

ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world



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ASA invites every member of the Assamese community to attend Assam Day 2004 during the Independence Day Weekend in 2004. We will send out communications to the community as soon as details are worked out. ASA's President Mantu Baishya had requested Barada Sarma, Chairman of the Steering Committee for AANA's Assam Convention 2004 to hold Assam Day 2004 at the same time and the same venue so that the entire Assamese community can be together under the same roof. ASA is still waiting for the reply whether the Committee is willing and able to hold Assam Day 2004 along with Assam Convention 2004.

Guest Editorial:

Assam's Dwindling Economic Condition

Assam is one of the most resourceful states of India. Assam receives plenty of rainfall --- so full of water resources. The soil is fertile. It is full of green and there are a large number of rivers including the mighty Brahmaputra. She has abundant forest resources and she has the petroleum reserves, which she can boast of. Assam is one of the largest producers of tea in the world. Then why is Assam suffering from a pitiable economic condition?

I think it is the attitude of the Assamese people towards life. The Assamese people are happy with whatever they are getting. A competitive mind is not there --- it seems. For example, Punjab is growing three crops a year, but Assam is growing only two crops in spite of good rainfall and fertile soil. In Upper Assam only one crop is grown and the fields remain idle for 8 months. What a pity state of affairs!!

between North East India and the rest of India is of vital interest to the integrity of India and must be secured at any cost.

At the same time, on behalf of the Assamese community in North America, I deeply regret and mourn the lives of innocent Bihari people shed in the tragic aftermath being played out in Assam and Northeast India. There is no justification for the extreme violence visited upon them and it must be stopped at any cost. This loss of lives is absolutely untenable and I extend my deepest sympathies and condolences to the families and friends of those who have perished.

However, I would like to remind you that according to recent estimates 1.5 million Bihari people make their livelihood in Assam. These expatriates send a huge amount of money back to their motherland from their hard-earned incomes in Assam. Thus, Bihar benefits handsomely by exporting its people to toil in Assam. These people mostly work in the private sector and a large number of them in menial work, but also a good percentage as traders at various levels. Thus, Bihar and Assam are dependent on each other, Bihar more so on Assam than the other way.

For most of the 56 years of Independence of India, even highly qualified natives from Assam and Northeast India have been shut out, almost completely, from Central Government jobs. Therefore, we feel that it is a very justifiable demand that all low-level and a large percentage of high-level Central jobs in Assam and Northeast India be given to the natives and long-term residents of the area. Since unemployment is the root cause of the current unfortunate happenings, providing employment to educated youths of the region will benefit those who otherwise are likely to join groups seeking independence from India for the region.

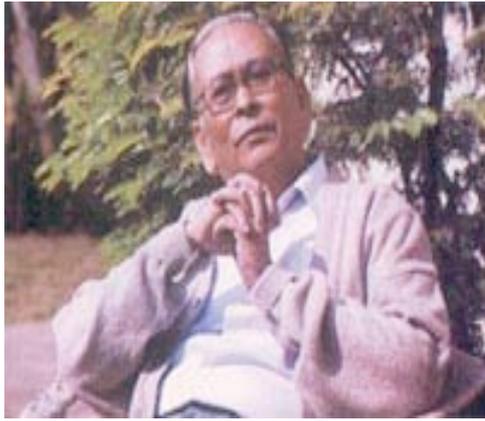
The people of India are blessed to have you as the President of the great land of ours. I trust you will use all the resources available at your disposal to stop the recurrence of such episodes in future. I also implore you to punish the culprits as well as the Government Officials who failed to discharge their duties in Bihar and Assam. However, I want to impress upon you that human rights and dignities of innocent civilians must be respected when you employ Government resources to find the culprits and bring them to justice.

Respectfully,

Mantu Baishya, PhD
President
Assam Society of America
Omaha, Nebraska

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A Tribute to Late Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia



Several months after he passed away, we are still in mourning for Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia, a giant of Assamese literature and culture. His death was untimely and premature. It created a shock in the literary circles in Assam. The renowned literary Assamese magazine "Goriox" has dedicated the November 2003 issue in memory of Dr Saikia. Many people have written at length about Dr Saikia's contribution to Assamese society. As a personal tribute to this him, I would like to reproduce an updated version of an appeal for contribution to his projects through Assam Foundation of North America (AFNA).

