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Reflection of Sexism and Gender Inequality in the Assamese Language

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequalities or sexism in languages is a common phenomenon in almost all human languages, including the most influential and rich language of the world – English. Like other languages, the Assamese language is also not free from the influence of sexists' terminologies in various spheres of life. Though the social scientists from this region and some sociologists (Devi 2013) who worked on the Assamese society are of the view that in some indices, such as, education, decision making in the family, choosing life partners, etc., women in Assam have better indications in comparison to the other states of India; the language itself is not completely out of sexist terminologies which are totally biased and dominated by the male folks. Women in Assam at large are cocooned by various social customs and taboos, that they often cannot and do not want to bring changes in their own traditional lifestyle (Devi 2013). Hence, language is also no exception.

This paper highlights how sexism is associated with the Assamese language, and through a survey, an attempt is made to semantically and pragmatically analyze the gender biased terms in the language. The analysis is purely a descriptive analysis substantiated with the responses of the native speakers. Along with the questionnaire results, the native speaker's judgment of the author is also used without being prejudiced towards any preconceived notion.

Keywords: Sexism, sexist language, inequality, women, Assamese

1. INTRODUCTION

Let us define what we mean by sexism in a language. “It is the use of language which devalues members of one sex, almost invariably women, and thus fosters gender inequality.”¹ There would be occurrence of many lexicalized forms which have traditionally and culturally been used in a sense where the female folks are always undermined or sometimes demeaning connotation can be sensed. Those words, phrases, or proverbs would be in use in such a way that many a time, the speakers of that language would never realize that they are sexist usages. Another definition says, sexism “discriminates against women by rendering them invisible or trivializing them at the same time that it perpetuates notions of male supremacy.”² Just like any other Indian society, the social structure of Assamese society is also patriarchal in nature. The male members in the family and society are the major decision makers, both at family and societal level. Since patriarchy is deep rooted in the Assamese society, it can be assumed that there will also be reflection of male dominance or biasness in the Assamese language. With this assumption, a questionnaire was prepared and a few native speakers were asked to respond.

1.1. *Theoretical perspective*

Sexism, as defined by Vetterling Braggin (1981), creates, constitutes, promotes and exploits any irrelevant or impertinent marking of the distinction between the two sexes. A sexist statement refers to someone when gender is not relevant. In English, one of the main elements of sexism investigated and objected by feminists is the so called generic pronoun – that is the use of the pronoun “he” to refer to a person in general. For instance, “when the police officer takes your statement, he will ask you to sign it.” Here it is asserted that “he” is used generically. It refers to both male and female police officer. This can be cited as an example of sexism in English language. A language with abundance of so many lexical items, why is it that it uses the male lexical counterparts where a neutral or a plural lexical item would have been apt. Is it just a reflection of the

mind-set of a particular speech community, or is it just a fallout of the social structure or processes? With reference to the above example, even if one argues that there was no female police officer initially, therefore, the cultural and mental construct of this profession was male-centric, hence, the generic term he was used to refer to a neutral concept; that has to be interpreted as a gender bias term in the present day context.

1.2. *Defining gender*

Gender is more of a social construction than any biological distinctions. It is a social perception based on biological sex. Biologically, individuals can be called male or female, but their gender identity is a lateral imposition on them by a society. From this social perception, an individual is known as male or female in human societies. This implies two different types of relationships: that between the two genders and that between gender and society. Because gender is a society's interpretation of maleness and femaleness and society determines what should be male and female characteristics and roles. Girls and boys growing up in that society are therefore encouraged to adopt these characteristics and to fulfill these roles. They will be rewarded for being appropriately feminine or masculine, and this in turn helps to reinforce their behaviour. In other words, the process of "genderization" starts just after the birth of a baby. Each society adopts different ways and processes to attribute maleness and femaleness in a newly born baby.

1.3. *Sexist language*

The term "sexist" came during the decades of sixties and seventies of twentieth century. And it has flourished in the later decades of the same century with the emergence of feminism ideology. According to Grossman & Tucker (1997), "when sexist language is accepted as a part of everyday interaction, then the subordination of women becomes routinized in daily discourse. The routine use of forms that conceal or trivialize women reduces the salience and significance of women as a social category." It is a fact that women, stereotypically, being the weaker section of the society have been the subject of

domination and oppression across the globe. Hence, it is obvious that languages would employ certain strategies in the form of lexical items, phrases, idioms and proverbs to express these attitudes of the members of the society. Languages also employ grammatical gender to distinguish masculine and feminine.

