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## Relation of Koch and Mughals on political realm: From Akbar to Aurangzeb

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### Abstract

In North Eastern India the place 'Koch Behar' situated just next to the Assam. Koch Behar mentioned as 'Pragjyotish' or 'Kamrup' in various scriptures of Ancient India. From Ramayana, Mahabharat to Harshcharit in everywhere the term 'Kamrup' was mentioned. some period of time Kamrup mentioned as feudatory under Pala's, Ahoms and so on and also some sought of time Kamrup act as self-governed independent Kingdom. Mainly the habitat of Koches or Kamta named as Koch Behar. From the period of Akbar, Koches maintains direct relation with the Mughals and successfully suppress the Ahom aggression and able to rule moreover independently. The political alliance long last up to the period of Aurangzeb. In between time, not only the political relation but marriage association also done between them. Mughal intervention in the politics paved the way for Mughal type administration as well as land settlement method in Koch Behar.

**Keywords:** Koch Behar, Pragjyotish, Kamrup, Mughal, Ahom

### Introduction

In the North Eastern part of India on the foothills of Himalaya a place situated from ancient period of time named as 'Pragjyotish', 'Louhitya', 'Kamrup', 'Kamta' and so on. Though this part of India far away from the main political center of Medieval India but geographical strategic position of Pragjotish; connected this place with the center polity. From the Ancient scriptures like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Harivamsa, Bramho, Bramhanda, Matsya, Srimadbhagvat, Raghuvamso, BrihatSanghita- mentioned the name 'Pragjyotish' <sup>[1]</sup>. In 4<sup>th</sup> century BC from the Ashokan Pillar of Prayag, we get the name of Kamrup written by chronicler of Samudra Gupta. After that 'Harsha Charit' and 'Se- Yu- Ki' also mentioned the name of 'Pragjyotish' as well as 'Kamrup' in 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Narayan Paul in his Copper plate and also in Rajtarangini of 12<sup>th</sup> Century written the name of 'Pragjyotish'. In the writings of Bijay Sen, Lakhasman Sen, Ralph fitch also the sources of medieval India like Akbar Nama, Ain- i- Akbar, Tujuk- I -Jahangir etc., the name of 'Kamrup' was the common. From this we can established the fact that though Koch Behar situated far away from the main Ganga basin politics of India but this area always taken subjugated or a negotiable position under the central power. In 1526 Babar get victory over Afghans in the first Battle of Panipat and established the Mughal Emperor in India but it's just a starting only the main glory came under the hands of Akbar. The Second Battle of Panipat fought in 1556 from this period of time under the Emperor Akbar the Mughal empire concretize in India. In the region of Akbar, the direct relation with Koch Kingdom started, this relation continued till the period of Aurangzeb. The relation of Koch and Mughal not always stable. It was a political relation both the party here get unite for their own political desire. With the support of the Mughals Koches get independence from neighboring aggression and with the help of Koches Mughal get easily possessed over Ahom. In this article try to sketch the relation of Koches with Mughal from the period of Akbar to Aurangzeb.

It is said to be that the frightened Kshatriyas from Parshuram taken shelter in the lap of Bhagbati from these the name 'Koch' originate, though this theory was not an established fact. Most of the Muslim writer of the India written about 'Koches'. From 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Century Kamrup was a tributary under Palas. Bijay sena of Sen lineage get victory over Kamrup. In the region of Akbar, the Koch king was Lakshminarayan.

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Hence under the study period the political boundaries of Kamrup were not always same it always fluctuated with the new aggression or settlement. Practically Mughal relation with Koches began in the region of Akbar. The predecessors of the Mughal in Bengal, the Turko – Afghans had made unsuccessful attempts to established their hegemony in this region <sup>[2]</sup>. Muhammad Ibn Bakhtiyar Khilji a general of Qutub-ud-din-Aibak invaded Kamrup in 1205 A.D. This invasion paved the way for subsequent Muslim invasions in succeeding centuries. By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century as a consequence of the policy of expansion into Ahom initiated by the Mughals. The Koches was the first Assamese power to bear the brunt of this Mughal intervention. Also 16<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed the disintegration of the Kingdom of Kamrup-Kamta and over its ruins laid the foundation of the Koch Kingdom under their leader Bisu alias Viswa Singha <sup>[3]</sup>. Though Viswa Singha was one of the vassalages under Ahom rule. Mainly the History of the Koches entered into a brilliant glorious chapter of military glory and cultural achievements with the accession of Son Narayan. Narayan with his brother Sukladhavj alias Chilarai, they not only defeated the Ahoms but also reduced the position of the Ahom kingdom to that of mere feudatory of the Koch King. Encouraged by this success, they began extending their sway over Sylhet, Tripura, Manipur and in course of time they established the Koch sovereignty almost in the entire North-East and made it important enough to get recognition in the court of Mughal Delhi <sup>[4]</sup>.

