CHAPTER – II

PRE-MUGHAL CONTACT AND THE
RESULTANT EFFECTS

The first contact between India and the Islamic world dated as far back as the 7th century AD when during the Caliphate of Umar, the first Muslim fleet appeared in Indian waters in 636 A.D. However, they were met with not much success. Dr. Tara Chand observes that after this first invasion they became interested in spreading their commercial activities in India and as early as the 8th century A.D., they made their advent in South India and came to acquire great influences in both politics and society. These Muslim settlers in South India were treated fairly by the Indians and were also granted freedom of worship for which they were
allowed to build Mosques. It is also possible that they must have attempted the spread of their religion in the land. Islam with its simple form of worship must have appealed to the people of the region.²

In 712 A.D. Sind was invaded by an Arab named Muhammad Bin Quasim, this paved the way for the Arab traders to settle in the region and at the same time to profess their religion in the succeeding centuries. The Muslims no doubt tried to extend their sway over the other parts of India but they were checked by Nagabhatta the reigning monarch of Gujarat at that time. Hence they were compelled to confine their activities in Sind alone for about three centuries. This resulted in the migration of Arab Muslims into Sind³ and since the Muslim Governors were entrusted with the work of administration it facilitated a better understanding between the Hindus and Muslims of each other’s cultures. Towards the close of the 10th century, with the decline of the power of the Caliph in Baghdad, the Turks of Ghazni under
their leader Subuktagin and his son Mahmud made their inroads into India and defeated Jaypala the ruler of the Shahi dynasty. After this event Mahmud conducted his raids upon India which lasted from 1000-1026 A.D. This established the rule of Ghazni over Punjab which lasted for about 150 years.4 But at the same time Mahmud’s policy of religious intolerance as projected by his acts of demolishing temples and plundering them, sowed the seeds of resentment and bitterness in the Hindu minds against the Muslim invaders.

In 1170 in Afghanistan the ruling dynasty of the state of Ghor rose to prominence whereby its ruler Muhammad captured Ghazni and began extending his dominion over India. In 1186 A.D. he invaded and annexed Multan, Lahore and Sind and in 1192 A.D. he defeated Prithvi Raj Chauhan the most powerful Rajput ruler in the second battle of Tarain.5 He succeeded in establishing a Mughal dominion in India and entrusted his Indian dominion to the care of his General Qutub-ud-Din Aibak. After
the death of Muhammad of Ghor in 1206 A.D., Aibak became the independent ruler of the Indian dominion of Muhammad of Ghor which came to be known as the Sultanate of Delhi.  

It may be noted that the advent of the Muslims into the Eastern part of India dated as far back as the close of the 13th century whereby the Muhammadans established their authority over Bihar and Bengal and it was from Bengal that they extended their policy of expansion over the Brahmaputra Valley.

The Muhammadan policy of expansion into Assam was initiated in the 13th century whereby we have the invasion of Kamarupa in 1205 AD by Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiya Khilji a General of Qutub-ud-Din Aibak. It appeared that Muhammad Ibn-Bakhtiyar Khilji’s sole objective was the conquest of Tibet and that he was simply passing through Kamarupa en route to Tibet. However, he incurred the displeasure of the ruler of Kamarupa when he ignored the territorial authority of the Kamarupa king and
marched on to Tibet in spite of the latter requesting him to retreat. The Kanai Barashi Bowa an inscription or a piece of rock found in Gauhati referred to this invasion of Kamarupa by the Muslims and their complete defeat in 1127 Saka (1206 A.D.). Since the date given in the rock inscription conform to the date of Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar’s unsuccessful expedition to Tibet and since we have no records proving the advent of any other Turkish army into Kamarupa in 1205-1206, therefore it is very possible that Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar was the first Muslim General to lead an expedition into Assam. No doubt Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar’s forces were so completely routed that only Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar and few of his men could return to Bengal, nevertheless, this expedition was significant for as D. Nath has pointed out, it also paved the way for future Muslim invasions of the land thereby resulting in the settlement of Muslim population in Assam in the subsequent period. It is very possible that Muslim soldiers of Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar who failed to return to Bengal remained as war captives of the king of Kamarupa and later on settled in the
western part of the Brahmaputra Valley. Likewise the expedition of Bakhtiyar also paved the way for the expansion of Islam thereby creating a class of local converts to Islam in the region. It is recorded that Bakhtiyar won over a chief of local Mech tribe, who guided him during the expedition, this person was said to have embraced the Islamic faith and was named Ali Mech.