Today, sexist language is such a large part of our culture and lexicon that they even influence the way children acquire a language. Children learn to apply gender specific names to anything from toys to household appliance to large machinery, such as, cars and boats. Of course, if a language has a strong gender marking system at morpho-syntactic level, children are bound to acquire the gender markers in due course of time. But, at the same time one should not get confused or remain under the illusion that morphological gender inflections or lexicalized gender marking would augment sexism in a language. Madson & Hessling (2001) in their experiment explored whether alternating between the pronouns “he” and “she” in a text is an effective way to avoid sexist language. Author Corolyn Graglia (1998) when discussing research in “against sexist language” pointed out that sexist language is a language that embodies, affirms or reinforces discrimination against women. For instance, “man” is often used to mean both men, women, and mankind. But people think only men when the word “man” is used, even when an author or a speaker means both men and women. There are a number of different professional organizations that have banned the use of sexist language in professional writing. For example, the Google tests for their new hiring used to mark the job aspirants down if they wrote gender biased words in their tests. The generic masculine use of “he” to imply both women and men may indicate to readers that the subject matter is specific to males. There are many ways to avoid the use of sexist languages. The paired pronouns and plurals, such as the word “their” can help an author or a speaker to avoid the use of male specific language. Very recently, students at Oxford have been told to use gender neutral pronouns such as “ze” rather than “he” or “she”. The move, outlined in a students’ union leaflet, is intended to stop transgender students being offended. Deliberately using the

wrong pronoun for a transgender person is an offence under Oxford's behaviour code.³

Assamese is a Northeastern Indo-Aryan language, spoken mainly in the state of Assam as L1 and in some parts of Northeast India as the L2. It is also considered as the lingua-franca of the entire Northeast India. The Assamese language usually employs feminine suffixes to denote gender in the language. They are usually derivational suffixes. Usually, it is a morpheme being added to the base form of the word. In this process, sometimes the root form also undergoes some phonological changes. For example,

<i>Xikhok</i> (male teacher)	→	<i>xikhoyitri</i> (female teacher)
<i>Maastor</i> (teacher)	→	<i>maastoroni</i> (wife of a teacher)
<i>Porisaalok</i> (male director)	→	<i>porisaalika</i> (female director)
<i>Abhinetaa</i> (male actor)	→	<i>Abhinetri</i> (female actor)
<i>Gaayok</i> (male singer)	→	<i>gaayika</i> (female singer)

At the same time, the Assamese language also has gender specific classifiers such as – *joni* – usually to denote female human beings. In some varieties, this classifier is also used to refer to non-human such as “dog,” “cow,” “cat,” etc. Interestingly, the male counterpart of it, i.e., – *jon* – is never used to refer to non-humans like dog, cow, etc., for their male counterparts.

It was observed by Kakati (1962) that Assamese along with its sister languages, such as, Bengali and Oriya, has lost grammatical gender markings. Sex is usually denoted with some lexical items which are qualifying words such as *munih-tirotaa* (husband wife), *mataa-maiki* (male female), *loraa-sowaali* (boy-girl), etc. In certain instances of adjectivals also derivational morpheme such as – *ri* is added to make a word feminine. For example:

<i>Kolaa</i> (deaf)	→	<i>kaaleri</i> (deaf, female, used in some varieties of Assamese like Darrangia)
<i>Deka</i> (young male)	→	<i>dekeri</i> (young female).

Henly (1997) suggests that sexism in language may be reduced to three types.

1. Language that ignores women.
2. Language that defines women narrowly.
3. Language that depreciates women.

Women may be ignored in languages simply by not being the central focus point of a discourse. Masculine generics are rampantly used referring to sex indefinite references or sex-neutral concept as the primary example of how languages conceal women. The narrow definition of women in languages relates to women more often being discussed in terms of their relationship. However men are more often discussed in terms of what they do. The power to define women through languages is seen in the tradition of women losing their names through marriage. For example some emphasize the link between a name-identity with the cultural practice of name changing for a woman losing her individuality.

