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RESEARCH ARTICLE

COURAGE IN THE BATTLEFIELD: MULAGABHARU IN THE AHOM-TURK CONFLICT

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Abstract

The military history of medieval Assam has traditionally focused on kings, generals, and territorial expansion, while the participation of women in warfare has received comparatively little scholarly attention. Among the notable female figures preserved in the historical memory of Assam, Mulagabharu occupies a distinctive place for her participation in the Ahom resistance against the invading forces of Turbak Khan during the sixteenth century. Her courage at the Battle of Duimunisila has become an enduring symbol of sacrifice and patriotism in Assamese historical consciousness. Yet, despite her prominence in regional memory, the available historical evidence concerning her life remains scattered across Ahom chronicles, later historical writings, and popular traditions. This study critically examines Mulagabharu's role in the Ahom – Turk conflict by analysing primary sources, particularly the Ahom *Buranjis*, alongside modern historical scholarship. Rather than presenting her merely as a legendary heroine, the paper situates her within the broader political, military, and social context of sixteenth-century Assam. It explores the organisation of the Ahom military system, the strategic importance of the conflict with the Bengal Sultanate, the role of royal women during wartime, and the construction of Mulagabharu's historical legacy. The study argues that Mulagabharu's participation demonstrates that women could assume active military responsibilities during moments of political crisis and that her memory reflects both historical reality and the evolving cultural imagination of Assamese society. By reassessing available historical evidence, the article contributes to the growing scholarship on gender, warfare, and state formation in medieval northeastern India.

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Introduction: -

The history of medieval Assam is characterised by prolonged military struggles, political consolidation, and cultural adaptation. Among the regional powers that shaped the political landscape of northeastern India, the Ahom kingdom occupies a unique position. Established in the early thirteenth century by Sukapha, the kingdom gradually evolved into one of the most resilient states of South Asia, successfully resisting repeated invasions from neighbouring

powers for nearly six centuries. The strength of the Ahom state lay not only in its administrative innovations and military organisation but also in its ability to mobilise diverse sections of society during periods of external threat. One of the most significant episodes in this history was the series of conflicts between the Ahom kingdom and the Bengal Sultanate during the sixteenth century. These encounters represented more than territorial disputes; they reflected competing political ambitions and strategic control over the Brahmaputra Valley. Among these invasions, the expedition led by Turbak Khan occupies a particularly important place because of its intensity, duration, and consequences for the future of the Ahom state. The eventual Ahom victory not only preserved political independence but also strengthened the kingdom's military institutions and collective identity.

Within this historical episode emerges the figure of Mulagabharu, whose participation in the Battle of Duimunisila has been remembered as an extraordinary example of courage. According to the Ahom chronicles, after the death of her husband Frasengmung Borgohain in battle, Mulagabharu entered the battlefield wearing his armour and continued the struggle against the invading forces. Although she ultimately lost her life, her sacrifice became one of the most celebrated episodes in Assamese historical tradition. The significance of Mulagabharu extends beyond the narrative of individual heroism. Her story invites broader historical questions regarding the participation of women in warfare, the political role of royal women within the Ahom kingdom, and the relationship between historical memory and documented evidence. Unlike many popular retellings that emphasise emotional or legendary aspects, a historical study requires careful examination of available sources, contextual interpretation, and critical comparison between chronicles and modern historiography.

This article therefore seeks to reconstruct Mulagabharu's role within the political and military realities of sixteenth-century Assam. Rather than treating her solely as a symbolic heroine, the study analyses her contribution within the framework of Ahom military organisation, gender relations, and state formation. In doing so, it contributes to a more balanced understanding of women's participation in medieval warfare while highlighting the importance of regional historical traditions in reconstructing India's military past.

Necessity of the Study: -

The history of warfare in medieval India has generally privileged the achievements of kings, commanders, and political elites, while the military contributions of women have remained comparatively neglected. Although women such as Rani Durgavati, Chand Bibi, and Rani Abbakka have received increasing scholarly attention, the military role of Mulagabharu continues to occupy only a marginal position in mainstream Indian historiography despite her significance in Assamese historical tradition. Most discussions of her life appear as brief narratives within larger political histories of the Ahom kingdom rather than as independent subjects of historical inquiry. The present study is therefore necessary for several reasons. First, it attempts to reconstruct Mulagabharu's role using historical evidence rather than relying solely on popular legend. Second, it contributes to the growing field of gender history by examining women's participation in military affairs in pre-modern northeastern India. Third, it places the Battle of Duimunisila within the wider context of Ahom state formation and resistance against imperial expansion from Bengal. Finally, by critically examining both primary and secondary sources, the study seeks to distinguish historically verifiable events from later commemorative traditions, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Assamese history.

Objectives of the Study: -

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives: -

1. To examine the historical background of the Ahom–Turk conflict during the reign of Suhungmung.
2. To reconstruct the historical role of Mulagabharu using available primary and secondary sources.
3. To analyse the participation of women in warfare within the Ahom political system.
4. To assess the military and political significance of the Battle of Duimunisila.
5. To critically evaluate the representation of Mulagabharu in historical writings and Assamese cultural memory.

Review of Literature: -

The political and military history of the Ahom kingdom has attracted considerable scholarly attention since the late nineteenth century. However, studies devoted exclusively to Mulagabharu remain limited. Most historical works discuss her only in relation to Turbak Khan's invasion of Assam in 1532 – 1533, without examining her contribution within the broader framework of gender, warfare, and state formation. Consequently, the available literature provides important historical information but leaves significant scope for critical reinterpretation. The earliest systematic account of the Ahom kingdom in English was produced by Edward Gait in *A History of Assam* (1906). Gait reconstructs the sequence of Turbak Khan's invasion from the Ahom *Buranjis* and Persian records, describing

the campaigns fought between the Bengal Sultanate and the Ahoms during the reign of Swargadeo Suhungmung. His account briefly mentions the death of Frasengmung Borgohain and the subsequent participation of Mulagabharu in battle. While Gait recognises her courage, he does not analyse her role from the perspective of women's participation in warfare.

The works edited and translated by Surya Kumar Bhuyan, particularly the *Deodhai AsamBuranji*, *TungkhungiaBuranji*, and other Ahom chronicles, constitute the principal primary sources for reconstructing the political history of sixteenth-century Assam. These chronicles provide detailed descriptions of military campaigns, administrative organisation, and diplomatic relations. The references to Mulagabharu are comparatively brief but historically significant because they originate from court chronicles rather than later folklore. Nevertheless, these texts were compiled within specific political contexts and therefore require critical examination concerning authorship, chronology, and royal patronage.

