



Volume 33, Issue No 7, April 2005

ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world

Table of Contents:

A Message from the President	1
2005 Rongali Bihu Reports	2
Rongaali Bihu Celebrated In Dubai.....	2
Bihu Sensation at Dilli Haat	3
April Meeting of ASA Held	3
Sharodi Saikia: The Leading Exponent of Xotriya.....	4
Assam's School Education vis-à-vis Other States & Strategies for Improvement	5
Conclusion	7

A Message from the President

Dear Friends and well-wishers,

First of all, I thank those of you who have renewed their 2005 membership. If you have not done so already, please renew your membership (membership dues are on a calendar year basis) and encourage others to either to renew their membership or become member, or both! Details on becoming a member and renewing membership are given below. Please note that regardless of membership, you are welcome to take part in our community activities and our efforts geared towards Assam, e.g., you can donate to on-going projects, such as preservation of rare manuscripts, or write a column in the ASA Newsletter, or join your fellow Assamese people in a community picnic, etc.

Talking about community events, here's a big one - Assam 2005, which will be hosted in the Disney World in Orlando, FL in Disney's Coronado Spring Resort located in the Animal Kingdom area. I'm sure you've received information from the organizers on hotel reservation



already. If not, this information can be found elsewhere in this newsletter. Please book your rooms early to get the excellent group rate. Also contact Sunil Nath, Chair of the Organizing Committee (sunil.b.nath@att.net) for more details on this event.

As you are aware from our past newsletter, e.g., the Feb newsletter (available at www.assam.org – follow the “newsletter” button on left), you will notice that the Assam Society of American (Asom Sangha) has done some pretty good work in 2004. As past records would show, such work is not new to the Society or to its members and well-wishers. We thank all those who donated their time and money in 2004 in our efforts to accomplish some of our Society's goals, i.e., help the people of Assam as well as bring together the disparate Assamese families and communities around the globe in general, and in North America in particular.

As its current President, I'm very proud to say that the Assam Society of America has a bright future built on an excellent past. However, we are always looking for dedicated and committed people who would like to help us accomplish our goals. Without such direct participation by someone like you, however, our efforts will remain efforts only and promises will remain unfulfilled. In this regard, we seek your participation, advice, and resources to do a better job in the current and future years. In return, it our promise that we will continue our efforts to help the people and culture of our beloved Assam as well as try to bridge the gap that exists in the expatriate Assamese community here in North America. Thank you and best wishes,

Sincerely,
Sanjib Bhuyan
President, ASA

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION: please make your check payable to “Assam Society of America, Inc.” and mail to: Assam Society of America, P.O. Box 254, Mays Landing, NJ 08330. Note that Assam Society of America is a NJ registered Non-profit organization, and all its office bearers are volunteers (i.e., work for free). Membership dues are as follows: Life member: \$500.00; Family:

\$40.00; Single: \$20; Student: \$5.00. Please add any donation you want to make to the above

amount. Please make sure that the following contact info is included in your mail along with your membership dues: Your name, Your spouse's name, Children's name, Full mailing add, Tel, Email, and Occupation (optional)

2005 Rongali Bihu Reports

In United States, this year Rangali Bihu has been celebrated and organized more collaborative way in different parts of the country. On April-09-2005, North East Bihu celebrated at Six Mile Run



Reformed Church, 3037 Hwy 27, Franklin Park NJ 08823. Almost 200 Diasporas participated in various



activities including children games, and colorful cultural program.

Tilor Laru, Ghila pitha and many other Assamese dishes were main

attraction of this celebration. Children program were fabulous.

On April-16-2005, Washington DC metro area Bihu celebrated at The Club House, 7700 Provincial Dr, Mclean, VA 22102 with more than 120 Diasporas. Dr Jayanta



Madhav, The Economic Advisor to Chief Minister of Assam and Dr. Sanjay Hazarika's participation to this Bihu made more significant and colorful.

Washington Metro Area community celebrated Rangali Bihu as community event for the first time. For last 30 years, Bihu were celebrated at Dr. Jiten Borpujari's house as the community was very small.

