

Rare Coins Throw Fresh Light on Dimacha Rulers of Maibong

S. K. Bose

In the late seventies, a school teacher at Haflong found a hoard containing silver coins of some unknown rulers. On hearing about this, Shri H. K. Gayan, the then Inspector of schools, North Cachar Hills, who was interested in numismatics, collected the coins from the teacher (unfortunately, it has not been possible for us, at this stage, to ascertain the name of the said teacher or the size, shape etc. of the hoard). On the 14th November, 1985 a news item was published in 'The Assam Tribune',¹ Guwahati, identifying the coins as those of the Kachari rulers of Maibong. The item also stated that the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati, acquired these coins from Shri Gayan. Since then, the coins, sixtyone in number (including two broken pieces), and of various denominations, have been examined by a number of numismatists/scholars and everyone has expressed the hope that on completion of an in-depth research these will focus a new light on the history of Dimacha-Kachari rulers of Maibong.

The first analysis of these coins was in the form of an article published under the title "A Hoard of Silver Coins From Haflong" written by Dr. P. C. Choudhury.²

We have read the above article with great interest. To start with, Choudhury, in his article, has given the description of a coin dated saka 1503, issued by a Kachari King Amara Manikya. From the very description, however, it becomes clear to us that this coin was the coin of a Tripura ruler (who had reigned during the period Saka 1499 to Saka 1508, i.e., 1577 AD to 1586 AD). The King has been wrongly identified by Choudhury as a Kachari ruler. It has been narrated in his article that :—

- i) the said coin was struck after the Kachari King's victory over the Ahoms. The name of the King and his consort as read by Choudhury on the obverse of the coin, was 'Subha-Vijayee Sri Srijutamarmnikya Deva-dhai Rovati Devi';

- ii) The queen was possibly an Ahom princess. The Ahom King Sukhampha alias Khoraraja, after his defeat in the hands of Kacharis, found no other alternative but to enter into a marriage alliance with the Kachari King Amarmankya alias Yasonarayana ;
- iii) According to Choudhury, the disastrous defeat of the Ahoms and conquest of the Ahom territory by the Kachari King is 'testified by the standard of victory (vijayastambha) depicted on the Ahom royal insignia' (as shown on the reverse of the coin) ;
- iv) the coin in question, according to the author, was definitely minted in the Ahom mint ;
- v) Choudhury has also come to the conclusion that the coin was a half rupee since the weight was about 10 grams.

The above claims of the author and his readings made us curious to examine the said coin along with the other finds. We are thankful to the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam for allowing us to examine all the coins of the hoard and our observations are given below :

AMARA MANIKYA'S COIN : PLATE-I

A (i) This coin dated Saka 1503 (1581 AD) of Amara Manikya of Tripura had been published as early as in 1934 AD.⁴ The correct reading of the legend on the overse of the coin would be :

Srihatta Vijayee
Sri Sri Jutamar
Manikya Deva. Sri
Amaravati Devyau

A coin of this type is also in the collection of the Indian Museum, Calcutta⁵. In fact it is one of the most common of all medieval coins of Tripura.

- (ii) The above information against item A(i) nullifies the second conclusion of the author.
- (iii) The 'standard of victory' on the royal insignia as shown on the reverse of the coin in question, is the traditional symbol of the Tripura rulers and can be seen on almost all their coins. This symbol (with a standard of victory) was at first introduced by Vijaya Manikya in 1532 AD (Saka 1454) and was continued on the coins till 1934 AD, when the last coin of the last Tripura ruler, Vir Vikrama Kishore Manikya, was

minted⁶. The photographs of the royal insignias used by the Ahoms, Kacharis and the Tripura rulers have been given at the end of this paper which themselves will illustrate the differences between the symbols. (PLATE-I)

- iv) There is no reason to believe that this coin was struck anywhere other than in Tripura mint.
- v) Prior to the advent of British rule in India, the native rulers in the North Eastern part of our country had either followed the standard weight of ancient Hindu coins, or that of the Bengal Sultans as under :

a) One Karsapana (silver coin) = 80 ratis = 146.6 grains = 9.4 grams.⁷

b) One Sultani Tanka = 166 grains = 10.7 grams⁸.

