CHAPTER - 2
ECONOMIC CONSCIOUSNESS OF
THE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURIS :

2.1. INTRODUCTION:

Economic life is vital to any society. Unless a society is economically stood on their own legs, they cannot survive meaningfully. Economic wellbeing creates a proper atmosphere to look ahead optimistically.

Economic wellbeing releases energy to devote more on the political, social and cultural life of a society. Hence the problem of rural reconstruction at social and cultural level is organically bound up with the problem of eradication of rural poverty. Since economic production is the basic activity of a human society, the mode of production plays the determining role in shaping the social structure, psychology and the ideology of that human society.

Rural society is predominantly based on agriculture. Village agriculture is sharply distinguished from urban industry by the fact that it is based on direct extraction from nature by men. The primitive nature of agriculture, the resultant low level of agricultural production explain the general poverty of the rural people, their hierarchic gradation into a pyramidal system of socio economic groups and their distinct social institutions and cultural flourishing.

Agriculture mainly produces commodities for meeting domestic needs of village population. Village economy is still now agricultural economy which does not go beyond the subsistence level. If a village farmer produces little more than what he needs for consumption at home, he can sell his excess production in a nearby hut, thus earning a small return. His production range is restricted to the domestic expertise which can utilise. He does not have machines to use and he
uses his bare hands to work with. It is his ‘domestic wisdom’ which beautify a small community like the Bishnupriya Manipuri.

The agricultural implements are very simple and these are used elsewhere in a traditional society. The bullock and plough is mainly used. It may be called the plough culture which implies the use of animals (oxen or buffaloes) in agricultural productions. Recently we find a very few among the farmers using tractors, pumping machines and fertilizers but these entrepreneurs among the farmers are very few in a village. Such an entrepreneur is an educated person having some knowledge how to sell the excess production in a market. For such an advanced farmer, the employment of some helping hands might be necessary. He must generate some capital out of his products to get such help. The improved method of production provides opportunity to seek the services of a few persons such as mechanics, fertilizer and machine suppliers as and when necessary. The volume of wealth of the rural community depends primarily on agriculture and it is seen that higher is the technique used, greater are the yields. The principal causes of rural poverty are primitive agricultural techniques, insufficient irrigation system, land fragmentation, uneconomic holdings, over pressure on agriculture and alarming rural indebtedness.

Trade and commerce is another economic activity through which a rural population can see the light of solvency. The trade and commerce is dependent on many extraneous factors. The flow of goods from one ‘production area’ to a less productive needs better road connectivity. Unfortunately, the areas, where the population is mainly concentrated, are ill served by roads forcing the people to travel a distance to get essential things. It is seen that a Bishnupriya Manipuri fellow does not know the technique of trade, big or small. A village being homogenous, a small shopkeeper cannot expect good sales in his shop. An ordinary person in a village, as said earlier, is satisfied with his subsistence level existence. A scrutiny brings a fact
before us, there are three categories of people live in a village, rich, middle income and poor. A rich person is only countable by hand because he has large land holding which he cultivates to his advantage and often employs an outside labourer on contract basis. Moreover he has access to education which fetches him a good job. The middle income group in many villages predominates. The poorer section feels the brunt of the economic strains as they do not have good land holding. The population increase, it is observed, tend to fragment the land holding also. Some have at least the realization that a society can progress speedily because modern world is business oriented. They also understand that some amount of capital is needed to start a business. As they lack in initiative, they also do not know how a loan can be obtained.

Employment, public or private, is another source of economic consciousness or existence. Government is creating opportunities for providing employment to the youth who will avail jobs on the basis of merit. When opportunities for the government jobs are bleak, private companies come forward to provide employment to the educated youth. It is seen that youth prefer private company jobs to government jobs for the higher salary system and other incentives.

2.2 ROLE OF AGRICULTURE:

Economic consciousness of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community, an agro-based community, is not having any other thought except agriculture. This agro-based community accepted agriculture as the main source of livelihood. They reside in villages having paddy fields all around. In early days, people did not prefer service, government and private. A Bishnupriya Manipuri person did not go for work under a village landlord as he thought it to be below his dignity. The independent spirit motivated them to take agriculture as the main source of livelihood.
Generally paddy fields are spread out in fertile areas in which return of agriculture is above the subsistence level. They generally follow the traditional system of cultivation i.e. cultivating a land with a plough pulled by oxen or buffaloes. So the method of cultivation is strenuous as well as unproductive. Male section of this community would plough the field of cultivation and women section would sow paddy plants in the ploughed field. After few months they would collect harvests from the agricultural fields. The collected paddy crops would be left to dry up in the open space under sunlight for two or three days and all dirts are removed from the paddy.

These cleaned crops would be stored in a box made by wood which is known as ‘Barango”. Single cropping or double cropping is practiced by Bishnupriya Manipuri cultivators. Multi-cropping system is yet not practiced by them.

But with the passing of time, fertility of the land comes under the thumb rule of 'law of diminishing return' and production in the field begins to decline. Now a days there are small number of cultivators who are self sufficient and can earn surplus income after maintaining his family. But there are large number of cultivators who cannot maintain their family because of the diminishing production in the field. This problem arises due to many reasons. The primary reason is seasonal occupation. A cultivator is engaged in his profession only for six months of the year and remaining six months, he remains unemployed for which the problem of seasonal unemployment arises. In the off-season period, cultivators remain idle and consider this period as ‘the rest period’. So they consume the accumulated agricultural products without further additions to the stock till the next harvest. This is one of the most important reasons of the economic backwardness of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people. In the village economy, no capital is really formed.
But some cultivators, who are alert, try to do some economic activities during their leisure period. They go to the nearby hills and collect bamboos and dried up grasses to cover roof of the house or for selling purpose or for his domestic use. But this kind of geographical facility is not available in all areas of the Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited valley. It is partly seen in the villages such as Nurkha, Dewali, Nuwagaon, Piplacherra of the Longai forest reserve area of Patharkandi, Karimganj and in some other Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited areas because some hills are located in these areas.

