CHAPTER-III

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The second phase of the Renaissance in Manipur was that of social reform. The intellectual fermentation and activities which have woken up from the feudal slumber exercised the thinking power of the educated section. The intellectual edge which was sharpened by the creative activities in literature and arts was now directed towards diagnosis of the social environment amidst which the people were living.

The social atmosphere in the Manipuri society was suffocating because of the anachronistic feudo-religious customary laws. The high caste and aristocratic community arrogated to themselves all the privileges in the society. The Brahma Sabha, which was the apex body for religious arbitration harassed the ordinary people with the practice of Mangba-Shengba.¹

Socio-economic and political oppression in a society has its basis on the intellectual and psychological bondage of the common masses. The ruling ideas have always been largely the ideas of the ruling class. The mass of the people were steeped in ignorance. Schooling was confined to children of a few elite. Illiteracy was the curse of that period of history.

In such a situation the need for a real leader was felt. History demanded the emergence of a personality which combined a high intellect and steadfast will power to praise the people from the mire of

ignorance and lead them against the antiquated wall of medievalism and colonialism. The need of the hour was to fulfil the dream and yearning of the people to have a life of dignity free from the double bondage of ignorance and oppression. The leader emerged in the person of Hijam Irawat Singh.

Irawat was the leading inspiration behind and the moving force of the social reform movement ushered in the thirties of the 20th century.

Irawat started his career as a protagonist of Pan Manipuri movement. The great diaspora of Seven Years' Devastation had scattered the Manipuris in the eastern part of India and Burma. Haunted by a fragile demography, with neighbouring enemies threatening her survival, Manipuris' two historical preoccupations were (i) the survival as a nation and (ii) the unity of Manipuris scattered all over the world. Pan Manipuri movement aimed at ensuring the survival of the Manipuris as a nation, by forging the unity of all Manipuris scattered all over the world.

In 1934 Irawat was, among others, instrumental in the formation of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha which became the vehicle of the social reform and social movement. Since 1930 he was a Member of the Sadar Panchayat court. While he was an incumbent of this post which carried much authority and commanded great respect, though he had powers of a second class Magistrate, he was not one to misuse his power.

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2 Soyam Lokendrjit, "Irawat as a Reformer", paper presented at the Seminar on Jana Neta Irobot, Assam University, Silchar, 12 May 1999, p.3.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
for self-aggrandisement.\textsuperscript{5} Never encouraging bribery and corruption, he looked for a kind of justice in favour of the downtrodden and the poor peasants of the society.\textsuperscript{6} It was during his tenure of his Membership in the Sadar Panchayat Court that he consciously acquired the knowledge of the thoughts and deeds of Lokmanya Tilak, Bhagat Singh, Khudiram, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi etc.\textsuperscript{7} He thus acquainted himself with how the freedom struggle in India was developing under the guidance of the national leaders. After having cultivated a broad national perspective, he sat down to the task of arousing the common people, who were sunken in the slumber of religious orthodoxy and weighed down by the feudal fiats and British colonial might. In the given condition of Manipur his logical path was that of reforming the society and of activising the common people.

The root of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha can be traced to 1933 when a general meeting was first held at the Manipur Girls' High School.\textsuperscript{8} This meeting decided that a conference of all the Hindu Manipuris be held during the Christmas holidays of the same year. A reception committee was constituted by the general meeting. Hijam Irawat Singh was elected as the president of the reception committee.\textsuperscript{9} Akoijam Amubi Singh, Nongmeikapam Gopal Singh, Nongmaithem Thanin Singh and Mahendra Singh were elected as the Secretary, the Secretary-in-charge of Manipur Exhibition, Assistant Secretary in-charge

\textsuperscript{5} Soyam Chhatradhari, Manipurigti Itihasta Irawat(Manipur), Imphal, Manipur State Krishak Sabha, 1972, p.8.
\textsuperscript{6} Mongjam Ritichandra, Meeyamgi Luchingba Irawat(Manipur), Nambol, Published by Smt. Tababi Devi, 1977, p.6.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{8} L. Yaima Singh and R.K. Maipaksana Singh, op.cit., p.44.
of Manipur Exhibition and the cashier respectively. Excluding the above-mentioned office bearers, there were fifty-five members all from the elite section of the Manipuri society. The reception committee applied to the President, Manipur State Durbar for a venue of the conference. The presence of the Maharaja being considered to be of utmost importance, the schedule of the conference was so changed as to be held when Maharaja Chura Chand Singh came back from Brindavan where he had gone on a pilgrimage.

In the early part of 1934 a delegation led by Hijam Irawat Singh visited Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma, Bidyaratna one night at his residence and intimated him that a group of His Highness’ subjects would be coming to the royal palace on the second of Phairen (a month of the Meitei Calendar corresponding roughly to the second half of February and the first half of March). The subjects would be making a supplication to His Royal Highness to use his royal authority to arrange a huge gathering by convening all the brethren of the Manipuri nation settled in various lands outside Manipur and the Agya (honorific address to a Manipuri Brahman) was requested to participate in that delegation and thus agreed upon a delegation consisting of the Dwijamanideb Sharma, Koijam Amubi Singh, Khumanthem Mahendra Singh, Nongmeikapam Gopal Singh, Lalita Madhab Sharma, Bangkabihari Sharma, Sorokhaibam Lalit Singh, Mutum Jhulon Singh as well as other persons came to the Royal Palace. They along with thirty sports persons

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11 _Ibid._, p.44.
were granted an audience by His Highness Maharaja Churachand Singh.\footnote{Ibid., pp.1-2.}

Thier supplication was:

"In the great diaspora that occurred during the reign of your forefathers, our kinsfolk were scattered in all directions. Now our prayer to you as our sovereign is, let all our kinsfolk be united through a bond of love during your golden reign and let the national life be rebuilt under your leadership."\footnote{Ibid., p.2.}

These words echo the fond dream of every Manipuri, a dream that led to the formation of Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha (NHMM), of which the president was His Highness, the Maharaja of Manipur himself. The Manipur Mela, an industrial exhibition which was organised as a part of the first session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha had commenced from 22 May 1934 and continued upto 30 May 1934, the opening day of the first session of the NHMM. The exhibition was inaugurated by Maharajkumar Priyabrata Singh, who was the second son of Maharaja Churachand Singh. The inaugural session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was opened on 30 May 1934 at the palace Raas Mandal. Maharaja Churachand Singh was its first President. The opening session was conducted in a pompous and royal grandeur. The whole of the state administration was involved. When the Maharaja came out of the palace a salute of 11 guns was fired in his honour. The sepoys in formation offered salute while the police band played its music. As the Maharaja entered the conference hall, the Ratans of the Brahmasabha – Chaitanya Sharma Hidang, Leirenjao Sharma, Bachaspati, Gourahari Sharma (Bidyarnabesh), Angouba Bidyalankar, Atombapu Sharma
(Bidyaratna), pandits from Cachar Khelchandra Mukhopadhyya, Jaychandra Mukhopadhyaya (Byakaran Ratna), pandits from Manipur Shribadatta Sharma (Tarka Tirtha), Gokul Sharma Shastri etc. all these Brahmans offered blessings to the Maharaja. All the delegates of the session presented the Maharaja a letter of congratulation. The letter of congratulation was presented by Shrijukta Khelchandra Mukhapadhyaya and read out by Shrijukta Atombapu Sharma Bidyaratna. The letter of congratulation stated:

"Taken captive and brought to alien lands and the golden land of Manipur being ruined and depopulated owing to the cruel torture during the Burmese War, a bulk of the subjects settled in the different lands, it is still terrifying in remembering these acts of the Burmese. But whatever God ordains is for the benefit of its subjects is now being proved.

"Under the benign shadow of the glorious British government we are witnessing the reign of His Highness. In this land the scattering of the nationality and the resultant diaspora being transformed into the expansion of the nation have rather resulted in the wide propagation of our nation. So, in all directions there have been settlements as large as Manipur outside Manipur.

"All those numerous national brethren are now bound together by the bond of love also called the national solidarity. Thus, all of us being a unity of education, religion and nationalism are now a single stream which has taken the form of a national Ganga. This stream is known as Manipuri to other national groups.

"In the last revolution of the golden land of Manipur the alien people thought that we Manipuris along with our religion and nationality will be doomed to extinction. However, since the benign respected British Government put Your Highness on the royal throne on which sat all the sovereign kings descending without interruption from Emperor Brabubahon and with the

15 Ibid., pp.27-28.
16 Ibid., p.28.
sublime rule of Your Highness an undertaking is being made for the prosperment of the Sanatana Kula Dharma and the autonomous national spirit.

"If a country disintegrates, these two Dharmas perish, as they perish the nation is doomed to ruin, hence a great hero like Arjuna shed tears on these grounds. If His Highness did not undertake upon himself to protect these two Dharmas the whole of Manipur would have been now extinct.

"It was during your golden reign that the new civilization of education shed its light on Manipur where all the lights of the world are shut off, being surrounded in all directions by the nine ranges. Other alien currents having flowed in, His Highness' protection has enabled the Manipuris national spirit and the Kula Dharma to shine as a decorative Venus to the beautiful full-moon of the Goura Dharma. This has become possible on account of the incomparable magnificence of His Highness. Until the Manipuris exist on the earth, we will not forget to be grateful. That we have been regarding your Highness is not only the king of Manipur, but also as the emperor of our nation, we affirm this conviction from the depth of our hearts and express our acceptance."{17}

The burning aspirations of the Manipuris who were scattered by the vicissitudes of history beyond their homeland to intermingle and interact with each other was the cause of the emergence of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasaha. The foundation on which the unification of the Manipuri diaspora were to be realised was to be built on the pillars of education, religion and nationality.{18} The Pan Manipuri movement could be cemented only through strengthening the three pillars of education, religion and nationality. Education was important because only through it the modern branches of knowledge could be acquired and the process of modernisation could be unleashed. Sanatana Dharma was the way of life of the overwhelming section of the Manipuri population. The lost glory of

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{17} Ibid., pp.31-33 (translated from Manipuri).
{18} Ibid.
Manipuri nationality could only be resurrected on the twin planks of language and culture. A programme of rejuvenation of the Manipuri language and revival of the positive achievements of Manipuri culture was launched.

