

Military Administration of Manipur

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Abstract

Historically, Manipur was an independent ruled by a Meitei dynasty. Today, Manipur as a northeastern state of India. It has boasts a rich and diverse history that spans centuries. This land, steeped in tradition and culture, has witnessed significant events and been home to remarkable individuals who have shaped its narrative. From ancient kingdoms to modern struggles for identity, the history of Manipur is a captivating journey through time. In this article, we delve into a detailed timeline, explore key historical moments, and highlight prominent figures that have left an indelible mark on Manipur's vibrant history.

For an independent country, it was quit an indispensable thing to establish a well equipped army for its own defence. Even today, many countries are trying to enhance their military in order to protect their sovereignty. When Manipur was an independent kingdom, it took up the following measures for its defense.

Key Words: Manipur, Meitei dynasty, Administration, Military etc.

Introduction:

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For an independent country, it was quit an indispensable thing to establish a well equipped army for its own defence. Even today, many countries are trying to enhance their military in order to protect their sovereignty. When Manipur was an independent kingdom, it took up the following measures for its defense.

For the defence of the kingdom, well equipped, brave and skillful warriors were indispensable. The lexical meaning of Lanmi (warrior) is man of war, i.e., man in battle. In Manipur, the institution of 'Lanmi' began with the establishment of a unified administrative system. But, we can say that the actual establishment of a unified administrative system entrusted with proper functions and duties during the reign of Meidingu Punshiba (1404-1432). This king initiated the military department called 'Shingchep Meira Haijouroi' (wedge torch swingers). Whenthe kings went on royal tours, the Lanmis would wait upon them by holding oblong shield, flag and arrow.

Though, they went to war, during the time of peace they were entrusted with different tasks and functions. The tasks of the Lanmis were falling down from trees. Making Paya (thin lengthwise slices of bamboo), breaking the bamboo into strips, making of rafters, arrangement of crow-driving ritual ceremony (Kwak Tanba) and the clearing of the place where the ceremony is to be held, cutting of reeds for thatch, making of flower baskets and trugs for religious and ritual's purposes, attending the Royal Horse and Royal Elephant with

oblong shield and flag, and keeping the criminals and convicts in their custody. It was the duty of the Lanmi to catch birds i.e., crow, vultures, Nongoubi (chaclamator) charoitong, chingcharit, Wakambong and others.

A tradition that was in practice in early Manipur was husbands of the king's daughters were debarred from joining the Lanmi department. It was a taboo for 30 people to go to the battlefield. If there was news of a tiger breaking out, it should be reported to Lanmi Yairekshang (man on sentry duty). The Lanmi Keirungba would relay it to Yairekshang (post of the sentries). Then, the Keirungba would report the matter to Cheirap (a court of justice). The Cheirap would apprise the king of this matter.

'Ayang Chatpa' was the duty of the Lanmis. For the ritual adoration of the nine 'Umanglai' (tutelary god), Choranthanba (secret agents) would go out for 'Ayang' for five days from 1st day of Mera. They would abduct a victim, cut his hair and nails, wash his hands and feet. Then he would be brought before the god and made to lie on banana leaf. Amaiba (priest) would make an offering of him to the god. During the five days of 'Ayang Chatpa' duty, the Choranthabas were forbidden to enter their houses and meet wives and children. For their food, their respective wives would keep a Chayom (packet of food) hanging to the post of the house standing on the north-east side of the verandah. They would take it down and eat.

Organization of the Army:

The reign of king Garibaniwaj was the time when the might and strength of the Meitei army at its zenith. In addition to the two offices, Ahallup and Naharup that had been established by king Kiyamba, Garibaniwaj set up other two offices, Khabam and Laipham. Then, he entrusted most of the administrative works of his kingdom to his nobles and officials and took to himself all the functions relating to defence and improvement of the army's strength. During his reign, the Manipuri army was divided into three divisions, (i) Khong Lanmi (infantry or foot soldiers), (ii) Sagol Lanmi (cavalry), and (iii) Hi Lanmi (boat army). Thus, he tried to enhance the might of the Meitei army.

