https://doi.org/10.65734/tgi.ssei.avp.ijcsss.ti.26.29.14

Kumudini Maharani, the Regent Queen: A symbol of maternal strength and leadership

Ningthoujam Rebika Devi

Abstract:

This paper explores the life of Kumudini Maharani after her husband, Maharaja Gambhir Singh, the king of Manipur died at an early age leaving behind queen Kumudini and son, Chandrakriti at the age of two. In-spite of the time of grief for the death of the King she has to face the political turmoil, save the kingdom from enemies within and outside and most importantly secure a safe future for her little son. She then took the decision to appoint her son as the King of Manipur and ruled on his behalf. Her preparation from the constant threat of foreign invasion and internal administration of the kingdom was held with great political prowess.

This paper examines her dual role as a mother and an idol, highlighting how her personal virtues extended beyond the royal families into the broader society. As a mother she played the crucial role in shaping the character, values and leadership quality of King Chandrakriti, guiding him with wisdom, discipline and emotional support. Her influence contributed significantly to the development of a responsible and capable leader. At the same time, Kumudini Maharani emerged as an ideal figure in Manipur society embodying qualities such as resilience, moral integrity and dignity. She became a symbol of strength and guidance, inspiring women and reinforcing cultural values associated with ideal womanhood. Though an analysis of historical narratives and cultural memory, this paper argues that her role as a mother and idol was central to her lasting legacy. It highlights how her life bridged motherhood and spheres of ruling a kingdom making her an enduring figure of admiration and respect in Manipuri history.

Key words: Regent, Motherhood, Political prowess, Administration, Idol.

Introduction

In ancient times, Manipur grew into a sovereign kingdom. For over two thousand years, its spirit remained strong. From 33 A.D. to 1891 A.D., seventy-six kings ruled the land, each taking responsibility for protecting and guiding the kingdom.

Manipur faced many challenges, including wars from outside enemies and conflicts within the royal family. Even during these difficult times, there was a strong code of conduct that everyone followed. This code ensured that no ruler was above the law and helped maintain order in the kingdom. It also shaped the culture, religion, and political system, making Manipur a well-organized and caring state.

Many great kings are still remembered for their bravery and achievements. However, the strength of the kingdom did not come from kings alone. Behind them stood the Maharanis of Manipur. The queens played an important role with their wisdom and strength, helping the kingdom stay stable during both peaceful and difficult times.

To name some, we may mention:-

a) Maharani 'Leimarembi' Linthoingambi, Chief Queen of Meidingoo Ningthoukhomba (1432-1467 A.D.),

b Shija Ebemma Gomati Rani, the queen of Ninghthou Pamheiba (1709-1748 A.D.),

c) Kumudini Maharani, Chief Queen of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1788-1834 A.D.) and so on.

As the tale of Maharani Kumudini unfolds, also referred to as Leimarembi, Chief Queen of Maharaja Gambhir Singh (1788-1834 A.D.), her life may be remembered in three sacred lights.

1. Maharani Kumudini's Role in the successful reign of Maharaja Gambhir Singh.
2. As supreme mother, ruling the kingdom on behalf of her young son, offering her life for her son, Chandrakriti, like a candle that burns only to give light.

3. Maharani Kumudini, as she walked the path of true devotion of Shri Shri Govindaji.

Maharani Kumudini and successful reign of Maharaja Gambhir Singh.

Kumudini was born to Meishnam Gourashyam and Sanulembi in 1792 A.D. at Kangamong (Now in Bishnupur District, Manipur). Her birth was seen as a blessing sent by fate itself. It was believed that during her infant period a serpent was seen spreading its hood above her, as if to guard her, as an omen that she was destined for greatness.

As she grew up to be a beautiful girl in Kangamong area, yet her beauty, wisdom and bravery shined like a hidden gem. Maharaja Gambhir Singh visited the residence of Maishnam Gourashyam, a nobleman of Royal Palace and saw Kumudini. Maharaja Gambhir Singh was impressed by the wits and bravery of Kumudini beyond her years; thus, the couple was married in 1808 A.D. as his 2nd Queen at new palace of Konthoujam Yumpham. From that day, she was honoured with the Royal Title of Queen "Apanbi-Ahal" and observed every step of politics tactfully, sharing joy and sorrow of Maharaja Gambhir Singh and strengthening him. What more to say of Kumudini Maharani in bolstering Maharaja Gambhir Singh in every step forward.

