

The history of Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahsabha or simply Mahasabha is itself synonymous with the history of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community. Its decades long history, though partially is evident of the cusp of changes the society has undergone.

By Rebati Mohan Sinha, Mumbai

1932:

British Government's Franchise Committee released a notification on March 31, 1932 wherein they held Manipuris are tribal. Both Meitai Manipuri and Bishnupriya Manipuri people raised objection to this declaration and held a meeting under the banner of Surma Valley Manipuri Association on June 12, 1932 at Tarapur, Silchar, Assam.

In the meeting, Mahendra Kumar Sinha, B.A, B.T, produced certain documents showing the evidence that the Bishnupriya Manipuri people are Khasatriyas, and are not tribal. Accordingly a decision was taken to submit a memorandum to the Governor. Both communities decided to send their respective delegates.

From the Bishnupriya Manipuri community, Mahendra Sinha, B.A, B.T, and Hemchandrajit Rajkumaar participated, and from Meitei Manipuri side, Raman Singha and Binay Singha.. However, due to some reasons or other the memorandum

could not reach to the authorities.

Another meeting was held on September 25, 1932 at Ambikapatty, Cachar, Assam where the following decisions were taken:

(1) To place a demand for a reserved category seat in state legislative council for our backward communities.

(2) For job reservation for both the communities.

However, in that meeting Meitei Manipuris did not take part.

Later, the Government of Assam withdrew the earlier order and released a fresh order, declaring Manipuri as high caste Hindu.

The declaration was welcomed by the whole Manipuri society. A reception was also given to the concerned Government

official, Commissioner, Mr. J.B Walker, I.C.S, at Bhakatpur in Kunjeshwar Sinha's house.

1933:

On September 30 and October 1 in the year 1933, a conference was organised at Pratapgarh (Patherkandi) where people from Cachar, Sylhet and Tripura assembled at Gokila Srimandop. It was a historic day as the Nikhil Bishnupriya Manipuri Mahasabha (Mahasabha in short) came into existence on that very day.

Although the name was proposed in the second session; the date and year was kept in retrospect to the first meeting held on September 25, 1932.

On the last day of the meeting, a resolution incorporated with following proposals was initiated by educationist Tanu Babu Sinha, advocate Kirti Chandra, Historian Mahendra Kumar Sinha and others:

- Welcomed the Government recognition of Bishnupriya Manipuri community as high caste Hindu.

- Inclusion of a member from the backward community to Assam legislative Council.
- Youth Committees to be formed especially in Bishnupriya Manipuri villages.
- Permission to worship in Gobinda Mandir at Ningthoukhong, Manipur.
- Job opportunities should be given to Bishnupriya Manipuri living in Manipur.
- There should be English School in Bishnupriya Manipuri populated areas in Manipur, for this the King of Manipur and the political agent should be approached.
- A fixed contribution for Sri Sri Radhamadhavjiu Mandir Seva Puja should be collected from Bishnupriya Manipuri people.

It is to mention here that the Meitei Manipuris again kept themselves away from this conference.

To defuse the charged atmosphere in the areas where both the communities were living, a meeting was held in Imphal on November 19, 1933. The meeting acknowledged and appealed to both the communities to maintain peace and harmony. However, Falguni Sinhga was entrusted to take measures to maintain the unity among Bishnupriya Manipuris and Meiteis Manipuris.

The next meeting was held at Shantipur Mandop on February 14 and 15 at Narsingpur (Baramuni), Cachar, Assam. The Gaddishwar of Ghaghrapaar, Rajyeshwar Mukherjee chaired the meeting of Biraat Sabha.

The meeting comes out with the following decisions:

- Mahendra Kumar Sinha would compile a history of Bihsnupriya Manipuri
- A group of people would work for the recognition of Bishnupriya Manipuri language
- A discussion on Radhamadhavjiu Seva Puja was also held in that meeting.

1937:

The 9th session was held at Dharmanagar, Tripura.

1938:

The 10th session was held at Bhakatpur on December 26 and 27 in 1938, where the freedom fighters Arun Kumar Chanda and Jnanadananda Chakrabarty (from Murshidabad) were also present in that meeting. Gokulananda Gitiswami sang the

Jagorani songs in Bishnupriya Manipuri.

1939:

In 1939 the Mahasabha session was held at Bhanugachh in Sylhet district and in the same year World War II broke out.

1947:

India got Independence in 1947.

Some parganas like Bhanugachh, Parua, Chandipur got separated from India and joined East Pakistan in the district of Sylhet however other parganas like Patherkandi, Dullabchhera and Badarpur remained in Cachar district in Assam.

1950:

After independence Mahasabha again resumed its activities. In these years, the body gave much emphasis on the language.

