

Raja Dumbragi Jeevan Charitra

[The Nature of King Dumbra's Life]

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Publisher's Note

Shri Moirangthem Tomcha is the father of a dear friend during my youth. Whenever I used to go to their house, I would find his father studying various dictionaries on a table and chair. At that time, I did not give much thought about what he was writing.

After a long time I went to my friend's house and had conversation with his father. On that day also he was writing something. His father said, "It's been a long time you haven't come to us." During this talk I came to realize that his father was writing a book. He showed me his works.

If published in book form it would have around 600 pages, more than a 1000 perhaps. The writings were kept nicely packed. When questioned, he replied that he had enquired with many printers/publishers, and they said it will cost around Rs 1 lakh to publish. That is why he was unable to publish it. He also showed some works published by the government. Since I could not afford that much money, I requested him to allow me to publish the smallest manuscript he had. Thus, I got this work for publication. Presenting this book for the public to read.

Rajen Khumukcham

Managing Director

Rinda Library and Preservation Foundation

Manipur

Foreword

Manipur Public School was renamed as Raja Dumdra Singh High School. On the day, the statue of Raja Dumdra Singh, Senapati, was being unveiled, I took part to write down a brief character of his life. These descriptions have been collected from various intellectuals—mainly Maharaj Churachand Singh's Ramandi Guru Shri Chumbashi Sharma's sons and grandsons.

On 15/7/1970 the headmaster of the school asked me to write it down and forward it. This is a copy of that write-up.

If anyone can provide the correct and complete record of the same, it will be greatly appreciated.

M. Tomcha Singh

Raja Dumbragi Jeevan Charitra

Raja Dumbra was born on March 7, 1871 (28 day of Pheiren 1792 by Manipuri calendar). Shri Rajkumar Chaobiyaima (popularly known as “Maikhumbi” [covering of face]—shy/diffident?) was the father; mother was Shija. His wife was called Lalita Manjuri, earlier called Numit Leima. Dumbra Singh was official/formal name, and his birth name was Sanajaoba. Chaobiyaima a.k.a. Yumbra Singh was son of Bhubansana Yubaraj who was Meidingu Narsingh’s son. The time of birth of Raja Dumbra Singh was the time of reign of Meidingu Chandrakirti, KCSI (Knight Commander of Star of India). That year Sukte Haoban was performed. When the conflict reached Mombi Hiroi, Meidingu Chandrakirti taking Meitei warriors defeated Sukte. Gokhothang and 1000 Sukte warriors were captured. Gokhothang was handed to jail. During that period unmanageable North Lushai also rebelled. Political Agent Mister Quinn defeated Lushai revolutionaries with British and Meitei troops, and expelled them beyond the borders of Manipur.

Raja Dumdra Singh a.k.a. Sanajaoba, Dinbhu Singh a.k.a. Sanayaima a.k.a. Deb Singh, Chandrahas, Digendra Singh (born by Thangjabi Chiyabati), Churachand a.k.a. Amusana were all sons of Chaobiyaima. Muktasana and Takonsana (who died as teenage child) were daughters born between the boys.

In May 1886, Meidingu Chandrakirti died. Son Surchandra became king of Meitei land. Meidingu Naba Tangkhomba’s (Narsingh) elder son Bongajaoba Yaiskul Lakpa rebelled against Surchandra. This was generally known as war of Yaiskul Lakpa. Raja Dumdra Singh’s father followed the steps of Yaiskul Lakpa. On the request of Meidingu Surchandra, the British government sent Cachar frontier battalion. Due to unpreparedness Yaiskul Lakpa was defeated. Raja Dumdra’s father lived in Cachar due to inability to return to Manipur. One son and two brothers of Yaiskul Lakpa died in the battle. Yaiskul Lakpa was exiled to Hazaribagh (Bihar?) for life. Father Chaobiyaima, who loved the younger son Amusana, took care of him for 1 year till Sir Churachand Singh Maharaj KCSI CBE came of age and without even meeting sons and wives at the time of departure left the land of Meiteis for Cachar. Grandfather Ramananda (later king of Moirang) took care of Raja Dumdra Singh, younger brothers, and mother Shija. Father Chaobiyaima died a few years later.

