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India's
contribution
to the rest of
the world

“Many of the advances in the sciences
that we consider today to have been made in Europe
were in fact **made in India centuries ago**”



Grant Duff British Historian of India

Contents

The Musings of Brahmaputra: Reflections and Refractions	P-5	Why We Need A Ram Temple In Ayodhya?	P-18
The Brahmaputra and Tourism	P-7	Rattled Nerves at JNU	P-19
Glory of Sanskrit	P-8	Team Youth Helps Youths	P-20
Mahamilonor Tirtha	P-10	Our Guests Should Not Mess Around	P-21
The Dalai Lama and Tibet's Freedom Struggle	P-11	Folk Music of The Northeast Has Greatly Influenced Me: Singer Adnan Sami	P-22
Dalai's Dreams	P-12	Bangladeshi-Muslims Will Over Run Assam – A Report	P-24
The Monk Who Saw Religion Through The Prism of Science	P-14	India Never Used Me Against China: Dalai Lama Amid Chinese	P-25
Brahmaputra Was A Great Natural Highway	P-17	Frogs That Rode a Snake	P-26

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Namami Brahmaputra

Kudos to the organizers for envisaging the unique idea of paying tributes to *Mahabahu* Brahmaputra, surely there could have been none more deserving of the honor. The Mighty Brahmaputra has played a stellar role in shaping the destiny of a region which stretches over three countries.

Though the event, most imaginatively named as Namami Brahmaputra, was envisaged as a platform to showcase Assam's tremendous potential as a state brimming with trade, tourism and cultural excellence, but this description cannot be construed as denying the latent reverence that we Indians have towards Mother Nature and her various forms.

In our culture, the rivers are not seen just as water bodies; rather we look up to them as life-giving Gods or Goddesses. To the limitations of logic this may not sound very convincing. "Well, a river is a river, how is it a goddess?" This would be the usual question posed by the person. Now, if we lock that very person for three days without supplying him with water, once after the three days are over, the moment he gets his first glass of water, he would be more thankful than he had ever been in his lifetime. Because what we call as water, what we call as air, what we call as food, what we call as the earth that we walk upon – these are not commodities, these are life-sustaining material and according to our culture, they deserves all the respect and reverence that we can bestow.

In India Rivers are venerated as Mothers (Nadi-Mata). Like a Mother, each river has a pleasant (saumya) and an unpleasant (ugra) form. In their fierce form, they can cause great destruction of life and property by the means of floods and rapid currents. Hence the scriptures prescribe rituals to pacify them. Rivers symbolically represent divinity, motherhood, purity, life, source of life, cleansing power, femininity, forbearance, movement of time, fertility and so on. The Kumbha Mela and Pushkaras are important festivals associated with the worship of rivers.

It is time that we realize the true worth of Brahmaputra, the mighty river that flows through Tibet, China, Burma, India and Bangladesh to meet its destiny in the Bay of Bengal assimilating the diverse cultures of the diverse people of these countries. The Chief Minister of Assam Shri Sarbananda Sonowal has very aptly said that "Brahmaputra is our culture, civilization, economy and lifeline."

It is also time to rediscover the Brahmaputra which effortlessly brings together Assam's trade, tourism and cultural aspects apart from its religious and spiritual eminence. We will be doing our sacred duty towards the Louhitya, if we do not limit ourselves in keeping its water clean and unpolluted, but also utilize its abundant water resources to economically rejuvenate our motherland.

Editor

The Musings of Brahmaputra: Reflections and Refractions

Dr Ranga Ranjan Das

History reveals that there are close relationship among city, civilizations and river. Great civilizations across the globe developed nearby the rivers. The world history and past geography always remained as witness of such civilizations that is seen in archaeological discourse and metaphors. It reflects much developed socio-economic life of the natives. Be it Indus Valley Civilization, Mesopotamian Civilization, Sumerian Civilization, all have a close nexus with rivers. The Indian social histories reflect that rivers have played important role in the development of Indian civilization. The geography of India is blessed with various rivers. Various prominent cities developed besides these rivers. These rivers have its' own significance and importance according to their strategic locations. The territory of north east is also blessed with various streams and turbulent rivers. Among them the Brahmaputra, literally said as 'the Red River' possesses paramount importance.

The almighty river Brahmaputra flows bisecting entire Assam, regarded as sacred, and life line of entire people of Assam. The origin, its various names according to various places, flow, its various tributaries, distribution, wideness, depth, economic importance as a resource of various aquatic fauna, sand, socio-economic life of riverine communities, socio-religious aspects for entire population of Assam, its role over entire agrarian economy of the state, are considered under various discourse of positive impacts while the chaos, havoc, destruction due to growing water level during flood, massive erosion engulfing larger plain territories nearby the bank posing threat to large section of people including famous riverine Island Majuli caught eye as a negative discourse relating to Brahmaputra.

