

Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharya

**A  
History of  
Mughal  
North-east  
Frontier  
Policy**

Not many books are available specifically on the Mughal period *vis-a-vis* North-East Frontier Policy. This important book was first published in 1929 and has remained unavailable for many years. Suggestion to take up this work was made to the author by no less a person than Sir Jadu Nath Sarkar, the eminent historian and authority on Emperor Aurangzeb. Dr R.C. Majumdar, then Professor at Dacca University, also read through this work when it was still in mss. form.

Covering in great detail the political relations of the Mughal Empire with the Koch Kingdom of North Bengal and the Ahom Kingdom in Assam the book has the distinction of the author's deep research. Contemporary Persian Chronicles and later Persian works, Ahom and Assamese Buranjis, Koch Chronicles, accounts of early foreign travellers and modern historical works of special value and those of general reference, (notably, Hunter's *A Statistical Account of Assam* ) and various journals, maps and directories of the time were the basic tools of the author.

Assam's own well-known historians, P.C. Choudhury and H.K. Barpujari have ably covered the medieval and modern period's of Assam history and the present work suitably fills the need of a standard book on the Mughal period.

#### *Publisher's Note*

As we go to press, it is learnt that this book was reprinted by a Calcutta publisher in 1994, but this was not widely known in Assam. The Calcutta edition being quite expensive, we decided on a modest (by our standards) edition at a much lower price, as to keep it within reach of all.

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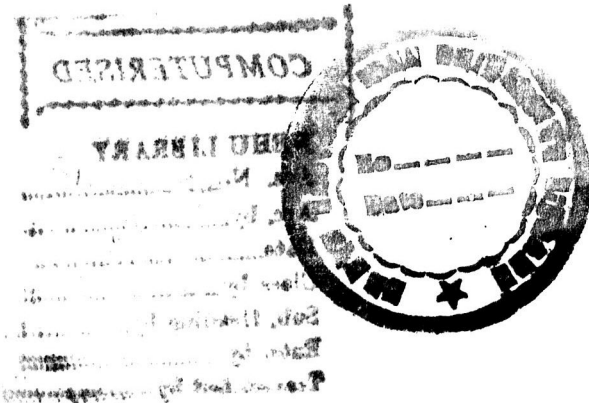
**A  
HISTORY  
OF  
MUGHAL NORTH-EAST FRONTIER POLICY**

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OF  
MUGHAL NORTH-EAST FRONTIER POLICY

BEING A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL RELATION OF THE  
MUGHAL EMPIRE WITH KOCH BIHAR,  
KAMRUP AND ASSAM

BY

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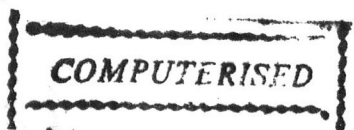
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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The object of the present work is to make an attempt to fill a gap in the history of Mughal India. The political relation of the Mughal Empire with the Mongoloid states of Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam on its north-east frontier is really an interesting theme, but no serious attempt seems to have been made so far to work it up. The suggestion for taking up this subject was first given to the writer by Professor Jadu Nath Sarkar, the distinguished historian of Aurangzib. He contributed a valuable article to the Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, March, 1921, containing an analysis of the contents of the *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*—a Manuscript History of Bengal and Orissa during Jahangir's reign, written in Persian by one of his own officers, which offered the prospect of a vast amount of new material for this topic. Through the kindness of the Dacca University authorities, a rotograph of the MS. was secured from Paris and placed at the disposal of the writer. The work more than fulfilled his expectations and proved really to be a mine of information, of course, from the Mughal standpoint. For the collection of materials extant in the Ahom and Assamese languages, as well as for a personal inspection of the scenes of leading events of the period, a visit to Assam, particularly to Gauhati and Shillong, was then undertaken. A critical and exhaustive study of the different sources was attempted, and the result embodied in a monograph on "Early Mughal Relations with Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam," which secured for the writer a Premchand Roychand Research Studentship of the Calcutta University in the year 1925. The subject was gradually worked up to its practical completion in the three subsequent instalments of the thesis submitted during the tenure of the Studentship (1926-28). The present volume comprises mainly the work of these years.

A few remarks regarding the treatment of the subject-matter may here be made. Chapters I and II are merely introductory. The former gives a rapid survey of the various forces—geographical, ethnological, social, economic, political and cultural, which determined the history of the kingdoms on the north-east frontier during the Mughal period, while the latter offers a connected account of the numerous invasions led by the Muslim Sultans of the pre-Mughal period in that direction. The main topic is mooted in chapter III, and the subsequent chapters deal with its various phases, which have been summarised at the end.

The completion of this volume in the midst of the heavy preoccupations of the work at the University has made it inevitable that there should be defects in respect both of form and matter. Consistency in spelling has not always been maintained and diacritical marks could not at all be given. For want of sufficient time, a more detailed map could not be inserted : for a more thorough knowledge, the inquisitive reader is referred to Rennell's Bengal Atlas and the Maps attached to Robinson's Descriptive Account of Assam, and also to the District Maps of the Assam Province.

Notwithstanding these blemishes, the fascination and importance of the topic will, the writer hopes, justify his rushing into print. He will think his labours well repaid if the attention of more competent persons is drawn to this important aspect of Mughal history. Further, it might lead to a more comprehensive study of the history and culture of the contemporary Koch and Ahom states, and much of the material which had necessarily to be discarded as not strictly relevant to this topic, would then be used quite profitably.

The writer cannot conclude this note without acknowledging the debt of gratitude he owes to a number of persons and institutions in connection with the present volume. His thanks are due to the Dacca University authorities for giving him facilities for work, and particularly for sending him on deputation to Assam in the summer of 1925, for the search of original materials. He tenders his thanks also to the Assam Government and particularly to its Director of Public Instruction, as well as to the *Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti* and its Honorary Secretary for the loan of books and *Buranjis*. The writer is greatly indebted to Prof. J. N. Sarkar for his kind suggestion of the topic and for his loan of the two volumes of the transcript of the MS. *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*. His warmest thanks are due to Dr. R. C. Majumdar, Professor, Dacca University, Dr. Beni Prasad, Reader, Allahabad University, Mr. I. Banerji, Lecturer, Calcutta University, for reading through the work in MS. For help in proof-reading, the writer expresses his great obligations to his friends and colleagues, Messrs H. D. Bhattacharyya and P. B. Junnarkar. For help in preparing the Index, he is indebted to Mr. P. C. Chakravarty, Research scholar at the Dacca University.

58, Hatkhola, P. O. Wari,  
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} Sudhindra Nath Bhattacharyya

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# A

## HISTORY OF MUGHAL NORTH-EAST FRONTIER POLICY.

### INTRODUCTION.

*Importance of the theme in the light of modern political developments in British India—Previous writers on the field—Blochmann—Gait—J. N. Sarkar—Their achievements and shortcomings—Possibility of improvement upon them firstly (1) owing to the discovery of new material mainly contained in the Persian Manuscript Baharistan-i-Ghaibi, some Assamese Buranjis, Dr. Wade's two works (History of Assam and Geography of Assam) as well as in some Koch coins, and secondly (2) by a more intensive and synthetic treatment of the material already handled, viz. the Ahom Buranji from Khunlung and Khuntai, the Purani Asama Buranji, the Akbarnamah, the Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri, the Padishahnamah, the Alamgirnamah, the Fathiya, the Darrang Raj Bansabali, the Rajopakhyan, European travellers' accounts, as well as numismatic, epigraphic, and monumental sources—A critical estimate of all the authorities old and new—Scope of the work—its limited character, and its influence on the nature of the narrative, and on the perspective of the writer—Unavoidable defects—Repetition in a twofold sense—Their justification.*

The first quarter of the twentieth century had been a period of great political upheaval not only in the West but also in the East. The time-honoured despotic government in China, the biggest and most populous of the Asiatic states, was overthrown and a republic established in its place. This tremendous change let loose all the discordant elements so long kept under restraint,

and China soon became the scene of a great and bloody Civil War. The foreign powers were not slow to take advantage of the internal confusion and dissensions to establish and perpetuate their influence in the Far East, the most prominent of them being Soviet Russia.

