

## Role of Maharaja Naranarayana in the Consolidation of the Koch Kingdom: A Historical Study



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**Kartik Chandra Sutradhar**

*Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University*

Email: [ksutradhar77@gmail.com](mailto:ksutradhar77@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The name of Maharaja Naranarayan is almost unknown to the people of Bengal or Assam, not only that there is no sign of the name of the Maharaja in the history of India; but once he was a remarkable King or Monarch who placed the Koch Kingdom on the fame and glorious position in the soil of North east India. He became the challenging figure in the larger areas of North east India defeating the contemporary rulers gradually one by one, namely Ahom Kingdom, Kachhar, Jayantiya, Manipur and Dimrua. Maharaja not only defeated his rivalry and consolidated his empire, but also he took a diplomatic policy like Samudragupta, the great Gupta King because in spite of wining the native states in the North east India he returned the concerned Kingdoms to the native rulers by getting annual tribute and yielding. But unfortunately the name of the great king including the history of the other rulers of the Koch Kingdom has not get any place in the history of India. Beside the expansion and consolidation of the Koch Kingdom he established peace and integrity maintaining the cultural assimilation and economic development in the Koch Kingdom. In the present article the achievement of this great Koch King will be highlighted.

### KEY WORDS

Kamata – Koch, Ahom Kingdom, North- east India, Shupladhwaja or Chila Roy, Sankardev.

### INTRODUCTION

Maharaja Naranarayana ascended the throne of Koch Kingdom in 1455 Shakabda or 1533 AD (1534 AD). With the ascension of Maharaja Naranarayana some complications can be noticed. Khan Chowdhury Amanatullah Ahmed writes, "Kumar Narnarayan and Shukladhvaj were living in Kashi Dham till the time when Kumar Narsingha ascended the throne abandoned by his father (c. 1533 AD). Their midwife (Dhaima) lived in Rajapur, people called her Ratni Dhai'; he sent the news of Kumar Narsingha's becoming king to Kumar Naranarayana and Shukladhvaj with a letter from a monk named Nagbhog. When they objected to Narasingha becoming king at his side following the patriarchal system, the other brothers also sided with them; So Narsingha became helpless and fled to the kingdom of Morang with his son and four companions. While fleeing, he took with him a ten-armed deity and Hanuman Danda. When Naranarayana became the king and pursued the fleeing Narsingha, he was unable to fight and took refuge in Nepal from Morang.<sup>1</sup>

This is the explanation given by Yadav Chandra Chakraborty about Narnarayan's accession to the throne that Maharaja Narnarayan ascended the throne in 1554 AD. It is said that his elder brother Narsingha was the rightful heir to the throne and his initiative was being taken. At that time Narnarayan's wife appeared and told him that when she bowed to him after the

completion of her marriage, 'you would be the queen', saying that Narasimha had blessed her. If Narasimha becomes King in this situation then his blessing will be false. On hearing this, Narasingha did not accept the Kingdom and installed his younger brother Naranarayan on the throne.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the truth of the above description is found in the Rajopakhyan texts. In this book Munshi Jayanath Ghosh writes, "Maharaja Bishwa Singha's reign extended to the 44th year of the Raj Shaka. In the year 45 Raj Shaka, corresponding with the Bengali year 961, and the year 1476 Shakabada, the Maharaja relived to the morentain to devote himself to an ascetic life.

Preparation were then made to place his eldest son Nri Singha on the throne, Brahmans and Pundits from all lands assembled, and were ready to begin the inauguration ceremony according to the shastras, and the three brothers, took their seats in the assembly according to their rank. At this moment, Naranarain's wife, accompanied by one or two of her attendants, came before the assembly, and bowed down in front of Nri Singha. The men of the assembly and Nri Singha himself were surprised at this procedure, and the later directed that she should be asked why she had come. The Devi said to Nri Singha, 'Immediately after my marriage, when I came and bowed before you, you blessed me, saying: 'you will be a queen consort' Now that you are about to become King, how can I be the queen consort? Your words have proved untrue. "

Nri Singha smiled and said, "O mother, you have spoken rightly. My words cannot fail of accomplishment. Nara Narain will be King and you will be the queen consort. I shall not be King."<sup>3</sup>