Hence in no way can this coin of Amara Manikya be regarded as half rupee.

B. This entire collection is unique in a sense that it contains the coins of the Kachari rulers (about whom very sketchy historical information is available) and also of the Koch and Tripura rulers, who are ethnically believed to be very closely connected⁹. The hoard contained the coins as follows :

i) coins of Kachari rulers	= 59nos.
ii) coins of Koch rulers	= 1 no.
iii) coins of Tripura rulers	= 1 no
	—
	61 nos.

Again, not only does the hoard contained as many as sixty-one pieces of medieval coins, but five of these coins which have somehow escaped the notice of scholars, are extremely important from the historical and numismatic points of view¹⁰.

C. It transpires that one of the coins was issued by Sri Jutindra Pratapa Narayana Deva" the most illustrious Kachari ruler. This particular coin was issued by Pratapa Narayana to commemorate his victory over the Ahoms in Saka 1524 (not in Saka 1528 as is generally believed/accepted). We furnish below the details of the coin :

Metal : Silver, Shape ; round ; Diameter : 3.1 cm. (iii)

Weight : 8.70 grams ; Thickness : 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ mm ;

Script : Old Assamese/Bengali and proto Nagri ;

Legend : Sanskrit, Denomination : Full Tanka.

Obverse : 1. Hari Charana

2. Kamala madhu

3. Karasya Sa

4. Ka 1524

- Reverse :
1. Sri Sri
 2. Yutindra Prat-
 3. apa Narayana
 4. Deva N. ¹¹ a Swarga
 5. Vijayendra (vijayan ?)

(PLATE II)

This is the first numismatic evidence of the victory of the Kachari ruler over the Ahoms. As the Ahom King was known as "Swarga deva", the legend 'Swarga Vijayendra', was used to mean victory over 'Swargadeva'. ¹²

This coin is the third genuine full size tanka in the name of Pratapa Narayana ; other two being in the collection of the British Museum ¹³. The discovery of this coin conclusively proves that the victory of Pratapa Narayana over the Ahoms was in Saka 1524 and not in Saka 1528 as mentioned in the 'Kachari Burunji' ¹⁴. The date mentioned on the coin, however, is in conformity with the year mentioned in the Assam Burunji written by Kashinath Tamuli Phukan ¹⁵.

It may not be out of place to mention that the numismatic evidence repudiates the information recorded in the chronicles that Yaso Narayana and Pratapa Narayana were the one and same person. According to chronicles, it was only after defeating the Ahoms that Kachari King Yaso Narayana assumed the title of Pratapa Narayana. ¹⁶ But now, it is evident that Pratapa Narayana defeated the Ahoms in Saka 1524, and a coin in the name of Pratapa Narayana (in the collection of the British Museum) is dated Saka 1523 ¹⁷, a year before the above war took place. Therefore, Yaso Narayana and Pratapa Narayana were not necessarily the same person.

D. The next, an extremely rare silver tanka, which was found in the hoard, was minted by Nara Narayana, the successor to Yaso Narayana. There were two full size coins in the name of Nara Narayana in the hoard. On examination, we found that one of the said coins related to Koch King Nara Narayana, with the date Saka 1477. ¹⁸ The full description of the other coin is given below:

Metal : Silver ; Shape : round ; Diameter : 3.3 cm. weight: 10.25 grams ; Thickness : 1 mm ; Script : old Assamese /

Bangali character ; Legend: Sanskrit; Denomination : Tanka.

- Obverse :
1. Sri Sri Hara Gau-
 2. ri Charana par-
 3. ayana Hachangsavam-
 4. Saja

- Reverse :
1. Sri Sriyut Na
 2. ra Narayana
 3. Deva Bhupala
 4. saka 1532

PLATE - III

We know that in keeping with Indian traditions of the medieval period, the rulers of the various kingdoms in Eastern India used to strike their first coins at the time of their coronations. The Rajas of Heramba were not exception in the matter.¹⁹ Again, coins were also minted by them to commemorate the important events such as victory over the enemy etc. As nothing has specifically, been mentioned on it, we can assume that the above-mentioned coin was struck at the time of Nara Narayana's coronation to the Kachari throne at Maibong, in the year 1532, i.e., 1610 AD. History suggests that Pratapa Narayan reigned upto Saka 1532 (1610 AD).²⁰ Nara Narayana had definitely ascended the throne in Saka 1532, since he was the successor of Pratapa Narayana. Hence, the date Saka 1532 as mentioned on the coin can reasonably be assumed to be the date of his coronation.

