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Assam 2005: My Impressions

By Alpana Sarangapani, Houston, Texas

We just got home from the great Assamese get-together at Orlando, Florida held at the beautiful and elegant setting at Disney Coronado Springs resort, which we enjoyed thoroughly.

Here are some of the highlights of the event (from my point of view as a member of the audience):

There was no small-time politics and upstaging one another at all. Thus there was no tension and each and everyone was having plain and simple fun. It was truly a “community event” where the community was the focus, as opposed to a convention which is consumed by itself.

Even though there is only one Assamese family in the Orlando area, there are many out-of-town Assamese Floridians (and also from other states) who organized or helped in this great event for the guests to have some down to earth fun. It made us feel like it was taken care of by ‘local people’ - we were totally “at home”.

Some from the crowd like, Ganesh Bora, Utpal Brahma, Partha Gogoi, Prakash Deka, Abani Sharma, Jukti Kalita, Priyankoo Sharma, Jugal Kalita, Kamal Sharma etc., made the event much more livelier by their frequent jokes and the use of their sense of humor at the right times.

Both professional artists (Elora Bora Singh and Jitul Sonowal) from Assam gave great performances as expected. We had the experience of personally talking and dining with them - never get this opportunity even

back home. The guest artists were not just great performers, but were also able to mix and mingle with us freely.

Before going to Orlando, we had often heard of many of the names involved and thought they were larger than life, but were pleasantly surprised that none of them had any airs about them.

To add to this, we enjoyed and were extremely proud to be able to enjoy the performances of great artists from the US itself. To mention some are: Rabin & Arundhotee Goswami, Abani Sarma and his granddaughter little Ranikiran, Priya Saikia, Anjana Bordoloi, Umesh Tahbildar, Biraj Bhuyan, Chumki Gogoi, Ruprekha Bhuyan, Lona Sarma, Leoni Borkakati, Preetha Kamath, Priya Saikia, Bihu - wonderfully danced by little Jahnabi Das, Rick Bhuyan, Nick Bhuyan, Nikumani Bhuyan, Surabhi Kalita, Jukti Kalita, Nilakshi Thakuria, Jayanta Thakuria, Malabika Brahma, Moushumi Chatterjee, Anuradha Deka, Please forgive me if I missed any performer’s name. MCs: Rick and Nick Bhuyan, Pari Saikia, Santanu and Moushumi Chatterjee kept the show moving at a good pace.

Rabin Goswami’s presentation was just mesmerizing. His personality filled with humility and politeness won’t give you a clue that he possesses a great voice and the quality of a professional singer, unless and until you hear him singing.

The food was just great. The host families went out of the way to provide the whole gathering with sumptuous, nutritious meals

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of a medley of American, Italian, Indian and Mexican (as opposed to the regular oily Indian restaurant food) dishes. They even paid attention to the details where vegetarians like me had a wide choice - gestures like this reinforces the feeling that each and everyone is welcome.



Jitul Sonowal

Then there was this unique arrangement where guests were taken by bus (a nice scenic drive) to a local Indian restaurant for a grand dinner. It was like fun mixed with food.

Before I forget, we also had the pleasure of viewing a short film by Ms. Sanchayita Sharma, “The Passage”, about a poor family and their life “amidst the crisis of insurgency”. The film is based on the award winning short story by Dr. Indira Goswami.

We also got to see Sanjoy Hazarika’s A River’s Story, the Quest for the Brahmaputra, directed by Jahn Barua. It depicted the everyday life of all the people of the countries through which the great river flows.

The gathering was also able to enjoy some of the outstanding paintings of Mahesh da (Baishya) and Ms. Jupi Tara Das' art (paper cutting) creation. Mahesh da also took the extra time to educate us to the essence of water-color painting. The discourse was not just educational but also enabled many of us to appreciate painting and art in a more knowledgeable way. There was also a beautiful exhibiton of Some of you missed the event because of some reason or another, but we really wish you all had been there. Like us, I am sure you too would have thoroughly enjoyed the fun-filled events. We made many new friends, and touched base with a whole lot more.