No matter how Naranarayan ascended the throne, his fame is memorable in the history of Cooch Behar. During the reign of Naranarayan, the extent of the Koch Kingdom was so wide

that no other Koch Kings did. Not only a state conqueror but also a ruler he had set a shining example. His territory extended to Gaur, including most of north-eastern India. In this connection, it is relevant to mention here that the relation between Koch Kingdom and Ahom Kingdom was not always good. That relationship took the form of a dispute during the reign of Maharaja Naranarayan. The Ahom Prince drove out all the guards of the Kingdom of Kamata on the border of the Ahom Kingdom. At that time Maharaja Naranarayan's brothers Kumar Deep Singh, Kumar Hemdhar and Kumar Ramchandra were engaged in his work separately in the eastern part of the Kingdom. Their feud with the Ahoms began when some of their soldiers, the Ahom staff, seized a boat belonging to Bara Sandik at Bhramarakunda in Kumar Kumara. The Ahom Prince attacked Deepsingh's army and killed one hundred of them, and many soldiers, including Kumar Deepsingha, were killed when war broke out between the two sides. His daughter and 14 elephants were captured by the Ahom Prince. When Kumar Ramchandra and Kumar Hemdhar went to war, they too were killed. Then the new army of Kamata Raj advanced and attacked the Ahom army in the water defeated them. A few Ahom generals and many soldiers were killed on the banks of the river Dikrai, and many of them fled. When Kamata's army followed them and advanced to Saul, a fierce battle ensued. A large number of Ahom soldiers and generals took part in this battle and as a result the Kamata soldiers fled towards the Brahmaputra River. The Kamata troops built a fort at Narayanpur and assembled troops there and attacked the Pikilla fort of Ahom Raj. Ahom Raj's brother himself took part in this battle and attacked and defeated the Kamata army. It is said that at this time, the heads of five thousand soldiers of Kamata Raj who were killed in a battle were stacked at a place in Ahom, which is known as Mathadang (in Shivsagar district).<sup>4</sup> "Not less than 5000 Koch soldiers were massacred; their heads

were brought to Mathadang, a place in the Sibsagar district and cremated there.”<sup>5</sup>

After the defeat of Narnarayan he had to take up arms to take revenge, but before re-attacking, Naranarayan offered peace to the Ahom King in a single letter, and for this purpose sent a letter through envoys with many subtexts. He wrote:

“Writing is effective. This is my good fortune. I wish you all the best. Then my satisfaction is that the editor of the newspaper passed away. In both cases there is a complete digestive tract. In my duty to you, he will be bound and flowered. I am in that entrepreneur. What more can I write? Satananda Kaji, Rameshwar Sharma, Kalketu and Dhuma Saddar, Udvand Chauniya, Shyamrai are sent. After hearing, take necessary action and see off them.”<sup>6</sup>

With another lawyer, dragon 2 bow, 1 chonga fish, 1 jor balich, 1 jakai (9) shari (cloth) 5 pieces is being sent..... In your response, 1 Gomcheng, 5 Ghagri, 10 Krishna Chamar, 20 Shukla Chamar are sent. No more today. 1477 Shaka, Month, Ashar, Day 10.”<sup>7</sup>

The reply letter sent by Ahom Raj in the light of that letter:

“Writing is good here. I am confused to hear your good news. But all my love for you has happened..... We are in the forefront. All the goods that were sent with the other lawyer are to be shown in the meeting but all those who are unjust, even if it is unethical, see it as a policy and give it as a matter of principle. Seeing this, the whole day will be spent in the same way as the people who have been introduced to that product. My lawyer Srichantibar Sridamodar Shrammam is being sent with your lawyer to understand all the news them. In response following goods are sent Nara Kapor (cloth) 2 pieces, elephant teeth 4, Gathiyon 2. No more today. Shak 1479, month Ashar, day 10.”<sup>8</sup>

When the ambassadors of the kingdom of Bihar returned from the Ahom Kingdom Maharaja

Naranarayana heard all the details from them. After hearing all this, Naranarayan ordered the hom King to be ready for attack. Roads in eastern Assam were very impassable at this time. In this situation, the Maharaja entrusted the task of building a new road to his brother Gohai Kamal to send troops and ammunition. Gohai built a long road from the Bhutan Mountains to Parshu Kundu through the central province of the Brahmaputra, as instructed by Kamal. After the construction of the road, General Shukladhwaja marched to the battlefield with a large number of troops including rmmaments in 1562.

