

A Brief History of Lachit Barphukan

Early life

Lachit Borphukan was born on 24 November 1622 at Charaideo in Assam. He was the youngest son of Momai Tamuli Borbarua and Kunti Moran. He was born in a royal family. Momai Tamuli Borbarua was the commander-in-chief of the Ahom army, he was the 1st Borbarua (Phu-Ke-Lung) of upper-Assam and Commander-in-Chief of the Ahom army) under Prataap Singha. Momai Tamuli Barbarua was a founder of Paik practices.

The Mughal-Ahom conflict first began in 1615 and continued afterwards. It was in this backdrop Lachit grew up in. Lachit possessed his early education at his own residence. He completed his education in humanities and military strategies. Besides Momai Tamuli appointed a domestic teacher to make Lachit Borphukan a mark with proper education and educated him in the subject of Ahom scripture, Hindu religion, economics etc.

Career:

Lachit Borphukan was appointed to the post of commander of 'Hanstidhara Tamuli' by the then minister of the state while he first held post of commander of the state of Ahom. He entered the politics of Ahom state for the first time holding this post at the level of personal assistant. He was subsequently next appointed in the position of "Ghura Baruah". While serving in the post as a Ghura Baruah, Lachit Borphukan introduced his talent and bravery by not overseeing the horse properly but also by subduing many great/formidable horse. For his smoothly completing the task of the post of "Ghura Baruah" he was appointed as chief officer of Shimaluguria games in post of Shimaluguria Phukan. Later subsequently he was appointed Dulakasharia Baruah. He had a task of controlling the king's pali-paharia (sawdang) while king was taken to Dula.

At this time Swargadeuw Chakradhwaj Singha got to know about the skill of Lachit Borphukan and was appointed 'Commander-in-Chief. And Borphukan of the state of Ahom. In 1662, Army of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb invaded Assam under the leadership of Mirjumla and included the state of Ahom as a Tax-based state. Swargadeuw Chakradhwaj Singha took up efforts to salvage the glory of the past. This is the main reason Lachit Borphukan was entrusted with the responsibility of Senapati (general) by searching for a qualified Senapati (general). King Chakradhwaj Singha selected Lachit Borphukan lead the army in the campaign against the Mughals who held Guwahati. The King presented Lachit with a gold-hafted sword (Hengdang) and the customary paraphernalia of distinction. Lachit raised the army and preparations were completed by summer of 1667. Lachit recovered Guwahati from the Mughals and successfully defended it against the Mughal forces during the Battle of Saraighat. In February 1669 AD Mughal troops led by Ram Singh came to Assam to attack.

The life of Lachit Barphukan reflects concentration on work, duty and bravery. At this time Ahom army was not fully prepared but Lachit Borphukan was wisely ready to face potential. But ten thousand soldiers of Ahom died on the same day. Lachit was momentarily upset but was not tired.

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 Singh 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.

During the last stage of the Battle of Saraighat, when the Mughals attacked by the river in Saraighat, the Assamese soldiers began to lose their will to fight. Some elements retreated. Though Lachit was seriously ill he boarded a boat and with seven boats advanced against the Mughal fleet. He said: "If you (the soldiers) want to flee, flee. The king has given me a task here and I will do it well. Let the Mughals take me away. You report to the king that his general fought well following his orders". His soldiers rallied and a desperate battle ensued on the river Brahmaputra. Lachit Borphukan was victorious. The Mughals were forced to retreat from Guwahati

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Lachit Borphukan died about a year after the victory at Saraighat due to natural causes. His remains lie in rest at the Lachit Maidaam built in 1672 by Swargadeo Udayaditya Singha at Hoolungapara 16 km from Jorhat.

Conclusion

Lachit Borphukan is a symbol of indomitable courage. Lachit Borphukan's strong, selfless and visionary leadership remains us of the Assamese nation cannot be imagine without Lachit Borphukan. The courage and foresight of leadership of Lachit Borphukan is trilled in every Assamese mind.

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 Barphukan's heroism and sacrifices.

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