

Architecture of the Kangla palace, Manipur

Dr. Sougrakpam Dharmen Singh,

(Assistant Professor, Department of History, Thoubal College, Manipur, India)

Abstract: The Ningthouja dynasty, who ruled from 1st century A.D. in Manipur, played an important role for the growth and development of the Kangla palace. They constructed forts, royal residence, roads, temples, coronation hall, excavated tanks and moats and other secular buildings. Among the ancient capitals Kangla was the most important because of its geographical location as well as religious matters. The archaeological remains of kangla give very valuable information about the art and architecture of Manipur. The paper is to find out new fact with the help of scientific methods and also to interpret literary sources in the light of the information gathered from field investigation. The sites of the remains were explored and studied the materials to finalise the facts. Emphasis has also been laid on the study of the general layout, ground plan and vertical feature of the structures. The present paper is based on the field investigation and literary sources.

Key words:- *Art, architecture, archaeology, ancient, citadel, capital, excavation, fort, moat, sacred, residency.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Manipur is an ancient state, lies in the North-Eastern corner of India. The rich cultural heritage of Manipur is well known. Nongda Leiren Pakhangba, who ascended the throne in 33 A.D, founded the Ningthouja dynasty and Kangla was his capital. From first century A.D. Kangla was the most important centre of administration, socio-economic and religious activities. Most of the king of the Ningthouja dynasty used Kangla as their capital. Because the place is situated at the heart of the Imphal city, surrounded by natural and artificial forts in all directions that protected the palace. They also considered Kangla as the most important sacred place. 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. 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. Among them the Kangla and the 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. 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. Some of them are still survived. These remains give very valuable information about the art and architecture and their religious believed and practices. The remains are protected by the government of Manipur under the provision of "The Manipur Ancient & Historical Monument & archaeological Sites & Remains Act 1976".

II. DISCUSSION

'Kangla', the ancient capital of Manipur, is located at the Imphal city. On the eastern side of the Kangla is the Imphal River and the north, the south and the western side of the Kangla is the national highway (Indo-Myanmar Road). It lies in between 24° North Latitude and 94° East Longitude, measuring 236.84 acres including the outer moat and Kekrupat. The Kangla was the ancient capital and the most important seat of political power of the Ningthouja dynasty. It has two type of forts i.e., natural fort and artificial fort. The place is surrounded by rivers and hills on all four sides as natural forts. These forts protected the ancient capital and it was difficult for the enemy to occupy the place easily. The layout of the Kangla fort depicts a system of concentric enclosures acting as protective barrier to the palace buildings at the heart of the enclosure. (Archaeology of Manipur:1995:4) During the period from the 1st century A.D. to the 19th century A.D. the rulers of the Ningthouja dynasty excavated ponds, moats and constructed many secular and religious buildings at this place. Some of them are still survived. These are recognised as the most important historical

and archaeological sites of Manipur. Beside these there are other buildings belong to the British period. These buildings were constructed by the British after the occupation of Kangla in 1891.

2.1. THE KANGLA MOATS (THANGAPAT):

There are two moats (Thangapat) i.e., the inner moat and the outer moat at Kangla. These moats are treated as the water fort (Jala Durga). The moats were excavated by the kings of Manipur to protect the Kangla palace. The royal chronicle refers the excavation of moat and construction of mud ramparts or fortress by king Khunjaoba (1652-1666). (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:46) The outer moat is situated on the western, the northern and the southern side of the Kangla and forming the outermost part or boundary of the Kangla. The eastern side of the Kangla is protected by the Imphal River. The river was also treated as natural water fort of the Kangla. Another water fort is the inner moat which is smaller in size. The moat is about 6.10m wide and 2.00m deep. It is expanded in the western, the northern and the southern sides. The inner moat was excavated by Maharaja Chourjit(1803-1813). Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle of Manipur also refers the re-excavation of moat during the reign of king Garibaniwaz(1709-1748A.D.) and the inner moat during the reign Maharaja Chandrakirti(1850-1886). Between the outer moat and the inner moat, there is a mud wall which surrounded the palace complex of the Kangla in four directions.

