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“Significance Of The Battle Of Saraighat In The History Of Assam”

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Methodology: For the purpose of collection of this data secondary sources are used such as the books written by the authors and prominent historians of India. This books has provided the required information needed to complete this work.

Keywords: Mughal Empire, Ahom kingdom, Lachit Barphukan, Rajput, Saraighat, Alaboi.

Abstract: The battle of Saraighat has great importance in the history of Assam, plus at this particular event the history has shown how a small kingdom like that of Ahoms too can resist the invasion of mighty and powerful enemies like that of Mughals. Basically in this event we have witnessed the emergence of a great hero from Assam who have written his name in the history, he is none other than Lachit Barphukan. The recent historians have praised this tough resistance from Ahoms in the battle of Saraighat.

Introduction: The establishment of Mughal Empire in the year 1526 brought about many political changes in the history of India, the collapse of Sultanate changed the political dynamics of the Northern regions of India. The newly established Mughal Empire started the policy of expansion and consolidation throughout the whole subcontinent and after that the whole of subcontinent was under the mercy of Mughal troops. The kingdoms of north, south, west and east all were under Mughal dominance, but there were few kingdoms who were resisting the Mughal occupation from their borders. The Rajputs for example kept on fighting and in the North-Eastern region the Ahoms too were a great power, who always stopped the Mughal forces from entering their territories. The problems between Mughals and Ahoms started after the annexation of Koch kingdom which stood in the middle of both, but after its annexation it brought the Ahoms into direct contact with imperial Mughals. The mighty Mughals have conquered many small kingdoms and the Ahom kingdom was another one of them which the Mughals expected to conquer it in a single shot. Besides this motive, the Mughals also had a very keen interest in having trade and commercial relations with the Ahoms but the later did not have the same.

Main Body: During Mughal Emperor Jahangir's reign the first ever conflict emerged after that emperor Aurangzeb's reign was the time when large scale conflicts escalated. Before that there were few small conflicts and earlier Ahoms were successful in stopping the invaders but during Aurangzeb's reign the Ahoms were forced to flee from their lands as they could not resist the much well organized and well equipped imperial troops of Mughals led by Mir Jumla. He was the governor of Bengal province and he launched his campaign in the year 1661, he also managed to capture the Ahom capital Garghaon (Baruah:1985:272). But the Ahoms quickly managed to recapture the lost territories from the invaders, as the monsoon season arrived imperial troops were not trained to fight in such a harsh condition which led to their downfall and they were forced to retreat back.

The defeat of Mughal armies at the hands of Ahoms made Emperor Aurangzeb very much furious, he again made preparations for another massive invasion of Ahom kingdom and in the year 1667 the emperor appointed Raja Ram Singh of Amber to command the imperial troops. This time the invading forces were of combined troops from Rajputs, the imperial Mughal army and the forces from Thanedar of Gauhati Rashid Khan, a total of 70,000 troops including cavalry, infantry and war boats (Gait: 1926:155). The Ahom king in that period was Chakradhvaj Singh and commander in chief of the Ahom army was Lachit Barphukan, who earned the name and fame of a great warrior and a hero for the people of Assam who stopped the invading forces from entering the lands of Assam. The war was fought on many fronts in land and in water but there was no any advances made by any party. But the forces led by Ram Singh do achieved a victory at Alaboi. But Ahoms did not give up and kept on fighting (Baruah:1985:273). With all the efforts made by both the parties went into waste and the troops of both the sides wanted a quick end to the battle and both the commanders Ram Singh and Lachit Barphukan decided to end the war with a last decisive battle which will be fought at Saraighat and it will be known as the Battle of Saraighat. It was fought on the year 1671. This battle has a great importance in the history of Assam as because the Mughals were well equipped and well organized and they too have superior weapons as compared with the Ahoms. The Ahoms on the other hand had less number of troops and had small boats. The Battle of Saraighat has put a deep impact in the history of Assam not just because the invaders were defeated but the way in which the Ahoms fought was commendable and it did shape the history of Assam, if Mughals had succeeded in the battle the whole of Assam and its adjoining areas could have become the victim of Mughal imperialism, destruction and occupation.

