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Impact of Arabic on Assamese society since 1947

Shafiqul Islam Ansary

Research Scholar, Dept. of Arabic, Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

Abstract

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. The last not the least, 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 Assamese people. For instance, 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, creed and color. The use of various ornaments as well as wearing of various typical garments particularly trousers and long shirts by gen and selwar kamis by Assamese young girls and ladies are the direct contribution of Arabic learning in Arabic institution of Assam.

Influence of Arabic on Assamese: India is a great country and Assam is an integral part of it. The life, language and culture of the Indian people have been an assimilation and synthesis of the life and culture of the diverse people, living in the different parts of the country. The life and culture of the people of Assam also have been contributed to the flow of Indian culture and life through the ages. Therefore, the study of the history of India and its language is incomplete without a study of regional histories and their languages including the history of Assam, which is necessary important and component of the history of India.

The people of Assam with their successes and failures, their qualities and fallings, their customs and habits are as the products of their history, environment and other circumstances and any other people living in any part of this country of Indian as a whole. To be able to gain knowledge, therefore of different aspects of life as it was lived in Assam in the past, a critical study of its history is indispensable.

The unity of Indian culture in reflected oneness, although its outward expression exhibit considerable variety and complexity through different languages and scripts. To significant elements that we see in all the modern Indian literature are the deep and abiding influences of Arabic. The influence of Arabic on modern Indian languages is clearly seen not only in the literary form but in phonology and vocabulary as well.

The subject of Arabic language in India has a long history to study. It was started with the arrival of Muslims in India. India and Arabia were commercially, politically and culturally connected from ancient times, even as early Achaemerian period.

The development of Assamese language in the Indo-Islamic environment; with thousands of Arabic and Persian words, phrases and thought from 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 Punjabi, Bengali, Kashmiri, Marathi and Assamese etc. There is 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. The assimilation has been so perfect and natural that speakers, except the specialists and the scholars may be aware of this admixture. This large scale linguistic assimilation points out that there was a considerable flow of cultural and linguistic elements from outside, one side to another; 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 conception networks they contained. This shows furthermore the process of cultural synthesis took place not only in the higher level of the society but also and more intimately, amongst the common people and as a result of their intimate intercourse.

Islam, it's cultural and literature influenced the other cultures and literatures of the words; it is necessary to know the historical cause and co-ordination through which Islam influenced the other part of the world.

The light of Islam which emerged, penetrating the darkness of the Arab deserts, spread far and wide in the east and west and fully illumined them. Due to this, a new life and reformation came into light in the continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. Islam, of course is a sharp revolution through which death also gains a new life, from it, the people of far middle-east saw the light of a new drawn if pleasure, the darkness of Africa became far away forever and there was created a new renaissance among the European people who were in utter darkness. Like this the arrival of Islam hit the greater India, giving it fresh life and drinking. Due to the result of such activities, the religious, social, literary and cultural revolutions appeared before us. From the historical point of view, Islam and its culture came to Assam very late in comparison with other parts of India. Therefore, Assam came into contact with the Muslims in the early thirteenth century. During this time, the people of Assam were in utter darkness and superstitions. In spite of that there was no need of trade, especially for the Assamese people, due to an abundance of the necessary requirements available 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 college and Title Madrassa.
3. Middle English and High Madrassas.

The medium of instruction for imparting Arabic language and literature in Kharijiah or Dini Madrassas and senior or title Madrassas in Arabic or Urdu, while in Middle English or High Madrassas of Assam valley, is Assamese and Bengali in Barak Valley. Although the learners like 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.

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 the country.

The rise of Muslim population in Assam in the first and foremost factor which promoted Arabic words to inter in the Assamese language. It appears from the article of Hem Bordoloi entitled "Asom, Asomia aru iar Babbhiswat" published in the 'Dainik Asom' that some areas of Assam inhabited by the Muslim became the centers of Islamic civilization spreading Arabic language and literature through the media of Makhtabs and Madrassas among the Assamese.

Assamese and English have been recognized as official language of Assam. Bengal, Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Nepali, etc languages are also spoken by the different communities in Assam. Muslim, scattered all over Assam, though speak diverse local dialects hold Arabic as their only religious language and the learning of it has been regarded as sacred duty by the Muslims. So, those who are educated in the Madrassa, very occasionally attempt to make entry of Arabic words in Assamese so as to elevate the standard of the latter so much so that sometimes.

