

Usage Of Arabic Words and Terms in Assamese Language and Literature: An Analytical Study

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Citation: Dr. Md. Atowar Rahman, (2024). Usage Of Arabic Words and Terms in Assamese Language and Literature: An Analytical Study, *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 30(1), 6420-6425

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v30i1.9759

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Long before Islam arrived, the Indo-Arab commercial relations had a significant influence in India as well as Assam, where Arabic language has grown and developed through different periods. Assam has come into a relation with Arabs as well as Arabic language. In the early years of the seventh century A.D., Arabs left for India and began to settle in various regions after they invaded Sind (in 712 A.D.). In due course of time, they built Masjids, spread the Islamic faith and instructed people to Islamic customs using Arabic words and terms. The proportion of Arabic learning people in all parts of India significantly increased. Arabic has been become the language of religion and education for Muslim rulers and subjects ever since. Later, when Muslim Sufis like Peers, Faqirs, and Awliyas emerged, they were also played a vital role in teaching Arabic to the Assamese people. The usage of Arabic words and terms in Assam and its different region can be traced back to the early 13th century, when the Nawab of Gour, Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khalji, wanted to conquer China through Assam. Moreover, we know that there are many prominent Assamese authors who have been incorporating a good number of Arabic words and terms into Assamese literature. Accordingly we find a significant relation of Arabic and Assamese language.

Keywords: Arabic language, literature, term, Indo-Arab, Propagat

Introduction:

As we know, language serves as a vital means of communication for the interchange of ideas between individuals or within homogenous groups of people through the use of sounds and gestures. It facilitates the sharing of thoughts, feelings, and other information. This language has possessed a unique position in the field of linguistic scenario of the world. Philologically Arabic is the language of the Semitic language family. It is extensively known outside of the Arab world and is spoken there as well. Today, it has presumed the international status because of its world wide application in trade and commerce, sports and cultural activities.ⁱ It served as the *Lingua Franca* during the middle periods and it became inactive for quite some time but revitalised itself and today carries a singular status which very few classical languages command. Arabic language (words and terms) also commands an indelible relation with European languages, including the English language.

Within the linguistic topography, Arabic language is one of the important and prominent branches of Semitic group of language family. Shahidullah, a prominent historian remarks: *'The language prevailing throughout Arabian Peninsula in sixth century is known as most developed and ideal form of Arabic language'*.ⁱⁱ In a sizable portion of the world, Arabic is the official language and is spoken by a huge population. Due to its use in the Holy Qur'an and Hadith and prayer of Islam (salat), this language is regarded as the most sacred by Muslims worldwide. Every Muslim learns Arabic compulsorily for their religious activities. It has been said that wherever Muslim travel, the Arabic language follows.

Arabic language gradually evolved into the medium of trade and commerce. It has become the language of commercial ties and cultural exchange of science and technology and international politics. Apart from its religious significance, Arabic holds significant importance in the domains of language and literature, in poetry and philosophy. It is used as one of the sixth official languages in the UNO. It has assumed considerable importance in recent time due to the emergence of Sovereign Arab States, controlling vast natural resources. Realizing the influence of the Arab States in the World Scenario, the Indian Government

has taken keen interest in the Arab affairs and also in Arabic language right after the Independence.ⁱⁱⁱ However, because of the Indo-Arab commercial relationship, this language held a prominent place in India. Despite the fact that India is not an Arabic-speaking nation, the Arabic language flourished and expanded as a result of the Arabians' arrival in India and Assam, as well as their close interaction with the Arab people and their language.

Background of Arabic Words are used in Assamese Language and Literature

Due to the Indo-Arab economic relations, Arabs and their language have had a relation with India long before Islam. With the arrival of Muslims in India during the early Islamic era, both Islam and the Arabic language expanded through trade and commerce. However, there were several stages in the development of Muslim society in India, including migration, colonialism, conversion, and conquest. In addition, the Arabs travelled to India and began to settle there in various regions after the Arabs invaded Sind (in 712 A.D.). later, the Ghaznavid invasion in 1000 A.D. preceded by small colonies of Muslim in the Southern Punjab. It has been observed that the actual growth of Muslim society came into existence after the conquest of Shihab al- Din al-Ghuri in 1192 A.D. in Northern India because it provided a conducive settlement to Muslim people. Furthermore, the process of conversion from other religion to Islam continued with the earnest propagation of Sufi-saints who handled the problem with understanding and love. Accordingly, they established Masjids, propagate Islamic faith, rites and rituals in the regions that they settled. Henceforth, the ratio of Muslim population notably increased in all parts of India. Ever since, Arabic has served as both religious and educational language, gaining widespread popularity among Muslim subjects and rulers until the reign of Bahadur Shah Jafar (1837-1857 A.D.), the last emperor of the Mughal dynasty.

