



**SUFIS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE
CULTURAL LIFE OF MEDIEVAL ASSAM
IN 16-17th CENTURY**

DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Master of Philosophy

IN

HISTORY

BY

NAHIDA MUMTAZ

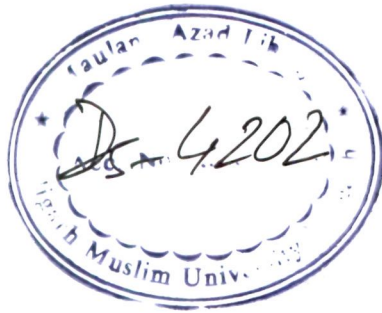
Under the Supervision of
DR. MOHD. PARVEZ

CENTRE OF ADVANCED STUDY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY
ALIGARH (INDIA)

2010



DS4202



22 JUL 2013

CENTRE OF ADVANCED STUDY



Department of History
Aligarh Muslim University
Aligarh-202 002

Dr. Mohd. Parwez
Reader

Dated: June 9, 2010

To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "***Sufis and their Contribution to the Cultural Life of Medieval Assam in 16-17th Century***" is the original work of **Ms. Nahida Mumtaz** completed under my supervision. The dissertation is suitable for submission and award of degree of **Master of Philosophy** in History.

(Dr. Mohd. Parwez)
Supervisor

Dedicated
To
My Parents

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	i – ii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	iii
Introduction	1 – 09
CHAPTER-I: Origin and Development of Sufism in India	10 – 31
CHAPTER-II: Sufism in Eastern India	32 – 45
CHAPTER-III: Assam: Evolution of Polity	46 – 70
CHAPTER-IV: Sufis in Assam	71 – 94
CHAPTER-V: Sufis Influence in Assam: Evolution of Composite Culture	95 – 109
Conclusion	110 – 111
Bibliography	iv – viii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is pleasant duty for me to acknowledge the kindness of my teachers and friends from whose help and advice I have benefited. It is a rare obligation to express my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Mohd. Parwez who has taken tremendous pain understanding and care to explain several aspect of this work. This work could see the light of the day only because of his constant encouragement and guidance particularly when I have embarked on to take up this work, which was completely new to me. I am grateful to him for taking keen interest and having cordial attitude during the completion. I would not be exaggerating if I say that it is to him that I owe deepest debt.

It gives me immense pleasure to express my deep sense of gratitude and sincere thanks to Professor Bhanwar Lal Bhadani, Chairman, Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh for his valuable suggestion and constant help from time to time.

I thank all my friends and senior of the department for their endearing support and enthusiasm.

My especial thanks are due to the staff the Department Library, Centre of Advanced Study, Department of History and Maulana Azad Library, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh.

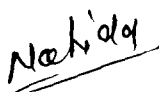
This acknowledgement would not be complete without remembering my grand father (Late) Mohd. Samsul Haq and grand mother Asma Khatoon.

My family member were a constant source of encouragement especially my younger brother and sisters Nadeem Khan, Nagma and Nishat.

Last but not the least I acknowledge the sincere contribution and sacrifice of my beloved father Mohd. Mumtaz Khan and mother Mrs. Anjum from the bottom of my heart. It is indeed their inspiration, moral and emotional support and blessing that gave me the strength and determination to complete this work. It is the path shown by them that I tread upon and have come past a significant milestone on it.

While my dept both general and specific are many in venture of this sort. I accept the sole responsibility for any error that might have inadvertently crept into this work.

Thanks are due to Mr. Fahimuddin for typing my thesis with wholehearted devotion and sincerity.


(Ms Nahida Mumtaz)

ABBREVIATIONS

- EI - Epigraphia Indica
- JARS - Journal of the Assam Research Society, Guwahati.
- JASB - Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
- JBORS - Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.
- PIHC - Proceeding of Indian History Congress.

INTRODUCTION

The medieval Assam had been a cradle of Sufis and Sannyasis, where they had preached their ideas and contributed towards the making of the cultural life of the people which is still reflecting.

The passage of time has evolved composite culture in India, assimilating diverse elements in its fold. But the composite social aspects are suddenly under frantic attack which is damaging the social fabric perhaps due to the anxiety to provide sustenance to this cultural aspects are conscious efforts on the part of academia to identify the symbols and elements of composite culture and such elements of our socio-cultural and material life.

The present study is an attempt to analyse the evolution of composite culture in Assamese society. Although the Assam state is inhabited by large number of tribal and ethnic groups but for present purpose, we have concentrated mainly on mutual interaction between Hindu and Muslim communities.

The Muslims started migrating to India in a large number after establishment of Delhi Sultanate. Several intellectuals

(danishmand) and Sufi had also migrated during the period and perhaps it was this section of migrants, who could be credited with the germination of composite culture in India, which achieved its glory, during the reign of Akbar. The Sufism and Bhakti movement in India, owing to mutual interaction and influences has largely given rise to the composite culture.

The Sufi were the spiritual leaders who developed their intuition by exercise contemplation and self denial. Similarly Sufism appears to be fascinated with occult, orgiastic practices and reflect a process and intoxicated dancing, gradually a large section of Sufis were able to stabilise emotions and understandings.

By 12th century, Sufism had become integral to Islamic social life and a large number of Sufis promoted the elements of humanity, devoid of caste or religious distinctions. They had not only imbibed the spirit of humanity but they seriously preached the humanity.

The syncretism is visible in art architecture material culture like in agriculture, dress, ornaments, social customs, music and literature. The assimilatory and fusion of various aspects of the culture is obvious is the work of Amir Khusrau, Malik Mohammad Jaisi, Tansen Mirza, Abdus Samad (Court Painter) and other. The

translation of Mahabharat (Razmnama) Ramanaya Suka Saptati (Tutinama) are testimony of growing syncretism.

The catalyst to this syncretism were Sufis. The Sufi movement was well spread in north India and gradually the Sufi's had extended the area of activity towards eastern India.

Gradually, these Sufis spread in eastern India and the earliest Sufi immigration to eastern India took place around 1221 after a few year of Bakhtiyar's conquest of the region. These Sufi immigrants established a *Khankah* in the present Birbhum district. The Sufis were regarded as the carrier of Islamic literary and intellectual tradition to eastern India and initially, the prominent of them stayed in successive capitals of Bengal. Most of them belonged to either Suhrawardi, Chishti, or Firdausiya Silsilah. According to Minhaj-us-Siraj, the founder of Bengal Sultanate Ghiyasuddin Iwaz got blessed by two dervishes is Afghanistan, when he shared the food with them like north India in Bengal also the connection between political authority and Sufis blessing was visible. Nizamuddin Auliya's *Khankah* emerged important centre of the training of the Sufis where almost all political authority used to visit the shrine to seek blessings of the saints.

Sheikh Nizamuddin Auliya's first disciple from Bengal was Shaikh Akhi Sirajuddin who was revered that he was entitled as *Ayina-i-Hindustan*. He returned to Bengal around 1325 and made several disciples, foremost among them was Shaikh Ala-al-Haq, who was instrumental in spreading Sufi tradition in Bengal. After Shaikh his son Nur Qutb-i-Alam.

Besides the Chishti order we also find enormous influence of Shaikh Muzaffar who initially came as a scholar to tutor the Sultan and thus renounced the world once he met Firdausiya Sufi Sharafuddin Yahya Moneri. He had also visited Chittagong while going to Mecca.

Similarly Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi after studying Sufism at Tabriz initially and then studied under Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi travelled to India and stayed at Lakhnauti, where he established Khankah and made several disciples.

Another important Sufi Shah Jalal reached sylhet and established his Khankah. According to Ibn Battuta the Shaikh was famous Sufi and credited with several miracles and was revered by the inhabitants.

Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji was first Turkish Commander to enter Assam, while making an effort to invade Tibet. An inscription found near Guwahati testifies about the disastrous campaign of Bakhtiyar Khalji, but it had also marked the beginning of Muslim settlement in Assam. There were series of invasions by the Afghan rulers. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji, ruler of Gaur (Bengal) invaded Kamrup in 1226-27 prince Nasiruddin son of Sultan Iltutmish ruled Bengal as viceroy after overthrowing and he had also appointed a tributary king in Kamrup. The first serious attempt to conquer Kamrup was made by Ikhtayaruddin Yuzbak Tughril Khan, the ruler of Bengal who advanced upto the capital city of Kamrup and built a mosque, but his conquest subsequently failed due to climatic condition. Later Kamrup was invaded by Ghiyasuddin Bahadur, Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (Bengal Sultan) Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Sultan Ilyas Shah (1342-57) Sikandar Shah (1357-62) and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1393-1410).

Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah made attempt to annex Kamrup permanently and he had extended the territory up to Hajo and Barnadi Kamrup was placed under the control of two Afghan commanders namely, Ghiyasuddin Aulia and Musundar Ghazi.

Ghiyasuddin Auliya is believed to have come with the conquering army and founded Muslim settlements. He built a mosque on a hill in Hajo and was later buried there. It is popularly known as “Pao Mecca” and Mirza Nathan had called him a darvesh. The influence of these interaction survived even after the withdrawal of Bengal political suzerainty. The archaeological evidence like brick lined tank, a tank named Hoseyn Dighi probably excavated by Hussain Shah and twelve brick built house suggest the presence of Muslim Masons and artisans in Kamrup.

Sufis started entering into Assam from 14th century as the Muslims started setting down in different parts of the state. Some of the prominent Sufis of Assam of 16-17 centuries were Peer Shah Madhar, Sufi Chand Khan, Syed Raushan Ali Chishti (Boga Baba) Shah Ghazi Aksar, Hazrat Shah Miran (Azan Fakir). These Sufis had been attributed to many legends and their tombs have become part of popular culture of Assam to day.

The paucity of contemporary sources was one of the impediment for the progress of the work. Unfortunately like North India, we do not find any *Malfiz* collection or biographical details of the Sufis in Assam therefore, origin and their subscription to any main order of Sufism in Assam is shrouded in mystery. The evidences are not

forth coming to establish their evolution as a Sufi. However their writings in form of *Zikirs*, *Zari* and even *Kirtan* reflect their thought and their attitude towards state and common people. These have been used in our work. They have inculcated a sense of mutual love trust and co-existence among the people.

We find lack of emperical study on Sufi movement in medieval Assam. The teaching life and the order to which they were associated has not been studied so far.

The study is therefore a modest attempt to provide emperical study on the theme beyond eastern frontier of Bengal. We shall however concentrate in the Brahmaputra Valley as this was the traditional heartland of Assam and area of Ahom kings.

Large number of work have been done on Sufism but all these have not taken into consideration the development in medieval Assam. Even the recent publication by *Richard M. Eaton*, "The Rise of Islam and Bengal Frontier 1204-1760", does not provide any information on such movement. Some work are available in Bengali and Assamese but these suffer from lack of empirical analysis. Even the several contemporary sources like *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, '*Baharistan-*

i-Ghaibi of Mirza Nathan and 'Rehla' of Ibn-i-Battuta. Some of *Buranjis* do also mention about them.

Still one of prominent surviving reminder of their contribution are their *dargah* located in different part of the region, which command respect all section of the society. The legends may not stand to a scientific security but the lasting memories of the legends appear to be some kind of driving force in the society. The work has also taken into account role of these legends.

For the sake of presentation the dissertation has been divided into five chapter, where chapter I about the origin and development of Sufism, Islam the religion of mankind, the "Complete Code of life revealed for the first man and the first Prophet Hazarat Adam (AWS), in the time immemorial by the creator as a guidance for solution of human problems both in the perestarial world and the world to come hereafter. The Sufism entered into India around 11th Century and gradually there emerged some prominent Sufi Silsilah. The second chapter under the caption of a brief history of Sufism in Eastern India. According to some evidences do not reflect any sufi in Bengal actually indulged in the destruction of Temple.

The third chapter Assam: Evolution of Polity, Assam was largely ruled by Ahoms. In the Brahmaputra valley there were established state formations existing prior to 1228. The agrarian economy was primary means of production. The Ahom society was divided in aristocracy, common people and after sometime in late period the divides on was in between higher caste and lower caste.

The fourth chapter Sufism in Assam, various sufi saints arrived and their *Silsilah* in different parts of the region and establishment of *Khankah*. Their life their activities and obviously their Shrines and their role over the society, policy and culture of Assam received prime treatment in the work. The trace will be given on the attribution of mystical powers to the Sufis.

The fifth chapter Sufis Influence on Assam Evolution of Composite Culture. The close contact of the sufi saints with the common masses and their mutual interaction with the state and people, even after the death of the sufi saints their tombs and teaching emerged as composite culture in Assam.

Chapter – I

Origin and Development of Sufism in India

CHAPTER – I

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF SUFISM IN INDIA

The terms Sufi *Wali Allah* (protégé of God) dervish and *faqir* are applied to Muslim spiritualists who attempt to achieve a development of their intuitive faculties through ascetic exercises contemplation renunciation and self-denial.¹

Sufism as a means to achieving the highest form of obedience to God had a long course of development in the history of Islam.² It is a stream of intuitive perception with emphasis on an emotional attachment to God. It is personal and experiential in

¹ Saiyid Athar Abas Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India to 1600 A.D.*, Vol.I, 1986 (reprint) Introduction.

² S.K. Abdul Latif, *The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal 1301-1550*. Introduction.

character and in apparent contrast to Islamic theology which lays stress as a received knowledge of God, law and rituals. The Sufis being well-versed in Islamic sciences stuck to the prescribed forms of worship and ritual as laid down by the “Quran and the tradition of the prophet. Apart from the obligatory forms of prayers the Sufis developed and used certain practices to make their prayers more effective by practicing love repentance renunciation of the world remembrance meditation, devotion etc.³

The word Sufi is derived from Suf meaning “wool” and the ascetics who wore woollen garments in place of finer ones like silk or cotton as a mark of asceticism and self denial, were known as Sufis. Generally a Sufi used to have a simple life and strove to achieve the inner realization of divine unity by arousing intuitive and spiritual faculties. Hasan Basri a prominent Islamic theologian describes the characteristics of a Sufi as he who wears wool out of humility towards God increases the illumination of his insight and his heart,

³ For an account of the forms and norms of mystical practice, A.J. Arberry *Sufism*, Unwin paperback, London, 1979, pp.51-52.

but he who wears it out of pride and arrogance will be thrust down to hell with the devil".⁴

The Sufism derives its conception from the theory of "Unity of Being" (*Wahdat-ul-Wajud*) which has been enunciated by Ibn Arabi (1165-1240). According to theory God is both transcendent and Immanent as transcendence and immanence are two fundamental aspects of reality where.⁵ He is absolute being and is the sole source of all existence in him alone being and existence are one and inseparable there is no such thing as union with God in the sense of becoming one with God but there was the realization of the already existing fact that the mystic is one with God. This philosophy was very compatible with the theistic philosophy of the Yogis cult particularly with Nath Yogis.⁶

The Sufis indulge in meditation and also used music (*sama*) to attain ecstasy they were organized in different orders (*silsilah*) and had established *Khankah* (hospices), which emerged as centre of

⁴ T.C. Rajtogi, *Islamic Mysticism Sufism*, p.1-2, 1982, Philip K. Hitti, *A History of Arts*, pp.433. M.P. Srivastava, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, p.19. Allahabad 1975, The Ency of Islam, Vol.IV, Part III, London, p.631, 1964.

⁵ Abu-al-Hajib, *At Suharawardi Kitab-ul-Muridir*. An Abridged translation and introduction by Memhem Milson, Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.3.

⁶ Nazibullah, *Islamic Literature was Hington*, p.149. S.A. Malik, *Sufi Aur Sufibad*, p.17, Jorhat, 1975.

mediation, mutual love and trust. This was opened to all irrespective of caste, class and religion. These had become so popular that even after death of Sufi, these emerged also centre of pilgrimage for every section of the society particularly of the Hindu and Muslim Communities, giving emergence to the syncretic shrines and as symbols of mutual love trust and to brotherhood.

By the 12th century Sufism had become a universal aspect of Islamic social life whose influence had spread to all Muslim. There were also on social life whose influence had spread to all Muslims. There were also an important number of Sufis who transcending religious and communal of distinctions promoted the interests of humanity at large. On the whole Sufism gave meaning and mission to the religious feelings and beliefs of the wide cross section of society both in India and in many parts of the Islamic World.

