

Importance of War in Pre-Modern Meitei Kingdom

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The Meiteis engaged in the war against foreign powers to gather large war booty, to impose taxes on vanquished states and defend her sovereignty. Thus, war is highly essential during the pre-modern Meitei society to show the strength of capability of her survival and to feed her people. These compulsions encouraged the Meitei Kings to imply war as a requisite assignment of the state. Kautilya said, "According to the conditions of time and place either the army or the treasure became dominant, but while the army was the means of acquiring and preserving the treasure, the latter was the means of acquiring and preserving both itself and the army" [1]. Besides civil administrative programmes like the appointment of various officials, the introduction of new administrative institutions, enactments of laws, political manoeuvring and matrimonial alliances from time to time are the important means to govern the kingdom smoothly. During the pre-modern time, war was an unavoidable task carried on by the Meitei Kings against her enemies to acquire land, to accumulate wealth and to increase power and prestige. In the beginning, the Meitei Kings fought usually against his fellow clan chiefs and tribal leaders to bring consolidate his position and acquire booty. The increase of power compelled him to cross the mountain barrier.

With the establishment of the Meitei Kingdom, all the able-bodied men were made compulsory state service for making a good administration. Nongda Leiren Pakhangba was capable of organizing to acquire a large militia service from his service from his subjects. The political supports got by Pakhangba from the Angom Chief Pureiromba, Luwang Chief Longba Langmaiba and Mangang Chief Apauba at the time of prestige Meitei state formation would enable to set up the stability of the Kingdom. It further helped to attribute a normal political relationship between King Pakhangba and the aforementioned clan Chiefs in the near future. The hostility between Nongda Leiren Pakhangba and Poireiton was subsided by a matrimonial alliance. In pre-modern Meitei society war was highly essential to show her strength and capability. These compulsions always compelled the Meitei Kings to wage war against their enemies. The Meitei King Naothingkhong collected large-quality of war booties, after defeating the Thanga Kangbong [2]. He also raided against the Mangangs of Loijing hill (Koubru – Laimaton ranges west of Imphal). In this expedition, Medingu Naothingkhong defeated three brothers namely Ranga Naohal Ahanba and Yoicharol and he collected all their pigs and Chicken. He further marched against another Mangang village situated in the western slope of the same range. Naothingkhong was able to crush another Mangang Chief Khunkucha Atengba. He gathered drums, gongs (made of bell metal) and copper made musical instruments an war booty [3]. Meitei King NInghoucheng attacked Khuman village i.e. Haogei and looked cattle's and pigs [4].

The nature of the wars waged by the Meitei Kings against his enemies would reflect about their policy towards the subjugated areas. To a greater extend, they would have a more intention to established tribute village than the collection of booties from the defeated tribes or principalities at the time of war. The Meitei Kings with this idea adopted various policies that were suited to the population of the Kingdom. Their eagerness was only to meet their administration's needs. It is worth to mention that the Meitei Kings realized about her smaller population and limited resources. He introduced Lallup (Lal- war; Lup- organization) in 1112 AD to acquire necessary labours of the Kingdom.

According to this system, all man population aged from 16 to 60 were liable to render state service 10 (ten) days out of for every 40 (forty) days [5]. His policy makes more advantageous to organise militia service. Thus, the king was able to acquire enough militiamen when the war broke out without expending a single coin. Along with different administrative programmes of the Kingdom, King Loiyumba launched a number of military expeditions against the tribal chiefs and others. He sent an expedition against the Sekta village due to disloyalty. King captured several Chakpa warriors. The chief of Hoauku village was invaded for his refusal to pay tribute to the King. After defeating him, some warriors were captured [6]. King Loiyumba marched against the chiefs of Haothang Haoyen of Malloi and Khomung of Leihau for their obstinate attitude. King suppressed them and forcibly gathered tributes consisting of wine, arum, clothe, dog, chicken, and wooden seats from those vanquished tribal villages.

