



# LOCATING MUGHAL STATE FORMATION IN THE HIMALAYAN REGION: TWO REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

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**Abstract:** *The paper explores the expansion of Mughal political authority across the Himalayan region. The paper takes up two polities- the Parmars situated in the Central Himalayan region and the Kochs who were the rulers of Koch kingdom located in sub-Himalayan Bengal. Using these two regional case studies, this paper attempts to throw light on some of the strategies adopted by the Mughals to consolidate their imperial hold over smaller ruling elites of the Himalayan belt. The strategies examined in this paper are diverse - ranging from policies of collaboration to use of coercion. Internal dissensions within these regional ruling houses and the constant pressure exerted by the superior economic and military resources of the Mughals also contributed in convincing some Parmar and Koch rulers to acknowledge Mughal supremacy. Thus, the aim of this paper is to investigate the gamut of complex negotiations that shaped the trajectory of Mughal relations with local rulers of Garhwal and Koch Behar. An understanding of these relations would help in giving a coherent idea of the interactions between the Mughals and local ruling houses (both within and outside the Himalayan region), vital to any discussion on the nature of Mughal state formation. The final part of the paper argues that Mughal ambitions of consolidating their political authority over the Himalayan region was also dependent on their ability to reach out and win the support of the varied local social groups existing below the ruling elite. This paper contends that the failure of winning the support of such groups made it all the more difficult for the Mughals to exercise complete political authority over various localities in the Himalayan region. The concluding portion of the paper makes it evident that Mughal state formation in the Himalayan region and beyond needs to be evaluated in terms of the relations of the Mughals with the various local ruling houses as well as with numerous local social groups comprising of peasants, artisans, merchants, religious preachers, to name a few, all of whom existed as co-sharers of imperial sovereignty.*

**Keywords:** *Mughals, Regional History, Conflict, Diplomacy, Local social forces.*

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## I

The nature of the Mughal state has been an important research topic among medievalists for years. The centralised nature of Mughal polity was underlined by the likes of Habib and the subsequent Aligarh School of historians. While Habib asserted that the ‘state in Mughal India was not merely the protective arm of the exploiting classes, but was also the primary instrument of exploitation’, other scholars like Athar Ali saw in the empire a centralised and systematic polity controlling its arbitrariness. Ali in fact saw in the Mughals, vestiges of a quasi-modern, rather than an Asiatic state (Ali: 1993: 706-741; Habib: 1991:257). These views have been subjected to increasing revision by modern scholars who reject the presence of a centralised state structure. Chris Bayly focused on the importance of ‘corporate groups’ and identified them as the constitutive elements of Mughal polity whose shifting of loyalties was seen as facilitating the decline of the Mughals. The likes of Chetan Singh and Muzaffar Alam took such a line of thought further and argued that within the peripheral regions of the empire, the authority of the Mughal state was informal in nature and dependent on alliances with various local forces. Andre Wink emphasised on the power of the intermediary gentry or the *zamindars* and saw Mughal expansion achieved by *fitna*. This term was used by Wink to imply a policy of adjustment or conciliation, thereby, perceiving the Mughal empire as ‘representing a form of sovereignty, a balancing system of continually shifting rivalries and alliances’ (Wink: 1986: 34). Athar Ali feels that the revisionist historiography only throws light on the tri-polar relationship involving the Empire-Zamindar-Peasantry which is the cornerstone of Mughal historiography from its early days and ‘does not dent the proposition regarding the centralised nature of Mughal polity’ (Ali 1993). While commenting on the validity of these schools of thought is beyond the purview of this paper, it aims to examine the processes through which the Mughal political authority expanded into the

Himalayan region. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the scholarship which focuses on the expansion of the Mughal political authority by looking into the nature of Mughal expansion into areas generally unexplored in conventional Mughal historiography.

