Arabic influence on Sher Shah Abadi Dialect

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Abstract

Modern Bengali is originated from different spoken Bengali dialects. Sher Shah Abadi Dialect is one of such distinctive spoken Bengali that is used by the Sher Shah Abadi Community. This dialect comprises a lot of Arabic words and phrases. The ancestral abode of this community was Shershahbad Pargana that covered the areas of Gaur, the capital city of Bengal. Bengali language was developed with Arabic and Persian vocabularies, by the independent Muslim rulers in Bengal. Sher Shah Abadi Dialect was the communicative and administrative Bengali during Sher Shah and Sur dynasty in Bengal.

Keywords: Bengali, Sher Shah Abadi Dialect, Arabic, Persian, Shershahbad Pargana

Introduction

According to the historical data of the British period, the Sher Shah Abadi Community is the descendents of the Afghan soldiers and settled at Shershahbad Pargana. Arabic influence on their dialect indicates their relation with the Arabs. During the British rule, Bengali language was deformed with Sanskrit originated words in written form and fixed by anew linguistic pattern. That corruptive Bengali was included in the course curriculum by the British government. As the Sher Shah Abadis were victimized by the British, they did not take formal education commonly offered by the government. Cultivation was their main profession. So they preferred to live far in rural areas of undivided Bengal and Bihar. As a result, they could have preserved the pre-British characteristics of Bengali having Arabic- originated vocabularies on their dialect.

Sher Shah Abadi Community

A particular Muslim group of people who had been living at Shershabad Pargana of present Malda and Murshidabad districts was called Shershabadis or Shershahbadiyas by the British. They were the descendents of the army of the emperor Sher Shah and the Shershabad Pargana was named after the emperor Sher Shah. He established this Pargana for the settlement of his army in 1540s. In this regard a reference can be mentioned about the name of the Sher Shah Abadis that- "The name is derived from Shershabad Pargana of Murshidabad district, from which they were forced to emigrate owing to the erosion of the Ganges. There are several theories about their origin. One is that they were originally Mahrattas, who came to Bengal with the Mahratta invaders. It is said that a number of them were made prisoners and forced to accept Islam. Their appearance however is unlike that of the typical Mahratta, and it seems more likely that they are descendants of the army of Sher Shah, one of the Afghan kings. Whatever their origin may be, it is certainly not Bengali."1

The soldiers of Sher Shah as well as the administrative officers and intelligentsia led to the formation of a new community, who were initially amalgamation of immigrants from Afghanistan and indigenous people. This mixed Muslim population gradually evolved into a distinct community especially towards the advent of Mughals in North Bengal and was known as Sher Shah Abadi Community. Shershabad Pargana was the formative place of this

Community. Due to erosion of the Ganges and suppression policy of the British they left their formative place. Now they are living at Malda, Murshidabad, Uttar Dinajpur of West Bengal, Pakur, Sahebganj of Jharkhand, Katihar, Purnea, Araria, Soupal, Kishanganj of Bihar, Shunsari, Jhapa of Nepal, Chapai Nababganj, Rajsahi of Bangladesh.

Arabic-Bengali Connections with reference to Sher Shah Abadis

Arabic, being a Semitic language, is one of the most prominent languages of world whereas Bengali is one of the major Indian languages. Because of geographic, culture, civilization and linguistic distances, these two completely different languages had no early connection in the past until the advent of Muslims in Bengal. While Arabic with a history of two thousand years, is one of the oldest living languages of the world, Bengali is relatively a very new language. Being the language of the holy Quran and the Prophet Muhammad, Arabic, spread all over the world including India. So far as the Sher Shah Abadi community is concerned, it is believed that the forefathers of this community were originally from some Arab regions. Considering socio-religious aspects, it can be presumed that the forefathers of Sher Shah Abadis might have come from Nurishthan. In this respect a reference can be added that- "The people of Nurishthan admit themselves as Quirish origin of the Arabs. They are *Ahle Hadeeth* in Islamic practices. They have separate language that differs from other Afghani languages. Their migration started during the victory of Mecca by the prophet Muhammad, in 630s C.E."2. So the forefathers of Sher Shah Abadis might have migrated from Arab world to Nuristhan, in Afghanistan via Iraq then to Shershabad Pargana of Bengal. During this long period (7th to 16th century), they mixed up Persian, Afghani and Bengali words and phrases with Arabic. The inclusion and exclusion of vocabularies continue even today.

