CHAPTER – III

POLITICAL CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE MUGHALS AND THE KOCH AND AHOM KINGDOMS

Assam during the initial years of the 16th century witnessed the disintegration of the kingdom of Kamrup Kamata and over its ruins was laid the foundation of the Koch kingdom under its leader Bisu alias Viswa Singha. However, it may be pointed out that the position of Viswa Singha was one of vassalage being subordinated to the Ahom rule till the very end of his reign. After his death he was succeeded by his son Malladev alias Naranarayan and with his accession the history of the Koches entered into a brilliant chapter of military glory and cultural achievements. Naranarayan together with his brother Sukladhvaj alias Chilarai
not only defeated the Ahoms but also reduced the position of the Ahom kingdom to that of a mere feudatory of the Koch king. Encouraged by this success, they began extending their sway over Sylhet, Tripura, Manipur and in course of time they established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire North East and made it important enough to get recognition in the court of Mughal Delhi.²

Meanwhile the ruling monarch in Bengal was Sulaiman Kararani who in spite of the fact that he maintained cordial relations with Akbar, the Mughal emperor of Delhi. Nevertheless he always felt the constant threat of a supposed Mughal invasion and therefore felt the need of surrounding himself with a ring of feudatory. Hence with this aim in mind he attempted to subjugate the Koches. Both the Persian chronicles as well as some Assamese chronicles recorded that it was Kararani accompanied by his general Kalapahar who played the offensive and invaded the Koch kingdom. A fierce struggle took place between the Afghans and the Koches but the latter were defeated and it is recorded that
Sulaiman Kararani proceeded up to Gauhati and destroyed the Kamakhya Temple. The Koch princes were completely routed and Chilarai the brother of Naranarayan was taken prisoner. This event was said to have taken place in 1568 A.D. However because of the constant threat of Mughal invasion Sulaiman Kararani became anxious to maintain cordial relations with the Koches and hence he ordered the release of Chilarai. Meanwhile Naranarayan, the Koch ruler after his defeat at the hands of the ruler of Gaur, felt an urgent necessity of recovering his lost prestige hence, he sent an envoy to Akbar with proposals of friendly alliance. This was reciprocated by Akbar. Naranarayan and Akbar jointly prepared for a simultaneous attack upon Bengal. According to the Koch chronicle the forces of both Akbar and Naranarayan then invaded Bengal, Akbar from the west and those of Naranarayan from the east, and the combined army defeated the ruler of Bengal and partitioned Bengal between themselves. This alliance continued and it is recorded that in 1578 A.D. Naranarayan sent a formal embassy to Akbar’s court with variable
presents including 58 elephants. However, the glorious epoch of the Koch kingdom under the rule of Naranarayan did not last long. Following the death of Chilarai, disintegration soon sets in. Chilarai’s son named Raghudev asserted himself by declaring himself ruler of the eastern territory of the Koch kingdom. Therefore Naranarayan forced by circumstances had to accept this partition of his kingdom. Thus the Koch kingdom came to be divided into two parts in 1581, one part being named as ‘Koch’ Hayo’ or ‘Kamrup’ comprising of the eastern territories of the former Koch kingdom and the other part being named Koch Behar comprising of the western division of the former Koch kingdom. This partition greatly weakened the power of the Kocheṣes and paved the way for the Mughal intervention in the political life of the Kocheṣes.

