

LACHIT BARPHUKAN AND HIS TIMES



Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan

“Death is preferable to a life of subordination to foreigners,” exclaimed the Ahom monarch Swargadeo Chakradhwaj Singha, and launched accordingly extensive preparations to expel the Moguls from Gauhati, having received meanwhile an additional incentive from Shivaji’s successes in the Deccan. The Assamese general Lachit Barphukan recovered Gauhati after a brief campaign. Raja Ram Singha of Amber, now deputed against Assam by Emperor Aurangzeb as a punishment for his connivance at Shivaji’s escape from Agra, also failed in his diplomatic overtures and in his armed operations, his hopes being finally crushed in the battle of Saraighat. The greatest figures of the time - Emperor Aurangzeb, Shivaji Maharaja and Guru Teg Bahadur - enter into the texture of the story of Lachit Barphukan’s matchless gallantry and leadership, presented to the world for the first time in the well-documented and animated pages of this historical monograph.



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LACHIT BARPHUKAN AND HIS TIMES

**(A history of the Assam Mogul conflicts
of the period 1667 to 1671 A.D.)**

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PREFACE

A short paper on Lachit Barphukan was read at the first session of the Indian History Congress held at Poona in June 1935. It was warmly received, specially by my Maratha friends who found in the Assamese general a great counterpart of their own national hero Shivaji Maharaja, both of whom and at the same time were engaged in resisting the mighty power of the Moguls, Lachit Barphukan in Eastern India and Shivaji in the Deccan. The paper was partially revised and enlarged, and left at that stage when I proceeded to England in September 1936, from where I returned two years later.

Other preoccupations intervened, and I could come back to my labours on Lachit Barphukan towards the end of 1945, when the termination of World War II enabled many of us to return to our favourite pursuits and studies. I went over again through all the sources discovered mainly through the efforts of the Assam Government Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, and incorporated a mass of new information. Whatever leisure I could command during the last fourteen months has been devoted to the revision and enlargement of this history, and the work in its present form has been completed in the middle of December 1946.

The story of Lachit Barphukan is of absorbing interest to students of Indian History, for it brings into the picture some of the greatest figures of the time Emperor Aurangzeb, Shivaji Maharaja, and the Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur—all of whom were directly associated with the events leading to Raja Ram Singha's deputation to Assam. So I have taken great pains in making the narrative as broad-based as possible in order to lay out an accurate background and perspective. This purpose has been followed specially in reference to Raja Ram Singha, a knowledge of whose antecedents and tactics is necessary to understand the significance of his war-

measures in Assam, and to properly appreciate the leadership of his antagonist Lachit Barphukan.

The story is also interesting for the revelations concerning the offshoots and ramifications of the Mogul conflicts from the standpoint of the invaded country ; and no race in India has preserved such a detailed and systematic record of these reactions and repercussions as the Assamese people, through their contemporary Buranjis or chronicles. What the Mogul commanders did in Assam, what they said, how they behaved, and what difficulties they faced, are all to be found in the Buranjis, and they thus add considerably to the knowledge derived from the Persian chronicles, to which therefore the Assamese Buranjis are indispensable supplements.

The subject of Ram Singha's wars in Assam has been dealt with briefly in Sir Edward Gait's *History of Assam*, and in Sir Jadunath Sarkar's *History of Aurangzeb*, as necessitated by the plan and scope of their monumental works. But the materials available and the importance of the subject call for an independent volume, because the crisis through which the Assamese passed in their conflicts with the Moguls during the four years 1667 to 1671 was a momentous one, and the manner in which they succeeded in overcoming it, magnificent and eternally inspiring.

Very little is known about the past history of Assam though it has produced great warriors, statesmen, poets and reformers. The Assamese people have now fallen on evil days, and their present condition is a poor index of their past achievements. To show the heights to which the Assamese mind could soar under the storm and stress of a national ordeal I have reproduced the utterances of the leaders as preserved for us in the folios of the ancient Buranjis. The ideals enshrined in these utterances, and the plans and measures adopted in consonance therewith will demonstrate that Assamese leadership was not deficient in the qualities which ensure the solidarity and stability of a nation. These qualities are in greater demand now than before as many complex political, economic and social problems are waiting for solution by us as Indians in our coming role of an independent nation, The example of Lachit

Barphukan and his selfless compatriots of Saraighat will be a source of inspiration not only to my countrymen in Assam but also to my friends in the rest of India.