Vegetable and Dal cultivation system were very much prevalent among Bishnupriya Manipuris. After Durga puja, people started cultivation of potato, brinjel, ladies finger and cauli flower etc. They also cultivated various types of dals such as Mashuri dal, Aral dal and Kalai dal etc. But recently this dal cultivation is not found in any Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited area. In earlier times Bishnupriya Manipuri people also produce mustard oil cultivating mustard oil seeds. Most of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people did not purchase mustard oil from market. This was much visible at Nurkha village of the Longai reserve, Patharkandi at Karimganj district of Assam. But it is a matter of regret that the cultivation to produce mustard oil is now not visible among Bishnupriya Manipuris. But all these productions are used for domestic purpose and not for industrial or commercial purpose. So it is observed that Bishnupriya Manipuri people are not able to accept agriculture as the main source of livelihood.

Bishnupriya Manipuri people remained backward agriculturally for various reasons such as overcrowding of people in the agricultural field, lack of irrigation facility, lack of scientific method of cultivation, lack of proper finance by banking institutions and lack of proper scientific information about agricultural implements and seeds.

But recently due to the pressure of population which generated unemployment among the employable youth and also because of the
rapidly expanding worlds of new innovations, the traditional village economy cannot become their only occupation. Some people are, at least, trying to mould the traditional system of cultivation into modern line where profit is the motive. Now a days, power tillers are used in the paddy fields replacing ploughs and bullocks for cultivation. Now, a farmer will need less labour and earn more productions in the field. Only an initial capital investment is necessary. Youth are approaching the government agencies or financial institutions for loan in order to purchase agricultural equipments for scientific cultivation. Now a days, they are thinking for multi-cropping system and co-operative farming in the agricultural field.

Youth have started to cultivate vegetables in big fields and apply all modern methods of cultivation, equipments and fertilizers. They produce various types of vegetables in huge quantity and supply these products to sell in the different markets of the area. By this they want to be self-employed in the modern unemployment days. By this effort, youth try to convert agricultural economy into market economy. This is a good trend in modern days which are found among the youth of this community. Harendra Sinha of Betubari, Ningthou Sinha of Nurkha, Milan Sinha of Sonapur, Akshway Sinha, Anil Sinha, Swapan Sinha of East Krishnanagar and others are very sincere about this commercial cultivation. Bishnupriya Manipuri farmers also cultivate sugarcane in agricultural field and produce 'gur' (unrefined sugar product), which is used for domestic and business purposes. The Bishnupriya Manipuris of the Dullovcherra area of the Karimganj district practiced this cultivation. But now this type of cultivation (sugar cane production) is not found universally among the Bishnupriya Manipuri society. Recently Bishnupriya Manipuri youth have started on their own, pisciculture, it is a new innovation. Educated youth are digging ponds for fish cultivation which is mainly done for business purpose. The pisciculture has become popular in Patharkandi area of Karimganj district.
2.3 ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT:

Employment, public or private, is another vital support of economic existence of Bishnupriya Manipuris. About 16% of the total population depends on government service or private service for their means of livelihood. They were very conservative in religious affairs for which during pre-independence period they never preferred to serve under the British government practicing Christian religion. Instead of this very few countable Bishnupriya Manipuri people opted government service under the British government. Besides these, they procure sufficient amount of paddy crops for which they did not feel the necessity of having government service. Moreover at that time most of them are uneducated because of lack of educational institutions in their areas.

But after attaining independence, conservative attitude of the Bishnupriya Manipuris is removed and most of them became educated due to the establishment of the educational institutions in the areas densely inhabited by Bishnupriya Manipuris. Though they opted government service as their source of income yet they preferred mainly to serve as a teacher and soldier because of their moral and patriotic character.

It must be mentioned that in the very beginning Bishnupriya Manipuri youth did not join in military service due to their conservative attitude. It is a fact that military men will take meat which is prohibited in this community. But when people of this community became extremely poor due to the inundation of their cultivated lands by flood regularly, then youth of the families facing acute economic crisis, joined in the military service as soldier without the consent of their guardians. As a result families of military men improved their economic conditions seeing which poor guardians allowed their youth to join in
this service. Now it is seen that number of military men in this community are increasing day by day.

In pre-independent India, very few Bishnupriya Manipuri people served under the British government. Tanubabu Sinha of Patarkandi, first graduate of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community securing first class first position in Sanskrit Honours in 1902 from the Calcutta University, became superintendent of the central excise department, government of India³.

Mohendra Kumar Sinha of Patarkandi, second graduate of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community also served as a teacher of a High School in Manipur.Nilmani Sinha and Sena Sinha of Narsingpur also served as a teacher in the High Schools. Haridas Sinha of Mashughat was also a government officer under the British government.

Gojendra Kumar Sinha of Nurkha also served as the Forest Beat Officer at Nagaland during the pre-independence period. Later on he founded Lal Tin Bool Bidya Mandir Middle English school in this area and served as the head master of this school. Samarendra Sinha of Patarkandi, son of Tanubabu Sinha, also started his career as the Head master of a Model High School, Patarkandi, Samarjit Sinha, another son of Tanubabu Sinha, who started his career as a judge of the sub-divisional court, retired as the judge of the High Court of Guwahati, Assam.Maipak Sadhu also served as a graduate teacher in Borkhola Higher Secondary School, Borkhola.

Reputed educationists like Jagat Mohan Sinha, Golapbabu Sinha, Kameswar Sinha, and Nitya Gopal Rajkumar etc. also served as a teacher earning reputation in the Barak valley.

After independence, Bishnupriya Manipuri people got opportunities to be educated and even highly educated due to the
establishment of the schools and colleges in different areas and towns of the Barak valley of Assam.

