Chapter VI

THE WOMEN'S BAZAR AGITATION, 1939-41

The Background

The month of December is the harvest season in Manipur. Although the State was liable to the vagaries of nature and severe famines like the rest of India, shortage of food was never a usual phenomenon and self-sufficiency was rather the norm. The rice produced in Manipur was just sufficient for local consumption. However, 1939 was the year of scarcity of food-grains. A severe famine threatened the eastern-most area and Manipuris became restless anticipating the impending tragedy.

That year heavy rains caused great damage to crops. The same happened in the Garo Hills and other areas. The harvest was not up to the expectation. Because of the fall in the production of rice, which was the only staple food of the Manipuris, the local populace came to the point of starvation. The price of rice shot up and the poor people, particularly, were badly affected. Moreover the women-folk earning their livelihood from hand-
pounding of the paddy were rendered unemployed. The Manipuri women were adversely affected and had to face starvation due to loss of work. The women's bazaar had to be closed down until the situation improved.

Before the trouble started, the price of rice was only one sícce (equivalent of four annas of that time) per shangbai (about thirty-two kilograms). Later, it rose to two rupees. As the burden of the price-rise increased day by day, the women-folk became more and more agitated. On the other hand, the Manipur State Government did not ban the export of rice. The rice business was mainly run by the outsiders designated as 'Foreign Merchants.' These traders were Marwaris, who monopolized the rice purchases in the State and became its sole exporters. These same people

1. These women-workers purchased paddy from the wholesale and sold it in the form of rice at a very reasonable price. And what they got out of that was spent on their livelihood. As the price index moved up, the poor people were unable to purchase rice at the high rate for their daily consumption.

2. The Khairamband Keithel or bazar has been only a big market entirely run by the women. It was the main market in the British Reserve area. It opened at about four or five O'clock in the evening and closed at midnight.
operated as money-lenders in Assam. As these Maruaris possessed big commercial capital, they naturally controlled and monopolized the whole food-grain business. They purchased all available quantities of paddy at cheap rates in the market and sold rice in turn at higher rates in the neighbouring states. In this way they made fabulous profits. They never sympathized with the cause of the women wage-earners. They were guided solely by self-interest and profiteering. They were thus opposed to the demands of the country people and the labour.

The Government of Manipur took no action against the Maruaris. On the other hand, in November 1939, the export of rice from Manipur was permitted, and the Marwari merchants who had recently started some rice mills in the State bought up large quantities of rice for milling and export. Had the Government banned the export of


4. Home Department, Political File No. 26 (23), 1940, NAI, New Delhi.
rice promptly, it could have forestalled the crisis. Neither the Maharaja nor the Durbar took any interest. On December 12, 1939, the women-folk openly agitated against the Government policy and the Marwari business community; a large group of women went to the length of lying down on the roads to stop the movement of rice-carrying trucks which were about to take loads of rice to the Manipur Road. In this way the situation became worse.

On the other hand, the Durbar could not evolve a unanimous policy on rice export as the members had different opinions. The Durbar President T. Sharpe and a member, R.K. Bhaskor Singh, voted in favour of rice export. S. Somorendra Singh, I.M. Ibungohal Singh and S. Nadia Chand Singh, other members, advocated a total ban on the export of rice from the State including civil supplies to Kohima. Maharaj Kumar Priyabrata Singh opined that rice should be exported after thorough checking of the State paddy stocks. The President expressed Durbar's


inability to bring about a consensus regarding the suspension of rice export. It was his opinion that the decision of the Maharaja would be highly needed at this critical juncture. The excited women, thousands in number, who had been waiting eagerly outside the Durbar Hall with a view to hearing the decision, being unable to console themselves pressurized the President to send immediately a telegram to the Maharaja, who was at Navadip (in Bengal). Urged by the crowd, the President accordingly wired to the Maharaja. Until the reply came from the Maharaja, Sharpe was not allowed by the crowd to go out of the telegraph office. The furious crowd besieged the telegraph office till 11 O'clock in the night. The Civil Surgeon, Major P. H. Cummins, who was with Sharpe was also detained. It seemed that even the flies were not allowed to fly off the telegraph office. Cummins, however, managed to slip a note to his driver, who was allowed to pass unmolested. The note, besides

7. All India States Peoples' Conference File No. 18, 1939-1942, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

requesting coffee and sandwiches, also summoned military help.

The arrival of Colonel Bulfield, the Commandant of the Assam Rifles, on the spot saved the British officers who were held up there by the crowd. During the rescue operation, a number of women agitators were injured. For lack of conclusive evidence, it is difficult to affirm that the women were bayonetted with intent to injure and wound. Some twenty persons, however, received wounds from bayonets and five severe wounds. On 11.3.1940, the Amrita Bazar Patrika, carried the news that two women agitators were injured following a clash between a group of women and the State Civil Police. In that incident, the women surrounded the Durbar Hall with the Durbar members and President, Sharpe inside, demanding immediate disposal of a case in which an Inspector of Police of Imphal was charged with assaulting a woman. The newspaper further mentioned that the women demonstrators kept the members confined in the Durbar Hall for several hours in spite of repeated

9. All India States Peoples' Conference File No. 12, 1940, NMML, New Delhi.
warnings from the State police, who subsequently dispersed them with a mild charge.

