

Editorial

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Khonjom Day : Its okay to observe on April 23 , but the fact should be well maintain

The debate over the actual date of Khonjom war is still going on. A group said the war occurred on April 23, 1891 while another group denied it saying that the war actually happened on April 15, 1891.

Knowingly or unknowingly the state government started observing Khonjom Day every April 23 in commemoration to the war heroes of Khongjom War which is also known as the last battle of Anglo-Manipuri War after issuing a govt. notification No. 2/9/82 R , dated Oct. 11 1982 and Gazette Notification No. 266 of October 15.

But then a controversy has been raging over the actual date of determining the historic battle as the occasion has been observed as a state function since 1973 for which a memorial foundation stone was laid by late Hon'ble President of India Shri V. V. Giri on 21st October, 1972.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the souvenir published by Publicity Department, Government of Manipur issued in connection with late President's visit to Manipur (refer to above), -it is mentioned that the Battle of Khongjom took place on 25th April, 1891 (page no. 19 of the Sovenir).

Considering the importance of event and to arrive at a amicable conclusion to put an end to the controversy a High Level Committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of Yumnam Yaima Singh, the then Speaker of Manipur Legislative Assembly on May 1982 which recommended 23rd of April, 1891 as actual date in which the said battle.

It's not about disregarding the observance of Khongjom Day on April 23 to commemorate those sacrificed for the cause of the erstwhile kingdom but it is about correcting the error as it would mislead the historical facts.

Well as per war diary of the British army it is stated that - On the Letter No 181-M dated 29th April, 1891, location Camp Manipur, Brigadier-General T Graham, C.B., commanding the Tamu Column, Manipur Field Force wrote to the Assistant Adjutant- General, Manipur Field Force. This was also published by, The London Gazette dated August 14, 1891.

In the report it is being reported that he main body of the Tamu column concentrated at Tamu on the 21st April, and advance on the 23rd April, it having been arranged that the column from Kohima, Silchar, and Tamu should concentrate on Manipur on the 27th April, 1891.

The report said that, on the 24th April, While the main body was at Tengnoupal, Information was received from Palel that the Manipuri troops had entrenched themselves in a position about six miles north of Palel, and orders were issued for a reconnaissance to be made on the 25th April to ascertain their strength.

The letter showed that Tamu troop who had fierce battle with Manipuri army reached only on April 25.

That means that it was not possible for the war to occur on April 23 of 1891.

After the debate over the actual date of the war nearly reached its catastrophe the Department of Art and Culture of the State government constituted a review committee comprising of 6 experts to find out the historical facts of the Anglo Manipuri War on November 14, 2014.

For reason best known the committee remain slumbered and another reminder was sent to the Commissioner of Arts and Culture, government of Manipur by the then Director of the same department on March 18, 2016.

This write up has no opposition in the observance of Khongjom Day on April 23 , but the fact about the battle should let known and well recorded in Govt. records.

The Evolution of The Meitei State

Dr. K. Manikchand

Introduction:

The ancient kingdom of Manipur ruled by its sovereign monarchs uninterruptedly for about two millennia under a single dynasty has now become a state of India consequent upon its merger with the latter on 15th October 1949. Manipur has now an area of 22, 356 sq. kms only. But in the days when Manipur was a sovereign state, its territory was much bigger. The areas comprising the three sub-divisions of upper Chindwin District of present day Burma, viz., Thangdut, Khambat and Kale were integral parts of Manipur and river Chindwin (Ningthi) formed the international boundary between Manipur and Burma till 1834 AD. The said areas continued to be bone of contention between Manipur and Burma till Manipur was merged with the Republic of India. In west parts of the plains of southern Cachar were included in its empire and in the North the forest between Doyang and Dhunsi were the boundary between Manipur and Assam.

Manipur consists of both hills and plains. The Central plain known as Manipur Valley and its adjacent hill areas were the homeland of the Meiteis since time immemorial. Meetei by now are inhabiting only in the plain, the hills being made the exclusive abode of the Nagas and Kukis. It was in the heart of this central plain of Manipur that the Meiteis since the dawn of history began to evolve from a petty principality to a powerful kingdom with a vast geographical area comprising not only the valley and the surrounding hills but also of other territories that lay beyond its present frontiers. It was their high sense of ethnocentrism, inherent martial tradition, spirit of heroism and soldierly qualities that led the forefather of the present day Meiteis to engage in frequent encounters even with their bigger and powerful neighbour, the Burmese. It was no mean achievement for such a numerically small nation to plunder and lay in devastation frequently areas right up to the walls of Awa, the then imperial capital of Burma.

