Chapter I

Introduction: Theoretical Context

Hijam Irawat Singh’s name has been variably used (idem sonans) as “Irabot”, “Irabat” and “Irawat”. The last one i.e., Irawat is now commonly used, officially as well as for research purposes or otherwise. The People’s Age, the Organ of the Communist Party of India, dated 30th December, 1945, in the election supplement describes him as “Poor Orphan to People’s Hero – Builder of Manipuris’ Freedom Movement”. In this issue he has been briefly described as, the unquestioned leader of the Manipur State (Assam) people and a legendary hero of Manipur.¹

The widely hitherto accepted view about the birth place, genealogy and clan allegiance of Irawat that he was born on 30th September 1896, at Pishum Oinam Leikai in the family of Hijam Ibungohal and Chongtham Chanu Thambalngangbi Devi, is now contested following new researches on his life. The actual birth place of Irawat is now said to be at Yaiskul Hijam Leikai, the western portion of the present location of the 1st Battalion of the Manipur Rifles.² This view has been affirmed by Indukumar, a nephew of Irawat.³ Moreover, according to Indukumar, citing the Hijam Sagei Puya (Genealogical scripture of the Hijam Clan) as well as some informed personalities, there is no record of any Hijam family settlement at Pism Oinam

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¹ P.C. Joshi, ed., People’s Age, No.7. Dec., 30, 1945, Bombay, 1945, pp. 1-3. (It is the organ of the Communist Party of India.)
³ Hijam Indukumar Singh, nephew of Irawat, Personal Interview taken on 24th October, 2015. For details see Appendix No. 1.
Leikai. Perhaps, briefly the Ibungohal’s family might have been shifted to Pisum Oinam Leikai, as a consequence of eviction carried out for the establishment of the British Reserved Area.

On the other hand there are suggestions from different quarters that the Hijam Sagei (Hijam Clan) to which Irawat belongs to, is not the original Hijam. Indukumar suggests that, there were different stages of the change of allegiance of the Hijam Sagei, under certain circumstances. Originally it was Laitonjam, and then a few of its households converted to Huirem, then ultimately to Hijam, a clan which has been already in existence.

Ibungohal died while Irawat was very young. In fact he was a small time betel leaf and nut trader who used to travel frequently to Cachar for business purposes. He was believed to be mysteriously murdered on his way to Cachar, which still remained un-absolved.\textsuperscript{4} Ibungohal’s wife Thambal also did not live long. With their death, Hijam Gopal Singh, younger brother of Ibungohal of Naorem Leikai along with his wife Tharongangbi Devi, had taken care of Irawat’s early upbringing along with their other children, Gouramani and Ibempishak. Gopal by profession was a Kabaw (Myanmar) trader.\textsuperscript{5}

Indukumar, suggests that Irawat was the eldest son of Gopal and Tharongangbi. Perhaps, due to economic pressure the family of Gopal considered more viable shifting their residence at the Sougaijams. On the insistence of Ibeni (Ibeton) Devi, the younger sister of Hijam Ibungohal and Gopal, Tharongoubi went to stay at the residence of Sougaijam Ibouchou Singh, husband of Ibeni Devi, who was a Darbar

\textsuperscript{4} Indukumar, \textit{op. cit.}  
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
Member. She (Tharongoubi) sold out her homestead land at Naorem Leikai. Henceforth, till Irawat’s last schooling days in Dhaka was taken care of by Ibeni, his paternal aunt. However, his childhood was not a happy one, for he still had to face many hardships. He had to work as a cook in a student’s mess for getting a little education because he could not afford even the monthly tuition fees of four annas.

Irawat is arguably regarded as the pioneer of many trending-setting movements in Manipur and its neighbouring areas, especially in Assam. The present research broadly covers the period from 1936 to 1959, viz., when the First Session of the All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS) was held in Lucknow till the official announcement and confirmation about the death of Irawat was made by the Communist Party of India (CPI), Manipur State Council (MSC). Nonetheless, it focuses more on his participation and leadership, under the banner of the CPI in the North East region of India, for the period of 1943-1959.

The CPI during the concerned period had adopted and followed different policies and programmes, namely: Right Deviation line; Left Sectarian Deviation line; Chinese or Telangana path; and lastly Constitutional line, one after another. It is in this perspective that the Communist Movement in North East India is being analysed.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Researches and write-ups on Hijam Irawat Singh have been started from the early 1970s onwards in the form of booklets (journal length), books, pamphlets, souvenirs, journals, even theses. So far, these texts have been written on various levels, ranging

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6 Sanajaoba, 2007, op. cit., p. 27.
7 P.C. Joshi, ed., People’s Age, Dec., 30, 1945, op. cit.
from state to regional. The genres of literature produced so far discuss on nature which are biographic, socio-political, partially economic, etc. However, many grey areas still remain, which need better perspectives and understanding. Some studied his role, even during his Communist phase, from the Manipur centric outlook, partially covering his exile days in Surma Valley. What is found lacking is an in-depth analysis of various factors with greater application of Marxist theory.

