

Unveiling Linguistic Echoes: Tracing Arabic Influence in Assamese Discourse

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Abstract:

This research paper delves into the profound and multi-dimensional influence of Arabic on the Assamese language, tracing its historical roots, socio-cultural impact, and linguistic integration. Arabic, belonging to the Semitic language family, serves as the language of the Arab world, with significant global linguistic and socio-political relevance. The exploration reveals a close connection between Arabic and Indian societies since the 7th century A.D., particularly evident in trade interactions and administrative foundations laid by Arab individuals. Across various domains including trade, literature, and religion, Arabic has left an indelible mark on Indian cultures.

The arrival of Islam in Assam ushered in a new era of cultural fusion, as Muslim settlers integrated into Assamese society, contributing across diverse professions and embracing local customs. Linguistically, Arabic and Persian words assimilated into Assamese speech and writing, enriching the language with a diverse vocabulary spanning administrative, judicial, educational, culinary, and architectural domains. Notably, Assamese literature and folklore, including the works of renowned poets like Hem Saraswati and Azan Faqir, showcase the integration of Arabic words.

Through historical analysis and linguistic examination, this study highlights the pervasive influence of Arabic on Assamese language and culture, underscoring the intricate dynamics of cultural exchange and linguistic evolution. The comprehensive exploration of Arabic's impact on Assamese elucidates the complexities of cultural assimilation and the enduring legacy of linguistic integration in diverse societies.

Keywords: Arabic Influence, Assamese Language, Socio-cultural Impact, Linguistic Integration, Islam in Assam, Cultural Fusion, Language Evolution, Cultural Assimilation etc.

Introduction:

The interplay between languages reflects the intricate tapestry of human interactions and historical exchanges, shaping the cultural landscape of societies. In this context, the exploration of Arabic influence on the Assamese language unveils a fascinating narrative of cultural assimilation and linguistic evolution. Arabic, as a language belonging to the Semitic family, holds significant global significance as the language of the Arab world and the sacred texts of Islam. Its historical connection with Indian societies dates back to the early 7th century A.D., characterized by trade interactions and the establishment of administrative foundations by Arab individuals.

The arrival of Islam in Assam marked a pivotal moment in the region's cultural landscape, ushering in a period of cultural fusion and exchange between Muslim settlers and the indigenous Assamese populace. This era witnessed the integration of Arabic words into Assamese speech and writing, enriching the language with a diverse vocabulary spanning various domains such as administration, judiciary, education, cuisine, and architecture. Notably, Assamese literature and folklore bear testament to this integration, with renowned poets like Hem Saraswati and Azan Faqir incorporating Arabic words into their works.

Through a comprehensive examination of historical records and linguistic analysis, this study endeavours to trace the profound influence of Arabic on Assamese discourse. By unravelling the linguistic echoes of Arabic within Assamese language and culture, this research aims to shed light on the dynamic processes of cultural assimilation and linguistic integration, illuminating the rich tapestry of human interaction and exchange.

Description:

Arabic is a member of the Semitic language family, ¹and it serves as the primary language of the Middle East, embodying the linguistic identity of the Arab world. Its significance transcends mere communication, as it is the language of the holy Qur'ân and the esteemed Hadith of Islam, thus holding a paramount position in global linguistics. Moreover, Arabic's socio-political influence extends to commerce, where it dominates as the primary language in the Middle Eastern market and holds an official working language status in the United Nations.

Across various domains such as trade, science, literature, and politics, Arabic has left an indelible mark on global interactions. Its historical connection with the Indian

subcontinent dates back to the early 7th century A.D., evidenced by trade interactions between Arab individuals and Indians, notably in the coastal regions of Malabar, Kerala. These exchanges facilitated the assimilation of certain Arabic words into Indian languages. Additionally, historical records indicate the administrative contributions of figures like Muḥammad Bin Qâsim al-Thaqafi (d.715 A.D.), who laid administrative foundations in Sind in 712 A.D., further solidifying the connection between Arabic and the Indian populace.

In essence, Arabic's influence permeates diverse societal matters, reflecting its profound impact on global culture and communication. Its enduring legacy underscores the interconnectedness of societies and the richness of linguistic exchange throughout history.²

Throughout history, Arabic has held a sacred status, gaining significant prominence among Muslim rulers and their subjects in India, enduring until the reign of Bahadur Shah Zafar (d. 1862 A.D.), the final Mughal emperor, in 1857 A.D. Its influence persisted during both British and post-British eras across the Indian subcontinent. Notably, the province of Assam embraced Arabic education in its institutions, including schools, colleges, and universities, reflecting the deep-rooted impact of Arabic on Indian society.

