CHAPTER-IV

THE POLITICAL AWAKENING AND THE POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN MANIPUR BEFORE WORLD WAR II
CHAPTER-IV

THE POLITICAL AWAKENING AND
THE POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN MANIPUR BEFORE
WORLD WAR II

The movement against the practice of Amang Asheng had come to an end with irreversible success. The people had risen up in unity against the fiat of the combined feudal and religious authority, viz., the Brahmasabha. The Brahmasabha had now been immobilized and its tentacles were frozen. The Maharaja Churachand Singh was quite powerless to help the Brahmasabha which was his favourite instrument for exercising his authority over his subjected people. At the same time the common people had been aroused from the slumber and inertia and had the experience of standing up against the might of the feudal and religious establishments.

With the experience of the struggle against the feudal-religious establishment, the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha (NHMM) under the leadership of Irawat Singh was bracing up for the inevitable political confrontation with the imperialist as well as the feudal establishment. The polarisation of the feudal-religious groupings on the one hand and the awakened people, on the other, which had begun at the time of the third session of the NHMM held at Mandalay was now complete with the successful culmination of the people's struggle against the practice of Amang-Asheng. Irawat Singh and his associates were now making preparations for the holding of the fourth session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha.
Before we discuss the fourth session of the NHMM, we must trace the germination of political awakening in the early part of the 1930s and the beginning of a movement which was trying to approximate to the character of a political movement. This movement launched by the Nikhil Manipur Praja (NMP) under the leadership of Laikhuram Khagendrajit may be characterized as the proto-political period of the history of modern Manipur.

The masses of the people in various parts of India were rising in waves in the struggle for freedom under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The intensity of this momentous political movement against the British imperial rule was also reflected in the Manipur state and lit up the flame of freedom in the heart of some leading protagonists.

Just as the Congress for the first time pioneered the articulation of public issues by the process of submitting of public grievances to the British government, in Manipur also those protagonists, who were politically enlightened and because of this were convinced that a united effort should be made to raise public demands, emerged and actually raised the demands.1 Among these pioneers, Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh (also called Iboongohal) was an important leader.

In 1923 Laikhuram Khagendrajit, who was from Wangkhei locality of Imphal town started for a journey of pilgrimage. After visiting Cachar and Nabadwip, he reached Tripura state. Khagendrajit who was a physician treated the sick Maharani Smt. Ratnamanjuri Devi back to recovery. Smt. Ratnamanjuri Devi appointed Khagendrajit as her Private

---

Secretary. In 1926 the Maharani started out on a pilgrimage of India and she called the mother of Khagendrajit, Rajkumari Tharosana to be her companion during the journey. On her second pilgrimage in 1928 Maharani Ratnamanjuri Devi made all the family members of Khagendrajit, all the disciples of Khagendrajit in the discipline of Thang-ta and the art of healing, accompany her during the journey. During this journey the pilgrims stayed at Calcutta for seven months. While they were staying in Calcutta the Congress Session was held there in December 1928. Upon the request of the Reception Committee of the Congress, the Maharani gave a generous donation to the session.² Khagendrajit was also allowed to participate in the session as a visitor by virtue of his being Private Secretary to the Maharani.³ From this experience the spirit of patriotism was aroused in him. Having heard the speech of Mahatama Gandhi, Khagendrajit was inspired with the seed of political consciousness.⁴ Having been acquainted with the mantras of Ahimsa and Swaraj evolved by Mahatama Gandhi, Khagendrajit nursed the yearning to translate the newly acquired wisdom of Ahimsa and Swaraj into practice in the soil of Manipur.⁵ In view of his position as a private secretary of the Maharani of Tripura as well as being a Manipuri and his enthusiasm, the Congress leaders were amiably disposed towards him. In the pilgrimage journey Khagendrajit found that those activists

² Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sanmilani Amasung Anishuba Nupilu (Manipuri), Imphal, Published by the author, 1987, p.13.
⁴ Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, Imphal, Khagendrajit Research Committee, 1985, p.3.
who were working for the welfare of the common people of different places were all of the Congress. In the course of the pilgrimage he was able to study the movements of the masses conducted under the leadership of Gandhiji.  

In the last leg of her itinerary the Maharani stayed for about one year in 1930 and she returned to Tripura at the fag end of March 1931. Not long after her returned home, in June 1931, she died in the capital of Tripura. After the Maharani’s death, Khagendrajit did not stay long in Tripura, he returned to Manipur. Khagendrajit analysed the religious and the economic situation and thought deeply about the political implications. His mind was engaged about the introduction of the non-violent resistance of Mahatma Gandhi in Manipur. Khagendrajit was inclined on building up a people’s movement for the sake of the people as was done in many parts of India. Nevertheless as Manipur was a feudal state, the governing practice was different from the British governed provinces of India, a political party could not be formed. The dual rule of the British colonial regime and the feudal establishment ruled with a strong hand. No political party could be hoped for nor any political discussion could be made. In the prevailing circumstances he was pre-occupied with the problem of how a political movement could be launched in Manipur.

---


Khagendrajit took the first step and formed the Goura Sampradai Mahasabha along with Seram Kala, Chontham Meramacha, Mathurabasimayum Tonjao Sharma and Rajkumar Bhubansana. The main objective of this Mahasabha was to further the progress of the Goura Dharma. Large congregations of the Mahasabha began to be held in many localities of the Imphal town. In such religious congregations Khagendrajit introduced discussion of political issues. On listening to the political discourses of Khagendrajit who had met Mahatama Gandhi, heard Gandhiji’s speech and had met several Congress leaders while touring the whole of India, the thinking of a cross-section of people underwent a change. By this time he also formed an organization called Assam Manipur Banijya Samiti. This organisation helped in building up good relations among the Meitei traders based in Shillong, Gauhati, Hojai, Dimapur, Mao and Imphal and thus created a congenial climate for carrying on trade and commerce on the basis of mutual cooperation. Khagendrajit also found that in the Manipuri market only the womenfolk were the vendors. As the most important profession of weaving and vending were the preserve of the womenfolk, the men were left without any source of work. As a result, the menfolk were compelled to go outside Manipur in search of work. Khagendrajit thought that a Nipa Keithel (all men’s market) should be established to provide a place of work for the men. He actively campaigned for a Nipa Keithel and as a result such a market called Sagolband Nipa Keithel was set up on the easternmost outskirts of Sagolband locality of Imphal.

---

10 Naoroibam Indramani, op.cit.
12 Naoroibam Indramani, op.cit.
13 Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.15.
In that period of time when the religious congregations, interspersed with political discourses, were in progress, the common people were eking out a precarious existence. During the month of *Poinu* (December), an amount of Rs.1.00 could buy 4 *sangbais* of paddy in the villages and 3 *sangbais* in the Imphal area. That comes to 30 paise per *sangbai* in Imphal. The economic plight of the common people can be realised in view of the fact that the per day wage of digging the earth was six paise only. Even such type of work was not available in plenty. So able-bodied persons went outside Manipur in search of labour jobs. To compound this economic plight, a water tax was imposed on the residents of Imphal area who were situated near the public hydrants.\(^{14}\) The tax amount was Rs.2.50 per household on a yearly basis, i.e. about 21 paise per month. This yearly tax was imposed for public hydrants fixed on the roadside; there was no provision for individual household connection. In view of the economic hardship of the residents of Imphal town, it was an unbearable burden to have to pay an amount of Rs.2.50 in a lump-sum.\(^{15}\) By that time Mahatama Gandhi had just completed the salt satyagraha in the Dandi sea-shore in Gujarat and the impression of the success was fresh in the mind. Khagendrajit thought it opportune to start a satyagraha movement for the abolition of the water tax.\(^{16}\)

Khagendrajit organized a signature campaign among the residents of Khurai, Wangkhei, Khurai and Yaiskul Panas (administrative division of Imphal town in the feudal era) of Imphal who have been enlightened and consolidated on the basis of the religious congregation of the Goura Dharma Pracharini Mahasabha, Assam Manipur Banijya Samiti and the

\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*
Nipa Keithel at Sagolband and submitted a petition to Maharaja Churachand Singh stating that the residents were not in a position to pay the excessive water tax which was levied on the Imphal residents at the rate of Rs.2.50 per household and the water tax be wholly exempted. In response to the said petition, the Forest Member of the Manipur State Durbar issued a notice dated 9 May 1932 stating that the rate of water tax was reduced from Rs.2.50 to Rs.2.00 only. The residents could not be satisfied with the said notice of the Forest Member and submitted another petition to exempt the water tax completely. On the Maharaja’s reiterating that the water tax cannot be exempted totally, and that only reduction could be considered, the residents again submitted another petition praying for reduction of the water tax to Re. 0.75 (known as Siki Ahum in Manipuri).

As the month of October approached the friction between the state government and the residents of Imphal intensified. While the residents were pressing for implementation of the contents of the petition, the state government were exerting pressure for payment of the due water tax. The tax-debtor began to be arrested and imprisoned. The Manipur State Durbar issued a notice dated 16 October 1932 stipulating that unless the tax dues were not paid off within three days, all the tax-debtors would be arrested and imprisoned. As soon as the notice was received it transpired to Khagendrajit that a political movement was needed to

---

17 Ibid.
18 Laikhuram Iboi Singh, October Revolution: 1935, Manipur (Manipuri), op.cit., p.4.
19 Laikhuram Iboi Singh, Manipur Praja Samelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.16.
relieve the people of their miseries.\textsuperscript{21} On that very day Khagendrajit conferred with Seram Kala Singh, Mathurabasimayum Tonjao Sharma, Rajkumar Bhubonsana, Chongtham Meramacha Singh, etc. and formed a political party called "Nikhil Manipur Praja" (NMP) in a clandestine manner.\textsuperscript{22} This party canvassed the signatures of some residents and submitted another petition to the political Agent on 7 October 1932. The petition pleaded that no arrest be made before any final decision regarding the petition for reduction of the water rate to Re.0.75 was known.\textsuperscript{23} The petition did not have any effect at all. The Maharaja did not issue any urgent order; instead, he caused several tax debtors to be arrested and imprisoned. The Nikhil Manipur Praja prepared itself for a resistance movement. On 7 November 1932 Seram Kala Singh and Mathurabasimayum Tonjao Sharma led a demonstration of the residents.

