



Bhogali Bihu ... in Dubai



Photos by Niren Chodhury. Photos were provided to Posoowa by Kedar Bhuyan of New Jersey.

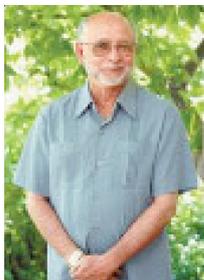
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Diasporic Indian, Assamese Diaspora and Networking

Wahid Saleh, The Netherlands

Wahid Saleh is a social worker and a retired IT professional. He lives in the Netherlands and is a leader among world-wide Non-Resident Indians. In the November 2006 issue of Posoowa, he gave a brief history of the Indian diaspora from pre-historic times to the present. In the December 2006 issue of Posoowa, he discussed the nature of the small Non-Resident Assamese community, outside India. He continues in this issue with a discussion on how NRAs can contribute to Assam in spite of their lack of financial muscle.



What can the NRA's offer? What has the NRA's to contribute?

The Assamese Diaspora on an individual basis is active in supporting the folks back home. Be it by paying the tuition fees of brothers and sisters, medical bills of parents and regular financial support of the family. But the question is how the Assamese Diaspora as a group can participate in the development of Assam in some meaningful, achievable, measurable and sustainable ways?

Based on the engagement of NRI's with the development activities of their home states, from time to time the political establishment sends signals and expects the same type of response from the Non Resident Assamese. 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 become investors and entrepreneurs in Assam. Moreover the environment of non-accountability that pervades every sphere of life is hardly going to entice anyone to risk the hard earned money. It is an unrealistic expectation. Had there been huge entrepreneurial successes amongst the NRA's, 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 handicaps, the NRA's can contribute. To start with it should be small undertakings, like:

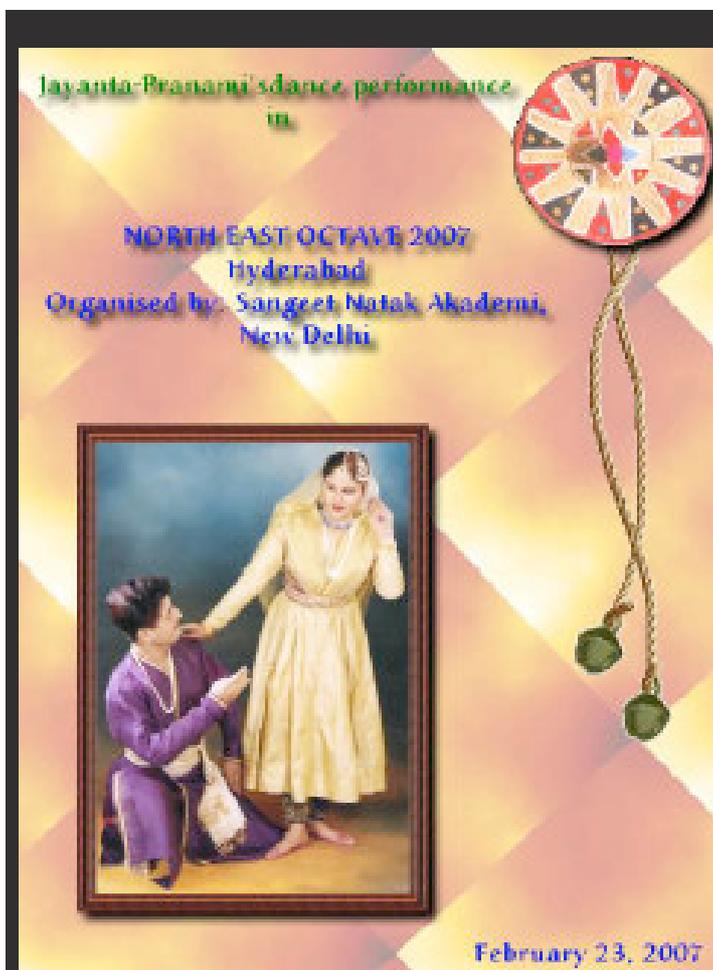
- those that are achievable without much capital,
- those that utilize the huge knowledge and experience pool,
- those that produce visible results and start producing benefits immediately,
- those that could be sustained without major efforts or undertakings,
- those that could be embarked upon without continuous ongoing involvement,
- those that can give a helping hand to locally generated efforts,

Before I embark on this subject I would like to point out that my observations are based on personal experience and interaction with other NRA's. I am no expert in this subject. According to me there are enough experts in Assam. There are enough brains available in

Assam. The same brains when they are allowed to work under a different environment in the West create wonders.