H. K. Barpujari's *The Comprehensive History of Assam* offers a more analytical interpretation of Ahom political expansion and military organisation. His discussion of the Ahom–Turk conflict emphasises the administrative reforms introduced by Suhungmung, the strategic use of riverine warfare, and the mobilisation of local resources. Although Mulagabharu appears within the narrative of the Battle of Duimunisila, the broader implications of her military participation remain unexplored.

S. L. Baruah places the Ahom – Bengal conflicts within the larger political history of northeastern India. His writings demonstrate that the repeated invasions from Bengal strengthened Ahom military institutions and accelerated administrative centralisation. However, like earlier historians, Baruah focuses primarily on kings, commanders, and political developments rather than the contribution of royal women.

Environmental and regional historians such as Arupjyoti Saikia have highlighted the importance of geography in shaping the political history of Assam. His analysis of rivers, forests, wetlands, and ecological conditions helps explain why invading armies from Bengal encountered enormous logistical difficulties while the Ahoms successfully utilised local environmental knowledge during warfare. Although his work does not specifically examine Mulagabharu, it provides valuable contextual understanding of the battlefield conditions in which the conflict unfolded.

Modern scholarship on gender history has opened new possibilities for interpreting figures like Mulagabharu. Historians such as Geraldine Forbes, Kumkum Roy, and Uma Chakravarti argue that women in pre-modern India often exercised political authority beyond domestic spaces, especially during periods of dynastic crisis and military conflict. While these studies focus primarily on other regions of India, their theoretical perspectives are useful for analysing women's agency in medieval Assam.

Studies on military history by J. N. Phukan, D. Nath, and Yasmin Saikia have further enriched our understanding of Ahom political institutions, military organisation, and social structure. Yet none of these works treats Mulagabharu as the central subject of investigation. Consequently, her historical role remains embedded within broader narratives rather than being examined independently.

A review of existing scholarship therefore reveals three important limitations. First, Mulagabharu has rarely been studied as a historical actor in her own right. Second, her participation has seldom been analysed through the lens of gender history and military studies. Third, historians have generally accepted the *Buranji* narratives without critically evaluating how later cultural memory transformed her into a symbol of Assamese heroism. The present study attempts to address these limitations through an interdisciplinary historical approach.

Research Gap: -

Despite the extensive scholarship on the political history of the Ahom kingdom, dedicated academic studies on Mulagabharu remain remarkably limited. Most standard histories mention her only briefly while describing Turbak Khan's invasion. Existing discussions largely emphasise her bravery but seldom investigate the broader political, military, or gendered dimensions of her participation. Furthermore, few studies critically compare the narratives preserved in the Ahom *Buranjis* with later nationalist interpretations or cultural representations. Consequently, the relationship between documented history and historical memory has not been systematically explored. This article addresses this gap by situating Mulagabharu within the larger contexts of military history, gender studies, and the evolution of the Ahom state.

Methodology: -

The present study adopts a qualitative historical methodology based upon critical examination of both primary and secondary sources. Since Mulagabharu belongs to the sixteenth century, no direct documentary evidence survives outside contemporary chronicles and later historical compilations. The reconstruction of her life therefore depends upon careful source criticism and contextual interpretation.

Primary sources include the various Ahom *Buranjis*, particularly those edited and translated by Surya Kumar Bhuyan, together with available Persian references concerning the Bengal Sultanate's military expeditions into Assam. These chronicles provide information regarding political events, military campaigns, royal appointments, and important battles. Because the *Buranjis* were court-sponsored historical records, they are analysed with due attention to their political purpose, authorship, and possible biases.

Secondary sources consist of books and scholarly articles dealing with the history of medieval Assam, Ahom administration, military organisation, women's history, and environmental history. Comparative analysis has been employed to identify areas of agreement and disagreement among historians.

The study further applies a historiographical approach by comparing traditional narratives preserved in Assamese historical memory with interpretations offered by modern historians. Rather than accepting every narrative uncritically, the paper distinguishes between evidence supported by historical documentation and later literary embellishments.

Finally, the study employs a gender-sensitive analytical framework. Instead of viewing Mulagabharu merely as an exceptional heroine, it seeks to understand how her participation reflects broader patterns of women's agency within the political and military institutions of the Ahom kingdom.

Historical Background of the Ahom – TurkConflict: -

The conflict between the Ahom kingdom and the Bengal Sultanate represented one of the most decisive phases in the political history of sixteenth-century Assam. Following the establishment of the Ahom kingdom by Sukapha in 1228 CE, the rulers gradually expanded their authority over the eastern Brahmaputra Valley. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, the kingdom had developed into a powerful regional state possessing an organised administrative system, an efficient military organisation, and a stable agrarian economy.

The accession of Swargadeo Suhungmung (1497 – 1539) marked a turning point in Ahom history. Widely known as *Dihingia Raja*, Suhungmung transformed the kingdom from a predominantly Tai polity into a multi-ethnic territorial state. His administration incorporated conquered populations into the *Paik* system, reorganised provincial administration, strengthened military institutions, and expanded political authority westward.

These territorial expansions inevitably brought the Ahoms into conflict with neighbouring kingdoms, particularly the Bengal Sultanate. During the early sixteenth century, the rulers of Bengal sought to extend their influence over the strategically important Brahmaputra Valley. Apart from political prestige, Assam possessed valuable economic resources, including elephants, forest products, precious metals, and river trade routes connecting eastern India with Southeast Asia.

Several military expeditions were launched from Bengal before Turbak Khan's invasion. Initial campaigns under commanders such as Bar Uzir and Bit Malik met with limited success owing to the difficult terrain, unfamiliar climate, and determined resistance offered by the Ahoms. Nevertheless, the Bengal Sultanate continued to regard Assam as a region of strategic significance.

The political ambitions of Bengal intensified during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Nasrat Shah (1519 – 1533), who organised one of the largest military expeditions against Assam under the command of Turbak Khan. Contemporary and later chronicles describe this invasion as one of the most formidable military challenges faced by the Ahom kingdom before the Mughal invasions of the seventeenth century.

Political Situation before Turbak Khan's Invasion: -

The years preceding Turbak Khan's campaign witnessed significant political consolidation within the Ahom kingdom. Suhungmung had successfully annexed the Chutiya kingdom in 1523 and subsequently brought large

portions of the Kachari territories under Ahom influence. These victories expanded the kingdom's territorial limits while increasing its economic resources and military manpower.

