CHAPTER IV

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With the advent of the Ahoms, the Darrangi Rajya often had to face the brunt of economic and political exploitation of the Ahom rulers, which led to a series of revolts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An interesting feature of the Darrangi Rajya was that these protests and revolts were led by both the rulers and the subjects as well as. The power of the rajya rested on this solid unity based on social and religious freedom. As many as six revolts took place, of which two were headed by the Raij Mel1 or the assembly of the people and the others were led by the rajas. It is significant to note that the methods of revolt were varied in the case of the Raij Mel and the rajas. It was limited to non-cooperation and protest demonstration in the case of the Raij Mel and armed conflict including the use of hired mercenaries in the case of the rajas. This is unique feature of the history of Assam of that time.

The discontent grew primarily out of the gradual reduction of power and territories in so far as the Darrangi Rajas were concerned, and increase of revenue and discrimination in the case of both. Dharma Narayan, the founder of the Darrangi Phaid was installed as an independent ally of the Ahom kingdom and the rajya became a buffer state between the Ahoms and the Mughals with the boundary extending from the Bhareli river in the east to the Karatowa river in the west on the North bank of the Brahmaputra. However, at that time the territory west of Barnadi river, which formed the part of Kamrup was under Mughal occupation. Therefore, at that occasion the Darrangi Rajas practically did not come into possession of the territories west of Barnadi river. Hence, Barnadi river became the western limit of the rajya. In the succeeding period, Dharma Narayan with the aid of the Ahoms gained victory against the Mughals and recovered the territories of

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1 The usage of the term 'Raij Mel' was first made by eminent scholar Amalendu Guha, in Planter Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947, People's Publishing House, New Delhi (First Published-1977), 1988, Footnote p. 53. A Raij Mel is an assembly of the people of a village or several villages or a large area convoked to solve public problems. Guha states that the word Raij, in Assamese, means 'people in general or in the context of a particular locality'. It is derived from the word rajya which meant an administrative or fiscal unit in some parts of medieval Assam. Hence Raij Mel was much more than what we understood by a village Panchayat in India.
the *Dhekeri Rajya*\(^2\) or Koch Hajo. It is reported that Dharma Narayan accompanied by Momai Tamuli Barbarua, an Ahom officer arrested Abdulla Islam, the Mughal Governor of Hajo and took him to Gargaon, the capital of the Ahom kingdom. Satisfied with this success the Ahom king Pratap Singha entrusted the responsibility of the government of the *Dhekeri Rajya* or Koch Hajo to Dharma Narayan.\(^3\) Thus Koch Hajo or Kamrup came under the aegis of Dharma Narayan. As observed by S. K. Bhuyan, the conferment of Koch Hajo on Dharma Narayan on this occasion, later, became the basis of the *Darrangi Rajas*’ claims to Kamrup.\(^4\) Dharma Narayan ruled the country comprising Kamrup, Darrang and Charduar\(^5\) independently, while the Ahoms promised not to interfere in the affairs of the rajya.\(^6\) But the Ahoms did not keep their promise and instead made attempts at political encroachment and economic exploitation, taking advantage of the weakness of the *Darrangi Rajas*.

It was soon after the death of *Raja* Dharma Narayan that the Ahom government tried to establish their hegemony upon the *Darrangi Rajya* by reducing the power and territories of the *Darrangi Rajas*. When Dharma Narayan died the Ahom king tried to deprive his young son Mahendra Narayan (Sundar Narayan) from becoming *raja* on account of his minority. However, considering the friendship and faithful service rendered to the Ahom government by his father Dharma Narayan, he was reluctantly installed in his paternal rajya comprising Kamrup and Darrang by the Ahom king.\(^7\)

With the accession of Mahendra Narayan, the **history of the Darrangi Rajya entered a new phase.** The independent status of the *raja* was slowly undermined through a series of measures. The new ruler was instructed to consult the Barphukan, the Ahom Governor stationed at Gauhati on all important matters of the rajya.\(^8\) He had to follow the orders of

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2 There was a *paragana* or administrative division called *Dhekeri* under Kamrup district. That was why it was known as the *Dhekeri Rajya*. –Sarbananda Rajkumar, *Itikase Sowura Chashata Bachar*, Banalata, Dibrugarh, 2000, p. 55.


8 Ibid.
the Ahoms and had to attend the Ahom court personally when called upon to do so. As observed by Edward Gait, from this time the eastern Koch kingdom i.e. the Darrangi Rajya can no longer be regarded as independently ruled. The loss of the independent status became the chief cause of the discontent of the Darrangi Rajas and the people. Since then the Ahom king began to interfere in the internal affairs of the Darrangi Rajya.

It may be mentioned that on the pretext of a complaint of the Chutia subjects of the Darrangi Rajya, the Ahom king separated them from the jurisdiction of the Darrangi Raja and appointed three Hazarikas to take charge of them. This lowered the power and prestige of the Darrangi Raja. Such type of internal interference made the Darrangi Raja furious with the Ahom administration.

Moreover, Raja Mahendra Narayan or Sundar Narayan was also deprived of the province of Kamrup and it was put under the charge of the Barphukan, the Ahom Governor of Lower Assam. The deprival of Kamrup was unbearable for the Darrangi Rajas, which was considered as their ancestral property. Krishna Narayan rightfully complained, in a letter to Captain Welsh, that there never was a distinction between the Government of Kamrup (Kamroop) and Darrang (Durrung); both were held by one person until the king (raja) of Assam, possessing superior power, appropriated Kamrup to himself. Therefore, the loss of Kamrup became another important cause for revolt against the Ahom administration. Although only Darrang remained in their possession the rajas had to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom Government.

