

The Meitei State Committee

(An Underground revolutionary party of Manipur)

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The outbreak of rebellion, revolution or any type of movement was not a new phenomenon in the history of Manipur. Right from the beginning of the colonial rule down to the post-independence era, the people of this state witnessed a series of movements on different objectives. The first women agitation of 1904, the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-1919, the Zeliangrong uprising of 1930-32, the Great women agitation of 1939 are the most important anti-British movements of the colonial period of Manipur. The most outstanding movement of the post independence period was the 'Armed Revolutionary Movement of 1948-51' under the leadership of Hijam Irabot Singh. These movements, undoubtedly played a great role to the growth of new political ideas and development among the people of Manipur. However, as compared to the movement of 1948-51, the objective of the movement of the colonial period was confined within a limited area. Their basic aim was against the colonial and imperialistic rule of the British. As a result of this, they were not able to give a clear vision about the social, political and economic life of the future Manipur. Whereas the movement of 1948-51 was carried out under the banner of the principle of socialism propounded by Marx. So, the aim of the movement strongly emphasised the establishment of a new society based on the socialistic principle. Their strong demand was to bring about a complete transformation in the existing social life of the state. The fashionable political idea and objective became an eye opener to all people particularly the younger generation of the state.

The establishment of Meitei State Committee, as an underground revolutionary organisation was a significant political development in the history of the post independence period. The deep rooted cause of the out break of this movement was closely interlinked with the growing political development

from the time of the integration of the state into the Indian Union. It is a well known fact that the merger was taken place in a very undemocratic way. Some important section of the society was not happy with this and the political development after the merger was also against their expectations. This was clearly evident by the decision of the Manipur National Union, a local party of the state. This party was the first political organisation in Manipur who introduced the idea for a responsible government in Manipur. They strongly criticised the political attitude of the Congress government in Centre and asserted that a responsible government should be established in Manipur within a stipulated time. On the 20th April 1953 they openly declared that if the Indian government failed to grant statehood to Manipur within 15 days, they would declare Manipur as an independent state [Prajatantra' (a local Manipur Daily Paper), 21.4.1953] and with this strong political idea they finally formed a 'Revolutionry Party'. From such evidences it is quite clear that the new political and administrative changes which was developed after the integration was not to the expectation of the majority of the state.

In the meantime the Naga underground movement broke out with a strong objective to establish a separate political identity of their own. The outbreak of such type of separatist movement in the neighbouring area was, indeed, a great opportunity to those persons who had already imbedded the idea of revolution. The political objective adopted by the Naga movement gave a new light to the people of the younger generation of the state and it also greatly helped in the consolidation of their political idea of self-determination.

Apart from the economic condition of Manipur which developed after the integration also helped in a large scale way to the growth of such type of political movement. The student movement of 1965 was a glaring evidence of the acute economic problem of the state. The movement was a spontaneous outburst against the scarcity of rice. Then, the problem of unemployment further strengthened the anti-Indian

stand among the younger generation of the state. The outbreak of the movement was also a product of the circumstances.

The idea of the establishment of the Meitei State Committee was emerged for the first time in the last quarter of the year 1966. This underground organisation was established with a full understanding with the Federal Government of Nagaland. It is mentioned that the link between the leaders of this organisation and Naga rebels was established at the initiative of some Meitei youths from the Ukhongsang and Chandra-khong village of Manipur. At that time they were the members of the Naga underground movement. It is further recorded that they were sent by the Naga underground leader to meet the ex-revolutionaries of 1948-51 movement so that the present movement would be able to spread throughout the major area of north eastern states. They met Shri Wangkheirakpa Tomba Singh, who was a close associate of Irabot during the period of 1948-51 movement and a leader of the Communist party of India. They told him about the desire of the leader of the Naga underground. He thought that it was a very good opportunity for them if they wanted to follow the political line adopted by their late leader Irabot Singh. He discussed the matter with other ex-revolutionaries and they also agreed the proposal of the Naga leaders. Then he went to Nagaland and met the underground Naga leaders near Kohima. He was not able to speak English and so one Nileh, a youth of Mao Naga from Manipur was the interpreter in their discussion.

It is said that the only desire of the Naga underground was to carry out an arm movement in Manipur so that they would be able to have a separate political identity outside the Indian Union. As a response to their appeal and in order to follow the political line of late Irabot, Shri Tomba Singh convened a meeting of all the likeminded ex-revolutionaries at the residence of the Pukhrambam Tomba Singh of Wakhong village, near Sagolmang about 15th miles to the north of Imphal city. This meeting was the first step for

the establishment of the organisation. First they all agreed to propose its name as the 'Manipur State Committee'. Then, in an another meeting held at the residence of Shri Abung of Thangal village, about thirty miles from Imphal its original proposed name was again changed as the 'Meitei State Committee'. Thus, the 'Meitei State Committee' was formally established as an underground revolutionary party in January 1967.

The basic aim and objective of the movement was to establish an independent state of Manipur based on the principle of socialistic pattern of society which had been already initiated by late Irabot Singh during the 1948-51 movement. In this connection it is mentioned that the only desire of late Irabot was to bring a socialist revolution in Manipur with the help and co-operation of the surrounding hill people. He believed that no revolution could be launched successfully without the co-operation and active participation of the hill people. But his untimely death brought the matter to an end without positive result. In this regard it is further mentioned that the only objective of the organisation was to follow the revolutionary path of late Irabot, and to translate his ambition into action.