Dr Saikia stands as an eternal light of hope for the Assamese. Dr Saikia happened to be a family friend of ours. We are also greatly in awe of his amazing creative abilities and his stellar contribution to Assamese literature, filmmaking and his bold editorship of the "Prantik" magazine. With two very successful projects in Assam just before his death: the 'Kalakshetra' and the 'Aarohan', he had very ably demonstrated to the people of Assam how to preserve our rich culture and what we can do for our children in need.

A major complaint of the Assamese overseas had been that they cannot trust anybody in Assam to contribute to the right cause. I think Dr Saikia removed that mistrust. One can feel safe that any donations to the projects he initiated will not be wasted in corruption. I think AFNA can take the leadership in collecting and channeling donations to these projects from the overseas Assamese. Making a Web page for the purpose is a right step in getting the word out.

His children's project "AAROHON" is being built with his personal donation of land and his hard earned award monies. I am glad to see that now donations are pouring in to this much needed project from many quarters. Before he passed away, I had a short discussion with him during the Magh Bihu celebration a year ago regarding these projects. You are right. He had very big plans for Aarohan. I think AFNA should take up one item of Aarohan (such as the Conference Room, Libray, or Auditorium, for example) so that AFNA's name will be permanently engraved there as the donor.

'Srimanta Snakaradeva Kalakshetra' is another project, which was his brainchild and where he displayed great leadership in trying to present and preserve Assamese culture. Regarding the Kalakshetra, I had discussed with him a particular idea: creating an Assamese 'Hall of Fame' so to say. I was very pleasantly surprised to know that such a project was already under way under his leadership. A separate Hall is being developed where pictures and information regarding about 400 selected Assamese cultural leaders will be highlighted for everybody to see. Assamese painters have been selected to paint about 400 paintings in the same size picture frames. As you can imagine, this itself is a very expensive project. As a rough estimate, one pictures will cost about Rs 5000 (say) including the painters' remuneration, paints, canvas, photo frame (part of the material was bought from Delhi). Thus $400 \times \text{Rs.}5000 = \text{Rs.}20,00,000 = \$40,000$. I was excited to hear about the project because I was also thinking (am still thinking) of a similar project. I told Dr Saikia that I would donate to this project.

I conclude with the thought like Ms Nirupoma Buragohain did in her article in 'Goriox'. Quoting Wordsworth who said to Milton, I also say: "Dr Bhaben Saikia! Thou shouldst be living at this hour in Assam. Assam needs you."

- By Rajen Barua, Houston, Texas

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The Assamese Diaspora and Assam.

The excessive euphoria, generated by the upcoming jamboree of the Assamese Diaspora, to be held in Guwahati in the early part of next year, raises a couple of pertinent questions. Firstly, should Assamese expatriates consider returning to Assam with their money and invest into the future of what was once their native land? And secondly, why do the Assamese Diaspora, ambitiously called NRA (Non-resident Assamese), work better and shine in a country, say for example, the USA?

Although, Indians are the single largest community among the movers and shakers here in the US, thanks to the Midas touch of the IIT graduates, the size of the Assamese community, in comparison, is really tiny. Without equivocation, one must admit that the members of this minuscule community have had fair amount of success in their respective professional fields. But, would they be able to emerge victorious and cast a magic spell in the economic development of Assam? In view of the existing sociopolitical framework, I have serious reservations.

The pace of infrastructure development in Assam can be matched with that of a snail, in which setting up of a business is an uphill task and bribing bureaucrats galore. The politicians, who are profuse with their promises, suddenly turn invisible, indifferent and inaudible, when it is time for them to deliver. It is equally important to keep in mind that no investor is likely to venture into a business deal, where physical security is a big question mark. One must remember that the work of philanthropy is vastly different from investing one's hard-earned money into a business. Without an efficient economic infrastructure, there is no guarantee that honesty and hard work will be rewarded adequately.