The integration of newly conquered populations was achieved through administrative innovations rather than simple military occupation. The *Paik* system enabled the state to mobilise labour and military service from different ethnic communities, thereby creating a flexible military structure capable of responding rapidly to external threats.

Meanwhile, the Bengal Sultanate faced its own political challenges arising from succession disputes, frontier management, and relations with neighbouring states. Nevertheless, military expansion remained an important component of its regional policy. Control over western Assam would have strengthened Bengal's commercial networks and provided access to valuable elephants that were highly prized in medieval warfare.

The frontier between Bengal and Assam therefore became a zone of continuous military tension. Frequent raids, counter-raids, and diplomatic negotiations characterised relations between the two states throughout the early sixteenth century. Against this background, Turbak Khan's invasion represented not an isolated campaign but the culmination of a long series of military confrontations.

Source Criticism and Historiography: Reassessing the Ahom *Buranjis*, Persian Chronicles, and the Historical Reconstruction of Mulagabharu: -

The reconstruction of Mulagabharu's role in the Ahom – Turk conflict presents a significant historiographical challenge due to the uneven nature of the surviving historical evidence. Unlike many major political events in medieval India that are documented through multiple contemporary narratives, the Battle of Duimunisila and Mulagabharu's intervention are primarily preserved within the Ahom *Buranjis* and later regional historical traditions. Persian chronicles produced under the Bengal Sultanate remain largely silent regarding her participation, while colonial historians interpreted these indigenous sources through varying methodological frameworks. Consequently, any historical reconstruction must critically examine not only the information preserved in these texts but also the circumstances under which they were composed, transmitted, edited, and interpreted. Rather than privileging one source tradition over another, a balanced historiographical approach requires evaluating each source within its own political, cultural, and intellectual context.

The *Buranjis* constitute the principal documentary foundation for the political history of the Ahom kingdom. Derived from the Tai-Ahom word *buranji*, meaning “a storehouse of knowledge” or “record of the past,” these chronicles served as official state records documenting diplomatic relations, royal successions, military campaigns, administrative decisions, and important political developments. Initially composed in the Tai-Ahom language and later increasingly written in Assamese, the *Buranjis* were prepared by court officials entrusted with preserving the institutional memory of the kingdom. Unlike purely literary narratives, they functioned as administrative documents intended to assist governance by recording precedents and political experiences. Their official character therefore provides considerable historical value, although it also necessitates careful consideration of the political objectives underlying their composition.

The transmission of the *Buranjis* over several centuries, however, complicates their interpretation. Many original manuscripts have not survived, and numerous extant versions are later copies prepared under different political circumstances. Repeated copying inevitably introduced textual variations through scribal omissions, interpolations, linguistic modernization, and editorial adjustments. Some passages were abbreviated, while others were expanded to clarify events for later readers or to emphasize particular political or dynastic concerns. Consequently, historians must distinguish between the probable core narrative preserved across multiple manuscripts and additions that may reflect the concerns of later periods rather than contemporary observation.

Among the most important texts for reconstructing the Ahom – Turk conflict is the *Deodhai Asam Buranji*, one of the earliest surviving chronicles based on older Ahom records. It provides valuable information concerning the reign of Swargadeo Suhungmung, the military campaigns against Turbak Khan, and the defence of the kingdom during the sixteenth century. Although the narrative does not present Mulagabharu through the elaborate heroic language characteristic of later literary traditions, it records the military crisis surrounding the death of Frasenmung Borgohain and acknowledges her participation in the subsequent resistance. The relative restraint of its narrative style suggests an emphasis upon recording significant political events rather than constructing heroic biographies, thereby enhancing its value as an early historical source.

Other *Buranji* traditions, including the *TungkhungiaBuranji* and subsequent compilations, present broader narratives of Ahom political history that occasionally incorporate greater descriptive detail regarding notable historical figures. These later texts often reflect evolving literary conventions and changing political priorities. While they preserve valuable historical information, they also reveal how collective memory gradually expanded around important personalities such as Mulagabharu. Some versions emphasize her loyalty to the Ahom state and royal authority, whereas later retellings increasingly portray her as the embodiment of courage, sacrifice, and patriotic devotion. Such developments illustrate not necessarily historical distortion but rather the dynamic relationship between recorded history and evolving cultural memory.

The modern publication of the *Buranjis*, particularly through the editorial work of Surya Kumar Bhuyan, represents another important stage in the historiography of medieval Assam. Bhuyan collected, translated, compared, and critically edited numerous manuscript traditions, making them accessible to modern scholars while preserving significant textual variants wherever possible. His editions remain indispensable for the study of Ahom history because they provide extensive annotations, comparative readings, and historical commentary. Nevertheless, historians must recognize that editorial decisions – including the selection of manuscripts, normalization of language, and organization of textual variants – inevitably influence modern interpretations. Accordingly, Bhuyan's compilations should be understood as scholarly reconstructions based upon multiple manuscript traditions rather than exact reproductions of any single original chronicle.

The existence of textual variation does not diminish the historical importance of the *Buranjis*; instead, it provides insight into the evolving processes through which historical memory was preserved and transmitted. Historiographical methodology therefore requires identifying points of convergence across different manuscript traditions rather than expecting absolute textual uniformity. Where multiple versions consistently record the invasion of Turbak Khan, the death of Frasengmung Borgohain, and Mulagabharu's subsequent participation in battle, historians may reasonably regard these events as forming part of a stable historical tradition. Differences in descriptive language, chronology, or narrative emphasis should be interpreted as evidence of textual evolution rather than grounds for rejecting the underlying historical narrative.

In contrast to the relatively detailed Ahom chronicles, Persian historical writings produced within the Bengal Sultanate offer remarkably limited information concerning Mulagabharu. At first glance, this silence might appear to undermine the historicity of her participation. However, the absence of evidence in one documentary tradition should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of absence. Persian court chronicles were composed primarily to celebrate the achievements, legitimacy, and military successes of ruling dynasties. Their principal audience consisted of political elites associated with the court, and consequently these works tended to emphasize victories, successful campaigns, and the authority of the reigning sovereign.

