

Volume 31, Issue No 9. June 2004

ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world



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From The Editor's Desk

Recently a few encouraging signs have been observed in Assam. In particular, I am very excited by the initiative to encourage students for better performance on All India Civil Services Examinations and to give government grants to schools that have shown good results in examinations such as the HSLC. I have also observed activities of the Self-Help Groups (SHG) in many parts of Assam. During the last two years, SHGs have contributed significantly to Assam's economy. They not only help generate employment, but also open many options to the educated youth.

These are positive and forward-looking steps. Assam needs to cultivate ideas of self-help and entrepreneurship among its populace, starting from childhood. It is necessary that the textbooks used in schools, the teaching methodologies employed at all levels, and the basic outlook to life and living undergo drastic changes if Assam is to see the face of prosperity. Otherwise, there are signs of grave danger everywhere for the coming generations. The Government should focus on being an engine of economic change in addition to working on social upliftment of the downtrodden and the unfortunate.

NRAs can play a significant role in changing the face of Assam. Obviously it is not necessary to mention that the people of Assam have great expectations from this group of people. The tourism sector, in particular, has great potential for growth, NRAs along with many others can play role in it. There can be many big players in this sector. Schools and colleges can play a vital role. Schools and colleges should start Departments of Tourism Studies. Not only that, a novel collaborative approach among the various academic departments such as education and tourism should be developed. Tourism should be developed at all levels to draw visitors not only from other states of India, but also from the neighboring countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand. Well-planned tourism initiatives by the Government along with help from academia and the private sector will lead to improvements in roads, communications, security and other related infrastructure needs.

More SHGs also need to be involved in marrying the education sector and tourism in Assam. A more systematic, scientific and well-managed approach needs to be developed similar to the ASTC or otherwise with a visionary leader.

- Vavani Sarmah (June-12-2004)

Congratulatory Letter from ASA President to Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh

Dr. Manmohan Singh
 Hon'ble Prime Minister of India
 South Block R
 Raisin Hill
 New Delhi – 110 011
 Dated: 20th May, 2004



Dear Sir,

Please accept our heartfelt CONGRATULATIONS on your being elected to lead the country as the Prime Minister. The Assamese community living in North America is proud and overwhelmed to see a Hon'ble Member of Parliament from Assam being chosen to lead the largest democracy in the world.

At this historic moment in India's journey towards becoming a major economic power in the world there cannot be a better person than you to be the Prime Minister of India. We are confident that our country will further prosper both socially and economically under your stewardship.

We are equally confident that the process of economic liberalization that you started more than a decade ago would continue under your able leadership. We are proud of your achievements as the Finance Minister of India and your innovative ways of economic development striking a balance with the needs of India's masses.

The Assamese community in North America would like to appeal to you to continue with your personal nurturing of the issues related to the overall development of Assam. We are hopeful that you will be able to bring the pace of Assam's economic development at par to the rest of the country.

Once again we wish you the best in the future endeavors, and we pray to God for his blessings on you and our beloved country.

Sincerely,

For Assam Society of America

*Mantu C. Baishya, Ph.D, PE
President*



TSIC : Development – with and without money

The topic may be slightly confusing for most people. These are the people who think that India is not developed because we don't have money. But that is not even 10 percent of the truth. The truth is that Indians are becoming less civil, less tolerant, less kind-hearted, more corrupt and more money minded. With people like these one can hardly expect development to take place. The sad part is that the good things have to start from the people at the top and these are normally people with money. Instead of making positive changes here and there since they can afford to live without earning an extra buck through unfair means they seem to be taking more and more not knowing what to do with their surplus.

There are hundreds of negative things that one can talk about these days about our society. Discussion in any social gathering revolves around such topics. While appreciating all the difficulties and possibilities, my wife and I started the TSIC (Thaneswar Sarma Institute for Change)

which is charitable trust in memory of my father who served Assam as a rural development officer in various capacities. Earlier I had joined hands with some friends to start another NGO called Economic Development Initiative (EDI) and Eastern Himalayan Society (EHSoc). The latter was supposed to provide micro credit and the former to initiate for all-round



development of the society roping in the well-established friend circle, old school friends etc. EDI is almost at a standstill after moving into fishery project in Hajo. EHSoc is surviving only because I have taken it as a personal challenge to make it successful.

Seeing the way things work here, I decided to start an organization so that I could do things my way. Also, I have seen that people normally set up a trust when they have reached the end of their career and when they no see that their money has no value for them. Giving away funds when one has the need is what is more meaningful. TSIC was the result all this discussion I had with my wife. Since the trust belongs to my family I have been able to initiate steps which, in my view, have important ramifications. By the way, my daughter also enjoys spending time at TSIC. The initial funding of the trust came from a personal loan from a friend of mine in the US, an NRI.