With all the due advantages favoring the invaders, the Mughal army under the command of Raja Ram Singh again started the offensive after their victory at Alaboi. But neither of the side was successful in breaching the defences of each other, Mughal navy launched a massive offensive with their big canons which had long coverage. The attack was led by Munnawar Khan from the Mughal side while Lachit Barphukan was commanding the Ahom forces. Ahom forces were in a desperate situation as they were yet to recover from their losses at Alaboi and their commander in chief was ill and he could not take an upper hand in the battle. Despite his worsening condition with severe illness, Lachit ask his troops to carry him in to the frontlines of battle in a small boat just to boost his soldiers morale as the Ahom forces were losing their numbers and they were in a retreat, commander of the Ahom forces did not want his troops to lose their morale and despite huge challenges in front of him he went to the battle and started commanding his army against the powerful enemy the Mughals who were fighting from their ships which were huge and they also had long guns which can fire upto hundreds of meters. Ahom forces after seeing their commander in chief joining them in the battle started to overcome all the enemy obstacles and they too started to fight back with a promise of driving the enemies away from their motherland. The way in which Lachit commanded his forces against mighty Mughals is commendable and the people of Assam still remembers the bravery shown by the commander in chief the battle despite of his illness and Ahom forces were also supported by new contingent of 20000 troops sent by Ahom king Udayaditya Singha (Baruah,S.L:1985:275). Ahom troops regained their grounds and holded the invaders after getting supplies from their king.

The situation was tense on both sides and armies of both the sides kept on fighting. Lachit Barphukan's strategy of using the small boats in the battle proved decisive in close encounters as the huge Mughal boats could not move very quick and they could not manoevere quickly enough with their canons to engage them. Lachit's military strategy proved very effective as he was able to put a tough fight against a much larger army who have got lots of resources as compared with Ahom army who have got limited sources and limited manpower under them (Barpujari,H.K:2007:72). The Mughal army then found a way to enter into the heartlands as they got the information about a narrow opening in the rampart at Andharubali sandbank located between Itakhuli and Bharalmukh. Lachit after knowing about this event he commanded his men to rebuild the defences of the rampart in a single day, Ahom forces tried their best to build up defence, Lachit gave the task of construction to his maternal uncle but an unfortunate event took place on the same night, that night the Ahom forces who were fighting all day long felt the need of rest in the middle of construction, and Lachit's uncle gave the order to take rest, at the midnight

when the commander woke up from his bed just to check the construction work of his men, after watching them sleeping he became very much furious about this event. He asked his men that who gave the order for taking rest, after knowing that his uncle has made that call he immediately took up his sword and slayed his maternal uncle in a single blow. This event struck fear into the heads of the army and Lachit said to them that nobody is greater or important than the motherland and he will do anything or anyhow to keep it safe away from the enemies. After witnessing this event the Ahom soldiers began to work at high speed and finished the construction before the morning began. This approach of Lachit Barphukan is still remembered in the minds of Assamese people and for that he is well respected and his position was kept in high.

The morale of Ahom soldiers were high and they fought with high confidence which they got from their commander Lachit, Mughal navy suffered a lot at the hands of Ahoms navy which was small in number because of the swiftness of the navy. Mughal navy commander's forces took a heavy toll and eventually lost his life during the fight which forced the ground force led by Raja Ram Singh to retreat as navy suffered and the situation was not in favor of them. Munnawar Khan was killed and Ram Singh were forced to retreat as the Mughals had lost the cream of their forces during the river engagement. The Mughal was forced and pushed all the way to the Manas where Lachit halted his army in order to consolidate his territorial gains. The Battle of Saraighat was altogether a success for the Ahoms as they managed to put the invaders away from their motherland and this battle was the last major engagement between Mughals and Ahoms. Emperor Aurangzeb lost his intentions of getting the North-Eastern part of India under Mughal flag after that event and his focus largely shifted from East to South India that of Marathas as the Southern part of India was very much important in terms of trade and commerce, political establishment and for military establishment. Whereas the region of Assam was of less importance according to Mughal perspective.

Conclusion: The Battle of Saraighat is of great importance in the history of Assam not only because it stopped the Mughal invasion but it also showed that the Ahoms as fierce fighters, it showed the leadership skills of Ahom commanders specially commander in chief Lachit Barphukan who gave the troops hope of winning against the much larger and powerful armies in that period and this also showed that Ahom army is strong and they won't allow any foreign invaders to occupy their land and enslave its people. It brought a decisive victory for the Ahoms and it also officially closed their long drawn conflict with the Mughals, the only sad end after this battle was that the greatest hero in the Assam history Lachit Barphukan lost his life after the end of the battle due to severe illness that he suffered during the course of the war. The correct example of bravery was seen in this battle and also the example of great military leadership, war skills and self believe. The Ahom army defeated the Mughals by their brilliant strategy, clever negotiations and perfect use of their own terrain.

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