The capture of Raja Surya Narayan and his subsequent removal to Delhi by the Mughals created confusion in the Darrangi Rajya. Taking advantage of this situation the Ahom kings tried to strengthen their hold on the Darrangi Rajya. Consequently the Ahom

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10 These Chutia peoples numbering 3000 were obtained from the Ahom kingdom by Dharma Narayan at the time of his installment in the Darrangi Rajya. Ibid, p.63.
11 J. P. Wade, op. cit., p. 242. The young Raja ordered the Chutia subjects to erect a pious mound of earth called deul (dowl) of such a height that his turban must fall from his head when he should attempt to look at the summit. The deul was constructed but was not expected height. So the accused were punished by falling them from the top of the deul.
12 Ibid, pp. 248-49; and also, Major Adam White, op. cit., p. 174.
13 Major Adam White, op. cit., p.174.
Government made a register of paiks to maintain a standing militia in the Darrangi Rajya. It was formed out of six thousand men and the Ahom appointed six Hazarikas to command them. They were transferred to Gauhati and placed under the Barphukan. This naturally not only reduced the manpower but also limited the power of the Darrangi Rajas. Besides, the chamua paiks, who were exempted from military service and manual labour by paying taxes in gold, cow-tails and blankets of Bhutan, were also placed under the charge of the Barbarua and other government officers at Gauhati. The transfer of the Darrangi subjects to the Ahom administration created discontent among both the rulers and ruled. Besides, the Darrangi Rajas had to pay the Ahom monarch rich presents including large quantities of gold, horses, different kinds of clothes, etc., on different occasion especially at the time of coronation which had impact on the economy of the rajya.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the Darrangi Rajas the Ahom government tried to increase the amount of the tribute that had to be paid by the Darrangi people and so Darrang was surveyed several times from the time of the Ahom king Gadadhar Singha (1681-96 A.D.), which greatly irritated the people of the Darrangi Rajya. The first survey operation was done in the Darrangi Rajya during the reign of Gadadhar Singha in 1685 A.D., with the object of ascertaining the amount of tribute, which the Darrangi Rajas would be able to pay. Survey operation in the Darrangi Rajya was again undertaken in 1707 A.D. by an Ahom officer named Dhaniram under the orders of the Ahom king Rudra Singha during the time of Raja Indra Narayan. The revenue assessment was made so high that the people were unable to pay and the rajas fell in arrears. Mention may be made that the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha reduced the size of the rajya by issuing a copper plate on the pretext of arrears of tribute. The increase of revenue without considering the taxpaying capacity of the rajya became another important cause

14 J. P. Wade, op. cit., p. 251.
19 Dineswar Sarma, op. cit. p. 47.
of indignation of the people of Darrang, which made them rebellious towards the Ahom administration.

The discriminating treatment meted out to the Darrangi people was also no less responsible for the general discontent. The Ahom monarchs distrusted the Darrangi people and a ban was imposed on them preventing their entry into the Ahom capital and important places. Moreover, they also tried to exploit the people of Darrang in many ways, which were clearly exposed during the Moamoria rebellion. Thus, the powers and territories of the Darrangi Rajas were gradually reduced by the Ahom kings who tried to make them more dependent upon the Ahom Government. All these naturally irritated the people and the rajas of Darrang, who were waiting for an opportunity to rise against the coercive measures of the Ahom kings and tried to regain their lost power and position.

Mahendra Narayan, who was also known as Sundar Narayan and Makardhaj, first openly expressed discontent against the reduction of powers and territories of the Darrangi Rajas. The invasion of Assam by Mir Jumla, the Mughal general provided him an excellent opportunity to revolt. The internal dissension among the Ahom officials also greatly encouraged him to pursue his schemes. When Mir Jumla was at Gauhati 'the Darrang Raja' Makardhaj or Mahendra Narayan met him and accepted his protection and joined hands with the Mughal general against the Ahoms and personally led the war. The Mughal General gave him a Persian horse for this friendship. He died of small-pox at Jaji while he was returning from the war. However, Mahendra Narayan did not gain any advantage from the mission, as the Mughal victory over the Ahoms was short lived.

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21 A controversy regarding the identity of Makardhaj has arisen among scholars. Scholars like Lakshi Devi have tried to show that he was not a Darrangi Raja. [-Lakshi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations*, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1992, p. 308.] However, Paramananda Rajbongshi with evidence proves that Mahendra Narayan was the same Raja with the name Sundar Narayan as Gait mentions and Makardhaj as mentioned in the Persian chronicles. [-Paramananda Rajbongshi, *Rajpistaposakatat Asamiya Sahitya*, Bina Library, Guwahati, 2005, pp. 82 and 96.] The Persian chronicle also mentions about the Darrangi Raja Makardhaj, who sided with Mir Jumla during his invasion of the Ahom kingdom. [-cited in Edward Gait, op.cit, p.123] Jagannath Bhattarchya in his *Koch Rajar Buranji*, also clearly mentioned that Mahendra Narayan joined with Mir Jumla against the Ahom kingdom.

22 Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 123.

23 Jagannath Bhattarchya, op. cit.
When the tide of the invasion of Mir Jumla was over, the Ahoms tried to regain their power and therefore, it was necessary for the Darrangi Rajas to readjust their political relations with the Ahoms. It was no wonder that when Chakradhaj Singha ascended the throne of the Ahom kingdom, the Darrangi Raja sent an envoy to congratulate the new Ahom king.24 Thus, a cordial political relation between the Ahom kingdom and the Darrangi Rajya was redefined. Although Mahendra Narayan could not get much through his revolt, it infused the rebellious zeal among his successors who launched vigorous revolts of significance.

