

Incorporation of Arabic Words in Assamese Language and Literature

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Abstract

In ancient times, some Arabic words were used only by the Muslim community in the Assamese language, but Arabic vocabularies have been incorporated into the Assamese Language on a large scale from 1206 A. D. when the first Muslim soldiers entered into the territory of Kamarupa (Kamarupa is the ancient name of Assam) under the commandership of *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khilji*. Though many times different Muslim dynasties invaded Assam, in every invasion, the Muslim soldiers were defeated and a large number of Muslim soldiers captivated. These captive Muslims were settled in the territory of Assam and gradually they learnt Assamese language to interact with the

Assamese peoples. They used a large number of Arabic words along with Assamese Language and the Assamese people were also influenced by these Arabic words. In this way various Arabic vocabularies have been incorporated into the Assamese language and literature. Though many Assamese scholars tried to replace these Arabic words into Assamese words but they did not get suitable words to replace it as these words are perfect to express the complete ideas of some particular subjects.

Keywords: Ahom, Arabic vocabulary, Assamese vocabulary, Language

Introduction:

Amongst the most important and popular languages recognised by the United Nations, is the Arabic language. It contains a rich legacy and history which dates it back to the ancient times. Coming to the context of this paper which is concentrated on Assam and the Assamese language, It is interesting to note that the Assamese language is greatly influenced by the Arabic Language. The incorporation of Arabic words to the Assamese language and society is manifold. As history shows many times there were different Muslim dynasties which invaded Assam and in the due process of amalgamation various Arabic words had penetrated into the Assamese language through these invaders. This paper has made an attempt to highlight some invasions of those Rulers in Assam and their interaction and exchange with the Assamese people culturally and linguistically and also in terms of their feelings and cultures, and in the due process how the Arabic words penetrated thus into the Assamese language and literature.

Incorporation of Arabic Words in Assamese Language through the Khilji Dynasty:

The extreme north-eastern province of the Indian Territory is called Assam. The geographical boundaries of the region were permanently demarcated by nature though the political picture of the region varied from time to time. Once Assam was a part of the ancient nation Pragjyotishpura. The

word Pragjyotishpura is derived from the Sanskrit Language, Praga means “east or eastern”, Jyotish means “Star or astrology” and Pura means “city”, it means “the city of eastern astrology”. But the capital of Kamarupa was also known as Pragjyotish as astrology or Jyotish Shashtra was vastly practiced in this part.¹

Between 1205 and 1206 A.D., *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khilji*, a Turk from the Khilji tribe who served *Qutbuddin Aibak*, the then-Sultan of Delhi, led the first Muslim soldier to set foot on Kamarupa.² It was basically under his leadership that the first Mughal invasion happened in the soil of Assam. He was selected as governor of Bihar and established Muslim role in Gauda. After conquering the surrounding areas, he planned to invade Kamarupa. So, he marched to Kamarupa with a well-equipped 10,000 army and attacked the historic land of Assam.³ When the local people came to know that the Muslim army under the leadership of *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar Khilji* has marched to Kamarupa, they also led a counter attack force on the Muslim force but they were defeated by the latter. Gradually, the Muslim force occupied some areas of the territory of Kamarupa. *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar* came to know from a captured Assamese army that the local army would be strengthened the following morning by a well-trained and well-equipped force from the city of Karampattan, *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar*, the leader of Muslim army scared and broke up his camp and in the same night he started to return to Gauda. However, the Muslim army was attacked on the street by the Raja of Kamarupa. The native army killed some Muslim soldiers and a large number of them were imprisoned. *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar* and a few soldiers saved their lives and managed to reach Gauda.⁴ The imprisoned soldiers requested the Raja to excuse them, and then the Raja forgave them and arranged their settlement in his kingdom with some basic facilities. The Raja called them Gaudia as they originated from the province of Gauda or from the realm of *Muhammad Shihabuddin Ghori*. From that time onwards, the Assamese people started to refer to the Muslims as Gaudia.⁵ *Muhammad bin Bakhtyar's* ineffective (in-futile) expedition officially marked the beginning of the Muslim settlements in Assam. The captivated Muslim soldiers in the due course of time were forced to learn Assamese in order to communicate with the Assamese people in their daily lives. They preferably