Beginning 1891, the Meitei land faced terrible misfortune in the form of lost of freedom. It was the time of replacing the old with the new. On September 20, 1890, brothers became enemies. As Senapati Tikendrajit a.k.a. Koireng attacked Yubaraj’s group and crossed the wall of the palace and sounds of firing was heard, Meidingu Surchandra secretly escaped to Hapta Bangla (Political Agent’s Bungalow?). Advice of the Political Agent was wasted. On September 23, along with 3 younger brothers and servants Meidingu Surchandra left the land of Meitei and reached Cachar by the end of September. Yubaraj Kulachandra became king. Meidingu Surchandra who claimed to renounce the throne to the Political Agent to go Vrindaban sent a letter to Government of India. The letter asked to punish Senapati Tikendrajit. Assam’s Chief Commissioner Quinton left Golaghat towards Silchar on March 22, 1891 and came to Meitei valley. Lieutenant Colonel Quinn carrying Gurkha platoon met the Chief Commissioner. To capture Tikendrajit durbar was held twice in Hapta Bangla but failed. On 24, government soldiers surrounded Tikendrajit’s house. Exchange of fire took place between Meitei and government soldiers. Government soldiers were defeated. Meitei soldiers attacked Hapta Bangla. Till 8 pm the conflict did not finish. To hold peace talks, Chief Commissioner

and other British officers (4) came to Kangla from Hapta Bangla. Political Agent Mister Grimwood was killed on the steps of the Kangla Palace Durbar Hall. Assam's Chief Commissioner, Grimwood, Colonel Skene, Mister Cossins [mispronounced as Qasim in the book], and Lieutenant Simpson were beheaded. The British attacked from three sides, Kohima, Silchar, and Tamu. On April 27 the Palace was held by the British. President Saint(?) Johnneffer, Count(?) Michael Commandant Major A.K. Rijouri, and Naga Hills Deputy Commissioner A.W. Davis all three of them formed a commission and on oral evidence of 14 soldiers convicted Tikendrajit and Thangal in Imphal for waging war against the British and killing 5 Britishers. On August 13, they were hanged in Khwai Sana Keithel. Meidingu Kulachandra and 13 "manai agamba" (aides-de-camp) were exiled for life. [The author uses the "loan word" "jila kharij".] After father Chaobiyaima escaped to Cachar from the British, Ramananda took grandchildren and mother Shija to Thanga for some time for protection.

In September 1891, the British government held discussion on who should be appointed as the next king and what should be the future of Manipur.

In 1824 Pembatna (Pemberton?) came from Srihat leading a battalion. Awa attacked up to Cachar. They were surrounded by Awa. British government asked who can save them from Awa. Brothers Gambhir Singh and Nartangkhomba came out. The two brothers along with Achoiba Luwang on foothills of Yilain mountain fought against Burmese. Riding the famous horse called Pe Singh, Nartangkhomba rode into the middle of the Burmese battalion. Seizing "makoipu" from the hands of the Burmese and gripping it in his armpit he got up the horse and rode back and handed it to the British government.

When Gambhir Singh sent servant to enquire, Narsingh who was fighting Awa said: "If [I am] true son of Ebudhau Pakhangba [I will] defeat Awa and save motherland Manipur, will return throne of ancestors to brother to be king, and save motherland from misery; today Lengund pond will dry."

Nartangkhomba's wish was granted by Pakhangba. Water of Lengund pond dried. To this day, the pond is called Lengund Pat. When enquired by the British government what the brothers have agreed on, Gambhir Singh said, "I will be the king and brother will be Yubaraj." Nartangkhomba (Narsingh) also agreed, "Yes Saheb, brother will be king and as younger brother I want to serve my elder brother." At this Gambhir Singh said, "After me you shall be king."

Remembering the honesty and big heart of Nartangkhomba, "thaba" (progeny?) of Meidingu Leiren Nonglen Sendreng Manik Khomba Narsingh was searched. Narsingh's son Khwairakpa Pukar(?) Mani was asked to be king. Khoiyoiroon Haobam Chanu Maharani's child from Meidingu Narsingh and Bhuban Singh Yubaraj's son/grandsons are there. Make one of them the king said Pukar(?) Mani. Colonel Maxwell and others praised Pukar Mani as "true blood" of Narsingh.

In mid September 1891, one day sound of Pakhangba was heard in the inner big drain of grandfather Ramananda's garden. Early morning Pakhangba appeared in in awang-chingkhei (north-east) direction. Flower and rice were offered. Grandfather Ramananda called out his grandsons and asked them to pray. Four days later, in the morning, Political Agent Colonel Maxwell, Pukar Mani and few Meitei dignitaries came to Grandfather Ramananda. On the courtyard "tangbah" was put ("phabangji with white cloth over it"). At that time Raja Dumdra Singh was only 20. Grandfather Ramananda called out grandchildren and introduced them. They had come to discuss who should be the king. Child Churachand could be influenced, hence preferred. However, it is claimed that 6-year-old Churachand came and sat on the "tangban" without no one asking him to do so, while others sat on "pharanji". Political Agent showed due respect with a smile. They returned happily. On September 18, 1891, 6 years and 5 months old Churachand (later on Meidingu huyen langjan phaba