Many people of this community have become highly educated and are serving as teachers of the different colleges and universities. Among them Kaliprasad Sinha, retired professor of Assam University, Bimal Sinha, Birendra Sinha, Nishi Ranjan Sinha of Gurucharan College, Silchar, Namadeb Sinha of Government college, Halflong, Manoranjan Sinha of Lala Rural College, LalaBazar, Brojendra Kumar Sinha, Barun Kumar Sinha of Shrikishan Sarda College, Hailakandi, Shyam Charan Sinha of St. Anthony College, Shillong, Kukil Sena Sinha of Ladycane College, Shillong, Kamini Sinha of Guwahati Commerce College, Guwahati, etc. are remarkable. Besides them some youth like Smriti Kumar Sinha of Tezpur University, Probhat Kumar Sinha of Radha Madhab College, Silchar, Gopa Sinha of Gurucharan College, Silchar and Joybabu Sinha of Diphu government College, Diphu, are serving with reputation in their respective institutions.

In Medical Colleges of Assam some Bishnupriya Manipuri fellows like Dr. Anil Sinha, Dr. Anita Sinha, Dr. Deben Sinha and Dr. Debabrota Sinha have earned reputation in their respective medical colleges.

Bishnupriya Manipuri fellows like Dr. Ashok Sinha, Dr. Nridul Sinha, and Dr. Ajit Sinha etc. are serving in different engineering colleges of Assam.

Many educated people of this community also occupied important positions in various offices of the central government of India and Assam government. Among them Ranjit Sinha, Director, Indian Council of Social Science Research, Chandrakanta Sinha, Retd Indian Revenue Service, Manindra Kumar Sinha, Retd Indian Forest Service, Gopendra Kumar Sinha, Retd Assam Civil Service, Manisena Sinha,
Retd Assam Police Service, and Rabindra Kumar Sinha, Retd Addl. Chief Engineer, Assam State Electricity Board, etc. are remarkable.

Besides government jobs many Bishnupriya Manipuri fellows have chosen the legal profession. Among them Sri Krishna Sinha, Bhimsen Sinha and Bishwadeb Sinha etc. are advocates of the Guwahati High Court, Assam. Moreover many youth are now practising this profession in various judicial courts of Assam.

Now due to the unemployment problem in the government institutions and influence of privatization in this global world. Bishnupriya Manipuri youth have chosen employment in reputed private companies of the country and world. Many talented engineering graduates and highly educated youth, prefer to serve in the private companies to government offices due to lucrative financial benefits depending upon their efficiency in the jobs. This is a good trend visible in this society to uplift their economic conditions and realise their economic existence in comparison to other communities of the country.

2.4 ROLE OF BUSINESS:

Due to the low productivity of agriculture and over crowding in agriculture and lack of employment opportunities in the government institutions, Bishnupriya Manipuri people became compelled to pay their attention for starting business in order to be self employed. In earlier times Bishnupriya Manipuris were never inclined to do business which is purely a new economic profession among them. Business requires hard labour and sound finance which are generally not available among Bishnupriya Manipuris. But due to the pressure of earning they are bound to start business.

Bishnupriya Manipuri youth first started to dig fisheries in their locality. It is advantageous to dig a fishery in hilly areas with less
finance. This trend is visible among the Bishnupriya Manipuri youth of the Longai Reserve of Patharkandi. They also feel the necessity of loan in order to continue this business smoothly and began to apply to the various financial institutions for availing loans.

Some Bishnupriya Manipuri people also start another type of business in buying and selling of paddy crops. They purchase paddy crops and other agricultural products from the villages in fewer prices and sell these commodities in the market with high price after few months earning profit. This was visible in the village Nurkha of the Karimganj district. Haricharan Sinha and Pratap Sinha earned a lot of money from this business.

Nowadays it is seen that in every Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited area shops of different commodities have been started by the youth who are earning money by this business. Many youth have come out successful in this business. Ranjit Sinha of Bidyanagar, Bijoy Sinha of Bhakatpur and Bidhan Sarma of Singari etc. are successful in the business and earn reputation in this profession. Pradip Sinha of Kachubari runs his business smoothly at Tarun Nagar, Guwahati. Many educated youth have now started business of purchasing and selling used cars and also extend loans provided by financial institutions to purchase cars. Mrinmoy Sinha, who was born and brought up in Guwahati, is doing this business successfully by opening an office cum show room at Rajgarh, Guwahati which is renowned as Brahmaputra Motors and Computech. It has also branch office in various district headquarters of Assam. But most of the youth are struggling hard to continue their business. It is also seen that many youth have closed their shops because of the ignorance of business techniques for which they should be well motivated and well aware about the management of a business. So they should arrange different business workshops inviting established businessmen of different communities in order to be trained in the line of business. Here
reference is given regarding the Bishnupriya Manipuri people of Bangladesh. They are well motivated in business and become successful in this profession. They produce many agricultural products for business purpose.

Self-Help Group Scheme is offered by the government for providing self-employment opportunities to the youth in the present unemployment period. Bishnupriya Manipuri youth are advancing to form self-help group in order to create employment opportunities among them. They are also maintaining close liaison with the rural development government officials in order to avail government facilities in this respect.

Recently educated youth are now turning towards another educated business i.e. agencies of financial institutions such as Life Insurance Corporation of India, the Peerless Finance and General Investment Limited and M/S Sahara India Paribar etc. Many educated youth are committed to run Life Insurance Corporation of India agency business and visit door to door in order to motivate people to insure their lives by a policy. This will benefit to both agents and policy holders who will contribute to the economic development of the society. For their goodwill in this business some agents have been promoted to the rank of the Development Officers. Among them Raj Kumar Sinha of Dharam, is well established Development Officer of Life Insurance Corporation of India and under his supervision many educated Bishnupriya Manipuri youth are running their business successfully. On the other hand ordinary people of rural areas now can realise the usefulness of the Life Insurance policy in the present days. Thus Life Insurance Corporation agents are now self-employed earning a good amount of money monthly or annually.

