

## Contribution of the Muslims to Assamese culture

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### Abstract

The Muslims are an integral part of the Assamese culture who have contributed immensely to almost every fields. The Ahom kings also settled the Muslims in different posts according to their profession. The culture of the Muslims assimilated to the Assamese culture. Many contents of Islamic culture dissolved in the practical Assamese life. Influence of Islam was found in Assamese language, literature, art, architecture, music, costume etc. The objective of the paper is to discuss the contribution of the Muslims to Assamese culture.

**Key words: Muslim, contribution, Assamese culture.**

### Introduction

When the Muslims came to Assam, whether as invader or to propagate religion, they became an integral part of the Assamese culture. The culture of the Muslims also merged into the lives of Assamese society. It assimilated to the Assamese culture in a way that there was conspicuous difference between the Muslims of Assam and the Muslims of other regions. Historian Shihabuddin Talish, who came to Assam with Mir Jumla, opined on the indigenous Muslims of Assam, "As for the Musalmans who had been taken prisoner in former lives and chosen to marry there, their descendants are exactly in the manner of 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 Muslims invasion did not only harm Assam. It benefited in a way or other. The Assamese learnt to prepare developed weapons from the Muslims. Before the invasion of Toorbok in 1543, there was no use of gun in Assam. Toorbok invaded Assam with guns. Since then, kings's craftsman started manufacturing guns in Assam. Dr Wade wrote in his *Account of Assam*, "Muslims had not been made in Assam before this period, but king's artists now formed them after the made of these which Toorbok had brought from Bengal in 1543". Regarding the administrative posts, Dr Wade wrote, "the office of Phukan had has some affinity to a rank in the Moghal government."

The Pir-Fakir got the opportunity to propagate their religion in Assam because of the sponsorship by the Ahom kings. After Ajan Phakir was punished as he was charged of being a spy of Moghol emperor, he had been donated land and property in Dikhounukh. Ahom king Rudra Singh brought eight kinds of Muslims to Assam such as *fasipotiya*, *akhorkotiya*, *silakotiya*, *gunakotiya*, *khonikor*, *negeria*, *dorji* and *jola*. They had been appointed according to their profession. The new professions were introduced with these Muslims. As a result, the elements of Islamic culture entered into the Assamese culture and also Assamese life style made its entry in to the daily life of the Muslims.

The motion of a culture is determined by its religion. Religion also impacted the architecture, literature, music, art etc. Although, the influence of Islam was not to be found on the Hindu or Vaishnavism directly, many contents of Islamic culture dissolved in the practical Assamese life. Influence of Islam was found in Assamese language, literature, art, architecture, music, costume etc.

#### 1.01. **Contribution to language**

Language is the prime base of a particular culture. Influence of different indigenous and foreign languages on Assamese is conspicuous. There are more than two thousand Persian

and Arabic words in Assamese vocabulary. Hem Swaraswati used the word *nofor* in his Prahlad Charita in 13<sup>th</sup> century. In 14<sup>th</sup> century, Madhab Kondoli wrote the words *bodoli*, *dukan*, *bojar*, *hazar* in his Ramayana. Sankardeva also utilized words like *muluk*, *jinjiri*, *duwar*, *haramkhor* in his *borgeets* in 15<sup>th</sup> century. Example of Madhabdeva can also be mentioned for using words like *talap*, *forman* etc. Various words of this category found its way in ***Katha Gurucharita***. Moheswar Neog pointed out many Persian and Arabic words while discussing the linguistic issues of Charita Katha in his edited book ***Guru Charita Katha***.

Birinchi Kumar Baruah presented the Persian and Arabic words that are being used in Assamese categorically:

**Administrative words-** *badshah, ujir, nabab, dewan, sakor, gulam, talukdar* etc.

**Law, wage, war-** *adalot, amanot, sorkar, joban, jorimona, koidi, phoujdari, khajona, tohbil, eleka, ejahar, Kaman, sipahi, bonduk, phouj, lokab, uwasil, jamanot* etc.