During the ancient period, Assam was known as Kamrupa or Pragjyotish. Humans have been living in the area since around 2000 B.C. Generally, it is known that these people migrated from Burma and China. They landed in Assam following the Mongoloid migration. They also went from Punjab through Bihar and North Bengal. As a result, Assam offers a blend of Mongol and Asian cultures. The early history of Assam is believed to be of the Varman dynasty. The reign of the dynasty expanded from 400 A.D. The kingdom of Ahom and Koch were established by 15th Century. During this time, Assam saw changes in all aspect of life.

However, the Muslim settlers in Assam began almost eight hundred years ago, when Muhammad bin Bakhtiar Khalji, the Nawab of Gour, wanted to conquer China through Assam in 1205-1206 A.D. Numerous conflicts ensued, resulting in the defeat and subsequent imprisonment of Muslim soldiers by the rulers of Kamrup, who were eventually released after enduring several years in captivity. Many of them settled at North- Guwahati and in other parts of Assam. In course of time, those Arabic speaking people mixed with the local Assamese people.^{iv}

With respect of the earliest Muslim settlement in Assam Makhanlal Kar, a renowned social scientist, writes: The earliest Muslims attempt at a forcible entry into Assam was led in 1205 by Muhammad Bakhtiar Khalji from Bengal. Till the advent of the Ahoms in 1228, several Muslim invasions had taken place and affected the present district of Kamrup and its adjoining areas. Some of the captive mercenaries and other decided to settle in those places. Therefore, the camp followers of military commanders can be regarded as the pioneer Muslim settlers of Assam. The first invasion was guided by Ali Mech whom Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar had converted to Islam. This was perhaps, the earliest instance of proselytisation which synchronised with their appearance on the borders of Assam. Though Kamrup faced no serious Muslim invasion from then till the end of the 15th century, occasional Muslim raids, particularly from the directions of Mymensing continued. A colony of Muslim settlers was established around Hajo in Kamrup after the unsuccessful invasion of Allauddin Hussain Shah in 1498 A.D. A mosque was erected there by Ghyasud-Din Aulia. This was perhaps, the earliest recorded Muslim settlement in Assam.^v

The early Muslim settlers in Assam could not bring a rich treasure of Arabic literature with them, because most of them were warriors, traders and artisans who had been either taken prisoners or came to live in Assam in different political circumstances. Thereafter they married the daughters of the local converted Muslims. In this way, they gradually mixed up with the Assamese people, language and culture. Similarly, Muslim officers used to make diplomatic correspondence with their Sultans or the local counterparts in Perso-Arabic language and speak similar dialects in their daily lives. From the 13th century, the Muslim subjects used a dialect that was largely influenced by Perso-Arabic terms and terminology, mixing the Assamese language, which in turn enormously influenced the local language, literature and culture. Further, Ahom Kings like Gadhadar Singha (1681-1696 A.D.) and Rudra Singha (1696-1714 A.D.), maintained diplomatic ties with the Mughals and their representatives across different territories, which also in turn shaped Assamese language and culture.

It has also been obvious that Muslim settlement and conversion to Islam occurred at various point of times. The influx of newly settled Muslims from diverse backgrounds, including Turk, Afghan, Arabic and Persian, during the 13th to 15th centuries A.D. along with the integration of newly converted Muslims and non-Muslims, contributed to the improvement of language polity, economy and society of Assam. Consequently, local languages and dialects became infused with new vocabulary introduced by these people. In this, Arabic and Persian loan words greatly influenced on Assamese language. It is thus that Muslims introduced new dimensions to Assam and inaugurated a new chapter in Assamese literature, particularly in terms of

linguistics, wherein countless Perso-Arabic vocabulary seamlessly integrated with Assamese and their respective sub-dialects.

The study of the Arabic language generally commenced in Assam and its different regions as early as the beginning of the 13th century, coinciding with the arrival of Muslim Sufis. Muslim spiritual scholars like-peers, Faqirs and Awliyas amongst others contributed immensely in the introduction of Arabic language by establishing Masjids, Khanqahs and Darghas in the early periods. Masjids played a vital role in respect of spreading education among the Muslims during the era. Verses from the Holy Quran, Hadith and procedure of 'Salat and Siyam' (prayer and fasting) through Arabic language would come to have a significant influence on the people of Assam.^{vi}

