

Evolution of the Indian National Congress in Manipur

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Abstract

This paper seeks to study how the Indian National Congress (INC) evolved in Manipur. It argues that the party's growth in Manipur was closely link with the constitutional and political transformation of the state from a princely state to a Part 'C' State, later to a Union Territory and finally to a full-fledged statehood within the Union of India. The study will look back to what circumstances led to the establishment of the Manipur State Congress (MSC). It will further examine the party's participation in the making of Manipur Constitution, its internal organizational conflicts, its role in forming a responsible government and the party's position in the merger of Manipur into Indian Union. The paper also studies the institutional transition of the Manipur Congress from the Manipur State Congress (MSC) to the Manipur Territorial Congress Committee (MTCC), and finally to the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC).

Keywords: Indian National Congress, Manipur State Congress, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee, Political development, constitutional history, political developments

Introduction

Manipur is one of the North-Eastern states of India bordering with Myanmar (Burma). The state has been ruled by different regional as well as national political parties from the time of princely state to the present day. Manipur, like many princely states in India witnessed the rise of political consciousness after the end of World War II when educated elites started to demand constitutional reforms, representative institutions, and responsible government. These developments laid the foundation for the growth of organized party politics and change the political landscape of Manipur. Among the political organizations that emerged during this period was the Manipur State Congress (MSC). The evolution of this party was closely linked with the constitutional transformation of the state. The MSC which was established on 4th October 1949 was due to the demand for having a responsible government by different parties coming together. After the formation of Manipur State

Congress (MSC), the party continued to walk different political paths in the history of Manipur. Not forgetting the main reason for its formation, it really participated in the demand of full-fledged statehood. For this, the party leaders took careful decisions during the period of Union Territory.

Following the merger of Manipur into Indian Union, the Congress in Manipur underwent a series of organizational transformation and became affiliated with the All India Congress Committee (AICC). The former Manipur State Congress Committee (MSCC) was reorganized into Manipur Territorial Congress Committee (MTCC) when Manipur was uplifted to Union Territory, and was subsequently renamed as the Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) in anticipation of statehood. So, these development shows the party's adaptation to changing political environment of Manipur. Despite the Congress played important role in Manipur's political history, there is research gap where a researcher has to come in. Against this background, the present study examines the emergence and institutional evolution of the Indian National Congress in Manipur from 1946 to 1972. It explores the factors surrounding the party's formation. It also examines the party's role in the merger of Manipur into Indian Union, position on Purvanchal state, and attainment of statehood. In doing so, the paper seeks to highlight that the evolution of the Congress organization was inseparable from the broader political and constitutional development of Manipur during the formative decades of its integration into independent India.

Formation of the Manipur State Congress (MSC)

During the time of Manipur being a princely state, the society was feudal in nature, the state was not democratic and political consciousness among the people was minimal. The period was also during the Second World War. Therefore, after the end of the Second World War when the British government were to leave, educated Manipur youths like other Indian sub-continent felt the necessity to demand for democratic political reforms and having a common platform by forming a strong political party in Manipur to fill a political vacuum. To achieve this objective, they took the initiative to bring together the three major political organizations of the state namely the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, the Praja Sangha, and the Krishak Sabha. They approached to propose to the leaders of these parties for creation of a unified organization where they can collectively work towards shared political goals. The responses of the proposal were quite favourable in which they agreed to participate in discussions for the formation of a new political party.

As a result, a meeting was convened on 18th September, 1946 at the Aryan Theatre Hall, Imphal. During this meeting, to look after the process of forming a proposed political organization, a 'Coordinating Committee' was constituted. The conference was presided with the initiatives of leaders like S. Indramani Singh, R.K. Maipaksana Singh, Sudhir Singh, Yaima Singh, Lalmani Singh, A. Chandrahas Singh, and Budharam Singh. At this conference, a proposal was made by some group to form a "Manipur Praja Congress". On the other hand, some group also propose for "Manipur National Congress". However, both the proposals were not finalised, so an agreed decisions will be taken in the following meetings.

Again, another conference was convened on 4th October, 1946 at Aryan Theatre Hall, Imphal. The conference was initiated by leaders like Yumnam Khoimacha Singh, Sagolsem Indramani Singh, Sinam Krishnamohan Singh, Loitam Yaima Singh, Rajkumar Manipaksana, and Sarungbam Ibohal Singh. In this conference, from each of the three party they sent their representatives.