Islam, the religion of mankind, the 'Complete Code of life', revealed for the first time on the first man and the First prophet Hazrat Adam (AWS), in time immemorial, by the Creator as a guidance for the solution of Human problems both in the perestarial world and the world to come hereafter. After the death of Hazrat Adam there were a long series of prophets who came to this world.

Only to remained the mankind the same 'code of life' that is the Religion Islam. Hazrat Mohammad (PBUH) was the last prophet of this series and no other prophet will come after his death. Infact, this divine code of life was completed and finalized through the revelation of prophet Mahammad, who had practically established it in Medina as an Islamic Republic in 722 A.D. as an example for the people of subsequent generations.

After the death prophet Mahammad (PBUH) the responsibility, as no other prophet will be revealed, of the guidance of mankind has been entrusted upon the Pious followers of prophet Mohammad (SM) and ultimately the four pious caliphs, who were selected as the president of Islamic Republic in Medina, had displayed their duties for a few years upto 761 A.D., but with the ascendancy of the Umayyad Dynasty over the throne of Islamic Republic, every thing was shattered. They had not only changed the Republican character into a Monarchical one but by adopting a huge number of Un-Islamic principles, they had weaken as well as broken the real spirit of Islam and ethos of mankind. At this situation, being disgusted with the worldliness and absolutism of the Umayyad sovereigns, a number of pious man started opposing their activities

and followed the path of self purification. They sought to secure salvation through devotional practices, meditations and retirement from Society. They also started to sever their connections with the world and strengthened a trend by meditations on God, the soul, the mysteries of creations, and herein lies the starting point of sufism, the mystic path in Islam.

But the question of the Origin of Sufism has long been debated by western scholars, most of whom, until the last generations, held that the essential ideas of Islamic mysticism had originated from alien, non Islamic sources.⁷

But so far mysticism is concerned, Islam does not encourage it. Even the prophet himself said that “There is no monkery in Islam”. And during the early days of Islamic practice, the conceptions were not seen. It is only during the Umayyad region, its adherents from practicing the mortifying austerity and asceticism, which were followed by the Jewish essences, Christian Monks and Hindu Yogis.⁸

⁷ Abu-al-Najib, *At Suharawardi Kitab-ul Muridir*. An Abridged translation and introduction by Memhem Milson, Published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.3.

⁸ Nazibullah; op.cit., pp.149-50.

The third century A.H. (After Hijiri) appears to have been the formative period in the development of Sufism, when great Sufi masters Dhu-al-Nun-al-Misri, Al-Harith-al-Muhesibi, Sahl-al-Tastari, Abu-Yazid (Bayazid)-al-Bistani, Junaid-Al-Hallaj, Rabia-al-Basri, etc. created the modes of mystical practice and theory in Islam.⁹

Thus forwarded upon by Muslim Orthodoxy, yet quite amazingly fawned upon and romantically fondled by Muslim masses, tasawuf that is Islamic mysticism, has proved its vital viability and over centuries extended its loving embrace by bringing into the fold of Islam, massive numbers of people in the lands, where crescent beamed forth.¹⁰ Thus being started, Sufism has developed and flourished during the later centuries and started playing an important role in Arabia as well as the whole Islamic world.

There has been a controversy over the derivation of the word 'Sufi'. Some Scholars has commented that the word Sufi is derived from 'Sufi' means 'purity'.¹¹ But it is seem that the term Sufi was

⁹ Menhan Melson : *Introduction in Kabab-ul-Muridis*, p.5.

¹⁰ T.S. Rastogi; op.cit, p.1.

¹¹ Ibid., p.2, Delhi 1982. There are a contradiction regarding the total number of the prophets. According to one some their number was one lakh forty thousand, while another source advocates for two lakhs Forty-Fourteen thousands. Obviously the actual figure is known by the creator himself only.

first applied to Muslim ascetics who clothed themselves in coarse garments of wool (sufi). From it comes the form 'tasawwuf for mysticism.¹² Again Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has expressed the view with the tasawwuf, derived from Hebrue "Ensof" or the Greek "Sophia" or both Ensof and Sophia may be regarded as the religion of humanity.¹³ Al-Gazzali held the view that One who has not tested the Savours of tasawwuf, despite one's knowing the term prophet hood, cannot take in what prophet hood is the Sufi ways and experiences have intuitively downed upon me the reality and speciality of prophet hood.¹⁴ In passing it may be mentioned that Sankritayan regards the word Sufi as derived from the Greek word Sophist'.

At one time it was also held that the word "Sufi" was synonymous with the word mystic. But the word "Sufi" as used in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Bengali and Assamese, has a religious connotation. The origin of the name "Sufi" is explained by the Sufis themselves, the word is derived from an Arabic root 'Safa' (purity). This view is also held by Bashr-al Hafi (d. 841-42 A.D.)

¹² T.S. Trisuingham : *The Sufi orders in Islam*, p.1.

¹³ Radhakrishnan's : *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western*, Vol.I, p.101.

¹⁴ Al-Gazzali- *As quoted in Rahul: sankrityayan : Darshan - Digdarshan*, ed. III Allahabad, 1963.

and Junaid Baghdadi (d.909-10 A.D.) According to them the Sufi is one who keeps his heart pure with God.¹⁵

The word "Tasawwuf" is derived from the root 'Suf meaning wool. As the Sufis wear woollen dress to distinguish themselves from others. They came to be known as Sufi.¹⁶ Noldeka has conclusively established that the word was derived from an Arabic word 'Sufi', meaning coarse wool and was originally applied to those Muslim mystics who wore coarse woollen garments as a sign of self renunciation and penitence.

Historian Iba Khaldum says that coarse woollen garments, were put on so that those who wore them might be distinguished from those who indulged in luxury.¹⁷ According to Qushayri, the term 'Sufi' got currency before the close of 200 A.H. (815-816 A.D). According to Jami.¹⁸ Abdul Hashim of kufa (d. 778 A.D.) was the first Sufi of Islam. In 858 A.D. we find the name of Harith-Al-Muhasibi who wrote *Reyait Le Haqullah* in which he described the

¹⁵ M.Y. Tamizi : *Sufi Movement in Eastern India*, p.1, Delhi 1982, *Sufi Aru Sufibad* by S.A.Malik, p.1, Jorhat, 1976.

¹⁶ The Ency, Islam, Vol.IV, pt.II, London, 1964, p.631, *Sufi Aru Sufibad* by S.A. Malik, p.19.

¹⁷ M.Y. Tamizi; op.cit., p.2.

¹⁸ The Ency. of Religion and Ethis, p.373.

stages of Sufism. R.A. Nicholson says that "The west can still learn in respect of mystical psychology and speculation. Some thing from the East, though it had learned much during the middle ages, when Muslim philosophy and science radiated from Spain through Christian of Europe".¹⁹

The Sufis claim to have inherited their doctrines directly from the teachings of the holy prophet who strictly speaking has given no dogmatic or mystical theology. The Quaran of course supplies raw material for both when it says; Allah is the highest of the heaven and earth "(XXIY-35)". There is no God but He; every thing is perishable except He "(XXVIII-880)". I breathed into man My spirit "(XV-29)", I have created man and I know what his soul suggests to him, for I am nearer to him than his Jagular vein "(1-16)," whosoever you turn, there is the countenance of Allah "(11-109)". To whom Allah gives no light, he has no light at all" (XXIV-40) Dr. Sayed Nisar says that origin of Sufism is the Quran and Sunnah.²⁰ The great Sufi of Baghdad, Shaikh Shihabuddin Suhrawardi said in his famous book." Awariful Ma'arif (chapter one) that though the term Sufi is not used in the Holy Quran the word

¹⁹ M.Y. Tamizi, op.cit., p.2.

²⁰ M.Y. Tamizi; op.cit., p.2,3.

“Maquarrab (nearer) connotes the same meaning which is expressed by the term Sufi.²¹ According to Dr. Yusuf Hussain Khan, all mysticism is born of religion. Sufism is born in the bosom of Islam.²² It is said that knowledge can be described as book knowledge (Ilm-i-Sufina) knowledge of the heart (Ilm-i-Sina). The former is the doctrinal teaching of the Ulema and the later is the esoteric and mystical teaching of the Sufis.

The porch of the “Mosque of prophet”. Where the companions of the holy prophet used to assemble was called “Zillah’ or “Suffa”, meaning a raised place. Generally they were Suf (wool), hence they came to be known as Ahl-i-Sufia or Ashab-i-Suffa. Numerous devotees who attended the congregation of the most selected faithfuls, received special interpretation of some verses of the Quran in which the first four caliphs were included. It is said that it was due to the depth and sharp faculty of intellect that Hazrat Ali showed in grasping the Quranic contents that the holy prophet said “I am the city of learning and Ali is its door.” Thus the scholars trace the origin of Sufism from the Ahle-Suffa and particularly Ali on this very ground. The mystics of Islam of the first two centuries of the

²¹ Ibid., p.3.

²² Yusuf Hussain, *Medieval Indian Culture*, Delhi, 1957, p.33.

Higra were ascetics, who laid great stress on the principles of repentance (Touba) and trust in God (Tawakkul) their contemplation remained confirmed within the limits of the Quran and the practice of the prophet.²³

Sufism is the form which mysticism has taken in Islam. It is not so much a set of doctrines as it is a mode of thinking and feeling in the religious domain.²⁴

According to T.C. Rastogi, 'Sufi' comes from the word suf, or wool because most of the early ascetics and the succeeding Sufis were undyed woollen mantles of a coarse quality.²⁵ Again some contend that the word 'Sufi' is derived from Safa, meaning purity. There are writers including Thomas Arnold, Alfred Guillaume, R.N. Nicholson, J.A. Arberry, who contended that Sufi is derived from the word 'Sufi' meaning wool. In their opinion, the pious wearing woollen garments came to be described as 'Sufis'.²⁶

Some other scholars trace its origin by the word 'Safa'. They say that those who were pious people were called Sufis. Abu Nasr-

²³ M.Y. Tamizi; op.cit., p.3.

²⁴ Philip, K. Hihi, *History of the Arabs*, pp.432-433.

²⁵ T.C. Rastogi; op.cit., pp.1,2.

²⁶ M.P. Srivastav, *Society and Culture in medieval India*, Allahabad, 1975, p.19.

ul-Sarraj, the author of Arabic treatise on sufism, declares that in this opinion the word Sufi is derived from 'Sufi' (wool).²⁷

Dr. Tarachand says, "Sufism was a religion of intense devotion, love was its passion, poetry, song and dance its worship and passing away in God its ideal.

Sufism was a natural development in Islam, owing little to non-Muslim sources, though receiving radiations from the ascetical mystical life and thought of eastern Christianity. The outcome was an Islamic mysticism following distinctive Islamic lines of development.²⁸ During the early period. Sufism was a natural expression of personal religion which asserted a persons right to pursue a life of contemplation, seeking contact with the source of being and reality, over against institutionalized religion based on authority, a one way master-slave relationship, with its emphasis upon ritual observance and a logistic morality, where the spirit of Quranic piety has flowed into the lives and modes of expression, as in the form of recollection (dhikir) of early devotees and ascetics were reflected. Thus Sufism was a natural development out of this tendencies manifest in early Islam and it continued to stress them as

²⁷ Ibid., p.20.

²⁸ T.S. Triminglam: *Sufi Orders in Islam*, p.2.

an essential aspect of the way.²⁹

Subsequently, a vast and elaborated mystical system was formed which whatever it may owe to neo-platonism, Gnosticism, Christian mysticism or other system. We may truly regard, as did the Sufis themselves, as the inner doctrine of Islam, the mystery of the Quran.³⁰

Sufi teaching and practices were diffused throughout the Islamic world, through the growth of particular ways which were disseminated among the people through the medium of religious orders, and as a religious movement displayed many aspects. But gradually the system of religious practices was turned into institutionalized and people started coming to the Sufi Saints for spiritual guidance. Thus the relationship between the master and disciple developed. It was natural to accept the authority and guidance of those who had traversed the stages (Maqamat) of the Sufi path. Master of the way say that “every man has inherent within him the possibility for release from self and Union with God, but this is learnt and dormant and cannot be released except with certain

²⁹ Ibid., p.2.

³⁰ Ibid., p.3.

illuminates gifted 11' God, without guidance from a leader.³¹

Though the beginning of the mystic trends imbibed with the zeal of self purification of human soul, gradually, it had changed its mode into institutionalized to purify other's soul also. Thus the dominion of the missionary activities expanded worldwide. Usually the Sufi Saints have been individuals endowed with piety and religious zeal, frequently man of learning, who through their own personal interest in the spread of Islam and inspired with a "Divine Call" have been contact to wonder from place to place and gather disciples³² to increase the follower of the Creator.

Although the system originated and flourished initially in the Islamic world, it has spread over to may parts of the world including the Indian subcontinent, by the beginning of the eleventh century A.D. There was a large influx of Sufi Saints into India who had migrated from various parts of the Islamic world. Initially they flourished mainly in the North western part of India where they were engaged in spreading Islam or, in other words, the Sufi tarika (way of life) widely spreaded among the masses.³³ One of the earliest Sufi

³¹ T.S. Triminglam; op.cit., p.3.

³² Titus Murry; *Indian Islam, A Religious History of Islam in India*, p.42.

³³ T.W. Arnold: *The Preaching of Islam*, p.280.

Saints of the period about whom records are available was Sheikh Ismail, who came to Lahore about the year 1005 A.D. He belonged to the Bukhara Sayyids, and was distinguished both for his secular and religious learning. It is said that crowds blocked to listen to his sermons and that even any unbelievers who came into personal contact with him could not come back without being converted to the faith of Islam.

The next Sufi Saint, on whom information is available was 'Abdullah' from Yemen, began his work of preaching in Gujrat about the year 1067 A.D.³⁴ In the twelfth century we meet with the names of Nur-ud-Din, Nur Satagar Sayyid Jalal Uddin of Bukhara etc. But with the advent of Khawajah Muin-Ud-Din Chishti of Ajmer during the thirteenth century, the very spirit of Sufism became popular in India. Perhaps he was the most famous Muslim missionary worker of India. Khawaja Muin-ud-Din Chishti, a native of Sistan, an eastern place of Persia, is said to have received his missionary call to India while on a pilgrimage to Medina. The prophet came to him in a dream and said to him. The Almighty has entrusted the country of India to thee, go there and settle in Ajmer. By God's help the faith of

³⁴ Nizam-ul-Ghani Khan, *Madhahib-ul-Islam*, p.272, also Murry Titus, p.43.

Islam shall, through thy piety and that of thy flowers, be spread in that land: according to the account, he obeyed the call and came to Ajmer. Little by little Muin-Ud-Din attracted to himself a body of disciples, whom he had won over from infidelity by his teachings. His fame as a teacher became so well known abroad that Hindus are said to have come to him in great numbers and that many of them were induced to embrace Islam. He died in Ajmer in 1236 A.D.,³⁵ where a tomb was erected by his disciples and still today people from all over India and world as well to visit the place every year to pay homage to the holy soul of the Saint. Muin-Ud-Din Chishti left behind him a long line of spiritual successors, almost equally celebrated. Shaikh Farid Uddin Shakarganj (dt. 1269 A.D.) and Khawaja Qutub-Ud-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki (dt. 1235) became very prominent among his spiritual successors.³⁶ Shaikh Nizam-ud-Din-Awliya of Delhi (1238-1325 A.D.), who was equally distinguished for his piety and learning also belong to this Silsilah (order). These Sufi saints had considerable influence on the masses as well as the

³⁵ Murry Titus; op.cit., p.44.

³⁶ Shaikh Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dihlawi, *Ahibharul*, Akhyar (in Persian), The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, p.29.

nobles.³⁷

Generally it is seen that Muslim missionaries in India have followed the footsteps of the conquering armies, while at the time of their wander for the cause of Islam. But always this was not happened because ample examples are there to prove that Sufi Saints had travelled many such places which were not conquered by the soldiers, but in regards of Bengal. Bihar and other eastern provinces including Assam the case is somewhat particular, because here in these provinces the Sufistic wave are seen only after the occupation of the area by Mohammad Bakhtiyar Khilji at the close of the twelfth century A.D., when a Muslim Kingdom was founded with its headquarters at Gaur, the Sufi Saints or the missionaries found freedom for the exercise of their zeal under the protection of these Muslim sovereigns and as a result of certain social and religious causes. They were eminently successful, in establishing their dargahs here and there. In Eastern Bengal, they did not confine themselves to the cities and centre of the Govt. as it is largely seen in Northern India.

