



পছোৱা

P O S O O W A

News & Events of the Assamese People Living Around the World
VOLUME 34, ISSUE NO. 9 :: JUNE 2006



Cityscape in Winter 30" x 22"

This painting was done by a process called monoprinting, which is a form of glazing. The monoprinting is done as follows:

Set out pigment at random on a smooth surface of glass or plastic and create a pattern with it. Then place a hot - pressed paper over the painted surface, and apply pressure with hand, a ruler or a roller to transfer the pigment onto this paper surface. Then lift the paper from the painted surface, and turn and twist it until something emerges from the patterns that form. Some detail can be added to this or keep it as an abstract design, it is the choice of the artist.

After going through the monoprinting process, my choice was to create some form to go with the distribution of color, texture, shape & values. I took a credit card started creating forms by scraping. And, finally I could see the form of the skyscrapers at night. After looking at painting I thought that I need little more work to make it more interesting. I used Gesso for spattering and a sponge roller to create some white solid horizontal forms to balance the dominant vertical forms. When I became satisfied I stopped working and thought of a title of the painting as " Cityscape in Winter ".

- Mahesh Baishya

Table of Contents:

Education, Job, and the Government.....	2
How do Fathers Grieve?.....	4
A Sunday in Los Angeles	6

Education, Job, and the Government

SANJIB BHUYAN

Like most of you, I subscribe to multiple on-line communities, most of which are Yahoo groups. One such group was formed recently by a few graduates of the Assam Agricultural University (AAU), my alma mater, and has become very popular among AAU graduates of old and young. Topics discussed in this AAU forum range from saying hello to debates on serious topics. I'm afraid this article with its origin in the AAU forum is of the serious kind. Regardless of the educational background, however, this issue applies to all Assamese and that is why I want to share it with the rest of the community. I'll try to express my opinion in a more general way with the AAU as background.



even in the world stage, and not expect their government to provide them with jobs when they finish their undergraduate degrees. If the stage is not yet set for such changes in the connections between education, jobs and the government, time may have come for an open discussion on reforming the bachelor's and post-graduate education levels in Assam.

Here's the genesis of this article: about mid-February, 2006, an AAU graduate from Guwahati wrote that he and other AAU graduates were "lured" to AAU by the government promising jobs after graduation, and now they were either unemployed or underemployed and that the government must take corrective measures, i.e., provide jobs, etc. The writer goes on to say that instead of spending four years in the AAU pursuing a bachelor's degree, he could have attended a local college in his village/town and could have had the same job prospect as an AAU graduate. The argument went on to say that it was entirely the government's fault to have misled scores of young people and that the government must make amends by providing jobs to all AAU graduates and so on.

One of the downsides of an economic restructuring is people losing jobs left and right; this is a very politically sensitive issue (as we experience here in the USA in the last few years as jobs are lost to India, China, and Mexico, etc.). But such job loss is in fact an economic issue and needs to be explained in terms of economics, i.e., in terms of benefit-cost and welfare of the overall economy, by the leading intellectuals, the media, and political leadership instead of making it into a political issue. In the USA, the overall majority is convinced that the economic benefits outweigh the political costs and thus, despite domestic opposition from some groups, outsourcing of jobs, services, and manufacturing continues and will continue. Unfortunately side effects include economic losers and winners, but it is inevitable in this day and age of one-world economy. However, the hard landing can be softened by support from the government and the private sector that is reaping the benefits of globalization and increased efficiency.

I found faults with the arguments above and here's why (and I wrote to the AAU forum where the debate continues). First of all, I don't recall Assam Government or any other government luring or even promising jobs after graduation to agrarians (or in other fields) when I was a student at AAU-Jorhat! I bet no one can truthfully say that he was promised a job by the government when he joined his bachelor's program regardless of the field of study. In any case, the notion that the government should or would provide jobs to its educated masses is a pass in a market-oriented economy which India's is slowly but surely becoming since its liberalization in 1991. As the Indian economy grows, the public sector will shrink significantly in the next few decades as products and services that are currently provided by the government will be regularly provided by the private sector. In the process, those who prepare themselves with education and skills that fit the needs of the economy will prosper and those who don't will lose. This trend has its roots in development economics and India is not going to be an exception. Given this inevitable outcome in near future, waiting for the government to provide jobs in such an economy would be a bad idea! Thus, the best way to prepare the future generations is to provide an education so that they can compete in Assam and beyond,