spoke in the Assamese language which did undergo a lot of changes as a result of intermingling with the Arabic words, which consciously or unconsciously interceded into the Assamese language and vocabulary. Simultaneously, the Assamese people and as such the Assamese language was also greatly influenced by these Arabic words and very soon most of the Arabic words became a part and parcel of the Assamese vocabulary. In this way the Arabic words began to be incorporated in the Assamese Language.⁶

In 1226 AD another Khilji leader named *Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz - i - Husain Khilji*, who was the prominent ruler of Bengal attacked Kamarupa with a huge army. The Raja of Kamarupa, Prithu could not resist the attack and had a treaty with *Ghiyasuddin Iwaz*. Later on, though Iwaz returned to Bengal but he left a large number of his army in Kamarupa, who wholeheartedly accepted the Assamese language and culture and mixed with the native people.

During that time another Muslim Commander named Shaikh *Jalaluddin Tabrizi*, who was also famous as *Sultan Ghiyasuddin Awliya*, marched to Kamarupa with 13,000 Turkish foot soldiers and 12,000 horsemen and occupied a vast area of Kamarupa which is the present-day surroundings of Hajo. Ghiyasuddin Awliya constructed a huge Mosque in the *Gurudachal* Hillock and after his death, he was buried beside the Mosque in Gurudachal Hillock. His tomb is still in Gurudachal hillock which is famously known as Poa Makka, which is considered a sacred place and respected by both the Hindis and the Muslims. *Ghiyasuddin Awliya* was considered as the first Muslim who propagated Islamic faith among the people of Hajo area. It was during his invasion that the Assamese dialect was much influenced by the Arabic language showcasing strong influence of the emperor's invasion. During the propagation of Islamic faith and interaction with the common people various Arabic words possibly got breached along with the Assamese language that went on to give shape to the present-day Assamese vocabulary. This altered vocabulary was readily accepted by the local people of the region probably because these words happened to be the perfect words to express complete ideas in some particular subject.

In 1228 A.D. *Nasiruddin Mahmud khilji* invaded Kamarupa to annex it with the Turkish Empire and killed Raja Prithu in the battle, yet, *Nasiruddin Mahmud khilji* was unable to include the Kamarupa dynasty and the region with that of the Turkish Empire.⁷

In 1257, *Malik Ikhtyaruddin Yuzbak Khilji* attacked and defeated Sandhya, the successor of Prithu.⁸ But again Sandhya strengthened his army, and attacked on *Malik Yuzbak* and defeated him. All the troops of *Malik Yuzbak* including him and his family members were made captive.⁹ Then the Raja distributed these captive troops among the native Hindus to use them as servant in the houses of the Assamese Hindu people. In this way the native Hindu people came in close contact with that of the captive Muslim soldiers and were greatly influenced with the Arabic words used by these captive Muslims soldiers.

Turbak attacked Kamarupa in 1532 AD and was defeated by the King of Kamarupa. Many Mughal Muslims including *Turbak's* daughter *Sawalai* were imprisoned in this battle. These captive Muslims were engaged by the King in feeding the elephants, but they proved themselves incompetent; then the king involved them in the work of paddy cultivation, here also they proved ineffectual. So, the King engaged them in their own assignment i.e. artisans of brass-metal work, where they showed efficiency as they had expertise in this work. Later on, these Muslims began to be known as Marias. These Maria Muslims learnt the Assamese language and mixed some Arabic words in their use of the Assamese language. In this way the Arabic words used by these Muslims became an undividable part of the Assamese language.

