

# Queen Abhayeswari: The benevolent ruler of Bijni Raj Dynasty

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## **Abstract**

*Queen Abhayeswari Devi was one of the benevolent rulers of Bijni Raj Estate. She got the opportunity to rule over the Bijni Raj Estate after the death of her husband, king Kumudnarayan. The Bijni Raj Estate was the largest Zamindari Estate of undivided Goalpara district of Assam. The founder of the Bijni ruling dynasty, Bijit Narayan also known as Chandranarayan was a descendent of the Koch Royal family. The Bijni Ruling Dynasty established by Bijit Narayan in 1671, came to an end in 1956 after abolition of the zamindari by the government of Assam. Till that time many rulers ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate. Queen Abhayeswari Devi was one of them. She was the only ruler of Bijni Raj Estate who was honoured by the British administration by offering the Kaizer-i-Hind gold medal. Queen Abhayeswari in her tenure adopted a series of measures for the spread of education in Bijni Raj Estate. She established many schools, Sanskrit tols and other centres of learning for both boys and girls. Queen Abhayeswari introduced in her kingdom the Dhap Salami system which later on proved to be a very good medium for maintaining cordial relation between the rulers and the subjects.*

**Keywords:** *Queen Abhayeswari Devi, Contribution, Bijni Raj Estate, Benevolent ruler.*

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Queen Abhayeswari was the widow of king Kumudnarayan of Bijni Raj Estate. The personal life of king Kumudnarayan was eventful, romantic and tragic also at the same time. His first wife was Queen Siddheswari Devi. Kumudnarayan possessed a romantic and adventurous mind and was fond of hunting. One day while he went out for hunting in a nearby place, he saw a group of girls, who were going out for fishing. The king noticed one very beautiful girl among them, whose name was Abhaya. Later Kumudnarayan married her following all Hindu rituals and brought her to the royal palace. Thus a simple village girl named Abhaya became the Queen of Bijni Raj Estate. [1] After the death of king Kumudnarayan and the first Queen Siddheswari Devi, Queen Abhayeswari became the

sole owner of the Bijni Kingdom. Queen Abhayeswari, though not formally educated so much, rose to the occasion, so far administration of the kingdom was concerned. Religious at heart, she was always concerned about the well being of the subjects.

The history of the Bijni Raj Estate is one of the important parts of local history. But very few people know about the history of Bijni Rajas and their contribution or patronization towards the society. Very limited research works have been done to explore the history of Goalpara and Bijni Raj Estate. Most people know Bijni Rajas as zamindars only. It is true that it was a zamindari estate. But the rulers of Bijni got the opportunity to use the title Raja (king) before their names. It was the Mughal rulers who offered them the title Raja. Later on the title Raja was acknowledged by the British rulers of India also. [2] There were twelve permanently settled estates in the undivided Goalpara district at the time of permanent settlement. These permanently settled estates were included in six zamindaries, namely Bijni, Gauripur, Mechpara, Chapar, Karaibari and Parbatjoar. Among these six different zamindaries only the zamindars of Bijni were allowed to use the title Raja. [3] It happened only because of their benevolent works and their contribution towards the development of their estate as well as, the help they rendered to the Mughal rulers in their Assam expedition.

The proposed study is an attempt to discuss about the contribution of Queen Abhayeswari to the people of Bijni Estate. Though many rulers of Bijni Dynasty got the opportunity to rule over the Bijni Estate, Queen Abhayeswari was different from them in many respects. She had neither any Royal Background nor any formal education. But she was able to overcome all her shortcomings and proved herself as a good administrator by her welfare measures.

In spite of her benevolent measures, the contribution of Queen Abhayeswari is absent in the History of Assam as well as in the History of India. Some prominent writers of Assam history have mentioned about the existence of Bijni Raj Estate

and their lineage with Koch Royal family. But they have neglected the latter rulers of Bijni Estate, specially about Queen Abhayeswari Devi, who was the only Queen to get the opportunity to rule over the Bijni Estate. Therefore it is necessary to take steps to explore the history of Bijni Raj Dynasty and their contribution to society as a subject of study with observation before they have totally been destroyed by crucial time.

