CHAPTER II

MANIPUR UNDER THE BRITISH RULE
(1891-1947)
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INTRODUCTION:

In the first chapter it was given that in ancient Manipur, there was monarchical form of government with his council of ministers. The kings were god like as stated in the Manusmiriti. The king could protect the boundary and sovereignty of his country with his subjects. But occupied by aliened rulers and devastated them means they lost their political status. So one could witness the seldom reactions from the masses against the colonial masters (British) and the king, who ruled for the interest of themselves. It is part of people’s war to regain their lost sovereignty. So it is highly necessary to study the socio-political movement and agitation launch by the people of the state.

In Manipur, like in many other colonized countries, it was colonial administration in the 18th and 19th centuries that brought the new economic and political process. The coming of the British and its interference in the administration of the country was root cause of socio-political movements in Manipur. All the movements were the part of anti-
colonialism and anti-feudalism struggle fought by the people of Manipur since 1891. During this period one could find notable anti-colonial and the anti-feudal struggle launched by both hill and valley people, viz Nupi Lal Ahanba (First Women Agitation), 1904; Thoubal Agitation, 1913; Kuki rebellion, 1917 – 1919; Zadonang Movement (from 1921 onwards); Irawat Movement (1934 – 1950). Even the same aspiration seems to reflect in the minds of non state actor in this on-going political violence in Manipur.

In the previous pages it was given that in ancient Manipur, people seldom reacted in the administration of the government because of monarchical form of government. There was little input from people. Administrative decision in the form of output was fanned out. But mounting of discontentment among the people because of spoon feeding of economic and political values and disorder of social process made their struggle both inevitable and necessary. As a part of political participation, it is highly necessary to study the socio-political movement and agitation launched by the people of the state. The passive reaction against the government is an important ingredient of political participation and also political study is a part and parcel of social study as was pointed out by Talcott Parsons. It may also give indication of political status of the existing system.

Before writing a brief survey about the politico-social movements of Manipur, it is desirable to know them. Politico-social movements are part of collective behaviour. People’s participation is based on the macro political level in order to bring a change in certain social institution or to create an entirely new order. Most of the scholars distinguish the term social and political movements on the ground that the former is related to social activities and the latter to only administration of the state. Bruce Cameron remarked that “A social movement occurs when a fairly large number of people band together in order to alter or supplant some portion of the existing culture or social order”. A progressive society cannot remain static. After purifying undesirable social values with the help of social reformation by launching different social movements, an infrastructure of political ideas could be made through ages. A social being presupposes a political being. All movements are related to political movements. All have political implication even though their members do not strive for political power. In other words, society is a general system in which there are economic, political and social sub-systems. If there is any

3. Yaima L. and Maipaksana R.K. 1983. Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha, p.171-72. In 1934 the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was formed with the Maharaja as its president. This social organisation was replaced by a political one in 1938 at Chinga session.
strain among these sub-systems there must be movement. No social movement is likely to take place without the presence of sub-systems’ strain.\textsuperscript{5} That is why, all movements either social or political are shaped and coloured by group interest and in turn, they contribute significantly to the character of the whole political system.\textsuperscript{6} Popular reaction from the articulative section of people can save and shape the government. The question of individual and group organisational participation in the movement is based on different political development of that society. The vast and competing welter of desires which the state confronts among its members, only some are selected for implementation. Only the effective demand has become, therefore, irresistible.

**CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIO-POLITICAL MOVEMENT:**

The following are the characteristics of socio-political movements in Manipur together. There was no movement launched by any of the inhabitants of Manipur. Firstly, movements of Manipur started were sporadic and localised. The Meetei, the Hao (Naga), the Pangan (Muslim), and the Mayang (Outsiders)\textsuperscript{7} had moved separately. In reality, all these movements before independence were launched by the Meetei and the Hao (both Naga and Kuki) separately. Only in statehood movement during

\begin{itemize}
\item S.K. Dubey, 1982. "*Inter Ethnic Alliance*" from the Tribal Movements and Integration in North East India, Edited by K.S. Singh Vol.1, p.2
\item Laski H.J., "An Introduction to Politics, 1944, p.15. The authority of a state is a function of its ability to satisfy the effective demands that are made upon it.
\item All Movements launched in the pre-independence period were not organised by the different communities of Manipur except in case of Thoubal Agitation and Kuki Rebellion. But their number is very few.
\end{itemize}
1960’s all sections of the people took part. All movements were sentimental. Secondly, discontentment of people mainly based on economic values and malpractices of the ruling people could not bring political consciousness. Their movement was against specific discontentment. In short, their aims and objects were confined to a very limited area. If they got it, they remained silent until another problem came up. For example, women agitation and Thoubal agitation were launched by the people against the government. Manipuris were carrying state servants’ luggage known as Pothang, feeding and guarding them without payment. The people were heavily taxed for decorating chandon (a paste of sandal wood) on the forehead of all Hindu Meiteis. Therefore, they had launched movement against these oppressive measures. They remained silent only after removal of such measures. Nevertheless, these movements were stepping stones for getting political consciousness and played a great positive role in the gradual developing process of political and social life of the country.

Mention may be made of the movement led by Hijam Irawat in pre-independence and other revolutionary leaders like N. Bishesore and R. K. Tulachandra in the post-independence period. In the movement headed by Irawat, people had no full political consciousness though it had political party and organisation. Thirdly, one character of our

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8. Manipuris includes all people inhabiting Manipur. The Author gives emphasis on Meetei and Nagas only as all socio-political movements in Manipur were launched by them.
movement is hiding of group consciousness. Very few had political consciousness and got political titbit. Manipuri movement was leader dominated and as such the people had a little participation only in making and implementing policy. Lastly, another characteristic of movements in Manipur was that every political movement was preceded by a social movement. Moreover, all movements launched in the pre-independence period had the same goal. All were against the forced labour. That indicated Manipuris’ love for freedom.

**TYPOLOGY OF MOVEMENT'S:**

In connection with typology of 'movements, we need to see them from two periods i.e. pre-independence and post-independence. In pre-independence, we get two types of movements they were anti British movement and against the native rulers. First Nupilal (First Women Agitation, 1904), Khongjai Lal (Kuki rebellion, 1917 - 1919), and Jadonang Movement (1925-1931) were against the colonial rulers. Thoubal Lal (Thoubal Agitation, 1913) was against the native ruler. Irawat movement and, second Nupilal of 1939 were against both British and Native rulers. After independence, we had Statehood Movement, Sanamahi Movement, Foreigner’s issue and some other revolutionary movement like Peoples Liberation Army (P. L. A.), People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (P. R. E. P. A. K.), United Nation at Liberation Front (U. N. L. F.) and Kangleipak Communist Party (K. C. P.) etc. These were against Indian Union. If we examine those movements or agitations, we come to
understand that all movements except revolutionary movement were constitutional.

**A BRIEF SURVEY OF MOVEMENTS:**
**Nupilal Ahanba (First Women Agitation 1904)**

A short duration of Women Agitation of Manipur in 1904 made a great stepping stone to the wide political platform of Manipur. Like the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 which was mercilessly subdued by the British, it served awakening to Manipuris and showed that the British were not something to be worshipped. But the movement was launched by a very few people. They could understand the rare instrument of political participation i.e., passive reaction. With the help of it they could fight for their political freedom from the imperial yoke. This Women’s Agitation was backed by men who had been disarmed after the battle of 1891. A number of factors are responsible for the outbreak of the agitation. That may be social, economic and political.