In 1562, the struggle between Kamta Raj and Ahom Raj began. The naval general Tepu and Bhaktamal went upstream through the Brahmaputra river and advanced to the mouth of the river Dikshu to capture Seola and Makalang. As the Ahom forces advanced towards them, they started bombing on the enemy. While the two generals were at the mouth of the Hariya river, a horse-fight ensued between the two sides. The Ahom army was defeated in this battle, some of their generals were killed and one was taken prisoner. In January 1563, General Shukladhwaja advanced on the waterway to build a fort at the mouth of the river, and in the following April, he plundered the land of Morangi. The Ahoms were stationed at the mouth of the Shisandi to build a fort on the other side of the river to block the passage of the party. At that time Maharaja Ratikanta was sent to the Ahom Kingdom as a messenger when he came to Maharaja Naranarayan with the proposal of three prominent personalities from the Ahom side. Ratikanta tries to make Ahom Raj understand that Ahom Raj and Kamata Raj have a long history of friendship. So there should be no war between the two states.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of meeting with Ratikanta and Ahom King and exchange of gifts, the war between the two did not end. Thereafter, in the month of May Tipu, the Naval General built a fort on the

banks of the Dihing river and started to plunder enemy-occupied lands. The battle began again and the Ahom army was defeated. The Ahom King was helpless and fled to Nata mountain. Maharaja Naranarayana was staying at Majuli at that time and when the Ahom capital Garhgaon was captured he moved there. Then a leading man on behalf of the fugitive Ahom Raj came to Maharaja Naranarayana to make peace and give him presents. The Maharaja, in recognition of the treaty, instructed the Ahom Prince to send Yao-Mong-Lang Shendang and the sons of Kham-sheer. The Ahom King accordingly sent Ahu, son of the courtier Lang-lau, and four nobles to Maharaja Naranarayan in July 1563, and yielded to Maharaja by paying tribute. It is said that Ahomaraj gave a large amount of gold, silver, clothes, 60 elephants, 60 beautiful daughters, 300 people and a blood-stained royal crown to Maharaja Naranarayan as a pledge of the treaty.<sup>10</sup>

After the conquest of the Ahom Kingdom, Naranarayana and the other Kingdoms of north-eastern India Shukladhwaja or Chila Roy looked to conquer. In this regard, they first came to notice to Kachhar. Kabindra, Rajendra Patra and Damodar Karji, the generals of Shukladhwaja or Chila Ray, along with Megha Makdum, attacked the nearby capital Moibanga. Frightened by the sudden invasion Kachhar Raj surrendered and yielded to the Koch Raj giving various valuable goods and 26 elephants including 70000 silver coins, 1000 golden coins. Shukladhwaja established a colony at Kachhar at that time. It is pertinent to note that the state of Kachhar was under the state of Tripura, though Kachhar was autonomous. As such, during the time of Chila Roy attack, the state of Tripura should have protected the neighboring state from the Koch attack. But the Raja of Tripura was afraid and could not resist the attack of Chila Roy. As a result, the nearby state was taken over by the Koches. D. Nath wrote, "As a result, Kachhar came under the control of the Koches and Longai came to be

recognized as the boundary between the Koch and Tripura territories."<sup>11</sup>

After the conquest of Kachhar, Naranarayana and Chila Roy sent envoys to the Manipur Royal court to acknowledge the submission of Koch Raj.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, it was not possible for him to show the courage to fight against the Koches. So Manipur Raj agreed with the Koches and agreed to co-operate with them. He agreed to give Koch Raj 20,000 silver coins and 300 gold coins annually including 10 elephants. Not only that, at the time of signing the treaty, he agreed to make peace with 20,000 silver coins, 1,000 gold coins and 40 elephants at a time.<sup>13</sup>

Next, Sukladhwaja invaded on Jayantiya consisted with the plain area situated in the southern part of Jayantiya hill and the northern part of the Surma or Barak river. The King of Jayantiya did not surrender to the Koch King like the Kings of Kachhar without fighting, rather he participated in direct battles with the Koches. In this battle Jayantiya Raj was defeated and killed by the Koches. The son of Jayantiya Raj was enthroned on the orders of Maharaja Naranarayan after the death of Jayantiya Raj. D.Nath writes, "The new King gave the Koch general 100 horses, 10,000 silver and 1000 gold coins including 100 special type of Jayantiya swords called khang as complementation for the war. It was also agreed that the vanquished King would pay an annual tribute of 10,000 silver coins, 70 select Ghotakas (horses) and 300 Nakiidaos (a special kind of knife)."<sup>14</sup>