1.4. *Methodology*

The aim of this study is to explore the evidences of sexism in the Assamese language. In many cases, many masculine terms are used where neutral terminologies would have been possible. With the help of an open ended questionnaire, the informants were asked to respond and later, those data were analyzed to see the evidence of sexism in Assamese.

The survey was conducted among a few young speakers of Assamese who were studying at Jawaharlal Nehru University during 2005-06, while the author was a student of this University. A few informants were also interviewed recently at Tezpur University of Assam. There were total 12 informants comprising 6 male and 6 female informants. This number of informants was considered satisfactory as Gordon (2003) also recommends that six male and six female speakers as an ideal pool to collect data from for quantitative study. This study could be called both quantitative and qualitative.

While choosing the informants, those students were considered who could read, write and speak the Assamese language fluently. The reason for not taking the illiterate Assamese speakers is that since certain lexical items were included in the questionnaire which were completely unused or unheard of to the native speakers, yet they carried the probability of becoming the male or female counterparts in the language, may not find a place in their linguistic imagination, which is why, they were avoided in this survey. Moreover, while considering the informants, the micro-cultural variables such as people speaking a different language at home and using Assamese outside were taken into account. Here, all the informants use Assamese as their L1 and other languages as L2 and L3. At the same time some simple lexical items were taken which are frequently used by the native speakers of the Assamese language. The meaning and the semantic explanations of these entities will be discussed in the following part of the paper. Moreover, some simple English sentences were taken and asked them to translate into Assamese. The intention of giving these items will be discussed.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY

2.1. *Section A*

In this section, five sentences were given where the informants had to fill the blank up by a pronoun or a noun item. The informants were expected to give the pronoun or noun which denotes male or female. Here, the survey shows that the first two terms were used only for females, the third one though it was a neutral term in Assamese language it denotes only female and the last two items were used for only males. The idea was to see what kind of socio-cultural constructs came to the minds of the native speakers of the language, whether they are male or female specific words.

Results

1. *satitta* (virginity) → 91% female.

2. *kulakhsini* (characterless/adulterous) →75% female. At the same time the informants told that there is also an equivalent word i.e. *kulakhoniya* to denote males with ill-mannered nature. Out of twelve, four informants could invoke this word with reference to this particular context.
3. *beisyaa* (prostitute) →100% female. All the informants unanimously related this word with the female section of the Assamese society. At the same time some of them equivocally mentioned that now a days they get to hear stories of the presence of male prostitutes in some urban pockets of Assam. But, till now, the language lacks a proper word to denote this profession.
4. *lampat* (characterless) →100% male.
5. *dogaabaaz* (fraud) →100% male.

Here, one can say that there are some lexical items in Assamese which are used only either for male or female. In spite of having similar semantic connotation for both sexes, the language does not seem to have developed a male or female counterpart of some lexical items in it.

2.2. Section B

In this section, the informants were asked to translate a few lexical items from English to Assamese, which usually take a classifier along with their root forms. Since there are gender specific classifiers in Assamese, the intension was to see what classifier they use with those nouns or subjects. In Assamese, *jon* is a human male classifier, and *joni* is a feminine classifier. If they perceive these words only as female, they will use female marking classifier, if not, they would use classifiers specific to male.

Results

1. *garisaalak/ jon* (driver) →91% male.
2. *odhyoksyo/ odhoksyaa/ jon/ joni* (principal) →58.33% male, 41.66% female.
3. *naars / joni* (nurse) 75% female, 25% male.
4. *xipinijon/ joni/ goraki* (weaver) 66% female, 34% male.
5. *nartak /nartaki /jon/joni* (dancer) 50% female, 50% male

From the responses of this section, one can come to the opinion that except the “vehicle driver”, other terminologies are more or less used for both sexes. With the increase of purchasing capacity of Assamese people, the number of female drivers, especially in the section of light motor vehicle, is also increasing, which is why, the stereotype of male driver seems to have broken gradually. But, yet, the presence of female drivers is found only in the urban pockets of the state. Therefore, the social construction of this concept is always centred on the male driver. However, it has also been noticed that the word *saalak* always carries the male connotation, there is also a word to denote the other section of the society, i.e., *saalika* (female driver). But, no one was found to have used the word *saalika* in this context, rather they would use the male-centric word by putting feminine classifier along with it.

