CHAPTER VI
NON HINDU TEMPLES AND SHRINES

A. Introduction of Islam:

The word Islam is derived from the recurrent use of the verb Aslāmā, found in the Quaran to denote the characteristic attitude of the true believer in relation to God. The Arabic word ‘Islām’ means the act of resignation or submission. Islam denotes the system of beliefs and rituals based on the Quaran, the sacred book of Mohammadan which contains the recollected revelations of Mohammad in a definite written form. Later on, the followers of Mohammad form a religion with the teachings, beliefs and rituals of Mohammad which is known as Islām. A person who embraces Islām is generally known as a ‘Musalman’. Islamism as preached by Mohammad was a simple one. With complete surrender to God’s will, chanting his name in daily prayers is the principal doctrine of Islam. The religion was based on fast, alms giving to pilgrimage and belief in Mohammad as the last prophet of God. The principle of equality and brotherhood among Muslims before the eye of God were the important characteristics of the religion in its social side.
The first contact of India with the Islamic world dates back to the early part of the 7th century A.D. Dr. Tarachand observes that the Muslims made their advent in south India on the Western coast as early as in the c. 8th century A.D., on the eastern coast in the 10th century and within a short period acquired great influence on the life of the people of the Indian society. These groups of Muslims settlers in south India received fair treatment from the Hindu rulers and their subjects. They were granted the freedom of faith and worship. Consequently they were in a position to build mosques in the locality to openly practice their faith. Probably that they entered upon the missionary efforts for the propagation of the religion.¹

It is seen that Islamic culture gained its popularity in the western region of Kamrup. One organised colony of the Afgan warriors was located at Rangamati in the present Panbari hill area of Dhubri district. Probably this was the earliest colony of the followers of Islam in Assam.² It was also known as Magazine house of Hussain Shāh. Reference can be cited from the terracotta objects of different period datable to c. 7th to 17th cen. A.D. unearthed at that site. The objects are now preserved in the

¹ Dr Tarachand : Influence of Islam on India Culture, p. 77.
² Bora, M. I. : Baharistan-L-Ghayebi, p. 360.
Kāmarūpa or ancient Assam came into contact with Islam in 1203 A.D. for the first time. The Turkish Army led by Mohammad Bin Bakhtiyar made a disastrous expedition to Tibet through this region. Kāmarūpa was then ruled by one Pṛthu (Bartu), as mentioned in the Tabaqat-i-nāsirī. Following this, several other expeditions were made by a number of Turko-Afgan and Mogal forces in the subsequent centuries. In the prolonged wars between the invading forces and the Assam kings also led to the gradual growth of Muslim population in Assam. As a result of it, the conquering Nababs of Bengal left a few archaeological monuments which are mostly called as Mosques. Again, we learn from Minhaj-ud-din that “the sign of Islam” appeared in the country only after Malik Yuzbek had conquered it and “instituted Friday religious services” having “erected a mosque there.” This had influenced the people of this locality towards the Islamic faith.

From different historical sources, it is also evident that Dhubri district came in contact with the Islam earlier than any other part of Assam. The impact of Islamic faith in Dhubri district can be ascertained by the fact that Muslim people halted at Dhubri

during the Ramzan period. A good number of Mosques, Dargahs, Mazars and other holy places of worship witnessed the habitation of Muslim community in this frontier region. Though there is no record of either Islamic movement or a large scale of conversion into Islam in this region, it is a fact that a good number of soldiers, who accompanied the Mughal invaders did not return to their native land and a section of them stayed back here and got married to the local women. On the other hand, a good number of local people were converted to Islam by the teaching and persuasion of the leaders thus commencing the growth of the Muslim population of Assam, E.A. Gait writes in the Report of Census 1891 A.D. that the great majority of persons professing the Islamic faith in Assam are, as in Eastern Bengal, local converts from the lower castes and aboriginal tribes, who on conversion described themselves as Seikhs. But he had at the same time admitted that conversion to the faith in the country did not occur until much later dates and its earliest believers of faith, “Who settled in the eastern districts were remnants of the army of Turbak who was defeated and killed by the Ahoms in 1522-23 A.D.”

that the local Muslims call themselves desi (local) and they used the term Bhāṭiā to denote the “down river Mohammadans from East Bengal.

The existence of many old Muslim religious institutions belonging to this region shows that, though the Musalmans were smaller in number in comparison to the Hindu populations in the country, they had ever been considered as an important part of the country’s population and enjoyed no less privilege than the Hindus both in social and religious matter.