Military defeats, unsuccessful frontier expeditions, and campaigns that failed to achieve their objectives frequently received only brief treatment or were omitted altogether. This pattern is not unique to the Bengal Sultanate but characterizes many forms of medieval court historiography across South Asia, the Islamic world, and Europe. Frontier campaigns conducted in geographically distant regions such as Assam often occupied only a marginal position within broader narratives devoted to imperial politics. Consequently, the absence of Mulagabharu from Persian chronicles reflects the priorities and conventions of court-sponsored historical writing rather than providing conclusive evidence against her historical role.

Furthermore, the contrasting perspectives of the Ahom and Persian sources illustrate the importance of adopting a multi-perspectival approach to frontier history. The Ahom chronicles naturally emphasize the successful defence of their kingdom and celebrate individuals who contributed to that achievement, while Persian narratives primarily record events considered significant within the political framework of the Bengal Sultanate. Each tradition therefore possesses its own institutional biases, narrative conventions, and intended audience. Rather than privileging one over the other, modern historiography seeks to reconstruct historical events by comparing these complementary perspectives alongside archaeological evidence, geographical analysis, and broader studies of state formation and military organization.

Recent scholarship on medieval Assam has increasingly moved beyond simplistic distinctions between “objective” and “biased” sources. Instead, historians recognize that every historical document reflects the political culture in which it was produced. The *Buranjis* preserve the administrative memory of the Ahom state, while Persian chronicles express the ideological concerns of the Bengal Sultanate. Both require critical reading, yet both remain

indispensable for understanding the broader political landscape of sixteenth-century northeastern India. When interpreted comparatively rather than competitively, these source traditions illuminate the complex interaction between regional kingdoms, imperial ambitions, and frontier societies.

Accordingly, the historiography of Mulagabharu should not depend exclusively upon either indigenous chronicles or external narratives. A rigorous historical reconstruction emerges only through the careful integration of multiple categories of evidence, acknowledging both the strengths and limitations of each. The convergence of the *Buranji* tradition, the broader political context of the Ahom–Turk conflict, and modern historical scholarship supports the conclusion that Mulagabharu’s intervention was rooted in genuine historical circumstances, even though later generations expanded its symbolic significance. Such an approach not only strengthens the credibility of her historical biography but also demonstrates the methodological importance of critical source analysis in reconstructing the history of medieval Assam.

Military Geography: -

The military confrontation between the Ahom Kingdom and the Bengal Sultanate under Turbak Khan in the early sixteenth century was not merely a contest of armies but a struggle shaped by geography, environment, logistics, and political resilience. While Mulagabharu has traditionally been remembered as a courageous heroine who sacrificed her life defending the Ahom kingdom, her intervention acquires greater historical significance when situated within the broader military strategy adopted by the Ahom state during the invasion. Rather than representing an isolated act of personal bravery, her participation reflected the operational flexibility of the Ahom military establishment, whose commanders effectively combined knowledge of the local environment, decentralized warfare, and collective mobilization to counter a technologically formidable invading force.

The Battle of Duimunisila must be understood within the geographical realities of the Brahmaputra Valley. Unlike the relatively open plains where cavalry and large infantry formations could manoeuvre efficiently, Upper Assam presented a landscape characterized by numerous rivers, dense forests, marshlands, seasonal floodplains, and narrow communication corridors. These environmental conditions significantly influenced military planning. The Ahom rulers had, over generations, developed an intimate understanding of this terrain and integrated environmental knowledge into their defence strategy. Rivers functioned not only as natural barriers but also as vital communication routes that facilitated the rapid movement of troops, supplies, and intelligence. Forests provided concealment for reconnaissance units and enabled surprise attacks against advancing enemy detachments, while marshes and waterlogged fields restricted the mobility of cavalry and heavy artillery.

These geographical conditions posed serious challenges to Turbak Khan’s invading army. Contemporary and later historical accounts suggest that the Bengal Sultanate fielded a well-equipped force comprising experienced cavalry, infantry, archers, elephants, and gunpowder weapons, including matchlocks and artillery. Such forces had achieved considerable success in the relatively open terrain of Bengal, where mounted warfare and artillery deployment could be executed effectively. However, the environmental conditions of the Brahmaputra Valley considerably diminished these advantages. Heavy artillery was difficult to transport through marshy ground and dense forests, while cavalry charges became ineffective on narrow embankments, uneven terrain, and river-crossing points. Consequently, the invading force found itself increasingly dependent upon elongated supply lines that were vulnerable to continuous disruption by local resistance.

Recognizing these limitations, the Ahom commanders deliberately avoided prolonged conventional engagements whenever possible. Instead, they adopted a strategy that emphasized mobility, local intelligence, and gradual attrition. Rather than seeking immediate decisive victory through direct confrontation, they exploited their familiarity with the landscape to weaken the invading army over time. Small military detachments harassed enemy supply columns, intercepted communication networks, and launched sudden attacks before withdrawing into forests or across river channels inaccessible to larger enemy formations. Such methods closely resembled what modern military historians describe as irregular or guerrilla warfare, although they emerged organically from indigenous military traditions rather than from any codified doctrine.

An equally important component of Ahom strategy was the extensive utilization of riverine warfare. The Brahmaputra and its numerous tributaries formed an interconnected transportation network that allowed the Ahom administration to maintain communication between dispersed military units. River flotillas transported soldiers, provisions, weapons, and intelligence with remarkable efficiency, enabling commanders to reinforce threatened sectors rapidly while simultaneously restricting enemy movement. Boats were not merely instruments of transport

but formed an integral part of military operations, supporting reconnaissance, supply distribution, and tactical manoeuvres. Control over waterways therefore became an essential factor in sustaining prolonged resistance against the invading forces.

The operational effectiveness of these strategies depended heavily upon the *Paik* system, which constituted the institutional foundation of the Ahom military organization. Every able-bodied male subject was enrolled into a rotational labour and military service structure that enabled the kingdom to mobilize substantial manpower during emergencies without maintaining an expensive permanent standing army. The flexibility of this system ensured that local populations could be rapidly organized for defence, logistics, construction of fortifications, transportation of military supplies, and battlefield service. Because the *Paiks* were recruited from local communities familiar with the terrain, they possessed invaluable geographical knowledge that greatly enhanced military efficiency. The defence of the kingdom thus became a collective social responsibility rather than the exclusive function of a professional military class.

