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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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*Paban Sarma of Fort Collins had a good harvest of Lao in the early Fall of 2006.
Photo by Bharat Baruah, also of Fort Collins*

Table of Contents:

Jayanta Hazarika Remembered in London, UK . . .	2
A Tribute to Jayanta	3
Chemistry	4
Iowa State Fair	6

Jayanta Hazarika

Remembered in London, UK



On October 18, 2006, the Nehru Centre, the Cultural Wing of the High Commission of India in London presented a stunning programme to commemorate the 29th death anniversary of Jayanta Hazarika, the great legend and music icon of Assam. Lord Swraj Paul and Kamalesh Sharma, High Commissioner for India lit the candle while Manisha Hazarika paid her tribute by offering a white flower on his photograph because white was his favourite colour. Dignitaries from various offices and a representative of the Mayor of London were also present with well wishing messages.

Dr. Atul Khare, Director and Minister of Culture for India, welcomed the dignitaries and guests, and chronicled the life and philosophy of the great musician of Assam. He also narrated the struggles Mrs. Manish Hazarika had to face alone to bring her only son, Mayukh Hazarika to re-liven the voice of his father. Her daughter-in-law, Laili Dutta Hazarika, a superb musical talent herself, is an asset for the Hazarika gharana. The whole scenario was very nostalgic to me. I remembered Rana's innocent face, polite and always smiling.

With their unique live performance, Mayukh and Laili enthralled the gathering. Laili captivated the audience with her Bhajan recital in what was a fitting finale to the long list of cultural activities at the Nehru Centre. Virtues of simplicity and grace that make Mayukh Hazarika, the most enchanting artist of the musical world of Assam, showed up in ample evidence during the performance.

Manisha Hazarika, impressed the whole Indian audience when she delivered her speech in fluent Hindi. "Aap Ne Ye Sanman Jo Mujhe Diya Hai, Ye Sirf Mujhe Nahi, Puri Assam Bashiyo Ko De Raha Hai, Ye Mai Kabhi Nahi Bhulungi". She thanked all the dignitaries and expounded on the rich heritage of Assam along with the work of her late husband. She emphasised on the importance of showcasing unity in cultural diversity. She specially thanked Rini Kakati for her effort to bring this event to the largest cultural centre of the world for the first time.

The husband and wife team was invited on 20 October, 2006, to perform at a special function at the Indian High Commission. Mayukh & Laili mesmerised the audience when they played both



Laili Dutta Hazarika with Mayukh Hazarika, Rini Kakati & Manisha Hazarika, Dr. Atul Khare, Director and Minister of Culture for India, with Rini Kakati & Lord Swraj Paul at a party at Rini Kakati's place with the Jayanta Hazarika family along with Prabin Hazarika, older brother of Jayanta Hazarika.

classical songs as well as popular hits of Bhupen da's good oldies like Dil Hum Hum Kare, Sonar Boron Pakhi, Bistar Hai Apar. The whole audience gave a standing ovation joining hands to show their respect to the Hazarika family's unofficial motto "Music has no boundaries, no religion, no caste."

The next day, on 21 October, 2006, they performed at the Alperton Community Centre, Wembley. Many overseas Assamese students from various universities of UK attended this special cultural evening. Dr. Jogen Kalita of Kings College, London conducted the function with a welcome speech to the Assamese community among whom he was actively involved during his study time few years earlier. He is the one who was the brain behind forming Assam Sahitya Sabha, UK.

The function started by Mrs. Neeta Sharma felicitated the guests and the artists in a Assamese traditional way with phulam gamosha. Mr. Prabin Hazarika from Leicester, an older brother of Jayanta Hazarika says "to pay a tribute to a loved one is always painful when feelings of nostalgia and memories make one emotional." He could not resist his tears. When Mayukh started singing the popular hits of Jayanta Hazarika, such as Xar Pau Moi Puoti Nixati, it made the audience nostalgic and emotional prompting them to join in the chorus.