We find a number of words between Assamese kingdoms but we do not find any permanent Muslim kingdom in Assam in those days. So Assam never had been influence culturally by the Muslim through their rule, for the influence which we find to see in the kings' courts of Koch Bihar, but we have no records of its influence in the Ahom kingdom. The crowning system of Mughal style was introduced only from the reign of Ahom King Rudra Singha. On the other hand, from Sah Sultan Ghiasuddin to Azan Faqir, there came a number of Sufis and Faqirs to Assam for the purpose of preaching Islam, established Khanqahs, Dargahs and Mosques and prepared a large number disciples: but they could not remove away the bigotries from the minds of their disciples fully. The Muslims of the Mughal Kingdom built a fort in Kaliabar in the district of Nagaon for trade purpose but they were killed by the Ahom who treated them as spies, so during that time, the influence of Islam stopped here through trade.

We find many Muslim prisoners in Ahom Kingdom, some of them started to prepare gun, bartop (canon) and gun powder for the Ahom kingdom; while others were engaged the working of brass metals. In addition to them, we find some of them doing the work of picture and art. We do not find any serious impact of Islamic culture through these prisoners in the life of the mass people of Assam. But we find them marry in with Assamese women and following their Assamese culture whole hearted by leaving their names as Muslims. As the historian Shihabuddin Talish who came to Assam with Mir Jumla, mentioned "As for the Musalmans who had been taken prisoners in former times, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined for more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Muhammadans who had come here from Islamic lands engaged in the performance of prayer or publicly recite the 'word of God'.

The Qur'an, the foundation of Islam, has much influence on the Muslims of this region as the rest of the world. The Quranic language being the language of the Islamic players, laws has also influenced Muslims of every nook and corner of the world and their language.

It is noted that the flow of Arabic vocabulary into Assamese language came in a continuous stream only from the early seventeenth Century when the Ahom and Koch rulers of Assam came into direct contact and conflict with the Mughal power of India. The conflict between the Mughal and Assamese rulers culminated in the outbreak of a series of wars in the early seventeenth century which continued till 1682. During these wars there were exchanges of diplomatic letters, missions and envoys between Ahom and the Koch on the one hand and Delhi as well as Dhaka on the other hand. As a result of these diplomatic exchanges many words of Arabic origin found their way into the Assamese language. The use of Arabic words in their letters, however small their number might

be, by the Ahoms, Koches and the tribal chiefs of Assam confirm that in the seventeenth Century many of the Arabic words came into common use of the inhabitant of Assam including the tribal. It has already been mentioned by us that several Arabic words pertaining to Islamic faith and rituals entered Assamese language through the Assamese Zikir and Zari which were perhaps, composed by some Sufi-Saints and pairs in the seventeenth Century. The naturalized Arabic words as understood by the local Hindus and other are, however, not many, but the native Muslims employ a large number of the worlds of Arabic origin connected with their religion. The Zikirs and Zaris are most outstanding and sustaining contribution of the Assamese Muslims to the popular literature of Assam. A Zikir is a religious or philosophy. In various songs of this variety a story, centering around the life of Shah Milan or Azan Faqir, to whom these songs are ascribed, is told sometimes these Zikir are elegies in character and content and so they are called Marathiah (مراثي) elegies, and generally relate to the tragic tale of Karbala, sometimes these Zikirs and Zaris are composed as a mark of affinity to the Bargeets of Brajabali idioms. The chief objective of the Zikirs appears to be the re organization of the Assamese Muslim society by re generating their faith and love for Islam in such a way that there will be no dispute or discord in their age old harmonious relations with the Hindu society in which the great movement of social reform initiated by Sankardeva seems to have attained its logical culmination already, referring to the relation of the Hindus and Muslims, we may cite a Zikir.

Among the Muslims of different places in Assam, some native poets, whose songs and poems in which the Islamic influence is obvious, were retained verbally among the common people of Assam. Belief in the unity of Allah, his Prophets, his Angles, his Books, the day of Judgment, Fate and self-surrender towards Allah are fundamentals of Islam. Justice against injustice, truth against falsehood, tolerance in all conditions of life and struggle for the right path are most essential to lead one's life in the right path of Allah. Equally among the human beings of all sections, integrity and brotherhood are other tents of Islam. Adoption of such things in the daily life of Muslim is considered in Islam a holy war; this holy war is a part of Muslim's life. Islamic culture includes all these things which influenced Assamese literature and culture.

Literary Contribution of Arabic to the Assamese literature:

Like Hindu religious institutions, Islamic organization likes khanqa, Maktab, Madrassa of various types also began to receive some care and attention of the crown from this period. Some of the successors of Rudra Singha granted revenue free land to many khanqahs and darghas, employed Muslim priests in royal palaces. The creation of Muslim satras, the existence of more than twenty Madrassas for the children of Muslims in Rangpur the Ahom capital and ten or twelve in Gauhati as were observed by Wade in the eighteenth Century, help us to see clearly that Islam received sufficient encouragement from the king during this period.

The early Muslim settlers in Assam could not bring a rich treasure of Arabic literature with them, because most of them were warriors, traders and artisans who had been either taken prisoners or came to live in Assam in different political circumstances. As a matter of fact, the broad culture of Arabic literature in Assamese by them appears to be improbable.

