CHAPTER - 5

5.1 POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS DURING PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:

India attained independence after a long period of struggle against the imperialistic British government. The people of India irrespective of any caste, creed, community and faith have actively participated in the various phases of the freedom movement launched by the Indian National Congress. The Bishnupriya Manipuri people also actively participated in the freedom movement of India which is discussed in the following.

It is to be mentioned that at that time Bangladesh was the integral part of India and in Bangladesh, the population of the Bishnupriya Manipuris still staying in that country is substantial and they are not inclined to leave the country. There are few instances of the population crossing the borders in search of business. They live where they have their own concentration of population. So the participation of the Bishnupriya Manipuris in the freedom movement of India means the role of the Bishnupriya Manipuris of both India and Bangladesh.

Primarily, the role of the Bishnupriya Manipuris now staying in Bangladesh is discussed. Among the notable freedom fighters, the name of the Baikunthanath Sarma of Bhanubill in the district of Maulavi Bazar in the Sylhet region can well be remembered. In 1910, some revolutionaries of Bengal joined the secret operations against the British government and Baikunthanath Sarma maintained close links with these revolutionaries and actively participated in those operations. At that time, Baikunthanath Sarma was the President of the Bhanubill Congress Committee. He accompanied Pandit Moti Lal Nehru when the latter visited Bhanugach to sort out the organisational
matters. Motilal Nehru was the then a leader of great stature at the all-India level and had provided leadership to the Home Rule movement along with Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Sarma as the President of the local committee led the agitation and was arrested by the police commissioner of the Sadar Sylhet and imprisoned on the charge of sedition. Another courageous woman to participate in the freedom movement of India was Lilabati Sarma, the daughter of Baikunthanath Sarma. She was the revolutionary from her childhood due to close association with her father. She participated actively in the Non Co-operation Movement and Quit India Movement launched by Indian National Congress.

The most notable freedom fighter from Sylhet is Girindra Mohan Singha. He was high class patriot which was proved in the freedom movement of India. He came into close contact with Congress leaders like Purnendu Kishore Sen and Durgesh Dey, GirindraSingha became the member of Bengal Provincial Congress. He took part actively in the Non Co-operation Movement, Swadeshi Movement and Quit India Movement. At the time of the peasant movement of Bhanubil he was arrested and imprisoned in jail for two years. He was lifelong Congressman and wore khadi till death. In 1973 Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, invited Girindra Singha along with other remarkable freedom fighters to give honour for the contribution in the anti-British freedom movement of India. But unfortunately he could not attend on that occasion arranged at Red Fort due to illness. He died at his own residence in old age and Bishnupriya Manipuri society lost a courageous freedom fighter like Girindra Mohan Sinha. Another notable freedom fighter is Panchanan Thakur who is always revolutionary against the British government. He actively participated in the Home Rule movement launched against the British government. He spent two years in jail because of anti-British activities.
Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Assam were not lagging behind in the freedom movement of India. They participated in the various phases of the freedom movement of India. The role of the Bishnupriya Manipuris in the freedom movement of India can be discussed pargana wise.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people of the Narsingpur area actively participated in the various phases of the freedom movement of India.

Manikbabu Sinha (Kabya Ratna) was the lifelong Congress member and motivated by the Gandhian philosophy. He participated actively in the various phases of the freedom movement of India. He was the political associate of Bishnuram Medhi, Amiya Kumar Das, Bimala Prasad Chaliha, Hem Chakraboraty and Cachar Keshori Sanat Das. It is to be mentioned that Moinul Hoque Choudhury of Sonai, Ex – Union Cabinet Minister of India was the political disciple of Manikbabu and got a political platform in the Cachar District Congress by the influence of Manikbabu.

Another remarkable freedom fighter from this area was Nanda Kishore Sinha, Ex – M.L.A., Silchar who participated in the Quit India movement of 1942. He was arrested and kept in jail for participating in this phase of the movement. He was the active member of the Hindu Mahasabha and sent some delegates to Sylhet to motivate the people for voting in favour of India at the time of referendum. Radha Mohan Sinha of Gandhi Nagar, Kabuganj was imprisoned in the jail for participation in the Quit India Movement of 1942. This is a surprising fact that he was released from the jail by the jailor because of his attractive ‘Bhatiali’ song. Besides them Gosai Singha, Goluk Chand Sinha, Nilmani Sinha and Beni Madhab Sinha also actively participated in the Quit India Movement.

From the Meherpur pargana, many people participated in the freedom movement of India. Nanda Kishore Mukherjee of
Chencooree, Silchar, actively participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and he was imprisoned in the jail. He was rewarded freedom fighter’s pension recognising his participation in the freedom movement of India. Pabitra Kumar Sinha of Chencooree is also awarded by freedom fighters pension by the government for his participation in the Quit India Movement.

Surendra Kumar Sinha of Kalinjar was active as a Congress man before the independence and he participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. In recognition of his service, the Government awarded him a “Tamra Patra” in 1998. Anuradha Sinha of Kalinjar was a lady with awareness of the urge for freedom from the colonial rule. She participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. The Government recognised her role in the freedom movement and she was awarded the freedom fighter’s pension. Besides them, Sachidananda Misra of Kalinjar, Tamphasena Rajkumar of West Singari, Kamala Kanta Sinha, Kala Chand Sinha of East Singari, Kunjeswar Sinha, Amusena Sinha, Manindra Kumar Sinha, Dewan Sinha of Bhakatpur. Surenda Sinha of West Kachudharam and Braja Sinha of Shankarbasti actively participated in the freedom movement of India.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Bikrampur area came forward to participate in the freedom movement of India. Rasaraj Sinha of Bikrampur, Cachar was remarkable freedom fighter of the Quit India Movement of 1942. When the Hindu Muslim communal tension between the Hindus and the Muslims raised its head in 1946, he was active in normalising the situation. He was in Jail for sometime before the independence.³ Churachand Rajkumar of Baropoa actively participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement. Jagadish Sinha of Mohanpur, Kameswar Sinha of Bihara, Cachar also participated actively in the freedom movement of India.
Fula Sinha of Chiparsangan, Hailakandi was the freedom fighter and he participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. He was associated with the Indian National Congress before the independence. At Hailakandi, Bishnupriya Manipuri People had also participated in the various phases of the freedom movement of India. Dhanbabu Sinha, Upendra Sinha of Khunou and Sena Sinha of Khumel participated in the Non-Co-Operation Movement of India. Chourojit Sinha of Khunou, Bhubaneswar Sinha and Krishnadhan Sinha of Khumel also played important role in the Quit India Movement of 1942.

Many Bishnupriya Manipuri people participated in the freedom movement of India from the Dullovcherra pargana. Banamali Sinha participated actively in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and he was imprisoned and spent some months in the Tezpur jail along with Bhupendra Kumar Sinha of Patharkandi. Manisena Rajkumar of the village Amarkhal, Anipur also participated in the freedom movement of 1942. He also played active role to maintain communal harmony in the communal riot of 1946. Mahendra Sinha, a resident of village Chamtilla under Dullovcherra block of Karimganj district, was also another freedom fighter in the movement of 1942 and awarded freedom fighter's pension.

Many other people participated in the freedom movement of India. Among them Golap Sarma of Kukitilla, Kamal Sinha of Amarkhal, Churachand Sinha of Rupagram, Rasmani Sinha, Bharat Mukherjee, Kamini Mukherjee of Pachadali, Nadiachand Rajkumar of Betubari, Gokulbabu Sinha of Baskaltilla, Kunjamohan Rajbanshi of West Krishnanagar, Dronacharya Sinha of Chamtilla, Bagindra Chatterjee of East Krishnanagar, Bhadra Sinha and Badan Sinha of Fetipat etc. are remarkable.
From Patharkandi (Pratapgarh) area many Bishnupriya Manipuri people actively participated in the freedom movement of India.

Jilakhamba Sinha of the village Bilbari, Patharkandi of Karimganj district was a freedom fighter in the movement of 1942 for which he was awarded freedom fighters pension.

Sukhomoy Sinha of Rajargaon, Patharkandi actively participated in the movement from his young age. He was associated with the anti colonial revolutionary forces in the district of Sylhet when he was student in the College. At that time the Colonial Government arrested him and he was detained in jail for 11 months along with Biresh Misra, Kedarnath, Basanta Das, Suresh Deb, Rathindra Nath Sen and Himangshu Gupta. After he was released from the jail, he continued his activities. He was awarded the freedom fighter's pension for his contribution in the freedom movement of India.

Bhupendra Kumar Sinha (Mani Sinha), later on the editor, Dristipat, weekly newspaper, was an admirer of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and he knew the great leader personally and accompanied him the latter, went to Kulaura and Maulavi Bazar in a car and since then he worked as a Congress volunteer. In 1942 he joined the Quit India Movement at Tezpur and Sylhet and was imprisoned for several times. He also worked for Congress in the referendum of 1946.

Sonachand Sinha, a resident of the village Jamirala under Patharkandi area of Karimganj district in Assam, jumped into the freedom movement when Gandhiji returned from the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 after it was proved to be a failure as Gandhiji sensed a sinister design in the British policy towards India. He was determined to start the struggle again and another phase of struggle e.g. the Non Cooperation Movement engulfed the country. The atmosphere in the country was very tense. Sonachand was then a degree student of Victoria College, Comilla (now in Bangladesh) decided to boycott the examination and his friend, the great revolutionary, Ullaskar Dutta also joined him in the
abstention from the examination. Scores of other students participated in the boycott and made it a success. The police arrested many students including Ullaskar Dutta and Sonachand Sinha and they were kept in the jail for a week.

Another freedom fighter at that time was Shyamakanta Sinha of village Montrigram under Patharkandi. He was arrested and imprisoned in Karimganj jail for 21 days for participation in the Non Co-operation Movement. He was again imprisoned during the Quit India Movement in 1942. He was honoured by the Government of Assam with a “Tamra Patra” in 1998 and received the freedom fighters pension. He was associated with the District Congress Committee, Karimganj. Kaireng Sinha of Rajargaon also participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942 for which he was honoured by the freedom fighters pension. Gojendra Kumar Sinha of village Nurkha, Patharkandi participated in the Quit India Movement of 1942. He is remembered for his efforts to maintain communal harmony in Longai Valley within the subdivision of Karimganj when there was imminent danger of communal riot breaking out in that valley at the time of the referendum.⁶

From Patharkandi area Sukumar Sinha, Babanu Sinha, Udaichand Sinha, Pyarimohan Sinha and Jugal Sinha participated in the Non Cooperation Movement and the Quit India Movement of India. Radha Mohan Sinha of Nalibari, Madan Chand Sinha of Chataragaon and Krishna Kumar Sinha of Bilbari also had played important role in the freedom movement of India.
5.2 POST INDEPENDENCE PERIOD—A PERIOD OF POLITICAL AWAKENING:

After the independence, the population, left in this part of the country, were engaged in two distinct fields, some were involved in the politics and joined national political parties. Among the notable politicians of this phase were Nanda Kishore Sinha, Pulakeshi Sinha and they were active in Barak valley of Assam. Both were the members of the Indian National Congress. In the present century, Kartik Sena Sinha from Patharkandi is active in politics. He belongs to the present generation and is a member of Bharatiya Janata Party. In Tripura, the leaders who came into prominence in the mainstream politics were Tarini Mahan Sinha, Bimal Sinha and his wife, Bijaylakshmi Sinha. Sundar Mukherjee was active in the extreme left movement in Tripura and he is still active in politics of another mould and he is now the President of the state Unit of the Janata Party (2008). In Tripura, Gokulananda Geetiswami was the member to the Tripura Territorial Council twice when that council was formed.