In this paper, Mughal incursions into two distinct polities are examined - the Garhwal Raj in the Central Himalayan region and the Koch kingdom located in Sub-Himalayan Bengal. While the regions selected are located at two different points of the Himalayan range, the rationale behind such a choice is to depict the wide range of strategies deployed by the Mughals across the vast Himalayan belt to expand their political authority<sup>1</sup>. Taking up these two geographically distant polities also provides a unique opportunity to realise that the Mughals were experts in *realpolitik*, and when presented with even the slightest opportunity, could resort to any means whatsoever to use these very opportunities for their own benefit. This contention holds true as will be seen in the case of both the Garhwal Raj and the Koch rulers. It is hoped that by throwing light onto the interactions of the Mughals with the Garhwal and Koch kingdoms, this paper will be able to contribute not only towards a more refined understanding of the process of Mughal state formation but also fill in some of the void that exists in the Mughal historiography of the Himalayan region.

The Terai region is a flat alluvial stretch of land lying between the Himalayan foothills and the Gangetic plain extending through Nepal, Bihar, North West Bengal and Assam. One of the important polities in the Terai region during the Mughal period was the Koch kingdom. Similarly, the Garhwal kingdom under the Parmar Rajas was one of the important territorial states in the Central Himalayan belt. The idea of the Mughal Empire as explained by Abul Fazl was one without limits (Gommans: 2002: 202). Naturally, such a definition meant that the vast stretches of the Himalayan region were considered by the Mughal rulers as part of their imperium.

However, the possibility of expanding Mughal political authority across the Himalayan region by reducing the local ruling elites to a position of political vassalage presented the Mughals with an opportunity to secure tangible economic rewards from the region. This is an important reason why the Mughals were keen on gaining a firm footing in the Himalayan region and thus kept a close watch on the various local polities here.

The Central Himalayan region was part of a lucrative slave trade and one reason for being attracted to the region was the opportunity to avail slaves (Gommans: 2002: 202). The trade with Tibet was yet another reason for the Mughals to try and gain greater control over the Garhwal and neighbouring Kumaon region. Under the Parmar Rajas, the region of Garhwal served as a nexus between Tibet and the Gangetic plain. Goods from Tibet would find their way into the plains through the region of Garhwal and controlling this region would go a long way in enabling the Mughals to establish a firm grip over the profitable Tibetan trade. Furthermore, the Terai region as well as the Garhwal hills boasted of valuable forest resources, like timber, honey, and elephants. The Koch kingdom was of great strategic importance as securing it could serve as an entry point to organise expeditions into the neighbouring region of Assam and then expand further eastwards. Therefore, a variety of economic and geo-political considerations made the area extremely attractive for the Mughals.

However, the distance of both these Himalayan regions from the imperial capital at Delhi, and their difficult geography, ranging from tough obdurate hills in the Garhwal kingdom to swampy marshes in the Koch kingdom did not suit the Mughal military which was reliant on heavy cannons and cavalry warfare. This also meant that a simple military expansion to conquer these two Himalayan regions was not always feasible, thus creating a range of complex political manoeuvres aimed at expanding Mughal authority in the region, in turn, providing an insight into the complexities of Mughal state formation.

## II

The Koch traced their descent from Haria Mandal, a tribal village headman whose son Bisu established his supremacy over lands from the river Kartoya to the Bar Nadi and thereby adopted the title of *Raja* initiating the line of the famed Koch dynasty (Eaton: 1993: 94). They were one of the powerful local ruling groups in the Terai corresponding to the modern areas of Koch Behar in North Bengal. According to Risley, the Koch were a non-Aryan, non-Hindu tribal group while Oldham considers them to be of Dravidian origin (Risley: 1891: 492). The Koch, according to Nath are of Mongoloid origin having close affinities with other Bodo tribes like Meches, Rabhas, Garos (Nath: 1989: 2). Following the death of Bisu or Biswa Singha as he named himself, his successor Naranarayan consolidated the Koch kingdom. Naranarayan defeated the Ahom king Sukhmapha who was forced to concede the entire territory from the river Suvansiri to the north of the river Brahmaputra to Naranarayan. The Koch victory over the Ahoms paved the way for a number of neighbouring kingdoms (Kachar, Manipur, Jayantiya, Tripura to name a few) to submit themselves to the Koch king Naranarayan (Sahariah and Halder: 2016: 89-94). Thus, the Koch kingdom under the leadership of Naranarayan soon posed a threat to Suleiman Karrani. In 1568, to counter the Koch threat the latter launched a vigorous attack on them. A defeat at the hands of the Karrani ruler made Naranarayan wary. To prevent a similar debacle in the future, Naranarayan began maintaining friendly relations with the Ahoms. He set all Ahom hostages free to secure an alliance with the Ahom king. However, the Ahom king was not moved by this. Taking advantage of Suleiman Karrani's attack on the Koch kingdom, the Ahom King had been able to recover the territories he had lost to the Koch earlier and now begun to harbour designs of encroaching further upon Koch territory.

