

CHAPTER II

Genealogy of the Bijni Raj Dynasty

The genealogy of the Bijni Raj Dynasty has its own share of controversy. But before the discussion of genealogy of the Bijni *Rajas* it is indispensable to highlight the origin of the Bijni *Rajas*. The great Koch King Naranaryan ruled over the Koch kingdom with a grand manner. However towards the end of his rule, his nephew 'Raghudev Narayan' (son of Chilarai) dismayed against his uncle, king Naranarayan. King Naranarayan however did not start any punitive action against Raghudev Narayan. He moderately offered the eastern part of his big Koch kingdom to Raghudev Narayan in order to stay away from family quarrel in 1581 A.D. River Sonkosh, which flows through old Goalpara district and new Dhubri district was acknowledged as a separating line between two Koch kingdoms. Yet Raghudev Narayan was not an independent ruler. He had to pay yearly tribute to King Naranarayan. The newly generated kingdom was named 'Koch Hajo'.¹

King Naranarayan died in 1587 A.D., at the age of 79 years. At his old age, a son was born to him, who was named as Lakshminarayan. Obviously he became the future inheritor for the throne of Koch Bihar. Raghudev Narayan (Chilarai's son), became dissatisfied with all these developments, because Lakshminarayan was younger to him. So Raghudev Narayan threw away his allegiance to the Koch Bihar Kingdom and affirmed sovereignty for his kingdom 'Koch Hajo'.² However Raghudev Narayan was very soon murdered by some miscreant, as a result of which his son Parikshit Narayan was declared as heir to the throne. Likewise his father, Parikshit Narayan also acknowledged total autonomy of Koch-Hajo kingdom and started a war in opposition to his uncle. Thus civil war began between the two Koch kingdoms.³

The civil war continued for nineteen years and both the Koch Kingdoms suffered badly throughout the period of Civil War. Another remarkable development of this Civil War was that Koch Bihar king Lakshminarayan sought the help from Mughal authority to fight against Parikshit Narayan of Koch Hajo. Similarly Parikshit Narayan also approached the Ahoms, who

were ruling in the east, for help in fighting against the king Lakshminarayan.⁴ In course of the war, Koch Hajo king Parikshit Narayan was imprisoned by the Mughal armed force and was taken to Dacca. Koch Bihar king Lakshminarayan also had to obey the orders of the Mughal king Jahangir, which were served through the *Nawab* of Dacca. All these developments greatly dissatisfied the subjects of 'Koch Bihar' and 'Koch Hajo'.⁵ The dissatisfaction of the masses rose so high in both the Koch kingdoms that, they augmented in rebellion against foreign intervention in the administration.

The Mughal king Jahangir observed all these developments very carefully and released king Parikshit Narayan at Delhi. Parikshit Narayan also showed his repentance at the consequence of the Civil War and became very sad. On his way back to Koch Hajo, he died in 1616 A.D., at Tribeni Sangam, Allahabad. Koch Bihar king Lakshminarayan also became very sad and unhappy that he left his kingdom and resettled himself at Koch Hajo and lived there till his death in 1627 A.D.⁶ Demise of Parikshit Narayan opened a new road for the emergence of Bijni Raj on the remnant of the Koch Hajo Kingdom. The responsibility for the organization of a new kingdom was taken up by Chandra Narayan (Bijit Narayan), efficient son of Parikshit Narayan.⁷

2.1. Chandra Narayan (Bijit Narayan):

After the death of Parikshit Narayan his son Chandra Narayan alias Bijit Narayan carved out a part of Koch Hajo kingdom and gave it a new name 'Bijni'. He became the king of the newly recreated Bijni kingdom. For this purpose, he had to take a written *Farman* from the Mughal emperor.⁸ The northern boundary of this new kingdom was covered by 'Bhutan hills'. On the southern side, there was 'Mandachal' alias lower part of Garo hills. On the eastern side there was river 'Manas' and on the western side, there was river 'Sonkosh'. The geographical area of Goalpara district created by East India Company in 1822 is roughly the area covered by Bijni Kingdom.⁹

After the grant of Charter by the Mughal king, Chandranarayan ruled in Bijni from 1671 to 1696 A.D. He may be regarded as the real founder of Bijni Kingdom. He set up the centre of administration at a place named Bijni and began to rule the newly created state. It was from him, that the newly created Bijni Kingdom and the Bijni Royal dynasty started.¹⁰ Chandranarayan

paid an annual tribute of Rs. 5998/- to the Mughal king. Later on, 68 elephants were given annually in lieu of cash. But due to inconvenience in transporting the elephants to the Mughal territory, it was again decided to pay the tribute in the form of money. This time it was fixed at Rs. 2000/- annually. According to the sources left by Tarini Sen, Chandranarayan ruled in Bijni Kingdom from 1671 to 1693 A.D.¹¹

2.2. Raja Jay Narayan:

After the death of Chandranarayan, his son Jay Narayan was affirmed as king of Bijni *Rajya*. He was only two years old, when he ascended the throne. During the reign of this minor king Jay Narayan, Ramsingha, the Mughal general of Mughal king Jahangir invaded Assam. The attack was led against the Ahom king and the king of 'Darangi *Rajya*', who was an ally of the Ahom king.¹² The invasion of Ramsingha had to proceed through the Bijni *Rajya*. So the cooperation of Bijni *Raja* and his subjects was necessary for the Mughal army. Of course, Ramsingha was experienced enough and he could draw all kinds of collaboration from the Bijni *Raja* and his subjects.

The Bijni King Jay Narayan helped the Mughal invaders liberally. He hoped that after the invasion against the Ahoms was over he would be given the status of an independent king. He sought to make himself free from the burden of paying annual tribute to the Mughals. Ramsingha being a Hindu easily mixed up with the people of Bijni *Rajya*. He had many Rajput soldiers in his army, who were Hindus. Ramsingha liberally encouraged them to marry Hindu girls, specially from Koch Rajbongshi community.¹³ Healthy and warlike youths of Hindu community were admitted into the Mughal army. They were of much help for the Mughals in fighting against the Ahom king.

