CHAPTER II: EMERGENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN MANIPUR

1. Growth of political consciousness and emergence of political parties in Manipur:

The study of the emergence of political parties in Manipur which has long been considered to be the province of political history of Manipur is emerging as an important field of political research. Tracing the evolution of political parties in Manipur involves the study of many important historical events inside the state. Growth of political consciousness on modern lines among the people of Manipur is closely associated with the establishment of British rule in Manipur. After the British annexed Manipur in 1891, Manipur was not put under the direct rule of the British. Instead, she was allowed to continue with a Native Rule where the administrative power of the princely states was shared between the Political Agent and the Maharajah. While the Political Agent assumed powers like that of managing external affairs, trade and commerce, law and order, etc., the Maharajah was mainly in charge of the
religious and customary rites and usages of the people. He was assisted by two institutions viz. the *Brahma Sabha*, a religious council looking after the religious affairs of the people, and *Pandit Loishang*, a council of scholars, while dealing with these matters.¹

2. Administrative changes brought about by the British:

When Manipur was granted Native Rule, Churachand Singh, the newly appointed Maharajah, was a minor. Therefore, Sir Major H. St. P. Maxwell, the then Governor General of Assam became the Regent. He continued to be so till the Maharajah came of age on 15 May 1907. Indeed, the period of Churachand Singh can be divided into two parts. The first part was a very significant period in the colonial history of Manipur because it was a period of Regency Administration during which the British authorities brought about several changes in the administrative system of the state. The changes, in fact, greatly affected the traditional

¹ Dr. N. Basanta Singh: *Socio-Economic Changes in Manipur*, (Imphal), p. 46.
practices of the state. Some of the major changes brought about by the British may be discussed as follows:

The first major administrative measure taken up by the British was that of the abolition of the Lallup system. According to this system, every male subject between the age group of 16 to 60 was required to work for the state for 10 days out of every 40 days. If a person failed to carry out his Lallup duties, he must give a substitute in place of him or he must pay fine.

In order to fulfill their colonial interests, the British authority in Manipur also decided to establish colonial courts inside the state. Regarding the working of the then native courts, Maxwell said that “these courts have not been working long enough to enable me to form a judgment whether they satisfy the public but the Town Panchayat has so far carried on the business with considerable promptness.”

The Regency Administration established the Court of the Political Agent, the Court of the Assistant

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3 Ibid.
4 Report of Political Agent, 1891-92, p. 11.
Political Agent, the Court of the Superintendent of the State and the Court of the Assistant to the Superintendent of the State. The Court of the Political Agent heard all the appeals. It also tried all the civil and criminal cases in which British subjects were concerned or in which one of the parties was a British subject.\(^5\)

The Court of the Superintendent of the state and the Court of his Assistant dealt with all the civil and criminal cases concerning the native people. It also acted as an appellate court for revenue cases from the Court of the Sub-Deputy Collector, for civil and criminal cases from the Courts of the Assistant Superintendent and Cheirap Court, and tried the criminal cases of more serious nature.

Another administrative development was the reconstitution of the Manipur State Durbar which was brought about simultaneously with the coming of age of Churachand Singh on 15 May 1907. Indeed, the reconstitution of the Manipur State Durbar was a very significant development in the colonial history of Manipur.

\(^5\) ibid.
because it reflected the *de facto* position of the British Political Agent in Manipur regarding the constitutional status of the state. According to the new arrangement, the Maharajah himself was the President of the Durbar and he was assisted by an English ICS officer as the Vice President. Besides this, there were another six Manipuri members who were entrusted with different portfolios. Education, Medical and Armed State Police were subjects given to the Vice President. Other portfolios like Judiciary, Works, Civil Police and Jail, etc. were entrusted to the other members. After this new arrangement, the influence of the Political Agent over the affairs of the Durbar was so great that he got the power of access to every affairs of the Durbar.\(^6\)

Another significant result of the new arrangement was that the entire administration of the hill areas of the state went into the hands of the Vice President who was also an English officer. Earlier, the king of Manipur directly dealt with the affairs of the tribal people and the relationship between the hills and the plains men was very good and

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\(^6\) N. Joykumar Singh: *op. cit.*, p. 38.
cordial. However, with the implementation of the arrangement, a strained relationship developed between the hill and plains people. By keeping the administration of the hills and the plains separate from one another, the British inflicted a lasting blow to the unity and integrity of the people of the hills and the plains. A serious gap of understanding and a growing dichotomy between the hills and plains people was also created.7