Raja Surya Narayan, who returned to Darrang from captivity after a period of about forty years at Dacca,25 led a remarkable revolt. He expressed his surprise at the reduction of power and territories of the Darrangi Rajas during his long absence. He had held a government that was nearly independent and found on his return that his numerous people had been transferred to the offices of the Ahom king. As a mark of protest, he recalled the Mul26 from Gauhati who was under the service of the Ahoms. However, he did not receive any support from his brother Raja Indra Narayan, instead who allied with the Barphukan, reported the matter to the Ahom king and the latter despatched his naval officer (naobaisa phukan) with a number of gunboats to capture Raja Surya Narayan. The latter was captured and taken to the Ahom court where he boldly complained 'that Swurge Deo formerly deprived him Kamrup and had now rendered the Prince of Dehrrung (Darrang) still less independent by transferring the Mool of that Province to the Department of the Burro Fokun (Barphukan)'.27 On such terms he refused to become raja and abdicated in favour of his brother Indra Narayan. Raja Surya Narayan came back to Mangaldai with about eighty men granted to him by the Ahom king to prepare the intoxicating herb (bhang) for him and established his residence on the eastern side of Mangaldai. His father’s personal property was equally divided between the two

24 Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 143.
26 An adult male whose name was registered for state service was called ‘paik’ and three paik constituted a unit called ‘got’. The levy of one man from each got was called ‘mul’, of two the ‘dowal’ and of three the ‘tewed’.-S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., pp. 10-11.

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brothers.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, the protest of Raja Surya Narayan failed due to the lack of popular support and internal conflict within the royal family. He failed to motivate his subjects due to his long absence from the \textit{rajya}. The result would have been a different one if Raja Indra Narayan had cooperated. However, his example became a great source of inspiration for his successors.

Another form of revolt under the \textit{rajya} was led by the assembly of the people or the \textit{Raij Mel} of Darrang against the revenue settlement of 1770 A.D.\textsuperscript{29} It has already been mentioned that Darrang was surveyed twice during the reign of Gadadhar Singha and Rudra Singha respectively. The survey operation was once again undertaken in Darrang in the year 1742-43 A.D. during the reign of the Ahom king Siba Singha (1714-44 A.D.), the successor of Rudra Singha.\textsuperscript{30} The taxpaying powers of the people of Darrang were severely strained by the higher rates of assessment, which these successive surveys and settlement operations imposed. As observed by S. K. Bhuyan, the \textit{Darrangis} dared not raise any protest during the reign of Pramotta Singha (1744-51 A.D.) and Rajeswar Singha (1751-69 A.D.), when the Ahom government was sufficiently strong to suppress any opposition.

However, after Lakshmi Singha’s restoration to the throne, when sedition became the order of the day,\textsuperscript{31} the \textit{Darrangis} got a new opportunity to rise in revolt. The people assembled in a \textit{Raij Mel} and took the decision to protest against the new rent-roll directly in front of the Ahom king. It is said that with a view to forestalling the new rent-roll the \textit{Darrangis} numbering about 4,000 men marched in a body to distant place Rangpur, the capital of the Ahom kingdom for staging a protest demonstration.\textsuperscript{32} They had undergone a hard and long journey of seven to eight days on foot, forcibly crossed the \textit{chakies} or the police check posts at different places, and appeared at the palace gate in violation of the orders which banned entry of Darrang and Kamrup subjects into the Ahom capital. The spirit of liberty of the \textit{Darrangi} people made it possible to undertake such a venture. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 255
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Amalendu Guha, op. cit., p. 109.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit, p. 269.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Amalendu Guha, op. cit. p. 109.
\end{itemize}
king's constables who had been despatched to disperse the intruders got into a 
confrontation with the Darrangi people. But the royal forces could not turn them away. 
The Darrangis expressed their strong determination to 'die on the spot' if their 
grievances were not met. The determination of the Darrangi people was so strong and 
effective that the Ahom king could not turn them away without meeting their logical 
demands.

Ultimately, two days later, top Ahom officials i.e. the Barbarua, the Bargohain and the 
Majindar Barua were compelled to depute the Na Gohain to explain the situation to the 
king, who considering it expedient, annulled the disputed revenue settlement. Thus, the 
Darrangis were successful in the annulment of the unpopular rent settlement and 
achieved justice. The annulment was a great achievement for the Darrangi people and 
had significant consequences. They achieved justice through protest. The successful 
march of four thousand people to such a distant place, the Ahom capital, which was well 
fortified and secured, was itself a glorious episode. It signifies a march to safeguard their 
rights and liberty. It emboldened them to demand further concessions and adopt more 
vigorous steps in future against the Ahom exploitation. Such venture was not found 
among the people of other parts of contemporary Assam.

The Darrangi people once again showed their united action against the Ahom 
exploitation and maltreatment during the Moamoria rebellion, which had far-reaching 
consequences. The Ahom nobles and royalists regarded Darrang as their conquered 
territory and treated it so. This was clearly exhibited during the Moamoria rebellion in the 
reign of the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha (1780-94 A.D.), when they oppressed the 
people of Darrang in various ways. Many inhabitants of upper Assam had to leave their 
homes due to the atrocities of the Moamoria rebels and took shelter in Darrang, which 
was not affected by it. The fugitive nobles forced the local inhabitants to work for them 
in their farms, plundered their grain stores, betelnut and other articles of consumption.

33 S. K. Bhuyan, Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 1975, p. 243; and 
also, S. K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations (1871-1826), Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, 1974, pp. 
269-70.

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The oppression became unbearable and the people of Darrang soon felt the scarcity of foodstuffs.34

These coercive acts and plundering activities of the Upper Assam refugees greatly annoyed the Darrangis, which resulted in an outburst of popular discontent in Darrang. On these occasions the gaonburhas or the village heads of Darrang assumed the leadership of the Darrangis and played a strong role in the rajya. It is said that an assembly was held which was attended by about two hundred and forty village heads of the Darrangi Rajya to consider measures for counteracting the oppression of the Upper Assam refugees.35 The assembly of the people or mel had arrived at some important decisions which had far-reaching consequences. The significance of the mel lay in its ability to exercise control over the people and the rajas and take timely action against injustice and exploitation.

