

## IRABOT DAY OBSERVANCE

30 September, 2015

*The meaning of nationalism is not to annex another country by destroying the nationalism of others. True nationalism cannot be the toy of imperialism. True nationalism is self-determination; it cannot be an obstruction to the self-determination of a country.*

Excerpt from Irabot's Capitalism



Hijam Irabot  
(30-09-1896 to 26-09-1951)

## MESSAGE

How do we carry forward the democratic movement in Manipur towards development, peace and unity!

Dear friends,

30 September, widely observed as IRABOT DAY in Manipur, is the birthday of comrade Hijam Irabot (30-09-1896 to 26-09-1951). Irabot, who had a humble origin as a destitute orphan, was married to a princess, which ensured him royal prerogatives and appointment to the post of membership of the prestigious Sadar Panchayat Court. He, however, was not lured by all these. He resigned from the government job. Between 1930s and 1940s he became a leading person of the social reform movement and political agitations, against feudalism and colonial rule. He had also contributed a lot towards promoting culture, sports, literature and journalism. After 1942 he became a communist. During his six years political exile, till late 1946, he was politically active in some parts of Assam. After the Independence, in 1948, he was elected to the Manipur Assembly. However, he was considered a threat to the ruling class, who subsequently declared him a terrorist on 21 September 1948. He went underground, carried out an armed struggle and died in the jungle in 1951.

Irabot had spearheaded a movement to establish a socialist Manipur that would be free from subjugation, oppression and exploitation. The movement died out without a continuity. In the decades after 1951, neither Irabot's revolutionary line has been encouraged nor his ideology adequately promoted. Irabot has been merely honoured for his contributions to the society and symbolically commemorated. Some parties have appropriated his names, as their pioneer, and merely use him as symbolic flag post in observances and election campaigns. There is a lull, or complete discontinuation, of the revolutionary line of Irabot. The discontinuation is not an indication of the absence of the objective conditions of suppression and exploitation, which are the favourable objective pre-conditions of a revolution. The discontinuation is largely due to lack of subjective consciousness towards a progressive qualitative change. The subjective 'slavery' is the combined

result of: (a) ignorance and the deliberate refraining from adopting the socialist ideology to address the socio-economic conditions, (b) widespread disillusionment generated by the left wing revisionists, and (c) the extensive counter-revolutionary propaganda of the right-wing opportunists.

The continuous emergence of ‘outlawed’ armed organisations exemplifies the persistence of the spirit of resistance vis-à-vis some forms of colonial oppression and the continuous rules under oppressive regimes. However, the resistances are being led by the right-wing nationalist organisations. These organisations adopt a racial (or ethnic) approach to constructing nationhood and they gradually got perverted into chauvinism. Most of them are uncritical about the structural constraints of the colonial or semi-colonial societies under the burgeoning neo-liberal political economy. What added to the political complications is the emergence of either state sponsored armed organisations or those who collaborated with the rulers, who use the cloak of ‘revolution’ and indulged in forced extortion of money, human rights violations and individual terrorism. All these make the people confused between what is revolutionary and reactionary activities. In the overall scenario there is absence of a progressive ideology and common political line among the oppressed peoples. The rulers take advantage of the situation to keep the people continuously subjected, divided and misrule. The rulers and reactions play with the emotive and sensitive issues such as communalism, territorial questions, various forms of repressive and terror tactics, and other divisive tactics to divert the peoples’ attention.

The objectives of the Irabot Day Observance, on 30 September, are primarily: (1) to honour the historical role that Irabot had displayed, and (2) to discuss the revolutionary line that Irabot had taken up in his time and the relevance of his political ideology in the contemporary Manipur. Some interrelated themes that may be touched upon in the discussion are: (a) the general trend of the political economy since the time of Irabot; (b) the forms of social oppression and contradictions under the existing political economy; (c) the objective conditions that called for a qualitative social change towards development, peace and unity in Manipur; and (d) the role of party in the making of the qualitative changes.

We invite you to kindly attend the Irabot Day Observance and share your views on the above issues. Your kind presence is highly solicited.

