



Islamic Influence on Assamese Language and Literature: A Study

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Abstract:

There is a history of how the religion, literature and culture of a part of the people of the world influence the other religion and literature. That is why it is necessary to know the historical cause and coordination through which Islam influenced the other parts of the world. The light which appeared penetrating the darkness of the Arab deserts, spread far and wide in the east and the west and illuminated them fully. Due to this a new life and reformation came into light in the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe. Islam, of course, introduces a sharp revolution through the death also gains a new life. From it the people of far Middle East saw the light of new dawn of pleasure, the darkness of Africa became very far forever and there created a new renaissance among the European people who were in utter darkness. Like that the arrival of Islam also had a hit to the great India, giving it fresh life and thinking. Due to the result of such activities the religious, social, literary, and cultural revolutions appeared before us. In comparison to the other parts of India, Islam and its culture came to Assam very late from the historical point of view. So, except Assam, in the other parts of India, we find vast developments of Islamic culture there.

Key Words: Islamic, influence, Assamese, language and literature

Introduction:

Assam came into contact with the Muslims in the early 13th century. During that time the people of Assam were in utter darkness and superstitions. Priestliness was the main religion and the thinking and the freedom of the mass people were hidden in the spiritual thinking of the so-called saints. In spite of that, there was no need of trade especially for Assamese people due to the abundance of their necessary requirements available in Assam.

We find a number of wars between Assam kingdoms and Dacca as well as Delhi Muslim kingdoms. But we find no chapter of permanent Muslim kingdom in Assam in those days. So, Assam never had been influenced culturally the Muslims through their rule. For the influence which we find to see in the king's court of Koch Bihar, such we have no record of influence in the Ahom kingdoms. The crowning system of Mughal style was introduced only from the reign of Ahom king Rudra Singha. On the other hand, from Shah Sultan Ghiyasuddin to Adhan Faqir, there came a number of sufis and Faqirs to Assam for the purpose of preaching Islam, established Khanqahs, Dargahs and Maqams, and prepared a large number of disciples, but they could not remove away the bigotries from the minds of

their disciples fully. The Muslims of Mughal kingdom built a fort in Kaliabar on the district of Kaliabar for trade purpose, but they were killed by the Ahoms treating them as spies. So, during that time, the influence of Islam was stopped here through trade.

We find many Muslim prisoners in Ahom kingdom. Some of them started to prepare gun, bartop(canon) and gun power for the Ahom kingdom;while others were engaged in the working of brass metals. In spite of that we find some of them doing the work of picture and art. We do not find any severe impact of Islamic culture through these prisoners on the life of the mass people of Assam. But we find them marrying with Assamese culture wholeheartedly leaving only 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 and had chosen to here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Muhammedans who had come here from Islamic lands engaged in the performance of prayer and fasting, but were forbidden to chant the call to prayer or publicly recite the “Word of God”

The saint Shah Milan(Miran) was entitled as ‘Adhan Faqir’ due to proclamation of Adhan and performing prayer (Namaz) at first in the state of Assam.² The Mugals ruled over Kamrupa for a very short period and made their capital in Hajo. In Hajo they established a religious school ‘Madrassa’. But due to the attack of the Ahoms it was destroyed.Since then, no Islamic religious school is found up to the British rule.Therefore, the Muslims of Assam like other people, were ignorant of Islamic culture and education. Meanwhile the Sufis (Muslim saints) and the Faquirs preached the Quranic teachings among the Muslim masses of Assam. A good number of the Holy Quran written by hand distinctly on the papers, were prepared in those days. Such copies of the Holy Book are being preserved even today in the ancient mosques and asylums of different places of Assam. Except these hands written copies of the Quran no written materials of Islamic faith were found among the Muslims of that time.

Discussion: Among the Muslims of different places of Assam, some native poets were born, whose songs and poems were retained verbally among common people of Assam in which Islamic influence is obvious. The belief in the unity of Allah, His prophets, His angels, His books, the day of judgement, fate and self-surrender towards Allah is the main fundamental things of Islam. Justice against injustice, truth against false, tolerance in all conditions of life and struggle for right etc. are most essential to lead own life on the right path of Allah, Equality among the human being of all sections, integrity and brotherhood are world-wide examples of Islam. Adoption of all such things in the daily life of a Muslim, is considered in Islam a holy war and this holy war is a long-life friend of the Muslims. Islamic culture includes all these things which influenced the Assamese literature.

