

# **Lachit Borphukan**

Lachit Borphukan was a general of the Ahom Kingdom whose army he led successfully in resisting the imperial expansion of the Mughal Empire in the late 1600s.

To this day he is remembered for his bravery and leadership in the face insurmountable odds.

## **Background of Lachit Borphukan**

Lachit Borphukan was born on 24 November 1622 to Momai Tamuli Borbarua and Kunti Moran. His father was the commander-in-chief of the Ahom army. The Ahom kingdom was located in the Brahmaputra valley of eastern India. It was first established in 1228. The kingdom was repeatedly assailed upon by Turkic and Afghan rulers of the Delhi Sultanate and later the Mughal Empire

The Mughal-Ahom conflict first began in 1615 and continued afterwards. It was in this backdrop Lachit grew up in. Upon completing his education in humanities and military strategies, Lachit was given the responsibility of serving as the Soladhara Barua (scarf-bearer) a modern-day equivalent of a private secretary to the Ahom King. He held other important positions such as Superintendent of the Stable of Royal Horses and Superintendent of the Royal Household guards before being appointed as the commander of the Ahom Army.

By the time of Lachit Borphukan's appointment as commander, the Mughals had occupied Guwahati and had forced the Ahom's to sign the humiliating peace treaty, Treaty of Ghilajharighat in 1663 which imposed harsh conditions on the Ahom kingdom. King Chakradhwaj Singha resolved to rid the entire region from Mughal occupation, a will that would be carried out by Lachit Borphukan.

## **Battle of Saraighat**

Lachit raised the army and preparations were completed by summer of 1667. His army successfully retook Guwahati from the Mughal forces. Emperor Aurangzeb after being informed of the defeat at Guwahati sent an expeditionary force from Dhaka under Ram Singh. Due to the numerical and technological inferiority of the Ahom forces, Lachit resorted to guerilla tactics which successfully withered away from the Mughal army.

Knowing fully well that Ahom forces would easily be defeated if their commander was removed, Ram Singh resorted to subterfuge. An arrow carrying a letter by Ram Sing was fired into the Ahom Camp. It later reached Chakradhwaj Singha. The letter stated that Lachit had been paid 1 lakh rupees to evacuate Guwahati. Furious that his commander was allegedly in negotiations with the enemy, the king started doubting his sincerity, but his prime minister Atan Buragohain convinced him that this was a trick by the Mughals to make Chakradhwaj Singh dismiss the commander who successfully fought the Mughals so far.

Having exhausted all avenues Ram Singh made his way to Guwahati with a naval flotilla sailing upwards of the Brahmaputra river in 1671. He came upon an Ahom flotilla led by Lachit Borphukan himself near Saraighat. Once again outnumbered and outgunned in open space, the Ahom soldiers began to lose their will to fight. Some elements began to retreat and seeing this Lachit boarded a boat himself to rally his troops. Offered to be taken to safety by one of his troops, Lachit furiously threw some of them into the water bodily despite being severely ill, loudly proclaiming that he would "die fulfilling his duty to his king and country, even if it meant he had to do it by himself". Inspired, Lachit's soldiers rallied and a desperate battle ensued on the river Brahmaputra.

Lachit Borphukan was victorious. The Mughals were forced to retreat from Guwahati. The Mughals were pursued to the Manas river, the Ahom kingdom's western boundary. The Borphukan instructed his men not to attack the retreating army.

Lachit Borphukan would die in 1672. His remains lie in rest at the Lachit Maidaam constructed in the same year by King Udayaditya Singha at Hoolungapara 16 km from Jorhat.

This would not be the end of Mughal incursions into Ahom territory as the Mughals would take Guwahati in 1679, retaining it until 1682 when the Ahoms would permanently end the prolonged Ahom-Mughal conflict.

### **Legacy of Lachit Borphukan**

On 24 November each year, Lachit Divas is celebrated statewide in Assam to commemorate the heroism of Lachit Borphukan and the victory of the Assamese army at the Battle of Saraighat.

Lachit Divas is celebrated to promote the ideals of Lachit Borphukan – the legendary general of Assam's history.

The best cadet from the National Defence Academy is awarded the Lachit Borphukan gold medal. It was first instituted in 1999 following an announcement by General VP Malik saying the medal would inspire defence personnel to emulate Borphukan's heroism and sacrifices.

Sushma Nair

Vidhya Sagar High School