Why the Manipuri females were so exasperated? As has been officially explained, perhaps, '... the fact of the strongest causes of resentment against the Assam Rifles in connection with the December (1939) riot was that a number of men of this force were Kuki tribals and touching of their Hindu women by such persons was regarded as a great insult to them.'10 'These (Kukis) are looked down as half savages by the Manipuris whose resentment at their touching their women who are Hindus was great.'11

Eventually, the crowd in the telegraph office of the British Reserve compound was shoved away by a detachment of Assam Rifles. However, the tempo of the women's movement was kept up for a few days, then the tempers cooled down.

10. Personal letter from Central Intelligence Office to Governor of Assam, 18 June 1940, Home Department, File No. 26(23)/40-Poll, 1940.

11. Ibid.
On the next day of the Durbar Hall incident, the Political Agent in Manipur received a reply from the Maharaja. He instantly issued an order suspending the export of rice. But this could not normalize the situation, and the agitators turned their attention towards the rice mill-owners, who had assured them to close down their mills with immediate effect. In spite of one mill-owner secretly soaked and boiled some paddy for the purpose of making par-boiled rice; then in this way, he would be able to export rice after converting it into the form of thumped-rice. This uncooperative attitude had fanned the movement rapidly. As a result, an angry mob of nearly 10,000 women proceeded to one of the principal mills in order to stop the mill running. At the same time a deputation went to see C. Gimson, Political Agent in Manipur, who was on tour, when he heard about the women movement.

A massive demonstrating crowd of nearly 15,000 threatened to burn down all the rice-mills,

if the authorities failed to stop milling. The women agitators gave a slogan that the only way the Political Agent could stop this milling by the Marwaris was to have switches taken out. And this was what the Political Agent eventually had to do before the angry throng would disperse. Seeing no alternative, the Political Agent personally went to, and ordered the removal of electric switches of the mills. Then Gimson took chance of persuading the women agitators to go back home. But it did not pacify the women.

One serious incident took place in the last week of December 1939, when certain bullock-carts carrying rice were thrown into the gutter. At the same time women traders had started to boycott the main women market. It continued a month long. However, some of the women traders, violating the understanding among themselves attempted to sit in the bazar. But their piece goods were snatched from them and torn into pieces by the group of women agitators, who were in favour of the bazar economic boycott. No body even dared to complain.

On March 20, 1940, hundreds of women took out a long procession along the main roads of the
Imphal town. A woman was arrested, but she was rescued from the police by the demonstrators. The matter came to the notice of the Political Agent, who rushed to the scene with armed policemen. The State police arrested two more women leaders named Shabi Devi and Kabokhi Devi in connection with picketing foreign cloth. As they failed to furnish bond and securities against their charges, they were sentenced for nine months imprisonment by an order of the Manipur State Durbar. The local market observed complete hartal as a sequel to the conviction of the women leaders. Further, the general mass including men and women put forward the following demands to the Political Agent and the Maharaja:

1. To stop the export of rice till the next harvest as there is every fear of having a famine due to want of stock.

13. Defying the hartal some of the women leaders of small influence or reputation, about fifty in number, challenged to sit in the market, and they sat regularly. But the great majority were intimidated. This time no attempt was made to interfere with the private business runners. A few of them conducted their business outside the British reserve. Here, the role of the new women leaders was not so successful, as they could not persuade the women-folk convincingly. They repeatedly failed in their attempts to stir up the sentiments of the women eventhough they held several meetings on several occasions.
2. To stop the rice-milling system which has 'eaten up' the earnings of the women of paddy-husking.

3. To remove the present Durbar members who have proved unworthy for the administration and replace them by new members through elections.

4. To remove the present State servants in the Police Department who are all untrained and also found unfit for administration.

5. To establish a Legislative Council as already claimed by the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha and a scheme for which had been submitted to the Maharaja as asked for through his Private Secretary.

6. To decide the case of one Chabi Devi, who was assaulted by the Inspector of Police, by snatching her from the crowd and giving two slaps with a kick of boot on the chest.

7. To decide the case of ten women who were imprisoned for one month on the charge of picketing, by the Durbar.
8. To decide the case of one Dinam Ibemhan Devi who was assaulted in an inhuman manner by a police officer causing bleeding for several days. She remained in the Imphal Civil Hospital for several days under the treatment of the civil surgeon.

9. To decide the case of causing unnecessary assault to the innocent crowd on 14.1.40 and thereby causing injuries to forty women and some men.

10. To decide the case of nine leaders of the Praja Sanmilani, who were arrested out of the processionists, on 28.1.40 and detained in the police custody more than twenty hours, without informing the charge on which they arrested.

11. To decide the cause of the bayonet charge and thereby causing severe wounds to twenty women including a woman of more than seventy years.  