As a small social group, they are aware of the genuine problems which are peculiarly their own, and they showed awareness through participation in political activities. In the post independence days, the community is confronted with the question of self identity and if the self identity is not asserted fully, the opposition to their claim to a distinct social group would have got upperhand. It was a long fight which was fought at different levels. Their main concern, social and political, are linked with the state and the local politics and the leaders are not showing interests in national politics now.

Nanda Kishore Sinha (1918—95) of Silchar may be called a political forerunner of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community because he was the first person to represent in the democratic body i.e. Assam Legislative Assembly. In 1952 & 1957 elections, he was elected as the
member of the Assam Legislative Assembly twice from Sonai constituency of the Cachar district as a Congress candidate. But in his second term, the Official Language Act, 1960 was passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly. In spite of strong opposition from members of Cachar to impose the Official Language Act over the unwilling population in Barak Valley, the Government was determined to do it. As a protest against the imposition of this Act on the unwilling people, Sinha resigned his membership of the Assam Legislative Assembly supporting the cause of the Bengali language who saw in the Act, a vicious attempt to gag the voices of the minority communities in the state. It was viewed not against the interests of a particular linguistic group, it tend to affect all groups who are considered minorities in the state. As therefore, the resignation from the membership of the State Assembly was a historical event and in the next Assembly election held in 1962, he was elected as an independent candidate by huge votes from Silchar constituency defeating another popular leader Congress candidate Mohitosh Purkayastha. At that time, the opposition to the Assam Official Act ran high in the district and the people of Silchar remembered his sacrifice and elected him afresh. His popularity was very high in 1962. But in 1967 Assembly election of Assam he contested from Sonai constituency as an independent candidate and was defeated. Besides these, he was the member of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and he was the President of the Cachar district Congress Committee in 1960. He was also the President of Cachar District Janata Party Committee in 1977.

Another political personality, Pulakeshi Sinha of Kabuganj represented the Sonai Constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1962 elected on Congress ticket. He was an educated person and in politics, he was close to Moinul Hoque Choudhury, a political heavy weight of that period. He was the member of the
Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. The community expected him to rise in politics as he was considered fairly educated in his community. But he could not achieve at that expected level as he was unable to continue his run as the member in the Assembly after that term and went into oblivion.

Another young political personality from the community is Kartiksen Sinha of village Piplacherra under Patharkandi police station of Karimganj district, Assam. He was primarily an industrialist and later on he decided to join politics in order to serve the community properly. To fulfill his ambition he joined the Bharatiya Janata Party and was able to get nomination as the party candidate from Patharkandi constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly election held in 2006. Kartiksen Sinha was assertive as a politician and became popular. He was elected as the member in 2006.

One of the most politically knowledgeable personality was Bhupendra Kumar Sinha (popularly known as Manida) who was associated with politics from boyhood and was imprisoned in Tezpur jail due to his participation in the Quit India Movement. As a Congress worker he was close with Congress leaders of state and national level and contributed a lot in the organisational work of the Karimganj District Congress. During the Bangla Bhasha Andolan of 1961 in Barak Valley he took an active part in the movement. When the leaders of the movement were arrested Bhupendra Kumar Sinha continued the movement filling up the vacuum in the leadership. In 1977 the Indian National Congress was divided after the defeat of Mrs. Indira Gandhi in the parliamentary election, then he organised the Karimganj District Congress (I) Committee as the founder president through various odds and difficulties. He along with Haren Talukdar and Sri Pranab Mukherjee organised and formed the Hailakandi and Silchar District Congress (I) Committee. In 1981 he organised Labour Conference of the Barak Valley at Sonakhira near Patharkandi of the Karimganj
district in the capacity of the Chairman, Reception Committee of Tea Labour and Youth Conference which was gathered by two lakhs of people and Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India attended the Conference. In this way he showed his political intelligence.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people are also proud of Bhimsen Sinha, of Patharkandi who is advocate by profession. During his student life, he went to Calcutta in order to earn his livelihood and came into contact with many stalwarts of the Congress Party including Pranab Mukherjee. He was an active worker of Congress (I) Party. He became one of the secretaries of Assam Pradesh Congress (I) Committee. He was a political worker who played the key role to convince Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister of Assam for issuing the order for introduction of the Bishnupriya Manipuri language in the primary schools of the Bishnupriya Manipuri dominated areas of the Barak Valley in 1983. He was an active political worker of Congress (I) even during the period of AASU movement when Congress politicians were physically assaulted by the AASU volunteers. He was politically ambitious and prayed to the Congress (I) High Command for ticket for contesting in the Assam Legislative Assembly election in 1985 from Patharkandi constituency on Congress (I) ticket. But his appeal was not considered by the party for which he resigned from Congress (I) and contested from the same constituency as the United Minority Front candidate. Though he was not successful in his ambition yet he became the General Secretary of the United Minority Front led by Golam Osmani. But after few years he again joined the Congress (I) but could not prosper his political career.

Another renowned political figure of the Bishnupriya Manipuri society was Shambhu Sinha of Mantrigram who led the Communist movement at Patharkandi prior to independence. In 1952 when government of India had withdrawn the ban on Communist Party then
Shambhu Sinha was nominated as the party candidate from Patharkandi constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly election held in 1952. Though he failed in this effort, he was successful in spreading communist ideology in the Patharkandi area. He was a committed comrade of the party and was influential in the area. Another political figure from this community was Sonachand Sinha of the village Jamirala of Patharkandi and he belonged to the Indian National Congress. Though he had considerable influence in his area and was a freedom fighter, he was denied ticket of the Party in the Patharkandi constituency in 1957, 62, and 67. In protest, he contested the Assembly elections of those years as an independent candidate but lost.

Naba Rajkumar of Patharkandi popularly known as “Monu” is a man of political ambition and became the President of Patharkandi Gaon Panchayat defeating Jamini Das, a popular personality of that area. Later on he contested from Patharkandi constituency of Assam Legislative Assembly as a candidate of the Forward Block and came second behind the ultimate victor which proved his popularity. However, he lacked political wisdom and was considered less skilled in political manoeuvres necessary in winning elections. He lost in all subsequent elections held for the Assembly. He now belongs to the Asom Gana Parishad. Another active politician in the community was Madon Mohan Mukherjee who came from the village Pachdali and his family believed in the left ideology. He was educated, intelligent and earned his popularity as a good teacher and propagator of education in that area. Because of political ambition, he resigned from the post of the Headmaster of Chargola Public High School, Bazarghat and contested from Ratabari constituency in the Assam Legislative Assembly elections held in 1967 & 1972 but failed. Though he lost in the political battles, he maintained popularity in his constituency till his death.
During the time of the National Emergency declared in 1975, many Bishnupriya Manipuri people reacted against the curb of basic fundamental rights of the citizens and protested against this emergency. As a result of this protest three Bishnupriya Manipuri political activists namely Jogendra Kumar Sinha of Masughat, Kalababu Sinha of Patharkandi and Sundhar Mukherjee of Tripura were arrested.

Here reference is given regarding the representation of the Bishnupriya Manipuris in the state politics of Tripura.

Gokulananda Geetiswami, who was the minstrel poet of the Bishnupriya Manipuris, was also politically conscious following the ideology of Karl Marx and may be called the political pioneer of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community. He was elected twice in the then territorial council of Tripura as a left candidate. Ghana Sinha of Rupaspur of Kamalpur and the grand father of Bimal Sinha, Ex – Minister of Tripura was also elected as a member of the Territorial Council of Tripura.

Tarini Mohan Sinha, another prominent political figure was the first Bishnupriya Manipuri M.L.A. in Tripura Legislative Assembly representing from Fatikrai constituency twice.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people are proud of Bimal Sinha who was a political beacon light of the Bishnupriya Manipuris not only in Tripura but also in the whole Bishnupriya Manipuri society. He was involved in politics from his student life and he was a member of the Tripura Legislative Assembly from Kamalpur constituency for five terms consecutively from 1978 as a candidate of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). It is a record for the Bishnupriya Manipuri society. He was M.L.A. in 1978, Deputy Speaker in 1983, Chief Whip of the opposition party in 1988, Speaker in 1993 and Cabinet Minister in 1995. But on March 30, 1998 he was killed by unidentified persons. If the fate did not intervene in such a cruel way, he would have created a record in the Tripura Legislative Assembly because of his unflinching
devotion to the party ideology and the popularity he had among the people of the state. He was really a man of political wisdom and scores of young people of the community would follow him as a role model. Because of his continuous efforts, the Bishnupriya Manipuri language was introduced in the Lower Primary Schools of the state. His death was a great loss for the community in Tripura as he was a voice of the community in the North East.

   Bijoy Lakshmi Sinha, wife of Bimal Sinha represent in the Tripura Legislative Assembly after the unnatural death of her husband. In the bye election of the Kamalpur constituency she was selected as Communist Party of India (Marxist) candidate and won the game. In the general election of Tripura Legislative Assembly held in 2003 she was again elected from the same constituency on Communist Party of India (Marxist) ticket and is now the Weaving and Handloom Minister of the government of Tripura. She is the only woman minister from Bishnupriya Manipuri community and symbol of inspiration of women’s political career because she got many hints and advices due to close association with her politically stalwart husband, Bimal Sinha.