Now we get a clear picture of the period Pratapa Narayana reigned at Maibong or Kirtipur. The earliest coin of Pratapa Narayana discovered bears the date saka 1523 (1601 AD)²¹. So, as per numismatic evidences available, Pratapa Narayana had reigned at Maibong (Kirtipur) for a period of nine years from Saka 1523 to Saka 1532.

E. Here, we would like to draw the attention of the readers to an important issue. A coin in the name of 'Sri Sri Pratapa Narayana', dated Saka 1528, surfaced in Calcutta and was acquired by a private collector. This coin was subsequently published in a Journal²². After the publication of this coin it was accepted that this coin was struck on the occasion of an important event of the King's life²³. This date also coincides the date on which Ahom King Pratapa Simha was defeated in the hands of the Kacharis (recorded in Kachari Buranji). Unfortunately, this particular coin breaks many of the rules which were followed by the Kacharis for minting their coins. These are :—

- a) After the coronation coins, all subsequent coins were minted only in commemoration of great events, which were mentioned on the coins. From saka 1524 onwards, we now have two genuine coins in the name of Pratapa Narayana, viz., "Swarga Vijayana" and "Shri-hattavijayinah". Therefore it is not clear why a coin

would suddenly be struck by Pratapa Narayana in Saka 1528 without mentioning any event on the coin.

- b) All genuine coins of Pratapa Narayana, including the twenty seven coins found in Haflong hoard bear the ruler's name as 'Sri Sri Indra-Pratapa Narayana' or Sri Sri Jutindra Pratapa Narayana'. The coin dated saka 1528 has the name 'Sri Sri Pratapa Narayana'.
- c) The weight of the coin referred to is 13.04 grams²⁴ whereas all the genuine tankas of Yaso Narayana weigh between 9.4 and 10.64 grams.
- d) The thickness, flan and calligraphy of this coin also differ with the other coins of Pratapa Narayana.

Rhodes and Mitchiner were specific when they referred to this coin as a forgery. They commented that this coin did not relate to the year of installation neither did it commemorate any special event. 'A more likely explanation', according to them, 'is that the forger was unaware of the genuine tankas of Pratapa Narayan In this case Saka 1528 would have seemed a reasonable accession year in the light of the historical information available to a potential forger'²⁵.

It now appears that a number of Kachari coins on which articles have been published during the last one and a half decades, are likely to be fake. In one case, Rhodes and Mitchiner had pointed out that the obverse die used to strike a coin of Bhim Darpa Narayana (dated Saka 1552) was used again to mint the coin of Harischandra (Saka 1642), a mistake on the part of the forger²⁶.

Kachari coins have all along been in great demand because of their rarity and considerable collection value²⁷. These may be the reasons which prompted forgers to produce fake Kachari coins. During the late seventies, a large number of Kachari coins suddenly appeared in the market through some enthusiastic dealers²⁸. It now seems that many of these coins are fakes. Now, to the historians, it becomes essential to revise the chronology of the Dimacha Royal Dynasty, on the basis of genuine coins only, if other epigraphic, chronicler and historical evidences are not available.

F. A coin of 1/8th tanka weight was found in the hoard. Such a small denomination Kachari coin has never been previously recorded²⁹. This beautifully designed coin was minted in the name of Sri Sriman Nara Narayana. From the design it is evident that this was struck in the Kachari mint. The other particulars of the coin are as follows :

Metal : Silver ; Shape : Round ;

Diameter : 1.8 cm ; Weight : 1.25 grams,

We do not have any definite information whether coins of such denomination were in use among the inhabitants of Maibong as a regular currency. We also cannot say with certainty whether the coin was a ceremonial one. However, though the barter system was highly popular in this region during the period, it was not unlikely that coins of small denominations were used by the common Kacharis for trade and other commercial purposes. We know that their Kingdom extended to the plains as far as Sylhet (now in Bangladesh) where small denomination Mughal coins were in circulation. ³⁰.