3. Economic changes brought about by the British:

Before 17 April 1891 when Manipur was an independent country, all the land belonged to the King. During this time, the king was known as Leimaba (Lei = Leipak or land, Maba = Mapu or owner). This land was broadly divided into Ingkhol (homestead) and lou (agricultural land). No tax was realized from these homesteads but only from agricultural land.8

It appears that till 1891 there was no well defined system of land tenure. But in this year a major change took

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7 Manipur Administrative Report 1892-93, p. 11.
place in the system of land tenure in Manipur. On 29 April 1892 the then Political, Agent Major Maxwell, announced the termination of the Lallup system and imposed a house tax in its place at Rs two per house per annum. The introduction of a uniform rate of annual land revenue of Rs five per pari (four acres) was also made known to the people.9 Thus Maxwell’s measures introduced a break from the past in that it did away with the assumption that all land belonged to the ruler. The cultivators now held land directly under the state on the payment of land revenue in cash. Though the land tenure was not regulated under any codified law, the cultivators, in fact held land as tenants of the state and had rights of occupancy, inheritance, and transfer subject to the payment of land revenue to the state.

In order to ensure the above rights of the tenants, the government also charted a plan to introduce patta or Jamabandi system giving the land holder information about the exact quantity of land in his possession. A land Register was also opened and in this register the transfer of land had

9 Administrative Report of the Manipur Political Agency 1892-93, p.3.
to be recorded. But the transference had to be permitted only on the sanction of the officer supervising the concerned department of the state. Relinquishment of holdings would be granted on application.  

After the annexation of Manipur in 1891, the British officers found the revenue system in a most confusing situation. During the first year of the occupation, the people were given option to pay revenue in cash or kind. But the difficulties in the realization of full revenue led to the introduction of cash payment of Rs five per pari (four acres) from the next year.  

4. Education and social awakening during the British Rule:

Ever since the establishment of the British Political Agency (1891) in Manipur, the Political Agents worked hard to inculcate primary education among the Manipuris. However, the general attitude of the people towards education was not conducive to it. During this time, the Manipuris were suffering from strong Hindu feudalism and

they believed that they would lose caste if they knew English as they considered the Sahibs (the British) as impure or polluted. As a result, the western education disseminated by the British was also treated as impure. The students who attended the schools had to change their clothes before entering their houses. Their school dresses had to be kept somewhere outside the house. But the books used by them were not considered polluted and they were allowed to take them inside the house. Girls were also very much discouraged from attending schools. Such an attitude of the Manipuris towards modern education certainly hindered the spreading of education in Manipur.\textsuperscript{12}

From 1895 to 1903, Sir William Pettigrew worked tirelessly for the establishment of schools in various parts of the capital and the valley. He secured and appointed teachers, and arranged academic curricula with the help of Manipuri teachers who were educated in Lower Assam. Efforts were also made to initiate girls’ education in Manipur. By the end of 1899, girls’ education also started

\textsuperscript{12} N. Bosania Singh, op. cit., p. 54.
with 12 pupils. Later, the need for imparting secondary education to those who had completed lower classes was also felt. In 1921, the Johnstone M. E. School was upgraded into a high school and it was affiliated to Calcutta University. In May 1935, the first girls’ high school in Manipur, T. G. Girls’ High School was established in the Palace and later it was shifted to the present site on 1 April 1936. In 1946, a college was established at Imphal in the name of Maharani Dhanamanjuri Devi who donated a sum of Rs ten thousand for the cause of education. With the opening of D. M. College, Manipur entered into the arena of modern higher education on the eve of Independence.

Regarding the British administration of the hills, it was confined mainly to the survey of the land, introduction of house tax, maintenance of police and army, creating a small bureaucracy to carry on their administration, development of minimum means of communication and transport in accordance with the requirements of their interests, opening

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16 Dr. Jamini Devi, op. cit., p. 38.
of a few primary schools, etc. Otherwise, the administration was most of the time seriously out of touch with the hill people.¹⁷

One lasting fruit of the British administration in the hills was the emergence of Christianity there. It not only helped to bring about a progressive change in the values and beliefs of the tribes but also made a singular contribution in spreading education among the hill tribes. The British administration also produced a tribal elite who filled up the lower level of the bureaucracy and gave support to the administration. Thus the arrival of western education woke up the Manipuris from their slumber. Before the arrival of Western education, the world they assumed was a world of Manipur and her surroundings only. Superstition was wide spread. It remained embedded in the minds of the people and they were enchained by traditional beliefs and customs. The Meiteis considered the hill men and the Manipuri Muslims as impure and polluted. It was Western education which gave a new world outlook and instilled a

global knowledge to the minds of the people. It slowly and gradually freed the mass from the superstitious ideas and beliefs and loosened the hold of customs on them. Modern education made the boys of hills and plains seat together in the classroom, thereby reducing the limitations on social mobility. More significant was the fact that by the 1930s, a small group of urban elite was produced. It was this elite group who led the masses in many social and political reform movements.  