Incorporation of Arabic Words in Assamese Language through the Mughals:

In 1612 A.D *Shaikh Alauddin Chisty*, the Viceroy of Bengal sent a huge troop under the leadership of *Shaikh Kamal* and under the guidance of Raja Raghunath to attack in Kamarupa.¹⁰ Raja Parikshit could not resist the attack and was compelled to surrender to the might of *Shaikh Alauddin Chisty*. Though Kamarupa was annexed with the Mughal Empire in 1613 A.D, it was in 1617 A.D that Raja Parikshit fought a severe war against the Mughals and defeated them in war. In this way

Raja Parikshit not only rescued the Kamarupa region but also captured a large number of Mughal soldiers.¹¹

In June, 1660 AD *Aurangzeb* became the emperor of Delhi, and he appointed *Mir Jumla* as the governor of Bengal. During the civil war in the Mughal ruled provinces, the Ahom Raja of Kamarupa raided and seized the Mughal territory, as such, *Aurangzeb* was very angry with the Ahom Raja, and ordered *Mir Jumla* to attack on Kamarupa to marking his revenge upon the King of Ahom. Ahom Raja of Kamarupa Jayadhwaj Sinha was defeated in this battle, so Jayadhwaj Sinha, the Ahom king along with his notable leaders and soldiers were compelled to flee away. So, Mughal army were easily abled to occupy some prominent areas of Mughal like Mathurapur, Gargaon, Dergaon, Gajpur and some other areas.¹² When *Mir Jumla* came to know that the Ahom king was hiding in Namrup hill along with some nobles he marched along with his troops to Namrup hill. When Ahom king Jayadhwaj Sinha came to know about the arrival of *Mir Jumla* in Namrup hill areas, there was no way for him except to have signed a treaty with the Mughal ruler. So, with some terms and conditions the Ahom king made a treaty of peace with the Mughal ruler *Mir Jumla* in 1663 A.D. for four years.¹³

When the four years treaty period was over the energetic Ahom king Chakradhwar Sinha determined to get back his Ahom territory without any terms and conditions. So he forcefully attacked the Mughals and recovered his lost territory and in 1667A.D. The invasion of Gauhati happened to be his major achievement. In that battle many Mughal people including a large number of soldiers and officers were made captive. The Ahom recovered till Manas River, a vast area of lost land from Mughal and Gauhati became the headquarters of the Ahom Viceroy. As the possibility of the re-attack of Mughals was very clear, so, the Ahoms established forts at Saraighat to defend their enemies.¹⁴ Next season again the Mughals with a vast army marched against the Ahoms under the leadership of Raja Indraman, the imperial officer of Srighat, but the Ahoms fought a furious war with the enemy and compelled to push them back to Rangamati of Dhubri.

When the Mughal Emperor *Aurangzeb* came to know about the loss of Gauhati, in December, 1667 A.D, he sent Raja Ram Singh a large group of Rajput soldiers to recover Mughal Kamrup from

the Assamese ruler. Though the Rajput soldiers fought severe fights with the Ahom army for seven long years, they could not get back Kamarupa from the Ahom king Chakradhwaj Sinha. After the continuous defeat of Raja Ram Singh in those battles with Ahom, the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb asked Raja Ram Singh to come back to Delhi. But a large number of captive Mughals could not get back to Delhi from Assam.

A huge number of Muslim Mughal troops were made captive in the battle of Saraighat which occurred in 1681 A.D. and the Ahom King did not kill the imprisoned soldiers but allowed them to get settled in the Ahom Kingdom itself. These newly settled Muslim soldiers were allowed to get married with the local Assamese girls and in this way, they wholeheartedly mingled with the Assamese society and their culture. The mother tongue of these newly settled Muslims were Persian but they used a large number of Arabic words in their day-to-day life. But when they got married to the Assamese girls, they were compelled to speak the Assamese language to interact with their wives. Gradually they started to speak the Assamese language using some Arabic words. In this way the Assamese people were also influenced with these Arabic words and started to use these Arabic words in their day-to-day life and these Arabic words became an inseparable part of the Assamese language.¹⁵

Incorporation of Arabic Words in Assamese Language through the Local Peoples:

