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Beyond Conflict: Mughal-Ahom Interactions and Mutual Exchanges in Medieval Assam

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Abstract

The Ahoms and the Mughals were two contemporary states one confined to northeast India while the other in most of India. Both groups were migrants -one from the northwestern frontier and the other from north east frontier. The Ahoms laid the groundwork for a kingdom that lasted for almost 600 years when they established their dominion in the Brahmaputra Valley under the leadership of Sukapha. The Mughals on the other hand established their empire in 1526 in Northern India. The Mughals and the Ahoms lived in the same time, in the same vicinity and the social and economic systems they created could not have survived without mutual exchanges of practices, ideas, and institutions. Both the Ahoms and the Mughals were migrants who were unfamiliar with the land they ruled. Their stories of migration, settlement, expansion, and adjustment in a new environment among diverse and heterogeneous people were similar. The Ahoms had to import ideas, practices, functionaries, arts, and artisans from Mughal India, and vice versa. Yet the co-operation between the two systems has remained unexplored and the exclusivity of one and the expansionism of the other is discussed as a story of collision. Two such large polities can't exist side by side with no interaction at all, and their interaction could be limited to 'invasion' and expulsion. This paper seeks to examine the interactions and exchanges between these two great powers, as well as to provide a more nuanced understanding of Assamese society in Medieval Assam.

Keywords: Assam, Ahom Dynasty, Mughal, Collision, Invasion, Expulsion, Mutual Exchanges of Practices

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The Ahom period (1228–1826 CE) represents a significant chapter in Assamese history, characterised by the establishment and consolidation of the Ahom dynasty. The Ahoms established a foundation for a kingdom that endured for nearly 600 years, asserting its authority in the Brahmaputra Valley under the leadership of Sukapha. The Mughals, conversely, founded their empire in Northern India in the year 1526. The Mughals and the Ahoms existed during the same period, and the social and economic frameworks they established were inherently reliant on reciprocal interactions. The Mughals and the Ahoms coexisted during the same historical era and geographical region, and the social and economic frameworks they established likely thrived due to their reciprocal exchanges of practices, ideas, and institutions. Both the Ahoms and the Mughals were migrants to the territories they governed, lacking familiarity with the landscapes and cultures they encountered. Their narratives of migration, settlement, expansion, and adaptation within a new milieu populated by diverse and heterogeneous individuals bore striking similarities. The Ahoms engaged in the exchange of ideas, practices, functionaries, arts, and artisans with Mughal India, and reciprocally, Mughal India drew from the Ahoms as well. Nevertheless, the interplay between the two systems has largely gone unexamined, with the exclusivity of one and the expansive nature of the other framed as a narrative of conflict. It is inconceivable for two such expansive entities to coexist without any form of engagement, and that their interactions could be restricted solely to 'invasion' and ‘expulsion’. This paper aims to explore the dynamics and exchanges between these two significant powers, while also offering a more refined comprehension of Assamese society.

The attempts by both the Ahoms and the Turks to establish a foothold in Assam during the thirteenth century represent a captivating historical development, unfolding within a mere span of twenty-two years. The two groups represented unique warrior tribes; the Turks originated from Central Asia, whereas the Ahoms constituted a faction of Shan or Tai warriors who migrated from Southeast Asia in pursuit of new settlements. The Shan tribe made their entrance into the Brahmaputra Valley in the year 1228 AD, while Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Islamic Turkish commander, initiated his first attempts to invade Assam during his campaigns towards Tibet in 1198 and again in 1206 AD. The incursion from the western frontier by the Turks coincided with the eastern migration of the Shan warriors, who crossed the Brahmaputra River to establish their initial settlement in Cheraideo, from which they would extend their dominion over the valley for the subsequent six centuries.
The Mughals, having arrived in South Asia in 1526 AD, adeptly founded a kingdom in North India. It was not until the year 1615 AD that a significant incursion by the Mughal Empire into Assam took place, spearheaded by a Mughal chieftain. During the seventeenth century, conflicts between the two powers occurred with regularity; however, these hostilities were largely characterised as reprisals executed by a provincial governor rather than as direct

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invasions. The interaction between the Mughal Empire and Assam significantly intensified during the invasion led by Mir Jumla in the year 1662 AD. Although certain regions of contemporary Assam continued to be governed by the Mughals for considerable durations thereafter, the hostilities between the Ahoms and the Mughals were rekindled in 1670.During these extended phases of both conflict and engagement, the Ahoms and the Mughals cultivated a sophisticated comprehension of one another's governance frameworks and state policies, which significantly impacted their administrative approaches. The intricate relationship between the two powers underscores the complexities of their interactions, demonstrating that their historical encounters were not solely defined by conflict, but also by a substantial exchange of knowledge and practices that influenced the political landscape of the region.

The Mughals initiated their expansion into Assam in the early 16th century, signifying a pivotal moment in the historical narrative of the region. The initial Assamese authority to confront the repercussions of Mughal interference was the Koch kingdom, which reached the zenith of its influence under the leadership of Naranarayan and his brother Chilarai.[1] However, following the demise of Naranarayan, the realm was bifurcated into two distinct entities: Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. This division fostered a deterioration in amicable relations, which ultimately precipitated the intervention of the Mughals. In the year 1616 A.D., Mukarram Khan received the appointment as governor of Koch Hajo, thereby designating it as the administrative centre of the newly constituted Bilayat Koch Hajo province.[2] The area was segmented into four Sarkars, each comprising several Paraganas, to facilitate the collection of revenue.[3] The emergence of Mughal political institutions in the area resulted in a significant arrival of Muslim aristocratic families, whose lineage persisted even following the conclusion of Mughal authority in the 17th century. [4]

Political Interaction

The Mughal incursion into Kamrup led to a confrontation with the Ahoms, who had extended their influence in the area. In 1639 A.D., the hostilities between the Mughals and the Ahoms resulted in the delineation of a border, with the Bharali River, situated north of the Brahmaputra and Asurar Ali positioned to the south.[5]The Muslim presence in Assam increased with the expansion of Mughal power, elevating Gauhati and Hajo to prominent trading centres.[6] The Buranjis

[1]D. Nath, *Asom Buranji* (Guwahati: LBS Publication, 2007), 85, 92.

[2] E. A. Gait, *A History of Assam* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co., 1933), 66.

[3] Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*, vol. 1, trans. M. I. Borah (Gauhati: Government of Assam, 1936), 272.

[4] Nath, *Asom Buranji*, 103-104

[5] Gait, *History of Assam*,118.

[6] Gait, *History of Assam*,118.