The coming of Western education stirred the minds of the people which further led to a slow but steady social awakening among the people. The reform movements spearheaded by the educated elite class may be divided into two categories – socio religious revivalist movements and political reform movements. The revivalist movement related to the revival of ancient or traditional Manipuri religion which was driven out to the periphery of the social system due to the conversion of the Meiteis to Hinduism in the first quarter of the 18th century. The political movements, on

18 N. Basanta Singh, op. cit., p. 54.
other hand, stood against the British colonialism and were also in pursuance of democratic political reforms in the form of a popularly elected legislative assembly, a responsible government, constitutional monarchy, etc.

5. Oppressive measures against the people of Manipur during the British Rule:

With the establishment of the British rule in Manipur, the people of the state, already suffering from the feudal social system of their own, were subjected to further hardships. With a view to humble the people, the British immediately started measures to disarm the people. They asked the people to surrender their arms. They started engaging the defeated people in forced labor. Severe punishments were meted out to the Manipuris who participated in the 1891 war. They were sent to Khuzama, seventy two miles from Kohima, and were engaged in carrying rations for the British troops. The average load of each man was half a mound (20 kg) of rice.¹⁹

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In 1904, Major Maxwell, the Superintendent of the state ordered the town people of Imphal to supply all the material locally available for rebuilding of the bungalow of Captain Nattal which was destroyed by a fire in March 1904. It created more anguish in the minds of the Manipuris, especially the womenfolk. The women took up actions collectively in the form of demonstrations against the order of Maxwell, and it lasted for about a week. This marked one of the earliest political agitations by the people of Manipur. This episode is known as the First Nupi Lan (Women’s Agitation) in the colonial history of the state.

It was not only in the hands of the British that the people suffered. They were also subjected to a number of oppressive measures in the hands of the Maharajah and his Brahma Sabha. During the reign of Maharajah Churachand Singh, the Brahma Sabha was the predominant Hindu religious organization in Manipur. The Brahma Sabha, in collusion with the Maharajah, systematically took up a number of exploitative measures. The socio-religious

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20 R. Constantine: Manipur Maid of the Mountains, [Delhi, 1891], p. 128.
oppressions reached its apogee in the third decade of the last century. The most notorious form of exploitation was the practice of Mangba Sengba which was appropriately termed as “the plague” by the President of Manipur State Durbar, McDonald.\textsuperscript{21} Under this practice, the Maharajah and Brahma Sabha had the power to ex-communicate any individual or a person from the Vaishnavite Hindu society by declaring the individual or the locality as polluted. The dead bodies of such persons were not allowed to be cremated and no Shradha ceremony was allowed to be performed for them. Yet again, such ostracized persons or locality could be re-admitted in the Hindu society after paying a heavy fine.

Besides, the whole people in the valley were also extremely burdened with a number of feudal taxes and services. They had to pay Chandan Senkhai (a tax for putting chandan mark as a sign of Vaishnavism), Pacha Napet (five anna levy), Peon Chakthak (providing ration for

\textsuperscript{21} S. Mangi Singh, Reform Movements in Manipur During the 1930s and the Middle of 1940s, paper presented in the National Seminar on the Pte and Post Colonial History of Manipur and Its Neighboring areas, sponsored by the UGC, and organized by the Department of History, M. U., held from 29-31 October 1994.
the touring peons and amins), *Pothang* (forced labor to carry
the luggage of the touring officers), *Dolaireng* (carrying the
palanquins of the nobles), *Khewa Lanba* (ferry toll collected
for crossing rivers though the ferry was not managed by the
state), *Yairek Santri* (keeping vigil on the official people on
tour in the village), etc.\(^{22}\) As a result of long oppression both
by the British administration and the Maharajah and the
Brahma Sabha, dissatisfaction and resentment was
mounting in the minds of the people.