So far, the role of Irawat in the Communist Movement on the regional level, especially after he was indoctrinated into Marxism in the Sylhet Jail, is yet to be done. Irawat, the first Communist from Manipur has not been studied purely from the Marxist perspectives. Taking this problem into consideration, the present research is being taken up, to give a better perspective and greater depth of the Communist Movement in the North East India, in which Irawat played a crucial role.

1.2 Brief and General Outline of the Marxist Theory

It is pertinent to have a brief and general outline of theoretical discourse of the ideas of Communism jointly propounded by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, commonly known as “Marxism”, which has been further developed by V.I. Lenin.

Way back in 1853, Marx had studied the Indian situation and put that British rule of the Indian sub-continent had to fulfil two contradictory missions – one of destroying the old, passive, unresisting and unchanging ‘Asiatic society’, and on the other, of regeneration by laying the material foundations of the Western society.\(^8\) By ‘regeneration’ he meant the political unity of India under the British rule which had

hitherto not been more consolidated. The introduction of telegraph, the native army trained by British officers, free press, native Indians educated reluctantly under English education system, introduction of steam engines, railways, modern industry resulting from the railway system, etc., would all contribute to strengthening unity brought by the sword of British. However, the Indians would not be able to reap any fruit from this, unless and until Indian themselves grow strong enough to overthrow the British yoke altogether or the British industrial proletariat class itself supplant their bourgeoisie ruling class.⁹

Incidentally, the above write up of Marx was done just a few years before the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857, also known as the ‘First War of Independence’ by some writers. This shows the understanding of social, economic and political situations prevailing in other parts of the world and the applicability of the Marxist tenants, wherever applicable.

In the Communist Manifesto (1848) and elsewhere, Marx and Engels very lucidly propounded the theory of modern Communism. Frederick Engels opines that the fundamental proposition of the Manifesto, which forms the nucleus, belongs to Marx. He expresses that proposition as under:

That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which it is built up, and from that which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; That the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 82-85.
history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, nowadays, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class – the proletariat – cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class – the bourgeoisie – without, at the same time, and once and for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class distinction, and class struggles.10

Engels in his review article written for Rheinische Zeitung on Marx’s Capital Volume I, on 12th October, 1867, announces the necessity of abolishing the capitalist mode of production. He writes in the following manner:

However much the few social-democratic parliamentarians may be at loggerheads with each other, we can be sure that all factions of this party will welcome the present book as their theoretical bible, as the armoury from which they will take their most telling arguments. . . . we here have before us a work which with undeniably rare scholarship presents the whole relationship of capital and labour in its connection with economic science as a whole . . . “to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society”, . . . to the conclusion that the whole “capitalist mode of production” must be abolished.11

Again, Engels in his review article written for Elberfelder Zeitung on the same volume of Marx, on 22nd October, 1867, exposes the duplicity of the entire capitalist system and challenges the capitalist economic theorists. He puts,

Fifty sheets of learned treatise to prove to us that the entire capital of our bankers, merchants, manufacturers and large landowners is nothing but the accumulated and unpaid

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labour of the working class! . . . This time Marx appeals with his unusual propositions not to the masses but to the men in science. It is up to them to defend their economic theories which are here attacked at their foundations, and give proof that capital is indeed accumulated labour but not accumulated unpaid labour.\textsuperscript{12}

The whole tenant of Marxism is based on the materialist concept of history. It is not accident that its opponents criticised it for neglecting other factors like, religion, philosophy, culture, traditions, and so on, which without any doubt impact upon human activities in all the epochs. On the other hand, Marx argues from his findings on Political Economy as under:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter onto definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.\textsuperscript{13}

From the above quotations it becomes clear that Marxism is a revolutionary theory which scientifically analyses the entire mode of capitalist production. It entails the exploitation of man by man in a capitalist society in the form of surplus value which are the accumulation of unpaid labour of the working class. With the further accumulation of wealth by the bourgeoisie class and the inherent law of capitalism, a stage would come that the exploited class could no longer tolerate. This results into


the intensification of the class-struggle which would ultimately prove to be the doom of capitalism. Marx and Engels converted the Hegelian concept of *Dialectical Idealism* into *Dialectical Materialism* by making materialism as the basis of understanding the world. Under the doctrine of *Dialectical Materialism* economy is the base on which all other superstructures are built upon.

Lenin has further appended and adapted this theory, and for this reason during the present era, it is commonly known as Marxism-Leninism. The movement these practical theoreticians and activists started is known as Communist Movement. It offers to the revolutionary movements, throughout the world, a scientifically based theory for both the individual and society. Again, it formulates the laws of development of socio-economic formations, of the historical role humans have to play. It also offers the concepts and methods through which men comprehend their own existence as well as the world about them. This would enable them to frame and realise human purposes in the world.

