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Historical Development of Ancient Capitals of Manipur With Reference to Kangla

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Abstract:

Manipur is situated in the North-East frontier of India. The state is well known for its archaeological sites. The remains are mostly found at Kangla and Langthabal, the ancient capitals of Manipur. From first century A.D., Kangla, the capital of the Ningthouja dynasty, was the most important centre of administration, socio-economic and religious activities. It is located at the heart of the Imphal city. Due to political instability, some of the rulers of the Ningthouja dynasty shifted their capitals to other neighbouring places for the convenience of administration as well as to protect from foreign invasions and internal revolts. The paper is to describe the historical developments of the ancient capitals of Manipur from early period till the beginning of the 20th century A.D. Historical events and other valuable information both secular and religious are obtained from literature. The paper is reconstructed after comparisons with the report of field work and other original sources.

Keywords: Country, Culture, Development, Deity, Fort, History, Hinduism, Kingdom, Monuments, Palace, Religion, Temple.

1. Introduction:

‘Kangla’, the ancient capital of Manipur, is located at the Imphal city. It lies in between 24° North Latitude and 94° East Longitude, measuring 236.84 acres. Kangla was the ancient capital and the most important seat of political power of the Ningthouja dynasty. The historical development of the ancient capital ‘Kangla’ can be trace back from early period with the help of archaeological evidences, literary sources, oral traditions etc. There are different theories regarding the origin of the state Manipur. People believed that in the beginning, Manipur was submerged under water. There was no land or mound to settle there. In course of time, the submerged place became dry and suitable for human habitation.(N.Indramani:2015:3) Another legend mentioned that the land was created by nine gods and seven goddesses by throwing earth into the water and created a mound above the water level for the convenience of human habitation. The place was filled with earth and had become dry. The place was called ‘Kangla’. There are different theories regarding the naming of ‘Kangla’. According to the ‘Thirel Layat’(an early Manipuri literature) the name ‘Kangla’ was derived from the ward ‘Kangsu kangle Lasu

lare', which means dry and clear.(S. Nilbir:2007:1) It becomes the most important sacred place for the Manipuris. Therefore, since time immemorial, the chiefs of various clans or lineages attempted to occupy this sacred place.

1.1 Discussion:

The valley of Manipur was inhabited by seven clans. They were the Ningthouja (Mangang), the Luwang, the Angom, the Khuman, the Moirang, the Kha-Nganba (Khaba & Nganba) and the Sarang-Leishangthem (Chenglei). These clans fought among themselves and those who occupied Kangla exercised political supremacy over other smaller principalities. (Gangmumei Kabui:2003:71) The Khabas, one of the most powerful clans, occupied and ruled over Kangla before the ascendancy of Nongda Leiren Pakhangba in 33 A.D. In the first century A.D. the strongest enemy of Khaba Nongjengba, the chief of the Khaba tribe was Nongda Leiren Pakhangba. Pakhangba claimed the throne of Kangla. After a series of fights, the Khabas were defeated by Pakhangba with the help of the force of the Moirang clan and occupied Kangla in 33 A.D. (Gangmumei Kabui: 2003:83) Poireiton, one of the contemporary of Pakhangba, also claimed the throne of Kangla. He was a prince migrated for the colonisation in Manipur. Pakhangba defeated Poireiton in 33 A.D. and founded a new dynasty called Ningthouja dynasty. (L. Iboonghal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:503) In course of time the Ningthouja clan absorbed the other clans one after another and brought all the ethnic groups of the valley and the hill under his suzerainty. Ningthouja clan ran administration from Kangla and it became the most important centre of administration, socio-economic and religious activities.

The Ningthouja dynasty played an important role for the growth and development of their capitals by constructing forts, palaces, temples and other buildings. Taothingmang (264-364A.D.), grandson of Nongda Leiren Pakhangba, was a great builder. The king himself participated in the dredging of the two rivers i.e., the Imphal and the Iril River to free from flood in his capital Kangla and the valley. King Naophangba (428-518A.D.) constructed the throne room at Kangla Men Surung/Leikhul and a seven storied Kangla palace. During his reign the treaties on the construction of the royal palace, 'Kangla Houba' was written by a scholar named Laiba of Ashangbam family.(Gangmumei Kabui:2003:102) 'Kangla houba' described rules and regulations and types of raw materials for the construction of secular and religious structures at Kangla. King Naothingkhong(663-763 A.D), Thawanhaba (1195-1231A.D.), Kyamba (1467-1508A.D.) and Lamkyamba (1512-1523A.D.) also contributed for the growth and development of their capital Kangla.

