



IMPACT OF TURKO-MUGHAL INTERACTION WITH THE AHOMS IN ASSAM

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

The interaction of the Turkish and the Mughals with the Ahoms occupied an important part in the field of historiography in the medieval period of Assam. The beginning of Turkish invasion in Assam was started with Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji from Bengal in 1205-06. A series of invasions was followed later on from Bengal by his descendants. The Mughals had continued the same line of aggression in Assam after the Turks. The 17th century is the 'Century of Ahom-Mughal Conflict' in the history of Assam. So, the age-long interaction in between the Turko-Mughal and the Ahoms had left a remarkable impact in the different dimensions of socio-cultural, political, economic history of Assam. It was out of many centuries age-long conflict and socio-cultural interactions, many transitions were noticed in the geo-politics of Assam. For example, the prolonged interaction led to increase the number of Muslims; the dominant role of the Persian language and the emergence of Persian literature; the appearance of coins and inscriptions; the appointment of Mohammedan in the administration of the Ahoms; the appearance of Mughal paintings in the Ahom set up; and finally, the event of matrimonial alliance in between the Mughals and the Ahoms. It was during the Ahom rule of around 600 years, the Ahom-Muslim relation was never disturbed in Assam. Both the communities maintained not only a close relationship between them, but out of centuries of assimilation, there developed a solid and strong Assamese society. The Muslims gradually occupied a unique position in the socio-economic, political and cultural fields of Assam. They formed a part and parcel of the Assamese society and joined in the collective venture to enrich the state and its people with every possible means. Out of this historical interaction between the Ahoms and Muslims, many artistic and architectural designs developed and many socio-cultural values were improved.

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Introduction

The Muslims occupied a unique position in the history of Assam. The footstep of the Muslims in Assam was seemed to be the arrival of the Ikhtiyar Uddin in the beginning of the thirteenth century in Assam. The Ahom also came in Assam after some years. During their long period of administration in Assam, the Ahom kings had to face a great challenge from the Sultanate of Bengal and the Mughal emperors of Delhi. The Muslim rulers had undertaken a long series of invasions time to time against the Ahom kings with a view to extend their frontier and tried to set up their administration in Assam. However, the invasion of the Muslims in Assam since the time of Ikhtiyar Uddin Mohammed Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji had far reaching significance in the history of Assam.

Beginning of Muslim settlements in Assam: It was due to the long five hundred years of struggles, the Muslim settlements took place in the different parts of Assam. The Turko-Mughal relation with the Ahom was one of the most important reasons for the increase of numerical strength of the Muslims in Assam. Apart from the wars and conquests in between the Turko-Mughal and Ahom, the interaction of both the races, had in fact, created a condition of atmosphere for the Muslims to settle and live here permanently.

Introduction of Persian language: The Muslims had recorded the history of Assam right from their footsteps in Assam. The Ahoms also, later on, had done the same. Both had the tradition of writing historical accounts and chronicles. Tai scholars had written Buranjis as per the instruction of the Ahom kings, which provided a lot of information regarding the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of Assam. The Muslim invasions of Assam (almost seventeen times) from 1206-1682 and socio-cultural, geographical and political conditions of Assam were reflected in various accounts, memoirs left by the Turko-Mughal

Waqiya Nabis (news reporter) and Muslim scholars. The Persian language was a dominant language during the entire medieval period of India, which had its entry with Sultan Mahmud's invasion of India in 1000 A.D. The Turko-Afghan rulers (Delhi Sultanate 1206-1526) and the Mughals (1526-1857) adopted the Persian language and nursed it to make it a common language of both Muslim and the Hindus. Under the Mughal patronage, the Persian language had reached its zenith and was taught in maktabas, madrasas etc. where both the Muslim and Hindus were taught. The Persian was also found as official language along with other languages in the kingdoms of Marathas and the Sikhs. In Assam also, the Persian language had occupied a considerable position. Due to long interaction in between the Turko-Mughal and the Ahoms, many Persian words were used in the writings and speeches of Assamese society. Many Persian words like Bazar, Diwar, Dokan, Mulk etc were found in the writings of Sankar Dev (1449-1568) and Madhab Dev. Regarding the influence of Persian in Ahom Buranjis, Dr. Surya Kumar Bhuiya remarked, 'The Buranjis compiled by Parmanand Bairagi of Gokulpur during the regime of Ahom king Udayaditya Singha, who ruled from 1670-73 was in Assamese but with a large admixture of Perso-Arabic diction'¹

