CHAPTER – 1

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1.1 Introduction

The history of Muslim contact with north-east India began practically along with the establishment of their suzerainty in Bengal in the early 13th century. From their new base of operation at Bengal it was but natural that the Muslim rulers began to look to the eastern frontier for territorial aggression. The geographical propinquity of the kingdom of Kamarupa to the newly established Muslim rule in Bengal made the kingdom the earliest target of the Muslim rulers in the region, which was gradually extended towards the kingdoms of Sylhet, Tripura and Assam. Thus, these kingdoms became the main hindrance of the political ambition and military zeal of the early Muslim rulers of Bengal. Their political ambition was further aggravated by the rich natural resources of the kingdom – fertile lands, dense forest populated by valuable wild animals, especially elephants, various aromatic plants (aloe wood) and syrups, silk, musk, ivory, gold and silver, etc. The nature of relation between the Muslim rulers of Bengal and the kingdoms of Kamarupa, Sylhet and Tripura throughout the pre-Mughal period was characterized by hostility and ill will. It was only from the Mughal period that we saw a departure from this policy, thereby bringing in various phases of premeditated moves.

1.2 Political Relation of Muslims with Kamarupa, Koch Behar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the Pre-Mughal Period

Muhammad Bhaktiyar Khalji,1 after consolidating his hold over Bengal (A.D. 1201-03) by defeating the Sena ruler, Lakshmana

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1 Muhammad Bhaktiyar Khalji came to India in A.D. 1195 and entered the service of Hijbar-ud-din, the governor of Badayun. He was granted a jagir in the Mirjapur district by Husam-ud-din, the governor of Oudh, in A.D. 1196. He under the instruction of Qutub-ud-din Aibek, raided Bihar and Muner in A.D.
Sena,² planned to undertake an expedition to Tibet. The motive behind this expedition is not specified in the contemporary and near contemporary Muslim accounts. The expedition was, in all probability, either an outcome of his inborn spirit of adventure, further induced by the lure of the booties of the northern mountains or an attempt to explore and open a shorter route to Turkistan.³ After necessary preparations Bhaktiyar proceeded on his expedition to Tibet in A.D. 1206 at the head of an army of 10,000 horses.⁴

The mountains between Tibet and the Lakhnauti were inhabited by three tribes of different races – koch, mech and tiharu. On the way Bhaktiyar took captive of a mech chieftain, whom he converted to Islam and gave the name Ali Mech. Under Ali Mech’s guidance, they marched in the north-eastern direction till they reached the banks of the river Begmati (lower down it is called Gandak). They followed the river upstream for ten days through the mountains and reached a bridge of hewn stone.⁵ As the safety of the

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² For the history of the conquest of Bengal, see Tabaqat-i-Nasiri, vol. I, pp. 554-60. After the conquest of Bengal by Muhammad Bhaktiyar it was made a province of the Delhi Sultanate but it became an independent kingdom from A.D. 1338 to 1538. Between A.D. 1538 and 1576, a line of Afghans kings ruled Bengal, and it then became a subah of the Mughal Empire from A.D. 1576 to 1717. The tenure of the independent Nawabs of Bengal lasted from A.D. 1717 to 1757. Along with the defeat of Siraj-ud-Daulah at the battle of Plassey the political power of the Muslims in Bengal came to an end and British rule was established.


⁵ The Sil Hako bridge, the remnants of which are seen even today, is situated about 8 miles north-west of northern Gauhati on the high alley, which at one time was the principal land route between ancient Gauhati (Pragjyotisha) and western Kamrup. It was built across what may have been a former bed of the Barnadi river. The "structure was of solid masonry, built without lime or mortar, of the same massive and enduring material (gneiss and granite) found in the neighbouring hills, and which appears to have been used so largely in the construction of the more ancient temples of central and lower Assam. There are no arches, the superstructure being a platform with a slight curve 140 ft. long and 8 ft. in breadth, composed of slabs of stone, 6 ft. nine inches long and 10 inches thick, numbering five in the whole breadth, resting on an under structure of 16 pillars, three in a row, equally divided by three large solid buttresses projecting from a circular mass of masonry forming the abutments of each end of the road, their being in the whole length 12 passages
bridge was necessary for them to secure a safe return, Bhaktiyar left a division of the troop to guard it, under the command of two amirs. Then they passed through the northern extremes of the Kamarupa kingdom.

The movement of the Muslim troops came to the knowledge of the king of Kamarupa, who dispatched an emissary to solicit friendship with Bhaktiyar Khalji, and to ask him to reconsider and defer for a year the expedition, as it was not a proper time and assured him help in the future. Paying little heed to the proposals and promises, he proceeded for another sixteen days through the narrow valleys and over lofty mountains, and finally landed in an open country populated by various tribes. The troops plundered the country, but the inhabitants resisted and got an upper hand, and inflicted serious losses on the Muslim troops in a pitched battle that was fought from morning till evening. Finally, Bhaktiyar decided to retreat, as the fight and the march they had undertaken fatigued the troops. The inhabitants of the region put them to further obstacles. Taking recourse to "scorched earth policy" they set fire to the forests and grains, which were on their route. On their return journey, till they reached the bridge, they could not find any food or grass for the troops and horses, putting the armies in great straits. Worse still, they found that the forces of Kamarupa had damaged the two arches of the stone bridge by overpowering the two amirs.

The Muslim troops, finding no way out, halted at a temple, nearby the stone bridge. Meanwhile, the troops of Kamarupa

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7 Ibid., pp. 564-69.
8 There are differences of opinions about this idol temple. It has been identified by K. L. Barua as the Siva temple of Gopeswar, which lies about four miles from the bridge whereas T. K. Sarmah is of the opinion that it was the Narashinha temple, which lies on an isolated hillock, known as Narahsingha Parbat, now in ruins. See K. L. Barua, Early History of Kamarupa, p. 138; T. K. Sarmah, "The Temple where Bukhtiyar took Shelter," in Readings in the History and Culture, pp. 180-82.
rounded the temple and occupied the river bank. Left with no alternative, the Muslims troops mounting on their horses hopped into the river. Many were drowned, only a few along with Bhaktiyar managed to cross the river and was helped by the kinsmen of Ali Mech and reached Diw-Kot. Not long after this event, Bhaktiyar was knived by Ali Mardan in A.D. 1224.9

The only indigenous evidence that provides information about this ill-fated expedition is the rock inscription in north Gauhati. The text runs as following:

\[
\text{sake turaga jugmesa madhumasa trayodase.}
\]
\[
\text{Kamarupam samagatiya Turuskah khayamayayuh.}
\]

On the thirteenth of Chaitra, in the year Saka 1127.
The Turks coming into Kamarupa were destroyed.10

Ghiyasuddin Iwaz Khalji (A.D. 1213-27), the sultan of Bengal, made the first direct offensive on Kamarupa in A.D. 1226-27. The details of the expedition are wanting. The ruler of Kamarupa again routed the Muslim forces.11 Malik Yuzbak (A.D. 1251-57) in A.D. 1257 undertook another expedition to Kamarupa. This time, the king of Kamarupa, who was feeble hearted, hearing the approach of the Muslim troops fled. Malik Yuzbak took possession of the city of Kamarupa and plundered it; countless wealth and treasure fell in his hand. He instituted the reading of kutbah12 and Friday congregational prayers in Kamarupa. He introduced Muslim settlement in the region.13 The king of Kamarupa sent emissaries

10 K. L. Barua, op. cit., p. 138. The date is not of the invasion but of the annihilation of Bhaktiyar's army. According to D. N. Mukherji, saka 1127 corresponds to A.D. 1205/6, but as the month was chaitra it should be A.D. 1206, in which year the 13th day of chaitra corresponds to the 7th day of March. But nowadays the 13th day of chaitra corresponds to 27th March. See D. N. Mukherji, "The Date of Bhakhtiyar's Invasion of Assam," JARS, vol. III, no. 4 (Jan. 1936), pp. 89-91.
12 Kutbah is a Muslim prayer book recited on Id, Friday congregational prayers, and other special days and occasions. The recital of the kutbah after one's name and the minting of coins were regarded by the Muslim sovereigns as emblems of sovereignty.
13 Jadunath Sarkar, History of Bengal-Muslim Period 1200-1757, p. 53.
pleading with Yuzbak to reinstate him on the throne and in return promised to pay an annual tribute in gold and elephants. When Yuzbak disagreed to the proposal, the former took recourse to “scorched earth policy” by acquisitioning all the grains. With the advent of harvest time, the Kamarupa king along with his troops raised and opened the water embankments all round, which compelled Yuzbak’s troop to retreat. On their way back, probably along the foot of the Khasi and Garo hills in the direction of Mymensingh, the troops of the Kamarupa attacked them. There ensued a fight in a narrow passage. In the encounter, an arrow struck Malik Yuzbak and was taken as captive along with his family and troops. Nothing more is known about the fate of these people. 14

Many years later, Sultan Ghiyasuddin, the sultan of Bengal, undertook another marauding raid in A.D. 1321-22. He went on to subjugate the northern part of Mymensingh, east of the Brahmaputra, which from the early times had been part of the kingdom of Kamarupa. Sultan Ghiyasuddin invaded, most probably, as far as Nowgong and is believed to have been repulsed by the cacharis, who had by then occupied the region. 15 The Muslim chroniclers however do not mention this expedition.

Few years following the Kamarupa campaign the renegade Sultan Ghiyasuddin was killed in an encounter with the forces of Muhammad-bin-Tughluq. The latter, following the example of the enterprising steps of Sultan Ghiyasuddin dispatched 1,00,000 well-equipped horsemen towards Kamarupa in A.D. 1332-33. The Muslim troops perished there, according to Alamgirnama, due to the effect of witchcraft of the region. Muhammad-bin-Tughluq further sent reinforcement, but the troops could not advance further in the region and the expedition had to be called off. 16 The campaign,

according to the same account, was directed against Assam, but the fact is not corroborated in any of the contemporary and near-contemporary Persian sources, and the *Buranjis*.

Sikandar Shah (A.D. 1357-89), the sultan of Bengal, commenced another invasion of Kaśmirupa in A.D. 1357. The cause and event yet again is not known, but he probably conquered a part of the kingdom. This seems to be corroborated by the coins he issued from his camp in Kamarupa.17

Rukunuddin Barbak Shah (A.D. 1459-74), the sultan of Bengal, dispatched troops to Kamarupa, which was then in its flourishing state in and around A.D. 1460. The military general-cum-saint, Ismail Gazi, led the Muslim troop. He fought two battles against Kameswar, the ruler of Kamarupa. The king finally tendered his allegiance, and agreed to pay tribute. It is said that the saintly character of Ismail Gazi impressed Kameswar so much that he embraced Islam. The Hindu governor of Ghoraghat being envious of Ismail’s fame falsely charged him into entering an alliance with the ruler of Kamarupa. Sultan Barbak consequently beheaded him in A.D. 1474.18 The conquest of Ismail Gazi probably was confined to the vicinity of Ghoraghat and Kanta Daur (in Rangpur) where he was eventually buried, and he is also known to have founded a city there named Nusrut.19 However, the invasion of Ismail Gazi is not mentioned in any of the *Buranjis*.

Alauddin Husain Shah (A.D. 1493-1519), the sultan of Bengal, in A.D. 1498 launched one of the most significant campaigns. According to a popular tradition, the expedition was instigated by a Brahman minister of Nilambar whose son was put to death by the

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18 G. H. Damant, “Notes on Shah Ismail Gazi,” *JASB* (Nov. 1874), p. 227; *Annals of Delhi Badshahate*, pp. 3-4. According to the manuscript found in the possession of the fakir of Kanta Daur, Ismail Gazi came to Gaur during the reign of Barbak Shah and gained the favour of the king by building a bridge. He was then sent at the head of a troop against Gajapati, king of Madaran (Orissa), whom he defeated. See ibid, p.227.
king for having an affair with the queen.\textsuperscript{20} He conquered Kamarupa after defeating Nilambar, the last king of the Khen dynasty.\textsuperscript{21} The event of the conquest of Kamarupa is corroborated by the cenotaph of a mosque in English Bazar, dated first Ramzan, A.H. 907 (March 10, A.D. 1502).\textsuperscript{22} After consolidating his hold on Kamarupa as far as Hajo, he is said to have led a campaign towards Assam.

