

# Queen Abhayeswari Devi and the Bijni Kingdom

**Dipanjali Barman**

Assistant Professor, Department of History, Sapatgram College  
Email: dipanj8@gmail.com

## Abstract

Queen Abhayeswari Devi was one of the benign rulers of the Bijni kingdom. She was the only ruler of the Bijni Raj Estate to receive the Kaizer-i-Hind title as a token of appreciation from the British government. During her reign, Queen Abhayeswari Devi implemented a number of policies to promote education in the Bijni Raj Estate. So, here in this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse her role and contribution towards the people of Bijni Raj Estate, which seems neglected in history. Along with this, an attempt has also been made to focus on Abhayeswari Devi's journey from a commoner to the queen of the Bijni Raj Estate.

**Keywords:** Abhayeswari Devi, Bijni Kingdom, Education, Zamindary

**Introduction:** One of the benevolent rulers of the Bijni Raj Estate was Queen Abhayeswari Devi. The largest Zamindary Estate in the undivided Goalpara district of Assam was the Bijni Raj Estate. Bijit Narayan, also known as Chandranarayan, was a member of the Koch Royal family and the founder of the Bijni ruling dynasty. After the zamindary was abolished by the government of Assam in 1956, the Bijni ruling dynasty, founded in 1671, came to an end.<sup>1</sup> The Bijni Raj Estate had previously been ruled by numerous kings, one of whom was Queen Abhayeswari Devi. She took control of the Bijni Raj Estate following the passing of her husband, King Kumudnarayan. She was the only ruler of the Bijni Raj Estate to receive the Kaizer-i-Hind title as a token of appreciation from the British government. During her reign, Queen Abhayeswari implemented a number of policies to promote education in the Bijni Raj Estate. For both boys and girls, she founded numerous schools, Sanskrit tols, and other educational institutions.

**Early History:** One Haria Mandal, a resident of the village of Chiknagram in the Khuntaghat pargana of the undivided Goalpara District, is considered to be the ancestor of the Koch royal family. The head of the twelve influential Koch families in that region was Haria Mandal. He had two sons with these two sisters—Hira and Jira, daughters of a Koch chief Haju of Hajo area, Bisu (Bishwa Shingha), the son of Hira, and Sisu, the son of Jira.

Bisu, the son of Haria Mandal, was a superb warrior. He organised the power of his tribe, vanquished every neighbouring Bhuyan one by one, and eventually established himself as the ruler of the realm that

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<sup>1</sup>Rajashree, Das, 2017, 'Queen Abhayeswari: The benevolent ruler of Bijni Raj Dynasty' International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, V413, p.105

stretched from the Karatova in the west to the Barnadi in the east. It is possible to date Bisu's rise to power is around 1515 A.D.

He reportedly took 12 years to subjugate the nearby Bhuyans before proclaiming himself king in 1527 AD.<sup>2</sup> Kochbehar was the name of his kingdom, and Kamatapur served as its capital.

His two older sons, Malladev and Sukladhvaj, were studying in Benaras at the time of Bishwa Shingha's passing, under the tutelage of a wise Brahman named Brahmananda, away from the kingdom. Another son of the deceased king, Nara Singha, seized the throne by taking advantage of the circumstances. When Malladev and Sukladhvaj heard the news, they hurried to their kingdom, assembled an army, and vanquished Nara Singha. Malladev became king and inherited Naranarayan after driving out Nara Singha. He appointed his brother Sukladhvaj (Chilarai) as his supreme commander.

Sukladhvaj was known throughout history as "the kite king" or Chilarai because of his prowess and quickness in military operations. In a short amount of time—roughly 4 years, from 1562 to 1565—the Koch army subdued all of North-Eastern India. The golden age of the Koch kingdom is regarded as the time of Naranarayan and Chilarai.

Chilarai contracted smallpox during his second expedition against Gauda and passed away on the Ganges bank sometime between 1572 and 1575.<sup>3</sup> He left his brother to take care of their son, Raghudev. For several years following Chilarai's passing, there were no more wars in the Koch Kingdom. Naranarayan became very devoted to his religion and humanitarian efforts.

Naranarayana was childless until a very advanced age. Therefore, it was anticipated that Raghudev would succeed him. However, Naranarayan was fortunate to have a son by the name of Lakshminarayan in his old age. Raghudev became suspicious as a result of this. He proceeded to Barnagar on the banks of the Manaha River at the advice of some officers and councilors and proclaimed himself as king. At this point, the pacifist Naranarayan chose to divide the kingdom over declares war on his own nephew. As a result, he gave Raghudev the areas east of the Sonkosh while keeping the western portion of the kingdom for himself and his line of ancestors. Raghudev consented to recognise his uncle's authority on his behalf. In 1581, this had taken place. Later, the eastern part of the kingdom was known as Koch Hajo, and the western part of the kingdom was known as Koch Behar, respectively.

With the division of the kingdom, Raghudev founded the Koch-Hajo estate. The son of Raghudev was Parikshit Narayan. And Parikshit Narayan was succeeded by his son Chandra Narayan allies Bijit Narayan. And Bijit Narayan was the founder of Bijni Kingdom. Rani Abhayeswari Devi was a benevolent queen of the Bijni Kingdom.