The age-old Meitei political organization and social setup was a model of excellence. Since the first century AD, the Meiteis developed a monarchical form of government. From the 5th Century it was monarchy with an unwritten constitution. But from the 11th Century it was monarchy with a written constitution. The constitution is still known as 'Loiyumba Shinyen' after the name of King Loiyumba (1074-1122 AD) who promulgated it. 'Loiyumba Shinyen' was based on earlier codes and conventions current during earlier reigns with further additions and improvements enshrined the state duties of the crown, the administrative duties of officials, the administration of justice, functions of various state departments, the social distribution of economic occupation, etc. The Constitution was in force till the British occupation of Manipur in 1891 AD. The old Meitei religion has the characteristics of a national religion having elaborate system of religious acts, especially sacrifices, prayers and hymns, etc. It was the state religion of Manipur and was professed not only by the Meiteis but also by the Lois and other communities including some tribal communities. The religion was evolved from tribal polydaecnovism to polytheism and thence to a monotheistic tendency. The Meitei supreme Lord, Shidaba Mapu, like the Shang Ti in the old Chinese religion is the 'Father of gods and men'. The Meiteis, however, came within the fold of Hinduism extensively since the beginning of the 18th century on account of proselytization. But

Hinduism had taken roots in Manipur in such peculiar and superficial way wherein the Meiteis rejected many of its tenets while at the same time, keeping up most of their traditional basic elements which formed the core of the Meitei religion. Dr. S.K. Chatterji has compared such a Manipuri brand of Hinduism with the Japanese Buddhism or 'Mixed Shinto'.

The Meitei language which originally belonged to the Meitei tribe (Ningthoujas) ultimately became the official and Court language of Manipur as it is today. It has been the lingua-franca among the hill tribes since very early period. The civilization, the Meitei built up in the valley of Manipur was amazingly magnificent. Sir Charles Lyall described it as a singular oasis of comparative civilization in the midst of barbarous people. Bowers also subscribes to the same view when he says, "Manipur is an oasis of civilization among head-hunters, aborigines and predatory and warring neighbours".

The process of Evolution:

The erstwhile Meitei nation was formed by the assimilation of seven different but closely knit and allied tribes once settled in different parts of Manipur both in the plains and the adjacent hill areas having well defined principalities, each independent of each other. The components of Meitei confederacy were : The Meitei, Angom, Khaba Nganba, Chenglei, Khuman, Moirang, and Luwang. Beside these, there existed several other tribes such as Mangang, Monding, Chairen, Khende, Heirem Khunjab, etc., each of the reigning on their own principalities. In course of time these principalities were merged into one or the other of seven principalities. Then seven tribes again underwent an age-long struggle against themselves till the Meitei tribe finally established supremacy over the rest and absorbed them one by one in a period that covered several centuries. After their assimilation, the name Meitei became the common nomenclature for all of them. Those seven tribes were what are now known as the seven sallahs of the meiteis, viz., Ningthouja, Angom, Moirang, Khaba Nganba, Chenglei, Khuman and Luwang. It may be noted that the Meitei tribe was and is still known as Ningthoujas in terms of Salei. The remaining six sallahs retained their tribe names.

Though the different sallahs were once ruling in their own principalities independent of one another, the people of one sallah could reside in the principality of another sallah by owning his allegiance to the sallah, he resided. Thus a khuman could live at Moirang and vice versa. In spite of maintaining their own distinct identities, these sallahs, as noted already belonged to a closely knit and allied tribes having more or less similar social set up, political organization, religion, language, customs, traditions, usages, food habits, dress etc. Inter-marriage among these different sallahs have been a very common feature since time immemorial. Besides matrimonial ties, political alliances were not uncommon among them. During the time of King Khumomba (1263-1278 AD) the Burmese attacked the Khuman Kingdom. The invasion was repulsed by the united force of the Meitei, Moirang and Khuman. However internal feuds among themselves were the order of those days till the Ningthoujas (the Meitei tribe) gradually annexed all the principalities.

The recorded history of Manipur begins from the second quarter of the first century of Christian era when Pakhangba became the first historical king of the Meiteis.

Though the pre-history of Manipur, is still under investigation, all evidences point to the fact that the Khaba Nganba, Angom, Moirang, Chenglei and several other tribes were already in existence by establishing their strong holds in different parts of Manipur years before the accession of Pakhangba to the throne of Kanga, the historic capital of Manipur.

The evolution of the Meitei nation was started with the accession of king Pakhangba in 33 AD. The first Salai (tribe) into the Meitei fold was Khaba. Till the beginning of the Christian era, the Khaba Kings were ruling at Kanga. When Pakhangba arrived at the outskirts of the capital with the intention to seize the throne, the Khabas resisted fiercely. In their first encounter Khaba Nungjenba, the king of the Khabas, defeated Pakhangba and the latter fled to the Moirang kingdom. When he took refuge in Moirang, he left two progenies Munyang Chaopa and Tangkhurum Limyiya. Both of them were observed in the Moirang Salai under the Sage is of Mungyancham and Lairenjam respectively. The fact that, the Ningthouja Salai, the descendants of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, do no marry these two sages of what had occurred in early times.

