

Airo International Research Journal

Volume XIII, ISSN: 2320-3714

November, 2017

Impact Factor 0.75 to 3.19



UGC Approval Number 63012



A Multidisciplinary Indexed International Research Journal



ISSN : 2320-3714

Volume : XIII

Journal : 63012

Impact Factor : 0.75 to 3.19



ADHYAYAN
INTERNATIONAL
RESEARCH
ORGANISATION



ROLE OF MUSLIMS IN ASSAM: A CRITICAL STUDY IN THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ASSAMESE SOCIETY

Md. Jahangir Islam

Research Scholar

JJT University, Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan, India

Declaration of Author: I hereby declare that the content of this research paper has been truly made by me including the title of the research paper/research article, and no serial sequence of any sentence has been copied through internet or any other source except references or some unavoidable essential or technical terms. In case of finding any patent or copy right content of any source or other author in my paper/article, I shall always be responsible for further clarification or any legal issues. For sole right content of different author or different source, which was unintentionally or intentionally used in this research paper shall immediately be removed from this journal and I shall be accountable for any further legal issues, and there will be no responsibility of Journal in any matter. If anyone has some issue related to the content of this research paper's copied or plagiarism content he/she may contact on my above mentioned email ID.

Abstract

Muslim settlement in Assam is as old as the spread of Islam in India itself. The Muslims of Assam have been categorized into two sections. The first category composed of Assamese origin, living mainly in districts laid in the Brahmaputra valley and Bengali speaking Muslims of Assam's original citizens living in both districts of Barak valley as well some areas of Brahmaputra valley which once were the parts of Eastern Bengal. The Muslims of Assam have been playing a very significant and positive role in the formation and development of Assamese society and their culture from ancient time to today. Being integrated by the various socio-economic and cultural factors, they are spread over the length and breadth of the state, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley which is the home land of the Assamese culture. The Muslims is the largest minority group in Assam, with strength of 30.9 percentage of the total population. Assamese Muslims like other Muslims in India reflect significant variations in terms of culture, caste, class, language, occupation, geographical distribution and ideology. The contemporary Assamese society is fundamentally a multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-caste, multi-class and dominantly unilingual, composite and by and large a secular society. The Muslims are scattered in all the areas of Assam, with high concentration of 70.45 percent of total population in Dhubri district, western part of Assam and the lowest density of 1.48 percent in Dhemaji district as per the census report of 1991. These Muslims of Assamese origin Embraced Islam due to the efforts of different religious preachers. And the second Category composed of Bengali Muslims, 'Na-Assamese' who are mainly immigrants who arrived in Assam at different periods of history; many of these were people who had been invited to Assam by the British and afterwards by the Congress rulers for the development of the economy of Assam and especially for the cultivation of vast barren and forest lands. Historical accounts dates the presence of Muslims in Assam to about 1198 and thereabouts, when Bakhtiyar Khilji defeated Lakhshmaniya and soon embarked on a "filibustering expedition to the north." Indeed, historical records are replete with mentions of Muslim invasions of Assam and the "seven and a half century"

history in which the legacy of Muslims in Assam is steeped. In 1206 the Turks were defeated in their attack on Kamrupa and in 1257 Turgil Khan repeated it but failed to make any headway. He built the first ever Mosque in Assam in

North Kamrupa Subsequently, 1448 Nawab Hussain Shah of Gaur made

Successful inroads in Kamalapur and appointed hisson administrator

Kew-Words: *Muslim settlement spread of Islam in India, Brahmaputra valley, historical records, administrator, expedition, invasions*

Introduction:

A regular and systematic process of Muslim influx into Assam seems to have commenced since the reign of Niladhawja's successors Chakradhwaja, the king of kamata. During the war of Hussain Shah with Nilambar the influx of Muslims continued with growing more intensity. It was actually during the period of Muslim occupation of the Kamrup and Goalpara region and particularly after the creation of the colony of the Afghan warriors in Hajo by Hussain Shah that a large number of Muslim could find an opportunity for the first time to settle in erstwhile district of Goalpara and Kamrup permanently.