The use of Persian language was much more observed in Assam during the Ahom- Mughal relation in the 17th century and particularly, when Mughal rule was set up for a short while in Gauhati and in the western Assam up to Barhnadi river. Many Persian terminologies relating to administrative and military departments like Barud, Amaldar, Insaf, Jallad, Talash, Chaprasi, Maf, Khidmat etc used in Assamese language.² The Ahom government had to apply Persian words and language for their official correspondence with the Mughals. Dr. S. K. Bhuiya in his work '*Annals of the Delhi Sultanate*' said, 'the Ahom monarchs maintained in his court a large number of Mohammedan officials, who deciphered Persian correspondences received from the outside and drafted letters to foreign sovereigns and potentates. The royal mint was under the Superintendence of a Mohammedan officer, and several Assamese kings and queens struck coins with Persian legends engraved on them. The Persian or Urdu language was not absolutely unknown among the mass of the people'. It was for the need of administrative purpose and official correspondences, many Ahom kings had to promote the Persian language in different sectors of administration. They adopted several measures for learning Persian language. They also hired Farsi Parhiyas (Persian Transcribers) with a view to transcribe Persian documents and other correspondence from the imperial Mughal and Delhi Sultanate. In course of time, many non-Muslim Assamese became well versed in Persian language and literature. G. Ram Barua rightly said that a man's knowledge is not complete without the knowledge of the Persian at that time.³ Similarly, Navakanta Barua, a renowned poet and novelist said, 'the influence of Persian language is so powerful and all prevailing on Assamese that today no one can speak standard Assamese without using Persian words'.⁴ But the decline of Mughal empire and the rise of English to the political power of India, the Persian language began to lose its position and finally in 1837, it was replaced by the Bengali language in Assam. Among other causes of its ruin, were the lack of nursing the language and branding it as the language of the Muslims.

Significant historical writings regarding Assam

The invasions of the Muslims had been mentioned in the different writings of Muslim historians and authors in Persian. For example, *Tabaqat-e-Nasiri* by Minhaj Uddin Siraj (covering first three Mohammedan invasions); *Tarikh-e-Firoj Shah* by Jia Uddin Barni; *Tarikh-e-Firistha* ie *Gulshan-e-Ibrahimi* by Mohammed Qasim; *The Akbar Nama* of Sheikh Abul Fazal; *Muntaqabuth Tawarikh* by Abdul Qadir Badauni; *Tabaqat-e-Akbari* by Khaza Nizam Uddin Ahmad Bakshi; *Tuzuk-e-Jahangiri* (an autobiography of Jahangir); *Baharistan-e- Gaibi* by Ala Uddin Ispahani alias Mirza Nathan also entitled Sitab Khan; *Padshahnama* by Abdul Hamid Lahori; *Alomgirnama* by Mirza Mohammed Qasim; *Futuhath-e-Alomgir* by Iswar Das ; *Zafarnama-e- Alamgir* known as *Aurangnama Waqiath and Halath -e- Alamgir* by Mirza Askari; *Masarir-e-Alomgiri* by Mohammed Saqi Mustaid Khan; *Riaz us Salatin* by Munshi Gulam Hussain Salim ; *Fathih-i- Ibriyah* known as *Tarikh-e- Mulke Asham or Tarikh-e- Assam* by Ibne Mohammed Wali Ahmed popularly known as Sihab Uddin Talish (who was basically a news reporter ie Waqiya Nabis and accompanied Mirzumla during his Assam expedition). The expeditions of the Turko-Afghan Muslims in Assam was well mentioned by a number of authors like H.K. Barpujari in his work (ed) *The Comprehensive History Of Assam* , Vol-II; S.L.Barua in her work *A Comprehensive History Of Assam* . Later on, in 1935, Dr. Maidul Islam Bora and Dr. Surya Kumar Bhuiya had presented articles on the theme like *History of Assam as told by Muslim Historians* and *Assam as seen by Sihab Uddin Talish* respectively on different occasions.⁵