My family has a flat behind St. May's High School, Guwahati Club. This was given on rent to a private computer institute. We used to earn Rs 9000/- per month. Once we decided to set up the trust, this flat was utilized for the purpose. We bought a computer, collected books, magazines, journals etc and

set up a library too. Today, we have two computers with printers, chairs and tables for holding small discussions, conferences and other paraphernalia needed. There are four people working for the trust. Two of them earn part of their salary from running the micro credit activities of EHSoc, which is housed in TSIC. EHSoc pays 10% on deposits and charges 20% on loans. Demand for small loan is endless.

Under TSIC, training was conducted for some ten groups of NGO workers in cooperation with Ecosystems India, a trust set up by Nandita Hazarika, Gautom Narayan and Manzul Hazarika of AIT. Smaller programs are being held on and off. When Tehelka.com chief Tarun Tejpal wanted to visit Assam, it was TSIC which gave him the platform. There is some advantage in starting an independent trust.

One major activity of TSIC is in developing the fishermen of Hajo area. NEDFi and EDI are also active in Hajo. Another organization called ACRD was also roped in. Hajo is famous for its local fish production. Unfortunately the government department office has been closed there for some years now. Seeing the potential we moved in. The place is coming up very quickly. Soon a sale counter for Hajo fish will be set up where one will be able to get local fish at a fixed price which will be much below the market price as there will be no middlemen.

Through the micro credit activities both from Ehsoc and TSIC, we have been able to help more than seventy

families. More than 250 members have opened saving accounts. This is one venture having an excellent scope, both for the growth of the organization and for the development of the people. But much more funds is required than what is being revolved presently. There are quite a few borrowers who have been coming to TSIC everyday looking for some small amounts. The collection that we are able to generate is only about five hundred everyday, and about 15 thousand pr month. We plan to borrow some funds at personal level to put in the society. A few of our loans at Hajo have made a tremendous difference to the individual as well as the society.

In order to earn some income for the trust, a tea packaging and selling activity has been taken up. Tea will be procured from the producers in small amounts and packaged and sold in the rural areas. The women members of EHSoc will do the packaging activity for a fee. Markets will be the Self Help Group members. Once again, there is need of funds.

TSIC also plans to start a new scheme under which poor families can be given loans for pressure cooker which saves on firewood and also time; gas connections and stove which is again a time saver an environment friendly device and for low cost sanitary latrines. The loans are normally for Rs 500/-, Rs 2500/- and Rs 4000/- respectively.

There are many small things, which can be done without money too. In Hajo, there are

many fish farmers who have the wherewithal to have better standards of living. But they are not aware. We have gone there and interacted with them, telling them how important it is to have a sanitary latrine, a good bathroom, gas connection for cooking instead of firewood, separate room for guest instead of making the guests sit and sleep in their bedrooms, etc. Things are slowly changing, especially when they find that well-meaning self less people from the city are visiting them regularly. They are also influenced by their visits to our home.

In some cases, it is the information about the various schemes available in the financial institutions and government departments that help the visitors to TSIC and the people we meet during our field visits. In other cases it is the combination of advice and very small loans that can make a difference. In the handloom sector we have reduced a lot of burden and saved a lot of time for the weavers by giving loan for a 'drum', which cost about Rs 8000/-. For a tea stall we purchased corrugated sheets, plastic chairs and a gas stove. The owner who started his business with Rs 70/- a couple of years back is earning about Rs 1000/- a day. Some poor families have been distributed ducklings so that they can supplement their income in a small way.

Anyway, TSIC is a very modest beginning. The few steps we have been able to take are tiny indeed. But with some assistance from friends and well-wishers we should

be able to bring about a lot of change where it is needed. As Joseph Schumpeter remarked to Peter Drucker's father in so many words: one is now old enough to realize that all these

awards, articles, publications don't mean much. One hasn't made a difference if the difference is not in the lives of the people around.

- Contributed by Dr Amiya Sharma. Dr Sharma received his Ph.D. in Economics from Rutgers University in New Jersey and is an economist at NEDFi, Guwahati, Assam.

Media Fellowships

Concept Note on proposed C-NES Media fellowships for Assam and NE: a call for support from NRAs and NRNEs



The Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research was founded in 2000 to work, research, document, lobby for policy changes and disseminate information on crucial issues related to the region. C-NES has a distinguished Board of Trustees, including Dr. VA Pai Panandiker, the founder of India's first major independent think-tank, the Centre for Policy research in New Delhi, Jayanta Madhab, former CMD of NEDFi and a former director of the Asian Development Bank, and Mr. Niketu Iralu, a prominent social activist from Nagaland.

Some of our work is having a visible impact on policies at the state and central levels such as better perception of migration issues (work permits and ID cards), better use of our resources (more boats on the Brahmaputra and leasing IWT vessels out to private entrepreneurs) and developing inclusive policies for ethnic groups.

