CHAPTER IV
RAN SINGH'S CAMPAIGN

The death of Mir Jumla on 31 March 1663, left the Mughals in difficult situation in Bengal. The campaigns in the North East had taxed the Imperial treasury in a handsome manner, and the Bengal famine of 1662, had its scorching trials on the administration of the province needing time for the local administration to recoup fully. To make matter worse, the authorities in Delhi could not immediately find a Governor for the eastern subah. The task was indeed difficult considering the personality and efficiency of Mir Jumla. Shaista Khan, until then commanding the Mughal forces against the Marathas in the Deccan, took over as the Subedar of Bengal in December 1664. During this interregnum period of more than a year, the administration of the province was absolutely looked after by Emperor's nominees, Dilir Khan and Daud Khan respectively, who had to be so much involved in running the normal administration of the extensive province that they had hardly any time to follow up the victory of Mir Jumla in the North-East or even to contribute to the maintenance of the status quo there.

NORTH-EASTERN SCENE

Meanwhile, the news of the demise of Mir Jumla, the conqueror of Cooch Behar and Assam, on his return march to

1. H. Blochmann, "Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo, and Assam, in the 16th and 17th centuries, according to the Akbarnama, the Padishanama, and the Fathiya-i-Ibriya" J.A.S.B. Vol.XLI, 1872, pp 88, 93.
Dacca was indeed a relief to the vanquished rulers in the north-east. The Ahoms, it may be recalled, were to pay huge indemnity according to the Treaty of Chilajorighat. Chakradhvaj Singh, who succeeded JayadhvaJ Singh on latter's death, as the Ahom monarch in November 1663 conveniently evaded the payment. The Mughal Faujdar of Gauhati, who was exasperated over the delay in the payment of the balance could not do any thing more than pressing for it with growing harshness. The Mughals, however, did not leave their occupied territory in lower and central Assam, and Kajali on the south bank and Basbari on the north bank in modern Nowgong district continued to be the eastern outpost 1667. The Raja of Dimarua, who did not personally visit Mir Jumla on his return journey but had only sent his mother and nephew, did not affirm his allegiance to the Mughals, nor did pay any tribute as demanded by Mir Jumla, and seems to have taken an independent posture. Jasomanta Roy, the Raja of Jayantia, who had, as it has been mentioned already, sympathised with the Ahom monarch during Mir Jumla's invasion and indulged in a series of raids in Mughal Sylhet continued to harass the local authorities in that sarkar in the same method. The Raja also sent an envoy to convey his congratulation to Chakradhvaj Singh on latter's accession to the Ahom throne. Chakradhvaj Singh, in return wrote to the Raja of Jayantia expressing gratitude for the sympathy during Mughal invasion. He also sent valuable presents for the Raja and sought his friendship.

5. Ibid., pp 29-30.
6. Ibid., pp 37-38.
The Raja of Jayantia also pledged for the continuation of the friendly relation.\(^7\)

Interestingly enough, the State of Darrang whose Raja Makaradhvajnarayan took the side of the Mughals during Mir Jumla’s invasion and died in the battle of Nathurapur at the hands of the Ahoms and there widowed queen, the Regent of the state called on Mir Jumla on his return march to reaffirm the vassal status of Darrang to the Mughals also behaved in a curious manner. Indradaman, new Raja of Darrang also sent congratulatory message to Chakradhvaj Singh on his assumption of the Ahom authority paving apparently the way for the restoration of the friendly relations between the two parted neighbours.\(^8\)

The relations with the erstwhile rival state of Cachar, however, did not improve much. It is evident from the fact that when Chakradhvaj Singh demanded the surrender of Barchetia, an Ahom Officer, who had taken shelter in Cachar deserting his monarch during Mir Jumla’s invasion, from Birdarpanarayan, the Raja of Cachar, the latter refused to comply with on the ground that the officer had sought refuge in his territory and it is the duty of the monarch to protect him. Nevertheless, the Raja of Cachar offered to help the Ahom monarch in case there is repetition of the Mughal invasions.\(^9\) A more serious defiance of the Mughal authority was persisted on by its