The acceleration of India's economic reform process has created a favourable climate for generating investments. Assam should ride the wave of attracting the attention of the NRI's with the help of the NRA's.

- There is a large reservoir of highly trained experts and scientists especially in the areas of Science, Technology and Knowledge based industries. They can play an important part in Assam's economic development and in boosting Assam's knowledge pool.
- Foreign investments from NRI's generally remain in IT, Biotech, manufacturing or similar sunrise industries where the returns can be quick. This should not be the lone reason for investment in Assam. The investment needed should be focused on projects like fighting unemployment, offering vocational training, better healthcare services etc. However, as mentioned above, there is a reluctance to invest in such as the Assam government has no credibility with the NRAs as they



Jayanta-Pranami's dance performance
in
NORTH EAST OCTAVE 2007
Hyderabad
Organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi,
New Delhi

February 23, 2007

BHANGIMAA hereby cordially invites u to the dance performance of Jayanta-Pranami, in the North East OCTAVE 2007, organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi on February 23, 2007 at Shilparamam, Madapur, Hyderabad. The Show will be held from February 18 - 21, 2007 in Hyderabad.

Regards,

Siddhartha & Prashanta
Entertainment Administrators, BHANGIMAA
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know that a part of the money invested will be utilised for other activities and may disappear.

A few examples of NRI's investments in India where profit is not the main motive:

- U.S. based ex-IIT students have committed to raise substantial amounts to improve the working of their old institution of education.
- Opening of educational institutions or hospitals in their places of origin in India.
- Set up their back offices in India.
- Promotion of Indian products outside India.
- Facilitating the interaction of foreign companies with their Indian counterparts.

Investment can take many forms. If the NRA's can make the investment or promote NRI's to invest in Assam it can take the form of investments in business for profit as well as investment for social needs.

- As an individual the NRA's might not be able to contribute much. But as a group they are certainly in a position to contribute. For example by supporting a village or supporting a school which is run by NGO's without governments support.
- The NRA's can create a centre of information where all information relating to job and educational opportunities abroad could be concentrated and made available to the youth of Assam free of charge.
- In the field of medicine and healthcare in the countries of their residence the Overseas Assamese have also distinguished themselves. They can play an important role in secondary and tertiary healthcare in Assam. APPI-The American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin is active in India. This organisation can contribute knowledge, skills and experience. NRA's can try to involve organisations like APPI in healthcare development and setting up pilot projects in Assam.
- There are NRA hotel owners and others active in tourism, tourism related education and in promotion of culture. In these areas the linkage with the NRA's can be broadened.

Assam should initiate constructive measures to ensure that NRA's pride and an atmosphere should be created where the NRA's can have faith in the state government and its decision making process. The decisions like changing the name of Assam to Asom without giving any reason, without proper debate does not create faith for investment in Assam. It creates an atmosphere that laws can be amended easily to suit the whims of the political parties in power without any respect for democracy and understanding of the enormous cost implications of such actions. It is said that the politicians make policies to win elections and not win elections to make policies. The government of Assam should first solve the problems facing the population like providing running water, clean sewage, electricity, roads where one can walk safely without running the risk of being run over by a car of motor cycle and a dependable, reliable, motivated police force to enforce law and order instead of changing its name. There should be transparency in all actions of the government.