There is an Advisory Council which includes figures from the academic, social, media, environmental, cultural, non-government, business and professional sectors such as

Patricia Mukhim of Meghalaya, Arnab Goswami, the NDTV news editor, Bhagat Oinam, a prominent young academic from Manipur, Mr. LC Jain, the development economist who drafted economic policies for Assam based on the Assam accord, and Mr. Denghnuna, former Secretary, government of Mizoram.

I am Managing trustee of C-NES and a former correspondent for The New York Times, an author of several books on the region as well as an independent documentary film maker (I have made films for Doordarshan, including an acclaimed mini-series on the Brahmaputra river in 1999 which is still being repeated on various DD channels!). Currently, I am also Consulting Editor of The Statesman, publishing its North East Page every Saturday in all editions.

As you will agree, despite many initiatives and efforts over decades, the North East remains one of the least understood areas of the country and many gaps remain in the public mind and particularly among media persons about the challenges

and difficulties it faces as well as its many complexities.

My special interests related to issues of migration, local governance through involvement of stakeholders, grassroots innovations, documenting the Brahmaputra and the livelihoods of people along its banks, reducing confrontations and conflicts in the North East through dialogue. C-NES and those of us associated with it focus on both field work as well as advocacy for policy change through a process of dialogue and dissemination. As you are aware, one of our principal focuses has been on the Brahmaputra, documenting and developing policies which can regenerate the livelihoods of those living by it and dependent on the river and consequently transform the economy of the region by tapping natural resources in practical ways, such as improved boat communications, better cattle for the *khutis* and cattle herders on the *chars* and *saporis* leading to better milk production -- not through massive interventions such as big dams and river linking.

The approach is participatory, involving local groups and

communities, heeding their voices and views.

Proposal: Media Fellowships For North East

In an effort to bridge the information gap between the North East and the rest of India, I conceived and launched the North East Media Exchange Program in 1996 (through the National Foundation for India), which awards scholarships to media persons from the region and other parts of the country to study and report on issues which they may not, in the normal course, get a chance to research and write about. Thus in the past years, not less than 67 journalists (42 from the North East and 25 from other parts of India) have benefited from this effort to bridge the information and communication gap between the NER and the rest of India.

C-NES wishes to organize and offer two major fellowships, each lasting about six months, along the lines of NEMEP but much more in-depth. We propose a Committee of eminent journalists and editors to select the fellowships. One fellowship will be for a senior journalist from the NER; the second will be for a journalist from the rest of the country. We wish to offer the fellowship to the North East journalist in the specific area of local governance and the use of communications (particularly information technology) in states such as Andhra Pradesh or Madhya Pradesh. The second fellowship will focus on development perspectives from the grassroots, especially local innovations, in the North East.

This effort, we believe, will bring the region closer to the rest of the country, especially by making journalists and communicators better informed about issues and, in turn, informing readers and audiences. My effort through the fellowships which we have been conducting is to widen this base of knowledge and understanding, to sensitize journalists and communicators to major issues.

The work of the fellows could be edited and published as monographs and extensively distributed.



In addition, we could conduct workshops for journalists in the NER with the participation of prominent media figures and scholars to enable direct interaction which would broaden perspectives and deepen understanding, particularly on new technologies and approaches. Workshops to familiarize journalists and media in other parts of the country about the NER could be similarly held with NE participation in such workshops. These events could also be documented and widely disseminated.

We appeal to the Non-Resident Assamese and others of NE origin in the US to back us with a grant that will enable us to run such activities and programs over the next years with competence and professionalism so that the aims outlined above are met. The North East is a major priority of the Government of India (it has set up the Department for the Development of the NE Region in the past few years) and we feel that the strategies outlined above could play an important role in bringing the region closer to the rest of the country.

The obvious question that would arise immediately is what would be the impact (visible) of such fellowships? Those in market research, impact assessment and interested in the outreach of such activities would have such a query, which is most appropriate. The impact of such fellowships is difficult to quantify – I can only share some experiences as someone who has curated an innovative set of fellowships for the past seven years.

The immediate visible impacts are on the fellows who win the awards. First, there has been an interaction of journalists with host organizations such as the Hindu, The Times of India and the Indian Express and Statesman and the building up of their capacities, especially from the North East. This has had several results: people are promoted

within their own organization or they get a better job elsewhere (at least 15 journalists have been appointed to good positions in new organizations) or they are absorbed by the host organization or work on a freelance basis for it. Thus, Sushanta Talukdar, who was a fellow is now the Hindu correspondent for the NE; Ritu Raj Konwar, who worked also with the Hindu during his fellowship as a photographer, is their cameraman for the region. We have better informed writing and reporting on the region as a specific result and thus are able to fight for more space in the media.

