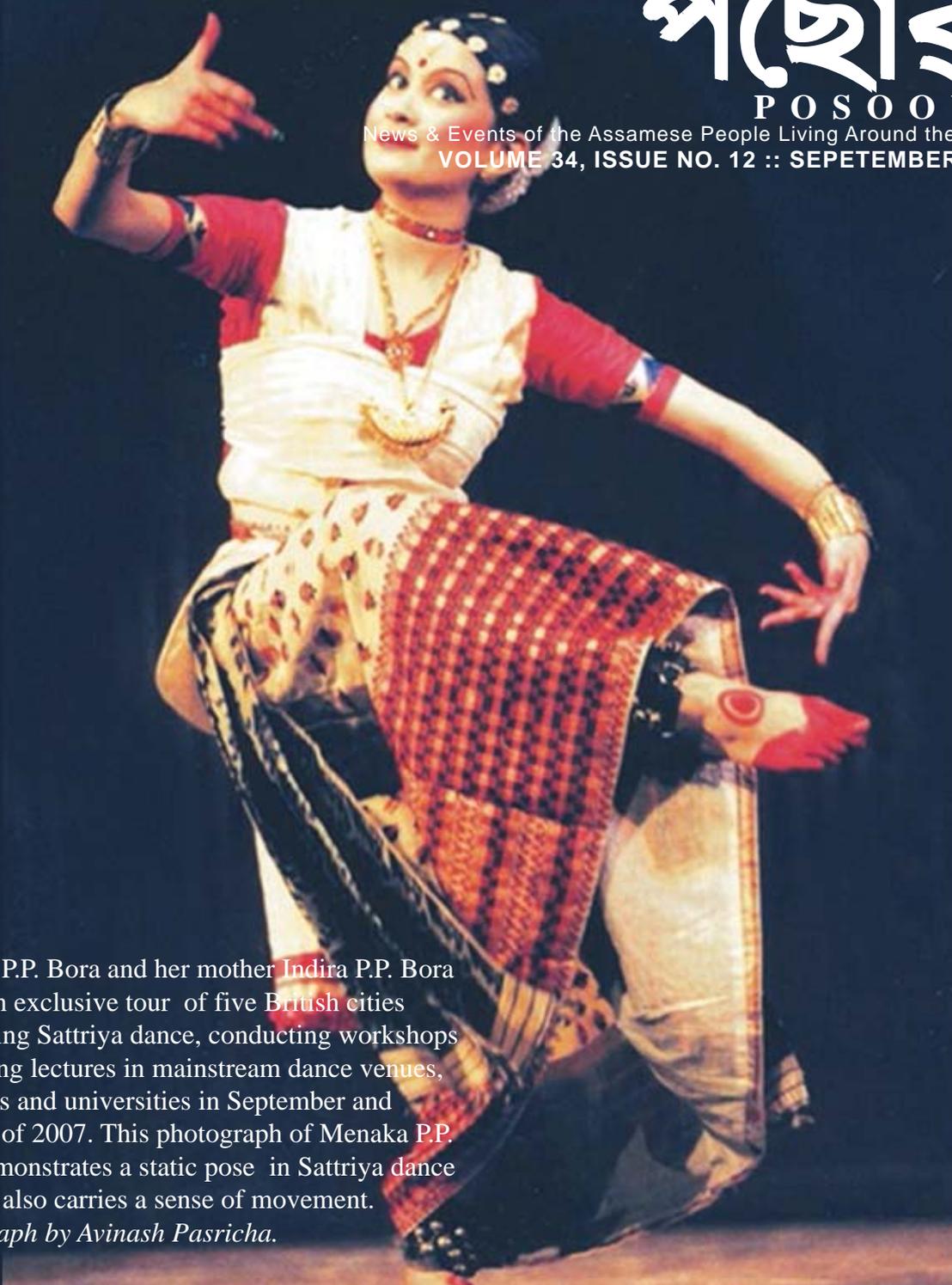


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POSOOWA

News & Events of the Assamese People Living Around the World  
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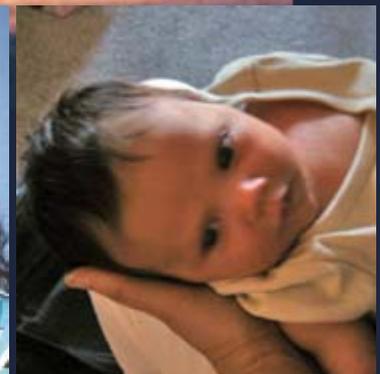


Menaka P.P. Bora and her mother Indira P.P. Bora are on an exclusive tour of five British cities performing Sattriya dance, conducting workshops and giving lectures in mainstream dance venues, museums and universities in September and October of 2007. This photograph of Menaka P.P. Bora demonstrates a static pose in Sattriya dance but they also carries a sense of movement.

*Photograph by Avinash Pasricha.*

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# Nitin Sarangapani

September 25, 1981 - September 25, 2006



*Remembering Courage, Strength,  
Patriotism and Eternal Youth*

Nitin Bezbaruah Sarangapani Memorial (NBSM) Fund  
[www.nitinfund.org](http://www.nitinfund.org)

## Great Success Awaits Nandini Sarma of Kansas!!

Nandini Sarma, a senior high school student at the Shawnee Mission East High School, Kansas has recently received several awards and wide recognition for her outstanding research work in biomedical sciences. Since her freshman year in high school, Nandini has been conducting research to find solutions to common health related problems such as food-borne illnesses, cancer and viral infections.