The Brahmaputra is not only significant from geographical-geological as well as socio-cultural perspectives; it has been source of creating great literature and music in Assam. In the context of Assam, the legendary singer Late Dr Bhupen Hazarika penned as well as rendered voice to the great Assamese song like: Shwakiya roop loi Bohag nu aahe koloi.../Brahmaputrar dui paroloi nohoi jaanu.../ Ei Brahmaputrar Mahan Oitijoy ba ki? Mahabahu Brahmaputra Maha Milanar Tirtha...Kata jug dhori aahise prakaxi. Xomonayay artha. /Xudur

Kannakubjare pora barobhuyan ahisile.../Xei bongxote Xonkordeu iyaate jonomile.../ Marur dexore ajaan phokire madhur zikir rosile.../Dillir Diluwaare aahi asthi puthi aakile/ Poncho nodir tegbahadure dharamar xetu gorjile.../Xomonoyor dekhuaale koto prakax swatahsfurta/ Duror Lachite xotoru aagosile / Jati dharma bhaxa xobaake swadex premere baandhile / Kiraat putra Bishnu rabhai maatir Kristi diyaale /Xomonoyor dekhuaale koto prakax swatahsfurta /Mahabahu Brahmaputra. / Patra nadee (?) /Patra nadeer dhumuhat aahi koto xoto jon aahile / Luitor duyu pare kotona atithi aadorile / Kisu lobo laage Kisu dibo laage/ Jeen jaabo hole...Milibo laage milaabo lage / Rabindra natheu kole.../ Agarwal Jyotiye iyate jyotir prapat buwale. Ajeen patoki xobor chakra jyoti kori byartha! / Mahabahu Brahmaputra Maha Milanar Tirtha / Kata jug dhori aahise prakaxi /Xomonayay artha.....

There might be some mistakes in the lyrics as the source where I take it is not so convenient. But, still the entire song depicts the entire history of Assam and its relationship with Brahmaputra. The song itself narrates the metaphoric musings of Brahmaputra and the role played since time immemorial in the socio-historic context of Assam.

Besides, it is important to have some preliminary information on Brahmaputra in geographical context to understand the genesis of its origin and its flow. The geographical and geological narratives relating to Brahmaputra is found in various descriptions. Here, I would like to refer one article written by JN Senapati on *the Brahmaputra and river bank cottages* (4.4.2017, AT). According to the author: "The river Brahmaputra is one of the longest river in Asia, 2900 kilometers long, flowing from Angasi Glacier, located at Burang of Tibet to the Bay of Bengal. As Yarlung Tsangpo River, it flows across southern Tibet breaking through the Himalayas in great gorges. It enters Arunachal Pradesh from its eastern corner as Dihang or Siang and joins the Dibang and the Lohit rivers at the head of Assam valley from where it is known as the Brahmaputra River. The Brahmaputra flows south-west through Assam and then south in Bangladesh as the Yamuna River. In the vast Ganga delta, it merges with the Padma River and then the Meghna River before emptying into the Bay of Bengal... As the Brahmaputra river follows its

braided 700 km course through the Assam valley, it receives several rapidly rushing Himalayan streams, the chief of these are the Subansiri, Kameng, Bhoroli, Dhansiri, Manas, Champabati, Saralbhanga and the Sankosh rivers. The main tributaries from the hills and the plateau to the south are the Buridihing, the Disang, the Dikhow and the Kopili...Between Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur districts, the river is divided into two channels, the northern is the Kherkutia and the southern is the main Brahmaputra river. The two channels again meet after 100 km downstream forming the Majuli Island which is the largest River Island in the world...The average depth of the Brahmaputra is 124 feet and its maximum depth is 380 feet. It is up to 10 kilometers wide in some parts in Assam and at Guwahati the Brahmaputra cuts through the rocks of the Shillong plateau, and at its narrowest at 1 km bank to bank”.

Further, the same author and other authors also regard the Brahmaputra River is sacred for the Hindus and the river has a rare male name which means ‘sons of the Brahma’ (in Sanskrit *putra* means son). It is very interesting in Indian context. Most of the major rivers in India have names with female affiliations: Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Kaveri and others. The name Brahmaputra itself means a lot in religious context. During Asok Astami, Chhat puja devotees throng and assemble by the river bank to make a holy dip and offer prayer respectively. The famous Aswakranta temple and Umananda, a famous Shiva temple is situated by the side and in the midst of Brahmaputra respectively, close at hand of Guwahati city. Both the temples have mythical connections. In the book *Pavitra Assam*, edited by Maheswar Neog, regarding the name of Aswakranta, it is written that a fierce battle had taken place between the soldiers of Lord Krishna and Narakasura (a cruel king of asura who ruled ancient Kamrupa) in this particular place where the temple is located now. The horses of the chariot of Lord Krishna had to face a tough resistance here. Aswa means horse and akranta is to face resistance or getting attacked. However, Lord Krishna killed Narakasura here. Further, as stated earlier, the famous Majuli, a riverine Island, who is claiming inclusion under UNESCO’s heritage is situated in the midst of Brahmaputra under Jorhat district.

Keeping all the holistic perspectives in mind, the Government of Assam, for the first time has celebrated Namami festival in order to render and offer tribute to the river Brahmaputra for its role played in all the

spheres in Assam over the centuries. The festival is celebrated across the Assam and gets a mixed response from all the quarters. The festival is important so far as tourism is concerned. But it fails to deliver as per desire due to various reasons. In an editorial note on ‘Promoting Tourism’ published in the Assam Tribune dated 5th April, it revealed: “It appears that the organizers had no idea what it was actually celebrating and showcasing. No thought was given to the timing of the festival and the incessant rains during the event played a complete spoil-sport. Secondly, publicity of the festival outside the State had been virtually non-existent with newspapers and channels focusing for a brief period only on the visits of the President and the Dalai Lama. It would have made some sense had the occasion been utilized to bring in a few people connected with international tourism such as reputed tour operators, travel writers, etc. If we are indeed serious about promoting the Brahmaputra as a destination, developing a world-class riverfront with diverse recreational facilities including water sport should gain precedence over meaningless festivals organized with public money”.