6. The First Manipuri Nupi Lan (Women’s Agitation),
1904:

The First Manipuri Nupi Lan occurred in 1904. The
circumstances leading to the agitation may be described as
follows. One night in March 1904 (28\(^{th}\) day of Lamda), the
bungalow of Captain Nattal who was the Assistant
Superintendent of the state, caught fire. It caught fire for
the second time again in the same month (23\(^{rd}\) day of
Eengen).\(^{23}\) It was built of bamboo and thatch. The British
authorities suspected that it was set on fire deliberately by

\(^{22}\) Ibid.

the local people. Though they could not arrest any guilty person or persons, they decided to teach a lesson to the local people. As a punitive measure for all the people in the locality, the British authority ordered that the Bungalow should be rebuilt by the local men folk. They were also ordered to bring teak wood from Kabaw (now in Myanmar) and construct the Bungalow of the Assistant Superintendent.24

Once the order was issued, men started bringing materials for the construction of the Bungalow from their houses. However, the women felt that the people were being penalized unjustly. So they came out and organized a protest against the step taken up by the British. They blocked the men who came for the construction and snatched the materials they brought. They threw the materials down into the Nambul River.25 They also demanded that the British should nab the culprits and punish only them, not the general people. The British

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issued an order prohibiting assembly of more than five persons. But the women defied the prohibitory order, went ahead with their and agitation, and even entered the Residency of the Political Agent.26 Bowing to the pressure of the women, the British authority ultimately withdrew the order. This episode in the colonial history of Manipur came to be known as the first Nupi Lan of Manipur.

7. The Kuki Rebellion (1917-19) and the Zelianrong Movement (1930-32):

The Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19 was a serious challenge that the British faced during their rule in Manipur. The immediate cause for its outbreak was that of the British’s decision to recruit a Labor Corps from Manipur to be sent to France. The Kukis were feeling the burnt of the British administration when the decision came out. They were already subjected to new taxes introduced by the British. Along with other peoples of the hills, they were also subjected to two types of forced labor – Pothang Bekari and Pothang Senkhai. Under the first category, they were required to carry personal goods or baggage of touring state

officials, and also to make bridges or roads and build bashas or temporary houses for their convenience. Under the second category, each household were required to contribute food items like eggs, chicken, rice, etc. and serve the touring officials. The Kuki chiefs were also very much annoyed with the interference the British made to their village administration through local interpreters called Lambus. In such a situation, the decision to recruit a Labor Corps came more or less like the proverbial last straw. Ultimately, powerful Kuki chiefs like those of Aisan, Jampi, Chasad, Khoyang and others took an oath after killing a mithun that not a single soul of Kukis would go to France. Soon many more Kuki Chiefs also decided against the British decision. Ultimately it took the British about one and half years to subdue the rebelling Kukis. Their operation came to an end only in the last part of May 1919.

The Kuki Rebellion had far reaching consequences in the political, religious, social and educational history of the Kukis. After the Rebellion, the British introduced significant

27 Lal Dena: Modern History of Manipur, (Orbit Publisher-Distributors, New Delhi, 1993), p. 80.
administrative changes and measure for socio-economic development the people in the hills. There was development in all walks of life in the hill areas of Manipur in general and among the Kuki inhabited areas in particular.\textsuperscript{28} All these created an environment within which a slow but steady process of socio-political awakening took place among the hill people.

At any rate, the Rebellion was a grim challenge to the British India’s colonial regime in Manipur, the most serious one since the revolt of the 1891. The outbreak of the Rebellion brought new political ideas among the people of Manipur in general, and the hill people in particular. It further paved the way for the growth of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial tendencies among the masses of the state. It began to flourish very quickly throughout the state.\textsuperscript{29}

The next landmark in the history of political awakening of the people of the state during the British rule was that of the emergence of the Zelangrong Movement.

