

Lesson from the History of Assam

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Assam rulers in 13th century

Assam the state of Brahmaputra and beautiful forests was ruled by Hindu Kings for centuries. It was only in 13 century when Bakhtiyar Khilji attacked Assam. He was helped in his conquest by a converted Hindu. He crossed the River Testa stone bridge and entered Assam. He asked the King of Kamrup for troops and supplies. The Assamese king delayed, so an impatient Bakhtiyar decided to carry on by himself. The Turks raped and looted their way through the mountains of Darjeeling and Sikkim before entering Tibet. Here he faced stiff resistance. With supply lines stretched, Bakhtiyar decided to retreat but his army was harassed by guerrilla attacks as it made its way back through the mountain passes. Supplies were so short that the Turks were forced to eat some of their horses. [Ref. Nitish Sengupta, Land of two rivers, Penguin, 2011]

When the retreating armies finally reached the *Testa*, they found that the Assamese had destroyed the bridge and laid a trap. In the end most of the *Turks* were killed by the Assamese or drowned in a desperate attempt to cross the fast-flowing river. *Bakhtiyar* was trapped like a mice in cage. Finally he killed bulls to make their boat and somehow crossed Testa sitting on them. *Bakhtiyar* reached *Devkot* with only hundred of his soldiers. He was assassinated by his own companion *Ali Mardan*. The wise rulers in 13th Century saved Assam from Islamic rule. This defeat of *Bakhtiyar* was remembered for long time. For the next 500 years no one dared to enter the difficult terrain of Assam.

Assam rulers in 17th Century

In 17th century *Ajan Fakir*, born *Shah Miran*, a Sufi of *Chistiya* clan came from *Baghdad* to settle in the *Sibisagar* area of Assam. His main aim was to reform, reinforce and stabilize Islam in the region of Assam. He acquired the nickname *Azan* came from his habit of calling *Azan*. He married an *Ahom* woman of high social stature and settled at *Gorgaon*, near *Sibisagar* town. His all attempts in earlier life failed to convert Hindus to Islam. In the end he used an old Sufi trick. He authored two forms of devotional songs *Zikir* and *Zari*. These songs were composed of teaching of Quran as well as they have striking similarities with the teachings of *Srimanta Sankardeva*, the 16th-century saint-scholar from Assam. Hindus considered these songs as teachings of *Sankardeva* while *Azan* Sufi was preaching Islam in disguise. This tricked worked. *Azan Fakir* gained many Hindus disciples. He later converted them to Islam. The news of his success reached the ears of the King. The king was reported that *Azan* was a secret agent of Mughal rulers of Delhi. King ordered to pluck the eyes of *Azan*. He was punished by removing his eyes. His disciples went one step ahead. A story of miracle was propagated that the *Pir* had two earthen pots brought into which he let his "two eyes drop". This was again an old trick of *Sufis* to convert any mishap into a miracle to gain disciples.

Soon, an accident happened with the King. Some fellow adviser said to King that this accident was caused due to curse by the innocent fakir. King apologized and made land grants to *Ajan fakir* at

Sovaguri Chapari, near *Sibsagar* and had a *matha* built for him. The king patronage made Azan fakir a local hero. He gained thousands of disciples to convert to Islam. After his death his place became a *majar* on the bank of Brahmaputra . Now every year on *Ajan Pir's Dargah* an annual *urs* is held. Thousands of Hindus as well as Muslims throng the place to pay respect to the *faqir*.

Take Home Message

What an Islamic sword was unable to do in 13th century was accomplished by a Sufi. Islam was deeply rooted on the heart of Assam by treachery and trickery. Whose fault was this? In my opinion the fault was of advisers to the King. They misguided the King. They made the King ignorant about the Truth. They must have taught that all such tales of miracles are superstitions. The Vedic Philosophy of Hinduism is not even superior but also self sufficient to guide us. We do not need to import any foreign thought or idea to satisfy our religious quest.