Meanwhile Suleiman Karrani's death in 1572 provided an opportunity for the Mughal Emperor

Akbar to enter Bengal. While Suleiman Karrani may not have been a huge fan of the Mughals, he was careful to maintain outward signs of subservience to Mughal authority. Suleiman's son Daud however refused to recognise the authority of Akbar and minted coins and got the *khutba* read in his own name. Consequently, Akbar sent his troops into Bengal who routed the Afghan defenders and in 1574, Munim Khan with the victorious Mughal forces entered Tanda. The Afghan rebels being hotly chased by the Mughals fled to different parts and many even fled into the Koch kingdom. However, Naranarayan not only denied them asylum, but also sent an envoy to Akbar with presents. Having being humiliated by Suleiman Karrani and witnessing the growing power of the Ahoms, Naranarayan saw this as an opportune moment to strike an alliance with the Mughals. The emperor Akbar was pleased with these gestures of Naranarayan and struck an alliance with the Koch king. In the Mughal offensive against Daud in 1576, the Koch actively helped the Mughals. The assistance provided by Naranarayan to Akbar strengthened their alliance which was further cemented by the former sending 54 elephants to Akbar in 1578 (Sarkar: 2001:155-56). The *Akbarnama* states that "one of the occurrences was the arrival of presents from Bengal and Koc (Koch Behar) Rajah Mai Gosai (Naranarayan), the Zamindar of Koc, also again made his submission,.....including 54 noted elephants" to Akbar" (Fazl:1972:349-50).

Though Abul Fazl's description involves referring to Naranarayan as a zamindar who was making submissions to Emperor Akbar, most modern scholars are of the opinion that the alliance between the two was based on equal terms. This is evident from the fact that Naranarayan never accepted the overlordship of the Mughals. S.N. Bhattacharya argues that there was no reference to tribute or territorial concession or any other symbols of political tutelage anywhere (Bhattacharya: 1998: 98-103). Even the Koch chronicles mention that the alliance was contracted between two sovereign

states out of peace, amity and goodwill. It ought to be kept in mind that the alliance was beneficial to both the parties but more so to the Mughals as the Koch alliance provided a strong support base to the Mughals in Bengal where the latter were still trying to gather their roots. Secondly, the alliance gave the Mughals a much needed foothold in the fragmented politics of the Terai region. Thus, the first step of expanding the Mughal political order in the region of Himalayan Terai seemed to be one of building alliance based on mutual co-operation between the two equal powers (Chetry:2018: 21-30).

A somewhat similar strategy was also seen in the Garhwal kingdom located in the Central Himalayan belt. Balbhadra Shah, ruler of the Parmar dynasty ruling over Garhwal is often attributed to be the first ruler from the region to have participated in a hunting expedition with the Emperor Akbar. He is even considered to have assisted Akbar in his campaign against a few neighbouring hill tribes. For his help, he was supposed to have been conferred with a *Khillat* from Akbar who also bestowed him with the title of *Bahadur Shah* (Raturi: 1910: 182). However, the Mughal sources are silent of any such event. The first ruler from the Parmar dynasty whose name is found in a Mughal source is Shyam Shah, a contemporary of Jahangir. In his *Tuzuk*, it is mentioned that Shyam Shah, Zamindar of Srinagar was presented with a horse and an elephant by the emperor (Jahangir: 1968: 202). There is no reference of Shyam Shah accepting the formal supremacy of the Mughal ruler. Neither was there any mention of tribute or territorial privileges bestowed upon the Mughals. It is possible that this was an attempt on the part of the Mughal emperor to try and establish a political relation with the ruler of Garhwal which would be based on friendship and co-operation. Thus, the initial Mughal policy with regard to the Koch king Naranarayan and their Garhwal counterparts seem to be quite similar. In their bid to establish their authority over the Himalayan region, the Mughals seemed to be following a policy of

‘rapprochement’ where they actively sought to enter into alliances with the various local ruling houses of the Himalayan region. As per the policy of rapprochement, the Mughals were not only willing to ally with the local ruling houses but also follow a policy of mutual collaboration. What is of further importance in this first phase is that the Mughals seem to be refraining from treating local rulers like Naranarayan and Shyam Shah as vassals to the Mughal emperor and regarded them as equals, a very important factor for cementing the ties between these powers.

