

Influence of Arabic to Build-up the Assamese Society

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Abstract:

The land of Assam have been favour to have had a grand Madrassa set up after the pattern of Darul Uloom Deobond at Baskandi by Hazrat Maulana Ahmad Ali, under the reformed scheme, the most ancient Madrassa in modern Assam was set up at Badarpur by Hazrat Khawaja Sheikh Tamizuddin (d.1899A.D.) and the High Madrassa of Sibsagar is said to have been the most ancient Madrassa in Assam. These Madrassas, being the parent institutions for spreading Arabic knowledge and other Islamic subjects have given birth to several Arabic institutions founded in various parts of Assam. The contribution of Arabic Language and Literature to the Assamese society in different aspects of social life is manifold. The Arabic language by dint of its huge words stock has made an access to Assamese literature and thereby it has enriched the standard of Assamese language. This kind of literary as well as linguistic contribution of Arabic has brought forth a new era to the Assamese literature through precious words so many litterateurs from the Muslim sect. On the other hand, contribution of Arabic language and literature to the Assamese society is the cultural progress which has caused a great change to the cultural aspect of the Assamese people. Hazrat Azan Faqir who by dint of his composing several Zikirs and Zaris endeavored much to bring communal harmony among various religious people of Assam irrespective of caste and creed and colour. The use of various ornaments as well as wearing of various typical garments particularly trousers and long shirts by gent and shelwars kamis by Assamese young girls and ladies are the direct influence of Arabic learning in Arabic institution of Assam.

Keyword: Arabic literature, Assamese people, Madrassa, Azan Peer, Zikir-Zari etc.

Introduction:

The subject of Arabic language in India has a long history to study. India and Arabia were commercially, politically and culturally connected from ancient times. It was started with the arrival of Muslims in India. Other hand, the development of Assamese language in the Indo-Islamic environment; with thousands of Arabic and Persian words, phrases and thoughts form naturalized in them, is an interesting point that needs to be noticed in all the local languages of northern, southern, western and eastern part of India such as Panjabi, Bengali, Kashmiri, Marathi and Assamese etc. There are invaring degree of admixtures, large number of Arabic words and expressions not only in the spheres of poetry and literature but in popular proverbs and daily speech as well.

There was a considerable flow of cultural and linguistic elements from outside, one side to other; for when a language received words and expressions into its own system from another language, it takes not only a number of sounds syllables but areas and conceptional networks they contained. This shows

furthermore the process of cultural synthesis took place not only in the higher level of the society but also more intimately, amongst the common people and as a result of their intimate intercourse.

According to Dr. Mohini Kumar Saikia, the gradual rise of Arabic and Persian word in the Assamese language, in fact, is another noteworthy and tangible effect of the age old contact of Assam with the Muslim. The main factors which appear to have played a dominant role in promoting the growth of such elements in the Assamese language are (1) the rise of Muslim population in Assam (2) the travelers of pilgrims from Assam in northern India (3) the wars and diplomatic relations between the Assamese kings and the Muslim powers (4) religious songs like *Zikir* and *Zari* of the Assamese Muslims (5) cultural exchanges in the later period of Ahom rule in Assam.

It is in this perspective that the following few pages an attempt will be made to study and examine the influence of Arabic on Assamese language and literature and its impact in the prevalent events, trends and customs in Assam.

Literary Development of Arabic in Assam

The linguistic contribution of Arabic to Assamese language is that the Arabic language and literature has been being taught as the compulsory subject in all the trio-typed Madrassas of Assam namely: (1) *Kharijiah* or *Dini Madrassa*, (2) Senior Madrassa, Arabic colleges and Title Madrassa and (3) Middle English and High Madrassas. The medium of instruction for imparting Arabic language and literature in *kharijiah* or *dini* Madrassa and senior or Title Madrassa is Arabic or Urdu, while in Middle English or High Madrassas of Assam valley is Assamese and Bengali in Barak Valley. Although the learners take to learning Arabic language and literature through Arabic or Urdu, they have equal, if no stronger command in Assamese on account of its being the mother tongue than Arabic or Urdu. So, Arabic language and literature taught in various Madrassas of Assam has been contributing since their inception in Assam, in the growth and development of Assamese language to a great extent.