Dr. Padma Hazarika, from Coventry talked about contributions of the great Hazarika family of Assam. Mr. Topon Sharma offered vote of thanks to the guest artists and the Assamese community for their attendance.

Last but not the least for whose support the whole event was possible were the Indian Association of UK, the Director Travel Company and Mr. Ronen Sharma, an NRA doctor of UK.

When Mayukh performed in all these functions before the huge gatherings of mostly Indian audience, my heart cried out for Bhupen da. Behind all the pomp, after all it was one and only Bhupen Hazarika whose name was uttered by most of the Indian audience that evening again and again. Everyone asked me "How is Mr. Hazarika?" I still remember the same audience enjoying an evening at the World Hindi Conference, 1999 held at Wembley Arena when Bhupen da sang, Bistar Hai Apar. I wish him well.

It makes me feel proud that by God's will, I was able to give the highest tribute to my dearest friend, Rana. "Tumi Akou Ahiba Amar Majoloi Aei tu dinote. Hee Bondhu Tumaloi Xoto Nomoskar."

Contributed by Rini Kakati, London



Lord Swraj Paul with His Excellency Mr. Kamalesh Sharma
(HC For India)

A Tribute to Jayanta

On 21 October 2006, this year's Diwali day, enthusiastic music lovers from Assam, led by Mrs Rini Kakati organised a musical evening at Wembley in London to commemorate the death anniversary of Jayanta Hazarika. He was our dear Rana Bhaity who passed away at the age of 34 on 15 October 1977. Jayanta's wife Manisha, son Mayukh and daughter-in-law Lailee were invited for this occasion and had come all the way from Assam.

The function started with a solemn emotional speech by Rini Kakati recalling her association with Rana in earlier days when he was an up and coming singer. Manisha Hazarika (Mithu) paid her tribute by offering a white flower on his photograph because white was his favourite colour. She described her life with him, his commitment and dedication to music and his desire to serve the society through his "xurabahini", the army of musicians.

To pay a tribute to a loved one is always painful when feelings of nostalgia and memories make one emotional. In a family of 10 siblings, Rana Bhaity was the 9th in line. He was born in Mangaldoi. As a young man he was a rebel, angry and shy at the same time but very determined to achieve his goal to be a musician. At times this led to feelings of frustration. He showed his first signs of musical talent by playing a mouth organ without any formal teaching.

In the late fifties, when Bhupenda returned from USA, he recognised Rana Bhaity's talents and took him under his wing. Later he accompanied Bhupenda with his harmonium, guitar or accordion which he could play with equal dexterity. He also played with many renowned singers like Hemanta Kumar, Salil Choudhury, Shyamal Mitra and travelled to Berlin to sing on the same stage with Bhupenda, Mirium Makeba of South Africa and others in an International Youth Festival. Rana Bhaity also accompanied our sister Queen (Sudaksina Sharma) to the Radio station in Guwahati. He was very close to his two elder sisters Rose and Ruby, now Kavita Baruah and Stuty Patel, respectively. The caring and loving relationship between the sisters and a brother lasted right to the end.

The young and shy Rana later grew up to be a caring, decent human being full of wit and humour, confident, meticulous in his choice of clothes but remained humble, polite and courteous to his elders. He grew up to be a well known musician, music director of films and theatre, and a documentary maker. At this time I was thousands of miles

away from home in Africa. As a result, his pursuit of musical career and his contribution to the evolution of modern Assamese music remained anecdotal and second-hand to me. Now I have to piece together his times as a teenager and his youth from various writings, journals and other sources. I now know our younger brother Rana Bhaity became a bohemian minstrel and a legendary trailblazer in creating unusual music. His wife, Mithu gave him full support and followed him like his shadow in pursuit of his chosen path of creating meaningful music.