\(^8\) *Assam Buranji* Mss No. 44, Tr No. 259, D.H.A.S. (Gauhati).
\(^9\) S.K. Bhuyan (ed) *Kachari Buranji*, pp 52-54; *Assam Buranji*, pp 89-90.
earliest vassal in the north-east, the State of Cooch Behar. Mir Jumla, it may be recalled, totally annexed Cooch Behar and organised it as a Mughal sarkar when Raja Prannarayan was forced to take refuge in Bhutan. But Prannarayan took the advantage of the difficulties of Mir Jumla’s forces during the occupation of Garhgaon to recover his territory and set himself as an independent ruler till the arrival of Shaista Khan at Bengal and Cooch Behar had since then thrown away the Mughal suzerainty. The return of Prannarayan to power was in a royal fashion. As soon as he came down from his refuge in the hills, the people of the state gathered round him, killed the Mughal thanadar of Kanthalbari and forced Isfandiar Beg, the Mughal Subedar of Cooch Behar to evacuate the capital by cutting his supplies. The detachment under Askar Khan retired to Ghoraghat beyond the southern boundary of Cooch Behar, while the troops under Isfandiar joined the retreating army of Mir Jumla in February 1663. All that the Mughals could do was to occupy the Kuch Chakla of Fathepur. Mir Jumla had no time or energy to pacify Prannarayan after the signing of the treaty of Giljargarh.

AHOM MOVES

Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch, took the advantage of the Mughal indifference towards north-east immediately following the death of Mir Jumla. He had been able to maintain good relations with Jayantia. The attitude

of the Raja of Cachar was also not hostile. The friendly gesture of Raja of Darrang was both surprising and encouraging to the monarch. Chakradhvaj Singh was further emboldened to reassert himself from the Mughal yoke by the independent posture maintained by the Raja of Cooch Behar. It may be recalled that this state had been subsidiary to the Mughals ever since the rise of the Imperial power in Bengal and served as a catalyst to the Mughal manoeuvres in Assam. Now that Cooch Behar had taken a professedly anti-Mughal stand, the Ahom monarch endeavoured to capitalise the situation by establishing diplomatic relations with Cooch Behar. The exchange of letters and messengers professing friendly relations followed during this period between the courts of Cooch Behar and Assam.

Having successfully pacified the rulers of the neighbouring states in the region, Chakradhvaj Singh set himself in revitalising his administration. The morale of the people had been greatly undermined during Mir Jumla's invasion. Most of them had become panicky, or the opportunists entertained secret sympathy with the powerful invaders. For example, Neog Phukan and few others were engaged in a treasonable correspondence with the Mohammedans and were arrested and put to death. Again most of the officers who had taken shelter in the neighbouring areas returned to their duties.

resumption of Mughal hostilities. Further the Ahom monarch had taken a position that threatened the security of the occupied territory of the Mughals in Assam Valley. As a matter of fact, the years immediately following the death of Mir Jumla constitute a remarkable chapter in the Ahom history in as much as they brought their diplomacy, arduous and sense of prestige to the highest pitch of efficiency and organisation.\textsuperscript{13} Atan Buragohain, the Prime Minister advised the Ahom monarch for preparing the army and to collect a sufficient stock of food provisions and war materials so that hostilities might be continued for a considerable number of years in such an eventuality. The Ahom monarch also nourished the scheme to fall upon the Mughals and to oust them from the occupied territory. Chakradhvaj Singh had already engaged himself in repairing the demaged forts at Sambhara and Patakallang and in restoring his army to a state of efficiency.\textsuperscript{14}

\section*{Shaista Khan and Frontier States}

The ascendancy of Shaista Khan as the viceroy of Bengal in 1664 could partially repair the lost position of the Mughals in the north-east. An experienced and capable administrator and veteran general, the new Nawab was determined to carry to a successful conclusion of the half-done work of Mir Jumla. In March 1664, he reached Rajmahal and announced his plan to conquer Cooch Behar on his way to Dacca. Prannarayan, the Raja of Cooch Behar, was alarmed

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 200-202.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
by the news and considered it prudent to save his kingdom by a final submission to the Mughals. He offered to pay a sum of five lacks and a half in a few instalments as tributes to the Mughal Emperor and as war indemnity to the Nawab. Shaista Khan was then more concerned to subdue the ruler of Aracan who was responsible for inspiring Mughal depredations in Lower Bengal. The Nawab, therefore, agreed to the terms offered by Prannarayan and ordered the Mughal army to withdraw from the Kuch frontier when the first instalments were already paid by the Raja. The Cooch Behar state thus once again became vassal to the Mughals. Prannarayan died in 1666 and was succeeded by his son, Roshnara, whose accession was followed by a series of internal rebellions and misgovernment in the state that prevented it from raising head against the Mughals for a long time.15

