

Kangla: The Evolution of Culture and Tradition in Manipur

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Abstract: *The term 'Kangla' is very familiar to all the people of Manipur but, the historical importance of the place is known by a few people in Manipur. In fact, right from the very ancient period 'Kangla' is closely associated with the life style, tradition, and culture of the people of Manipur. It is the cradle of the evolution of culture and tradition of Manipur. There in the tradition and ancient literally texts this place is regarded as the sacred place of the people of Manipur. In one sense this sacred place may also regarded as the nerve centre or the hub for the evolution of the society of Manipur. Indeed, for the people of Manipur 'Kangla' are their history and the history of Manipur is 'Kangla'. However, for quite long time, except some scattered papers, the researchers of this place have not done any piece of major research work on the historical importance of Kangla. On the other hand many groups of people of different colours and outlook have started to look Kangla from their own perspective. The people worked on culture took it as an important site and historians took it as an important historical monument. Methodology: Primary and secondary sources and published and unpublished information pertaining to the present topic is used in the present research work.*

Keywords: Kangla, Culture, and Tradition, etc.

1. Introduction

The term 'Kangla' is very familiar to all the people of Manipur. But the historical importance of the place is known only by a few sections of people in Manipur. In fact, right from the very ancient period 'Kangla' is closely associated with the life of people of Manipur. It is the cradle of the evolution of culture and tradition of Manipur. There in the tradition and ancient literally texts this place is regarded as the sacred place of the people of Manipur. In one sense this sacred place may also regarded as the nerve centre or the hub for the evolution of the society of Manipur. Indeed, for the people of Manipur 'Kangla' are their history and the history of Manipur is 'Kangla'.

However, for quite long time, except some scattered papers, the researchers of this place have not done any piece of major research work on the historical importance of Kangla. On the other hand many groups of people of different colours and outlook have started to look Kangla from their own perspective. The people worked on culture took it as an important site and historians took it as an important historical monument.

Objective of the Study

To study Kangla as social and historical importance.

2. Methodology

In the present research work both primary and secondary sources of information are used. Moreover, the research work visited to the important historical places especially the 'Kangla' ancient capital of Manipur to get the first hand knowledge about the subject. Interview with key person like elders, officials, village heads are also conducted.

Historical Significance of Kangla:

Kangla was the ancient capital of Manipur from the ancient times upto the year 1891 A. D. It is located at the heart of the Imphal city almost intersected by 24⁰ N Latitude, 94⁰ E Longitudes and it is 2, 291 feet elevated from the sea level. It is situated on the western bank of the Imphal River. In ancient times, Kangla was the royal palace since the reign of Pakhangba who ascended the throne in 33 A. D. according to 'Khunung Leikoil' the manuscripts of Manipur. In the pre - Pakhangba period, the ruling clans named Tangja Leela Pakhangba, Leinung Lonja Pakhangba, Lolang Pakhangba, Sakakpa, Wankakpa, Kaksuba, Tonkanba, Kangba Ningthou, Moriya Phambalcha, Sentreng, Kuptreng, Chakpas, Khaba and ruled at Kangla. There are a number of ancient treaties / manuscripts specially 'Sakoklamlen', 'Chinglon Laihui', 'Nunglon', 'Khunung Leikoil' etc., which lay down the rules for the construction, worship, ceremonies relating to Kangla.

It is from this capital that the 'Ningthouja' clan gradually wielded enough political and military power and grew - up to be the most dominant clan in Manipur. The royal chronicle gives many references to the construction of Kangla by successive reigning kings in Manipur. King Pakhangba and his queen Laisana were coronet at Kangla. The ceremony of coronation (Phambal Tongba) has its own peculiar traditional characteristics. The nobles, priests, scholars and all the people were invited to the ceremony. The royal couple were cleanse with water from Nungjeng Pukhri and then adorned with ceremonial robes. The King and Queen sat below the red parasol. The royal couple of the coronation was performed. As a ablest ruler of king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba consolidated the kingdom. He laid the foundation of social, political as well as a landmark in the history of Manipur. He was succeeded by his son Kuiyoi Tompok ib 154 A. D. According to the royal chronicle, his reign was peaceful. He was known as the inventor of the 'Drum'.