(i) Khong Lanmi (infantry or foot soldiers)

The most numerous of the Manipuri armed forces was the infantry. In the direct hand-to-hand fight, the foot soldiers played a very important role. They were no less brave and adroit than the horsemen. In direct fighting, one Meitei foot soldier did not hesitate to lose his life by encountering more than 5 to 10 antagonists. King Garibaniwaj had an army of 13 thousand well equipped foot soldiers. In addition to this, there was an auxiliary force of 7000 foot soldiers to back the above force. Every male citizen between 18 and 60 years of age trained to become an accomplished soldier by attending Lallup (compulsory forced labor for the state). The arms of the foot soldiers were sword, spear, oblong shield, Langshoi, Tapak (broad tipped spear), etc.

A force of 1000 Manipuri soldiers was known as Fouja or Doli. Doli corrupted into Tuli which was equivalent to a regiment. The commander of a Tuli was called Lallupchingba. A Tuli was divided into several Lups (companies). In a Tuli there were many officers of the Poila, Sajor, Amondar (Aondar), Kut which were important posts. The head of a Lup was called Lakpa. Under him were Hidang Hanjaba, Thangsuhanba, Thangsunaha, Tenshuhamba, Tenshunaha, Meiraba etc. during the time of Gambir Singh, Captain, Subedar, Jamadar after the fashion of the British army.

The Manipuri army consisted of 13 Tulis. They were (i) Tulihal, (ii) Tuliayima (iii) Tulinaha (iv) Bhitna Tuli (v) Vishnu Senahal Tuli (vi) Vishnu Naha Tuli (vii) Top Tuli (viii) Loya Tuli (ix) Kang Tuli (x) Kangnao Tuli (xi) Oinamlong Tuli (xii) Naya Tuli and (xiii) Bamdiyar Tuli.

(ii) Sagol Lanmi (Horse soldiers, cavalry):

An important armed force of Manipur was the cavalry. The Manipuri horse soldiers were very adroit so much so that they could swiftly encircle and overwhelmed the enemies and the enemies in no position except to surrender for their dear lives. The Manipuri horsemen were very good equestrians, they might be compared with the half man, half horse centaurs. If the enemy is advanced, they would throw Arambai to expulse them. The tactics of a Manipuri horseman was to ride the horse back and forth incessantly and whirl in a circle round the enemy and then suddenly attack the enemy at the slightest chance at the right moment. Ceaselessly piercing, striking, slashing, brandishing and countering without even stopping for a moment, and jumping up and back, the Meitei horsemen stunned the enemies and inflicted utmost injuries on them and their horses.

A Meitei horseman was hard to compete with for the enemy. For he could do whatever he liked to do at will. He could also make his horse do whatever he liked to do. He was accomplished in the use of almost all weapons like sword, spear, Arambai, Lance, Hunnata (spear to hurl), Taronta, etc. So, the Manipuri cavalry men could easily vanquish the enemy.

Dress of the horse soldiers:

A Meitei horseman wears his dhoti above the knee. He wears a half sleeved shirt, a pair of greaves and gauntlets. Lanphi (war cloth) is worn over the right shoulder across the body. A turban is wrapped on the head; a silk thread fastens the turban with the chin so as to cover the mouth. A sword is tucked at the waist on the left side under the Lanphi cloth. A round shield (chungoi) is hung over the chest or on the left side of the soldier. Taron Ta is hung on the left whereas Timen Ta wielded by the hand. On both sides of the horse saddle are tucked quivers full of Arambai darts. A whip of 5-9 crops is suspended from the left fingers. Thus accounted and equipped with all weapons, the warrior will touch the forehead of the charger in adoration, mount it from the left and then go to war.

Meitei kings like Kiyamba, Mungyamba, Khagemba, Garibaniwaj, Bhagyachandra, Chourajit, Marjit, Gambhir Singh etc. used the cavalry with tremendous success against Awa, Khagi, Mayang, Takhel etc.

(iii) Boat Army:

In early days the communication system of Manipur was very bad, road and bridges were very few and far. So, as there were many water-logged swamps and wet lands, boats were rampantly used for communication. For trade and commerce with distant places, the boat took a great part along the river courses. For boat war, the Meitei kings kept a strong enough force adroit in boat fight, expert in rowing and adept in the use of all types of weapons. For boat war the kings maintained an adequate number of boats on the Ningthi River in the east and on the Barak River in the west. As boat war exercise, every year, boat race festival was regularly held. Later on, this festival was held as a form of amusement.