In the cultural mosaic of India, where diverse historical interactions with various imperialist nations have occurred, the convergence of distinct cultures often leads to a new cultural amalgamation, impacting language profoundly. Similar to how English thrived during British rule, Arabic flourished during Muslim rule in India. This cultural fusion enriched the Assamese language and its dialects with novel words, attributable to the influence of Muslim imperialists. This phenomenon is common across cultures, where new communities introduce fresh trends and cultural diversity, ultimately enriching existing cultural aspects.

Arabic, revered as the language of the Holy Qur'ân, has supplied theological vocabulary to millions who embraced Islam globally. The socio-cultural and linguistic integration of Arabic with Assamese expedited the inflow of Arabic words into the Assamese lexicon. However, Assamese is not alone in absorbing Arabic-origin words; Muslim invaders and spiritual scholars, including Sufi saints, Faqirs, and Awliyas, played pivotal roles in this linguistic exchange. They established institutions such as Masjids, Madrassas, Khanqahs, and Dargahs, facilitating Arabic instruction and contributing to the dissemination of Arabic vocabulary.

Among these figures, Hazrat Shah Miran, or Azan Faqir, stood out for his significant contributions. His devotional songs, known as Dhikr and Zari, are replete with Arabic and Persian words and have been accepted in Assamese literature as an important poetical genre.³

It is worth mentioning that the Islamic Sufi Sheikh from Baghdad, Azan Faqir, migrated to the state of Assam in the seventeenth century from Baghdad, accompanied by his brother Nabi Shah, with a great aim of spreading Islam. Our Sufi Sheikh is known as "Azan Faqir" in the state of Assam, and in modern times, he was appointed as the legendary poet in Assamese literature. It is known that his original name is Shah Milan or MuinuddinMiran Shah.

He initially resided in the sanctuary of GhiasuddinAwliya, which is located atop the mountain 'Garurachal' in Hajo, Assam, India for several consecutive years. Then, he moved with his brother to the place called 'Gargaon' and stayed in the neighbourhood of 'Sunpora' for a long time, where he lived his ordinary life. Finally, he came to "SaraguriSapori", which is located near the present-day town of 'Sibsagar'." Azan Faqir settled there with 120 of his beloved disciples for several consecutive years until Allah Almighty called him back in the year 1690.⁴

We are aware of the fact that the Dhikr and Zarî compositions in the Assamese language by Azan Faqîr played a significant role in the development of Assamese literature. Through his compositions, a great deal of Arabic and Persian words was incorporated into the Assamese language. The profound and multi-dimensional impact of Arabic on Assamese language, literature, and culture warrants comprehensive exploration. The goal is to underscore the various avenues through which Arabic has deeply influenced Assamese, enriching it with an array of Arabic words across domains such as administration, court proceedings, business, domestic affairs, cuisine, clothing, professions, and more, both verbally and in written expression.⁵

Arrival of Islam in Assam:

The arrival of Islam in India marked a significant turning point in the region's history, coinciding with the influx of continental conquerors. The encounter between India and Muslims dates back to the 8th century, with Muslims arriving in Assam around 1205 A.D. This initial wave of Islamic influence in Kamrupa, present-day Assam, was led by

Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar in 1205-06 A.D. However, this endeavour met its end in defeat at the hands of the local king.

Subsequently, a series of impactful engagements unfolded, with Muslim emperors from Delhi and their representatives in Gour (Bengal) orchestrating nearly twenty invasions on Assam. This pattern persisted until the pivotal clash at the Battle of Itakhuli in 1682 A.D. In many instances, the Kamrupi or Ahom Army managed to successfully detain a significant number of Muslim soldiers. Over time, these detainees were eventually released and found settlements within the geographical bounds of Assam, which encompassed the former Kamrupa region.

These engagements between Muslim invaders and the local rulers of Assam not only shaped the political landscape of the region but also influenced its cultural and social fabric. The integration of Muslim settlers into Assamese society led to a blending of traditions and customs, contributing to the rich diversity of the region. Despite the conflicts and challenges posed by these invasions, Assam emerged as a melting pot of cultures, with Islam playing a significant role in its historical evolution.

In essence, the arrival of Islam in Assam and its subsequent engagements with the local populace reflect the complex dynamics of historical interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the region's identity over the centuries.⁶

The integration of captive Muslim soldiers into Assamese society marked a significant chapter in the region's history, leading to a complex intertwining of cultures and traditions. These soldiers, hailing from diverse backgrounds and professions, gradually became an integral part of Assamese society, contributing their skills and expertise to various domains.