## BRIEF PROFILE OF COMRADE HIJAM IRABOT

### **Hijam Irabot:**

- Born on 30 September 1896, at Oinam Leikai, near Pishumthong, Imphal East, Manipur.
- After his father’s death, he moved with his mother to stay with his aunty Sougaijam Ongbi Ibeton Devi, at Moirangkhom Sawaijam, Imphal. After his mother’s death and his return from Dacca in 1915, he lived in the house of Maibam Samden of Wangkhei, Imphal East.
- He was called *Jana-Neta* (Leader of the people) by the Cacharis, *Simanta Prahari* (Sentinel of the Frontier) by Hemango Biswas, *Afoji* (elder comrade in Burmese) by the then Burmese Communist Party, and *Comrade Ahal* by the then armed Manipuri Red Guards.
- Died on 26 September 1951, at the foothills of the Anggo Hills.

### **Father’s Name:**

- Hijam Ibungohal.

### **Mother’s Name:**

- Chongtham Ningol Thambalngambi of Hijam Leikai.

### **Spouse’s Name:**

- Rajkumari Khomdonsana, daughter of M.K. Chandrahas, elder brother of the then reigning King Churachand.

### **Schools attended:**

- Johnstone Higher Secondary School, Imphal (upto Class seven).
- Pugo High School, Dhaka, in present day Bangladesh (upto class nine). In 1915, he dropped out due to shortage of money and went to Agartala (Tripura).

### **Literature & Journalism:**

- Editor, *Meitei Chanu*, a hand written magazine brought out in 1922.
- Authored, *Seidam Seireng*, a text book purchased from him by the Manipur State Durbar on 4 December 1929 and prescribed as a text-

book for the High School students of class five.

- Authored, *Mohini*, a novel published in serialized form, from August 1931 in *Yakairol monthly*.
- Authored, *Dalil Amasung Darkhast Iba*, printed in 1933.
- Founder General Secretary, Manipur Sahitya Parishad; 1937 and 1938.
- Author of a collection of poems, *Imagi Puja*, written in Sylhet jail, published in 1987.
- Founder cum editor of the weekly *Anouba Jug*, from 13 April 1947 onwards.
- Author of *Lokmanya Tilak* (Biography), *Jaymati* (Drama), *Gomati* (play) and translated Bankimchandra's novel *Krishnakanter Will* into Manipuri – many of these are still in manuscripts.

#### **Art & Culture:**

- Acted in Bengali plays during the early period (1915-20).
- Acted in both male and female characters in early 1930s.
- Played the role of Kumud in his first historical play Nara Singh (1925).
- Played the role of Chandra Singh in Areppa Marup, a social play of S. Lalit Singh.
- Played the role of Baladeva in the Manipuri version of the play Debala Devi.
- Acted in Satee Khongnang.
- Founding member, Manipur Dramatic Union (MDU, established in 1931).

#### **Sports:**

- Played hockey, football, cricket, tennis and badminton.
- Encouraged Sat-jal, Manipuri martial art.
- Founder member, Imphal Town Club, a premier sports club in his time.
- Founder member, Manipur Sports Association.

#### **Appointment:**

- Member of the Sadar Panchayat Court; appointed on 1 April 1930 and resigned on 17 March, 1939.

#### **Organisational experience:**

- Founder, Bal Sangha and Chatra Sanmela while in Johnstone Higher Secondary School.
- President of the Reception Committee of Manipuri Sabha, appointed in November 1933.
- Original member, Manipuri Mahasabha, in early 1930s.
- Founder member, Nikhil Manipuri Hindu Mahasabha, 30 May 1934, at Imphal (later on Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha). On 15 Feb 1939, the NMM was declared an illegal organization. On 7 January 1940, Irabot defected from the Mahasabha on matters regarding the disagreement on physically supporting the Nupi-lan among its members.
- Founder of various organizations such as Krishak Sabha Praja Mandal, Praja Sanmelani, Mahila Sanmelani, Youth League, and others.