The reflex influence of the prevalence of Bolshevistic ideas and principles in China could not but be felt in British India and held to be subversive of peace, security and the established government of the land. The "Red Menace", as the Bolshevistic bogey is commonly termed, is thus getting great prominence in the British and Anglo-Indian Press. That it is no empty phrase and is the subject of anxious thought in responsible quarters was brought home to us all, quite recently, by the startling announcement of a project for a North-East Frontier Province, with Shillong as the capital. Though it has met with prompt official contradiction, the careful and well-planned tour, conducted lately by the Commander-in-Chief of India in person, through the hilly and strategic regions of Assam, Manipur, and Chittagong up to distant Burma, is quite a significant fact, and goes far to dispel the idea that such a province is altogether outside the pale of governmental policy.

Thanks to the cross-currents of international politics, the frontier problem in the north-east has thus been looming large before the government and the people of the country, and the necessity for a well-defined policy in that strategic region, similar to that already adopted towards the north-west, is now being keenly felt. With the centre of political gravity shifting towards the north-east, we reach the threshold of a new phase in the foreign policy of British India.

At such an opportune moment, the story of the origin and growth of a clear-cut policy of the Mughal Emperors—the lineal predecessors of the British power, regarding the north-eastern frontier of India cannot fail to be of absorbing interest to all lovers of history. That the Mughals evolved a definite policy in that quarter and pursued it tenaciously through thick and thin for more than a century, is a fact which

appears to have been completely ignored in present times. No reference to this very important phase of Mughal Indian history finds a place in any standard work, and it is really a pity that while a number of excellent monographs have been written on select topics of this period, none at all has hitherto been attempted on this fascinating theme. What is worse still is the fact that the central event of the period, viz. the conquest of Kamrup during Jahangir's reign, is entirely omitted in current text books. In short, the history of Mughal north-east frontier policy, which, in its essence, is the history of the political relation of the Mughals with the three independent Mongoloid states of Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam, remains practically a virgin field of study, and a desideratum.

A few writers have, however, touched the fringe of this subject in their own way. Mr. (now late) Blochmann was the first to moot it in an article headed "*Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the 16th and 17th centuries, according to the Akbarnamah, the Padishahnamah, and the Fathiyah-i-Ibriyah*".\* Though it must be conceded that his is the earliest and the only attempt so far made at an independent treatment of the topic, Blochmann appears to have failed totally to appreciate the underlying unity and continuity of policy of the Mughal Government towards the north-east frontier kingdoms, with the inevitable result that his thesis consists merely of a number of isolated quotations from standard Persian works of the period, and is chiefly of bibliographical interest and value.

Moreover, the extracts taken are not always accurate and complete, and guilts of commission and omission may be laid at the door of their compiler.† But, by far, the most palpable defect in Blochmann's article is the marshalling of one-sided

\* JASB 1872, Part 1, pp. 49-100.

† One or two instances may be given. Blochmann has not at all mentioned the revolt of Raghu Deb against his royal cousin Lakshmi Narayan, nor the aid rendered by Isa Khan, the Afghan chief of "Bhati" to the former, and its sequel, which is detailed by Abul Fazl (*Akbarnamah*, Vol. III, pp. 1081-82, 1093-94, Beveridge's translation). Again, a passage (JASB, 1872, p.52) regarding the Koch

evidence only—that of the Mughal historians. The Koch chronicles as well as the Ahom and Assamese native annals—the *Buranjis* as they are called, were probably a sealed book to him, or if he were conscious of their existence, he obviously underestimated their value.

The next worker in the field is Mr. (now Sir E. A.) Gait. His monograph on “The Koch Kings of Kamarupa”\* may be regarded as the first attempt at a systematic and authoritative study of the origin, growth, and decline of the kingdoms of Koch Bihar and Kamrup, with special reference to their relation with the Muhammadans. Unfortunately, it is based mainly on one indigenous Koch chronicle, the *Darrang Raj Bansabali*, the gross exaggerations and palpable absurdities of which have not been critically examined. Moreover, the materials furnished by the Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis*, till then lost in obscurity, have remained unutilised, nor have the original Persian works available been consulted. These defects have visibly affected not merely the volume but also the quality of Gait’s maiden enterprise.

The latter works of the same author do him real credit. He is unquestionably the father of historical research in Assam, and his “Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam,” published in 1897, is a monument of his pains-

king Nara Narayan’s relation with the Mughal Emperor Akbar is translated as follows :—“Rajah Bal Gosain who is the zamindar of Koch submitted again, and sent valuable presents from Bengal with fifty four elephants”. A more faithful and complete rendering would be :—“Raja Mal Gosain, the zamindar of Koch, also again made his submission. First of all, the rarities of Bengal, including fifty four noted elephants were produced, and then the presents of the landholder.” It is easy to see that the faulty version of Blochmann has entirely obscured the true import of the passage. Another extract runs thus :—“When he (Bal Gosain) died, and Lachmi Narayan became Rajah, Patkunwar rebelled”. A more accurate and literal translation is :—“When he died, the kingdom came to him (Lachmi Narayan). The Patkunwar raised the head of rebellion, and by the help of Isa had some success”. The great difference in meaning and substance caused by the defective rendering may easily be appreciated.

\* JASB, 1893.

taking energy and great perseverance in exploring all possible sources—literary and otherwise, for a comprehensive history of that country. A vigorous search was made for the *Buranjis* written in the Ahom and Assamese languages, and the most important of them recovered and published in English. Besides these, coins, inscriptions and monumental remains in Assam were eagerly sought for and carefully gathered. The material obtained was then critically examined and ably summarised in the Report, so as to furnish a complete and accurate bibliography for the history of a province which had till then no history worth the name.

The result of the labour was embodied by Gait himself in a work titled "A History of Assam," published in 1906. It is the first real historical work on Assam, on lines of modern research. A comparative estimate of the evidence furnished by the *Buranjis* and the Persian chronicles has therein been made, and a systematic and comprehensive history from olden times till our own presented. What enhances its value in our eyes is the fact that in it a detailed and authoritative account of the numerous Ahom-Muslim conflicts down to the end of the Mughal period for the first time sees the light of print.

But Gait's is a pioneer work, and, as such, has its defects. So far as we are concerned, its value has been somewhat marred by his failure to utilise the Persian authorities in original and consequently by his implicit reliance on Blochmann's faulty extracts from the same. Further, his assimilation of the copious materials furnished by the native annalists leaves much room for improvement. Nowhere is this more keenly felt than in connection with the history of Ahom-Mughal contact during the last two decades of Shah Jahan's reign and also during the post-Mir Jumla period. Gait has not done full justice even to Mir Jumla's Koch and Assam wars. He does not seem to have studied them in their proper perspective as the climacteric of the north-east frontier policy of the Mughal Emperors, nor does he fully appreciate and emphasise the far-reaching consequences

of Mir Jumla's campaign on the subsequent history of Assam in general and that of the Ahom-Mughal relation in particular.

