

Impact of Arabic on Assamese Language and Literature

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Abstract:

Arabic is a language commonly spoken by the people of the Arab world. It is considered as one of the important languages of the world. Hence Arabic, as an international language, has achieved the position one of the official languages of the United Nations Organization (U.N.O.). Arabic is the medium of trade and commerce, poetry and philosophy, science and technology, international politics etc. in the Middle Eastern Countries. For this importance, they are studied in most countries of the world. As a result of its world wide popularity, Arabic language has been able to achieve the glorious position in the U.N.O. where they are used as an official language.

The relation of Arabic with the Indians was very close from the dawn of the 7th century A.D. Assam is a province of India, where Arabic is taught and studied in various institutions like Schools, Colleges, and Universities etc. Arabic has attained important places in the life and society of Assam. When two cultures come in close contact a new culture is born. This has an impact on language also. Hence during the Muslim rule in India Arabic was introduced as English gained the Indian ground during the British rule.

This way Assamese language and its dialects became filled with new words used by the adventurer. Assamese language is full of Arabic words. As a result of socio-cultural synthesis and linguistic amalgamation of Arabic and Assamese, the influence of Arabic words into Assamese vocabulary got accelerated. However, Assamese is not the only language which absorbed a large number of words of Arabic origin in its lexicon.

Impact of Arabic on Assamese language, literature and culture is so crucial and dimensional that it needs an extensive and proper study. The endeavor of this study in this case is to highlight those particular grounds through which the Assamese language had deeply been influenced by Arabic language and enriched with the assimilation of a large number of Arabic words in various fields like, the administration, court, offices, business, domestic affairs, food, dress, cloths, callings and so on, in oral and written form.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Arabic is a language commonly spoken by the people of Arab world. As a language of the Qur'an and Hadith of the religion Islam, it is considered as one of the important languages of the world. Hence Arabic, as an international language, has achieved the position one of the official languages of the United Nations Organization (UNO)¹. Arabic is the medium of trade and commerce, poetry and philosophy, science and technology, international politics etc. in the Middle Eastern Countries. For this importance, they are studied in most countries of the world. As a result of its world wide popularity, Arabic language has been able to achieve the glorious position in the UNO where they are used as an official language.

The relation of Arabic with the Indians was very close from the dawn of the 7th century A.D. They carried on the business together in the Malabar Coast. For the commercial purposes the merchants of the coastal places of the Arabian Sea, used to learn Arabic. On the other hand, Muhammad Bin Qasim laid the foundation of the Muslim Empire in India by conquering Sind in 712 A.D. Since then, Arabic being the religious language became very popular to the Muslim rulers and their subjects up to the days of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last emperor of the Mughal dynasty (1857 A.D). It continued to be studied in the British and post British periods all over in India.

Assam is a province of India, where Arabic is taught and studied in various institutions like Schools, Colleges, and Universities etc. Arabic has attained important places in the life and society of Indian people. The main reason is that India had a rich past and hence it was attracted by different imperialist nations who invaded

¹ Dr. B.H.A. Ahmed, . *Arabic Language: Its Impact on Assamese Language and Literature*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2013, p. 1.

it from time to time. When two cultures come in close contact a new culture is born. This has an impact on language also. Hence during the Muslim rule in India Arabic was introduced as English gained the Indian ground during the British rule.

This way Assamese language and its dialects became filled with new words used by the adventurer. Assamese language is full of Arabic words. So Muslim imperialists added new dimension to Assam what every new community develops certain trends and cultural diversities in the society and polity of that land which is turn enrich the existing one. As a language of the Holly Qur'an Arabic enjoyed a very special status and supplied the needed vocabulary of its theology to hundreds of millions of people, who embraced Islam in different parts of the world. Historically for theological concepts, Assamese depended upon Arabic as English remained dependent upon Latin and Greek for Christian theology and its religious concepts. As a result of socio-cultural synthesis and linguistic combination of Arabic and Assamese, the inflow of Arabic words into Assamese vocabulary got accelerated. However, Assamese is not the only language which absorbed a large number of words of Arabic origin in its lexicon.

