Chapter - 4

TEACHINGS AND ATTITUDE OF THE SUFI SAINTS TO THE SOCIETY AND STATE DURING MEDIEVAL PERIOD IN ASSAM.
The study over the life and missionary activities of the Sufi saints of the Brahmaputra valley as well as the whole Assam during medieval period reveals that they did not remain mere spectators of the political events of their contemporary times, rather they had extended their help and cooperation 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 adopted local idiom and preached message of
love and universal brotherhood. According to K.A. Nazami, "mysticism is nothing but service of humanity." The Sufis strongly believed in equality and fraternity of mankind. The Sufis of Assam adjured 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 indigenised 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 doctrine ‘Ulema’.

Sufi Islam was definitely more influential than the Islam of the ambitions conquerors. The Sufis again deeply influenced local Hindus, as a result large number of Hindus embraced Islam. The sympathetic nature and attitude of the Sufis attracted the local people in a large scale.

The Sufism in Assam during the medieval period, as... has been stated above, has its beginning since the early past of thirteenth century and throughout the whole course of the Study, it has been found that the Sufi saints were the living force of the Society, who not only kept themselves busy for self purification, rather they came out from the four walls of their shrines and tried to enlighten others in medieval society of Assam.

The Sufi missionary activities contributed the lion's share in the cultural progress of the Assamese Society. This mission, in respect of religion, literature, education and their mode of living may be considered as reawakening in Assamese social and cultural life. It bound the people of different faith and belief together with the feelings of fraternity, humanity, religion and culture. Another important contribution made by the Sufi saints towards the growth of nationalistic feeling and the spirit of social harmony among the people of diverse racial strains is that unlike other parts of India, it made the caste system more liberal.

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1 Asghar Ali Engineer, Sufism and Communal Harmony, p- 109, Jaipur, 1991
2 Ibid- p- 110
3 S. Abdul Malik : Sufi Aru Sufishad, p- 68
4 S. K. Bhuyan : Surgadev Rajeswar Singh, p- 172
At this point the Sufi Saints had to adopt many liberal attitudes towards the practice of Islam. In this new situation, the preachers of Islam had made the religion more liberal and flexible, the gateway of which was opened to all irrespective to the belief and faith. Throughout the study, it has also been highlighted that the propagators had rendered many reformatory services imparting socio-ethical rules of conduct in order to make the local people refined and cultured.  

Equality and spirituality and Universal brotherhood were the important teachings which were to be maintained by the Sufi saints in their devotional matters. These two factors, along with the liberalisation of the prophetic Islam, made Sufi cult extremely popular in this region.

As a result of this liberal policy in respect of religion, the Sufi mission succeed in initiating into Islam a large number of local inhabitants, making them devoted, righteous and refined in their manners and customs. One of the most important teachings of Sufism is that one should not only respect and be non-violent to the fellow beings but also should show kindness and pity to all living beings, because as the souls of Allah is living in the hearts of all. It teaches them to surrender at the fact of the Almighty God, to detach themselves from wordly objects and to suppress their egos. As a result of these teachings of Sufism, even today, the common people are found as very modest, simple, well-behaved, devoted, refined and righteous, besides having some knowledge of religious lores, the art of dancing, singing and playing of instruments during the time of ‘Urs’ celebrations. From whatever rank or position of the Society he comes of, he posses all these qualities, either owing to his direct contact with Sufi teachings or with traditions handed down to him.

In this way, it has been observed that Sufism was one of the main cult of medieval Assamese Society and received a good ground in the hearts of the people. As has been observed above, prophetic Islam could not penetrate deeply among the people of Assam, as the Sufistic Islam could

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7 S. K. Bhuyan: Sargadeva Rajeswar Singha, p- 173
during the period. Nevertheless, credit must be recorded to handful of Sufi saints for having spread Islam among the mass of native population as because they had liberalised and universalised the tenets of Islam, which became an easily acceptable faith and belief, for the solution of all types of human problems both terrestrial and eternal.

The noble teachings of fellow-feelings mutual co-operation amongst the human beings and deep fraternity had not only developed the harmonious atmosphere but also commented the heterogeneous elements for the formation of greater Assamese community, the test of which is still been enjoying by the people of the whole region of Assam who saying and sing the Zikir and Borgit together at a time. Thus it is due to their humble contribution, the compact elements for the formation of greater Assamese community developed.

