

**AHOM-MUGHAL RELATIONS :
A STUDY IN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY (1600-1663)**

**A THESIS PRESENTED FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
OF THE GAUHATI UNIVERSITY**



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**GAUHATI UNIVERSITY
GAUHATI
1982**



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**Gauhati University
24 November 1962**

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PREFACE

Our work deals with Ahom-Mughal diplomatic relations from 1600 to 1663 A.D. Although studies on the general history of the period are there in a number of works, the subject of our investigation do not appear to have been the subject of detailed investigation at the hands of scholars so far. Ours is a modest attempt at filling a gap in the study of diplomatic history.

This thesis deals with the armed conflict between the Ahoms and the Mughals and their diplomatic relations at different stages of the Seventeenth century till 1663. After the annexation of Koch Kingdoms to the Mughal empire, Assam bore the brunt of Mughal imperialism which eventually led to serious hostilities. In the course of the description of these hostilities some references have been made in regard to the Koch-Mughal wars and their impact on Assam. I have endeavoured to focus the details of the wars and also the nature and working of Ahom diplomacy in relation to their Mughal counterpart. The prolonged hostilities produced great impact on the people of Assam in their political, social, religious and economic life. In view of this reason, emphasis has been laid on the history of the Ahom Kingdom of Assam - its social and political system including the diplomatic ties that the Ahoms maintained with the Mughals.

This contains eleven chapters. The first chapter deals with introduction giving historical background and also the brief history of the Ahoms.

The second chapter deals with the consolidation of Mughal power in Bengal, Koch-Mughal relations and annexation of Koch Kingdoms of Koch Behar and Karrup to the Mughal empire.

The third chapter deals with the circumstances leading to the Ahom-Mughal rivalry followed by armed conflict.

- The fourth chapter contains a brief description of the struggle in Karrup.

The fifth chapter deals with the rebellion of the Koch Chiefs and the hill Rajas in south Kamrup (Dakhinkol) and the Ahom intervention in favour of the native rulers.

Chapter six deals with fresh rebellion in different parts of Koch territory - the Ahom intervention in Dakhinkol, consolidation of Mughal authority in Kamrup and diplomatic efforts for restoration of peace.

The seventh chapter deals with the renewal of Ahom-Mughal hostilities leading to the Mughal victory and the conclusion of the treaty of 1639.

The eighth chapter deals with the maintenance of diplomatic relations and the Ahom conquest of Kamrup.

Chapter nine deals with Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam and the defeat of the Ahoms.

The tenth chapter deals with the Ahom system of diplomacy and its application in the Ahom-Mughal conflict. It is followed by a concluding chapter.

The study is based on an analytical study of both published and unpublished sources.

While preparing this work, use was made of the materials as available in the office of the Director, Historical and Antiquarian studies, Assam. I also collected materials from the National Library, Calcutta, the Gauhati University Library, Assam State Central Library, Assam Legislative Assembly Library, and the Meghalaya State Central Library. Besides these, some published books of eminent authors and unpublished documents collected from individual sources helped me to a great extent in writing my thesis.

SHILLONG
the 24 November 1982

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply indebted to Late Penudhar Sharma, an eminent historian and literateur of Assam for his valuable help and encouragements in writing this thesis.

My thanks are due to Dr. N.N. Borah, Head of the Political Science Department, Sankardev College, Shillong who helped me in numerous ways.

I am also thankful to Shri N.K. Paul Choudhury for helping me with the typing work.

SHILLONG
24 November 1982

GOVINDA BALLAV BOSWAMI

ABBREVIATIONS

J.B.O.R.S.

Journal of the Bihar and Orissa
Research Society

J.A.S.B.

Journal of the Asiatic Society of
Bengal

J.A.R.S.

Journal of the Assam Research
Society

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the Sixteenth century A.D., the Ahom Kingdom of Assam lying at the extreme north-eastern frontier of Mughal India stretched from Sadiya in the east up to the river Barnadi in the north-west and the river Kalong in the south-west. It was closely bordered on the north by a range of mountains inhabited by the Bhutanese, the Akas, the Daflas and the Jhors; on the east by another line of hills inhabited by the Mismis and the Singphos; on the south by the Patkai, Naga, Khasi and the Garo Hills.¹ Due to these natural barriers, Assam was practically impervious to foreign invasions from these directions. In the west it merged in the plains of the Koch Kingdom across the Barnadi and the Kalong rivers. Thus the Kingdom of Assam roughly corresponded to the modern districts of Pirbugarh, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang and Lakhimpur comprising the entire Brahmaputra valley from Sadiya to the neighbourhood of Guwahati. The successive advances of the Assam Kingdom had been westward and the rivers Barnadi,

¹Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.1.

Manas (Manaha), and Sankosh had been the boundary between Assam and its Koch Behar or Mughal India in different ages. In spite of geographical barriers, successive streams of migration took place into this land through the mountain passes and 'duar's (passes) in the north and the north-east. The river Brahmaputra which was navigable throughout the year served as a means of communication between Assam and the rest of India. Since the age of the Epics, Assam was known by different names such as Pragjyotisha or Kamrupa and it had been maintaining political, cultural and commercial contacts with the rest of India as well as other lands in the east and the west.² The present Assamese society is the synthesis of diverse racial cultures and forms basically a part of Indian cultures and traditions.³

The Ahoms are members of the 'Shan' branch of 'Tai' or 'Thai' family of the Mongoloid race. Legend had it that, Khunlung and Khunlai, the two brothers were asked by their grand father, Lengdan (Indra) to

²Basu, N.K., Assam in the Ahom Age, p.2. (Reproduced from Dr. V.S. Agarwalla - All India Oriental Conference, 22nd Session, Gauhati, 1963, pp.1 ff).

³Choudhury, P.C., The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth century A.D., p.118.

come to earth from heaven to establish a Kingdom. They were presented with an idol called 'Somdeo' or magic sword or Hengdan. The Ahoms, however, did not originally claim heavenly origins. Padmeswar Gogoi says, "In the Brahmaputra Valley alone they were looked upon as 'born of the gods' (deo-hans) by the local people, either from their superior physique or from their superior might. The Ahom dynasty is called "Indravamsi" by the Brahmins and hence heavenly."⁴

Prince Sukapha, a descendant of Khunlung and Khunlai left his native state of Manlung in upper Burma with his followers about the year 1215 A.D. after some quarrels with his Kinsmen. For thirteen years Sukapha wandered about the hilly country of Patkai. It divides Assam from upper Burma. He crossed over to this territory which came to be known as Assam. The date of his conquest has been widely accepted to be 1228 A.D.⁵ Gradually they extended their territory after subjugating the local Chiefs, the Barahis and the Morans who were in possession of the neighbouring territories. After wondering from place to place in

⁴Gogoi, P., The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms, p.542.

⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.2.

search of a suitable habitat to settle down, Sukapha arrived at Charaideo in 1253 and built a city there.⁶ He wisely adopted a conciliatory policy towards the conquered tribes by treating them as equals and by encouraging intermarriage he welded them all into one nation.

Sukapha and his followers left their womenfolk in their Shan homeland since they were regarded as unfit to undertake the rigours of long journey. Thus, Sukapha and his followers took to marrying girls from among the conquered tribes.⁷ These tribes used to supply various forest products, such as elephants, dye, honey and mats in lieu of revenue to the Ahom King.⁸

S.K. Bhuyan, on the authority of Harakanta Barua, says that the vanquished Morans and the Barahis also accepted both Sukapha and his followers as men of divine origin. Hence nobody was 'sama' or equal to them and they could be designated as 'a-sama' or 'unparalleled'.⁹ It is generally believed that the word

⁶Gait, E.A., A History of Assam, p.79.
Barua, Harakanta, The Assam Buranjis, p.12.

⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranjis, p.99.
Gait E.A., Op.cit., p.79.

⁸Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.79.

⁹Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.3.

'Assam', the name of the State is derived from this circumstance and that Ahom is a corruption of the word - 'A-Sam' as in the Assamese language, the sibilant 'S' in many cases becomes an aspirate 'H'. Others hold the view that Assam is so called because of the uneven character of the State, composed as it is of hills and plains.¹⁰ The latest view as offered by Padmeswar Gogoi is that 'Assam', the name of the country is from 'A-sam', the country of the 'Sams' which was later Sanskritised into 'A-Sama' from which the forms 'Asom' and 'Ahom' gradually arose.¹¹ The Ahoms called Assam 'Mungdunsukham' the country full of golden gardens because of abundance of natural wealth and beauty.¹²

The period from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth century is marked by consolidation of Ahom power over the neighbouring tribes. Besides the Borahis and the Morans some Naga tribesmen and Kacharis were brought under their domination. The real expansion of the Ahom Kingdom began from the Sixteenth century. Suhungmung Dihingia Raja (1497 - 1539 A.D.) annexed the Kingdom

¹⁰Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit. p.3.

¹¹Gogoi, P., Op.cit., p.19.

¹²Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.80.

of the Chutias centering round their capital Sadiya after a fierce fighting. A new officer of the State, known as the 'Sadiya Khowa Gohain' was appointed to administer this new conquered territory.¹³ The Bhuyan Chieftains who had been ruling in the north bank of the Brahmaputra were brought under Ahom control and made to settle in Bardowa in Nowgong; though their complete subjugation was effected a hundred years later.¹⁴ In 1526, Suhungmung marched against the Kacharis in the Dhansiri valley. The Kachari resistance was crippled and they were driven out from their stronghold at Dimapur. A new official, called the 'Marangikhowa Gohain' was appointed for the newly acquired territory in the Dhansiri valley, north of the river Kalang.¹⁵

The reign of Suhungmung witnessed the emergence of the new Kingdom of Koch Behar on the ruins of Kanata Kingdom on the western frontier of Assam. Biswa Singha, the founder of this new Kingdom visited the Ahom Raja in 1537 as a friendly mission and offered presents.¹⁶ And nearly for one hundred and fifty years the relations

¹³Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.89.

¹⁴Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.4.

¹⁵Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.99.

¹⁶Ibid., p.98.

between Koch Behar and Assam depended on each others' destiny. Envoys were also sent to the Raja of Manipur and presents were exchanged.

The first Mohammedan expedition to Assam under the great Uzir took place in 1527. E.A. Gait, on the authority of 'Riyazus-Salatin' says that the invader was probably Sultan Hussain Shah of Gaur.¹⁷ Ahom history simply records his name as Uzir.¹⁸ S.N. Bhattacharya identifies him with Rukunuddin Ruku Khan who was the wazir and general of Hussain Shah.¹⁹ The Mohammedan force was driven out with heavy losses after being hotly pursued by the Ahoms. Soon thereafter, the invaders renewed their attacks, reinforced by another general, Bit Malik with an army of one thousand horses and fifteen thousand soldiers.²⁰ The combined forces, one under the command of the Uzir advanced by boats up the river Brahmaputra while the other under Bit Malik marched by road, attacked the Ahom forces of Barpatra Gohain at Temani. The attack was repulsed and the Mohammedan Commander, Uzir fled. This was followed by more encounters at Sala, Singri and Khagarijan. At last the

¹⁷Gait, E.A., Op.cit., pp.91-92 (foot-note).

¹⁸Bhuyan, S.K. Deodhai Asom Burajni, pp.28-29.

¹⁹Bhattacharya, S.N., Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, p.86.

²⁰Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, pp.28-29.

invaders were defeated and their Commander, Bit Malik was slain. Horses, cannons, guns, boats etc. were seized by the victorious Ahom force.²¹

Another Muslim invasion under Turbak took place in 1532 and they advanced up to the fort of Singri on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Ahom army after its initial reverses regained its position. After nearly one year of fighting, the Ahoms gained a decisive victory at Daimunisila, the invaders under Turbak were subsequently reinforced by Hussain Khan, but the Ahoms again defeated them in a series of engagements. The last battle was fought near the Bharali river. Turbak fell fighting. The defeat became a rout and the fugitives were pursued as far as the river Karotoya, evidently through the Koch territory. The Koch Raja Biswa Singha wisely did not intervene in the pursuit. Hussain Khan was killed in course of the chase.²² To commemorate the victory, a temple was erected and a tank excavated on the bank of the Karotoya by the Ahoms. The Ahom Commanders sent envoys to the court of the Padshah of Gaur and they brought back a

²¹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., pp.93-94.

²²Barua, K.L., Early History of Kamrupa, pp.193-194.

princess for the Ahom King. As a mark of victory, Suhungmung performed the 'Rikkhvan' ceremony.²³ The diplomatic relations that had been established by the Ahoms with the Padshah of Gaur testifies to the fact that the invasion was the work of some other Mohammedan Chiefs of Bengal. The results of these Muslim invasions were very significant for the history of Assam. The Mohammedan prisoners of war were settled in parts of the country. They were later employed as grass cutters to the elephants, cultivators and makers of brass utensils.²⁴ These people gradually mixed up with the Assamese by embracing the latter's culture and language. Another important result was the adoption of the use of fire-arms by the Ahoms which they learnt from the Muslim invaders. Till then, the weapons of war had mainly consisted of swords, spears, bows and arrows.²⁵

Having expelled the Mussalmans beyond the river Kartoya, the Ahom generals allowed the ruler of Koch Behar to continue as before since it was not the object of Ahom expedition to occupy the subdued territories.²⁶ Undoubtedly the victory was a great landmark in the annals of Ahom

²³Gait, E.A., Op.cit., pp.95-96.

²⁴Barua, Harakanta, History of Assam, p.28.

²⁵Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.96.

²⁶Bhuyan, S.K., Atan Buragohain and his times, p.7. (1st edn. 1957).

foreign policy. Since then the Ahoms looked upon the Kartoya as the extreme western limit of their dominion. However, there had been no attempt on the part of the Ahom monarch to extend their sway over the Koch territory, although Ahom's Suzerainty was much felt there for sometime. Consequently the western boundary of Assam underwent many changes and the river Manas (Manaha) which falls into the river Brahmaputra opposite Goalpara town remained as the western boundary of Assam for a long time.²⁷

During the reign of Narayanarayan (1540-1584 A.D.), son of Biswa Singha, Koch Behar reached the climax of its power. Accompanied by his brother Sukladvaj alias Chilarai, Narayanarayan entered into a career of conquest and advanced as far as the Dikroi river along the north bank of the Brahmaputra. The Ahoms acknowledged Koch suzerainty at least temporarily. Soon thereafter, however, the Ahom King Suklengmung mobilised all his forces and brought the Koches to bay - after several encounters. Suklengmung thus regained his lost territories on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. To mark this victory, he performed the Rikkhvan ceremony.²⁸ This

²⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.27.

²⁸Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.100.

invasion was followed by fresh Koch invasions under Chilarai in the reign of Khora Raja (Sukhampha - 1552 - 1603). A terrible battle ensued on the north of the river Dikhau and therein the Ahoms were routed. The Ahom King and his nobles fled to Namrup. After this victory Chilarai entered Gargaon, the capital of the Ahom kingdom. Peace however, was soon concluded between Chilarai and Akhek Buragohain, the Ahom plenipotentiary. Khore Raja acknowledged Koch Suzerainty, agreed to pay war-indemnity and ceded a considerable tract of the conquered territories on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Many sons of the nobles including Sundar Gohain were sent to the Koch court as hostages. Later, the Ahoms recovered their lost territories and in 1564, the hostages were returned back. In order to maintain friendly relations, Narayanarayan sent numerous presents and a friendly letter to the Ahom King.²⁹ This was necessitated by a desire to count the assistance of the Ahoms in case of Muslim invasion. The invasion had, in the meantime taken place under Kalayahar resulting in the sack of the temple of Kamakhya in 1564. The Mussalmans however, hastened back to Bengal after this invasion.

²⁹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.56.

Chilarai died about the year 1578 and on his death the Koch Kingdom was divided into two portions in order to accommodate the demands of Raghudev, son of Chilarai. The territory extending from Moharanda in the west to the river Sonkosh in the east was retained by Naranarayan himself while the eastern part from the Sankosh to the river Barnadi in the east was given to Raghudev on a tributary basis. Thus the western part came to be known as Koch Behar or Bar Dewan and the eastern portion as Kamrup or Saru Dewan or Koch Hajo (Hajo being the capital).³⁰

Lakhminarayan succeeded his father as King of Koch Behar and soon after trouble started between the two cousins. Not satisfied with his uncle's plan, Raghudev assumed independence and entered into hostilities with the Raja of Koch Behar. After Raghudev's death his son and successor Parikshitnarayan continued the feud and as a result Lakhminarayan appealed to the Mughal Emperor Akbar and then to Jahangir for help to protect him from the aggression of Parikshit. The inevitable result was the Mughal intervention in the affairs of Koch Behar. Lakhminarayan was allowed to

³⁰ Phuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.4.

continue as a vassal ruler under the Mughals. By the year 1613, Kamrup was taken possession of by the Mughals after the defeat of Parikhshit. His brother, Balinarayan later sought the Ahom assistance which was offered. The Ahoms installed Balinarayan as a tributary Raja of Darrang which lay on the north bank of the Brahmaputra to the east of the Barnadi opposite to Guwahati.³¹ It also included the tract of the territory between Kajalimukh to Guwahati on the south bank.

The hostilities between the two Koch Kingdoms resulting in the Mughal occupation of Kamrup brought about far reaching consequences in the north east frontier of Mughal India. The contiguity of the frontiers of the two powerful states led to inevitable clashes and conflicts which continued for nearly thirty five years (1615-1639). Thus the history of the Ahoms of the seventeenth century was mainly the history of Ahom-Mughal conflicts which arose out of the ambitions of the Mughals to extend their sway further to the east beyond Bengal, the Ahom intervention in the affairs of the rival princes of Koch Behar and the determination of the Ahoms to check further advance of the Mughals.

