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News & Events of the Assamese People Living Around the World

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Gautom Kalita, of Panigaon, Nagaon, became the Bantam class Mr. World during the bodybuilding championships called ESPN-Musclemania World held at Wilshire Grand Hotel in Los Angeles on 16th and 17th November, 2007. Gautom, son of Late Golok Kalita and Sabitri Kalita of Nagaon, learned to bodybuild by himself, without formal lessons, by reading books. Then, he participated in local contests and finally made it to the world scene. In the Bantam class, he was Mr. Nagaon in 1989-90; Mr. Assam for five times during 1994-98; Mr. North East three times in 2001, 2002 and 2003; Mr. East India in 2001, 2002, and 2003; Mr. India in 2004, 2005 and 2007. Finally, he became Mr. World in his class in 2007!

A DREAM PROJECT

With its gifted and strategic location, high hills and tall mountains, mighty rivers, picturesque landscapes, graceful weather, rich flora and fauna, and inhabitants with rich cultural heritage, Northeast India occupies a unique place on earth.

The mighty Brahmaputra is the lifeline of this region. The shape of the Brahmaputra valley is long and thin. It is long in the east-west directions and narrow towards north and south. Let us dream a project to make this a Dream Valley! Dreaming is the first step in any project. If we can dream and develop a phase-wise plan that conforms to our dream, barriers of technology, time, energy and money can be overcome. We need to keep in our mind that Rome was not built in a day and the Great Wall of China was constructed over centuries. The mega-project I am dreaming is multi-purpose. Though it can be construed as wild Imagineering and thinking out of the box, with perseverance it can be implemented. It would be a high-valued upgrade to the quality of life to the people of the valley and the surrounding areas including Bhutan.

The steps (sub-projects) of the mega-project are enumerated below.

1. The first step is to construct a wide highway parallel to the Brahmaputra with four lanes for four-wheelers and one for two-wheelers (let us call it NH-37A) on the south bank from Dibrugarh to Mankachar including connection to Tura. The distance in between this proposed road and the Brahmaputra will be maintained at 4.5 kms for most of its length excluding the Majuli area, Guwahati city, and

near bridge entrances. The distance from the river will be wider towards Dhubri. The road will be monitored by Control Rooms along the way. There will be beautiful gates to villages, towns and cities on the way. Well-designed information kiosks along the way will be set up for the benefit of the travelers. There will be public-friendly beautiful road crossings, view towers, bus stops with cable TV, and public call offices. There will be drinking water and public conveniences at specific intervals. All cabling works will be underground. The whole road-area will be lit up with high-mast halogen lamps. Layout and design of NH-37A will be appropriate with the surrounding terrain. The entire infrastructure will be maintained by private enterprises on a contract basis. The Ganga Expressway project recently announced by UP can be a model to emulate.

2. At the same time, there will be the construction of a road parallel to the Brahmaputra (let us call it NH-52A) on the north-bank from Dhemaji (connecting Pasighat) to Dhubri (connecting Kochbihar). The distance between centerlines of NH-52A and the Brahmaputra will be maintained at 4.5 kms again. It will be a mirror image of NH-37A.

3. (a) NH-37A will have sufficient number of bridges, overbridges and culverts so that floodwaters, wild animals, boats, etc. can travel easily. Some portions of existing NH-37 will coincide with NH-37A in places such as Jakhlabandha, Burhapahar, Jalukbari, etc.). 3(b) ditto for NH-52A.
4. (a) The south embankment of the Brahmaputra will be paved with stones of size more than 250cm and reinforced concrete. Stairs down to the water with wide steps following latest civil engineering design will be built at intervals on the south embankment throughout from Dibrugarh to Mankachar. The embankment will be decoratively planted with branchless trees like coconut, tal, and khejur. This sub-project will permanently solve the erosion problem and moderate the floods. It will also highly facilitate water transport, and boost tourism, rural industries and water sports. 4(b) Similar for north-bank.
5. Every district will be facilitated with at least one upgraded riverport. The riverports will be constructed at a lower elevation compared to NH-37A. The south bank will have a number of boat stations to facilitate small businesses including fishing and water sports. 5(b) ditto for north-bank.
6. The riverbed will be dredged and the dredged sand will be used for the construction of NH-37A and NH-52A. The average width of the riverbed will be maintained at 4.0 kms excluding Majuli, Guwahati, and bridge entrances.
7. The main tributaries of the Brahmaputra will also be engineered such so that issues

of flood, irrigation and water transport will be resolved. Tributaries such as Jia-Bhoroli, Manas-Beki, etc., can be developed for thrilling adventurous water sports like rafting.