In order to work in a very systematic way, the organisational structure of the Meitei State Committee was divided into two wings i.e. Civil and Military. The civil wing was to carry out the responsibilities of general administration of the organisation, fund collection, publicity works and recruitment etc. The military wing was put under the command of Shri Thangjam Ramchandra Singh of Litanpokpi village. Under his command the organisation tried to expand the military activities throughout the other places of Manipur. It is said that the members of military wing received the military training from the Federal Government of Nagaland, besides they also supplied fire arms. The military training was held for about one month. It is further said that in order to make the military wing more effective, the management of the wing was put under the care of three important leaders. They were (1) Hourungbam Angou Singh of Lousangkhong

village, (2) Shri Rengdol, a Kom tribe of Utonglok village of near Leitankokpi and (3) Soibam Yaima Singh of Patlou village. In regard to the question of recruitment policy of the organisation, it is mentioned that, there were no specific recruitment rule of the organisation. Majority of the members of the arm wing were the ex-revolutionaries of 1948 movement. They came out and joined the organisation with some certain determination.

Just at the beginning their activities were confined mainly to Keibi village and surrounding areas. Then the activities began to spread very soon. As a result of this, a serious disturbance were made in the functioning of local administration. In the meantime, some educated youths from the urban areas also joined the organisation. Thus it became a serious problem to the state administration. On top of this, their relations with the Federal Government of Nagaland and the material and moral support given by them to the revolutionaries, brought another serious impact to the question of national integrity. Keeping this view in mind and in order to bring a normalcy in the law and order situation of the state, the state government decided to take up some repressive measure against their organisation. At that time Shri Ito Singh of Salungphal village was the commander-in-chief of the arm wing. Under his command the organisation established a base camp near Purum Liklee and from this camp the organisation launched its military activities. The information of their whereabouts was reached to the knowledge of the government very soon. Immediately a police force was sent to that area. In the exchange of fire between the revolutionary party and the police force, Shri Ito Singh was killed and a large number of members were also arrested.

The untimely death of Shri Ito Singh was indeed, a serious set back to the functioning of the organisation. After this incident the activities of the Meitei State Committee was sharply declined. Taking the opportunity of this deteriorating condition of the organisation, the state government also tried to weaken the activities

of the Meitei State Committee. The Government declared that the State Government would provide the maximum facilities if the rebels surrendered to the government. The plan of the government worked very effectively. It is mentioned that Shri Rangdol, a prominent leader of the organisation was the first member who surrendered to the government. The government immediately gave him Rs. 2,000/- (Rupees two thousand only) under the rehabilitation programme. His action was, indeed, a shock to the moral in the rank and file of the organisation. It gave a serious set back to their activities. After him a sizeable number of activists were either surrendered or arrested from the different areas and they were put in jail. At last Shri Wangkheimayum Tomba Singh, was also arrested by the police from the residence of Shri Mohari Singh of Yairipok village. His arrest brought the end of the political movement of the Meitei State Committee. In the record of the government it is said that the Meitei State Committee had been virtually smashed in the year 1970-71 and finally became extinct in year 1971-72. Thus the revolutionary activities of the Meitei State Committee was Completely shattered when it was just an infant state.

Many factors were responsible for the failure of the movement. One of the most important causes was the lack of intellectual depth among the members of the organisation. Majority of the members of the Meitei State Committee was illiterate. Even the leader of the movement also was not an educated person. Because of this, they were not able to give a proper theoretical guideline which is the basic need for the success of any type of the movement. As a result of this the leaders of the movement faced a series of problem during the time of their activities. It is a well known fact that any type of movement was not able to go smoothly without the help of people. Whereas in the case of this movement, the people were not in favour of their cause because the leaders of the movement were not able to give a clear picture about the aim and objective of the movement to the people. On the otherhand, the propaganda work of the Government also make a good situation for the

development of such condition. The government projected the activities of the Meitei State Committee as an anti-social activities and the leaders as an anti-social elements. The propaganda work of the government was so effective that the people was afraid of the members of the organisations. The growth of such type of feeling among the people was directly related with the lack of intellectual depth among the rank and file of the organisation.

Another factor was the lack of cohesiveness in the system of the organisation. It is a fact that the movement was started while the functioning of the organisation was not properly maintained. In this regard it can be suggested that the majority of the leaders of the organisation was highly influenced by the activities of the Naga movement. And so, without keeping any reservation they opted the style of the Naga people as priority of their movement. This factor was the most important cause for the debacle of their movement. It is admitted that the failure of the movement. This is admitted that the failure of the movement was due to the lack of systematic organisation. Because of this policy they were not able to get the maximum support of the masses particularly of the elite section of the urban area. So, the intensity of the movement in the urban area was not strong.

Despite all these drawbacks, the revolutionary movement of the Meitei State Committee was a great landmark in the history of the post merger period of Manipur, because it laid a basic foundation for the growth of the idea of self-determination among the younger generation of the state.