The slogans shouted in this demonstration were against the arrest of tax-debtors and for abolition of the water tax. On the same day the two leaders were arrested and imprisoned.\textsuperscript{24} On the next day i.e. 8 November 1932 Rajkumar Bhubonsana Singh, Rajkumar Latsaheb and Rajkumar Tombireisana led a demonstration of three hundred residents shouting slogans demanding the release of all arrested residents and the abolition of water tax. The three leaders were promptly arrested and imprisoned.\textsuperscript{25} After sensing the mood of the people, Maharaja Churachand Singh released all the five leaders on 11 November 1932 and assuring them that a new order in respect of the water tax would be issued, he appealed to

\textsuperscript{21} Laikhuram Iboi Singh, Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, (Manipuri), op.cit., p.4.
\textsuperscript{22} Laikhuram Iboi Singh, October Revolution 1935, Manipur, (Manipuri), op.cit., p.4.
\textsuperscript{23} Laikhuram Iboi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasang Anishuba Nupilan (Manipuri), op.cit., pp.16-17.
\textsuperscript{24} Naoroibam Indramani, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
them to refrain from any agitation. In pursuance of the Maharaja’s instruction the Forest Member of the Manipur State Durbar issued a notice dated 30 November 1932 notifying that the water tax liability of Rs. 2.00 per household now stood reduced to Rs.1.50. The notice also stipulated that all the tax arrears were to be paid at the new rate, and also that all the defaulter fines would be waived off. The tax liability of the destitute persons e.g. widows etc. were also waived off. In his meeting with the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja, the Maharaja gave the assurance that he would strive to abolish the water tax after a period of three years and appealed to them to pay the water tax at the newly fixed rate of Rs.1.50. The leaders accepted the proposition of the Maharaja. They considered the outcome as a big success and were obliged to wait for three years in compliance with the commitment made by the Maharaja.

At the start of the year 1934 the committee of the Nikhil Manipur Praja was reconstituted. The four Panas (administrative divisions), i.e., Khurai, Wangkhei, Khurai and Yaiskul were each taken as the constituencies of the organisation. Four representatives from the said constituencies were elected to form the working committee. Kshetrimayum Tomba Singh from Khurai, Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh from Wangkhei, Chongtham Meramacha Singh and Hijam Hawaimaton Singh from Yaiskul. Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh was elected as the President. The working committee formed a secretariat by incorporating two persons from outside. Wayenbam Ningthoujao Singh and Pungshumbam Ningthoujao Singh were elected as the General

26 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, October Revolution, 1935, Manipur, (Manipuri), op.cit., p.5.
27 Ibid. p.6.
Secretary and the Assistant Secretary respectively. In this way the Nikhil Manipur Praja acquired a new shape.\textsuperscript{28}

As the year 1935 set in, the time limit promised to the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja by the Maharaja within which the waiver of the water-tax would be considered was getting nearer. In the year 1935, large congregations of the Goura Sampradai Mahasabha took place. In these congregations, efforts were made for political consolidation. On 19 August 1935 the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja submitted a memorandum containing eight points to Maharaja Churachand Singh.\textsuperscript{29} The memorandum contained the following eight points:\textsuperscript{30}

1. In view of rising cases of theft and robbery in spite of police vigil, village volunteer force should be established in every leikai/village so as to insure peace and normalcy among the people.

2. As the Maharaja promised in October 1932 that waiver of the water tax would be considered after payment of the said water tax for three years, now three years are completed so water tax may kindly be waived.

3. The tax on bicycle which brings no income be waived.

4. The Manipuri people were mostly destitute without any source of income; so, they were defaulters of land revenue. Payment of land revenue in four instalments may be allowed.

5. Since some rich people took up the work of paddy husking in mechanical mills, the women paddy pounders have been

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p.7.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., p.9.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., pp.11-13.
deprived of employment. To save the employment of the paddy pounders, paddy husking in the mills may kindly be banned. Since the mill owners export the rice outside Manipur, the banning of paddy husking in the mills would prevent scarcity in the month of Inga-Ingan.

6. Fair price shops be opened in every leikai/village by forming consumers cooperatives.

7. The judicial members be appointed by election so that the mature aged persons can participate in the administrative work as the people are averse to the educated youths monopolising the administrative work.

8. Whenever the Maharaja travels outside Manipur, he should not stay long because during his absence the cases of theft and robbery increases and other people suffer acutely.

As October arrived, it became clear that the waiver of the water tax would not at all be considered. As the imprisonment of water tax debtors did not cease and the bicycles of the bicycle tax-debtors were seized and brought to the office, the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja intensified their campaign. On 6 October 1935 the NMP submitted another memorandum to Maharaja Churachand Singh.\(^{31}\) In the first place, the latter memorandum asserted that the holding of the exhibition of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha from 21-30 May 1934 and the interaction of the members at the police land (also known as Haying Khongban) which was the abode of the deities, was a sacrilege committed by the organisers not out of ignorance but of a separate motivation. It would bring a bad result for the king as well as the people. The

---

\(^{31}\) Naoroibam Indramani, op.cit.
perpetrators of the sacrilege should be punished; if so, the bad results would possibly be obviated. Secondly, after notifying that a visiting fee at the rate of Re. 0.25 would be taken in respect of the session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha, it was again announced that no fee would be taken. Afterwards, the visiting fee was taken. This is a display of bad arrangement. Since the organizers are responsible persons in the state administration and the administration run by such doubtful persons cannot possibly bring any good results. Thirdly, while arresting water tax-debtors, some persons who had no tax-debt were also arrested and the released on finding no dues. This unjudicious use of authority is a bad practice. Fourthly, these perpetuators of wrong acts were all educated youths. They should be removed and persons having knowledge and good motives and administrative ability should be appointed in their stead. Fifthly, in the Manipur State Durbar and other courts juniors appointed by the courts participate in the hearings. Jurors should be appointed by the vote of the people. Only then the purpose of justice will be fulfilled.\textsuperscript{32} The contents of the above memorandum cast aspersion on the integrity of the Maharaja and the Durbar Members while the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja heightened the momentum of these campaign, the Manipur State Durbar were waiting for an opportunity to frame the leaders.\textsuperscript{33} On 17 October 1935 some activists of the Nikhil Manipur Praja in the Nambol area held a meeting and resolved that they did not pay attention to the movement and also did not render cooperation to the activities of the leaders; they also submitted a copy of the said resolution to the Maharaja. This resolution copy was passed by the Judicial Member to the police on 24 October 1935. On 22 October 1935 the houses of the five


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p.14.
leaders who were signatories to the first memorandum, viz; Laikhuram Khagendrajit, Kshetrimayum Tomba, Chongtham Meramacha, Hijam Hawaimaton and Wayenbam Ningthou Singh were searched and many documents were sized by the police as per the order of the police member. On 24 October 1935 as per the order of Judicial member of the Durbar the police registered a FIR case No.52 of 1935-36 and accordingly 9 (nine) leaders of the movement were arrested. The names of the nine leaders according to the list of the accused are:

1. Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, Wangkhei
2. Kshetrimayum Tomba Singh, Khurai Soibam Leikai
3. Chongtham Meramacha Singh, Khurai Lamabam Leikai
4. Hijam Hawaimaton Singh, Yaiskul
5. Wahengbam Ningthoujao Singh, Singjamei
7. Chongtham Yaima Singh, Khwai Lalambung

The first five leaders were sent to jail on 26 October 1933 and the last four leaders were released on bail on the same day. The police arrested and detained 81 subjects connected with the resistance movement from Imphal and the village areas. After their statements were taken they were released. On the basis of these statements the police submitted the enquiry report to the Durbar on 28 November 1935 and the Durbar registered a criminal case No.30 of 1935. After trial for about five months

---

34 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan (Manipur), op.cit., pp.21-22.
36 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, October Revolution:1935, Manipur, (Manipur), op.cit., p.15.
the Durbar announced the judgement on 20 March 1936.\textsuperscript{37} The accused Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 9 viz. Laikhuram Khagendrajit, Khsetrimayum Tomba Singh, Chongtham Meramacha Singh, Hijam Hawaimaton Singh, Wayenbam Ningthoujao Singh and Pungsembam Ningthoujao Singh were sentenced to one month’s rigorous imprisonment under Sec. 124, IPC and accused Nos. 1, 3 and 4 viz., Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, Chongtham Meramacha Singh and Hijam Hawaimatol Singh to one month’s rigorous imprisonment under Sec. 417 I.P.C. which were to run concurrently. Accused Nos. 6, 7 and 8 viz. Mutum Chaoba Singh, Chongkham Yaima and Hijam Chaoten Singh were acquitted. Accused Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 were to serve the above sentences in addition to the jail term which they had already served. All the six leaders were released on 19 April 1936 from the jail.\textsuperscript{38}

On the very next day of the release of the six leaders, Hijam Irawat Singh visited the residence of Khagendrajit and both the leaders discussed the emerging the political scenario.\textsuperscript{39} They also discussed about the steps to take for actualizing a stronger political party in Manipur.\textsuperscript{40} After their release from the jail, the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja were thinking that a bigger political party was the need of the juncture and were looking for the way of its materialisation. At the fag end of 1937, the leaders of the Nikhil Manipur Praja worked shoulder to shoulder with the leaders of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha and battled against

\textsuperscript{37} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan} (Manipur), op.cit., p.23.

