

Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam (1662–63), War Experience of a Dutch Sailor Heiden and Translator Glanius

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journals.sagepub.com/home/ihr**Paranan Konwar¹****Abstract**

Frans Jansz van der Heiden (1638–81), a Dutch East India Company sailor, accompanied the expedition of Mir Jumla to Assam (1662–63) during the reign of sixth Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707) and Súa-taam-laa (1648–63), king of the Ahom kingdom in Assam. Heiden was the eyewitness of the war, history, topography and culture of then Assam. Many historians mentioned that it was W. Glanius who came along with Mir Jumla. But by evidence, W. Glanius was the English translator of the travel account authored by Heiden who was actually a conscripted sailor and accompanied Mir Jumla's expedition to Assam. Heiden visited Northeast India, such as, Bengal, Assam and the adjacent areas. It was a sensational narrative of his journey, filled with hallucination, shipwreck, experience in a desert island, hunger, cannibalism, bad luck, warfare of the Mughal army and Ahom, culture, customs, society, religion, knowledge of a new land and people. In his travelogue, we found much information on gold, elephants, the nature of Assamese people, beliefs in cows, the capital (Gargaon) of the Ahom kingdom, a tribe as a man-eater, plundering of grave (*maidam*), tradition of burial system of Ahom kings and nobles and so on.

Keywords

Heiden, Glanius, Mir Jumla, Assam

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Introduction

Not only on political ground, the invasion of Assam by Mir Jumla² in 1662–63 during the reign of the sixth Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb³ (31 July 1658–3 March 1707) and the twentieth Ahom king Süa-taam-laa alias Jayadhwaj Singha⁴ (1648–63) was significant in the historical literature of Assam also. It is because we found the eyewitness of war, history, topography, culture of then Assam from the letter of Gelmer Vorburg, a Dutch surgeon to Mir Jumla,⁵ and accounts of two persons, namely Shihabuddin Talesh who wrote *Fathiyyah-i-Ibriyya* (or *ibratia*) and Frans Jansz van der Heiden, a Dutch sailor who published a travelogue. All of them accompanied the expedition of Mir Jumla to Assam. It is interesting to note that in the history of Assam we found the name of W. Glanius instead of Frans Jansz van der Heiden. For example, S. K. Bhuyan,⁶ S. N. Bhattacharya⁷ and J. N. Sarkar⁸ all mentioned the name of W. Glanius relating to Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam. But W. Glanius was the English translator of the travel account authored by Heiden.

Background of Mir Jumla's Expedition to Assam (1662–63)

According to the political history of Assam, the westernmost part of Assam originally belonged to the Kuches. Later on, its suzerainty over that territory fluctuated between the Ahoms and Mughals. As per the treaty of 1639, the west part of Assam started from Guwahati (formerly known as Gauhati) and was handed over to the Mughals from the Ahoms.⁹ Thus, the Mughals retained the west of Bar Nadi (Great or Big River) on the north bank of Brahmaputra and west of Asurar Ali (road) on the south bank of that mighty river.¹⁰ But Jayadhwaj Singha (1648–63), taking advantage of the illness of the fifth Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (who reigned during 1628–58) and the war of succession, threw out the Mughals from Guwahati and expelled them beyond

² Mir Muhammad Said Ardistani, famous as Mir Jumla in Indian history, was born in about 1591 AD at Ardistan. He was Persian by birth and son of a poor oil merchant. In Persia, he first joined as a clerk to a diamond merchant and then served in the office of another Persian merchant who sold horses from Persia to the king of Golkonda. Subsequently, he arrived at Golkonda for service. At Golkonda, though he started his job as an apprentice to a diamond merchant, later on he left that service and established his own diamond business. From the post of a record keeper of the governor of Masulipatam, he became the wazir of Golkonda. Sultan Abdullah Qutb Shah deputed Mir Jumla to conquer Karnatak. By his talent, from Diwan-i-Kul of Mughal Empire during the reign of Shah Jahan, he became the governor of Khandesh and ultimately the viceroy of Bengal during the reign of Aurangzeb (Sarkar, 1951).

³ The original name of Mughal Emperor Sobriquet Aurangzeb was Muhi-ud-Din Muhammad. His kingly title was Ālamgīr and popularly known in the history as Aurangzeb.

⁴ The king fled to the nearby Naga hills when Mir Jumla approached Gargaon, the capital of Ahom kingdom. So later he was known by the appellation 'Bhaganya Raja' (fugitive king).

⁵ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. IV, pp. 603.

⁶ Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 59–60, 420.

⁷ Bhattacharya, *A History of Mughal North-east Frontier Policy*, pp. 35, 329–30.

⁸ Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, p. 158.

