



THE NORTH-EAST
AND



THE MUGHALS

Sushil Chandra Dutta

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THE NORTH-EAST

AND

THE MUGHALS

(1661-1714)

S. C. Dutta



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Dedicated to
The Sacred Memory
OF
MY PARENTS

Dr. SURJYA MOHAN DUTTA (1896-1938)

and

Mrs. HIRONMOYE DUTTA [KASHIMONI] (1902-1952)

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FOREWORD

The peoples and societies in the north-eastern region of India did not evoke much interest among the historians until very recently; and although some works are by now available on the modern and contemporary periods, the pre-colonial period continues to be virtually neglected. One simply wonders, how a fascinating subject like "The North-East and the Mughals" could wait for Dr. S.C. Dutta to research on. Some scholars have no doubt written on the Mughal relations with the region; but their studies were limited to political relations with the Ahom and Cooch Behar states and, barring Dr. S.N. Bhattacharya's, the discussions on Mughal contacts casually formed part of the central theme.

Dutta's study is a pioneering contribution on many counts. He discusses a period of North East's history which was crucial not only for the Mughal expansionism but also due to the socio-economic changes that occurred in the region. He deals with Mughal relations with the North-Eastern region as a whole, identifying two distinct flanks of connections with clusters of territories, and social and economic impact of the relations. In his attempt to probe into the concerned measures of the North-Eastern monarchies and chieftaincies to resist the Mughal expansionism, what he describes as the "North-Eastern Challenge", the author introduces a new dimension in approach to region's history by way of suggesting that it ultimately contributed to a process of regional understanding. The author has also identified several areas of lasting effects of Mughal invasions and suggests that these invasions had indirectly created conditions for revitalisation of the indigenous institutions and larger social formations in the region. An extensive use of the local sources is another feature to add to the merit of the work.

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I am confident that this book shall provide basis for further research in the history of North-East India, besides being information to all those interested to understand this region, and do recommend to all readers.

J.B. BHATTACHARJEE

P R E F A C E

The North-Eastern region of India, as it is designated today, came into contact with the Mughals ever since the latter rose to power in Bengal during the reign of Akbar. Attempts were made by the successive Mughal emperors during their reigns, Jahangir from 1605 to 1627 and Shah Jahan from 1627 to 1658 to extend their imperial hold over the monarchies bordering Bengal. The accession of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to the Mughal throne experienced a desperate forward policy in the North-East during the early years of his stewardship. The more formidable challenges of the Marathas, Rajputs, Sikhs and the Jats in the later years, however, forced the Emperor not to attempt his expansionist endeavours beyond Bengal. To make matters worse, disloyalty, plots and rebellions were noticed on the part of imperial officers, local chieftains and *Zamindars* and the European Factors in Bengal. The monarchies in North-East also passed through internal strifes and dissensions. A new spirit was inspired by Rudra Singh (1696-1714), the Ahom monarch who succeeded in bringing the chieftaincies and monarchies in the North-East together to invade the Mughal province of Bengal. Although the death of Rudra Singh marked the end of the challenge of the North-East, the Mughals too thereafter, made no attempt to renew their aggressive frontier policy mainly due to the decaying condition of their empire, the earlier expeditions and the continued commercial contacts with Bengal had generated lasting political and social and economic impact for the North-East.

In spite of the historical significance of the problem, no serious attempt has so far been made at an integrated study

of the Mughal relations with North-East India and its impact on the region. Sir Edward Gait in his '*A History of Assam*' (London, 1905) briefly discussed the history of Mughal relations with Assam. S.N. Bhattacharya's '*A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*' (Calcutta, 1929), confined itself to such relations with Cooch Behar and Assam. The works of Sir J.N. Sarkar '*The History of Bengal*' (Patna, 1973), Jagadish Narayan Sarkar's '*The Life of Mir Jumla*' (Calcutta, 1951) etc. also cover mainly this western division of the region. Besides these and other works, including the articles that have appeared in various journals all are mainly concerned with political relations alone. No attempt has virtually been so far made to project the nature of Mughal contacts with the monarchies in the eastern division of the North-East viz., Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura and the chieftaincies in the foot-hills of the Garos and the Khasis which were located directly on the borders of Bengal. The Mughal impact in the territories beyond the borders were also beyond the comprehension of the historians so far.

The object of the present research is to provide a comprehensive and critical analysis of the Mughal relations with North-East India in a common perspective for the whole region from 1661 to 1714, i.e. from Mir Jumla's campaign to the death of Rudra Singh. Attempt has been made particularly to throw new light on the relations with the eastern division of the region and the Mughal impact on the North-East as a whole. The Mughal relations with Assam and Cooch Behar, which were covered by the learned historians earlier, have been re-discussed in the context of their North-East frontier policy covering the region from Cooch Behar to Aracan. The North-East India, as it stands today, has been visualised as a geographical-historical unit for the purpose of this treatment.

Chapter I opens with the geographical, ethnological and historical background of the North-East and covers briefly the history of Mughal relations with the region before the accession of Aurangzeb. The character of the frontier

policy of Aurangzeb, his attitude towards the North-East and campaign of Mir Jumla, along with its objectives and consequences, have been discussed in Chapter II and Chapter III. The next Chapter deals with the campaign under Ram Singh, the Mughal defeat in the historic battle of Saraighat and its aftermath, and the causes and consequences of the debacle suffered by the Mughals. The years of inaction on either side in the years following the battle of Saraighat, the facts behind such inaction and the minimal contact maintained by the Mughals with Cooch Behar, Bijni, Darrang, Sherpur, Susang, Laur, Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura are dealt with in Chapter V. Chapter VI deals with the problems faced by Aurangzeb during his encounters with the militant races of North-West India and their repercussions in the eastern province of Bengal, and how the successive Ahom monarchs—Gadadhar Singh and Rudra Singh planned a confederacy of the North-East to lead a campaign against the Mughals, its modus operandi and the nature of response of the rulers and chieftains in the region to this scheme that failed to effect its objectives due to sudden death of Rudra Singh. The political, economic and social impact of the Mughal contacts has been discussed in the Chapter VII. And finally, Chapter VIII sums up the problem in retrospect and prospect.

The work is based mainly on local chronicles—Ahom, Assamese, Bengali, and Manipuri—that are available both in print as well as in manuscripts with the record offices and research departments. The inscriptions, coinage and other records pertaining to the period under review have been taken cognizance of and utilised. The Mughal chronicles have been used from their published English versions. Portions of '*Fathiya-i-Ibriya*', a Persian chronicle by Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir Jumla in his Assam campaign, were translated for the author by Maulavi Md. Khalique of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta. The records of the Dutch Factors have also been used from their published English translation. A large number of contemporary and semi-contemporary as well as secondary works

have been consulted and utilised. These details are appended in the Bibliography towards the end of the volume.

I am deeply indebted and grateful to Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee, Professor and Head, Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong for his supervision throughout the course of my investigation and for his valued criticism and suggestions without which I would have fallen into too many errors and flaws. My acknowledgements are also due to such authors whose works I have consulted, and to the Director of the National Archives, New Delhi, Director of Archives, Government of West Bengal, Calcutta, Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam, Gauhati, and the Librarians and staff of the Central Library, North-Eastern Hill University, State Central Library, Shillong and The Asiatic Society and National Library of Calcutta, for allowing me access to the material in their custody.

I am also immensely grateful to Late Dr. S.P. Sen, Director, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, Dr. J.N. Sarkar of Jadavapur University, Calcutta, Dr. Amalendu Guha of CSSS, Calcutta and Late Dr. Padmeswar Gogoi, Late Dr. J.R. Basu of Gauhati University, Late Dr. C.D.S. Devanassen, founder Vice-Chancellor of North-Eastern Hill University, Prof. L.P. Dutt, the then Rector of Dibrugarh University for their academic guidance. I also pay my homage to respected professor Late Dr. Bhupendra Narayan Chaudhury of Gauhati University, Late Sri Sarbananda Rajkumar the then Additional District Magistrate of Kamrup, Gauhati and also to Holy Mother Vidyagiri of Juna Akra, Kasi (Varanasi) U.P. for their encouragement.

Finally, I acknowledge the services of my wife, Pranati Dutta (Mitu) and affectionate son Sudip (Ranju) and daughter Indrani (Krishna) who took upon themselves a lot of unspeakable stress and strain until the completion of this thesis.

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The errors and shortcomings of the book are, of course mine, and I would ungrudgingly crave the indulgence of the esteemed readers for the mistakes and flaws that may have crept in spite of my best precautions and meticulous efforts.

S. C. DUTTA

ABBREVIATIONS USED

B.P.P.	Bengal : Past and Present.
B.R.C.	Bengal Revenue Consultation.
D.H.A.S.	Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies.
E.F.I	English Factories in India.
I.H.Q.	Indian Historical Quarterly.
J.A.S.	Journal of Asiatic Society.
J.A.S.B.	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal.
J.A.R.S.	Journal of Assam Research Society.
J.B.O.R.S.	Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.
J.I.H.	Journal of Indian History.
J.I.C.	Journal of Islamic Culture.
I.H.R.	Indian Historical Review.
J.N.E.I.C.S.S.R.	Journal of North-East India Council for Social Science Research.
K.M.	Kilometre.
M.S.S.	Manuscripts.
Q.R.H.S.	Quarterly Review of Historical Studies.

Introduction

THE GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES of the North-Eastern Region of India is of special significance in understanding its historical evolution. Geopolitics or the relation of geography to political processes has of late been receiving more and more attention in explaining any historical phenomenon on global basis. It is crystal clear by now that environmental factors and the natural resources besides other situations affecting human life were at the back drop of social formation and historical development. Researches have firmly established that the concepts of geography could affect and mould the political thinking in a fundamental manner. The economic integration makes the areas mutually dependent and is equally important.¹

In respect of sea power, there is nothing like a vacuum. However, there is one saving factor with regard to sea power. It is wholly ineffective against organised land masses.² While North-East India has no sea in its immediate vicinity, this land-locked region had experienced waves of immigration of races and people through ages from adjoining South-East Asia and the mainland of India, because of its natural resources, despite hostile climate, geographical barriers and invasions of various imperial forces. No wonder, the imperial Mughals ever since their mastery over Bengal and repeated expansionist endeavours to subjugate the region on the immediate north-east of the *Subah*, bore no fruit.

Geographical Sketch

The geographical concept attained a more distinct identity because of the North-Eastern Council constituted by an Act of the Parliament in 1973 to ensure faster economic

development in the otherwise backward frontier region. This specific isolated region during the period under review has been peculiarly honeycombed by natural barriers like adverse calamities of uneven nature. Even though, unlike other parts of India, this isolated tract contains maximum quantum of fertility. Moreover there are lesser remarkable potentialities of immediate and usual demographic transformations, especially in this inaccessible section. This is due to the established fact of hazardous communication bottle-neck. However, there have been innumerable *Rajas* and chieftains who according to their respective norms and codes have run the affairs of their kingdom and domain—the subjects of which covered both plain and hill tribes of varied ethnic groups speaking different languages and varied dialects. It is desirable to recall the whole topography under review by the introspective and comparative study of the nineteenth and twentieth century's geo-political changes with a break of caution. In fact, most of the European authors of modern age have given a sketchy topographical description of this region only after their spot study but that too of later period. The graphic note of Ahom capital of the seventeenth century as written by the contemporary Mughal chronicler Shiabuddin Talish of *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* does neither tally in exact form with the topographical note of the European authors nor does this leave a vivid and accurate geo-political detail of this isolated region and as such this vacuum exists in sketching the topography of North-East India as a whole. In view of the above unavoidable flaws, it seems to be safer to have a scientific glance with analytical view of this as narrated by various European scholars like W. Robinson, J.P. Wade without any pre-conceived prejudice or dogmas and thereby not to be confused of to-day's nomenclature in respect of certain places and newly formed political units which have already been mentioned for assertion and identification in the present work.

The north-eastern region of to-day's India as defined in the constitution of India consists of five States and two Union Territories. The five States are Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya,

Nagaland and Tripura while the two Union Territories are Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. The whole region is situated between latitude 29° and 20° North and longitude about 90° and 97° East and covers an area of about 24,099 square kilometres with a projected population of about 24,099,000 in 1979, as per the figures of 1971, census report. This accounts for about 8 per cent of India's total geographical area and about 3.7 per cent of the country's total population.³ This region has a long international boundary with Bangladesh on the south-west, Burma in the east, China on the north and north-east and is connected with the mainland by the 'Silliguri neck' in West-Bengal.

The classification of land in the entire north-eastern region is variable because of its peculiar natural hindrances. However, according to one school of thought this region can be classified into five physiographic units like the Assam : The Himalayas, the Brahmaputra Valley, the Shillong plateau, the Barak Valley and the south-eastern Hill region.⁴ Again William Robinson divides the land of Assam into three categories, according to the level of the waters of the Brahmaputra. With abruptly varying altitude (Agartala 35 metres, Aizawl 1,115 metres, Imphal 78 metres, Pasighat 155 metres, Kohima 145 metres, Shillong 1,525 metres, Tura 400 metres) above mean sea level the region is gifted with the monsoon winds which blow in a north-easterly direction. Consequently the whole region lies exposed to this Cherrapunji (Moushinram) which has the prestige of receiving the rainfall of over 1,125 centimetres, highest in the world. As R. K. Mukherjee describes,⁵

This region like other parts of the country was thus easily and naturally grasped by the national thought as a geographical unit whose strength and fervour triumphed over the physical difficulties of pre-mechanical ages in the way of having an intimate knowledge of different parts which were welded into a whole; they have created those hydrographical conditions which have made India pre-eminently the land of agriculture and one of the best-watered regions of the world.

The region is however, not free from recurring natural calamities. Heavy rains, earthquakes, natural curses and varied topography, have made most of the rivers capricious and destructive during high floods, which at the same time leave behind rich fertile soil while receding. Though the country is in all seasons generally swampy and intersected with half-filled channels and stagnant lakes, yet in the dry season it is susceptible of cultivation, and amply repays all labour and experience bestowed upon it by producing abundant crops.⁶ The soil of the Brahmaputra valley is fertile, but its climate is damp and relaxing, so while the people enjoying great material prosperity, there is a "strong tendency towards physical and moral degradation".⁷

The means of communication between North-Eastern India and Bengal have been entirely maintained by water because the road communication was very backward prior to the rule of East India Company. There was a free communication between the Brahmaputra and the Ganges and boats with the largest burden could pass by different inosculation from one into the other throughout the year.⁸ Likewise, the Barak in Cachar Valley divided into Surma and Kushiara on the Sylhet (now Bangladesh) border confluenced with river Meghna, served a link line with the ports of the Ganges. The then Tripura Kingdom was connected by river routes, particularly by Gumati and other tributaries of Meghna, but during post-independence period, river Khowai is the main artery of modern Tripura State.

With regard to humidity, the region may be considered as enjoying the maximum. The rains are of long continuation which generally commence in March, and last about the middle of October. The average annual temperature is 67.2°F, the average of the four hottest months being 80°F, and that of winter to about 57°F.⁹ The ultimate effect of the climate on the general masses seems to be injurious even though the physical structure of the highlanders was comparatively stronger than the people living in the valleys. On the whole, the prevailing diseases are fever,

bowel complaints, cholera, smallpox, leprosy, etc. On the whole, the poorer classes seem to be the greatest sufferers from dysentery.¹⁰

People

The process of migration of the races from the mainland of India on the one side and from south-east Asia on the other, passing through the region left their substratum in both the hills and the plains, beginning from the earliest time. In fact, the culture of India is extremely complex in its roots and implications; it is perhaps more complex than any other.¹¹ While *Arya-Dravida* and *Nisada* were engaged in building up a complex culture under joint Aryan and Dravidian leadership, another racial element came on the scene—the *Kirata* or Mongoloid, with its various Sino-Tibetan dialects. Leaving aside the Chinese and Siamese, who are far away from India, and the Tibetans and Burmese who only touch its frontiers, there are the following Sino-Tibetan-speaking people in the country, grouped according to their dialects : (a) the sub-Himalayan peoples of the west, of whom the most important are the Newars; (b) the speakers of sub-Himalayan Sino-Tibetan dialects showing an Austric substratum, like the Kanawaris; (c) the tribes of northern Assam like the Abors and Mishmis; (d) the great Bodo people, who at a time occupied the greater part of north and east Bengal and the entire Brahmaputra Valley; (e) the Nagas, in the Haka Hills; (f) the Mikirs, a mixed Naga-Kuki groups; (g) the Kuki-Chin tribes, the most advanced of whom are the Meitheis of Manipuris; and finally, (h) the Ahoms, who came late in Assam.¹²

In this context, Dr. B.S. Guha, an eminent anthropologist writes,¹³

Those races who came from East-ward direction and thence occupied this country but very soon they had been compelled to migrate towards Eastern and Southern part only after clash and confrontation with varied races belonging to the

group of new migrants. Therefore, it is evident that there exist various aboriginal tribes of innumerable ethnic groups. Some of those tribes took shelter either in hills or in the lap of dense forests. One of the good results of this even distribution is that the sub-races groups could not remain in a position to keep up their traditional customs in pure form. For these reasons, there is no such oldest and multifarious race of distinctive ethnic group in other parts of the world except in Indian sub-continent. However, human races of India, can broadly and mainly be classified into six-divisions as well as nine sub-divisions.

In view of the above analysis, it is pertinent and reasonable to observe that although very recently the entire north-eastern region has been demarcated into seven units, but nonetheless the very age long geography, history, economy, tradition and cultural streams often transcend the political boundaries and bring the whole composite region, despite its certain unavoidable drawbacks, into a single conception with a common destiny to share with the mainstream of India, and this is the established legacy of the bygone ages.

Economic Background

The economic organisation of the region centres around its ecological factors. The hills and valleys, the rivers and streams, the marshy and swampy tracts, high rainfall, unwholesome climate, the technological backwardness in the hills, the extension of the artisan and agrarian methods of Eastern India to the valley regions, the availability of the raw materials and adaptability of the craftsmen influenced the occupational patterns. As in the rest of India, in this region too, the village had been the backbone of economic life of the people. The technological backwardness standing on the way of any large scale utilisation of the industrial material and mineral resources, agriculture was the mainstay of economy. Rice cultivation was the chief employment and since it required co-operation in ploughing, irrigation, harvesting and cattle grazing, it necessarily demanded con-

centration and grouping of dwellings and so led to the formation of villages. This compact form was also convenient for defence and social organisation.¹⁴

Among the hill tribes, however, *Jhum* or shifting cultivation was the prevalent practice. The people were also craftsmen at leisure. The extensive trade between the tribal groups and villages and between the hills and plains in the region as well as with Bengal and cross-country trade with Bhutan, Tibet, China and Burma enabled the people to exchange their surplus produce through the prevalent barter system to balance the deficit of articles of essential consumption.¹⁵ The trade also played a crucial role in the exchange of ideas and technology, contributing to the process of social formation since ancient times. The epigraphic records conclusively probe large landed holdings by non-agrarian Brahmins and the existence of artisan castes in a rudimentary feudal pattern of production in ancient Assam.¹⁶ The economic condition of the region was nevertheless believed to be on the whole satisfactory. The tradition which is current throughout Assam, in particular acclaims it as a land of abundance. As Sir Judunath Sarkar gives the economy of Assam during pre-Mir Jumla invasion,¹⁷

The chief crop of the country was rice, but the thin and long varieties of the grain were rare. Wheat, barley and lentils were not grown. The soil was fertile, whatever they sow or plant grows well.

Industry in terms of cottage also developed in the Ahom period. There are references to weavers, spinners, goldsmiths, potters and workers in ivory, bamboo, wood, hide and cane.

To quote E. Gait,¹⁸

According to Muhammadan historians the people were very skillful in weaving of embroidered clothes. Assam enjoyed a high reputation for production of silk of fine texture. Another industry of Assam was gold washing and manufacture of jewellery. According to the Buranjis, the

art of brick-making was continued with all perfection down to their time.

During the seventeenth century the rulers of Assam seem to have adopted a policy of isolation and forbade people to enter or leave their territories; and trade was carried on by people which proceeded to Assam *Chauki* with gold, musk, *agarwood*, salt-petre, pepper, sulphur and other articles.¹⁹ The urban centres were then very few. The towns were adorned with many temples; the temple was the centre of many attraction and amusement.²⁰ In the valley regions of north-eastern India, the cottage-industries were more or less in line with the rest of other parts of India, whereas the technology in terms of crafts and loom were comparatively underdeveloped, particularly in the hilly areas. Moreover, the inhabitants of the hill areas were devoid of many essential commodities, the surplus indigenous produces of the hill areas like cotton, zinger, potato, *tezpat*, hide, timber, cane, limestone and other minerals used to be bartered with the trading people of the plains for getting essential commodities like salt, oil, molasses, dried fish, rice, utensils, cloth etc. The various hill units in this region were inter-dependent and thus the extensive internal market system used to facilitate the trade and commerce which also regulated the economic structure. Most of the rulers of the period under review granted certain areas to the hill tribes bordering the foot-hills, known as *Khat* or *hat*, for exchange of goods under certain conditions.²¹

The glimpses of life and condition in these hills also suggests the economic inter-dependence. In the Jaintia Hills, the cattles were reared and driven down to the plains where they found a ready market in Sylhet.²² The spinning and weaving on a limited scale was also resorted to by the Khasi-Jaintia in commercial line. The Mughals had trade contact with Khasi Hills primarily for the supply of limestone quarries and all the limestone being procured from the northern hills across Surma river. The lime trade of Sylhet was the monopoly of Mughal Government.²³ The Garos seem to be allowed a free trade in the territories of the frontier *zamindars* who were

tributary to the Mughals in Bengal. They brought salt from northern markets of Sylhet and Mymensing and cotton from their own hills.²⁴ In Arunachal Pradesh, the north-east Frontier of Ahom Kingdom, most of the tribes depended on jhumming. The unit of social organisation was the patrilineal family, unlike the Khasis and Garos whose organisation was of a matrilineal society. In accordance with the variation in rainfall and gradient of terrain, agriculture in Arunachal Pradesh, land of Mikirs, Mismis, Daflas, etc., could be classified into three categories such as permanent or sedantry, shifting or *jhum*, and mixed type of agriculture, shifting in part and semi-permanent. Throughout Arunachal Pradesh, various tribal groups, clans, and sub-clans of villages exercised the right of cultivation over large tract of land in the valleys and mountain slopes as demarcated by natural features. Womenfolk of those tribes were expert in weaving and handicraft.²⁵

The Nagas and Bhutanese also carried on trade with Assam valley and Barak valley through North Kachari kingdom in a similar fashion.²⁶ The people in Cachar, especially those in the North Cachar hills, carried on trade through the famous medieval market Mulagul and through Jaintia with Bengal.²⁷ The entire volume of trade between Bengal and Manipur passed through Cachar Valley controlled by the Raja of the State.²⁸ The trade relation between the people of Cachar and the Mizo hills is indeed very old.²⁹ Similar trade relations prevailed between the peoples of the hills and plains and with Bengal and Burma in Tripura.³⁰

Historical Background

The Mughal relations with modern North-East India began in the sixteenth century, although during the Sultanate period many attempts were made since thirteenth century to expand the north-east frontier. Assam, or the valley of Brahmaputra, was then ruled over by the Ahoms, a branch of the Shan race.³¹ In the early decade of the thirteenth century, Sukapha, the founder of the Ahom Kingdom, crossed the

Patkais and carved out a principality of his own in the south-east corner of the present district of Sibsagar. In the next three centuries the conquerors reduced to submission the Morans, the Borahis and the Nagas and other inhabitants of the region and brought under effective control the greater part of the valley of Brahmaputra. However, the emergence of the Koches in the early sixteenth century called to a halt in respect of the forward policy of the Ahoms; but the most formidable enemy which challenged their authority in the west was the Mughals.³² The Age of the Ahoms in the far eastern India and the Age of the Mughals in India were memorable in many ways as the Tudors in England, Bourbons in France and Hapsburg in Spain and Austria. These parallels, striking as they are, may not be possessed too closely because the comparison or contrast was not between the individuals but primarily between the general circumstances and achievements of the respective dynasties and countries. Aurangzeb and Cromwell, despite their differences, had many a stern traits in common that evoked natural revulsion and reaction in each case.³³ The history of the Ahoms of the seventeenth century was mainly the history of the Ahom-Mughal conflicts which arose out of the ambition of the Mughals to extend territories further to the east because of intervention of the Ahoms in the affairs of the rival princes of Cooch-Bihar, and the violation by the Ahoms in respect of terms of the treaties entered by them with the Mughals.³⁴ The weak point of the Ahom kingdom was its diversity of population. Early in the seventeenth century, the Mughals, after annexing Koch-Hajo (c. A.D. 1612) had a long war with the Ahoms, who had harboured a prince of the deposed dynasty.³⁵ The leader of the *Vaishnava* renaissance in Assam was Sankardeva (1449-1568). The *Sattras* institutions had played a great role in the social life of the people, and as a social force, this institution was greatly strengthened by the acceptance of the *Vaisnava* faith by the Ahom monarchs and nobles.³⁶ According to an account of Auniati *Satra* of Assam, Jayadhvaj Singh (c. 1648-63) became the disciple of Niranjan Dev, the first *Satradhikar* of that *Satra*, in the Saka 1576 (A.D. 1664) that is, in the sixth regnal year of his reign but he came

undoubtedly under the Brahmanic influence at a much earlier date.³⁷ Another author writes that Rudra Singh (1696-1714) was the first Ahom ruler to announce publicly his intention to become the disciple of a Hindu priest. Therefore, the above controversial issue can be judiciously solved in the light of the then creative forces of the philosophy of Sankardeva as referred to. Above all, by the end of the sixteenth century the Ahoms became Hinduised, and fifty years later we find their rulers beginning to adopt Hindu name in addition.³⁸ But in the course of their stay in Assam, they began to be changed under the spell and influence of Indian civilization as well as the Hindu religious fervour. Ahom monarchs had married into the Kamata and Cooch Behar families, and Hindu priests and artisans had entered Ahom domain in the train of these queens.³⁹ The relations with the neighbouring Hindu kingdoms were far from friendly because of its aggressive policy of expansion based on natural frontiers being the order of day.

Further, "the Ahom king was nominally placed at the head of the constitution. Immediately under him in rank were three great council of States, called Gohains, whose duty was to give advice to the king. With them, the king was expected to consult on the affairs of the Government; even he was not permitted to issue any orders without their approval, or enter into any negotiations without consulting them."⁴⁰ This did not exactly coincide with the pretensions to the 'divine origin' of the royal family. The 'divine origin' of the royal family was most likely not thought of until the Rajas had become powerful, and had embraced Hinduism, when the Brahmins in gratitude to their devoted royal patrons invented a genealogy in accordance with their sacred books.⁴¹ The ritual practices of Ahom worship continued, down to the end of their rule in the Brahmaputra Valley with diminishing attraction after the acceptance of the creed concerning Hinduism by the Ahom monarchs in the middle of the seventeenth century.⁴² The organisation of the Ahom Government, both in centre and provincial level was quite elaborate in form, and this issue will be discussed in the relevant

chapters in comparison with the Mughal system of Government. An excellent description of Ahom kingdom was given by Muhammed Qazim who also accompanied the Muhammedan army in 1662, when they ventured to conquer this country.⁴³ The dwelling houses of both the rulers and the subjects were made of wood and bamboos; during the Ahom rule all people were not allowed to use variety of dress and ornaments.⁴⁴ An author rightly remarked in this context that Assam served as a transmitter of Aryan civilization to lands like Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and Burma and could be considered as the frontier outpost of Indian civilisation. And Sankardeva, the religious saint was truly the medium through whom the spiritual light of Medieval India as a whole shone upon the life of Assam.⁴⁵

Edward Gait refers to one very important Assamese source of information containing an account of the political geography of Brahmaputra valley in the seventeenth century which was unlocked by Hem Chandra Goswami. The source of information was in the possession of Babu Surendra Nath Barkakati of North Gauhati. According to him,⁴⁶

The *Puthi* (Assamese chronicle) opens with a description of the various Ahom forts, their size and garrison, and the number of guns and other weapons mounted in each. A short account was given of the war with Raja Ram Singha and the *Puthi* then describes the river system and gives a list of princes tributary to the Ahoms with the outposts held in their country as a protection against the Kachari and Khairam Rajas (modern Khasi hills of Meghalaya). It is stated that the chiefs of Khala, Neli, Gobha, and Nagoan (modern Nowgong), whose country was bounded on the north by the Kallang (river) and west by the Killing, were tributary to the Rajas of Jaintia (present Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya and Jaintia parganas of Bangla Desh). The Daphlas, Akas, and Bhutias are referred to, the tribute paid by them being noted and the passes by which they descended to the plains described. The eastern part of Gosain Kamalar Ali is said to be known as the Kabirar

Ali. The *Puthi* closes with the description of the Mikirs and Miri villages under Ahom rule.

The Ahoms thus ruled over an extensive territory and also exercised some control over bordering tribal chiefs and principalities, but their declining powers caused mainly due to internal strife and impact of Hinduism and incessant hostilities with the monarchs of Cooch Behar, Cachar and Jayantia was on the surface at a time when they were called upon by the circumstances to reckon with the challenge of the powerful Mughals who in turn had to consolidate their position in Bengal and posed to a carrier of further imperial expansionism in the north-east.

The territory, mutually exposed to the Ahoms which served as a buffer in later's relation with the Mughals was the Cooch Behar State which was organised by Viswa Singha into a powerful monarchy by subjugating the various chiefs and principalities in Lower Assam and North-Bengal in the sixteenth century on the ruins of the former kingdom of Kamata. The prowess of the monarchy was at its zenith during the reign of Naranarayan (1540-87) whose illustrious brother and valiant general Chila Rai reduced the Ahom monarch along with the Rajas of Dimarua, Khyrim, Jayantia, North-Cachar (Maibong), Manipur and Laur (Sylhet) to submission, wrested Cachar valley from Tripura and thereafter led ambitious campaigns against the Mughals in Bengal. The reverses faced by the Koches in Bengal, however, enabled the north-eastern States to reassert themselves, and the death of Chila Rai in Bengal obliged Naranarayan to surrender to the Mughal suzerainty in 1578.⁴⁷

After the death of Chila Rai, his son Raghu Dev laid his claim on the throne of Cooch Behar and rebelled against Naranarayan. Ultimately the part of the State, east of river Sankosh, had to be assigned to Raghu Dev. This part of Cooch Behar State came to be known as Koch-Hajo or Kamrup. The death of Naranarayan was followed by incessant conflicts between his son and successor, Lakshmi-

narayan and Raghu Dev. Thereafter, Lakshminarayan had to enter into an alliance with the Mughals to put a check on the aggression from the eastern Koch kingdom. The Mughals, on the other hand, on the strength of the alliance in A.D. 1578 treated Cooch Behar as a vassal state but pursued an aggressive policy towards Kamrup.⁴⁸ Raghu Dev formed an alliance with Isha Khan of Sonargaon and other Afgan chiefs to combat the hostile Koch-Mughal alliance. Raja Parikshit Narayan, son and successor of Raghu Dev, inherited from his father this unfriendly relations with Lakshminarayan and thus incurred the wrath and vengeance of the Mughals. He strengthened his fortification and raised a powerful army and launched an attack upon Cooch Behar. The attitude of the Raja resulted in Mughal expedition in A.D. 1612 and in that campaign or expedition Parikshit was defeated and taken as prisoner to the Mughal court and his territory annexed to Mughal dominion.⁴⁹ Bali Narayan, brother of Parikshit, was thereupon installed by the Ahoms as a vassal ruler in Darrang and that is to be used as a buffer against the Mughals and the western Koches.⁵⁰

Thus the political condition of the kingdom during the seventeenth century was in a fluid state full of chaos and confusion; because two imperial powers—Ahom on the east and Mughal in the west—vigorously followed the policy of expansionism and met with direct confrontation for the possession of Koch kingdom.⁵¹ The rivalry began with the second decade of the seventeenth century and continued till 1682. In fact, the partition of Koch territories not only diminished the material prosperity of the Koch State but also it gave rise to discord and ill-will between the two branches; the result became disastrous for both, leading to imperial intervention in Koch-politics.⁵² The Ahom relations with the Kacharis was no more better. The hostility between the two came into confrontation in the early part of the sixteenth century. Meanwhile the Ahom ruler sacked Dimapur and forced the latter to take shelter at new capital of Maibong in the North Cachar Hills.⁵³ Political despatches continued to be inter-changed with the Ahom courts, and the Kachari Raja was desirous of maintaining his hold on his country in

the Kopili-Jamuna and Doyung-Dhansiri Valleys on friendly terms of equal status with the Ahom monarch, but the Ahoms always persisted on the vassalage of Kachari Raja.⁵⁴ By 1562, the Koch expedition under Chila Rai forced almost all the kingdoms of North-East India to acknowledge the Koch suzerainty and agree to pay annual tributes, besides war indemnities and valuable presents.⁵⁵ The Koch authorities made an administrative centre at Brahmapur (Khaspur) in Cachar valley in order to maintain diplomatic relations with the adjoining subsidiary States and the collection of tributes. Accordingly, Kamalnayan, popularly known as Gosai Kamal, another brother of Naranayan, was appointed as the Governor of Cachar who was also called the first Dewan Raja.⁵⁶ After the decline of Koch prowess when the North-eastern states reasserted their independence, Khaspur came to be considered as a separate Koch kingdom. The Kacharis from Maibong succeeded in extending their limit to Cachar valley bordering Sylhet but the Jayantias were still dominating the political scene. During the seventeenth century, the Ahoms and Kacharis were in conflict with some intervals, while the paramount supremacy of the Ahom monarchs was being denied by the Kachari rulers.⁵⁷

The Kingdom of Jayantia, which then included the modern Jaintia Hills, Jayantia Parganas of Sylhet and parts of Nowgong district in Assam Valley, enjoyed a conspicuous geographical position because of having bounded by the Ahom and Kachari territories and Bengal respectively. The Rajas of Jayantia clashed with the rulers of Maibong over the jurisdiction in Kapilli Valley and had to reckon with the Ahom challenge. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Jayantia Raja, Dhan Manik, seized Probhakar, the chief of Dimarua*, whose family had formerly been the vassals of the Kacharis.⁵⁸ After the hostilities between Jayantia and Cachar, Mulagul the seat of frontier trade was fixed as the boundary between Jayantia and Cachar.⁵⁹ E. Gait confirms that by saying "after the war, the boundary was fixed at Mulagul in the Jayantia parganas and there was peace for sometime, although occasional disputes seem to have occurred."⁶⁰ The establishment of commercial inter-

course between the Ahoms and the Jaintia during the reign of Ahom monarch Pratap Singha (1603-14) was followed by the appointment of frontier officers.⁶¹

In the west of the Jaintias, the Khasi Hills enjoyed comparative political isolation. The Khasi State of Khyrim, however, maintained political relations with the Ahoms⁶² and was also one of the States subdued by Koches under Chila Rai.⁶³ The Khasis, however, maintained trade relations with Bengal and some of the Khasi States extended up to the southern plains.⁶⁴ Then the Garos in the western extremity of the hill-range maintained their own affairs but they were under the nominal control of the feudal *zamindars* in the plains whose estates encircled the Garo Hills from three sides and paid nominal tribute to the Mughal Government.⁶⁵ The hill tribes of the then Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, enjoyed splendid political isolation but maintained extensive commercial contact with the plains and limited political relations with the rulers in the bordering areas⁶⁶

Manipur was an ancient monarchy but did not have so much political relations with the neighbouring States or with Bengal because of its peculiar geographical situation, before or even during the period under review.⁶⁷ Tripura at the extreme end of the region was also an ancient monarchy, but because of its peculiar geographical location on the border of Bengal when the kingdom included a vast area of present Bangladesh, the rulers of Tripura used to maintain political relations and in certain occasion had hostilities with the political authorities in Bengal.⁶⁸

Early Mughal Relations

The history of the Mughal relations with north-east India began practically with the reign of Emperor Akbar when Bengal was almost annexed to the Mughal Empire. The predecessors of the Mughals in Bengal, the Turko-Afgans had made unsuccessful attempts to extend their hegemony in the region.⁶⁹ Muhammad Bin Bukhtiyar, a Turk of the Khilji

tribe, invaded Kamrupa about A.D. 1205-06,⁷⁰ and this was followed by several raids up to the middle of the sixteenth century.⁷¹ These however, failed to achieve any permanent result. In Sylhet, that was the eastern *Sarkar* of Bengal, however, the Afgan rule was fairly established along with the rest of the province and the Mughals had to reckon with considerable difficulties in dispossessing the Afgan chiefs.⁷² The position in Sylhet, on the other hand, exposed Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura in the eastern division of North-East India, on its immediate vicinity to the Afgans in Bengal. While the nature of relationship with Jayantia and Cachar is not definitely known, the contacts with Tripura are corroborated by several sources. As a matter of fact, Cachar was not a distinct territory at that time being part of Tripura. The fact that the river Surma constituted the boundary between Jayantia and Bengal, and that Jayantia on the other side of the river was one of the *Mahals* in the Sylhet *Sarkar*⁷³ at the time of Tudormalla's revenue settlement in Bengal is perhaps suggestive of the fact that this *Mahal* earlier formed part of Jayantia but was taken over either in the Afgan or in the early Mughal period. The historical records in Tripura suggest that Ratna Manikya could be installed as the Raja of Tripura at the military support extended by the Sultan of Bengal.⁷⁴ The army of Gaur helped him in recovering the fort of Jamir Khan and conquering Rangamati.⁷⁵ The relation with the Sultans of Bengal during the reign of the subsequent rulers was, however, not free from hostilities. A portion of Tripura was probably conquered by Sultan Jalaluddin of Bengal towards the close of the fifteenth century during the reign of Maha Manikya.⁷⁶ However, Dhanya Manikya conquered some parts of Bengal such as Patikera, Gangamandal, Meherkul, Khandal and other places when Hussain Shah was the Sultan of Bengal as known from his coin dated A.D. 1505.⁷⁷ The Sonargaon inscription of A.D. 1513 indicates that a portion of Tripura was conquered by Hussain Shah⁷⁸. Another coin of Dhanya Manikya, dated A.D. 1513, describes him as the conqueror of Chittagong. On the authority of *Rajmala*, the Tripura chronicle, it is known that Hussain Shah sent an expedition to Tripura in A.D. 1514 and a fierce battle continued till 1518 in which

some parts of Tripura were annexed to Bengal.⁷⁹ The coins, inscriptions, historical records and relevant chronicles also suggest that the hostility between Tripura and the Sultans of Bengal resulting in frequent border clashes and war continued till the Afgans were succeeded by the Mughals in Bengal.⁸⁰

The determination of the Afgan Chiefs in the frontier areas of Bengal to resist the Mughals and the conflicts of interest between the monarchies in the North-East India had added to the almost definite possibility of expansionist and imperial Mughal intervention in the affairs of the region. The alliance between Raghu Dev of Kamrup and Isha Khan, the famous Pathan chief of Sonargaon in eastern Bengal, compelled Lakshminarayan of Cooch-Bihar to accept the formal supremacy of the Mughals.⁸¹ The latter thus got a stepping stone in its new vassal state on the north-east frontier of Bengal that geographically provided the door way to Assam or the western division of north-east India. Raghu Dev was defeated, and Isha Khan abruptly made peace with Lakshminarayan and offered submission to the Mughal Emperor.⁸² Raghu Dev was now obliged to make a new alliance with the Ahom monarch⁸³, who looked upon the growing intervention of the Mughals in Koch-politics with suspicion and alarm and realised the necessity of strengthening Kamrup as a buffer state.⁸⁴ Due to the death of Raghu Dev in A.D. 1603, however, he could not see the Eastern Koch-Ahom alliance through its maturity.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the son and successor of Raghu Dev, Parikshitnarayan was a more determined antagonist of the western Koch and the Mughals. As a result, the reign of Jahangir as the Mughal Emperor witnessed greater participation and extension of the Mughal political influence and authority towards the North-East frontier of the Empire; Islam Khan, the viceroy of Bengal, in June, A.D. 1609 sent an ultimatum to Lakshminarayan, Raja of Cooch Bihar, demanding his total submission. Lakshminarayan, accordingly acknowledged the formal Mughal suzerainty and agreed to render all assistance in his power to the Mughal viceroy in latter's campaign against the Kingdom of Parikshitnarayan on the understand-

ing that Parikshit's territory would be handed over to Lakshminarayan.⁸⁶ Having thus prepared the ground for an aggressive imperialism against the western division, the Mughal viceroy turned his attention towards the Eastern division of North-East India through its Sylhet gateway.

Islam Khan knew that Sylhet was the stronghold of the Afgans and that Bayizid Karrani, the Afgan Chief of north and central part of district, was their acknowledged leader. He had also extended asylum to Usman Afgan, the rebel *zamindar* of Bukainagar in Mymensing district, and if Usman was to be finally crushed, Bayizid must be subdued simultaneously. Accordingly, two-fold expeditions were sent on an imperial scale, one against Bayizid under Shaik Kamal and another against Khwaja Usman under Mirza Nathan. By April 1612, Islam Khan succeeded in annexing the domain of Usman.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, Shaik Kamal and Raja Satrajit* crossed the river Surma in their campaign against Bayizid. The position of the Afgans in Sylhet was strengthened by the arrival of a large number of force from the Raja of Cachar, but the news of the fall of Usman came as a fatal blow to Bayizid and his allies. The resistance was collapsed and they begged for peace. Sylhet was formally annexed to Bengal *Subah* as a unit of *Sarkars* and the administrative arrangements made tentatively by Shaik Kamal were approved.⁸⁸ Bayizid, his brother, and the leading Afgan chiefs were deprived of their personal liberty and kept in close confinement. Mubariz Khan, the Mughal general, remained at Sylhet in charge of the imperial forces.⁸⁹

The establishment of Mughal supremacy in Sylhet brought the two neighbouring kingdoms of Cachar and Jayantia on a common boundary with the Mughals. Islam Khan next turned his attention towards Cachar and sent Shaik Kamal for the conquest of that country. The latter at the outset came down to Sylhet, made it the base of his operations, and with additional officers and men, including Mubariz Khan and twenty-two *amirs* from Bihar, proceeded against the Raja of Cachar⁹⁰ named Satrudaman, alias Pratapnarayan (c. 1605-28) who was then the Dimasa Raja of Maibong in North

Cachar Hills, and whose territory then extended to Cachar Valley that intervened between Sylhet and the Koch State of Khaspur, who also determined to offer a strong resistance. His capital, Maibong or Kirtipur situated in the midst of the North Cachar hills, about 50 miles (90 K.M.) north of Silchar town, was inaccessible to the invaders. But unfortunately, the Imperial forces captured the defensive forts of Pratapgarh and Asuratekar in the Cachar Valley. The loss of the two frontier forts cooled down the military ardour of the Cachari Raja, and he offered to come to terms with the Mughals. An agreement was made between Shaik Kamal and the Cachari Raja. The Emperor Jahangir, however, disapproved Islam Khan's hasty peace with the Cachar and asking him to renew the campaign by revoking the contract under the command of Mubariz Khan, an imperial officer, in the place of Shaik Kamal.⁹¹

The Mughal general now occupied the Cachari territory, adjoining the fort of Pratapgarh (c. Nov. 1614). Mubariz Khan also subdued a group of people occupying an area intersecting Cachar and Jayantia who claimed themselves as the descendants of the soldiers left in charge of his conquest by Timur, a Mughal adventurer.⁹²

Qusim Khan, the new Mughal viceroy, was gratified at the success of Mubariz Khan and exhorted him to continue his expedition against Cachar, where the Raja had evidently shaken off his allegiance during the period of interregnum. Satrudaman offered a strong resistance as he had done before, causing heavy casualty in the imperial camp by his repeated night attacks. But Mubariz Khan's persistence at last yielded fruits, and the fort of Pratapgarh was stormed and Asuratekar was attacked. Unable to bear the privations of the seize, the Raja again sued for peace. He gave up the fort of Asuratekar, reaffirmed his allegiance to the Emperor, offering him 40 elephants and a tribute of 1,00,000 rupees in cash, and prayed for exemption from personal attendance at the court. He also sent presents for the *Subahdar* and the Mughal commander. Meanwhile these terms were accepted by Quasim Khan. The sudden end of Mubariz Khan at

this critical juncture, however, compelled the Mughals to withdraw to Sylhet, and the Cachar campaign failed to produce any conquest with concrete dividend.⁹³

The broken morale of Mughal soldiers in Sylhet was, however, greatly roused when Mukram Khan, the Mughal commander who had already proved his worth in Kamrup campaigns, and he thenceforth was sent to Sylhet sector to proceed against Tripura where an earlier raid upon the fort of Kaliagarh had failed.⁹⁴ The expedition in A.D. 1618 was particularly ordered by Emperor Jahangir in order to secure a suitable base for military operations against Arakan. Two divisions of the Mughal army under Nurulla Khan and Ispinder Khan entered Tripura from the north-west and western borders. Added to this, a naval force was also put into operation. After a fierce land and naval confrontation, Josadhar Manikya, the Raja of Tripura, was captured and sent to Dehli where he died.⁹⁵ The Mughal army held the country under military occupation but after about three years, they were forced to retreat due to the outbreak of epidemic, when Kalyan Manikya ascended the throne of Tripura. As known from the royal chronicle of Tripura and the accounts of an European visitor, Peter He Leys (1652), the Tripura-Mughal conflicts prolonged for many years.⁹⁶

Meanwhile, the Mughal authorities had taken counter measures against Parikshitnarayan of Kamrup according to the agreement made with Lakshminarayan. The Rajas of Sushang and Sherpur in Garo-Mymensing border had also in the meantime adopted the vassalage of the Mughals and agreed to extend help in the ensuing campaign against Parikshit.⁹⁷ The domain of Parikshit was then extended from the river Sankosh and Brahmaputra in the west to the Bhorali river (Darrang district, on the north bank) and western borders of Nowgong in the east (on the south bank), Bhutan in the north to the western limit of the present Mymensing district in the south.⁹⁸ Islam Khan despatched a sizeable number of forces against Kamrup under the com-

mand of Abdul-i-wahid. This was easily defeated by Parikshitnarayan (c. A.D. 1612) and the family of Raja Raghunath (Susang) was made captive.⁹⁹ In November, A.D. 1612 Islam Khan sent another expedition against Kamrup under Mukarram Khan, with Shaik Kamal as second in command, and Raja Raghunath as the guide. A huge number of imperial officers, including 22 officers of Bihar, and vassal *zamindars*, and Afgan *mansabdars* of Bayizid and Usman, joined the expedition.¹⁰⁰ Mirza Nathan captured Bahirbond and Bhitarband*. The fort of Dhubri was reputed to be the strongest in the entire Koch region, and its seize dragged on for three and a half months. Fateh Khan Salka, the commandant of Dhubri fort, however, out of affection for his son was taken captive, and then surrendered to the Mughals (c. middle of April, A.D. 1613).¹⁰¹ Raja Parikshit after having lost confidence in himself, gave up further resistance, and became eager for peace. He agreed to acknowledge the imperial overlordship and sought peace with honour towards victors offering them rich presents. He also promised to release Raghunath's family, but the viceroy of Dacca revoked the peace offer, and demanded the surrender of Parikshit's persons as well as of his kingdom. Consequently, the hostilities were resumed.¹⁰² Parikshit also directed his son-in-law, the Dimarua Raja, with his entire fleet of 700 boats, and 50 elephants to seize the imperial post on the Godadhar river; and then to join him in the assault on Dhubri campaign along with his entire land force.¹⁰³ The combined assault was partially successful but the sudden demise of Dimarua Raja in the next encounter totally paralysed the Kamrup navy, and had to withdraw abruptly.¹⁰⁴ Raja Parikshit tried to escape and to take shelter under the Ahom monarch but failed to do so and subsequently decided on an almost unconditional surrender. He appealed to the imperial commanders, Mukarram Khan and Shaik Kamal, to spare his life and personal liberty, surrendered all his belongings, his war-elephants, and even his kingdom (c. July, 1613). Kamrup thus lost its short existence as a separate state and was afterwards annexed to the Mughal Empire. Parikshit was taken to Dacca as a war prisoner and

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the family of Raja Raghunath was released. The administrative charge of Eastern Kamrup was given temporarily to Lakshminarayan, and Mirza Qasim was directed to occupy the *Thana* of Pandu and then to proceed alone to Jahangir-nagar leaving the entire fleet at Pandu under the command of Raja Satrajit.¹⁰⁵

The occupation of the eastern Koch territory of Kamrup or Koch-Hajo brought the Mughals on the threshold of the Ahoms and the stationing of the powerful fleet at Pandu and Raja Satrajit caused genuine anxiety to the Ahoms about the security of their State from imperial expansionism. The earlier Mughal intervention in Koch politics was also seriously viewed by the Ahom monarchs and could provide the backdrops of Koch-Ahom alliances during the reigns of Raghudev and Parikshit. It is, however, not known from the records whether Parikshit received any material assistance from the Ahoms. Nevertheless, the Mughal occupation of Kamrup left no alternative for the Ahoms but to search for its own security. An opportunity for instituting a buffer state against the Mughals also came through Balinarayan (1615-37) alias Dharmanarayan, the brother of Parikshitnarayan, who fled to Ahom court and sought the protection. Pratap Singha (1603-41), the Ahom monarch, installed Balinarayan (1615-37), as the vassal ruler of Darrang with the territory extending from Bhorali river in the east to Barnadi on the west.¹⁰⁶ Pratap Singha also set himself to strengthening his position by raising a chain of forts at strategic points, building embanked roads (*ali*), and drawing all the neighbouring rulers to his side by war, marriage, friendly alliance, and extension of his protective vassalage over them. His growing power induced most petty chiefs of the area in order to save their estates by voluntarily accepting his overlordship. The expansive force of the Ahoms as it spread west-wards inevitably came into collision with Mughal power in Kamrup.

The matter came to a head when a Muslim trader was murdered near Kaliabar, on suspicion of being a spy and his merchandise looted. Shaik Qasim, the Governor of Bengal, sent an expedition in 1615-16 under Sayed Kakim

and Aba Bakr. This was defeated by the Ahoms at the mouth of river Bhorali and their commanders killed. After this Ahom victory, the Mughals had to fight constantly in order to maintain their hold on the country west of Bar Nadi and with great difficulty they could occupy Hajo town and a few other frontier forts. When Islam Khan Mashhadi arrived as the *Subahdar* of Bengal, Ahom vassal Balinarayan was instigated by Satrajit, the disloyal Mughal *Thanadar* of Pandu, to profit by the administrative disorder caused by the frequent change of Governors, and the latter dislodged the Mughals from the post at Pandu. Fresh reinforcements also failed due to lack of concerted efforts among the imperial commanders.¹⁰⁸

Satrajit was, however, captured by the Mughals and sent to Dacca, where he was imprisoned and later executed.¹⁰⁹ Abdus Salam, the Mughal *Faujdar*, and a few other imperial officers were then sent as captives to the royal court in 1637. Mir Zain Uddin, a Mughal commander occupied Karaibari on the north bank of Brahmaputra, by driving out its ruler Chandranarayan who had also rebelled against the Mughals.¹¹⁰ The growing Ahom challenge, particularly at the support of their vassals in Balinarayan of Darrang, and the series of rebellions at the instigation of both in the Khuntaghat region of former Kamrup in modern Goalpara prevailed upon the Mughals to search for a loyal Chief to restore peace in the newly annexed region. The choice fell upon Parikshitnarayan who was then in the Mughal court. He was asked to take the possession of his former state as a vassal under the Mughals, so that his territory could serve as buffer between the Mughals and the Ahoms. While Parikshit was on his way to Kamrup, some high dignitaries of Kamrup, resented at Dacca court against his return. The Raja was accordingly recalled but he committed suicide on his way back to Delhi at Tribeni.¹¹¹ Thereupon, Bijitnarayan, a son of Parikshit, was instituted by the Mughals as the Raja of Bijni estate comprising of the Khuntaghat region.¹¹²

In the meantime, the Ahoms had pushed on to Jogighopa (near Goalpara opposite to Panchratna) and began raising

stockades there, but the Mughal army forced them to retreat to the bank of the river Manas. By October 1637, the Mughals defeated the Ahom forces led by Balinarayan on the Kalapani river near Bishnupur resulting in the death of a huge number of Ahom soldiers and officers. The Mughals also took into possession substantial amount of arms and equipments. This was followed by the conquest of Pandu and Srighat (December 1637). The whole of Koch-Hajo or Kamrup was thus cleared of the Ahoms and the campaign was closed down for a while just after the occupation of the Kajali fort, which lies at the junction of the Kalang river with the Brahmaputra.¹¹³

To meet this adverse situation, the Ahoms created the post of *Barphukan* with headquarters at Kaliabar (now in Nowgong district) to be in administrative charge of Lower Assam and to conduct diplomatic negotiations with the agents of Mughals.¹¹⁴ During the next three months the whole district was pacified, and a revenue settlement was made with the landlords, with Gauhati as the headquarters of the governor. Finding all their resources exhausted during twelve years' successful war, the Ahom frontier officers induced their monarch to make peace with the Mughals through Alayar Beg, the successor of Zain-uddin Ali as *Faujdar* in Lower Assam (c. September 1638), whereupon Barnadi in the north and the Ashurar-ali in the south of Brahmaputra were to be fixed as Ahom-Mughal boundary. As a result, considerable good relations were generated between the two parties for quite sometime and hence the period from 1638 to 1658 was virtually free from any major confrontation.¹¹⁵ As Sir Jadunath Sarkar writes "with the coming of Prince Shuja to Bengal as Viceroy began a long period of peace for this province."¹¹⁶ As a matter of fact, the Mughals were deeply engaged during this specific period in campaigns towards the north-west frontier, and this was followed by the war of succession among the sons of Shah Jahan and Shuja was himself one of the contenders. The imperial authorities could not persue a policy of expansionism beyond the north-east frontier and their provincial administration in Bengal had broken down with resultant anarchy. Nevertheless, the

Mughals could retain their hold over the conquered territory in Lower Assam and maintained political relations with the frontier states. Prince Shuja, in a letter to Shah Jahan in March 1655, could boast of his administrative success¹¹⁷ :

The Zamindars of Morang, Kachar and other places, who had never paid tributes to any of my predecessors, have sent me ambassadors with letters professing loyalty and obedience and some elephants by way of presents. I have promoted cultivation in both the Subahs (i.e. Bengal and Bihar).