Now turning to the question as to why Assamese expatriates in the US or other economically better-off countries do well, the answer is simple. They can succeed only where there is an adequate and proper infrastructure in place. As if, some divine power was so upset with Assam that it gave away all the "good stuff" to the USA! The successes of the NRAs in the US are a credit to the Americans, who built a system that rewards work and productivity. Assam's failure in this regard, is a discredit to each one of the Assamese people and to no one else. Who is going to provide the infrastructure? In our piercing insights and profound analysis of Assam's failure, there is not even an iota of the awareness that "I" may share some of the responsibility. Who is supposed to agitate for probity and accountability? Who else, after all, are the public, the politicians and the insurgents, other than someone from amongst us? The Assamese people tend to wring their hands, whine and blame anything and everything other than themselves. The people of Assam cannot be absolved from the messy situation, they are in today. Only, if the people realize the need for them to participate more fully in their roles as "responsible citizens," will things really begin to improve.

It is time for the good citizens of Assam and the politicians of all shades and grades to wake up from stoicism and start thinking of Brain Gain instead of lamenting of Brain Drain. In my opinion, at this point of time, the human capital of the Assamese Diaspora rather than the financial capital really matters. In this regard, the NRAs, as a

first step, can perhaps lay the groundwork by forming a people's awareness group, where meaningful information can be exchanged.

- *Kamaljit Deka, Sugarland, Texas*

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What can Prabaxi Oxomiyas Do?

What can Prabaxi Oxomiyas (Assam expatriates) do for Assam?

It has been a question that has been going around amongst us ex-patriates for a long time. There is definitely a great deal of desire amongst this group of people to be able to participate in some meaningful, achievable, measurable and sustainable ways, to give back.

The upcoming "Prabasi Asomiya Sanmilan" to be held in Guwahati in January next year brings the subject to the forefront once more. However, many of us who might have had interest in participating are asking: In what ways can I be of assistance? What can I contribute? There has been talk of expectations from the Assam political establishment, time-to-time, about NRA (Non-resident Assamese) INVESTMENTS in Assam, like the Andhra expatriates, or Gujarat expatriates and so forth. This particular expectation however, has been a definite discouragement. The handful of Assam expatriates, mostly wage-earners in private industry, or in academia, and a few professionals who have done relatively well, are hardly in a position to go become investors and entrepreneurs in Assam. The environment of non-accountability that pervades every sphere of life, not merely in Assam but throughout India, is hardly going to entice anyone to risk the hard earned nest eggs. It is an unrealistic expectation. Had there been huge entrepreneurial successes amongst us, like those from elsewhere in India that made it big, like in the Silicon Valley gold-rush of the ninety's, or those with a legacy of business involvement that have done well in other arenas and thus had the luxury of taking risks; it could be different.

But in spite of these, we can do a lot of little but extremely valuable things for Assam. In fact I am partial to taking on only little undertakings, those that are achievable without much capital, those that utilize the huge knowledge and experience pool, those that produce visible results and start producing benefits immediately, those that could be sustained without major efforts or undertakings, those that could be embarked upon without continuous ongoing involvement, those that can give a helping hand to locally generated efforts.

There are many different arenas that we can participate in the above manner. A database of possible areas could be generated through an ongoing dialogue between Assam society and the expatriates. A good forum for examining them could be the Assam Net (assam@pikespeak.uccs.edu). We can set up a facilitator in Assam who would receive ideas and suggestions from those who do not have ready access to the Internet and then post it in Assam Net. A website could be the repository of such an information bank.

This article is not the right place to examine the many possible areas of our involvement. But for starters, I take the opportunity to suggest one:

Start a Reading Room, or a dedicated special interest section in a public library, such as the District Library at Guwahati, or at the Cotton College Library. Ex-pats can provide books, periodicals, professional journals and pay for the services of a custodian/librarian who would be responsible for managing the operation. The ex-pats could obtain further assistance from American and British universities, the US Information Services, the British Council and the like. The sponsors could pay for a few computers, Internet hook-ups, public copying facilities and link-up with libraries and reference sources in the US and Britain and so forth.

Such an undertaking can immediately begin to be extremely beneficial for students, researchers, educators and even business and industry, while accessible for all segments of society.

We can provide expertise in refurbishing a section of such a library, air-condition it, and provide other physical amenities including security.