In the middle of seventeenth century Hazrat Shah Milan or Azan Faqir, the most renowned Muslim saint, poet of Assam, who came from Baghdad and is said to have entered the Ahom kingdom with his brother Nabi Pir. In the field of *Zikir* and *Zari*, Azan Faqir made an outstanding contribution towards the popular literature of Assam. He probably composed about hundred and sixty *Zikirs*, besides him Chan kha, Sheikh Farid, Bandar Faqir and many other had also composed *Zikirs*.

Apart from Azan Faqir, Chand Kha or Chandsai was one of the renowned religious men of ancient Assam. A number of *Zikirs* and other religious songs of anomic type are ascribed to him. Besides these he is also reported to have compiled a biography of *Gopaladeva*. The Sufi saints of eighteenth century are found to have contributed much to the Assamese literature. Of them mention must be made of Hazrat Abdul Jalal Zulqad Ali who was been at Sibsagar (in Assam) in 1796. In Gawahati, Kamrup, Darrong and Nagaon he started his missionary activities and fought against the evil practice done by the Assamese Muslims. In order to lead aright the people he made speeches, wrote books and pamphlets. His work *Tariqul Haq fi Bayne Nurul Haq* in Assamese but in Arabic script, is an important production as it is reckoned as one of the oldest works in modern Assamese prose literature. Talib Hussain of Phul Bari, district Cachar (Assam) is another Sufi saint who has also volumes of Sufi literature in manuscript from Sylhets Nagari, preserved in the different *khanqahs* of Cachar district.

An important contribution in this direction is late Sader Ali's translation work of Holy Quran into Assamese language. He also took interest in composing a good number of religious books on Islamic principle and philosophy. Syed Shamsul Huda translated the *Sura Baqarah* of the Holy Quran with

commentary into Assamese entitled as *Quran Bodh*. He also worked on *Hadith Sangrah* is an excellent work promoting to progress to Assamese literature. An exhaustive biography of Prophet in simple Assamese was propagated and published by Faizuddin Ahmed. His other works are on the lives of the caliphs and martyrs of the *Karbala*. Another purely Arabic works written by some scholars of Assam like *Tarikhul Uloom al-Arabia* written by Maulana Taibur Rahman of Hailakandi; some non Muslim writer like Madhav Sarma, Gopinath Bordoloi and Atul Baruah wrote biography of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Dr. Atowar Rahman, a professor of Gauhati University, has contributed to Assamese literature by writing books such as *Mritiyur Somay aru Pisat*, *Quran Gyan aru Musalman* and *Muslim Bibhah*. In his works he has given scientific explanation of the Quranic verses besides their Assamese translation which would certainly mark ahead in the development of Assamese literature through Arabic. Maulana Abdul Jalil Ragibi, his outstanding works like *Islamor Dristith Bibhah Bandhan*, *Islamor Dristit Manav Santan*, *Charitra Chitrakanot Islam* etc. are very important for Muslim people. Another prominent Muslim scholar Mufti Khairul Islam has contributed a lot, mainly *Muslim Jivon Alongkar*, *Jakator Bristarito Masael*, *Muslimor Namaz*, *Hajj Korar Pronali*, etc.

During the time of renaissance of the Muslim, Muslim writers embracing the Islamic ideas and subject matter had entered into Assamese literature forcefully as we find the impact of Islamic culture and ideas in their poems, novels, essays, songs, translations etc. In the poems of *Gyan Malini* of Mofizuddin Ahmed Hajrika and *Karbala* of Raghunath Choudhary are full of Islamic culture and feelings. On the basis of Islamic ideas, the poet Raghunath Choudhary has become successful in depicting characters like Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain, how they sacrificed themselves for the cause of Islam and close the way of the holy war.