In addition to this, the contribution of Muslim invaders and spiritual scholars including *Pirs, Faqirs, Awliyas* were remarkable one. They established Maszids, Madrassas, Khanqahs and Dargahs in introducing and teaching Arabic. Among them, one of the most familiar persons was Hazrat Shah Miran, popularly known as Azan Faqir. Azan Faqir's contribution of devotional song as many as Eight Scores²

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Arrival of Islam in Assam:

The arrival of Islam in India coincides with its continental Conquerors, India came in contact of Muslim in the 8th century and thereafter the arrival of Muslims in Assam can be traced back to 1205 A.D. The first Mohammedan host to enter Kamrupa was led by Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar in the year 1205-06 A.D. when he was badly defeated by the local king³. From this ill fated invasion of 1206 AD Muslim emperors of Delhi and their agents in Gour or Bengal made as many as twenty remarkable invasions on Assam up to the battle of Itakhuli 1682 A D. In most of the cases a large number of Muslim soldiers were detained by the Kamrupi or Ahom Army, in course of time that were released and settled in different places of the then Kamrupa⁴ which is now covered under the limits of Assam. These captive soldiers were engaged in different fields of works, All such Muslim soldiers got married with local Assamese girls and assimilated a blood relation themselves whole-hearted with the Assamese life and society.

Cultural Influence:

Many of the Muslim prisoners were settled and engaged in professions by the Ahom royalty. Apart from these, in different times the Ahom kings invited the Muslim artists, musicians, architects, sculptor and technicians and engaged them in their respective fields. Even some scribes, having knowledge in reading and writing Arabic and Persian were also appointed by Ahom royal court for political and diplomatic functions. All these Muslims mixed themselves with the Assamese people and played their part well in the activities of the Assamese national life. They were assimilated with the Assamese society so much that they even did not hesitate to involve in some non Islamic culture also. It is believed that the worship of goddess Manasa was first introduced by the Marias, a section of the Mohammedans who were brass metal workers by profession. The Mohammedans of some places worshipped the goddess Visahari also and took part actively in the Oja-Pali performance.⁵

The Muslim Sufis and Faqirs who entered Assam with the Mohammedan armies rendered religious services among the Assamese people in general and the Muslims in particular. They constructed Maszids and Khanqahs and propagated their mission among the Assamese Masses. The crowning system of the Ahom kings began from the contact of the Ahoms with the Mughals. Even in literary culture, the Muslims of Assam were not

² Dr. B.H.A. Ahmed, *Arabic Language: Its Impact on Assamese Language and Literature*, pp. 32-45.

³ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, Edition-II, Guwahati, Lawyer's Book Stall, 1966, p-136

⁴ Dr. Bakshi H A. Ahmed, *Muslim Migrants: Their Impacts on Assamese Language and Culture*, 2011, pp. 74-75

⁵ S. Rajguru, *Medieval Assamese Society*, Nagaon, Asamni, 1988, p-47.

lagging behind. The gathering of *Kitabis* to recite some epics, ballads, heroic poems and religious songs were introduced to Assam by the Muslims, who gathered after any kind of momentous events to mark the occasions.

Linguistic Influence:

The Muslim settlers in medieval Assam were the descendants of the Muslim soldiers employed by the Nawabs of Gour, Bengal and the Delhi Sultans contributed a lot toward the formation of greater Assamese nation. Although their children had already learnt the Assamese language and culture in natural process from their Assamese wives they could not give up some terms and words used by their Muslim ancestors comprised of Turk, Afghan, Gouria or Mughal. Hence a number of Arabic and Persian words were used by these people in their family as well as with other people of Assam mixing with Assamese language. The mixture of Arabic and Persian words in the Assamese language is really remarkable and a tangible effect of the age-old contact of Assam with the Mohammedan. It is important to note that Assamese people also began to speak Arabic words. A famous Assamese poet of 13th Century Hem Saraswati used an Arabic word *Naphar* in his poem, which appeared to have been starting point of the flow of Arabic and Persian words to Assamese.⁶

