

THE LIFE OF HIJAM IRABOT : THE TRUE LEADER

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Abstract

Hijam Irabot was born on September 30th, 1896 at Pishum Oinam Leikai, Imphal. He was a man of seriousness, farsightedness in his mind and soul. He was a nationalist by nature and works as a Socio-Political Economic activities for the Society. He was also the icon of the Sociolistic revolutionary of Northeast. Being born in a poor family, he always work for the people as a fearless social worker and later he was known as “Jana Neta”. As he was politically active, he met different leaders and kings for upliftment of Manipuri Society. Irabot’s impact in pointing Manipuri Politics towards democracy and socialism was great. While there had been popular outbursts against autocratic feudal rule most notably in the second women’s war of 1939-40, it was Irabot who gave to these movements a clear sense of political direction. Irabot was the unquestioned leader of manipuri people during those days was regarded as a legendary hero in every manipuri home. His life became a metaphor of hut to temple and temple to hut as humanist, leader of the people against feudalism as an antifascist.

Key word: Born and Brought-up, King’s Relationship, Job Resignation, Underground Imbroglia, Politics.

Introduction :

Relevance of the Manipuri Hero : At a time when the British conquered Manipur and start administrative rule for just 5 years, Hijam Irabot was born on September 30th, 1896 (Wednesday) at Pishum Oinam Leikai, Imphal. His parents were Hijam Ibungohal Singh and Hijam Ongbi Chongtham Chanu Thambal Nganbi. He parted with his parents when he was young. Then, his aunt Sougaijam Ongabi Itebombi Devi took care of him at Moirangkhom. Though he got little relief, staying at the residence of his aunt, he could not strive hard in study due to financial derailment of his aunt. However, his aunt sent him to the Johnstone School for study. In 1914, the study in school was only upto the High School standard in Manipur. One had to go to Assam or other places if one wished to appear at Matric Examination or further study. Irabot, after completing 6th standard at the Johnstone School left for Dhaka for further study along with Sougaijam Somorendra Singh in the year 1913. But he had discontinued again his further study after completing class 8 due to acute financial crisis at home. After staying a few months in Tripura in the year 1915, Irabot came to Manipur and stayed at the residence of Maibam Samden at Wangkhei Ningthem Pukhri Mapan. Maibem Samden who married the daughter of Maharaja Nara Singh was the son of Maibem Tamra Singh. Maibem Ibomcha, son of Maibem Samden established close associate with Irabot Singh.

Establishment of King’s relationship :

The Maharaja and the general people were well aware of the fact that Hijam Irabot Singh was always a man of seriousness, having farsightedness in his mind and soul. The first Women War took place in Manipur when he was hardly eight years old which made him known what war was. He got married as per Hindu rituals with Khomdonsana, the eldest daughter of Chandrahas who was elder brother of Maharaja of Churachand. Thus, besides being a Panchayat Member, the common people of those days respected him as the son-in-law of the Maharaja family as if he was Member of royal family. Ofcourse , it was the law of land that the Darbar Member or the Panchayat Member generally was to be inducted from the royal family and / or from other social elites of those days. In 1930, he was appointed as member of sadar panchayat. Irabot enjoyed remunerative benefits of Rs. 25/- per month when he was Panchayat Member Cheirap Court. He had even possessed 25 Pari of the plot of land and many others servent to this credit. Thus, he could have satisfied himself with these possessions.

Resignation Drama :

Jananeta Hijam Irabot was always concerned for the well-being of the Women as well as the farmers. His firm convictions and ideology was that the Manipuris of inside and outside Manipur should come together to a common platform so that they could stand on the threshold of self-reliance in all respects, In 1933, the Bhadramahilla Samaj, the first Women organization was established in Manipur. Under his guidance, by establishing the Nikil Hindu Manipuri Samaj on May 30th 1934, a big convention with Maharaja Churachand as President was held at Reshmandal of the palace compound. Different issues relating to the causes of women were deliberately discussed in the convention. The second convention of the Sabha was held on January 30th, 1937 at Tarapur , Silchar in which the Maharaja was himself present. Then , the next convention was resolved to be held in the heart of Mandale, Burma w.e.f. February 28th to March 2, 1937. But, the Maharaja could not attend the convention; instead Irabot dared to shoulder the responsibilities of attending the same on behalf of Royal family, and started his journey upto Mandalay on both land

and water ways with the masses. He presided over the convention.