As regards Koch chronology, his ignorance, on the one hand, of the traditional custom, prevalent even now, of the issue of fresh coinage *only* on the occasion of the accession of a new ruler to the throne, and, on the other hand, of the valuable data furnished particularly regarding kings Lakshmi Narayan and Parikshit Narayan by the author of the *Baharistan*, has led him into an error which has been perpetuated by all others.

The last worker in this line, till now, is Professor J. N. Sarkar, the distinguished historian of Aurangzib. He gives a brief survey of Koch-cum-Ahom-Mughal relation prior to the advent of Mir Jumla, utilising in the main the material available to Gait. With regard to Mir Jumla's Koch and Assam campaigns and their sequel, he seems to have made an independent study of the principal Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis* along with contemporary Persian authorities extant, with a view to improving upon his predecessor. But he has not sufficiently emphasised the full significance of the wars undertaken by the first Bengal viceroy of Aurangzib in all their bearings, and his account of the Ahom-Mughal affairs for the two eventful decades following Mir Jumla's wars has been, in our opinion, rather sketchy. Apparently the limited scope of Professor Sarkar's work did not permit the full utilisation of the material available in the *Buranjis*.

These are all the writers who require special mention. Notwithstanding their individual merits and drawbacks, what all of them seem to lack is the proper angle of vision from which the theme should be approached. None of them appears to have fully succeeded either in assigning to it its due place in the history of the foreign policy of the Mughals or in treating it as an organic whole, but each has dealt with one or other of its many phases in relation to his own subject-matter.

It will not probably be too much to say that there has hitherto been no conception of any such topic as Mughal north-east frontier policy, and even if there has been any, it has not been fully worked out probably from a sense of its being a baffling or unworthy task.

More than half a century has passed since the earliest work in our line was published, and about twelve years have elapsed since the last one was attempted. The time has certainly come when one should break the ice, and a systematic and thorough study of the foreign relations of the Mughals in north-eastern India should be undertaken.

The discovery within recent times of some valuable sources of information (literary, numismatic and otherwise), on the one hand, and a more intensive and synthetic study of the material found in the existing Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis* and other quarters, on the other hand, enable us to attempt a connected history of the relation of Mughal India with the north-eastern border states, in its various phases.

The most important newly discovered original authority is the Persian manuscript—*Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*. It is written by one Mirza Nathan,\* later on titled Shitab Khan, who held important office in the newly conquered province of Kamrup, under Emperor Jahangir. He was the son of Ihtimam Khan, who,

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\* The full name is Mirza Nathan Alau-d-din Ispahani. Prof. Sarkar (JBORS, 1921) read the name as Mirza Sahan. I beg to differ from him for two reasons. One is internal, furnished by the manner of writing, and the other, corroborative evidence, from outside. The name is generally written in the MS. as

نathan

Now what are the letters which form the last part of the name? Prof. Sarkar would have only three—*shin*, *he*, and *nun*, but I would suggest four—*nun*, *te*, *he* and *nun* and no *shin*. It cannot of course be denied that the three *noktas* appearing together, go to make *shin*, but it may also be pointed out that in many places the *noktas* appear clearly separate, and thereby provide for *nun* and *te* (e. g. p. 107b, end of the 8th line from the bottom, p. 237b, 9th line from the bottom). Further, the letters *nun* and *te* are written in a similar clumsy manner so as to look like *shin* in case of the name of Khonthaghat, a well-known territory in Kamrup (e. g. p. 169b, 8th line from the bottom, p. 176a, 10th line from the bottom). That Mirza Nathan is the name of the author is definitely proved by references

according to the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* and the *Baharistan*, was the *Mir Bahr* of the Bengal *nawwara* during the viceroyalty of Alau-d-din Islam Khan. Mirza Nathan does not expressly mention the date of composition of his work, but internal evidence, furnished by the text as well as the fly-leaf of the autograph, leaves no doubt that, though begun during the reign of Jahangir, it was not completed till the early years of his son's rule. It is thus a valuable contemporary authority.

The manuscript *Baharistan* is a voluminous work (328 × 2 pages, with 21 lines to a page) professing to be a history of Bengal and Orissa, under the three *subahdars*, Shaikh Alau-d-din titled Islam Khan, his brother Qasim Khan, and Ibrahim Khan Fath-jang, as well as under the brief regime of the rebel prince Shah Jahan (1623—24). But its chief value, in our eyes, lies in the fact that it furnishes for the first time, a minute and well-connected account of Mughal policy towards Koch Bihar and Kamrup for the greater part of the reign of Jahangir. About one third of the whole MS. is devoted to it. The author brings before our mind quite vividly the rapid changes in Mughal relation with the various border states during his time. He shows how a policy of armed imperialism fructified first in the reduction of Koch Bihar to tributary vassalage, and then, in the conquest of its rebellious offshoot, Kamrup, and ended at last in a futile attack upon Assam, giving way to a new phase, of which peace, conciliation, reconstruction and defence became the watch-word. The working of the first stage of policy, in special reference to Kamrup and Assam, is delineated in an exhaustive manner; the operation of the second phase as well, particularly in Kamrup is described with a unique wealth of detail and

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to him in the *Ahom Buranji* from *Khunlung* and *Khunlai*, the *Purani Asama Buranji* and in Dr. Wade's *History of Assam*. Though the unfamiliar name of the Muslim officer naturally figures in diverse forms such as "Mirza Nathal", "Mirza Nathan", "Mirza Nant" etc, in the works just mentioned, there seems little doubt that all these mean one and the same person—Mirza Nathan, the author of the *Baharistan*.

brilliant mastery of form. In short, almost a day-to-day account of the gradual consolidation and growth of Imperial authority in the first Mughal province in the north-east frontier, has come down to us from the pen of Mirza Nathan. This is really a topic regarding which our present knowledge is practically nil.

The authenticity of the *Baharistan* and of its author may now be deemed to have been established beyond doubt.\* The author is no "obscure" person but a genuine historical figure, who himself made history in Mughal Kamrup during the period 1612—1625. He is thus not only a contemporary person, but an eye-witness and actual participator in the events he records. Perhaps the most conclusive proof of the historicity of the author is furnished by the mention of his name—though under different titles, in the most important of the Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis*, as well as in Dr. Wade's History of Assam, in connection with the account of the Mughal conflict with the Assamese, during the first two decades of the 17th century. As regards the work itself, the narrative is fuller and more systematic than that of the *Buranjis*, and it is remarkably corroborated by them as well as by the other Persian authorities, whenever they are available for comparison.

It is indeed a pity that no attempt has till now been made to utilise to the full this first-hand source. Gait has lately recognised its worth and has tried to profit by it. Unfortunately he has had no access to the original MS., and has remained satisfied with only a brief and imperfect synopsis, rendered in English. He has misread the name of the author, and though, as a matter of fact, he has inserted only a few stray passages from the voluminous work, he has been led to believe that he has utilised all the relevant portions.

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\* A disparaging note was sounded by Beveridge ( Journal of Indian History, January, 1924 ) regarding the historical value of the *Baharistan* which has been fully met by Prof. Sarkar in a subsequent issue of the same Journal.