The settlement of the Muslims in the eastern region of Assam started from 1530, when the Muslims army under Turbak invaded Assam and Ahom king Suhungmung defeated the Muslim invader and those who were taken as prisoners were settled in different parts of the state and they subsequently came to be known as the Mariyas. In this regard Edward Gait remarks that the Muslims who were taken as prisoners by Suhungmung were the earliest Muslim settlers in the eastern valley of the Brahmaputra.

During the 17th century the Islamic faith grew more intensity when a major part of western Assam was occupied by the Muslims and also established their court at Rangamati (near Gauripur) and Hajo (in Kamrup). Later on the Muslims settlers in those region stayed by freely mingling with the indigenous people. Again, the 2nd phase of the Muslims influx into the western part of Assam began with the Koch-Mughal alliance and these Muslim soldiers settled there and increased the Muslim population of Assam when the Koch-Hajo region fell under the Muslim power. Many Muslims serving in the fighting forces of the Mughal in Assam and employed in other activities might have poured into this region in continuous streams from different parts of the Mughal Empire to help the local Muslim authorities in the war and the civil administration besides trade and commerce. It is one of the important points that they had to marry non-Muslims from Assam due to absences of their wives. During the region of Ahom King GadadharSingha the last battle of Ahom-Mughal conflict broke out in 1682 where Mughal vacated Kamrupa in 1682 and



retreated again to Rangamati and Thus, during the Mughal attacks on Assam the number of the Muslims were increased there. This happened particularly with the attack of Mirjumla in 1661 A.D. One of his descendants. Khan Gandhela Garia, later took a prominent part in repelling attacks on the Ahom Kings in 1695 and announced titles of officials such as Pukan, Barua, Saikia, Bora, Hazarika and Khankar. This does not mean that only people who came from outside were Muslims; it is equally true that there was also a good number of converted Muslims of Assamese origin. The credit for preaching Islam in Assam also goes to the Muslim religious saint, popularly known as Azan Fakir, who came to Assam in approximately 1635 A.D from Baghdad. He acquired a congenial atmosphere for propagating unity between the two religious groups-the Hindus and the Muslims. Another Muslim saint namely Boga Shah who had a great influence on Assamese society, came from Uttar Pradesh.

Another factor behind the spread of Islam in Assam was the Muslim war prisoners who were allowed to settle in Assam, during various reigns. Their presence in Assam attracted the people towards the humanitarian values prevailing among them. The local people were impressed by the simplicity and logic behind the Islamic belief and way of life. Sir Edward Gait (1863-1950) who served in Assam as a British member of the Indian Civil Service also has similar opinion on the settlement

of Muslims in Assam with a little difference. He believes that Muslims were settled there only with the mercy of the then rulers not on the basis of their skill of cultivation. Gait penned his history of the Muslims of Assam in 1905 thus; "The Mohammedans who were taken prisoner in this war [April 1532, when Turbak with thirty elephants, one thousand horses, and a large park of artillery, as well as a great number of foot soldiers, invaded Assam] were settled in different parts of the country. Tradition says that they at first were ordered to cut grass for the king's elephants, but were found quite unfit for this work. They were next employed as cultivators, but their ignorance of agriculture was so great that they carried mud to the paddy seedlings instead of ploughing land and planting the seedlings in it. They were then left to their own devices, and took to working in brass, an occupation that their descendants, who are known as Morias, carry on to this day.

In contrast to Gait's assertions, M. Kar believes that, the Ahoms who ruled over Assam for over six hundred years and during whose rule most of the Muslim invasions took place, seemed to have invited Muslim professionals from Bengal to undertake architectural and other such projects which also increased the number of Muslims in Assam.[^] According to Kar, Ahoms "encouraged men from other parts of the country to settle in Assam, provided their introduction was of advantage to her. They included



artisans, draftsmen, weavers, accountants, Scholars and saints, both Hindus and Muslims." And, although it would seem that Kar's argument ^ is contrary to Gait's version of the usefulness of the Muslims in their new found home, the documentation is clear about the fact that Muslims in Assam found a place of pride in the Ahom kingdom.

Kar writes: Many Muslims were appointed in the several departments of the state for deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, carving inscriptions on copper plates and other metals, minting of coins, embroidery work, painting, carpentry, sword and gun making, manufacture of gun powder, tailoring and weaving. As useful members of the community they were recognized by the Ahoms as citizens but of a lower status. No outsider could aspire to rise high in the Ahom court. The Ahom's allowed the Muslims to follow their own faith. Some of the Muslim religious leaders known as Dewans were granted revenue free lands generally called papal lands, to settle on. Thus, long before the beginning of the modern history of Assam, Muslims had formed a permanent part of Assam's society though their number cannot be determined.