\textsuperscript{29} N. Joukumar Singh, op. cit., p. 137.
The term Zelianrong stands for three closely related tribes namely the Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei. The basic objective of the movement was the preservation of the identity of this group of people and their political emancipation from the hands of the colonial rule. The movement was carried out under the dynamic leadership of Haopu Jadonag. He put forward the idea of 'Naga Raj' and free homeland of the Zelianrong people. His ideas inspired the Zelianrong people very much and under his guidance, they prepared to challenge the then existing system of colonial administration in their areas. Jadonang also asked his followers not to pay taxes to the British. After his death, his legacy was carried forward by Rani Gaidinliu. Like Jadonang, she was also a charismatic leader and the Zelianrong movement gained further momentum under her leadership.\textsuperscript{30}

The closing years of the colonial rule also witnessed the emergence of a number of other socio-political organizations in the hills. Of these, mention can be made of

\textsuperscript{30} A Scheme of State Reforms, submitted by the Maharajah to C. Grimson, the Political Agent in Manipur as an enclosure to his letter dated 22nd April, 1940.
Kabui Samiti (1934), Kabui Naga Association (1946), Zeliangrong Council (1947), Manipur Zeliangrong Union (1947), the Kuki National Assembly (KNA), Paite National Council, Tangkhul Long, Vaiphei National Union, Gangte Tribal Union, Hmar National Union, Khulmi Union, etc.\textsuperscript{31} All these developments facilitated growth of political consciousness among the hill people.

8. Socio-religious and political reform movements during the 1930s and the middle of the 1940s:

Socio-political development on modern lines is said to have started during the 1930’s, especially in the valley. During this time the valley people witnessed organized and persistent demands for socio-economic, religious and political reforms. Once again the newly emerging educated elite class came to the forefront spearheading the movements. Of this new class, Hijam Irabot was the single most dominant figure. He was born on 30 September 1896 at Pishumthong Oinam Leikai, Imphal. After getting primary education from Johnstone M. E. School, he went to Dacca for his Secondary Education. There he studied up to class

\textsuperscript{31} Sangai Express, dated 22 November 2003.
IX, and at this ended his academic career. He was the first leader who awakened the Manipuris from their long slumber. He led the masses to social progress by defying unjust practices.

Irabor was related to the royal family through his marriage with Rajkumari Khomdonsana Devi, the daughter of Chandrahas Singh who was an elder brother of Maharajah Churachand Singh. He was appointed as a member of the Sadar Panchayat Court. But all these did not distract him from his commitment to social reform works. In an act of open defiance of the authorities like the Brahma Sabha, Ratan, Peon, Amin, etc., he dug out from the grave the dead bodies of the ostracized people whose funeral rites were not allowed to be performed. All these drives were carried out through his organization called the Manipur Seva Committee. He also established another organization

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named Praja Mandal to further carry out his drive against the evil practices of those times.33

In order to counteract the various reform activities of Irabot, the Maharajah established the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in 1934 with himself as President and Irabot as Vice-President. What the Maharajah intended to do was to put down the revolt of Irabot by bringing him within the fold of an organization which was controlled by him. Yet, ironically enough, Irabot was to take advantage of this very organization to further promote his goals.34

The first inaugural session of the Mahasabha was held on 13 May 1934 at the Palace Ras Mandal. In the Session, he expressed his criticism about the religious life of the Meiteis in Manipur and outside it. His intellectual and philosophical outlook on the problems of education, religion, politics, language and ethnic groups of the people in Manipur also found their expression in his Vice Presidential Speech. His socio-political ideas got further expression in

the Third Session of the Mahasabha which was held at Mandalay (in the present Myanmar) from 28 February to 2 March 1937.\textsuperscript{35} There, he voiced his opinion in favor of interracial marriage, development of trade and commerce, a \textit{Swadeshi} cult emphasizing the use of local products and an open revolt against the excessive influence of the Brahma Sabha on the society.\textsuperscript{36}

At the same time, parallel with the Maha Sabha, Irabot also formed another organization known as Krishi Sanmelani in 1936 with the aim of agricultural and socio-economic advancement of the peasants’ groups. Salam Herananda Singh, Panchayat member and Maimon Madhumangol Singh became the President and Secretary respectively of the Sanmelani. The main demands of the Krishi Sanmelani were, among others, abolition of \textit{Yairek Santri, Peon Amin Chakthak, Pothang, Dolaileng}, etc. It also demanded the withdrawal of auction system on hills, rivers and lakes. Further it demanded that the peasants should be

\textsuperscript{35} S. Satradhari: op. cit., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{36} K. Manipmohon Singh: \textit{Hijam Irabot Singh and Political Movements in Manipur}, (Delhi, 1989), p. 3.
the owner of the land and a mound should have only 40kg.\textsuperscript{37}

9. The Second Manipuri Nupi Lan (Women’s Agitation), 1939:

The outbreak of a great women’s agitation known as Nupi Lan (1939) of Manipur was a turning point in the emergence of a new trend of political consciousness in the state. The colonial authority regarded the outbreak of this movement as the most important event of 1939.\textsuperscript{38}

