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*Alpana Barooah*

## *Magh Bihu celebration in New Jersey*



## *Magh Bihu Celebration at* **NEW JERSEY**

**T**ruе to the tradition of past many years, this year too the NE Assamese community congregated at the Kingston Presbyterian Church, Kingston, New Jersey, on January 12th, to celebrate one of the most important festivals of the Assamese - the Magh Bihu. The Assamese diaspora from the tri-state area and neighboring Pennsylvania and Delaware - spurred by the milder than normal weather - participated in record numbers in this year's celebration. The total number of participants was about one hundred.

The program was kicked off with fun and games for the children and adults that included the very Assamese "tekeli bhonga", hot potato and musical chairs. A cultural program of song and dance followed the games. M/s Rick and Nick Bhuyan and Ms. Pongkhi Sharma enthralled the audience with their superlative performance of popular Hindi songs while Mr. Prafulla Chaudhury rendered a sonorous Borgeet. The cultural program concluded with an impromptu Bihu dance.

As in the case of Magh Bihu back home in our Assam, the most important feature of the New Jersey celebration was of course the community feast - thanks to



the army of food volunteers. True to the name "Bhogalee", there were abundant food of many varieties - from traditional Ghila pitha, Doi-Chira to popular snacks, from main course of very Assamese "bengena pitika", "Maasor tenga", "Xoriyoh diya maas" to desserts

important festivals of the Assamese - Gurujonar janmotsav and the Bohag and Magh Bihu. A tentative announcement was made about the upcoming Rongalee Bihu celebration in April 2008.

*Jyoti Handique, NJ*



### **Congratulations to Mriganka and Gopa**

**M**riganka Kalita, of Dubai (UAE), married Gopa Talukder, of New Delhi, in January of 2008. Mriganka works in Dubai in Advertising and Marketing. Gopa Talukder, a corporate lawyer, practised law at the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi, prior to her marriage. Mriganka is the oldest son of Purna Kalita and Dr. Chitra Kalita of Beltola Guwahati. Gopa is the oldest daughter of Dr. Sarat Talukder and Kalpana Talukder, also of Beltola Guwahati. The picture shows from left to right: Gopa's grandmother, Chitra Kalita, Mriganka, Gopa, & Kalpana Talukder.



*Kalyan Dutta-Choudhury  
Berkeley*

## YOU OWN THE MONKEY, AND YOU TRAIN IT YOUR WAY

**M**icrosoft Corporation, which makes software (basically strings of digit 1's and 0's embedded in silicon chips in computers) for computers, is worth billions and billions of dollars. The corporation is so rich that its founder Bill Gates practically doesn't know what to do with his vast wealth. So, what does he do? He has started with his wife a huge foundation named 'Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation' for helping the disadvantaged all over the world.

Google Inc., which was born barely eight years ago, as an Internet (pathways to what you want to know as well as what you want to buy) search engine is flush with greenbacks (dollars). It has amassed so much wealth in such a short span of its existence that its employees and investors are also deemed rich. Google has also started a 'Green Energy' initiative of its own as public relations stunt

Yahoo Inc., which is relatively older than Google and does the same the same sort of things as Google does is in relative distress. The company is in distress because its profits aren't rising compared to Google's. So, Microsoft Corporation wants to buy Yahoo Inc., for 45 billion dollars. For Microsoft, the amount is pocket change.

Start-ups, and ups and downs of start-ups in Silicon Valley, are nothing new. Gordon Moore of Intel made Silicon Valley very sexy when he propounded the famous law that bears his name. When Netscape blazed its way into the scene in the mid-1990s with the first graphical Internet browser, there were 'wows' all around. But, what happened to it eventually? The company has practically vanished from the scene. Browsers with new features appeared on

the scene and took away its business killing it along the way.

Software cannot run without hardware just like a menu alone can't give you a meal. On the hardware side, Sun Microsystems and Silicon Graphics had their moments of spectacular glory. These companies will survive but their survivability will more be so and so and not definitely cause 'wows' although the companies still employ thousands of employees worldwide. Then there is Cisco Systems, which controls a significant market-share in server and router markets. Without servers and routers, the Internet can't operate.

How about Intel, which makes most (about 85% of the worldwide market) of the microprocessors and chip-sets used in providing the brainpower of computers and intelligent devices? Intel will be doing alright as long as no upstart company comes along stealing the thunder. It has a lock on the international market. The rest of the market is in the hands of Advance Micro Devices, which hasn't been able to get its act together for one reason or another.

Intel has come up with a new Itanium (part of the name rhymes with 'Ita' that is manufactured in brick fields all over Assam) microprocessor that packs a whopping 2 billion transistors in a space of less than one-quarter inch. How much will the new microprocessor sell for? Perhaps, more than 200 dollars apiece, wholesale. How much 'educational experience' (hundreds of PhDs at a minimum) went into the development of the microprocessor? How much education goes into the manufacture of a piece of 'Ita'? You figure that out. My father used to sell one thousand pieces of 'Ita's for 60 rupees. That was nearly 60 years ago.

