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The Ahom King Lakshmi Singha and the Muslims of Assam

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ABSTRACT :

This article explores the relationship between Ahom king Lakshmi Singha and the Muslims of Assam during his rule from 1769 to 1780. It discusses how a Muslim leader once attempted to remove Lakshmi Singha from power, the king still kept friendly ties with Muslim scholars, especially Anwar Haji, and made grants to famous Muslim dargahs. Through these actions, Lakshmi Singha showed respect for religious differences and promoted a spirit of secularism, which helped Assam's different communities live together peacefully during those days but still Lakshmi Singha saw the rise of Moamoriya rebellion. To understand this topic of Lakshmi Singha's interactions with muslims, the article uses a mix of sources, including the old Buranjis, which are the main historical records of the Ahom kingdom. It also takes information from books written by respected historians for a more balanced and reliable view. Additionally, an oral tradition passed down in the region has been included, giving a local perspective that's not found in written records. By putting together stories of both conflict and cooperation, this study highlights how secularism and mutual respect were valued in Ahom kingdom even in challenging times. The article hopes to help readers appreciate the rich and diverse history of the region and the important role of understanding and harmony among its people.

1. Introduction

Throughout Assam's medieval period, the Ahom dynasty often engaged with the region's diverse communities, and nearly every Ahom king bonded some form of relationship with the Muslims of Assam. These connections ranged from political alliances to personal friendships to having them in their administration and included acts of both cooperation and conflict. King Lakshmi Singha's reign (1768/69–1780) was no exception—marked by an attempted coup involving a Muslim maulana yet also having good relations with the Muslim scholars like Anwar Haji. Remarkably, Lakshmi Singha not only overcame challenges to his rule but also continued the traditional Ahom practice of granting endowments to Muslim dargahs, underscoring a policy toward religious coexistence. This article explores these intertwined thread of rivalry, diplomacy, and mutual respect, offering fresh insight into the complex bonds between the Ahom monarch and Assam's Muslim community.

2. About the Ahom King Lakshmi Singha

Swargadeo Lakshmi Singha is estimated to be the 34th Ahom king. Lakshmi Singha was coroneted as the Ahom king in the year 1691 Saka (i.e 1769 A.D as per the Gregorian calendar). He succeeded his elder brother i.e Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singha. He is the 6th king from the Tungkhungia dynasty of Assam. During his brother's death, he was serving as the Namrupia Gohaindeo. After Rajeshwar Singha's death, the Ahom nobles decided that Rajeshwar's younger brother should be the legitimate King and hence he was coroneted on the 21st of Jaistha, 1691 Saka (which approximately makes up to 31st of May 1769). Lakshmi Singha previously went by the name *Kalsilia Gohain* and after his coronation, he embraced the new name Lakshmi Singha.¹ This name was given to him by the Brahmins and the Ganaks. He was named *Sunyeophaa* by the Ahom preists.²

As we already know that the Buranjis are thus primary sources to the Ahom kingdom's history, yet they are inconsistent in their narratives. Regarding the coronation part, Ahom Buranji mentions that it occurred in the year 1768 A.D. Satsari Assam Buranji mentions the same year as Tungkhungia Buranji i.e 1691 Saka, but it has a difference in the date of coronation. According to Satsari Assam Buranji, Lakshmi Singha was coronated on the 20th of Jaistha 1691 Saka. But it seems that Buranjis are after all not much inconsistent regarding the narrative of Lakshmi Singha, it had minor changes like one says 20th while the other says 21st or one says 1768 A.D while the other says 1769 A.D.

It was during Lakshmi Singha's reign that the famous Moamoriya revolt aroused. The Hati Chungi Morans had elected their own king and prime minister, after which they started a rebellion against the Ahom king.¹ This rebellion spread quickly around the kingdom and more and more people started to join the rebellion.³ This rebellion ultimately had weakened the Ahom kingdom.