There is much controversy regarding Husain Shah’s Assam campaign. According to contemporary Muslim accounts, Husain Shah along with a formidable force of cavalry, infantry, and boats had invaded Assam. The Ahom king being defeated relinquished the plains and retreated to the mountains. Husain Shah returned to Bengal, leaving his son. But, when the rainy season commenced, the king came down from his hideout, encircled the Muslim troops, and cut off their supplies. Many of the Muslim troops were killed while others were taken captive.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} According to the tradition, Nilambar, after the execution, invited the brahman minister to a banquet, forced him to consume his son’s flesh, and told him the whole story. The minister with the intention of taking revenge went to Ganges on the pretext of washing his son’s sin. There he met Husain Shah and instigated him to invade Kamarupa. Husain Shah made a campaign but was defeated. Having failed, Husain Shah decided to retreat, but requested Nilambar that his wife be allowed to meet the queen. When the meeting was arranged he somehow managed some of his armed men to intrude into the city and lay seize. Nilambar was taken as prisoner but managed to escape on the way. See E. A. Glazier, \textit{A Report on the District of Rungpore}, pp. 11-12; \textit{Kamrupar Buranji}, Appendix-C, pp. 123-24.


\textsuperscript{22} The inscription was originally attached to a madrasah in Gaur, now removed for preservation. The translation of the inscription runs:

“The Prophet (God’s blessings an him!) has said, ‘Search after knowledge, and if it were in China,’ This excellent madrasah was ordered to be built by the great and generous king, the Sayyid of the Sayyids, the source of auspiciousness, who exerts himself on the road of God the All-giver, the conqueror of Kamru and Kamta with the help of the Merciful, Alauddunya waddin Abdul Muzaffar Husain Shah, the King, the Husaini -- may God perpetuate his kingdom! -- for the teaching of the sciences of religion and instruction in those orders which alone are true, because he hopes to obtain from God the great reward and asks Him for His everlasting mercy, on the 1\textsuperscript{st} Ramzan, A.H. 907 (10\textsuperscript{th} March, A.D. 1502).” See H. Blochmann, “Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal,” \textit{JASB}, vol. 43, (1874), p. 301.

\textsuperscript{23} H. Vansittart, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 137; Jadunath Sarkar (tr.), \textit{Fathiya-i-Ibiriya} pp. 188-89; \textit{Riyas-us-Salatin}, pp. 132-33.
According to the anonymous author of an article, which appeared in the *Calcutta Review*, entitled "Ancient Assam," Husain Shah marched up to Tezpu and ravaged the capital, but he was propelled by the *bara bhuyans* and had to content himself with his possession of Kamarupa. E. A. Gait is of the opinion that Husain Shah's Assam campaign is just a myth.

Husain Shah, before his retreat from Kamarupa, appointed his son-in-law, Dalal Ghazi (a corruption of Daniyal), as governor of the occupied province. He also introduced a colony of Afghans in Kamarupa, who took over the civil and military administration after dispossessing the Hindu *zamindars*. His imbecile son, Musunder Ghazi and Sultan Ghiyasuddin, in turn, succeeded Dalal Ghazi. In another account the credit for introducing a colony of Muslim is given to Sultan Ghiyasuddin, who also assigned large amount of land for their sustenance. He is said to have adopted extreme measures for converting the inhabitants of Kamrup, and the stone temples of Kamakhya and Moha Muni at Hajo were plundered and demolished. As per numismatic evidence, Husain Shah continued to hold sway over Kamarupa as late as A.D. 1518, as the epithet on the coins continued to style Husain Shah as "conqueror of Kamru and Kamtah."

After the campaign of Husain Shah, for a short period Kamarupa was left with no ruler. A number of petty independent chieftains sprang up. Around the time, by A.D. 1515, the *koch* tribe under their leader Bishva Singh (A.D. 1515-40), emerged as the ruler

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27 H. Blochmann, "Contributions to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period)," *op. cit.*, p. 282.
of the tract west of Barnadi, called Koch Behar. This he achieved by subduing the Baro Bhuyans. Thus, on the remains of the Kamarupa kingdom came up the state of Koch Behar. He probably appropriated the Muslim territory in Kamarupa.

The first Muslim campaign accounted in the Ahom Buranjis is that of an anonymous vazir. He is identified by H. E. Stapleton as Ghiasuddin Mahmud, brother of Sultan Nusrat Shah (A.D. 1519-32), who had managed to establish a principality in the country east of Baranadi river. The Ahom troops offered stiff resistance and put them at bay. The vazir was defeated in an encounter that followed at Temani. The Muslim forces fled only to reappear with reinforcements under a military commander, named Bit Malik. They were again defeated, Bit Malik was killed and his forces were pursued as far as Khagarijan. This campaign finds no place in the Muslim chronicles.

After the death of Nusrat Shah the attempt was renewed by another general, who is referred in the Buranji as Turbak, in April A.D. 1532 at the head of 1,000 horses, 30 elephants, well armed with large supplies of arms and ammunitions. The Muslim forces proceeded up to the Ahom capital, Dihing. Ahom troops took position but due to the instruction of an astrologer they had to wait for the Muslim troops to cross the Brahmputra. The Ahom troops

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30 H. E. Stapleton, "History and Ethnology of North-East India," op. cit., pp. 163-64. For specimen of the coins of Nusrat Shah, Ghiasuddin Mahmud and Ahoms, see ibid.
31 G. C. Barua (ed.), Ahom Buranj, pp. 61, 66, 68.
32 The Assamese, as a custom, performed some sorcery before going to the battle. Mirza Nathan describes the procedure:
"...they send some magic object floating down the river towards the enemy's side. If floats down towards the enemy's side, they take it as a good omen. If it travels upstream out of its own accord, they take it as foreboding something against them and consider it as a sign of their defeat and they do not go out to battle. In short, according to that custom, they build one raft of plantain trees...and performed puja...in the following manner. They sacrificed a black man, a dong, a cat, a pig an ass, a monkey, a he-goat, and a pigeon, all black. Their heads were collected together and placed on the raft along with many ripe bananas, pan, betel-nut, chuwa (acanthophyllum squarrosum), various kinds of
being impatient crossed the Brahmaputra and attacked the Muslim troops, but were defeated. Further encounters took place between the two forces. By March A.D. 1533 the Ahoms defeated the Muslims in a naval engagement and took possession of 20 small ships. Turbak was reinforced with elephants, horses and troops. Shortly, there took place another fight in which the Ahoms took an upper hand. Muslim troops got into their ships and retreated. The last ditch battle was fought on the banks of Bharali river. Turbak and one of his general, Husain Khan, were killed in the encounter. Ahoms took possession of a large number of elephants, horses, arms and ammunitions, and gold and silver coins. The severed heads of Turbak and Husain Khan were entombed on the Charaideo hill. Many Muslim troops were taken into captivity, who were later settled in various parts of the country. The entire contemporary and near contemporary Persian accounts are silent on this campaign.

During the reign of Sulaiman Kararani (A.D. 1563-72), the founder of a new Afghan royal line in Bengal, his famous general Kalapahar undertook a campaign against Koch Behar. The Muslim

scents rice paste coloured red, yellow and green, cotton seeds, mustard seeds, mustard oil (raughan-i-talkh), ghee (raughan-i-zard) and sindur (vermilion), and then the raft was pushed adrift." See *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, vol. II, p. 487.

33 G. C. Barua (ed.), *Ahom Buraniji*, pp. 68-73. According to an indigenous account, Turbak was commissioned by Gaureswar, believe to a Nawab of Gaur, to rescue his daughter Sushaddhi, popularly known as Gaurama Kunwari, noted for beauty, from her husband, Durlabh Narayan, the ruler of Kamata. Durlabh Narayan maltreated her alleging that she had illicit affair with the royal priest. Durlabh Narayan, unable to stand against Turbak, capitulated to the Dihingia Raja (A.D. 1497-1539) for help leaving behind his family. Gaurama fled to the rescue of Cachari king, who accepted her as his chief consort, but she was later captured by the Ahoms and presented to their king with her son Madan after the Cachari king was killed in the Ahom-Cachari war. Turbak invaded the Cachari kingdom for her and then proceeded to attack the Ahom kingdom where she was taken. There is doubt about the historicity of this account as no reference of it is made in the Muslims accounts. See U. L. Baruah, "Gaurama Kunwari and General Turbak," *JARS*, vol. 19 (1970), pp. 8-13. A similar account is also given in P. Gogoi, *The Tai and Tai Kingdom*, p. 302.


35 Kalapahar was one of the nobles of Babar, a Hindu convert, whose original name was Raju. It is said about Kalapahar that in Orissa (which he subjugated in A.D. 1586 and introduced Islam) wherever the sound of his drum reached, the hands, feet, ears and noses of the Hindu idols broke. The remains of these stone-idols
troops ascended the Brahmaputra as far as Tezpur, but could not make permanent possession of the country; retreated after razing many temples to the ground. According to a Buranji, he died in Koch Behar and was interned on the Gaurachol hill according to the Islamic rites. Shah Shuja while at Rajmahal is said to have made an endowment of paiks (foot-soldiers) and lands for the maintenance of worship at his tomb. Kalapahar is known in the history of Assam as Poa-Sultan, for his iconoclastic disposition. However, there are conflicting opinions about this campaign. According to Riyaz-us-Salatin, Sulaiman Kararani himself set out for the campaign and subjugated Koch Behar and its outlying areas, but hearing the news of the insurrections in Orissa he had to abandon Koch Behar and retreat. This was the last Muslim campaign in the pre-Mughal period.

1.3 Political Relation of Muslims with Kamarupa, Koch Behar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the Mughal Period

A profound change in the political scenario was witnessed in Bengal with the death of Sulaiman Karani. Daud Karani, unlike his father, failed to show allegiance to the Mughals. Mughal Emperor Akbar (A.D. 1556-1605) after setting his house in order and extending his sway over Gujarat and the whole of northern India up to the borders of Bihar turned his attention to Bengal. After a series of campaigns in July A.D. 1576, Daud was defeated in the battle of Akhmahal, captured and beheaded. The defeat of Daud, at last, laid the foundation of Mughal supremacy in Bengal. Moreover, it brought the Mughals in direct and close contact with the rulers of north-eastern India for the first time.

are seen at several places in Orissa. See Riyaz-us-Salatin, p. 18. For an account of the conversion of Kalapahar as recorded in a Buranji, see Appendix-C.

Ibid., p. 54; H. Blochmann (tr.), Akbarnamah, p. 53.


Riyaz-us-Salatin, pp. 18, 152.

S. N. Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 93-94.
1.3.1 Mughal Relations with Koch Behar and Koch Hajo, A.D. 1576-1612

The need of containing Bengal from the Afghans rebels, who had spread in and around Bengal, and defector imperial officials necessitated Akbar to look out for an ally to counter them. As Koch Behar stood adjacent to Bengal, its ruler Nar Narayan (A.D. 1540-81), who succeeded Bishva, appeared to be the natural choice. Likewise, the ruler of Koch Behar was also on the look for for a powerful ally to defense against the Ahoms, with whom he had strained relations. Thus, Nar Narayan found the Mughals as a strong ally against the Ahoms. Hence, the need of mutual help and support in order to serve their respective interests paved the way for a friendly alliance. The Koch king took the first step in establishing friendly ties with Akbar during his encounter with the Afghans, by denying them asylum. Two years after the Mughal conquest of Bengal (A.D. 1578) Nar Narayan sent an envoy, along with presents to the court of Akbar. With this act a peaceful and defensive alliance between Mughals and Koch Behar was laid for the first time on equal terms.