The period of King Khagemba (1597-1652A.D.), marked the beginning of a new era of technological and cultural development. It was particularly due to the close contact with the South Asia and East Asiatic people through war, invention and migration. During his reign, technology was further improved due to contact with the Muslim and the Chinese. The chronicle mentioned the construction of Sanathong, the gate of the royal fortress with bricks in 1614A.D., and construction of Uttra Sangai at Kangla in 1629A.D.(L. Iboonghal Singh and N.



Khelchandra Singh:1989:35:38) King Khunjaoba (1652-1666A.D.) continued the development works of his father King Khagemba in the Imphal valley and his capital Kangla. He excavated moat in front of the royal gate and constructed ramparts or fortress at strategic points. (Gangmumei Kabui: 2003:226) In 1661A.D. a new brick wall was constructed to protect the palace compound. King Paikhomba (1666-1697A.D.), nephew of King Khunjaoba contributed for the growth of the art of making brick as an important industry. These bricks were mainly used for the construction of temples, fortress, royal gate, coronation hall and other public buildings at his capital Kangla.

The coming of Hinduism opened a new chapter in the history of Manipur. The first Manipuri king who formally initiated to Vaishnavism was king Charairongba (1697-1709A.D y.). Due to political stability, economic prosperity and the coming of new religious cult in his period art and architecture and crafts flourished to a considerable extent. He erected many magnificent buildings and other artistic monuments at Kangla and other parts of the valley. Many architects and masons were visited from Burma during his reign. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:70:71) They contributed for the growth of art and architecture in Manipur.

Garibaniwaz Pamheiba (1709-1748A.D.), son of king Charairongba, was the most brilliant figure in the history and his reign marked a new epoch in the political and cultural history of Manipur. The economic prosperity of the country was at a high level and many arts, crafts and occupations developed well. King Garibaniwaz period was a great landmark in the history of art and architecture. He constructed many temples of traditional deities and also built temples of Hindu deities and excavated tanks at Kangla and other parts of the valley. He also made many images of Hindu gods and goddess including Lord Rama, Krishna and Kalika. The maharaja restored the image of Sanamahi (traditional deity) and constructed its temple at Kangla in 1731A.D. and 1732A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:92) Garibaniwaz constructed a brick wall and his own royal residency at Kangla in 1732A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:92) The king re-excavated Kangla moats. In 1742A.D. he constructed Utra Sangai at Kangka.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:105)

Garibniwaz reigned was followed by a patricidal war among the princess for the throne. It leads to the decline of political and military strength. Chitshai (1748-1752A.D.), Bharatshai (1752-1753A.D.), and Maramba (1753-1759A.D., 1761-1763A.D.) ruled one after another at Kangla. The invasion of Burmese in 1758 A.D, 1764A.D., 1769 A.D. and 1772 A.D led to the destruction and exploitation of Manipur.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:124-127) During the reign of Gaurashyam, the Burmese invaded and occupied Kangla in September 1758A.D.(Gamgmumei Kabui:2003:266)

Chingthangkomba (Bhagyachandra/Joy Singh-1763-1798A.D.) fled to Assam in 1764A.D. to sought help from the British and Ahom king Swargadeo Rajeshwar Singh against the Burmese but in vain. The capital Kangla and the valley were devastated. "After his return from Cachar in 1764, Jai Singh made his capital at Shangaithel which was renamed Joy Nagar for one year. Then he shifted the capital to Sangaibrow at the outskirts of Imphal." (Gangmumei Kabui:2003.281) After recaptured the valley of Manipur, the king followed the policy of consolidation of power, construction and reformation. In 1775A.D, he made a new capital at Bishnupur and after for four years he shifted his capital from Bishnupur to Langthabal (Canchipur) in 1779A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:132) He conducted all his operation from the capital Langthabal for about 17 years. At Langthabal he constructed his palace, excavated Langthabal river, dug out Langthabal pukhri (pond) in 1779A.D. and 1782A.D. respectively. In November 1779A.D. the ritual installation ceremony of the god Shri Govindajee was held at his new capital Langthabal.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:133) For the convenience of his administration he again constructed a new capital at Konthoujam Yumpham (present Rajbhaban, Imphal) in 1794A.D. Maharaja shifted his capital from Langthabal to Khwai Khunpham Konthoujam Yumpham in April 1796A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:168)