The immediate cause of the outbreak was the excessive export of rice by the Marwari traders which culminated to a near famine situation during the harvesting season. In other words the origin of the Nupi Lan lies in the irregularities and mal-practices of the colonial administration of the state. Another factor was the economic exploitation of the people by the non-Manipuri traders coming from outside Manipur. It was also a time when some of the local businessmen were collaborating with the imperialists. Some writers regarded this movement as a dividing line between the oppressive

\textsuperscript{37} S. Satadhar: op. cit., p. 51.
economic and administrative policies followed by the Maharajah and the Political Agent on the one hand, and the new Manipur which emerged aftermath the Nupi Lan on the other.\textsuperscript{39}

The unrest set off by the Nupi Lan further helped the political awakening of the people of Manipur. Demands were made that the feudal political system along with the Darbar should be replaced by an elected legislature. A constitutional change was demanded. At the outbreak of Nupi Lan the then Maharajah of Manipur, Sir Churachand Singh was in Nabawip and not in the state. To the politically awakened people of Manipur, his many trips indicated that he was not listening to the voice and grievances of the people who were his subjects.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, one of the demands of the Second Nupi Lan was that Sir Churachand should take proper care for his subjects.

\textsuperscript{40} VISION, a quarterly Journal, vol.II, Issue 4, (Imphal, 2005), p.3.
10. Emergence of Political Parties:

10.i. Nikhil Manipuri Maha Sabha (NMS), 1938:

The Fourth Session of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Maha Sabha (NHMM) was held at Chinga on 29 and 30 December 1938. The First, Second and Third Sessions were presided over by the Maharajah of Manipur, Sir Churachand Singh. He was also the President of the NMHM then. However, in the Fourth Session, Irabot was appointed as its President by the delegates unanimously.

The Session opened with the slogan of “Bande Mataram”. During those time, the slogan ‘Vande Mataram’ was very much restricted by the British authorities. It was very unfortunate that people could not use even these words which means Khuramjari Imabu or “Oh Motherland, I bow to thee”. In the said Session, the delegates unanimously decided to change the name of the organization from Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha to Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha
(NMM) by dropping the word Hindu, and the organization was declared to be a political party.\textsuperscript{41}

In his presidential speech Irabot muted the idea of the right to self-government of the people, amalgamation of the hills and plains administration, release of Rani Gaidinliu, election of the members of the Mahasabha by the people, etc. Some of the important resolutions passed in the Session were as follows:

1. Self-government should be established in Manipur;
2. Universal Adult Franchise should be introduced;
3. Panchayat institutions should be established at the village level;
4. Administration of the hills and plains should be amalgamated;
5. Rani Gaidinliu should be released immediately from the jail;
6. Schools should be established in every villages;
7. \textit{Yarek shantri, Peon-amin chakthak, Pothang, Dolaireng}, etc. should be immediately abolished;

\textsuperscript{41} Soyam Satradhari, op. cit., p.46.
(8) Free and compulsory primary education should be introduced;

(9) Public health centers, veterinary hospitals and post offices should be established in the villages;

(10) Good irrigation facilities should be provided for the agricultural lands;

(11) Auction system on hills, lakes and rivers should be abolished;

(12) Khewa (ferry) tax should be immediately abolished.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{10.ii. Manipur Praja Sanmelani (1940)}

By the beginning of January 1940, there were debates and arguments among the members of NMM as to the question whether the struggle against colonial exploitation as symbolized by the Nupi Lan should be carried forward any further or not. Opinions got divided among the members of the Maha Sabha on this issue. Many of the members were self seeking pro-monopoly capitalists who were against the cause of the Nupi Lan. As a result, Irabot and his supporters within the Maha Sabha became a

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p.46.
minority. After this, Irabot, along with his followers left the Maha Sabha and formed a new political party called Manipur Praja Sanmelani. The party stood against the British capitalism, colonialism and imperialism, and stood for the rights of the oppressed people and democratic form of government.