Since the reign of Ningthoukhomba, the might of the Kingdom of Manipur was largely reflected in the military aggrandizement and territorial expansionism, socio-religious and economic development. King Ningthouba engaged in wars against the Moirang and the Shan principalities. His shrewd political manoeuvring

could not only make political alliances with the Shan of Kabaw Valley but also materialize the Meitei Shan combined attack on the powerful principality. After the establishment of his control in the whole of Manipur valley, King Ningthoukhomba for the first time by crossing the mountain barrier sent military expeditions to the Akla Chingtombi and Taro Louchingpat Shan villages of Kabaw Valley [7].

He collected war booties from those defeated Shans to fill up the Kingdom's granaries that were supported to feed his subjects Thangwai Ningthouba better known as Kyamba son and successor of Ninthoukhomba was renowned for his political exposure in the international arena. He had a good relationship with Pong King Khekhomba. The joint forces of two Kingdoms invaded to Kayang a Shan principality of Kabaw Valley and defeated the King. Both kings also signed a friendship treaty. Accordingly, the boundary between the two Kingdom was fixed in the following terms: in the northeast Mungkhong Mungjang was given to Manipur and the land of the dwarf mango groves was put under the control of the Pong in the east, the boundary of Manipur was extended upto Loijiri hills, in the south upto Miyolong. So far concern about, Shamjok, the eastern portion was given to Pong and the western portion was given to the Meiteis [8]. Thus, for the first time, the sphere of Meitei influence in foreign land was officially recognized by another power.

King Kyamba was very tactful to repulse the Mayang invaders. As his predecessors did, he raided different tribal villages. His contribution in the aspect of culture was everlasting in the annals of Manipur civilization. The introduction of the recording of the royal chronicle namely Cheitharol Kumbaba from the year 1485 A.D. became the guiding source of the Meitei civilization. King himself was responsible to introduce the system of Cheithaba (Chei- stick, Thaba- giving up; It is done in the first day of Shajibu the first lunar month of the Meiteis) [9].

The period from 1508 to 1562 (about 15 years), the Meitei Kings would have neither effectively employed any sort of systems benefitted to the state administration. Thus it was known as a period of stagnancy. Of course, this period came to an end with the accession of Kabomba to the throne in 1523. He also adopted an aggressive policy as his forefathers did against his enemies. He saw his vigour by engaging war against different ethnic groups. King, however, initiated to dig a defensive canal namely Takhel Khong in 1533 to defend from the Tripuri invasion [10]. It is reported that his reign marked to set up Meitei-Ahom relation [11]. Since the dawn of the Meitei state, war has been the traditional policy effectively adopted by the Meitei Kings to sharpen the ideas of statecraft by waging war against the Shans of Kabaw Valley, different villages of Western hills, South Eastern hills and Southern hill, Mongyamba was able to consolidate the Kingdom. Such a programme helps to sustain his subjects.

Soon after the accession to the throne of Meitrabak, without losing time, he soon set forth a military expedition to the Shan principalities of Kabaw Valley. In 1602 Kyang a Shan Principality was attacked. As many as 17 (seventeen) persons were captured as war prisoners. He made another raid against the Kyang in 1624 AD and in 1647 A.D. [12].

It is recorded that Ayangpha daughter of Meidingu Mungyanba was given in marriage to the chief of Kyang. Such a matrimonial relationship would not be maintained last long. King Khagemba marched against Kyang and its chief Choi Seng and his wife Chou Soi along with stone makers were taken as prisoners [13]. Samjok one of the oldest and powerful Shan principality in Kabaw Valley was attacked in 1607 by King Khagemba and 60 (sixty) persons were captured. He further raided another Shan principality in 1626 and he collected cattle and buffalo as war booty. It also recorded that many Shans from Samjok moved to dwell in Manipur in 1632. During the reign of King Khagemba, the Toongro Burmese invaded to the Kabaw Valley which was protected by the Meitei King in 1648 and 1651 A.D. The Burmese forces were driven back by the Meitei armies [14].

Sanongba the younger brother of Khagemba fled to Cachar due to quarrels amongst the royal brother. He requested the Chachari King Supradas Narayan to give possible help for the invasion of Manipur. Hence, a Cachari force along with Sanongba was sent against Meitrabak in 1604; but they were defeated [15]. Once again, the Cacharis and the Muslims jointly invaded to Meitrabak in 1606 C.E. They were defeated and a large number of invading forces including their leader and Sanongba were captured. This brought to increase labour population of the Kingdom [16].