One thing other meets in future might want to learn from Assam 2005 is the spirit of comradrie and kinship and the utter lack of groupism, that was felt throughout the 3-day event. Its not just enough to put up a lot pomp and glitz, but the main reason we need to gettogether once in a while whether it's for Bihus or for other events is to develop and enhance the coheshiveness of Porbaxi Oxomiya.

Young children too had their share of fun in the sports and picnic - many of them were also enjoying it in a grand way at Disney.

Dr. Birendra Gohain, Commissioner to the CM of Assam, was the keynote speaker on Sunday. He touched upon a number of important issues involving Assam.

While describing the fun that we had at the Orlando get-together, I don't want to leave out the names of the organizers of the event.

See what I mean! These organizers did not make us feel that they are the ones who were instrumental in making this happen. They are: Mr. Sunil B. Nath, Mrs. Abha Nath, Sanjib Bhuyan, Abani Sharmah, Kanika Sharma, Ganesh Bora, Samarjyoti Kalita, and Nilakshi Thakuria.

I am pretty sure I have missed somebody, then again, that is 'coz they were really working hard for the event to go smoothly without being noticed by the regular people like us. Like I said earlier, it was truly a "community event" for the people and just not for the organizers.

Mrs. Sharma took the extra effort to teach the Chef of the resort center to make quite a few Assamese dishes like, Dail, Maasor tenga, Porotha, Paleng-xaakor bhaji, Poduna Satni, etc. - Assamese style, then providing desserts like Jilepi, Rosogullah, Lal-muhon, etc., (even the cucumbers were cut in Assamese style – you know! not in round circles, but in small chunks, I was touched :), really!)

Also, I now realize that a big percentage of the people in the get-together were the members of the Assam Society of America, but not a single soul asked us to be members of the Society, neither did they make us feel like "outsiders", even for a second. I truly commend their gracious hospitality and thank them for a job well done.

We heartily congratulate all the people involved in Assam 2005 for making the event a grand success.

Assam 2005 Disneyland, Orlando, USA

July 1-4, 2005

Jukti Kalita, New Jersey

Disneyland in Orlando, Florida, arguably the entertainment capital of the USA was the venue of ASSAM 2005 from July 1st to July 4th. During that sultry summer long weekend, when the natives flocked to the beaches in droves and enjoyed their backyard barbecue parties, Assamese families from various states of the union gathered in this USA's Sunshine State to celebrate their ethnic heritage. Their goal was to listen to their favorite songs from the invited artists, watch their favorite dances, dance to the tune of *bihugeets*, enjoy a few Assamese movies, discuss issues of importance to Assam and India, network with the fellow Assamese expatriates and talk till the end of the night. Some of them had planned extended stays before or after the get-together to enjoy what Orlando has to offer – after all they were only steps away from the world-renowned

entertainment parks like Magic Kingdom, EPCOT Center, Sea World and the Animal Kingdom.

This year's get-together was jointly organized by the Assamese residents of Florida. The conveners were Sunil Nath, Abha Nath, Abani Sarma, Samar Kalita, Ganesh Bora – all of Florida and Sanjib Bhuyan of New Jersey. The cultural show was put together by Nilakshi and Jayanta Thakuria of New Jersey. There were two invited artists from Assam – the immensely popular Assamese singer Jitil Sonowal and Ellora Bora Singh who is an accomplished *Xatriya* and *Bharatnatyam* dancer. Robin Goswami from Washington DC was featured as the invited artist from within the USA.