The representatives from each party were:

- A. Three representatives from the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha - Sinam Krishna Mohan Singh, Laishram Yugeshwor Singh, and Elangbam Tompok Singh.
- B. Three representatives from the Praja Sangha - H. Irabot Singh, Rajkumar Bhubon Sana Singh, and Ayekpam Anggo Singh.
- C. Three representatives from the Krishak Sabha - M. Modhumangol Singh, Leiren Doctor, and Kanhai Singh.
- D. Three representatives from the youths - Yumnam Khoimacha Singh, Sagolsem Indramani Singh, and Rajkumar Maipaksana.¹

In this meeting, all the participants resolved to establish a new political party which was named as the 'Manipur State Congress' (MSC). One very interesting decision taken in this meeting was that, any individual joining the newly formed political party has to relinquish its membership if he/she joins any other political organization to ensure exclusive allegiance to the Manipur State Congress (MSC). At that time, Hijam Irabot Singh was still a member of the Communist Party of India (CPI). With this, Irabot's participation in the newly formed party was opposed by some members on the ground that Irabot Singh has a communist background. It did not end there, he was asked to publicly state that he was no longer a communist. For Irabot Singh, this was an insult in which along with his supporters walked out of the meeting as a sign of protest.

However, the meeting did not end even after Irabot and his supporters left. The remaining participants continued the meeting and finally formed body called the "Manipur State Congress" (MSC) on 4th October, 1946. They also set up a nine member working committee with representatives from the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha, the Praja Sangha, and the Coordinating Committee. The first President of the Manipur State Congress was R.K. Bhubosana Singh, and Y. Khoimacha Singh was made as the General Secretary. The executive members of the Manipur State Congress were Dr. Leiren Singh, Sinam Krishnamohan Singh, Laishram Yugeshwor Singh, Priyogopalsana, Bhubosana, and Dwijamani Dev Sharma. After its establishment, the working committee of the party held the first meeting on 10th October, 1946 at the residence of R.K. Bhubosana Singh. In the meeting, they discussed on the impact of the Second World War on Manipur, and how to make the party's influence in the rural areas as it was confined only to rural areas after its formation. The party also held several meetings between November and December of 1946 in which significant decisions were taken to establish a Congress office, elect office bearers, mobilize the masses.

¹ Maipaksana, Rajkumar, *Manipurda Lhan Hanba Satyagraha Aandalon*, (A Manipuri book), 1996, Imphal, p-11

The Manipur State Congress (MSC) and the Transition to responsible Government in Manipur (1946-1948)

After its formation, the Manipur State Congress (MSC) continued to actively participate in the political activities of Manipur. On 12th December 1946, the Maharaja of Manipur formally proposed to form a 15 members 'Constitution Making Committee' to draft the Manipur constitution. For electing the 15 members, the chairman of the Election Committee on 24th December issued a notice that filing of nominations should be on or before 5th January 1947. This angered parties like the Manipur Praja Sangha (MPS) and the Manipur Krishak Sabha (MKS) due to limited number of days of preparation approximately seven or six days. So both MPS and MKS boycotted the election alleging inadequate preparation time and favouritism towards wealthy candidates like the Manipur State Congress (MSC). However, the election was conducted and the Manipur State Congress (MSC) secured huge margin and became a dominant force in the Constitution Making Committee. Subsequently, the MSC took part in drafting the constitution which was submitted on 27th July 1947, and later enacted.

Following India's independence in 1947, the Maharaja of Manipur like all the princely states took initiative of administrative reforms. The Maharaja of Manipur began its administrative reforms by replacing the 'Manipur State Durbar' with the 'Manipur State Council', and later establishing it into an 'Interim Council'. The establishment of this Interim Council was not appreciated and welcome by political parties including a large section of the Manipur State Congress (MSC). The reason why large section of the Manipur State Congress (MSC) opposed the Interim Council was that, two Congressmen namely Krishnamohan and Dwijamani were appointed without the approval of the party's Working Committee. This internal disagreement within the MSC led to a party split into two factions popularly known as the Tomal Congress and the Tompok Congress.

The Tompok Congress emerged as the more active faction and launched a political movement demanding the establishment of a responsible government through a popularly elected Interim government. When the government did not give their demands, the Tompok Congress started to launch a political agitation in November 1947. The agitation was supported by several organizations including the Manipur Praja Sangha, Manipur Krishak Sabha, Mahila Sammelani, and the Manipur Students's Federation (MSF). Although the movement faced repression from the government, it compelled the Chief Minister to announce the establishment of a responsible government on 23rd November, 1947. At the same time, on 26th November 1947 the political agitation led by Tompok Congress was called off and preparations began for elections of establishing a responsible government under the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947. With all these developments, the two Congress - Tomal Congress and Tompok Congress also reconciled and were reunited. However, the MSC although securing 18 out of 53 Assembly seats, were not able to form the government as the Hill MLAs and the Krishak Sabha gave their support to Praja Shanti.