From comprehensive study the whole course of time, it is observed that there were two phases of relationship between the Sufi Saints, society and state. In the first phase from thirteenth century to the end of Sixteenth century, the Sufi saints had their cordial relations and received patronage from the Muslim commanders, subeders and Generals who halted to the western part of Assam. It is a matter of fact that during this phase, not a simple instances of contact of the Sufi Saints with the Ahom King are found. It is only after Seventeenth Century, when the hostility between the Ahoms and the Mughals came to an end.

The second phase of the relationship started during this period, the Sufi Saints could extend their influence over the royal court of Ahoms and ultimately became successful in gaining royal patronage through all the possible means including revenue free lands. It is even under the British occupation, the influence of the Sufi Saints and their shrines did not come to an end, rather they enjoyed various previliges in time and after.

The Sufi saints, specially the protagonists of the Suhrawardiya order whether in the Brahmaputra valley or elsewhere, had kept a close relationship with the state and society. It is a fact that some of the Sufi Saints

* S. Samsher Ali; Sufi Aru Sufi Darshan, (Introduction)
had to face oppositions from the non-Muslims and the kings or Emperors with whom they had their close contact. In many cases the Sufi Saints accompanied the Muslim invading army, to clear the routes from various difficulties, by dint of their miraculous powers. And this was a common phenomena, with regards to the early Sufi Saints who came to Assam, because there was a general belief among the Muslim soldiers that Assam is the land of magic and evil spirit, and it is only the miraculous power of the Sufi Saints, that could remove them, otherwise nobody who used to go there for invasion or any other purpose could never come back or survive. Therefore, record says that almost every Muslim invasions towards Kamrupa as well as the Brahmaputra valley of Assam as a whole accompanied the spiritual Saints alongwith them. References are available in the pages of history that the Sufi Saint Ghiyas Uddin Awliya, entered Assam with the invading army of Sultan Ghiyas Uddin in A.H. 721. Another reputed Persian Work Alamgir-namah mentions the Assamese people as being highly expert in witch craft and magic. There is some exaggeration in Alamgir-namah when it states. That whoever from other parts of Hindustan comes to Assam cannot return but has to live here being befooled and charmed in this land. Even it is known from a chronicle preserved in the Damdama Sikh Gurudwara at Goalpara, that Raja Ram Singha, the noted Rajput general of Aurangzeb, at the time of his punitive expedition against Ahom King Chakradhwaja in 1667 A.D. brought with him five renowned Sufi Saints. Shah Akbar, Shah Bahmar, Shah Sufi, Shah Sharan and Shah Kanial to overcome the Assamese black art and magic. Later on who had founded

9 S. Samsher Ali : Sufi Aru Azam Pir, pp- 44-102
10 Sheikh Shamsher Ali, Sufi Darshan Aru Azam Pir, p- 78, Guwahati
the Panch pirar dargah at Dhubri and Shah Kamal's dargah at Mehendraganj in Meghalaya.  

It is a matter of fact that in every most of the cases the Sufi Saints did not only assist and co-operate the kings but the rulers also became respectful towards the Sufi Saints and built mosques, madrassas and Khanqahs as a matter of honour, and also helped them in their missionary activities. They even granted revenue free lands for the maintenance of these centers. The construction of a mosque by Ikhtiyar Uddin Malik Yuzbak in 1256 A.D. On the hills of Garudachal at Hajo where Ghiyas Uddin Awliya lived and the land grant issued to the same dargah by Sultan Shuja, son of Mughal emperor Shahjahan, are the glaring examples of such respect paid by rulers to the Saints.

It is a matter of fact that during the early days, the Sufi Saints of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam received such cordiallity from the Muslim rulers only. But apart from the Ahoms are concerned, it is only from the time of Rudra Singha, the Sufis, their Shrines and other Islamic institutions began to enjoy some special care and attention from the crown. The issue of Copper Plate inscription by some of the successors of Rudra Singha, granting revenue free land to many dargahs and Khanqahs, the employment of Muslim priests in the royal palace, the creation of Muslim “sattras”, the existence of more than twenty houses of instructions for the children of Muslim in Rangpur, the Ahom capital and ten or twelve sattras at Guwahati, as were observed by J.P. Wade in the eighteenth century, help us to see very clearly that Islam and its religious preachers received adequate encouragement from the ruling class during this period.
Satyendra Nath Sarmah states that according to Dr. S.K. Bhuyan there were about 10-12 schools around Guwahati exclusively meant for imparting Muslim education and in the capital Rangpur (Sibsagar) such schools went up to twenty during the later part of the Ahom rule. It is to be noted the Muslims constituted a microscopic minority during the Ahom rule. Queen Pramatheswari popularly known as Phuleswari and her husband king Siva Singha were great patrons of learning and art. She not only patronised scholars in diffusing education and learning but also maintain a school within the palace. as noted above, if there were so many schools for the teaching of the Islamic education in two important towns the member of schools for the over whelming majority community must have been innumerable.\(^{19}\)

