

LACHIT BORPHUKAN

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INTRODUCTION

Lachit Borphukan (24 November 1622- 25 April 1672) was a commander and Borphukan, one of the five patra mantris (councillors) a position that was created by the Ahom King Prataap Singha in the Ahom Kingdom, located in present-day Assam, India. He was known for his leadership in the 1671 'Battle of Saraighat' for successfully resisting the imperial expansion of the Mughal Empire.

He is remembered to this day for his bravery and leadership in the face of overwhelming odds.

Early life 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 Mughal-Ahom conflict first began in 1615 and continued afterwards and Lachit grew up in the very centre of this chaos.

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.

Battle of Saraighat

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. He presented Lachit a sword with a golden handle called Hengdang, and the customary paraphernalia of distinction, and appointed him Commander-in-chief of the Ahom Army, which had been raised specifically to drive out the imperial Mughal rulers.

Lachit raised the army and preparations were completed by summer of 1667. His army successfully retook Guwahati from the Mughal forces. Emperor Aurangzeb (born on November 3, 1618) 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. He sent a letter to the King stating that Lachit had been paid 1 lakh rupees to evacuate Guwahati. It was a trick to make Chakradwaj Singh dismiss the commander who successfully fought the Mughals so far but his Prime Minister convinced him otherwise.

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.

Legacy

Lachit Divas

November 24 is celebrated as *Lachit Divas* (Lachit Day) in Assam to commemorate the heroism of Lachit Borphukan and the victory of the Assamese army at the Battle of Saraighat

Lachit Borphukan Gold Medal (Best Cadet of NDA)

The best passing out cadet of National Defence Academy is conferred the Lachit Borphukan gold medal every year from 1999.

Mahabir Lachit Award

An award is presented to notable personalities of Assam by Tai Ahom Yuba Parishad (TAYPA).

Lachit Borphukan's Maidam

Lachit Borphukan's Maidam was constructed in memory of Lachit Borphukan at Jorhat, Assam. It is 16 km far from the famous Hoolungapar Gibbon Sanctuary. The last remains of Borphukan were laid under this tomb (Maidam) constructed by Swargadeo Udayaditya Singha in 1672.

CONCLUSION

Herein it may be mentioned that Assam was the only State in India, which defeated successive attempts at invasion by the Delhi Sultans and the Mughal Emperors. The State survived 17 such invasions.

In Assam on a three-day visit, President Ram Nath Kovind on March 04 2022 inaugurated the year-long celebration of the 400th birth anniversary of Lachit Borphukan. He also laid the foundation stone for the Alaboi war memorial, a tribute to soldiers who had fought and suffered a setback against the Mughals at Alaboi, two years before Lachit's decisive victory at the battle of Saraighat in 1671.