Contribution of Arabic to Bengali used in Shershahbad Pargana

During the Muslim rule in Bengal, the Bengali language was highly patronized. In those eras (1203- 1757 C.E.), Arabic vocabularies intermingled with indigenous vocabularies. Bengali flourished and was enriched with Arabic and Persian vocabularies. That kind of Bengali continued in oral communication as well as in literary writings, approximately up to 1778 C.E. During that period the poetry in Bengali literature got greater attention and that kind of poetry is now called as *put^hi*. But those poetries i.e. *put^his* were hardly protected or published. In those eras the Bengali Hindus and Muslims had no communal feelings regarding the usage of Arabic and Persian vocabularies either in verbal or written Bengali. In this respect, a letter of a Hindu *Zaminder*, who sent it to a then administrative officer for the protection of his land, written on 26th July 1778 C.E., is mentioned bellow-

শ্রীরাম। গরীব নেওয়াজ সেলামত। আমার জমিদারি পরগণে কাকজোল তাহার দুইগ্রাম শিকিস্তি হইয়াছে সেই দুইগ্রাম পয়স্তি হইয়াছে-- চাকালে একবেলপুরের শ্রী হরে কৃষ্ট রায় চৌধুরী আজ জবরদস্তি দখল করিয়া ভোগ করিতেছে। আমি মালগুজারীর সরবরাহতে মারা পড়িতেছি-- উমেদওয়ার যে সরকার হইতে আমিও এক চোপদার সরেজমিনেতে পঁছুচিয়া তোরফেনকে তলব দিয়া আদালত করিয়া হক দেলাইয়া দেন। ইতি ১১৮৫ তারিখ ১১ শ্রাবণ ফিদবী জগতাধিব রায়।(চিঠিখানি ইংরেজি তারিখ হবে ১৭৭৮ সালের ২৬ শে জুলাই)।

(*ʃriram gɔrib neojaɟ ʃelamɔt. amar ɟɔmidari pɔrgɔne kakɟol tahar duigram ʃikiʃti hɔijac^he ʃei duigram pɔjɔsti hɔijac^he — cakale ekbelpurer shree Hore Krisno Roy Chaudhury aɟ ɟɔbɔrdɔʃti dɔk^hɔl kɔrija b^hog kɔritec^he. ami malguɟarir ʃɔrɔbɔrahɔte mara pɔɽitec^hi — umedeojar ɟe ʃɔrkar hɔite amio ek copdar ʃreɟɔminete pɳhucija torp^henke ʈɔlɔb dija adalɔt kɔrija hɔk delaija den. iti 1185, tarik^h 11 ʃrabɔn , p^hidbi, Jagtadhib Roy.)3*

The above piece of writing was composed with the help of Arabic and Persian vocabularies. Since our research work is relevant to the Arabic influence on Bengali dialect, we find out Arabic elements from the above mentioned letter that would highlight the supremacy of Arabic language. The words are: গরীব (*gɔrib*) < غريب - remarkable, সেলামত (*ʃelamɔt*) < سلامة - security, দখল (*dɔk^hɔl*) < دخول - invasion, তলব (*tɔlɔb*) < طلب - pursuit, আদালত (*adalɔt*) < عدالة - justice, হক (*hɔk*) < حق - rightful possession.