It can become a model for improving other such facilities elsewhere in the region and show a way for its ongoing management and upkeep, breaking the cycle of a pervasive and steady degradation that has been the tragic hallmark of our public institutions.

I hope readers would build upon the concept and will come up with other achievable undertakings. And even if we cannot participate in the upcoming "Prabasi Asomiya Sanmilan" in Guwahati, we still will be able to offer a tiny bit towards making it meaningful.

- Chandan Mahanta, St. Louis, Missouri

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Not Purple Again!!

Last summer my friend Mary's grandmother came over to visit and she had purple hair. This summer she topped that!! Now she has everything purple even her rearview mirror is a light shade of purple. By the end of the week I was sick of purple, even though it used to be my favorite color. Now all I could see was purple swirls in my head whenever I went to my friend's house. From then on I would always go past her grandmother's room as fast as I could; straight to Mary's room I know I wasn't the only one terrified. Once she went jogging and all the other ladies who were out jogging and saw her ran away as fast as they could, frightened. One lady actually almost fainted. I knew because I was watching the whole thing through Mary's window. Now I always see someone look through their windows before they go outside to jog, mow, or even check the mail!

I had to think of a solution. I have it! Maybe I can tell the journalists who writes the Omaha World Herald to write an article. The article would explain that if you wore purple you would go to jail and I am the only person who could bail them out. No, that wouldn't be that important to them, and anyway they would have to ask the police which would never agree to that deal.

When I got home that day I saw a green convertible outside. It didn't belong to my family. As I went inside I was thinking about what my mom had said. She said that Mary's grandmother would be coming over. When I got to my living room I saw a stylish, old looking person sitting on the couch talking to my mom and dad. When the

lady faced me I was taken by surprise when I saw whom it was. It was.... no it couldn't be... yes it was MARY'S GRANDMOTHER!!!!!!! Except you wouldn't guess what she was wearing, she was wearing lime green everything to heels to eye shadow oh, and trust me I could make a whole list of lime green things she was wearing. I wonder what color she will be next summer.

- *By Shikha Baishya. The article got second prize in a writing contest at Omaha Pubic School. Shikha is the daughter of Mantu & Silpi Baishya of Omaha, Nebraska.*

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Assamese Engineer Saved a Historic Bridge

Mr. Samar Gogoi, Structural Engineer and our own Treasurer of Assam Society of America, has saved a historic bridge in Bellevue, Nebraska. This is one of the oldest bridges in Nebraska and also has lots of historic significance. This has not only helped taxpayer's lots of money, also kept this historic structure alive.

According to the Bellevue Leader (Wednesday, October 22, 2003), Samar Gogoi, structural project manager for TranSystems Corporation in Omaha announced the findings of a study about the bridge's condition. Gogoi informed that it would cost about \$1.5 million to fix the 51-year-old Bellevue toll bridge. The improvements would mean closing it down for three to six months, and the bridge could last up to another 30 years. Not fixing it means it will last four to five more years.

The deck of the bridge needs to be replaced. The guard rails should also be replaced and made so the curb and guardrails are flush with each other. The substructure and structural steel needs minor repairs, and the bearings need maintenance. The deck joints also need attention because most of them leak. Because of the nature of repairs they all should be done at the same time.

Gogoi advised against repainting the bridge because it would cost \$2.6 million to remove the paint and repaint it. He estimated the bridge was painted 25 years ago, and said the paint most likely contains lead. He suggested the city not to spend money making temporary repairs in order to save for paying more intense repairs.

He also recommended slowing the speed limit from 45 to 25 mph and reducing the load maximum on trucks. Doing this could buy the city time to find funding for the repairs.

According to Gogoi, people traveling across the bridge shouldn't be concerned about the safety of the bridge. At least for the next few years, even without repairs, the bridge is safe to drive across, he said.

- *Mantu C Baishya, Omaha, Nebraska*

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To The Stars

"To the Stars" is a repetition poem in which my intent was to use at least one line and reproduce it somewhere else in the writing. All topics were given in the Writer's Workshop class I attended recently, but the individual student selected the themes. For this poem, I used the theme from a Japanese Animation series known in the U.S.

as "Robotech." For fun I added a Robert Frost and William Cullen Bryant verse and slight sensibility. That just came to mind in the 3rd and 4th paragraph.