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indicate that during King Pratap Singha's reign, the Ahom general Momai Tamuli Barbarua launched a deliberate initiative to create new villages around the kingdom, promoting the settlement of Muslims to facilitate their integration into local society.[7] This description corresponds with Shihabuddin Talish's writings, which also confirm the existence of Muslim populations in these newly established areas.[8]Subsequently, during Mir Jumla's incursion into Assam, the Ahoms first triumphed against the Mughal soldiers, taking several captives as prisoners of war. Historian Edward Gait offers a detailed description, indicating that while Mughal commanders were resettled in Silpani and like areas with provisions of land and labour, the ordinary troops were allocated as slaves to Ahom aristocrats, such as the Baruas and Phukans.[9] This process illustrates the intricate and often pragmatic method of assimilating conquered populations, highlighting how power dynamics, social structures, and ethnic interactions influenced Assam's history. Concurrently, Mir Jumla assumed control of Gargaon. Shihabuddin Talish offers a comprehensive description of the resources obtained by the Mughals after their conquest of Gargaon. The booty was 82 elephants, 300,000 rupees in currency, 1,343 camel swivels, 1,200 Rachangis, 675 artillery pieces, 6,750 matchlocks, 340 maunds of gunpowder, over a thousand boats, and 137 paddy storehouses, each housing between 10 and 100 maunds of grains.[10] Mir Jumla was stationed at Gargaon for almost one year, designating Mathurapur, situated seven miles southeast of Gargaon, as his official home. Throughout this occupation, he expanded his dominion over around one hundred villages spanning from Mathurapur to Gargaon, instituting strategic outposts throughout the area.[11]

The campaign led by Mir Jumla, the Mughal General, in Assam, signifies a crucial juncture, denoting the official incursion of the Mughals into Ahom lands and resulting in the capture of Gargaon. While he did not establish a comprehensive Mughal administrative framework in Gargaon, akin to that of Kamrup, Mir Jumla did introduce a police administration to maintain order during his tenure in Mathurapur. Shihabuddin Talish further elucidates the economic ramifications that this expedition exacted on Assam. Reports indicate that Mir Jumla's forces unearthed the burial sites (Maidams) of Ahom princes and nobles, obtaining treasures estimated at 90,000 rupees, while also plundering important religious sites, such as the temples of Kamakhya, Luna, and Dergaon.[12]This act of plundering highlights the profound material consequences of the Mughal occupation and the significant redistribution of Assam's wealth.

[7] Lila Gogoi, *Historical Literature of Assam* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1986), 224.
[8] Gait, *History of Assam*, 149.
[9] Gait, *History of Assam*, 114.
[10] Gait, *History of Assam, 114.*
[11] Gait, *History of Assam*, 135, 137.
[12] Gait, *History of Assam*, 149.

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Following the Treaty of Ghilajarighat in 1663, Mir Jumla made his way to Delhi, signifying the conclusion of a significant period characterised by vigorous Mughal-Ahom confrontations. During his absence, the Ahom king orchestrated the settlement of proficient Muslim artisans, referred to as *Khanikars*, in regions adjacent to Gargaon.[13] This integration served as a preliminary signal of the intricate social tapestry that would define Assam in the ensuing decades. The waning of Mughal authority in Delhi during the late 17th century prompted the Ahoms to re-establish their supremacy, leading to the significant Battle of Saraighat in 1671.[14] The Ahoms, under the astute leadership of Lachit Borphukan, achieved a significant victory over the Mughal forces commanded by Raja Ram Singh of Amber. This triumph was realised through a coalition of adjacent states, encompassing Koch Behar, Jayantiya, Darrang, and Cachar, whose backing epitomised a burgeoning regional unity and fortified the social fabric of Assam.[15]This victory enhanced the Ahoms' position as protectors of Assam, garnering them esteem and acknowledgement from various smaller ethnic communities throughout the area.

The sustained interaction between the Ahoms and Mughals enabled the persistent influx of Muslim artisans, craftsmen, and scholars into Assam, thereby enhancing the local cultural and administrative environment.[16] The Ahom kings, acknowledging the skills of the Muslim settlers, engaged them in multiple areas, particularly in defence, where numerous individuals took on roles as bodyguards (Dadhora) and arms bearers for the Ahom nobility. Expert craftsmen, such as royal engravers or *Akharkatiyas*, were tasked with the meticulous inscription of royal decrees on metal and stone surfaces. Furthermore, scholars from Persia, known as *Persi Parhias*, were tasked with translating correspondence from Delhi and Dacca for the Ahom court. During the reign of Rudra Singha, there was a notable intensification of cultural exchange.[17] He extended invitations to a variety of Muslim artisans, intellectuals, and craftsmen from Mughal India to Assam, initiating a period characterised by assimilation and intercultural interaction. The cultural landscape of Assamese society evolved to embrace Mughal practices, notably falconry, which was adopted as a courtly sport during the reign of Pratap Singh. The incorporation of Mughal influences was evident across multiple sectors, particularly in administration, where officials trained in Mughal practices were assigned roles such as *Boras*, *Saikias*, and *Hazarikas*. As Muslim settlers became essential to Assam's governance and cultural landscape, they fostered a sense of belonging and loyalty to the region. Honoured for their significant contributions, they occupied important positions within the Ahom state, and their lineage persisted in serving Assam. The incorporation of Muslim communities

[13] Gait, *History of Assam,*134-135.
[14] Gait, *History of Assam, 134-135.*
[15] Gait, *History of Assam,* 187.
[16] Gait, *History of Assam,* 110.
[17] S. K. Bhuyan, *Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha* (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 1975), 166.

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introduced Assamese society to a variety of cultural advancements from Mughal India, influencing Assam's social and political identity in the subsequent centuries.

Mughal Imprints on Assamese Culture and Society

The interaction between the Mughal Empire and Assam profoundly influenced the Assamese language and literature, incorporating a wealth of Persian and Arabic vocabulary. The influence commenced in the 14th century with Hem Saraswati's *Prahlad Charit*, which incorporated the Persian term "Nafr" (servant).[18] Later, the influence was expanded upon by saints who incorporated terms such as sahib (master), chakar (servant), and chakari (service) into their writings.[19] The Ahom rulers integrated Persian and Arabic terminology into their administrative and revenue frameworks, including terms like *Umraos* (nobles), *Nawabs* (governors), and *Hazaris* (officials responsible for a thousand soldiers).[20] The vocabulary of Assamese colloquial expressions now incorporates elements from Persian and Arabic. Historian S.K. Bhuyan notes that the Ahom rulers took significant steps to promote Persian by creating educational institutions in locations like Gauhati and Rangpur, enabling Muslim children to learn the language.[21] They additionally dispatched Assamese students to various regions of India for Islamic education and employed Persian transcribers in their courts to facilitate correspondence. This cultural exchange via language represented a significant turning point in the development of Assamese literature and common discourse.

The Mughal impact on Assamese culture is evident via the integration of Muslim cultural aspects into Assamese ballads. Notable instances include the Jana Gabharu Git, popular among the Mariyas (Muslim braziers) in the Eastern Brahmaputra Valley, and the Phulkonwar Aru Monikonwar, which is intricately linked to Abdul Gaffar's 18th-century Bengali song Kalu Ghazi Champawati Pachali.[22] The notable song, Chikan Sariyahar Git, narrates the tale of a Muslim lady who marries an Assamese monarch, illustrating the cross-cultural themes cherished by Assamese Muslims. The Sat Nawabar Git song narrates the entrance of the Nawabs in Assam, embodying the romantic and adventurous motifs prevalent in Assamese and East Bengal-Bihar folk cultures.[23] Nonetheless, the Zikirs and Zaris, devotional compositions by prominent Muslim Pirs like Azan Pir, Chandsai, and Sheikh Farid during the Ahom dynasty, represent the greatest enduring contribution of Assamese Muslims to Assamese literature. These

[18] Gait, *History of Assam,* 46.
[19] K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa* (Calcutta: Lawyers Book Stall, 1961), 266.
[20] M. Neog, "Two Assamese Ballads," *Journal of the University of Gauhati* 11, (1968).
[21] M. Neog, *Sahapari Upakhyan: Introduction* (Gauhati: Assam Prakashan Parishad, 1958), 62, 85.
[22] Imran Shah, "Asamalai Mababar Agaman," *Asam Bani*, February 3, 1961.
[23] M. Neog, *Sahapari Upakhyan: Introduction* (Gauhati: Assam Prakashan Parishad, 1958), 80.