Being born out of the feudal and colonial system, at the first session of the Mahasabha the umbilical cord was not yet severed. So many fetters bound the fledgling goliath of social reform and modernization. Hence, the Maharaja’s typical response to the expression of loyalty was:

“I am very pleased to see that all the Meiteis from Manipur and from alien lands have congregated to further the solidarity and interaction among the Manipuri nation and to progress on the path of education, religion and nationality of the Manipuri nation . . . we must all unite and strive to please the magnificent Sarkar Bahadur (meaning the British government)”.

While Maharaja Churachand Singh’s focus represented the fetter on the development of the Manipuri nation, Irawat’s vision represented an effort to grasp the stage of a modern Manipur which was to emerge in the near future. His vision transcended the truncated thoughts of his contemporaries in the Mahasabha. The seed of the thought which was to transform the Manipuri society from an orthodox and medieval society was now buried inside an integument. The seed was due to sprout and the integument would be burst asunder. Irawat cited the following reasons for the convening of the session:

19 Ibid., pp.48-49 (translated from Manipuri).
"First, acquaintance and congregation of all brethren, kith and kin who have settled in the distant lands."

"Second, an opportunity to establish a intellectual channel of mutual enlightenment";

"Third, to augment the strength of the nation by mutual love and solidarity"

"Fourth, in a nutshell, it provides an opportunity to us to strive for the national progress".

He further expounded the three pillars of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in his own typical way:21

"Education: - It has not been long, but only about 40 years ago that the education of the Hindu Manipuri assumed the present form. In those times English education was looked down upon and despised by the Manipuris. Textbooks printed in English alphabet were not to be touched and those baptised in English education were not allowed to offer even water to others. Now, during the reign of His Highness Maharaja Churachand Singh on account of the growth of this kind of education, the standard of education of the Manipuri nation has been rising higher and higher. It is not meant for the boys only, but the cause of women’s education has been gaining momentum which will be beneficial for the section taking the exact half of the social responsibility as well as for the development of education for both boys and girls. But for the unbounded kindness of His Highness all of the Manipuris would be under ignorant slumber. The whole of the Manipuri people are indebted to His Highness.

21 Ibid., pp.39-41.
Would it not be in the fitness of things to endeavour with a single purpose to make progress in the field of education, trade and commerce and industry in accordance with the wishes of His Highness, which we can accomplish as a token of showing gratitude?

"Religion :- Till today the Manipuri Hindus have been able to preserve intact their religion who made it possible? It was His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur, the protector of religion. A national religion is the ony bond to bring about unity. In order to preserve intact the religion and the social milieu as well as to absorb newly introduced tenets in whom have we to seek shelter? It is only to the lord of the Manipuri nation, the emperor protector of the religion, whom God has sent to rule us and to glorify over religion. Shouldn’t we derive our satisfaction by dipping in the stream of the religion which is being protected by the patron of our religion.

"National progress :- In these times when the new sun has arisen and the light has spread in all directions by the kindness of His Highness the protector of religion, many among the Manipuris have trodden the path of national progress.

"Among the Indian scripts the ancient Manipuri script has been included in the twentieth category. Isn’t it a valuable jewel which projects the identity of the Manipuris? Isn’t it not our treasure? Although I have not much knowledge of linguistic science, it is evident to all that it is appropriate in expressing the phonetics and in writing the spelling of our language. Isn’t it our duty to observe carefully this priceless jewel of ours?
“During the golden reign of His Highness’ ancestors, the kirtans which were part of the Bhagawat Dharma were never sung in the Manipuri tongue. This was introduced by His Highness, the Maharaja of Manipur in the mother tongue during his golden reign. Should it not be our obligation to strive for success in the path shown by the sovereign of the Manipuris who is also the king of devotees?”

The first session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was attended by 311 delegates from Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Dhaka (Bangladesh), Burma and Dibrugarh (Assam). A working committee consisting of 14 members was constituted. The following persons were elected as the working committee members:

1. Loitongbam Tombi Singh, Burma
2. Gokulchandra Singh, B.A. Dhaka
3. Konthoujam Gulap Singh, Tripura
4. Hijam Ratan Singh, Assam Valley
5. Kshetrimayum Bijoychandra Singh, Cachar
6. Narendra Singh, Cachar
7. Raman Singh, Sarpanch, Cachar
8. Khelchandra Makhopadhyaya, Cachar
10. Lalit Madhab Chattopadhyaya, Manipur
11. Irawat Singh, Manipur
12. Nongmeikapam Gopal Singh, Manipur
13. Mahendra Singh, Manipur

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22 Ibid., pp.9-23.
23 Ibid., pp.59-60.
The President and the Vice-President were not formally elected. The Maharaja Churachand Singh and Atomchouba Singh, President of the Cheirap Court and brother-in-law of the Maharaja were deemed to be the President and the Vice-President of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{24} In their absence the Maharaja entrusted the function of the Presidentship to Atomchouba Singh, Sinam Krishnamohon Singh, was elected as the General Secretary.\textsuperscript{25} On his resignation from the position, Hijam Irawat Singh was elected as the General Secretary by the working Committee on 20 October, 1935.\textsuperscript{26} Merachaoba Singh of Tarapur, Silchar and Nabakanta Singh, of Imphal were elected as the Assistant General Secretary and Secretary respectively.\textsuperscript{27}

To further the cause of nationality the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha passed appropriate resolutions. The fifth resolution stated, “The Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha is aggrieved to hear that an estrangement has developed between the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas and a feeling of ill-will has arisen between them. Such feeling of alienation is absent in Manipur which is the place of origin of all Manipuris so, all the Manipuris of the Surma valley are apprised to give up their ill-will. It is resolved to apprise the two communities to remove all the allusions regarding the communal alienation and ill-will from the memoranda submitted to the government”.\textsuperscript{28} The sixth resolution stated that “we have no original history of our own. The existing history books written by the outsiders are not acceptable because they do not reflect the true backgrounds of the religion and the historical origin. The session,

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., p.29.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p.112.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p.51.
therefore, has resolved to provide support in the form of awards to those who write our natural history.”  

The eighth resolution states, the traditional Manipuri arts of Thang-Ta and Mukna Kangjei are scientific techniques of self-defence as well as hygiene. Manipuris were famous because of these arts. Now these arts have gone into decline, and can be said to be almost extinct. Because of this the Manipuri nation has lost its vigour and valour. With a view to advance on the path of progress by revamping the declined valour of the Meiteis, we will be highly benefitted by studying the above mentioned arts.

In order to implement this it was resolved:  

(1) Competent teachers be engaged in clubs which will be organised in appropriate localities to teach these arts.

(2) Competitions be organised on the occasions of Babrubahan Jayanti.

The twelfth resolution states thus “If the sessions of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha are not prejudicial to the politics relating to the British and the state administration, representations be moved to the local governments of Assam, Bengal and Burma as well as the state authority of Manipur to allow the official and non-official Meiteis residing in British India to join the sessions wherever they are held. It was also resolved to send each Manipuri copy (along with its English translations) of all resolutions of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha to the Governments of Assam, Bengal and Burma.”  

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29 Ibid., pp.51-52.  
30 Ibid., p.53.  
31 Ibid., pp.54-55.
resolution, the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha resolved that Manipuris should strive to master the Meitei Mayek (Manipuri script).\(^{32}\)

The session also passed resolutions for the advancement of education. The seventh resolution states that "It was decided by the session that Manipuri language which is recognised by the university be studied as a school vernacular by all Manipuris in and outside Manipur".\(^{33}\) In the thirteenth resolution the session decided that every Manipuri should provide their children with primary education compulsorily. It was also stated that girls should be allowed to read in the boys' school upto the primary stage. It was to be made obligatory for Brahmans to read upto the stage of Adya.\(^{34}\) The fourteenth resolution stated that "In order to increase the number of citizens educated upto the secondary level High Schools should be established in appropriate locations".\(^{35}\)

For the safeguard of religion, the session passed several resolutions. The ninth resolution stated that "In order to propagate Gourdharma a mission be established as sanctioned by the Hindu Shastra".\(^{36}\) The eleventh resolution espoused that there be no inhibition of matrimonial tie between the Hindu Manipuri community and other Hindu communities of India if there is no harm to our community according to the shastras and the rules.\(^{37}\) According to the seventeenth resolution, the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha "considers the ways to

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.57.  
\(^{33}\) Ibid., p.52.  
\(^{34}\) Ibid., p.55.  
\(^{35}\) Ibid.  
\(^{36}\) Ibid., p.53.  
\(^{37}\) Ibid., p.54.
remove the sorrows of the Kshatranees who were married to Brahmins and the resulting social chaos and has resolved to request the Maharaja of Manipur to ensure that the Brahmins do not marry the Kshatranees while not disturbing the existing marriages. The fifteenth resolution stated “It was resolved that a committee be formed to prevent those Manipuri males who go outside the state with female prostitutes under forged identities and seek income by using immoral physical exposure to alien persons; also to prohibit Manipuri female dancers who commit unlawful sexual transgressions for getting undue incomes”. The sixteenth resolution reiterated that “That those man who mislead the women to prostitution and sexual exhibition be ostracised from the society after due punishment by the state government unless they be redeemed according to proper procedure of the shastras”.

The first session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha also passed some miscellaneous resolutions. In resolution No.1, the sessions acknowledged that the conferring of the title of KCSI on His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur is a symbol of the progress of our nation and expressed the rejoice of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha. In Resolution No.19 the session decided to establish a provident society under the Government of India Act of 1912 (5th Article) and to form a preparatory committee therefor. Resolution No.20 stipulated “to prevent the evil effects which may arise from the habit of excessive smoking prevalent among the Hindu Manipuris it was decided to implore the state

38 Ibid., pp.56-57.
39 Ibid., p.56.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., pp.49-50.
42 Ibid., p.57.
authority to introduce the Assam Juvenile Smoking Act. In Resolution No. 21 the session placed on record its deep sense of appreciation and heartfelt gratitude for the noble service voluntarily rendered by Srijut Nongthombam Gourahari Singh, Moirangkhom, by arranging free board for delegates from outside Manipur and wished him every success.