The successors of king Bhaigyachandra followed his footsteps in religious matters and other development works. Maharaja Labanchandra Singh (1798-1800A.D.) shifted his capital to Kangla after 35 years in 1798A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:175) He constructed royal residential building, renovated fortress and coronation hall. Madhuchandra (1800-1803A.D.) who ascended the throne in 1801A.D. reconstructed Capital Langthabal in 1803A.D. and used it as his second capital.

Maharaja Chourjit(1803-1813A.D.), the fifth son of Bhaigyachandra, ascended the throne in 1803A.D. As a great vaishnava ruler, the king was also a great builder. He dug ponds, excavated inner moats, planted mango trees, constructed palace, coronation hall and temples of Hindu deities. The Maharaja constructed Kangla Shas(statue of lion like animal) in front of the Uttra Kangla in 1803A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:185) At Kangla, the Maharaja constructed royal palace, temple, Natyasala and other buildings in 1804A.D. During the reconstruction of Kangla he lived at Khwai Khunpham Konthoujam Yumpham. His coronation ceremony was held with Hindu system of religious rite and rituals at Kangla at the age of 28 in January 1805A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:187) In 1806 A.D., a temple of Shri Shri Govindaji was constructed at Kangla. The unique contribution of king Chourjit was the construction of *Navaratna* temple (1803-4A.D) and Chourasi Khambha (84 pillars), a royal residential building at Kangla. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:184) Prince Marjit Singh revolted against Chourjit Singh Maharaja to capture the throne of Manipur in 1807A.D. and 1808A.D. but in vain. During his revolt, he destroyed and burnt down most of the building found at Kangla including Oaksu, Uttra Kangla,



Tanyeiba Loishang, Lukkanba Thong, Sumshang, Chiraiba Thong, Lakton, Erushang, Sanggai Yumjao, Laishang, Mandap, Leikhomshang, Nonghumshang, Ayokpa loishang. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:199) Chourjit Singh reconstructed most of the building destroyed during the Marjit invasion. He made a second capital at Tendongyang. (Gangmumeu Kabui:2003:285) Marjit Singh again invaded in Manipur with the help of Burmese forces in 1813A.D. and defeated Chourjit Singh. Chourjit Singh fled to Cachar. Maharaja Marjit Singh (1813-1819A.D.) ascended the throne in 1813A.D. and his coronation ceremony was held in 1814A.D. at Kangla. To protect his capital Kangla from Burmese invasion, he constructed a brick wall.

Maharaja Marjit Singh shifted his capital to Khurai Khunpham in September 1819A.D. However, the Burmese invaded Manipur in December 1819A.D. and defeated him.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:216) The Maharaja fled to Cachar and his people also fled to the neighbouring hills. The valley was devastated for seven years. The Burmese dominated and exploited the valley of Manipur from 1819A.D. to 1826A.D, which was known as ‘Chahi-taret Khuntakpa’, the seven years devastation, in the history of Manipur. The Burmese not only occupied Manipur but also her suzerainty and domination was felt all over North-East India. After the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-1826A.D.) the king of Burma recognised Gambhir Singh as the raja of Manipur. He started the reconstruction and modernisation of the ruined country. He established his capital at Bishnupur in 1825A.D. and constructed his royal residence at the top of the hill of Bishnupur in 1826A.D. The king transferred his capital to Langthabal in 1827A.D, which is situated about 8 kilometers south from Imphal and constructed a road between Langthabal and Bishnupur.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:230)

Maharaja Nara Singh (1844-1850A.D.) ascended the throne in February 1844A.D. whose reign was marked with the revival of religious activities including construction and renovation of temple after the Burmese war. The king transferred his capital to Kangla, from Langthabal on Monday 6th May 1844A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:266) He constructed Kangla Shas (statue of Lion like animal) in front of the Uttra in July 1844 A.D. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:267) The most important contribution of Maharaja Nara Singh was the construction of brick temple of Shri Shri Govindaji and a mandapa of the temple at Kangla in 1846A.D. He constructed a brick wall which was connected with royal gate and also built Uttra Kangla.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:290:297)

