INTRODUCTION

The present work '**Arabic Studies in the Brahmaputra Valley during Twentieth Century**' is a comprehensive study. It is basically projected on the origin and development of the process of teaching and learning Arabic language in the Valley, Contribution of the local writers to the Arabic language and literature through their writings of different kinds and qualities and the Impact of Arabic elements on the Assamese language and literature.

1: The Arabic Language:

Arabic, the language of the Holy Qur'ān and Hadith, is one of the most important languages of the world. It is not only the national language of the Arabs but also the language which is spoken and studied in large number of African Countries, in terms of poetry and philosophy, trade and commerce, science and technology and international politics and diplomacy. During the Middle Ages, Arabic language was spoken and written by all cultivated 'Moslems' of whatever nationality they might be, from India to America, it was language of all branches.[1]

In this way, Arabic Language has been being spoken and studied in 24 countries by as much as 256 million of people[2] with a great importance and thus it has achieved the position of a leading language of the world. As a result of its religious, literary, commercial, economic, political and diplomatic importance, the Arabic Language has been being given a glorious position in the U. N. O. where it is employed as one of the six working languages.

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1 R A. Nicolson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, New Delhi, 1994, p.xxiv.

2 www.tolearnarabic.com/learnarabic/the_importance_of_arabic.html, date-19-07-2008, 21.45hrs.

This language of international importance is learnt by the students all over the world with various objectives. In order to understand the Quran, Hadith and many other kinds of Islamic literature, Muslims learn Arabic. People of western country generally learn Arabic in order to comprehend the poetry and politics of the Arab Nations. Many others learn Arabic Language for the prospects of employment in the oil producing gulf countries which are still suffering from shortage of man power in the days when many countries face an unemployment problem. Owing to these needs of multipurpose aspects Indian people also do cherish the desire of learning Arabic Language and Literature.

The Arabic Language had come to a close contact with the Indian people long before the advent of Islam, through the Indo-Arab trade relation.[3] After the conquest of Mohammad Bin Qasim in 712 A D, Sind remained under the direct administration of the Arabs for two hundred years up to the end of 9th century. Similarly, Muslim Sultans and Emperors ruled over India from the conquest of Mohammad Ghori in 1192 A D. to the fall of Bahadur Shah Ja'far in 1857 A D. They made commendable efforts for public instruction in Persian and Arabic language which had been the royal languages in that period. This language of international importance had its way to ancient Assam known as *Kamrup* or *Kamata* etc. by the dawn of 13th century A. D. with the entrance of the Muslims.

2: The Brahmaputra Valley:

Assam is an important state of the North-East India. It is situated in between 89° 43′ E and 96° E Longitude and 24° N and 28° N Latitude. The Brahmaputra and the Barak are the two big rivers of Assam where as the former is the chief artery of the state. Excluding the two hilly districts – Karbi Anglang and N C Hills and the three districts of Barak Valley i.e. Cachar, Karimgaj and Hailakandi, the greater area of Assam is popularly

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3 M. Ahmed, *Indo-Arab Relation*, p. 85.

known as '*Brahmaputra Valley*'. The Valley is comprised of as many as eighteen administrative districts up to the end of Twentieth century covering 56480 sq. km.[4] Land of the Valley is divided by the river Brahmaputra into two long strips from east to west.

The total population of the Valley is 2,26,58,369 as per census, 2001.[5] Hinduism and Islam are the principal religious faiths and Christianity is also adopted by some people of the Valley. On the other hand Assamese is the representing language of the area where Boḍo, Bengali, Santali, Manipuri, Hindi, Nepali etc. languages are also spoken and studied all over the Valley. However, the Muslims of the Valley speak the Assamese Language, but a small section of them speak Bengali and Hindi also. Although, the Muslims comprise of only the 30.25% of the total population of the Valley, they have their own lingu-cultural identity. The students of this community learn Arabic Language and Literature with a great importance in addition to their core subjects and languages.