The news of Shaista Khan's advance and submission of Cooch Behar terrified Jasamanta Roy, the Raja of Jayantia, who had indulged in a series of raids in the Mughal territory since the time of Mir Jumla. The Raja now sent a letter of submission to the Nawab and offered the best elephants in his possession as tributes through the Faujdar of Sylhet. The frontier states of Jayantia also thus acknowledged the superior authorities of the Mughals, a no mean achievement of Shaista Khan. The next important success of Shaista Khan was the conquest of Chittagong and suppression of the Mughals.

in the extreme souther eastern portion of Bengal in 1666. Chittagong had for sometime been a bone of contention between the Mughals and the Burmese ever since the Burmese King of Aracan had wrested the districts from the Sultans of Bengal in 1459. The rulers of Aracan had also incurred the vengeance of Aurangzeb by harbouring the fugitive Prince Shah Suja and the dislodged Raja Govindamanikya of Tripura in an apparent scheme of making a common cause against the Mughals. Besides being a strategic base in the waterways of Bengal delta, Chittagong had been the nerve centre of the European mercantile concerns of the various nationalities like the Dutch, Portuguese, French and the English. The commercial rivalry between the European contenders than on a global basis also coloured the area by the settlements of Portuguese adventurers in Aracan and their usurpation of some island tracts in the region. The matter came to head when the island of Sandip was conquered by the Aracanese from a Portuguese and the Dutch factors solidly entrenched themselves in Aracan politics. The European settlers and their local converts known as Feringis and the Mughal tribal subjects of the ruler of Aracan indulged in frequent raids in Chittagong and adjoining areas causing indignation and harassment to the Mughal frontier administration. An early task of Mir Jumla, it may be recalled, was to lead a campaign against Aracan. But his involvement in Assam and the way his life was cut short, left no opportunity for the Nawab to translate that Imperial scheme into action. Naturally, it remained
for Shaista Khan as the successor of Mir Jumla to take up the unfinished task of his predecessor, particularly because the Moghals and the Feringis at the behest of the ruler of Aracan, took the full advantage of Moghul involvement in Assam and the Deccan and their considerable indifference towards the south-east frontier to strike terror in the region. 17

The task was, indeed, difficult as the Aracanese cannons were beyond counting and their war vessels were more numerous than the waves of the sea. They also enjoyed the support of the European defenders particularly the Portuguese and Dilawar Khan, a runaway captain of the Moghul navy, who had established himself as the King of Sandip, had assumed an anti-Moghul posture. The circumstances, however, turned the table in favour of the Moghals. A feud broke out between the Moghul ruler of Chittagong and the local Portuguese with the result that entire Feringi colony crossed over the Noakhali with their war boats and other weapons and sought refuge from the Moghul commandant there. Shaista Khan won over these Feringis by extending relief and utilised their services in recovering Chittagong. The defected Moghul Chief of Sandip was easily defeated and captured in November 1665. The major naval battle with the Moghul rulers of Chittagong occurred in January 1666 in which the Feringis led the Moghals, culminating in the Moghul occupation of Chittagong and since then Chittagong was made the seat of Moghul Faujdar. 18

The renewed Mughal attention towards the eastern frontier and their solid entrenchment in Chittagong was bound to cast consequential effect upon the neighbouring principality of Tripura. Nakshatra Roy who, it may be recalled, occupied the throne in 1661 by forcing Govindamanikya to escape to Aracan, could not rule over that State for long. Govindamanikya recovered the throne in 1667, as it is said to be with the help of the King of Aracan. There is controversy among the historians about the manner in which Govindamanikya regained the throne. According to some authorities, he became a ruler for the second time after the death of Chatramanikya, while others suggest that he recaptured the throne by assassinating Nakshatra Roy. Be that as it may, no one has so far disputed the fact of his return to power at the support of the Aracanese ruler. It is not unlikely that this was prompted by the policy of the Aracanese to install an ally on the Mughal frontier after the fall of their vassal Magh ruler in Chittagong. It was but natural therefore, that Govindamanikya was commissioned to oppose the Mughals and in the circumstances, his relation with the latter was bound to be strange. The Raja of Tripura, however, frustrated the hope of Aracanese by his submission to the Mughal authorities. Immediately on his accession to the throne, Govindamanikya made peace with the Mughals by agreeing to give them five elephants annually as tribute. Tripura thus again became tributary to the Mughals. Till his death in 1676, Govindamanikya maintained peaceful relations with the Mughals. The royal chronicle
maintains that he subsequently got permission by the Nawab of Bengal for pilgrimage in Bengal and holy both in the Ganges. 19