Chandrakirti Singh, the son of Maharaja Gambhir Singh ascended the throne on 13th July 1850A.D. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:302) The British authority recognised Chandrakirti Singh as the Maharaja of Manipur in February 1851A.D. With the help of British authority “he made all round improvement of the state up to date. He was one of the best, strongest and most intelligent Indian princes of his time”.(L. Iboongohal Singh:1987:194)

Kangla was the centre of his administration. However, he never neglected the earlier capital Langthabal and protected the palace. In 1863A.D. the Maharaja re-excavated inner moat of Kangla, constructed a brick wall to protect the palace, a brick prison and built Utra.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:354:356:409) He also renovated Kangla Men Surung. The great earthquake, which was occurred on Sunday 10th January, 1869 A.D. damaged many brick buildings including brick building of the king, brick walls of the palace compound and temples.

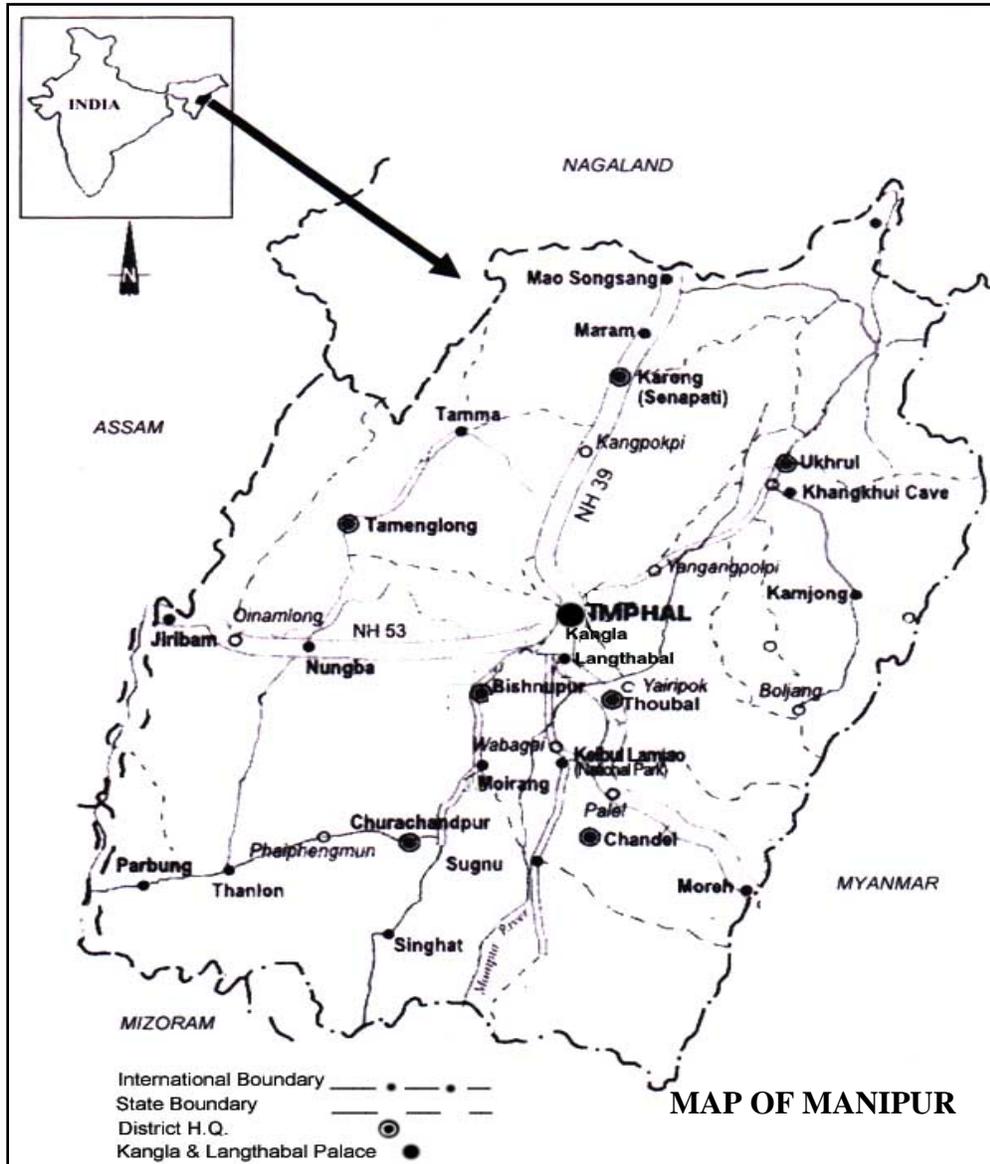
The period from 1890 to 1891 witness two important events. i.e., the palace revolt of 1890 and the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891. Jubaraj Surchandra Singh, the eldest son of Maharaja Chandrakriti Singh ascended the throne in May 1886A.D. In September 1890A.D, Angousana (Dolairoi Hanjaba), Jilangamba, Koireng (Senapati) revolted against Surchandra Maharaja and occupied Kangla. Kulachandra Singh ascended the throne of Kangla with the support of his revolted brothers in 23rd September 1890A.D. The Manipuri's loss their independent to the British in the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891. Kangla was occupied by the British on the 27th April 1891A.D. and destroyed most of the structures found inside the palace including Kangla Shas(lion like statue), Utra Kangla, Sanathong(royal gate), residential buildings, departmental buildings and sacred places. After the end of the war, the British government appointed Churachand Singh, the great-grandson of Maharaja Nara Singh as the Raja of Manipur. A summer palace complex of Raja Churachand Singh was constructed at the top of the Langthabal (Canchipur) hillock in 1907A.D, three miles to the South of Imphal. A temple dedicated to Radha Ramon, was also constructed inside the palace complex. The summer palace was installed on Wednesday poinu/December, 7, 1907.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:557) The most important achievement of Maharaja Churachand Singh was the construction of new palace and Govindaji temple at Imphal East. The temple was constructed under the supervision of the British Engineers. The palace was occupied in November 1908A.D.