Jitil Sonowal enthralled the audience with

songs from his popular music cassettes including remixes of songs of the bye-gone era and *bihugeets* on both nights of the get-together. Many members of the audience got on to their feet at the tune of Jitil's melodies and the *bihu* numbers. Jitil's remixes in which he sings popular Assamese songs to the blended Eastern and Western tunes were hit with both the young who grew up in the USA and the grown-ups. On the second night of the program Jitil invited some members of the audience like Nilakshi Thakuria and Umesh Tahbaldar to accompany him for a few songs.

Ellora Bora Singh who is in the US with her husband Vijay Singh performed on the second night of the get-together. Her superb *Xatriya* and *Bharatnatyam* recitals were enjoyed by all. She showed pure brilliance through her own creations in which she dances to the tune of '*O mor apunaar dex*' and the American national anthem. Despite the fact that she had arrived only a few hours before her performance from India after a long flight, she delighted everyone through her exquisite exposition of the dance forms of Assam and India.

Rabin Goswami sang songs composed and

popularized by the brothers Bhupen and late Jayanta Hazarika in addition to a few Hindi songs. The expertise with which he rendered his voice to songs sung by other artists is indeed amazing. When he sang Bhupen Hazarika's songs, he sounded exactly like the doyen of the Assamese music. But, when he switched over to Jayanta's songs, he transformed his voice instantly and voila' the audience now had a Samar incarnation in front of them. Rabin's wife Arundhati also accompanied him for a few songs.

Dr. Birendra Gohain, Commissioner to the CM of Assam was the keynote speaker on Sunday. He discussed various issues regarding the development of Assam and how the current Gogoi government is trying to accelerate the process of integration of Assam's development with the rest of India. There was a question and answer session at the end of Dr. Gohain's presentation.

Some of the other notable performances during the two days were as follows: (1) *Aadhunik* dance by Suravi Kalita and Nilakshi Thankuria, (2) *Bodo Bagarumbaa* dance by Malabika Brahma, Mausumi Chatterjee and Anuradha Deka, (3) *Bihu* dances by Anjana Bordoloi Hazarika, Priya

Saikia, Jahnabi Das, Nikumani Bhuyan and Jayanta Thakuria, (4) *Oddissi* dance by Leoni Barkakati, (5) *Bhartnatyam* by Loni Sarma, (6) Old Hindi and Assamese songs of 1930s to 1950s by Abani Sarma. (7) Dances to the tune of Bhupen Hazarika's songs by Sumki Gogoi, (8) Assamese songs by Umesh Tahbildar and Biraj Bhuyan, (89 Assamese and English songs by Rupak Bhuyan and Neepak Bhuyan, and (10) Assamese songs by Ruprekha Bhuyan. The functions were emceed by teenagers Rupak Bhuyan, Neepak Bhuyan and Priya Saikia on the first night and on the second night by Shantanu and Mausumi Chatterjee. Both nights featured *mukoli bihus*.

A magazine called *Asomi 2005* as well as souvenir was brought out on the occasion of the Assam 2005 celebrations. *Asomi 2005* which has sections in Assamese and English featured articles by writers from the USA as well as Assam. It was edited by Jukti Kalita while the souvenir was edited by Sanjib Bhuyan. Pre-conference communications including several newsletters to the community were prepared by Jugal Kalita, Probal Tahbildar and Prakash Deka.

There was a display of art by Jupi Tora Das

of Pennsylvania, Mahesh Baishya of California and Dadul Chaliha of Mangaldoi, Assam. Jupi Das has set up her own studio in Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania and regularly participates in the arts and crafts shows in the north-eastern USA. Mr. Chaliha, though not personally present, had sent several pieces of his art for display. He is an upcoming artist and had already held shows not only in Assam, but also in various parts of India including in New Delhi, Calcutta and Amritsar. Krishna Hazarika of Maryland designed the tasteful banner of Assam 2005.