Marx and Engels, during their time had tried to establish such a system for the first time in human history. Much progress had been made towards this end. However, the first successful socialist revolution broke out in Russia under the leadership of V.I. Lenin in 1917, after more than 30 years of Marx’s death (14th March, 1883, London). With that the world has witnessed the establishment of the first Socialist State, which gave all round impetus for liberty, equality, progress and ‘emancipation from man by man exploitation’.

Lenin, on his part developed the Marxist doctrine to suit the changing times. During the era of Marx and Engels, Imperialism was not yet developed, though signs
of it were already there. Lenin calls Imperialism as the highest form of Capitalism, where the rate of exploitation of the working class in general and those of the colonial countries in particular, was at its highest level. Under the impact of the First World War (1914-1918), which he characterised as an ‘Imperialist War’ and the two ‘peace treaties’ viz., Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and Treaty of Versailles signed thereafter among the warring nations, affected universally throughout the world. Lenin puts the cause and effect of the Imperialist war in the following lines:

The tens of millions of dead and maimed left by the war—a war to decide whether the British or German group of financial plunderers is to receive the most booty—and those two “peace treaties”, are with unprecedented rapidity opening the eyes of the millions and tens of millions of people who are downtrodden, oppressed, deceived and duped by the bourgeoisie. Thus, out of the universal ruin caused by the war a world-wide revolutionary crisis is arising which, however prolonged and arduous its stages may be, cannot end otherwise than in a proletarian revolution and in its victory.\(^\text{14}\)

The successful introduction and implementation of Five Year Plans under the Soviet society gave an unprecedented impetus to the nationalist movements throughout the world. Not surprisingly, during the colonial era, the Russian Revolution (1917) inspired the freedom struggles in many colonies, which paved the way for liberation from the colonial yoke. The basic tenants of Communist Movement are based on the three main pillars viz., Independence, Democracy and Socialism.

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The Indian National Movement was not an exception from the impact of this all pervasive idea. In fact a section of the India intelligentsia had brought it to shore from the 1920s onwards. However, the date for the establishment of the CPI remains contested among sections of the Indian Communists. One section is of the view that it was formed in Taskent in 1920, while the other is of the view that it was formed in Kanpur in 1925. It was only in 1933 that the Party got its proper centre and programme; from hence it started functioning as a unit. With the ban imposed by the Central Authority (British Indian Government) in 1934, it had to take recourse to use the Indian National Congress (INC), especially the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) as its platform to further its cause.

It was in the early 1930s that CPI had for the first time started influencing the Trade Union movement in the North East India. The peasant movement did not lack behind and it progressed among the peasantry from the mid 1930s. In this regard the First Session of the AIKS held in 1936 in Lucknow and that of the Surma Valley in the same year, gave a major boost to the peasant movement in the region. Local communist parties started to function, especially in the Surma Valley area, though in a clandestine manner, as the Party was banned during that period. The leftist forces in the North East Indian region branched out into different streams, such as, CPI, Radicalist Party, Bolshevik Party, CSP, Socialist Party, Forward Block, etc. during the period under study but emphasis is given to CPI.
Irawat Singh was arrested on 9th January, 1940, for leading the Second Nupi Lan (Women’s War) of 1939-1940. His release on the 20th March, 1943, from Sylhet Jail, and exiled in the Surma Valley until March 1946, gave a new impetus to Communist Movement in North East India. He attended the First Congress of the CPI, held from 23rd May to 1st June, 1943, in Bombay, and his application for membership was officially accepted. It was of great significance for the Communist Movement in the region in general and Manipur in particular. In fact, the social and political movements led by Irawat, before he formally became a Communist, were more or less Communistic in nature. Therefore, he proclaims that, “Before understanding what a Communist is I was already a Communist”. Communism or Communistic ideas seemed to be naturally ingrained with him and his imprisonment and extended stay (exile) in the Surma Valley gave the inadvertent, but necessary temper, for furthering the cause of the movement in the region.

After returning to Manipur in March 1946, without losing much time, he chalked out the next course of his struggle which was outwardly social and democratic, but communistic in nature, following subtle and tactful methods. An undeniable hallmark of Irawat’s personality is, belief in the democratic values, for which he vehemently struggled throughout his life. Rather, his personality is an anti-thesis of the typical dictatorial type of leadership, which becomes synonymous with the contemporary politics of his times. To him democratic values and socio-economic equality of the people are inseparable for which he strongly demanded for political independence from foreign rule. He believed that unless and until peoples are liberated from both

the traditional and alien exploitative system, no meaningful freedom could be established or maintained. Therefore, political independence is pre-requisite for attending economic liberation and vice versa.

