

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR- 58314

Title: **Courage in the Battlefield: Mulagabharu in the Ahom–Turk Conflict,**

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality			✓	
Clarity			✓	
Significance	✓			

Reviewer's ID: Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The manuscript titled "Courage in the Battlefield: Mulagabharu in the Ahom–Turk Conflict" offers a rigorous and timely historiographical intervention into the military and gender history of medieval Northeast India. Centered on the iconic yet understudied figure of Mulagabharu, the study meticulously reconstructs her participation in the Ahom resistance against the invading forces of the Bengal Sultanate's commander, Turbak Khan, during the sixteenth century. While regional historical memory in Assam has long celebrated Mulagabharu's ultimate sacrifice at the Battle of Duimunisila as a paramount symbol of patriotism, mainstream Indian historiography has frequently relegated her to the margins, often treating her actions as isolated folklore rather than an object of serious scholarly inquiry. The primary strength of this paper lies in its determination to move beyond romanticized or purely legendary nationalist narratives. By cross-referencing primary court-sponsored textual traditions like the *Ahom Buranjis* with available Persian records and modern socio-political scholarship, the author successfully contextualizes her actions within the complex state-formation processes, environmental realities, and military frameworks of the sixteenth-century Ahom state under Swargadeo Suhungmung.

The conceptual value of this study is particularly visible in how it links individual female agency to the structural mechanics of the Ahom military apparatus. The author provides an insightful analysis of the Paik system—a compulsory labor and military service framework that integrated the adult male peasantry directly into the defense of the state, allowing for rapid mobilization during external existential threats. By highlighting how the sudden battlefield demise of high-ranking nobles, specifically Mulagabharu's

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husband, Frasengmung Borgohain, threatened to cause a psychological and organizational collapse among the mobilized Paiks, the paper positions Mulagabharu's entry into the battlefield not merely as an emotional reaction of a grieving widow, but as a calculated, symbolic intervention designed to stabilize military morale at a critical juncture. Furthermore, the manuscript makes a notable contribution to gender history by demonstrating that while regular military command within the Ahom kingdom remained a predominantly male domain, the political culture of medieval Assam possessed a unique institutional flexibility that allowed royal women to step into active leadership roles during moments of extreme dynastic and political crisis.

Recommendations for Improvement

To further elevate the academic rigor of the manuscript and maximize its impact within wider South Asian historiography, several analytical and narrative areas should be expanded. First, while the author successfully identifies the geographical challenges encountered by Turbak Khan's forces—such as the dense forests, riverine networks, and marshes of the Brahmaputra Valley—the analysis of the Battle of Duimunisila itself remains somewhat abstracted. The paper would benefit immensely from a deeper engagement with the spatial and tactical dimensions of this specific confrontation. The author should expand the narrative prose to detail how the Ahom commanders strategically leveraged the local terrain to fragment the superior cavalry and gunpowder-reliant artillery of the Bengal Sultanate into smaller, manageable units. Integrating a more detailed discussion on the role of river flotillas and guerilla-style logistics in relation to Mulagabharu's specific deployment on the field would bridge the gap between abstract environmental history and concrete military tactics.

Second, the section dedicated to the critical evaluation of historical sources notes that surviving *Buranji* manuscripts were copied and recopied over several centuries, leading to textual variations, yet it leaves the specific nature of these variations largely unexamined. To improve the manuscript's methodology, the author should explicitly discuss how different versions of the *Buranjis*, such as the *Deodhai Asam Buranji* or court records edited by Surya Kumar Bhuyan, handle the timeline and actions of Mulagabharu. For instance, analyzing whether earlier versions present her intervention purely in terms of dynastic loyalty while later versions introduce more localized cultural elements would greatly clarify the trajectory of her legacy. Additionally, the author notes the complete silence of Persian records regarding her role. Rather than simply dismissing this as standard court-centric bias, the author should expand the discussion to explore how Islamic and Bengal Sultanate historiographical traditions systematically recorded defeats on the frontier, thereby providing a more balanced, multi-perspective critique of the conflict.

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Finally, the transition from contemporary historical reality to twentieth-century nationalist imagination requires a more robust theoretical framing. The author correctly observes that Mulagabharu was elevated to a premier symbol of patriotism during the rise of modern Assamese nationalism. However, the paper should expand its analytical narrative to explain the specific literary and political mechanisms through which this transformation occurred. Discussing how colonial-era distortions or regional anti-colonial movements actively repurposed medieval figures to construct a cohesive cultural identity would deepen the paper's historiographical value. Elaborating on how modern school curricula, regional dramas, and public commemorations choose to depict her armor, her speech, or her death would clarify the exact relationship between documented historical reality and the evolving collective consciousness of modern Assamese society.

Final Recommendation

This manuscript represents a sophisticated, well-researched, and highly valuable contribution to the study of pre-modern Indian history, gender agency, and regional resistance movements. By refusing to rely solely on popular folklore, and instead grounding the remarkable actions of Mulagabharu within the operational realities of the Paik system and the geopolitical tensions between Bengal and the expanding Ahom territorial state, the author offers a model framework for treating regional heroines with the academic seriousness they deserve. The paper successfully demonstrates that the defense of medieval Assam's sovereignty was a collective societal endeavor that occasionally overrode conventional gender boundaries during times of extreme crisis.

The recommendations outlined above—particularly regarding the spatial tactics of the riverine battlefield, a more detailed textual comparison of the *Buranji* variations, and a deeper theoretical analysis of nationalist memory-making—are intended to strengthen the existing narrative and maximize its scholarly depth. These enhancements can be smoothly integrated into the current structural layout without requiring a fundamental rewrite of the core thesis. Therefore, I highly recommend this article for publication with **Minor Revision**.