2.2. SACRED PLACES OF THE KANGLA:

The Kangla is not only the seat of political power but also the most important sacred places and religious centre for the Manipuris. The Manipuris, who worship traditional deities believed that Lord Pakhangba resides under the Kangla and ruled the kingdom of Manipur and universe. It is also believed that there are 375 important sacred places at the Kangla.

2.3. SACRED PONDS:

There are many sacred ponds at Kangla. Religious ceremonies particularly for traditional deities were performed in these ponds. The royal chronicle gave many references to the excavations of sacred ponds by the Manipuri Kings including Garibaniwaz Maharaja (1709-1748 A.D). Among the sacred pond 'Nungjeng Pukhri achouba'(big), 'Nungjeng Pukhri macha'(small) and 'Lai Pukhri' were consider as the most important sacred ponds at kangla. Its holy water was used by the Ningthouja clan for ancestral worship. The 'Nungjeng Pukhri' are located to the north-western side of the 'Uttra Kangla'. The 'Nungjeng Pukhri achouba' is believed to be the abode of Lord Pakhangba by the Manipuris. There are other two ponds situated at the eastern side of the Uttra Kangla. They are 'Chingkhei Pukhri' and 'Wagon Pukhri'.

2.4. KANGLA MEN SURUNG/ LEIKHUL:

'Kangla Men Surung/Leikhul' also called 'Menkhong-Yaikhong' is one of the most important sacred places of the Manipuris. They considered that all the souls of human beings, animals, birds, fish, and insects were inhabited inside the 'Kangla Men Surung'. People also believed that placenta of all the ancestors of seven clans and Taoroinai (Pakhangba) were keep inside the Surung. (Ch. Hemchandra:1997:9) Therefore, if the king performs coronation ceremony at the 'Kangla Men Surung/Leikhul' he will be able to rule the state peacefully. The kings of the Ningthouja dynasty performed their coronation ceremonies at the 'Kangla Men Surung'. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle of Manipur also mentioned the performance of coronation ceremonies by the kings of Manipur at the 'Kangla Men Surung'. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle, also records the construction and renovation of 'Kangla Men Surung' during the reign of king Naophangba(428-518A.D.) and Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh(1850-1885A.D.). The site of 'Kangla Men Surung/Leikhul' is situated in the eastern side of the Uttra Kangla. However, no proper structure is found there.

2.5. SITE OF LORD WANGBAREN:

Site of the Lord 'Wangbaren/wangpurel' is located to the south-eastern corner of the Kangla. The kings of Manipur worshipped 'Wangbaren' as one of the most important traditional deity. 'Wangbaren' was the deity of rain and water. In connection with flood and natural calamities the kings of Manipur performed religious ceremonies and sacrifices at this side to propitiate the deity.

2.6. SITE OF LORD KOUBRU:

The site of Lord 'Koubru' is located to the north-western corner of the Kangla. Koubru is one of the 'lamlai'(gods of the countryside) of the traditional deities. The god was worshipped by the Manipuris for good rainfall at the time of drought, by offering foods and by burning incense and lamp to propitiate the deity.

2.7. MANGLEN:

'Manglen' is the cremation site of the kings of Manipur. It is located to the northern side of the Uttra Kangla. The site is believed to have been developed by Garibaniwaz Maharaja in 1738 A.D. (Archaeology of

Manipur:1995:9) However, before hinduisation the site was used as burial ground by the Manipuri Kings. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle, records the cremations of Maharaja Nara Singh (1844-1850 A.D) and Maharaja Budhachandra Singh (1941-1955 A.D.) at 'Manglen'.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:299:689)