The Meetei had conventional character of loyalty to the royal family. People were quite upset psychologically and also demoralised at the loss of their sovereignty. They had a great tendency to revenge against the British. On 15th July, 1904 the bungalows of Captain Nattal and Mr. Dulop were destroyed by fire at night and again on 4th August another bungalow of the same persons was also burnt down after midnight. The

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British people could get a stick with an oil rag attached. So they decided that it was an organised work of some people of Manipur particularly urban people. Smelling that this was done by some prominent leaders of the urban area, Maxwell, the superintendent of the state of Manipur issued an order on 30\textsuperscript{th} September, 1904. He ordered Manipuris to rebuild the bungalows which were burnt down and also asked the people of Imphal to extract teak wood from the Kabaw Valley and construct the house.\textsuperscript{10} Most of the Manipuris were suffering from the oppressive measures of the British. So they made a written representation to the British authorities to cancel the order. Chingsaba Natak Singh of Sagolband on behalf of the people submitted it to the British authority. But, Maxwell refused their plea. People were more disappointed. In the event of failure to carry out his order to rebuild the bungalow, a punitive force would be posted in the town and the inhabitants would have to pay monthly the cost of the force. The merciless attitude of the British added fuel to the fire and they decided not to obey the order of the British.

Besides, there were some political factors also which influenced the agitation. They were:

\textsuperscript{10} Order of Mr. Maxwell, 1904. Superintendent of the "- Manipur State, 30 September,\textsuperscript{,} p.5. In his order, it is mentioned that "... if the people decline to carry out the order an application will be made to the local government for permission to quarters upon them a force of punitive police at their own expense".
1. The selection of Churachand as king was against the Chatlam Luptin of Manipur.\textsuperscript{11}

2. Manipuris resented the insulting order of disarming the whole population. At the beginning they collected about 400 fire-arms.\textsuperscript{12}

3. Various oppressive measures including force labour were very unpopular. \textsuperscript{13}

4. The severe harassment of the British greatly affected the economic life of Manipur. They proposed to acquire a sum of rupees two and a half lakhs from the state of Manipur as a token of punishment for the disturbances of 1891. The British collected Rs. 50,000.00 as a tribute from the Manipur state. The British authorities proposed to impose tax from the valley at the rate of Rs. 2/- per house and Rs. 3/- from a family in the hill areas of the Manipur. Being poor, the people considered it a great burden. Moreover the policy of free trade was adopted by the British. Under this policy the British authorities exported thousands of maunds of rice freely to Kohima.\textsuperscript{14} As a result, people of Manipur began to face the problem of scarcity of rice.

\textsuperscript{11} Notification (No. 1862-E, dated, the 18 September 1891) in the Gazette of India, No. 1700-E, dated the 21 August, 1891. Reproduction in Reid’s “History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam” 1983, p.70. People firmly believed that according to the traditional convention of the country the vacant throne would have to be filled up either by the ex-Maharaja Surachandra, who was deposed from the throne by the 1890’s Palace Revolt or by his eldest son. Instead Churachand, son of Chaobi Yaima, six years old, and great grandson of Raja Narasingh of Manipur was selected by the Governor-General in Council.

\textsuperscript{12} Letter No. 144 dated Manipur the 21st May 1892 from Maxwell Superintendent of the state to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.

\textsuperscript{13} After 1890, Manipur had Manipur Standing army. They were divided by the British into four squads. In every two weeks one squad marched to Khuzuma, very far from Imphal and carried back rations required for the British troops. The average load of each man was about twenty seers. When the British soldiers marched to different places of Manipur they used Manipuris as porters.

\textsuperscript{14} Administration Report of Manipur 1892-93, p.3.
People resolved in a meeting not to obey the order of the British. Six Rajkumars were arrested and expelled from Manipur on November 10, 1904. This order demoralised Manipuris. So some persons of Imphal began to supply the building materials and prepared to rebuild the house. In the meantime, Womenfolk of Manipur made a big demonstration for several days. They reacted against the rulers. The authorities had great tendency to correct their mistakes. Because they knew that these women were backed by men. This great agitation launched by women of Manipur severely paralysed all departments of administration. As a consequence, the British withdrew the order for the reconstruction of the building. The people of Manipur understood the value of massive reaction against the government.