To The Stars

*We went to the stars
One calm stormy night
Up we flew to the stars
Oh so bright
Nothing is barred
Everything is all right*

*We left our barren planet
To make everything safe
Tidirol beckons us
For the sake of a
Weeping race*

*Dashing and burning we tear
Through the gap
With our Valkyrie fortress
We do bring our wrath
To crush the masters in
Their own burning swath*

*Are we a war-like race
Like our friends do
Say so
It is hard to believe the
Strife of the human soul*

*Someday we will return
To our earthly place
To the land of our birthing waste*

*We went to the stars
One calm stormy night*

- *By Rajit Hazarika, Kansas. Rajit is an 11th grade student in Overland Park High School, Kansas.*



The Smart Cat

Once upon a time there was a cat. The cat sat with his library book and started reading it.



Suddenly Woof...a dog jumped out of nowhere and caught the cat by its tail....

“Ahhhh!” Said the dog.
I’ m going to have a roasted cat. “



“Oh-no!” said the cat, “I’m going to be the roasted cat. Oh-no!”



As the dog got his apron on, the cat yelled, “STOP”, I’m not going to taste good if I’m going to get roasted. I am going to need tongue-twisters and stories.

The cat asks which one he would like to hear.

The dog said he would like to hear the tongue-twisters first. So, the cat started with a few tongue-twisters, and the tongue-twisters were:

“Clean clams crammed in clean cans “

“Andrea and Andrew ate eight acid apples accidentally”

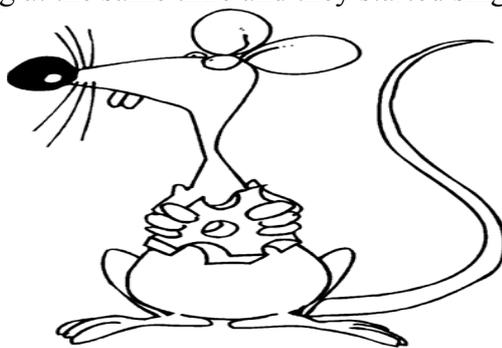
“Free kiwis, free kiwis, free kiwis, Frank feasted on flaming fish at the famous Friday fish fry, can a flying fish flee far from a free fish fry and flat flying fish fly faster than flat flying fleas.”

Now for the story said the cat. Once upon a time there was a mouse who loved crickets who sang to her. One day she called ten crickets to sing to her and they immediately started singing.

I want more music said Mimi who was the mouse.



What? Asked the crickets, we can’t talk and sing at the same time and they started singing again.



Mimi yelled “I want more music!!”

What? Said the crickets, you want less music, we'll send four crickets away and soon there were six crickets singing.



"I want more music!" Mimi shouted. What? said the crickets you want less music, we'll send three crickets away.

I want more music screamed Mimi.

You want more music, well, why didn't you say so. We'll invite twenty friends and soon the mouse was happy. Then said the cat, "Now I will taste good", said the cat.



The dog asked where he could get the things he needed to make the roast cat taste good. The cat told him to get clams, eight acid apples, kiwis, flaming fish, flying fish, flat flying fish, fleas, crickets and a mouse.



The Dog went out leaving the door open behind him. All that catching bugs and animals made him dirty but when he got home, the cat was gone.

- *Niribili Sarmah(Niky), Philadelphia, PA.* Niribili is 3rd grade student in Amosland Elementary School, Ridley. Already School Publicity Center has published Niribili's three stories.



Community News

A sumptuous Thanksgiving feast was held at Juri and Madan Bhattacharyya's place on November 27th in Ames, Iowa. As usual there was the local *Kharkhuwa* community as well as visitors from Iowa City; Prabhat and Uma Goswami with daughter Monaalee and son Sauvik; and Devajyoti and Monika Katakya of Woodbury, MN with their daughters Meghna and Devika

- *Satyam K Bhuyan, Ames, Iowa*

[The New Jersey Assamese Community Kids Program](#) is designed as a few hours of programming currently running every Saturday. Kids of various age groups below 16

years old present their talents. The NJ Assamese Community encourages you to help your kid to practice any event they like which can be presented to a small group of audience, mostly friends and families. Currently we are planning items like Recitation, Poems, Songs, Musicals, Science Topics, Speech, Instrument Playing, Dance, Acting or anything else you can think of.