### III

The initial phase of rapprochement did not mean that the Mughals had forgotten their imperialistic designs. Rather, the desire to expand their political authority continued to shape the trajectories of the Mughal interaction with these local ruling groups in the Himalayan belt. In the case of the Koch dynasty as well as with the Garhwal kingdom, the Mughals were constantly looking for an opportunity to expand their own political authority at the expense of these local potentates. In the context of the Koch, Naranarayan’s decision to divide the kingdom between his son Lakshminarayan and his brother’s son Raghudev<sup>2</sup> not only created two separate polities of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo but also presented a perfect opportunity for the Mughals to expand their authority (Bapari: 2010:125). Following the death of Naranarayan in 1587, Raghudev entered into an alliance with the Afghan chief Isa Khan to overthrow Lakshminarayan and gain control of the entire (former) kingdom. Realising the strength of the opposition, Lakshminarayan was eager to secure the help of the Mughals and waited upon the *Subedar* of Bengal Man Singh. Sensing an opportunity, Man Singh entered into a matrimonial alliance with Lakshminarayan’s sister Prabhabati. He also promised Mughal help to Lakshminarayan, provided the latter formally accepted Mughal suzerainty (Rahman: 2005: 26-33). While so far the Mughal-Koch alliance was one of equality, realising the political ineptitude of

Lakshminarayan, the Mughals reshaped the nature of the relation promising help against Raghudev and Isa Khan but only when Lakshminarayan had acknowledged the political supremacy of the Mughals (Fazl: 1972: 362). However, even at this stage Man Singh was happy with a verbal submission and Lakshminarayan did not have to pay an annual tribute as a sign of vassalage. When Raghudev did attack Lakshminarayan, the former was cornered when Man Singh sent forces to help Lakshminarayan. Raghudev requested Isa Khan for help and his involvement resulted in a pitched battle between the two forces in September, 1597. This conflict ended with Raghudev and Isa Khan’s victory. However, fearing Mughal retaliation Isa Khan submitted himself to Akbar and without his help Raghudev could not fight against the dual forces of Lakshminarayan and the Mughals and gave up his ideas of conquering Koch Behar. Though Mughal help did save Lakshminarayan from his foes, he no longer remained an independent sovereign.

In 1603, when Raghudev died, his son Parikshitnarayan who succeeded as the ruler of Koch Hajo, also coveted Koch Behar. With Parikshitnarayan improving ties with the Ahoms, Lakshminarayan met Islam Khan Chishti who was the Governor of Bengal in 1609. At this juncture, in order to further cement his bond with the Mughals, Lakshminarayan personally submitted to Islam Khan and accepted Mughal vassalage, agreeing to pay an annual tribute and provide military assistance to the Mughals wherever required, in return for Mughal support against Parikshitnarayan (Nathan:1936: 40). Though an alliance with Islam Khan enabled the king of Koch Behar to defeat Parikshitnarayan, it came at the cost of the complete political subjugation of the Koch Behar state and resulted in the strengthening of Mughal authority in the sub-Himalayan region of the Terai. In 1612, both Lakshminarayan and Parikshitnarayan were taken to Dacca and from there to the Mughal capital Delhi, where they remained confined for a few years. Parikshitnarayan agreed to pay Rs

700,000 as war-indemnity and returned to Dacca but died on his way back, allowing Koch Hajo to be annexed by the Mughals (Nathan:1936: 521). Lakshminarayan returned from the imperial court in 1618 after exchanging certain gifts (Jahangir: 1968: 2)<sup>3</sup>. Though Lakshminarayan remained the ruler of Koch Behar, he was reduced to the position of an obedient vassal who had to pay regular annual tribute and provide regular military assistance (Nathan: 1936: 522)<sup>4</sup>. Koch Behar unlike Koch Hajo was not annexed by the Mughals but it no longer remained an independent state.

