



*International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*  
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal  
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)  
ISJN: A4372-3142 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3143 (Print)  
Volume-IV, Issue-I, July 2017, Page No. 177-182  
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711  
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

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## **Contribution of the Bijni Rajas towards the Development of Education: A Study in Historical Perspective**

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#### **Abstract**

*The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate contributed greatly towards the development of Education. Specifically the later rulers of Bijni Dynasty established many educational institutions for the moral as well as intellectual development of their subjects. Queen Abhayeswari although uneducated but realised the importance of education and opened schools for both boys and girls separately. When the whole Assam was lagging behind in respect of female education, the rulers of Bijni Dynasty exhibited exceptional interest by establishing separate school for girls. The rulers of Bijni Raj Estate did not confine their duties by establishing schools only. They also bore the expenditure of food, lodging and education of the students who studied in the schools of their estate. They also provided scholarships for the poor and needy students which attracted the students from entire Assam. For the purpose of providing quality education to the students the Bijni Rajas brought qualified senior teachers from outside of the state by giving handsome salary. They invested much money for the development of education which shows their greatness as well as their indomitable will to improve the educational backwardness that prevailed in Bijni Raj Estate. This article is an attempt to discuss about the contribution of the Bijni Rajas towards the development of education in Bijni Raj Estate, during Pre British and Post British period.*

**Keywords: Bijni Raj Estate, Education, School, Raja, Contribution.**

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**Introduction:** The light of education illuminates the society. Education also enlightens and enriches the society. People need education to prepare for a better life and for the fulfilment of their desires and curiosities about the world. Education provides a broad base of knowledge that teaches people about the world around them. It can also teach them valuable critical thinking skill. The later rulers of Bijni Raj Estate understood the need and importance of education for their subjects. When education was in a very underdeveloped condition especially in lower Assam, Bijni Raj Estate showed an exception by establishing centres of learning for the general masses<sup>1</sup>. By establishing centres for primary and

secondary education, rulers of the Bijni Raj Estate exhibited their love, affection and care for their subjects.

The history of Bijni Raj Estate is one of the important parts of local history. Very few people know about the history of Bijni Rajas and their contribution or patronization towards development of society. In spite of lot of welfare measures, the contribution of Bijni Rajas towards society 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 contribution of the rulers of Bijni Estate towards the society. 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. The contribution of Bijni Rajas towards the upliftment of its people in different spheres such as social, cultural, economic, religion etc., is a vast topic to delve with and it is difficult to discuss it in a short Research Article. So in the proposed work we restrict ourselves to the contribution of Bijni Rajas towards the development of education in the Bijni Raj Estate.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the proposed work are:

1. To study about the contribution of the Bijni Rajas towards the development of Education.
2. To discuss about the condition of female education within the area of Bijni Zamindary during British Period.
3. To make an assessment on the educational institutions established by the Bijni Rajas.

**Methods:** The Methodology adopted for the proposed work is historical one based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included District Gazetteers, Bijni Raj Succession Suit, Letters and Proceedings of State legislative council and assembly, Papers of the courts of wards, various reports and other documents of legal validity. A few secondary sources also be utilized for the proposed work. Among the Secondary sources, reputed books on Bijni Raj Family and various articles about the Development of Education in Assam are helpful for the purpose.

However a sociological approach including personal interview has also adopted to collect first hand information. Oral sources are also helpful in this regard.

**Historical Background of Bijni Raj Estate:** Before going to the discussion about the development of education under the Bijni Rajas, we have to know what Bijni Raj Estate actually was. The Bijni Raj Estate was the largest zamindary estate of undivided Goalpara district. The founder of the Bijni ruling dynasty was Bijit Narayan, who was also known as Chandra Narayan. Biswasingha established the Koch kingdom in Koch Bihar in the first part of the sixteenth century. After the death of Biswa Singha, his son Naranaryan with the help of his mighty brother Chilarai (Sukladhvaj) extended the geographical and cultural boundary of Koch Bihar kingdom to a great extent. King Naranaryan divided the vast Koch Kingdom into two parts after the death of Chilarai in 1580 A.D.<sup>2</sup> Naranaryan

retained in his hand Koch Bihar proper and the rest part of Koch kingdom, which included parts of Darrang, Kamrup and present Goalpara district was renamed as Koch Hajo and was given to Raghudev Narayan (son of the great Chilarai)<sup>3</sup>.