During the reign of Naophangba the treatise on the construction of Kangla, Kangla Houba is believed to be written by Ashaingba Laiba. He was succeeded by his son Sameirang in 518 A. D. The period from 518 A. D. to 1512 A. D., the year in which Lam Kiyamba ascended the throne, was also important, because during this period the kingdom of Manipur was further consolidated and the all principalities were integrated under the Ningthoujas. Lam Kiyamba succeeded his brother \koiremba in 1512 A. D. the rulers after Lam Kiyamba like Kabomba, Chalmba and Mungyamba were great conquerors. They were engaged in defending the kingdom from foreign inroads and expansion of its territory. Kabomba defeated the Tripuri invaders in 1533 A. D. and dug Takhel Khong in their capital to commemorate the victory. He established contact with Assam and a trade route to Upper Assam was opened in 1536 A. D. Mungyamba was a great conqueror and his reign is remarkable for his successful military expeditions.

Khagemba was one of the greatest rulers of Manipur. He ascended the throne of Manipur in 1597 A. D. His other names are Sana Hi Honba, Khagingamba and Ningthouhanba. His father great Mungyamba left behind a strong and stable state. His reign brought major developments in the fields of Arts & Architecture, Coinage, Metallurgy etc. He introduced the art of brick making in Manipur. The art of reading and writing was also brought to limelight i. e., Schooling System of education. He was also fond of games and sports.

The development of Kangla began in earnest during the reign of Khagemba. The royal chronicle Cheitharol Kumbaba records the construction of brick gate way and brick wall on the western side of the capital Kangla in 1614 A. D. A Five - storied building was constructed by him in 1616 A. D. The Chronicle records the construction of the Utra, the ancestral coronation hall in 1629 A. D. The course of the Imphal river was diverted from Keckrupat to the north - east corner of the present Mongbahanba (Mahabali) area in 1630. The shrines of Nongshaba, Lai - Kasha (Soralen) were developed and a temple of Lainingthou Sanamahi was also constructed. He introduced a support or pillar known as Sana Yumbi.

Khunjaoba succeeded his great father Khagemba in 1652 A. D. He inherited a powerful and prosperous kingdom. Khunjaoba tried his best to improve the capital as a centre of commerce. He was engaged also in the fortification of Kangla. He excavated by Khagemba. Kangla thus became a well fortified capital with the moat surrounding the palace in all directions.

Paikhomba ascended the throne of Manipur in 1666 A. D. He consolidated his power in the valley and laid his arms against the hill and far beyond. His kingdom extended as far as Samjok in the east and Takhel in the west. He took great interest in development of Kangla, the capital of his kingdom. He constructed the brick temple of Lainingthou Sanamahi and Lai - Kasha in 1678. The temple of Panthoibi and Yumjao were constructed in 1680 and 1686 A. D. The royal chronicle records the moulding of bricks for three months by Paikhomba in 1886 A. D. Utra the ancestral coronation hall was constructed in 1688 and the western

brick wall of the Utra, which was constructed by his great grand - father, was again constructed in the same year. A palatial building and Yumjao were also constructed in 1697 A. D. Paikhomba established the offices of Ahallup, Naharup, Shagol Shang and Shamushang at Kangla.

Charairongba succeeded his adopted father Paikhomba in 1697 A. D. Charairongba was a good king. His reign was peaceful from the military point of view. Charairongba was an able administrator. He erected inscribed administrative decrees and edicts on stone at prominent places like temple. The royal chronicle records that in 1698 A. D. the king raised a stone inscription engraving all the administrative rules in the front of the temple of Lai - Kasha.