³¹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.111.

Apart from these reasons, the violation of the treaty obligation entered into by them with the Mughals led to bitter rivalry in the diplomatic sphere. Thus the period from 1615 to 1682 was replete with events of political rivalry besides diplomatic intercourse.

It was during Pratap Singha's reign (1603-1641) that the first phase of the Ahom-Mughal conflict began. After several reverses in the early part of the hostilities, the Ahoms had to cede some territories on the west including Guwahati by the treaty of 1639.³² The territories which roughly correspond to the modern district of Kamrup thus passed into the hands of the Mughals. For nearly twenty years from the conclusion of the treaty, a period of comparative peace followed till the year 1658. Jayadhwaj Singha took advantage of the war of succession among the sons of Shah Jahan at Delhi and recovered the lost territories up to Sandu on the south bank of the Brahmaputra by expelling the Mughals upto the neighbourhood of Dacca.³³ The Mughals under Mir Jumla invaded Assam in 1662 and marched as far as Gargaon after overrunning the Koches. After

³²Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji (ed.), p.42 (printed - 1958). Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.121.

³³Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.54.

Bhuyan, S.K. Atan Buragohain and his times, p.23.

this Mughal victory, a treaty was concluded in 1663 according to which Jayadhwaj Singha had to transfer Kamrup to the Mughals and promised to pay a war indemnity of twenty thousand tolas of gold and six times this quantity of silver and forty elephants to be handed over immediately besides hundred tolas of silver and ninety elephants payable within twelve months. Some Ahom princes were sent to the Mughal court as hostages and a prince was given to Prince Mohammad Azam, son of Emperor Aurangzeb. Jayadhwaj's successor, Chakradhwaj Singh (1663-1669) wrested back Kamrup from the Mughals in 1667 under the generalship of Lachit Barphukan. The Ahoms remained in undisputed possession of their territories till 1679 when Laluk Barphukan, the Ahom Viceroy of Guwahati entered into a collusion with Sultan Azantara (Prince Azam), the Subedar of Bengal and made over Guwahati to the Sultan's deputy, Nawab Mansur Khan. The Mughals were expelled across the river Manas during the reign of Gadadhar Singha in 1682. The river Manas remained as the western boundary of Assam till 1826.³⁴ Rangmati* became the headquarters

³⁴Bhuyan, S.R., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.5.

* The place was situated on the bank of the river Gadadhar near its confluence with the Brahmaputra, not far from modern Dhubri.

of the 'fouzdar' who administered the frontier territories and conducted the diplomatic relations with Assam on behalf of the Subedar of Bengal.

The Ahoms were a martial race who could prevent the extension of the Mughal sway in the north east. They could establish a strong Kingdom in a foreign land because of their religious tolerance and political insight.³⁵ Although the Ahom rulers inherited the political ideology of their ancestors, later on, they came under the influence of the Hindu political ideology, the keynote of which was that the King should identify his happiness in the happiness of the people.³⁶

The Ahoms had realised the importance of keeping records of events of the reigns of Kings. These official records came to be called Buranjis or Chronicles. Sukapha said "the Pandits should write down all particulars, whenever an incident takes place, when a person dies and when we acquire new territories."³⁷

Ahom political ideology was based on the principles of unity, benevolence and justice. This is

³⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.7.

³⁶Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.242.

³⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, p.98.

evident from the advice given to Khunlung and Khunlai at the time of their departure to earth. "Just as a man loses his wife if he quarrels with his father-in-law and just as a mother bird guards her nestlings with her wings and protects them from rain and storm and rears them up by feeding them herself, so you two brothers should protect your subjects and desist from quarrelling with your friends and supporters."³⁸

The Ahom monarch had to act according to the advice of the three hereditary councillors of the state, viz., the Buragohain, the Bargohain and the Barphukan. However, a powerful monarch could override the decisions of the three Gohains and in the same manner an astute Gohain could impose his will upon his colleagues and upon the large bodies of Phukans and Paruas and even upon the King himself. Next to the three Gohains, was the Barbarua, the head of the executive and the judiciary and the Barphukan who acted as the governor of Lower Assam, his headquarters were first located at Kaliaber and later at Guwahati. The Barphukan conducted the political and foreign relations with Bengal and the Chieftains of the adjoining hill tracts.

³⁸Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.2.

The Council of five, known usually as the Patra-mantri, the Buragohain, the Bargohain and the Barpatragohain, the Barbarua and the Barphukan may be taken to correspond to the modern cabinet. Besides, there was a gradation of officers such as Phukans, Rajkhowas, Sandikois, Baruas, Hazarikas, Saikias, Boras etc..

All able-bodied adult male subjects were registered as 'paiks' and they had to perform specific services to the State, such as labourers and soldiers. The paiks were organised into 'gots' and 'Khel' according to the nature of duties. The 'Khels' were attached to several fields, namely, bow makers, bow-shooters, masketeers, gunpowder manufacturers, boat builders, rice suppliers, gold washers, elephant catchers, revenue collectors, temple supervisors etc..³⁹ In short, the Assamese paik system was like a vast tutorial organisation in an educational institution.⁴⁰ Thus the paik system of the Ahoms obviated the necessity of maintaining a huge army as the non-serving paiks constituted a standing militia which could be mobilised at short notice

³⁹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., pp.249 - 250.
Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.10.

⁴⁰Bhuyan, S.K., Atan Buragohain and his times, p.17.

by the 'Kheldar'.⁴¹ There is a marked similarity between the Ahom Khel system and the Mughal 'mansabdari' system and it is likely that the Ahoms had taken the care from the Mughals whom they knew through their frequent political contacts. According to the 'mansabdari' system ranks were decided by the number of soldiers commanded by an officer, both Cavalry and infantry. There is also some similarity in the gradation of insignias. The Ahom Khel system was organised by Momai Tamuli Barbarua in 1609 A.D. under the direction of Swargadeo Pratap Singha.⁴²

Two other important functionaries of the state were the Katakis and the Kakatis. The Katakis served as envoys to the foreign courts and also as intermediaries between the King and the principal nobles. As the duties were of a highly important and responsible character, trained Brahmins were generally appointed as Katakis from amongst a number of selected families. The Kakatis served as writers and keeper of accounts.

Ahom policy with their frontier neighbours was generally based on the principle of mutual friendship

⁴¹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.251 (Reproduced from 'Aspects of the Heritage of Assam', p.91).

⁴²Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.11.

and co-operation. Maintenance of commercial relations was also encouraged. Relations with the Muslim powers of Bengal and with Koch Behar were systematic and continuous, more so after Koch Behar came under the domination of the Mughals; on the other-hand relations with the hill tribes were casual and sporadic, as they had no territorial ambition and their trading activities were conducted on a minor scale.⁴³ It was the accepted policy of the Ahoms to take to apparently humiliating treaty terms in dealing with the powerful enemy if this could serve the best interest of the State. But when as soon opportunities arose, such terms were defied resulting in armed conflict. So contravention of treaty terms was not an unusual feature of the strategy of the Ahoms. They held the view that 'promises made under duress need not be fulfilled if such fulfilment puts the promiser state in a serious disadvantage.'⁴⁴

Assam had political relations with Mughal India, Koch Behar, Cachar, Jayantia, Dimarua, Khyrim, Phutan, Manipur, Tripura, Nara and Munkang States. Besides this, they maintained foreign relations with the principal

⁴³Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.23.

⁴⁴Ibid.,

hill tribes such as Daflas, Miris, Nagas, Khamptis, Singhnos and the Mismis. The Katakis who negotiated the relations were well-trained for this job. They were generally guided by the principles that in dealing with the more powerful enemy attack, as a preliminary step Katakis should be sent for friendly negotiations. To secure the withdrawal of the enemy, they should enter into a treaty and stick to it and observe it for some time and later defy it when sufficient forces are mobilised. During the Mughal invasion in 1638, the Ahoms with incomplete war preparations were compelled to adopt diplomatic methods in order to gain time for completion of their preparations. Accordingly, Katakis were sent to the enemy camp at Kajalimukh under royal instructions. The Katakis approached the enemy thus - "for what purpose the Nawabs come here? If they have come with the intention of war let them so inform us. But war is waged between the Padshahs and not between the common people like you and us. Therefore, we are ready to give you whatever you demand"⁴⁵ Under no circumstances, the enemy should be relied on. Weak enemies should be dealt with mercilessly and should not be given

⁴⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji (ed.), p.40.

the opportunity to make peace.⁴⁶ The doctrine of 'danda-dama-bheda-danda' (conciliation, concession, capture and force) was always practiced by the Ahoms in the conduct of diplomatic relations. Within the framework of the general policy, the Katakis had enough scope for exercise of discretion, originality and inventiveness; and on their powers of advocacy and exposition depended the proper settlement of grave issues. They carried written epistles which they had to explain and sometimes supplement by 'Mukh-javan' or oral-submission.⁴⁷ On many occasions they misrepresented the fact in such a manner that the Mughal Commanders were compelled to entertain dubious hopes of success against Assam. According to diplomatic norms, the Katakis were not responsible for the contents of the message they carried and were immune from the consequences thereof. Sometime the Katakis bringing bad news or messages not to the liking of the haughty monarchs or the nobles had to suffer ignominy. Strict honesty was enjoined on the Katakis. Based on these principles Pratap Singha maintained diplomatic relations with the Mughals. However, under his instructions several Katakis were executed for receiving gratification from Raja Dharmnarayan and from the Mughal Commander Raja Satrajit.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Goswami, S.C., Nililatankur, pp.12, 13, 17.

⁴⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, pp.30-31.

⁴⁸Ibid.,

The importance of a class of skilled Katakis was first realised by Swargadao Pratap Singha. He replaced the Ahom Katakis by Brahmins who were considered to be shrewd. Once he explained to the Katakis about their duties in the following words :

"I am highly pleased with the manner in which you have conducted yourselves and asserted your views in a foreign place (Court of the Mughal Commander Allayar Khan). Katakis should be like Shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth; more specially the relations between ourselves and yourselves are like gold and borax; the former is refined with the help of the latter. You have been able to vindicate your cause in a foreign Durbar and thereby to protect the interests of your government, without paying any heed to your personal safety. Therefore, 'O Bamuniputeks', have I got anyone dearer to me than yourselves?"⁴⁹

During the period of Ahom-Mughal wars numerous diplomatic epistles were exchanged between the two powers. The Katakis who carried the epistles of the Ahom government were well versed in Persian language. The style of writing as well as the language of the epistles are unique from the literary point of view. The language is a curious mixture of Persian, Hindi and Assamese. Many Persians generally known as 'Parsiparhias' or Persian readers were attached to the Ahom Court. Their occupation

⁴⁹Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.31. (Reproduced from Assam Buranji No.7).

was deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, drafting and supervision of the Persian correspondences of the government. The Persian chronicles of the Mughal Court throwing light on the Assam-Mughal conflicts of the seventeenth century are equally prolific. The series of epistles exchanged for nearly twenty years following the treaty of 1639 are of invaluable help in unfolding the eventful story of a forgotten era in the history of Mughal north east frontier policy - an era of peace, diplomacy and busy-trade and commerce with the Assamese which terminated only with the outbreak of the war of Succession (1658).

The Ahom Government strictly observed diplomatic etiquette with its Mughal counterpart. They also expected similar treatment from foreign powers. After the treaty of Ghilajharighat (1663), Emperor Aurangzeb sent two Ahadis (envoy) to Assam, Dor Beg and Ruston Beg, with the present of a 'Shirpao' for Swargateo Jayadhvaj Singha. But Jayadhvaj soon died. The Ahadis then offered the present to the new King Chakradhwaj Singha. The envoys insisted that the Ahom King should come forward from his throne to receive the 'Shirpao'. Atan Buragohain objected to this humiliating proposal

and said, "Should the slave of a Mughal speak in this fashion? Should we renounce the time honoured custom of the land and age-old diplomatic practices?" The articles were then deposited in the royal stores.⁵⁰

The Ahoms always stressed the doctrine of natural boundaries and they regarded the river Kartoya as the western boundary of Assam on the basis of the limits of ancient Hindu Kingdom of Kamrup. It was bounded on the west by the river Kartaya including roughly the Brahmaputra valley, Bhutan, Fangpur and Behar. Thus the ultimate territorial ambition of the Ahoms was to restore the old limits up to Kartoya and they succeeded at times in bringing parts of ancient territories under their sway.⁵¹

Suhungmung Dihingia Raja first extended his suzerainty up to the river Kartoya by expelling the Mohammedans who invaded Assam. It was nothing but an extension of the sphere of influence and the Ahoms did nothing to retain this boundary permanently. In 1658 King Jayadhvaj Singha extended his sway up to the river Manas after driving out the Mughals from Kamrup. The river Manas occupied a strategic position from the

⁵¹Bhuyan, S.K., Anglo-Assamese Relations, p.23.

military point of view, and fixation of western boundary at Manas (Manaha) was a voluntary contraction on the part of Assam.⁵² The second rallying point of the Assamese was at Guwahati with the hills on both banks of the Brahmaputra and then at Sandhara and Simalgarh with the same strategic advantage of hills and rivers. The Ahoms avoided contest in the plains as they had a meagre cavalry and the level regions were not found suitable for their guerrilla tactics. The invasion of Mir Jumla (1662-1663) changed the geographical limit of Assam. At a much later stage, King Rudra Singh expressed his desire before the nobles to restore the old limits of Assam up to the Kartoya. Even in his death bed he hoped that his successors would honour his sentiment.⁵³

Dihingia Raja's expedition to Gaur took place during the days of the independent Afghan Sultans of Bengal and the Mughal first established their supremacy over that province in 1576. Till about 1614, the Ahoms had no quarrel with the Mughals but hostilities broke out in the following year as a result of Mughal encroachments and raised raids which Assam opposed. The war continued

⁵² Stewart, History of Bengal, p.317.

⁵³ Wade, J.P., An Account of Assam, (ed. Venudhar Sharma, p.146.

with varying fortunes till the year 1639 when a treaty was concluded according to which lower Assam from Guwahati to Manaha passed into the hands of the Mughals. The first and second phases of the struggle of this period were mainly confined in Kamrup, both in 'Uttarkol' and 'Dakhinkol'. The wars in Dakhinkol were mainly a story of the struggle of resistance by the local chiefs against the Mughal invasion. In 1658 the Ahoms recovered their lost territories; ceded it again in 1663 and regained it in 1667 by Lachit Barphukan. The Ahom Viceroy at Guwahati, Laluk Barphukan treacherously surrendered lower Assam to the Mughals in 1679, only to oust the Bura Gohain with whom he had personal enmity. The Bar Phukan vainly expected to be the ruler of Assam with the help of the Mughals. Finally in 1682, the Ahoms were able to recover the territories upto the river Manaha which remained the boundary of Assam till the termination of their rule.

The Ahoms remained ever vigilant over the activities of the Mughals. In normal peace time they were on friendly terms. This was evident from the exchange of visits of the envoys from both sides. But the Ahoms were always apprehensive of the Mughals on their territory and as such they remained on alert

with full armed preparations to deal with the enemy as and when occasions arose. Assam's hostilities with the Mughals were almost always successful and the latter admitted the difficulties of a war against Assam in view of natural disadvantage combined with the intrepidity of the Assamese generals.⁵⁴ The ultimate issue of the Ahom Mughal conflict was greatly determined by the geography of this region. A study of the details of the wars, the route of the march, the plan of operations, the tactics employed by the combatants and even the nature and number of engagements bears unmistakable evidence of the influence of the geographical factor.⁵⁵

The Mughal's attitude towards Assam was influenced partly by their traditional policy of imperialism and partly by their desire to obtain an access to the forests of Assam which were full of elephants and 'agar' wood and other precious articles.⁵⁶ Their policy of imperialism shows different tendencies on different occasions. At the beginning of their contact with Assam, the Mughal policy was based on securing economic advantages, such as trade facilities and the availability of the natural resources of Assam for the Mughals. It would, however,

⁵⁴Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.26.

⁵⁵Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.42.

⁵⁶Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.26.

be wrong to presume that the policy of intervention was the outcome of a deliberately calculated policy to extend Mughal suzerainty over the area occupied and administered by the Koches. The occupation of Kamrup lay in the logic of circumstances. The close proximity of Kamrup with the Empire and the latter's intervention in the affairs of the rival Koch Kings of Koch Behar and Kamrup ultimately brought Kamrup into conflict with the Mughal. All the Mughal campaigns either into Koch Kingdoms or Assam were conducted at the initiative of the viceroys of the Bengal Subah. Emperor Jahangir and his successor Shah Jahan took little interest in the north east frontier of Bengal. Emperor Aurangzeb viewed the north east in a somewhat different light. Mir Jumla was despatched to Assam only to get rid of a formidable rival to the Emperor. Many of the conflicts of the pre-Mir Jumla period were the outcome of either deliberate actions of the Mughal officers of Hajo or mishandling of the diplomatic relationship. This is evident from the role of Raja Satrajit, the Commander of the Mughal thana of Chandu. Assam's name for Mughal strategy was 'Mughal-fard', which they tried to thoroughly master through Assamese messengers and agents despatched to Mughal India, both

in authorised and unauthorised manner; and also through Mughal subjects who stayed on in Assam after the departure of the expeditions to which they were attached.⁵⁷

At the beginning of the foundation of the Kingdom of Koch Behar by Biswa Singha, The Ahoms looked upon the Koch Raja as belonging to the category of 'thapita-chanchita' - a name applied to the rulers who were first settled by the Ahoms in the government of a particular state. Naranarayan and Chilarai, two sons of Biswa Singha rejected the Ahom authority and rather went to the extreme step of invading Assam. At a subsequent period, two Koch princes were installed as tributary Rajas in Darrang and Beltola states respectively. Cachar was another territory of 'thapita-chanchita' order, as after a brief interregnum, its ruler, Nirbhoynarayan, had been placed on the throne by Dihingia Raja.⁵⁸

There had been frequent friction between the Jayantia Raja and the Ahom monarch, but the latter forced the former to come to terms on many occasions. Matrimonial relations were also established between the two Kings as a mark of abiding friendship. The state of Pimaru, however, became the bone of contention as both of the

⁵⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit. p.27.