Besides, the demonstrators reminded that if the local authorities did not look into the matter, they would continue the bazar boycott. The

14. The Forward (Calcutta), February 17, 1940, p. II.
Political Agent, instead of sympathizing the cause of women, felt very much satisfied with the dutiful service rendered by the Assistant Sub-Inspector. The women were also unhappy with the order of the Durbar for the withdrawal of ban on rice export which was promulgated about a year ago. The Political Agent openly refused to do anything until he could get orders from the Viceroy. The Governor General of India and the Governor of Assam, had been approached for favour of causing a prompt inquiry by a tribunal and thereby decide the cases; but no action was taken.

Sooner or later, no one seemed to be any longer enthusiastic to the cause of the economic boycott. Gradually the market place was re-occupied by the women-sellers. By the beginning of February

15. The Political Agent, acknowledging the service of the Assistant Sub-Inspector (including other constables) wrote to J.P. Mills, Secretary to the Government of Assam, that '... I wish to place on record my appreciation of the persistence and tact with which the Assistant Sub-Inspector performed his duties and the willingness with which the constables supported him. They had very long hours of most anxious and unpleasant work and they were not found wanting. They kept their tempers even under the insults of women's tongues' Ibid, March 30, 1940, p. 14.

16. All India States Peoples' Conference File No. 18, 1939-42, NMML, New Delhi.
1941, some four or five hundred were sitting regularly. But a fresh problem was created on the issue of allotment of seats to the new and the old occupiers of the market. The Political Agent only to avoid further complications notified that as the seats had been vacated by the old sitters for a long period, he would allot to any one who chose. He announced that if any one of the former sitters wished to return to her respective seat, she should file an application to him within one month. This naturally disappointed the old sitters. They thought that they should be given first preference. The Maharaja was asked by the Political Agent if he had desired to raise any objection on this issue. But the Maharaja was silent. By and by many applications both new and old poured into the Political Agent's office. And for a few days there was a vigorous scramble with many tussles between the parties. However, there was no serious incident. In continuation of the previous notice dated 23.8.1940, the Political Agent wisely issued another notice on September 28, 1940. He cancelled the settlement of old seats for new arrangements. Those who had filed
applications for retaining their old seats would be given first preference. It appeared that the Political Agent did not like to do injustice to those old sitters. He was sure if he had allotted seats to other new-comers, that would have a year long ill-feeling and resentment among themselves.

The women's year long movement gradually died down. The economic distress or the political excitement might lead them to take up other form of agitation, as they had in the past, but this time they had learnt that their best interests lay inside and not outside the Khwairamband Keithal or bazar. The majority of them were economically backward. There might have been serious ill-economic consequences if the movement would have continued. On the other hand, there were no prominent leaders who could guide the demoralised women agitators, as most of them had been locked up. The petty leaders failed to revive the dying spirit of the movement. The women also could not complain as the price of paddy had gone down. 17

The split in the Working Committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha took place in 1939, when some of its members came under the influence that the women agitation should be suspended immediately, which was vehemently opposed by a section of members.

The split in the Working Committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha had disheartened the agitators. This was the only political party which had been fighting for the cause of the women. The defection in the party itself helped to strengthen the hands of the government. In this way, the lack of political and moral guidance to the women, the economic pressure, defection in the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha and with the resumption of their business brought the close of the year long agitation.

Political Repercussions

There was considerable controversy whether the women's uprising was politically motivated. Some observers commented that the scenario had nothing to do with politics. Others said that the women were 'hungry' so they demanded rice only
to fill up their bellies. The price index had risen up very high. They wanted rice at a cheaper rate. They sought for this with no exception. The agitation was stopped when the export of rice was suspended. They came to the market and sat as usually and regularly. There was no organisation in the movement. That was the reason why the struggle did not last long.

The view that the agitation had economic rather than political causes appears to be partially right. But we cannot overlook the political fact that women-folk resorted to direct action for the redress of their grievances. The shortage of rice caused from the heavy export of rice from Manipur to other neighbouring districts was not only the problem which kept the movement going for about one year. If we study in detail we would be able to see the underlying political trends in the movement. It was the party of Hijam Irabot Singh, which aroused and stirred up the feelings and sentiments of the women. Irabot was the architect of this movement. The Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha used to give instructions to
the women leaders from time to time. Accordingly, the women stuck to the policies and programmes which were chalked out by the party. The women also received encouragements from Indian political leaders during the movement. 'If I may advise, you should not lose heart and at the same time not indulge in any kind of violence which would give the authorities a pretext to crush your movement. Organise yourselves peacefully and quietly insist on your demands. Do not give in or be frightened by the power of the State. Big changes are coming all over India and your State cannot left out of them', advised Jawaharlal Nehru in a letter to the Working Committee of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. He expressed his inability to approach the Viceroy or Government in the matter, but assured the Working Committee that all those who learned about their difficulties

18. The Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, under the leadership of Hijam Irabot Singh, came into prominence early in 1939, when it submitted a memorial to the Governor-General requesting him to advise the Maharaja to establish a legislative council as a step towards the introduction of a responsible form of government in Manipur.