There are three or four things that stand out in this game of constant change, more appropriately, in the high-tech industry. First is the silicon technology itself (until some new technology arrives blazing its way on to the scene), which is at the heart of the revolution. Where is all this money coming from? To comprehend the dimension of a billion of anything, consider the fact a billion means the digit '1' is followed by nine digit '0's. The money comes from all over the world. For example, if you consider the computers given to each of the 1<sup>st</sup> divisioners of the last matriculation examination in Assam, Microsoft got a royalty for the software installed in each computer given unless the suppliers of souped-up computers did away with legality. That's just aspects of its royalty revenue. The third aspect is selling what you have - a whole bunch of them. The fourth aspect is good management of company's resources by good allocation of resources.

Let's ask why the Western nations have a monopoly on things happening in the world, and we are trying to imitate. The short answer is rampant corruption and subservience to old ways - the Colonial ways. The long answer follows.

Exploring and learning never were, and never were meant to be, confined to all the books that had been written, and to the study of bygone and living personalities. Knowledge of humankind is constantly evolving based on learning and experience; new knowledge refutes some of the old on the way to more and better collective learning and experience. That is the nature of beasts that they are.

Moreover, learning and experience together have added dimensions to it - both commercial and economic. For example, if you did well in science or engineering in Assam in our time, you become a veritable 'hero' of your time. Nobody cared to know what you could do for the State or the country. Your future path to progress was (and with it prosperity) practically in your hands.

On the other hand, if you weren't in science or engineering but in arts, the (your) path to progress was limited. You were left no choice but to compete in

the entrance examinations of the State or the Central Governments, or teach at a college or a university. If you bagged a Central Government position, you became a 'whiz kid' in American parlance or 'Avatar' in Indian parlance. But, while a whiz kid like Bill Gates or Steve Jobs didn't complete undergraduate education, but became known by their spectacular achievements, an Avatar was likely to command an enchanted audience for his or her lifetime. Folks back home are still talking about those 'toppers' thirty years ago as if they topped something monumental...

Anyway, things aren't so easy now. This is the new age of 'Creative Destruction', which, according to economist Joseph Schumpeter, is the age when the decomposed remains of old and failing companies form the compost for the crop of start-ups. But, you would say, 'what's a start-up a company when I haven't seen a real one yet? What's compost anyway?'

That is far from the reality on the ground. Everybody wants to be somebody over so many bare and naked bodies, and in the process of trying to

get there, we never get around to learning or knowing what compost is. The word is a 'metaphor' for all things we're supposed to know. Who in his right mind would do that? Are not the 'khetioks' supposed to handle that kind of smelly stuff?

The Vice-chancellor of a university in Assam- his head, presumably, in the rarefied air of the university - said to his friends and colleagues that they must speak in English otherwise, horror of all horror, they would be denied a chance of working for a MNC. I heard that from many others as well. Multi-national companies are in the business of earning money - lots of money. They don't care if the money comes the 'Chinese' way, the 'Vietnamese' way, the 'Hindi' way, the 'Assamese' way, or any other language way. With hard-working and competent employees working for them, they (MNCs) will be happy to get a sizable ROI (Return On Investment). Are you ready to provide that? Do you have the smarts to do that or you're simply smarting off your English?

Do you have imagination to explore new territories, and the curiosity to know what you don't know? Are you hung up

on the 'language' you know? Are you ready to try new ideas and new processes? Are you ready to take risks? Are the degrees you earned more important to you than what you are capable of doing with confidence? Do you come to an Indian Hindu 'sradha' ceremony wearing a suit and a tie? Do you send a general letter of your father's death, and in that letter you include your and all your siblings' professional degrees? Get real. Then you need re-education for you and your next generation to survive in this evolving new and complex world of ours. Are our schools, colleges, and universities ready to take up the challenge? Can the State Government of Assam provide a clean administration? Can the top police administrators, instead of marveling at their omnipotence and glory and getting involved in corrupt practices, do what they are supposed to do - protect life and property of citizens to establish the rule of law? Can you assure us that what happened in Beltola a few months ago would never happen again - Never Again?. Therein lies the long answer.

## ASSAMTIMES.ORG CONTRIBUTOR GETS UNHCR-CNES FELLOWSHIP

The Guwahati based journalist and a regular contributor to 'Assam Times', Nava Thakuria has been awarded with the first media fellowship on refugee issues sponsored by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (C-NES). The Fellowship with the theme, 'The Chins of Myanmar: Refugee Life in a Distant Neighbour', with a focus on Protection and Durable Solutions for the Chin ethnic group from Western Myanmar, which lives in challenging conditions in the Northeast as well as in New Delhi starts from 1 March to 31 May.

The announcement was made by a Committee comprising Mr. Sanjoy Hazarika, C-NES Managing Trustee, journalist and editor, Ms. Pamela Philipose, Independent Journalist and Ms. Nayana Bose of the UNHCR on February 15 last. The awardee Mr Thakuria has written extensively on issues related to Burma (Myanmar). Thakuria is a regular contributor to many acclaimed newspaper and portals based in Guwahati, Kolkata, New Delhi, Dhaka, Hong Kong, Seoul, London and California and his special areas of interest include socio-political developments in



Northeast India with Burma, Bhutan and Bangladesh

It may be mentioned that Mizoram, a Burma bordering Northeast Indian state gives shelter to nearly 40,000 Chin refugees. Those Burmese citizens fled their country to get rid of the atrocities of the present regime named State Peace and Development Council. Led by the Senior General Than Shwe, the SPDC is identified as one of the worst human rights violators in the globe.