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

Having thus settled his accounts with all the frontier states in the frontier from Cooch Behar to Tripura, Shaista Khan was placed in an advantageous position to insist on the demand for payment of the tributes and balance of the indemnity from the Ahoms. The refusal of the Ahom monarch to comply with the demand and his preparations for war left the only

WAR CRY OF THE AHOMS

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

The Ahom monarch considered it as an insult and was determined to curb the Mughal audacity. He began his preparations for the war on an extensive scale which continued for two long

20. Assam Buranj, Nss No.44, Tr. No. 259, D.H.A.S.(Gauhati); H. Goswami, Purani Assam Buranj, p 103.
years. He personally looked after the training of the soldiers, and instructed them about the proper method of plying bows and other weapons of war. A Phukan was placed in charge of a contingent of 6,000 soldiers that could spearhead the aggression. When these preparations were completed, the expeditionary forces marched past the monarch in their final manoeuvres, and Chakradhraj Singh expressed satisfaction at their dash and gallantry. The general selected to command the expedition was Lachit, the son of Noma Tamuli Barbarua, the great statesman - warrior of the reign of Pratap Singh. Lachit had given proofs of his gallantry and leadership in the operations against Mir Jumla's troops and in the various offices he had occupied. He was appointed commander-in-chief of the army, and was also made Barphukan and placed in charge of the civil administration of Lower Assam. Lachit Barphukan inherited from his father this supreme sense of duty, and the capacity for self-effacement in maintaining the integrity of the State.

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

RESUMPTION OF GAUHATI

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

The Faujdar, Syed Firoz Khan then sent a message offering his submission to the Ahoms and asking the latter to desist from firing their guns or shooting their arrows.

27 S.K. Bhuyan (ed), Assam Buranji pp 92-93; H. Goswami, Purani Assam Buranji, pp 104-05; S.K. Bhuyan (ed), Kamrupar Buranji, p 92.
This was done, and the battle came to an end. The Faujdar and his associates were captured and brought up as prisoners. The Ahoms also got possession of the Mughal stores consisting of war provisions, boats, horses, elephants, camals, bullocks, buffaloes and a large quantity of gold, silver, brass and copper. As a result of the defeat of the Mughals, the territory extending up to the river Manas, became once more a part of that Ahom Kingdom. The temporary fortifications at Kaliabar were converted into a strong and permanent citadel and fort known as 'Rangali buruz'.

Thus within the short space of two months the Ahoms succeeded in recovering their lost possession and along with it their lost prestige and glory. Chakradhavaj Sing then proceeded in person to Biswanath and performed there a colossal sacrifice in the way of thanks giving to the gods for conferring upon him the honour of a victory. The success of the Ahoms in recovering possession of Gauhati and Lower Assam marked an important event in the history of their conflicts with the Mughals. This event was inscribed on a cannon found at Silghat, near Simlagarh Fort of Nowgong District. The inscription refers to the recovery of the weapon by King Chakradhavaj Sing after having destroyed the Mohammedans in battle in Saka 1589.

The reoccupation of Gauhati by the Ahoms was followed by

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

Atan Buragohain was asked by the monarch to erect the necessary fortifications on both banks of the river. The Buragohain employed all the resources at his disposal, and finished the work within an unexpectedly short time. Lachit Barphukan was also summoned to post a contingent of soldiers at each strategic point under the command of an able officer.

The Barphukan used to inspect the strong and vulnerable points

32. S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Buragohain and his times, p 63.
in the area on the pretext of hunting on horseback or on foot. The warzone extended from Pandu to Asurar Ali on the south bank, and from Agiahati to Kurua on the north. Itakhuli Hill, commanding a view of the entire area, was the seat of the General Lachit, while the Buragshah remained in charge of the northern division at his base on the Lathia parbat. Thus the Ahoms stood ready for launching fresh encounter with the imperialists.

