

MEDIEVAL ODISHA

The Bhoi Dynasty: Govinda Vidyadhara and Others

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Odisha's political landscape became tumultuous following Prataparudradeva's demise. Treachery, consternation, and bloodshed became the norm. Gajapati Prataparudradeva had left no able successor to carry on Gajapati imperialism's banner. Cowed down by feudatories' selfish rivalry in politics, threatened by Muslim invasion, and facing economic ruin as a result of ceaseless wars fought during Prataparudradeva, mediaeval Odisha was on the verge of a great disaster. At this point, the accession of Kaluadeva, Prataparudradeva's eldest son, to the Gajapati throne in 1540 CE provided no peaceful administration for the

people. He was assassinated seventeen months later by Govinda Vidyadhara, Prataparudradeva's treacherous general. His demise compounded the perplexity. Kakharudeva, the deceased Gajapati's younger brother who succeeded him on the throne of Odisha, suffered the same fate again at the hands of Govinda Vidyadhara, who usurped the Gajapati throne in 1541-42 CE and established the Bhoi dynasty in Odisha.

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Govinda Vidyadhara (C-1542-1549 CE)

Govinda Vidyadhara ascended to the throne of Odisha during a period of political turmoil in the state. He desired to exert his influence over the people of Odisha upon assuming power by adopting the title 'Suvarna Kesari' as gleaned from the Narasimha temple inscriptions at Simhachalam. According to the Madala Panji, he led an expedition to Golkonda in order to reclaim the Krishna-Godavari-Doab from Sultan Quli Qutab Shah. Meanwhile, Raghubhanja Chhotaray, a descendant of the Mayurbhanj Bhanja dynasty and a nephew of Govinda Vidyadhara, rose up in revolt. He attacked and besieged Cuttack with the assistance of Valmiki Srichandana, another nephew of Govinda Vidyadhara and Abdul Shah. However, Mukunda Harichandana successfully defended the fort in the absence of Govinda Vidyadhara. Govinda rushed back to his capital after entrusting Danai Vidyadhara with the task of operating against the Bahamani kingdom. Raghubhanja departed the capital upon his approach. Govinda Vidyadhara defeated a combined army led by his nephew Raghubhanja Chhotaraya and pursued them all the way to the Bengal border. In 1549 AD, while returning to Cuttack, he fell ill and died at Dasasvamedha ghata on the river bank of Vaitarani.

If one examines Odisha's social history, one will discover that there was no such caste as Bhoi. However, as time passed, the accountants and record keepers of Odisha's kings came to be known as Bhoi. They eventually became generals in the Odishan army. Govinda Vidyadhara and, later, Danai Vidyadhara were outstanding examples of this. Whatever the

truth, Govinda Vidyadhara laid the cornerstone of the Bhoi dynasty, and the dynasty is despised as the dynasty of traitors. Additionally, some historians regard the Bhois as belonging to a lower caste (Sudra).

Chakrapratapa (C 1549-1557 CE)

In or around 1549 CE, Chakrapratapa succeeded his father Govinda Vidyadhara. He recalled from the South General Danai Vidyadhara and appointed him Prime Minister. Chakrapratapa ruled with tyranny, cruelty, and oppression. Abul Fazl recounts in his Akabarnama that he was assassinated by his son following an eventful eight-year reign.

Narasimha Jena (C 1557-1558 CE)

In 1557 CE, Narasimha Jena ascended to the throne. He came under the sway of Mukunda Harichandana, who convinced the king to depose Danai Vidyadhara. Narasimha Jena, on the other hand, turned a deaf ear to Mukunda Harichandana. When his persuasion failed, Madala Panji reports, he murdered Narasimha Jena and installed Raghurama Chhotaraya, Narasimha Jena's younger brother, on the throne.

Raghurama Chhotaraya (C 1558-1560 CE)

Raghurama Chhotaraya succeeded to the throne of the Bhoi dynasty after his elder brother Narasimha Jena died. He was made a puppet ruler by Mukunda Harichandana, the Odishan army's general. Danai Vidyadhara returned from the South after learning of Raghurama's accession. Mukunda Harichandana met him in Mangalajori, Puri, on his way to Cuttack, and won his confidence. Mukunda entrapped Danai Vidyadhara and imprisoned her. Danai Vidyadhara perished after a brief period. Meanwhile, Raghubhanja Chhotaraya, aided by Bengal, marched up to Cuttack and challenged Mukundadeva's authority. Mukundadeva apprehended and killed him. Mukunda Harichandana then assassinated Raghurama Chhotaraya and declared himself king of Odisha.

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