

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BADARPUR FORT (14TH CENTURY -17TH CENTURY) WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SHAH JALAL, MUGHALS AND BRITISH OCCUPATION OF CACHAR

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ABSTRACT

Architecture plays a momentous role in the socio-cultural structure of the society. It not only reflects the might and right of the dynasty, but also reflects the socio-religious culture of the kingdom. Moreover architecture is also the fundamental source of information to the historians. Temples, dargahs, mosques, tombs etc are the specimens from which our past can be traced easily. These constructions had been made possible through the patronage of wealthy royal dynasties, wealthy merchants and guilds. Standing the ravages of time, the architecture of Barak valley are the legacy to its citizens. Khaspur in Cachar district, Bhuvan Tirtha of the Bhuvan hill, Badarpur fort at Badarpur, Rontilla at Hailakandi district, Malegarh in Latu etc are the contributions in the field of architecture.

Keywords: architecture, dynasty, socio-culture, dynasty, legacy, kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

Badarpur is popularly acclaimed as the "The Gateway to the Barak Valley of Assam". Its name is derived from Shah Badruddin who was a staunch disciple of Shah Jalal of Sylhet who had arrived from Yemen. It is surrounded by Baralli hill range in the east and Barak river on the north and is located at 24.9 degree 92.6 degree E. Badarpur was a hub of British India. The Badarpur Railway junction is the first railway station in the Barak valley. It was introduced by the British Government with meter gauge rail lines in 1898. The dominant religions of Badarpur are Hinduism and Islam while Buddhism, Christianity, Jainism cover only a minor part. Badarpur is a town area committee in Karimganj district (Assam) sharing an urban part named-Badarpur Railway Town..The official language of Badarpur is Bengali with a total population of about 33,400 according to Population census (2011).



BARAK VALLEY OF ASSAM

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE “BADARPUR FORT “

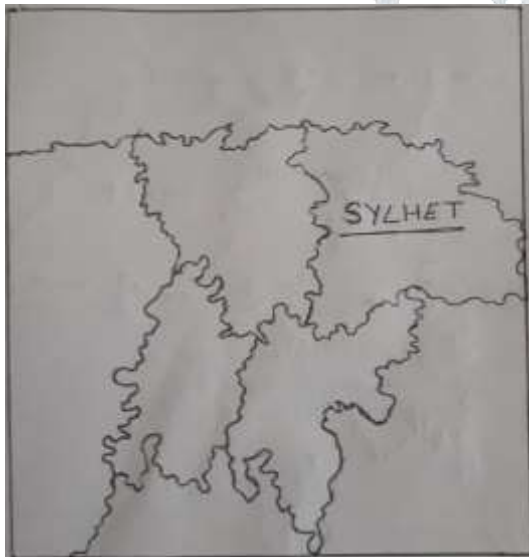
ORIGIN OF ISLAM IN INDIA

The origin of Islam can be traced back to 612-613, when Prophet Mohammad who was an Arabian started preaching the worship of Allah and existence of a single community of believers(umma). Prophet Mohammad belonged to a tribe called “Quraysh” who lived in Mecca and controlled the main shrine called Kaba. In 612, Muhammad declared himself to be the messenger of God (Rasul) who had been commanded to preach Islam. Those who accepted the doctrine of Mohammad were called Muslims. But soon the Muslims felt strong opposition from Meccans. In 622, Muhammad along with his followers was forced to leave Mecca (hijra) and migrated to Medina and this was the turning point in the history of Islam.

After hundred years of Prophet Muhammad’s death, the Arabians extended their empire upto West Asia, Africa and Europe. Though towards the 10th century A.D, the Muslim domination started to decline, yet the Turkey continued extending Islamic religion and entered India via Afganistan. In Afganistan, the Turkey intermingled with them and formed a new caste which entered India and laid the foundation of Sultanate. Therefore, the Sultanate period is also termed as “Turk-Afghan” era.

