CONCLUSION
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The history of Muslim relations with north-east India begins practically with the establishment of Muslim dynastic rule in Bengal in the early 13th century. The geographical proximity of the kingdoms of Kamarupa, Sylhet and Tripura to the newly established Muslim rule in Bengal naturally made them the earliest target of the Muslim rulers. Muslim contact with the kingdom of the Ahoms was little, and far between; due to its geographical remoteness. One does not find any coherent policy being implemented by the Muslim rulers in the pre-Mughal period.

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 in north-east except in Sylhet, which was occupied in A.D. 1303.1 Besides, a few temporary acquisitions were made in Kamarupa and Tripura. As shown by the nature of the campaigns all the Muslim expeditions in the pre-Mughal period were more or less plundering raids.

The advent of the Mughals saw a departure from this policy leading to a more rigorous and consistent attempt to expand the physical and economic frontier of the Empire, towards the north-east India. The policy of the Mughals for territorial expansion throughout north-east India was guided by the economic motive of, acquiring the rich natural resources, controlling and monopolizing all the trade and commercial routes and centers, and expanding the agrarian base with the creation of a host of landed gentry under their control. All these aimed to replenish the provincial exchequer of Bengal subah and the faltering Imperial treasury with the booty and revenues earned from the region, and was evolved through various phases of premeditated moves.

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The north-east policy of the Mughals was initiated for the first time by Akbar as a policy of defensive and friendly alliance with the ruler of Koch Behar in A.D. 1576. Politically its motive was, containing the Afghan threat from their newly conquered territory of Bengal. However, the policy took a somersault with the division of the Koch kingdom into two parts – Koch-Behar and Koch Hajo – and the hostility and constant rivalry between the two. The gradual weakening and dependence of the ruler of Koch Hajo on the Mughals led to the gradual transformation of the latter's old policy. A policy of subordination and subjugation was initiated towards Koch Behar where as a policy of armed imperialism was unleashed against Koch Hajo, which was achieved with full success during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. Koch Behar was reduced to vassalage by A.D. 1609, while Koch Hajo was incorporated to the Mughal Empire by A.D. 1613.

Armed imperialism was also implemented against Sylhet with the political motive of wiping out the Afghan supremacy in the region and Sylhet was annexed in A.D. 1612. The Mughals carried away by the successes of their extreme imperialistic ambition and economic gains, made an imprudent attack upon the rich and prosperous kingdom of the Ahoms in A.D. 1615, which met with great reverses. The event led to a mellowing down of their imperialistic temperament and subsequently they took to consolidating their authority in their newly occupied territories, especially Koch Hajo.

About this time the Mughals diverted their attention towards the kingdom of Tripura by carrying out territorial aggression in around A.D. 1618, which met with partial success. After an elaborately planned campaign the Mughals managed to occupy only

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2 H. Blochmann (tr.), *Akbarnama*, p. 52.
3 S. N. Bhattacharya, *op. cit.*, p. 126; H. Blochmann (tr.), *Padishahnamah* pp. 53-54.
5 H. Blochmann (tr.), *Padishahnamah* pp. 54-55.
a part of the kingdom, which was enlisted to the rent-roll of Mughal as Sarkar Udiapur.\(^6\)

The gradual disappearance of almost all the recalcitrant elements in Koch Hajo, either due to submission or natural demise, cleared the way for a direct clash between the Mughals and the Ahoms. It commenced with the efforts of Bali Narayan, the Koch feudatory of the Ahom monarch, to recover Koch Hajo. A protracted war was fought from A.D. 1628 to 1639, which concluded with a peace treaty. The treaty, for the first time, formally fixed the boundary of the kingdoms of Mughal and Assam. Gauhati was thus incorporated to the Mughal Empire.\(^7\)

Mughal policy witnessed its low ebb in the late 17th century. Taking full advantage of the political commotion of the Mughal administration – owing to the war for succession among the siblings of Emperor Shah Jahan – Koch Behar slipped out of Mughal's control and declared its independence while the Ahom king annexed Koch Hajo.\(^8\)