19. The Amrita Bazar Patrika (Calcutta), March 25, 1940, p. 4.
sympathised with them. Nehru recorded his personal admiration for the way in which the women of Manipur had been carrying the agitation, and wished them success.

The Kamrup Mahila Samity recorded with price of fight of the Manipuri ladies against injustice done to them by the State authorities. They congratulated them on their stand for justice, patriotism, selfless service, organising capacity and moral courage. The Samity wished that the ladies of Manipur would further continue their movement with complete non-violence and unanimity. It further urged the Government of India and the Maharaja to devise ways and means to meet the demands of the Manipuri females and see that peace and order was restored in the State. 20

The link between the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha and the women's bazar agitation could be seen from the very beginning. When the women's movement started in full swing in the early part of December 1939, they felt the lack of leadership

20. Ibid, April 9, 1940, p. 10.
of Irabot, President of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, who had just gone to Cachar some days back for attending a political conference.

Informing him of the women's agitation in Imphal, he was asked by the women leaders to return and lead the movement.

In a massively organised meeting held at Police Bazar, Irabot was pointing out the Government's inefficiency in tackling the situation. He repeatedly condemned the policies of the Government for their carelessness to redress the grievances of the women. As a result of his violent speech, a clash took place between the civilians and the police at the spot. 21

As the area was already under Section 144 IPC, Irabot was arrested on January 9, 1940, on the charge of giving a seditious speech, and sentenced for three years imprisonment under Section 1, u/s 124A, I.P.C. by the Manager State

21. Particularly from this occurrence the movement had turned into a different shape as the men had started taking part actively in the women's agitation. Later, it converted into a constitutional movement.
Durbar. 22

It was the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha which popularized the women's movement in Manipur and other parts of India. The Political Agent firmly believed that some of the agitating women leaders were playing in the hands of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. He further asserted that the women's agitation, which was started by the bazar women of Imphal against the Government policy of rice export, was gradually taken over by the Mahasabha; later on, the Mahasabha had exploited the women as a tool for fomenting agitation on the Congress lines. E.F. Lydall, the President of the Manipur State Durbar, observed that '... the agitation, which is said to have been fanned by an old prophesy that the appointment time had come for the arrival of a new Maharaja riding on a white elephant. The Mahasabha, a local body with congress affiliations, also took advantage of the unrest suggested that their leader (Irabot) was rider of the prophesy.' 23


A Central Intelligence report showed the role of the Congress in the movement of the Manipuri women and a direct link with the leaders of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, like Irabot and later Magho Singh with the All India States Peoples' Conference, which helped them in making out plans and direct tactics to be applied in the agitation.²⁴

In a letter from Purnendu Sen, a Congress worker of Sylhet, who had former revolutionary connections, to Labanya Lata Chandra, a leader of the Congress women's movement in Bengal and a member of the women's sub-committee of the Bengal Provincial Committee, that it was clearly indicated that the writer was trying to gather news about the women's agitation in Manipur for the purpose of its publication in the press. He further persuaded Labanya Lata Chandra that if she could prepare to meet the expenses, he would like to send some agents to Manipur. Purnendu Sen also suggested Amrit Kaur, a freedom fighter, should go to Manipur and study the political situation. On account of her ill-health the matter was dropped later on.²⁵

²⁴. Home Department, Political File No. 26(23), 1940, NAI, New Delhi.

²⁵. Ibid.
It was quite apparent that the leaders of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha also received regular instructions from the Sylhet and Gauhati Congresses. Irabot occasionally visited Gauhati and Sylhet to see the President of the Assam Provincial Committee with a view to receive instructions. When Irabot was in the Sylhet Jail, his lieutenant Magho Singh assumed the party leadership and tried to keep the movement alive. He used to correspond with Kamala Chatterji, a member of the Jugantar Party, who was working with the Communist Party of India in the Bengal Provincial Student's Federation, in connection with the women's agitation in Imphal. 26

The Manipur Government was quite aware of the political developments in the State. The Government was ready to prevent any sort of activities which might lead to commotion and anarchy in the State. Every incident was vigilantly observed. The State administration prohibited meetings of political character in Manipur without prior permission from the same. 27 As a precautionary

26. Ibid.

measure, the Government also adopted a policy of prohibiting the entry of unauthorised persons into the State. A strict vigilance was kept to prevent the Congress propagandists from entering Manipur. As suggested by D.A. Brayden, the Central Intelligence Officer, the Political Agent accepted the establishment of Agency at Dimapur. This was with a view to prevent the flowing of the Congress political elements and influence over into Manipur. Undoubtedly this was to check the political fomentation of the Manipuri women's agitation by political elements from outside the State.