- There are examples that a few from the Diaspora donate for worthy developmental causes in India. I am sure with friendly policy regulations and associations, philanthropy can act as a catalyst in Assam's development. But this is an option which is only open with the correct exposure to such institutions.
- As the Indian economy is growing and different opportunities are opening up more and more NRI's are coming back to their roots and exploring new opportunities for mutually beneficial relationships. They are bringing their expertise and experience with them. How many of them have returned to Assam? This is another area to tap. It is a two-way traffic in which both the Diaspora and the Government of Assam can be mutual beneficiaries.
- Some of our fellow countryman of the younger generation is currently running and joining the ULFA movement and being thoroughly exploited by the ULFA leadership. The kids are doing this out of sheer desperation, lack of opportunities and belief that this will help them economically.

A way forward to tackle this could be education programs run by local people but financed by the Assamese Diaspora whereby the boys and girls would get good education,



Photo by Mallika Bora of Lake Alfred, Florida, of a Bhool gos (*Luffa squash* or *Luffa cylindrica*) germinated from a seed of dry boolor jeem (*Luffa sponge*) brought from Assam. The dry jeem was given to Mallika by Abani Sharma of Orlando, Florida. The squashes were quite big in size and were distributed to most of the Assamese families in Florida as well as to some Americans.

boarding and living free until they finish their high school. Special attention should be given to girl's education as it is the best way of getting changes in the society. It is a big project but feasible if necessary in steps. In Titabor Pragalaya (*Prajnalaya*) organisation (www.prajnalaya.org) is doing it. Another example is Parijat Academy of Pamohi, Guwahati (www.parijatacademy.org)

This should be carried out without government's interference. If the project plan is prepared well and is realistic, I am sure even local Assamese businessmen etc. would be happy to share some of the financial costs. After all, the terribly slow growth in Assam is directly attributable to terrorism and governance without accountability. NGO's like Pragalaya and Paraijat academy should be encouraged and supported.

- The government of Assam should play a more active role in interacting and collaborating with the Assamese Diaspora. In order to engage the Assamese Diaspora, the Government of Assam has to make realistic plans that are executable. In its execution the models like Demming circle should be utilised – plan-do-check and act.
- The interaction with and the input from the NRA's is very important. While visiting a foreign country government officials should make it a point to meet the local NRA's. The embassies can organise such meeting.
- Efforts should be made for exchange programmes between educational institutions of higher studies with educational institutions abroad. The NRA's working with foreign educational institutions should be approached to stimulate such bilateral relationship.
- In Europe it is very common that the students before the completion of their studies, if possible go for an internship in a foreign country. Our institutions of higher education should be stimulated to open up for this type of short term practical internship.
- Another area is a dedicated special interest section in a public library. There are different educational institutions in USA which support this type of projects. NRA's can explore the possibilities of engaging such institutions including the assistance from Goethe Institute, India Foundation, 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 other countries. 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.

- The different Internet forums like the FASS should create a special section dedicated to the promotion of interaction between the NRA's and the people of Assam.
- The Assamese Diaspora with their knowledge and experience is in a position to start discussions on issues which are important to the Government of Assam and the people of Assam. Some of the ideas presented by the NRA's are:
 - Sounding board for organisations from Assam.
 - Introduction of Computer Club House.The Computer Clubhouses are like a more advanced version of the Community Information centres in the North East India.
<http://www.efooting.org/clubhouses.shtml>
- To make the government and the public aware that the name of Assam existed before the British came to India.

There is need for planned study of Assamese Diaspora, their expectations, their contributions and scope of collaboration in various sectors of economy. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. The state government of Gujarat, Kerala Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka etc. have realized the potential of development through association with their Diasporic citizens. They have made considerable efforts to draw upon the resources of the NRIs. The potentials of Assamese NRI's are limited. But the Government can contact their fellow state Governments which have already a successful engagement with their Diaspora.

It is important that Assam need the purse of the NRA's. But for the development of Assam, Assam also needs more. It is the heart and minds of the NRA's. It is the commitment of the NRA's. In the coming period NRA's involvement should meet the social challenges to change the face of Assam. India is going to be the third largest economy of the world. But still out of eleven children one dies before the age of five. Assam is no exception. In one hand there is prosperity and on the other hand poverty and widening inequality. NRA's contribution will be judged not only by the mega projects they might help to realise, but more so by the contribution in uplifting the lives of the poor millions who are deprived of the basic needs.

