

Kangla and Its Historical Development

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As we all know that Kangla was the ancient capital of Manipur from ancient times. It is located at the heart of Imphal city. Kangla lies between 94°E longitude and 24°N latitude covering an area of 1 square mile (237 acres) and it is 2619 feet above the sea level¹. Kangla position is close to the banks of the Imphal river. The people of Manipur considered Kangla as the most significant sacred place. The old manuscript Thirel Layat stated that Kangla as “Kangshu Kangle Lashu Lare Kangla Kouye” its means that Kangla was the first dry land that appear after long submission under the water. The history of Kangla is related with our myth and Legend. The area of Kangla was known as Purumching Khongnem where seven slopes or ranges joint together. Manuscripts such as Ningthourel Lambuba, Nunglöl and Nongban Pombi Luwaoba wrote Kangla as a hill having seven slopes. Kangla was the origin of Meitei seven clans like Ningthouja, Angom, Luwang, Moirang, Kha-Nganba, Khuman and Chenglei. The seven clans have their original birth places such as Ningthouja at Ngayansang, Angom at Apong Ingkhol, Luwang at Khullak Mallak, Khuman at Thingrabi, Moirang at Atang Shallungpham, Chenglei or Thanga Kambong at Ngaprupung and Kha-Ngangba at Tokpung. The names of Manipuri Kangla were mentioned in various sources as Tilli Kokton Leimakon Kangla in Chakparol, Kanglei Pungmayon in Kangleirol, Thon Taret Thonllangmei in Sakok Lamlen, Kurum Sanaching Kangla Pungmayon etc.

According to legend of the Meiteis, the seven clans of Manipuri i.e. Ningthouja (Mangang), Luwang, Angom Khuman, Moirang, Kha-Nganba and Sarang-Leishangthem. These seven clans fought among themselves. It is also assumed that Khaba clan ruled at Kangla before Pakhangba ascended the throne. Nongda Lairen Pakhangba the first historical king of Manipur ascended the throne in 33 A.D.² and create his capital at Kangla. After occupied the Kangla Pakhangba gradually expanded his territory and also consolidated the kingdom of Manipur. By the middle of 15th Century the Ningthouja clan control over the whole of Manipur. Now the Ningthouja dynasty functioned the administration from Kangla and it became the most important centre of administration, socio-political, cultural and religious system of Manipur. The royal chronicles gives as many references to the construction of Kangla by various successive kings of Manipur during their respective periods. Manuscripts like Nunglöl Achouba, Chinglon Laihui Sakoklamlen, Kangla Layat and Kangla Houba etc. turned down the rules and disciplines for the construction of Kangla³. Kangla Houba a treaties was written by a scholar named Ashangbam Laiba during the reign of king Naophangba described rules and regulations how to construct Kangla a royal place.

Khagemba :

King Khagemba was one of the ablest rulers of Manipur. He ascended the throne of Manipur in 1597 A.D. His original name was Sana Hihonba and Poirei Ningthouhan⁴. His long reign was a remarkable epoch in the history of the kingdom. Khagemba brought major developments in the fields of Art and Architecture. He also attributed the art of brick making and it was learnt from the Chinese. The development of Kangla began at his time. The royal chronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba records the construction of high buildings and gilded houses were started during his time⁵. The architecture of a five storied building, construction of the Utra, the ancestral coronation hall. Utra is located to the east of the Kanglasha and the northern side of the Liphounung. The brick wall around the palace compound at Kangla were some of the architectural innovations of Khagemba⁶. For the convenience of his rule, he diverted the course of the Imphal river from Keckrupat to the north-east of the present Mahabali area. Royal chronicle also record the construction of Lainingthou Sanamahi Temple and shrines of Nongshaba and Lai-Kasha⁷. He established ten markets at different area of the Kingdom. The skill of writing, reading, games and sports were highly developed.

Khunjaoba succeeded his father Khagemba in 1652 at the age of 32. During the short regime of fifteen years, Khunjaoba paid much more attention to the development works particularly for the improvement of Kangla. He excavated a moat, constructed by his father, Meidingu Khagemba⁸. Hence, the royal capital was

surrounded on the three sides by the moat and the eastern side by the Imphal river⁹. Thus, Khunjaoba made the Kangla a well fortified and protected palace.

Khunjaoba also improve waterways for inland trade as well as to control flood in Manipur. The bed of the Nambul River from Chigna to Khwairamband Bazar and the Naga Stream from Khwairamband Bazar to Thangmeiband were dredged during his period¹⁰.