Archeological set up: Apart from the literary sources of the Sultanate and Mughal period, there are a number of archeological sites in the form of mosques, roads etc in the different parts of Assam, which showed the foothold of the Muslim settlements in Assam. The Pooa-Mecca, in memory of a Muslim divine Gias Uddin Awliya in the 16th century, a mosque at Hajoo built by Lutfullah Siraji, Mughal Fauzdar of Gauhati, a mosque built at Mankachar in Rangamati in Goalpara in 1688-89 are some of the examples of Muslim architecture during the period.⁶

Evidence of coins: The evidence of coins also formed an important source of writing the socio- economic condition of a society of a period. It also helps us to know the chronology of the rulers, the names, titles, dates, extent of their kingdom, language, script and religions of the then society. So, the discovery of silver coins of Sultanate of Bengal and the Mughal emperors in the different parts of Assam, which indicate the extent of their advance in these areas. The silver coins of Gias Uddin Iwas Hussain 1226-27, the first Sultan of Bengal, which was found in 1880 in Gauhati (Kamrup); another silver coin (dated 1321-22) was found in 1911 at Rapaibari, Nagaon, Assam; a silver coin dated 1321-23 at Kodalgigaon in Nagaon district, Assam; a silver coin of Sultan Ilyas Shahi of Bengal dated 1357 minted at Kamrup, was found at Guahati; a number of coins of Alauddin Hussain Shah of Bengal (1493-1519) and many others coins of Sultanate described the march of their armies in the interior of Assam.⁷ Besides the Sultanate rulers of Bengal, a good number of Mughal coins were also found in many parts of Assam. The silver coins

of Shahjahan (minted at Akbarabad) and a few coins of Aurangazeb were found at Sibsagar in Assam. Some Mughal coins were discovered at Panbari (about 14 miles north of Dhubri). The coins of Shahjahan, in one side, depict the names of four caliphs, while the other side carried the name of Shahjahan.⁸

Inscriptions: The inscriptions on different kinds also contributed a lot to field of historiography. The inscriptions on the works of religious buildings like dargahs, mosques, temples had added our knowledge on the different aspects of the society. The epigraphs in the different mosques, shrines like Munger Shah Nafah inscription in Persian on the wall of Dargah of Shah Nafah indicate the campaign of Ala Uddin Hussain Shah (1498). The Persian inscription at Hajo mosques, built by Lutfullah Seraji, a Mughal Faujdar, Gauhati, during the reign of Joydhwaj, the Ahom King (1648-1663), the Persian inscription on the Mankachar hill mosque, Goalpara, in 1689 etc which shows the Muslim settlements and their amicable relationship with other communities in Assam.⁹ Apart from the monuments, the inscriptions on the canons of the Mughal, particularly, explored many information on the Ahom-Mughal conflicts and settlement of the Muslims in this region. Many Mughal cannons, which were captured by the Ahom soldiers during their clash with the Mughals, have been discovered in various locations of Assam; namely Gauhati, Silghat, Lakhimpur, Margerita (Dibrugarh), Tinsukia, Dikon etc. All these cannons containing Persian inscriptions, were used in the battle of Saraighat. In addition to that, the Ahom soldiers had also captured huge number of Mughal guns, which were used during their long struggle against the Mughals.¹⁰