After the death of Raghudev Narayan, his son Parikshit Narayan became the ruler of Koch Hajo kingdom and also a tributary ruler under the Mughals. After the demise of Parikshit Narayan, the Koch Hajo kingdom became headless and a chaotic situation arise there. In the midst of this restlessness Bijit Narayan, son of Parikshit Narayan established the Bijni Kingdom comprising a big part of Koch Hajo. The name Bijni, now a sub-division of Chirang district of the Bodoland Territorial Council area in Assam, comes from the name of the king Bijit Narayan. The Geographical boundary of the Bijni Estate was covered by Bhutan Hills in the North, Mandachal alias lower part of Garo Hills in the South, River Manas on the Eastern side and River Sonkosh on the Western side. The geographical area of Goalpara district created by the East India Company in 1822 is roughly the area covered by Bijni Kingdom<sup>4</sup>.

Chandranarayan (Bijit Narayan) ruled in Bijni from 1671 to 1696, after the grant of Charter by the Mughals. After Chandranarayan many rulers from the Bijni family namely- Raja Jay Narayan, Sibanarayan, Bijoynarayan, Mukundanarayan, Haridebnarayan, Balitnarayan, Indranarayan, Amritnarayan, Kumudnarayan, Queen Abhayeswari Devi, Jogendranarayan and Bhairabendranarayan ruled over the Bijni Raj Estate<sup>5</sup>.

The capital of Bijni kingdom was transferred twice for different reasons. The first capital was situated in an around of modern Bijni town (1671-1864). The reason for change of capital was an aggression led by Jhawlia, who was a local chief under the king of Bhutan. As Bijni was situated near the boundary of Bhutan kingdom, it was exposed to further aggression from Bhutan. This consideration led the Raja of Bijni to shift the capital to another place named Dumuria (now known as Dalan Bhanga), which was far from the boundary of Bhutan. But as ill luck would have it, a dreaded earthquake occurred on the 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1897, badly damaging the royal palaces of Dumuria. Therefore it was decided to shift the capital again to Deohati forest area which was later named as Abhayapuri<sup>6</sup>.

**Results and Discussion:** As a newly established capital there was no educational institution in Abhayapuri (the last and permanent capital of Bijni Rajas) at the beginning. Three rulers of Bijni Raj Estate, namely Queen Abhayeswari Devi, Raja Jogendra Narayan and Raja Bhairabendra Narayan took many positive steps towards the development of education. Among them, contribution of Rani Abhayeswari was very valuable. In 1904 A.D., Queen Abhayeswari established a High School in the capital of Bijni Raj Estate (Abhayapuri). The name of the school was Abhayeswari High School. Establishment of an educational institution by an uneducated lady is a rare example in the history of not only Assam but India also. 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<sup>7</sup>.

Another praiseworthy contribution of the Bijni Zamindary 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. Establishment of very good quality of school building was another contribution of Bijni Rajas. The doors and windows of the school building were brought from Calcutta and building houses were prepared by Chinese carpenters. As a result after 70/80 years of construction of the school buildings remained as it was.

Here a point to be mentioned is that, the admission of girl students were not allowed in the school which was established by a lady. The cause of the problem can be attributed to the rules and regulations prevalent at that time which was laid down by the society. At that time society was very conservative and it did not allow the girls to read with the boys in the same school.

For providing education to the girls of Bijni Raj Estate Queen Abhayeswari established Abhayapuri Balika Vidyalaya in 1910 A.D. At that time the school was the only centre of female education of the Bijni Raj Estate. In later period the school was recognised as primary and M.V School<sup>8</sup>.

