

## **Kuranganayani: Manipuri in Craft, Assamese in Heart**

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**Abstract:**No disaster or revolution form in only one day. Anger, indifference, contempt suppressed for long ages burst out with devastating results. The prime factor contributing towards the decay of 600 years old Ahom Kingdom was the Moamoria Rebellion. The Moamoria Rebellion manifested during the reign of King Lakshmi Singha. Many critics condemn ‘Borbaruah’ Kirtichandra to be the immediate cause of the rebellion. Two disciples of Moamoria Mahanta- Nahar Khora and Ragho, were brutally punished which contributed to the high inflammation of the rebellion. In the first phase of the rebellion, Moamorias succeeded in capturing the throne. The person, who helped Lakshmi Singha to ascend the throne again and played a vital role in rooting out the rebels, was Kuranganayani.

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### **I. Introduction**

A woman, who with her charm, intellect and courage, was able to put off the spark of an intense mass rebellion. The Moamoria rebellion was that very incident associated with the exploited subjects, which shook the foundation of the great Ahom Kingdom. But the irony is that very less is found about that woman named Kuranganayani in the rich granary of Assam history. What we know about Kuranganayani, daughter of Manipur king Jayasingha and *borkunwari* (chief queen) of Ahom king Rajeswar Singha, is extensively from Dr. Suryakumar Bhuyan’s *Swargadew Rajeswar Singha*. Still after the first phase of the Moamoria Rebellion, Kuranganayani disappears from the pages of history. *Datiyolia Buranji* only cites the incident of a Manipuri princess marrying Rajeswar Singha.

#### **Objectives:**

This study seeks to bring out contribution of a princess of Manipur and later chief queen of Ahom Swargadew Rajeswar Singha, named Kuranganayani, through highlighting the ‘Moamoria rebellion’ a mass uprising that first took in the reign of Swargadew Lakshmi Singha.

#### **Methodology and Source:**

To enquire into the role played by Kuranganayani that brought about an end to the first phase of Moamoria rebellion I used Dr. Suryakumar Bhuyan’s *Swargadew Rajeswar Singha*. I have also used other several books written by established writers on Ahom History.

### **II. Discussion**

Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha, the fourth son of Rudra Singha, become the king of Ahom Kingdom after the death of his brother king Pramatta Singha. His brother Mohanmala Gohain, was considered illegible for kingship as his face was pitted with smallpox marks. During his rule the administration was looked after by ‘Borbaruah’ Kirtichandra, also known as Bakatial Gendhela Borbaruah. He was an overbearing person, disliked by the other nobles. One of the prominent noble of that period Numoli Borgohain attributed a low and non-Ahom origin to him, in his ‘Chakaripheti Buranji’. To extinguish a future challenge to his position, he collected all the Buranjis under the king’s order. Many Buranjis were destroyed in fire. Thus all his activities led to a growing dissatisfaction among nobles as well as general people.

In the year 1765, Kachari king Sandhikari made his submission to Ahom king. During this visit the Kachari king was accompanied by Raja Jai Singha of Manipur, who had taken shelter in Kachari kingdom, owing to the invasion of Manipur by the Burmese. Jaysingha offered his beautiful daughter Kuranganayani to the king. After discussing the matter with his higher officials Swargadeo decided to marry her. The beauty and charm of Kuranganayani made her achieve a particular space in which she was being his ‘Borkuwari’ (chief queen) Later with the help of Ahom soldiers Jai Singha drove out the usurper ‘Kelemba’ who have been placed on the throne as the king of Manipur by the Burmese. But it is controversial whether princess Kuranganayani was married to the Ahom king Rajeswar Singha after or earlier to the Manipur expedition. It is known from the historical writings that after Kuranganayani and all her family members were being taken to

Assam, Swargadeo's one of the higher officials Kirtichandra Borbaruah considered her as his daughter and took great care of her. When she was married to the king all the required things of marriage were being arranged by him and his wife. After Swargadeo Rajeswar Singha's death, his brother Lakhmi Singha sat on the throne. His reign was one of the anarchical periods of Ahom Kingdom. During this period 'Moamoria Mass Uprising' broke out in Assam. The formation of the background of the Moamoria rebellion was initiated long ago. At that time *Namghars* and *Satras* were only organizing platforms of the subjects. The *satras* and *namghars* became the media of those subjugated people's contempt. Getting worried of the increasing strength of the subject the royals started harassing the supposed centre of the rebellion that is Moamoria Satra. During "Bhagaraja" Surampha's reign Moamoria Mahanta Nityanandadev was assassinated (1650AD). Seventh Moamoria Mahanta Baikunthanathdev was murdered during Gadadhar Singha's time (1694 AD), Moamoria Mahanta Astabhujadev was harassed during the times of Sivasingha, Phuleswari Kunwari and Lakhmi Singha. At last, when the treatment of the leaders of the common people by the royals reached its maximum brutality, their rebellion became an all-encompassing fire.