It is important to note that Koch Behar inherited by Lakshminarayan the son and successor of Naranarayan, whereas Koch Hajo was inherited by Raghudev the son of Chilarai. The
two cousins however failed to maintain cordial relationship between themselves. Lakshminarayan wanted to assert his authority over Raghudev therefore he granted asylum to Raghudev's rebellious son Parikshit. This angered Raghudev who then formed an alliance with Isa Khan a fugitive Afghan chief of East Bengal and forcibly occupied a part of Lakshminarayan's territory. Meanwhile Lakshminarayan realizing that he could not resist the invaders, he therefore submitted before the Mughal Governor of Bengal Raja Man Singh and by giving his daughter by marriage sought Man Singh's help against the Koch Afghan alliance. This alliance no doubt served its purpose for Lakshminarayan since it prevented Raghudev from encroaching upon Koch Behar. Nevertheless it also paved the way for the Mughal intervention over the politics of Koch Behar. In the year 1603 A.D., Raghudev died and was succeeded by his son Pariksit Narayan who in order to safeguard his throne sought for an alliance with the Ahom king Pratap Singha. This was followed by Parikshit's policy of aggression towards Koch Behar whereby
he was able to subdue the forces of Lakshminarayan. Meanwhile Lakshminarayan finding that it would not be possible to fight Parikshit single handed decided to seek Mughal aid, as recorded by the Vamsavali. In may 1908 Lakshminarayan was compelled by Man Singh Governor of Bengal to renew his acceptance of Mughal overlordship, to pay regular annual tributes and to assist the Mughal forces in times of needs. After this he then sent an invitation to the Mughal governor of Bengal Alauddin Fathpuri Islam Khan to invade Koch Hajo. Islam Khan then decided to send a fresh expedition against Parikshit under the command of Mukarram Khan accompanied by Shaikh Kamal, Shaikh Muhiuddin brother of Mukarram Khan, Mirza Iman Quli Beg, Shamlu and Raghunath. The Mughal Army started their expedition from Barampur situated near Dacca and proceeded towards the Brahmaputra. Parikshit’s fleet of 300 war boats met the imperial force however in the encounter that followed the Koch Navy was given a crushing defeat at Sulkuna a place situated on the western border of Kamrup. The victorious Mughal Army
then pursued the forces of Parikshit who had taken shelter in the fort of Dhubri. After a great deal of fighting the fort of Dhubri fell to the hands of the Mughals and Parikshit was faced with no other alternative except to submit to the invaders and he was taken prisoner at Pandu. He was then brought to Delhi before Jahangir whereby the latter released him only after exacting a promise from the latter to pay the Mughals seven lakhs as tribute. However the Mughal Governor of Bengal realising that Parishit would always pose a great danger to the imperial Mughals refused to release him, Parikshit therefore returned to Delhi and on his return journey died on the bank of the Ganges. The Mughals then annexed Parikshit's kingdom in 1613 and Abdus Salam the brother of Mukarram Khan was put in charge of the conquered territory. In 1616 Mukarram Khan came to be appointed as Governor of Koch Hajo. Hence the Mughals were able to establish complete hegemony over the Koches. The disappearance of Koch Hajo or Kamrup as a buffer state between the Mughals and the Ahoms
brought the Mughals and the Ahoms into direct clashes with one another.

Meanwhile the Ahoms by this time had extended their territory up to the border of Kamrup. The Assamese Chronicles maintained that at the defeat of Parikshit at the hands of the Mughals, his brother Balinarayan fled to the Ahom kingdom and sought protection from the Ahom ruler Pratap Singha who by sheer diplomacy on his part established Balinarayan at Darrang as a tributary King. The Ahom king therefore concerned of the fidelity and honesty of the prince bestowed on him a new name Dharmanarayan. Thus Balinarayan on his part continued to wage a persistent struggle against the Mughals and thereby proved himself to be the most persistent enemy of the Mughal authority in Kamrup till his death in 1638 A.D.