After a lot of contribution in the field of education Queen Abhayeswari died in 1918 A.D. Queen Abhayeswari was succeeded by her adopted son Jogendra Narayan. After succession to the throne Jogendra Narayan was suffering from mental illness. As a result of this administration of Bijni Raj Estate was taken over by the Court of Wards. In this system of Court of Wards the administrative head was known as Manager not as *Dewan*<sup>9</sup>. Under this system, the Manager, who was appointed first was Mr. Berculi. As an agent of British government Mr. Berculi introduced many changes in the administration of Bijni Raj Estate. For example, he stopped the system of education without any fee and started the system of collecting half fees for education. Subjects of Bijni Raj Estate showed their dissatisfaction for such types of changes introduced by Mr. Berculi.

At the same time Mr. Berculi took some good measures for the development of education. At that time many students were given free studentship and poor but intelligent students were given stipends. In addition to these, contribution of the Bijni Zamindary towards the development of higher education was also notable. In the Bijni Raj Estate a student who passed Matriculation examination with flying colours were given post Matriculation scholarship<sup>10</sup>.

Till that time no girls' high school was established in the Bijni Raj Estate. We have already mentioned about the establishment of a Girls' M.V School. Realising the necessity of higher education for girls, a Girls' high school was established in 1938 A.D. This school

was named as Jogendra Narayan Memorial High School. The expenditure of food, lodging and education of the students who came to study in this school was borne by the Bijni Estate. Raja Bhairebendra Narayan was intimately related with the establishment of this school. In later times Principal as well as one Superintendent was also appointed for the school. By the hard work of such type of personalities they earned reputation. The school Inspector of that time, the great educationist Late Sarat Chandra Goswami wrote in 1939 after visiting the school that- "I am very glad to find improvement of its finances and at the instances of the Manager, the Bijni Raj has resumed its old interest in the education of its tenants."<sup>11</sup> Such type of comment of an eminent school inspector proves that the Bijni Rajas were very much conscious about the education of their tenants.

Except all these, many primary schools are run by the Bijni Rajas. Among them Dharmapur Primary School which was established in 1908, created an environment of education among the students of Bijni Raj Estate area. In 1926 A.D another school namely Pachduar Primary School was established where many boys of the western side of Abhayapuri started their educational career. When the number of students in this school increase very much, then at the instruction of Jogendra Narayan, a part of the school was transferred and a new school was created namely Balak Vidyalaya, in the middle of the capital. The expenditure of these primary schools came from royal treasury<sup>12</sup>.

The importance of the establishment of a college for higher education at Abhayapuri first came to the mind of Raja Bhairabendra Narayan (last ruler of Bijni dynasty). In 1945 he took some steps for constructing a college in Abhayapuri, the capital of Bijni Raj Estate. But after the independence of India, political condition of all the Zamindary estates of India became changed. This diverted the attention of Bhairebendra Narayan from his future public welfare schemes. Later the college was established under public initiative. But thirteen *bighas* land for the construction of college and forty four *bighas* land for the construction of college hostel were provided by the Bijni Raj family.

**Conclusion:** The Rajas of the Bijni Raj Estate played a great role towards the development of education in their estate. It was the time when students of Assam had to go to Calcutta for education. The later rulers of Bijni Raj family realised the necessity of education for the progress of their subjects. Queen Abhayaswari who herself was an uneducated women laid the foundation of educational development process in the Bijni Raj Estate. Along with the primary schools, high schools were also established for the benefit of the peasant and other class. In the period of king Jogendra Narayan and Bhairebendra Narayan also the process of development of educational institution was going on. The process continues upto 1956, when the acquisition of the Bijni Raj Estate by the government of Assam actually took place. Earlier rulers of Bijni ruling family did not get enough time to think about the development of education, because they were engaged in controversy over the throne, Zamindar and tenant struggle and peasant agitation. So the credit for development of education in the Bijni Raj Estate goes to Rani Abhayeswari, King Jogendra Narayan and King Bhairabendra Narayan. Thus by their continuous efforts the subjects of Bijni Raj Estate were able to connect themselves with the present world.

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