In the dark period of Manipur's past, there came a time between 1819 A.D. - 1826 A.D., known as "Chahi Taret Khuntakpa" (Seven years devastation), when the kingdom fell under the rule of the Burmese.

Meanwhile, prince Marjit in collaboration with Burmese king struck down the princes of Manipur one by one, and his gaze soon turned toward Maharaja Gambhir Singh.

At that time, Maharaja Gambhir Singh was staying far from his palace at the residence of Gourashyam Singh, his father-in-law at Singjamei Chingamakha. By his side was Maharani Kumudini, whose mind, sharp as a knife. Together, they planned in silence, waiting for the right time to escape the incoming storm.

The troop of Marjit, fought against the troop of Maharaja Gambhir Singh, and as they gained the chance under the darkness, Maharaja Gambhir Singh along with his Queen left the land and journeyed toward Cachar, and settled

there for safeguarding their son as well as waiting for the time to regain the lost throne of Manipur.

In the distant land of Cachar, under the unfamiliar skies, Gambhir Singh served as a General in the Court of Krishnachandra, preparing for a destiny far greater than just survival. His residence was at Malugram, but later shifted to Sylhet.

After a long period of 7 (Seven) years at Cachar, came the turning tide – The formation of the "Manipur Levy", forged with the support of the Britishers. Royal brother namely Nara Singh regained the throne of Manipur by defeating Burmese on 26th Sunday, May 1825 A.D. at Bishnupur Palace, rewriting the destiny as the Burmese forces fell and Manipur breathed again. The throne was not just regained; it was conquered with sacrifice, courage and unwavering faith.

Maharani Kumudini stood by his side, the lady of wisdom, silence and vision. Her arrival at Bishnupur Palace, 6 months after the King's triumphant return, was not merely a reunion, but a sign of restoration. From there they journeyed to Langthabal Palace in 1827 A.D.

A true devotee of Shri Shri Govindajee, Kumudini Maharani brought back a sacred idol through Mayang Leibak. With true devotion she installed it in a new temple, where pujas and rituals were offered as a symbol of gratitude – for the King, the People and the Land Reborn.

Maharani Kumudini's Role in Canchipur Rebellion.

In the year 1831, Maharaja Gambhir Singh set out with his army to stop the Khagi Rebellion far away and the kingdom was left without its king. Only three days after the king's departure, trouble arose. Khurailakpa and his followers took advantage of the situation. They marched boldly and entered the Royal Pallace, hoping to take control of the throne.

Little did they know, the courage of the queen. Maharani Kumudini stood strong and fearless. Along with the Brave Yubaraj Narashing and loyal soldiers, she fought against the rebels. A fierce battle took place. In the end, the queen and her forces defeated Khurailakpa and captured him.

Because of her bravery and quick action, Maharani Kumudini saved the royal throne and the Kingdom. Her courage and the appraisal of braveness was clearly mentioned in the report submitted by the then Political Agent to

the Supreme Administrative Council. Thus, proved Maharani Kumudini was the Right Arm of Maharaja Gambhir Singh.

A Mother's Valor: Maharani Kumudini's sacrifices for her son Chandrakriti.

Kings of Manipur had a custom of selecting his Rani according to King's wish, thus most of the Meitei King had at least 10 Ranis during their reign. However, there were only seven posts of rani for Royal Titles and special place in public gatherings and seat of honour in Royal Court of Manipur.

The titles of Ranis are:-

1) Leimarembi (Maharani: Chief Queen)
2) Apanbi Ahal
3) Apanbi Yeima
4) Apanbi Naha
5) Leimakhubi Ahal
6) Leimakhubi Yaima
7) Leimakhubi Naha

At first, Kumudini got the title of Apambi Ahal and Nongmaithem Chanu Tulshipriya as Leimarambi (The Chief Queen). When Leimarembi Tulsipriya died in 1830 A.D., there was a crisis of selecting Leimarembi Chief Queen. Conspiration among the Ranis arose. At the same time, Raja's promise to one of the Rani for appointing Maharani became a big issue while Kumudini's promotion to Leimarembi is officially on line. At last, the selection of Leishembi is on the wish of Shri Shri Govindaji. As decided, there was lottery for the selection of the Chief Queen, Maharani. Whoever's the name picked up by an innocent child out of two Tulshi leaves will be declared as "Leimarembi".