In the meantime the king Gaurinath Singha, who was staying in his camp at Gauhati, had ordered the two rajas36 of Darrang, Hangsa Narayan I, the Burha (senior) Raja and Hangsa Narayan II, the Deka (junior) Raja to march with their forces against the Moamorias. The two rajas with about 2,000 men37 halted at a place called Ghiladhari (Gilladaree) near Bishwanath, from where they sent a detachment northward against the rebels. At this time the Moamarias sent a letter to the rajas expressing that they had high respect for the descendants of Nar Narayan family and were unwilling to wage war against them with whom they had no cause of enmity. The rebels further motivated them to their plan of partition of the Ahom kingdom in which the Darrangi Rajas would receive the portion west of Kaliabor. This was naturally an attractive offer for the Darrangi Rajas. But the two rajas now began to vacillate between their allegiance to the Ahom king and the temptation of having independence and control over Kamrup, which had always been their long cherished dream. They would have gladly accepted the offer

34 J. P. Wade, op. cit. p. 262.
35 Ibid.
36 At that time the Darrangi Rajya was ruled conjointly by two rajas usually known as Burha (senior) Raja and Deka (junior) Raja.
37 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 131.
of the Moamorias if they had not received at this juncture fresh orders from the king Gaurinath Singha to proceed with the duties entrusted to them.\textsuperscript{38}

The assembly or \textit{mel} of the \textit{gaonburhas} or village heads unanimously decided to adopt a policy of non-cooperation as a method of their protest and counteracting the oppression of the Upper Assam refugees. They were determined to recall their 6000 \textit{Mul} from Gauhati, which was stationed for the services of the Ahom kingdom. It was also decided to threaten the Ahom king (\textit{Swurge Deo}) with hostilities, if any further oppression was attempted. Such decisions were significant and effective in a situation when the Ahom kingdom required help from the \textit{Darrangi Rajya} to suppress the Moamoria rebellion. The decision of the assembly of the village heads was so effective that the \textit{Mul} could not defy it but readily obeyed. The \textit{Darrangis} also collectively took an oath that no assistance should be given to the Ahom king in any way, and that anybody who supported the Ahom government in any way would be excommunicated, expelled from the \textit{rajya} and if it was expedient even killed if he tried to re-enter the \textit{rajya} by force.\textsuperscript{39}

It is significant to note that the \textit{Darrangi Raij Mel} could exercise more control upon the people and the \textit{rajas} and acted independently while remaining within the feudal frame of administration. On that occasion the chief leaders of the \textit{Darrangis} were Swarup, Mainapowa, Kalia, Phatik Hazarika and Bhotar Kownar, son of Hem Narayan.\textsuperscript{40} The latter was not a \textit{gaonburha}, but a royal prince. So it can be said that even members of royal blood actively participated in this protest. Moreover, it is significant to note that the assembly or \textit{mel} of the village heads also took the drastic decision to recall their \textit{rajas}, who were then in the service of the Ahom king and engaged against the Moamorias. Consequently, an urgent message was sent to the \textit{Burha} (senior) \textit{Raja} and the \textit{Deka} (junior) \textit{Raja} to return to the \textit{rajya} immediately and assist the inhabitants in opposing the tyranny of the people of Assam. The people's mandate was so strong and effective that the two \textit{rajas} complied with the decision and abandoned the battlefield immediately, disobeying the orders of the Ahom king at a time when the latter needed the \textit{Darrangi}
Rajas’ military help to suppress the Moamoria rebels. The rajas then returned with their men to Darrang. This clearly indicates that the rajas had high regard for the popular decision and can be taken as an important milestone in expression of disobedience towards the Ahom king. Thus, the institution of gaonburha emerged as a savior and protector and a guiding force of the people in their time of exigency. The Raij Mel exercised great power and influence upon the people and the rajas. Both the people and the rajas could not disobey the orders of the assembly of the people or the Raij Mel. The principle of ‘Raijei Raja’, implying people’s power was established in the Darrangi Rajya, which corresponds to the modern idea of democracy.

The Darrangi Rajas could not forget their quest for independence and temptation of occupying Kamrup. They rose in revolt whenever they got any opportunity or perceived any weakness in the Ahom government. Such an opportunity arose during the Moamoria rebellion, which shook the foundation of the Ahom administration. Meanwhile, taking advantage of the weakness of the Ahom government and disaffection of the people of Kamrup, Haradatta Choudhury of Bujarbarua family, a landlord of North Kamrup organized a secret plot to expel the Ahoms from Kamrup. Knowing about the discontent of both the rajas and the subjects of the Darrangi Rajya, he came to Darrang where he met the two rajas Hangsa Narayan I, the Burha Raja and Hangsa Narayan II, the Deka Raja who had just returned from the battle field disobeying the orders of the Ahom king. He instigated the two rajas to drive the Ahoms out of Darrang and Kamrup. He also promised to give possession of Gauhati or Kamrup, which they thought they had been illegally deprived of by the Ahoms. This proposal of Haradatta Choudhury greatly encouraged Hangsa Narayan II, the Deka Raja, while Hangsa Narayan I, the Burha Raja refused to involve himself in hostilities. However, he promised to remain friendly with the Deka Raja. With a considerable force commanded by Nurhama the Deka Raja marched to a place called Sundarikola Khetra (Khundiree Kola Khutter). The force proceeded as far as the pass of Sendurgopa which is identified by S. K. Bhuyan as

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41 Ibid. pp. 262-63.
42 Ibid., pp. 263-64.
Hindughopa in Sipajhar, few miles west of Mangaldai. The Darrangi forces were defeated at the hands of the Ahoms in the battle that ensued and they abandoned the field.

