

Nongda Lairen Pakhangba and the establishment of the Ningthouja Dynasty of Manipur

Gangmumei Kabui

The foundation of the Ningthouja dynasty by a prince of mysterious origin named Nongda Lairen Pakhangba is regarded as the sheet anchor of the history of ancient Manipur. The emergence of the Kingdom of Kangla the heartland of the Meitei Kingdom under the aegis of the dynasty was an outcome of the struggle between different clans and lineages of various ethnic groups which inhabited the valley of Manipur in the historical times. These ethnic groups and tribes who were at different levels of social and political development, had built up small clan principalities in Manipur Valley. But there was a political vacuum due to the absence of central or a more capable authority which would have established its way over the people in different parts of the valley during the period. Several literary sources, specially 'Shanglen Puba' Puya referes to the devastation of the valley by a flood caused by the big landslide due to the change of the courses of the Leimatak river in western hills of Manipur. The population fled to the hills and for many years there was no government. After the draining away of the inundated water, the people gradually came down to the valley, but there was no organised state in Kangla. There was political vacuum and anarchy. There was constant fear in the mind of the people that a country without a king was not worth living. During this period of political anarchy there was struggle between different ethnic groups and tribes who sponsored rival candidates both from inside and outside the land to the throne of Kangla. In the process Nongda Lairen Pakhangba emerged successful and ascended the throne of Kangla.

with regard to his parentage. According to Khagemba Yangbi Pakhangba's mother was Leinung Yaibirok, who was described as one born three times and married to three kings. Chada Laihui, the geneology of the queens of Ningthouja dynasty mentions Leinung Yaibirok as the mother of Pakhangba : Pakhangba Nongkarol a text dealing with the death of the rulers of Manipur¹¹ corroborates with the geneology of the Ningthouja clan kept in the royal court of Manipur¹² and describes Nongda Lairen Pakhangba being born of Leinung Yaibirok. Another text¹³, Leishemlon Shakok says that Yaibirok was the mother of Pakhangba. However Sanglen Puba Puya¹⁴ gives an interesting account of Leinung Yaibirok worshipping Sun god for a child who would become a ruler of the realm, and she was granted a divine cloud egg by the sun God, and it was brought to her by Puleiromba, a Chief of one Angom clan. A Child was hatched out of the divine egg. Yaibirok was also described as the mother -in-law¹⁵ of queen Laisana, who was the wife of Pakhangba.

However, Leithak Leikharol, a work of 18th century which is a compendium of myths and legends of Meitei cosmogony and some clan geneologies give a different version according to which Leinung Yabi Yakha Chanu was the mother of Pakhangba. It is of interest that the name of this woman is mentioned in Khagemba Yangbi along with other women who were connected with Pakhangba's birth. Khagenba Yumbi¹⁶ says, "Piritnu, Areinu, Ahumnu, Nongda Nongkhal Lembi, daughter of Marengthonba Yakha having been blessed with many distinguished ancestors and ancestresses and having become Yumjao Leima, thrice born as queen and married to three chiefs Leinung Yaibirok gave birth to Pakhangba". According to these authors the names of queens mentioned here are of different persons and not the surnames and aliases of Leinung Yai-

with regard to his parentage. According to Khagemba Yangbi⁹ Pakhangba's mother was Leinung Yaibirok, who was described as one born three times and married to three kings. Chada Laihui, the geneology of the queens of Ningthouja dynasty¹⁰ mentions Leinung Yaibirok as the mother of Pakhangba : Pakhangba Nongkarol a text dealing with the death of the rulers of Manipur¹¹ corroborates with the geneology of the Ningthouja clan kept in the royal court of Manipur¹² and describes Nongda Lairen Pakhangba being born of Leinung Yaibirok. Another text¹³, Leishemlon Shakok says that Yaibirok was the¹⁴ mother of Pakhangba. However Sanglen Puba Puya¹⁴ gives an interesting account of Leinung Yaibirok worshipping Sun god for a child who would become a ruler of the realm, and she was granted a divine cloud egg by the sun God, and it was brought to her by Puleiromba, a Chief of one Angom clan. A Child was hatched out of the divine egg. Yaibirok was also described as the mother -in-law¹⁵ of queen Laisana, who was the wife of Pakhangba¹⁵.