In the above letter, a Pargana by the name Kankjole there is mentioned. It covers the areas of the present Malda in West Bengal. It was connected with Shershahbad Pargana. It is found that- "Eastern Portion (of Kankjole): This portion is situated on the Sheershahabad Map."4 It is also found that- "The eastern portion (of Kankjol) is contained within Shershahabad Pargana."5

It is found that there is Arabic influence in the description of different seasonal crops of Shershabad Pargana by the revenue surveyor that- "Harvest: The harvests are *Bhuddooee*, *Khureef* and *Rubbee*."6. In this reference the following Arabic words are found.

  Khureef (crops) < $k^h arip^h$ (خريف - autumn)
  Rubbee (crops) < *rabi'* (ربيع - spring time)

These Arabic words have been used to categorize different seasonal crops as $k^h arip^h$ ʃɔʃʃɔ (Mjɖl g npɖ) for the autumnal crops and *rabi'* ʃɔʃʃɔ (lɦ npɖ) for the crops of the spring, in standard Bengali. But these facts of Arabic loan words are hardly mentioned in Bengali lexicons.

Role of the British in corrupting the Bengali

It was the 'divide and rule' policy of the British government which paved the way for discrimination against the Arabic and Persian Vocabularies. The British government instigated the Brahmins to incorporate Sanskrit words into Bengali language and literature. They tried to give a fixed linguistic pattern to Bengali language. The first printed book on Bengali grammar, "A Grammar of the Bengali Literature", was written by Nathaniyel Brancy Halhed, published from Shreerampur Press, Hoogly, in 1778. Bengali department was opened under the supervision of William Carry, in Fort William College on 1801C.E. Initially eight scholars were appointed for teaching Bengali. Among them, Mirtunjoy Tarkalankar and Ramram Basu were renowned. They began to write Bengali prose on Sanskrit pattern. Their first writings were "*Kathopokathon*" and "*Itihasmala*". Professor Wilson, a European educationist, wrote a book on Sanskrit grammar. He also became the president of the Translation Society in 1828 C.E. This society translated many European books on science and literature into remoulded Bengali language. The British government recognized this Bengali, which was devoid of Arabic and Persian vocabularies, as the mother tongue for the Bengalis and made it compulsory in schools and colleges in 1837 C.E. In 1838 the government passed a law to replace Arabic and Persian terminologies with English terminologies in judicial and other official departments. Due to lack of matching substitute of Arabic and Persians terminologies, a few of such Arabic and Persians terminologies continued during the period. That is why such Arabic and Persians terms exist in different judicial departments even today.

Role of the Brahmin priest-class in making Bengali difficult

During the British rule the Bengali literature with a new trend grew fast. Bankim Chandra, Rabindra Nath Thakur and others played a very active role to promote such new trends in Bengali literature. The introduction of printing technology for printing Bengali books further promoted rapid growth of Bengali language and literature. On the other hand, the introduction of technology for printing books also gave a fixed linguistic pattern to Bengali as the literary Bengali language. The printed Bengali books were more or less developed by an educated Bengali Brahmin priest-class that ignored Arabic and Persian words commonly used in rural Bengal and promoted Sanskrit words instead of Arabic and Persian words. In most of the cases the uses of Arabic and Persian words were altered by the unused and difficult Sanskrit-originated words into the literary form of written Bengali. Those efforts continued for more than two centuries to familiarize Sanskrit-originated words with the common Bengalis. They wrote a large number of poems and literary pieces using Sanskrit dominated words as the substitute for Arabic and Persian vocabularies in literary Bengali. But the masses did not accept such *Sanskritized* Bengali and hence many Arabic and Persian words continue even today. The zeal to incorporate the *Sanskritized* words into Bengali resulted in making this language difficult for the

common people. So, the authorities of Bengali language (i.e. different boards of education and language associations) were compelled to divide the Bengali language into two major categories. The one is *Sadhu Bhasa* that comprised Sanskrit dominated words in written form of Bengali. Another category is *Cholito Bhasa* that comprised Arabic and Persian words along with useful Bengali words for verbal communications and simple writings.

Moreover, numerous Arabic and Persian vocabularies are still surviving in literary Bengali as well as in its dialects. A very few of Arabic vocabularies have been signified as Arabic loan words in literary Bengali but the plenty of Arabic-originated words that are used in literary Bengali are to be manifested and highlighted.