⁵⁸Ibid., p.27.

rulers laid claims to it. The Ahom claim on Dimarua was based on their occupation of that principality after defeating the Mughals in early 1616 and again in 1667, by defeating Sayid Feroz Khan, Fouzdar of Guwahati.

The Ahoms adopted a conciliatory policy towards the neighbouring hill tribes. Occasionally, under compelling circumstances they had to apply force. But complete subjugation was never contemplated. The Ahoms were required to check the inroads of these tribes inhabiting the hills so as to protect their own subjects. Attempts were made to adjust the mutual relationship, but their strict observance could not be usually enforced as the tribesmen lived in inaccessible hills and forests.⁵⁹ The Ahoms appointed frontier officers to deal effectively with these tribes and to maintain friendly relations. The Sadiya Khowa Gohain was in-charge of the affairs of the tribes of the Sadiya region; the Marangi Khowa Gohain and the Rahial Barua of the Kacharis and Mikirs; the Jagiyalia Gohain and Kajalinukhia Gohain of the Tayantiyas. The Barphukan was responsible for maintaining relations with the Raja of Dimarua and the Chieftains of Dakhinkol. A number of officers well-versed in the languages, dialects,

⁵⁹Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.32.

customs and habits of these tribesmen were attached to these frontier officers. Whereas Brahman ambassadors were, as a rule, appointed to the states of western Assam; they were replaced by sturdy tribal experts in conducting negotiations with the bordering races, for in dealing with these tribesmen, namely, the Singphos, the Nagas, the Duflas, the Abors etc., there was greater need of a spirit of forbearance and understanding, sincerity and straightforwardness than of subtle logic, sophistry and propaganda.⁶⁰ That the Ahoms succeeded in maintaining cordial relations with the hill tribes is evident from the writings of the Mughal chronicler, Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied the Mir Jumla expedition. He wrote, "Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam, yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands."⁶¹ Captain St. John F. Michell in his 'Report on the North-East Frontier, 1883' says, "The Assamese army appears at this time (1660) to have been largely recruited from the Nagas and the Miris, and it is evident that they were quite able to hold their own against the well-trained armies of Hindustan".⁶² Thus

⁵⁹Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.32.

⁶⁰Ibid., p.47.

⁶¹Ibid., p.47. (Reproduced from Sir J.N. Sarkar, J.B.O.P.S., 1915, pp. 184-185).

⁶²Ibid.

the Ahoms regulated their tribal policy in a realistic and judicious manner and at times they did not hesitate to apply force, lest the offer of friendship and good will should be interpreted as a manifestation of weakness and imbecility.

In the Seventeenth century, the Ahom rulers seem to have adopted a policy of isolation in regard to the commercial activities with the foreigners in a restricted form. They restricted the movement of their traders beyond the Assam 'Chowky'. The foreign traders were prohibited from entering into the Assam territory. The Assamese traders exchanged their goods, such as, gold, musk, agar, pepper, silk etc. for salt, saltpetre, sulphur and other articles carried on by the Mughal traders.⁶³ By these commercial intercourse, the Assamese traders could keep close watch on the movement of foreigners. During the early stage of the Ahom-Mughal contact, the Mughal traders, lured by the precious articles of Assam forests, illegally entered into Assam territory leading to frequent conflicts between the two powers. As the Mughal traders showed their keenness to establish commercial intercourse with the Assamese,

⁶³Gait, Op.cit., p.274.

'hats' were arranged on the frontier for exchange of goods.

The Assamese traders were, however, not allowed to interfere in the administrative affairs. Three Assamese traders (Mudois) had once assured the Nawab of Dacca that they would establish friendly relations between the Nawab and the Ahoms. Accordingly they brought with them to Assam some diplomatic agents of the Nawab together with letters and presents meant for the Ahom monarch, Pratap Singha. The King accused the merchants thus, "They are merchants and as such should have confined themselves to trading activities. What business had they to bring envoys from Bengal?" The traders were later executed under orders of the monarch.⁶⁴

The Ahoms conducted their trading activities with the frontier tribes on a small scale. Protection was given to the traders by the frontier officials of the Ahom government known as 'Datiyalia Bisayas' and 'Duarias'. The Duaria Barua enjoyed the exclusive privilege of trade with Bengal at the later period of Ahom rule. Goalpara on the south bank and Jogighopa and Rangamati were the eastern outposts of Bengal whence its merchants maintained their trade relations with Assam.

⁶⁴ Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji (ed.), p.28.

The frequent Mohammedan invasions from the time of Bakhtiyar Khilzi in 1205 A.D. to the final expulsion of the Mughals in 1682 made the Assamese averse to foreigners and considered them as a source of danger to the security of the nation. The security of the kingdom being the primary concern with the government, foreigners were admitted with great caution; but those who came to stay with the avowed purpose of serving the country in some capacity were given every facility to do so.⁶⁵ All people living in the countries to the west of Assam and entering into Assam through Bengal were called, 'Bangals' a term applied even to Europeans as Baga Bangal. But this term was also applied to those foreigners entertaining hostile designs against Assam. The fear of enemy attack from the western frontier compelled the Assamese to be suspicious of all foreigners. Assam was usually described as 'sonar Saphura' or a 'casket of gold', the lustre of which must always be kept shining.⁶⁶

But there were exceptions to this rigid exclusion of strangers or foreigners. The Ahom rulers encouraged people from other parts of Hindustan to come and settle

⁶⁵Bhuyan, S.K., 'Atan Buragohain and his times', p.12.

⁶⁶Ibid.,

in Assam provided that their introduction was of advantage to the nation. After Hinduisation the Ahoms began to take some interest in the religion and culture of India. They deputed Brahman priests to the shrines outside the state for making offerings. Political agents, mostly in disguise, were sent outside to study foreign customs, manners and also political behaviour. Scholars and saints, artisans and craftsman, clerks and accountants, both Hindu and Muslim, were freely admitted, and brought by special arrangement with the rulers of Hindustan as there was dearth of such men in Assam and considered them useful for cultural and economic development of the state. But these 'licensed foreigners' had to cut off all relations after coming into Assam. They, like other subjects of the state, were equally treated by the government and they had to learn Assamese language, manners and customs. The Assamese made a distinction between 'desirable foreigners' and 'undesirable foreigners.' The former category comprised those who came to stay and became naturalised. The latter category consisted of those who had no intention to stay permanently and upon whom the Assam government had no control.⁶⁷ Shihabuddin Talish gives a clear picture of the attitude of the Assamese people towards

⁶⁷Bhuyan, S.K., 'Anglo-Assamese Relations', p.57.

foreigners" - No Indian King in former times ever conquered Assam. Even the intercourse of foreigners and the Assamese was very limited. They allow no stranger to enter their territory."⁶⁸

The relations with the hill chieftains of the tract of the territories bordering the Khasi and the Garo Hills were very friendly with the Ahom rulers. These chiefs mostly belonged either to Jajha or Garo tribes and ruled their territories as vassal paying moderate tribute to the Ahom Raja. In times of necessity they were protected by the Ahom ruler from external aggression. The Ahom intervention in the affairs of these hill Rajas of Dakhinkol came in the wake of Mughal invasions of the latter's territories in the course of the subjugation of Kamrup. These hill chieftains (Raja) are mentioned as 'Eighteen Hill Rajas' of 'Dakhinkol' Sarkar on the south bank of the Brahmaputra in the Koch territory of Kamrup, both in Persian chronicles and Assam Buranjis. The states of Darrang, Beltola and Rani enjoyed full autonomy in their internal administration like other vassal states. The Rani Raja paid no tribute to the Ahom monarch. The other states were, Luki, Boko,

⁶⁸Blochmann, J.A.S.B., 1872, - Part I, 'Koch Behar and Assam.'

Barduwar, Bholagaon, Mirapur, Pantar, Bangaon, Bagaduwar, Dimarua etc.. In addition to annual tribute, they were required to furnish a stipulated number of paiks to the Ahom monarch in times of war. They remained under the control of the Ahoms from the reign of Pratap Singha till the end of the Ahom rule.⁶⁹

The Ahom kings granted some rights to these hill chiefs for the purpose of bartering their products at certain 'hats' or market places. The hillmen came to these places through some 'duwar's which were the gateways to the hills. This was required for maintaining peace in the frontier.

The Ahoms had a very efficient and well-disciplined army which could stem the tide of repeated Mughal invasions. The invincibility of the Assamese during the period of Mohammedan conflicts had led a writer to remark 'the Assamese were to the Moslems what the Numidians and Mauritians were to the old Romans'.⁷⁰ The Mughal Commander, Rashid Khan spoke of the Ahom army thus - "the enemy is beyond the reach of our heavy artillery; and there is no opportunity for fighting with arrows and guns. Their ministers, commanders and infantry are

⁶⁹Fajkumar, S., 'Nilachal, 1963, 2nd issue, pp.229-302- 'Khasi Jayantia Parbatar Uttar Kasaria Raja 'ru Raja Nowali'.

⁷⁰Bhuyan, S.K., Annals of the Delhi Badshahate (ed.) p.12. (Reproduced from The Religious History of Assam- Calcutta Review, 1867, vol. XLVI, p.78).

all to be admired for having constructed such an impregnable wall of defence."⁷¹

The king was the supreme commander of the armed forces. All officers from the highest to the lowest were liable to military service. The non-serving paiks constituted the standing militia. The army mostly consisted of infantry and elephants. The most noted animal from the standpoint of war and trade was the elephant. It had a prominent place in Koch and Assamese military array and occasional many a diplomatic and armed contest between the Mughals and the Assamese. According to the treaty of Chilaijharighat (1663), the Ahoms had to pay a war indemnity of rupees three lakhs and ninety elephants and an annual tribute of twenty elephants. A series of epistles were exchanged between Atan Buragohain and Pashid Khan, fauzdar of Guwahati regarding delivery of elephants to the Mughals. The failure to deliver the elephants and money within the stipulated time led to renewal of hostilities.

The performance of religious rites was customary to the initiation of a campaign. In the course of their campaign the Ahoms preserved and protected the cows

⁷¹Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.252.

and Brahmans as there were standing royal instructions to do so. The Ahom art of fighting was unique. They constructed highly ingenious and impregnable fortresses which evoked admiration even from the hostile Mughals. Open encounters were supplemented by guerrilla fighting, in which the Ahoms were superb. They would only come out from their forts at night and fall on the enemies unnoticed. In the event of their repulse they would hurry back to retreats. By these tactics they nearly succeeded in thwarting the activities of Mir Jumla's army.⁷²

Striking were the naval achievements of the Assamese under Ahom rule. The naval engagements with the enemy at Kalaibar and Saraighat were noteworthy. At the end of the battle at Saraighat, the Mughal general Ram Singha had to acknowledge the valour and skill of his adversaries thus, "Every Assamese soldier is expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and wielding guns and cannons. I have not seen such specimens of versatility in any other parts of India."⁷³

There had been frequent Mughal invasion in the north bank of the Brahmaputra valley from Dacca by

⁷²Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.253.

⁷³Ibid.,

following the left bank of the Brahmaputra. But in southern Assam, the invading forces had to depend much on the flotilla of war-boats for their success. The Mohammedan invaders were so much impressed by the superior force of the Ahoms that they did not hesitate to record their appreciation about the Assamese. Mir Jumla wondered at the strength of the fortifications at Simalgarh. "Strong in their tribal unity, fierce in their independence, invigorated by a nourishing diet and buoyed up by an exhilarating drink, the Ahoms, in spite of many defects in their political and military system, ultimately got the better of the Mughals still in the hey-day of their prosperity and glory"⁷⁴ - Shihabuddin Talish, the author of Pathiya-i-Ibrivah describes beautifully the technique of the Ahom fort at Jogighopa in the following terms,

"It is a large and high fort on the Brahmaputra. Near it the enemy (Assamese) had dug many holes for the horses to fall into, and pointed pieces of bamboos (Panjis) had been stuck in the holes. Behind the holes, for about half a short distance, on even ground, they had made a ditch and behind the ditch, near the fort another one three yards deep. The latter was also full of pointed bamboos. This is how the Ahoms fortify all their positions. They make their forts of mud. The Brahmaputra is south of the fort and on the east is the Manas".⁷⁵

⁷⁴Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.46.

⁷⁵Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.132.

During Mir Jumla's stay in Assam for ten months, the Mughals were subjected to endless suffering and harassment. They found the country of Assam 'wild and dreadful, abounding in danger - a land of unhealthy climate, witchcraft and pestilential diseases', as evident from the writings of the Mughal Chroniclers Talish. In spite of their sufferings and hardships, the Mughals remained in occupation of a vast area of the country. Seeing the plight of the Assamese subjects, Atan Buragohain expressed his sorrow and said "we cannot vanquish the Mughals in open warfare; but preservation of the country and protection of its subjects are the first necessity for the government." With this aim in view, the Ahoms accepted the peace proposal, although with extremely humiliating terms, but it was in conformity with the recognised principle of Ahom diplomacy.

The 'Daivajna astrologers' of the Ahom court played a vital role in the conduct of the military operations especially during the Ahom-Mughal conflicts. Astrologers were first stationed with the Ahom monarch at the capital, and later on the officers serving in lower Assam had expert astrologers attached to their respective staffs, as they had to be frequently consulted

as to the prospects of the Ahom force in projected encounters. Thus astrologers became an indispensable element in the establishment of the leading administrators and commanders stationed in different places.⁷⁶

The Ahom forces were supported by a strong espionage system. The commanders entrusted with the conduct of the military engagements could never be bribed or won over to the hostile camp. There were instances of voluntary desertion to the enemy's camp by men like Akhek Gohain, Baduli Phukan and Bejooloi Phukan, but these had no effect on the course of the war. Akhek who stayed as a fugitive in the Mughal camp, later deserted and furnished detailed information about the strategy of the Mughals. Ram Singha made repeated attempts to win over Lachit Barphukan and his commanders but here Mughal Rajput strategy failed while it had succeeded in many other parts of India.⁷⁷ To strengthen further the espionage system, the Ahom monarchs introduced

⁷⁶Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Ason Buranji(ed), p.VIII ff. Nahar and Kalia, two astrologers accompanied the Ahom troops to Hatisila led by Lapeti Phukan and Baduli Phukan in 1659. During Mir Jumla's invasion Jayadhwaj Singha deputed two astrologers, Birat and Bharua to advise the Ahom commanders. The astrologers who took active role in the Ahom-Mughal conflicts during the period from 1667 to 1671, the names of Jyotirbhusan, Achyutananda Doloi and Ramkhari are very prominent. (Annals of the Delhi Badshahate p.11).

⁷⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Annals of the Delhi Badshahate, p.11.

a class of devoted and trusted officers from among their own clan, called the 'sajati' who were responsible for furnishing information relating to the conduct of the officers directly to the King. Instances are also not rare to indicate that the Mughal officers at Guwahati succeeded in utilising the services of the Brahman priests of Umananda and Kamakhya temples for the consolidation of the Mughal administration. The land grant made to the two Pujaris (priest) of Kamakhya by Allayar Khan and Hasan Khan, fauzdars of Guwahati (1639-1658) and later confirmed by Emperor Aurangjib in 1667 bear proof to the fact that these grants were made in consideration of the services rendered. Obviously the Mughals needed the help of these influential priests for consolidation of their sway in this strategic region of western Assam. Another Sanad was issued to the priests of Umananda in 1667 by the Emperor.⁷⁸ It is interesting to note that a Badshahi Fishery grant was issued to a priest of Kamakhya temple. The area of operation was as follows,

'On the south of the Brahmaputra, from the mouth of Khanajan (Khanamukh) under Sayani mouza within Palasbari circle to Simna (Rangagora Simna). On the north bank of the Brahmaputra, from the Agiathuti hill of Duk-Bansar mouza under Hajo circle to Hatimura hill of Bamundi village in the district of Kamrup.'⁷⁹

⁷⁸Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., pp.17-18.

⁷⁹Guwahati High Court Case, Civil Rule No.80 of 1973.

The Mughal Badshah Aurangzeb was a bigot and as such it is doubtful if he ever encouraged either the establishment of Hindu temples or patronised their priests.

The impression which the Assam expedition of Mir Jumla made upon the Mughals has been very graphically described by the Mohammedan historian, Muhammad Kazim, the author of the 'Alamgirnama' - "The Rajas of Assam have never bowed the head of submission and obedience, nor have they paid tributes or revenue to the most powerful monarch, but they have curbed the ambition and checked the conquests of the most victorious princes of Hindustan. The solution of a war against them has baffled the penetration of heroes who have been styled conquerors of the world."⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Bhuyan, S.K., 'Atan Buragohain and his times', p.32. (Reproduced from H. Vansittart, - 'A description of Assam from Alamgirnama' - Asiatic Researches, Vol. II, 1807, pp.179-180.