2.8. NUNGOIBI:

'Nunggoibi' is also a sacred place for the worship of the goddess of war, which is situated at the northern side of the Uttra Kangla. This is a burial place of the heads of defeated enemies of the Meitei kings from different battlefields.(N. Indramani:2015:38) The kings of Manipur worshipped the goddess of war before their departure to the battle field. The 'Huyein Lalu Chanba' ritual was performed here, whenever a king of Manipur emerged victorious in battle.(Archaeology of Manipur:1995:8) The royal chronicle also refer the performance of 'Huyen Lalu Chanba' ritual after the killing of five British officers in 1891 at 'Nunggoibi'.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:486) There are many other sacred places found in different places of the Kangla. They are *Luphou Nung*, *Nonghumshang*, *Paotak Pung*, *Pakhangba Nonga Pung*, *Pakhangba Khuda*, *Nata Pung*, *Laitinkol*, *Yaoreibi*, *Yaichampat*, *Lukhrapat*, *the site of Mangang Guru*, *Yumjaolairrenbi*, *Lai-Nongshaba*, *Panthoibi*, *Asiba* and *Atiyasidaba*, *Leimarel Sidabi*, *Thongarel*, etc

2.9. SITE OF RASMANDAL:

The site of 'Rasmandal', which was the place to performed 'Ras Leela', is located to the south west of Shri Shri Givindaji temple.

2.10. MAIN GATES (SANATHONG):

There are four gates at Kangla located to the four directions. They are (1) 'Nongpok Thong', the eastern gate (2) 'Sanathong', the western gate (3) 'Karaoba Thong', the northern gate and (4) 'Chingjagu Thong', the southern gate. Among these gates 'Sanathong' (the Royal gate), the western gate was the main gate. It was regarded as the most important gate of the Kangla. The royal chronicle gave many references to the construction of these gates. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle, also records the construction of 'sanathong' during the reign of king Khagemba(1597-1652A.D.) in 1614A.D. However, there is no archaeological remain of these gates. Present structure found in the southern gate belongs to the post independence period.

2.11. POLO GROUND:

The Polo ground at Kangla was known as 'Manung Kangjeibung'. The polo ground is located to the southern side of the Uttra Kangla. The polo ground was developed during the reign of King Marjit (1813-1819 A.D.).

2.12. RUINS OF THE CITADEL:

The citadel of Kangla is attributed to King Khagemba (1597-1652A.D.) and is believed to have been built in the first half of the 17th century A.D. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:35:38) The citadel is built of different sizes of well-burnt bricks, including the size of 28cm long, 13 cm broad and 8cm thick. The wall is 6.10m high and 84cm thick. The kings of the Ningthouja dynasty constructed coronation hall, palace buildings, royal residence, sacred places tec. inside the citadel. The royal chronicle also gave many references to the construction of these buildings by successive reigning kings of Manipur. These structures were protected and separated by the citadel. The wall of the citadel raised vertically and meet the straight cornice. Above the cornice is the railing which highlighted by a series of rectangular holes. Rectangular frames are projected in the surface of the wall. The citadel had three entrances, one on the southern side and two on the western side. The southern entrance of the citadel is highlighted by a dome roof and a porch in semi-circular shape. The roof of the porch is supported by six rounded pillars. Four semi-circular steps are provided in the porch which connected with the passage leading to the Shri Shri Govindaji temple.

2.13. RUINS OF THE UTTRA KANGLA:

The 'Uttra Kangla' is the coronation hall of the Ningthouja dynasty. The Uttra Kangla is located to the southern side of the cremation site or 'Manglen' of Maharaja Nara Singh and Maharaja Budhachandra Singh. 'Cheitharol Kumbaba', the royal chronicle mentioned the construction of Uttra during the reigns of King Khagemba (1597-1652A.D.) in 1629 A.D., king Garibaniwaz(1709-1748A.D.) in 1742A.D., King Chourjit(1803-1813A.D) in 1803A.D, Maharaja Nara Singh.(1844-1850A.D.) in 1844 A.D. and Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1850-86 A.D). in 1863 A.D.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:38:105:185:297:409) The structure was destroyed in air raids during the Second World War. The flight of steps and the ruins of the foundation are the only remains of the Uttra Kangla. In front of the Uttra, there are sites of two 'Kangla Shas' (Nongsha/lion in Cheitharol Kumbaba) made of brick. These sites are found on either side of the passage leading to the Uttra. The royal chronicle, 'Cheitharol Kumbaba' mentioned the constructions of lion statue in 1803 during the reign of King Chourjit(1803-1813A.D) and Maharaja Nara

Singh in 1844 A.D.(1844-1850A.D.). (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:185:267) The 'Kangla Shas' were blown to pieces by the British after their occupation of the Kangla Fort in 1891.(L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:500) Present structures of 'kangla Shas' belongs to the post independence period.

