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Contd. from Yesterday

Tikendrajit – The Lion of Manipur

Conflict of Symbols in the Anglo-Manipur War 1891

Life's pain

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Walking through such a pain, I know not life's about;
I cried and cried for nothing, lying upon her bosom;
She tried pushing me out, out into this worldly pain;
My first ever pain "aang ngaa, aang ngaa" too thrilling;
I remembered not how hard 'he' better hit me;
Forcing me to gain 'pains', those pains of happiness;
Cutting and caring that umbilical cord of mine;
What a sigh! My 'mother' so relieving and promoting;
Those laughers and those talks, still lingering;
I cried and cried even when I am hungry
I knew not, she's trying, trying so much;
Consoling and patting, patting on my body;
She watches me upon, day and night so everlasting;
Guarding upon my lines, I see life's so tangy;
Life's too patty, don't and dos, too many;
Choices! Never an easy option, those pains;
Piercing and cutting; falling down and hitting;
Don't go there; don't jump; sleep, go and sleep;
Doesn't matter, how I feel like, how I dealt with;
Life's always be criticizing; 'lean upon some for nothing'
'Blame me for unnecessary count' am I?
'Blame me for useless presence' am I?
'Blame me for extra surviving' am I?
'Blame me for how lazy I at work' am I?
'Blame me for how stupidity and silliness' am I?
I knew not, life's too painful, life's so harsh;
Twisting and turning; sit here and stand up;
Calculating and reckoning; walk faster and walk in front;
I never reckon happiness would suffice enough;
Love and hatred; living and death;
Disease and infections; Famine and floods;
Cancer and AIDS; Fever and Diabetics;
Rape and murder; Abortion and Flushing out;
Gun and drugs; women and weapons;
Corruptions and laws; Sickness and headaches;
Marriage and divorce; Delivery and motherhood;
Young and old; affairs and extra affairs;
All matter of purpose, it's too harsh overcoming those;
Life's a misery, it's painful.

Hojang

By:Chinkhei Luwang

Oh Hojang where are u?

us to a place
everyone unites
y and blurred here
d despondent youths
ching for you.

re were you all day long?
ks down here.
u lead a clearer path,
untain of freedom
mortal spirit of justice.

ng where are you?
winds of equity
isty bondage of suffering
p the disheartened soul.

are a path finder
I a lost soul
n a place
oppressed the oppressed...

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By - Dr. Lokendra Arambam

Manipuri scholars, following the attitude of their British masters in their analysis of the character and behaviour of the Manipur princes in their struggle for power of the throne, often spoke of the hatred and spite amongst the aspirants of the throne. They write about the animosity, hatred and factional disputes between the sons of Maharajah Chandrakirti and point to Tikendrajit as being the mastermind of the palace revolution of 1890, the coup against the eldest son Surchandra's occupation of the throne, and thereby leading to the intervention of the British on the issue of succession to the throne. Not much of studies are done by Manipuri scholars on the issue of what it is to occupy the throne, and how the throne represented a sacred energy bequeathed by the ancients which empower the occupant to serve the basic unity of the cosmos and the earth, and to effect the regulation of the course of the seasons to provide welfare and equilibrium to the citizens, that the court and palace of the king should represent an exemplary centre, a model of the heavenly abode of human ancestors who provided the life and continuity of the race, and the vivacity and joy of living. The throne was indeed a sacred power which the incumbent received through a complex ritual of coronation whereby the spirits of the ancestors empowered the occupant the right to effect force to govern the state and model the polity towards a spiritual attainment which was sacred, sanct and pure. The ancient capital Kangle was therefore a sacred ritual centre which should never be contaminated by profane human acts, and attack on the sacred space should be punished by capital punishment. By tradition of the absence of the law of primogeniture, the princes had a moral and spiritual right to succession, but the wishes of the elders, the women of the court, and the desire of the populace would be important factors to succession. But the changes of perceptions and precepts in association of new values that penetrated the realm in the wake of a new world religion and practical pragmatic influences of the secular western ideas would have had a dilutive effect on matters of politics and exercise of power later in history.

