



Contribution Of Sufistic Literature In Respect Of Communal Harmony In Assam With Special Reference To The Works Of Some Eminent Sufis

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Abstract

This study explores the contribution of Sufistic literature in promoting communal harmony in Assam, with special reference to the works of eminent Sufi saints such as Ajan Fakir and Syed Moinuddin Baghdadi. Sufism, with its emphasis on love, tolerance, and spiritual unity, played a significant role in bridging religious and cultural divides in Assam's diverse society. The research adopts a qualitative approach, drawing from historical texts, literary analysis, and oral traditions to examine how Sufi literature particularly Ajan Fakir's *Zikirs* has conveyed universal messages of peace and brotherhood. Field visits and interactions with local communities further reveal the enduring influence of Sufi teachings in fostering interfaith respect and social cohesion. The study also highlights the syncretic relationship between Sufism and indigenous spiritual movements like Vaishnavism, underscoring the inclusive cultural identity of Assam. In an age of growing religious intolerance, the values embedded in Sufistic literature remain deeply relevant as models of peaceful coexistence and cultural integration.

Keywords : Sufism in Assam, Communal Harmony, Ajan Fakir, Sufistic Literature, Interfaith Relations

Introduction

Communal harmony means the co-existence of all communities in an atmosphere of peace, love and amity, where people may live without any fear from one another and they can get equal opportunities for development and progress irrespective of their caste or creed. Lack of mutual understanding and sympathetic attitude of different sects of the society as well as shortage of communal harmony are the imprecation of our modern civilization. Communal disunity is like an infectious disease that leads to a sense of insecurity amongst all the peace loving citizens of a country, as a result of which the common people start living in a constant state of fear and distrust. Moreover, it also impedes the socio-economic progress and cultural development of a country. Because, all round development of a nation is only possible under such conditions where the people can live and co-exist in an atmosphere of peace and goodwill. Communal disintegrity and misunderstanding is more harmful and dangerous for a country like India where we have several religions, several communities, several castes, several languages, several cultures and so on. Unfortunately, since independence India has been facing a very serious problem of

communal conflict and dissension. It is the communal discord that is at the root of all the unrest and uncertainty that is now prevailing in our country.

Objectives

1. To explore the historical development and spread of Sufism in Assam.
2. To examine the literary contributions of prominent Sufi saints in Assam, particularly focusing on figures such as Ajan Fakir, Syed Moinuddin Baghdadi, and others.
3. To analyze the role of Sufistic literature in promoting communal harmony, social integration, and interfaith understanding in the Assamese socio-cultural context.
4. To study the themes, language, and style of Sufistic literature that contributed to its appeal across religious communities.
5. To compare the influence of Sufistic literature with other contemporary spiritual or religious movements, such as the Bhakti movement, in shaping a syncretic cultural ethos in Assam.
6. To assess the relevance of Sufi teachings and literature in present-day Assam with regard to communal peace and cultural pluralism.
7. To document and interpret the oral traditions, songs, and local narratives associated with Sufi saints that have played a role in sustaining communal harmony.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, which is suitable for analyzing historical, literary, and cultural phenomena. The focus is on understanding the philosophical and social significance of Sufistic literature and its role in promoting communal harmony in Assam.

1. Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and analytical design. It aims to:

- Describe the development and impact of Sufism in Assam.
- Analyze the content and messages of literary works by eminent Sufis.
- Interpret how these works have contributed to building peace and unity across communities.

The study also employs a historical approach to trace the spread of Sufism in Assam and its intersection with other spiritual traditions, especially Vaishnavism.

2. Data Collection

- Books and Journals: Literature on Sufism in Assam, biographies of saints like Ajan Fakir and Syed Moinuddin Baghdadi, and studies on communal harmony.
- Historical Records: Manuscripts, inscriptions, and other archival materials available in libraries or local institutions.
- Published Zikirs: Analysis of written versions of *Zikirs* attributed to Ajan Fakir.

Theme in details

Assam being an inseparable part of India, it is not quite free from this contagious disease of communal disintegrity and hostility. Though the Assamese people are more moderate and more tolerant to each other creed and faith in compare to the people of some other parts of India, yet some fanatical elements both the Hindu and Muslim communities of Assam are constantly trying their level best to spread the seeds of communal antagonism and hatred amongst the peace-loving citizens of the region for the fulfillment of their narrow objectives. Generally, it has been seen that cunning politicians and some religious leaders saw the seeds of communal discord in the society for their own vested interests. Instead of preaching tolerance and restraint, they incite the ignorant masses with their provocative speeches to serve the purpose of their ill motive, and thus the communal violence spreads in the society. Under the patronage of some anti-social and dishonest political leaders, day by day these communal forces are getting fertile ground in Assam and gradually their sectarian activities are increasing to a great extent, posing a serious threat to our long-standing mutual toleration, unity and fraternity.