The Ahom king Gaurinath Singha immediately deputed Bholai Barbarua, an Ahom army officer, to Darrang with a considerable force to capture the rebellious raja of Darrang. The Barbarua captured Hangsa Narayan II, the Deka Raja, and came back to Gauhati loaded with the spoils of Darrang. King Gaurinath Singha, who was then at Gauhati ordered the execution of the Deka Raja. To carry out the order of execution, a raft was made of banana stems in the middle of which a stake was driven. The raja was then impaled on the stake and the raft with the raja was floated down the river. His property was confiscated. A brother, an uncle and two nephews of Haradatta were also put to death in this connection. According to S. K. Bhuyan this incident took place in 1790 A.D. Bishnu Narayan, also known as Bairagi Kownar was appointed as the Deka Raja of Darrang. The claim and rights of Krishna Narayan, son of Hangsa Narayan II to the rajaship was set aside and he was dismissed from Gauhati. The repudiation of the claim of Krishna Narayan to the rajaship of Darrang became the reason for his revolt later. The revolt of Hangsa Narayan II had failed due to the lack of good planning and strategy. However, his failure became a lesson for his son Krishna Narayan, who later on launched a formidable revolt against the Ahom monarchy with a concrete plan and elaborate preparation.

A more vigorous and well-prepared revolt against the Ahom monarch was undertaken by Krishna Narayan, which had far-reaching consequences. He employed outside mercenaries to carry out his project. At the time of his father Hangsa Narayan II’s execution in 1790 A.D. Krishna Narayan was an energetic youth of seventeen years. It is natural that the treacherous seizure and murder of his father by the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha greatly aggravated Krishna Narayan, whose mind became revengeful.

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44 J. P. Wade, op. cit., pp. 263-64.
46 J. P. Wade, op. cit, p. 264.
48 Edward Gait, op.cit. p. 190.

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He also could not bear the confiscation of his father’s property and repudiation of his legitimate claim on the *Deka rajaship* of Darrang. Moreover, he was discontented at the reduction of the jurisdiction of the *Darrangi Rajas*. At that time the possessions of the *Darrangi Rajas* were confined to Darrang alone while their predecessors hitherto had ruled Koch Hajo comprising Darrang, Kamrup and a considerable part of Goalpara. Krishna Narayan in a letter to the British East India Company government rightly complained that Darrang and Kamrup were his ‘hereditary *Rauje*’.  

The ongoing Moamoria disturbances, which shook the foundation of the Ahom administration and even compelled the king Gaurinath Singha to flee from the capital, also greatly encouraged Krishna Narayan to rise against the Ahom kingdom. At this time when his mind was full of vengeance he met Haradatta Choudhury who instigated Krishna Narayan to recover his ancestral possessions in Darrang and Kamrup. This intensified the revolutionary zeal of Krishna Narayan. He was aware of the fact that his father had failed to achieve success against the Ahom authority due to the lack of proper preparedness. With the resources at his disposal he knew very well that it would be difficult to defeat the Ahom without the help of outside mercenaries. Because of their superior military tactics the British assistance would be invaluable for his success. With this view he communicated with the British principal merchant of Goalpara, Daniel Raush, who encouraged him to recover the possession of Darrang and Kamrup. Raush could not recover any portion of his outstanding balance estimated at about 70,000 rupees from the Assamese merchants although he repeatedly applied to the Ahom (Assam) government. It is believed that it was for recovering the remaining balance that Raush offered his help and cooperation to Krishna Narayan against the Ahoms. Raush guided Krishna Narayan to Koch Behar wherefrom he carried on negotiations with the authorities of Calcutta through Henry Douglas, the Commissioner of Koch Behar in July 1791 A.D.

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49 *Board of Revenue Papers (1791), File No. 50*. State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati.
51 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 275.
52 Ibid, p. 274.
Krishna Narayan appealed for military assistance to reinstate him to his father's possessions of Darrang and Kamrup, which he regarded as 'hereditary Rauje'. He offered to pay the Company a tribute of 50,001 Rajah Mohury rupees on condition of his being assisted with troops to recover Darrang and Kamrup, of which he had been deprived by his relative Bishnu Narayan, aided by the Ahom king.\footnote{Board of Revenue Papers (1791), File No 50. State Archives, Dispur, Guwahati.} However, the British East India Company did not think proper to interfere in the internal dispute between Krishna Narayan and his relative Bishnu Narayan and the Ahom government. Consequently on July 29, 1791 A.D. the Supreme Board decided not to assist Krishna Narayan with troops.\footnote{Ibid.} Krishna Narayan was not disheartened at the refusal but rather he prayed through Lumsden for a Perwanah to entertain troops on his own account. The authorities of Calcutta directed the Collector on 9th September, 1791 A.D. “neither to grant the Perwanah solicited by the Rajah, nor to take measures to prevent him entertaining in his service persons residing in the Company’s provinces.”\footnote{Ibid.}

On the strength of this order Krishna Narayan collected mercenaries consisting Burkendazes, Sainyakhis and Fakirs from Rangpur and Koch Behar.\footnote{H. K. Barpujari, (ed.), op. cit. p. 297.} These mercenaries were equipped with horses, camels, elephants, rockets and jingal pieces and arms of all kinds.\footnote{S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 278.} Therefore, the employer was relieved from supplying arms and weapons to them. Krishna Narayan with a force of 3000 and accompanied by Haradatta Choudhury entered Assam through Bhutan and Bijni.\footnote{H. K. Barujari (ed.), op. cit. p. 295.} With his mighty forces he occupied Darrang and after driving out Raja Bishnu Narayan, the nominee of Gaurinath Singha, proclaimed himself as the raja of Darrang.\footnote{Edward Gait, op. cit, p. 191.} This marked a great victory for Krishna Narayan. In the meantime Gaurinath Singha, who had left Nowgaon on account of the outbreak under Sindhura Hazarika, was taking shelter at Gauhati.\footnote{H. K. Barujari (ed.), op. cit. p. 295.} In such a situation king Gaurinath Singha had no alternative but to come to terms with Krishna Narayan by granting him his rights. With this view he entered into negotiation through Raush then at Gauhati. This
clearly indicated the intensity of the revolt of Krishna Narayan. The terms were acceptable to Krishna Narayan, but it is said that he was prevented by the Burkendazes, whose plundering activities would have to end with the cessation of hostilities. Besides, a huge amount of arrears had to be paid before any settlement.61 The negotiations ended in failure. Gaurinath Singha had no alternative but to seek help from the British East India Company through the Collector of Rangpur, Lumsden.62