Within this context, the Battle of Duimunisila represented a critical turning point in the Ahom campaign against Turbak Khan. Historical traditions indicate that the conflict witnessed intense fighting in which several distinguished Ahom commanders suffered severe casualties. Among them was Frasengmung Borgohain, one of the kingdom's senior military leaders and the husband of Mulagabharu. His death threatened not only the tactical stability of the battlefield but also the morale of the mobilized *Paik* forces. In pre-modern warfare, the loss of experienced commanders frequently produced confusion and psychological disorientation among troops, particularly during prolonged engagements against powerful adversaries.

Mulagabharu's decision to enter the battlefield immediately after her husband's death should therefore be interpreted within this broader military and psychological framework. Rather than viewing her intervention solely through the lens of personal grief or heroic sacrifice, it is more historically plausible to understand her actions as a symbolic act of leadership designed to preserve cohesion during a moment of acute crisis. By assuming visible leadership, she demonstrated that the defence of the Ahom polity transcended individual loss and remained a collective obligation. Her appearance on the battlefield likely served to reinforce the determination of soldiers who had witnessed the death of one of their principal commanders.

Although regular military command within the Ahom kingdom generally remained the responsibility of male officials, the political culture of the kingdom exhibited a degree of institutional adaptability during periods of exceptional emergency. Royal and aristocratic women occasionally assumed significant administrative, diplomatic, and ceremonial responsibilities, particularly when dynastic stability or state security was threatened. Mulagabharu's battlefield participation should therefore be viewed not as an extraordinary violation of established political norms but as an exceptional response permitted by the extraordinary circumstances confronting the kingdom. Her leadership reflected the resilience of Ahom political institutions, which prioritized the preservation of sovereignty over rigid adherence to conventional gender expectations.

The subsequent death of Mulagabharu during the engagement transformed her into one of the most enduring symbols of sacrifice in Assamese historical memory. Nevertheless, reducing her contribution to the language of martyrdom alone risks obscuring her broader historical significance. Her intervention formed part of a coordinated military effort that successfully resisted a major external invasion through effective leadership, environmental adaptation, institutional organization, and collective mobilisation. The eventual defeat of Turbak Khan cannot be attributed solely to individual heroism; rather, it resulted from the cumulative effectiveness of Ahom military strategy, which systematically exploited geographical advantages while maintaining the morale and cohesion of its defending forces.

From a military-historical perspective, therefore, Mulagabharu occupies an important position not merely as a legendary heroine but as a participant in a sophisticated defensive system that combined environmental knowledge, decentralized military organization, and adaptive leadership. Her actions illustrate how individual agency operated within broader institutional structures, demonstrating that the successful defence of the Ahom kingdom depended upon both collective organization and exceptional personal commitment. By situating Mulagabharu within the strategic realities of the Battle of Duimunisila, her legacy may be understood not simply as an episode of heroic sacrifice but as an integral component of the military resilience that enabled the Ahom state to withstand one of the most formidable invasions in its early modern history.

Frasengmung Borgohain and the Ahom Counter – Offensive: -

Among the distinguished commanders entrusted with the defence of the kingdom was Frasengmung Borgohain, one of the highest-ranking nobles of the Ahom administration. The office of Borgohain occupied an important constitutional position within the Ahom political system, combining administrative responsibility with military leadership. Frasengmung Borgohain was therefore not merely a battlefield commander but one of the principal architects of the kingdom's defence.

The Ahom military organisation differed significantly from many contemporary Indian states. Instead of maintaining a large standing army throughout the year, the kingdom relied upon the *Paik* system, under which adult male subjects rendered compulsory military and labour service to the state. During emergencies, thousands of *Paiks* could be mobilised within a relatively short period. This arrangement ensured that military manpower remained closely integrated with the agrarian economy.

Frasengmung Borgohain successfully organised resistance against Turbak Khan through coordinated attacks conducted across multiple fronts. Small detachments harassed enemy movements, destroyed communication routes, and launched surprise attacks against isolated units. Such operations gradually reduced the operational effectiveness of the invading forces.

Nevertheless, the conflict proved exceptionally fierce. During one of the major engagements preceding the Battle of Duimunisila, Frasengmung Borgohain was mortally wounded while leading his troops. His death represented a severe psychological blow to the Ahom army because he had commanded considerable respect among soldiers and administrators alike.

In many medieval armies, the death of a principal commander often resulted in confusion, declining morale, and military retreat. The Ahom army therefore faced a critical moment. It was at this juncture that Mulagabharu emerged as one of the most remarkable figures in Assamese history.

Mulagabharu's Battlefield Leadership: -

According to the Ahom *Buranjis*, Mulagabharu, the wife of Frasengmung Borgohain, refused to allow the death of her husband to weaken the defence of the kingdom. Instead of withdrawing into mourning, she is said to have donned her husband's armour, mounted his war elephant (or horse according to some later traditions), and entered the battlefield to encourage the Ahom soldiers.

This episode occupies a unique position in Assamese historical literature because it represents one of the earliest recorded instances of direct female participation in organised warfare in the region. The *Buranjis* describe her action not as an impulsive emotional response but as an expression of loyalty towards the Ahom state and determination to continue the struggle against foreign invasion.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the historical core of this narrative and later literary embellishments. The contemporary chronicles confirm Mulagabharu's participation in battle but provide comparatively limited details regarding speeches, dramatic episodes, or symbolic gestures that appear in modern retellings. Many such elements entered Assamese literature during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as part of regional nationalist interpretations.

From a historical perspective, the essential fact remains that Mulagabharu assumed an active military role after the death of Frasengmung Borgohain. This itself was extraordinary within the political culture of medieval South Asia.

The Battle of Duimunisila: -

The decisive engagement occurred at Duimunisila, a strategically important location that became the turning point of the Ahom – Turk conflict. Although the precise geographical identification of the battlefield remains debated among historians, there is broad agreement that the battle constituted the final major confrontation between the Ahom forces and Turbak Khan's army.

The Ahom commanders deliberately selected terrain favourable to their own military strengths. The battlefield contained rivers, marshes, dense vegetation, and narrow approaches that restricted the movement of Bengal's cavalry and artillery. Instead of confronting the enemy on open plains, the Ahoms utilised natural obstacles to fragment the invading army into smaller units.

During the battle, Ahom infantry launched coordinated attacks supported by elephants and archers. River flotillas disrupted enemy communications while mobile detachments attacked vulnerable sections of the invading force. The prolonged campaign had already exhausted Turbak Khan's soldiers through disease, difficult climate, shortages of supplies, and continuous guerrilla-style harassment.

Mulagabharu's presence appears to have had considerable symbolic importance. Leading soldiers after the death of one of the kingdom's principal commanders demonstrated that the struggle transcended individual leadership and represented the collective defence of the Ahom state.

