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P O S O O W A

News & Events of the Assamese People Living Around the World
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Principal Muhiram Saikia at his Principal's Desk in Nowgong College in an undated photo by Silpi Baishya



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My First Encounter with a Great Personality

Mantu C Baishya



I graduated from high school in 1975. It was the stepping-stone towards a good college education and beyond. Everyone had an opinion about college in general and the college I should go to. The most common opinion was “College makes or breaks one’s career, there’s nothing in between.” I am the middle child in my family with two siblings above me and two below. We were in a small town called Nowgong, situated in center of the state of Assam, India. My father had a transferable job; he was the District Health Officer in Nowgong. Academically, I did well in high school. Obviously, my parents wanted to send me to the best college possible. My parents and I discussed going to Nowgong College, the local institution I went to for my Pre-University classes. It was of mediocre quality compared to some of the better-known colleges in Assam. However, it had the reputation of being run by a famous principal known to be extremely strict and all-powerful. The name of this person was Mr. Muhiram Saikia. When we were in high school, we had all heard of him and knew how disciplined we would have to be in order to survive in that college with him as the principal. I had enough self-confidence in myself and knew I could survive college and do well. My dad got along very well with Principal Saikia and he claimed that they had gone to the same college for their undergraduate studies.

Thus, I had already heard a lot about Principal Muhiram Saikia and was eager to see him in person. It was time for admission to Nowgong College. My dad told me that he would come with me and introduce me to the Principal. Even though we had lived in Nowgong for two years at the time, I had never seen Principal Saikia, even from a distance. I was idealizing him and imagining all kinds of things in my mind about him. Finally, it was time. My dad and I stood in front of the Principal’s office and lifted the curtain to enter and meet Principal Saikia. At that moment, my heart was pounding hard as I remembered the things I had heard during high school. A simple question came to my mind over and over again, “How can a human being earn this kind of status?” After lifting the curtain, as we entered the Principal’s office, I was not disappointed. What I saw struck me. I saw a tall dark person sitting in an executive chair with a white khadi dress and thick glasses. I did not have any doubt in my mind that the person is Principal Saikia. I was impressed with his stature, style of talking and his behavior. I was almost sure that, if the Principal’s office were huge and there were a gathering of a hundred people in the office at that very moment, I would be able to pick out Principal Saikia in that group without any prompting from anyone. Perhaps that was one of most memorable days of my life!

During our conversation, Principal Saikia mentioned that he was happy that I had decided to attend Nowgong College. I did not have any doubt in my mind that under his guidance, I would



be able to excel in my undergraduate studies. The Pre-University studies were a two-year program. Once I had completed my first year of college and had done very well, I felt very comfortable with the idea of starting my second year at the same college. But my father had completed his three-year tenure in Nowgong and had to move to another town for his job. I had to quit Nowgong College and go to another college for my second year of Pre-University studies. I had to break this news to the Principal. By this time Principal Saikia knew me personally and wanted me to graduate from Nowgong College with good results. It was very hard for me to tell him that I was leaving Nowgong College. However, the decision was made for me at home and I had to request a transfer out of Nowgong College. This was second time I had lifted the curtain to face Principal Saikia. This time I saw another side of Principal Saikia. I was sitting in front of him and discussing my transfer to another college. I still remember that conversation. This conversation generally happens between a father and a son when their relation is very cordial. I could see in his eyes that he wanted for me to stay in Nowgong College, but at the same time he wanted me to excel. It was very difficult for me to comprehend that a person

Birth: 05th May 1923, Sibsagar

Death: 1st Feb, 2007, Guwahati

Education: J.B College, Jorhat
M.A, L.L.B from Gauhati University

Professor at Golaghat College. Professor and Vice Principal at Jaisagar college. Principal at Sibsagar Girls College. Principal Nowgong College, 1971 to 1985.

Member of Parliament and become Union Minister in HRD Ministry, 1985 to 1997.

Former Union Minister and three-time AGP MP Muhiram Saikia died on February 1, 2007 after a prolonged illness. He was 82.