The linguistic, ideal and subjective influence are very much obvious in the songs and rhymes though the main object of Islam had not been dislocated at all in these songs and rhymes, yet the Assamese poet had clearly described his idea about Allah in his poetry as:

“Mao Nai Bapo Nai Nai beradar

Aowal Saowal Nai, Ase Akal Sar I

Ujeer Nazeer Nai, Nai patantar II”³

(He has no mother, no father, no brother. He has no offspring, he is alone. He has no minister, no equal one nor destruction.)

With the thought of human body, the Islamic songs and rhymes are so serious that the unity and the Logical thinking are very clear. The composers have presented the idea with the Local example tactfully. For example:

Amon pomanok sambhali rakhiba
Knobai bhangibo dhorì,
Monor panch halik thikkai bandhiba,
Kalima lahar Jari I 4

(Control your stupid mind, someone will destroy it. Fasten the five elephants of the mind tightly with the string of Kalimai.e., words of faith.

Apart from such songs some other Assamese popular songs have been composed. Zari or Marthiya songs, Bibi songs and Haidar ghazir songs are very much popular. The subject matter and the conception of these songs are purely Islamic and their language contains numerous Islamic words. The songs except Zari(Marthyah) songs, have been influenced sometimes by local culture. No native influence has been found in zari (Marthyah). Only the mournful story like the story of Imam Hasan and Imam Hussain is described in them. Like Marthyahs of the Shiah Muslims, some Sunni Muslims have also composed such songs where the Islamic thought is found.

In the Assamese historical literature, the influence of Islamic culture and language can be seen. During the days of Mughal-Ahom conflict, they Assamese Brahmin and Kayastha envoys came into close touch with the Muslim capitals like Delhi and Dacca, and they wrote the history of the Badshahs and Nawabs in their own hand writings.⁵ Among those histories the Badshah Buranji(accounts of the Delhi Sultan) were most important. In their message letters from the Ahom kings to Mughal Badshahs and Nawabs, a linguistic mixture of Assamese and Islamic language was obvious. On the other hand, in Assamese language some anti-Islamic literature is found through some Islamic ideas and linguistic influence are obvious.⁶ For instance Manasa puja, description of which has no relation with Islam, has many Islamic ideas and words there in. the Maria Muslims first introduced the Manasa puja in Kamrup of Assam. The songs of Padma-Puran written by Mankar have described the maria Muslim men and women as:

Tusta haiya Brahmani Moriak bole bani
Dhan Jan barhibo oparI
Tusta haiya Padmavati dekha dila tar
Thapanat basia Mariak dila barII 7

(Being satisfied the goddess Brahmani said to Maria that your wealth and child would become much more)

(Being satisfied the goddess padmavati appeared before him and being seated on the place of worship gave the Maria a boon.)

Most of the singers and reciters of these songs and rhymes of Manasa puja were Muslims. The 'Hasan-Husen' part of Padma-Puran composed by Narayan Dev proves the contributions of the Muslims to Manasa puja.⁸

Description of the topic: A new renaissance took place among the Muslim masses of Assam during the British rule. A large number of Islamic cultured scholars and preachers Bengal and Northern India came forward to preach the true Islamic faith among the Assamese Muslims. At that time Islamic religious schools were instituted in Bengal and Northern India and the students of them were given Islamic religious education either through Urdu language or Persian language. The Islamic religious publicity of the scholars and preachers created a religious movement among the Muslim of Assam. As a result of which a sufficient number of them became ready to give religious education to their children