Central to this integration was the phenomenon of intermarriage between Muslim soldiers and local Assamese women. These unions not only facilitated cultural exchange but also fostered deep bonds between the assimilated Muslims and the broader Assamese community. Through intermarriage, familial connections were established, blurring the lines between different religious and cultural identities and firmly embedding the assimilated Muslims within the fabric of Assamese society.

This intermingling of cultures had profound implications for the social dynamics of Assam. It led to the enrichment of the region's cultural landscape, as traditions, customs, and

practices from both Muslim and Assamese backgrounds were shared and adapted. Moreover, intermarriage contributed to the formation of hybrid identities, where individuals embraced elements from both cultures, further strengthening the bonds of unity and cohesion within the community.

Over time, the assimilated Muslims became an integral part of Assamese life, actively participating in various aspects of society, including governance, trade, and cultural activities. Their contributions helped shape the socio-economic and cultural development of the region, leaving a lasting impact on its identity and heritage.

In essence, the integration of captive Muslim soldiers into Assamese society through intermarriage epitomized the spirit of cultural exchange and mutual respect. It exemplified the resilience of communities to embrace diversity and forge meaningful connections, ultimately enriching the tapestry of Assamese culture and history.

Cultural Influence:

A significant number of Muslim captives found themselves settling and establishing occupations under the patronage of the Ahom monarchy, marking a pivotal phase in Assamese history. The Ahom kings, recognizing the talents and skills of Muslim individuals, extended invitations to artists, musicians, architects, sculptors, and technicians, leveraging their expertise in various domains. This exchange of knowledge and skills not only contributed to the enrichment of Assamese culture but also facilitated advancements in art, architecture, and craftsmanship.

Within the royal court of the Ahom dynasty, certain individuals proficient in Arabic and Persian reading and writing were appointed as scribes, tasked with diplomatic and political endeavours. Their linguistic proficiency played a crucial role in diplomatic relations and administrative affairs, highlighting the inclusive approach of the Ahom rulers towards cultural diversity.

The integration of Muslims into Assamese society was seamless, with individuals earnestly contributing to various facets of Assamese societal life. Despite their Islamic background, many Muslims readily embraced non-Islamic cultural practices, demonstrating a willingness to assimilate and adapt to local customs and traditions. This cultural fusion resulted in a rich tapestry of beliefs and practices, where diverse religious influences coexisted harmoniously.

One notable example of cultural exchange is the introduction of the worship of goddess Manasa by the Marias, a subgroup of Muslims known for their expertise in working with brass. This illustrates how religious practices transcended boundaries, with Muslims actively participating in rituals associated with Hindu deities. Similarly, in some localities, Muslims partook in the worship of goddess Visahari, engaging in *Oja-Pali* performances and contributing to the vibrant cultural landscape of Assam.

Overall, the integration of Muslims into Assamese society during the Ahom period was characterized by mutual respect, collaboration, and cultural exchange. This period of coexistence and cooperation laid the foundation for a diverse and inclusive society, where individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds lived harmoniously, enriching the collective heritage of Assam.⁷

Muslim Sufis and Faqirs, who accompanied the Mohammedan forces, played a significant role in extending their religious services to the broader Assamese populace, including the Muslim community. Establishing Masjids (mosques) and Khanqahs (Sufi monasteries), they actively propagated their spiritual mission among the people of Assam. This endeavour not only contributed to the spread of Islam but also fostered a sense of spiritual community and guidance.

The Ahom kings were influenced by their interactions with the Mughals, incorporated elements of Mughal traditions into their coronation ceremonies. This marked a pivotal point in Assamese history, symbolizing the fusion of different cultural influences and the evolving socio-political landscape of the region.

Moreover, the literary landscape of Assam witnessed significant contributions from the Muslim community. Muslims introduced the concept of assembling book readers, gatherings aimed at reciting epics, ballads, heroic poems, and religious songs. These gatherings served as platforms for communal expression and cultural exchange, allowing for the preservation and dissemination of literary traditions.

In fact, the involvement of Muslim Sufis and Faqirs in religious propagation, the incorporation of Mughal influences into royal ceremonies, and the contributions of Muslims to Assamese literature exemplify the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the history and heritage of Assam. These developments underscore the rich tapestry of

religious, social, and literary traditions that characterize the region's diverse cultural landscape.