Initially the East India Company Government was neither interested nor ready to provide assistance to Gaurinath Singha due to obvious reasons. The Pitts India Act (1784 A.D.) had already declared “to pursue Schemes of Conquest and Extension of Dominion in India are measures repugnant to the Wish, Honour and Policy of Nation.”63 Following these guidelines Lord Cornwallis (1783-93 A.D.), the Governor General of India was not interested in involving himself in avoidable complications. Besides, the British forces were engaged in the Mysore war, and it was difficult for him to turn his attentions to Assam. However, the attitude of the Company towards Assam had changed with the changing commercial and political situation. The commercial interests guided British policy in the North East India. It is clear from the fact that in September 21, 1785 A.D., the Court of Directors had expressed its desire to extend the Company’s salt trade into Assam.64 Two years later on the recommendation of the Court of Directors, the Governor-General in Council, Calcutta, had appointed Hough Baillie, a covenant servant of the Company and who was the original proposer for opening trade with the Assamese, as the Superintendent of the Assam trade at Goalpara. The salt trade of Baillie received a set back on the outbreak of the disturbances in Assam.65

Therefore, Cornwallis could not remain indifferent towards the anarchy in Assam, just on the border of the British territory, which not only affected the trade between Assam and Bengal, but also posed a threat to political insecurity toward the British possessions.

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61 Ibid, p. 298.
63 Quoted by H. K. Barpujari (ed.), op. cit. p. 305.
64 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 154.
65 H. K. Barpujari, Assam in the Days of the Company, NEHU, Shillong, 1996, p. 6. For example, during the year 1788 A.D. Baillie sold only 9493 maunds of salt at Goalpara, whereas he had expected to sell 100,000 maunds. S.K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 174.
Moreover, the Burkendazes recruited by Krishna Narayan were the subjects of the British. Therefore, it was the duty of the British government to return the Burkendazes, who had created trouble in Assam. As the Burkendazes would not obey the order to leave Assam, the British authority had no alternative but to employ force against them. In the meantime, the termination of the Mysore war left the British authorities free to deal with the Burkendazes. Therefore, in response to the appeal of the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha, Cornwallis, decided to expel the Burkendazes and consequently in September, 1792 A.D. a British contingent was sent to Goalpara under the command of Captain Welsh, with Lieutenant Mcgregor as adjutant and Ensing Wood as surveyor. John Peter Wade who had also accompanied as Assistant Surgeon. He would be given detailed instruction for future operations after he submitted a report, on local enquiry, to the Governor General.66

On November 8, 1792 A.D. Captain Welsh reached Goalpara where he met Daniel Raush and obtained from him a detailed account on the internal trouble in Assam. Bishnu Narayan, the fugitive Raja of Darrang, also provided further details.67 It is learnt from a letter sent by the king Gaurinath Singha that his real condition was akin to a heavy-loaded ship on the point of sinking.68 Welsh found that the condition of Gaurinath Singha was very critical and an urgent rescue was sought. Without waiting for further instruction from Calcutta he started up the river Brahmaputra towards Gauhati.69 Krishna Narayan was also aware of the movement of Welsh. He sent a letter through Ramkishore Ray to Welsh, who received it just before leaving Goalpara, desiring possession of nothing less than Darrang and Kamrup which “had descended from generation to generation to him.”70

The condition of king Gaurinath Singha became very critical following a raid by a mob of Doms or Kaibartas from Pakeriguri, under the leadership of a Bairagi. The identity of the Bairagi was doubtful. However, it is reported that he was a man from Pakeribari

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69 Edward Gait, op. cit., p. 192.
village of the Darrangi Rajya. But it is said that he had been enjoying the shelter and support of Krishna Narayan. Thus, strengthened by the support and encouragement from the latter, the Bairagi entered Gauhati and set fire to some houses near Gaurinath Singha’s residence to frighten the latter. Threatened, thus, the King fled. As there was no one to oppose him, the Bairagi easily occupied Gauhati and declared himself raja. When the defenceless inhabitants of Gauhati began to desert their homes, the Bairagi Raja asked them not to disperse and assured their protection by identifying himself as “the nephew of the Swargadeo.” Thus, Gauhati, the western stronghold of the Ahoms passed into the hands of a supporter of Krishna Narayan. It strengthened his position.

In course of his march to Gauhati Captain Welsh suddenly came across some Assamese boats carrying the fugitive king Gaurinath Singha and a few of his attendants, who had fled from Gauhati on the previous night, near Nagarbera Hills. That the political condition of Assam was very deplorable can be traced from the words of Gaurinath Singha to Captain Welsh: “the country is in such a state of anarchy and confusion that any man who can pick up 100 desperate fellow sets himself up for a Raja”. Gaurinath Singha requested Captain Welsh to continue his march and assured him that he had many adherents who would openly support him if he returned with sufficient forces. Moreover, the Barbarua on behalf of the king asked Captain Welsh for aid against all the enemies including Krishna Narayan of Darrang. Convinced by the appeal of the Ahom king, Captain Welsh virtually committed himself to “place Maharaja Surge Deo in his capital at Ghurgaon (Gargaon)”.

Gaurinath Singha returned to Gauhati accompanied by Captain Welsh. On the way the tributary chief of Rani Rajya joined them at a point about 8 miles west of Gauhati. Thus,

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72 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p. 308.
73 Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 192.
75 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 308.
76 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 164.
77 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 308.
78 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 165; and also Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 192.
the strength of Gaurinath Singha increased. There they left a company in charge of the boats and the king and the remaining five companies and the nobles including Barbarua made a night march to Gauhati. The Bairagi Raja and his men were not ready to repulse the attack. As a result, when the British forces reached Gauhati they fled in all directions of which about sixty men fell into the hands of Captain Welsh who made them prisoners. However, the Bairagi Raja himself could escape. Thus, Captain Welsh occupied Gauhati without much resistance. This was not happy news for Krishna Narayan who was taking position with his forces on the North bank of the Brahmaputra, opposite Gauhati. The fall of the Bairagi Raja made Captain Welsh free to deal with Krishna Narayan.

