

IMPACT OF THE MUGHAL CONTACT ON THE KOCH AND AHOM KINGDOMS

ABSTRACT

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THESIS

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

COMPUTERISED

TO

NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY

SHILLONG

2001

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Historical Background

It may be noted that the Muslim advent into the Mongoloid states of Koch Behar, Kamrup and Assam dated as far back as the 13th Century when during the period of the Delhi Sultanate Muhammad Iban Bakhtiyar Khilji a general of Qutb-ud-din Aibak invaded Kamarupa in 1205 A.D. This invasion paved the way for subsequent Muslim invasions in the succeeding centuries. This resulted in significant increase in Muslim population and settlement in the region, which in turn contributed to the expansion of Islam in Assam. By the beginning of the 16th Century as a consequence of the policy of expansion initiated by the Mughals towards the East. Assam began to have frequent contacts with the Mughals so that by the beginning of the 17th Century we have the occupation of Koch Hajo by the Mughals and consequently Koch Behar too became subjugated. During this period of Ahom–Mughal conflicts the Mughals further advanced into the East and in Kamrup alone Mughal rule lasted for almost half a century.



This Mughal contact of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms certainly brought about significant changes in the political, social and economic life of the region. The territorial expansion of the Mughal empire resulted in the increase of Muslim settlement and population which increased enormously and constituted an important fraction of Assamese population. The impact of the contact was felt in the political life of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms whereby they came to be introduced to the Mughal system of administration and political organisation. Added to this, the impact of the contact is also seen in the enrichment of the social and cultural life of the region whereby notable changes were witnessed in the dress, diet, literature, art, architecture, painting, music and many others. The impact was also felt in the economic life of the region whereby commendable contributions were made by the Mughals in the realm of trade, craft and industries, medium of exchange and coinage, nevertheless as a consequence of this contact the Mughals or Muslims were inversely affected since they were also greatly enriched as far as their culture was concerned.

Survey of Literature

The political, social and economic impact of Mughal contact on the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms forms one of the most interesting but little known chapter in the annals of the history of the region. It offered an almost unexplored and uninvestigated field of study and so far no detailed work on this aspect is present. Some writers no doubt have dealt with it in their own way. Blochmann was the first who in his article, *Koch Behar, Koch Hajo and Assam in the 16th and 17th Centuries* based his study on Persian sources in J.A.S.B. 1872. He was followed by Sir J.N. Sarkar who translated 19 folios of *Fathiyah Ibriyah* as *Assam and the Ahoms in 1660 A.D.* in J.B.O.R.S. 1915. Sir E.A. Gait made certain references on the relations of the Kingdom of Koch Behar and Kamrup with the Muslim in his work. *The Koch Kings of Kamarupa* and in his "Report on the Progress of Historical Research in Assam" as well as in his "History of Assam" which narrated the numerous Ahom Muslim conflicts. S.N. Bhattacharjee in the *History of Mughal North Eastern Frontier Policy* gave a description of the diplomatic relations of the Mughal empire with Koch Behar, Kamrup and Assam. Reference is also made in N.N. Acharya's *History of Medieval Assam* and *A Brief History of Assam*. Dr.

Mohini Saikia in her *Assam Muslim Relation and its cultural significance* has referred to the cultural impact of Ahom-Muslim contact. Prof. J.N. Sarkar narrated about the Muslim campaigns in Assam in his work *Freedom struggle in Medieval Assam*. H.K. Barpujari's *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol.-II sheds some light on Mughal inroads into Assam, B.K. Barua's *A Cultural History of Assam* referred to the social and cultural conditions of Assam from the earliest period till the present. Khan's Chaudhury Amanatullah Ahmad's *Koch Beharer Itihas* or a history of Koch Bihar in Bengali is a commendable work which throws some light on this aspect but needs to be supplemented by other accounts. D. Nath's, *History of the Koch Kingdoms (1515-1615)* does not cover the most crucial period of the contact, i.e., mid 17th century onwards.

includes both

Besides the above mentioned works the studies of B.L. Barua, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, M. Kar *Muslim in Assam Politics*. Sushil Chandra Dutta, *The North East and the Mughals* Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam* also mentions about the contact of the Muslims with Assam, but it is to be noted that none of the works mentioned above have presented a comprehensive history of the political,

social and Economic impact of Muslim contact on the North Eastern region. Gazetteers like B.C. Allen's, *Assam District Gazetteer Vol.-IV Kamrup*, E.F. Howard's *Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India* shed some light on the Muslim contact with these kingdoms, however, none of these works gave a detailed account of the impact of Muslim contact though the reports and Gazetteers help as important source material to fill up the gap.