Moamoria rebels attacked the capital and imprisoned King Lakhmi Singha in Joydol. Ramakanto, Son of Nahor Khora Moran, one of the prominent leader of uprising, became the king of Ahom Kingdom. Ragho, another son of Nahor Khora took the title of 'Borbaruah'. After being Borbaruah, Ragho forcefully married the daughters and other women from higher officials family. It is said that he thus married hundred women. The crudeness of the Moamorias increased day by day. Borbaruah, Borphukon, Dekaphukon all those higher officials were sentenced to death by Ragho Borbaruah. Those who were still safe decided to fight back and throw the Moamorias from the throne. Moamoria Mahanta Astabhujadev too enraged in his activities. Mahanta's son Saptabhujadev planned for overthrowing him and his brother Romakanto from the throne and to restore power in his own hands. For this purpose he gathered people and build up 'Sekoni-Kubua dal'. Ahom officials decided to go in disguise by pretending to be the Sekoni-Kubua dal of Muamorias and kill Ragho on the day of Sot Bihu. Certain worth-mentioning officials among them are Kuworiganya Bhogi Buragohain's son Ghanashayam Gohain Hazarika, Sotai-Olia Dol Bandha Rajmantri Borgohain's son and Laithapona Borgohain's grandson Bailung, Bhadrasen of Bakotial, Jado Tamuli's son's Ramkrisnai and ramnath and Khanikar Bhuyan's son Kekuru Kalita Hazarika was being chosen to meet her.

Kuranganayani had a very faithful servant, named Hunai. Kekuru Kalita used to know Hunai and with her help he made it possible to meet Kuranganayani. Kuranganayani informed it to him that she has always been faithful to her husband and even though Borbaruah Ragho forced her to marry him, she not allowed him to touch her. Her servant Hunai helped her by being so loyal. She replaced Kuranganayani at nights and he never knew the truth as lamps were not being lightened while sleeping. Kuranganayani assimilated with Ahom officials and planned to kill Ragho. They decided that on the day of Bihu plan will be implemented and Borbaruah Ragho will put to death. Kekuru Kalita discussed it with other officials and further discussion was held about the plan. Ragho Borbaruah cherished some kind of weakness for Kuranganayani, as he thought that she was full of royal qualities and intelligence. Kuranganayani taking advantage of it influenced him on his decisions. With the coming of Assamese New Year, Ahom officials accompanied by Kuranganayani prepared to implement their plan. It was decided that the 'Sekoni-Kubua-dal' of Ahom's visits Borbaruah's house, on the night of Sot-bihu and when Ragho bowed down to the people for blessing, they would kill him. On that night of Sot-bihu Sekoni-Kubua dal of Ahom came to Borbaruah's house, ready with their weapons. Kuranganayani convinced Ragho that the people wanted to bless him for good fortune and advised Ragho to pay honor to all. Ragho without any idea about her tricks, fall in the hands of Ahom. He wanted to hold a weapon when going out to meet the villagers. But Kuranganayani debarred him to do so that it will mean showing disrespect to them and he goes out empty handed.

Ahom officials, Kuranganayani and other wives of Ragho, who were forcefully married by him, were ready to attack him. It is said that when Ragho bowed down to the villagers, Kuranganayani first attacked him with a dagger at his right leg. After that all gathered there jumped on him with weapons and killed him. When the news of Ragho's murder reached other Moamorias, they left Rajdhani (the Capital). Nahar Khora Moran, his son Ramakanta, Moamoria Mahanta Astabhujadev, his son Saptabhujadev and many more involved in the conspiracy were sentenced to death. Thus Ahom officials along with Kuranganayani succeeded in bringing Lakhmi Singha back to the throne. King Lakhmi Singha announced in his court that it was Kuranganayani's help that restored him to the throne. He addressed her to be his mother and gifted her all things of Borbaruah's house. Kuranganayani Kunwari thus with her courage and intelligence snatched away a well deserved victory in Ahom's side. For her valour and patriotism, people still remember her as the Mogolu Kunwari. In Manipur too she is well known as Tekhau-Leima (Axom-Kunwari).

### **III. Conclusion**

During the time while women were confined inside the four walls or behind the *purdah* (veil), a handful of women, although very small in number, took part in statecraft and other political and social issues; and endeavored to give them a newer dimension. Some such women in Assam's scenario were- Borroja Phuleswari Kunwari, Manipur Princess Kuranganayani, queen Ambika, Joymoti Kunwari and so on. Assam history witnessed the devastating experience of the Moamoria Rebellion which was later extinguished by the house of royals and Kuranganayani played the key-role. Without her engagement, it would not have been easy to bring an end to the first phase of the revolt. King Lakshmi Singha remained imprisoned in the hands of the rebels and it was her intellect by virtue of which she too hypnotized Ragho, one of the prime rebels; and succeeded in killing him, which marks the end of that phase of the revolt.

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