40 H. Blochmann (tr.), Akbarnama, p. 52. The English sojourner, Ralph Fitch visited Koch kingdom during the reign of Nar Narayan. He has left a short account of Koch kingdom:

"I went from Bengala into the country of Couch (Koch) or Quichen which lies 25 days journey northwards from Tada. The king is a Gentile (Hindu); his name is Suckel Counse (Sukla Koch or Sukladhvaj); his country is great and lieth not far from Cauchin China; for they say they have pepper from thence. The port is called Cacchegate (Chichakot). All the country is set with bamboos or canes made sharp at both ends and driven into the earth, and they can let in the water and driven into the earth, and they can let in the water and drown the ground above keen-deep, so that men nor horses can pass. They poison all the waters if any wars be. Here they have much silk and musk, and cloths made of cotton. The people have ears which is marvellous great, of a span long, which they draw out in length by devices while they be young. There they be all Gentiles, and they be young and they will kill nothing. They have hospitals from sheep, goats, dogs, cats, birds and for all living creatures. When they be old and lame they keep them until they die. If a man catch or buy any quick thing in other places and bring it thither, they will give him money for it, or other victuals, and keep it in their hospitals or let it go. They will give meat to the ants. Their small money is almond, which often times they use to eat." See E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, pp. 60-61.
But the friendly alliance was not destined to last long. The alliance took a gradual turn for the worse with the division of the Koch Behar into two parts. It was during the reign of Nar Narayan that the division took place. It is said that Nar Narayan married late. Before he got married he appointed Raghu Deb (or otherwise referred to as Pat Kunwar), his brother's son, as his successor. When he got married at the request of his eldest brother, Shukl Gosain, a son was born, named Lakshmi Narayan. The helpless Raghu Deb rebelled, and carved out a principality for himself.41

Nar Narayan, failing to achieve reconciliation with Raghu Deb, divided the kingdom, keeping the western portion of the Sankosh river for himself and his successors, which included Koch Behar and parts of Dinajpur, Jalpaiguriand and Rangpur, and conceding to Raghu Deb the tract east of the Sankosh river in A.D. 1581. Muslims chroniclers refer to the two kingdoms as Koch Behar (western kingdom)42 and Koch Hajo (eastern kingdom).43

The division of the Koch kingdom not only weakened its power and prestige but also gave way to mutual jealousies and incessant war between the two, which led to foreign intervention in the Koch politics. After the death of Nar Narayan, Raghu Deb proclaimed formal independence and allied with the Afghan chief of Bhati, Isa Khan. Lakshmi Narayan, who then succeeded Nar Narayan, too reacted by instigating Raghu Deb's son Parikshit to revolt. The attempt of Parikshit was crushed. Parikshit fled and took refuge in the court of Lakshmi Narayan.44

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42 Only outsiders use the name Koch Behar. The appellation used by its people is Nij Behar; the word nij, meaning “own or particular,” and was applied to distinguish the country from Koch Hajo. See W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. X, p. 332.
44 E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, pp. 63-64.
Raghu Deb, seeing the weak position of Lakshmi Narayan, embarked to conquer Koch Behar. The latter being helpless turned to the Mughals. This ushered in a gradual shift in Mughal policy towards Koch Behar. The weakness and growing dependence of Lakshmi Narayan on the Mughals brought a sudden change in the political outlook and status of the latter. Mughal policy towards Koch Behar took the form of subjugation and subordination. Lakshmi Narayan offered formal submission to the Mughal sovereign in A.D. 1596 by giving Raja Man Singh (A.D. 1594-1605), the viceroy of Bengal, his daughter in marriage.45

Meanwhile, Raghu Deb attacked Koch Behar and occupied parts of it. Considering the precarious situation Lakshmi Narayan sought the help of the Mughals. Man Singh’s troops arrived and defeated Raghu Deb. Isa Khan hastened to the rescue of his ally. In a naval encounter with the Mughals in September A.D. 1597 Isa Khan’s troops killed Durjan Singh, son of Raja Man Singh, along with numerous other troops.46

It was only in A.D. 1599 with the death of Isa Khan that Lakshmi Narayan heaved a sigh of relief. Till the death of Raghu Deb in A.D. 1603 there was peace between the two kingdoms. Hostilities again resumed with the accession of Parikshit on the throne of Koch Hajo, who like his father, unleashed aggressive policies toward Koch Behar. Lakshmi Narayan had to again turn to the Mughals. By the early part of the 17th century there was significant shift in the political relation between the Mughals and Koch Behar. The Mughal policy of subjugation and subordination towards Koch Behar was taken to the higher plane of armed imperialism, and was implemented with full success by Emperor Jahangir’s (A.D. 1605-27) energetic and ambitious viceroy of Bengal, Alauddin Islam Khan (A.D. 1608-13). In January A.D. 1609, Alauddin Islam Khan sent an emissary asking Lakshmi Narayan to accept Mughal vassalage. The

45 H. Blochmann (tr.), Akbarnamah, pp. 53.
helpless Lakshmi Narayan accepted to the demand thereby loosing the political independence.\textsuperscript{47}

In the meantime Mughal relations with Koch Hajo sunk low and became increasingly hostile. The growing power of Parikshit became one of the main factors for Alauddin Islam Khan to enforce armed imperialism towards Koch Hajo. Furthermore, the Mughals had been fancying the prosperous kingdom of Koch Hajo, with its rich natural resources, especially elephants and various aromatic plants, for long. In A.D. 1613, Alauddin Islam Khan got the opportunity when Raja Rughunath, a zamindar, complained against Parikshit for imprisoned his whole family. After verification, Islam Khan ordered Mukarram Khan to invade Koch Hajo at the head of 6,000 horse, 10,000 to 12,000 foot soldiers, and 500 ships. Shortly, the Muslim force reached the banks of the Brahmaputra river and bombarded for a month killing a large number of enemies. Parikshit sued for peace, but Islam Khan demanded the surrender of both the country and Parikshit in person. Hostilities continued. Unable to stand the Muslim attack, Parikshit fled. Muslim troops pursued him up to the Manas river. Unable to hold himself any longer, he surrendered, and was taken captive along with a large booty. Parikshit's brother Bali Narayan (or Baldeo) fled to the court of the Ahoms. Later, on the orders of the Emperor Jahangir, Parikshit had to present himself at the imperial court. Jahangir restored him his kingdom with the assurance to pay a sum of four lakh of rupees, but he died on his way back home due to an illness. Koch Hajo, which stretched from the Kari Bari hills on the south-west to the banks of the Barnadi on the east, lost its meteoric independence of about a quarter of a century and was merged to the Mughal Empire. Mukaram Khan was appointed the governor of Hajo. Several Muslim

\textsuperscript{47} S. N. Bhattacharya, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 115, 122, 126.
notables and soldiers were consigned land in the conquered country.\textsuperscript{48}

A temporary administrative arrangement was made. The whole kingdom was enlisted as Vilayat Koch Hajo and was divided into four sarkars – Sarkar Kamrup, Sarkar Dhekeri, Sarkar Dakhinkul, and Sarkar Bangalbhum.\textsuperscript{49} The main administrative concerns of the Mughals were the collection of revenue and repression of rebel Koches. The conquest of Koch Hajo was a significant event in the course of the Mughal north-east policy. It demonstrates how their policy of munificent intervention was tactically transformed into one of aggressive imperialism, resulting in the territorial expansion of Mughal Empire. Koch Hajo was the springboard of the Mughals by which their territorial expansion in the north-east could be achieved.

With the death of Alauddin Islam Khan in August A.D. 1613 Qasim Khan (A.D. 1613-17) took over as the viceroy of Bengal. He was cruel and tyrannical by disposition. He rejected the legitimate claim of Lakshmi Narayan, and summoned Lakshmi Narayan to Jahangirnagar and put him in confinement. A great deal of obscurity prevails over the life of Lakshmi Narayan. It appears that he was confined at Jahangirnagar and then sent to the imperial court. For about two and a half years he lived in exile. It was with the appointment of a new viceroy that he was reinstated to his throne.\textsuperscript{50} The attitude and cruel treatment of Qasim Khan towards Lakshmi Narayan further worsened the relation between Koch Behar and the Mughals. The vassalage status of the ruler of Koch Behar was pulled down to the level of an ordinary political reprobate and he was dispossessed of his personal liberty and kingdom.


\textsuperscript{49} For details, see \textit{Annals of Delhi Badshahate}, pp. 193-97.

\textsuperscript{50} S. N. Bhattacharya, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 131-32.
1.3.2 Mughal Relations with Assam, A.D. 1613-16

The Mughals, after the conquest of Koch Hajo, came in direct contact with the Ahoms, thereby opening a new and eventful phase in the Mughal policy towards north-east, which lasted for about three quarters of a century. Thus, the Ahom kingdom was the last to face the heat of the aggressive policy of the Mughals. The Mughals made a deliberate act of political aggression by claiming the territories up to Singri, and even as far as the mouth of the Bharali river, as part of the conquered territory and asserted their authority in spite of strong denial by the Ahom king.\(^51\)

Besides, the rich natural resources of the country incited the Mughals further. Assam was famous for its raw cotton, lac, mustard seeds, *muga*, silk cloth, gold, elephant tusks and slaves.\(^52\) The Mughals wanted to establish permanent trade links with the country by overcoming the aversion of the Assamese for trade with them.\(^53\) The Mughals carried out unauthorized and illegal trade in Assam for long much against the wishes of the Ahom king. Before the war of succession among the sons of Shah Jahan (A.D. 1628-58), once a

\(^{51}\) Jadunath Sarkar (tr.), *Fathiha-i-Ibriya*, p. 184. Talish describes the boundaries of Assam in the early part of 17th century thus: "...the length of Assam from west to east, from Gauhati to Sadiya, is about 200 kos; its breadth north to south, from the hills of the Miris, Mishmis, Daflas and Landahs (rather Ankas) to those of the Naga tribe is seen or eight days journey at a guess. Its southern mountains touch lengthwise the hilly region of Khasia, Kachhar and Gonasher (southern part of the Garo hills) and breadth wise the hills inhabited by the Naga tribe...The land on the north bank of the Brahmaputra is called Uttarkol and on the southern bank Dakhinkol. Uttarkol stretches from Gauhati to the home of the Miri and Mishmi tribes, and Dakhinkol from kingdom of Nak-kati Rani (rather Desh Rani) to the village of Sadiya." *Ibid.*

\(^{52}\) Talish observed that gold was washed from the sands of the river Brahmaputra. Ten to twelve thousand Assamese were engaged in it and they paid to the king one *tolah* of gold per head every year. But the gold was of a low quality and a *tolah* of it fetches only eight or nine rupees. He was also told that gold could be procured from the sand on the banks of the Brahmaputra, but only the Assamese knew how to gather it. Aloe wood, known in Bengal as *Agar* (*aquilaria agallocha*), used for making incense, was also grown in abundance in the hills of Namrup, Sadiya and Lakhugarh. It was known as sac tree in Assam, the bark strips were used for writing purpose. See Jadunath Sarkar (tr.), *Fathiha-i-Ibriya*, p. 187; E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, Appendix-D, p. 375.

year, a group of Assamese used to go for trade in the vicinity of Gauhati (meaning betel-nut market) on their frontier by order of their king; they procured salt, saltpetre, sulphur, and other products in exchange for gold, musk, aloe wood, pepper, spikenard, and silk-cloth. Mughals also possibly realized the importance of north-east for trade routes with China and Burma. The north-east with its narrow passes across the hills and rivers facilitated trade in the region.

During the viceroyalty of Qasim Khan, in A.D. 1615, a large force was dispatched to Hajo with orders to invade Assam. Though the political issue was main cause of attack, the relation was further worsened by boundary quarrels and trade disputes. The Mughal forces, while camping at Hajo and waiting for the rains to end, were crushed by the Assamese troops in a night attack. Sayyid Abu Bakr and many other generals were killed in the onslaught. As a result of this disastrous expedition, Qasim Khan was deposed from his office as viceroy of Bengal.

1.3.3 Mughal Relations with Koch Hajo, Koch Behar and Assam, A.D. 1617-58

The disastrous Assam campaign of Qasim Khan taught the Mughals a lesson or two. And it marks the beginning of a new chapter in the course of the Mughal’s north-east policy. The Mughals after shedding their aggressive attitude adopted a policy of peace and conciliation towards Koch Behar and a policy of defensive and consolidation in Koch Hajo.

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54 Jadunath Sarkar (tr.), *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, pp. 187-88. Many of the Mughal officials also indulged in trade. It is said that Shaista Khan on his visit to Jahangirnagar used to import by ship salt, betel nut and other articles, and sold them in Bengal on profitable terms. He also sold salt and betel nut to the merchants and traders in the city of Dacca. See *Annals of Delhi Badshahate*, pp. 167-68.

55 Mc Cosh, Topography of Assam, p. 111. There was an open road from upper Assam to China via Burma. A considerable trade in Chinese and Burmese manufactures was carried on through this route. For details, see *ibid*.