In this period of time ruling monarch in Bengal was Sulaiman Karwani who maintained cordial relations with Akbar, the Mughal Emperor of Delhi. Nevertheless, he always felt constant threat of a supposed Mughal invasion and therefore he initiated to surrounding himself with a ring of feudatory. Both some Persian and Assamese chronicles record stated that it was Karwani accompanied by his general Kalapahar invaded in Koch kingdom. They proceeded up to Guwahati and destroyed Kamakhya Temple <sup>[5]</sup>. Koch princes were completely routed by this Afghan struggle and in 1568 A.D the famous leader of the Koches Chilarai was taken as a prisoner <sup>[6]</sup>. Though soon Chilarai released by the Karwani because he understood that imprisonment of Chilarai was a strategically wrong decision and goes against him but after the defeat at the hands of Afghan King, Narayan felt an urgent necessity of recognizing his lost prestige hence he sent an envoy to Akbar with the purpose of friendly alliance. The result of the alliance formed between Mughals and Koches, the Afghan ruler of Bengal was defeated and Bengal came to be divided between the Koches and the Akbar, Mughal emperor <sup>[7]</sup>. This alliance continued and it was recorded that in 1578 A.D. Narayan sent a formal embassy to Akbar's court with variable presents including 58 elephants <sup>[8]</sup>.

However, this glorious epoch of the Koch kingdom came to an end with the death of Narayan and the Koch state came to be divided into two divisions namely Koch Behar inherited by Lakshminarayan the son of Narayan and Koch Hajo which came under the possession of Raghudev the son of Chilarai <sup>[9]</sup>. Thus the Koch Kingdom divided into two part by 1581. This partition greatly weakened the power of the Koches. Since these two-division failed to maintain cordial relation between themselves hence paved the way for the Mughal intervention in the Political life of the Koches, Lakshminarayan the ruler of Koch Behar wanted to established his authority over Raghudev therefore he granted

asylum to Raghudev's rebellious son Parikshit'. This angered Raghudev who then formed an alliance with Isa Khan, a fugitive Afghan Chief of East Bengal and forcibly occupied a part of Lakshminarayan territory <sup>[10]</sup>. In this sought of time period Lakshminarayan realized that he could not resist the invaders, he therefore submitted before the Mughals and grab the help of Mughal emperor Akbar.

For acquiring Mughal shelter Lakshminarayan sent his envoy to Man Singh, the subedar of Bengal. For acknowledged his position in Koch to the Mughal's. For the interest and invitation of Lakshminarayan; Man Singh came to Anandpur through Salim Nagar for the meet up with Lakshminarayan. Here both the party directly meet, talk & celebrate with each other. In the year of 1596, Pravabati Debi the sister of Maharaja Lakshminarayan gets marry with Amber Raj Man Singh <sup>[11]</sup>. With this union Lakshminarayan sought Man Singh's help against the Koch Afghan alliance <sup>[12]</sup>. This alliance no doubt served its purpose for Lakshminarayan since it prevented Raghudev from encroaching upon Koch Behar, nevertheless it paved the way for the Mughal intervention over the politics of Koch Behar.

In the year 1603 AD, Raghu Dev died and was succeeded by his son Parikshit who in order to safeguard his throne sought for an alliance with the Ahom king Pratap Singha <sup>[13]</sup>. This was followed by Parikshit's policy of aggression towards Koch Behar meanwhile Lakshminarayan finding that it would not be possible to fight Parikshit single handedly so he decided to seek Mughal aid in May, 1608. Lakshminarayan was compelled by Man Singh, Governor of Bengal to renew his acceptance of Mughal Overlordship, to pay regular annual tributes and assist the Mughal forces in time of needs. After this he sent an invitation to the Mughal Governor of Bengal Allaudin Fatehpuri Islam Khan to invade Koch Hajo <sup>[14]</sup>. Islam Khan send a fresh expedition against Parikshit under the command of Mukarram Khan accompanied by Shaikh Kamal, Shaikh Muhiddin, Mirza Iman Quli Beg, Shamlu and Raghunath. The Mughal Army started their expedition from Brahmapur situated near Dacca and proceeded towards Brahmaputra <sup>[15]</sup>. Parikshits fleet of 300 war boats met the imperial force however in the encounter that followed the Koch navy was giving a crushing defeat at Sulkuna situated on the western border of Kamrup. The victorious Mughal Army then pursued the forces of Parikshit who had taken shelter in the fort of Dhubri. After a great deal of fighting the fort of Dhubri fell to the hands of the Mughals and Parikshit was forced with no other alternative except to submit to the invaders and he was taken prisoner at Pandu. He was then brought to Delhi before Jahangir, whereby the emperor released him only after exacting a promise from the latter to pay the Mughals seven lakhs as tribute <sup>[16]</sup>. However the Mughal Governor of Bengal realizing that Parikshit would always pose a great danger to imperial Mughals refused to release him, Parikshit therefore returned to Delhi and on his return journey he died on the bank of the Ganges. The Mughals then annexed Parikshit's kingdom Koch Hajo in 1613 and Abdus Salam the brother of Mukarram Khan was put in charge of the conquered territory.