Among the Life Insurance Corporation of India agents Kartiksen Sinha of West Dewali of Longai Reserve, Patharkandi
earned glory in this business and now stands fourth among the Life Insurance Corporation agents in North Eastern region. He is earning near about Rs. 80 lakhs per month and investing money in different industries of this region. Gautam Sinha of Patharkandi, Joy Kumar Sinha of Betubari are shining in their profession. Similarly youth of this society have also taken agencies of Private Insurance Companies such as Tata Insurance Corporation Limited and Bajaj Insurance Corporation Limited respectively.

The Peerless Finance and General Investment Limited is another financial institution, which provides employment opportunities to the educated youth of the society when government is failed to provide employment opportunities to them. Bishnupriya Manipuri educated youth availed this opportunity by taking agencies of peerless institution. These youth roam from village to village and convince the people to invest in this institution for the financial security of themselves and their family members. Now these agents have become successful in their mission and earn a good amount of money from this business. On the other hand policyholders have been benefited by these welfare schemes of peerless agency.

M/S Sahara India Paribar is another glorious financial institution of the country, which conducts a large amount of financial business in the country. Bishnupriya Manipuri youth also joined in this company as its agents and devoted themselves fully in their profession. As a result they have become successful to fulfill annual target given by Sahara India motivating the people to undertake the policy of peerless and are free from tension of availing government jobs due to the opportunity of earning a sufficient amount of money. They are able to motivate common people regarding the necessity of investing their surplus money in this institution for which agents and society are benefited economically.
Besides these, nowadays network business i.e. chain system of money has become another economic profession of the youth. According to this system money can be earned by their participation on the basis of their business transaction with the investment of the small amount of money. It is observed that many educated youth of all communities including Bishnupriya Manipuris are moving at fast speed in order to gear up their business.

Recently many educated youth have started a new business i.e. career guidance for admission in various technical, medical and other professional institutions of the country. Rajkumar Chandrakanta Sinha who originally belong to Bikrampur of Cachar district, now settled in Guwahati, has taken initiative in this business.

2.5 ROLE OF INDUSTRY

Recently Bishnupriya Manipuri people are paying their attention to start industry-cottage and small scale industry in various areas in order to be self employed and create employment opportunities for the youth.

Binoy Sinha of Kabuganj of Silchar is an engineering graduate (B. Tech) and was not interested to be employed under the government or any private company. He decided to start an industry in order to be self employed and economically independent. He decided to do welfare of the society by giving scopes of employment to educated youth in his company. Accordingly he started a glass company on April 12, 2004 known as "The Bishnupriya Glass Manufacturing Ltd." The Head Office of the company is located at Kabuganj and this company established a manufacturing factory at Srikona in an area of one hundred bighas. To manage this factory there is a board of Directors.

Chairman : Binoy Kumar Sinha
The main product is plain glass and bottle and production target per day is one hundred quintal. Its market is not only confined to North East India but also the markets of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. It will supply plain glass to automobile industries to produce industrial glass. It is the only manufacturing glass industry in the North East India. Statical registration for this company was done so that no substitute industry in this line can be started in this locality. In case of opening an industry with this mission within this period in this locality it has to maintain liaison with this industry.

This company has started share business in the North Eastern markets in 2004 and the value of each share is Rs. 20. Production of this factory started from 2007 in full swing.

Bishnupriya Manipuri women are not lagging behind in every aspect of life including business. Nandita Sinha of Bekirpar, Kabuganj, Silchar is the glorious example and is now a successful industrialist of this community. When Nandita Sinha was a student of M.B.A., she did not waste her valuable time and started a technology company known as “Devises Private Company Limited” in Mumbai which earned reputation in the video conferencing technology. In 2005 this company is rewarded as the best reseller in Asian Pacific Region by the greatest video conferencing technology ‘Polican’ located in the U.S.A. At present in her company business of amount of Rs. 200 crore is going on.
Very recently she has started another industry known as “Tea Enterprise” whose main function is to produce feature, documentary and corporate film. She invested Rs. 70 crores from her company in order to produce films. She wants to expand the business area of her company in the country and the headquarter of the company is located at New Delhi. She wants to produce film in Assamese, Bengali and other languages so that people of North Eastern Region will get facilities. Her future plan is to create another speciality in the Bollywood World. Through the production of digital cinema and to help new comers in this business world as a successful industrialist she wants to advance forward in the business world.

Kartik Sena Sinha of West Dewali of Longai Reserve, Patharkandi is also successful industrialist of this community. In his boyhood he was very poor for which he shifted to Guwahati for earning something. After spending few years in Guwahati, he proceeded to Itanagar, capital of Arunachal Pradesh to do business. At that moment he got association of a businessman by the inspiration of whom he became an agent of the Life Insurance Corporation of India and earned huge amount of money. Then he started international business. He opened hotel in Guwahati for business. He also purchased many tea gardens and created employment opportunities for the youth.

Promod Ch. Sinha of Katigorah founded a village Industry known as “Katigorah Gram Unnayan Parishad” at Katigorah in 1978-79 for the rural development of the Katigorah area. This organisation was registered under the Societies Registration Act in 1979 vide Registration No. 592. This organisation is sponsored by K.V.I.C. (Khadi and Village Industries Commission) and is producing clothes, laisanghbi, agarbati, cane furniture and jute products.
It is managed by an executive body consisting of 11 members out of whom two must be female members. Chief functionary and secretary of this organisation is Promod Ch. Sinha. One accepted principle of this organisation is that every member of the executive body must wear khadi clothes. It extended its units at Kalinagar and Goomra of Cachar district.  

It conducts training in various trades and women are getting more opportunities to be well trained in order to be self-employed. Exhibition cum sale on produced commodities of this non-governmental organisation is done regularly in various expos. This non-governmental organisation participated in Central Khadi Village Industries Exhibition which was held in 2004 in the engineering field at Chandmari, Guwahati. It also participated in Central Khadi Village Industries Exhibition which was arranged in Mumbai world trade centre in 2004.

This non-governmental organisation is also registered under F.C.R.A. (Foreign Code and Regulation Act) bearing No. 02072001 I 1976.