Muhammad-Ibn-Bakhtiyar was said to have been killed by another Turk named Ali Mardan. The Persian chronicles and a few scholars mentioned that Ali Mardan subjugated the rulers of Kamarupa and Bang for which he also exacted tributes. However, there is no reference to this incident is the local chronicles. Added to this from the Tabaqat-I-Nasiri we get the information that the entire region from the Barnadi up to Gauda was not under the control of the ruler of Kamarupa but in fact were ruled by tribal chiefs who were hostile to Ali Mardan, hence in most probability Ali Mardan must have subjugated these tribal chiefs and not the ruler of Kamarupa.
Meanwhile Malik Husamuddin Iwaj a leader of the Khilji nobles of Gauda successfully usurped power in Gauda from Ali Mardan. Iltutmish was the ruling monarch of the Sultanate and Iwaj asserted his independence from the control of the Delhi Sultan and continued to rule independently over Gauda till 1225 A.D. Having acquired power in Bengal, he embarked upon the conquest of Kamarupa. Meanwhile there is dearth of authentic information pertaining to the ruler of Kamarupa in between the period of Ikhtiyar’s expedition and that of Husamuddin Iwaj. No doubt he was referred as the ‘Rae of Kamrud’ in the Persian chronicles but other scholars mentioned him as Barthu alias Prithu Raja of Kamarupa. Husamuddin Iwaj proceeded to Kamarupa and advanced up to Gauhati and struck coins in his own name. Iwaj success was momentary for no sooner than the news of Iwaj rebellion reached Iltutmish than he deputed his son Nasir-ud-din to put down the rebellion of Husamuddin Iwaj in Bengal. Nasir-ud-din then followed Husamuddin Iwaj to Kamarupa, a fierce struggle
ensued and as a consequence both Husamuddin Iwaj and Barthu the ruler of Kamarupa lost their lives. Nasir-ud-din then placed a descendant of Barthu on the throne of Kamarupa. This descendant was referred to by scholars as Samudrapala. It is most probable that Samudrapala ruled as a tributary ruler paying regular tributes to the Sultan of Bengal, however one thing is known for sure that the laws enforced by Samudrapala in his kingdom were required the sanction of the Turkish administration and to conform to Islamic principles as well. Hence in a way the expedition of Nasiruddin marked the Turkish intervention in the political and administrative set up of Assam, Nasiruddin’s victory also resulted in increased Muslim migration and settlement in Assam thereby resulting in the growth of Islam in the region.

It is most probable that Turkish influence in Kamarupa could not be retained for long since in the year 1256/1257 Ikhtiyar-ud-din Uzbak Tughril Khan again led a campaign into the region. Minhaj-ud-din mentioned that Tughril Khan’s objective in
embarking upon this expedition was for the purpose of spreading the tenets of the Islamic faith. During this expedition it is recorded that the ruler of Kamarupa was Sandhya who in all probability must have been the successor of Samudrapala. Sandhya being unable to resist the invading Muhammadan army fled from his capital Kamarupanagar and retreated to the hills.\textsuperscript{16} Ikhtiyar-ud-din occupied Kamarupasagar and got constructed a Mosque there. \textsuperscript{17} This came to be the first Mosque to be built in the region. He then instituted the reading of the Khutba and the Friday Namaj or religious services in the land.\textsuperscript{18} He was also said to have issued coins in his own name.\textsuperscript{19} Ikhtiyar-ud-din introduced his own system of administration in the region which conform to Islamic ideals and principles. Ikhtiyar-ud-din did not rule over Kamrup for long. Meanwhile the monsoon sets in and Ikhtiyar’s forces were rendered helpless as a result of shortage of food supply and other amenities. His soldiers were completely worn out and at this critical juncture the indigenous inhabitants struck back at the Muhammadan. A fierce struggle ensued, Ikhtiyar was
killed and his soldiers were taken as war captives and permanently settle in Assam. It may be noted that during the intervening period of Ikhtiyar-ud-din’s expedition till the initial years of the 15th century. Kamrupa remained free from the incursion of any ruler of Bengal.