In the context of the above letter, it can reasonably be supposed that trail of Mughal expedition towards the north-east frontier during the period of Shuja's *Subahdarship* took place, without which Cachar and other *zamindaris* would not be tributary-cum-vassal states. As known from a Persian chronicle it appears that Prince Shuja had also tried to subdue Tripura. He appointed his son Zainuddin Muhammad as his Deputy in Rajmahal and personally proceeded to Dacca and despatched an expedition against Tripura under his chief minister Jan Bag Khan. The expedition failed to occupy any of the forts of Tripura even after labouring for one year and ultimately had to be withdrawn only when many of the soldiers died due to unfavourable climate.¹¹⁸ *Rajmala* also claims that Kalyan Manikya (c. 1623-1660) defeated the Mughals.¹¹⁹ However, from the fact that in the revenue records of Bengal Subah prepared at the time of Sultan Shuja in 1580 *Saka* (A.D. 1658) '*Sarkar Udaipur*' was recorded as a revenue paying area. It is possible that a portion of Tripura was conquered by the Mughals. It is further supposed from the fact that a mosque was constructed at Comilla in the name of Prince Shuja and a village named Suryanagar was gifted to the mosque as its *wakt* property.¹²⁰

Notwithstanding the political turmoils brewed on the illness of Emperor Shah Jahan in 1657, and the absence of Prince Shuja from Bengal was bound to shake the imperial hold over the north-east. During this confusion, Prannarayan,* Raja of Cooch-Bihar, saw an opportunity for throwing off the Mughal yoke as well as for regaining the

territories of his ancestors, east of the Sankosh river which were already lost to the Mughals. He made a series of plundering raids into the Ghoraghat region, carrying off a number of Imperial subjects as captives and declared himself as an independent ruler by stopping paying tribute to the Mughal Emperor¹²¹. Mir Lutfulla Shiraji, the Mughal *Faujdar* of Kamrup (Koch-Hajo) was compelled to retreat to Gauhati (c.1657) where being hemmed in by the Koches on the one side and the Ahoms on the other, left Gauhati. The Ahoms thereupon took instant possession of Gauhati, Pandu and Saraighat (c.1658-1659) and many war equipments including twenty canons were acquired.¹²² Prannarayan (1633-66) also proposed to Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-63), the Ahom monarch for an offensive and defensive alliance against the Mughals and to divide Kamrup mutually. The latter, however, turned down the ensuing proposal possibly because of his own intention to occupy the whole of Kamrup or because of the fact that western Koch family had always been an ally of the enemy of the Ahoms from the west. Prannarayan then advanced to Dhubri and took its possession by defeating the Mughal *Faujdar* of Kamrup¹²³. On further advance, he was, however, defeated by the Ahoms and Jayadhvaj Singh followed up his victory by extension of his sway west-ward and established a military station at Hatsila, and then annexed part of the Pargana Karaibari¹²⁴. In fact, the mutual jealousy and antagonism between Jayadhvaj Singh and Prannarayan facilitated the revival of Mughal expansionism under Emperor Aurangzeb¹²⁵.

North-East India had thus attracted the notice of the Mughals soon after the consolidation of their position in Bengal *Subah*. The legacy of the raids towards this frontier during the Sultanate period, the situation as prevalent gave incentive to the Mughals. Thus lack of unity among the local monarchs, chieftains and *zamindars* encouraged them further. The division of Koch Kingdom and Afgan confederacy are illustrations in point. The Mughal viceroys of Bengal took every chance to cash the situation for the territorial expansion and military annexation. The annexations of Koch-Hajo and Sylhet, since forming parts of Bengal *Subah*,

placed the two gateway of North-East India under the Mughals where they turned from irresponsible conquerors to serious administrators and introduced several reformist measures with a view to firmly consolidate their position. Besides, establishment of their influence, no matter nominal, over Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura and the hostile relations with the Ahoms served as the prelude to the more serious attempts just to pacify the region during the reign of Aurangzeb¹²⁶.

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Aurangzeb and the North-East Frontier

THE ASCENDANCY OF AURANGZEB as the Mughal Emperor introduced significant changes in the policy of the Government towards states and territories in the country. An imperialist in his attitude, the Emperor was vindictive towards the rulers who had so long resisted the suzerainty of the Mughals. The internal challenges immediately after the assumption of power, were also no mean. Everywhere, lawlessness caused tumults, the *ryots* refused to pay the revenue, the *zamindars* disobeyed the local governors or tried to rob and conquer their rivals. The local rulers, thus, especially in the north-east, violated the frontiers and made inroads into the imperial territory¹.

During the viceroyship for two terms in Deccan, Aurangzeb virtually trained himself in the art of practical politics as well as in diplomatic skill from the association with Mir Jumla, who followed a policy wholly divorced from ethical considerations and was mainly guided by exigencies of the given time and circumstances. As such, Aurangzeb's aggressive Deccan policy was rooted in the counsel and co-operation of Mir Jumla, the *wazir* of Golkonda and then Prime Minister of the imperial Mughals. Thus both the officials began to act as a centre of gravity in the imperial politics of Mughals formulated their grand strategy in collaboration with each. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar rightly says :

Aurangzeb had perforce to rely on Mir Jumla for inducing the Emperor to approve of an aggressive policy against the Deccan by counteracting the machinations of Dara, always friendly to the Sultans, and opposed to the viceroy

and the *Wazir* and who yielded a great influence over the Emperor.³

Aurangzeb in Making

Aurangzeb was promoted to the viceroyship of Deccan in July 1636 and completed the first term in May 1644, with his seat at Aurangabad. "During these eight years he paid four visits to his father in Northern India, leaving some great noble, usually his maternal uncle Shaista Khan, to act for him."³ Most probably Aurangzeb was intriguing to get a higher position in the imperial seat. But the Emperor Shah Jahan in collaboration with Dara transferred Aurangzeb to Gujrat as Governor. The main intention was to embarrass him in controlling that turbulent province.* There he acquired considerable experience of tackling the robber tribes and rebels. The Emperor did not like the long-stay of Aurangzeb at Gujrat, because the popularity of Aurangzeb could cause menace to the future rise of Dara. Aurangzeb was accordingly transferred to Balk and Badakhsan⁴. In this north-west front, Aurangzeb had to face acute hardships in subduing the Uzbek tribes. No substantial gains were made; rather it incurred heavy losses. Aurangzeb was discredited and naturally the Imperial authority took an opportunity to condemn Aurangzeb in further assignments.

By March 1648 Aurangzeb was posted as Governor of Multan and Sindh and maintained that post up to July, 1652. For the first time, Aurangzeb came in contact with the hostile Afgan and Beluch clans. Aurangzeb was not the man to break disorder and disobedience. Whatever damages done in the preceding assignment were repaired by the present campaign of Multan and Sindh. "Everywhere lawless men and frontier clans felt that they had got a new master (Aurangzeb), who could not be safely defined."⁵ As viceroy he not only displayed administrative capacity but also proved himself as successful general. Even in economic matters, he envisaged some plans for the enrichment of Imperial exchequer. But his Kandahar operations in 1649 and 1652 met with failure. This was not because of his negligence.

Rather, the Imperial authority did not grant him any power to act in discretion. The last viceroyship of Aurangzeb was completed in the Deccan where he took real training. The second viceroyalty of Deccan (1653-1658) therefore was a crucial period in his political career. The experiences that he acquired were put into operation for mastering the art of political chess-board of the imperial government. Indeed, Mir Jumla came forward to drill Aurangzeb with a view to acquire the most coveted imperial throne.⁶ Contrary to the intentions of Shah Jahan, Aurangzeb emerged successful in the war of succession for the Mughal throne among four brothers. When Agra fort was surrendered, Aurangzeb became truly the sovereign, and the whole administrative staff submitted to him. A grand *darbar* was now held (10th June 1658) in his camp, and captive Shah Jahan presented him a sword named '*Alamgir*'. The high grandees and other imperial officers came in troops to the court of Aurangzeb in the hope of getting patronage and each received favour suited to his rank.⁷ As Murad Baksh, the younger brother of Aurangzeb, was violently preparing a rebellion and was waiting for an opportunity to carry his futile plans, Aurangzeb made him a prisoner at Mathura and thus freed the people from mischief and tumult. The captive Murad was sent to the fort of Delhi under Shaikh Mir.⁸

Dara Shukoh, the eldest son of Shah Jahan and the favourite to be the successor of Emperor, took asylum in Punjab on certain considerations.⁹ Firstly, Punjab was the land of militant soldiers. Moreover, from the north-west frontier province the services of the hardest mercenaries could be properly utilised. Secondly, he had past experiences as the viceroy of Punjab. Besides, Lahore fort contained immense wealth and war materials. But Aurangzeb was vigilant in keeping his eagle eyes upon Dara. He took personal initiative in chasing Dara who was camping in different places such as Multan, Sewan, Sindh and then to Gujrat. Meanwhile, Aurangzeb halted at Multan and turned back towards Delhi because an alarming situation had developed in the east by Shuja's invasion which required his presence there, entrusting the campaign to divisional commanders.¹⁰ Dara

made an attempt to capture Agra fort from the west while Aurangzeb was camping in the Punjab. The battle of Deorai (Ajmir, March 1659) shattered his hopes and he fled to Gujrat where he was ultimately made a prisoner by Malik Jiwan, an Afgan agent of Aurangzeb and brought to Delhi in August, 1659. The doomed prince's agent unsuccessfully tried to save his life by running to different mediators.¹¹ Dara was put to death in the same year and in 1661, his son, Sulaiman Shukoh fell into the clutches of Aurangzeb who ordered him to be removed to the fortress of Gwalior, "where he was killed by poisoning to death."¹²

The next rival of Aurangzeb for the Imperial throne was prince Shuja, the revered son of Shah Jahan who served in the capacity of viceroy in Bengal *Subah* for two terms. In A.D. 1649 prince Shuja was re-appointed for the second term to the *Nizamat* of Bengal by Shah Jahan.¹³ As the Governor of Bengal he was involved in the administration of north-east frontier of the Mughals and his contention for the throne of Delhi immediately attracted the attention of Aurangzeb to the north-east. When the news of Shah Jahan's illness reached him, Shuja did not fail to register his claim to the Mughal throne. However, he could be satisfied with the pact with Sulaiman Shukoh, son of Dara, effected in May 1658 that made him the supreme authority over Bengal, Bihar, Orissa up to the east of Mungir.¹⁴ The news of the reverses faced by Dara and the defacto assumption of power by Aurangzeb prevailed upon him to march towards Delhi. But the struggle between Aurangzeb and Dara had terminated before Shuja's arrival and Aurangzeb already mounted the imperial throne could use the entire army of Hindustan against Shuja.¹⁵ In the battle of Khajwa (January, 1659) Prince Shuja was defeated by Aurangzeb by winning over the generals and commanders of Shuja by bribe and temptations. Meanwhile, Aurangzeb's position was strengthened by the arrival of Mir Jumla from Deccan. "Being in constant attendance on the Emperor during the battle, as his right-hand man, he offered him timely advice regarding the tactical moves and instilled hope and courage into his mind during critical moments."¹⁶ Shuja was now forced to take

to flight and fortifying the passes of Teliagadi, and Sakrigali, he entrenched himself at Rajmahal (Akbaragar).¹⁷ Aurangzeb, however, returned to Delhi apprehending danger from Jaswant Singh who was reported to have taken his position in favour of captive Shah Jahan. On the eve of his departure, Mir Jumla was provided with a large force to pursue Prince Shuja.¹⁸ Aurangzeb also bestowed special powers and privileges to Mir Jumla probably with two-fold objectives. Firstly, Mir Jumla would explore and utilise all the potential sources that are available in order to end the physical existence of the fugitive Prince Shuja and his legacy. Secondly, Mir Jumla would chalk out a new strategy in order to execute the aggressive policy in the north-east frontiers of Bengal. Mir Jumla was also asked to guide Sultan Muhammad, first-born son of Aurangzeb in the campaign, and was given the supreme command to execute the operation.¹⁹ "Reinforcements were soon despatched under Mir Jumla, as joint Commander-in-Chief, raising the pursuing force to 30,000 men²⁰." Prince Shuja displayed remarkable feat in respect of courage and war strategy. But due to irony of fate, he had to retreat from place to place. Finally, he bade farewell even to his eastern capital Dacca in May 1660 along with his family and a few faithful officials and took shelter in Aracan²¹. This fate of Prince Shuja was occasioned by several factors. The character and strength of the new Emperor and the efficiency of his deputy, Nawab Mir Jumla, were known to the Chieftains and zamindars in Bengal, most of whom shifted their allegiance to the new administration²². The Mughal officers in the province like the *Faujdar*s and *Thanadar*s also deserted Shuja and confirmed their loyalty to the Nawab. Prince Shuja pushed his way to Arakan through south-eastern frontier and this episode brought the eastern Kingdom of Tripura into the forefront. Taking the advantage of the confusion caused by the war of succession Raja Kalyanmanikya, who had earlier submitted to Shuja, proclaimed his independence and regained some portions of the western plain that had ceded to the Mughals.²³ Kalyanmanikya died in A.D. 1660 (*Saka* 1582), and was succeeded by his son Govindamanikya²⁴ who was the defacto ruler of the kingdom

during the last years of his father's reign and was instrumental in throwing away the Mughal yoke. Prince Shuja, therefore, turned to Nakshatra Roy, the step brother of Govindamanikya and encouraged him to dethrone Govindamanikya and promised him military support. Nakshatra Roy accordingly rebelled against his brother but meanwhile Shuja was dislodged from his authority in Dacca and no help could be accorded to the rebelled prince. Shuja also could secure no help for shelter from Tripura then ruled by an unfriendly Govindamanikya. The imperial authorities were, however, perhaps under the impression that Shuja had entrenched himself in Tripura or was in league with the rulers of Tripura and Aracan. Aurangzeb, therefore, in a letter addressed to Govindamanikya demanded that the latter should capture Shuja and hand him over to Mir Jumla. To quote the letter;

I hope you will capture him and send him carefully under the surveillance of your army officers and thereby oblige me, so that the age-old friendship may continue to exist. Otherwise you will take it for certain that as a result of the stay of that imprudent rash in your territory, our happy relationship will be breached by conflicts. I do believe that things will be done in accordance with my letter.

Meanwhile, Shuja had sent his son Sultan Bang to the King of Aracan for help and the latter sent Sultan Bang back to his father with a number of war boats, commanded by Portuguese subjects up to the Chittagong frontier where the Aracanese frontier met Mughal Bengal.²⁵ This, however, being unable to reckon with the Mughals and as no help was forthcoming from Tripura, Shah Shuja ultimately fled to Aracan with his family and followers.²⁶ Though the Aracanese King initially promised him help, the difference of opinion crept in between the two when the king demanded the daughter of the Prince and also the services of his sons and officials. Shuja then planned to proceed to Macca and according to Dutch records (*Dag Register*, p. 115), he started for Tripura. Nevertheless, he was chased by the Aracanese and killed in jungles either at Tripura or Chittagong hill tract.²⁷

Govindamanikya, Raja of Tripura, on the other hand, incurred the displeasure of Aurangzeb and Mir Jumla having failed to captivise Shah Shuja who had already escaped to Aracan. The rebel claimant to the throne of Tripura, Nakshatra Roy managed to secure the support of the Mughals and possibly with the help of Mir Jumla, as believed by the historians of Tripura²⁸, occupied Udaipur and ultimately succeeded in dethroning Govindamanikya. The royal chronicle of Tripura, however, claims that Govindamanikya voluntarily abdicated, in favour of Nakshatra Roy, although it describes fierce battle between Ramdev, son of Govindamanikya, and Nakshatra Roy.²⁹ Be that as may be, Nakshatra Roy began his reign as the Raja of Tripura in A.D. 1661, and assumed the name of Chatramanikya as known from his coins³⁰, presumably as an ally of the Mughals. Govindamanikya was thus forced to be a fugitive and ultimately obtained asylum in the Aracanese court where, according to some traditions he met Prince Shuja and the latter presented a precious sword and a diamond.³¹ The alignment, if at all any, between the two fugitive princes took place, but it could not certainly pose any threat to the Mughals or their ally in Tripura as mentioned earlier. But the fact is that Prince Shuja was killed shortly after. Govindamanikya could, however, stage his come back to Tripura after a few years, but this too was not without the blessings of the Mughals as will be described later on.

Nawab Mir Jumla thus completed the immediate task of clearing his new province from the threat of Shuja and could consolidate his authority in the eastern frontier. The uncertainties, and resultant anxiety, however, prevailed in the Mughal camp by the news of Shuja's death which was concealed for some time by his followers who also spread the false news of his fleeing into jungle. Aurangzeb could be sure of the death of Shuja only when it was confirmed by the Dutch factors. Moreover, "these uncertainties and expectations came to an end in time through the evidence of many persons from Arakan, who had been present at the unhappy prince's death".³² Thus the lust of Mughal throne kindled among

the four sons of ill-fated Shah Jahan was terminated after making Aurangzeb, the undisputed master of this mighty Empire.

Mir Jumla in Bengal

Mir Jumla consolidated his position as the Governor of Bengal and was destined to supervise north-eastern policy of the Mughals under Aurangzeb. He had also acquired practical knowledge of Bengal and its frontier states while pursuing prince Shuja for long seventeen months. The action of the new Subahdar makes it clear that while the frontier policy of Shuja was defensive, Mir Jumla's policy was aggressive as well as offensive.³³ The strength of his aggressive attitude was in the line of highly imperialistic policy of his Emperor. On becoming the Emperor, Aurangzeb reshuffled the policy in respect of appointment of provincial Governors and other high officials. The reason behind this change was to eliminate the loyalties towards the popular regimes of Dara, Shuja and Murad respectively. Obviously, most of the provincial Governors and high officials were replaced by those who had firm faith and loyalty in Aurangzeb's paramountcy both in the central and provincial levels. The immediate problems of the Emperor seemed to be three-fold in nature. Firstly, the authority in north-east frontiers had to be reasserted. Secondly, the Deccan problem was mounted by the rise of Marathas under Shivaji. Thirdly, the Afgan tribes in the north-west frontier were in rebellious state. One of the major administrative changes made by Aurangzeb at his second coronation (July, 1659) was the posting of Shaista Khan to the viceroyalty of the Deccan, in the place of Prince Muazzam. He was specifically directed to suppress Shivaji.³⁴ Muhammad Amir Khan, son of Mir Jumla, was given the charge to crush the chronic rebellions of north-west frontier provinces reasserting forward frontier policy. North-east frontier was entrusted to Mir Jumla who devoted his full energy to assert firmly the imperial prestige as well as to extend the bounds of the empire up to the royal seat of Assam.³⁵

North-Eastern Policy

Aurangzeb's attitude towards the States on Mughal frontiers was based mainly on the expansion of imperial boundary as well as the assertion of Mughal prestige and authority. The application of this policy was directed in the Deccan, the north-west and the north-east with different variable magnitude depending on respective geo-political factors. To assess his frontier policy by one scale will be mere oversimplification of the whole issue, though some elements are common. Aurangzeb could not freely apply his personal discretion in asserting the expanding imperial policy towards Deccan as well as north-west frontier during his viceroyship, because of restrictions and interruptions of the imperial authorities. But as the supreme authority of the imperial Mughals, he was now free to design and implement his own scheme. Aurangzeb unearthed his true guide in the intriguing personality of Mir Jumla. As a matter of fact, Aurangzeb's personal political missions and diplomatic schemes were processed and materialised in different phase under the stewardship of this Persian general.³⁶ No wonder, Aurangzeb's expanding frontier policy towards the north-eastern states was solely entrusted to Mir Jumla. However,

It was the common belief that Aurangzeb ordered Mir Jumla into Assam that he might be got rid of, dreading that, as he had thrown the kingdom of Gulkandah into confusion, and had known how to arrange for the conquest of Dara and the destruction of Shivaji, he might likewise attempt by his devices to place someone else on the Mughal throne.³⁷

Although difference of opinion was occasionally noticed between the Emperor and the *subahdar*, there is reason to believe that Mir Jumla enjoyed the full confidence and support of Aurangzeb.

The appointment of Mir Jumla as Governor of Bengal had some special significance. Only the persons in whom the Emperor had firm faith were selected as viceroy, subject to

the limitations of imperial decrees sponsored by Aurangzeb. Mir Jumla was reputed as a man of lofty integrity, imperial justice and a cherisher of the subjects³⁸. Unlike other Governors, he was given special honour and specific responsibilities. The Emperor conferred on him the title of *Khan-i-Khanan* and *Sipah salar*; a *mansab* of 7,000 and a belt together with a special bejewelled sword.³⁹

Aurangzeb also asked Mir Jumla to devote himself to the efficient administration of the province by pacifying the people, chastising the unruly, regulating the artillery, and especially the *nawwara* (flotilla), securing the safety of traffic on the roads and highways and issuing well calculated regulations concerning various other matters.⁴⁰

The aforesaid directives amply justify the truth that Mir Jumla was vested with supreme authority concerning political, military and economic affairs of Bengal and the adjoining territories.

It is pertinent to note that Aurangzeb had tactically snatched away all the material wealth that Mir Jumla had acquired from Karnatak and Golkonda. Now the Emperor's greed turned towards Bengal *subah* with a view to reap the last fruits from the aged viceroy. The normal revenue of Bengal province was about four crores, next to Bijapur and Golkanda⁴¹. Since the war of succession, the requisite revenue of Bengal *subah* was not deposited in the imperial exchequer. Consequently, Mir Jumla was obliged to exploit all the available potential sources of revenue and thereby to give economic relief to Aurangzeb's campaigns in the ensuing North-west and Deccan fronts. Undoubtedly, Mir Jumla responded to the wishes of the Emperor with all sincerity and never deviated from the task as entrusted to him. The Emperor also possibly directed Mir Jumla to carry the banner of Islam in the Hindu Kingdoms of north-east frontier. Because the effective chastisement of the rather refractory *zamindars* of Assam and of the Maghs, who had ill-treated and oppressed the Mussalmans.⁴² "Out of three years* he was only present in the province of Bengal for barely a year

and a half (May 1660-November 1661) being absent on the campaigns of Cooch Behar and Assam from November 1661. During this short period, he skillfully utilised the military resources of the European powers with conviction. He also used the services of English, the Dutch and the Portuguese and their ships in his north-eastern campaigns. He also employed an Englishman, Thomas Pratt, in building boats and making ammunition for river fighting.⁴³ This proves that the *zamindars* of Bengal who used to supply war boats and man-power for imperial campaign were inactive and disloyal at this critical stage. A considerable number of bordering *zamindars* and tributary Rajas withdrew their necks from the collar of obedience; and not only neglected to send any part of their revenues to the Imperial treasury, but even invaded the provinces.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the Ahom monarch Jayadhvaj Singh, (1648-1663) who was also on the alert to take advantage of the dissensions amongst the Mughals, raised a strong army, threw two bridges over the Kallang river and advanced towards Gauhati. After occupation of Gauhati, the Ahom army marched against the western Koches and after a moderate conflict, defeated them twice and drove them across the Sankosh river⁴⁵. The Ahom monarch extended his plunders and laid the country waste almost up to the vicinity of Dacca, and carried away with him a number the inhabitants as slaves which was naturally considered an insult to the Mughal Government⁴⁶. Jayadhvaj Singh tried to keep the Mughal viceroy in good humour. He sent an emissary to Mir Jumla with costly presents and made a gesture for peace. He put the entire blame for the subversion of the Mughal authority in Kamrup on the shoulders of Prannarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar (c. 1633-66), then a Mughal vassal on the plea that he had taken possession of the imperial territory in order to prevent it from falling into the hands of Cooch Behar. As a matter of fact, the Ahom monarch was only gaining time for further aggressions. But this strategy was smelt by Mir Jumla who began necessary and elaborate preparations for the fresh north-eastern venture.⁴⁷

Mir Jumla was till then apprehending danger from Aracan where fugitive Shuja had taken shelter. He was naturally, anxious to invade Aracan after the end of the rainy season, and directed Rashid Khan to operate the north-east campaign in the early part of 1661 and to take delivery of Kamrup from the Ahoms⁴⁸. On his approach, the Ahoms abandoned Dhubri, and fell back beyond the Manas river, but he sustained snare and waited for reinforcement before taking possession of the tract which they had abandoned. The Ahom monarch gave severe punishment to the retreated commanders and appointed *Baduli Phukan* to be *Neog Phukan* as well as Commander-in-Chief. He was particularly ordered to drive out Rashid Khan from the soil of Mughal Kamrup⁴⁹. Mir Jumla was not inclined to forgive the disloyalty of a vassal ruler, Prannarayan of Cooch Behar. So a second war operated under the generalship of Raja Sujan Singh, the Rajput Chief, subsequently re-inforced by Mirza Beg Shuja, in order to chastise the Cooch ruler. Both the Commanders were interrupted by the Ahom and Coch forces respectively⁵⁰. Thereafter, Mir Jumla was compelled to follow an intensive aggressive policy towards this frontier, based on strong military and naval forces. As mentioned earlier, Mir Jumla put more stress on the recruitment of European residents both in the land and in the naval army. This was imperative necessity as the existing Mughal armies of Bengal were meagre and they had been demoralised and the morale of the general subjects was at its lowest ebb during the period of civil war. Moreover, to contest with the age long Hindu Kingdoms on the frontier of Bengal, a strong naval force was bound to be formed. So the Mughal viceroy kept Aracan campaign pending and on the night of 1st November 1661, started from Dacca (Khizirpur) accompanied with Dilir Khan on his historic Assam campaign.⁵¹

Evidently, the crucial years beginning from January 1659 to November 1661 marked the formative period of Mir Jumla's north-eastern frontier policy. The emperor Aurangzeb was too much engrossed in consolidating his imperial power and prestige just after the closure of the war of

succession and at the same time threatened by the ambitious Rajputs in the north as well as the grave Maratha menace in Deccan. Moreover, the traditional north-west policy of the Mughals was to be pursued with a more vigorous push in view of the rebel and hostile Afgan tribes, knocking alarmingly at the frontiers. So the Emperor had ultimately to take his camp in Kashmir to revitalise the conventional frontier policy, keeping in view of the maintenance of political equilibrium. Aurangzeb personally guided and supervised the strategies and military operations according to the exigencies of time and situation in the vulnerable frontiers of north-west, the gateway of all the preceding dynastic intruders of India. In view of the above condition, Aurangzeb was not in a position, at the outset, to pay personal attention in the intricate affairs of north-east India but to bank on the ambitious Persian general, who took the unexpected assignment of viceroyship in Bengal by the Imperial decrees of his Sunni Master in May 1660.⁵²

Once Aurangzeb was finally confirmed of the death news of exiled Prince Shuja, the Aracan campaign was put under suspension. Most probably, the cause of the revision of imperial policy was on the apprehension that the prolonged stay of the aggrieved viceroy in the hot bed of Bengal *subah* might create either political convulsions or radical revolution endangering the very stability of Mughal rule. Taking all these unseen factors into consideration, the imperial order was issued forthwith to execute the north-eastern campaign on priority basis. However, the astute viceroy did not leave the seat of Bengal at the outset. Rather Rashid Khan and Raja Sujan Singh were directed and deputed by Mir Jumla to accomplish the directives of the imperial assignment of north-eastern campaign.⁵³ Mir Jumla, however, could not reconcile the ill-motivated manoeuvres of the imperial authority. Indeed, he was considered as the main pillar and brain to Aurangzeb, specially during the crucial period in-between 1656 to 1660 because he had limitless wealth. Now the Shia viceroy of Bengal completing about seventy summers of his life, could not maintain the equilibrium of discretion

when Aurangzeb's imperial authority demanded the oscillating energies of the new viceroy, defying all canons of ethics.⁵⁴ In obedience to the imperial mandate, the aggrieved general-cum-viceroy had to carry out the duties with mixed feelings. Now Mir Jumla had no substantial quantum of copper to tide-over the tuff and chronic problems of the province of Bengal as well as the challenge of the frontier Hindu sovereigns. To consolidate the present incumbancy, it was an imperative necessity to inject and impose his earlier policy of Deccan in the soil of Bengal *Subah* and the frontier Kingdoms. As a matter of fact, Mir's Deccan formulae was neither applicable and viable either in Bengal *Subah* which was already engulfed with conflicting and complex loyalties nor in north-east regions where ethnical diversities were too much pronounced to accept any homogeneous paramountcy. However, Mir too like his Sunni Master was lured by the dazzling prospects of acquiring the treasures both from Bengal *Subah* and unexplored mines of wealth that lies in the entire north-east frontier states. But this wild venture was too much difficult if not impossible to be accomplished especially in north-east India, as because the aspirant was to start from Dacca, where he had stayed hardly for eighteen months (May 1660-November 1661).⁵⁵

Further, the political and economic conditions of Bengal *Subah* were in a fluid state right from the viceroyalty of Prince Shuja (1639-1657) and these unavoidable wounds were aggravated and multiplied by the war of succession. The feudal economic structure of Bengal *Subah* became stagnant to the lowest ebb. Corruptions in all segments of the cross-section of life became rampant. The reactionary forces of conflicting loyalties towards Aurangzeb's authority created an unseen and unusual vacuum especially in Bengal *Subah*. The imperial revenues from Bengal were in arrears since 1657. Curiously enough, the contumacious masses alike expressed their gestures of superficial loyalties especially during the period of interregnum following the great war of succession. Consequently, the din of rebellion and divisive forces became ripe when *ex-wazir* of Golkonda was seated in the capacity

of Viceroy at Dacca (Jahangirnagar).⁵⁶ Again, to chastise the age long powerful rulers and chieftains of north-east India, representing heterogenous nature, it vitally required considerable time factors, substantial finance, tactical devices in addition to trained men and war materials. As already referred to, the Bengal *Subah* was on the brink of financial bankruptcy. But the rulers and chieftains were comparatively maintaining political and economic stability from their respective end than the counterpart of Mughal province. It is because, the Mughal-Ahom bilateral treaty of 1639 was more favourable and advantageous to Mughals especially in trade and as such the Mughal authority pursued a definite policy of non-intervention in north-east India, ensuring the territorial integrity and uninterrupted usual commercial activities of the frontier rulers. However, the terms of this treaty were put in abeyance since the time of war of succession as both parties encouraged in laying the path of free trade for the present and posterity.⁵⁷

In fact, the concerted plan of north-eastern campaign was conceived by the emperor Aurangzeb while it had to be executed by his so long general Mir Jumla, although it was not pre-concerted by the two diplomats. Again the course of actions and modalities of conducting the north-eastern campaign, projected later on altogether different attitude of the Emperor who exercised the imperial authority as the supreme of the Mughal army. But none of the requisite Imperial forces and substantial economic resources were made available to Mir Jumla because of the concentration of lion parts of Mughal corps into other frontiers. Yet, the viceroy was expected to mean his own business by husbanding the stagnant resources on the spot. Indeed, it was a formidable and herculean task involving great risks for Mir Jumla who required to collect a sound finance within the time bound limit of eighteen months only. Accordingly, he could launch the historic campaign of north-east India by November 1661 in the lines of integrated operation.⁵⁸ Even though, this viceroy was given solely the independent charge coupled with some prerogative powers in formulating the policy

matters of Bengal *Subah* as well as North-East frontier states, but the Persian statesman started his policy shakily at the initial stage mainly under adverse pecuniary conditions as cited earlier. Now, Mir was to be guided only by his own wisdom and experiences what-so-ever, in order to overcome all the unforeseen knotty and vexed problems and hurdles that he had to face.⁵⁹

Above all, north-east India was to offer Mir Jumla altogether a different terrain, unfamiliar plateau, treacherous weather, turbulent rivers with upward current, streamlets, riverine lands, unfavourable climate etc., about which he must have ascertained the factual reports from the traders, preachers, *faujdar*s, petty officials of the frontier outposts. He also collected the news of stored wealth of the Ahom rulers from microscopic number of Muslim settlers and immigrants of Ahom Kingdom. He was also provided with solid informations about the frontier Kingdom from Rashid Khan and Raja Sujan Singh, the two generals, cum aides of twin operations whom Mir had deputed on eve of diplomatic transactions as well as actual raids. To Mir Jumla, it was not viable and practicable to formulate a ready-made war plan or to pursue the traditional policy of military campaign which he had long been following in the Deccan and northern India. Therefore, the policy concerning north-eastern campaign developed from time to time and with every new turn of events, it had undergone changes before it could take a final shape and his success and failure also varied according to the extent he could muster strong his limited resources in order to execute his policy.⁶⁰ To understand the predicament which befell him in the north-east India, it is desirable to make brief comparative estimate of Mughal north-east and north-west policy in the light of which the new re-orientation of Mir Jumla's policy can be better appreciated and tentatively gauged in its formation period as referred to.

North-East and North-West

On his accession to the Mughal throne the shrewd Emperor, Aurangzeb was called upon to reckon with the two

traditional frontiers of the empire, the north-east and north-west, both policies are to pacify the rebellious conduct of frontier Chiefs and to articulate his policy of imperial expansionism. The use of defensive diplomatic weapon was the common feature in the north-west frontier but this doctrine was not conducive to the rulers and chieftains with heterogenous character in the north-east. Consequently, the policy was oscillating like pendulum from defensive to offensive and vice-versa. Again in north-west, the policy was mainly of punitive character and the Mughal authorities had to patch up a bundle of peace by pensioning of the hostile tribal leaders from time to time, overlooking their depredations. But in the north-east the policy was mainly based on aggrandisement and annexation. The retributory measures of north-west were more or less sustained whereas in north-east these were mere transitory.⁶¹ The Mughal authority used to take the advantage of the inter-tribal jealousy with a view to root out the perpetual source of irritation created by the plundering raids of the Rebel Pathans and the political indoctrination continued to be a dominant factor in dealing with the inhabiting tribes; but in the north-east such a policy and alike blue print could not be very meaningful as the rulers and chieftains were backed by sound political organisation. The maintenance of political equilibrium and stable government with sound financial basis, obviously, evoked convulsion and excited the jealousy of Mughal rulers most of whom were the believer of autocracy based on religious bigotry. Freed from the traditional Shia-Sunni conflict of the north-west, the Mughal authorities in the north-east had possibly resorted to determined stress and strain in consolidation of the Mohammadans in the Brahmaputra, Surma and Barak valleys. The pan-Islamic policy could however be exercised in the foot hills of Tripura, Khasi and Jaintia hills and Garo hills in phased and calculated manner. Nevertheless, the main object of north-east policy was to control and monopolise all the trade and the commercial routes and centres so as to fill up the gap of both provincial exchequer of Bengal *Subah* and the tottering Imperial treasury with booty and revenues.⁶² Contrary to the north-west where

political stability and border security were the sole aims. In fact, economic imperialism was put into operation under the coverage of frontier policy in the fertile regions of north-east. Strategic position of the two frontiers was pole asunder in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In fact, the basic problems of the two pulsative and sensitive fronts differed in scope and magnitude.⁶³

The earlier Mughal authorities could not properly visualise these two fronts in proper perspective. Thus on the accession of Aurangzeb, the problems of the above fronts took different turn. This new Emperor also put over-emphasis by magnifying the problems of north-west and, diverting and draining away the best forces and resources of the country up to A.D. 1680. As a result, the Mughal authorities under Aurangzeb also failed to cope with the eventualities under requisite assessment and importance in the north-east frontier policy. In this frontier, the Mughal authorities continued to handle and analyse the strategic value mere on simple equations. No matter, when the Mughal authorities were in deep illusion, the European free booters and traders under the coverage of the respective factors exploited the fluid situations and step by step took all available advantages on the plea that they would extend their possible assistance in realising the dreams of the Mughals. As the final phase of Mughal's north-west frontier policy began to roll under the stewardship of emperor Aurangzeb, the wheels of fortune turned otherwise.⁶⁴ To the Emperor, the strategic value of north-east front was decreasing whereas to the European Factors it was in ascending scale. Of course, the Emperor pretended to revitalise the north-eastern frontier policy, though based on the principle of exigency.

NOTES

1. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, vol. I, II. p. 179; F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, pp. 167-68.
2. J.N. Sarkar, *Life of Mir Jumla*, p. 108; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshatsate*, p. 153.
3. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
*From Feb. 1645 to Jan. 1647.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
7. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (tr.), *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 3.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
9. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. II, p. 275.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 289.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38.
12. M. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. 1, p. 360.
13. A. Salam, (tr.), *Riazus-Salatin*, p. 215.
14. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 294.
15. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 217-20.
16. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
17. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 220.
18. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 316; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *op. cit.* pp. 146-47; F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-9.
19. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 316.

20. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 351; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 351.
21. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Ibid.*, pp. 376-77.
22. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
23. *Tripura District Gazetteers*, K.D. Menon, (ed.), p. 87.
24. *Rajmala*, Education Directorate, Tripura, pp. 76-78.
25. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 350; F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10.
26. 'Dagh Register', by Casteal Batavia, ed., J.A. Van der Chijs, the Hague, pp. 105-06 as cited by W. Irvine, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 356; F. Bernier, *op.cit.*, pp. 109-10.
27. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p.357; F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 112.
28. N.R. Roy Choudhury, *Tripura Through the Ages*, p. 41.
29. K.C. Sinha, *Rajmala*, pp 84-92.
30. N.R. Roychoudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
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45. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 130; *Alamgirnama*, pp 679-80.
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Expeditions Under Mir Jumla

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST Cooch Behar and Assam was the first direct imperialist intervention in the affairs of north-east by the Mughals under Aurangzeb.

Motives Behind

A number of factors are discernible from the various possible sources that prompted such an aggressive military campaign. The militant territorial expansionist policy of Aurangzeb was undoubtedly the prime factor.¹ Nevertheless, the European traders and travellers suggested two untold intentions of the Emperor and his viceroy. Firstly, the expedition was a clever device on the part of Aurangzeb who was anxious to get rid of his most powerful minister-general by engaging him in foreign wars.² Secondly, the campaign was the outcome of an inordinate personal ambition of Mir Jumla to secure the base for an invasion upon Burma and China.³ This could, however, never be the sole reasons for a determined endeavour to subdue the rulers of Assam and Cooch Behar. Although the local sources⁴ portray that Mir Jumla had undertaken the expedition without prior sanction of the Emperor, it cannot be denied that Jayadhvaj Singh and Prannarayan were guilty of aggressions in the Mughal territory⁵ and Aurangzeb himself had ordered the expedition.⁶ In his *farman* (June, 1660) appointing Mir Jumla as Viceroy of Bengal, Aurangzeb has asked the Nawab to conquer Assam and Aracan.⁷ A Dutch record of October 10, 1661, suggests in clear terms that Mir Jumla had been ordered by the Emperor to invade Cooch Behar.⁸ The measures designed against Cooch Behar and Assam were undoubtedly retributive and coercive in character. It may be recalled that when

Prince Shuja was engaged in the war of succession and later, Mir Jumla preoccupied in hasty chase of Shuja, the Koch and Ahom rulers threw themselves in reclaiming their lost territories in lower Assam, while Prannarayan took possession of the Goraghat and Khuntaghat region, Jayadhvaj Singh marched against the former and occupied the Mughal territories on both banks of Brahmaputra.⁹ Doubtless, this was too serious an offence on the part of the frontier rulers in gross violation of the existing treaties to be overlooked by an arch imperialist and vindictive despot under Aurangzeb. No wonder, as soon as Mir Jumla established himself in Dacca (Jahangirnagar), the Ahom and Koch rulers tendered their virtual submission and loyalty to the Mughals.¹⁰ This was, however, not considered adequate to impress upon the Mughal authorities to abandon their scheme, which leads to underline the fact of imperial expansionism at the backdrop of Mir Jumla's north-eastern campaign.

Further, commanding the frontier trade controlling the commercial routes and centres was also one of the places of Mir Jumla's task,¹¹ as he had already set himself in Bengal raising funds by taxing the merchants and landholders so as to fill up the almost exhausted imperial treasury under specific instructions of Aurangzeb.¹² Above all, as recorded by Mir Jumla's own chronicler, the expedition was "a holy war" prompted by "an ardent passion for releasing the captive Muhammedans (prisoners of war), rooting out idolators, lifting up the banner of Islam and destruction of the customs of unbelief and errors."¹³

Local Reactions

As desired by Aurangzeb, Mir Jumla's preparations to translate the scheme against Assam and Cooch Behar started ever since he established himself as Viceroy of Bengal seated at Dacca. Meanwhile, as known from the authorities of *Alamgirnama*, Jayadhvaj Singh sent an emissary to the Mughal viceroy stating that he had taken possession of the imperial lands for no other reasons but to keep the Koches

out and that he was now prepared to hand them over again to an officer whom the Viceroy might depute for the purpose.¹⁴ Mir Jumla rewarded the Ahom emissary with a *Khalat*, and Rashid Khan, Sayyid Nasiruddin Khan, Sayyid Salar Khan, Agar Khan and others were ordered to receive back the imperial lands.¹⁵ The Koch ruler also sent representative soliciting the governor's pardon for his disloyalty and open rebellion. Mir Jumla would listen to no excuse and imprisoned the emissary and ordered Raja Sujan Singh,* the Rajput Commander to occupy Cooch Behar with an imperial corps and Mirza Beg, one of his own officers, with 1,000 horses.¹⁶

As soon as the Ahoms heard of Rashid Khan, they withdrew from Karaibari and the neighbouring places, and retreated beyond the river Manas (opposite Goalpara).¹⁷ Rashid Khan considered this sudden retreat to be a snare, and on receiving further reinforcement under Sayyid Yusuf, who had been *Faujdar* of Karaibari during Shuja's government, took the possession of Rangamati.¹⁸ Sujan Singh by this time advanced to Yak-Duar: but finding that Rashid Khan did not press forward, he, too remained where he was, especially as the rains set in, and due to discouraging reports to the Governor. Mir Jumla found that matters could no longer be left in the hands of his officers, and on obtaining the necessary order from the imperial court, prepared himself to invade Cooch Behar and Assam. The Ahoms did not remain silent spectators. They made diplomatic tricks by sending emissaries with fourteen tusks, two swords, sixty gold coins and many other presentations, but at the same time reinforced the existing army and navy.¹⁹ Mir Jumla on the other hand, prepared to occupy Gauhati where from Mughal *Faujdar*, Mir Nathulla, was driven by the Ahoms. He also threatened the cows and the Brahmins along with the inhabitants.²⁰ Accordingly, Mir Jumla mobilised his army towards Assam. The Ahoms took possible measures to counteract the imperial forces. Soon a terrible battle began between the Mughals and the Ahoms both on the south and in the north bank of the Brahmaputra and the Ahom army

retreated resulting the capture of huge war materials by the Mughals.²¹ Mir Jumla with his loyal follower Dilir Khan marched to conquer the new realm. About the strength and initial progress of the expedition the venetian traveller Niccolao Manucci says²² :

Both were anxious to open to Aurangzeb a door for entering China They left the city of Dhakah together, at the head of forty thousand horsemen, in addition to infantry—these moved by land; and by way of the river he sent a large fleet commanded by Portuguese. These two forces reached, at a distance of one hundred leagues from Dhakah, a small fortress called Aso (Hajo), which, years before this time, the Assamese had taken from the province of Bengal. In a short time Mir Jumla captured that fort.

Cooch Behar

Mir Jumla made some administrative arrangements for Bengal before his departure for the Assam expedition and officers were directed to abide by his orders during his absence. Thus the protection of the provincial capital was put in charge of Ihtisham Khan. The financial matters were to be looked upon both by Bhagawati Das, *the Diwan*, and Khwajah Bhagwant Das. Mir Ghazi was appointed both as *Bakshi* and court chronicler, and Muhammad Maqim was to command the fleet. Blochmann on the basis of *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* writes²³ :

The Nawab first marched to Baritalash (opposite to Halshila near Pargana Karaibari), the harem and the heavy baggage having been sent via Ghoraghat.

There were three approach roads towards the city of Cooch Behar. Two roads were directly connected with the border of the Mughal territory. The third road connected Mughal empire with the Cooch-Bihar state via Morang. The first two roads were known as Yak-Duar and Khontaghat (Ghoraghat) respectively. Mir Jumla decided to strike

through Yak-Duar route. The second road had many obstacles. It passed near Rangamati and was intersected by innumerable small brooks. Another unidentified road that linked Cooch Behar was finally selected by Mir Jumla beyond the calculation of the Raja of Cooch Behar, for intensive march which was surrounded mostly by dense bamboo shrub.²⁴ Nawab's strategy befooled the Raja of Cooch Behar. Mir Jumla began his war operation by ordering the fleet to anchor in the nearby rivers which flow from *Sarkar* Ghoraghat into the Brahmaputra. On December 12, 1661, Raja Sujan Singh had joined Mir Jumla.²⁵ Now there from began the ordeal of the imperial army. The march was tedious and difficult, and the elephants and the footmen had continually started to cut the road through the dense jungles. While they reached the vicinity of Cooch Behar, it was reported that Raja Prannarayan had fled away to Bhutan. Mir Jumla entered the town of Cooch Behar with flying colour and thereafter prayer call was chanted by Cadir Mir Muhammed Calih in the Raja's palace.²⁶

Mir Jumla demanded the surrender of Koch Raja who took refuge in the royal court of Bhutan and the latter refused to comply with the order of the Nawab. But the son of Prannarayan about this time dissociated from his father, and waited on the Nawab, and embraced Islamic creed.²⁷ Isfandiar Beg, son of the late Alayar Khan was ordered to move towards Morang* in order to arrest Bhabanth Cargi, the *wazir* of the Koch-ruler. Another party was sent under the command of Farid Khan through an alternative route. After a few days the fugitive *wazir* with his family was captured by Riza Quli Beg Abakash and placed before the court. Meanwhile, Cooch-Bihar was annexed officially to Mughal territory. The name of the said town was changed to *Alamgirnagar*. Isfandar Beg was duly honoured as well as to officiate as *Faujdar* of that occupied country till the arrival of Askar Khan, who had been appointed to that specific office. The Nawab halted at Cooch Behar for sixteen days up to January 3, 1662 and directed the officials to reorganise the political and revenue set-up in the imperial line²⁸ in addition to other administrative affairs.

Assam

Mir Jumla then left Cooch Behar on January 4, 1662, and marched over Khontaghat into Assam. When the Nawab reached Rangamati, Rashid Khan joined him.²⁹ The *Zamindars* of the district could not be trusted by Mir Jumla. Obviously for carriage and guides he had solely to depend on his own discretion and exertions. Dilir Khan, Officer-in-Charge of his van and Mir Murtaza, the commandant of the imperial artillery were asked to safeguard both the river banks and land routes. The numerous streams and thorny jungles caused untold hardships and consequently Mir Jumla's progress was not more than a day.³⁰ On January 20, 1662, the Mughal army under Mir Jumla took possession of fort Jogighopa, situated opposite Goalpara, which belonged to Kamrup. The author of the *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyya* narrates the structural skill of the fort of Jogighopa as follows³¹ :

It is a large and high fort on the Brahmaputra. Near it the enemy had dug many holes for the horse to fall into, and pointed bamboo spikes, called *panjis* were studded in the holes. Behind the holes, for about half a shot's distance, on the even ground, they had made a ditch, near the fort, another one three yards deep. The latter was also full of bamboo spikes. In this way the Ahoms used to fortify the strategic bases. The Brahmaputra was south of the fort, and in the east a large river, called Manas, flew ... the mountain and joined the Brahmaputra. To the north, the fort was guarded by a ditch, several hillocks and dense jungles. The horse of Mir Jumla's chronicler was lost when it fell into holes."

Indeed, the Ahoms had their specialised art and skill in the mechanism of fortifications made of bamboos and muds.³²

Mughal Advance

The Mughals after occupying the fort of Jogighopa, opposite hill of Pancha Ratna appointed Ataula, one of the

Nawab's men, as Commander of the fort. The Mughal army was divided into two divisions just after crossing the turbulent river Manas by a bridge of boats. Mir Jumla took the charge of the main army and began to advance along the north bank. Nasiruddin Khan, Yadgar Khan and other *Amirs* proceeded along the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, while the fleet was maintaining close touch with the usual progress of the land forces. On February 4, 1662 Mir Jumla's army reached the neighbourhood of Gauhati and deputed Rashid Khan to surround Srighat by preventing the enemies from escaping to the north. But before he could reach the appointed station, the Ahom forces fled away out of panic and began their night flight up the river to Kajali. The Ahom army on the south bank of the river were overtaken by a flying force and a good number of them met with death. This setback on the part of Ahoms was due to defection of the army Commanders under Baduli Phukan and his aides. Next day (February 5, 1662) the Mughal army reached at Fort Srighat. Haaji Muhammad Baqir of Isfahan, a servant of Nawab, was ordered to clear up the hurdles of the fort with a number of elephants. Mir Jumla entered and inspected the fort and then began his march to Gauhati which was two miles farther on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.³³ Mir Jumla quickly recovered Gauhati, the then seat of Mughal Kamrup. Fort Pandu on the other side of the river and opposite to Fort Srighat, was taken without fight. A good number of the retreating forces were killed by the troops under Yadgar Khan Uzbek. As soon as the news of the fresh sufferings reached Kajali fort, after initial resistance the frightened Ahoms left it and fled to Fort Samdhara, at the mouth of the Bharali river.³⁴ Fort Kajali was about fourteen miles from Fort Pandu and its fall created unthinkable consternation which forced the Ahom monarch to redistribute the army mobilisation in order to combat the further progress of the imperial forces. Mention may be made that the Fort Srighat was bigger and higher than Fort Jogighopa while Fort Pandu was equal to Fort Srighat. Fort Kajali, fourteen miles off from Gauhati Fort, was no less important in construction and strength. As Blochmann

writes³⁵: "For Kajli lies near the very same 'Kajliban'*, which is mentioned in Hindu books. It is a reserve forest full of elephants."

Resistance

Meanwhile, the victorious General made some new appointments in the conquered territories and exerted tactical pressure for the unconditional surrender of the Ahom monarch. After waiting for two days he resorted to military action. Local Chiefs were asked to submit their allegiance. Thus Makardhvaj*, Raja of Darrang, who was so long a vassal of the Ahom monarch came down and paid respect to Mir Jumla, presented an elephant and in return, received *Khilat*. He was assured full protection and ordered to assist the current campaign of the imperialists. The Raja of Dimarua, the protected State under the Ahoms also sent his nephew to assist Mir Jumla's contingent. By this time, Muhammad Beg, an assistant to Nawab was appointed as *Faujdar* of Gauhati on temporary basis and Hasan Beg was posted as *Thanadar* of Kajali Fort situated at mouth of the Kallang river. From the Ahom side, the following measures were taken. The fort of Samdhara was put in charge of Baduli Phukan, and Charigian Raja, Bhitaraul Ghoin, and many others were stationed on the south bank as effective measure by the Ahom monarch.³⁶ As Blochmann writes, "At a place Bartina*, which lies half way between Gauhati and Samdhara, the whole imperial army crossed in two days the Brahmaputra on boats on the 6th Rajab (February 15, 1662)." The fort of Simlagarh was highly protected by the Ahom monarchs as it was the main gateway to the palace of Garhgaon.³⁷ While the imperial army continued their march along the south bank to desert the inmates of the Fort Simlagarh, unexpected natural calamities interrupted the progress. To quote Blochmann,³⁸

At one of the stages, a tremendous storm took place, during which many ships were upset, large pieces of hail also fell, and many horses threw themselves into the river. The

Assamese, thinking that Fort Chamdhurah would be, as it had been in former expeditions, the farthest point of the advance of the imperialists, had strengthened the fortifications of Simlagar, which lies on the other side of the river, opposite to Chamdhurah. On the 11th Rajab (February 20, 1662), the army encamped at the foot of Simlahgar, so near the fort that a *zamburak* ball from the fort passed over the Nawab's tent. Some of the Nawab's men wished to take the fort by climbing up; but as this would have cost much human life, they were ordered not to do so, and a siege was commenced.

The Mughal army started operations to encircle the Fort Simlagarh under the stewardship of Muhammad Beg, imperial Bakhshi. Dilir Khan and Mir Murtaza were in advance, and threw up trenches within gun-shot distance from the fort. The large guns were deployed but it was difficult to break the thick walls. Now the attacking column moved forward, commanded by Dilir Khan and succeeded in entering the Fort and Mir Murtaza opened the gate. The defeated Ahom army was chased by Muhammad Beg. Mir Jumla then inspected the fort and was astonished at the skill of fortifications. The fall of Simlagarh Fort unnerved the defender of Samdhara Fort. Having lost the morale, they too evacuated to avoid further imperial attack.³⁹

Battle of Koliabar

After the fall of Simlagarh and Samdhara, Mir Jumla encamped at Koliabar where his army also took rest for three days. The Nawab issued some directives on the occupied territories. As time gap administrative arrangements, Sayyid Nasiruddin was made *Faujdar* of Koliabar and Sayyid Mirza, Sayyid Nisar and Raja Kishan Singh garrisoned the Samdhara Fort. However, the captured war materials were taken along. Mir Jumla did not allow any torture on the local people. On the contrary, severe punishments were imposed on the marauders during the whole expedition.⁴⁰

While Mir Jumla was advancing upward at some distance

from the river, the fleet became isolated and the Ahom army took its full opportunity and made a determined attempt to check the progress of the Mughal navy. To quote Blochmann⁴¹ :

It happened that Ibn Hussain for some important reasons was away from the fleet with the army, when suddenly, after evening prayer, on the 21st Rajab, for 800 hostile ships attacked the fleet, which had just anchored. Munawwar Khan Zamindar and Ali Beg did their best till more ships came up. The cannonade lasted the whole night, and was heard by the army. The Nawab sent Muhammad Beg (a servant of Yakahtaz Khan) to assist the fleet.