Yes! It is definitely understandable. There is lack of proper planning and timing. But we should understand the honest and sincere thinking of the government. As, it was for the first time, there may be some errors. But we have to wait and watch aftermath. How it goes? Whether, the problems related to Brahmaputra are properly addressed or not? There are lots of announcement from the desk of central government. It is said that the Government of India would dredge the Brahmaputra River from Sadiya to Chittagong Port. There is a project which would change the entire economic corridor of Assam as the Brahmaputra National Waterway-II would have direct access to Chittagong Port in Bangladesh and Halda Port in West Bengal. It would consequently boost trade with the Southeast Asian countries. Further, there is Brahmaputra Express Highway! We have to wait for realization and positivity.

The Brahmaputra lives in the heart of the people of Assam. It has provided smiles and tears in the form of flood and erosion since time immemorial. As it flows centrally, there is tremendous scope for the people of Assam so far as economy is concerned. The aquatic animals derived from its body have the ability to transform entire economic scenario of the people of Assam. We have to think beyond agro-

(Contd. to Page 17)

The Brahmaputra and Tourism

- Jayanta Sharma

The Namami Brahmaputra festival is an appreciable effort by the Assam Government for showcasing the enchanting cultural and natural bounties of the State and her people for the knowledge of the global audience and thus to promote tourism in this part of the globe. These types of promotional activities would definitely contribute to some extent in creating awareness about the cultural and natural heritage of a territory, which is relatively lesser known and at the same time unexplored. However, since tourism has emerged as one of the most important areas for earning revenue particularly for Assam and North-east India these days, keeping the Namami Brahmaputra festival as a starting point to explore tourism in Assam, we have to take recourse to some practical steps while formulating our approaches. These include educating our people, particularly the young generation (of Assam and other States of North-east India) in matters of our historical monuments, like the largest man-made tank Joysagar, which covers more than three square kilometres of area and the water level at 14 feet above the ground, and many more prehistoric heritage, because the extent of the archaeologically and paleontologically rich Himalayan and Siwalik Hills Range of pre-Ice Age is in the region.

Its natural heritage like the endangered river dolphin (which is the mascot of the festival now and significantly from Assam to Amazon only a few thousands of such dolphins are now surviving and out of these about 500 river dolphins are living in the Brahmaputra and its tributaries), the one-horned rhinoceros, the feral horses of Dibru-Saikhowa forest, and many more flora and fauna of the region also have tremendous potential to attract domestic and foreign tourists.

Its traditional art and cultural practices, traditional sports, traditional dances, dramas, music and musical instruments, architectural grandeur and of course the cleanliness and the decorous hospitality of the people of the State towards their guests, are the unique areas, which need to be highlighted for attracting tourists.

Preparation of a roadmap and creating tourist area zones are important aspects which need

adequate attention. This should be stitched together with proper and adequate arrangements for communication and a dedicated team of trained guides.

The unique characteristics of the State as well as the NE region's societies should be so highlighted that these also attract those people from across the globe who take interest in societal matters. These characteristics include the non-existence of the caste system, absence of the dowry system, the undying bonhomie among the communities, where people of a religious community sing paeans of the people of a different religion. The Zikirs of Assam are such hymns, which though sung by the devout Muslims, declare that Hindus are also God's creation. Mention may be made of another important example of communal harmony, which is a rare thing in other parts of the world. This is a structure of the Ahom era, where the outer walls of the monument are decorated with the terracotta images of various Hindu deities, but its interior is shaped like a mosque with the Mihrab, which is usually located in the mosques. It is the Ghanshyam House or Nati Goshai Dou located on a bank of the Joysagar tank.

The Assamese society has emerged through a process of assimilation of the ethno-linguistic diversity of Indo-Aryan, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and Tai-Kradai linguistic groups, people of which are living in close proximity for centuries. Pan-Assam is the result of the assimilation of these groups. So, Assam is the 'Maha Milanar Kshetra' (an area where all ethnic elements have melt together to give a new ethnic entity), as was viewed by legendary singer late Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

Assam should also be projected as a biodiversity-rich area, with its lush green forests and brilliant wildlife. Its tea gardens, the rich craftsmanship of its artisans and weavers, among others, should also be highlighted through producing short films with sub-titles in different languages for different countries.

The promotion of selected cultural items of Assam in foreign lands by small teams of

(Contd. to Page 25)

Glory of Sanskrit

Dr Jyotsna Bhattacharjee

Recently there have been lots of controversies, protests and agitations by some people against the cabinet decision to make Sanskrit compulsory in schools from class-I to 8th standard. I wonder why some people are so much against this wonderful language. It is sad to note that the Sanskrit language, the life line of Indian people, has lost its glory in recent years, and at present we can see that very few people are interested in this glorious language. Some critics of the language opined that the inclusion of Sanskrit in the school curriculum as a compulsory subject will encourage communalism. I am amazed at such senseless criticism, since the Sanskrit language does not have a trace of communalism. Anyway, I do hope that now the controversies would come to an end, since I believe that now it would not be a compulsory subject.