In 1987 it adopted grannies scheme which was introduced in this area by Helpage international, U.K. Initially 30 old people above 60 years of age is properly nourished by this organisation. Now 59 old people are enjoying pension provided by this organisation. Most probably this is the only non-governmental organisation of Assam getting this advantage.

This organisation is trying at its best for the development of self help groups including that of women. Now total number of self help groups under this non – governmental organisation is 56. This organisation introduced solar energy scheme first in Barak valley at Dudhpur of West Silchar, Nabashantipur of Hailakandi and three villages such as Kandigram, inhabited by Muslim fishermen. Narapali
village under Labourputa gaon panchayat and Japda, inhabited by scheduled caste people under Katigorah where there is no electricity at all. Now this scheme will be extended to three tribal villages under Kalain development block, Cachar. In the year 2005 under Kalain development block this non-governmental organisation has established ten bio-gas plants along with a bio-fertilizer unit.

In 1978, the secretary of this non governmental organisation was awarded by Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Award for his contribution in the rural development.

2.6 ROLE OF CO-OPERATIVE:

Village co-operatives have always been an integral part of every rural development programmes and are playing a significant role at every stage of rural development. Long before the initiation of community development programme, the co-operative credit movement was started by government at the beginning of this century to save the poor farmers from the evils and mal practices of moneylenders. The Co-operative Credit Societies Act was adopted in 1904 as a measure of administrative strategy to provide cheaper agricultural credit to the peasant farmers. Proper godown facilities are must for the supply of agricultural inputs for which a massive programme of construction of rural godown in every rural panchayat was launched. In every state the work of distribution of essential commodities in rural area was entrusted to co-operatives. Village co-operatives were the procurement agents for the Food Corporation of India.

The most important advantage in utilizing co-operative for Integrated Rural Development Programme is that co-operatives are in a better position to enlist peoples participation which is a time tested pre-requisite for the success of any rural development programme. For this reason the functions and area of operation of the Village Co-
operative Society have been considerably increased. It is advancing loans, distributing bulk of fertilizers, making available essential consumer goods, and providing training on marketing business at a number of places.

Village co-operative system is playing a vital role in the economic development of the Bishnupriya Manipuris. This society has firm faith on this system in agriculture. Ploughing of agricultural land is also done by a group of cultivators on the basis of rotation which is a co-operative system. This co-operative system is known as “Bala system” which is visible in every agricultural village of the Bishnupriya Manipuri society.

In the next phase of cultivation i.e., in paddy cutting and cleaning crops, group system on rotation basis is prevalent so that every one will enjoy the benefit of this system.

Co-operative system among Bishnupriya Manipuris is prevalent at the time of the death of a member of any family. People of that area will contribute a fixed amount of money on the basis of the principle of equality and collected money will be handed to the head of the bereaved family in order to meet the partial expenditure incurred in the ceremonies of the death fellow. This system is known as “Sheldang system.”

In rural areas co-operative system was also prevalent at the time of the construction of the roof of a house on rotation basis. The owner of the house will be assisted in the construction of the roof by the villagers for which the owner of the house will not employ any wage labour. This proves their simplicity and develops the spirit of mutual help and co-operation, which are very essential for the establishment of a sound economic society. But it is a matter of regret that these systems are going to be abolished from this society.
Co-operative system is also prevailing at the time of great occasions like marriage and Durga puja etc. At the time of the marriage of a boy, the parents of the bride will invite all villagers, known men and relatives who will help him by giving an amount of money according to their capacity. Thus he is helped financially by others in co-operative way. Similarly parents of the groom will invite all his villagers, known men and relatives who will help the host giving valuable presentation and money to the groom. In this way the guardian of the groom will be helped by others in co-operative way. This co-operative system is known as “Porleng System”.

At the time of great occasions like Durga Puja, people arranging Durga Puja will be assisted financially by his villagers and relatives. As a result a poor people can arrange such type of occasions for this co-operative spirit.

Another co-operative system was prevalent among Bishnupriya Manipuri people for 30 days at the time of “Kartikar Pali” in the month of Kartik (in the month of October-November) and 9 days at the time of “Khechuri Pali” in the month of Ashar (in the month of July) in every year which are observed collectively by groups on the basis of rotation. Kartikar pali starts from the day of Lakshmi Purnima followed by Durga puja and continues uptil the day of the Raspurnima. During this pali, few people of the village collectively offer rice in the temple at the day time and fried grain at the night time. Invitation for the daytime will be selected whereas in the night any people can attend without any invitation. At night all villagers will attend in the community Hall of the village temple and will hear the events of the great epics “Mahabharata” which will be explained by the pandits before the gathering. After then fried grains and fruits will be distributed among all who attended in the community Hall.
At the khechurir Pali hotchpotch are offered collectively which will be distributed among the gathered people after performing cultural dances like Joydeb by men and Khupak Ishei by women. Economy is maintained in these two occasions by spending money on necessary things collectively on group basis.

Some renowned Bishnupriya Manipuri people also managed co-operative societies on individual effort. Gojendra Kumar Sinha of Nurkha just after attaining independence, had managed a co-operative society named as “Longai Co-operative Society” at Khagra Bazar of Patharkandi, Karimganj district and supplied essential commodities to the people of that area at the cheap rate\(^\text{11}\). Surendra Sinha of Dharam, Silchar also formed co-operative society in his locality to provide basic facilities to the people of the rural area. Sukumar Sinha of Lowairpoa also managed a co-operative society in his locality just after attaining independence and supplied essential goods to the common people at the cheap rate\(^\text{12}\). But due to the lack of awareness among the people and the absence of proper control, the co-operative societies run by Gojendra Kumar Sinha, Surendra Sinha and Sukumar Sinha could not see much success and soon went out of circulation.

But recently Bishnupriya Manipuri youth are trying to run co-operative societies smoothly in order to enhance the financial stability of the rural people and also to provide loan to the villagers to fulfill their basic needs. Shanta Babu Sinha of Dharam, Silchar has cited the example in this time forming a co-operative bank in the name of Surendra Memorial Co-operative Trust.