- *Vavani Sarmah, Secane, PA*

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A Travelogue

Recently I made a trip to the USA accompanying my younger son Ujjal who started his undergraduate studies (BS in Computer Science) at the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, beginning Fall 2003. We had a nice trip by KLM/North West from Calcutta to Baton Rouge via Amsterdam and Memphis. From Delhi to Amsterdam, a Brazilian student doing her BA in philosophy in Aberdeen, UK, was our co-passenger. She came to India on a holiday tour and her main purpose was to study Buddhist philosophy. During our 8-hour travel from Delhi to Amsterdam, she gave me a lot of insights into the teachings of Lord Buddha. I, though am from the land of Gautam Buddha, I have scant knowledge about Buddhist philosophy!!

Exactly on schedule, our plane landed at Baton Rouge at 11:44 PM on August 6, and I was thrilled to see my elder son Jyotishman after one full year, waiting at the Airport Lounge to receive us. (Jyotishman is pursuing his Ph. D. in Computer Science at Iowa State University from Fall 2002)

At Memphis, our port of entry, we went through our immigration check; but I was a bit worried since I could not find my two registered bags. The airport personnel however assured me that the baggage would be delivered at our hotel the next day. We stayed at a motel in Port Allen, and next day my two bags were delivered with an apology letter along with a check of \$50.00 to compensate my inconvenience. I was overwhelmed at the system and the concern the airlines showed us.

We stayed in Port Allen, about 16 miles from Baton Rouge. Flowing in between Baton Rouge and Port Allen, is the world's longest river Mississippi. I had only heard about the river Mississippi and I was thrilled when I crossed the river while going to the LSU Campus at Baton Rouge. The LSU Campus, a big campus of 32,000 students is full of scenic beauty with lakes and greenery everywhere. To carry out various formalities for my son's admission, we had to visit various departments and were greeted warmly wherever we went. There is discipline; punctuality and sincerity of purpose everywhere.

While staying at Baton Rouge for two weeks, we also visited various sites of historic importance in Louisiana including the famous USS Kidd – a restored World War II destroyer kept nicely on the bank of the Mississippi for the visitors. This reminded me the historic relics of Assam – the Rang Ghar, the Tala Tal Ghar, the Kareng Ghar, the Siva Sagar and Jay Sagar Pukhuri and Barpeta Namghar etc. which are not getting due attention and publicity to attract foreign tourists.

After the completion of Ujjal's orientation and registration formalities, I along with Jyotishman came to Ames on August 18. Ames is a small city in Iowa and surrounded on all sides by cornfields. Jyotishman and Satyam, son of B.K.Bhuyan, live together in apartment close to their university (Iowa State University). Satyam is doing his graduate studies in Physics and both Satyam and Jyotishman joined ISU in Fall 2002.

When we arrived at Ames from Baton Rouge, in the mean time B. K. Bhuyan also had arrived in Ames from Guwahati and I was very happy to have company.

I along with Bhuyan visited the ISU campus, various places of the city of Ames and Des Moines – the capital city of Iowa. It is a memorable event when we saw the first electronic digital computer invented by Iowa State Mathematics and Physics professor John Vincent Atanasoff in 1930. We were also amazed to see the vast corn and soybean fields in and around the city of Ames. How scientific way the agricultural production is carried out in USA – one has to see physically to believe. Why these methods cannot be implemented in India where 80% people live on agriculture?

After staying about 10 days at Ames, I along with Bhuyan went to Denver/Westminster on August 31 by Greyhound bus. At Denver, Ganesh Bhuyan, who has lived in Westminster for the last 20 years, received us. Ganesh Bhuyan works in US Federal Government in Internal Revenue Service Department. We stayed for one week with Ganesh Bhuyan and he and his wife Jacqueline took great care of us for the whole week. Every day at night he arranged for two very good Hindi movies for our entertainment.