Once, Sanskrit was the crown of Indian literature, but now it has fallen down from its pedestal. In the ancient era Sanskrit was held in great esteem and it was termed as a “Devobhasha”, because it was believed that the gods used this language to communicate with the people. So the Sanskrit language has some sacred implication. It has a vast treasure and our ancient religious and philosophical concepts were expressed through this language. Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Dramas, Scientific Texts, Philosophy, Art, Humanities—all were written in Sanskrit. The gurus in ancient India imparted lessons to their disciples in Sanskrit. In short, Sanskrit language expresses the culture and tradition of ancient India and we may regard the Sanskrit literary compositions as a kind of history of the ancient era. Only Sanskrit can acquaint us with the earlier age, without the knowledge of which our education will remain incomplete. We would be a poor nation, if we are ignorant of our own culture and traditions as well as the life in the past. How can we know about ourselves without knowing about our history in the long past?

In actual fact, Sanskrit is the soul of India and without this language we would lose our spirit and the life line of the Indian people. It is endowed with the spirit of liberation and tolerance as well as some ethical principles. Anybody, after reading a few books in Sanskrit, would realize how magnificent the language is. It may be called the richest and the

sweetest of all the languages in the world. Sanskrit does not belong to any particular race, sect or religion. It represents a culture that is not narrow and sectarian, but open, tolerant and all-embracing. To have real progress of mind and body, it is imperative that we inculcate Sanskrit in our present day life. It is very important to do that, since because of our negligence of Sanskrit, western culture has nearly elbowed out our rich Indian culture. Today we have a pseudo culture which is rather denigrator to our rich Indian culture. Sanskrit is one of the oldest languages in the world and the beauty of this language is incomparable. Often it is misconceived as only a language of a particular religion, hymns and rituals. This view does great injustice to Sanskrit and also betrays the ignorance of the modern generation regarding the intelligence and brilliance of ancient sages as well as the writers, thinkers, scientists and geniuses like Kautily, Charaka, Sushruta, Aryabhatta, Varahamihira, Brahmagupta, Bhattaraya, Kalidasa, Bhababhuti, Vyasa and others.

Sanskrit has a treasure of knowledge comprising Mathematics, Medicine, Botany, Chemistry, Art and Humanities besides great literary works. It is so rich that to delve into it is like delving into the ocean. The names of Kalidasa, Bhababhuti and some others in the field of literature need no introduction. Abhigyan Sakuntalam, Swapna Basabdatta, Kadambari, Kiratarjuniyam, Manusanhita are only a few gems out of so many precious stones in the field of literature. In these books you can find magnificent description of Nature’s beauty. These books demonstrate how Nature was venerated in the golden era. Animals and birds were also viewed with respect. From these books we can know that there was no question of environmental pollution or destruction of wild animals in that era. These literary works depict the rich culture of the Indian people brilliantly. Only the knowledge of Sanskrit can make us aware of our rich Indian culture, which should be preserved. A Sanskrit drama never ends in a tragedy and it demonstrates the fact that man’s hope for happiness is always there. Maharishi Valmiki’s Ramayana and Maharishi Vyas Deva’s Mahabharata amply demonstrate the brilliance of these immortal talented authors. These two epics are not only invaluable, but they are also incomparable. Countless characters are intertwined to make a composite whole with every person and

incident falling in proper places. The beauty and the great attraction of these epics are such that one never gets bored even after going through them repeatedly. They depict the life style of Indian people of that era, covering religion, culture, rituals, marriage, customs, warfare, education and morality. Actually the moral tone is never lost. These epics display the triumph of good over evil forces. I have read many books of renowned authors, but I have not found any book as interesting and captivating as Ramayana and Mahabharata. They are still a source of joy for me and perhaps for many others as well.

Bhagavad Gita is incorporated in the Mahabharata. The Hindus venerate it as a religious text with the firm faith that all the aphorisms laid down in the Gita were actually stated by Lord Sri Krishna himself. Though it is revered as a religious scripture, in fact it is more a philosophical and ethical text. When the Kurukshetra battle was about to commence, Arjuna, the third Pandava requested his mentor and charioteer Lord Sri Krishna to drive the chariot to the middle of the battle field, so that he could see all those people who were supporting the Kauravas. Accordingly, Lord Krishna drove the chariot to the central place, from where the opposite side could be seen clearly. Arjuna saw his grand sire Pitamah Bhishma, other relatives, preceptors and friends in the enemy line. On seeing his own people in the enemy line he became devastated with grief. He told Lord Sri Krishna that he was not going to commit sin by killing his own people. Arjuna laid down his famous 'Gandiva' and declared that he would not fight. Then Lord Krishna took the role of a preceptor and Arjuna became his disciple. Lord Krishna explained to Arjuna the meaning of life and the duty of man as well as the significance of death. He also explained the nature of soul, which happens to be immortal. That is Bhagavad Gita, the crown of Indian philosophy. It is more a philosophical text than a religious one. Though the Hindus venerate Gita as a sacred scripture, the word 'Hindu' is not mentioned even once in this great literary text. Gita instructs Arjuna regarding his duty as a Kshatriya and shows the way to liberation. Philosophy is the main topic of this text. Gita depicts Indian culture, philosophy and the facts about life and death in a language which is sweet, simple and rich as well. We have innumerable translations of the Gita in various languages—but the translated works miss the beauty of the original text.