However, the Muslim Sufis who arrived in Assam those were instrumental in bringing Arabic and teaching it to people so they could perform Islamic rites and rituals. The most well-known Muslim saint and poet of Assam, Hazrat Shah Miran, also known as Azan Faqir, was born in Bhagdad and is believed to have travelled to the kingdom of Ahom alongside his brother Nabipir in the middle of the seventeenth century. Azan Faqir made a significant contribution to Assamese popular literature in the fields of "Zikir and Jari", he probably composed about hundred and sixty Zikirs. Besides him others like Chan kha, Sheikh Farid, Bandar Faqir and many other had also composed Zikirs. Moreover, Azan Faqir used to compose as many as 'Eight Scores'^{vii} of devotional songs in Assamese language, mixed with a large number of Arabic as well as Persian words and terms. These songs, which are known as 'Zikir and Jari'^{viii}, continue to be sung in Assam by all groups of people, regardless of caste and religion. Another well-known Sufi Peer, Ghiyasud-din Awliya, traveled to Assam and built his Khanqah at Hajo, top of the Garurachal hills. He erected a mosque in that location, whereupon his burial took place within the mosque premises upon his demise. This mosque has been considered as Assam's second mosque. Between 1653 and 1658 A.D., Mughal Faujdar Mir Lutfulla Siraji constructed it at Prince Suja's request. The Masjid of Ghiyasud-Din Awliya at Hajo is held in high regard, commonly revered by the people of Assam as a sacred site known as 'Powa Makkah,' symbolizing a quarter of Makkah.^{ix}

In addition to the Muslim Peers and Faqirs were closely associated with the Vaishnava propagators and poets of Assam. The Faqirs and other people utilized a great deal of Arabic vocabulary so frequently that the Vaishnava poets also took up and employed many of these phrases in their poetry. The people living in this region were familiar with Arabic language and phrases even before the Vaishnava faith spread throughout Assam. Relevant evidence includes the use of Arabic words by Hem Saraswati, a court poet of the Kamata ruler, Durlava Narayan from the 13th century and Srimanta Sankar Deva, a Vaishnava propagator who lived from 1449 to 1569 A.D.^x Furthermore, some Arabic terms have been incorporated into the Assamese language primarily through diplomatic correspondence.^{xi} A good number of historical works and land revenue documents of the later Ahom period attest to these developments.

Usage of Arabic Words and Terms in Assamese Literature

This study examines a select number of Assamese literatures. These literatures cut across various genres and shows that the authors have incorporated a significant number of Arabic words into Assamese literature. The most prominent Assamese books of various genres contain a good number of Arabic words such as *Maghribar Azan* (Dibrugarh, 1993), *Sharaguri Sapari* (Guwahati, 2003), *Surujmukhir Swapna* (Guwahati, 2007), and *Adha Lekha Dastavez* (Guwahati, 2005). In these works by renowned authors, an analysis reveals the presence of several Arabic words, illustrating the linguistic blend and cultural exchange within the Assamese literary tradition. Let us look at some of the examples as are founds in these books.

Maghribar Azan^{xii}, a social drama jointly composed by Sarada Kanta Bardaloi and Krishnananda Bhattacharyya, reveal a loan of seventy words of Arabic origin at least. The text employs such Arabic words as: آداب (Adab) - Culture, عاقل (Akal) - Sensible, باقى (Baki) - Balance, دستور (dastur) - Rule, custom, عزة (Ijjat) - Chastity etc. *Saraguri Sapari*^{xiii}, a social play relating to a famous Islamic saint of Sufi order of 17th century A.D. by Mahendra Barthakur reveals about forty Arabic words as أحمق (Ahmak) - Fool, stupid, سلام (Salam) - Salute, علم (Ilim) - Knowledge, قسم (Qasam) - Oath, كلام (kalam) - Speech etc. Similarly, *Surujomukhir Swapna*^{xiv}, a social novel by Syed Abdul Malik, an eminent novelist and Sahitya Academy Award winner, reveals about fifty Arabic words, such as: أعجاب (A'ajab) - wonderful, اجمالى (Ijmal) - Collective, غرض (Garaj)- Interest, خدمة (Khedmat) - Service, نور (Noor) - Light etc. *Adha Lekha Dastavez*^{xv} is an autobiographical book of Mamoni Roysom Goswami, prominent novelist and recipient of the Sahitya Academy and Gyanpeeth awards uses about sixty five words of Arabic origin, such as: عدالة (Adalat)- Court, وداع (Bida)- Farewell, فرمان (Forman)- Order, decree, عمارة (Emarat)- Building, تعليم (Talim)- Lesson, and so on.^{xvi}

Usage of Arabic Words and Terms in Assamese Language

Muslims started to acquire and speak Assamese with their Assamese cohabitants beginning in the 13th century of Ahom governance. When conversing in Assamese, speakers would naturally incorporate both local vernacular and technical terms of Arabic origin. This blending of languages highlights the seamless integration of Arabic vocabulary into everyday Assamese speech, reflecting the rich linguistic and cultural exchange that has occurred over time. The British officials in Assam in 1826 employed a great deal of Arabic vocabulary in their administrative, military, and judicial nomenclature. Arabic words were thus spoken by

everyone in Assam, from government officials to common people, to the point where they became an integral part of the language and literature of the region.