Administrative Remedies and Reforms

The idea of reforms brought a lot of complications and made it more difficult to follow a line of agreement. The Maharaja, Durbar members

28. The purpose of the establishment of this Agency was to function as a check-post. The Agent would have an opportunity of discussing matters with the State's people leaving the State and should soon get to know any outsiders who visit the State frequently.
and President of the Durbar had different proposals with diverse justifications. Besides, the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha had its own demands.

The Political Agent first of all thought that a radical constitutional reform was not so necessary as the Manipuris never had a tradition of democracy. Though certain elements of it would be found in the Mahasabha and Congress adherents. The women were neither interested in constitutional reforms nor setting up a constituent assembly.\textsuperscript{29} The Maharaja was also of the opinion that there would be no need of administrative changes. He remarked that the women's disturbance had no direct bearing with the introduction of reforms in the state.\textsuperscript{30} It was aggravated by the Nikhil Manipur Mahasabha. However, he felt the need of certain administrative changes. In June 1940, he ordered the members of the Durbar to devise a plan to deal with the problem of agitation and give specific

\textsuperscript{29} Political Agent of Manipur to Secretary of Governor of Assam, 20 January 1940, Home Department File No. 11(7)/40-Poll 1940.

\textsuperscript{30} Maharaja of Manipur to Political Agent, 22 April 1940, Home Department File No. 26(23), 1940, NAI, New Delhi.
suggestions which could remedy the existing administrative defects. The following were the proposals put forth by the individual Durbar members:

1. Establishment of three or four posts of sub-divisional officers with a police station at every sub-divisional headquarters,

2. A chief court separate from the administrative Durbar,

3. A municipal committee for the capital,

4. A local Manipuri President of Durbar,

5. A legislative assembly composed of twelve elected, and ten nominated members,

6. Abolition of separate administrative branch for the hills,

7. Admission of pleaders into the State courts,

8. Creation of a Manipuri Civil Service with senior and junior divisions,

9. Replacement of cherap and sadar panchayat courts members and the hill sub-divisional officers,
10. Cancellation of village choukidars and establishment of ten police stations in the valley and seven in the hills,

11. Restriction on the Maharaja's civil list to ten per cent of the revenue of the state,

12. Opening of a department of excise,

13. Introduction of examination system for the candidates for State services,

14. Revision of pay-scale of State Government servants,

15. Mineralogical survey in the State,

16. Expansion of Durbar by increasing its members and inclusion of elderly statesman,

17. Promotion by efficiency, not by seniority,

18. Starting of an agricultural department and co-operative societies,

19. Opening of more hospitals and veterinary dispensaries outside Imphal, and

20. Introduction of the British administrative system in toto, including trial by jury. 31

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The President of the Durbar was doubtful about the successful implementation of such reforms as the State was lacking in honest, capable and efficient persons who could be employed to implement the reforms.

Secondly, the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha weighed in with a demand for a unicameral legislature of 100 members, eighty to be elected and twenty to be nominated by the Maharaja. The other suggestions were for voting by ballot, no communal electorate, electors to be literate or tax-payers or both, a bill to become law if passed by the Maharaja who would otherwise refer it back to the legislature, the legislature to pass the budget, the civil list to be in a fixed proportion to the State's revenues, the Maharaja to ask the leader of the largest party in the legislature to be prime minister and to choose three cabinet ministers who with him would have joint responsibility to the legislature, the Maharaja appointing more ministers whose responsibility would be individual, the Maharaja to set up a constituent assembly and nobody to vote twice over. But the reforms proposed by the Nikhil Manipuri Manipuri Mahasabha were never
considered by the Government. The Political Agent was under the impression that as there had never been any form of democratic government in the State, not even municipal or local boards, this proposal seemed to be too wild to consider seriously. 32

Lastly, the Maharaja also submitted a draft of reforms to the Political Agent. 33 He wanted his reforms should be introduced in his State. The constitutional proposals for reforms submitted by the Maharaja (to the Political Agent) may be studied under the following heads:

The State Executive

1. The Executive authority of the State shall be exercised by the Maharaja either directly or through ministers to be chosen from amongst the members of the State Legislative assembly.

2. There shall be a council of ministers of limited number to aid and advise the Maharaja in the exercise of his functions.

32. Political Agent of Manipur to Secretary of Governor of Assam, 20 May 1940, Home Department File No. 26(23)/40-Poll. 1940.

33. Maharaja of Manipur to Political Agent, 22 April 1940, Ibid.
3. If any question arises whether any matter is or is not a matter as respects which the Maharaja is to act in his discretion will be final.

4. The prime minister will be chosen by the Maharaja in consultation with the prime minister of the state who will be a lent Indian Civil Service (I.C.S.) officer or a retired officer from British India and shall hold office during the Maharaja's pleasure.

5. The prime minister will be responsible to the Maharaja for the proper administration of the finance and revenue departments and will on behalf of the Maharaja exercise general supervision over the working of all departments. The Maharaja in consultation with the prime minister will arrange for the distribution of work between the prime minister and other ministers.