According to Cheitharol Kumbaba, Charairongba constructed the temples of Panthoibi, Sanamahi and others. He was credited with the casting of the bronze statue of Panthoibi and Sanamahi. He initiated to Hinduism in 1704 A. D. He was the first Hindu king of Manipur. After his conversion to Hinduism, the king constructed the temple of Krishna and other deities. But he continued to look after the deities of the ancestral religion. The most remarkable achievement of Charairongba was the introduction of temple built in the style of Burmese Kyoung in Manipur. Charairongba built many temples in Kyoung style dedicated to gods and goddesses of both the Hindu and Meitei.

Garibaniwaja ascended the throne of Manipur in 1709 A. D. he was the greatest king of Manipur during his reign Manipur attained the zenith of her glory and became one of the most powerful kingdoms in the region. He was a great religious reformer, under his royal patronage Cheitanya's school of Vaishnavism was propagated in Manipur. Afterwards, he switched over to Ramanandi school of Vaishnavism. His religious reforms brought significant changes in the social, cultural and religious fabric of Manipur. Kangla was well fortified with the excavation of the outer Moat and constructed of a brick wall around the bank of the moat. He also constructed a number of buildings at Kangla including one five storied palatial building.

The king issued several coins during his reign. The last days of this mighty king were miserable. He abdicated the throne in favour of his son Chit Shai in 1748 A. D. Chit Shai ruled for four years only. He was driven out of Manipur by his brother Bharatshai in 1752 A. D. And, Gourashyam exiled Bharatshai in 1753 A. D. After the expulsion of Bharatshai, Gourashyam or Maramba ascended the throne of Manipur. He was formally coronated at Kangla. During the reign of Gourashyam, Alaungpaya the Burmese king invaded Manipur in 1758 A. D.

The invading Burmese force crossed the Ungoching by the Khambat route and entered the Manipur valley through the Aimol passed and defeated the Manipuris. They overran the kingdom of Manipur owing its success mainly to the use of modern fire - arms. The Burmese force then marched to the capital and occupied it for nine days in 1758. Gourashyam and Bhagyachandra fled to Shangkhaithel. After the departure of the Burmese they returned to the capital Kangla. In 1759, Gourashyam abdicated the throne in favour of his younger brother Bhagyachandra restored normalcy in the kingdom

and consolidated his power and tried to regain the lost glory of Manipur in 1764 A. D. the Burmese again invaded Manipur. In this occasion Bhagyachandra fled to Ahom kingdom, and the people fled to Moirang. The whole country was devastated by the invading Burmese and a large number of Manipur captives were taken to Burma.

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Bhagyachandra also known as Jai Singh with the help of the Ahom King Rajeshwar regained the throne of Manipur in 1768 A. D. and ruled the country for more than 30 years. His reign was landmark in the history of Manipur for propagation of Cheitanya's school of Vaishnavism. His deep religious devotion earned him the title of Rajarshi. He ruled the country from Bishnupur after the war with Burma. He shifted his capital to Chanchipur in 1779 and from Chanchipur to Imphal in 1796. He however did not occupy Kangla. His palace was at what is now the compound of the Raj Bhavan (Konhoujam Yumpham)

Labyana Chandra succeeded his father and ascended the throne of Manipur in 1798. He ruled for only three years. He restored and revived the important religious places of Kangla and occupied the ancient seat of power in 1799. He then organised the death anniversary of Bhagyachandra at Kangla.

Modhuchandra succeeded his brother in 1800 A. D. According to the Royal chronicle of Manipur, Moshuchandra completed the constructed works of the temple and mandap of Shri Shri Govindajee which was left unfinished by his predecessor at Kangla, then he dedicated the temple and the mandap to Shri Shri Govindrajee during the short period of his reign.

Chourajit ascended the throne in 1803 A. D. he introduced grand scheme for the beautification of Kangla. He constructed two huge statues of Kangla Sha in front of the Utra in 1804 (But some scholar suggested that the Kangla Sha was constructed since the time of king Khagemba)

A temple of Shri Shri Govindaji was also constructed at the capital. He also constructed a religious hall with eighty four pillars known as Chourasi Khamba in 1805 according to Royal Chronicle of Manipur. The king also constructed the Mandap of Shri Shri Govindaji Temple in 1806 A. D.