Linguistic Influence:

During medieval times in Assam, Muslim settlers were primarily descendants of Muslim soldiers enlisted by the Nawabs of Gour in Bengal and the Delhi Sultans. Their presence and contributions played a significant role in shaping the greater Assamese nation. As they integrated into Assamese society, their offspring naturally absorbed Assamese language and culture from their Assamese spouses. However, they also retained certain terms and words inherited from their Muslim forebears, stemming from Turk, Afghan, Gouria, or Mughal origins. This resulted in the integration of Arabic and Persian words into their speech, which gradually mingled with the Assamese language.

The infusion of Arabic and Persian words into Assamese is a testament to the longstanding interaction between Assam and the Islamic world. Notably, even Assamese people began incorporating Arabic words into their vocabulary. For instance, in the 13th century, the renowned Assamese poet Hem Saraswati used the Arabic term 'Naphar' in his poem, marking an early instance of Arabic and Persian words entering Assamese.

During the rule of the Ahom dynasty, particularly during the era of MahapurushSrimantaShankardeva (1449-1569 A.D), the prevalence of Arabic and Persian words further increased. Words like 'wasil' and 'baqi' from Arabic, 'forman' from Persian, and combinations like 'haram' and 'haramkhor' blended from both languages became evident in Assamese literature during this time. This integration extended into everyday conversations, gradually assimilating these words into the Assamese lexicon.

Moreover, Islamic devotional songs and poems like Dhikir and Zari, composed in Assamese by figures like Azan Faqeer, featured an array of Arabic words. Similarly, Assamese folk songs like Zari, Marthiya, Bibi Songs, and HaidarGhazir songs were replete with Arabic terms. This linguistic fusion reflects the cultural exchange and synthesis that characterized Assamese society, enriching its language and literature with influences from the Islamic world.⁸

Arabic and Persian-origin words found their way into the Ahom'sBuranji literature, particularly in diplomatic contexts. The materials compiled for PadshahBuranji, primarily during the 17th century and predominantly in Assamese, showcased a significant presence of

Arabic vocabulary. With the establishment of educational institutions during the colonial period, the study of Arabic as a subject was facilitated.

During this era, there was a notable surge in the Muslim population in Assam. These individuals played a crucial role in establishing various educational institutions, many of which included Arabic as a subject in their curriculum. Additionally, a wide array of Arabic terms related to administrative, military and judicial domains were adopted by British officials. This linguistic trend permeated through different strata of society, from high-ranking officials to ordinary citizens of Assam, leading to the seamless integration of Arabic-derived words into the official lexicon and terminologies.

As a result of this natural and organic progression, the Arabic vocabulary used within the administrative apparatus and embraced by the state's second-largest populace has become an integral part of the Assamese language. This linguistic fusion reflects the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the linguistic landscape of Assam, highlighting the assimilative nature of the region's cultural heritage.

Arabic Words Used in the Assamese Society:

The integration of Arabic loanwords into everyday speech and writing among the Assamese populace is notable. These specific Arabic terms have found usage across diverse sectors, encompassing administrative, judicial, official, commercial, domestic, sartorial, culinary, and more. These words have become deeply rooted in the Assamese language, often lacking direct substitutes in Assamese vocabulary. Let's explore a few examples from various domains:

Administrative and Military Terminology: "badal" (replacement), "banduq" (gun), "batil" (cancellation), "chabuk" (whip), "daftar" (office), "dakhil" (entry), "hukum" (order), "khilaf" (abstain from), "Mahkuma" (sub-division), "manzoor" (grant), "naqal" (duplicate, copy), etc.

Judicial Terms: "adalat" (court of justice), "bayân" (statement), "dalîl" (deed), "dewani" (civil), "hakim" (judge), "insaf" (justice), "Izhar" (FIR), "Jimma" (custody), "Jamin" (bail), "muzrim" (accused), "Munsif" (magistrate), "Nazir" (superintendent), "Radd" (stay), "rây" (decree), etc.

Revenue and Treasury: "Dakhal" (interfere, possession), "ejmali" (joint, collective), "Jareef" (land survey), "khazna" (revenue), "Kheraj" (land revenue), "lakhiraj" (revenue-free), "Naqsha" (trace map), etc.

Education: "alim" (learned, scholar), "aql" (wisdom), "aljabra" (algebra), "daftar" (post), "dawat" (ink pot), "faida" (benefit), "gafilati" (negligence), "haraf" (letter), "hisab" (account, arithmetic), "istehar" (circular), "kalam" (pen), "khitap" (title), "kitab" (book), "lafz" (word), "mushkil" (difficult), "nakal" (copy), "rakam" (kind, class), "talim" (lesson), "ustad" (teacher), etc.