Appointment of the Muslims in Ahom administration

The Muslims were closely attached to the everyday life of the main stream of Assamese society. As a result of their cordial relationship, the Assamese Muslims were mainly appointed in the professions, in which they were skilled i.e. embroidery, engraving, wood-carving, cannon- casting, sword-making etc. The Muslims artisans and craftsmen were also included in the khanikar khel or the guild of artisans, which worked under the supervision of superintendent known as Khanikar Barua. Apart from this, the Muslim women of Assam had also a positive knock and share in the artistic weaving. There was constant interchange of embassies between the Ahom and the Mughal courts. The Ahom Government appointed some officers to look into the feasibility of introducing some foreign customs, which would benefit the Assamese society and increase the prestige of royal court. During the reign of Rudra Singh, the Ahom king, appointed two officers namely the Khaunds and Bairagis, whose main duty was to visit the prominent places like Delhi, Agra of Mughal India and import some meaningful cultural and political norms for the enhancement of the dignity of Ahom court.¹¹

The Ahom kings had engaged in their court a good number of Muslim officials for different royal purposes of the administration like translating correspondence received from outside particularly from the Mughal court, drafting letters on behalf of the Ahom kings to the foreign sovereign etc. Even the royal mint was under the superintendence of a Muslim officer. In addition to this, many Ahom kings along with their queens had struck coins with Persian legends engraved on them.¹² The number of Muslim officers, who were attached to the Ahom court, were 12 Dewans, 01 Nawab Dekah, 2 Persian Readers, 01 Engraver.¹³ The use of Persian or Urdu language was also popular among the Assamese society and it was found in a witness in a criminal trial of about 1775 reproduced the exact words of the conversation which had been carried on by the accused in "Farsi". The main body of the present Mohammedan community of Assam was formed during the time of Mohammedan wars, which was further enhanced time to time by fresh immigration and conversion to Islam.

Prevalence of communal harmony in Assam

Many Ahom kings had granted a number of land grants to Muslim Faquirs, Saints and their shrines, which had tremendous impact on the social-cultural life of Assam. Anwar Hazi Faqir, an Assamese Muslims saint, after his performing Haz (a pilgrimage to Makkah) had met Lakshi Singha, the Ahom king. The Ahom king was very much pleased by his conversation with Faqir and granted him a revenue free land in Kamrup along with a good number of servitors. The other muqams like Shah Madar Bar-Muqam in Bauri Parganah, Shah Faquir muqam in Barnagar parganah, Panch Pirer muqam in khettrie parganah, and the shrine Hazo muqam (which is called one fourth of Mecca). The land grant of the Ahom king was embodied in a royal farman inscribed on a copper plate. It was said that "Anwar Hazi Faquir Parsi-Parhia will enjoy the above in perpetuity, down to the days of his sons, grandsons and their descendants on the male line, wishing for the welfare of the king. He will also be the head of the above-mentioned muqams, and maintain his religion there by".¹⁴ Another instance of honour was shown to a Muslim priest in the court of Ahom king of Assam, was the case of a Muslim named Newas. The royal court of Rudra Singha, the Ahom king, witnessed the presence of numerous attendants dressed in the high Musalman fashion. Newas was residing nearby the Ahom capital and fascinated the darbar hall. The Ahom king usually send him to Hazo for prayer seeking the prosperity of the province and royal family. The kings were so fond of the Muslim priests that there were three or four priests always remained presence at the Ahom palace. And whenever the Ahom king come out for fresh air, they called down the blessing of Almighty on him with elevated hands. The Ahom kings also sent presents to the Hajoo Maqam, through these priests.¹⁵ It was not only the Ahom kings, but the Muslim rulers were also very much active and interested for the improvement of mosques, shrines along with Hindu temples during the four decades of Mughal rule in Gauhati and Kamrup in the mid of 17th century. For example, the foundation stone of the mosque at Shujabad (near the shrine of Gias Uddin Auliya at Hajoo) was laid by Lutfullah Sirazi during the region of Shah Jahan Badshah Ghazi, and the Governorship of Abdul Ghazi, Shuja Uddin Mohammed Shah. The mosque was completed by Niamatullah, son of Lutfullah Siraji in 1657 AD. Like the Ahom kings, Aurangazeb, the Mughal emperor, had also granted a number of land grants to many Hindu priests of Assam. For instance, a gift of two bisas (bighas?) of land in Mauza Turukpara, Sarkar Dakhinkul was granted to two pujaris or priests, named Sri Ballabh and Pranath of the Kamakhya