The Ahom armada of 700 or 800 ships under the admiralship of *Bargohain* terrorised the crews of the imperial boats, anchoring near Kukurakata.⁴² The historic naval fight of Koliabar could ruin the cause of the imperial power if there would not be breach of co-ordination between the Ahom fleet and the army.⁴³

Fall of Salagarh

Mir Jumla advanced up to Salagarh, which the Ahoms evacuated on the approach of the imperial army. The Ahom forces withdrew to the Namrup hills, and trusted to the tactics of surprise and night attacks. Mir Jumla was approached by some Ahom *Phukans** who came with letters from their monarch (Jayadhvaj Singh) asking for peaceful settlement. But it soon became evident that their object was just to cause delay or to liquidate the activity of vigilance, in which hope they were disappointed by the refusal of overtures.⁴⁴ Mir Jumla became over optimistic in getting the favour of fortune. But his consideration was cooled down by the traditional guerilla warfare of the Ahom forces. As J.N. Sarkar writes, "Never daring to face the Mughals in an open engagement, they took recourse to guerilla tactics, organising surprise raids and night attacks, hindering enemy supplies and killing any stray person searching forage or firewood."⁴⁵ The

forces under the command of the *Bar Gohain* on the north bank of the Brahmaputra achieved few victories in order to compensate the irreparable losses mainly of Samdhara Fort. By this time, the imperial army under Mir Jumla consolidated their strength on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.⁴⁶

Fall of Lakhugarh

Mir Jumla triumphantly occupied the rocky fort of Salagarh without any confrontation and began preparations for advancing to Lakhugarh which was twenty-seven miles due east of Biswanath, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra near the western point of the Majuli island. The Ahom monarch commissioned all war Commanders of both banks of the Brahmaputra to concentrate the dislocated forces at the fortress of Lakhugarh but the objective was torpedoed by few Ahom deserters. The Ahoms now found it really difficult to resist the forces of Mir Jumla and seriously thought of making peace.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Mir Jumla insisted on a forward policy till the final occupation of the Ahom capital.⁴⁸

Mir Jumla intruded into Lakhugarh in connivance with Ahom deserters by the second week of March 1662 which compelled the Ahom monarch to apply unusual diplomatic wiles through the royal spiritual guide. To describe the situation in the words of H. Blochmann,⁴⁹

A Brahmin, an inhabitant of Dewalgaon* and spiritual guide of the Rajah, came to the camp; so did Yalnoli Phukan,+ who brought a *pandan*, a gold vessel, and two silver jars, 100 gold muhurs, and a submissive letter from the Rajah. But the letter was not deemed sincere, and a reply was sent that the Nawab would soon be in Ghargaon, where alone he would treat with the Rajah.

To make matter worse, the Ahom monarch, Jayadhvaj Singh was duped by his father-in-law and officials also deserted him.⁵⁰ He found no other alternative but to leave the capital. Then the charge of Garhgaon was entrusted to the *Bura Gohain* and other dependable officials, while the monarch with *Bar Barua* and *Bar Phukan* began their back-

ward march to Tipam, halting at Charaideo and Taraisot respectively.⁵¹ During the long haltage for more than a fortnight the Ahom monarch was likely to offer more economic privileges to the frontier Naga Chiefs in order to utilise the militant manpower, experienced archers unparalleled in guerilla warfare. But the Nagas of the Tipam were discouraged to combat the imperial forces by their Chief who was already in fued with the other Naga Chiefs that lay between the river Doyeng and the Dikhu.⁵² The Ahoms were no more strangers to the Nagas after the rule of about five hundred years. There were some minor confrontations on the issue of trading outposts and differences of opinion were pacified by conventional dialogue. However, H. Blochmann interprets saying, "The Rajah had first intended to fly to the Naga Hills, but for fear of our army, the Nagas would not afford him an asylum."⁵³ In the same context, J.N.Sarkar writes, "The Raja of the Nagas now sent envoys to the Mughal General agreeing to help him with men against the Ahoms. The General declined the offer but assured him of Mughal protection in case he did not assist the Ahoms."⁵⁴ It is quite reasonable to believe that the Nagas could not abruptly seek the protectorate of the Mughal General without knowing the final victory of the imperial troops, even though this militant tribe was not at all susceptible to cajolary. To the Mughals, the Nagas though well built, were considered to be treacherous.⁵⁵ Most probably, the Ahom monarch took the decision duly envisaged by his advisers to advance towards Namrup hills via Balihat because of the detaching attitude of the Rajah of Tipam.⁵⁶ He was accompanied by a huge number of his nobles, officials and followers. The *Bar Gohain* escaped to Tirap (Tiru), east of Garhgaon, and considerable number of officials took refuge in the island Majuli.⁵⁷

Occupation of Garhgaon

Mir Jumla left Lakhugarh on March 12, 1662, with the help of Ahom deserters on his march to Garhgaon, the Ahom capital, which was sixteen miles from Lakhugarh and could be approached only by travels close to the south bank of Dhing. The Mughal fleet consisting of 323 ships was ordered

to remain stationed at Lakhugarh under Ibn Hussain, Jamil Khan, Ali Beg Munawar and others.⁵⁸ Nawab entered Garhgaon on March 17, 1662 and encamped in the eastern wing of the Rajah's deserted palace while Jayadhvaj Singh took shelter in the Namrup hills which was four days' journey from Garhgaon.⁵⁹ The magnificent Ahom capital thus fell into the hands of the Mughals. It was indeed an occasion for the Mughals to rejoice over their almost unopposed occupation of the citadel of Ahom prowess.⁶⁰ During the peak hours of expedition the imperial General was making hectic measures in order to tranship unaccountable booty under the supervision of Mir Murtaza to Dacca. But the Nawab was in the horns of dilemma by the curses of monsoon. The nature, however, before long, took the matter into its own hand and the monsoon came to the rescue of the Ahoms.⁶¹ The Ahoms completely uprooted the Mughal *thanadars* of Dewalgaon and Gajpur. The other Mughal *thanadars*, appointed by the Nawab were in a state of uncertainty and panic. In fact, the tale of Mir's Garhgaon campaign was full of misery and agony like titanic naval fight of Koliabar.⁶²

Due to torrential rain for three consecutive days and nights, it became impossible and strenuous to live in tents that were about to be submerged. At the outset, the Nawab was inclining to spend the rainy season in Lakhugarh but apprehensive factors compelled him to change the earlier decision. He now resolved to move to Mathurapur, which stood seven miles beyond Ghargaon at the foot of a mountain, towards the south-east.⁶³ As the Nawab was forced by the circumstances to encamp in a place less exposed to rains, he left behind a contingent of his troops in Garhgaon under Mir Murtaza, Farhad Khan and Sayyid Salar Khan.⁶⁴

Mughal Difficulties

The Ahom statesmen might have expected the debacle on the part of the invading forces as they knew the character of the season better. As such, Jayadhvaj Singh entrenched himself in the Namrup hills which was perhaps not without strategic considerations. The advantage of the hardships caused

to their adversaries, they were certainly not expected to ignore. As a matter of fact, the continued night attacks of the Ahoms in and around Garhgaon virtually reduced the imperial forces to severe strait and the Nawab was forced to withdraw all *thanas*. The pangs and untold agony of the imperial forces knew no bound.⁶⁵ The Ahom monarch came down to Salaguri, equidistant from Mathurapur and Garhgaon, the former seat of the kingdom in order to make some new assignments and policy matters. Respective Phukans and high officials were out into operation by the Royal authority. Thus Ahom monarch directed all to obey this royal decree and to assist in captivating the Nawab.⁶⁶ The imperial forces withdrew their camp before a collective assault launched by Baduli Phukan but met with failure.⁶⁷ The next venture of Baduli Phukan in blockading Garhgaon did not yield any success due to the disloyalty of Muhammedan musketeers of Assam, recruited from the village of Chachni and stationed by Mir Murtaza, on the north, refused to leave their areas, when threatened by the Ahom army.⁶⁸

The vulnerable position of Garhgaon was partially secured by the arrival of a flotilla with provisions as sent by Ibn Hussain under the command of Muhammand Murad from Lakhugarh. Ibn Hussain continued his offensive attack upon the fortified island of Majuli in order to ensure the security of north bank, keeping in touch with all downward links up to Bengal.⁶⁹ The reverses of the imperial army caused unspeakable consternation. The whole country was virtually re-occupied by the Ahoms, only Mathurapur and Garhgaon being in the hands of the Imperials. As Jadunath Sarkar writes, "The beleaguered Mughals despaired of returning to Hindustan, and at Delhi funeral rites were performed for the Assam expeditionary force."⁷⁰

Encounters

The hopes of Mathurapur operations were nipped in the bud both by Nawab's strategic considerations and unthinkable pestilence cum famine, during July 1662. Now Garh-

gaon once became a rendezvous and to test the trial of strength by the contending armies. Mir Jumla started manoeuvre for coming back to Mathurapur to Garhgaon,⁷¹ by the third of August after sending a strong detachment under Farid Khan and Garwal Khan towards Lakhugarh to keep the road communication clear for the supplies and to assist Sarandaz Khan in getting Gajpur and then sending reinforcements to the *thanas* under Mir Murulla and Muhammad Maqim at Trimchani and Ramdang respectively.⁷² The Rajput soldiers under Rajah Sujan Singh distinguishing themselves by capturing forty-one Ahom ships and drove the Raja of Saring belonging to the members of the reigning Ahom family. His appointment requires the concurrence and approval of the Ahom monarch. His discretion is considered to be final. Due to temporary misunderstanding and rift, the Raja of Saring living in the southern mountains had been involved in evil and antinational design by way of threatening Garhgaon.⁷³ Farhad Khan sent Muhammad Beg to chastise the villages that were involved in sporadic attacks on the Mughal *thanas*. He did his job with some Ahom defectors.

Peace Proposals

Nevertheless, Baduli Phukan, being unexpectedly ill, proposed to send an emissary to Nawab who was about to elude at Garhgaon with his associates. The Nawab's party was honeycombed mainly by the pestilential diseases, converting Mathurapur to hell and dungeon. The peaceful gestures of Baduli Phukan, asking for cessation of the prolonged hostilities were trickily accepted with specific condition. The Nawab threw his diplomatic net piloted by Khwajah Bhor Mall.* One of the Rajput Chiefs, who also cajoled Baduli Phukan. New onwards, Baduli Phukan became victim to labyrinth and fifth columnist.⁷⁴ The said Phukan gave full support to the following conditions of the bilateral peace treaty without the final approval of the Ahom monarch and his subjects. As Blochmann writes on the authority of Fathiya-i-Ibriya,⁷⁵

The Mughals must receive five hundred elephants that had

still their first teeth; thirty lacs of tolahs of gold and silver as *peskhas*, a daughter of the Rajah for the harem of His Majesty, a yearly tribute of fifty elephants with their first teeth; and lastly, a promise to cede that portion of Assam over which the Imperialist passed. The Ahom Rajah was to keep Namrup and the whole of the mountainous districts to himself.

The Ahom monarch's refusal of five point humiliating clauses unnerved the machinations of Baduli Phukan as well as the followers of the Imperialist. No sooner the Nawab, the supreme commander with his officers had entered into capital town of Garhgaon,* the Ahoms renewed their frantic attacks on Garhgaon.⁷⁶ The Ahoms after devastating the campus decided to crush the Mughal fleet. But the retreat of the Bhitari Phukan from Dewalgaon to Rangali Chapari in the Majuli island ruined the cause of the Ahoms. The imperial navy under the admiralship of Ibn Hussain displayed unparalleled valour, though with few defectors of Ahom nobility.⁷⁷

In spite of their continued endeavours, the Ahom forces failed to dislodge the Mughals both from Garhgaon and strategic naval bases. The Mughal forces completely foiled the attempts launched by the Ahoms who even attempted to destroy the capital complex. The occupation army enjoyed special advantage from the fort but the entire might was now concentrated in repairing Garhgaon that made the task formidable for the Ahoms.⁷⁸

As the season heralding the arrival of autumn came, Mir Jumla began his unrest bid in intensifying the offensive attacks upon the Ahoms. Cavalry was thoroughly engaged which frightened the Ahom army and the people.⁷⁹ There began a large scale exodus of the Ahom natives. As Judunath Sarkar writes, "The Assamese peasantry, who had returned during the rains, again deserted their fields and huts and betook themselves to the hills across the Brahmaputra with their families and movable property."⁸⁰ The cupidity of

Nawab was realised by digging out the hidden treasures of the royal grave yards.

The Ahom monarch went to Solagarh and then back to Namrup only after the crushing defeat at the hands of Ibn Hussain.* Then Baduli Phukan revoked the peace proposal for the second time, subject to the withdrawal of the Imperialist troops. But it was turned down by Nawab. Suddenly, Baduli Phukan joined the side of the Mughals along with his three brothers at Silikhatol.⁸¹ The defection of the Phukans alarmed the Ahom monarch who could not pardon the elusory tricks of plan. Nevertheless, the renegade Phukan now enjoyed the confidence of the Mughal General and was destined to play a crucial role on behalf of the Mughals in Assam. His local experience was an asset, and the Nawab valued his suggestions and advice.

Administrative Measures

Baduli Phukan was appointed as *Subedar** covering the area between Garhgaon and Namrup.⁸² He gave all secret plans and concrete assistance to Nawab for capturing the Ahom monarch by a steady march up to Tipam village, the farthest point of Nawab's advance.⁸³ Thus on his advice Mir Jumla sent a detachment in the first week of December 1662 under Darwesh Beg to Solaguri, where several *Phukans* well-equipped with a number of trained elephants were reported to be available to the Mughals. Baduli Phukan accompanied Darwesh Beg. The Nawab crossed the river Dihing but due to his sudden illness, the expedition of Namrup was put in a coma. Baduli Phukan, the deserter, was honeycombed by the loyal and patriotic Ahom officials.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the Nawab after receiving treatment from Karima of Gilan, a physician, became sanguine to accomplish the stupendous task, in spite of serious illness. On the following day (December 10), he resolved to capture the Ahom monarch camping at Namrup through the puppet Deka Pajah and advanced up to the village Tipam* on December 18, 1662.⁸⁵

Indeed, both the belligerent nations were benumbed by the

vacuum caused by the afflictions. The Ahom monarch decided to execute Baduli Phukan and his associates with a view to push up the morale of the country. Now the Nawab had no alternative resources to save this protege who betrayed the country. The ailing General was terribly perplexed by the downward morale of his army. Lobbying began in both the camps.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, the Ahom monarch insisted on the revocation of the preceding bilateral treaty of 1638 as his countrymen already rejected outright the humiliating clauses of the peace convention recently made by the machinations of Baduli Phukan and Khawja Bhor Mal. Now Mir Jumla also could not ignore his acute illness as well as the dissatisfaction of his tired army.⁸⁷ On the other hand, most of the *Phukans* and other high ranking officials of Ahom monarch wanted to stop the active confrontation for the time being. Thereby they could recoup the losses for further offensive attack upon the forlorn Mughals.⁸⁸

Treaty of Ghilajorighat

After prolonged dialogues, both the parties finally came to the peace table at Ghilajorighat on January 22, 1663. Due to the Nawab's serious illness the treaty was mainly piloted and signed by Dilir Khan on the modelity suggested by Khawja Bhor Mal.⁸⁹ The main terms of the treaty are summarised as follows.

Firstly, the Ahom monarch (Jayhdhvaj Singh) and another native Raja (Batamor Tipam) with the status of Saring Raja as mentioned earlier had his seat of administration adjoining Namrup hills. That Raja or king was to make provision of sending one of his daughters to the harem of the Imperial court both at provincial level as well as central level. Secondly, as war indemnity, both rulers were asked to pay 20,000 tolas of gold, and 1,20,000 tolas of silver. Thirdly, fifteen elephants are to be handed over to the Emperor, fifteen to Mir Jumla and five to Dilir Khan. Fourthly, twenty elephants are to be despatched as annual tributes. The sons of the three

principal Gohains and Raja Sahur Phukan will remain as hostages. Fifthly, the hostages will be released on the replenishment of the condition that 3,00,000 tolas of silver and 90 elephants be sent as tribute to Bengal *Subah* in three, four monthly instalments. Sixthly, Sarkar Darrang, Nakti-Rani, Dimarua, Mikir* shall be ceded to the Mughal emperor.⁹⁰ Finally, all the Mughal prisoners of war and family of Baduli Phukan should be freed and restored to the Nawab.⁹¹

After initial hesitation on the vital issue of hostage, the Ahom monarch and the Raja of Tipam sent their daughters, the stipulated gold and silver, ten elephants and the hostages to the Nawab and promised to thirty elephants more to be delivered at Lakhugarh.⁹² Dilir Khan escorted the hostages and Ahom princess meant for Nawab's harem by the first week of January 1663.⁹³

The announcement of return march gave unbounded joy of par excellence to the Mughal forces and on January 9, 1663 the sick Nawab went to Trimohani by the help of palanquin where the prisoners and the family of Baduli Phukan arrived.⁹⁴ Mir Jumla began his sorrowful return journey straight from Tipam to Trimohani avoiding Garhgaon route, facing unspeakable hardships and pressing problems.⁹⁵ He also ordered the main part of the army to retreat up to Baritalah along the southern bank of the Brahmaputra, where they should cross the turbulent river.⁹⁶

The Nawab had now resolved to go back at Gauhati for further settlements and implementation of matters concerning finance, administration etc. including retributory expeditions mainly against the native Rajahas of Dimarua, Beltala, Nakti-Rani and lastly the Raja of Cooch Behar as they recovered their territories denying the Mughal mandate with the exception of the widowed queen of Darrang as Makara-dhvaj met with death at Mathurapur on behalf of the imperial army.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Mir Jumla's retreating army came to a standstill and was benumbed in the vicinity of mighty Kajali Fort during the first week of February 1663⁹⁸

due to unprecedented and destructive earthquake, followed by the stormy rains, tremendous lightning and thunder. The Nawab being constantly attended by the imperial doctors including few European physicians in his palanquin journey from Kaliabor crossing Mallang river by boat, became also victim and was compelled to halt for few days there. Moreover, this place belonging to Rajah of Dimarua was never traversed by the Imperial forces. This adverse situation was utilised by all the native Rajas including Dimarua whose mother and nephew made only a courtesy visit. However, the widowed queen of Darrang sought outward mercy.⁹⁹

The Nawab despite his acute illness left the horrible sight of Kajali and arrived at Pandu by the second week of February 1663. Even then he was now making few time bound financial steps with specifications and administrative changes by confirming the appointment of Rashid Khan as *Faujdar* of Kamrup with Gauhati as headquarters in place of Muhammad Beg, the temporary *Faujdar*. Muhammad Beg was put as *Thanadar* under Rashid Khan.¹⁰⁰

The Nawab also received confirmation from the *Diwan* of Dacca that protected Baduli Phukan was duly granted necessary *jagirs* in Bengal.¹⁰¹ Thereafter, he arrived at Baritolah and met the Cooch-Bihar detachment; and had to abandon the retributory expedition against Raja of Cooch Bihar who had reoccupied his territory during the debacle of Nawab in Upper Assam.¹⁰² As J.N. Sarkar writes, "However, as his condition grew alarmingly worse, he was forced to abandon the idea of invading Kuch Bihar himself and selected Dilir Khan for executing that task with the assistance of Askar Khan and Raja Bahroz".¹⁰³ The Nawab embarked in a well protected boat escorted by all the available physicians and glided down towards Dacca. But on the way he succumbed to eternal sleep, just half an hour before sunset, about four miles above Khizrpur* either on 30th or 31st March 1663 (A.H. 1073). The funeral rites were conducted by Dilir Khan and Ihtishman Khan, devoid of conventional courtly honour.¹⁰⁴ Strangely enough, his last wishes in the death-bed for carrying his body to Jajaf and then to be buried in holy

ground remained unfulfilled for ever.¹⁰⁵ The past and the present generations are still stunned by the non-existence of his burial tomb, despite tendering herculean services full of whim and vigour for the boastful master. Unfortunately the Nawab had to meet a inglorious death.¹⁰⁶

Thus an eventful and chequered career came to an end. Indeed, it was Mir Jumla who made the Mughal prowess effectively felt in Cooch Behar and Ahom states. He had completely annexed Cooch Behar and made it directly a part of the Mughal Empire. He held the Ahom capital under occupation, compelling the Ahom monarch to take shelter in the rigorous jungle of Namrup hills, at least for a considerable time. The treaty of Ghilajorighat that he forced on the Ahoms at latter's repeated requests had virtually reduced the Ahom state to the status of a Mughal vassal.¹⁰⁷

J.N. Sarkar considers the Treaty of Ghilajorighat "Peace with Honour." In fact both the parties, the Mughals and Ahoms, were exhausted by incessant wars. The ailing and aged Mughal general was between the two horns of dilemma. As J.N. Sarkar argues,

Weighed down by disease, worried about his shattered constitution, disconcerted by disaffection in the army, calculating the possible evil effects of rejecting the peace offer, and desirous of releasing all Mussalman prisoners of war, Mir Jumla reluctantly agrees to conclude peace.¹⁰⁸

As a matter of fact, Mir Jumla was not physically present in the final negotiation as the provisions were dictated and conducted by his trusted agents as mentioned earlier. And on the other hand, Jayadhvaj Singh was embarrassed by a few defected *Phukhans*, and disloyal war prisoners. So Mir Jumla endeavoured to save his thread of life by offering valuable gifts to the Ahom monarch through the instrumentality of Dilir Khan, superseding Khawja Bhor Mal.¹⁰⁹ Yet the Ahom monarch did not leave any stone unturned to reject the coercive provisions of the harsh as well as humiliating treaty that was practically imposed and dictated by the

Mughal authority. In fact, the wars in capital campus of Garhgaon could neither decide the final victors or the vanquished. The apparent phrase implied the truth of the comment "Peace with Honour" from the judgement of the Mughal authority. The major provisions of the treaty were not implemented as the fatigued Nawab moved back to Dacca,¹¹⁰ and meanwhile the Ahom monarch Jayadhvaj Singh did not survive to see the practical effects of the unholy and revengeful treaty of Ghilajorighat as he went to eternal sleep on 1585 *Saka* (November 1663), leaving an historical truth and thought provoking lesson to his successors to follow.¹¹¹

It is pertinent to refer that the Aracan expedition under Mir Jumla was not given any priority although the imperial mandate was specific in apprehending the distressed family of fugitive Shuja.¹¹² Mir Jumla defended the expedition of north-east India on priority basis as because a considerable part of the Imperial troops were involved in grim struggle against the provinces of Cooch Behar and Assam, and that to march towards Aracan, without accomplishing the conquest of the aforesaid two provinces, was virtually opposed to expediency.¹¹³ Evidently, Nawab's campaign in the north-eastern Kingdoms was not merely to infuse Mughal loyalty and fidelity but also motivated by fiscal considerations of underneath motive. The critical analysis of his conspicuous political career of Golkonda reveals that all the available opportunities and factors were dramatically utilised and exploited to ensure his brisk trade and commercial activities. As Sarkar writes "Absorbed as Mir Jumla was in his political activities, he never lost sight of commerce, the perennial source of his wealth, prosperity and power".¹¹⁴ Further, it is reasonable to believe that transference of provincial head-quarter from Rajmohal to Dacca (Jahangirnagar) by Mir Jumla was motivated both by economic greeds as well and military strategies besides other motives whatsoever either for private or for public interest.

As Mir Jumla possessed uncommon speculation, he would never miss the chance in harbouring the unexplored resources of North-eastern states to compensate his lost treasure of

Deccan. As Sarkar writes "The basis of Mir Jumla's economic system in Bengal, as well as in the Karnatak, was monopoly."¹¹⁵ Indeed, North-east part of India during the seventeenth century practically drew the attention of the Mughals as well as masked European free-booters for her unusual virginity as evident by the narrative given by Shihabuddin Talish, the court chronicler of Nawab.¹¹⁶

Eastern Division

As regards the nature of Mir Jumla's relations mainly with Jayantia, Cachar, Tripura, Manipur Kingdoms, the contemporary historical records are shrouded in obscurity, although stray references are made by the notes left by Mir Jumla's chronicler. According to the available indigenous sources, the Rajas of the aforesaid territories maintained their independent position.¹¹⁷ It is possible that as Mir Jumla's campaign was directed mainly against the Koch and Ahom rulers, he did not enter into any formal contact with the states in the eastern division of the region. The Nawab had received specific directions from the Emperor to proceed against Assam and Cooch Behar and there was nothing such about Jayantia or Cachar. Again Manipur was not on the border of Bengal, being intersected by Cachar, and the Mughals till then had no formal contact with that hill-locked valley state; while Tripura came into Nawab's purview only on his chase of Prince Shuja. The relations if at all any, during this period with the eastern states were maintained in all probability through the *Faujdar* of Sylhet at the local levels.

Nevertheless, the erstwhile rivalry of Jayantia with the Ahoms receded for a while during the Mughal campaign, and the Raja of Jayantia sympathised with the Ahom monarch in his difficult time. Jasamanta Roy, the Raja of Jayantia, sent in 1662 two envoys to the Ahom court with some gifts and a letter expressing sympathy on the invasion of Assam by Mir Jumla. But the envoys were captured by Mir Jumla's forces.¹¹⁸ On hearing of this, Jayadhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch, wrote to the Raja of Jayantia expressing regret at

the capture of his envoys. He also sent four pieces of silk cloth, eight musked pod, one gathion, two knives and other gifts to the Raja to strengthen the friendship between the two states.¹¹⁹

On the request of the Ahom monarch, Manik Singh, the *Doloi* of Nortiang, arranged the safe conduct of the Ahom envoys with letters and gifts to Jayantiapur.¹²⁰ The reciprocal exchange of notes of gratitude were communicated between the royal courts of Jayantia and Assam in order to combat their common enemy, the Mughals and to adopt protective measures to upset the aggressive designs of the forces of Mir Jumla.¹²¹ Interestingly this was followed by a series of raids conducted by the Rajas of Jayantia in the Mughal *Sarkar* of Sylhet.¹²² This might have been provoked by capture of the Raja's messenger to Assam and to divert the attention of the Mughals from the friendly state of Assam by harassing them in a new frontier. The withdrawal of Mir Jumla from Assam, following the signing of the treaty of Ghiljorighat and the accession of Shaistakhan as the *Subedar* of Bengal, however, saw an immediate end of raid.¹²³

Evidently, the Raja of Cachar gave full support and assistance to the Ahom monarch against the military expedition of Mir Jumla.¹²⁴ During Mir Jumla's expedition, Cachar was probably undisturbed for its mighty prowess and intrusion that took place, both from the north and south-west fronts. As Mir Jumla's chronicler categorically referred to the Kingdom of Cachar which had now stopped the migration of elephants from his territory and also specifically warned the neighbouring Raja of Dimarua, the then Ahom protectorate not to catch a single elephant from the bordering *Khedas*, including the resourceful forest reserve of "Kajali Ban."¹²⁵

Mention may be made that the erstwhile Afgan settlers coming from Sylhet, settling themselves in the adjoining foot hills of the Kingdom of Cachar, Jayantia and Tripura during the early decades of the seventeenth century served as bul-

wark if not bugbear against the rapid expansion of Mughal hegemony.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, the Mughals continued their attack up to the forts of Asuratekar, Pratapgarh and Udaipur and then to withdraw the army after being promised of loyalty, fiddity and tribute. It also appeared that the Mughals were granted some trade facilities by respective Rajas through the river *ghats* of Surma Barak, Khowang and its tributaries along with the *Chowkis* of the landed area. This state of relationship was perhaps maintained for some-time.¹²⁷

Gait mentioned of an invasion of Cachar by a detachment of Mir Jumla's expeditionary force.¹²⁸ The author has himself suggested that Satrudaman, the Raja of Cachar, who was said to have been killed during this expedition is inconsistent as he died at least forty years before Mir Jumla's invasion and fought against the force despatched during the reign of Jahangir.¹²⁹ It is, however, possible that there was some minor encounter by Mir Jumla's forces in Assam or under the command of the *Faujdar* of Sylhet. Such an encounter might have been occasioned by the dispute over elephant trade. Talish¹³⁰ and Blochmann¹³¹ suggest the jealousy and fiction which were the main causes, for it was the total ban imposed by the Raja of Cachar on *Kheda* in his bordering areas. It is further known from the same authorities that the Mughals were severely aggrieved for losing mainly by the prospective trade of elephants but could not take retaliatory actions then due to the circumstances that forced them to withdraw from Assam by hastily making a treaty.

Impact of the Campaign

For the first time, the Mughals under Mir Jumla took venture in sending their expedition up to the capital city of Ahom Kingdom. No other Muhammadan rulers could push their respective campaign into that extremity. Undoubtedly, Mir Jumla's campaign was a remarkable military exploit. But it must be admitted that like all other previous expeditions, both Afgan and Mughals respectively, it was initially successful, but ultimately a failure. In spite of Mir

Jumla's quick march from Cooch Behar to the centre of Ahom capital was accomplished within barely two months and a half, yet he could neither crush nor demoralise, both the Koch and Ahom military and naval powers to his expectations.¹³² Mir Jumla's diplomatic games, of course, created temporary defections among the Ahom nobles and war generals and thereby gained the glory of victory in the ensuing campaign. Very soon, the Mughal army was isolated and blocked by natural calamities which definitely brought total frustrations both in the Mughal army and navy. Further, the forces of Mir Jumla were unexpectedly harassed and perplexed by the unchallenged night attack and guerilla warfare launched by the Ahom army. Had the defenders held their own guerilla warfare till the approach of the rainy season, the Mughals, as Talish himself admits, would not have been able to capture a single fort.¹³³

Mir Jumla created diplomatic pressure by way of demanding the restoration of Hatshila, Baritola and Gauhati, but the *Phukhans* of the Ahom monarch did not budge an inch to the threat of Mughals as the Mughal diplomacy proved to be ineffective.¹³⁴ However, in several cases, it were the local inhabitants, who were also terrified at collective slaughter of the contumacious villagers and willingly handed over several leaders to the Mughals. As Sarkar writes: "Absconding villagers, who had abandoned their inhabitants in pursuance of the Ahom policy of starving the invaders, willingly returned and the Mughals continued to get supplies from them."¹³⁵

Nevertheless, the contention that the Assam war would not become a fullfledged people's war lacked substantial truth, because the Ahoms and their neighbouring rulers and ruled took participation against the Mughals, who were their common enemy.¹³⁶ Of course, few nobility of the Ahom Kingdom betrayed the national cause in certain occasions. Thus Baduli Phukan and his followers brought a tremendous damage to fulfil his selfish design guided by the greed of temporary emotions at the cost of the nation as a whole. Even the Muhammadan inhabitants in Assam and more particularly of

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Garhgaon campus supplied all possible secret information to Mir Jumla and his associates.¹³⁷ Above all, Mir's uncommon prudence and organising capability enabled him to rescue the vast Mughal force from the total stage of destruction. As Sir J.N. Sarkar writes,¹³⁸

Judged as a military exploit, Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam was a success. He overran the country almost to its farthest limits, kept hold of the capital, forced the Raja to make a humiliating treaty, realised a large indemnity, and secured the promise of a large cession of territory and further payments.

In fact, the Mughal losses were not so much from the enemy's sword but from the stroke of pestilence which the Mughals could neither foresee nor avert. Though the Ahom monarch suffered from considerable setbacks, yet he did his best to recover the losses so as to deny the acceptance of the provisions of the humiliating treaty in phased manner.¹³⁹ The moment Mir Jumla died, all the rulers of north-east India withdraw their loyalties from the Mughal authority. The Raja of Cooch Behar even reoccupied his kingdom while Mir Jumla was in trouble at Garhgaon. As Sarkar observes, "Mir Jumla's success was won at a high cost, and it entailed enormous new acquisitions, the fruits of such sufferings, were lost to the Empire after Mir's death."¹⁴⁰

Evidently, Mir Jumla's diplomatic games towards north-eastern frontiers could not get proper nourishment due to the limitation of imperial support. Further, it proved to be fruitless because of denying the canons of geo-physical conditions of north-eastern India. As such, Mir Jumla's Deccan model formula did not yield desired dividends either in Bengal *Subah* or in the north-eastern campaign. He could not reach his goal also because of the half-hearted help of the European free booters.¹⁴¹ The fact is that all military campaigns, either in land or in waters yielded only transitory results if the main strength based mainly on mercenary troops and sailors. Unlike Deccan, Mir Jumla could neither squeeze nor realise the expected military aids and fiscal bene-

fits from the European factors of Bengal Subah whose home governments were then intensely engrossed in the military campaigns of Europe in order to crush the Bourbon France under Louis XIV.¹⁴² As S.N. Bhattacharyya writes,¹⁴³

The audacious attempt of Mir Jumla to subjugate the proud, independent and powerful kingdom of Assam still in the hey-day of its prosperity, involving untold miseries to its King and the people led to an inevitable national reaction which affected the future of Mughal Kamrup.

Nevertheless, the Mughal campaign under Mir Jumla was in its essence a barren enterprise. Though the Ahom monarch had some personal defects, yet it could be rectified provided there was unanimity among the council of advisers.¹⁴⁴ There was not at all dearth of strong leader in Ahom Kingdom. Only the administrative fabrics were dislocated by the divisive forces and fissiparous tendencies due to the absence of a strong central authority. Otherwise it could marshal and co-ordinate all the sinew of war, inspire and bring out the innate bravery of the people, forging all differences whatsoever, and enforce strict discipline both in common men and the army.¹⁴⁵ Despite Mir Jumla's unfulfilled mission in Assam, his military carnage left a sad memory full of agony and terror to the inhabitants of north-east India.¹⁴⁶

An indirect impact of Mir Jumla's campaign can under no circumstances be overlooked, and that was the changing nature of relationship of the Ahoms with their erstwhile rivals in the eastern division of the north-east. The hostility that the Ahom history through its critical stage had experienced with two powerful monarchies of Cachar and Jayantia eversince the beginning of their territorial expansionism, which however receded for the time being. During this period of Mughal challenge, the Ahom monarchies endeavoured not only to defuse the antagonism but also to pacify them¹⁴⁷, which yielded considerable fruits. The Raja of Jayantia, for example as it has already been mentioned, sent some messengers to the Ahom court conveying sympathy for the Mughal invasion and pledging support and co-operation

against the common enemy.¹⁴⁸ The Raja carried out his commitment by indulging in raids in the Mughal territory. Similarly, the Raja of Cachar also extended support and assistance to the Ahom monarch,¹⁴⁹ which, as has already been observed, might have been occasioned by an unsuccessful invasion of his own territory.

Another by no means insignificant was the cessation of hostilities and, on the contrary, attempts at increased understanding between the monarchies of Jayantia, Cachar, Manipur and Tripura in the eastern region of the Kingdom. During the first few decades of the seventeenth century, the Rajas of Jayantia and Cachar clashed with each other rather fiercely over the borders, particularly on the issue of the vassalage of Dimarua;¹⁵⁰ whereas during the period under review when Dimarua passed through the vassalage of the Ahoms and the Mughals, there is no reference of encounter between the erstwhile hostile neighbours. Similarly, although the period was preceded by encounters between Cachar and Manipur,¹⁵¹ the states were rendered to maintain perfectly good neighbourly relations by the situation. Further, matrimonial alliance was effected between the two royal houses about this time.¹⁵² The Raja of Manipur also sent an emissary to Jayantiapur to prevail upon the ruler of the state not to indulge in any encounter with Cachar. The period also saw no hostility with Tripura either on the part of Manipur or Cachar. On the contrary, Nakshatra Roy, the Raja of Tripura, sent a goodwill mission to Manipur.¹⁵³ This peaceful good neighbourly relationship among the monarchies in the division might have generated an impact of the renewed Mughal challenge at a time when Emperor Aurangzeb had embarked upon a policy of aggressive imperial expansionism and the campaign against Cooch Behar and Assam under Mir Jumla which could be a beginning of the onslaught against the entire region.

NOTES

1. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 151; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. V, 390; W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II., pp., 60-61; A. Salam, *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, p. 224.
2. W. Irvine, (tr.), Vol. II, p. 91.
3. J.N. Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla*, p. 223.
4. H. Goswami, *Purani Assam Buranji*, p. 92.
5. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, pp. 155-56.
6. *Ibid.*,
7. *Ibid.*,
8. W. Foster, *The English Factories in India*, Vol. V, pp. 297-98.
9. H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92.
10. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 77.
11. J.B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. II, p. 281.
12. W. Foster, *op. cit.*, Vol. V, pp. 275-76.
13. S. Talish, *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyya*, Mss No. D72, Asiatic Society, Calcutta, pp. 7-8, 18-19.
14. H. Blochmann, "Koch Bihar, Koch-Hajo, and Assam, in the 16th and 17th Centuries, According to the Akbarnama, the Padianama, and the Fatiya-i-Ibriya", J.A.S.B., Vol. XLV, 1872, p. 63; S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
15. N. Blochmann, *Ibid.*, p. 63.
*Alias Suban Singh Bandela.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

18. *Ibid.*,
19. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 54-56.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.
21. H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-95
22. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 91; F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, pp. 171-72.
23. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65; S.N. Khan, *The Maathirul-Umrah*, Vol II, p. 197.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29.
25. *Ibid.*,
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-66; A.A. Chowdhury, *Cooch-Beharer Ithas*, p. 265.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 67; A.A. Choudhury, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
*A petty Chieftaincy in the north-western border of Cooch Behar.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
29. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 131; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99.
30. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, 69; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-21; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99.
31. *Ibid.*, S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-25.
32. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 61-63; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 69; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99.
33. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 234; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 69; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 133; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 78.
34. S. K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 78; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 133, S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99.
35. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 70; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-99.
*For the Kachari Raja it might have been the main source of income by catching elephants and also as military rampart against the neighbouring Rajas.

- +In *Alamgirnama* (p. 703) it is Makrapanj alias Makrapani. E. Gait says the surrender of Darrang Raja is mentioned only in the Mohammedan chronicles. Again one of the Kachari Rajas was Makardhvaj (c 1695), see p. 419.
36. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 78.
*J.N. Sarkar identified it as Burchola and Barcholgaon vide Darrang district Gaz. (p. 177).
37. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 237; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
38. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 71; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
39. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 238. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-36; H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 95; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
40. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 72; S.K. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
42. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
43. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
* Called Amirs in *Fathiya-i-Ibriyya*.
44. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 73; *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 677, Tr. No. 213, D.H.A.S. Gauhati.
45. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 241; W. Irvine, (tr.), Vol. II, p. 92.
46. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 136; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 241.
47. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 79; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42; H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 95; G.C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, p. 167.
48. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 174.
49. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
*E. Gait identifies it as Debargaon.
+J.N. Sarkar's coining of Tambull Phukan is relevant (p. 242).
50. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 79.
51. *Ibid.*, G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

52. G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 168, 193
53. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
54. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
55. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
56. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 79; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 169.
57. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 137; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
58. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 174; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 73; W. Irvine, (tr.), Vol. II, p. 92; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
59. H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 137; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 75, 85; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 200.
60. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 84; W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 93.
61. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 81; W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 93.
62. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 86; W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 93., F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
63. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 225; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 202.
64. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 80; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 86; G.C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 175-76, J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 255.
65. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. II., p. 93; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
66. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 88; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 257; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 175; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 168.
67. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 257; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76.
68. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 258; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
69. S. Talish, *Fathiyya-i-Ibriyya*, pp. 75-76; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 255; S.K. Dutta, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 20-21; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

70. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 168; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 88; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
71. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 260; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
72. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 87; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 169; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 259, E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.
73. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 89; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 257. I In *Alamgirnama*, it is Puran Mal.
74. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 89; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 178.
75. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 89; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 260; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 81.
*17th-18th August 1662.
76. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 81.
77. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-26, J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 264; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 178; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 141; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, pp. 173-74.
78. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 92; S.K. Bhuyan, *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 63.
79. G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 178; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 175.
80. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
*Alias Abul Hasan.
81. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 92; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-84.
*J.N. Sarkar mentions Deka Rajah (lit. the junior king) (p 267).
82. *Ibid.*, p. 93; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 81; G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
83. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
84. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 93; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 267; H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, pp 97-98.

*Opposite Namrup; But H. Blochmann mentions Batam and also confessed that there was no such name in the available map (J.A.S. B. 1872, p. 93).

85. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 93; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
86. G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 185; S.N. Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 203; *Ibid.*, p. 92, J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 268; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-77.
87. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 268; S.K. Bhuyan, *Mir Jumla's Assam Akraman*, pp. 85-90.
88. G.C. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 185; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 64.
89. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 268; S.K. Bhuyan, *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 64-65.
- *Some Rengma Nagas are inhabitants vide Blochmann, p. 94.
90. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 94; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 270; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurengzeb*, Vol. III, pp 177-78.
91. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 270; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 142; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 85.
- *According to Buranjis it appears that the district of *Dakhinkol* was neither annexed by the Imperial power nor ceded by the respective Rajas during or before Mir's expedition. According to the terms of the treaty, Bharali river was presumed and supposed to be the boundary between the Mughal empire and Assam in the *Utterkol* and Kallong river in the *Dakhinkol*. The Ahom monarch with the full support of his officials and subjects was mortified and adopted delatory tactics in implementing the new boundary line despite promises. In fact, most of the provisions remain unaffected and unfulfilled by the tragic return march of Mughal general. Theoretically the new boundary belonged to Imperial power but in practice it was never actualised, despite many attempts. See S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 67 and *Assam Buranji*, p. 85.
92. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-156.
93. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 68, *Assam Buranji*, p. 83.
94. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

95. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-57, 161-164; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 95; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
96. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-57, 161-63, J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
97. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 230-278; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-69, 170-71; H. Blochmann, pp. 95-96.
98. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 162-65; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 95; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-276; *Assam Buranji* Mss No. 677, Tr. No. 213, Mss No. 95, Tr. No. 53, D.H.A.S., (Gauhati) F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
99. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, p. 164-67; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 95; *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 677, Tr. No. 213, D.H.A. (Gauhati); F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
100. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-67, H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96, J.N. Sarkar *op. cit.*, p. 277.
101. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
102. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 277; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-68; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
103. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 278; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-71; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96; B. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
 *The identification of Khizrpur was not made either in Rennel's Map of the 'Environs of Dacca' in 1778 (Map xii, of the Bengal Atlas) or in Survey Maps. However Dr. James Wise of Dacca, an eminent scholar of the local history of Dacca clarifies the place saying "Narainganj, eight miles south-east of Dacca, is in a parganah called Khizrpur. It is bounded by the Dacca river, the Buri Ganga. This situation corresponds with that of the historical Khizrpur, which was on the banks of the Ganges. A tomb, said to be that of one Shaistah Khan's daughters, is called by the Muhammadans of the present day the 'Khizrpur Maqbarah'. It is strange that the tomb of such a great man should not exist." H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96; According to *Assam Buranji* by S. K. Bhuyan, Nawab died at Bagribari of Goalpara District (p. 35).
104. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-71; J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-74; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 179; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
105. F. Bernier, *op. cit.*, p. 171, 173, W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 94.

106. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-72; J.N. Sarkar; *op. cit.*, p. 274; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Padshah Buranji*, p. 79; W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 94.
107. P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 423; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 83-84.
108. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-69.
109. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 83-85; *Assam Buranji* Mss No. 677, Tr. No. 213; Mss No. 49, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati.)
110. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 677. Tr. No. 213, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati), P. Gogoi, *op. cit.*, pp. 423-24, 431-22.
111. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 49, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati); E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 143; P. Gogoi, *op. cit.*, p. 432.
112. A. Salam, *op. cit.*, p. 224.
113. *Ibid.*,
114. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
115. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
116. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-84; J.B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. II, pp. 281-82.
117. H. Goswami, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
118. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 21-22.
119. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
122. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 377; S.M. Ali, *The History of Jayantia*, pp. 18-19; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 36
123. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 377; S.M. Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
124. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kachari Buranji*, pp. 48-49.

125. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-60; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 94.
126. M.I. Bora, (tr.), *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, Vol. I, p. 172.
127. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North-East India*, pp. 10-11; M.I. Bora, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 156-75.
128. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 305.
129. *Ibid.*,
130. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-60.
131. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
132. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 131-32.
133. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-86.
134. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, Introduction, XXVIII.
135. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 281.
136. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*; p. 23.
137. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-44.
138. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib* Vol. III, p. 179.
139. S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, pp., 85-86.
140. J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p 283.
141. M. Foster, *op. cit.*, Vol. VI, pp. 275-95.
142. *Ibid.*,
143. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Mughal North-East Policy*, p. 35-55.
144. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 606 Tr. No. 203; Mss No. 49. D.H.A.S. (Gauhati).
145. *Ibid.*,

146. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, p. 358; *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 49, D H.A.S., (Gauhati).
147. S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 25-26.
148. *Ibid.*,
149. S. K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kachari Buranji*, p. 47.
150. L. Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, p. 108.
151. *Bijay Pancali*, Part I, p. 68.
152. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-07.
153. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-16; N.R. Roy Chaudhury, *Tripura Through the Ages*, p. 42.

Ram Singh's Campaign

THE DEATH OF MIR JUMLA on March 31, 1663, left the Mughals in difficult situation in Bengal. The campaigns in the north-east had taxed the Imperial treasury in a handsome manner, and the Bengal famine of 1662¹, had its scorching trails on the administration of the province that needed considerable time for the local administration with a view to recoup the losses fully. To make matter worse, the authorities in Delhi could not immediately find a Governor for the eastern *Subah*. The task was indeed difficult considering the personality and efficiency of Mir Jumla. Shaista Khan, until then commanding the Mughal forces against the Marathas in the Deccan, took over as the *Subedar* of Bengal in December 1664. During this interregnum period of more than a year, the administration of the province was absolutely looked after by Emperor's nominees, Dilir Khan and Daud Khan respectively. Both of them had to be so much involved in running the normal administration of the extensive province that they had hardly any time to follow up the victory of Mir Jumla in the north-east or even to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo there.

North-Eastern Scene

Meanwhile, the news of the demise of Mir Jumla, the conqueror of Cooch Behar and Assam, on his return march to Dacca was indeed a relief to the vanquished rulers in the north-east. The Ahoms, it may be recalled, were to pay huge indemnity according to the Treaty of Ghilajorighat. Chakradhvaj Singh (1663-1669), who succeeded Jayadhvaj on latter's death, as the Ahom monarch in November 1663 conveniently evaded the payment. The Mughal *Faujdar* of Gauhati, who was also exasperated over the delay in the

payment of the balance could not do anything more than pressing for it with growing harshness. The Mughals, however, did not leave their occupied territory in lower and central Assam, and Kajali on the south bank and Basbari on the north bank in modern Nowgong district continued to be the eastern out-post till 1667.² The Raja of Dimarua, who did not personally visit Mir Jumla on his return journey but had only sent his mother and nephew, did not affirm his allegiance to the Mughals, nor did pay any tribute as demanded by Mir Jumla,³ and seems to have taken an independent posture. Jasomanta Roy, the Raja of Jayantia, had, as it has been mentioned earlier sympathised with the Ahom monarch during Mir Jumla's invasion and indulged in a series of raids in Mughal Sylhet and thus continued to harass the local authorities in that *Sarkar* in the same method.⁴ The Raja also sent an envoy to convey his congratulation to Chakradhvaj Singh on latter's accession to the Ahom throne.⁵ Chakradhvaj Singh, in return wrote to the Raja of Jayantia expressing gratitude for the sympathy during Mughal invasion. He also sent valuable presents for the Raja and sought his friendship.⁶ The Raja of Jayantia also pledged for the continuation of the friendly relation.⁷

Interestingly enough, the State of Darrang whose Raja Makaradhvajnarayan took the side of the Mughals during Mir Jumla's invasion and then died in harness during the battle of Mathurapur at the hands of the Ahoms. Then his widowed queen, the Regent of the state, was called on Mir Jumla on his return march to reaffirm the vassal status of Darrang to the Mughals, though behaved in a curious manner. Indradaman, the new Raja of Darrang also sent congratulatory message to Chakradhvaj Singh on his assumption of the Ahom authority which paved apparently the way for the restoration of the friendly relations between the two parted neighbours.⁸

The relations with the erstwhile rival state of Cachar, however, did not improve so much. It is evident from the fact that when Chakradhvaj Singh demanded the surrender of Barchetia, an Ahom officer, who had taken shelter in

Cachar deserting his monarch during Mir Jumla's invasion, from Birdarpanarayan, the Raja of Cachar, the latter refused to comply with on the ground that the officer had sought refuge in his territory and it was the duty of the monarch to protect him. Nevertheless, the Raja of Cachar offered to help the Ahom monarch in case there is any repetition of the Mughal invasions.⁹ A more serious defiance of the Mughal authority was persisted on by its earliest vassal in the north-east, the state of Cooch Behar. Mir Jumla, it may be recalled, totally annexed Cooch Behar and organised it as a Mughal *Sarkar* when Raja Prannarayan was forced to take refuge in Bhutan. But Prannarayan took full advantage of the then difficulties of Mir Jumla's forces during the occupation of Garhgaon in order to recover his territory and then set himself as an independent ruler till the arrival of Shaista Khan in Bengal and Cooch Behar who had since then thrown away the Mughal suzerainty. The return of Prannarayan to power was in a royal fashion. As soon as he came down from his refuge in the hills, the people of the state gathered round him, killed the Mughal *Thanadar* of Kanthalbari and forced Isfandiar Beg, the Mughal Subedar of Cooch Behar with a view to evacuate the capital by cutting off his supplies. The detachment under Askar Khan then retired to Ghoraghat beyond the southern boundary of Cooch Behar, while the troops under Isfandiar joined the retreating army of Mir Jumla in February 1663. All that the Mughals could do was to occupy the Kuch *Chakla* of Fathepur.¹⁰ Mir Jumla had no time or energy to pacify Prannarayan after the signing of the treaty of Ghilajorighat.