Besides the *Baharistan*, a good many Assamese *Buranjis* have come to light in recent times. Though they for the most part contain repetitions, oftentimes brief, of the narrative given in the works previously discovered,\* they occasionally give good details and throw flash-lights upon many a dark corner in Ahom-Muslim history. The most important of them is the *Assam Buranji from Khunlung to Gadadhar Singh*, originally obtained for the Assam Government Collection of *Puthies*, and now preserved in the library of the *Kamrup Anusandhan Samity*, at Gauhati. It is written on the same lines as the previously discovered *Purani Asama Buranji*, but is sometimes more detailed and elaborate. It is of special interest in connection with the Mir Jumla and post-Mir Jumla periods of Ahom-Mughal history. Another new discovery is that of the *Assam Buranji from the Dihingia Raja to Pramatta Singh*. It is also to be found at Gauhati, and is of great importance for the same period.

A letter written by a contemporary Jesuit traveller, named Stephen Cacella, who visited Koch Behar in 1626-27, is an additional new source. It throws light on the question of Lakshmi Narayan's death, and confirms the date derived from the *Baharistan*. It also gives a glimpse of the then economic condition of Koch Bihar and of Raja Satrajit's career.

Over and above these sources of information, there is another work, written in English, so long almost unknown and unutilised, which yields valuable material for the history of our period as a whole. It is a *History of Assam* in MS.,† written by Dr. J. P. Wade, an Assistant Surgeon under the

\* A typical instance is furnished by the Assamese *Buranjis*, discovered in the American Baptist Mission premises at Gauhati, in May, 1925. Most of them are mere repetitions of the older chronicles, and add practically nothing to the stock of knowledge.

† As we are going to the press, we learn about the publication of Dr. Wade's MS. history by an enterprising Assamese gentleman, named Benudhar Sharma. In spite of repeated attempts, we could not lay hold on a copy of that work, and so we have to rest content with the transcribed copy only.

East India Company. He was attached to the British Expeditionary Force, sent to Assam by Lord Cornwallis in 1793, and utilised his eighteen months' sojourn there, in gathering material for a history which was completed about the year 1800.

Dr. Wade thus anticipated Gait's work by more than a century, and may be regarded as the pioneer historian of Assam. His is a voluminous production, and is divided into three parts, the last two being very useful for our purpose. A detailed history of Kamrup from the earliest times down to his own, is followed by an equally minute narrative of the conflicts between the Muhammadans and the Assamese, fourteen of which are mentioned as having occurred till the times of Gadadhar Singh.

Far from being a contemporary history, Dr. Wade's work is actually modern in its compilation. Yet it may well claim to be included in the list of authorities. For, the author was a keen and observant person, and mixed freely with the most intelligent and best informed of the natives of Assam, and also appears to have taken great pains in gathering material from the Koch chronicles and Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis* he could lay his hands on. There is unmistakable evidence of his utilisation of the most important of these indigenous sources, and his narrative shows substantial agreement with them. But what really enhances its historical value is the fact that it is often fuller and more comprehensive. Nowhere is this more clearly noticeable than in regard to the rivalry and hostility of kings Lakshmi Narayan and Parikshit Narayan and their tragic sequel, as well as in connection with the prolonged contest of the Mughals with the Ahoms. It is impossible to dismiss the new information lightly on the ground that its sources are not known,\*

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\* Gait (History of Assam, second edition, preface, p. XIII) speaks of the work in disparaging terms, which it does not really deserve. He styles it as a "manuscript volume containing translations of certain *Buranjis* which are not forthcoming", and adds that it would therefore be unsafe to place very much reliance on them. True, the first part of Wade's book contains an English rendering

as it is sometimes well-confirmed by contemporary Persian works.\*

In addition to the history of Assam, there is another work of Dr. Wade which has received scant attention till present times. It is a political geography of Assam, written about the same time as the history, and based probably on an old Assamese compilation of the same nature, supplemented by personal observation and inspection.† Martin‡ gives us the contents of the work, which is invaluable in identifying old place-names, and tracing the ever-changing course of the rivers in Assam.

Valuable numismatic data are also now available to supplement the literary one. A half-coin of Lakshmi Narayan, a full coin of his cousin Raghu Deb, and the only coin yet known of Raghu's son Parikshit, have been found subsequent to the publication of Gait's work. Though in the second edition Gait has referred to them, they have not been used in revising his tentative scheme of Koch chronology.

So far for the new material. A more thorough and searching treatment of the material handled already, may be made to yield more fruitful results. This is mostly to be found in the Ahom and Assamese *Buranjis*, Koch chronicles, Persian works, contemporary European travellers' accounts, and in coins, inscriptions, and archæological remains scattered throughout the Koch region and Assam.

of an Ahom *Buranji*. but the second and third parts comprise more or less a continuous narrative. Set in the general history, there is a vivid and detailed account, based on first-hand knowledge, of the Ahom administrative system. All these lead us to suggest that his work deserves a better appellation than "translation." As regards its historical value, the *Buranjis* on which it is based appear to have been authentic compilations, often containing more details than those now known.

\* One typical example may here be given. Dr. Wade says that Parikshit was released from confinement at the Mughal Court, on condition of the payment of seven *lakhs* of rupees, and this is remarkably confirmed by the *Baharistan* (p. 235a).

† Cf. Gait's Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, p. 17.

‡ Eastern India, Vol. III, pp. 626-59.

Let us take them one by one. Of the *Buranjis*, the *Ahom Buranji from Khunlung and Khunlai* and the *Buranji from Sukapha to Gadadhar Singh*, in Assamese prose, recently published under the name of the *Purani Asama Buranji*, hold the foremost place, not only by reason of their great antiquity, but also because they contain by far the most exhaustive and minute account of the long-drawn Ahom-Muslim warfare that has yet come to light. The other *Buranjis*, Ahom as well as Assamese, mostly base their narrative on, and often copy verbatim from, these parent sources.

Amongst the two principal works, the *Ahom Buranji from Khunlung and Khunlai* deserves more careful consideration on account of its greater wealth of detail, more accurate chronology and more systematic treatment of Ahom-Mughal history as a whole. Very little is however known regarding its author, and the period of its compilation too has not as yet been definitely ascertained. But internal evidence, supplied by the textual condition, makes it reasonable to assume that it was written about the end of the seventeenth century.

The paucity of information regarding the authorship and period of composition of the *Ahom Buranji* should not lead us however to underestimate its value. Its authenticity is unanimously recognised by workers in this line, and is proved beyond doubt, not only by the way in which it supports the contemporary Assamese chronicle, the *Purani Asama Buranji*, but also by the remarkable corroboration of its account by the Persian chronicles, whenever they are available for comparison. While the *Ahom Buranji* is generally silent with regard to Koch Bihar and Kamrup<sup>\*</sup> affairs, its narrative of the Ahom-Mughal contact during the reigns of Jahangir, Shah Jahan and Aurangzib shows substantial agreement with the contemporary Persian chronicles.

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\* The truth of our contention will be realised if the accounts of some of the important episodes of the period (e. g. Assam campaigns of Sayyid Abu Bakr, of Islam Khan, and of Mir Jumla) as given in the *Ahom Buranji* and in the contemporary Persian works—the *Baharistan*, *Padishahnamah*, *Alamgirnamah*, and *Fathiya*, are compared.