But in course of time the influence of the Sufi Saints were so deeply rooted to the Assamese ruling class, as it is reported that Ahom King Siva Singh managed to meet Shah Noor Dewan of Khankarpar Dargah, near Barpeta and expressed his childlessness and requested him to do something that he could have a son. Accordingly, it is said that, the saint forwarded a "banana" to the king and on eating the banana, the Queen Phuleswari gave birth to a male child. The King delighted granted a revenue free land (called pirpal land) to the dargah of the Sufi Saint there in Bhella under Berpeta Mouza. The dargah is still enjoying the (peerpal land) revenue free “nijifikherej land there.

Alike Shahnoor Dewan, many other Saints and Shrines also received revenue free land grants from Ahom Royal Court, whose names may be mentioned here. The copper plate grants that the King Lakshmi Singha issued in 1780 A.D. let us know that the Panch Pirs of Khetri Pargana, Shah Fakir of Barnagar pargana, Shah Madar of Bausi Pargana and Haji Anowar Fakir of Hajo Maqam\(^{20}\) received such grants, as a result of their cordial and friendly relation with the crown. The privileges in the form


of land grants and patronages that were received by Swal Pir, Khandkar Pir, Nabi Pir and Azan Fakir in Sibsagar districts are no doubt the examples of such relationship. Even several other Sufi Saints received such grants from different Seminars in west Assam during twentieth Century. Hazrat Nasir Uddin Shah Baghdadi at Jaleswar and at Basbari (Lakhipur) is the prominent amongst them.

It is also experienced that certain Sufi Saints of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam had to face the royal persecution on gaining much popularity among the masses. It is known that Azan Fakir's growing popularity had gradually become a cause of concern to the early Muslim Settlers of Assam.

Because through his writings and preaching, the Saint had bitterly attacked the anti-Islamic doings of the native Muslims. Thus in course of time he came into direct clash with the Assamese Muslim official Rupai Goriya, the “Dadhara” or the armSour carrier of the Ahom King. In 1685 A.D. i.e. during the reign of Gadadhar Singha this Rupai Gariya brought open charges, thrice against the pir before the King, saying that the pir was a spy of the Mughals and he used to meet Mughal soldiers in jungles. The king however, heeded him not thrice. But at last Rupai succeeded in convincing the King alleging that the pir gave wrong guidance to the Muslim subjects in the country and thus polluting the religion. Still the King would not take himself any steps against Azan Fakir. The King, therefore, tacitly suggested Rupai to do what the latter deemed best, and also cautioned him to act with utmost care and in a rightful way so that neither the King nor the Muslim subjects be held responsible for his mis-judgement. Rupai Garia, thus having the King concurrence, arrested the pir and extracted his eyes. But subsequently the King learnt all about the intrigue against the pir and therefore, he immediately put Rupai Gariya to death and the pir was granted

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a monastery with free land grant servitors near the Dikhow river in Sibsagar. 24

Due to liberal teachings attitude and the relationship between the two were so deeply rooted that even the Ahom Kings used to visit the shrines with the view to paying respect to the sufi Saints and to request them for making special prayer for the safe protection of the country. It is said that Ahom King Rudra Singha visited the Shah Mukdam’s dargah at Sijuguri (Guwahati) with such aim in view. 25

Thus from the discussion of the foregoing pages, it may be clear to us that Sufi Saints did not remain mere spectators of the Political events of their contemporary times, rather they had tried to help and cooperate them in their way of territorial expansion, clearing the routes of the expeditions from the black art of magic and evil spirit by dint of their miraculous power. It is also observed that, beyond political affairs, the Sufi saints applied their miracles for the fulfilment of the individual desires of the Kings and nobles this way during the whole course of study the relationship between the Saints and ruling class were found to be cordial and friendly, which helped in the deepest foundation of the Sufistic faith amongst the common masses of the region. 26