MUGHAL REACTION

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

Ram Singh was accompanied in his expedition by Rashid Khan who had been in Assam during Mir Jumla's invasion and

34. Ibid.,
who had served as Faujdar of Gauhati for four years. It was the practice of Emperor Aurangzeb to depute a Muslim Officer as second-in-command when a Hindu was placed in sole charge of an expedition, especially when the enemy himself was a Hindu. It was in pursuance of this policy that Dilir Khan had been sent with Mirza Raja Jai Singh in the war against Shivaji.³⁷

Ram Singh also met Nawab Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal Subah at Dacca. Being a close and intimate friend of Mirza Raja Jai Singh, now deceased, the Nawab received Ram Singh very cordially, and offered to help him in all possible ways. He at once sanctioned a reinforcement of 2,000 soldiers from the Bengal command.³⁸

RAM SINGH AT RANGAMATI

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

BARPHUKAN'S STRATEGY

Vigilance is the prince of freedom, and Ahom spies had followed Ram Singh's army since their departure from Delhi. Then the news of Ram Singh's departure from Dacca was promptly communicated to Ahom general. So the Barphukan, in order to lure the invaders into the war-zone of Gauhati, surrounded by hills on all sides with forts and garrisons at regular intervals, despatched three Rajkhowas to Manas river to seduce the enemy into the neighbourhood of Gauhati. The Assamese Commanders met at Gauhati and offered their prayer to the temple of Kamakya for success against the invaders. The waters on the north bank of the Brahmaputra were guarded by Pani - Dihingia Rajkhowa, nephew of the Dihingia Phukan, with 80 Char-baches and Buragdathin Phukan with 100 char-baches.

In April 1669, Raja Ram Singh pitched his camp at Sualkuchi on the north bank and deployed his soldiers in the outlying villages situated in the immediate vicinity of the Ahom fortifications. His enthusiasm was marred by the arrogant attitude of Rashid Khan, the Faujdar of Gauhati. The misunderstanding between the two gave an advantageous position to the Ahom general, who tried to gain time in order to consolidate and perfect his preparations. The Barphukan despatched a messenger to Ram Singh to enquire of the reasons for his coming to Assam, adding that if there was any issue or dispute it could be settled by peaceful negotiations.

41. Ibid., pp 93-94.
war was not the only method for such settlement. In return, Ram Singh demanded the restoration of the limits fixed in 1639, in default of which the Barphukan was asked to give the Rajput Raja 'a fight for an honour'.

**EARLY ENCOUNTER**

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

Sporadic engagements accompanied by proposals of peace continued during 1669 and 1670. The Mughals made an attempt to enter Gauhati through Darrang but it was baffled through the timely warning of the vassal Raja of Rani. In an encounter near Sesa river in the vicinity of Agliathutik

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44. E. Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp 159-60.
the Ahoms first obtained a victory over the Mughals but Ram Singh took the field in person and inflicted a crushing defeat upon the Ahoms. At Rangmahal on the north bank, the Ahom forces led by Gohaln-Phukan, first encountered a reverse. But the Commanders re-arranged the war bases and compelled the Mughals to withdraw their forces from the attacks without achieving any tangible result.47

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

47. S.K. Bhuyan, Atan Buragohain and his times, p 71.
Ram Singh now thought that the disaster at Aliabar must have humbled the spirit of the Assamese and he repeated his demand for the evacuation of Gauhati with vehemence and rigour. Then conciliatory attempts having failed, the Rajput general now adopted the two other stereotyped methods of overcoming an enemy by way of rupture and gifts. Further Ram Singh tried to bribe the Phukans and Rajkhowas but no such corruption could contaminate the patriotic zeal of the Assamese commanders. No other course was now left to Ram Singh but a definite attack on Gauhati. Ram Singh proposed to enter Gauhati by the breach in the rampart at Anchuradari with a detachment of his cavalry, by carrying his men and horses in boats across the river.