Clothing and Attire: "Astar" (border), "astin" (sleeve), "burkha" (Burqa), "gaz" (three feet), "jeb" (pocket), "qamis" (shirt), "salwar" (female dress), etc.

Food and Fruits: "halwa" (sweet), "kabab" (roasted meat), "Murabba" (a kind of sweet made from fruit/vegetables), "qimah" (an item of meat), "salad" (salad), "shorbat" (a drink), etc.

Architecture: "buniyad" (foundation), "deraj" (drawer), "hamam" (bathroom), "hauz" (water basin), "imarat" (construction), "kursi" (chair), "makan" (house), "mahal" (palace), "Marmar" (marble), etc.

Business: "aday" (payment), "amanat" (security), "Baqi" (credit, remaining), "dalal" (broker), "dukan" (shop, stall), "faida" (benefit), "hisab" (account), "karz" (loan), "maal" (goods), "munafa" (profit), "nagad" (cash), etc.

These examples demonstrate the widespread adoption and integration of Arabic loanwords into Assamese, reflecting the historical and cultural exchanges between Assam and the Arabic-speaking world..¹⁰ Through a comprehensive linguistic exchange, the infusion of Arabic words has profoundly enriched the Assamese language, seamlessly merging into various facets of everyday life.

Discussion:

The exploration of Arabic influence on the Assamese language reveals a multifaceted dynamic shaped by historical interactions, cultural exchanges, and linguistic integration. The findings of this study illuminate the profound impact of Arabic on various domains of Assamese discourses, including administration, judiciary, education, cuisine, and architecture.

One significant aspect of the discussion is the socio-cultural integration of Arabic-speaking Muslim settlers into Assamese society. The arrival of Islam in Assam facilitated a period of cultural fusion, as evidenced by the integration of Arabic words into Assamese speech and writing. This integration reflects the adaptability and resilience of languages in accommodating diverse cultural influences.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of Assamese literature and folklore as repositories of cultural amalgamation. Poets like Hem Saraswati and Azan Faqir incorporated Arabic words into their works, showcasing the linguistic diversity inherent in Assamese discourse. This cultural exchange not only enriched the Assamese language but also contributed to the broader tapestry of Indian literature and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the linguistic integration of Arabic into Assamese reveals the intricate dynamics of language contact and evolution. The assimilation of Arabic words into Assamese vocabulary underscores the fluid nature of language, which continuously adapts and evolves in response to historical, social, and cultural influences.

Overall, the discussion highlights the significance of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse, emphasizing the interconnectedness of languages and cultures in shaping the linguistic landscape of societies. Through further research and exploration, we can continue to unravel the complexities of language contact and evolution, deepening our understanding of the rich diversity of human communication.

Conclusion:

In fact, the exploration of Arabic influence on the Assamese language unveils a captivating narrative of cultural exchange and linguistic evolution. Through centuries of interactions, Arabic has left an indelible mark on Assamese discourse, enriching the language with a diverse vocabulary and cultural nuances. The arrival of Islam in Assam facilitated a profound fusion of cultures, as Muslim settlers integrated into Assamese society, contributing to various facets of life and embracing local customs.

The linguistic integration of Arabic into Assamese, evident in administrative, judicial, educational, and everyday domains, highlights the dynamic nature of language and its role in reflecting historical interactions. Assamese literature and folklore bear testimony to this integration, serving as repositories of cultural amalgamation and linguistic diversity.

By tracing the linguistic echoes of Arabic within Assamese discourse, this research not only sheds light on the complexities of cultural assimilation but also underscores the resilience and adaptability of languages in the face of historical change. The study of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of cultural exchange and the richness of linguistic diversity in societies.

As we continue to delve into the intricate dynamics of language and culture, the exploration of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of human societies and the profound impact of historical interactions on linguistic evolution. Through further research and exploration, we can continue to unravel the intricate tapestry of languages and cultures, enriching our understanding of the diverse world in which we live.

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These engagements between Muslim invaders and the local rulers of Assam not only shaped the political landscape of the region but also influenced its cultural and social fabric. The integration of Muslim settlers into Assamese society led to a blending of traditions and customs, contributing to the rich diversity of the region. Despite the conflicts and challenges posed by these invasions, Assam emerged as a melting pot of cultures, with Islam playing a significant role in its historical evolution.