After the victory of Jayantiya, Srihatta came to the forefront. Shukladhwaja sent envoys to Amil to acknowledge Shrihatta's surrender. But when Amil ignored the offer, Koch Raj started a war against the King of Srihatta. There was a fierce battle between the two sides. After two days of fighting, Shukladhwaj himself entered the battle. Amanatullah Ahmad writes: "The army was gradually going ahead targeting the enemies, he reached to Amil and cut his head from body with a sledgehammer; seeing this

result of Amil, his army was dispersed all around. When the brother of the slain Amil was brought to Maharaja Naranarayan in due time, the Maharaja appointed him as Amil and promised to give him the newly appointed Amil a hundred thousand rupees, ten lakh silver coins, ten thousand gold coins and two hundred horses as annual tax.<sup>15</sup>

After conquering the Kingdom of Jayantia, Chila Roy attacked the King of Tripura with 40,000 troops.<sup>16</sup> Chila Roy's fierce battle with the Tripura King took place at a place called Lakshmai. In this battle one-third of the army and General Bhimbal were killed and on the other hand the King of Tripura himself along with eighteen thousand soldiers died. After winning the battle, Chila Roy planted a Lakshmai (Aussie) and a lineage as a sign of victory. The Prince of Tripura was agreed to sign a treaty by giving ten silver coins, one hundred gold coins and thirty horses, then the annual tax of his Kingdom was fixed up to nine thousand rupee and the rights of the Tripura King over the nearby Kingdom Kachhar were abolished. At that time the northern part of Chittagang was also under the King of Tripura. Maharaja Naranarayana sent a force to Brahmapur to defend his rights in the newly conquered province which known as 'Kochpur' and later as Khaspur.<sup>17</sup>

It is mentioned in the 'Darang Rajbangshaboli' that Khairam Raj willingly yielded to the Koch Raj after seeing the image of the neighboring states and yielding to the Koch Raj. The Khairam Kingdom was situated to the north of the state of Jayantiya which was ruled by the King Birjabanta.<sup>18</sup> D. Nath wrote, "... besides agreeing to pay an annual tribute, the Khairami Raj offered 60 elephants, 60 horses and 40,000 silver and 10,000 gold coins as presents. The Raja was then restored to his position but as an autonomous ruler."<sup>19</sup>

There is a controversy about the victory of Dimrua state. It is said that Dimruya King Panteshwar surrendered to Maharaja Naranarayan in order to escape the harassment of the

Kacharis. On the other hand, it is said that Dimrua Raj was conquered and captured by Maharaja Naranarayana. Later, on the orders of Maharaja Naranarayana, Panteshwar was appointed overseer of eighteen small Kingdoms on the outskirts of Jayantia Kingdom.

The story of Maharaja Naranarayana's invasion of the Gaur Kingdom is found in all the genealogies and Ahom Burunji. It is said that Maharaja Naranarayana attacked Gaur to avenge the destruction of the Kamaksha temple by Kala Pahar. But this narrative has not been written in any history written by Muslims. However, Maharaja Naranarayana attacked Gaur but could not win. The Koch soldiers and fighters were defeated and the commander Shukladhwaja was captured and the King himself escaped with great difficulty. The King did not eat until Sukladhwaja was released. He used to spend his days drinking milk. It is written in the 'Daranga Rajbangshaboli' that once Gaureshwa's mother was bitten by a snake, he became cured by the treatment of Shukladhwaja. In return for this benefit, Rajmata addressed Shukradhvaj as 'son' and released him, marrying him to five daughters of the same lineage, and the dowry for this marriage was given to Baharband, Vitarband, Gaybari, Serpur and Dashkahania Paraganarta.

After the defeat in the Kingdom of Gaur, Naranarayana could no conquer any Kingdom later on. Although Naranarayana could not able to win in Gaur, he succeeded in most of his kingdom conquests. In the history of the Koch Kingdom the name of Maharaja Naranarayana will remain written with gold letters in case of expansion of the Kingdom. No other ruler among the Koch Kings was as successful as Naranarayana. Such a large empire was never built during the reign of Koch Raja. One of the leaders of Naranarayana's success was his brother, Chief of Army Staff Shukladhwaja or Chila Roy. Harendra Narayan Chowdhury writes in this regard, "Thus in the time of Maharaja Naranarayana Cooch Behar was an extensive Kingdom,

and comprised, in addition to the little state of Cooch Behar of the present day, almost the whole of Northern Bengal, Bhutan and Assam, as well as the modern states of Kachar, Jaiantia, Manipur and Tipperah and extended up to the coast of the Bay of Bengal. Naranarayan was the most powerful of the Kings of the large extent of the country which once formed the ancient Hindu Kingdom of Kamrupa."<sup>20</sup>