⁹ Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, p. 154.

the Manas river.¹¹ He also demolished the territory near Dhaka (formerly known as Dacca) and carried off Mughal subjects as captives to Assam.¹² On the other hand, the King of Kuch Bihar also took the advantage of defenceless frontiers and insulted the Mughal personals hailing for collecting annual tribute. He also sent armies to catch the zaminder who escaped to the Mughal territory. As a result, the Mughal Faujdar of Gauhati fled to Dhaka and Mir Jumla was appointed Viceroy of Bengal with the orders 'to punish the lawless Zaminders of the province, especially those of Assam and Magh (Arracan)'.¹³ Aurangzeb also 'apprehended that an ambitious soldier could not long remain in a state of repose, and that, if disengaged from foreign war, he would seek occasion to excite internal commotions'.¹⁴ So, he sent Mir Jumla to conquer Assam, and subsequently an expedition to Kuch Bihar and Assam started. In addition to these factors, there were other guiding motives behind the Mughals' invasion to Assam, the gateway to Northeast India, that comprised basically Mongoloid tribes. Among them, the prime motives were the desires of the Mughal Empire for political supremacy, aggressive imperialism, territorial expansionist policy, boundary disputes and violation of treaty, political rivalry, promotion of trade and commerce, natural resources (such as food and fruits, abundance of elephants and aromatic plants) and penetration into newly Hinduised states (like Kuch Bihar and Assam).

Causes of Mir Jumla's Retreat from Assam

Mir Jumla, whose invasion of Assam was judged as a military exploit and 'a great politician',¹⁵ attacked Assam on 17 March 1662 and occupied up to the place of treaty of Ghilajharighat on 22 January 1663.¹⁶ As per the treaty, the Mughals secured a huge war indemnity and availed a large cession of the Ahom territory. They agreed for the Ahoms to send a royal princess to the Mughal harem, to make payment of annual tributes and release the captives carried off by the Ahoms.

There were many reasons for Mir Jumla to leave Gargaon, the capital of the Ahom kingdom, and move on for Bengal. First is the geographical and climatic feature of Assam. On the one hand, the plain areas of Assam valley were surrounded by hills and on the other hand, plains are full of rivers, tributaries and rivulets. Weather is such that Assam experiences a rainy season for about 6 months during which most of the areas are inundated by floods. The dense forest area, hills, rivers and rains made cavalry difficult. On the contrary, the use of elephants and navy in wars was indispensable and made convenient. Owing to such an inconvenient situation, the well-disciplined cavalry of the Mughals could not move forward, whereas it made the navy of the Ahoms easily approach. Second, heavy incessant rains blocked all transport and

¹¹ Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 5; Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, p. 155.

¹² Bhuyan, *Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 5; Stewart, *The History of Bengal*, p. 319.

¹³ Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, pp. 155–56.

¹⁴ Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 171.

¹⁵ Heiden judged Mir Jumla as 'a great politician'. For details, see Glanius, *A Relation of an Unfortunate*, p. 177.

¹⁶ Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam*, p. 41; Gait, *A History of Assam*, pp. 137–42.

communication systems of the Mughals and caused the break-out of pestilence and famines. So Mir Jumla's army felt that 'If it had been easy to get into, it was very difficult to get out of this country, owing to the floods'¹⁷ and 'sooner than is customary'.¹⁸ Third is the military system of Assam. During that time, the Ahom military system that was based on its *Paik* system (the basis of the socio-economic and military organisation of the state) reflects the influence of Shan states on the *Tais* or their homeland. All adult males excluding the royal nobles and priests were to render compulsory services (civil and military) to their state. The non-serving *Paiks* of all able-bodied adult males were considered as the standing militia that was mobilised at short notice or signal by the concerned officers during emergencies, such as war, revolt and so on. Of course, the Mughals had a huge standing militia every time. Fourth was the war strategy of the Ahoms. The Ahoms followed Guerrilla warfare (partisan) with the strategy of surprised night attacks and ambushes, blockades (cutting off the supply lines of foods and provisions), scorched Earth (a military strategy that aims at destroying useful assets, such as fortifications, boats, foods, transport, etc. of the enemy to impede their further advance), use of poisoned arrows, deception, killing of the stray persons searching firewood, pillage of valuable goods of the enemy and mountain warfare.¹⁹ The situation was such that 'Mir Jumla's army, the soldiers were forced to eat the flesh of horses and camels'.²⁰ The general could not combat the all-round attack of the Ahoms. He 'found equally difficult to advance or to recede'.²¹ To tackle that situation, Mir Jumla even intelligently concealed the fact of his own sickness and mutiny of the tired Mughal soldiers and their anxiety to go back. Now it is thought that if the Ahoms had waited and delayed their war for a longer time, the Mughals certainly would have retreated without any gains. 'But, that was not to be and that is what history is all about'.²² The details of the history of Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam are found in details in the notes of Talesh and partly in the travelogue of Heiden.