The other lexical items in this section have taken both masculine and feminine classifiers in Assamese. It is because, the existence of both male and female concepts denoting these lexical items is ambivalently distributed in the Assamese society. Here, the nominal classifiers *jon*, *joni* and *goraki* are used as masculine classifier, feminine classifier, and gender neutral classifier respectively.

2.3. Section C

In this section, four compound kinship terminologies were given in English. The intension was to see which one, that is masculine or feminine, comes first to the minds of the informants. Having assumed this way, one should also be considerate to the fact that the convention of gender-ordering in coordinative compounds (such as “husband and wife”) may be fixed in a given language to the point that it is fully lexicalized as a single words, and no-one is free to change the ordering no matter how they may wish to.

For example, in some languages of Northeast, such as, Galo (Post 2007), the expression “mother-father,” “antecedents” cannot be changed, or else, the meaning no longer holds; if one says “father-mother,” this can only denote an individual father plus a mother, not necessarily his/her mother, “antecedents” is no

longer possible. This does not prevent one from suggesting these societies within which the compound was lexicalized was one which exhibited a feminist bias, but it does prevent us from unproblematically judging a modern-day Galo speaker as being gender-biased simply because he (or she) speaks the language he (or she) was taught.

Having said it, one can also posit certain questions in this context. If it is so, why is it so? How come people of Assamese society have never realized that the order of gender in these coordinate compounds is biased towards a section of the society? Therefore, the corresponding English words of these compounds were asked to translate into Assamese.

Result

1. *pitrimatri* (parents) 100% preceded the masculine term.
2. *swami stree* (husband-wife, wife husband) 100% preceded the masculine term.
3. *koka-aita* (grand parents) 100% preceded the masculine term.
4. *lora-sowali/sisu* (children) 83.33% preceded the masculine term, 16.66% uses neutral term.

Here, one can see that the informants of this survey invariably use the masculine gendered word first rather than the feminine word. There are also some exceptions such as *ma-deuta* (mother-father) where mother is given priority than one's father in the construction of this kind of compound. At the same time one can notice that there are also some words with gender neutral connotation in Assamese which are used by the Assamese speakers like in the example 4.

2.4. *Section D*

In this section, two sets of words were given. Set A's words are usually connotative of female references and set B was derived from set A for their masculine counterparts. Here, most of the words are usually not used in Assamese, the author is trying to derive these words forcefully. Like generative syntax, where one talks about possible sentences, here also an attempt has been made to create possible words in Assamese to find out the

acceptability of these words among the native speakers. The informants were asked to comment on whether they are “very odd,” “funny,” “acceptable,” simply “not acceptable” or if they can “create a new term” for a particular context. These phrases or concepts were created thinking that they would be the male/female counterparts in a particular context.

Results: Set B

1. *ghargiriek* (househusband) 66.66% very odd, 16.66% acceptable, 16.66% not accurate.
2. *patnirnaam* (husband of:.....) (In the time of filling up any form, it is given as “wife of.....”. Here, the opposite was given.) 20% very odd, 70% acceptable, 10% not acceptable.
3. *purukhxruea* (henpecked wife) 25% very odd, 41.66% funny, 33.33% not acceptable.
4. *banuoi* (female worker) 16.66% odd, 58.33% acceptable, 25% not acceptable.
5. *khetiyikaa* (lady farmer) 10% odd, 10% funny, 20% acceptable, 60% not acceptable.