2.14. RUINS OF THE ROYAL RESIDENCY (SANGGAI YUMPHAM):

The site of the Royal Residency/Sanggai Yumpham is found in ruins inside the citadel and located to the northern side of Shri Shri Govindaji temple. Cheitharol Kumbaba, the royal chronicle, records the construction of royal residence with break during the reign of king Charairongba(1697-1709A.D.) in 1707A.D. and king Garibaniwaz(1709-1748A.D.) in 1732A.D. Different types of well-burnt bricks i.e., thin flat rectangular bricks, broad thicker rectangular bricks, one side angle flat elongated rectangular bricks etc. were used. Among them size of 28cm long, 8cm broad and 4cm thick brick is largely used in the construction.

2.15. THE SECRET UNDERGROUND PASSAGE:

The secret underground passage is situated in the north-eastern side of the Royal Residency (Sanggai Yumpham). The passage was built of well-burnt bricks. The size of the brick is 30cm long, 14 cm broad and 8cm thick. The passage is extended from north-east to south-west direction. The inner space of the passage is 40cm wide and 66cm depth. It was cover by a break roof of 34cm thick. It is believed that the passageway was connected with the royal residency.

2.16. TEMPLE OF SHRI SHRI GOVINDAJI:

The temple of Shri Shri Govindaji at Kangla was built by Maharaja Nara Singh (1844-1850 A.D.) in 1846 A.D. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:274) During the reign of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1850-86 A.D.) the temple was damaged in the great earthquake of 1869 A.D. The temple was reconstructed in its original form in 1869 A.D. by Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh. The temple of Shri Shri Govindaji is rectangular free standing temple and built of well-burnt brick, wood and mortar. The basement of the temple is a raised platform. The temple is double-celled type. The sanctum of the temple is rectangular in shape. It has one arch doorway in the east as main entrance and provided windows in both side of the doorway. The circumambulatory passage is provided in between the external wall and the sanctum wall. The roof of the temple is dome-like oblong design. The temple is facing towards the east. There are three flights of steps in the northern, the southern and the eastern side of the porch. The porch is a flat structure supported by rounded pillars. The temple measures 18.35m in length and 14.71m in breadth without porch. Another feature of the temple is the pillared hall, located to the front of the temple. It was popularly known as *Bheithob*. It was dedicated to Lord *Govindaji* by Maharaja Chandrakirti. (L. Iboongohal Singh and N. Khelchandra Singh:1989:356) The structure has two double-storied buildings, provided at each side of the free standing columns. Bells were located at the top of the buildings. There are 12 rounded pillars. Brick staircases are provided on the western side wall of the building. The *Beithob* measures 87.10m in length and 9.60m in breadth. The temple is belongs to Indo-Islamic architectural style. The flat roof, pillars of the porch, the dome, the decoration of the railings and flower decoration shown the influence of Indo-Islamic architecture of medieval period.

2.17. TEMPLE OF BRINDABANCHANDRA:

The temple of Brindabanchandra was built by Yuvaraj Tikendrajit Singh, son of Maharaja Chandrakirti Singh (1850-1886A.D.) in the second half of the 19th century A.D. The temple is situated at the north western part of the Kangla palace. The temple is built of well burnt Brick, sand-stone and mortar. The temple is stand on a rectangular ground plan and facing east. The exterior wall of the temple supported the upper railing. The upper railing is an exact replica of the lower railing. The roof of the temple is flat. The circumambulatory path is provided in between the exterior wall and the sanctum wall. The *garbhagriha* or sanctum is rectangular. The rectangular entrance doorway is in the eastern side of the sanctum wall. The sanctum wall has no windows. There is a steep brick staircase in the northern sanctum wall leading to the roof of the temple. Another feature of the temple is a hidden tunnel to the north-eastern corner of the sanctum wall. The floor of the temple is paved with stone slab. The temple is stylistically affiliated to the Indo-Islamic architecture.