Biraj Bhuyan, a prominent Assamese businessman from Pennsylvania was so enthralled by Assam 2005 that he volunteered to personally sponsor multiple artists for the next convention, the venue for which will soon be decided upon. Everyone attending the conference was highly pleased with the hospitality of world renowned Walt Disney. The cooks at the Disney's restaurants had prepared excellent Assamese and Indian dishes based on the directions of a few of the participants. Everyone carried wonderful memories back to their homes.

Book Review:

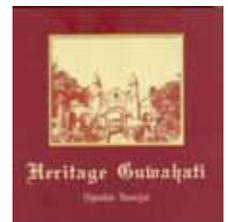
Heritage Guwahati by Dipankar Banerjee

Recently, I was reading a book called *Heritage Guwahati*, written by Dipankar Banerjee, professor of History in Gauhati University. In this book Professor Banerjee in association with Kamrup (Metropolitan) District Association narrates some of the historic landmarks of the city of Guwahati which themselves have a heritage of their own. The list includes some prominent landmarks like Northbrook Gate; Bijulee Cinema.; Cotton Collegiate; Kamrup Anusandhan Samiti; Kasturba Ashram; Harishaba; Cotton College; Dighalipukhuri; Bura Majid; Handique Girl's College; Mahafezkhana; Arya Natya Samaj; DHAS; Sikh Temple; Earle Law College, Kelvin Cinema; Barpeta Sakha Satra; GMC; Bengali HS School; J Barooah's Bungalow; Brahma Samaj; Rasul Lodge; Borgola; The Gauhati Club; Umananda; Curzon Hall; Satribari Christian Hospital; Kumar Bhaskar Natya Mandir; Saikh Brothers; Baptist Church; DC's Bungalow; KB Banerjee & Sons; Maharana

Club; Cotton Principal's Bungalow; Harikrishna Das' House; and Kamrup Academy. By reading the book I came across a lot of information. For example the first silent movie was screen in the city in a small hall opposite Nag Kota Pukhuri later named as Bijulee Cinema. Amalprabha Das with the help of her illustrious father Dr Harikrishna Das built the Kasturba Ashram according to Gandhiji's wishes. The Harisabha Trust was created by people from different communities for religious discourses and other festivals in 1913. The Mahafezkhana (Record Room) was established between 1855 and 1865. The Arya Natya Mandir attracted some of the icons of the socio-cultural, political and literary life of India. The department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies (DHAS) was established to promote knowledge of history. The Sikh Mandir was established in 1904-05 and Kelvin Cinema 1935. The Guwahati Municipal Corporation was started under the 1850 Bengal Municipal Act. The Brahma Mandir was constructed in 1901 from a plot of land acquired by the government. The Curzon Hall was constructed in 1912 to commemorate Governor General Lord Curzon's visit in 1900. In 1885, three brothers from Calcutta estab-

lished the Shaikh Brothers bakery in Panbazar. The Maharana Club was established in 1907 by ten youths. In addition there are lot more information that Professor Banerjee shares with the readers. The book edited by, Monideepa Choudhuri, contains a preface by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. In his words, Dr. Singh calls Guwahati a 'city of great beauty with affectionate people who have lovingly built the city into a brilliant mosaic of cultures'. The Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup (Metropolitan) District, A K Asbar Hazarika, says that the city's scenic splendor, way of life and architecture has won over over the heart and delighted the soul. The book is worth reading for all those who love Guwahati.

- Contributed by Satyam Bhuyan, Ames, Iowa. The writer is a graduate student at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.



The Passage by Sanchayita Sharma

Not too long ago today I watched your film “The Passage,” and despite my lack of expertise as a film critic, I want to say that Sanchayita has done a fantastic job in your first attempt. I was very moved by the scene when “Atoi” touches Pokhili’s bloodied face towards the end of the film - I don’t know how Sanchayita was able to do it, but the expression in his face tells many many untold stories of pain, suffering, helplessness, and human suffering in general. Kudos for able to bring up some imp issues that Assam and its people are facing in your film. Thank you for letting us screen the film at Assam2005 – on behalf of everybody involved in it, I thank you sincerely.

