Script the status of a royal script.

In the early 20th century, the 'Nagari Pracharani Sabha' advocated for the Devanagari script for Hindi and regional language. This Sabha argued that -'Political sensation, for the unity of each other, is essential to the Devanagari script.' From 1882 to 1913 AD, the publication of school textbooks in Bihar was equally done in 'Devanagari' and Kaithi script. In 1913, the Bihar government had directed that text books should not be printed in the Kaithi script. In 1914 AD, this government decision took effect.⁶ Dr Rajendra Prasad also made an appeal in favour of the Devanagari script. Land documents were written in Kaithi script, but this changed after 1970 AD.

Kaithi Script In Islampur Subdivision

The official script of Islampur Subdivision of the Dinajpur district was Kaithi Script, which was used during British rule. The Kaithi script was used to record government activities. Education in schools and colleges were conducted in the Kaithi script, which was one of the most popular script at that time. The use of the Kaithi script has diminished today, but its significance in history is immense. The history of Islampur Subdivision and culture

of undivided Purnea district of Bihar can be found in Kaithi Script. In the past, this subdivision was part of the Surjapur Pargana, which has laid the foundation for local culture. The original language of this Subdivision is known as Surjapuri language. This Surjapuri language was written in Kaithi script. "Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Magadhi, Urdu, Bajjika, Angika, Bengali, Surjapuri were written in the Kaithi script." Historical evidence of the Kaithi script has been found in the Islampur Subdivision. Below are a number of evidence of the Kaithi script used in the Islampur Subdivision.

PURNEA DISTRICT.
Cloth Ration Card (Rural.)

1. Name of the Sub-Division
2. District
3. Village
4. Circle Number
5. Serial Number
6. Name of head of the family
7. Address
8. Children (below 12)
9. Unit sanctioned
10. Number of yds per month

Signature of the Secretary of the Ration Committee
Signature of the President of the Ration Committee

4, Purnea Bishnagar, 1500, 1000, 217

Name of Rationed Cloth Distributor
M. DILAWAR HUSSAIN NASIRUDDIN AHMED

Month	Yds. of Supply	Yds. of Cloth (in yds.)	Yds. of Cloth (in yds.)	Signature of Distributor
Jan.				
Feb.				
March				
April				
May				
June	22-2-47	4-3	7-4	13-4-47
July				
August				
Sept.				
Oct.				
Nov.				
Dec.				

Cloth Ration Card

from June, 1947, written in Kaithi script.

7375
GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR
KHAGRA FAIR
KISHANGANJ (DIST. PURNEA)
FAIR BETWEEN JANUARY & FEBRUARY 1955
खगड़ा मेला मधुनी हरी १
खगड़ा बाजार बिहार की राजधानी

(Name)
Name of Seller
Seller's Name
District (District)
Name of Purchaser
Purchaser's Name
District (District)
Name of Cattle
Cattle's Name
District (District)
Name of Elephant
Elephant's Name
District (District)
Name of Horse
Horse's Name
District (District)
Name of Buffalo
Buffalo's Name
District (District)
Name of Bullock or cow
Bullock or cow's Name
District (District)
Name of Dumba
Dumba's Name
District (District)

7374
GOVERNMENT OF BIHAR
KHAGRA FAIR
KISHANGANJ (DIST. PURNEA)
FAIR BETWEEN JANUARY & FEBRUARY 1955
खगड़ा मेला मधुनी हरी १
खगड़ा बाजार बिहार की राजधानी

(Name)
Name of Seller
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Purchaser's Name
District (District)
Name of Cattle
Cattle's Name
District (District)
Name of Elephant
Elephant's Name
District (District)
Name of Horse
Horse's Name
District (District)
Name of Buffalo
Buffalo's Name
District (District)
Name of Bullock or cow
Bullock or cow's Name
District (District)
Name of Dumba
Dumba's Name
District (District)

Toll receipt for

buying and selling animals at the Khagra Fair in Kishanganj.

Researchers have presented multiple opinions regarding the origin of the name Surjapur or Surjapuri. Finding the origin of the name Surjapur is quite difficult, but there are some popular tales. The sun dynasty Kings were ruled in this area since ancient times, marking it as a significant event in history. It is presumed that the sun dynasty originated from Bibasvan(The Sun). The grandson of the Prajapati Kashyapa. It is said that the first king of the sun dynasty was Ikshvaku, who expanded the empire during his reign. He had three sons, namely- Bibukshi, Nimi, and Danda. Bibukshi was the king of Ayodhya and Nimi was the king of Mithila. After them, many kings of this dynasty ruled the country.⁸ This area was once under the rule of the kings of Mithila. "The boundary of Mithila comprises the modern districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Champaran, and parts of the district of Monghyr, Bhagalpur and Purnea."⁹ There is a commonly held belief behind this place being named Surjapur. It is not impossible that the people of the tribes lived in this region. This tribes believed that worshipping the sun and brings strength to their lives. As a result, these tribes worshipped the sun. The sun worship has been practiced since ancient times, and its proof still resides in the land of this Subdivision, which is known as "Chhatapuja"(the sun worship). The place has been named Surjapur due to participation in the sun worship. Many claim that the first ruler of Dinajpur, Adisur, governed in this area. They believe that the name of this area could be Surjapur, based on his name. This Subdivision has a very ancient village called 'Surjapur' at Chakulia police station. Many people believe that the origin of the Surjapur Pargana came from this Surjapur village.¹⁰ Many believe that the aforementioned reasons may have contributed to the naming of Surjapur.