Skill reorientation or retraining generally becomes necessary for those who lose job when the economy restructures, and that's where government should provide the necessary resources. For instance, time has come for every district in Assam to have state employment offices (funded by the government) where those looking for jobs can get help in retraining in the skills needed to get jobs as well as get linked to job opportunities around the state and the nation. Instead of spending tons of money by creating new districts every few years and increasing the bureaucracy and red tape, the government should focus on investing in economic and social infrastructures that have long-term benefits. Losing a high paying job due to a layoff and getting into a low paying job just to survive financially is nothing new, but it helps when there is external support. For instance, the government can provide unemployment benefits (monetary) for a short period of time while the person is looking for a job. Such economic support infrastructures may become part of the national and state development programs directed towards the poor and made a permanent part of government's overall economic growth and development programs. Additionally, government-sponsored programs targeted at those left out by the economic boom (particularly those in rural areas and in the urban fringe) will be necessary so long as there is blatant poverty in India.

Assam ranks almost at the top as one of the most corrupted states in



India; that says a lot about our leaders, bureaucrats, and technocrats, and how they are providing disservice to the people of Assam. Although in the past the Center has been very negligent towards the NE part of India, in the last decade or so there has been a tremendous flow of resources, monetary or otherwise, to the NE India in general and Assam, in particular. Unfortunately, factors such as corruption, myopic view of leaders, over-focus on North East's primate city Guwahati, division and infighting along ethnic lines to the delight of politicians of all stripes, selfishness, a lethargic bureaucracy, etc., have resulted in resources not reaching the needy people and areas. Among the worst sufferers of this state of sad affairs include the educational institutions, particularly those in the public education system starting at the primary level, the poor who are working hard to put food into their mouths everyday, those without proper education and access to health care, women and children without family and home, and the list goes on. So, it is not only the fault of the Center, which is being used as a scapegoat by politicians and non-politicians alike, that is responsible for problems facing Asom in general and the educated unemployed or underemployed in particular. It is our leaders, bureaucrats, and technocrats who are lacking a sense of accountability and personal and moral responsibility. Anyplace where these leaders of the society rise above the pettiness and selfishness and show personal and moral responsibility and accountability, those places rise and shine - we are still waiting for that (miracle) to happen in Assam! My humble and earnest hope is that such turnaround in the hearts and minds of the Assamese leadership is not far away! Caution - such turnaround cannot come through the barrel of a gun, it must be through a democratic process, albeit a faulty process.

Asom has also been missing out on investment from outside (outside Asom or outside India) mainly due to the never-ending political unrest that started in the late 70s. Just think for a second - why would an outside investor invest in Assam if he/she is subjected to

the plethora of uncertainties brought in daily by numerous Asom bandhs (which seemed have lost their meaning and impact and has become barriers to development), constant threats of violence and extortions and the like, and the heavy uncertainty that goes along with such an environment. As India grows into a developed economy over next 50 years, the future for jobs will be in the service sector, including the financial, technical, and scientific communities, and the reliance on both primary (i.e., agriculture, fisheries, and forestry) and the public sectors will decline to only few percentage of the national economy. And if, and it is a big IF, the socio-political and bureaucratic environments do not change soon, Assam and places like Assam will remain at the bottom of the development ladder. It is heartening to note that there are AAU graduates who are leaders in various IT (information technology) fields across India and these graduates didn't have IT as their area of specialization at AAU (such specialization does not even exist!). Like many young and driven people around the world today, these agrarians took charge of their own destiny by retraining themselves or by completing further studies and shaped their careers instead of waiting for the government to provide them with jobs. Of course, there is risk in such ventures which requires risk taking ability, but calculated risks generally lead to gainful rewards. Just look around you- there are plenty of examples around you.

As for those of us who are living and working abroad, we do have responsibilities and we can and should do something about our brethren in Asom. Such deeds can be directed towards your alma mater, or the primary or high school you attended, or anything that would improve the education and employment prospects in Assam. We may take such actions as individuals or as a group (formal or otherwise). Many among us are already doing something no matter how small or large the work may be, and I sincerely hope others would follow suit. Let's not forget our birthplace - the Assam of our dreams!



Keith Catone, pictured with his immediate family, graduated from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in June, 2006. Keith completed his Ed.M in School Leadership and is now certified to be a high school principal. In September 2006, Keith will continue his graduate studies at Harvard to obtain his doctorate (Ed.D.) His research and professional interests lie at the intersection between public education, social justice activism, and grassroots community development. Keith lives with his wife, Dulari Tahbildar, in Somerville, Massachusetts. Dulari is pursuing her Masters in City Planning degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



How do Fathers Grieve?

