



# ASA Newsletter

News & events of the Assamese people living around the world

## Table of Contents:

Assam 2005! Orlando!! Florida!!! .....	1
Program.....	2
Hotel Information.....	2
Contact Information.....	2
Minutes of ASA Quarterly meeting, January 9, 2005 .....	3
Independent Assam?.....	4
The Multiple Uses of Vinegar.....	5
Photographing Manuscripts at Kuruabahi Xotro .....	5
The twin cities of Assam - Guwahati and Uttor-Guwahati.....	6

## Assam 2005! Orlando!! Florida!!!

Few events are anticipated as eagerly by the Assamese community in North America and by people of Assamese origin living outside Assam as the annual conference. This year we have a special conference planned. Assam 2005 is expected to be one of the biggest conferences in recent years, with guests attending from across North America, Canada, Europe and Assam. We take this opportunity to invite you to attend Assam 2005. In recent years, the Assamese community has come together under a single roof for the annual conference. Continuing in the same spirit, Assam 2005 is being organized as a conference for all, whether you live in North America or in Europe or in Japan, whether you are a member of AANA, a member of Assam Society of America or you are a member of any other organization. This is YOUR conference. We are only the hosts. Starting July 1st, we have a full weekend of activities planned, ranging from a picnic to dance lessons to cultural programs. Take them all in, or attend only the events you wish. The choice is yours. The pleasure of welcoming you is ours. Assam 2005 will be held at the Disney Coronado Springs Resort in



Scene from past Conference: Khagen Mahanta and Archana Mahanta being felicitated in 1993.

Orlando, Florida on July 2 & 3, 2005. Inspired by the Southwest, Disney's Coronado Springs Resort is built around a 15-acre picturesque lake, Lake Dorado. Featuring a Mayan pyramid, and palm-shaded courtyards and Spanish-style haciendas, the resort creates the perfect climate for relaxation. Of course, the resort is located right in the middle of Magical Disney World, with each of its theme parks within close distance.

Visiting Florida is in itself a cherished dream of most people. "The Sunshine State", "God's own country", any way you describe Florida, it is never enough. There is always something about Florida offers that defies description. The Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center, Animal Kingdom, Universal Studios, Sea World, Kennedy Space Center and the pristine Atlantic beaches nearby. Orlando is a destination that only gets

better each time you visit. For conference attendees, Assam 2005 will of course be more than just an opportunity to visit this wonderful state.

This year we have invited several noted personalities to attend the conference. We look forward to bringing you additional information about invited guests as soon as they become available.

**Program**

**July 1, 2005:** Arrival and General Reception (8:00 pm)

**July 2, 2005:** Meeting, Games, Dinner, Cultural Show

**July 3, 2005:** Meeting, Games, Picnic, Dinner, Cultural Show

**July 4, 2005:** Departure/Check out

We are in the process of bringing you additional information about Assam 2005. Please visit again soon for additional information.

We have invited several guests to perform at the cultural program. We are in the process of working out the details of these performances and expect to bring you additional information in a few days.

We are also delighted to inform you that a team of journalists representing the popular Assamese TV program *Bideshat Apon Manuh* will be covering Assam2005.

We hope to bring you more information about invited guests in the following days. Until then, please bear with us and visit again soon for additional information.

**Hotel Information**

Assam 2005 will be held at the delightful Disney's Coronado Springs Resort located in the heart of Disney World®. Inspired by the architecture of Mexico and the American Southwest, the resort is set around a picturesque 15 acre lake, Lake Dorado, and is surrounded by palm-shaded courtyards and Spanish style haciendas. The resort is designed as

an archeological dig site complete with a five-story Mayan pyramid. For additional information about the hotel, please visit the web-site at:

<http://disneyworld.disney.go.com/wd/resorts/resortLanding?id=CoronadoSpringsResortLandingPage>.

A room block at the conference rate of (\$99.00+tax for SINGLE &

be sent via mail to Assam 2005 delegates.