10.iii. Manipur Praja Mandal (MPM), 1946:

The Manipur Praja Mandal (MPM) was formed on 7 March 1946, again under the leadership of Irabot. He was the President of the newly formed political party. It was established after he returned from Syhlet (present Bangladesh) where he was exiled by the British because of his role in the Nupi Lan. The main objective of the political party was to re-unite the paralyzed organizations and political parties in the state during his absence for six years consecutively from Manipur.43

43 Ibid., p.62.
10.iv. Krishak Sabha (KS), 1946:

The Krishi Sanmelani which was formed in 1936 under the leadership of Irabot changed its name to Krishak Sabha on 16 May 1946 in a meeting held at Nambol. Once again Irabot was the President of this party. The party stood against the formation of a proposed North East Frontier Province. It was also against the increase of tax on agricultural land from rupees six to twelve. This was affected during the Second World War. The Krishak Sabha demanded the reduction of the tax to its former rate. It also demanded daily consumable items to be made available to the people at a subsidized rate.44

10.v. Manipur Praja Sangha (MPS), 1946:

In a joint meeting of the Manipur Praja Mandal and the Manipur Praja Sanmelani held on 21 August 1946 at Kwakeithele, a new political party was formed by combining the two parties. The newly formed party was the Manipur Praja Sangha. The members of the party travelled in every nook and corner of the state trying to bring about socio-

44 ibid., p. 70.
economic and political awareness among the people.\textsuperscript{45} The party criticized Mr. F. F. Pearson, the President Manipur State Durbar, for the undemocratic manner with which he tried to constitute a Constitution Making Committee for drafting a constitution for Manipur. It also refuted the claim by the Congress that the latter was a party supported the people at large.

\textbf{10.vi Manipur State Congress (MSC), 1946:}

On 4 October 1946, a joint meeting of the three political parties namely - the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, the Praja Sangha and the Krishak Sabha was held at Aryan Theater, Imphal. The meeting was organized by the bourgeois with the aim of marginalizing Irabot from the political life of the state. Right from the very beginning of the meeting they criticized Hijam Irabot in particular and the Communist Party in general. This was followed by an ugly scene following which Irabot and his followers walked out of the meeting hall. Those who remained behind were mainly NMM members and they, after the departure of Irabot,
formed a new party called the Manipur State Congress under the Chairmanship of R.K. Bubhonsana Singh.\textsuperscript{46} The Manipur State Congress party was one of the major political parties during the pre-independence period in the state and the party got two ministerial seats out of nine in the Interim Government when M.K. Priyobrata was the Chief Minister. Further, in the first Assembly elections held in 1948 under the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947 it captured 14 seats.

11. Emergence of political parties during the post-Independence period:

The post-independence period in Manipur also saw the emergence of various political parties in Manipur. Some socialist minded persons from the Manipur State Congress left the party and formed a Socialist Party in 1948. Many more organizations followed. Most of them were in the nature of local political parties. Of these, mention can be made of Gandhi Sevak Sabha, Praja Shanti, All Manipur National Union, Historical Research Committee, Achumba Pamba Congress, Naga National League, Mizo Union, \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p.70.
Manipur Zeliangrong Union, Mao Maram Union, etc. These parties emerged during the early years of Independence. Many more small parties emerged like the Hmar Congress (1954), Paite National Council (1956), Gangte Tribal Union (1958), Hmar National Union (1962), Zeliangrong Naga Union, Paomai Progressive Party, Poumai National Union, etc.\textsuperscript{47} The Samyukta Socialist Party also came into existence in 1963.\textsuperscript{48} Later, Manipur Peoples’ Party (MPP) was formed in 1968. This was followed by other small parties like Manipur National Organization (1972), Kanglei League (1972), Manipur Hill Union (1874), Ereipak Leishemba Party (1980), etc.

12. The 1948 Elections:

With the adoption of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947, Manipur went to poll in 1948. It was the first ever elections in the state based on the principle of universal adult franchise. It brought the state to the threshold of democracy and democratic elections based on

\textsuperscript{47} P. S. Dutta: Electoral Politics in North East India, p. 69.
lines of party competition. The parties which contested the elections were the Manipur State Congress, Manipur Krishak Sabha, Socialist Party, Praja Shanti Sabha, etc. The party positions just after the final election result was out were as follows:

1. Hill Union/Independents - 18
2. Manipur State Congress - 14
3. Manipur Krishak Sabha - 05
4. Manipur Praja Sanga - 12
5. Socialist Party - 03

Total - 5249

*Election was not held in one of the constituencies in the hills.*

Perhaps it will not be out of place to make a brief study of the election strategies and propaganda adopted by the various parties in the election. It was the first ever popular election in Manipur. The establishment of responsible

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49 Satradhari, op.cit, p.90.
government was the major issue raised by all the contesting parties. Both the Congress and the Praja Shanti tried to present themselves as the real upholders of Gandhian ideals. The Congress promised responsible government, communal harmony, administrative reforms, Panchayati Raj, economic planning, social control over state economy, improvement of the standard of living of the people, development of agriculture, trade and transport, land to peasants, less taxation, abolition of corruption, payment of war compensation, etc. However, the Party side-stepped significant issues like that of the relationship between the Indian Dominion and Manipur. Regarding this sensitive and important issue, it simply said that it would always endeavor to preserve the identity of Manipuri language, culture and civilization.