RAM SARANGAPANI

It was in the early hours of August 27, 1983 when the huge Lufthansa jet took off from New Delhi's international airport. The three of us were huddled together in the economy class. We were on our first trip to the United States. The journey was filled with a lot of anxieties. Our family of a grand total of three people (two adults and an infant), were embarking on a journey to an unknown place. We were excited, but were cautious in our exuberance.



After all, we were leaving our comfort zone, and were heading toward a place we knew very little about. Of course, we had read up everything we could have, about the American culture, the way of life, the food, the language (being so different from the British English that we were used to), and of course the people.

I vaguely remember the airfare was something around \$2500 for both of us adults, while we had to pay about \$250 for our young son, who was just about a month shy of his 2nd birthday. Our destination was Fort-Worth, Dallas. I had earlier in the year, applied for, and secured admission to a Texas university to pursue an MBA degree.

Coming to America was a dream that many of my generation had in those days. Most of us wanted to come to the US, to realize and to take part in the great American dream. We dreamed of advanced American degrees, a great career, of opulence, and the very best this world could offer for our son.

Over the years, we were able to realize a good part of that American dream. We had made sure we had a solid educational foundation, built our careers, and provided the best things in life, we could afford, for our growing son. We settled in Houston, Texas, brought up our son with the best that America could offer. We were also able to become American citizens. It was big and emotional decision to cast away the Indian citizenships we had since birth, and embrace the American ones. Ultimately, we did come to a decision. We had chosen America to be our home, and it stood to reason that we ought to be completely vested in this new country.

America's success was our success, and we had taken and given her, over two decades of our lives.

Moreover, visits to India proved that we were fast becoming alien there. Things had changed, and many friends had moved on and many older relatives had passed away. We had become strangers in our country of birth. The harder we tried to hold on to values we cherished, the more elusive they proved to be. India was changing fast, and in time we realized that even our frequent trips to the old country was more in step with walks down memory lane.

This past September, we lost our only son. Actually, we lost our only child. The death of anyone is really painful for the near and dear ones, but when a parent loses a child, the pains can be excruciating and never-ending.

Our son had just turned 24, and it was on his birthday that someone played God, and took away our precious child.

Having lived for a good many years in the US, we had become accustomed to all the good things that America provides. We learned that hard work pays, and pays well. We learned that our children were safe in a country of laws, and that people are generally law-abiding citizens. We learned it was imperative that we instill American values in our son, and felt proud that he opted to join the US Marine Corps, and postpone his studies for a while. After all, he was an all American kid, and wanted to serve his country, the best way he knew. I have often held that children of new immigrants are 100% vested in America, while the parents are often held back in being fully vested. The ties to back home are strong and extremely emotional and most of all we often miss family and friends.

Ah! Yes, the stories we read about violence and shootings happened somewhere else, and certainly not within 5 minutes' drive from our home. We learned Americans, born and brought up in this country may own guns. They were the ones more likely to use them randomly. We knew that people coming in from India are not prone to senseless violence, and much less own guns. That we believed was in our culture. Ah! How wrong could one get? Our son was murdered but not by someone foreign to our culture. He was murdered in cold-blood, by one our own immigrants. An Indian immigrant, transplanted from India to seek better opportunities, an immigrant who probably brought all his societal baggage along with



him into the new world. An Indian, whose family knew our son well, whose daughter, our son was seeing, and who was quite familiar with our son and who thought it prudent to murder in cold-blood his daughter's friend near the street in front of their own home.

We believe in the American justice system. We believe that the system will be fair, and that our son will ultimately receive justice. Our son's murderer has not been charged yet. The authorities tell us that the case would be referred to a Grand Jury, and they would decide whether or not to charge this person. However, we have patience and trust that the system will not let this person go without paying for his crime.

Our pains are such, we believe that the US Marines lost a valuable, irreplaceable asset, America lost a true patriot, and we lost our son. Our son had a lot of hope and big dreams. He wanted to become a doctor, and to work as one in the US military. His singular passion to serve the country knew no bounds. There were no obstacles that he would not surmount to achieve his goals. Alas! Was he wrong? He was stopped 'dead' in his tracks by some trigger-happy individual who has no qualms or is even aware of the colossal loss he has inflicted on family, friends, and this country. In one trigger-happy moment, this individual had singularly managed to destroy a small, happy family, left parents childless, left his old grandfather in far away Assam, India devastated, left a huge void among numerous cousins, aunts, uncles and friends.

After our son's passing, we followed the routine that so many Americans follow, when confronted with such a huge tragedy. They seek psychiatrists, or attend grief sessions. We chose the latter, and attended a few of these group sessions. These do help ease some of the pain, but in the end, it could also be depressing. I usually come away with the feeling "misery loves company" after these meetings.