THOUBAL AGITATION:

Another agitation launched by villagers of Manipur against the system of ‘Pothang’ (carrying state servants luggage without payment), ‘Chakat’ (feeding state servants) and ‘Yarak Santri’ (guarding the state servants at night when they came to villages) was also very important

though it was short lived. The Agitation was started in ‘early 1913.\textsuperscript{16} It was done mainly by the people of Nambo\textsuperscript{l} and Thoubal. But, besides demands for abolishing Pothang, Chakat, and Yarak Santri, people of Thoubal demanded construction of road from Thoubal to Mayang Imphal also. In olden days, Thoubal was composed of small Khuls (villages) of Thoubal Achouba, Thoubal Kshetri Leikai, Thoubal Ningombam, Thoubal Sabaltongba, Thoubal Moijing, Khekman, Keibung, Thoubal Leisangthem, Thoudam, and Irong. People of these villages went to Mayang Imphal on the bank of the Thoubal river. It made great inconvenience for trade and communication. Their grievances could not be redressed. The movement came to be known as Thoubal Agitation. The leaders of the agitation were Thokchom Thokchao Khema Choukidar, Hangoichura, Waikha Pheijao, Yumnam Mera, Tanjou and Mohamad Alip-chaoba.\textsuperscript{17} Many villagers assembled and demonstrated before the Durbar and the palace.\textsuperscript{18}

Several people were imprisoned. Nevertheless their agitation was successful. All forced labour was forbidden. But the land revenue was increased by annas-3-per rupee. Small fisheries and grass mahals were sold by auction. Both urban and rural people participated in the political affairs of the state and they began to realise the value of effective demand.

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{17} This information was given by Yumnam Ongbi Chaobi Devi (98 years) daughter of Khema Choukidar.
\end{thebibliography}
KUKI REBELLION\(^9\) (Khongjai Lal):

Khaikhtintha克 Kipgen maintained that it was purely “Thadou Gaal” (Thadou war). Kuki was a generic term signifying several tribes like Paite, Hmar, Thadou, Gangte, Vaiphei, Zou, Kom, Chiru, Anal etc. He further mentioned that “all tribes of Manipur except the Nagas were known as Kukis. Moreover, the 20 chiefs and the other leaders of the uprising who were imprisoned at Sodia and Taunggi (Burma) belonged to Doungel, Kipgen, Haokip, Sithou, Rholhou, Singron, Lupheng and Lotjem clans of the Thadous. It is also recorded that all the non-Thadou and old Kuki tribes as well as the Nagas remained loyal during the Kuki rebellion. Therefore the Thadou Gaal or the Khongjai Lal (as was described by the Meetei) is more appropriate”\(^{20}\). But the Zous claimed that they also fought against the British in the same year. So they claimed that it is better to call it Kuki rebellion.

CAUSES:

Firstly, the British colonial system directly affected the tribal people who loved freedom and wanted to be ruled by their local rulers. After

19. Tribal History of Eastern India, 1973, p.44 Kuki Tribes consists of the old and new Kuki. The old and new Kukis are obviously of the same race, and points of divergence arising from their having settled at different periods are not so great. The Kukis are now found as neighbours of Naga in Assam and scattered in Northern Cachar and Manipur. They are described as a nation of hunters and warriors, they ruled as a nation by their principal hereditary chief’s. According to Dr. Grierson the term New Kukis may be taken as synonymous, with the Thadou clan. The clan is very large and Thadous entered Manipur hills at about the middle of the 18th Century. The Thadou inhabited Dampi, Sangmao, Khaochangbong, Dulen and Laijang in the west, Chasat, Maokot, Dehtum and Phaisat in the east, and Henglap and Loikai in the south.