The Koch example shows that rapprochement was only a temporary measure adopted by the Mughals across the Himalayan region. Their ultimate aim was to expand their political authority across the belt by subjugating the local ruling houses and for this the Mughals were willing to take advantage of any opportunity presented by the slightest weaknesses of these local potentates. In the case of the Koch kingdom, the internal rivalry between the rulers of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo provided a perfect set-up for the Mughals to capitalise on and expand their authority in this stretch of the sub-Himalayan region. Thus, while collaboration with the Koch Behar king continued, it was now reconfigured with the Mughals seeking recognition as overlords of the Koch Behar kingdom in return for their help against their adversaries. On the other hand, the territory of Koch Hajo, once isolated and defeated was annexed by the Mughals. Both these territories were subjugated to Mughal authority, albeit through different means. This was not simply an exception but rather the model followed by the Mughals across the Himalayan polities as will be further evident from the example of the Garhwal hills.

#### IV

The Garhwal king Mahipati Shah was succeeded by his son Prithvipati Shah, who was a minor when he came to the throne and his mother Rani Karnavati served as the regent<sup>5</sup>. It was during her

regency that the first conflict between the Mughal forces and Garhwali forces has been documented in Mughal sources like *Ma'asir-ul-Umara* as well as European travel accounts like those of Manucci and Tavernier. According to Niccolao Mannuci, Shah Jahan tried to capture the region and sent 30,000 men. He goes on to say that the Mughal forces were allowed to enter the region without much resistance. However, the prince and his soldiers soon closed all the routes and surrounding the Mughal army. The Mughals were forced to strike peace with the prince who set them free on the condition that the nose of each soldier be presented to the Prince as a memorial and also as a reminder to the Mughal ruler not to attack the region in future (Manucci 2010: 207-8). In the *Ma'asir-ul-Umara*, Rani Karnavati is identified as the *Nak Katti Rani* (literally it means queen without a nose) and the nose cutting incident is attributed to her (Khan and Khan: 1999: 366-7). Thus, what these sources depict is a definite attack on the Garhwal region made by the Mughal forces which ended in the defeat of the latter. According to the likes of Mola Ram, when Prithvipati Shah came to the throne, a *khillat* was sent to him by Shah Jahan along with a messenger asking Prithvipati Shah to accept his suzerainty. However, as per this account, Prithvipati Shah declined to accept a Turk as his master and even declined to accept the *khillat*. This incident enraged Shah Jahan who asked his general to attack Garhwal and bring the ruler to Delhi. However, Prithvipati thwarted the Mughals (Ram: 1977: 58).

This serves to reinforce the earlier assertion that the Mughals were not satisfied with their policy of rapprochement and it was their desire to expand Mughal authority all across the Himalayan region. The internal dissensions of the Koch Behar and the Koch Hajo kings had helped the Mughals to consolidate their authority in this region. In the case of the Garhwal *Raj*, the fact that Prithvipati Shah, a minor rose to the throne presented a similar opportunity to the Mughal emperor to pressurise the young king and his regent to acknowledge Mughal superiority. The

refusal of the *khillat*, by the young Prithvipati Shah was seen as a violation of Mughal honour which needed to be rectified and hence the military assault. Shahjahan must have felt that their large army would be able to easily vanquish the ruler of Garhwal thereby putting the Mughals in a position where they could dictate terms to the king. Unfortunately, the eventual defeat of the Mughal forces was a humiliating blow to Mughal imperium thereby putting a temporary hold to their expansionary desires<sup>6</sup>. This is not to say that the Mughals forgot the kingdom of Garhwal.