This discounted rate is available only to attendees of Assam 2005. To avail this discounted rate, attendees must make reservations by May 31, 2005. This rate is effective for stays from three days prior to the start of the conference to three days after the conclusion. Regular rates for nights beyond this period is \$145.00 per night.



Scene from past Conference: Kawali Group, Cherry Hill, 2000

**Contact Information**

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DOUBLE OCCUPANCY) has been reserved at the Walt Disney World's Coronado Springs Resort from July 1-3, 2005. This rate is also available for you 3 days prior and 3 days after the convention. The cut-off date for room reservations at the conference rate is May 31, 2005. Please mention the group event as "Assam 2005" when booking to receive this special rate.

There are two ways to book your room at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort:

(A) To make your room reservations using the web, please click here: <http://disneymeetings.disney.go.com/dwm/reservations/reservation?eventid=CoronadoSpringsCr>.

(B) To make your room reservation using the phone, please call (407) 939-1020, or fax your room request to (407) 939-1012.

After the reservation is made, Assam 2005 attendees will receive an email confirming receipt of the request once they have submitted their information. This does not guarantee availability for pre/post nights not in the block or if the block has been filled. Disney's standard confirmation letter will also

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**By Probal Tahbilda (New Jersey),  
 Ganesh Bora (Florida), Jugal Kalita  
 (Colorado)**

# Minutes of ASA Quarterly meeting, January 9, 2005

(Hosted by Jayanta and Nilakshi Thakuria)

**Present:** *In person:* Sanjib Bhuyan, Kedar & Ruprekha Bhuyan, Utpal & Munmun Brahma, Mukul Chowdhary, Nomal & Pronoti Dutta, Jukti Kalita, Ritumoni & Kabita Sarma, Probal Tahbaldar, Jayanta & Nilakshi Thakuria.

**Proceedings:** This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarterly meeting for the 2004-05 term. The meeting started around 11:30am.

1. Minutes of the October 10, 2004 meeting was approved unanimously.
2. A minute of silence was observed to honor those who lost their lives and their livelihood in the tsunami tragedy of December 26, 2004.
3. **President's Report:** Sanjib Bhuyan's report contained the following items:
  - a. **Incorporation:** Completed. Storage and scanning of documents will take place after all documents are signed. Yahoo vault?
  - b. **Assam 2005:** Sunil Nath informed Sanjib that about 6 hotels from a list of over 50 made the final cut, and he will soon make site visit. He'll contact Sanjib and other people thereafter. Sunil Nath requested help with the Cultural functions and other work from all Assamese people and Sanjib encouraged members to Sunil Nath directly.
  - c. **Newsletter:** In a unanimous decision, it was agreed that Jugal Kalita will continue as the Editor-in-Chief. Sanjib is continuing to mail 150 copies of the newsletter to people around North America. He'll mail the December issue which contained a call to Assam 2005 by Sunil Nath to almost 450 people in US and Canada. December issue was sponsored by Prakash and Anuradha Deka, and the Jan issue will be sponsored by Utpal and Malabika Brahma. Those members who opted not to receive the paper copy (to save money) include Probal, Ganesh, Prakash, Sanjib, Mukul Ch., Mahesh B., Utpal, Ritumoni, Shankumoni, Nomal D., and Vavani.
  - d. **Membership related:** See VP report.
  - e. **Fund raising:** Sanjib wrote to the "mahilas" but no action has been taken! Kabita Sarma was asked to explore fund raising by the "mahilas" via various functions and activities. Fund raising

for continuing projects, such as Project Hope, Phase II will start soon (Malabika Brahma in charge).