Seminars like this and other related events are much needed to find out ways to endure the partnerships between the Assamese Diaspora and the Government of India. I congratulate the organisers for this event and wish many more seminars like this in future. May be the AIM can introduce a management course on interaction

with the Assamese Diaspora and using their potentials. But the big question remains: Whether the NRA's really want to do something for Assam without self interest?

Thank you.
Monday, 22 January 2007

Note: My thanks to Mr. Arup Phukan of Brussels, Belgium and Mr Chandan Mahanta of St. Louis, USA for their assistance and contribution.

(Concluded)



Wishing all our esteemed readers a Happy and Prosperous New Year! Congratulations to the proud parents Reema and Bharat Baruah of Fort Collins on the birth of their daughter Prioska on the 31st of January, 2007!



On the cover page of the December 2006 issue of Posoowa, we presented you with a water color sketch of the Louvre in Paris painted by Mahesh Baishya of Dublin, California. The Baishyas went on vacation for two weeks to Spain, Portugal and France in December 2006. Here we see a photograph of the Louvre along with an ink sketch, both by Mahesh Baishya. According to the artist, "In the sketches, I try to show how reality can be simplified to produce something that bears only spirit of the truth."

Chemistry

Nagendranarayan Choudhury

Translated from Assamese by Jukti Kalita

Jukti Kalita, a marketing professional with a Ph.D. from Columbia university has translated several Assamese stories to English. Here, we continue with his translation of the story called "Roxayon".



The *puja* started under the guidance of the pensioner surgeon. Upon being signaled, doctor Phukan and the current civil surgeon walked away a few hundred yards and stood behind a large tree so that the patient could not see them. The big man tied both the legs and hands of the boy with a thick rope, and then threw him at the alter in the front of the

goddesses statue. The *puja* got over late in the afternoon. One burly man kept vigil of the young patient and other went away to relax and have lunch. As soon as the other disappeared the patient began praying to his watchkeeper, "Sir, you are like my father. Please set me free. Please let me run away from this mess. I will remain your servant for my entire life."

The man who was keeping watch was unmoved and simply said, "O! If I let you go free, they will sacrifice me instead of you. Why are you scared, little boy- everyone will die some day. You are lucky that you are going to die at the temple of the *kesaikhaiti* goddess. You will straight rise to heaven."

The patient now started praying to the almighty. He realized that there was no way out and became completely silent. As the evening approached, his condition got miserable even further.

He drifted into senselessness several times. Each time he regained consciousness after a short lapse.

The sitting civil surgeon left in the afternoon. Doctor Phukan and the retired civil surgeon kept a constant eye on the patient looking for any visible changes. At dusk, the other men returned and started making arrangements for another *puja*. The big man who looked like *bhima* started sharpening the machete. A few torches made of straw were lighted. As the midnight approached everyone got ready for the sacrifice. At first they sacrificed an uncastrated male goat. Upon seeing the big man with the machete cut the throat of the goat into two in one clean sweep, the boy realized that the same fate was going to befall him soon and started shaking heavily. Then a priest threw some water at the boy, said *mantras* to purify him and placed the boy's head in the wooden yoke. The big man with the shiny machete stood next to him. Everyone prayed and said hymns in praise of the goddess. Then the patient became unconscious.

The two doctors took the patient out of the wooden yoke and examined him under the light of a torch. He had changed immensely in those few minutes, but that change was rather strange. He had become small like a *hanuman* monkey. Black hair had started to grow on his body. As they watched, a tail grew from the bottom of his backbone. He was transformed into a monkey in a few minutes. Then he regained consciousness. He looked around in all directions. As monkeys sometimes do, he stood up on his hind legs while the long forelimbs still touched the ground. The monkeys were forefathers of the human race, and the patient had undergone an inter-species transformation. The monkey shouted '*hupu, hupu*' and climbed up a tree. It jumped from that tree to another, then to yet another tree and disappeared in the darkness.



(Concluded)

New Members of the Editorial Board of Posoowa

We are very fortunate to have several new members join the Editorial Board of Posoowa for the year 2007. Among them are Ankur Bora of Texas and Kaushik Phukan of Washington.