It is our misfortune that Sanchayita will not be there in person to show the film, but we did our best to present the film, including distributing a short flier on Sanchayita and

her film.

Here in NJ, I’m involved in Rutgers University’s South Asia program - with your permission, I can ask them if they’d like to screen the film (either during summer or in fall). I can be there in the screening and explain the background. There is one Aytree Phukan, a doctoral student in English comp lit, who is also associated with the South Asia program and may be also help.

Again, we missed Sanchayita in Orlando, but we thank her very much for letting us show her work. I’m confident that her future is quite bright and I’m sure others agree.

- Sanjib Bhuyan, New Jersey

Sanchayita’s Response:

I am glad that you enjoyed the film. Yes, for a non actor Atoi was excellent in that shot. All I did was talk him through the pain involved while he was giving the shot and he didn’t let me down. The lighting was good too which helped to see the creases in his Eri and the lines on his forehead. I does have a lot of character on his face was one of the strong points for casting him. The map of his face tells a story about his pain and simplicity which sometimes you don’t get on an actor’s face. I purposely didn’t rehearse this shot and wanted to catch him off guard and I think, for him, it came from within. I was lucky too as he is indeed a genuine man in a world where a lot of people do a lot of things in the name of God. I believe that good people can be good actors.

On a lighter side, off and on, in his namghar Atoi gives prayers in my name and dutifully delivers proxad to my mom and catches up about me. Bless.

Assam 2005 Photos



Suravi Kalita and Nilakshi Thakuria, both of New Jersey, danced to an Assamese song during Assam 2005.



Biraj Bhuyan and his wife Hansa pledged \$10,000 to bring in artists from Assam for Assam 2005. Biraj Bhuyan is a Pennsylvania businessman who deals in diamonds. Currently, he is involved in building a chain of small motels called Stop Inns (<http://stop-inn.com>) across the US.



Rabin Goswami of Washington, DC, sang songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and others. He sounds exactly like Dr. Hazarika! His wife Arundhoti Goswami also joined him for a few songs.



Elora Bora Singh performed Xottriya as well as Bharat Natyam on the second evening of Assam 2005. She and her husband had arrived only a few hours earlier from Assam.

London Torn into Pieces: My Heart Bleeds

On Thursday morning I took the tube from Baker street to Whitechapel station my usual route to work. I was lucky to get off in time 10 minutes away from Liverpool station, when the bomb blast. I was holding onto my Saibaba locket and prayed for saving my life.

This is the second time that I have been caught up in a major disaster and to be honest, I am feeling very shaky.

In spite of the massive difference in surroundings there have been uncanny similarities with the bomb explosion at Ganeshguri Market, Dispur few years back where I was shopping on that fatal day.

The same bewildered expression of innocent people stunned by sudden horror. The same creeping realisation that people are dead and dying.

I can't believe that such barbarism should come the day after the national euphoria at winning the Olympics. It is desperately sad. And especially when G8 Summit of world leaders gathered for its mission to make poverty history.

Terrorist on this earth don't care about anyone. Their killing is indiscriminate. Edgware Road is full of Arabs, Aldgate has many Asians and predominately Muslims. How our earth anybody can really believe that God is pleased with this,

that killing innocent people will earn them a place in Heaven. Every act of terrorism in the name of religion is wrong and does damage to those practising it.

Walking down Oxford street you feel like you are in Park street, Chowringee, Kolkata. The Salwar Kameeze is as ubiquitous as the cropped top jeans ensemble and you can hear as many snatches of Hindi, Gujarati, Punjabi and Bengali as you do of English. This is an example of that much vaunted British multiculturalism.

It is not just holidaying that appeals. When rich non-resident Indians -- whether it's L.N. Mittal or Naresh Goyal -- have to choose a baseout of where to operate it's always London that makes the cut.