   Another prominent politically intelligent name from Bishnupriya Manipuri community of Tripura is Sundar Mukherjee who has been associated with the political movement of Tripura following the philosophy of Lenin. But now he became alienated from that political ideology and is now the President of the State Janata Dal unit of Tripura. He is a dominant political figure in Tripura.
5.3 ROLE OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS IN THE POLITICS OF THE LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT:

Bishnupriya Manipuri people also play a very significant role in the politics of the local Self Government. But it is to be noted that this community is primarily a rural based community for which they have no significant role in the urban local government politics like Town Committee, Municipal Board and Municipal Corporation. Yet one or two prominent personality contested in the elections of urban Local Self Government. Gourkishore Sinha, Ashram Road, Silchar contested in the Silchar Municipal Board election in 2002 from ward no. 26 on Congress (I) ticket. But he was unsuccessful in this attempt. Shanti Kumar Sinha, who was originally from Hailakandi district, is now permanently residing in Guwahati. He contested in the elections of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation from South Sarania constituency for the last two elections as an independent candidate but he was also unsuccessful.

But Bishnupriya Manipuri people play a very significant role in the Panchayat politics of Assam which can be discussed into two phases.

First phase starts from the Assam Rural Panchayat Act 1948 to the implementation of the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959.

Second phase starts from the implementation of the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959 to the present day.

Under the Assam Rural Panchayat Act of 1948, there were two hierarchical Panchayat institutions - Primary Panchayat at the village level and Rural Panchayat at the block level consisting of 5 Primary Panchayats. The lowest unit of Panchayat institution is Primary Panchayat and the head of the Primary Panchayat is known as
Sarpanch who was elected by open voting in a field from among the villagers of the Panchayat in the presence of the government officer.

Besides these two panchayat bodies, there was another local government institution from the rural area known as Local Board which was established at the sub-divisional level.

In all three rural local government institutions, Bishnupriya Manipuri people played active role in their respective bodies.

In Dullovcherra area Braja Mohan Singha of Gajargang, Kamal Sinha of Gurabanji, Nanda Sinha of East Krishnanagar and Ramgopal Sinha of Bidyanagar represented as Sarpanch in their respective areas.

From Patharkandi area Hurudhan Sinha of Burunga, Hemanta Sinha of Mantrigram, Huna Sinha of Bilbari, Sanatan Sinha of Lowairpoa and Pyari Mohan Sinha of Burunga were the Sarpanches of their respective areas.\textsuperscript{12}

From Narsingpur areas Dhana Pandit of Batirgram, Gosai Sinha of Gandhi Nagar became the Sarpanches from their respective areas.

From Meherpur area, Giridhan Sinha of Bhakatpur, Chandra Kanta Sinha of Singari, Sonachand Sinha of Chencooree and Amusena Sinha of Dharam played significant role as the Sarpanch of their respective areas.\textsuperscript{13}

Besides them Fula Singha of Chiparsangan, Rajkumar Churachand Sinha of Bikrampur, Thombou Singh Choudhury of Masughat, and Kirtan Singha of Srikona also became Sarpanches in their respective areas.

In Rural panchayat they also play a vital role. Sri Golap Babu Sinha was the President of the Kabuganj Rural panchayat in 1948.
Kameswar Sinha was the President of the Bikrampur Rural panchayat in 1956.

In the Local Board Bishnupriya Manipuris also play a vital role. From Patharkandi Taraleima Debi of Rajargaon, Gosai Singha of Nayagram and Ramkrishna Sarma of Mantrigram represented in the Karimganj Local Board.

From Dullovcherra area, Golap Sarma of Kukital, Nadiachand Rajkumar, Kunjababu Sinha of Betubari, Nishi Kanta Sinha of East Krishnanagar, Dronacharya Sinha of Chamtila represented in the Karimganj Local Board. One noticeable fact is that Nadiachand Rajkumar was the chairman of the Karimganj Local Board.

In Silchar Local Board, Chandrakirti Sinha of Katakhal, Girishbabu Sinha of Dudpur, Nanda Kishore Sinha of Silchar, Nanda Kishore Mukherjee of Chencooree, Kameshwar Sinha and Binod Behari Sinha of Bikrampur represented.

Among them Girishbabu Sinha was the Chairman of the Silchar Local Board followed by Nanda Kishore Sinha.

In the Panchayat Raj institutions since the Panchayat Act of 1959 Bishnupriya Manipuri people play a significant role for the rural development which is discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Patharkandi Area** – Narendra Sinha of Rajargaon was a man of political consciousness and was always loyal to the Indian National Congress. He also played the role of Kingmaker in the politics of Patharkandi area.

Gojendra Kumar Sinha of the village Nurkha, Longai Reserve was always devoted for the development of his locality by helping the poor and the down trodden people. After retirement from government service as the Headmaster of the Lal Tin Bool Vidya Mandir, a Middle
English School in the Longai Forest Reserve, he became the President of the Longai Gaon Panchayat, Patharkandi block which he served from 1968 for four years. He was the member of the District Congress Committee, Karimganj and remained loyal to the Indian National Congress Party. Golap Sinha of Shibergool also played a significant role in the panchayat politics. He was a man of strong personality and deeply involved in the politics of Karimganj district. He was the Vice – President of the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat when Mahabur Rob Choudhury was the President of the same Anchalik Panchayat. Another political figure of Patharkandi in the panchayat level is Sri Radha Mohan Sinha of the village Nalibari of the Karimganj district. He is a man of intelligence and possesses great presence of mind. By virtue of these qualities, he was very popular in his area. He was the President of Kalkalighat Gaon Panchayat in 1968 – 72 and Councillor of Karimganj Mahakuma Parishad twice from 1974 – 78 and 1978 – 82. He was the member of the Karimganj District Congress Committee. He was also the member of the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat in 1992 – 97 representing from Kalkalighat Gaon Panchayat.

Another popular name of Patharkandi politics is Sukhomoy Sinha who actively participated in the freedom movement of India. He was the General Secretary of the Karimganj District Congress Committee and the member of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee. Later on, he was elected as the President of Patharkandi Gaon Panchayat in 1965 – 68. Naba Rajkumar (prominently known as Manu) started his political career from the panchayat politics and later on he played the political game in the state politics. He became the President of Patharkandi Gaon Panchayat once in 1774 – 78 and next in 1978 – 82. In the 1974 Panchayat election he was elected defeating Jamini Das, prominent political personality of Patharkandi.¹⁵
In 1974 – 78 term, Sudhanya Sinha of Shibergool and Narendra Sinha of Kachubari became the President of the Lowairpoa Gaon Panchayat and Kalkalighat Gaon Panchayat respectively. During the term, 2002 – 2007, Mohendra Sinha of Lowairpoa and Rajib Banerjee of Block road, Patharkandi became the President of Lowairpoa Gaon Panchayat and Patharkandi Gaon Panchayat respectively.

In 1992 Hari Narayan Sinha of Nalugaon and Gandhi Sinha of Mantrigram were the members of the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat representing from Patharkandi and Kafaribond Gaon Panchayat respectively. It is noticeable that Hari Narayan Sinha was the Vice – President of the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat. Krishnacharan Sinha of Rajargaon and Dwijamani Sinha of Kachubari were the members of the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat representing from Patharkandi and Kalkalighat Gaon Panchayat (2002-07). Dwijamani Sinha was the Vice – President of Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat in the same term.

Besides them, Huna Singha of Billbari, Kulabidhu Sarma of Singari, Braja Sinha of Tinokhal, kshiro Gopal Sinha of Rajargaon, were the Presidents of their respective Gaon Panchayats once or twice.

From Ratabari area, many Bishnupriya Manipuri people represented in the panchayat level as the President of Gaon Panchayats and member of the Anchalik Panchayats.

Nadiachand Rajkumar of Betubari is a popular name in the local politics of Ratabari. He had political intelligence for which he always dominated the local politics. He became the member of the Ramkrishnanagar Anchalik Panchayat in 1968 – 72. Kamini Singha of Bishnupur became the member of Dullovcherra Anchalik Panchayat (2002-07) representing from Durgarbond Gaon Panchayat. Shyam Sundar Sinha of Gorerbond was an educated person and became the
President of Gandhi Nagar Gaon Panchayat twice first in 1974 and second time in 1978. Politics was his passion and remained in politics till his retirement from it. He had influence over his electorate and he got their support. In 1974, he got the nomination for the election of President of the said Gaon Panchayat which was objected to by the then Supply Minister of Assam, Suranjan Nandy on the ground of non-payment of the government loan taken by him. Immediately, he refunded all the dues payable to the Government and there after, submitted his nomination. He came out successful in the election and became the Gaon Panchayat President. Bishweswar Sarma of Bidyanagar was a young politician in the eighties and was active in the service of the society. A Bishnupriya Manipuri village does not contain any other linguistic group and in most of the cases these villages are surrounded by the villages of other communities. A politician, therefore, cannot aspire to become successful unless he maintains liaison with other communities. He became the President of Bidyanagar Gaon Panchayat twice, first in the adhoc body of the Gaon Panchayat during 1987 to 91. In the second time, he was elected by the people for the term 1992 – 97. But he died prematurely at the age of 50. In his death, the people of that locality lost a popular leader.

Another politically astute leader was Chandbabu Sinha of the village Pachadali, Anipur who believed in left ideology. The ordinary people in the village and its neighbourhood remember him for his ready wits in speeches and it is heard, he could influence his electorate in any political gathering addressed by him. He was always invited at Tripura to deliver speech in support of left political parties to address election rallies. He was the President of the Patiala Gaon Panchayat in 1974 panchayat election. Another dominating political figure of Dullovcherra area was Kunjababu Sinha Rajbangshi of West Krishnanagar who played a key role in the panchayat politics of this
area. He was the President of the Durgarbond Gaon Panchayat in the term 1968 – 72.

In the term 2002 – 2007, Chandra Kanti Sinha of Higher Secondary School Road, Dullocherra, at his young age, became the President of the Durgarbond Gaon Panchayat. Rajendra Sinha of Awalala, Behari Sinha, Babudhan Sinha of Shyam Nagar, Nanda Sinha of Baskal tilla and Utpal Sinha of East Krishnanagar were the Presidents of their respective local Gaon Panchayat in a time.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Meherpur area, Silchar, have actively participated in the panchayats of their locality. Surendra Kumar Sinha of Kalinjar is a man who is nicknamed as the ‘Tupiala’ as he always put on Gandhi cap and he is active at the time of the present study. He was the President of the Baijayantipur Gaon Panchayat from 1963 – 66. He was also the member of the Sonai Anchalik Panchayat twice, in 1960-63 and also in 1968-72 and he represented the Rangirkhari Baijayantipur Gaon Panchayat. He was also the councillor of Silchar Mahakuma Parishad from 1974-78 representing the same constituency. He was the member of the Silchar District Congress Committee. Surendra Sinha of the village Dharam was elected several times till 1982 as the President of the Rangirkhari Baijayantipur Gaon Panchayat from the advent of the Panchayati Raj in 1959 with a break during 1963-66. He was associated with the Indian National Congress and he had admirers among his own community for his service. Gurudas Sinha of Bhakatpur also played active role in the politics of his locality. He resigned from the government service and joined politics and he belonged to the Indian National Congress (I). He was nominated as the Councillor of the Silchar Mahakuma Parishad from 1987 to 91 and was elected as the President of the Silchar Anchalik Panchayat defeating Bholai Mia, a political personality for the term 1992-97. Still now he is involved actively in the local politics.
Sudhanya Sinha of Dharam and Nirmal Sinha of Chencooree are the members of the Silchar Anchalik Panchayat and Algapur Anchalik Panchayat for the term 1992-97 & 2002-2007 respectively. Another young political leader of this locality was Salil Sinha who became the martyr in the linguistic movement of Bishnupriya Manipuri language. He was elected as the President of the Chencooree Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97. Purnendu Sinha of Dharam became the President of Baijayantipur Gaon Panchayat for the term 2002-2007. Panchayat bodies of Narsingpur area were represented by the Bishnupriya Manipuri people of that area.