There are many Arabic and Persian words like *Rasul*, *Imam*, *Islam*, *Badshah*, *Surahi*, *Shaitan*, *Jallad*, *Katowal*, *Qasid*, *Rawza*, *Sultan*, *Kamil*, *Herem*, *Khalifa*, *Shahid*, *Shahidana*, *Kafer*, *Khanfar* etc. can be seen to be used in the Assamese books. After poetry, drama also is seen to possess a deep influence of Islamic literature. In *Rustam Sohrab*, *Marjina*, *Shershah* and *Magribor Azan* of later dramatists, all of them have presented the Islamic picture as well as culture and its language is full of Islamic words. As far as novel is concern, it is also impacted by Islamic thought. Not only Muslim novelists but non Muslims have depicted Islamic ideas and feelings in their novels. In *Siraj*, Lakhmidhar Sarma has shown the responsibility for neighbours and sacrifice to others attractively; these are purely Islamic characteristics. *Bidhva* and *Patit aru Patita* of Troilakyanath Goswami are also completed on the basis of Islamic ideas, *Miyan Mansur*, a successful novel of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, is based on deep Islamic feelings and the author has beautifully described how Miyan Mansur, a purely Muslim character, save a woman from drowning by reciting some verses of the Quran. Like Jogesh Das, one of the most famous novelists of Assamese literature, has presented some Islamic characteristics through his novel *Dawor aru Noi*, in which he has established an Islamic character through a bicycle mechanic, Nizam. Another of his best creations *Ramdhan* is also based on Islamic ideology.

A good number of writers have contributed to the novel literature. The most popular of Assamese novelists Syed Abdul Malik has written a large number of novels of high standard. Most of his novels are written on the basis of Islamic feelings. *Suruj Mukhir Shapna* (Calcutta, 1960), *Tara*, *Juti* and *Molak* are the novels which shows obvious more Islamic influence. In the novels *Piriti-Upahar* and *Sangam* by Muhammad Piyar, Muslim problems and Muslim characters are discussed. *Karbalar Shahid* is another publication where the Islamic characters of brotherhood is shown clearly.

A satisfactory number of Islamic magazines have been published up now in which both Islamic culture as well as linguistic influences are distinct. Among these, *Insaf* edited by Fatima Khatun, *Adhan* by Alimuddin Dewan, *Hefazat* by Rafiqul Haque, *Jumma* by Jahid Choudhury, *Eid Mubarak* and *Orani* by Eli Ahmed, *Al-Hilal* by Nawabuddin Ahmed, *al-Jamaiyat* and *Quran Jyoti* by Abdul Jalil Raghbi, *Hedayet* by Keramat Ali, and the latest magazine *Gyan Shambar* by Maulana Abdul Jalil Raghbi are most mentionable. In such magazines, most of the articles are on Islamic rites and rituals and innumerable Islamic words have been used in the articles.

Impact of Arabic to the Culture of Assamese Society

The influence of Arabic or Islamic learning is undoubtedly an effective contribution to the various aspects of Assamese culture. The culture of Islam admits of differences in language and literature, art and architecture, name and nomenclatures, customs and traditions. Dynamic movement is the fundamental principle of growth in the Islamic culture. Islam was cohesive when in a state of continuous forward motion. It had no fixed territorial contours, no boundaries, no limits of its own hence, it has become able to own the various kinds of people of the world. We have, meanwhile discussed that our honourable Prophet has been the symbol of the development of Arabic language and literature, religion and culture etc.

According to historian Minhazuddin that the *Koch* and *Mech* people in the western part of Kamrupa displayed their admiration of Islam as early as 1198 A.D. so much so that they assisted Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khiliji to enter the country after the Muslim conquest of India. Similarly the Chutia king Ratnadhvaj Palas (1224- 1250 A.D.) has kept friendly relation with the Sultan of Gauda in the middle of thirteenth Century, thus the acceptance of Islam by the king Chakradhwaj in 1474 A.D. and the use of some Arabic and Persian words by the Assamese poets including Sankardeva (1449-1558A.D.) clearly prove that the Islamic culture gained popularity in the conquest of Sultan Hussain Shah in 1502A.D.