During Irawat’s time many crucial social and political challenges were faced, all seemingly insurmountable. However, virtually, no task was proved to be too big for him, as one after another, he extended his hand in bringing them to their logical conclusions. In Marxist philosophy he found means for both, formulating practical solutions for all forms of problem as well as long term vision. Nevertheless, perhaps, due to many bungling of policies and programmes from the side of the Politburo (PB) Central Committee (CC) of the CPI, the District Organising Committee (D.O.C.) or the Communists Party of Manipur as well as the Assam POC had to face many undesired consequences.

Irawat, being a person of multifaceted personality, achieved wide-ranging milestones in various fields. Born in a poor family and orphaned since his early childhood, apparently grew up in a very harsh environment. While alive, he was hounded by the government, yet after his death he has been elevated as an iconic leader of not only Manipur but perhaps for the entire North East India. In a way, his life is more akin to that of Marx, if a parallel is to be drawn. Lenin puts the treatment of life and death of Marx by the bourgeoisie scholars and State in the following manner:

During the lifetime of great revolutionaries, the oppressing classes constantly hounded them, received their theories with the most savage malice, the most furious hatred and the most unscrupulous campaigns of lies and slander. After their death, attempts are made to convert
them into harmless icons, to canonise them, so to say, and to hallow their names to a certain extent for the “consolation” of the oppressed classes and with the object of duping the latter, while at the same time robbing the revolutionary theory of its substance, blunting its revolutionary edge and vulgarising it.\(^{17}\)

Nonetheless, and not surprisingly, and also perhaps due to his gifted talents, Irawat went on to become the most beloved leader of the peoples. His legacy is passed down to the following generations, after his untimely death in September, 1951, in Burma (Myanmar). It is therefore, well-nigh a daunting task to cite all of his achievements and put in a correct perspective. Notwithstanding, the present study is an attempt towards that end, especially on the last phase of his life as a Communist.

1.3 Review of Literature

The following books are reviewed purely on the basis of what E.H. Carr has put as the ‘idea of progress’. Historical statements are not adjudged in absolute terms as completely true or completely false. Rather, they are treated in a more relative terms as ‘inadequate’ or ‘one-sided’ or ‘misleading’ or ‘rendered obsolete’ or ‘irrelevant’ as a result of ‘later evidence’.\(^{18}\)

Soyam Chatradhari Singh, *Manipur-ki Itihasta Irawat* (Manipuri language), published by the Manipur Krishak Sabha, Imphal, 1972. The author is an associate of Irawat. This book deals on the life and politics of Hijam Irawat Singh. It seems to be written in haste, which lacks sufficient research materials/documents, though the


author claims that he starts doing research from 1952 onwards, which results in presentation of facts and interpretation in a rather insufficient and incongruent ways. The author has subsequently made ‘necessary’ revisions and published an ‘improved’ version of the book, though the latter has been published by a different publisher.

Some of the points taken out from the first book are as follow:

(i) Chatradhari opines that Irawat is against merger of Manipur with the Indian Union on 15th October, 1949, citing the resolutions adopted in a Krishak Sabha Conference at Nambol (Chatradhari, 1972: 46-47). On this issue Irawat had major differences with the State Congress Party which had launched the movement for the abolition of kingship and the integration of Manipur with India (Chatradhari, 1972: 68-69);

(ii) Irawat had difference with CPI (Chatradhari, 1972: 68);

(iii) Tonjam Basna of Cachar, who was deputed by the Assam POC criticised Irawat for his anti-merger stand which was against the stand of the CPI Central leadership (Chatradhari, 1972: 71-72);

(iv) The reason for Irawat’s visit to Burma (Myanmar) was for seeking the help of the Burmese Communists for establishing an independent Socialist Republic of Manipur (Chatradhari, 1972: 73).

Points of diversion and conversion between the two books

In the enlarged version of the book by the same writer with the same title, published in 1996, by Soyam Publication, Imphal, the above mentioned points are shifted with a slightly modified interpretation but retaining more or less, most of the
ideas put up in the first book. Some of the points of diversion and conversion are as follows:

In the former book, Irawat spelled out his ideas in a Conference of Krishak Sabha held at Nambol. While in second edited volume published in 1996, his earlier standpoint of the merger issue is drastically changed in a meeting of Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha (Chatradhari, 1996: 73). He has landed forcefully without any substantive documents that Irawat seems to have a pro-merger attitude. Pertaining to the said Krishak Sabha Conference, there is no resolution regarding the merger agenda which has been resolved in the Nambol session except a few resolutions relating to anti-Purbanchal stand of the Sabha, reduction of taxes, war compensation etc. (Chatradhari, 1996: 70). Surprisingly enough, in the later part of the book, Chatradhari remarks a contradictory statement which creates more confusion about Irawat’s position on the merger issue in such a way, “The political stand of Irawat was anti-Purbanchal, anti-merger” (Chatradhari, 1996: 82). Regarding the issue of making Prubanchal state under Couplan Plan, Irawat’s objection is very clear. However, there is no clear picture on the stand of Irawat as far as merger issue is concerned.