In essence, the arrival of Islam in Assam and its subsequent engagements with the local populace reflect the complex dynamics of historical interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the region's identity over the centuries.⁶

The integration of captive Muslim soldiers into Assamese society marked a significant chapter in the region's history, leading to a complex intertwining of cultures and traditions. These soldiers, hailing from diverse backgrounds and professions, gradually became an integral part of Assamese society, contributing their skills and expertise to various domains.

Central to this integration was the phenomenon of intermarriage between Muslim soldiers and local Assamese women. These unions not only facilitated cultural exchange but also fostered deep bonds between the assimilated Muslims and the broader Assamese community. Through intermarriage, familial connections were established, blurring the lines between different religious and cultural identities and firmly embedding the assimilated Muslims within the fabric of Assamese society.

This intermingling of cultures had profound implications for the social dynamics of Assam. It led to the enrichment of the region's cultural landscape, as traditions, customs, and practices from both Muslim and Assamese backgrounds were shared and adapted. Moreover, intermarriage contributed to the formation of hybrid identities, where individuals embraced elements from both cultures, further strengthening the bonds of unity and cohesion within the community.

Over time, the assimilated Muslims became an integral part of Assamese life, actively participating in various aspects of society, including governance, trade, and cultural activities. Their contributions helped shape the socio-economic and cultural development of the region, leaving a lasting impact on its identity and heritage.

In essence, the integration of captive Muslim soldiers into Assamese society through intermarriage epitomized the spirit of cultural exchange and mutual respect. It exemplified the resilience of communities to embrace diversity and forge meaningful connections, ultimately enriching the tapestry of Assamese culture and history.

Cultural Influence:

A significant number of Muslim captives found themselves settling and establishing occupations under the patronage of the Ahom monarchy, marking a pivotal phase in Assamese history. The Ahom kings, recognizing the talents and skills of Muslim individuals, extended invitations to artists, musicians, architects, sculptors, and technicians, leveraging their expertise in various domains. This exchange of knowledge and skills not only contributed to the enrichment of Assamese culture but also facilitated advancements in art, architecture, and craftsmanship.

Within the royal court of the Ahom dynasty, certain individuals proficient in Arabic and Persian reading and writing were appointed as scribes, tasked with diplomatic and political endeavours. Their linguistic proficiency played a crucial role in diplomatic relations and administrative affairs, highlighting the inclusive approach of the Ahom rulers towards cultural diversity.

The integration of Muslims into Assamese society was seamless, with individuals earnestly contributing to various facets of Assamese societal life. Despite their Islamic background, many Muslims readily embraced non-Islamic cultural practices, demonstrating a willingness to assimilate and adapt to local customs and traditions. This cultural fusion resulted in a rich tapestry of beliefs and practices, where diverse religious influences coexisted harmoniously.

One notable example of cultural exchange is the introduction of the worship of goddess Manasa by the Marias, a subgroup of Muslims known for their expertise in working with brass. This illustrates how religious practices transcended boundaries, with Muslims actively participating in rituals associated with Hindu deities. Similarly, in some localities, Muslims partook in the worship of goddess Visahari, engaging in Oja-Pali performances and contributing to the vibrant cultural landscape of Assam.

Overall, the integration of Muslims into Assamese society during the Ahom period was characterized by mutual respect, collaboration, and cultural exchange. This period of

coexistence and cooperation laid the foundation for a diverse and inclusive society, where individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds lived harmoniously, enriching the collective heritage of Assam.⁷

Muslim Sufis and Faqirs, who accompanied the Mohammedan forces, played a significant role in extending their religious services to the broader Assamese populace, including the Muslim community. Establishing Masjids (mosques) and Khanqahs (Sufi monasteries), they actively propagated their spiritual mission among the people of Assam. This endeavour not only contributed to the spread of Islam but also fostered a sense of spiritual community and guidance.

The Ahom kings, influenced by their interactions with the Mughals, incorporated elements of Mughal traditions into their coronation ceremonies. This marked a pivotal point in Assamese history, symbolizing the fusion of different cultural influences and the evolving socio-political landscape of the region.

Moreover, the literary landscape of Assam witnessed significant contributions from the Muslim community. Muslims introduced the concept of assembling Kitabis, gatherings aimed at reciting epics, ballads, heroic poems, and religious songs. These gatherings served as platforms for communal expression and cultural exchange, allowing for the preservation and dissemination of literary traditions.