Meanwhile Pakhangba organized and trained an army at Moirang and with the latter help Pakhangba attacked the Khabas. Khabas Nungjenba was shot dead by Moirang Chaopa Shapon Sharoupa by a stroke of arrow. Thus Pakhangba usurped the throne from the Khabas. Afraid of the wrath of Pakhangba, most of them fled to different places in the hills and the valley. Some of them fled towards, the eastern hills and became Tangkhul Machiya and the others who tied towards, the western hills became Kabui Nungnang and those who fled toward, the south became Mahou Londai. Some of the Khabas took shelter in the Angom Court. Khaba Nongnaba, the youngest of the Khaba princes, besought the mercy of Pakhangba and was pardoned. Thus Pakhangba usurped the Khaba principality and since then the latter ceased to exist as an independent tribe and were absorbed into the Meitei fold.

When Pakhangba defeated the Khaba king and usurped his principality, he also overran the Angoms and Chengleis. In ancient Meitei texts and Chronicles, the three defeated Chiefs were referred to a 'Soraren Asiba Ahum'. But while Khaba salai was subdued permanently the Angom and Chenglei however, continued to preserve their political identity for several centuries. While the Angoms continued to be a powerful Salai and it entered into several conflict and encounters with the Ningthoujas (Meiteis), not much was recorded about the Chengleis in the annals of Manipur. In the fifth Century A.D. King Naokhomba had forcibly taken away and married the wife of Chenglei King, Thangji Khongjomba. In the seventh Century, we find a reference in Ningthoural Lambuba to the conquest of Chengleis (Thanga-Khambong) by king Naothingkhong on his way home after the conquest of the Mangangs at Loiching. Yet another reference in state Chronicles, Cheitharol Kumbaba, reveals that king Punshiba (1404-1432) also invaded and conquered the Chengleis. This was the last that was heard about the Chengleis. However, it seems very clear that since the time of King Pakhangba till their final absorption the Chengleis could preserve their political identity only at the pleasure of the Meiteis.

During king Naothingkhongs reign a small tribe called Mangang was

inhabiting loiching Phouoichang as an independent tribe. Naothingkhong invaded the mangangs and defeated Mangang Khongkhuchu Atengba, Chief of the Mangang and brought them under Meitei supremacy. Naothingkhong was hence-forth called Mangang-ngamba (the conqueror of Mangang). Since then the mangangs were merged into the Meitei tribe.

The annals of Manipur do not record any conflict between the Meiteis and the Luwangs. The Luwangs were ruling in their own principality independently of the Meiteis for several centuries after the first century AD. But nothing worthy of attention was heard about them before and after the reign of Luwang Ningthou Punshiba, the foremost king of Luwangs. He was a renowned scholar statesman king, who flourished until the middle of the seventh Century AD. Before ascending the throne of the Meiteis in 663 AD : Naothingkhong received instructions on the customs, manner, royalty and administrative duties of a king from Luwang Punshiba. The Luwang king died on the middle of the seventh century when Naothingkhong was still at the Luwang capital. After his death Luwangs began to decline. Subsequently around the middle of the 8th century, the Luwang king, Phantek Shoknaiba who reigned at Lamangdong was defeated and his principality was devastated by the united forces of Khuman King Chongkhong Thongsaba and the Moirang king Ura Khundaba. Subsequently, the Luwang lost their independence.

The Khuman principality lay to the south of the Meitei. They were famous for their wild and turbulent nature. For several centuries they made their capital at Thoubal. Around the 7th century the Khuman Chief Adon Laiphengba shifted the Capital to Nongyai Leikoipung (Now Mayang Imphal). Till the 13th Century, the Khumans were able to preserve their sovereignty in spite of the intermittent onslaughts of the Meiteis. Still the Meiteis did not choose to annex the Khuman principality till the Khuman King Adon Lamyaj Kaikhinba voluntarily handed over the administration of his kingdom to Meitei king Kongyamba (1324.335) The Khuman king himself settled in the capital of the Meiteis for the rest of his life. The Khuman principality was thus annexed by the Meiteis.

The Moirang principality lay to the south west of the Meiteis. We have alluded already about king Pakhangba's sojourn in the Moirang principality. The Moirangs were then probably the most powerful principality in Manipur. Since then the Moirangs were able to withhold their sovereignty until the middle of the 15th century. When Ningthoukhomba, the Meitei king (1432-1467) conquered the Moirangs and killed Sanahongba, the Moirang King, the principality was lying in devastation for a long time. Since then the Moirangs came under the Suzerainty of the Meiteis. Instead the Moirang Chief duly appointed and installed by the Meitei Kings continued to rule the principality. But during Gourashyam's (elder brother of Joy Singh) reign Khellei Nungnang Telheiba, who was appointed Moirang Chief by the former, revolted against Jai Singh alias Bhagyachandra with Burmese help. Being defeated Jai Singh fled to Assam. After his return from Assam Jai Singh killed the Moirang Chief and principality was then put under the direct rule of the Meiteis. Subsequently the Moirang Chiefs appointed by the Meitei kings were made nobles in the Court of Meitei kings at Imphal.

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