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compositions pay tribute to Vaishnava leaders like Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva by integrating Islamic and Hindu themes in a manner akin to Assamese folk and neo-Vaishnavite poetry. Zikirs and Zaris, analogous to Sankaradeva's Bargits in their dedication and intellectual profundity, fostered a harmonic amalgamation of Hinduism and Islam, significantly advancing the development of Assamese literature.

The tradition of historical documentation in Assam started with the advent of Ahom governance, however interactions with Muslims significantly broadened and enhanced Assamese history. This cultural contact led to the enhancement and expansion of *Buranjis*, the historical chronicles of Assam. One of the most significant works is the *Padshahi Buranji* (1670-1682), compiled by S.K. Bhuyan, which offers a thorough record of Mughal endeavours in Assam. Further contributions are *Fathiya-i-Ibriyah*, authored by Shihabuddin Talish, Aurangzeb's court historian who participated in Mir Jumla's 1662 expedition to Assam, and *Alamgirnamah*, penned by Munshi Muhammad Kazim, which chronicles the Ahom-Mughal battles of the 16th and 17th centuries. Supplementary Persian texts that enhance Assamese historical literature include *Maasir-i-Alamgiri* by Muhammad SaqiMustaid Khan, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (the autobiography of Jahangir), *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* by Mirza Nathan Ispahani, *Riyaz-us-Salatin* by Munshi Ghulam Hussain Salim, and *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* by Minhaj-us-Siraj. These publications together provide insights into Assam's historical terrain and significantly contribute to Assamese historical studies.

In the late Ahom period, Muslim craftsmen significantly contributed to the architectural and cultural advancement of Assam. The craftsmen, divided into guilds called the *Khanikar Khel* and overseen by a Chungrung Phukan, were responsible for construction and maintenance endeavours, including beautiful stonework and elaborate carvings on significant structures. Prominent instances of their impact include the Talatal Ghar and Ranghar in Rangpur, the Jay Dol in Jaysagar, and the Siva Dol in Sibsagar. The integration of Mughal artistic elements into Assamese architecture is evident in characteristics such as rounded pillars, intricately carved door frames, and dome-shaped minarets, signifying a synthesis of Islamic and Assamese architectural styles.[24] The Kamakhya Temple and the Hayagriva-Madhava Temple display these stylistic aspects, with dome-shaped patterns and other architectural characteristics influenced by Islamic design. This amalgamation also included bridge building, shown by the Namdang Stone Bridge and temples commissioned by Ahom monarchs such as King Rudra Singha and King Gadadhar Singha. The Mughal influence in Assam contributed to robust construction methods, such as the use of mortar, hence improving the durability of Assamese edifices. Additionally, Islamic influences influenced Assamese art in the 18th century, marked by the advent of Mughal miniature

[24] Gait, *History of Assam,* 181.

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painting, a style illustrating quotidian life, mythology, and flora and wildlife.[25]

The Mughal influence profoundly impacted Assamese attire, especially during King Rudra Singha's reign in the late 17th century. Influenced by Mughal aristocratic attire, Rudra Singha designated a crew called *Bairagi* to apprise the monarch of international fashion trends.[26]This impact resulted in the incorporation of diverse Mughal attire in the Assamese court, including turbans, *pyjamas*, *ijar*, and *chauga*. The *chapkan*, a coat style, gained popularity among the Ahom elite. Initially embraced by royalty, these Mughal-inspired clothing swiftly infiltrated Assamese culture, being worn by cultural performers such as Ojapali dancers and ultimately gaining popularity among the general populace.[27]Women at the Ahom court adopted Mughal design by integrating opulent textiles like *Kharchippi* and *Kingkhap*—embroidered fabrics that introduced an unprecedented refinement to Assamese attire.[28]The Mughals brought fitted attire, signifying a shift from the traditionally draping fashions worn by Assamese royalty and commoners. The transition to tailored clothing established a new benchmark in Assamese fashion, bringing the region's style into closer alignment with Mughal-influenced India.

During the reign of Ahom ruler Rudra Singha, Assamese music and culinary traditions witnessed significant cultural enrichment, reflecting broader Mughal influences that were assimilated into Assamese society. Rudra Singha, a devoted patron of the arts, was particularly influenced by Hindustani music, which he sought to introduce within Assam. Assamese chronicles record that he actively encouraged this cultural exchange by bringing numerous Hindustani musicians into his kingdom, enriching the local musical landscape with new styles and techniques. Further, he sent Assamese artists to Delhi to formally train in Hindustani music, ensuring a sustained transfer of musical knowledge and practice. These artists not only learned Hindustani music but also gained proficiency with various musical instruments, thereby enhancing the technical and expressive possibilities of Assamese music.[29]

In the realm of cuisine, Mughal influence during and after this period contributed significantly to Assamese gastronomy, especially within elite circles. Mughal culinary traditions introduced an array of richly spiced and fragrant dishes that gradually became integrated into the Assamese diet. Dishes such as *polao*, *khichri*, *kabab*, and *halva* were embraced for their flavour complexity and

[25] S. K. Bhuyan, ed., *Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha,* (Guwahati: Publication Board Assam, 1975), 168, 207.

[26] Lila Gogoi, *Tai Sanskritir Ruprekha,* (Calcutta: Sribhumi Publishing Company, 1985), 5.

[27] A. Saikia, *Dress and Ornaments of the Medieval Assamese Society,* (Dibrugarh: Dibrugarh University, 1982), 60.

[28] Birinchi Kumar Barua, *A Cultural History of Assam (Early Period),* (Assam: K.K. Barooah, 1951), 122.

[29] Harakanta Barua, *Assam Buranji,* (Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, 1930), 66.

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richness, blending seamlessly with local preferences.[30] The Mughals' extensive use of spices such as almonds, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, and saffron also influenced Assamese culinary practices, adding a refined flavour palette that is still appreciated today.[31] Additionally, the Mughals popularized various types of fruit pickles, peas *polao*, and other delicacies, diversifying local diets and infusing Assamese cuisine with new taste profiles.

The introduction of tobacco in the 17th century by a Mughal trader brought new habits, including the use of hookahs and pipes, especially among the Ahom nobility.[32] Persian chronicles also mention the popularity of opium, sold in Assam and reportedly consumed by Ahom royalty like King Gaurirath Singha.[33] Alcoholic beverages also gained traction; rice-based liquors (*Laopani*or *Haj*) became popular among some Assamese communities. Meanwhile, *sarbat*—a fruit-based wine—was introduced as a refreshing drink.[34]The Mughals also popularized the practice of chewing betel nut with scented *Bangia Pan* (betel leaf), which became deeply integrated into Assamese social customs, symbolizing hospitality, celebration, and even dispute resolution.[35]Together, these Mughal contributions to Assamese dress and diet enriched the region's cultural heritage, leaving a lasting influence on Assamese society.