However, this historic document first mentions the Surjapur Pargana during the Mughal Era. When the emperor Humayun was defeated by Sher Shah Suri in battle, he sought help from various Kings and politicians to regain his Kingdom. Syaid Khan Dastur was an important figure who assisted Humayun, and for this, Humayun rewarded him. As a token of the Humayun award, the Surjapur Pargana has especially presented it to him. "According to its Chronicles, the founder of the family was Saiyad Khan Dastur, who did good service under the emperor Humayun in the war against Sher Shah and was reawarded, in A.H.962, i.e., 1545 A D., by the grant of a Sanad confirming on him, together with the title of Kanungo, the Zamindari of Surjapur, which was formerly held by a Hindu Raja named Sukhdeo."¹¹ This Surjapur Pargana was under the Subah of Bengal and Sarkar of Tajpur. The eastern part of the Mahananda river was under the Tajpur Sarkar. According to Francis Buchanan account, the Surjapur Pargana was formed within 14 and 15 lakhs of bigahs or 5,00000 acres.¹² L.s.s.o' Malley in his gazetteer gave the area of Surjapur Pargana as 729(4,66,560 acres) square miles.¹³ Over time, the area of this Surjapur Pargana has increased and decreased. Currently, this Surjapur Pargana has been divided into different areas, which has brought changes to the lives of local people. The Islampur Subdivision of the Surjapur Pargana is a notavailable area among others. As a result of living in this Surjapur Pargana, the indigenous people here are commonly known as Surjapuri.

Surjapuri Language In Islampur Subdivision

The current Islampur Subdivision was previously part of the surajapuri Pargana. For this reason, the people here and their language are known as "Surjapuri Language." From the British era until 1956 AD, the Islampur Subdivision was included in the undivided Purnea district of Bihar. Therefore, to explore the history of this language, one must rely on the undivided Purnea district of Bihar. In the survey during the English rule, this language was referred to as "Kishanganjia or Siripuria." Currently, the name surjapuri is widely used. In his book 'Kaithi Lipi : Ek Parichay ', scholar Dr. Dhrub Kumar stated that the language known as Kishanganjia or Siripuria in the region of Purnea, Kathihar, and Kishanganj district are accurately referred to as "Surjapuri."¹⁴ Also, this Surjapuri language was written in Kaithi script. In addition to Bihar and Islampur, the Surjapuri language is also found in many other places in Bangladesh and Nepal. During the British rule, Mr. Grierson conducted a language survey throughout India. He has not referred to the language of the indigenous people of this region as surjapuri.

The character of this dialect is described as follows by Dr. Grierson - "The Western limit of Northern Bengali extends into the Purnea district. That language maybe taken as occupying the eastern third of the district, that is to say, the whole of the Kishanganj and the eastern half of the Sardar Subdivision. In the Kishanganj subdivision, and in the Kasba Amur and Balarampur Thanas, the Musalmans, who are said to be Koch origin, speak a mixture of Bihari and Bengali, closely resembling the Koch-Bengali of Malda. The dialect is called Kishanganjia or Siripuria, and is returned as spoken by 603,623 souls. Although, in the main, a Bengali dialect, it is written in the Kaithi character, which is one of those used for Bihari. It is unnecessary to give an analysis of its forms, as it closely resembles, on the one hand, the dialects of Malda, and on the other hand, in the forms borrowed from Bihari, the dialect existing in western Purnea."¹⁵

During the British era, 98% of the people in the undivided Purnea (including Islampur Subdivision) district spoke the Surjapuri language. It was talking about 2% emigrants. "According to the statistics obtained at the census of 1901, only 2% of the population are emigrants."¹⁶ Surely, this language has a mixture of Hindi, Maithili, and Bengali languages. Indeed, this language is one of the popular language in North Bengal, a different branch of the Kamtapuri language. The language family of this Surjapuri language is- Indo-European > Indo-Iranian > Indo-Aryan > East Bengal -Assamese > Kamtapuri > Surjapuri.¹⁷ This Surjapuri language has slight differences from the Kamtapuri language.

In 2000, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi delivered an important speech in parliament about this language and cultures. In 2009, UNESCO recorded the naming of the Surjapuri language. For several years after independence, the pure Surjapuri dialect has been in use in this Subdivision. On the first of December 1956, the Islampur subdivision was incorporated into West Bengal. Many refugees began to settle in this Subdivision from Bangladesh, from 1965 to 1971 even after that. After 1980, the Badia Muslims who came from Malda began to settle in this Subdivision.¹⁸ As a result, this Surjapuri language is losing its pure form, which is an unfortunate occurrence. Many Surjapuri people are ashamed to identify the Surjapuri language in their mother tongue. All those Surjapuri people think of Bengali as gentle language, accepting it. In 2011, an organisation (Transferred Area Surjapur Organisation) took the initiative to conduct a linguistic survey in the Islampur Subdivision. According to the report of this organisation, a total of 3,95,138 people in the Islampur Subdivision have registered the Surjapuri language as their mother tongue.¹⁹

Conclusion

Finally, it can be said that the Kaithi script was an ancient Script of the present day Islampur Subdivision. The language of the indigenous people of Islampur Subdivision was Surjapuri, which identifies their cultural identity. It holds special significance from a historical perspective. The folk culture and songs of the indigenous inhabitants of this Subdivision are sung in the Surjapuri language. These songs are an important part of the local tradition and culture. The Surjapuri language is still prevalent in this Subdivision and the usage of the Kaithi script has nearly disappointed. A larger number of Surjapuri people have adopted the Bengali language, but currently, Songs and Comedy in the Surjapuri language on social media are making the Surjapuri Community more aware.

Notes & References

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