Mr Saikia was the Union Minister (India) of State for Human Resource in both the Deve Gowda and I K Gujral governments. Mr Saikia was a renowned educationist before entering politics and became one of the longest serving MPs from 1985 to 1997 of the state.

who was a very strict disciplinarian also had a soft corner for a general student like me. It was a very difficult decision for me to move away from Nowgong College.

In the year 1979, the Student Movement had started in Assam. This movement was against rampant illegal immigration from Bangladesh. Each and every Assamese household was involved in this movement. Each and every student of Nowgong College participated in it. The students of Nowgong College were in the forefront of this movement because they had the leader and father figure of Principal Saikia. I recall a famous saying "Leaders are born, not created." Principal Saikia was a born leader. When the Student Movement was in full swing, I was studying for an Engineering degree at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science in Pilani, Rajasthan, far away from Assam. Unlike today with email and the Web, the only communication we had at the time was through newspapers and radio news reports. I used to hear quite a bit about Nowgong through both of these. I did not have any doubt in my mind that the reason Nowgong was in the forefront of the movement was because of leaders like Principal Saikia and others like him. Because of his involvement with the movement he was sent to prison several times.

When the movement subsided, a new political party emerged in Assam. The name of the new political party was Asom Gana Parisad (AGP). The student leaders and college professors actively participated in this new political party. They thought that they had first hand knowledge of state politics. Once known as a great administrator and great educational leader, Principal Saikia turned to politics. He was elected a Member of Parliament in 1985 from Nowgong constituency. A common belief among people is that you have to be rich in order to be a politician. Principal Saikia proved this belief wrong. If you have will power, honesty and the trust of the common people, you can win any election. Subsequently, he won the election in 1991 and 1996 from the Nowgong Lok Sabha constituency.

In 1987, I was contemplating about coming to United State of America for higher studies. I was still unmarried. This is one of the worst risks a parent can take to send their unmarried son or daughter to the United States for higher studies. Being conservative, my parents had the same problem. So they needed a solution. My dad took the first shot at this problem. He conveniently remembered that he had a good friend a long time

ago and his friend had a daughter. It was an utter surprise to me that he was referring to Principal Saikia. It was a shock to me that the person whom I admired most would be my father-in-law. I did not have any doubt in my mind that the girl we sought would be educated. The only prayer I had was that the girl should be good looking. God had really blessed me, not only did I get a beautiful educated wife; I also got a great family with her. Once I married his daughter, I became close to him. I started knowing a few more details about him. He was not only a person of dignity and honor, he was also a person who believed in doing the right thing and also in the given amount time. He believed, by doing work punctually and promptly, you could be ahead of the game.

On February 1, 2007, when this great person departed from this world, a few thoughts came to mind. I learned a lot from this person. It's very difficult to describe them all. However, I would like to list four important ones. The first lesson is that as the Principal of a college you can dominate your entire student body with an iron fist, as long as you can convey to them that you have a soft heart for them and you treat them as your own children. Second lesson: It does not matter where you were born or how you were born as long as you believe that if you have will power, you can achieve greatness. Third lesson: You do not have to be rich to win election in Assam; you just have to have good ideas. Fourth lesson: politicians are not corrupt to begin with, the circumstances make them corrupt, but if you can avoid the circumstances – the temptation of corruption can be overcome.

It is sad that Principal Saikia is no longer with us; however, his teachings will go a long way. I pray to the Almighty that during his final journey, that wherever he is God be always with him. I also pray to the God that there shall be many more like Principal Saikia born in my homeland of Assam.

Errata:

In the February 2007 issue of Posoowa, the caption under the Bihu photographs in Florida said that the Bihu was celebrated in the house of Nabajyoti Barkakati. In fact, Magh Bihu was celebrated in the house of Ratnajoyti and Jahnabi Barkakati in Florida.



Chandan and Nandini Das of Colorado recently celebrated the onnopraxon ceremony of their son Ashvin.

The War in Iraq and Freedom of Nations

The US invaded Iraq in 2003 without any well-founded reasons. The US Administration has given several shifting reasons over the past few years. It started with the allegations that Saddam Hussein was acquiring weapons of mass destruction, notwithstanding the fact that WMDs abound in the Western world. This was a made-up rallying cry as President Bush illegally attacked another sovereign nation. When no WMDs could be located within Iraq, the reason touted to justify the destruction of the lives of untold numbers of Iraqis and the infrastructure of the hapless country shifted to spreading of democracy to the Islamic world, making Iraq a shining example of democratic ideals in the Middle East. When this justification didn't seem to go anywhere, the reason once again shifted to attacking terrorists in their home base such as Iraq so that they cannot come and attack the US homeland. Now, I think the administration says we must remain there so that the country regains stability.