On the Religious demography

On the religious front, it marked the arrival of Islam in Assam. It not only marked the sustained immigration of Sufi saints, but it also emerged as a centre for the practice of Sufism. They or the Sufi Saints came here with the invading Muslim army, a few of them entered Assam along with traders, while some of them settled here with a zeal and enthusiasm for preaching Islam. A host of others were however sent to this land by their spiritual guide with the sole intention of spreading Islam and its doctrines.[36] S. K. Bhuyan refers that "Muslim Mazams" or dargahs are scattered in the valley of Assam and their maintenance was encouraged by the state as we know from the assignment of the prerequisites of several maqams in Kamrupa to Haji Anowar Fakir, and the custom of dispatching annual presents from the court of Powa Macca Shrine at Hajo, An examination of the *maqams* in Assam is bound to add our knowledge of the careers of the eminent Muslim saints who came to this country from outside to monitor to the spiritual needs of the people. The religious songs composed by the Assamese

[30] Abū al-Fazl ibn Mubārak, *Ain-i-Akbari*, vol. 1, trans. Heinrich Blochmann (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1873), 62–63.
[31] P.N. Chopra, *Some Aspects of Society and Culture during Medieval Age, (1 526-1707),* New Delhi, 1962, p. 40.
[32] Gunaviram Barua, *Assam Buranji* (reprint; Gauhati: Publication Board Assam, 1972), 168.
[33] A. L. Srivastava, *Medieval Indian Culture* (New Delhi: [Publisher not listed], 1971), 25.
[34] Gait, *History of Assam,*144
[35] Gait, *History of Assam, 144.*
[36] Mohd. Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movement in Eastern India*, (Delhi: Idarah-i-Adabiyat-i-Delli, 1992), 84.

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Muslim Pir, known as *Zikirs*, are heard even to this day.[37] Ibn-Batuta who visited Bengal during 1346-47 A. D. wrote in his narratives account that he came to the "Mountain of Kamru" to visit a saint Jalal Uddin Tabrizi. It is now recognized by historians that this Jalal Uddin was no other than the famous Shah Jalal of Sylhet who died about 1346 A. D., shortly after Ibn-Batuta visited Assam. It will appear therefore that the country to the east of Mymensingh was called *"Kamru"* irrespective of the territories, actually within the Kingdom of Kamrupa.[38] It is not unlikely that Hazrat Jalal Uddin Tabrizi visited Assam sometime in the first quarter of the thirteenth century A. D. when the Kamrupa region of the Brahmaputra valley was ruled by local tribal chief either independently or by vassals of Gauda Sultan Alauddin Murdan Khaliji. It is also probable that he might have entered the country with the invading army of Hussam Uddin Iwaz in 1226-27A. D. [39]

The Morrish traveller, Ibn Batuta narrated that he stayed in the cavern of a mountain of (Kamrupa) Kamru. This mountain was within or near the territory of "Habank". A large river flowed through this territory and sailing down this river, one could reach Lakhnawati or Gauda in Bengal. He had steered down this river when he returned from Kamrupa.[40] It is, however, difficult to ascertain the travel account whether the name of the Saint was Jalauddin Tabrizi or Jalaluddin Sheraji.[41] In this context, it seems essential to state that a renowned Saint from the city of Shiraj is believed to have stayed in Assam sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century. The consensus is that Ibn-Batuta visited Saint Shah Jalal of Sylhet, who is also regarded as the traditional conqueror of the later territory, in A. H. 703[42] This contention seems to have been based on Blockmann's observation that Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrizi passed away in 1244 A. D.[43] H. Beveridge, however finds sufficient reasons to assert that the year 1244 A.D. cannot be the last year of Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrizi and that he was not the same person as Fakir Shah Jalal of Sylhet.[44] It is said that Ibn-Batuta's earlier copy of the travel account *(Rehla*) was lost in his journey, and he had to compile the second copy of it, in the latter part of his life. But he did not write it himself. He

[37] S. K. Bhuyan, *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate: Being a Translation of the Old Assamese Chronicle Padshah-Buranji, with Introduction and Notes*, (Gauhati: Government of Assam, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, 1947), 16–17.

[38] K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, 3rd ed. (Shillong: K. L. Barua, 1933), 154–155.

[39] Mohini Kumar Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, (Golaghat: Luit Printers, 1978), 194.

[40] Aga Mehdi Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta: India, Maldive Islands and Ceylon*, (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1953), 241.

[41] H. A. R. Gibb, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press for the Hakluyt Society, 1958), 268, 366.

[42] Jadunath Sarkar, *The History of Bengal*, vol. 2 (Dacca: University of Dacca, 1948), 100.

[43] H. Blochmann, "Title of the Article," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 42, (1873): 266, 281.

[44] H. Beveridge, "The Khurshid Jahan Numa of Sayyad Ilahi Bakhsh al Husaini Angrezabadi," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 64, no. 3 (1895): 230.

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dictated it to an African friend. Consequently, the great traveller certainly had recorded this latter account entirely from his memory.

It appears to be certain from the account that he came to Kamrupa, the land of magic,[45]and visited a renowned Saint who lived in the cavern of a mountain.[46] But this Saint cannot be Fakiir Shah Jalal of Sylhet, because the Sylhet shrine of Fakir is not on hills and the river Nahr-Ul-Azrag of the account also cannot be identified as the Meghna of Barak in Sylhet, because the way from Kamru mountain (Khasi-Jayantia or Garo hills) of the river but through the Brahmaputra.[47] From Lakhnawati Muhammad-Ibn-Bakhtiyar followed the course of the Brahmaputra to enter 'Kamru mountain' in 1205 A.D. Lakhnawati falls to the north of the Meghna and near the Brahmaputra where the latter rivers turn to South having passed through the Assam Valley; we, therefore, believe that Ibn-Batuta came to Hajo which lay on the North bank o Brahmaputra and facing Kamakhya, the place of magic.[48] It may, therefore, be accepted that he visited Hazrat Ghiyas-Ud-Din Awliya who entered the country in 1256-57 A.D. and lived till the time Ibn Batuta visited that place. It is not unlikely that Hazrat Jalal Uddin Tabrizi who visited Assam, probably during the first quarter of the thirteen century, established the 'Khanqah' at Hajo where Ikhtiyaruddin Malik Yuzbak later erected a mosque in 1256-57 A.D. when Ghiyasuddin Awliya came to stay there.[49] Thus this place being associated with the name of Jalaluddin Tabrizi, it gradually attained widespread celebrity, particularly from the stay of Hazrat Ghiyasuddin Awliya there. It is very likely that to pay homage to the memory of Saint Jalaluddin Tabrizi, the founder of the Khanqah Ibn Batuta visited Hajoi, and in the latter period of his life when he dictated the account of his travel, the aged Moorish traveller might have misplaced the name of the founder of this renowned Khanqah for the name o the Saint who stayed there during his visit. This supposition thus shows that Ibn-Batuta came to the Garudachal mountain in Hajo situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, in the Kamrupa region, which is further strengthened by the fact that his description of the place of the Saint appears to be greatly in agreement with the mountain and the Shrine of Hajo.[50] A small cavern still exists there at the foot of this mountain, facing the Brahmaputra on the South. The natives around the place believed it to be a mysterious cave where there were heaps of ancient metal wares and wealth kept by some unseen spirit. It is believed that from the southern slope of the hill this cave underground right to the base of the place where the shrine is now situated.[51]

Apart from this, we learn from the travel account of Ibn Batuta that when he went

[45] Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*, 237.
[46] Husain, *The Rehla of Ibn Battuta*,238
[47] Barua, *Early History of Kamarupa*, 212.
[48] Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, 196.
[49] Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, 196.
[50] Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, 197.
[51] Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, 197.

