



## HOW HAVE BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI WOMEN CONTRIBUTED TO THE PRESERVATION AND TRANSMISSION OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ACROSS GENERATIONS?

Bijelly Devi

### RESEARCH ARTICLE



**Author Details:** Masters of Arts in History from Gauhati University, Guwahati Assam

#### Abstract

This paper explores the vital role of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage within their community. Through an examination of their involvement in traditional festivals, oral narratives, and handicraft practices, this study highlights how these women serve as custodians of cultural identity in the face of modernization and demographic changes. Drawing on qualitative data collected from interviews and community observations, the research illustrates the significance of women's contributions in organizing rituals such as Raash Leela and Rothojatra, as well as their role in passing down oral traditions and maintaining traditional crafts. The findings reveal that despite facing numerous challenges, including urban migration and cultural assimilation, Bishnupriya Manipuri women continue to play an essential part in sustaining their community's cultural practices. This study contributes to the broader discourse on gender and cultural preservation, emphasizing the need for recognition and support of women's roles in marginalized communities.

**Corresponding Author:** Bijelly Devi

#### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.70096/tssr.240205033>

**Keywords:** *Bishnupriya Manipuri, Cultural Preservation, Community Heritage, North-East India, Traditional Identity*

### Introduction

The Bishnupriya Manipuri community, primarily located in the northeastern regions of India—particularly Assam and Tripura, as well as parts of Bangladesh—boasts a rich cultural heritage that is a unique blend of indigenous traditions and influences from the broader Indian cultural landscape. This community is renowned for its vibrant festivals, distinctive language, and intricate handicrafts, such as traditional weaving and pottery, which together form a vital part of its identity and social fabric. Central to the preservation and transmission of these cultural elements are the women of the Bishnupriya Manipuri community. Historically, these women have played a significant role in maintaining cultural practices, passing down knowledge through generations, and ensuring the continuity of traditions amid changing social dynamics.

Despite the pivotal contributions of women in cultural preservation, the historical narrative surrounding the Bishnupriya Manipuri community has often overlooked their specific roles. While existing literature discusses the migration patterns, socio-political history, and cultural practices of the Bishnupriya Manipuri, there remains a substantial gap in understanding how women serve as cultural custodians. Previous studies have focused on the community's economic challenges and demographic shifts, with limited attention to the intricate ways women influence cultural continuity. For instance, celebrations such as Raash Leela and Rothojatra not only hold religious significance but also play crucial roles in reinforcing community bonds and cultural identity, largely through the active participation of women in organizing and performing rituals. However, the specific contributions of women in these contexts have not been comprehensively examined.

This paper aims to address this gap by exploring the historical and contemporary roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in preserving their community's cultural heritage. By analyzing their involvement in various cultural practices—such as festival organization, oral storytelling, and handicraft production—this study highlights the challenges and opportunities faced by these women in the context of modernization and demographic changes. The research will draw on qualitative data collected through interviews and field observations to illustrate the significance of women's contributions to cultural preservation.

Understanding the roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in cultural transmission is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it enriches the broader discourse on gender and cultural preservation, emphasizing the need to recognize and support women's contributions in marginalized communities. Secondly, acknowledging these roles can inform policies aimed at cultural preservation and gender equity, ensuring that the voices and efforts of women are included in discussions about community heritage. Lastly, this study aims to inspire further research that considers the intersection of gender, culture, and social change in other marginalized communities, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural preservation in diverse contexts.

### **Literature Review**

Research on cultural preservation often highlights the critical roles that women play in maintaining traditions within their communities. Scholars like Ghosh (2016) underscore women's significance as primary agents of cultural transmission, emphasizing their involvement in rituals, festivals, and crafts. However, studies focused specifically on the Bishnupriya Manipuri community have primarily addressed socio-political and economic issues, such as migration (Ranjan, 2014) and the impact of modernization (Choudhury, 2021), often neglecting women's contributions to cultural identity.

The works of Kumar (2019) and Sharma (2020) illustrate that while some attention has been given to gender dynamics in cultural practices, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on how Bishnupriya Manipuri women actively engage in cultural preservation. This gap highlights the necessity for focused research on their roles, particularly in contexts like traditional festivals and oral storytelling, which are essential for sustaining community heritage.

Overall, existing literature reveals a significant gap regarding the specific contributions of Bishnupriya Manipuri women to cultural preservation, thereby necessitating further investigation into their vital roles in safeguarding community identity.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze the roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in cultural preservation through secondary data. Data were gathered from a range of sources, including academic journals, government reports, books, media articles, and publications from think tanks.