Hari Kumar Sinha of the village Pakaipar, Narsingpur Part – II is active in politics from the student life. He was the President of the Silchar Mahakuma Chatra Parishad, the student wing of the Silchar District Congress in 1969. He is involved in the district politics and was elected as a member of Silchar Mahakuma Parishad in 1974 representing his local Gaon Panchayat. As a member of the community, he made his presence felt in the local politics of Narsingpur. Shymananda Misra of Narsingpur Part II was elected as a member of 2nd Narsingpur Anchalik Panchayat for the term 1992 – 97 on Congress ticket where as Dibakar Sinha of Narsingpur Part II is a member of 2nd Narsingpur Anchalik Panchayat in 2002-2007 on Bharatiya Janata Party ticket.

Besides them Ashwini Kumar Sinha and Bhupendra Sinha Choudhury were the presidents of Narsingpur Part – II Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97 and 2002-2007 respectively. Moreover, Goluk Chand Sinha and Gosai Sinha of Santipur were motivated by the ideology of the Indian National Congress and were actively involved in the local politics.

From Bikrampur area many Bishnupriya Manipuri people were represented in the panchayats in various capacities. Chura Chand
Sinha Rajkumar was the President of Seuti Gaon Panchayat for several terms starting from 1963. Kameswar Sinha was the President of the Burunga Gaon Panchayat for the term 1963-66. He became the President of Katigorah Anchalik Panchayat for the term 1968-72. Krishnadas Sinha, who was motivated by left ideology, became the President of the Burunga Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97. Jagadish Sinha and Rasaraj Sinha played important role in the politics of the local government of that locality.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people of the Jatrapur area are not lagging behind panchayat politics of their locality. Kunjeswar Sinha of Dudpur was the President of the Phulbari Gaon Panchayat for the term 1974-78. Moti Kanta Sinha was the President of Dudpur Ganirgram Gaon Panchayat in 2002-2007.

Abunga Sinha of Nandigram was the President of the Salchapra Gaon Panchayat for the term 1968-72 where as Jiten Sinha of Rajnagar was the President of the Rajnagar Gaon Panchayat continuously for four terms since 1960. He is very active in politics and now he is the member of the Central Committee of the Asom Gana Parishad. Gour Hari Sinha was the President of the Masughat Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97 where as Dalim Sarma was the President of the Masughat Gaon Panchayat in 2002-2007. Mohisena Sinha was the member of the Rajnagar Anchalik Panchayat from Rajnagar Gaon Panchayat for the previous term from 1992-97.

Some persons are motivated by the Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha (RSS) ideology. They are involved in the propagation of their ideas. In Patharkandi area, Biramangal Sinha and Ranendra Kumar Sinha of Tinokhal were very much inspired by this ideology. Biramangal Sinha now is the Sangha Chalak of Patharkandi Mahakuma. Rajib Sinha and Rameswar Sinha of the village Nurkha of Patharkandi, propagates the ideology in their locality. Brojendra Sinha of Lowairpoa is the Prakhan Karyabahi of Patharkandi. Ranendra Sinha of Tinokhal, Tilli Singh of Unamgram, Bidyapati Misra of
Unamgram and Tanu Kumar Sinha of Burunga are the well-organisers of their respective areas.

Manibhushan Sinha of Krishnanagar of Dullovcherra is the Sangha Chalak of Dullovcherra Prakhan. Lalit Mohan Sinha of Krishnanagar is the Karyabahi of that area. Harendra Sinha and Senatamba Sinha of Dullovcherra are also inspired by this ideology. Kulamani Misra of Bihara is the Sebapramukh of the South Cachar district. Hem Kanti Sinha of Mashughat was the Karyabahi of Dudpatil Mandal. Later on, he joined Janasangha. Kamini Sinha of Tarun Nagar is the Karyabahi of Guwahati bibhagh. Rajeswar Sinha of Mashughat is the buddhi pramukh of Halflong bibhagh.

Jogendra Kumar Sinha of Mashughat joined Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha at an early age. In early period he opposed this Sangha and accused it for its communal character. Thereafter, one day Sri Kabindra Purkayastha, the then bibhagh karya bahak (Secretary) of Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha and Sri Arabinda Bhattacharjee, the then Silchar Mahakuma Karya Bahak and Umananda Bhattacharjee, Silchar, Prakhand Karya Bahak, went to his village and convinced him saying that Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha is formed only to work for the national upliftment. They convinced him and he decided to join this political organisation. Shri Pannalal Bakshi, Zilla Karya Bahak, went to Mashughat one day and appointed him as Shakha Karya Bahak of Mashughat Shakha. In 1969 he joined Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha as the Organising Secretary of the Cachar district. In 1978, he left Cachar as a whole time state worker of Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha. In 1983 he joined Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha as Mahakuma Karya Bahak of Silchar and then became District Bouddik Pramukh, Southern Assam including Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and North Cachar. Now, he is working as Prachar Pramukh of Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha of Southern Assam.

Ramkrishna Sinha of Singari, Meherpur is also a political worker motivated by the ideology of the Bharatiya Janata Party. From his
student life he was associated with this political party. His attachment to the party ideology was rewarded and he became the President of the Meherpur Bharatiya Janata Party Mandal Committee. Now he is one of the General Secretaries of the Cachar district Bharatiya Janata Party Committee. Some young leaders like Chira Kumar Sinha of Shankarbasti and Satyajit Sinha of Bhakatpur are also actively involved in the politics of the Cachar district under the banner of Bharatiya Janata Party.

5.4 ROLE OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI WOMEN IN THE PANCHAYAT POLITICS:

Bishnupriya Manipuri women are also showing awareness in panchayat politics. They are proud of the fact that two women of their fraternity represented their community in the Zilla Parishad of Cachar and Karimganj. Bina Sinha of Vivekananda Road, sister of assassinated Tripura leader, Bimal Sinha, was a member of the Cachar Zilla Parishad (2002-2007) elected on Congress (I) ticket from the West Silchar constituency.

Tezimala Rajkumari of Patharkandi became the member of the Karimganj Zilla Parishad (2002-2007) and she was elected on Bharatiya Janata Party ticket from Patharkandi constituency. She is an ambitious young lady and she is expected to do well in future years. Two other Bishnupriya Manipuri women contested from Patharkandi constituency of Karimganj Zilla Parishad (2002-2007) are Renuka Sinha of Nalugaon on Asom Gana Parishad ticket and Aloka Sinha of Kachubari on Congress (I) ticket, who were defeated by Tezimala Rajkumari. Kamalabati Sinha of Sonapur also contested from the Matizuri constituency in the election of Hailakandi Zilla Parishad (2002-2007) on Bharatiya Janata Party ticket but was unsuccessful.

Taraleima Debi of Patharkandi, daughter of Mohendra Kumar Sinha, who is a known figure in social field, is also active in politics
since her student days. She was the President of Patharkandi Gaon Panchayat in 1968-72 and the Vice – President of the Karimganj Mahakuma Parishad in 1974-78. She was the member of Assam Pradesh Congress Committee representing the Ratabari constituency.

Chitralekha Sinha, daughter of Churachand Sinha came from a family with political background and she shows keen interests in politics. She hails from Rupagram, Dullovcherra. She became a councillor of the Karimganj Mahakuma Parishad in 1974-78 representing from Dullovcherra Gaon Panchayat.

Bina Rajkumari of Betubari under Karimganj district is another lady who is involved in politics. Due to her association with her uncle Nadia Chand Rajkumar, who was a popular local leader during his time, Bina was elected a member of the Dullovcherra Anchalik Panchayat in 2002 on the Congress ticket representing the Kazir Bazar Gaon Panchayat. She was also the Vice President of the Dullovcherra Anchalik Panchayat. When the elected President was removed from office on a charge of corruption, she became the President of the Dullovcherra Anchalik Panchayat.

During the same time, Shefali Sinha of Patharkandi was representing the Patharkandi Anchalik Panchayat from Faridkona Gaon Panchayat on Congress(l) ticket in 2002-2007. Usha Sinha of Sheipargaon belonged to the Bharatiya Janata Party and she represented Patharkandi AP from Burunga Gaon Panchayat. Lakshmi Rani Rajkumari of Rajnagar was also a member of Rajnagar Anchalik Panchayat (2002-2007) representing from Rajnagar Gaon Panchayat.

Senarup Sinha wanted social reformation of the Bishnupriya Manipuri society and he was actively involved in his work. His daughter Purabi, inspired by her father, has joined politics as a member of Kalain Anchalik Panchayat and represented Seuti Gaon Panchayat during 2002-07. Brinda Sinha was a member of the Kalain Anchalik
Panchayat for the same term representing the Burunga Gaon Panchayat. Ashalata Sinha, a young lady was involved in the politics in her locality. By virtue of her political consciousness, she became the member of Panibora Anchalik Panchayat for the term 2002-2007.

In the Gaon Panchayat level many Bishnupriya Manipuri women represented in the different areas. Jasodha Sinha of Lowairpoa of Karimganj was also actively involved in politics and she was elected as president of the Lowairpoa Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97. Manibala Sinha of Bhakatpur, Silchar is a lady of political consciousness and was elected as the President of Ambicapur Gaon Panchayat for the term 1992-97. Kulabati Mukherjee of Chencooree was elected as the president of the Chencooree Gaon Panchayat (2002-07). Rita Sinha of Rengti village of Kabuganj, a young lady is politically conscious and determined to do positive good for the society. She is the active Congress worker and became the President of Narsingpur Gaon Panchayat Part – V for the term 2002-07. Besides them, some Bishnupriya Manipuri women are also engaged in the organisational work of different political parties.