In April A.D. 1617 Qasim Khan was deposed from office, and Ibrahim Khan Fathjung (A.D. 1617-24), an honest, sincere, and energetic man was put in charge of Bengal. Subsequently, Lakshmi Narayan was reinstated on the throne, who remained loyal to the Mughals till his death in A.D. 1627. Since then, the Mughals allowed the kingdom to be ruled by the heir-apparent peacefully.57

Bali Narayan, who had taken refuge in the court of Assam with the fall of Koch Hajo in A.D. 1613-14, was till his death the most persistent enemy of Mughals in Koch Hajo. He, along with the army of Assamese and Koches, made frequent attempts to destabilize the Mughal authority from Koch Hajo. His attacks put the Mughals in utter confusion and in state of perpetual alarm and insecurity. Taking advantage of the situation arising from the removal of one viceroy and the arrival of another, Bali Narayan occupied Darrang (lies about 10 kos from Hajo), which was owned by several zamindars of that district. He was made the tributary ruler of Darrang.58

Bali Narayan by March A.D. 1636, after a series of raids, occupied some parganas of Koch Hajo. Abdus Salam, who was in charge of Koch Hajo, asked the Nawab of Dacca (Jahangirnagar) for reinforcements.59 The Assamese king, Pratap Singh, taking the opportunity attacked the Mughal out-posts along with the help of leading hill chieftains and occupied many forts. Islam Khan sent Abdus Salam’s brother, Shaikh Muhuiddin, Muhammad Calih Kambu, Sayyid Zainul Abidin and a host of other imperial mansabdars at the head of 1,000 horse, 100 matchlock men, warships, etc. After elaborate arrangement, a section of the Muslim forces led by Sayyid Zainul Abidin met the enemy at Pandu. After a

57 S. N. Bhattacharya, op. cit., pp. 131-32.
58 H. Blochmann (tr.), Pudishahnamah, pp. 55-56.
59 Ibid., p. 56
severe fight, the Assamese were dislodged Muslim troops destroyed their camps, and moved towards Srighat, where a fight ensued.\textsuperscript{60}

Further reinforcements were sent; but before the provisions reached Hajo Bali Narayan with his force stormed towards Hajo and besieged the region by cutting off all supplies. Abdus Salam, from want of provisions, delay of reinforcements, and the superior number of the enemies, was forced to accept an offer of peace, and went with his brother to the hostile camp. He was imprisoned and sent to Assam.\textsuperscript{61} The Mughal generals were later settled at Silpani and other places, and were given land and slaves, while the common soldiers were distributed as slaves among the \textit{baruas} (an officer of the rank having superintendence over a department), \textit{phukans} (head or superintendent of a \textit{khe\textl{}l}) and other Ahom nobles. Sayyid Zainul Abidin with the rest of the men tried bravely to face the enemies, but they failed. Hajo was thus lost to their enemies.\textsuperscript{62}

Another section of the Mughal troops attacked the principality of Chader Narayan, son of Parikshit – who established his hold at Hatsila in Karaibari – on the south bank of the Brahmaputra with the aid of a detachment of Ahom troops. Chander Narayan fled, but was killed later in an encounter.\textsuperscript{63}

The Mughal troops cleared Dakhinkol from the Assamese troops. Bali Narayan, who was then encamped in Budhnagar, was pursued by the Mughal troops. He made frequent night attacks on the Muslims. The Muslims took an offensive attack; Bali Narayan retreated to Darrang. Muslim troops then marched towards Pandu and Srighat and cleared the area. Many Assamese were killed. Numerous warships and guns fell into the hands of the Muslims. Shortly the whole of Koch Hajo was cleared of the Assamese, and was again annexed to the Mughal Empire by December A.D. 1637.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 57
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 57-58.
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 58; \textit{Riyas-us-Salatin}, pp. 210-11.
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 58-59.
Bali Narayan fled to Singri along with his two sons, who all died later due to a disease. Gauhati, which had formerly been an important town, became the head quarter of the Mughals. A treaty was signed in February A.D. 1639 between the Mughals and Ahom ruler, which for the first time formally fixed the boundary of the kingdoms of Mughal and Assam. The Barnadi river on the north bank of the Brahmaputra and Asurar Ali on the south were fixed as the boundary between the Mughals and Assam. Gauhati was passed to the Mughals and their headquarter at Hajo was transferred to Gauhati. Mir Nurullah was appointed thanedar of Koch Hajo, with a force of 3,000 troops and 2,500 horses.64

The second half of the 17th century witnessed new political developments. In A.D. 1657 Shah Jahan fell sick, and there began a scramble for succession among his four sons. Shah Shuja, the second son, who had been viceroy in Bengal for some years, set out with all the troops at his disposal to contest for the throne. Taking the opportunity, Pran Narayan, the king of Koch Behar, made raids in Ghoraghat, carrying off a great member of Muslim subjects, both men and women. He openly bade defiance to the Mughals, stopped payment of tribute and set himself up as an independent king. He then made an attempt to regain the long-lost political supremacy over Koch Hajo. The Ahom king, Jayadhvaj Singh (A.D. 1648-63), thinking that the circumstances were favorable and unwilling to allow the Koches to recover territories, which they formerly had held, marched with a large army into Kamrup. Mir Lutfullah, the faujdar, failing to defend withdrew to Dacca. The Koches, unable to oppose the Ahom king, retreated. The Ahom king reoccupied the whole province.65

64 Ibid., pp. 60-62; Riyas-us-Salatin, pp. 211-13; E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 118.
65 H. Blochmann (tr.), Fathiya-i-Ibriya, p. 63.
For nearly three years the Assamese rulers had undisturbed possession of the newly annexed territory. The war of succession was over with the triumph of Aurangzeb in June A.D. 1660. The accession of Aurangzeb saw significant changes in the course of the Mughal north-east policy. Mir Jumla — the greatest military general of the time — was appointed as the viceroy of Bengal with orders to punish the rebels of the north-east. Thus, a policy of aggressive imperialism was let loose by the Mughals under Mir Jumla. In fact, the last and the most daring attempt of the Mughal to conquer Assam was made under the greatest general of the time. It also saw the closing phases of the Mughal north-east policy, characterized by a long drawn period of incessant struggle between the Mughals and the Ahoms.

There are conflicting opinions about Mir Jumla’s proposed expedition to the north-east. Officially, Mir Jumla was commissioned to conquer the kingdoms of Assam and Arakan and to capture the fugitive prince Shah Shuja who had then fled and taken refuge in the court of the Arakan king. According to some of the

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66 Mir Jumla or Mir Muhammad Said Ardistani, better known as Muzzam Khan, was born in Ardastan. He left his hometown in search of fortune and made an immense fortune in the business of diamonds and precious stones in India. He later served under Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah, the ruler of Golconda. He attained great eminence there and soon rose to the position of Prime Minister. Due to some differences with Qutb Shah he joined Aurangzeb when the latter was in south India. He served as a military general under Aurangzeb, appointed viceroy of Bengal in A.D. 1660, and was given the title of Yar-i-Wafadar “or Faithful friend of Aurangzeb.” He is referred to by various names in the Buranjis — Mit Janathula, Mayium Khan, etc. He was a statesman of great sagacity and foresight, and as a general, he was matchless during those days. For details, see Jadunath Sarkar, The Life of Mir Jumla.

67 Shah Shuja along with his wife, Piare Banu, two sons, three daughters and dependents took the road to Assam, and from there proceeded to Arakan. First he set out from Tandah on boats and reached Dacca, where his eldest son Zainuddin had been requesting king of Arakan, Sanda Thudhamma, for asylum and a safe passage to Mecca from there. They started on 6th May A.D. 1660 from Dacca on boats, guarded by the Arakanese, and reached Arakan by the end of A.D. 1660.

Initially, Shah Shuja was well received and treated with honour by the king of Arakan, but became indifferent afterwards. The king of Arakan asked for one of the daughter in marriage, which Shuja rejected. The king showed
contemporary European accounts, the expedition of Mir Jumla was an attempt on the part of Aurangzeb to get rid of the former. Manucci writes:

> It was the common belief that Aurangzeb ordered him into Assam that he might be got rid of, dreading that, as he had thrown the kingdom of Golkonda into confusion, and had known how to arrange for the conquest of Dara and the destruction of Shivaji, he might likewise attempt to his devices to place someone else on the Mughal throne.\(^{68}\)

On 1\(^{st}\) November A.D. 1661, Mir Jumla started from Jahangirnagar, with an army consisting of nearly 300,000 cavalry and 500,000 foot soldiers; a large number of the officers was Portuguese and Englishmen.\(^{69}\) The news reached Pran Narayan who out of helplessness sent an envoy to Mir Jumla with an excuse for his offenses, but Mir Jumla did not pay heed to the plea offered and imprisoned the envoy, and ordered troops to occupy Koch Behar.\(^{70}\) The vassal state of Koch Behar was reoccupied and annexed to the Mughal Empire by December A.D. 1661. The city was renamed as Alamgirnagar and Isfandiar Beg was appointed as the *faujdar* of Koch Behar.\(^{71}\) Silver coins were struck in the name of Emperor

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\(^{69}\) Glianius, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 15.

\(^{70}\) H. Blochmann (tr.), *Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, pp. 63-64.

\(^{71}\) *Ibid.*, p. 68.
Aurangzeb. Mir Jumla after staying for 16 days proceeded towards Assam, leaving behind Isfandiar with a contingent of troops.

But the aggressive policy of the Mughals failed at the sweeping speed at which it was implemented. The newly occupied state of Koch Behar slipped out of the grip of the Mughals within a few months. After Mir Jumla had left for Assam, the Mughal officers sat down to introduce amendments in the land revenue system, which was opposed by the people leading to a revolt. Taking advantage of the situation, the deposed king came out of hiding and took over the people. In the revolt, many of the Mughals were killed. Unable to face the situation the remaining troops fled. Koch Behar was once again independent by May A.D. 1661. From the death of Pran Narayan till the end of the 17th century, Koch Behar had a chequered history, marred by struggles for succession, rebellions, and foreign invasions.

Hearing the approach of Mir Jumla, Jaidhvaj Singh, the Ahom king, too sent an envoy, pleading that he had taken possession of the imperial lands just to keep out the Koches and was prepared to hand it over. The Ahoms withdrew from Karibari and returned beyond the Manas river. But the Mughal troops, suspecting the Ahoms, reported to Mir Jumla that the Assamese were making extensive preparations to recover the lost territory. Mir Jumla then decided to invade Assam. Mir Jumla’s troops left Koch Behar on 4th January A.D. 1662, and marched over Khonthaghat, into Assam. After crossing dense jungles, they reached Rangamati, and soon took possession of all the forts that came their way. On the way Makardhaj, the ruler of the small principality of Darrang, who was a

72 R. D. Choudhury, A Source Book of the Numismatic Studies in North-East India, vol. II, pp. 70, 76. These coins bear an inscription in the Bengali script but in the Urdu language A specimen bears:

1/2 Rupee, no date visible, obverse: “Aorangajeva vadas aha Alamgira” Reverse: “Jarava Alamgirmagara Sam (vat).” Ibid., p. 76.

73 H. Blochmann (tr.), Fathiya-i-Ibriya, pp. 64-68.

74 S. N. Battacharyya, op. cit., pp. 308-09.

75 H. Blochmann (tr.), Fathiya-i-Ibriya, pp. 63-64.
subject to the king of Assam, paid his respects to Mir Jumla. He provided him with troops.\textsuperscript{76}

The Mughal troops entered Assam proper, marched towards the capital, Gharigaon. The strategic and strong fort at Simlaghar was attacked and invested. A large number of Muslim men and women captured by the Ahoms were rescued. The Mughal troops proceeded further along the banks of Brahmaputra. Ships of the Ahoms attacked them and an engagement took place between them. Mughal troops seized around 300 to 400 ships of the Ahoms. The helpless Ahoms withdrew to the hills, and carried out frequent night attacks. By the time the Mughal troops reached Solahgar, the Ahom king sought for peace. Mir Jumla declined the proposal and proceeded further.\textsuperscript{77}

On 17\textsuperscript{th} March, Mir Jumla entered Gharigaon. There he recovered enormous spoils.\textsuperscript{78} The Ahom king fled with his officials to Namrup, the eastern most part of Assam. Then rain set in. The Mughal troops were stranded in Gharigaon, as the immense booty could not be moved out. Moreover, the booty included elephants, which needed time to train.\textsuperscript{79} Mir Jumla resolved to move to Mathurapur, which lays 3.5 \textit{kos} beyond Gharigaon. Many garrisons

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 68-70.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 72-73.