The second impact which can be mapped clearly is that on those traveling and working in the NER for the first time. Their own knowledge levels have grown as have their personal and professional interests and in the process they have benefited substantial, influential reading audiences.

Thus, AJ Philip, formerly Senior Editor at the Indian Express and now Associate Editor of The Tribune at Chandigarh, never misses an opportunity to write edits or share information with readers about issues of the NE. Similar is the case for several others. Preeti Gill, formerly an editor with The Book Review and now an editor at Zubaan (successor to Kali, the feminist press) who went to Assam and wrote about Assamese writers, helped organize a seminar on Assamese writing in Delhi (Indira Raisom Goswami – Baideau – still speaks of it as one of the few efforts to enable

writers like herself have an interaction with international and national publishers like Penguin) and now is planning to bring out at least three volumes of writings (novel and non-fiction) from Assam and the NE for Zubaan, including a new novel by Mitra Phukan.

Thus, media practitioners develop a commitment, greater interest and a love for the region and its people.

The fellows are both a network (email association) and a strong resource base for visiting journalists as is the Selection Committee, comprising of editors and reporters from the region and outside.

The third impact is slower and takes longer and needs sustenance: the building up of information and better understanding among larger sections of the media, particularly television, and information among the public. I would draw your attention to a press conference that some of us held in Bhopal after a workshop which drew over 70 participants on March 29, 2004, on Critical Issues before the North East and the report in the Hindu from their Bhopal correspondent: ‘Slowly, but surely, their voices are being heard’ on 31 March 2004.

We from C-NES conduct these workshops because we feel it’s time the NER stopped whining and complaining and instead went ahead to share its experiences and stories, its challenges and hopes with people across India. We had a little modest funding from the

Indian Council for Social Science Research which enabled us to do that at Bhopal – the enthusiasm generated was visible and exciting. It shows how much goodwill exists in the rest of the country for our lands and also how many of our young men and women are doing well outside the region (not just in the West) and form a vibrant pool of talent and resources that we can tap. This we propose to continue doing and raising funds for.

I believe that the Media Fellowships which can be funded by the Assamese and North Eastern friends in the United States can be a major step in plugging the information gaps which exist and at developing a clearer, better informed image of the region which will help in a number of other ways – they can, for example, enable potential investors to take realistic decisions, based on facts, not media hype or rhetoric.

The media’s role in developing a correct image of our region and peoples is critical. The fellowships program which I have outlined is part of the process of enabling a better flow of information and changing both mindsets and prejudices: in the minds of journalists and editors as much as in the general public. For if the media is misinformed, then can the public be blamed? We have to tackle the problem at its root – and I share this as a practicing journalist who is committed to helping young journalists from our area find better professional opportunities and space.

Budget

(Figures below are for one year: we propose a minimum of three years)

| | |
|---|---------------------|
| Two Fellowships for six months @ Rs. 100,000 each | Rs.2,00,000 |
| Travel/lodging allowances @ Rs. 50,000 each | Rs.1,00,000 |
| Advertisements, dissemination, publicity, press conferences | Rs. 60,000 |
| Stationary, faxes, communications, printing, secretarial assistance, administration | Rs. 50,000 |
| Meeting of Selection Committee (in the NER) (committee will include two journalist/editors from outside the NE and two from the NE: i.e. air fare for two persons Delhi-Guwahati-return approx. Rs. 36,000 plus taxis, local conveyance, accommodation and sitting fee for all members) | Rs. 65,000 |
| Coordinator | Rs. 1,00,000 |
| Publishing of monographs (two every year @ Rs. 10,000 each and mailing/distribution costs of Rs. 2,000) | |
| Rs. 10,000 + Rs. 2,000 x 2 x 3 | Rs. 72,000 |
| Miscellaneous | Rs. 10,000 |
| Total | Rs. 6,57,000 |
| For three years: Rs.6,57,000 x 3 | Rs.19,71,000 |

Contributed by Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee, C-NES and Consulting Editor, The North East Page (op-ed)

C-NES Fellowship

Raiz,

Many of you probably remember the presentation, which I did on behalf of Sanjoy Hazarika at the Rongali Bihu celebrations at the India Community Center in Milpitas, California. The presentation was to raise funds for the Center for North East Studies (C-NES) fellowship program to educate people on Assam and the rest of the North East region.



A number of families pledged donations at the Rongali Bihu event. So far, we've raised pledges for \$1700. Our original target for the Bay Area was \$2500. I know that many of you who haven't pledged yet are interested in donating money to this worthy cause. I encourage you to write a check today.