The accession of Aurangzeb on the throne and the appointment of Mir Jumla as the viceroy of Bengal saw the resumption of Mughal north-east policy with vigour and tenacity. Mir Jumla carried forward the policy of armed imperialism towards north-east to recover the lost territories. He also made one of the most audacious moves towards the establishment of Mughal influence over the kingdom of Assam. Koch Behar was reoccupied in A.D. 1661, however it was lost again in the following year. Finally, Mir Jumla's Assam campaign met with catastrophic consequences.\(^9\)

Even though the Mughals managed to subjugate the Ahom kingdom, as a tributary state and recovered Koch Hajo against all

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\(^7\) H. Blochmann (tr.), Padsihahnamah, pp. 60-62; E. A. Gait, A History of Assam, p. 118.

\(^8\) H. Blochmann (tr.), Fathiya-i-Ibriya, p. 63.

\(^9\) H. Blochmann (tr.), Fathiya-i-Ibriya, pp. 63-75.
odds, they met with humiliation and lost of one of the most experienced, determined and dexterous military generals of the time along with thousands of men, and material.

After the death of Mir Jumla Mughal policy turned defensive in nature against the renewed move of the Ahoms to overthrow their control over Koch Hajo. In spite of the most frantic efforts of the Mughals to sustain their control over Koch Hajo, it was lost to the Ahoms in A.D. 1682, and they were left with the south-western parts of the Brahmaputra Valley up to Rangamati.10

The Mughals who were left with no alternative made their last ditch attempt at territorial expansion against the kingdom of Koch Behar and Tripura. Taking advantage of the political turmoil the Mughals gradually integrated the peripheries of the kingdom of Koch Behar. They ultimately reduced Koch Behar as a vassal state in A.D. 1711.11 The kingdom of Tripura was also subjugated in A.D. 1733 and the lowlands, renamed Chakle Roshnabad, were rented to the ruler of Tripura as a zamindari estate.12

One noticeable social impact of the long-drawn contest between the Muslim powers and the rulers of the north-east from the 13th to the 18th century was the gradual swelling of the Muslim population in the region thereby introducing Muslim constituents in the regional demography. Regions such as the western parts of Assam, Sylhet and Tripura Plain, which were subdued and controlled by the Muslims, eventually became the strongholds of Muslim population.

According to British writers, the early growth of Muslim population in the above-mentioned regions was effected by Muslim rulers through pressure and force.13 However, this is not corroborated by the contemporary and near contemporary sources.

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Instead, the early growth of Muslim population was effected through the introduction of Muslim colonies and slow infiltration in the wake of the Muslim conquest. The population was further augmented by many of the Muslim armies posted in the region, who in course of time inter-married with the natives and settled down permanently. Besides, trade and commerce between Bengal and north-east also brought Muslim traders and persons involved in diverse trades from Bengal, many of whom settled in various parts of the region.

The significant physical changes in the Bengal delta that occurred between the 12th and the 16th century, and resulted in the linking up of the Ganges with the Padma by the late 16th century, also pushed the Muslims population of Bengal eastward, i.e. towards western Assam.

The individual efforts of scores of peripatetic Muslim preachers, who entered and worked in widely scattered and remote parts of north-east India, also contributed to the further expansion of the faith of Islam among the local population. These Muslim saints, through their missionary zeal, personal and religious charisma, and thaumaturgic powers, won the hearts of a great bulk of the local populace, who subsequently embraced Islam. Their proselytizing activity in the region was further encouraged by the favorable attitude of the local rulers, who made endowment in the form of revenue-free lands, stipends, and gave grants for the maintenance of their shrines and other establishments attached to them. Many of the Muslim religious pontiffs were employed in royal courts to pray for the welfare of their benefactor.