What enhances the importance of the *Ahom Buranji* is the fact that it may be made to yield more light on our topic than has hitherto been done. In conjunction with the *Purani Asama Buranji*, it illuminates the dark way, through the mazes of intrigue and treachery of Raja Satrajit of Bhusna, which runs the length of about a decade (1625-36), following the end of Mirza Nathan's monumental work. Next, it gives a more systematic and detailed account of the Ahom-Mughal war of 1636-38, particularly of its last phase, than is to be found in the other *Buranjis*, and the contemporary Persian chronicle—the *Padishahnamah*, and it is a pity Gait has depended too much on the last work, almost to the exclusion of the *Ahom Buranji*.

Nowhere is the value of the *Ahom Buranji*, as a source but imperfectly utilised, more clearly perceptible than with regard to the Mir Jumla and post-Mir Jumla periods of Mughal north-east frontier history. As to Mir Jumla's campaigns, it agrees closely with the contemporary Persian chronicles, and occasionally supplements them. This additional information, by no means inconsiderable, has till now been totally ignored. The kaleidoscopic changes in the fortune of the Ahoms and the Mughals for about six or seven years following Mir Jumla's death, have been very vividly and exhaustively dealt with *only* in the *Ahom Buranji*, the Persian works maintaining an almost unbroken silence thereon. The handling of the mass of material here by modern scholars has hardly been thorough, and affords scope for much improvement.

Next to the *Ahom Buranji*, the *Purani Asama Buranji* is a valuable original authority. Its authorship and time of compilation are shrouded in the same veil of obscurity as envelops those of the former work. Yet it is possible to suggest that it was composed about the end of the seventeenth century.\* For, internal evidence, furnished by the style of writing as well as references in the text, makes it essentially a late seventeenth century work. Thus, it is a contemporary source for the history

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\*See Introduction to the *Purani Asama Buranji*, p. 17.

of Mughal north-east frontier policy at least in its concluding phases, which are crowded with many interesting and important incidents. Its historicity is established not only by its remarkable conformity to the *Ahom Buranji*, but also by the striking similarity of its narrative with that of the contemporary Persian works. It closely follows the former with regard to Raja Satrajit's career, the Ahom-Mughal conflicts of Islam Khan's time, and those of Mir Jumla and post-Mir Jumla periods, and shows general agreement with the latter (Persian works) especially on the Kamrup campaign, and the fate of king Parikshit, and on the Assam war of 1636-38, as well as on the antecedent circumstances leading to the recrudescence of imperialistic fervour under the first Bengal viceroy of Aurangzib's reign.

Its chief claim to attention lies in the fact that it contains much new information not available anywhere else, and it is rather unfortunate that this has not at all been recognised—far less utilised.\* The *Purani Asama Buranji* alone emphasises the economic aspect of Mughal imperialism in the north-east frontier, and shows what a prominent part trade and commercial matters played in originating the dogged struggles with Assam during the early years of our period. Further, it enables one to throw light on probably the darkest corner in the history of Ahom-Mughal politics, *i. e.*, the last two decades of Shah Jahan's reign. The series of diplomatic letters, which form a sort of appendix to this work, have been of invaluable help to me in unfolding, for the first time, 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 in 1658. With regard

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\* Though Gait was the first scholar to point out the historical importance of this *Buranji* (Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, P. 17), he has made little use of it in his work on Assam. In fact, he has excluded it from the list of the chief *Buranjis* he has given in the Introduction, p. XI. Prof. Sarkar has taken the cue from Mr. Gait and does not appear to have consulted it at all.

to the history of Mir Jumla's campaigns and their sequel, the *Purani Asma Buranji* is a valuable supplement to the *Ahom Buranji*, and helps to clear up many of its confusing issues, while its treatment of the closing stages of the Ahom-Mughal contest, from 1670 onwards, is more systematic and minute than that of the latter. In spite of this wealth of information, it is curious to note that the main workers on the field have almost totally passed it over, with the inevitable result that their account has been quite scrappy. This is particularly noticeable in connection with the history of the two months of hard struggle which centred round Gauhati—the Mughal capital, prior to its final fall to the Assamese in 1682.

Of the contemporary Persian works, whose more intensive and searching study yields additional information, the first to require mention is the *Akbarnamah*, the monumental Court chronicle of Akbar's reign, compiled about the end of the 16th century, by Abul Fazl, his guide, philosopher, and friend. The deep erudition and mastery of facts of the author is unquestioned, and, notwithstanding his pronounced partiality and the cumbrous phraseology and tedious rhetoric of his style, his work stands to this day as an unrivalled historical source.

It is from the *Akbarnamah* only that we get a glimpse of the opening phase of Mughal north-east frontier policy, marked by the establishment of a defensive alliance with Koch Bihar. This is not all. The disruption of the Koch kingdom, and the consequent political complications which drew the Mughals closer into the whirlpool of Mongoloid politics and ultimately paved the way for the transformation of their original policy into one of political aggression, have been quite unconsciously brought out by Abul Fazl. It is thus an indispensable authority for the first chapter of our history, and it is regrettable that Blochmann should content himself with only two short and incomplete extracts from it, which solely constitute Gait's Persian source.

The next work worth mentioning is the *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, the autobiography of Emperor Jahangir. Though it contains

only a few stray references to the Koch Bihar king Lakshmi Narayan, the Kamrup ruler Parikshit Narayan and the conquest of his realm, a discerning eye may read in them the story of the former's exile and subsequent release from the Mughal Court.

Then comes the *Padishahnamah*—the official chronicle of the first twenty years of Emperor Shah Jahan's reign, written by Abdul Hamid Lahori. The authenticity of the work is well admitted, and though it is practically silent with regard to Koch Bihar affairs, it is in fact the only contemporary Persian work bearing on Ahom-Mughal history of the age. It throws a new light on the genesis of the policy of armed imperialism launched under the Bengal viceroy Alau-d-din Islam Khan in Kamrup, and gives in outline the story of its conquest, which is of great corroborative value. It alone, amongst the Persian works, illuminates the dark period towards the end of Jahangir's reign, of which Bali Narayan's unceasing hostility is the key-note. Again it is our only authority, of course from the Mughal standpoint, for the renewal of open contest between the Mughals and the Assamese in the ninth regnal year of Shah Jahan. The details of the conflict, studied in comparison with those found in the *Buranjis*, yield valuable results, and Messrs Blochmann and Gait's handling of the topic is far from comprehensive.

The *Alamgirnamah* of Mirza Muhammad Kazim is another valuable original authority. It is a Court chronicle, covering only the first decade of Aurangzib's reign. A casual reference here to the Ahom-Mughal war of 1636-38 suffices to confirm the story of its ultimate failure detailed in the *Buranjis*. The author furnishes an authoritative account of the circumstances which paved the way for the renewal of aggressive policy towards Koch Bihar and Assam under Mir Jumla, and follows it up by details of actual operation and the ultimate tragic end. Interwoven with the narrative is a valuable sketch of the two frontier states—their geography and natural resources, their kings and the people, as well as their political,

social, economic and military condition. In spite of its limited scope, an intensive study of the *Alamgirnamah* as far as it goes, in the light of the contemporary *Buranjis*, is of great profit to the historian of the north-east frontier policy of Mughal India.