In pursuance of these resolutions of the first session, several steps were taken up to implement them. Accordingly, a Historical Research Committee was formed and research into the history of the land and the nation has been commenced and writing thereof has also begun. As a result, Shrijukta Mutum Jhulon Singh has already written a history book titled “Manipur Panchali” in the Manipuri language and submitted an English translated version of the same to the Secretary of the Research Committee. By January, 1936 the printing of the book was not yet completed Irawat, however, assured the delegates that they would be provided a copy each of the said book when the printing was completed.

In pursuance of the fifth resolution of the first session of the Mahasabha a conciliatory meeting of the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas residing in Surma valley was held on the 1 December 1935 at the Silchar Government High School. A copy of the resolution passed in the said meeting was sent by the Assistant General Secretary from Silchar for the approval of the working committee. Expressing joy on hearing the news the working committee held an urgent meeting on the 8 December 1935 and passed a resolution and sent it to the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas of the Surma valley through the Assistant General Secretary. It was assumed

\[43\] Ibid., pp.57-58.
\[44\] Ibid., p.58.
\[45\] Ibid., pp.114-115.
that within a short time both the communities got intimation of this resolution because the local working committee met and sent a resolution co-opting a member in the working committee and the reception committee. The said resolution being deviating a little from the Resolution No.22 of the first session of the Mahasabha, a reply was returned to requisition a meeting with proper quorum. Consequently a representation was submitted on behalf of the Bishnupriyas of the Surma Valley to His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur, who himself handed over this copy to the Mahasabha on 17 January, 1936. Regarding that representation, the Mahasabha returned a reply stating among others that the resolution of 1 December 1935 could not be tresspassed. Though the Mahasabha was not the cause of the alienation between the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas and there is no restriction to the nationalist Hindu Manipuris in joining it and in addition to that, the session of the Mahasabha being held in Silchar, it was hoped that both the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas would have enrolled as members if not already enrolled and strived for the progress of the nation. Though it is not quite upto the mark, it is heartening to know that the bond of love and unity has embraced the Manipuri nation on hearing that the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas have now behaved cordially among themselves.\footnote{Ibid., pp.113-114.}

In pursuance of the 9th Resolution, a mission named Gourdharma Pracharini Sabha was formed to further the qualitative improvement of the Manipuri society by propagating the sacred doctrine of Shrishri Gouranga Mahaprabhu. It is expected that in order to facilitate further
expansion of the activities of the Sabha branches of the Sabha will be set up wherever the Manipuri settlements exist.\(^{47}\)

Apropos the eighth Resolution on the ancient Manipuri martial arts tradition of Thang-Ta and Mukna Kangjei, Shrijukta Sanatomba Singh Rajkumar and Shrijukta Sanahal Singh Rajkumar authored a treatise *Satjal Marol* Part I (free hand skill), and presented a copy to Irawat Singh. After reading the book from the first to the last page, Irawat made experiments with one or two techniques of the art and had wonderful success. This form of martial arts was extant in the ancient Manipur. This art does not largely deal with the techniques of overpowering an enemy with weapons in hand. Rather it enables one to safeguard himself with bare hand when an enemy attacks with weapons such as stick or sword in hand and give the enemy due punishment. This has been clearly exemplified by the late Shrijukta Narasingh Maharaj. One day while the Maharaja was lying prostrate before the deity in worship and in such a condition when he was unarmed, Nabin Singh attacked him with a sword. Thereupon, Nara Singh could deflect the sword with bare hand and could punish the enemy rather easily. Such a priceless treasure was for long thought to be non-existant. Now this book is under print.\(^{48}\)

Regarding the 15\(^{th}\) Resolution a Nari Raksha Samiti was established by the grace of the Manipur State Authority and the Maharaja of Manipur and thus the prestige of one or two unfortunate sisters was salvaged. Over and above this, it is significant that the tour of female dance groups outside Manipur in the previous years no longer continued as the Maharaja of Manipur did not issue permission to any dance groups

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p.115.  
\(^{48}\) Ibid., pp.115-116.
to tour outside the state with effect from the year 1935. This act has safeguarded the honour of the nationality by erasing the stigma in which the Manipuri nationality fell and removing the black stain on her face.\textsuperscript{49}

The birth of the NHMM symbolised the resurgence of the national spirit after the colonisation of Manipur by British imperialism. The social base of this resurgence was the elite which was the educated employees, landed aristocracy and the privileged strata of the society. At the first stage the Maharaja of Manipur was naturally the pivot around which Manipuri national resurgence was built up. The common people of the outlying villages had yet to be touched. The nostalgia of living together with our countrymen torn apart from their homeland to distant and alien lands by the vicissitudes of history was the seed which sprouted as the shoot of Pan-Manipuri movement. This Pan-Manipuri movement was launched on the triple planks of education, religion and nationality meaning cultural resurgence. At the very first session of the NHMM this Pan-Manipur movement assumed the form of upsurge of creative life.

The objectives of the NHMM fulfilled the aspirations of the historical period but they could not transcend the boundary fixed by the feudal colonial set-up. The intellectual conception of the elite were also fettered by the suffocating ambience and the type of education in which they were nurtured. Irawat with his experience of the Swadeshi movement at Dhaka and his intellectual acumen could transcend the constraints in the perspective of his peers at the historical juncture.

The foundations of the NHMM was built on the three pillars. i.e. education, religion and nationality. Irawat’s conception transformed the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p.116.
The concept of nationality into national progress. The concept of national progress was definitely broader and more concrete than the ambiguous term of nationality. For Irawat national progress is meaningless unless there is economic development. For real improvement of education, religion and national culture of the Manipuris, economic basis must be laid. He said, “Manipur is poor and backward in the matter of economy. Although there is progress in the fields of education, religion and other fields, nobody can deny that Manipur is backward in the economic matter. Would it not be correct to strive for complete progress by filling up this lacunae?” Irawat exhorted to the delegates that it was time to make progress in the fields of education, trade and commerce, and industrial development. However, all these far-sighted and signal observations of Irawat were not reflected in the resolutions passed in the first session of the NHMM.

The 2nd session of the NHMM continued in the same vision. This session which was held on 26-30 January 1936 took place at Tarapur Silchar. In making the Silchar session successful, Shri Merachaoba Singh, Assistant General Secretary of the Working Committee, and Chairman and Secretary of the Reception Committee respectively. Khelendrachandra Mukhopadhyaya and Yumnam Chandra Singh, Secretary rendered signal services.

In the second session also Maharaja Churachand Singh and Angom Tomchouba Singh, Angom Ningthou acted as the president and the vice-president respectively. More than 400 delegates from Manipur,
Nabadwip, Mandalay, Sibsagar(Haichara), Bar Kola (Manipuri Basti). Naoga(Hojai), Puri(Shri Kshetra), Dharam Nagar (Tripura State), Sylhet, Jhapirbandh (Cachar), Borkhola. Dhumkar (Bor Khola), Ram Nagar, Silchar, Tooko (Ram Nagar), Bar Rampur (Bar kholo), Lakhipur, Jirighat, Shribar, Shivapur, Ashra Labuk, Banskandi, Sengerkad, Jaipur, Banraj, Sunai, Ram Prasadpur (Bam), Govind Nagar (Sunai), Udharband etc attended the session.  

In the letter of felicitation presented to the Maharaja by the delegates on behalf of the NHMM it was stated:  

"That we are having His Highness as the emperor of the golden land of Manipur, as the ornament on the heads of all Manipuris and as the leading light in all endeavours of religion, education, national progress is a reward of the reverence shown by all Manipuris during the golden reign of the hallowed ancesstral rulers and the untold sufferings borne by them, and it is a significant instance of our good fortune.

"When we observe the hillocks of the T-line which is very near from this place where we are gathering, we vividly remember the patriotism, the undaunted courage and the incomparable strength shown by your grandfathers Gambhir Singh and Nara Singh at the time of conquering the Burmese with the help of the British.

"The diaspora resulting from the acute adversity of the war ravages of the enemies and the suffering borne by us all have now led to the proliferation of the Manipuri populace and turned out to lay the path of progress.

54 Karam Manimohan Singh, op.cit., p.55.
“Of all the endeavours for the national progress undertaken during his golden reign the following measures are the most important:

1. All the members of the Manipuri nation who became scattered in distant lands unknown to one another for a long time have been bound together by the sacred thread of national solidarity.

2. In order to bring out the ancient sagas of history which have been lying hidden in the dark depths of time because of the ravages of war befallen in the millennium, a Historical Research Committee has been formed.

3. In the contemporary world which is full of constant metamorphoses, the new current of progress has been slow in penetrating the land of Manipur being surrounded on all sides by the mountains. In the golden reign of His Highness we are seeing the light of progress in all fields of language, national literature, religion, education, sciences etc.

4. Under the benign shadow of the kind and magnificent British Government, we are able to endeavour for progress in the matters of religion, education etc.

“We pray at the feet of the kind Shrishri Govindaji to bless His Highness so that he may lead all the Manipuris for a long time and in happiness.”

In his address to the session, Maharaja Churachand Singh’s reply to the letter of felicitation was:56

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56 Ibid., pp.110-111.
“I am very pleased to observe the reverence shown to me by all the delegates of the session as due to their own ruler. I regret the fact that I could not perform my due task in the session because of the death of His Majesty the Emperor of India: I have already informed of the news.

“My role here is that of cementing this gathering which is bound by the sacred thread of the minds of all the Manipuri nation, and this has become possible owing to the incomparable national love which has been existing since the reign of our ancestors. I am very pleased to see that this stream of love is running amidst our nation without any hindrance, I wish that this may continue undiminished. It was to observe this event that I have travelled on foot crossing the nine ranges of that mountain.