Ahom Moves

Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch, took the advantage of the Mughal indifference towards north-east immediately following the death of Mir Jumla. He had been able to maintain good relations with Jayantia. The attitude of the Raja of Cachar was also not hostile. The friendly gesture of Raja of Darrang was both surprising and encouraging to the monarch. Chakradhvaj Singh was further emboldened to reassert himself from the Mughal yoke by the

independent posture as maintained by the Raja of Cooch Behar. It may be recalled that this state had been subsidiary to the Mughals ever since the rise of the Imperial power in Bengal and served as a catalyst to the Mughal manoeuvres in Assam. Now that Cooch Behar had taken a professedly anti-Mughal stand, the Ahom monarch endeavoured to capitalise the situation by establishing diplomatic relations with Cooch Behar. The exchange of letters and messengers professing friendly relations followed during this period between the courts of Cooch Behar and Assam.¹¹

Having successfully pacified the rulers of the neighbouring states in the region, Chakradhvaj Singh set himself in revitalising his administration. The morale of the people had been greatly undermined during Mir Jumla's invasion. Most of them had become panic stricken or the opportunists and entertained secret sympathy with the powerful invaders. For example Baduli Phukan and a few others were engaged in a treasonable correspondence with the Mohammadans and some of them were arrested and put to death. Again, most of the officers who had taken shelter in the neighbouring areas returned to their duties.¹² Chakradhvaj Singh contemplated immediate resumption of Mughal hostilities. Further, the Ahom monarch had taken a position that threatened the security of the occupied territory of the Mughals in Assam Valley. As a matter of fact, the years immediately following the death of Mir Jumla constitute a remarkable chapter in the Ahom history in as much as they brought their diplomacy, martial ardour and sense of prestige to the highest pitch of efficiency and organisation.¹³ Atan Buragohain, the Prime Minister advised the Ahom monarch for preparing the army and also to collect a sufficient stock of food provisions and war materials so that hostilities might be continued with full force for a considerable number of years in such an eventuality. The Ahom monarch also nourished the scheme to combat the Mughals and to oust them from the occupied territory. Chakradhvaj Singh had already engaged himself in repairing the damaged forts at Samdhara and Patakallang and also in restoring his army to a state of efficiency.¹⁴

Shaista Khan and Frontier States

The ascendancy of Shaista Khan as the viceroy of Bengal in 1664 could partially repair the lost position of the Mughals in the north-east. An experienced and capable administrator and veteran general, the New Nawab was determined to carry out a successful conclusion of the half-done work of Mir Jumla. In March 1664, he reached Rajmahal and announced his plan to conquer Cooch Behar while on his way to Dacca. Prannarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, was alarmed by the news and considered it prudent to save his kingdom by a final submission to the Mughals. He offered to pay a sum of five lakhs and a half in a few instalments as tributes to the Mughal Emperor and as war indemnity to the Nawab. Shaista Khan concentrated more attention in order to subdue the ruler of Aracan who was then responsible for inspiring Magh depredations in Lower Bengal. The Nawab therefore, agreed to the terms offered by Prannarayan and ordered the Mughal army to withdraw from the Kuch frontier when the first instalment was paid by the Raja. The Cooch Behar state thus once again became vassal to the Mughals. Prannarayan died in 1666 and was succeeded by his son, Modhnarayan, whose accession was followed by a series of internal rebellions and misgovernment in the state affairs that prevented its people from raising head against the Mughals for a long time.¹⁵

The news of Shaista Khan's advance and submission of Cooch Behar terrified Jasamanta Roy, the Raja of Jayantia, who had indulged in a series of raids in the Mughal territory since the time of Mir Jumla. The Raja now sent a letter of submission to the Nawab and offered the best elephants in his possession as tributes through the *Faujdar* of Sylhet.¹⁶ The frontier states of Jayantia also thus acknowledged the superior authorities of the Mughals, which was a great diplomatic feat in respect of Shaista Khan. The next important success of Shaista Khan was the conquest of Chittagong and suppression of the Maghs in the extreme south-eastern portion of Bengal in 1666. Chittagong had for sometime been a bone of contention between the Mughals and the

Burmese ever since the Burmese King of Aracan had wrested the districts from the Sultans of Bengal in 1459. The rulers of Aracan had also incurred the vengeance of Aurangzeb by harbouring the fugitive prince Shah Suja and the dislodged Raja Govindamanikya of Tripura in an apparent scheme of making a common cause against the Mughals. Besides being a strategic base in the waterways of Bengal delta, Chittagong had been the nerve centre of the European mercantile concerns of the various nationalities like the Dutch, Portuguese, French and the English. The commercial rivalry between the European contenders evoked consternation on a global basis and consequently the settlements of Portuguese adventures in Aracan usurped some island tracts in that region. The matter came to head when the island of Sandip was conquered by the Aracanese from a Portuguese usurper, and the Dutch factors solidly entrenched themselves in Aracan politics. The European settlers and their local converts known as Feringis and the Magh tribal subjects of the ruler of Aracan, indulged in frequent raids in Chittagong and the adjoining areas causing indignation and harassment to the Mughal frontier administration. An early task of Mir Jumla, it may be recalled, was to lead a campaign against Aracan. But his involvement in Assam and the way his life was cut short, did not leave any opportunity for the Nawab to translate that imperial scheme into action. Naturally, it remained for Shaista Khan as the successor of Mir Jumla to take up the unfinished task of his predecessor, particularly because of the Maghs and the Feringis at the behest of the ruler of Aracan, who took the full advantage of Mughal involvement in Assam and the Deccan and their considerable indifference towards the south-east frontier in order to strike terror in the region.¹⁷

The task was, indeed, difficult as the Aracanese cannons were beyond counting and their war vessels were more numerous than the waves of the sea. They also enjoyed the support of the European defenders particularly the Portuguese and Dilawar Khan, a runaway captain of the Mughal navy, who had established himself as the King of Sandip, and began an anti-Mughal posture. The circumstances, however,

turned the table in favour of the Mughals. A feud broke out between the Magh ruler of Chittagong and the local Portuguese as the result of which that entire Feringi colony crossed over Noakhali with their war boats and other weapons and sought refuge from the Mughal commandant there. Shaista Khan won over these Feringis by extending relief and utilised their services in recovering Chittagong. The defected Mughal Chief of Sandip was easily defeated and captured in November 1665. The major naval battle with the Magh rulers of Chittagong occurred in January 1666 in which the Feringis led Mughals, culminating in the Mughal occupation of Chittagong and since then Chittagong was made the seat of Mughal Faujdar.¹⁸

The renewed Mughal attention towards the eastern frontier and their solid entrenchment in Chittagong was bound to cast cumulative effect upon the neighbouring principality of Tripura. Nakshatra Roy who, it may be recalled, occupied the throne in 1661 by forcing Govindamanikya who then escaped to Aracan, and as such could not get the chance to rule over that State for long. Govindamanikya recovered the throne in 1667, as it is said to be, with the help of the King of Aracan. There is a controversy among the historians about the manner in which Govindamanikya regained the throne. According to some authorities, he became a ruler for the second time after the death of Chatramanikya, while others suggest that he recaptured the throne by assassinating Nakshatra Roy. Be that as it may, no one has so far disputed the fact of his return to power at the support of the Aracanese ruler. It is not unlikely that this was prompted by the policy of the Aracanese in order to instal an ally on the Mughal frontier after the fall of their vassal Magh ruler in Chittagong. It was but natural therefore, that Govindamanikya was commissioned to combat the Mughals and in the circumstances, his relation with the latter was bound to be strange. The Raja of Tripura, however, frustrated the hope of Aracanese by his submission to the Mughal authorities. Immediately on his accession to the throne, Govindamanikya made peace with the Mughals by agreeing to give them five

elephants annually as tribute. Tripura th is again became tributary to the Mughals. Till his death in 1676, Govindamanyia maintained peaceful relations with the Mughals. The royal chronicle also maintains that he subsequently got permission by the Nawab of Bengal for pilgrimage in Bengal and holy bath in the Ganges.¹⁰

The principality of Cachar that was situated between Tripura and Jayantia, bordering the Mughal *Sarkar* in Sylhet does not figure in Mughal records in this period. It is but natural when Jayantia, Chittagong, and Tripura, all in a chain were brought under the vassalage or occupation by Shaista Khan. It was now the turn of Cachar which could not escape the notice of the Nawab. It is possible that the nature of relationship entered into at the time of Prince Shuja was respected also by the Raja of Cachar and thereby no such offence was given to the Mughals. The restrictions imposed on the Raja of Cachar by Mir Jumla during his campaign in Assam about the supply of elephants to the Ahoms were also not violated. As it has already been mentioned, the Ahom-Cachar relations did not improve even after the retreat of Mir Jumla as the Raja refused to comply with the request of the Ahom monarch to surrender, the Ahom officer who had taken refuge in Cachar. On the whole, it may be only presumed that Cachar maintained peaceful relations with the Mughals at that time.

Having thus settled his accounts with all the frontier states in the frontier region right from Cooch Behar to Tripura, Shaista Khan was placed in an advantageous position with a view to insist on the demand for payment of the tributes and balance of the indemnity from the Ahoms. The refusal of the Ahom monarch to comply with the demand and his preparations for war left the only one alternative in respect of the Mughals in order to launch a new campaign.

War Cry of the Ahoms

The Ahom monarch made up his mind to fight. His policy was endorsed in a meeting of the high officials of the State.

The determination of the monarch is also evident from a statement that he made in the meeting wherein he said : "Death is preferable to a life of subordination to foreigners".²⁰ The suggestion of the Prime Minister that any dialogue with the Mughals should be avoided and that the relations should be decided on the war path. The Ahom, therefore, did not follow the path of Cooch Behar and Jayantia. The success of Shaista Khan in enlisting the renewed allegiance of Cooch Behar and Jayantia was a prelude to a stronger policy towards Assam. The submission of these two states had virtually isolated the Ahom monarch who had thrown off the allegiance to the Mughals and stopped the payment of tribute as envisaged in the treaty of Ghilajorighat. The reoccupation of Cooch Behar, moreover, cleared for the Mughals their traditional route for Assam campaign. Thus early in 1667 Sayie Firoz Khan, who had succeeded Rashid Khan as *Thanadar* of Gauhati, sent a strongly worded letter to the Ahom monarch, demanding the payment of the balance of indemnity still outstanding.²¹

The Ahom monarch considered it as an insult and was determined to curb the Mughal audacity. He began his preparations for the war on the extensive scale that continued for two long years. He personally looked after the training of the soldiers, and instructed them about the proper method of playing bows and other weapons of war. A *Phukan* was placed in charge of a contingent of 6,000 soldiers that could spearhead the aggression. When these preparations were completed, the expeditionary forces demonstrated march past before the monarch in their final manoeuvres, and Chakra-dhvaj Singh expressed satisfaction at their dash and gallantry.²² The general selected to command the expedition was Lachit, the son of Momai Tamuli Barbarua, the great statesman-warrior of the reign of Pratap Singh. Lachit had given proofs of his gallantry and leadership in the operations against Mir Jumla's troops and in the various offices he had occupied.²³ He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the army, and was also made *Barphukan* and placed in charge of the civil administration of Lower Assam. Lachit Bar-

phukan inherited from his father this supreme sense of duty, and the capacity for self-effacement in maintaining the integrity of the State.²⁴

After the performance of the religious rites that were customary to the initiation of a campaign, the Ahom army sailed down the Brahmaputra in two divisions, under the leadership of the *Barphukan* and other commanders on 20 August 1667. Before the departure of the army from their rendezvous near the capital, the Ahom monarch urged them to win over the Mughals by any means fair or foul.²⁵ The Ahom army encamped at their base at Kaliabar which was generally the headquarters of the *Barphukan* when Gauhati was under the Mughals. Early in September, 1667 the Ahom Commander Dihingia Phukan succeeded in expelling the Mughals from their garrison at Bahbari. Two leading Mughal Commanders, Lal Bag and Roshan Beg, were also captured together with a substantial quantity of war provisions, and then sent up to Garhgaon.²⁶

Resumption of Gauhati

Proceeding by land and water, the Ahoms directed their attention at storming the Mughal garrisons situated between Kapili and Gauhati, and the forts of Kajali, Sonapur, Panikhaiti and Tatimara soon fell into their hands. Their primary object being the occupation of Gauhati, the Ahoms posted detachments in the eastern precincts of the city on both banks of the river. The Mughals had strongly fortified the towns, and the Ahoms experienced considerable difficulty in their attacks on its several fronts. The Ahoms also succeeded in bringing back the Assamese subjects who had previously been taken as captives by the Mughals during the expedition of Mir Jumla.²⁷

The *Faujdar*, Syed Firoz Khan then sent a message offering his submission to the Ahoms and asking the latter to desist from firing their guns or shooting their arrows. This was done, and the battle came to an end. The *Faujdar* and his associates were captured and brought up as prisoners. The

Ahoms also got possession of the Mughal stores consisting of war provisions, boats, horses, elephants, camels, bullocks, buffalos and a large quantity of gold, silver, brass and copper.²⁸ As a result of the crushing defeat of Mughals, the territory extending up to the river Manas, became once more a part of the Ahom Kingdom. The temporary fortifications at Kaliabar were converted into a strong and permanent citadel and fort known as 'Rangali buruz'.²⁹

Thus within the short space of two months the Ahoms succeeded in recovering their lost possession and along with it their lost prestige and glory of the preceding decade. Chakradhavaj Singh then proceeded in person to Biswanath and performed there a colossal sacrifice in the way of thanks giving to the gods by conferring upon him the honour of a victory. The success of the Ahom in recovering possession of Gauhati and Lower Assam marked an important event in the annals of their conflicts with the Mughals. This event was inscribed on a cannon found at Silghat, near Simlagarh Fort of Nowgong District. The inscription refers to the recovery of the weapon by King Chakradhvaj Singh after having destroyed the Mohammedans in battle in *Saka* 1589.³⁰

The reoccupation of Gauhati by the Ahoms was followed by strenuous preparations on their part for retaining possession of what they had acquired. All the best officers, whether in statesmanship or war, were now stationed at Gauhati. The commanders deliberated frequently on the plan of defence project, and they concluded that the first necessary step was the strengthening of the fortifications of Gauhati, taking advantage of the high hills which surrounded the city on both banks of the river Brahmaputra, so that soldiers and war provisions could be safely accommodated as safety measure.³¹ The intervening field between one hill and the next was to be linked by a newly constructed earthen rampart. The hills and the ramparts taken together would provide a ring of defence about twenty-five miles in circumference, and the city inside, with the Brahmaputra flowing in the middle, would provide a suitable base from where they could control the

operations effectively. Gauhati was finally selected as Assam's war base in view of its superior strategic advantages.³²

Atan Buragohain was asked by the monarch to erect the necessary fortifications on both banks of the river. The *Buragohain* employed all the resources at his disposal, and finished the work within an unexpectedly short time. Lachit Barphukan was also summoned to post a contingent of soldiers at each strategic point under the command of an able officer.³³ The Barphukan used to inspect the strong and vulnerable points in the area on the pretext of hunting on horseback or on foot. The war zone was extended from Pandu to Asurar Ali on the south bank, and from Agiathuti to Kurua on the north. Itakhuli Hill top was selected as the seat of the General Lachit, while the *Buragohain* remained in charge of the northern division at his base on the Lathia Hill or Parbat.³⁴ Thus the Ahoms stood ready for launching fresh encounter with the imperialists.

Mughal Reaction

The news of the defeat of the Sayed Firuz Khan and the loss of Gauhati, reached Aurangzeb in December, 1667. The Emperor at once decided to depute the Rajput general Raja Ram Singh, son of Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Ambar, in order to lead an expedition against Assam. On December 27, 1667, Ram Singh was seen off with a robe, a horse with gold trappings and a jewelled dagger with pearl strap. Nasir Khan, Keshari Singh Bhurtia (Rathor), Raghunath Singh, Brahmdeo Sisodia and many other nobles and *mansabdars* were also appointed under him.³⁵ Ram Singh's army consisted of 21 Rajput Chiefs, 4,000 troopers in his own pay, 1,500 gentlemen-troopers and 500 artillerymen; and with reinforcements from Bengal Viceroy, his total army swelled up to 30,000 infantry, 18,000 Turkish cavalry and 15,000 native archers.³⁶

Ram Singh was accompanied in his expedition by Rashid Khan who had been in Assam during Mir Jumla's invasion and who had also served as *Faujdar* of Gauhati for four years. It was the practice of Emperor Aurangzeb to depute a

Muslim Officer as second-in-command when a Hindu was placed in sole charge of an expedition, specially when the enemy himself was a Hindu. It was in pursuance of this policy that Dilir Khan had been sent with Mirza Raja Jai Singh in the war against Shivaji.³⁷ Ram Singh also met Nawab Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal Subah at Dacca. Being a close and intimate friend of Mirza Raja Jai Singh, now deceased, the Nawab received Ram Singh very cordially, and offered to help him in all possible ways. He at once sanctioned a reinforcement of 2,000 soldiers from the Bengal command.³⁸

Ram Singh at Rangamati

In February 1669, Ram Singh arrived at Rangamati, the frontier garrison of Mughal India. The Assamese generals now became more vigilant and circumspect in their preparations for resisting the invading forces. Fresh ramparts were constructed on both banks of the river. Lachit Barphukan's maternal uncle was entrusted with the construction of a rampart on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Having failed to complete it within the prescribed time he was executed by Lachit Barphukan who declared on the occasion, "My maternal uncle is not greater than my country."³⁹ This sternness produced the desired effect upon the army, and averted all possible slackness and delinquency.

Barphukan's Strategy

Vigilance is the price of freedom, and Ahom spies had followed Ram Singh's army since their departure from Delhi. Then the news of Ram Singh's departure from Dacca was promptly communicated to Ahom general. So the *Barphukan*, in order to lure the invaders into the war-zone of Gauhati, surrounded by hills on all sides with forts and garrisons at regular intervals, despatched three *Rajkhowas* to Manas river to seduce the enemy into the neighbourhood of Gauhati.⁴⁰ The Assamese Commanders met at Gauhati and offered their prayer at the temple of Kamakya for sure success against the invaders. The waters on the north bank of the Brahmaputra

were guarded by Pani-Dihingia Rajkhowa, nephew of the Dihingia Phukan, with 80 *Char-bachese* and Burgohain Phukan with 100 *Char-bachese*.⁴¹

In April 1669, Raja Ram Singh pitched his camp at Sualkuchi on the north bank and deployed his soldiers in the outlying villages situated in the immediate vicinity of the Ahom fortifications. His enthusiasm was marred by the arrogant attitude of Rashid Khan, the *Faujdar* of Gauhati. The misunderstanding between the two Mughal dignitaries gave an advantageous position to the Ahom general who in turn tried to gain time with a view to consolidate and perfect his preparations.⁴² The Barphukan despatched a messenger to Ram Singh to enquire of the reasons for his coming to Assam, adding that if there was any issue of dispute it could be settled by peaceful negotiations, as war was not the only method for such settlement. In return, Ram Singh demanded the restoration of the limits as fixed by the Treaty of 1639, failing which the *Barphukan* was asked to give the Rajput Raja 'a fight for an honour'.⁴³

Early Encounter

Meanwhile, Rashid Khan from his base at Hajo advanced along the north Brahmaputra Valley and was planning to attack the Ahom front at Sorai or Amingaon. The guns on both sides began to discharge their contents. Ram Singh's nephew was killed by an arrow and a cannon-shot made a breach in the tent of the Rajput general. The battle ended without any decisive result.⁴⁴ A friction had developed between Ram Singh and Rashid Khan. The latter, having previously been in independent command at Gauhati, could not brook a subordinate position, and claimed equal rank with Ram Singh. To make matters worse he was suspected of secret correspondence with enemy. "At last Ram Singh had to expel Rashid Khan from his camp after cutting his tent ropes."⁴⁵ The Ahoms gained a naval battle and thence forth drove the Muhammadans from Sualkuchi.

Sporadic engagements accompanied by proposals of peace continued during 1669 and 1670. The Mughals made an

attempt to enter Gauhati through Darrang but it was baffled through the timely warning of the vassal Raja of Rani.⁴⁶ In an encounter near Sesa river in the vicinity of Agiathuti, the Ahoms first obtained a victory over the Mughals but Ram Singh took the field in person and inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Ahoms. At Rangmahal on the north bank, the Ahom forces led by *Gohain-Phukan*, first encountered a reverse. But the Commanders re-arranged the war bases and compelled the Mughals to withdraw their forces from the attacks without achieving any tangible result.⁴⁷

The Ahoms supplemented these open encounters by waging guerrilla fighting for which ample facilities were provided by their unobserved camps and garrisons that were situated in the thick woods and lofty hill-tops. But these guerrilla tactics did not carry the Ahoms very far beyond harassing the enemy. They realised that the enemy must be definitely repulsed and dislodged and expelled from their position, so that prospect of their re-attack was completely eliminated. Now onwards the Ahom army avoided open encounters with the enemy.⁴⁸ The postponement of a decisive encounter implied some degree of vacillation on the part of the Ahom commanders. Exaggerated reports of the *Barphukan's* dilatory methods reached the ears of the Ahom monarch, Chakradhavaj Singh. He threatened the *Barphukan* and his commanders with dire punishment if they further postponed their offensive operations. The Mughals had then concentrated near Aliabor Hill on the outskirts of a vast plain in which flows the Brahmaputra on the one side and the Sesa river on the other.⁴⁹

Ram Singh now thought that the disaster at Aliabar must have humbled the spirit of the Assamese and he repeated his series of demands for the evacuation of Gauhati with vehemence and rigour. The conciliatory attempts having failed, the Rajput general now adopted the two other stereotyped methods of overcoming an enemy party by way of rupture and gifts. Further, Ram Singh tried to bribe the *Phukans* and *Rajkhowas* but no such corruption could contaminate

the patriotic zeal of the Assamese commanders.⁵⁰ No other course was now left to Ram Singh but a definite attack on Gauhati as the next alternative means. Ram Singh proposed to enter Gauhati by the breach in the rampart at Andhurarali with a detachment of his cavalry, by carrying his men and horses in boats across the river.⁵¹

At this critical juncture, Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch died in April 1670. His brother Maju Gohain, thenceforth known as Sunyatpha, succeeded him. He assumed the Hindu name Udayaditta Singh and married his deceased brother's wife.⁵² The leadership of the new monarch fell far short of the spirited exertions of his patriotic predecessor. The long continuance of hostilities without any decisive result produced some discontent in the Ahom camp. Ram Singh's demands for the restoration of the limits of 1639 as mentioned earlier received a more encouraging response from the *Barphukan* and his lieutenants; and the diplomatic dialogues and negotiations became more cordial than before. Nevertheless, Aran Buragohain, the Prime Minister, did not support this change in the attitude of his colleagues.⁵³

The dislodgement of the Ahoms from Gauhati, said the *Buragohain*, might be followed by their expulsion from the capital Garhgaon. Udayaditya Singh confirmed the views of the *Buragohain*, and directed the Commanders to bring the war to a victorious conclusion.⁵⁴ Ram Singh's continuous efforts were interrupted on receiving reports of his son's maltreatment at the hands of Emperor Aurangzeb, Lachit Barphukan did not hesitate to give warning to Ram Singh, even though Lachit was attacked by illness.⁵⁵

Ahom Success at Saraighat

Lachit Barphukan sent messages from his sick-bed expressing his determination to die on the spot rather than desert his charge. He was removed on his bed to the gatehouse from where he observed the fury of the attack made by the Mughals upon his boats and sailors on the waters of the

Brahmaputra. On an auspicious moment the plan for counterattack was completed by Lachit Barphukan and he boarded his boat accompanied by six other war-vessels. The naval warfares under Ram Singh suffered immense setback.⁵⁶

The appearance of Lachit Barphukan filled the hearts of his soldiers with animation and courage. He rushed towards the enemy with his seven boats and was soon joined by Ahom fleet and in the fight that ensued the Mughals could not stand the well-directed attack of the Ahom soldiers.⁵⁷ The combat came to an end, and it was a decisive victory for the Ahoms. This fierce engagement became one of the most eventful battles known as the battle of Saraighat. The Mughals were chased down to Pandu, and then beyond Assam's western frontier at Manas river and the Ahoms retained their possession of Gauhati and Kamrup.⁵⁸ Thus the battle of Saraighat can be considered as epoch making in the annals of Assam history for its far reaching effects in every segment of whole north-east India in particular and India in general.

Lachit Barphukan who was in high fever when he led the attack against the Mughals, died soon after the memorable triumph at Saraighat.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the counsels of Atan Buragohain helped a lot for the success of Barphukan. Atan Buragohain was in complete command on the north bank making a camp at Lathia Hill. The failure of the Mughals to break through the Ahom fortifications on the north bank proved the unique gallantry and organisation as displayed by Atan Buragohain. Even he infused fresh vigour into the wavering hearts of his colleagues and checked their plans and measures whenever he found them to be ill-conceived, and hence detrimental to the best interest of his country. Though both sides were weary of the war, the Buragohain did not allow any concession to the reciprocal dialogues. Consequently during the second half of 1670, there was a lull in the fighting.⁶⁰

Aftermath

Raja Ram Singh being frustrated in his attempt to recover the possession of Gauhati retired from the Agiatuti Hills to

the Mughal garrison at Rangamati, and waited there during the eight decades of the seventeenth century for an opportunity to renew the Assam campaign.⁶¹ All Ahom officers remained vigilant in securing the occupied territories from the Mughal authorities. However, Udayaditya had to manage the affairs of the capital with the aid of few inferior commanders. The three ministers, the *Buragohain*, the *Barpatra Gohain* and the *Bargohain*, paid occasional visits to Garhgaon, but their temporary intervention could not offer any effective check to the evil designs and machinations of ambitions and unscrupulous nobles.⁶²

Atan Buragohain had thus a dual duty to perform by way of supervising the military affairs at Gauhati and of the civil administration at Garhgaon. His attention was concentrated mainly at Gauhati due to the demise of Lachit Barphukan. The Barphukanship was conferred upon his elder brother Nimati commonly known as Metakatalia Laluk Sola Barphukan.⁶³

The wisdom and foresight of Atan Buragohain came out in the advice he tendered to Udayditya Singh who also launched an expedition against the Dafla tribe living in the adjoining hills of North Lakhimpur. The western front of Ahom territory reached up to Hadira, opposite Goalpara. Chandranarayan alias Suryanarayan, son of Mohendranarayan and grandson of Balinarayan was installed as tributary Raja of Darrang and Gandharbanarayan as Raja of Beltola. The Bar Barua and the Bar gohain were entrusted with the arrangements for the defence of Upper Assam.⁶⁴

After March 1671, Ram Singh was virtually isolated at Rangamati. There he spent his days in the midst of worries and uncertainties. Sometime in 1676 he received permission to leave Bengal, and reached the imperial court in June.⁶⁵ It may be recalled that the Mughal authorities of Bengal under Shaista Khan did not take active initiative in reviving the strength of Ram Singh in the later stage. Even the imperial government was not timely apprised as done in the case of Mir Jumla's campaign. Evidently, the Ahom monarch

could systematically consolidate his available sources of strength despite the defection of few court officials.⁶⁶

Indeed, Udayaditya Singh did not live to reap the fruits of his well-earned victory. He fell a victim to a palace conspiracy set up in the interest of his younger brother and was put to death in August 1673. He was murdered by Debera, a *Hazarika* from Dakhinpat, in collaboration with Saru Gohain, the monarch's brother. Nevertheless, Udayaditya Singh gave unbounded hope and aspiration to the people of Assam by the conquest of Kamrup from the Mughals and the construction of strong fortifications at Gauhati.⁶⁷

The Mughal Viceroy was then Shaista Khan whose age reached about sixty-three. During his two term Viceroyalty (1664-78 and 1679-88), he could not give any encouraging hope for revigorating the policy matters towards north-east frontier. He came to Jahaṅgirnagar with his five sons, two sons-in-law, Nawab Nurulla Khan, Muhammad Maqim and many other *Mansabdars*.⁶⁸ In youth he had been remarkable for his military capacity and energy, especially in the Deccan campaign of Shah Jahan. But in Bengal he was a tired old man, who depended mainly upon his subordinates while he himself spent his days in ease and pleasure amidst his numerous harems.⁶⁹

However, the most memorable work of Shaista Khan in Bengal was the conquest of Chittagong and the breaking of the pirates' nest, which had long terrorised the waterways of the Bengal delta. He was more interested in amassing wealth by exploring the various ways.⁷⁰ Shaista Khan used to import by ship various commodities like salt, betel nuts and other articles and sold them in Bengal on profitable terms. Besides, he accumulated seventeen crores of rupees by procuring two or three *tolas* of gold for one gold mohur. He had a trade monopoly by putting restriction upon the merchants and traders in the city of Dacca. Most of the European traders were thus debarred from making purchases and sales on their own account.⁷¹

Shaista Khan virtually established a family rule in Bengal. Indeed, his sons were gifted with adventuring spirit. Thus Buzurg Ummid Khan became victorious in Chittagong campaign in 1666 and then promoted to Subahdar of Bihar. The next son Zafar Khan was posted as *thanadar* of Chittagong; Abu Nasar as the deputy Subahdar of Orissa and Tradat Khan as *Faujdar* of Cooch Behar respectively. Thus one family started ruling in all divisions of Bengal, and ruled them worthily.⁷² Shaista Khan did not dare to take the risk of Assam campaign in person. Moreover, the Emperor was pre-occupied with the north-western and Deccan problems. Evidently, the Emperor's attention towards the military projects of Bengal was not seriously taken. Aurangzeb was bound to be satisfied by the substantial cash amount as provided by Shaista Khan.⁷³

Behind the Victory

The defeat of the Mughals at the battle of Saraighat and their retreat to Rangamati wherefrom Ram Singh actually retired, speak a volume about the strength and vigour of the Ahoms at the time vis-a-vis the weakness of the forces under Ram Singh. This might appear surprising within a few years of an accomplished expedition under Mir Jumla and more so, when Aurangzeb was still the reigning Emperor of Delhi. The reasons are, however, not far to seek.

After the death of Mir Jumla, the Mughal navy decayed in the eastern sector, Shaista Khan's effort did not yield expected results due to apathetic attitude of the European factors. A deadlock was created by the imposition of restrictions on the existing trade facilities as previously enjoyed by the European traders. Consequently, Shaista Khan was deprived of receiving source materials so long controlled by the foreign powers in Bengal.⁷⁴

When the naval strength of Bengal was on decline, the Ahoms began massive preparations of war-boats. The Ahom war boats had certain advantages in comparison to the Mughal boats. The Ahom war-ships were lighter and speedy

whereas those of the Mughals were larger and heavier.⁷⁵ Further, in the north-eastern part of Bengal, jungly hills, morasses and innumerable brooks rendered the cavalry practically useless. It may be recalled that the Ahom monarch did not encourage the maintenance of cavalry. The trained elephants were used by the Ahoms in major encounters. Like the Maghs and Feringis of Aracan range who traversed the numerous rivers and streams of south-eastern Bengal, the mainstay of the Ahom defence organisation was the war fleet. Moreover, prolonged rains and almost annual floods in Assam Valley made any campaign or transportation of merchandise absolutely impossible without a strong fleet. Above all, "the course and duration of the Ahom-Mughal contests were largely determined by the physical features of the Brahmaputra."⁷⁶

Certain other factors also helped the strong organisation of the Ahom flotilla. In Assam there was abundant raw material for building war-boats of various types. The people living in the river side of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries had a natural skill and bravery in the art of plying boats. The Ahom monarchs appointed specialised officials for royal navy. Thus the *Naubaichia* had an allotment of 1,000 men for manning the royal boats, while the *Nausalia Phukan* was entrusted with one thousand carpenters for building and repairing the boats.⁷⁷

The Mughals were severely terrorised and harassed by the guerrilla wars as waged by the Ahoms like the Marathas in the south. Ram Singh, the General of Aurangzeb remarked that "every Assamese soldier is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and in wielding guns and cannon. I have not seen such specimens of versatility in any other part of India."⁷⁸ The Ahom army largely consisted of infantry, navy and elephants. But on land the army mainly depended on the *paiks*. The *paik* system was the basis not only of the entire socio-political aspect but also of the military organisation as well.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, "the military system of the Ahoms derived its efficiency from the maximum utilisation of all the available resources of the country such

as its manpower, its economic strength, its strategic advantages, the religious sentiments of the people, and even their superstition.⁸⁰ With the help of an organisation as based on perpetual vigilance and preparedness, and diplomacy of a high order, the Ahoms maintained their sway over the Brahmaputra valley in almost uninterrupted manner for six hundred years; and successive generals of the invading forces—Afgan, Mughal and later on the Burmese—expressed their unstinted admiration of the fighting mettle of the Ahoms, their versatility, and their ability to shrink their differences in the face of a national ordeal.⁸¹ A ready militia was always available for quick mobilisation and the *paiks* took the respective duties under their respective captainship of the *Phukans*, *Rajkhowas*, *Baruas*, *Hazarikas*, *Saikias* and *Boras*. The co-operation of the neighbouring tribes-men also greatly helped the war-operations of the Ahoms.⁸²

The Ahoms were fearless in facing the situation created by any war. They rather became more active by rendering patriotic services in every phase of administrative and productive aspect of the country. Thus the production of war equipments and food provisions was equally carried on a war-footing. The activities of the dockyards and arsenals became prompt. The surrounding area of the Ahom palace was covered by the factories run by band of expert smiths who make muskets, cannons, swords, spears and arrows. Even the monarch himself supervised the workshops in addition to imparting of the training directives to the new recruits.⁸³

The espionage system of Ahoms though simple was highly efficient and the spies were always vigilant and busied themselves in supplying information about the designs of the neighbours and the resources of the enemy. The Mughal spies had to take more time in collecting news due to communication bottlenecks. So the Ahoms took advantage of the interval, gained additional time by despatching emissaries to the invading generals under countless pretexts, and thereby perfected their own preparation. Usually the Ahom preferred intelligent *Brahmins* in the appointment of emissary

who could diplomatically silence the arrogant attitude of the Mughal commanders. The spying net of suspense could mystify the Mughal authorities who were always haunted with dubious hopes in their military operations.⁸⁴

The methods of warfare in north-east India were surely dictated by its unaccustomed topography. The trained cavalry of the Mughals were too much of a match for the Ahoms, and they, therefore, avoided open attacks. The Ahom commanders followed a policy of attacking the enemy camps during the mid hours of the night. "Shivaji's success against the Mughals in 1665 encouraged the Ahom monarch Chakradhvaj Singh to speed up his preparations in order to recover Gauhati."⁸⁵ In fact, the Ahom soldiers were the masters of a variety of tactical skills which they had acquired as cultivators and householders.

The hillocks in Assam offered ready made sites for fortifications. The hills on both banks of the Brahmaputra were capped with forts which caused wonder even to the Mughal general Mir Jumla. The mountains in the adjoining areas of Gauhati were strongly fortified and linked with each other by a chain of ramparts erected in the intervening plains. The trained soldiers were posted in military outposts in order to guard and secure the line of communication. Above all, the military system of the Ahoms was highly organised and it enabled the Ahoms to keep up the supremacy over Brahmaputra valley for such a long period. A Muslim historian, Muhammad Kazim, admitted that "the Rajas of Assam had curbed the ambition and checked the conquest of the most victorious princes of Hindustan; the solution of a war against them has baffled the penetration of heroes who have been styled conquerors of the world."⁸⁶

Evidently, the Ahoms were in stronger position in comparison to the Mughals. In addition to the great military tradition and organisation, particularly the navy, as discussed above, the geography itself was to their special advantage. The partial success of Mir Jumla in temporary occupation of Assam and forcing a treaty on the Ahom monarch were virtu-

ally all undone during Ram Singh's campaign. Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch, who ascended the throne almost immediately after Mir Jumla's return to Bengal set himself in reorganising the government and the defence of the Ahom state was revitalised in order to recoup its lost prestige and valour. His policy was continued further by his successor Udayaditya Singh. To the fortune of the Ahoms, these two succeeding monarchs were assisted by a highly calibrated and dedicated statesman and general in the personalities of Atan Buragohain and Lachit Barphukan respectively.⁸⁷ The Mughals suffered handsomely due to lack of geographical knowledge of the new area and its strange climate. Neither their army was suitable to the conditions in Brahmaputra valley nor could they receive adequate support and reinforcement from the Imperial government of Aurangzeb, who were then awfully busy in the Deccan wars. Unfortunately for Ram Singh, the Mughal general, he was pitted against the zeal and patriotism of valiant Lachit. The navy that decided the battle of Saraighat, as already said, was a great weakness of the Mughals, in addition they were destined to fight upstream.

An interesting feature in Ram Singh's campaign that created further confusion in the Mughal camps was the way the General was deserted by the Sikh Commander. Raja Ram Singh took the Sikh leader in his Assam campaign. The Sikhs under the guidance of Teg Bahadur became anxious to spread the message of Sikh creed in every part of India, especially in the eastern region. Teg Bahadur also resided for a time at Patna where he rendered his missionary services.⁸⁸ Since Teg Bahadur was in the rank of a mercenary Commander, he naturally avoided the compulsory obligations of the Mughal army. Moreover, the Sikh leader was more interested to revive the militant spirit among his followers through the preachings of Guru Nanak unlike Islam. When Teg Bahadur came down to Rangamati, the seat of Mughal garrison, "he meditated on the bank of the Brahmaputra and he is stated to have convinced the pulsating heart of the Raja of Kamruj."⁸⁹ The Ahom ruler and the neigh-

bouring Rajas were indirectly convinced to form a league for the safety of Hindu religion.⁹⁰

Most probably, during the idle days of Ram Singh, the message of Teg Bahadur inspired the local Rajas and convinced Ahom monarch to reassert his kingly spirit. Thereafter, Teg Bahadur left Rangamati in 1675 for his home, leaving a section of his Sikh followers to settle permanently in Assam, without the sanction of imperial order. Evidently, the Emperor Aurangzeb suspected the performance of the soldier priest and put him to death as a rebel in 1675 with great cruelty in the street of Delhi.⁹¹

Ram Singh's failure to receive the support and inspiration that was required in a Imperial campaign in a distant frontier from his own government, stood decidedly against him. The Mughal general was forced to withdraw to Rangamati in the west of Assam. This enabled the Ahoms to regain their lost territories in lower Assam and consolidate their position firmly. It is curious to note that Ram Singh withdrew himself in 1671 and encamped there till 1676. The prolonged haltage of Ram Singh at Rangamati after retreat from war theatre during the eighth decade of the seventeenth century creates some mystery. There is also lack of any activity on the part of a Mughal general whose fate was in suspense. A static life was not conducive to martial Rajput. He was neither called back nor asked to renew the Assam campaign. His stay there was limited only to some border clashes with the Ahoms.⁹² Some historians believe that Ram Singh was not called back with an avowed object of Imperial punishment for his failure to uphold Mughal interests in Assam.⁹³ There is no definite information to offer any scientific analysis of the situation. The hypothesis that logically follows is that the matter can be reviewed in the context of the Deccan war of Aurangzeb. It is possible that the Emperor intended to reinforce the detachments under Ram Singh as soon as the Marathas were subdued. As this did never happen and in 1670s the hostilities of the Marathas attained a serious magnitude against the Mughals, Ram Singh had to be called back abandoning the hope of immediately recapturing the ceded

territories from the Ahoms. It may also be assumed that the stay of Ram Singh at Rangamati was not without any purpose. These years of apparent inaction could be utilised by the Mughal general in understanding the hazardous frontiers and establishing diplomatic contacts with the local chiefs.⁹¹

A significant achievement of Ram Singh's stay was the continued loyalty of Cooch Behar. The Raja of Cooch Behar, it may be recalled, assumed an independent posture since the war of succession for the Mughal throne during Shah Jahan's illness and was forced to submit after the ascendancy of Shaista Khan as the Nawab of Bengal. The disasters suffered by the Mughals in Assam and their difficult time with the Marathas in the south could have inspired the Raja to reassert himself once again. That it did not happen might be considered as no mean result of Ram Singh's presence in the *neighbourhood*. The zamindars and petty chieftains of the area like those of Bijni, Koraibari, Susang or Darrang also showed no symptom of rebellion. The relations established with the eastern states of Jayantia and Tripura by Shaista Khan also remained unchanged.

NOTES

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2. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 183.
3. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
4. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 36-37.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
8. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati).
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11. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 88.
12. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 188.
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18. *Ibid.*, p. 212; W. Irvine, *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, pp. 109-10.
19. *Rajmala*, Education Directorate, Tripura, p. 80.
20. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati); H. Goswami, *Purani Assam Buranji*, p. 103.
21. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 89.
22. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 91.
23. S.K. Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, pp. 17-25; *Assam Buranji*, p. 91.
24. *Ibid.*
25. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 83-84.
26. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 355, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati); S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 91-92.
27. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 92-93; H. Goswami, *Purani Assam Buranji*, pp. 104-05; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 92.
28. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 92-93; S.K. Dutta, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 28-30.
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31. S.K. Bhuyan, "Mir Jumla and Ram Singh in Assam", J.I.H., Vol. V. 1926, pp. 373-79.
32. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 63.
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50. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 96-97.
51. G.C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, pp. 203-4.
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53. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Burgohain and His Times*, pp. 75-76.
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55. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 100-101.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
57. L. Gogoi, *Saraighatar Yuddhar Katha*, pp. 23-28.
58. *Ibid.*

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60. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 189; S.K. Bhuyan, *Kamrupar Buranji*, pp. 96-97.
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63. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 79.
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93. S.K. Bhuyan; "Mir Jumla and Ram Singh in Assam", J.I.H., Vol. V, 1926, pp. 375-79; W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II., pp. 142-43.
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Years of Inaction

THE WITHDRAWAL OF RAM SINGH, the Rajput general of the Mughals, from Saraighat and his idle stay at Rangamati as already mentioned earlier virtually marked the end of Mughal forward policy in Assam. The hope of Aurangzeb about the resumption of campaign could not mature due to the more serious challenges to his imperial stranglehold by the more martial races in the western and north western sentinels of the empire.¹ The years that followed noticed prolonged inaction on the part of the Mughals, although several opportunities were available to them in order to extend the imperial frontiers by the weaknesses and internal dissensions in the north-eastern states.

The victors of Saraighat, on the other hand, suffered most in this era of chaotic rule caused by weak and incompetent princess, unscrupulous and ambitious ministers and internal corruptions and dissensions. The exemplary success of Ahoms at Saraighat that had forced the Mughals to withdraw from Gauhati and Kamrup by way of extending the western boundary of the State proved their prowess and national spirit, but however the internal chaos barred their subsequent achievement. Unfortunately for the Ahoms, Lachit Barphukan passed away no sooner had the battle ended and Udayaditya Singh (1669-72) was assassinated in a palace rebellion spear-headed by his younger brother Saru Gohain, later Ramadhvaj Singh (1672-75) in league with a hoard of unscrupulous nobles headed by one Debera. These disgruntled officials took the advantage of the absence of the stalwarts of the state who had just completed their victory against the Mughals and were encamping at Gauhati in order to guard the State's vulnerable western frontier against the redoubtable Imperial

foes. The Ahom court in the capital of Garhgaon was thus left in the hands of these minor but crazy officials who began to indulge in ministerial politics for personal gains at a time when the monarchy could play a crucial role in expanding and consolidating its position.²

Politics in Ahom Court

In November 1672, Ramadhvaj Singh formally ascended the throne. The new monarch tried to ease his conscience by instituting expiatory measures in atonement for the sin of fratricide. He appointed pious Brahmin priests in order to perform sacrificial rites at Golaparaghat on which occasion he liberally distributed gifts to the other priests and astrologers. Therein assembled the Vaisnava devotees who arranged religious recitals which continued uninterrupted for seven days and nights.³

Debera alias Lachai, the ring³ leader of the conspiracy which brought the monarch to the throne, was lifted from the post of *Hazarika* to *Bar Barua*.⁴ In fact, the 'Kingship' of Ramdhvaj was unstable as it was tainted by fratricide and massacre of innocents. As arranged by Debera, a number of influential nobles informed the monarch that Longichang Bar Gohain was in league with the disciples of Mayamara Mahamta. He then started hatching a plan in order to kill Ramdhvaj Singh and place on the throne Moran Gohain who was the son of Udayaditya Singh. Debera, the leader of the reign of terror, also produced witnesses just to support the allegations of conspiracy. The tragic fate was shared both by Langichang Bar Gohain and Mora Gohain without any trial.⁵

Ramadhvaj's growing illness combined with the misgiving arising out of the tragic end of Langichang Bar Gohain and Mora Gohain prompted him to make timely arrangements for a peaceful succession in the event of his demise. The monarch summoned a meeting of nobles with a view to finalise the crucial issue. Some recommended the candidate of King's brothers, other favoured the son of Ramdhvaj Singh and the

third group decided to install Kalia Gohain, the only surviving son of Udayaditya Singh. Though Debera Bar Barua was not invited to take part in the deliberation, yet he got the proceedings of the vital summit. He could now realise that his position would be endangered if the last-mentioned would succeed to the throne and determine to ruin the plan of Ramdhvaj Singh.⁶

The monarch, too, decided to kill Debera and engaged Tangachu Phukan to execute the plan. From that moment Debera became extremely careful and hatched a political conspiracy in league with opposition group. He then killed the main officials of the royal court and finally, in March 1675, caused the monarch to be poisoned.⁷ The murder of Ramadhvaj Singh was indeed a prelude to the brutalities of Debera which he now pursued with undiminished ferocity. The modus operandi adopted by him in his campaign of slaughter was as follows : when an official will be visiting the court in connection with his duties, Debera would announce to him that the monarch was offended with him and had, therefore, asked him to renounce his office and retire to his house. The officer would then be deprived of his retainers and insignias of office. Ratanpuria and Dakhinpatia would then be instructed to escort the dismissed officer to his dwelling house. They would in their turn, cut the officer into pieces. In this way, Debera caused the destruction of high officials of Garhgaon including the claimants of Tipam and Namrup Raja. Thus the descendants of Ramadhvaj Singh were put to an end.⁸

Debera then placed on the throne a prince of the Samuguria branch of the royal family. The new monarch was known as Suhung Raja. Debera Bar Barbara now suspected the loyalty of the monarch who was assassinated after a reign of only twenty-one days.⁹ The ill-fated monarch was replaced by one Gobar Raja, alias Gobar Gohain, of the Tungkhungia family. On this occasion too the shrewd Debera succeeded. He committed many misdeeds and practically assumed sovereign power as well as the status of the powerful noble of the State. He could now install any one of his choice as

a puppet on the throne and see his final end in case of any difference whatsoever. The new monarch was obviously alarmed at the atrocities of the disgruntled noble and decided to kill him. Gobar Raja, the Ahom monarch, was also thus put to death after reigning for barely a month in A.D. 1675.¹⁰

As a number of provincial nobles at Gauhati were sure to disfavour Debera's elevation to the status of a dictator of the State, he therefore hastened the death of a few others. His prominent antagonists were, however, Laluk Sola Barphukan, the Ahom Viceroy at Gauhati and Atan Buragohain, the Prime Minister who continued to encamp at Gauhati as the possibility of fresh invasions of the Mughals had not yet completely disappeared.¹¹ The Prime Minister was then engaged in repairing the old forts and constructing new ones in and around Gauhati. Debera's diabolical activities reached its climax when he despatched emissaries to capture and kill the *Barphukan* and the *Buragohain*. However, the officials in Gauhati could smell the evil designs of Debera who wanted to be the dictator on the ruins of monarchy by connivance and as such began their expedition and machinations against Debera.¹²

In this politics of power that enveloped the Ahom court, only the nobles of low calibre were actually involved as the veterans of the State who were preoccupied with the threat from the Mughals. Under no circumstances, they could be persuaded to relax their efforts as the threat of a foreign invasion was still looming large upon Raja Ram Singh who continued to stay at Rangamati. They had to choose between two alternatives—the suppression of the disorders at Garhgaon, and adherence to their military responsibilities at Gauhati—and naturally they opted for the second.¹³

Nevertheless, the deterioration in the affairs of Garhgaon concerned them much. The stalwarts of anti-Debera confederacy decided to proceed to the seat of Ahom capital in order to exterminate the reign of terror. Atan Buragohain, the great patriot, launched the campaign with a view to extinguish the excesses of Deber Bar Barua during the early part of 1675

giving full responsibility of state affairs to the army commanders.¹⁴

With a section of the Ahom force in Gauhati and raising new militias that were offered by the veteran commanders of Saraighat, the Buragohain led the expedition up to Garhgaon. Debera realised the futility of resisting the advancing army and tried to prevent their progress by way of diplomatic overtures. The supporters of Debera were demoralised the moment Gauhati commanders appeared in the vicinity of Garhgaon. The frustrated followers did not fail to foresee the inevitable termination of the reign of terror which was engineered by their master after taking advantage of the absence of royal patriots.¹⁵

Debera Bar Barua, the ring leader of the reign of anarchy was captured and sentenced to death. So the evil designs of both Gobar Raja and Devar Bar Barua as referred to had been nipped in the bud.¹⁶ Atan Buragohain thereupon set himself in cleansing the administration by replacing most of the officers who also had shared the mis-rule of Debera. Eventually, Laluk Barphukan and other commanders returned to their respective positions leaving Atan Buragohain in charge of state affairs.¹⁷

Arjun Kowar, known as Dihingia Raja, was installed as the monarch. Before installing him, the nobles had themselves appointed a new *Bar Barua* in place of diseased Debera. The beginning of the reign of Dihingia Raja was smooth and peaceful due to the active service and co-operation of Atan Buragohain. But a section of the officers disliked this combination, as they abhorred the growing power of the *Buragohain*.¹⁸ As advised by them, Dihingia Raja, with a view to secure the throne for his own sons, killed the princess who descended from Suklenmung, Gargayan Raja. The *Buragohain* and his colleagues condemned and disapproved this ruthless slaughter. Henceforth, the Dihingia Raja employed spies to keep a dog watch over the political designs of the *Buragohain* and his associates.¹⁹

The Raja's plan just to put an end to the life of the *Buragohain* which became known to the *Phukans*, ruined the cause of the monarch. Further the *Buragohain* was also persuaded by his loyal colleagues to lead all the available officers in the capital with a plan to assassinate the Raja. The failure in an initial attempt forced the *Buragohain* to retreat towards Dergaon where he was joined by the commanders from Gauhati in organising an army. This was followed by an open battle between the forces of the Raja and the Prime Minister in which the latter won and succeeded in occupying the capital and executing the Raja and his sons.²⁰

After this carnage, the *Phukans* and other nobles again pressed the *Buragohain* to assume the sovereign power, giving reasons that his refusal to offer on the previous occasion, after the death of Gobar Raja, had involved his friendly associates in such awful predicaments. But Atan Buragohain refused on the ground that he was not entitled to the throne according to the tradition and convention of the Ahom State. On the other hand, he persuaded the nobles to crown Sudaipha, the Raja of Parbatia clan as the monarch.²¹

The assumption of royal throne by Sudaipha, the Parbatia Raja, was followed by a partial overhauling of the official personnel which was then carried out mainly by the counsels of Atan Buragohain. The relations between Parvatia Raja and Atan Buragohain continued to be cordial for sometime. At latter's instance Mecha Bar Barua, who had then become obnoxious to him, was dismissed; but he tried to take revenge upon the *Buragohain* as well as the monarch. He fled to Gauhati and apprised Laluk Barphukan and his close aides who agreed to render full assistance in favour of *Barbarua's* design. The matter came to a head when Parvatia Raja summoned *Bar Barua*, who was then in league with the *Phukans* at Gauhati. The officials of Gauhati expressed their unwillingness to the decrees of the royal court of Garhgaon. Obviously, there developed two rival groups at Gauhati and Garhgaon, each running counter to the other.²²

Nobles Invite the Mughal

The conduct of the officials in Gauhati needed urgent pacification. But Atan Buragohain was unwilling to sanction military action against Laluk Barphukan for one obvious reason that the Mughals had not totally given up their intentions to re-capture Lower Assam even though Raja Ram Singh had already left the Mughal seat of Rangamati. Now also the imperial *Faujdar* was indulging in the court politics of the Ahoms by bribing and intimidation to the *Phukans* at Gauhati.²³ Therefore, his apprehension of a possible attack by the Mughals was not only due to his over-anxiety for security of the state, but also to serve as a pretext to suspend vigorous measures against Laluk Barphukan. As a matter of fact, Sultan Azamtara, the third son of Emperor Aurangzeb, had meanwhile demanded Gauhati and Lower Assam while taking the charge of viceroyship in Bengal.²⁴ Atan Buragohain's mind was filled with apprehension of a possible invasion by the Mughals before which the *Barphukan's* refractories were faded into insignificance. Between Samdhara and Garhgaon there was no such strong fortification. So the *Buragohain* constructed a rampart facing the Brahmaputra river from where it was possible to obstruct the progress of the enemy at a safe distance away from the capital. The construction of the rampart proceeded in full swing in the early part of 1678 and was named by the monarch as Chintamonigarh.²⁵

On the other hand, Laluk Barphukan began his operations to dislodge Atan Buragohain and his puppet monarchy of Sudaipha. Accordingly, he held secret consultations with his two brothers who then decided to invite their uncle Baduliphukan, then living in the Mughal court of Dacca, to come up to Gauhati duly equipped with the Imperial force and thereby cause the extinction of Atan Buragohain from vertex of Ahom politics.²⁶ Laluk began to play a double game. On one hand, he sought the help of Ahom monarch and on the other, he wanted to become the monarch of Assam backed by the Mughal support. Laluk Barphukan and the members of his league gave their full support for the surrender of Lower Assam to the Mughals, provided prince Azamtara

finally installed Laluk as Ahom monarch on the ruins of the caucus made by the *Buragohain*.²⁷

Evidently, Laluk was tempted like Baduliphukan who during Mir Jumla's invasion betrayed the Ahoms just to usurp the Ahom throne. Of course, Baduli was made the monarch of Upper Assam in theory for a very short period but very soon he set out for Bengal with his relatives and dependants along with the retreat march of Mir Jumla. In short, Baduli nourished his hope that his presence at Dacca as a Mughal protege would be of capital use in future dealings with the court politics of Assam. It is reasonable to believe that Baduli would come forward in promoting the prolonged design of giving the Ahom crown to Laluk who was his nephew.²⁸

About this time, Laluk Barphukan sent two messengers to Mansur Khan, *Fauzdar* of Rangamati along with precious presents. Those couriers were sent up to Dacca with the recommendation of Mansur Khan for the acceptance of the *Barphukan's* proposal. The gist of the proposal was that Laluk will make a mock-fight against the Mughal invaders after which he would evacuate Saraighat and Gauhati and then retreat towards the seat of Kaliabar. The Mughals would meanwhile occupy the deserted garrison of Gauhati where they would not meet with any opposition. In return, Laluk Barphukan will be lifted to Ahom throne after handing over all the enemies to the Imperial forces.²⁹

By the end of 1678 Sultan Azamtara, the then viceroy of Bengal issued orders directed to Mansur Khan, the *Fauzdar* of Rangamati to proceed towards Gauhati and take delivery of the particular town from the charge of Laluk Barphukan as per the preceding agreement. The Mughal viceroy formally conveyed the right of Kingship of Assam to Laluk. This message was transacted in June-July 1678. Laluk Barphukan now disclosed the military secrets to Mansur Khan who then easily captured Gauhati, accompanied by Ali Akbar, Satmal Dewan and Baduliphukan.³⁰

Mansur Khan had been staying with his force for a considerable time at Agiathuti outside the western approaches of the Gauhati fortifications. He hesitated to enter into the fortified zone of Gauhati on apprehension that some trap might be laid by the Ahoms for his destruction. However, the agent of Laluk Barphukan encouraged the Imperial commanders to occupy the historic city. Meanwhile, Mansur Khan sailed up to Gauhati on February 26, 1679 and became the master of Kamrup vacated by Laluk Barphukan.³¹

The Mughal reoccupation of Gauhati and Kamrup during the Viceroyship of Sultan Azamtara in Bengal was highly applauded by Emperor Aurangzeb. The Emperor acknowledged this victory by rewarding 1,000 rupees in cash and the prince a pearl necklace of 91 beads worth two lakhs of rupees, and a jewelled turban worth of 25,000 rupees.³²

Laluk Barphukan left Gauhati keeping in view that his uncle Baduliphukan would give necessary guide to the Mughal troops up to Garhgaon to annihilate the strength of Atan Buragohain. But Baduli had abruptly changed the course of action after realising the atrocious deeds done by Laluk Barphukan. Having failed to re-concile, Baduli went back to Dacca by boat. Nevertheless, Baduli's gesture could not produce any patriotic change in the day-dream of Laluk Barphukan who was crazy for Ahom throne.³³

Wasteful Strifes

Laluk Barphukan sailed up towards Kaliabar after voluntarily evacuating Gauhati and pretending to fight against further Mughal advance asking Atan Buragohain to stay at Biswanath and also to send up the *Phukans* to Kaliabar for reinforcement. But Atan Buragohain could soon smell the evil intrigues of Laluk and took counter measures with a determined plan to end the life of Laluk.³⁴ Meanwhile, most of the *Phukans* that had already marched in Lower Assam were imprisoned by Laluk. Very soon a fierce contest ensued between the followers of Laluk and the loyal royalist group. In the long run, the troops of the Buragohain met with crush-

ing defeat and the ring leaders of the royalist party were put into prison. Laluk overpowered the authority of Parvatia Raja. He then promoted his adherents and supporters to the key posts of the state.³⁵

The disaster of the royalist forces compelled Atan Buragohain to leave the camp at Biswanath and take temporary refuge in the Naga Hills. By March 1679 the *Buragohain* was captured in the house of the *Rajkhowa* and taken to Kaliabar along with his elder brother, the *Naobicha Phukan*, who had been seized on the way. Parvatia Raja was thereafter captured by the followers of Laluk and put to death.³⁶

Laluk also then installed Sulikpha, as puppet monarch who was known as Ratnadhvaj Singh or Lora-Raja and then himself became His Majesty's Minister without consulting the other great nobles.³⁷ His ambition was, however, just to get the royal umbrella, ignoring the support and approval of court nobles as well as the royal members. As a shrewd politician and being over ambitious, he tried his utmost to exploit the assurance sounded by Sultan Azamtara. By August 1679, he sent envoys at Dacca to get official recognition as monarch of Ahom Kingdom but Sultan Azamtara by this time had left for Mewar to join Aurangzeb in his expeditions against Rajputs.³⁸ Meanwhile, Shaista Khan also took the viceroyship of Bengal for the second term as mentioned earlier, did not give any sort of cognizance to the vexed appeal of Laluk Barphukan.³⁹

Laluk Barphukan, however, became self-styled monarch of Upper Assam in contravention of the monarchical tradition of Ahoms. He also knew that his dream could not see final consummation as long as Atan Buragohain was alive. So he turned his attention to finish the life of Atan Buragohain and his brothers too. In December 1679 he cruelly murdered the *Buragohain* and his brothers with the tacit approval of Lora Raja, the puppet monarch.⁴⁰

The thorns of the path of the *Barphukan* to power were, however, still not over. There were the princes of royal

blood scattered over the state, each of whom was a potential material and had powers for launching insurrection. So Laluk Barphukan made a final bid in order to kill Lora Raja along with other princes.⁴¹ To get rid of the reign of terror as inspired by the *Barphukan*, the disgruntled nobles joined hands with the fugitive princes. Laluk Barphukan was entrapped by the nobles and was then put into prison in November 1680. Shortly after, he was penalised by way of death sentence. The nobles followed it up by the assassination of Lora Raja himself, and installing Gadadhar Singh on the throne who succeeded in restoring peace and stability in the state after a period of prolonged chaos and confusion that could be dangerous for sovereignty had the Mughals been in a position to capitalise.⁴²

Hard Problems of Mughal Authority

The Mughals failed to capitalise the weakness of the Ahoms due to their own difficulties. The rivalry with the Afgans that had been a serious challenge to the Mughals ever since the first battle of Panipat and seemed to have been crushed by Akbar, raised its ugly head again when Emperor Aurangzeb was preoccupied with the Marathas. During the years from 1672 to 1676 Aurangzeb had to reckon with a number of Afgan rebellions in north-western India.⁴³ On the other hand, Shivaji, the Maratha chief took the full advantage of the withdrawal of a section of the best soldiers of the Mughals who were sent to the north-west frontier. He followed an aggressive policy in order to damage the Mughal authority in western India. Accordingly, he connived with the Afgan rulers of Bijapur and Golkonda and succeeded in the annexation of Karnatic and its dependants by conducting a series of raids in the Mughal territories that continued uninterrupted till the death of Shivaji in 1680.⁴⁴

With the Bijapuri barons whose fields lay close to his dominions, Shivaji had, however, to wage war till he wrested Kolhapur, north Kanara and south Kankan from their hands. In the Karnatic division, viz., the Dharwar and Belgaum districts, the contest was still undecided when he died.