In the middle of seventeenth Century Hazrat Shah Milan or Azan Faqir, the most renowned Muslim saint, poet of Assam, who came from Bhagdad and said to have entered 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.

Dr. Atwar Rahman, Reader in the department of physics, 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. Maulana Abdul Jalil Ragibi who was an ex principal of Jamia Jalalia Islamia, Hojai and an ex M.L.A. of Jamunamukh L.A.C. is a great portion of Arabic as well as Urdu language and literature. His outstanding works like 'Islamor Dristith Bibhah Bandhan', 'Islamor Dristit Manav Santan', 'Charitra Chitranganot Islam' etc are very important for Muslim people in modern age. Another prominent Muslim scholar Mufti Khairul Islam, Pir-e Kamil, Ameer- Shariyat, North Eastern India, Saikhul Hadith in Darul Hadith parmaibheti Islamia Madrasaa, has contributed a lot mainly Muslim Jivon Alongkar, Jakator Bristarito Masael, Muslimor Namaz, Hajj korar pronali, etc.

Another important organization of Assamese Muslims in Jama'at-e Islami (North Eastern Branch), this organization took the initiative to publish the weekly newspaper Mujahid for the first time among the common Muslim.

Nadwatut Ta'mir is also a socio- religious organization founded by late Maulana Abdul Jalil Choudhury and grown up under his able leadership and careful guidance. This organization has been developing under the skillful observation of the prominent scholar, Moulana Tayeebur Rahman Barbhuya, Ameer-e Shariyat and Ameer Nadwatut Ta'mir, North East India and the member of the working committee, All India Muslim Personal law Board. In present, all the senior and Title Madrassas are running by the government are influenced by the religious and philosophical concept of Nadwatut Ta'mir and become the role model and pioneer establishment of the govt. Madrassas in hundred speed all over the north east India especially in Assam.

Cultural Contribution of Arabic Education to Assamese: The influence of Arabic or Islamic learning is undoubtedly an effective contribution to the various aspects of Assamese culture. The Muslim culture includes the total sunnas or the entire activities of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad. Islam is not an isolated culture but it is essentially a universal creed inspiring a common world view among all human being who are the descendants of Adam and the worshippers of Allah. It maintains the image of history as one of the great process limited in time. It aims at creating unity in diversity and treats tribes as nations and tribes as convenient symbols used for identification and in no way indicating fundamental differences.

The culture of Islam admits of differences in language, literature, art and architecture. Dynamic movement is the fundamental principle of growth in the Islamic culture. We have meanwhile discussed that our Honorable prophet has been symbol of the development of Arabic language, literature, religion and culture. Hazrat Muhammad was gifted with Prophet Hood in 610 A.D. when the Angel commanded the prophet 'Read' in the cave of Hira Mount and immediately after his prophet hood he began to spread Islam among the relatives of Mecca.

Within the period of 610-632 A.D, about entire Arabian people came to the fold of Islam. The companions of the Prophet and their followers being inspired by the Islamic concept worked hard for the spread of it in the far away Countries of the world.

We have learnt from great historian Minhazuddin that the Koch and Mech people in the western part of Kamrup displayed their admiration of Islam as early as 1198 A.D. so much so that they assisted Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khiliji enter the country after the Muslim conquest of India, Similarly the Chutia king Ratnadhvaj palas (1224-1250 A.D.) friendly relation with the Sultan of Gauda in the middle of thirteenth Century A.D. acceptance of Islam by the king Chakradhwaj in 1947 A.D. The use of the word Khan by the Assamese people official status and the use of some Arabic and Persian words by the Assamese poets including Sankardeva (1449-1558 A.D.) clearly

prove that the Islamic culture gained popularity in the conquest of Sultan Hussain Shah in 1502.A.D.

In course of time the local as well as imported Muslims were able to identify themselves with the general population of Assam. The Muslim people, having displayed their loyalty to the Country not only commanded love and respect of the local inhabitants but also increased the confidence of the ruling class on them and many of them were appointed to the offices like that of Baruah, Hajarika, Saikia in various departments including defense services of the government.

The Assamese Zikir and Zari through the Pir and Alims preached Islam among the local people of Assam. In course of some natural calamities and disease the Hindu people of Assam are also seen visiting the majar of Pirs, Dargahs and Mosques amidst the Muslim and making offerings indicating their wish to obtain fulfillment of their prayers.

In the summing up the 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.

The Universities and colleges of Assam majority of girl students are found to have dressed themselves with selwar kamis and urna, before twenty years ago, only the Muslim girls used to dress themselves in the Madrassa of Assam but at present, under the influence of learning Arabic not only in Madrassa of Assam but also learning Arabic in school, colleges and Universities of Assam. 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.

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