\textsuperscript{38} Naoroibam Indramani, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{39} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan}, op.cit., p.28.

\textsuperscript{40} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh}, op.cit., p.8.
the stigma of Mangba-Shengba and the Brahmasabha.41 Observing this emerging picture, many high ranking officials who were members of the Mahasabha dissociated themselves from the organization. Ultimately, the Maharaja and his brother in-law Angom Nighthou dissociated from the Mahasabha. In the month of October 1938 Irawat Singh and Khagendrajit Singh discussed the situation; as a result, the Nikhil Manipur Praja merged with the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha.42 All the activists of the NMP joined the NHMM. Khagendrajit Singh and many activists participated in the fourth session of the NHMM.

Irawat who had observed the Swadeshi Movement while he was a student at Dhaka kept track of the nationalist movement led by the Indian National Congress in general and the states’ people’s movement which was rising up in the different Indian princely states placed under the paramountcy of the British Imperial rule in particular. The upsurge of the states’ people’s movement was of relevance to Manipur because Manipur was also a princely state under British Paramountcy. The 51st Annual Session of the Congress, i.e., the Haripura Session held on 19-21 February 1938 and the 52nd Annual session, i.e., the Tripuri Session held on 10-12 March 1939 brought a catalytic effect in this upsurge of the states’ people’s movement. In respect of the demand of the states’ people to clarify that India meant the whole of India, including the Indian states and to appoint a committee to enquire into the political and economic

41 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.28.
condition of the states' people in some selected areas, the Haripura Congress resolved that it stood for the same political, social and economic freedom in the states as in the rest of India and considered the states as integral parts of India which cannot be separated. Pointing out that the Purna Swaraj or complete independence, which was the objective of the Congress, was for the whole of India, inclusive of the states, the resolution put on record that the only kind of federation that could be acceptable to the Congress was one in which the states participate as free units, enjoying the same measure of democratic freedom as the rest of India. Deploiring the existing backward condition and utter lack of freedom and suppression of civil liberties in many of these states the Haripura session declared its support for full responsible government and the guarantee of civil liberty in the states.

The adoption of a new and activist approach towards the states was due to the pressure of the states' people's leaders upon the Congress. But so far as actual political action was concerned, the Haripura Congress upheld the earlier policy of non-interference. It was decided that the state Congress Committees, though functioning under the direction and control of the Congress Working Committee, could not engage in parliamentary activity or launch direct action in the name or under the auspices of the Congress. Giving the suggestion that independent organisations should be formed in the states for carrying on internal struggles, the Congress

45 Atul Chandra Pradhan, op.cit., p.281.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
advised the states’ people to bear the burden of carrying on the struggle for freedom and with its moral support and sympathy and permitted individual Congressman to render assistance to the states people’s movement in their personal capacities.\textsuperscript{48}

The months following the Haripura Congress witnessed an unprecedented awakening in a number of princely states and the greater involvement of individual Congress leaders as well as the Congress party in such movements.\textsuperscript{49}

The agitation in the Mysore state figured prominently before the Congress and the nation. In March 1938 the Mysore congress was formed to carry on parliamentary activities and internal struggle for responsible government. The Mysore congress used to hoist the flag of the National Congress. The state authorities sought to suppress the movement with oral warnings and prohibitory orders. On 11 April 1938, the police fired on a public meeting held at Viduraswatham defying the ban order; 32 persons were killed and 48 were injured. Sardar Patel and J.B. Kripalani negotiated with the state authorities and arrived at a settlement by which the state authorities agreed to recognize the Mysore Congress, consider responsible government. They also committed themselves to withdraw repressive measures and announce general amnesty to all who were persecuted. As a result of this the Mysore Congress withdraw its civil disobedience movement.\textsuperscript{50}

On 26 August 1938 the Travancore State Congress started the civil disobedience movement. As the state authorities resorted to repressive

\textsuperscript{48} V.P. Menon, \textit{op.cit.}, p.43.
\textsuperscript{49} Atul Chandra Pradhan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.282.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.282-283.
measures, the Travancore State Congress alleged that it was impossible to carry on agitation in a constitutional manner because of repression and abrogation of civil liberties. Mahatama Gandhi appealed to the state authorities to allow the state Congress to carry on the agitation and to initiate an inquiry into charges of repression.51

While the Travancore movement was continuing people’s movement also started in the biggest states of Kashmir and Hyderabad. In Kashmir, the Muslim conference carried on its agitation, in spite of severe repressive orders issued by the state authorities. On the Dewan’s alleging that the Muslim Conference was a communal Organisation, the name was changed to the People’s Conference on the advice of Jawaharlal Nehru. Hindus were also allowed to join it. In Hyderabad State, the Hydrabad State Congress started its agitation on 24 October 1938 for its legal recognition and responsible government. The simultaneous agitation against the Nizam by the Hindu communal organisations, i.e. the Arya Samaj and Hindu Mahasabha landed the State Congress in a complexity as it preferred to be secular in spite of its Hindu predominance. On the advice of Mahatama Gandhi and other Congress leaders, the State Congress suspended its satyagraha on 23 December 1938 hoping that the Nizam’s government would release the political prisoners, lift the ban on the State Congress and pave the way for responsible government. 52

In the Kathiawad state, Jethalal Joshi and U.N. Dhebar with encouragement from Sardar Patel organised a public meeting of the Kathiawad Rajakiya Parishad in March 1937. The public meeting

51 Ibid., p.283.
attended by about 15,000 people resolved to demand responsible government. By mid-August 1938, similar agitation began in the Rajkot state. After a meeting of the Rajkot Praja Parishad on 5 September 1938, Sardar Patel put forth its demand for a scheme of responsible government, the holding of elections, limitation of the Privy Purse, etc. On 25 December 1938 Sardar Patel arrived at the agreement with the ruler by which the ruler proposed to limit his privy purse and set up a committee of the subjects or officials to recommend reforms. Sardar Patel was to recommend seven names of the said committee. Thereupon the Praja Parishad withdrew its agitation.\(^5^3\)

On 24 April 1938, at Udaipur, the Mewar Rajya Praja Mandal was formed with the object of attaining responsible government by peaceful and legitimate means. In October the satyagraha against the ruler of Mewar began in the towns of Mewar.\(^5^4\)

In the mid-1938 the Praja Mandal movement began in the Orissa States. The second Orissa State’s People’s conference held at Cuttack on 23 June 1938 authorized its delegates to form People’s Sabhas or Praja Mandal in three respective areas. The All Orissa States Enquiry Committee was formed with Sarangadhar Das as convenor to investigate and report on the illegalities in the state. Meanwhile Praja Mandal were formed in different states. The Enquiry Committee and the local Praja mandals became the channels for the expression of the accumulated discontent of the State’s people. Hundreds came forward to give evidence.\(^5^5\)

\(^{53}\) Ibid., p.285.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., p.287.

\(^{55}\) Ibid., pp.285-286.
On 5 July 1938, Prajamandal agitators were arrested in the Nilgiri state. Due to harassment by the Durbar, the agitators fled the state and set up their headquarters in a village of the adjoining Balasore district. From that village trained volunteers were sent to Nilgiri by their leader, Guruchandra Das, a Congress socialist.\footnote{Ibid., p.286.}

By September 1938, the Prajamandal movement began in the Talcher and Dhenkanal states. The Talcher Prajamandal, formed in September 1938 put forward the demands for responsible government, freedom of speech, assembly and association, abolition of several feudal corners etc. Meanwhile in Dhenkanal, after the arrest of the agitators by the state authorities, large crowds, armed with weapons, flocked to the state capital. In the stern measures taken by the Durbar, about 18 persons were killed as a result of police firing. In November 1938 also, in the course of the agitation, the excited people attacked the state police. In the firing and the clash with the police a number of policemen and the agitators were injured. In the first week of December, Nabakrushna Choudhary, the Congress socialist leader led the movement after resigning from the Orissa Legislative Assembly. A party of the agitators led by Choudhary, was arrested by the Dhenkanal Police on 3 December 1938.\footnote{Ibid., pp.286-287.}

Although the Haripura session had already adopted the policy of non-interference in the affairs of the states, it was not easy even for Gandhiji to draw a Khadi curtain screening the states from the general mass-awakening. \footnote{V.P. Menon, op.cit., p.43.} Meanwhile individual Congressman started leading
the agitation in the states themselves. The All India Congress Committee meeting in Delhi in September 1938 condemned regression in Travancore, Hyderabad, Kashmir and the Orissa States.\textsuperscript{59} The meeting of the Congress Working Committee, held at Wardha in December 1938 welcomed the awakening of the people of the Indian states in many parts of the country as a hopeful prelude to the larger freedom comprising the whole of India for which the Congress had laboured.\textsuperscript{60} The Working Committee was now finding it impossible to justify the policy of nonintervention. Gandhi, the staunch advocate of non-interference, felt inclined to favour intervention by December 1938 and observed, “If the Congress feels that it has the power to offer effective interference, it will be bound to do so when the call comes”.\textsuperscript{61}

These political developments in the British provincial areas resulting from the mass movement launched by the National Congress and the rising tide of the people’s movements in the princely states inspired by the National Congress could not go unnoticed by the educated elite of Manipur. Having observed the Swadeshi Movement from close quarters while studying at Dhaka, Irawat Singh, of course, experienced the most profound impact.