6. The salaries of ministers shall be such as the state legislature may determine, and until the state legislature so determine, shall be determined by the Maharaja provided that the salary of a minister shall not be varied during his terms of office.
7. The question whether any, and if so, what advice was tendered by the ministers to the Maharaja, shall not be enquired into, in any state court.

8. In the exercise of his functions the Maharaja shall have three special responsibilities, i.e., (a) the prevention of any grave menace to the peace and tranquility of the state, (b) the safeguarding of legitimate interests of the subjects, (c) and the securing of the peace and good government of the state.

If and in so far as any special responsibility of the Maharaja is involved, the Maharaja shall, in exercise of his functions, exercise his individual judgement as to the action to be taken.

9. If it appears to the Maharaja that the peace or tranquility of the state is endangered by the operations of any persons committing, preparing or attempting to commit, crimes of violence which, in Maharaja's opinion, are intended to overthrow the state government, the Maharaja may, he thinks that the circumstances of the case require him so to
do for combating those operations, direct that his functions shall to such extent as may be specified in that direction, be exercised by the Maharaja in his discretion and, until otherwise provided by a subsequent direction of the Maharaja, those functions to that extent shall be exercised by the Maharaja accordingly.

10(a) All executive actions of the state government shall be expressed to be taken in the name of the Maharaja.

(b) Orders and other instructions made and executed in the name of the Maharaja shall be authenticated in such manner as to be suggested by the prime minister and approved by the Maharaja.

(c) The prime minister, the ministers and the heads of the departments shall transmit to the Maharaja all informations with respect to the business of the stage government.

The State Legislature

1. There shall be a state legislature which will consist of the Maharaja and a chamber to be known as the state legislative assembly.
2. The state legislative assembly will consist of a lent I.C.S. officer or some retired officer from British India and twenty-seven members. Out of twenty-seven members eighteen will be elected - two each from the four panas of Ahallup; Naharup, Khabam and Laipham; eight will be elected - two each from the four leikhais of Kwai, Yaiskul, Khurai and Wangkhai and two will be elected from the Muslim community; nine will be nominated out of which five will be officials and four non-officials.

3. The state legislative assembly unless sooner dissolved shall continue for five years from the date appointed for their first meeting and expiration of five years shall operate as dissolution of the assembly.

4. (a) The assembly shall be summoned to meet at least four times a year.

(b) The Maharaja may in his discretion from time to time summon the assembly to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit and prorogue it.

(c) The Maharaja may in his discretion send any matter to the assembly for discussion.
5. The prime minister will preside the meetings of the assembly and manage its workings.

(a) All the questions in the assembly shall be determined by a majority of votes of the members present. In cases of equality of votes the prime minister shall have a casting vote.

(b) The assembly shall have power to discuss any matter of the state including the budget.

(c) The state budget will be drafted by the prime minister, and will be laid by him before the state assembly for examination. After the assembly has recorded its suggestions, if any, for modifications in the prime minister's draft budget, the Maharaja will record his opinion. If the Maharaja desires any modifications in the budget proposed by the assembly, the Maharaja will communicate his opinion to the assembly in order to give them an opportunity of reconsidering their views and submitting a further minute to the Maharaja. The Maharaja will then record his own final opinion indicating clearly the form in which he desires that the budget shall be accepted by the government of Assam and will forward all
the papers to the Political Agent for submission to the government of Assam. The government of Assam after giving due consideration to the wishes of the Mahajara and the assembly, will finally approve the budget with such modifications as it thinks fit. When once approved by the government of Assam the budget must be adhered to subject the such modifications as are allowed by the rules sanctioned by the government of Assam for the keep of the state accounts.

(d) It shall be the duty of the prime minister to adjourn the meetings of the assembly until more than half of the total number of the members are present.

(e) The assembly and the council of ministers will submit copies of their proceedings to the Maharaja who may (i) approve thereof, (ii) refer any matter back to the assembly or to the council of ministers as the case may be for further consideration, (iii) veto any resolution and issue what orders he sees fit, stating his reasons in writing. This power of veto will be exercised in very rare cases.
After the Maharaja passed his orders, copies of the proceedings and the order passed thereon will be submitted to the Political Agent.

(f) If a member be absent without permission of the assembly for thirty days from all meetings of the assembly, the assembly may declare his seat vacant. Provided that in computing this period of thirty days, no account shall be taken of any period during which the assembly is prorogued, or is adjourned for more than three consecutive days.

6. The Armed Police shall be under the control of the Maharaja.

7. Qualifications of membership in the assembly have to be decided later.

8. Members of the state legislative assembly shall be entitled to receive such allowances (not salaries) as may be fixed from time to time by the assembly.

9. No state court shall have power to enquire into the proceedings of the state assembly.
1. (a) If at any time when the state assembly is not in sitting the Maharaja is satisfied that there exist circumstances in the state which render it necessary for the Maharaja to take immediate action, the Maharaja may promulgate such ordinances as the circumstances appear to require.

(b) Such ordinances shall have the same force and effect as resolutions of the assembly approved by the Maharaja.