The Surendra Memorial Co-operative Trust was founded on Oct 10, 1999. Its function started on January 1, 2001. The initiative to establish this co-operative trust was taken by Hemanta Sinha, Rathindra Sinha, Santa Sinha, Joy Kumar Sinha, Brinda Rani Sinha,
Chairman of this Trust is Shanta Sinha. Aims and objectives of this bank are-

i. To adopt the principle of co-operative system for the socio-economic upliftment.

ii. To develop the spirit of self-help among the members.

iii. To create self-employment opportunities.

iv. To create consciousness for doing minimum expenditure in every social occasion.

v. To meet financial needs of the members and

vi. To develop sense of co-existence and co-operation.

The Head office of this organisation is Kachudharam, Chencooree. The jurisdiction of the function of this organisation is Cachar district.

It has an executive body consisting of the chairman, secretary and 15 other members. Selection of the members of the executive body is annual and it depends upon the amount of subscription and opinion of the general members of the trust. Besides them there are certain ex-officio members and seven right holders group in this body. There are also 400 general members of this trust.

A minimum subscription of Rs. 50/- per month is paid to the Trust by a member and a person may pay more as a subscription fee by the multiple of Rs. 50/- subject to the maximum payment of Rs.
300/-. A person may take loan from this Trust when required. The Trust formed in October, 1999 has already acquired a capital of Rs 3,00,000 and the people of Chencooree and Kachudharam are benefitted by the establishment of the Trust.

This trust has come into existence for the following reasons:-

i. Inducing the habit of saving in order to prevent financial aid.

ii. Preventing to take loans from other financial institutions with high interest.

iii. Providing the facility of loan from this institution.

iv. Distributing profit among the members including loans as dividends.

v. Helping the poor people for developing the capacity of saving and taking loans with less interest.

vi. Preventing economic exploitation over the ordinary people from the money lenders or the village Zamindars.

Financial transactions of this trust was carried on through the Assam Co-operative Apex Bank.

There are three categories of members (I) General (2) Permanent (3) Right holders group.

General members can withdraw their membership after six years.

General members will be promoted to the permanent members by application if they desire.
Permanent members can become Right holders group who are the parts of the management groups. The remaining part of the management will be carried by the executive body including the chairman. Approval of the Right holders group is necessary for opting loan.

For the financial cleanness Right holders group are bound to audit all collections permanently. If they are not doing their duties, 50% of their incentives will be deducted. This is very essential for the security of the deposited amounts. Accounting and Auditing of the financial transactions must be carried by the executive body after every three months.

Another notable example of this trend is found in the village Patiala of Dullovcherra area where a co-operative private Bank was established with the initiative of Haripada Sinha. This bank is well managed by the board and provides loans to the people at the low rate of interest.

2.7 ROLE OF WOMEN:

Economic consciousness of women is very essential for the development of any society because it helps to a great extent to remove poverty from that society. Women’s participation in income generating activities would increase their status and decision making power. If an woman is economically parasite, she can never claim an equal status with man. The problem of poverty cannot be removed without providing opportunities of productive employment to women and without economic consciousness of women.

Bishnupriya Manipuri women are playing an important role in the economic development of their community. They are very much laborious in nature and supporting men in the economic existence of the society. Bishnupriya Manipuri community is mainly based on
agriculture for their economic existence. In the process of cultivation women become active partner of men at the time of sowing, reaping, collecting and sorting of paddy crops. Moreover women earn cash money sowing and harvesting the crops of other in addition to her own family works in connection with the cultivation of their own land\textsuperscript{14}. By this earning they fully support the head of the family to run a family smoothly. Poor Bishnupriya Manipuri women can earn money by husking the grain of others.

For the development of education in their society, they partly finance to their brothers, sons, daughters to get education in the school level, college level and university level by their hard earned money. Even many Bishnupriya Manipuri women sacrificed their lives for the sake of education of their close relatives.

Bishnupriya Manipuri women are very much well known in society due to their expertise in weaving clothes such as ghamsa, bedsheet, bed cloth and dress of ladies which are necessary in daily life. By this handiwork they are involved in business indirectly preventing to purchase these necessary clothes and saving money of this community. They also do business directly selling their woven clothes to the people of other communities and earn a lot of money.

Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahila Samiti known as Nari Kalyan Samiti under the leadership of Chandana Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar also opened a stall of the Bishnupriya Manipuri clothes for sale in Gandhi Mela. Promodini Sarma of Singari, Patharkandi had run a weaving centre under the supervision of Singari Mahila Samiti. She converted this weaving centre into commercialised industry because she opened a stall of the Bishunupriya Manipuri clothes for sale in the Gandhi Mela, Silchar from 1986 to 1988. Labourious women earn money as wages by weaving clothes of others without wasting their valuable time. They also weave various designs of clothes with artistic
works without which marriage, shraddha and other social ceremonies cannot be performed. Madhabi Sinha of Singari, Silchar, propagated the idea of weaving technology of the Manipuri clothes among the ladies of other communities. She gave free training to the poor women. Aloka Sinha of Kachubari, Patharkandi, opened an weaving centre in her village which gives training to the young girls in weaving different types of clothes.

But with the influence of globalisation, fashion designing has entered into the weaving industry. Many of them try to produce clothes in modern and fashionable style in order to attract others to purchase their designed clothes. Recently they use muga for weaving the clothes of women for which the dress of the Bishnuprua Manipuri women in social gathering has become attractive. For example “Anubhav India” is an weaving industry run by Usha Sinha of Ashram road, Silchar. Its main aim is to improve quality of Manipuri Handloom clothes which is woven in modern style. It produces 35 items such as gamcha (towel), bed sheet, bed cover, gents’ shirt pieces, Inafi and chakchabi made by muga etc. Its special items are mugas chakchabi and Inafi which are woven in modern style. This organisation also supplies various designs of Manipuri clothes to the Assam Government Marketing Corporation for sale.