The *Fathiya-i-Ibriya* is the official history of Mir Jumla's Koch Bihar and Assam expeditions, compiled by his *waqia-navis* Shihabu-d-din Talish. The scope is really very narrow, yet the work is of great value as its theme symbolises the climacteric in Mughal foreign policy in the north-east frontier. The genesis, the progress and the end of Mir Jumla's wars are described in such a vivid, thorough, and systematic way as to make the narrative unique in character. Though there is a remarkable coincidence, not only in language and phraseology but also in substance, between the *Fathiya* and the *Alamgirnamah*, the treatment in the former is more detailed and comprehensive than in the latter. This is clearly brought home to us when we study the descriptive account of Assam and the Assamese that finds place in them. A comparative estimate of the material found in the two contemporary Persian chronicles and that derived from the *Buranjis* is well worth an attempt, and it has enabled me to present probably the most interesting episode of the period in a more exhaustive and methodical manner than has hitherto been done.

*The Darrang Raj Bansabali* of Surjya Khari Daibajna is probably the most important indigenous source for the first chapter of the history of Mughal north-east frontier policy. The author, a reputed scholar and a man of great piety, flourished in the last quarter of the 18th century, and wrote his work in verse about the end of its last decade. Though far from being a contemporary record of men and affairs and full of fulsome eulogy and glaring exaggeration of the traditional achievements of the early rulers of Koch Bihar and Kamrup, the *Bansabali* contains the most detailed narrative of their life and career, and, when tested by the more sober and authentic version of the *Buranjis* and the

Persian works, yields valuable result. The simple and frank style of the royal panegyrist fails to hide his attempts at suppression or distortion of facts unpalatable to his patrons. The author hints at the establishment of friendship between the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Koch king Nara Narayan, and gives the most detailed account of the division of the latter's kingdom which led to the origin of the Kamrup state. The interplay of forces which paved the way for Mughal intervention in Koch politics is ably brought out, and much new information on the point added. Shorn of its absurdities, the *Bansabali*, conjointly with the *Akbarnamah*, offers the most comprehensive and authoritative study of the early phases of Mughal north-east frontier policy. It is a pity the poem ends abruptly with the conquest of Kamrup and the flight of Bali Narayan (brother of the ex-king Parikshit) to Assam and is thus useless for subsequent chapters of our history.

The *Rajopakhyān* holds the second place amongst the native Koch chronicles. It was written by a state official of Koch Bihar, named Jadu Nath Ghosh, during the reign of King Harendra Narayan, in the first quarter of the 19th century. Thus it is essentially a modern work. Though the author tells us in the preface that he derived his material from the works of the learned *pandits*, who flourished during the times of Nara Narayan and his great-grandson Pran Narayan, there is a great tendency towards omission and exaggeration of known facts. It is, however, valuable for the fact that it furnishes the only connected history of the Koch kings for the entire period under review. In matters where the writer had no motive for concealing or distorting facts (*e.g.*, chronology of kings), and in case of events with regard to which he was more favourably placed in point of time, his work may generally be relied on. Though he is almost silent about Koch-Mughal affairs of the first eighties of the 17th century, he is our only source in regard to the history of the two closing decades, which witnessed the last phase of Mughal policy, marked by the gradual disruption of the helpless vassal state of Koch Bihar.

In addition to the Persian and native literature, the accounts left by a good many contemporary European travellers and adventurers may also be made much use of. Most of them, however, refer to the Mir Jumla period, and cast light upon the fortunes of the Koch Bihar and Assam wars, as well as upon the political, economic and military resources of the conquered tracts. Of these, the itinerary of Bernier and Manucci and the reminiscences of the Dutch sailor Glanius deserve prominent mention.

A fair amount of epigraphic and numismatic material, and also monumental remains are available, whose close study sometimes clears up dark and doubtful points. The inscriptions which throw light on the earlier period are few, only two or three, found on temple-walls or rocks, being worth noting. One is of Sukladhvaj (brother-general of the second Koch king Nara Narayan), another is of his son Raghu Deb; besides these, there is one Ahom inscription of the time of Susengpha (Pratap Singh).\* As regards the latter period, particularly the post-Mir Jumla one, a large number of inscriptions (in Persian as well as in Sanskrit) are forthcoming. Most of them are inscribed on cannon, while a few are found on mosques and rocks. Their historical value is great, for they corroborate remarkably the narrative of the *Buranjis*, regarding the vicissitudes of the protracted Ahom-Mughal struggle, on which the Persian chronicles are generally silent.†

As to numismatic evidence, the coins of the earlier Koch kings Nara Narayan and Lakshmi Narayan, and their Kamrup contemporaries—Raghu Deb and Parikshit Narayan, are of great value in determining their chronology, regarding which much confusion still prevails. Further, coins being regarded as the symbol of independent status, the aforesaid coins help us in clearing occasionally the tangled web of Koch-cum-Kamrup-Mughal history. With regard to the Ahom coins, they require no special mention, as very few of them are available for our

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\*Sec Gait's Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam, p.p.4-5.

† *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 9, 29.

period, and even when they are forthcoming, they scarcely yield new light, as the *Buranjis* are quite exhaustive and comprehensive in their nature.

Coming to monumental sources for our period, we must admit they are not quite abundant ; yet they are of considerable historical value. While they offer corroborative evidence in general, they are of great use in settling chronological details. The archæological remains may be divided into two broad classes—those left by the Koches and the Ahoms, and those left by the Mughals as well as by the Medieval Bengal Sultans. Of the Koch monuments, the most important of them are in the form of temples, *e. g.*, the temple of Kamakhya near Gauhati built by Sukladvaj (1565), the temple of Vishnu at Hajo made by Raghu Deb (1583), and the temple of Kamateswar at Gosainmarai (Koch Bihar) made by Pran Narayan (1665). Besides these temples, a magnificent embanked road, styled Gohain Kamala Ali, was constructed by Nara Narayan, through North Kamrup and Mangaldai.

Very few of the temples and other memorials raised by the Ahom kings have survived, and those that exist are sadly deficient in dates. Amongst them, the Saiva temples of Zergaon and Bishnath are ascribed to Pratap Singh, while the one at Umananda, opposite Gauhati, is attributed to Gadadhar Singh. The remains left by the Mughals and the Bengal Sultans are mostly in the form of mosques, the most noted of them being the one, styled Poa Mecca, near Hajo, built to the memory of a Muslim saint, Sultan Ghiyasu-d-din Aulia, who flourished probably early in the 16th century. Another important monument is a mosque on the Rangamati Hill, about six miles north-east of Gauripur, built in 1688-89.

These are the main sources, old and new, literary and otherwise, on which the present work is based. Now to come to its scope, it is primarily a political narrative, in which the origin, progress, and result of an interesting phase of Mughal history, *i. e.*, Mughal foreign policy in the north-east frontier of India, has been described in as exhaustive and systematic

a manner as has been found possible. The history of Mughal north-east frontier policy, which, in its essence, is the story of the relation of the Mughal Emperors with the Mongoloid states of Koch Bihar, Kamrup, and Assam, during a period of just more than a century (1576-1682) may well be likened to a great drama in several acts. It opens with the establishment of a defensive alliance between the Mughal Emperor Akbar and the Koch Bihar king Nara Narayan, immediately after the conquest of Bengal. A varied combination of circumstances prepared the way for the second act, in which the Mughals appear as the exponent of a policy of armed imperialism in the north-east frontier. Koch Bihar is subjugated, Kamrup conquered, and Assam raided. The signal failure in Assam principally leads to a change of scene, and the next act finds the Mughals settled to a policy of peace, conciliation and defence. The drama reaches its climax in the next act, when Mughal imperialism reaches its high watermark under Mir Jumla. Koch Bihar is annexed, and Assam overrun as far as its north-eastern extremity. Then the anticlimax comes. Renewed failure in Assam resuscitated the old policy once more, and the last act finds the Mughals strictly on the defensive with regard to Assam, and offensive by way of defence, in case of Koch Bihar. The great historic drama ends in a tragedy, for, before the first half of Aurangzib's reign had run out, the Mughals lose their last vestige of power as a result of the final capture of Gauhati by the Ahoms.