On a fateful day on 17 October 1977, very unexpectedly his life was cut short and he died suddenly. The curtain had abruptly dropped on the stage for the final time ending his performance on this earth, leaving behind his widow, a young son, his brothers and sisters and fans all over the country in shock. Every year, on this day we remember his sudden loss and miss his beautiful music and songs. While commemorating his death with pleasant reminiscences of his past, we also rejoice in the presence of Jayanta's legacy in Raja (Mayukh) his son, Raja's lovely talented wife Lailee and his devoted mother Mithu (Manisha) to preserve, revive and spread his music in the national and international arena.

None of the Hazarika siblings were formally trained in music. However, equipped with a harmonium, a guitar or an accordion, Rana was able to create a tune and a vision from lyrics to compose a new song. In Rana's case, poet Nirmalprova provided that poetry of lyrical quality to combine with Rana's moods to weave through musical notes to create a memorable song sung with emotive sincerity. In some of his compositions, there are hints of extreme pain of a tormented soul. His tunes had a combination of traditional as well as Western notes which were sung in his own indomitable sonorous voice with a clear distinct diction of a musical brilliance!

Our Rana Bhaity, Jayanta Hazarika, the bohemian minstrel is no more with us but we will always remember him through his music.

May God bless him and let his departed soul REST IN PEACE

Contributed by Prabin Hazarika Leicester, UK

[Prabin Hazarika is an older brother of Jayanta Hazarika. - Editor]

Chemistry

Nagendranarayan Choudhury

Translated from Assamese by Jukti Kalita

Phukan had been relentless in his research into the medicinal properties of the local flora for several years. Since his return from England upon completion of doctoral work, he had been scouring the neighboring areas for any plants, and their roots, barks, seeds or fruits that were known to possess healing qualities. He had also been scouting the surrounding districts of the state for any local bez or medicine man that claimed abilities beyond the normal for their herbal potions. Dr. Phukan made extraction from plants or native drugs, so found, and injected them into the veins of caged monkeys that served as subjects of his pursuits that often verged on brink of pseudo-science.

Around this time, newspapers all over India were agog with detailed accounts of the octogenarian Hindu leader Madan Mohan Malaviya's claims that he had used Ayurveda to roll back the effect of aging. Of course, it could not be said with definiteness that Malaviya's attempt at reversing the irreversible, the process of senescence that every mortal being experiences was anywhere near successful. But it was widely believed all over the country that there were lost secrets in the ancient Ayurveda which was compiled over three thousand years ago. These secrets included instructions to prepare drugs to substantially erase the stamp of old age, and physically transform one from senility to the vitality of the youth, something that western medicine had not yet been able to achieve. Newspapers those days were also galore with advertisements of seemingly amazing drugs that claimed to rejuvenate the physical body and mind. Western educated scientists tended to dismiss these claims of Ayurveda or local medicine men as unsubstantiated and not tenable. However, it was well known that many of their colleagues in Europe and America were experimenting with drugs based on Ayurveda. The anecdote of Puru in the epic Mahabharat in which Puru displayed his unswerving respect for father Jajati by giving up own youth for father's old age would not have been possible without the wealth of knowledge that Ayurveda had to offer.

Dr. Phukan had delved headlong into reinventing the drugs mentioned in Ayurveda and other Hindu scriptures. He often altered the proportions of the ingredients, and introduced new ones hoping to be lucky.

He needed subjects to test these drugs that he believed had the potential to add many years to human life. After a considerable search, he was able to locate an old man who willingly became a test subject. This gentleman had remained a life-long celibate. But, now, at an old age he longed to enjoy

the bliss of wedded life. When contacted by Dr. Phukan and told that these drugs had the potential of bringing back to him the spring of youthfulness, he jumped at his fortune, and merrily offered to become a candidate for testing.

By another stroke of good luck, Dr. Phukan found a monk called Abhagiri who was reputedly versed in the medicinal aspects of Ayurveda and other Indian scriptures. Abhagiri who was originally from the state of Bihar, received patients and disciples who came from far and near to seek blessings and Ayurvedic treatment. Rumor had it that some of his potions worked like magic. Dr. Phukan imagined that pooling their expertise together will lead to some amazing results. He thought of presenting his results in international conferences and of perhaps even winning the prestigious Nobel prize.