(c) But the ordinances shall be laid before the assembly and shall cease to operate after the expiration of three weeks from the day on which they are so laid, or if a resolution disapproving them is passed by the assembly and approved of by the Maharaja upon the passing of the resolutions.

(d) The Maharaja may withdraw the ordinances at any time.

(e) The ordinances shall be void if they relate to matters concerning which the state assembly has no power to make legislation.
2. (a) If at any time the Maharaja is satisfied that circumstances exist which render it necessary for the Maharaja to take immediate action for the purpose of enabling him satisfactorily to discharge his functions in so far as the Maharaja is required to act in his discretion or to exercise his individual judgement, the Maharaja may promulgate such ordinances as in his opinion the circumstances of the case enquire.

(b) The ordinance thus promulgated shall continue in operation for such period not exceeding four months as may be specified therein, but a subsequent ordinance may be extended for a further period not exceeding four months.

(c) The ordinance shall have the same effect and force as a resolution of the assembly approved of by the Maharaja.

(d) The Maharaja may withdraw the ordinance at any time.

(e) If it is an ordinance extending a previous ordinance for a further period, it shall be communicated to the government through the Political Agent.
(f) The Maharaja shall exercise this power with the concurrence of the government; provided that, if it appears to the Maharaja that it is impracticable to obtain in time the concurrence of the government. The Maharaja may promulgate an ordinance without its concurrence, but in that case the government may in its discretion advise the Maharaja to withdraw the ordinance and the ordinance shall be withdrawn accordingly.

Provisions in Case of Failure of Constitutional Machinery

1. If at any time the Maharaja is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the state government cannot be carried on properly the Maharaja may by proclamation -

(a) declare that the Maharaja's functions shall, to such extent, as may be specified in the proclamation, be exercised by him in his discretion; (b) assume to himself all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by any state constitutional body or authority; (c) any such proclamation may contain such incidental and consequential provisions as
may appear to the Maharaja to be necessary or desirable for giving effect to the objects of the proclamation, including provisions of the state constitution relating to any state constitutional body or authority; (d) provided nothing in the foregoing provisions shall authorise the Maharaja to assume to himself any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the state chief court, or to suspend either in whole or in part the operations of any provisions of the judiciary relating to the state courts.

2. Any such proclamation may be revoked or varied by a subsequent proclamation.

3. (a) A proclamation thus made shall be communicated forthwith to the government.

(b) A proclamation unless it is a proclamation revoking a previous one shall cease to operate at the expiration of four months.

Provided that, if the government approves of the proclamations continuing in force, the proclamation, shall, unless revoked, continue in force for a further period of eight months from the date on which it would
otherwise have ceased to operate, but no such proclamation shall in any case remain in force for more than two years.

4. If the Maharaja by a proclamation assumes to himself any power of the state legislature to make laws, any law made by the Maharaja in the exercise of that power shall subject to the terms thereof, continue to have effect until two years have elapsed from its date on which its proclamation ceases to have effect, unless sooner repeated or enacted by an appropriate state legislature.

The State Judicature

1. The judicial Durbar under some suitable name (like the chief court of justice) shall continue to exercise the highest original or appellate jurisdiction in the state both civil and criminal cases.

2. The personnel of this court may to some extent be decreased by some gradual process.

3. The Maharaja shall continue to exercise revisional jurisdiction as at present.
4. The state will better borrow a European officer of the Imperial Police to act as superintendent of the state police for three or five years. He will train the state police work in technical and the force of the present state police is untrained. 34

The Political Agent remarked that the Maharaja did not mention that how a prime minister would be appointed, and removed from the office. The Maharaja wanted that out of nine members of the State assembly five should be State officials. The Political Agent suggested that there should be at least some elected members otherwise the ministers would be responsible to him only and not to the assembly. The age limit at thirty for the members was also unduly high. With reference to the power of the State assembly, it was not clearly defined that what would be the role of ministers in initiating resolutions, and whether the proceedings of the assembly would go direct to the Maharaja from the assembly or through his council of

ministers. The procedure proposed for the budget seemed unduly cumbersome, when dealing with a body of twenty-eight members.

As in the case of judicature, the Political Agent remarked that the intention of the Maharaja was to reduce the Durbar to a purely judicial body. The Maharaja had also overlooked the need of reforming the administration of courts. The Political Agent suggested that these courts should be thoroughly reorganised as they had been the centre of deep-rooted corruption. Further, he said that if the Durbar members had only judicial work, then they should have enough time to supervise the work and duties of the lower courts. It might lead to a better administration of justice.

The Political Agent was certain that the State would not be able to restore and maintain order with the existing police force. He agreed with the Maharaja on his proposal of borrowing a European police officer to re-organise and train the police. But he criticized the Maharaja for his unwillingness to allow the control of the State military police to pass from his own hands.
To the Political Agent, there appeared to be some confusion of the prime minister, who was also to be president of the assembly. The leader of the assembly would take over most of the duties of the President of the Durbar, who did preside over Durbar meetings. The Political Agent presumed that the prime minister would preside over the council of ministers, but not over the assembly. The confusion might have arisen from the use of the term 'President' of the Durbar.