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back having visited the Saint, he steered his way through a big river which flowed by a prosperous place called Habank. This Habank was probably the same place as Hajo, which lay on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Since the latter part of his life, he might have failed to remember the exact name of the place and therefore wrongly referred to it as Habank instead of Hajo.[52] Regarding the stay of Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrizi at Garigaon Dargah, though no literacy or pieces of evidence are available, the people of the locality are deeply associated with his memory, who is believed to have passed away in that place. One ancient tomb was discovered in the place, a few years ago, which enhanced the belief of the people. However, scholars have been in difference of opinion regarding the date and place of death of the Saint. Abdul Fazl relates that this great Saint breathed his last in Mahal-dev. This Mahal-dev has been identified as Maldives.[53] The word "bandardeo" is also mentioned along with it. Bandardeo might be Bandardewa Hill in North Lakhimpur, Assam.[54] H. Beveridge finds ample reasons to accept this identification as quite tenable.[55] But the recent developments regarding his death related to the place Lakhnawati in Bengal where a *dargah* is still running after his name.[56]These widespread controversies make us think that he may not breathed his last in Garigaon but tradition stating that he was the founder of the *dargah* does not appear to the altogether baseless, because it does not appear to be unlikely that Hazrat Jalaluddin Tabrizi entered Assam in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. It was during this period that the great saint is said to have sojourned throughout India, thereafter it is not improbable that Jalaluddin Tabrizi had visited this place also during that period.

Shah Madar, (Probable 1398 A.D.) another *Pir*, whose original name was 'Badi-Ud-Din Shah Madar, seems to have come to Kamrupa during the early thirteenth century. It is believed that he hailed from Madina and he was a disciple of Hazrat Bayazid Bistami. It is also that from him the 'Madari Fakir' community developed.[57] Before his arrival to Kamrupa, he had spent many years in east East Bengal (now Bangladesh), where there are holy places associated with his name in Paharpur, Rajshahi, Begura, Ghespur, Basta etc. are still enjoying and bearing homage to his name. It is said that therefore Shah Madar hailed eastward and spread the principles of Islam. The flowers of Madari orders are still found in some places of Cachar, Goalpara and Kamrupa district of Assam.[58] Dr. Maheswar Neog refers to a copper plate inscription of a land grant issued to

[52] Saikia, *Assam-Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, 197.
[53] Ibn Mubārak, *Ain-i-Akbari*, 366.
[54] Bhuyan, *Assam Buranji*, 80.
[55] Gait, *A History of Assam*, 230.
[56] Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 1997), 176.
[57] Khan Amanat, *Koch Bihar Itihas*, vol. 1 (Calcutta: State Press, 1936), 73; R. H. Bora, *Islamiya Ayotiya Aru Asom* (Jorhat: Lucy Publication, 1989), 15.
[58] Mohammad Yahya Tamizi, *Sufi Movements in Eastern India*, (Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, 1992), 89.

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Anowar Fakir, where mention was made about four Mazars, out of which one Mazarbelongs to Shah Madar in the Bausi Paraganah, which proves the deep-rooted influence of the Saint over the state, for which he had received the privileges to enjoy Pirpal land grant.[59] But at present no *dargah* in his name is found in Assam.

It is learnt from the *Assam District Gazetteers (Kamrupa) records*, edited by B.C. Allen, two different accounts concerning the *dargah* on the top of the mountain in Hajo. One of these accounts related that a mosque was built on the mountain by one Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-Din. But he died before it was completed and was buried there within the enclosure of the mosque. According to the other version of the record, Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-Din was killed in a war with the Ahoms, near Bishwanath and his body was brought to Hajo by his vanquished soldiers[60] where he was buried for eternal sleep. Prof. S. K. Bhuyan, a renowned scholar of Assam, stated that in 1614 A.D. during the region of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1605-1627 A.D.) Makarram Khan was a *faujdar* at Koch Hajo and had sent three generals, namely Sayed-Hamim, Abu Bar, and Satyajit to invade Assam to take revenge for a merchant, who was killed by the Ahom King as he was suspected to be a spy. In this punitive war, Abu Bakr and his son Ghiyas-Ud-din lost their lives. Ghiyas Uddin was buried at Jao (PowaMacca). It is said that he was also a Sufi of high order. Later on, his tomb came to be known as Puwa Macca Dargah. The author further states that during the reign of Hussain Shah (1494-1544 A.D.) of Bengal, his son Danyal Shah was appointed as the *faujdar* of Hajo. After him, a man, Ghiyas Uddin by name took charge of *Faujdar*. A section of people believe that he died there and the tomb belongs to him.[61] According to K. L. Barua, although Hussain Shah's invasion of Kamata ultimately proved to be a failure, it appears that a colon of Muhammadans remained in the country around about Hajo. A Mosque was erected there by Ghiyas-Ud-din Awliya who subsequently died and was buried near a mosque. This place is still considered sacred by local Muhammadans who regard it as "Powa Macca" or one-fourth of Macca.[62]

We are also informed by another reputed scholar of Assam Dr. Moidul Islam Borah that Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-din was the name of a Saint, whose tomb is at Hajo. The detailed account of his life is still in obscurity. But a local tradition says that he was a great Saint and devoted his life to the propagation of Islam in Kamrupa.

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59 Dr. Maheswar Neog, *Prachya-Sasanavali*, (Calcutta: Assam Prakashan Parisad, 1974), 174.

60 Dr. M. K. Saikia, *Assam Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance*, (Golaghat, 1978), 191; B. C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteers: Kamrup* (1905), 103; R. Hussain Baru, *Islamiya Ayotiya Aru Asom* (Jorhat: Lucy Publication, 1989), 19.

61 M. I. Bora, *Baharistani I Ghaibi*, 488; Irfan Saffai, *Kabir Gohain at Haji* (Guwahati: Western Book House, 1999), 126; S. K. Bhuyan, *Saraghadeva Rajeswar Singha* (Guwahati, 1975), 174.

62 K. L. Barua, *Early History of Kamrupa*, 3rd ed. (Guwahati, 1988), 174–75; S. S. Ali, *Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir* (2001), 79.