CHAPTER - I I

MUGHAL INVASION OF KAVRUP

Bengal became an integral part of the Mughal Empire after the defeat of Daud Kararani, the great Pathan hero in the battle near Rajmahal in 1576 A.D. Soon after that diplomatic relations were established between Emperor Akbar and King Narnarayan of Koch Behar. Both the monarchs thereby recognised each other's territorial integrity and mutual friendship. With this opened a new Chapter in the history of Mughal north-east frontier policy. The formation of such an alliance was, however, due mainly to political expediency. Many vanquished Afgan Chiefs of Bengal fled to the neighbouring state of Koch Behar for taking asylum there. Most of them started creating troubles in Bengal and posed a threat to the security of the province. Emperor Akbar wanted to check it with the co-operation of King Narnarayan. The latter also apprehended such troubles in his own Kingdom from these refractory Chiefs and refused such asylum.¹ As per the terms of the treaty Narnarayan assured his

¹Roy, A .C., History of Bengal, p.146.

counterpart not to extend any help to the Pathan rebels. Four years later, Narayanarayan, with a view to pleasing Akbar and as a friendly gesture sent an envoy to the Imperial Court with rich presents. The visit of the envoy further confirmed their friendship. This led to greater understanding on both sides. Some dethroned Afghan Chiefs of Bengal and Orissa had re-established their hold in parts of East Bengal under the leadership of Isa Khan of Sonargaon. Because of the continuous threat of these rebel chiefs from the northern and eastern parts of Bengal, the Imperial government needed the co-operation and friendship of the neighbouring state of Koch Behar. On the other hand, Narayanarayan, in his desire to have a powerful ally against the apprehended menace of the Ahoms, looked to the Mughals as a strong arm of defence against Assam.² So long as Narayanarayan was alive, the Mughals respected this alliance (1578) based on perfect equality. However, the partition of the Koch Kingdom into two, viz. Koch Behar and Kamrup changed the political situation. Being contiguous to Bengal, it was natural that the Mughals first came into contact with the Kingdom

²Roy, A.C., Op.cit., p.147.

of Koch Behar. Towards the close of Akbar's reign the defensive alliance was transformed into a subordinate one - the King accepted the Mughal vassalage without, of course, any obligation as to the payment of tribute. Thus from 1596 to 1608 A.D. the Koches were compelled to make subordinate alliance with the Mughals due to internal feuds between the two Koch rulers.³

In 1594 A.D., Raja Man Singh was appointed Viceroy of Bengal and with this, the consolidation of Mughal authority in Bengal really began. In the following year he laid the foundation of a new capital at Rajmahal alias Akbarnagar for administrative convenience and political considerations.⁴ Rajmahal was considered to be a central place of Bengal province and it was expected that the local Chiefs could be effectively dealt with from this place. Man Singh could not follow a strong forward policy due to internal troubles in Bengal. His viceroyalty was a story of the struggle between the Mughals and the local rulers for supremacy. The authority of the Emperor continued

³Choudhuri, H.N., 'The Land Revenue Settlement of the Cooch Behar State', p.234.

Stewart, History of Bengal, pp.187-188.

⁴Roy Choudhuri, I, Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir, p.50.

to be resisted by powerful Bengal Chiefs, notable among them being Isa Khan of Sonargaon, Kedar Rai of Vikrampur, Pratapaditya of Jessore and Usman, the most powerful of all the Afgan Chiefs.

The restoration of the Afgans in Bengal was the burning passion of Usman in his life. He threw off his vassalage and along with Khwaja Soloiman, raided Orissa in 1592. This country had recently been conquered by the Mughal general Man Singh. The attack was however, repulsed by the Imperial general with all his vigour.⁵ Usman revolted again after sometime and defeated Maha Singh, son of Man Singh. On coming to know of it, Man Singh hurried back from Rajputana and inflicted a crushing defeat on the rebels. He remained constant source of danger till he was defeated in the battle of Neik Ujyal on March 12, 1612.⁶

It is, therefore, apparent that the Mughals could not follow an imperialist policy in the north-east frontier during the viceroyalty of Man Singh. He - relinquished his office in 1606 and was replaced by Qutubuddin who died next year. His successor Jehangir Quli Khan, an old man, succumbed to the Bengal climate

⁵Stewart, History of Bengal, p.133.

⁶Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, pp.207-208.

within a year of his assumption of office.⁷ Any way, the period from 1594 to 1606 A.D. was one of consolidation of Mughal authority in Bengal. The Mughal intervention in the affairs of Koch Behar is not to be viewed as an act of aggressive design only. This was due to political expediency and after Akbar's death, his son Jahangir simply carried out his father's policy.

Ever since the partition of the Koch Kingdom, into Koch Behar and Kamrup, the relations between the two rulers continued to be strained. Raghudev (1581-1603), King of Kamrup who was a tributary to Koch Behar, refused to pay tribute to his uncle, King Naranarayan. He went a step further, after his uncle's death (1584) by carrying on frequent plundering raids in the Koch Kingdom. This led to inevitable clashes between Lakshminarayan of Koch Behar and Raghudev of Kamrup.

During the reign of Akbar in 1596 A.D., Lakshminarayan, son of Naranarayan approached the Mughal viceroy of Bengal for help against his cousin, Raghudev. They met at Anandapur near Ghoraghat and concluded a treaty of subordinate alliance. To cement the bond of friendship, Lakshminarayan gave his sister Pravabati in

⁷ Beni Prasad, History of Jehangir, p.209.

marriage to Man Singh. In return Man Singh sent a detachment to Koch Behar apparently to resist the raids of Raghudev. It was a definite land mark in the history of Mughal north-east frontier policy.

E.A. Gait, on the authority of the Akbarnama states that Pravabati was the daughter of Lakhsminarayan.⁸

The observation appears to be wrong and in fact Pravabati was the sister of Lakhsminarayan.⁹ According to the terms of the treaty, Lakhsminarayan acknowledged Mughal suzerainty and Koch Behar thus became a vassal of the Mughal Empire.¹⁰

The Mughal force under the command of two Afghan officers met Faghudev in an open engagement. In the fierce struggle that ensued, the Koch King fought unaided and was defeated with heavy losses in men and materials. He was compelled to vacate Bahirbond, a Koch territory in 1597.¹¹ The Koch chronicles and Buranjis are silent about this event. The Koches thus had to continue this policy of subordinate alliance till the year 1608 A.D.

⁸Gait, E.A., J.A.S.B. - LXII Part, 1893, p.297, 'The Koch Kings of Kamrup'.

⁹Sarkar, Ambika, Koch Pajbansi Jatir Itihas, p.73.

¹⁰Roy, A.C., Op.cit., pp.146-147.

¹¹Bhattacharya, S.N., Mughals north-east frontier Policy, p.112.

The Koch Mughal alliance and the defeat of Raghudev at the hands of the Imperial forces compelled the former to seek the assistance of the Ahom monarch. The latter was also alarmed at the Mughal intervention in the affairs of the Koch Kingdoms.

It is not true that Raghudev ever made any friendly alliance with Isa Khan, the Afgan Chief of Sonargaon.¹² In fact he was afraid of this Afgan Chief and the later encouraged by the dissensions between the two Koch Kings took the first opportunity of invading south Kamrup.

There are conflicting accounts regarding diplomatic relations between Raghudev and Isa Khan. Gait, on the authority of Mohammedan writers states that, Isa Khan after fierce fighting, took from the Koches the whole country as far as Rangamati in the present Goalpara district of Assam.¹³ S.N. Bhattacharya narrates a different story about this incident. He says that the Mughals supported by Lakhsminarayan made an assault on the combined forces of Isa Khan and Raghudev in 1597

¹²Roy, A.C., Op.cit., pp.148-152.

¹³Gait, E.A., A History of Assam, p.63.

at Katrabari. The result was very disastrous to the Mughals. Isa Khan scored a brilliant victory. Purjan Singh, son of Man Singh was slain in the battle. A large number of Imperial soldiers including some Koch paiks were taken prisoner.¹⁴ The local Koch history does not refer to such incidents.

The incidents referred to, are two different incidents. The first one regarding the battle between Raghudev and Isa Khan might have occurred earlier while the second incident took place at a later stage. The fact remains that Isa Khan became a source of danger to both the Koches and the Mughals and he continued to consolidate his sway in the eastern part of Bengal. Apparently the Mughals and their protage, Lakshminarayan were alarmed at the recent victory of Isa Khan against Raghudev.

At this stage, Raghu's position was extremely precarious. He was surrounded by enemies. In these circumstances he was forced to seek the help of the Raja of Assam. Gunabhiram Barua says that Raghudev concluded a matrimonial alliance with the Ahom monarch by giving his daughter in marriage to the latter.¹⁵

¹⁴Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.13.

¹⁵Barua, G.R., Asom Buranji, p.47.

The Koch princess Sankala was given a dowry of two elephants, seven horses and a hundred domestics. The Ahom King Sukhampha in return presented to the Koch King twenty-two elephants and twelve horses.¹⁶ This alliance was a triumph of Raghudev's skillful diplomacy and wide statecraft. It marked the beginning of a new phase in the diplomatic history of Assam as well. The Ahom monarch viewed with alarm the growing Mughal intervention in Koch politics and realised the necessity of strengthening Kamrup as a buffer state. Another incident which prompted Raghu to come close to the Ahoms was that the Ahom monarch had given protection to some rebellious officers from Koch Behar. As a result the relations between the Ahom monarch and the Koch King Lakshminarayan became strained Raghu took the opportunity by offering his friendship with the Ahom monarch at a time when it was needed most.

Raghudev died about the year 1603 A.D. and was succeeded by his son Parikhsit narayan. In the same year, Susengpha, alias Pratap Singha ascended the Ahom throne. By the year 1603 - 1604 A.D., the turbulent

¹⁶Gait, E.A., Op.cit., pp.104-105.

Chiefs of Bhati were effectively crushed for the time being by the Bengal Government and there ensued a period of comparative peace in Bengal¹⁷ - and the adjoining areas. Raja Satrajit of Bhusna submitted to the Imperial power in 1609, entered into Imperial service and was confirmed in his possession of lands. By 1611, Musa Khan, son of Isa Khan, Chief of Bengal zamindars and his associates also laid down their arms. Usman, the Fathan hero was defeated in 1612.¹⁸ The political power of the Afgans and also the Hindu zamindars was destroyed but they were treated well by Emperor Jahangir. They were allowed to enter the services of the Imperial government with pleasure. "As a result of this humane policy", writes the author of *Makhzan-i-Afgani*, "the Afgans abolished all treasonable designs and remained loyal to the throne."¹⁹

The appointment of Islam Khan, a trusted friend of Jahangir as Viceroy (Subadar) of Bengal in 1607 A.D., to deal effectively with the rebel Chiefs of Bengal changed the political situation. After the departure of Man Singh in 1606, the Afgan Chiefs and their allies

¹⁷Roy Choudhuri, *Tapan, Bengal under Akbar and Jahangir*, p.50.

¹⁸Beni Prasad, *Op.cit.*, p.207.

¹⁹Iswari Prasad, *The Mughal Empire*, pp.428-429.

raised their heads again.²⁰ Islam Khan soon transferred the capital from Rajmahal to Dacca to cope with the increasing confusion arising out of the internal revolts. The extension of the Mughal territory in the east and the policy of bringing pressure on Kamrup necessitated the transfer of the capital to Dacca.²¹ The new viceroy was determined to extend the frontier in the north-east after the subjugation of Bengal. However it was hardly possible for the Bengal government to follow an aggressive policy and interfere in the affairs of Koch Behar prior to the year 1612 due to the troubled situation in the province. The Mughal viceroy was anxious to have a defensive alliance with the King of Koch Behar to check the Afgan fugitives in his Kingdom. The prolonged revolt of these chiefs caused much trouble to the Bengal government in consolidating its authority.

The two Koch Kings solicited the friendship of the Ahoms as there had been frequent wars between these two countries.²² But Parikhsit was prompt in securing the help of the Ahom Raja. He gave his daughter, Mangaldahi in marriage (1608 A.D.) to Pratap Singha.

²⁰Beni Prasad, Op.cit., p.209.

²¹Tripathi, R.P., Rise and Fall of the Mughal Empire, p.384.

²²Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.65.

The latter gave twenty three elephants to Parikhsit who in turn sent with his daughter, six families of domestics and twenty female slaves.²³ The purpose of forming a matrimonial alliance was obviously to protect Kamrup from foreign aggression. The subsequent events show that both the Mughals and the Ahoms were not fighting for the cause of their proteges. They really fought for the establishment of their own predominance in the frontier. While the Mughals befriended their protege Lakhsminarayan, the Ahom King Susengpha, although entering into marriage alliance with Parikhsit remained indifferent when help was surely needed against the Mughals.

Lakhsminarayan was naturally aggrieved at the failure of his attempt to be friends with the King of Assam. On the other hand the conflict between the two Koch Kings did not abate. The frequent invasion of Koch territory by Parikhsit posed a danger to the Koch King. Besides this, the formation of the diplomatic alliance between the Kings of Assam and Kamrup caused much anxiety to him. At this critical juncture he was forced to seek the help of the Mughals. It is

²³Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.110.

also a lesson of history that due to internal weakness a country falls an easy prey to foreign powers. Lakshminarayan accepted the Imperial vassalage in 1609. It was significant in the annals of Mughal north east frontier policy. It symbolised the process which had began with the political subjection of Koch Behar in the winter of 1596. 'A new vista of aggressive imperialism, formerly undreamt of, now opened'.²⁴ M.I. Bora, on the authority of Baharistan expresses the view that Lakshminarayan paid his homage to Islam Khan, the Mughal viceroy at Ghoraghat and not at Dacca as narrated by Gait, through Raja Raghunath of Susang in 1608.²⁵ The year 1609 witnessed the eclipse of the independence of Koch Behar. It is mentioned in the Kamrupar Buranji that Lakhmi went in person to Mughal court and submitted to Emperor Shah Jahan. The reigning Emperor at that time was Jahangir (1605 - 1627 A.D.). The Koches had already established their diplomatic ties with the Mughals and as such there was no reason for the Koch King to go to Delhi at a time when his state was in danger of invasion. It might not also be practicable for Lakhmi to go to distant Dacca as his absence might be taken advantage of by the enemy.

²⁴Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.126.

²⁵Borah, M.I., Baharistan-i-Ghaybi of Mirza Nather (trans) vol.II, p.807 (foot notes).

In view of these circumstances, the views of M.I. Borah in this regard seem opposite. The Mughals received encouragement from the King of Koch Behar to conquer Kamrup in order to take revenge upon his enemy. Nevertheless, the Koch campaign was due more to Parikhsit's refusal to accept imperial vassalage than the request of Lakhminarayan.²⁶

Another factor responsible for the invasion of Kamrup was that Raja Raghunath of Susang was badly treated by Parikhsit and members of his family were imprisoned by him. Raghunath was a protegee of the Mughals and hence, he too, was anxious for the invasion of Kamrup. He played a vital role in convincing the Mughal Subadar to invade Kamrup at the request of Lakhminarayan. Later the family of Raghunath was released by the Mughals after their victory against Parikhsit.²⁷

The real aim of the Mughals in adopting a strong forward policy towards Kamrup has been summed up by A.C. Roy - "This rich and flourishing Kingdom of Kamrup taming with elephants and aromatic plants must be wiped off and made a part and parcel of the Empire."²⁸ He

²⁶Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.807.

²⁷Ibid., (taken from Padishahnama, 11).

²⁸Roy, A.C., Op.cit., p.152 (Reproduced from S.N. Bhattacharya's Mughal North East Frontier Policy).

further says that the Bengal government sent a punitive expedition under Abdul Wahid to Kamrup but could not produce any satisfactory results. K.L. Barua observes that Abdul Wahid was defeated easily by Parikhsit and the former fled to Fathpur.²⁹ According to S. N. Bhattacharya,

'the real origin of the conflicts leading to the intervention in Kamrup is to be found in a three fold combination of causes, operating in varying fortunes. Dynastic jealousy and enmity had certainly its influence, but it was intensified by the secret and selfish machination of Lakshmi against the territorial integrity of Parikhsit's domain. The aggressive imperialistic tendency was undoubtedly the most dominant factor in the whole issue'.³⁰

In 1612 Islam Khan despatched a strong force under the command of Mukarram Khan and Sheikh Kamal to invade Koch Hajo. The force consisted of 6000 horses, 300 elephants, 10,000 to 12,000 infantry and about 500 warboats.³¹ A large number of Imperial officers, some vassal zamindars including Raja Raghunath as guide and Afgan mansabdars of Bayizid joined the expedition.³² In December, 1612, the Imperial army advanced by way of Phawal and Tok till they reached Salkona, on the left bank of

²⁹ Barua, K.L., J.A.R.S., Vol. III, pp.64-70, - 'Mirza Nathan's narrative'.

³⁰ Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.136.

³¹ Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.66. Blochmann, J.A.S.B., 1872, pp.53-62.