“I do not want to brand all Manipuris as foreigner Manipuris or non-residential Manipuris, because we are all Indians and Manipur is also a part of India. Hence, though over nation is separated in different fields, the mode of ploughing is the same. The whole of the nation where this mode of ploughing is prevalent is the same. What the Meities defended by sacrificing their priceless blood during the golden reign of our ancestors, it was this self-same nationality. Although it is now seen as outside India Meiteis bought even the Purba Upadwip with blood as price, and this national love is still flowing in the veins of all the Meiteis residing in that land. The same thing is prevailing among those settled in Burma, but what we regret is that fact that the two communities of Manipuris are not sitting down together as they are of different minds; I hope that they will work together in the Mahasabha. Lastly, I would like to appeal to you that since you have declared me as the sovereign of your nationality and religion by residing under the benign shadow of the Lord Shrishri Gobindaji’s feet, I hope that you would stay by my side in pleasing the magnificent Sarkar Bahadur (British Government).”

Resolutions adopted in the second session at Silchar were all in the furtherance of the spirit of the first session at Imphal. The most important of the resolutions adopted were to recognise the Samiti named Manipuri Sangha established by the students and the gentlemen of Shreedham
Nabadwip as a branch of the Mahasabha,\textsuperscript{57} to make a representation to the railway and shipping authorities for favour of employing Manipuris in the stations located near the Manipuri settlements in different districts of India and Burma;\textsuperscript{58} to encourage Manipuri songs to spread far and wide as a means of advancement for the Manipuri literature;\textsuperscript{59} to move the Government of Burma to set up departments for the promotion of Sanskrit and Manipuri languages, in order to preserve the Manipuris' national religion and to maintain the trade relations between Burma and Manipuris of other countries;\textsuperscript{60} to make any Brahmin outcaste from the Brahmin society if he married a Kshatriya woman after the second session of the Mahasabha (i.e. January 1936) in the light of the reconsideration of Resolution No.15 of the first session of the Mahasabha;\textsuperscript{61} to beseech His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur that co-dining may be allowed in the house of Manipuri Ganak (Acharya Brahmins) who have already been allowed to dine in line with other Manipuris outside their houses;\textsuperscript{62} to give the same social Kshatriya status to a kshatriya woman, if she be divorced and outcast after having been unlawfully married by a Brahmin;\textsuperscript{63} to make efforts for the establishment of Primary Schools in every Manipuri village of other provinces,\textsuperscript{64} to discuss the proposal contained in the letter of Shrijukta Yengkhom Kamal Singh dated 24 November 1935 regarding the joining of Hindu Manipuris of not only Assam and Bengal but also those in Manipur, Burma etc in

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.120.  
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.121.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp.121-122.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p.122.  
\textsuperscript{62} Karam Manimohan Singh, op.cit., p.56.  
\textsuperscript{63} Loitam Yaima Singh and R.K. Maipaksana Singh(Ed.), op.cit., p.123.  
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
the Assam Bengal Manipuri society which had been set up and duly registered for the upliftment of education, economy etc. of the Manipuri nation and to entrust Srijut Dwijamani Sharma with the responsibility of forming a sub-committee to consider the by-laws of the society;\(^{65}\) and to establish sub-committees of the Mahasabha at suitable places to observe the social conditions of Hindu Manipuris in and outside Manipur as well as to consolidate the position of the Mahasabha by spreading the objectives and activities of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahsaabha and to entrust Shrijukta Krishnachandra Singh to form a sub-committee at Sylhet.\(^{66}\)

The following persons were elected members of the working committee of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha for the year 1936.\(^{67}\)

1. Dwijamani Sharma, M.A. Imphal (Manipur)
2. Irawat Singh, Sadar Panchayat Member,-do-
3. Atombapu Sharma, Vidyaratna, -do-
4. Lalita Madhab Chattopadhyaya, -do-
5. Banka Bihari Sharma, Vyakaran Tirtha, -do-
6. Maimom Madhumangol Singh, Nambol (Manipur)
7. Hijam Raman Singh, B.A.,B.T., Tarapur (Silchar)
8. Nirjit Singh, Ramnagar (Cachar)
9. Yengkhom Kamal Singh, -do-
10. Bijoychandra Singh, Silchar (Cachar)
11. Dhaneshwor Singh, Binakandi (Cachar)
12. Yumnam Krishnachandra Singh, Bhanugachh (Sylhet)

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\(^{65}\) Ibid.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., p.124.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., pp.124-125.
14. Nadiyachand Singh, Tripura State
15. Radhamohan Sharma, Kavya Tirtha, Hailakandi.
16. Hijam Ratan Singh, Digboi, Assam
17. Merachaoba Singh, Silchar
18. Yumnam Chandra Singh, Tarapur, Silchar
19. Nityananda Sharma, Mandalay Burma
20. Lalbala Sharma, -do-

Shri Hijam Irawat Singh was re-elected as the General Secretary of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha.\(^68\)

In his report to the second session Irawat expressed his concern about the need to realise unity among the Manipuri nation. He drew attention to the existence of disharmony among the Meiteis themselves\(^69\) and the discord between the Meiteis and the Bishnupriyas in the Surma valley.\(^70\) His deep concern about the need to bring unity of the Manipuris is understandable against the background of the need to bring economic progress of the Manipuris who were very far behind in the field of economics. Irawat said “The Manipuri nation is especially backward compared to other nations in regard to economic matters. Not a single Manipuri can venture into the profession of trade and commerce to earn cash. It is now a fact that five or more persons have begun to gather to promote this cause, but hitherto it cannot be translated into practice because a rumour is being injected into the ears of everyone continually that ‘No two Meiteis can get along together’ No sooner did conference with one another begin than this rumour comes; in this state of stagnation

\(^{68}\) Ibid., p.126.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., p.117.
\(^{70}\) Ibid., p.113.
the agony of deprivation goes on abating. In these circumstances, this rumour must be transformed into a talisman ‘Two Meiteis ought to get along with each other’. Only then the shining rays of fortune will begin to shed light on the Meitei nation”. 71 It can indeed be said that the outlook of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was nationalism based on cultural resurgence or cultural nationalism. But Irawat’s nationalism was not simply cultural but encompassed economic nationalism as well.

Irawat’s nationalism was not directed against any other nation or community. Rather his nationalism sought friendship and cooperation with other nations or ethnic groups. Irawat said, “I don’t think that, if available there is any hitch in taking the assistance of others for rescuing a nation which is on the verge of death. We must remember that the Seven Years’ Devastation during which period if the late Shrijut Gambhir Singh and Nara Singh did not exercise their excellent minds and take the help of the mighty British Government and if the British did not consider to help them our motherland would have perished without any trace along with the Manipuri nation. By that time the Manipuris sacrificed their blood for the salvation of our own country and nation. To save this nation which is being nearly burnt out by the fire of deprivation while we have time we ought to strive under the noble intellect of His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur who is the royal grandson of the late Maharaja Nara Singh”. 72

Irawat advocated that religious differences could not be any stumbling block in the path of national unity and thus, to him secularism was the natural panacea for harmonising different religious groups or communities. Religious harmony is the natural condition for building

71 Ibid., p.117.
72 Ibid., pp.117-118.
national unity. Irawat said “Nobody can deny the existence of two different congregations of catholics and protestants among the Christians of England but when a task of national importance comes up they never forget that they are English. It is the general opinion that nobody equals the Manipuris in the art of imitating others but in this particular aspect we have lagged far behind others. I express my profound belief that all Manipuris will now blaze the path of national progress and fortune by enlisting as members of the Mahasabha and establishing new branches at the appropriate places.”

In 1937 the status of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha regarding the implementation of the resolution was picturised by Irawat as follows:

The printing of the book Free Hand Skill dealing with the ancient martial arts of Manipur was under process. Training in the art was already started under an institution called Byayam Charcha Samiti. Srijut Rajkumar Sanatomba Singh of Herangoiathing, Keibung, a great scholar of the arts, was arduously teaching many of the Meitei children. Srijut Manikchand Singh, Town Fund overseer was the secretary and Srijut Rajkumar Sanahal Singh was the Assistant Secretary of the Samiti. In the 16th resolution of the Mahasabha’s first session an appeal was made to the state authorities, of Manipur to implement the Assam Juvenile Smoking Act. This act was now put into effect and the Mahasabha had expressed its sincere gratitude to the authority concerned. Regarding the 5th resolution of the second session a representation was presented to the

73 Ibid., p.118.  
74 Ibid., pp.144-145.  
75 Ibid., p.145.
Traffic Manager of the Assam Bengal Railway. He returned a very satisfactory reply stating that Manipuris could be employed in the Assam Bengal Railway Service.\(^{76}\)

The third session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha took place on 28 February, 1 and 2 March 1937 at Mandalay of Burma.\(^{77}\) Here it is appropriate to summarise the political context in which the third session came to be held at Mandalay. Towards the end of the eighteenth and the first two decades of the century, friction arose between the Burmese kingdom and the British authorities in India, due mostly to the unwise exercise of sovereignty by the former over Assam, Manipur and Arakan bordering on British administered Bengal.\(^{78}\) The weakness of the Burmese kingdom and its incursions into the border areas and Britain's desire to protect her empire and far-eastern trade, brought about a clash of interests in which Burma was too weak to protect herself.\(^{79}\) Burma's annexation to British India was achieved as a result of three Anglo-Burman wars of 1824-26, 1852 and 1885-86, which were launched from India, with Indian forces under British command.\(^{80}\) As a result of the first war coastal provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim were ended to the British along with other concessions.\(^{81}\) The second war resulted in the British annexation of lower Irawaddy valley.\(^{82}\) The third and final Anglo-Burman War of 1885-86, witnessed the deposition of the king Thibaw

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\(^{76}\) Ibid.
\(^{77}\) Ibid., p.127.
\(^{79}\) Ibid.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
\(^{81}\) Ibid.
\(^{82}\) Ibid.
and extinction of Burman kingdom from the map of the world. In 1886 Burma became politically and administratively a part of India.\textsuperscript{83}