Historical records are available to show that during the reign of Yaso Narayana Kacharis traded in rice with Bengal at Sylhet ³¹. We also know that the mountainous terrain of the Kachari Kingdom did not deter its inhabitants from their commercial activities. Martin had recorded that there were merchants, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, coppersmiths among the Kacharis (in early 19th Century) and they had frequent intercourse and commerce with the plains in Assam ³². Such a state of commercial development could not have been reached by the Kachari hillmen unless it was built-up over the centuries. Hence use of coins (small and higher denomination) by them in their commercial activities can be an acceptable proposition.

G. Two more interesting specimens of coins issued by the next Kachari King Darpa Bhima Narayana, were also found in the hoard. Darpa Bhima, alias Darpa Narayana, succeeded his nephew Nara Narayana. Gait stated that Nara Narayana died after a very brief reign³³. We may, therefore, assume that Darpa Narayana became King between 1610 AD and 1611 AD and reigned till 1638 AD³⁴.

Darpa Narayana was a great warrior. As a Commander-in-Chief of Pratapa Narayana he had defeated the mighty Ahoms as well as the Jaintias. He was then known as Bhimabal Konwar³⁵. After ascending the throne he became known as Bhimabal Narayana. ³⁶ Gait referred to him as Bhima Darpa ³⁷. The reason for different names might be due to the fact that the Kachari rulers used to take a surname, or a new name at the time of ascending the throne or when any great event took place ³⁸. A peculiar feature of both the coins is that they bear no date, though important events are mentioned thereon. The style and lettering of these coins closely resemble those of his predecessors. One of the pieces which weighs 2.6 grams and is

fairly round, with a diameter of 2.35 cm, gives the following reading:

- Coin No. I - Obverse :
1. Sri Sri Hara
 2. Gauri Charana
 3. Para Hachongsha
 4. Padshah bala
 5. Jaya (Jayee ?)

- Reverse :
1. Sri Sri Yu
 2. ta Darpa Bhima
 3. Narayana Sri
 4. Sri Gunavati
 5. cha Lakshmi

PLATE - IV.

This is the first time we have come across the name of a queen mentioned on a Kachari coin. It may not be out of place to mention that except Tripura³⁹, no contemporary rulers in the North Eastern Region had mentioned the names of their queens on the coins.

Another piece of the coin issued by Darpa Bhima Narayana bears the following inscriptions :

- Coin No. II - Obverse :
1. Sri Sri
 2. Hara Gauri Chara-
 3. na para Hachengsha
 4. Jainteno Bala
 5. Jaya

- Reverse :
1. Sri Sri
 2. Yuta Darpa Bhima
 3. Narayana Sri Sri
 4. Gunavati cha La-
 5. kshmi

PLATE -IV.

The weight and diameter of the above coin (No. II) is 2.6 grams and 2.7cm respectively. The word 'Lakshmi' ('Goddess of Wealth') after the word 'cha' (a Sanskrit word meaning 'and'), may be an adjective after the name of queen Gunavati ('Virtuous Lady'), or this was the name of the second queen.

A question may be raised that if the king defeated the Mughals and Jaintias, as mentioned on the above mentioned two coins (No. I & II), why were the dates of such great events not mentioned as had been done by his predecessor Pratapa Narayana. We know that no corroborative information is available from any other source that Darpa Bhima, as a King of Kachar, had defeated the Mughals and Jaintias. In the circumstances, the only probable answer to the question could be that as the Commander-in-Chief of Pratapa

Narayana, Darpa Bhima was the key figure in annexing the Mughal territory⁴⁰ and defeating the Jaintias. He wanted to glorify these great achievements by mentioning them on coins. As the incidents took place before he became King, dates have deliberately not been mentioned on the coins. We hope that historians might throw some additional light on this particular issue.⁴¹

