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## **Sourashtri and Gujarati: A Case Study of Documenting Language through Internal Diaspora**

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Sourashtra People are believed to have migrated from Saurashtra, the western region of Gujarat, in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century. Sourashtra, an endangered language, is an Indo-Aryan language closely related to Gujarati and spoken by more than 3,00,000 people in southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, particularly in Madurai Salem, Thanjavur, and even villages like Paramkudi.

‘Baar gaave boli badlai’ is a Gujarati proverb to mean that: ‘a dialect changes every twelve miles.’ But the case/story of Sourashtra people’s language, Sourashtri, is that it (Gujarati of eleventh century) has survived after travelling thousands of miles from western coastal region of Saurashtrain Gujarat to Tamil Nadu. It is true that language is the last thing that a person parts with. The Sourashtra migrant community has proved it and there is hope that Sourashtri, which has minority language status in Tamilnadu will live on till there are two speakers alive. The scenario is not so grave because it is the spoken language of more than three lakh people in Tamil Nadu.

Sourashtra Community has a minority status in Tamil Nadu on the basis of the fever speakers of Sourashtra language. They are also known as ‘Patlunkars’, similar to the handloom weaving communities as Vankar and Khattris known for silk weaving of patolas and Bandhani (tie and dye) in Gujarat. No serious historical or linguistic study of the people’s migration or development of Sourashtra language is available. Historian Prof. C. S. Krishnamoorthy traces the origin in the vedic period as, ‘At the beginning they spoke Vedic Sanskrit or the Old-Indo Aryan language and subsequently the Prakrits and got transformed into the modern form after its contact with Marathi, Kannada and Telugu.

The official classification of Sourashtra according to Linguistic Survey of India vide Census of India 1961 Volume I INDIA Part II-C (ii) Language Tables p. ccxvii, published by The Manager of Publications, Civil Lines, Delhi, 1967 as ‘Sourashtram is classified under Indo-European Family – Aryan Sub Family - Indo-Aryan Branch – Inner Sub Branch Central Group-and pending some authoritative work, is tentatively grouped under Gujarati’

With all that has been passed on orally and the linguistic traces, it is believed that Sourashtra Language with all its influences during the nine hundred years of internal migration is intact (Gujarati in 11c) to a larger extent with the influence of the languages on their migration route and settlement. Modern Gujarati as well as Sourashtra language developed only after the 11<sup>th</sup> century i.e. the time of migration. It would be interesting to examine the development of the script of the same language on homeland Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, where the Sourashtrians have largely settled. Linguists today have been able to trace the



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origins of the Sourashtra language to Gujarati, the language spoken by the people of Gujarat. Sourashtri, language of the Sourashtra, is Gujarati (that was spoken a thousand years before in Gujarat) has its traces of Marathi, Konkani, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu (Keeping with the rout of Sourashtra migration). This difference is because both Gujarati and Sourashtra has a common parent language, but in course of time the Sourashtra language diversified and imbibed the elements that we see in it today can be traced by tracing the roots and rout of migration. Thus the vocabulary and grammar of Sourashtra Language is mainly Gujarati/Sanskrit.

## Sourashtra vowels and vowel diacritics with T.M.Rama Ray Script

ଅ	ଌ	ଐ	ଊ	ଋ	ୠ	ୡ	ଌ	ୠ
a	aa	i	ii	u	uu	ୠ	ru	lu
ୠ	ୡ	ୢ	ୣ	୤	୥	୦	ଌ	ୠ
luu	e	E	ai	o	O	au	am	aha
କ	କା	କି	କିି	କୂ	କୂୂ	କୃ	କୃୂ	କୃୃ
ka	kaa	ki	kii	ku	kuu	kru	kruu	klu
କୃୃ	କେ	କେ	କୈ	କୌ	କୌ	କାୂ	କାମ	କାହ
kluu	ke	kE	kai	ko	kO	kau	kam	kah
କ	ହ	ହା	ନାସାଲାଇଜେସନ୍					
k	h	half ya	nasalization					

## Sourashtra consonants

କ	କ୍ଷ	ଗ	ଘ	ଙ	ଚ	ଚ୍ଛ	ଜ	ଜ୍ଞ	ଞ
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṅa	cha	chha	ja	jha	ña
ଟ	ଠ	ଡ	ଢ	ନ	ତ	ଥ	ଦ	ଧ	ନା
Ta	Tha	Da	Dha	Na	ta	tha	da	dha	na
ପ	ଫ	ବ	ଭ	ମ	ଯ	ର	ଲ	ୱ	ଶ
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ya	ra	la	va	sha
ଷ	ସ	ହ	ଲ	କ୍ଷ	ନ୍ଧ	ମ୍ଧ	ର୍ଧ	ଲ୍ଧ	
Sha	sa	ha	La	kSha	nha	mha	rha	lha	



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Sourashtra language is more or less a dialect/ boli, it's indigenous script was developed by the end of nineteenth century. In case of Gujarati too, after its evolution adopted Devnagari as the script for centuries. Gujarati Script is largely an adoption of Devnagari Script. The earliest known document in the Gujarātī script is a manuscript dating from 1592, and the script first appeared in print in a 1797 advertisement. No script can be coded artificially. It passes through the phases of evolution as the requirement to write, writing activities, limitations of written literature, and at times the influence of other cultures. Until the 19th century it was used mainly for writing letters and keeping accounts, while the Devanāgarī script was used for literature and academic writings. Ucida in his 'introduction' gives his observation with regards to the standardization of the script and the feud among scholars which is true even today as:

Saurashtrians had their own beautiful and systatic script, the origin of which is not known. At the end of last century T.M.Rama Ray reformed the script and cast type for it. He published many books in this script. Later he introduced some changes and standardized it, which is now used by some people as Saurashtra Script. Since the end of the nineteenth century in Telugu, Tamil, Devnagari and Saurashtra scripts. [...] As such, the Tamil script, though not suitable for the language, is mostly used for Saurashtra language. ...