Functions of departments in relation with martial affairs:

During monarchical rule in Manipur, several departments were established for the smooth conduct of the administrative affairs of the state. There was proper division of functions and tasks among the departments which carried out their respective functions properly. Among these numerous departments were also many departments related with the making of war weapons. Below are some of the departments with their respective functions.

(a) Functions of Khut-heiba:

The functions of the Khut-heiba are paring and trimming the bow, fitting the arrow shaft, straitening the spear shaft, making of Arambai darts, paring and trimming the stick of 'Pajeng Phiral' (a small flag of honour) to be conferred to heroes as reward, gold plating the tip of the Langmei (hornbill) feather.

(b) Functions of Thangsa Hanba:

The functions of this department are making arrangement for the handles of spear and Lambu (a kind of spear), collecting wood for making the butt of the guns, filling the material of the golden oblong shield, collecting iron from Kakching, doing all the works related with iron, and making swords and carrying iron, bow, spear oblong shield, sword, axe, bullet etc. when the king is on royal tours.

(c) Functions of the Thangsaba (bladesmith):

The functions of the Thansaba department are making arrangement of sword, iron, arrow, spear, etc. and carrying the hammer, tongs, bellows, anvil when the king is on the royal tours, and cutting whetstone along with the Keiroi department.

(d) Functions for Arambai making:

For Arambai making, the men of the Nandeiba office will bring leather and sew with it the Arambai quiver and tube. The Thangsaba (bladesmith) will bring the Arambai and arrow, the Keirungba will bring raw cane arrow and quiver. The Khut-heiba will fit arrow and Arambai with handles and then pare and trim them. The Potsangba will bring peacock feathers and the Khut-heiba will fasten the bow string. The shaft of Arambai is made of cane. The Kumphi archers will weave the string of the bow by turning over and over. The soldiers (Lanmi) will bring the vulture feathers whereas helmsmen (Hiru Hinaoba) will bring the feathers of Ura (a water fowl). The Khut-heiba will fit the arrow tip. These are the functions carried out for making Arambai.

In early days, there was tradition of performing rituals in connection with war hunting. Rituals were performed by men to absolve themselves of sins committed by them by having killed foes or animals in war or hunting so that the sins might not visit upon them and their descendants in future. Moreover, on the eve of war, rituals were performed, before actual fighting, to merit victory against the enemy. Below are described some rituals related with martial affairs:

1. Yenbum Huiroi Chanba:

If man captures, animal or man, improperly, i.e., if he kills a pregnant animal or a foe who has fled in fear and has begged for life or has given up arms and surrendered, in sheer triumph, the triumphant killer and his posterity will suffer from bouts of insanity, hysteria, spasm, deformation of the eyes, muscle cramps etc. to be delivered from the evil consequences, the offending warrior or hunter will on the north side of his courtyard, spell out the names of the victims and offer them food and the like and then sing the martial ritual songs. This ritual for absolution from evil consequences on account of improper capturing of victims is called 'Yenbum Huiroi Chanba' (enlisting of hen and dog as captives).

2. Lanchak Thakpa:

If a man, who had brow beaten and tortured his fallen foes or had killed them inspite of their surrender and request for life's safety, had not performed "Yenbum Huiroi Chanba"

in his lifetime, his descendants would perform a ritual called 'Lanchak Thakpa' (offering of food to victims of war and hunting) for deliverance from the visitations of their ancestor's sins. This ritual shall not be performed at Naktha (north-east side of the verandah under the eaves of the house). Rice is cooked a Naktha (under eaves of the house north east of the verandah) but the ritual performer, wearing a black cloth across the body, holding oblong shield, spear and sword, will offer the cooked with other necessary things of offering at the border of the village or at the funeral place of a man who died on a Saturday. If this ritual of offering 'Lanchak' (rice food for war victims) is performed, the evil effects of transgression can be avoided.