During the period of the 15th century various changes were effected in the political scenario of Kamarupa. King Sadya was said to have shifted his capital from Kamarupanagar to Kamatapur in Koch Behar in about the year 1260 A.D. and from this time onwards Kamarupa came to be known as Kamrup Kamata or simply as Kamata. Added to this, it was during this period that the Ahoms initiated their policy of expansion towards the Western Brahmaputra Valley. Meanwhile the Turko Afghans were ruling over Bengal and thus the rulers of Kamata were faced with a dual threat from the rising power of the Ahoms in the west and that of the Turko Afghans in the east. Above all, this period also witnessed the emergence of the Bhuyans or the feudal chiefs who
were ruling independently in various parts of Assam. All these changes greatly effected the political and administrative set up in Assam.

In the year 1493 A.D. Hussain Shah the Prime Minister of Shamsuddin Muzzafar Shah succeeded the latter as ruler of Gauda or Bengal. Buchanan recorded that Alauddin Hussain Shah the Bengal Sultan made an attempt to conquer Kamrup Kamata in 1498 A.D. This was corroborated by the Assamese chronicles which mention that during the period when Kamata was invaded by the ruler of Bengal, the Ahom ruler was Suhungmung alias Dihingia Raja and that the ruler of Kamata approached the Ahom king for help. Hussain Shah defeated Nilambar the ruler of Kamata and occupied the territory up to Hajo in the east by subjugating the independent feudal lords or the Bhuyans. After occupying the kingdom of Kamata, Hussain Shah constructed a Madarsah at Malda in 1502 A.D. as a mark of his victory, at the same time he also issued coins in his own name. This annexation
of Kamata by Hussain Shah is significant in the sense that it not only ensured the success of the repeated attempts of the Muslim conquerors in the previous centuries to establish Muslim rule in Assam but also brought the Ahom rulers of Assam into direct contact with the Muhammadans for the very first time. They acquired the knowledge of fire arms from the Muhammadans and this knowledge facilitated them to emerge as the saviour of Assam during the period of repeated Mughal incursions in the subsequent centuries. During the period of his reign over Kamata Hussain Shah created a large colony at Hajo where he settled Afghan warriors. In spite of the fact that Hussain Shah did not stay on at Kamata for a long time soon after conquering it he returned to Bengal after entrusting the conquered territory to the case of his son Danial, nevertheless his expedition was significant since it resulted in an increase of Muslim population in the region, whereby the Muslims came to comprise an overwhelming majority of the percentage of population especially in hajo whereby it came to be considered sacred by the Muslims of Assam. It is a fact that
Ghiyas-ud-din Aulia one of Hussain Shah's General got constructed a Mosque at Hajo. This place came to be known as 'Poa Mecca' which in other words symbolised it being considered as being a part of Mecca. Ghiyas-ud-din Aulia was buried near this Mosque and his grave remained a sacred place which was venerated by Hindus and Muslims alike. Meanwhile the Governorship of Danial over Kamata lasted for a very brief period. The Bhuyans or the feudal lords who were previously subjugated by Hussain Shah once again asserted themselves, they formed an alliance with Bisu alias Viswa Singha the chief of the Koch tribe and jointly they gave a crushing defeat to the Muslims. Danial was killed and his territory passed into the hands of Bisu alias Viswa Singha. Hence we have the disintegration of the kingdom of Kamrup Kamata and over its ruins was laid the foundation of the Koch kingdom. Hence in spite of the fact that the rule of Hussain Shah over Kamrup Kamata was shortlived, nevertheless it had a considerable bearing on the political life of the region. The legacies of Afghan rule over Kamrup could be seen in the realm of
archaeology, coinage whereby the coins issued by Hussain Shah remained in circulation till 1518 A.D. Hussain Shah's invasion was important in the sense that it resulted in the expansion of Islam and Islamic culture in the region. Added to this the Muslims were also credited for undertaking various works of development for public welfare such as the construction of tanks and other buildings which were said to have been unearthed by Buchanan Hamilton in the year 1809 A.D.\textsuperscript{31}