The refugees started fleeing Burma after the 1988 uprising for restoration of democracy in the land of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Thousand of Burmese have already sacrificed their precious lives supporting the pro-democracy movement led by the Great Lady. Many of them left Burma to live an exile live in its neighbouring Thailand, India, Bangladesh and many other countries around the globe.

"The effort is to build capacity and better understanding among journalists interested

in refugee issues, especially at the middle-level, but also to publish their findings and observations extensively in the Indian media," said Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee of C-NES. It is an opportunity for the journalist to look at issues relating to refugee movements into the country, the condition of refugees, the problems of mixed migration (refugee movements combined with economic/environmental international migrants).

Carol Batchelor, Chief of Mission, UNHCR India, while mentioning the fellowship to study the refugee issue said, "It is hoped that through this opportunity for an in-depth review of refugee issues, journalists will be strengthened in their efforts to inform public opinion." There are two other fellowships, applications for which are welcome, one on "The need for a refugee specific legislation in India" (to be announced in May 2008) and another on Sri Lankan refugees (to be announced in August 2008). The programme is aimed to research and write on the issue comprising the protection and durable solution of the refugee problem.

Guwahati, February 18, 2008

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# “INVISIBLE MOVEMENT”

## NEW WORKS BY SANTANA GOHAIN

### 2008

There and not there

By Peter Bevan, Glasgow



Santana Gohain

There are three intriguing paradoxes in these new works, traces of which were seen in some of the paintings shown in her exhibition, “Silent Speech”, The Museum Gallery, Mumbai in 2006.

In the catalogue essay for that exhibition, I wrote that some of these works are, “like many animals and plants...sensitive to light and movement”, and that, the viewer, “becomes an interactive element in the work’s completion”. The seed of this idea now blossoms in the present exhibition where all the works combine to form an enchanting space, in which the presence of the viewer enables it to come alive.

The first paradox concerns the illusory weight of the paintings. On first encounter, the works appear implacably solid, massive, sombre, and serious. The dark, metallic density of their surfaces weighs heavily on the walls of the gallery. Even the “white” works have a visual weight not immediately associated with paintings. There are connotations of permanence in their hard metal or stone-like surfaces, but they are in fact, very fragile constructions in graphite on paper and speak more about uncertainty in our perceptions.

These monumental works cannot be overlooked but they also demand close scrutiny. As we examine them more closely, we become aware that what is on the surfaces is also ephemeral. Changes of tone in shapes, lines and edges hint at an illusion of space within the pictorial plane but cannot be resolved into a coherent spatial illusion. Areas of tone and texture are fragmentary, either diffusing from one to another or occupying relief panels, resembling slate chalkboards or the irregular stones of ancient walls. The paintings are also partially and variably burnished or polished in whose sheen is reflected the light and colour of their environment and this kinetic phenomenon is dependent on the movement of the viewer. This provides the second paradox, intimated by the exhibition title. How is it that movement is invisible?

The paintings are motionless but their surfaces are active, constantly changing as

the viewer moves closer, looks from different angles, walks from one painting to another. This ephemerality contradicts the material surfaces. Solid masses dissolve into myriads of subtle, amorphous shapes and sparkle with reflected colour and light. These paintings are dark imperfect mirrors, like polished black granite, in which we may search in vain for definition. They are both “there” and “not there”.

**“Works are not only paintings, working on the surfaces is very sculptural. I use graphite like clay”.** (S. Gohain. 2008)

The surfaces are heavily “worked” rather than “painted”. We find multiple layers of media and a dense variety of marks indicating the making processes of the artist. Santana studied printmaking in Vadodara and the evidence of her training and sensibilities for this discipline prevail in these albeit, irreproducible, unique works.

As she says, her prime concern is with the surface. Her “image”, as it were, cannot be seen as an illusion *in* the work; it is the whole work itself, in its entirety. She sees the interior of the painting as an active space where things happen through a language of ambiguity rather than imposition. Although divisions, rectangles and other shapes are perceived within compositions, their relationships are not defined with certainty and because of their variable reflective capacities, spatial relationships are inconstant. This is her “image” or vision in microcosm and by extension; the unified environment of related paintings in the exhibition is a macrocosm.

Santana’s paintings have a superficial likeness to Minimalism, but they are in fact, quite the opposite in temperament. Where minimalist artists extolled industrial materials and processes far removed from the hand of the artist, Santana relishes the slow and painstakingly handcrafted.

**“I still use printmaking tools and sometimes make my own tools for my drawing”.** (ibid)

The love of *making* is seen in the dexterity and subtlety with which these large surfaces

are made. There is a meticulously staged layering and overlaying of materials and the evidence of a gradual accumulation of mark after mark. In this unspoken dialogue between artist and media, marks mutate in accordance with modified intentions. They change shape, tone, texture, viscosity, and brilliance in order to reflect delicate gesture, emotion, tension, deliberation, and uncertainties. Sometimes, they reveal a minor dissatisfaction perhaps inevitable in long repetitive processes; a hand impatient, or a little out of control, due to the tension inherent in concentrated work, and also in a related sphere of improvised performance.

Santana’s paintings reveal the *habit* of working; the discipline of serial work; the stoic acceptance of the slowness of process. This fastidiousness is necessary to achieve the materialisation of thoughts, ideas, and feelings, and acknowledges consequent delay in the realisation of aesthetic experience. It is the *body*, which “understands” the acquisition of habit and develops a harmony between intention and performance in our work in the given material. Tools used everyday by artists, become extensions to the body, in the same way that a blind man learns to perceive the space around him through the tip of his stick.