³² Sarkar, Sir J.N., History of Bengal, p.285.

the Prahmaputra, midway between Patladah and Hatisila.³³
 A fierce naval battle took place in which Parikhsit's
 fleet of 300 boats was annihilated.³⁴

Before the battle broke out, realising his helpless position, Parikhsit made a frantic attempt to strengthen himself with the help of the Ahoms. He sent envoys to the Ahom monarch to report that unless the Invasion was resisted at the initial stage, the consequence would be very disastrous both for Assam and Kamrup. The Ahom monarch welcomed this gesture and in reply requested Parikhsit to see him personally.³⁵ Unfortunately, Parikhsit had no time to visit the Ahom court as Mughal invasion was imminent. He also failed to estimate the strength of the enemy as he was feeling proud of his recent victory over them commanded by Abdul Wahid. Had there been a joint defence as planned by Parikhsit, the results of the Mughal invasion would have been different. The Ahom-Mughal conflict which followed immediately after subjugation of Kamrup was the indirect result of the short-sighted policy of Pratap Singha. Nearly three years had passed after the invasion of Abdul Wahid till the expedition of Mukarram Khan and during this period

³³Roy, A.C., Op.cit., p.152.

³⁴Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.66. Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit., p.285.

³⁵Wade, J.F., An Account of Assam (ed.) Benudhar Sharma, p.232.

the Kamrup King could have mobilised all his resources and convinced the Ahom monarch for a joint defence. At a subsequent stage the latter rendered some help to Koch prince Bali Narayan but could produce no effective results. Nevertheless, by seeking help from Assam Parikhsit displayed his wisdom and foresight.

According to Gait, the Ahoms consented to the request of Parikhsit for help on condition that the latter sent all available forces to join the Ahom army. But Parikhsit was unwilling to do so.³⁶ S.N.Bhattacharya on the other hand says that the Ahom King gave an evasive and vague reply which was tantamount to refusal. The Ahom King further reported to have advised his counterpart to vacate his kingdom and then join the former for an united defence.³⁷ Apparently it was unbearable for the Koch king to vacate his kingdom. It can therefore, be seen that Paratap Singha paid half-hearted attention to this serious problem and persisted in his impolitic attitude. The idea of creating Kamrup as a buffer state had been frustrated.

The Imperial army in the meantime was re-inforced at Salkona and the expedition proceeded northwards very cautiously along the bank of the Brahmaputra and reached

³⁶ Gait, E.A., Op.cit., p.66.

³⁷ Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., pp.134-135.

the vicinity of Dhubri. There, they garrisoned 500 cavalry and 1000 infantry. The Imperialists under the command of Mirza Nathan conquered the newly acquired territories of Farikhsit, viz., Bahirbond and Bhitarbond covering the entire right bank of the Brahmaputra.³⁸ Gradually they advanced as far as to Dhubri, supported by the forces of Raja Satrajit and Lakshminarayan. The siege of Dhubri fort followed which continued for three and half months. Finally it fell in April, 1613 A.D. Farikhsit was forced to retire to his capital Gilah on the Gadadhar river.³⁹

Both sides now wanted peace. Farikhsit sent an envoy to the Bengal viceroy to negotiate the terms of the treaty. The Koch king agreed to pay a huge sum as indemnity.⁴⁰ The Imperialists wanted that Farikhsit should visit Dacca personally and give his consent to cede a portion of his territory. This demand was rejected by the Kamrup King.⁴¹

Hostilities, therefore, were renewed. The Mughals under the command of Bahadur Ghazi and Sona Ghazi marched

³⁸ Sarkar, Sir J.N., History of Bengal, p.285.

³⁹ Ibid.,

⁴⁰ Poy, A.C., Op.cit., p.152.

⁴¹ Gait, Op.cit., p.66. Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit., p.286.

to Gilah. The Koch forces, under the command of Dimarua Raja, son-in-law of Parikhsit with his 700 war boats and 50 elephants met the enemies on the bank of the Gadadhar river. The son-in-law of Parikhsit was not Dimaria by name as stated by Gait, but the chief of the state of Dinarua.⁴² The name of the admiral of this Kamrup fleet, as mentioned in some Buranjis, is Purandar Laskar. Apparently this Dinarua Chief was no other than Purandar Laskar of the Koch fleet. He performed his duties pretty well and captured 250 war boats inflicting heavy losses on the enemies. Bahadur Ghazi and Sona Ghazi escaped Kuber Khan, the commander of the Imperial fleet fell fighting. The victors then moved down to Phubri with a huge force of 20 elephants, 500 cavalry and 10,000 infantry.⁴³ A division of Afgan and Rajput forces led by Jamal Khan Mankali and Lachmi Rajput was easily defeated. The commanders also received wounds.⁴⁴

Then the army of Parikhsit under the command of Fateh Khan advanced to another fort guarded by the Afgan archers of Usman, the Pathan hero and now a commander of the Imperial forces.⁴⁵ Nitai, a commander of the Koch

⁴² Sarkar, Sir. J.N., Op.cit., p.286.

⁴³ Gait, Op.cit., p.66.

⁴⁴ Sarkar, Sir. J.N., Op.cit., p.287.

⁴⁵ Bhuyan, S.K., Padishah Buranji (ed.), p.189.

army fled away followed by his soldiers. Parikhsit rallied the rest of his forces and a terrible battle ensued. Fateh Khan was captured and Paramananda Toloi, another officer of the Koch army died fighting.⁴⁶ But the battle dragged on all the day without any decisive results.

Meanwhile, the fleet of the Zamindars of Bengal, alarmed at the disastrous defeat on the previous night failed to stand any longer and they were about to be overpowered. At this critical moment, a cannon ball struck the Dimarua Faja at his breast. He succumbed to his injuries and this incident completely demoralised the Kamrup navy and so it hastily withdrew.⁴⁷ Parikhsit then decided to retreat to his former position after midnight leaving behind all his war elephants and the whole army following him in utter confusion.⁴⁸

Once again fate favoured the Mughals. They chased the Kamrup King to Gilah. But no sooner the Imperialist reached Gilah than Parikhsit evacuated that place and proceeded as far as to Barnagar on the Manas. The victor occupied Gilah and seized immense booty.

⁴⁶Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit.,

⁴⁷sarkar, sir J.N., Op.cit., p.287.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Supported by Lakshminarayan, the Mughals continued their relentless pursuit of Parikhsit for six days. A fleet under Mirza Qasim Khazanchi and Raja Pratapjit also moved eastward along the Brahmaputra to intercept Parikhsit's passage on the Manas.⁴⁹

Worn out in body and mind, the Kamrup King at last escaped to Pandu. He was hotly chased and forced to surrender in July 1613. Kamrup, thus lost its separate existence and was annexed to the Mughal Empire.⁵⁰ The annexation of Kamrup by the Mughals produced far reaching results. Pratap Singha's idea of creating Kamrup as a buffer state had been completely frustrated. The Mughals now became the deadly neighbours of the Ahoms. Gradually, Assam plunged into a long period of armed conflict with the Mughals.

According to S.N. Bhattacharya,

"the conquest of Kamrup would not have been much delayed even if the Neo-Koch Ahom alliance had remained intact. The mighty wave of imperialistic aggression which had swept over Koch Behar was sure to deluge Kamrup next and would then have flooded its immediate neighbour, Assam."⁵¹

It might have been difficult indeed to check the wave of

⁴⁹Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit.,

⁵⁰Ibid.,

⁵¹Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.150.

aggressive imperialism of the Mughals because concerted efforts at resistance were lacking. The Ahom monarch did not give any assistance to the Kamrup King in time.

After the conquest of Kamrup, Parikhsit, as advised by his officers offered to pay to the Padshah an annual tribute of two maunds of agar wood, 500 thungas, 100 elephants, 200 tungan ghoras (horses) and 400 yak tails as a price for the return of his kingdom. The Mughal commander Mukaram Khan rejected this offer. He however, asked Parikhsit to submit in person for which full security was assured. Then accompanied by ministers and nobles, Parikhsit offered his submission to Mukharam Khan. The latter received him with great honour and presented clothes and ornaments. Later the Kamrup King was sent to the Padshah.⁵²

According to local Buranjis both Lakshmi and Parikhsit were sent to the Imperial court. Emperor Jahangir received them cordially and tried to reconcile the conflicts between the two kings. Apparently, the Emperor wanted to restore peace in the north-east frontier of his empire through a permanent settlement in the

⁵²Bhuyan, S.K., Padshah Buranji, p.190.

affairs of Kamrup and Koch Behar. Accordingly Jahangir advised Parikhsit to bow down to Lakshminarayan but he refused. Parikhsit was therefore, detained for sometime.⁵³ Lakshminarayan was allowed to return to Koch Behar as a vassal ruler as before. He was also presented with horses and swords as a token of love. 'But inspite of his fidelity to the Emperor, the Viceroy of Bengal put him into detention till 1617, contrary to all cannons of diplomacy and morality. During this period his son Virnarayan ruled the country as a vassal.'⁵⁴

After sometime Parikhsit was allowed to return in consideration of a promise of seven lakhs of rupees and the admission of his four sons and daughters into the Imperial Court as hostages for the release of their father.⁵⁵ Parikhsit also promised not to create any trouble among his Kinsmen and brought a portrait of Jahangir as a mark of respect. It is however, doubtful whether he ever could pay the sum of Rupees seven lakhs as promised in view of the fact that his country had been devastated by protracted wars. On the other hand, if he was sincere in his promise to pay the amount, he

⁵³Borah, M.I., Baharistan-i-Ghaybi, p.836.
 Bhuyan, S.K., Padshah Buranji, p.191.

⁵⁴Borah, M.I., Op.cit., 137. Bhattacharya, S.M., Op.cit., p.147.

⁵⁵Sharma, Benudhar, 'Dakhinkol', Souvenir of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, 1882 Saka - 'Palasbarir Ditiye Pasare'.

would not have committed suicide at Tribeni (Allahabad) on his way back home. The fact remains that Kamrup was already annexed by the Mughals and that neither Farikhsit nor his sons could fulfil the promises. It seems probable that the failure to pay the stipulated amount by Farikhsit led to the viceroy's refusal to restore him to power.⁵⁶

In regard to the death of Farikhsit at Tribeni, certain views were expressed in the Padshah Buranji.⁵⁷ Farikhsit was guided by the belief that 'one who dies in Tribeni (the confluence of the three rivers, viz., Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati) commits no sins and rather he attains whatever desire a man cherishes before death'. Thus he renounced his body in the holy water of Tribeni. Another factor responsible for his suicide might be that, Islam Khan, the Viceroy received many complaints from some officers of Kamrup against Farikhsit for his alleged atrocities upon them while he was the King of Kamrup. Apparently these officers did not welcome the release of Farikhsit. These complaints were brought to the notice of the Koch King ; This might have wounded his vanity. He died broken hearted in infamy and obscurity some time after the spring of 1618.⁵⁸ "He was utterly unfit to guide the ship of the state through the stormy waters ahead. He lacked the prudence of his father."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.147.

⁵⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Padshah Buranji, p.192.

⁵⁸Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.147.

⁵⁹Ibid.

While Parikhsit was taken prisoner to Delhi, his brother Balinarayan, defeated by the Mughals fled to Assam seeking help from the Ahom monarch. Kamrup was thus annexed to the Mughal Empire. The military affairs of this territory were first conducted under the supervision of the fouzdar of Rangamati. Sayid Abu Bakr, brother of Mukarram Khan was left in command of the Mughal garrison which was first stationed at Khelah. On the death of Abu Bakr at the first Ahom-Mughal armed conflict (1616 A.D.), Mukarram Khan was appointed fouzdar. He transferred the headquarters from Rangamati to Hajo.⁶⁰

Some Koch officers of Kamrup accompanied their king to Delhi. They were Kabindra Patra's son, Kabisekhar, Sriram Laskar and others. After the annexation of Kamrup these officers received some assignments with the titles of Choudhury, Katakai, Patwary, Laskar etc..⁶¹ Kabisekhar was appointed Kanangoe at Hajo. Likewise several Mohammedan officers were given estates in Kamrup. Many Muslim soldiers also were settled in Kamrup and provided with land.⁶² A Mughal fleet was stationed at Pandu to maintain the line of communication with Bengal

⁶⁰Gait, Op.cit., p.67. Blochmann, J.A.R.S., 1872, Part-I.

⁶¹Bhuyan, S.K., Pādshah Buranji (ed.), p.193.

⁶²Gait, Op.cit., pp.67-68.

as well as to put down internal rebellion in Barcup.⁶³

Thus the period from 1609 to 1613 A.D. witnessed the first phase of Mughal imperialism in the north-east frontier beyond Bengal leading to the annexation of two Koch Kingdoms. It was the mutual rivalry between the two which helped the invaders to acquire territory.

⁶³Gait, Op.cit., p.155.

C H A P T E R - I I I

THE AHOM-MUGHAL RIVALRY

The Mughal conquest of Kamrup in 1613 A.D. marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of north-east frontier of Mughal India. The boundary of the empire was thus pushed up eastward to Pandu and the river Barnadi and Koch Kamrup now became a part of Bengal Suba. With a view to maintaining the security of the frontier region, Satrajit, a vanquished Raja of Bengal and now in the services of the empire was appointed the thanadar of Pandu as a reward for his services in the recent Mughal Koch War.¹

Ever since the advent of the Mughals in Kamrup, tension had been simmering in the western frontier of Assam and it seemed almost certain that Assam would face the brunt of Mughals' military power soon. The close proximity of the two powerful neighbours was bound to create serious problems. Within a short time a sort of hostile relationship grew up between the two powers. But this hostility was not the result of Mughal's friendship with Koch Behar or the enmity of the Ahoms with this Koch Kingdom as stated by S.N. Bhattacharya.² However, the intimate relations formed

¹Gait, E.A., History of Assam, (reprint, 1967), p.110.

²Bhattacharya, S.N., Mughals' North-East Frontier Policy, p.149.

with their political rivals tended to create inimical feeling between the Ahoms and the Mughals. Their subsequent actions proved beyond doubt that both of them fought for the establishment of their predominance in the north-east frontier of India.

The first task before the Mughals was to consolidate their authority in Kamrup. It was really a formidable task in the face of armed revolts of the Koch Chiefs who refused to submit. For more than two years after the expulsion of Parikhsit, the Mughals were fully occupied with consolidating their authority over the region west of the river Manas. Although they were de-jure rulers of this entire tract, effective control of the Mughals during the early years did not extend much beyond Jahangirbad and Rangamati because of their incessant hostility with the rebels of Khontaghat region.³ The scene of activity gradually, shifted to the territories east of the Manas.

Prince Palinarayan, brother of Parikhsit - narayan and many Koch Chiefs who had fought earlier against the Mughals soon rose into revolt. They were scared not crushed. The prominent among them were, Sanatan of Dandama (Hajo), Samudra (Samuroid) Kayeth

³Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.175.

of Rangjuli, Rabha Chief Parsuram of Solmari, Mamu Gobind of Beltola. After the conquest of Kamrup they fled to different parts of the Kingdom and tried to establish there with their followers. However to lack of united efforts among them they fought in vain.

The first Koch leader to resist Mughal imperialism in Kamrup was Sanatan of Dandama. When Abu Bakr advanced upto the Brahmaputra eastward Sanatan opposed him.⁴ But the Mughals easily defeated him. He could however, defend his fort for a long time. Most of the Koch Chiefs were highly aggrieved at the confinement of their King at Delhi Court. Some of them later gave up their resistance after the release of the Koch King. However, the news of his death was too much to bear for them. Sanatan did not give up struggle even after the death of his master as stated by K.L. Barua.⁵ Subsequent to the death of Parikhsit Sanatan inflicted several defeats on the Mughal forces near Hajo.⁶ There had been more sporadic Koch insurrections in the neighbourhood of Hajo. Abdul Baqi, the Mughal fouzdar of Barnagar along with Mirza Sahin tried hard to put down these rebellions. The Mughals captured a Koch fort at Kewarhada hill on the bank of the Brahmaputra.⁷ At one stage the Koches

⁴Barua, K.L., J.A.R.S. Vol. III, A Koch Hero of the 17th Century.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Gait, Op.cit., p.68.

⁷Ibid.

were chased as far as to Jootia by the Mughals under the command of Dhar Munkut, a Hindu officer.⁸ Balinarayan also revolted in the easternmost part of Kamrup.

Shortly after the annexation of Kamrup, Islam Khan, the Subadar of Bengal passed away (August, 1613). With his death the Mughals lost a dynamic personality. He dominated the scene waging wars unrelently against the local zamindars reducing them to submission. He may rightly be regarded as one of the makers of Mughal empire and the greatest viceroy of the Bengal Suba.⁹

After his defeat at the hands of the Mughals, Balinarayan in his utter distress fled to Assam for shelter. The Mughal occupation of Kamrup was a nightmare to him. In vain he put resistance so long against the invaders. He now realised that without the help of the Ahoms it would be difficult to fight back the Mughals, with a view to securing help, he exchanged his ideas with the Ahom King through a special messenger, Shalluna Wakeel.¹⁰ The messenger handed over a personal letter from Balinarayan addressed to Swargadeo Susengpha alias Pratap Singha narrating the circumstances that led to his flight from his homeland.

⁸Barua, K.L., Op.cit., p.96.

⁹Sarkar, Sir J.N., History of Bengal, p.286.

¹⁰Wade, J.P., An Account of Assam (ed.) Manuchar Sharma, p.237.