However, such efforts of individual preachers are quite insufficient to explain the increase of the Muslim population in the region. In fact, the efforts of the preachers were further reinforced by the social condition of life among Hindus and aboriginals. To the aboriginals and Hindus at the lower rungs of the social ladder – who were subdued by invidious and iniquitous social divisions and other
disabilities – Islam with its basic feature of egalitarianism appeared as a revolutionary force and attracted by it, many entered the pale of Islam on their free will.

The introduction and patronization of skilled Muslims by the local rulers of the north-east too helped in the gradual escalation of Muslim population. In Assam the rulers patronized these Muslims by provisioning them in diverse trades. They were recruited in departments like minting of coins, carpentry, painting, and gun-manufacturing. Scholarly Muslims were attached to the Ahom court as scribes.\textsuperscript{14} In Manipur too, the rulers patronized Muslims. The one thousand Muslim captives from Sylhet and the batches of immigrant Muslims who made their entry in Manipur were encouraged by the rulers to settle down by offering local women in marriage and land for sustenance.\textsuperscript{15} The rapid increase of Muslim population in some parts of north-east, especially in Sylhet, is also explained by the superior fecundity of the community.\textsuperscript{16}

Muslim population in north-east was further increased in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century due to the horde of immigrants, which swarmed in Assam and Tripura to occupy wastelands and serve as labourers in the tea-gardens. However, the large-scale immigration, which the Assam province and Tripura owed to the tea industry, did not affect the increase of the Muslim population significantly. As per the census count of 1901, 15,083 Muslim tea-garden labourers were recorded in the tea-gardens of the Assam province; 8,676 in the Surma Valley and 6,407 in the Brahmaputra Valley.\textsuperscript{17}

It was rather the farmer-migrants from the districts of eastern Bengal that brought about enormous increase in the overall Muslim population in north-east India. Although, immigration of farmer-migrants was recorded from the early census count, it was not in

\textsuperscript{15} Nongsamei, p. 30, 36, 40, 49; Pangal Thorakpa, pp. 40, 43-44.
\textsuperscript{16} B. C. Allen, \textit{Assam District Gazetteers, Sylhet}, vol. II, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{17} B. C. Allen, \textit{Census of Assam, 1901}, vol. II, pp. 301-04.
large number till the early part of the 20th century. In fact, large-scale immigration of farmer migrants from the eastern Bengal, especially Mymensingh, could be noticed from the census count of 1911. From the 20th century the overall increase of population in north-east India, Assam and Tripura in particular, was attributed to the immigration of farmer-migrants; the immigration of tea-garden labourers had reduced to a great extent. In the Brahmaputra Valley, the districts of Goalpara, Nowgong, Kamrup, and Darrang became the main targets of the farmer-migrants. However, Surma Valley was less affected by immigration of farmer-migrants and the increase of Muslim population was mainly due to natural growth and certain socio-cultural aspects of the Muslims. The net increase of Muslim population in the Assam province from 1891 to 1931 was 87.4 per cent, while that of Brahmaputra and Surma Valley was 292.9 and 45.5 per cent respectively.18 In Tripura too, large number of Muslim farmer migrants from east Bengal entered and occupied the fertile lowlands, which was under the control of the British. This is borne by the fact that from 1872 to 1901, Muslim population in the district of Tripura increased by 50.36 per cent.19

Muslims immigrants also made their entry into the hills. Most of the immigrants were tradesmen from mainland India and migrants from the plain districts of north-east. However, their population was of miniscule proportion. Between 1921 and 1931, Muslim population in the hill districts of Assam province recorded an increase of 23.8 per cent. According to the census count of 1872, in Hill Tripura Muslims constituted 53.3 per cent of the total population.20

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18 C. S. Mullan, *Census of India, 1931*, Assam, pt. III-Tables. p. 198. The net increase of Hindu population in the Assam province was 73.7 per cent, while in the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys it was 99.3 and 15.2 per cent. See *ibid.*