Ankur Bora is originally from Nagaon. A computer engineer by profession, he came to United State in 1998. He is a software developer. Ankur completed an MS in Computer Science and Engineering from University of Texas, Arlington. He lives with his wife Anjana and two little daughters in Austin, Texas. Ankur is currently involved with a number of developmental projects in Assam. He is getting good response from Association for India (AID), ASHA for education, Assam Society and Assam Foundation of North America on these efforts. He is planning to share his experience in writings with others.



Ankur Bora

Kaushik Phukan lives in Seattle and works as a Senior Technical writer. "Since the time I could write, I have been writing for various magazines and newspapers", Kaushik says. He has worked with various magazines and newspaper in India.

The Brahmaputra (Silent Screams By The River), published in 2001, is Kaushik's first novel. It is contemporary reflection on the present Assamese society, set in the midst when the militancy was at its height.

Kaushik has completed two more manuscripts, *Meera* and *A Journey Without a Ticket*. The idea of *Meera* came to him after he heard the story of a woman who used to work at his teacher's house. When she was a kid, her parents left her with the teacher to work as a maid. In course of time, the girl became a part of his teacher's family. When she became a little older, she eloped with a laborer who did some jobs at the teacher's. Years later, the teacher got a glimpse of her as his train, with open windows, passed by a dirty slum. She was sitting in front of a run-down house by the tracks. Seeing him, the woman covered her face in shame and ran inside. She looked old and weak, and was in tattered clothes. Kaushik says "This story got me thinking how her life must have been." It led him to write *Meera*.

A Journey Without a Ticket is a sarcastic portrayal of contemporary society. It holds true for all the societies, but Kaushik has used Indian society as a base. It uses a narrative style.

Kaushik is also working on a fourth novel, *The Bazaar Bus*, loosely based on the life of an uncle who loved his bus more than anything or anyone. He expired the day after he sold the bus. The bus stopped working the day he died.



Kaushik Phukan

Utpal Sharma Completes Ph.D. on Assamese Morphology Learning

Utpal Sharma, a lecturer at Tezpur University in Napaam, Assam, finished his work toward a Ph.D. in December 2006. Utpal's work is in the area of Computational Linguistics. His dissertation is titled *Unsupervised Learning of Morphology of a Highly Inflectional Language*. The title sounds esoteric, like most Ph.D. dissertation titles do, but the topic is something that may interest any technology-savvy Assamese who envisions Assamese being widely available on the Internet and in computer applications, just like English is today.



Assamese is an inflectional language. In other words, Assamese words have inflections. An inflection is a change in the pronunciation and spelling of a root word to reflect grammatical information. Inflections are common in all languages of the world. Usually, nouns and verbs are inflected to represent features such as tense, number, gender, person, and case. For example, in English, the root word *walk* becomes *walks* in third person singular present tense, *walked* in past tense, *walking* in gerundive form. Of course, there are always exceptions to usual rules of inflection. In English, inflections are common, but the nature of inflections is simple and the number of possible inflections is not large.

Compared to English and many other languages of the world, Assamese is highly inflectional. An inflected Assamese word can have only one inflectional component at the end (e.g., *khAm* = *khA* + *m*, meaning "I will eat") or a concatenated sequence of inflectional endings as discussed here. For example, let us look at the Assamese verb word *karABlE* (pronounced *koraboloi*, meaning *to make someone else do something*). In this word, *kar* is the main or root word. The *A* that follows is an inflection that changes the agent of a verb from the subject of a sentence to someone else (e.g., *korim* means "I will do it: and *koram* means "I will get it done by someone else"). The *b* that follows changes the tense of the verb. *lE* at the end of a verb form indicates an infinitive form. Thus, the correct decomposition is *karABlE* = *kar* + *A* + *b* + *lE*. Another example of an inflected noun word is *mAnuHznrHe* (pronounced *manuhzonorhe*). Here the root word is *mAnuh* (meaning *man*) followed by *zn* (meaning *the*) that specifies an article, followed by *r* (meaning *of*) to indicate possessive. Finally, there is *He* to represent an emphasis. In other words, the correct morphological decomposition of the word is *mAnuHznrHe* = *mAnuH* + *zn* + *r* + *He*.