During the time of Ahom rule, especially in the time of Mahapurush Srimanta Shankardeva (1449-1569 A.D) the use of the Arabic and Persian words became more frequent. The use of *wasil*, *baqi* (Arabic), *forman* (Persian), *haram*, *haramkhor* (Arabic+Persian), *ora* (Arabic) etc. in Assamese literature of that time is good evidence. As a result, the followers of Vaishnavite faith began to use such words in their day to day conversation and gradually these words entered into the Assamese language. Even Azan Faqeer has used a large number of Arabic words in his heart-touching Islamic devotional songs and poems *Dhikir* and *Zari* composed in Assamese language. Apart from these, other Assamese popular songs like *Zari* or *Marthiya*, *Bibi* Songs and *Haidar Ghazir* songs also contain numerous Arabic words. The words of Arabic and Persian origin are found in the literature of *Buranji* of the Ahoms, especially in their diplomatic aspects. The materials of *Padshah Buranji* mostly compiled in the 17th century, were primarily written in Assamese language, but they contained many Arabic words.

During the colonial period, a number of educational institutions were founded and Arabic was also introduced as course of study there in. During this period, Muslim population was remarkably increased in Assam. These people have established more educational institutions of different categories, where Arabic have also been introduced. At that time a large number of Arabic words of Administrative, Military and Judicial terminology were used by the British officials. Accordingly, from the top officials to an ordinary subject of Assam used to speak these words of Arabic origin so commonly that they entered the treasury of official terms and terminology.⁷ As a result of this normal and natural process Arabic words used by the Administrative machinery and the second largest population of the state of Assam have penetrated into Assamese language.

II. LITERARY INFLUENCE:

The propagation of Islamic religious faith among the common folk was made accessible by the Sufis Hazrat Azan Faqeer who composed some heart-touching devotional poems and songs in Assamese language. These poems and songs known as *Dhikir* and *Zari* are devotional songs which symbolize the teaching of the Islamic faith and the system of manifestation in the similar way of Assamese *Vaishnava* literature. Apart from these, many other Assamese popular songs were also composed. *Marthiya*, *Bibi* songs and *Haidar Ghazir* songs are very popular. The subject matter and concept of these songs are purely Islamic and have added beauty and richness to Assamese literature. In addition to that Arabic literary and cultural influence can also be seen in the writings of history of *Badshah* and *Nawabs* i. e. accounts of Delhi Sultans and Badshahate.

During the colonial period many books were written on Arabic thought and ideas. However, Arabic literary works found its position in the Post-colonial period also. The Arabic influence on Assamese literature is obvious in all branches more or less, like the poetry, drama, novel, stories, and articles. We find the poems of *GyanMalini* of Mufizuddin Ahmad Hazarika, *Karbala* of Raghunath Choudhury and some other poems of Sayed Abdul Malik, Ibrahim Ali, Zamiruddin Ahmad, Fatima Khatun and so on, have shown the influence of Arabic culture on Assamese literature.

After poetry, the drama literature has also the deep influence of Arabic ideas and feelings. *Golenur* of Zamiruddin Ahmed and other works like *Rastum-Shohrab*, *Marjina*, *Shershah* and *Maghribar Adhan* all of which have borne the Arabic picture, culture and influence. In this way, Assamese novel literature is also influenced by Arabic thought and ideas. For instance, the popular works of Assamese writers both Muslims and non Muslims, like: *Siraj*, *Miyan Mansur*, *Suruji Mukhir Swapna*, *Gulam*, *Chenimai*, *Tara*, *Jeuti*, *Jaban Bandi*

⁶ Dr. Maheswar Neog, *Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, 10th edition. Guwahati, Chandra Prakash, 2000, P. 12.

⁷ Dr. B.H.A. Ahmed, *Arabic Language: Its Impact on Assamese Language and Literature*, p. 42.

etc. have Arabic thought and ideas. In modern times as well as in the Post colonial period the influence of Arabic language is obvious in all branches of Assamese literature more or less.