[coming of age?] called Sir Churachand Singh KCSI CBE) was given the title "Raja" by Governor General in Council. On September 29, 1892, he was declared king of Manipur as per tradition. Not long after visit of Colonel Maxwell in 1891, along with mother Shija Lalita Manjuri and brothers and sisters Raja Dumdra Singh moved to what is now known as Purana Rajbari. Raja Dumdra Singh became guardian of his brothers and sisters. In that place, "mantup" and temples were built. Brahmin colony Rajpurohit (known to be the oldest purohit) was established. Shri Shri Govindji was set up and served. To the west of the temple, a golden sagai (hamlock?) was built. To the north of the temple, sagai for Raja Dumdra Singh was built (not far from the temple). To the east, sagai for other brothers were built.

Beginning 1892, people were released from slavery. Lallup for 10 days each for the king was abrogated. Instead of lallup, Rs 2 per year was given for service (yumkok yeiba). In 1897-98, for the first time "hal jarip" (ploughing) was done. In 1899 Rs 2 per head per year was abolished. Instead tax was collected set at Rs 2 per head per year in the valley and Rs 3 in hills for 1 acre of land. Sons of Brahmins and ningthem (royal blood?) were not taxed declared Assam Chief Commissioner on April 18, 1898. That year cholera was widespread. Many people died. Grass grew on roads and doors were locked at sunset.

In 1895 young Raja Churachand Singh went to Mayor College for studies. Political Agent also acting as Superintendent ruled on major matters. Later, an ICS came to act as Superintendent. From the side of the king, Raja Dumdra Singh acted as guardian and looked at matters including custom, religion, and tradition. Some events during the rule of the Political Agent, Superintendent, and Raja Dumbra Singh:

1. In 1896, Colonel Maxwell and Burmese Captain Memaksha discussed borders with Kongkam Thanaga.

2. On February 3, 1898, Assam Chief Commissioner Mr Quinn came to see Manipur and watched festivities of Meitei. Raja Dumdra Singh discussed with elders on following matters:

- (a) To relocate to the old palace.

- (b) To write off taxes of Brahmins and ningthem.

Chief Commissioner after discussion with the Political Agent expressed unwillingness regarding relocation to the old palace. A palace was proposed to be built on north of Johnstone School and Ngowarkhan (after going through khuyathong). The Political Agent was told to write a note regarding the same (mainly regarding numbers 1 and 2). On April 12, 1898, the Political Agent sent the note. British soldiers were to be kept in the old palace; hence, it was not given. Also, it was claimed that it can be had by repaying the cost incurred by the British in reconstruction.

In 1898, Angom land, Brahmin land (in 1891 many left during the war leaving the land vacant) and ground of Guru were used for construction of palace. British engineers presented many designs out of which one was selected to build today's Rajbari. In 1905, the construction was completed. From old Rajbari, Shri Shri Govindji was shifted. Festivities were organized.

3. In 1892, Kuki attacked Chingjaroi village. In 1897 Somnga village started rebellion. The village was burnt. In 1904 tribal rebellion began. Superintendent Mr Uller taking Meitei soldiers destroyed villages and captured the king. In 1905, Political Agent Mr Makespear taking Meitei soldiers burnt Khoirao tribal village.

4. In 1903, Raja Dumbra Singh attended Delhi Durbar with Raja Churachand.

5. In 1904, Viceroy of India Lord Frazen (Lord Curzon?) came to Manipur. In Thangapat of old Rajbari boat race was organized.

6. In 1904, at midnight Hapta Bangla got burned. The Political Agent held Meiteis responsible and asked one man from each house bringing some item should build it again. Few women led by Samujaobi protested. Even king's lallup has been abolished, why should their husband go to lallup for sahib. The government relented and built it again with bricks on its own.

7. On November 22, 1904, Commander-in-Chief of India Lord Kitchener came to see Manipur.

8. Laws were made for law and order and powers given to appropriate authorities. Assam's governor was made the head.

9. On May 15, 1907, Raja Dumbra Singh came of age (nabalak oikhi). On February 4, 1908, Lieutenant Governor of West Bengal and Assam Sir Lancelot came to Manipur and gave the throne to Raja Dumbra Singh. Maharaj Churachand was made the head. Five senior Meiteis were made members of newly established Durbar. West Bengal and Assam government sent an ICS British officer as vice president. Till today it is remembered as 8-member Durbar. Raja Dumbra Singh as a member ruled the land.

The Durbar had legislative and judiciary powers. Devyani (civil?) and military cases were handled although it had to be agreed by the judicial member at last. The position of judicial member was held by the most senior member. Raja Dumbra Singh was judicial member as well as Durbar member for lifetime. Along with this, Raja Dumbra Singh was involved in inner rule, i.e., custom, religion, and Meitei society and culture.