Therefore, it is the prime need of the time that all of us should resolve to maintain the communal harmony at any cost. The religious bigotry and fundamentalism must be fought tooth and nail if we want to save unity of our country and if we wish to modernize it. There are various ways to fight communalism. One of the ways is to make people aware of our common heritage in the realm of religious spirit of universal brotherhood. Because the true religious teaching, replete with the spirit of self-control, broad outlook and toleration, can play a very constructive role in this regard. It also affirms a balanced life, which means a harmonious development of all human faculties. People from all walks of life should cultivate a feeling of love and respect, trust and tolerance for one another as all the religions foster. So if we heartily wish to tackle the problem of communal menace at intellectual and cognitional level, we will have to unearth our common heritage of the past. We will have to focus upon sufistic literatures filled with the spirit of mutual love and fraternity which the Sufis produced in order to preach their cults and spiritual teachings among all sections of people. As for spiritual resources, we must look to our past history, especially to those who belonged to the Sufi or Bhakti movements. Because, these movements were primarily based on true religiosity and humanism instead of narrow sectarianism and religious fanaticism. Therefore, in this paper I shall try to make a humble effort to throw some light on the contribution of Say's and their literary works which greatly helped in bringing about the communal harmony between the two great religious communities of Assam, i.e., Hindu and Muslim.

During the several attacks of Muslim conquerors in Assam, many soldiers including religious preachers and sufi-saints, under normal circumstances or being captured, took to staying here after marrying the daughters of the local converted Muslims, which gradually increased the numerical strength of Muslim settlers in Assam. Many of them accepted Assam as their native country and at the time of necessity they fought for the security, peace and prosperity of their native land. It is to be noted that in compare to the conquerors and religious preachers, the Sufis played a vital role in the spread of Islam in Assam. They also performed various duties as harbinger of Hindu-Muslim unity in the valley. By the continued activities of the Sufis, Assam was once so over flooded that the visible effect of that influence can still be marked in many beliefs, practices, songs and outpourings of the Assamese people like the silt deposited on a paddy field after the flood. Indomitable zeal, uncommon piety and widely believed miracles possessed by the Sufis were the chief causes of their success in Assam. In fact, it was the Sufis who were the real torch-bearers of Islamic faith and culture in Assam. Unlike the orthodox preachers or Ulama of Islam, the Sufis neither vilified the ancient religious of this region, nor unusually glorified their own. They were true devotees and understood the essence of religion, and hence did not believe in superiority of one religion to the other. Through their sermons and writings they only presented to the public the most liberal and universal aspects of Islam, which did not fail to produce the desired result attracting a large number of the masses to Islam, already groaning under various social and religious disabilities.

From the beginning of the thirteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, large number of sufi-saints belonging to different orders came to Assam and made extensive efforts for the consolidation and promotion of Islam as well as sufistic cult in this valley. Jalaluddin Tabrizi, Shah Jalal Mujarrad, Hazrat Giasuddin Aulia, Hazrat Azan Faqir, Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri and Hazrat Syed Nasiruddin Baghdadi were some of the eminent sufi-saints among them. Throughout the ages, these saints were encouraged by the cotemporary Ahom rulers to propagate Islamic faith in Assam. Some of the Ahom rulers patronized the Muslim preachers and sufi-saints with liberal grants of land and maintenance. Occasionally the Ahom rulers also used to despatch some of the Muslim preachers to pilgrimage to pray for their prosperity and peace.

Islam is ever famous for its strong monotheistic belief in God and for its theoretical and practical teachings of universal brotherhood and fraternity. The credit for preaching liberal aspects of Islam and its harmonious as well as humanitarian spirit in Assam, goes to the celebrated sufi-saint Miran, popularly known as Azan Faqir, who came to Assam in approximately 1045 A.H / 1635 A.D. from Baghdad. He acquired a congenial atmosphere for propagating unity between the two religious groups - the Hindu and the Muslim. With a view of spreading the teaching of Islam, Azan Faqir had composed large number of Zikirs and Zaris in Assamese language in resemblance of the Bargits or devotional songs of Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva, with which the Assamese people had already been acquainted. The chief objective of the Zikirs was to re-organize the society of Assamese Muslims by regenerating their faith and love for Islam in such a way that there will be no discord in their age-old harmonious relation with Hindu society. Accordingly, Azan Faqir achieved great success in ensuring the

cordial relation between Islam and Hinduism. particularly with the Vaishnavism preached by Sankaradeva. Most of his Zikirs not only reveal a sense of high esteem for Hinduism but also clearly show his sincerest endeavour to strengthen the amity and mutual respect for each other. As one of his Zikir declares with all sincerity and emotion.