At this critical juncture, Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch died in April 1670. His brother Maju Gohain, thenceforth known as Sunyatpha, succeeded him. He assumed the Hindu name Udayaditta Singh and married his deceased brother’s wife. The leadership of the new monarch fell far short of the spirited exertions of his patriotic predecessor. The long continuance of hostilities without any decisive result produced some discontent in the Ahom camp. Ram Singh’s demands for the restoration of the limits of 1639 received a more encouraging response from the Burphukan and his lieutenants; and the diplomatic negotiations became more cordial than before. Nevertheless, Atan Buragbhair, the Prime Minister,

52. E. Gait, op.cit., p 160.
did not support this change in the attitude of his colleagues.\(^53\)

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

**AHOM SUCCESS AT SARAIGHAT**

Lachit Barphukan sent messages from his sick-bed expressing his determination to die on the spot rather than desert his charge. He was removed on his bed to the gate-house from where he observed the fury of the attack made by the Mughals upon his boats and sailors on the waters of the Brahmaputra. On an auspicious moment the plan for counter-attack was completed by Lachit Barphukan and boarded his boat accompanied by six other war-vessels. The naval war fares under Ram Singh suffered immense set-back.\(^56\)

The appearance of Lachit Barphukan filled the hearts of his soldiers with animation and courage. He rushed towards the enemy with his seven boats and was soon joined by Ahom fleet and in the fight that ensued the Mughals could not

53. S.K. Bhuyan, *Ahom Buragohain and His Times*, pp 75-76.
54. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p 101.
stand the well-directed attack of the Ahom soldiers.\textsuperscript{57} The combat came to an end, and it was decisive victory for the Ahoms. This fierce engagement became one of the most eventful battles known as the battle of Sariaghat. The Mughals were chased down to Pandu, and then beyond Assam's western frontier at Manas river and the Ahoms retained their possession of Gauhati and Kamrup.\textsuperscript{58}

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

\section*{Aftermath}

Hills to the Mughal garrison at Rangamati, and waited there up to 1676 for an opportunity to renew the Assam campaign. All Ahom officers remained vigilant in securing the occupied territories from the Mughal authorities. However, Udayaditya had to manage the affairs of the capital with the aid of few inferior ministers. The three ministers, the Buragohain, the Barpatra Gohain and the Bargohain, paid occasional visits to Garhgaon, but their temporary intervention could not offer any effective check to the designs and machinations of ambitions and unscrupulous nobles.

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

The wisdom and foresight of Atan Buragohain came out in the advice he tendered to Udayaditya Sing who launched an expedition against the Dafla tribe living in the adjoining hills of North Lakhimpur. The western front of Ahom territory reached upto Hadira, opposite Goalpara. Chandranarayan alias Suryanarayan, son of Mohendranarayan and grandson of Balinayarayan was installed as tributary Raja of Darrang and Gandharbanarayan as Raja of Beltola. The Bar Barua and the

Bar C^ain were entrusted with the arrangements for the
defence of Upper Assam. 64

After March, 1671, Ram Singh was virtually isolated
at Rangasati. There he spent his days in the midst of worries
and uncertainties. At long last in 1676 he received permission
to leave Bengal, and reached the imperial court in June. 65 It
may be recalled that the Mughal authorities of Bengal under
Shaista Khan did not take active initiative in reviving the
strength of Ram Singh in the later stage. Even the imperial
government was not timely apprised as done in the case of Mir
Jumla's campaign. Evidently the Ahom Monarch could systemati-
cally consolidate his available sources of strength despite
the defection of few court officials. 66

Indeed, Udayaditya Singh did not live to reap the
fruits of his well-earned victory. He fell a victim to a
palace conspiracy set up in the interest of his younger brother
and put to death in August 1676. He was murdered by Debera,
a Hazarika from Dakhinpat, in collaboration with Saru Cohaín,
the monarch's brother. Nevertheless, Udayaditya Singh gave
unbounded hope and aspiration to the people of Assam by the
conquest of Kamrup from the Mughals and the construction of
strong fortifications at Gauhati. 67

The Mughal Viceroy was then Shaista Khan whose age
reached about sixtythree. During his two term viceroyalty

65. Sir J.N. Sarkar, op.cit., Vol. III, p 190; H.Blochmann,
op.cit., p 99.
67. Ibid., pp 917-18.
(1664-78 and 1679-88), he could not give any encouraging hope for reviving the policy matters towards north-east frontier. He came to Johangirmagar with his five sons, two sons-in-law, Nawab Nurulla Khan, Muhammad Haqim and many other Mansabdars. In youth he had been remarkable for his military capacity and energy, especially in the Deccan campaign of Shah Jahan. But in Bengal he was a tired old man, who left campaigning to his subordinates while he himself spent his days in ease and pleasure amidst his numerous harems.