Partly of course it is that our easy familiarity with English makes it much easier to work and live here. But also the pace of life here is much more civilised when compared to say the frenetic energy of New York.

Small wonders then that London has become the spiritual home away from home for most of us. It's the Indian punters who are the high rollers and it's their money that keeps the tills ringing. The British may have colonised us for several centuries. But it's taken us only a few decades to take over their capital and make it our own.



British are the most tolerant nation in the world. And it is the best country to live in. We knew after 9/11 then Madrid and next us but do not know when.

For a few blissful hours we were the envy of the world, the place to be. Britain was the double winner that had staged the immensely successful Live 8 concert and became the winner of hosting the 2012 Olympics. Thursday atrocities in London once more brought out the best of Britain.

I salute the heroes of the Ambulance Services, the paramedics, the police, the fire brigade, doctors and nurses who gave of themselves to save life.

- Rini Kakati, London

Some Key Concepts of Assam Vaishnavism

Dr Archana Barua

I made an attempt at understanding some key terms of Assam Vaishnavism like *Deva*, *Guru*, *Nâm*, *Bhokot* etc. in the background of Assam's socio-cultural perspective and that in the wider perspective of Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy that relates meaning of words and terms into a socio-cultural context or what he identifies as a 'form of life.' In my dissertation, I sought to make a comparative study of some of the key concepts of Assam Vaishnavism, identifying it as a form of life that has its own rules for playing a particular language game. This was an attempt at understanding what

specific connotation the term *Deva* (God) has within Assam Vaishnavism even if that *Deva* is called Krishna, Râma, Mahâpuruxa, and so on. Does this concept have similar meaning within other forms of Vaishnavism, say, within the Chaitanyite form, that is also known as Bengal Vaishnavism, irrespective of the fact that all these terms refer to one common Godhead who is also the *Deva* of the Gita, and of the Bhagavat Purana?

My special focus was on the distinctive shades of meaning that is culture and context dependent, based on that one can use Wittgenstein's terminology and say that the

grammar of the concept of *Deva* decides what particular religious game is to be played and in what form. Within the context of Bengal Vaishnavism of Sri Chaitanya, *bhakti* becomes more eroticised and passionate, Krishna, the *Deva*, is incomplete without His own blissful energy, *hladini sakti* that is symbolized by Radha. Within the agriculture based and the comparatively catholic and mostly non-priest oriented socio-cultural context of Assam Vaishnavism, Shankaradeva and Madhavadeva, concentrated more on *Dasya* and *Sakhitva* than the passionate and intimate love of Krishna, accordingly the Lakshmi-Vishnu form of the *Deva* centered round a chaste and domestic image of the *Deva* who is equal to all the *gopies* in the *Râsa Leela*, without any spe-

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Golden Jubilee of AEC and Sustainability Issues

Dr Atul Bora

The journey of Assam Engineering College began in 1955 as the Assam Civil Engineering College from the Assam Engineering Institute's campus of Chandmari, Guwahati. Late Bishnu Ram Medhi, the then Chief Minister of Assam laid the foundation of the main college building at Jalukbari on 25th Jan 1956. The College got shifted from Chandmari to Jalukbari on 1st June 1957 and renamed as Assam Engineering College. The college was formally inaugurated on 16th Jan 1958 by the then Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The college celebrated the first Re-union of its ex-students on 25th Jan 1966. The Silver Jubilee of the college was celebrated on 6th & 7th March 1981, although 1980 was the Silver Year of the college. In the light of the Silver Jubilee Year of the college, its Golden Jubilee Year is 2005 and the college is all set to celebrate the occasion with various events earmarked in different dates starting from 25th Jan 2005 to 25th Jan 2006. Celebration is focused for expanding the range of opportunities of the students along with the all round development of the institution for sustenance of AEC's glory and relevance.