REASON FOR THE CONQUEST OF SYLHET BY SHAH JALAL DURING 14TH CENTURY A.D:

The significance of Badarpur fort goes back to 14th century A.D. with the conquest of Sylhet which was considered an Islamic conquest. Muhammad’s death created the phenomena of Muslim conquests that led to the creation of Caliphates, conversion to Islam, specially Imams who intermingled with local population to propagate Islamic religion. (Arnold, 1913) During this period Sylhet consisted of many predominant but petty kingdoms such as Gour , Laur , Jaintia.



SYLHET (BANGLADESH)

The kingdom of Gour was ruled by Gour Govinda who was a conservative and staunch Hindu ruler of the kingdom. He was intolerant and harsh towards other religious faiths and sects such as Islam, Buddhism and even certain other sects of Hinduism. (Allen, 1905).He passed twelve years of his life seeking religious and military training in the Kamakhya temple and Kulsia ashram which was situated on the banks of the Kulsia river in modern –day Sualkuch. He paid great attention to the fortification of his kingdom and also built a seven storeyed brick tower which spread his fame far and wide of the country.

The Gour kingdom was a Hindu dominated principality, but a small minority of Muslim population also resided in the Gour kingdom after the Azmardon’s invasion of the Gour kingdom led by the Governor of Bengal, Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Luzbak. Azmardon(Ajmiriganj) is an upazilla of Habiganj district situated in the division of Sylhet, Bangladesh. The Governor of Bengal Malik Ikhtiyaruddin Luzbak invaded Azmardon in 1254 and defeated the local raja. But this was short-lived. This was the main reason why a minority Muslim population resided in the principality of Gour kingdom.



AJMIRIGANJ (BANGLADESH)

The Bengali principality of Lakhnauti, ruled by the Muslim Suktan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah of the Balban dynasty, was bordered by the Gour kingdom. Religious tension took place when Burhanuddin's Quhafa, a Muslim, sacrificed a cow on the occasion of Aqiqah (the Islamic tradition of sacrificing an animal specially a cow on child's birth).

Hearing this inhuman sacrifice of cow which was considered an act against Hindu belief, Govinda in a feat of fury slaughtered the new born child of Burhanuddin Quhafa and also mutilated his right hand. Shortly after this incident that added fuel to the fire was the slaughtering of a cow for the feast by Qadi Nuruddin of Taraf during his son's marriage ceremony. The Qadi was immediately executed by Achack Narayan, a feudal ruler of Sylhet. Both the incident forced Burhanuddin and Nooruddin's brother, Helimmuddin travelled to lower Bengal and placed their plea to Sultan Shamsuddin Firopz Shah. Thus territorial and religious tension took place which led to the conquest of Sylhet.

In 1303, a pitch battle took place between Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (1301-1322), an independent ruler of the Lakhnauti kingdom of Bengal and Gour Govinda (1260-1303), the 21st and final king of medieval Sylhet's Gour kingdom. Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (Al-Azam Shams Al-Duniya Wa Al-Din Abu Al-Muzaffar Firuz Shah Al-Sultan) inscribed in his coins the name of the Abbaside Caliph, Mustasim Billah. Gour Govinda, known by the epithet "Son of the Sea" was a very conservative Hindu ruler of Sylhet.

Following the conquest of Sylhet, another pitch battle took place which was also a part of the "Conquest of Sylhet" was "Capture of Taraf". Taraf which was also known by name "Tungachal" was a feudal territory of the Sylhet region. It was governed by different petty kingdoms in different period of time. At present, it was a part of the modern-day Habiganj district of the Sylhet (Miah, 2003). It is situated in the North-Eastern part of Bangladesh. It was a part of Brahmachal in 1170 A.D, but in 1258 Gour Govinda annexed it and ruled it for few years. Later it came under the annexation of Twipra (Tripura) kingdom which was the largest historical kingdom in the North-East India with its capital called Khorongma (Kholongma) and was situated along the Meghna river in the Sylhet division of present-day Bangladesh. But again in 1260, Gour Govinda, the king of Gour annexed Tungachal to his kingdom.



