



Folk Tradition of Kangla (The Ancient Capital of Manipur)

Dr. S. Chaoton Singh

Assistant Professor, Dept. Of Manipuri, Western College, Konthoujam, Manipur
anjichao84@gmail.com

Dr. M. Imocha Singh

Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Modern College Imphal, Manipur
imochamoirangtherm14@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

*Kangla, Cheitharol
Kumbaba, Nongda Lairen
Pakhangba, Mythology,
Manipur history, Puyas
(manuscripts).*

ABSTRACT

The folklorical term of Oral Narrative encompasses myth, legend and folktale which taking a vital role in strengthening and nourishing social norms and social relationship. Since the majority of North East Communities are characterized by orality, every account of their societies abounds in folklore. It has been tremendously important to any kind of discussion towards understanding, culture and other aspect of society of NE India. The practices of tale telling tradition of Kangla through the centuries into a formidable fortress as ancient Capital of Manipur. The Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur recorded that Kangla was the seat of government since the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba, the first historical king of Manipur who ascended the throne in 33 A.D. upto the reign of Maharaja Kullachandra in 1891. It is also regarded as the Lord Pakhangba resides under Kangla and ruled the kingdom of Manipur and the earth. During primordial times there were the ruling clans named Leinung Lonja Ariba, Tangja Leela Pakhangba, Lolang Pakhangba, Ningthou Kangba, Sakappa, Wankappa, Kakshuba, Tonkonba, Lambicha, Chakpa, Khaba etc., who ruled own the Kangla. The fables among the legend, folklore and a number of ancient treatise (Ms) Sakok Lamlen, Nonglon Sakok, Nunglon, Kangla Houba, Kangla Thiren, Machiren

and etc., which lay down the rules for the formation, worship, rituals ceremonies are still associating with Kangla.

Introduction

The foremost thought about native land were, who am I and, how this land was created and whence the inhabitants, Meitei and tribals came from where etc. It led me to a long journey in search of own identity. It also compelled me to read many books on creation stories of the universe, i.e, Leisemlol an incredible book on Meitei / Manipuri folklore and it further incited to study 'Folklore'. Russian folklorist Y.M. Sokolov have said "Folklore is an echo of the past, but at the same time a vigorous voice of the present." (Richard M. Dorson: Introduction concepts of Folklore and Folklife Studies, Pub. University Press, 1972, P.17). These words made me to think over the past history of native land and people. At present we are searching about our identity and culture this is the vigorous voice of present. "The fairy tale flies, the legend walk, knocks at your door; the one freely out of the fullness of poetry, the other has almost the authority of history. As fairy-tale stands related to the legend, so does legend to history, and we may (add) so does history to real life." (Linda Begh in Richard M. Dorson edited Folklore & Folklife, P.72). In case of all forms of literature, oral literature precedes written forms of literature. Manipuri literature flourished with traditional manuscripts Puya evolved. This is the thrust to restraint, and give recognition to text and without text literature. Particularly in North East India where there is a huge tribal population, but also all over the world, the preservation and continuation of our heritage is a big concern. There might be differences in performance but the common and shared concern is how to preserve them. Every week a language dies, every week one language disappears and one point of view of one culture dies. It has always been focusing on the role and future of local and regional cultures in the age of interconnected globalization and we share so much.

Brief history of Kangla

Kangla the ancient capital of Manipur has occupied a significant place in her history. It was the seat of power from where the Manipuri kings exercised political and military power well beyond the present political boundary of Manipur. Her mighty rulers like king Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D) and king Garibaniwaz (1709-1748 A.D) carried their military might well beyond the Ningthi River (Chindwin River) of Burma and occupied the entire Cachar District of present day Assam. At the beginning of the 18th century Manipur became a powerful kingdom in the region. Woven into history and mythology of the state, it casts a spell on the minds of its inhabitants and deeply influences their thinking. It is not only

a seat of political power but also a holy place for religious worships and ceremonies which represents the history, culture and integrity of the people. (Preface: Pangambam Bharat Singh, IAS: Kangla the National Heritage of Manipur, 2008, Imphal).