Nevertheless, he welded the scattered Maratha race of the Deccani Kingdoms into a mighty nation. Before the rise of Shivaji, the Marathas were mere hirelings and treated as servants of aliens. Shivaji was the first to challenge Bijapur and Delhi and thus taught his countrymen the possibility of their being independent leaders in war ⁴⁵

Emperor Aurangzeb's hurdles were turning more complicated by open challenge of the Rajputs and Jats who took the advantage of the situation in order to revive their traditional hostility with the Mughals. The seizure of Rathor principality of Mewar by Aurangzeb after the death of Jaswant Singh in 1678 was virtually a signal for the Rajput chiefs just to indulge in widespread rebellions against the Mughals.⁴⁶ However, the long bitter struggle between the Mughals and the Rathors (1679-1708) came to an end just after Aurangzeb's death. Another militant Sikh race became hostile, the moment their religious chief-cum-general was assassinated by Aurangzeb in 1675. Indeed, it was the beginning of the holy war as waged by the Sikhs against the Islamic rule of the Mughals.⁴⁷

In such a situation in which the Mughals were called upon to reckon with determined challenges of the formidable Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs, Marathas and the Afgans in the northern, western and north-western divisions of their empire, Aurangzeb was naturally not expected to be able to give enough attention in the eastern *Subah* of Bengal. Both the Imperial authority and Viceroy of Bengal were bound to suspend the policy of territorial expansionism beyond the established limit in north-east India. The authorities in Delhi were so much indifferent towards their relations with Assam that the campaign under Ram Singh that had to be abandoned by the Rajput general after the defeat at Saraighat and forced to retire at Rangamati and from where he was neither reinforced nor called back till sometime 1676.⁴⁸

Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal had to face with numerous problems mainly created by the European factors and few Rajas of the bordering areas. The Viceroy was

mainly concerned with revenue reforms in order to give relief in respect of the economic strains of imperial campaigns as referred to. Naturally, the Viceroy of Bengal provoked the nobles and zamindars who not only refused to pay extra-taxes but also expressed their disloyalty towards the Viceroy.⁴⁹ The *subahdar* had also to overcome the trade conflicts with the European factors, particularly the East India Company who systematically violated the terms of the existing agreements in order to augment their commercial interest.⁵⁰ Aurangzeb had also his difficulties in finding out an efficient Viceroy and able officers and army commanders for posting in Bengal as because all such efficient and loyal personnel had already been deployed mainly in the disturbed areas of north-west and Deccan. As a matter of fact, Shaista Khan whose term as the Viceroy of Bengal had expired in 1678 could be replaced by Sultan Azamtara, the third son of Aurangzeb for a short period.⁵¹

However, Sultan Ajamtara could not properly gauge the situation of Bengal as he stayed at Dacca for less than two years. The Sultan had to be recalled by the Emperor as his loyal services were found essential in the rebellious western front of the empire. Meanwhile, the veteran Shaista Khan was reappointed as the Viceroy of Bengal for the second term in 1680. No wonder, either the Imperial authorities or the Viceroy of Bengal made no serious attempt to repair the damages as already suffered at the hands of the Ahoms at the battle of Saraighat.⁵²

Interestingly enough, when the Ahom commanders in Gauhati had to conduct two consecutive expeditions with a sizeable part of their army against the pseudo rulers in Garhgaon, the western frontier of the Ahom state remained practically unprotected. The Mughals too were armless in availing of the unprecedented opportunity. Sultan Azamtara was fully aware of the situation in Assam through Mansur Khan, the *Faujdar* of Gauhati but his endeavours were limited to the use of some threats in order to recapture and reoccupy Lower Assam.⁵³ The recovery of Gauhati through

Baduliphukan was possible only due to the treachery of unscrupulous Laluk Barphukan. The reoccupation of Gauhati was mere a surrender of the Ahom officials in charge of the area which fell far short of a military conquest. It was only the Faujdar, Mansur Khan who played a certain diplomatic role in winning over the Ahom officers through dubious means in persuading Dacca so as to avail best opportunity for recovering Gauhati by despatching a nominal force under Baduli.

Western States

The internal situation in Cooch Behar, the western gateway to the north-east was no better than in the Ahom state, although the rulers there also did not lag behind in taking the advantage of the difficulties faced by the Mughals. Modnarayan, the son and successor of Prannarayan ruled virtually as a puppet for fifteen years from 1666 to 1680. The officials in the state indulged in court politics following the same pattern as in the Ahom state, and it yielded the recurrences of civil wars. The shrewd *Nazir*, however, survived all such stress and strain and managed to retain Modnarayan in the throne. The continued stay of Rajput general, Ram Singh in the threshold of the state till 1676 served as a strong restraint on the court against throwing off the Mughal suzerainty but the departure of Mughal general on that year from Rangamati virtually removed such pressure. The rebellious attitude of the nobles and zamindars of Bengal during the viceroyalty of Sultan Azamtara gave encouragement to Cooch Behar with a view to stop the payment of tribute to the Mughal since 1676.⁵⁴

The petty state of Bijni that was brought into existence by Mughal themselves by liquidating the Eastern Koch State of Kamrup to serve as a buffer against the Ahoms and Darrang, did not behave up to the tentative expectation during these years of strains. The Raja of Bijni followed the suit in organising a confederacy of the local zamindars in a common bid to withdraw the payment of dues to the Mughals and to scrap the stipulated obligations including the *Kheda* opera-

tions no sooner had Ram Singh left Rangamati.⁵⁵ The Raja of Bijni was strongly supported in his efforts by the *zamindar* of Karaibari who was responsible for the supervision of the revenue matters of *Sarkar* Dakinkol on behalf of the Mughals. The said *zamindar* also relaxed his loyalty and fidelity and like the Raja of Bijni and other neighbouring *zamindars* assumed an independent posture.⁵⁶

The development in the Eastern Koch State of Darrang was indeed interesting. It may be recalled that Darrang was constituted into a vassal state by the Ahom monarch with a prince from the former royal family of Koch-Kamrup, Balinarayan, after the Mughal occupation of that state in 1615 and his successor Makardhvaj, the then Raja of Darrang, abruptly sided with the Mughal during Mir Jumla's Assam campaign, But no sooner had Mir Jumla marched back from Assam, Surjyanarayan alias Indradaman, the new Raja of Darrang disowned the overlordship of the Mughals and assumed an independent status. This, however, brought him into confrontation with the Ahoms, the Mughals and the Cooch Behar state. Ever since Raja Ram Singh's departure from Rangamati both the Ahom and Koch authorities exerted heavy pressure on Darrang in order to reduce the territory to their respective vassalage. Raja Surjyanarayan, on the other hand, successfully resisted all such pressures.⁵⁷ The strategic importance of Darrang was significant as it served as buffer state between Mughal Kamrup and Ahom kingdom. Moreover, most of the hill *duars* for commercial enterprises towards the present Bhutan Hills and Arunachal Pradesh yielded substantial amount of revenues to the state. The Mughals also conducted profitable *Kheda* operations into that region.

Nevertheless, Surjyanarayan was not destined to rule over his state for long. He was the unfortunate victim of a trap of Mansur Khan, the *Faujdar* of Gauhati during the time of Mughal reoccupation of Gauhati in February 1679. Surjyanarayan was made a captive in the hands of the Mughal forces and was sent to the Imperial court at Delhi in 1680.⁵⁸ The Mughals, however, did not succeed in annexing Darrang to

their territory due to the same inaction that marred their activities in the frontier during the period. As a result, Indranarayan, the brother of Surjyanarayan could be peacefully installed as the Raja of Darrang and a vassal ruler by Gadadhar Singh, the new Ahom monarch.⁵⁹

Gauhati, as already mentioned had been reoccupied temporarily by the Mughals due to the treachery of a microscopic section of the Ahom officials themselves. As the Mughal forces marched up to Gauhati and even captivised the Raja of Darrang, it is possible that the rulers of Karaibari and Bijni had to reaffirm their allegiance to the Mughals. Although there is no record to probe into such a development, it may be conjectured from the fact that the Imperial forces that moved towards Gauhati and as such Darrang could proceed only through their territories. The Cooch Behar state had then rebelled against the Mughal and there is no information either from the Mughal or from the Koch sources to suggest that the Mughals undertook an operation against Cooch Behar or that Gauhati campaign passed through that state. The movement of the Imperial forces from Bengal through Koraibari and Bijni were therefore, the only alternative. The re-establishment of the Mughal base in Gauhati beyond their territories was bound to re-inspire the rulers of Koraibari and Bijni to loyalty. The consolidation of the Ahom authority under Gadadhar Singh might also be an additional factor in pacification of these two chiefs who could survive, as in the past, only with Mughal support as the Ahoms were not unlikely to revive their western pressure.

The rulers of Sherpur and Susang State in Mymensing, bordering Garo Hills were also inspired by the growing spirit of insubordination among the frontier Chiefs and *zamindars*. Raja Ram Sinha of Susang stopped the payment of tribute to the Mughals and began to fortify his capital possibly with an intention to reckon with the Mughal retaliation. He was, however, taken to Murshidabad as a prisoner and forced to embrace Islamic faith and marry a Muslim girl. He was actually charged with several offences, of which treason was

the highest, but all the charges were withdrawn when he embraced Islam and married a Muhammedan noble's daughter. He was restored in Susang under the name of Abdul Rahaman. Meanwhile, his Hindu wife and her son, Ran Sinha, took refuge in the neighbouring state of Sherpur. The fact that the Raja of Sherpur very generously extended hospitality to prince Ran Sinha and his mother is perhaps suggestive of the fact that two ruling families that were in league with each other indulged in underground activities in order to assert their independent position. The Raja of Sherpur also harassed the ruler of Susang, who of late became a Muslim and a Mughal protege, by occupying a portion of Susang state and converted it into Susang *pargana* under the rule of Ran Sinha. It should have required a great deal of courage on the part of a Hindu ruler with a view to extend such helping hand to the dislodged Hindu prince of a neighbouring state and interfere in the internal affairs of the state whose ruler was a Muslim convert and enjoyed Imperial support. The attitude of Raja of Sherpur is clearly indicative of his rebellious and determined anti-Mughal stand. The matter could perhaps proceed further, had Aurnagzeb not interfered at that stage and recognised Ran Sinha as the Raja of Susang. To quote the autobiography of a former Maharaja of Susang :⁶⁰

It is very curious to find a fanatic Emperor like Aurangzeb restoring the Raj to a Hindu successor when he could easily have retained the Muhammedan in power. This fact gives us an insight into the policy of north-east frontier administration followed during this period of Aurangzeb's regime when the Marathas, the Rajputs and the Sikhs had rebelled against the Emperor. Aurangzeb did not like to add one more, by dislodging Ran Sinha who had already become the master of the Susang fort even before his father's death.

That Aurangzeb did not opt for any retaliatory measure against Sherpur in spite of the clear rebellious stand of the Raja and his recognition of Hindu prince in Susang, who was in league with the Raja of Sherpur and was also perhaps

due to the same policy of pacification of the chiefs in north-east frontier during the difficult days in the north-west. The rulers of Sherpur and Susang had also their difficulties in snapping the tie completely with the Mughals as they held their authority in the foot of Garo hills against the predatory raids of the Garos only at the support of the latter. Further, to the Mughals, they paid only a nominal tribute in kind and enjoyed a semi-independent status wherein their internal affairs were never interfered by the Mughals.⁶¹ No wonder, as soon as Shaista Khan became the viceroy for the second time in 1680, in place of Sultan Azamtara, the rulers of both Sherpur and Susang cleared of their dues.⁶²

Eastern States

A similar situation had developed in the state of Laur, in Sylhet to the east of Susang, which then included besides the plains territory, a vast tract in Nongstain-Langrin area in the Khasi Hills. The ruler of Laur, Govinda Sinha was taken as prisoner to Delhi under the orders of Aurangzeb and restored after his conversion to Islam under the name of Habib Khan. This, however, led to the division of the State as Jaganathpur and Baniachong seceded under Hindu branches of the royal family. Nevertheless, Habib Khan and his successors ruled over Laur holding Mughal fief and being responsible for the security of the Mughal frontier from the predatory raids of the Khasis living in Khasi Hills of present Meghalaya state.⁶³

The Raja of Jayantia, at this stage, it appears, did not maintain any formal relation with the Mughals and it is possible that he complied with the clauses of the engagements that took place with Shaista Khan in 1664. The Raja had however, serious dispute with the Ahom over Dimarua which was earlier a vassal state of Jayantia but ran over by the Mughals during Mir Jumla's campaign and thereafter recovered by the Ahoms. The Raja of Jayantia insisted that his suzerainty over Dimarua should be restored, while the Ahom monarch maintained that his forces had captured Dimarua by defeating twenty-two Mughal commanders headed by

Sayed Barbakar and held it against Sayed Feroz and other Mughal commanders.⁶⁴ As the Ahoms refused to return Dimarua and diplomatic exchanges began to continue in between the two royal capitals over the issue, it is not unlikely that Laxmi Singh, alias Laxmi Narayan, the Raja of Jayantia, could not afford to antagonise the Mughals on the threshold of his state at a time he had no commitment from the Ahoms to comply with his claim.

Bir Darpanarayan, the Raja of Cachar also perhaps maintained cordial relationship with the Mughals during the period under review as there is no mention anywhere of any hostility. His relation with the Ahoms, it appears, marked no improvement. The Ahom monarch particularly apprehended that the Raja of Cachar was articulating his policy to expand his influence in the internal politics of Jayantia and Dimarua. Bir Darpanarayan was a powerful monarch as it is evidenced from the stabilised position in the state during his regime. Cachar flourished economically out of the trade relations maintained with the Mughal territory since the time of Mir Jumla.⁶⁵ Raja of Cachar neither expanded nor surrendered any part of his territorial jurisdiction.

Similarly, the Raja of Tripura seems to have maintained the terms entered into by Govinda Manikya with Shaista Khan. Ramdev Manikya, who succeeds Govinda Manikya in 1676, had to reckon with a conspiracy hatched by his nephew, Dwarika Thakur along with Nasir Muhammad, an Afgan Chief of Sarail in order to dislodge him. Ramdev Manikya sought the help of Shaista Khan who then sent an army that suppressed the rebels. The internal chaos in Tripura could thus be suppressed only with the support of the Mughal Viceroy of Bengal. The Raja of Tripura was thus forced by the circumstances with a view to maintain cordial relationship with the Mughals.⁶⁶

Conclusion

The Mughal north-east relationship ever since the battle of Saraighat was thus marked by inaction on both sides.

The eastern states of Tripura, Cachar and Jayantia had no reason to conflict with the Mughals. The latter also had no provocation for any retaliatory expedition. Tripura had its own internal problem that was indeed a serious constraint against risking the support of the Mughals as suzerain authority. The Mughal failure in Assam and the Imperial engagements in the north-west could not encourage Cachar and Jayantia to begin any confrontation with the Mughals as their relationship with the Ahoms did not improve and the states failed to make a common cause against the Imperialists. The convert ruler of Laur held his authority at the Mughal support and the latter did not interfere in the internal affairs of the Raja and expected nothing from him beyond repelling the raids of the hill-men. Susang and Sherpur were too petty states to offer any significant challenge to the Mughals and the latter never antagonised them by interfering in their internal affairs. Cooch Behar passed through internal strifes and its rivalry with the Ahoms on the claim of Darrang, lost its possibility of capitalising the Mughal difficulty. The Mughals were so involved in the north-west as such they could hardly resort to any action against the defaulting Koches and the Ahoms or take advantage of the chaotic situation in these states. The internal chaos in the Ahom state was equally responsible for not being able to push their boundary westward. Rather the Ahoms became victim to Mansur Khan by surrendering Gauhati in February, 1679.

NOTES

1. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 247; W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, pp. 189-90.
2. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, p. 229; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkungia Buranji*, pp. 3-4.
3. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 106.
4. E. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 164; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 106.
5. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati).
6. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S. Gauhati; S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 107; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 164.
7. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 107; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
8. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 108
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 110; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
11. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, pp. 102-5.
12. S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10; *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259; D.H.A.S. Gauhati; S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 105.
13. S.K. Dutta, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 37.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 37-39.
15. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 110.
16. *Ibid.*
17. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 113,

18. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, pp. 111-12.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13, E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 166.
20. S K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, p. 113; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
21. S.K. Bhuyan, *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
22. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 139; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhugia Buranji*, p. 8.
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North-Eastern Challenge

THE ACCESSION OF GADADHAR SINGH to the Ahom throne in 1681 ushered in a new era in the history of the Ahom State. Besides consolidating his position as the ruler of a State, he also took steps to pacify the Chiefs and Rulers of the neighbouring territories, thus setting a trend towards a common challenge of the north-east against the Mughals. On the other hand, the reappointment of the veteran and experienced Shaista Khan as the Viceroy of the Bengal for the second time also witnessed considerable improvement in the internal affairs of Bengal, although ever since the battle of Saraighat the Mughals made no endeavour to renew their north-eastern expansionism. The main reasons for their not doing so was because, firstly, their involvement in the affairs of the Marathas, Rajputs and Sikhs that kept the Mughals fully engrossed. Secondly, the decaying condition of their imperial hold that followed shortly. Soon after ascending the throne, the first act of Gadadhar Singh was the stamping out of the possibilities of disloyal manoeuvres on the part of the nobles. Thus he did it by inflicting exemplary punishments on those who had participated in the machinations of chaotic regime under unscrupulous Laluk Barphukan, or had exhibited symptoms of rebellious and treacherous disposition.¹

The Ahom monarch made him more popular in the leading circle of the nobles by matrimonial link. It may be recalled that Gadadhar Singh, alias Godapani, who belonged to the Tungkhungia branch of the Ahom royal tradition, enjoyed tremendous support and sympathy of a section of the nobles which ultimately brought him to the power. This section of the nobles championed the cause of Godapani when unscrupulous Lora Raja had made him a prisoner in his bid to ex-

terminate all potential princes of the Ahom royal blood and the State passed through a virtual civil war, inspired by the ambition and ruthlessness of Laluk Barphukan. The nobles also entrapped Laluk Barphukan to death and caused the assassination of Lora Raja himself. This section of the nobles that emerged powerful out of the civil war, had enthroned Gadadhar Singh and promised him full support and loyalty. The monarch also succeeded in suppressing the disloyal princes and nobles. The prolonged politics of power in the Ahom Court thus came to an end. The personality and character of the new monarch earned his popularity among the masses.² Gadadhar Singh thus found himself in a comfortable position to consolidate his authority. He also made appointments of loyal and able persons to the high offices of the government in his attempt to thoroughly overhaul the administration.³

Problems of Aurangzeb

The imperial court at Delhi, on the other hand, passed through dissensions. On January 1681, Prince Akbar, the fourth son of Aurangzeb, in his campaign against Rajputs drifted away from the policy of the Emperor. He, rather in union with the Rajput rebels, issued a manifesto deposing his father, and crowned himself as Emperor; and the next day he set out for Ajmer to wrest the Mughal crown from Aurangzeb's brows.⁴ However, Prince Akbar was deceived by the Rajputs and his rebellion failed to change the sovereign of Delhi, but it brought expected relief to the *Maharanas*. The Rajput war was a drawn game, but its material consequences were disastrous to the *Maharana's* subjects. The loss caused to Aurangzeb by his Rajput policy cannot be measured solely by the men and money that he poured on the desert. He had concentrated all his resources against two States of Marwar and Mewar and had failed to achieve success.⁵

Despairing of success in his attempt to conquer the Ranas' country, owing to the difficulty of making his way into it, and finding that Prince Akbar found a retreat to the territories of

Sambhuji, Aurangzeb became desirous of concluding a peace with the Rana, for which that ruler had several times made overtures. Aurangzeb was now eager to strengthen his position in the Deccan, fearing that Prince Akbar would lose neither time nor the opportunity in making himself formidable with the aid of Sambhuji.⁶

Aurangzeb was already exhausted by the incessant Maratha wars under Shivaji who consolidated his kingdom during the period from 1670 to 1680. However, on April 1680, Shivaji died of illness putting the Maratha Kingdom into a state of confusion and impediment on the question of succession. His eldest son Sambhuji, who mounted the throne, failed to combat the Mughal authority. But Shambhuji's interests did not coincide with rebel prince Akbar who was involved in the secret dialogues with Kavi-Kailash, the premier of Shambhuji.⁷

In the long run, the escape of the rebellious Prince Akbar into Maratha territory obliged Aurangzeb to come down to the Deccan, where he was destined to spend the remaining twenty-seven years of his life. On hearing of Aurangzeb's march to Aurangabad, Shambhuji intensified his plundering expeditions in all possible directions. So the Emperor became desirous of completing his acquisition of the Bijapur Kingdom. He therefore, corresponded with the generals of that realm, sending them large gifts and presents in the hope that they might rebel against their Sultan and come over to his enemy.⁸

The moment Marathas were attacked by the Portugues, there was a large scale dissension among the officers and vassals. Aurangzeb exploited this weakness by bribing the Maratha officials to capture Sambhuji.⁹ On the other hand, Shambhuji also like his father, befriended the Qutb-Shah and Adil-Shah, Sultans of Golkonda and Bijapur respectively, whenever it was convenient to co-operate with them against the Mughals. But the Maratha ruler due to his moral degradation failed to divert the Mughals from the sieges of Bijapur and Golkonda in 1686 and 1687 respectively. He was

made captive by Muqarrab Khan in February 1689 and put to death.¹⁰

“Thus, by the end of the year 1689, Aurangzeb was the unrivalled lord paramount of northern India and the Deccan alike. Adil Shah, Qutb Shah, and Rajah Shambhuji had all fallen and their dominions had been annexed to his empire.”¹¹ But this victory was the beginning of an end. Lawlessness reappeared in every part of the Empire. The Sultans of Bijapur and Golkonda were making plans to defy the Mughal authority. Finally, Emperor's endless campaign against Maratha forts as organised by Rajaram (1689-1700) and his followers, could only wear out the last years of his life from his base at Aurangabad. He returned to Ahmednagar in January 1706, to die a year later in February 1707.¹²

Ahom Recovery of Gauhati

Gadadhar Singh, unlike his predecessors, did not fail to take full advantage of the problems faced by Aurangzeb and his suicidal policy of encamping himself in the distant Deccan and western end of his vast empire, employing all the imperial resources there and leaving the eastern frontier completely unprotected and uncared for, at a time when the Ahoms staged a come back to their lost prowess and prestige. He also reorganised the army and navy and ordered the recovery of Gauhati from the Mughals.¹³ A conference of the nobles was held at the capital city in March 1682 in order to discuss the possible ways and means. The monarch then consulted the astrologers for the final date of the campaign. The astrologer gave the verdict that the monarch was sure to win the victory over the Mughals and enjoy the sovereignty of Kamrup.¹⁴

On the completion of the preparations, the Ahom army set out for Gauhati in three divisions; Loanakru Bandar Barphukan of Lower Assam and Champa Paniphukan proceeded by water on the Brahmaputra, Sondikoi Neog Phukan of Garhgaon and Khamrak Charingia Phukan by the Kalang river on the south bank, and Hulon Deka Phukan

and the Namdangia Phukan by the north bank of the Brahmaputra. On the approach of the Ahom forces, the Mughals evacuated their advanced garrisons at Kajali, Panikhaiti and Kurua for fear of being outnumbered and they mobilised their strength based at Itakhuli and Gauhati.¹⁵

On the other hand, the camp followers of Mansur Khan, the Mughal *Faujdar* were aggrieved by the unusual delay in getting remuneration and brought the matter to the notice of Bengal Viceroy. But their representations did not receive any favourable response. A section of the Mughal soldiers then decided to take revenge by imprisoning the sick *Faujdar* who managed to escape from his rebellious troops. The *Faujdar* tried to pacify the advancing Ahoms through his envoy Sam Singh but his efforts did not yield positive results.¹⁶

The *Faujdar*, was now forced to resist the organised attack of the Ahoms despite his internal weakness. Fierce battle began at Bahbari, Sonapur, Sarania, Jaiduar and other places. The Mughal *thanadars* of Kajali, Panikhaiti and Kurua retreated to Gauhati having been chased by the Ahom commanders. The Mughal army took refuge at Umananda, an island in the Brahmaputra river opposite Gauhati. The place was well protected with arms in order to rescue the main garrison of Itakhuli or Sukreswar Hill near Gauhati. Jayanti Singh, the Mughal commander, had to face the battle of Itakhuli against the Ahoms, and later, he became captive and the *Faujdar* meanwhile, withdrew from Itakhuli and made his camp to the west of Gauhati.¹⁷ Ali Akbar, another hero of the Mughal troops fought in the battle of Itakhuli by launching the attack upon the Ahom fort of Sarania but he too failed to withstand the onslaughts of the Ahoms and fled to the camp of Mansur Khan. After a haltage of few days, the *Faujdar* and his associates had to retreat further to Rangamati. The Ahoms chased the Imperial troops up to the river Manas.¹⁸ This river was, thenceforth, accepted as the western boundary of the Ahom State and was maintained till the occupation of the British. The battle of Itakhuli that took place in September 1682 marked a new era of the

Tungkhungia dynasty as Ahom victory dislodged the Mughals once for all from Gauhati after they had been in its occupation for three years and a half, while the Ahoms under Gadadhar Singh succeeded to recover their prestigious western port town.

The battle of Itakhuli and the occupation of Gauhati constitute a landmark in the annals of Ahom-Mughal relations, being the last decisive encounter in a series of clashes, spreading over almost the whole of seventeenth century. The Mughal surrender of territory was accompanied by huge amount of war materials. The Ahoms secured a vast amount of booty, including pearls, gold, silver, copper, brass, lead, elephants, camels, horses, buffaloes, oxen, cannon of all sizes, guns, spears, swords, bows and arrows and war boats.¹⁹ Three cannons are still to be found at Dikom (between Dibrugarh and Tinsukia), one in the Indian Museum and the third outside the residence of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur, which bear the following inscription: "King Gadadhar Singh having vanquished the Mughals at Gauhati, obtained this weapon in 1604 *Saka*" (A.D. 1682).²⁰ Few cannons that were captured are preserved at Assam museum, Gauhati.

Back to Prowess

Although the unfortunate symptoms of disloyalty in a section of the Ahom officials again crept in, no sooner the recovery of Gauhati was effected, Gadadhar Singh succeeded in straightening the administrative machinery and defence structure of the society. The personal popularity and support of the more dominant nobles, his patriotism and vision, were the strength of the monarch. The rebel and disloyal nobles and officials were either dismissed or put to death. The crushing of the political conspiracies was followed by radical overhauling of the administration and reshuffle of administrative posts. The key positions were centralised and administration manned by personnel where integrity and fidelity were beyond question.²¹ In a short time, Gadadhar Singh achieved the consolidation of the Tungkhungia rule in

the Ahom state and brought back the monarchy to its old prowess. He also succeeded in pacifying the hostile neighbours like the Nagas and the Miris through a determined policy of coercion and conciliation.²²

The monarch drew his inspiration from the spiritual world and set himself also in strengthening the Hindu solidarity by combating the conflicts of orthodoxies. He also made determined efforts to curb the political influence of the religious leaders. The ascendancy of the *Stradhikar* and *Mahantas* in court politics was looked upon by him as centre of political distraction. To pull down the edifice of *Vaishnava* monasticism, the shrewd monarch turned to be a patron of *Saktism*, although he was not the disciple of any *Sakta* preceptor. He also looked upon the *Sakta* spirit as the strength of the society and the state and considered the injunctions of the *Gosains* as the cause of physical deterioration. Obviously, the monarch commanded the full support of the followers of *Saktism* who offered support to his scheme of state-rebuilding. The *Vaishnava* preceptors, on the other hand, turned against him but many of them were subjected to torture and their wealth was confiscated.²³

Then according to royal decrees, the dwelling houses of all Hindu *Gosains* were reduced to ashes. Then the golden image of Dakhinpat was removed and melted, and placed on the turret of the temple at Charaideo as its pitcher. The eyeballs of Ram Gosain of Dakhinpat were extracted for the series of offences that he was charged with, and Auniati Gosain was banished to Sadiya. Most of the religious leaders were removed from their localities and settled in new areas in order to diminish their social and political influences.²⁴ The actions of the monarch led to unfortunate destruction of religious centres but succeeded in recovering the administration and politics from the unwanted religious influences. A secular state structure had revitalised the traditional potentialities and regained the support of all sections of the subjects, a majority of whom were tribals.

Gadadhar Singh also cleverly patronised a Mughal from

Secundrabad, named Muhammad Ali, who belonged to the staff of Mansur Khan and was entrusted with the education of then *Faujdar's* sons. Immediately after the retreat of the Mughals, Gadadhar Singh extended patronage to this learned Mughal and allowed him to remain at Gauhati enjoying that immunity from suspicion to which a scholar was entitled according to Indian tradition. Sandikoi Phukan, the Ahom Governor of Gauhati, generously patronised him and appreciated his scholarship. The Ahom Governor also seized this opportunity of collecting information about the Mughal Empire by arranging for recording of the narratives of Delhi and other materials that were in his possession.²⁵

Mughal Dependencies

The defeat of the Mughals at Itakhuli and re-establishment of the Ahom authority under Gadadhar Singh could not be without some cumulative impact in the Mughal dependencies in the north-east viz., Jayantia Tripura and Cooch Behar. It is interesting to note that in 1682 itself, that the battle of Itakhuli took place and that Raja of Jayantia did lose no time in doing away with the old pledges and indulging in a series of raids in the Mughal territory. By November, 1682 Raja Lakshmi Singh alias Lakshmi Narayan extended his raids up to the Sylhet town and burnt down its environs.²⁶ The letters exchanged between the royal houses of Jayantia and Assam during this period are clear suggestive of the fact that the reigning monarchs professed friendship and were working on a scheme to resist the Mughals. The raids of the Raja of Jayantia proved so disastrous that Shaista Khan had to send an imperial army under his son Iradat Khan who succeeded in pushing back the Raja's raiders to his own territory.²⁷

Ratna Manikya II who ascended the throne of Tripura in 1685, also assumed an anti-Mughal posture. Balibhim Narayan who acted as regent during the minority of new Raja, led an expedition in the Mughal territory of Sylhet. He was however, captured by the Mughal forces. On the other hand, Narendra Manikya, a cousin of Ratna Manikya

II, who claimed the throne of Tripura, inspired Shaista Khan to send a powerful expedition by promising to the Mughal to give gifts of two more elephants and one additional elephant for the governor of Dacca over the prevalent system of annual presentation of two elephants.²⁸ Shaista Khan, Subehdar of Bengal, accordingly invaded Tripura as a reprisal for the invasion of Sylhet. The encounter that continued for some years ultimately resulted in the installation of Narendra Manikya as the Raja of Tripura in 1693. Ratna Manikya II and his three sons were made prisoners. Champak Roy, another cousin of Ratna Manikya II, however, opposed the reign of Narendra Manikya and succeeded in enlisting the support of the people and the nobles including those who earlier backed Narendra Manikya to power. Narendra Manikya also shortly afterwards, incurred the displeasure of the Mughals, perhaps by violating the agreement. Champak Roy, thereupon, with the help of General Mir Khan defeated Narendra Manikya at the battle of Chandigarh and placed Ratna Manikya II on the throne in 1695 and himself became the virtual ruler.²⁹

Champak Roy, however, ignored the tradition of sending annual presents of elephants to the Mughal courts. The rising power of Champak Roy, however, alarmed Ratna Manikya II who killed Champk Roy and regained the sympathy of the Mughals by appointing his younger brother Chandramoni as a 'hostage' in the court of Murshidabad and renewing the presentation of annual tribute and earning in return *Khelat* or robe of honour.³⁰ The attitude of the Raja towards the Mughals, however, did not fail to provoke challenge to his authority from within, that shall be described in a subsequent section.

The decadent state of Cooch Behar also passed through similar developments. Mohendra Narayan who ascended the throne in 1682 was only five years old and therefore, as before the actual administration was carried on by Mahi Narayan and his two sons Jagat Narayan and Jajna Narayan. The tyranny of the trio caused a total disorder in the state and the officers of various *chaklas* behaved like independent

rulers, while some of them conspired with the Mughals.³¹ Shaista Khan did not fail to harness the fluid situation. Three successive Mughal expeditions of 1685, 1687 and 1693 succeeded in the annexation of a portion of Cooch Behar and clearing the way for the renewal of hostility with Assam. The Raja of Cooch Behar was also terrorised to invade Assam on behalf of the Mughals and agreed to pay a tribute of rupees ten lakhs.³²

The Mughal imperialism in Cooch Behar created a favourable condition for the Ahom-Mughal rapprochement. As early as in March 1685, Mahendra Narayan, Raja of Cooch Behar, wrote to Sandikoi Barphukan, informing him of the reported intention of the Mughals to invade Assam, after having first brought Cooch Behar under their domination. The Raja reiterated his plan of a concerted action and simultaneous attack on the Mughal territories. Meanwhile, the Mughals had occupied Bahirbond extending from Bagduar, and Mahendra Narayan considered himself incapable of single handed action to dislodge the aggressions. However, the Ahom monarch was then engaged in reform measures and did not feel inclined to accept the proposal of Cooch Behar that caused miseries to the Ahoms in the past. Further, in the same year i.e. 1685, Gadadhar Singh had to face the challenge of the Miris and Nagas.³³ However, the Barphukan wrote a letter to the Raja of Cooch Behar expressing sorrow at the discomfiture of the latter at the hands of the Mughals. This letter too, unfortunately, could not reach Cooch Behar due to the difficulties caused on the way.³⁴

The Mughal expansionism, nevertheless, forced Mahendra Narayan to stand on his own strength and he declared war against the Mughals in 1691. Jajna Narayan was appointed as the Commander-in-Chief of the Koch army. The Raja also received substantial assistance from the ruler of Bhutan.³⁵ A number of treacherous officers of various *chaklas* betrayed the Raja and secured rights over their lands on payment of revenue directed to the Mughal Government. A good part of the Cooch Behar state thus passed into the hands of the

Mughals. In the midst of the war, Mahendra Narayan passed away in 1693. Rup Narayan, the son and successor of Mahendra Narayan continued to fight with the Mughals.³⁶

Ascendancy of Rudra Singh

The concept of north-eastern solidarity and concerted challenge to the Mughals that had been matured further under Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch, who then succeeded his father Gadadhar Singh in A.D. 1696. He was brilliant in his intellect, unrivalled in his political foresight and was endowed by nature with extraordinary talents and noble birth. He was a man of passions based on glory and victory. He embodied all the virtues of benevolent despotism. He had dazzled the imaginations of his neighbouring rulers and chieftains and delighted their eyes by his magnanimous personality. As a military leader, his strong determination to take all precautionary measures against the Mughal authorities, both at central and provincial level, broke down the morale of the Bengal viceroys. He took full advantage of the then internal dissensions in the Mughal province of Bengal during the Viceroyship of Ibrahim Khan (1689-97) as well as Prince Azim-u-din (1697-1712), alias Azim-ush-shan, the grandson of Aurangzeb. Owing to the Emperor's protracted absence from his capital as well as being engrossed in fighting for twelve years in the Deccan, rebellious *zamindars* specially of Bengal openly started defying the Imperial authority.³⁷ For example, during the Viceroyship of Ibrahim Khan in Bengal, one Shova Singh, the Chief of Cheto-Barda (Midnapur district), rebelled and in alliance with Rahim Khan, the Chief of the Orissa Afgans defeated and slew Raja Krishna Ram, the revenue-farmer of the Burdwan district, and captured its chief town with the family and property of the Raja. Then they seized the fort and city of Hoogly, and plundered the rich cities of Nadia and Murshidabad, Malda and Rajmahal.³⁸

However, Shova Singh was stabbed to death by a daughter of the Raja of Burdwan and the rebels then chose Rahim Khan as their ruler with the title of Rahim Shah. The English,

French and Dutch, on the outbreak of the rebellion, had obtained permission of the Viceroy with a view to fortify their respective settlements at Calcutta, Chandannagar and Chinsura and the Dutch afterwards helped to wrest Hoogly fort from the rebels. The Emperor dismissed Ibrahim Khan and appointed his own grandson, Prince Azim-usha-Shan, in his place. After the arrival of the Prince at Burdwan from Deccan, his minister Khvaja Anwar was treacherously slain at an interview by Rahim Khan, but the rebel leader was killed and his army broke up.³⁹

Above all, the Emperor was only hankering after wealth from Bengal *Subah* as the Imperial treasury in the Deccan expedition was totally exhausted. During the viceroyship of Shaista Khan for two terms, the Emperor used to get immense wealth from Bengal at the cost of the masses and classes. Added to this, after 1705 the Marathas under Peshwas became masters of the situation all over the Deccan and even in parts of Central India. The Mughal officers were helplessly reduced to the defensive. A change came over the Maratha tactics with this growth of power; they were no longer, as in Shivaji's and Shambhuji's times. Light horsemen who had plundered and fled or merely looted unprotected traders and villagers, was disappearing at the first report of the Mughal army's approach. On the contrary, as Manucci noticed in 1704, "The Maratha leaders and their troops move in these days with much confidence because they have cowed the Mogul commanders and inspired them with fear. In short, they are equipped and moved about just like the armies of the Moguls. But at the present time they move like conquerors, showing no fear of any Mogul troops."⁴⁰

The growing weakness of Mughal authority was advantageous to the Ahom monarch, Rudra Singh, who had inherited from his father an orderly government and a peaceful stable state. Consequently, he had the opportunity to formulate new and vigorous plans in order to elevate his kingdom as one of the first-rate powers in India. However, the rising popularity of Rudra Singh created a jealousy in his younger brother who had made an attempt to rebel against him.⁴¹

In the conspiracy that ensued, the prince acted in concert with few high officials who were very much aggrieved by the rule of benevolent despotism. But Damodar Phukan of Mechaghar had unveiled the secrets of the conspiracy to Rudra Singh who in turn took drastic actions against the ring of conspirators. However, the three *Phukans* were exempted from capital punishment due to intervention of loyal nobles. But those *Phukans* were sacked from the responsible offices and sent to their respective home towns. Soon after, the paramount monarch took revenge upon his rebellious brother by extracting his eye-balls.⁴²

Indeed, Rudra Singh was the embodiment of enlightened despotism like those in Europe in the eighteenth century as most of the benevolent despots worked for the benefit of the people over whom they ruled. They were fully conscious of their despotic powers, and at the same time conscious of their responsibilities and justice to the subjects. Hence they were not so selfish and oppressive. To them, the government existed for the good of the people. Most of the rulers were sincerely interested to translate the enlightened views into practice. Thus, attempts were made to improve the condition of the country by introducing constructive reforms of common interests in all possible fields. In the long run, the system of 'enlightened despotism' did not prove successful. Nevertheless, the monarchs at least expressed their gesture in saving the common masses from the grip of rebel feudals and selfish nobility. Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch was well in advance to cut off the root of parasite classes which were banking on the rule of weak monarchy.⁴³

Obviously, the autocratic rule of Aurangzeb over the Mughal empire generated a repulsive reaction on the political condition of north-east frontier which was then marching in the path of benevolent monarch as initiated by Rudra Singh. Presumably, he also created a tactical pressure upon the tottering authority of Mughals and thereby brought about the collapse of Pan-Islamic dominion to north-east India and China in the next. The deeds of Rudra Singh also served as an ideal example and model of 'enlightened despo-

tism' that began its process in the region under review. In religious field too, a new approach was given by the Ahom monarch by instilling the spirit of *Saktism* into conventional *Vaishnava* sect.⁴⁴ He restored the *Vaishnava* monks to their original *Satras*, encouraged art, literature and music. Auniati *Gosain* was specially honoured, as the monarch not only recalled him from exile, but appointed him as spiritual preceptor of the royal court. The persecution of *Sudra Medhis* also ceased, but *brahmins* were forbidden to bend the knee to them, and they were compelled to wear as their distinctive badge like small earthen jars hanging from a string round the neck.⁴⁵

The monarch, however, did not withdraw the patronage that his predecessors had extended to the Saktas. In fact he brought from Bengal one Krishnaram Battacharya, a famous Sakta mahant of Nadia, who was given the care of the temple of Kamakya, near the vicinity of Gauhati and became the preceptor of Rudra Singh's son and a large number of *Brahmins* at the wishes of the monarch. A significant feature of Rudra Singh's policy was epoch making that always encouraged increased contacts with Bengal. He imported a large number of artisans from Bengal and established numerous schools for the education of *Brahmins*. He also sent outside his kingdom a large number of *Brahmin* boys for higher education. He secured the submission of the bordering hill chiefs and encouraged extensive trade with Tibet. He abandoned isolationist policy of his predecessors and encouraged intercourse with other nations. He also sent envoys to the contemporary rulers of other parts of Eastern India and studied their customs with an object to revitalise the system in his own state.⁴⁶

Rudra Singh imported from Cooch Behar an artisan named Ghansyam, under whose supervision numerous brick buildings were erected at Rangpur, close to Sibsagar, and also at Charaideo. When Ghansyam had finished his work, and was on the point of departing, richly rewarded by the monarch, it was accidentally disclosed that he had in his possession a secret document containing a full account of the country and

its inhabitants. It is assumed that his object was to betray the Ahoms to the Muhammadans, and he was arrested and put to death. The monarch also encouraged the foreign costumes in respect of nobles and members of the royalty.⁴⁷

Towards Confederation

Rudra Singh, thereupon, proceeded to pacify the two monarchies on the immediate borders of Assam, namely, Cachar and Jayantia. During the major part of the seventeenth century, Ahom rulers followed the policy of non-intervention towards these two states as they were confronted with the imperial Mughals. In fact, the traditional rivalry between the Ahoms and the Kacharis was kept in abeyance because of the more formidable challenge from the west. As the Ahoms could consolidate their position during the reign of Gadadhar Singh and Rudra Singh, they had no reason to tolerate the diplomatic overtures made by the Kachari Raja, Tamradhvaja-narayan, who was reluctant to acknowledge the Ahom hegemony. Tamradhvaj sent letters to the Ahom monarch where he assumed the role of an independent sovereign in accordance with the custom of his immediate predecessor.⁴⁸ The Kachari Raja also demanded the territories up to Mahang that are to be surrendered by the Ahoms. This demand provoked Rudra Singh to expel the Kachari ambassador from his court. Gandharba Roy, the Kachari Ambassador was escorted by Ahom official of Gauhati up to the border of Cachar and he relayed the view of Rudra Singh to his monarch.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Rudra Singh was resolved with a view to reduce the Kacharis to submission. The Ahom army was mobilised and Rudra Singh took personal care in organising the army. In November, 1706 the Ahom army set out from Biswanath in two columns. One under the Dihingia Deka Barbarua through the Dhansiri route, and the other under Pani Phukan through the Kopili route.⁵⁰ The Barbarua's column was intercepted by the Nagas but the Miri soldiers in Ahom army played an important role in defeating the Nagas with their bows and arrows,⁵¹ In the valley below

the Nomali Hill, the Kacharis made their first stand, but the Ahom troops had outnumbered the enemy and the Kacharis were forced to retreat. Ultimately, the Ahom army reached the Kachari capital at Maibong when Tamradhvaj escaped to south Cachar.⁵²

Meanwhile, the column under Pani Phukan made its way to Demera, in the Kachari territory where he had received the envoy of Dimarua Raja who then gave proposal for bilateral peace between the Ahoms and the Kacharis. However, Pani Phukan reached Maibong in February 1707 and joined the *Bar Barua* there. Rudra Singh was informed by a messenger that Maibong which situated on the river Mahur in the North Cachar hills, had come under the complete occupation of the Ahoms but its ruler fled away towards the plains of Cachar in the south. The monarch was disturbed by the fact that there was every possibility of Mughal assistance to the Kachari Raja through the *Faujdar* of *Sarkar Sylhet*. Therefore, the Ahom monarch issued a fresh order for the attack upon southern plains of Cachar. Unfortunately, the entire Ahom army became victim to pestilence that occurred at Maibong and Dihingia Deka Bar Barua succumbed to death by illness while returning to Demera near the fort Gelemu.⁵³

Rudra Singh, who was camping at Roha, was perturbed by the attitude of the Commanders as they refused to undertake southern campaign. In March, 1707 Rudra Singh was compelled by the pressure of the *Phukans* to abandon the project. On the other hand, the Kachari Raja having failed to obtain military assistance from the Mughal *Faujdar* of *Sarkar Sylhet* moved to Bikrampur wherefrom he contacted the Jayantia Raja for help and shelter.⁵⁴

Raja of Jayantia at that time passed through unfriendly relations with the Ahoms and the Kacharis. Raja Ram Singh of Jayantia thus got an opportunity to establish his authority over the Kacharis. He could also, in process, ensure suzerainty over the chieftaincies of Dimarua, Nelly, Gobha etc. It is also possible that Ram Singh had made a contact with the *Faujdar* of *Sarkar Sylhet* for support. His motives could

be smelt by Tamradhvaj. As the Ahom forces had in the meantime been withdrawn from North Cachar Hills, Tamradhvaj could inform the Jayantia Raja that help was no longer necessary. Nevertheless, the Jayantia Raja marched towards Mulagul, which was then situated near Fort Haritkar in the modern district of Cachar, on the plea of friendly meeting at Baleswar. He seized Tamradhvaj and took him off to his capital at Jayantiapur.⁵⁵ Several members of the royal family of Cachar were placed in close confinement and the Kachari frontier forte at Bandasil and Ichamati on the northern bank of river Surma were attacked and taken by the Raja of Jayantia. This incident infused a dramatic change in the situation. A request was made to the Ahom monarch on behalf of the Kachari Raja in order to intervene in the issue. The *Bar Phukan* and other officials of Gauhati had then induced Rudra Singh in order to take appropriate measures against Jayantia and thereby to fulfil the double purpose of subduing Cachar and Jayantia and other vassal states. Accordingly, Rudra Singh sent an ultimatum demanding the unconditional surrender of the captives as well as Jayantia Raja himself. Since the Jayantia Raja refused to comply with the demand, an expedition against him was despatched.⁵⁶

The expedition ultimately succeeded in bringing both the Rajas of Jayantia and Cachar to the Ahom court. The moment the captives appeared at the victorious camp at Biswanath, Rudra Singh officially announced the annexation of both the states. Tamradhvaj voluntarily accepted the suzerainty of the Ahom monarch. Accordingly, he was sent to Khaspur duly escorted by Ahom troops. Ram Singh of Jayantia died in illness at Rangpur.⁵⁷ Jaynarayan, the son of Ram Singh, was thereupon installed by the Ahom monarch as the vassal ruler of Jayantia. Tamradhvaj also died shortly after his return to Maibong, his son Suradarpanarayan ascended the throne of Cachar as a vassal ruler.⁵⁸

The success of Rudra Singh in imposing Ahom vassalage over Cachar and Jayantia was a significant step towards a north-eastern confederacy in order to counteract any

possible repetition of the Mughal expansionist policy. These two were only organised monarchy on the eastern and south-eastern borders of the Ahom state and extended up to the Mughal territory in the Surma Valley. The Ahoms were for about three centuries in confronting relations with the ruler of these monarchies. Both of them had dependent chieftaincies in Assam Valley, e.g. Dimarua, Khola, Nelli, Ghoba etc. During the years that the Ahoms were forced to reckon with the Mughal invasions, they were constantly haunted by the fear of possible alignment of these erstwhile rival monarchies with the Mughals. The achievement of Rudra Singh in pacifying the rulers of Cachar and Jayantia brought these states, along with their dependencies, within Ahom sphere of influence. The network of traditional forts in Cachar and Jayantia on the borders of Bengal was an additional security for the Ahom state. The relationship with Cooch Behar state could not be settled till then, but by this the Ahom state was exposed to the Mughals only by their narrow western front, in which the Mughals were actually defeated in a number of encounters. Further, the petty chieftaincies in west Assam, Raniduar, Lukiduar, Bagduar, Beltala, Barduar, Mairapur, Panton, Dimarua, Bhola-goan, called *Na-duar* or nine duars⁵⁹ were, in fact, the dependencies of the Ahoms and, as such, could be catalyst to Ahom defence system.

Pacification of Hill Neighbours

The success against Cachar and Jayantia was a great impetus for Rudra Singh with a view to extend his policy of pacification towards the hill-tribes in the northern and north-western boundaries of the state, namely the state of Daflas, Apatanis, Mismis etc. now called by the modern terms, the Arunachalis, the Bhutanese and the Nagas, in a common perspective of north-eastern solidarity. These tribes lived in a common border with the Ahoms for centuries and there had been an extensive trade relations between the hills and the plains passing through the *duars* or the passes to each of which a market was generally appended. Nevertheless, most of the tribes were predatory in character and occasionally

resorted to raids and plunders in the villages within the Ahom territory.⁶⁰ The earlier Ahom monarchs generally had endeavoured to reckon with these predatory challenges by force, although not with much success. Pratap Singh, the Ahom monarch (1603-41) viewed this hostile situation as dangerous when he was logged in a prolonged confrontation with the Mughals. He could not risk to allow such hostility to continue in the other frontiers of his state when he was faced with the invading Mughal in the western border. The monarch, therefore, invented a system called *posa* whereby the Hill-Chiefs in the frontiers were allowed to certain collections from the plains and in return, made responsible for the maintenance of peace and order in the respective borders. The *posa* system introduced by Pratap Singh had since then formed the network of the Ahom conciliatory policy towards the trans-Himalayan tribes.⁶¹

The conciliatory policy had worked well in pacifying the hill-neighbours during the reign of subsequent Ahom rulers and Rudra Singh could pursue it more vigorously as part of his own scheme. The Miris, who were one of the earliest tribes to enter into Pratap Singh's system, were, by the time Rudra Singh ascended the throne, "submissive and peaceful and continued to be so till the end of Ahom rule in Assam."⁶² They were recruited to the Ahom army by Pratap Singh and rendered invaluable services to Rudra Singh during his Cachar and Jayantia campaigns. As a matter of fact, the Miri soldiers were instrumental in subduing the various Naga clans that intercepted the expedition to Cachar.⁶³ Similarly, the Akas and Daflas, two other border tribes under *posa* in modern Arunachal Pradesh, maintained relationships with the Ahoms, despite occasional hostilities. During Rudra Singh's time the Akas posed no major problem and the *posa* system continued as usual. A section of the Daflas, however, turned hostile and a large number of bordering tribes represented to the monarch for protection against the Daflas. Rudra Singh immediately despatched an eight thousand men strong army under the command of the *Naobaicha Phukan* and *Nyaya Sodha Phukan* to suppress the Daflas. The Dafla chiefs who were summoned to appear before the *Phukans*, confirmed

their allegiance to the Ahom monarch and agreed to furnish six hundred Daflas to the Ahom army.⁶⁴

The relations with the Mishmis, another powerful tribe of modern Arunachal was, matured by 1687 when the Ahom monarch confirmed them in the possession of their hills in return of the payment of tribute and an Ahom officer called *Sadia Bargohain* was posted at Sadiya as Governor of the area. "The advantages of trade offered by the Ahoms, coupled with the policy of non-interference in the internal administration of the hill tribes and non-annexation of their territories to the Ahom kingdom helped in establishing peaceful relations between the Ahom rulers and the Mishmis."⁶⁵ Rudra Singh carried on the policy of his predecessors and ensured the loyalty of the Mishmi chiefs.