The second book, that is, the second edition of the first book, the author adds some of the first hand information that narrates interesting story about Irawat, which recollects human experiences during the underground period. This fascinating account is not surprising, as the author has been involved in some of the events, he is narrating. However, at the same time, it also lacks objective and empirical interpretation of the ideas of Irawat. Perhaps the author, being a member of the
Communist Party of India, may somewhat be carried away by anti-Congress rhetoric. The overall ideas of the book remain more or less the same as the earlier version.


For the present research, the book is not reviewed in its entirety but only to the portion which pertains to the present research topic. In one of the sub-chapters written by G. Kabui, “Leftist Movement and Hijam Irabot Singh, 1938-1949” (Chapter VI, 6.2., pp. 157-172), the author loosely maintains that Irawat was released from Sylhet Jail in the last part of 1943 (Lal Dena, 2012: 161). Further, he opines that the political activities of Irawat in Assam – such as involvement in the establishment of Assam Krishak Sabha, CPI Assam Provincial Committee, Assam Students’ Federation etc., begins after his release from Silchar Jail (Lal Dena, 2012: 162). However, it is generally agreed and established from various sources that Irawat was released from Sylhet Jail on 20th March, 1943. This established fact contradicts Kabui’s statement on the date of Irawat’s release from Sylhet Jail.

Again, his argument on the involvement of Irawat in various political activities in Assam and subsequent imprisonment of Irawat in Silchar Jail is also not supported by adequate research findings. In fact, Irawat was arrested on 15th September, 1944, for his political activism and released on 3rd February, 1945, albeit with lots of restrictions on his movement. It was made for him to take prior permission from the
concerned police officer (S.P.) to move in and around Silchar. Kabui’s statement seems to connote that before his imprisonment in Silchar Jail he did not work for the above mentioned party activities and its allied frontal organisational activities. As per different sources, Irawat started working for the Communist Party in the Kisan front of the Cachar area without losing much time after his release from Sylhet Jail. G. Kabui further puts that,

After the departure of the British he wanted an independent Manipur with full responsible government elected by the people, with the king remaining as a constitutional head. For relation between Manipur and India he wanted the same relation or state which Ukraine or Bylo Russia, a state within the USSR, even a membership in the United Nations. He spelled out his ideas in a Conference of Krishak Sabha at Nambol.¹⁹

The above passage is apparently taken from the Chatradhari’s 1972 book reviewed above. This shows that the research on Irawat during the 1970s has been done relying on a few secondary sources and that perhaps explains to the consultation of Chatradhari’s book. G. Kabui first presented it as a paper at the 35th session of the Indian History Congress, Jadavpur (1974) and published in the Bulletin of the Division of History, Centre of Post Graduate Studies, J.N.U., Imphal (1975).²⁰ However, the problem here is that the source itself suffers from lot of discrepancies.

In fact, in the said Krishak Sabha Conference held on 23rd May, 1946, at Nambol, what has actually been stated in the resolutions (a free translated version of Resolution number 8. Also see Appendix No. 6) is as follows:

²⁰ Ibid., p. vi.
(a) The proposal for the formation of the North Eastern Frontier Province in the Eastern frontier of India is cutting off all the Eastern portions of India. The Manipur Krishak Sabha is strongly rebuking the arrangement for keeping the brothers of the Hills in the Eastern region of India and Manipur suppressed again for a long time to come.

What this Sabha desired is Manipur also remain as *Independent Manipur within Independent India* (emphasis added).\(^\text{21}\)

Therefore, what has been put up by Chatradhari in his 1972 publication and subsequently consulted by G, Kabui in his article and published as a sub-chapter in the Lal Dena edited book is full of contradiction with what has been seen from the proceedings of the said Kisan Sabha Conference (Ibemhal, 2015: 321-328). The former point is that of anti-merger stand taken by Irawat while the latter is for pro-merger.


Here again, the review of the above mentioned book focuses on the political movement in Manipur pertaining to Irawat. Chapter VII of the book, “Insurgency” (Rao, et al., 1991: 166-186), starts with defining the term “insurgency”. They opine that so far, there is no consensus definition of the term, “insurgency”, among the political scientists and sociologists. The term is loosely used to connote people’s movement of armed resistance as revolution or rebellion against the authority of a Government. At the same time, many of the political analysts also use the term to understand different political activities, such as, revolutionary warfare, guerrilla warfare, partisan warfare and protracted warfare. Thus, insurgency is a comprehensive term which includes action against the invader not by conventional warfare but by other means. From this perspective, even the non-violent movements of Gandhi can be considered as a form of insurgency in recent years, as it is considered by some scholars.

