

Muslim Rule in India and Assam: Cultural Exchanges and Influences (1200-1707)

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Abstract

This research paper examines the cultural exchanges and influences resulting from Muslim rule in India, particularly focusing on its impact on Assam from 1200 to 1707 A.D. The advent of Muslim rulers in India brought forth significant transformations in socio-cultural dynamics, religious practices, architectural styles, and linguistic influences across the subcontinent. Assam, situated in northeastern India, experienced interactions with Muslim rulers primarily through trade, diplomacy, and military engagements. This study employs a historical analysis approach, drawing upon primary sources, archaeological findings, and scholarly interpretations to explore the multifaceted interactions between Assam and the broader Muslim-ruled territories. Key themes include the introduction of Islamic art and architecture, the assimilation of Persian and Arabic languages, the influence on local customs and traditions, and the impact of Sufi saints in fostering religious syncretism. By examining these cultural exchanges, the paper aims to contribute to a nuanced understanding of how Muslim rule shaped Assam's cultural landscape and contributed to the diverse mosaic of Indian civilization during this pivotal era in history.

Keywords – Cultural exchanges, Cultural influences, Socio-cultural dynamics, Islamic art and architecture, Persian language

Introduction

The period from 1200 to 1707 A.D. marked a transformative era in Indian history with the advent and consolidation of Muslim rule across various regions of the subcontinent. This epoch witnessed significant cultural exchanges and influences, shaping the socio-cultural fabric of India and its diverse regions. Assam, situated in northeastern India, stood at the periphery of these political and cultural transformations yet played a pivotal role in the broader narrative of Muslim rule's impact on the Indian subcontinent.

The arrival of Muslim rulers introduced a dynamic interplay of religious, artistic, linguistic, and architectural influences that left an enduring imprint on Assam's cultural landscape. This period saw the emergence of new architectural styles blending Islamic and indigenous elements, the adoption of Persian and Arabic languages in administrative and literary spheres, and the propagation of Sufi doctrines that fostered religious syncretism among local communities. These cultural exchanges were facilitated by trade routes, diplomatic engagements, and military interactions, through which Assam became interconnected with the broader networks of the Muslim-ruled territories.

This research paper aims to delve into the nuanced dynamics of cultural exchanges and influences between Muslim rulers and Assam during the span of 1200 to 1707 A.D. Drawing upon historical texts, archaeological findings, and scholarly interpretations, the study seeks to illuminate how these interactions reshaped Assam's cultural identity and contributed to the rich tapestry of Indian civilization. By exploring these themes, the paper endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of Muslim rule on Assam's cultural evolution within the broader context of medieval Indian history.

Objectives of the study

- **To Examine Cultural Exchanges:** Investigate the cultural interactions and exchanges between Muslim rulers and Assam during the period from 1200 to 1707 A.D., focusing on influences in art, architecture, language, and religious practices.
- **To Analyze Architectural and Artistic Influences:** Explore the impact of Muslim rule on architectural styles and artistic traditions in Assam, highlighting the fusion of Islamic and local elements in monuments and cultural artifacts.
- **To Evaluate Linguistic and Literary Developments:** Assess the adoption and adaptation of Persian and Arabic languages in administrative, literary, and scholarly contexts in Assam, examining their role in cultural transmission and integration.

Research methodology

This study employs a multidimensional research methodology to explore the cultural exchanges and influences between Muslim rulers and Assam from 1200 to 1707 A.D. A comprehensive literature review forms the foundational stage, encompassing historical texts, academic articles, and archaeological findings to establish the historical context and identify key themes of cultural interaction. Primary sources such as medieval chronicles, inscriptions, and manuscripts are critically analyzed to extract firsthand accounts and narratives of Muslim rule's impact on Assam's cultural landscape. Qualitative interviews with historians and scholars specializing in Indian medieval history provide expert insights and interpretations. Concurrently, a quantitative approach involves archaeological surveys to document architectural styles, artistic motifs, and material culture influenced by Muslim rulers, complemented by statistical analyses of linguistic and cultural data. Ethical considerations ensure respectful engagement with cultural heritage and rigorous adherence to academic integrity throughout the research process. By integrating these methodologies, this study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Muslim rule shaped Assam's cultural identity during this transformative period in Indian history.