The limited scope of my work has affected its character and made it only a compendium of dry facts. The origin and development of Mughal foreign policy in the north-east frontier region being the burden of the theme, details of political history have been brought in only so far as they illuminate it, while social, economic and other aspects of Mughal, Koch, and Ahom popular life have been excluded altogether. The effect is exceedingly trying. There is nothing to relieve the dull monotony of the narrative. The whole atmosphere echoes with the din of battle and the beat of

war-drum, and page after page is filled with details of land and naval encounter, night-attacks, sieges and surrender, peace-moves and their break-down. The goddess of fortune is proverbially fickle, and she sometimes favours the Mughals, and sometimes their opponents—the Koches and the Assamese.

My perspective has also been strictly circumscribed. As my primary aim has been to unfold the various phases of the north-eastern frontier policy of the Mughal Empire, the march of events and the development of the subject have necessarily been tuned to the Mughal standpoint, and only so much of the history of the various frontier states concerned has been included as is really helpful to me.

A good deal of repetition has crept in, but this has been found to be unavoidable. The history of the various Mongoloid states in north-eastern India is so closely interconnected, and the interplay of political forces so overlapping, that it is impossible to deal with any one of them, all by itself. Yet historical continuity and uniformity demands that the story of the relation of each of these states with the Mughals—the prime factor, should be independently treated. This explains the inevitable repetitions which have found their way in Chapters III and IV, to the great detriment of historical interest and literary flourish.

Repetition in another sense may also be noticed. The peculiar geography of the north-east frontier region so greatly shaped its history that the story of the numerous campaigns, directed thither by the Mughals and their predecessors from Bengal, has invariably the same outline—the same initial success, followed by the same dismal failure, owing to self-same causes, *viz.* difficulties of communication and food supply, unhealthy climate, and the peculiar military tactics of the local people.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

I have now brought my review of Mughal contact with Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam down to the end of the seventeenth century. (The relation of Mughal India with the Mongoloid states on its north-eastern border which began only with the conquest of Bengal by Akbar at the beginning of the last quarter of the sixteenth century, gradually waxed into great prominence during the reigns of Jahangir and Shah Jahan, reached its climacteric in the early years of Aurangzib's rule and waned into insignificance and obscurity during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.)

In the preceding chapters, I have dealt in some detail with the origin, growth and final form which Mughal policy assumed, during this period of more than a century, with regard to each of the frontier states ( Koch Bihar, Kamrup and Assam ) in a separate manner. But, as has already been noted, the history of Mughal relation with these different kingdoms is, in its essence, the story of the gradual evolution of one organic whole—the north-eastern frontier policy of Mughal India.

(Mughal policy in the north-east frontier passed through several well-defined phases during this long period. The necessity for consolidating the Imperial authority over the newly acquired province of Bengal in the face of serious Afghan menace, led to the initiation of a policy of friendly alliance by the Mughal Emperor Akbar with Nara Narayan, the powerful and independent ruler of the state of Koch Bihar on the north-east. It was entirely a defensive policy in its origin, but the kaleidoscopic changes in Koch politics soon paved the way for a gradual transformation

Its various phases :—(a)  
Policy of defensive alliance (with Koch Bihar),  
1576-96.

in its character. The division of the Koch kingdom into two parts, with the inevitable rivalry, jealousy and hostility which it gave rise to, weakened both the states and made them equally anxious to enlist supporters on their side. While Lakshmi Narayan, the weak and indolent son and successor of Nara Narayan, looked up to the Mughals for help, his able cousin and antagonist Raghu Deb, the founder of the state of Kamrup, entered into an alliance with one of the most powerful enemies of the Mughals—Isa Khan, the Afghan chief of south-eastern Bengal. The Mughals and the Afghans were now drawn into the whirlpool of Koch politics apparently as arbiters, but really to fight their own issues on foreign soil as allies of rival powers, just as in the Carnatic wars, the English and the French fought to a finish the question of political supremacy in India, while engaged ostensibly in the petty dynastic disputes of a few South Indian potentates.

The successful intervention in Koch affairs was fraught with far-reaching consequences for the Mughals, for, it speedily

(b) Policy of subordinate alliance (with Koch Bihar), 1596-1608.

changed the defensive character of their north-eastern frontier policy. The Mughals emerged out of the Koch warfare completely changed in their political status and outlook. While, on the one hand, the weakness and

growing dependence of the Koch Bihar king on his powerful allies, as against the persistent hereditary hostility of the rival Kamrup dynasts, cut at the root of the original independent alliance and degraded it into one of formal subjection about the end of the sixteenth century, it, on the other hand, raised a natural ambition in the mind of the Mughals to perpetuate their political power and influence in the strategic region of the north-east.

Mughal policy thus imperceptibly took an aggressive turn. This new phase of policy was carried into effect during the early years of the reign of Jahangir, under the auspices of the able and ambitious Bengal viceroy, Alau-d din Islam Khan. Steeped in imperialistic ideas and firm in the enjoyment

of the Emperor's confidence, the new *subahdar* on the completion of the task of consolidation of authority at home, turned the helm of foreign affairs in the north-east in a new direction. He established Mughal political influence in Koch Bihar on a solid basis by turning the subordinate alliance into abject vassalage

(c) Policy of aggressive imperialism (towards Koch Bihar and its offshoot Kamrup as well as Assam), 1608-1617.

on the part of its king. Not satisfied with the assumption of sovereign authority over the Koch Bihar state, he resolved to extend the bounds of the Mughal empire in the north-east by the conquest of the rich but defenceless state of Kamrup, then under the fickle and tactless king Parikshit Narayan. He utilised the bitter hostilities of the rival dynasts to play off one against the other, and enlisted the support of the Koch Bihar king in his campaign against the ruler of Kamrup with a vague promise of territorial gain. The policy of *divide et impera* which Aurangzib adopted with regard to the north-western frontier was thus long anticipated by the crafty Bengal viceroy of Jahangir in dealing with the north-eastern border problem of Mughal India.

The Kamrup war was the first visible symbol of the great transformation which had taken place in Mughal north-east frontier policy. Originally a defensive diplomatic weapon, it now turned into an engine of armed imperialism and of aggressive territorial expansion. For a time, the new policy attained splendid success. In less than a year's vigorous fighting, Kamrup was conquered and annexed to the Mughal empire.

Hardly had the Mughals established their authority over the newly conquered realm than they were carried away by their imperialistic ambition and thirst for trade and commerce to make an indiscreet attack upon the rich and prosperous domain of the neighbouring king of Assam. The unprovoked invasion ended, however, in a great disaster.)