The book points out some of the historical events occurred in Manipur, such as, the Palace revolt of 1844 started by the widow of Gambir Singh, the Thadou War, Kabui Naga Insurgency, Guidenluiinism, and Meitei Insurgency and categorises as insurgent movements. It is, therefore, not surprising to extend the movement led by Irawat as insurgency. What is remarkable is that Irawat has been called the ‘father of insurgency’ in Manipur. Applying the same logic of branding Irawat as the ‘father’ of Manipuri insurgency, what about the numerous ‘insurgencies’ prior to Irawat. Could they be call as ‘grandfather’, ‘great grandfather’ or ‘forefather’ of insurgency in Manipur? In it Irawat is being described as someone, even though a Marxist, he was essentially a nationalist who opposed merger of Manipur with the Indian Union.
He desired that Manipur should be independent with membership in U.N. He was opposed to regionalism like The Purbanchaliya Parishad consisting of Manipur, Cachar, Tripura and the Lushai Hills. He intensely desired that Manipur should be a sovereign democratic republic with Parliamentary system of Government with headquarters at Nongda.²²

What is discernable here is that of some reflections of the Chatradhari’s opinion as well as something all together new, i.e., about Irawat’s desire for Nongda, a place in the north-eastern side of the Imphal Valley, as the site for the headquarters of the ‘sovereign’ Manipur. What could have led Irawat to consider Nongda as the seat of power for the ‘desired’ ‘Sovereign Democratic Republic’ of Manipur ‘with U.N. membership’?

The portion of the book is question begging on many issues rather than answering any. What is all the more lacking is that no citation of sources, what so ever is mentioned anywhere, for whatever is written in this book. Moreover, reference on Irawat is given just in a passing by fashion, only in one paragraph, perhaps with an intention to highlight the genesis of the insurgency movements in Manipur in the following years. The overall effect of this part of the book is rather appending to the already existing variegation of anachronism on this subject, instead of giving a homogenous, comprehensive and objective interpretation of the Communist Movement of the concerned period.

Karam Manimohan Singh, Hijam Irabot Singh and Political Movements in Manipur, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1989. It is rather fascinating to know that this book is one of the comprehensive works on political history of Manipur from 1891 to 1952, as well as the political movement of Irawat, though the author is not a

trained historian. It is the first full length book of the political history of Manipur for the above mentioned period. The years 1891 and 1952 are historically significant events of Manipur as the British Paramountcy was formally established and the first General Elections of India took place after independence respectively.

The book is divided into 41 chapters. The author traces the dual rule of the British Imperialism and the first independently appointed Raja of Manipur. He deals on the twin yoke that people had to bear, and the vice and abuse in the administration that the reigning Rajas of the State had practiced. He also traces the emergence of peoples’ political consciousness as an impact of Indian National Movement for Independence from foreign rule. It is in this awakening that Irawat emerges as the beacon of liberty for the oppressed and suppressed peoples of Manipur. He deals on broadly three main streams of politics in the State viz., the Monarchy, the Congress and the Communist in the colonial, as well as post-colonial contexts. Irawat figures in the centre stage of this book, yet Communist movement as such is not exclusively demarcated and therefore, lacks a correct perspective of the movement.

His outlook is predominantly Manipuri (of Manipur only) and therefore, lacks theoretical perspectives, such as the Capitalist-Marxist dichotomy, ramification of international working-class movement, class consciousness among different sections of the Manipuri society, and so on. His style is more of a factual narrative predominantly relying on primary sources. Considering the period in which he has written this book (1989), when there were not many secondary sources to consult with, it could be regarded, nonetheless, as a step forward. And many portions of the book still remain valid for researchers.

It is divided into 7 chapters, contributed by 7 different authors. The third chapter is entitled “The Leftist Role and the Student, Peasant and Labour Fronts” written by S.P. De. Other chapters deal with the general upsurge of the ‘Mass Movement’; Quit India Movement; Freedom Movement and Press; Politics of Muslim League; Role of Regional Parties; and finally the Cabinet Mission Plan. For the convenience of the current research this book is being reviewed putting more emphasis in the third chapter mentioned above.

The period covers by this book concerns the Second World War and the emergence of great national awakening, resulting in upsurge of strong liberation movement in every nook and corner of India. The author draws a picture of the role of Leftist organisations vis-à-vis the Indian national liberation movement in general and that of Assam in particular. De starts from the period of the inception of the CPI, which he puts as 1927, perhaps for the purpose of giving a better perspective to the Leftist Movement in India. Here, the date of inception of the CPI is debatable, as there are two versions on this. As per the available sources, a section of Indian Communists puts it as 1920, formed in Taskent, while another section puts it as 1925, and formed in Kanpur. De’s date of inception of CPI does fall into neither the former case, nor that of the latter. Moreover, it was only in 1933 that the Party got its proper centre and
programme. CPI began to function as real centralised party only after the release of the Meerut Conspiracy Case prisoners in 1933 (Surjeet, 1993: 12). De fails to address this aspect as well.