1891, the hill tribes were brought under the direct administration of the British. They introduced a house tax of Rs. 3/- per annum. They had to render forced labour and direct adjudication of tribal customary cases disturbed their society which was based on barter economy. And Kuki rebellion was the result. Secondly, it took place towards the close of the First World War - 2,000 Nagas and Kukis were forcibly recruited for serving as coolies in France. These people were engaged in digging trenches, carrying loads, building roads and base camps. But in 1917 more of them were needed for second batch to be recruited from various Kuki clans inhabiting hill regions of Manipur. The Kuki tribes particularly Thadou strongly resented. They showed their resentment in action against the British after a meeting was made between political Agent and two leaders of Mombi and Longya, Ngulkhup and Nungbul. Master brain of Kuki rebellion were Enjakhup, a Kuki ex-sepoys of the Naga hills battalion, Chingakham Sanajaoba and Ngulkhukhai.

Lastly, Higgins, Assistant Political Officer and Deputy Inspector General tried to arrest Ngulbul. The Longja Valley was burnt down but

23. This rebellion was greatly shared by Chingakham Sanajaoba and his three companies of sepoys and 8 expert swordsmen. Chingakham Sanajaoba was a Manipuri who was once annoyed by the Maharaja of Manipur for living with his disciples at Kumbi, near Moirang. He went to Ukha and formed an alliance with the chiefs of Henglup, Mombi, Longya and Ukha and declared his firm confidence that the rule of British was coming to an end.
Ngulbul could not be arrested. It led to distribution of sazam,\textsuperscript{26} Thinkho (half burnt firewood) and Malchom (red chilli) among the Thadou chiefs to declare war against the British. It took three years, cost 28 Lakhs of rupees and many lives. The rebellion ended in 1919 owing to shortage of food. It broke out after the harvest of 1917. British forces operated a wide area and prevented then from sowing and reaping crop in 1918 and 1919 otherwise they would fight indefinitely.\textsuperscript{27} Kuki rebellion was an eye-opener for all tribes of Manipur in matters of revolution against the British. In future they had full knowledge of interaction among themselves and reaction against the government.

**THE ZADONANG MOVEMENT:**

The Zadonang movement is rooted in primarily against the excesses of Kuki rebellion of 1917 and secondarily against the British Raj. The British indifference towards the Zelianrong Naga tribes of Manipur during and after Khongjai Lal (Kuki rebellion, 1917 - 1919) was the main cause of the movement.\textsuperscript{28} It had political social and religious objectives. It was an awakening of Naga people for the modification of social and religious taboos. It injected the idea of inter-tribal unity and solidarity among the Nagas.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sazam are pieces of meat, distributed during to a number of chiefs as a signal of request military alliance.
\item Robert Reids, 1942. *History of Frontier Areas Bordering Assam*, p.166.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
At last it took the shape of political aspiration i.e., Naga Raj. This movement covered three tribes viz. Zerni, Liangmei and Rongmei, the prefixes of each of these three names were taken and combined into one name 'Zeliangrong' (Ze + Liang + Rong). The Zemies and Liangmeis were sometimes known as Kacha Nagas\textsuperscript{29} and the Rongmeis as Kabui.\textsuperscript{30}

The leader of the movement was Haipo Jadonang, a young Rongmei Naga of Puilon (Kambiron) village of Tamenglong Sub-division.\textsuperscript{31} Though the uprising is commonly known as Jadonang movement, the Zeliangrong were the principal participants. After the Kuki uprising, Jadonang movement was the next major uprising in Manipur. The two uprisings differed in many respects. The Kuki uprising was basically "Anti-British intra-tribal and intra-dynastic" in character.

The Naga uprising was the combination of till following forces-socio-religious revivalism Anti-British and some sort of rudimentary tribal nationalism.

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\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{30} Rani Gaidinleu was of the opinion that the original name of Kabuis was Mapui, which of British administration distored as Kabui. There are three divisions among Kabui, the Zemi, the Liangmei and the Rongmei who have many similarities in their custom, traditions and ethnic characteristics. The Zemi are concentrated in the eastern portion of the North Hills at Asalu, Laisong, Thringi, Hajaisak, Hajailo, Baladhan and Hangrum. The Liangmei are mainly spreaded over the South-Western parts of Nagaland, and the Rongmei form the majority of the Kabui population in the Tamenglong district of Manipur.