3. Nungoibi Lallu Chanba:

In olden days, when kings returned from war with beheaded human heads a ritual known as 'Nungoibi Lallu Chanba' (enlistment of skulls at Nungoibi) was performed. Nungoibi was a sacred place resided inside Kangla. To the west of a former cave called 'Kangla Men Surung' where the Meitei kings coronated in Kangla and in the north west of Uttra, there is a rounded stone tablet covering the mouth of a cave. The place surrounding this cave was the sacred place of Nungoibi. This flat rounded stone tablet had been brought from hill village called Tayon Thangdapung and installed it at Kangla by king Loiyumba (1074-1122). It was believed that in this sacred place Nungoibi there was a female deity called Chaisna who fed on skulls. According to the old book, 'Sakok Lamlen', the name of the female deity was also called as Chikpi Leikhombi. This ritual burial of the beheaded of the war captives at Nungoibi was a ritual offering of food to this female deity. After the conquest of Manipur in 1891, the British leveled down this sacred place and destroyed the sanctity of the place. Therefore, it is now very difficult to find the exact location of the sacred place.

4. Lanmi Yanba:

In the early days, when the enemy country invaded the kingdom, there was a tradition of performing the ritual of 'Lanmi Yanba' (failing of the warrior) by ritually cutting the commander of the invading army imaginarily one day before battle fight. It was believed this ritual would enable to defeat easily the already failed enemies the following day in actual battle. The Amaiba Maichou (priests-cum-pandits), well versed in rites and rituals, would perform this ritual by placing all the necessary articles of ritual offering over different ritualistic stones in Kangla. This ritual is called 'Lan Achangba Phaba' (capturing of warriors alive). And the capturing of war captives in actual battle the followingday is called 'Lanshi Phaba'.

5. Keiyang Thekpa (breaking the spine of the tiger):

'Keiyang Thekpa' was a ritual usually performed in relation with capturing of tigers. Once the tiger was very ferocious animal. It is known from the royalchronicle, Cheitharol Kumbaba that this animal abounded in Manipur once. So, the capturing of tigers was once a very important and serious affair of the state. For this purpose, a book called Keipharol (accounts of catching the tiger) was specially written. The purpose of this ritual was similar to those of the rituals of 'Yenbum Huiroi Chanba' and 'Lanchak Thakpa'. Keiyang Thekpa was performed to avoid the sins and guilts on account of the catching tiger having died an ugly death or a premature death. An ordinary man had not the right to perform the ritual of 'Keiyang Thekpa'. Only heroes and warriors who had captured 100 animals and 100 warriors and received 'Thangballoi' (royal honour) had the previledge of performing this ritual. But, the king Jubaraj, the heir of the throne or a person who entrusted by the king to perform this

ritual had the privilege of performing the ritual. A 'Keiyang Thekpa' performers should wear the following items, viz., 'Ningkham Samjin', Khudangyai, (gauntlets), Khubomyai (greaves), hornbill plume, Leikham, Pajeng phiran (a small flag with a bamboo pin), Ningthouphi Tajin (a robe of honour), Shayang and Tanchap (Bangles and bracelets). Any one of these ornaments and clothes could not be excluded at the time of 'Keiyang Thekpa'. Otherwise, the life of the 'Keiyang Thekpa' performer would not last long, misfortune would fall on the king and queen, and people would suffer. So, it was an anathema, since it would bring about 'Chakton Phidon Lomba' (extreme poverty of cloth and food).

6. **Lanbao Tamba:**

During the monarchical rule in Manipur, the ritual of 'Lanbao Tamba' was unavoidably performed with due importance. When the kings returned from war or hunting, he would first go to the shrines of god Pakhangba, god Nongshaba and goddess Yumjao Lairemma and report to them the news of his success in capturing war prisoners or animals. This proceeding was called Lanbao Tamba, i.e., reporting of the news of war. Then, only the king would retire to his royal residence.

7. **Thenggou:**

Thenggou is a spear dance done over (the edifice of) the god Pakhangba. For success in war and hunting and for the welfare of the king and the kingdom 'Thenggou' was danced. Thenggou cannot be performed anywhere at random. Any person cannot perform this ritual indiscriminately. It is subject to certain rules and codes. Only brave men in war and hunting and the high officials of the king performed this ritual dance. The dresses costumes and ornaments worn at the time of Thenggou were Khamen Chatpa Pheijom (a robe of dhoti), Ningkham Smjin (a shirt of honour), Lamthang Khulat Koyet (a turban of honour), Pajeng Phiral (a small flag with a bamboo pin), Ningthouphi Mana Phurit (a shirt of honour), gauntlets and greaves, horn bill plume, bangles and bracelets, Leikham, Ningthouphi Tajin (a robe of honour), Sayang, Tanchap, Shaphi Lanphi Khaon (armour cloth worn across the body), etc.