The spiritual saints who are generally came to be known as Sufi, Darwesh, pir or Awliya traced enormous influence and authority over the Society and people of the whole Assam during medieval period. From the study of the life and missionary activities of the Sufi Saints of Kamrupa and Assam it reveals that their activities and influence were not confined only within the four walls of their shrines rather they exerted a great attractions in the minds of the people in the Society also. 27 Records are available that these Saints did not only concentrate themselves within the Urban places, but

27 S. Samsher Ali, Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir, pp- 76-77
also scattered in the rural areas to reach the heart of the poor villagers. They
 even reached the top of the hills and mountains. 28 The attractions that were
 earned by the Saints of the medieval period due to their high esteemed ideals
 and refined characters still continued and people, thousands in number, used
 to visit the tomb of those saints, to pay due respect to them and to pray for
 their “Magfirat” (Salvation) and obviously for the fulfillment of their
 “mannat” (desires). 29

In the light of the above, it is significant to assess teachings and
 influence of the Sufi Saints and their shrines on the serial, political, cultural
 and educational life of the people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam during
 the period of our study.

The Sufi Saints, from the very beginning, enthusiastically
 embibed with the sayings of prophet Muhammad (SM) that “ Spread
 whatever you have heard from me unto others” and adopted the sole aim of
 their life to preach it. 30 Thus from the very inception, it is seen that the Sufi
 centers or Khanqahs were virtually the centers of missionary activities and
 religious syncretism. 31 With regards to the Sufi Saints who entered Assam
 during the first half of the period of present study, it is seen that while they
 were mentally and spiritually ready to go to the new places, received the call
 from the invading Muslim soldiers to accompany them towards the Sea of
 Bengal with a view to recognising the magic and black art with their
 miraculous power, they simply responded to it and entered into Assam. To
 them it matters little, whether the expedition was over, so as to respond to the
 sayings of the Holy prophet and devoted themselves to the missionary works
 for the propagation of Islam. 32 Apart from these, there were some other Sufi
 Saints who had hailed to this land, spontaneously with their spiritual mission.
 Thus whatever might be the mode of their advent to the land the Sufi saints

28 S.K. Bhuyan, Annals of Delhi Budshahate, pp- 16-17,
30 Y. Tamizi, Sufis in Eastern India, (Introduction)
31 J. J. R. Burman, Hindu-Muslim Syncretic shrines and communities, p- 17, Delhi, 2002
32 M. Choudhary, Luit Barak Aru Islam, p- 25, Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir, pp- 76-77
had devoted themselves to the mission of preaching Islam with religious
syncracy.\textsuperscript{33}

The major section of Sufi Saints had entered Assam, when the
central government of Kamrupa disappeared and the people became the easy
prey of all sorts of oppressions and exploitations, and their minds were over
whelmed with the feelings of uncertainty, terror and despair so much so that
they were bound to seek solace in religion. To save the people from such
sickening state and to enthuse them with new hopes, the role of great social
informers and spiritual guides, like Sufi Saints become the crying need of the
hour. In such situation, the Sufi Saints had brought the principles of equality
and brotherhood, were the important characteristics of the religion in the
social side.\textsuperscript{34} It was the philosophy of Islam with the Sociological features of
equality and brotherhood, rather than its religious aspects of the faith in
India as well as in Assam, as “Hindu philosophy” which in the medieval
period “had been responsible for the social chaos from which Islam showed a
way but for the masses of the Indian people.”\textsuperscript{35} It was with the simple
formula of faith, dogmas and rituals of Islam, the preachers, had attracted
the people who had been suffering from the exploitation of the priestly
class.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus the most note worthy contribution towards Islamisation.
in this period, was that of the Sufistic mission, propagated by the Spiritual
Sufi Saints. It can be said that this mission succeed in converting the people
of different tribes and communities to the Islamic faith in a large scale due to
various reasons firstly the Saints had liberalised and modified tenets of Islam
in order to make them easily practicable by the common people.\textsuperscript{37} Secondly,
the Sufi mission removed the differences between the high and the low
grades, prevailing in the society and opened the door for backward and
untouchable communities for entering into Islam under Sufi order. after