The Muslims of those days were not only craftsmen, but also missionaries of Islam. Wherever they went they preached Islam in their words and deeds. They were enthusiastic with the revolutionary and aesthetic spirit of Islam, and were responsible for different musical and

architectural achievements. In this process of

interaction, then literature of Assam also was influenced by the Muslims. The

Muslim influence is clearly visible in Assamese songs and music and the singing of quailghazel and jari became familiar in Assam.

At this point we should note that in Assam, as in the case for the whole of India, Islamic teachings concerning social life were not imparted to the people. This is why it is very difficult to find any difference between the Assamese Hindus and Muslims in cultural matters. The Muslims of Assam are very close to the Assamese Hindus in their culture and traditions. The Muslims have retained many customs and rituals of their pre- Islamic times. In social and matrimonial matters, the family dress known as mekhala chaddar has become a uniting link Between the two religious communities. Even the festival Bihu, with its many rituals, has been adopted by many Assamese Muslims. These details show how close the affinity between the Assamese Hindus and Muslims was in the various cultural and social spheres of life. Yet there is a large section of Muslims comprising Bengali Muslims, most whom have migrated from undivided Bengal to Assam.

The immigration of Muslims to Assam from other states, especially Bengal has taken place over a long period of time.



As early in 1874, Lord Northbrook was approached by about signatories belonging to Assamese middle class desiring an increase of population of Assam by importing people from outside. Almost all communities in Assam have immigrated from one or the other place to Assam

With the passage of time.

Objectives:

The objectives of this present paper is to attract the attention of the readers and lovers of literature and history and the researchers towards the **role and struggles of Muslims in Assam in the formation and development of Assamese society**. In spite of their very hard and tough life, they left no stone unturned to make their own identity as successful citizens of Assam of high repute and also proved themselves that they can work very hard for the development of Assam as well as of our country.

Formation of the Muslim society in Assam :

Formation of the Muslim society in Assam can clearly trace back to the last decade of the 12th century. Since then, this community has been evolved gradually over a very long stretch of time. Four different major factors contributed for the formation and development of Muslim society in Assam.

Muslim Invasions of Assam (1206-1682)

Towards the close of the 12th century, Mahammad Ibne Bakhteyar, a military commander under

Qutubuddin Aibak, the founder of the slave dynasty in India invaded Assam in 1206 A.D. According to Tabaqat

Nasiri, written by Minhaj Seraj, it was during this time that Assam for the first time came in contact with the Muslims. Thereafter began a series of Muslim invasions over a period of 475 years, which eventually culminated in the battle of Itakhuli that was fought between the Ahom and Mughal in 1682. Although Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyarkhilji was defeated severely and most of his soldiers that, it can be presumed from that fact that some of the Muslims who survived their lives preferred to stay in Assam instead of going back with their defeated General. They may be regarded as the first batch of Muslim settlers who decided to stay in Assam even before the advent of the Ahoms to this land. Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyarkhilji was guided to Assam by a local chief of this land, Ali Mech. It indicated that from this time or much earlier to it, the Muslims had established contact with Assam large section had accepted this region as their home land.

A plethora of literature exists about the immigration of Muslims into Assam and the demographic changes that the ingress entailed for Assam. Many contemporary writings have even sought to politicize the issue by seeking to blame both the British and



the Congress Party for the problem. Whereas some historians¹⁰ have sought to accuse British administrators of the ilk of Sir Charles Elliot, Chief Commissioner of Assam from 1881 to 1885, for first alluding to the availability of large areas of untouched alluvial land into which peasants from Bihar and Bengal could be settled, the Congress Party has been pilloried for encouraging the influx for the political leverage which it purportedly provided the party. Indeed, present day analysis seems to hold that the Congress Party has largely been to blame for the enactment and sustenance of the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal)—IM (DT)—Act of 1983, which certain observers feel is responsible for the continuing influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh. This perception is of course also due to the fact that parties that have sought to raise the banner of protest against the illegal influx have been traditional foes of the Congress. Indeed, in the last elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 2001, the Akhom Gana Parishad (AGP) "allied itself with the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is in power in New Delhi. This led to a polarization of the communities in Assam, and even the traditional Muslim votes of the AGP shuffled to the Congress Party, which eventually won the 2001 elections.