Although by 1886 the whole of Burma had become a part of British India, it took nearly ten years for the country to be pacified.\textsuperscript{84} The revamping of the Burma administrative machinery was the work of Sir Charles Crosthwaite, who took over as Commissioner in 1889.\textsuperscript{85} Administration by districts, each under a British Deputy Commissioner was introduced. Indian subordinates from Lower Burma and India, well-versed in the British method of administration, were drafted into service.\textsuperscript{86} By 1886 the British had occupied entire Burma militarily, but they could establish their administration in Burma on a firm basis only during the course of the quarter century between the end of the pacification and the outbreak of World War I (1914).\textsuperscript{87} After the annexation of Upper and Central Burma in 1886, the entire country as a single province was placed under the Chief Commissionership.\textsuperscript{88} In 1897 Burma became a Lieutenant Governorship. In 1923 her status was further raised and she was placed under a Governor. In 1937 Burma was separated from India, and the Governor was made directly responsible to the Government of the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{89}

The establishment of British rule in Burma in 1886 gave a fresh impetus to the immigration of Indians to Burma which had already begun

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p.14.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
prior to that from 1852.\textsuperscript{90} Because of the administrative union of Burma with India, there was no hindrance to migration of Indians.\textsuperscript{91} Indian traders, contractors, lawyers, doctors, labourers and moneylenders began to arrive in Burma in considerably large numbers. In 1872, there were 136,504 Indians in Burma. In 1891, the Indian population had increased to 420,830 and in 1931 to 1,017,825, that is, 6.9 percent of the total population of Burma in that year which was 14.6 millions.\textsuperscript{92} The majority came over only for seasonal occupations on land and returned home afterwards or stayed for only a year or two. This was partly due to the Government's economic, and administrative need for Indians and partly due to the fact that Burma for all practical purposes was a province of India.\textsuperscript{93} Indian moneylenders, the Chettyars made much profit in Burma and this was bitterly resented by the Burmese. Worse still was the fact that increasing number of Indians were pouring into Burma during the years of rapid economic progress.\textsuperscript{94}

The net result of this development which was dangerous from the Burmese point of view was the origin of communal discord. This flared up in 1930 in a frightful outbreak of anti-Indian riots in Rangoon in which 120 Indians were killed and more than 900 were wounded.\textsuperscript{95} However, after 1930 there was a decline in the percentage of Indian population in Burma. This was due to change in the political situation in the country. The British policy was definitely now for Burmanisation,

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p.17.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.17.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
although it could not effectively check the influx of Indians till Burma was separated from India in 1937.\textsuperscript{96}

The British government in India and Burma encouraged this unprecedented Indian immigration in Burma as a policy to strengthen the network of British imperialism in Burma. This large scale immigration led to the vibrant growth of the nascent nationalist movement in Burma.\textsuperscript{97} During the first phase (1886-1919), traditional nationalism arose on the crest of revival of Buddhism, renewal of awareness of the historic past before the British conquest and the inspiration from the Indian national movement.\textsuperscript{98} This led to the founding of the Young Men’s Buddhist Association (YMBA) in 1906. Its objective was to reshape important elements of the Buddhist tradition in the context of the best western learning.\textsuperscript{99} A strictly non-political approach to the study of Burmese history and culture was initiated by the Burma Research Society in 1909. Its field of interest included all aspects of Burma’s cultural history.\textsuperscript{100} A General Council of the Buddhist Associations (GCBA) began to meet in annual sessions during the course of the second decade of the twentieth century. At the close of the World War I, the GCBA emerged as an important spokesman for the educated Burmese laity.\textsuperscript{101} Nationalism as a powerful political force emerged in Burma only after the end of the First World War.\textsuperscript{102} In the period between the two world wars Burma’s primary aim was separation from India and emancipation from the

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp.17-18.  
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., p.19.  
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., p.16.  
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p.19.
economic hold of the Indians. Burmese nationalist leaders were in favour of the idea that separation from India and Indian influence must precede independence from Britain. But at the same time they tried to take full advantage of India’s progress towards self-government and constitutional reforms and vigorously pursued for their application to Burma. The Burmese kept a careful watch on the political developments in India. In August 1917 the Secretary of State for India announced the policy of “increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire”. But in the application of this policy, Montague-Chelmsford Committee excluded Burma, taking the stand that ‘Burma is not India’. The high hopes raised by the announcement turned to disappointment and the consequent unrest. The YMA emerged as the political nerve-centre of nationalism in Burma. Two delegations were sent to England from Burma in July 1919 and May 1920 under the auspices of the YMA, the first to press that Burma should also be included in the reform proposals and the second going even further for separation from India. During 1920-1923 political nationalism took on a mass character. At the return of the second delegation to Burma with demands for Home rule as its objective, the national agitation gathered momentum. On the patterns of India, weapons

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Hansard, Commons, 20 August 1917, Col.1695, quoted in Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.20.
106 Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.20.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
of boycott and non-cooperation were employed.\textsuperscript{109} Under these circumstances, the imperial British government was forced to implement the Montague-Chelmsford reforms as modified by the Whyte Committee in January 1923.\textsuperscript{110} The experiment in governmental reform under dyarchy was “at best a makeshift, opportunist measure which had little relevance to Burma’s wishes or needs”.\textsuperscript{111} But this experiment in governmental reform under dyarchy was incapable of tackling the country’s economic problems and was doomed to failure. Political unrest was aggravated during this period (1923-1929) by tangible economic grievances and by the rising tide of oppression to the Indian minority.\textsuperscript{112} Moreover there was “somewhat un-settling air of impermanence”\textsuperscript{113} about it, as the Government of Burma Act of 1921, had laid down that after ten years a Statutory Commission should be appointed to consider the possibility of a further instalment of reforms. In 1928, the Simonr Commission came to review the working of the reforms. It reported in favour of separation and a number of constitutional advances.\textsuperscript{114}

The germ of the proposal to separate Burma from India was contained in the Montague-Chelmsford report where it said that ‘Burma is not India’.\textsuperscript{115} In the first session of the Legislative Council constituted under the 1923 constitution, a resolution was passed favouring separation.\textsuperscript{116} There was no doubt that this correctly represented the views

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p.21.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.21.
\textsuperscript{114} Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p.22.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
held by most of the countrymen. "Official circles, and more informed Burmese opinion felt that the Indian connection was working to the disadvantage of Burma in several ways".  

The most important political issue which Burma faced from 1931-1936 was whether or not the country should be separated from India and if so, on what terms. A special Burma Round Table Conference sat in London between November 1931 and January 1932 to discuss the main lines of a constitution for a separated Burma. It became the major issue in the bitterly contested election of 1932. Anti-separation League won a resounding victory. However, hardly a single Burmese anti-separatist was in favour of permanent union with India. "Hence when Britain made it clear that she was not prepared to give Burma the option of contracting out of the Indian government at will, the league executed a complete volte-face and the Government of India Act of 1935 provided for the separation of the two countries to take effect on 1 April 1937". The new constitution of separated Burma " was given body in the Government of Burma Act, 1935 and spirit in the Instrument of Instructions from His Majesty to the Governor". The Burmese government came directly under the British parliament and a separate Burma office was created.

The new status assumed by Burma under the Government of India Act, 1935 raised the question of the relations of Manipur with that

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118 Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.22.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
123 Uma Shankar Singh, op.cit., p.22.
country, no longer a part of India but a separate Dominion. In November 1936 orders were issued by the Government of India as to the channel of communication on matters affecting Indian states and Burma and it was laid down that all correspondence on matters affecting Indian states and Burma should be conducted through the headquarters of the Crown Representative, except that as long as the Governor acted as Agent of the Crown Representative, correspondence which was not of importance and did not affect policy should be conducted direct between him and Burma regarding Manipur, the Khasi Hills and Tribal areas.

It was at this juncture when the Government of Burma Act, 1935 had already been passed by the British parliament and the actual separation was just to take effect on the 1st April, 1937 that the third session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha took place on 28 February, March 1 and 2, 1937 at Mandalay. Meanwhile after the second session of the Mahasabha held at Silchar on 26-30 January 1936, Maharaja Churachand Singh and the British officers became wary of the activities of the Mahasabha and kept a watchful eye on it. There was a suspicion on the part of the state government that the Mahasabha would gradually assume the form of political organisation which would surely tread on a path of conflict with the prevailing establishment. It was on this ground that Maharaja Churachand Singh chose to abstain from the third session at Mandalay. The Vice-President, Angom Tomchoubha Singh (Angom Nighthou) for the same reason did not join the third session.

Moreover, hindrances were placed against important leaders of the

125 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
Mahasabha, particularly Irawat to create difficulties in attending the session.\textsuperscript{128} Just on the preparatory stage of the third session, the Judicial member of the Darbar issued an order on 19 December 1936, restricting Irawat to join in the session and other meetings conducted by the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{129} Irawat, of course, made a formal approach to the Judicial Member who, contrary to his former restrictions, issued an order on 12 January 1937, which lifted the ban. Although there was no official declaration on the Mahasabha as a political body, Irawat was conscious of his own position in the state government service. He, therefore, submitted an application to the Judicial Member to grant him leave from his office in order to join the third session of the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{130} On the basis of the judicial members Memo No. 5993-J. III-3 dated 9 February 1937 forwarding a report from Shrijut Hijam Irawat Singh, Sadar Panchayat Member stating that he was leaving for Mandalay from 15 February to 20 March 1937 to join the annual session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha, the Manipur State Durbar granted the said leave on 3 March 1937 one day after the third session ended.\textsuperscript{131} We see from this episode that the Judicial Member though he was the head of the judicial department did not deliberately grant the leave to Irawat Singh although he had submitted the application for leave well in time. Resorting to the technique of red tapism, the Judicial Member managed to delay the granting of leave to Irawat Singh. Meanwhile Irawat Singh, true to his nature, undaunted by any consideration of punishment, chose to depart for Mandalay without waiting for the bureaucratic formality of the

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid.
sanctioning of leave. Crossing these bureaucratic hurdles Irawat Singh thus reached Mandalay in time for the third session.