Her research on natural food preservatives revealed that garlic (*Allium sativum*) can effectively replace the harmful synthetic chemical preservatives from the food chain (meat and eggs), thus providing a health friendly, easily available and cost effective natural alternative to prevent food-borne illnesses caused by consumption of Salmonella and E. coli contaminated meat and eggs.

For cancer research, Nandini studied the effect of a selected virus infection on Herpesvirus induced tumor development in-vivo and its affinity to kill transformed cells in-vitro. Although, from the preliminary studies she came out with interesting findings and encouraging results, further work is in progress before coming to a final conclusion.

Recently, Nandini started working on pathobiology of Herpes simplex virus under the mentorship of Prof. G. S. Read, one of the world's most renowned scientists in Herpes simplex Virus research. Using RNAi, real time RT-PCR and other molecular biology techniques, she found that certain eukaryotic cellular translation initiation factors are required for the virus to initiate infection and cause mRNA degradation, eventually leading to cellular death. Her research findings were presented at the 32nd International Herpesvirus Workshop and a research paper is being prepared for publishing in the "Journal of Virology".

Her research on natural food preservatives, cancer and pathobiology of Herpes Simplex Virus infection brought her several awards and recognition from the scientific community at the national as well as international level. She is the recipient of the Greater Kansas City Science and Engineering Fair (GKCSEF) 1st place grand award consisting of plaques, trophies, cash and certificates for three years in a row for outstanding achievement in biomedical research and selected for all expense paid trips to present her research findings at the 2005, 2006 and 2007 Intel In-



ternational Science and Engineering Fair (Intel ISEF). At the Intel ISEF, Nandini's research projects won several awards including 1st place grand award in microbiology, 4th grand award in medicine and health, 2nd special award from the AVASC foundation, 1st place award consisting of a plaque, certificate of achievement and cash from the US Air Force, and 1st place award consisting of a gold medallion, cash and certificate of achievement from the US Army. At the 2007 Intel ISEF, she was also selected for an all expense paid trip to participate in the London International Youth Science Forum (LIYSF) held in London from July 24 to August 8, 2007. All total, 250 selected high school students from 61 countries participated for this year's International Youth Science Forum in London.

As a first place grand award winner at the 2007 Intel ISEF, Massachusetts's Institute of Technology's Lincoln laboratory near-earth asteroid research (LINEAR) program in collaboration with US Science Service and with the approval of the International Astronomical Association has named a star (a minor planet / asteroid) in our solar system after her name. The minor planet named "Nandinisarma" (Number 23228, Name ref. 60503, Prov. Des. 2000 WQ57) was discovered on November 21, 2000 by MIT- LINEAR (Site: Socorro)..

In 2006 Intel ISEF, Nandini was selected for this award for her research on cancer. Recognizing her extraordinary contribution in science research, the Youth Science Foundation of Portugal invited Nandini to participate as a special student guest speaker at their

2007 international youth science forum. Nandini's trip to Portugal was financed by the forum organizing committee and the Shawnee Mission school district in Kansas. In 2006, Nandini won the first prize (plaque and cash award) at the international science essay contest organized by the Society of Plastic Engineers and established another line of achievement as an Indian origin student.

Besides international recognition, Nandini also received several awards and honors nationally for her research endeavors in biomedical sciences. She is the first place award winner for three years in a row at the Kansas-Oklahoma-Nebraska - Junior Science and Humanities Symposium (JSHS), and qualified as a national finalist to participate and make oral presentation of her research findings at the 43rd, 44th and 45th JSHS national contests. Nandini's research projects also received Award of Distinction and Vic Regnier awards (Cash, trophies, plaques and outstanding research certificates) at the Research and Development forum of her school district for three consecutive years. In August 2006, Nandini was invited by the governor of Kansas to participate in the National Governor's Association's (NGA) annual meeting at Charleston, South Carolina and take part in the nation's governors' round table discussion on how to motivate students for science and technology. This program was broadcasted live by C-SPAN on August 6, 2006.

Yet, another remarkable achievement in the world of science is her publications. As of now, Nandini has 8 publications (2 full text research papers and 6 research abstracts). This is very rare for a high school student, and indeed distinctly reflects her deep interest in science and technology.

Science research is not the only passion for Nandini. She is equally involved in various other activities besides her school and laboratory. She is an avid debater and prolific writer. She is a distinguished member of the national forensic league, and has won several medals and other awards at the local and regional debate tournaments, literature and writing contests. She has won the Sons of the American Revolution's (SAR) American history essay and oration contests at the state level competitions and got selected to represent Kansas at the national contest for two consecutive years. At the national competition, she won 3rd place award for American history essay contest and received medals, certificates and cash awards from SAR. Besides being a top ranking student in her high school class and a straight "A" student with an overall GPA 4.0 / 4.0, she is also a national merit semifinalist.

Nandini also loves music very much. She has been playing piano since she was six. In

music also, she has received several awards including A+ ratings from the KCMTA, 3rd place award at the Baldwin International Piano Competition and got selected to play at the Truman Presidential Library piano concert in 2005. Besides Piano, Nandini also loves to dance. She has been learning to dance since she was 7 years old. Currently, she is learning Indian classical dance (Bharat Natyam). She also performs and choreographs various Indian folk dances including "Bihu dance" from Assam

It is interesting to note that, Nandini is a scientist, musician and dancer who loves to play sports as well. She has been playing tennis in her school's tennis team since her sophomore year and played soccer in her school's girls' soccer team during her freshman and

sophomore years. Her soccer team won the runners' trophy at the Midwestern all girls' soccer tournament in 2005.