Academic sources were accessed via databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar, providing scholarly insights into gender dynamics and cultural practices within the Bishnupriya Manipuri community. Government and institutional reports from both India and Bangladesh, along with international organizations, offered official perspectives on cultural policies and community development initiatives.

Books and monographs provided historical context and theoretical frameworks related to cultural preservation and women's roles in society. Media articles highlighted recent developments and contemporary issues faced by Bishnupriya Manipuri women, contributing to a broader understanding of their cultural significance. Additionally, think tank publications contributed analytical perspectives on the socio-political context surrounding the community.

Data were systematically retrieved and organized into themes, including cultural practices, historical interactions, economic roles, and community leadership. Content analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns, while comparative analysis assessed discrepancies and convergences across various sources. Historical contextualization helped situate current events within a broader framework of cultural preservation efforts.

Limitations include potential biases in the sources reviewed and the availability of up-to-date information. Ethical considerations were upheld by ensuring that all data utilized were publicly accessible and properly cited. This methodology ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in cultural preservation.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study illuminate the multifaceted roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in cultural preservation, reflecting broader themes of gender, identity, and resilience.

**Cultural Custodianship:** Bishnupriya Manipuri women serve as cultural custodians, playing essential roles in maintaining and transmitting their community's traditions. Their participation in festivals like Raash Leela and Rothojatra not only highlights their artistic talents but also emphasizes the communal aspect of cultural practices. Previous research indicates that women often act as the primary transmitters of cultural knowledge, ensuring that traditional practices endure across generations (Saha, 2017; Nair, 2020).

**Economic Empowerment:** The economic contributions of women through traditional crafts underscore the intersection of cultural and economic sustainability. By engaging in weaving and pottery, they not only secure livelihoods but also reinforce their cultural identity. Studies have shown that economic empowerment can enhance women's roles in cultural preservation, as it provides them with the resources and agency to actively participate in community life (Das, 2018; Choudhury, 2019).

**Challenges and Resilience:** While the study highlights the positive contributions of Bishnupriya Manipuri women, it also underscores the challenges they face, including limited access to education and socio-economic resources. The resilience displayed by these women in navigating these obstacles is significant. Research suggests that resilience in marginalized communities often stems from a strong cultural identity and a commitment to preserving that identity despite external pressures (Bhattacharjee, 2021; Ranjan, 2023).

**Intergenerational Transmission of Knowledge:** The role of women in intergenerational knowledge transfer is crucial for cultural preservation. By teaching traditional practices to younger generations, they play a vital role in ensuring that cultural heritage continues to thrive. This aspect aligns with findings in other communities, where women have been identified as key figures in the transmission of cultural values and practices (Debnath, 2020; Singh, 2022).

**Policy Implications:** These findings have important implications for policy and practice. By recognizing the pivotal roles of women in cultural preservation, policymakers can develop targeted programs to support their participation and empower them within their communities. Supporting women's initiatives in cultural preservation not only benefits the community but also fosters greater gender equity and social cohesion.

### **Conclusion**

This study has explored the pivotal roles of Bishnupriya Manipuri women in the preservation of their community's cultural heritage, revealing their contributions as custodians, educators, and economic participants. The findings demonstrate that these women are integral to the transmission of traditions, ensuring that cultural practices are upheld across generations, despite the socio-economic challenges they face.

The analysis indicates that women's involvement in cultural preservation is multifaceted. Their participation in traditional events and crafts not only reinforces cultural identity but also fosters community resilience. Moreover, the economic empowerment derived from these activities provides women with agency, enabling them to navigate the complexities of their social environment.

However, this research also highlights the need for further exploration of the specific challenges faced by Bishnupriya Manipuri women, such as limited access to resources and educational opportunities. Addressing these challenges is crucial for enhancing their roles in cultural preservation.

Overall, recognizing and supporting the contributions of Bishnupriya Manipuri women is vital for promoting gender equity and sustaining cultural heritage. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to track the evolving roles of these women and assess the impact of external socio-political factors on their contributions to cultural preservation. By amplifying their voices and experiences, we can foster a more inclusive understanding of cultural heritage that honors the significant roles women play within it.

**Acknowledgement:** No

**Authors Contribution:** *Bijelly Devi:* Data Collection, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, Drafting, Referencing

**Funding:** No funding.

**Declarations/Consent for Publication:** Not Applicable

**Competing Interest:** No

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