There is a place named 'Boitamari' in the district of present Bongaigaon. It is said that there was a big camp of Mughal army at this place. Some stone pillars can be seen at Boitamari and nearby places like Amguri, Dewangaon, Dhaknamari etc. These were probably the ruins of some revenue offices under the Muslims (*Nawab* of Dacca). Some ponds were also dug by the Mughal army near Boitamari. These were Ganak *pukhuri*, Padma *pukhuri*, Bhot *pukhuri*, Dighi *pukhuri* etc.¹⁴

There is a huge embankment towards the northern side of present Abhayapuri town, which is known as 'Ram *Rajar Garh*'. It is said that, Mughal general Ramsingha in his march towards Guwahati to fight against the Ahom Army, excavated this embankment. During the big earthquake of 1897 a 'Sivlinga' and stone plate have come out from this embankment.¹⁵ Thus the route to Guwahati followed by Ramsingha to fight against the Ahoms still bears testimony of Ramsingha's great march.

The joint army of Mughal general Ramsingha and Bijni king Jay Narayan fought against the Ahom army. In this battle, Jay Narayan and his army fought so bravely that Ramsingha was very much impressed. He wrote a letter to the Mughal king Jahangir that, Jay Narayan should be allowed to use the title '*Raja*' before his name.¹⁶ The Mughal king accepted the proposal. From that time, the rulers of Bijni Estate used the title '*Raja*' before their names. Later on the title '*Raja*' was acknowledged by the British rulers of India also.¹⁷

But the *Nawab* of Dacca did not like the act of using the title *Raja* by the Bijni king. He considered it to be an insult to the *Nawab*. So he was aggrieved. Meanwhile, *Raja* Jay Narayan married a very beautiful girl of '*Gopa*' Community (community of milkman) following the *Gandharva* System. Jay Narayan already had married three queens. But there were no children from their side.¹⁸

The *Nawab* of Dacca was not satisfied with Jay Narayan. He was opposed to the use of the title '*Raja*' by the Bijni king. So the *Nawab* invited Jay Narayan. When Jay Narayan with his newly married wife reached Dacca, he was made a captive on the plea of misrule in his kingdom. Jay Narayan had to remain there for several years as a captive. His newly married queen gave birth to three sons, one after another. Their names were, Shivnarayan, Harnarayan and Dugdhanarayan. However Jay Narayan had to die as a captive. After the death of Jay Narayan, his three sons were sent to Bijni by the *Nawab*. These three princes, though very much loyal to the *Nawab* during their stay at Dacca, revolted immediately after they reached their state (Bijni). The *Nawab* sent punitive forces and prince Harnarayan and prince Dugdhanarayan were arrested. Prince Shivnarayan absconded himself and took refuge under the Bijni ruler Chaturising.¹⁹

The existence of Chaturising on the throne of Bijni State was itself an exceptional incident. When *Raja* Jay Narayan was under house-arrest at Dacca, the administration of Bijni

deteriorated to a great extent. Under such circumstances some well wishers of Bijni *Rajya* decided to nominate one Dayal Sing to the throne. They found many kingly qualities in him, though he was a common man. Jay Narayan, *Raja* of Bijni was under house-arrest at that time in Dacca. The important personalities of Bijni approached Devaraj also, who was the administrator of lower Bhutan, neighbouring Bijni. Bhutan king Devaraj also helped Dayalsing in becoming the ruler of Bijni Kingdom.²⁰ Dayalsing was a good ruler. He died after a few years of good administration. After him, his son Chatursing ascended the throne of Bijni. During this period Shivnarayan and Dugdhanarayan, both son of Jay Narayan came to Bijni and approached Chatursing. Chatursing though not happy at heart, welcomed them to the Bijni Estate.

All of them put their heads together and decided to attack the *Nawab* of Bengal. But Chatursing was a born conspirator. He made a conspiracy of betraying Shivnarayan and Dugdhanarayan, in the midst of war. Accordingly, the war started and Chatursing, instead of fighting against the Mughal army, began to kill the army and soldiers of Bijni i.e. of Shivnarayan and Dugdhanarayan. Shivnarayan fled away from the battlefield and reached Bhutan. He approached the king of Bhutan for help. It was with the help of the Bhutan king Devaraj, Chatursing was completely defeated by Shivnarayan.²¹ Chatursing fled away. Mughal *Badshah* and his subordinate ruler, the *Nawab* of Dacca made a treaty with Shivnarayan. Shivnarayan had to pay a nominal tribute of 68 elephants annually. King Shivnarayan ruled for forty years. He had five queens, who gave birth to 18 sons. Among these sons, Vijaynarayan was formally enthroned by king Shivnarayan during his life time. Shivnarayan died in the year 1758 A.D.²²

2.3. Raja Vijaynarayan:

Vijaynarayan was the seventh son of the deceased king Shivnarayan, who had eighteen sons. His mother was Kamini Devi, who was the chief queen of king Shivnarayan. The accession of Vijaynarayan was not liked by his brothers, many important officials of the court and many influential persons of Bijni kingdom. Naturally, they started conspiracy against Vijaynarayan in order to throw him out of power. On the other hand *Raja* Vijaynarayan was so simple and religious person that he pardoned them every time.²³

Taking opportunity of the simplicity of the king, one Balaram Choudhury alias Kamal Lochan Choudhury, who was the care taker of Mechpara and Tisimpur *Pargana* joined hands

with the representative of *Badshah* of Delhi. He prayed the *Nawab* of Dacca, to make him the *Raja* of Mechpara Estate. Thus he wanted to become completely free from the control of Bijni *Raja* Vijaynarayan. The creation of Mechpara *Zamindary* weakened the Bijni kingdom to a great extent. Henceforth the rule of Mechpara Estate had direct relation with the *Nawab* of Dacca in matters of administration and annual tribute.²⁴