³⁷ Amit Dey, "*Some aspects of Sufi Movement in Bengal*" an article published in Quarterly Review of Historical Studies; (ed.) by Amitabh Mukherji Vol.XXII, October, 1993, March, 1994, Calcutta, p.13.

But in the eastern Bengal (and in the Western part of Assam), we find it mostly in the villages; and Judging from the manners and customs of the followers of the prophet, their physical appearances, and the caste distinction which they still retain, it seems clear that these converts were restricted' from the original inhabitants of the Soil.³⁸

Infact, in this part of India, Hinduism was not nearly so well organised and consolidated as in the northern, western and Southern part of the country. The inhabitants were under the influence of a crude form of Buddhism; and despised as they were by their proud Aryan rulers, who held them in disdain, they apparently welcomed the Muslim missionaries gladly.³⁹

The following statement of W.W. Hunter would seem to be quite a fair interpretation of the response made by the people of Eastern Bengal to the work of the Muslim missionaries.

“To these poor people, fishermen, hunters, pirates and low caste tillers of the soil, Islam as a revelation from on high. It was the creed of the ruling race; its missionaries were man of zeal who

³⁸ Sir H. H. Resley; *The Tribes of Bengal*, p.282.

³⁹ Murry Titus; *op.cit.*, p.45.

brought the Gospel of the unity of men in his sight to a despised and neglected population.⁴⁰

Missionary efforts in Bengal and Assam as well, are attested by the graves and shrines of Sufi mystics, who are credited with having been zealous for the spread of their faith. One of the earliest of these belonged to the thirteenth century, Shaikh Jalal Uddin Tabrizi, who is said to have visited Assam and Bengal and died there in 1244 A.D.⁴¹

But Dr. Enamul Haq has given a contradictory view that the first Sufis who came to Bengal were Shah Sultan Rumi who arrived in Mymen Singh in 1053 A.D. and Baba Adam arrived in Bikrampur in Decca in 1119 A.D.⁴² It is said that a certain koch king accepted Islam, at the hands of Shah Sultan Rumi and donated a village to him.⁴³ Infact it would be unhistorical to study Sufism in Assam, Isolating it from the northern or north western part of India, because during the early stage, most of the Sufi Saints who were preaching the Sufi tariqa (way of life) in Bengal were either the Khalifahs

⁴⁰ T.R. Arnold; *The Preaching of Islam*, p.279.

⁴¹ H. Blochman; *J.A.S.B.*, Vol.XL, II, pp.266, 288.

⁴² Mohd. Enamul Haq, *A History of Sufism in Bengal*, 145, Dhaka; Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 1972, p.144.

⁴³ *Mymen Singh*, Bengal District Gazetteers, 1917, p.152.

(deputy) or the murids (disciples 13) of the north Indian Murshids (Spiritual guide).⁴⁴ However it should not be regarded JIS an example of one way traffic, as it would be shown later on that many celebrated Sufi Saints of Bengal used to sent their Khalifahs to different parts of the subcontinent including Assam as well as Kamrupa. with a view to spreading the Sufi tariqa among the masses.

The Sufi missionaries imbued with the verses of prophet Muhammad (PBDH) “spread whatever you have heard from me to others” adopted their mission in life to spread the holy teachings to the mankind everywhere in the globe. The land of the medieval Assam also did not remain far behind from the pious mission of the Sufi Saints, who alongwith other parts of India, entered into Assam and found a very congenial atmosphere for their growth. Mohd. Yahya in his doctoral thesis entitled. “Sufis in Northern India” remarks that this part of the country had always been a fertile soil for the Sufis and preachers of different religions and its valley have proved to be the appropriate place for their religious devotion, mystics practices and prayer.⁴⁵ Even Ibn Batuta who had travelled Kamrupa during the middle of thirteenth century had the privilege of

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ M.Y. Tamizi; op.cit., p.1 (Introduction).

meeting Shah Jalal Mujarrad, one Sufi Saint of that time in Assam.⁴⁶

Thus from the beginning of the thirteenth century till date Sufism has been playing a vital role not only the Socio-cultural life of the people but also to the pages of History of Assam.

⁴⁶ Ibn-Batuta; *Rehla* (Arabic Text) Beirut 1968, pp.601, 604, Swargadeva Rajeswar Singha by S.K. Bhuyan, p.173 (see chapter Asamiya Muslim).

Chapter – II

Sufism in Eastern India

CHAPTER – II

SUFISM IN EASTERN INDIA

The earliest known Muslim inscription in Bengal concern to a group of immigrant Sufi-written on a stone tablet found in Birbhum district and dated July 29, 1221. After seventeen years of Bakhtiyar's conquest, the inscription records the construction of a sufi khanqah by a *faqir* who was son of a native of Maragha in northwestern Iran. The building was not recent for this faqir alone, but for a group of Sufis (*ahli's suffa*), "who all the while abide in the presence of the exalted Allah and occupy themselves in the remembrance of the exalted Allah."¹

¹ Z.A. Desai "An early 13th century inscription from West Bengal *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement (1978)*. The inscription was found in a village of Siwan in Bolpur Thana of Birbhum District.

The tablet appears to have been part of a pre-Islamic edifice before it was put to use for the khanqah for on its reverse side is a Sanskrit inscription mentioning the victorious conquests made in this part of the delta by a subordinate of Nayapala Pala king from A.D. 1035 to 1050. The inscription refers to a large number of Hindu temples in this region and despite the Buddhist orientation of the pala king, it identifies this Subordinate ruler as a devotee Brahmanic gods.²

A similar historiography pattern is found in Bengal while it is true that Persian biographies often depict early sufi holy men of Bengal as pious warriors waging war against the infidel, however such biographies were not contemporary. In case of Shaikh Jalal-ud-Din Tabrizi (1244-45) one of the earliest known Sufis of Bengal. The earliest notice of him appears in the *Siyar-al-arifin* a compendium of sufi biographies compiled around 1530-36 three centuries after the Shaikh's lifetime. According to this account after initially studying Sufism in his native Tabriz in northern Iran. Jalal-al-Din Tabrizi left around 1228 for Baghdad where he studied for seven year with the renowned mystic Shaikh Shihab-al-Din

² D.C. Sircar, "New Light on the Reign of Nayapala", *Bangladesh Itihas Parishad: Third History Congress, Proceeding* (Decca, Bangladesh Itihas Parishad, 1973), pp.36-43.

Suharwardi, who died in 1235 Jalal-al-Din Tabrizi traveled to India and not finding a warm welcome in the court of Delhi, eventually moved on to Lakhnauti, the provincial capital of Bengal.³

As the contemporary evidences do not reflect any sufi in Bengal actually indulged in the destruction of temples, it is probable that as with Turkish Sufis in contemporary Anotolia later biographers reworked Jalal-al-Din Tabrizi's for the purpose of expressing their own vision of how the past ought to have happened for such biographers the Shaikh's alleged destruction of a Hindu temple his conversion of the local population and his raising a sufi hospice on the temple site all defined for later generation his imagined role as one who had made a decisive break between Bengal's Hindu past and its Muslim future.

Much the same to hagiographical reconstruction was given the career of Shah Jalal Mujarrad Bengal's best known Muslim saint. His biography was first recorded in the mid 17th century by a certain Shaikh Ali a descendant of one Shah Jalal's companions. According to this account Shah Jalal had been in Turkestan where he become a

³ Maulana Jamali, *Siyar-al-arifin* (Delhi: Matfa Rizvi 1893), pp.164-69.

spiritual disciple of Saiyid Ahmad Yasawi one of the founder of the central Asian Sufi tradition.⁴

If we are compare the hagiographic account of Shah Jalal's career with two independent non-hagiographic sources. The first is an inscription from Sylhet town dated 1512-13 from which we learn that it was a certain Sikandar Khan Ghazi and not the Shaikh, who had actually conquered the town and that this occurred in the year 1303-4.⁵ The second is a contemporary account from the pen of the famous Moroccan traveler Ibn-Battuta (d.1377) who personally met Shah Jalal in 1345. Traveling by boat up the Meghna and Surma rivers. Ibn Battuta spent three days as Shah Jalal's guest in his mountain cave near Sylhet town. As the Moroccan later recalted.

This Shaikh was one of the great saints and one of the unique personalities. He had to his credit miracles well known to the public as well as great deeds and he was a man of hoary age. The

⁴ The account of Shaikh Ali was later reproduced in the well-known hagiography *Gulzar-i-Abrar* compiled CA 1613, the relevant extracts of which were published by S.A. Ikram. An account of Shaikh Jalal of *Journal the Asiatic society of Pakistan* (1957) 63-68 since Ahmad Yaseen died in 1166 Shah Jalal's when spiritual monster must have been an unidentified intermediary bin Yasani and Shah Jalal.

⁵ Shamsud-Din Ahmad ed. and trans. *Inscription* 4-25.

inhabitants of these mountains had embraced Islam at his hands and for this reason he stayed amidst them.⁶

One would like to know more about the religious culture of these people prior to their conversion to Islam. The fragmentary evidence of Ibn Battuta's account suggests that they were indigenous people who had little formed contact with literate representatives of Brahmanism or Buddhism for the Moroccan visitor elsewhere described the inhabitants of the East Bengal hills as "Noted for their devotion to and practice of magic and witchcraft."⁷

The Turkish conquest there began to circulate in the deta Persia and Arabic translation of a Sanskrit manual on tantic yoga entitled Amrtakunda (The pool of nactor). According to the translated version the Sanskrit text had been composed by a Barhman yogi of Kamrup who had converted to Islam and presented the work to the chief qazi or judge of lakhnauti Rukh-al-din Samarqandi (d 1218). The latter is turn is said to have made the first translation of the work into Arabic and Persian. While this last point is uncertain there is no doubt that for the following five hundred years the Amrtakunda through its repeated translations into Arabic

⁶ Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta tran. Mahdi Husain*, pp.238-39.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 237-38.

and Persian circulated widely among Sufis of Bengal and even throughout India. The North India Sufi Shaikh Abd-al-Quddus Gangohi (d 1537) is known to have absorbed the logic ideas of the Amrtakunda and to have taught them to his own disciples.⁸ In the mid 17th century the Kashmir author Muhsin recorded that he had seen a Persian translation of the Amratakunda⁹ and in the same century the Anatolian Sufi scholar Muhammad-al-Misri (d 1694) cited the Amrtakunda as an important look for the study of yogic practices noting that in India such practices had become partly integrated with Sufism.¹⁰ The renowned Shattari Saint Shaikh Muhammad Ghauth even traveled from Gwalior upper India to Kamrup in order to study the esoteric knowledge that Muslims had identified with the region. In doing so he was following a tradition of Sufis of the Shattari order. Whose founder Shah Abd Allah Shattari (d 1485) included Bengal on his journey from central Asia through India.

⁸ S.A.A. Rizvi, *A History of Sufism in India*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1978, p.335.

⁹ Muhsin Fani, *Dabistan-i-Muzahib* ed. Nazir Ashar and W.B. Baylay (Calcutta 1809), p.224.

¹⁰ Husain Haud-al-Haya – version Arabic, p.294.

“The principal” carries of the Islamic literary and intellectual tradition in the Bengal Sultanate were group of distinguished and influential Sufis who resided in the successive capital cities of lakhnauti (from 1204) pandua (from CA 1342) and Gaur (from CA 1432). Most of there men belonged to organized sufi brotherhood especially the Suhrawardi, the Firdausi and the Chishti order and what we know of them can be ascertained mainly from their extant letters and biographical accounts. The urban Sufis about whom we have the most information are clustered in the early Sultanate period from the founding of the independent Ilyas Shahi dynasty at Pandua is 1342 to the end of the Raja Ganesh revolution in 1415.¹¹

The political roles played by Sufis in Bengal’s capital was shaped by ideas of sufi authority that had already evolved in the contemporary Persian speaking world. We have already referred to the central place that sufi tradition assigned to powerful saints, a

¹¹ Around 1414 the Chishti Shaikh Ashraf Jahangir Simnan stated seventy disciples of Shaikh Shihab-al-din Suhrawardi (d.1144) had been buried in Devgaon (site not identified) and that other Sufi of Suhrawardi order together with followers of Shaikh Jalal-al-din Tabrizi were buried in Mahisantosh and Deotala both Near Pandu “In short”, he noted in the country of Bengal not to speak of the cities, there is no town and no village where holy saints did not come and settle down “Shaikh Ashraf Jahangir Simnavi, Maktubat-i-ashrafi, Aligarh Muslim University, History Department, Aligarh, persian MS No.27, letter 45, 139 b, 140 a. see also S.H. Askari , New light an Rajah Ganesh and the Sultan Ibrahim Sharq of Jaunpur from contemporary correspondence of the Muslim Saints, Bengal past and present 57, 35.

sentiment captured in Ali “Hajwiri’s statement that God had made the saints the governors of the universe. Being in theory elder to God than warring princes could ever hope to be Muslim saints staked a moral claim as God’s representatives on earth.

Similar tradition circulated in Bengal concerning the foundation of independent Muslim rule there. In 1243-44 the historian Minhaj-al-Siraj visited Ikhnauti where he recorded the following anecdote.¹²

The first Bengal born Muslim known to have studied with Shaikh Nizam-al-Din was Akhi Siraj-al-Din (d.1357) who journeyed to Delhi as a young man. Having distinguished himself at the Sufi lodge of the renowned Shaikh, Siraj-al-Din received a certificate of succession and so thoroughly associated himself with the North Indian Chishti tradition that he was given the epithet, “Ayina-yi-Hindustan”, or ‘Mirror of Hindustan’. Returning to Bengal some time before 1325, when his master died, he inducted others into the Chishti discipline his foremost pupil being another Bengal born Muslim, Shaikh Ala-al-Haq (d.1398)¹³ Kamarupa from Panudra Varddhana or

¹² Since Sultan Ghiyath-al-din Iwaz had died only seventeen years before Minhaj’s visit it is probable that this story had been in circulation in the Bengal capital soon after and perhaps during the king’s reign.

¹³ Abd-al-Rahman Chishti *Mirat-al-asrar* fol.514 a.

Pubna is Middle India. The Chinese pilgrim (Hwen Thsang) proceeded for 900 or 150 miles to the east and crossing a great river entered *Kia-mo-len-po* or Kamarupa, which is the Sanskrit name of Assam. The territory is estimated at 10,000 or 1667 miles in circuit. This large extent shows that it must have comprised the whole valley of Brahmaputra river or modern Assam together with Kusavihara and *Batan*. The valley of Brahmaputra was anciently divided into three tracts, which may be described as the Eastern Middle and Western districts namely *sodiya* Assam proper and Kamarupa. As the last was the most powerful state and also the nearest to the rest of India its name came into general use to denote the whole valley.¹⁴

Ibn Batutah once calls the saint Tabrizi and once Shirazi which shows that he was not sure. If he was either Shaikh Jalaluddin Tabrizi died in 642H. or 1244 A.D. No serious doubt is now entertained that it was Shah Jalal, the famous saint of Sylhet, whom the traveller went to see. The visit took place about 1345 A.D. The saint died soon afterwards as the traveller came to know of his demise from Shaikh Burhanuddin Shahgarji, next year in China.

¹⁴ The Ancient Geography of India, The Buddhist Period I, Varanasi 1963, pp.421-22, coins and chronology of the early Independent Sultans of Bengal, N.K. Bhattasali (W. Heffer S. Sons, England, 1922) p.138.

Shah Jalal is the traditional conqueror of Sylhet and one who converted the people of sylhet to Islam. Ibn Batutah also says that the people of the tract received Islam at his lands. This achievement of Shah Jalal Worked on the popular fancy and gave rise to a multitude of legends which are still current among the Bengal peasantry and which an analysis amazing admixture of fiction and history.¹⁵

Gibb adds a note to the identity of Shaikh Jalauddin. It has been fully established by yule (Cathay IV.151) that the district visited by Ibn Battuta was sylhet, where the tomb of Shah Jalal is still venerated.¹⁶

He was one of the greatest of Saints and a most unique man. He performed famous miracles as well as great and memorable deeds. He was a man for advanced in years. He informed me that he had seen the Abbasid Caliph Musta Asim Billah at Bghdad and that he was in that city at the time of the caliph's assassination (A.D. 1258) subsequently his disciples informed me that the Shaikh died at the age of 150, that he had been obscuring the fast for about forty

¹⁵ Bhattasali, coins and Chronology. pp.149-50.