Handicrafts or Handiworks of Bishnupriya Manipuri women are also attractive. Bishnupriya Manipuri women do some artistic works on a particular cloth known as ‘Chakchabi” and make the clothes lucrative. It is the pride of this community that Bishnupriya Manipuri women weave their dresses which exhibit their identity, this is the sign of awareness and efforts in self reliance.15.

With the spread of modernity nowadays, the Bishnupriya Manipuri women purchased sewing machines for woolen clothes and produce various designs of woolen clothes for personal uses and also
for business purposes. They earn a lot of money selling these types of clothes and many of them are now self-employed. Aruna Sinha of the village Nurkha do this business and earns a lot of money.

Bishnupriya Manipuri women practise “adhi system” in khadi cloth weaving. The word ‘adhi’ means the half of the product. The fact is that, some parganas are located near tribal areas and some sort of barter system prevail there. The Bishnupriya Manipuri women need raw cotton for weaving clothes and a tribal woman brings cotton to a Bishnupriya Manipuri house. A lady in the Bishnupriya Manipuri house knows how to make a reel of fine thread out of raw cotton. A tribal woman needs these reels for weaving khadi clothes. A tribal woman is also adept in cloth making and they need more threads which they obtain from the Bishnupriya Manipuri houses. Hence the mutual needs are met through exchanges. They decide among themselves, how much raw cotton is to be obtained in exchange of reels given to the tribal person. The Bishnupriya Manipuri women weave bed sheets, covers, scarfs and some other types of clothes they wear. Some tribes live in the vicinity of the Bishnupriya Manipuris in the district of Karimganj, produce raw cotton, a portion of which they exchange with the Bishnupriya Manipuri women who produce clothes at their looms. Women of Longai Reserve area of Karimganj have such economic exchanges with the tribal women for a long time and there is some sort of inter dependence. In this belt, the tribes are closely related to their kins in the state of Tripura. It is observed that, before the arrival of the typical urban cultures, the tribals and the Bishnupriya people had a relationship through such cloth making. So the profession of weaving pursued by women of the community is a remarkable occupation and some are sincerely trying to make it commercially viable by taking it beyond the four walls of the house.

Bishnupriya Manipuri women imbibed the Gandhian spirit because long before the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, they used spinning
wheel i.e. ‘Charkha’ for weaving cotton clothes such as Katalurir(cotton) chaddar, Katalurir bed sheet and dhuti which are essential in winter period. Mahandas Karamchand Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru during their visit to the Bishnupriya Manipuri inhabited areas in Bhanubeel, now in Bangladesh, had seen the spinning wheels or charkhas and weaving mechanism used by the Bishnupriya Manipuris and appreciated them and called them true ‘swadeshis’. Women of this community want to be self sufficient and there is a spiritual attachment to weaving and they are doing this practice long before the advent of Mahatma Gandhi. They produce angaluri (cloth for the lower portion), chakchabi (a wear for lower portion of the body and it is worn ceremonially) and Inafi (for the upper portion of the body) etc. This swadeshi spirit of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women was also inspired by the great social reformer Gokulananda Geetiswami who exhorted this custom among the Bishnupriya Manipuri women and wanted its continuation.

Barik pushak lana akhan amare hika dhila
Amar baksi futi uta tangi pidhiya ahila.
Dekhiya kana Manipuri dekhiya dekhiya na dekhla.
Bujhan dite buj na loila takkariya ureila.

It means that this fine tradition of the Bishnupriya Manipuris is forgotten now and they are now imitating others and wear clothes purchased from markets.

Another economic activity of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women is dress making. They make dresses (for gopis and gopals) for cultural functions like Rasleela and Rakhal Ras which are popular in the community. On those occasions, these dresses are hired. These dresses are finely knitted and require much time for making it. They earn a lot of money from these dresses when these are given on rent in festive occasions. Women members of the family of Sachitra Sinha
of Chamtilla, family of Gambhir Singha of Rajargoan and family of Pichika Sinha of Kalinjar, are doing this business for money.

Co-operative system to become self sufficient economically was prevalent among them from the ancient time when they did not seek any employment in government offices. The cooperative banks give loans on application and any lady who wants to do business on weaving may get loans. According to this system some women will form a co-operative group and money in cash or kind will be collected by the members of this group on rotation basis so that each and every member of the group will get an equal amount of money in time. By this collected money they will purchase essential commodities and clothes without depending upon the head of the family. They also help the head of the family in case of any economic crisis. Sometimes members of this co-operative society donate some amount of money from their fund for the development of their village.

The habit of saving is generated through Co-operative banks and money is given to a farmer at the time of reaping and cutting harvests for which wage labourers are not employed. The reaping and harvesting are thought to be joyous occasions where there is lot of merry making and songs are sung to enliven the atmosphere.

Co-operative banking also helps women for starting weaving in a family and a lady seeks loan from the bank for this purpose. They often engage some helping hands for this purpose. The cooperative bank among the Bishnupriya Manipuris is grown indigenously and the persons in distress are assisted by the bank.

Sources from which they can get funds are not too many and some ladies save money from selling clothes and at the time of necessity, they use that saving. Similarly, they save some rice every day and use it when rice is not available otherwise. The money which a lady saves is called "Aatar Musti System"
In the village areas, the houses are made of bamboo, all the poles in the house are of bamboo and a pole is round shaped. The careful housewives make a hole cutting on the bamboo pole and keep in that hole the money they save. It is called “Chung system”.

With the change of time, many women went to schools and colleges and some serve in offices also. Many of them who are suitably employed are solvent and there is obvious sign of neglect of the traditional handicraft, which was with them for many centuries. They move to towns along with their husbands and are now economically self supportive.