\textsuperscript{78} Large quantities of gold and silver were also recovered from the places of sepulchre for “when the Raja of that country or a great \textit{zamindar} dies, they dig a large tomb or apartment in the earth, and in it they place his wives and concubines, as also his horses and equipage, carpets, vessels of gold and silver, grain, etc, all such things as are used in that country, the jewels worn by wives and nobles, perfumes and fruit, sufficient to last for several days. These they call the provisions for his journey to the next world, and when they are collected the door is closed upon them.” \textit{Muntakhab-ul Lubab} in \textit{History of India as Told by its Own Historians}, vol. VII, pp. 267-69. See also Glanius, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{79} According to Talish, the Ahom king employed some elephant keepers, who knew a particular technique to capture wild elephants. They rub a particular grass on the body of a female elephant and took her to the pasture of the wild elephants. As soon as they smell the scent of the grass they helplessly followed the female. Then the drivers led the female elephant to an enclosure, and the wild elephants, too, entered after her and were thus captured. Mir Jumla tried hard to secure one of these drivers, but failed. Jadunath Sarkar (tr.), \textit{Fathiya-i-Ibriya}, p. 186.
and outposts were pegged up to station the troops that stretched from Lathau westwards along the Brahmaputra river to Gauhati. The Ahoms who had then occupied the mountains south of Gharigaon resumed the offensive. They carried out frequent night attacks on the out-posts.\textsuperscript{80}

By May, the rain set in heavily, the rivers rose in flood, making it impossible for the troops to move and the imperial out-posts were isolated.\textsuperscript{81} The Mughal troops remained in a state of seize throughout the rainy season (May to October). Talish gives a graphic account of the miserable state of affairs:

The whole country is now re-occupied by the Assamese, only Mathurapur and Ghargaon being in the hands of the imperialists. If a man dared to leave the camp, he was certain to be shot by the Assamese. A similar case never happened before in the history of Dihli. Here were 12,000 horse and numerous infantry locked in for 6 months, prevented by rains from continuing operations and yet scarcely attacked by the enemies that surrounded them. Nor did during this time provisions arrive. The amirs turned their eyes longing for Dihli, and the soldiers yearned for their wives and children.\textsuperscript{82}

Many of their cavalry horses and draught cattle perished. The troops could not establish any communication with the outside world. Taking the opportunity, the Ahom king, who had came out of his hiding, recovered all his realm east of Lakhu while the Mughal troops were left with Gharigaon and Mathurapur. The Ahom king reorganized his troops for launching an offensive. Minor encounters occurred almost everyday. In the midst the Ahom king also made efforts to sue for peace by sending envoys. Mir Jumla at last agreed

\textsuperscript{80} H. Blochmann (tr.), \textit{Fathiya-i-Ibriya}, pp. 75, 84-86.
\textsuperscript{81} Assam is known for its copious rain and inordinate length of rainy season. According to Ghulam Hussain, rainy season prevails in this region for eight months and even the four months of winter was not free from rain. See \textit{Riyaz-us-Salatin}, p. 13.

Overall, outsiders knew Assam as a dreadful country for its magic and charms, flood, pestilence and deadly climate. In fact, almost all the Persian sources are replete with such descriptions. One famous poet, Mulla Darvish of Herat, who happened to accompany Mir Jumla's Assam campaign, composed an ode \textit{(qasida)} describing the land and people, which is reproduced in the Appendix-D.

\textsuperscript{82} H. Blochmann (tr.), \textit{Fathiya-i-Ibriya}, p. 88.
to stop hostilities on receiving five hundred elephants, 30 lakh *tolahs* of gold and silver, a daughter of the king for the Emperor, a yearly tribute of 50 elephants and a promise to cede that portion of Assam over which the Muslims had traversed. But, nothing worked out. In the meantime, epidemic broke out in the form of fever and flu, which took the life of hundreds on a daily basis in the Mughal camp at Mathurapur. The troops were left with no provisions, had to depend on coarse rice, and finally even had to depend on the meat of the draught oxen. Many of the diseased Mughal troops of Mathurapur were left to their own fate and moved to Gharigaon. Shortly, in Gharigaon an epidemic spread in the form of fever and dysentery.83

By September the rains ceased, floods receded and things were back to normal. Provisions arrived at Gharigaon. Mir Jumla made some futile attempts to resume the offensive against the Ahoms, but met with little success. He was by then attacked by fever and severe pain in the chest and developed fainting fit. Moreover, many of his officers and soldiers showed little interest to carry on the offensive further. Both sides then sought for peace and finally the following conditions were agreed upon in the treaty of Ghilajorighat signed in February A.D. 1663:

a) the kings of Assam and Tipam (Patam) should send one of their daughters 84 to the Mughal court.

b) both the kings should pay 20,000 *tolahs* of gold, and 1,20,000 *tolahs* of silver.

c) fifteen elephants were to be sent to the Emperor and fifteen to Mir Jumla.

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84 Rahmat Banu, known in Assam as Ramani Gabharu or Nangchan Gabharu, was the daughter of the Ahom king, Jayadhvaj Singh, who was sent over to the Mughals. She was married to Azamtara in May A.D. 1668. See *Annals of Delhi Badshahate*, op. cit., p. 25.
three lakh tolahs of silver and 90 elephants were to be sent as tribute to Bengal with in 12 months in three monthly installments.

e) 20 elephants were to be sent annually to the imperial court.

d) till the fulfillment of the indemnity, the sons of bar gohain (one of the three cabinet ministers in the Ahom administration), bura gohain (the chief of the three cabinet ministers), barpatra gohain (one of the three cabinet ministers), and Rajmantri (Prime Minister), the four chief phukans of the Ahom king were to be kept as hostage with Mir Jumla.

f) the four Parganas – Darrang Pargana extending up to the Bharari river in the north bank; and on the south bank, Dhumaria Pargana as far as the Kalang river; and the Parganas of Kajali and Belta! – were to be given as dowry to the princess as dowry.85

Mir Jumla began his return march, but he died on his way to Dacca on 30th March A.D. 1663.86 With the death of Mir Jumla the most ambitious and grandest attempt of the Mughals for territorial expansion in the history of medieval India ended in complete disaster. But judged as a military exploit, the campaign would remain as the most daring and fascinating expeditions in the history of medieval India.

1.3.5 Mughal Relations with Assam, A.D. 1663-82

The history of the Mughal's north-east policy after the campaign of Mir Jumla was a defensive postures. For the next two decades the Mughals made the most persistent attempt to retain


their hold on Koch Hajo. The Ahoms too determinedly made efforts to oust the Mughals from the region. Gauhati became the battleground where the two contending powers flexed their muscles for supremacy.

After the death of Mir Jumla, Kajali on the south bank and Bansbari on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river remained their easternmost outposts till A.D. 1667. The war-indemnity continued to be paid in installments as late as May A.D. 1667. The harsh and covetous ways of the Mughals regarding financial matters and their encroachment on Assamese territories violating the terms of treaty became a matter of concern for the Ahom king Chakradshevaj Singh (A.D. 1663-69). He had been brooding over the injustice and insolence of the Mughals ever since his accession in A.D. 1663. At last his endurance reached its limit when Sayyid Firuz Khan, the new faujdar of Gauhati, demanded the balance of the indemnity in provoking terms. Against the advice of his nobles, Chakradshevaj resolved to go to war, and began preparations for it. 87

He befriended the king of Koch Behar, and series of forts were erected on strategic points along the Brahmaputra. Then, in A.D. 1667 he sent two batches of troops under his phukans down the Brahmaputra, which succeeded in occupying Gauhati along with many forts. Its fugitive Mughal faujdar was defeated and taken captive; immense spoils fell to their hands. Many Mughals, including several officers, were taken prisoners and later massacred. Thus, the Mughal frontier was pushed back to the Manas river. Gauhati became the seat of an Ahom viceroy and was strongly fortified by erecting new forts. 88

Within a short time, the Mughals resumed the war, and some fighting took place around Rangamati. By A.D. 1667, Emperor Aurangzeb, on learning the loss of Gauhati, appointed Raja Ram Singh, son of Raja Jai Singh, to recover the lost territories. Raja Ram

88 Ibid., p. 153.
Singh headed with 4,000 troops consisting of 21 Rajput chiefs, besides 1,500 gentlemen troopers and 500 artillerymen of the imperial service. Raja Ram Singh was further reinforced by auxiliary troops from Koch Behar, numbering around 15,000. 89 On the way through Patna, Raja Ram Singh took with him the ninth Sikh guru, Teg Bahadur, 90 possibly with the belief that the guru's presence would have a sobering influence upon the soldiers, and contain any tendency towards indiscipline and excesses.

Raja Ram Singh reached Rangamati in February A.D. 1669, and then advanced along the north Brahmaputra valley. The Ahoms led by an Assamese Muslim, Bagh Hazarika; suffered setback to the Mughals and Raja Ram Singh reached the Barnadi. The Mughals gained a few victories, but with no decisive success, and soon the tide of war began to turn against them and they had to fall back westwards to Hajo. Then, Raja Ram Singh laid seizes to Gauhati, but all his attempts failed. After wasting four months he had to retire with heavy losses. The Ahoms sought the aid of the nagas, who

89 Maasir-i-Alamgiri, p. 43; Annals of Delhi Badshahate, pp. 163-66.
90 The event that led the guru to accompany Raja Ram Singh in his Assam campaign is given thus:

"(Aurangzeb) accordingly sent for me (Raja Ram), and ordered me to go and subdue Kamrup. On hearing this I went home, and told my mother and queens of the order I had received. They became alarmed and asked me if I desired to untimely death. They represented that there was none so brave as Mir Jumla and if he perished what hope was there for me? Of all the generals who had been sent on that errand none except Raja Man Singh had even returned..." "My principal queen then came to my assistance with her advice. She said, "My father's family were Sikhs of Guru Nanak. On Guru Nanak's throne is now seated Guru Teg Bahadur. Go and ask for his protection and support, and thy prayer shall not be in vain..." "O guru, on receiving this cheering from my queen, I was consoled and regained my peace of mind. Hence I have come from distant Rajputana to seek the protection of thy holy feet." The guru smiled and directed the Raja to continually meditate on God's name, and Guru Arjun hath said, "is medicine for all diseases. Guru Nanak will assist thee, and thou shall conquer Kamrup."

Raja Ram, following the advice of the guru, is said to have converted, taking initiation by the ceremony of charanpahul. He requested the guru to accompany him in his expedition. The guru with the belief that he would be able to get opportunity to spread Sikhism on the way accepted the request. While in Assam Guru Teg Bahadur established the Sikh Tola on the banks of the Brahmaputra at Dhubri, which is still in existence and visited by many Sikhs as a place of their pilgrimage. See M. A. Macauliffe, The Sikh Religion, vol. III, pp. 350-52, and S.K. Bhuyan, Lachit Barphukan and His Times, p. 115.
proved a new danger to the Mughals. Ram Singh sought for peace, but the sudden demise of Chakradhvaj hampered the process. Fighting continued; ultimately in the fierce battle fought at Saraighat the Ahom led by the outstanding general, Lachit Barphukan, defeated the Mughals. By A.D. 1671 Ram Singh retreated to Rangamati. In A.D. 1676 he received permission to leave Bengal and reached the imperial court by June. The Mughals annexed Darrang and Beltola, but Gauhati and Kamrup were lost to the Ahoms.

After the death of Chakradhvaj in A.D. 1670, the Ahom monarchy was greatly weakened due to political squabbles and petty factionalism. By February A.D. 1679 bar phukan (the Ahom viceroy posted at Gauhati), due to fear of his rival burha gohain, betrayed Gauhati into the hands of the Mughals through Azamtara, son of Aurangzeb. The conspiracy came to the notice of the then Ahom ruler Sudaipha (A.D. 1677-79). He made an abortive attempt to counter the Muslims, but it was too late as the bar phukan had already given up Gauhati in early March A.D. 1679.

In A.D. 1681 Gadadhar Singh (A.D. 1681-96) ascended the Ahom throne and soon retrieved the glory of the house. He set out for Gauhati with a large force in A.D. 1682. The forts of Bansbari and Kajali were seized. He also won a naval engagement at the mouth of Barnadi. The victories frightened Mansur Khan, the faujdar of Gauhati, and he had to vacate the place. Ahoms occupied Gauhati. A vast amount of booties which included gold and silver, elephants, horses, cannons and guns fell into the hands of the Ahoms. This

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91 For the history of Lachit Barphukan, see S. K. Bhuyan, Lachit Barphukan and His Times.
93 Tungkhungia Buranj, pp. 8-13; E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, pp. 163-64.
94 The Ahom ruler recovered many guns and cannons which are still preserved; three at Dikom, one in the Indian Museum, and one at Lakhimpur, which bear the following inscription-Sri-Sri-Surgga-Narayana-deva Saumaresvara Gadadhara Simhena Ja-Vanam jīt va Guva hatyam=idam astram praptam sake 1604.
was the last Ahom-Mughal conflict. Henceforth, both sides accepted Manas as the boundary. Gauhati and Kamrup extending up to the Manas river were incorporated to the Ahom kingdom. Rangamati, which lies on the banks of Brahmaputra, north of Dhubri, became from now on the imperial frontier in the north-east. The long drawn conflict between the Mughals and the Ahoms finally concluded with the defeat of the former. Apart from the territorial gains of the Ahoms, the defeat is significant in the history of medieval India because it saw the defeat of the mighty Mughals at the hands of an insignificant kingdom. Mughals since then could not look back towards Assam as the government of Aurangzeb was more engaged in north-west where he had to deal with the upsurge of the Marathas, Jats, Rajputs, Sikhs, etc.