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He built a mosque at the top of the hill at Hajo, near which he was buried. This place is held in great esteem and considered sacred by the Muslims as a place of pilgrimage and his shrine is called "PowaMacca" i.e. one-fourth of Mecca.[63]

Haliram Dhekial Phukan stated that Masandar Ghazi, Kalu Dewan and Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-din are possibly the generals of Hussain Shah. The latter is said to have built a mosque at Hajo and after his death, he was buried near it.[64] While Dr. Maheshwar Neog in support of HaliramDhekialPhukan, mentions two Muslim commanders. They are Musander Ghazi and Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-din, who were subsequently delegated by the Gauda ruler to Kamrupa. They built a mosque at Hajo and when he died his body was buried near that mosque. He again says that Ghiyas-Ud-din Awliya is considered to have been the first propagator of Islam in Kamrupa. But it is not clear that Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-din, the *faujdar* of Koch Hajo and Sultan Ghiyas-Ud-dinAwliya are the same persons.[65]

There is a strong belief among the Muslims of Kamrupa that the tomb at Hajo belongs to Hazrat Jalal Uddin Tabrizi, who visited Kamrupa during the first quarter of the thirteenth century. There is a Persian inscription on a stone plate attached to the mosque near the tomb, from which one can get ample information regarding the construction (reconstruction) of the mosque when and by whom it was done.[66] But it is a matter of fact that this inscription is silent regarding any information about the tomb and the person who is lying there for eternal sleep, except the mosque where it is attached. It is also interesting to note that this tablet was originally attached to the old mosque. And when the mosque was renewed this tablet was reattached to the new wall of the mosque. It may not be hidden from the inquisitive mind that this grand mosque was built during the reign of Shahjahan, by the humblest servants of the court and the [67] followers of Shah Niyamatullah in the month of Ramzan in 1067 A.H./ 1657 A.D.

Dr. Mohini Kumar Saikia states that Chand Khan or Chandsai, the Muslim disciples of Sankadeva, was a tailor by profession. It is said that Chand Khan, once, having sighted Sankardeva in four arms, made a shirt for the Saint with four sleeves, Chand Khan is venerated by the Assamese Hindus and Muslims alike.

The most renowned Muslim saint of Assam was Azan Fakir. His original name was Shah Milan or Shah Miran. It is known that Azan Fakir entered Assam in the first quarter of the Seventeenth century A.D. with his brother Hazrat Nobi Pir

63 M. I. Bora, *Mirza Nathari's Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* (trans.), vol. 2, 488; M. Choudhury, *Luit Barak Aru Islam*, 22.
64 *Haliram Dhekial Phukan Prakashan* (Guwahati: 2001), 80.
65 Dr. Maheswar Neog, *Shankaradev and His Times*, 46; M. Choudhury, *Luit Barak Aru Islam*, 22.
66 Amanatrullah Khan Choudhury, *Koch Beharar Itihas* (Calcutta, 1992), 68.
67 Choudhury, Koch Beharar Itihas, 68.

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from someplace in the Western country.[68] It is believed that Azan Fakir hailed into Assam with the Mughal forces as early as 1612-13 A.D., and stayed with them in Hajo, perhaps in the *dargah* of Powa Macca, till 1626 A.D. His biographers stated that he originally hailed from Baghdad and was a descendant of a section of the prophet Muhammad (SM).[69]

Azan Fakir, while staying at Hajo, had acquired deep knowledge of the Assamese language and literature. But originally he was a man of literature and had highly esteemed poetic calibre.[70] In Kamrupa, he not only earned knowledge of the Assamese language but also acquired a perfect knowledge of Assamese folk literature and other religious beliefs, which was selected in his unique literacy poetic works *Zikir* and *Zaris* or the *marshiyas*. From some *Zikirs,* we learn that Azan Fakir was a grey-haired man when he entered the Ahom Kingdom. The *Zikir* which the pir composed during his lifetime shows that in language and style,it conforms distinctly to the folk songs of eastern Assam Valley.[71]We have the least difficulty in asserting that he had settled in the Ahom Kingdom some years before this date (1635 A.D.) in 1636 A.D.

The second phase of the war between the Ahom King Pratap with the Mughals broke out and it ended with a peace treaty in 1639. A. D. By this treaty, as per the terms and conditions of the treaty, Asur Ali near the city of Guwahati on the South of the Brahmaputra, and its tributary Barnadi on the north had been fixed as the Ahom-Mughal boundary. Thus, the present city of Gauhati remained within the Mughal territory of Kamrupa. The first war is said to have started in 1616 A.D. and ended in a ceasefire in 1628 A.D. We may therefore, presume that Azan Fakir stayed in Mughal-Kamruptilthi date i.e. 1628 A.D. and after this, he had been to the Ahom Kingdom which he described in his Zikirs as "Pardesh" or alien county. It is also learnt from some other Zikirs that the Muslims residing near the capital of the Ahom Kingdom (Sibsagar) became scared when hostility between the Ahoms and Muslims broke out. This saint had, therefore, come down to Hajo and stayed there.[72]

It was perhaps that being a newcomer to the Ahom Kingdom, he might have deemed it better to be away from the capital for his safety and after the danger was over, he again came back to the capital and started the noble mission of preaching Islam. He met his followers, delivered speeches and composed poems in the form of Zikir and Zaris, through which he was trying to spread the message of Islam to the people, who did not know about it, on the one hand, and tried to

[68] Dr. Maheswar Neog, *Pabitra Assam* (Guwahati, 1960), 51; R. H. Barua, *Islamiya Aytijya Aru Asom*, 35.
[69] Dr. M. K. Saikia, *Assam Muslim Relation and Its Cultural Significance* (Golaghat, 1978), 202; Samser Ali, ed., *Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir* (Guwahati: Nandan Prakashan, 2001), 105.
[70] Samser Ali, *Sufi Darshan Aru Azan Pir*, 106.
[71] Sayed Abdul Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari* (Guwahati: Gauhati University, 1958), 28–29.
[72] Malik, "*Zikir Aru Zari"*, 28–29.

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rectify the Muslims who had given up the practice of the religious deeds. All these noble ventures made Azan Fakir very popular among the masses of the country irrespective of faith and beliefs. However, this growing popularity of Azan Fakir gradually became a cause of concern to the early Muslim settlers of Assam. Because, through his writings and preaching, the Pir had bitterly attacked those native Muslims who delighted themselves in doing such things which are against Islamic Shariah. Thusover time, he came into direct clash with the Assamese Muslim official Rupai Gariya, the Dadhara or the arm carrier of the Ahom king Gadhadhar Singha (1644-48 A.D.)[73] in 1685 A, D, Rupai Gariya brought open charges against the Pir alleging him to be spy of the Mughals and he used to meet Mughal soldiers in jungles, Beyond this he told the king that Azan Fakir used to give wrong guidance to the Muslims and thus polluting their mind both against the religion as well as the king. At this, the King being convinced, tacitly suggested Rupai to do what the latter thought best and also cautioned him to act with utmost care and in a rightful way so that neither the king nor the Muslim subject be held responsible for his misjudgment. Rupai Gariya, this having the king's concurrence, arrested the Pir and extracted his eyes.[74] But subsequently, the king learned all about the intrigue against the Pir and therefore he immediately put Rupai Gariya to death and the Pir was granted a monastery with free land grant and servitors near the Dikhaw River in Sibsagar.[75] Thus the Saint who had started his career in Hajo at Kamrupa ahead flourished with pride in the eastern part of Assam. Shah Milan Aiias Azan Fakir is said to have married one Assamese lady, by whom he had three sons. His brother NabiPir, who also entered into Assam along withhi founded his Khanqah near Simaluguri at Sibsagar Sub-Division. Azan Fakir probably died around 1696 A. D. It is known that Azan Fakir had three sons. The descendants of all these sons are still living in Sibasagar, Lakhimpur and the Nowging district of Assam, which are known as Saraguria or Jajorial, Kopohial or Chaporial and Gengdharaor Holongaparia respectively. These descendants are still found in Assam who are known as Saraguria Dewans, a name which originated from the name of place where the king settled the Saint after his eyes were extracted by Rupai Gariya. Generally, in India, the descendants of prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) used to write the title "Sayyid" as a prefix to their names.[76] As it is believed that Azan Fakir was a subsequent member of the prophet's family, therefore the descendants of Azan Fakir also adopted the same title "Sayyid" (Sayed) as a prefix of their names. Azan Fakir had occupied a unique place in the