Here, except the item no. 2, others are more or less not acceptable. The compound *ghargiriek* which means a husband who always stays indoor managing his home where his wife is a working lady is more or less an ill-formed social construct. Although, this type of people do exist in the Assamese society, their status among men-folks is not very high. They will be subject to direct or indirect humour in their society. Whereas, there is absolutely nothing wrong to construct housewife in Assamese society. If there is a deviation from this, then the language does not have an alternative lexical item to refer to this concept. The opposite of the second phrase in Assamese such as *swamirnaam* (husband’s name), *deutarnaam* (father’s name), etc., in any official document is a reflection of the thought that the immediate male relatives are supposed to be the guardian of females in Assamese society. Therefore, in the documentation, it is desired by any authority that the name of their related male member should be given. Equivalent female denoting terms, such as, *maar naam* (mother’s name), *baideurnaam* (elder sister’s

name)' are asked only in case there is a complete absence of male member in a family. The other-way around is not desired by the society, nor they would be accepted by the speakers. Again, if a husband is always ruled or controlled by his wife, there is a word *tirotaxerua* (henpecked husband) in Assamese, but the opposite word cannot exist in Assamese. It is because, probably it is thought that wives are to be controlled and dominated by their husbands in Assamese society, hence, it is a norm. Therefore, there cannot be a lexical item called *purukhserua* (henpecked wife) in Assamese. The words such as *tirotaxerua* are often used in a derogatory way in the Assamese society. Therefore, they can be said as sexist words in Assamese. Similarly, *banuoi* (female worker) and *khetiyikaa* (female farmer) are not constructed as words in spite of having female workers and female farmers in the Assamese society. The society is not yet culturally ready to accept these words in the lexicon of Assamese.

2.5. Section E

In the last section of the questionnaire, five words were given and asked them whether these were used for male/ female/ or both. English also uses many generic words like “mankind” to denote the entire humankind. Similarly, the author being a native speaker of this language, has come across some lexical items which are generic in nature, but uses male denoting words.

Results

1. *xaataampurukh*: It is a compound with derivation. The derivation of this word would be *xaataam* (seven)-*purukh* (male)-*ia*. It is a noun with the meaning age old, here *purukh* means male. All the informants said that it is a word denoting both male and female (100%).
2. *uttarpurukh* (generation to come) 100% for both.
3. *yubaxamaaj* (youth association) 100% for both.
4. *maanabxamaaj* (human society) 100% for both.
5. *saatraxamaaj* (student association) 100% for both.

One can say that these terms are superordinate terms for both men and women. In every item *xaataammahilaa*, *uttarmahilaa*,

yubatixamaaj, *maanabixamaaj*, *saatrixamaaj* could have been the possible female counterparts respectively. But, they are simply not considered acceptable in Assamese. Therefore, they are loaded with male biasness in this language.

There are also many other words where one could see sexism with male or female biases; everything was not included in this survey. The survey results were more of an indicative one than of absolute in nature. Yet, following observations can be made after analyzing the survey samples for this language.

1. The Assamese language has some words which are derogatively used only for women (such as *tirotaxerua* in section D), although, to some extent it does not lack some words for male counterparts as well.
2. Gradually, some words with feminine connotation are getting acceptance among the young speakers of this language, they are at least not being outrightly rejected (for example section B) by the native speakers. The occurrence of gender neutral classifier is an example of this proposition.
3. In compound kinship words, usually the male term tends to precede. But, there are also some compounds where the female word precedes, but their number is less.
4. Many sexist lexical items which are derived from their male or female counterparts generally not acceptable.
5. The Assamese language has shown many superordinate generic words to denote both male and female in the society.

3. GENERAL OBSERVATION

As it was mentioned earlier, the survey is just an indicative of sexism and gender inequality being shown in Assamese, it doesn't give the entire account of sexism in the language. Therefore, it is imperative to examine and explore the other spheres of society where sexism could be felt. Being a native speaker of the language, following, an attempt is made to describe the occurrence of sexism in other layers of the language. Following are some instances where biased terms are used.

1. In Assamese, also for neutral pronoun, the male term “xi” (he) is used as a generic term. Let us examine the following sentences in Assamese.
 - a. *Manuhmaatreixaamaajikpraani.*
***Xi**kolethaakibonuware.* (Man/human is a social being by nature. He cannot live alone.)
 - b. *Jimulaabaarhibotaardupaatote sin* (Morning shows the day.)
 - c) *Ugrapanthiboraraadarxoetiaapuronaahol.*
***xihot**lokhyabhrastahol.*
***Xihote**bahutnirihmanuhokmaarile.* (The principles and goals of extremists have now become obsolete. They have lost their goals. They have killed many innocent people.)