through Urdu or Persian medium in Bengal and Northern India. In 1836 A.D., the Bengali medium was imposed in the schools and offices of Assam by the British Government. Both the Hindus and the few number of Muslims being compelled began to learn education through the medium of Bengali. As Bengali was already influenced by both Arabic and Persian Languages, So it made the students and Assamese people influenced by many Arabic and Persian words On the other hand, The Bengali Muslim Traders, Who came from Dacca, opened their shops for business in different towns of Assam. Due to these causes Islamic life was grown up among the Muslim Community of Assam. Though the Bengali Medium was replaced by the Assamese medium in the schools as well as in the Government offices in 1871A.D.; yet the impact of Bengali Language remained in the minds of Assamese masses. At the same time an Islamic Literary flame arrows in the neighboring State of undivided Bengal and its effect was widely spread amongst the mass people of Assam. Bengali knowing Assamese Muslims gave the taste of it to the general people. So *Alfo-Laila*, *Shahnama*, *Amir Hamzah*, *Shahid-e-Karbala*, *Jangnama*, *Zari Jangnama*, *Jang-e-Khaibar*, *Hatim Tai*, *Laila-Majnu*, *Sunabhan*, *Kalu Ghazi*, *Qasasul Ambiya*, *Chan-Pawati* etc. which were written in Bengali Language, began to be read in each and every house of the Muslims. The reader of such Books was entitled as 'Kitabi'. The system of gathering of poets in particular meeting was prevalent in every part of India. But such system was not introduced in Assam and as an alternative the Muslim people began to arrange a big gathering to where the 'Kitabis' and the common people were invited and epics with rhymes were recited loudly. In such meetings of the people feast was supplied to them. These meetings influenced the common people and attracted them towards Islam as well as its Culture. The 'Kitabis', aged of 40-50 years were regarded very much by the general people as wise personalities.

We find in the writing 'shahapari' of Dwijram, the influence of Islamic language and idea as its stories 'Rabab' 'Razar', 'Malik Zoda', and 'Aram' etc. bear the feelings of the Muslims. In these stories the poet has used a good number of Arabic and Persian words. Moreover, the poet also took the Islamic idea and presented it with the religious feelings.

During the British rule when the courts were established in the towns of Assam. On the pattern of Delhi court, the trade and commerce began to increase and the school as well as the colleges began to be founded. A good atmosphere was created in all respects of the ancient society of Ahom reign. Among the Muslim community a satisfactory number of youths had come back from outside acquiring knowledge in Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. Moreover, many literate and cultured persons of different places of India made Assam as their travelling place. As all the Indian languages had been influenced more or less deeply by Arabic and Persian languages, so these travelers of such different Indian languages made a linguistic impact of their own on the Assamese language. Arabic and Persian languages were introduced as core subjects in schools and colleges. On the other hand, a good number of religious institutions were founded by the Islamic cultured individuals in the greater interest of common Muslims. Therefore, an Islamic atmosphere was created in the Muslim societies. The literate Muslims coming from outside used to talk with local people either in their mother tongues, Urdu, the language deeply influenced by Arabic and Persian, or in broken Assamese language and when they talked in Assamese, they used maximum Arabic and Persian words. The Assamese people also tried to understand them and started to use these words when they talked in Assamese among themselves. Thus, slowly and steadily the Arabic and Persian words began to penetrate into the Assamese language. Today the Assamese people can not only avoid them from the use of their day-to-day life. There are so many specific Arabic and Persian words which have occupied the place of the Assamese words and the Assamese people can understand the

actual meaning and object only when such Arabic and Persian words are used in the sentences or for any purpose. For instance, adalot, hakim, okil, nazir, kazi, peshkar, piyada, chaukidar, mauzadar, muqardama, ain, qanun, zalim, dakhil, mohar, jarip, banduk, barud, Kaman, kheraj, nispi-kheraj, ghazal, tapla, fauzdari, Dewani, nakal-nabis, jahaz, hawai-jahaz etc. are the only Arabic and Persian words which are used in Assamese to particular meaning. There are no particular alternative Assamese words to be used in place of such Arabic and Persian words. Such thousands of words have entered into Assamese language and have made it composite and prosperous. Even today in the modern times, the Assamese writers and poets also have been influenced and attracted by the Islamic language and literature. Many of them even boasted in using the Islamic words (Arabic and Persian words) like shahenshah, masnad, darbar, ishk, shairy, gulab, nargis, badshah, gulbadan, keramat, etc. The influence of Islamic language and literature is obvious in all branches of Assamese languages and literature, more or less, like poetry, drama, novel, stories, and articles.