No, no, we haven't written these sessions off. I have seen a number of people actually benefit from them when they meet people who have suffered similar losses. Women seem to deal with grief much better, on the whole. For men, however, it seems a totally different story. There are numerous books and articles on the subject of dealing with grief. However, I have yet to come across one specifically geared to men, and more specifically fathers. Fathers don't really seem to have any safety nets. They don't cry their grief away, nor do they bounce their inner feelings off on to others. Further, friends and relatives who do step forward to ease some of the pain are usually more concerned about the mother. Of course, that is exactly how it should be. The ultimate loss is that of the mother. Fathers, come in only a distant second. Yet, their grief is also nearly as deep as that of mothers. Though, I must add here that my wife has been tough as nails. She seems to have a new outlook and philosophy on life now. Her strong belief systems toward religion and faith have helped her immensely. Her belief in the permanence of the human soul is the very basis of her existence today. Her belief that her son's absence is only temporary is paramount in how she is able to cope with this tragedy.

It is toward this end, that I have wanted to write a little about how fathers grieve upon the loss of someone as valuable as a son or daughter.

Fathers often grieve by putting up a brave front. Their grief is often interspersed with utter helplessness, and of anger, and of not being able to relate their true grief to even close friends and relatives. After the initial shock and grief period has passed, then comes the lowest point in the grieving period. Now, people who have come to console have left, the enquiries have trickled to a few calls once in while. Our "normal" outward behavior is often mistaken by friends and relatives. They may actually seem to relegate the tragedy to some sort of obscurity. While this may actually be a prerequisite for the healing process, and that is how a society would deal with such tragedies, this often is not what unfortunate parents are looking for. Parents affected by such tragedies are full of mixed emotions. For the unfortunate parents the colossal loss is permanently etched in their memory.

Life goes on. Friends and colleagues at work want to make sure that everything is back to normal. They want to make you feel comfortable and don't want to remind you of your loss. With the best of intentions people around you would like for you get back to your old self again.

Only few realize that you love to talk about your child even though he is not physically present with you. But he is within you. He is with you, every moment of your life. You would love to talk about all the things that you did together with your child, and those precious moments that you wish you can somehow bring back. The things we as a family did when he was a baby, a toddler, and then a teen. And those teenage years! An advice to parents with teens: We would love to relive any number of teenage tantrums from our son. Those "terrible teen years" would be of great pleasure if we could get them back.

I do understand the difficulty that friends and others face. It is very difficult for many to fathom the emotional roller coaster these parents go through. Often they may feel that there is very little they can say to contribute to the healing process. As the issue itself is so sensitive, it is also difficult for people to say the right things at the right time.

But in spite of such difficulties, friends and relatives do have an important role to play.

For fathers it may be good to draw out inner feelings. Talking about the positive role your child has played in your life may somewhat ease pains. You often want people not to keep quiet when you mention your son. Probably they don't know what to say, but take it first hand from us: we love talking about our son – for us, he was not just in the best part of our past lives, but he is our present us, and he will be our future - for many lives to come.

Note: I am planning(?) to write a small book on this topic and maybe get it published if I can. In that respect, this is just a draft. Suggestions and critiques are always welcome.



A Sunday in Los Angeles

UMESH SHARMA

It was 11:05 pm in Los Angeles and I had just finished watching the Miss Universe crown go to Miss Puerto Rico in a local city hall (Shrine Audi). She beat Miss Japan who was speaking about women's rights in four languages (French, Spanish, English and Japanese) and her choice of national costume was as a Samurai warrior –like that you see in video games sold by Sony, Nintendo, Sega, etc. Maybe, beauty won and brains lost – perhaps that's why they have the question-answer section after the contestants have been chucked out based on how they look and body language. Surprisingly, all the judges were Americans. My friend and host Kamal had commented that it was the first Miss Universe contest he was watching since Sushmita Sen won the crown for India in 1994. That means he was watching the program with his family for the first time after getting married.

Well, we had just returned from the house-warming ceremony of a Sikh friend of Kamal's and I must say it was the most moving experience I have had so far in the USA. They had a proper Sankirtan –with all in proper Sikh attire –with even women carrying daggers; all had to have their heads covered at all times till the hymn singing was over. The soulful music reminded me that it was nearly 3 years since I had attended such a gathering –the last one being with my father at an all-night one organized by Valmiki community (so-called low caste) in Oct 2003 –just before I went to Allahabad to take the GRE and TOEFL exams . The music and the environment gripped me and I could not get up from my seat and sat –all ears– charging up my emotional batteries. It did not quite bring tears to my eyes (as it did when I went to a Himalayan shrine of Sikhs – HemKund Sahib – my first great spiritual experience) but did remind me that

God is near –among friends–though family may be far (incidentally, my brother called up a couple of days back at 5 am [5pm IST] to tell me that he had gotten engaged through mutual friends of the two families and was to be married on Nov 2nd of this year – I cannot be there –unless my US work visa application is rejected –so much for globalization). It made me confident enough to disregard the results of the visa application –and accept what God grants me.