In these above sentences, one could see that emboldened words, such as, *xi*, *tar*, *xihot*, *xihote* are actually male denoting words where they are referring to both male and female sections in that particular context. The genitive case inflected form of he in Assamese is *tar* (as shown in b), and the feminine form is *tair*, but it is not being used in the second statement. Although it is a proverb in Assamese, the male generic genitive pronoun is preferred. It could also be because of the lack of gender connotation in every entity/concept, such as, in Hindi. Hence, the male denoting genitive pronoun is used. Similarly, although the generic term for “they” in Assamese is *xihot*, it is actually a derivation of xi(he)-hot (plural classifier). The word *taihot* could have also been used to refer to both male and female. *Taihot* is exclusively used when there are presence of all females in a particular context. Hence, these terms are heavily loaded with sexism in Assamese.

2. In the Assamese language, there are some proverbs which relegate the status of Assamese women, or one can say, these usages represent Assamese women narrowly. For example, the proverb *tirirmelkalarbhel* which means a meeting of women is like the banana rafts which are used as vehicles

during the time of flood. The proverb *tirirmelkolorbhel* compares *tiri* “woman” to *bhel* “raft” made from *kol* “banana plantain.” At the time of flood *kolorbhel* helps people to escape from the natural calamity. Women too at the time of distress prove to be a saviour. But, once the flood subsides, *kolorbhel* is of no use; same is true for women, once the problem is solved she is of no consequence. Even if the *kolorbhel* is a temporary means of transport during floods, its importance cannot be overlooked. But people do have a tendency to forget its worth. Similarly, women in a patriarchal society do not enjoy any significant status. Her help is taken when needed but is ignored most of the times. So *tirirmel* “a gathering of women” is of no consequence for she does not have any say in the man’s world. The inherent meaning of this proverb is that the *bhel* is used only in the time of flood which is a temporary vehicle. After the flood, a *bhel* becomes simply useless. In the similar note, the decisions of women’s meeting are temporary, they have no everlasting value. This clearly relegates the status of women in the Assamese society. There are many more such examples, such as, *Lao zimaaneidaangornohouk*, *xi xodaipaatorlot* means whatever may be the size of a gourd it always has to remain beneath its leaves. In this example too, the generic pronoun *xi* has been used to denote a very derogatory meaning, i.e., whatever position a woman may hold, eventually, she has to be under the shadow of a man.

3. The Assamese language has certain words which are used only to characterize the stereotypical nature and behaviour of Assamese women. If any equivalent term for male counterpart is created deriving from these terms, people would tend to reject them considering these some odd and weird lexical items. Though the probability of accepting these terms by the higher educated liberal speakers is more, the common people will not accept them considering awful. For instance – *daaini* (witch), *axati* (adulterous women), *xati* (pure and pious wife) *ardhaangini* (the married women is regarded as the half-limbs of the husband), *maahimak*

- (stepmother), *xatini* (the other wife of husband), *beisyaa* (prostitute), etc. are used only for women.
4. Apart from these terms, traditionally Assamese speakers have been using some words which are completely biased towards male. In this category one can put the following examples. *Xatampurukhia* (considering as an age-old tradition which has been continuing from the days of one's grand-grandpa), *uttarpurukh* (post generation), *baapatixaahon* (which has been going on for a long time like a ritual and something very old and dear), *zubaxakti*, *dekaaxakti* (youth power), *bihuadol* (bihu party), *saatrxamaaz* (student association), etc. These compounds are mostly derived from male connotative words. Here, either the Head or Dependent has to have a reference point in the male section of the society. But, they are used for both male and female as superordinate terms.
 5. In contrast to the above terms, there are some words which are used only for one sex. For example, *zobotixamaaj* (girl's association) *xikhyaitrixamaaz* (lady teachers' association), *saatrixamaaj* (girl students' association), *bihuoti dal* (female bihu dance group), etc. These words are always used to define specifically the feminine part of the society and also to differentiate them from their male counterparts.
 6. Moreover, the influence of sexism on sports industry is also quite noticeable. In the Assamese language, when a team of a sport has to be distinguished from boys to girls, the word *mahilaa* (women) is added before it or in the middle of the original name. When they refer to "Axom football dal" or "Axom cricket dal" (Assam football or cricket team), they usually mean the male cricket or football team. But, the truth is that for both games, the female teams are also there. In this case by adding the word *mahilaa*, the Assamese society makes them feminine. For instance *Axommahilaa football dal*. *Axommahilaa cricket dal* (Assam women football/cricket team), etc. This is quite common in the names of other female sport teams as well. The names are always feminized and seem to come across the female version of the original male team.