- f. **Bihu:** Unfortunately no Magh Bihu. Is it a question of reliability or something else? Time will tell!! Hopefully Bohag Bihu will be different.
4. **Vice-President's Report (Utpal Brahma):** Utpal suggested that we come up with a USP – something unique which involve a common thread of people through cultural and project related activities. Utpal will follow-up and report in future meetings. Utpal also going to explore having skits and dramas, i.e., cultural aspects, that'll bring people together.
5. **Report from the Treasurer (Kedar Bhuyan):** Kedarda will send details later. Members are urged to renew their membership for 2005.
6. **Report from Project Coordinators:** Money sent to Assam with Prakash Deka for both Flood Relief-related project and Project Hope, Phase I.
7. **Report from Asomi Magazine editor (Jukti Kalita):** Camera-ready, needs money or sponsor to publish. Will print before Assam2005 where members will get free copies.
8. **Newsletter and Web site Editors' report (Jugal Kalita and Probal Tahbaldar, respectively):** Jugal is out the country. Probal reported that he'll update the Assamsociety.org page, and will also help Sunil Nath to run the Assam2005 page when all info are available.
9. **Old Business:** None
10. **New Business:** ASA Directory – Probal is in-charge, and he's currently updating the addresses. He'll send a call for updating add in AssamNet and other avenues, and hope to publish it before July.
11. **Meeting adjourned around 2:30pm with an excellent lunch!**

**NEXT ASA QUARTERLY MEETING IS ON APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup> PRAKASH & ANURADHA DEKA'S HOME. PLAN TO BE THERE!**

*By Sanjib Bhuyan, New Jersey*



## Independent Assam?



Recently *The Times* reported that Osama bin Laden through Islamic web sites was believed to have asked his

fighters to aim attacks on oil sites in the Gulf and Iraq by accusing the Saudi King of usurping the powers of the Almighty Allah who alone commands sovereignty and complete obedience. This is an important news on various counts. I attend to sovereignty alone, not the terrorist angle.

Perhaps all religions attribute sovereign powers to the Almighty alone but he certainly administers through his representative on earth. That is how the theory of divinity came into being. The monarchs of the world even today draw their inspiration from an omnipotent God. One Mughal emperor when advised by the highest cleric of the land that it was lawful to kill Brahmins who refused to convert to Islam decided to seek divine guidance directly. He shut himself up inside his prayer room and emerging after days of intense prayer and fasting ordered to stop killing any more non-converts. He asserted: 'I would not like to preside over an empire of graveyards.' This reveals an interesting point. Students of European history would know how the Pope alone contended to be the sole representative of God on earth and how the medieval royals resisted it.

Near at home we're familiar with the concept of the *chakravarty*, the *rajadhiraj* who is the king of kings, the emperor, which was the highest aim of the monarchs of India for centuries. The Mughal emperors too were aptly described as *shahenshah*.

Today in a democracy sovereignty resides in the people. Parliament represents the people. Often Parliament fails to reflect peoples'

real desires because of divergent interests within the Parliament; hence a device known as the referendum is applied. Referendum asks each and every person for his or her views and thus a broad consensus is reached. ULFA too wanted this to find out whether the desire for sovereignty is universal. They also plead that the people have the right of self-determination, another modern political concept. But it is a great risk in case of Assam as it is doubtful whether all the people living in Assam share common interests and aspirations in a number of vital matters. Assam's population is certainly not homogenous.

Sovereignty is linked up with another concept. It is the concept of territorial integrity. The architects of the Constitution of India were keenly aware that India was not a nation in the past as it is today. It has not only a large population but it has large groups scattered all over the country having separate identities of race, religion, ethnicity and culture. There is another interesting development in the world scene. It has been proved that in order to be a sovereign state, i e., a member of the international community it is not necessary to have a big territory, big population, a common culture (language being a part of it) enormous natural resources or industrial strength. All that is necessary is will to live independently and in unity. And this way it is a shortcut to attain self-sufficiency. If there are natural resources it is all the better. Look at the prosperity of the small sovereign independent states of the Middle East. Till the other day they were third world countries but the discovery of oil in the Gulf made them rich overnight. Their standard of life is as good as those of the, say for example, the Canadians. Sovereignty has therefore become an attractive idea for some people. What is then holding them up? Of