King Vijaynarayan ruled from 1759 A.D. to 1770 A.D. During his reign the British East India Company started trade and commerce in Assam also. At that time there was a river port at Goalpara, on the banks of river Brahmaputra. This port was naturally under the jurisdiction of Bijni *Rajya*. But the British authorities did not take any permission from Vijaynarayan, the ruler of Bijni. The British authorities kept some armed soldiers also at the river port at Goalpara. This led to controversy and resulted in a battle between the army of Vijaynarayan and the British East India Company. Vijaynarayan was defeated in the battle and he was sent to Calcutta as a prisoner. While going to Calcutta, he wanted to have a bath in the holy river Ganges. But while taking bath, he was unexpectedly knocked down by the deep water of the river and died. Probably it was a conspiracy made by the British authorities.²⁵

After the death of Vijaynarayan, again anarchy started in Bijni Kingdom. Many relatives of the deceased king submitted their rival claims to become the king of Bijni. A prince, Rudranarayan by name forcibly ascended the throne with the help of the British East India Company. As a result the future of three sons of the deceased king Vijaynarayan became uncertain. At this juncture, one intelligent and prudent man, namely Budharu Ram Baruah, along with the three sons of Vijaynarayan, approached the king of Bhutan for help. The king of Bhutan agreed to help them and selected the middle prince (second son of Vijaynarayan) to be the king of Bijni. He also agreed to send an army to Bijni accompanying them. Prince Mukundanarayan along with his brothers and the army of Bhutan king recovered Bijni from the hands of Rudranarayan, the usurper. Rudranarayan fled away and Mukundanarayan formally ascended the throne of Bijni.²⁶

2.4. Raja Mukundanarayan:

Raja Mukundanarayan was an intelligent man. As he was God loving and God fearing, his own brothers Devinarayan and Mahendranarayan liked him and believed him. Administration was conducted in a smooth manner, which resulted in peace and tranquillity in Bijni Kingdom.

Mukundanarayan had seven queens, but none of them had been able to give an heir to the throne. So Mukundanarayan adopted his nephew Balitnarayan (son of his elder brother Devinarayan) as an heir to the throne. Mukundanarayan had deep respect for his elder brother Devinarayan. So the sudden death of his elder brother moved him so much that he himself died after two and half months of his elder brother's death. Mukundanarayan died in 1788 A.D. It was during the reign of Mukundanarayan that, two *parganas* of Bijni kingdom (Chapar and Mechpara) separated itself from Bijni and came under East India Company.²⁷

2.5. Raja Haridevvarayan:

After Mukundanarayan, his adopted son Balitnarayan should have ascended the throne of Bijni. But he was a minor. The East India Company began to interfere in the internal affairs of administration. So a section of wise people led by one Baneswari Devi preferred Haridevvarayan as the king of Bijni. As a result Haridevvarayan ascended the throne of Bijni. In 1760 the East India Company got the right of collecting '*Diwani*' from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam. Gradually the company received the power of collecting '*Diwani*' from Bijni *Rajya* also. One representative of East India Company, Sir Hiuren established a *thana* at Rangamati.²⁸ The entire Rangamati area was separated from Bijni *Rajya*. At that time, the Bijni *Raja* had to pay Rs. 2000/- annually to the Mughal *Badshah* in lieu of supplying elephant. Raja Haridevvarayan did not live long. After two years of reign, he fell victim of a conspiracy and was killed. After his death, there was lawlessness throughout the kingdom.²⁹

2.6. Raja Balitnarayan:

Balitnarayan was the adopted son of *Raja* Mukundanarayan. In 1790, when Haridevvarayan died, *Rani* Kamaleswari Devi, first queen of Mukundanarayan was alive. Her efforts made it possible to enthrone Balitnarayan, who was an adopted son of *Raja* Mukundanarayan. During the reign of Balitnarayan, a British official, whose name was David Scott was stationed at Goalpara as a Collector. Taking opportunity of internal trouble in the Bijni

Kingdom, David Scott withdrew the power of exercising '*Diwani*' and '*Faujdari*' in the *pargana* of Khuntaghat and Habraghat.³⁰

Raja Balitnarayan was very much offended by the actions of David Scott. He asked his subjects to commence a movement in opposition to the domineering activities of British officials. The people therefore started the movement, but it was not so powerful to stand against the British. King Balitnarayan was a disciplined and religious minded king. He never encouraged his subjects to adopt unfair means to drive out the British from Bijni Kingdom. Balitnarayan made donation of lands (*Brahmottar* and *Devottar*) to the *Brahmanas* and temples. He died in 1829 A.D. after 36 years of reign.³¹

2.7. Raja Indranarayan:

Indranarayan was the son of *Raja* Balitnarayan. He ascended the throne of Bijni in 1829, after the death of his father. After a brief rule for less than ten years, he breathed his last. Like his father, he was a peace loving and religious person. During his period Sir Jenkins was the Collector of Goalpara district. This post was created in 1822. Mr. Jenkins adopted the policy of non-interference in the internal matters of administration of the native rulers.³²

2.8. Raja Amritnarayan:

Amritnarayan succeeded his father Indranarayan at a comparatively young age. He appointed his elder brother Mrigendranaryan in the post of *Subadar* and entrusted with him many responsible work of administration. His other relatives were also appointed in high and accountable works of management. Thus he made his place secured from his kith and kin.

During his reign, the British government appointed Mr. Ratharford, to look after British interest in Goalpara and Bijni. The British virtually wanted to occupy in Bijni Kingdom directly under their control. Mr. Ratharford secretly advised the subjects of Bijni Kingdom, not to pay any tribute or *Khazna* to the king of Bijni. Under such circumstances Tileswari Devi, mother of Amritnarayan and Amritnarayan himself decided to report the whole issue to the Agent of British administration residing at Guwahati.³³ The charges against Mr. Ratharford were proved and he was transferred to Calcutta. Amritnarayan refixed the revenue rent for *Sali* land, *Ahu* land and *Bheti* land.

Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, who was famous for his revenue regulations served as a '*Dewan*' in Bijni Estate and introduced many regulations for the smooth management of revenue department.³⁴ It is a matter of pride for *Raja* Amritnarayan, that such a genius like Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan served for a few years in his kingdom. Amritnarayan ruled as a king from 1838 to 1853 A.D.³⁵ *Raja* Amritnarayan married five times but he left this world without having any issue. His queen Bhagyeswari adopted a prince Chandranarayan, who was closely related with Royal family. But as Chandranarayan was the eldest son of his father, he was disqualified for the throne. So another prince Kumudnarayan was adopted as a future king. After the death of king Amritnarayan, queen Bhagyeswari, with the help of the officials, continued the administration. Kumudnarayan was then minor. Queen Bhagyeswari runs the administration from 1854 to 1861. In the month of March of 1859, the British administration recognised queen Bhagyeswari as the owner of Bijni kingdom.³⁶ She died on 27th May of 1861 A.D.

2.9. Kumudnarayan:

Kumudnarayan was adopted by queen Bhagyeswari with the hope that he would be king of Bijni Raj after death of Amritnarayan. But Kumudnarayan was a minor at the time of death of Amritnarayan. So queen Bhagyeswari was compelled by circumstances to take up the helm of administration herself. She was helped by Kantheswari Devi (widow of *Raja* Amritnarayan) and a few other respectable ladies of the royal family. But inspite of all these efforts, some conspirators and anti-social elements began to create trouble in the kingdom. So the British authorities in order to avoid further trouble placed the Bijni kingdom under the court of wards. Kumudnarayan was sent to Benaras to earn proper education. It was in 1863, he went to Benaras and began his studies there.³⁷ Within short period, Kumudnarayan learnt English, Persian, Bengali and some other Indian languages. He also earned experience by travelling many important places of India.

In the absence of a powerful king, the defence of Bijni kingdom became very weak and dilapidated. The British authorities were stationed at Goalpara, which was far away from the capital of Bijni kingdom. Under the circumstances one 'Jhawlia', who was a Deputy General of Bhutan army, led an invasion against the Bijni kingdom. It was actually a case of looting and plundering. Jhawlia with his army attacked the common man, officials of the court and at last even the royal palace. This incident of disaster, which took place at Bijni, came to be known as

'*Jhawliar Dhuma*'.³⁸ As many people left the capital Bijni, it was at last decided to transfer the capital from Bijni to 'Dumuria'. In the meantime, the British authorities, with the soldiers stationed at Goalpara started fighting against the army of Jhawlia. Jhawlia was defeated and compelled to go back to Bhutan. Thus the attack of Jhawlia resulted in the transfer of capital from Bijni to Dumuria. Kumudnarayan, after completion of his studies at Benaras attained maturity and travelled many places like Delhi, Bombay, Agra, Calcutta and many places of Assam. He ascended the throne at 'Dumuria' as a king of Bijni in September 24, 1874 A.D.³⁹

The personal life of king Kumudnarayan was eventful, romantic and tragic. He married in 1874 (21st September), in the same year of his attainment of power over Bijni Estate. His first wife was Siddheswari Devi, who was from Deohati village near Abhayapuri. Kumudnarayan possessed a romantic mind and he was fond of hunting. One day while he was busy in hunting in a nearby place he saw a group of beautiful girls, who went out for fishing. The king selected himself one very beautiful girl among them, whose name was 'Abhaya'. Later Kumudnarayan married her following all Hindu ritual and took her to the Royal Palace.⁴⁰

It was a tradition for the *Rajas* of Bijni kingdom to get married several times. So majority of the kings had more than one queen. Kumudnarayan had two queens. But both of them maintained a very bitter relation between them. Even queen 'Abhaya' had to lose one of her eyes in the hands of queen Siddheswari.⁴¹ Under these circumstances the king died in 1881 (9th March). Probably he committed suicide being fed up at the quarrel between his two queens.

The condition of the kingdom further deteriorated next to the death of the king. The officials and state servants were divided into two groups, taking sides of two queens. A number of cases were also filed in Calcutta Court claiming the ownership of the kingdom by the two queens. The subjects of Bijni kingdom called this incident as '*Dui Ranir Dhuma*'.⁴²

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. Both the queens had no children. All administrative activities had to be looked after by *Rani* Abhayeswari.

2.10. Queen Abhayeswari Devi:

Queen Abhayeswari was born in the year 1862 A.D., in a poor family of Tilapara village. Her father's name was Nisharam Barua and mother's name was Kireswari Barua.⁴³ She was the second wife of Bijni King Kumud Narayan. After the death of her husband, there came several obstacles in her life which she dealt very bravely. The first wife of king Kumud Narayan, *Rani Siddheswari Devi* was her diehard protagonist who left no stone unturned to eliminate her name and status, but never succeeded in her evil motives. Ultimately Queen Abhayeswari officially took charge of the Bijni Raj Estate. Soon after capturing the throne of Bijni Raj Estate, Queen Abhayeswari appointed her brother Bhabani Prasad Baruah in the post of *Moktar*. He became the right hand of Abhayeswari and assisted her in managing the administration of the Bijni Raj Estate. The visitors of the state who wish to meet the Queen had to take permission from him. Thus he came to be known as *Dwarmoktar*.⁴⁴

When *Rani* Abhayeswari became the queen of the Bijni Raj Estate, the most critical problem that she faced was that the royal treasury was empty and the estate was facing acute financial problem. But such was the popularity of the *Rani* that all the people of the estate contributed generously to the royal coffers, so as to bail *Rani* Abhayeswari out of this financial crisis.

The contribution that came from a small *Dihi* Boitamari was to the tune of 12000 Rs. Keeping this contribution in mind the people of the Bijni Raj Estate gave the name of 'Barohajari *Dihi*' to Boitamari. Other places such as Jogighopa, Chalantapara etc which were part of the Bijni Raj Estate constitute a very small population of fisherman. But inspite of being small in number, their contribution resulted in procuring nine numbers of '*Xiki*'. For this reason, the fishermen community of this part of the estate was given the name 'Noixikiya' by the people of the Bijni Raj Estate.⁴⁵

During the year 1897 A.D., in the month of June, a massive earthquake jolted Bijni Raj Estate. Such big was the tremor and such recurring was its intensity that the people of Bijni Raj Estate felt that this ordeal will never end. The people fled to the nearby Lungai hill. This earthquake completely devastated the capital Dumuria of Bijni Raj Estate.⁴⁶ The Raj Palace also could not withstand the tremors and was completely destroyed. Although Dumuria was once a self-sufficient capital it had to lose everything in this natural calamity.