Over and above the Assamese Literature is also impacted by the Islamic ideas and subject matters. During the time of renaissance of Muslims, the Muslim writers embracing the Islamic ideas and subject matters, had entered into the Assamese Literature forcefully as we find the impact of Islamic culture and ideas in their poems, novels, essays, songs and translations etc. During this period neither they misguided the Muslim community nor they accepted the Islamic culture blindly like the modern writer of "Hasan and Husain's" epic, but they had made their effort to understand Islam clearly and to lead the Muslims to the right path through Islamic belief and feelings. Such things are found fully in 'Asomiya Maulud Sharif' of Naziruddin Ahmad and in the short poems of Muhammad Sulaiman Khan etc. We also find the poems of 'Gyan Malini' (Gauhati-1987) of Mafizuddin Ahmad Hazarika and 'Karbala' of Raghunath Choudhury, as full of Islamic culture and feelings.

On the basis of Islamic ideas, the poet Raghunath Choudhury has become successful in depicting the characteristics like imam Hasan and Imam Husain how did they sacrifice for the cause of Islam and choose the way of holy war. Actually, epic has become as message of Islamic teaching. There are so many Arabic and Persian words like rasul, Imam, Islam, Badshah, sorahi, shaytan, jallad, katowal, qasid, rauza, sultan, kamin, herem, khalifa, shahid, shadiyana, kafer, khanjar etc. can be seen to be used in the book.

The famous mystic poet of Assamese literature Jatindra Nath Duwara has lost himself in the poems of Persian poet Umar Khyyam, devoted himself fully to 'Rubayats' which proved him as the poet of mysticism. Sri Duwara not only followed Umar Khyyam but also studied the poems of famous poet Rumi, Hafiz and Shekh Sa'di etc. another mystic poet Ananda Ram Barua also translated the Rubayat-e-Hafiz as well as he composed some such type poems in which he had used a number of Arabic and Persian words.

In addition to the above-mentioned poets some others like Sayed Abdul Malik, Ibrahim Ali, Zamiruddin Ahmad and Fatima Khatun, have shown the influence of Islamic culture on Assamese literature. They have properly used both Islamic ideas and language in their compositions. The poems 'Koloi palabi Toi Here Gariya', of Sayed Abdul Malik and 'Palariya' of Ibrahim Alipenrate the Islamic spirit into the hearts of Muslims. The 'Agnishikha' of Zamiruddin Ahmed and the 'Agnikonat' of Fatima Khatun also have represented the Islamic feelings and revolution.

After poetry, the drama literature also has the deep influence of Islamic ideas and feelings. From 'Gulnur' of late Zamiruddin Ahmed to 'Rastum-Shohrab', 'Marjina', 'Shersah' and

'Magribar Adhan' of later dramatists, all of them have beard the Islamic picture as well as culture and its language in full Islamic words. In 'Shershah' of Atul Chandra Hazarika we may see clearly that the Islamic character, bravery, forgiveness and service etc. are depicted distinctly.

So far as novel is concerned it is also impacted by Islamic thought. Not only the Muslim novelists but also the non-Muslims have depicted the Islamic ideas and feelings in their novels. In 'Siraj' Lakshmidhar Sharma has shown the responsibility for neighbors and sacrifice to others attractively, which are the purely Islamic characteristics. The people's revolutions which he has presented in this novel are Islamic. The 'Bidhva' and 'Patit aru patita' of Principal Troilakya Nath Goswami are also completed on the basis of Islamic culture. 'Miyam Mansur' a successful novel of Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya, is based on the deep Islamic feelings and the author has beautifully described how Miyam Mansur, a purely Muslim character, saved a woman from drowning into water reciting some verses of the Holy Quran. Like the famous Bangladeshi Novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Yogesh Das, one of the famous novelists of Assamese Literature also has presented some Islamic characteristics through his novel 'Dawar aru Nai (gauhati-1988) in which he has established an Islamic character through a bicycle mechanic Nizam. Another best creation 'Ramadan is also based on Islamic ideology where the author has obviously has shown the sacrifice for his friends, Humanity and forgiveness to the murderer etc. Which is no doubt Islamic virtues.