King Paikhomba ascended the throne of Manipur in 1666 after Khunjaoba and ruled upto 1697 A.D. The original name of the king was Poireikunkhomba. He defeated the eastern village Paikhu and captured Paikhu Chief, **Lakya**¹¹. Since then he came to be the popularly known as Paikhomba in the history of Manipur. He also developed Kangla. The Royal Chronicle records the construction of the brick temple of Lainingthou Sanamhi and Lai-Kasha during his period. The temple of Panthoibi and Yumjao were constructed in 1680. The most remarkable work of King Paikhomba was the construction of Utra, the ancestral coronation hall in 1688 and the western brick wall of Utra. Paikhomba also set up the offices of Ahallup, Nahrup, Shagol-Shang and Shamushang at Kangla¹².

Paikhomba died without leaving behind any heir. So he was succeeded by Charairongba. King Charairongba was the first Manipuri king who initiated to Vaishnavism. The royal chronicle records that Charairongba erected stone inscription engraving administrative decrees rules and regulations of the state in front of Sana Keithel. A remarkable contribution of Charairongba was the construction of a three storied temple and a temple of Panthoibi an Laiwa Haiba at Kangla. He also constructed both Hindu and Meitei temples.

Charairongba was succeeded by his eldest son **Pamheiba** under the reign name "Nongpok Pamheiba Thongmang Mayamba" in 1709. In order to developed his capital Garibaniwaj took up many remarkable works. During his reign Garibaniwaj well-fortified the Kangla by digging the Outer Moat and the construction of brick wall around the Moat¹³. King Garibaniwaj period was a turning point in the history of Manipur. Many significant changes in social, cultural, religious, art and architecture were brought in the state. Hinduism became the state religion during his period. Many temples of indigenous and Hindu deities were constructed. Temples of Kalika, Krishna, Hanuman and Ramji Prabhu were built. He also established the Laipham and Khabam Loishang inside the Kangla. Cheitharol Kumbaba records the construction of a numbers of buildings at the capital including one five storied palatial building. Another landmark in the growth of the Kangla fortress was during the reign of Garibaniwaj was the construction of Royal Citadel. Another important landmark activities for the improvement of Kangla Fortress was excavation of moat around the Fort.

Gourashyam abdicated the throne in favour of his younger brother **Bhagyachandra**. His reign was a landmark in the history of Manipur for the propagation of Vaishnavism. Bhagyachandra ruled the kingdom from Bishnupur and then he transferred his capital Langthabal in 1779¹⁴. During his reign, Kangla the ancient royal seat was deserted. Bhagyachandra never made his capital at Kangla.

Labyanachandra succeeded his father and ascends the throne of Manipur in 1798. He lead the kingdom for only three years. Labyanachandra re-established and brought back main religious places of Kangla. He also developed the Nonghum Shang, Yumjao, Utra and the royal residence¹⁵. Royal Chronicle mentioned revival of important religious places of Kangla with the help of the people in 1798 A.D. Labyanachandra resided the royal seat in 1799 after the completion of the reconstruction works. He also started the construction of Fort at Kangla.

Modhuchandra, the third son of Bhagyachandra ascended the throne in 1800 A.D. and he ruled for a short period of three years only. During his short period, no remarkable events took place. According to chronicle, Madhuchandra finished the construction works of the Mandap of Shri Shri Govindajee at Kangla, then he devoted the Mandap to Shri Shri Govindajee¹⁶.

Chourajit ascended the throne in 1803 A.D. He constructed two massive statues of Kangla Sha in front of the Utara¹⁷. The Kangla Sha represents the National Emblem of the Manipur State. However Burmese invader destroyed the two Kangla Sha during Chahi Taret Khuntakpa (the Seven Years Devastation period). Afterward, Nara Singh Maharaja re-build the two Sha again in 1844 A.D. New halls like Nonghumshang, Yumjao, Heirushang and dancing hall Chourashi Khamba which having eighty four pillars were constructed. In 1806 Ras Mandal was again extended and a Mandapa of Shri Govindaji also built in the same year.

Marjit ascended the throne in 1813 and ruled the country for six years. During his reign, he constructed the coronation hall Utra, Nonghum-Shang and Yumjao. The gilded planks roofed the building. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle, also records the development of Polo Ground or Manung Kangeibung during the reign of Marjit. It is located to the south of the Utra and to the west of the Shri Govindaji Temple. It is now used as a helipad.

The king also erected inscribed stone monument on the northern part of Kangla. On the stone monument, it inscribed about the construction of a brick wall with a height of a feet on the outer side of the king's palace¹⁸.