1955:

The session held in this year, it was proposed that Mahasabha would place its demand to Assam and Tripura Governments regarding education of children in 'Imaar thaar', in primary stages.

The Sahitya Parishad, Sanskriti Parishad, Arthanaitik Parishad and Bhasha Parishad came into existence.

1960:

On July 2, there was an emergency meeting at Silchar to urge Government to incorporate a separate census of Meitei Manipuri as well as Bishnupriya Manipuri in the Linguistic Census.

A delegation comprising Samarendra Sinha, President Mahasabha, Madan Mohan Mukhopadhyaya, Joint Secretary Sahitya Parishad, went to meet Chief Minister of Assam, to submit memorandum on primary education with mother tongue, the Bishnupriya Manipuri.

The Chief Minister accepted the memorandum and assured them that he would look into the matter.

1963:

In 1963 a letter (CMS/18/63 dated 25-7-63) was received by Sri Gopinath Sinha, where it was mentioned that matter was under the Education Department. Unfortunately nothing came out concrete even after one year. From July 2, 1964 Bhasha Daabi Saptah got started.

The Government came up with a letter (CHS 162/64 dt.28th July `64) that the matter was under political consideration.

1965:

In 1965, from 02 – 12 July, there was a ‘Gono Andolan’ in the Bishnupriya Manipuri populated areas as well as in the district Head Quarter Silchar. A letter (No. 17/1/65/150 dt.12th July 65) was sent by Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, but no action was taken by the Government of Assam. With no positive response from the Government an agitation was started.

1971:

In 1971 census, the code structure was not given to

Bishnupriya Manipuris as a result on December 13 – 15, 1972 there was a hunger strike for 48 hours in front of D.C. Office. The then President of Jana Sangh, Sri Atal Bihari Vajpayee sat with them and assured the strikers that he would do the needful.

The Deputy Secondary Education, letter (no.EMI/117/69/158 dt.12th Jan 1973) stated that the Speaker of Manipur Vidhan Sabha, objected to the using the word 'Manipuri' in the Bishnupriya, either as prefix or suffix. A reply was given by the Mahasabha Secretary (vide letter no.NBMM/Cor/1/73/80 dt.19thFeb 1973) that Speaker of Manipur had no right to interfere in our constitutional birth right.

1975:

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (vide its letter no.13/5/73-B/8 dated April 29, 1975) sanctioned a slot of 45 minutes to Manipuri programme in Radio, out of which 30 minutes are for Meitei Manipuris and the rest for Bishnupriya Manipuri.

As the word 'Manipuri' was not suffixed with Bishnupriya, Mahasabha did not participate in Akashvani program.

1977:

In 1977 Government agreed to enroll 25 Bishnupriya teachers but Mahasabha rejected it for the same reason stated above.

1980:

A Bishnupriya Manipuri seven point Demand Action Committee was formed. There were demonstrations and hunger strikes by NBMSU in front of D.C. Office. The Government of India granted the Code structure (vide letter No. 9/27/78-CD (CEN) dated August 22, 1980) as Bishnupriya Manipuri.

1983:

People were overwhelmed at this development, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia also declared in cabinet meeting on October 26, 1983 that the next academic year the language would be started in the primary schools. And on November 14, in the same year it was notified in the Gazette. The Government of Manipur had strongly objected to it. The order was later stayed.

1984:

In 1984 a delegation met Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Delhi with fact-finding

Booklet 'Let History and Facts Speak about Manipuris'. The delegation was comprised of Jagat Mohan Sinha, Manoranjan Sinha, Kusadwaj Sinha, and Bhimsen Sinha.

1989:

The then Chief Minister of Assam, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta vacated the order on July 21, 1989; but with objection raised from Manipur Government, the order had to be withdrawn again on September 9 in the same year.

1991:

On November 27, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteshwar Saikia was given a warm reception at Patharkandi, where Saikia said that if Tripura Government agree to start the language, he would not mind starting it in his state; even though there was an objection from Government of Manipur but nothing came out later.

1995:

Again a conference was organized at Patharkandi, Assam, called "Mundamala Mahamel", supported by NBMM on

February 11-13, 1995. It is said there were over 30000-40000 people gathered in that meeting. The then Speaker of Tripura, Bimal Sinha was the person behind the famous Mundamala Mahamel. People still remember him.

On May 23, 1995 the Tripura Government started Bishnupriya Manipuri language in primary schools. The then Chief Minister Dasharath Debabarman was very much appreciated by Mahasabha.

And in Assam the Chief Minister was again approached and reminded of his earlier promise of starting the language. No action was taken by the Assam Government.