The Raj family and ministers decided to shift the capital of Bijni Estate to a new place. The name of Jogighopa was proposed as the new capital. During that time Jogighopa was a flourishing place of Bijni Estate and its population density was quite high. *Rani* Abhayeswari thought that if the capital is shifted to Jogighopa, then its residents have to be relocated to a new place. So *Rani* Abhayeswari decided to change her mind and ultimately decided to shift the capital to 'Abhayapuri'.⁴⁷ During that time, the place Abhayapuri was covered by dense forest. Before establishing the permanent capital of Bijni Estate this place was an obscure village. But after establishing the new capital it was named 'Abhayapuri' which was derived from the name of the queen of the estate. Some people believe that the name Abhayapuri was taken from the royal deity 'Abhaya' worshipped by the Bijni Raj family from time immemorial.

In the beginning the capital complex was made up of temporary structures. The people of Bijni Raj Estate having complete faith in Queen Abhayeswari believed that their future will also be shaped up beautifully like the new capital. Queen Abhayeswari took up several welfare schemes. In the year 1904 a school was established in the capital by the name of 'Abhayeswari High School'.⁴⁸ Free education was imparted to the students of this high school. The spending of the school was shouldered up by Queen Abhayeswari. Female education was very unprogressive in Assam during the British period. But exhibiting a difference to the prevailing situation, a Girls' M.E. School was established in the capital of Bijni Raj Estate in 1938 A.D.⁴⁹ In 1942 A.D. this school was upgraded as a High School and named after the adopted son of Queen Abhayeswari.

Queen Abhayeswari was a very pious lady. She was a firm believer in God. She was also a devoted wife. After the death of her husband *Raja* Kumud Narayan she abstained herself from wearing jewellery made from gold, silver and other expensive stones. She started wearing saffron clothing. Her life was bereft of any worldly pleasures. She had forbidden the lifestyle of a queen. She would eat only vegetarian food and that too only once in a day. Another feature that the queen adopted was that her clothing covered her face. No men were allowed to see her face. She herself remained away from public glare. While attending her *darbar* no one could see her face, only listen to her authoritative voice. A thin barrier covered with black clothing separated the *Rani* and her ministers during their meeting at the *Rajdarbar*.⁵⁰ Due to her such type of

Parda Nashi system tenants of Bijni Raj Estate sometimes faced difficulties to represent their problems and grievances before Queen Abhayeswari.

In order to enquire how Queen Abhayeswari was running her estate, the Chief Commissioner of Bijni Mr. E.U. Earl visited Abhayapuri. It is worth mentioning here that Bijni Raj Estate was under the British dominion at that time. Mr. Earl was given a grand welcome by Queen Abhayeswari. He was invited to the Bijni *darbar*. The chief commissioner was highly impressed by the systematic and efficient functioning of the administration by the *Rani*. He praised the Queen for her efficiency and diligence. At the time of the conversation with Queen, Mr. Earl questioned her that she had been facing lots of problems to run her estate, but for what reason she was providing free education in her estate.⁵¹ In reply Abhayeswari told him that, her subjects are illiterate, ignorant and simpleton by nature, and if she does not provide them free education they will be deprived of education. Mr. Earl again asked her that though there is abundance of land in her estate but majority of them are *devottar* and *dharmottar* land. In this situation how she was collecting tax to run her administration. Queen Abhayeswari answered pragmatically that there were some affluent subjects residing in the Khuntaghat and Habraghat *pargana* of her estate, who paid tax of 25 *paisa* for per *bigha* of land, and in this way she received tax of sixteen lakh rupees every year, which helped her to run her administration.⁵²

Queen Abhayeswari after settling down the capital in Abhayapuri town thought of constructing a beautiful royal mansion. Skilled workers from China were brought for this purpose. Huge wooden logs of Sagun tree were brought from Burma.⁵³ The royal mansion was surrounded by high brick walls. A huge area was confined within these walls. In the front, there was a large entrance door. Provision was made for elephants to walk through the side gate towards their shed. A wide open space was kept adjacent to the front gate. It was for the purpose of gardening of flowers. The flower garden path leads towards the '*Choraghar*' (Sitting room). On both sides of the main room, a line of other rooms were built to fulfil variety of purposes. Next a wide open space could be seen. Then provision was made for constructing the main resting room for the queen. The queen's royal mansion was a two storied building.⁵⁴ The mansion had all the facilities for comfort of the queen. From the top storey, the queen could look at each and every nook and corner of her huge mansion. Inside the mansion, variety of fruit trees such as mango, jackfruit, litchi, guave etc could be seen. The bush of magnolia flowers blooming

inside the mansion however does reminded about the colonial supremacy. All the rooms were decorated with costly furniture and show-pieces.⁵⁵

Queen Abhyeswari was an enthusiast for English education. In order to learn English, Queen sent the daughters of her brother to *Dewan* Ramesh Chandra Sen's wife, who hailed from England. All the responsibilities of the late king of Bijni were suitably performed by her.⁵⁶

In the meanwhile entire world was engulfed by the 'First World War'. The countries of the world according to their affiliations gave their support in this war. The wave of the First World War also swept the British ruled Indian sub-continent. Queen Abhyeswari extended helping hand to the British rulers. For the construction of roads and bye-lanes she indulged the labourers of the Bijni Raj Estate. She also gave three steam engine boats to the British government. A monetary amount of rupees one lakh and an ambulance was also given by her. Queen additionally offered the service of one thousand *Jawans*, who were her subjects to fight for the British cause.⁵⁷ As per her capacity she helped the British government. Gradually World War I came to an end. For all the help that Queen Abhyeswari had extended to the British government during the time of war, she was honoured with the respectable 'Kaizer-i-Hind' gold medal.⁵⁸

