PREFACE

The existence of a society depends upon the socio political consciousness of its members. The Bishnupriya Manipuri Community, a linguistic minority of the North East India, shows some distinctive characteristics peculiar to the community and at the same time greatly influenced by the environment they live along with. The history of a group is found in the diverse situations they live and their social and political attitudes are formed and in the long run, the institutions inherent to them emerge slowly. The political changes that occur surrounding the community, in which they do not have any hand, influence the attitudes with which they get adjusted with efforts. Long time before the independence of the country, they lived a simple life in the villages where they lived in a group. A village inhabited by the Bishnupriya Manipuris is, more or less, homogenous where their social interactions take place. At the political level, they come into contact with people from other groups when such interactions become necessary for them. The ordinary people spent their times in the daily core of regular social and economic pursuits unaffected by the big events at the national or provincial levels. The twentieth century was a period of consolidation as the colonial rule established semblance of peace in the area where they live. The century is, more or less, divided into two distinct parts, the period before the independence and the period after the independence. The independence has left a sizeable section of the population on the other side of the border; some thousands live in Bangladesh cut off from the people living in India. While in the Indian part, the agitations for the recognition of their language
bore fruit, the same remained a non starter in Bangladesh. But the beginning of the 20th century marks a landmark of their social consciousness when some Bishnupriya Manipuri students of Murari Chand College, Sylhet, published a literary magazine known as ‘Jagaran’ in 1925 and ultimately led to the formation of the Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahasabha, a social organisation which became the mouth piece for the allround development of the society. Subsequent literary magazines, such as Manipuri, Bishnupriya and Kshatriyojyoti etc. enhanced their social consciousness. Just after independence following the spirit of the constitution, intellectual people of this community demanded to the Government to get education to the children of this community through their own mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the primary level and this demand paved the way to start their long historical linguistic movement from the sixth decade of the 20th century. This linguistic movement became successful when the Assam Government, at last, conceded to their demand and issued orders to introduce the Bishnupriya Manipuri language as a subject in the primary schools of the Barak Valley of Assam in 2001.

As a result of the awakening after the independence, the literature began to take shape as many writers among them began to write poems, short stories and essays influenced by the trends in the literatures in their neighbourhood, particularly among the larger linguistic groups around them. The people subsist mainly on agriculture. But some people, due to lack of adequate returns, do seek employment in other sectors of economic activities. Particularly the youth are not confined to villages now
and they go to the towns where many of them are settled there. They boast of a distinct culture which they share with the other segment of the Manipuris, the Meiteis like the Rasleela a dance form which is renowned throughout the world. They are the vaishnavites and the whole culture is woven round the worship of the Lord Krishna.

Before the independence, under the colonial rule, there was no necessity of asserting their political identity but there were movements on their status, we may mention of the congregation of the Manipuris at Tarapur, Silchar on June 12, 1932 to protest against the government order according the tribal status to both the segments of the Manipuris. Yet many of them were represented in local boards and village bodies. Thrown in the new political situation after the independence, their aspiration took a turn and they faced suddenly the question of their own group identity paramount in their hearts. They are now represented in the Legislative Assembly of Assam and Tripura and also in the sphere of the panchayats.

Role of women in the socio political development of the community cannot be ignored as they played vital role in the social consciousness of the community specially in the Bishnupriya Manipuri linguistic movement. They are the economic pillars of the society because their role in cultivation, weaving and Handloom industry is very remarkable. Now they are gradually drawn into the literary and political fields.

No comprehensive research studies in this field were undertaken so far. This research work undertaken by me will enable the scholars of other communities to get a fair idea about
the Bishnupriya Manipuri people. Moreover, this work records all the available historical evidences with sources indicated to enable the scholars in future to deal with the aspects of the community which may be required.

The present research work is confined to the state of Assam and the references of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people living in Tripura and Bangladesh also appeared wherever necessary. This work scan a period of hundred years with the help of field works.

Place: Silchar

Date: May 12, 2008

Probhat Kumar Sinha

(Probhat Kumar Sinha)