She has evolved a highly personal emphasis on habitual processes, perhaps to maintain a sense of individuality in the growing homogeneity of contemporary society. This is based on the traditional unity of *craft*, i.e. between the mind, the hand and the material. There are elements of a kind of Tantric ritual in this carefully designed, meditative activity. Using both mental and physical strategies with a limited vocabulary of visual language, she achieves the freedom of creative play.

In front of Santana Gohain’s works one thinks of the well known dictum, “God is in the detail”, and this may be even more significant when considering the extraordinary “texts” found in her work. The fact that this obscure but tenacious graffiti is indecipherable constitutes the third paradox.

## Drawn "writing"

The idea of a kind of "writing", which is drawn, is a useful approach to an interpretation of these blocks of inscription found in the recent paintings. They should be considered as a form of *drawing* as much as as insipient texts.

Santana's letterforms are in no recognisable alphabet or script and in breaking with convention, draws our attention to their appearance rather than their potential for meaning as signs. Their abstract forms have singular "characters", and combined in lines, do trigger associations in the viewer. But not in the way that we read the meaning of words, it is through the formal values of the drawn "letters", the regularity of textual structure, how they are made and the context in which they are placed in the work as a whole.

Art frequently has a refractory element, an avoidance of clarity in communication, it acts more as a unifier of external and inner reality, accepting ambiguity as a truer reflection of our experience in the world. But how do we respond to this third paradox, in which what initially look like written texts but are actually a form of drawing?

We should perhaps firstly concede that it is a poor analogy between art and language, since it is the requisite intention of language, other than poetry, to communicate specific information dependent upon accepted conventions. Artists on the other hand, often work on the intersections between multiple intentions, for instance, between idea, image, media and context, and their creative explorations frequently alter or break conventional structures, which appear inadequate to their purpose.

Santana is working on the intersection between drawing and writing, which we might initially define as calligraphy. Calligraphy employs minute gestures in mark making with the fingertips, allowing individual characterisation and expression. But it also implies a distinction between the forms of letters and their "content".

In the Surrealist's use of "automatic writing, ideas and feelings were liberated from the norms of logic and reasoned statement by the free association of words. Drawing essentially from the unconscious mind they achieved startling incomprehensible texts however, in most cases, individual words were still "readable" since they conformed to a recognised alphabet.

In order to understand Santana's interest in the common ground between drawing and writing we may also look at the paintings of so-called, Abstract Expressionists (to which I referred in the catalogue for, "Silent Speech"). In the case of Jackson Pollock, there is no calligraphy and the marks he made were completely divorced from the conventions of representation. His spontaneous splashes and dribbles of paint are instead, indexical signs, that is, signs with direct correlation to the physical acts of his painting.

This spontaneous drawing-with-paint was seen as a recognition and assertion of selfhood, welling up from within the body, uncorrupted by the conventions of representation and therefore proposed as pure and "authentic" creative expression. It was suggested that it results from a psychic access to a primordial essence, i.e. a *pre-verbal* experience.

This desire to access pre-conventional states of experience is echoed in the atavistic notion of an adult's re-connection with childhood experiences, again, "uncorrupted" by the learned thought processes of logic and reason. We can all perhaps, remember instances of early objective learning about the world, which were at the same time, integrated with the fantasies of childhood imagination. These memories may still have a vivid sense of reality for us, compared with our jaded current perceptions and may constitute an attractive route towards (re)

discovering a truer sense of "identity". However, even if this search can avoid a potentially debilitating nostalgia, it may unearth a form of knowledge so personal that it can only remain fundamentally, *secret*, perhaps even barely "known" by the artist herself. But we all know how very seductive the idea of a "secret language" is.

This thought is reinforced by the look of the "texts" themselves. They remind one of ancient inscriptions in a language no longer known, inducing an almost reflexive action to try to "break the code". Even after the realisation that these "texts" are indecipherable, there remains a curiosity to look for clues as to how we might "construct" a meaning for ourselves by searching for "patterns" in letterforms or "rhythms" in their placing, or examining individual "letters" for recognisable attributes like pictograms.

In thinking about why these inscrutable texts are so fascinating and evocative, I refer to the (Oriental) counter argument to the idea of human life progressing through continual innovation. That there is in fact, nothing new under the sun because the cosmos is so unutterably vast, everything that happens must have happened many times before. It may be said therefore, that what matters in Indian metaphysics is the *pattern* rather than the instance; the general rather than the particular. It is the "pattern" of these texts which is significant, not what they might or might not say. They will remain a "secret"

language to us but the important thing is that they are there, evidence of a private 'performance' of work. They are highly personal, silent monologues, which sometimes resemble incantation, and here I am reminded of the further paradox contained in her title for the previous solo show, "Silent Speech".

In answer to my question, I think Santana's "texts" may embody all of these ideas, illustrating the earlier point that through juxtaposing paradoxical elements, art continually questions and remodels convention.

She has discovered a working method combining both physical working processes and meditative states of mind, in which actions and results are spontaneous. However, the results are not random indeed they have a kind of *sublime* order, each mark fits naturally between the one after and the one before. The mind is working at the just-below-conscious level, required by a performing concert pianist or any master craftswoman wielding her tools. It is not characteristic of a heightened consciousness but a heightened awareness, connecting her



to all the paths of knowledge available to her.