Sanskrit language is essential for understanding our culture and to regenerate the divinity in man. It has the capacity to stir the soul and bring to the fore the finer qualities of a human being. Descriptions and manifestations of diverse phenomena of nature in Sanskrit is really unique. In Kalidasa's "Abhigyan Sakuntalam" we find the wonderful presentation of natural flora and fauna in such a magnificent way that nature seems to appear as a benign deity. The same reverence for nature can be seen in "Meghdoot" and other Sanskrit texts. In fact this seems to be the only language which brings nature close to human beings. Nature seems to come alive in these classics of the ancient era. At a time when scholars, scientists, intellectuals and others are getting apprehensive about the survival of the planet Earth and when they are discussing about the ways and means to save the earth from annihilation due to man's assault on Nature, I suppose, these Sanskrit texts would be of great value to make man realize and appreciate the contributions of Nature. From these great works we learn that once man venerated Nature, but today he is trying to dominate and exploit Nature. In his arrogance he has forgotten the simple and conspicuous truth that man cannot survive without Nature. If we go through the Sanskrit texts we would surely realise how close we stand to Nature. Environmental imbalances has brought crisis to the earth and it is time we understand how important natural phenomena are for our survival. If we read the Sanskrit texts we would realize the value and importance of Nature's gifts to earth.

Sanskrit language also has been the source of values and ideals that have sustained India through the ages. The open-minded seers and thinkers, who spelt out their vision and philosophy in the sacred Vedas and the Upanishads, were able to balance the opposites in their life and in philosophy. The message of the ancient sages of India, who gave us the concept of "Vasundhaiva Kutumbakam", the world as one family, continues to be of great significance to the world even today. So it can be said that the Sanskrit language embraces the whole world—it is a language for all times and places. There are no limits to its ideas—it covers everything from the lowest of the low to the highest of the high. It has given us such gems of knowledge like "Tat tvam asi", which identifies "Atma" (soul) with the "Paramatma" (Absolute Soul). It implies that Absolute Reality is residing within us. So Sanskrit language has put forward such highly regarded philosophical notions,

which give new direction to our life and thought process. If we follow its direction, surely we would realize the implication of universal brotherhood which implies that all human beings are brothers, since they belong to the same Reality.

Sanskrit embraces a complete knowledge system that embodies the great learning traditions of ancient India. As long as it motivates and influences the life of the Indian people, so long will the basic genius of India will flourish. Many modern Indian languages depend on Sanskrit for their vocabulary. Only by learning Sanskrit people can realize the superb contributions of the language to our life and culture. It covers a diverse range of topics like poetry, drama, aesthetics, scientific literature, philosophical texts like Vedas, Upanishads, and epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and various other subjects.

It is unfortunate that Sanskrit has not been given due importance in our educational institutions. If our young generation does not learn the language, they would be the losers. They would lose their identity and would know nothing about our glorious culture and traditions. It is important to widen the range of Sanskrit and make it relevant and useful to the present day situation. The vast literature of Sanskrit should be explored, so that India becomes richer in every way. Then only peace and happiness will return to the country, since the Sanskrit language teaches readers to take a spiritual view of life. We know very well that only the path of spiritualism can give peace and happiness to all of us.

(The Sentinel, 02/04/2017)

‘Mahamilonor Tirtha’

The President of India Pranab Mukherjee aptly chose the banks of the Brahmaputra to highlight the pluralistic nature of Indian society. Inaugurating the Namami Brahmaputra festival, being celebrated by the Government of Assam to pay homage to the mighty river, the President said that the Indian tradition, as articulated by Assam’s great scholar and reformist Mahapurush Sankardev, had no room for intolerance. India’s strength was its ability to manage diversity and forge unity from it and the nation’s people were committed to trust, mutual understanding and harmony. Indeed the North-East in general and Assam in particular mirror this theme of the President’s inaugural speech; this region is a melting pot of different ethnic groups possessing distinct cultures yet amalgamating into one identity not to be encountered anywhere else. The Brahmaputra, being a highway for migration, was the facilitator to creating this ethnic-cultural mosaic — no wonder Bhupen Hazarika, the bard of Assam, dubbed it as a “Mahamilonor Tirtha,” or “the holy site of a great synthesis” which has for untold centuries been propagating the message of unity and harmony. In the context of the disharmony that is occurring between communities in some other parts of the country and the attempt of vested interests to foment discord, Namami Brahmaputra festival can send the message of tolerance, the President had broached upon.

However, the President had not quite hit the nail

on the head when he reportedly asserted that Assam was emerging as an economic hub of eastern India and South East Asia. While, with its rich natural resources and strategic location as a corridor between mainland India and South East Asia, the State certainly has the potential to become an economic hub, the slow pace of industrial growth and a moribund economic scenario signifies that it is yet quite a distance away from emerging as one. Indubitably, the seminal key to the economic rejuvenation of this region lies in restoring the severed water communication link through Bangladesh as well as creating scope for greater and more sustainable use of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries for commerce and communication both east and west. It is all very well for the State Government to pay homage to the river through celebrating an ostentatious festival, but it must also begin the arduous task of harnessing and managing it so that it can play the fruitful role it had done in the days of yore. As the President stated, Assam does lie at the heart of India’s Act East Policy, thus the region needs to be prepared to reap the benefits that would accrue once land connectivity is established with South East Asia. Having paid homage to the Brahmaputra, our Government must start work towards achieving that goal.