On the other hand the Praja Shanti Sabha dealt very little with matters of substance. Most of their appeals to the public were attempted to tarnish the image of the Manipur

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50 Election Manifesto of the Manipur State Congress, 1948.
51 An Election pamphlet by the General Secretary of the Praja Shanti Sabha, 8 June, 1948.
State Congress, and present themselves as the real Congress. They were for maintaining the monarchy and responsible government. They also voiced many insinuations about Hijam Irabot Singh, who was a Krishak Sabha candidate saying that he was a communist and was trying to mislead the simple peasants with false promises and pretences. It may be noted here that there were serious misgivings about communism during the period. To be a communist was regarded almost as an offence. Perhaps it accounts for the absence of a communist party in the elections.

In this first popular election no party could secure a majority. The Manipur State Congress became the single largest party while the Praja Shanti became the second largest party after the elections. Subsequently a non-Congress coalition government led by the Praja Shanti was formed. M.K. Priyobarta Singh became the first Chief

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52 Election pamphlet circulated on 7 June, 1948, under the caption "The Praja is the real Congress", issued by N. Ibomcha Singh, General Secretary of the Manipur Praja Shanti Sabha.
53 An Election pamphlet by the General Secretary of the Praja Shanti Sabha, on 8 June, 1948.
Minister of Manipur. The new ministry was sworn in on 26 November 1948 at the Palace Durbar by the Chief Judge, Chief Court. They were:

1. M.K. Priyobrata Singh - Chief Minister
2. Arambam Ibotomcha Singh - Minister
3. Dr. N. Leiren Singh - Minister
4. Ayekpam Gourabidhu Singh - Minister
5. Teba Kilong - Minister
6. Major R. Khathing - Minister
7. Md. Alimuddin - Minister

13. **Concluding remarks:**

Political consciousness among the people of Manipur on modern lines started with the consolidation of British rule in the state. This was followed by the emergence of political parties inside the state during the 1930s and onwards. They emerged against the backdrop of a multi-dimensional socio-religious, economic and political reform movements during the 1930s and during the middle of the
1940s. Some of the important demands of the political parties during this period were that of the establishment of a constitutional government, the right to self government, a legislative assembly comprising elected representatives of the people, election on the basis of the principle of universal adult franchise, etc.

Elections on the lines of party competition were held for the first time in Manipur in the year 1948. They were held under the provisions of the Manipur State Constitution Act, 1947. They were also the first ever elections based on the principle of universal adult franchise in India during the post-independence period. Not less than four political parties along with a number of Independent candidates fought for a 53 member legislature. However, none of the parties won a majority and the government which was established after the elections was a coalition government. It was quite indicative of things to follow in the sense that no party has so far won a majority in any of the general elections held so far in the state. This is true for both pre and post-statehood period elections.
After the merger of Manipur into India, she became a "Part C State" without a legislative assembly of her own. This greatly diminished the prospects of the emergence of elections on lines of party competition for a considerable period of time. However, by and by, with the establishment of a Territorial Council, and subsequently a Territorial Assembly, elections on party lines emerged inside the state which was conducive to the emergence of party system inside the state. Numerous local parties emerged inside the state along side the national parties. This multiplied with the failure of the parties to win a majority in all the elections held so far, have resulted in the emergence of a multi-party system inside the state.

It may also be noted here that till the grant of statehood to the state in 1972, the right to self government, a popularly elected legislative assembly and a government responsible to it became the most important concern of all the political parties. It was also the main issue in all the elections held in the state before 1972.
The emergence of numerous political parties, both national and state, and also failure of the political parties to win a majority of the seats, led to the inevitability of coalition ministries. More significantly, in the absence of stringent anti defection laws during those times, political defection became a very serious chronic problem in state politics thereby adversely affecting the stability of governments inside the state. It also did not help in the evolution of a healthy and meaningful party system in the state.