In the *aesthetic experience*, such a state of mind is reciprocated by the viewer in front of works with which, they empathise and at this point, I am fully aware of empathy in my reading of Santana's works. They signify an artist's imagination alive and in flux, finding resonance in my own life experience, not just as an artist but also through memory as far back as it can go. It is perhaps true to say that art offers not new knowledge, but a "place" of shared experience, where what we already know is stimulated and intensified by the artist's approach.

*"Red is always vibrant in my eyes"* (ibid)

Santana's methodology is to work in series of related images as most artists do, but they frequently select one or two to release into the public realm of exhibition. Her exhibitions however, reveal a consistent and continuing series and in this sense the works are typologically related. They are all of the same *species* exhibiting evolutionary change, each being a further interpolation of predecessors. This can also be observed in the evolution of the "texts" in the works from 2006 to 2008.

This visual development is not a logical progression but an aesthetic phenomenon driven by a highly personal poetic imagination. However the sensibility to the formal values of visual art (shape, tone, colour, texture) is still rooted in the commonality of cultural experience. It is generally thought that red works best in small quantities in relationship with other colours and if experienced in great quantities, an intense red may cause nervous disorder. It is seen in nature in small quantities and relatively short periods as flowers, against a background of green. Red can be seen from a distance, it cannot hide.

Santana concurs, and deliberately "leavens" her work in mostly black, white or grey with fewer using red. The surfaces here, look like patched cloth with threads of "texts" woven, stitched, scratched or stained into them. Perhaps even more than the black or white works, they appear like layered fragments of varying ages, some more distinct than others, some lying in or on the surface, others faded, becoming almost indistinguishable, perhaps echoing the unreliability of memory. The artist has an unspoken dialogue with colour, which is not at all complicated, their conversation results in recognisable moods, of solemnity, calm and occasionally, delight.

In those works with reflective surfaces, colour is also crucial but not through the

physical application of media, but because colour is infused into the surfaces as fleeting reflections of the environment. In this sense it is alive, a constantly changing, continuous "performance" in time and space. The reflected light changes because of the viewer's movement and because of this, paintings do not operate in the way we are accustomed to view autonomous art objects. Instead, we become conscious of *our* role in causing them to come to life.

### Invisible movement

In December 2007 Santana took me to her studio. In my experience, unoccupied studios often feel desolate, a word meaning both uninhabited and sad. Empty studios are melancholic environments, which is understandable since they are essentially

remarkable that some works of art do seem to have this life of their own. *They* had known how beautiful the world is all along and as we acknowledged them, *they* revealed it to us.

*"When I display my works in the gallery, it should be like one work, with the whole interior environment"*. (ibid)

It seems to me that the sensations I felt on that studio visit are of a kind she wants to trigger in her exhibition.

The desire to create a total environment is of course not new, and there is an example from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century I would like to discuss in terms of an interesting analogy.



"Les Nymphéas", Claude Monet, 1922-26. Installed in L'Orangerie des Tuilleries. Paris.

places designed for a working activity. They are also highly personalised by individual working practises and consequently they may feel "alien" to visitors used to their own requirements and predilections.

I recall a feeling of melancholy as we entered her studio in a relative twilight and surveyed the "empty" spaces, the stacks of boards in corners, closed cupboards, empty chairs, the worktables laid out with papers, tools, materials, all still and silent, temporarily *use-less* and in silence, waiting for work to resume.

Rows of dark paintings lined the walls and it was only as I walked towards these and began to look into them, that I discovered they were coming alive. They were being *switched on*, as it were, by the presence of moving people. The burnished surfaces absorbed and reflected continuously changing patterns of subtle colour and light. It was as though all the rich nuances of our surroundings, which were previously unremarkable, were drawn into them and re-presented to us as if enhanced. It is

Monet developed the idea for this enormous work in the last few years of his life. He envisaged a continuous elliptical screen, made up of painted panels representing nothing but an endless surface of water with no horizon and no banks, seen as it were, from a bird's eye view. The viewer would be totally surrounded by this immense screen depicting the infinitely variable qualities of pond water; softly modulated tones of depth where the surface is transparent, patches of surface where it is visible and elsewhere, whatever is subtly reflected in it. This produces a completely ambiguous sense of space since it is all painted in his diffuse and atmospheric style of Impressionism. Monet proposed that this room would offer a refuge for peaceful meditation.

In L'Orangerie the viewer is embraced by an apparently infinite expanse of water and initially becomes aware, as they walk around, of the awkward clumsy movements of their bodies accustomed to the gravity of air. Their eyes drift, slide and curve, wandering over these vast surfaces and the

body unconsciously adopts the slower, fluid movements of a swimmer.

In using this work as analogous to Santana's exhibition I am suggesting that she also wishes to present an environment in which the viewer is not only actively involved, but is changed by it. If we overcome our initial awkwardness, we come to see the work not only through our eyes, but also through our bodies. She invites the viewer's participation in order to activate the paintings during our presence, enabling them to function at their full potential.