It is a fact that many Muslim saints entered Assam with the invading Mohammadan army. Some of these saints stayed in the country while others might have returned after a short stay. But the names of several saints are associated with the holy places of Dhubri district, such as Pāṅch-Pīrs, Pāgal-Pīr, Satya-Pīr etc. The caretaker of the Muslim dargaha or shrines are usually known as Pīrs (Mendi-cant). Among them the name of Satya-Pīr still holds its importance. A section of scholars believe that Satya-Pīr was a Hindu converted from Rājshāhī district and Satya-Pīr was his name only. In the Paṅcāli of Satyanārāyaṇa, there is no distinction between Satya-Pīr and Satyanārāyaṇa. To quote the Paṅcāli: “Jeи Satyanārāyaṇa sei Satya-Pīr / dui kule loiche sevā kariyā jāhir // [Satya-Pīr is the same as Satyanārāyaṇa,
he who recieves devotion from both the sides (Hindus and Muslims) in his two forms.”\(^5\)

Again, during his Assam campaign Rājā Rāmsingh was accompanied by Pañch-Pīrs (five Mohammadan Pīrs) to ward off the supposed black magic of Kāmarūpa. But as soon as they reached here they became more or less instrumental in propagating the ideal and philosophy of the Islamic faith in this locality.

Pāgal-Pīr is believed to be the founder of a Dargāh in Dhūpdharā, situated fifty miles away from Goalpara town. It is said to have been endowed with a vast tract of pīrpal land till 1859 A.D. After this the area was included in the Bijni estate (Zemindary).

Mosque:

Mosques are the basis of the Islamic religious organizations by which only the orthodox muslim social life continues. Mosques may be grouped mainly into two types:

a) The re-inforced concrete buildings having characteristic domes with a touch of Mughal architecture. There are also inscriptions of some verses of the Qurāna on the walls of the Mosques.

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b) The other type of mosques are modest Assam type buildings with iron roofs. Generally in mosques five time prayers (Namaz) in a day are offered by the Muslim devotees.

In Friday special congregational prayer (Jāme Nāmāz) is offered.

Apart from this, Huzuri is another type of Mosque which are very simple in size. It serves the purpose of a Mosque for the daily prayer of Muslim devotees. But the prayer for Jāmā Nāmāz is not offered at Huzuri Masjids.

Generally, Idul Fitre and Id-ul-Azha festivals are celebrated in the Mosque. In the interior of Mosque the recess or Mishrub indicate the Kabāh at Makkāh.

Ancient Mosques of Dhubri District are as follows:

1. The Mosque of Rangamati:

The oldest Mosque in Assam is situated on Pānbarī hill area on the national highway and north of Gauripur. It was erected by Hussain Shāh, the Governor of Bengal (Gauḍa), who after annexation of Coochbehār and Western Assam established his head quarter at Rangāmāṭī or the present Pānbarī area in Dhubri district. The Masjid belongs to Pre-Mughal period which can be identified from its typical architectural design. This is a concrete
building having characteristic of three domes with the evidence of the influence of Mughal architecture.

It is a living Mosque with a perfect shape. It attracts the devotees for daily prayer. One Moqtab school is also attached to this Mosque. This Mosque is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India. (As per the provisions of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act). One old well is seen within the campus of the Masjid. According to local people there is a tunnel which connects Mankachar area of South bank with Panbari of Dhubri district.

2. Mosque of Mankachar:

In the Hātsingimari Sub-division of Dhubri district, there is another ancient Mosque which is said to have been built in memory of general Mirjumlā who reached Pānbarī during his campaign to Assam. But after a short stay here, due to adverse situations, he was compelled to leave this place and died at Mankachar (1633 A.D.). It is a flourishing Mosque. According to the Persian inscription inscribed on the Mosque wall, it was built in 1689 A.D.

3. Jāme Mosque of Šālkochā:

This Mosque was built by the renowned citizen of this locality, late Abir Mahammad at Šālkochā in Dhubri district
about 200 years back. The Mosque was damaged during the great earthquake of 1889. Again, Ārabuddin Sarkar, son of Abir Mohammad got the Mosque re-constructed during his time.

4. Mosque of Chāpgarh (near Gauripur):

This Mosque is situated near Bhojpuri beel the neighbourhood area of Khudimari or Chapgarh. The architectural pattern of this mosque is almost similar to the Rāngāmātī Mosque of Panbari. It is a spacious building with octagon pillar, curved door frame with geometrical patterns and intricate designs of creepers and flowers. The dome and mingrates wearing the shapes of inverted pitchers, which shows the general characteristics of Islamic art and masionary construction.