3: Statement of Problem:

The settlement of the Muslims in the Valley was started with the process of rehabilitation of the detained soldiers of Mohammad bin Bakhtiyar who had entered *Kamrup* or Assam in 1205 A D., with a view to conquering Tibet.[6] It is found in the relevant literature that the teaching and learning process of Arabic Language took place only after a Masjid had been erected near Guwahati in 1257 A D by Malik Yuzbak Tughril Khan, which was treated to be the first Masjid founded in the Valley as well as in Assam. The erection of some other Masjids has developed the process of Arabic Studies in different places of the Valley. In course of time, Masjids were followed by *Maktabs* to impart education on Islamic rites and rituals in Arabic Language.

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4 M. Taher, 'Physiographic Frame Work of North-East India', *North-Eastern Geographer*, Guwahai University, vol.18, 1986, p-15.

5 *Statistical Hand Book*, Assam, 2006, p.34.

6 Maulana Minhaj-ud-Din, *Op. cit.*, v. I, pp. 560-61 and K. L. Barua, *Op. cit.*p-136.

Along with the growth of Muslim population in the Valley so many Masjids and Maktabs were set up in different parts of the area, which were the basic institutions for 'Arabic Studies'. These institutions had been originated mainly during the period of Ahom-Muslim Conflicts (1228-1682) and developed in the British administration (1826-1947) by the establishment of many other Primary, Secondary and Islamic institutions in the Valley. The present study is the discussion, analysis and solution of the problems stated as follows:

3.1: The role of Sufi scholars comprising of *Pirs, Faqirs* and *Ulama* are very much remarkable. They made their abodes by setting up *Dargahs* and *Khanqahs* where different sects of people used to assemble to visit the pious men and take their religious teachings in different Sufi orders. However, the teachings of these Sufi scholars given in Arabic text were also the basic lessons on Arabic Studies in the initial stage. Hence, the role of these 'scholars' may be considered to be a matter of discussion.

3.2: In the beginning of Twentieth Century, some intellectual Muslim leaders of the valley felt the need of educational institutions of different kinds and categories, especially for the instruction of their children. They made a commendable effort to establish a large number of such institutions where Arabic was also included in the courses of study, throughout the valley. The role played by these socio-religious Muslim leaders or activists of the area is important to be evaluated and highlighted.

3.3: The role of the Government authority, both Academic and Administrative is also not less important. The Academic authority initiates the courses and curricula and organizes different examinations and the Administrative authority looks after the general and financial managements for the smooth running of the institutions. The role of these Government agencies is also considered to be discussed.

3.4: Different courses and curricula are adopted to teach and learn Arabic language and literature in different categories of institutions in the valley from the beginning to the closure of the Twentieth Century. Moreover, different courses and curricula are conducted in different method and media of instruction which are also equally important to be discussed in a systematic way.

3.5: A good number of writes and authors made commendable efforts in writing Arabic books of various kinds and qualities, which may roughly be divided into – (a) Creative writings in Arabic, (b) Text Books including Arabic Grammars, (c) Lexicon, (d) Translations and Commentaries, and (e) Research Works. All the writers, authors and research scholars related to the Arabic Studies need special care and attention for the assessment and evaluation of the works.

3.6: It has been stated that the Muslim settlement started from 13th century and the number of their population increased in high speed during the later part of Ahom administration. They spoke a language which had been a mixture of Perso-Arabic elements. In course of time, they forgot their language and gradually adopted to speak the Assamese language having been mixed up with the local co-habitants. Nevertheless, they naturally used to apply some Arabic terms and words in their conversation with the indigenous Assamese people. It is well known that the rule of Assam came under the British administration in 1826 A D and a large number of Arabic words of Administrative, Military and Judicial terminology were also used by the British officials. Accordingly, from the top of the administrative officials to the ordinary subjects of Assam used to speak many words of Arabic origin so commonly that these became essential elements of the Assamese language.