With the occasion of Golden Jubilee, time has come for formal commemoration and introspection of AEC's standing for the last fifty years. A brain storming session on the introspection and growth orientation of the college is an important aspect of celebration. However, as the pioneer in technical education of the North Eastern Region, AEC represents the status of the higher education sector of the state. With such a perspective, the occasion of Golden Jubilee Celebration of AEC is also an occasion for introspection and growth orientation of the entire higher education sector of the state. The situation dictates such an exercise and would be possible only with the active participation of intelligentsia and policy makers of the region..

Geographically, Assam and the sister states of North East India is a relatively remote and obscure part of this great country. Of late, the popular perception of negligence and underdevelopment of the region has found recognition almost at all levels. On the other hand the issue of negligence and underdevelopment of the region needs to be addressed by proactive local initiative instead of usually adopted reactive posture. Here, the indigenous capability to analyze, prioritize and solve the local set of problems arises. Thus, the state needs to develop a brand of youths with technological and managerial capability either for productive use of local natural capital or for management of natural hazards endowed. The Assam Engineering College in particular and the higher educational institutions in general are supposed to shoulder these responsibilities in the state's perspective. Thus the deep-rooted relevance of AEC that determines the technological contours of the indigenous youths is evident. So, unless AEC is developed to cope with the course of time or any reluctance for investment in AEC would imply only the lack of a focused agenda for



sustainable development of the state. In other words, Golden Jubilee celebration of AEC calls for a socio-political awareness about the need of institutional sustainability of the state, as a precondition for sustainable development.

Today, government is too occupied to the pressing needs of immediate attention, be it terrorism or be it the service conditions of its employees. On the other hand, the individual teacher's role in higher educational institutions is narrowed down around a subject of specialization with loss of sight to overall institutional objectives, not to speak about the state's perspective with which these institutions were originally established. To come out from such a complex and bleak scenario, the only option left is to link the state's higher education and scientific establishment to the state's agenda for sustainable development. This is also the fundamental step to handle unemployment of youths in one hand and for productive utilization of employed youths on the other hand.

For AEC Alumni: Golden Nostalgia AEC 2005

Assam Engineering College, Guwahati does not need any introduction to you being an alumnus of the college. But what probably needs to be said is that this almamater of our completes 50 years on 7th September 2005. On this date in 1955, Late Shri Hari Prasad Baruah joined as the first Principal of the first Engineering College to be established in Assam. As an act of remembering that land mark day, ex-students as well as present and past faculty members have now come together to celebrate this occasion in a befitting manner on 7th through 10th September 2005 with a programme christened

"Golden Nostalgia AEC 2005". Amongst other things, we are planning to hold a symposium on "Technological Vision 2025: AECIANS on the Road Map" on 8th September 2005 at Guwahati.

With kind regards.

Yours faithfully,

*Prof. U Miri
Shri Gajendra Nath Khound
Jt. Convenor
Symposium Sub-Committee
Golden Nostalgia AEC 2005*

It is a matter of concern that many private buildings have grown up in the very low-lying area within the heart of the college. Apart from distorting the unique feature of the college campus, the environmental and academic sustainability of this premier institution is at stake unless appropriate measure is not taken immediately to this end. The state government may enforce existing land use regulation to stop private settlements within the heart of the college even without any resource consumption. The option of purchasing private land within the AEC campus and allotting the same to the college should also be considered without delay to protect the immediate and long-term interest of this capacity building center of the region.

Today, infrastructure of AEC is poorer than what existed twenty years back! The physical infrastructure plays a significant role on the overall organizational behaviour and personality. However, an improved physical infrastructure alone will lead us nowhere unless the same is correlated with a vision plan. As such formulation of a vision plan and commensurate infrastructure-need for the college is one of the Golden Jubilee Events. A comprehensive proposal should follow for sponsorship of relevant central government's agencies. Homework by the college community and moral support from government are the key to this end. Efforts have also been directed to explore the possibility of overcoming the fund crunch of state through various supportive measures

from the corporate citizens of the region. Popular demand for modernization of AEC & JEC along with the state's medical colleges under PM's package should be raised.