Dr. Borpujari mentioned that he started celebrating bihu with seven families in this area long time ago. He says he is very happy to see that the community is growing



significantly. The cultural program and children's games were very interesting. The husori team played a very high quality Bihu husori makes the celebration more interesting.

On April-16-2005, Huston Bihu celebrated more colorful way in a beautiful weather. Children played



lots of fun games during this Bihu. Astronaut Mike and his family always make Huston Bihu special. The pitha, Laru and display of other Assamese culture in Huston Bihu always make more significant.

Contributed by Vavani Sharma, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Rongaali Bihu Celebrated In Dubai

Rongaali Bihu was celebrated by the Assamese Community of UAE with an overnight program on the 14th & 15th April last at the Flamingo Beach Resort, Umm Al Quwain, about 50 kilometres from Dubai. The program was attended this year by about 75 people from the Emirates of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Ajman.



The main attractions of the program was a musical performance by Sri Pankaj Dutta from Assam. Sri Dutta enthralled the audience with his rendering of famous numbers of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, besides lively Bihu songs to match the mood of the occasion. Other attractions of the evening included Husori led by

local 'Dhulia' Dayananda Gogoi which saw the participation of ladies and gents in large numbers. Dance performances by the veteran duo Rohini and Rupali kept everyone on their feet. Little Shireen Dutta, of Abu Dhabi, with her recitation of two Assamese poems of yesteryears, impressed everyone. The two and half hour long cultural program, which continued till late in the night, included group dance performances by Suffraz, Shartaz, Harshita and Arnav. The function concluded with 'Mukoli Bihu' where almost everyone took to the dance floor.

by D K Borah, Axom Xomaj, Dubai. More photos at www.assamdubai.com

Bihu Sensation at Dilli Haat

A little known team from Dhemaji district in upper Assam today created sensation at Dilli Haat by superb performance of bihu, which has retained its traditional forms at these secluded areas. The team Bordoloni Anchalik Navajyoti Sangha was invited by Katha and Assam Association, Delhi for performing at Katha valedictory day and at the Rongali Bihu celebration of Assam Association, Delhi on 2nd May, 2005 at Samaj Sadan, Laxmibai Nagar.



the bihutolis of upper Assam, in the festival of merriment.

The average age of the team is below 20 with 14 girls and 36 boys. They are superb in all faculties. Be it with the drums, flute, buffalo horn flute, lyrics etc. There was a sizable gathering on this otherwise dull working day at Dilli Haat. The authoritative drum beats transcended ones to

The team is on a mission of conquering Delhi culturally. On 29th they will perform at the valedictory function of Katha. 30th May will bring them face to face with more than 3000 students of Mother's International School, the numero uno school of India. Same evening they will be mesmerizing the higher end guests at Night Bazar of Hotel Ashok, India's premier 5 star hotel. 1st May is reserved for showcasing their talents at the newest fun station "Garden of 5 senses" in the vicinity of Qutab Minar.

The team from the most backward district of Assam seems to be most forward in culture. Their unspoilt version of bihu is a treat to the eyes.

Contributed by Manoj Kumar Das, General Secretary, Assam Association Delhi.

April Meeting of ASA Held

A quarterly meeting of Assam Society of America was held on Sunday, the 17th of April between 11 AM and 2 PM at the home of Prakash and Anuradha Deka's residence in New Jersey. Here was the agenda for the meeting.

1. Approval of January 9, 2005 Minutes
2. President's Report - Sanjib Bhuyan

a. Membership related - membership renewal, voluntarism - 'walk the

walk,' raising awareness about ASA and its good work by all, politics of Assamese in the NE and North America (ASA/AANA relation - Magh bihu and Bohag Bihu - Prakash Deka will add later)

b. Update of Assam 2005 (based on info received)

- i. Info on Hotel, Regn, and Food
- ii. Cultural comm. Info (Nilakshi will report)
- iii. Souvenir info
- iv. Fund raising

v. Dedicated web site (Probal reporting)

c. Newsletter update - full round is completed in March. Have sponsor till August 2005.

d. Constitution amendments - Mantu Baishya will bring it up in FL (if he can't make it, then the President will bring it up).

e. Projects

- i. Flood relief - Prakash reporting + report from the Institute of Integrated Res Mang, Tezpur
- ii. Project Hope, Phase I - Prakash reporting + report from the Padmini Sangha, Kahilipara
- iii. Other projects -

f. Fund raising strategies - email to the ladies (Kabita), any plan?

g. Updated list of calendar of events you should be aware of.