After visiting the Mosque, one question came to my mind repeatedly as regards the builder who has constructed such type of mosque in this remote area. It is certainly not possible for the common people of the locality people to constructs an architectural structure. It is also very interesting to note that there is another site in the locality called “Mirjumlar Garh” which is few miles away from the said Mosque. The Mosque is also situated near the Chāpgarh high school a muslim populated area. It is not known why this old Mosque has not yet been
visited or studied by the earlier scholars.

In Dhubri district only a small number of mosques are old but others are of recent origin. Among them the Dhubri Baro-Masjid and Dhākāipatti Masjid of Dhubri and Gauripur (Bazar area), respectively are from olden times. At present, due to the rapid population growth, new mosques are being constructed by the devotees according to their religious need.

**Dargāh :**

“In persian, Dargāh means a royal Court. But in India it is used for a Mahammedan shrine or tomb of some reputed holy persons which are regarded as the obiect of pilgrimage and adoration.” On the other hand, Dargāh means the tombs erected by the Muslims in memory of great saints known as Pīr or Āuliya at the place of their demise.

**Important Dargāhs of Dhubri district are as follows :**

(i) Pāṅch-Pīr Dargāh :

The famous Pāṅch-Pīr Dargāh is situated on the northern bank of river Brahmaputra at Dhubri town-adjacent to the Netāi Dhubunī Ghāt. This Dargāh houses the Māzār Sharif of five Pīrs, namely Shāh Ākbar, Shāh Bāgmor, Shāh Sharān, Shāh

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Sūfī and Shāh Kāmāl. These five Pīrs accompanied Mir Jumlā, the Commander-in-Chief of Mughal army with the purpose of warding off the supposed “black magic” of Kāmarūpa, since in early times Kāmarūpa was known by the outsider as the land of magic, sorcery and witchcraft. There is a local belief that the “Five Pīrs (mendicant) took their last breath together at the place where the “Pāñch-Pīr Dargāh” is now situated. But according to others only Shāh Ākbar the head of the Pīrs, stayed here and took his last breath, and thus the Dargāh contains his tomb only. Whatever may be the origin of the Pāñch-Pīr Dargāh it is undoubtedly an unique example of religious tolerence and co-existence of Hindu-Muslim communities where people belonging to different sectarian groups visit to the Dargah fulfill their wishes by lighting candles and offering sweets and money.

(ii) Shāh Śvarān Dargāh:

This is also called the Pāñch-Pīr Dargāh which is situated at the centre of Dhubri town just adjacent to the District Jail campus. It is the Māzār Šarif of another Pīr (Mendicant) among the five who came to Dhubri from accompanying Mirjumlā, the Commander-in-Chief of the Mughal army during his Assam invasion. Local people visit this Dargāh and pay their respect,
by lighting candles and offering money and other articles for fulfilling their wishes. In return from the side of the Dargāh authority a chip of clay is given as a token of blessing.

(iii) Dargāh of Shah Kamāl:

Shah Kamāl is said to have come to Assam with Shah Jālāl. Rājā Mahendra Nārāyana, who was also known as Paglā Rājā, donated some land to the Dargāh. His headquarters was at Mahendraganj. The Dargāh is about 8 miles away from Mahendraganj town. The Dargāh has an endowed estate or Pirpal, a kind of grant of Mohammedan system which was offered to the Muslim Pīr as well as to the Dargāh the Khankār and the mosques of the country. This grant correspond to the “Devottara or Dharmottara type of land grant in Hindu system. Besides the Mosque and Dargāh, a few number of Mazārs and Khankārs are maintained by the local muslim community.

CHRISTIAN PLACES OF WORSHIP

General Introduction of Christianity:

“Christianity is the ethical, monotheistic, redemptive religion, in which the relation of God and man is mediated by the passion and work of Lord Jesus Christ.”

preached by Jesus Christ, who was a Jew by birth and by faith.

Though Christianity originated in the teaching of Jesus Christ; are other saints, mystics and thinkers who have added much to it which took the shape as a religion, at the definite hand of St. Paul. He propagated not only the teachings of Jesus but also added some important ideas from his own side.

Christians are divided into two Sects namely Catholics and Protestants. These two sects are divided mainly on the question of the authority of the Church.