On 27 February 1937 all the members and delegates of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha gathered at the mandop of Shrijukta Gokulbala Sharma in the Bamon Khunjao, Mandalay and the Subject Committee was formed. After this proceeding was over, Shrijukta Lalbala Sharma, the Branch Secretary of the Mahasabha in Burma informed the gathering of the telegram sent by His Highness Churachand Singh, the Maharaja of Manipur and his brother-in-law Angom Tomchouba (Angom Ningthou) informing of their inability to attend the session and raised his proposal to elect a President of the Mahasabha. On Irawat’s reiterating that though quite feasible in accordance with the rules of the Mahasabha, in view of the 10th resolution of the first session of the Mahasabha that His Highness the Maharajah of Manipur would be the sovereign of the Manipuri nation, that is, the head of the society and religion it would be correct to bring the activity of the Mahasabha to the pinnacle of success by keeping the chair of the President unoccupied as a mark of veneration for the Maharaja, all the participants of the meeting unanimously agreed to elect a new Vice-President. Shrijukta Churamani Singh, the Chairman of the Reception Committee proposed that Shrijukta Irawat Singh be elected as the Vice-President for the year 1937, which was supported by Shrijukta Chandrachor Sharma of

133 Ibid., pp.127-128.
134 Ibid., p.128.
Ningthem Purit Khun. The gathering approved the proposal to elect Shrijuuktka Irawat Singh as the Vice-President for the current year.

On 28 February 1937 as the session began Irawat Singh was elected the Vice-President. On being requested to take the seat of President, Irawat Singh put forth his proposal that the seat of the President be kept vacant as a mark of honour to His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur and he would discharge his duties of the session by sitting in a chair to be placed separately to the left side of the President’s seat. Though all the gentlemen from Burma and Manipur expressed the opinion that since His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur had not come to participate in the session there was no question of irreverence and hence all would be pleased if he discharged the duties of the President, Irawat Singh chose to sit on a separate chair as a mark of respect to the Maharaja of Manipur who was the President of the Mahasabha.

As the Vice-President took his seat Shrijuuktka Churamani Sharma welcomed all the delegates in a speech. After this speech Shrijuuktta Lalitamadhab Chattopadhyaya read out the annual report of the Gour Dharma Pracharini Sabha. This was followed by the reading of the long and eloquent speech of the Vice-President. When this speech was reading, all those delegates from Manipur and Burma paid homage to the motherland Manipur with tears. On 1 March, 1937 the second day of
the session, ten resolutions were discussed and passed.\textsuperscript{142} On 2 March 1937 the session was packed with delegates and visitors. All the resolutions which could not be covered in the previous day were considered and four resolutions were passed.\textsuperscript{143} After this Shrijukta Lalitamadhab Chattapadhyaya, Shrijukta Bangkabihari Sharma and Shrijukta Brajabala Sharma gratified the audience by their lectures on variegated topics i.e. history, religion, education, literature etc.\textsuperscript{144} The new Working Committee was constituted and Shrijukta Lalitamadhab Chattopadhyaya was elected as the General Secretary.\textsuperscript{145} The newly constituted working committee was composed of the following persons:\textsuperscript{146}

1. Churamani Sharma, Mandalay, Burma Khunjao
2. Brajabala Sharma, -do-
3. Jaduchandra Sharma, -do-
4. Gokulbala Sharma, -do-
5. Churachandra Sharma, -do-
6. Gokul Sharma, -do-
7. Brajabala Sharma (Tagaya), -do-
8. Chandradeb Sharma, -do-
9. Kulamani Sharma, Sagaing
10. Muktiram Sharma, -do-
11. Gokulchandra Sharma, -do-
12. Sukracharya Sharma, Amarapur, Taumyok

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p.131.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p.139.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., pp.138-139.
13. Gopal Singh, -do-
14. Brajashyam Sharma, Mandalay, Purit Khun
15. Nabachandra Sharma, -do-
16. Labanyachandra Sharma, -do-
17. Mohanshyam Sharma, -do-
18. Punyaban Sharma, -do-
19. Mani Sharma, -do-
20. Surdas Sharma, -do-
21. Kulamani Sharma, -do-
22. Bangkabihari Sharma, Manipur
23. Lalitamadhab Sharma, -do-
24. Kashiram Sharma, -do-
25. Lalbala Sharma, Mandalay, Bamon Khun

The resolutions adopted in the third session were in the spirit of education, religion and nationality. The second resolution was to request the local Authority to help an M.E. School where the Manipuri could learn Manipuri language (recognised by the Calcutta University), which was to be established in Mandalay.\footnote{Ibid., p.133.} The third resolution reiterated that with a view to preserve the Vaishnav religion of the Hindu Manipuris and to make progress thereof the education authority of the Manipur state be approached to include one of the religious books such as nityachar etc. as a textbook in the syllabus of the primary and high schools and the Manipuris residing outside Manipur be also obliged to learn these books as part of the syllabi.\footnote{Ibid., pp.133-134.} The fourth resolution stated that many Hindu Manipuri women in Burma have married out of the Manipuri society and
to save the situation from worsening, daughters be given in marriage to
the bridegrooms of own community by waiving the consideration of
money, thinking it to be a matter of pride in case they are deserving. In
the fifth resolution it was decided that to establish a branch samiti of the
Gourdharma Pracharini Sabha which was functioning as a wing of the
Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha. Vide the sixth resolution it was
decided to establish a Historical Research Society in accordance with
Resolution No.4 of the first session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri
Mahasabha. The seventh resolution stated that those brothers and
sisters who were outcasts from the Hindu Manipuri society be taken back
into the fold of the society after proper atonement according to the rituals
of the shastra provided that they voluntarily and frankly renew their faith
in the Sanatana Gourdhara, after a full realisation of their folly and errors
and the glory of our religion. It was stipulated in the eighth resolution
that a society of the Hindu Manipuris in Burma to be known as “Burmese
Manipuri Pandit Jyotisodaya Samaj” be established as a wing of the
Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha and the Local Authority be requested
to include it in the Jyotish Pandit society. The ninth resolution stated
that for the benefit of the Hindu Manipuris, the Local Government be
approached to reserve seats for the Hindu Manipuris (Pauna) in the cadre
of the Municipal Commissioners and Honorary Magistrates of the
different regions in which the Hindu Manipuris reside. The tenth
resolution stated that according to the creed of religion the Hindu
Manipuris cannot eat or drink anything until a dead member of his or her

149 Ibid., p.134.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid., p.135.
153 Ibid.
154 Ibid., p.136.
family is cremated. The Hindu Manipuris were very inconvenienced as they could not freely make arrangement for the timely cremation when a Hindu Manipuri deceased, which might sometimes amount to transgression of the religious rituals. It was decided to approach the Local Authority to take appropriate measures for timely cremation to avoid any irregularities in religion. In the eleventh resolution it was decided that each local authority of the various regions be approached to put on end to the utilisation of cows in the ploughing of the field as owing to such employment they failed to produce fine class of breed and led to premature loss of strength. According to the twelfth resolution the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha would adopt the “Goura Samprada” which was the forum for musical study of the Hindu Manipuris of Mandalay as its wing and it was resolved that the Sangeet Sammelani of Manipur be requested to assist the forum in the matter of music. The thirteenth resolution stated that the eighth resolution of the 2nd session was reconsidered; it was decided to request the governments of Burma and India to preserve intact the already prevalent commercial relations between the Manipuris of Burma and the Manipuris outside it.

Up to the third session, the social reform movement was based on the three pillars of education, religion and nationality. The movement assumed a harmonious character under the shadow of His Highness the Maharaja of Manipur and sought to strengthen the moral fabric of the Manipuri society to spread the light of modern education and restore the lost national pride by reviving the indigenous culture of the Manipuri

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., p.137.
158 Ibid.
people. The third session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was the watershed in the social reform movement ushered in at the first session of the Mahasabha and led by Irawat Singh. From this point onwards the social reform movement entered the stage of radicalisation. The radicalised movement which sought to address the root cause of the various social evils was naturally to take on a confrontation path with the feudo-religious establishment. Now the social reform movement at that stage assumed the following dimensions –

(i) The national consolidation of all Manipuris to awaken them to the necessity of unity i.e. organisation and to acquaint them with the prevalent picture of historical reality and to provide a forum of interaction and a channel of enlightenment.

(ii) The cultivation of creative activity among the Manipuris in all areas of human activity such as education, small-scale industries, trade and commerce, employment in government offices as well as private firms etc.

(iii) To acquire a space for the creative activity of the Manipuris so that the shackles of the feudo-religious regime could be broken through radical social and later political movements.

In the third session of the Mahasabha Irawat's thought as a protagonist of Manipuri national resurgence took a definite shape. In his address as the President of the session, he laid down the five pillars on which the Manipuri resurgence was to be built up, viz. (i) Manipuri language, (ii) Sanatana Dharma which is the Manipuri national religion, (iii) trade and commerce, (iv) women's education and (v) organisation.
Irawat saw that most of the Manipuris having left Manipur for a long time and being born and brought up in Burma, and having to intermingle with the Burmese day and night once they stepped out of their houses, had forgotten the Manipuri language though they knew that Manipuri language was their mother tongue, since they had resorted to the Burmese language as the medium of intercourse of the country, rather it could be said that most of them did not know the mother tongue.\textsuperscript{159} He noted that the national language is the strong knot that cements a nation and is the sacred foundation on which a nation develops.\textsuperscript{160} If we could not save our beloved mother tongue, there was no doubt that our nation would be doomed to perish.\textsuperscript{161} Irawat reiterated that the Resolution No. 7 of the first session i.e. Manipuri language which was recognised by the University be studied as a school vernacular by all Manipuris in and outside Manipur, and Resolution No. 12 of the second session i.e. to make efforts for the establishment of primary schools in every Manipuri village of other provinces, were not yet implemented in Burma and that if the mother tongue is studied thoroughly at the schools from the early childhood, the present misfortune of near-oblivion of the mother tongue would be prevented.\textsuperscript{162}

Irawat was much concerned to know that the Sanatana Gouradharma had degenerated in Burma. He desired the vital spirit of the religion to be brought out and serve as the unifying spirit of the Manipuri community in Burma. He pointed out that according to learned scholars Hindu religion was the grandest of all religions. The main causes of the