The conquest of Kamrup made it inevitable for a direct clash between the Ahoms and the Mughals. These clashes were initiated
in the first decade of the 17th century during the reign of Pratap Singha the then reigning Ahom monarch. The final showdown of arms between these two rival powers as mentioned by the Chronicles was brought about by the murder of a Mughal merchant named Ratan Shah by the Ahoms, on grounds of him being suspected to be a Mughal spy.23 At this Qasim Khan the Mughal Governor of Bengal immediately sent an expedition in 1614 under his most trusted officer Sayyid Abu Baqr accompanied by other imperial officers such as Raja Satrajit of Bhusna, the Thanadar of Pandu and Gauhati.24 In the earlier engagements the Ahoms suffered heavy reverses. This encouraged the Mughals to proceed into the interior of the region. By crossing the Brahmaputra, they then proceeded to the Bharali and encamped just opposite the Ahom fort at Chandhara. Finally after about a month the Ahoms made a surprise attack on the Mughal fort on the Bharali and scored a brilliant victory. In the battle that ensued Syed Abu Baqr and many other officers were killed, meanwhile the imperial forces were pushed back to Hajo and many soldiers
were taken prisoners by the Ahoms. Thus the first attempt of the Mughals to expand towards the East was successfully thwarted by the Ahoms and Qasim Khan, the then Mughal governor of Bengal was removed from office. However, the hostility between the Ahoms and the Mughals did not end here. King Pratap Singha being encouraged by his former success and at the same time being anxious to check the further advance of the Mughals, in the year 1617 he sent an expedition against the Mughals in Kamrup. He was assisted by Balinarayan alias Dharmanarayan and other local chieftains. The Ahom Army occupied the Mughal fort at Aglaathuti and compelled them to retreat to Hajo. In spite of the fact, that Pratap Singha suspended fighting until further orders. Nevertheless some Ahom commanders surrounded Hajo and forced Abdus Salam, the commander of the Mughal army to surrender to the Ahom forces. These Mughal soldiers were captured and brought to Gargaon where they were settled permanently. This victory of the Ahoms over the Mughals for the time being compelled the Mughals to put a stop to their policy
of expansion, at the same raised the prestige and integrity of the Ahoms.

However, in the year 1636 war was once again renewed between Assam and the Mughals after an interval of twenty-one years. The war raged on with full fury as soon as the Ahoms launched an offensive on the Mughals. In the first round of the war, the Ahoms were crowned with success meanwhile towards the end of December 1936, Islam Khan dispatched the long awaited reinforcement for the Mughals under Mir Zainuddin assisted by Allah Yar Khan.\textsuperscript{29} The arrival of this new army marked the second phase of the war. Crossing the Brahmaputra the Mughals arrived at Dhubri in Uttarkul where they captured Raja Satrajit and transported him to Delhi where he was executed.\textsuperscript{30} From Dhubri the Mughals advanced eastwards and consolidated their rule in Kamrup. The struggle raged on for a period of four years. The Ahoms suffered many reverses and even lost their territories in some difficult struggles, nevertheless the struggle
ended with a decisive victory for the Ahoms after their infliction of a crushing defeat to the invaders in a naval battle at Duimunisila in the Nowgong districts. Both the Ahoms and the Mughals were completely worn out by the war. Hence in 1638-1639 A.D. a peace treaty was concluded between Allah Yar Khan and Momai Tamuli Barbarua the commander of the Ahom army of Pratap Singha. According to this treaty the boundary line between the Ahom and Mughal territories was fixed by the river Barnadi on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra and by the Asurar Ali on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra. Thus by this treaty for the first time the Ahom ruler recognised Mughal supremacy in Kamrup. Gauhati came under Mughal occupation at the same time the Mughals acknowledged the independent authority of the Ahoms. Nevertheless the treaty of 1639 was not really able to bring a lasting peace between the two powers. The Ahoms were dissatisfied over the loss of Gauhati. Hence this period of about twenty six years which followed the treaty is in fact a period of prolonged diplomatic war of charges and counter charges between
the two powers and as Dr. S.K. Bhuyan has remarked “the treaty of 1639 became the pivotal point in the subsequent relations of the two states”. The Moguls insisted on the maintenance of the stipulated limit while the Ahoms aimed constantly at repudiating them.34

As mentioned earlier the Ahoms being dissatisfied with the loss of Gauhati as soon as the news of the war of succession in Delhi following the death of Shah Jahan reached them, they took advantage of the situation and tried to recover their lost territories as well as to extend their control over the whole region up to the river Karatoya. Pran Narayana was also not slow in seizing this opportunity he asserted his independence of the Mughals and occupied Goalpara and Kamrup. Meanwhile the Ahom ruler had also dispatched his armies to conquer Kamrup. Hence Pran Narayan proposed the formation of a Koch Ahom alliance against the Mughals, as well as the partition of Kamrup between the two powers. This proposal was rejected by the Ahom king and he
ordered his forces to attack the Kocheś. In the struggle that followed the Kocheś were defeated and chased out of Kamrup by the Ahoms.\textsuperscript{35} The Ahom ruler Jayadhvaja Singha also captured Gauhati and became the master of the Brahmaputra valley whereby he regained possession of the long lost western territories limit of ancient Kamarupa on the Karatoya and till the end of 1660 the Ahoms continued to exercise their authority over this region.\textsuperscript{36}