The Mughals made their last-ditch attempt to compensate the lost of Koch Hajo by embarking on aggressive expeditions against Koch Behar, which was then under weak rulers and in political mayhem. After a series of expeditions, the Mughals during the reign of Mahendra Narayan (A.D. 1681-93), in A.D. 1693 succeeded in subjugating parts of the country as far as Boda, Patgram, and Purba Bhag (in and around the Tistah river). The regions were reoccupied by Rup Narayan (A.D. 1693-1714), who succeeded Mahendra Narayan, by a treaty signed in A.D. 1711 according to which he had to pay tributes in return to the Mughals. Ultimately, Koch Behar was

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96 The Manas river divided the Koch Hajo into two equal parts, the tract lying to the east of the river enclosed by the Barnadi river was regarded as Kamrup proper.
made a vassal state and the history of Koch-Mughal relations virtually draws to a close.97

The independence that the Ahoms had preserved for so long since the inception of their kingdom was ultimately lost to the British due to internal political dissensions. Shortly after the accession of Chandra Kanta Singh (1810-18) in 1810, he fell out with bar phukan of Gauhati. The bar phukan took the help of the Burmese king, Bodawpaya. The latter sent up his troops. The Ahom king was left with no alternative, but to make peace with the enemies. After the retreat of the Burmese fresh dissensions took place, the bar phukan was assassinated and Chandra Kanta was deposed from the throne. Purandar Singh, a direct descendant of king Rajeshwar Singh was installed on the throne. Chandra Kanta then appealed to the Burmese, who, in 1818, returned with a large troop, and reinstated him on the throne and occupied the valley. The Burmese meted out gross atrocities to the people during their occupation. The king, suspicious of the Burmese intension, fled to Goalpara in 1820. He, with the help of the British, made abortive attempts to recover the lost kingdom. In 1824, the British Government declared war, and by 1825 the Burmese were driven away from the Brahmaputra valley. The following year, by the treaty of Yandaboo, Assam was ceded to the British Government.98

1.4 Political Relation of Muslims with Sylhet

Sylhet or Srihatta had at times formed part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa, but is barely mentioned in the old legends, which makes its early history obscure. It is generally believed that the region was inhabited by the bodos and ruled by a line of Hinduised Bodo kings.99 The region was at one time divided into

98 For details, see Tungkhungia Buranji, pp. 201-16; G. C. Barua (ed.), Ahom Buranji, pp. 376-88.
99 The two copper plates recovered in the foundations of a ruined building on a hillock near Bhatarabazar, which record land-grants made by Gobind alias
three small principalities, namely Jaintia, Lour, and Gor or Sylhet proper.

The Muslim conquest of Sylhet is ascribed jointly to the Sikandar Khan, the military commander sent by the sultan of Bengal, Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (A.D. 1301-22), and warrior-saint Shah Jalal in the early 14th century. The circumstances that led to the conquest are described in the *Suhail-i-Yaman*. A Muslim by the name of Sheikh Burhanuddin, who resided in a hamlet, Tol-takar in Sylhet took a vow to God that if he was blessed with a son, he would sacrifice a cow. A son was born and as promised he sacrificed a cow. Accidentally, a kite carried a piece of flesh of the sacrificed cow and happened to drop it in a *brahman*’s hutment. The angry *brahman* complained about it to the king of Sylhet, Gaur Gobind. The king summoned Burhanuddin and his newborn son, put the child to death, and mutilated Burhanuddin’s right hand. Burhanuddin left for Gaur and complained the matter to the then ruler of Bengal, Shamsuddin Firuz Shah. The king ordered his nephew, Sikandar Khan, to attack Sylhet. Gaur Gobind, who possessed magical power, on receiving the news, assembled a score of devils and sent them against the invader. An encounter took place thereafter, in which the Muslim troops were routed. Sikandar Khan intimated the matter to the sultan of Bengal, who after receiving positive response from the astrologers sent reinforcements. In the meantime they consulted Shah Jalal, who with 360 *darvesh* (disciples) was then waging war with the infidels in Sylhet. After the meeting, he agreed to join the Muslim forces in annihilating Gaur Gobind.

Subsequently, the army of Shah Jalal encountered and prevailed against the devils of Gaur Gobind. Gaur Gobind fled and sought refuge in a seven-storied temple in Sylhet, built by magic. Shah Jalal after praying made each of the seven stories fall each day.

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Keshab Deb and his son Ishan Deb, give the genealogy as follow—nabagirvan also called Kharavan, Gokul, Narayan Gobind also called Keshab Deb, Ishand Deb. See E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 275
and on the fourth day Gaur Gobind surrendered and was made to retire to the mountains of Kohistan.\(^{100}\)

An inscription originally attached to a building from Sylhet now preserved in the Dacca University further confirms the event of the conquest of Sylhet. Its translation runs as thus:

In honour of the greatness of the respected Shaikhu-I-Musaiikh (?) Shaikh Jalal, the hermit, son of Muhammad.

The first conquest by Islam of the town 'Arsah Srihat was by the hand of Sikandar Khan Ghazi in the time of Sultan Firuz Shah De (h) lavi (or Shamsuddin Firuz Shah) in the year 703 (A.D. 1303)

This building has been erected by Rukn Khan, the conqueror of Hasht Gamhariyan, who being Wazir and General for many months at the time of the conquest of Kamru, Kamata, Jaznagar and Urisa, served in the army in several places in the train of the king (written) in the year 918.\(^{101}\)

Sylhet thus came under the Muslim rule leaving Laur and Jaintia. The ruler of Laur made his submission only during Akbar's reign. During Aurangzeb's reign, the ruler of Laur, Gobind, was summoned to Delhi and converted to Islam.\(^{102}\)

For the next several centuries little is known of Muslim rule in Sylhet. In the 16\(^{th}\) and early part of the 17\(^{th}\) century Sylhet became the stronghold of the Afghans, who were established in the region between A.D. 1538 and 1576, when a line of Afghans kings ruled Bengal. The most prominent Afghan chieftain was Bayizid Karani, who held sway over the north and central parts of Sylhet. Bayizid's strength lay in the large number of smaller Afghan chieftains who all showed allegiance to him. The Mughal Emperors realized that the occupation of Sylhet by large number of Afghan chieftains posed a threat to the frontier territories under their control, especially

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100 J. Wise, "Note on Shah Jalal, the Patron Saint of Silhat," in H. Blochmann, Contributing to the Geography and History of Bengal (Muhammadan Period), pp. 73-75. J. Wise's paper is a partial translation of Nasiruddin Haider's Suhail-i-Yaman, a Persian text, compiled in 1859. There are also Hindu legends regarding the defeat of Gaur Gobind of Sylhet by an army led by pirs and ghazis, who were reinforced by the troops of the Sultan Shamsuddin in A.D. 1384, during the reign of Sikandar Shah. Ibid., p. 76. For a similar account of the Muslim conquest of Sylhet, see District Census Report, Sylhet, Population Census of Pakistan, 1961, pp. 1-6.


Bengal. It was only during the reign of Emperor Jahangir, under the ambitious and able viceroy, Alauddin Islam Khan, that Sylhet was cleared of the Afghan chieftains. The region was then formally incorporated to the Bengal subah in A.D. 1612\(^{103}\) and placed under the administration of an amil (revenue collectors), who was subordinate to the Nawab of Dacca. Earlier, the region was famous for its supply of eunuchs, but Jahangir banned castration of boys by issuing an edict to that effect.\(^{104}\) From the second half of the 17\(^{th}\) century in order to bring agrarian growth through wet-rice cultivation large tracts of jungles were farmed out to Muslim and Hindu religious institutions.\(^{105}\)

Islam Khan, gratified by his success in Sylhet, next took out a campaign in the early months of A.D. 1612 towards Cachar, bordering Sylhet, which was then ruled by Sutradaman (A.D. 1605-28), an ambitious and powerful king, who had defeated the ruler of Jaintia and Assam. The Mughal forces led by Mubriz Khan attacked Cachar and reached up to the capital. Sutradaman offered his submission, but made peace with the payment of a suitable tribute.\(^{106}\) Another campaign was directed towards Cachar during the viceroyship of Qasim Khan. This time too Sutradaman, unable to face the Mughal attack, sued for peace, offering 40 elephants and a tribute of one lakh rupees in cash.\(^{107}\)

It is noteworthy that in A.D. 1740, Alivardi Khan, the ruler of Murshidabad, who had an administrative charge of Sylhet, planned a stratagem for claiming the throne of Jaintia by entering matrimonial alliance with the ruler of Jaintia. He married Bhairavi Kuanri, the sister of Jaintia ruler, Bar-Gosain II. His intention was


\(^{106}\) For details, see Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal-Muslim Period 1200-1757*, pp. 281-82.

that the son born out of the marriage could lay claim over the throne of Jaintia. As luck would have it, their son, named Fateh Khan, was born a little too late and when he went to Jaintia to claim his maternal uncle’s throne, he found that his uncle had a sister younger than his mother, and her son had the legal claim. Fateh Khan remained at Jaintia to serve his uncle as a faithful general. He trained the Jaintia forces in improved methods of warfare and the use of artilleries. Fateh Khan constructed a mosque in the capital town and this gave an impetus to the infiltration of Muslim immigrants from the neighboring areas of Sylhet. Though the king did not raise any objections, his ministers seeing the danger killed Fateh Khan and demolished the mosque. There was factionalism for some time over this tragedy, however it soon got settled.\footnote{Rajmohan Nath, \textit{The Background of Assamese Culture}, p. 104.} The event is not chronicled in any of the contemporary or near contemporary sources.

Mughal rule in Sylhet came to an end when the region passed into the hands of the British in A.D. 1765, together with the rest of Bengal.

1.5 Political Relation of Muslims with Tripura

The history of Muslim contact with the rulers of Tripura dates back to the early days of the Sultanate period. Almost all the campaigns directed against Tripura in the pre-Mughal period, except that of Husain Shah, were mere marauding raids and failed to achieve any permanent conquest. In fact, no systematic policy of territorial expansion was sought to be implemented. It was only with the advent of the Mughals, particularly during the reign of Jahangir, that serious attempts were made to subjugate the kingdom and reduced it to a tributary state. And the Mughals achieved their objective when in the early part of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century they went on to subjugate and hold Tripura as a rent giving state. Curiously, among the causes of all the Muslim attacks, both in the pre-Mughal and
Mughal period, elephants seem to have been the coveted object, and it was this beast of burden that the tributes imposed upon the kings of Tripura were always paid. The rent of Sonagram village in Dacca district held by the Tripura king was paid in elephants.\textsuperscript{109} Thus, the chief object that attracted the Muslims to Tripura appears to have been the abundance of elephants and, of course, the exceedingly fertile lowlands. Mughal policy towards Tripura was more or less an attempt to get free access to the rich resources and to subjugate the kingdom thereby compelling the rulers to pay revenues.

\textbf{1.5.1 Pre-Mughal Period}

The earliest reference to Muslim campaign against Tripura is that of Mughisuddin Tughril Khan (A.D. 1268-81), the sultan of Bengal, in A.D. 1279. The circumstance, which led to the expedition, is that around A.D. 1270 a Hindu while passing through the territory of Tripura, on his way to the court of Tughril Khan at Gaur, was robbed. He complained about the matter to the king of Tripura, but he was denied justice. The matter reached Tughril Khan who promptly made it an excuse, and invaded Tripura with a large army. In the engagement that ensued the Muslim armies were defeated and were forced to withdraw.\textsuperscript{110}

Tughril Khan set out on another campaign during the reign of Hari Rai. The incident that led to the campaign relates to one of his youngest and the most intelligent son, Ratna Pha, who was sent to Bengal to gain experience. While Ratna Pha was having his sojourn at the court of Tughril Khan he heard the news of the death of his father and the accession of one of his elder brothers. Ratna Pha

\textsuperscript{109} W. W. Hunter, \textit{A Statistical Account of Bengal}, vol. VI, p. 359.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Ibid.} See also N. Roychoudhury, \textit{Tripura Through the Ages}, p. 41. A small fort was discovered on the way from Comilla to Kali Bazaar, sunk in the soil, which is believed to be constructed by Muslims. There are traditions of a great battle that took place in this vicinity between the invading Muslim forces and Tripuris. It was most likely that the battle was fought during the first Muslim invasion in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. See W. W. Hunter, \textit{A Statistical Account of Bengal}, vol. VI, p. 361.
requested Tughril Khan to help him in taking over the throne. Tughril Khan taking an opportunity to take revenge and regain the lost fame readily accepted the request and headed for Tripura with his troops. The king of Tripura was defeated in an engagement and beheaded. Ratna Pha was installed on the throne. He presented Tughril Khan elephants and treasures along with a ruby. According to a popular legend, the ruby was procured from a frog and was ordained by Siva to be presented to the sultan of Bengal. Tughril Khan conferred the title of Manikya to the Ratna Pha. Ever since the title was used by all the kings of Tripura.