King Khagemba (1597-1652) ushered in ten forms of Thenggou for success in war and to defeat the enemies. Those forms of Thenggou were – (i) Paphan Thenggou, a ritual spear dance to enemy country (ii) Chekap Thenggou (Thenggou in the style of tongs), to overrun the enemy country; (iii) Lamban Thenggou (Thenggou at the border), to prevent the outbreak of war; (iv) Pallandabi Thenggou (Thenggou without crossing a certain limit of area), to prevent the extension of the fighting zone or sphere of war; (v) Kishi Thenggou (Thenggou for entanglement), to capture the enemy or make him immobile; (vi) Leinet Thenggou (Thenggou by treading on the ground), to achieve victory in battle fight and war; (vii) Atan Thenggou (Thenggou for driving out), to drive out the war; (ix) Pachi Leikhom Thenggou, for the realization of tributes and for conquest; and (x) Chupsa Nonga Thenggou, which was performed for Chup Saba (a ritual adoration for prevention of the recurrence of unnatural death and the like in family), for Lallu Chanba (skull burying), for offering food to Sayang Athouba (an evil spirit), and for preventing the occurrence of calamity, harm, evil etc.

8. **Ougri:**

Ougri is an ancient ritual song of this land, full of esoteric words. In the cosmological account of the Meitei. There is a story, that when lord Sanamahi and his brother Konjil Tuthokpa Pakhangba were vying for the throne, there ensued the event, 'Ougri Hangel Chongba', a form of jumping dance. There is also evidence that Ougri was chanted during the reign of Nongda Lairen Pakhangba. Singing of Ougri along with Ningthourol (Genealogical

account of the kings) began from the time of king Loiyumba. There are two forms of Ougri singing, (i) for the prosperity of the country and (ii) for the ruination of the enemy country. Ougri sung in the Lai Haraoba (merry making of god). At the abode of the village 'Umanglai' (tutelary god) is for prosperity. During the reign of the kings, when a tributary village became stronger and arrogant, the Meitei king would conquer and subdue it and then sing the Ougri of ruination.

Prize for capturing enemies and animals:

In the early days, there was a tradition of conferring prize and rewards on the heroes and warriors by way of encouragement and in recognition of their courage and heroism in the battle and hunting. The following were the prizes and rewards conferred by the Meitei king Apanba for Martial activities.

1. Reward for capturing enemies in war:

In a big battle fight, if a warrior attack and defeats his enemy in the very presence of the king, he will be rewarded with the robe of honour Ningthouphi Mayek Suba. Above this wife of the king (a woman of royalty) is bestowed on him. If he can merit such success five times he is honoured with a flag. If he wins the battle seven times, he will be awarded 'Thangbanloi' (Tangballoi). For nine times, he will be given the honour of Meibul Haijao' (flaming torch). The flaming torches will be arrayed up to his courtyard.

If the warrior catches the enemy without any casualty on his side, he is given a servant and Khamen Chappa Phurit (a shirt of honour). If he can break up the vanguard of the enemy forces, 'Wanphak Phurit' (a shirt of honour) is conferred on him. If he catches enemies by breaking up the central flank of the enemy force, he is bestowed with Ningthouphi Tajin (a robe of honour). If the enemy force is in disarray, 'Ningthouphi Tajin and hornbill plume are given to the relevant heroes or warriors. If the warrior can break up the enemy force, he is rewarded with 'Lupa Leikham'. If the enemy king is taken prisoner, it is equivalent to catching 100 animals and 100 enemies. The warrior who accomplishes this feat is given 'Tangbanloi', allowed to perform Akham Thenggou (a ritual spear dance), given a wife of the king, and given the honour to carrying the torch from his residence.