**From Commoners to the Queen of the Bijni Raj Estate:** Raghudev Narayan established his Kingdom at Barnagar. Later, the capital was renamed Ghila Vijaypur. After the death of Raghudeva, his son Parikshit Narayan became the king. The Mughal invasion took place during the reign of Parikshit Narayan. As a result, part of the kingdom indirectly fell under the Mughals. The rest of the kingdom was limited to the territory from the Manah River in the east to the Sonkosh River in the west. By accepting the submission of Parikshit Narayan, Chandra Narayan became the king of a part of the estate. The state division of Chandra Narayan was the state of Bijni. There were two parganas in the Bijni kingdom-

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2 S.L,Baruah 2013, "A Comprehensive History of Assam" Munshram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd, New Delhi, p.204

3 Ibid, p.212

Habraghat and Khutaghat. Khutaghat is on the north bank of the Brahmaputra, and Habraghat is on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.

Chanvra Narayan was succeeded by his son Jai Narayan. Jay Narayan helped General Ram Singh when he came to invade the Ahom kingdom. Ram Shing was pleased with Jay Narayan's bravery and gave him the title of Raja. King Jay Narayan was succeeded by his son Shiva Narayan. When Shiv Narayan grew old, he made his son Bijay Narayan as the king of the kingdom. During his reign, the kingdom of Bijni was shrunk. Balaram Choudhury, alias Kamallochan of Mespara, and Jaynarayn Sharma of Chapar established petty kingdoms by deception.

After the death of Bijay Narayan, there was anarchy in the kingdom. Rudra Narayan, a member of the dynasty, conspired with the British and ascended the throne of Bijni. Three sons of Bijay Narayan, Devi Narayan, Mukunda Narayan, and Mahendra Narayan, were deprived of their rights. Mukanda Narayan, with the help of the Bhutanese King, drove out Rudra Narayan and ascended the throne of Bijni. He was childless and adopted Balin Narayan, son of his elder brother Devi Narayan. Balin Narayan was succeeded by his son Amrit Narayan. After the death of Amrit Narayan, there was a stir about who would sit on the throne as the king had no child. Finally, his eldest queen, Bhogeshwari, took the throne. The queen adopted a royal child named Kumud Narayan. And Rani Abhayeswari was the second queen of Kumud Narayan. As Kumud Narayan remained childless for a long time, he married Abhayeswari Devi, a beautiful young woman from Uttar Salmara, desiring a son.

After the death of King Kumud Narayan, the Bijni kingdom was in great chaos. A quarrel between the two queens led to the outbreak of civil war. As a result, the younger queen Abhayeswari Devi fled for her life. She lost an eye in the fight. There were two sides between the two queens among the people. Finally, Queen Abhayeswari Devi filed a case in 1887 in the Goalpara Deputy Judge's Court seeking state inheritance.<sup>4</sup> According to the court opinion, both queens would supervise the zamindari and enjoy the right equally. However, within a short time, the elder queen Siddheswari died. After this, Queen Abhayeswari ruled the kingdom of Bijni alone, and she ruled the kingdom as queen for the rest of her life.

### **Rani Abhayeswari and Her Time:**

Rani Abhayeswari Devi was one of the great rulers of Bijni Raj Estate. She tried to listen to people's problems and was very down-to-earth. Rani Abhayswari Devi was also referred to as the estate's mother by the residents. The capital Bijni Raj Estate Dumuria was completely destroyed by the earthquake that occurred on July 12th, 1897.<sup>5</sup> After that, she reconstructed the new capital of the Bijni Kingdom, first at Jogighopa and then at Ram Raja's fort. She gave the newly constructed Bijini Raj Estate capital the name as Abhayeswari. She lavishly embellishes the new city. She enhances the city's beauty by planting Devadaru trees (*Cedrus deodara*) alongside the road.

Rani Abhayeswari Devi also had a strong interest in education and learning. She established Sanskrit Tol's for learning Sanskrit and Abhayswari High School for the advancement of education. She constructed unique hostels just for poor students. Due to Rani Abhayeswari's interest in education, the Jogendra Narayan Memorial High School was later established at the king's initiative to advance women's

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<sup>4</sup> Sambhu Charan Barman and Nityananda Barman(ed), 2020, "*Sidli Rajya Aru Bijni Rajyar Itihas*", Akhar Prakash, Guwahati-1, p.150

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.151

education. An important fact was that the authority used every expense related to education and hired teachers from Kolkata to teach at Abhayeswari High School.

Rani Abhayeswari was able to deal with the unrest in the estate and establish peace in the kingdom with the help of the astute Diwan Rabdanath Halder and Balisramanna Dutta. To make up for the lack of funds during World War I, the British government collected money from its colonies. Rani Abhayeswari immediately responded when the British government asked for money by offering 3 lakh in cash, one car, and one ambulance. Rani was given the title Kaizer-i-Hind by the British government after being pleased with her prompt response. Rani Abhayeswari passed away in 1918,<sup>6</sup> most likely after fourteen years in power. The last rite of Rani was carried out in Jogighopa, the location of the confluence of the Manah and Brahmaputra. As Rani was childless, Jogendra Narayan succeeded her upon her passing. Jgendra Narayan was the son of Kirti Narayan Konwar. Bhairabendra Narayan succeeded Jogendra Narayan. Till the Indian Government seized the zamindary in 1956, Bhairabendvra Narayan ruled the Bijni Raj Estate.

**Conclusion:** By analyzing the paper closely, it can be said that Rani Abhayeswari Devi played a prominent role in the development of the education system in Bijni Raj Estate. Abhayeswari High School, located in present-day Abhayapuri Town in Bongaigaon district, was one of the great examples of her benevolent work. Rani's contribution towards the environment and beautification of her kingdom is still reflected in the Abhayapuri area of the Bongaigaon district. But in spite of such a fact, Abhayeswari Devi is neglected in history.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.