Due to some special occasion the Assamese people had to come in close contact with some people who used Arabic words in their language. So, the Assamese people influenced by these Arabic words began to use it in their use of the Assamese language. Such as during Ahom rule Sankardeva (1449 - 1569 A.D.) and his contemporaries used a large number of Arabic words in their literature like Halal (حلال), Haram (حرام), Hasil (حاصل), Sawal (سؤال), Jawab (جواب), Baqi (بقي) etc. Even the pilgrims of the devotees of the Vaishnavite faith were unconsciously and unknowingly influenced with some of the Arabic words and as such started to use it in their daily local dialogue, and gradually these Arabic words became an important part of the Assamese language.

During the Ahom rule in Assam, various Mughal Muslim Khanikars and Artists were invited to Assam for their Khanikar Khel and valuable artistic works. These Mughal Muslims came to Assam and stayed here permanently and contributed a lot in Assamese Arts and culture. In the course of time these Mughal Muslims forgot their own language and mingled themselves with the Assamese society and culture. Though they interacted with other local people in Assamese, they used a large number of Arabic words in their conversation. These Arabic words influenced the Assamese people a lot.

In the 16th century a prominent Sufi saint called *Shah Milan (Miran)* who was also popularly known among the common people of Assam as *Adhan Faqir*, composed *Dhikirs and Zari* in the Assamese Language. Though the main purpose of *Dhikirs and Zaris* were to spread spiritual, metaphysical and religious message amongst the Muslims but it became popular and touched the hearts of almost all the people of Assam. *Adhan Faqir* composed around one thousand *Dhikirs and Zaris* where he used a large number of Arabic words which contributed a lot to enrich the Assamese language.

In this way the Turkish, Mughal and Afghan Muslims who settled in Assam, forgot their mother tongue and adopted the Assamese language as their mother tongue, yet they used a huge number of Arabic words mixing with the Assamese language. The Assamese people also accepted most of the Arabic words and used it in the Assamese vocabulary and usage. Later on, these Arabic words became the integral part of the Assamese language and literature.

The Arabic Words used in Assamese Language:

The Arabic words are recycled in Assamese as noun, adjective, verb and adverb. These Arabic vocabularies are used in Assamese language for centuries. Though in recent times some scholars tried to replace these Arabic words into Assamese terms but they were unable to find suitable words to replace it. Moreover the common people also prefer to use the Arabic term rather than its Assamese term. These Arabic words are used in various fields, as:

1. Arabic Words relating to Education:

From the beginning of the settlement of Muslims in Assam by the Assamese kings, the Muslims were treated equal as other Assamese people. So, like other Assamese people they also got the opportunity to acquire knowledge and education from the ancient Assamese educational institutions. As they were habituated with Arabic language, therefore they used many Arabic words with the Assamese language related to education. The Assamese people were also influenced by these Arabic words, and accepted as well as started to use it with other Assamese people. In this way these Arabic words in relation to education become an important and integral part of the Assamese language and literature. There are various Arabic words related to education which have been used in the Assamese language for centuries. Some Arabic words related to education are as follows:

Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning	Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning
علم	<i>Ilm</i>	Knowledge	أستاذ	<i>Ustad</i>	Teacher
تعليم	<i>Talim</i>	Education	مدرس	<i>Mudarris</i>	Teacher
حساب	<i>Hisab</i>	Accounts, Calculate	عقل	<i>Aql</i>	Intelligence, Mind Etc.
أخبار	<i>Akhbar</i>	Newspaper	مجلس	<i>Majlis</i>	Meeting
لفافة	<i>Lifafa</i>	Envelope	مدرسة	<i>Madrasah</i>	School
محفل	<i>Mehfil</i>	Conference, Meeting	خبر	<i>Khabar</i>	News
قلم	<i>Qalam</i>	Pen	جلسة	<i>Jalsa</i>	Session