According to Cheitharol Kumbaba, the Royal Chronicle of Manipur, Kangla was the seat of government since the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba in 33 A.D., up to the reign of Maharaja Kulachandra in 1891. Before that period, the ruling clans named 1. Leinung Lonja Ariba, 2. Lolang Pakhangba, 3. Tangja Leela Pakhagba, 4. Ningthou Kangba, 5. Moriya Phambalcha, 6. Sakappa, 7. Wankappa, 8. Kaksuba, 9. Tonkonba, 10. Pitinggoi, 11. Lambicha, 12. Puthiba, 13. Khaba 14. Sentreng, 15. Kuptreng, 16. Chakpas etc., were ruled own the Kangla. (MS: Leishemlol Ariba). There are number of ancient treatise / manuscripts specially Sakoklamlen, Nonglon Sakok, Chinglon Laihui, Nunglon, Khunung Leikoirol, Kangla Thirel, Machirel etc., which lay down the rules for the construction, worship, ceremonies relating to Kangla.

With the defeat of Manipur in the Anglo-Manipur War 1891 under the hands of British which became the dominion of British India. During the British colonial period, Kangla was known as Manipur Fort and a Battalion of Assam Rifle was station over there. The British left Manipur in 1947, but the ancient Royal seat of Manipur remained under the control of the Assam Rifles. Since then, the people of Manipur were demanding for the vacation of Kangla by the Assam Rifles and to hand over the ancient seat of Royalty to the state Government for restoring Kangla to its ancient glory. The aspirations of the people of Manipur were realized on 20th November, 2004 when Kangla was handed over to the people of Manipur by the Assam Rifles in a historic event held at Kangla in the presence of the then Honourable Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh. (Handing over of Kangla Fort: Hon'ble Prime Minister Addressed Manipur, 20th November, 2004).

Mythological background of Kangla

Myth tales and explain rituals and relate to gods and spirits. Usually, it is a narrative dealing with gods, demigods of culture heroes (Kanneth W. Clark and Marry: Introducing Folklore, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winson, 1966, P.26). The meaning of Kangla denoted Kang means Sky (the vault of heaven) and La means earth. Thus, Kangla and its meaning stand for signifying both haven and earth. Kangla was once a hill and known as the KurumchingKhongnem having seven ranges. Seven streams also flowed from this hill of which have religious significance in the lives of the Manipuri till today. It is also believed that there are 360 important holy places in Kangla.

Manipuri version

Taibangpanbagi mapu oiriba Guru Shidabana Ashiba, Atiya Shidaba, Konjin Tuthokpa ga macha ahumda Korou Nongkhong koirucho ahanba thunglabada Sana Phambal pige, Leibakki mapu oihange asumna haikhi. Mapan Gurugi wa tabada Ashiba Kei tongduna Nongkhong koiba chatkhare. Atiya Shidabasu Nongkhong koiba chatkhare. Masanou Leirong Atonba Unou Konde Hunba Konjin Tuthokpa leihoure. Asumna machanipa animak Nongkhong koiba chatkharabada Guru Shidabana machanupa Atonba KonjinTingthokpada masu Nongkhong koiruro haina thousikhi maduda Konjin Tuthokpana Guru Shidababu henba ama leite aduna Gurugi nakhong thambal manbabu kojage haina khutfang changjou chepna lonna machinda Gurugi mingkheibu shonduna Gurugi Phangkhong taretlak koiraga Guru Shidababu khurumduna phamle. Madudagi Guru Shidabana Pari Atonba nangdi eetik arubabu karamna khangbano, nangdi Epa Aribane haiduna maming Pakhang Yoirenba haina koure. Asimatungda Korou Nongkhong koiba chatkhiba Gurugi Pari Ahal Ashiba amasung Atiya Shidaba animak thunglare. Makhoi anina Atonbabu nangdi thunglamlaboire asumna hairabada Guru Shidabana nanaodi hanna thunglamle Leipakki Mapudi mahakni haikhi.