¹⁶ A bridge tr. by H.A.R. Gibb. *The travels of Ibn Batuta Asia and Africa*, London, 1963 A.D. (5th Impression) ed. by Sir E. Denison Ross, p.366.

years and was not it the habit of braking it until after the lapse of ten consecutive days. He had a cow with the milk of which he used to break his fast. He would remain starling all night. He was a lean, tall man with sunken checks. Through his efforts many of the mountaineers became converts to Islamism and this was the motive which led him to dwell in their midst.¹⁷

Some of the Shaikh's disciples informed me that he called them the day before his death and enjoined them to fear God and said to them verily shall go away from you tomorrow if it so please God and my successor with you is God than whom there is no other God", when he said the mid-day prayer on the following day. God took him away exactly at the last prostration of that prayer. At the side of the cell in which he dwelt they found a grave which had been dug and upon which there lay a winding sheet and incense. They washed his body, wrapped it round with the winding sheet offered prayers upon him and buried him in the tomb. May God have mercy on him.

When Ibn Battuta went to visit this Shaikh I was met by four of his disciples at a distance of two days Journey from the place

¹⁷ Account of Shaikh Jalaluddin, Omitted by Gibb Editor.

where the Shaikh used to live. They informed me that their Shaikh had said to the Fakirs who were with him – “The traveller of the west has come for that purpose in pursuance of the Shaikh’s injunction. Now this Shaikh knew nothing about my affairs but they had been revealed to him.

So I went with these men to the Shaikh and I reached his hermitage which is outside his cell. Hear it there is no cultivated land, but the people of the country Mussalmans as well as non-Mussalmans came to visit him and bring with them gift and presents which supply the food of the Fakirs and of the travellers who arrive there. As for the Shaikh, he is content with the possession of a cow with the milk of which he breaks his fast at the end of every tenth day as we have already mentioned, when I came to him he rose up and embraced me and asked me questions concerning my country and my travels. On my giving him the information desired he said to me “Thou art the traveller of the Arabs” and of the Persians too, O Master” added those of his disciples who were present. Thereupon he said “yes of the Persians too, treat him therefore with respect”, and I was brought to the hermitage and entertained with hospitality for three days.

On the day on which I was presented to the Shaikh I saw on him a large coat of goat skin which took my fancy and I said to myself "would to God" the Shaikh gave it to me. "When I went to him cell took off his coat and put it on me together with a high cap from his head; while he himself put on a patched garment. I was told by the Fakirs that the Shaikh was not in the habit of putting that coat on and that he had put it on as soon as I had arrived. They added that he had told them. "They Maghribi will ask for this coat and it shall be taken away from him by a non Mussalman king who will give it to our brother. Burhanuddin Asghar Ji to whom it belongs and for whom it is intended". When the Fakirs told me of this I said to them "I have got the blessing of the Shaikh. Since he has put his own coat upon me and I shall not visit any Mussalman nor non-Mussalman king with this coat on my back". I felt the sheikh and long afterwards when I entered the country of China and reached the city of Khansa the accident actually happened to me. My comrades had separated from me owing to the crowd and I had that coat upon me. Now while I was in a certain street to. I saw the vizier who was there at the head of a large retinuc and his glance fell upon me. Thereupon he sent for me, took me by the hand and asked me about my arrival and did not let mego until I reached the royal palace with him. I

intended to get away from him but he prevented me and took me along to the king who asked me questions about Mussalman sovereigns. When I was replying to him he looked at my coat and took a fancy to it. Thereupon the vizier said to me. Take it off and I durst not act against his order. The king took the coat and ordered that ten roles of honour should be given to me as well as a fully equipped horse and a sum of money. My mind was displeased at this and then I called to mind that Shaikh had said Viz. that the coat would be taken away from me by a non-Mussalman king. My surprise became great on account of this and in the following year I entered the palace of the king of china at king Baliq and betook myself to the hermitage of Shaikh Burhanuddin Assagharji. He found the Shaikh busy reading and the coat was an him the every some coat. Surprised thereat I began to examine the coat with my fingers. He asked me why I was examining it and said “so you know it”. I replied “yes this is the coat which was taken away from me by the Sultan of Khansa”.

Chapter – III

Assam: Evolution of Polity

CHAPTER – III

ASSAM: EVOLUTION OF POLITY

Assam was largely ruled by Ahoms, who were a branch of the Shan/Tai race. The Shans were occupying the northern and eastern hill tracts of upper Burma and western Yunnan,¹ they formed a number of states called *Mung-mau* or *Pong*. In 1228 AD, the Ahom pressed by the Burmese in the Maulung district of upper Irawadi crossed the Patkai range and entered into the eastern part of the Brahmaputra Valley and Sukapha was the chief of this marshal group of the Ahoms.² They had initially established themselves in the south-eastern corner of the Brahmaputra Valley after subjugating the *Moran* and *Borahi* tribes, who were then got assimilated with in the Ahom system.³

¹ Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Guwahati, 1997, p.66.

² *Ibid.*, p.73-74

³ *Ibid.*, p.73-74.

In the Brahmaputra Valley there were established state formations existing prior to 1228. The ancient kingdom of Kamrupa had disintegrated into a number of tribal and non-tribal polities.

The state of Kamrupa existed between the rivers Barnadi and Karotoya and in the east there were two dominant states-*Chutiya* and *Cachari* and in the west there were a number of feudal chieftains called *Bhuyan*.⁴

The political history of the Ahoms was, therefore, largely struggle for the mastery between the new entrants i.e., Ahoms and these state formations. The subsequent centuries were to witness intermittent conflict among the various powers and in this power struggle, the Ahoms, at the cost of already existing state formation, were successful in extending their domination.⁵ Along the political extension the Ahoms kings also adopted a policy of systematic settling of Ahom families in the newly conquered territories to strengthen their position. However, the main foundation on which the establishment of state, its function and domination rested on Ahoms' intervention in the production process, through which it

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.73-74.

⁵ Amalendu Guha, "*Medieval North-East India: Polity, Society and Economy 1200-1750AD*", Occasional paper 19. Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 2-4.

strengthened state structure.⁶ Another factor which helped strengthening of the Ahom state even when they faced existential threat from the mighty Mughal state and its immediate neighbour, was its adoption and absorption of the Mughal institutions and influences.

II. Economic, Political and Ideological Practices in State Formations

Pre-Ahom Assam comprised of vast alluvial plain, jungle and marshes and due to the heavy rainfall in the region, its major economic activity was rice-cultivation. The tribal groups inhabited the region, using primitive methods of cultivation like jhooming and employing hoe and stick, were producing dry variety of rice (*Ahu*).⁷

The Ahoms introduced wet rice economy by reclaiming land. They cleared the forests and levelled the surface, using better iron implements and had employed the technique of water control on the slopes, which proved crucial for rice cultivation⁸ as these allowed them to retain rain water for longer period. This had started a

⁶ Sajal Nag, "*The Socio-economic Base of Medieval Assam in the Light of the Asiatic Mode of Production*", *NEHU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities 1-1*, Shillong, 1998, pp.32-38.

⁷ Amalendu Guha, *op.cit.*, p.9, Tejimala Gurung, "*Social Formation in Eighteenth Century Assam*", unpublished PhD thesis NorthEastern Hill University, Shillong, 1990, pp. 48-51.

⁸ Tejimala Gurung, *ibid.*, pp. 50-51.

flourishing agrarian economy and had seen emergence of network of embankment, which necessitated compulsory state service by the militia organised under *Paiks* system and the *Paiks* were allowed to cultivate community wet rice land free of tax.⁹ This led to the emergence of king as a despot.

The agrarian economy was primary means of production and theoretically the king was the owner of the land who used to give it in grants to nobility and *paiks* in lieu of their service and rent free grants for religious purpose.¹⁰ A *paik* used to possess three types of land firstly, household and orchards, secondly, inferior land used for cultivation of *ahu*, mustard etc. and thirdly, the wet rice land. The third category was very important and owned by the state, which granted it to *paik* whereas the first two category happened to be in private possession with some clannish restriction and similarly these categories of land were available in abundance. But, a *paik* could not sale, gift or mortgage the land.¹¹

The Ahom state also allotted land grants to brahmins for temple and religious purposes namely, *Brahmottar*, *Devottar* and

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-58.

¹⁰ Edward Gait, *op. cit.*, p.209, 270.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Dharmottar and during neo-vaishnism movements, the *gossains* and *satras* also received land grants.¹² All ruling clans or powerful clans were expected to be loyal to king and these include political as well as spiritual nobility. The king depended on the service of the nobles and nobles always remained loyal to king, as only he had the authority of granting or withdrawing *paik* service. The king used to be on the top and noble in the middle of pyramidic social structure and the base was comprised of peasants. The first two had parasitic existence over the peasants like Mughal nobility.

In Assam two major varieties of rice *ahu* and *sali* were cultivated, where *sali* was more productive and required wet climate as well as transplantation. The Ahoms were able to raise ridge or barrier to contain required amount of rain water.¹³ The construction of the ridges or barriers required huge manpower and thus, a system evolved which enlisted the whole adult male population and the organisation was divided into *khel* where each member of the *khel* was called *paik*. The *khel* was further divided into *got* consisting of four *paik* each and each *got* was expected to render one man year of

¹² Amalendu Guha, "Tribalism to Feudalism in Assam 1600-1750" in *Indian Historical Review*, Vol.I, Delhi, 1974, pp. 65-75.

¹³ Amalendu Guha, "The Medieval Economy of Assam", in *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. 1, 1200-1750/ (ed.) Tapan Roychaudhury and Irfan Habib, Delhi, 1984, pp.480-82.

service to the state and' when one *paik* rendered the service of the state the rest of the *got* cultivate the land thus, ensuring continuous supply of food grain despite absence of a particular *paik*.¹⁴ Thus, the medieval Assamese economy was self-sufficient having artisans and craftsmen available in the village itself for carrying out non-agricultural production. The state also made efforts to bring artisans and craftsmen from the rest of India into Assam and the Mughal influence introduced with arrival of new crafts like making granulated sugar, tailoring etc.¹⁵

In the caste hierarchy the *Brahmin*, *Daivajana* and *Kayastha* were on the top and the untouchables were at the bottom and also had a range of intermediary castes including *kalita*. The upper caste were enjoying privileged position and were granted land grants, *paiks* as well as important administrative position.¹⁶

So far the political system was concerned the king was supreme authority and supported by monarchical oligarchy. There used to be a council of ministers consisting of the *buragohain*, the *bargohain* and the *barpatragohain*. The head of the judicial

¹⁴ Sajal Nag, *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North-East India*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22.

organisation happened to be *barbarua* and an official designated as *barphukan* based at Gauhati (Guwahati) not only acted as viceroy and administered the province west of Kaliabor but also maintained diplomatic relations with other states like Mughal, Bhutan etc.¹⁷

Next in the hierarchy, there was *Phukans*, six each of whom formed the council of *barbarua* and the *barphukan* and then in the rank were *baruas* followed by *rajkhawas*, *katakis* and *dolois*. Besides there were many petty officials like *hazarika*, *boras* and *saikias* who were enjoying some exemptions from the compulsory taxes.¹⁸

As the king was repository all powers, the final authority rested with him. The Ahom concept of kingship too, believed in the divine origin of kingship, therefore, he could not be questioned as his command and will was the will and command of God. They were, therefore, also entitled as *swargadeo* and all honours, titles etc. emanated from him. The expressed ideology was unity, benevolence and justice.¹⁹

The Ahom society was divided in aristocracy, common

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

people and after sometime in late period the division was in between higher caste and lower caste and the lower caste could not even imitate the higher caste in dress code. The common people were not allowed to construct house of masonry. The *kayastha* and *kalita* were enjoying good social status, though resented by the Ahoms.²⁰ Ahoms and several other tribes were admitted into Hinduism by the end of 17th century but assigned to peasant caste of lower order. The Ahoms retaliated by not allowing any high caste Hindu to enter into higher administrative echelon.²¹

Agricultural produce did not form any surplus and the artisan services fulfilled agricultural need.²² The mode of exchange was barter system by which the betel leaves and nuts were exchanged in local markets.²³ Shihabuddin Talish testified about small daily *bazar* in the lanes of capital Gargaon in 1660 where the settlers sold only betel leaves.²⁴ However, surplus was absent, but some production was made to exchange with the products of essential need which resulted in the creation of quasi-marketing network.²⁵ Therefore, the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24. Also, see, Amalendu Guha, "*Tribalism to Feudalism*", *op. cit.*

²² *Roots of Ethnic Conflict*, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Edward Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-39.

production was determined by the use-value instead of being market oriented.²⁶

The self-sufficiency of the village caused the immobility of people and in fact transportation system did not develop much in Brahmaputra Valley. Even the state also induced this seclusion by not allowing outsiders, to enter and since the trade with external world was controlled by the state through its officials the state did not allow any amount of interaction.²⁷ The evolution of the society was fairly homogenous as it was mainly comprised of one major ethnic community-the Assamese an Indo-Aryan race²⁸ and other minority groups got assimilated within the main stream.

Although society did not allow immigration, but on embracing Hinduism, the Ahom kings invited several upper caste people mostly from Bengal.²⁹ Such immigration got momentum during reign of Rudra Singha and gradually Hinduism became dominant religion of Assam³⁰ (Several zone). Brahmin families migrated to Assam and were known as *Kamrupia Brahmin, Vaidik*

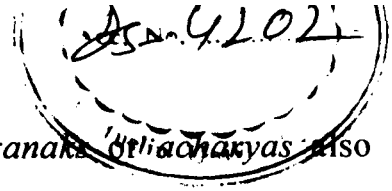
²⁶ *Roots of Ethnic Conflict, op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁷ S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, Guwahati, 1949, pp. 50-55.

²⁸ *Roots of Ethnic Conflict, op. cit.*, p. 25.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid., cf. Edward Gait, op. cit.*, pp. 170-74.



Brahmin and *Rashi Brahmins*. Similarly, *ganaks* ^{of the} *acharyas* also immigrated from Bengal³¹ and immigration of these group had increased tremendously during the reign of Sib Singha (1714-44) and they all got assimilated.³²

Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji was first Turkish commander to enter Assam, while making an effort to invade Tibet. An inscription found near Guwahati testifies about the disastrous campaign of Bakhtiyar Khalji, but it had also marked the beginning of Muslim settlement in Assam.³³ There were series of invasions by the Afghan rulers. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji, ruler of Gaur (Bengal) invaded Kamrup in 1226-27. Prince Nasiruddin, son of Sultan Iltutmish ruled Bengal as viceroy after overthrowing and he had also appointed a tributary king in Kamrup.³⁴ The first serious attempt to conquer Kamrup was made by Ikhtayaruddin Yuzbak Tughril Khan, the ruler of Bengal who advanced upto the capital city of Kamrup and built a mosque, but his conquest subsequently failed due to climatic conditions. Later, Kamrup was invaded by Ghiyasuddin Bahadur, Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (Bengal Sultan),

³¹ *Roots of Ethnic Conflict, op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ J.N. Sarkar, "*The Turko-Afghan Invasions in Comprehensive History of Assam*", Vol.2, ed. H.K. Barpujari, Pub. Board of Assam, Guwahati, 1992, pp.35-37.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.38.

Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Sultan Ilyas Shah (1342-57) Sikander Shah (1357-62) and Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (1393-1410).³⁵

Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah made attempt to annex Kamrup permanently and he had extended the territory up to Hajo and Barnadi. Kamrup was placed under the control of two Afghan commanders namely, Ghiyasuddin Aulia and Musundar Ghazi.