8. (a) Next, a railway line parallel to NH-37A at a centerline distance of 1.0 km from NH-37A from Dibrugarh to Goalpara will be constructed for electric trains with stations near every river port. This proposed railway will be at a higher elevation than the proposed NH-37A such that there is no obstruction for clear view in between the south bank and the north bank for any traveler. This slope will also carry rain water to storm-water drains. 8(b) The areas between the proposed railway and NH-37A will be developed with amusement parks, orchid gardens, butterfly gardens, motels, book kiosks, flower gardens and storm-water drains, in urban areas, there will be market complexes.

9. (a) A railway in parallel to NH-52A at 1.0 km centerline distance will be constructed as well. It will be a mirror image of 8(a). 9(b) Areas in between this proposed railway and NH-52A will be developed like 8(b) from Tezpur to North Guwahati (next to Sualkuchi).

10. Both banks up to the proposed rail lines will be free from private occupation excluding Majuli and other river islands. **Opportunities in reclaimed land can be offered beforehand to the displaced persons.** The rural areas (even urban areas) will be kept free of private and public development towards the river as far as possible. Only public utilities will have offices and control rooms for services to

travelers and tourists including gas stations, emporia, haats, rest houses, hotels and motels at certain intervals and towards direction away from the river. The char (riverine islets) areas will become safe landing and resting places for migratory birds.

The ten points listed above are the sub-projects of the mega-project. Lets imagine the effect of this dream project just after its completion. We will get surface, rail and water transport with unimaginable ease and charm. In addition, tourism industry will get an extra boost. Tourists can tour the entire region in easier, cheaper and comfortable manner. It is no doubt that the brilliant combination of natural and artificial set-ups will transform the region to a dream valley. This will provide employment opportunities within a beautiful holistic environment to millions. It will provide heavenly facilities to locals as well as tourists. By the year 2020, it is projected by the UN that the tourism industry will be the biggest industry in the world. So, let's try to complete a fraction of this mega-project by 2020.

Let us refer to the cross-sectional sketch. As the first action item, let's prepare a prototype of the project. Then, we need to publicize through newspapers, exhibitions, demonstrations, meetings and presentations in places within the valley. These will create the public opinion and reduce problems during public hearings. These will also facilitate collecting statutory permissions prior to subsequent phase-wise commencement of the project. We have created the conceptual picture of our dream valley. Now, the biggest question in front of us is how to proceed toward implementation. Let's not be pre-occupied thinking that *this mega-project is not feasible or impossible*. Let's proceed step by step. A day will come when we will see it fully implemented.

As the second action item, intellectuals, NGOs, NRAs and the Government of Assam will have to harness tremendous **will power** to implement portions of the ten sub-projects one after another in priority and phase-wise basis. Let's consult with concerned agencies like EIL for detailed feasibility reports, drawings and technologies for each of these ten sub-projects. Then we need to workout and arrange estimates for each sub-project separately.

Funding will be the main constraint in starting this project. We need to work out a priority-wise short-list for fractionated sub-projects and on that basis commencement action will be initiated. As the south bank is suffering from severe erosion in comparison to the north bank, let's prioritize the south bank first. Secondly, from the tourist point of view, it is important to connect Guwahati, Pobitora, Lawkhowa and Kajiranga. So, step 4(a) above can be divided into fractions out of which the portion from Guwahati to Jakhlabandha (a phase of 4(a)) may be kept at priority position 1. The portion of NH-37A from Chandrapur to Jakhlabandha, a phase of no 1, may be kept at priority 2. It will benefit Orang, Nameri, Bhalukpong and Tezpur too, for the Kolia-Bhomora Bridge.

We may get considerable contributions from NFR, Oil, Tea, Telecom, and Power sectors. These organizations will be given advertising facilities besides transport facilities in lieu of their contributions. Similarly, other private investors and donors will also be encouraged to obtain opportunities for display in marble tiles fond memories of their near and dear ones against donation to complete any fraction.

On successful completion of above, the rail link from Chandrapur to Jakhlabandha may be kept in priority position 3. Its completion will clear the shape and size of the dream project and give encouragement to the next phases.