Arabic Words Used in the Assamese Society:

It is interesting to note that Assamese people are accustomed to use the Arabic words in the speaking and writings of their day to day life. There are so many specific Arabic loan-words which are being used in various fields. These words may be classified under: administrative, Judicial, official, related to trade and commerce, domestic affairs, dress and costume, food and drink, travelling etc. These words have occupied the place of Asamese words and there are no particular alternative Assamese words to be used. Due to the lack of time and space let us discuss about a few words only for instance which are being used in various branches.

Administrative and Military Terms: badal (replacement), banduq (gun), batil (Cancellation), chabuk (whip), daftar (office), dakhil (entry), dastakhat (signature), hukum (order), iqarnama (affidavit), Kaman (cannon), khilaf (abstain from), Mahkama (Sub-Division), manzoor (grant). Manda or Mouza, namjari (mutation of nane), naqal (duplicate, copy) etc.

Judicial Words: adalat (court of justice), bayan (statement), dalil (deed), dewani (civil), faujdari (criminal), hakim (Judge), insaf (justice), Izhar (FIR), Jimma (custody), Jamin (bail), jabanbandi (statement), mamla (case), (muzrim (accused), Munsif (Magistrate), Nazir (superintendent), Radd (stay), rai (decree) etc.

Revenue and Treasury: Abadi (cultivating, residential), Bedakhal (adverse possession). Besarkari (nongovernment), Dakhal (enterfere, possession), ejmali (joint, collective), Jareef (land servey), khazna (revenue). Kheraj (land revenue), lakhiraj (revenue free), malkhana (store house), namzari (mutation of name). Naqsha (trace map), nisphikheraj (half revenue), Tapsil (detail statement), Tauzi (allotment), etc.

Education: alim (learned, scholar), aql (wisdom), aljabra (Algebra), daftar (post), dawat (ink pot), faida (benefit), gafilati (negligence), haraf (letter), hisab (account, calculation, Arithmatic), istehar (circular), kalam (pen), khitap (title), kitab (book), lafz (word), mushkil (difficult), nakal (copy), rakam (kind, class), talim (lesson), ustad (teacher), etc.

Clothes and Dresses: Astar (border), astin (sleeve), burkha (Burqa), gaz (three feet), girah (1/16 gaz), jeb (pocket), kamis (shirt), kurta (a kind of shirt), neqab (musk). Pajama (trouser), salwar (femal dress), Shirwani (a design of fashionable kurta), tahband (lungi), etc.

Foods and Fruits: biryani (a kind of ghee rice), halwa (sweet), kabab (roasted meat), kheer (delicious sweet item), khurma, ghee (ghee). Murabba (a kind of sweet made of fruit/ vegetables), polao (a kind of ghee rice), qimah (an item of meat), salad (salad), shorbat (a drink), etc.

In Architecture: buniyad (foundation), dalan (building), deraj (drawer), diwar, (wall), hamam (bath room), hauz (water basin), imarat (construction), kursi (chair), makan (house), mahal (palace), shisha (glass), Marmar (marvel), etc.

In Business: aday (payment), amanat (security). Baqi (credit, remaining), dalal (broker), dukan (shop, stall), faida (benefit), hisab (account), karz (loan), maal (goods), munafa (profit), nagad<naqad (cash). Nuqsan (loss), tijarat (business), tarju, tahbil, etc.

In Social Life: aurat (ladies), buniyad (base), hawa (air), fiqir (thinking), hazar (thousand), jam<jahm (crowd), janwar (animal), khandan (dynasty), maidan (ground), musafir (tourist), nazar (looking), namuna (sample), naqsha (map, drawing), shahid (martyr), tufan (storm), waqt (time), etc.

In Medical and Human Life: badan (body), bala (disease), bimar (ill), dawai<dawa (medicine), dimag (brain), gargar (gurgle), gardan (neck). Hazam (digestion), hakim (physician), hayez (menstruation), khalas (free after birth), mezaz (temperament), mout (death), etc.

In Social Relations: Abba (father), Amma (mother), bibi (wife), ijab (consent), izzat (chastity), jawab (reply), Khala (maternal aunt), Khalu (maternal uncle), khidmat (service), mahar (dowry), nikah (marriage), qabul (accept), sowal (question), talaq (divorce), walimah (wedding feast), etc.