One of her biggest passions however, is community service. During her junior year, she created a volunteer organization, called "International Education Outreach Program (IEOP)" which works with other organizations in the field of education. Her first fundraiser event was a "Used Book Sale" that rose over \$4,000 that went towards building schools, hiring teachers, etc. in Guatemala. Currently, she is the chairperson of her school's AIDS awareness program (a community education project), board member of the American Red Cross - greater Kansas City chapter (measles initiative project), board member of the Midwest rural-urban girls

collaborative (a national girls collaborative project), board member of the Kansas State University's EXCITE senior advisory panel, member of the Johnson County library youth advisory committee, member of the National Honor Society and Spanish National Honor Society, peer tutor and committee chairperson of SME Student Council. For outstanding community service, she was awarded President's student's service award (Gold) during her junior year at SME high school.

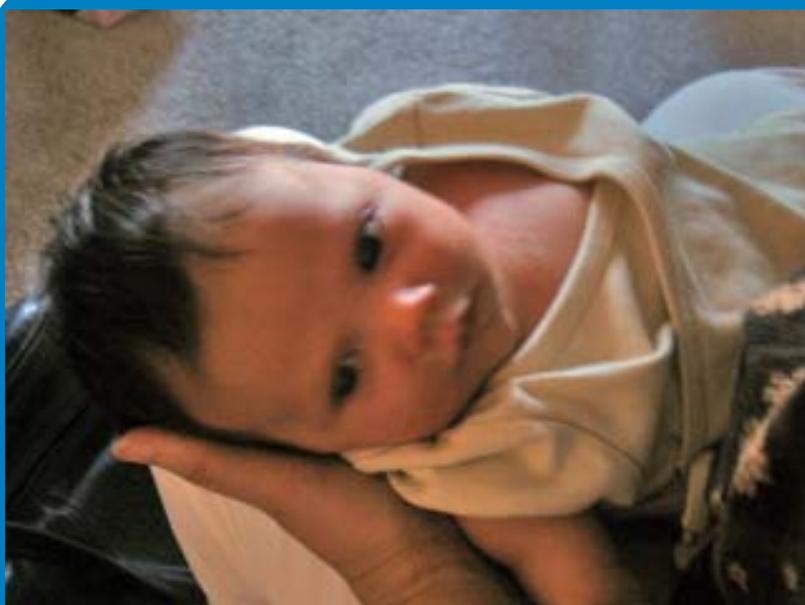
Nandini is the daughter of Girish and Minakhi Sarma of Overland Park, Kansas.

*Reported by Jugal Kalita, Colorado*

## Bihu Performance in New York City

A Bihu team from Assam performed in New York's popular Bryant Park at 42nd St. for three consecutive days beginning Sunday (9/24) through Wednesday (9/26). It was a part of the *India at 60 Celebration* in New York. The celebration coincided with the gathering of heads of states from all over the world at the United Nations at the same time.

*Deepak Chakravarti, Cherry Hills, NJ*



Nasreen Barua Schulze was born on July 13, 2007 in San Francisco at the home of her mother Jina Saikia Schulze and father Stefan Schulze. Amulya and Polly Saikia of the Bay Area are her proud grand-parents.



*With compliments of the Das Family: Dhruba, Susan and Elora (standing), Rupam and Ronju (in front), of Coatesville, Pennsylvani, USA*

# Assam Day, UK

Assam Day, the popular premier annual function of the Assamese in the UK was celebrated during the weekend of 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2007. It was held at Novotel in the city of Nottingham. The function was very well attended. People from all corners of the country attended and both the younger and older generations fully participated in the event. All enjoyed the weekend immensely making the occasion a great success.

The President of the Association, Bhupendra Dev Sarmah, inaugurated the function with his welcome speech. The President told the guests of the importance of having a strong organisation to represent the people from Assam and urged all Assamese in the UK to join the Assam Association.

A minutes silence was observed as a respect to the late Mr Ajit Tamuli, a Professor in nuclear physics who sadly passed away couple of weeks earlier.

The highlight of the function was the performance by the invited young artists from Assam. They were, a classical dancer, Miss Dreamly Gogoi and accompanying instrumentalists of Dhol, Tal, Gangana and Pepa, Mr Lakhyadhar Gogoi and Mr Jagat Saikia. The artists delighted the audience with their superb performance.

The enjoyment of the function was enhanced further by local singer artists Gitika Saikia, Meera Azad, Mamani Sharma and Miss Sharmin Sohani. A mystery group of singers of Bhaktinum and parody singers from North East of England entertained the audience. A group of young girls performed Bihu dance.

The other events of the function were the Debate and quiz show presented by Miss Nina Goswami and the Assam Day Olympics organised by Miss Leena Sharma.

The gala dinner on Sunday night was an elegant occasion with ladies exquisitely dressed in exotic Mekhalas and Saris and the gents in immaculate suits.

Probir Brahma, the General Secretary, in his welcome dinner speech emphasized the importance and value of Assam Day. He also told of the uniting factor that the Assam Association holds in bringing people together from Assam in UK.

*Contributed by Sanchayita Sharma. UK*



# Wind Power

## - A Renewable Energy Source

Umesh C. Tahbildar

Poetical context aside, the Bob Dylan's lyric “-the answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind--” can be appropriately applied to wind as an available and renewable source of much needed energy in the context of today's environmental problems. Our civilization is vitally dependent on supply of energy that drives the machines to support an increasingly rising standard of living among nations. Whereas conventional sources of energy -coal, oil, gas and nuclear fuel- provide the bulk of energy need, the only significant renewable source of energy – hydro power- provides only about 20% of global electricity need. In the last fifty years the population of the world has increased three times, but the demand for electricity has gone up more than fifteen times. Dependence on conventional fuel to meet this staggering demand has created a dangerous environmental situation that includes the greenhouse effects. Ex-VP Al Gore has been a champion of an awakening of this grave danger that faces the human race. There is ample evidence that business as usual as far as energy supply is concerned is untenable and humanity has to find alternatives for the survival of the race.