In fact, the involvement of Muslim Sufis and Faqirs in religious propagation, the incorporation of Mughal influences into royal ceremonies, and the contributions of Muslims to Assamese literature exemplify the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the history and heritage of Assam. These developments underscore the rich tapestry of religious, social, and literary traditions that characterize the region's diverse cultural landscape.

Linguistic Influence:

During medieval times in Assam, Muslim settlers were primarily descendants of Muslim soldiers enlisted by the Nawabs of Gour in Bengal and the Delhi Sultans. Their presence and contributions played a significant role in shaping the greater Assamese nation. As they integrated into Assamese society, their offspring naturally absorbed Assamese language and culture from their Assamese spouses. However, they also retained certain terms and words inherited from their Muslim forebears, stemming from Turk, Afghan, Gouria, or Mughal

origins. This resulted in the integration of Arabic and Persian words into their speech, which gradually mingled with the Assamese language.

The infusion of Arabic and Persian words into Assamese is a testament to the longstanding interaction between Assam and the Islamic world. Notably, even Assamese people began incorporating Arabic words into their vocabulary. For instance, in the 13th century, the renowned Assamese poet Hem Saraswati used the Arabic term "Naphar" in his poem, marking an early instance of Arabic and Persian words entering Assamese.

During the rule of the Ahom dynasty, particularly during the era of MahapurushSrimantaShankardeva (1449-1569 A.D), the prevalence of Arabic and Persian words further increased. Words like "wasil" and "baqi" from Arabic, "forman" from Persian, and combinations like "haram" and "haramkhor" blended from both languages became evident in Assamese literature during this time. This integration extended into everyday conversations, gradually assimilating these words into the Assamese lexicon.

Moreover, Islamic devotional songs and poems like Dhikir and Zari, composed in Assamese by figures like Azan Faqeer, featured an array of Arabic words. Similarly, Assamese folk songs like Zari, Marthiya, Bibi Songs, and HaidarGhazir songs were replete with Arabic terms. This linguistic fusion reflects the cultural exchange and synthesis that characterized Assamese society, enriching its language and literature with influences from the Islamic world.⁸

Arabic and Persian-origin words found their way into the Ahom'sBuranji literature, particularly in diplomatic contexts. The materials compiled for PadshahBuranji, primarily during the 17th century and predominantly in Assamese, showcased a significant presence of Arabic vocabulary. With the establishment of educational institutions during the colonial period, the study of Arabic as a subject was facilitated.

During this era, there was a notable surge in the Muslim population in Assam. These individuals played a crucial role in establishing various educational institutions, many of which included Arabic as a subject in their curriculum. Additionally, a wide array of Arabic terms related to administrative, military and judicial domains were adopted by British officials. This linguistic trend permeated through different strata of society, from high-ranking officials to ordinary citizens of Assam, leading to the seamless integration of Arabic-derived words into the official lexicon and terminologies.

As a result of this natural and organic progression, the Arabic vocabulary used within the administrative apparatus and embraced by the state's second-largest populace has become an integral part of the Assamese language. This linguistic fusion reflects the dynamic interactions and cultural exchanges that have shaped the linguistic landscape of Assam, highlighting the assimilative nature of the region's cultural heritage.

Arabic Words Used in the Assamese Society:

The integration of Arabic loanwords into everyday speech and writing among the Assamese populace is notable. These specific Arabic terms have found usage across diverse sectors, encompassing administrative, judicial, official, commercial, domestic, sartorial, culinary, and more. These words have become deeply rooted in the Assamese language, often lacking direct substitutes in Assamese vocabulary. Let's explore a few examples from various domains:

Administrative and Military Terminology: "badal" (replacement), "banduq" (gun), "batil" (cancellation), "chabuk" (whip), "daftar" (office), "dakhil" (entry), "hukum" (order), "khilaf" (abstain from), "Mahkuma" (sub-division), "manzoor" (grant), "naqal" (duplicate, copy), etc.

Judicial Terms: "adalat" (court of justice), "bayân" (statement), "dalîl" (deed), "dewani" (civil), "hakim" (judge), "insaf" (justice), "Izhar" (FIR), "Jimma" (custody), "Jamin" (bail), "muzrim" (accused), "Munsif" (magistrate), "Nazir" (superintendent), "Radd" (stay), "rây" (decree), etc.

Revenue and Treasury: "Dakhal" (interfere, possession), "ejmali" (joint, collective), "Jareef" (land survey), "khazna" (revenue), "Kheraj" (land revenue), "lakhiraj" (revenue-free), "Naqsha" (trace map), etc.