course the so-called colonialists of India. This is of course not right. The authors of the Constitution of India knew very well that because of differences in language, culture, ethnicity, religion and what have you, some parts of the mighty India might develop fissiparous tendencies which must be curbed at the root. Actually according to some foreign observers India would inevitably end up in so many separate countries. But the makers of the Constitution insisted that no part of India would be allowed to be ceded. It is the duty of every citizen, administrative officer, judge, MP and everybody to swear loyalty to the sovereign country in toto. There is a national integration committee which is working for its objective of keeping India united. That is what the so-called colonialist are doing. Dr Manmohan Singh and the few officers from the Government of India therefore cannot agree to talk about sovereignty.

It is interesting how China, a strong democracy, is dealing with anti-cessational possibilities. Taiwan, formerly known as Formosa, which also includes a number of tiny islands, was the headquarters of the Nationalist Republic of China under Chinag Kai Shek. Taiwan lost its membership of the United Nations and also its permanent seat in the Security Council to Communist China in 1971, reducing itself to the status of a district of modern China. Premier Wen Jiabao recently stated that China would never allow Taiwan's independence. The United States has pledged to help defend the Taiwan Strait. Addressing a news conference Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said the other day: Any practice of putting Taiwan directly or indirectly into the scope of Japan-US security cooperation constitutes an encroachment on China's sovereignty and interference in internal affairs.

*By Bhuvan Barua, UK*

## The Multiple Uses of Vinegar



While looking at the looks in a library, I came across a book on vinegar and the contents appeared to be interesting. Since time immemorial vinegar has been in existence the loaf baked first was taken with vinegar, it was sort of poor man’s recipe. Vinegar is almost found in every kitchen in the country but most of us use it as a salad dressing or a drop or two with chips, chops and cutlets. Maxwell Stein tells us in his book “Vinegar, Honey & Garlic – nature’s secret weapon” that there are 325 tried and tested uses for vinegar. Some of the uses mentioned in Maxwell’s book are as follows:

- Polish the chrome on the car.
- Clean work surfaces, mirrors and glasses.
- Repair scratches on wood.
- Whiten white, brighten colors and fade stains.
- Ease the pain of insect bites.
- Lift stains on carpets.
- Remove ink stains.
- Clean brass, copper and pewter.
- Banish unpleasant odors.
- Dissolve chewing gums.
- Lots of other household cleaning tips are also there.

Maxwell tells us also about some remedies where vinegar can be used such as:

- Sooth tired and aching feet.
- Relieve head aches.
- Lift painful corns and calluses.
- Clear embarrassing dandruff.
- Help treat burns.
- Help fade age spots.
- Prevent infections.
- Ease nausea and stomach upsets.
- Relieve coughs and tickly throats.
- Cure hiccups fast.
- Guard against food poisoning.
- Disinfect almost everything-it is used in many hospitals.
- Sooth painful sunburn.

Besides covering 325 uses for vinegar Maxwell also tells about honey and garlic as these are considered two very impressive natural allies of vinegar. Maxwell put these three natural wonders to the test as he looks at many common ailments. He talks about how honey and garlic have been used as simple, yet cost effective home remedies – alone or mixed with vinegar at a fraction of what we would pay for the commercially prepared products. Maxwell looks at many health problems and whether simple treatments can be used to tackle them such as:

- An easy to prepare poultice that has been used to treat painful joints.
- A simple drink used to ease muscle paint fast.

- An easy to prepare mixture to prevent burns from scarring.
- A tasty recipe used to help keep cholesterol at a healthy level.
- A fast remedy used to treat cold sores.
- A morning treat to ease the discomfort of asthma.
- An ancient Indian broth, used for blood pressure.
- A tasty brew that has been used to help lose weight.
- A method to stop toothache by retrieving pain naturally.
- A Russian folk remedy, used to treat cold.
- A fast method to clear spots and blemishes.
- A simple method to ease gas and indigestion problems.
- A simple preparation to combat flu.