Asumna haikhiba mapham adu Loiren koukhi. Adudagi Thingkrumchingda karaklaga Mapa Guru Shidabana macha nipa ahal Ashiba amadi yaima Atiya Shidaba anida haikhi – Nasanou Leirong Atonba Konjin Tuthokpana eigi eetik khanglamlabagidamak Pakhangba koure. Sana Phambal di mana phamlasanu. Epari Ashiba Sanamahi nangbu taibang panba pumnamakna khurum khajanglasuno, Epari Yaima Atiya Shidabanangna Napn Guru Eiga tethok tesinnangeine haiduna Guru Shidabana machanipa Atonba Apanba da Leipak shinnaduna Sana Phamballangda / Phallangmeida phamhankhi. Asumna Guru Shidabana mapari ahumbu Nongkhong koihanba, machanipa Leirong Atonba Konjin Tuthokpa da Apanba kouna Leipak shinnakhiba, Phambal tonghankhiba mapham adumak kangladani haima akhang ahei amasung Pandit kayana hairi.

Free Translation

Guru Shidaba, the Lord of the Universe, then asked his three sons viz, Ashiba (Sanamahi), Atiya Shidaba and KonjinTuthokpa (Pakhangba) to go around the Universe and said that whoever first completed the journey would be made king of the world. Ashiba soon set out for the journey riding a tiger. Atiya Shidaba also set out to accomplish the task. But the youngest brother KonjinTuthokpa remained unprepared Guru Shidaba encouraged him to set out for the journey. KonjinTuthokpa perceived that there was none more exalted than Guru Shidaba and went around the seat of the Guru, which was the Universe itself, seven times with folded hands uttering the name of Guru Shidaba. The

Guru enquired how he knew his exalted power and named him Pakhang Yoirenba (the ideal who knows his father). He also known as Epa Ariba (the first forefather). Then one by one the other two brothers arrived after their successful journey around the Universe. They were surprised and shocked to find KonjinTuthokpa their youngest brother had already completed the journey. Guru Shidaba, the Supreme Lord, then ordained that their youngest brother would be the master of the earth because he arrived first. The place where the Guru said so was named Loiren. Then they climbed up the Thingkrum Ching. Guru Shidaba told his first and second sons that as their youngest brother KonjinTuthokpa knew the exalted power of their father. He was named Pakhangba and ordained to let him sit on the royal throne. And he ordained eldest son Ashiba be worshipped by all the human beings in their houses and that Atiya Shidaba should be made to be united with him. Then Guru Shidaba handed over the earth to his youngest son and let him sit on the royal throne. The very place where Guru Shidaba handed own the earth to his youngest son KonjinTuthokpa and ordained to sit on the royal throne by naming him Pakhangba and Apanba was at this very Kangla suggested by many Scholars and Pandits of Manipur. It has been regarded that Kangla as a hill which is found in the old manuscripts like Ningthourol Lambuba, Nunlolo and Pombi Luwaoba. When the event of travelling around the Universe or Nongkhong Koiba was over, from what Guru Shidaba ordained, “My son, you shall rule alone over the world (worldly life) as the manin hinge lying at the Royal hill, the central Thingkrumching where seven slopes /ranges join”. It is understand that this place what we knew as Kangla , was a hill having seven slopes.

Archaic Version

Taoroinaine, Lintaorenne animakna Langshanggi makha Esinggidi mathakta maming NungmuTumdaba Mangdaba kouna leire. Mamingdi Taoroinekou-e. Adugi mathakta Taibangpanba Mapu Shidabana Hi Manik Shidababu Yetta pai, Yai Manik Shidababu oida pai Mukta Yai Marubu yetta net, Mani Hi Maru oina nettuna Leimarel Guru animakna lei-e. Haibagibu Kanglei Pungmayol Mayai Sukdongpan Kangla Thon Taret Thollangmei Meereimana Tanphangdaba Meeren Tongmuba Ching Langshang Chinglangmei-o kou-e. (MS: NunlonaChouba).

Free Translation

Both Taoroinai and Lintaoren have existed under Langshang and above the surface of water by the name of NungmuTumdaba meaning a black stone which can neither be dissolved and nor destroyed. Besides, Guru Shidaba, Lord of immortal existed holding Hee Maru Shidaba (the Gem of Immortality) in the right hand and Yai Maru Shidaba in the left hand while his right foot treading upon Nungbi Shidaba and his left foot upon Nungnang Nadaba. Leimarel Shidabi (Immortal Goddess) existed holding Hee Manik Shidaba in the left hand, while her right foot treading upon Mukta Yai Maru and her left foot upon Mani Hee Maru. Because of the reason that both Leimaren and Guru existed. Thus, the place was called 'Kangla Nongthou Phambilel Meera Pongthoklam Kangleipung Mayol Mayai Sumdongpan Kangla Thone Taret Thollangmei Meereimana Tanphangdaba Miren Tongmuraba Ching Langshang Chinglangmei.