The following families pledged donations at the Rongali Bihu event:

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
| Jugma and Luna Bora | \$200 | Amulya and Polly Saikia | \$100 |
| Monalisa Bora and Rohit Natarajan | \$300 | Manas and Taranushi Chaliha | \$100 |
| Mahesh and Lulu Baishya | \$100 | Trinayan Bora | \$100 |
| Jugal & Bonmayuri Kalita | \$100 | Dipankar and Leena Thakuria | \$100 |
| Satyajit and Latha Nath | \$100 | Akhil and Ranjita Choudhary | \$100 |
| Pranab and Ranju Sharma | \$100 | Roopa Barua and Ranjan Das | \$300 |

You can send the donations directly to me. I'll collect the checks and send them in one package to Sanjoyda. My address is:

Ranjan Das

750 Bounty Drive, #5009
Foster City, CA 94404

Finally, many thanks to the families, who have already pledged. I encourage the rest of you to make a donation today.

Sincerely,
Ranjan Das

(Ranjan Das is an MIT undergraduate and a graduate of the MBA program at the Harvard Business School. He is a Vice President of the German software giant SAP. Ranjan's responsibilities are world-wide. He has traveled 160,000 miles during the first five months of 2004 all across the globe.)

Anundoram Borooh: A genius and a scholar

Anundoram Borooh was born on May 21, 1850 in North Guwahati. He had his early education in North Guwahati and Guwahati. He passed then matriculation examination in second division from Guwahati Government Seminary which is present day's Cotton Collegiate School. He proceeded to Kolkata to join Presidency College wherefrom he passed L.A. (F.A. later I.A.) with 6th position and B.A. with 3rd position.

Anandaram had the ambition to join I.C.S. and only way he could do so was to secure Gilchrist scholarship, which would enable him to proceed to England to prepare himself for the entrance test for I.C.S. examination. He secured 1st position in Gilchrist Scholarship examination. When he studied for I.C.S. at the same time he studied for Bar-at-law in Middle Temple and as well as B.Sc. in Mathematics in London University. He completed his studies and passed I.C.S. test to become the 5th Indian civilian and only Assamese ever. He started his career as a magistrate in Sibsagar and

later was transferred to undivided Bengal where he later became the first Indian District Magistrate in Noakhali District. During his service in Bengal he continued his scholarly works in Sanskrit. He was an eminent Oriental Sanskrit Scholar. He authored many books. Anundoram died at an early age of 39 in 1889 in the home of his lifelong friend Sir Taraknath Palit in Kolkata. The present Calcutta University Science College building was a gift of the philanthropist Sir Taraknath.



Noted Assamese historian and littérateur, Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan, undertook the painstaking research work for his contemplated book on life and works of Anundoram which was published in 1920. When Dr. Bhuyan studied in

Presidency College, Kolkata from 1911 to 1915 he took this opportunity to gather materials from all available sources for the biography. Sir Gooroodass Banerjee taught Anundoram Mathematics at Presidency College in 1865. Sir Gooroodass was the first Indian Vice-Chancellor of Calcutta University and first Indian Judge of a high court. Dr. Bhuyan met Sir Gooroodass and at his request he gave his reminiscence regarding Anundoram in a letter form which he sent on 24th January 1912, where he stated, "The first year class in the Presidency College that year was a splendid class containing many brilliant students, such as the late Mr. R.C. Dutta, the late Babu KartikChandra Mitra....Babu Trailokya Nath Bose....BL Gupta, Babu Uma Kali Mukherjee....Mr. Borooh was unquestionably the brightest of this band of young students. It is worthy of note, that his class fellows never grudged to admit his superior merit. It is a matter of deep regret that his brilliant career of public service was cut off so early".

The 92 year old letter is considered as a historic letter and is proposed to be gifted for preservation to the Asiatic Society, Kolkata; Asia's oldest historical, antiquarian and archival research society

founded in 18th century. A brief report about this landmark letter was published recently in three leading Kolkata dailies.

- By, Bijoy Kumar Bhuyan. The writer is the youngest son of Dr. Suryya Kumar Bhuyan and now lives in Guwahati. He visited his son Satyam at the Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa in May and June of 2004

Investigation into Abusive Letters: A Preliminary Report

There has been a spate of emails recently with fictitious names on **Assamnet** (assam@pikespeak..). Some of the anonymous IDs that have been used are dasmadhurima@yahoo.com, benukalita@yahoo.com and holou@rediffmail.com. Some of the mails have been defamatory to the extreme, such as those from benukalita and holou bandor.

Incidentally "Benu Kalita" is the real name of my father who is currently retired and who lives in Nagaon, Assam. As such, and as one of the administrators of the group (and also that the machine that hosts Assamnet belongs to my university) who is ultimately responsible for the contents of the mailing list, these anonymous and defamatory emails have bothered me a lot. I therefore decided to try and track down the source of each ID.

Initially, I started with dasmadhurima@yahoo.com, but have also been investigating into the benukalita@yahoo.com ID. I was able to make a determination that emails from both IDs originated at the same IP address. While it is possible that more than one person shared the IDs, I have been able to conclusively identify at least one of the persons behind the emails.