According to the Rajmala, during Chungthumpha’s reign, a rich Muslim, Hirabant Khan, a resident of Tripura, took lease of Maherkul from the ruler of Bengal and administered the cultivators with much oppression. The king of Tripura came to know of it and attacked Maherkhul. Hirabant Khan complained about the matter to the ruler of Bengal, and the latter undertook a campaign against Tripura. The king, who was feeble-hearted, dared not fight and tried to settle with a treaty, but the courageous queen, Mahadevi, encouraged the troops and took to the battleground. The Muslim troops were ultimately defeated. Hirabant’s territory was occupied.

Shamsuddin Iliyas Shah (A.D. 1342-57), sultan of Bengal, took out another campaign, probably in A.D. 1345, during the reign of Pratap Manikya. There is very little information regarding the details of this campaign. In all probability it was a plundering raid of short duration.

Husain Shah (A.D. 1493-1519), sultan of Bengal, is believed to have carried out at least four campaigns against Tripura. A great deal of obscurity and confusion remains around these campaigns. He dispatched a troop gathered from the twelve provinces of Bengal

111 For details, see Tripura Buranji, pp. 34-35.
under the leadership of Gaur Malik. They managed to take over the fort of Maherkul, but could not get in further. At the advice of an eunuch soldier the Tripuri king, Dhayan Manikya, constructed a dike of red earth across the Gumti river and blocked the water for three days and then released it suddenly. The strong currents caused the Muslim troops to retreat. The king sacrificed a black *chandal* boy to Bahbachari, the consort of Siva, on the banks the Gaumti river. The head of the boy was then thrown in the enemy camp at night and it created such loud noise that the Muslim troops were frightened and fled.\(^{115}\)

Husain Shah dispatched another troop under the command of Hyten Khan. There ensued a daylong battle; the Tripuri troops were defeated. This time too they followed the same strategy. The king ordered the witches to block the stream and then released the water. Once again the Muslim troops were swept away and fled.\(^{116}\)

Husain Shah commissioned another troop for the third time under the leadership of the two generals, Haitan Khan and Karab Khan, and managed to take over Kailagarh, Bisalgarh, Jamir Khani and Chhaikuria. The Muslim troops then proceeded towards the capital, Rangamati. At this juncture a girl appeared and encouraged the Tripuri army to fight. She came up with the old strategy of opening the dam over the Gumti river. And for the third time the Muslim soldiers were swept away and were forced to retreat.\(^{117}\)

According to Jadunath Sarkar, Husain Shah made a campaign for the fourth time, which he himself commanded. However, the result of the battle is not known. Dhayan Manikya too probably took the battlefield.\(^{118}\) The inclusion of a tract of Tripura within the administrative charge of one of Husain Shah’s officers as per an inscription on the door of a mosque at Sonargaon, dated A.D. 1513,


\(^{117}\) Puranjan Prasad Chakravarty (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 35-36.

\(^{118}\) Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal – Muslim Period 1200-1757*, p. 149.
suggest that at least Husain Shah occupied a part of Tripura. The inscription records Sher-e-Laskar (?) as the founder of the mosque.\footnote{119 N. Roychoudhury, op. cit., p. 17.}

1.5.2 Mughal Period

The earliest account of Mughal campaign against Tripura comes from the reign of Emperor Jahangir. However, the western and southern portions of Tripura were included in the Todar Mall’s rent-roll (A.D. 1582)\footnote{120 W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol. VI, p. 466.} suggesting that the territory occupied by Husain Shah were taken over by the Mughals and enlisted in their rent-roll or a Mughal campaign took place during the reign of Akbar. But there is no account of Mughal campaign during the reign of Akbar. Ibrahim Khan Fathjang (A.D. 1617-24), the viceroy of Bengal, under the instruction of Jahangir, launched an expedition against Tripura during the reign of Yasodhar Manikya (A.D. 1600-23) to procure elephants and also probably to prepare a suitable base for a military operation against Arakan. It was in fact the most significant campaign undertaken by the Muslims.

Ibrahim Khan after making elaborate preparations launched the campaign in A.D. 1618. The armies were arrayed in two divisions, both on land and water. A contingent, under the command of Mirza Isfandiyar, with a force that consisted of 2,700 cavalry, 4,000 artillery, and 20 war elephants was to attack from the side of Kailagarh on the north-west. Another, under the command of Mirza Nuruddin, with a force that consisted of more than 3,000 cavalry, 5,000 artillery, and 50 war elephants was to attack eastwards towards the capital Udaipur, through Meharkul. The fleet was under the charge of Bahadur Khan who had to proceed up to the river Gumti by way of Comilla towards Udaipur. It is narrated in the Baharistan as follows:
When two land armies and one naval force traversed the stages and stations and arrived at Kawailagarh, the king of Tipperah planned to lead a night attack against the imperial officers. Therefore, he came out with a force of 1,000 cavalry, 6000 infantry and 200 elephants and at midnight fell upon Mirza Isfandyar who had crossed Kawailagarh and reached the vicinity of Udaipur. A contested battle was fought and many were killed and wounded on both sides. But as the fortune of the emperor, which is never in its wane, came to the aid of the loyal officers, the Muslims attained a fortunate victory. The trumpet of victory was blown in its highest pitch and the raja of Tipperah leaving behind many of his followers to be killed left as a wanderer to the desert, scattering the dust of disgrace on his head. The imperialists captured 70 of elephants as booties, and they obtained a victory, which may be considered as one of the leading victories of an army.\textsuperscript{121}

An attempt was made by Yasodhar Manikya to obstruct the imperial fleet, but it failed. The Mughals captured the capital city, Udaipur, and chased the king who retreated into a dense forest. The Mughal troops managed to capture Yasodhar Manikya along with his wives. Udaipur became the seat of a thanah (out-post) and was placed in the charge of Mirza Nurullah while the Mughal commanders returned with the royal captive, who was then sent to Jahangirnagar (Dacca) to the court of Khan Fathjang, by the end of A.D. 1618.\textsuperscript{122}

According to Rajmala, the Emperor of Delhi offered him his throne, but he refused to return back, and spent the rest of his life in Benaras and Mathura. He died at the age of 75 at Brindavan. The Mughal army continued to hold Tripura for almost two and half years until they were forced by an epidemic to leave the country. The occupied portion of Tripura entered into the rent-roll of Mughal as Sarkar Udiapur. The Mughals built a mosque on the banks of Gumti river commemorating the success of their campaign.\textsuperscript{123}

As Yasodhar Manikya had no offspring, Kalyan Manikya, the grandson of Maha Manikya, was unanimously chosen as the king in A.D. 1623. During his reign the Nawab of Murshidabad threatened to attack Tripura in case he was not provided with 1,000 elephants

\textsuperscript{121} Baharistan-i-Ghaibi, vol. II, p. 537.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., pp. 554-56.
\textsuperscript{123} Puranjan Prasad Chakravarty (ed.), op. cit., pp. 53-55.
as gifts. The refusal by the Tripura king led to an incursion in which the Mughals were defeated.\textsuperscript{124}

After the death of Kalyan Manikya, his eldest son Govinda Manikya (A.D. 1660-61 and 1667-76) ascended the throne. Nakashatra Roy, his step-brother contested for the throne. Nakashatra Roy took the help of the Mughals and secured the throne. Govinda Manikya abdicated the throne and left Tripura without any opposition. He took refuge in the territory of the reang tribe, but as he was not treated well he moved to the court of the Arakan. It was in Arakan that Govinda Manikya met Shah Shuja. Shah Shuja presented Govinda Manikya a precious nimcha sword and a diamond ring as a memento of their friendship. Later on, with the help of the king of Arakan Govinda Manikya regained his throne in A.D. 1667. He sold the sword given by Shuja and devoted the money to various welfare projects including a mosque on the banks of the Gumti river. Aurangzeb, around this time, suspecting that Shuja was taking refuge in Tripura sent a letter to Govinda Manikya asking for the latter's co-operation in capturing Shuja.\textsuperscript{125} The English translation of the letter read:

Of a noble lineage, without equal, favoured by fortune, your exalted Royal Highness Maharaj Govinda Manikya Bahadur, may Allahtalla protect (and grant prosperity to) your kingdom (in His infinite grace).

I have confirmed information that my long-standing enemy Suja has been secretly staying in your kingdom. For the sake of alliance between mine and your illustrious ancestors, when our enemies, the ill fated Afghans took shelter in your kingdom, your venerable ancestors drove them to Bengal on sword points. At present, I also hope that correspond to my communication, you will likewise capture the said enemy and send him to me (at an) early (date).

If you so desire, I may order my commander of the troops to wait at Munghyr. After capture, kindly send him under strict surveillance of your troop commander and oblige me; so that (our) old amity may remain perpetual, otherwise, you may know it for certain that sojourn of the independent one in your kingdom will result in differences and quarrel between us. I firmly believe that actions will be taken in accordance with my letter.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 56.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p. 59.
\textsuperscript{126} Maharaj Kumar, et. al. (eds.), Tripura Historical Documents, p. 1.
As Shuja was not taking refuge in Tripura he made peace with the Mughals by agreeing to give them elephants as tribute annually.\textsuperscript{127} There are conflicting opinions about Shah Shuja’s asylum in Tripura. According to \textit{Rajmala}, he fled to the Arakan passing through Rangamati, the old capital of Tripura.\textsuperscript{128}

Tripura saw its downfall during the reign of Dharma Manikya II (A.D. 1713-29/30). His failure to pay regular tribute in the form of elephants annoyed the \textit{Nawab} of Bengal, Shujauddin Muhammad Khan (A.D. 1727-39). The \textit{Nawab} of Dacca, by the orders of the \textit{Nawab} of Bengal, sent a troop against Dharma Manikya, but the latter offered a stiff resistance. Around this time, Jagatram, a nephew of Dharma Manikya, contested for the throne. But he was subdued and exiled to Dacca where he met Aka Sadik, the \textit{zamindar} of Patpasar Pargana. Aka Sadik further recommended to him his friend Mir Habib, an officer of the Naib Nazim of Decca. Taking his permission, Mir Habib and his troops crossed the Brahmaputra and entered Tripura, stormed the fort of Chandigadah – the residence of king of Tripura – and occupied it without much difficulty. The king of Tripura, unaware of it, fled to the neighboring hills. The whole kingdom was occupied. Jagatram was raised to the throne as a feudatory ruler with an annual revenue rent of 92,993 rupees. A large number of Muslim troops were stationed in the country under the command of Aka Sadik, who was nominated \textit{faujdar}. The \textit{Nawab} of Bengal on receiving the news was much pleased. He renamed Tripura as Chakle Roshnabad (the country of light) and gave the title of Bahadur to Murshid Coolly and of Khan to Mir Habib.\textsuperscript{129} The kingdom of Tripura, which from time immemorial existed as an independent kingdom, was annexed to Bengal in A.D. 1733.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., pp. 59-61, 66; Rev. James Long, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 22.


\textsuperscript{129} Charles Steward, \textit{The History of Bengal}, pp. 427-28; Riyas-us-Salatin, pp. 301-02; Puranjan Prasad Chakravarty (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 66-67.
Dharma Manikya, however, appealed to the Nawab of Bengal and recovered his throne. The Nawab granted him the zamindari right of the district of Chakle Roshnabad on an annual rent of 50,000 rupees. Since then the king of Tripura remained in possession of Chakle Roshnabad as zamindar.\textsuperscript{130} Thus the Nawab of Bengal, after their conquest of Tripura, occupied the lowlands while the hilly tracts was left to the possession of the king of Tripura, but subject to the control of, and tributary to, the Nawab of Bengal.