Normally, we are not conscious of the equilibrium maintained between awareness of our bodies and the spaces we move through. By leaving the familiar spaces of our everyday lives we enter this exhibition and communicate with an imaginative space, which is psychically innovative and through it we are reminded of our essential indivisibility from the world. Santana's work is a perfect example of the precepts of phenomenology, in that,

**“Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism”.**

M. Merleau-Ponty. 1962

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About the author: **Peter Bevan** originally studied Painting at the Royal College of Art in London and taught at the Glasgow School of Art from 1973-2003. He began to make sculpture in 1989 after his first visit to India and since then has worked and exhibited in USA, Japan, China and India. In Vadodara, 2005 he worked collaboratively with Ganesh Gohain on "Jugalbandi", an exhibition of sculpture and drawings. Over the last ten years he has also written a number of essays on artist's work with a view to bringing his own practical experience as an artist to the task of writing about art.



*Graphite, Paper on Board. 6ft X 4ft*



*Graphite, Paper on Board. 6ft X 4ft*



Ankur Bora  
Texas

## MY TRIP AND A PILGRIMAGE TO PARIJAT ACADEMY

I still remember my first visit to Parijat Academy in 2006. Uttam Teron, at that time had started the school with about 50 students and a small staff. This year, Parijat Academy has more than 400 students and a staff of 16. In addition, Uttam Teron has been successful in raising awareness among the people of the area about education and healthcare. Parijat Academy is located in Village Pamohi. Even after sixty years of India's independence, the people of Pamohi and the nearby village Garbhanga have been living without civic amenities such as adequate healthcare, quality education and reliable road communication. In the summer, the people still have to walk 17 kms to reach the nearest weekly bazar at Lohra, Guwahati. Medical facilities are non-existent in the area where malaria, jaundice and waterborne diseases are common. The hilly track to Garbhanga is motorable only during winter. Amidst this gloomy atmosphere, Uttam Teron is bringing rays of hope to

the people. Uttam is planning to adopt two schools in Garbhanga and sponsor a few teachers from Parijat Academy for appointment in these schools.

I visited Parijat Academy on 2nd January, 2008. I had the good fortune of meeting the children, the teachers, and notables such as Mr. Jayanta Barman (retired engineer and eminent builder and constructor), Ms. Santana Sarma (advocate, Guwahati High Court) and Mrs. Meera Saikia (noted social worker). They are well wishers of Parijat Academy and they have been providing the much-needed mental and emotional support to the teachers and the school children. I was also delighted to meet Alpana and Ram Sarangapani of Houston.

**Nitin Bezbaruah Sarangapani Library at Parijat Academy:** In the month of December 2007, Alpana and Ram Sarangapani of Texas, visited Parijat Academy and established a

library as a dedication to their son Nitin. The construction of the library has started with one room and the Sarangapani family has funded book shelves, a marble sign, and books and materials. The library is also getting help from Wahid Saleh of the Netherlands. A Netherlands based organization has been approached for funding with an objective to equip the library with computers, a printer, a photocopier and other learning tools. It is expected that the library will be a knowledge center and will provide immeasurable help to both students and the community in that area.

On that January day, I also met Mr. Satyajit Nath of Seattle, Biju Barbaruah of Tamulpur, District of Nalbari, and Kaushik Das of Guwahati. Satyajit Nath works at Microsoft and also volunteers for Asha for education supporting many projects in Assam. Biju Barbaruah has been working selflessly for the underprivileged children, men and women in Tamulpur, a remote area situated near Bhutan border. The organization *Asha Darshan* has been supporting a number of educational institutions and women Self Help Groups. The vocational unit of *Asha Darshan* has been doing *som* tree plantation for *muga* rearing, weaving, cutting knitting and embroidery. Mr. Kaushik Das is the founder of *AtmaNirbhar-Ek Challenge*. This is a



unique organization dedicated for the welfare and economic rehabilitation of the disabled through packaging and marketing of tea, spices etc. It is also worthwhile to mention that Mr. Das won the prestigious Helen Keller Award in the promotion of employment of the disabled.

That day I also met Bitu Gogoi of Prajnalaya, Titabor, Assam. Mr. Gogoi mentioned that despite the untimely demise of founder Jugal Bhuyan, Prajnalaya is growing and has created a positive influence among the villagers and people of that area. In recognition of Prajnalaya effort, the Chief Minister of Assam, Mr. Tarun Gogoi visited Prajnalaya and lauded their effort. Mr. Bitu Gogoi also shared with me the news that An Assamese documentary film *Echoes of Sunshine* based on the life and struggle of insurgent-turned-social activist, late Jugal Bhuyan, has been nominated for the New York International Film Festival, which is scheduled to take place tentatively in the month of March this year.

Mr. Jayanta Barman told me that he is planning for a *Charity Walk* in Guwahati, led by Garvin Brown, a noted Gandhian of Australia. Eighty years old, Mr. Garvin Brown is coming for this walk to raise fund for Parijat Academy, Prajnalaya and Asha Darshan. It is expected that the Charity Walk will also raise awareness about the wonderful work of Late Jugal Bhuyan, Uttam Teron, Kaushik Das, Biju Barbaruah and others.

Sincerity, credibility and dedication are the keys for success in any endeavor. If someone has these qualities, he or she is going to achieve his goal no matter the obstacles that come on their way. Parijat Academy, Prajnalaya, AtmaNirbhar–Ek Chalenge and Asha Darshan are the living proofs of that. As I left Parijat Academy I felt fulfilled; it became the most sacred pilgrimage of my life.