The Political Agent pointed out that the Maharaja's proposals did not touch the hill tribes. He thought that it would be impossible for the prime minister to be responsible for the administration of the hill tribes in addition to his other duties. It would be necessary to consider a new arrangement for the hills.

Finally, the Political Agent rejected the Maharaja's suggestion that any extra expenditure incurred on account of his proposed reforms might be met by a cut in the pay of the State servants. In his opinion the Maharaja had under-estimated the cost and more important had not realised what an
unfavourable start his reforms would receive, if they were dependent on a reduction in salaries, which were already very small. He remarked that the State military police and the civil list were two heads under which the economies might be effected. On the other hand, the Maharaja wished to increase the expenditure under both. 35

Pointing out all the defects and irregularities of the draft proposals of reforms by the Maharaja, C. Gimson, the Political Agent asked him to review it once again. Instead of admitting the validity of the comments by the Political Agent, he rather upheld his reforms. He further observed that 'In view of the pressing demands of the subjects I have ventured to experiment with the proposed constitution. The provision has been made to safeguard its failure. The council of ministers will take over the executive functions, the Durbar will cease to exist as a judicial body. The ministry will necessarily be responsible to me only. Changes will have to be made in the rules for the administration of the State assembly.' 36

35. Political Agent of Manipur to Secretary of Governor of Assam, 20 May 1940. Ibid.

36. Maharaja of Manipur to Political Agent, 8 May 1940, Ibid.
The Political Agent referred the proposed reforms to the Governor of Assam, who remarked that the Maharaja's proposed reforms would be '... so nebulous and questions such as the suitability to Manipur have been so insufficiently worked out that they are worth very little indeed,' 37. It became apparent that the Maharaja's draft reforms meant almost nothing from a democratic point of view and in fact, if anything, tended to give more power to an autocratic ruler than what he actually possessed. The Governor considered that they were far less likely to satisfy and other element in the State. He assumed that the Maharaja's ruling passion was money. The Governor firmly believed that the reforms proposed by the Political Agent would be more suitable and practicable, and that they would really pacify the excited people. At the same time the Governor felt that if the British officers were to

37. Governor of Assam to Governor-General, 4 June 1940, Home Department File No. 26(23)/40-Poll. 1940.

Supporting the views of the Governor of Assam, the Governor-General was of the opinion that the scheme for constitutional reforms proposed by the Maharaja appeared to be impracticable and wholly unsuited to the needs of the State.
do their duty as trustees, in a sense, for Manipur, they were bound to try and force the ruler to give his subjects a reasonably sound system of administration.

The Assam Governor informed the Viceroy about his difficulties in convincing the Maharaja as he was unwilling to introduce the reforms in the British pattern. Moreover, the Maharaja was waiting for the introduction of the federation to take up the question of reforms. Keeping in view the critical situation of Manipur, the Governor-General agreed that the proposed reforms should be initiated without further delay. He observed that the question of further reductions in the Maharaja's privy purse that it might be left for later consideration. The Governor-General suggested that the Maharaja was generally inclined to adopt an obstructive attitude; therefore, '... the best course would, perhaps, be after an appropriately brief interval, for you (Assam Governor) to summon him and suggest to him that he should go on a

38. Secretary to the Governor-General, to Governor of Assam, 10 June 1940, Ibid.
pilgrimage or otherwise take a rest from his activities and leave the President under the instruction of the Political Agent and the Governor to proceed with putting matters straight.

The Maharaja was probably quite aware of the developments. He was sure that his proposed reforms were not going to be introduced in his State. Seeing no alternative, the Maharaja left Imphal for Calcutta for 'medical check-up'. At the same time, his intention was to delay the introduction of the reforms in his State. The Maharaja vaguely talked of announcing the British proposed reforms on the day of the golden jubilee of his reign. Sensing the obstructive attitude of the Maharaja, the Assam Governor immediately communicated with the Political Agent, expressing his views that it is no longer possible to postpone the introduction of reforms designed to bring the administration more into accord with accepted standards of good and efficient administration.

39. Secretary to the Governor of Assam to Secretary of Crown Representative, 7 June 1940, Ibid.
Later he felt that if the government wanted to achieve success, it should go slowly.

Having reigned for fifty years, the Maharaja announced his intention to abdicate in favour of his eldest son. He died at Navadwip twenty-four days later on November 6, 1941. The long drawn efforts of the British at constitutional reforms were of the demands of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha. The British administrators suspected that the Maharaja aimed at concentrating all powers in his own hands. However, the colonial overlords themselves never intended to go beyond half-hearted constitutional reforms. To conclude, the women's agitation, which later turned into a mass movement, moved the British administration to plan and implement at least some reforms in the State essential to deal with its social and economic problems.

40. Secretary to the Governor of Assam, to Political Agent of Manipur, 6 September 1940, Ibid.

41. Home Department, Political File No. 160, NAI, New Delhi.