However, Leithak Leikharol, a work of 18th century which is a compendium of myths and legends of Meitei cosmogony and some clan geneologies give a different version according to which Leinung Yabi Yakha Chanu was the mother of Pakhangba. It is of interest that the name of this woman is mentioned in Khagemba Yangbi along with other women who were¹⁶ conncted with Pakhangba's birth. Khagenba Yumbi¹⁶ says, "Piritnu, Areinu, Ahumnu, Nongda Nongkhal Lembi, daughter of Marengthonba Yakha having been blessed with many distinguished ancestors and ancestresses and having become Yumjao Leima, thrice born as queen and married to three chiefs Leinung Yaibirok gave birth to Pakhangba". According to these authors the names of queens mentioned here are of different persons and not the surnames and aliases of Leinung Yai-

birok. According to them quoting Leithak Leikharol, Piritnu was the mother of Kuptreng and Sentreng in a traditional period called Hayi Chak. Areinu was the mother of Tuma Nganba and wife of Leikhom-tao. Ahumnu was the mother of Leishatao and wife of Konthou. Leikak Leiyarel chanu was the wife of Konchin Tuthokpa and mother of Leishanglen and leinung. Yaibi Yakha chanu according to Leithak Leikharol was the wife of sentreng and mother of Mingthem Pakhangba. According to them Yaibirok was a foster mother. Meitei Puri says that Leikak Leiyarel chanu had an union with the Sun god and gave birth to Pakhangba and Yaibirok was a nursing mother (Naoroibi).

Y.M. Singh and N.B. Singh have opined on the basis of Meihourl Lathup Latam that the mother of Pakhangba was Liklabicha Nongtangnu who was illegitimately touched by Luwang Langmaiba and she was forcibly married to Puleiromba¹⁸. This opinion is not convincing as Liklabicha was, according to chronicle of the Luwang clan (Luwanglon), the daughter of Luwang chief, Luwang punsiba. she had a secret affair with Puleiromba of the Angom clan. He was caught by her father. He was left scot free when he told the Luwang chief that he would have a long life if he approached the Mayang Guru. A son was born to Liklabicha, he was named Khoidom. According to a tradition, Liklabicha had another son named Mandom created by the spiritual power of her father¹⁹. Liklanicha brought up the two sons who were told that their father was Pureilomba. They met their father who refused to take them to his abode. Therefore, Liklabicha, mother of Koidom and Mandom could not be the mother of Nongda Lairen who was fathered by Luwang Langmaiba, but forced on Puleiromba as his son. Khoidom became Luwang, and Mandom became Angom. It can be interpreted that Liklabicha Nongtangnu was married to a Luwang designated Luwang Langmaiba and she was also married later on to Puleiromba. Khoidom was born out of the

first marriage and the Mandom was born of her marriage to Puleiromba who did not accept her socially. Wahengbam Ibohal Singh²⁰ also supports the view that Yaibirok was the mother of Pakhangba, while Yabirok, from all accounts, is accepted as mother of Pakhangba, we do not have much knowledge about her background. As stated above, various texts²¹ describe Yabirok as "Leinung girl, Yakha girl, a Chakha with numerous ancestors and ancestresses, a Yumjao Leima three times queen, married to three chiefs successively, Leinung Yabirok begets Nongta Lairen Pakhangba"²⁰. Ningthourol Lambuba describes Yabirok as "Grand madam Meitei queen leinung chakkha Yabirok of numerous ancestress, handsome and beautiful, the cream of the leihou and Leinung, three times queen and married to the these chiefs successively"²³. However, W. Ibohal Singh's description of Yabirok as a polyandrous woman is evidently erroneous²⁴ perhaps due to mistake in transliteration of the Meitei phrase "Nurol Pirol Yamba (one who has numerous ancestors and ancestresses). The Meiteis were never a polyandrous people though there was polygamy. The society is patriarchal: however, the importance given to the female ancestor or the mother is suspected to be a relic of a matrilineal system as prevalent among some Austro-Asiatic people like the Khasi. But the chronicles and other literary texts clearly show that Yabirok was the mother of Pakhangba.

