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Topic of Research: Empire and Region: A Study of Socio-cultural Interaction between Mughal Empire and Ahoms (16th-18th century Assam)

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Findings

The medieval era in the history of Assam begins with the advent of the Ahoms in the valley in the year 1228 A.D. and stretches up to the transfer of power in the hands of British colonialists in 1826 A.D. with the signing of the treaty of Yandaboo. The Ahoms ruled predominantly in the eastern or upper part of Assam for a long period of six hundred years and remained the most formidable force in the valley. Before the arrival of the Ahoms, Assam was under the control of a good number of small principalities like Kacharis, Chutiyas, Morans and Barahis who had their share of domination at various places in the eastern part of the Brahmaputra valley. While the western portion was under the sway of landed aristocrats called Bhuyans and Kamata kingdom. The western Brahmaputra valley, saw the rise of another powerful tribe, the Koches, after the decline of the Kamatas in the sixteenth century. Such was the political scenario of Assam when the Ahoms came to the region and established their rule. Another momentous event in the history of medieval Assam is the Mughal influx in the seventeenth century. The Mughal appearance in Assam was chiefly influenced by idea of territorial expansionism, by the Mughal sovereigns, to further east beyond Bengal. The first confrontation thus took place amidst the Ahoms and the Mughals at the battle of Koliabar in 1614 A.D. during the reign of Mughal emperor Jahangir and the last battle between the two political entities took place in 1682 A.D. at the battle of Itakhuli, after which the Mughal empire forsook the scheme of controlling the northeast.

Not only there was a distinct demographic change, but one can also witness changes in all the aspects in the region be it political, social or cultural. Firstly, Assam emerged as a region that was not merely a periphery to the mighty Mughals, or a frontier or borderland, rather it served as more than a contact zone and became homeland for many.

Consequently, visible transformations can be witnessed in various socio-cultural practices of the Ahom kingdom as well as among general masses. A vibrant trade flourished between the Ahoms and Bengal that not only caused economic benefits to these polities, but also facilitated in the influx of many merchants. Moreover, the Ahom monuments of seventeenth century and beyond bear heavy impression of Indo-Islamic architectural styles. Owing to the Mughal presence in the region, one can also witness introduction of many Persian terminologies in the region, for instance, Ayin, Badshah, Chaprasi, Hafta, Insaf and a scores of other terminologies. Such were the various changes that were introduced with the coming of the Mughals in Assam.