Similarly, Assamese poets and writers both— Hindus and Muslims have whole-heartedly accepted these Arabic words in their common use and applied them in their Assamese writings since 13th Century itself. The use of Arabic words by *Hem*

Saraswati, a poet of thirteenth Century is specially remarkable. Again, the Vaishnava propagator and out standing classical poet Srimanta Sankar Deva (1449—1569 A D) has also used Arabic word, especially in his '*Kirtan Ghosha*'. In this way a large number of Arabic words, has become a part and parcel of the Assamese language. It will be a tremendous work to collect and survey these words of Arabic origin which are used in Assamese language and literature. The use of these terms and words in Assamese is nothing but a direct impact of Arabic.

Although, the field of translation works from Arabic into Assamese has not been properly developed, a few Arabic works have been translated into Assamese by the local translators. The most of these books translated are the Holy Qur'ān and Hadiṯh. However, Arabic influence still exists in the Assamese version of these works. Hence, the Arabic influence on Assamese language and literature is also an important problem.

The problems stated above are very much significant with valuable objectives. Because, *the* '*Brahmaputra Valley*' has made a remarkable contribution to the Arabic Studies, especially in Twentieth Century.

4: Hypothesis:

We have carefully formulated the Hypothesis of the present problem, which will properly be tested in order to obtain suitable findings and appropriate solution of the stated problem. It was our tentative proposition that the study of the Arabic Language commenced in India with the Indo-Arab Relations and developed during the period of Muslim Rule in the country for centuries together up to the first half of 19th Century. Arabic study originated in the Brahmaputra Valley with the entrance of the Muslims who had established Masjids, Maktabs, Dargahs, Khanqahs in different places of the Valley, which were developed up to the end of 19th Century, through the different institutions, established under the Colonial administration. It was our presumption that a large number of educational institutions, dealing with the teaching and learning of the Arabic language and Literature had been established by some Socio-religious activists of the Valley.

The evaluation of the roles played by these activists and the categorical enumeration, observation and assessment are our consideration. Our primary investigations lead us to presume that a good number of writers had contributed a lot with their writings in Arabic of different types and tastes, evaluation of which would also our probable result of this study. The Hypothesis includes that a large number of Arabic words used in the Assamese language and literature are the effect of long cohabitation of the Muslims in the Valley and the influence of the Arabic institutions, Arabic books and their Assamese translations.

5: Methodology:

We have collected relevant data and authentic literature related to the problem and reviewed them by testing their reliability to get a final result. We relied upon the historical literature of both primary and secondary nature regarding the Muslims' settlement in India, Introduction of Arabic Studies under the Muslim rule, Muslims' settlement in the Brahmaputra Valley and the setting up of Masjids and Maktabs as the basic institution of Arabic Studies (Chapter-I & II). We have discussed this literature in Historical Method and took decision avoiding confusion and contradiction.

We have surveyed the area of study through field works visiting different places and institutions. Ample information about some religious institutions like Masjids, Dargahs, and Khanqahs of historical importance has been gathered from different places (Chapter-III). In the same process, we have collected information about the Socio-religious institutions, customs and practices and the role of socio-religious activists of the Valley. In addition to that, Government records, circulars and orders have also revealed an important phenomenon of the study, which leads us to discuss the role of Government agencies – both Academic and Administrative, in the light of historical and descriptive methods.

In the same way, we have surveyed the Arabic institutions of different kinds and categories right from traditional Qur'ānic Madrasas to Title Madrasas or Arabic Colleges and from Middle English Schools

to Degree Colleges or University classes (Chapter-IV). Here we have surveyed different courses of study and necessary information about methods and media of instruction adopted in these institutions which have been treated in analytical method. However, we have used Response sheets and Questionnaires as data gathering tools in order to reach a right conclusion.

Through the field study we have surveyed the area and obtained information about the writers, and authors who contributed a lot by their Arabic writings of different kinds and qualities (Chapter-V). Besides, their works have been collected from different sources and classified, discussed and assessed in the light of descriptive and analytical methods. However, a Survey Method has been adopted in gathering data and materials relating to Arabic influence on the Assamese language and literature (Chapter-VI). We have selected **seven** Assamese books of renowned authors of different categories from Vaishnava to modern period and enumerated the Arabic elements through Survey method and found a good number of words of Arabic origin, used by the writers both— Muslims and non Muslims.