- i. Next ASA Meeting: August 14, 2005 (Kedar and Ruprekha Bhuyan hosting. Lottery for 2005-06 hosting to take place)
- ii. Upcoming sponsors of newsletter - Mahesh Baishya (April) and Sanjib Bhuyan

(May)

3. Report from the VP - Utpal Brahma (membership, cultural program for Assam 2005, ?)

4. Report from the Treasurer - Kedar Bhuyan (balance sheet, 1st qtr, 2005)

5. Report from NE ASA VP - Prakash Deka (Bihu and Axomia politics!)

6. Report from ASA Foundation - Nomal Dutta and Mukul Chowdhury

7 Report from Project coordinators - Jugal Kalita, Vavani Sharma, Malabika Brahma, who else?

8. Report from Asomi Magazine Editor - Jukti Kalita

9. Newsletter Editor-in-Chief's report - Jugal Kalita

10. Old Business

11. New Business

Next ASA Quarterly Meeting, August 10th, 2005 (Kedar and Ruprekha Bhuyan hosting)

Reported by Sanjib Bhuyan, New Jersey

Sharodi Saikia: The Leading Exponent of Xottriya

On 13th Feb '05, at Pragjyoti Complex in Guwahati, I was invited to attend the "Nriya Sangam" - a festival of all the eight major traditional dance forms of India at Guwahati organised by Sonal Mansingh, the director of Sangeet Natak Akademi.

I have enjoyed thoroughly Sharodi's performance by seeing the respected "bayans" dancing as a group with Sharodi. Being among the seven elite across India to be nominated as a member of the dance advisory committees to the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi and the first to represent the Xatriya dance in the panel is one of the many honours that Sharodi Saikia's dedication to the dance form has brought her. It is more of an intellectual exercise (Sangeet Natak Akademi) where eminent dance exponents and critics sit together to bring the rich classical dances of India to the forefront.

The item "Rangarochans" performed by the main dancer with the help of a group of performers - the "Gayan - Bayan !. For the first time "Bhakat" of the Xatriya have agreed to perform with a woman on stage.

1) About Kamalabari Xatriya and Xatradhikars: The origin of Kamalabari Xattra can be traced back to the sixteenth century when Shri Padma Ata, one of the foremost disciples of Shri Shri Madhavdev was sent by the latter to establish it for propagation of Bhakti movement in upper Assam region. At present it is comprised of a group of six Xattras, the primary three being Purona Kamalabari, Natun Kamalabari and Uttar Kamalabari. Sharodi is fortunate to have blessings from the Xattradhikars of all these Xattras.

Sharodi vehemently denies the branding of Xattras as "conservative" as she finds them quite keen to new ideas and change, albeit not destroying the traditional structure and form of the dance consortium. Her "Rangarochan" is a proof of this.

2) How she got into it ? : Sharodi was invited into the world of dance at the tender age of six by her parents. She learnt Manipuri dances from Guru Rathia Singh and Kathak from Late Munin Barua as well as Late Charu Bardoloi in addition to learning a variety of folk dances

before getting into the legendary figure in the field of Xatriya culture of Late Raseswar Saikia Barbayan of Kamalabari Xattra, the moving spirit and main protagonist instrumental in transplanting this rich cultural treasure trove from the religious-ritualistic moorings of the Xattras to the secular stage enabling the common people to enjoy it as a cultural treasure, who introduced Sharodi to the vast ocean of Xatriya



tradition with its great corpus of compositions.

Sharodi is the first person to develop and present a distinctive repertoire for solo performance of Xattriya dance, which is usually performed by a group of monks in the Xattras. She tirelessly attempts to acquaint the masses especially the young generation, with priceless heritage of Assam in the form of Xattriya heritage through her innumerable lecture and demonstrations organised by the Sangeet Natak

Akademi, Spic-Macay, universities and colleges, both within and outside the state of Assam. Sharodi has long 33 years association with Xattriya dances as learner, performer, researcher and exponent.

