

# Discoveries of the Pillars in the Middle of the Pond, Associated with the History of Rankini Devi Temple in the Undivided Nandigram Thana – A Field Survey

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is to explore the evolution of the legendary story of Rankini Devi or Rukminidevi Mother's Temple is one of the Fairy-tale stories but it is the true factual scientific history. The history is not written on myths or superstitions or stories. True scientific history is written by facts, theories and accurate evidences. With the assimilation of History and religion there arise some different legends and mythological stories. Hence it can be said that one of the most significant criteria behind social differentiation was religious worship. Differences arose among people based on the differences in religious customs and rituals and the way of worshipping gods and goddesses. On the other hand, within Hindu society, there is a difference between caste-based Hindus and underdeveloped Hindus, as well as differences in religious practices and deities. There is a hiatus between the view of history and the factuality of history, that is, the ontologico-epistemology of history and exactitude of history, and this hiatus plays the role of the stimulant for those who are conscious of history as institutional historians, private scholars, archeologists, ideologues, amateur historians, lovers of history, authors, artists or persons adhering to a specific set of values rooted in history, to undertake the arduous but inspiring task of finding out the archeological and other sorts of evidences. The research emphasizes a bottom-up perspective, centering the voices and experiences of Chandipur and Nandigram Thana's people.

**Keywords:** Scientific history, Devalaya, Maljhita or Maljhata, Ganga dynasty, Kalapahar, Vishnumurti

## INTRODUCTION

'Rankini' means the Indian Goddess of sustenance and nutrition and a symbol of motherly love and protection. The ancient temple is said to have formerly existed on a rock. According to the legends, the temple had witnessed the human sacrifices (*narabali*) in the past. The belief amongst the tribes was that the Goddess herself killed the victims. The Goddess worshipped in the temple is believed to be a physical incarnation of Goddess Kali. This ancient temple is said to have been formerly existed on a rock. According to the folk tales, this temple had witnessed the human sacrifices (*narabali*) in the past, until 1865, when this was eventually stopped by the British Government. It was believed by the tribal people that the Goddess herself killed the victims. The stone deity was originally worshipped by the local Bhumij tribes.

But the medieval period of Bengal in 511 Bengali years, Rukshraj established Maa Shakti, after him the Maa temple is named Rankini Mother Temple. So, this legendary worshipping of Rankini temple is very famous in the history of Bengal. Now we discuss this social and religious background of the Rankini temple. Maljhita or Maljhata in Brajalalchak of Nandigram is average Mauja-Brajalalchak, Post-Brajalalchak, Brajalal Chowk No. 7 Thana-Chandipur (Undivided Nandigram Thana) District East Medinipur. In the description of 'O' Mally, the revenue collector of Medinipur published in 1911 (Chap. XV P. 223), it can be

seen that an area called Maljhita or Maljhata was spread in the area between the *Haldi* river in the north and the *Subarnarekha* river in the south-west. Brajalalchak Mauza belongs to Brajalalchak zone no-7 of present Chandipur block of undivided Nandigram police station under East Midnapur district<sup>1</sup>. *Vishalgarh* ruins 3 km x 2.25 km east-side of Gargram school bus-stop on Tamluk-Contai road. According to honourable Adhar Chandra Ghatak's book '*History of Nandigram*' (published in 1964), Raja Rookhsma established Brajalalchak as the capital of Maljata in the twelfth century AD. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Anantavarma Chorangadeva came to Malkata in Brajalalchak of Aranganagar Pargana after ousting the Kesari dynasty of Orissa and established a Vishnu temple<sup>2</sup>.