(Ref: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind_power))

A partial answer to the problem can be sought in the utilization of wind as a source of energy that is renewable and plentiful all across the surface of the earth. Unlike the conventional sources

of energy, it does not cause toxic and greenhouse gas emissions. Wind energy is the result of uneven solar heating of the mainly tropospheric blanket of air that envelops the earth for about 10 miles. This causes air masses to move in a complex pattern. The moving mass of air by virtue of its velocity carries with it kinetic energy that can be transformed to usable electricity by wind turbines. In the olden days, before invention of electricity, the same energy was converted into mechanical energy in wind mills. The process of generating electricity by wind turbines is the reverse of a household air circulating fan that consumes electricity and rotates the blades causing air mass to move. Wind turbines are driven by the force of moving wind

impinging on a set of blades and the turbine/generator turns the mechanical energy into electricity. A typical wind tower is shown in Figure 1.

Wind as a source of energy has been known to mankind for thousands of years although the knowledge to transform to electricity has been relatively recent. As early as 1700 BC, windmills

were employed mechanically to water the planes of Mesopotamia. There is also written evidence of early utilization of windmills in Afghanistan and Iran.

Although wind is one of civilization's oldest forms of energy, it suffered setback beginning last century as the benefits of cheap conventional energy supply became available. But as the true cost of conventional energy sources have become more and more evident, wind power is making a strong comeback during the last few decades. Although, installation of wind power is growing at brisk pace, its contribution to the total installed electric capacity is still very small as shown in **Table 1**.

Among the countries in the forefront of wind power development is India as shown in **Table 2**.

The state in India that has seen substantial growth in wind power generation is Tamil Nadu. A major wind farm is operational in Muppandal (Figure 2) - a small coastal town near Kanyakumari. Muppandal region has one of the largest concentrations of wind generators

**INSTALLED ELECTRICITY CAPACITY in GIGAWATT**  
( 1 Gigawatt = 10<sup>9</sup> Watts)

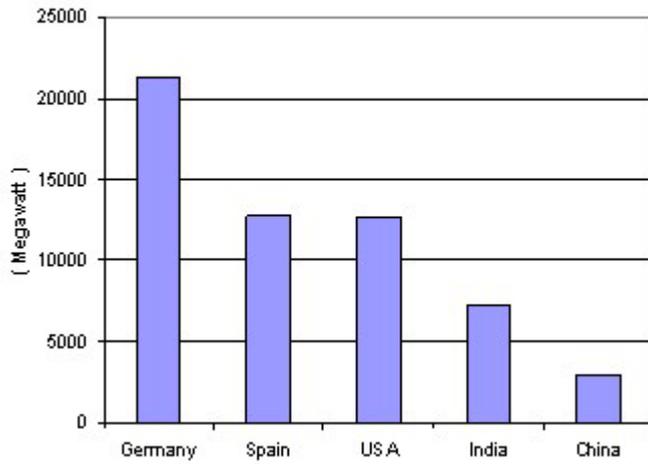
	WORLD	INDIA
TOTAL	4,000,000	200,000
WIND	75,000	6,000
% of WIND POWER	1.9%	3.0%

Note: The above numbers are approximate

Table 1

Table 2

**Global Wind Power Installed Capacity**



and generates an aggregate of 540 MW of electricity. It has presented employment opportunities for the youth and brought prosperity to an otherwise barren area.

Table 3 shows the wind power installed capacity in various Indian states. At present Assam has no installed wind

power capacity.

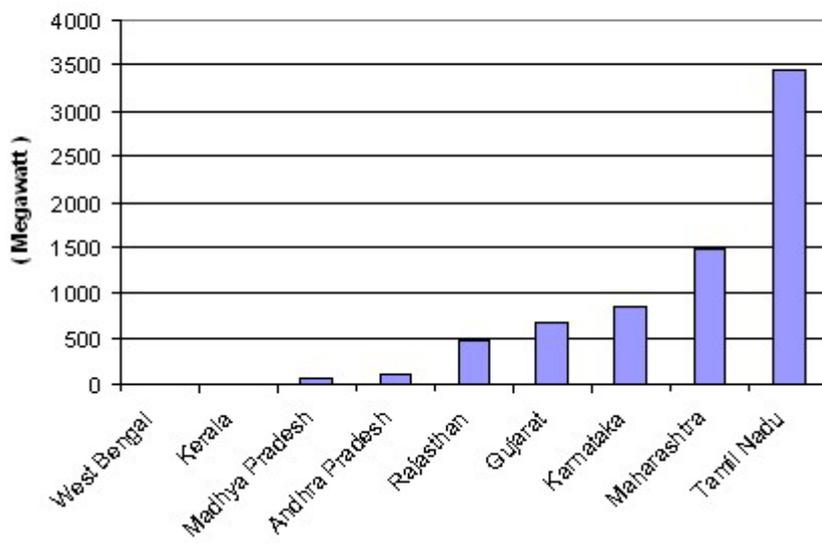
In a recent communication with the Government of Assam, the author was told that wind power is not feasible in Assam because of damp weather. The author is yet to receive any feasibility study to support that statement. Furthermore, there are only two operational wind-monitoring stations in Assam. To dismiss wind power development in Assam without a thorough exploration is unacceptable. This mindset has to change and a vigorous attempt should be made to identify locations to install wind power generators in Assam. Assam must develop sustainable and renewable energy sources like wind, run of the river hydro, mini and micro hydro plants rather than placing short sighted emphasis on massive hydroelectric plants in the highly seismic area because of the obvi-



