

## Raghu Deva's Coin in Nara Narayana's Name

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Nara Narayana was the greatest of the Koch kings. He built a vast empire, mainly depending on the unique militarymanship of his brother Sukladhavaj alias Chilarai, <sup>1</sup> a great general. Chilarai died in c. 1578. <sup>2</sup> Raghu Deva, son of Chilarai, after his father's death, quarreled with his uncle Nara Narayana. To accommodate the demands of Raghu Deva, in 1581, Nara Narayana divided his kingdom into two parts. The western part of his kingdom was retained by him, while the eastern zone was given to his nephew. The western portion, west of Sankosh, came to be known as Cooch Behar or Bar-dewan while the eastern part as Koch-Hajo or Saru-dewan. <sup>3</sup> However, Raghu Deva was to mint coins only in Nara Narayana's name. <sup>4</sup> After the death of his uncle, in 1588, Raghu Deva struck coins in his own name to ascertain his independence. <sup>5</sup>

Till now, no specimen of the earlier coins minted by Raghu Deva in the name of Nara Narayana was known. Fortunately, we have recently come across a unique rupee coin in the name of Nara Narayana, which bears various signs indicating that it was minted by Raghu Deva and can be regarded as the earliest coin of Koch-Hajo.

The striking similarities of this coin with those of Raghu Deva are the arrangement of four lines legends over the date on the coin and the similarity in calligraphy. Again, the weight of this piece (10.5 gms.) is almost same with the recorded weight of Raghu Deva's coin (10.4 gms.). <sup>6</sup>

It is difficult to identify the mint which produced this unique coin. But it is certain that it was minted somewhere in the eastern Koch Kingdom as no coin of this type was found/noticed in the western part of the Koch kingdom or elsewhere. The provenance of this coin is Haflong, a place far away from western part, but nearer to the eastern border of the eastern kingdom. This coin was found in a hoard, along with a good number of Kachari coins, <sup>7</sup> and is now preserved at the Department of Historical And Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati (Serial No. 15) <sup>8</sup> The minting technology <sup>9</sup> and the appearance is also similar to Kachari coins. This has strengthened the hunch that this was minted for Raghu Deva

in a Kachari mint. We know that the relations between Nara Naryayana and Raghu Deva were strained and the latter may not have had the scope to strike his coins from western Koch mint. The Ahoms, during the said period had not started minting their coins. The other immediate alternatives to Raghu Deva were Kachari and Jaintia mints. Ethnically, as Koches were nearer to the Kacharis, it could not have been difficult for Raghu Deva to contact the Kacharis.

Rhodes has regarded the possibility of minting Koch-Hajo coins in a Kachari mint as somewhat unlikely. According to him there is also no evidence during the said period, in North East India, of one ruler having coins struck for him in the mint of a neighbour<sup>11</sup>. He, however, opined favourably that this particular coin could possibly be one of the pieces struck by Raghu Deva after he rebelled against his uncle Nara Narayana.

From the economic point of view let us see whether it was necessary for Raghu Deva to mint his coins. From available information it appears that in undivided Koch kingdom, revenue was collected in cash or kind, although the former was preferred.<sup>12</sup> Raghu Deva himself had always kept an amount of rupees three crores ready in his treasury.<sup>13</sup> Use of coin as an economic unit was also not uncommon among the commoners. It is stated in Katha Guru Charit' (based on a manuscript- a biographical account of Vaishnava saints of Assam, written in 1758) that one Narayani rupee was sufficient to buy all the daily necessities (including clothes) of an average family.<sup>14</sup> In fact, Narayani tankas brought about the process of monetization in commercial transactions in this part of the country.

The details of the above mentioned coin is given below :

Metal - Silver ; Shape- round ; size- 34 mm ;  
thickness-0.7 mm ; wieight- 10,5 grams. ; legend-  
Sanskrit ; script- Assamese-Bengali; date- Saka 1477;  
denomination- one tanka.

Obv. : 1. Sri Sri.                      2. Siva charana

3. Kamala madhu

4. Karashya

Rev : 1. Sri Sri

2. Man Naranara-

3. Yana Deva Bhupa-

4. Lashya Saka

5. 1477.

Legends are inside a double circle with dots.

This coin bearing five lines (on the reverse), calligraphywise differs from two of the five lines Nara Naryana coins published so far. The later were akin to the western Koch coins with proto Nagri script.

### Notes & References

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4. Botham, A. W. '*Catalogue of the Provincial Coin Cabinet Assam*', Allahabad, 1940, p. 525.
5. Khan Choudhury Amanatulla A, '*Koch Beharer Itihas*', 1936, p. 136.
6. I am grateful to Mr. N. G. Rhodes, Hythe, Kent (U. K.) for pointing out to me the interesting similarities.
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8. I am thankful to the D. H. A. S. Assam, Guwahati for allowing me to examine and take rubbings of the discussed coin.
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11. My thanks to Mr. Rhodes for this observation by a letter.
12. D. Nath, '*History of Koch Kingdom*, Delhi, 1988, p. 126.
13. *Darrang Rajvansavali* (Manuscript; V. 688)
14. Kakati B. and B. K. Barua, '*Katha Gurusarita*', p. 344.
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