Queen Abhayeswari introduced the system of '*Dhap Salami*' for the purpose of establishing a very cordial relation between the king and the subjects.⁵⁹ Commonly it was held during the time of *Durga Puja*. On the particular day of *Vijaya Dashami*, a attractive '*Mandap*' was prepared, in the interior of which seating arrangements were made for all significant officials like *Barua*, *Choudhury*, *Purohit Pandit*, *Sukhbasu*, *Gaonburah*, *Jotedar*, *Lakherajdar*, *Devottar*, *Brahmottar bhogi*, important *Praja*, Well Wishers etc. The Royal throne decorated with Daimond, Gems, Ivory and Horns of Rhino was placed at high pedestal. Soon after the arrival of the king or queen to the *mandap*, the *Rajpurohit* pronounces *stotras* and *mantras* for the welfare of the king or queen as well as the subjects. The officers who came from *muffasil* areas exchange their views with the king. They also made presentation to the king. These presentations were called '*Salami*'.⁶⁰ The local officers and important *Prajas* also made '*Salami*' to the king. This function created a very happy atmosphere and cordial relation between the ruler and the subjects. The role of this function in the administrative system can never be underestimated. The great queen Abhayeswari breathed her last in 1918 during the time of

Durgapuja. At that time R.C. Sen was the *Dewan* of Bijni Raj Estate and he informed all the *Naibs* and *Tehsildars* the news of the death of Queen Abhyeswari.⁶¹ Before her death, she adopted Jogendranarayan as her son and heir to the throne of Bijni. Jogendranarayan was distantly related to the Royal family.

2.11. Jogendranarayan:

After properly observed the funeral ceremony of *Rani* Abhayeswari, Jogendranarayan formally ascended the throne of Bijni. Upto the time of his formal appointment, he was a completely normal man. But immediately after that, he began to show symptoms of lunacy. He began to behave like a mad man. Some people were of opinion that he fell victim of a conspiracy made by ambitious member of the royal family.⁶² Different parties with vested interest began to circulate rumours against him. Petitions were submitted in the Judge court of Guwahati that Jogendranarayan should be declared unfit for the throne and claims of new prince should be entertained. The British government considered the matter in the Judge Court of Guwahati. The Court according to Indian Lunacy Act (sub clause-63) declared injunction of Jogendranarayan and he was declared unfit for ruling the kingdom. The British government of Assam took up the administration of Bijni Raj under Court of Wards.⁶³

However the subjects of Bijni Kingdom were not satisfied. There were quite a few princes and relatives of the royal dynasty, who were ambitious for the throne. Many of them were distantly related to the royal family. It is interesting to notice that most of the claimants for the throne were either adopted sons of the deceased *Rajas* or their children. Such a claimant was *Raja* Bhairabendra Narayan also, who later on became the king after the death of Jogendranarayan. Thus 'adoption' played a very important role in the history of Bijni.

Most of the kings were either sons or grandsons of the deceased *Rajas*. Immediately after taking over the estate by the Court of Wards, several cases were filed in the court by the rival claimants including Bhairabendra Narayan. Under such circumstances the British government passed a law namely 'Bijni A' on the 9th May of 1931. According to this law it was decided that King Jogendranarayan would rule over Bijni Kingdom, so long he would be living. After his demise, Bhairabendra Narayan would turn into the king of Bijni Kingdom.⁶⁴

When Jogendra Narayan was the ruler of Bijni Estate, practically *dewan* R.C. Sen had to run the estate. He maintained the administrative work with due permission from the British government. Even the *dewan* had to look after the medical treatment of Jogendra Narayan with the help of Civil Surgeon W.D. Ritchie.⁶⁵

King Jogendranarayan breathed his last on 18th June, 1938 A.D.⁶⁶ After his death Kumar Bhairabendra Narayan became the king. But as there were quite a good number of cases pending in the court and the king of Bijni had to bear the cast, the state was again placed under the Court of Wards. The king was paid rupees one lakh per month as a pension.⁶⁷ In the former judgement of the court, it was mentioned that, Bhairabendra Narayan would be the crown prince (*yuvaraj*) and after the death of Jogendranarayan, he would get all benefits enjoyed by the deceased king.

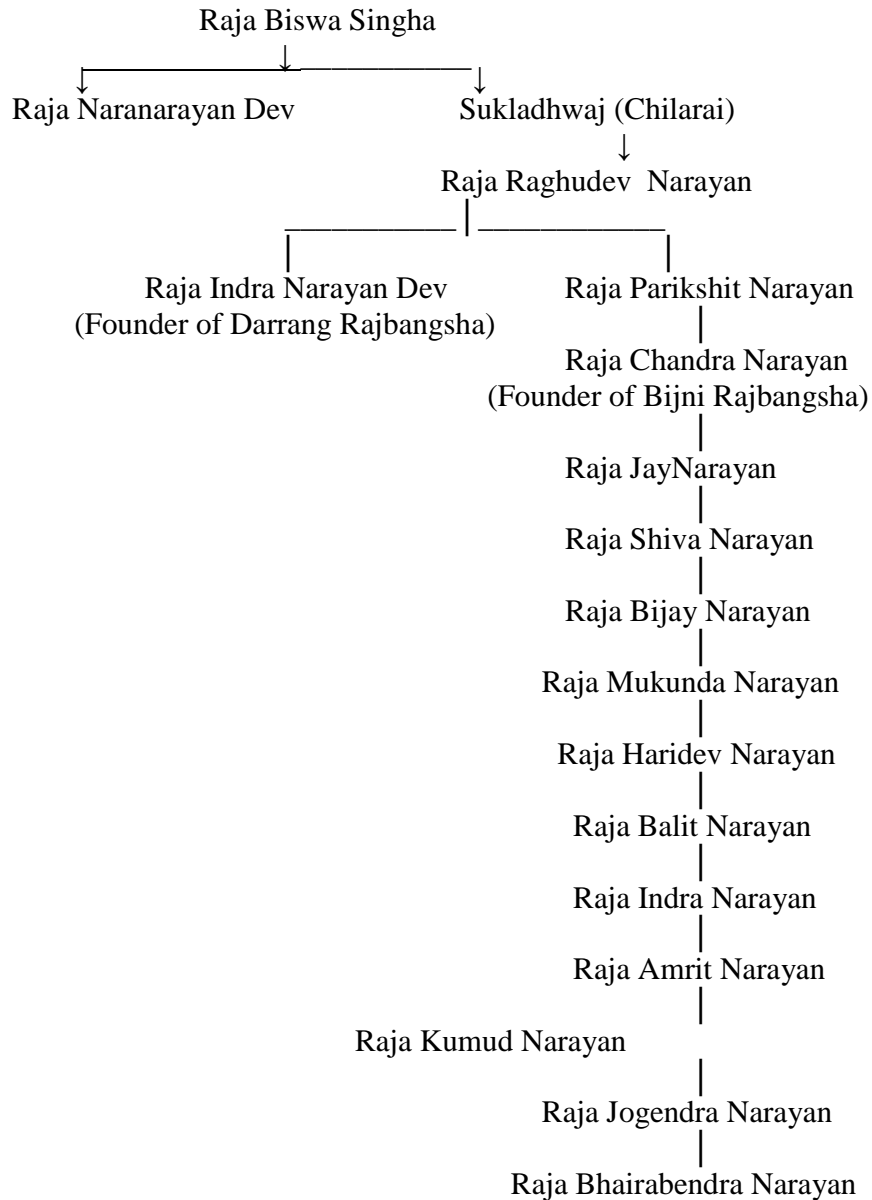
2.12. Bhairabendra Narayan:

