

# Challenges and Prospects of Teaching-Learning Arabic in Assam

**Suhail Ahmed Hadi**  
Research Scholar  
Assam University, Silchar  
Email: suhailhadi786@gmail.com

## Abstract:

Assam is a northeastern state of India known for its ethnic culture and tradition. The different languages in Assam have its own importance in their respective areas. Along with the local languages, Arabic is taught in different educational institutions in Assam as a second or third language. Arabic, which actually came to Assam in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, is a foreign language that has gained utmost importance in the present world due to job orientation and Islamic culture. This paper attempts to highlight teaching-learning of Arabic in Assam and a glance to the educational institutions which provide Arabic studies. It also elucidates the conditions and problems of Arabic studies and prospects of the Arabic language and literature in Assam.

**Keywords:** *Muslim saints, Arabic posts, general educational institutions, private madrassa.*

## Introduction:

Assam is a multilingual state situated in the North-east of India. It is known for its ethnic culture and tradition. The different languages in Assam such as Assamese, Bengali and Bodo have its own importance in their respective areas. Along with these regional languages, Arabic is taught in different educational institutions in Assam as a second or third language.

The birthplace of Arabic language is Saudi Arabia. It began to spread abroad the country with the expansion of the Muslim Empire and because of the language of Holy Qur'an and Hadith. Muhammad bin Qasim laid the foundation of the Muslim Empire in India in 712 A.D.

The Arabic language came into Assam through the *muslim* rulers and saints in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. The arrival of Arabic in Assam was late in comparison to other states of India. It first came to Assam when Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji took his forces to Eastern India in 1205 and then gradually spread by some *muslim* saints like Jalaluddin Tibrizi and Sultan Giasuddin. Till the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arabic was confined to prayers, Quran recitation and basic religious learning in mosques and Subahi Maktabas, locally conducted morning schools for providing children with basic Islamic education. In 1901, Arabic was first introduced in Cotton College, Guwahati by the British Government for formal education.

## A Glance to the Teaching-learning of Arabic:

Arabic is taught in various districts of Assam through two main types of institutions: general educational institutions and private *madrassas*. In general educational institutions, Arabic is offered as an elective subject starting from the 9<sup>th</sup> standard in high schools and continues up to the university level. Three universities in Assam—Gauhati University, Assam University Silchar, and Cotton University—provide education in Arabic language and literature. Gauhati University established its Arabic department in 1969, offering M.A. and Ph.D. courses. Assam University Silchar, a central university, founded its Arabic department in 1997, offering M.A., M.Phil, and Ph.D. courses. Similarly, Cotton

University offers B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. courses in Arabic. Additionally, several colleges in Assam, affiliated to Gauhati University and Assam University Silchar, also offer Arabic higher studies.

Private *madrassas* play a distinct role in the teaching and learning of Arabic in Assam. Currently, there are 704 private *madrassas* in Assam affiliated to All Assam Tanzim Madaris-e-Quawmiya, Nilbagan, and 154 *madrassas* affiliated to All Assam Talimi Taraqqi Board, Haibargaon, providing education in Arabic language and literature. Some of these private *madrassas* offer Islamic higher education and confer the 'Fadhil' degree. Notable among them are Jamia Islamia Jalalia in Hojai, Darul Hadith Parmaibheti Islamia Madrassa in Nagaon, Darul Uloom Balapara Madrassa in Bongaigaon, Jamia Islamia Darul Uloom Moirabari in Morigaon, and Assam Darul Hadith Hussainia Madrassatul Banat in Nilbagan. Additionally, Darul Uloom Baskandi in Cachar is renowned for providing the 'Fadhil' degree. In private *madrassas* across Assam, Quran, Tafsir, Hadith, Fiqh, Islamic History, and Arabic literature are taught in Urdu and Arabic medium.

### Challenges and Prospects:

There is a great challenge to the teaching and learning of Arabic in Assam. In the provincialized schools, a considerable number of Arabic posts remain unfilled. This situation can be attributed to governmental negligence and a lack of qualified candidates to occupy these posts.

In May 2022, the Government of Assam appointed 2221 teachers in High Schools, followed by an additional 3811 teachers in September 2022 for school education. Subsequently, around 1718 teachers were appointed in High Schools in May 2023. However, over the past five years, there has been a notable absence of advertisements for filling the vacant Arabic teaching positions in High Schools and High Madrassas. It's worth noting that in 2017, the government appointed approximately 130 Arabic teachers in High Schools and High Madrassas. Nonetheless, numerous positions remained vacant because they were reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). It is important to mention that thus far, there has been no participation from SC and ST students in learning Arabic in Assam.

In Higher Secondary (H.S.) Schools, the teaching and learning of Arabic face significant challenges due to the difficulty level of the course and a shortage of teachers. In 2021, the Government of Assam advertised 37 vacant positions for Arabic posts in provincialized H.S. Schools. However, only nine candidates applied for these positions, resulting in the appointment of nine individuals while 28 posts remained vacant. Similarly, the following year, the government advertised 27 vacant Arabic Subject Teacher positions, but only two candidates applied. This low application rate is attributed to the requirement for candidates to be Teachers' Eligibility Test (TET) qualified and hold a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degree, in addition to a Masters' degree.