temple, Gauhati, Assam, in the 9th year of Emperor Aurangzeb's reign i.e 1667 AD. (Rabiul awal 1078 A.H.). The land was exempted from the payment of normal taxes and from the customary personal service to the state.¹⁶ On September, 1667, Aurangzeb had issued another Sanad in 9th year of his accession to the throne, to two pujaris named Sudaman Barman and his son Kamdeb of Umananda Temple at Gauhati, which granted two plots of land (free land grants) in Bangeswar, pargana Pandu and Sarkar Dakhinkul. The two priests were also granted an amount of Rs 20/ for their expenditure on high and low lands.¹⁷

Ahom-Mughal paintings

Another significant impact of the Ahom-Mughal interaction was observed in the Assamese manuscript *Hastividyanava*, which was compiled by Sukumar Barkaith in 1734 C.E under the instruction of Siva Singha, the Ahom king and his queen Ambika Devi. The work is basically a treatise on elephants, showing the different types of elephants etc. But what made the work a historical landmark is due to its some distinctive features of illustrating the Ahom- Mughal paintings. Sukumar in his work, inserted a number of pictures depicting the king, queens, maids, attendants of the palace, nobles, officers, subjugated chieftains, Hindustani musicians, dancing girls, wrestlers etc. Interestingly, there was a painted scene of the portals of a Mughal palace with their *Nahbat-khana*, opposite to every picture of Ahom court. During the reign of Rudra Singh (1696-1714), the Mughal costumes were also introduced in the Ahom court. The Ahom kings along with their nobles were depicted in *Hastividyanava* with wearing the Mughal head dress. Even a fully blossomed rose was shown in the hands of Ahom king, which was generally observed in the Mughal portraits. It was also said that the drawings were the result of two painters viz Dilbar, a Muslim and Doshai, a Hindu painter.¹⁸ Besides *Hastividyanava*, there were other works also which showed the influence of Mughal school of painting in the Ahom royal court and an example of Ahom-Muslim cultural tie of four hundred years back.

Matrimonial alliance in between the Mughal-Ahom

Amidst the series of wars and conquests, a matrimonial relationship was also found in between Prince Azam, son of Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor and Ramani Gabharu (Nangchen Gabharu), daughter of Joyadhwaj Singh, the Ahom King. The event was narrated in several *Buranjis* and Persian chronicles in the way that as per the Treaty of Gilajharighat, on 23rd January, 1663, Joyadhwaj Singh, the Ahom king had agreed, along with other conditions, to send his own daughter with worth dowry to the imperial court of the Mughal. When the Ahom was defeated in the hands of Mughal army led by Mir Jumla, the Mughal General, a treaty was signed in between the Mughal and the Ahom King. The Ahom princess Ramani Gabharu or Nangchen Gabharu, was born of Joydhwaj Singh and his wife Pakhari Gabharu (who was the eldest daughter of Momai Tamuli Barbarua.) Ramani Gabharu was married to Prince Mohammed

Azam, known as Azamtara in *Buranjis*, son of Aurangzeb, the Mughal emperor. The wedding ceremony had been taken place after five years of her sending to imperial harem i.e. on May, 1668, with her new name Rahmat Banu.¹⁹