The concluding period that the book covers is up to the Independence of India. It is a period when Communist Movement was just starting to spread in the North East India, though some units of the Party were already started functioning in some parts of Assam since 1936 onwards. Nevertheless, for the relevant period he is addressing into, are full of insightful investigations relying on authentic sources. However, a thorough and comprehensive research towards the Communist Movement in the North East region, covering greater time and space is needed for giving a better picture.

Amalendu Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi, 1977. This book is about Assam of the colonial period, which includes present Assam, Nagaland, Meghayala and Mizoram. However, for some reasons, Manipur, though still a part of the Province during the concern period, is left out from its purview. It analyses the role of the legislature in the context of the freedom struggle and background of the colonial socio-economic structure. The author divides it into 9 chapters.

In the first chapter, Guha traces the advent of colonial rule of the Province for the period of 1826-1873. It is followed by a phase of British Administration without a legislature from 1874-1905. Next phase is from 1906-1920, when the Province got the first experience of Council Government. The period of 1921-1923 is categorised as that of the ‘Non-Cooperation and Dyarchy on Trial’. This is followed by the flexible
tactical approach of the Congress for the period 1924-1936. From 1936 onwards till
the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, it analyses the context of the
‗Assembly Politics and Left Nationalism‘. The chapter that follows deals the War
period, National liberation movement and the Assembly politics of January 1946. The
last phase is that of the final bid for Independence and power. It is concluded with an
‗Epilogue‘.

In all the chapters the author attempts to give a concrete analysis of the situations
– social, political, and economic. For the first time, a comprehensive understanding of
the Assam Province under the British Imperialism is given. However, it still suffers
from some short comings; in terms of collection of data as far a peasant movement is
concern, which leads to incorrect presentation of some events. It also suffers from
some discrepancy while giving the dates on some matters concern with the 1946
Provincial Election.

R.C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India, Volume III*, First
KLM Private Limited, Calcutta, 1996. This book is the last part of the trilogy, on
which the author writes about the freedom movement in India. It contains two parts
viz. Book IV and V respectively, divided into 12 chapters in all.

The author tries to adhere to the ethics of writing history as far as possible, i.e. of
giving an objective interpretation of the topics he discusses. In some of the events he
narrates, he is an active participant and even writes in the first person. Not
surprisingly, Gandhi’s role in the Indian freedom dominates all others. His insightful
knowledge on this aspect is quite remarkable. Three figures clearly stand out, namely
Gandhi, Jinnah and S.C. Bose. Thus, Indian National Congress, Muslim League and Bose’s brand of politics are being discussed with the goal of shedding more light to the destiny of India, after independence from British rule. However, his subjectivism, while discussing the different issues is quite discernable.

On the hindsight, what is found lacking is his understanding of the leftist movement in India. He simply makes a virtually passing-by comment on this aspect and rather putting the entire leftist movement in India in a somewhat negative light. Instead of making an objective interpretation of it, he simply puts it as some sort of unnecessary variegated appendage in the course of the freedom movement in India. It clearly reflects his political leaning towards the bourgeoisie brand of politics of Gandhi and Jinnah as well as unreserved admiration of Bose. He fails to highlight in a proper direction, the stream of politics Bose adopted and pursued. Rather, he simply does it from the point of a fellow Bengali. It brings in some aspect of narrow Bengali chauvinism in his writing, thus fails to show the movement in proper perspective.

R. Palme Dutt, *India To-Day*, People’s Publishing House (P) Ltd., First published in England by Victor Gollanz Ltd., 1940, Revised and enlarged edition published in India, 1947, Tenth edition 2008, Delhi. The author’s decent is Indian, though he is a British national. This book can be regarded as the only historical work of its period, constituting a survey from the Marxist perspectives of the British rule in India and the development of the Indian liberation struggle. It addresses polemically both the national and working class movements, as well as the peasant movement. First published in England in 1940, with lots of censorship, it has been published in its full version in India in 1947. It is divided into 4 parts, which are subdivided into 18 chapters.
Though the manuscript of the text was written in 1936-1939, to be published with Victor Gollanz, its relevancy is acknowledged still today. The author makes a brilliant analysis of many of the then prevailing political and economic situation of India. However, he being a non-native Indian and also perhaps due to limited access of data, presents the political events in a rather limited scope. For instance, the Digboi Oil Strike of 1938-1939 is not mentioned in his work. On the other hand Bombay mill workers’ strike of 1940 is given precedence to all other strikes, which inspires strikes in other parts of India. Another aspect which makes his work rather incomplete is the second fiddle being given to the peasant movement in India. In fact in the Indian context, during that period, the peasants seem to have more revolutionary potent force than the industrial workers. His views are no doubt highly polemical, but as with the case of many Indian Communists of the period, presents a rather lop sided views on some issues.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of the research work are given below:

- To study the nature of Irawat’s anti-feudal, and anti-colonial struggles.
- To analyse the nature of Democratic movement led by Irawat.
- To analyse the role of Irawat in the Communist Movement on the regional context for the period 1943-59.