Just before the war started, even in our very conservative Republican-dominated religion-dominated city of Colorado Springs, there were several demonstrations against the impending war. I took part in one of these demonstrations that took place in Palmer Park. Several hundred individuals from all across Colorado had gathered to listen to speaker after speaker denounce the war plans of the administration. The age of the demonstrators ranged from infants to 80-year olds. Surprisingly, there were a large number of teenagers and people in their early 20s. After listening to speakers, we lined up on the two sides of Academy Boulevard that abuts the Park. We had our banners; some professionally printed, but a lot of them hand-made. Many had tiny US flags with them. A lot of people had musical instruments and were playing them. Others were dancing. It was a festive affair. There were cops everywhere making sure that protesters did not block Academy Boulevard, the main road in town. Some might have stepped from the sidewalk to the road. I didn't see anyone do so, but it's possible that some did. That's when the police, with their microphones and bullhorns, warned the protesters. Soon, they ordered the protesters to disperse. There were several policemen lined up in two rows in the middle of the road with tear-gas guns ready to be fired at the protesters. Anyway, the demonstration was about to end; the leaders urged everyone to leave. We all walked back to Palmer Park so that we could leave. Our cars were parked in an empty field and when we were almost getting in our cars, we heard thunder-like noises and soon after felt the impact of the tear gas shells that were lobbed at us. A couple of them landed within five feet or so of me. It's the first time in my life that I was exposed to tear gas. The smell is pungent and it bites into the nose and the eyes. You can't see anything for five or ten minutes. You have to sit down or lie down and let the gas pass through the air and your system. I had taken part in some protests in Assam a long time ago, but this was the first time when I was struck by tear gas. The point in recounting this story is that the US administration, and many state and local governments worked hard to suppress any opposition to the impending war when the US Administration was cooking

the book and defying world opinion to launch an ill-fated war on a nation of 28 million because the administration didn't like the dictator that the people of Iraq didn't choose to rule them!

Anyway, four years have passed. The war goes on in its meaningless and destructive ways. Anywhere between 60,000 to 600,000 Iraqis have been killed by American shock and awe bombing at the beginning of the war, additional fire-power of the world's most well-equipped military, and sectarian violence and general lawlessness that the American failed occupation has brought to Iraq. More than 3000 American soldiers have been killed. On the eve of the 1000th American death in Iraq in 2004, I had organized a 12-hour "Reading of Names of the Dead" program on the University's Internet Radio station that I used to manage. In this show, several university students, staff and faculty members took time to read the names of those American soldiers who had died in Afghanistan and Iraq. I am thinking of organizing another such reading of names in the future when the proper occasion arises.

Americans have soured on the war. About a year ago, I had a discussion with a former student of mine who retired as a Lieutenant Commander in the US Navy and who is a professor at a military Academy now. This individual called Bush a thoughtless and incompetent moron to have started the war. She said it's all because Saddam Hussein purportedly tried to get the older Bush killed. Another former student of mine who was a bomber pilot for the US Air Force has nothing but profanities for Bush for having started the war. He says it's all about the oil and nothing else. The US wants to control the oil fields of Iraq for a long time to come.

In some sense, the war has become something of a personal thing for me now. I have some young American buddies. One of them, Chris, joined the Marine Corps. I am pretty close to Chris and his family. He is like a younger brother to me. From all I can tell, he joined the Marine Corps, not primarily because of patriotism, but because of the circumstances he was in. He was a high school graduate and had also passed the GED. But, he was unable to keep a steady job, and he didn't have money for continuing with college. He didn't think he was ready to college. His family was also not in a position to support him in any way. Chris joined the Marine Corps out of a whim last year, went to boot camp in California, and is now a PFC. He was shipped to Iraq a week ago and is somewhere in the Anbar province, the hotbed of Iraqi Sunni insurgency. I received a text message from him a few hours before he shipped out. I pray for Chris's return in one healthy piece. This is in spite of