I have drawn the Assam portion of the narrative from the Buranjis, both published and unpublished, as enumerated in the Bibliography. The most significant of them is the chronicle Ram Singhar Yuddhar Katha, which, as its title indicates, is devoted wholly to Assam's conflicts with the Moguls under Raja Ram Singha of Amber. From internal evidence the author appears to be Samudra Churamani Doloi who, in my opinion, is no other than Achyutananda Doloi, astrologer-in-chief to the general Lachit Barphukan. Achyutananda was awarded the title of Samudra-khari in recognition of his services in the naval battle of Saraighat. A chronicle compiled by an erudite scholar like Samudra Churamani, who was at the same time an eye-witness and a participator in the events described, cannot but be of the highest value as a source material. But unfortunately, the present manuscript is incomplete, and the narrative ends abruptly long before it comes to the final engagement at Saraighat. The language is archaic owing perhaps to the compiler's desire to be a bit epical and out of the ordinary. The text is very much mutilated, being probably transcribed from a bad copy or by a careless copyist. This chronicle has helped me to introduce a number of vivid and realistic touches. A Note on Ram Sinhar Yuddhar Katha has been inserted in Appendix IV to this book in order to stimulate interest in the chronicle which may eventually lead to the resuscitation of a second and a fuller copy from some neglected family archive.

I have tried to do full justice to the materials at my disposal; but I have suffered from the limitations of a research worker at Gauhati, — from the want of a good library, and for lack of opportunities for consultation. How far I have succeeded is left to my readers to judge. It may be mentioned that the present book represents the first attempt at an intensive and scientific study of a period of Assam History centering round a leading personality of the time. Imperfections are therefore inevitable; but I have been

emboldened by the words of the great Cambridge orientalist, Professor Browne,— “He who would write a flawless book writes nothing. Even the most imperfect book, if it breaks fresh ground, may, though itself doomed to oblivion, prepare the way for a better”

After the death of Lachit Barphukan, Assam became a hot-bed of dissension and strife, attended by constant changes of kings and ministers, and assassinations of rivals and mutilations of princes. This deplorable state of affairs continued till the accession of the powerful monarch Swargadeo Gadadhar Singha in 1681. The events of these ten years, 1671 to 1681, have been exhaustively dealt with in the present writer's *Atan Buragohain and His Times*, which is going to be published shortly.

I embrace this opportunity of expressing my thankfulness to Seth Mirzamall Agarwalla of the firm of Messrs. Dasuram Mirzamall, an inhabitant of Lachhmangarh in Sikar, Rajputana, and a leading mill-owner and merchant of Gauhati, for contributing towards the expenses of printing this book ; to Srijut Madhab Chandra Baroowa of the D. H. A. S. staff for his enthusiastic interest in this publication and for being instrumental in obtaining the above contribution from Seth Mirzamall Agarwalla ; to Srijut Umesh Chandra Talukdar of the D. H. A. S. staff for his help in preparing the press copy ; to Srijut Suryya Kanta Barpujari, M.A. and Srijut Bhupendra Kumar Hazarika, M.A. for occasional assistance ; to Maulavi Abul Fazl Saiyid Ahmed, MA, at present Assistant Director of Public Instruction, Assam for translating into English the sketch of Raja Ram Singha's life from the original Persian text of *Maasir-ul-Umara* ; to Mr. M. M. M. Khambatha, Registrar, Mahakma Jaipur, for the Memorandum on Ram Singha ; and to Mr. G. Srinivasachari, Proprietor, G. S. Press, Madras, for his untailing courtesy and personal interest in the printing of this book.

Gauhati, Assam,
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S. K. BHUYAN