Ghiyasuddin Aulia is believed to have come with the conquering army and founded Muslim settlements. He built a mosque on a hill in Hajo and was later buried there. It is popularly known as 'Pao Mecca' and Mirza Nathan had called him a *darvesh*.³⁶ The influence of these interactions survived even after the withdrawal of Bengal political suzerainty. The archaeological evidences like brick-lined tank, a tank named Hoseyn Dighi, probably excavated by Husain Shah and twelve brick built house, suggest the presence of Muslim masons and artisans in Kamrup.³⁷

With reference to the inscription K.L. Barua asserts that the army reached the modern Kamrup district and after it had crossed the river Barnadi by the Silsako bridge at the vicinity of the kanai

³⁵ J.N. Sarkar, *ibid.*, pp.35-48.

³⁶ M.K. Saikia, *Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance*, Golaghat, 1978 A.D., pp.71-72.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.120-126.

Barashi Bowa sil, marched in the north hardly direction through the Darrong district.³⁸ The date given in the rock inscription concurs with the date of Muhammad Ibn-Bakhtiyar's unsuccessful expedition to Tibet.

It is well acknowledge by historians that there existed several trade routes connecting India with China and South East Asia through Kamrupa.

While describing the route of Muhammad ibn-Bakhtiyar, Minhajuddin states that Tangan horses were brought to kamarupa and even to Tirhut for sale by that route, 'Ralf Fitch' observed in 1583 that there were merchants who came from china and probably from Moscow to Assam. Even today the Monpas of Tawang attend winter fairs at Udalguri, Dewangiri and Godam is the plains of Assam.³⁹

The evidence furnished by the rock inscription of the Kanai Barashi Bowa Sil, as well as the traces of the remains of the stone bridge over the Barnadi in the vicinity of the inscription convince us of the accuracy of K.L. Barua's contention that Muhammad ibn

³⁸ K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrup*, Shillong, 1933, pp.212-14.

³⁹ S. Johari, where India, Burma and China meet, p.251.

Bakhtiyar marched to Tibet through the modern kamrup and Darrang Districts.⁴⁰

Conquest

According to K.R. Qanungo Ali Mardan Khalji the Slayer and successor of Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar Khalji “cowed the Hindu rulers of Kamarupa and Bang” from whom he is said to have “received tributes,”⁴¹ we have again no evidence to show that the Raja of Kumarupa extended his authority over it even after he had destroyed Muhammad ibn-Bakhtiyar. Some tribe chiefs like “Ali Mej” the guide of Muhammad ibn-Bakhtiyar might have been ruling in different part of the territory as the feudatories of the Gauda Sultan. But in any case this conquest doest not seem to have anything to do with the sovereign ruler of eastern part of Kamarupa.

Malik Hussamuddin Iwaz the leader of Khalji nobles of Gauda instituted a successful coup against Ali Mardan Khalji in 1213 A.D. Thus usurping power in Gauda Iwaz threw off his allegiance to the Delhi emperor.

⁴⁰ M.K. Saikia, op. cit., p.44.

⁴¹ J.N. Sarkar, History of Bengal (ed.), Vol.II, p.20, Dacca University, 1947 A.D., p.20.

It is recorded in some chronicles that Hussamuddin Iwaz in his bid for the conquest of Kumarupa advanced up stream of the Brahmaputra and reached as far as Sadiya⁴² in the extreme east. We have no evidence to show that Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar and Ali Mardan Khalji who made inroads to Kamarupa before Iwaz indulged in act of destruction and desecration of the holy places in the country. Hussamuddin Iwaz therefore appears to be the first of the Muslim invaders of ancient Assam to demonstrate to its people the fury of Muhammadan iconoclasm and disrespect for Hindu idolatry.

The Problem of identity of the king of Kamarupa of the time of the invasions of Muhammad-ibn-Bakhtiyar and Hussamuddin Iwaz. No authentic information of the king of Kamarupa at the time of the invasions of Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar and Hussamuddin is so far available to us from any sources.

The question about the prince regnant of Kamarupa in the first quarter of the 13th century it is essential to discuss here the genealogy of princes given in the plate of Vallavadeva. Vallavadeva was the contemporary of Muhammad ibn Bakhtiyar and consequently it must have been by him that the army of the latter was destroyed in 1205-1206 A.D. Soon after Hussamuddin Iwaz had

⁴² Gait, *op.cit.*, p.37.

returned to Guda several small and independent principalities arose in different part of Kamarupa.

The invasion of Malik yuzbak Tughril Khan in 1256-57 A.D. Ikhtiyaruddin Malik Yuzhak the ruler of Gauda started his fatal expedition for the conquest of ancient "Kamarupa" in 1257 A.D. The Muslim Chroniclers seem to have incorrectly mentioned it as the invasion of Kamarupa because as we have already seen Kamarupa as one country did not longer exist at all during that time and in the invasion was confined only to western part of the Assam valley.⁴³

The king of kamata being unable to resist the invading Muhammadan army retreated to the hills yielding opportunities for Malik Yazbak to enjoy though for a time the pride of victory which he celebrated by erecting a mosque on the soil of this country. The Raja could not bear the sight of his clear domain being thus invested by the Musalmans. He tried to adopt sufficient means to secure the withdrawal of the invaders from his kingdom. The proud Muhammadan conqueror rejected these peace offers with disclaim. But soon after he had to pay a heavy penalty for such temerity.

⁴³ Minhaj-ud-din, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, including Hindustan (810-1260) Trs. by H.G. Raverty, Calcutta. Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1881. Reprint, 2 Vols. New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corp. 1970. p.263.

Malik Yuzbak therefore made a hurried retreat through a hilly route with the help of a local guide.

The *Riyaz-us-Salatin* records that Sultan Mughisuddin Tughral of Bengal conquered the western part of Assam that is kamata.⁴⁴

It is not possible to determine from the account of Minhajuddin or any of the subsequent Muslim chroniclers as to who was the Raja of Kamata whom they all refer to as the “Rae of Kamrud”. But considering the time of the invasion of Malik Yuzbak and the rise of the Kamata kingdom we however find in several other account the mention of Durlabhanarayana as a king of Kamata. Considering the length of the intervening period between the accessions of Sukhangha in 1298 A.D. and Sudangha in 1397 A.D. the account of the latter Buranji which states that there were three king who reigned in Kamata during the period appears to be quite reliable. These three rulers of Kamata have now been identified as the same persons as king Sukarangka. Sangarangga and Mringangka of the family of Amimatta.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, trans. Abdus Salam, Calcutta, 1902 DHAS, p.79.

⁴⁵ Saikia, op.cit., pp.62-63.

The biographies of Sankaradeva the Vaishnava saint of Assam record that this great grandfather Chandivera come to settle in Kamatupa at the initiative of its king Durlabhanara Yana.⁴⁶

To conclude, we hold that the invading army of Ikhtiyaruddin Malik Yuzbak was destroyed by the Kamata king Dharmapala in 1256-57 A.D. and that the later was perhaps the founder of this kingdom. The next king to rule in Kamata was Durlabhanarayana and he seems to have flourished from 1290 A.D. to 1312 A.D. after which the country passed into the hands of Arimatta dan or dynasty. The king of this line ruled in Kamata till the close of the 14th century.

A number of coins issued in A.H. 721 (1321 A.D.) by Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah son of Sultan Samsuddin Firuz Shah have been discovered in the Mymenshingh district of East Pakistan and in Koch Behar region in north Bengal and also in the Rapaibari area in Nowgong in the Assam Valley. But in the absence of sufficient evidence to show that Sultan Ghiyasudin exercised his authority over these regions K.L. Barua and S.N. Bhattacharya presume that he launched a marauding raid into these territories.⁴⁷ In

⁴⁶ Dwija Ramananda, *Gurucharit*, p.11.

⁴⁷ K.L. Barua, *op.cit.*, p.233.

the light of some evidences gleaned from different sources we shall however presently try to show that Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah having led a successful expedition to these regions brought under the sway of his father the locals chiefs ruling there by 1321 A.D.⁴⁸

As some of the coins of Sultan Ghiyasuddin discovered in the places mentioned above show that they were minted at Ghiyaspur in the Mymensingh district in A.H. 721, when he was killed in an encounter with the army of emperor Muhammad Tughlaque. We therefore presume that this district remained within Kamata till some time before A.H. 721 only when Ghiyasuddin issued his coins from Ghiyaspur.

From the Kamarupar Buranji we learn that Sultan Ghiyasuddin ruled over the Kamrup region for Sometime and that the seat of his government was on the Garu dachal mountain in Hajo on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.⁴⁹

A tradition concerning the advent of Hazarat Ghiyasuddin Auliya of the "Poa Mecca" shrine of Hajo in Assam with the conquering army of one Sultan Ghiyasuddin who invaded the

⁴⁸ Saikia, op.cit., p.66.

⁴⁹ S.K. Bhuyan, ed. Kamarupar Buranji. p.4.

country in A.H. 721-22. It also states that with the arrival of the Saints at Garigaon to the west of Gauhati, all the idols of an old temple in the place disappeared.⁵⁰

During the time of the invasion of Ghiyasuddin the part of the Brahmaputra valley comprising of Nowgong district on the southern regions of Kamrup and Goalpara districts seems to have been ruled by some local chiefs in Sonapur, Rani luki Bakeli, Barduari and Barraja as feudatories of the Kamata king Sukrangka the son Arimatta.

Considering these facts we may perhaps hold that by 1320-21 A.D. Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah son of Sultan Samsuddin Firuz Shah of Bengal not only invaded and annexed the Koch Behar and Mymen Singh regions of the Kamata or Kamarupa kingdom but also procured allegiance of the local chiefs ruling in the south western part of the Brahmautra valley up to Nowgong on the east. We have therefore perhaps to reject the contentions of K.L. Barua and S.N. Bhattacharya that Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah simply launched a marauding raid to Kamata or Kamarupa.

⁵⁰ Sayed Abdul Beset, Hazarat Ghiyasuddin Auliya, p.2.

The Alamgirnamah records that in 1338 A.D. an army of one lakh horsemen of Muhammad Shah son of Ghiyasuddin Tughlaque invaded Assam and was completely destroyed in this land of witchcraft.⁵¹ In the accounts of Isami Barani and Ibn Batutah who were contemporaries of the Delhi monarch Muhammad Shah. We find no reference to the latter invasion of Assam although the chronicles are eloquent about the total annihilation of a large body of men of the imperial army in the expedition to certain mountainous region called karajal or Qurrachil According to Barani this Karajal region lay intervening India and China and the emperor tried to secure in it is order to enter China through which he hoped to break a route for his projected invasion of Khorasan.⁵²

It is learnt from a coin issued in A.H. 759 by Sultan Sikandar Shah of Bengal from his camp is Chawlistan urf Kamrup that the country by that time remained under his sway.⁵³ The exact date of this invasion is however not known. There is no reference to this in any of the Muslim Chronicles so far available.

⁵¹ Shihab-ud-din Talish, *Fathiyah-i-Ihriya*, trans. H. Blochman, J.A.S.B., 1872, p.79 and Alamgirnamah, p.731.

⁵² Elliot Dawson (History of India. Vol.III), p.241.

⁵³ Elliot Dawson, *ibid.*, p.241.

Towards the end of the reign of Sikandar Shah these local chiefs ruling in the south western part of the Brahmaputra valley might have once again thrown off the yoke of the Bengal Sultan.

Kamata and the Ahom Kingdom in the 15th Century

With the death of Mrigunka during the early years of the 15th century the line of Arimatta disappeared from history. Numismatic evidence show that the conquest of “Kamarupa Kamata” by Husain Shah occurred in 1502 A.D.⁵⁴ According to the Buranji the state of anarchy prevailed in the country for this whole period of about ninety years from the death of Mirgangka.⁵⁵ This Sultan ruled from 1459 A.D. to 1474 A.D. Epigraphic record show that his invasion of Kamata occurred before 1472 A.D.⁵⁶ This confirms that Harup Narayana flourished till that time.

According to another source Niladhwaja Chakradhwaja and Nilambara the three kings of the khien dynasty ruled in Kamata respectively and Nilambara was overthrown by Husain Shah.⁵⁷ This invasion of Husain Shah occurred between 1493 A.D. that is the date of his accession and 1602 A.D. when he issued his coins as the

⁵⁴ S.N. Bhattacharya, *Mughal North East Frontier Policy*, Calcutta, 1929, p.70.

⁵⁵ But it does not seem to be probable.

⁵⁶ J.N. Sarkar, *op.cit.*, pp.134 -...

⁵⁷ S.K. Bhuiyan, ed. *Kamarupar Buranji* (Appendix), p.124.

conqueror of Kamarupa and Kamata obviously Nilambara the last king of this line of the rulers of Kamata certainly flourished till that time.

The Assam Buranji states that prince Durlabhendra was the son of the Kamata king who was contemporary of Suhungmung. We have already shown that this king Kamata was Nilambara. In another place this Buranji relates that Viswa Singha's son and successor Naranarayana having overthrown the son of the Kamata chief Durlabhendra, finally annexed the country to the Koch kingdom.⁵⁸ We can therefore safely conclude that after the fall of Nilambara of the Khen dynasty his son and grandson continued to rule in Kamata in direct succession until the territory was annexed to the Koch kingdom.

The Ahom king Sudangpha who was contemporary of Mriganka of Kamata died in 1407 A.D. After his death for a period of ninety years that is till the accession of Suhangmung Dihingiya Raja in 1497 A.D., five princes ruled in the Ahom kingdom. Among the first five Ahom kings, Suhenpha who was succeeded by Supimapha the immediate predecessor of Suhungmung tried to

⁵⁸ S.K. Bhuyan ed. Assam Buranji (SKM), p.36.

extend his Suzerainty to the west of this river but the Kachari king forced his to beat a retreat with heavy losses.⁵⁹

The Persian chronicle *Risalat-us-Suhada* states that Sultan Barbak Shah suffered several reverse in a prolonged war with the Kamata king until having displayed supernatural power his saint general Ismail Ghazi procured the voluntary submission of the king. We learn from the *Kamarupar Buranji* one Masalanda Ghazi ruled a few years over the present Kamarupa district and the seat of his government was at Garurachal mountain is Hajo. This Masalanda Ghazi was perhaps the same person as Ismail Ghazi who procured the submission of the Kamata.

Husain Shah the prime minister of Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah succeeded the later as Sultan of Gauda in 1493 A.D.⁶⁰ This shows that this Sultan of Gauda conquered "Kamarupa and Kamata" when he was the prime minister of Sultan Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah or immediately after his accession, but in any case his conquests must have preceded the issue of those coins. The Kamata king being unable to stand long against the invaders left his son

⁵⁹ E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p.85.

⁶⁰ V.A. Smith, *Oxford History of India*, part-II, p.263.

Durlabhadra there and come to the Ahom sovereign Suhungnug for help.⁶¹ This Ahom sovereign ascended the throne in 1497A.D.

Some of the Persian Chronicles also make brief reference to the invasion of Kamata and Kamarupa by Hussain Shah, although they give no definite account of its antecedents.⁶² The Riyaz-us-Salatain however states that although Sultan Husain at first took possession of Kamarupa the Kamarupa king finally destroyed his forces who retreated to the hills at the onset of the invasions.⁶³

Though Hussain Shah captured and imprisoned Nilambara, he does not seem to have been able to conquer the whole of the latter's territory because, we learn from the Buranjis that the son and the grandson of Nilambara continued to rule the country in succession till the middle of the 16th century.⁶⁴

The account of the Buranjis about the exploits of Mit Malik and Rukn Khan in Kamata and Kamarupa reveals that the two generals having returned from Kamata planned a simultaneous attack on the Ahoms and the Kacharis.

⁶¹ Sk. Bhuyan ed. Assam Buranji (SKM), p.18.

⁶² S.N. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p.68 and note

⁶³ Salim, op.cit., p.132.

⁶⁴ S.K. Bhuyan ed. Assam Buranji (SKM), p.36.

The Muhammadan war with the Ahoms however did not end with the first defeat of the Uzir Rukunuddin Rukn Khan. It flared up again after some time when Rukn Khan in the company of Mit Malik came for the second time at the head of an army for superior in number and skill to the previous one.

After his initial reverse at the hand of the Ahom. Rukn Khan the great Uzir must have joined the company of Mir Malik, because we find him to have marched anew with Mir Malik at the head of a large army of 1000 horses and 1,00,000 infantry against Suhungmung as soon as the news of the lattes espousal of the Kamata queen reached their camp. This final disaster of Mir Malik and Rukn Khan however did not in any way affect Husain Shah's authority over the Kamarupa region.