TARAF (1200-1600)

With the successful capture of Taraf in 1304, Tungachal came under the control of Syed Nasiruddin (Sheykh Al-Mashaikh Makhdum Syakh Jalal Mujarrad Bin Muhammad Kunyai), popularly known as Shah Jalal and was renamed "Taraf". Shah Jalal was a Sufi saint and was also the military commander or sipah salar of the armed forces of Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah. He played a prominent role in the conquest of Sylhet in 1303 and was a celebrated Sufi dervish who was responsible for the spread of Islam in Bengal in the 14th century. Under his guidance, the territory was transformed to a renowned centre of linguistic and most specifically Islamic education in the Indian subcontinent. Renowned writers like Syed Shah Israil popularly known as Shah Bondegi, a 16th century Persian language writer and a Sufi and Syed Rayhan Ad-Din, a Persian language writer and a Sufi who earned the epithet "Bulbul-e-Bangalah" (Nightingale of Bengal).

After receiving an order from his maternal uncle and spiritual guide, who offered him a handful of soil and instructed him to settle in a place whose colour, smell and taste of soil is similar to his own, Shah Jalal started for Hindustan and reached Delhi along with his numerous followers. In Delhi he was warmly received by Hazrat Nizamuddin Awlia. On the way to Medina, Shah Jalal accidentally met Burhanuddin who narrated him the pathetic plight of Muslims in Eastern India along with his own story. Shah Jalal decided to move to Sylhet in order to relieve Muslims from Hindu atrocities. Accordingly Shah Jalal moved to Sylhet and helped Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah in the conquest of Sylhet.

Shah Jalal's maternal uncle instructed him with the words "It is the wish of Merciful Allah, you are to hoist Islamic flag at the eastern part of Hindustan and will do immemorable work. Go eastward and settle in a land similar to your motherland."

After the successful annexation of Gour, Shah Jalal ordered his disciples to spread and propagate the Islamic religion throughout the greater part of Sylhet.

During the Tungachal expedition, Shah Jalal met Adam Khaki also known as Khaki Pir in the early 14th century. He was a 14th century Sufi Muslim Pir in the Sylhet region. In 1303, he accompanied Shah Jalal in the final battle of the "Conquest of Sylhet". He accompanied Shah Jalal in his expedition across the Indian subcontinent to propagate Islamic religion. Receiving order from Shah Jalal to disperse across Eastern Bengal and surrounding areas for propagation of Islamic religion and faith, one of his disciples Adam Khaki migrated to Badarpur (modern-day Deorail) and preached Islamic faith to the local people.

It is said that after his death, he was buried in dargah in Badarpur, Karimganj which was situated in close proximity to the modern-day Badarpur railway station. The people were given Pirumuttara land grants who were attached to the maqam of Adam Khaki.

After Shah Jalal's occupation of Sylhet in 1328 A.D, Srihatta and a major portion of present Karimganj district came under the Bengal Sultanate. Two inscription, one of Hussain Shah and another of his son Mahmud Shah, found respectively at Kaliganj and Suprakandi indicates that the entire region was under the control of the Sultanate. Most of the areas of the district were placed under the Pratapgarh Revenue Mahal of the Sylhet Sarkar of the Mughals.

Shah Jalal was not only a renowned dervish of Sylhet, but also received sainthood in Assam both in Brahmaputra valley and especially in Barak valley. His graveyard in Dargah Mohallah is considered a pious place for the inhabitants. The preaching of Islamic religion both in Sylhet and Karimganj, his augmentation in Sylhet and his successful Sylhet invasion can be traced from historical sources like "Tawarikh-e-Jalali" by Nasir ad-Din Hayadar and "Gulzar-e-Abbar" by M.Ghausi Shittari Mandavi. After investigating from many sources, the historians fixed the date of successful Sylhet invasion in the year 1303 A.D and measured his age to be 31 or 32.

REASONS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF BADARPUR FORT BY THE MUGHALS

After the death of the last Mughal emperor (Aurangzeb) in 1707, war of succession took place among his successors. Taking advantage of this chaos, the Subedar of Bengal declared their nawabship and started ruling independently. Later, other subedars also followed the same footsteps. Murshid-Quli-Khan, Shuja-ud-din, Muhammad Khan, Sarfaraz Khan, Alivardi Khan, Siraj-ud-daula, Mir Jafar and Mir Qasim were the nawabs of Bengal during the period from 1717 to 1765. That is why this era is termed as ‘Nawabi era’.