Sandhya Sinha of Silchar is playing active role in local politics. Now she is the President of the Cachar District Mahila Committee of Asom Gana Parishad and plays politics in intelligent way. She knows that common people is the main base of politics for which she is always maintaining liaison with common people. She is always admired by her party for her organisational work. She contested in the election of Silchar Zilla Parishad (2002-2007) from South Barkhola constituency as an independent candidate with the support of Trinamul Congress Party and was unsuccessful. Gita Mukherjee of Karimganj is also associated with the Asom Gana Parishad of Assam since its formation in 1985. She tries at her best to popularize the political party at Karimganj. Now she is one of organising secretaries of the Central Committee of the Asom Gana Parishad.
Ruma Rajkumari of Srikona following her father played a role in the district politics of Cachar and held the office of the secretary of the Cachar District Mahila Committee of Asom Gana Parishad. Indurekha Sinha of Katabari in Patharkandi belongs to the Congress Party and she is active in her area.

Belonging to a family with left leanings, Renuka Sinha of East Krishnanagar, Dullovcherra, is motivated by CPI(M) ideology. She is now the President of the Karimganj District Committee of All India Democratic Mahila Samiti and represents women in the party at the district level.\(^{17}\)

Some women are also motivated by the extreme right wing ideology of Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangha. Among them, the name of Chandana Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar may be mentioned. She is now the Silchar Bibhagh Karya Bahika of Rastriya Swayam Sevika Samiti (Barak Valley and North Cachar). She attended organisational conferences at Nagpur, Delhi and Durgapur.\(^{18}\)

Women take part in the political process of the country, a small section among them are in the active politics, most of them exercise consciously the voting rights with discretion. As members of a small ethnic group, their role is often dictated by the demands of the society they belong to.

5.5 PARTICIPATION OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS IN THE PEASANT MOVEMENT OF BHANUBIL (NOW IN BANGLADESH):

Peasant movement of Bhanubil, a pargana of the old Sylhet district which was a part of Assam before the independence, paused a great challenge to the British imperialism in the third decade of the 20\(^{th}\) century. In 1930, peasants of Bhanubil started a movement against the oppressions of the landlords, locally known as the Zamindars, who acted as the agents of the colonial government upon the peasants. Manipuri peasants of Bhanubil stopped the payment of rent to get ownership of land. Baikuntha Nath Sarma was the leader of this
movement. The government in order to suppress this movement established a military camp at Bhanubil.

At that time, the landlord of the Bhanubil area was Amzad Khan who started torturing the poor peasants, among whom, a good number were the Bishnupriya Manipuris. As a result, the peasants faced great economic hardships. Before the beginning of this movement, Amzad Khan summoned the peasants for a discussion to solve this problem. On behalf of the peasants, Panchanan Thakur, Baikuntha Nath Sarma and Kasim Ali were represented. The discussion ended without any result. The peasants decided to resume the movement afresh. The landlord took too more repressive measures and seven hundred soldiers accompanied with seven hundred ryots (cultivators who lived on rents paid to the landlord) entered into the Bhanubil area and demolished the house of a Bishnupriya Manipuri peasant, Chouba Sinha and forty seven houses of other peasants. Moreover, the landlord willfully caused the destruction of the crops with the active participation of soldiers when these were ready for harvesting. But all these oppressions could not dampen the spirit of the movement and it received further momentum.

In the mean time, the Non–Cooperation Movement was started by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in 1921 against an evil structure of the colonial Government in India. The peasants of the Bhanubil area came into close contact with the Indian National Congress. In 1931, District Congress of Sylhet arranged the Sylhet Surma Valley youth conference throughout Maulavi Bazar Sub division of the district and a group of peasants attended the conference with banners and festoons and chanting slogans in support of the peasants movement of Bhanubil. One of the slogans was “we want our rights; we do not want anybody’s mercy”.

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This procession of the peasants was led by Baikuntha Nath Sarma, Girindra Sinha, Nikunja Gosai, Rupchand Singha and Krishnomani Sarma and women leaders such as Lilabati Sarma, Sabitri Singha, Sashiprova Dey and Javeda Khatun. Among Bishnupriya Manipuri processionists, Buddhimanta Sinha, Nabadwip Sinha, Bidyasagar Sinha, Khamtal Singha, Babuchand Singha, Purnachand Singha, Khangbati Singha and Bijoy Singha are remarkable. In this conference it was decided not to pay tax to the government and rent to the landlord. Moreover the leaders of the peasant movement decided to continue the movement in a non violent way on the line of the Indian National Congress.

On the other hand, the landlord was determined to collect the tax at the rate of Rs. Two and paise fifty and he used force to evict four or five peasants from their houses. Eleven protesters including Baikuntha Nath Sarma were arrested and were kept in confinement. Two prominent persons, Girindra Singha and Purnendu Kishore Sen were arrested on the ground of leading the peasant movement. The peasants had legitimate grievances against the Government policies on agricultural taxation and the Indian National Congress had endorsed this movement. At that time, Bishnupriya Manipuri people of other villages of the Bhanugach pargana joined this movement and some were imprisoned. Among them Dhananjay Singha and Arjun Singha are remarkable. The Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Goramara village also took part actively. Phulobabu Singha, Bijoy Singha, Dhanbabu Singha and Gopeswar Chatterjee were the prominent persons who joined actively in this movement. As the peasants lent unequivocal support to the movement, it was turned into an anti imperialist movement soon in which all showed great enthusiasm. Many protestors were taken to Sylhet Jail and imprisoned in the jail of Sylhet and Medinipur.
In December 1932, the government installed a military camp at Bhanubil demolishing several houses with two thousand five hundred soldiers accompanied with ten elephants. The police Inspector, Choudhury Sinha, who belonged to the Bishnupriya Manipuri community of Patharkandi area, it was alleged, to get a lift in the service, demolished the house of Baikuntha Nath Sarma, the leader of the movement. This police officer with the help of the armies committed atrocity on the agitating peasants. Though provoked to the extreme, they did not resort to violence and held a peaceful march from Bhanugach to Kurma where hundreds of women also took part and raised slogans condemning the atrocities. The Bishnupriya Manipuri women, who were leading lights in the movement, were Thampanu Debi, Suradhani Debi, Inakhambi Debi, Uttara Debi, Ambika Debi and Bengali women leaders like Sarala Debi and Charushila Debi. Out of 752 houses of Bhanubil, 352 houses were demolished. But the spirit of the movement was alive and all peasants of these villages were determined to continue the movement with the slogan “Do or Die”.

The role of Swadeshi Ashram, Kulaura Vidyashram of Sylhet in this connection is noteworthy. The Swadeshi Ashram was established at Rangirkhal hill within the Kulaura Police Station covering three thousand bighas of land. In this Ashram, thousands of workers were employed to weave cloth to produce handloom products and to sell these products. Subhash Chandra Bose, Dr. Prafulla Chandra Roy and Masterda Surya Sen visited this Ashram.

On the direction of Mahatma Gandhi, the voluntary workers of the Swadeshi Ashram and the Kulaura Vidyashram participated in the movement. The sizeable number of the oppressed peasants in Bhanubil belonged to the Bishnupriya Manipuri community and they were pushed to the wall under the continued tortures. But they showed their unity and steadfastness and face the ordeals manfully. The movement forced the Government to come to a negotiated settlement.
with the agitationists. The Government of India Act, 1935 raised a new hope and the attitude of the Government was slightly mellowed down. The tenants' right law of Sylhet was passed by which some rights of the peasants of the Bhanubil were recognised. In the mean time, due to the initiative of the civil Sub divisional Officer Dowsen, rent per bigha was fixed at Rs. Two in place of Rs. Two paise fifty. This is the end of the peasant movement of Bhanubil.

Impressed by the intensity of the movement, Jawaharlal Nehru, then the President of the Indian National Congress, visited Bhanubil in 1937 to see the condition of the Manipuris of which the Bishnupriya Manipuri peasants formed a part. He delivered a speech at a public gathering arranged in the field at the eastern side of Ghuramara near Bhanubil and he recorded his admiration of the struggle they raised against the Government to realise their just demands.

“I saw the Manipuri people of the Bhanubil of Sylhet. The Men and women of the Manipuri community, looking very handsome, greeted me standing in rows, spinning wheels in hands. They were a disciplined lot of people and showed respect to me. I was a little surprised to know that the Manipuris showed their heroism participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement led by the Indian National Congress. Only a few years ago, they revolted against the oppression and decided to stop payment of rent on land when the oppressor landlord, acting as an agent of the colonial government, raised the rates on his own.

They are a community totally unknown to me and I have never seen such community in India. They look like the Burmese and their dress pattern is like the Burmese. Both men and women are equally clean, the young people always presented smiling faces and looked young and clean. Most of the Manipuris are peasants. They are very expert in spinning thread and to weave clothes. They are always proud
of their society and all are Vaishnavites. They behaved like the Burmese. I heard of divorce prevailing among them”.

Bhanugach is a railway station on the Assam – Bengal Railway on the Akhaura—Badarpur line. Two stations on the two sides of it, are Srimangal and Samsernagar. It is an area where there is a good concentration of the Manipuri people. Though the independence in 1947 and the resultant partition of the country included their habitats in East Pakistan, they did not leave the place and continued to live there retaining their hold on land and rights.

5.6 PARTICIPATION OF BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS IN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT AT PATHARKANDI AND RATABARI:

There was another unique movement appeared among the community which attracted a part of the population when the independence of the country was drawing closer. The left ideology made a dent in the district of Sylhet and some people were instantly drawn to it. The left organisation took a shape at the Patharkandi and Ratabari police stations area where most of them were the cultivators and the movement was a part of the greater left movement in the district. Many young men joined the Indian People’s Theatre (IPTA) and awakened a part of the community to the new ideology.

In the thirties, only a few people knew the name of the Communist Party. But the Manipuri people of both the factions came into contact with the communist movement very early. Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta gave a vivid description of the participation of the Manipuri people in the left movement. He wrote ‘the reactionaries, the agents of the imperialists and the communal forces opposed the progressive movement. The leaders had to negotiate with these obstacles to move forward. The Manipuri people had obvious contradictions within the society and these were very complex. The reactionary forces, taking
advantage of such contradictions, tried their best to alienate them from the main stream of the movement. In spite of all efforts of the reactionaries, it was possible to keep them in the movement which explains their strong sense of patriotism. The expansion of the political activities, organisation and agitation were accompanied with some constructive works like the cleansing of the water body (bil) ‘jhanjhani’ from hyacinth, construction of roads at Junaipatty village, embankment at Bhurunga, the engagement of volunteers in Borlekhana Madhabkunda Mela. A good number of youngmen came out with enthusiasm. The movement was extended to villages other than the Manipuri areas within thirty miles. In many Muslim villages, the peasants bodies were established. The Bishnupriya and the Meitei Manipuris, peasants other than Manipuris belonging to the scheduled category and a good number of Muslims, were taken to the fold of the Communist Party after providing them some training. In spite of the fact that the Communist Party was banned in the district, it was possible to enlist a good number of peasants into the Party. The majority part of these peasant members were the Bishnupriya Manipuris.