The Dutch Travelogue 'Vervarelyke Schip-Beruk Van 'T Oost-Indisch Jacht Ter Scheling' and the Author 'Frans Jansz Van Der Heiden'

The Age of Writing Travelogues Among the Dutch and Contents of the Book Vervarelyke Schip-breuk van 'T Oost-Indisch Jacht Ter Schelling is a seventeenth-century Dutch travelogue authored by Frans Jansz van der Heiden²³ (1638–81), a Dutch East India Company sailor. Heiden, a member of the crew, accompanied the expedition of Mir Jumla to Assam during 1662–63. The prime themes in this journal are hallucination, shipwreck, experience in a desert island, hunger, cannibalism, bad luck and knowledge

¹⁷ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. II, p. 101.

¹⁸ Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 172.

¹⁹ See Sarkar, 'The Ahom Administration', p. 83; Talesh, *Tarikh-e-Aasham*.

²⁰ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. III, p. 101.

²¹ Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 172.

²² Tripathi, *Aspects of the Medieval*, p. 32.

²³ Sometimes his name is found as Frans Jansz. Vander Heyden.

of new land and people. Seventeenth century was the golden age of the Dutch for their economic prosperity and intellectual upliftment. In this century, the Dutch set up their supremacy in Southeast Asia, defeating its maritime rivalry, especially the Portuguese, and thus founded their business establishment in this region. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the travelogues of the Dutch who travelled to Asia as a sailor, soldier, merchant, *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC) servant and missionary preacher were very popular among the readers of Europe, especially in the Netherlands, and subsequently among the historians of the world as a source of knowledge.

Translations of the Book, Its Publication History and Glanius

The Dutch travelogue authored by Heiden was first published in Dutch language from Amsterdam in 1675. It was published by Johannes van Someren, a bookseller (boekverkoper). The book was reprinted as the second edition in the same year but edited by Willem Kunst. In 1676, it was translated into German by Wouter Schouten, a seventeenth-century famous travel writer and a VOC surgeon under the title *Ost-Indische Reyse: Worin ... Viel gedenckwurdiges ... bluthige See- und Feld-Schlachten, wieder die Portugisen und Makasser, Bela gerungen, Besturmungen und Eroberungen vieler fu rnehmen Sta dte und Schlo sser ... Nebenst noch Dem gefa hrlichen Schiffbruch des Jagt-schifs, ter Schelling genant, Von Frantz Janß. von der Heyde aufgezeichnet. Mit vielen kunstreichen Figuren geziert. Und Aus dem Niederla ndischen ins Hochteutsche u bergesetzt durch J. D.* The German version was published by Meurs and Sommeren from Amsterdam. In 1681 the book was translated into French by W. Glanius under the title *Relation du naufrage d'un vaisseau hollandois, nommé Ter Schelling, vers la côte de Bengala*. It was published by Ve J. Van Meurs. The new French edition of the book is *Le naufrage du Terschelling sur les côtes du Bengale: 1661*. It was published by Chandaigne (Paris) in 1999. In 1682 the French version was translated by W. Glanius into English under the title *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage to the Kingdom of Bengal*. It was published from London. In the English translations Glanius did not mention the name of Heiden as the original author of the book. So, the historian and readers of the English version confused Glanius as the original author or as the Dutch sailor. W. Glanius also translated many Dutch travelogues into English and French.²⁴ Anyway, there was no further

²⁴ For example, Mr Glanius translated a travel book into English entitled *A new voyage to the East-Indies containing an account of several of those rich countries, and more particularly of the kingdom of Bantam: giving an exact relation of the extent of that monarch's dominions, the religion, manners and customs of the inhabitants, their commerce, and the product of the country, and likewise a faithful narrative of the kingdom of Siam, of the isles of Japan and Madagascar, and of several other parts, with such new discoveries as were never yet made by any other traveler*. London, Printed for H. Rodes, next door to the Bear Tavern near Bride Lane in Fleetstreet, 1682 (Second Edition). In 1720, he also translated the book of Jan Janszoon Struys into French under the title *Les Voyages De Jean Struys, En Moscovie, En Tartarie, En Perse, aux Indes, & en plusieurs autres Pais etrangers: Accompagnez de remarques particulieres sur la qualite, la Religion, le Gouvernement, les Coutumes & le Negoce des lieux qu'il a vus; avec quantite de figures en taille-douce dessinees par lui-meme, & deux Lettres qui traitent a fond des malheurs d'Astracan*. Regarding this book, it is observed that instead of W. Glanius, there is mention of M. Glanius along with Stermann as co-translator in some places.

information about Glanius²⁵ regarding his nationality,²⁶ education and life. Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. Van Kley tried to consider Glanius as ‘pseudonym of the translator or translator-pirate’.²⁷ In 1741–42, a bookseller named Johannes Marshoorn from Haarlem published the book along with Jan Janszoon Struys’s travelogue under the single title *Drie aanmerkelyke en seer rampspoedige Reizen*. In 1846, the travel narrative was published in ‘Tales of Shipwrecks and Adventures at Sea’ edited by Lindridge,²⁸ with some edited form written in modern language. In 1865, the book of Heiden was included in the edited travelogue *Op de zee*²⁹ of H van Lennep and published by Noothoven van Goor from Leiden. It is observed that there are variations in translations from the Dutch language to French and then to English. Deviations are observed in translations of many paragraphs, sentences and terms among English translators also.