Even though I have identified one of the individuals behind the emails, I was willing to let

it go if the individual offered an apology and agreed to not post such abusive emails in the future. While I have the right to pursue the matter either legally or with the employer of the individual, I had hoped that he would offer an apology and we could put this behind us.

To that end, I have made at least two public requests on Assamnet stating the same, i.e., the individual has been identified, but I would close the matter if he apologized. I have waited several weeks for this to happen, but unfortunately no apology has been forthcoming. This past weekend, I took the initiative to call the individual personally on the phone to try and solve the matter one last time.

The individual initially denied that he had posted any anonymous emails, but when presented with evidence, admitted to having used the email ID dasmadhurima@yahoo.com. I again stated to him that I would close the matter if he apologized to me in writing so that there is no denying later. In addition I told him that if he did apologize, I would not disclose his identity publicly on Assamnet, nor pursue the matter with his employer. He said that he would think about it. I also informed him that if he decided to write me, he would need to do it by Monday, June 6, 2004.

Unfortunately, he has not written to me as of 2:30 PM on June 8, 2004. As I have mentioned before, I have gone out of my way to still try and solve this matter amicably. But by refusing to apologize, the individual is refusing to owe up to what he has done. Therefore, I am forced to disclose his name.

This individual is Dhiraj Goswami of Texas. He is the person behind the ID dasmadhurima@yahoo.com. As far as I am concerned, he is also one of the persons behind the ID benukalita@yahoo.com. I will forward my logs to his employer for final verification.

As I have mentioned before time and again and in this email, I am yet willing to let it go and not forward the mails to his employer if he still apologizes to me and to Assamnet under his own true identity. This is my last attempt at reconciliation. If an apology is not made by as soon as possible, I will be forwarding his mails to his employer.

Thank you

Jugal Kalita
Administrator, Assamnet

Abusive Letters: A View from the UK

Since holou's missive appeared in Assam net, a few appropriate rejoinders have also surfaced. As an NRA from the UK, and obviously not belonging either to ASA or AANA, this matter really does not concern me. I, however, do feel that I have a little contribution to make. Abusive correspondences constitute, I believe, a species of the genre of the well-known poison penmanship. Whatever the nomenclature, keeping in mind what happens in politics in India today, the subject is conspicuously significant. Rivalries for political offices, particularly at the time of selecting candidates for the State legislatures and Parliament, generate an avalanche of such poison letters and the selection board is inevitably nonplussed with these. A poison letter may be very effectively used to break a marriage by disclosing a secret love affair or some such relevant information to the parties concerned.

About a decade ago, a journalist from Assam visited UK and met several members of the Assamese community. In a short article published in

the Assam Tribune he wrote that some of the people he interviewed were infighting for leading roles in various social organizations. Since our community here is small and there being not many social organisations either, I dismissed the journalist's observations as nonsense. But in course of time my view has changed.

Holou is seemingly not a seeker of social or political office or a marriage-breaker. It appears to me he is just out of step with his fellows and trying to scandalize them. His style of writing betrays the fact that he is an intellectual with a background in science, and is a familiar figure in the contemporary active Assamese American society. He is just an angry and frustrated person; not happy with the commissions and omissions of his compatriots in their social life. Nobody is perfect. It is easier to find fault in others. Michelangelo was a grumpy, aloof and arrogant person. Scientist now believe that he was actually suffering from Asperger's syndrome, a type of autism. Albert Einstein, Mozart, Charles Darwin, W B Yeats and Andy



Warhol were all said to have been victims of Asperger's syndrome. Instead of facing a colleague by calling names, holou has discovered a means to humiliate or attack an individual or a group of people he does not like or even hate. And this is it, if not some other malaise.

As a past president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, UK Chapter, we had to deal with a poison letter. It was handwritten and posted and its contents were like those of holou's. An informal committee, not part of Sahitya Sabha, had a few sittings and decided to hand over the matter to the police. In no time the culprit was found but the committee decided that as the offence was not likely to be repeated, litigation was dropped. In another instance, a few friends told me that a person was actually prosecuted and the culprit

fined. I was told that the matter happened before my time and those members who were conversant with the whole episode were reluctant to reveal the name of the person to me in order to avoid further embarrassment to their aberrant friend.

In another instance a lady wrote an open letter to several friends pointing out many mistakes we were supposed to have committed. I drafted a

letter covering all the points except one which was rather weighty for me to deal with. I sought the advice of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, he being an ex President of Asam Sahitya Sabha , during one of his visits to UK. At first he advised me to obtain from our lady friend the source of her claim. Then after ten minutes or so, he called me back and said: It would be better not to reply to that letter. I took his advice.