In Assam, only Muslim students typically study Arabic, and many come from middle-class or poor families unable to afford the high fees for B.Ed courses. Moreover, in January 2021, the H.S. Level TET examination was conducted to recruit Subject Teachers in schools, but unfortunately, very few candidates with an MA in Arabic passed the TET examination. Despite an increase in the number of Arabic learners since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the quality of education has not yet reached satisfactory levels.

Additionally, it is observed that the Arabic course content at the higher secondary level is more challenging compared to high school and graduate levels. Consequently, many students are reluctant to choose Arabic as one of their subjects in H.S.Schools.

Although various colleges provide Arabic course, sufficient teaching staff are not available in the department of Arabic. It is because of minimal sanctioned posts in the departments and reservation system of the posts. It is also noted that most of the college libraries have insufficient stock of books related to Arabic language and literature. However, the syllabi of Arabic courses in the colleges and universities have been modified. Functional Arabic has been included in the curriculum which is very important for job orientation. In this era of competition, quality teachers are being recruited in the vacant posts.

It is also observed that the condition of private *madrassas* is very poor. There is no adequate physical facilities and free health service in the private *madrassas* due to financial problem. In addition to this, the curriculum of the private *madrassas* is rigid. The modern issues related to literature, history and Islamic jurisprudence should be included in the curriculum. The inclusion of the English language and basic computer education in private *madrassas* would provide a kind of platform to the budding talents to show their skills in the field of Arabic language and literature.

Assam's contribution in the field of Arabic writing is noteworthy and it also helps in teaching-learning of Arabic. The first Arabic work written in Assam is *Tarikh al-'Uloom al-'Arabiyya* by 'Allama Tayeebur Rahman Barbhuiya of Hailakandi. Maulana Hidayatullah al-Qasimi, who belongs to the village Bhojmari in the district of Sonitpur (Assam), is an emerging Arabic writer. He is a young enthusiastic writer and his first step towards the development of Arabic literature is a translation of the Assamese book *Sankhpta Bisuddha Aqaid* by Mufti Muzahidul Islam into Arabic. The name of the translated version is *Mujaz al-'Aqa'id al-Sahihah fi Dhaw' al-Kitab Wa al-Sunna* published in 2011. The book deals with the Islamic ideologies, superstitious beliefs and issues related to ill-omen which are deeply rooted in the present society. His next work is a book by himself entitled *Hidaya al-Muhtar fi Diraya al-'Athar* published by Maktaba Sa'd al-Islamiyya, Sonitpur (Assam) in 2013. This book is on Hadith literature. Then he wrote another noteworthy work *al-Nahw al-Hadi* published in 2014 which is a grammar book. This grammar book, unlike the other grammar books, is more practical and colloquial in manner.

Dr. Jaherul Islam, presently Assistant Professor of A.D.P College, Nagaon, has written a book entitled *Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi min al-Nahdha Hatta al-An* published by Ashok Publications, Panbazar, Guwahati in the year 2013. In this book, he gathers the Arabic literary history of last two centuries and it covers all the genres of literature. Another book of this kind has been written by Dr. Syed Abdullah Ahmed, Assistant Professor of Rangia College, Kamrup under the title *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyya 'Abr al-'Usur* published by Shahid Publications, New Delhi in 2012. This book covers all the periods of Arabic literature i.e. from Pre-Islamic to Modern Period in a concise manner. It also includes Mahjar literature and Indo-Arabic literature.

The contribution made by the writers of Assam is immense and they are to be thanked for their hard work and selfless dedication towards the enrichment of Arabic language and literature in Assam.

## Conclusion:

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Arabic was taught in traditional way. There were no adequate teaching-learning materials available in Assam for teaching Arabic. In addition, Arabic printing facility was not easily available. Most of the prescribed textbooks and references were rare in the market. But in 2010s, the teaching-learning of Arabic is improved. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is used in teaching-learning Arabic. The Arabic language is included in the system software of computers and smartphones. For this, teachers and students can search on the internet in Arabic for their necessary materials. The writers and scholars can print their texts easily and can upload their texts on the internet.

It is noticed that the number of women Arabic scholars in Assam is few. It cannot be denied that women are at par with the men in the matter of talent and skill. If the intellectuals of the society and faculty members of the colleges and universities take special care to bring out the girl students from the interior of the society, the women can then show their talents which would further help in the teaching learning of Arabic in Assam.

As stated earlier, the status of Arabic teaching-learning in different level of institutions is a bit challenging. It needs massive reinforcement and reformation for the improvement of the Arabic education system. However, during the last decade, Arabic studies have reached immense height in Assam and much more is yet to come. The students of Arabic studies have been gradually increasing in Assam and the curriculum of the colleges and universities has also been updated on the basis of national and international importance. So it can be asserted that the future of the Arabic language in Assam is bright.

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