Comrade Harendra Sinha of Rajbari village of Patharkandi was motivated by the communist ideology through his association with the labour union when he was working in a mill at Calcutta and took the membership of the Communist Party. Due to his influence, many Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Patharkandi were motivated by the communist ideology and among them Khandal Singha, Monmohan Singh, Baldeb Singh, Arjun Singh, Hunou Singh, Kalachand Singh, Sena Singh, Brjomohan Sinha, Sureswar Misra, Nilmuni Misra and Kuleswar Sinha are remarkable and they actively participated in the communist movement. From Bazaricherra area, Moiba Singh, Khalendra Singha, Gourmohan Singha, Shyam Sundar Singh and Sanatan Sinha were also drawn to the movement.
At Patharkandi, Shambhu Sinha, who is earlier a Congress man, joined the Communist Party. Many Bishnupriya Manipuri women also joined the left movement. They are Tulsi Debi, Maiyon Debi, Fulkumari Debi, wife of Shambhu Sinha, Purnamashi Sinha of Pekurgaon, Moloya Debi, Choubi Debi, Bidhumukhi Debi and Juni Debi. The movement gained momentum at Bazaricherra. Sudhir Paul and Shishir Paul were the two leading businessmen of Bazaricherra and they were charging high interests from the cultivators who, in great economic desperation, took loans from them. These businessmen exploited the poor cultivators who did not have any means to protest. The Communist Party workers initiated agitation against this particular case of usury and the exploitation of the money lenders in general. The main leaders of this movement were Mrinal Kanti Das Gupta and Khandal Singha. Police arrested some picketers who were protesting.

The Mukherjee family of the Pachdali village was instrumental in spreading Communist ideology among the Bishnupriya Manipuris of Ratabari area. They motivated people of their village to follow the path of communism. Gopi Mohan Mukherjee of Pachdali, Selkom Sinha of East Krishnanagar and Monoranjan Chatterjee of Betubari are the prominent communist workers in Ratabari area.

As the crucial day of the Indian independence came nearer and the fate of Sylhet was sealed through a referendum, there was apprehension that, Patharkandi might be given to East Pakistan. The movement was initiated by the communist leaders to scuttle such possibility. Mrinal Kanti Das Gupta, Shambhu Singha and Kalachand Sinha led the agitation. The leaders lent earlier their support to the tea garden workers who were denied voting rights in the referendum but the Government refused to accede to their demand. When the referendum was held on July 6 and 7, 1947, their representatives
remained passive onlookers without any say in this vital matter concerning their lives. They were branded by the colonial administration as outsiders in the district of Sylhet. This was unjust as they earlier voted in the General Election in 1946.

Shambhu Sinha, Kalachand Sinha, Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta, Gopesh Namasudra were the prominent leaders and they exerted pressure on the government to grant voting rights to the tea garden workers. It did not have any effects on the colonial government as they were in great hurry to leave the country. The part of Karimganj subdivision of the old Sylhet district, which is in India now, is the result of the award given by the Radcliffe Commission on the determination of the boundary between India and Pakistan.

After the independence in 1949, the Communist party started the anti reserve movement in the villages in the vicinity of the Longai Forest Reserve. Their main demand was the abolition of the forest reserve system and the distribution of lands to the occupiers and to give them the ownership rights. There are many people who live in such reserve areas. The settlers in the reserve forest area cannot own, sell or offer on rent to anybody but they can cultivate and enjoy such lands through generations. But the demands were not accepted by the Government. It was an intensive movement with many people involved in it. They proceeded to the Longai Forest Reserve and camped at Manikcherra near Nagra Bazar. There were two fold demands, (1) The abolition of physical labour popularly known as ‘Oth’ and (2) The abolition of the Forest Reserve System. The Divisional Forest Officer of Cachar came to the spot and requested the picketers to come out from the forest area. He assured the protesters that the problems
would be sorted out through discussion and a meeting was arranged at Patharkandi where the Civil Sub divisional officer of Karimganj and the Divisional Forest Officer, Cachar were present. The government gave assurances to the picketers but it is a matter of regret that the Forest Reserve System was not dismantled.

The communist party again started the movement against two petty landlords, Narendra Sinha and Jamini Das of Patharkandi who exploited the peasants and the ordinary people. The main leaders of this movement were Shambhu Sinha and Mrinal Kanti Dasgupta. Shambhu Sinha was undoubtedly one of the pioneers of the communist movement in India giving it a shape in the Surma valley. A meeting was held at Singari, Patharkandi where Kartik Biswas of Silchar also attended. After that, they proceeded to Patharkandi to confront these landlords directly and snatch their properties by force. It is narrated that Jamini Das was hiding under his cot when the agitationists reached his home and Narendra Sinha faced the wrath of the protesters next. The information reached the police station quickly and a contingent of police reached the spot and a deadly conflict ensued. The force attacked this communist mob on September 23, 1949 and fight between this mob and police force continued for sometime. During this fight Chandbabu Sinha challenged the police, the Sub-Inspector of Police killed Chandbabu Sinha on the spot by firing. The mob snatched three guns of the police force and broke one gun. Behari Sinha, a communist worker was injured by bullet and was taken in the safe place by his comrades. In the next morning, a military force arrived on the scene and they jointly started a combing operation in the villages putting people in the area into great harassment. The forces caught hold of many people and many of them
were severely beaten, Bilbari village faced their anger. Some youngmen, Kalachand, Atul and Sureswar were among forty eight arrested from Singari, Patharkandi and they were sent to jail.

A list of imprisoned communist workers are available, they were Sureswar Misra, Nilmani Singha, Khambatal Singha, Fulbabu Singha, Sena Singha, Dhansena Singha, Kalachand Singha, Sudhanya Sinha of Chatragram, Arjun Singha, Baldeb Singha, Dhansena Sinha of Narayandahar, Braja Mohan Singha of Mantrigram, Gangamani Singha, Tampha Singha, Bhubaneswar Sinha of Patragoan, Kukileswar Sinha of Kanaibazar, Monmohan Sinha of Pekurgoan, Debkumar Sinha, Jogeswar Sinha, Madan Gopal Rajkumar of Rajargaon, Fulkumar Sinha, Rupa Sinha, Sena Singha of North Bilbari, Kalachand Sinha, Gopalsena Sinha and Gourbidu Sarma of Singari, Bidhu Bhusan Sinha, Jogeswar Sarma of South Bilbari, Chandra Kishore Sinha, Brojendra Singha of Kanaibazar, Kalababu Sinha of Unamgram and Hunou Singha of Kachubari. But the main communist leader, Shambhu Singha was not arrested because he was hidden in the East Krishna Nagar village of Dullovcherra, the whereabouts of him was not known to the police. The police, however, tried to nab him, eventually when they got his address of hiding but failed. He escaped in front of them masquerading as woman. The people of Pachdali village, Anipur were inspired due to the initiative of Gopi Mohan Mukherjee and Madon Mohan Mukherjee, Barachouba Sinha of Rupagram, Dhansena Sinha, Behari Sinha, Kamala Kanta Sinha of Baskaltilla, Selkom Sinha, Bharat Sinha, Mani Sarma of Rupagram were also inspired by the communist ideology. Mani Sinha and Selkom Sinha were arrested. People of Pachdali village were influenced by C.P.I(M) ideology when the Party regrouped after the
split in the Communist movement in 1964. The intensity of the left movement could be gauged from the fact that, when the colonial rule in the country was drawing close, one, Girak Sinha of the same village was murdered as he was considered as an agent of the British government. Bapu Sinha and Chandbabu Sinha were the sincere workers of the Communist Party. Chandbabu Sinha played a key role for the spread of communism in Ratabari area and became the President of Patiala Gaon Panchayat of the Karimganj district.

In 1952 Government of India lifted ban upon the Communist Party and the Communist Party workers were released from the jail. The left influence is still noticeable among the Bishnupriya Manipuri community settled at Patharkandi and Ratabari police stations area.

5.7 INFLUENCE OF THE MARXIST IDEOLOGY UPON THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS:

Marxist ideology in politics has also influenced upon the Bishnupriya Manipuri society. In the Narsingpur area specially in the village Katakhal, many people followed the ideology of Marxism. Madhab Sinha of Katakhal, a teacher of Dholai Higher Secondary School, was the active propagandist of the communist ideology. He inspired the people of his area to accept the left ideology. He was very active to organise a Krishak Sobha at Dholai in which Bankim Chatterjee of Calcutta was the main speaker. Bimal Sinha of Katakhal was also a renowned artist and was employed in Guwahati Refinery. He was progressive in outlook and very popular among the party cadres for this thinking.

In Meherpur area, left ideology was spread among the Bishnupriya Manipuris. Hare Krishna Mukherjee in spite of being the son of a freedom fighter, was the active member of the left ideology.
But in the last part of his life, he resigned from his party. Among other party workers, the names of Manilal Singha, Rasamoy Singha of Dharam, Fulasena Sinha and Mani Sinha of Kalinjar & Krishna Ballov Sinha of Singari are remarkable. Here it is to be mentioned that Gopinath Sinha, the renowned social worker during his service in Singari High School, has influenced the youth of this area to accept the left ideology.  

Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Kalain area are not lagging behind this aspect. Many people accepted this ideology. Among them Lakshmi Kanta Sinha of Kalain, Rajendra Sinha of Bihara, Krishnadas Sinha of Burunga, Ashwini Sinha, Kaliprasad Sinha of Baropoa, Kripamoy Sinha and Nalini Kanta Sinha of Bihara etc are very remarkable.

In Ratabari area impact of communist ideology upon Bishnupriya Manipuri was felt. Mukherjee family of the village Pachdali of Anipur was motivated by the ideology of the Communist Party. Gopimohan Mukherjee and Madon Mohan Mukherjee motivated the people of this area in the communist ideology. Madon Mohan Mukherjee contested twice in the Ratabari constituency of Assam Legislative Assembly election as an independent candidate.