(Ref: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind\\_power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wind_power))

Table 3

**Wind Power Installed Capacity in India as of March 31, 2007**



ous and unacceptable risk that they present to the people of Assam for now and into the future. Assam should be able to develop wind power capability in a public-private enterprise provided enough incentives are chalked out. There is no case that it is not technically feasible. John F. Kennedy set the goal to put a man on the moon- a seemingly impossible task a few decades ago that was materialized. The Chinese are contemplating controlling the weather during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing by firing artillery and dispersing clouds. If these can be materialized, wind power can certainly be materialized in Assam. All it needs is a resolve and a change of mindset.

# The Matrilineal Society of the Khasis

India's northeast is an eclectic medley of tradition, ethnicity and cultural heritage. Popularly known as the Seven Sisters, the states Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, and also the newest entrant in the North East Council (NEC)—Sikkim, are all sibling states that are treasure troves of a heady mix of race and rituals. Each state has its own remarkable and distinguishing features. One such state with a unique attribute is Meghalaya with its legacy of a matrilineal society, a heritage that sets it apart from all the other states of not only the northeast but that of the entire country of India.

Also known as the Scotland of the East, Meghalaya is rich in culture as well as natural bounty. The Abode of Clouds, as it is popularly known, also houses the two wettest places on the earth—Cherrapunjee which was earlier on the top rung of wettest places and Mawsynram which later dislodged Cherra as the new most wet place on the face of the earth. This is mainly due to its proximity to the towering Meghalaya plateau against which the moisture laden southwest monsoons strike, resulting in heavy rainfall.

Meghalaya, the 21st state of the Indian Union was declared a full-fledged state on 21st January 1972, comprising the areas of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills. Mother Nature has been rather generous to the state of Meghalaya with its hills, valleys, rivers, plateaus, majestic waterfalls and silent lakes; you name it and Meghalaya has it. The real charm of this state is however the two-fold fascinating climate, winter and monsoon, which can be enjoyed for the better part of the year. Shillong is the capital of Meghalaya.

The Khasis who are one of the oldest inhabitants of the Northeast, belong to the Austro-Asiatic family of the human race. And the matrilineal society of the Khasis is the icing on the cake of Meghalaya's endless list of treasures. When most states of India are busy shunning the girl child by committing female feticide, participating in bride burning, demanding dowry or in short persecuting the weaker sex, Meghalaya is the only state that is holding a flame, a beacon of hope by putting the weaker sex on a strong pedestal of society. This is the state where woman power is at its peak.

The northeast is known for the enhanced social status of its women folk. Compared to the rest of India, women here are compara-

tively safer and command respect. Probably the prevalence of "devi puja" (goddess worship) is a key to such a trend. Here a girl child is not considered a burden but is treated with equal status as the male child in both rural and urban societies.

Speaking of the Khasis, it is difficult to state an exact date of the settlement of this tribe in the Khasi hills but it is believed that they migrated into the present home from the plains either from the Brahmaputra Valley or Kamakhya during the tenth and thirteen century AD. The striking feature of the Khasis is that they are a matrilineal society. In this region the woman enjoys a comparative freedom albeit in different degrees. This trait is characteristic of the Mongoloid races of South-East Asia.

The woman is considered the mistress of the household and the sole custodian of wealth and not just a proprietress. The father on the other hand is provider, master and guide of the family, with the uncle as the undisputed director of the ancestral property. The Khasis trace their descent through the mother for the property is handed over to the women, especially the youngest daughter (Ka khadduh). If the youngest daughter dies, the property is transmitted to the next youngest in age. Such a legacy has empowered the Khasi woman to enjoy a position of importance and dignity. Though it's a matrilineal society the authority and control are in the hands of the maternal uncles. However, the woman has rights over the house and property sanctioned by customs and religious traditions. She is considered the custodian and preserver of her clan, family and lineage.

In a Khasi marriage it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother in law's house. He does not take his wife home as is customary in other communities. Whatever the wife earns is meant for her mother's house, which is expected to support the entire family. If a man marries a woman of a particular clan his children take the title of that clan therefore there is no illegitimate child in Khasi society as the children take their mother's title.

The institution of bride price does not apply in a matrilineal society like that of the Khasi because of its incompatibility with a system in which the woman plays a more important role in the social system than the man. This is often exaggerated and women are believed to "rule the roost" in the family but this is a

misconception. For a woman is accorded respect as one through whom the race is propagated, but it does not deny the fact that her commitments as mother and housewife are equally important and constitute a fulltime occupation. Responsibilities relating to regulation of the family are entrusted to men-folk. Among the Garos, male blood relations or Mahari exercise control over affairs of the family and even in matters affecting women. In arrangements of marriage, for instance, women are not consulted but male-in-laws often are. In relation to property though, it is inherited in female line. It is always managed by the male Mahari.

In a typical Khasi household responsibilities are shared between the maternal uncle and the father. The father earns for his own wife and children but in matters affecting the clan or the family, such as the arrangement of marriages, management of ancestral property and performance of religious duties, it is the uncle who makes the decisions though generally in consultations with other members of the family. Thus there is a virtual three fold division of family responsibility- the mother looks after the hearth and home, the father provides all that is necessary for the maintenance of his wife and children and the uncle attends to the business affairs that come before the family. A man does not forego membership in his own clan after marriage. His position in his wife's house is that of 'being in it, but not of it'. The impact of modernization and influence of other cultures has somewhat eroded the maternal uncle's authority but, by and large the tradition is still honored.