Manipur was brought under Burmese rule for seven years from 1819 to 1826 A.D. This seven years is known as Seven Years Devastation or in Manipuri Chahi Taret Khuntakpa in the history of Manipur. Gambhir

Singh with the help of British East India Company and Manipur Levy, liberated his kingdom from the Burmese. He selected Langthabal (Canchipur) as the capital of Manipur and reconstructed the ruins of Langthabal with the construction of some new buildings and temples.

Nara Singh ascended the throne in 1844 due to pressurized by the people of Manipur. He also tried his best to developed the beautification of Kangla. According to Cheitharol Kumbaba Maharaja Nara Singh reconstructed the two Kangla Sha again which was destroyed by the Burmese during the Seven Years Devastation (Chayi Taret Khuntakpa) period. He also set up Top Garod (military head quarter) at Kangla.

Maharaja Gambhir Singh have a strong desired to build a temple of Shri Shri Govindajee at Kangla but he died before it could be built. Maharaja Nara Singh make a commitment to build the new temple of Shri Shri Govindajee in the name of Late Maharaja Gambhir Singh. Therefore, Nara Singh constructed the temple of Shri Shri Govindajee at Kangla¹⁹. He also planted saplings of Keli-Kadam on both sides of the road in front of the Kangla Sha.

Chandrakriti, son of Gambhir Singh ascended the throne of Manipur 1850 A.D. During his period Maharaja Chandrakriti took up numerous works for the improvement and beautification of Kangla. During the ruled of Chandrakriti the Mandapa of Shri Govindaji and the king's mother residence were constructed at Kangla. Chiraithong and five storied building were also constructed. The most remarkable gift made by Chandrakriti was the construction of the Citadel which we see today²⁰. Citadel is built of well burnt bricks. The wall is 20 feet high and 84 cm thick covering an area of 200 sq. yards. It has three main entrances, one on the southern side and two on the western side. The southern gate was connected by a passage leading to the temple of Shri Shri Govindaji. Mrs. Grimwood describes the citadel thus "The whole citadel was built with a view of resisting attack in the time before Burmah was annexed, when armies of raiders used to come down upon Manipur with hostile intent, and it was a place which could easily be held against an attacking force, provided big guns were not brought to bear upon it."²¹ It is the innermost and the last defensive wall of Kanga Fort.

Another important achievement made by Maharaja Chandrakriti was the construction of Beithab of Shri Govindaji temple standing to the east of the temple. And it is dedicated to Lord Govinda by Maharaja²². Beithab consists of two tall and architectural identical structures on both sides (North and South) of three rows of column. Bells were located at the top of the tall buildings. The columns was covered by a roof but after the earthquake of 1868 the Beithab hurt sever damaged and now the columns are standing without roof. Chandrakriti also constructed jail inside the Fort. It is located to the north of the Nungjeng Pukhri and to the south of inner moat.

Maharaja Chandrakriti also rebuilt the Uttra Shangai but it was destroyed in air raid at the time of 2nd World War. Only eleven brick steps are there.

I. CONCLUSION

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, who ascended the throne in 33 A.D. founded the Ningthouja dynasty and make Kangla his capital Pakhangba consolidated the Kingdom and laid the foundation of the social, political, cultural and religious system of Manipur. It is from this capital that the Ningthouja clan spread their political and military power. Kangla is the most important Historical and Archaeological site of Manipur.

Rulers of Manipur like Khagemba, Charairongba, Garibaniwaj, Bhagyachandra, Chourjit, Marjit, Gambhir, Nara Singh and Chandrakriti carried out various activities for the improvement of Kangla, the capital of the kingdom. They fortified the Palace, excavated moat around the capital constructed royal residence, roads, temples and coronation hall.

Kangla is regarded as the holiest place by Manipuris, living in the state and outside. Therefore, they consider it as a centre of pilgrimage. It also occupies the pride of place in the heart of Manipuri people. To preserve and to restore 'Kangla' to its original condition is the essence of the people of Manipur. To fulfill the dream of the Manipuris, the Concept Development Plan of Kangla Fort took up the project for the development and beautification of the ancient historical ruins and sacred and holy places inside 'Kangla', including the citadel and temples in ruins, 'Nungjeng Pukhri' and reconstruction of 'Kangla Sha' which were razed to the ground by the British. Now it is need of the hour to extend logical support and keen assessment from the people of Manipur, because Manipuri assumed that without the history of Kangla the history of Manipur might be incomplete.

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