The Mughal pressure on Prithvipati Shah intensified after he had provided refuge to Suleiman Shukoh, eldest son to Dara Shukoh while he was on the run from his uncle Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb put pressure on Prithvipati Shah to hand over Suleiman Shukoh but when the king refused, the Mughal emperor asked Baz Bahadur of Kumaon and Sobhag Prakash of Sirmour to attack from the eastern and western sides respectively. In 1657, the Mughal forces also entered the region from Doon. Though Doon was captured, the onset of monsoon and their previous lessons of defeat cautioned the Mughal army which retreated (Gairola and Chetty: 2017-18). Though Prithvipati was successful in thwarting yet another Mughal attack, the Brahmin and Khassiya nobles at Prithvipati's court were quick to realise that the limited resources of the Garhwal Raj was no match against a sustained Mughal onslaught, and they compelled Prithvipati Shah to conciliate the emperor Aurangzeb (Ram: 1977: 28). Not only was Suleiman Shukoh handed over to the Mughal Emperor<sup>7</sup> but a new *khillat* and *farman* sent by Aurangzeb was readily accepted by Prithvipati (Mannuci:2010: 373-74). The fact that the Garhwal rulers had accepted Mughal sovereignty was evident from the actions of Prithvipati's grandson Fateh Shah who actively sought a *farman* from Aurangzeb seeking permission to march against the zamindar of Kumaon and capture his *mahal* (Joshi: 1990: 81). Thus, the threat of Mughal might saw the Garhwal *Raj* acknowledging Mughal overlordship and being reduced to the position

of a dependent vassal. Interestingly, Aurangzeb was satisfied with external signs of obeisance and made no efforts to compel the Garhwal kings to pay an annual tribute as signs of their vassalage.

From the above analysis, it is evident that Mughals wanted to expand their political authority over the Himalayan region by gaining overlordship over the diverse political formations that dotted this landscape. Keeping this end in mind, the Mughals used various means to achieve their goals. Initially, the Mughal rulers maintained an attitude of friendliness and cordiality towards the Himalayan states as seen in their encounters with the likes of Shyam Shah and Naranarayan. However, the Mughals were quick to seize any opportunity that would allow them to subjugate these powers and reduce them to the position of dependent vassals. The strategies undertaken by the Mughals to achieve this varied from outright military annexation (in the case of Koch Hajo), sustained politico-military pressure (as seen in the region of Garhwal) to assertion of their political paramount status in return for military favors (Koch Behar). Thus, the two case studies of Koch kingdom and the Garhwal *Raj* serve as an entry point to investigate the complex strategies (ranging from collaboration to conflict) deployed by the Mughals to expand their political authority over the two Himalayan kingdoms.

## V

Mughal state formation in the Himalayan region was dependent on their multi-dimensional relation with the local ruling elites like the Koch kings or their Garhwali counterparts. This relation was at times collaborative, but the Mughals had no qualms of resorting to coercive tactics when the opportunity presented itself. It was this constant negotiation between different strategies and choosing the right time to adopt a particular strategy that lay at the heart of Mughal state formation in the Himalayan region. Thus, it would be unfair to consider Mughal state formation in the Himalayas as merely a product of their military ventures (McNeill: 1982:46). In

many parts of the Himalayas, the rugged terrain and the inhospitable geography made it difficult for the 'centralized and well-equipped army of the Mughals' to militarily defeat their adversaries, thus creating the need for adopting a wide range of tactics and methods. However, once these polities had been integrated to the Mughal framework through their recognition of Mughal suzerainty, constant efforts were made to replicate Mughal institutions and practices in these areas. To cite an example, in the Garhwal kingdom, an increasing emphasis was given from the time of Fateh Shah onwards to learn Persian language, or imitate Mughal dressing patterns and court etiquettes (Ram: 1977: 26). Paintings from the time of Fateh Shah show kings wearing *kurta* (long shirt), *payjamas* (trousers), *kamarband* (waist- band) and a head gear similar to that seen in Mughal court paintings. Similarly, in the annexed Koch Hajo region, the Mughal *Subedar* Qasim Khan replaced the older *paikan* system popular in the Koch Behar- Assam region and introduced the Mughal revenue assessment patterns. The entire territory was divided into revenue circles and *karoris* and *mustajirs* were appointed whose primary task was to carry out land assessment, fixing the *jama* and collecting revenue (Bhadra: 1998: 474-491). Even when the region of Garhwal came into contact with Mughal revenue system, one finds the naming of officials like *Duftari*, *Faujdar*, *Golda* and *Sayan* were made in accordance to Mughal officials (Walton: 1910: 88-9). This replication of Mughal institutions, both cultural and economic in areas integrated within the Mughal fold does validates Athar Ali's claim of the Mughal Empire as a 'centralized polity, geared to systematization and the creation of an all-imperial bureaucracy' (Ali: 1993: 706-741). However, the process of Mughal state formation was far from over with the co-option of local rulers and the replication of Mughal administrative and institutional practices. Sovereignty was not simply confined to relation between the rulers and the political elites and included and involved the wider society as well (Hasan: 2006: 24-5).