During the reign of Maharaja Naranarayana, his Kingdom was divided into two parts, the eastern bank of the river Sankosh, i.e. East Kamrupa, was ruled by his brother Shukladhwaj. In this regard, Harendra Narayan Chowdhury wrote, "In this reign the country was divided into two portions; and Maharaja Naranarayan made over the portion of the Kingdom east of the Sankosh to his brother Sukladhwaja who thenceforth became the ruler of Assam of Eastern Kamrup. Maharaja Naranarayana was thus the last of the Koch Kings, who ruled over the vast territories comprised by the old Kingdom of Kamrupa. His descendants, as will appear hereafter, held sway over the western part of Kamrupa for the next two centuries."<sup>21</sup>

#### **OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS OF MAHARAJA NARANARAYANA**

Maharaja Naranarayan was not only the conqueror of the Kingdom, he ruled the state with efficient hands. During his time the empire was improved in context of the reformative works. In his time the province of Kamarupa was exposed to enlightenment and that is why he is still called Vikramaditya of Kamarupa. People used to call him Dharma Raja. The fame of his character and knowledge was also discussed in the court of Delhi at that time. He was specialized in wrestling, also known as Malladev. He was an expert in discussing the scriptures and from time to time he competed with the scholars.<sup>22</sup>

Maharaja Naranarayana built the Kamaksha temple by Shukladhwaja. It is mentioned, "Naranarayan was decidedly the most powerful of

the Kings of the large extent of the country which once formed the ancient Hindu kingdom of Kamrupa. He through his brother Sukladhwaja repaired and added to the real temple of Kamakshya situated near the ancient city of Pragjyaotisha, modern Gauhati, which had been destroyed by Kalapahar .... He arranged the services of the temples and provided for the maintenance by making grants of Devottar lands to all the Sebacks or officiating Brahmanas. He has also a portioned lands to the support of the servants of the temples. Even at the present day Nirmalya or flowers offered to the Goddess Kamakshya are regularly sent to the Cooch Behar Rajbari."<sup>23</sup>

Sri Sankardeva was a preacher of Vaishnavism in Assam. After the conquest of Assam by Maharaja Naranarayana, Sri Sankardeva came to the Kingdom of Kamata and stayed there till the last day of his life. He used to preach Krishna's name under the patronage of Maharaja Naranarayana and he wrote many books of Vaishnava religion such as Sitasvayamvara Natak, Krishnagunamala and Srimadbhagavata Pada. The Maharaja had left behind an identity of advanced culture and taste, many wise men were gathered in his court, and he brought a lot of Brahmins from Mithila, Gaur and arranged for them to live in their own Kingdom and gave them a lot of Brahmmatara land. Many books were compiled and written on the initiative and advice of Maharaja Naranarayana. Pandit Purushottam Vidyabagish composed the grammar 'Prayogratnamala' on the orders of the King and Queen. Pandit Aniruddha and Rama Saraswati translated the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Eighteenth Purana in verse by order of the King. Sridhar wrote an article entitled 'Vaishnava Astrology' and a book titled 'Land quantity in Bakulkayastha' and translated 'Lilavati'. Other books were also written and compiled which enriched the literary and cultural world of Naranarayan's period.

Agriculture and trade also improved during the reign of Maharaja Naranarayana. The land of

Cooch Behar was fertile; there was no lack of rainfall, thus, different types of crops were produced very easily. Trade and commerce also improved during the reign of Maharaja Narayanaraya. Trade was conducted through the ways both on water and land. Trade was carried on daily through the rivers Teesta, Jaldhaka, Brahmaputra and other rivers with Bengal and other states in the north-east. Trade was carried on by land with Bhutan and other states.

From the above discussion it can be said that in all respects Maharaja Narayanaraya placed the Kingdom on the fame and dignity in the history of the Kamata-Koch Kingdom. He was successful both from the state conqueror and the administrator. He also possessed diplomatic knowledge. Like Samudra Gupta, he was a real genius. So even after the conquest of many states of North-East India, these were returned to the concerned rulers to rule their respective states in exchange for their yielding and tribute. In this regard D. Nath wrote, "... Narayanaraya did not annex most of the conquered territories allowed the defeated rulers to enjoy their autonomy by paying annual tributes. As such the territories directly administered by him, extended from Trihut in the west to Narayanpur on the north bank of the Brahmaputra in the east where he had a military outpost established and connected it with his capital at Koch Behar by means of a road called Gosain Kamal Ali to which reference has already been made."<sup>24</sup>

This great ruler passed away in 1587 A.D. He left two sons named Laxminarayan and Boli Narayan and a daughter named Prabhavati. In the history of Kamata- Cooch Behar, the name of Maharaja Narayan will be written in the gold letters.

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