"Mor manta an bhah nai O Allah
mor manat bhin par nai O Allah
Hindu ki Musalman. eke Allar forman
mor manat eketi bhab.
Hinduke jalab - mominok garib
Ekekhami jaminor talat"

(In my mind, O Allah, I have no different thought and distinction, except that the Hindus and Muslims are under one law of Allah, Hindus will be cremated and the believer in Islam will be buried under the same ground.)

This is an excellent example of Azan Faqir's teaching in respect of unity and communal harmony in Assam. Another great saint of Assam was Hazrat Giasuddin Aulia, who came to Assam in around 721 A.H/1321 A.D. and devoted his life to the propagations of Islam in Kamrup. He built a Mosque at the top of Garudachal hill at Hajo, near which he was also buried after death and his shrine is popularly known as Powa Mecca. His influence on the people made a remarkable change on the Muslim way of life and gave a new impetus to the bond of communal integrity and Hindu-Muslim unity in Assam. On account of his liberal attitude to all section of people and his harmonious teachings, he was equally loved by all and his shrine is still considered as a sacred place of pilgrimage both by the Muslims and Hindus alike.

Another prominent sufi-saint Mawlana Karamat Ali Jawnpuri did extensive reform works in Assam, who visited this region several times in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is worthy to be mentioned here that being fascinated by the ethical and moral teaching as well as loving conducts. of the Mawlana, many Non-Muslim masses also embraced the faith of Islam in his hand. The Mawlana was a man of free from any discrimination in every matter and equally generous to all classes of people which greatly improved the communal harmony in Assam. For example, during his missionary work in Assam, he distributed attires not only among the Muslims; rather the non-Muslim masses were not deprived from his liberal gift. Due to his impartial nature the Mawlana was uniformly loved by all sections of people irrespective of caste and creed. As regards his contribution to the Assamese society an English scholar has been found to have remarked: "Mawlana Karmat Ali not only elevated the common Muslims of Bengal and Assam to a better position of their religious lives, rather he upgraded the non-Muslim masses too to the status of human being in the true sense of the term by means of making them habituated with the custom of wearing cloths in a proper way. Now even the non-Muslims of the region can rightly identify themselves as the descendant of Adam as well as constituent parts of the civilized human society".

Conclusion

In short, growth of cordiality and unity between the Hindus and the Muslims of Assam is one of the great achievements that the Sufis accomplished in this valley. From this point of view the Sufis may fairly be regarded as the connecting link of harmony between the two great religious communities of Assam. Liberal writings and fraternizing influence of the Sufis were daily drawing the two people of different religions closer and closer, and ultimately during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the two communities were greatly united together by the inalienable bond of mutual toleration and fraternity. On the other hand, in some aspects the Vaishnavism in Assam preached by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva appears to have a close affinity to Islam. With the abrogation of idolatry of any kind and the dualistic conception of God, the Bhakti cult of Sankaradeva seems to have conformed greatly to Islam which could developed the profound feelings

of admiration as well as respect among the Hindus and Muslims of Assam for each other religion. This close relation between the two communities tremendously helped the growth of a deeper sense of mutual understanding and tolerance in the minds of their adherents so much so that Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva were taken as "Guru" by several noted Muslims like Chandkhan or Chandshai and Haridas. The impact of

the harmonious relation between Islam and Vaishnavism as well as friendly dealings of both the religious groups of Assam greatly helped the germination of a deep rooted outlook in Assamese social life right in the seventeenth century. This secularity waxed ever stronger and stronger as it passed through the long corridor of centuries so much so that even in the hectic days of Hindu -Muslim riots in different parts of India. Assamese Hindus and Muslims could assemble in the courtyard of a Namghar or a Mosque so express their disapproved of an1 hostility among people of the same land. Moreover, the converted Muslims have retained many customs and rituals of their Pre-Islamic times, as their spiritual masters did not disapprove them. In social and matrimonial matters, the female dress known as " Mekhala Chaddar " has become a uniting link between the two religious groups of Assam. Even the festival Bihu, with its many rituals, has been adopted by many Assamese Muslims which greatly increased the communal harmony in Assam. On the other hand. the sufistic influence is clearly visible in many Assamese songs and music and the singing of qatuali, ghazal and zari initiated by sufi-saints has become familiar among all the communities of Assam as a mark of cultural affinity among them. In brief, under the liberal influence of sufistic literature and the humanitarian values preached by the Sufis, the Muslims of Assam have become very close to the Assamese Hindus in their culture and traditions and likewise the Hindus have become familiar with many cultural aspects of the Muslims which has strengthened the bondage of unity and fraternity among all sections of people of Assam.

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