Being a relation to the Koch King, the Swargarao was apparently aggrieved to see the plight of the Koches. The defeat of Parikhsit and his confinement also shocked him much. He was equally alarmed at the rapid advance of the Mughals towards the east. He thus made a common cause with the Koch prince and accordingly sent Harinath, a Ahom Katakai asking Balinarayan to see him personally at Gargaon.¹¹ Soon after he was cordially received at the Ahom Court. They discussed the strategy to expel the Bangals from Kamrup (Feb, 1615).¹² The Koch prince was later installed as the tributary Raja of Darrang after the Ahom victory over the Mughals (1616).

One of the reasons as to why Pratap Singha desired to support Balinarayan might be that he wanted to check the further advance of the Mughals by erecting Darrang as a buffer state between the two powerful kingdoms. He had already committed a blunder by not helping the Koch King of Kamrup (Parikhsit) when the latter sought his help. Pratap Singha realised that Balinarayan and the hill Chiefs of the western region would serve as an effective check against the Mohammedans. So he sought their cooperation against their common enemy. But unfortunately neither his plan succeeded

¹¹Wade, J.P., Op.cit.

¹²Phuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji (ed.), p.19.

nor Balinarayan could consolidate his authority in view of prolonged war.

Besides this, there had been a number of causes that led to the Ahom-Mughal wars. The bitter rivalry and jealousy of the Imperial officers made stable government in Kamrup very difficult. The revolt of Sheikh Ibrahim, the Krori (revenue officer) of Kamrup weakened the edifice of the Mughals. In fact the Mughals remained in Kamrup like an army of occupation.¹³ Many of them were not loyal to their masters. The efficiency of the Mughal administration deteriorated much after the death of Islam Khan, the viceroy as it all depended upon his personality to set it right. Two Mughal officers, Santosh Laskar and Jairam Laskar fled to the Ahom Kingdom only to escape punishment at the hands of the viceroy. They failed to supply elephants to the government.¹⁴ They wanted to take vengeance upon their masters. One of the major tasks of the Bengal government immediately after the occupation of Kamrup was to catch elephants for the imperial force. About 10,000 to 12,000 paiks were sent to Kamrup where they were given jaigirs by the government for keeping up Kheda operations (enclosures for catching wild elephants).

¹³Poy, A.C., History of Bengal, p.156.

¹⁴Blochmann, J.A.S.B., 1872, Part I.

As most of the paiks failed to supply the required number of elephants, they faced punishment at the hands of the Subadar. Subsequently they sought retribution by passing over to the side of the Assam King.¹⁵ The Ahom King liberally gave them shelter and, gradually, he was encouraged by these hostile elements to support their causes. The hill-chieftains of Dakhinkol, in course of their frequent conflicts, with the Mughals, also prayed for help from the Assam King. Apparently the Assam King became an enemy of the Mughals.

The most important factor responsible for the first Mughal invasion was the political ambition of the Viceroy Qasim Khan to carry out his brothers forward policy in the north-east, a step further by the conquest of Assam.¹⁶ 'An unholy desire for political supremacy and territorial expansion appear to have been the guiding motive of the Mughals.'¹⁷ Though the political issue was predominant, it was complicated by boundary and trade disputes. The Mughal traders penetrated into the Assam territory although there had been protests from Assam from the beginning of their

¹⁵Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.246.

¹⁶Sarkar, Sir J.N., History of Bengal, Muslim Period, p.295.

¹⁷Roy, A.C., Op.cit., p.159.

stay in Kamrup, their activities were very much provocative. Further, the rich natural resources of Assam, viz., ivory tusk, aloe wood, silk etc., encouraged the illegal trade which embittered feelings on both sides and precipitated the crisis.

The situation was further aggravated by the presence of a dismissed Ahom officer, Akhek Gohain in the Mughal camp. This officer along with his brother, Kera Gohain escaped to Mughal camp and encouraged them to invade Assam. He happened to be one of the leaders of the first Mughal expedition to Assam.

It is however, doubtful if Emperor Jahangir could adopt a strong aggressive policy in the north-east in view of the fact that the first part of his reign was marked by indiscipline and dissension in the Imperial camp in Bengal. In the later part of his reign, the efficiency of the administration had gone down due to the influence of his queen, Nurjahan. Stately Lanepoole tells us that Emperor Jahangir had been addicted to intoxicating liquor very heavily from the age of 18. "The Emperor used to drink as much as 20 cups a day, at first of wine, then of double-distilled liquor of such potency that it made Sir Thomas

Roc, the British ambassador, sneeze, to the delight of the whole court."¹⁸ This being the state of the realm, the empire was practically ruled by the queen with the aid of her brother, Asaf Khan. During this period the Mughals lost their old military spirit and control of the central Government over the provinces were not what it should have been. Everything became rotten.

It, therefore, turned out that the military operations in Assam constituted a part of the foreign policy of the Bengal Government. The officers served under the general supervision of the Viceroy but they were really responsible to the Emperor.¹⁹ Hence many Imperial officers engaged in the expedition were found to be not sincere and loyal to the Viceroy. They also found it extremely hazardous to pass through the jungles of Assam. This resulted in the emergence of intrigues and dissensions in the Mughal camp in Farrukp.

A number of Mohammedan traders were once found collecting agar wood for the imperial store in an unauthorised manner. Early in 1615 A.D., one Ratancha, a Mughal trader, suspected to be a spy was captured

¹⁸ Lanepoole, Stanely, The Heritage of Akbar, pp.12-13.

¹⁹ Querreshi, J.H., The Administration of the Mughal Empire, p.231.

by the Ahom officers, Habung Chetia and Chandhara while purchasing agar wood at Singari hill. Two of the associates of Ratanha were killed at the same time and their boats were seized. Ratanha fled away. Swargudeo Pratap Singha became indignant with the Mughal traders and ordered his officers to capture the traders if found within his territory.²⁰ To deal effectively with the foreigners, the Ahom monarch took steps to strengthen the espionage system. The gradual infiltration of the 'Bangals' in the guise of commercial intercourse and their rapacious activities were viewed with alarm by the Assamese. All these brought to the surface mutual recrimination resulting in serious armed clashes.

The incident of the killing of the Mughal traders in the early part of 1615 A.D. was only a pretext to launch an attack on Assam. The Viceroy had so long been preparing for invasion of Assam. He immediately despatched a powerful army to organise retaliatory measures against the Ahoms.²¹ The Mughal force included most of the vanquished chiefs of eastern Bengal with their war materials and some Rajput leaders. The expedition started at the end of the rainy season in 1615 A.D. under the command of Sayid Hakim and

²⁰Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Purnaji (ed.), p.20.

²¹Bhuyan, S.K., Atan Buragohain and his times, p.8.

Sayid Abu Bakr, a Zamindar of Kishar with ten thousand horses and infantry and four hundred large war boats. Satrajit, the thanadar of Pandu later joined the Mughal force and remained in charge of the expedition. The Ahom army first moved to Kohatta, the frontier village of Kamrup on the mouth of the river Barnadi and halted there for reinforcement.²² The enemy reached Kaliabar (Sala) by way of the Kalong and then a column of the force crossed the Brahmaputra to the mouth of river Bharali on the north bank.²³ The invaders won the first battle at Kaliabar as the Ahoms were not prepared to meet them there. This victory was followed by another victory on the bank of the river Bharali near Sandhara. The Mughals seized the materials of the royal stores at Kaliabar and also took away two dancing girls from the temple of Dergaon (Nov. 1615).²⁴ Some Ahom officers were either killed or captured. Pratap Singha who was camping at Agiabandha, failed to defend and retreated.²⁵ The Mughals followed up their victory by a series of plundering raids into the interior. It is unfortunate that two Ahom nobles, Akhek Gohain and Kera Gohain who were fugitives in the Mughal camp

²²Mazumdar, R.C., The Mughal Empire, Vol.VII, p.164. (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).

²³Gait, Op.cit., p.110.

²⁴Barua, Harakanta, Asom Buranji, p.38.; Barua, G.R., Asom Buranji, p.79.; Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji (ed.) p.20.

²⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Op.cit., p.21.

informed the Mughal Commander that the Ahoms had two Chowkis in the frontier, one at Khajarijan on the bank of the Kalang and the other at Sandhara on the bank of the Bharali. Evidently the invaders could easily defeat the Ahoms with the help of these two Assamese officers.

Pratap Singha was overwhelmed with grief at his recent defeat and asked his nobles to prepare for a counter attack on the Mughals who were taking rest near Sandhara. They constructed a fort at Dikhowmukh and gradually advanced towards Sandhara, New Bridges were constructed over the river Bharali. Chengohara Neog was appointed the commander of the expedition. Lacham Sandikoi, Pikchai Chetia and others advanced by boats. The Ahom force consisted of 3,00,000 Infantry and 700 war elephants.²⁶ Akhek Gohain in the meantime deserted the Mughals receiving a promise of pardon from the Ahom King. Gohain's return to the Ahom camp gave an opportunity to the Ahoms to get valuable information about the war strategy of the Mughals. At this stage, the Buragohain, the Bargohain and other high officials asked the Deodhais to examine the legs of fowls.²⁷ The Deodhais after examining it asked

²⁶Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit., p.297.

²⁷Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, p.60.

them to strike in the night.²⁸ Thus as advised, the Ahoms surprised the Mughals in a night attack (January 1616). The Mughals who were unprepared to face the enemy in the night were easily overpowered. Their camp at Sandhara was stormed, arsenals destroyed and elephants seized. A large number of officers including Sayid Hakim, Jamal Khan Mankali, Bhagaban Roxi, Gokul Chand, Lachmi Rajput, Abu Bakr and his son were slain. The deadbody of Giyasuddin was brought to Fajo as he was considered to be a pious man and buried there.²⁹

The imperial fleet, mainly consisting of the war boats of the zamindars, at first resisted. But the news of the fall of Abu Bakr, the Commander and the seizure of their fort so much unnerved them that they gave up further resistance and fell an easy prey to the enemy. Almost the whole fleet was seized some naval officers viz., Miran Sayid Masud, in-charge of the Zamindari war boats, Sona Ghazi and Raja Satrajit escaped while Iahdad Khan Dakhini, Raja Rai, Narsing Rai, Karamchand, son of Satrajit and many others

²⁸Bhuyan, S.K., *Op.cit.*, p.60.; Parua, Golap Chandra, *Ahom Buranji*, p.99.

²⁹Gait, J.A.S.B. - Vol. LXIII, Part I, 1873 - 'The Koch Kings of Kamrupa'.; Sarkar, Sir J.N., *History of Bengal, (Muslim Period)*, p.297.; Bhuyan, S.K. *Kamrupar Buranji* (ed.), p.22.

were captured.³⁰ According to Baharistan-i-Shaykh, 5000 Mohammedans were killed, 9,000 were captured and 3,000 fled from the field. Satrajit's son was later sacrificed at the altar of the Goddess Kamakhya. On the Ahom side, Srifal Bora, Namal Pora, Hati Barua, Lachan Sandikai and Chiringdung were killed.

Having heard the news of the victory, Pratap Singh immediately ordered not to kill the captive officers as he was anxious to see them in person. He dashed to Sandhara but no sooner did he reach the place than most of the captured officers were slain. At this, the swargadeo expressed his great anguish and ordered that Choulai Konwar, his elder brother and other officers responsible for the killing of the Mughal captive officers be put to death. He then returned to the capital in triumph and performed the Pikkhvan ceremony.³¹

Soon after the Ahoms established their camp under the charge of Habung Pikhai at Kajalimukh (Jany. 1616 A.D.). The promise of pardon granted to Akhek Gohain was later revoked by the King as he was treated as traitor to the motherland. Akhek and his daughter

³⁰Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit., 297.

³¹Gait, A History of Assam, p.111.; Barua G.C., Op.cit., p.99.

Mohanpuria were subsequently put to death.³²

Thus the first expedition of Qasim Khan on Assam ended in a disaster. The loss in men and materials was heavy but heavier still was the moral breakdown, the loss in military prestige and political power. On the other hand, the victory enhanced the self-confidence of Pratap Singha. He succeeded in stemming the tide of Mughal victory temporarily.

The Ahom King felt the imperative need of strengthening the administration now. This was necessiated due to growing problems arising out of the conflict with the Mughals. Dissensions and intrigues among the officers had already gripped the country. Although the government was centralised, the nobility acted in a manner which brought about suspicions and jealousies against each other. The position being such, no officer could be relied on. The necessity to remodel the war strategy and diplomacy was also seriously considered by the King. He introduced a class of new petty officers, called the 'Sajati' to ensure receiving correct information about the affairs of the state including the conduct of the officers. These

³²Barua, G.C., Op.cit., p.99.; Bhuyan, S.K., Deochai Asom Buranji, p.62.; Gait, Op.cit., p.109.

officers (Sajati) remained under the direct control of the King and had served as secret informers, advisers and messengers to their master. With a view to streamlining the diplomatic corps he replaced the Ahom Katakis with Brahmin Katakis as the latter were gifted with speaking faculties and intelligence. Pratap Singha once explained to the Katakis the importance of their duties thus : "I am highly pleased with the manner in which you have conducted yourselves and asserted your views in a foreign country. Katakis should be shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice."³³

The merit of the improved espionage system could be seen when Akhek Gohain was won over by the Ahom spies and deserted the enemy camp through a promise of pardon. It was considered to be dangerous that an Ahom officer should be helping the enemy in the wars. At the second stage of the first Ahom-Mughal war at Samdhara, Akhek gave important information to the Ahoms which partly contributed to their victory. Satrajit, the Mughal thanadar of Pandu was also influenced by

³³Devi, L., Ahom-Tribal Relations, pp.261,262.

the Ahom officials at a later stage. But contrary to expectation, Satrajit did more harm than good to the Ahoms by frustrating all attempts for restoration of friendly relations between the two powers.

Prince Balinarayan who had earlier decided to fight along with the Ahoms against the Mughals remained aloof in the recent war. It may be due to the fact that he did not get much time to organise his force. However, after Ahom victory he was installed as a tributary king under a new name Dharma Narayan, in the newly created state of Darrang. This new state comprised the western portion of Assam on both sides of the Brahmaputra and his capital was established at a place on the south bank of the Brahmaputra,³⁴ probably near present Guwahati. The Ahom king conferred the title 'Dharma Narayan' in allusion to the propriety of his conduct and conversation on the occasion.³⁵ He was also empowered to collect revenue from the 18 hill Rajas on a tributary basis.³⁶ Unfortunately, he could not consolidate his power in view of protracted wars with the Mughals. The

³⁴Gait, A History of Assam, p.111.

³⁵Wade, J.P., (ed.) Benudhar Sharma, An Account of Assam, p.23E.

³⁶Bharma, Benudhar, 'Dakhinkoli', Souvenir of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Saka, 1882, 'Palasbarin' 'Atiye Kasare'.

history of Mughal Kamrup subsequent to the year 1616 which lasted till 1635 is one long tale of persistent attempts made by Dharma Narayan to subvert the Imperial authority, sometimes by open attack and sometimes by secret help offered to the hill Rajas of Dakhinkol. Throughout his life he struggle hard to yoke off his ancestral domain from foreign domination. 'Like the great Rajput hero Rana Pratap Singh of Chitor, he refused to bow down to the Mughals and held his head high as long as he lived.'³⁷

The most important single factor responsible for the outbreak of the Ahom-Mughal armed conflict was the imperialistic venture of The Bengal Viceroy, Qasim Khan. Due to his impolitic designs, however, the first expedition ended in a disaster. The failure of the expedition led to the dismissal of Qasim Khan from office. He was succeeded by Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang. The victory of the Ahoms against the Mughals gave the former an opportunity to remodel their traditional war strategy. They now launched a counter attack on the Mughals in Kamrup.

³⁷Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.181.

CHAPTER - IV

WAR IN KAMRUP

The defeat of the mighty Mughals at the battle of Sandhara (Jany. 1616 A.D.) was an event of far reaching importance. Both panic and despair seized the Mughal forces. The loss of most of their commanders completely demoralised them. They were further threatened with fresh attack by the Assamese and the very foundation of empire was shaken. The Mughals now realised that the invasion was untimely and impolitic. The Imperial authority at Delhi was shocked to death over this disaster and held the Bengal Viceroy responsible for this. Within a short time a new viceroy was appointed to replace Qasim Khan. The Mughals also were compelled to give up their policy of aggressive imperialism and soberly settled down to a policy of peace, conciliation and consolidation in their new sphere of activity.¹

Meanwhile the Assamese forces chased the remnant of the Mughal troops as far as Fandu. They also stormed the Imperial fortified camp at Agiathuti. Abus-Salan,

¹Bhattacharya, S.N., Mughal North-East Frontier Policy, p.158.

²Gait, E.A., A History of Assam, p.112.

the Mughal Commander could not resist the enemy at Pandu for long. He retreated along with his fleet to Hajo. Satrajit, the thanadar of Pandu outpost also retreated to Hajo, their official headquarters. Gradually the Ahoms concentrated their troops heavily near Pandu. They also constructed one fort each at Pandu and Agiathuti on both sides of the Brahmaputra. Most of their high officials including the Buragohain and Bargohain were asked to stay there to strengthen their position.³ Constructions of two more forts, one at Samdhara and the other at Kaliabar had, in the meantime, been completed. The Ahoms now were fully prepared to launch a counter attack. Thus the scene of the conflict had been shifted to the Mughal territory.

Abus-Salam, in his utter distress, immediately, sent urgent message to the Viceroy of Bengal narrating the state of affairs in Kamrup. He also requested for heavy reinforcement in order to combat the fresh attack of the Assamese. Subadar Qasim Khan, on receipt of the report ordered Mirza Nathan, who was then staying at Barnagar to proceed to Hajo with his troops. Accordingly he left with a thousand horse, a thousand matchlockmen and two hundred war-boats.⁴ Soon after his arrival,

³Barua, G.C., Ahom Buranji, p.101.