the fact that I don't believe in this war and haven't believed in it from the first moments. Another young buddy of mine, Aaron, also is in a similar situation like Chris was a year ago. He has signed up for the Army, primarily because he wants discipline in his life and a steady source of income. Aaron is also greatly motivated by the thousands of dollars of bonus the Army pays for signing up and for remaining in the military for a certain amount of time. He is also motivated by the GI Bill that pays for education once he gets out of the Army. Another buddy Drew is very patriotic but hates this war. He says he will never let the government control his life, which would happen if he joins the military. Doug is once against the war, the next time he supports it.

My teaching colleague, Robert C., has been and is still against the war. He can't stand the sight of Bush on TV and says he changes the channel any time he hears Bush on TV. He thinks the best way to solve the problem is to partition Iraq, a creation of the British from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, into three parts: a Kurd, a Sunni and a Shia part. America's role should be to keep the warring parties in this Civil War in Iraq separated from one another, from killing one another. And, keeping Iraq's borders safe from intruders from neighboring countries. I happen to agree with him. It was no business of



America to attack Iraq and destroy the country. But, once we are there and that we have messed up the country real bad, we have the obligation to make it right as much as possible and then leave. We cannot stay

there forever. Iraq was an artificial creation of the British after the First World War. It may be better off divided into three regions, which may be a prelude to long-term creation of three independent nations that are overdue. High ideals such as integrity of a nation's borders and indivisibility of its land only go so far, especially, if it was created by colonial powers without any concern for the wishes of the people who live there. Recently, the breakdown of the old Soviet Union created almost a dozen new countries out of regions that were forcibly integrated. East Timor wrested independence out of Indonesia a few years ago. The breakup of Yugoslavia created a few additional countries. Kosovo may gain freedom in the near future. India and Pakistan are talking, although half-heartedly and in spurts, about a solution to the Kashmir problem, that may involve Freedom is a birthright for people. Colonialism created a lot of anomalies in the structure of the world. A lot of countries were created that are not natural or where the people don't get along. It may be best if such countries slowly disintegrate and the injustices of colonization undone. It is best for the world of ours if more people achieve the freedom they desire so that they can flourish the way they want. The world of ours is intertwined, all nations are inter-dependent in all sorts of ways, but independence and self-determination are the cherished goals of many nations and so-called nationalities that are still suffering under the yoke of occupation. Maybe, the something good will come out of the disastrous invasion and subsequent incompetent occupation of Iraq.

Jugal Kalita, Colorado

Minutes/action item for last ASA meeting March 3, 2007 at the Das Residence, PA:

This was a very short meeting because ASA members could not arrive on time, 2:00 PM except for couple of members. We had 2 meetings on same day: Assam2007 meeting was scheduled at 4:00 PM.

Following people attended the meeting at various times: Malabika & Utpal Brahma, Kedar Bhuyan, Mukul Chowdhury, Kabita Sharma, Dhruba Das, Umesh Tahbildar.

Planned agenda items were:

Old business, ASA Account, ASA Directory Discussion on General body meeting during ASSAM2007, News Letter, Project Updates, Handling of Assam2007 fund & ASAF, ASA's future as an organization, any New business.

This is a long list of topics but we only could discuss only a few.

ASA account: *Kedar B. is still managing the account as of now although Mukul C. also can write checks. Mukul C was going to find a branch near him so that it will be convenient for him to handle the account. Also to add Dhruba D. so that he can also write checks.*

Handling of Assam2007 fund: *This topic was in the agenda so that ASA members could discuss & sort out how ASAF would be involved to handle fund for Assam2007. Thanks to ASA Foundation executive body/trustees who had already discussed this in a separate meeting and came to some resolution to help Assam2007. Utpal Brahma & Mukul Chowdhury on behalf of ASAF clarified in the ASA meeting and also later at the ASSAM2007 meeting. (Utpal sent an E-mail earlier to everyone)*

ASA Directory: *Didn't have time to discuss in the meeting.*

But I would like to thank Sanjib, Probal & others who worked hard to publish the last directory. I would also like to solicit ideas to improve the process to minimize errors. Probably we can never have a 100% correct data in the directory since people move/change address, especially one living in apartment. Any suggestion to improve this process?