The Supporters of Devnagari (for wider communication) and the revivalist of the Saurashtra script (for the identity of the community) are in feud. However, due to unfavorable conditions, none of the groups have been successful in getting their script occupy the position of the Tamil script. (xxi)

The Sourashtra alphabet was developed towards the end of the 19th century. A number of Sourashtra letters a similar to the letters in the Oriya and Gujarati alphabets. Sourashtra has also been written with Telugu and Devanagari alphabets but is usually written with a slightly modified version of the Tamil alphabet. Today according to V. Renuga Devi, 'Sourashtra speakers maintain their language for ethenic identity'(35), the use of Sourashtra script is very minimal as its use is limited to home/domestic domain.

The elderly people in the community are much concerned about their language which is fast disappearing due to the limited use and its limited speakers. There have been very limited efforts to keep it in use institutionally. There are educational institutions run by the community enjoying the status of minority institutions in Madurai and around but no course is offered in Sourashtra language because it is not vocationally viable. Some efforts are done by the community to print their magazines and newsletters as Zig but it is futile as the young generation has no means to adapt to the script. The religious ceremonies



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particularly the bhajan/ kirtans of the saints and the role it has played as a mother tongue sustains the language to a larger extent. Recently established Sourashtra Heritage Chair by Sourashtra University has also taken up the concerns of the community and generated some interest of the scholars towards the linguistic study of Sourashtra.

The affiliation to the land of migration has added one more dimension to the linguistic study. Till now the different scholars studied Sourashtra language without the knowledge of Gujarati and thus most of the studies attributed the influence of Sanskrit directly without going back to the original source i.e. Gujarati. The latest domestic vocabulary published as a result of the Vocabulary workshops in Madurai and Rajkot could add Gujarati equivalent of Sourashtra word and it was evident that eighty percent words were common in both languages. It would be interesting thus to revise the etymology of the words in the dictionary available (e.g. Ucida has rarely gone to look at the Gujarati equivalent and thus most of the roots are stated as from Sanskrit) by taking help of Gujarati scholars.

Sourashtra, though a branch of the Indo-Aryan linguistic family, has developed a grammar that is of Dravidian structure. At morphological level it is rigid enough not to lose much but at syntactic level it has the basic word order in simple unmarked sentence as: subject-object-verb i.e. SOV (which is a case with Gujarati). The Tamil scholars believe that the Indo-Aryan languages have borrowed the sentence structure from Dravidian languages. Again keeping with the structures of Gujarati much can be restated.

Much needs to be done to make aware the young generation speakers of Sourashtra today to keep intact the status due to ones mother tongue. Domestic boundaries can be the centuries to preserve the language that is fast moving towards a status of extinction. A linguistic study of Sourashtra can also be a scientific endeavor to go back to the roots and rout of migration. One the other hand Sourashtra language can be an archival source for Gujarati linguist to study Gujarati that has undergone a change through centuries under the influence of Hindi, Urdu, Persian, English and the languages of the neighboring states.

It would not be out of place to mention the activities of the Sourashtra Heritage Chair founded by Sourashtra University and has initiated some activities with a view of cultural exchange.



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Sourashtra Heritage Chair is established by Saurashtra University since 2007 due to the concerns of the Sourashtra People living in Madurai and NRI's in US to search their roots, historically study their migration route, and generate interest of the scholars to take up research related to the Sourashtra people with special areas as culture, Diaspora / migrant experience, language, socio-economic status etc.

Among various activities of the Chair there were two vocabulary workshops organized by the Chair in series. The Sourashtri Vocabulary Development Workshop jointly organized by Sourashtra Heritage Chair – Saurashtra University, Rajkot, Gujarat and Sourashtra College, Madurai -4, Tamilnadu with the academic and financial assistance from the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)(Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India), Mysore. A list of 1200 words was worked out with Sourashtri words along with its Gujarati and English equivalent and transcription in Gujarati and English .

**Note:** 'Sourashtra' is how the Sourashtra community articulates as well as spell in Madurai for their temples, institutions and social organizations. Thus, it has been retained to name the Chair as 'Sourashtra Haritage Chair' by Saurashtra University to preserve its distinct identity. Scholars in Madurai use the spelling 'Sourashtra' which the paper also ought to retain in the quotations.

Pages of some Websites with concerns for Sourashtra Language:

<http://palkar.org/index.shtml>

<http://palkarblogs.com>

<http://sourashtra.info>

<http://sourashtra.info>



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