⁴Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.181.

he started giving relief work to the panic stricken and wounded soldiers. His main task was, however, to boost up the morale of the soldiers. Simultaneously he was to prepare for clearing the Pandu fort from the enemy attacks.

Highly elated by the recent victories and also encouraged by Dharmanarayan, Pratap Singha prepared for a bigger attack. The 18 hill Rajas and the Dimaria Raja submitted to the Ahom King and promised all help so as to drive the Mohammedans out of the vicinity of Kamrup. The dimarua Raja was formerly a tributary to the Koch King of Kamrup. He took the first opportunity to support the cause of the Assam King. Apparently he was happy to hear the news of the Assamese victory followed by advance of their troops upto Pandu. The Dimaria Raja and the hill Rajas had no direct contact with the Mughals till then and they were seriously alarmed at the latter's advance eastward. The recent Ahom victory gave these frontier Rajas an encouragement to fight unitedly against the invaders. People from all walks of life also submitted to Pratap Singha and expressed their determination to expel the invaders.⁵

⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji, p.24.

Mirza Nathan, the new Mughal Commander soon proceeded to Pandu to meet the challenges of the enemies. He faced the combined attacks of the Ahoms, the Dimaria Raja, Dharmanarayan and the hill Rajas. A series of clashes occurred near Pandu. With utmost valour the Mirza could defend the Pandu fort. At one stage he advanced southward and captured the fort of Panipat.⁶ At this stage serious internal troubles broke out in Kamrup. Sheikh Ibrahim Krori, the principal revenue officer, taking advantage of the weakness of the Bengal government and the disorderly state of affairs in Kamrup, misappropriated a sum of Rs.7 (seven) lakhs from the Imperial exchequer and with about 3000 followers rebelled in the vain hope of becoming independent. He went a step further by inducing the local Koch leaders to stir up against the Mughals. The Koch hero Sanatan accordingly proceeded to the thana of Dandama with his force to assist the rebel officer.⁷ Abdul Faqir, the Chief Officer of Hajo had in the meantime, left for Bengal. The incident necessitated the presence of Mirza Nathan at Hajo. As there was no strong officer to deal effectively with these internal revolts, the

⁶Borah, M.I., 'Baharistan-i-Ghaybi' of Mirza Nathan, p.423.

⁷Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.247.

Mirza was required to return immediately leaving the fort of Pandu at the mercy of the Assamese. Thus he assumed virtual control of the military affairs in Kamrup.

During the short period of about one year (1616-1617) after the Mughal disaster at Samdhara till the arrival of the new Subadar, Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang at Jahangirnagar (Dacca), significant changes took place in the administration of Kamrup. Besides external danger, the Mughals were confronted with serious internal disorder. Most of the favourite officers of Viceroy Qasim Khan were withdrawn. Abdul Baqi, a favourite officer of Qasim Khan left Hajo after the arrival of Mirza Nathan. He was later on made a captive in the hands of the men of the new viceroy, Ibrahim Khan.⁸ In the absence of a bold policy on the part of the viceroy, the Mughal administration in Kamrup was confronted with external and internal dangers. The rebellions of Sheikh Ibrahim Krori and Sanatan, the repeated attacks of Dharmanarayan and his allies, the treachery of Satrajit, all were the direct results of the change of the Viceroy of Bengal and the apathetic policy of the Imperial court.

⁸Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.442.

Gait, on the authority of Padishahnama says that the failure of the Mughal expedition against Assam led to the disposition of Qasim Khan from office.⁹ This view has been accepted by S.N. Bhattacharya.¹⁰ M.I. Borah on the basis of the writings of 'Rogers and Beveridge' says that the orders for Qasim Khan's dismissal and the appointment of Ibrahim Khan were issued by the Emperor Jahangir on the 8th April, 1617 A.D.¹¹ The fact that the outgoing viceroy opposed the incoming Viceroy with arms on his way to Jahangirnagar at Jatrapur shows that the former was not willing to relinquish charge of office. Qasim Khan was, however, defeated by Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang.¹²

Evidently, Ibrahim Khan Fath Jang, brother of Queen Nur Jahan was appointed Viceroy after a lapse of one year of the disaster. The arrival of the viceroy designate was again delayed by about six months as he arrived at Dacca at the end of the year 1617. Gait admits that Ibrahim Khan assumed his office after the battle of Ranihat which took place sometime at the end of the year 1617 between the hill Rajas and the Mughals.¹³

⁹Gait, Op.cit., p.111.

¹⁰Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.186.

¹¹Bora, M.I., Op.cit., p.844 (notes-13).

¹²Ibid., p.442.

¹³Gait, Op.cit., p.69.

Judging from this view, it may be concluded that although Qasim Khan was held responsible for the ill-fated Assam campaign, the Imperial authority at Delhi failed to take prompt action to replace him. This indicates its lack of interest in the north-east frontier. Secondly, the delay in the execution of the orders of appointment testifies to it. Nevertheless, the new Viceroy showed his keen interest in the north-east frontier. He immediately sent a strong force under the command of Sheikh Kamal to restore order in Kamrup.¹⁴

While the Mirza was busy with putting down the revolt of the Krori, the military affairs at Pandu again took a serious turn. Mirza Yusuf Barlas who had been defending the fort of Pandu sent urgent message to Nathan through Balabhadra Das describing the attack of Raja Dharmanarayan and the hill Rajas. It was also made clear by Mirza Yusuf that unless substantial reinforcement, came, it would not be possible to defend the fort.¹⁵ Large numbers of soldiers had, in the meantime, been killed on both sides. On receipt of the message, Mirza Nathan immediately despatched Islar Guli with a fleet to the aid of Mirza Yusuf with the assurance that further reinforcements would follow in quick

¹⁴Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.447.

¹⁵Ibid., p.452.

succession. Masud Qasim Khan, the personal messenger of Nathan accompanied Islam Quli to Pandu to get a first hand knowledge of the affairs there. After studying the situation he returned to Hajo and described how the Mughals were attacked by the enemies through cannons, ballistas and rockets. The Mirza was also informed that two successive assaults were repulsed by the Imperialists. Considering the position hopeless, the Mirza sent special messenger to the viceroy asking for strong reinforcement. On being informed, the viceroy sent urgent orders to Qulij Khan, the jagirdar designate of Koch territory to march quickly to assist the Imperial officer at Patol.¹⁶ Reinforcement was also rushed-in to Pandu under Islam Quli assisted by Suna Ghazi, Adil Khan and other admirals of Musa Khan. Heavy fighting followed. Both sides engaged their full forces. Dharmanarayan ultimately fled with his brother. The Mughals repulsed the enemy attack and achieved victory. This gave them temporary relief and now a section of their forces was withdrawn to Hajo in order to engage them towards suppression of the revolt of Sheikh Ibrahim Krori. Hostilities with the Assamese stopped for few months. Mirza Nathan considered this victory as a prelude to another victory

¹⁶Eora, M.I., Op.cit., pp.456-457.

¹⁷Ibid. p.459.

over the rebel officer Krori. All attempts to capture the rebel officer through conciliatory means, in the meantime failed.

At this stage rumour spread that the King of Assam had sent a force to the rescue of the Sheikh. Apparently the Imperial officers were alarmed at this news. However, they carried on their operations and after a hot pursuit the Sheikh was captured and his head was cut off. The head was then sent to the Subadar along with a detailed report of the victory.¹⁸ The King of Assam did not send any reinforcement as apprehended. Subsequently the Mughal officers responsible for the suppression of the revolt were rewarded by the subadar with promotion in their ranks.

Before the outbreak of the rebellion, Sheikh Ibrahim exchanged some correspondences with the Ahom King. With a view to securing Ahom help, he sent a messenger to the Ahom court with this message - "If you help me with men and money and make the King of the Koches, I will exert my utmost valour and will be devoted to you and never allow the enemies of Delhi to proceed against you as long as I live."¹⁹ The Krori further suggested

¹⁸Borah, M.I., Op.cit. p.443.

¹⁹Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.443.

that unless a joint action was taken at that stage against their common enemy, the Imperial authority would send a big army to Assam only to cut root and branch of the Ahoms. The narrative of Mirza Nathan further states that the Raja of Assam welcomed this proposal but was reluctant to believe the Shaikh. Pratap Singha replied that the Shaikh first lead the war in order to prove his sincerity. The Ahom King further promised to help and rather install him as the King of the Koches with valuable presents if the latter could send one or two Mughal officers alive or dead.²⁰ This view has been accepted by S.N. Bhattacharya when he says that the Ahom monarch suspected the bonafides of the rebel and in order to test his sincerity, he advised the Shaikh to commence hostilities forthwith, thus preparing the ground for intervention.²¹ It is, however not true as stated by the learned author that the first Ahom intervention in Kamrup took place on behalf of the Krori.²² Gait admits that the Assam King promised to help on condition that the Shaikh first drove out the Imperialists from Hajo. He further says that although he (Shaikh) was assisted by the Ahoms, the Mughals defeated and killed him.²³ The two views

²⁰Bora, M.K., Op.cit.,

²¹Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.247.

²²Ibid.

²³Gait, Op.cit., p.69.

of the learned author seem to be contradictory. The reaction of the rebel officer on receipt of the reply from the Ahom King was also not known. Mirza Nathan says that the Assam King was always apprehending the conspiracy of the Mughals. Before the rebellion broke out, the Ahom King sent an envoy to the Shaikh to get a first hand situation report. At that stage the Mirza tried to win over the rebel officer through pacific means. In order to create misunderstanding and apprehension in the mind of the Assamese envoy, the Mirza rode on the same elephant with the Shaikh.²⁴ On seeing this, the Assamese envoy apparently apprehended conspiracy.

There is no record in any Assamese chronicle to show that the King of Assam either exchanged messages with the rebel officer or helped the latter with men and money. It appears the Ahom king desired to exploit the situation by a threat of intervention in favour of the rebels. At the initial stage they might have exchanged ideas with the rebel chief. But there is nothing to show that the Ahoms really helped the rebels in view of the fact that the allies had already decided

²⁴Bora, M.K., Op.cit., p.451.

to expel the Bangals (Mughals) from Kamrup. The Ahoms failed to utilise the opportunity and merely remained content with capturing the fort of Randu with the help of the allies. Swargadeo Pratap Singha expressed his shock and resentment at the death of the Sheikh and also over his failure to give timely assistance to the latter. He now realised that the rebel officer was motivated by sincere consideration and that it was a mistake not to have offered help to him. Mirza Nathan says that the destruction of the Sheikh was due to the treacherous conduct of the Assamese officers.²⁵ However, there is nothing to substantiate this prejudiced views.

The suppression of the rebellion was followed by more serious troubles in Kamrup. Hajo was threatened with attacks from the Ahoms. Padmeswar Gogoi says;

"Sheikh Ibrahim's death hastened the preparation at Gargaon for sending a powerful army to Guwahati. Hso-Hseng-pha (Susenpha) bitterly criticised the conduct of the lower Assam generals in allowing the Sheikh to be killed in that manner".²⁶

This observation is apparently based on the narrative of Mirza Nathan (Baharistan-i-Ghaybi). In the absence of any record in the local Buranjis, it is difficult to

²⁵Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.479.

²⁶Gogoi, P., The Tai and the Tai Kingdom, p.357.

accept this view. The Ahoms, however, put heavy pressure on the Mughals along with their allies at Pandu repeatedly in order to divert the attention of the Hajo administration.

Meanwhile Dharmanarayan took possession of the fort of Pandu after evacuation of this place by the Imperialists. Thereupon Mirza Nathan again sent Mirza Yusuf Barlas to recapture Pandu. While on the move, the Mughals came to know about heavy concentration of enemy forces at Pandu and so they halted and pitched their camp at Jharighat, a charland, situated between Hajo and Pandu.²⁷ Dharmanarayan sent urgent messages to the Ahom officers who were already on the march under royal orders to proceed quickly to Pandu. The Ahom force consisted of innumerable elephants and boats under the command of Buragohain, Hati Barua, Rajkhowa, Khargharia Phukan. They all rushed to Pandu and then proceeded further west and encamped at the village Bardadhigaon.²⁸

Realising the gravity of the situation after receiving report from Yusuf about the strength of the enemy, the Mirza sent more forces under Raja Satrajit

²⁷Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.480.

²⁸Ibid.

with his Hindu officer Badridas. They were ordered to stay at Jharighat against their will and constructed two forts on either side of the Brahmaputra where its course was comparatively narrow. The attempts however, failed. At this critical juncture, Satrajit fell back from the fighting line and returned to Hajo, followed by others. None of the Mughal officers had the courage to face the formidable combined allied forces. The news of this retreat was reported by Balabhadra Das and Badridas to the Mirza who was then sick. Mirza Nathan expressed his anguish at the cowardly actions of the officers. At his distress he despatched Balabhadra Das and Haji Lang to Barnagar with a message to Qulij Khan seeking his help. As he had a small force at his disposal, he in turn, sent a message to the Chiefs of Jahangirnagar to come to the rescue of the Imperial forces of Kamrup immediately.²⁹ Soon heavy reinforcements arrived from Bengal. Sheikh Kamal who had been sent by the new Viceroy earlier, also arrived and joined them.

After reoccupation of Pandu, the Ahoms were advancing towards Hajo. Preparations for a grand attack on Hajo now made. A strong fort was constructed on the bank of the river Shesha near Hajo under special instructions of the monarch.

²⁹Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.483.

Several small forts were also erected on the south-eastern frontier of Hajo. The three Gohains were ordered to stay at Shesha to keep strict vigilance on the movement of the enemies. Lachampam Bhandari and Raidingia Barua were especially instructed not to attack the Mohammedans without the order of the King.³⁰ A strong naval force was also despatched under the joint command of Laluk Phukan and Lasham Siring with their new titles Neog Phukan. As advised by the Deodhais, they advanced to Hajo through the river Shesha. The Gohains, the Baruas and other high officials pleaded the positive prohibition of the king to advance. Other prominent leaders waiting at Shesha fort were Raja Dharma Narayan, Mani Konwar of Dhakeri (Uttarkul); Jadu Deka, the Chutia Prince; the Dimarua Raja and the Hill Rajas of Dakhinkol.³¹ The Ahom strategy of the invasion was to make a three-pronged attack, both by land and water. A division of the army waited on the foot of the Talaya hill (Mak Kuberachal - about 5 miles north east of Hajo). For sometime the Ahoms were watching the movement of the Mohammedans. At this stage some Ahom soldiers were killed by the enemies while moving round to study the enemy position. This action of the Mughals was definitely provocative to their

³⁰Barua, G.C., Ahom Buranji, p.101.

³¹Barah, M.I., Baharistan, p.488.; Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji, pp.24-25.; Gait, A History of Assam, p.112.

counterpart. In the meantime, the Ahom spies reported to the Neogs about the advance of Mohammedan horses. The Neogs thought the time opportune and without wasting time, ordered their forces to strike at the enemies, according to the maxim - 'He never loses who strikes first'. The three Gohains and the Deodhai Pandit and the Bharali Barua prohibited the Ahom officers from taking the offensive and advised them to wait for orders from their monarch.³² According to Baharistan, the Assam Raja ordered to attack the enemy first. A letter was reported to have been addressed by the king to his officers which read thus - "As the armies of Delhi have not begun their attack and as you have already reached near them with a large army, it is proper for you to begin the battle without further delay."³³ The local chronicles, however, gave a different account. The Assamese forces acting on the King's orders first stayed at Pandu. At the request from his officers stationed at Pandu, the King sent one Laluk of Borgohain family and one Lacham serving as War Neog with supreme power to lead the forces to Hajo. They were also empowered to behead anyone who would act contrary to their orders.³⁴ The time was, however, not found opportune in view of

³²Barua, G.C., Ahom Buranji, p.101.; Gait, A History of Assam, p.112.

³³Borah, M.I., Baharistan, p.487.

³⁴Baruah, G.C., Op.cit., pp.487

adverse omens predicted but the Deodhai Pandits. King Pratap Singha sent special messengers from Samdhara to the officers of the Assamese expedition not to take aggressive part till they would get final orders from him.³⁵ Pratap Singha took serious exception to the action of some hot-headed commanders which showed that the attack was ill-timed, and not in accordance with his advice.

Sheikh Kamal, after his arrival at Hajo ordered the Imperial officers to proceed as far as to village Talia and to construct a fort there. The Imperial force was now well equipped with contingent of forces of Culi Khan, Dust Beg, the fleet of the twelve Bhuyans of Bengal, the regular force of Mirza Nathan besides those of Sheikh Kamal and Satrajit. The details of the war are narrated in Baharistan-i-Ghaysi as follows,

"The Burha Gohain at the head of one hundred thousand infantry was to march along the hilly and jungly bank of the Brahmaputra towards the main part of Hajo. Hati Barua and Raja Baldev and Samuroid Kayeth with a force of two hundred thousand infantry, one hundred and eighty elephants (including heated elephants) called upon Sheikh Kamal. The Rajkhowa and the Khargharia were to take the command of the fleet of four thousand war boats against the fleet of the Twelve Bhuyans. The eighteen hill Rajas were to take their position with all their hill men on the bank of the river

³⁵Barua, G.C., Op.cit., p.102.

in aid of their fleet and not allow the enemies to escape to Dakhinkol. One thousand war boats were sent to the mouth of the river Pawrawa to the rear of the Imperial army in order to block the passage of ration and communication from Dacca. In short the Imperial army was brought to bay like games in a hunt."³⁶

The accounts of the operations have been precisely given in the Ahom Buranji and the Kamrupar Buranji. All the accounts agree with the view that Hajo was besieged from all sides by the Assamese (February/March, 1618 A.D.).