Reliability of the Account

Many scholars tried to consider the travel account of Heiden as fictitious and unrealistic and found similarities with *Journael* of Willem Ysbrantsz Bontekoe published in 1646 from the United Provinces and *Drie aanmerkelyke en seer rampspoedige Reizen* of Jan Janszoon Struys. But it has dissimilarities also. Reliability of this account can be justified by the compatibility and resemblances of the descriptions of this account with those of European authors (Jean Baptiste Tavernier, François Bernier and Niccolao Manucci),³⁰ Mughal chronicler Shihabuddin Talesh³¹ and Ahom and Assamese chroniclers. Along with the experience of misfortunate travel, it depicts the full account of the take-off, confrontation, sieges, climax, victories and retreat of war.

Narration on the Unfortunate Voyage, Mir Jumla’s Invasion of Assam and the Production of Knowledge on Assam in the Travelogue

In 1602, the merchants of the Netherlands established a united company named VOC, that is, the United East India Company or the Dutch East India Company. The state general of the Dutch Republic gave the company monopoly power to trade in Asia. Heiden made an unfortunate voyage along with four ships, namely *Ter Schelling*, *Wezop*, *Brouwershaven* and *Nieuwenhove*, towards their trading settlement in Bengal.

²⁵ Glanius is a Latinised Dutch surname. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a tradition among university and Latin school graduates of the Dutch people of the Netherlands to Latinise their surname. This practice prevailed not only in the Netherlands, it was followed a practice in Italy and elsewhere to Latinise their surname. Glanius is a Latinised surname such as Christopher Columbus (Cristoforo Colombo, Italy), Nicolaus Copernicus (Mikolaj Kopernik, Poland), Nostradamus (Michel de Nostredame, France) and so on.

²⁶ From my observation, Glanius was a Dutch, neither French nor English.

²⁷ Lach and Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, p. 586.

²⁸ Lindridge, *Tales of Shipwrecks*, pp. 705–10, 721–25.

²⁹ Rasel, *The Seventeenth-century Dutch Travel*, p.11.

³⁰ See details in Tavernier, *Travels in India by Jean Baptiste*; Bernier, *Travels in the Mogul Empire*; Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. IV.

³¹ Talesh, *Tarikh-e-Aasham*.

He was boarded on the ship 'Ter Schelling' that contained 85 sailors, 8 cannons,³² a freight of silver coins and copper plates.³³ The ship 'Ter Schelling' left Batavia, present-day Jakarta and the former capital of Dutch East Indies (1619–1949), to Bengal on 3 September 1661. The captain of the ship was Jacob Jansz Stroom (Amsterdam).

On 18 October,³⁴ they were in sight of the coast of Bengal but were uncertain whether this place was actually Bengal or not. They anchored at two leagues³⁵ from the shore. The Captain Jacob Jansz Stroom sent the pilot with seven or eight men and the steward who was acquainted with the local language of that country along with a long boat. The aim was to inquire into the nature and name of the coast they saw. Three days passed but the boat did not return. So, they sought for a port where they might inquire about them. After a while they decried three small barques coming towards the ship from the shore. These barques stopped at a small distance from their vessel and tried to consult about their boarding in the ship. The commander or head man of these barques called *Orangkai* and told them by signs that two of their barques were laden with fowls, fish and fruits of their country. The people of *Ter Schelling* welcomed him delightedly and assured with promise that he had no reason for apprehension. Then, *Orangkai* with other persons entered *Ter Schelling* and ordered others to unlade their provisions into the ship. The captain took *Orangkai* into his cabin, behaved in the kindest manner and discussed about the country. Suddenly, the ship struck a shelf. It caused a noisy situation inside the ship and occasioned a general alarm. *Orangkai* became afraid of that and thought that it was the signal to betray him. He immediately escaped from the ship. Interestingly, nobody was aware of his departure till he came at some distance. After a while, the people of the ship understood the cause of the escape of *Orangkai* when they came to know that he left behind the money which they had paid to him for his provisions.

