

First Muslim Settlement in Manipur

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Khagemba was the eldest son of of the Meitei King Senbi Mungyamba or the conqueror of Mungkhong Mungyang of Kabaw Valley. King Mungyamba married with Nongpallon Kainou Changpombi and Koubarol Thokchom Chanu. Kainou Changpombi was the chief queen and she gave birth to Khagemba, Koiremba and Sanongba, while Thokchom Chanu gave birth to Khoma Pukhramba. Khagemba was the eldest son of king Mungyamba or Thangwai Ningthou Kiyamba. of king Mungyamba or Thangwai Ningthou Kiyamba.

Khagemba was born in 1576 A.D., Muba, Khutheiba's (Muba the skilled artisan) year 1498. As he was eldest son of the queen, he was entitled as Ningthou Hanba or Poirei Ningthouhanba. The popular name Khagemba or Khagi Ngamba (conqueror of the Khagi or Chinese) was given to him by the people.

An epoch making event that occurred during the reign of Khagemba was the invasion of the Muslims in Manipur under the initiative of his own brother, Sanongba Yaiskul Lakpa in 1606 A.D. According to the traditions the genesis of Muslim invasion in Manipur was due to the personal enmity between the two younger brothers of Khagemba on the question of a boat race. On one occasion Khwairakpa², the younger brother of Khagemba hired a race boat from his youngest brother Sanongba Yaiskul Lakpa. Unfortunately the boat broke down after collision at Leishangkhong. When offered to repair the boat or a new one, Sanongba obstinately rejected any plea and demanded his own boat due to the instigation of his mother Changpombi. Having failed to solve amicably, the matter was referred to the king. The king being the eldest brother of the two, tried to persuade Sanongba to accept the pleadings of Khwairakpa as it was impossible on his part to give the same boat which had already broken. Sanongba was adamant

and the king, having found no alternative expelled him from the capital.

Sanongba then requested the king of Cachar to invade Manipur in order to enable him to become king of the country as a tributary ruler under Cachar. On receiving the letter, the king of Cachar immediately invaded Manipur under the command of Bhimbal and Yakharek and stormed the Manipuri forces with their numerous firearms. Being unable to withstand against the Cachari fire-arms the Manipuri force surrendered. A settlement was then made between king Khagemba and the Cachar king by which a boundary was demarcated after incorporating a large track of Manipur land into Cachar. Sanongba and his mother Changpombi became hostages. In spite of this settlement, the Cachar army took away a large number of men and cattles from Phaknung Paorabi situated near Chingaren towards the northern side of the capital as captives⁴.

King Khagemba took exception to the highhandedness of the Cacharis and reported the matter to his court, Yumnam cha Kiyamba, Haobam Cha Aroi, Elangbam Cha Khungam and Pala Koireng volunteered their services in containing the Cacharis. Accordingly, a large force under their leadership waited the intruders besides the Langjing hillock in their return journey at Langjing and made sudden attack on them. A large number of Cacharis were arrested and others fled to Cachar⁵. When the retreating forces reached Cachar, they reported the treacherous action of the Meitei king to their king Jasanarayan. Viewing with grave concern the geographical delicacies and the military statesmanship of king Khagemba, the Cachar king in consultation with Sanongba decided to revenge against Manipur by taking the help of the Muslim soldiers of Taraf in Sylhet. Sanongba with a view to dethroning his brother Khagemba and for getting the kingdom for himself, accepted to lead the Muslim soldiers equipped

with fire-arms to Manipur⁶.

In 1606, Sanongba came at the head of the army, crossed the hill passes of Manipur and encamped at Bishnupur. On getting the report, the king himself went in person with a large force in repelling the invasion, and, as such, a fierce battle ensued in which the king got a decisive victory against the invading army led by his own brother Sanongba. In this battle the royal chronicle records that 1000 soldiers including Muslims were captured, and 30 elephants and 1000 muskets were also collected. The captured persons included blacksmiths, artisans, musicians, washerman, grooms, utensil makers and elephant tenders. Sanongba although vanquished in his mission was pardoned by his royal brother king Khagemba who made him settled peacefully in Manipur. The Muslim captives were also treated sympathetically by the king and rehabilitated in Manipur by giving land and wives. Thus, a new era of cultural intercourse between Manipur and other parts of India started. For the sake of the welfare of the newly settled Muslims the king established a new law court for the administration of their customary laws. The Manipuris called the new settlers as 'Pangal' which is a percolated word from Bangal as they came from Bengal.

With the settlement of the Muslims in Manipur with kind treatment by the benevolent king Khagemba, some remarkable changes were brought into the social and cultural life of Manipur. In fact, the regime of Khagemba was a landmark in the history of Manipur for introducing manifold reforms for the welfare of his subjects. Among these the introduction of fire-arms, improved agricultural method, use of doolis, smoking through hookah pipes, use of turbans, salutation, improvements of Meitei script, polo, boat race etc. deserve mention. In some of all these measures the influence of the Muslims was clearly manifested. As maintained by the royal chronicle, Cheitharol

Kumbaba, among the Muslims captives includes black smiths, artisans, utensil makers, musicians, washerman etc. From this group of artisans and smiths the Manipuris learned in that art as there were no skilled artisans in Manipur upto the age. In other traditions it is also referred to that the transplanted system of paddy cultivation was taught by the Muslims in Manipur. Regarding the use of dooli, there was only three wheeled type in Manipur. But after when the Muslim settlers presented in four wheeled dooli, it became the only design in Manipur smoking through pipe hookah was also started in Manipur through the Muslim influence. In this way the Muslims made valuable contributions towards the social and cultural enrichment of Manipur.

Notes & References

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