The book contains answers to many health problems. I read in P.C. Sorcar’s book on magic for children a trick to put an egg inside a glass bottle by keeping the egg in vinegar and the egg’s shell will be soft enough to pass through the neck of the bottle. Maxwell Stein’s book, “Vinegar, Honey & Garlic – nature’s secret weapon”, is marketed by Windsor Health, Emery House, Brunei Road, Southampton, S040 3SH, UK for £ 9.95.

*Contributed by Bijoy Bhuyan, Guwahati. The writer was involved with the tea industry in Assam and North Bengal for many years and now lives a retired life with his wife in their Guwahati home.*

## Photographing Manuscripts at Kuruabahi Xotro

For the past three years, ASA has been working with Kuruabahi Xotro in Golaghat, Assam, photographing the rare Assamese hand-written manuscripts it has. The Xotro is one of the four original Xotros of Assam.

The Xotro has a total of about 60 such manuscripts.

On behalf of ASA, Prabodh Nath of Nagaon, made the first contacts with Kuruabahi Xotro, located a few files

east of Bokakhat on Assam Trunk Road, by telephoning them in 2002, after seeing a small advertisement from the Xotro in a newspaper seeking help for preservation of the manuscripts. Prabodh Nath and

Babul Gogoi, then of Guwahati, visited the Xotro to make initial contacts. ASA had started a project to digitally photograph rare hand-written manuscripts of Assam after being first introduced to the idea by Chandan Mahanta of St. Louis in Assam 2002 held in Denver. So, this was a really good opportunity for both ASA and the Xotro.

On behalf of ASA, Babul Gogoi of Guwahati and Delhi, has done most of the photographing. Babul has photographed more than 2000 pages covering a dozen manuscripts with a digital camera donated by Samar Gogoi of Omaha. Some of the manuscripts are fairly large, running to hundreds of pages. They are anywhere between a hundred to almost 400 years old according to the Xotradhikar.. This past winter, Jugal also photographed one book of about 400 pages.

The Xotro considers itself a guardian of these rare manuscripts on behalf of the entire Assam nation. It has been preserving the manuscripts for the future generation the best they can. However, their funds are limited. The Xotro wants to build a library with facilities for proper preservation of the manuscripts. It will have a reading room for any researcher who wants to look at the actual manuscripts. The Xotro has appealed to ASA for financial help.

Last Saturday (3/26/2005), Sanjib Bhuyan, President of ASA, received a letter from the President of the Sri Sri Kuruwabahi Satra (near Bokakhat). This letter of appeal for financial aid to restore rare manuscripts also included a news item reporting (dated Feb 14th) a



gift of \$120 (Rs 5000) from ASA that was delivered by Jugal Kalita. A similar gift of Rs 5000 was given on behalf of ASA in 2004 as well. Sanjib Bhuyan says in an email message to the Newsletter: "According to the letter, this Xotro is one of the oldest of the four Satras given homestead by the Ahom Kings. It has made a commitment to restore ancient manuscripts (that's the connection to ASA) and would like our help (either as ASA or as individuals). They are also trying to locate funding sources in Assam (probably only government sources – not an easy task, I'd assume given the level of corruption, etc.)."

Sanjib Bhuyan continues in his email "Given that ASA already has this restoration of rare and ancient

Assamese manuscripts as one of ASA projects with Jugal Kalita as the coordinator, the organizational infrastructure to help is there! In this regard, I'd like to request that we consider the request for monetary help from both organizational and individual points, i.e., donation from individuals as well as from ASA itself. In the meantime, I'll contact them and will let them know that their request is being considered."