Most of the crew of the ship were of the opinion that they should stay here and searched for a long boat. Even after 8 days they did not find any long boat and went out to the sea in search of other vessels. While searching, the ship struck on a shoal. When they got off, she struck upon another more dangerous one. Then they sent out a skiff to understand the surrounding but found nothing except shoals. Water everywhere was so little that they could not see how and what way they were to get out. They anchored their ship fore and aft. The wind swelled the waves to such a degree that the ship let in water through the port holes, and every movement the vessel seemed to dash against a sandbank. The ship leaked everywhere. Though they worked at the pumps, the water gained on them. In this way the ship was wrecked. The crew then got on board with simple provisions such as two compasses, two cutlasses (a short, heavy, slightly curved sword with a single cutting edge, formerly used by sailors), a sword, a hatchet, some oars, lanterns and candles. In course of time, they arrived at an isolated and uninhabited island that was supposed to be eight or nine leagues distant from the

³² Rasel, *Opcit*, p. 8 referred it as 28 cannons.

³³ *Ibid.* Rasel referred it as money such as *kopstukken* and *spiljateur*.

³⁴ It is translated as 8 October by Glanius, *A Relation of an unfortunate voyage...*, p. 2.

³⁵ A league is a unit of length. Originally, it referred to the distance a person could walk in an hour. On land, the league is defined as three miles, and at sea, a league equals three nautical miles (3.452 miles, 5.556 kilometres). Of course, the length of league varies from county to country.

mainland. In this island they suffered from hunger. They ate tortoise, leaves of trees, serpents (a large snake), rotten buffalo and so on. Day by day their strength decreased. They lost the hope of seeing any vessel approach their island. They agreed to make a raft that might carry them to other friendly islands. Five of them went off on the raft. The others sought the corpse of Lector or Chaplain whom they suspected to be dead. It was because their hunger was so terrible that they planned to eat the human flesh. Disappointed in finding the dead body, they decided to kill one of their boys who were with them. From this hour, it made them suspicious to each other and they couldn't sleep without fear. They also proposed to murder and eat a Negro woman. This cruel intention was overruled by them. First she was a mere skeleton in appearance and too sick. Second, if they began to feed human flesh, they would never stop; rather, they would pass on to eating each other.

One day they reached Sandwip, a large island in Bay of Bengal. After 5 days of staying at Sandwip, they begged for permission of the governor and requested him to send them to Bhalua, a village few miles west of Sudharam, the sudden station of Noakhali district. He acceded to their request and arranged three barques—one to carry them and the other two for their convoy. On the first night, they arrived at Anam, the mainland opposite Sandwip. It was 'a poor and despicable place that afforded not anything'. One day they reached Bhalua where they sent back three barques and they hired another one to Bhalua. At that time Bhalua was famous for salt production. The East India Company had a monopoly market on salt that was controlled by 'Salt Agent of Bhalua and Chitagong'. After arrival at Bhalua, the raja or nawab sent them to Dhaka. At that time, as Manucci³⁶ mentioned, there were two factories—one English and another Dutch. At Dhaka, they came to know that one of their ships named Wesop was wrecked on the Andamans and forty of their crew were eaten by inhabitants. The chief of the factory or governor arranged a barque to send them to Hooghly, where they had a Dutch factory, but an hour before starting their journey, an order or letter came from Mughal General Mir Jumla to send them up to him. They were bound to abide by the order of the general, fearing that the General might seize upon all the Dutch and make them slaves in case of refusal. They were told that Mir Jumla was a fortunate person who was never defeated in any war. They were convinced and set out their journey to join the Mughal army. On the day they arrived at Rangamati, Mir Jumla welcomed them with delight and offered wine. The general assured them that he would send them back to their own nation after 6 months of their expedition. He permitted full authority for the use of all booty that they might capture from their enemy. He offered ₹50 against every head of the enemy and ₹100 against every prisoner. The general sent to them ₹300 and assigned certain powerful *ghurabs*,³⁷ each towed by four rowing boats with oars called *kosa* in Bengali and carrying 14 guns and a crew of fifty to sixty men. There were several flat-bottomed boats that carried no mast but well furnished with gun. Most of the naval officers were Portuguese. Mir Jumla had such a good opinion of Christians that if a Moor knew a little Portuguese and introduced himself as Christian,

³⁶ Manucci, *Storia Do Mogor or Mogul India*, Vol. II, p. 86.

³⁷ Arabic 'ghurab' is a square-rigged two-mast vessel (Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', p. 13). J. Sarkar refers to it as 'floating batteries' (Sarkar, *History of Aurangzib*, pp. 157–58).

he appointed him to a prestigious officer rank. There were other vessels and barques laden with provisions, ammunition and wives of Mughal personnel. It is said that Mir Jumla had 500 women with him. Mir Jumla marched amidst the cavalry. Ahead of him were trumpeters and cattle drummers mounted on elephants. He was followed by twenty animals, each of which carried two small pieces of cannon and two gunners with a numbers of chargers. Then, they were followed by 3,000–4,000 *moscovites* (soldiers and highwayman), all extraordinarily well mounted.³⁸ The Mughal army was accompanied by thousands of horses and foots.³⁹ Several thousands of camels laden with baggage were followed by merchants, artisans, courtesans, some mounted on camels and others on horses.⁴⁰ After a long march, they entered Kuch-Bihar and conquered it. Then, they reached Hajo. When they moved on upward through the river Brahmaputra they lost four Dutch men and twenty-four Moors. In their journey they encountered with the fleet of the Ahom army. The Mughal army routed the fleet of the Ahom army. On their way, they conquered the Ahom fort⁴¹ and their admiral cast

³⁸ Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', pp. 13–14; Glanius, *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage*....