The Arabic terms that are frequently used in Assamese language and literature can be divided into certain set of categories. Those are- Islamic religious terms, Educational terms, Socio- Cultural terms, Administrative and Military terms, Revenue terms, Legal and Judicial terms, Economics and Commercial terms, Human Life and Medicine terms, terms related to Food and Fruits terms, terms pertaining to domestic items, Abusive terms, terms related to times and seasons and miscellaneous subjects terms ^{xvii}. Let us look at some of the examples in specific categories:

Terms relating to Education:

| Sl. no. | Assamese use | Arabic words | English synonyms |
|---------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Aam | عام | General |
| 2. | Adat | عادة | Habit |
| 3. | Barbar | بربر | Uncivilized, Berber |
| 4. | Chuk/ Chok | سوق | Street of a bazaar |
| 5. | Faida | فائدة | Benefit |
| 6. | Farak | فرق | Difference |
| 7. | Janab | جناب | Honourable |
| 8. | Kitap/Kitab | كتاب | Book |
| 9. | Khabar | خبر | News, Information |
| 10. | Nakal | نقل | Copy, Transcription |

Administrative and Military Terms:

| Sl. no. | Assamese use | Arabic words | English synonyms |
|---------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. | Badali | بدلي | Transfer |
| 2. | Daftar | دفتر | Portfolio |
| 3. | Dastur | دستور | Rules |
| 4. | Farman | فرمان | Order |
| 5. | Istifa | استعفاء | Resignation |
| 6. | Manjur | منظور | Grant, acceptance |
| 7. | Mokam | مقام | Place |
| 8. | Mutayen | متعين | Posting, deploying |
| 9. | Sadar | صدر | Center, headquarter |
| 10. | Tadarak | تدارك | Looking after |

Terms relating to Revenue Department:

| Sl. No. | Assamese use | Arabic words | English synonyms |
|---------|--------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1. | Araj | عرض | Submission |
| 2. | Dakhal | دخل | Interference, possession |
| 3. | Dalil | دليل | Deed |
| 4. | Haq | حق | Right, legal |
| 5. | Ijmali | اجمالي | Joint, collective |
| 6. | Qabuliyat | قبولية | Deed of land settlement |
| 7. | Khajna | خزنة | Revenue |
| 8. | Khiraj | خراج | Land revenue |
| 9. | Mahafez | محافظ | Record keeper |
| 10. | Tafsil | تفصيل | Detail statement |

Legal and Judicial Terms:

| Sl. No. | Assamese Use | Arabic Words | English Synonyms |
|---------|--------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1. | Adalat | عدالة | Court |
| 2. | Batil | باطل | Cancel |
| 3. | Faisala | فيسة | Decision |
| 4. | Hakim | حاكم | Judge |
| 5. | Hazir | حاضر | Present |
| 6. | Ikhtiyar | اختيار | Authority |
| 7. | Insaf | انصاف | Justice |
| 8. | Jimma | ذمة | Custody |
| 9. | Qanoon | قانون | Law |
| 10. | Zamanat | ضمانة | Bail |

There are many categories of Arabic terms and phrases which cannot be possible to write in this brief study. This study reveals that the Arabic language has exerted a significant relation with Assamese language and literature, spanning from the early periods to the modern era. Every book in Assamese language contains a substantial number of Arabic words with their appropriate application. The use of Arabic terms and words, as employed by Assamese writer, refine and enhance the narratorial voice. This linguistic integration allows for a richer and more nuanced articulation of ideas, reflecting the deep cultural and historical ties between the Arabic and Assamese languages. The integration of Arabic elements has been prevalent in the Assamese language, a trend that has persisted throughout the 20th century and continues to be prominent in contemporary literature. These Arabic influences can be observed across a wide array of subjects and genres, demonstrating their enduring significance and impact on Assamese literary expression. Hence, it is apparent that Arabic has wielded a significant and enduring influence on Assamese literature, permeating its linguistic fabric and enriching its literary landscape with a diverse array of vocabulary, themes, and cultural references borrowed from the Arabic language.

Conclusion

Through this study it is observed that the language of Arabic has a significant relation with Assamese language and literature from the earlier to the Modern period. This language had a notable position in India as well as in Assam. It is also reveals that in every book of Assamese language undoubtedly contains a good number of Arabic words with their appropriate application. Besides, there are many Arabic words and terms used by Assamese writer in their writings with a view to making their expression more suitable and proper on any subject during 20th century as even today. Accordingly, the Assamese speaking people knowingly or unknowingly used Arabic words and terms in Assamese language. So, it may be said that this language has an immense value not only among Muslims but among non- Muslims also in their daily conversation. Today, Arabic has occupied the position of an important language as spoken by millions of people and it is studied as a language of great civilization all over the World.

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Notes:

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