On September 2, Ganesh Bhuyan took us to University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and introduced us Jugal K. Kalita, Associate Professor of Computer Science of UCCS. We enjoyed the beautiful campus of UCCS surrounded by mountains and nice landscape. We were also highly impressed at the project work initiated by Prof Kalita regarding collection and preservation old Assamese manuscripts. It is a big task, however we are sure the project will be highly successful at the able hands of Prof Kalita. He then took us to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. One can never forget the beauty of the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. It is a gift of nature and tourists from all over the world visit Colorado mainly to enjoy the beauty of Rocky Mountains and also for skiing.

On return from Colorado Springs to Westminster, we also visited University of Colorado at Boulder, a big and beautiful campus indeed; the famous Buddhist temple and the ISKCON center of Denver.

On September 6, both B K Bhuyan and myself returned to Ames again by Greyhound bus and reached Ames on 7th morning. On the same evening, we had an Assamese family get together at the residence of Prof Arun Barua where Prof Madan Kumar Bhattacharyya's family also joined. We discussed a lot regarding America's systems, values, perceptions etc .

On 8th September I boarded my plane in Des Moines for my return to India and reached Calcutta on 10th September.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that this second visit of mine to USA is quite memorable in a sense that I had the opportunity to visit four university campuses and many other important places. The river Mississippi flowing by the side of city Baton Rouge and the Rocky Mountains of Colorado will leave a lasting impression on me. I have also had a glimpse of various systems of different institutions establishments of America. I was really moved to see the discipline, the punctuality, the commitment, the warmth and above all the respect to the systems, rules and procedures. We are yet to learn lot of things.

- Adhar Chandra Pathak, Duliajan, Assam. Shri Pathak is Chief Engineer (OSD), Oil India Limited.



John Atanasoff and his magnificent digital computer:

Did you know who invented the world's first digital computer? When Professor John Vincent Atanasoff and a graduate student Clifford Berry were building the world's first digital computer at the basement of Iowa State University's Physics building, it barely came to their minds that they were stepping on to a significant stone that laid the very foundation of computing technology. It was neither fame nor fortune that had motivated Dr. Atanasoff to invent a machine whose principles would change the technology forever, but rather his desire to find a better, more efficient way for his students at Iowa State University to learn. Specifically, he was seeking a way to help his graduate students spend less time working on lengthy linear equations by hand or mechanical means. As a result, from 1939 through 1942, the Atanasoff-Berry Computer became a reality in the basement of the Physics Building on the Iowa State University campus in Ames, Iowa, USA. To honor this occasion, Iowa State University, recently, conducted a symposium, "The International Symposium on Modern Computing", and at a right time to coincide with the 100th birth anniversary of Dr. John Vincent Atanasoff, the father of modern computing. The symposium, held from Oct 30 to Nov 1, brought together leading experts in the field of computing technology to discuss the potential future of new computers that could change the world. The event was marked with workshops on High-Performance Computing, Computational Intelligence, Application-specific IT Infrastructure, Grid Computing and talks by distinguished speakers like Gordon Bell, Senior Researcher, Microsoft, San Francisco; John Gustafson, Principal Investigator, High Productivity Computing Systems, Sun Microsystems Inc., Mountain View, California; Dr. Stephen Wolfram (by teleconference) President and CEO of Wolfram Research, author of "A New Kind of Science" and creator of powerful scientific computing package, Mathematica. I shall provide with a detailed history of the Atanasoff-Berry Computer at a latter publication.

- *Satyam K Bhuyan, Ames, Iowa*



Paintings of Mahesh Baishya, Bay Area, California

I am grateful to Mahesh Baishya for letting me enjoy three of his paintings. They are very beautifully made!



The object of a symbolist painting, especially in the Postmodernist types, is to convey a unified feeling to the viewer and the success of the painter is proportional to the degree to which he can convey his own feeling.