Bhairabendra Narayan was the last king of the Bijni Raj family. His legacy to the throne of Bijni can be claimed from the third king of Bijni dynasty- *Raja* Sivanarayan. King Sivanarayan had eighteen sons. Hangshanarayan was one of them. Hangshanarayan's son was Harinarayan, who had two sons namely Chandranarayan and Suryanarayan. This Chandranarayan was the father of future king Bhairabendra Narayan.⁶⁸

Nevertheless Bhairabendra Narayan ascended the throne of Bijni kingdom on June 18, 1938 with due permission from the court of wards. It was in 1944 that the state was released from the control of court of wards. On 1st October, 1944 the court of wards was withdrawn and Bhairabendra Narayan was allowed to rule independently without any interference by the court of wards. Bhairabendra Narayan is considered as the last ruler of Bijni Dynasty. In 1956 when the government of India acquired the native states, the government of Assam also acquired the native states of Assam. Accordingly the Bijni Raj Estate was acquired by the Government of Assam in 1956 A.D.⁶⁹ Hence the rule of Koch Kings in Assam came to an end.

Thus the family history of Bijni Raj Dynasty has been choronologically outlined below

Lineage of Bijni Raj Dynasty⁷⁰



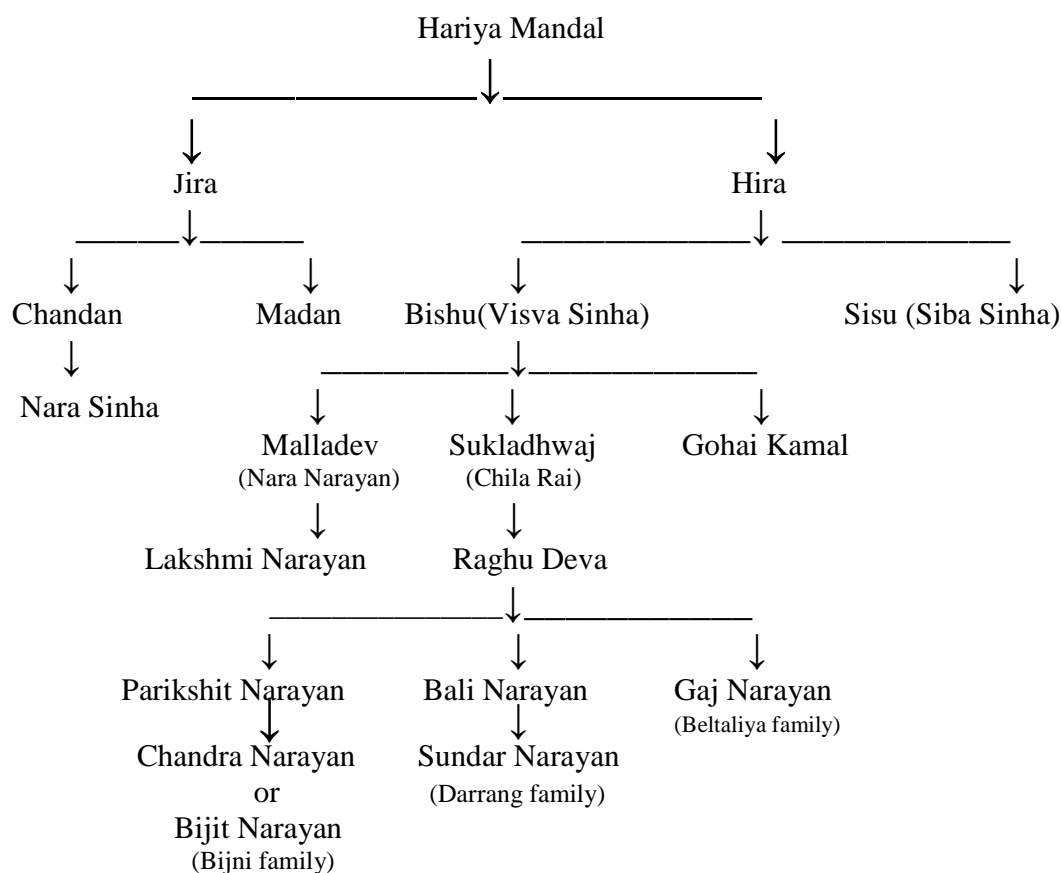
It is beyond all doubt that the rulers of Bijni Raj were mighty, noble, God loving and God fearing. They wanted the well-being, peace and happiness of the subjects. That is why during Mughal period, they were entrusted with the administration and maintenance of peace and tranquility in the kingdom. The rulers were even empowered to take the title '*Raja*'. During the period of British rule, the Bijni Estate went under the court of wards twice, due to absence of

legal heir to the throne. But the rulers of Bijni Raj had been able to recover from these adverse situations. They won over all disputes and disagreements and again established the kingdom on a solid foundation. The kingdom saw internal strife, dispute over the throne, Peasant's revolt etc., from time to time. But the kings of Bijni Raj had been able to face and solve all these problems faced by the kingdom. It was under these circumstances the Bijni kingdom continued to stand as a strong kingdom. It was only with the abolition of *Zamindari* system throughout India in 1956, the Bijni kingdom lost its independent status. It was taken over by the government of Assam.