[73] Bhuyan, *Saraghadeva Rajeswar Singha*, 180–81.

[74] Bhuyan, *Saraghadeva Rajeswar Singha*, 180–81.

[75] M. Y. Tamizi, *Sufi Movement in Eastern India* (Delhi, 1992), 100; Sayed Samsul Huda, M.A., the retired DDPI and former Professor of Arabic at Gauhati University, is currently associated with the Assam Falah Society, a renowned NGO dedicated to the socio-educational development of Assam. He belongs to the family of Azan Fakir.

[76] S. A. Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari*, 31. All these verses have been quoted from the *Zikirs and Zaris* collected by Sayed Abdul Malik in 1958, published by Gauhati University.

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development of the language and literature of Assam embedded with high poetic zeals of Perso-Arabic origin. His writings in the form of *zikir* and *Zaris* have added new elements to the Assamese literary field. Beyond this Azan Fakir had acquired profound knowledge of Madhabdeva, which is reflected in his writings as follows:

SankardevajiyariMadhavdewurbowari/Rahpurnagaraghar/Rahpurnagararrasak namaiani/ diyasakaloke bat.[77]

(She is the daughter of Sankardeva and daughter-in-law of Madhadeva, and she dwells in the city of Rahpur or the land of Rassa, which is the sentiment of love and devotion. Boring down the Rassa from the city of Rahpur and distribute it among us all.) Moreover, Azan Fakir was a pioneering symbol of communal harmony and religious-cultural assimilation, which was also reflected inZikirs compiled by him :

Hindu mussalmanekAllarfarman/ gorasthaneKabar Sari sari/ hindukpuribamominakgariba…[78]

(Hindus and Muslims are bounded by the same set of the divine of Allah… The act of cremating a Hindu and the entombing of a *mumin* only signify one end death for all.)

The Mughal influence on Assamese society was profound and multifaceted, spanning cultural, linguistic, culinary, and artistic domains. The Mughals played an important role in shaping Assamese identity through sustained contact, conflict, and exchange. Overall, Mughal interactions helped to create a unique blend of cultural and social practices in Assam. This influence helped shape Assamese society into a more diverse and resilient culture, reflecting both indigenous traditions and adopted innovations that are still present in Assam's modern cultural identity.

Impact Ahom Economy

Before Mughal incursions, Assam had a barter economy with cowrie shells serving as the primary medium of exchange. However, the introduction of Mughal coinage into Assam in the 17th century marked a significant change. According to Shihabuddin Talish, the currency in Aasham consisted of cowries, silver rupees and *Ashrafi* (gold coins) and copper coins are not accepted here. Although some Ahom rulers minted coins before, the issuance of currency was irregular; for example, Sukhengmung, also known as Gargaya Raja, minted the first Ahom coin in 1543 A.D.[79] These early coins had distinct characteristics, but widespread coinage did not emerge in Assam until Mughal influence prompted

[77] Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari*, 52.
[78] Malik, *Zikir Aru Zari*, 48.
[79] Gait, *History of Assam*, 42.

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economic reform in the 18th century. By the mid-1700s, Ahom rulers had begun systematic coin issuance, which facilitated broader economic circulation and gradually reduced the prevalence of barter transactions. Ahom coinage was predominantly octagonal, but during Siva Singha's reign, coins with a variety of shapes and intricate designs appeared. In 1651, Saka, Queen Pramatheswari, Siva Singha's consort, introduced square coins inscribed with Persian scripts, and Rajeswar Singha later included Persian inscriptions in coinage.[80] Under Rudra Singha's patronage, skilled Muslim families—known as *Akharkatiyas* were hired to inscribe script on coins.[81] As a result, denominations such as rupees, half-rupees, and quarter-rupees proliferated and circulated throughout Assamese society during the 18th and 19th centuries, leaving a legacy of Mughal influence on the Ahoms.

In medieval Assam, the state owned both the soil and the subjects. Thus, the majority of the population, known as the *paiks*, was required to provide various services to the Ahom state. The most important of these tasks included the clearing of forest lands to make new lands suitable for cultivation. Ahoms had their methods of land surveying and measurement. The notion of land ownership being vested not in the peasants or people but in the king or the state continued until the end of the Ahom rule. In the Ahoms state, no land surveys appear to have been conducted regularly. Talish too mentions that collection of taxes from the public is not the custom in *Asham* and that one person out of three from each family was obligated to provide service to the Ahom Raja. One of the most fundamental changes that the Mughals introduced into Assam was the assessment of land revenue based on land measurement. The Ahoms began a detailed land survey across the country, inspired by the Mughal land measurement systems. This survey based on Mughal land measurement began during the reign of King Gadadhar Singha (A.D. 1681 - A.D. 1696). He ordered a survey in Sibsagar and then elsewhere, employing surveyors (Kakatis) from Koch Behar and Bengal. The successors of Gadadhar Singha continued the work and sought to ascertain the areas of revenue-free lands and reorganize the units on areas of revenue administration, particularly in lower Assam.Apart from the general land survey King Siva Singha had also carried out a systematic survey of religious institutions enjoying revenue-free *dharmottar, devottar, brahmottar* lands, along with their paiks in Kamrup, Darring, Rangpur etc. Unlike earlier surveys, Siva Singha's survey covered hitherto unsurveyed areas to estimate the total area of land, and the total population and prepare rent rolls. The survey was finally completed during the reign of King Pramatta Singha (A.D. 1744-A.D. 1751).The establishment of Mughal revenue administration in the conquered territories of the Koch kingdoms and Assam marked a significant transformation in the region's governance structure. This reorganization aimed to impose a systematic

[80] Rabin Dev Choudhury, ed., *A Source Book of Numismatic Studies in North East India*, vol. (Guwahati: Directorate of Museums, Assam, 1987).
[81] Gait, *History of Assam*, 181.