The book, Saka Lanka Kangla Ngangba gives a detailed account of how the king's heroic nobles and warriors were rewarded in accordance with their merits and according to the number of captives they took in ascending order e.g. for the first capture, Pajeng (a pin of bamboo), for the second capture Lupa Leikham, for the third Langmei (hornbill) feather..... For the 17th, if the enemy king is taken prisoner, the captor is deemed to be captor of 100 animals and 100 enemies, and bestowed with Tangballoi. In case of not catching the enemy king, the man who has captured an enemy for the fourteenth time will be conferred Tangballoi and allowed to perform the ritual of 'Akham Thenggou'. For the first capture of a captive in the very presence of the king, Ningthouphi Wanphak is given, for the second time Kapei Shinnangpal, for the third time Ningthouphi Tachin, for the fourth time Ningthouphi Sachonba, and for the fifth time, if the captive is the vanquished king it amounts to capturing 100 animals and 100 enemies, the captor is bestowed with a wife of the king Tangballoi and the honour of carrying torches from his residence. This 53 consummates his service for the king.

2. Rewards given for catching animals:

As in the capture of enemy in war and battle, rewards were conferred on captors of animal according to their merit and the number of animals they had taken. E.g., for the catch of one animal, one pair of paddy field and one cake of salt was given, for the third capture a pajeng (bamboo pin for fastening flat), for the fifth capture Lipa Leikham, for the seventh

capture hornbill feather, and for the 35th capture, if the captor catches it to save the life of the king, it is equivalent to capturing 100 animals and 100 enemies. The hero who accomplished this feat was endowed with Tangballoi and permitted to Chingon Then Kaba (performing of Akham Thenggou on the Chingon hill). The first beginning of such a feat starts with the reward one cake of salt.

In the case of catching a tiger, though the number of captors was 10, the number of awardees was only three. The first was given one Pari of paddy field, one cake of salt and one length of cloth. The second was given half of a salt cake, half of a Pari and one length of cloth. The third also received the same as the second.

Methodologies in connection with martial matters:

In the past, there were frequencies of wars in the kingdom of Manipur. Therefore, during invasion by the enemy, on the eve of setting out for war, different methodologies were studied to augur the auspicious moment and omen of defeating the enemy. After knowing the auspicious moment of the enemy's defeat, the auspicious moment at which to set out for war again augured. The following are some of the methodologies employed in martial matters.

1. Leichillon Kanglon Yengba:

Among the different methodologies of fortune telling and augury, Leichillon Kanglon Yengba (prognostication by observing the clouds). According to this methodology, by observing the shape and form of the clouds in the sky during military campaign, on the eve of starting for the war, or during battle fight omens for success or defeat were augured following which either advance to war or retreat from war was carried out. Therefore, warriors who marched upon the enemy had to master this method of auguring by observing the cloud. One or two methods of observing the clouds in the sky are given as under.

“While going to war, if there be cloud in the sky above our head in the shape of a man with neck hanging down, it is inauspicious, prepare for retreat. If that shape of cloud is viewed in the enemy camp, advance quickly, victory is sure to come.”

“if the cloud be in the shape of a man accounted with complete war outfits and equipped with all sorts of weapon, flee the battle field. There shall be heavy casualty.”

During march to war, if the cloud resembles a pennon or looks like a broken flag, the battlefield will be in disarray, it is quite ominous”

2. Shaya Miren Yengba:

Before going to war, a warrior can know beforehand whether he would die or not in battle or would achieve success or not, by looking at his own shadow just at the start for the battle. This usage is known as Men Jatra Yengba (looking for the auspicious moment to start). Some people also use the method of looking at the reflections of their images in the sky or in the mirror. If the shadow or image has not neck or arms, it is bad omen. This method of seeking omen is called Shya Miren Yengba (seeing one's own shadow).

Conclusion:

When there was monarchy in Manipur, when there was frequency of wars and battle and when it was defending its independence from enemies' clutches, it was the unavoidable obligation of very citizen to learn and master the martial arts. But now, with the inexorable change in the course of time, almost everybody has neglected this art. Therefore, it is high time for everybody to practice and preserve the traditional practice of martial arts of Manipur. It is the cultural tradition of martial arts only that has shown to the world that, the Meiteis, as a unique ethnic people, once flourished with might and pomp in the comity of independent nations. Therefore, for the sake of both the present and future generations, the powers that be also should take upon themselves the responsibility of protecting and preserving the unique traditional body of martial arts of Manipur.

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