## II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BIJNI RAJ DYNASTY

The founder of the Bijni ruling dynasty, Bijit Narayan alias Chandra Narayan was a descendent of the Koch ruler Biswa Singha. In the first part of sixteenth century, Biswa Singha established the Koch kingdom in Koch Bihar. After his death, king Naranarayan with the help of his mighty brother Chilarai (Sukladhvaj) extended the geographical and cultural boundary of Koch Bihar kingdom to a great extent. [4] At that time, a great part of lower Assam was included in the Koch kingdom. After the death of Chilarai, in the year 1580 A.D., king Naranarayan divided the vast Koch kingdom into two parts. Koch Bihar proper was retained by Naranarayan and his son Lakshminarayan. The rest of the Koch kingdom, which included parts of Darrang, Kamrup and present Goalpara district of Assam was renamed as Koch Hajo and was given to the son of Chilarai, Raghudev Narayan. [5]

The Koch Hajo kingdom, established by Raghudeva did not remain as a compact state for long time. In course of time the Ahoms and the Mughals exercised their political supremacy over the Koch Hajo kingdom. Darrang *Rajvamsa* became a tributary under the Ahoms and Bijni *Rajvamsa* became a tributary kingdom of the mighty Mughals. [6] The Mughal rulers established two kinds of zamindaries in Eastern India. In the First category were those who had independent ruling estates. The rulers of these estates were recognised as Raja (hereditary zamindar) who acknowledged suzerainty of the Mughal rulers. They had to pay annual tribute to the Mughal emperor. In the second category were those officers, called Choudhuris who were responsible for collecting revenues. They also came to be known as zamindars in the later period. The Rajas of Bijni belonged to the first category and they ruled as hereditary rulers in their estate. [7]

After the death of Parikshit Narayan, son of Raghudeva, there existed a vast restlessness throughout the kingdom of Koch Hajo. In the midst of this restlessness, Bijit Narayan, son of Parikshit Narayan established the 'Bijni kingdom', comprising a big part of Koch Hajo. [8] The name Bijni, now a subdivision of Chirang district of

Bodoland Territorial Council Area in Assam, comes from the name of the king Bijit Narayan.

Starting from Bijit Narayan, the founder of Bijni Raj Estate many rulers from this ruling family ruled Bijni Raj Estate to the abolition of Zamindari by the Government of Assam in 1956. After Chandranarayan many rulers from the Bijni family namely- Raja Jay Narayan, Sibanarayan, Bijjoynarayan, Mukundanarayan, Haridebnarayan, Balitnarayan, Indranarayan, Amritnarayan, Kumudnarayan, Queen Abhayeswari Devi, Jogendranarayan and Bhairabendranarayan ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate. [9] Though many Rajas ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate, the proposed work is a discussion only about the contribution of Queen Abhayeswari Devi, for the all round development of her kingdom.

## III. CONTRIBUTION OF QUEEN ABHAYESWARI TOWARDS THE BIJNI RAJ ESTATE

Queen Abhayeswari was the second wife of Raja Kumudnarayan. It was customary for the kings of Bijni kingdom to marry several times. Kumudnarayan had also two queens. The first queen was Siddheswari Devi and the second one was Abhayeswari Devi. But the relation between them was very bitter. After the death of king Kumudnarayan the condition of the kingdom further deteriorated. The officials and state servants were divided into two groups, supporting two queens. Several cases were also filed in Calcutta Court claiming the ownership of the kingdom by the two queens. The court in its verdict declared both the queens as joint owners of Bijni Kingdom. But in the meantime Rani Siddeswari died. After her death Rani Abhayeswari became the sole owner of the Bijni Kingdom. [10]

Queen Abhayeswari proved herself as a good administrator. She always attended the grievances of the people. Any subject could meet her in the morning and tell about his grievances and problems. She tried to solve them as far as possible and advised the suffering people. She was very liberal in sanctioning monetary grant to the poor people of her kingdom. For all these good qualities people used to call her '*Rani Maa*' (Queen Mother).