On December 30, 1995 there was a road-block on National Highway for 12 hrs in which students were heavily injured by Police lathi charge. One Salil Sinha succumbed to this injury.

1996:

Subsequently a rail ruko andolan was initiated on March 16, 1996 at Bilbari, Patharkandi, in which Sudeshna Sinha lost her life in police firing and another 9 youths also got injured

seriously.

On August 11, 1996, a meeting was held in the Community Hall of Sri Sri Bhubaneshwar Sadhu Thakur Sevashram, Tarapur to chalk out a program jointly with like minded bodies for future course of action to maintain unity among all Bishnupriya Manipuris while fighting the court cases in Assam High Court.

1998:

In 1998, December 9 at the call of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the then Chief Minister of Assam, Sri Manaranjan Sinha, President NBMM, General Secretary Sri Kushadhwaj Sinha, and the present Working President of NBMM Sri sunder Mukherjee and others had a meeting at Dispur. In the meeting, Chief Minister requested the delegates to wait for the court hearing.

1999:

In 1999, there was a three-day session on 19, 20 and 21 February, in which Dr. Debendra Kumar Sinha was elected as President of NBMM. The elected Secretaries were Sri Uday Sinha, Krishna Bhallab Sinha, Sunder Mukherjee and Sri Rajendra Kumar Sinha.

The new committee office-bearers began working on March 25 and on April 19 met with Assam Chief Minister. Chief Minister assured the visiting Mahasabha delegates that in due course of time the language would be started.

Again on April 27 the delegates of Mahasabha held another meeting with Chief Minister and apprised him of the impending Government Notification which was later published in Gazette of Assam (Part II, page 338) on July 7, 1999.

On April 5, 2000, Education Minister, Education Commissioner and Director SCERT, Assam, Director of Elementary Education, Assam, were all present in a meeting with Mahasabha and decided that the language would be started in primary schools very soon.

2000:

On May 5 2000, Dr. Debendra Kumar Sinha, President of NBMM, along with his colleagues Sri Jogendra Kumar Sinha, Sri Barun Kumar Sinha, Sri Uday Sinha and others met with the Chief Minister, Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta at Circuit House in Silchar to apprise him of the plight of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community.

Mahanta assured the delegation that he would look in to the matter. There were meetings after meeting but no concrete steps were being taken to implement the language.

Finally, the Education Department (vide letter No.E- 154/95/Pt-Dt. Dispur July 4, 2000) asked Mahasabha to arrange for the text book publication as Government had no fund. And again (vide letter No. E-154/95/P-V/30 A dt.Dispur May 31) the Government granted only the “language” status and not the “medium of instruction”.

Mahasabha`s Working Committee in its meeting on November 19, 2000 welcomed the Government move to go ahead with the printing of the text books.

On December 18, 2000, a draft copy of “Kanak Path” was recommended by Government for publication. The job of publication of “Kanak Path” was entrusted to Sri Biresh Ranjan Sinha, Debajyoti Sinha, the working president and the vice president respectively of NBMM Guwahati Regional Committee. They completed the job brilliantly and submitted the book (Kanak Path) to Commissioner, Education, Director, Elementary Education and Director, SCERT (vide letter no.NBMM-3/corr/2K/144 dt 02 /01/2001).

2001:

On receiving the book, the Deputy Director, Elementary Education (vide his letter no. ELM/10/89/150 dt.07/02/2001) issued directive to the 52 L.P. Schools of Barak Valley to implement the language.

Ultimately, the Kanak Path was launched by D.I of schools on February 9, 2001 at village Singari, near Silchar in a simple ceremony.

2002:

The 41st session of NBMM was held on 8, 9 and 10 March 2002 at Kalain, Birkampur under the Presidentship of Dr. Debendra Sinha. Mahasabha congratulated the audience and expressed gratitude towards the Assam Government for the implementation of Imaar thaar in primary schools. In that meeting Dr. Debendra Kumar Sinha was re-elected as President of NBMM and Sri Uday Sinha as General Secretary.

2005:

The 42nd session was held on 18, 19 and 20 February 2005 in

the village Unam, Patherkandi, Karimganj. The Mahasabha again urged him to lead the committee for another term. Dr Sinha agreed to continue and took in his team: Sri Gapinath Sinha, Sri Chanrakanta Sinha, Sri Sunder Mukherjee (Tripura), Sri Padmasen Sinha (Bangladesh) Sri Rebati Mohan Sinha (Mumbai) as Working Presidents and Uday Sinha as Secretary General of NBMM.

The 43rd session is going to be held at Kailashahar, North Tripura on 13, 14 and 15 February 2009.

Source: <http://bishnupriyamanipuri.blogspot.com/2009/02/brief-history-of-mahasabha-from-1932-to.html>