It is also observed that many ladies of this community have started Music Schools, Fine Arts School and Doll Making Schools in different areas which help to solve the unemployment problem partially. Kamala Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar is running Sagar Kala Niketan which conducts diploma course in Fine Arts. Anita Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar is running Saraswati Kala Academy from 2001 which is affiliated to Bangiya Sangeet Kalakendra, Calcutta. This institution conducts diploma course and degree course. Shanti Sinha of Bekirpar, Kabuganj is also managing Ashwini Kala Academy in Narsingpur area of Cachar district. Anima Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar is now running Kshetromohan Sinha Music College. Many ladies of this community take doll making as a profession to earn money. They are also expert in this profession. Some educated ladies chose this profession as a career of life. For example Gita Sinha of Vivekananda Road, instructor of Normal School, Silchar can make dolls by abandoned materials.

Another economic contribution of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women is their new trend to start mass media business like cable network and publication of news papers. Entrepreneurs of this business earn profit and give opportunities of employment to the
educated youth in addition to enlighten the society. Sandhya Banerjee of Silchar is pioneer among Bishnupriya Manipuris to start a cable network known as “Khash Khabar” which is one of the oldest cable network at Silchar. Sandhya Rani Sinha of Silchar is also publishing a monthly magazine known as Nuwa Ela which is very popular in this society. Anjana Sinha who was born and brought up at Dullovcherra of Karimganj district is also publishing a fortnightly bilingual magazine (Assamese and Bishnupriya Manipuri) known as “Nuwa Dristi” published from Guwahati. “Hridir Pou” edited by Manashi Sinha and published by Amogh Monjooree annually is also remarkable. This magazine is going to be published quarterly.

In the present age of globalisation along with other communities of India entrepreneurial motivation is developed among Bishnupriya Manipuri women. Entrepreneurship requires four qualities such as risk taking, behavioural achievement, motivation and mobility and adjustment with other people. Bishnupriya Manipuri women have to possess these qualities in order to enter the business world to become self employed and self-sufficient. Bishnupriya Manipuri women are trying to run industry and many of them are successful in this mission. Here we may cite the example of Nandita Sinha, Bekirpar, Kabuganj about whom discussion is made.

Now a days under the present rural development schemes, opportunity of formation of self-help groups are given for the economic development of the society. Unemployed youth and women are well informed about this scheme and formed many self-help groups in rural areas and urban areas. A large number of self-help groups are formed in different areas inhabited by Bishnupriya Manipuri people. As a result, they are trying to become self-dependent and self-sufficient economically. So they have become able to uplift the economic condition of themselves and also the whole society. Short history of the few self-help groups is given below –
A self-help group was formed in the village Chencooree in 2004 and the President and the Secretary of this self-help group are Fula Rani Sinha and Anjana Sinha respectively. This group offers loans to the needy people from its own fund and participated in the Handloom Exhibition organised by district Administration, Cachar in 2006.

Another self-help group was formed at Chencooree in 2005 and the name of this self-help group was “Chencooree Bhutan Tila”. The President and the Secretary of this group are Namita Sinha and Anita Mukherjee of the same village respectively. This group is registered under Tapang block of Hailakandi district.

Another self-help group in the name of “Bhagyabati self-help group” was formed in January 2005 and the President and the Secretary of this self-help group are Lehaunu Sinha and Swapna Sinha of Chencooree respectively. This group also provides loan to the needy people of this area.

Indurekha Sinha of Katabari is now the President of the Joint Forest Management Committee of Baithakhal, which was founded in 2004 under the Forest department scheme of the government of Assam and registered under memo no SAC/Karimganj/22 dated 7/12/04. This committee was formed in order to preserve environment through the plantation of forest and undertaking various developmental schemes such as supply of water, establishment of Community Halls, development of the roads of the village and allocation of Indira Abash Yojna. This committee is working under the guidance of thirty-two departments of the Central government and Assam government. This committee is managed by the managing committee of 9 executive members.

Another economic profession of the Bishnupriya Manipuri women is to work as an agent of the financial institutions such as Life Insurance Corporation of India, The Peerless Finance and General
Investment Limited, M/S Sahara India Paribar, Tata Life Insurance, Bazaz Alliance, Free India Concept and other network business. It is noticed that ladies can motivate people to invest money in these financial institutions. As a result they have become successful in their profession and contribute for the economic development of the society. Mono Sinha of Vivekananda Road, Silchar is earning reputation in this field.

Another new trend of economic business is carried by the educated ladies through the establishment of the educational institutions to be managed in private way in order to become self-employed. This effort of Bishnupriya Manipuri women creates many employment opportunities for the educated unemployed youth of the society. Sukhojyoti Sinha, who was born and brought up at Patharkandi of the Karimganj district, now settled at Guwahati, established an educational institution at Tarun Nagar, Guwahati employing a few youth in this institution.

Another new trend of economic business run by Bishnupriya Manipuri women is the management of the girls' hostel in Guwahati and other cities of India. They are earning their livelihood by this profession. For example Jaya Sinha of New Bhakatpur, Silchar is managing a girls' hostel at Rajgarh, Guwahati.

Women organisations are contributing a lot in the economic development of the society. These organisations are taking joint venture in economic side so that it can provide employment opportunities for the women in order to earn money for their self-sufficiency. These organisations are seriously pondering over the economic development of themselves as well as for the development of the society.

It is worthily mentioned that Bishnupriya Manipuri women are conscious of their own prestige while earning money by economic
activities. For that reason they never do any business in open market by the establishment of the business shops because many customers may deal with the lady shop owners in impolite way. For example once Gokulananda Geetiswani, social reformer, noticed that one Manipuri women shopkeeper was ill treated by a customer. From that day, he sent the message for the community through a song prohibiting Bishnupriya Manipuri women to act as a shopkeepers in the open market.  

It is a general observation that women in both the parts of Manipuri people, the Bishnupriya and the Meitei, are assertive in economic pursuits and the efforts of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people in the field of weaving can be cited as examples. Thus it is observed that Bishnupriya Manipuri women are contributing a lot in the economic development of the rural based community. Now they are in the spirit of empowerment which is very essential for vitalizing women in various activities of the socio-economic development of the society.

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