A good number of Muslim writers have contributed to the novel Literature Sayed Abdul Malik has written a good number of novel of high standard. None of the Assamese community can ignore any one of his novels. Most of his novels are written on the basis of Islamic feelings. 'Suruj Mukhir Swapna' (Calcutta-1960) 'Gulas', 'Chenimai,' 'Tara,' 'Juti,' and 'Molak' are more Islamic influenced novels. In the novels 'piriti-uphar' and 'Sangram' of Muhammad Piyar, the Muslim problems and Muslim characters are discussed. 'Karbalar Shahid' is another publication where Islamic character of brotherhood is shown clearly. Moreover, this book has been influenced by the shi'aites very much; we find a good number of Arabic and Persian words in their novels.

In modern times the young writers are also influenced by Islamic culture and civilization. Sayedul Islam, Idrish Ali and Shihabuddin are renowned among these writers. 'Hajar Nishar Kahani' Parachya kahani' and 'Hatim Tai' books of fascinating stories, all are written on the basis of Islamic books of culture. Among the muslim short story writers Imam Shah, Abdul Lais, Mustafizur Rahman, Anisuz Zaman, Sakina Asraf, Eli Ahmed, sakina Khatun, Akila Khanam, Abdul Majid, Sayeeduddin, Ali hyder, Fanuwara Begum Hazarika, Munirul Hussain, Alimunnisha Pyar and Sayeedul Islam are notable in most of whose stories Islamic cultural as well as linguistic influence are obvious.

A satisfactory number of Islamic magazines have been published up till now, in which both the Islamic culture as well as Linguistic influences are distinct. Among these 'Insaf' edited by Fatima Khatun, 'Adhan' by Ilimuddin Dewan, Hefazat by Rafiqul Haque, 'Jumma' by Jahid Chaudhury, 'Eid Mubarak' and 'orani' by Eli Ahmed, 'Al-Hilal by Nawazuddin Ahmed. 'Al-Jamaiyat' and 'Quran Jyoti' by Abdul Jalil Raghbi, 'Hedayet' by Keramat Ali and the latest magazine 'Jnyan Sambhar' by Maulana Abdul Jalil Ragibi, are most mentionable. In addition to these the 'Kachi Jon', a literary journal for children, 'paigam', 'Zam Zam', 'Noor-e-Islam' and the 'Minar' earned popularity among the common readers. In such Magazines most of the articles are on Islamic rites and rituals and innumerable Islamic words have been used in the articles.¹⁰

On religious aspects a good number of books have been written in Assamese language about Islamic teachings until now. 'Asamiya Malud' of Nazair Hussain was another substitute of Urdu eulogistic compositions on Prophet Muhammad. 'Misbahul islam' of s. Abdul Haque was written on the principles of Islam, which became a useful work of then Muslims. The complete translation of the holy Qur'an into Assamese was made first by late Md. Sader Ali. He also took a great interest in composing a good number of religious books on Islamic principles and philosophy. In sweet and simple Assamese languagean exhaustive biography of prophet Muhammad (S) was prepared and published by Faizuddin Ahmed, a direct descendant of famous Bagh Hazarika.He also did works on the lives of the caliphs and the martyrs of Karbala. Some non-Muslim writers like late Mahadev Sarma, gopinath Bardoloi and Atul Barua, wrote biography of prophet Muhammad (S) were linguistic influence of Arabic and Persian language obvious.

During the last forty years a great renaissance had taken place among the Assamese Muslims in the field of religion. Three most remarkable organizations namely Tablighi Jama'at, Jamiyat -e- Ulama e- Hind (Assam branch) and Jama'at -e-Islami (North East branch) had taken the great initiative regarding the propagation and expansion of islam among the common Muslims. The Tablighi Jama'at has created a best movement to awaken the Muslims towards their religion, Islam. The workers of Tablighi Jama'at, coming from different states of India other than Assam, always deliver their lectures for Islamic faith only in Urdu language in which they apply sufficient number of Arabic and Persian words. The Assamese workers of the organization also apply the proper Arabic or Persian words for same particular subject matter and purposes in their religious orations which are delivered in their mother tongue, Assamese, among the common Muslims. Moreover, they have been so accustomed with such words that they also use them in their day-to-day life.Thus, slowly and steadily these words have penetrated into Assamese language. For instance, gast, ta'leem, mushaqqat, muqaddar, mashwara, zehn, khayr, azaim, tarteeb, torkeeb, ilm, tableeg,nusrat,hizrat, ilan, bayan, karguzari, khidmat, usul, rahmat, barkat, maghfirat etc. are now common among the Assamese Muslims.