*Photograph shows the Xotradhikar of Kuruwabahi Xotro and Jugal Kalita on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, 2005.*

**By Jugal Kalita, Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA**

## The twin cities of Assam - Guwahati and Uttor-Guwahati.

I took a quick trip to Guwahati last month to attend the first yearly 'Shraddho' ceremony of my mother, and also to give company, and a little moral support to my father. My route was through Bangkok to Guwahati for the final destination. While going,

that flight got cancelled as there were only 13 passengers and we wasted a day in Kolkata for that. Fortunately, while coming back, the flight from Guwahati to Bangkok was on time, and I could avail all the connecting flights back to the US. The

immigration process at Guwahati was very quick and as usual, the security process was tight but was done quite efficiently.

While at Guwahati, after a long time, I visited the Kamakhya temple (after

many years) and Dol-Govindo temple in Uttor-Guwahati. I found the communication to Kamakhya a lot easier now, buses and taxis go up to the hill – almost every minute of the day. There are many ‘trekkers’ (it was totally a new thing for me to see, the vehicle looks somewhat in between a SUV and a Jeep) in Guwahati now that provide the service of a taxi-cum-auto. They have different routes and charge Rs.5.00 for every stop at about two kilometers’ distance. They are convenient for people to use, but they do have a reputation of being driven carelessly and these trekkers are so overcrowded that people feel that they ‘pan jopa-di jaapi jaatri niye`.’

We took the trip to Dol-Govindo via a motor-boat (Bhot-Bhoti). The ride on a Bhot-Bhoti is quite comfortable and enjoyable. If you are lucky, you can see the (almost extinct) river dolphins diving around. You can also see the Urboxi and picturesque Umanondo temple on the mini islands from very close, if you go via the route from ‘Panbozar to Roja-Duwar ghat’. These ‘Bhot-bhoti’s ferry people from Uttor-Guwahati to Guwahati and vice versa, many times a day. They are safe if the weather is good and if the wind is not blowing hard. It takes about 15 minutes to cross the Brohmoputro in the winter when the water level is low. A

‘Bhot-bhoti’ can easily carry about 50 people. People with bicycles and motor-bikes also use them to cross the river. A trip costs only Rs.5.00 per person.

Uttor-Guwahati is the place where my father's family is from. I have beautiful memories and I feel really close to the place. The things that most interest me in Uttor-Guwahati are the quiet and calm country-side atmosphere and the innocence of people living there.

Though you can't call it a "complete" GAON, you can still expect to (occasionally) see a bullock cart or even a cart pulled by buffaloes.

While I like the calmness and the serene beauty of Uttor-Guwahati, it makes me sad to see that, in spite of it being only a few miles away from

other side of the Brohmoputro, it is lacking the economic development that the other cities in Assam are enjoying, even though it houses the institutions of higher education like the IIT, the historic and holy sites like the Dirgheswori Dewaloy, the Ashwaklanto, etc. People cross the river and come to Guwahati, almost everyday, to go to work, do the main part of their shopping, banking, etc. People from Uttor-Guwahati are very much used to commuting to Guwahati via boats, ships, motor-bikes, trekkers, buses, cars, etc. Probably that is why it is still not developed as one can get everything just by crossing the river and get it from Guwahati. While crossing the river and also from Uttor-Guwahati, Guwahati looks extremely beautiful, especially at night, when the lights are on and there is a big moon in the sky.



A picture of Umanondo, taken from a Bhot-Bhoti while crossing the mighty river, The Brohmoputro.

The recent proposal by the Assam government to construct a ropeway between the two cities via Umanondo is just wonderful. Hopefully it will bring some more projects for the overall development of Uttor-Guwahati in the near future, without hurting the calmness, and the cleanliness that it has been possessing for ages.

By Alpana Sarangapani  
Houston, Texas

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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), Babul Gogoi (New Delhi, India), Jugal Kalita (Colorado Springs, Colorado, Editor-In-Chief), Symanta Saikia (Wichita, Kansas), Santonu Goswami (El Paso, Texas), Vavani Sarmah (Secane, Pennsylvania), Ujjal Pathak (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), Rini Kakati (London, UK), Umesh Sharma (Cambridge, Massachusetts), 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).

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