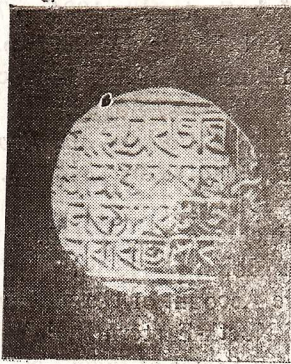
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41. We are thankful to Shri Hemrath Barman, Silpukhuri, Guwahati, Director of Museums (Assam), Guwahati, The Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Guwahati, Shri J. N. Choudhury, Rabindra Smriti Granthagar, Shillong for their kind cooperation and permission to examine the coins, manuscripts, books and records preserved with them. Our thanks also go to Dr. J. B. Bhattacharjee and Dr. J. P. Singh, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Shri P. C. Dhar and Shri S. S. Guha, Shillong for all the help they have rendered to us in preparing this paper.

PLATE I

a



b



c

d

d

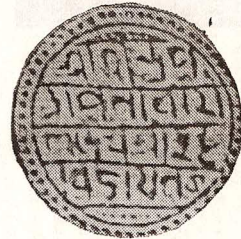
PLATE. II

a



c

b



e

f



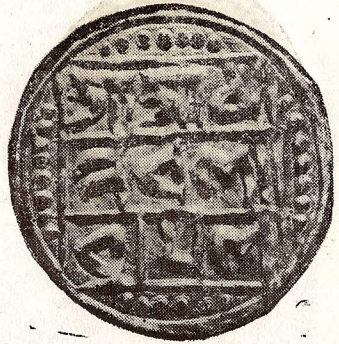
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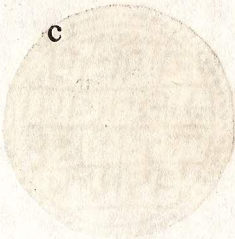
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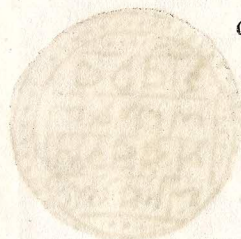
d



b



c



d



a



b



c



d

LIST OF COINS ETC. ILLUSTRATED

Pl. No.	Name of the Issuer	(The reproductions are in variation with the sizes of the actual pieces)	Obverse or reverse	Provenance and/or place of Deposition
I	(a) Amara Manikya		Obverse	Amarpur (Tripura) : S. K. Bose, Dhubri (Assam), K. G. Roy, Agartala, Not known : Indian Museum, Calcutta Haflong : DHAS, Guwahati.
	(b) —Do—		Reverse	South Tripura : S. K. Bose, Dhubri (Assam). Not known : House of Late J. Burman, Shillong.
I	(c) Udaya Manikya (Saka 1489)		Reverse	
I	(d) 'Royal insignia' as used during the period of Vira Darpa Narayana (Photographed from the Conch shell carved in the name of Vira Darpa Narayana of Kachar in Saka 1593).			
	(e) Royal insignia as shown on the copper plate of the Ahom king Gouri Nath Simha, dated 10th Magh, Saka 1714 Indra Pratapa Narayana (Swarga Vijayendra).			
II	(a) —Do—		Obverse	Not known : State Museum, Guwahati.
	(b) —Do—	Saka 1523 (?)	Reverse	(Courtesy - State Museum, Guwahati). Haflong : DHAS, Guwahati.
	(c) —Do—		Obverse	Not known : British Museum, London.
	(d) —Do—	Saka 1524	Reverse	—Do—
	(e) —Do—		Obverse	
	(f) —Do—		Reverse	
III	(a) Nara Narayana (Kachar)		Obverse	Haflong : DHAS, Guwahati.
	(b) —Do—		Reverse	—Do—
	(c) —Do—		Obverse	
	(d) —Do—	1/8th rupee	Reverse	—Do—
IV	(a) Darpa Bhima Narayana (Padsha Bala Jaya)		Obverse	
	(b) —Do—		Reverse	—Do—
	(c) —Do—		Obverse	
	(d) —Do—		Reverse	—Do—
	(e) Darpa Bhima Narayana (Jaintia Bala Jaya)		Obverse	
	(f) —Do—		Reverse	—Do—