One author says, “. . . there was no scope for a political action in the policy and programme of the organisation (i.e. Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha). Finding this lack of opportunity for political activities, some leading members, mostly educated elite group, who were influenced by the political programme of the Indian National Movement, strongly felt

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Atul Chandra Pradhan, op.cit., pp.287-288.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p.288.
the immediate need of a political organization in Manipur. They were fully convinced that a sweeping political change in the state could be possible only when there was a political organization\textsuperscript{62} With this objective firmly in their minds, the protagonists of the new political awakening were now transforming the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in its fourth Session into a platform for launching a political movement in the state of Manipur. The fourth session of the NHMM took place at the Chingnaga ground to the south of Imphal on 29 and 30 December 1938.\textsuperscript{63} There occurred a momentous metamorphosis in the perspective and objective of the organisation. The communal qualifier ‘Hindu’ was removed from the nomenclature of the organisation.\textsuperscript{64} The Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha now became the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The Hindu religious perspective built upon the foundation of the Manipuri speaking Hindu community was now abandoned and the secular ideology was adopted. The second momentous metamorphosis was the taking up of political struggle by the adopting of the demand for responsible government.\textsuperscript{65} From a social and cultural organization the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha was transformed into a political organisation. The session strongly condemned the repressive measures adopted towards the people who carried on agitations for fulfillment of their demands in the states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Dhenkanal, Atgar, Rajkot, Kolapur and the other native states in Orissa expressed its sympathy to all the bereaved members of the families of those heroes

\textsuperscript{62} N. Joykumar Singh, Social Movements in Manipur, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1992, p.96.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., p.171.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
who scarified their lives in the struggle of freedom.\textsuperscript{66} The Mahasabha expressed its joy at the reforms being introduced in two states of Majurbhanj and Jodhpur for responsible government, as well as at the success and consolidation of the Congress Coalition Ministry in Assam and congratulated the Honourable Chief Minister Shrijut Gopinath Bordoloi in his success.\textsuperscript{67} The session lamented at the fact of continued incarceration of Rani Gaidinlieu in the Shillong Jail while all the political prisoners in Assam and many of them in the other provinces had already been released and resolved to approach the Indian government as well as the Local Authorities for the immediate release. Regarding the separation of the administrations of the Hills and the valley the session maintained that the separation of the Hills from the State was a great loss to the Hillman as well as to the Meiteis and lodged a strong protest against the separation of the Hills and resolved to approach the India government for keeping the Hills under the state administration. The Mahasabha also demanded the fulfilment of the claim of the Manipur state subjects for the establishment of a legislative council for the attainment of the representative form of government and resolved that the Mahasabha made efforts for attaining this claim.\textsuperscript{68}

Besides taking up the political mantle, the fourth session continued to pay attention to the three principles of education, religion and nationality. On religious affairs, the session pointed out the absence of sound and well-established Sanskrit Institutions worth the name for imparting education to the Manipuri Brahmins who had to perform

\textsuperscript{66} Karam Manimohan Singh, Hijam Irabot Singh and Political Movements in Manipur, Delhi, B.R. Publishing Corporation, 1989, p.75.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p.p. 75-77.
without commission of mistakes the functions of directing religious matter, making recitals at worship and Sradha ceremony etc. and resolved to approach the state authorities for establishing good Sanskrit Institutions where the Manipuri Brahmans may be given good education in Sanskrit, as well as in theology and philosophy. Citing the existing members of the Brahma Sabha as the prime cause of the suffering of the Manipuri Vaishnabs who were declared as mangba on the slightest pretext and extorted fixed amounts of money, the session resolved to approach the state authorities to dissolve the existing body and form a new body to decide religious affairs by electing members from among the Meiteis and the Brahmans. The session also resolved to inform the leaders of those Kritania Manipuri of the Tripura state to do Sudhi in 15 days for both the cases of birth and death, instead of the former practice of Sudhi of birth in 10 days and that of death in 15 days.\(^{69}\)

The session did not leave out resolutions on the education principle. Noting that not even one out of a hundred Manipuri people were literate, the session called for a literacy campaign among the illiterate adults so that they might become literate to double the current rate of progress. It was also resolved to approach the appropriate authorities to introduce the Manipuri language, recognized by the Calcutta University in the schools where only the Manipuri pupils read as well as in those where the Manipuri pupils also read. The Mahasabha conveyed its thanks to the Maharaja of Tripura for exempting the Manipuris living in the state from payment of their tuition fees in the schools of the state.\(^{70}\)

\(^{69}\) Ibid.  
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
On the nationality principle, the session passed resolutions to safeguard the identity of the Manipuris. The Mahasabha deplored the fact that the display of a statue depicting the tribal prototype and the absence of any prototype of a Hindu Manipuri led to the misinterpretation of the tribal prototype as the Hindu Manipuri and resolved to approach the Superintendent of the Calcutta Museum to make necessary redress. Finding no works of arts and crafts from Manipur on display in the Calcutta Commercial Museum while innumerable works of the sort contributed by various communities were displayed. The Mahasabha resolved to make necessary arrangement to send some fine indigenous works to the said Museum. It was also resolved to approach the state Durbar to provide means of livelihood by giving arable land to the Manipuris who migrated to Tripura and Assam and were wasting their lives in clearing the jungles for settlement. It was also resolved to send Manipuri delegates to the all India Kshatriya conference. Noting that the special concession granted to the Manipuri pilgrims proceeding upto Nabadwipghat was due to the Mahasabha’s efforts, the session resolved to approach the Agent of EIR to grant similar concession to the Manipuri pilgrims proceeding to Brindaban. It was also resolved to approach the Political Agent and the Assam Government to appoint competent Manipuris in higher grades in the Agency Court of Manipur, as no Manipuris had so far been appointed in higher grades though there was no restriction for appointing them. Another resolution was to move the Assam Government to reserve seats in the Assam council and Assembly for the cast Hindu Manipuris in proportion to their population. A remarkable advance in the outlook of the educated elite was the realisation of the importance of economic development and it was the result of the leadership of Irawat Singh. It was reflected in the resolution
stating "That, in order to remove the poverty of the Manipuri nation, to revive our cottage industry that has been lying in a decaying state for a long period of time, to improve our economic condition and to enable ourselves to control the market, an all Manipuri Khadi Sangha be established by starting Khadi Pratishans in the villages of Manipur and by propagating 'Khadir.'\(^{71}\)

As a token of adoption of the secular principle, the Mahasabha passed a resolution condoling the death of some Manipuri Muhammedans who had long settled in Burma, in the recent riot between the Burmese and the Muhammedans. Among the miscellaneous resolutions, the session resolved to approach the state authorities to permit the parties to appear in the Cheirap and the Panchayat courts with their shoes and not to kneel down on the floor at the time of giving their statements as well as to abolish the wakheisel. It was also resolved to approach the State Durbar for passing orders to make the state courts and the other state officers use terms of civility in their summons and notices.\(^{72}\)

The Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in its fourth session made a signal advance from the previous three sessions in terms of perspective, objectives and the social basis. The perspective of the previous three sessions was defined in terms of the three principles i.e. education, religion and nationality. The objective was to consolidate the Hindu Manipuri who were scattered in Assam, Bengal, Burma and Manipur owing to the vicissitudes of the times and rejuvenate the Manipuri culture. The social basis of the Mahasabha was the Hindu Manipuri community. The fourth session encompassed the broader perspectives of

---

\(^{71}\) Ibid.
\(^{72}\) Ibid.
secularism, political movement and economic development which symbolized the ushering of the modern democratic revolution in the specific condition of Manipur. The spirit of the new consciousness was reflected in the presidential speech delivered by Irawat Singh in the said session.

"Manipur is now under the administration of the State Durbar Members who were all appointed by the Maharaja out of his personal interest and matrimonial relations. These members were not selected by the public and hence, they would never think of happiness and prosperity for the common subjects. Elected members will only satisfy the people’s wishes and needs. I humbly appeal to all peasant brothers that these nominated high officers of Manipur will one day fall into your hands when their decorated legs of the chairs are suddenly broken."\textsuperscript{73} Hijam Irawat Singh was elected the president of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{74} Chingakham Pishak Singh, M.A. and Laishram Jogeshwar Singh were elected the General Secretary and the Assistant General Secretary respectively.\textsuperscript{75}

On 8 February 1939, Chingakham Pishak Singh, the newly appointed General Secretary of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha forwarded an English translation of the resolutions passed in the fourth session to the PMSD for consideration and necessary actions. However, contrary to the expectations of the Mahasabha, the PMSD passed Resolution No.5 on 15 February 1939 which warned all the state servants

\textsuperscript{73} Soyam Chhatradhari, \textit{Manipurgi Itihasta Irawat}, Imphal, Manipur State Krishak Sabha,1972, pp.11-12.
\textsuperscript{74} Soyam Chhatradhari Singh, \textit{Manipurgi Itihasta Irawat}, Imphal, Soyam Publications, 1996, p.46.
\textsuperscript{75} Karam Manimohon Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.77.
and masters in state-aided schools that the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha had become part of a political movement and therefore, that they were not allowed to take part in it, subscribe in aid of it or assist it in any way.\textsuperscript{76}