The Fourth Mahasabha was held on December 29-30, 1938 at Chinga, Manipur. It was a very important occasion for Irabot, getting the spirit of nationalism with him ironically, the then political instability had led the public to get the opportunity of rising the issues head and corner against the government. In the Mahasabha of Chinga, the word 'Hindu' was dropped and replaced by 'Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha'. Thus, in the Chinga convention, Irabot unfurled the flag of Pakhangba Salai with Pafal in the Flag.

Among the 13 Resolutions adopted so far in this convention, the important one's, inter alia, were establishment of school and hospital in each and every village, claiming ownership of the land for those handling with plough. Seeing the ever increasing strength of the Mahasabha, the President of the Manipur State Darbar announced the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha as the political party. As per order passed by the Darbar President, restrictions were imposed upon those members belonging to the royal family to part with the membership of Mahasabha. However, Irabot defying the order of the Darbar President tendered resignation from the Panchayat Membership. Engalam Tompok Singh also followed Irabot and resigned from the post of Head Clark. The Maharaja Churnchand too had to distance from the Mahasabha, after having been declared as a political party. Why Irabot parted with Panchayat Membership was well defined with his pre-determined ideology of getting associated with the well and woes of the masses and tried to bring change in the society. Thus, though he resigned from the Panchayat membership, his ideal philosophy, strong will power, well-defined principle brought unity among the people, which evolved a good renaissance in Manipur. Meeting and deliberation were held continuously in Dhaka, Tripura, Burma to improving the socio-economic life of the village farmers, a Krishak Sanmelon was established in 1935. Later, it was changed by Krishak Sabha.

Towards the jail :

Irabot Singh was not stable at a place because of his busy schedule everywhere. When 2nd Women War broke out in Manipur, he was in Cachar. His diversified farsighted principles brought change in the minds of the women. His firm stand to wake up the cause of the Manipuri Women was to fuel impressive movement waves against the Manipur Government. The Women War started and tolerated equally the aftermath war deteriorations. On Jan 9, 1940 (Jan 7, 1940 was mentioned somewhere), Irabot made strong deliberations in the context of Women War at Police Land in Imphal. His well-prepared scathing attack upon the government for what had happened for begging rice by the Manipuri Women propelled the movement, resulting finally his arrest from his house. As Manipur State Darbar Criminal Case No. 4 of 1940, Irabot was put in jail for a term of 3 years. When he was set free from the jail after completion of jail term, his age was around 44 years. The way he was sentenced to jail switched over unexpectedly relentless wave of public commotion against the authority.

Underground Imbrolio :

All political parties in Manipur did not agree with the creation of Purvanchal Pradesh at that time. The Manipur State Congress also, after a series of meeting held on the agenda, submitted memoranda to government. The general public supported the movement. However, the government turned a deaf ear to the so-called legitimate demand of the people of Manipur. Irabot reviewing these development had called a general convention on September 21, 1948 at the premises of Manipur Dramatic Union(MDU) Hall, Imphal, involving Krishak Sabha and Praja Sabha. Their appeared a sea change in public gatherings from all sides to witness the political conference. The Manipur Police tried to stop the masses from attending the conference which led to the great public chaos at Pungdengban. Finding no other means than resorting to Police firing, S.I Narain Babu had been killed, injuring a couple of general public. By the time of the incident that had happened at Pungdengban, Irabot was busy inside the premises of the Manipur Dramatic Union(MDU) Hall for the proposed meeting. A few workers rushed to the premises and narrated the incidence to Jananeta. Getting the information, he, by handing over a few documents to his followers, had to move towards Nambol in a bicycle without giving his specific whereabouts to them. Because as a farsighted man he was, he thought of not being trapped in the nest of the police; he did not think of himself of not avoiding from the scene of escape. He attended the meeting of the working committee of the Manipur Krishak Sabha at 2 pm in which he put his signature in the resolutions. Interestingly the venue of the meeting did not figure in the agenda. The copies of the resolution were sent to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Governor of Assam, The Maharaja of the State Council.