One of the belief system is called Tillikoktong Laimakol kangla Nongthou Phambirel that inside the earth beneath of Kangla, there were a python, a tortoise, a boar, an ox, an elephant and a Leijao (in the form of a man) bearing a Paphal on the head, one above the other from the bottom upwards to the top. Hence Kanglaia known as Thon Taret Thollangmei. (MS: Leihou Naophamlon).

The Capital Kangla became organically related to the physio-geographic setting of the state in a special manner. It occupied the ritual centre in Meitei cosmogonic thought. Pre-Hindu Meitei belief system provide a biological homology of the physical state functioning like a human organism, where Kangla occupied the navel, the hollow in the belly left by the detachment of the umbilical cord. In the bio-physical structure of the state, the Koubru hills in the northwest, the early settlement area in pre-historic times, is regarded as the head; the three rivers Iril, Imphal and Nambul are regarded as the main arteries of the body, and the Loktak Lake as he pelvic zone.

The drain at the Chindwin beyond the Sugnu Nungthong (Stone Door of Sugnu) was regarded as the restum. Kangla therefore, occupied a strategic are in the body structure, which was energy receptacle in the human organism. An ancient manuscript Leihou Naophamlon, treating Kangla, its functions and ritual connections gives itself the amazing title of the origination of the earth and of the placenta bracketed in similar symbolic connotations. The Koubru hills or the organic head was represented by the physical, presence of the shrines of the first creators, the Ashiba (Sanamahi), and Pakhangba temples along with the Okshang (First interview's house) slightly north west of the coronation seat. The breast of the organism was represented by the Sanathong (Golden Door) and the Kangla Utra (House of public duties) at the south-east of the coronation site. The main arteries of the body were now represented by the khongs (rivulets) the Khakhong, Laikhong, Marongkhong, etc., which washed the central areas of the historic site in a semi-subterranean drain system. The coronation seat (Phallangmei), which was a

stone at a cave a Surung was regarded as the eye-the all seeing, light emitting centre in the human organism. (Manipur University Research Journal: A Ritual Theatre State, vol. III No. 1, P.35).

Another narrative is that the rivulet Laikhong gave birth to the nine gods of creation, and sacrifice with human heads near the bank of this rivulet would secure the vital-soul to the worshipper. And the rivulet Marongkhong took the form of the ancestral serpent deity, with its tail in the mouth, in a form capable of giving ever-renewing cycles of generative power, with blood like colour of the waters, that it connected itself with the waters of the pond Nongjeng, where the ancestor snake Pakhangba dwelt. Pumsaikhong the mother rivulet of the three streams were associated with eternal acts of creation and of struggles for the first throne, etc.,. These ancestor snakes were chthonic in character, manifesting below the earth surface; sometimes in the waters, sometimes in the vaults or caves. They were no double fertility giving powers, the veneration of whom lay at the core of Meitei religious belief, for protection, growth, grace and power.

Conclusion

Such were the myths woven around the historic site of Kangla the ancient capital of Manipur. Every area in the waters or in the mounds of the hills, or in the sacred spot at the foot of the tree could be conceived as the coiled state of the ancestor serpent dragon, vitally spread and guarding its domain. The ruling lineage Ningthoujas, conceived various pattern of the coiled deity, manifest in various ritual areas, with exotic, dreamlike motifs, known as Paphal – sometimes the dragon heads shaped like pigs, with horns, move, wings and tails like that of whales. Various designs of the serpent – dragon were visualized in as many as 364 forms, and most of the major motifs were associated with Kangla. Our tradition, both oral and written, said that in the beginning there was an empty darkness. The Supreme God, Guru Shidaba, the Immortal Lord of the sky, created the Universe, the Gods and all living beings. Thus, the history of Kangla is intricately related to the evolution of Manipuri culture, religion and cosmogony.

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