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., p.150.
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., pp.150-151.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., p.151.
Hindu Manipuris of Burma taking leave of the Vaishnab religion were the vagaries of war which they had to suffer occasionally and the lack of endeavour on the part of the Brahmins to protect the religion owing to personal miseries.\textsuperscript{163} Some followers of the religion had to leave the religion owing to complicacies which occurred at the time of marriage. It was also probable that this degeneration had resulted because the followers did not care to search for the essence of the Gourdharma and not know the essence even if they had searched for it.\textsuperscript{164} The learned also did not enlighten the people and the priests practised too many restrictions and excommunications without bringing to light any positive teachings of the religion.\textsuperscript{165} However, some followers were still abiding by the tenets and moral codes of the Gourdharma and it was heartening to know that ways are provided in this religion to attain a sacred path and to purge all sins. In this regard, the religious scriptures such as Shrimadbhagavat Geeta, Shrimadbhagavat, Shrishri Cheitanya Charitamrita etc. were the pride of the Hindus.\textsuperscript{166}

Irawat further warned that if they did not make efforts now to protect the Gourdharma and not try to search for the truth and abide by it, the Manipuri nation would perish along with the religion just like the bubbles on the sea burst out and disappear; it is their part and obligation to take all consequences of whatever bode for the Manipuri nation because they had the right to save and to make all efforts therefor.\textsuperscript{167} For the progress of the Manipuri society and the Gouradhama, Irawat appealed to all the Manipuri citizens in Burma to establish a

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p.154.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., p.154-155.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., pp.154-155.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.155.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., p.164.
“Gourdharma Pracharini Sabha” in every locality where the Hindu Manipuri Vaishnabites reside.\textsuperscript{168}

Irawat saw total inactivity of the Manipuris in trade and commerce as the principal reason for the manifest poverty of the Manipuri people. He pointed out that trade and commerce was the economic key for bringing progress in the stagnant Manipuri society. He belonged to the first generation of modern Manipuris who could foresee the role of market forces in the modernization of a traditional feudal society. Citing the shastras as the source Irawat said that Lakshmi dwelt in the midst of trade and commerce.\textsuperscript{169} He did not see the economic life of the Manipuris to be flourishing both in and outside Manipur. In cities like Rangoon, Mandalay etc. which are vibrant centres of trade and commerce, not a single establishment run by Manipuris was to be seen and the same situation was obtaining in convenient places like Cachar, Sylhet etc.\textsuperscript{170} Manipuri did not have any source to earn money because they did not pay attention to trade and commerce.\textsuperscript{171} Even if there was a stock of money, it was lost in no time because they did not know how to invest it.\textsuperscript{172} Irawat cautioned the Manipuris of his time that it was not proper to sit complaisantly when the problem of scarcity of money as well as the curse of unemployment was overwhelming the whole world.\textsuperscript{173}

Irawat observed that the womenfolk of Burma were literate generally and could read and write what they cognised, and, compared to

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., p.156.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., p.165.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
them the Manipuri womenfolk had lagged behind their Burmese counterpart in the field of education. If all the Manipuri women could at least read and write, the nation would become wholesome. Irawat said, “If the better half of the society lies benumbed, the society which is comparable to a human body is like a person afflicted with hemiplegia. That is why we must make all-out effort to provide education to the women.”

The fulfilment of the historical objective depended on the unity and solidarity of the Manipuri people. Irawat was deeply aware of the problem of getting his own people organised. Individualistic, sentimental and alienated among themselves the Manipuri nation is rift with dissensions. Irawat said, “Lastly I would like to appeal to all that we can realise the spirit of “Sangha Shakti Kalou Juge” (Strength lies in association) only by unity and association. The Manipuris are a people with exclusivist mind-sets based on individualistic ego. In a locality of five households there will be formed four separate parties among which one party will play the destabilising role. Some people will not consider such attitudes as wholesome and it is a consequence of these attitudes that the nation is steeped in the present miseries. This disunity among the siblings of the same mother who share in the joys and sufferings of each other should be discarded; we should devote ourselves to the service of the mother and the nation by building a bond of love. Except along this path the goal of progress will be very far to achieve and the stage of fulfilment will be very hard to reach.”

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174 Ibid., p.168.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid., p.169.
mind and make unified effort to save the beloved nation which was near extinction and face all the adversity that may come on the way.177

The Mandalay session of the Mahasabha marked the watershed of the social reform movement in Manipur. The period before this session was characterised by the collective effort of modernization based on the presupposition of non-agonistic picture of various sections of the Manipuri society. After the Mandalay session the social reform movement assumed a radical perspective and the edge of the movement was defected against the state authority and its coterie of people.

With the beginning of the year 1937 the Manipuri people experienced an added dimension over and above the old sufferings which exhausted the limit of tolerance.178 In April after the conclusion of the session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha at Mandalay in 1937 there was an atmosphere of unrest and tension in Manipur. Under the State Government the burden of pothang, yairek sentry, khewa tax, dolaireng, chandan senkhai etc. was intensified acutely.179 The added dimension was that of Amang Asheng (Pure and impure) related to religion which was enunciated by Shri Purailatpam Atombapu Sharma, the chief priest of the Shri Gobind Brahma Sabha.180 Having returned from Mandalay after the third session of the Mahasabha, Irawat launched a series of social reformation programmes under the banner of the NHMM, which may be summarised in this way.

177 Ibid.
178 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan(Manipuri), Imphal, Published by the author, 1987, p.31.
180 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Samelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan(Manipuri), op.cit., p.31.
These were protests against a feudal system of forced labour known as Pothang, under which peasants were forced to render compulsory labour in the service of state officials while on tour, official or otherwise, through the length and breadth of Manipur; against a system of forced sentry duty known as yairek sentry by which villagers were required to guard the taxes collected by the state officials on tour in the villages and render sentry duty at night against the system of peon/amin chakthak or forcing the villagers to provide compulsorily food and shelter to the peons and amins on tour in the villages; against the imposition of Pacha Napet and Chandan Senkhai, customary taxes levied on the Hindu subjects for wearing the chandan mark on the forehead and shaving of the head for religious ceremony; and other oppressive feudo-religious practices.\textsuperscript{181}

The most dramatic movement, however, is the struggle against the hegemony of the Mahasabha whose president was the Maharaja himself. A body of Brahmins headed by the Maharaja, the Brahmasabha represented the unholy alliance of the Maharaja and the priests. As it is, the Maharaja and the Brahmins were centres of power by themselves. In alliance, they could strike terror at the heart of any Manipuri who was a feudal subject and a Hindu by faith. The Brahmasabha could excommunicate any member of the Hindu community on any ground of which the body was the best judge and declare him an outcast from the society. The man becomes a mangba (a polluted one), an untouchable. A person who dares to mix with a mangaba (Pulluted) man in any form will become infected with ‘mangba’ in turn like a communicable disease.

\textsuperscript{181} Soyam Lokendrajit, \textit{op.cit.}, p.10.
The movement against the practice of Amang Asheng or the Brahmasabha was the epitome of the social reform movement launched by the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha under the leadership of Hijam Irawat Singh. The intensity of the peoples suffering increased manifold as the people were under a constant threat of being declared a ‘mangaba’ (impure) and ostracism under any pretext. The status of being a ‘mangaba’ was the state of living death as a ‘mangaba’ person was cut off from his near and dear ones and from the whole society. Suppose that a person is declared as impure and excommunicated from the society. In order for him to be restored to the society a purification ritual was to be performed and only then he could mix with the society. The purification ritual was to be performed only after an amount of Rs.80 paise 3 pais 2.  

182 In the case of a sick or a dead person, after due payment of the redemption money, the chief priest would go to the place where the sick or the dead person was staying and perform the purification ritual.  

183 After the purification ceremony the sick person could mix with the society. In case of the dead person, he could be cremated according to the religious rites and shradha karma could be performed.  

184 Until and unless this purification ceremony was performed a dead person could not be cremated according to religious rites. R.K. Rotonsana Singh says, “In those days, the people in the Imphal town and the villages were living in fearsome awe of the spectre of Amang Asheng. The number of those declared as Amangba soared like a deluge. On the other hand, the number of those who sought expiation increased day by day. The principal function of the Brahmasabha was to seek out the Amangbas and carry out expiation of

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182 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Samelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan(Manipuri) op cit., p.31.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
those ‘mangaba’ persons. As the number of those seeking expiation soared, it became a perennial source of income for the Brahmasabha. At the time Shri Atombapudev Sharma, Bidyaratna was the most authoritative person in the Brahmasabha who could deliver the final judgement on the issue of Amang Asheng. Taking advantage of his position, he was indulging in boosting his incomes.\textsuperscript{185}

In the historic struggle against the practice of Amang Asheng Irawat allied himself with Laikhuram Khagendrajit, Lalit Madhab Sharma and Bangkabihari Sharma.\textsuperscript{186}

In the early part of 1938 a well-known story-teller Kshetrimayum Gulamjat living at Kongba Kshetri Leikai to the South-East of Imphal who was declared sometime before as amangba by the Brahmasabha and prohibited from mixing with anybody, became terminally ill.\textsuperscript{187} The news of his illness was brought to Khagendrajit. Khagendrajit had already known through Irawat about the expressed commitment of the delegates of Manipur at the Mandalay to launch a frontal assault on the practice of Amang Asheng from the platform of the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{188} Both of them had already agreed between them to take up action with the co-operation of the people in case the death of Kshetrimayum Gulamjat occurred.\textsuperscript{189} At this juncture Khagendrajit met Irawat and both visiting the residence of Lalita Madhab conferred with him. Lalita Madhab also agreed to participate. Next all three of them went to the residence of Bankabihari

\textsuperscript{185} R.K. Rotonsana Singh, Manipurda Amang Asheng (Unpublished manuscript).
\textsuperscript{186} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Samelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan(Manipuri), op.cit., p.32.
\textsuperscript{187} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Hijam Irawat Singh(Unpublished manuscript in Manipuri).
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid.
Sharma and conferred with him. Bankabihari Sharma also agreed to participate in the event. Both Irawat and Khagendrajit were rejoiced at the two erudite Brahman Pandits standing by them.\textsuperscript{190} For ritual singing and for percussion instrument i.e. Pung. Thokchom Gopal, the exponent of manoharsai and Keisham Bishwarup, exponent of pung were all prepared for the occasion.\textsuperscript{191}