After Aurangzeb had succeeded to the throne in Delhi, he consolidated his position and thereafter immediately dispatch his ablest general Mir Jumla to conquer Assam.\textsuperscript{37} On the 1\textsuperscript{st} November 1661 Mir Jumla with an army comprising of 12,000 horses, 30,000 foot solders and hundreds of war boats manned by Portuguese and Dutch sailors marches against Koch Behar and Assam.\textsuperscript{38} Mir Jumla marched against Pran Narayan the ruler of the Kocheś defeated him and occupied Koch Behar.\textsuperscript{39} Mir Jumla then turned his attention towards Assam, he sent two messengers Lal Beg and Hariram Raikh to the Ahom ruler Jayadhvaja Singha
asking him to surrender the territories of the Mughals which then was in possession of the Mughals. However, the Ahom king refused saying that he had acquired Kamrup from the Koches and not from the Mughals. This signaled the outbreak of a war between the two forces. Mir Jumla was accompanied by his ablest officers and Rashid Khan the Mughal Thanadar at Gauhati joined him at Rangamati. The imperial forces crossed the Brahmaputra and reached Jogighopa, the Ahoms whose strength was reduced owing to the outbreak of an epidemic could offer only a feeble resistance and the fort of Jogighopa fell to the hands of the Mughals. Meanwhile Jayadhvaj Singha sent large reinforcements to Saraighat and Pandu, however he committed a blunder by appointing Manthir Bezdalai Bharali Barua a mere store keeper as the then commander of the Ahom forces in lower Assam. This created so much resentment among the Ahom officers who felt insulted being superseded by a mere junior in rank hence they refused to fight, the Ahom forces retreated to Chamdhara in Gauhati however because of the treachery of the Ahom forces
everything was lost to the Ahoms, the Mughals won the day and Mir Jumla finally occupied the Ahom capital city of Gargaon in 1662 A.D. and Jayadhvaj Singha retreated to the forest of Namrup leaving his capital to the care of his officers. Mir Jumla remained in Gargaon for a period of one year from March 1662 to January 1663 A.D. whereby he was able to acquire many valuable articles for the Mughal monarch. It may also be noted that Mir Jumla opened a mint at Gargaon and stuck coins in the name of Aurangzeb. With the occupation of Gargaon by Mir Jumla, the whole of the plain territories of Assam came under the sway of the Mughals. Nevertheless he could not destroy the patriotic aspiration of the people of the region who being subjected to untold miseries and humiliation became determined for reprisals.

The advent of the monsoons made it difficult for Mir Jumla to maintain his various outposts means of communication became dislocated on account of the recurring floods thereby resulting in shortage of food supply. So that the Mughal forces were almost
driven to the state of actual starvation. Meanwhile taking advantage of the situation, the Ahoms under the leadership of their officers launched incessant guerilla operations thereby becoming a great source of terror for the imperial forces. To add to their misfortunes an epidemic broke out in the Mughal camp thereby resulting in a considerable loss of lives. It was at this period of crisis for the Mughals that king Jayadhvaj returned from the forests of Kamrup and then made preparations for expelling the Mughals from Gargaon and appointed Baduli Phukan as commander-in-chief of the Ahom forces. Baduli Phukan however, proved treacherous and was won over to the Mughal side. In the meantime the Ahom king through his Premier Atan Burgohain Dangaria made peaceful overtures to Mir Jumla. On the other Mir Jumla failing to ensure the compliance of his men to proceed on another expedition added to this as a consequence of the fast deteriorating condition of his health, he was compelled to prepare for an early return journey from the country. Hence he was made to accept the proposals for peace made by the Ahom
ruler and thus on January 22, 1663 the treaty of Ghilajarighat was concluded between Dilir Khan and Atan Burgohain.