One central question is, vision plan of AEC must have linkage to the state's vision for overall sustainability! As such, formulation of a local agenda of sustainable development with regional perspective is a logical beginning. Of course, it is only a visionary leadership that can pave the way of linking state's higher educational institutions and scientific establishment to the state's agenda for sustainable development.

Some Key Concepts of Assam Vaishnavism

.. contd. from page 5..

cial preference for a particular devotee. This democratic spirit of Assam Vaishnavism is reflected in popular sayings 'Rou barali xoroki g'ol, puthi kholihona jâlot ro'l'. (that the net of Vaishnavism in Assam could not catch big fish), it was rather aimed at not catching big fish into its fold. With strong emphasis on the Four Realities *Deva*, *Guru*, *Nâm* and *Bhokot*, with more emphasis on one or the other of the realities in the respective *Sotros*, for example, the *Kâla Samhati* established by Gopal Âta, and its centrality of *Bhokot* (devotee), the *Deva*, there was scope for more equality of all the devotees irrespective of caste and creed, the *Satra* could attract large number of devotees into its fold which later strengthened the spiritual bond of all fellow devotees under the banner of *Ek Saran Nâm Dharma*.

Within the liberal sect of *Kâla Samhati*, with its centrality of *Hari Bhakat*, large number of tribes of upper Assam found easy access to the liberal and modified form of Mohapuruxia *dharma* that made *bhakti* easily accessible to one and all with 'Nâbasé Nâmé jâti ajâti'..! Equally significant is Gopal Âta's attempt at liberalizing *bhakti* with concession made to some form of meat eating, use of rice beer (xaj pani) etc. among some plains tribes of Assam, if that happened to be the existing custom of the tribe, provided, they would gradually modify those practices in order to be promoted to the sta-

tus of Modhyom Bhokot, Uttom Bhakat, and so on. This naturally gave enough cause for resentment against the liberal principles of *Kâla Samhati* by some other sects of Vaishnavism saying that the sect here has *gone West!* But it was the catholicity of this particular *Samhati*, along with some others of its kind, that was mostly responsible for bringing large number of devotees into the fold of Assam Vaishnavism, including a large number of Ahom devotees in upper Assam. It was interesting to find how the democratic spirit of Assam Vaishnavism appealed more to all sects of common people irrespective of caste and creed as they could share spiritual ties with one another as *Hari Bhokot* that kept room for caste mobility in a great way. For example, a xornia father refused to dine with his own axornia son but they became soul mates (*Atai/Atma Rama*) with anyone from another caste or creed as *Hari Bhokots*.

Within the *Smarta system*, it is the *Deva*, the Lord, who is special to a particular devotee, (In Bengal Vaishnavism *Radha* is central in the *Râs Leela*), while in the *Bhâgavat Purân* centric non priest Assam Vaishnavism *Krishna* in the *Ras-Leela* is equal to all the *Gopies* as this is more the democratization of *bhakti* than the tightening of the caste structure within its fold. That led *Xoangoro Deva* and others to opt for a non idol centric but *Guru*, *Nâm* and *Bhakat* centric catho-

lic *bhakti* scheme with innovation to select a *Guru* from any eligible community, eligible not in terms of high caste, but in terms of fulfilling the required norms laid down by the *Gurus* (*Xorono*, *Bhojono*, etc.) that once enabled *Naga's Norottam*, *Javanar Chandasai*, *Garor Govinda*, among others, to be as perfect a *Guru* as anyone from the so-called high caste of the society. Naturally, it evoked mixed response from different sections of the society as a result of which after the demise of the *Gurus* (*Dujona Guru*), changes were incorporated among all the sects of Assam Vaishnavism to make it more acceptable among the pan Indian Hindu social and cultural milieu with the tightening of caste hierarchy etc. that gradually.

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