Many expeditions were sent against the hill villages by King Khagemba. In 1605 he raided Maring village of Meiyengching. He also defeated Tangkhul Itok, Itek and Machi. He conquered Purum, Mayang Khang and Tarang villages respectively in 1608. Thangal village was occupied in 1609. King conquered different villages like Maring Khudei Kangoi, Maring Yaoton, Machi Monting Lamnem, Loipoi, Tonpung and Kharam, King Khagemba further raided other hill villages namely Tompi, Nongphou, Kabui Nungtek, Moyons, Maraws, CharoiKapeng and Monthei, Mapau, Purum Leikai, Ithou, Ithailok and Ihanglo [12].

King Khagemba's tactful martial quality, deep knowledge about his kingdom, personal valour and wisdom in different aspects would be certainly considered as standard values to govern the state successfully. Whenever a

King failed to fight a successful war, he and his domain would not ever survive. Undoubtedly war was chosen by the pre-modern Meitei as a device of statecraft. Because it would enable to make respond of all challenges, to get support of his subjects and to make healthy the martial culture of the Meiteis.

Though the Kingdom of Meitrabak was a land-based agricultural kingdom, politico-military would be regarded as one of the centrifugal bases to determine the fate of the Meitei civilization.

King Khunjaoba inherited a powerful kingdom from his great father Khagemba. He was rather to adopt various peace and development works. Besides, the King also tried hard to stabilize his kingdom. So, he mainly directed his raids against the subjugation villages and principalities to make more convenient of his consolidation work. King Khunjaoba gathered cattle, buffaloes and elephants from Samjok as the spoils of the war [18]. King marched against the Chakpa Angoching village near the Ningthi river. He was able to defeat the Shans of Ava and their Chief Choupha Mangtra was taken prisoner. King attacked Mangsa a Shan village in Kabaw Valley in 1657 [19].

King Khunjaoba conquered hill villages namely Machou, Yangoi, Mayangkhang and Korou in 1652. After defeating Itok Tangkhul village from where fifteen prisoners were captured. In 1654, the king raided against Kuyong, Ningashai, Wainun, Aanl, and Sharon. Fifty Sharonmen were captured as war captives. With the assist of Itok Tangkhul, the king attacked the villages of Karong, Ngaikhong, Sarang, Phungbang, Wakching, Lengkhu, Lengeng, Shikhong, Andro and Yaibirok in 1655. The King further crushed the power of the Marams and their chief was taken prisoner [20].

King Khunjaoba was succeeded by Parikhomba a son of his brother prince Tonaba. Like his predecessors, he sent military expeditions to hill villages and the Kabaw Valley area. In 1692 and 1693 he raided Samjok the Shan principality of Kabaw Valley. In his first attack, the Meitei king captured fifteen prisoners and confiscated shields, swords, guns and horses. His second raid was particularly to gather paddy from that conquered principality. The paddy collected from the Samjok principality was put in the royal granary at Mangsha. Usually, the tribute collected from Kabaw Valley would help to prosper the kingdom. King also subdued hill villages namely Nungkon, Touden, Khanpok, Monthei, Moyon, Mayangkhnag, Nonghou, Mahou, Anal, Namfow, Mareipung, Lamgang, Lamthon and Sagong [21]. King's military action against these aforementioned villages was not only to reestablish his suzerainty over them but also to collect tribute.

King Chairairongba was a good administrator. Apart from the routine administrative programme, he raided different villages to collect tributes. King Charairongba showed his attitude of friendship towards the chiefs of the eastern hill by organising a big festival in 1700 A.D. All chiefs of the eastern hills were invited to attend such a festival and a friendship relation between these chiefs and the nobles of his court was begun to establish [22].

King Garibaniwaz was regarded as one of the greatest kings of Manipur. During his reign, Manipur attained its zenith. It was due to a combination of his gifted martial quality and his profound knowledge of administration. He was a tireless army general who employed was as a potent device of statecraft. His vigorous militarism would make Manipur one of the powerful states in the eastern Himalayan and mainland southeast Asian regions in the wake of the decline of the Tongoo dynasty in Burma. King Garibaniwaz's raids against the hill tribes and Kabaw Valley areas were to consolidate the position of his kingdom and to collect tribute from these areas whereas the war against the Burmese was probably a struggle for power.