The conflict amongst the brothers and cousins amidst the sons of Chandrakirti no doubt has poignancy and thrust in the scramble for power, but at the same time we have to be aware of the contemporary experiences in the history of the Burmese polity in the 18th and 19th centuries which had similar refrains in those of Manipur, who shared valuable culture and traditions of the courts. We must be aware of the fratricidal conflicts and massacres in the Konbaung dynasty amidst the successors to Alaung Zeya (Alompra by Manipuris, 1750-1760), and Bodaw Paya (1782-1819), who was the fourth son of Alaung Zeya effected a murder of some eighty three princes and princesses in 1789. This sort of fratricidal blood-letting was also effected during the reign of Thibaw, the last of the Konbaung dynasty (1875-1885), who massacred some seventy to eighty brothers and kinsmen in Mandalay in 1878, which was known as the Massacre of the Kins. In Burmese tradition it was in fact a purging of the realm according to custom, and the body of the king was homologous with the body of the polity. This was so in Manipur too. Manipur had an autonomous, independent attitude to kingship and occupation of the throne

according to ancient beliefs and traditions. The British authorities had a mundane, earthy notion of holding of power as a source of control over people and resources, and they claimed the right to intervene in all aspects of succession to kingships all over India, thereby gradually depriving political authorities of the princes the exercise of their own sovereignty. For Manipur it was a challenge to their civilizational symbols and beliefs. The midnight attack in the capital by Quinton and his co-hosts was a severe trampling upon the sacred space of the Kangle, the sacred navel of the universe of the Meitei. 'Heads of white bodies shall roll in front of the Kangle Uttra' was a prediction of the soothsayers.

The story of the visit of the Chief Commissioner of Assam along with a military escort and the subsequent developments leading to the massacre of four British officers and the confrontations led to the defeat of the Manipur state is known to one and all. But not much is known about how the native state of Manipur responded to the visit of the British dignitary from Shillong, and the gestures of the officials and military representatives of the Asiatic state towards the visitors reflect the attitude of the traditional Asiatic power towards the foreign dignitary worthy of respect and honour. A contingent of the Manipur army with seven hundred soldiers under General Thangal went to Mao in the northern hills to first receive the visiting British dignitary. Later the Senapati Tikendrajit himself with fifty soldiers met him at North Sekmai. The Commissioner, as head of the military contingent reached the capital, at every nook and corners of the highway, the citizens erected banana plants, with sugarcane and lighted lamps to give blessings to the visitor. The Maharajah Kulachandra who was now king of the land, followed by the palatial officials received the Commissioner with four hundred soldiers with a thirteen gun salute at the western gate of Kangle. The Commissioner was ushered into residence of the Political Agent, at Konthoujam ifam (the present Governor's residence).

The Commissioner ordered the Durbar to be held on that day itself at the Residency of the Political Agent Mr. Grimwood, and the native ruler and his retinue was forced to wait at the gate of residency for hours, since the Government of India's proclamation was to be translated and it took quite long. The military preparations surrounding the residency became an object of suspicion to the native officials, especially Tikendrajit, who sensed the dubious preparations and absented himself from the Durbar, pleading ill-health. It led to the immediate postponement of the Durbar, since it became clear that the Durbar should be held with Tikendrajit himself to be present. The next day, the 23rd of March, the matter became more complicated since Tikendrajit refused to attend the Durbar. The failure to hold the Durbar, where Tikendrajit was to be arrested, led to Mr. Quinton scheme the attack at the Kangle at dawn the next day with force of arms which led to the reprisal by the native soldiers and the subsequent tragedies.

New documents that had now become available had revealed that the Chief Commissioner Mr. Quinton was pre-determined to remove Tikendrajit from Manipur, and he was already in consultation with the Government of India, represented by the Viceroy's