The Chiefs of the *duars* bordering Assam and Bhutan as well as in the ancillary of Bhutanese territory in present Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam, were also brought under *posa* system during the time of Pratap Singh. These *duars*, however, experienced, hostile raids and confrontations during the subsequent periods as inspired mainly by the rulers of Bhutan. Nevertheless, these *duras* played an important role in the trade history of Assam and vice versa as they linked the markets of Assam with those in Bhutan, Tibet and China⁶⁶ and the Ahom monarchs had always endeavoured to maintain peace in the area. The hostile situation in this sector came to an end during the reign of Gadadhar Singh (1681-96) who was instrumental in the construction of a string of forts all along the Assam-Bhutanese border by the help of the Raja of Darrang.⁶⁷ Rudra Singh inherited this powerful net-work of forts. He reinforced the defence structure and succeeded in re-establishing extensive trade contacts with Tibet.⁶⁸

The relation with the Nagas had also already taken some definite shape through the arrangements that had been made with the border chiefs⁶⁹ and Rudra Singh had nothing much to alter. Nevertheless, the salt mines in the bordering regions that the Nagas used, generated occasional feuds. In A.D.

1701 a merchant had killed about sixty Nagas at Barhat near Simlagarh who had entered the Ahom fort guarding the salt mine there. In retaliation, the Nagas also killed a large number of persons on the Ahom side.⁷⁰ Rudra Singh immediately despatched an army under Basang Phukan to punish the Nagas. The *Phukan* succeeded in persuading, at the display of forces, the Naga chiefs of the area to accompany him to the Ahom court. The chiefs submitted to the Ahom monarch and assured their good conduct in future. Rudra Singh rewarded them and sent them back to their hills and this gesture of the monarch proved significant in his policy of pacification. As a historian writes, "the policy of persuasion employed by Basang Phukan proved to be very successful, for we do not hear of any Naga's raid until the beginning of the 19th century when the Ahom Kingdom had already begun to decline."⁷¹

Evidently, Rudra Singh could settle the accounts with the otherwise predatory neighbours in the hills without much difficulty. The peaceful situation in these borders were necessary to rebuild the state in the line that the monarch cherished and the solidarity of the states and chieftaincies in the regions could only motivate the people in a common challenge to the Mughals that he aspired. The ball was set rolling to the end by his father Gadadhar Singh whose strong and rational policies had revitalised the decaying Ahom state. Rudra Singh inherited the system of relations with hill neighbours and he carried it further to ensure their submission and loyalty in order to strengthen his position. His spectacular success against the redoubtable Kacharis and Jaintias might have been a powerful instrument in securing good behaviour of the hill neighbours. A section of the Nagas and Daflas, who turned hostile for only a short while, had to surrender unconditionally and reaffirm their allegiance and agreed to pay tribute only at the display of force. Such conduct of the fiery hillmen can be understood only in terms of the prowess and the prestige that Rudra Singh commanded. The vassalage of Cachar and Jayantia, along with their tributaries, and the pacification of hill-tribes were bold steps taken towards a

confederacy in the north-east that Rudra Singh planned to beat the Mughals in their own territory in Bengal. In this grand scheme, these vassal states and the pacified hills became the recruiting hinterlands to his confederated army that shall be discussed in a following section.

At Mughal Cost

The Ahom monarch could, however, organise the north-east as a potential challenge to Mughals only by taking full advantage of peculiar situation and that the rulers of Delhi were put in by the unscrupulous policies of Aurangzeb. The last ten years of Aurangzeb's life were inexpressibly sad. Politically, he found that his life-long endeavour to govern India justly and strongly had ended in anarchy and disruption throughout the empire. A sense of loneliness haunted the heart of Aurangzeb in his old age. One by one, all older nobles had died. To quote J.N. Sarkar :

As the aged monarch looked round his court circle he only found on all sides younger men, timid sycophants, afraid of responsibility, afraid to tell the truth, and eternally intriguing in a mean spirit of personal greed and mutual jealousy.⁷²

The endless wars in which Aurangzeb became involved in 1679 and which were to continue till his death, began very soon to react on the political condition of Northern India. The Emperor left Delhi in 1679 for Rajputana and thence proceeded to the Deccan before the end of 1681. In unvarying succession, Northern India continued to be annually drained of its public money and youthful recruits in order to fill the void caused by the Deccan wars. Reports of occasional disasters to the imperial arms, of Prince Akbar's rebellion, Shambhuji's daring raids and the hopeless entanglement of the Emperor with Bijapur, Golkonda, the Marathas and Sikhs, reached the bazars and hamlets of Northern India with unusual exaggeration.⁷³

Then in 1685 the Jats raised their heads under two new leaders, Raja Ram and Ram Chehra, the petty chieftains of

Sinsani and Soghor, who were the first to train their clansmen in group organisation and open warfare. Added to this, the European traders came into contact with the Mughal authorities throughout the Mughal Empire. William Hedges' mission at Dacca received cold reception from Shaista Khan, the *Subahdar*. The local officials at Hugli continued to stop the Company's boats and seize their goods. In vain, Hedges offered large sums of cash money to be excused of the payment of customs. At last, the English traders lost patience with the Mughal government. The company, therefore, decided to protect itself by force, break with the Indian rulers, and seize and fortify some convenient place on the Indian coast where its trade would be safe from molestation.⁷⁴

Even in Bengal *Subah*, the rebellion of Shova Singh and Rahim Khan were of far-reaching effects. This bears an evidence of administrative and military bankruptcy of the Imperial government of Bengal. Moreover, the foreign companies in Bengal lost faith in the local government and they obtained permission to defend themselves. This was the beginning of Fort William, Fort D'Orleans and Chinsura Ramparts. These foreign traders never wholeheartedly supported the government either militarily or economically. Under the cloak of neutrality, they refused to take the side of the lawful government except the Dutch, and thereby, they indirectly extended their support to the underground activities of the rebels.⁷⁵

The economic drainage caused by Aurangzeb's quarter century of warfare in the dreadful Deccan was appalling in its character. The operations of the imperial armies, especially their numerous siezes, led to a total destruction of forests and grass. In addition, the Maratha raiders destroyed whatever they could, feeding their horses on the standing crops, and burning the houses and property too heavy to be removed. When Aurangzeb retired from his last campaign in 1705, the country presented a scene of utter desolation. As Manucci rightly remarked, "Aurangzeb withdrew to himself to the city of Aurangabad in the year 1706, leaving behind him the fields of these provinces devoid of trees and bare of crops, their

place being taken by the bones of men and beasts.”⁷⁶ Thus the Deccan campaign proved to be the graveyard not only of Aurangzeb but also of his Empire. The Emperor committed a Himalayan political blunder in coercing and annexing the two Shia states of the Deccan to be merged with the Mughal Empire. Instead of serving as pillars to the Mughal structure, the annexation generated unsurpassable problems to Aurangzeb. As it is found the states of Bijapur and Golkonda emerged prominent, defeating the cause of Bidar, Berar and Ahmednagar, which served as a barrier between the Mughal empire and the power of militant Marathas.⁷⁷ But by annexing the Adil-Shahi and Qutb-Shahi States, Aurangzeb had demolished the aforesaid barrier and brought the Marathas and the Mughals face to face with one another, inviting unthinkable and dreadful tension like the dismemberment of Poland in the eighteenth century that put three powers like Austria, Prussia and Russia in constant confrontation.

The prestige and power of Bengal Viceroy was in the process of eclipse due to the dominating role of the European traders. In theory, Prince Muhammad Azim-ud-din,* the Emperor's grandson took charge of the government of Bengal in November 1697 and he had only for three years a free hand in Bengal, till the assignment of Murshid Quli Khan as *Diwan*, but thereafter a new force entered the Bengal administration which was destined to drive out the Prince in less than three years and leave an abiding mark on this *Subah* of Bengal.⁷⁸

This new force of Murshid Quli Khan alias Kar Talab Khan as well as Jafar Khan, brought a new legacy with whom the Nawabi rule in Bengal began its train. He joined in the Bengal administration in 1700 as *diwan* with an interval of two years (1708-09). He was promoted to fullfledged subahdarship only from 1717 and continued this covetous post till his death in 1727, after laying the foundation of an independent provincial dynasty emerging from the cockpit of Murshidabad. Although he was neither *Subahdar* nor deputy *Subahdar* of the province prior to 1713, he could enjoy enormous power and tremendous influence from the outset.

Obviously, the office of the Viceroy and deputy Viceroy of Bengal from 1700 to 1713 was run virtually under the dictatorship of Murshid Quli Khan till he was conferred deputy *Subahdarh* in 1713. Some prerogative powers were virtually granted to him by Aurangzeb during the last decade of his reign. Following the tradition of Bengal Viceroys, Murshid Quli Khan had succeeded in collecting huge wealth by his unprecedented revenue reforms, the basis of his past and fruitful experiments of Deccan and thereby won the blind support of Aurangzeb.⁷⁹ He could give substantial economic assistance to the hungry Emperor whose resources were at that time reduced to unmanageable position. Even though, Murshid Quli Khan became an eye sore to the leeches of feudal nobility, corrupt and hereditary officials of Bengal, 'Aurangzeb did not pay any heed to the incessant complaints as repeatedly lodged by those pugnacious parasites.' Rather, the Emperor continued to bestow more favours and rewards on the *diwan* and assured him of his protection against the official clique of Bengal. Evidently, the moral backbone of the so-called officials both in Bengal and also at the central level was practically paralysed. It may be recalled that right from the second term of viceroyship of Shaista Khan, no Viceroy could lay out any 'forward policy' in respect of north-east India. Rather, the Viceroy of Bengal was more crazy for independent attitude denying the usual loyalty and fidelity towards the Imperial government. This tendency of separation was set rolling in Bengal from the time of Murshid Quli Khan.⁸⁰

The emergence of Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch, as a strong challenger to the Mughals and the way he attained the status of a virtual super-power in the north-east by organising the local rulers and the Chiefs in the region into a cohesive and co-operative group can be judiciously understood in the context of the endemic disorder in the declining Mughal State. Articulate and shrewd as he was, Rudra Singh could not be expected to cash out only dividend out of the chaotic situation as because the erstwhile Imperialist power pathetically passed through at the time while the Ahoms were put

back to the zenith of power. The lawlessness in Bengal, like other parts of India, gave him the golden opportunity as he envisaged a plan for forming a strong confederacy in north-east India. It is against this background that the Imperial policy of the Tungkhungia rulers could be gauged and understood. To translate the idea of confederation into action, as has already been mentioned, Rudra Singh followed a 'forward policy' in respect of Jayantia and Cachar. The subjugation of these two monarchies and pacification of the hill-chiefs on the borders, as discussed earlier, strengthened the hands of the monarch, particularly in his own state. He could thereafter proceed further in order to bring in terms the rulers of other states in north-east concerning the issue of confederated movement against the Mughals.

North-Eastern Confederacy

Rudra Singh's political genius can be fully realised neither from the extent of the State he won for himself, nor from the internal development of the country, but from a survey of the conditions amidst which he chalked out the concept of north-eastern confederacy. In other words, he followed a policy of political unification of the entire north-east India with three-fold aims. Firstly, his contemplation was to promote the heritage of Ahom rule; secondly, he was keen to keep pace with cultural heritage of India; and thirdly, he was determined to eliminate the Mughal influence from the nook and corner of north-east India. The contents of the diplomatic letters sent to the court of Tripura clearly suggest that he wanted to make every effort to revive the 'vedic religion' against the aggressive 'pan-Islamic' culture of the Mughals. In this connection, the Ahom monarch made a request to mobilise public opinion along with the influential *zamindars* and nobles of his state on the common cause.⁸¹

It is possible that Rudra Singh looked upon the confederacy from various other angles as well. The way, as the head of the confederacy, the Ahom monarch ascended as a super-power in the north-eastern region was bound to integrate the region into a loose political structure under the leadership of

the Ahoms. This would also tame the fury of the internal challengers to the Tungkhungia rule after the Ahom state had experienced a series of domestic conspiracies during the rule of his predecessors. Liberating the north-east from the Mughal influence was no doubt one of his major objectives. But the monarch had actually gone a step further by planning an invasion of Bengal. This was perhaps intended to beat the Mughal in their own territory that would deter them from interfering in the affairs of the north-east any more. An interesting feature of his policy was that Rudra Singh sought the support of the Hindu or at least non-Muslim rulers in this common scheme. It is further more curious to note that he even inspired the Hindu Rajas and *Zamindars* in the Mughal territory in order to join this endeavour.⁸² This makes abundantly clear his pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim stand*.

Rudra Singh could not reconcile with the subordination to the Mughal government that was sounded through the diplomatic letters of Murshid Quli Khan. He rather diplomatically continued the outward amity till the execution of the objectives of confederacy. In this respect, he possessed the true master's gift of judging character at sight and choosing the fittest instrument for his lofty design. In fact, the initiative of Rudra Singh fired the imagination of the contemporary rulers and chieftains of the north-east and his name became a spell calling the Ahom race to a new lease of life. Before him, the reigning monarchs and chieftains of the north-eastern region were scattered like atoms and he tried to integrate them in a common platform in the teeth of the opposition of Mughal Viceroy and European traders of Bengal Subah.⁸³ No other medieval Hindu ruler of eastern India could display such a capacity and political acumen.

Evidently, Rudra Singh was the first to strike both the Mughal authorities as well as the politically motivated European traders of Bengal and thus convinced the members of the confederation that they could conduct their own defence. They could also protect and promote literature and art, commerce and industry. Above all, he gave instructions

and courage to Hindu rulers of eastern India with a view to rise to the full stature of their growth. Nevertheless, the common slogan was a political one with a religious overtone mingled with it.

It may be recalled that the battle of Itakhuli was a final blow, both to the naval and land power of the Mughals and their eastward expansion was effectively checked. To the Ahoms the fight was life-and-death struggle which called for their best energy. Economic and political subjugation which the Bengal Viceroy had pursued during this period under review disgusted many of the loyal Rajas and *zamindars*. So the short-sighted policy of the Imperial government combined with the corrupt officials of the provincial level especially in Bengal Subah induced the frontier Rajas and Chiefs to place themselves under the strong leadership of Rudra Singh who voluntarily came forward to consolidate the united league of north-eastern States.⁸⁴

As mentioned, the main object of the confederated league was to protect the sovereign authority of the frontier regions from the claws of Mughals and also intended to drive them out from the various outlying strongholds that were still retained by them in the contour of Bengal Subah, and as such the confederacy in question had combined the allies mainly as a league of hill-states. The basis of the contact was that each state should furnish stipulated land forces to the common pool as they were not able to furnish naval forces and that standing naval forces would be solely conducted and shouldered by the royal contingent of the Ahoms. Further, the confederacy of north-east India was a voluntary union of independent allies, each state having an equal voice in the deliberations of the war council that met from time to time for deliberative purposes.⁸⁵

The confederacy was to be operated as based on convention and local usage of the respective territories. Since the Ahom commanded the superiority in naval fleet, Rudra Singh was virtually the dominating personality in the practical workings of the confederacy. The immediate problem before the

confederacy was the cupidity of Mughal Viceroys after the death of Aurangzeb, still formidable, which might destabilise the Eastern confederacy by way of capitalising the unscrupulous defectors. Nevertheless, the intrigues of Bengal Viceroy could not minimise the efforts and contributions of Rudra Singh, the paramount Ahom monarch and it was his clarion call to rejuvenate the patriotic spirit that emerged and dominated the whole affairs of the formation of the confederacy in north-east India.⁸⁶

The first task before the confederacy was the assessment of the contributions to be made by the member-states. Due preparations were made in order to expel the Mughal garrisons and outposts from the border line of the entire north-east. Fortifications both in Assam and Cooch Behar front were specially built. The other tribal chiefs of the bordering areas were well equipped militarily and were directed to co-ordinate with the deployed fleet of the Ahom navy. The final task of the confederacy was the liberation movement against the tyranny and autocracy of Aurangzeb and his successor.⁸⁷

Further, the Ahom monarch also took adequate measures in checking the designs of proselytism as followed by the Muslim and Christian missionaries under the garb of trading agents. Rudra Singh mobilised the desired intentions of the Hindu rulers by waging crusade against the alien forces, sinking their local and petty grievances and also to assert the strength of their age long religion.⁸⁸

Indeed, some of the Hindu potentates and refractory chieftains were also brought under the orbit of Ahom sovereignty by force and they were enlisted as responsible members of confederacy. Many of the principalities were brought to the fold of confederacy through dialogues. Rudra Singh's diplomatic wile had generated a fresh consciousness of co-operation among the diversified authorities ruling in the eastern region. Consequently, Rudra Singh's statesmanship had also projected timely foresight and farsight. He had

successfully prepared the ground for emotional integration in order to reach both at political and fiscal frontiers.⁸⁹

The working of the confederacy virtually had begun with the subjugation of Cachar and Jayantia and the pacification of hill-chiefs each of whom promised to contribute to the confederated army. Rudra Singh had then turned towards Tripura, another organised monarchy in the north-east bordering the Mughal territory. It may be recalled that Ratnamanikya II had ascended the throne in 1695 and had to put down his rivals with the help of the Mughals. In the long run, Ratnamanikya II could not reconcile himself with the subordination of the state to the Mughal authority. There were also strong resentment in the state of Tripura against the overlordship of the Mughals. It was at this time, Rudra Singh invited the Raja of Tripura to join the confederacy to throw away the Mughal suzerainty once for all.⁹⁰

Anandaram Medhi, was instrumental in Ahom-Tripura rapprochement by explaining the inner objectives of the confederacy. Anandaram, who was on a visit to the Ahom court, was intimately known to Raja Ratnamanikya of Tripura. Rudra Singh offered valuable presents to the musician and asked him to impress upon Ratnamanikya II of Tripura about the influence and power of the Ahom monarch so that the latter might be persuaded to seek friendly alliance with the former. Anandaram succeeded in inducing the Raja of Tripura to be a partner to such an alliance. Needless to say, that the "object of Rudra Singh's embassies was to establish friendly relations with Tripura in furtherance of his aim in order to organise a confederacy of the Hindu rulers against the Mughals."⁹¹ Anandaram did the spadework and his mission was a prelude to a definite alliance between Assam and Tripura in concrete terms. Rudra Singh, thereafter, sent Ratnakanali and Arjundas Bairagi as his diplomatic envoys to the court of Tripura. The envoys were accompanied by Anandaram Medhi and cordially received by Raja Ratnamanikya II sometimes in 1708-09.

The visit of the Ahom envoys was reciprocated by the Tripura court when Ratnamanikya II sent Rameswar Bhattacharjee Nayalankar and Udayanarayan Biswas as Tripura envoys to the Ahom court in 1710. They reached Rangpur, the Ahom capital, in 1711 and were received by Rudra Singh amidst pomp and ceremony. The return visit of the Tripura envoys was a step further towards the alliance and Rudra Singh decided to send another mission to Tripura.⁹²

Ratnakandali and Arjundas, who were once again to lead the second mission to Tripura in November 1711, were entrusted with a secret letter from Rudra Singh soliciting the co-operation of the Raja of Tripura in order to counteract the hostile attempts of the Mughals against the religion of the vedas.⁹³ The Ahom envoys reached the royal court of Tripura in March 1712. During their stay there, a court conspiracy was planned by Ghanashyam Barthakur, the step brother of Ratnamanikya II in conjunction with the Mughals who then ascended the throne by dislodging Ratnamanikya II. Nevertheless, Ghanashyam Barthakur, who took the title of Mohendramanikya also turned hostile towards the Mughals and began dialogue with the Ahom envoys in July 1712. The envoys were given full assurance of co-operation by the new Raja⁹⁴ and thereafter, they returned towards Assam in January 1713.

Mohendramanikya, the Raja of Tripura, also sent an embassy to Assam. The Tripura envoy, Aribhimnarayan, was received at the Ahom court in October 1713, and then he took interview with Rudra Singh on December 1713. The Tripura envoy was given leave on April 1714 when he was furnished with letters and presents to Mahendramanikya.⁹⁵ The Ahom envoys proceeded on third mission to Tripura in the same year. These diplomatic missions succeeded in establishing cordial relationship between the two states and prepared the ground for a common approach towards the Mughals.

Rudra Singh next turned towards Cooch Behar. Although the hostile relationship prevailed between Cooch Behar and

Assam for many years and as a matter of fact, the former had actually been an ally of the Mughals in their campaigns against Assam, it may be recalled, Mahendranarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, had proposed combined action against the Mughals in 1693. This in fact was a marked change in the Koch attitude towards Ahom-Koch rapprochement. Although Gadadhar Singh, the then Ahom monarch, sent his message of sympathy to the Raja of Cooch Behar, it may be recalled, the messengers could not reach Cooch Behar due to difficulty on the way. Rudra Singh on the other hand, was determined to win over the Raja of Cooch Behar to the cause of confederacy.

An understanding between Assam and Cooch Behar was also made possible by the fact that Rupnarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, had assumed a determined anti-Mughal attitude and mobilised all the resources of his state in order to dislodge the Mughals from the occupied *chaklas*.⁹⁶ The severe fighting that continued for several years forced the *Subahdar* of Bengal with a view to withdraw from many of such *chaklas*. Nevertheless, the border clashes between the Koches and Mughals were in progress when the Ahom monarch extended his hand of friendship towards Rupnarayan. Such a proposal was indeed welcome to Rupnarayan who had to fight for years together, almost single handed, with the Mughal authorities in Bengal. He was, in fact, forced to sign a treaty in 1711 with the *Subahdar* of Bengal whereby the Raja of Cooch Behar ceded the three *chaklas* of Fathepur, Gazirhat and Kankina, besides Boda Patgram and Purbabhag and promised to pay tribute for some former Koch territory in Rangpur.⁹⁷ Rupnarayan, nevertheless, continued to strive for the recovery of the lost *chaklas*. Determined as he was to resist the Mughal authority, the Raja of Cooch Behar had lost no time to respond to the proposal of friendship of the Ahom monarch.

Rudra Singh, on the other hand, succeeded in reviving the diplomatic relations between Assam and Cooch Behar in furtherance of his policy of regional confederacy and the common challenge of the north-east to the Mughals. The

Ahom Barphukan at Gauhati, who wrote a letter to Rupnarayan, took the initiative in the dialogue. Rupnarayan, thereafter, wrote to Barphukan that there could be no diplomatic exchanges between the two monarchies for a long time due to the impossible condition of the routes, caused by encamping Mughal garrisons. In his letter, the Raja of Cooch Behar categorically stated that there was no such difficulty then and the two states could make a common cause. The letter reached *Barphukan* when Rudra Singh was camping at Gauhati to make the final preparations to invade Bengal.* Rudra Singh was thus assured of cooperation by the Raja of Cooch Behar in his scheme. The assurance was particularly pertinent in view of the fact that Cooch Behar had been an ally of the Mughals in their former invasions of Assam.

The important monarchies in the north-east namely Cooch Behar, Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura were thus diplomatically pacified by Rudra Singh and the rulers of these states assured the Ahom monarch of their co-operation in his scheme of a common challenge to the Mughal imperialism. The only other monarchy in the region was Manipur which was then politically organised and the ruling race belonged to Hindu creed. Although, the ruling family in Assam had a matrimonial alliance with its counterpart in Manipur during the reign of Suhungmung (1497-1599), the Ahom monarch,⁹⁸ there is no mention of Assam-Manipur relations in the chronicles of the either state till in the second half of the eighteenth century.⁹⁹ Manipur had however connections, mostly in the war path, with Cachar and Tripura in the fifteenth and sixteenth century.¹⁰⁰ The state had, however, more intimate connections with China and Burma with which it had common borders.¹⁰¹ The state had practically no political contact with the Mughals as it had no direct boundary with Bengal. Nevertheless, the first Muslim settlement in Manipur as recorded in its chronicle was in A.D.1606.¹⁰² The descendants of these Muslim settlers are known as 'pangan' which is believed to be a corruption of 'angan' or Bengal.¹⁰³ The historians of Manipur also suggest that there were some Muslim invasions, obviously from Bengal, around

that time.¹⁰⁴ The historical records also clearly suggest that Manipur had extensive trade relations with Bengal through Cachar.¹⁰⁵

A turning point in the history of Manipur was however, the accession of Pamheiba alias Gharib Niwas in 1709.¹⁰⁶ His reign saw the promotion of *Vaishnava* faith in Manipur when Shantidas Adhikari, a *Vaishnava* missionary from Bengal went to Manipur and became the preceptor of the monarch. Gharib Niwaz proved himself as a dedicated champion of his new faith through all his reformist actions. He also fought with Cachar and Tripura and successfully carried his arms to Ava.¹⁰⁷

Evidently, Gharib Niwaz had promoted Manipur into a strong monarchy at a time when Rudra Singh engineered his north-eastern confederacy against the Mughals. Unfortunately, there is no record to suggest whether there was any dialogue between Rudra Singh and Gharib Niwaz or his predecessors in the context of the confederacy. The absence of any mention in the chronicles of Assam generally leads one to believe that Manipur had remained outside Rudra Singh's contacts and communications. But it is a difficult position to accept because Rudra Singh looked for Hindu solidarity against 'pan-Islamic' policy of the Mughal rulers and endeavoured to secure the co-operation of all Hindu potentates and chiefs not only in the north-east but also in Bengal which he envisaged to invade. In such a situation, the absence of negotiations with the powerful ruler of a Hindu state within the region is misleading.

In spite of everything, it is not possible to comment on the nature of understanding, if any, between Rudra Singh and Gharib Niwaz due to complete absence of historical information. A glimpse into the history of Manipur around the time (1709-1714) shows that Gharib Niwaz was engaged in the task of state-rebuilding after years of confusion and in a series of wars with Burma. It may be conjectured that Gharib Niwaz would not join the confederacy in subordinate status as did the rulers of Cachar and Jayantia. There could

of course, be a friendly alliance on terms of equal status as in the case of Tripura or Cooch Behar. But nothing like that probably happened, as there is no reflection in historical records or in the chronicles of either Assam or Manipur. The mere guess work cannot be cited to explain a historical phenomena. The historians are also silent about the relations between Assam and Manipur during the period, particularly in the context of anti-Mughal alliances as engineered by Rudra Singh.

The only revealing observation of a historian¹⁰⁸ is that the epithet of Gharib Niwaz was given to Pamheiba by the Mughal emperor of Delhi. If that be the case, it can be conjectured that the Mughals rewarded him for not taking side with Rudra Singh. It may also happen that the Mughal administrators in Bengal had some understanding with the ruler of Manipur and managed to see that latter did not join the confederacy. It is also doubtful, as some historians¹⁰⁹ observe, if the title of Gharib Niwaz was actually given by the Mughal emperor. The only certain explanation is that the term Gharib Niwaz belongs to the Persian vocabulary and it means 'kind to the poor'. Its Persian origin cannot be disputed. As then, "the major portion of eastern India was still under Muslim domination, percolation of a Persian word . . . into Manipur through the hills and becoming favourite of her powerful King is not at all an impossibility."¹¹⁰ It is also not at all an impossibility that the Mughal emperor of Delhi or his *subahdar* in Bengal, honoured the Raja of Manipur with such a title as a political deal. Nevertheless, the only safe conclusion in the context of the challenge of the north-east to the Mughals is that the involvement of the Raja of Manipur is not known from historical records.

Be that as it may, it is also not known from any source that the monarchs of Assam and Manipur were logged in any confrontation. Such a possibility cannot be ruled out at a time when the two states were fast rising into prominence and both aimed at consolidating their respective positions. Rudra Singh and Gharib Niwaz were both ambitious rulers.

and commanded respect and authority in their states. That the policy of Rudra Singh did not confront with the powerful ruler of Manipur may be considered as a success of his policy of pacification. Moreover, there is no record to suggest that Gharib Niwaz in any way opposed the scheme of Rudra Singh or he made any deal with the Mughals. But not opposing Rudra Singh he might have indirectly encouraged the north-eastern confederacy against the Mughals.

On the whole, Rudra Singh achieved spectacular success in securing the support and co-operation of the rulers and chiefs in the north-east before launching his expedition against the Mughals in Bengal. He also wanted to obtain the sympathy of the Hindu potentates and chiefs in Bengal itself. With this objective, he despatched envoys to Marang, Bana, Bishnupur, Nadiya, Bardwan and Barnagar.¹¹¹ He endeavoured to impress upon the rulers of those states that it was necessary to concert measures in order to annihilate the Mughal power which had been destroying the Hindu religion. It is believed that the rulers of these states, who were all vassals of the Mughals, supported the proposal of the Ahom monarch. The princes in Bengal were asked by Rudra Singh to co-operate by not opposing his arms in his attempt to resume the possession of territories up to the river Karatoya. It is also suggested by some records that Rudra Singh wanted to secure free access to the holy water of the Ganges by annexing some territories in Bengal through which the tributaries of Ganges passed through.

The next task left for Rudra Singh was to translate his plan of invading Bengal into action. There was "no doubt as to the thoroughness of his preparation."¹¹² As Gait writes, "He proceeded in person to Gauhati and there organised a great army and a powerful fleet, and collected all his available cannon."¹¹³ He was joined there by all the vassal Chiefs and the Raja of Cachar and Jayantia with their quota of soldiers. Ultimately, a 'grand army' was raised with the contributions of the Ahom state and all other partners of the confederacy. The 'grand army' reached a total strength of

4,00,000. Of this total, the Raja of Cachar contributed 14,000 soldiers, the Raja of Jayantia 10,000, and the Daflas 600. It was planned that the expedition would commence in November 1714, after the autumn harvest to ensure the abundant supply for the army. An advance division of the army was sent down to Kandahar Chokey* to erect the encampments for the soldiers of the Ahom monarch and other princes on the bank of Manas.¹¹⁴

End of the Challenge

The preparations made at Gauhati and Kandahar Chokey showed that the invasion was imminent. Assam, Cooch Behar, Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura had been forced to reckon with Mughal invasions ever since the latter had consolidated its position in Bengal in the sixteenth century. The north-east had so long been on the receivers' end and the Mughals in the role of invaders. It was now time for the north-east to challenge the Mughals not only in their own frontiers but by marching into the Mughal province of Bengal. Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch, was the architect of the scheme and leadership of the army and the confederacy were naturally bestowed on him. The 4,00,000 strong army at Gauhati, including its advance division at Kandahar Chokey, was the fruit of his sustained statesmanship. Unfortunately, when the dream of invasion of the Mughal territory was about to be fulfilled, death snatched away Rudra Singh at Gauhati in August 1714.¹¹⁵

The death of the architect of the north-eastern confederacy was the end of the challenge. His sudden death left the 'grand army' without a commander and the north-east without a statesman who could take his position. Siva Singh (1714-44), the son and successor of Rudra Singh, "gave up the projected invasion of Bengal."¹¹⁶ The development in other states of the region was also not congenial to contemplate a fresh effort to revive the challenge.

The Assamese envoys that were sent by Rudra Singh in April 1714, to Tripura were on their way when the Ahom

monarch died at Gauhati. Mahendramanikya, the Raja of Tripura, also died before the envoys reached Tripura. The Assamese envoys were received by the succeeding Raja Dharmamanikya II. The new Raja, however, gave dismissal to the envoys with a letter to the Ahom monarch conveying general assurance of friendship.¹¹⁷ This letter never reached Rudra Singh as he died before the arrival of the envoys. On the other hand, the State of Tripura fell from its glory during the reign of Dharmamanikya II. The Nawab of Bengal was displeased with him for non-payment of tribute. It is not clear whether Dharmamanikya II had failed to pay the tribute or he intentionally stopped payment due to the spirit of north-eastern confederacy. Nevertheless, this had invited an invasion from Bengal.¹¹⁸ Dharmamanikya II fought for long eight months and the Mughal army was forced to retreat. Meanwhile, Jagatram, a member of the royal family, conspired with the Mughal *Nazim* of Dacca. The Mughal authority had deputed Mir Habib to lead an expedition to Tripura. He had received desired assistance from Jagatram and succeeded in capturing the capital town of Tripura. Dharmamanikya II was forced to flee from the State. Jagatram was therefore made the Raja, under the name of Jagatmanikya, on the condition of paying a large portion of revenue to the Nawab of Bengal. As Stewart writes, "The whole country in consequence, quietly submitted; and thus the province of Tipperah which from time immemorial had been an independent kingdom became annexed to the Mughal empire."¹¹⁹ "Under the circumstances, it was not expected of the new government of Tripura either to challenge or resist the Mughal authority.

The year 1714 also witnessed the change of monarchy in Cooch Behar. Rupnarayan (1707-14), the Raja of Cooch Behar who had roused his state against the Mughals after several generations of subordination to the latter and fought with it for many years, died in 1714.¹²⁰ He was succeeded by his son and successor Raja Upendranarayan. During his reign (1714-63), the relationship with the Raja of Bhutan was further augmented to challenge the Mughal inroads over few

chaklas. Murshid Quli Khan, the acting Nawab of Bengal did not dare to antagonise the Raja of Cooch Behar keeping in view that there was every possibility of loosing the prospective revenues from the captured *chaklas*. As such, the antagonism between Cooch Behar and the Mughal authority was considerably subsided in the viceregal period of Murshid Quli Khan (1713-27).

Gharib Niwaz, the Raja of Manipur as mentioned earlier was then busy in fighting with the Burmese which continued in the first instance up to 1718 and then revived and continued up to 1739. In fact, major part of Gharib Niwaz's reign was spent in fighting with the Burmese. He was however, ultimately successful in conquering some parts of Barma.¹¹ In the years following 1714, Gharib Niwaz also fought some wars with Tripura and Cachar. As a matter of fact, there was a major confrontation between Tripura and Manipur in A.D. 1717.¹² Gharib Niwaz was therefore, concerned only with border clashes with the neighbouring states. Obviously, he played no role in the scheme designed by Rudra Singh nor took any definite initiative in the matter after the death of the latter.

Evidently, the death of Rudra Singh proved to be the end of the challenge of the north-east to the Mughals. The Ahom monarch who succeeded him abandoned the project. The rulers of Cachar and Jayantia were bound to withdraw their troops as the policy of Siva Singh was not conducive to the purpose of confederacy. Tripura since then became a permanent Mughal vassal. The Raja of Cachar, Suradarpanarayan was a minor. The state was a vassal of the Ahoms and joined the confederacy in that capacity. Suradarpanarayan, besides being a minor, was a patron of learning and religion.¹²³ He faced no particular problem from the Mughals and had neither the requisite strength nor the intention or any reason to antagonise the latter. Jayantia had also joined the confederacy in the subordinate capacity. Jainarayan, the Raja of Jayantia (1698-1731), however, had some problems with the Mughal officers in *sarkar* Sylhet around the time. Durlav Das, an *amil* of Sylhet, made some gifts of land actually

belonging to Jayantia. Jainarayan, thereupon, marched with his army and occupied Dhakadakshin, a *pargana* belonging to *Sarkar* Sylhet. A Mughal force was then sent from Dacca, under Nausherwan Khan, which succeeded in recovering Dhakadakshin.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, the confederacy had already succumbed. Jainarayan, therefore, could not afford to antagonise the Mughals. Finally, like the Raja of Tripura, he too became submissive.¹²⁵

The state of Cooch Behar also played no effective role in activising the confederacy after the death of Rupnarayan.¹²⁶ Upendranarayan, the son and successor of Rupnarayan, no doubt, endeavoured to challenge the Mughals and in that matter, he managed to secure the support of his immediate neighbour, the Raja of Bhutan. Had Siva Singh, the son and successor of Rudra Singh, not completely abandoned the project of his father and clung to an isolationist policy of self-defence and domestic consolidation the spirit that Upendranarayan inherited from his predecessor could be utilised as an asset by the Ahom monarch. Upendranarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar gave fight to the Mughals on the score of proprietary right over some of the *chaklas*. Nevertheless, the policy of non-intervention carefully followed by Murshid Quli Khan avoided the possibility of confrontation.

The north-eastern confederacy thus failed to achieve its purpose due to the sudden demise of its architect, Rudra Singh. It was engineered by one man and as a result, its successful execution depended on him. The objective was laudable and the scheme opportune. The architect of the confederacy made a bold venture to eradicate the various fissiparous and divisive tendencies that were endangering the very existence of the Hindu rulers and chieftains in Mughal frontiers. Undoubtedly, the very purpose was to evolve a code in order to preserve the common economic, military and political interests of the member-states putting a stop to the further expansion of Mughal authorities of Bengal. The military strength of the Ahom army and navy was unexpectedly strengthened with the voluntary contributions of member-states by way of man-power and war equipments. Naturally,

the spirit of dynamism was hopefully generated through the different wheels of the confederacy. Rudra Singh made every effort to appraise the situation and sought the advice of the council of ministers who readily ratified the royal plans of war strategy. The monarch, thereupon stressed the valour of his predecessors and argued that his ancestors by virtue of their prowess and courage, crossed the boundaries of Rangamati in modern Goalpara district and washed their swords at the river Karatay-Ganga but the historical forces had compelled them to establish a garrison at Gauhati, with the river Manas as their western limit.¹²⁷ The monarch, therefore, envisaged to expand his territory by concerted means.

It is indeed, undeniable that the unique sense of unity and co-ordination had been attained at its highest peak due to stimulating spirit of the confederation. In most of the preceding expeditions against the Mughals, the Ahom contingents suffered from the forces of defection owing to feuds among few war generals and potential nobles. But now under the confederacy, both the rulers and the ruled became united, sinking all their local and personal differences. On the other hand, it may be recalled that the declining blaze of the second term Viceroyship of Shaista Khan in Bengal (1680-88) had mellowed into a softer glow in the tedious conflict with the basic interests of the East India Company.¹²⁸ No sooner had the dominating Viceroy been recalled by the Imperial court than all the forces that he had sternly controlled and all the warring elements that struggled for emancipation from the grinding yoke, had broken out in irresponsible tumult.

His successor, Ibrahim Khan (1689-97) was exposed as a weak *Subahdar* that became favourable to crazy European factors in order to fortify their respective settlements as already mentioned. The *Subahdar* now being an eyesore, was sacked by the Emperor and appointed his own grandson, Azim-ush-Shan as Viceroy of Bengal. Within the span of few years he too was overshadowed by Murshid Quli Khan's appointment as *Diwan* in 1700. Both the Viceroy and *Diwan* were at variance in their respective goal and political objectives. The new *Diwan* was permitted by the Imperial govern-

ment to remove the revenue offices away from the provincial capital to a new place called Murshidabad that soon became the new capital of Bengal.¹²⁹

The last decade of Aurangzeb's reign caused administrative degeneration in an extensive and diversified empire like India. Like Napoleon I after the end of Tilsit, Aurangzeb could bear no contradiction, and his ministers were reduced to the position of clerks. Above all, Aurangzeb had quickened the disintegrating forces already in operation in the land. The death of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1707 finally exposed the tottering stage of the Mughal empire. The sharp contest ensued for the throne killing two of his sons and three grandsons in the field. Ultimately, Bahadur Shah I alias Prince Muazzam (1707-12) had mounted the imperial throne at the age of sixty-three. He too wanted his residual resources in suppressing the Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs. His was the last reign that is reminiscent of the glories of the great Mughals. However, his strong inclinations for *Shia* innovation had provoked civil wars, as the *Sunnis* formed the immense majority of the Muslim population in India.¹³⁰

Further, the final campaign against Banda, the Sikh Guru, taxed upon the health of Bahadur Shah I and he met with natural death in February 1712, leaving his work undone. Jahandar Shah alias Muz-ud-din (1712-13) the eldest son of Bahadur Shah, became the undisputed master of the empire of Delhi after fierce context with his three brothers. Revengeful actions were taken against the leading supporters of his defeated rivals. On his arrival at Delhi from Lahore in June 1712, the news came that Farrukh-Siyer, the second son of Azim-ush-Shan and his deputy in the government of Bengal had marched to Delhi across Patna for the crown. In the ensuing war of succession, Jahandar Shah was assassinated by the spies of Farrukh-Siyer and ended the administration that was wretched in content. Farrukh-Siyer thereupon, took counter measures in order to root out the partisans of Jahandar Shah and the proclamation of the emperor was actualised in January 1713, though deposed cruelly in

February 1719. All his life, Farruk-Siyar was determined to crush the Saiyid regime (1712-19) and he organised a number of conspiracies to depose of the 'Sayyid Brothers' who were considered as king-makers but the imperial brickerings had a very evil effect on the whole facets of Mughal administration.¹³¹

Nevertheless, the episode on the war of succession during 1712 by the stormy march of Farruk-Siyer from the seat of Bengal encouraged the reactionary forces of the province in order to undo the whole system of government as envisaged by the de facto *subehadarship* of Murshid Quli Khan. During his *Dewanship*, Emperor Aurangzeb gave blank cheque unlike Mir Jumla which was capitalised by Murshid Quli Khan in scaling the ladder of Bengal. In fact, almost all the viceroys were obsessed with tempting wealth and courtly pleasure at the cost of common masses as well as the denial of the code issued by the Imperial authority. Again, the very image of the selfish viceroys was overshadowed by the aspiring zeal of the then *Dewan*,* Farruk-Siyer, Khan-i-Jahan II and Farruk-Kunda Siyer from the seat of Bengal.¹³² On the other hand, the Imperial rulers like Bahadur Shah, Jahandar Shah and Farruk-Siyer were also challenged and obstructed by the 'Sayyid Brothers' and the Emperors were helpless and bound to remain as silent spectators to the plight and sufferings of Bengal. Even the high officials were not free from corruptions, and involved in local intrigues ignoring the norms of loyalty towards their temporal authority. This chaotic state of affairs also adversely affected the economic walls of Bengal which was unofficially treated as pawn to the European enterprises. The grave fiscal crisis also had forced the Timurid authorities to waive the rigid trade regulations and statutes and the European factors set the ball rolling in laying out western capital with pre-requisite conditions for harvesting the speculative dividend. Evidently, the European entrepreneurs were indirectly entangled in the political chess of Bengal.¹³³

The European traders were also conservative to the core in extending concrete assistance to the Viceroys of the time in

Bengal. They rather put emphasis to fortify their respective headquarters especially in all port towns so as to enable them for upholding the extraordinary trade facilities. Incentive was given to the local recruitments of troops mainly of Afgan and Rajput stocks who were eager to earn the minimum needs from the purse of French and British factors. The military base of the Europeans was strengthened through their local garrisons by the disgruntled soldiers of the Mughal contingent. Very soon, a considerable portion of corps being frustrated by non-payment of the Mughal government, had joined voluntarily the row of European adventures whose meagre cash coins was considered to be of immense relief to ever neglected and uncared wounds of the native army.¹³⁴ No wonder, Rudra Singh drew his strength from the weakness of the Mughal authorities in order to organise the north-eastern confederacy.

The circumstances that helped Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch, may be summed up as follows :

Firstly, the emerging sense of integrity and national consciousness as generated were the guiding principles of the confederacy, whereas under the later Mughals, the secessionist tendencies mainly of the Viceroys of Bengal tempted the European factors to infringe upon the court politics of the Mughals both at provincial and central levels, pretending false compassion, coaxed and camouflaged under the cloak of fiscal assistance. Secondly, the mirage of few Viceroys proved abortive when the native traders of Bengal were dislodged mostly by the European traders as they had laid out their projected investment in the main commercial key-points of the province with the concurrence of high-handed Viceroys. Now Bengal, like other port towns, also witnessed a pandemonium as the European free-booters geared up their hectic activities as if like octopuses. So the Mughals also began to loose their prolonged influence in the north-eastern *Chokys*.¹³⁵ Thirdly, like the Marathas, Rajputs, Jats and Sikhs, the members of the north-eastern confederacy were imbued by the patriotic zeal and traditional chivalry and were determined to clip off the wings of the contumacious Viceroys of

Bengal that depended so long upon the turbulent *jagirdars* and *mansabdars*. No Viceroy during Later Mughals could formulate any project either in national or in imperial perspective unlike the benevolent rulers, owing to excessive dependence as parasites upon the feudal bureaucrats whose vicious circles were mere den of corruptions. The demoralised bureaucracy instead of pacifying the cataclysm of the crucial time, paved the way in raising up their tottering castles at the cost of innocent and groaning *ryots* and dumb masses which are bound to collapse through the wheels of time. Fourthly, the protagonists of the north-eastern confederacy had timely channelised all the local resources for strengthening their respective fronts and succeeded in attaining the sound economic position in congruity with military side; whereas the Viceroys of Bengal were in constant hitch and tussle with the *Diwan* and the public exchequer of the province was on the verge of bankruptcy, inviting the European factors who came forward as pawn-brokers in exploiting the fluid position as the future prize. On the other hand, the soldiers posted in the north-west province began to starve as their salaries for five years fell into arrears. The Imperial government had counted on the Bengal revenue that did not reach in time.¹³⁶ Fifthly, the Rajput and Sikh rebels under the stewardship of Maharana Amar Singh and Banda, the Sikh Guru, had caused irreparable damages to the emperorship of Bahadur Shah. The gospel of Bahadur Shah as earlier mentioned was opposed tooth and nail by the uncompromising Afgan troops who were loyal to *Sunni* creed. The emperor's prejudice for Shia creed had projected and reacted in the body politic of Bengal.¹³⁷ This offered an advantageous scope to the leaders of the north-eastern confederacy to shape their stipulated objective.

Further, Murshid Quli Khan was caught hold of the radar to save the would-be wreckage of the provincial ship if not the imperial. As Sarkar writes, "Although Murshid Quli Khan was not officially either *Subahdar* or a deputy *Subahdar* before 1713, his power was indisputable from the outset."¹³⁸ The ego of Murshid Quli Khan alias Jafar Khan had reached

at its peak when Emperor Farruk-Siyer granted the offices of the *Nizamat* and *Diwani* of the three *Subahas* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to him.¹³⁹ Despite his imperial patronage, Murshid Quli Khan could neither get rid of the pressure of the European factors nor from the demoralised bureaucrats and prey to temptations and nepotism. He now took the course in appointing his kith and kin to the key posts of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, putting the Viceroys on the horns of a dilemma. He gave special preference to the Hindus in the collection of revenues as because most of the Muslim collectors have conspicuously grabbed and squeezed the public revenue.¹⁴⁰ The state of affairs gave a further push to the member-states of the confederacy for augmenting the campaign with vigour.

Evidently, the initiative of Rudra Singh in organising the confederacy and his ambitious scheme to invade Bengal had been inspired by the decaying conditions of the erstwhile imperial invaders. But the scheme failed to produce the desired results due to the death of the architect. It is, however, interesting to note that such a scheme against the Mughals is not reflected in their records. The confederacy as it is known from the local sources aimed at an invasion of Bengal. But it is doubtful whether it was at all known to the provincial administrators in Bengal. There seemed to be no reaction on their part. They made no endeavour to resolve their conflicts with the European factors and the provincial governor even turned to be disloyal to Delhi. He failed to meet his quota of revenue to the central authorities in time. Murshid Quli Khan behaved in a peculiar way, sometimes functioning in the style of an independent ruler. Had the *subahdar* of Bengal envisaged an attack for the north-east, he must have adopted sufficient defensive measures for the protection of his territory. He would also not antagonise the European factors to avoid confrontation at home when its security was at peril, and particularly, he would maintain good relationship with the central authority to be sure of full support. It is, therefore, possible that the provincial authority in Bengal either did not attach

much importance to the confederacy or their espionage system failed to gather particulars about it.

Nevertheless, the indirect results of the scheme of Rudra Singh was not insignificant. He could remodel his state and remove internal differences through his anti-Mughal staunch. Similar was the impact in other states in the region. The rulers and chieftains in the region for the first time came closer in spirit in order to oppose the common enemy. It is also significant to note that Murshid Quli Khan, who was instrumental in the secession of Bengal from the Mughal state, ultimately followed a policy of non-intervention towards the north-east as he was more concerned with his own province. The intervention in the affairs of Tripura was due to the initiative of a member of the royal family who was an aspirant for the throne. The Jayantia case was one of border clashes and subsided with the resumption of the tract that was occupied earlier by the Raja.

NOTES

1. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 122.
2. *Ibid.*
3. K.N.T. Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 45.
4. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. III, p. 351.
5. W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, pp. 239-42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 235.
7. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 337-38.
8. Irvine, W., (tr.), Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
9. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. IV, p. 343.
10. Irvine, W., (tr.), Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp. 291-92.
11. Sir J.N. Sarkar, Vol. IV, *op. cit.*, p. 484.
12. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *A Short History of Aurangzib*, p. 263.
13. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, p. 262.
14. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 122.
15. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, pp. 222-23. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *Ahom Buranji*, p. 263.
16. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 122.
17. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 123.
18. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 263; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 123, S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kamrupar Buranji*, p. 103.
19. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 123; G.C. Barua, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 263.

20. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 57, Tr. No. 8, D.H.A.S., Gauhati, E. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 172.
21. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 266-67; *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 57, Tr. No. 86, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.
22. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 123.
23. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 29, G.C. Barua, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 270.
24. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 29-30.
25. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 212.
26. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *History of Bengal*, p. 377; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 62-64.
27. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 62-64; S.M. Ali, *The History of Jaintia*, p. 23.
28. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, p. 37.
29. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, p. 38; N.R. Roy Choudhury, *Tripura Through the Ages*, pp. 44-45; Rajmala, Education Directorate, Tripura, p. 83.
30. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, p. 40.
31. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, pp. 312-13.
32. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 231.
33. E. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 172.
34. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranji*, p. 126; S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 234.
35. A.A. Chowdhuri, *Cooch-Beharer Itihas*, p. 175.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
37. A. Salam, (tr.), *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, pp. 229-31.

38. W. Haig & R. Burn, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, p. 311.
39. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 241.
40. W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. III, p. 480.
41. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 32.
42. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Assam Buranji*, Mss 49, D.H.A.S.
46. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-87.
47. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 33.
48. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Kachari Buranji*, pp. 60-67.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 108-110.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 111-12.
56. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 81-82.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-104.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
59. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *The Garos and the English*, p. 86.

60. G. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 60.
61. K.N.T. Phukan, *Assam Buranji*, p. 32, G. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
62. L. Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, p. 165.
63. S.K. Bhuyan, *Kachari Buranji*, p. 97.
64. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
66. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 195; W. Robinson, *A descriptive Account of Assam*, pp. 293-94.
67. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, pp. 206-07, W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. II, p. 413.
68. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-74.
69. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-38.
70. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tung Khungia Buranji*, p. 33.
71. L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
72. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. V. p. 202.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-38.
74. W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. IV, pp. 217-18. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *History of Bengal*, p. 395.
75. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *History of Bengal*, p. 395.
76. W. Irvine, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 237.
77. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Aurangzib*, Vol. IV, pp. 467-68.
*Later Azim-Ush-Shan.
78. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 57, Tr. No. 86, D.H.A.S., Gauhati; Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *History of Bengal* pp. 405-07; A Salam, (tr.), *Riyazu-s-Salatin*, p. 247.
79. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49; Sir J.N. Sarkar, (tr.), *Maasir-i-Alamgiri*, p. 288.

80. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.
81. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 15-16.
82. S.K. Bhuyan, *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, p. 235.
*Dr. S.K. Chatterji, calls Rudra Singh as Shivaji of North East India. 'See *The place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*,' pp. 46-51.
83. *Ibid.*
84. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 93-94, *Assam Buranji*, p. 94.
85. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungia Buranji*, p. 39.
86. *Ibid.*
87. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 95-96.
88. *Assam Buranji*, Mss No. 57, Tr. No. 86, D.H.A.S., Gauhati.
89. *Ibid.*
90. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, p. 4.
91. *Ibid.*, Introduction, pp. VIII-XI, S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in Assamese literature*, (Analysis of Tripura Buranji), p. 137.
92. S.K. Bhuyan, *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 13-15, S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the literature of Assam*, (Analysis of Tripura Buranji), p. 139.
93. S.K. Bhuyan, *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 15-16.
94. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 79.
95. *Ibid.*, Introduction p. XVII; S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in Literature of Assam*, (analysis in Tripura Buranji), pp. 152-53.
96. A.A. Chowdhuri, *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 271.
97. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 415.
*See L. Devi, *op. cit.*, p. 249.
98. G.C. Barua, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

99. H.K. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 74-75; K.N.T. Phukan, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungla Buranji*, pp. 52-58; L. Mangisingh and L. Mani Singh, (ed.), *Vijoy Panchali*, pp. 57-58.
100. L.I.G. Singh, *Introduction to Manipur*, pp. 160-65.
101. R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 38.
102. *Cheithaarol Kumbaaba*, p. 22.
103. G. Kabui, "Social and religious movement in Manipur" in S.P. Sen, (ed.), *Social and Religious Movement in 19th and 20th Centuries*, p. 414.
104. L.I.G. Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 163-64.
105. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North East India* p. 15.
106. L. Mangisingh and L. Mani Singh, (ed.), *Bijoy Panchali*, pp. 56-58, 64. Pemberton, however, believes that the year of accession was 1714 A.D. See R.B. Pemberton, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
107. *Ibid.*, (Vijoy Panchali), pp. 18, 54-58.
108. R.M. Nath, *The Background of Assamese Culture*, p. 91.
109. J. Roy, *History of Manipur*, p. 35.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
111. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, Introduction IX-X.
112. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 185.
113. *Ibid.*,
*Also known as Assam Chokey.
114. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungla Buranji*, p. 39; S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the literature of Assam*, (Analysis of Tripura Buranji), p. 153.
115. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tungkhungla Buranji*, p. 40; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

116. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 187.
117. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, p. 99.
118. *Rajmala*, Educational Director, Tripura, p. 86.
119. C. Stewart, *History of Bengal*, p. 485.
120. A. A. Chowdhury, *op. cit.*, pp. 180, 271.
121. L.I.G. Singh, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-66.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
123. J.B. Bhattacharjee, 'Chronology of the Dimacha Rajas of Cachar', *Journal of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research*, Vol. II, No. 2, p. 5, 1978.
124. S.M. Ali, *The History of Jaintia*, pp. 31-39.
125. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 415.
126. *Ibid.*
127. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Tung Khungia Buranji*, p. 39.
128. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 385; Sir W. Haigh and R. Burn, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, pp. 308-09; S.N. Khan, *The Maathir-ul-Umara*, Vol. II, pp. 690, 834-35.
129. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 251.
130. W. Haigh & R. Burn, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, p. 324; W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, pp. 136-40.
131. *Ibid.*, pp. 332-33; W. Irvine, *Later Mughals*, Vol. I, pp. 185-200.
132. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 276.
133. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 418.
134. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 396, 403.
135. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.

136. B. Singh Nijjar. "The North-West Frontier under the later Mughals", O.R.H.S., Vol. XI, 1971-72 No. 1, pp. 42-43.
137. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *op cit.*, p. 397.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 400.
139. A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, p. 273.
140. Sir J.N. Sarkar, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 409.

Mughal Impact on North-East India

THE FORWARD POLICY of the Mughals beyond the Bengal Subah virtually ended with the withdrawal of the campaign under Raja Ram Singh, while the challenge of the north-east too subsided with the death of Rudra Singh. The Mughals who directly ruled over the largest part of India before the rise of the British power in the country, had made some determined bids to extend their domination over the north-eastern sentinel of India. With the exception of Tripura where they could continue to exercise their indirect authority as the succeeding political power of the Sultanate of Delhi, the mighty Mughals had to satisfy themselves with the annexation of lower Assam and the imposition of tributary status on the state of Cooch Behar. The petty estates on the north-east frontier of Bengal viz., Karaibari, Sherpur, Susang and Bijni etc. had, in fact, a semi-independent status in a system wherein the Rajas (also called *Chaudhuries*) would pay a nominal tribute to the Mughal *faujdar* at Rangamati and the imperial authority would never exercise itself in the internal affairs of the state on the specific condition that the estate-holder would repel any lawlessness in Mughal territory by the predatory tribes in the frontier. The earlier attempts that were made to subjugate Cachar and Jantia were not possibly renewed during the period under review, although Aurangzeb was known for his otherwise die-hard policy at imperial expansionism. The policy of imperial expansionism and military campaigns that were persistently pursued against the Ahoms also yielded no permanent political results. In the same process, the hopes and aspirations of Rudra Singh (1696-1714), the Ahom monarch, to fight the Mughals in their own terri-

tory by invading Bengal also came to a stop by his sudden demise. His unexpected death could not offer any inducement to the Mughals in order to revive their north-eastern campaign as the decaying condition of the Mughals was very much precarious after the demise of Aurangzeb in A.D. 1707.

. Nevertheless, the repeated Mughal campaigns in the north-east had left behind some permanent impact on the region. The presence of the Mughal commanders, their infantry, cavalry and navy could inspire the people in the otherwise isolated region with their life style. It is but a historical process that when the two races come in contact, either in hostile or friendly situation, the reciprocal exchange of ideas and values results in composite change of complex nature. Again when a political system is forced to reckon with the challenges in order to defend itself, the innovations to revitalise itself politically and administratively and at the same time, to re-organise as well as re-christen its defence structure would automatically follow. The invaders in most cases, as during the Mughal invasions in Assam, are accompanied by the explorers who in the long run contribute in opening up the country and exposing the areas and avenues of interaction in future. Thereafter, the mobility of the forces would lead to the introduction of the new lines of communication and discovery of unknown routes that might be used subsequently for the administrative consolidation and commercial purposes in peaceful situations. A careful study of the processes of political, economic and social change in north-east India since the second half of the seventeenth century, would make the Mughal impact in the processes crystal clear. It should, however, be noted that the entire volumes of Mughal impact did not register itself through military campaigns only. The increased communication with and concerned for the neighbouring Mughal provinces of Bengal made the impact more easier and spontaneous.

Regional Solidarity

The foremost impact of the Mughal campaigns was the growing solidarity amongst the monarchies and tribal forma-

tions in north-east India. Ever since the liquidation of the ancient Kamrupa, which enclaved major part of the region with adjoining areas of northern and eastern Bengal, the north-eastern region passed through political disintegration and comparative isolation from the rest of the country. The political connections that the valley of Brahmaputra used to maintain with Bengal under the Palas and Senas from the eighth to eleventh century A.D. did not last longer. In the twelfth century and onwards, the monarchies and innumerable tribal formations in the region functioned in isolation. The attempts of the Ahoms, since their emergence in Upper Assam during the thirteenth century, at imposing imperial authority on the neighbouring areas infused mutual hostilities, thereby strengthening isolationist tendencies.¹ The unsuccessful and sporadic attempts of the Sultans of Bengal to extend their territory in the Brahmaputra valley had also the indirect effect of restricting the spontaneous relationship between Assam and Bengal.² The Sultanate was successful only in partially pacifying the Raja of Tripura who was obliged to accept their suzerainty in a limited form.³

Never before the Mughal challenge, the region as a whole, had a common force to reckon with. At the face of the formidable Mughal menace, the Ahoms had to modify their policy towards the neighbours. Rather, they attempted at inducing their friendship as the hostile and revengeful attitude of the neighbours would be dangerous for their territory at a time when they were engaged in war with the powerful invaders. To begin with, Pratap Singh (1603-41) did not leave any stone unturned to pacify his northern and north-western neighbours like the Bhutias, Monphas, Akas etc. By granting them *posa*,⁴ as already mentioned earlier, the system which regulated the nature of trade and relative loyalties. Pratap Singh also carefully avoided direct confrontation with the erstwhile rival monarchies of Cachar and Jayantia.

The regional solidarity in the north-east was experienced in a concrete form through the confederacy as organised under the stewardship of Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch. He could regulate relationship with the chief of the various

tribal formations on the immediate borders of the Ahom state. The Rajas of Cachar and Jayantia were so pacified that they not only supported the Ahom ruler's scheme against the common enemy of the region. Even Tripura that had never before any direct relationship with the Ahom state too participated in the confederation and effectively supported the regional scheme. Although Manipur's participation in the confederation is not definitely known, the records suggest the active collaboration and co-operation with Assam a few years later when Maomaria unrest rocked the Ahom state and the Manipur is had to face with Burmese invasion.* Rudra Singh's success in enlisting the support of the Raja of Cooch Behar deserves to be commended as spectacular in view of latter's allegiance to the Mughals for many years. The Mughal challenge thus indirectly brought the various states in north-east India together and inspired them with a spirit of regional solidarity.

Revitalism

The states of north-east India, big or small, were generally based on crude form of feudalism in which an individual would hold and use land belonging to the ruler. The individual would also render personal service to the government. Further, there was the division of social classes mainly into two strata: the rulers and the ruled. Again the land-holdings would determine the basic structure of the society. So the relationship between the vassal and overlord would be guided by the personal understanding. However, during the period under review, the elemental forces of Mughal rule had put a new layer on the social structure. Usually, the Ahom monarchy was centralised. The ruler was at the head of administration, but he was assisted by the three great councillors of State, called *Gohains*.⁵ The position of the monarch varied from ruler to ruler. For example, some monarchs, such as Pratap Singh (1603-41), Gadadhar Singh (1681-96) and Rudra Singh (1696-1714) appeared to have followed their own wishes without much respect for the opinions of their nobles, while some other rulers were mere puppets in the hands of one or other of the greedy ministers.

The monarch was the very pivot of the administration and all efforts were made to create a halo of divinity round him, with a view to make his person and his commands sacred and inviolable.⁶

The fundamental duty of the monarch was the protection of the people and of safeguarding the basic rights in respect of property and belief. The three *Gohains* or Ministers functioned as partly nominated and hereditary councillors of the state and served as key cabinet to the monarch. The latter could appoint any member of the appropriate clan to such offices though the hereditary principle was generally followed. Their counsels and concurrence were counted on all important matters. They proclaimed the monarch and could depose him in the instance of incapacity or great delinquency.⁷ Next to the *Gohains* in rank were the *Bar Barua* and *Barphukan*. Both the posts were created in the early part of the seventeenth century under the direction of Pratap Singh.⁸ This would definitely imply that the re-organisation of Ahom administration was also influenced by the Mughal invasion with a view to ensure the territorial integrity of the Ahoms as well as to counteract the militant forces of Mughal administration.

The *Bar Barua* received the revenues and administered justice in those portions of the eastern provinces from Sadiya to Koliabar. At the outset, the *Bar Phukan*'s authority was confined to the tract between the Kallang and the Brahmaputra in Nowgong. With the gradual expansion of Ahom territory towards the west, the *Bar Phukan* shifted his seat at Gauhati in order to make effective supervision and control from Koliabar to Assam chowkey of Goalpara. He represented the sovereign as Viceroy over all the provinces to the west of Koliabar. He usually received envoys from the adjoining territories including Bengal.⁹

All foreign envoys had to obtain prior permission from the office of *Bar Phukan* in order to visit the royal court at Garhgaon. The *Bar Phukan*, was empowered to nominate the lesser Rajas of the adjoining territory. His nomination

was always confirmed by the monarch.¹⁰ The *Bar Phukan* was more or less an autonomous governor in his administered areas. He was assisted by a council of six subordinate *Phukans* who were provided with fixed quotas of *Paiks**. Below the rank of *Phukans*, there was a class of officers known as *Baruas* of varied categories each of which represented distinct profession and responsibility. Next in rank were twelve *Rajkhowas*, and a number of *Katakis*, *Kakatis* and *Dalais*.¹¹

Usually, the high officials would be recruited from the Ahom community. However, some percentage of positions were occupied both by the non-Ahom natives of the country as well as persons of foreign descent. For example, many war prisoners of the Mughal wars were absorbed in the military and civil administration of the Ahom government. They were granted new ranks of *Bora*, *Saikia*, *Hazarika* along with their Islamic title. Thus the services of the personnel of Mughal Indian origin brought some remarkable changes in Ahom military as well as civil administrative organisation in line of Mughal model. However, all the captured war prisoners were not placed on the same footing as because the personnel belonging to the Mughal nobility were given the requisite scope and avenues corresponding to their earlier status, though not at par with those of the Ahom community. As such, certain features of the Mughal rule were not so common in the Upper part of the Brahmaputra valley as in Lower Assam or Cachar valley etc.¹²

The Mughal fashion of administration was mainly infused through the instrumentality of *Faujdar* and *Thanadar*, wherever the Mughal occupation lasted for a considerable period, the system of *pargana* was implemented covering a number of village units. In each *pargana* certain influential persons were honoured by conferring the title of *Chaudhury*, *Talukdar*, *Majumdar*, *Laskar*, *Bhuyan* and *Karoris* after giving them certain areas of arable land.¹³ They in turn would pay taxes either in cash or kind to the *Faujdar* or *Thanadar* in addition to the supply of manpower in war time. In fact, the military services were being mainly rendered by the *Jagirdars* and big

zamindars of both the *Uttorkol* and *Dhakinkol* who belonged to the nobility like Mughal *Mansabdars*.¹⁴ Thus the *pargana* system under the patronage of *Chaudhuri*, *Talukdar*, *Laskar* and *Karoris* was beginning to work in the lower part of Brahmaputra valley due to the extension of Mughal hegemony in those areas. Even in the south-eastern part of Jayantia Kingdom and the southern tract of Kachari Kingdom, those organisations of the Mughals were put into operation through different phases basing on the proximity of *Sarkar Sylhet*. Even in upper and central Assam, the *Maujadari* system was influenced by the *pargana* model bringing a radical change in the conventional paik and Khel* system.¹⁵

The guidelines of civil and criminal laws were usually framed by high caste Hindu Brahmins (priests) of the royal court. The Ahom monarch of the seventeenth century were inclined to give up their native code and laws and began to adopt the major rules of the Hindu law in administering justice.¹⁶ As there was no practice in maintaining written code, formerly the justice depended mostly on the whims and caprices of the monarch and his subordinate juries. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the character of criminal law was marked by sternness and comparative harshness. It is because the Mughal Emperor tried to translate Islamic code through the councils of the *Qazis* or judges of high order.¹⁷ Probably, the Mughal occupation of Kamrup and invasion of Assam contributed much in order to bring about a change in the Ahom judicial system. Firstly, the contemporary Ahom monarchs felt the necessity of severity and cruelty in executing criminal laws in order to counteract the foreign forces as well as to combat the internal insurrection by terroristic principles. Secondly, the delegation of judicial powers to the provincial governor of Gauhati in the line of decentralisation also marked its beginning from the time of Mughal invasion of Kamrup. Before that, judiciary of the Ahom court was mainly centralised in the Monarch and *Bar Barua*.¹⁸ Therefore, the introduction of decentralisation was a new phenomenon released only after the pressure of Mughals upon north-east India.

Nevertheless, the Mughal organisation was more elaborate than the states of north-east India. The entire structure of Mughal administration consisted of villages, *Parganas*, *Sarkars* and *Subahs*. "All the twenty Indian *subahs* of the Mughal empire were governed by means of exactly the same administrative machinery with exactly the same procedure and official titles."¹⁹ The immensity of the Mughal Emperor's power could be judged from the fact that he was the head of the Church and the State alike. The central government would issue directives to the provincial government for general administration and policy matters. Each of the provincial divisions had to be provided with courts where justice could be administered. The *Sarkar* was the sub-division of a *Subah* (province) and had within it a large number of *Parganas*. There would be a *Qazi* in each *pargana* to look after the judicial administration. The executive head of the *Sarkar* was *Faujdar*. A *Qazi* also was responsible for judicial administration (both civil and criminal) of the *Sarkar* and also heard appeals from the *Pargana* courts.²⁰

It would thus appear that in the Mughal administration, the principle of the separation of powers was tacitly followed by the creation of separate personnel under the supervision of Supreme *Qazi*. But in the case of Ahom government, the officials were given both executive and judicial powers. For example, the *Bar Phukan* and *Bar Barua* were also vested with judicial powers in addition to other administrative functions. However, appeal could be made to them as well as to the monarch. Nevertheless, the administration of justice under the Ahoms was comparatively liberal.²¹

'This type of Mughal administration with its arrangement, procedure, machinery and even titles, was borrowed by the Hindu states outside the territory directly subject to Muslim rule'.²² Like Mughal Kamrup, the Kingdoms of Cooch Behar, Jayantia, Cachar and Manipur borrowed some features of Mughal judiciary after making modifications in the traditional Hindu and tribal laws. In Cooch Behar, the Mughal contact ushered in remarkable changes through the frame-

work of political and administrative re-organisations. Right from A.D. 1613, many feudatory chieftains and *zamindars* had cropped up in Bijni, Sidli, Chirang, Ripu, Guma, Gauripur, Karaibari, Bhulua, Bakla, Bhosna, Sonargaon etc. in the eastern wing of the erstwhile kingdom of Parikshit. They were virtually accepted as the protectorate of the Mughal ruler. Consequently, the deputed Mughal agents in their respective assignments had pushed forward the guidelines of Mughal administration to those state holders. Shaykh Ibrahim Karori was appointed as supervisor who used to send a periodical report to the Imperial officers.²³ Very soon, the acquired tract was divided and sub-divided under system of *Sarkar* and *pargana*. In revenue matters too, the Mughal machineries were put into operation. During the stay of Ram Singh at Rangamati, necessary steps were taken to consolidate the new administrative innovations which were operative from the territory of Cooch Behar to Mughal Kamrup.

Most likely, the *Mauza* system of Assam incorporated certain basic elements of both Afgan and Mughal administration. In no case, this system was indigenous. This system became more viable to the monarchs of Assam in extraction of the meaningful resources of land which was not possible under the conventional *paik* and *Khel* system. Due to constant warfares, the exchequer of the Ahom court was also on the brink of bankruptcy. At the same time it was of imperative necessity to defend the country from Mughal onslaughts on the one hand and the rebel chieftains on the other. Evidently, the Ahom monarch during the period under review, had to stress in augmenting the quantum of major agricultural resources and this project was materialised by adopting *Mauzadari* system and at the same time, the state could overcome the time bound financial stringency.²⁴ Along with it, the *paik* system could enable the Government to carry out schemes of extensive constructional works throughout the kingdom.²⁵ The plough tax was mainly realised from the emigrating *ryots* who cultivated the land belonging to inundated areas. The cultivators belonging to hill tribes would pay hoe tax.

Notwithstanding, the rulers of Cooch Behar opened new office keeping in view the need to meet the unseen problems that cropped up due to the gradual expansion of Mughal hegemony. The policy of isolation on the part of Cooch Behar was broken right from the early part of the seventeenth century. Both the Afgan and Mughal powers brought tactical pressure upon Cooch Behar to accommodate certain structure and organisation of politics. Even though, the Afgans could not make any permanent authority, yet they succeeded in bringing about a change in the conventional polity and economy.²⁶ But the Mughals did make direct pressure upon the sovereigns of Cooch Behar and succeeded in transforming the whole structure and tone of administration.²⁷ The style of Mughal administration became prominent since the temporary victory of Mir Jumla over Cooch Behar and thus the synthesis of Afgan and Mughal pattern was accepted both by the victor and the vanquished. This new model of Cooch Behar would resemble that in *Sarkar Sylhet*, situated in the lower valley of Surma, where too the Afgan and Mughal features were combined together.²⁸

The enormous power so long exercised by the rulers of Cooch Behar was abandoned due to the adoption of political legacy of the Mughals. Now the council of ministers began to work as pillars of the monarchical edifice. Diplomatic activities were accelerated to combat the constant threat of the Mughals. Nevertheless, the rulers of Cooch Behar were facing the challenge of the newly emerged *zamindars* in its surrounding *chaklas*. They inspired the Mughals to cripple the status of the rulers and to grant substantial autonomy to the holders of *chaklas*. They were also in favour of transforming the conventional administration at par with the Imperial model. The double role of the *zamindars* belonging to different *chaklas* brought remarkable changes in the arteries of whole administration which could not be avoided by the rulers of Cooch Behar.²⁹

Tripura kingdom also introduced some administrative reforms in the line of the Mughal system of administration. The posts of *suba*, *Ujir*, *Nazir* and *dewan* were also borrowed

from the Mughals with a view to overcome the new complexity of administration. Further, many more posts were created to revitalise the revenue system. Thus the plains of Tripura and adjoining parts of the capital were divided into several *parganas*. Each *pargana* was ruled by an officer known as *Chaudhuri*. He was assisted by *Laskar* in controlling the newly acquired areas.³⁰ Above all, the administration of Tripura during the period under review, was an admixture of Tribal, Hindu and Muslim system of administration.

The tribal Chjefs, however, retained their hold over their respective tribes as before and ruled according to their system. However, the tribal chiefs had to assist the Raja with their men in times of war. Mention may be made that few hill-tribes patronised the growth of Buddhism centering Harikela and they had exchange of religious views with Burma and Assam.³¹ The rulers of Tripura in the later part of the seventeenth century, remodelled the court ceremonies in the line of Mughal court. The personnel of the diplomatic offices were selected on the basis of experience and wisdom.³² Nevertheless, "the history of the Tipras in the 17th century was one of gradual decay, although the state of Tripura never became a part of the *Subah* of Bengal."³³

Kacharis were engaged in tripartite wars with the Ahoms and the Jayantias, throughout the seventeenth century, and at the same time the Mughals tried to extend its hegemony over Cachar. But the kingdom of Cachar could never be brought under the direct rule of the Mughals, although the state was required to pay tributes annually to the Mughal court.³⁴ But this did not prevent the Mughal impact in the area as it was contiguous to Sylhet *Sarkar* of Bengal *Subah* and geographically a natural extension of the Bengal valley and the people in Cachar valley belonged to the same dialect group of Bengali as the people in Sylhet. Any political, social or religious change or development in Bengal had spontaneously influenced Cachar, particularly in the plain areas. The ruling family of Cachar belonged to the Dimacha tribal group but because of the situation of the royal household in the Barak or Cachar valley at Khaspur, surrounded by the

Bengali subjects of the Rajas, a socio-linguistic transformation of the ruling clans was very much prominent since the middle of the sixteenth century. Again Cachar was an extension of the Gangetic Bengal and even before the Koch rule, several Bengalee settlements had developed in the plain tracts of Cachar as a result of the natural movement of the people towards the east.³⁵

Formerly, Tantric Hindus, the royal family and the aristocracy embraced *Vaishvanism* of the Chaitanya school in the seventeenth century. The Bengali language and calendar were used for official work. With the growth of complexity in administration the rulers were bound to re-organise the administrative organisation. Thus the traditional *khel* was reshuffled in the form of *mauza* in order to yield better resources. The central Cachar Division in modern Nowgong district of Assam valley was known as *pargana Dharampur*, while in the Cachar valley mentions were made in the royal papers as *pargana Serispur*, *pargana Sonapur* etc. The office of *Mukhtars* had to assist the head of *mauzas* (*Mauzadar*) in the transaction of land tenure matters. There were various gradation of revenue collectors known as *Sezwal*, *Laskar*, *Bhuyan*, *Mazumdar* etc.. As the volume of state activities increased, the rulers had created and classified more upgraded posts known as *Barlaskar*, *Major laskar*, *Chota laskar*, *Bar Bhuyan*, *Majan Bhuyan* and *Chota Bhuyan* etc. corresponding to respective jurisdiction. Thus transformations also corroborate with the copper plate inscription which mentioned that Raja Kirti Chandra Narayan during seventeenth century appointed one Mohiram Deb Laskar of Borkhola as *Ujir* (wazir).³⁶

During the reign of Suradarpa Narayan, there was large scale immigration of both Hindus and Muslims who made colonies in the southern part of Kachari Kingdom.³⁷ The influential new settlers were more inclined to the style of Bengal and the ruler had to satisfy their aspiration by conferring new titles known as *Vakeels*, *Mazumdar*, *Chaudhuri*, *Bar Bhandari*, *Bhandari*, *Ujir* etc. Simultaneously, the rulers of Cachar began to confer the title of *Barua* to the

noble section of North-Cachar in the style of Ahoms.³⁸ So the changes that took place in social, economic and political aspects were mainly due to the pressure of migrated population from the *Subah* of Bengal. Further, the royal court had also patronised a galaxy of scholars drawn mainly from Bengal who translated ancient scripture into local language.³⁹

The revitalist impact of the Mughals was also spontaneously registered in Jayantia because of its close proximity with the former in the *Sarkar* of Sylhet. As mentioned already, the Rajas of Jayantia at times used to pay some tributes to the Mughal authority who exerted pressure out of political and economic reasons. Further the Mughal authority did not like Jayantia's allegiance towards Ahom monarch. As a result, the Jayantia envoy meant for the Ahom court was kidnapped by the agents of the Mughals.⁴⁰ The oscillating attitude of the Jayantia rulers was abandoned, the moment Ahoms re-occupied Gauhati in 1667. It would be reasonable to believe that when the corruptions of the Viceroy of Bengal *subah* weakened the administrative structure, the Raja of Jayantia wanted to get rid of the humiliating pressure of the Imperialists and opted to despatch soldiers in order to assist the Ahom monarch in the proposed campaign against the Mughals.⁴¹ No wonder, the Mughal system registered its impact on Jayantia and the neighbouring Khasi states.

The mounting pressure of Mughal imperialism had forced the Raja of Jayantia to reorganise the defence structure with a view to reckon with the imperialist challenge. On the other hand, to revitalise the state structure, several reformist innovations were introduced. For the regular administration and increasing the revenue, the land revenue administration underwent changes. The *pargana* system came to stay along with the traditional four-fold land systems like *Raj* land, service lands, *puja* lands and private lands.⁴² The offices like those of *Laskar* and *Bhandari* were introduced like Cachar. The changes were inducted in the line of Mughal administra-

tion. Raja Ram Singh (1701-08) appointed a *Sikdar* in each village and one *Chauduri* over sixteen *Sikdars*. The major function of the *Chauduri* was to collect revenue for the Raja, and the *Sikdar* and *Chaudhuri* were given judicial powers to decide petty cases.⁴³ These features were definitely influenced by the style of the counter parts in Mughal Bengal. Further, the Muslim population in the plains division of Jayantia considerably increased during the period and the Raja of Jayantia had to appoint *Qazi* for the administration of justice among their Muslim subjects. The court ceremonies underwent some changes by liberalising the traditional rules and regulations.

The Khasi *Syiems*, particularly in the southern hills that bordered with *Sarkar Sylhet*, appointed *Mukhtars* for maintaining records and correspondences. The states had a kind of officer called *Doloi*. The *Dolois* would serve the *Syiem* in the capacity of military general as well as to the neighbouring fiefs. During the period under review, the offices of *Mukhtar* and *Doloi* were upgraded by conferring more powers and responsibilities. Such transformation was necessitated by the increase of the volume of official transactions with the adjoining Mughal *Sarkar* of Sylhet. Mention may be made that the term *Mukhtar* was of Mughal-Persian origin and it had been an induction through close contact in the Khasi vocabulary. Likewise, the village headmen were known as *matabars*, *Sirdars* etc. The Chiefs in the Shella areas took the title of *Wahaddars* which was of Persian origin. These officials were elected for three years each by the people. The three *sirdarship* in the Jayantia Hills were elective as in the case of *Doloi*. Again the meetings and the councils came to be known as *Durbar*.⁴⁴ The western Khasis remained cling to their tribal religion and their state was known as the State of Khyrim, with its capital at Nongkrem near Shillong. Khyrim and Jayantia all along maintained their separate statehood. The Jaintia Rajas came into prominence in the sixteenth century. As Chatterji writes,

The Jaintia ruling house was perhaps fully Hinduised—they were staunch *Saktas*, and the temple of the Goddess Jantia,

a form of *Durga* in Jayantapura, the capital of the Jaintias, became famous all over Bengal and a great part of India as one of 51 *pithas* or sacred *Sakta* Shrines.⁴⁵

Although Manipur had no direct political contact with the Mughals, the trade relations with Bengal that were maintained through Cachar,⁴⁶ acted as the catalyst to such impact. The existing police organisation was renovated by the creation of *Kotwal* who was the chief of Police. The initiative in maintaining the royal horses and elephants is known by the new posts of *Sagol Hanjaba* and *Samu Hanjaba*. Probably, the Muslim traders volunteered to supply the horses through southern part of Cachar and thereafter the native people picked up the skill in training the horses. The use of fire arms was introduced simultaneously during this period.⁴⁷

In the early decade of the eighteenth century, Gharib Niwaj made intensive orientation in all aspects of a welfare state.⁴⁸ He also fought the Burmese from 1725 onwards, and on one occasion pushed as far as Ava, the Burmese capital.⁴⁹ Muslim traders and artisans from Mughal Bengal began to immigrate into Manipur long before the time of Gharib Niwaj. Even during the reign of Khagemba (1630-?), the ambitious predecessor of Gharib Niwaj (Pamheiba) alias Gopal Singha, the Muslim prisoners of war and low caste Hindus were given settlement in Manipur.⁵⁰ Probably, the Muslim settlers encouraged the Mullas and Gazis in order to make spiritual and social relief through itinerary camp and on the other hand, the Hindus were aspiring to get spiritual relief through the preachers of Chaitanya Vaishnavism from Mughal Bengal.

Trade and Commerce

The major impact of the Mughals on the north-east, particularly the areas outside their control, generated through extensive trade with Bengal. The history of Assam's trade connection with Bengal claims antiquity. During our period under review, in spite of occasional hostile political relations, the trade structure was organised at the initiative of the rul-

ing authorities especially between Bengal and Assam. As Bhuyan writes : "Free commercial intercourse with Bengal required governmental protection of the traders of both the countries, and the supervision and control of the frontier officers and collector of duties.⁵¹" The trade link brought the trans-Brahmaputra country closer with canvas of Bengal along with other parts of India. The travel accounts of Tavernier mentioned that

Dacca would export ornaments of coral, amber and shell to Assam, Bhutan, Nepal and Siam. People of Bhutan would barter their goods for horses, mules as there was no scope of money economy. Most of the commercial transactions were made mainly by the Armanian merchants.⁵²

Mention may be made that the commercial treaty concluded by Captain Welsh with Gourinath Singh in February 1793 was nothing but the confirmation of existing Mughal trade system by deploying company's troops in the strategic commercial outposts of Assam.⁵³

Among the frontier people, the Khasis also maintained trade connections with Bengal through its southern borders. Unlike the Garos, the markets were under the control of the Khasi syiems or rulers whose territories extended into Mughal Sylhet of Bengal Subah. Further, the trading profession was carried both by the male and female alike.⁵⁴ Jayantiapur the erstwhile capital of Jayantia rulers was the seat of distribution of all merchandise. Another commercial spot was Padua in the Surma Valley, close to the foot hills of the southern slope of the Khasi highlands. Agricultural products both from Jayantia Kingdom and Khyrim state were carried partly by porters and then by country boats to many river ports. The Khasis were also probably tempted to utilise the river port of Laur that lay in the north-western part of *Sarkar Sylhet*. Laur was visited by the traders of northern India too. During seventeenth century, the Mughals put some obligatory duties to the Hindu potentates of Laur for checking occasional inroads of the neighbouring Khasis. Thus one Govinda Chandra served as an influential Mughal agent after

embracing Islamic faith. He now took the name of Habib Khan and successfully resisted the Khasis and secured the estate of Laur.⁵⁵ The Rajas of Jayantia derived the lion portion of the income from the possession in the plains. The brisk trade with the chain of markets in the Surma Valley was prospective. The entire southern foot hills of Jaintia and Khasi hills and Garo hills were capped with innumerable markets of which Bholaganj, Chatak, Bonatit (Laur), Molagul, Jagirpara, Halloghat etc. considered to be prominent. The traders of Khasi-Jaintia-hills and Garo hills also participated in the transactions both in the occasional fairs (*molas*) as well as regular markets.⁵⁶

The limestone and iron ore were the principal minerals that the Khasi-Jaintia hills possessed and cotton of Garo hills supplied to the neighbouring areas. The traders in Bengal since the time immemorial imported those profit earning items. The Mughal authorities took active interest in limestone quarries and in course of time, assumed the monopoly of lime trade.⁵⁷

To begin with, the Mughal authority in Bengal took the lease of Laur (Nongstain-Langrin) hills.⁵⁸ While the Mughals held the monopoly of the limestones of the Laur hills, the private traders of Bengal used to take lease of quarries in other parts of the Khasi-Jaintia hills. In course of time, the entire trade was controlled by the Mughal authorities.⁵⁹ The Khasi chiefs appointed Bengali *Doardars* as their agents in order to deal with the Mughal authorities and traders, while such lease holders employed Bengali labourers for working in the mines.⁶⁰ Besides economic impact, such transaction was bound to result in cultural exchange. Towards the end of our period, a horde of private traders of different European nationalities—English, Greek, Dutch, Portuguese, French and the Armenians—crowded Sylhet to take advantage of the lucrative trade with Khasi-Jaintia hills.⁶¹ The iron and iron manufacturers of Jaintia and Khasi Hills also had a big market in medieval Assam.⁶² The merchants of European nationalities as well as Mughal India who were engaged in trade with Khasi-Jaintia hills took the advantage of the market

at Jaintiapur for trading with the adjoining territories. Trade in the commodities like wax, ivory and iron manufactures slowly followed. These articles as well as raw silk and wrought silk were produces of Cachar that passed through Jaintia hills and were traded by these Bengal based merchants with the Khasi-Jaintias as intermediaries.⁶³

Goalpara on the south bank, and Jogigopha and Rangamati on the north, were the three eastern outposts of Bengal from where its merchants would transact their trade with the frontier officers of Assam. However, the Ahoms were always suspicious of foreign traders and as such no undue privileges were accorded to the trading agents of the Mughals. These trading centres were also visited by the European traders mainly of Portuguese descent.⁶⁴ These European traders were actively competing among themselves in the field of manufactures out of the raw materials available in the hinterlands of Bengal. As Bernier writes: "The Dutch have sometimes seven or eight hundred natives employed in their silk factory at Kassem-Bazar, where in like manner, the English and other merchants employ a proportionate number."⁶⁵

A liaison officer of the Ahom government, called *Duaria Barua* was posted at the Assam Choky (Khandahar Choky) which was situated at the mouth of Manas river. He was empowered with special rights and discretionary powers in regulating trade with Bengal Subah. He was to pay fixed rent annually to the treasury of the Ahom government.⁶⁶ Mention may be made that in the field of commerce and finance, the big merchants of Murshidabad of which the house of Jagat Set was most prominent maintained connection with north-east India. He migrated from Rajasthan and started his career of fortune. The amount of economic and political control exercised by this commercial house over the affairs of Bengal Subah up to the days of Plassey, created a hurdle to the monopoly trade of the European merchants. Jagat Set was dislodged from the bullion market. Even he had to withdraw his agents from Goalpara, Jogighopa and Kandahar *choky* in Assam like other parts of India. This

suggests that the trade link of the business house of Calcutta continued with the north-east during the latter Mughal period.⁶⁷

Most of the Nawabs of Bengal beginning with Prince Shuja were involved in private trade. This resulted in corruptions that were brewing in the economic life of the time. The same article came to be taxed twice or thrice ignoring imperial restrictions. Shaista Khan in the capacity of Governor of Bengal tried to abolish the existing trade monopolies along with direct taxes that were imposed on sellers and buyers called *abwabs*. But the subordinate officials continued to squeeze the common masses by way of reviving the doctrines of monopoly. The goods were distributed among the merchants at rates 15 per cent to 10 per cent higher than the market rate.⁶⁸

Boat making industry of Bengal Subah depended mostly on the forest woods of north-east India. In fact, Assam was famous for its valuable timber used for various purposes. M'Cosh referred 90 (ninety) variety of timbers of Assam of which Jotikori, Kornii, Chatyan, Dudkuri, Bhela, Uriam, Borohelock, Aggur, Langchi, Kangtali Champa etc. yielded fruitful utility.⁶⁹ The Ahom government had elaborate system of boat making industry to maintain the standard of fleets. Occasional hostilities did not stop the flow of trade in between Assam and Bengal. As Bhattacharyya writes :

In exchange for elephants, tusk, hide of 'Chamari' cow, pepper, musk, silk cloth, gold, lignumaloes and 'jaluk' and other kinds of aromatic plants to be had in abundance in Assam, the Assamese used to import from the Mughal domain various kinds of winter clothings e.g. 'Lahori', 'Bapta', 'Banat', to protect themselves against the rigorous cold in their hilly habitation.⁷⁰

Another important industry of the Ahom period was gold washing and manufacture of jewellery. Gold was washed from the sand of the Brahmaputra. This profession was carried by a guild known as *Sonowal Khel*, who paid to the

Government a tax at four annas weight or five rupees worth of gold per annum. The state would derive considerable income from this lucrative enterprise.⁷¹ Rudra Singh (1696-1714), the Ahom monarch, adopted deliberate measures to increase the volume of trades, with Mughal Bengal as well as the Himalayan tracts without affecting the political guide lines. As Gait writes :

The trade with Bengal was considerable and the officials who formed the customs revenue paid rupees 90,000 a year to the *Bar Phukan* of which, however, only 26,000 reached the Royal treasury.⁷²

The Garos served as intermediate links connecting the trade between Assam and the Surma valley. They brought salt from *Sarkar Sylhet* and cotton from their own hills. The Garos also had regular trade transactions with the Mughal Faujdar at Rangamati who exercised some political control through the semi-independent or feudatory Rajas. These feudal agents were designated as *zamindars* or *Chaudhuris* with foothold at Susang, Sherpur, Karaibari, Mechmaru, Kalumalupara, Gauripur, Bijni etc. The principal source of income of those feudal chiefs would extract the lion portion of their income from the hills through piloting trade. In this process they had established as well as administered a string of markets at the mouth of the passes in their respective estates wherein the Garos and the merchants of Mughal Bengal bartered their commodities, keeping a fixed taxes payable to the *Zamindars* or feudal magnates. The revenue payable by the estate-holders to the *Faujdar* mostly in kind was assessed only on the basis of the volume of trade. The imports and exports fulfilled the variable needs of the respective states.⁷³

As Bhattacharjee writes :

Faujdar was appointed by the Mughal Government with headquarters at Rangamati, for the collection of tribute and maintaining the relations with the estate-holders. The

Faujdar, however, on no occasion interfered with the Zamindars or the Garos and other allied tribes in the frontier. The internal management of the estates was left entirely to the hereditary chiefs who were rather treated as tributaries than as subjects and the estates from Bijni to Susang served as buffer between the Garos and the Mughals.⁷⁴

As noted earlier, Shaista Khan, the viceroy of Bengal miserably failed to check the corruptions both in trade and revenue departments as because the subordinate officials were tempted to increase their personal wealth. The *Faujdar* of Rangamati (Rangpur) would indulge in private trade and make brisk trade in cotton and other forest products with the chiefs without the notice of revenue assessor of the provincial court. In fact, the mountaineers were economically exploited both by the feudal magnates and the mercantiles class. The *Zamindars* were well equipped with armed *Barkandazes* to push the mountaineers in the cradle.⁷⁵

Cachar had trade relations with Mughal Bengal through *Sarkar Sylhet* as the main trading route to that port-town passed through Mughal, a few miles south-east of Jayantiapur. When the capital town was shifted from Maibong to Khaspur during the early decade of the eighteenth century, the volume of trade was augmented through the river routes of Barak valley. The country was commercially important as the traders of Manipur, Mizos (Lushai) and Kukis would barter their respective products through the brokers of Cachar and the main venue of transaction was Jirighat and Sealtek. As Bhattacharjee writes :

There was a brisk trade between Sylhet and Manipur through Cachar in wax, ivory, silk and cotton and duties were levied by the Raja on the merchandise at the *ghats*. In the northern frontier there was extensive trade with Assam and the Nagas. In addition to a number of *Choukies* in the frontier, Mahung-Dijua was a flourishing area on the Cachar-Assam border.⁷⁶

The whole of Kachari Kingdom was rich in forest products which had good market in *Sarkar* Sylhet. The most valuable timber was called the jarul which was mainly used in boat-building as well as the posts in house-building.⁷⁷

Religious fairs were visited both by the native and Mughal traders. "*Sicca Tanka* which was the unit of circulation in medieval Bengal, was obviously the common media."⁷⁸ As already mentioned, the agrarian structure of Assam underwent some changes by the adoption of Mughal revenue system in a modified way. Obviously, this transformation had made indirect impact in some of the hill states as a logical consequence. The *Zamindari* system in lower Assam began to work in the line of Mughal Bengal. However in Bengal, the Mughal nobility and bureaucracy were combined into one who in turn put pressure upon the merchants and traders.⁷⁹ In Assam and its neighbouring hill states, traders were regulated under active state vigilance.

A significant change in the economic system in north-east India during the period under review as mentioned earlier was the imposition of the Mughal revenue system in Cooch Behar and in the occupied areas in Assam, the impact of which was transmitted to the region as a whole. As a result, 'profound changes began to take place' due to 'the increasing role of money in economic life'.⁸⁰ The Mughal system demanded revenue in cash whereas under the Ahoms the traditional practice was solely to offer militia service by the *paiks*. Interestingly, the Ahoms also retained the Mughal revenue system in such areas, namely Koch-Hajo wherefrom they succeeded in pushing back the Mughals subsequently. The relatively affluent section of the Assamese *Paiks* looked forward to the commutation of the service obligation to the state into kind or cash payment and the government was forced to concede to such demands.⁸¹ The collection of land tax from the cultivator was not part of the Ahom revenue system. Shihabuddin Talish, the author of *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, who accompanied Mir Jumla during his Assam campaign found that in every house one man out of three had to render ser-

vice to the state. He considered the revenue system to be liberal. To quote him :

If this country was administered like the imperial dominions, it is very likely that forty to forty-five lakhs of rupees would be collected from the revenue paid by the raiyats, the price of elephants caught in the jungles and other sources.⁸²

The Mughal attitude is clearly discernible from the observation of aforesaid chronicler. "This way of thinking" as Guha observed "had not left the Ahoms unaffected."⁸³

This is suggested by the subsequent developments. As Guha writes :

Impressed by the Mughal land measurement system, they started a country-wide detailed land survey and almost completed it during the years 1681-1751. In that process, attempts were made to detect taxable wet rice lands held in excess of the prescribed paik allotments and to explore new avenues of taxation, while keeping the militia system basically intact. Surveyors were brought from Koch-Bihar and Bengal. Selective commutation of labour service obligations for cash was also in progress. By 1663 pineapple and tobacco, both contributions from the New World, were under cultivation in the region. Both had potentialities as cash crops.⁸⁴

In the long run, land in western Assam acquired saleable value and transactions in the form of sale and purchase commenced.⁸⁵ The documents pertaining to A.D. 1667, 1685 and 1723 suggest instances of land purchases.⁸⁶ A *sunad* (A.D. 1667), issued by Aurangzeb in favour of two temple priests mentioned the market price of land donated. In 1685, a noble man purchased a plot of land, and in A.D. 1723 nine acres of orchard and rice lands were sold for Rupees twenty five. Although all the transactions occurred in western Assam,⁸⁷ these created the examples for other regions as well.

Such transactions made the circulation of money indis-

pensable. This also liquidated the traditional barter system. In former times, the rulers in the north-eastern monarchies, no doubt issued coins but such coins played no role in the economic life of the masses. The general media of circulation was *cowry* (conch-shell). There are epigraphic references to the use of *cowries*.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, barter remained as the main form of exchange along with the use of *cowries* and Bengal coins that infiltrated into the region through trade.⁸⁹ The trade link with Bengal, as mentioned already was indeed remote. The region imported salt from Bengal. The elephants' tusk, buffalo horns, rocksalt, iron, cotton, lac, silk etc. were the main products of the region and served as the item of consumer-producer relationship between the isolated groups and villages in the north-east. The producers could also generate surplus in respect of some of these items which they exported outside. During the Mughal period, the external trade of the region passed through diversification particularly with Mughal India, as a result of 'some growth taking place in trade and crafts and some advance made towards monetization and specialization'.⁹⁰ In place of the former gold coins issued by the local monarchs, by the middle of the seventeenth century, the minting of gold and silver coins, and even use of *cowries*, was vigorously resorted to. A large number of half, quarter, one-eighth and one-sixteenth rupee coins, issued during the period from the end of the seventeenth to the middle of the eighteenth century, were extensively in circulation throughout the region. There was however, no copper coinage and it is probable that the *cowries* served its purpose.

The rapid increase in money supply from several sources indicated that the demand for media of exchange and trade, both intra-regional and inter-regional, were increasing over the years A.D. 1500-1750⁹¹.

As Manucci also writes :

All the collectors of the Crown rents are, during the time they are in office, absolute masters of the province made over to them, and can take cognizance of all disputes,

whether regarding civil or criminal questions, even matters relating to religion.⁹²

The massive participation of the populace in the region is suggested by the fact that some *Vaishnava* saints of Assam also actively associated in trade.⁹³ The story of one Kali Charan of Cachar who was a Brahmin by caste but turned to be a wealthy person through trade carried on, besides Bengal and Burma, with other parts of India in the early part of the eighteenth century.⁹⁴ Similarly one Bhabananda Kalita, an Assamese enterpriser, growing into a big merchant through trade with Cooch Behar, Garo Hills, Bhutan and Bengal is known from an Assamese source.⁹⁵

As Guha writes :

Traders used to form temporary partnership to trade in distant markets with boat-loads of local products and returning with a cargo for sale. On completing the return voyage and sales, the profits were shared and the partnership was dissolved. Commodities involved in trading were mustard-seeds; arecanuts, betel leaves, ornamental umbrellas made of bamboo and *takaupat* (leave of a plant of the palm family), knives with ornamental handles, salt, silk, black pepper, elephants' tusks and gold.⁹⁶

The village artisans manufactured earthen wares, variety of bamboo baskets, fishing appliances and containers, cotton and silk clothes and made their living by locally bartering these for salt, oil, rice etc. The numerous weekly and bi-weekly local marts and markets throughout north-east India are known, both from the local and the Mughal sources.⁹⁷ "These local markets, in course of time, became linked with the markets in Bengal as the local traders took their trading boats as far as Dacca or followed and overland trade-route across the Jaintia hills to Sylhet to trade with Bengal in the early seventeenth century."⁹⁸

The trade relation with the Mughal territory was maintained throughout the period under our review, except when it

had to be suspended due to war situation. The diplomatic relations of the Ahom monarchs with the neighbouring States and tribes were motivated by the inclination to encourage free commercial policy in the interest of weal and woe of both the parties.⁹⁹ The traders from home and abroad were not given any indulgence as mentioned to involve in the political dialogue of both sides.

As Bhuyan writes :

The Ahoms were ever-vigilant of the merchants of foreign territories, and never allowed them to settle in Assam lest they, as secret agents of some designing state, created any disruption in the country.¹⁰⁰

The variety of Assam silk called *muga* had extensive and ready market not only with Bengal but also Coromondal and Malabar coasts in the seventeenth century. As Shihabuddin Talish found that 'Assam gave gold, musk, aloe wood, paper, spikenard and raw silk in exchange for salt, saltpetre, sulphur etc., at the Ahom-Mughal check-post¹⁰¹'.

Mention may be made that some of the European factors were thriving in trade vigorously centering Bengal. Thus the exports of the English company from Bengal increased its value from £34,000 in 1668 to £85,000 in 1675 and this suggests the Bay trade as the most lucrative trade of the company.¹⁰² Their extension towards north-east direction by establishing factory at Malda in 1681 justifies that a new incentive was generated to supply varieties of coarse goods from the adjoining region. It is also learnt from William Hedges's diary that after procuring the *parwana* in January 1683 from Shaista Khan, the then Viceroy of Bengal, their goods passed "as freely as ever they did formerly".¹⁰³ Shaista Khan followed the monopoly of trade as shown by Mir Jumla. He was alleged to be avaricious by the English, having collected 38 crores in 13 years. The English resorted to a policy of force (1686) to redress their grievances, and Fort William was established in 1696.

Moreover, the English in Bengal was granted free trade by

the *farman* of Emperor Aurangzeb in 1690¹⁰⁴ and their business concentrated at Sutanuti (later known as Calcutta) under the supervision of Job-Charnock. Evidently, 'the growth and development of the English East India Company at this time was one of the more notable forces at work creating a propitious environment for the radical economic advances which occurred later in the seventeenth century'.¹⁰⁵ The Dutch also had a flourishing trade in mid-seventies though they were not destined to enjoy their ascendancy for long. Like the Dutch and the English, the French were engaged in Bengal foreign trade from the time of Shaista Khan. As mentioned that the English were trading in Bengal on a more favourable terms than the Dutch and French. In 1686 King James II granted the East India Company a fresh Charter confirming all its privileges and by 1702 Murshid Quli Khan, the defacto Viceroy of Bengal offered the English freedom of trade as before.¹⁰⁶ 'The same tradition was practised earlier by Ajamtara alias Sultan Muhammad Azim (July 1678-Oct. 1679) who accepted the sum of 21,000 rupees from the English and granted official order from his own capacity for a free trade, without the payment of any duties.'*

Evidently, the trade activities of north-east India were significantly increased during the period under review. The 'merchandise trade surplus was generally in favour of Mughal India' and 'salt accounted for an overwhelmingly larger part of the imports into Ahom State'.¹⁰⁷ On the other hand, the trade with Tibet and Bhutan was favourable to the north-east as the outstanding balances were settled in gold and silver. These countries supplied mainly woollens, gold dust, horses, yak-tails (*chamar*), musk and Chinese silks in exchange for lac, dried fish, cotton, rice and iron.¹⁰⁸ The trade could grow more voluminous but the fact that 'there was no organised grain market, nor was there a vertically and horizontally organised chain of intermediaries to intervene in the market,¹⁰⁹ acted as serious limitations as Shihabuddin Talish wrote: "the inhabitants store in their houses one year's supply of food of all kinds, and are under no necessity to buy or sell any eatables."¹¹⁰ But the things changed under the Mughal impact in the early part of the eighteenth century

when the prices of articles like rice, pulses, salt, oil, betel leaves, ginger, black pepper, earthen vessels etc. for purchase by certain temples were mentioned in copper plate charter.¹¹¹ The information supplied by such charters suggest that commodities which were not tradeable earlier became so by that time and that money had assumed a definite role in local economy.

The traditional art and crafts too underwent transformation. In Assam for example, weaving, oil-crushing, rice-pounding, basket making, gold washing, salt manufacturing and such other crafts were carried on largely within the households. All the craftsmen had agriculture as additional occupation and the artisans and fishermen were not delinked from agriculture. Shihabuddin Talish was impressed by the timber palace at Garhgaon and locally built war boats.¹¹² He also found ten to twelve thousand *Sonowals* were engaged in gold-washing as mentioned earlier. Its process was job-oriented for a greater section of masses. "Each man makes in the average a tola of gold per annum, and hand it over to Raja. But the gold is not fine, sells for 9 or 8 rupees per tola."¹¹³ The different methods employed in gold washing involved sufficient amount of labour and skill. The period under review witnessed further technological developments mainly due to the recruitments of artisans from Mughal Bengal. The expert Muslim artisans were recruited from Bengal and northern India and granted settlement in the Ahom state on the merit of loyalty. Some of the Muslim settlers, who were originally prisoners of war, were also good braziers. Many artisans were engaged in the royal *Karkhanas* while others attended to private orders.

As Guha writes :

The impact of Mughal India facilitated the introduction of some new crafts like brass casting, tailoring and the manufacture of rose perfumes and granulated sugar.¹¹⁴

Defence Reorientation

The main military strength of the Ahom army largely con-

sisted of infantry and elephants, besides impregnable navy and requisite cavalry. But on land route, the army mainly depended on the *paiks*. The *paik* system was the basis not only of the entire socio-political but also of the military organisation of the Ahoms.¹¹⁵ All the adult males between the ages sixteen and fifty had to render compulsory service, civil-cum-military. The civil functions included manual labour in different crafts like making arrows, boats, houses, roads embankments and forts etc. Further, the non-serving *paiks* formed a standing militia who were also under obligation to render military service as para-military troops during wars and rebellions. The fortification of Gauhati was coupled with the armed retainers.¹¹⁶ During the period under review, the rulers of the Ahom government perfected the art of constructing improvised walls and stockades on river banks and in midstream, and constructed bridge of boats across the river Brahmaputra.¹¹⁷ To reckon with the Mughal challenge, the Ahoms resorted to the construction of forts at all vulnerable points. A number of forts also came up in Cachar, Jayantia and Tripura along the Mughal boundaries. As a matter of fact, the region experienced a mushroom growth of forts.

Early Mughal invasions were not so effective in Brahmaputra valley as because the Ahom naval boats had comparative advantages. The Mughal boats were mainly in larger size and heavier in weight. But the war-boats of the Ahoms were lighter and could operate in quick mobility. The Ahom *bacharis* and *Kosas* were superior than the Mughal boats even in technical skill. The head of the base consisted of levelled plank while the propo was extremely high curbed with ugly awe-inspiring faces. The Ahom war-boats stood for durability and strength.¹¹⁸

The naval battle of Kokiabar was the most decisive event in the Assam campaign of Mir Jumla. In the next titanic battle of Saraighat, the Ahom armada brought indescribable disaster to the Mughal fleet. The valour of the Ahom fighters was eulogised by Ram Singh, the Rajput general of Mughal contingent by admitting that the soldiers of Ahom

Kingdom were well experienced in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, the digging trenches and in wielding guns and cannon.¹¹⁹ During the Mughal invasions, a large number of arms and ammunitions of the invaders passed into the hands of the local rulers. Besides using them in the subsequent encounters, these weapons resulted in local innovations. Some of the captured weapons were later noticed in the region and found their place in local museum.¹²⁰ Similarly, the prisoners of war later on served in the local armies and their expertise was used by the local rulers in weapon making and renovating the defence structure.