3) Her own views: "Although the Akademi has recognised Xattriya dance, my aim will be fulfilled when everyone, in the nook-and-corner of

India will know and acknowledge the richness of Xattriya," she says.

At present she is the Deputy Director in the directorate of higher education, Assam. Married to a Dr. Dhrubajyoti Saikia a literature and Asst. Professor of medicine in Guwahati Medical College. She has a son of 12 year old boy.

By Rini Kakatia, London, UK

Assam's School Education vis-à-vis Other States & Strategies for Improvement

Introduction

Assam's government school education bears a striking contrast to that of other states. As is evident from the graphs below on the one hand, it is lagging behind the performance of Kerala, which has a high quality of education. On the other, compared to Rajasthan - Assam seems to be doing better, especially for education of girls from poor income families. Further, even India's capital Delhi is not taking care of its poor income children as is evident from the graphs below.

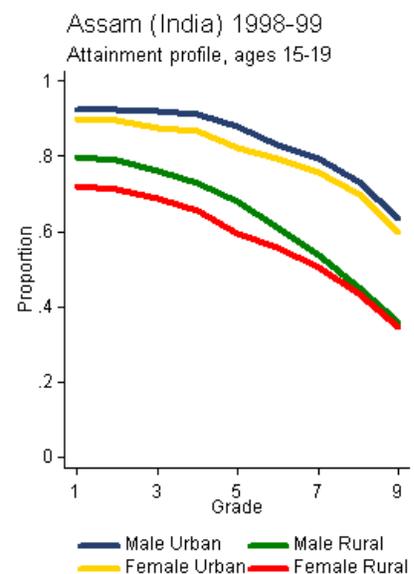
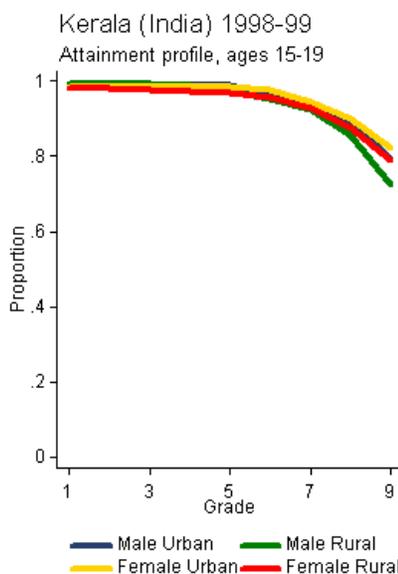
However, compared to other states discussed above, girls from urban, rich income families get less education in Assam, suggesting a gender bias even among the higher income families of Assam, in general.

NOTE: In choosing the graphs below, I have used different indicators while comparing different states for the reason that in some cases data was missing or unclear, in others the contrast was more clearly visible in the indicators presented below. Further, the reader may undertake to satisfy his or her curiosity by going through the World Bank website's web-link: http://www.worldbank.org/research/projects/edattain/profiles/ind4/ind4reg/at1_a.htm

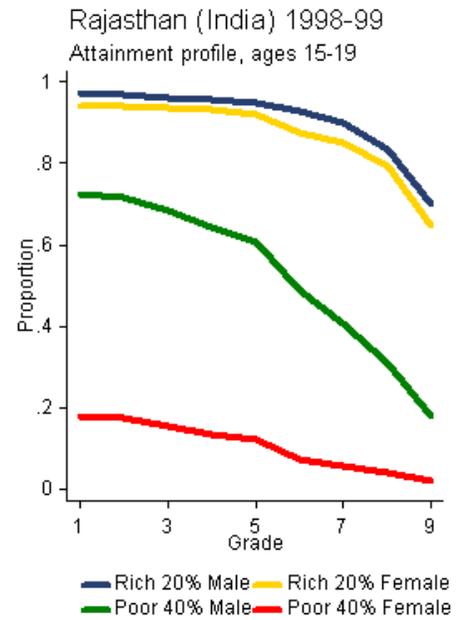
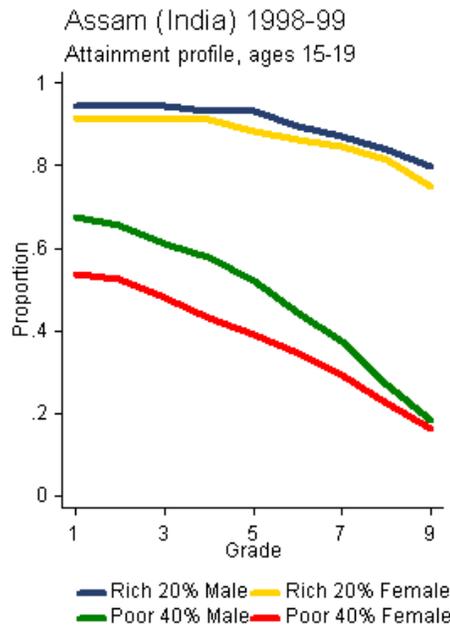
Source: World Bank data: Research Project on Educational Attainment and Enrollment around the world; World Bank website.