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

Shaista Khan virtually established a family ruler in Bengal. Indeed, his sons were gifted with adventuring spirit. Thus Buzurg Ummed Khan became victorious in Chittagong campaign.

in 1666 and then promoted to Subahdar of Bihar. The next
sons Zafar Khan was posted as thanadar of Chittagong; Abu
Nasar as the deputy Subahdar of Orissa and Iradat Khan as
Faujdar of Cooch Behar respectively. Thus one family ruled
all divisions of Bengal, and ruled them worthily. Shaista
Khan did not dare to take the risk of Assam campaign in
person. Moreover, the Emperor was pre-occupied with the
North-western and Deccan problems. Evidently, the Emperor's
attention towards the military projects of Bengal Viceroy was
not seriously taken. Aurangzeb was bound to be satisfied by
the substantial cash amount provided by Shaista Khan.

BEHIND THE VICTORY

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

After the death of Mir Jumla, the Mughal navy decayed
in the eastern sector, Shaista Khan's efforts did not yield
expected results due to apathetic attitude of the European
Factors. A deadlock was created by the imposition of
restrictions on the existing trade facilities previously

73. S.K. Bhuyan (ed) Kamrupar Buranj, p 99; S.N. Khan,
enjoyed by the European traders. Consequently, Shaista Khan was deprived of receiving source materials so long controlled by the foreign powers in Bengal.  

When the naval strength of Bengal was on decline, the Ahoms began massive preparations of war-boats. The Ahom war-boats had certain advantages in comparison with the Mughal boats. The Ahom war-ships were lighter and speedy whereas those of the Mughals were larger and heavier. Further, in the north-eastern part of Bengal, jungly hills, morasses and innumerable brooks rendered the cavalry practically useless. It may be recalled that the Ahom monarch did not encourage the maintenance of cavalry. The trained elephants were used by the Ahoms in major encounters. Like the Mughals and Feringis of Arakan range who traversed the numerous rivers and streams of south-eastern Bengal, the mainstay of the Ahom organisation was the war fleet. Moreover, prolonged rains and almost annual floods in Assam valley made any campaign or transportation of merchandise absolutely impossible without a strong fleet. Above all, "the course and duration of the Ahom-Mughal contests were largely determined by the physical features of the Brahmaputra."  

Certain other factors also helped the strong organisation of the Ahom flotilla. In Assam there was abundant raw materials for building war-boats of various types. The people living in the river side of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries had a natural skill and bravery in the art of plying boats. The Ahom

monarchs appointed specialised officials for royal navy. Thus the naubachis had an allotment of 1000 men for manning the royal boats, while the Nausalia Phukan was entrusted with one thousand carpenters for building and repairing the boats.77

The Mughals were severely terrorised and harassed by the guerilla wars waged by the Ahoms as the Marathas in the south. Ram Singh, the General of Aurangzeb remarked that "every Assamese soldier is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and in wielding guns and campons. I have not seen such specimens of versatility in any other part of India"78. The Ahom army largely consisted of infantry, navy and elephants. But on land the army mainly depended on the paiks. The paik system was the basis not only of the entire socio-political but also of the military organisation as well.79 Nevertheless, "the military system of the Ahoms derived its efficiency from the maximum utilisation of all the resources of the country - its man power, its economic strength its strategic advantages, the religious sentiments of the people, and even their superstition.80 With the help of an organisation based on perpetual vigilance and preparedness, and diplomacy of a high order, the Ahoms maintained their sway over the Brahmaputra valley in an almost uninterrupted manner for six hundred years, and successive generals of the

77. H. Blochmann, *op.cit.*, p 81.
Invading forces – Afghan, Mughal and later on the Burmese – expressed their unstinted admiration of the fighting mettle of the Ahoms, their versatility, and their ability to shrink their differences in the face of a national ordeal.81 A ready militia was always available for quick mobilisation and the pahads took the respective duties under their respective captainship of the Phukans, Rajkhawas, Baruas, Havarikas, Saikias and Boras. The co-operation of the neighbouring tribesmen greatly helped the war-operations of the Ahoms.82

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

The espionage system of Ahoms was though simple but highly efficient and the spies always busied themselves in supplying information about the designs of the neighbours and the resources of the enemy. The Mughal spies had to take more time in collecting news due to communication bottlenecks.