Data and Methodology

The study has been based mainly on medieval Persian Chronicles and Assamese sources which are now available in English translations. Besides the above sources are supplemented by secondary sources which includes books, theses and the various articles published in the journals of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Journals of Bihar and Orissa Research society, Proceeding of Indian History Congress and also the Proceedings of the North East India History Association. The Emphasis, therefore, would be more on contemporary writing and their various interpretations to provide a proper perspective towards an understanding of the impact of Muslim contact.

In the present work attempt have been made to bring into focus Muslim contribution to the society of Assam during the period of the Ahom-Koch rule in the region. The present work would be an analysis of the nature and extent of the impact of Mughal contact on the Koch and Ahom kingdoms and to describe the subsequent changes, growth and enrichment of the polity, society and economy of the region.

Organisation

The thesis has been organised under the following six chapters.

Chapter-I: Introduction

This chapter deals with a brief account of the land, people and geography of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms. In the medieval period the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms actually meant the Mongoloid states of Koch Behar, Kamrup and Assam which bordered serially on the province of Bengal in the North East. The region comprised of high and inaccessible hills which girdle it on three sides, north, south and east while on the west is the river Koratoya which is the only point of contact with the outside world and whereby the Mughal Imperial Frontier Policy was first

initiated. No doubt there existed a great deal of divergence on the racial background of the Koch and Ahoms, nevertheless there is little doubt as to the fact that the Koches are a mixed race of Mongoloid-Dravidians origin. However that of the Ahom is unmistakably Mongoloid.

Chapter-II: Pre-Mughal Contact and the Resultant Effects

This chapter deals with the advent of the Muslim into the region and the initiation of their policy of expansion. Muslim inroads into Assam dated as far back as the 13th Century whereby we have the invasion of Kamarupa in 1205 A.D. by a general of Qutb-ud-din Aibak named Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar. No doubt the Muslims were defeated but they were not thwarted in their attempt and in the year 1227 A.D. we have another invasion of Kamarupa led by Nasir-ud-din the son of Iltutmish. In the year 1256-1257 Ikhtiyar-ud-din Uzbek Tughril Khan the ruler of Bengal once again led a campaign to the region. This campaign met with momentary success whereby Ikhtiyar came to rule over Kamrup for sometime. Nevertheless his rule did not last for long and Kamrup once again came under native rule. In the last part of the 15th Century the Bengal Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah made an attempt to conquer

Kamrup Kamata whereby he defeated the ruler and occupied the territory upto Hajo in the East. These Muslim invasions of the region certainly were not one without repercussions. They paved the way for the creation of a class of local converts to the Islamic faith and at the same time encouraged the Muslims to settle in the region and during the period of the 13th century onwards we have the growth of Islam in the region.

Chapter-III: Political Conflicts between the Mughals and the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms

This chapter deals with the political conflicts between the Mughals and the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms starting from the time of Akbar till the liberation of Kamrup by Gadadhar Singha which brought to a close Mughal aggression in the region. By the 16th century the Mughals had further advanced to the East and they had ever occupied the Ahom capital at Gargooan for a short period. Conflicts between the Mughals and the Koch-Ahom Kingdoms was initiated in the first decade of the 17th century during the rule of the Ahom King Pratap Singha whereby a treaty was concluded in 1639 A.D., thereby fixing the river Barnadi on the north of the Brahmaputra and the Asurar Ali on the south of the Brahmaputra as

the boundary between the two powers. In 1662 A.D. we have Mir Jumla's Assam campaign whereby the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Singha had to surrender more than half of the province of Darrang to the Mughals. In 1671 we have the famous battle of Saraighat where the Mughal forces were defeated by Lachit Barphukan, thereby the Mughals were pushed back as far west as the river Manah. Though the Mughals attempted to extend their hold beyond Manah, nevertheless they were completely routed by Gadadhar Singha in the battle of Itakhuli 1682 A.D. and finally Kamrup was liberated.