Although the chronicles indicate that Mulagabharu fought courageously, they also record that she was eventually killed during the conflict. Her death transformed her into one of the earliest martyrs of Assamese military history.

The Death of Turbak Khan and the Ahom Victory: -

The Battle of Duimunisila ultimately ended in a decisive Ahom victory. During the course of the fighting, Turbak Khan was killed, an event that fundamentally altered the course of the campaign. The loss of the commander created confusion within the invading army, whose organisational structure depended heavily upon centralised leadership.

The Ahom forces immediately exploited this opportunity by launching vigorous attacks against the retreating enemy. Many Bengal soldiers were captured, while others attempted to escape through the difficult terrain of the Brahmaputra Valley. Contemporary chronicles indicate that large quantities of military equipment, elephants, horses, and firearms fell into Ahom hands.

The victory had consequences extending far beyond the immediate battlefield. Politically, it secured the western frontier of the Ahom kingdom and demonstrated that external invasions could be successfully resisted. Militarily, the conflict encouraged further improvements in fortifications, intelligence networks, and military administration. Psychologically, the victory strengthened collective confidence and reinforced loyalty towards the Ahom monarchy.

Historians generally regard the defeat of Turbak Khan as one of the major milestones in the consolidation of the Ahom kingdom during the reign of Suhungmung. Without this victory, the later political expansion and institutional development of the Ahom state might have followed a very different trajectory.

Mulagabharu and Women's Participation in Ahom Warfare: -

Mulagabharu's participation raises important questions concerning the position of women within Ahom society. Traditional interpretations often portray medieval warfare as an exclusively male domain. However, the Ahom political system presents a more complex picture.

Royal women participated in diplomatic marriages, religious patronage, economic administration, and occasionally political decision-making. Although military command generally remained a male responsibility, exceptional circumstances created opportunities for women to assume leadership roles. Mulagabharu's intervention during the crisis following Frasengmung Borgohain's death demonstrates that political necessity could override conventional gender expectations.

It would nevertheless be inaccurate to argue that women regularly served as military commanders within the Ahom kingdom. The available historical evidence suggests that Mulagabharu's participation was exceptional rather than representative. Her significance therefore lies not in proving widespread female military service but in illustrating the flexibility of Ahom political institutions during periods of existential crisis.

Her actions also reveal that concepts of loyalty and patriotism within the Ahom state were not confined exclusively to male warriors. The defence of the kingdom was understood as a collective responsibility involving members of the royal family, administrative elites, military officers, and, under extraordinary circumstances, royal women.

Historical Analysis: -

The historical importance of Mulagabharu should be assessed on three interconnected levels: -

First, her participation demonstrates the resilience of the Ahom military system. The death of a senior commander did not lead to organisational collapse because leadership could be symbolically and practically reconstituted during the battle.

Second, Mulagabharu represents an important example of female political agency in medieval northeastern India. Rather than remaining a passive observer of military events, she actively intervened at a decisive historical moment. This challenges simplistic assumptions regarding the complete exclusion of women from political and military affairs in medieval South Asia.

Third, the evolution of Mulagabharu's memory illustrates the interaction between history and cultural identity. While the *Buranjis* record her participation succinctly, later generations transformed her into an enduring symbol of Assamese courage, sacrifice, and resistance against external aggression. Historians must therefore appreciate both dimensions: the documented historical event and the subsequent construction of collective memory.

From Medieval Warrior to Cultural Icon: Mulagabharu in Assamese Nationalism and Collective Memory: -

Historical figures frequently acquire meanings that extend beyond the circumstances of their own lifetimes. While documentary evidence establishes Mulagabharu as an important participant in the Ahom resistance against the Bengal Sultanate during the sixteenth century, her enduring significance has been shaped by successive generations who reinterpreted her life according to changing political, cultural, and social contexts. The transformation of Mulagabharu from a historical actor into one of the foremost symbols of Assamese courage illustrates the dynamic relationship between history, memory, and identity formation. Understanding this transformation requires moving beyond the simple distinction between historical fact and legend to examine how collective memory selectively preserves, reshapes, and reinterprets the past in response to contemporary concerns.

Modern historiography increasingly recognizes that historical memory is neither static nor politically neutral. Rather than functioning merely as a repository of past events, collective memory actively participates in the construction of regional identities, political legitimacy, and cultural continuity. As Maurice Halbwachs argued, societies remember the past through social frameworks that continually reinterpret historical experiences according to present needs. Similarly, Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* (sites of memory) demonstrates that monuments, commemorations, literature, and public rituals become symbolic spaces where communities negotiate their historical consciousness. Within the Assamese context, Mulagabharu has gradually evolved into such a site of memory, representing not only a medieval military leader but also the enduring values of courage, sacrifice, patriotism, and resistance against external domination.

The emergence of Mulagabharu as a prominent cultural symbol became particularly significant during the colonial period. British administrators and historians produced extensive accounts of Assam's political history, yet their interpretations frequently reflected imperial assumptions that portrayed northeastern polities as peripheral or politically fragmented before colonial intervention. Although scholars such as Edward Gait acknowledged the military achievements of the Ahoms, colonial historiography generally concentrated on dynastic chronology, administrative institutions, and imperial expansion rather than exploring indigenous traditions of women's political participation. Consequently, figures such as Mulagabharu occupied only a limited place within broader colonial narratives of Indian history. This relative marginalization later encouraged Assamese intellectuals to recover regional historical personalities as symbols of cultural distinctiveness and historical continuity.

The rise of modern Assamese nationalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fundamentally altered the interpretation of medieval history. Faced with administrative restructuring, linguistic debates, and growing concerns regarding regional identity under colonial rule, Assamese scholars increasingly turned to the Ahom period as a source of historical inspiration. Medieval heroes and heroines came to represent not merely individual accomplishments but the collective resilience of Assamese society. Within this intellectual climate, Mulagabharu emerged as an exemplary figure whose sacrifice symbolized the determination of the Assamese people to defend their political autonomy and cultural identity. Her story was therefore integrated into broader narratives celebrating the historical continuity of Assam's resistance against external aggression.