In Meghalaya, women enjoy great freedom and independence. Many look after their own interest and earn their livelihood with great success. Although as a rule they have no direct say in communal matters, in their own families, they exert a good deal of influence. However, from the above one can conclude that women's emancipation is evident in all its glory in Meghalaya's unique women centric society.

By *Rituparna Goswami Pandey*. A freelance writer in various magazines in North East India, Ritu is a regular contributor to *Melange*, the *Sunday magazine of the Sentinel Group in*



*Guwahati, Assam. Presently she is pursuing a PhD on the Assam silk industry.*

# Srimanta Sankardev Janmotsav Celebration in Mumbai

Assam is known as the “land” of Srimanta Sankardev, and yes *Mahapurush Janmutsav* was celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion by the entire Assamese community residing in Greater Mumbai on Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2007 at Assam Bhawan, Vashi, Navi Mumbai which was organized by the Assam Association Mumbai.

The celebration started with *naam praxanga*, performed by *bhakats* from Kamalabari Sattra, Majuli, the largest river island in the world, together with the Mumbai Assamese community. The *praxanga* ended with the religious *ashirwad* ceremony by the *bhakats*. It was then followed by the distribution of *mah praxad*, a special kind of prasad that includes chickpeas and black peas, green pulses, raw coconut, ginger, rice, and salt together with all kinds of seasonal fruit. After that, afternoon lunch was served to the entire members in the form of *khichdi* along with mixed vegetables, tomato jelly and *kheer*.



The entire crowd, especially small children enjoyed the delicious *khichdi* very much.

The evening cultural session started at around 4:00 pm for which a very huge *pandal* was erected one day before, keeping in view to making the entire crowd comfortable during the show due to possible monsoon

rains. The program started with the welcome speech by Deputy Resident Commissioner, Assam Bhawan – Devashis Sharma, under whose special guidance the entire event was organized. Then the General Secretary, Deepen Rajkonwar, gave a brief speech on Sankardev’s life history. The program was followed by

welcoming the chief guests, Executive Director, ONGC, Pranip Kumar Borthakur and renowned Assamese film actor, Biju Phukan by the President of the Assam

*continued to page 12..*

## The Brahma Sisters...

Mridu and Marshilla Brahma are a pair of sisters who not only share the same roof but also share the same passion for the stage. The sisters have been dancing together for about 8 years now at events ranging from birthday parties, India Fests, to Bihus to annual conventions and gatherings. Marshilla is a 9<sup>th</sup> grade student at Pencader Charter High School in Delaware while her older sister Mridu is attending University of Delaware studying business. As busy as their schedules can get, they always make time for their love of dancing. At a young age these girls showed an interest in music, whether it was lip-syncing to the Spice Girls or jamming to Barbie Girl. It wasn’t till they performed at Assamese Bihus when they realized how much excitement they got from being on stage. Since then, they have performed many numbers to Bollywood hits mixing in classical Bharatnatyam and modern dance steps. Through dedication and hard work these girls have gained the reputation as the dynamic duo from Delaware.



Some of their Bihu dance performances can be seen in YouTube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hALPEX-3vdY> ;<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V88HfA8GTuU>

# The Phonetics of the Assamese Language

Rajen Barua, Houston

Assamese is the major language spoken in the state of Assam in North East India. It is the eastern-most branch of the Indo-Aryan (IA) group of languages which is a branch of the greater Indo-European (IE) language group. The phonetics of the Assamese language is somewhat different from other IA languages in India (Sanskrit, Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, etc.) chiefly for four reasons. (1) Assamese has developed, over the years, in comparative isolation from other IA languages in India. (2) Assamese was influenced heavily by the Tibeto-Burman and other languages of NE, while other IA languages in mainland India were not. (3) The IA languages in mainland India, on the other hand, were influenced heavily by the Dravidian languages while Assamese was not. (4) The branch of Aryans that emigrated to Assam in pre-historic times, were pre-Vedic Aryans, because of which Assamese still retains some of the characteristics of the original phonetics of the Indo-European group of languages which other IA languages in India seem to have lost. In the table below, we summarize the basic phonemes of the Assamese language as the Assamese speak today, and give a brief explanation of the same with nearest IPA symbols and English sounds.

**Note 1:** In Sanskrit, these two vowels, अ and आ, are called Hosro (short) 'Ah' and Dirgho (long) 'Ah' respectively. In Sanskrit, as well as in Hindi and other IA languages, the pronunciation of Hosro 'Ah' (अ) is like 'u' as in 'up', and that of Dirgho 'Ah' (आ) is like 'a' as in the word 'calm'. Because of this, the letter अ is represented by the Roman letter 'a' in Hindi or Sanskrit. However, in Assamese, the pronunciation of Hosro 'Ah' (অ) is like 'o' as in 'Boy'. In



Bengali also, it is like the Assamese (i.e., অ is pronounced like 'o' as in Boy). Writing on this characteristics of Assamese and Bengali, Baden Powell wrote, "In Assam and Bengal, the 'o' sound is generally the result of the dialectic pronunciation of the 'a' in the Sanskrit alphabets. Thus Bhagadutta is pronounced as Bhogodotto, and accordingly so written..." (*The Village Community*). Thus correct representation of the Assamese অ is by the Roman letter 'o', although many Assamese loosely use 'a' for অ trying to imitate Hindi and Sanskrit blindly. This however creates a phonetic confusion, and when Assamese write ('a' for অ) in words like Anjali (অঞ্জলী) Anil (অনিল), Amio (অমিয়), the non-Assamese Indian speakers mispronounce these words as আন্জলী, আনিল, আমিয়, reading 'a' for 'u' as in 'up'. To avoid this confusion and to retain the proper Assamese pronunciation, Assamese should write 'o' for অ and thus spell these words as Onjoli, Onil and Omio etc. Late Omio Kumar Das was one, who probably realized this error and used to spell his name correctly as Omio.