Let's hurry and come forward to implement the project from Chandrapur to Jakhlabandha. It may be past year 2020 and the whole project may go beyond year 2100, but the project will complete if there is whole-hearted support, sincere involvement and positive attitude from each inhabitant of this great valley. It's obvious that we cannot enjoy the outcome ourselves, even the next generation may not be able to enjoy the fruits of this project, but the third generation from now will surely enjoy this outcomes of this project. It will be the pride of Asom forever!

by *Abhayananda Medhi, Numaligarh Refineries Limited, Assam*

Book Review

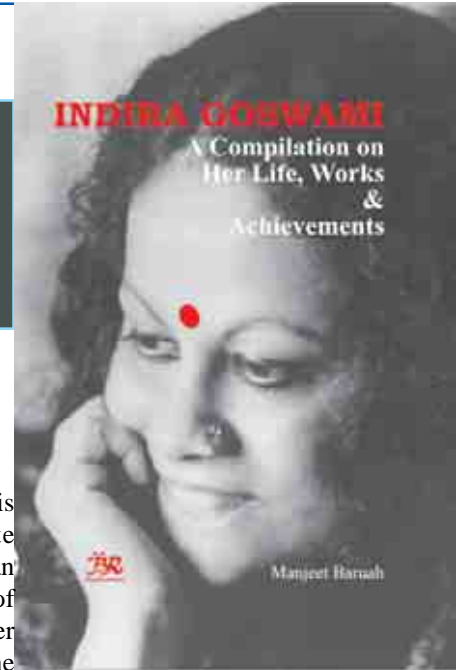
Indira Goswami A Compilation on her Life, Works and Achievements

Edited by Manjeet Baruah, BR Publishers, Delhi, 2007

One of the major problems that research on Indian literature has to deal with is general lack of information on the life of authors. There are several works that deal with different aspects of an author's life. There are also a few objectively written biographies. But far more important than such works become the details of an author's life that can help an investigator conduct research not only on the person but also on the historical context that an author engages with in his or her writings.

Indira Goswami A Compilation on her Life, Works and Achievements is an attempt towards compiling information

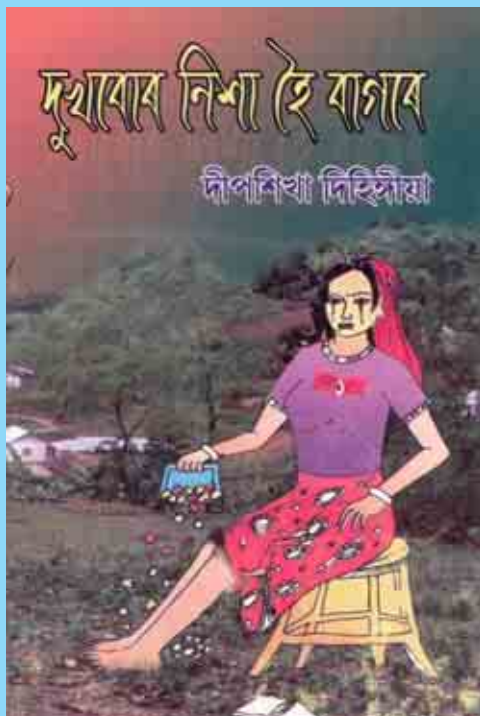
(or data) on the life and works of this celebrated writer and to facilitate research works on literature. Besides an introduction, the different chapters of the book tell the readers, a story of her life through an assembly of facts. The book has detailed list about the author's fictions, on the translations of her fictions, details of the publishers who have published these works, plays and films being made on her works, her research works (Assamese literature and Ramayana) in terms of research papers and books, details of the various national and international seminars that she has attended, a few critical essays by scholars and extracts from newspapers



and magazines to give a glimpse of popular reception of her works and finally an exhaustive chronology of her life. The last section of the book tries to tell the story of her life through various photographs. The photograph sections are divided into Family, Writers and Friends, Receiving Awards and Public Life.

Manjeet Baruah, New Delhi

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Dhruba, Susan and Elora (standing), Rupam and Ronju (in front), of Coatesville, Pennsylvania, USA

Impressions of Thailand

My travel preparations for attending the First NORTH EAST INDIA TRADE AND INVESTMENT WEEK in Bangkok on October 1-4, 2007, were very hectic. Piling workload, daughter's ensuing half-yearly examinations, and pressures of nuclear family living pushed it to the last hour. At the last minute, I decided to go with just one pair of jeans, few essential garments and things, a laptop, a camera, all packed into my laptop travel bag to fit it into the cabin to avoid problems with checked baggage.