The 'Holoidari Konwarhs'* were imparted training relating to musketry, cannonry, use of gun powder and ammunition etc. In the same process, the loyal Muslims were conferred the title of *Holoighoria*** along with non-muslim *Kharghoria* for rendering their skill in the manufacture of fire-arms including new war strategy. The metal of the cannons like copper and bronze were largely used by the *Holoighorias* in the *Karkhanas* of Ahom armoury. Besides, variety of war-swords used both by the Ahom generals and soldiers were designed by those professional persons¹²¹ in the model of Mughal style. The difference of Koch cannons and Ahom cannons was greatly removed by the new skill of *Holoighorias* in the military production of the Ahoms.¹²²

The cannon balls were usually made of granite stone in various dimensions. The native people were also given proper training in making better type of poisonous arrows and bows. War shields were mainly made of rhino's skin and soon the production was multiplied at the hands of *Holoighorias* as they began the use of metals as substitute materials.¹²³

The guerrilla warfare of the Ahoms, like the Marathas, was indigenous and this tactics unnerved the Mughals. As Sarkar writes :

The medieval Indian guerrillas, like their modern counterparts, turned the conditions of terrain and climate and their own society against the enemy in order to obstruct him, but

they themselves were not deterred by terrain or weather. Rugged of forest country was the most favourable for security and surprise notwithstanding some difficulties in getting supplies and reaching targets. The geographical and social features in Rajputana, Assam, Maharashtra, Punjab, Ahmednagar and Bijapur favoured this sort of warfare. The medieval Indian guerrillas used initiative and flexibility by dispersal, concentration and shifting position.¹²⁴

The Ahoms, as mentioned earlier, could maintain the tactical tradition especially in the guerrilla warfare. They would come out both from the forts and bush during night and make surprise attack on the enemy, beseige them, if possible and would retreat if repulsed. The troopers, avoiding a pitched battle, concealed themselves here and there, and mustering from different sides, made night attacks on Mughal posts and intercepted the transport of provisions by water from Lakhau to Garhgaon. Mir Jumla was bewildered when the Ahom troops launched successive night assaults on the Ahom capital complex at Garhgaon.¹²⁵

Elephants in north-east India were considered indispensable as a fighting machine and as a vehicle for carrying heavy items. They possessed tremendous strength and their appearance was frightful. "This wonderful animal", writes Abul Fazal, "is in bulk and strength like a mountain," and in courage and ferocity like a lion. It would add materially to the pomp of a king and to the success of a conquer; and was of the greatest use for the army. Shihabuddin Talish, the chronicler of Mir Jumla's Assam campaign narrated that there was 'plenty of spirited and well-proportioned elephants abounding in hills and the adjoining plains.'¹²⁶ To quote Sarkar :

In short, every army that entered the limits of the country, made its exit from the realm of life; every caravan that set foot on this land, deposited its baggage of residence in the halting place of death. In former times, whenever any army turned towards this country for raid and conquest,

as soon as it reached the frontier, the Ahoms made night-attack on it.¹²⁷

Mention may be made that the Ahom army was swift in mobilisation and could take spontaneous measures in repulsing the Imperial army. The heavy artillery of the Mughals was ineffective in the north-east campaign as it was very strenuous and hazardous to cross the bridges of boats passing innumerable rivers and brooks. Further, infantry was inconsiderable. As Bernier writes :

In Bengal, so frequently the seat of war, the number is much greater; and there is no province which can dispense with a military force, more or less numerous, according to its extent and particular situation, the total amount of troops in Hindustan is almost incredible.

In the military system and defence organisation, the forts and fortifications had a special place in medieval times. The use was almost universal and north-east India was not exception to it. Though various types of fortifications evolved under the care of Mughals but they could neither construct nor acquire the skill of Ahom fort due to uncommon physical features. Therefore, the Ahoms laid more stress equally on fortification and navy besides guerrilla tactics. Major forts of north-east India were made of muds and bamboo spikes, surrounded by a number of deep ditches. Fortifications of the Ahoms, as mentioned earlier, were made abundant only to obstruct the natural passes of the Mughal invaders. Most of the forts built up on the hill tops were great barriers to the Mughals as the 'forts were granite-based like the heart of heroes'.¹²⁸ The hills on both banks of the Barhmaputra were lined with a series of forts in order to keep constant vigilance both in the land and river route. Even Mir Jumla was surprised by the mettle of Ahom soldiers who created problems and panic to the imperial troops. The Ahom forts facilitated its garrison to fight the enemy with less stress and strain.¹²⁹ The Ahom monarch themselves took initiative not only in the guidance of the war

generals but also in supervising the smiths and gunpowder factories during the war emergency.¹³⁰

Society and Culture

The most noticeable social impact of the various Mughal invasions and the establishment of Mughal rule in the fringes and peripheries of the region was the extension of Muslim settlements and the growth of their population that had, as a matter of fact, started as early as in the thirteenth century but tremendously increased during the period under review.¹³¹ The Muslim settlements in the plains areas of Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura also occurred during the period. A section of the Muslims also made their way into Manipur through Cachar. A process of assimilation had begun since then and the descendants of the immigrants in due course became the part of the local population, racially and linguistically. A significant development in the state of Manipur was the advent of the Vaishnava missionary from Bengal and Gauriya Vaishnavism preached by them were embraced not only by the major Manipuris, but also by the Manipuri Kukis and Nagas.¹³² Bengali or Chaitanya Vaishnavism came to Manipur through *Sarkar* Sylhet from the beginning of the eighteenth century. Though Chaitanya was born at Nadia in 1487, his father hailed from *Sarkar* Sylhet. The religious innovation played an effective role both in synthesising Meithei religion as well as in the process of state formation there.¹³³

Another religion introduced during the period was *Sikhism*. Raja Ram Singh during his Assam campaign in 1669 brought with him the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur and some of his followers besides five Muhammadan *pirs* such as Shah Akbar, Shah Begmar, Shah Saran, Shah Sufi and Shah Kamal.¹³⁴ These *Pirs* naturally became instrumental in propagating the Philosophy of Islam and in the conversion of some local people in their faith. The followers of Teg Bahadur as already mentioned, who stayed behind, introduced *Sikhism* in Assam. The sizeable *Sikh* community in Nowgong even to-day claimed their descent from these followers of Teg

Bahadur.¹³⁵ In Assam today one comes across the Assamese *Sikhs* who are either the descendants of these pioneers whose number could be perpetuated through marriages with the local people or the local converts to *Sikhism*. Like the immigrant Muslims, the *Sikhs* too were assimilated.

Holding of Lower Assam by the Mughals on three different occasions extending a total period of twenty seven years during seventeenth century, brought positive pressure in transforming the social structure and cultural flow of north-east India with various degrees. Possession of wealth was considered to be a ladder to the social ascendancy. The professional classes of majority Hindus and minority Muslims were conferred numerous titles corresponding to different professions and responsibilities and they acted as the bridge between the rich and the poor. The Ahom monarchs and the other Rajas along the boundary of Mughal Bengal could neither check the demographic change nor ignore the forces. The traditional conservatism was liquidated by the Mughal manoeuvres. As Gait writes :

They were compelled to increase their number by marrying from the non-Ahom families, and by conferring upon them the privileges and status of the ruling race. These new entrants were thoroughly assimilated with the original Ahoms, and they and their descendants did not suffer any disability to hold high offices and enjoy privileges to which the older Ahoms were entitled.¹³⁶

The literary works of the period under review mentioned the classification of caste as *Brahmans*, *Kayastha*, *Vasyas* and *Sudras*. Not only in Assam but throughout India, the *Brahmins* were held in high esteem and veneration. They lived under the patronage of the Rajas or the *zamindars*. The Ahom priests called *Deodhois* were placed in high esteem. The Muslim settlers in north-east India would mainly get their religious guidelines from the well versed *Mullas* and *Qazis*. Like Bengal 'the convert Muslims of north-east India remained wedded to their time-honoured beliefs, manners and customs and continued to practise them in their

daily life and especially in villages.¹³⁷ 'The Mullahs earned their livings from the religious performance such as marriage ceremonies and ancillary rites.¹³⁸

As Shihabuddin Talish writes :

As for the Muslims who had been taken prisoner in former times and had chosen to marry here, their descendants act exactly in the manner of the Assamese, and have nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mingling with the Assamese than towards association with Muslims. The Muhammadans who had come here from Islamic lands engaged in the performance of prayer and fasting, but were forbidden to chant the call to prayer (*Ajan*) or publicly recite the 'word of God'.¹³⁹

Nevertheless, the preponderance of the adherents of Islam in this region started with the thirteenth century and it was successful mainly because the Brahmanical Hinduism of the masses was not yet deeply rooted.¹⁴⁰ In between the two currents, the trail of Muslim invasions and the advent of Sri Sankar-deva (1449-1569), Madavdeva and Sri Chaitanya (1487-1539), the eminent apostles of *Vaishnavism* generated the breach in ritualism and in Brahmaputra valley the growth of Neo-Vaishnavite cult which had proved the saviour of the poor and played a significant role in the social organisation of north-east India in general. Gadadhar Singh, the Ahom monarch, was himself a good lever to the movement.¹⁴¹

The Ahom monarchs, during our period of review had to make synthesis of the vital forces of Hinduism by patronising the cult of *Saktism*, *Vaishnavism* and *Saivism* in parallel way. However, monotheistic philosophy of Sankar-deva brought remarkable changes on the notion of caste barrier and of worship through various manifestations of the Deity. As Chatterji writes :

He gave to Assam a new disciple of faith in a single Divinity, and helped Assam to break away with a past with its complicated esoteric doctrines and its unmeaning practi-

ces, and gave to the people something simple and straight forward divested of all questionable associations or implications.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, like the temporal lords, the spiritual aristocrats in practice would follow the mechanism of feudal domain at the cost of slaves, serfs and other bondsmen. As Guha writes :

It was in the seventeenth century, that the emergent feudal relations became a centralizing force both in the economy as well as in polity. But at their base, the militia continued to retain much of its tribal legacy.¹⁴³

The view, generally held¹⁴⁴ that Islam was spread by the conqueror with the sword in one hand and the *Koran* in the other was not fully applicable in the whole region of north-east India. Islamic proselytization was carried mainly by preachers in the garb of traders besides known *Pirs* and *Mullas* in order to give spiritual relief to the prisoners of war and few converts. Like Bengal, the *Sufis* were patronised by the Muslim residents of Assam and could maintain their livings with the land grants made by the Ahom monarchs and few other neighbouring Rajas. Based on the *Sufi* religious preachings, the *Jikir* and *Jari* songs began to make a room in Assamese literature. The Muhammedans were granted some amount of lands for the support of mosques over the tomb of saints.¹⁴⁵

The education of Assam was mainly imparted through Sanskrit *tols* usually attached with *satra* institution during the period under review. Among the Ahom priests, instruction in Ahom language was regularly imparted. Various branches of knowledge were controlled by the state supervision. Dramatic art underwent radical changes along with its paraphernalia. Thus the variety of 'musical instruments and Mughal dresses like *chapkin*, *futuai* (Arabic futula) etc. were used by the Assamese dancers and stage players in the theatrical performances in the Vaishnavite monasteries.'¹⁴⁶ During the period of Rudra Singh, the educational system

was reorganised under the trained *Brahmins* hired from Bengal and northern part of India. In the same trend, the *maktabs* attached to the mosques and *madrassas* were run by Muslim teachers (*Maulavis*) duly supported by the wealthy citizens and *zamindars* throughout north-east India. Even the royal costumes of Ahom monarchs and nobles underwent changes especially from the time of Rudra Singh (1696-1714). The Assamese manuscript *Hastividya*, compiled by Sukumar Barkaith in A.D. 1734 described the wearing of Mughal headdress that was in vogue at the Ahom courtiers was not merely a hobby but to acquire the key to success in military operations against the Mughals.¹⁴⁷

The caretaker of the Muslim *dargahs* or shrines was usually *pirs*. The long settlement of immigrant Muslims side by side with the Hindus facilitated the flow of toleration. Visiting the tombs of the deceased *Pirs** who had served the cause of the Faith was common practice among the Hindus and Muslims alike. The tombs of Shah Jalal of Sylhet, Panc-Pir of Sonargaon, Pua Macca of Hajo etc. still evoke veneration. Evidently, those *dargahs* considered to be place of pilgrimage and offered respect not only by the Muslims but also by the Hindus of the respective locality. As Sarkar writes :

The result of this rapprochement in the domain of faith ultimately created a more tolerant atmosphere which kept the Hindus indifferent to their political destiny. It prepared the ground for the further inroad of Islam into Hindu society, particularly among the lower classes who were moved by miracles of the *Pirs*.¹⁴⁸

A noticeable trend in social relations, ushered in during this period, was the progressive Hindu-Muslim rapprochement and secular attitude gradually assumed by the local rulers. This is all the more pertinent in view of the Hindu overtone in the confederacy inspired by Rudra Singh (1696-1714) whom Chatterji termed as the Shivaji of the north-east.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly enough, the process of assimilation was considerable in Assam valley itself where the Ahom rulers adopted a tolerant policy towards Islam and patronised it by

making land grants to the Muslim saints.¹⁵⁰ Azan Fakir, the Muslim preacher, who came to Assam towards the end of the seventeenth century, was settled in the state permanently with land grants given by Gadhadhar Singh (1682-96).¹⁵¹ The *Zikirs* composed by that preacher suggest that he had one hundred twenty disciples and he is believed to have converted some Nagas to Islam.¹⁵² The spirit inspired by Rudra Singh made no change in the situation as the later Ahom monarchs also continued to patronise the Muslims. The Muslim religious pontiffs were attached to the Ahom court. They were appointed to the high posts in the Ahom government and as mentioned already, the Muslims were engaged in important defence matters. During later period, the Ahom monarchs even organised *Khel* for the Muslim settlers.¹⁵³ The liberal attitude of the rulers brought about a close contact between the Hindus and the Muslims. As Barua writes :

The Muslims, though a minority community, occupied a significant position in the society of pre-British Assam. A new element in the population of Assam in the early part of this period, they soon got assimilated with the Assamese people adopting their mode of living, sharing their superstitious and social rites, speaking their language, and accepting this land as their motherland and contributing towards her development. The wide social outlook of the Ahoms and the teachings of the neo-Vaishnavism sponsored by Sri Sanker-deva and his disciple Madhavadeva in the 16th century brought the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam closer to one another. Through the social intercourse with the Muslim settlers, the people of Assam became acquainted with Islamic religion and culture and accepted some elements of Muslim culture.¹⁵⁴

Similar was the situation in Jaintia, Cachar, Tripura, Manipur, where the Rajas appointed the Muslims to official position and even recruited from them in the armies.¹⁵⁵ In Cachar the Hindus and the Muslims were settled side by side in the same *Khel*.¹⁵⁶ The Rajas also appointed *Qazi*, as mentioned earlier for the judicious administration of justice

among the Muslim subjects. Jainarayan (1698-1731), the Raja of Jayantia on the request of the prominent Muslims in the state brought a learned Muslim scholar from Hardwar for religious leadership of his Muslim subjects.¹⁵⁷ The Cachar valley and the adjoining plains areas experienced Hindu-Muslim rapprochement in various fields. Manipur under the stewardship of Pamheiba alias Gharib Niwas, as mentioned earlier, witnessed new orientation in the religious field,¹⁵⁸ to cater to the needs of diversified religious faith including Islam. 'Tipra's (Tripura) contribution to the history and culture of Eastern India, particularly East Bengal, has its own unique place.'¹⁵⁹ As the Hindus held the *Mokama* or *dargahs* in high reverence and so also the Muslims contributed towards the worship of *Sitala* and *Manasa* in Cachar, Sylhet, Tripura besides Bengal.

The harmonious relationship between the Hindus and Muslims was no doubt inspired by the tolerant policy of the rulers of the north-eastern States. The close contacts and understanding between the peoples resulted in progressive assimilation of the immigrants of different faiths. The immigrants, as stated already, contributed substantial elements towards the growth of new technology, art and crafts in the region as a whole. In course of time, the lone words crept in local languages and myriad tribal dialects while food and dress habits of the people underwent transformation.

NOTES

1. G. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p 70; H. Dhekialphukan, *Assam Buranji*, pp. 31-32.
2. K.L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, pp. 158-59.
3. R.C. Majumdar, *Bangla Desher Itihas*, (Medieval period) pp. 79-80, 474; *Rajmala*, Education Directorate, pp. 38-41.
4. L. Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, p. 195.
*For details see E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 195, 200, 322-23.
5. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 239.
6. *Ibid.*
7. U.N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p. 98.
8. G.C. Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 121; U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
9. U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-05.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
*An enrolled adult subject of the Ahom government having specific duties to render to the State.
11. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-49.
12. H. Blochmann, "Koch Behar, Koch-Hajo and Assam in the 16th and 17th centuries, according to the Akbarnama, the Padishanama, and Fathiya-i-ibriya" *JASB* Vol. XLI, 1872, p. 99.
13. M.I. Bora, (tr.), *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, Vol. I, pp. 272-73.
14. *Ibid.*, B.R. Grover, "Socio-Economic change in the North-East India"—Seminar paper under Indian Council of Historical Research, held at Shillong, 1977, pp. 3-5.
*Khel is a division or unit of Assamese subjects having to perform specific services to the state, presided over by a Phukan or a Barua and commanded by the usual gradation of officers, viz. Rajkhowas, Hazarikas, Saikias, etc.

15. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-56.
16. U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
17. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, pp. 73-74.
18. U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145.
19. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 161.
20. U.N. Day, *The Mughal Government*, p. 206.
21. U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
22. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
23. M.I. Bora, (tr.), *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 40.
24. H. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 40; G. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 90.
25. P. Gogoi, *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, p. 551.
26. A. Salam, (tr.), *Riyaju-s-Salatin*, p. 166.
27. A. A. Chowdhury *Cooch Beharer Itihas*, pp. 49-50.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
29. M.I. Bora, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 296-300.
30. K.C. Sinha, *Rajmala*, pp. 45-50.
31. D. Mitra, "Antiquities of Pilak and Jalbari, Tripura," *J.A.S.* Vol. XVIII, No. 1-4, 1976, p.p. 73-75.
32. S.K. Bhuyan, *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 41-49.
33. S.K. Chatterji, *Kirta-Jana-Krti*, p. 73.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
35. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North-East India*, p. 16.
36. P.N. Bhattacharya, *Heramba Rajyar Dandabidhi*, p. 24.

37. U.C. Guha, *Cacharer Itibritta*, p. 97.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
40. *Ibid.* pp. 48-51.
41. P.R. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, p. 89; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.) *Jayantia Buranji*, pp. 164-165.
42. S.M. Ali, *The History of Jaintia*, p. 25.
43. P.R. Gurdon, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-91.
44. S.K. Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
45. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
46. W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. IV, p. 244; Sir W. Heigh and Sir R. Burn, (ed.), *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. IV, p. 511.
47. J. Roy, *History of Manipur*, p. 161.
48. L. Mangi Singh and L. Mani Singh, (ed.), *Bijoy Pancali*, pp. 63-64.
49. S.K. Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
50. J. Roy, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
51. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 49.
52. J.B. Tavernier, *Travels in India*, Vol. II, p. 260.
53. A.C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 401-404.
54. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Jayantia Buranji*, p. 186.
55. P.N. Bhattacharya, "Ruins in Laur," *J.A.R.S.* Vol. IV, No. 1, 1936, pp. 25-26.
56. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 194.

57. Bengal Revenue consultation 24th September 1790 No. 42 cited in B. Datta Ray, "Khasi Hills and Brahma Samaj Movement," paper presented in the First Session of the North-East India History Association, Sillong, 1980.
58. Bengal Judicial Consultation, 12th May 1823, No. 39, cited in P.N. Dutta "Relations of the Khasis and Jaintias with their southern neighbours till the British intervention," paper presented in the First session of North-East India History Association, Shillong 1980.
59. B. Datta Ray, *op. cit.*,
60. P.N. Dutta, *op. cit.*
61. Bengal Revenue Consultation, 16th June 1790, No. 31, as cited in B. Datta Ray, *op. cit.*
62. A Guha, "Medieval North East India" (1200-1750), *Occasional paper No. 19, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta*, p. 25.
63. Bengal Judicial Proceeding, 17th April 1797, No. 28-30, in Datta Ray, *op. cit.*
64. S.N. Sen, *Prachin Bangla Patra Sankalan*, pp. 68-69 (Part I), M. Martin, *Eastern India*, Vol. III, p. 477.
65. F. Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 440.
66. M. Martin, *Eastern India*, Vol. V, pp. 660-661; S.K. Bhuyan, *Early British Relation with Assam*, p. 19.
67. A. Salam, *Riyaju-s-Salatin*, p. 341.
68. Foster. W. *The English Factories in India*, Vol. VI, pp. 392-95.
69. M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, pp. 36-43.
70. S.N. Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, p. 269.
71. U.N. Gohain, *op. cit.*, pp. 170-73.
72. S.K. Bhuyan, *Early British Relations with Assam*, p. 18.

73. W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II, p. 168.
74. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *The Garos and the English*, p. 19.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
76. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North-East India* p. 204.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 207.
79. U.N. Day, *The Mughal Government*, p. 199.
80. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
81. *Ibid.*
82. Quoted in E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 147.
83. A Guha, *op. cit.*
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
85. U. Lekharu, (ed.), *Katha-guru-Charita*, pp. 87, 142, 263.
86. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 18.
87. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
88. Tezpur rock inscription dated C. 829 A.D.J.B.O.R.S. Vol. III, pp. 185-92, cited in A. Guha, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
89. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
90. *Ibid.*
91. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
92. W. Irvine, (tr.), *Storia Do Mogor*, Vol. III, p. 46.
93. *Katha-guru Charita*, pp. 65, 142, 241, 349, 492-93.

94. J.B. Bhattacharjee, "Socio-Economic Change in South Assam", paper presented in I.C.H.R. Seminar, Shillong, 1977.
95. *Katha-guru-Charita*, pp. 79-101, 424.
96. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
97. *Katha-guru-Charit*, pp. 65, 82-87, 197; S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Tripura Buranji*, pp. 21-33, S.K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Deodhai Assam Buranji*, p. 121; E. Gait (as quoted) *op. cit.*, p. 144.
98. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
99. N.K. Basu, *Assam in the Ahom Age*, p. 193.
100. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 50.
101. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 147; H. Blochmann, "Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo, and Assam, in the 16th and 17th century, according to the Alamgirnama, the Padishanama, and Fathiya-i-Ibriya", J.A.S. B.E. Vol. XLI. 1872, pp. 78-79; S. Talish, *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, Mss. No. D/72, pp. 36-46.
102. A. Chatterjee (Nee Basu), *Bengal in the reign of Aurangzeb*, pp. 126, 169, 174.
103. *Ibid.*
104. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 386.
105. A. Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
106. Sir N.N. Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p. 418; Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*, pp. 112-15; A. Salam, (tr.), *op. cit.*, pp. 276-77.
- *See C. Stewart, *The History of Bengal*, p. 303.
107. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
108. M.I. Bora, (tr.), *Baharistan-I-Ghaybi*, Vol. II, p. 677; F. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, pp. 73-74; A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 21; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 66; 'Around 1750 the annual salt import from Bengal amounted to 1,20,000 maunds'. See Gait, p. 223. In 1809 the total value of trade with Tibet and Bhutan in a foot hill

markets was estimated at Rs. 2,00,000; See F. Hamilton, pp. 73-74.

109. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
110. E. Gait, p. 153, H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 77; S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-75.
111. M. Neog, (ed.), *Prachya-Sasnavali*, pp. 45-47, 177-80, 184.
112. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83; E. Gait, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-54.
113. H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 78, E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 146; "Washing for gold in Assam", J.A.S.B., Vol. VII, 1838, pp. 621-28.
114. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
115. J.N. Sarkar, "Man and Beasts in Medieval Indian Warfare", J.I.H. 1973, p. 467.
116. G. Barua, *Assam Buranji*, p. 84.
117. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 252.
118. A.C. Roy, *History of Mughal Navy*, p. 113.
119. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 253; S.K. Bhuyan (ed.); *Assam Buranji*, p. 96; S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 13.
120. E. Gait, "Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam", p. 29.
*i.e. the Musketeer Princes.

**(Holighar) means Ahom magazine.
121. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.), *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 18.
122. See the letter of Itmadul Haq (Nowgong, Assam), the descendant of an old Assamese family to the Editor, The Assam Tribune, Gauhati 26 August, 1980.
123. *Ibid.*
124. J.N. Sarkar, "Guerilla Warfare in Medieval India", Q.R.H.S., Vol. XIII, 1973-74, p. 31.

125. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Assam Buranij*, pp. 96-97.
126. S. Talish, *op. cit.*, pp. 50, 67.
127. Sir J.N. Sarkar, "Assam and the Ahoms in 1660," J.B.O.R.S., Vol. I, 1915, pp. 188-89.
128. Sir J.N. Sarkar, "Assam and the Ahoms in 1660," J.B.O.R.S., Vol. I, 1915, p. 53.
129. S.K. Bhuyan, *Studies in the History of Assam*, p. 148.
130. S.K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 583.
131. K.L. Barua, "Mirza Nathan's Narrative", J.A.R.S. Vol. V, Oct. 1937, No. 3, pp. 71-73.
132. S.K. Chatterji, *Kirta-Jana-Krti*, p. 78.
133. Bijoy Pancali, p. 36.
134. S.K. Bhuyan, (tr.); *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 10.
135. M. Purkayastha, *The anatomy of North-East*, p. 13.
136. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 257.
137. J.N. Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal*, p. 28.
138. A. Karim, *Social History of Muslims in Bengal*, p. 150.
139. Quoted in E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 153; H. Blochmann, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
140. S.K. Chatterjee, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
141. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 222-23. E. Gait, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
142. S.K. Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, p. 71.
143. A. Guha, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
144. W.W. Hunter, *Indian Musalmans*, pp. 140-47.

145. N.M. Basu, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 226 and 267.
146. M. Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance*, p. 237.
147. S.K. Bhuyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, pp. 19-21.
*There is a Muslim Shrine at Dhubri, Known as Panchpirar-Darga where the remains of Shah Akbar, one of the Darvishes who accompanied Ram Singh, are buried; see S.K. Bhuyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, p. 231.
148. J.N. Sarkar, *Islam in Bengal*, Foot Note, pp. 30-31.
149. S.K. Chatterji, *Kirata-Jana-Krti*, p. 59.
150. S.L. Barua, "The Muslim population in Pre-British Assam their social status and Role in cultural history," *Proceedings of Indian History Congress*, Hyderabad, 1978, Vol. I, p. 575.
151. S.K. Bhuyan, (ed.), *Satsari Assam Buranji*, p. 149.
152. S.L. Barua, *op. cit.*, p. 572.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
154. *Ibid.*, p. 570.
155. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *op. cit.*, See Foot Note No. 96.
156. J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar Under British Rule in North-East India*, p. 75.
157. S.M. Ali, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
158. S.K. Chatterji, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
159. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

Epilogue

THE NORTH-EAST AND THE Mughals came into contact immediately with latter's ascendancy in Bengal. The predecessors of the Mughals, namely the Turko-Afgan rulers of Bengal had endeavoured to extend their influence in the north-east; but without any success with the exception of Tripura which experienced the political manoeuvre in a limited scale and the induction of new elements that crept in the social composition of the plains areas of the region through the process of immigration. The Mughal attempts also initially failed to achieve much. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were some organised attempts when Jahangir (1605-1627) despatched an expedition which succeeded in subjugating Koch-Hajo in Lower Assam in the western division of the north-east and also gained partial success against Cachar and Tripura, besides crushing the stronghold of Afgan nobles in Sylhet, in the Eastern division of the region. The Cooch Behar state had since become a permanent ally of the Mughals, and the Imperial government ruled in Lower Assam through their officers and *Jagirdars*. In the years following the expedition of 1613 the Mughal attitude towards the north-east was mainly influenced by a desire to promote trade and commerce. The Mughal influences began to penetrate in the region that had a predominantly tribal background through such connections, while in Lower Assam their rule had directly entrenched itself. Similarly, the *Sarkars* of Mymensing, Sylhet and Chittagong generated influences for the bordering Garo and Khasi hills and Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura. The administration of Prince Shuja, as the governor of Bengal, claimed the acceptance of tributary status by the Rajas of Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura.

The accession of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to the Mughal throne at Delhi, with which our study begins, ushered in a new era in the history of Mughal relations with north-east India due to the aggressive imperialism of the new Mughal emperor. The appointment of Mir Jumla, a shrewd statesman and a close associate of Aurangzeb during his viceroyalty in Deccan further aggravated the situation. The attitude of the Emperor and his shrewd Viceroy in the threshold of the north-east was coupled with the desire to secure the surrender of Prince Shuja who was one of the strong contenders to the Mughal throne during the war of succession that preceded the accession of Aurangzeb and who was believed to have taken refuge in Aracan. The reports of his projected campaign to capture the throne of Delhi in league with the rulers of Aracan and Tripura were indeed disturbing for the new administration and Mir Jumla was asked by Aurangzeb to enforce the surrender of fugitive Shuja. The news of the death of Shuja received through the Dutch factors reduced the necessity of the Aracan campaign. But the policy of expansionism prevailed. Mir Jumla had even in the past taken keen interest in commercial enterprise and now looked forward towards the promotion of trade and commerce in the eastern frontier of Bengal. In Karnataka Mir Jumla used to earn a substantial amount of revenue by engaging himself in commercial enterprises, both inland and foreign markets. He was also very keen in overseas commercial activities. As Dr. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar observes : "Absorbed as Mir Jumla was in his political activities, he never lost sight of commerce, the perennial source of his wealth, prosperity and power . . . Moreover, he had trading relations with (i) Burma—Aracan, Pegu, Tenascrim (Mergui Archipelago), (ii) Acheen, Peruk, Macassar and the Maldives, (iii) Persia and Arbia, and (iv) Bengal". From the above statistics of his trade cycle it is quite reasonable to believe the contention that Mir Jumla did leave no stone unturned to multiply his private treasury even after assuming governorship at Bengal and thereby to spread the network of trade and commerce over the potential field of north-east India that so long remained unexploited. Further, the rulers of the former

Mughal dependencies in the north-east had taken the advantage of the war of succession to withdraw their allegiance. The immediate task before the Mughal Viceroy of Bengal was to re-pacify these rulers.

In pursuance of the forward policy of Aurangzeb, Mir Jumla led the campaign against Cooch Behar and Assam. He succeeded in annexing Cooch Behar temporarily as the ruler of the state fled to adjacent Bhutan fearing the vengeance. The State was however, subsequently restored to its former Raja when the latter reaffirmed the allegiance to the Imperial government and undertook to pay tribute annually. Mir Jumla also secured the submission of the rulers of Dimarua and Darrang, the two petty states in Assam Valley (former was a vassal to Jayantia and the latter to the Ahoms). Mir Jumla also forced his way to Garhgaon, the Ahom capital. Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-63), the Ahom monarch signed the Treaty of Ghilajorighat, accepting the Mughal suzerainty and undertaking to pay war indemnity, tribute and hostage. The river Bharali came to be recognised as the Ahom-Mughal boundary and steps were immediately taken to organize Mughal administration in the occupied areas.

The withdrawal of Mir Jumla, however, enabled the Ahom monarch to scrap the treaty. The Ahoms under Chakradhvaj Singh (1663-1669) and Udayaditya Singh (1669-73) virtually raised an war cry against the Mughals. They recovered Gauhati and endeavoured to push their boundary westward by liberating the ceded areas. The attitude of the Ahom government produced sharp reaction in the Mughal camp and Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal insisted on the forward policy. The Imperial government sent a fresh expedition under Raja Ram Singh, the Mughal general. In the historic battle of Saraighat the Mughals met with crushing defeat and Raja Ram Singh had to retreat.

The withdrawal of Ram Singh from Saraighat synchronised the virtual end of the Mughal challenge in the north-east. The authorities in Delhi became so much indifferent towards this frontier that they even failed to recall Ram Singh who

encamped himself at Rangamati till 1676. As a matter of fact, the government of Aurangzeb was then more occupied in the north-west where they had to reckon with the challenges offered by the formidable Marathas, Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs and other martial races. The inaction on the part of the Mughals was therefore, not quite unnatural. Similar inaction was noticed on the part of the Ahoms who failed to capitalise the situation to recover their ceded territories in Lower Assam and even to extend their frontier westward. The Ahom state by the time passed through a series of internal dissensions and rebellions that were inspired by the personal ambition of the Princes of royal blood. The only achievement of the Mughals was the temporary re-occupation of Gauhati and that was made possible by the ruthlessness of a few members of the Ahom nobility. The impact of the Mughal inaction was also felt in other states of the region where the dependent chiefs became assertive. Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal succeeded in pacifying the Raja of Cooch Behar and the march of his forces to Chittagong prevailed upon the Raja of Jayantia to desist from raiding in the Mughal territory. The internal problem in the state forced the Raja of Tripura to agree to tributary terms as a means to derive stronger authority from the Imperial power. The march of the Mughal forces to Gauhati had the indirect effect of pacifying the chiefs of the petty states in Lower Assam like Bijni and Darrang. The States like Sherpur and Susang in the Mymensing frontier were also assertive, but the conciliatory policy of the Nawab of Bengal avoided the possibility of any major confrontation. The contender to the authority in Laur, in the Khasi hill border, embraced Islam and enjoyed the blessings of the Imperial government. The Mughals thus did not gain politically much beyond mere allegiance of the insignificant rulers, although they could ensure in the process the security of Bengal at a time when they were forced with more serious challenges in the other wing of the Empire.

The things however, changed with the accession of Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696) to the Ahom throne, who revitalised

the administration and succeeded finally in recovering Gauhati. The task of state re-building was carried further by his successor, Rudra Singh (1696-1714), whose administration experienced improvement of the state in all its departments. A shrewd monarch, he planned not only to resist further encroachment on the part of Mughals in the region but also ventured to lead a concerted campaign in the Mughal *Subah* of Bengal. He worked on a scheme for the regional solidarity of the north-east by enlisting the support and sympathy of all rulers and chieftains of the stipulated region in his proposed challenge of the north-east to the Mughals. As a matter of fact, he succeeded in pacifying the erstwhile monarchs of Jayantia, Cooch Behar and the tribal chiefs on the borders of his state and in ascertaining the collaboration of distant Tripura on the extreme eastern end of the region. The Ahom monarch even endeavoured to enlist the sympathy of the Hindu Rajas in Bengal itself. Elaborate preparations were completed for the invasion of Mughal Bengal and a confederate army was raised with contributions from the rulers and chiefs in the region. With the sudden death of Rudra Singh in 1714, with which we close our period, the challenge of the north-east too diluted.

The repeated endeavours of the Mughals to establish their hegemony in the north-east had failed to produce the desired result while the attempts of the north-eastern states to push back the Mughals from the fringes of their territories were equally unsuccessful. The north-east experienced the major challenges from the Mughals during the period under review. Beyond it, nothing spectacular happened to this effect. Politically the Mughal influence in the post-1714 period became limited to nominal suzerainty over the minor states on the immediate borders of Bengal to be succeeded in that capacity by the East India Company ever since their accession to the Dewani of Bengal in 1765.

Nevertheless, the Mughal contact brought in lasting impact on the society and economy of the north-east. Such impact could no doubt be registered spontaneously as the Mughals had emerged as the ruling power in Bengal since the reign of

Jahangir (1605-27). Although Akbar the great (1556-1605) by issuing a decree in 1586 enlisted Bengal as one of the eleven *Subahs* but the order took a quarter of a century to actually enforce the new type of uniform provincial administration. However, the confronting relations and occasional penetration of the Mughal forces deep in the region accelerated the process of change through augmentation and revitalism.

The formidable Mughal challenge left the rulers of the north-eastern States with only option to strengthen their administration through changing reforms and even borrowing elements and institutions from the system of the invaders themselves with a view to revitalise their bases and to reckon with the invading forces. The defence structure underwent trials and experiments. The innovations in the form of methods and weapons were vigorously resorted to. The benefits of the presence of the prisoners of war from the Imperial camp were ungrudgingly availed of. Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch even had recruited civil and revenue officers from Mughal Bengal in order to strengthen his government. Above all, the region as a whole was roused by the Mughal challenge.

The new spirit had enabled Rudra Singh to bring the region together in order to challenge and to combat the Mughals. His proposed invasion of Bengal did not come through, but the pulsating spirit as generated by the wheels of confederacy stabilised for a considerable period and yielded lasting effects to posterity. Till the subjugation of the whole region by the British, there was no major confrontation between the Ahoms and their erstwhile rivals, namely Cachar and Jayantia. The later two states also experienced no repetition of the border clashes. Assam and Cachar were sympathetic towards Manipur when that state was invaded by the Burmese in 1760s. The Raja of Manipur also endeavoured to help the Ahom monarch when Assam was disturbed by the Maumaria upsurge.

The period of Mughal invasions experienced the immigration

of various racial elements from the Mughal provinces particularly Bengal. The prisoners of war and the Muslim immigrants were settled by the rulers in their respective states. The settlement of the Sikhs introduced a new religion and a new social group. The local rulers also encouraged immigration from neighbouring Bengal and recruited officials and artisans to strengthen and augment the economy and administration. The newcomers irrespective of their caste and creed were assimilated in the local society with variations and were offered positions according to their talents.

The immigrant Hindus and Muslims along with the other religious groups alike could be integrated in the local aristocracy depending on their capability. The immigrants contributed to the regional economy by reclaiming land and inducing new technology and skill. The trade and commerce with Bengal besides Himalayan frontiers increased voluminously in the subsequent years which did not fail to attract the attention of the East India Company as well as other European merchants who were then already anchored in Mughal Bengal.

The process of immigration from Bengal went unabated in later years. The immigrants also contributed towards the development of language and literature. Changes were noticed in the field of religion and culture. The advent of *Vaishnava* missionaries in Manipur was indeed revolutionary. Even the neo-Vaishnavism of Assam underwent changes to be adaptable to the social needs of the emergent populace. The rulers of local states were no doubt the champions of their Hindu faith but they did not fail to patronise the religion of their Muslim subjects. The *Pirs* and *Fakirs* were respected in the society. The rulers also made provision for the administration of justice among their Muslim subjects according to the law of Holy *Koran*. The liberal attitude of the monarchs brought the subjects of various faiths closer and contributed to the process of social assimilation of complex dimension.

APPENDIX 'A'

A Note on Garhgaon in 1663*

The town of Garhgaon has four gates build of stone and mortar, the distance of each of which from the palace of the Rajah is three *kos*. A high and wide *Al*, very strong, has been made for the traffic; and round about the town, instead of fortifications, there are circular bushes of bamboos, about two *kos* in diameter. But the town is not like other towns, the huts of the inhabitants being within the bamboo bushes near the *Al*. Each man has his garden or field before his house, so that one side of the field touches the *Al*, and the other the house. Near the Rajah's palace, to both sides of the Dik'ho River, are large houses. The bazar road is narrow, and is only occupied by *pan*-sellers. Eatables are not sold as in our markets; but each man keeps in his house stores for a year, and no one either sells or buys. The town looks large, being a cluster of several villages. Round about the palace, an *Al* has been thrown up, the top of which is fortified by a bamboo palisade instead of by walls, and along the sides of it a ditch runs, the depth of which exceeds a man's height. It is always full of water. The circumference is 1 *kos*, 14 *jaribs*. Inside are high and spacious *chhappars*. The Diwankhanah of the Rajah, which is called *solang*, is one hundred and twenty cubits in length and thirty wide inside. It has sixty-six pillars, each about four cubits in circumference. The pillars, though so large, are quite smooth, so that at the first glance you take them to be planned. Now though the Assamese understand planning, yet you cannot believe that they did smoothen the pillars in this way. The ornaments and curiosities with which the whole woodwork of the house is filled, defies all description : nowhere in the whole inhabited

*Source : H. Blochmann's abstract from *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, J.A.S.B., Vol. XLI., 1872, pp. 83-84.

world, will you find a house equal to it in strength, ornamentation, and pictures. The sides of this palace are embellished by extraordinary wooden trellice work. Inside there are large brass mirrors highly polished, and if the sun shines on one of them, the eyes of the by-standers are perfectly dazzled. Twelve thousand workmen are said to have erected the building in the course of one year. At one end of the hall, rings are fastened on four pillars opposite to each other, each pillar having nine rings. When the Rajah takes his seat in the hall, they put a dais in the middle of these four pillars, and nine canopies of various stuffs are fastened above it to the rings. The Rajah then sits on the dais below the canopies. The *naggrachis* (drummers) strike the drum and the *dand*. The latter instrument is round and flat, and made of *ruin* metal, and is struck like a gong. The instrument is used when the audience commences, or when the Rajah issues forth, or the Phukans ride out, or leave for an appointment. Mulla Darwish Harawi (a poet who accompanied the expedition) says that those *dands* must be the very identical metal plates that are mentioned in the *Shahnamah* : but God knows best. There are other houses in Ghargaon, beautifully adorned, strong, very long and spacious, full of fine mats, which really must be seen. But alas, unless this kingdom be annexed to his Majesty's dominions, not even an infidel could see all these fine things without falling into the misfortunes into which we fell. Beyond the enclosure of this hall there is another house, the dwelling-house of the Rajah. It is a fine and beautiful house. The Phukans have erected dwellings in its neighbourhood. Each Phukan is a son-in-law of the Rajah, and has a beautiful garden and a tank. Indeed, it is a pleasant place. As the soil of the country is very damp, the people do not live on the ground floor, but on the *machan*, which is the name for a rased floor.

APPENDIX 'B'

Treaty of Ghilajorighat, January 1663*

Illness forced the Nawab to listen to the proposals of peace. Bhor Mall was again employed to confer with the Phukans, and the following conditions were agreed upon :

1. The Rajahs of Assam and Batam should each send one of their daughters to the imperial harem.
2. Each should pay 20,000 *tolahs* of gold, and 1,20,000 *tolahs* of silver.
3. Fifteen elephants to be sent to the Emperor; fifteen to the Nawab, and five to Dilir Khan.
4. Within the next twelve months 3 lacs *tolahs* of silver and 90 elephants to be sent as tribute to Bengal, in three four-monthly instalments.
5. Twenty elephants to be furnished annually.
6. The sons of Budh Gosain, Karkas-ha, Bar Gosain, Prabatar, the four principal Phukans of the Rajah, to remain as hostages with the Nawab, till the fulfilment of the conditions in para 4.
7. The following districts to be ceded to his Majesty the Emperor.

*Source : H. Blochmann's abstract from *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, J.A.S.B. Vol. XLI, 1872, pp. 93-94.

(A) In the Uttarkol

- (a) Sirkar Durang, bounded by Gawahatti on one side, and by the Ali Burari* which passes Fort Chamdhurah, on the other side.

(B) In the Dak'hinkol

- (a) The district of Nakirani.
 (b) The Naga Hills.
 (c) Beltali
 (d) Dumuriah.
8. All inhabitants of Kamrup kept as prisoners by the Rajah in the hills and in Namrup to be restored; so also the family of Baduli Phukan.

The districts of the Dak'hinkol that were ceded, have at no previous time formed part of His Majesty's empire Nakirani (Deshrani) lies near the Garo Hills.

*Called on the map Bhor-alli, or Bhoreli. It flows near Tezpur and the Kamakhya Temple, Central Assam.

APPENDIX 'C'

Inscription on Cannon*

(1) Cannon found at False Point :

*“Cr Cr Svargadeva Fayadhvaja Simha maharajena
Vayanath vakasadya idain jantram praptain Caka . . .
80.**”*

The king Jayadhvaja Simha, having vanquished the Musalmans at Gauhati, obtained this weapon in Caka . . . 80.

(2) Cannon in the possession of Mr. Wood, a tea planter in Nogong :

*“*Cr Cr Svarganarayana deva maharajadhiraja Cakradhvaja
Simhena jayalavdhastu samgrame yavananam ksaye punah
praptamastramidam bhupayacorihananam dhruvain Caka 1589.”*

King Cakradhvaja, having again destroyed the Musalmans in battle in Caka 1589, obtained this weapon, which declares his glory as the slayer of his enemies.

(3) The big cannon at Dikom :

*“Cr Cr Svarganarayana deva maharajadhiraja Cakradhvaja
Simhena jayalavdhastu samgrame yavananam ksaye punah
praptamastramidam bhupayacorihananam dhruvam Caka
1590.”*

King Cakradhvaja, having again destroyed the Musalmans in battle in Caka 1590, obtained this weapon, which declares his glory as the slayer of his enemies.

*Source : E.A. Gait's "Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam", Shillong, 1897, p. 29.

**If this inscription be read along with inscriptions No. 5 and 6, it is clear that after "Yavanam" the word left undeciphered is "jitva", and that the word "vasadya" is really "guvakahatya".

This cannon bears also the following inscription in Persian :

"Az babat-i-fath-i-usham dar ihtimam-i-sayyad Ahmad-al-Husain Arz dada shud Dar sin 1074 Hijri muwafik sin (6)."

This cannon has been placed in charge of Sayyad Ahmad-al-Husain for the purpose of conquering Assam in 1074 Hijri.

(4) Cannon in the dak bungalow compound, Gauhati :

"Cr Cr Savarganarayana deva Saumarecvara Udayaditya Simhasya Caka 1594 Cr Nityananda Coladhara Baruvaya garhova Camuva Kacudalai, Murali, Cidam, Puna, Mathura, Ramdhan, Krisnai ei satota ojha."

The cannon was manufactured by seven *Ojhas* (experts) Camuva Kacudalai, Murali, Cidam, Puna, Mathura, Ramdhan, and Krisnai under orders of Nityananda Coladhara Barua in Caka 1594, during the reign of King Udayaditya Simha.

(5) Cannon in the compound of the Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur :

"Cr Cr Svarganarayana deva Saumarecvara Gadadhara Simhena yavanain jitva Guvakhat yamidamastram praptam Caka 1604."

King Gadadhara Simha, having vanquished the Musalmans at Gauhati, obtained this weapon in 1604 Caka.

This cannon bears also the following inscription in Persian :

"Sakht Abd-ul-Karim top saz. Wazn 29 (?) mon, 29 ser. Shaikh Fakhr-ud-din."

Manufactured by Abdul Karim, gunmaker. Weight 29 (?) maunds, 29 seers, Shaikh Fakhr-ud-din (Probably the engraver).

(6) The small cannon at Dikom :

*“Cr Cr Svarganarayana deva Saumarecvara Gadadhara
Simhena yavanam jity a Guvaka hatyamidamastram praptam
Caka 1604.”*

King Gadadhara Simha, having vanquished the Musalmans at Gauhati, obtained this weapon in Caka 1604.

The cannon bears another inscription in Persian :

*“Dar ihtimam-i-Mir Sayyad Ahmad Darogha Ars dada
shud. Sakht Muhammad Zaman top saz. Waki Fahangir.”*

This cannon has been placed in charge of Mir Sayyad Ahmad Darogha Arz. It was manufactured by Muhammad Zaman, Gunmaker, during the reign of Jahangir.

GLOSSARY

Abwab	a trade tax.
Agor	a scented wood.
Ajan	Muslim prayer call.
Ajil	a Mughal revenue officer.
Alamgin	a Sword
Alamgirnama	an official history of the reign of Emperor Aurangzeb.
Ali	narrow road.
Bachari	a kind of Ahom fleet.
Bakshi	supervisor of certain administrative charges under Mughal.
Barbarua	Chief Adviser of the Ahom Government in judicial and administrative affairs.
Bar Bhandari	Chief Officer in charge of royal stores in Jayantia, Prime Minister in Cachar.
Bar Bhuya	holder of a large estate in Cachar.
Bargohain	an Ahom Minister.
Barkandaze	an armed retainer; mercenary soldier.
Bar Laskar	revenue collector of a large division in Cachar.
Barpatra Gohain	one of the Ahom ministers.

Barphukan	Provincial Viceroy under the Ahoms.
Barua	a high executive official of the Ahom Government.
Bhandari	an officer of royal store in Jayantia; a minister in Cachar.
Bhuyan	an estate-holder under the Raja in Cachar.
Bora	a kind of Ahom civil cum military officer endowed with twenty <i>paiks</i> .
Brahmin	the highest caste in Hindu social order.
Buragohain	Prime Minister in the Ahom monarchy
Chaitya	Hindu tomb or Shrine.
Chakla	Pargana or territorial division in Cooch Behar.
Chapkin	a Mughal costume.
Char-bach	light war boats of the Ahoms.
Chaudhury	a revenue officer in charge of pargana or estate.
Chota Bhuyan	holder of small estate in Cachar.
Chota Laskar	revenue officer of a small division in Cachar.
Chowkey/Choky	a transit station, a frontier outpost.
Cowry	Conch-shell used as medium of exchange.
Dag	an official record of the Dutch Factors.
Daloi	head of an administrative area in Jaintia Hills.

Dargha	Muulim shrine, tomb of a Muslim saint.
Deka Phukan	an Ahom official.
Deodhoi	Ahom priest.
Dewan	Chief executive; revenue collector, Governor.
Doardar	the frontier officer or trade agent of the Khasi Chief.
Doloi	a religious leader in Ahom state, an astrologer.
Duar	a mountain pass; a region adjoining a hill.
Duaria Barua	agent of the Ahom Government to regulate Assam-Bengal trade.
Durbar/Darbar	Court; assembly.
Farman	an imperial decree.
Fathia-i-Ibriya	a Persian account of Mir Jumla's Assam campaign by Shihabuddin Talish.
Faujdar	a revenue officer under the Mughals.
Fatuai	a Mughal garment.
Ghat	an anchorage on the river bank.
Gohain	an Ahom officer of rank.
Gohain Phukan	a chief executive for the supervision of religious ceremonies in the Ahom court.
Gosain	a religious preceptor or instructor.
Guru	a Hindu preceptor.

Hastividyarnava	a treatise on elephantry.
Hat	a periodical market.
Hazarika	a military officer of the Ahoms endowed with one hundred <i>paiks</i> .
Holoighoria	an officer of Ahom military factory or workshop.
Jagir/Jaigir	a revenue tract; assigned land.
Jagirdar	a feudal noble who rendered fixed services to the Mughal court.
Jhum	shifting cultivation.
Kakati	Compiler of government records in Assam.
Karkhana	workshop, factory.
Karori	Mughal revenue officer.
Kataki	an Ahom envoy.
Kayastha	a caste in Hindu society.
Khan-i-Khanan	a Mughal title conferred on provincial viceroys for exceptional merit.
Khat	an estate assigned by the Ahom monarch to the Naga chief.
Kheda	elephant hunting; trap for capturing wild elephants.
Khel	a unit or division of the people of Assam, a revenue division in Cachar.
Khilat	a gift awarded to foreign dignitaries by the Mughal court.

Koran	the Holy Book of the Islam.
Kosa	a light boat used by the Ahoms.
Kotwal	an official in Manipur to supervise the state police organisation.
Laskar	a revenue collector in Cachar.
Madrassa	a higher institution of Muslim education.
Mahal	a territorial unit or division.
Mahant	an official of the Vaishnava monastery in Assam.
Maharana	title of the Rajput chief of Udaipur.
Majar Bhuyan	holder of a medium estate in Cachar.
Majar Laskar	revenue collector of a medium size estate in Cachar.
Majumdar	a fiscal officer; an estate holder in Cachar.
Mektab	a Muslim institution for imparting the lessons of Islam.
Manasa	a Hindu deity.
Mansab	assigned land and subsidies granted by the Mughal court.
Mansabdar	holder of a <i>Mansab</i> .
Matabar	an elder in Khasi Hills.
Maulavi	a scholar in Islamic faith.
Mauza	a land division or unit.
Mauzadar	officer-in-charge of a <i>mauza</i> .

Medhi	a leader of the sudra caste in Assam.
Mela	a periodical fair.
Muga	a silk fibre.
Mukhtar	a revenue officer in charge of a <i>khel</i> or <i>Raj</i> .
Mulla	a religious preceptor of Islamic faith.
Naubachia Phukan	the admiral of the Ahom armada; the Phukan in charge of boatmen.
Nausalia Phukan	One of the chief naval officers under the Ahoms.
Nawara	a Mughal flotilla.
Nazir	a treasury officer; a cash officer in the court.
Neosali Phukan	the chief marine engineer of the Ahoms.
Nizamat	provincial viceroyship under the Mughals.
Paik	an organised system of personal service in lieu of taxation under Ahom state.
Paltan	an unit of army in Cachar; platoon of infantry.
Pandan	a container of betelnut and pan-leaf.
Pandit	Sanskrit scholar.
Panji	bamboo spike.
Pargana	a revenue division of the Mughals.
Parwana	an ordinance of Mughal court.

Patra	an official in Cachar.
Piskas	a gift offered by the Mughal court.
Phukan	an Ahom officer endowed with six thousand <i>paiks</i> .
Pir	a Muslim mendicant.
Posa	a tribute.
Qazi	judicial officer of the Muslims.
Quanungo	a revenue collector.
Rajamala/Rajmala	official chronicle of Tripura.
Rakhowa	an Ahom officer endowed with three thousand <i>paiks</i> .
Ryot	tenant.
Sadia Bargohain	a frontier officer of the Ahoms.
Sagol Hanjaba	a military officer in Manipur.
Saikia	an Ahom commander of one hundred <i>paiks</i> .
Saiva	worshipper of Shiva, the Hindu deity.
Sakta	worshipper of Sakti or Mother Goddess.
Samu Hanjoba	officer in charge of horses in Manipur.
Sarkar	a division of Mughal Subah; a district in the Mughal Empire.
Satra	an Assamese Vaishnava monastery.
Satradhikar	a chief priest of <i>Satra</i> .

Sejwal	a revenue officer; revenue collector in Cachar.
Shia	one of the sects of Islamic creed.
Sicca-Tanka	a Coin; one fourth of a rupee.
Sikdar	a revenue officer
Sirdar	headman of a village in Khasi and Jaintia hills.
Sitala	a Hindu deity.
Sonwal	gold-washer
Subah	a Mughal province.
Subahdar	Viceroy; Governor.
Sudra	the lower caste; lower ladder of the Hindu society.
Sufi	a Muslim cult.
Sunni	one form of Islamic creed.
Syiem	the chief of a Khasi state.
Zamburak	the cannon balls.
Zamindar	estate holder
Zikir	devotional song composed by a Muhammadan <i>Fakir</i> in Assam.

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