Dr. Phukan and Abhagiri prepared the patient for several weeks of treatment. The doctor reassured the old man - "I do not expect money or anything of value from you in return for giving you back your youth. I don't have my eyes set on your home, or the acres of your fertile farmland or any other property. My only goal is to be successful in my experiment, and roll back your years. That will be the greatest reward for me."

The old man was overjoyed at the prospect of the getting back the long lost youth. Given the wealth he had managed to stow away over time and the somewhat respectable position that he now enjoyed in the village, he bemused to himself that it will only be a matter of time till he finds a young and beautiful bride. He would hold a gala wedding, and have children too. Things that had eluded him during his normal youth and relegated him to less of manhood in the eyes of the society would surely be his to enjoy this time around.

After long deliberations, the doctor and the monk planned to use ingredients and the quantities prescribed in a puthi, an old handwritten book that had been passed from generation to generation in Abhagiri's family. Some of the pages of this puthi were torn. A few critical references to components that go into making of the drug and required quantities were missing or were illegible. The doctor and Abhagiri used their best guess-estimates and went ahead with their preparations. A few items mentioned in the puthi had become rare and were locally unavailable, so they agreed to use substitutes.

Abhagiri made two mixtures in separate stone pots for stone did not react with any chemicals. When the two portions were mixed, it created a visible reaction with a burst of thick white fume that moved away slowly. The patient was administered a small amount of the drug initially. He did not like its taste and twisted his facial muscles. He took only about three-quarters of the preparation that had quickly congealed into a thick white paste, and threw the rest on to the floor.

Dr. Phukan and Abhagiri were alarmed. They immediately remixed the medicine. The patient needed to consume



the right amount of the mixture to avoid any negative side effects. The patient was given the medicine again, but once again he vomited some out.

For diet, the old man was prescribed ample amounts of fruits and milk. At noon, he ate some fruits and promptly threw up. Thus, not much of the miracle drug remained in his stomach on

that faithful first day of treatment. The story more or less was repeated on the second day. The patient was administered a large but measured portion of the potion. However, he hardly retained any in his system - most of it was lost since he threw up like on the first day. The doctor and the monk, then, decided to lower the quantity of medicine.

Neither the doctor nor the monk knew that their patient was addicted to opium. The patient had not revealed that secret despite probing questions for he feared that if the doctor learned of this bad habit of his, he would not accepted for treatment. He, however, unknown to his benefactors, continued to consume small quantities of opium that he had brought along from home. After the first few days at the nursing home, the monotony of eating the same fruits became unbearable to the patient. He yearned for his favorite meal with rice. He was a downright lover of khar (a dish seasoned with alkali) and the homemade pickles like kahudi. Pretty soon he found his way out of this problem. He began bribing Dr. Phukan's servants who quietly brought to him any delicacy that he wished for.

There was little change in the physical appearance of the patient during the first days of the experiment. However, after a fortnight of continuous administration of the Ayurvedic mixtures, it became apparent to the doctor and the monk that the medicine was beginning to work, that a miraculous metamorphosis was underway, and that it was happening at a pace more rapid than originally expected. The old patient was elated at the providential fortune that had befallen him. Before he came to Dr. Phukan's nursing home, advanced age had cast its irreversible spell on him. He had lost much of the hair on his head and the rest of the body; he did not have any tooth left to chew anything hard; his skin had drooped and muscles become soft. What a transformation had occurred during two short weeks! The experiment had been successful beyond anyone's wildest dreams so far! The patient was starting to roll back the effect of old age- he had growths of hair on his head. A few little white teeth were beginning to beam out of his gums as they do in a baby; the muscles had mutated, and were becoming stiff and regaining vigor; and the skin that had sunk was becoming firm and smooth.