Jamiyat-e-Ulama-e-Hind(Assam branch) has taken the kin interest in giving Islamic education to the common Muslims. Under the patronage of the members of this organizationvarious patterns of Kharijiah Madrasahs, senior Madrasahs, Middle English Madrasahs, High Madrasahs, Hafiziah-Qariyana Madrasahs and Maktab attach with almost all the Mosques of Assam had been set up during the last 50 years in Muslim areas and localities of Assam. It is recorded that about 172 Khariziah Madrasahs and senior Madrasahs, including a few numbers of Arabic colleges and Title Madrasahs are there in Assam, where Arabic or Urdu language is compulsory as the medium of learning for the students. A large number of Hafiziah and Qariana Madrasahs are there in Muslim areas of Assam, where the Holy Quran is being memorized and taught to recite it correctly and Islamic knowledge of compulsory rites and rituals too is being given to the students. The students of various patterns of such Madrasahs are called 'Talibul Ilm'(seeker of knowledge). Almost in every muslim village or Mahalla there is a Maktab where primary Islamic education is given to the Muslim children. With the kind co-operation and patronage of the members of this organization the big publication centre 'Markazul Ma-'arif'is also established in Hojai under Nagaon district and this publication centre has taken the responsibilities of publishing the Islamic books. Already it has published a good number of important Islamic books, Like 'Behasti Zeor' in six volumes (Hojai-1993), Tabligi Nisab(Hojai-1994), 'Adarsha Ramani',(1997), 'Purba Bharator oli-e- kamil(1994), 'Zakator Bistarita Masail'(1997), 'Mahilar Pak- Pabitrata'(1995), Saponat Allahar Rasoolar

Didar(2000), Taubah(1997), ‘Namaz Shikhya(1985), etc. on Islamic theology and ideas of different experienced writers and translators. The members of the organization are very much accustomed with using the Arabic and Persian words in their day-to-day life and in their religious orations to the common Muslims as they earn Islamic knowledge through the medium of Arabic or Urdu language.

Another important organization of the Assamese Muslims is Jama’at-e-Islami(North East branch) which has created a momentous renaissance among the general educated Muslim youths towards the Islamic feelings and spirit. This organization had taken the initiative to publish the weekly newspapers ‘Mujahid’ for the first time among the common Muslims. It has also taken great interest in publishing the monthly Islamic magazine ‘Hedayat’ where the articles based on Islamic principles are published and a deep linguistic influence of Islamic languages is found on the writings of these articles. The Mujahid Gosthy (Mujahid family) has come forward to take the liabilities of publishing many Islamic books of religious feelings and spirit.

Apart from these three organizations some individual writers like Hafiz Bashir Ahmad Qasimi, Maulana Abdul Jalil Ragibi, Maulana Mansur Ahmad, Maulana Mainul Haque, Mohammad Piyar, Dewan Abdul Qadir, Dr. Atowar Rahman, Md. Keramat Ali, Md. Abdul Majid, Sheikh Samer Ali, Md. Ismail Hussain etc.

Conclusion:The Arabs have had commercial relations with India almost since the dawn of the history. They were indeed the first to attempt an invasion on India, though they were unable to proceed beyond the frontiers of Sind and Lower Punjab for certain reasons. But the Arabs developed relations with India in the spheres of culture and commerce, which ultimately had influenced the lives, languages and literatures of the Indians, especially Assam and Assamese people. A large number of Arabic words have been used in Assamese language and literature. The background of Arabic loanwords in Assamese language and literature is remarkable event in the linguistic world. The loan words are perfect words which express complete ideas, viz. substantives and adjectives. The Arabic loanwords in Assamese language and literature include not only nouns and adjectives but also prefixes, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections and verbs besides fragmentary words which are quite numerous.

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