Comparison to other states

In the graphs above (ideally for top quality school system- the graphs should show a straight line at proportion level of 1 on the Y axis, parallel to the X axis), it is evident that Kerala is by far much more capable in providing good quality education to all strata of its society, whereas Assam shows inequality in education - biased against girls and rural students.



On the other hand, the graphs above show that Rajasthan provides a slightly higher level of education to both boys and girls of upper income families - compared to Assam. However, Rajasthan's record is much poorer in providing quality education to girls from poor income families, compared to Assam.

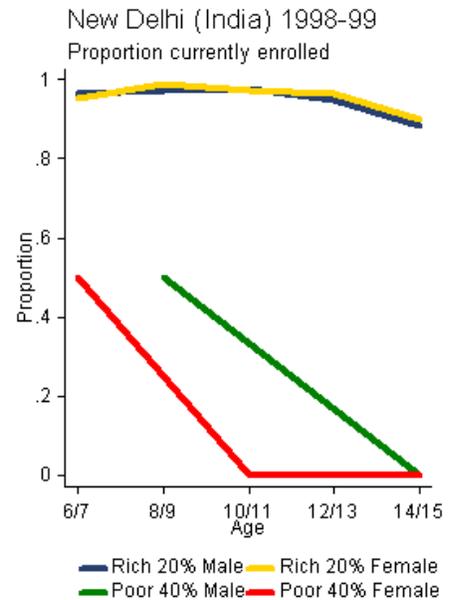
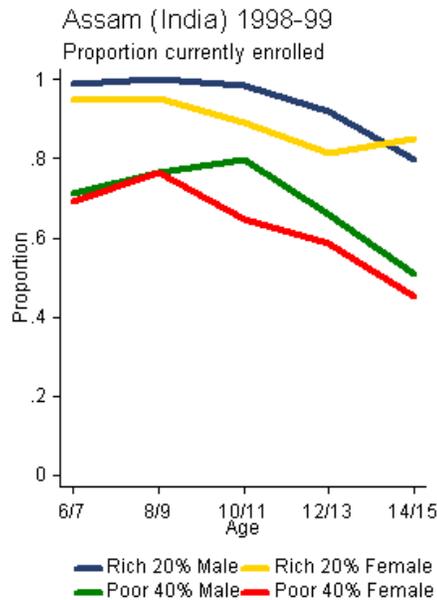


The graphs above show that in comparison to New Delhi, India's capital - Assam is providing lesser educational access to children (especially girls) from its higher income families.

However, Delhi is far below Assam's level, when it comes to providing education to children from its poor income families, since in Delhi girls (from poor income families) above 11 years of age are not enrolled in school at all and the condition of boys is not much better.

Inference

On the one hand, Assam's education quality for its school going children from rich families - is below that of many other states (including Kerala, Rajasthan and Delhi as discussed above) in India. Thus, it perhaps affects the ability of Assam's brightest students in clearing the extremely competitive national entrance exams for engineering and medical colleges, such as IIT-JEE, AIIMS or CPMT or that of foreign universities (such as SAT tests).