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid. p - 77-26
\textsuperscript{34} Tara chand: Influence of Islam an Indian Culture, p- 51
\textsuperscript{35} M.N. Roy : Historic Role of Islam, pp- 98-f
\textsuperscript{36} M.K. Saikia : Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance, Golaghat, 1978,
p- 177.
\textsuperscript{37} Melon Neog, Bharatiya Bhakti Andalanar Patahymith Sankardev, p- 25, Kalcutta, 2005
making them more pure, refined and enlightened with ethico-devotional
codes and rules of conduct. By adopting these methods, the Sufi Saints had
converted a large number of people into the liberal fold of Sufistic Islam. Due
to the policy of caste emancipation, the bond of friendship and fraternity
among the different tribes and communities became solid and firm and the
Assamese Muslim Society became more expanded. The Mosques, the
Khanqahs and the mazars are the main Muslim religious institutions which
have been playing a vital role in the Social and cultural life of the Assamese
Muslims during the period of last eight hundred years. The death
anniversary festivals “Urs also became a prime factor of their social, religious
and cultural functions.  

It is also a matter of fact that along with the growth of
Khanqahs dargas or mazars, the significance of mosque oriented islam seems
to be declined, however the religious and other functions and festivals held in
the mosques did not stop and continued with its dim observance.

The influence of the Khanqahs and the mazars on the life of the
Assamese people are of manifold. It may not be possible to quote appropriate
authority in support of any conclusive view, but the tradition which are still
alive in these institutions, will stand as testimony of the said view. 

However, it is known from Minhaj-Siraj, that the Koch and the
Mech tribes of the territory to the east of Gauda displayed their appreciation
of Islam so much that one of their chieftains even adopted the faith from
Muhammad-Ibn-Bakhtiyar as early as 1205-06 A.D. It has been discussed
earlier that these Kochs and the Mech people were the indigenous
inhabitants of the western part of the ancient Kingdom of Kamrupa. 

This shows that with the political contact of Assam with the
Muslims, the Islamic faith found its way into this land through the process of
conversions, which could have kept continued by the Sufi Saints of course
with the helping hands of the Muslim ruling class. Because, we can also know
from the same source that Malik Yuzbak, after conquering Kamrupa in

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38 Melon Neog, Bharatiya Bhakti Andolanar Putahunith Sankaldev, p- 26, 27
40 Minhaj-Ush-Shiraj, Tuhugut-I Nasiri, pp- 560-561, 572.
1256-57 A.D. erected a Mosque at Uttar Gauhati (which is said to have been located on the Garudhachal hill) where Ghiyas Uddin Awliya started to live permanently, with his mission of propagating Islam. The expansion of the suzerainty of Sultan Ghiyas Uddin over this part of the country might have support fresh incentive to the Saint in the task.

The accounts of the king Ratnadhwajapala of Chutiya Kingdom, show that about forty years after the advent of Muhammad-Ibn-Bakhtiyar on the political and cultural scene of Assam, the Islamic faith and culture could claim the appreciation even from the people of the Chutiya Kingdom in the far eastern region of Kamrupa. It is certain that all these events had laid deep impact on the people of Assam and compelled them to turn their eyes to Islam, out of whom, though very scanty in number, had accepted the religion during the subsequent period of time.

Commenting on the growth of the Muslim population of Assam Sir E. Gait writes, that the great majority of persons professing the Islamic faith in Assam are, as in eastern Bengal, local converts from the lower caste and of aboriginal tribes, who on conversion, described themselves as "Shaikhs" and he also says that converts mainly from the lower strata of the Hindus and aboriginal tribes constituted the book of Muslim population of the country.

It is a matter of fact that the Muslim invaders who now and then entered, captured and again had to vacate the provinces of Kamrupa as well as Assam, due to their unstable political condition, could not adopt any systematic attempt for preaching Islam. In such situation it will not be exaggeration if we assume that it was only the benevolent attempt of the spiritual Sufi Saints that the peaceful penetration of the message of Islam spread over the region.

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43 Census Report of Assam, 1891 A.D.
It is with the inclusion of the Sufi teachings and Sufistic missionary activities as well as the Islamic civilization, a new dimension was ushered in the field of Socio-cultural assimilation in almost every field of life, because the Muslims, obviously the Sufi Saint did not only brought the religious teachings, but they had come with the very zeal and examples of an already established civilization, which had flourished in Arabia and central Asia since sixth century A.D. 45

The Sufi Saints taught their disciples in this region the principle of “Patriotism as a part of faith” and inspired them to accept Assam as their home-land and to dedicate their strength in order to uphold the prestige of their land.

(Hubbul-Utaniyee Min al Imman.)

Alee Ahmed a reputed scholar is of the opinion that according to Hadith “Love of Motherland is a part of faith...............” 46

It has been noted that quite a large number of Muslims were employed in the guilds of weavers, tailors, drapers, masons and besides in the royal arsenals. After getting such inspiration from their employment in different governmental sector, which had widened the scope for the increase of Perso-Arabic elements in Assamese Culture. 47 Consequently different types of dress, brocades and various types of Muslim embroidery enriched the old Assamese customary. The use of enamelled gold ornaments, the dome shaped missionary constructions on the royal curved doom frames, gates and other missionary decorative works with intricate geometrical patterns of many Hindu temples, the use of metallic spittoons, smoking pipes and hookahs etc are no doubt the outcome of the cultural assimilation with Muslims. It is a matter of fact that though the Sufi Saints did not have directly related to the inclusion of the above mentioned cultural aspects: they

46 Ibid - p- 14
had no doubt, indirectly contributed in these fields because if they would not have cultivated the atmosphere of Social harmony and mutual co-operation amongst the people of different religions, it would not have been possible for the concerned exports to prove their caliber and thus to enhance the cultural scenario of Assam. 48

The growing contact and conflict of the Ahoms with the Muslims necessitated their developing the culture of the Arabic and persion languages not only in the court towards an effective diplomatic relationship with the latter, but also in the Islamic religious centres (Khanqah and dargahs) to impart religious education to their disciples. Even the Assamese fine arts, which developed in the Ahom court, blossomed forth into new vendeure having nourished on the element from those painting of “Hasti Vidyarnava”, the rise of the culture of the Hindustani music and painting is also not very insignificant and the musical instruments like Rabab, Nagara and the Pakhaj were used by the Assamese vaishnavas. 49 They also use, even now, Muslim type of dresses, as they had learnt from the Sufi Saints at the time of their performances in special occasions.

The other mode for the increase of social understanding is the matrimonial alliances which were also adopted by the Muslim Saints. As it is known that Azan Fakir married an Assamese lady of Sigsagar, by whom he had three sons and their descendents are still found in Assam, who are known as Saraguria Dewans. 50 Thus the Sufi Saints, in Assam, had established such an atmosphere which had not only developed the Socio-Cultural elements but also Assamese living style and culture which has become an integral part of present cultural spirit of culture for the people of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam.

Thus the Sufi mission in medieval period, rendered Significant services in establishing a healthy Assamese Society, embracing all the tribes
and aboriginal races of the region, by maintaining and infusing a spirit of humanity, cordiality and brotherhood in the hearts of all those who come within the current of this social progress.

From the very beginning, the Sufi Saints and their centres have been a significant role in the educational development of the people of Kamrupa, Goalpara and Rangpur as well as Brahmaputra valley of Assam. With this aim in view they have established Maqtabs and madrassas adjacent to the Khanqahs. In this context, mention may be made regarding the "Mazharul Uloum Madrassa", founded by Hazrat Nasir Uddin Baghdadi at Katarihara in the district of Goalpara, which still flourishing as a "centre of education" for the people of the district. It is known that the Saint himself was a very learned man and he encouraged, others for acquiring knowledge and education. Even he used to provide free food and lodging to the students who came to the Madrassa for learning. Moreover, he used to provide scholarship to the poor and meritorious students, both Muslims and non-Muslims and used to send them to the centers of higher study.

To acquiring knowledge, both religious and traditional, was very much essential to become a Khalifa or deputy of a Saint in Sufi order. Therefore, almost with every Saints, there remained a long gathering of their followers who came to fulfill the pre-condition of acquiring knowledge. Thus it can conducted that the Sufi shrines of the Brahmaputra valley during medieval times were not only the religious centers but played significant role for the promotion of education and culture of Assam.