**Note 2:** Assamese has two /o/ sounds. One is like o (অ) as in 'boy' and the other is like ò (অ') as in 'bone'. In Hindi and Bengali, the 'ò' (অ') sound is represented by the letter (ও) and is represented by the letter 'o'. In Assamese, (ও) has a different sound which we represent here by the letter 'w'. (See note 8 below).

**Note 3.** Assamese does not have long or short vowels for /i/ or /u/ although different letters are there for long and short vowels. These different letters are used rather loosely, and the spelling does not reflect the pronunciation.

**Note 4.** Assamese has two 'e' sounds like the English words 'get' and 'gate'. However, these are not differentiated in Assamese traditional spelling or in any Assamese dictionaries; one has simply

to know when speaking. In Roman script writing, we differentiate these for the foreign speakers, writing one as 'e' as in 'get' and the other as 'è' as a in 'gate'. Assamese ears are very sensitive to these two 'e' sounds as in words: বেলে ('bel' = a fruit) and বেলে ('bèl' = bell).

**Note 5.** These aspirated phonemes (kh, gh, th, dh, ph, bh) are not there in English in normal usage. However, in the sample words shown, these phonemes are pronounced. English speakers should be careful not to pronounce these as simple unaspirated k, g, t, d, p, b.

**Note 6.** Assamese has many letters for the /s/ sound (চ, ছ, শ), but only one phoneme, all of which sound like 's' as in the word 'sun. Assamese use 'sh' or 'ch' sounds only in foreign words.

**Note 7** Assamese has only one /j/ sound which is pronounced like soft 'z' as in the word 'zoo', although there many letters to represent this sound (জ, ঝ, য) etc. Assamese use /j/ as in 'John' sound only in foreign words.

**Note 8.** This is another unique sound in Assamese of which there is no exact equivalent in English or in any other Indian languages. Assamese (ও) sounds somewhat like the semi-vowel 'w' as in words 'swine', 'war' etc. But in Assamese it is used both as a full vowel (ও) as well as a consonant (ৱ). In other IA languages, the consonant (ৱ) is not there and the (ও) is pronounced like Assamese (অ') (as in 'bone') and is represented by the letter 'o'. In Bengali for instance, "ও is a pure vowel, (but) like o as in 'stone', 'bone' etc"- "*Learn Bengali for English Speakers*"- Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji). In Assamese, this (ও) sound is made by making the lips a bit more closed and the mouth a bit more round while making the sound 'o' as in 'bone'. Proper sound of (ও) is heard in such typical Assamese words as : wpor (ওপৰ=above), wla (ওলা=be ready), wlog (ওলগ=welcome), wroni (ওৰণি =veil) etc.

**Note 9.** Assamese has this guttural /kh/ sound which is represented by the letter ÷ in the International Phonetic Alphabets (IPA). This is a fricative sound which is not there in any of the Tibeto-Burman languages of North East nor in any major IA languages in India except in Kashmiri, Sinhalese and in some minor languages of West India and some languages of the Himalayas. However, this sound is there in many

Sl #	Assamese Script	Roman Script	Pronunciation (As in )	IPA Symbol	Typical Asm. Word	Assamese Pronunciation	Meaning	Note
<b>Vowels : Assamese has eight (8) vowel phonemes</b>								
1	অ	o	o in boy	P	অকরা	okora	ignorant	1,2
2	অ'	ò	o in bone	ə	ল'ৰা	lòra	boy	1,2
3	আ	a	a in arm	ʌ	পানী	pani	water	1
4	ই,ঈ	i	i in pin	I	নীলা	nila	blue	3
5	এ	e	a in marry	æ	মেলা	mel	meeting	4
6	এ'	è	e in mery	ɛ	দেশ	dèx	country	4
7	উ,ঊ	u	u in put	u	জুই	jui	fire	3
8	ও	w	w in swan	o	ওলাগ	wlog	obeisance	8
<b>Consonants: Assamese has 22 consonant phonemes</b>								
1	ক	k	k in kick	k	ক'লা	kòla	deaf	
2	খ	kh	kh in backhand	kh	খৰাহ	khorahi	bamboo basket	5
3	গ	g	g in go	g	গৰম	gorom	hot	
4	ঘ	gh	gh in doghouse	gh	ঘৰ	ghor	house	5
5	ঙ	ng	ng in song	ŋ	ডাঙৰ	dangor	big	
6	চ,ছ, শ	s	s in sun	s	ছবি	sobi	picture	6
7	জ,ঝ, য	j	z in zoo	z	জপনা	jopona	gate	7
8	ত,ট	t	t in toy	t	তৰা	tora	star	10
9	থ,ঠ	th	th in lefthand	th	ঠেলা	thela	to push	5
10	দ,ড	d	d in dog	d	দিন	din	day	10
11	ধ,ঢ	dh	dh in mudhouse	dh	ধূল	dhuli	dust	5
12	ন,ণ	n	n in noon	n	নখ	nokh	nail	
13	প	p	p in pipe	p	পাপ	pap	sin	
14	ফ	ph	ph in uphold	ph	ফুল	phul	flower	5
15	ব	b	b in baby	b	বেল	bèli	sun	
16	ভ	bh	bh in abhor	bh	ভাল	bhal	good	5
17	ম	m	m in moon	m	মানুহ	manuh	man	
18	ৰ	r	r in roar	r	ৰজা	roja	king	
19	ল	l	l in lull	l	লতা	lota	creeper	
20	ৱ	w	w in award	w	দুৱাৰ	duwar	door	8
21	স,ষ, শ	x	x in xor (Russian)	χ	শেষ	xèx	finish	9
22	হ	h	h in hot	h	হাত	hat	hand	
23		"	nasal		কঁকাল	ko'kal	waist	11