One day at midnight, a contingent of Ahom force led by the Bargohain, Lai Gohain and the Raidingia Barua advanced through the hilly and jungly tracts to the hillock of Sultan Ghiyasud-din Awliya (Foa-Macca, considered to be a holy shrine by the Mussalmans). Another troop under the Bor Gohain, the Borpatra Gohain, Moni Ponwar and Abboypuria proceeded forward by up road from the south towards Hajo fort. The Mussalmans could not anticipate the midnight attack and a fierce battle took place. At the initial stage most of the devotees of the shrine were massacred. But soon after reinforcement, the Mughals under the command of Dust Beg and Qulij Khan, defeated the Assamese. Large number of soldiers were killed and the rest retreated.³⁷ The elephants of the Assamese could not stand long against the cavalry of the enemy. The first battle of the expedition ended in disaster.

³⁶Barua, M.I., Op.cit., p.448.

³⁷Ibid., pp.449, .

Barua, G.C., Op.cit., p.103.

Early next morning, Dharmanarayan, Hati Barua and Samuroid Kayeth advanced in awe-inspiring formations with a huge army and innumerable elephants. Sheikh Kamal arranged his army in collaboration with his brothers. Satrajit and some mansabdars confronted the enemy attack. At this juncture the Imperial fleet of the Zamindars was also attacked by the Assam fleet and put to great straits. Mirza Nathan who was then at the main fort of Hajo, hearing the news of the attack from all sides sent a message to Qulij Khan giving details of the position in various fronts. He also promised to march to the help of Qulij Khan if required. Sheikh Kamal, realising the hopeless position, sent urgent messages to Mirza Nathan for help through Pandas. The Mirza rushed in to the help of Kamal and fought gallantly against the enemies.³⁸

Fortune favoured the Imperialists. A great victory was achieved. This was considered by Nathan as one of the foremost military conquest attained by the grace of God. The Hati Barua, Paja Dharmanarayan, Samuroid Kayeth ran away in disgrace along with their forces.³⁹ Thereafter, the Assamese concentrated their force on the southern side of the hill. In the mean time, the

³⁸ Borah, M.I., Op.cit., p.491.

³⁹ Ibid., p.492.

Assamese fleet was advancing towards Hajo after defeating the Imperial fleet. This gave an opportunity to the land force to renew its attack. Thus the Mughal forces were put to great straits. After defeating the enemy in the eastern front, Mirza Nathan and Sheikh Kanai came to the rescue of Qulij Khan. The three generals now prepared a new strategy to defend their main fort at Hajo. A fierce battle ensued. The scattered Imperial fleet also took its position. At last the Mughal triumphed and the vanquished allies fled away with heavy losses.⁴⁰

The failure of the expedition produced immediate and far-reaching results in the history of Ahom politics. In terms of casualties the losses were terrible. Thakbak Buragohain, Mani Konwar, Mon Hazarika fell fighting while a large number were killed and wounded. Many large ships and some elephants were lost. The Mughals also seized immense quantities of guns, shields and other war equipments. The rest of the force first retreated to Pandu and then to Kajalinukh.⁴¹

In Baharistan, Mirza Nathan has given an accounts of the losses on the Ahom side thus - 'When surveyed

⁴⁰Borah, M.I., Op.cit., pp.494-495.

⁴¹Wade, J.P., (ed.) Benudhar Sharma, 'An Account of Assam, p.282.; Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, pp.63-65; Gait, A History of Assam, p.109; Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji, p.25. Barua, G.C., Ahom Buranji, p.103.

after the retreat of the Assamese forces, out of four thousand war boats, only two hundred escaped. The enemy lost three thousand and seven hundred men in the field of battle; double of this number died in the adjacent places and more than ten thousand wounded fled away. On the Imperial side, two hundred attained martyrdom and double this number were wounded. The heads of the dead enemies were cut off and loaded in the boats and were sent to Jahangirnagar to Khan Fath Jang along with elephants and different kinds of booties."⁴² While admitting the fact that the Ahoms engaged a huge force, the description about the amount of losses seems to be an exaggeration.

Pratap Singh was extremely angry when he heard the news of the disaster. He at once ordered an enquiry into the failure of the expedition and asked the scattered forces to rally at Samdhara. Laluk Phukan, Lachar Siring and some others were held responsible and so put to death. Khamprat Bar Gohain and Tipani Raja who were also found guilty were put into a cage where they were allowed to die of hunger.⁴³ The king then returned to the capital and performed the Medammemphi (death ceremony).⁴⁴

⁴²Borah, M.I., Baharistan, p.497.

⁴³Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji, p.25; Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, p.66.; Gait, Cp.cit., p.112.; Barua, G.C., Op.cit., p.104.

⁴⁴Barua, G.C., Op.cit., p.104.; Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, p.66.

It may be admitted that the invasion of Hajo was not properly conducted. Pratap Singh who was staying at the Samdhara fort during the period of conflict failed to command the forces in right directions. The high officials were anxiously waiting for the final order of their monarch and at that stage they were asked to launch the attack by the Neog Phukans. The Mughals on the contrary, conducted the military affairs exclusively from Hajo. So the failure of the expedition may be partly attributed to the King for his lack of proper guidance at the critical time. The Mughals acted with foresight with reinforcement from Bengal. The irony of the entire episode was that Pratap Singha remained content by executing most of the top ranking officers engaged in the invasion of Hajo. The Ahoms now abandoned their policy of aggression and instead launched a policy of peace and consolidation.

With a view to securing efficient administration in the western part of his Kingdom and also to have proper vigilance on Mughal activity, Pratap Singha soon created a post of high ranking officer with the title, 'Bar Phukan'. Langi Panisia who distinguished himself in restoring order among the panic-stricken Ahom officers after the battle of Hajo was appointed to the post.

It was also felt that a responsible officer of the rank of Bar Phukan (governor) would be able to conduct diplomatic relations not only with Bengal government but also with the hill Chieftains on the frontier. Langi Panisia was accordingly appointed the first Bar Phukan with his headquarters at Kajalimukh.⁴⁵ The tracts of the territory west of Kaliabar were placed under his jurisdiction while the area east of Kaliabar and outside the jurisdiction of the Bargohain and the Buragohain was placed under another functionary of equal rank, known as Bar Barua. The first incumbent of this post was Momai Tamuli, the King's brother-in-law.⁴⁶

Shortly after the war at Hajo, dissensions occurred among the Mughal officers of Kamrup. Mirza Nathan in his narrative describes how he was put to trouble by the conspiracy of Sheikh Kamal, Qulij Khan, Satrajit and others. Jealous of Nathan's calibre, they sent false reports to the Subadar stating that the victory was achieved by them and not by Mirza Nathan. The Mirza was further aggrieved when he came to know

⁴⁵Gait, Op.cit., p.112.; Bhuyan, S.K. Kamrupar Buranji, p.23.

⁴⁶Sharma, Benudhar, Doorbin, p.3.

that Chisti Khan had been appointed the Chief Commander of Kamrup thus ignoring his claim. These officers went a step further to frustrate the attempts of Nathan to see the Subadar personally. The intrigues of these officers ultimately compelled him to leave Kamrup with a handful of followers for Dacca. At a later stage he was entrusted by the Subadar to the task of conquest of Dakhinkol and was suitably rewarded.

Mirza Nathan dominated Mughal politics in Kamrup as Chief Commander of the Imperial army for more than two years (1616-1618). He reorganised the administration of Kamrup and restored order at a stage when the morale of the Mughal was at a low ebb. He was engaged in a series of battles against Dharmanayan, the eighteen hill Rajas besides the Assamese and defended the Mughal territory. The suppression of the rebellion of Ibrahim Krori was another brilliant example of his courage and tactfulness. He cleverly alienated the Shons from giving military help to the Sheikh. At last he defended Hajo from the enemy attack and thereby the entire Koch territory was saved. But his sincere and heroic services were not duly recognised by the Subadar at that time.

⁴⁷Borah, M.I., Op.cit., pp.497-498.

of some selfish and jealous officers. with the result that a loyal and able officer had to leave the frontier in disgrace.

The state of affairs in Kamarup was still far from settled in view of the recent external aggression and internal revolt. The situation was further disturbed by sporadic Koch insurrections. On the request of the Viceroy of Bengal, Ibrahim Khan to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, Lakhshmi Narayan was released (March 10, 1618) from detention. It was expected that his presence might ease the situation caused by the revolts of the Koch chiefs. He was offered with gifts of a robe of honour, an Iraqi horse, a magnificent elephant, a bejewelled sword belt and a bejewelled dagger belt.⁴⁸ The viceroy immediately sent him to Hajo to render help to the Imperialists (Spring, 1618). After confinement for about three and half years, Lakhshmi Narayan got back his personal freedom and was reinstated in his kingdom as a vassal with great honour. But he was not destined to rule any longer⁴⁹ Sheikh Kamal, an old and experienced officer now became the Fouzdar of Kamarup (Hajo) and with his initiative he secured the permission

⁴⁸Borah, M.I., Op.cit., pp.521, 848.

⁴⁹Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.159.

of the Subadar to get the services of Lakshmi Narayan. He did not govern Koch Behar but left in charge of his son as before. "An era of honourable exile from his kingdom now sets in."⁵⁰ He continued to stay at Pat'e with a contingent of troops and aided the Imperialists in consolidating the authority in Uttarkol and Bakhinkol regions. He does not appear to have taken the field in person but he frequently placed his troops at the disposal of his colleagues, particularly Mirza Nathan, the astute and energetic conqueror of Bakhinkol, with whom he was on terms of great intimacy.⁵¹ At a later stage he joined the revolt of Shah Jahan in Bengal. He continued to remain loyal to the Emperor till his death in 1627 A.D. Another Bengal Zaminder, Musa Khan displayed similar faithfulness and loyalty in serving the Bengal government distinguishing himself especially in the conquest of Tippera besides his many conquests in Kamrup.

Sir J.N. Sarkar says that about the middle of the year 1618 A.D., Madhusudan, a nephew of Lakshmi Narayan seized the pargana of Koroihari but Musa Khan, the Imperial commander suppressed it.⁵² According to

⁵⁰Bhattacharya, S.N., Op.cit., p.160,; Torah, M.I., Op.cit., p.522.

⁵¹Ibid.,

⁵²Sarkar, Sir J.N., History of Bengal, p.300.

Baharistan, Madhusudan, son of Jisketu (Brishaketu), a relation of Raja Lakshmi Narayan marched with his forces to Dakhinkol and seized Koroibari, a south western part of Kamrup. The Subadar sent Chand Bahadur as Chief of the army against Madhusudan. Musa Khan and many other zamindars accompanied the Mughal force. They captured the Koch Chief alive and brought him to Khizrpur only to produce before the Subadar.⁵³ In pursuance of his liberal policy, the subadar treated him kindly and secured his services for the government of Kamrup. The incident occurred just after the departure of Mirza Nathan from Hajo. There is no reference in the Ahom chronicles about this incident. This may be due to the fact that the Ahoms were not involved therein. At a subsequent period, Madhusudan helped the Mughals against the Assamese led by Dharma Narayan at the battle of Minori.⁵⁴ As he accepted the Imperial vassalage, it was very likely that he helped them later on.

The protracted wars accompanied by Koch insurrections in Sarkar Kamrup exhausted the energy of both the Ahoms and the Mughals. They realised the necessity

⁵³Bora, M.I., Op.cit., pp.503-504.

⁵⁴Sharma, Benudhar, 'Dakhinkol' - Souvenir of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Saka 1882 - 'Palasbarir Ditiye Kasare'.; Sarkar, Sir J.N., Op.cit., p.300.

of peace and order in the Koch territory. At this stage Lakshmi Narayan, with the vain hope of becoming independent in recognition of his services, initiated a peace proposal between the two belligerents. He first discussed the matter with Shaikh Farul, the fouzdar of Hajo. Then he sent his personal envoy, Birukaji to the Ahom officers stationed at Bishukantha Chowki, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra (opposite to present Guwahati). The Ahom officers in turn escorted him to Kajalimukh to report the matter to the Bar Phukan. The envoy was detained there for sometime pending receipt of formal order of audience with the King. Swargadeo Pratap Singh welcomed the proposal and despatched Dharadhar Kataki to Kajalimukh so as to bring Bira Kaji to the capital by false promises.⁵⁵

After arrival at Gargaon, Biru Kaji reported to the King thus - "The Mussalman king wishes to make peace and to establish hat and fat as a mark of friendship. O' great King, I, your slave have been sent to by Lakshmi Narayan to inform you about the matter. Pratap Singha replied - "If Lakshmi Narayan can manage

⁵⁵Bhuyan, S.K., Deodhai Asom Buranji, p.117.; Bhuyan, S.K., Kamrupar Buranji, (ed), p.25. ; Parua, G.C., Ahom Buranji, p.107.; Wade, J.F., An Account of Assam, p.288.

to put a stop to the war that has been going on by making peace, I shall allow you to go back to your country as early as possible. But if he cannot, I shall not allow you to go back."⁵⁶ The conversation testified to the fact that Pratap Singha was keen to restore peace in the frontier permanently. He asked the Koch envoy to stay in his capital for sometime only to prove the fidelity of the peace proposal. He was given quarters at Baghchua to live under proper supervision. The narrative of Mirza Nathan is silent about the peace overture. This was due to the fact that the Mirza was engaged in the Dakhinkol operations at that time and was not aware of the developments in the administration of Hajo. Moreover, he was not on good terms with the fouzdar.

The peace proposal was not welcomed by Satrajit, the thanadar of Pandu. This officer wanted that the conflicts should continue for long to serve his interest. Satrajit became active in frustrating the peace negotiation and started conspiring with the Ahom officers. He made secret correspondences with the Assam King. Perhaps he entertained the idea of becoming an independent chief at Pandu with the help of the Ahoms. With

⁵⁶Gait, *Op.cit.*, p.113.; Bhuyan, S.K. Farruqar Buranji, pp.26-27.

this aim in view, he met the Bar Phukan at Kajalimukh and then sent his minor son to the Ahom court with rich presents by way of paying homage to the King. Satrajit also despatched Umar and Kanai, the two traders with a personal letter to the Swargadeo.⁵⁶ The party was also accompanied by a Sajati from Kajalimukh to Garoan. The letter reads as follows : "I become the son of the Swargadeo. Your majesty may treat me as your son or your servant. The details will be explained by the traders." (Feb. 1620). Pratap Singha accepted this proposal considering it as an act of friendship. In reply and as a mark of friendship the Assam King sent Kamal Lochan Kataki to Satrajit with a silver jhari (pitcher), a spout of gold. The queen also sent one of Satrajit's harem, a suit of silk riha-mekhal as a token of love. The Swargadeo also desired that Satrajit should drink water from the jhar that he sent just like a son (baby) took his mother's milk. Besides these presents, the King sent as present for Satrajit's minor son, an elephant and two thousand silver coins. Pratap Singha continued to exchange regular emissaries with Satrajit for sometime as he thought

that this friendship would serve as an effective check on the further advance of the Mohammedans.

One of the reasons which tempted Satrajit to come close to the Ahoms might be that the incident of sacrifice of his son at the altar of the Goddess Umakhyia was still fresh in his mind. Karamchan, son of Satrajit was sacrificed at the altar of the Goddess Umakhyia after the battle of Samdhara. Many more Mughal Commanders were executed by the Ahoms after the latter's victory in the battle. He thus wanted to take vengeance upon the Ahoms at the opportune moment. He was also afraid of losing his power and position if peace was allowed to be restored between the two powers. 'A traitor by nature, he had been false to the Mohammedans on many occasions, as he now intrigued with the Ahoms.' He further induced the local Chiefs to revolt against the Mughals.

In the course of the exchange of ideas, the Ahom King sent Kalia Katakai to Satrajit with some presents. But on way to Pandu the articles (presents) were lost. At this Satrajit expressed his sorrow and in order to

please the Katakis, presented him with clothes. The boatmen escorting the Katakis later misrepresented the incident to Swargadeo in such a manner that the Swargadeo considered the action as humiliating to him for receiving presents from the Mughal officer without his (King) knowledge. Although he was ordered to be arrested by the King, he was found not guilty after an enquiry. Satrajit could continue the friendly relations with the Ahom king for sometime through his diplomatic skill. But later on his various mischievous acts were detected.

The period of two years (1616-1618 A.D.) is marked by incessant wars between the Imperialists and the allied powers led by the Ahoms. This was accompanied by sporadic Koch insurrections in different parts of Kamrup. Another important event of this period was the rebellion of the Mughal officer Prori. All the challenges had been adequately met by the Imperialists. Mirza Nathan can be regarded as the real hero of the Mughal victory. The Assamese for the time being abandoned their aggressive policy. Their allies however, made persistent attempts to subvert the Mughal authority in south Kamrup. The Mughals also

gave up their traditional policy of Imperialism for some time realising their past mistake. They now adopted a policy of consolidation within their own territory. Some efforts were also made towards conclusion of peace and stability by both the powers. But these attempts were in vain and within a short time the two powers were involved in a fresh conflict.