In a preliminary study, Utpal Sharma found that in a written Assamese document, about 50% of the words are inflected, whereas in English, only about 20% of the words are inflected. The same preliminary study showed that in Hindi, about 25% of the words in a written document are inflected. Such statistics make Assamese a highly inflected language. Examples of other highly inflected languages are Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian, Greek, Sanskrit, Japanese and Basque. In Assamese and these languages, an inflectional component combines with the root word to make a complex word form, whereas in certain other languages, the inflectional form is written as a separate word. In general, these languages allow concatenation of inflections as well.

Morphology is the study of the components and rules that make up individual words of a language from constituent parts called morphemes. Knowledge of morphology is necessary to take an Assamese word and decompose it into its component parts, including

parts that represent inflection. Utpal Sharma's dissertation attempts to learn morphological rules of Assamese from corpora. In Linguistics or Computational Linguistics research, a corpus is large collection of documents with certain characteristics that can be used for a study at hand. Utpal used three corpora, a corpus of 231 Assamese news articles collected from various Internet newspaper sources, another corpus of 525 Assamese news articles also collected from various Internet sources, and a standard corpus called the Emille corpus obtainable from Lancaster University in the UK (<http://ling.lancs.ac.uk>). The Emille corpus, originally collected by researchers at the Institute of Applied Language Sciences, Bhubaneswar, India, has articles from various domains such as agriculture, anthropology, astrology, astronomy, biographical literature, business, industry, media, music, novels, stories, translated literature, and travel.

Utpal's dissertation focuses on developing algorithms and programs that can automatically (i.e., without any human intervention; that is where the word *Unsupervised* comes in his dissertation title) learn morphological rules of Assamese by analyzing the documents in the corpora. In other words, he developed artificially intelligent programs that read words one by one from the articles in the corpora, break a word up in random and heuristically-guided locations generating hundreds of thousands or millions of possible decompositions, perform statistical frequency of occurrence and other relevant analyses, and finally hypothesize that only certain decompositions are the "correct" decompositions of the words. From these "correct" decompositions, Utpal obtains a list of individual inflectional components. He, painstakingly, goes over the words and the computer generated inflectional components one by one to see how many are correct and how many are wrong based on his judgment as a native and educated speaker and writer of Assamese.

Utpal's programs are able to obtain almost 90% correct results with articles from the Emille corpus. This is very encouraging. The results are comparable or better than those reported for unsupervised machine learning by researchers working in any other language of the world. Utpal's work is the first computational linguistics work in Assamese as far as we know. Already, he has published papers in several Indian and international conferences based on his findings.

More such work in Computational Linguistics focused on Assamese is absolutely necessary if we ever want to have applications such as spelling checkers, character-based scanning of documents, electronic or Internet dictionaries, automatic translation to and from Assamese, and voice recognition. Such applications are already widespread in languages such as English, French, German, Japanese or Chinese. That is why when we type a document in English using Microsoft Word, the program can automatically flag wrong spellings, and wrong or awkward grammatical structures and offer to make corrections. That is why, we can telephone an Airlines reservation system and talk to a software-supported answering system that guides us through various alternative pathways, and connects us to a human agent if and when necessary.

Utpal's dissertation advisors were Dr. Rajib Das, of Calcutta University (and formerly, of Tezpur University) and Jugal Kalita of the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.

Utpal's Ph.D. dissertation is available at <http://www.cs.uccs.edu/~kalita/work/StudentResearch/UtpalSarmaPhDThesis2006.pdf> for the interested reader.

Jugal Kalita, Colorado

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The ASA Executive Committee is composed of Dhruba Das, President (Coatesville, Pennsylvania), Kabita Sharma (Hillsborough, New Jersey), Vice President, Mukul Chowdhary (Edison, New Jersey), Treasurer, and Ganesh Bora (Lake Alfred, Florida), General Secretary.

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