After King Rukhhma there was anarchy in Gargh-Maljhata for a long time. After the decline of the Ganga dynasty, Maharaja Kapilendradev dominated Malkata. He entrusted the ruling power in the hands of a person bearing the title of Pattanayk. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Orissa was conquered by Suleiman Karrani's commander Kalapahar, and the Pattanayak dynasty was removed from the ruling power. The kingdom of Malkata came under Pathan rule. Mughal supremacy was established in Bengal as Dayud Khan was killed in the Battle of Rajmahal. A prince named Balabhadra Mahapatra was appointed as the ruler of Maljata. Due to not being able to pay taxes on time, Maljhata went under Muslim rule. Later Raja Kalyan Roy got possession of the entire Gumgarh Pargana. He shifted his old capital from Gumaigarh to Maljhatagarh in Aranganagar Pargana. The famous Sultan Tajkhan Masnad-i-Ala or Maslandi of Hijli invaded the kingdom of Mahishadal. Welfare defeated in war Brajalalchak's Maljhata Ray surrendered the Gumgarh Pargana and was recognized as the ally of the victorious Sultan. The chariot road on which Tajkhan camped is still known as "*Machlandi Vehra*". Nasirabad (Hanschara) named after Taj Khan's son Nasir Khan, Muradpur named after Murad Khan still bears the memory of two Muslim invasions. Kalyan Ray's son Kasiram, later Kasiram's brother Hridiyaram and Hridiyaram's son Udaya Narayan gradually became the kings of Mahishadal. Udaya Narayan indulged in alcoholism and adultery and emptied the treasury, handed over the kingdom of Mahishadal to Rajaram Upadhyay, the great grandson of Janardana Upadhyay of Rangivasan Gargh of Mahishadal. Later Shuklal Upadhyaya became the king. Then his son Anandlal Upadhyay became the king<sup>3</sup>.

The royal palace and the fort-Garbari are on the eastern side of the temple of Rankini Devi founded by Raja Rookhsma. At present, this land is arable land. Here below the ground Redstone wall and square thin brick wall are seen. There is a *Dighi* called Kaman *Dighi* nearby. Cannons were watered from that tank and cannons were fired at enemy attacks. The moat on the north-east side of that *Dighi* is now arable water land called '*Kalidha*'. Chariot road '*Machalandi Bhera*' is present south of *Gargh*. To the north of Garagram, there was a king's flower garden in Phulbari village. Legend or myth has it that Lord Chaitanya rested for some time at Maljatarah on his way from Pichalda near Narghat to Puri during the reign of the Maljata ruler Gopinath Pattanayak in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup>.

The Rankini Temple is more than just a religious pilgrimage. The altar found in the middle of the pond is made of broken spider stones. According to the myth, there was a *Devalaya* or King's residence. But history is still invisible today. This is thought to be due to the abundance of bricks. However, according to Subha Majumdar Director, Archeological Survey of India, Bombay Circle

*"the altar in the middle of the pond was connected to the temple and the altar was originally built at that time if there was a big pond, a pillar had to be placed in the middle because a mark was cut there to measure the water and record how much rain had fallen."*

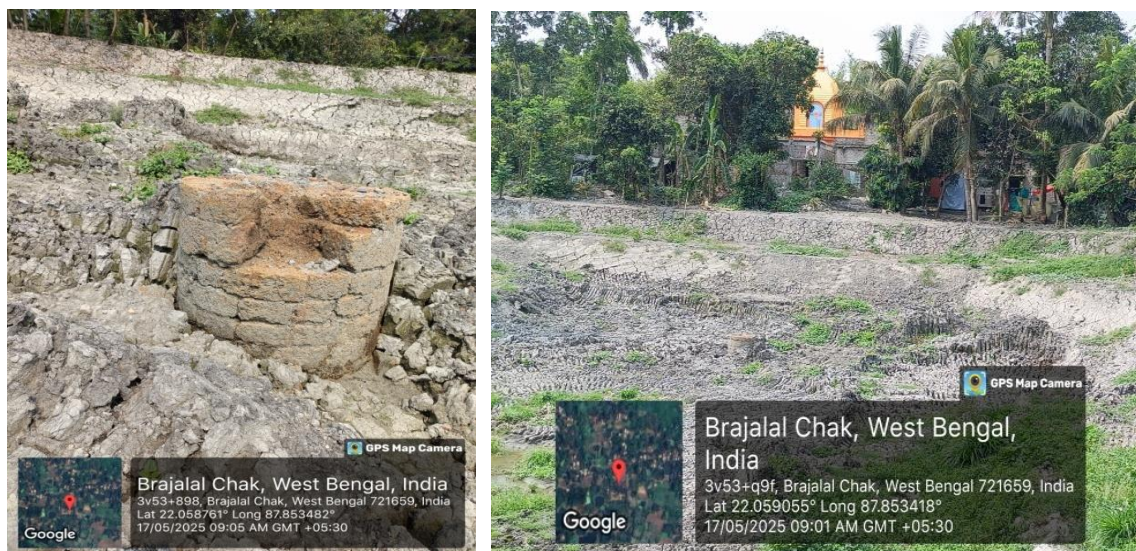
The reason for having so much bricks is that the *ghat* of the pond was built at that time. North Bengal also has such ponds with large pillars in the middle<sup>5</sup>.