Chapter-IV: Political Impact of Mughal Contact on the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms

This chapter deals with the subsequent changes brought about by Mughal contacts on the political and administrative set up of the region. As a consequence of Muslim inroads into Assam from the 13th century onwards, Assam witnessed an enormous increase of Muslim population and settlement in the region with the policy of expansion initiated by the Mughals from the 16th century onwards. The Mughals were able to extend their control over parts of the region for instance in Kamrup they began to introduce their own system of administration. In course of time Mughal

political institutions and Muslim settlements grew enormously in the region. Hence the administrative set up of the region underwent enormous and drastic changes. In course of time the establishment of Mughal political organisation resulted in the appointment and importation of many members of Mughal aristocratic and noble families into the region and their descendants stayed on in Assam even after the close of Mughal control over the region.

Chapter-V: Economic Impact of the Contact or the Region

This chapter deals with the subsequent repercussions brought about by Mughal contact on the economic life of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms. The Mughals no doubt contributed a lot to the economic life of medieval Assam. Though the economy of medieval Assam was largely based on agriculture nevertheless as a consequence of its contact with the Mughals, it witnessed the development of several crafts, industries as well as trade and commerce. Added to this a commendable contribution of the Mughals in the economic life of the region was the transition from a barter economy to a monetised one. Besides this, the Mughal contact certainly created an impact on the revenue administration of the region

through the introduction of the system of land measurement, land survey and other aspects of Mughal revenue administration.

Chapter-VI: Impact of the Mughal Contact on the Social and Cultural Life of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms

In this chapter an analysis will be made on the Impact of Mughal contact on the social and cultural life of the region. The Muslims played a very important role in enriching the socio-cultural life of the Koch and Ahom kingdoms in various ways and led to enrichment of their dress, diet, literature, language, art, architecture, painting, music, etc. Nevertheless this impact of the contact was not one sided and to a certain degree we find that the Mughals too were very much influenced by some aspect of Assamese culture, for instance, the Assamese Muslims then came to be divided into three distinct groups similar to the Hindu caste group. Hence though the Muslims in Assam retained their culture, nevertheless they assimilated themselves with the local people in various ways and thus contributed to the enrichment of the culture of the region.

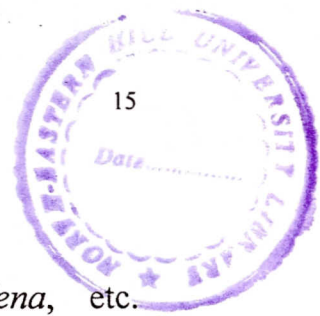
Major Findings

The survey of literature convinced us that though some scholars have dealt with some aspects of Assam's cultural and political relations with the Muslims during the medieval period. No detailed and systematic study of this subject has so far been attempted. The present work pioneering in nature is, therefore, an attempt to gather the available information and interpret them in the proper context to reconstruct Mughal contact with the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms.

Many historians like Mohini Saikia, N.N. Acharya, B.K. Barua and others have in their own way highlighted important facts about the Mughal inroads into Assam. Our study reveals that Mughal inroads definitely brought about significant changes in different aspects of the life of the region. Firstly the Muslim inroads in the 13th century resulted in the expansion of Islam through an influx of Muslim saints, most notably among them was Ajan Fakir who received much patronage from the Ahom ruler Gadadhar Singha. The neo-Vaishnaite movement of Sankardeva which played a role in liberalising Assamese society was deeply influenced by Islamic ideal and principles. Certain records also