If netters would like this matter to be pursued, I believe a close scrutiny of holou's written composition is enough to establish his identity. I know of cases where the author was identified just by his persistent spelling mistakes. Give a try if you want.

- Bhuban Baruah, UK

Assamese Boy Elected President of Junior Honor Society

Rupak (Rick) Kumar Bhuyan was elected President of the National Junior Honor Society, William Davies Chapter (New Jersey) for the next academic year. Currently Rick is a Grade 7 honor student. All together there were seven candidates nominated for President. After the first round (primaries) of election, three were left. They were Rupak Kumar Bhuyan,

Alexander Paralejo and Niah Grimes. Rupak was elected the President by beating other two candidates. Rupak is in high spirit about acquiring the position, which will last for one year. Rupak's twin brother Neepak was also nominated for treasurer of National Junior Honor Society. Unfortunately Neepak lost the election. This is a somber note but twin brothers

learned a lesson that both brothers won't be elected for two different posts in the same election. They are the sons of proud parents Kedar & Ruprekha Bhuyan of New Jersey.



Reported by Jugal Kalita

Honor for Assamese in the US

Geetima Das Krishna recently completed MBA with specialization in Finance and Investment from Baruch College of City University of New York and secured 3.9/4.0 GPA. She has been inducted by Beta-Gama-Sigma, the honor society of international management society for being top 1% of management graduates of USA in 2003.

Geetima has earlier done MS in Computer Engineering from Florida Institute of Technology, USA in 1996 and secured 4.0 GPA. She passed B.E. in Electronics and Tele-Communications from Assam Engineering College and was the best graduate of that year of Gauhati University for topping among all engineering graduates in 1988. She was a rank holder in Pre-University and was the first girl student in high school leaving

certificate examinations. She was Assistant Professor of Electronics department of Assam Engineering College, Guwahati.



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Gayatree Siddhanta Sarma currently teaches Business and Philosophy at Marist College in Poughkeepsie, NY. She has

graduated within top 1% of the MBA class from Marist and was inducted into the Beta Gamma Sigma for her academic excellence. She has had a brilliant academic career all along. Gayatree was the second position holder in her

Pre Degree examinations and secured First class First position both in BA and MA examination in Philosophy. She was the winner of the Gold Medal for academic achievement in MA. She started her MBA program

when her child was 10 months old, after having lived and worked in India, Japan and Germany.

- Reported by Ritumani Sharma, Hillsborough, NJ

Rajit Fights His Way and Wins Big Time

I still remember that day, some time during February of 1986. Three years old and now I had a new brother, Rajit Hazarika. Here was this quiet little bundle of baby fat and hair. It is hard to believe that this little person is now a behemoth, outweighing me by 70 pounds. And it is hard to believe that he has just graduated from Shawnee Mission East High School, especially since there was a time when no one thought he would be alive today.

Rajit is 18 years old, going on 60. When he was four, Rajit was diagnosed with a rare neurovascular disorder. As a

result of this condition, his young brain was receiving only a fraction of the blood it required. He was given six months to live. Oddly enough, it was my brother who was the most serene, binding together the pieces of my family's shattered world during the longest years. Those six months passed long ago, now a distant memory.

I respect my bother more than I respect anyone else. After innumerable seizures, multiple surgeries, thousands of pills, and a stroke, he has emerged as a mountain of a man, tough beyond his years, ready to deal with anything life throws at

him. And his trials are not over.

While part of me is in awe at his recent accomplishment, another part of me just shrugs it off. That's Rajit. Life-threatening illness? No problem. High school? Piece of cake. College and life thereafter? Bring it on.

Congratulations, Rajit.

Obhi Hazarika
June 14th, 2004



Rongali Bihu 2004 in Colorado

Colorado, USA has been celebrating *Rongali Bihu* for many years now. Indeed, the festival has always succeeded in pulling together families, whose roots lie in distant Assam. And, needless to say, this goes a long way in strengthening the fabric of tiny Assamese community.

Like previous years, the Assamese community of

Colorado (Assamardo) decided to celebrate Rongali Bihu on April 25, 2004. Jugal Kalita has been the host of the Colorado Bihu for many years in the past. This year, Mr. Ganesh Bhuyan and Mrs. Jackie Bhuyan of West Minsiter, CO volunteered to take over the fun and festivities. With Mr. Bhuyan at the helm of coordination, there was no dearth of enthusiasm amongst the members as

everyone promised to chip in with their bit to make Bihu a grand event with lots of fun and food.

The menu was decided in consultation with Mrs. Anima Goswami and the Bhuyans. Everyone decided to bring in his or her favorite Assamese delicacy to make the lunch an authentic Assamese one.

People started showing up at the venue around 11:00 AM. Mr and Mrs Bhuyan were cordially received each of them with hot chah and larupitha. The festive mood was pleasantly colored by the natural beauty of spring in Colorado.