1.5 Methodology

For this research the methods propounded by E.H. Carr, the Marxist methodology based on Historical Materialism, is primarily adopted while dealing with the
economic analysis of the different aspects of political situation of the proposed period. Both primary and secondary sources are being employed for building the analysis. For the primary sources both oral and written documents are extensively employed. While using the secondary sources all the available relevant documents, books, pamphlets, journal etc., are utilised. Indeed, the present research relies equally on both the types of sources, with a goal to shed new light and also to give a fresh impetus on the present area of research.

*Inductive logic* is mainly employed while constructing the narratives. Nonetheless, *Deductive logic* is also applied while making arguments. In short, both the logics are being applied taking into consideration the specific requirements. Effort is being made for adhering to the chronological narration of events, which sometimes makes putting arguments inconvenient. In order to maintain consistencies while narrating the events, arguments and comments are put up where ever necessary. A critical analysis and evaluation of the source materials are done by employing the tools from the above mentioned school of thought.

While doing this research outmost effort is made to give an empirical and objective interpretation of history of the period. Careful effort is taken to avoid inadvertent overlooking of significant historical events which appear seemingly insignificant. Oral sources are used as supplementary to the above mentioned sources, which serve as valuable sources for authenticating and getting a better perspective of the research. American Oral History Guidelines is followed while conducting oral interviews of some of the close associates of Hijam Irawat Singh and one of his
relatives. With the aim of giving a better perspective, an adapted/modified (sketched) map, pertaining to period of research, is also inserted.

**Primary Sources**

Primary sources include, ‘Collected Works’ of the proponents of the Communist Movement, namely, Marx, Engels and Lenin; some of the administrative records, both civil and police, of the British colonial period as well as post-colonial era; Proceedings, minutes, manuscripts, pamphlets, circulars, journals, news papers, etc., of different organisations.

**Secondary Sources**

For secondary sources pertaining to the area of study, both the published and unpublished works (English and vernacular) are being taken into consideration. Books and thesis concerned with Irawat, are exhaustively studied to find out both, the perspectives and the lacunae in the earlier works on Irawat.

In addition to the above mentioned sources, books concerned with Peasant and Communist Movement in the North East region, as well as India are also widely consulted.

Many journals, souvenirs, published by CPI, Manipur State Council are extensively used for reconstructing the Communist history. Apart from the already mentioned literatures concerning to the research area, there are many reliable and authentic secondary sources which are taken into consideration such as, seminar papers, individual publications, adding value to the research.
1.6 Research Questions

This research work has made an attempt at answering the following research questions:

i) What circumstances made Hijam Irawat, the social reformer to become a Communist?

ii) Did his Communist ideology influence by the principles of democratic revolution adopted by CPI?

iii) What was the stand of Irawat on the issue of joining Manipur with India?

iv) What was Irawat’s role in the Communist Movement of North East India in general and Manipur in particular?

1.7 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into 6 chapters:

Chapter I: The first chapter is the introduction of the present work which brings out the theoretical framework and the scope with its research questions and objectives.

Chapter II: This chapter is the backdrop upon which the superstructure of the subsequent chapters is built. Many factors and political currents, especially the left-wing movements in India, which impacted on the hitherto relatively isolated North East region of India to a great extent, the nationalist movement is being analysed.

Chapter III: This chapter looked into the Communist Movement in North East India in general and the role of Hijam Irawat Singh in the movement as a Communist, in particular, for the period of March, 1943 to March, 1946.
**Chapter IV:** This chapter deals with the democratic movements led by Communist Irawat, for the period of early March, 1946, to the last quarter of 1948 when he had to conditionally go underground. It examines the subtle undercurrents of the Communist ideas, which he consciously orchestrated while carrying out struggles for establishing democracy, along with some of his trusted associates, in the political arena of Manipur and North East India in general.

**Chapter V:** This chapter studies the circumstances under which, Irawat had conditionally adopted the underground Communist Movement in Manipur till his death in Burma (Myanmar) in September, 1951. It examines the impact of tactical lines, especially, the *Left Sectarian Deviation line*, adopted by the Second Party Congress of CPI (from 28th February to 6th March, 1948), vis-à-vis with that of Provincial and District level units as well as the later adopted lines, till the period of 1958-9. It also makes an attempt to give a critical assessment of his views on many of the then contemporaneous political events.

**Chapter VI:** The last chapter is the summary and the concluding remarks of the objectives and research questions on the basis of some major empirical findings.