News Letter: *Everyone appreciates Jugal & his team for doing an excellent work. There was a suggestion if we should be mailing a consolidated version to people who usually don't access it online. Secondly should we print a consolidated version for Assam 2007? Jugal please comment if you have any suggestions. Thanks also goes to Umesh da & Mukul da for sponsoring the cost of publishing the News Letter for one year. That money was used for last year's publications. Going forward we need more sponsorship. I will sponsor for next 3 months (I will give a check for \$45 dollars to Mukul da).*

Other agenda items didn't discuss due to lack of time:

ASA's future as an organization, Updates on Projects, Discussion on holding the general body meeting during Assam 2007.

So, please do give your opinion/remarks on these subjects.

Sincerely,

Dhruba Das, Coatesville, Pennsylvania

The Pilgrimage

Jukti Kalita



Jukti Kalita, a marketing professional with a Ph.D. from Columbia University has written several short-stories and translated several Assamese stories to English.

First part of this story was published in February 2007.

Zeenat, a name that Imran and his parents had fondly given her, was known by her Hindu name *Madhuri* till just six months ago. *Madhuri* fell in love with Imran, a tall handsome young man of Pakistani origin who was born and raised in the USA. He also liked her instantly. He had more experience with the opposite sex than she had with boys. She was a good catch. She was not only a good looking girl but had the brains too. She was a graceful sweetheart with an easy smile. She obviously had the brains being in Princeton. At the university she was in the top 5% of her class and kept busy with a lot of social activities like dances and dramas. In fact during her sophomore year she founded 'kala' - a art society that promoted Indian music and classical dances.

They met at a South Asian party at the university during her very first year. Imran was then in his junior year. He looked like any other South Asian kid in the college and spoke with a flawless American accent.

Madhuri soon discovered that Imran was a religious person, he said *namaz* five times a day and that he avoided pork. After dating *Madhuri* for a few months, Imran told her about his real feelings for Islam.

Madhuri was not a shy girl by any yardstick. Although she grew up in the shadows of her parents, when in high school she participated in all sorts of activities. High school debate club, South Asian club, music club and year-book club all feature in her resume. She volunteered with several hospitals and organizations that helped the poor in New Brunswick. Her parents, like most immigrants from India discouraged her from things that were sexual in nature. "*Beta*, you will have enough time for those in life when you grow up. Now is the time to get a good education and build up your character." She talked about boys with her girlfriends; however, unlike the American girls in high school, she placed a limit on relationships with boys. She stole a kiss or two here and there. But, she also felt that her parents put more restrictions on her than they did on her brother even though he was younger by a couple of years. For example, she had to be home earlier than he had to be.

Imran on the other hand went to private schools right from kindergarten on. His parents, both being doctors and extremely busy felt that he would be taken care of better at private schools.

Zeenat had a nonchalant attitude toward religion.

Imran watched his parents follow strict Islam at home when he was growing up - they were from a *khandani fouji* or well-to-do military family in Lahore. His parents were first cousins. Their family had been in the military - first in the British Royal army and now in the Pakistani counterpart for five generations. The family had a huge house back in Pakistan. Imran grew up in the Washington DC area and had plenty of Indian and Pakistani friends.

Madhuri did not tell her parents about meeting Imran for quite some time. She knew that they would disapprove of it - especially if they learnt that it was growing deeper as days went by. She confided in her brother Amitava and of course, her girlfriends at school knew about it. *Madhuri* dreaded grappling

with the issue of religion which she knew was bound to crop up when her parents learned of their intentions. She was aware of their life histories.

Religion for her was a theoretical concept. She had never experienced it till now. She had seen her parents pray at home and visit Hindu temples. She had gone to her American friends home during Christmas and Jewish holy days - but she never practiced it from her own within. They used to even have Christmas trees - but that to her was just a symbol of change of season and coming of the new year.

Imran's parents never put up a Christmas tree at home. They prayed five times a day to *Allah*. They kept fast during the month of *Ramadan*. Even while visiting out-of-town places, they would carry a carpet and pray inside their hotel rooms. The kids in the family went to Islamic schools during the weekends and to mosques. There they met a lot of Arabs and Indians in addition to Pakistanis.