### **Ancient Stone Pillar Found During Pond Excavation:**

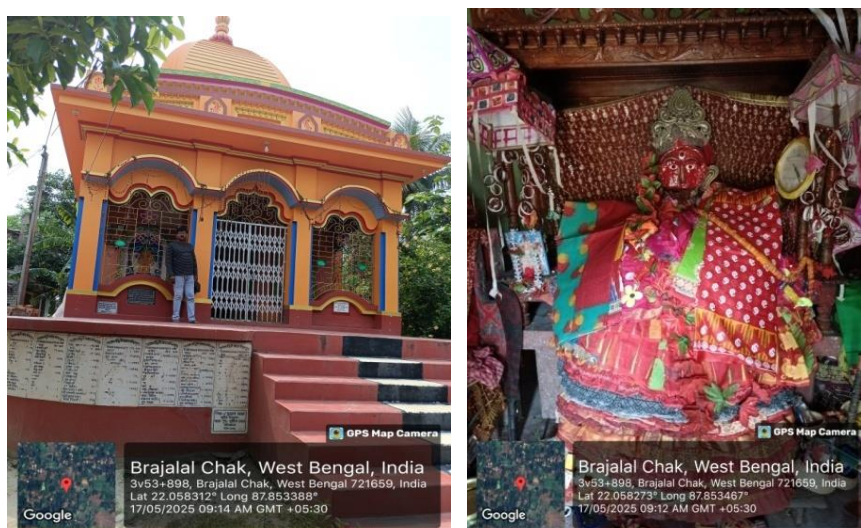
*Anandabazar Patrika* 18 Chaitra 1431 Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2025 was written that or report that an underground stone pillar has been discovered during the excavation of a pond adjacent to an ancient temple. The pillar was found on Sunday, 30<sup>th</sup> March, at Brajalalchak in Chandipur thana but previous it was belongs



to Undivided Nandigram thana. Experts believe it to be part of an old well structure, probably made of stone. Brajalalchak in Garhgram is home to the temple of Goddess Rankini. Nearby lay Kalidaha pond, Kaman Dighi, Rankini Kund, and Machhlondi Bhera. The Rankini Kund had not been renovated for decades. Recently, the descendants of the temple priests took the initiative to restore it. During the excavation on Sunday, this ancient pillar was unearthed. Upon seeing the image of the pillar, Kaushik Ghosh, Superintendent of the Museology Department at the University of Calcutta, said, “*It appears to be a 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century structure. It’s made of stone. It might have been a well.*” But why would there be a well inside a pond? According to Koushik Ghosh, “*It’s possible that a separate well was dug for the temple’s own use.*” Currently, excavation is continuing a short distance away from the location of the pillar. Locals have already informed the Chandipur Block Administration. Chandipur BDO Shashwat Prakash Lahiri said, “*We will inspect the area and take necessary steps.*” Nearby the temple of Goddess Rankini is also an ancient idol of Lord Vishnu. According to information from the book *Nandigramer Itibritta* by Adhar Chandra Ghatak, the Rankini temple was built in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century by King Ruksha, the founder of Maljhatta or *Maljhettia Garh*. Goddess Rankini is worshipped as a folk deity. Historical records suggest a connection between this temple and the royal family of Mahishadal. Local resident and teacher Pratik Jana said, “*It is believed that Rankini Devi had seven sisters, each with three eyes. One sister is enshrined in Ghatsila. This idol resembles her.*” The discovery of this pillar in the temple pond is considered highly significant from a historical perspective<sup>6</sup>.