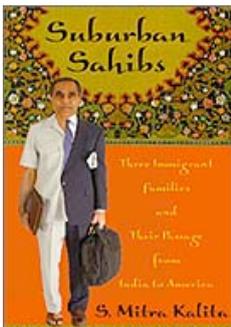
After the tea session, Bihu, in its truest spirit, got kicked off literally by Kani Junj. Rohan, Son of Bhaskar and Lipika Das from Aurora (CO) won the first prize. The egg that won the coveted spot was specially painted with his name.

Lunch was a spread of homemade, authentic, mouth-watering Assamese delicacies. It was indeed the focal point of the afternoon. That was immediately followed by a Husori Song and dance lead by Paban Sarma and Mr. Bharat Barua of Fort Collins. Dance performances by Dr. Deependra Goswami, Mrs. Anima Goswami, Mr Ganesh Bhuwan, Mr Bharat Barua, Mrs. Rima Barua impressed the audience.

The event concluded with a tea session in the late afternoon - everyone tired but visibly happy at the celebrations. Bihu has once again served its purpose - fostering the spirit of solidarity and brotherhood in this extended Assamese family in Colorado, USA.

- Contributed by Paban Kumar Sarma, Fort Collins, CO USA

“Suburban Sahibs: Three immigrant families and their passage from India to America”



“In a captivating work of narrative nonfiction, journalist S. Mitra Kalita traces the evolution of the suburb from a destination for new arrivals to a launching pad for them. She focuses on three waves of immigration in the post Civil Rights era through the stories of three families: the

Kotharis, Patels and Sarmas. Their experience offers a window into the America that has become: a nation of suburbs, a nation of immigrants.”
- www.desiwriter.com

Letter from Mitra Kalita, author of Suburban Sahibs:

Hi, all:

I'd like to thank you for your support of my book, "Suburban Sahibs: Three immigrant families and their passage from India to America." Initially published by Rutgers University Press, the book sold out of its first edition, is currently in a second printing and should be out in paperback next year. None of that would have been possible without community support and favorable press (including a New York Times book review).

I'm writing to ask for your help now as the book launches in South Asia and Singapore, published by Penguin-India. If you are a journalist in those countries, please consider doing a review or story on the book. If you live there, please approach your local bookstores and ask for the title. If you have family or media contacts on the subcontinent, please do forward this e-mail to them. If you are in Assam, please do alert them to my "local" roots as many bookstores in the northeast have yet to order the title...

For review copies (journalists only), contact: hemali.sodhi@penguin-india.com.

For interviews, feel free to contact me via e-mail at smkalita@yahoo.com or at 202-607-6836. If you need me to call you at an overseas number, please send me an e-mail and the best time to do so.

Below, I've included the blurb from the Penguin edition, a bio and a just-published piece in the Economic Times (of India). More information is available at www.desiwriter.com.

Thank you again for all your help. Best regards,

Mitra (smkalita@yahoo.com or call 202-607-6836)

About the author: On March 13, S. Mitra Kalita married Nitin Mukul, son of Kiran and Satish Mukul of Longmeadow, Mass., in a Hindu wedding ceremony in New Jersey. On May 8, the couple celebrated with a reception, also in New Jersey. Nitin is a fine artist (his paintings can be viewed at www.nitinmukul.com) and he works as the art director for K12, an educational company in McLean, VA.



Community News



Kabita Das, daughter of Dr. Nirode and Cynthia Das of Shavertown PA, was married to **Thomas Francis Keating** of Colorado on June 4, 2004. The

wedding reception, including an exquisite Hindu ceremony was held at the Newberry Estates in Dallas, PA and was attended by guests from across the US, UK, Scotland and Assam.

Mrs. Pronoti Borah of Nagaon, mother of Malabika Brahma, mother-in-law of Utpal Brahma and grandmother of Deisha Brahma of Burlington, NJ is currently visiting NJ and the United States. Mrs. Borah will

be here thru the middle of July.

Satyajit & Jolly Dutta and family has moved to a new home in Plainsboro, NJ.

Pankaj & Monalee Saharia and their son **Jason** has moved to a new house in Shrewsbury, MA.

- Contributed by *Probal Tahbildar and Umesh Tahbildar*

ASA Newsletter is a monthly email newsletter, posted during the first week 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 (ASA)**, is the publisher of this issue of the 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; Editor-in-chief), Symanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas), Santonu Goswami (El Paso, Texas), Ujjal Pathak, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania). This newsletter can also be read online at <http://www.assam.org/newsletter>. If you want a printed copy of this newsletter, please contact us at the email. If you want to become a member of Assam Society of America or contribute to its many projects in any capacity, in terms of money or in terms of volunteering your time, kindly contact Dr. Mantu Baishya, President of Assam Society of America at mcbaisya@hotmail.com or (402) 397 2283.