Congress and Statehood Movement

Now, after India got her Independence, the Government of India pursued for the integration of the princely states into the Indian Union. In this context, the Manipur State Congress (MSC) took this as an opportunity to strengthen its political position in the state. At this time, the MSC was disappointed because it failed to form the government in the previous election. It gradually supported the idea of merging the states with India. The party viewed merger as a means to strengthen its political position through closer ties with the Indian National Congress (INC). To strengthen their relationship, the MSC endorsed the proposal for a Purvanchal State (creation of a separate state by combining Manipur, Tripura, Cachar and Lushai Hills) and established contacts with the leaders of the All Indian National Congress Committee. However, the proposal of a Purvanchal State was not supported by other political parties in Manipur.

Unlike most of the political organizations in the state, the MSC openly advocated for the merger of Manipur into Indian Union. The party made its justifications by arguing that integration would restore law and order, protect Manipur from external threats, promote peace and development, and bring a responsible government. So the party extended its support to the Government of India's integration policy. Although the policy of merging Manipur into Indian Union was opposed by other political parties, the merger was ultimately formalized when Maharaja Bodhchandra signed the merger Agreement at Shillong on 21st September 1949. The agreement came into effect on 15th October 1949 by bringing Manipur under the Indian Union. However, this agreement brought undesirable result for the people of Manipur. It was unexpected as well as undesirable result for the people of Manipur, because the Manipur Constitution Act, 1947 was abolished, the elected government and Legislative Assembly were dissolved, and Manipur became a Part C State to be administered by a Chief Commissioner.

Then, after Manipur was merged into the Indian Union, the MSC became a constituent unit of the All India Congress Committee (AICC).² With the formation of Manipur Territorial Council, the Manipur State Congress also made several organizational activities. And Manipur State Congress Committee (MSCC) was changed into Manipur Territorial Congress Committee (MTCC). Later in 1963 Manipur was upgraded to the status of Union Territory. The most significant thing all the parties in Manipur including the Congress did from the year it got merged into Indian Union in 1949 was that, fight for having a responsible government and for full-fledged statehood. Surrounded by political environment like this, the 'Manipur Territorial Congress Committee' (MTCC) also make internal preparations in which MTCC was renamed it into '*Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee*' (MPCC) at its meeting held on 4th January 1970. Although the resolution was taken during this meeting, the change was implemented in accordance with the directives issued at the Bangalore session of the All India Congress Committee.³ Consequently, on 26th April 1970 all parties

² Singh, S. Ibomcha. (2015). *Congress party and political development in the post independent Manipur 1946-1972*, unpublished Ph.d thesis, Manipur University. P-68

³ Ibid, p-142

came together to demand for Manipur statehood under an umbrella called 'All Parties Statehood Demand Co-ordinating Body'. As a result, on 21st January 1972, Manipur was granted statehood with a Legislative Assembly of 60 elected members.

Conclusion

The evolution of the Indian National Congress in the Northeastern state of Manipur was closely linked with the state's constitutional and political transformation between 1946 and 1972. The formation of the Manipur State Congress (MSC) in October 1946 marked a significant event in the history of the emergence of organized political party in Manipur. The MSC formed through the collective efforts of several political organizations and educated elites sought to provide a common platform for demanding constitutional reforms, representative institutions, and responsible government. Although there were differences at the time of its formations, the party quickly established itself as a significant political force in the state. The study highlights the significant role played by the MSC during the shift from princely rule to constitutional governance. Through its involvement in the Constitution Making Committee, the party directly influenced the creation of the Manipur Constitution Act. of 1947. Even though there was internal discord between Tomal and Tompok Congresses, the party's dedication for having a responsible government in democratic principles helped both the parties to come back as united.

The paper further indicates that the merger of Manipur into Indian Union marked a turning point in the party's evolution in the state. Unlike many political parties, the MSC openly supported the merger thinking that it will strengthen the party by bringing closer to the Indian National Congress. Although the merger resulted in dissolution of Manipur's elected institutions and a dissatisfaction for many, it simultaneously integrated the Congress organization in Manipur into the wider national party structure through its affiliation with the All India Congress Committee (AICC). Another significant finding of this study is that the institutional evolution of the Congress organization reflected the changing constitutional status of Manipur itself. The transformation from the MSC to Manipur Territorial Congress Committee (MTCC), and subsequently to Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) was not just a change in name, but represented the party's adaption till attainment of statehood. Overall, the evolution of the Congress in Manipur was shaped by the interplay between organizational changes and constitutional transformation. The party evolved from a regional political organization seeking democratic reforms into a constituent unit of the Indian National Congress while simultaneously responding to the changing political aspiration of the people of Manipur. Therefore, the Congress history in Manipur cannot be understood in absence of states' constitutional development, Manipur integration into the Indian Union, and process of statehood. Thus, this study contributes to the understanding of regional party evolution by illustrating how national political organizations adapted to local contexts during the formative years of independent India.

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