III. CONCLUSION

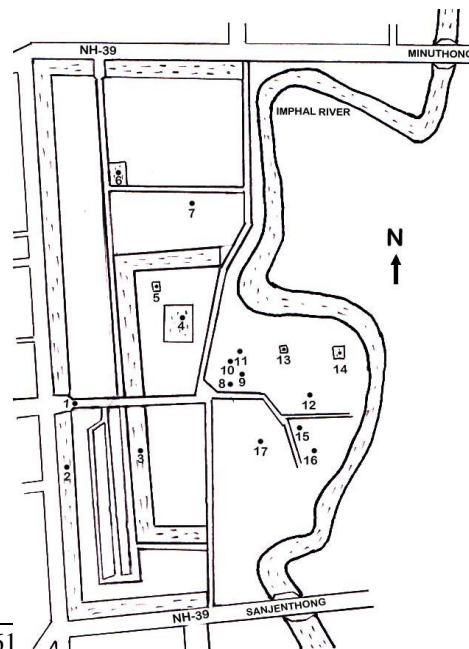
The monuments of Manipur are lying scattered at different sites. It can be divided into two classes, one is religious and the other is seculars. Only a few of the monuments found at Kangla have survived and some of them are found in ruins. They illustrate various designs and shapes. The surviving structure enables us to trace the styles of house building and other religious structure. The non-available of ancient monuments and relics to this present day is due to the frequent invasion of the Burmese marked by iconoclastic destruction, religious policies of the Hindu fanatic rulers and use of perishable materials or inferior quality. The royal chronicle refers

numbers of temple and royal residence built of perishable and non-perishable materials at Kangla in different period. The perishable materials such as timbers, bamboos, straw, thatch, reed etc. were largely used for the construction of religious and other secular building in the early period. These types of raw materials were easily available in the hill and the valley of Manipur. Later, from the 17th century A.D. non-perishable materials such as bricks, stone etc. of different shapes and sizes began to be used for the construction of palace, temple and other buildings. They chose brick, which was introduced by the Chinese, as the chief medium for all architectural undertakings. However, the general used of stone and bricks appeared from the time of king Charairongba period. Migration of different races from the south-east Asian and the north India and their social and cultural element presented in this land led to the growth of a synthesis in art and architecture. There are four types of architectural designed found in Manipur i.e., (i) indigenous style, (ii) south-east Asian style, (iii) northern Indian style and (iv) Indo-Islamic style. The Manipuri kings after their conversion to Hinduism began to build religious and secular buildings following the pattern of North Indian Hindu architectural styles and later adopted Islamic styles.

From the second half of the 19th century, the architectural trends of temple and other buildings appear to have much changed in comparison to the predecessors. This period marked the best synthesis of the Muslim ideas and Hindu method in the construction. From this period, experimented with numerous geometric forms and adopted different style in the construction. The Indo-Islamic style was popular in this period both secular and religious buildings. The decoration of sculpture as an element of external decoration on the temple and palace was not practice in Manipur. Only leaf and floral motifs and geometrical designed used as decoration. The dome roof including oblong, octagonal dome, arch entrances and external decorations (only leaf and floral motifs and geometrical designed) were the best example of Islamic influences of the 19th and 20th century temples and other secular buildings of the Kangla palace.



MANIPUR
KANGLA PALACE



LEGEND :-

1. Sanathong
2. Outer Moat
3. Inner Moat
4. Nungjeng Pukhri Achouba
5. Nungjeng Pukhri Macha
6. Lai Pukhri
7. Brindaban Chandra Temple
8. Uttra
9. Kangla Men Surung / Leikhul
10. Nunggoibi
11. Manglen
12. Sanggai Yumpham
13. Wangon Pukhri
14. Chingkhei Pukhri
15. Shri Shri Govindaji Temple
16. Ras Mandal
17. Polo Ground

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