Another fellow to propagate communist ideology in Dullovcherra area is Gopinath Sinha of the village Patiala. During his college life at Silchar, he was very much influenced by the communist ideology and successful to motivate youth of the Meherpur area, Silchar in the ideology of the Communist Party. He was teacher by profession and in this capacity he got the opportunity to spread communist ideology among the youth of the Dullovcherra area. In 1975 when national emergency was declared, he left the teaching service of the Chargola Valley Public High School, Dullovcherra due to the fear of arrest by the government. He came to Rakesh Nagar as the Headmaster of Mahadebpur High School and began to propagate the idea of communism in that area. By his inspiration Kamadeb Das became the active member of the party and Ratish Choudhury, ex M.L.A., Ratabari constituency was also inspired in the left ideology due to his guidance. His political intelligence was showed in the Badarpur area specially at
the time of election of Ramendra Chandra Dey as Communist Party of India (Marxist) M.L.A. from Badarpur constituency.

Besides him some other fellows are very sincere to propagate the idea of communism in Dullovcherra area. Among them the name of Kalasena Sinha, Haripada Sinha, Nilosena Sinha of Patiala, Haridas Singha of Chamtilla and Anil Singha Gautam of Betubari are remarkable.

5.8 PARTICIPATION OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS IN THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT OF TRIPURA:

Communist movement of Tripura was started with the philosophy of few leaders such as Debaprasad Sen Gupta, Biren Dutta, Nripen Chakraboraty, Baidyanath Mukherjee, Biresh Dutta, Jiten Dutta, Rasbehari Roy, Niranjan Sen and others. To spread the ideology of communism in this state, they published a book, "Tripura Rajyer Katha" in 1946 and it was edited by Birendra Dutta.

They primarily decided to spread the idea of communism among tribals and tried to stand by the side of the tribals because tribals are the majority people of the state. As a result of their effort, tribals of Tripura were motivated to join in this movement. Among them Dasharath Debbarma, Birchandra Debbarma, Manimoy Debbarma and Mohendra Debbarma etc. are remarkable. Gradually the forerunners of communist movement in Tripura also started to motivate Bishnupriya Manipuri people in the spirit of communism and most of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people are impressed by the communist ideology. At the earlier stage Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Fatikrai and Kailashahar were well motivated by the ideology of communism and gradually this movement gained momentum in a phased manner. Sashi Kumar Sinha of Sanicherra was motivated by the left ideology and became the secretary of the local unit. Sonachand Sinha, Gourmani Singha, Gunjananda Singha, Rajdhana Singha and Gouri Singha of Nadiapur propagated the idea of Marxism in that area and
many villagers of Sanicherra and Nadiapur became the followers of Marxism. Sundar Mukherjee of Khelenjooree was motivated by the Leninist ideology and he took leading part in the spreading of Leninist philosophy for which he remained in underground for several years. For his role people of Tripura state, irrespective of caste, creed, religion, admire him. By his influence majority people of Sanicherra were motivated by the ideology of Leninism, which was evidenced by the murder of Manindra Das, Sub–Inspector of Police in the Nadiapur Railway Station under his leadership.

Communist leaders are moving from one place to another place of Kailashahar and Dharmanagar in order to propagate the idea of communism. At that time, a Bishnupriya Manipuri student leader, Mohendra Singha helped them to their movement from one place to another place and residence of Mohendra Singha was the shelter house of the communist leaders. By his help, communist leaders were able to propagate the idea of communism in the Bishnupriya Manipuri villages of Dharmanagar and Kailashahar.

Another remarkable communist leader from the Bishnupriya Manipuri community was minstrel poet, Gokulananda Geetiswami of Ratacherra, who composed poems on the path of communist ideology. By his political intelligence he was elected twice in the Territorial Council of Tripura as the C.P.I. candidate. Narottam Sinha, Gourgopal Banerjee of Rajbari and Gopeswar Sinha of Bhagyapur also did a lot for the propagation of communism in their locality.

The other remarkable Bishnupriya Manipuri communist stalwart from Fatikrai was Tarini Mohan Sinha who was the M.L.A. of Fatikrai constituency twice on C.P.I.M. ticket.

Kailashahar is another pargana of Bishnupriya Manipuri people where majority Bishnupriya Manipuri people were motivated by the ideology of communism. In the very beginning, Kirti Sinha and other
Bishnupriya Manipuri intellectuals were inspired by the communist ideology and propagated the ideas of communism in every corner of the Kailashahar pargana. In course of time Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya has become the centre of propagating communism in Tripura & from this institution Bishnupriya Manipuri political stalwart Bimal Sinha had started his political career as the General Secretary of the Students Union under the banner of Student Federation of India unit of that college. Gourmohan Sinha of Kanchanbari was the student of this college and became very active in the propagation of communism in Tripura.

Kamalpur Sub – Division of Dholai district is another Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited area where majority of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people became communist due to the influence of Bimal Sinha of Rupaspur village who was the powerful Cabinet Minister of the Left Front Government of Tripura for several terms. Bimal Sinha from his childhood was the communist that was proved by the incident which took place during his student life of high school. At that time Sunil Dutta was the Congress M.L.A. in the Tripura Legislative Assembly representing from Kamalpur constituency. Both Bimal Sinha and Sunil Dutta belonged to the same village Rupaspur. At that time condition of the Public Works Department road in front of the Rupaspur village was miserable. But upto the house of M.L.A. Sunil Dutta, Public Works Department road was pucca due to his initiative. But just after crossing M. L. As house, road was muddy which was not suitable for walking in summer. Regarding this miserable condition of the Public Works Department road Bimal Sinha, the then High School Student with his friends, approached to M.L.A. Sunil Dutta to improve the condition of the road. But Sunil Dutta only assured them to do the work but actually did not do anything. Moreover Sunil Dutta was very corrupted which was not tolerated by the people of Kamalpur. So Bimal Sinha became very determined to give punishment to this corrupted M.L.A. and made
a plan with his friend Satish Sinha to do the same. One day at the afternoon in 1958, M.L.A. Sunil Dutta arrived at the gate of his home of Rupaspur from Agartala with security forces when Bimal Sinha and Satish Sinha were returning from the school. At that moment Bimal Sinha and his friend Satish Sinha decided to insult this corrupted M.L.A. and came in front of the M.L.A. and in the pretend of asking something they made M.L.A. naked by stretching. Dhuti (long piece of cloth worn round the loins by males). After committing this action both fled away from the village and police began to search in order to arrest them. Then they crossed Indo – Bangladesh border and stayed there for few days. They could not come back to their village Rupaspur because police was in search of them for this case. Finding no other way parents of Bimal Sinha sent him to Kailashahar where he began to study residing in maternal uncle’s house and his friend Satish Sinha went to Sylhet for further study.

This is the turning point in the political career of Bimal Sinha because Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya of Kailashahar was the political centre of the communist ideology in the banner of Students Federation of India. He always protested against injustice and dropped to appear examination for few years in order to be elected as the General Secretary of the Students Union for several times. After obtaining graduation he went to Calcutta for doing M.A. and L.L.B. This was the golden period of Bimal Sinha because he got a conscious political environment in Calcutta. Along with his academic education, he became educated politically and returned to his native area Kamalpur, Tripura with strong determination to spread communism at Kamalpur. He started his profession as a lawyer in the judicial court of Kamalpur and began to protest against injustice and exploitation for the interest of the common people. Bimal Sinha began to advocate in favour of the down trodden and neglected people of the Kamalpur area for which he became very popular as a communist leader and successful to spread
the ideology of communism among the ordinary people. Political atmosphere of Kamalpur began to be changed and majority people began to challenge injustice and corruption prevailing in the society.

Communist movement was organised at Kamalpur and Ranjit Ghosh, Kunjeswar Sinha and other villagers of Rupaspur demonstrated in the office of the Subdivisional Officer (Civil) under the leadership of Bimal Sinha. The students of Kamalpur area were organised under the banner of SFI (Students Federation of India). Montu Paul, Birendra Paul, Dipak Baidya, Ranjit Ghosh and Bimal Sinha led the movement from the front. Ranjit Ghosh was the Secretary of C.P.I.M party of the Kamalpur subdivision. He was a member of the State Committee. Montu Paul was a member of the Rajya Committee of the Krishak Sabha and also the Chairman of the Kamalpur Nagar Panchayat. They were prominent as political workers in the seventies. The left oriented politics came into full glare in 1976 and the Employees Association in the state took active part as a strong force in the movement.

Bimal Sinha was an active worker of the party and he was reckoned as a probable candidate for the Kamalpur constituency in the election to the State Assembly. He along with his friends in the party wanted to confront the political adversaries who, they alleged, were harassing and torturing the common people of the constituency. In the context of Tripura, it was a political tussle between the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the Congress Party. He came into close contact with the top most communist leaders in the state, Nripen Chakraborty and Dasharath Debbarma. So in the Tripura Assembly election held in 1978, Bimal Sinha was nominated as the C.P.I.M. candidate from Kamalpur constituency. At that time Sunil Dutta was the member of the state Assembly who won from this
constituency consecutively for three terms. Bimal Sinha broke his run and won the election. He represented the Kamalpur constituency till his unfortunate assassination on March 30, 1998. He retained his hold in the constituency and his popularity was immense. It is borne by the fact that his wife, Bijaylakshmi Sinha, in spite of her comparative inexperience in politics still wins the election from this constituency as the people remembered him always.

As he was accepted as a leader of the community, his voice was heard and Bimal Sinha began to popularise the communist ideology in every part of Tripura and most of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Tripura were motivated by the communist ideology due to the advocacy of Bimal Sinha. After his premature death, Bijaylakshmi Sinha, like her husband, continued his mission to popularise the communist ideology among the common people particularly of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community.

In Halhali area of Kamalpur sub division, Bishnupriya Manipuri people were actively inspired by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) ideology. Haren Sinha of Debicherra was the Regional Secretary of the Halhali region. Kanu Singha of Laityabil is at present the member of the Subdivisional Committee of the party at Halhali.

At Kailashahar most of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people are inspired by the communist ideology. Buttu Singha of Ishappur is also the contemporary worker of Baidyanath Mukherjee, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Tripura, Raja Kumar Singha and Lakshmi Kumar Singha of Kalabari are also active members of the party.

Women of the community enrolled themselves as the workers of the party and many of them held positions in the party. Rubi Sinha of Kirtantali, Kailashahar was once the General Secretary of the Students
Union of Ramkrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashahar on Students Federation of India ticket. She was an active member of the party and faced personal abuses from the opposition but she remained steady in her devotion to the ideology. It was said that the left ideology penetrated in the interiors of Tripura Princely state even before the independence. In 1944, the women members led an agitation in Kailashahar in which an woman, whose identity was not known, got injured when the police resorted to lathi charge. This story of the agitation indicated clearly the influence of the left ideology in the then Princely state of Tripura. This trend continues to this day.