It was funny that in two days we had two mix-ups –due to communication gap. Yesterday also we had all dressed up – me in my formal clothes, Kamal and his wife in traditional Indian clothes – kurta-payjama and sari respectively—to go the Sikh friend's party. He did not take the venue address with him and we ended up guessing whether the Indian looking house (with statues of Ganesh and Krishna in the window) with lots of slippers (flip-flops) outside was the party venue. It turned out to be the house of another friend

but full of little children and their mothers who gather in different venues to practice for the August 15 – Indian Independence Day celebrations. The little girls practiced their Rajasthani –Ghoomar– song – and the Indian mother-cum-teacher was in total contrast to our clothes –dressed in shorts. No doubt they were as surprised as we – dumb-struck perhaps.

Prior to the house warming ceremony was another goof up which resulted in my arriving at the very same place where I had landed in the USA for the first time on Sep 4, 2004. Due to some communication gap we reached Los Angeles Airport (LAX) waiting to pick up a family member though that group was supposed to land at Santa Ana airport 30 minutes away –as we learned later. It

was an experience in itself –quite a contrast to the hazy feeling I had after the 22 hour flight from India then in 2004 –and arriving in a strange new place after battling fears of rejection by immigration officials at the –Port of Entry–. I felt I had grown so much and that increased my confidence.

We had arrived at LAX from a birthday party of a child and I got to talk to some guys who all worked in an NRI run business –and how they had to face no interview 6 years ago for getting their H-1Bs in India-but had to stand in long, long lines since 4am to submit their documents at the US consulate counters – now it is online reservation for the visa interview date –since September 11, 2001 bombings of NYC. It seems that hiring a clown (a Mickey Mouse this time) is a must for a birthday party and that it must be in the neighborhood park where all (men) come dressed in knee length shorts (khakis).



Early morning today I too was in shorts and running along- with my friend Kamal and his marathon training group's (Lopers) first day of running practice on the road –the same route where I had run on a similar Sunday on September 5th, 2004 – my first morning in the USA –then I had run 5.5 miles in trousers and sandals –compared to Kamal's 8 miles. Later that year he completed his first marathon and his most recent one was at Las Vegas in December 2005 . Today we did two miles.

Next Sunday I plan to spend the entire day at Santa Monica's Venice Beach near Hollywood –while participating in ISKCON's chariot pulling and free food festival.

Any observations?





Lillies in bloom in flower garden of Pronoti Tahbildar, Princeton Junction, NJ



Summer vegetables from the patio garden of Umesh C. Tahbildar, Princeton Jn., NJ



This is an
Official Publication of
Assam Society of America, USA



The ASA Newsletter is published monthly. Sanjib Bhuyan, NJ, on behalf of Assam Society of America, has published this issue of ASA newsletter. The editors are Satyam Bhuyan (Ames, Iowa), Ganesh Bora (Lake Alfred, Florida), Prasenjit Chetia (Atlanta, Georgia), Babul Gogoi (New Delhi, India), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Co-Editor-In-Chief), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania), Rini Kakati (London, UK), Umesh Sharma (Cambridge, Massachusetts), Alpana Sarangapani (Houston, Texas), Nandini Borah Das (Centennial, Colorado) and Ram Sarangapani (Houston, Texas). The ASA Executive Committee is composed of Sanjib Bhuyan, President (Franklin Park, New Jersey), Utpal Brahma, Vice President (Burlington, New Jersey), Ganesh Bora, General Secretary (Lake Alfred, Florida), Probal Tabhildar (Kendall Park, New Jersey), Mantu Baishya (Omaha, Nebraska), Kedar Bhuyan (Mays Landing, New Jersey), and Sangeeta Duorah (California). Layout: Babul Gogoi

We invite contributors from all over the world. We appreciate your valuable feedback, comments & suggestions, and of course, news from your part of the world for inclusion in the coming editions. Please send your written contributions to asanewsletter@yahoo.com. If you prefer, you can send your contributions directly to any of the editors listed above as well. Any contribution must be 750 words or shorter in length. Please include a scanned image of the author. We also request you to submit other pertinent photographs if possible.



Enjoy Your Complimentary Copy

Assam Society of America
PO Box 254
Mays Landing
NJ 08330
USA