After the declaration of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha as a political party on 15 February 1939, the Manipur State Durbar began to check any sort of political movements in Manipur. The first official resolution was formally put down in the Durbar resolution No.1 of 22 February 1939 when two organizers of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee requested to visit Manipur to enlist Congress recruits and to organise Congress Committees.\textsuperscript{77} The Political Agent of Manipur was formally informed by the State Durbar not to allow any foreign Congress organisers, or foreign political agitators of any sort to enter the state. Secondly, the Political Agent had published a standing order on 3 March 1939, restricting all procession and public meetings excepting religious processions in the British Reserve areas unless previous permission was obtained from the Political Agent.\textsuperscript{78}

In the light of Durbar resolution No.5 of 15 February 1939, the Private Secretary of the Maharaja informed the General Secretary of the Mahasabha that Maharaja Churachand Singh had cut off all connections which he previously had with the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{79} Following his example most of the state servants had voluntarily resigned from the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{80} Among hundreds of the state servants, only two persons, viz, Hijam Irawat Singh and Elangbam Tompok Singh chose to sacrifice their

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p.84.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p.85.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p.86.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p.87.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
official positions for the sake of the people's cause. Irawat Singh resigned from his post of Sadar Panchayat Member and gave up his wife's landed properties.\textsuperscript{81} Elangbam Tompok Singh resigned from his post of clerk in the Revenue Department.\textsuperscript{82}

In April 1939 Irawat Singh became acquainted with the trade union movement in the person of Thounaojam Kunjo Singh, a Meitei national from the Barak valley, who was a leader of the Digboi Labour Union at the Digboi oil Refinery.\textsuperscript{83} In April 1939, Thounaojam Kunjo Singh and another Meitei labour activist from Ramnagar Tooko, Silchar were sent by the Digboi Labour Union to Manipur to canvass financial support for the striking oil workers of Digboi.\textsuperscript{84} Irawat could digest the dynamics and historical logic of the working class movement which was playing a transformative role in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century world through Kunjo Singh who had imbibed the ideology of left wing trade union movement.\textsuperscript{85} On 27 April 1939 Irawat Singh convened a meeting of the working committee of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha at his residence and passed a resolution expressing solidarity with the Digboi oil workers:


\textsuperscript{82} Mongjam Ritichandra, \textit{Ibid}, p.16; Soyam Chhatradhari \textit{Ibid}, p.12.


\textsuperscript{84} Interview with Thounaojam Chandreshwar, a close associate of Jananeta Irawat Singh at Jarailtola, Cachar District, Assam, 24 October 1998.

“The Mahasabha expressed its deep sense of sympathy for the Digboi Labour Union in their labour strike and takes a strong exception to firing on the unarmed labourers who resort to peaceful means only and appeals to the suffering labourers”.

This resolution was published in the periodical “Manipur Paojel”. On 27 April 1939 May Day which falls on 1 May was only four days away. Thanaojam Kunjo and his colleague of Digboi Labour Union were still staying in Manipur in connection with their assignment of canvassing financial support. Being a trade union leader Kunjo must have missed the spirit of May Day celebration and it is only logical that in his discourse with Irawat Singh, Thounaojam Kunjo Singh recounted the history and rationale of May Day and in the true spirit of labour militancy expressed his aspiration to celebrate May Day in Manipur. Irawat transformed Kunjo’s aspiration into reality in accordance with the specific situation in Manipur. As it was unthinkable to hold a function of militant working class movement in Imphal at the time a marriage procession provided an appropriate outlet for the suppressed spirit of the emerging anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement. 1 May 1939 happened to be the day of marriage of Ibenhal Devi, the eldest daughter of Lalitamadhob Chattopadhyaya, one of the prominent leaders of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The bridegroom was Aribam Shibadatta Sharma, Tankia Tarka Tirtha, a distinguished Pandit. Many of the processionists who accompanied the bridegroom

86 Karam Manimohan Singh, op.cit., p.89.
were leaders and volunteers of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. Irawat Singh also participated in the said marriage procession.\textsuperscript{89} Starting its way from Moirangkhom with the bridegroom, under Irawat's leadership the procession virtually turned into a May Day Procession. Shouting the slogan of "Bande Mataram" the procession winded its way through the prohibited British Reserve area and passed in front of the bungalow of the Political Agent, the Treasury office and the western gate of the Kangla. At the road junction in front of the western gate of the Kangla, the procession turned west and passing through the Khwairamband Bazar, it reached its destination at Nagamapal.\textsuperscript{90} This event was reported to Mr. C. Gimson, the Political Agent that a procession in connection with a marriage ceremony came from the direction of Morangkhom past his office shouting political slogans and was led by H. Irawat Singh. The Political Agent promptly sent a letter to Maharaja Churachand Singh on 2 May 1939 i.e. the very next day about the matter and asked him whether the Maharaja would prefer him not to take any action against the leaders of the procession for a breach of an order in force forbidding processions in the British Reserve.\textsuperscript{91}

In the beginning of November 1939 the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha took a step forward in pursuance of its demand of responsible government according to Resolution No.11 of the 4th session of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. Irawat Singh as the President of the NMM submitted an outline of the legislature to the Maharaja vide its Memo

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} C. Gimson's D.O. Letter no.568/G.A dated 2 May 1939 to His Highness Sir Churachand Singh, KCSI, CBE, Maharaja of Manipur.
No.124 dated 2 November 1939. A copy of the said outline was sent to the Government of Assam vide Memo No.126 dated 3 November 1939. The outline envisaged a unicameral Legislature of 100 members of whom not less than 80 were to be elected and 20 to be nominated by His Highness, corruption free election and voting by secret ballot, franchise of any male subject whose age is 21 years either paying any kind of tax or literate, joint electorate system and no reservation of seats for any communities or interests, any bill passed by the Legislature to become law upon securing the approval of the Maharaja who would otherwise send it back for reconsideration, the legislature to have power to make laws for allow things and persons under the state jurisdictions, the annual budget to be discussed and passed by the Legislature, the Maharaja to appoint the leader of the largest party as the Chief Minister and to ask him to form the cabinet, the chief Minister and 3 Ministers nominated by him to have joint responsibility and 4 ministers nominated by the Maharaja to have individual responsibility to the Legislature, the Chief Minister to allot different functions of the state to the Ministers, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker to be elected by the members of the Legislature at its first meeting and other occasions, the Maharaja to address, summon and prolong the legislature at his pleasure, any member of the legislature to be able to move a no confidence motion on finding any action of the Ministers prejudicial and the speaker to allow it to be discussed and put to the vote of the House if one third of the members present favour the motion, the Legislature to have the power of making interpellation and questions, a constitution committee set up by the

Maharaja to frame the elaborate scheme on the above outline and create constituencies of the electorate, double-voting not to be allowed, etc. However, in spite of the labour, sacrifice and the intellectual effort of Irawat Singh in the framing of the above stated outline of the Legislature, the President of the Durbar, Mr. E.F. Lydall termed it an unrealistic contribution in the Administration Report of the Manipur State for the year 1940-41.⁹⁴

In the year 1939 Irawat had become an activist of the Indian National Congress. Before the outbreak of the Nupilal in December 1939, Irawat paid a visit to Silchar on 12 November and stayed there till 14 December 1939.⁹⁵ Regarding Irawat’s Cachar visit, Achintya Bhattacharya says, “Name of com. H. Irawat Singh, as the builder of the states’ people’s movement in Manipur, a native state under the British Raj, became familiar to us in 1939”. In the same year com. Irawat paid a visit to Silchar in order to assess the political situation and the Congress policy of those days. Though already in touch with the underground Communist Party, I had been working as office bearer of the District Congress Committee of Cachar. Congressmen organised a reception for him and there in the reception, I met him for the first time. He was clad in Khaddar and donned a Gandhi cap, as was customary in those days⁹⁶

Irawat came to Cachar to meet the people inside the Congress organisation. He met Manipuri leaders of Cachar, viz., Goura Singh

---

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.7-10.
⁹⁵ Ibid., p.11.
of Lakhipur, Bhagirath and Babudhon of Ramnagar Tooko.\textsuperscript{97} Irawat Singh’s visit to Cachar was mainly concentrated in the Ramnagar and Jaroiiltola villages.\textsuperscript{98} In Ramnagar he was given “shelter by Bhagirath and Babudhon of Ramnagar Tooko.\textsuperscript{99} Bhagirath and Babudhon were already workers of the Congress at the time of Irawat’s Cachar visit. They had gone to prison in connection with the movement of occupation of the Jamindars land and had already come out of prison in 1938.\textsuperscript{100} Irawat Singh visited the Congress office along with the two leaders of the Manipuri community in the Cachar district. In his visit to the Congress office at Silchar, Bhagirath and Babudhon acted as interpreters to Irawat as at that time he was not fluent in Bengali language.\textsuperscript{101} On the appointed day, Irawat arrived at Jaroiiltola village. A meeting was held in a mandapa situated to the west of Thaunaojam Chandreshwar Singh.\textsuperscript{102} Irawat presided the meeting. Nikunja Goshai who was a local leader of the Congress delivered a speech. Irawat also delivered a speech and spoke against imposition of the arbitrary rule of the British imperialist power after colonial occupation of India.\textsuperscript{103}

While Irawat Singh was in Cachar, the Nupilal or women’s uprising broke out in Manipur. Before analysing Irawat’s role and

\textsuperscript{97} Interview with Mani Rai, an associate of Jananeta Irawat Singh at Silchar, Cachar District, Assam on 21 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{98} Interview with Thaunaojam Chandra of Jaroiiltola Village, Cachar District, Assam on 24 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{99} Interview with Mani Rai, an associate of Jananeta Irawat Singh at Silchar, Cachar District, Assam on 21 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{100} Interview with Thengaiajam Chandrababu of Ramnagar Tooko, Silchar, Cachar District, Assam on 22 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{101} Interview with Mani Raj, Silchar, Cachar District, Assam on 21 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{102} Interview with Thaunaojam Chandreshwar of Jaroiiltola Village, Cachar District, Assam on 24 October 1998.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
contribution in the Nupilal, the causes and circumstances leading to the outbreak of this momentous event may be recounted.