In Songs & Music: ghazal (a kind of song), Jaree (a kind of mouning song), qauwali (a kind of group song), sahnai (a kind of pipe), gan<gana (song), sharod (Musical instrument, sharod), Sitar (Musical instrument), tabla (a musical drum, tabala), utsad (expert in classical music), zikir (a kind of devotional song), etc.

Profession: bazigar (circus artiste), chawkidar (watchman, orderly), chaparsi (gate keeper), darowan (door keeper), dalal (broker), hakim (magistrate), jallad (executor, killer), quli (porter), qazi (Islamic judge), wakil (pleader), etc.

Titles and Designations: Ambia (messenger of Allah). Auliya (spiritual scholar), Bakshi (military officer higher than subedar), Darbesh (dervish), hafiz (one who preserves the Qur'an by heart), haji (one who performs pilgrimage in Kaba), Imam (a top leader of Islamic society). Khadim (servant), Khalifa (King of Islamic kingdom), mufti (Islamic theologian), Muhaddith (a narrator or expert in Prophetic Traditions), munshi (writer, clerk), qari (reader of the Qur'an), Shaikh (Islamic religious authority), Subedar (a military officer), etc.

In cosmetic Articles: aina (glass), atar<itr (perfume), gulub (rose). Hina (redish, henna), mishk (musk) shisha (mirror), surma (collyrium), etc.

In addition to the glossary given above, there is a large number other Arabic words and terms which are commonly used in Assamese society pertaining to many other subjects, like: art and painting, Reproach And rebuke, Islamic religious besides Islamic religious terms. Moreover, around one thousand new words may be derived from the vocabularies given above, by some certain prefixes and suffixes.⁸ For example, it may be mentioned that the following new words or terms are formed by prefixes: gair-hazir, gair-khilaf, gair-qanun, bad-duwa, bad-hazam, dhan-daulat, dan-khairat, man-izzat, mil-muhabbat, Hai-kaziya, na-insaf, na-jaiz, be-taj, nimak-harum, sadhu-faqir etc. Similarly, many terms may be found suffixing with Arabic words, like: badali (badal+i), dokan (dokan+i), hisab (hisab+i), haqdar (haq+dar), zamindar (zamin+dar), talaqnama (talaq+nama)⁹, dokan-pohar, mal-bastu, phali-kitab, Ram Rahim, etc. Sometimes new Assamese terms are also formed combining with English and Arabic words, such as: doctor-Khana, Seal Mohar, Jail-Khana, etc.

III. OBSERVATIONS:

After a concise discussion on the impact of Arabic on Assamese language and literature the following points have been observed from the study:

- The Arabic influence on the Assamese language has a historical, social and cultural back ground, which can be studied in three periods: 1206-1682 AD, 1682-1826 A.D and 1826 AD onwards.
- The earliest influence was very scanty, scattered and oral. It was basically related to mantra, religion and other esoteric affairs.
- The medieval age shows the remarkable effect of Arabic words in *Dhikir*, *Zaris* and other devotional poems and songs which were recited in public.
- Arabic Influence on Assamese through Political and educational vehicle in colonial and post-colonial periods.

IV. CONCLUSION:

The background of Arabic loan words used in Assamese language is a remarkable phenomenon in the linguistic world. These Arabic words used in all the fields of Assamese language and literature have integrated with the Assamese language. Such words have occupied their won places so strongly that no words of Assamese origin can fulfill the purpose and importance of those very places. There is a remarkable significant to collect and preserve the Arabic words and terms being used frequently in Assamese language, literature including newspapers and journals. Concerning authorities like Axom Xahitya Xabha, Universities and the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies of the state may take initiative for identifying the Arabic terms and words used in Assamese language and literature through comprehensive project. Because, the Muslims of Assam have a remarkable influence on the language and literature of the state who are the part and parcel of the greater Assamese Society in the development of its language, literature and long cultural heritage.

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⁸ Dr. B.H.A. Ahmed, *Arabic Language: Its Impact on Assamese Language and Literature*, p. 119.

⁹ Dr. B.H.A. Ahmed, *Arabic Language: Its Impact on Assamese Language and Literature*, pp. 120-122.