³⁹ Figures are different in different histories. For example, Gait, *A History of Assam*, p. 132) stated that the Mughal general had 12,000 horses and 30,000 foot with him at Jogighopa. In Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', it was written as 'Three hundred thousand horse, five hundred thousand foot' (Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', p. 13).

⁴⁰ Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', pp. 13–14; Glanius, *A Relation of an Unfortunate Voyage*....

⁴¹ To N. Gogoi, Chāmdharāgarh that was named after a village 'Chāmdharā' was constructed by Ahom king Pratap Singh (1603–41) in 1616 on both bank of river Brahmaputra. It extended from river Brahmaputra to Haruni-Daruni hills (present Dafla hills amidst Bharali-Bardikrai river) on the north bank, and from river Brahmaputra to Diju on the south bank of Brahmaputra. Now, there is no existence of Chāmdharāgarh. The northern part of it was already washed away by river Bharali (Gogoi, *Buranjje Parasha Biswanath Prantar*, p. 115–116). Other scholars opined that it is either Simalugarh or Sāmdharāgarh (Chamdharagarh) or Salagarh. There are variations in interpreting the exact location of these three forts. Simalu fort or Samdhara fort was situated on opposite side. Simalugarh, constructed with timbers of cotton tree named Simalu tree (*Bombax ceiba*), was on the north bank of river Brahmaputra, near Silghat, at the mouth of Bharali river of Brahmaputra, whereas Samdhara (Chamdharā) fort was fortified on the south bank (Baruah, *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, p. 259). To S. K. Phukan, Chamdharagarh runs close to Misa fort or camp of Nagaon district. But according to Gogoi (*The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms*, p. 404) and Bhuyan (*Lachit Barphukan and His Times*, p. 90), Sāmdharāgarh was at the mouth of the Bharali river on the north bank and Simalugarh, near Silghat, was on the south bank of Brahmaputra. Shihabuddin Talesh mentioned about Simalugarh and Salagarh only. He did not refer to Samdharagarh. It is said that Salāgarh (Solahgarh or Solalgarh) was a fort situated at the mouth of Bharali river above Kaliabar on the north bank of Brahmaputra (Bengal, Past and Present, 'Mir Jumla's Invasion of Assam', p. 20). [E. A. Gait showed Salāgarh in his map between Kaliabar and Dergaon on the south bank of Brahmaputra river]. After Simalugarh, Mughal army conquered Samdharagarh and Salagarh. In the *Gazetter of India: Assam State* (Vol. I), it is mentioned that 'Pratapgarh is situated about twelve kilometres west of Biswanath Chariali. West of it runs the late-medieval Salagarh, starting from Biswanath and ending at the foot of Dafla hills' (GoA, *Assam State Gazetteer*, p. 192). To Bhattacharyya, Salagarh was 'built on a rock difficult of access on the Brahmaputra, a few miles above Kaliabar' (Bhattacharyya, *A History of Mughal North-east Frontier Policy*, p. 330). But N. Gogoi mentioned that Salāl-Garh was constructed by King Pratap Singh (1603–41) in 1620–21 both on the northern and southern bank of river Brahmaputra. It extended from Chandi Deoghar to Kapalikati on the northern bank, and from Brahmaputra to Pakariguri hills on its southern bank. It is also popularly known as Pratap-garh (Gogoi, *Buranjje Parasha Biswanath Prantar*, p. 108).

anchor at *Lakhow*.⁴² When they reached Gargaon,⁴³ the capital of the Ahom kingdom, it was totally abandoned and the king fled away. As per order of the Mughal general, the chief of the fleet sent six boats: two boats were laden with gold and four with silver. But unfortunately, these were captured by the Ahoms. At that time there was a high level of water. The Mughal army encamped in a comparatively high land at Mathurapur⁴⁴ and cut down all trees around their camp for their safety. This place was full of fruits, and rice was sown around. The adjoining hills situated on the north of Mathurapur yielded pepper (*Piper nigrum*), agarwood or aloeswood (*Aquilaria agallocha*, *agor/agoro gach*), and sandalwood (*Santalum album*). These were sold in weight against gold.