(Editorial, The Assam Tribune, 02/04/2017)

The Dalai Lama and Tibet's Freedom Struggle

It seems the 'Dalai Lama' is a name which the communist ruled China or the Red China fears most today, because anywhere this great spiritual leader goes or anything he says to the public causes unlimited anxieties and anger for the Beijing autocrats. As if, the very presence of this apostle of peace and non-violence at anywhere or the words he speaks as messages may shake the very foundation of Red China's vast empire! Of late, this fear has increased more and more. The recent utterances and threats issued by Beijing on the Dalai Lama's visits to Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are the latest examples of such fear psychosis. Of course, there is obvious reason for this fear psychosis. The history says that after more than long 60 years of illegal occupation of Tibet, the home of the Dalai Lama, the communist dictators of China, since the days of Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, have not yet been able to diminish the image of the great Tibetan leader or erase the spirit of the Tibetan people's struggle for freedom from the world scenario. Rather, day by day, both the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan freedom struggle have attracted attention and gathered momentum from the conscientious, prudent and right thinking people around the globe. Today, the Dalai Lama has become a global entity, loved and respected by millions of people. Likewise, the Tibetan freedom struggle is earning widespread concern and sympathy from more and more people. This ever increasing popularity of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people's struggle for freedom has become a cause of embarrassment for the 'Socialist' dictators of China. Though by muscle power and brute force, Mao Zedong's gang illegally occupied Tibet and deposed the Dalai Lama in the 50s, yet the increasing public opinion around the globe in support of the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan struggle seems to embarrass Red China to a moral defeat. That is why Beijing's psychosis makes it jump and fuss about anything related to the Dalai Lama and Tibet.

The history of Red China's invasion and illegal occupation of an independent country like Tibet in the name of 'liberation' and 'Socialism' is an example of worst human rights violation. Before 1950, Tibet existed as an independent buffer state between India and China for centuries. As immediate

neighbors, Tibet's relation with India was very close and friendly, especially since the 7th century AD when Buddhism went to Tibet from India. But after the Second World War, Mao Zedong and his communist forces captured power in China in 1949. Hence, China became the 'People's Republic of China' or the 'Red China'. Mao Zedong then declared, "Tibet is the palm of China and Ladakh, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) are its five fingers." With this imperialistic intention, Mao's Red Army or the PLA (People's Liberation Army) made Tibet its first target and in October, 1950, Tibet was invaded. The Red Army inflicted brutal atrocities and destruction on the peace-loving Tibetan people. Thousands of unarmed civilians were massacred by Mao's so-called 'Liberation Army'. Tibet's national army could not resist the heavy armed assault of Red China. As a result, Tibet's highest spiritual leader and the head of the State, the 14th Dalai Lama had no other way but to escape into exile in India. By 1959, Mao's communist force illegally occupied whole of Tibet and thus, Red China became India's illegal neighbor. Since then, China's communist rulers are going on with their ruthless colonial rule over Tibet.

Known as the 'Roof of the world', Tibet is situated in the heartland of Asia. Before 1949, the people of Tibet lived there in harmony with nature, guided by their Buddhist principle of peaceful coexistence. But with the invasion of Tibet, the consumerist and materialistic Chinese communist ideology trampled upon this nature-friendly attitude of the Tibetan people. Under Red China, there is unprecedented systematic destruction of the social life and environment of Tibet. Besides humanity, the rich wildlife, forests, plants, minerals and water resources have all suffered irreplaceable loss and degradation. The deforestation of Tibet has led to the silting of rivers, causing floods in neighbouring countries. Red China's constructions of big dams over the Tsangpo (the Brahmaputra) in Tibet are signals of future disasters for India and Bangladesh. It has turned the once peaceful Tibet into a vast military zone. Besides, it now utilizes Tibet for chemical warfare exercises. The 'land of snow and peace' is now being used for dumping of China's nuclear wastes.

(Contd. to Page 13)

Dalai's Dreams

R. Dutta Choudhury

“If you extend the hand of friendship, today’s enemy can become tomorrow’s friends.”

Every person has dreams, but the dreams of a common person are different from those of a great one like the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama dreams about world peace and he strongly believes that the world will be a better place to live as more and more people, particularly the younger generations, are fed up with violence and they want a peaceful world. He also sees a better future for Tibet, which is now under Chinese occupation.

The 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso was born to a Tibetan farming family on July 6, 1935 and at the age of two; he was identified as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama. Even when he started talking, the young kid started saying “I shall go to Lhasa”, which surprised everyone. But no one in the family thought that the kid would go on to become the 14th Dalai Lama. The 13th Dalai Lama breathed his last in 1933 and since then the Tibetan Government was looking for his reincarnation. They identified the kid as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama and he was taken to the Kumbhum Monastery, where an old lama took good care of the child.

The 14th Dalai Lama was brought to Lhasa in 1939 and first taken to the summer palace Narbulinka. His formal education as the spiritual leader of Tibet started at the age of five. But right from his youth, he had to suffer hardships as in the summer of 1950; Lhasa received news that the Chinese troops started attacking Tibet. The small Army of Tibet was not at all strong enough to take on the mighty Chinese. At the same time, the Dalai Lama was entrusted with the responsibility of taking over the political powers of Tibet and he sent delegations to different countries like America, England, Nepal, etc., seeking their help to protect Tibet from the Chinese aggression. But America and England refused to help out Tibet and as last resort, the Dalai Lama sent a governor to hold talks with the Chinese. On March 10, 1959, the Dalai Lama received an invitation from a Chinese army officer to attend a drama festival. Though the invitation looked a simple one, the conditions applied by the Chinese made everyone understand a ploy

of the Chinese to take him into custody as one of the condition was that the personal security staff of the Dalai Lama would not be allowed to carry any weapon. Thousands of Tibetans gathered in front of the Narbulinka palace and decided that the Dalai Lama should escape from Lhasa. Dressed like a common army man, he left Lhasa and came down to India. The Government of India also agreed to give asylum to the Dalai Lama. Since then, he has been staying in India and waging a movement to free Tibet.