It was the first set-back to Mughal imperialism in the north-east, and the bitter lesson learnt was not soon forgotten. The

Mughals gave up their aggressive designs and turned towards the consolidation of authority in their new province of Kam-

(d) Policy of peace and consolidation (in Koch Bihar and Kamrup) and defence (towards Assam), 1612-1627.

rup. For more than a decade and a half (1612-27), Kamrup kept its victors busy over broad problems of policy and administration. The necessity for keeping hold of the country by safeguarding it

against enemies within and without, brought about a change in the Imperial policy. It became essentially defensive and constructive. The Koch king Lakshmi Narayan, who had been put in confinement, was now released and reinstated to power and made to bask in the sunshine of Imperial favour. Troubles with the Ahom state were scrupulously avoided and no further encroachment upon it was countenanced. In Kamrup, the Mughals were, however, engaged in almost incessant warfare against local Koch rebels and the numerous hill-chieftains of *Dakhinkol*, who were aided and abetted (in their insurrections) by Bali Narayan of Darrang and his suzerain, the Assam king. Thanks to the indefatigable energy and perseverance of the officers in Kamrup, notably Mirza Nathan, a semblance of peace and order was established about the end of the first quarter of the seventeenth century.

But Kamrup proved to be far from a bed of roses to the Mughals. Though it was the first province in the north-east, it was destined to be the last, and, what is more tragic, to be the lost as well. Its conquest opened really a new chapter in the history of Mughal foreign policy, for, it brought the powerful and independent Mongoloid state of Assam within its pale. The latter could not but look upon the forward march of Mughal imperialism in the north-east as a great political menace which must be nipped in the bud, while Mughal Kamrup on its part found its natural expansion blocked by the domain of Assam, at the expense of which only it could hope to flourish and stabilise its position and authority.

The conflict of the Mughals with the Ahoms supplies the most interesting and eventful phases in their north-eastern

frontier policy, which now reaches its full play. The policy towards Assam had already turned defensive by virtue of necessity. The Ahom ruler too at first avoided direct hostility with his troublesome foreign neighbours. Though he readily responded to the appeals for help made by the Koch malcontents and the hill-Rajas of *Dakhinkol* against Mughal overlordship, he refrained from launching into formal warfare as long as he could. This state of affairs lasted practically throughout the reign of Emperor Jahangir.

With the gradual disappearance (by submission, natural demise or otherwise) of the various rebel elements in Kamrup, the way was prepared for a direct conflict

(e) Policy of open warfare with Assam, 1628-1639. between the Mughals and the Ahom king, and the first open encounter began about the ninth regnal year of Shah Jahan. Though the bitter trade rivalry and jealousy on the part of the Mughals remains the dominant factor in the struggle, it was precipitated by an unprovoked attack on the Mughal capital by Bali Narayan, the Koch feudatory of the Assam monarch. From the protracted warfare that ensued, the Mughals on the whole emerged victorious. But instead of remaining satisfied with the recovery of their lost possession (Kamrup), they foolishly carried the struggle into the heart of the Ahom country, only to return discomfited, neutralising thereby the fruits of their victory. Both sides having now been sick of war, a peace was concluded early in 1639, which, for the first time, formally and definitely, fixed the boundary of Mughal Kamrup and Assam and also laid the basis of trade and commercial relations between them.

An era of peace, diplomacy and trade intercourse now dawned, for the first time, in the annals of the north-east frontier of Mughal India, which lasted for about two

(f) Policy of peace, diplomacy and trade intercourse with Assam, 1639-1658. decades (1639-58). The rich forest produce and the zoological resources of Assam had already excited the cupidity of the Mughals, and they showed themselves quite eager to overcome

the innate aversion of the Assamese for trade (particularly with foreigners) and were now apparently successful in doing so. Trade disputes were, of course, of inevitable occurrence, and these formed frequently the subject of diplomatic intercourse of this period. Boundary quarrels, extradition of political refugees, and violation of liberty, rights and privileges of individual subjects were other potent causes of inter-state friction which were sought to be remedied through the medium of diplomacy. Thanks to the moderation, tact, patience and pacific disposition of the Mughal *faujdar* and the Ahom Bar Barua, peace was fairly maintained during the last twenty years of Shah Jahan's reign.

The great political confusion and weakness of central authority engendered by the War of Succession, following the illness of Emperor Shah Jahan, disturbed the peace of the distant north-east frontier of Mughal India as well, and gave rise to a new phase in its history. The reigning Assam king took advantage of the helplessness of Mughal Kamrup to capture it after a short struggle from the hands of the Koch Bihar king Pran Narayan, who had already anticipated him in an attack thereon (thus breaking the traditional policy of faithful vassalage pursued for about half a century). As soon as the troubles of disputed succession had ended in Aurangzib's final triumph, the Mughal Emperor deputed the Bengal viceroy Mir Jumla to restore his authority in the north-east frontier, by the punishment of the refractory Koch vassal and by the recovery of Kamrup from the hands of the king of Assam.

The appearance of Mir Jumla in the north-east frontier is a great landmark in its history. After the lapse of more than half a century (excepting the short but inglorious venture in Assam of the autumn of 1638), Imperial policy in the north-east again turned definitely aggressive and, in fact, reached its culminating point. Koch Bihar was subjugated and annexed to Mughal

Genesis of the renewal of imperialistic fervour in the north-eastern frontier.

(g) Mir Jumla's Koch Bihar and Assam campaign (1661-63)—the grand climacteric of Mughal north-east frontier policy.

India, after an existence of more than a century and a quarter as a separate state, and Kamrup was reconquered. This was followed by a gigantic attempt upon Assam, with a view to making it the base of an attack on Burma and the distant China. It was the most daring and audacious piece of imperialistic venture, almost unparalleled in the annals of Mughal India, and has not probably been surpassed even in modern times. Though undertaken by the greatest general of the age, the Assam expedition was really an impracticable and visionary scheme, which ended in great discomfiture.

The ultimate effects of the Assam campaign were disastrous to Mughal India. Koch Bihar slipped away while Mir Jumla was still in the thick of the Assam campaign, and, though it was made to feel the weight of Imperial authority once more,

its disastrous results. it never again formed a part and parcel of the Mughal domain. What affected the Mughals most severely is the strong nationalist reaction which the aggressive military promenade of Mir Jumla gave rise to in Assam and the first fruits of which were reaped within four years of his retreat from that land.

The Mughals lost Kamrup in the autumn of 1667, and, for the next fifteen years, made a most frantic effort to save that frontier province from the clutches of the Assam king. Threatened with their very existence in that quarter, they now pursued a purely defensive warfare till the end. This, the last phase in their north-east frontier policy, was a total failure. By 1682, the Mughals were compelled, once for all, to give up their pretensions to Kamrup and to remain satisfied only with the south-western portion of the Brahmaputra valley up to Rangamati, as the residue of their empire in North-Eastern India.

The Mughals attempted to compensate themselves as it were for their loss of Kamrup by indulging in a morbid policy of territorial expansion at the expense of the already decaying

(h) Last phase of Mughal policy purely defensive with regard to Assam, 1663-82.

vassal state of Koch Bihar, then in the throes of prolonged internal confusion and disorder. One by one, the outlying districts were snatched away and added to the Mughal empire, till the disintegration of Koch Bihar was completed at the end of the seventeenth century.

But deliberately aggressive  
towards Koch Bihar,  
1685-1711.

The net result which Mughal foreign policy attained in the north-eastern frontier, after the lapse of a century, is far from satisfactory. The desire to attain natural boundaries in that direction was not at all fulfilled, and before the first half of Aurangzib's reign had ended, the last vestige of Mughal influence disappeared from Kamrup. To their inordinate greed for grasping what was almost unattainable, the Mughals sacrificed what was really their own by virtue of conquest and long possession. Only Koch Bihar was retained in political subjection and, what is worse, was gradually dismembered to swell the pampered but decadent fabric of Mughal India.

Net result of Mughal  
foreign policy in the  
north-east frontier.



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