Even after the stay of 3 months, they experienced incessant rain and overflow of water. It caused scarcity of food supply. The Mughal army was bound to eat the flesh of camels and elephants for their survival. When the Assamese army approached around them to attack, the Mughal general ordered not to encounter their enemy and let them draw near. They tried to pretend that they were starved and almost dead. As soon as the Ahom army attacked them, the Mughal army counter-attacked them by horses all around. Ultimately, the Ahom army was greatly defeated. The death toll was about 20,000 on the side of the Ahom army and about ten on the Mughal's side.

At that time the Mughal general sent some presents of provisions to the Ahom monarch and was told by his messenger that the Mughal general had more food supply than he required for subsistence of the Mughal army for the next 6 months. But the general did not receive any answer from the Ahom monarch. The Mughal general felt insulted and resolved to battle with the Ahom's army. But one from the Mughal army⁴⁵ requested the general to reconsider his decision as the greatest part of their army was either dead or sick. It would be shameful if they stay for more days in Assam. Accepting his advice, the general imposed some conditions on the Ahom king. If not fulfilled, the battle was sure. The conditions were that the king of Assam must offer half of his country to the Mughal general and the youngest of his daughters as his concubine, 2,000 elephants, large sum of money, and the richest vessels with excellent roots. Of course the Ahom king accepted their conditions.

⁴² Lakhow is the name of a village and Garh (rampart) of the village is known as Lakhowgarh. During 1662–63, river Brahmaputra (formerly known as Luit or Luit-Suti meaning Channel of Luit) was running on the north of Majuli (formerly known as Majali). The channel of river Brahmaputra on its south was absent. In its place, Dihing river united with river Brahmaputra at Lakhow or Lakhowgarh and the rivers Namdang, Dikhow, Darika and Droi were the tributaries of river Dihing at that time. Lakhow was situated beside the confluence of river Brahmaputra and Dihing. At that time the confluence was located just on the south of the present course of Brahmaputra. J. P. Wade mentioned that Lakhow or Lakhau was on the north bank of Brahmaputra river and it 'extends eastward of Khoologown, eight miles in length, and six in breadths; it is an elevated tract' (Wade, *Geographical Sketch of Assam*, p. 125). Khoologown indicates Salāl-gaon, a village. Now-a-days there is no place named Lakhow. It is said that to-days Gamiri, a place of Biswanath district, is nothing but that Lakhow (Gogoi, *Buranjī Parasha Biswanath Prantar*, p. 52). They arrived at Lakhow on 7 May 1662.

⁴³ The Mughal army entered Gargaon on 17 March 1662.

⁴⁴ Mathurapur, situated in present-day Charaideo district, is near the royal cemetery or *maidams* of Charaideo. It is on the east of Gargaon, capital of Ahom kingdom, with a distance of 20 km.

⁴⁵ Who might be Dilir Khan.

Very soon the water level had fallen and it led to improvement in communications. The Mughal army started to pack up their baggage and their journey back to Dhaka, from where they started their expedition.

Heiden admitted that he liked neither Assam, nor the manner of the Assamese. There were causes behind his comment. First, he came to Assam unwillingly and by force. Second, there was flood due to the monsoon season and famine due to war in Assam. Third, he could not forget the shipwreck of *Ter Schelling*. Fourth, he observed Assam and the Assamese as their prime enemies.

According to Heiden, gold⁴⁶ was abundant in Assam. Elephants were common, but these were lean and thin due to insufficient food to feed them. Considering the Assamese as the superstitious people, Heiden mentioned that they were worshippers of cows and so they never kill them. Heiden said that the temples of Assam were full of images of cows made of gold, silver and brass.⁴⁷ When they (Heiden and others) purchased cows the local inhabitants felt guilty to sell and they were to promise them that they would not kill the cows. Heiden and others used boiled water, because river water became infected due to prodigious quantity of dead bodies thrown therein that were killed in the war. On their way, they pillaged a temple⁴⁸ where they found a golden cow as booty and that was divided among them. Heiden wrote that the Assamese who fled over to the Mughal army for the sake of their life showed high respect towards their enemy. They made rooms or houses wherever the Mughal army went. Regarding Gargaon, Heiden said that it was extremely a beautiful town with extraordinary beautiful ladies.⁴⁹

In their expedition they had some Indian slaves who worked for the Mughal army day and night. They ate only rice. They were vegetarian. They would rather die but never eat fish or flesh. They did it for an eternal life.

Heiden mentioned about a tribe who had a fierce look, a rough carriage and fed human flesh. That tribe wanted to assist the Mughal army against the Ahom army, but the general rejected their offer, considering them as insincere people. But there is no trace of the man-eater tribe in the history of Assam. So reference of the man-eater was nothing but exaggeration. Either that tribe would be the Bodo-Kachari tribe or the 'head-hunting' Naga tribe.