It is noteworthy that Muslims in the interior hills, which correspond to the modern day states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram are of recent origin as these places were neither marked out as a target of Muslim conquest or occupation nor were these places visited by any saints who could convert the local population. Muslims made their entry into these isolated hilly regions from the neighbouring plains of Assam, Sylhet, and Bangladesh, in recent times for business and subsequently settled down. For instance, Muslims in Nagaland are known as mia, and are concentrated in the districts of Kohima, Makokchung, Dimapur and Jhalukie. Their first migration took place in 1930, though most of them migrated after the partition of India in 1947. After 1950, many Muslims made their entry from Cachar and Karimganj districts of Assam. Even today most of these Muslims perform all sorts of unorganised economic activities like- menial labour in construction works, opening pan kiosks and ration shops, catering, rickshaw-pulling, mechanical workshops, etc.\(^\text{21}\)

The Muslim society that developed in the north-east – like elsewhere in the Islamic world – was a part of rich and dynamic socio-cultural process. Even though its votaries in north-east adhered to the cardinal pillars of faith, at the popular level, Islam as practiced by them was overlaid with beliefs and practices which were accretions and influences from the local environment. These cultural values evolved gradually as a response to the existing cultural situations, adaptations and adjustments. The Muslims adopted these new cultural values within their fold according to their own requirements and needs, and they put an Islamic tinge to it. Much of these local accretions could be seen in the dress, food, language, literature, social organizations, life-cycle rituals and festivities, beliefs and behavioural patterns that could be described as practical religion.

\(^{21}\) N. K. Das & C. L. Imechen (eds.), *People of India, Nagaland*, vol. XXIV, p. 236.
In Assam and Tripura the Muslim social structure, like their Hindu counterparts, was stratified into caste-like divisions. Besides the hierarchical divisions, the Muslims had absorbed much of their related ideology and practices. These caste-like divisions exerted and still exert a great deal of influence on the social relations among the Muslims. In a similar way in Manipur the Muslims were socially stratified on the basis of lineage on the pattern of their meitie counterparts.

Local accretions were also observed in the life-cycle rituals and festivities. In the marriage customs of the Muslims, besides the nikah ceremony – which was performed strictly according to Islamic rules – the Muslims had adopted elaborate rites and ceremonies observed generally within the region. They also took part in the local festivities and adopted many other beliefs and behavioural patterns, which formed part of their practical religion. These included broadly, beliefs in the therapeutic powers of the Muslim saints manifested in the veneration of their dargahs, supernatural theories of disease causation such as epidemics of cholera, small-pox, and phenomenon such as evil eye, spirit possession, etc. and its remedial measures through the veneration of deities of the local or Hindu pantheon, sorcery and magic. In many parts of north-east Muslims sanctify the graves of real and imaginary or fictitious saints. These graves were visited by one and all, including non-Muslims and prayers of supplication (dua) and material offerings were made there to fulfill their inner wishes e.g., to ensure birth of children, recovery from diseases, to forestall misfortunes, etc. In many parts of Assam Hindu deity Sitala, which controls smallpox was worshipped and venerated by the Muslims when the smallpox epidemic spread.

It was against such a socio-religious tradition of the Muslims that, like elsewhere in the Indian sub-continent, in north-east India too there developed a Muslim reform movement in the 19th and early 20th century which emphasized on a purer form of faith and aimed at purificatory purges of non-Islamic accretions and excrescences prevalent among the Muslim folks. Persistent efforts were made by individual preachers and reforming sects such as Ahl-i-Hadith, Wahhabis, and Faraizis to get rid of such non-Islamic accretions and excrescences from the Muslim folks and to inculcate in them a purer form of Islam. However, in spite of their labours they failed to isolate the masses of co-religionists from their age-old customs and traditions. This could be explained by the failure on the part of reformers to perceive that much of these local beliefs and practices served some practical needs, which their religion does not provide. The existence of much of these local beliefs and practices even to these days among the Muslims of north-east India is a testimony to the powerful influence of small tradition over the great traditions.