So his goal was to revitalise and reform their traditional religious rites and beliefs in the face of advancing Christianity, to reorganise and integrate tribes referred to as Kacha Nagas; to remove inter-village and inter-tribal ill-feelings; to organise tribal people for the struggle against foreign rulers in order to achieve independence; to free themselves from the suppressive and exploitative rules and orders of the foreign administration and officials and to establish an independent Naga Raj.

Jadonang’s political aim was the establishment of a Naga Raj by driving away the foreign rulers i.e., the British. So he appealed to the Zeliangrong people to disobey unjust laws, to stop payment of taxes. His social programme was the integration of the three tribes by putting an end to inter-village, inter-tribal ill feelings. In the religious sphere, he abolished or modified many unnecessary taboos of birth and death ceremonies. He introduced some innovations in the traditional religion such as construction of temple which did not exist in the past.

Jadonang was caught by the British and hanged on 29 August, 1931 at Imphal on the charge of making human sacrifice of traders to pacify his God. From the Jadonang movement we come to understand that the movement was launched by Jadonang and his followers to modify

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32. The four Meetei betal-leaf traders who were staying at a daru bungalow on their way to Silchar were killed, their heads cut off and the skulls broken into small fragments for ritual distribution among Jadonang disciples in order to display conquest and sacrifice to deity. Finding the movement dangerous to the British empire, the Government resolutely decided to nip it in the bud.
social and religion taboos. Then it expressed political aspiration as demanding of Naga Raj. In other words they were gradually becoming as political actors and took sharing in the political participation.

**IRAWAT MOVEMENT:**

Hijam Irawat Singh acted with toiling masses in the social, political and economic systems of Manipur. He challenged the legitimacy of the then administration which had hitherto allowed them no outlet for articulation of their interest though he was a member of the prestigious Durbar (Sadar Panchayat).

**POLITICAL MOBILISATION:**

Irawat understood that without organised platform it would not be possible to remove social and political evils including administration and the system of imperial domination. So he took up political mobilisation which can give a definite shape to the people. He gave his political message to peasants. He established Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha which

His slogans were:  
Bande Mataram, give full responsible government, election by universal franchise, hill and plain are one, stop Yarak Santri, stop peon Administration, abolish “Potang, abolish the auction of hills and lakes, remove toll station, give hills to villagers, stop ferry tax, make a maund of 40 seers, peasants should fix price of paddy, abolish large scale land ownership, land to the tiller, establish Krishak Majdoor Raj, etc.
subsequently came to be known as Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{34} Its first session was held on May 30, 1934 at Rashmandal of the palace. The Maharaja was the president and Irawat, the vice-President of the Mahasabha. The initial task was to ensure cohesion of all Hindu Meeteis of Manipur, Burma and Cachar district of Assam in order to present a united front culturally and ethnically. Attempts were also made to remove the differences between the Meeteis and Bishnupriya.\textsuperscript{35}

The motive of the Maharaja was to control the leading educated elites of the state through the Sabha. Irawat knew the trick played by the Maharaja in the Organisation.\textsuperscript{36} The number of founder members of the Sabha were a few in number.\textsuperscript{37} The original members of the sabha were Hijam Irawat, Sorokhaibam Thambou, Nongmaithem Thanil, Hijam Anganghal, Hijam Angouba, Lourembam Kamdev, Longjam Ningthemjao, Huidrom Birahari and Takhelambam Damodar Singh.

Irawat was the only person who had definite political views. His tendency to challenge the king was too great. At that time the religious

and social oppressions carried out by the Brahma Sabha on the common people were unbearable. Maharaja Churachand being a poor prince, agreed undue collection of money.

He exploited the people. Besides, the state also imposed many levies on the common people. Irawat had started to move against these excesses of Brahmins and the king. Then, the Maharaja gradually withdrew from the Mabasabha. The Mahasabha in the Chinga session in 1938 was renamed as Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha by dropping the word ‘Hindu’.