2. Arabic Words relating to Administration and Judiciary System:

Among the settled Muslims; some of them were very obedient to the king. As a gift of their obedience, the king appointed them in his various administrative systems. Though they learnt the Assamese terms regarding the various administrative fields but they preferred to use some Arabic terms related to administration, though the Assamese people ignored it in the initial stage but later on these Arabic terms were well accepted by the Assamese people and they also started to use it in the

administrative fields. Now these Arabic words are used as Assamese words in various administrative fields. There are many Arabic words related to administration which are used in the Assamese language. Some of these are as mentioned below:

Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning	Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning
حكيم	<i>Hakim</i>	Judge	وكيل	<i>Wakil</i>	Pleader
عدالة	<i>Adalat</i>	Court	حراسة	<i>Hirasat</i>	Custody
بيان	<i>Bayan</i>	Statement	بليغ	<i>Baligh.</i>	Major
بقي	<i>Baqi</i>	Arrears	إنصاف	<i>Insaf</i>	Justice
ضمانة	<i>Zamanat</i>	Bail	خارج	<i>Kharij</i>	Dismissed
مقدمة	<i>Muqaddamah</i>	Case	دليل	<i>Dalil</i>	Proof, evidence
حاضر	<i>Hazir</i>	Presence	مجلس	<i>Majlis</i>	Meeting
منسوخ	<i>Mansukh</i>	Cancelled	محري	<i>Muharri</i>	Writer
بحث	<i>Bahas</i>	Discussion	مال	<i>Mal</i>	Property
منصف	<i>Munsif</i>	Judge	حساب	<i>Hisab</i>	Calculation
حق	<i>Haq</i>	Right	وزير	<i>Wuzir</i>	Minister
منشي	<i>Munshi</i>	Writer	شاهد	<i>Shahid</i>	Witness
حكم	<i>Hokum</i>	Judgement, Verdict	تهمة	<i>Tuhmat</i>	Charge
ضلعة	<i>Jilya</i>	District	دعوى	<i>Dawa</i>	Demand
تحقيق	<i>Tahkik</i>	Investigation	حق	<i>Haq</i>	Right
وصية	<i>Wasiyat</i>	Will	ظلم	<i>Zulum</i>	Torture
قانون	<i>Kanun</i>	Law			

3. Arabic Words relating to Religious Ceremonies and prayers:

The Muslim community used various Arabic words related to the religious ceremonies and prayers in Assamese language. Some of these are as follows:

Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning	Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning
الله	<i>Allah</i>	God	إيمان	<i>Iman</i>	Faith
رب	<i>Rab</i>	Lord	دعاء	<i>Dua</i>	Prayer
أولياء	<i>Awliya</i>	Saints	دين	<i>Din</i>	Religion
غسل	<i>Gusal</i>	Bath	مسجد	<i>Masjid</i>	Masque
نكاح	<i>Nikah</i>	Marriage	روضة	<i>Rauz</i>	Tomb
رسول	<i>Rasul</i>	Apostle	نبي	<i>Nabi</i>	Prophet
خليفة	<i>Khalifah</i>	Caliph	زيارة	<i>Ziyarat,</i>	Visit
حاجي	<i>Haji</i>	Pilgrim Of Makkah	موصلى	<i>Musalla</i>	A mat for prayer
عيد	<i>Id</i>	Id Festival	شريعة	<i>Shariah</i>	Religious law
جنة	<i>Jannat</i>	Paradise	زكاة	<i>Zakat ,</i>	Poor tax
مبارك	<i>Mubarak</i>	Congratulations	سلام	<i>Salam,</i>	Greetings
إمام	<i>Imam</i>	Leader in prayer	أذان	<i>Azan</i>	Proclamation
رحم	<i>Raham</i>	Mercy	فضل	<i>Fazal,</i>	Grace
قبر	<i>Qabar,</i>	Grave	سنة	<i>Sunnat,</i>	Tradition etc.
جهنم	<i>Jahannam</i>	Hell	ولي	<i>Wali</i>	Guardian
تقدير	<i>Taqdir</i>	Fate, Luck	وضو	<i>Wazu</i>	Ablution
مسلم	<i>Muslim</i>	Muslim	فقير	<i>Faqir</i>	Poor
جمعة	<i>Jumma</i>	Friday			