Impressions of Arabic on Sher Shah Abadi Dialect

There are many communicative and verbal dialects under the domain of Bengali language. The Sher Shah Abadi Dialect is one of such dialects. Arabic vocabularies have been conserved in this dialect even today. One of the causes is that the common people of this community have been living in rural areas and have a very less formal education. The people of this community have accepted words of other languages as well during all this period. Nevertheless, they preserve Arabic original words in their daily conversations.

It is very important to note that proverbs are always true, because it is formula type similes, composed by the intellectuals after the very long practical experiences and comparative studies of contemporary happenings. There are many Arabic words that are used in Sher Shah Abadi proverbs. The influence of Arabic vocabularies on the Sher Shah Abadi proverbs indicates a relation of this community with the Arabians. Like the women of other communities, the Sher Shah Abadi women participate in feasts. They sing many humorous and soulful songs named as *gid* during marriage ceremonies. They call the bride as *aruʃ* (عروس). The Arabic word *aruʃ* is used more frequently in all songs of women. The usages of Arabic words in women's songs are not found other than the Sher Shah Abadi women.

The Sher Shah Abadi dialect has no separate written form of Bengali. It is one of the verbal Bengali dialects. It is also to be noted that the Bengali and Arabic vocabularies, which are used in this dialect, are distinctive phonologically and morphologically from the standard Bengali dialects. The application of Arabic elements on Sher Shah Abadi Dialect are found in the fields of religion, daily life, socio-cultural affairs, administrative activities, economic transactions, physic and medicine, house hold items, proverbs and women's songs. Some applications of Arabic words are mentioned bellow-

● শয়তানের অসঅসাতে পইড়্যা গুন্হার কাম কইর্যাছো । অখন তোবা করো আর বেশি কইর্যা সোয়াবের কাম কত্তে থাকো তেরেই নjঃSįa fįჩhtįl Bnį আছে।

(ʃɔjtaner ɔʃɔʃate pɔiɽæ gunhar kam kɔiræcho. ɔkʰɔn toba kɔro ar beʃi kɔiræ ʃojaber kam kɔtte tʰako tebei naɟat pæibær aʃa acʰe)

Arabic words: ʃɔjtan (شيطان - Satan), ɔʃɔʃa (وسوسة – evil suggestion), toba (توبة – repentance), ʃojab (ثواب – virtue), naɟat (نجاة – release), aʃa (عسى – hope).

Meaning: you have done evil deeds by the evil suggestions of Satan. Now repent to Allah and continue to do voluntary good deeds. Then you can hope the forgiveness of Allah.

● আসোরে ঘশর মশর মগরোবে টিল এশারে খাওয়ান দাওয়ান ফজোরে নিন।

(aʃore gʰɔʃɔr mɔʃɔr mɔgrobe dʰil eʃare kʰaojan daojan pʰɔɟore nin).

Arabic words: aʃor (عصر – afternoon Salat), mɔgrob (مغرب – time of sunset Salat), eʃar (عشاء – time of night Salat) and pʰɔɟor (فجر – Salat time of dawn)

Meaning: Someone who passes the time of the *Salat* (praying *Namaz*) of afternoon out of laziness, leaves the *Salat* after the Sun set by passing the time intentionally, passes the time of the night *Salat* for taking dinner and leaves the *Salat* of dawn for a deep sleep.

- অদা খেলাপ করিশ ন্যা, মুশকিলে পোড়্যা যাবো।

(ɔda kʰelap kɔriʃ næ, muʃkile poɽæ ɟabo)

Arabic words: ɔda (وعد – promise), kʰelap (خلاف – oppose), muʃkil (مشكل – difficulty)

Meaning: Do not break your promise otherwise I will face some difficulties.