Unfortunately, in an emergent meeting of the Manipur State Council held on September 21, 1948, the Manipur Krishak Sabha and the Manipur Praja Sangha were declared unlawful organisation, following which good number of members of these organizations were arrested and sent to jail, inflicting thereby physical as well as mental tortures to them. Thus the interim government of the Chief Minister of Manipur M.K. Priyabrata Singh had issued arrest warrant that anybody who could information for Irabot would be rewarded for RS. 10,000/-. Under the compelling situation, Irabot finally went underground. Though he was in jungles and valleys, he did not stop serving the interest of his followers in their needs and requirements.

Irabot in Politics :

External forces did not rule out to avoid supporting the causes of Jananeta Hijam. Irabot he imbibed the theories of India and abroad regarding the respective socio-cultural derivations of their countries. He was very much

concerned about tortures meted out to the black by the white in Africa and the unbearable problems of the poor farmers in Russia, France, Chicago, etc. Which led to the outbreak of Farmer's Movement. He even repeatedly studied the books of Karl Max, dealing with the support of the labour Movement. Political instability in India made him restless in his mind. But he strongly appreciated the supreme sacrifice of the nationalist movement leaders of India like Subash Chandra, Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh, etc. for the cause of the motherland. The socio-political handicapped for a situation in Manipur in those days was very much unfortunate. The callous environment arising out of the fact that the British administration in Manipur on the one hand and the power exercise by the Maharaja towards the masses on the other, created much panic like the football played between them. Irabot took cognizance of the helpless disciples who as if were blind in their rightful claim for survival existence. His ideology was equal among the citizens in the context of modern democracy. According to him, the good governance should be in the hands of the people and every citizen should have equal voting rights. However, his political ideology was socialism or scientific socialism. While in the Sylhet jail, he met with the communist leaders and enlightened with the vision of Marxism. He even established close associate with three political parties of Burma when he remain underground.

In March 1943, Irabot was freed from the Sylhet jail on completion of term. But he did not move towards Manipur. He started again to join hand with social leaders of Cachar. With the comrades of the Communist Party, the resolution adopted so far directed towards addressing chronic problems of the Manipur farmers and the Tea Garden labours of Cachar district.

The success of the second Women War in Manipur was credit to his political movement. Standing on the threshold of self-reliance by virtue of self-cultivation upon on plots of lands, the relentless contribution of Irabot paved the way to send messages a awakening of the farmers in their feudal movement. It brought a great challenge of revolutionary movement against the administrative character of the then Manipur Government.

In the year 1948, Irabot contested the Manipur Assembly Election on Krishak Sabha ticket from Utlou Constituency and defeated the Congress candidate. His election symbol was House. Though he got elected in the 1948 Assembly Election, he did not attend the Assembly House and stood against the Meager Agreement. It is mentionable herewith that the nomenclature of the Manipure State Darbar was replaced by the Manipur State Council wef. July 1, 1947; and every Darbar Member was thereafter recognized as Minister. Irabot, however, sat aside all these development since he was neither jealous of money nor post of any kind.

Early in 1951 he had gone to Burma to arrange for military training for his supporters. On 26th september, 1951, Comrade Irabot left this world before could reach his motherland and communicate his achievement to his Comrades on account of typhoid fever at the Tangbow village, Burma. The memorial stone there bears the name 'Comrade I. Singh'.

Conclusion:

Hijam irabot was a leader as well as a fighter, he Sacrificed his life for the people of Manipur. The role in the re-construction of the Manipuri Society, his struggle against the Government rule as well as the autocratic Maharajah, his pioneering work in many fields, his tireless efforts to better the downtrodden and his able leadership in the december 12, 1939, 'Nupi Lal' that caused him imprisonment and exile in Cachar from where he worked restlessly among the Manipuri and Non-Manipuri peasants and workers could not be forgotten by us. Not only this, under the unavailable circumstances, he went to Burma and organised and convened the message of humanism, the feeling of oneness, arousing the mass movement against the imperialism with the full spirit of integration.

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