There is a slight difference between Assamese Muslims and Bengali Muslims. The Muslims of the Brahmaputra valley are socially divided

into two distinct groups, indigenous Muslims and immigrants. The former having a privileged position in society not because they accepted the Assamese culture (which many of the immigrants also have done) but because of their relatively early settlement, in the pre-British era. The indigenous Muslims have also secured access to the streams of modernization much earlier compared to the other groups, which has increased respectability. In addition, most of them are engaged in trades and vocations which fall in the non-cultivating category and which have promoted their economic affluence. In contrast the immigrant Muslims are predominantly an agricultural group and this is partly responsible for low social ranking in the eyes of their brethren. Matrimonial relations between the two are conspicuously absent; there is a lack of closer interaction between them in spite of the fact that both have a common religion. However the elite of the immigrant Muslims have advanced themselves. It should be noted that in terms of their economic contribution, the immigrant Muslims constitute a decisive factor in the upgradation of Assam's economy.

III. Classification of the Muslims of Assam:

The entire Muslim population of Assam can be classified into four major categories. These are as follows-

The Assamese Muslims

The Neo-Assamese Muslims



The Muslims of Cachar or the Barak valley

The Bihari or North-Indian Muslims living in Assam

Summing Up:

To sum up; the researcher would like to concluded that many Muslim soldiers and officers who fought against the Mughals in several battles including the historic battles of Saraighat in 1671 and it was one of the important fact that the Mughals were defeated because of the active participation of Muslim soldiers in the battles like Bagh Hazarika, sardarJulfikarBarua, Ramjan khan etc. So it can be argued that the Muslims of Assam are an inseparable and integral part of the contemporary Assamese political and socio-cultural milieu.

While the Muslim Bengalis were very industrious and hardworking, the Hindu Bengalis were not. They were more attracted to government jobs and administrative works. If, at all, the allegation of Assamese is accepted that the Bengali was introduced in schools as medium of instruction, it was done so by Bengali officials' efforts as some writers claim. The Muslims were not involved in this aspect. As Bengali officials occupied many of the top official positions they tried to pave way for the introduction of Bengali as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. This culminated inCampbell's order to that effect. Even then Assamese was used in primary schools in 1880, though middle schools were still

conducted in Bengali. According to Prof. Hiren Gohain, the imposition of Bengali language was not the design of Bengalis but of the British imperialists. It had in fact a purely British decision. Contrary to the Bengali Hindus the immigrant Muslims adopted not only the culture of Assamese but also their language as well. Although Muslims in Assam have actively assimilated with Assamese culture and languages, yet they have suffered various barbaric steps taken by the government.

Politics of migration and Muslims: Indeed, the problem of immigration in Assam has been very complex one. Those who claim Assamese origin have themselves had foreign ancestors.

References:

- [1] Allen, B.C., Census of Assam, 1901, New Delhi-1984
- [2] Barua, B.K., A cultural History of Assam, vol.-I, 2nd edition, Ghy-1969
- [3] Bhattacharya, S.N., A History of North-East Frontier policy, Calcutta- 1929
- [4] Bora, M.I.(translate), Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, 2 vols. Guwahati- 1936
- [5] Asif Mozhar (translate), Tarikh-i-Aasham, Guwahati- 2009
- [6] Francis, Hamilton, An account of Assam, Dept. of Historical Antiquarian studies, Guwahati- 1963



- [7] Hunter, W.W. A statistical account of Assam, vol.-II, New Delhi- 1879
- [8] Origin and Growth of Asamiya language, Guwahati- 1964
- [9] Ali Ahmed Kasim, The Muslim of Assam, EBHP Publisher, Guwahati- 2010
- [10] Boroah D.P., Goalpara district Gazetteer, 1979
- [11] Robinson, W Descriptive Account of Assam, 1841

Acknowledgements

I consider it is our moral duty to pay honour, regards and thanks to the esteemed and distinguished authors, researchers, scholars, librarians and publishers of all the books, Research papers and all other sources which I have consulted during the preparation of the present paper.