**Functions:** *eid-ul-fittor, eid-Ul-joha, allah, namaj, dunis, gunsh, koborstan, kofon* etc.

**Education and culture:** *kagoj, kolom, kitap, lefafa, marphot, sinyahi, duwat, khobor, horof, torjoma* etc.

**Music:** *sitar, tobola, tanpura, negera, khewal, gajal, ustad* etc.

**Medical:** *dawai, hakim, molom, hojom, haija* etc.

**Sports and rebuke:** *tas, kusti, choitan, haramjata, beiman* etc.

**Business and luxurious items:** *aina, ator, atosbaji, sosma, dalal, dukan, kosai, karbar, dorji* etc.

**Costume:** *kurta, parda, suridar, burkha, galisa* etc.

**Utensil:** *dekshi, bodona, payola, samush* etc.

There are certain Assamese phrases and idioms that are created with the influence of Arabic and Persian. For instance- *adob-kayoda, jur-julum, hukumjari, jawanbondi* etc. A few proverbs prevailing in Assamese are- *jur jar muluk tar, hakim lorileu hokum nolore* etc.

There are some Persian-Arabic words that entered into Assamese directly while some other in a modified mode. For instance, Assamese word *ukil* is derived directly from Arabic *wakil*. On the other hand, *shaheb, gulam* etc were modified form of the word *Shahib*.

These words have enriched the Assamese language immensely and turn unavoidable in the daily life style of Assam. It strengthens the base of the Assamese language.

### 1.02 Contribution to Assamese Literature

Apart from the language, Islam also influenced Assamese literature remarkably. Assamese literature primarily flourished on the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the *Puranas*. But later on, Sufism turned another factor in Assamese literature. Even, the Jikir and Jarer songs also contributed immensely.

### 1.03 Contribution to costume

The influence of the Muslims on the Assamese costume is also remarkable. According to *Tungkhungia Buranji*, Ahom king Rudra Singha first wore turban in the model of Moghal emperor. When the Moghol costumes such as *suriyar, sapkon, pyjama, ural* etc made its entry in the Ahom palace, it started prevailing among the common subjects. *Sapkon* and *pag* of Assamese *sutradhara* dance is considerable. The costume itself was a gift of Aurangzeb. According to a story, when Aurangzeb's son was the ruler of Bengal, he sent some items along with costumes to Ahom Dehingia king. The king sent the costume to the

*satradhikar*. Considering the dress as a gift from the king, the *satradhikar* utilized it as the costume of *sutradhar* dance.

The curtain started using after the arrival of the Muslims. Similarly, examples can be made of *ator*, *gulapdani*, *shoes*, *ardani* etc. Even the female nose jewellerys also took place after the Muslims.

#### 1.04 Contribution to food

The influence of the Muslims also extended its range to Assamese culinary. *Kopta*, *pulaw*, *kurma*, *muglai*, *paratha*, *sewoi*, *kismis*, *halwa*, *daliya*, *chick kabab*, *sah jahali*, *dilkhos*, *appkhos*, *borfi*, *jorda*, *tukma* etc enlarged the range of Assamese foods. The foods items started fashioning largely in Assamese culture after the Muslims.

#### 1.05 Contribution to music and instruments

The contribution of the Muslims to the Assamese music and musical instruments is also significant. Instruments like *nagara* had been derived from the Muslim. Moreover, the use of *sitar*, *sanai*, *dofola*, *tabola* etc has been adopted from the Muslim. The music such as *kawali*, *gajhal*, *khewal*, *miyaki*, *mohlar*, *dorkara*, *mitratakhi*, *saranga*, *imonrag*, *imon behag*, *homon*, *mokam* etc entered into the scene after the Muslims.

#### 1.06 Contribution to art and architecture.

The Ahom kings preferred the architecture of the Muslim craftsmen. The Ahom kings hired the skilled architects from Bengal to Assam. The *fasipotiya*, *akhorkotiya*, *silakotiya*, *gunakotiya*, *khonikor*, *negeria*, *dorji* and *jola* etc were invited by the Ahom kings to Assam. *Fasipotiyas* were the interpreter between the two kings. They acted as a medium of the two languages. It was because of them, the communication between the kings turned smooth.

They can be considered as a kind of translator. As a result, foreign expressions found its way in Assamese language and literature.

The Muslims were expert in crafting the copper plates. They were skilled in ivory craft too. The Muslims prepared various combs, trays etc of ivory. Apart from the statue, they also portrayed in the stones and woods. The sketches in the book **Hastividyarnava** were painted by a Muslim artist Dilbar under the sponsorship of Shiv Singh. Moreover, preparation of bomb, making coin, and mason turned feasible in Assam only after the arrival of the Muslims.

Thus, the contribution of the Muslims to every aspects of Assamese life is remarkable in a way or another.

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