Chapter – IV

Sufis in Assam

CHAPTER - IV

SUFIS IN ASSAM

The study over the life and missionary activities of the Sufi Saints the Brahmaputra valley as well as the whole Assam during medieval period reveals that they did not remain more spectators of the political events of their contemporary time, rather they had extended their help and co-operation to the society and state and thus a friendly and congenial relationship between Sufi Saints, society and state had gradually been developed over the time in the region.

The Sufis of the Indian Sub-continent did not keep themselves aloof from Indian mainstream. Accordingly during medieval period of our study the Sufis of this region.

The Sufis of the Indian Sub-continent did not keep themselves aloof from Indian mainstream. Accordingly during medieval period of our study, the Sufis of this region adopted local idiom and preached message of love and universal brotherhood. According to K.A. Nizami “mysticism is nothing but service of humanity”. The Sufis strongly believed in equality and fraternity of mankind. The Sufis of Assam adjured a narrowness of mind and oppose caste and communal barriers prevailed in this region which causes conflict and destroy social harmony. The Sufis also adopted local customs and Assamese traditions and indigenized. Islam thus drawing the masses nearer to Islam. Thus the Sufis of Assam during the period of our study played much greater role in spreading universal values of Islam than the doctrin ulema.¹

Several Sufi entered Assam along with invading army and many of them stayed back. Interestingly the available evidences do not lead us to link most of these Sufi with any Sufi Silsilah prevailing elsewhere in India. It appears that most of the Sufi were wandering *fakirs* (qalandar) who finally settled down in Assam. In western Assam the name of Khoyaj Pir (Khwaja Khizr) is held esteem a term Baliyan is ascribed to him. It is believed that he was

¹ Asghar Ali Engineer, *Sufism and communal Harmony*, Jaipur, 1991, p.109.

born in Siraz and was a merchant and chemist before becoming a Sufi. A rock inscription found near a stream on the foot of eastern slope of the Kamakhya hills reads *Abe Hayat Cashmakhizr*.

Some people accepted the pir as representative of God and he commanded enormous respect from all sections of society.² In Koch, Behar and western Assam the name of Satya Pir is revered and it is believed that he was converted from Hinduism. He introduced Shirni function without using animal flesh. The Hindu of region used to worship Satyanarayan and while reciting the Panchholi of Satyanarayan no distinction is made between Satyanarayan and Satya Pir like.

“Jei Satyanarayan Sei Satyapir, Dui Kule laiche seva kariya jahir” (Satyanarayan and Satyapir are some he receives devotion from both side (Hindu and Muslims) in his two forms).

Pir Shah Madar (Shaikh Badiuddin) believed to be resident of Madina and disciple of Mohammad Bustami and founder of “*Madari Fakir*” order had also visited Kamrup.

In Koch-Bihar and western Assam many people are devotees by pagal pir (actual name unknown). It is believed that rabid dogs

² A.C. Khan, *Koch-Bihar Itihas* (in Bengali), state press, Bihar, 1936.

and Jackals were also subdued by seeing him. Later people used to place a bamboo stick in his name to subdue these animals.³

The tomb of the two Pirs are in Panjatan enclosure or known as dakaidal dargah and the Degdhoa dargah located near modern Goalpara town. Several legends and tradition have been ascribed to the Pirs and as per one tradition when Pir of Degdhoa was stabbed to death by one of his disciple his pet bird also fasted till death.⁴

Chronicles preserved in the Damdana Sikh gurudwara in Goalpara district that Ram Singh (Amber ruler) when invaded Assam, brought five famous pir to counter the magic of the people of Kamrup. They were Shah Akbar, Shah Bagmar, Shah Sufi, Shah Sharan and Shah Kamal. It is generally believed that the five Pirs stayed together and after death buried at one place which is known as panch Pirar dargah (dargah of five of Pirs) situated near Dhubri. But according to some other tradition Shah Akbar only stayed at Dhubri till his death and Shah Kamal went towards the south west of Garo hills.⁵

³ M.K. Saikia, *Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance*. Golaghat, 1978, pp. 131-32.

⁴ Meheswar Neog, *Pavitra Assam*. A encyclopedia of holy places of Hindu Muslim and Christian in Assam, Jorhat. 1960 A.D., (2nd edition) Assam Sahitya Sabha, p.293.

⁵ M.K. Saikia, *op.cit.* pp.190-91. see also *Pavitra Assam*, p. 301.

On the top of Garudachal mountain of Hajo the dargah of Shaikh Ghiyasudin Auliya is situated. Some tradition believed that the dargah belonged to Sultan Ghiyasuddin Bahadur Shah of Gauda.⁶ According to tradition Shah Jalaluddin Tabrezi had visited Gorigaon, Hajo and Parbat during first quarter of the 15th century and he had probably established a Khankah at Hajo where Ikhtiyaruddin Malik later constructed a mosque in 1256-57. It seems that Ibn Battuta visited the mountain also and had staged with Sufi Ghiyasuddin Auliya.⁷

A Khankah was founded by Shah Sharifin is located in Khasi and Jayantia Hill district and according to tradition the Sufi went to Mecca through a tunnel. People even today hear Azan from the Sufi⁸ and owing to these miracles people still respect and visit the shrine for seeking blessings.

The foremost epitome of syncretic culture of Assam was Sufi Chandkhan popularity known as Chandasi. he was a tailor by profession and had become disciple of Sankardeva. Perhaps due to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Muhammad Hussain, "*Powa Mecca Dargah*" Assam Bani February 7, 1955, Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla to by Mahdi Hussain*, Baroda, 1976, pp. 226-235.

⁸ M.K. Saikia, *op.cit.* pp.197-98.

this he has been described as “Kabir”⁹ of Assam. Being a Muslim saint he not only wrote several Zikir and Kirtans but also authored biography of Gopaldeva, the Vaishnava Preacher several miracles have been ascribed to him.

Once he was ordered by his mother to repair the tottering roof of his house and went to fetch thatches but on seeing thatches waving to and from in the wind like Brahmin praying to God, desisted from cutting the reeds and returned home where he found house was already repaired. According to another miracle he gave some food four Hindu. Who were going for the pilgrimage for giving to the Ganges. But they forgot to give the food to the Ganges and become blind till they gave the food to the Ganges. Similarly he showed a bundle of straw to an oilmen who was going to pilgrimage to Jaganath and said that Krishna Balabhadra and Subhadra all were in the bundle and asked him to pour the oil in the bundle. The oilmen dreamt that the oil had already reached to God Jaganath. He was revered more by Hindu than the Muslims. He believed in the unity universality of God and equality of mankind and this equality was

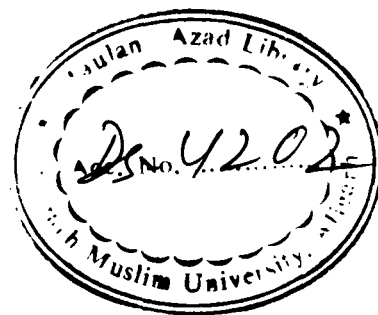
⁹ Saikia, op.cit. p.199.

extended to all animated creations. Hindus in Bengal accepted him as apostle and acknowledge God after him.¹⁰

In saraguri of Sibsagar in the dargah of Azan Fakir, the most revered of all Sufi saints in Assam. Sawal Pir was popularly known as Bandar Pir and it is said that he come to Assam during the time of Azan Pir.

The tradition informs us about presence of some other famous Sufi saints in different part of Assam.

Bogga (white) Baba	Dibrugarh
Laskar Shah	Golaghat
Lal Fakir	Golaghat
Kala Fakir	Golaghat
Shah Makhdoomshah	Sijubari
Nasiruddin Baghdadi	Jaleshwar
Zahir Auliya	Ulubari
Moinuddin Shah	Ponchalori (Dispur)



Besides we also find some *dargahs* at Bholagaon. Durgapur Damdana which are popular in the common people. Similarly *Sufi* Muhammad Hashim stayed in the village Ramgaon near Goreshwar

¹⁰ J.P. Wade, *Kavir Gosain at Hajjo*, Assam Review, May 1929, p.213 and Cited in Saikia.

and founded a *Khankah* Hashimbad. Besides these Pir there were Muslim Ulemas who were accepted as priest by some of the Ahom Kings.

A number of Muslims gorain also had stayed in Torhat and other places and functioned like the heads of Vaishnava monasteries that is “*Gariya Gosain*” or Muslim *spiritual* guides like Akan Deka. Dewan Deka and so on.

Surya Kumar Bhuyan in his *Annals of Delhi Badshahat* a historical research work on Assam wrote Muslim Maqams or Durgahs are scattered in Assam valley and their maintenance was encouraged by the (Ahom) state. The religious songs composed by Assamese Muslim Pirs, known as Zikirs are heard even this date. The major syneretic shrines in Assam are the Panch Pir Dargah is Dhubri, Boga Babar Mazar in Dibrugarh. The Dargah of Azan Pir, Nabi Pir, Khandkar Pir, Chawal Pir is Sibsagar, the Laskhar Shah, Lal Fakir Kola Fakir’s dargah is Golaghat, the dargah of Hazrat Giyasuddin Aulia in Hajo. the dargah of Shah Mukkadam Shah is Sijubari the dargah of Hazrat Tabrizi Sahib, the dargah of Durgapur and Dhamdama, the khorsan pir dargah of Goalpara, the dargah of Bholagaon, the dargah of Nasiruddin Bagdad in Jalesmdar the Zahir Aulia’s dargah is Ulubari the dargah of Moinuddin Shah and so on.

Many small ones have been devoured by rapid urbanization or growth of town/city area. They now are abandoned or been pushed into a corner that the new generation pass them by without having knowledge of it being a historical monument or of syncretic character. But the ones which are still revered and visited by tourists as well as devotees are the dargah of Panch Pir in Dhubri the dargah of Azan Pir in Sibsagar the Poa Mecca or dargah of Ghiyasuddin Aulia in Hajo and Boga Babar Major in Sibsagar to some extent.

Dargah of Azan Fakir

The most known and revered among these shrines is the dargah of Azan Fakir located in Saraguri on the bank of river Dikhaw near its confluence with the Brahmaputra in Sibsagar district. The arrival of devotees to this dargah has reduced considerably over the years due to the difficulty in reaching. The complex of the dargah sharif in however is quiet well furnished with rest house, a simple tourist lodge, water pump. It also has a office and a Zikir (the music from created by Azan Fakir). Research centre which published a research journal called, Saraguri Azan. There were however very few visitors even during winter and those found were almost are all devotees. Although the dargah is managed by Muslims the devotees were mostly Hindu who offered prayer the

Muslim way by bowing heads to in a kneeling position and hands seeking blessings. The locality is well versed in the history of the Azan Fakir whose dargah it is and associate miracle and magical power with the dargah. The local people or the visitors did not seem to understand the tradition of syncretism or Sufism but are aware the Azan Fakir was a Muslim. But for them he is a Pir a Sadhu a Baba and beyond religion.

The Saraguri Dargah (Azan Fakirs Tomb) is associated with Azan Fakir a seventeenth century Sufi Saint whose real name was Shah Miran. He is so known as he popularized *Azan* among the Muslim of the locality who had forgotten the practice of Namaz after setting is Assam.

Hazarat Shah Miran alias Azan Fakir the most renowned Muslim saint poet of Assam is said to have entered the Ahom kingdom with his brother Hazarat Nabi *Pir* from some place in the western country.¹¹ It is believed that he had entered Assam with the Mughal forces as early as 1612-13 A.D. and stayed with them in Hajo in the Kamrup district till 1626 A.D. It was not unlikely that he actually acquired true knowledge of the Assamese language and other literary works of Vaishnavite period during the period.

¹¹ M. Neog, op.cit. pp.51.

Legends has it that he originally hailed from Baghdad and was a scion of family of prophet Muhammad himself.¹²

From some Zikir we learnt that Azan Fakir was a grey haired when he entered the Ahom kingdom. The Zikir which the Pir Composed during 1635 A.D. shows that the language and style it conforms distinctly to the folk-songs of eastern Assam valley.¹³ Obviously we can suggest that he had settled in the Ahom kingdom. Some years before this date (1635 A.D.). In 1636 A.D. The second phase of war between the Ahom king Pratap Singha with the Mughals broke out and it ended with a peace treaty in 1639 A.D. Thus the present city of Gauhati remained within the Mughal territory of Kamrup. It is presume that Azan Pir stayed in Mughal Kamrup till this date that is 1628 A.D. and afterwards he come to the Ahom kingdom which he described in his zikirs as “pardesh”.¹⁴ It is also learnt from some other zikir that the Muslims residing near the capital of Ahom kingdom (Sibsagar) become scared when hostility between the the Ahom and Muslim broke out. The saint had therefore come down to Hajo aid stayed there.¹⁵ This suggests that he

¹² Saikia, op.cit. p.202.

¹³ Sayed Abdul Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari*, cited in Saikia, p.202.

¹⁴ Saikia, op.cit. p.203.

¹⁵ Malik, op.cit. p.35.

being a new comer to the Ahom kingdom probably deemed it better to be away from the capital for his safety. This reference to hostility between Ahoms and Muslims on found in the zikir, was probably to the second war between Pratap Singh and the Mughal Faujdar is Kamrup. When this ended in a peace treaty is 1639 A.D. the Pir might have returned to the Ahom capital. Because we find that he composed zikir in the same language and style referred to above us 1657 A.D. This time he appears to have settled in the country and gradually earned popularity amongst his followers in the country. The Mughal chronicler Muhammad Cazim and Shahabuddin Talish confirmed this. He come into direct clash with the Assamese Muslim official Rupai Gariya the armoar carrier of the Ahom king. In 1685 A.D. that is during the reign of Gadadhar Singha. Rupai Gariya brought open charges against the *pir* before the king accusing the *pir* of being spy of the Mughals and meeting Mughal soldiers in Jungles. Still, the king did not take any steps himself against Azan Fakir. Instead he suggested Rupai do what he deemed best, but cautioned him to act with utmost care and in a rightful way that the king should not be held responsible for his misjudgment.

Azan Pir is said to have married on Asamese lady, by whom he had three sons. Their descendants are still found in Assam and

they have been known as Suraguria Dewans, a name which originated from the name of the place where they were settled. Azan Pir probably died sometimes around 1690 A.D.¹⁶ *Nabi Pir*, brother of *Azan Pir* stayed near Simaluguri at Sibsagar sub-division. All his descendants are still found there. Needless to add that Azan Fakir's dargah is most popular syncretic shrines of Assam. His compositions called zikirs on syncretic themes are sung through out the Brahmaputra valley and almost all his devotees can sing this particular composition.

There is no feeling of "difference" in my mind
O God.

Indeed there is no difference Hindu and
Musalman are the creation of the same God.

Takes the name of the same God at the end of
life Hindus would be cremated Muslims buried
and Dust would merge with dust.

Poa Mecca Dargah Sharif

Originally a village now a mufassil township. Hajo is located some thirty two kilometers to the northwest of Guwahat across the river Brahmaputra. The religious importance of Hajo brought people belonging to different and even conflicting faiths together so as to build up a magnificent socio-culture heritage is the

¹⁶ Malik, op.cit., Introduction, p.28.

area. The Hindu population consist mainly of Brahmin, Kalita, Koch, Kaivarta, Namasudra etc. The Muslim consists of Garia or fakirs and Maria.

The most significant and known among the structures are the Poa-Mecca dargah Sharif. It is a holy shrine of the Muslims which stands at the top of the Gurudachal hill. The main object of Veneration is the shrine is the tomb of the Sufi Saint Giyasuddin Aulia. There exists a mosque close to the tomb. There are more than one legends connected with the name of Poa-Mecca and its founder. Another belief that one fourth of the merits obtained from a pilgrimage to Mecca can be earned by a visit to this shrine. Thousands of pilgrims from different parts of the country as well as other countries visit this place. Hindu pilgrims visit the shrine particularly on the full moon day of the month of Jaistha (May – June) when an *urs* is held. In fact Hajo is the meeting place of several religious and cultural streams. The process of assimilation gave the society and culture of the area a magnificent character in these days of communal disharmony and violence. The Hindu-Muslim unity is a single feature of the life of Hajo which is due to the co-existence of these shrines and temples.