The North-east region has a special place in the heart of the Dalai Lama as he had entered India through this region, and, the Sixth Dalai Lama was also born in Arunachal Pradesh. He still vividly remembers his journey through the North-east region and asserted that he would never forget the love and affection that he had received from the people of the region.

I had the privilege of doing a long interview with the Dalai Lama in his residence in Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh on November 3, 2016 on behalf of The Assam Tribune, and right from the time of entering his room, I was bowled over by his generous behaviour. Despite his busy schedule, he patiently answered the questions put forward before him and repeatedly asked about the North-east region. He claimed that the world would definitely be a better place to live in the days to come despite the fact that different countries of the world have been witnessing large-scale violence. “A peaceful world is not only my hope but I strongly believe that one day, everyone will understand the futility of violence. More and more youths are fed up with violence, which is a very positive development. At one point of time, different European countries used to fight among themselves, which resulted in unnecessary loss of life, but now they have realized the futility of such war and formed the European Union for overall development,” he pointed out.

The Dalai Lama further pointed out that religious tolerance and peace of mind are also key to peace. Giving an example, he said, “I am a Buddhist. But I

respect all religions. I have seen a very positive development in different parts of the world. I keep visiting various countries and majority of the people who come to listen to me are not Buddhists. This proves that people have started respecting other religions," he said.

The Dalai Lama asserted that violence would never solve any problem; rather it would aggravate the problems. If one has the commitment and self belief, there is no need for resorting to violence. He pointed out that they have been agitating for their rights for such a long time, but never resorted to violence. "We are fighting for a just cause and there is no need for resorting to violence. If you extend the hand of friendship, today's enemy can become tomorrow's friends."

Though the Chinese Government is still adopting a tough stand on the demand of the Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is hopeful of a bright future for Tibet. He said that some day or the other, the Chinese Government would realize their mistakes and accept the demand of the Tibetans. He pointed out that Tibet was never a part of China, but in the present global scenario, the Tibetans have agreed to accept a "middle way" and have agreed to stay with China if proper autonomy with high degree of self rule is given. The Tibetans should also be allowed to preserve their unique culture and spirituality along with the rich environment of Tibet, he said.

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(Contd. from Page 11)

The Dalai Lama and Tibet's freedom struggle

Under the communist China's occupation, over 1.2 million Tibetans have been killed and 6,000 religious and cultural institutions, monuments and national heritage have been destroyed. Now and then, Tibetans are imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights. They are subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention. Those imprisoned are often denied legal representation and the Chinese legal proceedings fail to meet international standards. It seems, as the Dalai Lama had said, "The ultimate Chinese aim is to destroy the Tibetan religion and culture and absorb the Tibetan race." Tibetan women are subjected to enforced sterilization, contraception and abortion procedures. Even children are not exempted from Red China's repression of freedom of expressions. There are Tibetan political prisoners below the age of 18, and the monks and nuns are consistently dismissed from their religious institutions. More than 70% of the Tibetans in Tibet now live below the poverty line. The communist authority is encouraging the unabated influx of Chinese immigrants to Tibet with an intention to overwhelm Tibet's distinct culture and religious identity and reduce the Tibetans to an insignificant minority in their own country amounting to a policy of cultural genocide. Presently, the six million-strong Tibetan people have been outnumbered by the 7.5 million Chinese in Tibet. Before 1950, there were hardly any Chinese in

Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. Today, the ratio between the Chinese and the Tibetans is roughly 3:1.

The Tibetan people's movement is going on against the repressive policies of the Chinese dictatorial rule. It is high time the international community boldly come forward to solve the Tibet issue at the earliest. The international community and media should send a fact-finding delegation to Tibet to remove the veil of censorship and disinformation campaign run by China's communist government.

When Tibet was illegally occupied, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, criticizing India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's appeasement towards Red China, commented: "Instead of according recognition to China in 1949, had India accorded this recognition to Tibet, there would have been no Sino-Indian border conflict." And Dr Rajendras Prasad, the first President of India, said: "Freedom is the most sacred thing. It has to be protected by all means – violent or non-violent. Therefore, Tibet has to be liberated from the iron grips of China and handed over to the Tibetans."

It is very true that 'Tibet's freedom is India's security'.

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The Monk Who Saw Religion Through The Prism of Science

Makarand Paranjape

When it comes to the relationship between science and spirituality, the prevalent view among most sceptical and materialistic scientists regards spiritual wisdom and religious scriptures not just as non-science, but as essentially nonsense. Naturally, Swami Vivekananda or any other religious figure's views on science would be suspect, unless and until they are corroborated by "hard" data. For a typical proponent of such an "anti"-view, we might turn to Richard Dawkins who considers religion as delusion made up of a "fixed false belief".