In the session, Mahasabha was converted into a political party and Irawat was elected the president of it. This conference had the following demands:

i) A fully responsible government for Manipur;

ii) Administration of the hills and valley of Manipur. (Thereby meaning that both hills and valley must be under one and the same administration)

Brahma Sabha was the highest authority on Hindu religious affairs in Manipur. It was presided over by the king. Members of the Sabha used to ostracise a family or village at their sweet will and when the ostracised person paid some amount of money he would be declared clean and readmitted in the Hindu society. Hundreds and thousands of poor people suffered under such outrageous action. This was known as Mangba-Sengba controversy.

There was a fixed rate for one to become sacred after he or she had been declared unsacred. If a person had been declared unsacred by a Ratan or the Brahma Sabha or the king, he or she had to pay fifty rupees or eighty-five rupees and twenty three pies or five hundred rupees respectively to the concerned authority if he or she wished to become sacred. The amount varied from person to person and from case to case.

39. Chinga session was the 4th session of Mahasabha, which was chaired by Hijam Irawat, 2nd and 3rd session were held in Silchar and Mandle in 1936 and 1937.
iii) Release of Rani Gaidinliu,
iv) Abolition of feudal levies (Pothang, Yarek-santri, Chakat and Chandon Senkhai). 40

Irawat Singh demanded the abolition of Manipur State Durbar which was composed of nominee of the king. The resolutions of the Mahasabha were submitted to the state government. The Manipur state Durbar declared the Mahasabha a political party and directed all the government servants who were associated with it to resign. Irawat who was a judge, resigned from his office. Elangbam Tampok, who worked in Revenue Department, also resigned and became the General Secretary of the Mahasabha.

As a consequence of this movement some makeshift reforms were introduced in administration of justice, law and order, local self-government and land records as a remedy for political discontent in the state. But it was more of an illusory nature and the supremacy of the Durbar remained unchallenged.

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40. Pothang-Carrying state servants’ luggage without payment; Yarek-Santri-Guarding the state servants at night when they came to villages; Chakat-Feeding state servants; Chandon Senkhai-Subscription of a little amount of money for decorating Chandon (a paste of sandal wood) on the forehead of all Hindu Meeteis).
NUPIILAL AS PART OF HIS MOVEMENT:

The agitation launched by womenfolk of Manipur popularly known as Nupilal (Women agitation of 1939) provided opportunity for action for Hijam Irawat. He gave the information of national movement of India led by Mahatma Gandhi to all people of Manipur through Mahasabha. These ideas could spark off discontentment to all, particularly to womenfolk. So he was trying to discard the autocratic rule of the king, supported by the imperial power. Confrontation with administration took place when Marwari traders with the connivance of the Maharaja exported rice from Manipur.

The economic exploitation by traders was so rampant in Manipur that traders used to purchase paddy for their mills at a nominal price and exported rice to other places. Irawat gave his maximum effort to end such injustices.

42. Manipuri womenfolk articulated political ideas more than menfolk. On 7th January, 1940 Irawat said, “Remember the Telegraph Office incident. We begged for rice and in return received bayonet wounds and wound from gun-butts. For one handful of rice we paid two handfuls of blood. Had we not paid blood, we should not have succeeded in closing the export of rice. The export of rice has been stopped and the mills closed at the cost of blood of a Brahmani woman who has shed her blood for the sake of food. So menfolk should no longer remain silent through fear of arrest and going to jail. It is no right to be afraid of Jail walls. See what were the condition of Japan and Russia. Rise up and be united. Womens work is finished and now the time has come for men, let us take revenge for the split blood of the Brahmani”.
43. Rajni Devi, 1985. Nupilal, p.11. Rajni Devi, a leader of Nupilal, mentioned about him: in her book ‘Nupilal’ that we all women were illiterate, so we went to Mahasabha headed by Irawat and requested him to write our officials letters and others. Mahasabha accepted it and gave maximum help to us.
On 12 December 1939, Manipuri women held a demonstration before the state office and requested the Durbar to ban export of rice and stop all rice mills. Armed policemen and military personnel attempted to subdue agitators by force and in that connection several ladies were arrested and some others were injured. Meetings were held regularly at Police Bazar. The speaker of these meetings were members of Mahasabha. On the 9th January 1940, the leader of the Mahasabha was arrested by the police. On 13th January, the Durbar passed orders forbidding all meetings at Police Bazar. A big meeting was successfully held against the order of the government. The state authorities found unable to disperse the crowd. Women then resorted to boycott of the Khwairamband Bazar in the British reserve which was the most important Manipuri market. It was occupied entirely by women who used to sell all produce of Manipur.