The rulers of *Ningthouja* dynasty changed their capital from one place to another to save from foreign invasions, internal revolts and for the convenience of their administration. As a result of this, they not able to built temple, palace and other secular buildings with bricks and stone on a large scale. Most of the buildings prior to the introduction of bricks were made of readily available materials like bamboo, wood and thatch etc. Many of them have been perished. Another caused for non availability of monuments of early period in Manipur are due to the frequent devastating invasions by the Burmese, the religious bigotry of king Garibniwaz, moist climatic condition of Manipur and the act of destruction of Kangla by the British after Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891.

2. Conclusion: Nongda Leiren Pakhangba, who ascended the throne in 33 A.D. founded the Ningthouja dynasty and Kangla was his capital. Most of the king of the Ningthouja dynasty used Kangla as their capital because it was surrounded by natural and artificial forts in all directions



that protected the palace. Besides Kangla there are some other places used as capitals by some kings of the Ningthouja dynasty such as Bishnupur, Langthabal, Khwai Khunpham Konthoujam Yumpham, Shangaithel, Sangaibrow, Tendongyang, Sana Konung (present palace) etc. Kangla and Langthabal were the most important capitals of the kingdom. Among the Manipuri kings Naophangba (428-518 A.D.), Khagemba (1597-1652 A.D.), Charairongba (1697-1709 A.D.), Garibaniwaz (1709-1748 A.D.), Bhagyachandra (1763-1798 A.D.), Chaurjit (1803-1813 A.D.), Gambhir Singh (1825-1834 A.D.), Narasingh (1844-1850 A.D.), Chandrakirti (1850-1886 A.D.), and Churachand Maharaja (1891-1941 A.D.) played an important role for the growth and development of the palace Kangla and Langthabal. They constructed forts, royal residence, roads, temples, coronation hall, excavated tanks and moats and other secular buildings. These remains give very valuable information about the art and architecture and their religious believed and practices. The structures constructed in the early period were perishable materials like bamboo, wood, thatch etc. These perishable materials were not able to survive for a long period. After the end of the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, the Kangla was occupied by the British. They destroyed most of the structure found inside the capital and the royal families were not allowed to live at Kamgla. Therefore, it was during the reign of Churachand Maharaja a summer palace was constructed in 1907 at Langthabal and Sana Konung (present palace) in 1908. The remains at Kangla and Langthabal are protected by the government of Manipur under the provision of “The Manipur Ancient & Historical Monument & archaeological Sites & Remains Act 1976”.



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