It was so surprised that the child who brought the leaf, which was kept before the Lord Govindaji the whole night had the name of Kumidini Rani. So, by the grace of Lord Govindaji, Maharani Kumudini got the post of Chief Queen "Leimarembi" of Manipur kingdom. It was on Friday, the 8th Thawan (August) 1830 A.D... Abhishek of Maharani Kumudini was held and coronation of Maharaja Gambhir Singh and Maharani Kumudini was promptly celebrated on Monday, the 24th Inga (June) 1831.

As privileged by Royal dignity, Maishnam Gourashyam, father of Maharani Kumudini was appointed the title of "Luwang Ningthou"(king of

Luwang clan) in 1832 at Langthabal Palace with ritual ceremony of Abhishek. Thus, the area of Chingamakha Meishnam Leikai was developed and Luwang Ningthou served with best level in keeping good administration. This situation could not have been possible without Maharani Kumudini.

Chandrakriti was born to Kumudini Maharani on 1831 as 1st born son of the lineage of Maharaja Gambhir Singh. As time drew up, Maharaja Gambhir Singh died on January 9th, 1833 at Canchipur Palace. According to the royal customary rule, the next king should be selected before the disposal of king's dead body.

Nara Singh, the Senapati placed the 2 years old Chandrakriti on the Gadi (Throne) and assumed himself the Office and dignity of the Regent. The promise and belief kept to Gambhir Singh Maharaja was fulfilled by the sacrificial quality of Nara Singh.

Maharani Kumudini's Role in shaping Chandrakriti, a well-educated first King of Manipur.

Maharani Kumudini strongly supported the introduction of Western Education in Manipur. She knew with her far sightedness that only with the Westerner Education, her son can be among the dignitaries of other Kings of India in Darbar as well as to share any conversation of the final resolution. Thus, Maharani Kumudini embraced the Westerner Education System despite the fact that it was considered untouchable, and an outcaste to hold the western book.

Thus, after receiving the acceptance from the then Governor General of British India through Captain Gordon, Agent of Manipur, one teacher named Harichandra, a brilliant student of Chitrapur College of India had reached as Guiding teacher of Chandrakriti. Chandrakriti Maharaja became a Bonafide King with full wisdom and thus in his future life shone as a perfect king with full knowledge.

Maharani Kumudini as saviour of Chandrakriti Maharaja Most of the people of Manipur appraised Nara Singh's sacrifice and regarded him as high level. At this condition, the dowager queen Maharani Kumudini feared whether the regent would ultimately usurp her son's throne. It is believed that by the wish of Maharani Kumudini, Nabin a nobleman tried to put an end

to the Regent's life by stabbing while Nara Sungh was prostrating before the image of Vrindavan Chandra on Saturday 27th January 1844. Within minutes, Nabin was killed by the Regent's bodyguards.

The queen mother fled to Cachar with her 12 years old boy king, fearing for his life being guarded by security guards under the leadership of Thangal General on 28th January 1844. Settled in Cachar, waiting for the chance to regain the throne for her son as her request to British Government went in vain.

As Nara Singh Maharaja died on Thursday, 11th April 1850, his brother Devendra succeeded on 11th April 1850. Polemkhombi's (Kumudini's phambal name) lotus mind bloomed when the sad news of the Nara Singh's death reached her ear as she started to make the plot for regaining her son's throne.

Rani along with her son Chandrakriti prayed to one saint having divine quality Alekbaba who was the worshipper of Lord Shiva at Cachar and asked to bring the Nirmala of Shiva when they marched for the Battle. In return, Rani had granted a land of 82 Bigya to the Devotee, who built a big Mandir of Lord Shri Shri Panchananda Shivaji. With full confidence and against strict security measures of Britishers, Chandrakriti along with his strong army left Malugram on 10th June 1850

A.D. for regaining the throne of Manipur. With the blessing from his mother, Chandrakriti captured Langthabal Palace from there they marched towards the Kangla. After defeating Devendra Maharaja, Chandrakriti became the King of Manipur at the age of just 19 years since 12th July 1850 A.D. in Kangla throne having the tiltle "Nongchup Waireng Pamheiba Chinglen Nongdrenkhomba".

Maharani Kumudini who had the doubt for the forthcoming problems on her son's journey to regain Kangla as she remained who will help her son in the future. All the times, she with her sharp eyes look after to defend problems fallen on her son, so Rani came to Manipur after some months later.