#### **Communist Background:**

- During the Nupi Lan, that broke out from 12 December 1939, Irabot was arrested on 9 January 1940 and sentenced to 3 years imprisonment for a speech delivered on 7 January 1940 at the Police Line Bazar. He was previously kept at the Imphal jail but shifted to Sylhet jail. In the Sylhet jail he met Congress and Communist leaders. Irabot was released from the Sylhet jail on 20 March 1943. But he was not permitted to enter Manipur. He stayed in Cachar to work among the Manipuri peasants and also among the non-Manipuri ex-tea garden workers. There, he joined the Kishan movements. He kept in touch with the communist leaders and attended the first congress of the Communist party of India that was held at Bombay from 23 May to 1 June, 1943 as a special invitee from Cachar.
- In Cachar, he organized cultural squads known as Swadesh Ganer Dal, which was later on incorporated in the Indian People's Theatre Association. He led a delegation from Cachar to the All India Kishan Sabha session held at Netra Kona in Mymensing District of Bengal. In March 1944, he went to Bejwada (Katakual Village) to join the Kishan Conference and stayed for some time at the Bengal Communist Party office. The same year, he went to Sylhet to join the annual session of the Surma valley provisional Kishan Sabha. Irabot was detained as a security

prisoner in the Silchar District jail, with effect from 15 September 1944, on the charge that he was a communist. He was released on 10 January 1945. After more than 5 years of political exile, Irabot was given permission to stay in Manipur for a week i.e., from 2 to 10 September, 1945. His request for an extension of his stay in Manipur was denied. He came back to Cachar and carried out peasants' movement. He was appointed General Secretary of the Cachar District Kishan Sabha and President of the Surma Valley Kishan Sabha. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Assam Kishan Sabha, the CPI Assam Provincial Committee, and the Assam Students' Federation. He contested in the 1946 election to the Assam Provincial Legislatures Assembly from the Silchar constituency as a CPI candidate.

- Irabot was finally permitted to enter Manipur in March 1946. In Manipur he organized a new party called the Manipur Praja Mandal in April 1946. He attended two sessions of the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, before he was expelled from the membership of the Working Committee of the Mahasabha, on the charge of being a member of the Communist Party of India. He attended the second congress of the CPI held at Calcutta, from 28 February to 6 March 1948. The first Communist Party of Manipur was formed on 23 August 1948. In the June/ July 1948 election to the Manipur Assembly, Irabot contested and won from the Utlou Constituency as a Krishak Sabha candidate. Before the inauguration of the Assembly, Irabot on behalf of the Manipur Praja Sangha and Manipur Krishak sabha called a meeting at the MDU Hall, on 21 September 1948, to protest against the proposed formation of Purbachal Pradesh, comprising Manipur, Tripura, Cachar and Lushai Hills. A scuffle took place at Pungdombam when the Manipur State Police prevented a group of citizens who came to attend the meeting; in which a police officer was killed on the spot. The Manipur state council declared the Manipur Praja Sangha and Manipur Krishak Sabha unlawful. The state officials declined to constitute an enquiry committee to investigate into the Pungdombam incident. Irabot could not attend the first meeting of the Manipur Legislative Assembly held on 18 October 1948, because of the warrant against him. Irabot formed an underground Communist

Party of Manipur on 29 October 1948 and carried out armed struggle against the government. He died, due to illness, at the Tangbaw village at the foot of Anggo Hills of the then Burma on 26th September, 1951.

## IRABOT DAY OBSERVANCE

Note making Competition cum Interaction

- The topic of the competition is: "Hijam Irabot and Revolutionary Movement: Legacy and Contemporary Relevance".
- A booklet will be issued to those who are interested to participate in the note making competition.
- The price of the booklet along with the participation form is 30 rupees only.
- The competition will be held on 30th September 2015 (Wednesday), at 1:00 p.m., at Faculty of Arts, Delhi University (North Campus).
- Participants in the competition will be allowed to refer the booklet issued by MSAD.
- The word limit of the note making is between 1000 and 1200 words, which has to be completed within 1 hour and 30 minutes.
- Each participant has to submit one article on the same topic within 10 days at our e-mail address. Both the note and article (2500 word limit) will be considered for the overall selection of the best three winners.
- There will be interaction session for an hour after the competition.

Organized by: Manipur Students' Association Delhi (MSAD)

Venue: Faculty of Arts, Delhi University (North Campus)

Contact us: +91 8376889477 & +91 7503553141

E-mail: msad.manipur@gmail.com