Father of Nongta Lairen Pakhangba was projected in the geneology of the Ningthouja clan to be Sentreng. An attempt has been made by Singh and Singh that Sentreng was one of the aliases of the father of Pakhangba and the real father was Luwang langmeiba of the Luwang clan and the social father was Puleiromba, the chief of the Angom clan. These two personalities were associated with the capture of the Kangla by Pakhangba. But as stated above, it is doubtful. W. Ibohal Singh opines that pakhangba's father was Likleng who was holding the post of Tupu. Likleng was

a Luwang officer also known as Luwang Langmaiba perhaps a designation rather than a name²⁵. The original name of Pakhangba according to W.I. Singh based on Leimaren Naoyom and Leithak Leikharol, was Nongta Tukuplik. According to Leithak Leikharol, "Taoroinai went up to the sky in the guise of a Tupa (meaning officer-in charge or guide) and got the divine cloud egg (Nonglum) which would become Pakhangba from Atiya Sidaba. The name of Taoroinai when he was under the guise of a Tupu was Likleng. Tupu gave the cloud egg to Yabirok, three times queen and married successively²⁶ to three chiefs and the name was Nongta Tukuplik²⁶. The same text says that after his birth Pakhangba was also called Layon Lang Tanouba²⁷. When he was hiding, he was called Leikhanba Mihi-sang Heining²⁸. Though some mythical elements are added in the legendary account, we are pretty sure that Nongta Tukuplik or Layan Lang Tanouba or Leikhumba was born of Yabirok and his father was Tupu²⁹ named Likleng. Pakhangba was thus the son of Likleng, a noble of the Luwang clan, who was a Tupu and later on a Langmaiba. Because of the comparatively low origin as he was not a royal prince, his ancestry was suppressed in a mysterious way by him or by his successors.

Pakhangba's struggle for the throne

Kangla, the seat of Meitei state, was ruled by the Khabas, a powerful tribe who ruled at Kangla. The geneology of the Khaba and Nganba (Kha-Nganba) clan traced their descent from the Supreme god but human personalities could be counted from Tourel Khaba - Tourel Khuba - Tourel Kha, Toutington, Tarang, Khaba. There is a tradition in Panthoibi Khongun that the Changlei chief Soipaiba sought the hand of the Mangang princess Panthoibi who refused the proposal. And ultimately she was married to a Khaba chief called Khaba Tarang Khonucha. Panthoibi had a romantic affair with Kairon Chingsomba or Nongpok Ningthou of

the Selloi Langmai. The Khaba chased the two lovers. Ultimately the two were united and Khaba chief realizing that the two were divine personalities, started worshipping them. In the periods before the emergence of Pakhangba, the Khabas had already declined, though they were also trying to regain the vacant throne of Kangla. The leader of the Khaba tribe was Khaba Nongchengba who challenged the claim of Pakhangba. Another leader who played important role in the political fortune of Pakhangba was Puleiromba, the chief of the Angom. According to their respective geneologies, the Angom clan which was founded by Puleiromba was descended from Kuptreng who was the brother of Sentreng from whom descended Pakhangba, the founder of the Ningthouja dynasty. But several legends associate Puleiromba with the birth of Pakhangba either as a foster father or a friend or husband of mother of Pakhangba namely Yabirok. Puleiromba was requested by Yabirok to support the cause of her son in the struggle for the throne. Actually it was on the invitation of Puleiromba, supported by Luwang, Chakpas and other tribes that Pakhangba could ascend the throne.

According to Chakpa Khunta Khunthok³⁰, Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, when he came of age fought against the Khabas under the leadership of Khaba Nongehenba. In this struggle, Pakhangba was defeated by the Khabas and he was forced to take refuge in Moirang principality. According to tradition recorded in some texts, Pakhangba was hiding at Moirang for many years. Some of his follower families namely Mungyang Chaoba and Tengkhujam who established the sub-lineage of Mungyangjam and Loirengjam who, though belonging to Moirang clan cannot intermarry with the Ningthoujam clan³¹. While staying in Moirang, he organised support from Moirang Chaopa Mathipa, Sapon Sanoupa who extended whole hearted support to him. The forces of Moirang for Pakhangba defeated the Khabas who were completely destroyed

by him. Some Khabas surrendered to Angom Puleiromba, some fled to hills and became Thangkhul and some became Kabuis of Nunngang village in western hills. Some Khabas went south and settled among the Mahou tribe. A group went north and settled at the foothills of Koubru and became Khaba Umlen.³ One Khaba Nonganpa surrendered to Pakhangba himself. The Khaba-Pakhangba rivalry continued throughout the reign of Pakhangba. But the defeat of the Khabas at the hand of Pakhangba ended the political power of the Khabas who were included into Kna-Nganba clan later on.