Literary production played a crucial role in this transformation. Assamese historians, novelists, dramatists, and poets reinterpreted Mulagabharu's life in ways that made her accessible to wider audiences beyond academic scholarship. Historical novels and dramatic performances often emphasized emotional elements such as her loyalty, determination, and willingness to sacrifice herself following the death of Frangengmung Borgohain. These literary representations undoubtedly incorporated imaginative reconstruction, yet they also fulfilled important cultural functions by transmitting historical consciousness across generations. Rather than functioning solely as historical documents, these creative works contributed to the formation of a shared public memory in which Mulagabharu became an enduring embodiment of courage and patriotic devotion.

Theatrical traditions further reinforced her position within Assamese cultural memory. Historical dramas staged during literary conferences, educational institutions, and cultural festivals presented Mulagabharu not simply as an individual warrior but as a moral exemplar whose actions transcended conventional gender expectations. Such performances frequently highlighted themes of loyalty to the homeland, personal sacrifice, and collective responsibility. Although dramatic representations naturally employed artistic interpretation, they significantly expanded public awareness of medieval Assamese history and encouraged popular engagement with regional historical narratives.

Educational institutions likewise contributed substantially to the preservation and dissemination of Mulagabharu's legacy. School and university curricula in Assam have increasingly incorporated discussions of the Ahom kingdom, emphasizing its political institutions, military achievements, and contributions to regional history. Within these educational narratives, Mulagabharu is presented not merely as a legendary heroine but as an important historical figure whose participation illustrates the broader involvement of women in moments of political crisis. Textbooks therefore serve not only to transmit historical information but also to cultivate civic values, historical consciousness, and regional identity among successive generations of students.

Public commemorations constitute another important mechanism through which Mulagabharu's memory has been institutionalized. Statues, memorials, commemorative programmes, and official observances throughout Assam publicly acknowledge her contribution to the defence of the Ahom kingdom. These commemorative practices transform historical memory into visible elements of the cultural landscape, ensuring that her legacy remains embedded within everyday public life. Such commemorations also reflect broader processes through which societies recognize exemplary historical figures whose actions continue to inspire contemporary civic values. In this respect, Mulagabharu occupies a position comparable to other regional heroines whose historical experiences have acquired enduring symbolic significance within their respective communities.

The reinterpretation of Mulagabharu has also attracted increasing attention within the fields of women's history and gender studies. Earlier historical narratives often focused primarily upon kings, generals, and political elites, leaving women's contributions comparatively underexplored. Recent scholarship has sought to recover female agency by examining how women participated in governance, diplomacy, economic production, religious life, and military resistance. Mulagabharu's battlefield leadership therefore provides an important case study demonstrating that women's political participation in medieval Assam cannot be understood solely through domestic or ceremonial roles. Her intervention illustrates those extraordinary political circumstances occasionally created opportunities for women to assume responsibilities traditionally associated with military leadership. Nevertheless, modern historical analysis must avoid imposing contemporary gender ideologies upon medieval society. Rather than presenting Mulagabharu as evidence of generalized gender equality, it is more historically accurate to interpret her participation as an exceptional response within a political culture capable of institutional flexibility during periods of existential crisis.

At the same time, the symbolic elevation of Mulagabharu raises important historiographical questions concerning the relationship between historical evidence and cultural memory. Historical records document certain aspects of her participation, yet later generations have inevitably supplemented these records through oral traditions, literary imagination, and commemorative practices. This process should not be dismissed simply as myth-making or historical distortion. Instead, it reflects the normal evolution of collective memory, whereby societies preserve historical figures not only because of what they accomplished but also because of what they come to represent. Historians therefore bear the responsibility of distinguishing verifiable historical evidence from later cultural elaboration while recognizing that both dimensions contribute to understanding a figure's historical significance.

Recent developments in public history further demonstrate the continuing relevance of Mulagabharu within contemporary Assam. Museums, academic conferences, cultural organizations, heritage initiatives, and digital media have expanded opportunities for presenting regional history to broader audiences. Such initiatives encourage dialogue between academic research and public memory, enabling historical scholarship to inform cultural preservation while simultaneously benefiting from community engagement. As a result, Mulagabharu increasingly occupies a central position within discussions concerning regional heritage, women's history, and the historical foundations of Assamese identity.

Consequently, Mulagabharu should be understood through two complementary historical dimensions. The first concerns her documented participation in the Ahom defence against Turbak Khan during the sixteenth century,

reconstructed through critical analysis of the available historical sources. The second concerns the evolving cultural meanings attached to her memory through literature, education, public commemoration, and nationalist discourse. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive; rather, they illustrate how historical personalities continue to acquire new significance as societies reinterpret their past in light of changing political and cultural circumstances. Recognizing this distinction enables historians to preserve scholarly rigour while acknowledging the enduring influence of historical memory in shaping regional identity. In this sense, Mulagabharu remains not only an important figure in the military history of medieval Assam but also a powerful symbol through whom successive generations have articulated ideals of courage, collective responsibility, and cultural resilience.

Historiographical Debate: History, Heroism and Collective Memory: -

The figure of Mulagabharu occupies an important place in the historical consciousness of Assam, yet her representation has undergone significant transformation over time. While the Ahom *Buranjis* present a relatively concise account of her participation in the battle against Turbak Khan, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literary works, school textbooks, popular histories, dramas, and commemorative writings have expanded her story into one of the most celebrated narratives of female heroism in Assamese history. This evolution raises important historiographical questions concerning the relationship between documented history and collective memory.

The *Buranjis* were official chronicles prepared under royal patronage. Their principal objective was to record political events, royal succession, military campaigns, diplomatic relations, and administrative developments. Consequently, they generally describe Mulagabharu only in connection with the death of Frasengmung Borgohain and the subsequent continuation of the battle. Unlike modern narratives, the chronicles do not provide elaborate descriptions of emotional speeches, patriotic declarations, or detailed battlefield episodes.

Colonial historians such as Edward Gait largely accepted the *Buranji* account while integrating it into a broader political history of Assam. Gait regarded Mulagabharu as an example of exceptional courage but did not analyse her within a wider framework of gender or military history. His emphasis remained on political chronology rather than social interpretation.

During the twentieth century, Assamese historians and literary figures increasingly interpreted Mulagabharu as a symbol of regional identity and patriotic resistance. This development coincided with the emergence of modern Assamese nationalism, when historical figures were frequently invoked to strengthen cultural pride and regional identity. In this process, the historical personality of Mulagabharu acquired symbolic meanings that extended beyond the available documentary evidence.

From a historiographical perspective, neither the historical record nor the cultural memory should be dismissed. Rather, both represent different forms of historical knowledge. The *Buranjis* preserve contemporary political memory, whereas later literary traditions reveal how successive generations understood and celebrated the past. A critical historian must therefore distinguish between documented facts and symbolic interpretation without diminishing the cultural significance of either.