**Janis Darbari**, a well-known journalist of New Delhi, and the author of “Srimanta Sankaradeva: The Living Legend” (Vikas, 1998, 210 pages) and former honorary Consular of Montenegro, was facilitated, along with other members of India’s diplomatic corps at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on the 23rd of January, 2008. Here are some photographs from the reception.

# RONGA NODIR PAROR PORALUITOR BUKULOI

(From The Red River to the Heart of Luit)

– by Alpana Barooah, Houston, Texas

Congratulations to Alpana Barooah for publishing a beautiful book of poems, a compilation of twenty-five poems in Assamese written at different times. The book is published in colorful art paper and the beauty of the pages is enhanced by a selection of beautiful sketches, paintings and photographs, creations of Barooah herself. The cover design is also by the Barooah. Besides a foreword by this author, the book is also graced by a foreword by the renowned Assamese poet Hirandra Nath Dutta.

Alpana is successful in portraying the life of a busy and active Assamese-American real life artist of multifarious talents; she is a dancer, a singer, a poet, a painter, a photographer, a world traveler, a cook, a gardener, a single mom, a grandmother and many others. On the top of all these, she also teaches in an American high school. Alpana came from Assam where the river Brahmaputra which is also known as Luit, meaning 'red', is the lifeline. Today however, she lives in Texas on the bank of another river, the Red River. The title of the book, 'Luitor Pora Ronga Nodir Bukuloi' (From Red River to the Heart of Luit) in way conveys the theme of Barooah's poetry. All her poems depict her deep nostalgia for her home, the land and life she left behind long ago on the bank of Luit.

Poetry comes in various types and it has different levels. In her own words, her poetry may not have much depth in thought but reflects her own emotions emanating during her journey through life. A poet writes poetry for her own sake, and not for anybody else. In that sense, her poetry allows us to peep into her own inner life. In the poem titled, 'Xongram' (Struggle), one probably sees her own struggle in real life as a single mom in a foreign country. In the poem titled 'Bixal Xagor' (Vast Ocean), we are reminded of the famous novel by Earnest Hemingway, 'The Old Man and the Sea'. She writes, "This is my journey; A vast ocean, and there I am; All by myself alone on a small boat...." It is not that her poetry reflects only the hard facts of life; her poetry also reflects the positive aspects of life, the joyous beauty

of life in general. In others one feels the depth of life. In one poem she writes, "Have you ever been to a sea at night? When the night is deep and silent; when there is no reflections of the stars; when there is simply the depth of the waves of the sea, the sounds of water flowing by, and the vast emptiness of the earth?"

Among Assamese-Americans, Barooah is a pioneer in publishing her own book of poetry. Let me conclude with a remark made by the poet Hirendra Nath Dutta in his 'Foreword' to the book about Alpana. He wrote, "After reading the poetry of Alpana Barooah, I strongly feel that Barooah has the potential of being a successful song writer in future." We hope Barooah will take note and we wish that she would continue her creative writing to bigger heights in future.

- Rajen Barua, Texas



## A Review of Alpana Barooah's "Ronganodir Paror Pora Luitor Bukuloi"

Alpana Barooah's 60-page book of poems, *Ronganodir Paror Pora Luitor Bukuloi*, is a coffee-table style book, printed on glossy paper with attractive photographs and paintings on each page, complementing the copious beauty of her poems. The collection of poems is eclectic in nature. However, her poems are explicitly personal, each one dripping in her love of life, family and nature. The poems are not abstract; she deftly pens in simple lyrical Assamese words her womanly inner thoughts in various



contexts in life, vulnerably exposing herself to her readers.

Some of Alpana Barooah's poems are heart-rending, depicting personal and intimate losses; some are expressions of joy at her successes and achievements in this beautiful, but competitive world; and, some present child-like and wondrous expressions of confidence in her ability to face the vicissitudes of life with smile, courage and determination. In several of her poems, she is mesmerized by the bounty of beauty in nature whether it is in Assam, Arunachal her extended family. Zubin, clearly, reciprocates the sentiment and writes a moving testimony on the back cover of the book.

The book clearly shows that Alpana Barooah, in spite of more than 25 years of living in America, is still a woman from Golaghat, tightly tethered to her motherland of Assam.

The photographs, the sketches and the paintings on the pages of the book illustrate Alpana Barooah's inner warmth and depth, as well as her appreciation of things beautiful in this world. There is a photograph of a flowering and vibrantly colorful rose bush in her backyard in Texas. There is a photograph of a massive tree geometrically branching out in Sonapur, Assam. There is even a photograph taken at the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, showing the serenity and immensity of the blue waters. There are many others to enjoy.

The book is definitely one you should buy for your personal library in America or elsewhere. Please contact the author at [loneebar@yahoo.com](mailto:loneebar@yahoo.com) if you would like to obtain a copy for yourself.

- Jugal Kalita, Colorado



Rini Kakati  
London

## CATLIE BAIDEW!

**M**y father, Sir Keith Cantlie, served in the Indian Civil Service from 1910 till his retirement in 1947. So, in a way I consider myself daughter of Assam, a land of outstanding natural beauty with distant views of the snow and Himalayas.”

With her disarming smile, simple down-to-earth manner, the bespectacled Dr. Audrey Cantlie welcomed me with a big smile at her door at Oxford Street as if I was somebody of her own. She has an emotional bond for Assam and the Assamese people.

I still remember the day I met her in September 1998, at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies, London). I introduced myself as an Assamese. I could see the sparkle in her eyes. She asked me “How many Assamese people are in London? I will love to meet them.”