The Poa-Mecca dargah is associated with one Giyasuddin on whose tomb (mazar) the shrine was built. But there is a controversy over the background of this Giyasuddin. He was a religious Sultan with deep knowledge of Persian language and literature. He travelled far and wide spreading the message of Islam. According to some the Poa-Mecca tomb belong to him. Another date of his visit was 1325-26 A.D. Giyasuddin was an Arab subsequently exiled himself to a cave of Garudachal hill in Hajo. The Mazar as associated with this Sufi Saint.

Both Ahom and Koch Kings also granted land and endowments to the mosque complex and took keen interest in the administrative system of the sacred complex of Hajo. It may be Vaishnava literature of Assam grew with such intensity that within a short time its influence became firm and deep-rooted in every sphere of life of all sections of the Assamese people. The impact of this influence was so great that not only all the literary creations of the subsequent period, but some of the Buranjis and many other works of different genres were also composed in the neo-Vaishnava literary style. Even the Islamic religious literature of Assam of this period were to be composed in this style this some relief was however

brought in by a few secular romances which seem to have grown under the influences of certain Persian under and Hindi works.

It seems to be doubtful if the early Muslim settlers in Assam could bring a rich treasure of Islamic literature with them because most of them were mainly warriors traders and artisans who were either taken as prisoners or came to stay in the country in different political circumstances. Islamic literature if there was any with its distinct and original hue and colour had to recede to the background and finally vanish away. The Zikirs and Zaris of a later period could as it seems retain its position and popularity mainly because they were based on the religious themes which were akin to those of Vaishnava Bhakti. Another reason for the absence of an early Assamese Islamic literature was probably that the early Muslim settlers had taken keen interest in their own vocations, rather than in the study or creation of literature. Moreover being always associated with war commerce and small industries they had a love for such professions or work rather than for taking the subtler interest in literature or culture. The *Pir* states that they took great delight in the work of agriculture and performed the duties of sentries with high skill and enthusiasm, but took an interest in the culture of knowledge. In other parts of India Persian literature had attained by

this time a great popularity among different section of the people. It was probably during or after the reign of this Ahom king that some of those popular literary works. Mainly romances of a profane and secular nature found their way into Assam through the Muslims and other settlers.

The Chandraketu Kamakala a fine piece of romance in Assamese appears as a part of the Sakuntala Kavya of king Rudra Singh's court poet Kaviraja Chakravarti Rudra Singha who showed high appreciation for Muslim art and culture might have also delighted in listening to some of the romantic tales from renowned Persian, Urdu or Hindi works from the Persian scholars or *Pirs* settling in his country. That he learnt about some non-Assamese romances like *Madhumalati* is confirmed by the fact that in his Chandraketu Kamakala's episode he introduced the Baramah; gir which is said to be rather a rare feature in Assamese literature and which forms an indispensable part of the romances like *Madhumalti* of the Hindi Sufi poet Shaikh Manjhan.

The 'Shaha-Pani' Upakhyān or *Mrigawati Charitra* is another romance in the Assamese language which has been composed on the basis of an Islamic there. From the point of its motif this *Mrigawati Charitra* appears to be akin to the *Mrigawati* of

the Hindi poet Kutuban who illumined the court of Sultan Husain Shah of Bengal Dvija Rama, the author of the Assamese work however does not seem to have been influenced by Kutuban at least directly. He appears to have gathered the story of the latter's work through some secondary source. But nevertheless this Kavya is a fine example of the result of the communion of Islamic and Hindu cultures. Nothing has so far been definitely known about the author of the romance of Madhumalati in Assamese. But the Assamese author has greatly altered the details of the story within its original frame work. He has also made no reference to this source or to the Sufi poet at all though out his work. Scholars therefore presume that the Assamese poet did not actually come across Madhumalati of the Hindi Poet, but that he collected its story through some oral source.

The study of these Assamese Kavyas thus reveal to us that except in regard to the original source of their story they became in form and style aims and objectives as well as in the treatment of the subject matter akin to the neo-Vaishnova literature of Assam so much so that even the Sufi Philosophical ideas in them have been entirely lost and replaced by the usual Vaishnova religious admonishing.

Panch Piror Dargah

Another Shrine most revered by both Hindus and Muslims alike in the Panch Piror Dargah situated in the Dhubri district of Assam. When Aurangzeb invaded Assam the second time is 1662 under the commandership of Mir Jumla. The whole of lower Assam was annexed to the Mughal Empire for a brief period. It is interesting that although the lower Assam was recovered by the Ahoms Goalpara continued remain a part of Mughal territory. When the Bengal Nizamate emerged as a successor state at the decline of Mughal Empire it remained a part of Bengal. In fact it was only in 1874 after the British occupation of Bengal of Assam that Goalpara was transferred back to Assam through territorial redistribution. As a result of its long association with Bengal Goolpara emerged as an unique part of Assam is the sense that its language culture music, social system land revenue system bore a striking resemblance to Bengal. Hence the Islamic culture and Sufi tradition which flourished in Goalpara was also similar to that of Bengal. The Panch piror Dargah is one such shrine. The dargah were built on the tombs of five Sufi saints named Shah Akbar, Shah Bagmar, Shah Sufi, Shah Saran and Shah Kamal from a chronicle preserved in the Damdama Sikh Gurudwara is Goolpara District. The general belief is

that these five saints stayed together is this place where they passed away subsequent to which this dargah was built on their tombs by their disciples. But a section of the local people believe that Shah Akbar the head of these saints alone stayed in Dhubri and the dargah contains his tomb only. The other saint moved away to different part of the region from Dhubri dargah and established Khankahs in their respective places.

The dargah is a centre for pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims of the locality like most of such Shrines they associate miracles and magical power with the dargah and offer prayer to the saints. The devotees however do not attach any importance to the fact that it is a Muslims religious Shrine where Hindus go. They feel it is normal after all neither God nor devotees have any religion.

Boga Babar Mazar (The Tomb of Boga Baba)

Out of sixteen shrines in the district of Dibrugarh Boga Baba mazar is most popular one. It is synergetic shrine which is evident from its name itself. Boga is Assamese language means fair and Baba is father figure. Translated it means the tomb of a fair Skinned saint. It is also known as the syed Roshan Ali Chishti which is the real name of Saint. He belonged to the Chistiya order of the Sufi and came to Assam from Ajmer. Legends say that he was a tall and fair

person who travelled on a white horse clad in woolen attire. Legends say that the saint on his arrival built a hut near the Dibrugarh Rail Station. This came to be known as the Boga Babar mazhar which is a popular Shrine for both Hindu and Muslims alike. Devotees come here light candles and offer prayer and we found a number of them come for thanks giving on their prayers had been answered.

Bander Piror Dargah

This shrine is one of the most mysterious syncretic shrine of Assam. It is located in a very inaccessible jungle along the river with mostly Mishing tribal who are animists settled in the area. Not much is also known about this saint. No historical accounts or evidences has also been found about him. The transmitted oral testimony from older generation narrate that this saint abhorred human habitation and preferred to live in distant isolated places. It is believed that he came to Assam during the time of Azan Fakir. He was called Bander (monkey) Pir. There are two legends accounting for such a name. One like monkey he moved from place to place and he had domesticated a number of monkeys with whom he lived in the Jungle. His attributes are similar to the qalandars. The present shrine was his tomb which was built by his devotees after he passed away.

This dargah is also known as the dargah of Chawal Pir. The word chawal means infant.

Although the shrine of Bandar Pir is widely in Assam. His current devotees consists of mainly of the Miching tribe who live in the area. The inaccessibility of the shrine perhaps the reason for back of visitors and devotees.

Khandkar Pir or Dargah of Abdul Gani (Ghani) Pir

The Dargah Sharif of Khandakar Pir is located at Pan Becha village of the Sibsagar district. It is at a distance of about 26km. from Silsagar taken. The Sufi had not married. He had adopted a son who married one of the daughter of Azan Fakir. In the Zikirs of Azan Fakir after the name of four saints are mentioned and Abdul Gani was one of them. It is reported that some people is recent time went to dargah of offer prayer of that they went down to the pond which was there all and when they cleared the bed in search of water they uncovered a pair of wooden sandals and some other relics belonging to saint. Since then huncheds of devotees of different religion visit this shrine.

Tomb of Khorasani Pir

Another synergetic shrine located in Goalpara district is the tomb of Kharasani Pir. It is situated in front of Goalpara college in the Goalpara town. This tomb belonged to a Sufi named Hazarat Abdul Kasim Khorasani who born in mid 18th century in Khiraseen bordering Russia, Afghanistan and Iran. He belonged to the Naqashbandi Sufi Silsilah. The saint passed away in Goalpara in 1896. The annual *Ursh* is organized every year where devotees of all faiths visit the dargah.

The Dargah:

The Deghdhowa Dargah is also in the Goalpara district. The tomb is situated on the Deghdhowa hill four miles southeast of Goalpara town on the bank of Brahmaputra river. The Tomb is associated with the Sufi saint Jalaluddin Tebrezi. It is also not known whether they are the same saints or not. The oral tradition has it that this saint travelled from the west most probably with the invading Muslim army of Bengal. Since then it has emerged as a holy centre of Pilgrimage for both Hindus and Muslims.

Emergence of Synergetic Culture

A great social reformer saint Sankardeva (1449-1568) preached in Assam and he was a great protagonist of the Vaishnav

Bhakti faith. Sankardeva does not appear to have been a follower or agent of any of the Vaishnava reformers of other parts of India with his own interpretations of the text of the sutras he evolved his own faith of Vishnu bhakti which it appears is distinct from those followed in different parts of India. The cardinal tenets of his preachings are:

- (i) It preaches supreme surrender to one God Vishnu or Krishna who is the central reality of soul and matter and the first cause of creation.**
- (ii) Lord Krishna is the full incarnation of God on earth.**

Chapter – V

Sufis Influence in Assam: Evolution of Composite Culture

CHAPTER – V

SUFIS INFLUENCE ON ASSAM: EVOLUTION OF COMPOSITE CULTURE

Influence of Assam on the Muslim:

Muslim settled in Assam got influenced by the local culture and given rise to a syncretic culture. Shihabuddin Talish informs us that unlike in the rest of India, the “Assamese” ate food cooked by Musalmans.¹

The acceptance of Sankaradeva as their apostle by Assamese Muslim like Chand Khan and Jayahari show to what an extent Vaishnavism exerted its influence on the Muslims settlers which is also

¹ Shihabuddin Talish, *Fathiyah-i-Ibriya*. trans. H. Blochman, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872, p.80.

visible in the Zikir, Zaris or Marshiyas composed by Muslims pirs particularly Azan pir.²

Muslims also believed that the outbreak of smallpox took place due to *Goddess Ali (mother)* also used to invoke the Goddess.³ Similarly many Muslim in Kamrup, Mongoldoi and Nowgong district also used to participate in Mansa Puja (Goddess of Snakes). In fact, they performed as Oja Pali (singer and dancer) in such ceremony, where Oja or the leader of the group expresses through his speeches, body movement, gestures and action described in narrative and the palis or followers sing with constant rhythmic body movement. It is similar to snake charmer dance in North India.⁴ Even today Muslims village in Mangoldoi is known as Oja Bara Chuk after the name of one such Oja.

There is visible influence also in following agriculture customs, food dress and ornaments and in keeping personal name etc. But the influence is starkly visible in occult practices for which Assam was well known. Many Muslims become acquainted with various magic charms and mode of its practices.⁵ The existence of

² M.K. Saikia, '*Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance*', Golaghat, 1978 A.D. Luit Printers, pp.228.

³ Ibid., p.229.

⁴ Saikia, M. Neog, *serpent love and serpent worship in Assam*. The Eastern Anthropologist, Lucknow, 1952.

⁵ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*. Silisagar, p.101.

words like “bismillah” and reference to Allah Rasul along with Siva, Brahma, Tara etc., in esoteric verses indicate that some of the Muslims acquired good knowledge of occult e.g. one of the charms used for detecting thieves and burglars starts as⁶

Bismillah-i-Allah u Tara, Gauri Haji
Bakun. Haji Bakun Haji Bakun appears to
be the charmer.

Influence of Muslim Settlers on Assamese Culture

A large population of Hindu display from belief that the pirs resting in dargahs possess divine powers and can ward off misfortune. Some of them light candles in dargah and take a little soil from the tombs of pirs for luck.⁷

Similarly the darvesh dance and qawwali have influenced Viashnava recital in “Bar Sabah” (mass prayer). In Bar Sabah men sit in two rows and the persons to lead the song stands behind the two rows. All the men sing in chorus with rhythmic clapping of hands and movements of the body and this continues for hours and individual completely lost in intense devotion.

⁶ B.K. Barua, *Asaniya Bhasa ara Sanskrit*, p.150f.

⁷ B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers*, Sibsagar, 1906, p.103.

The contact of the Muslim settlers of Assam with the indigenous people of the country also helped the growth of a number of Assamese folk-saying centering around the customs manners and beliefs of the two communities which are in common use. A few of these folk saying may be cited below.

1. Tini molona thakil Chai Khodoito olal bhorokai (As the three Maulanas were looking on Kuda appeared all on a sudden).
2. Ajan Fakireo Kay din gale rati hay (even does Azan Fakir (who was blinded) proclaim: when the day ends night begins).
3. Gariyar garu mariyai bay tarno ag guri kone chay (A Mariya tills the field with the bullock of a Gariya and who is there to see the nature of his work?).

The shining example of the syncretic culture in Assam is Zikirs, which were initially written by pir and Alims but they had brought some sort of revolution in the forms of songs and lyrics. In Zikir while singing the glory of Allah and Islam is a high lyrical vein, they often make social satire. Zakir and Zais are thus most outstanding and sustaining contribution of the Assamese Muslims to the popular literature of Assam. Zikir are religious or philosophical poems centering around the theme of faith or of philosophy. Many Zikirs were written by Azan pir. The zari is elegiac in character and resemble to marshiya generally contain themes of karbala tragedy. But

it is interesting to note that they have been able to score success in ensuring the harmonious relation between Islam and Hinduism. Particularly with the vaishnavism preached by sankardeva. In fact, they seem to have been impressed by some aspects of the Bhakti doctrines preached by this saint poet. One of the zikirs even goes so far as to express admiration for this sect of Hinduism as follows.

Sankardeva Jiyari Madhavdeur bowari
rehpur nagarat ghar rahpur nagarar rasak
namais ani diya sakaloke bati.⁸

(She is the daughter of Sankardeva and daughter in law of Madhavdeva and she dwells in the city of Rahpur or land of rasa, that is the sentiment of love devotion. Bring down the rasa from the city of Rahpur and distribute it among us all).

This song has a bearing on the esoteric Ratikhow school of vaishnavas, who hold their services at night. Similarly referring to the relations of the Hindu and Muslims the Zikirs declare.

Hindu Musalman, ek Alar farman
gorasthana kabar sari sari hinduk puriba
monninak gariba.

⁸ S. Abdul Malik, Zikir Aru Zari, Gauhati, 1990, p.52.

Hindus and Muslims are bounded by the some set of the divine rules of Allah. The act of cremating a Hindu and the entombing of a Muslim only signify one end death for all.

Though being couched is the spirit of Sufism the Assamese Zikirs sings the glory of Gurus or religious preceptors and urge upon the detachment from mundane pleasure for the sake of the selfless services to God,⁹ they appear to be devoid of the high poetic ecstasy of Persian Sufi poetry.¹⁰ Even in speaking about the services to God they like the Vaishnavas, vindicate the path of Dasya Bhakti or loving devotion of a selfless. Servant to his master one of these Zikirs also declares.

The Vaishnavism preached by Sankardeva is also known as “Nama Dharma” because it give utmost importance to Sravana-Kirtana or the listening to and reciting of the name of God with intense love and devotion. An Assamese Vaishnava regards it as the superb mode of worship.

Similarly the following remark of Azan pir in one of the zikirs against those who practice love and devotion to God only to win his mercy on the day of last Judgement reveals how the path of Niskama

⁹ Ibid., p.48.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.15.

Bhakti has been glorified the Zikirs. "*Makkar dawarat banda anek Juguti Jap mai par hale erile piriti.*

(In the portals of Mecca the devotee makes many a plan but when he leaps across the last tangle he aside the love of God).