The outbreak was a spontaneous eruption of the suppressed energy of the exploited people whose genuine aspirations for justice and human dignity helped create this great upheaval. It was a culmination of the various administrative and economic measures adopted by the British to secure advantageous economic position. The economic policies followed by the British led to the rapid transformation of traditional economy of the state into a colonial economy whose nature and structure were determined by the needs of the British economy.\textsuperscript{104} Manipur was an agrarian economy with rice as the main product and supported by other resources like salt, clothes, forest, iron, etc. With the introduction of free trade policy by the British authority,\textsuperscript{105} the self-sufficiency enjoyed by Manipur in the pre-colonial period disappeared.\textsuperscript{106} The small-scale manufacturing industry of salt, glass and paper disappeared. The production of paddy became the only economic mainstay of Manipur. Inevitably export of rice became the way to earn cash. Altogether 14 rice mills (13 in the Imphal town) most of them belonging to the foreign merchants and 1 in the northern Sekmai, which acted as agents for the export monopolist, collected the available paddy, milled and supplied the rice to the export monopolist.\textsuperscript{107}

The absolute dependence of Manipur's economy on agriculture and the increasing quantity of rice export were the twin factors leading to the

\textsuperscript{104} N. Joykumar Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.77.
\textsuperscript{105} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid.}, p.78.
\textsuperscript{107} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.39.
acute rise in the price of rice resulting in immiserisation of the Manipuri people and the outbreak of the people’s uprising in the form of the Nupilan.

At that time the general public got the news about the massive satyagraha movement rising up under the leadership of Mahatama Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Netaji Subhaschandra Basu et cetera for attaining the political independence of the whole of India for which many people have volunteered to sacrifice their lives. In Manipur the people could get the news of this satyagraha movement from the office of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha located at the residence of Khwairakpam Magha in Nagamapal, Imphal. On hearing this news some womenfolk approached the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha that a women’s movement against the increase in price of rice, the export of rice as well as for the banning of the rice mills would be launched and in this connection, requested the Mahasabha to help them in the matter of intellectual guidance. The Mahasabha readily agreed to the proposal. The more prominent of the womenfolk who went to meet the leaders of the Mahasabha were (1) Nongthombam Khongnang Devi, (2) Ayekpam Rajani Devi, (3) Wahengbam Ongbi Tongou Devi, (4) Wangkhem Ongbi Kumari Devi, (5) Laishram Leibaklei Devi, (6) Kshetrimayum ongbi Mukhi Devi, (7) Rajkumari Sanatombi Devi, (8) Tongbram Sabi Devi, (9) Sarungbam Ibeton devi, (10) Laishram Ongbi Amubi Devi, (11) Chingakham Ibeton Devi, (12) Aribam Chaobiton Devi, (13) Bamon Khambi, (14) Mongjam Leima Devi, (15) Loitam Tombimacha Devi.

109 Ibid., p.11.
110 Ibid., p.10.
The outbreak had its immediate case in the rise of the price of rice. The excessive rain during the last week of July and first week of August 1939, had damaged most of the crops in Manipur and there was already an apprehension of a famine in the state. On 8 December 1939 rice and paddy were scarce than on earlier days. On this day, Chaobiton Devi, a milkmaid vendor in the Khwairamband Bazar led a group of milkmaids and went to some rice-mills and requested those Meitei cart-men who were waiting to deliver paddy to the mills, not to sell the paddy to the mills and bring the paddy to the market instead as there was scarcity of rice and paddy in the market.\textsuperscript{111} The women were disappointed and returned. On 11 December these milk-maids rallied other women vendors and came to meet the political Agent but could not meet him as he had gone to Sugnu on tour. Then the women came to the Manipur State Durbar and requested the Members to stop the selling of paddy to the rice mills as well as to stop the export of rice. The Durbar Members assured to the women to come on the next day i.e. 12 December 1939.\textsuperscript{112} As the women returned to the market, they informed all the available women vendors to come early on the next day.

On 12 December, i.e., the next day a multitude of womenfolk gathered at the Khwairamband Bazar. At about 11 a.m. Aribam Chaobiton Devi, Loitam Tombimacha Devi, Lisham Ongbi Ibenhal Devi, Brahmaccharimayum Khambi Devi and other women led these women from the Khwairamband Bazar to the Manipur State Durbar.\textsuperscript{113} While the women were arriving the Manipur State Durbar was holding its

\textsuperscript{111} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammeloni Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.41.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., pp.41-42.
\textsuperscript{113} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammeloni Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.42.
session to discuss the situation of rice stock in Manipur but could not arrive at a concrete decision. However, when the women leaders went into the office of the Durbar, they could not meet any of the Durbar Members as they had already left the office to avoid any meeting with the women. Only Mr. T.A. Sharpe, the President of the Manipur State Durbar (PMSD) was present in the office. As the women insisted for the stoppage of the rice-export, the PMSD informed the women of their inability to pass any order pending His Highness's final approval thereon. The women crowd, however, pressed on the President to communicate their decision that very day. The President being pressed hard by the women agreed thereafter to communicate the order of the Durbar to His Highness at Nabadwip by telegram and thereby apprise them with the final order from His Highness. Though the PMSD wanted to go to the telegraph office by his official car, on the women's insistence he went to the telegraph office on foot accompanied by the crowd of women. While the PMSD was sending the telegram to Maharaja Churachand Singh, the crowd of women had swelled to about three thousand. After sending the telegram, Mr. Sharpe, PMSD wanted to return to his quarter for lunch. The women who had had the humiliating experience of hunger and the excruciating shame of having been let down by the Durbar Members were not ready to comply with the wish of the President and insisted that he should stay with them until a reply from the

---

114 Hindusthan Standard, 30 December 1939.
116 Hindustan Standard, 30 December 1939.
117 Ibid.
118 Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammeloni Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.43.
Maharaja was received.\textsuperscript{119} The crowd assembled for long hours before the telegraph office.

In the meantime the President tried to break through the crowd without informing them of any order from His Highness. Still the crowd pressed on the President that he could not be allowed to leave them without any decision being communicated to them. Thus, the womenfolk picketed the President. The Civil Surgeon and some other officials were also confined along with the PMSD. All of them were refused to leave even to take food.\textsuperscript{120}

Meanwhile at about 2.30 p.m. the Commandant of the Fourth Battalion, having heard of the confinement of the officials, came to the Telegraph office and was equally prevented from leaving by the crowd of women. At about 2.45 p.m. a platoon of the Assam Rifles arrived with bayonets fixed on the rifles.\textsuperscript{121} The state authorities reported that the crowd grew more excited and very soon began to throw stones at the Telegraph office. Two windows were broken and the situation was so dangerous that the troops were called in to clear the compound. The troops dispersed the excited crowd.\textsuperscript{122} Twenty women received injuries, the cases of five being very serious. It was known next morning that 5 wounded out of 20 were transferred to the Civil Hospital but none were allowed to see them.\textsuperscript{123} The Working Committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha approached the Political Agent and President of the Manipur

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., p.45.
\textsuperscript{120} Administrative report 1939-40; Hindusthan Standard, 18 December 1939.
\textsuperscript{121} Hindustan Standard, 18 December 1939.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{123} Hindusthan Standard, 30 December 1939.
State Durbar to allow them to see the conditions of the wounded women lying in the hospital, but no reply was received to their requests.\textsuperscript{124}

The news of 12 December spread throughout the valley and it had in particular created a lot of unrest among the people in Imphal. In the morning of the following day the leaders of the agitation called a complete hartal of the Bazar as an expression of protest against the violence meted out to them. The Khwairamband Bazar was completely deserted and since that day the boycott continued for almost a year.\textsuperscript{125} In the afternoon of 13 December Mr. Gimson, the Political Agent himself went to the Khwairamband Bazar and informed the womenfolk there of the Maharaja’s message agreeing that rice export would be stopped with immediate effect. However, the womenfolk who had experienced the brute force of the feudal and colonial power could not be reconciled to the official gesture. They now directed their attention to the rice mills and immediately started demanding that “all the rice mills should be closed down”.\textsuperscript{126} They firmly believed that the mills were responsible for the heavy export of rice and the consequent scarcity of food grains in the state. In the evening of the said day a large public meeting attended by a large number of women and some men was held at the police-lane ground. Altogether about 10,000 persons attended the meeting.\textsuperscript{127} The meeting was presided by P. Tomal Singh. On 14 December also a similar public meeting attended by a large number of women and some men was presided by Laishram Kanhai Singh: on 15 December also a public meeting presided by Thokchom Angou Singh was held. In this meeting

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
many women and men from distant villages of the valley, i.e. Heirok, Wangjing, Yairipok, Lamlai, Sagolmang, Pukhao, Nambol, Ningthoukhong, etc. attended. These meetings passed several resolutions and raised important demands. The Hindusthan Standard reported the following demands to have been made by the Manipuri women who were peacefully agitating about their acceptance:

1. That the State Government should stop rice export owing to recent abnormal rise of the price of rice in the harvest season.

2. That the State Government should abolish rice-milling system in the state and revive the old cottage industries especially of hand grinding and husking of paddy.

3. That the State Government should take up prompt action of the wounded victims now lying in the Imphal Civil Hospital.

4. That the State Government should replace the present administrative bodies and in their stead a new government in the line of the proposed reform scheme contemplated by the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha be established.