The next important episode in the life of Pakhangba was his relation with Poireiton. Poireiton was a prince, a younger brother of Thonjaren, the ruler of Khamnung country (the land of the dead). He came to a great mission of colonisation in Imphal Valley. Poireiton Khunthok does not contain anything about his claiming the throne of Kangla, nor of establishing a new kingdom. But the geneologies of Luwang and Khuman clans put him as one of the ancestors of the two clans. Was Chingkhong Poireiton the progenitor of the Luwangs or absorbed into the Luwang clan? Likewise as the Khuman clan had some connection with Luwangs, was Poireiton portrayed as its progenitor? Or were there two Poireitons? Poireiton of the clan geneologies, and Poireiton, the coloniser? Or was Poireiton added and interpolated in the geneology of the Luwang and Khuman? In Poireiton Khunthok, he was regarded as religious innovator, not as a ruler.

In Pakhangba Nongkarol³³, a text dealing with the death of Ningthouja kings, there is a reference that Poireiton and his hordes proceeded to Kangla. Pakhangba heard about his march and confronted him on the way. Poireiton was defeated and his royal costumes were confiscated. And he exclaimed that his costumes and wife were

forcibly captured by this prince. Later on he realised the identity of Pakhangba. In the duel, he was defeated by Pakhangba. He pretended to be dead. Pakhangba made the preparation for the cremation of Poireiton. Finding himself outwitted, Poireiton pretended to be mad. But Poireiton ultimately acknowledged the supremacy of Pakhangba.

It is not known whether Pakhangba fought against Poireiton before he ascended the throne of Kangla or after. Meanwhile, Thongaren, the elder brother of Poireiton, who stayed back, repented and proceeded to Imphal valley via Manipur River and arrived at Moirang³⁴. He came with his younger sister Laisra or Laisna and offered her to be the queen of Pakhangba. Perhaps Poireiton, Thongaren and Laisna were reconciled to the new situation in Manipur valley.³⁵ Poireiton became a village chief (Khun-Ningthou) of the Poireis. The contention of some scholars that Poireiton was sponsored by the Luwang while Pakhangba was sponsored by Angoms is difficult to accept. Poireiton's sister Laisna played an important role the social and cultural life of the court of Pakhangba. Even if Poireiton was sponsored by Luwangs, which is not substantiated by any evidence, Pakhangba married his sister and a matrimonial alliance was already effected. Luwangs and Angoms extended strong support to Pakhangba. Poireiton eventually went out of the historical scene.

Coronation of Pakhangba

Having defeated the Khabas and Poireiton, Pakhangba was invited by Puleiromba, the Angom chief, one Luwang priest (Luwang Langmaiba) Ningthem Apanba, and many leaders of Chakpa tribe to come to the Kangla, the ancient capital of the Meitei Kingdom. According to Chakparol, Kansurol, a leader of the Chakpas sent four persons, namely, Chakmaringba, Langmaringba, Mungmaringba and Ngangmaringba to call Pakhangba. They guarded Pakhangba at Kangla during the coronation. Pakhangba

marched to the northern part of north east Imphal valley between Heingang hills and Nongmaijing hills along the Lilwai (Iril) river and passed by the tribal villages of Lishi, Thangwai, Mucheng, keihon, Naokal, Haomu, Tangkhul whose willagers followed him and arrived at Kangla. The three chiefs arranged for the servants and attendants, arms and weapons, the officials like Pukhran, Nongthon, Anai (Priest), poets and signers, torch bearers, swordsmen, umbrella or parasol bearers, gold and silver, precious stones, clothes and food. At Kangla, the three Sorarens meaning Puleiromba, Luwang langmba and Ningthou Apanba presented all the arms and weapons and coronation costumes to Pakhangba. All the people were invited to the ceremony and Pakhangba and his queen Laisna were formally coronated. The poets and singers gave the regnal title of Tubi Yoinongda Nongda Lairen Pakhangba³⁶. According to Shanglen Puba Puya³⁷ the coronation was performed on Ist Saturday of the Meitei month of Kalen (June/July). The chief of four leading clans Angom Chief Puleiromba, Khunthiba of Luwang, Ponglahen of Moirang and Arong of Khuman clan fetched water from Nongjeng in Kangla and poured on the body of the king and queen. Scholars and priests, singers and poets, the 64 nobles were present. Clothes were changed and the king and queen sat below the parasol. The coronation robe was presented to Pakhangba by Puleiromba, the Angom Chief. The royal drum was beaten. The king and queen were raised to the Kanglame and the final ceremony of installation of the king was performed.

Notes and References

1. R.K. Jhalajit Singh, **A Short History Manipur**, 1965, Imphal, p.25.
2. Y.B.Singh : **Loithak Leikharol**, 1967. Imphal.
3. O.B. Singh : **Ningthourol Shireng**, 1968; N.M. Singh **Shandrembi Chaishra**, 1978.
4. N.B. Singh and Y.M. Singh, **Pakhangbagi Hourakpham Thiba**, 1982.

5. **Pakhangba Phambal**, Edited and Published by Kh. Yaima singh, 1972.
6. See the section on the Meitei cosmo-gony in Chapter two.
7. N.B. Singh and Y.M. Singh, op. cit.p.I.
8. Quoted by N.B. Singh and Y.M. Singh,p.3.
9. N. Khelchandra Singh, **Chada Laihui**, Imphal 1966 p.I.
10. **Pakhangba Nongkarol**, 1983,p.5.
11. Reproduced in Panditrāj A.P. sharma, **Pakhangba**, Imphal,1953.
12. **Laishemlon Shakoh**, p.31.
13. Quoted in N.M.Singh, **Shandrembi chasishra**, 1973, Imphal.
14. N.M. Singh, **Naothingkhong Phambal**, Imphal, 1967, p.64.
15. Quoted by N.B. singh and Y.M.Singh.
16. Y. Bhagya, **Leithak Leikharol**, 1967,p.78.
17. Quoted in **Leishemlon Shakok** p.31.
18. N.b. Singh and Y.M. Singh, p. 4.
19. Hemchandra,**Sagai salai Hourakpa**, Imphal, 1985.

One day Liklabicha went to fetch water keeping her son with her father who was meditating. The child cried and was taken away by Liklibicha. Her father opened his eyes and not finding the child he created another son who was given to her daughter and he was named Mandom.

20. W.I. Singh, **A History of Manipur**, 1986, pp. 226-228.
21. Khagemba Yangbi quoted by Singh and Singh, **Ningthourol Lambuba**, edited by O. Bhogeshore Singh, 1966, Imphal.
22. Quoted from **Khagemba Yangbi**, reproduced in Singh and Singh .
23. O.B. Singh, **Ningthourol Lambuba**, p.2. translated by W.I.Singh, **History of Manipur**.
24. W.I. Singh, op.cit.p. 229.
25. **Ibid**.

26. **Laithak Laikharol** (Ed) Y. Bhagya Singh, 1967, Imphal, pp.86-88. This passage in English is reproduced from W.I. Singh, op. cit., pp.267-68.
27. There are six traditional dinitaries who were associated with the administration of the Meitei state.
28. M. Manijao, **Chhandrembi Chaishra**.
29. O. Bhogeshore Singh, **Ningthourol Leireng**.
30. N. Khelchandra Singh, Presidential Address, p.3.
31. N. Angou, **Pakhangba Nongkarol**, Imphal, 1983, pp.6
32. B.K. Sharma, '**Khaba Nganba**', Seminar Paper, 1985.
33. N. Angou, op.cit, p.8.
34. Kh. Kaima, **Pakhangba Phambak**.
35. Ibid, pp. 26-27.
36. Reproduced by N. Manijao Singh, **Chhandrembi Chaisra**.
37. R.K. Jhalajit Singh, op. cit., p.13.