4. There are many Arabic words related to Marriage, Clothes, Rebuke, Titles and Designations, Revenue & Treasury, Architecture, Medical Science and Business which are used in the Assamese language. Some of these Arabic words are as follows:

Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning	Arabic term	Pronunciation	Meaning
مخمل	<i>Makhmal</i>	Velvet	عطر	<i>Atar</i>	Perfume
مكان	<i>Makan</i>	House, place	شهيد	<i>Shahid</i>	Martyr
قميص	<i>Qamis</i>	Shirt	دكان	<i>Dukan</i>	Market
منزل	<i>Manzil</i>	Storey, stoppage	حرامي	<i>Harami</i>	Thief, Dishonest
مسك	<i>Musk</i>	Musk	حكيم	<i>Hakim</i>	Physician
مريض	<i>Mariz</i>	Patient	علامة	<i>Alamat</i>	Symptom
مكر	<i>Makkar</i>	Cunning	محل	<i>Mahal</i>	Palace
شیطان	<i>Shaitan</i>	Devil, Wicked	حوض	<i>Hauz</i>	Reservoir
مشغول	<i>Mashgul</i>	Busy	طلاق	<i>Talaq</i>	Divorce
قار	<i>Qari</i>	Reader	عزة	<i>Izzat</i>	Honor
نقل	<i>Naqal</i>	Duplicate	قبول	<i>Qabul</i>	Accept
مسافر	<i>Mosafir</i>	Traveler	ظلم	<i>Zulum</i>	Torture
جواب	<i>Jawab</i>	Answer	عشق	<i>Ishq</i>	Love
وقت	<i>Wakt</i>	Time	عاشق	<i>Ashiq</i>	Beloved
فائدة	<i>Faida</i>	Help	جيب	<i>Jeb</i>	Jeb / pocket
نفع	<i>Nafa</i>	Benefit	مالك	<i>Malik</i>	Owner
نظر	<i>Nazar</i>	Sight	ارادة	<i>Irada</i>	Intention
دخل	<i>Dakhal</i>	Capture	نكاح	<i>Nikah</i>	Marriage
طلب	<i>Talab</i>	Search	طريقة	<i>Tariqa</i>	Method, way
نیت	<i>Niyyat</i>	Intention	اشارة	<i>Ishara</i>	Indicate
حاضر	<i>Hazir</i>	Present	غائب	<i>Gaib</i>	Abstain
مصيبة	<i>Masibat</i>	Calamity	موجود	<i>Majud</i>	Present
أمانة	<i>Amanat</i>	Preserve	مؤمن	<i>Mu'min</i>	Believer
روح	<i>Ruh</i>	Soul	خدمة	<i>Khidmat</i>	Service

قاضي	<i>Qazi</i>	Judge	أولاد	<i>Aulad</i>	Children
محبة	<i>Muhabbat</i>	Love	محبوبة	<i>Mahbuba</i>	Lover, beloved
تجارة	<i>Tijarat</i>	Commerce, trade	حافظ	<i>Hafiz</i>	Memories
قاري	<i>Qari</i>	Reader	محدث	<i>Muhaddith</i>	Expert in Hadith
إمام	<i>Imam</i>	Leader	خديم	<i>Khadim</i>	Servant

Conclusion: In this way the Arabic words had penetrated into the Assamese language through the Turk, Afghan and Mughal Muslims and thereby it has enriched the standard of the Assamese language. Whether it be an outcome of invasion or incursion the amalgamation that had taken place between the native Assamese and the Muslims had a greater impact upon the culture, tradition and societal norms of the region which directly got reflected in terms of linguistic infiltrations. Such linguistic infiltrations between the Arabic vocabulary and that of the Assamese is rooted so deep and has become such a major part of both the languages enriching and enhancing each other that searching its origin and differences sounds almost an impossible endeavor. This, nevertheless, shows the spirit of consolidation and union which can be hardly subdued by external forces.

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