5. That the State Government should stop the talkies cinema, which had a baneful effect on the masses in general. Of the above demands the first and second were accepted by the authorities. As for the third demand, it has been communicated to the Political Agent in Manipur. N. Thanil Singh, General Secretary of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha had addressed

---

129 Hindusthan Standard, 30 December 1939.
petitions to the Political Agent and Judicial Member of the Manipur State Durbar to enquire into the incidents of 12 December when women demonstrators were charged by the military.\textsuperscript{130}

On 16 December 1939 Maharaja Churachand Singh arrived at Imphal from Nabadwip. Irawat Singh, having received a telegram on 14 December while in Cachar also arrived at Imphal in the evening of the very day of 16 December. The agitators who had been waiting for Irawat received him at Chingmeiron where he addressed the women and expressed his solidarity with the movement.\textsuperscript{131} In the very evening of the day he visited the Civil Hospital and it broke his heart to hear the groaning of the wounded women. Immediately after his return Irawat assessed the overall situation particularly the role of the Mahasabha in it. On 21 December the Working Committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha held an urgent meeting with Irawat presiding at the residence of Banka Bihari Sharma. The meeting adopted three important resolutions and Irawat submitted these resolutions to the Political Agent, the Maharaja, the President of the Durbar and the Editor of the Matam Patrika for publication.\textsuperscript{132} The following is an extract of the resolutions adopted by the Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{133}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} C. Gimson’s confidential letter to Mills, dated 16 December 1939 quoted in N. Lokendra Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.141.
\textsuperscript{132} Karam Manimohan Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.112.
\textsuperscript{133} Memo no.151, NMM dated 22 December 1939 from N. Thanin Singh, Secretary, Nikhil Manipuri to the President, Manipur State Durbar quoted in K. Manimohan Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.112
A. "His Highness the Maharaja and the Political Agent be requested that the millwork may go on for fixed days, simply for the dhan wetted before stoppage of mill-works.

B. "His Highness the Maharaja be requested to settle a sub-contract between the government contractor and the supplier by fixing a rate with the actual quantity of rice.

C. "As for adopting a new measure, unless a settlement is made within 2 or 3 days, His Highness be requested to stay the new measure before a final settlement of item B.

D. If there be any emergency in the government ration, a special temporary arrangement may kindly be made for the special time".

Even after the submission of these 3 resolutions adopted by the Mahasabha the State authorities did not immediately consider and extend their views on the proceedings of the Mahasabha.134

Excitement died down for some days only to flare up again on 29 December. During this interval of calm and lull after 12 December, the women agitators were exercising vigilance and keeping a close watch on the activities in the Bazar. Women leaders absolutely controlled the Bazar area and ensured complete hartal. They met regularly at the market and kept a close watch of the movement of the local rice suppliers who were continuing to supply rice secretly in the night.135 On 28 December some carters brought rice for the Marwari mill owners. The women stopped them on the way and threw the rice into the gutter. The carters lodged a

134 Karam Manimohan Singh, op.cit., p.112.
135 N. Lokendra Singh, op.cit., pp.142-143.
complaint in the court of the Political Agent, naming five women as their assailants. The Agency Police thereupon asked the State Police to produce the women so that their statements could be recorded. 136 The women agitators were unwilling to hand over their colleagues to the authority. On 29 December the women came to the State Thana to protest against the police summons. There a verbal duel ensued between the women protestors and the police personnel led by Kh. Dhanachandra Singh, the Inspector of Police. The women protestors charged that the Inspector kicked Sabi Devi, a leader of the movement on the face and knocked down a Brahmin woman in the heat of the argument. The women crowd started demanding a bichar (justice for the physical assault). They besieged the State Thana for several hours and even threatened to murder the Inspector. Meanwhile the Inspector had successfully managed to escape from the midst of the women crowd and reached the palace. As the Maharaja was not available in Imphal, his son and police member, M.K. Priyobrata Singh rushed to the spot and tried to pacify the women.137

Mr. Gimson, the Political Agent who was also present at the spot promised the crowd that he would send a messenger to the Maharaja and ask him to come back to hold a trial. But the crowd demanded an immediate trial by the Political Agent, because they said they did not want a trial by the Maharaja as he was the Kayas’ Maharaja and not theirs’. Mr. Gimson refused to hold his trial in the night of 29 December because he felt sure that if the Inspector came out the crowd would

137 N. Lokendra Singh, op. cit., p.143.
certainly kill him. Later at 10 p.m., the crowd had somehow dispersed.\textsuperscript{138} In spite of their continuous demand for the bichar of the Inspector, the Mahraja, who happened to be the father-in-law of the police officer turned a deaf ear and left him free.\textsuperscript{139}

Now, the movement which was concentrated in the Imphal capital was growing in scope and dimension. The movement had spread to the neighbouring villages. On 29 December the women of Yairipok, village 14 miles from Imphal burnt ‘the goods of Manipuri shopkeepers’, there. At about 7.45 p.m. of the said day, Mr. T.A. Sharpe, the P.M.S.D. had gone out to Yairipok on receiving the news.\textsuperscript{140}

Hitherto, the women were carrying on the movement relying on their own initiative and strength. Although individual leaders of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha helped the womenfolk, the Mahasabha as an organization was not in a position to take up the movement started by the women as it was virtually a divided house. The Manipuri people at this stage were in a state of confusion and disorder like a calf without its mother because there was an irreconcilable chasm among the members of the Working Committee of the single premiere political organisation.\textsuperscript{141} The opportunist and pro-capitalist caucus inside the Mahasabha opposed the movement because they were apprehensive of the repression of the state government.\textsuperscript{142} On the one side, the three leaders, viz. Lalita Madhob Sharma, Bankabihari Sharma and Kh. Magha Singh thought that

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{138} Karam Manimohan Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.113.
  \item\textsuperscript{139} N. Lokendra Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.143.
  \item\textsuperscript{140} Karam Manimohan Singh, \textit{op.cit.}, p.113.
  \item\textsuperscript{141} Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.65
  \item\textsuperscript{142} Soyam Chhatradhari, \textit{Manipurgi Itihasta Irawat}, 1972, \textit{op.cit.}, p.23.
\end{itemize}
they ought to continue their activity to provide relief to the injured and aggrieved women agitators. On the other hand, L. Khagendrajit Singh, K. Bidur Singh and T. Amuselung Singh thought that along with giving relief to the women the menfolk as a political organization should launch a movement for Swaraj just as a large-scale movement for swaraj was being undertaken in the whole of India.\(^{143}\) On 12 December itself, Laishram Kanhai, the Secretary of the Sega Road Committee of the Mahasabha visited the office of the Mahasabha and gave information about the women’s movement. Leaders of the Mahasabha such as Magha, Bankabihari, Tompok etc. cited the absence of the foremost leader Irawat and notified a circular that the Mahasabha would not take leadership of the women’s movement.\(^{144}\) Thinking that it was irresponsible on the part of the Mahasabha to remain silent, Longjam Bijoy T. Bokul, T. Ibotombi etc. organized a public meeting in the police lane at 2.30 p.m. of the same day.\(^{145}\) It was resolved that a public assembly be organized to take up leadership of the women’s movement and that Hijam Irawat Singh be called out by wiring a telegram to Cachar.\(^{146}\)

While this stalemate was continuing a meeting of the Working Committee of the Mahasabha was held on 7 January 1940 at the residence of Khwairakpam Magha Singh in Nagamapal. The following members of the Working Committee attended the meeting:

1. Hijam Irawat Singh, President
2. Nongmaithem Thanil Singh, General Secretary

\(^{143}\) Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, *Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan*, op.cit., p.65


\(^{145}\) Ibid.

\(^{146}\) Ibid.
3. Laimayum Lalitamadhab Sharma, Member
4. Gurumayum Bankabihari Sharma, Member
5. Khwairakpam Magha Singh, Member
6. Laikhuram Khagendrajit Singh, Member
7. Elangbam Tompok Singh, Member
8. Keisham Kunjabihari Singh, Member
9. Karam Bidur Singh, Member
10. Takhelmayum Amushelung Singh, Member

Out of the 11 members of the Working Committee, only one member, viz., Maisnam Gopal Singh, from Lamsang was absent in the said meeting. In the said meeting Irawat Singh proposed a resolution for launching a massive people's movement as a sequel to the women's revolt. Khagendrajit Singh, Karam Bidur Singh and T. Amushellung Singh sided with the proposed resolution.\(^{147}\) Kh. Magha Singh opposed the resolution citing that there was no need to start another movement as the main demands of the women for banning the export of rice was fulfilled. Lalita Madhob Sharma and Bankabihari Sharma sided with Magha Singh.\(^{148}\) When the resolution was submitted to voting, it was defeated as it got only 4 votes in its favour against 5 votes opposing it. The General Secretary, N. Thanil Singh abstained from the voting.\(^{149}\)

After the conclusion of the meeting of the Working Committee of the N.M.M., the minority group of the Working Committee held, viz. L. Khagendrajit Singh, K. Bidhur Singh, T. Amushelung Singh and H.

---


\(^{148}\) Ibid.