During the reign of Queen Abhayeswari, the First World War started. At the call of Mahatma Gandhi, Abhayeswari made a donation of Rupees one lakh in cash to the allied forces, where the British were a member. Moreover she donated one ambulance. She further offered the Services of one thousand *Jawans*, who were her subjects to fight for the British cause. For all these valuable service the British government honoured queen Abhayeswari by offering 'Kaizer-i-Hind' Gold medal. [11]

In order to establish a very cordial relation between the king and the subjects, Abhayeswari introduced the system of 'Dhap Salami'. It was generally held during the time of Durga Puja. On the day of Vijaya Dashami, a beautiful *Mandap* (temporary decorated tent) was prepared, inside which seats were arranged for all important officials like Barua, Choudhury, Purohit Pandit, Sukhbasu, Gaonburah, Jotdar, Lakherajdar, Debottar, Pirottar, Brahmottar bhogi, important Praja, Well Wishers etc. On the other side the Royal throne was placed, decorated with Diamond, Gems, Ivory and Horns of Rhino etc. As soon as the king or queen comes to the mandap and takes his or her seat, the Rajpurohit pronounce stotras and mantras (hymn) for the welfare of the king as well as the subjects. The officers who come from mufossil areas exchange their views with the king. They also make presentation to the king. These presentations were called 'Salami'. The local officers and important Prajas also made 'Salami' to the king. [12] This function created a very happy atmosphere and established cordial relation between the ruler and the subjects.

In 1897 A.D., a dreaded earthquake occurred and badly damaged the royal palace of Dumuria. After that Queen Abhayeswari with her subjects shifted her capital in Jogikhopa for the time being. At last for the security reasons she established the capital near 'Ram Raja's Garh' and named the new capital as 'Abhayapuri'. From that time upto the abolition of zamindari in 1956, Abhayapuri was the capital of Bijni Raj Estate. [13] Queen Abhayeswari contributed a lot in the field of education also. In 1904 A.D., Queen Abhayeswari established a High School in the capital of Bijni Raj Estate i.e., Abhayapuri. The name of the school was 'Abhayeswari High School'. The school is still in existence with all modern amenities proclaiming the glory of the past. Establishment of an educational institution by an uneducated lady is a rare example not only in the history of Assam but also of India. Queen Abhayeswari did not collect any fees from the students of this school. Moreover she constructed three hostels for the students, who came from different parts of the kingdom. The salary of the teachers and the servants, who were engaged in the maintenance of these hostels came from the royal treasury. As a result of such kinds of facilities many students from far off places came to Abhayapuri for pursuing education.

In 1907 A.D. Queen Abhayeswari established a 'Sanskrit Tol' in Abhayapuri. But in later period the 'tol' was closed for the scarcity of students. [14] Another praiseworthy contribution of Queen Abhayeswari was the provision of free quarters to the teachers who came from different places of Assam and even from outside Assam. At

that time most of the senior teachers came from outside. All of them were provided with quarters, as a result of which they could concentrate on their duties very sincerely.

For providing education to the girls of Bijni Raj Estate Queen Abhayeswari established 'Abhayapuri Balika Vidyalaya' in the year 1910. At that time the school was the only centre of female education of the Bijni Raj Estate.

After a lot of contribution in different fields Queen Abhayeswari breathed her last in 1918 during the time of Durgapuja.[15] Before her death, she adopted Jogendranarayan as her son and heir to the throne of Bijni. Jogendranarayan was distantly related to the Royal family.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus we have come to the conclusion of our study that Queen Abhayeswari was a good administrator and benevolent ruler of Bijni Raj Estate. After the death of her husband, king Kumudnarayan she had to take over the burden of Bijni Raj Estate. For a lady who had no royal background and no formal education it was really difficult to rule over a zamindari estate. But Queen Abhayeswari was able to prove herself as a good administrator by her different welfare schemes and good maintenance of her estate. Queen Abhayeswari was deeply religious and constructed many temples in the capital of Bijni Raj Estate. Thus she was able to win the heart of her subjects.

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**DECLARATION**

I, Rajasree Das, solemnly declare that the article “Queen Abhayeswari: The benevolent ruler of Bijni Raj Dynasty” has been written by me. It has been prepared for publication in the SSRG- International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (ISSN-23942703). The article is original one. It had neither been published nor submitted for publication elsewhere.

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