King Garibaniwaz attacked to the disloyal hill villages such as Oklu, Tokpa, Naongphaouw, Sachung, Nongwapon, and Mahou. These villages were completely suppressed and it brought a great advantage to the wars with the Burmese [23]. In 1717 king himself crushed the Itok Tangkhul and a friendship relation between King Garibaniwaz and the Itok chief was made. He subjugated Hundung Tangkhul village [24].

King Garibaniwaz made a series of raids against the Kabuis settled in the western hills. He inflicted a crushing defeat upon Leimatak village, Kabui Lophok village, Noney village, Charoichakotlong village, Rangkhong village, etc [25]. During his kingship, the 'Lallup System' was extended to the hill tribes in order to get more labour. King Garibaniwaz introduced the post of Khullakpa (head administrator of the hill villages).

Cheitharol Kumbaba records seven attack on the Samjok principality. His military campaign against Samjok was mainly to show military strength and to get tribute [26]. Since the Burmese encroachment in Kabaw Valley was very prominent, the power of Meitei's political control over this region was required to be activated from time to time. King Garibaniwaz's frequent military expeditions to Kabaw Valley areas were to make alive his political grip over this region.

Since the inception of the state formation, Manipur had a strong administrative system on the other hand King Khagemba established a strong agricultural-based economy by introducing a new agricultural system. The agricultural-based economy was strengthened by the subsidiary occupation of fishing and cattle rearing etc. The wars adopted by the Meitei Kings especially to control Kabaw Valley would bring tremendous economic development to Manipur. However, the possession of the Kabaw Valley by the Meitei Kings enabled to acquire large amounts of natural resources, food grains etc. Having possessed of efficient state system and sound

economy. King Garibaniwaz tactfully built up a powerful military organization based on traditional patterns to defend from any impending Burmese attack and Burma whenever the situation permitted.

How far Garibaniwaz was successful in making Manipur a powerful Kingdom by applying the traditional aggressive policy? No doubt King Garibaniwaz adopted an effective warfare to respond to any challenges. Having developed this idea, King fully equipped all the compartments of his army. In 1718, the Burmese King Tainganwe sent a full-scale expedition against the kingdom of Manipur. The Manipur forces under the direct command of King Garibaniwaz gallantly fought against the invading Burmese army at Wangjing village. The Burmese were defeated [27]. Gariabniwaz again defeated the Burmese at Khoukep Loupnathong [28].

In 1723, the Burmese forces invaded Manipur. Simultaneously the Tripuri invasion took place. The Burmese marched up to Pallel where they encamped. Garibaniwaz sent his army to face the Burmese but they were defeated in the hands of the Burmese. The Manipuri forces soon retreated to Wangjing and prepared for another battle. King Garibaniwaz sent reinforcement and he personally supervised the battle of Wangjing. King's presence gave a great impetus to the rank and file of the Manipuri forces. The Burmese finally suppressed. After this, the King moved forces encamped the war with the invading Tripurians. Forces were made delayed more days by a plan of pretending talk proposed by the Manipuri nobles. King Garibaniwaz's successful protective wars against the Burmese exemplified the fitness to respond to any external aggression.

King Garibaniwaz was a contemporary of the last two Toongoo Kings like Taningrewe and Maha Dhamayajatipati. At that time Tungoo Burmese empire was very unstable and chaotic due to inefficiency of its rulers and the rise of Taling power. By taking full advantage of the weak situation of the Tungoos, King Garibaniwaz sent a series of counter-attacks against Burma by crossing the Chindwin River. By attacking Myedoo, the Burmese fortresses and collected elephants, horses and other articles as war booties [29]. Garibaniwaz again attacked Burma in 1738. The Burmese were severely defeated and every house up to the wall of Ava was also burnt down [30]. Another raid of Manipur was reported in 1740. But the Manipuri-Burmese relation was brought to normalcy about a decade later when Princess Satyamala was given in marriage to the Burmese King.

During the pre-modern period, war became a potent force for changing the political fortune of a Kingdom. The relationship between war and civilization becomes mandatory as war influences the fate of a state. Thus, the Meiteis waged war against their neighbours in an effort to gain access to resources, territories, power and glory.

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