Similarly, successful consolidation of the Mughal state formation in Himalayas also came to rely on continued negotiations with the wider social forces in a locality and not simply the ruling elite. Thus, the Mughal state could consolidate its reach only in those places and regions where the Mughal redistributive system was able to reach out and gain support of the various local social forces. In places, where the Mughal system was felt to be disruptive to local beneficiaries like merchants, peasants, petty clerks, religious preachers, the entire gamut of local society in pre-colonial India, the Mughals had to face stiff challenges to their authority even if they had successfully co-opted the local rulers.

This is evident in the context of the Himalayan belt as well. Though the region of Koch Hajo had been annexed by the Mughals and its ruler has been imprisoned, the entire region continued to witness massive rebellions against the Mughal rule. The region of Koch Hajo was plagued by popular rebellions like the Khuntaghat rebellion of 1614 which started in Khuntaghat (in the vicinity of modern day Goalpara) but had later spread to other regions as far as the *sarkar* of Kamrup<sup>8</sup>. Khuntaghat served as the epicentre of the Hathikheda rebellion of 1621 as well. The region of Koch Behar also witnessed a violent peasant uprising aimed at the Mughals in 1662 (Bhadra:1983: 165). These uprisings were orchestrated by varied sections of the common people who felt tired of the exploitation of Mughal officials. In the case of the above uprisings, they were primarily led by the *paiks*. The *paiks* were peasants who worked as soldiers in the Koch army and in return for their services were given revenue free arable land called *paikan*. In the Koch kingdom, peasants paid revenue in labour and received land in return. The Mughals were not interested in the *paikan* system and brought hitherto untaxed *paikan* land under assessment. Moreover, taxes were paid in cash. Assessment was high and there was a rigid collection of *jam'aa* (Bhadra: 1998: 474-491). This disrupted the traditional land tenure system familiar to people

living in Koch territory and the peasants along with other local groups felt that the imposition of Mughal economic and administrative practices left them with minimum economic rewards compared to what they enjoyed previously. In addition to this there were frequent instances of cruelty from the Mughal officials. Muhammad Zaman Tabrizi, the *karori* of Khuntaghat often abducted the daughters and sons of the local peasants. There were many charges of exploitation against Shaykh Ibrahim, the *karori* of Kamrup as well (Nathan: 1936: 272-73). Thus, the Mughal system was felt to be disruptive to the local social forces and the latter's displeasure with the Mughal practices articulated itself in the form of these revolts which not only saw the assassination of various Mughal officials but also ensured that the Mughal presence in the entire region of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo remained tenuous. The leaders of the Khuntaghat and the Hathikheda rebellions enjoyed wide support among the peasants and the rural society at large. The large support enjoyed by these rebels meant that the resistance to the Mughals continued despite the suppression of individual leaders, making it difficult for the Mughals to consolidate their hold over the entire region of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. Following the death of Mir Jumla in 1663, Koch Behar was lost to the Mughals while the region of Koch Hajo was annexed by the Ahoms in the 1680s.

This was a perfect example of the fact that any historical understanding of Mughal state formation will remain incomplete if it remained confined to examining the relation of the Mughal rulers with the local ruling elite. While investigating the relationship between the two is bound to throw up various strategies that range from co-operation to use of coercion to other techniques of intimidation, it is equally important to consider the Mughal interaction with the constituents of the political domain that were placed a level below the top-most crust. The failure of the Mughal political and economic system to reach out and win the support of this wider political sphere resulted in the growth of

stiff resistance from disparate social classes as seen in the case of the *paiks* and peasants of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. A prolonged resistance like this had the potential of undermining the process of state formation, preventing the Mughals from successfully consolidating their political authority, as evident from the Mughals loss of both Koch Bihar and Koch Hajo within a short span of time .