The king Gaurinath Singha accompanied by Jainath Barbarua paid a visit to Captain Welsh on the night of 26 November and the king expressed his gratitude for the assistance granted to him. At the same time the Barbarua referred to the numerous enemies of the king including Krishna Narayan. Responding to the appeal of Gaurinath Singha Captain Welsh turned his attention to Krishna Narayan and proceeded towards his territory.

Captain Welsh first tried to win over Krishna Narayan through peaceful means and with this intention he issued a Perwanah on 27 November to the Burkendazes working under Krishna Narayan ordering them to come to Gauhati within ten days and threatened them of severe punishment in case of disobedience. In response to this Perwanah, the Burkendazes sent arzis or application professing obedience but showing various pleas for delaying their attendance at Gauhati. In the meantime, Captain Welsh received a letter from Krishna Narayan expressing his satisfaction at the despatch of an “Amin” or officer from Calcutta to settle his affairs. Although Welsh sent a second Perwanah, the same reply was received from the Burkendazes. Convinced that the Burkendazes were not willing to obey his orders he determined to use force. At that time Krishna Narayan was in a strong position and had possessed a force amounting to four to seven thousand with

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80 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 165.
guns. He occupied all the strongholds on the northern side of the Brahmaputra river. Strengthened with a sufficient number of forces and occupying strategically important position Krishna Narayan was not ready to submit without making a strong bid. Krishna Narayan waited with his forces on the bank opposite Gauhati to check the advancement of Welsh. Convinced that Krishna Narayan would not follow his instruction he determined to take vigorous measures to reduce him to submission.

On December 6, 1792 A.D., Captain Welsh crossed the Brahmaputra with two hundred and eighty men and reached near Ashwaklanta Hill of North Gauhati where 3000 Burkendazes troops were posted. Thus, the forces of Krishna Narayan outnumbered the British forces. In the battle that ensued, the Burkendazes under Krishna Narayan could not succeed against the forces of Welsh due to its superior arms and tactics. The Burkendazes were brave, no doubt, but suffered from the lack of efficient military leadership. They fought strongly but had to flee and incurred the loss of twenty men and forty guns, with thirty wounded and several made prisoners as well. On the British side the causalities were only six men wounded. Thus, the Burkendazes under Krishna Narayan were expelled from the North Gauhati with little difficulty. Although the Burkendazes were defeated, they were not routed.

After being expelled from North Gauhati Krishna Narayan re-grouped his troops and concentrated at some distance from Gauhati to make a final bid at Welsh. The latter sent a detachment under the command of Lt. William against Krishna Narayan. A severe engagement took place at Kalitakuchi (Koolta Kochee) in Chatguri in Darrang near Bhutan frontier where Krishna Narayan’s troops suffered defeat with 100 troops killed or wounded and the rest fleeing to Bhutan. On the British side casualties were of about eleven soldiers wounded. The result of this defeat was disastrous for Krishna Narayan.

After the defeat at Kalitakuchi Krishna Narayan had to face a critical situation as most of the Burkendazes deserted Krishna Narayan probably due to arrears of payment and only

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83 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 166.
84 Ibid., p. 166; and also Edward Gait, op. cit. pp. 194-95.
85 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 166.
the Sanyasis (Gosain) remained loyal to him. The strength of Krishna Narayan was, thus, reduced. Krishna Narayan and Haradatta Choudhury were compelled to take shelter in Kaliapani in Khalling Duar lying between Darrang and Bhutan proper. The Bhutanese saw that the war between the British forces and Krishna Narayan might extend to Bhutan if Krishna Narayan continued to maintain his troops, and may affect their country. The raja of Bhutan, therefore, compelled Krishna Narayan to disband his troops and despatched a letter to Captain Welsh wishing the continuation of the friendship between him and the British. He also informed that the raja of Darrang (Krishna Narayan), Sootia Koonwar and Haradatta Choudhury (Barua) had taken refuge at his court. He hoped no offence would be taken. In reply Captain Welsh requested him to persuade the Darrangi Raja to visit Gauhati giving assurance of his safety.

Although Welsh informed Cornwallis, the Governor General of British-India about his success in expelling the Burkendazes, the latter made sporadic raids into Assam plains taking refuge in Bhutan. Besides, Krishna Narayan had still about 400 Burkendazes in his regular pay. In such a situation, the security of the Ahom King could not be expected. Cornwallis in a letter to Welsh instructed him to inform the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha to settle his differences with Krishna Narayan amicably and restore his ancestral possessions on condition that he should assist in restoring the Ahom king’s authority in other parts of his dominion. To this advice, the Ahom king replied that it was not customary to reestablish rebels in their old possessions. Gaurinath Singha was expected to pacify his rebellious subjects by adopting conciliatory measures; but contrary to this expectation he oppressed the rebels who were arrested. It was found that since his return to Gauhati about one hundred and thirteen persons had been murdered. Moreover, seventy others were found in prison dying from starvation. It would not be possible to establish peace in the country without the stopping such oppression and cruel activities. Therefore, Captain Welsh adopted stern measures. He not only arrested Barbarua and

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87 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 166.
88 Ibid. p. 173.
89 S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit. p. 315.
91 Major Adam White, op. cit, p. 167.
Soladhara Phukan and dismissed Barphukan, but also made the king virtually a prisoner by depriving him temporarily of all powers.\textsuperscript{92}