In June 1938 Khagendrajit was informed that Kshetrimayum Gulamjat was on the threshold of death. Khagendrajit promptly informed Irawat Singh, Lalitamadhab Sharma, Bangkabihari Sharma, Thokchom Gopal and Keisham Bishwarup.\textsuperscript{192} As dusk approached these persons along with Rajkumari Khomdonsana, wife of Irawat Singh in the front came accompanied by the volunteers and the local people and performed the cremation ceremony of the \textit{amangba} (impure or polluted) person.\textsuperscript{193} For the shradha karma Lalitamadhab Sharma acted as the priest, Bangkabihari Sharma recited the scripture, Irawat sang the ritual songs, Thokchom Gopal assisted the voice of Irawat, Keisham Bishwarup played the pung, Gourkishore Sharma who was Bishwarup’s disciple assisted his master and Ibomcha Singh acted as the duhar (second rank singer in the \textit{Nat Sankirtan}).\textsuperscript{194} After the successful performance of the cremation ceremony and the shradha karma of Kshetrimayum Gulamjat, Irawat Singh declared that an “amangba party” (a party of impure or polluted persons) will continue to exist and it will never submit to expiation. It was also declared that those who desired to join the \textit{amangba}
party would be welcome to it. 195 After about a month when a Meitei old man who lived to the north of Bangkabihari Sharma’s residence at Nagamapal died a similar ceremony was performed. 196 In this function two palas i.e. groups of singers, one pala of Nata Sangkirtana, and the other a manoharsai pala participated. Irawat was the main singer of the manoharsai pala. In this function performed at Nagamapal many Brahmins as well as many people from different localities took part. 197 As the resistance grew stronger in the year 1938 itself the number of people who were declared as amangba rose and became the majority of the Manipuri population. 198

In the year 1938 as the movement against Amang Asheng gathered momentum Irawat Singh, Lalitamadhab Sharma and Bangkabihari Sharma filed three legal suits to the President, Manipur State Durbar (PMSD) against the Chief Priest of the Brahasabha, Phurailatpam Atombapu Sharma on the charges of corruption and extortion. 199 The first suit i.e. Durbar Criminal Case No.6 of 1938 was filed by Bangkabihari Sharma, the second i.e. Durbar Criminal Case No. 18 of 1938 by Irawat Singh and the third i.e. Durbar Criminal Case No.56 of 1938 by Lalitamadhab Sharma. 200 Besides the above-mentioned three leaders, the

195 Ibid.
196 Ibid.
197 Ibid.
198 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan (Manipuri), op.cit., p.32.
199 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Hijam Irawat Singh, op.cit.
200 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan (Manipuri), op.cit., p.32.
following 10 (ten) activists also were the signatories to the said three legal suits, viz.:

1. Loukrakpam Ningthou Singh, Pung artiste
2. Phurailatpam Nilamani Sharma, Byakaran Tirtha
3. Rajkumar Ratan Singh
4. Loitam Yaima Singh
5. Haobam Lalhari Singh
6. Nongmeikappam Nabakishwar Singh
7. Aribam Gourahari Sharma
8. Aribam Kunjabihari Sharma
9. Okram Thouba Singh
10. Lairenlakpam Tombimacha Singh

In pursuance of the three petitions, Mr. A.R.H. MacDonald, Esq., ICS, President of the Manipur State Durbar commenced the proceedings of the cases. Although these cases were specifically filed against Atombapu Sharma, these were meant against the activities of the Brahmasabha. If the fees charged for expiation were proved to be a kind of extortion and materialised in the form of judgement, the consequence was going to be a traumatic for the Brahmasabha.

While the proceedings of the cases were going on in the Manipur State Durbar, an old man belonging to an ostracised family at the Gonok

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201 The list is prepared from Loitam Yaima Singh and R..K. Maipaksana Singh(Ed.), op.cit., p.9, in consultation with R.K. Rotonsana Singh, Manipura Amang Asheng (manuscript in Manipuri).
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
Leikai in Imphal deceased. After he was declared as impure by the Brahmasabha, he had deceased prior to his expiation. The family also decided not to pay the fee for expiation. The residents of the leikai did not venture in the house of the aggrieved family. As there was nobody to perform the shradha karma by reciting the scriptures, the religious ceremony was not to be performed. This new development was intimated to Irawat Singh. On hearing the news, Irawat Singh arranged the pung artiste and the ritual singers and performed the shradha ceremony and those signatories to the petitions attended as the audience of the occasion. Bangkabihiari Sharma, a leading signatory of the cases acted as the priest of the shradha function. Irawat Singh was the main singer, Okram Thouba, the pung artiste and Lairenlakpam Tombimacha, the assisting vocalist.

Meanwhile Mr. A.R.H. MacDonald, the PMSD was conducting the hearing of the cases. As the proceeding came to a conclusion, the PMSD was convinced that enough evidences were available to implicate Atombapu Sharma on the charge of extortion. The PMSD informed the petitioners that the judgement would be announced at 11 a.m. of the next day. However, on that day the PMSD could not announce the judgement as all the files relating to the cases were called up by Maharaja Churachand Singh. He informed the petitioners that the judgement would be announced in the court as and when the files were returned to

\[205\] Ibid.
\[206\] Ibid.
\[207\] Ibid.
\[208\] Ibid.
\[209\] Ibid.
\[210\] This list is prepared from Loitam Yaima Singh, op. cit., p.9, in consultation with R.K. Ratansana Singh, Manipurda Amang Asheng (Manipur manuscript).
\[211\] Ibid.
the court. The cases were adjourned indefinitely.212 Meanwhile on the same day when the Maharaja called up the files, Atombapu Sharma had departed for Nabadwip.213 Thus, the cases did not see the logical conclusion, having been terminated by the fiat of despotic power.

Among the masses the social reform movement under the physical and moral leadership of Irawat Singh had registered its first success. The people's defiance of the Brahmasabha had become complete as the majority of the Manipuri masses had chosen to embrace the fold of the Amangba rather than obey the diktat of the Brahmasabha. The tide of social change had reached the stage of irreversibility. Meanwhile the three cases filed against Atombapu Sharma under the leadership of Irawat Singh, Bangkabihari Sharma and Lalitamadhab Sharma had served its historic purpose by undermining completely the authority of the Brahmasabha and the Maharaja. The Brahmasabha was now in a state of coma and was dying any day. With the Brahmasabha in a comatose state the issue of Amang Asheng died down and the concomitant oppressive religious laws such as Pacha Napet, Chandan Senkhai etc. also ceased to exist. However, it must be noted that the success of the movement was limited to the capital and its surrounding areas as well as other important administrative centres such as Kakching. In the periphery and the secluded parts of the valley the unscrupulous Brahmins and the petty officials of the feudal regime continued their oppression. The social reform movement was continued in those peripheral areas till the advent of the Second World War in Manipur.

212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
The social reform movement which was being launched in Imphal and the nearby areas under the banner of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was taken up by the Manipur Krishi Sammelani in Nambol and the adjoining areas.\(^{214}\) This organisation was established to further the objectives of the Mahasabha in the matter of agricultural development.\(^{215}\) In 1935 the Manipur Krishi Sammelani was established in a large public meeting of the peasants/farmers convened in Nambol village under the presidenship of Salam Herananda Singh, Panchayat Member.\(^{216}\) Salam Herananda Singh, Maimom Madhumangol and Okram Ibomcha, Kaviraj were elected as the President, General Secretary and Secretary respectively.\(^{217}\) The headquarter of the Sammelani was centred at Nambol.\(^{218}\)

The Krishi Sammelani was in the forefront of peasants’ movements raising a number of social and economic slogans in Nambol and the adjoining areas. The Sammelani took part in and contributed in a large measure to the social reform movement against the evil practice of Amang Asheng under the leadership of Irawat Singh.\(^{219}\) When one Hidangmayum Amuba Sharma who was appointed Ratan by the Brahmasabha ostracized several villagers as Amangba, Okram Ibomcha Kaviraj organised a signature campaign and submitted a petition to the court of the PMSD against the said practice of ostracism.\(^{220}\) On 2 April 1940 the Durbar summoned the activists such as Okram Ibomcha et

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\(^{214}\) Mongjam Ritichandra, *op.cit.*, p.23.


\(^{216}\) Mongjam Ritichandra, *op.cit.*, p.22.

\(^{217}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{218}\) *Ibid.*


\(^{220}\) *Ibid.*
cetera and heard the case.\textsuperscript{221} Public meetings were repeatedly held in Nambol protesting against the oppression. The Ratan i.e. Amuba Sharma filed a case against Ibomcha Kabiraj regarding his protestations in the public meetings. The Durbar summoned and tried Ibomcha Kabiraj on 14 February 1941.\textsuperscript{222} The activists of the Krishi Sammelani also undertook a militant movement against the \textit{chandan senkhai} and \textit{pothang}.\textsuperscript{223} The leaders of this movement were Ningthoujam Yaojaba, Naorem Ibojao, Nongmaithem Panchai, Loukrakpam Iboton et cetera.\textsuperscript{224} Under their leadership the subjected people refused to pay \textit{chandan senkhai} and carry \textit{pothang}.\textsuperscript{225} Many protest meetings were held. The Manipur Government sentenced these leaders to imprisonment for five years at the Shillong Jail.\textsuperscript{226}

Thus we see that the social reform movement which was sparked off at the third session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha at Mandalay in 1937 saw its full development in the early part of 1938 under the leadership of Irawat Singh. The movement rached its climax when the three leaders of the movement, viz. Irawat Singh, Bankabihari Sharma and Lalitamadhab Sharma filed three different suits against Atombapu Sharma. Bidyaratna, the Chief Priest (Byabasthakari) of the Brahmasabha. The movement came to a successful culmination with the flight of Atombapu Sharma to Nabadwip and the complete immobilisation of the Brahmasabha. However, it took some more years for the movement to attain consummation in the peripheral and isolated

\textsuperscript{221} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., p.24.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{226} Ibid.
areas of the valley against the petty officials of the Brahmasabha who were taking undue advantage of the ignorance of the common people and the communication bottleneck in the peripheral areas.