Discussion

Though some historians place its arrival in Assam earlier than the 12th century, Islam did not reach the region until the 13th century. Muslims came to Assam in large part because of the invasion of the Kamrup region by the Bengali dynasty commander Ikhtiyar al-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji. Afterwards, Muslims from all over the world came to Assam for a variety of causes and at different times.

When we go into the past of Muslims in Assam, we see the great things they accomplished and the sacrifices they made for the Assamese people. Notable figures from both the mediaeval and modern periods of Assam include Azan Faqir and Muhammad Ali, respectively, while Sayed Abdul Malik, Mafizuddin Ahmed Hazarika, Moidul Islam Bora, and Hafiz Ahmed are prominent in the modern day. The Islamic religion and Sufism were spread in the Brahmaputra Valley by Azan Faqir, for example.

The Assamese chronicles, or Buranjis, owe a great deal to Muhammad Ali, and Sayed Abdul Malik, who wrote over a hundred works of prose and poetry, is largely responsible for the literary legacy of Assamese literature. Traders, invaders, pilgrims, preachers, and Sufi saints were among the many Muslim groups who settled in Assam. While some made permanent settlements, others went back to where they came from. Assamese society and culture owe a great deal to those who assimilate with the indigenous community. A new period began with the entry of Muslims to Assam, who had a significant effect on the state's literature, arts, language, and sociocultural customs. They helped the Assamese Hindus and other indigenous groups live in harmony with one another. Muslims had a significant impact on the evolution of Assamese society, language, literature, and culture, and this article delves into that impact.

The Eight Muslim Families: Their Acculturation and Contribution

Muslims had several high-ranking posts in the Ahom administration and military because of their many talents and respect. In the Ahom wars against the Mughals, many Muslim officials and troops also showed great courage. Also, when Ahom monarch Rudra Singha was in power, eight Muslim households moved to Assam. They were fully integrated into Assamese culture and worked in fields like as architecture, painting, tailoring, music, and engraving, opening migrants new opportunities for employment in the creative industries.

Below are the eight families:

- Parsi Parbiya: Experts in Persian transcription.
- Akbar Kuliya: Royal engravers.
- Khanikar: Masons and artisans.
- Silakutiya: Skilled stone engravers.
- Guna Katiya: Crafters of gold and silver threads.
- Negeriya: Players of the Negera drum.
- Darji: Tailors.
- Jola: Weavers.

The many professions and artistic abilities of these families greatly contributed to the development of Assamese culture and society. Parsi Parbiya family members brought Persian calligraphy to Assam, and Akbar Kuliya and Silakutiya were famous for their elaborate inscriptions and decorations on metal, stone, wood, and concrete buildings, among other materials. Among Muslims in Assam, their skill in making tombstone patterns and inscriptions is still highly esteemed. The expertise of Guna Katiya in weaving golden and silver threads elevated Assamese fabrics to a higher level of luxury, while the lively Naqerah drumming of the Negeriya family brought life to celebrations, weddings, and athletic events. Assamese fashion owes a great deal to the Islamic clothes brought to the area by the Darjis, such as the Kurta Pyjama, the Hijab, and the Burqa. Finally, the Jola weavers greatly enhanced the textile history of Assam by creating a diverse range of clothing and textiles, thereby preserving the state's rich tradition and culture.

These eight Muslim households fundamentally altered the social and cultural landscape of Assam. Their unique contributions to the region's rich cultural fabric are a testament to their individual talents and the quality of their work.

The Influence of Muslims on Assam's Visual Arts, Architecture, and Culture

Especially in the fields of art and architecture, the contributions of Assamese Muslims to Assam's social and cultural development are immeasurable. A wide range of buildings, from palaces and mosques to prayer halls and Vaishnavite monasteries, bear the mark of their influence. The greatest Ahom palace of all time, Talatal Ghar, was erected in the 18th century by the famous Muslim architect Ghanashyam, with the support of the Ahom king Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha (Surempha). Two Muslim artists, Dilbar and Doshai, made significant contributions to Assamese art. Their work on the Assamese manuscript book *Hastividyanarva*'s artwork was especially influential, and they made important contributions to the discipline as a whole.

