

## Ancient Meitei Military Organisation

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The military organisation is an important part of any government. In the history of Manipur, military organisation was found since the time of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba (33-154 A. D.). Reference was made to an army with which Pakhangba occupied the Kangla. During the time of Khuyoi Tompok, son of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the military organisation of the country was further developed and a new system of alerting the people by beating the war drum was introduced.

A good military organisation is highly essential by an independent principality to protect the right and responsibilities of the people as well as to defend from the outside attacks. Thus during the reign of king Loiyumba (1074-1142 A. D.) the Meitei militia was installed under the name of Lallup (Lal-war/battle, lup-group). In the initial stage there was no much strict rule except that every able man of the country would be a unit of the army. From time to time the seven principalities of the valley of Manipur viz. Ningthouja, Moirang, Khuman, Luwang, Kha-Nganba, Chenglei and Sarang-Leishangthem were reduced and by the end of the 15th century, the Meitei or Ningthouja supremacy was recognised as the Lord of the whole valley of Manipur. Thus, the whole valley came under one rule with a powerful military organisation.

In addition to the regular military personnel there was a rule that every able man in the country were forced to act as a soldier. No remuneration was paid in cash. Under the lallup system, during the peace time they were the civil servants, craftman, artisans, cultivator and workers of the state. The king could delegate his military power and empowered any person in the state from time to time in emergencies and in the time of need. The king delegated his power more specially to the ten executive ministers known as Ningthou Pongba Tara. They were 1) Pukhranba, 2) Nongthouba, 3) Khurailakpa, 4) Yaiskullakpa, 5) Hiyangloi-hanjaba, 6) Chongkhan hanjaba, 7) Yimingloi hanjaba, 8) Yimangloi hanjaba, 9) Phamthakcha and 10) Naikhurakpa. But the Kanglahouba (MS) gives them as 4 Leikai lakpas (village chiefs) viz. Khwairakpa, Yaiskullakpa, Khurailakpa and Wangkheilakpa.

The administrative divisions on the very outset there were Panas which were known after as 1) Arong and 2) Apao and followed by i) Laipham and ii) Khabam. But king Loiyumba divided his dominion into six divisions under the equivalency of divisions as 'Lup' viz. 1) Luplenlup, ii) Thouchalup, iii) Kongchalup, iv) Lukhubalup, v) Chingchalup and vi) Khaichalup. Six officers in charge were appointed to look after each lup. Again from each lup able men were sent to guard and protect the palace.

Lallup became the standing militia from king Loiyumba onwards but the number of the persons were not enough to fight or defend against outside invaders. So, to inform the whole country during the time of battles or difficulties in the country some systems existed. They were i) Kangla Yaibung thinba (beating of drum from the Kangla or palace), ii) Sagol pao (shouting riding in the horseback) and iii) sending some men holding burnt firewood with pepper on it. This system was known as 'Meihim Morok'. The later was used specially for hunting ferocious animals like tiger when they threatened the villagers.

The weapons and equipments used were daos, axes, Arampais (darts), swords, spears, spike, bows and arrows etc. There were different officers in charge of the office to look after the weapons i.e. Thangshuhanba, Tenshuhanba, etc.

The main army section was infantry and the subsidiary sections were cavalry, navy etc. Naotingkhong Phambalkaba refers to cavalry sent by king Urakonhouba against the Selloi Langmais. Later on cavalry became a dreaded wing of the campaign against Shans and Burmese. Elephants came to be associated with the Manipur army, specially in the Burmese war of the 18th century.

There were no separate divisions of army with their absolute numbers. The king or the lakpsa (chiefs) would be the commander-in-chief and next was lalmi or soldiers so on. Their rank were marked by the decoration of feathers, flag of sorts on the turban. The colour of the dresses of the Meitei army was black in colour.

From Nongda lairen Pakhangba to Mungyamba rewards were given to the heroes or soldiers according to their bravery in form of land, fishery, salt-spring and cloth but from the time of Khagemba (1597-1662) he introduced a new system of awarding clothes instead of land under the name of Pariphi equivalent to a Pari of land. Another reward is tangballoi. It is the highest title of honour awarded to the hero or warrior. This is awarded to such a hero who can arrest one hundred enemies in war or one hundred and five wild beasts and capture a ferocious wild animal thereby saving the life of the king or capture a king of another country in war and saves the life of the king etc.

Thus, from the above facts and finding it can be concluded that the power of any country is mainly based on the military power, and, further, can say that Meitei had a good military organisation from the very ancient times.

#### Notes & References

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