In order to carry out the administration throughout the kingdom smoothly, the *Raja* of Bijni kingdom created the post '*Dewan*'. The first man who became the *dewan* of the Bijni Raj Estate was, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan. He was appointed *Dewan* of Bijni Raj in 1849 A.D.⁷¹ Other than Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, there were few great personalities, who served the kingdom sincerely as a *Dewan*. They were Gopal Gobinda Sen, Jiban Ram Phukan, Baroda Haldar, Chandrakanta Sen, Ramesh Chandra Sen, Durgeswar sarma etc.

A discussion about the genealogy of the Bijni *Rajas* will be incomplete, if it is confined to the career of Bijni *Rajas* only. In This case, we have to draw reference to the kings of Darrang *Rajbangsha* and Beltola *Rajbangsha* also. Both these two Raj families draw their origin and genealogy from the Koch ruling dynasty of Koch Bihar. Dr. H.K. Barpujari in his book 'The Comprehensive History of Assam- Vol. II' has clearly mentioned about the origin of the three Raj families in the following way.

Family-tree of Koch Royal Family⁷²



In this phase of discussion, it is necessary to outline the origin of Darrang *Rajbangsha* and Beltola *Rajbangsha* in short. All these three royal families owe their origin to the same Raj family i.e., 'Koch Royal Family'.

During the first half of the 17th Century King Parikshit Narayan was overwhelmed by the Mughals and he was confined.⁷³ During this interlude Bali Narayan, a brother of Parikshit Narayan, established a small kingdom namely Darrang *Rajya*, on the western part of modern Darrang district. He established friendship with the Ahom King and established cordial relation with the Ahoms. The Ahom king offered him the title 'Dharmanarayan'. Bali Narayan was succeeded by Mahendra Narayan, Chandra Narayan, Surya Narayan, Indra Narayan and Aditya Narayan.⁷⁴ During the reign of Aditya Narayan, there was internal trouble with his brother Madan Narayan. As a result of this internal strife, Darangi *Rajya* was divided into two parts.

Thus a new state came into existence. During this period, the Darangi *Rajas* became completely subordinate of the Ahom rulers. Taking opportunity of the internal quarrel among the Darangi *Rajas*, the Ahom king occupied the whole of Darangi *Rajya*. The Darangi *Rajas* were given only a subsistence allowance known as '*Petbhata*'.⁷⁵

Considering the condition in the Darangi *Rajya*, it can be presumed that the Bijni *Rajas* were comparatively powerful and solid. In order to capture Royal Power, the Darangi *Rajas* divided their kingdom. But the Bijni *Rajas* never did it. Though their kingdom sometimes went under the court of wards, due to absence of legal heir to the throne or there were internal strife in the kingdom, they never allowed the kingdom to be divided. The solidarity of the kingdom was sustained at any cost. The Darangi *Rajas* had to satisfy themselves with the allowance (*Petbhata*) which they got from the Ahom king.⁷⁶ Gradually they lost their right over their own kingdom. But the Bijni *Rajas* never underwent through such pitiable condition. Right from Chandra Narayan upto Bhairabendra Narayan, the Bijni *Rajas* ruled over the subjects as independent kings. At last, the *Zamindari* Abolition Act of 1951 brought to an end, the rule of Bijni ruling dynasty. But it was an all India affair. The *Zamindari* Abolition Act was operative throughout the whole of India.⁷⁷

Parikshit Narayan's son Haranarayan alias Gajnarayan (descendant of Chilarai) established at Beltola (south of present Guwahati) a small kingdom under the Ahom rulers. After Gajnarayan, Sibendra Narayan, Gajendra Narayan, Lombodar Narayan and Lokpal Narayan ruled at Beltola. Gradually the area of land, occupied by this *Rajbangsha* began to be reduced in size. Due to occupation by outsiders and also for natural reasons, this small kingdom gradually took the shape of *Mouza*. Thus Beltola came under the *Mouzadari* System and its rulers lost their prestige of ruling over an independent kingdom.⁷⁸

From the above discussions, it can be ascertained that the Bijni Royal family was somewhat a powerful ruling dynasty. The rulers of Bijni dynasty assumed the title '*Raja*' by the acknowledgement of both Mughal and Colonial authority. But though they used the title *Raja* before their names, in actuality the size of Bijni kingdom indicated that it was a big *Zamindari* Estate. The big palatial building of the Bijni *Rajas* situated at the heart of present Abhayapuri town still bear the testimony of the glorious days of the *Rajas* of Bijni Raj family. The Bijni *Rajas* wanted to win over the minds of their subjects through their benevolent works. Proper

stress was given on the spread of Education especially by *Rani Abhayeswari*. But in spite of adopting benevolent measures, there was problem of insurgency among peasants from time to time.

Endnotes

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- ³ *Ibid.*
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- ¹⁰ Tarini Prasad Sen, *Bijni Rajbangsha*, Goalpara, 1876, p.08.
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- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
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- ²⁹ Tarini Prasad Sen, *op.cit*, p.16.
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- ³² Ambikacharan Choudhury, 1969, *op.cit*, p.279.

33 *Ibid.*

34 Gunabhiram Barua, *Anandaram Dhekial Phukanar Jiban Charita*, Assam Prakashan Parishad, Guwahati, 1971, p.81.

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44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*

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