By the treaty of Ghilajarighat the Ahom ruler Jayadhvaj Singha was reduced to a mere vassal of the Mughal emperor and had to pay regular annual tributes. He also sent his daughter Ramani Gabharu to the Mughal harem later she was married to Ajamtara the second son of Aurangzeb. Added to this Jayadhvaj Singha also ceded Kamrup and Darrang to the Mughals and from this time onwards the boundary line between the Ahom kingdom and the Mughals was fixed by the river Bharali in the north and the river Kalang in the south. Concurrently Jayadhvaj Singha after returning to his capital Gargaon, made it very clear his desire to fight against the Mughals, nevertheless, he did not live long to fulfill it. However, on his deathbed he summoned all his officials and requested them to select a strong successor who would be able to fulfill his desire of overthrowing Mughal overlordship. Hence after his death his successor Chakradhvaj Singha made
preparations for a renewed war with the Mughals. He started violating the terms of the treaty of Ghilajarighat and stopped payment of tributes. Owing to the wise counsel from his prudent minister Atan Bungohain Chakradhvaj the Ahom ruler was able to build the country’s economy and to consolidate his position in the region. Encouraged by the death of Mir Jumla and being confident in their own strength the Ahoms began attacking the various Mughal garrisons under the supreme leadership of Lachit Barphukan the commander of the Ahom forces, the Ahoms captured the Mughal forts one after the other such as Kajali, Banbari, Barnadi, Rang Mahal within a period of two months and in November 1667 Itakhuli or Gauhati also was captured by them. Thus once again the glory of the Ahom which had been eclipsed by Mughal expansion since 1663 A.D. reappeared in 1667 A.D. whereby the Ahoms came to extend their control over the entire region including Kamrup and Goalpara up to the river Manas.
The news of the assertion of Ahom independence and their acquisition of Gauhati reached Aurangzeb who in order to wipe out this disgrace, dispatched a large expeditionary force comprising of 18000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry under the leadership of Raja Ram Singha of Amber. Ram Singha arrived at Rangamati in February 1669 A.D. and demanded from the Ahom king the return of the lost territories of the Mughals and the unpaid tributes as well. On the other hand the Ahoms refused to meet these demands of the commander of the Mughal forces. Hence the Mughals launched the offensive whereby two battles were fought near Tezpur whereby the Ahom forces were compelled to retreat. At this critical juncture Lachit Barphukan the Ahom commander in spite of his illness came forward to give a new direction to the Ahom forces, through his inspiration the retreating Ahom forces turned back with a renewed vigour and a grim determination to annihilate the enemy. Thus while preparation were going on for a war, Chakradhvaj the Ahom ruler passed away in 1669 A.D. and he was succeeded by his brother
Sunyatpha alias Upayaditya Singha. Taking advantage of the situation Ram Singha consolidated his position and prepared himself for another war with the Ahoms. A severe naval battle was fought on 6th April 1671 at Saraighat in Gauhati whereby the Ahoms inflicted a crushing defeat on the Mughal navy followed by another victory or land.\textsuperscript{52} The Mughals were pursued down to the river Manas in Goalpara. Meanwhile Raja Ram Singha retreated to Rangamati in March 1671 where he stayed on till 1676 with the hope of invading Assam for the second time.\textsuperscript{53} However, he was called back to Delhi by Aurangzeb. Meanwhile Lachit Barphukan who was suffering from a terminal illness soon died after his memorable victory at Saraighat. Thus the Ahoms came to acquire the whole of Koch Hajo up to the river Manas in Goalpara.

