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**CHAPTER - VIII**  
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## EPILOGUE

The North East and the Mughals came into contact immediately with latter's ascendancy in Bengal. The predecessors of the Mughals, namely the Turko-Afghan rulers of Bengal had endeavoured to extend their influence in the North East; but without any success with the exception of Tripura which experienced the political manoeuvre in a limited scale and the induction of new elements that crept in the social composition of the plains areas of the region through the process of immigration. The Mughal attempts also initially failed to achieve much. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, there were some organised attempts when Jahangir (1605-1627) despatched an expedition which succeeded in subjugating Koch-Hajo in Lower Assam in the western division of the North East and also gained partial success against Cachar and Tripura, besides crushing the strong hold of Afghan nobles in Sylhet, in the Eastern division of the region. The Cooch Behar state had since become a permanent ally of the Mughals, and the Imperial government ruled in Lower Assam through their officers and Jagirdars. In the years following the expedition of 1613 the Mughal attitude towards the North East was mainly influenced by a desire to promote trade and commerce. The Mughal influences began to penetrate in the region that had a

predominantly tribal background through such connections, while in Lower Assam their rule had directly entrenched itself. Similarly, the Sarkars of Mymensing, Sylhet and Chittagong generated influences for the bordering Garo and Khasi hills and Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura. The administration of Prince Shuja, as the governor of Bengal, claimed the acceptance of tributary status by the Rajas of Jayantia, Cachar and Tripura.

The accession of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) to the Mughal throne at Delhi, with which our study begins, ushered in a new era in the history of Mughal relations with North East India due to the aggressive imperialism of the new Mughal emperor. The appointment of Mir Jumla, a shrewd statesman and a close associate of Aurangzeb during his viceroyalty in Deccan further aggravated the situation. The attitude of the Emperor and his shrewd viceroy in the threshold of the North East was coupled with the desire to secure the surrender of Prince Shuja who was one of the strong contenders to the Mughal throne during the War of Succession that preceded the accession of Aurangzeb and who was believed to have taken refuge in Arracan. The reports of his projected campaign to capture the throne of Delhi in league with the rulers of Arracan and Tripura were indeed disturbing for the new administration. Mir Jumla was asked by Aurangzeb to enforce the surrender of fugitive Shuja. The news of the death of Shuja received through the Dutch Factors reduced the necessity of the Arracan campaign. But the policy of expansionism

prevailed. Mir Jumla had even in the past taken keen interest in commercial enterprise and now looked forward towards the promotion of trade and commerce in the Eastern frontier of Bengal. Further, the rulers of the former Mughal dependencies in the North East had taken the advantage of the War of Succession to withdraw their allegiance. The immediate task before the Mughal Viceroy of Bengal was to re-pacify these rulers.

In pursuance of the forward policy of Aurangzeb, Mir Jumla led the campaign against Cooch Behar and Assam. He succeeded in annexing Cooch Behar temporarily as the ruler of the state fled to adjacent Bhutan fearing the vengeance. The State was however, subsequently restored to its former Raja when the latter reaffirmed the allegiance to the Imperial government and undertook to pay tribute annually. Mir Jumla also secured the submission of the rulers of Dimarua and Darrang, the two petty states in Assam valley (former was a vassal to Jayantia and the latter to the Ahoms). Mir Jumla also forced his way to Garhgaon, the Ahom capital. Jayadhvaj Singh (1648-63), the Ahom monarch signed the Treaty of Ghilaj<sup>o</sup>rightat, accepting the Mughal suzerainty and undertaking to pay war indemnity, tribute and hostage. The river Bharali came to be recognised as the Ahom-Mughal boundary and steps were immediately taken to organise Mughal administration in the occupied areas.

The withdrawal of Mir Jumla however, enabled the Ahom

monarch to scrap the Treaty. The Ahoms under Chakrdhvaj Singh (1663-1669) and Udayadity Singh (1669-73) virtually raised an war cry against the Mughals. They recovered Gauhati and endeavoured to push their boundary westward by liberating the ceded areas. The attitude of the Ahom government produced sharp reaction in the Mughal camp and Shaista Khan, the viceroy of Bengal insisted on the forward policy. The Imperial government sent a fresh expedition under Raja Ram Singh, the Mughal general. In the historic battle of Saraighat the Mughals met with crushing defeat and Raja Ram Singh had to retreat.

The withdrawal of Ram Singh from Saraighat synchronised the virtual end of the Mughal challenge in the North-East. The authorities in Delhi became so much indifferent towards this frontier that they even failed to recall Ram Singh who encamped himself at Rangamati for about seven years. As a matter of fact, the government of Aurangzeb was then more occupied in the North West where they had to reckon with the challenges offered by the formidable Marathas, Rajputs, Jats, Sikhs and other martial races. The inaction on the part of the Mughals was therefore, not quite unnatural. Similar inaction was noticed on the part of the Ahoms who failed to capitalise the situation to recover their ceded territories in Lower Assam and even to extend their frontier westward. The Ahom state by the time passed through a series of internal dissensions and rebellions that were inspired by the personal ambition of the Princes of royal blood. The only achievement

of the Mughals was the temporary re-occupation of Gauhati and that was made possible by the ruthlessness of a few members of the Ahom nobility. The impact of the Mughal inaction was also felt in other states of the region where the dependent chiefs became assertive. Shaista Khan, the Viceroy of Bengal succeeded in pacifying the Raja of Cooch Behar and the march of his forces to Chittagong prevailed upon the Raja of Jayantia to desist from raiding in the Mughal territory. The internal problem in the state forced the Raja of Tripura to agree to tributary terms as a means to derive stronger authority from the Imperial power. The march of the Mughal forces to Gauhati had the indirect effect of pacifying the chiefs of the petty states in Lower Assam like Bijni and Darrang. The States like Sherpur and Susang in the Mymensing frontier were also assertive, but the conciliatory policy of the Nawab of Bengal avoided the possibility of any major confrontation. The contender to the authority in Laur, in the Khasi hill border, embraced Islam and enjoyed the blessings of the Imperial government. The Mughals thus did not gain politically much beyond mere allegiance of the insignificant rulers, although they could ensure in the process the security of Bengal at a time when they were forced with more serious challenges in the other wing of the Empire.