During the reign of Mukunda Manikya (A.D. 1729-38), Rudramani, a descendant of Jaganath Thakur, organized a national militia to oppose the Muslims. At that time Haji Masum was the faujdar at Udaipur. Rudramani hatched a conspiracy to kill the faujdar. Mukunda being afraid of the consequences informed the faujdar about the conspiracy. The Nawab, not satisfied with Mukunda, took him prisoner on the ground that he had failed to provide elephants. Mukunda later committed suicide.\textsuperscript{131}

Rudra Mani made a surprise attack on the Muslim occupied Udaipur and regained it. The Muslims unable to resist his attack came to terms and left the capital. As a reward for this act of bravery people choose him as king in preference to the sons of Mukunda Manikya.\textsuperscript{132}

Shamser Gazi, a Muslim Zamindar, took over the throne of Tripura after the death of Bijay Manikya. The rise and fall of Shamser Gazi (A.D. 1748-60) is one of the most fascinating episodes in the history of medieval Tripura. Much of his life is accounted in Ghazinama, written by Sheikh Manohar. Shamser Gazi was the son of a Muslim fakir, named Pir Muhammad. He was born around A.D. 1712, in Kinchura village, southern Paragana. He, in his early days, served under Nasir Mohammad, the zamindar of Dakshinsik Pargana, as a revenue clerk. It is said that once he was presented

\textsuperscript{130} Puranjan Prasad Chakravarty (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 67.
\textsuperscript{131} N. R. Roychoudhury, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Ibid.}
an extraordinary sword by a *pir* who predicted that he would become the ruler of Roshnabad. Seeing the poverty of the peasants and oppressions unleashed by Nasir Mohammad he organized a band of peasants and revolted against the *zamindari*. Shamser Gazi also asked the hand of Nasir Mohammad’s daughter Daiya Bibi, but was refused. Shamser Gazi then killed Nasir Mohammad, married his daughter, and declared himself as the ruler of Dakshinsik. The ruler of Tripura, Bijay Manikya, dispatched a troop to suppress Shamser Gazi, but the latter entered into a treaty, gave 1,000 gold coins, and was allowed to rule over Dakhinsik. After three years he took the lease of Meherpul Pargana. After Bijay’s death he stopped paying taxes. He soon entered into a deal with Hazi Hussain, the representative of the Nawab of Bengal, to annex the throne of Tripura with the assurance to pay a huge amount of revenue to the viceroy. After the death of Bijay Manikya, Krishnamoni Thakur, the younger brother of Inder Manikya, made persistent attempts to secure the throne. Shamser Gazi defeated Krishnamoni and occupied Udaipur in A.D. 1798, and ruled over Tripura for 12 years. As the people refused to obey him, he raised Bonomali Thakur, a grandson of Dharma Manikya II as a puppet king for three years, and latter on took the throne himself. Shamser did not assume the title Raja instead took the name of Shri Shujukto Mohammad Shamser Choudhury Zamindar.\(^{133}\)

Shamser Gazi was an efficient administrator. His reign saw an increase in the revenue of Chakle Roshnabad. He appointed efficient administrators for each Pargana and built strategic forts. He is also known for his secular administrative policies. He employed both Hindus and Muslims in important offices of the administration. He regulated prices in the kingdom. Shamser Gazi is remembered for his great public works conducive to the material improvement of the people. For the welfare of his subjects he excavated tanks and rented

\(^{133}\) Puranjan Prasad Chakravaty (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71.
lands to Hindus and Muslims of Roshnabad. He also built a Kali temple near his residence and established a madrasah at Udaipur. He also built forts in Chortogram, Nowakhali, Gajircot in Sonamura, Kilaghat near the Feni river. He paid huge amount of money regularly to the viceroy of Bengal as tribute. In order to solve the financial difficulties, he committed dacoities in several places and extorted money from the rich that were distributed to the poor. The wealthy section being afraid of Shamser Gazi complained against him to the viceroy of Bengal. Taking the opportunity Krishnamoni took the help of the Nawab of Murshidabad who sent troops to arrest Shamser Gazi. He was caught and brought to Murshidabad. Abu Bakar, the governor of Chittagong, blew up Shamser Gazi by a canon at Rangpur in A.D. 1760. Taking advantage, Krishnamoni who was raising a troop in Cachar, recovered the throne. The Nawab of Bengal soon recognized him as the ruler of Tripura in A.D. 1760. 134

When the British obtained the diwani of Bengal in A.D. 1765, parts of Tripura that had been placed on the rent-roll of Nawab of Bengal, came under British rule, while the hilly tract remained under the ruler of Tripura. 135

1.6 Manipur

Manipur has from antiquity maintained its identity as an independent entity. Its unique topography – chain of hill ranges surrounding the valley – a viable economy, concentration of population in the valley, and the remoteness of the region from the plains of Bengal, Assam, and Burma favored the development of a compact and organized society; isolated from the rest. It was also probably due to its peculiar topography and remoteness that the region never invited the lure and attraction of the Muslim rulers. The only incidence of encounter between the Muslims and Manipuris

134 Ibid., pp. 71-73. For an account of Shamser Gazi, see also Ranjit De, Tripurar Lokgiban O Sanskriti, pp. 60-64; N. R. Roychoudhury, op. cit., pp. 34-36.
took place during the reign of king Khagemba in the early 17th century, which for the first time led to the settlement of Muslims in the Manipur valley.

The encounter between the Muslims and the Manipuris was the outcome of a scuffle that took place between the brothers of king Khagemba. It so happened that once during hiyang festival, Leishapamba borrowed a boat from his step-brother Sanongba. During the festival the boat suffered a collision and was damaged beyond repair. Leishapamba requested Sanongba to accept a new one instead. Sanongba, under the instigation of his mother, Changpombi, became irreconcilable, and denied anything except for the original boat. An altercation developed between the siblings. The matter reached the king, who got enraged by Sanongba’s nature and tried to castigate him. Sanongba, who under the influence of his mother was eyeing the throne for his son, corresponded with the ruler of Cachar to attack his brother, Khagemba. Thereafter, the mother and son comprehending their bleak future fled along with a host of retinues and took refuge in Cachar. Dimasha Prataphil, the ruler of Cachar, acceding to the request of Sanongba to invade Manipur, mustered a troop without much ado at the helm of the generals, Yakharek and Bimal, and dispatched to Manipur in A.D. 1604. There soon ensued a battle between the Cachari troops and the Manipuris, in which the latter suffered a great loss of men and a part of the kingdom came under the occupation of the Cacharis. In the second battle that followed between the two troops at the foothill of Langjing, the Manipuri troops managed to take over the Cacharis. Many Cacharis fled, while several were taken prisoner.

Dimasha Prataphil had to undertake another campaign due to an uproar created by the wives and families of the Cachari troops taken captive by the Manipuris. This time he intimated and sought the assistance of the Nawab of Taraf, Muhammad; probably an

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136 *Hiyang Tannaba* or boat race was a traditional game played by the ruling family and between the *pannas* (social divisions) every year.
Afghan chieftain. The Nawab furnished 7,000 troops led by Prasena Muhammad. They left for Cachar on 15th July A.D. 1606. The joint Cachari and Muslim troops proceeded for Manipur. As soon as they reached Manipur, they encamped at Khoubum hilltop. An encounter took place there, in which the Manipuris gained an upper hand. Later, getting the impression that Sanongba was deceiving them, the Cachari forces led by Bimal and Yakharek fled leaving the Muslim troops, who were then stationed at the banks of Yangoi river, at Bishnupur, in the western periphery of the kingdom.

The Muslim troops encountered the Manipuri troops led by king Khagemba himself. After a hard fought battle, the Muslim troops unable to make any headway were defeated and made prisoners of war; numbering 1,000, mostly turners, weavers, cleaners, cobblers, drummers, horse-keepers, sword-makers, utensil-makers, milkmen, cultivators, trumpeters, etc. Manipuris also recovered a huge cache of arms and ammunitions, 30 elephants, 1,000 guns, along with palanquins, swords, and flags bearing the crescent moon.

1.7 Summary

We have thus noticed, that in the pre-Mughal period the brunt of Muslim aggression was borne by the kingdoms of Kamarupa, Sylhet, and Tripura. Muslim contact with the kingdom of Ahoms was little and far between. It was only after the total subjugation of Kamarupa that the invasion of Assam was possible. In the pre-

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137 Taraf, as already discussed, was the stronghold of the Afghans in the 17th century. The region, in fact, was distributed among various Afghan chieftains who served as zamindars. Baniachang, included in the present Habiganj subdivision and occupying the south-western portion of Sylhet, was in the possession of Anwar Khan, the chief of the zamindars. The hilly tract of the Taraf, to the south-east of Baniachang and north of Matang, was in the hands of Mumriz, another Afghan chieftain. The capital, Taraf, was a fortified place, and it enabled the Afghans to offer a stubborn opposition to the Mughals. See Jadunath Sarkar, History of Bengal—Muslim Period 1200-1757, p. 240.

138 For details of the conflict, see Nongsamei, pp. 1-31.

139 Cheithrol Kumbaba, p. 33; Nongsamei, pp. 30-31; Sagei Salairol, p. 46.
Mughal period barring a few, most Muslim campaigns were plundering raids rather than well laid-out expeditions. These were essentially an outcome of the spirit of military adventure and material greed. Thus, in spite of a series of campaigns over a period of more than three centuries the Muslim rulers of Bengal could not make any permanent acquisitions, except Sylhet, in north-east India.

Mughal relations with north-east started formally with the occupation of Bengal from the Afghans during the reign of Emperor Akbar. The exigency of checking the Afghan menace forced Akbar to initiate a friendly and defensive alliance with the ruler of Koch Behar. But the division of the Koch kingdom and internecine conflicts between the two kingdoms brought about a transformation in the Mughal policy, who under Emperor Jahangir pushed towards armed imperialism. Bolstered by the initial success of the policy of armed imperialism against the kingdoms of Sylhet and Koch Hajo, the Mughals pushed it further against the Ahoms and Tripura with mixed results. The reign of Jahangir witnessed the greatest extension of the political influence and authority and the territorial limits of the Mughal Empire in north-east India.

The political turmoil following the war of succession among the sons of Emperor Shah Jahan led to the weakening of Mughal authority in north-east. However, the accession of Aurangzeb (A.D. 1659-1707) and the appointment of Mir Jumla as the viceroy of Bengal saw the Mughal policy taking an aggressive turn again. The Mughals, following the death of Mir Jumla, made the most frantic efforts to safeguard some of their possessions in north-east. Threatened with the very existence in that quarter, they once and for all pursued a protective warfare. They also made a last ditch attempt for territorial expansion and followed a prolonged policy of aggression towards Koch Behar and Tripura.

Overall, the main plank of the Mughal policy towards north-east was to extend their suzerainty and expand the imperial frontier.
over the rich and prosperous kingdoms of north-eastern India so as to serve both their political and economic ends. Unlike in north-west, where their policy was directed towards political stability and border security, in the north-east economic imperialism was implemented under the coverage of frontier policy. S. C. Dutta is of the opinion that the main aim of the Mughal policy towards north-east was to control and monopolize all the trade and commercial routes and centers so as to replenish the provincial exchequer of Bengal subah and the faltering imperial treasury with booty and revenues. Likewise R. M. Eaton is of the opinion that the Mughal territorial expansion towards the eastern frontier (east of the Karatoya and south of the Padma) was an attempt to create an agrarian base in the vast region covered by swamp and forest.

From Sylhet through Chittagong the Mughal government merged the political goal of intensifying its power among dependant clients rooted in land, with the economic goal of expanding the arable land area. A principle instrument for achieving these goals was the land-grants that aimed at the agricultural development of the forested hinterland. And it was executed in full swing in Sylhet from the second half of the 17th century.


141 The ecological changes that occurred between the 12th and the early 16th century in the Bengal delta (due mainly to calamitous events like the earthquake of A.D. 1762 and the major inundations of A.D. 1769 and A.D. 1786-88) lead to a profound change in the whole river system of the delta. By the late 16th century Ganges was linked up with the Padma river and it brought the Ganges' main discharge flowed directly into the heart of the eastern delta that bore the silt and fresh water necessary for wet-rice cultivation. This significant transformation coincided with Akbar's consolidation process in Bengal. For a detailed discussion on the changes in the river system of the Bengal delta, see N. D. Bhattacharya, "Changing Courses of the Padma and Human Settlements," *National Geographical Journal of India*, vol. 24 (1978), pp. 62-66; Dharma Kumar & T. Raychaudhury (eds.), *Cambridge Economic History*, vol. II, pp. 270-71.