(Ancient Stone Pillar Found During Pond Excavation near Rankini Temple)



(New Construction of Rankini Devi Temple)

## The History of Rankini Devi or Rukminidevi Mother's Temple:

The information we get from the interview with Beenapani Mishra dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 2025, a resident of this region about the Rankini Devi temple in Gargram area of East Mednipur district, is that Beenapani Mishra currently serves the temple of Rankini Devi. Here in 511 Bengali years, Rukshraj established Maa Shakti, after him the Maa temple is named Rankini Mother Temple. Rukshraj had no son, this Rankini mother told him that “the king will be your son, you establish me, then the king said, where I can get the statue of mother? Mother says you will get the statue in one place.” The statue of Mother is found in a forest on the western side of the paved road, some distance from where the shrine of Mother Rankini is now located. Sadhak Baglaprasad Mishra brought the statue and established it. The place where the idol was found is now where Radha Gobinda's rocking procession takes place. As the Brahmins were not available, the mother asked to bring a saint from Gouradesh (Kannagupta). His name is Sadhak Baglaprasad Mishra. Then the saint asked the king what will be the name of the temple? Then the king said that my idol should be named after my mother's temple. Since then the name of mother's temple is called Rankini mother's temple. This Beenapani Mishra's ancestral property was donated by the king. The king ruled over a vast area - hence the name Garagram.

Another amazing thing is the history of Kalapahar (1534-1580) he was a Bengali Muslim General of the Bengal Sultanate under the reigning Karrani Dynasty. There is a Vishnu idol on the Hari temple in front of Rankini Maa temple made of black stone with four arms broken from the elbows and feet broken and those broken pieces are kept under a banyan tree near the road in Amarshi (Now Bajkul-Pataspur Bus Road). Kalapahar loved the daughter of the then Muslim King Sulaiman Khan Karrani who formed in the region of Bengal which proved a potential threat to Mukuna Deva but the king did not want to marry his daughter to Kalapahar as his commander Kalapahar was poor. The fragmentary parts of the Vishnu idol were shuffled by *Bargi* Sudhakar Bhaskar during Alivardi Khan Period (1740-1756). This Sudhakar Bhaskar was killed by Sirajuddaula. Then Sudhakar Bhaskar curses Siraj, Siraj you have killed me one day you too will be killed.

Anyway, let's come back to Kalapahar, King Suleiman at that time forcibly converted many Hindus to Islam. So Kalapahar was also converted to Islam, then Sulaiman's daughter was married. When Kalapahar became the king, he decided that since we had converted from a Hindu to a Muslim, we would not have any Hindu Tagore. So he started breaking various idols, among them the idol of Vishnu was found in pieces, he also broke all the temples. Regarding the pond altar, he said, big pond was established at that time and the altar was built and to protect the altar, the altar has been raised a little higher in the pond<sup>7</sup>.



(Dismantled idol of Lord Vishnu this idol situated in front of the Rankini Devi Temple)



### Legendary myth history of Rankini Devi-Rukminidevi:

Rankini Devi-Rukminidevi was established in the early twelfth century AD by King Rukshma, the founder of Maljatarah. There is a myth — a block of stone (stone bell) was lying in the cow pasture near Brajalalchak near Maljatarah (to the west of the present Gargram School bus stop) for a long time. The shepherd boys used to rest on that stone block. One day 16 shepherd boys took a vow of worship by placing the stone block as a goddess in just like playing. Among the shepherds, some take the role of Brahmins, some musicians, some singers, some handmaidens, etc. Of the 16, the last boy is designated as the sacrificial animal. At the end of the *puja*, the killer boy is struck with a wooden block on the boy designated as the sacrificial animal—the boy's head is severed. Seeing this scene, the boys got scared and hid. The householders witnessed this miracle by going to the grazing field to find the shepherds with the returning cowherds. At night, the householders return home to see their respective boys. The sacrificed boy also returned to his master's house. The news the next day as King Rooks noticed and the childless king became dreamy, he transformed the stone into a goddess for the sake of having a son. At that time King Rukshma established this goddess as 'Rankini Devi' and the place where the Rakhal boys perform their worship is called 'Rakhal Dwipa'-'Rakhal Poriya' (now Deulpata).

This story was recorded in Oriya language on the beads of an ancient palm leaf called *Rankini Charit*<sup>8</sup>. Poet Rameshwar Bhattacharya's *Vandana Sangeet* of Devadevi has Rankini nomenclature.