Madhuri became an engineer and joined a large multinational company. She was a cutting edge engineer. Imran also graduated with flying colors and started working.

Their love affair continued. Imran finally told *Madhuri* that his parents wanted him to have a *nikaah*. He also softly explained to her that according to Islam they could not have a *nikaah* unless she signs an affidavit accepting Islam. Unless she did so, Islam would not recognize their marriage as *shahih* or valid.

She initially protested - "Can't I remain what I am and still marry you at a civil court? Though I am not religious, converting to Islam will hurt my parents. We will raise our children as Muslims - won't that be enough?"

Imran went back to his parents to get the clarification. "We can not have a *nikaah* because you were born a Hindu - it would have been O.K. if you were a person of the book. That is, you could have been a Christian or a Jew and we could have married without your embracing Islam. But, now we can't." That was the reply that Imran came back after discussing with his parents.

Madhuri was in a bind. She loved her parents and did not want to hurt their feelings. She knew that if she became a Muslim her parents would very likely disavow her. Her parents gave her everything that she ever wanted. But at the same time, she loved Imran above everything. He was so nice to her and respected her. Though they were about to be engaged, he never wanted to have sex with her. He said that there was enough time for that after their wedding. They kissed, they dined, went to shows together and but they never slept together or had physical sex. He always bought her gifts and never lost his temper.

As expected, *Madhuri's* parents did not want her to marry a Muslim boy. They said that she should find a non-Muslim boy or they could find one for her.

"*Madhuri*, we are Hindus. How can we accept a Muslim?" - said mom. "We have told you the history of the Indian partition and how we had to move," - added the father. "The riots were so bad - so many people on my and your mother's side were killed by the Muslims" - dad continued. "My uncle Lalit was struck down with a big *laathi* and then stabbed to death in front of my eyes by Muslims who wanted to take over our house. The Muslim thugs torched all of the houses in our father's village. There is not a Hindu left in our old village today." The dad was visibly exasperated.

"Imran is not like that," - said *Madhuri*. "Judge a person by his character. I have talked about this with Imran and he says that he does not approve of the killings or other violence in the name of Islam." Brother Amitava took sister's side. "I want you to be happy" - he said. "Imran says that Islam is a progressive religion. Some people have misinterpreted the Koran" - *Madhuri* argued.

"How are you going to maintain two separate religions at home?" - mom asked.

“Dear Madhuri, you can marry anyone who is not a Muslim. We prefer Indian boys who are Hindus, but Christians and Jews are also O.K. There is such bad blood between Hindus and Muslims that we can not accept a Muslim as our son in law” – mom continued.

“Mom, you never taught us much about your religion except for occasionally taking us to the temple in Bridgewater. That too stopped when I became a teenager. So, I am practically not a Hindu. I do not know any Hindu scriptures. I do not know or understand any of the prayers you sing.”

Finally she dropped the bombshell. “Mom, dad, I have decided to convert to Islam. Religion is so important to him. He prays five time a day,” - Madhuri added. Dad was angry – “We can even accept if you become a Christian or a Jew, but, never, never, will we give you the approval to convert to Islam.” “That religion preaches violence –all it has caused everywhere in the world is violence and misery. Do you see what is going on in Kashmir and Afghanistan and beyond? They are either fighting infidels or cutting each others’ throats in the name of religion.”

“I will still be your daughter and my children will be your grandchildren- isn’t that right, mom?” asked Madhuri.

The parents were flabbergasted. That can’t happen - our child can not become a Muslim. This was the worst argument that Madhuri ever had with her parents. Mom wept inconsolably and did not eat for several days. Madhuri, then, walked out of her parent’s home and they did not talk with one another for three months thereafter.

Nachnani did not tell their friends about this incident or that their daughter was converting to Islam to marry at all. But, news do trickle out. They had stopped visiting their friends. Madhuri who used to accompany them to many of their weekend parties whenever she was in town even after she had gone to college and she had many friends of her age in these families. It was through them that the news got out. The family friends sympathized with them. However, they did not discuss it openly.