3. Muslims during Lakshmi Singha's reign

It can be noticed from the pages of history that almost every Ahom king starting from its first ruler, Chaolung Sukaphaa (or Serkapha) had interactions with the Muslims. We learn from an account in Assam Buranji that after Sukaphaa had crossed the Patkai hills, journeying towards Assam, he met a Goriya family. Sukaphaa included this Goriya family in his caravan and brought them to Assam. ⁴ The term 'Goriya' is referred to an Assamese

Muslim. So it is clear evidence that Sukaphaa's caravan included Muslims as well. The same way, many Ahom kings had Muslims in their administration.

The Ahom king Rajeshwar Singha, the elder brother of Lakshmi Singha also had Muslims in his administration mostly holding the post of Barua (superintendent officer). Rajeshwar Singha used to issue land grants for Muslim Fakirs and Pirs.⁵ After Lakshmi Singha ascended to the Ahom throne, he continued the concept of granting land to Muslims. There is a copper plate inscription grant of Lakshmi Singha which refers to the Pirs and Fakirs of the modern day Kamrup district. The inscription mentions the *Panch Pirs* (five Pirs) of Khettri, Shah Fakir of Bamagar and Shah Fakir Maddar of Bausi.⁶

During the reign of Pramatta Singha, in his final days, Pramatta had started to feel constant migraines. His physician failed to cure it. But one day, Pramatta saw in his dreams that if he prays at the religious site of the Muslims i.e the Kaaba, his headache will be cured. Pramatta Singha summoned for a Muslim Maulana and provisioned him to go the Mecca, Ottoman Arabia. The work of this Maulana was to perform religious rites in the name of Pramatta Singha there in Mecca.⁷ This Maulana was none other than Anwar Haji.⁸ It was during the reign of Lakshmi Singha that Anwar Haji finally returned to Assam from Mecca. The time of his coming is estimated to have September of 1780 A.D. After his return, he met Lakshmi Singha and had a conversation with him. Lakshmi Singha was highly pleased with Anwar Haji and granted him revenue-free lands in Kamrup and provided Anwar with servants. We previously mentioned the issuance of a grant on a copper plate inscription, this very inscription was issued for Anwar Haji. Anwar was given the charge of all the Dargahs and Maqams from the grant i.e Panch Pirs maqam of Khettri Parganah, Shah Fakir of Bamagar Parganah and Shah Fakir Maddar of Bausi Parganah. Anwar Haji was also granted one-fourth share of Bar-Maqam at Hajo. Anwar Haji also served Lakshmi Singha as a Parsiporia which means that Anwar used to translate Persian documents for the Ahom king.⁹

Apart from these good relations with Muslims, there were some instances where Lakshmi Singha had to go a little harsh on some Muslims. It is mentioned in the Barpahi Buranji, one muslim man named Sotora Molona (Maulana) along with other muslims like Dilgiri, Bukujur, Sabur, Sonpur and Daulat made a failed attempt to overthrow Lakshmi Singha from the Ahom Throne.¹⁰ These muslims were reportedly in support of Hazari Dewan who wanted to place a son of a man named Mohanmala to the Ahom throne. Their plot was exposed and conspirators were captured. They were served light punishment.¹¹

Apart from this event, we have come across another event which was found only through oral traditions. According to the oral tradition, an Ahom commander had married a Mughal woman and had become muslim. This had angered the Ahom king who demoted the Ahom commander to the rank of Saikia. And the son of that couple approached the Ahom King to assign him to the position which his father held i.e Saikia, but the King refused to do so as he considered the person as impure Ahom. The king was assumingly Lakshmi Singha. Though we couldn't confirm this story and its reliability, we have history that has been recorded that this man had saved the Ahom king Gaurinath Singha from the Moamoriya rebels and earned back his rank as a Saikia.¹²

Conclusion

In conclusion, the story of Ahom king Lakshmi Singha and the Muslims of Assam shows that history is full of both challenges and cooperation. Even during tough times and political plots, Lakshmi Singha managed to build respectful relationships with Muslim leaders and supported their religious sites. His actions highlight the value of secularism and remind us that understanding and working together have always been important for Assam's diverse society as well as for its rich history.



The copper plate inscription of the land grant by Lakshmi Singha (source : Wikipedia)

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