5.9 PARTICIPATION OF THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI PEOPLE IN THE FREEDOM MOVEMENT OF BANGLADESH:

We achieved independence in 1947 and the country was divided into two territories, India and Pakistan. Pakistan had her two wings, East and West. A large number of Bishnupriya Manipuri people are now living in Bangladesh which was known as East Pakistan till 1971. They are settled in the composite district of Sylhet. When the Colonial Government decided to create two dominions out of their Indian Empire, the major parts of Sylhet district of Assam went to East Pakistan after a referendum was held in the district on July 6 and 7, 1947. There was a colonial design to please both the contesting parties halfway. The victims were many small groups of people whose consents were not sought. The Manipuris of both the factions, tea garden workers, all were left in the territory where they were forced to live in an alien situation. They are, believed to be, more than hundred thousands strong at present with larger concentration in the present district of Maulavibazar. There are Meitei Manipuris in Bangladesh who live along side the Bishnupriya Manipuri counterparts sharing advantages and disadvantages together. Interestingly, the social and political rifts, which we observe in India, are absent in Bangladesh. In
the context of Bangladesh, they are a small group hardly have any say in larger political matters. Both the groups live with their cultures and their interactions with broader Bangladeshi society were minimum with an unwritten code of non interference in the societal matters.

Though Pakistan was created on the basis of religion as advocated by Jinnah, yet it was geographically divided into two parts-East Pakistan and West Pakistan divided by the vast expanse of the Indian Union. In spite of having a common religion, culture and language of both part are different from each other. But the main administrative machinery remained in the territory of West Pakistan. Though Bengali is the language of the majority people of Pakistan yet the national language was Urdu. In February, 1948 the first Governor General of Pakistan Mohammad Ali Jinnah announced in Dacca, “Urdu shall be the state language of Pakistan”. People of East Pakistan raised their voices against this announcement and declared that it was never possible. There was wide spread protests against this utterance from Jinnah and in 1952, a great movement in support of the Bengali language was started and on February 21, 1952, some students were killed when the police opened fire on them in Dhaka. This day is still hailed as the start of the second phase of the freedom movement in the cause of the Bengali language. As the administrative machinery of Pakistan was located in the west, the central leaders were unappreciative and unconcerned about the needs and sentiments of the people of the eastern wing. The continuous neglect of the demands and the inability of evolving a political solution of the problem resulted in large movement against the central authority. The emergence of the state of Bangladesh was the ultimate reality which proved the fallacy that religion can only make a state.

In the general election held in 1970, the major political party of East Pakistan, the Awami League Party, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman secured nearly all seats in East Pakistan and secured
absolute majority seats in the National Assembly of Pakistan. The leaders of West Pakistan refused to accept the verdict and put pressure on Gen Yahya Khan not to invite Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to form the government at the centre.

President Yahya Khan without consulting Mujibur Rahman, the leader of the majority party in the National Assembly, convened a Round Table Conference in Dacca. The leader of the People’s Party which had its base in West Pakistan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutta only attended the conference and Mujibur was absent. Bhutto warned his party members not to attend the Assembly unless his demands were conceded by the President, Gen Yahya Khan. The President returned to West Pakistan and ordered the arrest of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The Bangladesh War started from the moment of the arrest and after a long struggle, the new state of Bangladesh emerged on the map of the world.

At first the soldiers attacked Pilkhana police out post of Dacca and disarmed police forces in their barracks fearing that they would rise against the military force. There was war against the people of Bangladesh on all fronts and the army went into action every where in the province. Innumerable number of innocent people died and the army was bent upon exterminating all talented people in the country who could provide leadership to this liberation war. Some hundreds of thousands of people took shelter in India for fear of their lives.

Like other communities of the country, a large number of Bishnupriya Manipuris took shelter in Assam. But all Bishnupriya Manipuris could not come out from the country as the border of the country was sealed by military forces. However, tortured Bishnupriya Manipuri people under Pakistan government did not hesitate to join in the freedom movement of the country. Bishnupriya Manipuri people of
the greater Sylhet district came forward with other communities to join in the freedom movement of the Bangladesh.

During the rule of Pakistan, Bishnupriya Manipuri people were deprived of basic amenities of life such as education, employment etc. For that reason, they nurtured ill feelings towards the Pakistani government. From March 25, 1971, Pakistani soldiers began their heinous crime of exterminating people indiscriminately and in the district of Sylhet, the small Bishnupriya Manipuri community were affected by the persecutions. The Community, spread over the whole district including their main concentration at Bhanubil, faced the ordeal. As a result, large number of people braving the odds at the borders, entered India for their precious lives.

On August 12, 1976, Pakistani soldiers captured an innocent Bishnupriya Manipuri Brahmin, Sarbabhoum Sarma from the village Bhanubil of Maulavi Bazar and killed him taking to the nearby jungle. Moreover they compelled Bishnupriya Manipuri villagers of the Bhanubil village to clear the jungle for the establishment of their camp. Fearing fresh tortures, thousands of people belonging to the Bishnupriya Manipuri community fled from their homes. On August 14, 1971, the house of Ratan Singha was looted. In the next day, some Bishnupriya Manipuri youth pretended to clean the jungles and cleverly ran away from the camp area and ran towards the safer places and ultimately took shelter in India. Among these youth, Krishna Kumar Sinha, Babusena Sinha, Bidyadhan Sinha, Kuleswar Sinha and Mantu Singha joined the Mukti Fouj (Liberation Army) which was organised to fight the oppressive Pakistani Army. They were followed by an innumerable Bishnupriya Manipuri people to join the Mukti Fouj. Among these freedom fighters, the exploits of some are remarkable and few lines about them are narrated below.
**Krishna Kumar Sinha** – He was the son of Shri Ratan Singha who was a villager of North Bhanubil of Maulavi Bazar district. He was a freedom fighter of the liberation movement of Bangladesh and his forefather played an active role in the anti-British movement of India. Krishna Kumar Sinha was compelled by the West Pakistani soldiers to clean the jungles nearby military camp of Kumacherra. He gave his physical labour for three days along with other men. On August 14, his house was ransacked by the Army. Krishna Kumar Sinha anticipated further trouble and escaped from the clutches of the Army and fled to India and reached to the village Dalugaon of Kumacherra, Tripura. From there, he reached Jalaigram and met Raja Saheb, a special organiser of Mukti Fouj, and proceeded to Kailashahar. On his way to Kailashahar, he was arrested by a police officer on the ground of carrying some house hold instruments which the police thought to be weapons and he was detained for eight days in the police station. He said in reply to the interrogation of the police, "I have come to join the freedom movement". Convinced of his innocence, police officer on duty released him. After his release, he got one month training at Halflong in North Cachar Hills of Assam. After the rigorous training in guerilla warfare, he was placed under the command of Sajjadur Rahaman of the Mukti Fouj. He participated in the successful attack on the Pakistani military camp of Kamarcherra. Few days later, on December 16, 1971, East Pakistan became an independent country and took the new name, Bangladesh. After the great victory of the Mukti Fouj, the responsibility of fighting for the freedom of the people was over. Krishna Kumar placed his services to the new government of Independent Bangladesh and he was offered an assignment in the Revenue Department.

**Satish Chandra Sinha** – He hailed from the village Tilakpur of the Maulavi Bazar district and was another freedom fighter of the liberation movement of Bangladesh. At that time, he was a...
In the month of May, he, along with Parimal and other few Bengali friends, started for India on foot in the dead of night and appeared in an interview at Bidyanagar Higher Secondary School, Tripura for joining the “Mujib bahini”. He was asked to proceed to Lower Halflong for training under the direction of one Indian military officer V. Krishnan by name. He was trained in various kind of military training and entered East Pakistan under the command of Captain Fakrul of Mujib Force. Their group fought against the enemy force for 3 days at Pathar Khola border day and night and the camp was damaged in various ways. They returned to Ratcherra and Indian Major S.K. Rajputana commanded the Mukti force soldiers. In the second phase, the Mukti force soldiers went to the Shamsher Nagar Airport. But on that day, the Pakistani Army fired at an Indian helicopter and five Mukti Fouj soldiers were killed. These soldiers of the Mujib bahini were given training to fight in different places and under different circumstances against the Pakistani forces. After attaining independence of the country, he like his other compatriots, placed himself for the service of the nation.

Girindra Sinha – He was a resident of Madhabpur, Maulavi Bazar and is a martyr of the freedom movement of Bangladesh. Gen Yahya Khan was making intimidating speeches against the Bengali freedom lovers and vowed to crush the movement altogether. It was an intimidation to massacre any opposition who dared to demand freedom from the Pakistani rulers. The people of Bangladesh were enraged and they were ready to fight this evil forces of tyranny. The message of freedom inspired Girindra Sinha, and he, along with some of friends, planned to resist the enemy forces and it was failed due to the adverse situation. On April 7, Pakistani soldiers raided the house of Girindra Sinha but he was fortunately not present in the house. He tried to resist the enemy forces staying in his own country. He ultimately decided to go to India and reached Fatikrai, Tripura. He also
went to Hal Hali of Dholai district, Tripura and joined the Mukti Fouj on
the month of June. After getting the proper training, he, along with
soldier friends, reached Padmacherra and villagers of Madhabpur
lovingly offered them food. He went to his own village secretly and
advised his people not to lose heart in those trying situations. In the
period of Durga Puja in the year 1971, he also went to his own village
secretly in order to collect information from the village. But some
enemy soldiers identified him and secretly followed him. When he
observed them pursuing him, he tried to run away. He was soon
gharoed by the soldiers from all sides. They arrested him and detained
him in the military camp torturing him physically for few days. In the
end, they fired at him and he was instantly killed. The brutal soldiers
threw his dead body in the Dholai river. In this way, an indomitable and
courageous man like Girindra Sinha became the martyr for the cause
of his own native state Bangladesh.

Besides them Nilkanta Sinha, Nandalal Sinha of Nayabalachar,
Brajā Mohan Sinha, Dhana Sinha of Chharapatharj, Babusena Sinha
of North Bhanubil, Mani Sinha, Hirendra Sinha, of Majergaon, Thoiba
Sinha, Nandeswar Sinha of Tateergram, of Baligaon, Mani Singha of
Rupnagar, Dhinamoni Singha of Puran Balichar, Biswamber Sinha,
Brajendra Sinha, Suramoni Sinha, Bappi Singha of Baligaon, Basanta
Kumar Sinha of Madhabpur, Kuleswar Singha, Mantri Sinha of
Bhanubil, Kunoj Sinha of Madhabpur, Padmasen Singha of
Gulerhowar, Bireswar Singha of Shaichiri, Rabindra Kumar Singha of
Tilakpur, Bhuban Sinha and Nilmani Chatterjee of Guramara etc. are
remarkable freedom fighters of the freedom movement of Bangladesh
in 1971.
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