Dr. Mohini Kumar Saikia, a noted Social scientist observed that almost in every medieval dargahs and Khanqahs of Assam, the Muslim religious teachers had maintained a number of monasteries which had their prototype like non-muslim ecclesiastical organisations. Before the advent of the Muslims, the literary language of Kamrupa as well as Assam was archaic or obsolete and its literature was not upto mark, which received a momentum and thus the gateway for its development opened and gradually it

51 S.K. Bhuayan, Swargadeon Rajeswar Singha, p- 166, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1961
52 Anowar Hussain, The last thirty years of Hazrat Nasir Uddin, Bagdadi, pp. "2, "3- 198"
was enriched with due treatment of the early settled Muslims and the Sufi Saints.

It is only after the hostile atmosphere between the Ahoms and the Mughals came to an end in the later part of seventeenth century, cultural exchange between Assam and the west of India began in a free and larger scale.  

Ahom king Rudra Singha (1696-1716 A.D.), was the first king to open the flood gate for Islamic influence to enter into Assam in a forceful torrent. References are no rare to show that, how during his reign the Mughal type of custom was sought to be introduced as Ahom court dress and how he tried to popularize the Muslim types of garments among his subjects. In the field of literature also he appears to have been taken a bold step to introduce a change in its kind with the admission of the fortifying effect of the Muslim element. In other parts of India, Persian literature had attained, by this time, a great popularity among different sections 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 Muslim Saints and other settlers.  

But we have, so far, no evidence to show that any such book was imported to this country and was directly translated to the Assamese language. It appears that only the themes were transported here orally by some Saints or their disciples. It is also known that Rudra Singha, the Ahom King, 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 Muslim scholars or Saints settling in this country. In this contest mention may be made regarding the romances like “Madhumalati” produced by Sufi poet Shaikh Manjhan, which the King used to have heard. Although no example of bringing Islamic Literature

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56 B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarmah : Madhumalati, introduction
from other provinces of India is found, but Romantic literatures like “Shahapari Upakhyan or Mrigawati-Charita” has been composed in Assamese literature on the basis of Islamic Theme “Mrigawati-Charitra” appears to be akin to the Mrigawati of the Hindi poet ‘Kutuban’ who illumined the court of Sultan Hussain Shah of Bengal (1493-1519 A.D.). In his description of houses, orchards and towns, Dvija Ram, the author of Mrigawati-charitra, had sincerely followed the conventions of the vaishnavite poet, although he had retained the Muslim names like Amir Shah, Malikzada, Amir, etc. Commenting on this romance in Assamese, Dr. Neog has justly observed that the story of Dvija Ram’s work is essentially an Islamic vaishnava fervour. But nevertheless these kavyas are the fine examples of the result of the communion of Islamic and Hindu more particularly, vaishnava cultures.

Alike the kavyas, a few popular Ballads in Assamese language also flourished with the influence of Sufi Saints and Islam as well. "ManikorvararGit" of Abdul Gaffar, “Chiken Sariyar Git” which narrates the story of how a Muslim damsel was espoused by one of the Ahom Kings; “Sat Nawabar Git” tales of seven Nawabs; Jaidhan Baniyar “Baramuhi Git” are the examples of such popular Ballads. Since the Subject matter and the themes of these romances have closer affinity to some of the folk-songs and ballads to be likely that they grow under the influence of such Ballads.

Beyond all these, the most outstanding and sustaining contributions of the Sufi Saints to the popular literature of Assam was the “Zikirs and Zaris” or the “Marshiyas”. A Zikir is a religious philosophical poem, centering around the point of faith on Islam and a Zari is elegiac in character and content and may be called a form of marshiya, and generally relates itself to the tragic tales of Karbala, Some of the Assamese Zaris may be called independent ballads giving the stories of Haidar Ghazi.

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57 M.A.Jalil ragibi, ed.: Gyan Sumbar, p-23, markaj sahitya parishad, Hoja, Feb.-2006
58 Maheswar Neog: Sahapari Upakhyan, pp-68, 70,79
59 Imran Shah: Assomaloi Nababar Agaman, Assam
60 R.Hissain Borua: Islamiya Ayatgya Aru Islam, p-14, Nallbar, 1986, Assam
The Chief objective of the Zikirs appear to be the reorganisation of the Society of Assamese Muslims, by regenerating their will be no discord in their age-old harmonious relation with the Hindu Society. in which the great movement of Social reforms initiated by Sankardeva seems to have attained its logical culmination already. 62