*'Maljhata Gargh Banda Mahala Rankini.*

*16 hundred (sixteen hundred) shepherds have eaten the Dakini.*<sup>9</sup>

King Rukshma brought in Bagla Prasad Mishra Vedacharya of Kanyakubja province to establish Devi. Forty-two sons of Bagla Prasad Mishra have been found. King Kalyan Roy of Gumaigarh was inspired by Rankini Devi and took possession of the property and organized the worship of the goddess. There is a proverb - the king could not offer a human sacrifice to please the goddess, so he sacrificed himself at the end. Later, King Shuklal Upadhyay of Mahishadal came to Rankini Devi and prayed for a son. Being the son of the King, he named the son Anandlal and arranged for the annual stipend of 39 for the worship of the goddess Durga. Then King Anandlal's wife Queen Janakidevi gave 4/- *bigha* of land Brahmaottara sananda to Bagla Prasad Mishra's descendant Abhirama Vidyalankara for the service of Goddess Janakidevi. Later the descendants of Bagla Prasad Mishra acquired 60 acres of land in different *mauzas* 25% of the revenue collected from the subjects was deposited in the Mahishadal royal estate.

The entrance to Rankinidevi's temple was on the east side. Mohan Lal Bhuyanya of Rasikachak village approached the goddess to sing to the goddess on her instructions, being ignored by the public, started singing at the back of the temple. Immediately the temple door of the goddess was blocked and the back wall collapsed and everyone saw the goddess facing west. Until then Devi is facing west. The King used to offer sacrifices to Goddess Rukhma. Prepare a tank in the north-west corner of the Devi's temple for the installation of Rudhi. Human or animal sacrifices were performed in this temple. The sacrificial sword is still preserved with the priests. The present sacrificial system has disappeared. As the old temple was destroyed, the new temple is being built by the efforts of the public. A four-day fair is held on *Paush Sankranti* in the temple premises of Rankini Devi.

### Vishnumurti Installed by Anantavarma Chorangadeva:

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, Anantavarma Chorangadeva came to Maljhatagarh at Brajalalchak in Aranganagar Pargana. He brought a stone carved Vishnu from Orissa and placed it there. Bravery King Kalapahar during the Orissa campaign broke this idol and destroyed the temple. Until then, the broken deity is staying under a five-hundred-year-old banyan tree adjacent to the Rankinidevi temple. The idol is 4'10"× 2'6"×1' feet made of stone. Local residents call this idol as Chondraj Vasudev idol. At the time of the marriage of the sons and daughters, the local residents donate oil Haridra to the body of Bhagnadevamurti and then give Haridra to the bridegroom and daughter.

## Chariot Festival of Maljhata:

King Kalyan Roy of Maljatarah established idols of Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra here and introduced *Rath Yatra* festival. Later, King Motilal Upadhyay transferred the Jagannath, Balarama and Subhadra idols from Maljhata to his Mahishadal. From that time Rath Yatra festival ended in Maljatarah. Nawab of Hijli attacked the famous Taj Khan *Masnad-i-Ala or Maslandi Maljhata*. Defeated in the war, Kalyan Roy surrendered the Gumgarh Pargana and was recognized as an ally of the victorious Sultan. Taj Khan camped on the road - the countrymen called it '*Maslandi's Sheep*' (sheep of Maslandi).<sup>10</sup>

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Adopting a qualitative research methodology, the study draws on oral histories, researcher observation and an analysis some secondary books of local publications and daily News Paper. The research emphasizes a bottom-up perspective, centering the voices and experiences of Chandipur and Nandigram Thana's people.

## CONCLUSION

The sacred stone deity of Rankini Devi herself is a simple stone, yet it exudes a powerful presence, worshipped with unwavering devotion. The sacred stone deity was originally worshipped by the local Bhumij tribes. Later, through the passages of time this worship transformed into the worshipping of the Hindu Goddess, Durga, probably when the Kings of Dhalbhumgarh took over. Dhalbhum was first written about when the British Army attacked the Dhalbhum and Ghatsila region in 1767 jointly with Raja of Midnapore, after a previous abortive attempt in 1765. The famous Bengali writer, Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay (1894-1950) has mentioned Rankini Devi in his Bengali story named "*Rankini Debir Khadga*". During the early days the priests used to be come from the tribal Bhumij community. Since then the priests of the Bhumij community used to worship in the temple. Goddess Rankini was held in high esteem and worshipped by both the tribal and the non-tribal people inhabiting the district. Basically, this region of Rankini Temple is a cultural and historical heritage. It's a testament to the enduring faith of the local people, who have kept the flame of devotion burning for generations. Whether you seek spiritual solace, a deeper understanding of local history and traditions, or simply a moment of peace amidst nature's embrace, this hidden gem promises an enriching and unforgettable experience.

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