A few weeks after this meeting, we organized the 550th Sankar Jayanti at Wembley, when we invited her as our Chief Guest. The speech she delivered about Sankardev was very informative. Since then Dr. Cantlie has always shared every Assamese Community function in London. Her guidance and support is very valuable to me at my work in women-oriented matters.

From studying sociology at the London School of Economics to teaching at School of Oriental and African Studies at Oxford, she has kept in touch with her beautiful past as an Assamese. She wrote the acclaimed book “The Assamese”, dedicated to the memory of her father Sir Keith Cantlie, who served 40 years in the state of Assam. How beautifully she expressed the qualities of Assamese people in this book!

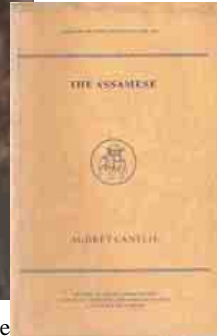
Call her a professor, a teacher, an academician, but for the Assamese society in London she is just our Cantlie Baidew!

Dr. Audrey Cantlie was born in Shillong in 1923. She spent six years in Jorhat where her father was the Deputy Commissioner. She considers herself a daughter of Assam.

After obtaining a degree in Sociology at the London School of Economics, she returned to Assam for fieldwork and carried out a



study of a village near Jorhat, which was later, published



under the title of “The Assamese”. It is perhaps the only intensive work done in the plains of Assam and Dr. Cantlie likes to think of it as a small contribution to understanding a unique way of life and, more particularly, the religion founded by Sankardev.

After working on the staff at the London School of Economics, she moved to the School of Oriental and African Studies where she still teaches part-time to the present day.

Her father Sir Keith Cantlie joined the I.C.S. in 1910 and served his whole working life in the province (as it was then called) of Assam until his retirement in 1947. His last appointment was as Chairman, Public Service Commission, Assam. He spent many years as Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and wrote a short monograph on Khasi Law, which is currently being re-printed for the second time. During the war he recruited a Khasi Porter Corps which he took up to Kohima when it was besieged by the Japanese. He was also a keen collector of butterflies of Eastern India.

T.T.S. Hayley, her husband, Thomas Hayley, was appointed to the I.C.S. during the Second World War. He stayed on after 1947 and was the first Deputy Commissioner of Sibsagar District after Independence. The Chief Minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha appointed him as Secretary and Director of Rural Development, responsible for creating Panchayat Raj in villages. He continued in this post until his retirement in 1950. He later became a psychoanalyst.

During her current stay at Guwahati, we organized an interactive session with teachers, academicians, journalists and students at Sudmersen Hall, Cotton College on Wednesday 13 February, 2008 at 4:00 pm.

Pictures show Dr. Audrey Cantlie and the book she wrote “The Assamese”.

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Manoj Kumar Das  
New Delhi

## “BOUQUET OF 8 FLOWERS”

*A fashion parade of colorful ethnic attires from north east*

A North East Cultural Dance Festival & Fashion Show was organized by Assam Association Delhi at India Gate Lawn recently as a part of its Diamond Jubilee Celebrations. Various artists and more than 20 renowned models from Assam arrived in capital to bring the culture, tradition, Ethnic Fashion and Folk dance forms from the land of festivals.

Chief Guest Hon’ble Union Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar inaugurated the programme by lightning ‘Mashals’ while rendering a beautiful song ‘Apoorva Milan Ka Raag’ by Songs and Drama division of Assam. He appreciated the efforts of Assam Association and praised their services towards Assam’s remarkable diversity of the Culture. “Assam Association is contributing to the unity of India, while preserving our enormous diversity. I wish them many more years of fruitful service to the Assam’s culture” he added. Chief Justice of Delhi High Court M.K. Sharma was also present to enjoy this colorful evening.

Artists appeared very keen in grasping the attention of the audiences by presenting various folk and traditional dance forms like ‘Satriya Dance’- a devotional dance which portrayed ‘Krishna Janma Katha’, a spectacular dance ‘Laiharaoaba’ from Manipur.

Programme continued with a fashion parade named “Bouquet of 8 Flowers” by designer Madhumita Sekia was a complete depiction of Northeast- A region of superfluous natural beauty and peace with exotic flora and fauna. The collective region is a picture of nature in its truest form unexplored and unexploited. The fashion show named “Bouquet of 8 Flowers” because it exhibited attires form the eight states Assam, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Tripura,



Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Pure Monga Silk fabric was used by designer Madhumita Sekia in her all designs,

first round was a peculiar traditional round where feathers, traditional and tribal jewellery was used. In the second round designer presented casual wares meant for working people and college students, where traditional fabrics from Assam were used largely. Third round was full of colorful attires with western touch.



After this spectacular fashion show, the sequence of dances continued with ‘Bardoi Sikhla’ a dance form of Boda tribe, ‘Cherao’ dance from Mizoram, ‘Ojapali Deodhani’ nriya- a Assam devotional folk, ‘War dance’ from Nagaland, ‘Abotanai’ dance from Arunachal Pradesh, ‘Bhortal Nriya’ devotional dance form, ‘Phailela’ from Tripura, Martial art from Manipur, the penultimate dance performance was from Meghalaya called ‘Nongkhrem’, Programme concluded with last but not the least and most awaited dance from ‘Bihu’.



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