The antagonists in all the three paintings are the colors red and blue chasing each other all over the canvas. In the first painting, the light coat of brown towards the top right lets the black color seep through giving the painting an almost translucent character. Like in the other two paintings, even in this one, the primary focus of the painting lies in the diagonal (from top left to lower right) spread of the red color. In color psychology, the color RED suggests aggression, danger, unrest, passion etc. and the Yellow spots highlight the red area. But this red and yellow is countered by blotches of sharp blue at bottom left giving a sharp heat and cold feeling to the painting. From the angle of balance, I guess, this first painting (War) is the most well balanced painting of all three: both in terms of mechanical balance and color balance. From the viewpoint of mechanical balance, the big spread of brown and black towards top-right is balanced by the strategic blue area towards the left edge of the canvas. (Objects in painting gain more "weight" as they move away from the center; and so a smaller object diagonally opposite towards the edge can balance a big object nearer the center). Also in color balance, RED is considered to be a cramped color, i.e., it makes the area of the painting look smaller; but in contrast blue is a cool color and visually expands the area it covers. So the small areas of blue counter the large areas of red very beautifully. The small dark lines moving upwards does two things: they give continuity to the painting by setting a motif and they give a sense of movement from the cool blue, through the hot red, to the upper realm of dull white and brown.



The second (Nature's Fury) painting gives very little sense of motion. It is rather like a snapshot; and since the blue spots are nearer the center while the position of the red diagonal is almost unmoved, the blue spots lose their potency and the unbalanced red conveys an intense sense of heat and raw power. The heat is accentuated by the absence of two things that balance the heat/passion in the first painting (namely, the dull area towards the top right and the little white image toward the top and almost at the center). But still the vertical spots of black give it a continuous motif.

The last painting (Tranquility) is the opposite of the second in terms of feeling. It gives a sense of stability, the peacefulness of white and blue almost choking the aggressiveness of red. Even though this painting has the same red vertical moving lines (which sets the motif for the first painting), the motif in this painting is established rather by the crisscrossing little white lines which permeate the whole painting with an innocent, clean and cold atmosphere. The red lines still move upward vehemently but are totally overpowered by the coolness of the heavy blue and white areas. The brown areas visually divide the painting into 1/3rd and 2/3rds from top to bottom, and the almost-absence of any psychologically hot colors towards the top 1/3rd gives the feeling that the red flames are about to be covered up with a blanket of unstoppable white. This painting has two diagonals of red meeting right where there is a big globe of black. The position of the black spot at the meeting point of the major and the minor diagonals makes it very prominent to the viewer. The color black is used in Symbolism to denote the social evils.

A strong diagonal is the mark of very good Neo-classicist painting and your first two paintings have a strong left-top to right bottom diagonal while the third one had a major and a minor diagonal which gives a classical verve and balance to the paintings even though they are painted with a postmodernist mentality.



I believe these three painting will make a very good trio; but the second painting will fit better in the first spot. It is for two reasons. Firstly, the second painting has the dominance of red (the heat); the first has a perfect balance of red and blue while the third has the undisputed supremacy of white and blue (cold). Again, the second painting is without any movement while the first is with a little movement. The third painting has a desperate movement, which is virtually choked by white.

I don't know what was in the painter's mind but the three paintings in the new order will denote the gradual mastery of the cold colors over the hot colors, the choking of the motion of red by the peacefulness of white and blue: the mastery of the cold feelings of innocence and peace over those of restlessness and passion.

-- Reviewed by Syamanta Saikia.

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ASA Newsletter is a monthly email newsletter, posted on the 1st day of every month. We invite contributors from all over the world. Your valuable feedback, comments & suggestions; and of course news from your part of the world for inclusion in the coming editions are highly appreciated. Mantu Baishya of Omaha, NE, on behalf of Assam Society of America, has published this issue of ASA newsletter. Assam Foundation of North America (AFNA) also sponsors the newsletter. The editors are Satyam Bhuyan (Ames, Iowa), Ganesh Bora (Manhattan, Kansas), Babul Gogoi (Guwahati, Assam), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado), Shymanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas) and Vavai Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania). We are seeking a few additional members to sit on the Editorial Board. The responsibilities include writing occasionally, editing submissions, collecting contributions and disseminating the newsletter to a wider audience. If interested, please write to kalita@pikespeak.uccs.edu.

Contact email: newsletter@assam.org or asanewsletter@yahoo.com. This newsletter can also be read online at www.assam.org/newsletter. If you want a printed copy of this newsletter, please contact us at the email address given above

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