Abhagiri's mood was ebullient, he contemplated the good fortune that would befall him now. Once the word of successful rejuvenation of the patient spread, he supposed that the rank and file of his disciples would swell, and they would contribute more generously to the coffers of their guru. The doctor thought that if the experiment worked well, and every-

thing was pointing in that direction at the time, he would become famous not only in India but all over the world. He pondered that the Nobel Prize committee may even immortalize him with the highest award in the realm of science. The old patient who no longer seemed that old was rapidly shedding the outward as well as inner symptoms associated with old age, and becoming a young man full of virility. He started dreaming of the near future when his unmet wants and desires would surely be fulfilled.

The treatment continued for several more weeks. Dr. Phukan examined the patient thoroughly every day, and wrote copious notes. He took a different photograph of the patient every day to visually document the path of the patient's regression in age, which was happening at a break-neck pace. The doctor planned to write up the results of the study with several pictures showing the dramatic changes, and to send them to many national and international medical associations.

At this point, the monk assumed that the success of the experiment was inevitable, and delegated the weighty responsibility of preparing the drugs to his assistant and a compounder who worked for the doctor. And like Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and regeneration, he began indulging himself in the bliss of opium smoking, sat cross-legged on a mat and often chanted 'hara, hara, bom, bom' in His praise.

Though the research was carried out secretly at Dr. Phukan's private nursing home, the news of the amazing results leaked to the neighbors. Some of them wanted to see the lucky patient with their own eyes, but none was allowed into the patient's ward.

There were seven days still left for the treatment to end as per planning. At that point, however, it seemed that the rejuvenation process was working far more effectively than had been anticipated. The patient had begun to revert toward adolescence from the youth phase that he had earlier entered into. The doctor was alarmed, and told Abhagiri, "Babaji, let's immediately stop the treatment. We want him to come out of the study as a youth. We do not want him to become an adolescent or a child."

Abhagiri carefully examined the patient. "Doctor, I fully agree with you"- he uttered. "Let's end the treatment now. Though human beings think fondly of their childhood, the memories of the youth are the most pleasant. Given a choice, a man would most likely want to get back to the prime days of youth, and not the dependent ways of adolescence or childhood. Even pre-pubescents dream of the fun-filled days of one's twenties and thirties. I have seen so many juvenile boys, who can't wait to shave for they think that such an action would enable them to break the laws of nature and would lead to growth of beard sooner than the nature intended. Of course, along with the beard they dream of the vigor of the youth. In any case, I am ecstatic with the results. This invention will make us immortals, doctor."

...to be continued to next issues

Iowa State Fair

..a Visit to Remember..

The Midwestern state of Iowa is unlikely to figure in a casual conversation about the USA. It is worth noting however, that Iowa contributes more than 10 billion dollars worth of agricultural output to the US economy annually. For starters, it accounts for 19 and 17 percent of the nation's total corn and soybean production respectively. It is also one of the leading producers of dairy, meat and poultry products in the country. Incidentally, Iowa also happens to be the birthplace

a showcase of the state's success in the field of agriculture. In 2006, the fair was held from 10th to the 20th of August; and it witnessed a record attendance of more than a million visitors.

The first Iowa State Fair was held at Fairfield, a town in southeast Iowa in 1854. In the subsequent years, the fair had different venues throughout the state. Finally in 1878, it was held in Des Moines, the state capital and the venue has remained unchanged ever since. For the past 150 years the fair has remained a tradition; a platform for the farming community to showcase their achievements. Since its inception, the fair has seen only two interruptions, the first being in 1898, when the event was cancelled due to the Spanish-American war. Again from 1942 through 1945, the fair could



of Norman Ernest Borlaug, renowned agricultural scientist and Nobel laureate. He is often referred to as the pioneer of the "Green Revolution" in developing countries like India and Mexico; and saving the world from an imminent food crisis in the middle of the last century.

It is then perhaps, only fitting that this state hosts one of the largest annual agricultural expositions in the world. Held at the Fairgrounds of Des Moines, the annual Iowa State Fair is

not be held due to World War II. Today, the fair is deemed a "National Cultural Event". The state of Iowa hosts one of the earliest Presidential caucuses in the United States. Therefore it is not surprising to find presidential candidates during years when elections are due.

In keeping with its agro-centric character, the fair is a showcase of livestock, fruits, vegetables and other agricultural products. A high volume of livestock sales is also registered

at the fair each year. Among the several popular contests held in the livestock category are those for the biggest animals—boar, rabbit, bull and ram. Other animals brought for exhibition and trade include beef and dairy cattle, sheep, goats, dogs and cats. Some of the traditional games and contests would surely remind someone from Asom of the “Khel-Dhemali” held during Bihu. Traditional competitions include rooster crowing, sheep shearing, pigeon racing, turkey, duck, and chicken calling, wood chopping, pie eating, arm wrestling, banjo, fiddle, accordion, harmonica, mandolin and piano playing, and backgammon, chess, cribbage, and checkers tournaments. These are very popular among visitors.

Music is another eagerly awaited part of the fair. Over the years, it has hosted a variety of concerts—from amateur performers to internationally acclaimed bands and singers. The Fairground Grandstand, with a capacity of about 10,000 people is the venue for these musical extravaganzas. Some popular artists who have performed at the fair include Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash, Beach Boys, the Eagles, Cher, Elton John, Brooks and Dunn. This year, soft rock artist James Taylor enthralled a capacity crowd. Among the amateur bands were several country music performers and “tribute” bands, which serenaded popular numbers of yesteryear’s bands like the Beatles.

The Bill Riley Talent Show is another attraction here. This event started in 1957, when radio celebrity Bill Riley Sr., hosted a talent competition for Iowans between 2 and 21 years of age. About a hundred hopefuls from all over the state participate in this talent hunt every year. Over the years, the event picked up in popularity and became a regular feature at the fair. Riley Sr. retired in 1996, and his son, Bill Riley Jr., has been hosting it ever since.

The butter sculptures of Norma “Duffy” Lyon are major crowd pullers at the fair. Since her first butter sculpture in 1960, Lyon has created replicas of different breeds of dairy cows, vehicles, prominent personalities and events. She has even contrived a butter version of Leonardo Da Vinci’s masterpiece, the last supper. All of her sculptures are life-size, and made with an amazing attention to detail. Lyon’s works have been featured in both national and international media. She has appeared in Jay Leno’s the “Tonight Show”, as well as in “Late Night”, hosted by David Letterman. This year’s attractions were Superman, Elvis Presley, Bill Riley Sr. and a Holstein Friesian cow.

An exhibition, featuring the state’s farm produce, also made visitors aware of the research projects in the field of agriculture. Notable among these is the Corn Genome Project. The Iowa State University is one of the four participating institutions countrywide in this prestigious venture, sponsored



by the National Science Foundation. In addition to being a major food crop, corn holds a lot of promise in solving some of the world’s energy problems. Genome sequencing will enable researchers to prepare a “genetic blueprint”, and help in the understanding of the impact of each gene in the life of the organism. This in turn, will help develop varieties of corn, customized to suit specific requirements. The project involves use of enormous amounts of genetic data and supercomputers to implement complex sequencing algorithms.

This year, two exotic animal shows attracted crowds by the hundreds. The first was the alligator show by Florida based Paul “Kachunga” and his team. The other was titled “Indian Tigers”. In addition to being entertaining, these shows help create awareness about conservation programs for endangered species like the alligator and the tiger.

The fair is also a good place for cheap, lip-smacking food. Be it barbeque, corn-dogs, or sweet goodies, the eats are fresh and the helpings usually large. This is an ideal place for those who like their platters good and full.

The Iowa State Fair is definitely a worthwhile experience in enjoyment and education. It reiterates the fact that agriculture is a fundamental pillar of a nation’s economic prowess.

Contributed by Harsha Phukan, Creston, Iowa.

[Harsha received the Best Student Poster Paper award from the 2005 American Society for Nondestructive Testing conference in Columbus, Ohio, for his research into detecting defects in friction-stir welds. - Editor]

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