show that later Ahom Kings extended much help and support to Muslim religious institutions, this liberal policy was followed by the Ahoms to a considerable extent whereby they even contracted marriages with the Muslims. The Muslims in turns were influenced by the Hindu caste divisions of the region whereby they came to be divided into three distinct groups namely, Sayeds, Sheiks or Gariyas and the Mariyas. Major changes were witnessed in the diet of Koch and Ahom Kingdoms. We have the popular use of salt, introduction of the use of spices, tobacco, opium, *sarbat* (palm wine) the chewing of perfumed betel leaf with dried nut (*Bangla Pan*) and many others. Certain innovations were seen in the dress sense of the people. We have the introduction of Mughal Customs such as Turbans or *Paguri*, *pagjamas* (trousers), *Ijar* (drawers), *Chauga* (shirt) and *Chapkan* (coat). The use of cosmetics was also first introduced in Assam by the Mughals. Mughal contact also resulted in enriching Assamese language and literature whereby we have the infiltration of Arabic and Persian words and terminologies in the Assamese language. A noteworthy impact of the contact is also seen in the growth of Assamese historical literature or the *Buranjis*.

We have also examined the political conflicts between the Mughals and the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms whereby as a consequences of these repeated conflicts we have Mughal infiltration into the politics and internal affairs of the region. Our study reveals that most of the rulers of the region, for instance, Lakshminarayan became the vassals of the Mughal empire and paid regular tributes. The Mughal occupation of Koch Hajo resulted in the introduction of Mughal administration in the region. Many Mughals from Bengal known as *Paiks* or soldiers migrated from Bengal to the Koch Kingdom whereby they were provided with land in return for military services. Also we have the introduction of various aspects of Mughal administration in the region Ibrahim Karori was deputed to Kamrup by Jahangir to carry out land settlement whereby he introduced the *Pargana* system in Kamrup. Similarly Koch Hajo was divided into *Sarkars* and *Parganas*. We also have the introduction of officials such as *Quanungo*, *Faujdar* and *Thanedars*. For realisation of higher amount of revenue the Mughals introduced classification of lands in Kamrup whereby lands were divided into three categories namely, *Kharaj* (revenue paying), *Nisf-Kharaj* (half revenue paying) and *Lakharaj* (revenue free estates). A class of officers were appointed for this purpose



namely, *Choudhury, Patowary, Thakuria, Talukdar, Mena, etc.*

Immediately after the battle of Itakhuli the Ahoms enforced their administration over the conquered region. Nevertheless, the Ahoms retained the Mughal system of administration whereby the division of revenue units, i.e., *Pargana, Sarkar, Taluk*, etc. was retained as before. The system of collection of revenue in cash as against the extraction of forced services was retained. Hence it may be said that Ahom system of land survey and measurement, payment of revenue in cash and kind was but a replica of Mughal administration.

Another significant feature that we could identify is the enrichment of the economic life of the region. Agriculture formed the basis of the economic life of the Koch and Ahom Kingdoms. Nevertheless the Muslims became acquainted with agriculture, they were known as *Paiks* and contributed to the agrarian set up of the economy. They also introduced many crafts and other economic activities in the region. The art of weaving and embroidery became popular in medieval Assam after the Muslim inroads. The Muslims also introduced tailoring in Assam and there flourished a particular Muslim clan called *Gunakatiya* who were

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experts in embroidery. Muslim influences were seen in the realm of painting, wood carving whereby we have the inculcation of Muslim designs on the doors and windows of buildings and temples seen especially in the palaces of Rangpur and Gargaon. The Ahom King Rudra Singha was the first to introduce shoes for the Ahom aristocracy and to have brought families of shoemakers and skin washers called *Muchiyar*. Assamese chronicles also record the importation of artisans from Mughal India for the production of brass articles and articles of bell metal. During the period of study there existed what is known as the *Paiks* or *Khel* system which was in many respects similar to the *Mansabdari* system and in fact the term *Khel* came from the Arabic Persian word *Kheil* meaning foot soldiers. The Mughal occupation of Kamrup also resulted in the introduction of land measurement and land survey also the introduction of the system of collecting revenue in terms of money. Lucrative trade flourished in the region in the 17th century and there was the growth of trade centres namely, Goalpara, Rangamati, Hajo and many others. Much changes were also seen in the realm of coinage whereby multiplication of coins of different shapes some bearing Persian scripts were issued. Thus the barter system was replaced by a monetary one.