Critical Evaluation of the Historical Sources: -

The reconstruction of Mulagabharu's life presents several methodological challenges arising from the limited availability of contemporary documentation. Unlike major political figures such as Suhungmung or Turbak Khan, whose activities are recorded across multiple sources, references to Mulagabharu remain comparatively brief.

The Ahom *Buranjis* constitute the most important primary source. Their proximity to the events enhances their historical value; however, they were official court chronicles produced under royal supervision. As with many pre-modern chronicles, their purpose was not merely to record events but also to legitimise royal authority and celebrate political achievements. Consequently, they require careful source criticism.

Another limitation concerns chronology. The surviving *Buranjis* were copied and recopied over several centuries. Variations among manuscripts occasionally create difficulties regarding names, dates, and sequences of events. Historians such as Surya Kumar Bhuyan devoted considerable effort to comparing different manuscript traditions, yet certain uncertainties inevitably remain.

Persian chronicles relating to the Bengal Sultanate provide valuable information regarding military expeditions into Assam but contain relatively little detail concerning Ahom internal affairs. Moreover, these sources naturally present

the conflict from the perspective of the invading power. Their silence regarding Mulagabharu should therefore not be interpreted as evidence against her participation, since court historians frequently focused upon rulers and commanders rather than individual opponents.

Modern historical works depend largely upon these earlier sources. Consequently, the available evidence permits reconstruction of Mulagabharu's historical role but does not support every detail that appears in later popular narratives. Historians must therefore avoid both extremes: uncritical acceptance of legendary embellishment and excessive scepticism that dismisses regional historical traditions without adequate justification.

Mulagabharu's Legacy in Modern Assam: -

Although nearly five centuries have passed since the Battle of Duimunisila, Mulagabharu continues to occupy an important place in the cultural and historical landscape of Assam. Her memory survives not merely through historical texts but also through literature, educational curricula, public commemorations, theatrical performances, and popular culture.

In Assamese literature, Mulagabharu represents courage, sacrifice, and unwavering loyalty towards the homeland. Writers frequently compare her with other celebrated women warriors of Indian history, thereby situating Assamese historical experience within the wider national narrative of resistance and heroism.

Educational institutions across Assam introduce students to Mulagabharu as one of the outstanding female personalities of medieval Assamese history. Such representation has contributed significantly to public awareness regarding women's participation in historical processes that have traditionally been narrated through predominantly male perspectives.

The story of Mulagabharu also possesses contemporary relevance for gender studies. Modern scholarship increasingly recognises that women in pre-modern societies exercised political agency in multiple forms, including diplomacy, administration, patronage, religious leadership, and, under exceptional circumstances, military action. Mulagabharu exemplifies this broader historical reality while simultaneously illustrating the limitations imposed by patriarchal social structures.

Her legacy therefore extends beyond military history. She represents the capacity of historical memory to preserve examples of courage that transcend conventional social boundaries. For contemporary Assam, Mulagabharu remains an enduring reminder that the defence of political independence involved the collective efforts of diverse sections of society.

Conclusion: -

The history of Mulagabharu occupies an important place within the broader political, military, and cultural history of medieval Assam. Although her memory has long been preserved in Assamese historical tradition as a symbol of extraordinary courage and sacrifice, a critical examination of the available evidence demonstrates that her historical significance extends well beyond commemorative narratives. Situating her actions within the political context of the Ahom-Turk conflict reveals that her intervention formed part of a carefully organized defensive strategy shaped by the institutional resilience of the Ahom state, the operational flexibility of the *Paik* system, and the effective utilization of the distinctive riverine and forested environment of the Brahmaputra Valley. Her leadership during a moment of military crisis therefore represented both individual courage and the collective determination of the Ahom polity to defend its sovereignty against external invasion.

The comparative analysis of the Ahom *Buranjis*, Persian chronicles, and modern historical scholarship further demonstrates the importance of adopting a critical historiographical methodology when reconstructing the history of medieval northeastern India. Rather than privileging a single textual tradition, this study has shown that meaningful historical interpretation emerges through the careful comparison of multiple categories of evidence, each reflecting its own political context, institutional purpose, and narrative conventions. The *Buranjis* remain indispensable for understanding the internal political culture of the Ahom kingdom, while the relative silence of Persian chronicles reflects the conventions of court-sponsored historiography rather than necessarily undermining the historicity of regional events. Such an approach not only strengthens the historical reconstruction of Mulagabharu's life but also contributes to broader debates concerning source criticism and frontier historiography in South Asian history.

Equally significant is the transformation of Mulagabharu's historical image during the colonial and post-colonial periods. As Assamese intellectuals, writers, educators, and cultural organizations sought to articulate a distinct regional identity, her life acquired meanings that extended beyond its original historical context. Through literature, theatre, public commemorations, educational curricula, and collective remembrance, Mulagabharu emerged as one of the principal symbols of Assamese patriotism, resilience, and cultural continuity. Recognizing this evolution does not diminish her historical importance; rather, it demonstrates how historical memory continually reshapes the significance of past events in response to changing social and political circumstances. Distinguishing between documented historical evidence and later commemorative traditions therefore enables a more balanced understanding of both history and memory.

From the perspective of gender history, Mulagabharu's participation challenges simplistic assumptions regarding the political roles of women in medieval India. Although military command generally remained a male responsibility within the Ahom administrative system, her intervention illustrates that extraordinary political crises could create opportunities for women of the royal and aristocratic households to assume positions of visible leadership. Her actions should therefore be interpreted neither as evidence of universal gender equality nor as an isolated legend, but as an historically contingent example of institutional flexibility within the Ahom polity during a period of existential danger.

Ultimately, this study argues that Mulagabharu should be understood simultaneously as a historical actor and as a powerful cultural symbol. Her contribution to the defence of the Ahom kingdom was rooted in the political and military realities of the sixteenth century, yet her continuing relevance arises from the ways successive generations have interpreted her life as an embodiment of courage, sacrifice, and collective responsibility. By integrating military history, gender history, historiography, and memory studies, the present study seeks to move beyond romanticized narratives and place Mulagabharu within the wider processes of state formation, frontier conflict, and identity construction in medieval Assam. In doing so, it contributes not only to the historiography of Assam but also to broader discussions on regional resistance, women's agency, and the preservation of historical memory in South Asian history.

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