

"Lachit Bar Phukan

A true son of Soil.

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"Lachit Bar Phukan" the name itself is enough to stir patriotic feelings among the Assamese population. Lachit bar Phukan was the Commander-in-Chief of the Ahom army. His leadership shown at the battle of Saraighat immortalised his names in the pages of history and also the hearts & minds of every Assamese. The life history of Lachit Bar Phukan is such that it doesn't fail to inspire every time someone reads or hears about him. Lachit Barphukan was born on 24 November 1622 in Chairadeo. He was the son of Momai Tamuli Borbarua, the first Borbarua.

During the course of Mughal invasion of Ahom kingdom when Mir Jumla invaded Ahom kingdom and took the Ahom capital Garhgaon. The Ahom king Jayadhwaj Singha sued for peace and the treaty of Ghilajharighat 1663 was signed. According to a clause of the treaty Swargadeo Jayadhwaj Singha sent his only daughter Ramani Gabharu who was only six and princes of Tipam king to the Mughal Harem, this was humiliating for the Ahom dynasty. Ramani Gabhuru was also a niece of Lachit Bar Phukan. After this treaty Jayadhwaj Singha died in despair, on his death bed he demanded his successor Chakradhwaj singha to "remove the spear of humiliation from the bosom of the nation". Preparations started to remove the spear of humiliation and an expeditionary army was organised under a new commander – Lachit Bar Phukan.

In August 1667 Lachit Bar Phukan took his army and sailed downstream in the river Brahmaputra to retake Guwahati which was under Mughal occupation. He made Kaliabor his base camp and on his way to Guwahati, Deka Phukan and Nausalia Phukan captured many forts. The Ahom Army finally reached Guwahati which was defended by five Choukies on each bank of the Brahmaputra. An extended battle took place to occupy the Itakhuli Fort and inspite of a mughal reinforcement approaching the for. A grand attack was launched on the night of 4th November 1667, the Ahom army scaled the walls by ladders and finally after two months of siege Itakhuli fell on the Ahom hands. It was followed by some more battles and finally the Guwahati was in Ahom hands.

After learning about the fall of Guwahati, Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb sent Raja Ram Singh of Amber to take back Guwahati with a massive army. The Mughal army consisted of 4,000 troopers, 30,000 infantry, 21 Rajput chiefs with their contingents, 18,000 cavalries, 15,000 archers, 5,000 gunners, 1,000 canons and large flotilla of boats. Surveying the massive Mughal force his eyes was filled with tears and he uttered "It is a tragedy that my country is facing this dire catastrophe during my Phukan'ship. How will my king be saved? How will my people be saved? And how will my posterity be saved.?"

Lachit aware of the Mughal military might and their strength against the Ahom forces especially the professional cavalry and mounted forces in open fields Lachit Barphukan made sure that the battle field is chosen by Ahoms to their advantage. The choice fell on Guwahati, which was hilly on either side and without any open fields for the Mughal forces to move. The Mughals reached the battle field of Guwahati unopposed thinking due to cowardice the Ahoms didn't choose to counter and as Lachit had planned the prey was lured to the trap. Lachit made a complex system of sand and mud embankments and hidden ditches with bamboo spikes that made Guwahati

Impregnable by land. The plan was to force the Mughals to go through the river route by using their navy, their weakest point.

Construction of one such embankment at Agiathuti near Guwahati was tasked to Lachit's maternal uncle and the work was supposed to be completed within 24 hours. When Lachit went for inspection at midnight he found the soldiers sleeping and he got infuriated when his maternal uncle tried to give an excuse saying that the soldiers were tired. He instantly took his sword and beheaded him saying "*Deshatkoï Momai Dangor Nohoy (Maternal uncle is not more important than the country)*".

Once in Guwahati the Mughal army became vulnerable and were easy prey to the planned guerrilla attacks by Ahoms. Lachit's army would only attack at night and retreat immediately. They even managed to enter the Mughal camp and walk out with all the silverware. So frustrated was Ram Singh with this nocturnal attacks that he sent a letter to Lachit demanding he stop such attacks at night to which Lachit replied "*It must be remembered that Lions fight at night*".

Lachit was also waging a war against the Mughals in the psychological front by not giving the Mughal camp peace at night and it is said that a rumour also spread claiming that Ahom army preferred attacking at night because they had Rakshasas or demons. When Ram Singh demanded proof when he heard about the rumour, Lachit is said to have send men dressed like demons into the Mughal camp.

The Ahom army faced setbacks when against the plan of Lachit Barphukan on the order of the Ahom King faced the Mughal army at Alaboi. The Ahoms were routed by the Mughal Cavalry and in a single day lost 10,000 soldiers.

Bar Phukan spent the next two years regrouping the army. Lachit's tactical moves and lack of progress of the Mughal Army made the Aurangzeb impatient so the Mughal army was forced to launch a direct attack.

The Ahom army planned to take the Mughals at Saraighat, where the river Brahmaputra was at the narrowest, only 1 K.M. It was an ideal place for naval defence. In the year 1671 The Mughals launched a massive naval attack at Saraighat

At first the Mughals were winning, Lachit was giving directions from his sick bed. The Ahom army was demoralised and were retreating. The Mughals were about to reach him at Andharubali. This made Lachit impatient he ordered all his land and naval forces to attack and against the advice of his physicians, he asked his troops to carry him on a boat and rowed straight at the enemy. This action had an electrifying effect on the Ahom Army. The retreating army reversed themselves and attacked the Mughal Army from all the sides. The Ahoms built an impenetrable fortification on water placing their boats one after another in a row. Quickly a large number of Ahom boats entered the river and smashed into the Mughal warships. Large ships of Mughals couldn't manoeuvre against the attack from small boats. The Mughal flotilla was completely destroyed. The whole stretch of the river Brahmaputra between Kamakhya, Itakhuli and Aswakranta became littered with boats and dead bodies. The Mughal admiral Munnawar Khan, who was smoking a hookah was shot from behind by a gun. The Mughals were forced to retreat and were pursued to the Manas river, the western border of the Ahom Kingdom.

Lachit died a year later due to an illness, the mortal remains of Lachit is laid under a Maidam (Tomb) at Jorhat. The maidam was constructed by Swargadeo Udayaditya Singha in 1672. Every year since 1999, The Lachit Bar Phukan Gold medal is given to the best passing out cadet of the National Defence Academy.

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