Initially, the British Baptist Mission and the Serampore Baptist Mission took interest to spread Christianity in the north-east. The Serampore Mission sent one Krishnagopal who was the first Indian Baptist Christian to preach the gospel in the north-east. The seed of Christianity was thus, perhaps first sown in this region of the country.

In spite of all the difficulties in travel, the early priests were constantly on the move for religious propagation. Along with Guwahati and other places the pioneering clergymen entered into Goalpara, Dhubri, Turā etc. of this locality. This way the Christian Missionaries started coming to Assam in the wake of the British occupation. The advent of the British and Christian missionaries in the 19th century led to the entry of Christian faith and
CHRISTIANITY IN ASSAM

Christianity appeared in Assam with the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826. But it is seen that the first recorded contact of the Assamese with the catholic missionary was in 1627 when the Tibet bound Jesuit missionaries, Stephen Cacella and John Carbral, visited some of the places of Goalpara and Kamrup districts on their way to Tibet. “The earliest attempt of the christian mission to sow the seed of Christianity in Assam was in the translation of the Bible into Assamese in 1813 at Serampore mission. This was done with the help of Ātmārām Sarma an inhabitant of Kaliābor, Nowgaon district of Assam.”

But till 1829, none of the christian mission made any attempt to establish their centre in Assam. After the conquest of Assam by the British, David Scott the first agent to the Governor General, North-east Frontier, who had a close friendship with William Carry, the member and donor of the Mission. He invited the mission to start their activities in Assam and in response to this, a branch of the Serāmpore Mission was established at Guwahati under James Rao in 1829. This was the first missionary centre

in Assam.

"Again in Goalpara, also the Baptist Mission established its centre in 1867."\(^\text{10}\)

In order to attract and motivate the public, the missionaries visited the village markets on the market days and delivered lectures on the Gospel of Christianity and also distributed the related books to them. Not only that, the Missionaries also started to open schools in different parts of Assam since 1845. Along with other places of Assam, a school was also opened at Goalpara in 1874 by Mrs. Keith. Undoubtedly it is an example of socio-religious impact of Christianity on female education of the Assamese society.

But in spite of all effort, the Mission, however, failed to introduce Christianity among the Assamese people in general. According to Moore, "Assamese are very slow to accept Christ. They think, by obeying, thinking on God, respecting His name, they will be saved."\(^\text{11}\)

Again, in the Western Assam, Rangamati as a trade centre of European merchant witnesses the prevalences of Christianity.

"Rāngāṃāṭi was situated at a distance of two miles from the

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bank of the river Brahmaputra. The town was 5 miles in length and 2 miles in breadth. In the year 1770 it contained nearly 1,500 houses, several of which were inhabited by Mughal chiefs and others by Portuguese. The Rāngāmāti Christians were paid for their service with the Jagir of lands at Ossumpur, a place further down to the Brahmaputra. But due to some lack of priority, Rāngāmāti itself declined as a trade centre and military outpost in the 2nd half of 18th century A.D. Frey Sicardo visited Rāngāmāti in the year 1606 A.D. and found that there were two churches, one dedicated to the Lady of the Rosary and the other to the Lady of Guadelup."

It is found that with the annexation of Assam by the British after Yandaboo-treaty, a small number of Europeans and Anglo Indians came into this region as employees of tea garden, railways and other sectors for their livelihood, who became permanent settlers of this locality. As a result of it, Christianity became more popular in this locality.

Churches and Missions in and around Dhubri district:

There are several missions and churches in Undivided Goalpara district namely Gaurang Mission, Grehampur Mission, Jayma Mission, Dindinga Church, Mornoi Church (three),

Bongaigaon Mission etc.

Union Church of Dhubri:

It is situated at the centre of Dhubri town. In the initial stage, one room was used as church. But in course of time the present church was built. It is a Baptist Mission. One school is also attached to the Church. Prayer is held on Sunday.

Devítolā Mission:

It is situated at Devítolā, a Rābhā populated area, few miles interior to Pānbarī of Dhubri district. A section of tribal people of this locality belonging to Rābhā, Boḍo, Gāro communities have adopted Christianity.

After a detailed study of the Christian places of worship, it is found that Christianity had influenced a section of tribal people belonging to Boḍo Kachārī, Rābhā, Gāro, Sāntāls etc. who are the inhabitants of this locality. They have now embraced Christianity instead of their own traditional religion. It is a fact that at present Christianity has become a popular religion among the tribal people belonging to Dhubri district under the banner of different Missionaries.