\(^{149}\) Ibid.
Irawat Singh continued their meeting at the residence of Irawat Singh.\footnote{Soyam Chhatradhari Singh, \textit{Manipurji Itihasta Irawat}, Imphal, 1996, p.55.} Having returned recently from Cachar Irawat was more informed of the latest developments outside Manipur. Irawat voiced that it was a time when the oppressed people were engaged in a massive struggle against the British imperial government and that they should not lose the historical opportunity. The other members held the same opinion.\footnote{Ibid.} The meeting resolved to organise a large public meeting and to build up a mammoth struggle of the people by forming a political party to be named Manipur Praja Sammelani.\footnote{Ibid.} Potshangbam Tomal Singh, Laishram Kanhai Singh, Longjam Bijoy Singh, Laishram Kulabidhu Singh and other activists were eagerly waiting to hear this resolution and immediately dispersed to give messages for the public meeting.\footnote{Ibid.}

At 2 p.m. of 7 January 1940 the said public meeting was held with L. Khagendrajit presiding. Elangbam Tompok Singh who had in the meeting of the Working Committee of the N.M.M. opposed Irawat’s proposed resolution, also came to attend the meeting. Several activists of the N.M.M also came to take part in it.\footnote{Laikhuram Ibobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan}, op.cit., p.71} Irawat delivered his historic speech which lasted for three hours. He dealt with four topics viz. I) Export of rice, (ii) Stoppage of rice, (iii) Stoppage of cinema, and (iv) Reform of the state administration\footnote{Select Documents of Jananeta Hijam Irawat, Manipur State Archives, Directorate of Art & Culture, Govt. of Manipur, 1996, p.27.} and formulated the demands of the people as:
1. to stop the export of rice from Manipur;
2. to remove the rice-mills, in Manipur;
3. to replace the Members of the present Darbar of Manipur State by new ones elected under the scheme of Governmental reforms as proposed by the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha.\textsuperscript{156}

He observed that it was not an agitation of the women but a movement of the people.\textsuperscript{157} His speech as recorded by P.W.2 is as follows:

"Remember the Telegraph office incident. We begged for rice and in returned received bayonet wounds and wounds from gun butts. For one handful of rice we paid two handful of blood. Had we not paid this blood we should not have succeeded in closing the export of rice. The export of rice has been stopped and the mills closed at the cost of the blood of a Brahmani. Womenfolk have shed their blood for the sake of food and the menfolk should no longer remain silent through fear of arrest and going to jail. Be determined, it is not right to be afraid of jail walls. See what was the condition of Japan and Russia. Rise and be united. The women’s work is finished and now has come the time for the men. Let us take revenge for the spilt blood of the Brahmani.\textsuperscript{158}

In his written speech Irawat stated that

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., p.11.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Judgement of Criminal Case no.4 of 1940, Manipur State versus Hijam Irabot Singh, s/o late Ibungohal Singh of Janmasthan, Imphal, in the court of Darbar, Manipur.
“some people make objections on the ground that if rice is not exported the people will not be able to pay taxes. But we point out to them that the state is the people and that of the two food and tax-food is by far the more essential one. If the people of Manipur die of starvation the state itself will be nowhere. Where then comes the question of taxation?”\(^1\)

He also said, “in former times the Manipuris were like fish kept in a pot to be enjoyed by the owner whenever he wished. Please listen all my countrymen, now that time is over. Nobody can suppress us like before.”\(^2\)

He appealed to the people not to pay land revenue to the State Government as long as the British ruled in Manipur, to utilise the hills and the lakes without any payment, to cut all Tera (Bombax ceiba/Bombax insignis) tree growing in the homestead lands; not to pay any tax for crossing the rivers by boat or by bamboo bridges; not to pay levy to the ceremonial barber or chandan tax; and not to provide the service of pothang or yairek sentry. Irawat thus showed the Manipuri people the path of non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement. The assembled people endorsed all resolutions proposed by Irawat Singh.\(^3\)

\(^1\) Judgement of Criminal Case no.4 of 1940, Manipur State versus Hijam Irobott Singh, s/o late Ibungohal Singh of Jamnasthan, Imphal in the court of Darbar, Manipur.

\(^2\) Ibid., p.25.

\(^3\) Laikhuram Ibohi Singh, Manipur Praja Sammelani Amasung Anishuba Nupilan, op.cit., p.72.
The said public meeting proved to be the watershed in the people’s movement. Irawat brought forth the mass character of the movement which was till now continued within the narrow compass of a women’s revolt. Irawat’s life too underwent a transformation as a consequence of the public meeting. To execute the resolutions passed in the meeting, a political organization named Manipur Praja Sammelan was formed. A Working Committee consisting of 26 members was also formed. H. Irawat Singh, E. Tompok Singh and L. Bijoy Singh were elected as President, General Secretary and Assistant Secretary respectively.  

On 9 January 1940 Irawat Singh was arrested by the State Military Police from his residence, in connection with the speech he delivered on 7 January 1940. After sending to jail, the Manipur State Durbar registered a Durbar Criminal case No.4 of 1940 and began his trial. The Durbar maintained that the accused’s speech would be highly successful in bringing into hatred and exciting dissatisfaction towards the state authority, and found him guilty of making a seditious speech under Section 124(A) of the Indian Penal Code. On 21 March 1940 the Durbar sentenced Irawat to a term of three years’ simple imprisonment.

While Irawat was in jail, the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement was launched under the leadership of the Manipur Praja Sammelan. On the day the Manipur State Durbar sentenced Irawat, the women vendors called a hartal in the market and

162 Ibid., pp.72-73.
163 Soyam Chhatradhari Singh, Manipurgi Itihasta Irawat, op.cit., p.56
164 Judgement of Criminal Case No.4 of 1940, Manipur State versus Hijam Irobort Singh, s/o late Ibungoal Singh of Janmasthan, Imphal, in the court of Darbar, Manipur.
strew the cloth wares of the cloth-shops on the street.\textsuperscript{165} As the political
Agent and his police force could not control the situation the Maharaja
himself went to the market and brought the situation to normalcy.\textsuperscript{166}

In the Yairipok area, the villagers did not render the service of
Yairek Sentry to the officials of the Revenue Office under the leadership
of Laishram Mera, Thiyan Ningthoujao Singh and Chanam Brojeshwor,
local leaders of the Mahasabha. Altogether 14 persons were arrested.\textsuperscript{167} In
the Pechi village also, the Revenue officials were refused the services of
Yairek Sentry and Pothang. 11 villagers including the two leaders, viz.
Wangkheimayum Bokul Singh and Khangembam Tollangou Singh were
arrested and trailed. In the Lamli area, the women folk marched towards
Gwaltabi which is about 10 kms. away and raided the godowns of
Khundrakpam Thambou Singh and Leiren Singh and strew the paddy and
other stocks. The police arrested, Khumbongmayum Ongbi Jati Devi,
Konjengbam Ongbi Leiphon Devi in this connection. In the Khurai area,
the women seized a bullock cart transporting paddy from the Lamli
village to Imphal during the night and tossed the paddy on the road. 9
women were arrested. In Heirol and Wangjing villages the women
protested against levying of cess on the firewood collected from the
nearby hills by destroying the forest toll station. The women of the same
villages also seized a bullock cart transporting paddy to Imphal during the
night. The women agitators were arrested and tried by the Manipur State
Durbar. In the Nambol village, women led by Mongjam Ongbi Tombi

\textsuperscript{165} Lairenmayum Ibungohal Singh and Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh(Ed.),
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Durbar Criminal Case no.11 of 1940, 14 March 1940, Manipur State vs.
Wangkheimayum Bokul Singh of Pechi and others, quoted in Laikhuram Ibobi
destroyed the Nambol Panchayat office. In the northern part of the Imphal valley, the villagers of Haraorou Tangkham, Khundrakpam and Chingkhu defied the official contractor and caught fish in the Lamphelsoi lake under the leadership of Elangbam Tompok Singh, the General Secretary of the Manipur Praja Sammeloni, 8 agitators including Tompok Singh were arrested and jailed. The villagers of Sagolmang, Uyumpok and nearby villages also seized the leased part of the Iril river and resorted to fishing defying the official contractor under the leadership of Takhelmayum Amusellung Singh, an organizer of the Manipur Praja Sammeloni. 7 leaders including Amusellung Singh were arrested and jailed. In the Naharup and Top villages, the villagers built a bamboo bridge under the leadership of Karam Bidur Singh, a leader of the Manipur Praja Sammeloni and ignored the contractor’s bridge and boat for which khewa was levied. The police arrested six agitators including Karam Bidur Singh. However the practice of khewa was discontinued shortly. In the villages to the west of Imphal, i.e. Lamban, Tera, Urak, Kangchup, etc. Hijam Shamu Singh, a militant volunteer was well known for defying the authorities by cutting down the Tera (Bombax ceiba/Bombax insigne) tree (Kapok tree) which was reserved by the government though growing in the private homestead land. The actual occurrence was that Shamu Singh gave the homestead land owners remuneration for cutting down the tera (Bombax ceiba/Bombax insigne) tree and distributed chits claiming responsibility for the act. The police arrested Shamu and sent him to jail. The Manipur State Durbar trailed and awarded him rigorous imprisonment for six months.\footnote{168}{Laikhum Irobi Singh, \textit{Manipur Praja Sammeloni Amasung Anishuba Nupilan}, op.cit., pp.82-110.}
While the civil disobedience movement was going on in full swing, Irawat was serving his stint in the prison. But he was not remaining silent. When he entered the Imphal jail in March 1940 he found the conditions in the jail very oppressive. The prisoners were made to do the work of bulls to operate the grinding wheel to extract edible oil from the mustard seeds. They were fed with low quality food. They were also made to sleep on wooden planks without any cloth sheet on it. Irawat consolidated the prisoners and lodged a protest movement in the jail. The state authority was alarmed at the development and did not want the presence of Irawat in Manipur even though he was in prison.\footnote{Mongjam Ritichandra, op.cit., p.36.}

After having served his jail term for about a year, Irawat was transferred to the Sylhet jail to compete the remaining term.