During the late 17th century, the Bengal subah was divided into 19 sarkar and Sylhet was the 19th sarkar. In 1722, for the purpose of extraction of maximum tax, Murshid-quli-khan divided Bengal into 13 settlements and Sylhet was the 10th settlement. Later, Sylhet was recognized into ‘mahal’ and combination of 148 parganas constituted Sylhet settlement. Among these, 40 parganas constituted Karimganj settlement. (Ahmed, 2016)

In Sylhet a fauzdar (Nayed Nazim) was appointed who was responsible for maintaining peace and order, executed Nawab’s order and maintained law and order. He used to extract tax from zamindars and also supplied army to the nawab when demanded. This arrangement of Murshid-quli-khan was later carried on by Shuja-ud-din in 1728 A.D.

But this arrangement of Murshid-quli-khan was shortlived. War of succession, Maratha attack and luxurious lifestyle of the later nawabs compelled them to depend highly on zamindars. Karimganj pargana including Sylhet was later placed under Permanent settlement (1793) by Lord Cornwallis.

So it can be easily proved that the nawabship of Bengal was scattered upto Karimganj. During the nawabship of Alivardi Khan (1740-1756), the fauzdar of Sylhet was Ali Quli Beg. Near Bundashil (Badarpur), he established a village called Alakulipur. In order to defend eastern Sylhet from neighbour’s attack like dimasa and kachari, a new nayeb fauzdar was appointed in Bundashil. The nayeb fauzdar brought a group of Muslim and Christian army from Mirat to protect the frontier. Near Bundashil, he created a fort which could be utilized as a frontier line as well as to keep an eye on the movement of the cacharis. This fort is famous as ‘Badarpur fort’.

THE TREATY OF BADARPUR AND THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF CACHAR :

By 1823, parts of the Brahmaputra valley and Manipur came under Burmese occupation (Myint-U, 2001). Lord William Amherst, the then Governor – General of India felt it necessary to occupy Cachar for guarding the nearby British held district of Sylhet from the Burmese. Finally on 6th March 1824, the ‘Treaty of Badarpur’ was signed between Gobinda Chandra and the British. According to the terms of the treaty, Cachar was declared as a British protectorate and Raja Gobinda Chandra was recognized as the ruler of Cachar.

To sum up, the Badarpur fort located in the Karimganj district along the banks of the Barak river reflects the historical era between (14th – 17th) century. It is the only Islamic architecture in Barak valley that bears the significance from Pre-Mughal period to British period. It reveals the provincial style of Mughal structure. Located at the crossroads of the National Highway 44 and 53 and Badarpur railway junction, it attracts tourists from the neighbours like Myanmar, Bangladesh, Tripura as they share history with Barak valley. The main reason behind this Badarpur fort was to keep a close watch on every movement in the region. For the locals, this semi – ruined Islamic architecture marks the cultural heritage and also a seat for preaching their local culture. A seat of religious dissemination where both Hindus and Muslims take pride of their heritage.

Nihar Ranjan Roy has rightly said, ‘South Assam / North Eastern Bengal or Barak Valley is the extension of the greater Surma / Meghna valley of Bengal in every aspect from culture to geography’. (Roy, 1980)

In conversation with the present circle officer (2020), SMT. DEBAJYATI GOGOI, I found that so far the Badarpur fort was lacking government and local attention. No step was taken to preserve this historical heritage of North-Eastern part of India. The government offices are also devoid of any written document. Recently the Government of Assam has sanctioned 10 lakhs for its improvement and development. The reason of not getting any attention may be that Badarpur is a small sub-division in Karimganj district. Its population are also not aware of preserving this cultural heritage. As Badarpur is not a hub of trading centre, so this heritage failed to grab the eyeball of government and local population. Moreover, government and both public and private educational institutions should play a significant role in preserving this semi-ruined historical heritage. Proper education should be dispatched to local people to safeguard our heritage. In this regard clubs, educational institutions, political groups, committees should come forward to provide a protective shield to our culture because our historical monuments are the legacy of our past.

DARGAH OF ADAM KHAKI IN BADARPUR



BADARPUR FORT IN BADARPUR



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