⁴⁶ Shahabuddin Talesh wrote that 'The gold is shifted out from the sand of Brahmaputra. Around ten to twelve thousand men are engaged in this work. Each of them has to deposit one Tola of gold annually to the treasury of the Raja. But this gold is considered of sub standard in quality. One Tola of Gold is sold for 8-9 rupees only. It is said that gold is found everywhere in the sand of Brahmaputra. But only the people of Aasham know the exact location where gold is found' (Talesh, *Tarikh-e-Aasham*, p. 51).

⁴⁷ As, Nandi is the gate guardian of Kailash (the abode of Lord Shiva); so, the images of Nandi are generally found in the Shiva temples of India. Heiden's comment that "temples of Assam were full of images of cows" is partially true and cannot be generalized. Because, as deity of Nandi is related to Shiva temples only; therefore, the idol of Nandi might have only in some Shiva temples of Assam during the invasion of Mir Jumla, but not in all temples (such as Bishnu, Devi temples) of Assam.

⁴⁸ Shihabuddin Talesh in his *Fathiyah-i-Ibriyya* mentioned that in Dergaon, on the southern bank of river Dihing, there was a nice temple surrounded by a beautiful garden. This place had an abundance of gardens with full of juicy, delicious and lucrative coloured oranges. On 15 March of the same year, Mughal troops left Dergaon. It is located in Golaghat district of Assam.

⁴⁹ Bernier mentioned that 'They found vast riches, it being a great, very fair, and merchant-like town, and where the women are extraordinarily beautiful'.

Heiden also mentioned that the admiral kept the Dutch in first rank of esteem and considered them as the deserving people to take the charge of the artillery. Next to them, the Armenian horsemen were given an honourable niche.

The Moors observed festivals every full moon day and that particular day began with the discharge of their guns. After that, soldiers were paid. A sum of ₹50 or 25 crowns was paid to every horseman and less than ₹5 or ₹6 was paid per foot soldier. In some cases, some were paid ₹100 and others were paid ₹30, ₹20 or ₹10.

They found many graves (*maidām*)⁵⁰ of Ahom kings and nobles with full treasure. Heiden said that the people of Assam were interred with their apparels, money and servants. Though the servants were buried alive, they followed it delightedly as they firmly believed that they would become a great personage in another world on the third day. Mir Jumla ordered to open those tombs and found immeasurable treasures. He received 3,900 tons of gold from those graves. He carried them with him. But unfortunately, Mir Jumla could not enjoy them, as he expired very soon. As per the custom and tradition of the Mughal Empire, all the wealth of Mir Jumla that was to be the value of four million went to the custody or hands of the monarch.

In this way, Van der Heiden along with his twenty-five Dutch companions joined the Nawab's army unwillingly and served the Mughal army for about 15 months. After serving the Mughal army for 15 months, Heiden sailed to the Dutch factory in Dhaka for 15 days. Then, he moved on and stayed at Cossimbazar, a place famous for silk. Then he sailed to Hugli. Van der Heiden spent about 10 years in India, later made journey to London and at last arrived in the Netherlands in 1673. Thus, Heiden visited Northeast India, such as Bengal, Assam and the adjacent areas. Heiden in his travelogue had written a sensational narrative of his journey, warfare of the Mughal army, culture, customs, society, religion and other information of the areas he visited based on his travel experience.

Conclusion

To conclude, the narrative of Heiden on Bengal, Assam and adjacent areas is a significant contribution to the history of medieval India. Similarly, the observations of Heiden, especially on Assam, are momentous in exploring the social, economic and political history of medieval Assam. If we cross-examine the remarks of Heiden and those of Talesh, we almost find conformity, except the former's exaggeration of having a maneater in Assam. The duo observed everything through the eyes of an enemy. As Heiden came to Assam by force, it was customary to have disappointments towards Mir Jumla, whereas Talesh had full loyalty to the latter.

⁵⁰ Charāideo (Che-Rāi-Doi), situated at the present-day Charaideo district, was the first capital city of the Ahom kingdom. Wherever the king was died, his corpse was usually buried in Charaideo. The queens, *Rajmāo* (mother of king), prince, princes, other royal family members and nobles were also buried at Charāideo. So, Charāideo is considered as the necropolis of the royalty and nobles. The burial grave is called in *Tai-Ahom* language *maidāms*. A *maidām* or a tumulus in appearance is a mound of earth raised over a grave made of woods or brick and stone. According to a *Tai* manuscript (see Barua, *Ahom Buranji*, p. 73), the heads of Mughal heroes like Turbak Khān and Hussain Khān that were killed in battle during the reign of Suo-Hong-Mong (1497–1539) were entombed at Charāideo making two *maidāms*. It was the honour to these heroic warriors though they were the enemy of the Ahom kingdom. The Mughal army of Mir Jumla plundered these *Maidāms*.

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