The Ahom-Mughal relationship can be understood from the treatment meted out to the two Ahom envoys, who were sent to the Mughal imperial court as a part of Treaty of Gilajharighat in 1663 in between the Ahom and Mughal. The two Assamese envoys Sanatan and Chandra Kandali, left the Ahom capital on 25th December, 1663, in the company of the Mogul Ambassadors Dor Beg and Rustom Beg. The account of their journey to Delhi and staying there deserves reproduction, "Then our Katakis or envoys left their boats at Rajmahal in charge of seven of their attendance. From there, they continued their journey in an imperial *Rahegari* [*Rahdari* ?], and arrived at Delhi after a four days halt at Agra. The Ahadis [Dor Beg and Rustom Beg] having reported their arrival to the emperor, they were lodged in the quarters of Nawab Hasan Ali situated on the Bank of the Jamuna. The Nawab was absent on war duty. Sanatan Katakis said to Dor Beg and Rustom Beg, "we are Brahmans and how will it be possible to arrange for our food and residence in this place?" Dor Beg then informed the Dewan, brought some workers and constructed separate houses for the two Katakis near the river Jamuna. Two days later, the Dewan sent to the Katakis the following *siddha* or present of food article, rice 600 maunds, fine rice 80 maunds, mug dal 40 maunds, kalai dal 20 maunds, masur dal 20 maunds, mah 60 maunds, ghee 40 seers, pepper 8 seers, turmeric powder 4 seers, asafoetida half a seer, ginger 10 seers, milk 8 mathis, salt 20 maunds, sugar 20 maunds, bay-leaf one load of two baskets, tatar 7 baskets, bilati pan or betel-leaf 8 baskets, and 3 deer. Then after five days came the *Siddha* from the Emperor. The Katakis were given 500 rupees and their men rupees 200. Then after an interval of eight days our two Katakis were presented before the emperor. The Padshah was sitting on the throne... Men were busy in their work sitting under roofs with golden streamers fluttering above. Then the Padshah, Sri Sri Lord of Delhi. Sri Srijut Maharaja Srijut Amir-ul-Omrao Alamgir Padshah heard the letter and said, "I will relinquish the territories occupied in excess of the Koch boundaries and I shall also make over those subjects [of Assam] who have been captured by our men." An epistle was made over, but no envoy was sent. Sanatan and Chandra Kandali were given a present of 1,000 rupees in cash for eating Pan and Tamol, and were sent off by the Dewan from Delhi: and they also received the following articles, two pairs of silver trays, 02 jamas, 02 pags, 02 patukas, 02 chit -pamarus, and 02 pegasis; ...The Nawab of Dacca. Shaista Khan, despatched his envoy Panditrai to the Swargadeo in the company of the two Assamese envoys." ²⁰

Conclusion

The Turko-Mughal relation with the Ahoms had left a significant impact in the history of medieval Assam. The age-long centuries had produced numerous results in the different socio-cultural, administrative, trade and mercantile fields of Assam. As a result of this, the settlement of Mohammedan community took place in different directions of Assam. The Persian language was also adopted in many fields of the society. Many Ahom kings also had granted a number of land grants to Muslim faqirs and their shrines, which had developed a kind of communal harmony in the society. Apart from this, the Muslims gradually became

an integral part of the Ahom society, as the Assamese Muslims were mainly appointed in the different professions like embroidery, engraving, wood-curving, sword making etc. In addition to this, the Ahom kings had engaged in their royal court a good number of Mohammedan officials for different royal purposes like royal correspondence, drafting letters etc. The Islamic influence is also visible in Assamese songs and music. The singing of Quwali, Gazal, Zikir and Zari become familiar in Assamese society. The Muslims of Assam were so assimilated in the society that it was difficult to identify the difference between the Assamese Hindus and Muslims in cultural field. In socio-cultural functions, many rituals have become so common between the two religious sections. As a result, a water tight close cultural affinity was observed between the Hindus and Muslims of Assam right from the 13th century. Sihab Uddin Talish found so close link between the Muslims and Hindus of Brahmaputra valley that he stated that “nothing of Islam except the name, their hearts are inclined more towards mixing with the Assamese than towards association with the Muslim. Thus, the followers of the Turko-Mughal races became a part of the Assamese society.

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