It is due to the non-availability of fertilising effect, the Islamic faith and culture in Assam grew somewhat state during the early days and therefore in the seventeenth century, a few Muslim Pir and Alims, Azan Fakirs (Shah Milan) was the pioneer amongst them, devoted themselves to its resuscitation. They seem to have tried to usher in a sort of renaissance through songs and lyrics like the Zikirs. It was probably this underlying motivation that some of the Zikirs, while singing a glory of Allah and Islam in a high lyrical vein, often come down in part to the level of social Satire. 64

Thus the Zikirs and zaris composed by the Sufi saints have been proved to be the works of high literary qualities with full contents of religious devotion and communal harmony, which may be observed from following verses of Zikirs:

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hindu mussalman, ek Allar forman
 ............... goras thane kabar sari sari
 ............... hinduk puriba mominak gariba...........
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(Hindus and Muslims are bounded by the same set of the divine rules of Allah. The act of cremating a Hindu and the entombing of a Mumin only signify one .......... death for all) Again ..............

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mor mant an bhab nai o Allah
 mor manat nai an bhab
 hindu mussalman ek Allar farman
 akherat ek Allar nam..........
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62 Ibid : p- 265

All these verses of Zikirs and Zaries are cited from “Zikir Aru Zari” collected by Sayed Abdul Malik in 1958. Published by Guwahati University.
(In my mind, Oh Allah, I have no different thought, save that the Hindus and Muslims are under one law, the will of Allah, and the final word of all services is Allah.) Again........................

dhan jan puttra bharya sabe akaram
chaya mutte beri ache mayar Karam.

(The wealth, friends as well as wives and children are all futile. They are only shadows that surround you on account of Maya.)

The Assamese Zikirs, though being composed with the spirit of Sufism, appear to be devoid of the high poetic ecstasy of Persian Sufi poetry, rather they sing the glory of Gurus or religious preceptors and urge upon the detachment from mundane pleasure for the sake of selfless services to God.64

Apart from these literary, and lyrical works and exercises, some Sufi Saints also devoted themselves in the production of prose works like "Tarikhul-Haq Fi-Bayan-e-Noor-Ul-Haq" or the "Satyar path" written by Zulqad Ali during the middle of 18th Century is the best example of this. The book though written in Assamese with Arabic scripts, bears the moral teaching to the people of the state. The following verses of the book will clearly show the literary quality of the writings:

dujahanak saraje sai
tar salag lour mai
kan di huna jadi dil lagai
Lakaloke adite Muhammad mustafak
paida karile jai
........................................
teo he bole khudai
teor halagor wor nai
mai aagiyani koun kenekoi
he mumin mussalman bhai
allahar hukum dien sunai,

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All these verses of Zikirs are cited from ‘Zikir Aru Zari’ collected by Sayed Abdul Malik in 1958.
(Hear ye, O, people! I praise him who created both the worlds and created Muhammad (SM). In the beginning of all for he alone is Allah whose praises endeth not. O, ye, who believe! Listen ye to the voice of this ignorant man for I chant unto you only Allah’s commands).

Moreover, some of the Saints who had flourished during the latter countries also used to compose poems and gazals which no doubt enriched the treasury of Assamese culture and literature. Hazrat Nasir Uddin Baghdadi is an authentic example for the same.65

The aspect of literary development was the enrichment of the treasure house of Assamese vocabulary with the Arabic and Persian words, was another field of contribution forwarded by the Sufi saints of Assam. In fact, the Ahoms, the Koches and the Tribal chiefs of Assam confirm that in the seventeenth century many of the Arabic and Persian words come into common use of the people of Assam.66

In the same light the Assamese Zakirs and Zaris, which were composed by several Muslim Saints from seventeenth century onwards, many Arabic and Persian words pertaining to Islamic faith and rituals entered into Assamese language. Beyond this many Arabic and Persian words are found in Kamrupar Buranji and the Assam Buranji, recovered from the house of Sukumara Mahanta of North Guwahati, which contains a vivid account of the Islamic oriented wars in Assam during the reigns of Koch and Ahom kings. This inclusion of Arabic Persian words in the Assamese chronicles and Buranji’s, no doubt prove the wide spread of Arabic Persian words in the local language, which became possible only due to the deep influence of Sufi Saints and other Muslim Settlers.

66 Anuwar Hussain: Last thirty years of Nasir Uddin Baghadi, Gondpara, Assam Sayed Abdul Malik, Zikir Aru Zari, pp. 53, 54, 55, Guwahati University, 1958.