7. Another feature of sexism in the Assamese language is that when a woman gets married, she usually gives up her surname and starts using the surname of her husband. For instance, if Miss Deepamoni Barua gets married to Ranjit Saikia, her name will change to Mrs. Deepamoni Saikia. But of late, the higher educated women started defying this tradition; rather they would prefer to use their husband's surname after their name as a tail.
8. In the Assamese language, the names of associations which represent a section of Assamese people have never used the term which are known as feminine terms. For instance, *xadou.AxomSaatraXantha* (All Assam Student Union), *Axomgaarisaalakxantha* (All Assam Drivers' Association), etc.; here, by the superordinate term *saatra* (student), *saalak* (driver) both men and women are represented within a single class.
9. At last, there are ample evidence of using masculine generic pronoun where some abstract ideas or inhuman qualities are referred to. For instance, in the discussion of a ghost, people tend to use *xi* (he) as pronoun rather than *tai*.

4. CONCLUSION

Since sexist language is somewhat under researched, and an inconclusive topic, it cannot be generalized to all people. However, age differences as well as cultural differences may be a problem when doing research on sexist language. One can avoid sexist language if they become more conscious, more loyal towards all strata and sexes of a society.

NOTES

1. Available online: <http://digilander.libero.it/mgtund/sexism_in_language%202.htm>. Accessed on 10 Dec 2016.
2. Available online: <http://digilander.libero.it/mgtund/sexism_in_language%202.htm>. Accessed on 10 Dec 2016.
3. The Student Union of the Oxford University has distributed a pamphlet recently among students and teachers urging not to use

sexist words, rather to use the gender neutral pronoun 'ze'. Available online: <<http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/oxford-university-students-gender-neutral-pronouns-peter-tatchell-student-union-ze-xe-7470196.html>>. Accessed on 10 Dec 2016.

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APPENDIX I**Questionnaire**

Name:

Age:

Sex:

A. Fill in the blanks with a pronoun (non- honorific) or a noun.

1. _____ *XatittaHeruaale*
(_____ lost virginity).
2. _____ *bar kulaksinidei*
(_____ is characterless/adulterous)
3. _____ *egaraakibeisyaa.*
(_____ is a prostitute)
4. _____ *bar lampat.*
(_____ is a characterless)
5. _____ *bar dagabaaz.*
(_____ is a fraud)

B. Translate the following sentences into Assamese.

1. The bus driver was drinking.
2. The principal of this college is a powerful person.
3. The nurse is so caring.
4. Is the weaver coming?
5. The next dancer is x.

C. Give the Assamese equivalent terms for the following words---

1. Parents
2. Husband-wife, wife-husband.
3. Grandparents.
4. Children.

D. consider the following two sets .Set B is derived from set A.
comment on set B

Set A

1. *gharghaini* (house wife)
2. In the time of filling up form
3. *tirutaxerua* (henpecked husband)
4. *banua* (worker)
5. *khetiyak* (farmer)

Set B

1. *ghargiriek* (househusband)
2. Wife of
3. Husband of.....
4. *Purukhserua* (henpecked wife)
5. *banuoi* (lady worker)
6. *khetiyika* (lady farmer).

Mark with a tick:

Serial No	Very odd	Funny	Acceptable	Not acceptable	Any new term
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

E. Following are some words in Assamese. Mark with a tick what it means for you:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| 1. <i>xatampurukhia</i> (Traditional) | M / F / MF both |
| 2. <i>uttarpurukh</i> (Offspring) | M / F / MF both |
| 3. <i>yubasamaaj</i> (Youth association) | M / F / MF both |
| 4. <i>maanabsamaaj</i> (Human society) | M / F / MF both |
| 5. <i>saatrasamaaj</i> (Student association) | M / F / MF both |

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