languages of Europe, and the Assamese sound is similar to the guttural sound in such languages as Russian, German, Scottish, Greek, Czech, Polish, Swedish etc. In Russian and Greek, this sound is represented by the letter x [Greek: *Veexo* (cough); *Xorrah* (country) etc; Russian: *Xolm* (hill); *Xor* (chorus); *Xam* (crude person)]. In German, Scottish and other languages, this sound is

represented by the letter 'ch': *Bach* (brook), *Loch* (pool of water) etc. Besides, the guttural kh sound is also found in Arabic language in such words as *khabar*, *khatam* etc.

**Note 10.** The IA languages of India (Sanskrit, Hindi etc), the cerebral pronunciations of t, th, d, dh and n are there mainly due to the influence of the Dravidian languages of the South. In

Assamese (as well as in Bengali), the cerebral pronunciations are not there. In this respect, Assamese is like the IE languages of Europe (English, German etc), and has only the mixed dental series (t, th, d, dh & n) although there are two sets of symbols for these letters both of which sound the same.

**Note 11:** Assamese also use the nasal notation (৞), called 'sondrobindu' above

certain words. This will be denoted by the sign " in Roman script when the nasal sound occurs.

Following are some typical Assamese words selected in random showing the basic sounds of the language:

amar (আমাৰ) : our  
barixa (বাৰিষা) : rainy season  
bhoiam (ভৈয়াম) : plains  
doxa (দশা) : fate  
dhauti (ধাউতি) : earnest desire  
èdin (এদিন) : one day  
ebar (এবাৰ) : one time  
gwhali (গোহালি) : (cow shade)  
ghonai (ঘনাই) : frequently  
hajòrika (হাজৰিকা) : common last name in Assam.  
ilahi (ইলাহি) : excessive, expensive  
jòlòkia (জলকীয়া) : chilli  
kopal (কপাল) : forehead, fate  
khura (খুৰা) : uncle, hoof on animal, leg  
lakhuti (লাখুটি) : walking stick  
motolia (মতলীয়া) : intoxicated.  
Nam-Ghwxa (নামঘোষা) : a famous religious book in Assam.  
oxom (অসম) : Assamese name of the state of Assam  
òjuhat (অজুহাত) : excuse

pòtion (পতিয়ন) : convince  
phulam (ফুলাম) : flowery  
raxi (ৰাখী) : sign of the zodiac  
swtal (সোতাল) : court yard  
twmar (তোমাৰ) : your  
thoronga (ঠৰঙা) : stiff  
upai (উপায়) : means, solution  
wlwta (ওলোটা) : opposite  
xongkordew (শংকৰদেৱ) : famous religious guru of Assam.  
xiwoxagor (শিৱসাগৰ) : name of a town in Assam

**Note:** The article has been prepared in consultation with various books on Assamese language, especially the following:

- (1) Assamese: Its Formation and Development – Dr. Banikanta Kakoty
- (2) The Structure of Assamese – Dr. Golok Ch. Goswami
- (3) Oxomiya Bhaxar Ussaorn – Dr. Golok Ch. Goswami
- (4) Oxomiya Bhaxar Moulik Bisar – Debananda Bhorali
- (5) Various Writings of Dimbeswar Neog, Kaliram Medhi etc
- (6) A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English – Kenyon & Knott

## ..Janmotsav ..

..continued from page 9

Association Mumbai Paban Kumar Katakay with the traditional Assamese *phulam gamusa* and bouquet.



The inaugural program was *dihā naam*, which is a *bhakti ras* of Assam performed by cancer patients and their family members staying at Assam Bhawan. It was followed by *bor geet*, *luko geet* presented by the local Assamese Mumbai residents. The function became more breathtaking when the renowned Assamese singer Mitali Choudhury took the stage with *bor geet* in her sweet melodious voice. The program was then followed by the main attraction of the evening, a *gayān bayān* show, a traditional Assamese religious performance that was given birth to by the great social and cultural reformer of Assam, *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankardev, during his life time. Sankardev brought a new enlightenment in the life of Assamese people by preaching faith and belief in one God; his teachings are still alive and followed widely till date. This was shown along with *khool* and *mridang* (kind of dholaks) and *taal* by the bhakats of Natun Kamalabari Sattrā and Uttar Kamalabari Sattrā of Majuli, Assam.

The special attraction of the program was a mesmerizing performance of *satriya nritya* by Prateesha Suresh, a renowned dancer who performed in various places in India and abroad, which made the audience worth seeing the show.

And thus the event was concluded.

By Deepankar Borgohain, Joint Secretary, Assam Association Mumbai

## Lara weds Neelanjan



Lara Natasha, daughter of Maria & Stanley Witowski was married to Neelanjan, son of Neeruj and Aswini Choudhury on September 22, 2007 at the Choudhury's Holmes, NY residence. Photograph shows Alpana (sister), Neeruj (mother), Lara Natasha, Neelanjan, Aswini (father) and Bidita (sister).  
Photography by Dhruva Das of Coatesville, PA.



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