The Bazar was within the jurisdiction of the Political Agent and it was estimated that over two thousand women used to sit inside the sheds and probably twice as many outside.

In relation with this movement, two members of the Mahasabha had gone to Assam. They contacted Shree Gopinath Bardoloi, who had

45. Ibid., p.2, Now the site is occupied by Manipur Dramatic Union (MDU).
46. Confidential D.O. No. 5660 GBC Grimson, Political Agent to J.P. Mills Secretary to the Governor of Assam, 21 March, 1941; File No. 38. C of 1940 (G.S.); The Assamiya, 27 January, 1940.
already tendered resignation from the Congress Ministry, and taking a
letter of introduction from him they proceeded to Calcutta to wait on
Gandhiji. There they apprised him of the situation.47

During the course of the movement Irawat made efforts to boost
up the morale of women agitators and ensure organisational cohesion of
the movement. He was however arrested on a charge of rebellion and
delivering lectures supporting the cause of women war. Significantly,
Irawat and his party workers created awareness among the people for
ensuring an end to economic exploitation and the Bazar boycott movement
ultimately projected a number of demands including for constitutional
reforms. Thus he mobilised Manipuri women successfully in women
agitation.

FORMATION OF ORGANISATIONS IN MANIPUR:

Maximum efforts were made by Irawat to mobilise peasants
simultaneously with women agitation. It was looked upon as a threat to
Maharaja's rule. His proposal to start non-payment of revenue received
ready support from peasants and they demonstrated their strength on 28
January, 1940 in a procession led by Tompok Singh, Secretary, Manipur
Praja Sanmilan. While Irawat was in Jail, his view was supported by all
organisations of Manipur. They were Manipur Praja Sanmilan, Manipur

Krishak Sanmilan, Manipur Youth League, Manipur Mahila Sangh and Manipur Students Federation. These organisations worked together for responsible government in Manipur. Irawat was the master brain of these organisations.

**IRAWat AS A REVOLUTIONARY :**

Irawat was a rigid critic of feudalism and colonialism and always forwarded to overthrow such political system. His idea was based on force of peasants and he knew grievances of Manipuris of both hill and valley. So his political inspiration was for the sake of the downtrodden because 90 % of the population of Manipur were peasants out of which 80 % were landless lumpen proletariat according to the estimate of the Kishan Sabha. Like other renowned revolutionary leaders of the world, he was also able to build up revolutionary organisations and mobilised masses under his charisma. At first he wanted to adopt the policy of non-violence as a means for the fulfillment of his political goal. With this conviction at the early stage of his work he embraced the idea of parliamentary democracy and worked within the core of the system. He, therefore, distributed leaflets, pamphlets and, also published his weekly paper “Anouba yug” regularly in which he criticised the policy of the government and also pointed out defects of the then existing social system of the country. So he was not primarily in favour of any type of violent activities.
From the movement of Irawat people could produce good political actors. Most of them were participating in the political affairs of both Manipur and India since 1934.

Thus, when one studies political status of any particular state, he has to see the political behaviour of people towards the existing system. The notable political attitude of the masses is having tendency to fight against the colonialism and feudalism. Even demanding of responsible government by the people of Manipur before Indian Independence is sign of people's political consciousness to see the dawn of democracy.