Although VOA (Visa On Arrival) is available at Bangkok, it was a wise decision to get the visa stamped beforehand at Delhi. The flight was uneventful except the noticed warning to few Indian fellow passengers by the Thai hostesses not to drink too much of the free stuff. There was some turbulence as we neared the coast of Myanmar. The landing was quick at the showcase 'Suvarnabhumi International Airport'. The airport was a gift from the people of Thailand to their beloved King His Royal Highness Bhumibol Adulyadej (the Thai version of Sanskrit

OTOP- village showroom



A scene at the airport from mythology

Bhumibal Atulya Tej) on attainment of his rule's diamond jubilee. He is the longest reigning royal in the world.

I was surprised to see the long waiting hours for VOA. It's probably due to the Sunday holiday attack! I gave my friends company for some time and we were finally out of the customs green

and clean. (Thais have good hygienic habits and love to keep their environs clean. It was a relief to be away from our spit smeared roads and walls for some days). Being a Sunday, there was not much traffic on the road and we reached Hotel Ambassador at Soi (Lane) 11, Sukhumvit, the place where all the delegates would be put up for the conference. The rates per room in the three-star hotel is Baht (Thai currency) 1500. The currency is stronger than our Rupee (1US\$=Rs. 40.0=Bahts (B) 33.5).

I bought a prepaid international calling card for 300 B and a local calling card for 100 Bahts. One can buy a mobile SIM for as low as 100 B and its OTC (Over The Counter), no need of identity proof.

I checked in at the Youth Hostel at 25 Soi, Sukhumvit. The rate for single AC room, including breakfast was 800 B, which was booked through the Internet. It was at walking distance from the Hotel Ambassador at Soi 25. Life



Thai rural road

A temple by the roadside



Riverside habitat



membership of Youth Hostel Association cost Rs. 1000/- in India.

I tried a 'Tuk Tuk' –the Thai version of the Indian auto rickshaw. They are as notorious as our Dilliwalla autos; it's worse here, being meterless. The guy knew English but was more interested in taking me on a tour of Bangkok, than to my place of stay directly. They get 5 liters of gasoline from the shopping joints, jewelry boutiques, etc., for bringing customers. Finally I took a taxi, which has a minimum fare of 35 B. Taxis are Toyota Corollas and air-conditioned.

I had a rendezvous with my Orkutian friend Saptarshi Pathak at 1 PM. Saptarshi speaks near-fluent Thai and is an MBA from a Thai International University. His assignment was my reinitiation into the Bangkok Shopping experience: I have to buy at least a business suit for wearing at the inaugural ceremony. He came at 1:30 and we both went out for lunch. The lunch was great, rice and Thai curry for 290 B for two.

We took a taxi to MBK shopping mall, a huge shopping arena. There were people and shops everywhere. I bought goods worth 8000 B which included things ranging from a pinstriped business suit (2200 B), a huge FRP 360 degree bag (2000 B), black shoes (990 B) and assortment of garments, electrical items, a yellow golf hat with Royal Thai insignia to wear on Monday (the day of the king, when Thais wear the yellow garments to show respect to the King).

Thailand is booming, growing at 4.5-5%. Its infrastructure is great. Last year, the trade surplus was US\$5.5 Bn. It has a foreign exchange reserves of US\$ 74.4 Bn. If we superimpose on India's population of 1.2 Bn people, the figures translate to a trade surplus of US\$101.5 Bn and a foreign exchange reserves of US\$1.43 Tn. It's quite prosperous, and has a per capita GDP of US\$3176 in 2006; compared to US\$ 2825 in 2005. Bottom line of this great country, the only country never to be colonized by any foreign power remains strong and is surging ahead.



Thai food bazaar

Its other economic and social indicators are impressive as well. Life expectancy for male is 69.23 years, while for females 74 years. Population growth rate is 0.91%. The country enjoys a very high literacy rate at 96%. The population is mostly Buddhist. Muslims, mostly in the Malay Peninsula are 4% of the population, Christians 1%, others 1%. The population is united through the Thai language. There are about 30% Chinese origin people, but they are also fully integrated. The demographic assimilation is similar to Assam, through the language and eventually through intermarriage. Thais are aware of their kinship with Assam. They know three things about India. Ahom, Asom and Bompur (Brahmaputra). They are very eager to visit their kins in Assam. They also have a custom of showing their birth charts to find out about their past life. And the most prized answer is to have their past life near Bodhgaya. They save to visit Bodhgaya at least once in their life time.