On January 26, 1908 (some records say July 24) Budhachandra was born. Elder son Budhachandra (Meidingu Tubi Lairel Achauba Maharaj Budhachandra Singh) was loved by Raja Dumbra Singh.

On January 1, 1918, "hereditary distinction" title of "Maharaj" was given for help in the First World War to His Highness Raja Churachand Singh CBE by India's Viceroy and Governor General Lord Chelmsford.

SANAD granted to His Highness Raja Chura Chand Singh. CBE Raja of Manipur – 1918

I hereby confer upon your Highness the title of Maharaja as an hereditary distinction for your services in connection with the war

Delhi

The 1st January 1918

Sd/-CHELMSFORD

Viceroy & Governor

General of India

Raja Dumbra Singh was righteous, religious, meticulous, and well wisher of Meitei society. He searched for younger brother Nartangkhomba's guru Shri Jagadishwar Sharma's children or grandchildren. Shri Chumbra Shahsi Sharma (grandchild) was appointed Ramandi Guru of Maharaj

Churachand. He invited Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's and Nityanda's grandchild to live in Manipur to follow Vaishnav religion properly.

After Kakta(?) lineage Narsingh's lineage became Meitei king. New Brahmin positions had to be filled. This caused some issues. Purohit had to be replaced. This was left in able hands of Raja Dumbra Singh by the king.

The notion of pure/impure, tradition, and behaviour of that time is worth knowing. Cloths worn in office, school, and market were considered impure and kept aside. People used take bath immediately after returning from these places. When saheb touched the golden sagai (hamlock?) it became impure, and the parts were given off to non-Meiteis. Names of elders and seniors were not taken. It is said that Raja Dumbra Singh never in his lifetime called anyone by name. He used only "Epa" (father) or "Ato". On road women and child would not step on men's shadow (even strangers). If the king came by road, people kneel on their knees to show regard. Women covered their heads. On roads women did not let their hair loose (except unmarried girls) else their hair would be cut as punishment. Men did not wear pheijom toman. In front of elders, shoes were not worn. While going past group of senior people, people hid their legs with hand or cloth. While visiting senior dignitaries, shoes were left at corner of courtyard. While praying head can be left uncovered for a while by women. On various occasions, 2, 3, or 4 pieces of betel nuts (wrapped in betel leaf) were made. After Raja Dumbra Singh these traditions vanished gradually. After school and college Raja Dumbra Singh did not study further. He studied religion related texts called "payar" after college. He studied Bengali and Hindi. He was not weak in fine arts. He was interested in music. He visited Vrindaban often. He bought land and built temple in Radha Kunda Keshi ghat.

For his handling of tribal rebellion before the reign of King Churachand, he was given two war office medals, one service medal for good rule, and one Victoria Cross medal by the British government. On January 1, 1935, Viceroy and Governor General Lord Willington gave the title of "Raja" to him and "Rani" to Haobam Chanu (who was earlier called Thambal Devi).

SANAD

To

Rajkumar Dumbra Singh, Senapati, Judicial Member Manipur State Durbar, Imphal Assam.

I, hereby confer upon you the title of "Raja" as a personal distinction

Delhi

The 1st January 1935

Sd/- WELLENGDON

Viceroy & Governor

General of India

On January 28, 1935, Raja Dumbra Singh died at the age of 64 years. He left 6 sons and 11 daughters. The names of his wives and children are as follows:

Shrimati Chontha:

1. Nayasna Devi
2. Manisna a.k.a. Bhaskar Singh

3. Sanatombi Devi

Shrimati Haobi:

1. Maipaksna Devi
2. Tigonsna Devi
3. Tekpisna Devi
4. Bobosna Devi
5. Nakausna Devi
6. Ebochauba a.k.a. Homendrajit Singh
7. Sanayaima a.k.a. Bhubendra Singh
8. Ghanshyam Singh
9. Ebempishak Devi
10. Khombisna Devi
11. Tathotsna Devi
12. Sanatomba a.k.a. Tikendrabis Singh
13. Tondonsna Devi

Shrimati Nongmaikhombi:

1. Sanajaoba Singh

Genealogy

Narsingh + Wahengbam Chanu Ramani Apambi Ahal



Bhappendra Singh a.k.a. Bhuban Singh Yubraj + Khoklem Chanu Kumari



Sanachaobi Yaima

1. Moirangthem Chanu Numitleima a.k.a. Lalitamanjuri

a. Raja Dumbra Singh

b. Deb Singh

c. Chandra has Singh

d. Amusna

2. Thangjam Chanu Chitrarati(?)

a. Bhipendra Singh