It may be noted that during the period of recurring Muslim incursions we have the emergence of three tribal states in the Upper Brahmaputra Valley. They were the Chutiyas who ruled over the territories comprising of present Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh districts, the Kacharis who ruled over the territory extending from the river Dikhau in the East to the Kapili in the West and finally we have the Ahoms a branch of the Shan tribe of Burma who migrated to the Brahmaputra Valley and under their leader Sukapha established a small state comprising the present
district of Sibsagar. The Ahoms being the ablest and most powerful from among these three tribes initiated their policy of expansion and soon they confronted with the Turko Afghan from Bengal in the 16th century.

In the year 1532 A.D. Hussain Shah the ruler of Bengal once again sent an expedition to Assam under his able General Turbak who proceeded as far as Nagaon being under the sway of the Ahoms. This marked the first inroad of the Muslims into the Ahom territory. The Assamese chronicles mentioned that Turbak at the head of a very large forced armed with sophisticated weapons advanced as far east as the fort at Singri where Turbak defeated the Ahom army and killed many notable Ahom Generals. The Ahom took refuge at Sala, meanwhile the monsoon sets in and the Mughal fleet for the time being stayed on at Silghat, where the rainy season stopped they advanced as far as Ghiladhari. Initially the Ahoms were no match for the Muslim artillery, they suffered heavy reverses and were forced to surrender the fort of Sala.
However, in March 1533, the battle swung in favour of the Ahoms, they defeated the Muslims in a naval engagement Duimunisila. The Muslim forces were completely routed. Turbak was not disheartened, he regained his composure and gathered reinforcements, once again the war raged on with full fury, at last the Ahoms attained a decisive victory over the Muhammedan place near the river Bharali. In the struggle Turbak was killed, the Ahoms then pursued the Muhammedan forces as far as the bank of the river Karatoya. The local chronicles mentioned that during the expedition a large number of Muslim soldiers were taken as war captives by the Ahoms, they came to be employed as artisans and subsequently came to be known as the Mariyas. These were the Muslim war prisoners brought by the forces of Sunghungmung the Ahom ruler who subsequently settled them in various parts of Assam comprising of Nagaon, Hajo, Sibsagar, Jorhat and Lakhimpur.
Hence the policy of expansion into the Brahmaputra Valley initiated by the Turkish Sultan of Bengal was no doubt checked by the Ahoms, nevertheless as we have seen it was significant in the sense that it paved the way for the extension of Islamic ideals and principles to the Brahmaputra Valley in the succeeding centuries. However, Assam’s contact with the Muslim world did not stop here for once again in the initial years of the 17th century Assam witnessed the expansionist policy of the Mughals which was brought to a close only after the liberation of Kamrup by Gadadhar Singha.
2 Tara Chand, *op. cit.,* p. 37.
   M. Saikia, *op. cit.,* p. 10.
4 M. Saikia, *op. cit.,* p. 11.
   D. Nath, *op. cit.,* p. 79.
   Riyaz-us-Salatin, Delhi, 1975, p. 65.
   E. A. Gait, *op.cit.,* p. 37.
   D. Nath, *op.cit.,* pp. 74, 78.
17 E. A. Gait, *op.cit.,* p. 37.
18 K.L. Barua, *op.cit.,* p. 150.
   E. A. Gait, *op.cit.,* p. 37.
22 E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
   Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1874, p. 303.
28 Riyaz-us-Salatu, p. 134.
29 *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1874, p. 303.
   E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
31 *Annals of Delhi Badshahate*, pp. 6, 17.
32 D. Nath, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
   E. A. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.
   16, 131f.