## VI

This paper was an attempt to explore the manner in which the Mughal political authority expanded across the Himalayan region. By focusing on the kingdoms of Koch Behar and Garhwal, the paper sought to illustrate the nuances of Mughal state formation in the wide Himalayan belt. To achieve their goal, the Mughals adopted various strategies. From an initial policy of co-operation seen between Naranarayan and Akbar as well as between Shyam Shah and Jahangir, the Mughals did not hesitate to use of coercion visible in the repeated attempts made by Shahjahan and Aurangzeb to vanquish Garhwal or even in their decision to annex Koch Hajo. The constant display of the Mughal military might and a projection of their superior resources also enabled them to convince the likes of Lakshminarayan and Prithvipati Shah to acknowledge Mughal supremacy. Such varied methods were often used to reduce the Himalayan polities to a subservient position vis-à-vis the Mughals.

However, the success of these strategies was heavily reliant on the ability of the Mughals to reach out and earn the support of the varied local social groups below the vertex, which is what the Mughals constantly strove for. Regions where the Mughals failed to secure the acquiescence of these local social forces were areas where the entire process of consolidation of Mughal authority remained incomplete and nebulous, as evident from the instances of the regions of Koch Behar and Koch Hajo. Thus, any study into the process of Mughal state formation has to take into consideration the nuances of the relation of the Mughal rulers with the local ruling elite as well

as with the local social forces - the latter being an equally crucial cog in the wheels of imperial expansion and state formation.

### Notes and References

1. It should be remembered that these two polities were not only geographically distant from each other but also culturally, politically and socially different. Furthermore, they were also located at the peripheries of Mughal imperium. The reason for selecting these two regions was to examine the manner in which the Mughal rule interacted with two such diverse polities, far from the Mughal center, and see if any common strategy could be detected in their approach of expanding their political frontier in such peripheral areas.
2. Naranarayan was blessed with a child much late in his life and he had earlier planned to hand over the kingdom to his brother Chilarai's son Raghudev. The birth of his own son Lakshminarayan changed the situation and Raghudev felt that his uncle would deprive him of his claim. Later, it is argued that Raghudev rebelled and declared his independence and established the city of *Ghilajoypur*. When repeated military and diplomatic efforts failed to change Raghudev's intentions, Naranarayan chose to divide the kingdom with the river Sankosh as the boundary. See Parimal Bapari, *King Naranarayan and his Times*.
3. Lakshminarayan offered 500 *muhars* to the Mughal Emperor Jahangir to confirm his loyalty to the Mughals. Jahangir accepted this and conferred one Iraqi horse, elephants and other valuable gifts upon him.
4. Mirza Nathan mentions that after 1618 Lakshminarayan's *peshkash* to the Mughals was Rs 100,000.
5. There are some differences in the historians' date regarding Prithvipati Shah's accession. Raturi in his *Garhwal ka Itihas* and Sankrityayan in his *Garhwal* agree that Prithvipati Shah came to the throne in 1646. Mukundi Lal in his *Garhwal Painting* and Shivprasad Dabral in his work, *Uttarakhand ka Rajnitik tatha Sanskritik Itihas* stated that Prithvipati's coronation occurred in 1640. However, Shivprasad Dabral in his other work titled *Garhwal ka Navin Itihas* mentioned that Rani Karnavati's regency was from 1635 to 1640. This can be further substantiated by a copper plate inscription issued in 1640 by Rani Karnavati in the name of her son Prithvipati Shah. On the other hand, Ajay Rawat in his work *History of Garhwal (1358-1947)* argues that Prithvipati Shah came to throne in 1631 at the age of 7. Rawat's description is based on the records of Azevedo, a Jesuit Missionary who

visited Tsaprang. According to Azevedo, he was at Srinagar in July 1631 when he witnessed the funeral of the king Mahipati Shah.

6. This was testimony to the military difficulty of being successful in the rugged mountainous tracts of the Himalayan range.
7. Manucci's text states that it was Prithvipati's son Medini who handed over Suleiman to the Mughals when his father was out for a hunt.
8. The Mughals divided the kingdom of Koch-Hajo into four *sarkars* namely Uttarakul, Dakhinkul, Kamrup and Bangalabhumi.

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