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fiscal policy that mirrored the broader Mughal administrative framework, creating a foundation for effective control and resource mobilization.[82]

To facilitate the efficient collection of revenues and governance, the Mughals structured the conquered regions into *sarkars and Parganas*. Each *sarkar functioned* as a district, while the *parganas* acted as subdivisions within these districts. This hierarchical arrangement allowed for a clear demarcation of administrative responsibilities and jurisdictions, essential for the consolidation of Mughal authority. Contemporary Mughal chronicles, particularly the *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi*, detail how the Mughal administration in Kamrup was instituted with significant changes, including the appointment of officials tasked with revenue collection. The introduction of officials such as *diwans, bakshis, faujdaars*, and *karoris* in the *sarkars* and parganas was crucial for enforcing Mughal fiscal policies. In A.D. 1615, Shaykh Ibrahim was appointed as the *Karori* of Kamrup, marking him as the first imperial officer responsible for reforming the revenue administration in the region. His administration divided Kamrup into four main *sarkars—Sarkar Kamrup, Sarkar Dhakeri, Sarkar Dakhinkul*, and *Sarkar Bangalbhum*—each further divided into several *parganas*.[83] The establishment of *thanas* (police stations) in strategic locations within Kamrup served both military and administrative purposes. The deployment of officials like Barlas, who commanded a force of one hundred horsemen and two hundred matchlock men at Barnagar, and Mirza Salih Arghun at Dhamdhama with two hundred and fifty horsemen and four hundred matchlock men, illustrates the militarized governance structure essential for ensuring the enforcement of revenue collection and acting as a deterrent against local uprisings.

The Mughal conquest also facilitated the emergence of a new class of local officials, such as *chaudharis* and *qanungos*, who held hereditary rights over territories within the *Parganas of* Koch and Kamrup. These officials played a vital role in the administration of local affairs and the collection of taxes. The continuity of their claims to authority, even after the decline of the Mughal Empire, suggests that their positions were deeply entrenched in the local governance system. Their enduring influence over local administration provided a measure of stability, enabling the preservation of local customs and practices despite changing imperial contexts.

Beyond administrative reforms, the Mughal influence significantly impacted various crafts and industries in Assam. A notable example is the wood carving industry, which, although existing since antiquity, flourished during the medieval period. The Persian chronicler Shihabuddin Talish documented the excellence of Assamese wood carving, particularly in the wooden palace at Gargaon.[84] This

[82] Anupama Ghosh, "Mughal Impact on the Revenue System of Assam: A Study of the Mughal and Early Colonial Records," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 73 (2012): 261–71.
[83] Ghosh, "Mughal Impact on the Revenue System of Assam", 261-71.
[84] Gait, *History of Assam*, 150.

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period saw the importation of Muslim artisans—carpenters and masons—who were integrated into a guild known as the *Khanikar Khel*, overseen by a *Khanikar Baruah*.[85] This integration of skilled craftsmen not only enhanced the quality of local craftsmanship but also led to a synthesis of artistic techniques, enriching the region's cultural heritage.

Similarly, the ivory industry experienced substantial growth due to the influx of Muslim ivory workers who were tasked with producing intricately carved ivory items for the Mughal royalty. In exchange for their craftsmanship, these artisans were often granted revenue-free lands, signifying the Mughal administration's support for local industries. J. Donald, in his study of ivory carvings in Assam, highlighted the contributions of artisans like Fiznur Mussalman, one of the prominent ivory carvers of Jorhat.[86]The bell metal industry also saw significant developments during this period, with the arrival of Muslim brass workers, particularly the Mariyas. Historical records indicate that these workers, often captured during military campaigns, were engaged in the manufacture of brassware for local temples, such as the Hayagriva Madhav Temple in Kamrup. The *Mariyas* were granted revenue-free lands associated with temple properties, highlighting the intersection of religion and economic activity in Mughal Assam. Other important centres for brassware production during the Ahom period included Amingaon, Kaliabor, Silghat, Mangaldoi, and Jorhat, contributing to a diverse and vibrant local economy.

The exchange of military knowledge between the Mughals and the Ahoms had profound implications for warfare in Assam. The introduction of firearms and gunpowder technology significantly altered the military landscape, particularly during the prolonged conflicts between the Mughals and the Ahoms. During this period, numerous Muslim soldiers were captured and subsequently employed in royal workshops to manufacture cannons, guns, and gunpowder. S.K. Bhuyan noted that these war captives, recognized for their proficiency, were designated as *Hilaigharia* (those in charge of royal arsenals), illustrating their crucial role in enhancing the military capabilities of the Ahom state[87].These Muslim war captives not only contributed to the production of military equipment but also served as personal bodyguards to Ahom rulers. For instance, Rupai Dadhora, an influential Muslim known as Rupai Gariya, was appointed as the armour bearer of Gadadhar Singha, the Ahom ruler. This intertwining of military and administrative functions further exemplified the collaborative dynamics between the Ahoms and the Muslim populations within their territory.

Conclusion

The Mughal era in Assam was characterised by substantial administrative,

[85] *Annals of the Delhi Badshahate*, trans. S. K. Bhuyan, 18, 83.
[86] J. Donald, "Ivory Carving in Assam," *Journal of Indian Art and Industry* 9, no. 75 (July 1901): 57.
[87] Saikia, "*Assam Muslim Relation and its Cultural Significance"*, 146.

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economic, and cultural changes that altered the region's historical course. The formation of a systematic revenue administration via the foundation of *sarkars* and *Parganas*, together with the incorporation of local authorities and the development of crafts, enabled a multifaceted interaction of government and cultural exchange. The lasting impact of these changes is seen in the intricate fabric of Assamese identity, where Mughal legacies persist in modern culture. The amalgamation of native traditions with Mughal innovations not only enhanced the cultural milieu of Assam but also established the foundation for the region's socio-economic development. Grasping these historical processes is crucial for understanding the intricacies of Assam's history and its enduring influence on the present.

The relations between the Ahoms and the Mughals have mostly been framed as military confrontations, with a prevalent narrative indicating that Mughal endeavours in Assam were generally ineffective and transient. Nonetheless, this viewpoint overlooks the substantial socio-cultural and administrative effects of the Mughal presence in the area. Despite the Mughals' difficulties in securing enduring dominance over Assam owing to its formidable terrain and geographical seclusion, their influence cannot be seen as a simple failure. The Mughal conquest of Assam, however not enduring, was a significant accomplishment in the face of substantial challenges. The Mughal government implemented several reforms, such as the creation of tax systems, the introduction of new crafts, and the integration of numerous creative traditions. The reforms, however, enacted over a short duration, had lasting effects on the socio-economic frameworks and cultural traditions of Assam.

Moreover, the administrative structure instituted by the Mughals, including the segmentation of territories into *sarkars* and *Parganas* along with the designation of diverse officials, formed a foundation for subsequent government in Assam. The impact of these administrative procedures endured long after the Mughals' departure, shaping the region's political environment until the 19th century when it fell under British rule in 1826.Therefore, it is essential to embrace a more sophisticated viewpoint about the Mughal conquest of Assam. An exhaustive examination of their effect indicates that, while their control was temporary, the changes they instigated were not just fleeting. These developments had significant and enduring repercussions that influenced the socio-cultural character of Assam and impacted its historical development. Therefore, comprehending the Mughal presence in Assam necessitates acknowledging it as a crucial juncture in the region's history, which substantially influenced its later growth and development.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declared that there are no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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