In 1616 AD Mukarram Khan was formally appointed as the Governor of Koch Hajo whereby he made Hajo his administrative headquarter <sup>[17]</sup>. In Koch Hajo he established a province called Bilayat Koch Hajo. The entire territory of Koch Hajo was divided into 'Sarkar's or districts which was

then further divided into a number of Parganas<sup>[18]</sup>. Thus, the Mughal established their own system of administration. This was followed by the establishment of Mughal Political institutions resulting in the growth of Muslim population in this region. The Mughal administration in Koch Hajo on Kamrup was indeed a more replica of Mughal administration in Delhi. It is said that Jahangir deputed one officer named Amir Sheikh Ibrahim Karori from Delhi to supervise land settlement at Koch Hajo in such a way it conforms to the land settlement in Delhi. Thus, Ibrahim Karori introduced the Pargana system in Kamrup. Jahangir then appointed Kabir Khan a noble of Parikshit as the 'Quanungo' on revenue officer of Koch Hajo. Hence the Mughals were able to establish complete hegemony over the Koches. The disappearance of Koch Hajo or Kamrup as a buffer state between the Mughals and the Ahoms brought the Mughals and the Ahoms into direct clashes with one another. Though the brother of Parikshit, Balinarayan from his part Darrang; continued a persistent struggle against the Mughal till his death in 1683<sup>[19]</sup>.

In the period of Mughal succession dispute Prince Shahjahan take shelter in Hajo for some sought of period. After Shahjahan, Aurangzeb in the year of 1661 dispatched his general Mir Jumla to invade Ahom therefore Mir Jumlas first encounter with Prannarayan the ruler of the Koches. He was defeated and Mir Jumla occupied Koch Behar. He then renamed the capital as 'Alamgirnagar' whereby he got constructed a mint and coins were issued in the name of the Delhi emperor added to this entire territory of Koch Behar was placed under a Faujdar equipped with 1400 cavalry and 2000 Musketeers who was also assisted by a dewan and two Amirs. Immediately after occupying Kamrup Mir Jumla established several military outposts at Kamrup to maintain the line of Communication with Bengal<sup>[20]</sup>. Mughals possession over Koch Behar did not last long with the weakening of the central power as a result these outskirt areas either get independent or came under neighboring aggression.

The Mughals no doubt contribute a lot of the economic and social life of medieval Coochbehar as well as Koch Hajo too. Mughals thoroughly reorganized the system of revenue administration in the region and introduced his own system of land measurement and survey and land revenue collection in cash which was then prevalent in Northern India. The unit of Land measurement introduced by Sikander Lodhi known as 'Gaj' which is equivalent to one meter is widely used till the present day. The kings of Kamrup were found to have been deeply influence by the system of classification of land into three categories namely good, middle and bad which was prevalent under the Mughals, for the rulers of Kamrup were found to have adopted a system of land survey whereby they classified lands into four parts followed by Ksetra (arable land), Khila (wasteland), Vastu (building sites) and Kristabhumi (inferior land)<sup>[21]</sup>. Hence Kamrup came to be divided into 26 parganas each entrusted to the charge of an officer called 'Choudhury' who was assisted in revenue collection by several other officers such as 'Thakurias', 'Talukdars', 'Patgiri', 'Gaon Kakati' whose duty was to calculate the revenue paying paiks and to assess the amount to be paid as revenue by them<sup>[22]</sup>. Ibrahim Karori also mentioned that during the region of Jahangir, land survey was carried out in Kamrup. For the purpose of realizing higher amount of revenues, the Mughals introduced the system of the classification of lands in

Kamrup according to the nature of their produce. Hence lands came to be classified into three categories namely 'Kheraj' or taxed land which comprised of the ordinary cultivating tenure, the 'Nisf Kheraj' or half assessed tenure and the 'La Kheraj' or revenue free tenure<sup>[23]</sup>. The Kheraj lands were further subdivided into 'Polaj', 'Parauti', 'Chachar' and 'Banjar'. Added to this the Mughal also created a class of officers entrusted with the work of land assessment and revenue collection. Apart from agriculture, metal work also done in medieval Koch Behar. Sarthebari in Kamrup was an important centers of bell metal works. Chronicles mentioned that the Mariyas in Kamrup manufactured brass wares for use in the Hayagriva Madhav Temple at Kamrup. The Mariyas at Hajo were also granted revenue free lands belonging to this settlement.

Thus, to conclude it may state that the Mughal contact with Koches was defiantly responsible for modifying and developing political, administrative, economic and social sphere of life in Koch kingdom. The territorial expansion of Mughal Empire resulted in the increase of Muslim settlement and population which increased enormously and constituted an important fraction. The impact of the contact was felt in the political life of the Kochs whereby they came to be introduced to the Mughal system of administration and political organization. Added to this, the impact of the contact was also seen in the enrichment of the social and cultural life of the region, where notable changes were witnessed such as the dress, diet, literature, art, architecture, music, painting and many mores. The impact was also felt in the economic life of the region, commendable contribution was 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 Mughal or Muslim were inversely affected since they were also greatly enriched as far as their culture was concerned. Lastly it can said that Political alliance with Koches with Mughals shaped Koch Behar-Kamta in a definite position.

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