Islam does not deprecate his value of this world and life as the field of action and the training ground for life, the world to come, the present world is of great importance to man. His idealism can be well compared to Sufi leader Ibn Sina's (Avicenna) conception of ultimate reality as eternal beauty seeing reflection in the universe mirror.

The Assamese zikirs also seem to have brought in a similar conception. It is not possible to ascertain whether their authors were directly inspired by the conception of Ibn Sina which is believed to have found an echo in the thoughts of Kabir, or whether they received such ideas from the doctrine preached by Sankardeva.

The Muslim population was assimilated in Assamese society gradually and were given various important positions in administration like Barua, Hazarika, Saikia and they had also displayed exemplary patriotism that they received derisive comment from Shihabuddin Talish.

The interaction between the Islam and Vaishnavism (Bhakti) in Assam helped the growth of a deeper sense of mutual respect and

tolerance in the mind of their adherents. Sankardeva and Mahadeva were taken as guru by several noted Muslim like Chand Khan, Haridas. The impact of this harmonious relation between Islam and Vaishnava Bhakti pervaded all aspects of moral, social art and material culture of the people. The zikir and zaris were composed by Muslim pirs and auliyas but several of them have also exalted the glory of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva and Bhakti and such relationship between Hindus and Muslim in Assam led to the germination of deep rooted secular, liberal and tolerant attitude in the society that when whole country faced communal violence Assam remain a oasis of peace and tranquility except for a rarest of rare incident. The finest example of cultural miscegenation is this north eastern corner of India could become possible due to the remarkable spirit of toleration, understanding and accommodation which still persist despite being under tremendous stress recently. But lack of inoculation or encouragement of such sycretic culture and growing ignorance of cultural legacy largely due to absence from curriculum are bound to affect it and it must be saved before it become extinct.

Religious Beliefs and Establishment

The acceptance of Sankardeva an their apostle by Assamese Muslims like Chand Khan and Jayahari and of Madhavedeva by

Yavana Haridas show to what an extant Vaishnavism exerted its influence on the Muslim settlers of Assam.¹¹ This is further confirmed by the marked influences of Assamese neo-Vaishnava literature on the zikrs and zaris or marshiyas composed by several Muslim Pir and Auliyas in the 17th century.

Apart from the impact of Vaishnavism certain other local religious beliefs also seem to have influenced the Assamese Muslims to a certain extent like their Hindu neighbors the Musalmans in certain parts of Assam believe that the outbreak of small-pox is the doing of a goddess known as Ai (mother) and that if this goddess is propitiated in a proper manner people might get rid of the menace of the epidemic. In some of his zikirs, Azan pir regrets that some Musalmans indulge in the worship of trees or deities who are believed to have dwelt in trees sacrificing ducks and pigeons or offering oblations on the upper end of a plantain leaf like the Hindus. Many Musalmans in the Kamrup, Mangaldai and Nowgong districts have also been taking part with their Hindu friends in the worship of Manasa (the goddess of snake). In Kamrup this section of Musalmans is known as Jahils (fools) while in Nowgong they are called Dhekeris¹² on such occasions they generally give performances on

¹¹ L.N. Bezbarua, Sri Sankaradeva aru, Sri Madhavadeva, pp.273.

¹² B.C. Allen, Assam District Gazetteers, Kamrup, 1906, p.101.

Oja-Pali or choric singers and dancers who sing narratives on Hindu religious themes. This institution of dance and music is claimed to be indigenous to Assam¹³ and is popular with the Assamese Muslim to such an extent that many of them earned laurels as Ojas or leader of such singing and dancing groups.

Though there are many separate Hindu and Muslim villages in Assam the two communities do not always reside separately. There is a large number of villages where the people of both the communities live together having different prayer houses. Even today in many of the Assamese villages Muslim villagers are often found visiting their Hindu friends in Namghars and delighting them having unhesitatingly accepted 'Man Prasad' that is part of the offering made during prayer of the latter. Similarly the Hindu villagers are also often seen visiting majars of Pirs, Khankah and Dargahs and making offering as well as hanging threads on trees or posts in such places indicating their wish to obtain fulfillment of their prayers.¹⁴

The Vaishnava sattars served as important centres of learning in ancient Assam. They may be likened to some extent to a residential educational institution of modern times. In our notice of the ancient dargahs and khankahs of Assam we have seen how the Muslim

¹³ K.R. Medhi, *Ankawali* (introduction).

¹⁴ Syed Abdul Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari*, p.11. Assam District Gazetteer, Kamrup, p.101.

religious teachers also maintained a number of monasteries which had their prototype in this Hindu organizations. Like the Assamese Hindus they also recruited their followers from among the general Muslim population and this process has been known as “Bhakat Kara”¹⁵ as is the case of Vaishnava Sattra novices.

Dress and Ornaments

When due to constant invasions of the Muslim rulers of India the Ahom kings had to divert all human resources to strengthen the economy of the country to help the increase of its defence potential they were constrained by circumstances to curtail all sorts of luxuries which might course a laxity or bring about a set back in the economic development of the country according to the needs of the time. In Assam during this period production of fabrics was not considered exclusively as a form of state enterprise. It was also left to the initiative of the people themselves. The paik or common citizen was allowed to use only a churia or dhoti consisting of a single piece of loin cloth as their waist garment and a cheleng or wrapper of the upper part of the body.

Body could also use a king of shirt since the this rule was to be strictly adhered to by all sections of the common people there was

¹⁵ Syed Abdul Malik, op.cit., introduction, p.48.

probably no laxity of it in the case of the Musalman settlers. But the painting depicting Islamic theme of the Assamese poem. Sohapari upakhayan suggest that probably the Muslims were also allowed to use coloured bungis on their waist garments. Apart from these the common people whether Hindus or Muslims was allowed to use Jarua Kapor or winter clothes phulam barkapor or larger wrapper with rich brocade work probably on certain occasions. The zikir make reference to the use of such clothes. These dresses consisted of shirts with long or short sleeves known as chapkan, Mirjai etc. and churia or dhoti which was popular among the Hindu and probably pajamas among the Muslims. But the use of churia and pajama was not uncommon among the officials of both the communities.

The Muslim males in the country were required to shave their heads. In the painting of Sahapari Upakhyan seem. We find a Musalman with a coloured lungi wearing a bunch of long hair on the top of his head. The fashion of the turbans used by the Muslims was perhaps slightly different from that of others because even to day we that group of Muslim who sing zikrs and zaris or Marshiyas in the country were their turban in a fashion which appears to be akin to the Rajput fashion rather than to that of a used by the Assamese.

The ordinary section of the Assamese Muslim women on the paintings in Sahapari Upakhyun show were a long sleeved Jacket for the upper part of the body and an Assamese Mekhela or long skirt for the lower. But the ladies of the higher class were richly clad with well decorated clothes and the mode of its wearing appears to have been more or less a variation of the Burkha with the face left exposed. The use of a beautifully embroidered small kerchief called Hachoti or wallet for betel nut preparations is still in vogue amongst both the Hindus and Muslims of either sexes in the rural areas of Assam. The male persons of both the communities are also seen even now using a towel with coloured borders in the fashion of a phachau or Ahom turban as head gear. The indigenous gold ornaments such as Hemtar for neck kundal for ears and nupurs for feet and even the use of vermilion marks on forehead was probably not very rare among the Muslim women of Assam. The Assamese zikrs and zaris records the intense longing for as well as the use of these by Muslim women in several places.

Literature:

Old Assamese literature which first gained its importance under the patronage of the Kamata king. Durlabha Narayana entered its golden age in the 16th century when Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva

enriched it with their new creations of drama prose and lyrics composed on the Vaishnava religion themes. The impact of this influence was so great that not only all the literary creations of the subsequent period but some of the Buranjis and many other books of different sciences were also composed in the neo.

Customs:

Many of the customs observed by the Hindus in their everyday life seem to have become popular among the Musalman settlers in the country. On Thursday and Saturday both communities refrain from cutting a cane from a cane-brake or a bamboo from the clump and desist from carrying inside a house earth from outside for using it in any kind of household work. It seems that an Assamese Muslim like his Hindu friend, also believes that a happy and successful journey should be started on a good day and at an auspicious moment and generally avoids the latter part of Thursday besides the Friday the day of his religious services. The members of both the communities believe that crows possess the occult power of foretelling an impending event. They also do not differ in holding as evil omens such incident as the falling or breaking of a pot while using water for some purpose and the displacement or falling away of the platter while taking meal. Though cook-fight which has been a popular

pastime among some section of Assamse people and the system of leading and borrowing money an interest which has been prevalent among the Hindus are strictly forbidden by Islam. It is observed that some of the Muslim settlers in the country unhesitatingly indulge in these acts.

Bihu the famous spring festival of dance and music of Assam, has been as popular among the Muslims of Assam as with the Hindus. In the Nowgong district Muslims are said to have joined their Hindu neighbours even in the cattle bating ceremony which marks the beginning of the festival. Certain Bihu songs which contain hints of some Islamic customs and also refer to their skill in playing some musical instruments show that they also participate in the group dances and music with the people of other communities.

CONCLUSION

The Muslim population was assimilated in Assamese society gradually and were given various important position in administration like Barua, Hazarika, Saikia and they had also displayed exemplary patriotism that they received derisive comment from Shihabuddin Talish. The Muslims have added new elements in the material culture of Assam whether building construction or manufacture of various items. But remarkable development took place in the socio-cultural aspect of life which is still visible and has a relevance in today's militancy prone state, where the message of love has a relevance.

The interaction between the Islam and Vaishnavism (Bhakti) in Assam helped the growth of a deeper sense of mutual respect and tolerance in the minds of their adherents. Sankardeva and Madhavdeva were taken as *guru* by several noted Muslims like Chand Khan, Haridas. The impact of this harmonious relation between Islam and Vaishnava Bhakti pervaded all aspects of moral, social, art and material culture of the people. The *Zikir* and *Zaris* were composed by Muslim *pirs* and *auliyas* but several of them have

also exalted the glory of Sankardeva and Madhavdeva and Bhakti and such relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Assam led to the germination of deep rooted secular, liberal and tolerant outlook/ attitude in the society that when whole country faced communal violence Assam remain a oasis of peace and tranquillity except for a rarest of rare incident. When the communal bitterness was increasing in mainland, in Assam Hindus and Muslims could assemble in the courtyard of a *Namgarh* or a mosque to express their disapproval of any hostility among the people of same land. Even today, the singing of *zikir* produce similar devotion to Sankardeva as well as to Islam and remind the people of their oneness. The finest example of cultural miscegenation in this north eastern corner of India could become possible due to the remarkable *spirit* of toleration, understanding and accommodation which still persist despite being under tremendous stress recently. Perhaps, this did not face much problem even during the days of Assam agitation and militancy. But lack of inculcation or encouragement of such syncretic culture and growing ignorance of cultural legacy largely due to absence from curriculum are bound to affect it and it must be saved before its being becoming extinct.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

Ibn Battuta, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, tr. By Mehdi Husain, Baroda, Oriental Institute, 1953.

„ *Account of Bengal*, tr. By Dc. Harinath, Calcutta, 1978.

Minhaj-ud-Din, Abu-i-Umar-i-Uzman, Maulana, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri: A General History of the Muhammadan Dynasties of Asia, Including Hindustan (810-1260)*, tr. by H.G. Raverty, Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1881, Reprint 2 Vols. New Delhi: Oriental Book Reprint Corp. 1970.

Nathan Mirza, *Bahraistan-i-Ghaibi*, 2 Vols. trans, Dr. M.I. Bora, DHAS, Guwahati, 1936, 2nd edition.

Salim, Ghulam Husain, *Riyaz-us-Salatin: A History of Bengal*, tr. by Abdus Salam, 1903, Reprint, Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delhi, 1975.

Talish, Shihab-ud-din, *Fathiyah-i-Ibriya*, tr. by H. Blochman, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1872.

European Account

Early Travels in India 1583-1619, Collection of the narratives of fitch. Mildenhall, Hawkins, Finch, Withington, Coryat and Terry, ed. W. Foster, New Delhi, 1968.

Books

Acharya N.N.; “*The History of Medieval Assam (from 14th to 17th Century)*” New Delhi, 1984.

- Barua, B.K.; *“Cultural History of Assam”*, Gauhat, 1951.
- Barua, K.L.; *Early History of Kamarup from the earliest times to the end of sixteenth century*, Shillong, 1933.
- Barpujari, H.K.; *“Assam in the days of the company 1826-58”* Assam Second Edition, 1980.
- „ *“An Account of Assam and her Administration 1603-1822 A.D.”*, Delhi, 1988.
- Basham, A.L.; *“The Wonder that was India”*, London, 1954.
- Bhattacharya, S.N.; *“Mughal North East Frontier Policy”*, Calcutta, 1929.
- Bhuyan, S.K.; *“A History of Assam”* 1681-1826 A.D. (Tungknungia Buranji), New Delhi, 1933.
- Chaudhury, P.C.; *“The History of Civilisation of the people of Assam”*, Ph.D. Thesis, London, 1953, Published at Gauhati in 1957.
- Eaton, M. Richard; *“The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204-1760”*, New Delhi, 1994.
- Elliot and Dowbon; *“The History of India”*, Vol.I-V, London, 1867-73, Endle S. The Kacharis, London, 1911.
- Engineer, Asghar Ali; *“Sufism and Communal Harmony*, Jaipur, 1991.
- Gait, Edward; *“A History of Assam”*, 2nd Edition, Calcutta, 1926, Third Edition, Barua, B.K. and Murthy, H.V.S., 1962.
- Guha, Amalendu, *“Medieval North-East India Polity Society and Economy 1200-1750 A.D.”*, Calcutta, 1978.

- Haq, Enamul Muhammad; *"A History of Sufism in Bengal"*, Decca, 1975.
- Haq, Enamul Muhammad; *"A History of Sufism in Bengal"*, Decca, 1975.
- Hussain, Yusuf; *"Medieval Indian Culture"* Delhi, 1957.
- Latif, S.K. Abdul; *"The Muslim Mystic Movement in Bengal, 1301-1550"*,
New Delhi, 1993.
- Malik Sayed Abdul; *"Zikir aru Zari"*, Gauhati, 1990.
- Nag, Sajal, *"Roots of Ethnic, Conflict, Nationality question of North-East India"*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1996.
- Nath, D.; *"History of the Koch Kingdom 1515-1615"* Delhi, 1989.
- Neog M.; *"Sankardev and his predecessors"*, Gauhati, 1953.
- Nizami, Khaliq Ahmad; *"Some aspect of Religion and Politics in India During the 13th century"*, Delhi, 1974.
- Rajtogi, T.C.; *"Islamic Mysticism-Sufism"*, Delhi, 1982.
- Rizvi, Saiyid Athar Abbas; *"A History of Sufism in India to 1600 A.D."*
Vol.I, New Delhi, 1978.
- Saikia, M.K.; *"Assam Muslim Relation and it Cultural Significance"*,
Golaghat, 1978.
- Sarkar, J.N.; *"The Turko Afghan Invasion in Comprehensive History of Assam"*, Vol.2, ed. H.K. Barpujari, Publication Board of Assam, Gowahati, 1992.
- „ *"History of Bengal"* Vol.II, Dacca, 1948.
- Srivastava, M.P.; *"Society and Culture in Medieval India"*, Allahabad, 1975.
- Tanizi, M.Y.; *"Sufi Movement in Eastern India"* Delhi, 1982.

Haq, Enamul Muhammad; “*A History of Sufism in Bengal*”, Decca, 1975.

Gazetteers

1. *The Encyclopaedic District Gazetteers of India*, Edited by S.C. Bhatt, New Delhi, 1998.
2. *Bengal and Agra Annual Guide and Gazetteers for 1841*, Vol.2, 3rd Edition, Calcutta.
3. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India. The Indian Empire*, Vol.I, Descriptive, New Edition, New Delhi.
4. *Assam District Gazetteers Calcutta and Allahabad*, B.C. Allen, 1905-06, 8 Vol.

Journal

1. *Journal of the Assam Research Society*, Gauhati.
2. *Epigraphia Indica, Arabic and Persian Supplement*.
3. *Journal of the Bihar Orissa Research Society*.
4. *Journal of the Bengal Research Society*.
5. *Proceeding of Indian History Congress*.