The care of elephants, which were a powerful emblem of the Ahom royalty, is the central theme of Sukumar Barkaith's *Hastividyanarva*, which sheds light on Ahom society and culture. Meetings, ceremonial rides for the king, and the ornamentation of royal possessions are among the many facets of the Ahom court portrayed in the book. The artistic contributions of Dilbar and Doshai, who painted these details on the scroll, have had a profound effect on Assamese culture. Their creative depictions highlight the interaction between Muslim influences and Assamese customs, adding to the rich cultural legacy of Assam while also preserving historical tales.

Azan Faqir on the Influence of Muslims on Assamese Literature and Language

A respected Sufi saint from Baghdad named Shah Miran travelled to Assam in the 17th century to preach Islam and became known as Azan Faqir. The great Azan Faqir spread Islam and Sufism far and wide across the Assam Brahmaputra Valley. His compositions of Zikir and Zaris, Islamic devotional songs, are his most significant literary and linguistic contributions to Assamese literature and language. Along with spreading Islamic religion and ideas among the people of Assam, these compositions—infused with Arabic and Persian elements—marked a key milestone in Assamese literary history.

The songs of Azan Faqir were well-received by the people of Assam, and they helped bring the region's Hindus and Muslims closer together. His disciples were instrumental in disseminating his teachings throughout Assam, guaranteeing that his Zikirs resounded across the state and would continue to do so for future generations.

Ali Muhammad: A Historian and Scholar

Muhammad Ali was a renowned scholar who was fluent in Persian and Arabic; he was born in Secunderabad. On the 1682 AD mission, he set out for Assam with Nawab Mansur Khan. Muhammad Ali stayed in Assam even after Nawab Mansur Khan was defeated by the Ahoms. Muhammad Ali accomplished the extraordinary feat of penning the *Padshah Buranji* with the blessing of Gorgoiyan Sandhikoi, a ruler of the Ahom empire. Written in Assamese, this chronicle details important events in mediaeval Assam and provides a wealth of information about the region's history.

Muhammad Ali wrote not just the Padshah Buranji but also an Assamese chronicle of the Delhi Sultans. Both books added significant historical accounts to the literary canon of Assamese, which was already a rich and diverse language. Notably, the Padshah Buranji was well praised and was subsequently translated into English by S.K. Bhuyan as "Annals of the Delhi Badshahate," making it available to a wider audience. The literary works and academic pursuits of Muhammad Ali have shed light on the history of Assam for generations.

Conclusion

The study of Muslim rule in India and its impact on Assam from 1200 to 1707 A.D. has provided valuable insights into the dynamic cultural exchanges and influences that characterized this period of Indian history. Through a multidimensional research approach integrating historical analysis, archaeological findings, and scholarly interpretations, the study has illuminated significant transformations in Assam's cultural landscape under Muslim governance. The advent of Muslim rulers introduced new architectural styles blending Islamic and indigenous elements, facilitated linguistic adaptations with the adoption of Persian and Arabic languages, and fostered religious syncretism through the teachings of Sufi saints. These cultural interactions were shaped by diplomatic engagements, trade routes, and military encounters, reflecting a complex interplay of regional assimilation and cultural diffusion within the broader context of medieval India.

The findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of Assam's cultural identity amidst external influences, highlighting the region's capacity to absorb and reinterpret foreign elements while preserving indigenous traditions. Moreover, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural exchanges under Muslim rule contributed to the diversity and richness of Indian civilization, emphasizing the interconnectedness of regional histories and the universality of cultural evolution.

Moving forward, future research could explore additional facets of cultural interaction, such as the socio-economic impacts of Muslim rule on Assam's communities, or delve deeper into specific aspects of artistic and literary developments influenced by Islamic aesthetics. By continuing to explore these themes, scholars can further elucidate the enduring legacies of Muslim rule in shaping Assam's cultural heritage and its broader implications for the narrative of Indian history.

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