

Write Up On Lachit Borphukan

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Lachit Borphukan

Lachit Borphukan was a general of the Ahom Kingdom whose army he led successfully in resisting the imperial expansion of the Mughal Empire in the late 1600s. He is remembered for his extraordinary victory against the Mughal army of Aurangzeb headed by Ram Singh in the Battle of Saraighat. Like Shivaji Lachit Borphukan also fought relentlessly to curb the expansion of the Mughal Empire in Assam. Lachit Borphukan was the commander in the Battle of Saraighat which was fought in 1671 between the Mughals and the Ahom Kingdom on the Brahmaputra river at Saraighat, now in Guwahati.

Lachit Borphukan was born on November 24, 1622. His father, Momai Tamuli Borbarua, was commander-in-chief of the Ahom army. It is pertinent to mention that Ahoms ruled major parts of Assam for nearly 600 years. The Ahom kingdom faced attacks by several rulers. Seven years before Lachit Borphukan was born, the first Mughal invasion of Assam took place.

Borphukan was educated in the humanities, military skills and the scriptures. He was first appointed 'Soladhara Barua' – which means scarf-bearer of the Ahom King – but quickly rose through the ranks.

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.

Battle Of Saraighat

Lachit Borphukan would, however, come to be known due to his valour in the Battle of Saraighat, one of the worst defeats the Mughal Army would ever face. Saraighat would be remembered for the victory of a much smaller Ahom army over the mighty Mughal Army, through a combination of tactical brilliance, guerilla warfare and intelligence gathering. In a sense, Saraighat would be the last attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam.

It was in such a dire situation that Lachit showed his tactical brilliance. Knowing very well that the Ahoms had no chance in an open field battle, he chose Guwahati with its hilly terrain. The only way up to Guwahati from the east was the Brahmaputra river. It was at Saraighat, where the Brahmaputra was at its narrowest point – just a width of 1 km – ideal for naval defence. While the Mughal army was the strongest on land, especially in open plains, their weakest point was their navy. Lachit set up a series of mud embankments in Guwahati and ensured that the Mughals would be forced to take the river route to the city. Andharubali, between Kamakhya and Sukreshwar hills, was where Lachit would set up his headquarters and monitor the war operations.

Lachit then planned a strategic retreat to Guwahati, ensuring that the Mughal forces were in sight, but their weapons could not reach. The Mughals had four divisions – one headed by Ram Singh (northern bank), Ali Akbar Khan headed the southern bank, the entrance to the Sindhurighopa was headed by Jahir Beg and the Baruas from Koch Bihar, while the naval commanders led by Mansur Khan, guarded the river.

The Ahoms, on the other hand, were allied with the Jaintias, Garos, Nagas, the Rani of Darrang and above all the monsoon. Atan Burhagohain commanded the northern bank while Lachit himself commanded the southern bank. Atan harassed the Mughal army with dagga judha (guerilla warfare) periodically, in the lead up to the battle. In the meantime, there was a fiercely fought skirmish at Alaboi, where the Ahoms faced a major reversal with around 10,000 Ahom soldiers massacred. A last-ditch attempt to persuade the Ahom ruler Chakradwaj Singha to surrender peacefully failed when Atan Burhagohain rejected it, saying there was no guarantee that Aurangzeb would abide by Ram Singh's proposal.

With peace talks failing, Ram Singh now made the final assault on Guwahati, with the reinforcements arriving in the shape of war vessels and imperial officers. Moving along the northern bank, he was joined by ships with artillery and archers under five Rajput Sardars. The Ahoms already demoralised by their loss at Alboi

had to face another blow, when Lachit himself became seriously ill. The battle started on both land and water at Ashwarkanta, Laluk Phukan, pushed back the Mughals, but their naval forces compelled the Ahom boats to retreat further. With the Mughals getting dangerously close to Andharubali, the Ahoms retreated further back to Kajali and Samdhara. And this is when Lachit Borphukan stood up to be counted, disregarding his illness. He sent orders for all the land and naval forces to attack, ordered seven war boats for himself. "The king has put all the people in my hands to fight the Bongal" he thundered, as he headed towards the battle.

Lachit's entry had an electrifying impact on the Ahom soldiers, who now attacked the Mughals fiercely. Ahom warships now began to attack the Mughal navy from all sides. Between Itajuli, Kamakhya and Aswakranta, one of the fiercest river battles was ever fought. Using an improvised bridge of boats, the Ahoms attacked the Mughals from both the rear and front, their admiral Munnawar Khan was shot dead, and it totally scattered them. More than 4,000 soldiers of the Mughal army were dead, their navy destroyed, and they were pushed to the westernmost part of the Ahom kingdom, the Manas river. Darrang also saw a rout for the Mughals, overall it was a total rout for the Mughals, and ensured that they would not make further inroads into Assam. Lachit Borphukan single-handedly led the Ahom force to victory over a much larger Mughal army. It was one of the greatest military victories ever.

Memories & Monuments

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.