Education: "alim" (learned, scholar), "aql" (wisdom), "aljabra" (algebra), "daftar" (post), "dawat" (ink pot), "faida" (benefit), "gafilati" (negligence), "haraf" (letter), "hisab" (account, arithmetic), "istehar" (circular), "kalam" (pen), "khitap" (title), "kitab" (book), "lafz" (word), "mushkil" (difficult), "nakal" (copy), "rakam" (kind, class), "talim" (lesson), "ustad" (teacher), etc.

Clothing and Attire: "Astar" (border), "astin" (sleeve), "burkha" (Burqa), "gaz" (three feet), "jeb" (pocket), "qamis" (shirt), "salwar" (female dress), etc.

Food and Fruits: "halwa" (sweet), "kabab" (roasted meat), "Murabba" (a kind of sweet made from fruit/vegetables), "qimah" (an item of meat), "salad" (salad), "shorbat" (a drink), etc.

Architecture: "buniyad" (foundation), "deraj" (drawer), "hamam" (bathroom), "hauz" (water basin), "imarat" (construction), "kursi" (chair), "makan" (house), "mahal" (palace), "Marmar" (marble), etc.

Business: "aday" (payment), "amanat" (security), "Baqi" (credit, remaining), "dalal" (broker), "dukan" (shop, stall), "faida" (benefit), "hisab" (account), "karz" (loan), "maal" (goods), "munafa" (profit), "nagad" (cash), etc.

These examples demonstrate the widespread adoption and integration of Arabic loanwords into Assamese, reflecting the historical and cultural exchanges between Assam and the Arabic-speaking world..¹⁰ Through a comprehensive linguistic exchange, the infusion of Arabic words has profoundly enriched the Assamese language, seamlessly merging into various facets of everyday life.

Discussion:

The exploration of Arabic influence on the Assamese language reveals a multifaceted dynamic shaped by historical interactions, cultural exchanges, and linguistic integration. The findings of this study illuminate the profound impact of Arabic on various domains of Assamese discourse, including administration, judiciary, education, cuisine, and architecture.

One significant aspect of the discussion is the socio-cultural integration of Arabic-speaking Muslim settlers into Assamese society. The arrival of Islam in Assam facilitated a period of cultural fusion, as evidenced by the integration of Arabic words into Assamese speech and writing. This integration reflects the adaptability and resilience of languages in accommodating diverse cultural influences.

Moreover, the study highlights the role of Assamese literature and folklore as repositories of cultural amalgamation. Poets like Hem Saraswati and Azan Faqir incorporated Arabic words into their works, showcasing the linguistic diversity inherent in Assamese discourse. This cultural exchange not only enriched the Assamese language but also contributed to the broader tapestry of Indian literature and cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the linguistic integration of Arabic into Assamese reveals the intricate dynamics of language contact and evolution. The assimilation of Arabic words into Assamese

vocabulary underscores the fluid nature of language, which continuously adapts and evolves in response to historical, social, and cultural influences.

Overall, the discussion highlights the significance of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse, emphasizing the interconnectedness of languages and cultures in shaping the linguistic landscape of societies. Through further research and exploration, we can continue to unravel the complexities of language contact and evolution, deepening our understanding of the rich diversity of human communication.

Conclusion:

In fact, the exploration of Arabic influence on the Assamese language unveils a captivating narrative of cultural exchange and linguistic evolution. Through centuries of interactions, Arabic has left an indelible mark on Assamese discourse, enriching the language with a diverse vocabulary and cultural nuances. The arrival of Islam in Assam facilitated a profound fusion of cultures, as Muslim settlers integrated into Assamese society, contributing to various facets of life and embracing local customs.

The linguistic integration of Arabic into Assamese, evident in administrative, judicial, educational, and everyday domains, highlights the dynamic nature of language and its role in reflecting historical interactions. Assamese literature and folklore bear testimony to this integration, serving as repositories of cultural amalgamation and linguistic diversity.

By tracing the linguistic echoes of Arabic within Assamese discourse, this research not only sheds light on the complexities of cultural assimilation but also underscores the resilience and adaptability of languages in the face of historical change. The study of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of cultural exchange and the richness of linguistic diversity in societies.

As we continue to delve into the intricate dynamics of language and culture, the exploration of Arabic influence on Assamese discourse provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of human societies and the profound impact of historical interactions on linguistic evolution. Through further research and exploration, we can continue to unravel the intricate tapestry of languages and cultures, enriching our understanding of the diverse world in which we live.

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