Council in Simla. The British authorities had been completely informed of the entire history of the political developments in Manipur and the details of the palace revolution in 1890. Instead of deciding to support the eldest brother Surchandra who requested British help to restore his throne, the Government decided to support the cause of the usurper Kulachandra, and at the same time see to it that Tikendrajit, the real power behind Kulachandra's throne be deported from Manipur elsewhere in India. The logic of the empire was of paramountcy to interfere in matter of succession, and the British interests that had perennially climbed since its conquest of Burma, and an absolute necessity to remove any potential enemies to its hegemony. Mr. Quinton and the Viceroy's Council had earlier mulled over the necessity to increase the strength of the military garrison posted at Imphal even, and Mr. Quinton was also aware (in his own way) that the Senapati (Tikendrajit), the most popular of the brothers, the present head of the Manipur Army, a man of bold and turbulent character may be expected, when driven to desperation, if he does not openly resist, to use these utmost efforts to stir up disaffection and rebellion. Mr. W.J. Cunningham, the officiating secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department in his confidential letter to Mr. Quinton on the 21st February, let it be known that "The Governor General in Council considers that it will be desirable that the Senapati should be removed from Manipur and punished for his lawless conduct. I am to enquire where you would recommend that he should be interned, and what steps you consider necessary for carrying out his removal without affording him the chance, which his position as head of the Manipur forces might possibly give him, of making any forcible opposition" (Fort William No. 360 E.).

The stealthy raid to the sacred capital, the unprovoked violence to women, children and ethnic residents in the night of the 23rd March 1891, and the hand to hand combats with the attacking soldiers, the devastation and fire to households, death to ethnic citizens and Brahmins and the burning of property and loss of lives to both sides were indeed an unpardonable crime perpetrated by the alien power to a historically trusted friend and ally. The so-called ceasefire and attempt at negotiation after the violence of the whole day of the 24th failed because of the refusal by the British authorities to surrender their arms, as demanded by Tikendrajit. The tense night witnessed the arousal of the masses affected by the provocation and those citizens earlier who had lost their near and dear ones, those who had nursed silent grievances against British officers for misbehaving with their daughters, rose in one fell swoop and punished those perpetrators of the crime. In the eyes of the indigenous patriots, the attackers on the sacred capital of the land had perpetrated an unpardonable crime, and the capital punishments was deserved, sanctioned by tradition.

In the reckoning of the powerful empire, the murder of the four British officers was a severe insult to the might and prestige of the Victorian Empire. The Asiatic state was attacked from three sides. The warriors of Manipur, aware of their inferiority of arms and superiority of the enemy in technical aspects of warfare,



retreated from the three mountain strongholds, but finally made a resolute stand at the fields of Khongjom, some 22 miles at the south of the capital, and from 8 am till 5 pm engaged in hand to hand combat, swords and shields against bayonets and cannon ball fire and the river Khongjom ran with blood! The Gurkha regiments who fought with the Manipur army later recognized that the Khongjom battle was one of the hardest and toughest they had ever fought for the prestige of the British empire.

As for Tikendrajit, for his personal leadership in the conduct of the war, in his heart of the hearts, must have felt it as an avoidable engagement. He saw to it that Mrs. Grimwood, in her flight to Silchar was not pursued by the Manipur army. He saw to it that those who had been captured in the early confrontation should no longer be kept in prison. Those fifty one soldiers who had been imprisoned due to the Quinton attack on the sacred capital were released and given rupees five each for their expenses on the way back. When the war became unavoidable, appropriate measures were taken for all defence in the three hill routes, yet attempts were made to have negotiations at the Thoubal battle in early April. But it was impracticable. The disaster at Khongjom in late April which was the last resistance, led to the final decision to leave the capital. There was a serious discussion whether Yubaraj Tikendrajit should lead a final confrontation, but realistic appraisal felt it was better for the prince to think of a resistance seeking the support of a foreign power i.e. China. The prince along with the Maharajah and some fifty armed men left the capital on horseback on the 26th April, and attempt to reach the Chassad region in the northeast where the Kuki friends of the state awaited. Unfortunately, the help of the Kuki chieftain Tonghu, at Chassad could not succeed, since the British forces had sealed all routes, since Burma had earlier been conquered. Tikendrajit, his brother king and the group returned in hiding, each on their own. He was later in May arrested from the home of his mother's elder sister and it was a Manipuri Subedar, Khelendra of the Konthoujam family, who was himself a distant relative from the line of prince Nar Singh, a colleague of Tikendrajit's grandfather Gambhir Singh, the heroes of the Manipur freedom struggle against the Burmese was of 1824-26. It was secretly rumoured that the prince Tikendrajit let himself be arrested by none other than a Manipuri soldier from the Surma valley military police, who had accompanied the British invading force from Silchar, under Lieutenant Col. R.H.F. Rennick, the Commander of the Silchar Column, who reached Imphal and entered the capital Kangle on the 27th April 1891.