Soon Gaurinath Singha came to realize about his helpless position and was compelled to accept the four proposals put forward by Captain Welsh. First, all ministers accused of misconduct would be dismissed. Second, all rebellious subjects and enemies would be pardoned. Third, no punishment extending to death or mutilation would be inflicted without fair trial and lastly, the \textit{rajas} and chiefs around Gauhati would be consulted in matters of framing regulations.\textsuperscript{93} On the establishment of justice at Gauhati after dismissal of the oppressive ministers and ill-advisers and ensuring the cooperation of Gaurinath Singha Captain Welsh turned his attention to settle the affairs of Krishna Narayan. On the instruction of Captain Welsh, Gaurinath Singha agreed to restore Krishna Narayan to his ancestor's possession. Captain Welsh wrote to Krishna Narayan asking him to appear before the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha at Gauhati. Communication with Krishna Narayan was conducted through Ensign Wood who had been engaged in survey operations in Darrang-Bhutan frontiers.\textsuperscript{94} At first Krishna Narayan was reluctant to come to Gauhati, in the presence of Gaurinath Singha, fearing for his life, for it was Gaurinath Singha who had put his father to death at Gauhati. However, on the pressure and assurance from Captain Welsh and persuasion of the \textit{raja} of Bhutan, Krishna Narayan decided to come to Gauhati. He expressed his desire to hold his country under the protection of the British East India Company and proposed to pay tribute to him. Besides Darrang, he also claimed the possession of a portion of Kamrup that had been ruled by his ancestors.

Captain Welsh despatched Lt. MacGregor on April 21 to Kalitakuchi to conduct Krishna Narayan and Haradatta Choudhary to Gauhati.\textsuperscript{95} Krishna Narayan arrived at Gauhati on May 20, accompanied by about 400 \textit{Burkendazes} and Haradatta's son.\textsuperscript{96} Welsh assured him friendship and protection. At the same time he determined to dismiss the

\textsuperscript{92} Edward Gait, op. cit. p. 195; and also Major Adam White, op. cit., p. 168.

\textsuperscript{93} H. K. Barpujari (ed.), op. cit. p. 314.

\textsuperscript{94} S. K. Bhuyan, op. cit., 325.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 327.

\textsuperscript{96} Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 174.
Burkendazes whose appearance might create disturbances. Those who were in the Darrangi Raja's regular pay numbering about 270 were sent to Rangpur where they were disarmed and paid arrears. After taking a formal oath of allegiance to Gaurinath Singha, Krishna Narayan was formally installed as the raja of Darrang in his ancestral possession of Darrang on 24 May. However, Krishna Narayan was not inclined to give up his claim on Kamrup. Sunder Narayan (Chandra Narayan) was the last prince of his family who possessed that province. Captain Welsh proposed to examine Krishna Narayan's claims to Kamrup with the help of the papers in possession of the Darrangi Rajas and the Ahom king. He investigated the matter and it was found that Bishnu Narayan and Sunder Narayan were both better entitled to it than Krishna Narayan. He could not arrive at a final decision. Thus, Krishna Narayan's claim on Kamrup remained unsettled.

Krishna Narayan reluctantly agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom king. However, Captain Welsh insisted on the king accepting a pecuniary compensation in lieu of feudal obligation of levy of men. It was agreed that Krishna Narayan would pay an annual tribute of fifty-eight thousands to the Ahom king, which was made up as follows for Darrang Rs. 50,000; for Chutia Rs. 2,000; for Kaliabor Rs. 3,000 and for custom duty between Darrang and Bhutan, Rs. 3,000. After completing this settlement Krishna Narayan left for his capital Mangaldai escorted by a guard of sepoys and took formal possession of his rajya. This was a great success for Krishna Narayan. The result of the revolt would be a different one if the British had not come to the assistance of the Ahom king. Although he had failed to achieve independence, he had succeeded in expelling the Ahom nominee from the rajaship of Darrang and reorganization of his legitimate right on the rajaship of Darrang, from which he was unjustly deprived. The success of Krishna Narayan also marked a setback to the Ahom policy of not establishing rebels in their old possessions. The employment of outside mercenaries in the revolt was a new strategy in

98 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 174.
100 Major Adam White, op. cit. p. 174.
101 Ibid. p. 176.
102 Edward Gait, op. cit. footnote, p. 196.
the political history of the Brahmaputra valley. Such a venture was not seen in other parts of medieval Assam.

From the above observations it can be concluded that the revolts by both the rajas and their subjects at different stages were not illogical. The Ahom government illegally made political encroachment upon the Darrangi Rajya and tried to exploit it economically. It was especially from the time of Mahendra Narayan that the independent status of the Darrangi Rajas was slowly undermined through a series of measures. Originally the Darrangi Rajas were faithful allies of the Ahom kingdom. But the Ahom government did not try to meet the grievances of the Darrangi Rajas through conciliatory methods; rather they tried to dominate them by force. Makardhaj or Raja Mahendra Narayan tried to fish in the troubled waters created by the invasion of Mir Jumla. Surya Narayan and Hangsa Narayan II also continued their rebellious zeal and exhibited great courage. Krishna Narayan had to launch a more vigorous step. He had recruited mercenaries to help in fighting the Ahoms from outside the state, and this had some lasting effects. Undoubtedly it contributed to the fall of the Ahom kingdom, even if in an indirect way.

It is found that the Darrangi Raij Mel or people’s village assembly could exercise great power and control upon both the rulers and the ruled. It made the people more conscious about their rights and duties and established social unity irrespective of caste and creed; this was the main prop of its power and strength. This explains as to why it could successfully lead a protest demonstration to the Ahom capital. Moreover, they had the strong determination to ‘do or die’ to achieve their goal. Even the feudal Ahom policy of economic exploitation became ineffective in the face of such determination, for which the Darrangis were excluded from the exploitative rent-roll. The gaonburhas or village heads had exercised great power and control in the rajya and emerged as true leaders of the toiling masses. The taking of public oath to maintain public unity and achieve their goal was remarkable. The principle of ‘Raijei Raja’ corresponding to the idea of modern democracy was established in the Darrangi Rajya. The unity that existed among the people explains the success of non-cooperation as a method of revolt, about one hundred and thirty-two years before Gandhi launched his Non-Cooperation programme at the national level.