- ওরে বাবা অকে কি শুধ্র্যাব্যার আশা আছে? উ তো আজোলের মারা।

(ore baba ɔke ki ʃudʰræbær aʃa acʰe ? u to aɟoler mara)

Arabic words: baba (بابا – father, used as address), aʃa (عسى – hope), aɟɔl (اجل – destiny)

Meaning: Whether there is still some hope to correct his behavior? Actually he is cursed by the destiny.

- ম্যালাই কোসিস করনু ঝামালাটা সমাজের বিচ্যারে মিটিয়া লিব্যার, কিন্তু হক বিচ্যার না প্যায়্যা অস্ত্যা পস্ত্যা শ্যাষে আদালোতে আরজি করনু।

(mælai koʃiʃ kɔrnu ɟʰamalaʈa ʃɔmaɟer bicære miʈijæ libær, kintu hɔk bicær na pæjæ ɔʃʈæ pɔʃʈæ ʃæʃe adalote arɟi kɔrnu)

Arabic words: hɔk (حق - right), adalot (عدالة - court), arɟi (عرضي - application)

Meaning: A lot of efforts were made to reach out a compromise through society but because of not getting justice I was compelled to move to the court.

- ধানের প্যাইক্যার আইস্যা বাইন্যা দিয়া গেছে, তিন দিন বাদে আসতে চ্যাহ্যাছে, আসলে ধান ওজন কইর্যা দিবো, বাকি রাখতে পারবোনা, টাকা আদাই কইর্যা লিবো।

(dʰaner pæikær aiʃæ bainæ dijæ gecʰe, tin din bade aʃte cæhæcʰe, aʃle dʰan oɟɔn kɔiræ dibo, baki rakʰte parbona, ʈaka adai kɔiræ libo)

Arabic words: bainæ (بيعة – agreement), bade (بعد – after), oɟɔn (وزن – weight), baki (باقي – due), adai (أداء – payment)

Meaning: The buyer of rice came and gave advance for agreement. He wished to come after three days. If he would come, I shall weigh my rice and take full payment. There is no scope for dues.

- অর হালাত ভালো ন্যাই, এঠে উঠে এলাজের ল্যাগ্যা ট্যান্যা লিয়া ব্যাড়াইতে ব্যাড়াইতে হামরা সভ্ভাই মিল্যা হয়র্যান হোয়্যাগেনু।

(ɔr halat bʰalo næi, eʈʰe uʈʰe elaɟer lægæ ʈænæ lijæ bæɽæite bæɽæite hamra ʃɔbʰbʰai milæ hɔjræn hojægenu)

Arabic words: halat (حالة – condition), elaɟ (علاج- medical treatment), hɔjræn (حيران – perplexed)

Meaning: His health condition is not well. We move here and there for his treatment. All of us are perplexed.

- খুব্বিই মজবুত কইর্যা ঘর বানিয়্যাছো জি ভ্যাই।

(kʰubbi mɔɟbut kɔiræ gʰɔr banijæcʰo ɟi bʰæi)

Arabic words: mɔɟbut (مضبوط- strong), banijæ (بنى - build)

Meaning: O brother, you have built your house very strong.

- কয়ল্যার ইল্লোত যায়ন্যা ধুইলে,আর লোকের খাস্লোত যায়ন্যা মইলে।

(kɔjlær illot ɟajnæ dʰuile, ar loker kʰaʃlot ɟajnæ mɔile)

Arabic words: illot (علة- dirtiness), kʰaʃlot (خصلة – habit)

Meaning: As the dirtiness of coal never removes by washing, like as the human habit never changes even till death.

Conclusion

The influence of Arabic words and phrases on Sher Shah Abadi dialect is apparent. In most of the cases, these words maintain their original forms and articulations along with original meanings though sometimes are used in distorted manners. But in many cases, it is found that there are specific articulations of Arabic words on this dialect and these articulations are unique in comparisons with others. Had the British not trespassed to corrupt Bengali language, the history of Bengali language would have been written with the glory of Arabic influence and the Sher Shah Abadi Dialect could have attained the majesty of standard Bengali Dialect.

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