On the other hand, except for Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and a few other states, Assam's record in providing unbiased education: regardless of gender(girls versus boys), rural-urban or rich-poor is better compared to many other states – even compared to India's capital Delhi. However, the situation in Assam is far from satisfactory as is evident from the graphs above.

My recommendations (not just to the government):

As seen in case of other states like Delhi or Kerala or Rajasthan, whose students are the toppers in the national engineering or medical exams lately – there is a greater focus on providing top quality educational environment to its

most skilled students (generally from urban, rich families) even at the cost of extremely low grade education to its rural, poor and girl students.

Most likely, the policymakers' (and bureaucrats) own children are the ones who benefit the most from this arrangement. However, without body of highly skilled and globally competitive manpower, it is unlikely that the state can ever make progress. On the other hand, Assam has been negligent in providing good quality education to its top strata of society as well (unlike Kerala, Delhi or Rajasthan) as well as in lagging behind providing good education to its rural, poor and girl students (compared to Kerala or Himachal Pradesh).

Thus the **multi pronged strategy** should be:

- A) to focus on improving the **competitiveness of its top students** - so that they start scoring in the national competitive entrance exams. A highly skilled Assamese group is needed to properly govern and improve the economy of the region.
- B) to **improve quality of schools in rural areas and for poor income students**. A World Bank study (book: Primary Education in India; World Bank publication , 1997) showed that training of Assam's school principals, female teachers in rural areas, distribution of free textbooks, improving the monitoring of schools as well as better physical infrastructure of schools - would be cost effective strategies for school improvement in such areas. Another study (mentioned in the same book as above) predicted that improvement of 0.5% in primary school student's achievement rates in Assam would lead to a 4.5% increase in Assam's economic growth.

Conclusion

Assam is neither at the bottom of the spectrum on Indian states in school education but neither is it at the top. However, its top quality schools lag behind a large number of those of many other states (like Delhi or Rajasthan). Further, states like Kerala or Himachal Pradesh are far ahead of Assam, in their efforts to provide universal and good quality schools to all. Thus, Assam needs to improve the quality of its top quality schools as well as that of its lower rung schools-at the same time improving the reach to remote areas –to aim for sustainable economic development of the region.

By Umesh Sharma. Mr Sharma is pursuing an M.Ed. at Harvard University, Graduate School of Education

The ASA Newsletter is published monthly. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ, on behalf of Assam Society of America, has published this issue of ASA newsletter. The editors are Satyam Bhuyan (Ames, Iowa), Ganesh Bora (Lake Alfred, Florida), Prasenjit Chetia (Atlanta, Georgia), Babul Gogoi (New Delhi, India), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Editor-In-Chief), Symanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania), Ujjal Pathak (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), Rini Kakati (London, UK), Umesh Sharma (Cambridge, Massachusetts), and Ram Sarangapani (Houston, Texas). The ASA Executive Committee is composed of Sanjib Bhuyan, President (Franklin Park, New Jersey), Utpal Brahma, Vice President (Burlington, New Jersey), Ganesh Bora, General Secretary (Lake Alfred, Florida), Probal Tabhildar (Kendall Park, New Jersey), Mantu Baishya (Omaha, Nebraska), Kedar Bhuyan (Mays Landing, New Jersey), and Sangeeta Duorah (California).

We invite contributors from all over the world. We appreciate your valuable feedback, comments & suggestions, and of course, news from your part of the world for inclusion in the coming editions. Please send your written contributions to asanewsletter@yahoo.com. If you prefer, you can send your contributions directly to any of the editors listed above as well. Any contribution must be 750 words or shorter in length. Please include a scanned image of the author. We also request you to submit other pertinent photographs if possible.

The Publication
of
This Issue
of
The Assam Society of America Newsletter
is Supported by a Generous Monetary Donation from
Jayanta and Nilakshi Thakuria
of Monmouth Junction
New Jersey



If you would like to sponsor an issue of the newsletter, please contact Sanjib Bhuyan, Assam Society of America President at sanbhu03@yahoo.com. The society's Web site is located at <http://www.assamsociety.org>. The Web site for Assam 2005 is <http://www.assam2005.org>.



Assam Society of America
PO Box 254
Mays Landing, NJ 08330
USA

Enjoy Your Complimentary Copy

TO: