

KING LOIYAMBA OF MANIPUR, AS AN EMINENT STATECRAFT OF MANIPUR

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Abstract

This article delves into the intricacies of statecraft and administrative reforms within the early Meitei state, particularly during the reign of King Loiyamba in 1094. It discusses the emergence of statecraft as a necessity for governance and the various measures adopted by rulers to ensure the smooth functioning of the state. King Loiyamba's reign marked a significant period of socio-economic and political development, characterized by strategic military campaigns, administrative restructuring, and the introduction of innovative systems such as the Lallup labour service. The article highlights the transition from customary socio-religious laws to a more organized administrative framework under King Loiyamba, culminating in the issuance of the first written constitution, the Loiyamba Shinyen, in 1110 A.D. King Loiyamba's astute leadership and commitment to ancestral worship are underscored as pivotal factors in the consolidation and expansion of the Meitei Kingdom. Through meticulous examination of historical accounts and royal edicts, the article illuminates the multifaceted nature of statecraft and governance in early Meitei society, shedding light on its enduring legacy and impact on subsequent developments in the region.

Keywords:

Meitei statecraft, King Loiyamba, military campaigns, administrative reforms, Lallup system, feudalism, socio-economic progress, institutionalization, Loiyamba Shinyen, Meitei legal history.

Introduction:

The emergence of the early Meitei state marked a significant turning point in the history of Manipur, characterized by the evolution of statecraft and the implementation of innovative governance mechanisms. Rooted in the art of managing the affairs of a burgeoning state, Meitei rulers navigated complex socio-political landscapes to ensure the smooth functioning and longevity of their kingdoms.

From the inception of the Meitei state, monarchs sought to implement diverse strategies and management devices to effectively govern their territories. These endeavours were driven by the recognition that a static approach to governance would not suffice in the face of evolving challenges and societal needs. Thus, the continuous renovation of systems and the introduction of new mechanisms became essential to adapt to contemporary administrative demands.

This article delves into the reign of King Loyumba, who ascended to the throne of the Meitei Kingdom in 1094, as a pivotal period characterized by remarkable socio-economic and political developments. Through a strategic blend of military expeditions, administrative reforms, and economic policies, King Loyumba laid the groundwork for the consolidation and expansion of the Meitei state.

Central to King Loyumba's vision was the consolidation of power and the establishment of effective governance structures. By introducing administrative divisions, appointing state officials, and implementing innovative labour systems such as the Lallup, he sought to address the Kingdom's economic challenges and ensure its stability and prosperity.

Furthermore, King Loyumba's reign witnessed the codification of laws and the issuance of the historic Loiyamba Shinyen, the first written constitution of the Meitei Kingdom. This groundbreaking decree underscored the monarch's commitment to institutionalizing governance and upholding ancestral traditions.

In examining King Loyumba's contributions to the early Meitei state, this article sheds light on the dynamic interplay between statecraft, military strategy, and administrative innovation, shaping the socio-political landscape of Manipur for centuries to come.

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It is learnt that after the formation of the early Meitei state, the idea of statecraft has also emerged. Various means were introduced by the kings to govern the state smoothly. Either one or some norms could not fit to run a state properly. Statecraft means the art of managing the affairs of a state. The classical states continued to exist for centuries by adopting different management devices. It is learnt that either one or some norms could not even run the state. So, the renovation of the systems and the introduction of new mechanisms of the state from time to time are essential to meet contemporary administrative needs. The creative efforts initiated by the head of the state become the life valve to prolong the state for many years. The state management devices were introduced by rulers from generation to generation to make an effective weapon to respond to all challenges. The state is a creation and its existence, continuation, development etc, could not be met by the military programme alone. Hence, all possible ways to govern the state were adopted according to time and situation. The concerned means of the statecraft should be everlasting or regular programmes managed by the state. Otherwise, statecraft would not be a convincing state plan in the face of challenges. A state without creative programmes of statecraft will not be fit to protect its sovereignty and territory. The timely enactment of these state agendas of statecraft would be possibly regarded as an effective step to make good governance. Whenever the state gets tedious to initiate any policy of administration, the state is fervently supposed to decay. The archaic Meitei state tended to be remarkably long-lived, comparatively stronger compared with surrounding barbarians and neighbouring Cacheri kingdom and Pong principalities of Kabaw valley but weaker than the Burmese Empire and systematically bale to extract manpower from a substantial population. However, the pre-modern Meitei state is incapable of maximum utilization of its natural resources due to lack of knowledge. Besides, there were elementary units like families, lineages, small villages or hamlets, bilateral kindred and larger villages. The changing trend of such potential social-political nodes brought by the population causes ethnic agglomeration reason and conflict factors are the usual phenomenon prevailing in pre-Meitei state formation. The birth of a new state leads to the formulate symbolic and ideological formulation of the state, to introduction of different rudimentary political institutions and to evolution of devices of statecraft with the slightest to wider power.

In 1094, King Loyumba ascended to the throne of the Meitei Kingdom [1]. A remarkable development took place in the socio-economic and political spheres. The strength of his wise and tactful statecraft had been a potent way of enhancing royal glory. Of course, he adopted the ancestral policy of aggressiveness towards the disloyal tribes. His entire plan was mainly to consolidate the Kingdom. Therefore, expeditions were sent only to the Chakpas of Sekta and tributary tribal villages like Haoku, Malloi, Leihou and Haoyen [2].

With these ideas, the King dispatched a number of expeditions. He ordered his brother-in-law Angouba Hoakhai Lantha to attack the Chakpas of Sekta. The main reason for this invasion was the chief's refusal to hand a stool with magical power King Loiyumba took up a stern step against the disloyal Chakpas. He asked his brother-in-law not to come back till the destruction of the six villages settled by the Chakpas. In this expedition, he captured some of the Chakpa warriors namely Chakpa Tao, Angom Tao, Akam Taoba, Haonutei Kwakpi etc. An expedition was organized under the direct command of his half-brother, Khamlang Pansa to conquer the Haoku tribal village since the chief Haoku village would not obey to pay to the Meitei King. In this encounter, the Haoku chief was defeated and some warriors were captured by Pansaba as a war captive. Another expedition was planned to be sent against the Malloi village. Because the chief of Malloi mocked Leithoi Lambu who was appointed as controller by the Meitei king to collect tribute from the Malloi tribal village that he could not give tribute. He even challenged King Loiyamba that he could be too weak to climb up the hill. When King Loiyamba received this news, he invaded Leichou and Malloi villages. Both chiefs namely Haothang Haoyen of Malloi and Khomung of Leihou were completely defeated and they were captured as prisoners. Then king accumulated different items from the vanquished villages as tribute. Thus, by demonstrating his courage and valour, King Loiyamba could earn the title of conqueror of Haothang Haoyen. On his return way king attacked Thangdapung and defeated the group of dark people while subjugating these

aforementioned hill tribes, King Loiyamba performed the practice of singing Ougri, a verse of commending the valour duties responsibilities which were usually chanted by the priest in the ears of winner king. However, the singing of Ougri in the open indicated the permanent demolition of the area in which Ougri's song was sung [3]. War was a usual task during the pre-modern Meiteis to defend their sovereignty. Such a compulsion encouraged to adopt was a requisite assignment of the state. King Loiyamba's wars against the hill tribe were certainly to consolidate his kingdom and to collect tribute that helped to feed his subjects. Apart from these, he would be able to crop up the loyalty of his subjects.

King's consolidation programme was accelerated by introducing new systems and innovating the old patterns. King Loiyamba was highly concerned about the continuing trend of greater decentralization by introducing elaborate divisions of administrative institutions. He, however, introduced six lups (institutions) like Khongchalup, Nongmailup, Angoubalup, Leichol Lakpa, Tolong Khombalup, Khurailup, Laiphambalup and Khangjelup. Besides more state officials would be also required to handle the newly created administrative departments, having developed such an idea, King Loiyamba appointed 10 (ten) state officials namely Pukhramba, Nongthomba, Khwairakpa, Yaishullakpa, Hijangloi, Chingkhaoba Halchaba, Mumangloi Halchaba, Phamthakcha and Naikhurakpa[4]. King Loiyamba realized the Kingdom's backward economy and scarcity of labour. However, the state required both money and manpower to administer the state smoothly. Therefore, the king determined to acquire resources. His entire plan required large human labour. Probably, the necessary labour was scarce since the population of the kingdom was small. Without spending even a single coin, the king desired to utilise people's energy for both socio-economic and security purposes. Thus, King Loiyamba, in order to strengthen his power and position and to meet the possible requirements of the kingdom, introduced the Lallup system (lal – war; lup – organization). The Lallup service was applied to every male population between the ages 16 (sixteen) and 60 (sixty) of the Kingdom. The Lallup labourers were obliged to perform the state's welfare service for only 10 (ten) days out of 40 (forty) days during peacetime but these labourers were sent as soldiers when the war broke out without any remuneration [5].

The development of the 3 Lallup system was the manifestation of feudalism in the social, administrative and political structure of the Meitei Kingdom the lallup was better administered through the administrative and social division.

Undoubtedly, the administrative reforms introduced by King Loiyamba were regarded as the steel frame of the Kingdom's administration for about seven centuries. However, the feudal administrative system came to emerge during the Kingship of Loiyamba. The existence of such a feudal system was covered with the sharing of administrative responsibility. King was no longer directly responsible to his subjects. Since, the appearance of the intermediate feudal nobles, subjects were indirectly linked with the king. On the other hand, through these feudal systems, the royal sway sufficiently by expanded to the far-flung areas of the Kingdom. Loiyamba's reign can be observed as a transitional phase between the ancient and medieval periods. There was a great development took place during the reign of Loiyamba and the agrarian economy was fully supplemented by the artesian economy [6]. Hence, the existence of a full-fledged peasant came to emerge during his kingship. The newly emerged artisan class took a very assertive role in developing the economic position of the kingdom. His economic policy was reflected in his royal edict Loiyamba Shinyen which depicted a well-organized society and economy for the kingdom of Manipur.

The early Meitei state before King Loiyamba was administered with the help of various unwritten customary socio-religious and laws which were left in rudimentary form by his predecessors. The introduction of administrative institutions and departments and the appointment of administrative officials in different successive periods would make it more convenient for the Kingdom's administration. Those of the previous codes and conventions used by former rulers and rudimentary socio-political units which were gathered on long discourse of Meitei society were the sources to codify new law. In 1110 A.D. King Loiyamba issued a decree which was better known as Loiyamba Shinyen the first written constitution of the kingdom of Meitribak [7]. The formation process of the early Meitei state attained completion during his period; because all the primary satellite institutions of the Kingdom's administration were registered for parallel development that might be regular or irregular [8].

King Loiyamba's knowledge in the field of administration was very praiseworthy. The decree itself was the finest product that was used to govern the state [9].

No doubt, King Loiyamba was the real upholder of ancestral worship. The royal edict popularly known as Loiyamba Shinyen in the distribution of socio-religious and economic functions to various families, assignment

of duties to priests and priestesses, allocation of the works earning of the administrative department duties and functions of kings and queens, royal etiquette, titles and decorations awarded to the nobles, administration justice, keeping of standard time and other are mentioned. The decree specifically mentions that 30 (thirty) families were assigned to weave various designs of clothes. These families were assigned to dye in respective colours. As many as 45 (forty-five) families were also assigned to look after 45 (forty-five) abodes of deities (forest gods – Umanglais) which were forced to scatter all over the kingdom [10].

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the narrative of early Meitei statecraft and governance under the reign of King Loiyamba unveils a profound tapestry of socio-political evolution and administrative innovation. From the nascent stages of state formation to the consolidation of power through strategic military campaigns and institutional reforms, King Loiyamba's tenure epitomizes a pivotal juncture in the trajectory of Meitei history.

The meticulous orchestration of expeditions against dissenting tribes, coupled with the introduction of administrative divisions and the pioneering Lallup system, underscore King Loiyamba's visionary leadership and commitment to statecraft. His efforts not only fortified the Meitei Kingdom but also laid the groundwork for seven centuries of administrative stability.

Moreover, the emergence of feudal administrative structures and the codification of laws through the landmark decree, the Loiyamba Shinyen, delineate a transition from customary practices to a more organized governance framework. Through these initiatives, King Loiyamba fostered socio-economic progress and societal cohesion, fostering the rise of artisan classes and delineating socio-religious roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, King Loiyamba's unwavering dedication to ancestral worship and the meticulous allocation of socio-religious and economic functions underscore his profound reverence for tradition amidst a backdrop of progressive statecraft.

In essence, the reign of King Loiyamba symbolizes a transformative era in Meitei history, marked by the fusion of tradition and innovation, military prowess, and administrative acumen. His legacy reverberates as a testament to the enduring resilience and adaptive capacity of the early Meitei state, casting a luminous legacy that continues to illuminate the annals of history.

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