In this way, we have surveyed the study area, collected data and materials which have been methodically treated and analyzed and the related literature have also been reviewed, more or less, in the light of Historical, Descriptive and Analytical methods.

6: Design of the Study:

The present work is a humble approach in assessing, highlighting and evaluating the different phenomena of Arabic Studies in the Brahmaputra Valley during the Twentieth Century. This investigation has been organized, manifested and designed in Six Chapters besides the 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' as shown below:

Chapter I : The Brahmaputra Valley and the Muslims.

Chapter II : The Arabic Language: It's Study in India, especially in Brahmapurta Valley.

Chapter III : The Role of Socio-Religious Institutions and Govt. Agencies in Promoting Arabic Studies.

Chapter IV : The Arabic Learning Centers: Courses of Study and Method and Media of Instruction there in.

Chapter V : Contribution of the Writers and Scholars of the Valley to the Arabic Studies.

Chapter VI : Impact of Arabic Elements on the Assamese Language and Literature.

Chapter I: This Chapter has been divided into four sub headings, such as: 1.1: Brahmaputra Valley: It's Geographical Condition, 1.2: Socio-Economic Conditions, 1.3: Muslims in the Valley: Past and Present and 1.4: Muslim Influence on the Valley.

Chapter II: This Chapter has been divided into six main points, such as: 2.1: Arabic Language and its Importance, 2.2: The Arabs in India and their settlement, 2.3: Propagation of Islam, 2.4: Education under the Muslim Rule in India, 2.5: Arabic Language in Brahmaputra Valley, 2.6: The early ~~institutions~~ of Arabic Studies.

Chapter III has been divided under the four sub headings, such as: 3.1: The Role of Socio-Religious Institutions, 3.2. Socio-Religious Customs and Practices, 3.3: The Role of Socio-Religious Activists, 3.4. The Role of Government Agencies—both Academic Agencies and Administrative Agencies.

Chapter IV: This chapter has been divided into three main units for elaborate discussion, such as: 4.1: Categorical Administration of Arabic Institutions, 4.2: Arabic Courses of Study in different Institutions and 4.3: The Methods and Media of Instruction.

Chapter V has dealt with some prominent scholars and writers of the Valley, who have contributed a lot by their writings to the under develop stage of Arabic Studies. It is revealed that these scholars started their writings only in the second half of Twentieth Century. Their works are assessed, evaluated and considered to be good contributions to this direction.

Here we have given brief notes on eight renowned scholars and writers along with their works, such as: 5.1: Moulavi Haidar Ali (1914 - 1962), 5.2: Prof. Syed Shamsul Huda (1915-2006), 5.3: Prof. Mohammad Shahabuddin (1913-1980), 5.4: Prof. Nazimuddin Ahmed (1935-81), 5.5: Dewan Abdul Qadir (b.1938), 5.6: Dr. Mohammad Yahya Tamizi (1940-2000), 5.7: Syed Md. Habibul Haque (b. 1946—), 5.8: Abdul Qayyum Al-Aman (b.1955—), and 5.9: Some other Scholars along with the 5.10: Classification of writings.

Chapter VI deals with Impact of Arabic Elements on Assamese Language and Culture which is organized in four main items like: 6.1: Musluim Settlement during Ahom-Muslim Conflicts, 6.2: Role of Ahom Kings for adopting Arabic Elements, 6.3: Role of *Pirs, Faqirs* and *Writers* in application of Aabic Elements, 6.4: Arabic Terms and Vocabulary Used in Assamese.

We are confident that no comprehensive works on this topic have been published so far; nor are we aware of any unpublished research work done there on. It is expected that this humble effort will reveal a glorious part of the History of Arabic Studies in the Valley, which might be proved to be a stepping stone for the further advancement in the development of Arabic Studies, not only in the Valley but also in Assam as a whole.