Marjit with the help of the Burmese invaded Manipur in 1813 and defeated his brother. He then ascended the throne in 1813 and ruled for six years. In 1819 he constructed a royal residence with teak wood from the Kabaw valley. The building was roofed with gilded planks. In the same year the Burmese king invited Marjit to attend his coronation to attend the coronation, which offended the Burmese king. The Burmese king sent a large force under the command of General Maha Bundala to humble Marjit. The Burmese army ransacked the country and let loose reign

of terror for seven years from 1819 A. D. This seven years Devastation or Chahi Taret Khuntakpa in the history of Manipur.

Gambir Singh with the help of the 500 strong Manipur Levy raised with the help of the British East Indian Company expelled the Burmese from Manipur. By assistance in arms and ammunition from the East India Company, Gambhir Singh expelled the Burmese beyond the Ningthi (Chindwin) River. Before that Gambhir Singh had ascended the throne of Manipur in June 1826. He consolidated his position and tried to restore normalcy in the kingdom. He ruled the country from Langthabal capital. He died on 9th January, 1834 and succeeded by his infant son Chandrakirti.

Nara Singh a second cousin of Gambhir Singh, was theregent. Kumudini mother of Chandrakirti was not satisfied with the arrangement. After unsuccessful plot to assassinate Nara Singh, she fled to Cachhar with her son. Nara Singh as desired by the people of Manipur ascended the throne in 1844 at the age of 51 Nara Singh shifted his capital from Langthabal to Kangla in 1844. He reconstructed the two statues of the Kangla Sha at Utra as that Burmese had dismantled or destroyed the statues made by Chourjit. He planted saplings of Keli - Kadam trees (a variety of Anthocephalus Cadamba) on the both side of the road in front of the Kangla Sha to the western gate. The temple of Shri Shri Govindajee at Kangla was constructed with bricks brought from Langthabal. Nara Singh died on 10th April, 1850. He was cremated at manglen inside the Kangla. He succeeded by his brother Debendra.

Chandrakirti came from Cachhar and defeated Debendra who fled to Cachhar in July, 1850. Chandrakirti regained the throne of Manipur. In the year he ascended the throne, the mandapa of Shri Shri Govindaji temple was constructed in 1855. In 1869, a powerful earthquake rocked Manipur and destroyed many brick structures including the temple of Shri Shri Govindaji. A temporary temple was constructed and inaugurated in the same year. All the sacred and holy places inside Kangla were developed and maintained. Kangla thus became a well - fortified palace surrounded by at least five barriers, including the inner and other moats, brick walls, an earthen rampart and citadel surrounding the palace in the centre. Chandrakirti's long and successful reigns came to an end in 1886. He died on Friday the 20th May, 1866 at the age of 55. Surchandra succeeded his father on the throne in 1886. There were revolts against his led Sana Borachaoba and Wangkheimayum Dinachandra. The revolts were not successful. But, on the 21st September, 1890, princes Zila Ngamba and Angousana with the able support of the Senapati Tikendrajit revolted against Surchandra. Surchandra abdicated and left Manipur for Brindaban.

His brother Kulachandra Dhaja ascended the throne in 1890 and Tikendrajit became the Yubraj, Surchandra requested the Government of India to reinstate him on the throne. The British refused his request and decided to recognize Kulachandra as the king of Manipur and to arrest Yubraj Tikendrajit. The chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. James Wallace Quinton, came to Manipur to execute the order of the Government of India with a 400 (four hundred) strong escort under the command of colonel Charles Mac Donald

Skene, D. S. O. This event led to the Anglo - Manipur war of 1891.

3. Conclusions

The people of Manipur have a strong sense of History. The Meiteis who mastered the art of writing from very early times kept records of the past in the form of royal chronicles, clan, genealogies and other literary works covering almost all branches of Knowledge. In the Kangla, we have seen changes in the life style, socio - cultural fabric in Manipur society.

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