

LACHIT BORPHUKAN

Introduction:

There are times of crisis in the history of all nations. The country needs able people to lead the nation during such critical days. Assam faced a similar situation in the sixth decade of the seventeenth century. Taking advantage of the dissensions among the Ahom nobility Mir Jumla invaded. Assam on behalf of Aurangzeb, the Moghul emperor without much resistance. The glorious Ahom kingdom thus came under the suzerainty of alien rulers. Mir Jumla left Gargaon, the Ahoam capital, but his lieutenants continued to rule the lower part of Assam including Guwahati.

It is at such a time of national shame that three great personalities appeared on the scene, viz. Chakradvaj Singha, the great king, Lachit Borphukan, the great general, and Aton Burhagohain, the great Prime Minister. The inspiring determination of Chakradvaj the incomparable bravery of Lachit and the unique wisdom of Aton were the forces that soon restored the glory of Assam as an independent country.

Early Life of Lachit Borphukan:

Not much is known about the early life of Lachit Borphukan. He hailed from the Lukhurakhun clan, which was one of the oldest of the Ahom clans, and was the son of Momaitamuli Barbarua. Momaitamuli Barbarua rose from the very humble position of a household servant to the position of an army general and became the most trusted and one of the most important members of the royal cabinet. As the son of such an important noble, Lachit had the advantage of a good upbringing and was duly trained in the martial arts.

As a young man, he is said to have fought against Mir Jumla's forces in and around Gargaon. Lachit had worked in various capacities as officer-in-charge of the royal stables, and the royal palanquins before being finally appointed as chief of the army. There is an interesting story about Lachit's appointment as army chief, Chakradvaj Singha, the king, had already known the merits of Lachit and had decided to make him the commander-in-chief.

But to test his sense of honor Chakradvaj employed a servant to remove Lachit's turban in the royal court. Lachit nearly killed the servant out of anger, and by showing the right kind of indignation at the loss of honor, Lachit duly passed the test. From his early career, Lachit had proved his unfailing sense of duty, which he inherited from his father.

The Retrieving of Guwahati:

As the new commander-in-chief, Lachit devoted himself fully to the task of raising and training up a strong army. The task was accomplished with great speed. The new general lost no time in driving out the alien forces under Syed Feroze Khan from lower Assam. Feroze Khan and many others were taken captive and Guwahati was free once again. That was in the year 1667

The Battle of Saraighat:

But Aurangzeb the powerful Moghul emperor of Delhi was no mean adversary. He appointed Ram Singha, the famous Rajput general, on January 6, 1663, to lead an expedition against Assam, and accordingly, Ram Singha reached the frontiers of Assam in February 1669, with a huge force that included 18,000 cavalry soldiers on Turkish horses and even a strong squad of hounds. Lachit Borphukan worked very hard day and night and personally supervised all the preparations for meeting the challenge. He was an uncompromising taskmaster and is said to have chopped off his uncle's head for the negligence of duty with the famous words, 'My uncle is not greater than my country'.

Guwahati was chosen as the chief point for opposing the enemy and ramparts were erected at strategic places. Intermittent fighting on land and water continued for nearly two years during 1669 and 1670, but Ram Singha failed to break through the strong Ahom defense. The Ahoms however, suffered a serious setback at Alaboi where Ram Singha's forces ambushed an Ahom regiment and killed ten thousand of them on a single day.

The decisive battle was, however, fought at Saraighat on the waters of the Brahmaputra in the early part of 1671. Lachit Barphukan was ailing at the time, and Ram Singha wanted to take advantage of the situation. Ram Singha had nearly succeeded in breaking through the naval defense of the Ahoms. But, with high fever in his body, Lachit got himself carried to his battle-boat and inspired such courage among his soldiers that Ram Singha's forces were routed in no time. Ram Singha had to accept defeat and left Assam on 5 April 1671. Lachit died soon after probably because of excessive physical and mental strains.

Conclusion:

For deep patriotism, bravery, dutifulness, and determined leadership, Lachit remains an unrivaled hero in the history of Assam. Like Shivaji, his Maharashtrian contemporary, Lachit succeeded in restoring and upholding the freedom of his country and, his people in the teeth of opposition from the mighty Moghul army. No wonder, Lachit Barphukan has become a symbol of Assamese patriotism

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