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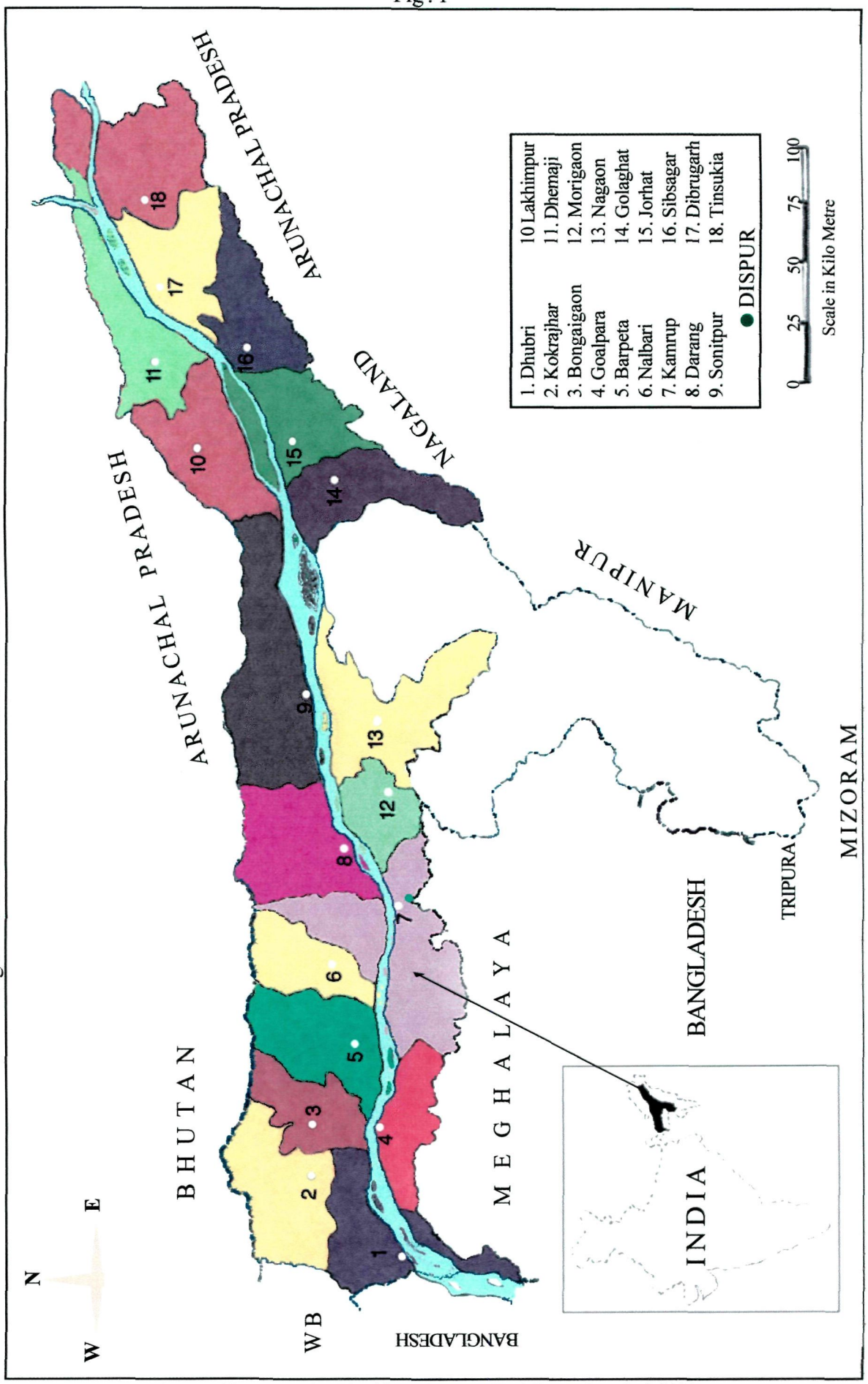
Fig : 1



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