Statue of Brahma on a Thai street

Saptarshi has been living there for the last four years. He is a young man of twenty-five, molding into the Thai culture. I asked him about the society. Thais are shy people, very humble. If two cars hit each other, both the drivers will apologize; in Delhi they will bang their heads. Thais regularly eat outside and are prolific spenders. The malls are full of local people apart from tourists.

Large pots used for rainwater harvesting. These houses can withstand floods as high as 11 feet. The boat is made of Stainless Steel.

Large pots used for rain water harvesting. These houses can withstand floods as high as 11 feet. The boat is made of SS Steel.



Bangkok is known for its nightlife. The section of the population employed in the sleazy trade is about 2%. Thai beaches, massage, spas, homestay, etc., attract millions of tourists every year and the tourism earnings are a huge portion of their GDP. In Phuket alone, the earnings from tourism are about \$10 Bn as my friend Tharadol Thongruang, Counselor (Commerce) at Delhi tells me. Thai Airways is one of largest airlines in the world and plays a big role in giving the much needed connectivity to the world, through the Star Alliance.

I took a stroll in the evening in the neighborhood where we were staying.



A rich man's house



Good old 'Ganesh' find favour for his connection with wealth

'Shiva'- half man half woman idol being worshipped near our hostel. They also worship 'Brahma'- along the way I saw a place where hundred were visiting a wayside 'Brahma' temple. There was a balcony where some Thai girls were dancing. This particular idol was once vandalized by a drunken man a few year's ago and he was butchered by a mob, then and there.

Thais eat quite liberally from beef and pork to oysters. They also consume a lot of green vegetable. Beef and meat are synonymous. For the religious minded Hindu, the best bet is to go for chicken, sea fish dishes. Youth hostel offers American-style breakfast.

The first time in life I felt fortunate to have the 'chinky' look. In Delhi my whole family is sick of being mistaken either for a Nepali or something as remote as Singaporean. I have conveniently passed off for a Malay origin Thai in Thailand. My colleague Biswadeep and Zeliang also shared this advantage. There are certain areas where local Thais are discouraged or have to pay little more. For example in the Siam Niramit Cultural Centre, ticket for a tourist is 1500 B, but for a Thai it is 2000 B.

*By Manoj Kumar Das
New Delhi*



There are Thai massage bars, and sleazy joints abound. The taxi drivers approach as one walks along. They offer various nightlife packages. If you say no, they don't bother. I think the oldest profession exists everywhere and the faithful will always find their way into it, be it in Guwahati or Delhi. In Bangkok, it is institutionalized. The city is very safe. Drunken girls walk alone at wee hours of the night.

The King is the centre of Thai lives. He is their father, demi-god. I saw many places where his photos and statues are worshipped. They wear yellow to celebrate his day every Monday. Thais worship many Indian Gods too. I saw a

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Eid Milan Celebrated in Delhi



Artists rendering Zikir

Assam Association, Delhi celebrated Eid Milan on 23rd December at Srimanta Sankaradeva Bhawan. The Association has been celebrating Eid since its inception on a regular basis.

The function was started with the welcome address by the president Gr Cpt (retd) A C Barua. Holy Koran was recited by a young member of the Association. Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed, who served as Medical Counsel of Indian Embassy in the Holy city of Mecca for many years shared his experience as a 'Haji' and as a spectator of this great annual spectacle, where millions of faithful from all over the world congregate to visit the holiest of holy places of Islam. Mr. Tassaduque Hussain, a 'haji' himself spoke about the

significance of the 'Haj' in the life of a devout 'Muslim'.

Dr. Bipul Kumar Baruah spoke about the century old religious harmony and tolerant religious of the Assamese society where Hindu and Muslims lived in perfect communal harmony.

Zikir, the traditional devotional songs of Assamese Muslim was rendered by the artists of the Association. Ghazals were also presented by Mr. Pranab Das and Mr. Sarat Barkakati. A gourmet dinner in traditional style was hosted for the guests after the function. About 150 people gathered to celebrate the festival.

by Manoj Kumar Das, New Delhi



Dr Zia Ahmed sharing his experience in Holy Mecca

URULI, the Assamese Womens' organization in Delhi celebrated its Annual Day Function on 8th December 2007 at LTG Auditorium, New Delhi. The function was started with opening remarks by the President Srimati Lily Baruah. The newsletter of Uruli was also unveiled on the occasion. In addition a comedy drama by the members- 'Athah telephone sambad' was staged. Other main attraction was an evening of songs by husband wife duo- Mayukh and Laili Hazarika. Mayukh is the son of Jayanta-Manisha Hazarika





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