The period following the battle of Saraighat is marked by various court intrigues and conspiracies which resulted in political instability throughout the kingdom of Assam. This period is marked by the accumulation of power in the hands of the Ahom
nobles who used it for the fulfillment of their selfish ends which became detrimental to the peace and security of the state. One such noble was Debera Barbarua who was responsible for the murder of many Ahom princes succeeding to the throne. They became fed up with such conspiracies and thus requested Prime minister Atan Burgohain not only to take charge of the administration but also to ascend the Ahom throne which was lying vacant on account of the murder of Ahom princes in quick succession. Meanwhile Atan Burgohain simply refused, nevertheless this honour and confidence which he commanded from the people roused the jealousy of his friend Laluk Barphukan who treacherously murdered him.\textsuperscript{54} Laluk Barphukan followed in the footsteps of Debera Barbarua and began his act of cruelty murdering the princes of the royal family. His cruel acts became a matter of great resentment among the Ahoms and he was put to death by a person named Bhotai Deka.\textsuperscript{55} This political instability encouraged the Mughals to occupy lower Assam including Gauhati for some time.\textsuperscript{56} Nevertheless after the death of Laluk
Barphukan the Ahom prince Gadadhar Singha who was previously absconding then ascended the Ahom throne in 1681 A.D. Immediately after his accession he dispatched a large army against the Mughal governor of Kamrup. Soon Gadadhar Singha won a decisive victory over the Mughals at the battle of Itakhuli in 1682 A.D. This victory was decisive in the sense that with this defeat the threat of Mughal invasion disappeared forever from the region and since then the river Manah remained as the permanent western boundary between the Mughals and the Ahoms.57

These recurring conflicts between the Mughals and the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms went a long way in facilitating an increased Mughal intervention in the political life of the region. As mentioned earlier in the course of these recurring conflicts, the Mughals were able to conquer as well as to establish their rule over parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, whereby they introduced their own system of administration. At the same time the establishment of Muslim colonies in the conquered regions
resulted in a significant increase in the Muslim population in Assam, the introduction of Mughal administrative units and divisions effected drastic changes in the administrative set up of the region, of which a detail analysis of these aspects is dealt with in the subsequent chapters.
1 D. Nath, *History of the Koch Kingdom (1515-1615)*, Delhi, 1989, p. 34.
   D. Nath, ibid., p. 61.
6 Darrang Raj Vamsavali, VV 582, 584.
8 Darrang Raj Vamsavali, VV 667.
9 D. Nath, *op.cit.*
11 *Akbarnama*, pp. 1068, 1084.
   E.A. Gait, *History of Assam*, p. 64.
14 *Baharistan I Ghaibi I*, p. 40.
17 *Baharistan I Ghaibi I*, p. 229.
19 Darrang Raj Vamsauali, V 778.
20 *Ibid* VV 780-785.
25 *Satsari Assam Buranji*, pp. 80-81.
   *Baharistan I Ghaibi*, pp. 253, 330.
28 Assam Buranji, pp. 100-101.
    Kamrupar Buranji, Guwahati, 1987, p. 35.
29 Kamrupar Buranji, p. 35.
    Assam Buranji, pp. 100-101.
30 Padshah Assam Buranji, pp. 100, 102.
    Assam Buranji, pp. 100-101.
    E.A Gait, op.cit., p. 115.
    J.N. Surkar, op.cit., p. 82.
31 Padshah Assam Buranji, pp. 92-93, 168-169.
32 S.N. Bhattacharya, op.cit., p. 284.
    Kamrupar Buranji, p. 42.
    E.A. Gait, op.cit., p. 118.
34 Padshah Assam Buranji, pp. 100, 102.
    E.A Gait, op.cit., p. 115.
    234.
37 S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burgohain and His Times, p. 23.
38 J.N. Sarkar. The Life of Mir Jumla, Section B, pp. 231f.
    Alamgirnama, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 222-223.
    S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burgohain and His Times, p. 281.
    E.A. Gait, op.cit., p. 127.
40 E.A. Gait, op.cit., p. 128.
41 Padshah Assam Buranji, pp. 92-93, 172-173.
43 S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Burgohain and His Times, p. 25.
44 Riyaz-us-Salehin, (reprint), New Delhi, 1975, pp. 224-225.
    E.A. Gait, op.cit., p. 134.
    Satsari Assam Buranji, p. 90.

45 Alamgirmuna, pp. 222-223.

46 *Satsari Assam Buranjii*, p. 90.


48 *Kamrupar Buranjii*, p. 63.


50 *Satsari Assam Buranjii*, p. 33.

51 *Kamrupar Buranjii*, p. 91.


53 E.A. Gait, *op.cit.*, p. 139.

54 *Kamrupar Buranjii*, pp. 91-92.


56 *Kamrupar Buranjii*, pp. 93-94.


59 *Kamrupar Buranjii*, Harkanta Sardar Amir Barua, p. 163.


62 *Satsari Assam Buranjii*, p. 98.