81. Ibid.,
82. Ibid., p 30.
83. Ibid., p 30-31.
So the Ahoms took advantage of the interval, gained additional time by despatching emissaries to the invading generals under countless pretexts, and thereby prefected their own preparation. Usually the Ahoms preferred the Brahmins in the appointment of emissary who could diplomatically silence the arrogant attitude of the Mughal commanders. The net of suspense mystified the Mughal authorities who were always haunted with dubious hopes in their military operations.

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

The hillocks in Assam offered ready made sites for fortifications. The hills on both banks of the Brahmaputra were capped with forts which caused wonder even to the Mughal general Mir Jumla. The mountains in the adjoining areas of Gauhati were strongly fortified and limited with each other by chain of ramparts erected in the intervening plains. The trained soldiers were posted in military outposts to guard

84. Ibid.,
85. Ibid.,
the line of communication. Above all, the military system of the Ahoms was highly organised and it enabled the Ahoms to keep up supremacy over Brahmaputra valley for such a long period. A Muslim historian, Muhammad Kasim, admitted that "the Rajas of Assam had curbed the ambition and checked the conquest of the most victorious princes of Hindustan; the solution of a war against them was baffled the penetration of heroes who have been styled conquerors of the world." 86

Evidently, the Ahoms were in stronger position in comparison to the Mughals. In addition to the great military tradition and organisation, particularly the navy, as discussed above, the geography itself was to their advantage. The partial success of Mir Jumla in temporary occupation of Assam and forcing a treaty on the Ahom monarch were virtually all undone during Ram Singh's campaign. Chakradhvaj Singh, the Ahom monarch, who ascended the throne almost immediately after Mir Jumla's return to Bengal set himself in reorganising the government and the defence of the Ahom state to recoup its lost vaastig. His policy was continued further by his successor Udayaditya Singh. To the fortune of the Ahoms, these two succeeding monarchs were assisted by highly calibrated and dedicated statesman and general in the personalities of Atan Buragahain and Lachit Barphukan respectively. 87 The Mughals suffered handsomely due to lack of geographical knowledge of the area and its strange climate. Neither their army was suitable to the conditions in Brahmaputra valley nor

86. Ibid, p 32.
did they receive adequate support and reinforcement from the Imperial government of Aurangzeb, then so busy in the Deccan wars. Unfortunately for Ram Singh, the Mughal general, he was pitted against the zeal and patriotism of valiant Lachit. The navy that decided the battle of Saraighat, as said already, was an weakness of the Mughals more so, they were destined to fight upstream.

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

88. J. D. Cunningham, A. History of the Sikhs, p 64.
89. Ibid.
Most probably, during the idle days of Ram Singh, the message of Teg Bahadur inspired the Local Rajas and Ahom monarch to reassert their kingly spirit. Thereafter, Teg Bahadur left Rangamati in 1675 for his home, leaving a section of his Sikh followers to settle permanently in Assam, without the sanction of imperial order. Evidently, the Emperor Aurangzeb suspected the performance of the soldier priest and put him to death as a rebel in 1675 with great cruelty in the streets of Delhi.\(^91\)

That Ram Singh did not receive the support and inspiration required in an imperial campaign in a distant frontier from his own government, stood decisively against him. The Mughal general was forced to withdraw him to Rangamati in the west of Assam. This enabled the Ahoms to regain their lost territories in lower Assam and consolidate their position firmly. It is curious to note that Ram Singh who withdrew himself in 1671 encamped there till 1676. It is not clearly known while Ram Singh had to remain at Rangamati for a period of five years and during this period, he was neither called back nor asked to renew the Assam campaign. His stay there was limited only to some border clashes with the Ahoms.\(^92\) Some historians believe that Ram Singh was not called back with an avowed object of Imperial punishment for his failure to uphold Mughal interests in Assam.\(^93\)

\(^{91}\) Sir J.N. Sarkar (tr) *Haider-I-Alamgiri*, p 94.


scientific analysis of the situation. The hypothesis that logically follows is that the matter can be reviewed in the context of the Deccan war of Aurangzeb. It is possible that the Emperor intended to reinforce the detachments under Ram Singh as soon as the Marathas were subdued. As this did never happen and in 1670s the hostilities of the Marathas attained a serious magnitude against the Mughals, Ram Singh had to be called back abandoning the hope of immediately recapturing the ceded territories from the Ahoms. It may also be assumed that the stay of Ram Singh at Rangarati was not without any purpose. These years of apparent inaction could be utilised by the Mughal general in understanding the frontier and establishing diplomatic contacts with the local chiefs.  

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