Madhuri had noticed that several of her Muslim girlfriends who were not religious in high school, started becoming so after going to college. They used to rarely pray in the past, but now they were regulars at the Islamic prayer clubs. Many of them now covered their heads with *hijab* or a scarf. She respected them for their faith in god. Many of her Jewish and Christian friends also showed increased embrace of spirituality and religion. However, being a girl born to Indian parents, she curiously noted

that there was no such movement among her close friends of Indian origin. They preferred to be non-religious.

She bought a few cassettes of a favorite Bollywood artist called A. R. Rahman who had created some popular tunes for Hindi movies in the nineties. Imran had told her that this artist was born a Hindu but after his father’s death his whole family had embraced Islam under the influence of a Sufi saint. It was as if she had started to identify spiritually with him. I fact this was one of the arguments that she has offered her parents during the fight. “Mom, dad, if A. R. Rahman could become a Muslim and still be the India’s musical genius, why can’t I become one too?” She had told them that her decision to become a Muslim was her and her alone, but there are examples of others who were living in harmony with their families after conversion. She also told them about her Catholic girlfriend from College who had married a Jewish boy and converted to Judaism without encountering much friction from her parents. Imran’s parents had told her that conversion of Hindu girls to Islam was common in India too. Many fine Muslim cricketers and film actors had married Hindu girls who converted and were accepted by the society there. After all Islam was as much a religion of India as is Hinduism.

Madhuri was determined to marry Imran and Imran only. She was resolute about it and Amitava supported her unconditionally. Six months before the wedding date, she went to DC to Imran’s family and officially converted at their home. “My dear son, you will rise to heaven upon your death for having converted a non-believer to the folds of our beautiful religion,” – said the *maulavi* at the end of a short ceremony. The priest gave her a certificate of conversion. “I hereby declare that Madhuri Nachnani has voluntarily embraced Islam, the religion of peace and equality. She will be called Zeenat or the beautiful from today,” – he further went on. Zeenat was one of the names that Imran’s parents had chosen for her – she liked it the best among a list of several others that they had picked.

Imran’s parents were extremely happy that he would now have an appropriate *nikaah*. They were very nice to her and bought her a lot of gifts. They started addressing her as their daughter or *beti*. She started keeping the same dietary restrictions as Imran. She also joined a Koran class after she got back to New Jersey at a mosque in South Brunswick. Imran showed her how to pray to Allah facing towards holy Mecca.

(To be concluded in the next issue)

Assam 2007 Meeting Minutes

March 24, 2007, Shifali, Atlantic City
at Kedar-da’s party

Attendees: Mukul Chowdhury, Niranjana Brahma, Kabita and Ritumani Sharma, Utpal Borah, Probal Tahbildar, Prabin & Sangeeta Dutta.

We had a very short meeting on 24th March, 2007 at Kedar-da’s party. However the meeting was very effective. The minutes of the meeting is as follows

Everyone highly appreciated the superb work Rajib Baurua has done on our web-site. Very well-done Rajib.

The web-site www.assam2007.com should have an automatic referral to www.asam2007.org. Rajib Baruah will look into it.

There are two dinners and two breakfasts included with the registration and it should be published in our www.assam2007.com web-site. Rajib Baruah will look into it.

Web-site should have link to the flyer. Probal Tahbildar will make a .pdf file of the flyer and send it to Rajib.

Flyer, Registration Form and a covering letter will be mailed jointly by Ritumani Sharma and Probal Tahbildar as soon as possible

ASA will sponsor gamusa of worth \$500

Ritumani Sharma has made a significant progress on fund raising. He will collect atleast \$7000.00.

According to Utpal Borah, Camphill.org will donate atleast \$500.00. Utpal Borah will give Ritumani Camphill’s contact information.

There will be a launch provided on Sunday (July first) from a nearby Chinese restaurant and that should cost \$3.00 per plate.

Utpal Borah has been working on bringing Krishnamani Nath(KMN). However he desperately needs a person to sponsor KMN.

Mukul Chowdhury has opened a bank account

NEXT MEETING:

The next meeting will be on 31st March, 2007 at Sangeeta/Prabin Dutta’s residence (2687 Saint Victoria Dr , Gilbertsville , PA - 19525). The meeting starts at 5.00pm

Prabin Dutta

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