People of Manipur welcomed the Dowager Maharani Kumudini who fled to Cachar in 1844, returned in 1850 for the welfare of her son with a salute of 55 guns and spreading uncountable coins and entered Kangla with full honour and respect. Chandrakriti bowed to her mother with eyes filled with tears for their joyous reunion.

The most important moment for the Chandrakriti Maharaja was the successful Darbar with North Brook, Governor General and Viceroy of India

in 1874 which is still known as "Jila Darbar". Though, it was just a formal meeting between the Viceroy and King of Manipur for knowing each other personally, Maharani Kumudini can't take it easily. So once again, Maharani prayed to local deity for her son's victory. For bestowing success and victory on her son a well woven Silk Kanak with embroidery work of Kangla-sha, floral motif and fish was offered to the Goddess of Phayeng.

It was not the end towards the contribution of the sacrifices of Maharani Kumudini for her son. In this crucial hour, Maharani Kumudini sent rare documents, Govindajee garland and Pan through her trusted follower named Tamara Singh who run all the way from Jiri to Imphal on foot. How faithful Maibam Tamaar Singh was. Only because of such sincere and nobleman like him, Manipur stood strongly as a sovereign kingdom.

Such a brave king Chandrakriti died on 7th May, Thursday 1886 A.D. at the age of 55. As if her duty of strengthening the security of her son and contribution towards her husband Gambhir Singh were successfully performed. Maharani Kumudini a superb queen, an Idol lady and a supreme mother breathed her last breath on 24th July, 1886. What a great Maharani Kumudini; Chief consort of Maharaja Gambhir Singh's sacrifice for the welfare of her husband, son and people.

1886 Borachaoba's Rebellion

Just few days after the death of Chandrakriti, there was a great attack by Borachaoba, son of Nara Singh Maharaja who had marched with a large army from Baskandi, Ratanpur Cachar and attacked Kangla in the midnight (1886 A.D.). Maharani Kumudini's presence of mind is quite unique and impressive. Even after the sacrifice for safeguarding Chandrakriti, still she stood as a pillar if success guarding her grandson Surachandra Maharaja.

As the rebellion, raised by Borachaoba came near Kangla at midnight, Maharani Kumudini ordered to start the ritual of Mangal Arti of Shri Shri Govindajee to make them believed that it was already close to sunrise. As rani's order should be followed, Rajpurohit executed the rituals. The bell of Mangal Arti was rang and the sound warded off the evil thought of Borachaoba's party, thinking it was about to be sunrise and not the right time for the war, lowered their arms as well as their mental state. Most of them were captured and adequate punishment were given.

This is again an impressive venture of Maharani Kumudini's participation in keeping strong administration of the then Manipur.

Maharani Kumudini's religious concept, an important point of discussion.

Whenever Maharani Kumudini went, an Idol of Govindajee was always with her.

1) She is a true devotee of Shri Shri Govindajee, her life was dedicated to the Lord Govindaji's services.
2) She sent her people, led by Nongmaithem Kriti Singh Nongthonba to build a Hari Mandir at Vrindavan, according to the last wish of her husband, King Gambhir Singh.
3) Praying all the time to Local Deity "Umang-Lai", actively participating in "Lai-Haraoba", the celebration of Lord Pakhangba and other deities.
4) Offering to Lamding Lairembi for the welfare of Chandrakriti in Jilla Darbar.

Thus, Kumidini Maharani, sent to the Earth as a mission of spreading wisdom, sacrifice and ascent of religious aspects had closed her last chapter spreading spiritual rays for the generation to come.

References

L.Ibungohal & N. Khelchandra: Cheitharol Kumbaba, 2012

Meishnam Jitendra, "Luwang Ningthou" Journal, produced by Ibudhou Luwangpokpa Haraoba Committee, 2004.

Meishnam Ibomcha: Meishnam Ningol Kumudini-Ibid, Page 11.

Meishnam Kesho Luwang - Meishnam Chane Kumudini, Maharani gi Khoiri Tapham, Meishnam Sagei Yumdaba Puya puthokpa - Meishnam Sagei Apunba Lup, Imphal, 2018 (74 P)

Social Welfare Dept - Saknaibi Nupising 1979 P100.

Dr. K. Sobita Devi - Traditional Dress of the Meitei, 1998.

Kunjalal Yendrembam-Maharani Kumudini, 2022.