Hussain Shah (1494-1519A.D.) annexed the kingdom of Kamrup to Gouda not only established Muslim rule in Assam but also brought the Ahom rulers of Assam into indirect contact with the Muslims. During his reign, he created a large colony of Afghan warriors who definitely added to the growth of Arabic or Islamic elements in Assamese culture. Most of the Muslims who were settled in Ahom kingdom, were war prisoners or artisans imported by the kings. Being settled in different parts of the Ahom territory, these Muslim inhabitants came in close contact with the local people and thus the Assam Muslim cultural relation acquired a momentum to flourish is a wider and more continuous stream.

The employment of Muslim settlers in various departments of the government broadened the scope for the increase of Arabic elements in Assamese culture. It is to be noted that the Muslims of Assam were employed in the guilds of weavers, tailors and drapers, masons besides in the royal arsenals and consequently different kinds of dresses, brocades and various types of Muslim embroidery enriched the old Assamese customary. The use of enameled gold ornaments is believed to have come from Muslims. Likewise, the dome-shaped masonry construction on the royal palace, curved door frames, gates and other masonry, decorative works with intricate geometrical pattern of many Hindu temples provides enough proof of Islamic elements in Assamese architectural design. It is assumed that the use of metallic spittoons, smoking pipes, hookahs and paper Tula-path among the Assamese, is the result of the Muslim influence.

The gun power and canon, manufactured during the Ahom rule were undoubtedly the matchless contribution of the Muslims to the Ahom military strength. The growing contact of the Ahoms with the

Muslims necessitated their developing the culture of the Arabic language not only in the court towards an effective diplomatic relationship with the later but also in the Islamic religious centre to impart religious education to their Muslim subjects.

The Assamese fine arts which developed during the Ahom rule blossomed forth in new verdure having nourished on the elements from those of Muslims. The paintings and the rise of the culture of Hindustani music in Ahom court are, perhaps, the best evidences of the Muslims. Apart from these, the influence of Arabic or Islamic elements on the Assamese neo-Vaishnavite literature, music and painting, is also not very insignificant. The musical instruments like Rabab, Nagara and Pakwaj were used by the Vaishnavas who use Muslim type of dress in their performances even now.

It is also interesting to note that learning of Arabic in the Madrassas of Assam has greatly influenced the Assamese culture. It is worth mentioning here that the Muslims of Assam under the impact of local Hindu culture did not have much difference in case of religious performances and wearing of dresses towards the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth Century. Maulana Keramat Ali Jounpuri (1873 A.D.) a prominent Islamic reformer of Bengal and Assam came to Kamrup (Assam) and observed that even the Muslims here were half naked and were doing some religious deeds contradictory to Islam. On such deplorable condition, the Maulana supplied *Pyjamas*, *Kamises* and *caps* to them free of cost and taught them Islamic culture and ideology. Now a day, we very often happen to observe the wearing of *kamis-pyjama* by males and *shilwar-churni* by the young girls' irrespective any caste and religion in Assam. Besides, the Muslims, the Hindus have begun to prefer *kamis-pyjama* and *shilwar kamis* to *dhuti-panjabi* and *mekhela-chaddar*. As a result the other religious young girls are using such Islamic dresses with a progressive attitude for promoting a high standard addition to the Assamese culture.

Conclusion:

The rise of Muslim population in Assam is the first and foremost factor which promoted Arabic words to inter in the Assamese language. Some areas of Assam inhabited by the Muslim became the centers of Islamic civilization spreading Arabic language and literature through the increasing of *Maktabs* and *Madrassas*. The second main factor is that the good relation and fraternity among all religious people of Assam helps to promote the cultural development of this area mixed with Islamic ideology.

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