The things however, changed with the accession of Gadadhar Singh (1681-1696) to the Ahom throne, who revitalised the administration and succeeded finally in recovering Gauhati.

The task of state re-building was carried further by his successor, Rudra Singh (1696-1714), whose administration experienced improvement of the State in all its departments. A shrewd monarch, he planned not only to resist further encroachment on the part of the Mughals in the region but also ventured to lead a concerted campaign in the Mughal Subah of Bengal. He worked on a scheme for the regional solidarity of the North East by enlisting the support and sympathy of all rulers and chieftains of the stipulated region in his proposed challenge of the North East to the Mughals. As a matter of fact, he succeeded in pacifying the erstwhile monarchs of Jayantia, Cooch Behar and the tribal chiefs on the borders of his state and in ascertaining the collaboration of distant Tripura on the extreme eastern end of the region. The Ahom monarch even endeavoured to enlist the sympathy of the Hindu Rajas in Bengal itself. Elaborate preparations were completed for the invasion of Mughal Bengal and a confederate army was raised with contributions from the rulers and chiefs in the region. With the sudden death of Rudra Singh in 1714, with which we close our period, the challenge of the North-East too diluted.

The repeated endeavours of the Mughals to establish their hegemony in the North East had failed to produce the desired result while the attempts of the North Eastern states to push back the Mughals from the fringes of their territories were equally unsuccessful. The North East experienced the major challenges from the Mughals during the period under review. Beyond it, nothing spectacular happened to this

effect. Politically the Mughal influence in the post-1714 period became limited to nominal suzerainty over the minor states on the immediate borders of Bengal to be succeeded in that capacity by the English East India Company ever since their accession to the Dewani of Bengal in 1765.

Nevertheless, the Mughal contact brought in lasting impact on the society and economy of the North East. Such impact could not doubt be registered spontaneously as the Mughals had emerged as the ruling power in Bengal since the reign of Jahangir (1605-27). Although Akbar the great (1556-1605) by issuing a decree in 1586 enlisted Bengal as one of the eleven subahs but the order took a quarter of a century to actually enforce the new type of uniform provincial administration. However, the confronting relations and occasional penetration of the Mughal forces deep in the region accelerated the process of change through augmentation and revitalism.

The formidable Mughal challenge left the rulers of the North Eastern States with only option to strengthen their administration through reforms and even borrowing elements and institutions from the system of the invaders themselves to revitalise their bases and to reckon with the invading forces. The defence structures underwent trials and experiments. The innovations in the form of methods and weapons were vigorously resorted to. The benefits of the presence of the prisoners of war from the Imperial camp



were ungrudgingly availed of. Rudra Singh, the Ahom monarch even recruited civil and revenue officers from Mughal Bengal to strengthen his government. Above all, the region as a whole was roused by the Mughal challenge.

The new spirit had enabled Rudra Singh to bring the region together in order to challenge the Mughals. His proposed invasion of Bengal did not come through, but the pulsating spirit as generated by the wheels of confederacy stabilised for a considerable period and yielded lasting effects to posterity. Till the subjugation of the whole region by the British, there was no major confrontation between the Ahoms and their erstwhile rivals, namely Cachar and Jayantia. The later two states too experienced no repetition of the border clashes. Assam and Cachar were sympathetic towards Manipur when that state was invaded by the Burmese in 1760s. The Raja of Manipur also endeavoured to help the Ahom monarch when Assam was disturbed by the Maumaria upsurge.

The period of Mughal invasions experienced the immigration of various racial elements from the Mughal provinces particularly Bengal. The prisoners of war and the Muslim immigrants were settled by the rulers in their respective states. The settlement of the Sikhs introduced a new religion and a new social group. The local rulers also encouraged immigration from neighbouring Bengal and recruited officials and artisans to strengthen the economy and administration. The new comers irrespective of their caste and creed were assimilated in the local society and they were offered positions according to their talents.

The immigrant Hindus and Muslims alike could be integrated in the local aristocracy depending on their capability. The immigrants contributed to the regional economy by reclaiming land and inducting new technology and skill. The trade and commerce with Bengal besides Himalayan frontiers increased voluminously in the subsequent years which did not fail to attract the attention of the East India Company as well as other European merchants who were then anchored in Mughal Bengal.

The process of immigration from Bengal went unabated in later years. The immigrants also contributed towards the development of language and literature. Changes were noticed in the field of religion and culture. The advent of Vaishnava missionaries in Manipur was indeed revolutionary. Even the Neo-Vaishnavism of Assam underwent changes to be adaptable to the social needs of the emergent populace. The rulers of local states were no doubt the champions of their Hindu faith but they did not fail to patronise the religion of their Muslim subjects. The Pirs and Fakirs were respected in the society. The rulers also made provision for the administration of justice among their Muslim subjects according to the law of Holy Koran. The liberal attitude of the Monarchs brought the subjects of various faiths closer and contributed to the process of social assimilation.