A tempting, but arguably disappointing "middle ground" seemed to be offered by the celebrated evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1941-2002). To avoid conflict between science and religion, he proposed a clear demarcation of each domain, labelling them both with the impressive sounding term "magisterial" to legitimate their separate but apparently equal spheres. These magisterial, separate fields of authority do not overlap, as indicated by the principle commonly known as NOMA, or "non-overlapping magisteria." In the essay that popularised the expression, "Non Overlapping Magisteria", Gould writes:

"The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two Magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty). To cite the arch cliches, we get the age of rocks, and religion retains the rock of ages; we study how the heavens go, and they determine how to go to heaven."

Gould was harking back to well-known traditional distinctions between practical knowledge, which helps us understand and manipulate matter, and spiritual wisdom, which helps us know ourselves or God. In Vedic terms, this would be Apara (limited, worldly) vs Para (unlimited, transcendent); vidya (knowledge) or Vyavaharika (empirical, practical) vs adhyatmika (spiritual, non-material) knowledge.

To make his proposal more complex, Gould postulated a no man's land between the two magisteria, but he also acknowledged that there

could be areas of inquiry which did not have a clear no man's land, citing evolutionary facts and moral arguments as clear examples. He also pleaded for "a respectful, even loving concord between our magisteria—the NOMA solution. NOMA represents a principled position on moral and intellectual grounds, not a mere diplomatic stance. NOMA also cuts both ways. If religion can no longer dictate the nature of factual conclusions properly under the magisterium of science, then scientists cannot claim higher insight into moral truth from any superior knowledge of the world's empirical constitution. This mutual humility has important practical consequences in a world of such diverse passions."

Gould was a strong proponent of respectful argument among scientists and religious teachers. "Here, I believe, lies the greatest strength and necessity of NOMA, the non-overlapping magisteria of science and religion. NOMA permits—indeed enjoins—the prospect of respectful discourse, of constant input from both magisteria toward the common goal of wisdom. If human beings are anything special, we are the creatures that must ponder and talk."

Gould's proposition may be considered firmly to emanate from the world of science. Unfortunately, his views, though cited by scientists, are often misrepresented. Dawkins, for instance, disagrees with Gould's principle of NOMA. In an interview to Time magazine, he famously said: "I think that Gould's separate compartments were a purely political ploy to win middle-of-the-road religious people to the science camp. But it's a very empty idea. There are plenty of places where religion does not keep off the scientific turf. Any belief in miracles is flat contradictory not just to the facts of science but to the spirit of science."

Prominent scientists at the forefront of this exercise today propound that religion is opposed to inquiry and clouds the mind of those who, if they were only willing to be guided by reason, would agree to the conclusions supported by the overwhelming preponderance of scientific evidence and reject the blind adherence to revealed authority that characterises religious belief. Moreover,

science is silent on issues such as salvation or afterlife, but religion often ventures into areas pertaining to physics, cosmology, or biology, where science has established itself as the most reliable source of what is true or possible. Even so, scientific “narratives” are also subject to and share similar limitations as other narratives, whether these are in the humanities or social studies. As Stanley Fish points out, “with respect to a single demand—the demand that the methodological procedures of an enterprise be tethered to the world of fact in a manner unmediated by assumptions—science and religion are in the same condition of not being able to meet it (as are history, anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology and all the rest).”

Consciousness as Missing Link?

There are, moreover, areas where the two, science and spirituality, do seem to overlap. One of these is consciousness studies. Vivekananda made numerous references to the word “consciousness” in his lectures. Notably, he used three categories: sub-consciousness, consciousness, and super-consciousness:

“You must remember that the first manifestation of this Prakriti in the cosmos is what the Sâkhya calls Mahat. We may call it intelligence—the great principle, its literal meaning. The first change in Prakriti is this intelligence; I would not translate it by self-consciousness, because that would be wrong. Consciousness is only a part of this intelligence. Mahat is universal. It covers all the grounds of sub-consciousness, consciousness and super-consciousness; so any one state of consciousness, as applied to this Mahat, would not be sufficient... The substance Mahat changes into the grosser matter called egoism.”

In contrast, a majority of the researchers in this field seem to be of the view that consciousness is in the brain.

The main drawback of this approach is that it relies almost completely on the means to analyse a “conscious experience” rather than make any attempt to answer the question, “Who is having this conscious experience?”

Moreover, if the primary focus is on understanding neural responses, then a definition such as, “Consciousness refers to those states of sentience and awareness that typically begin when

we begin from a dreamless sleep and continue until we go to sleep again, or fall into a coma or die or otherwise become ‘unconscious’” (J. Searle, “The Mystery of Consciousness”, *The New York Review*, November 2, 1995) is logical. But Vivekananda, following Indian spiritual and philosophical traditions, clearly stated that there are two other domains, one that is needed to understand dream and sleep or svapna and nidra (termed sub-conscious) and the other to study the level above individual egoism or samâdhi (termed super-conscious) that has to be included in any discussion of consciousness. Moreover, Vivekananda was very clear that the experience in the dream state is at a lower plane of existence (because it primarily arises from avidya, ignorance) than the experience during samâdhi. He also maintained that “when a man goes into samâdhi, if he goes into it a fool, he comes out a sage.” It is almost impossible for science today to corroborate or disprove this hypothesis. Moreover, though scientists are mapping the brain of subjects during meditation to understand changes in activity in various parts of the brain, the question, “what is the entity that remains unchanged before, during, and after meditation and tells the experience of these experiences” is unanswerable by present scientific methods. Many researchers have posited further analysis of Vedantic insights to make advances in this field. Vivekananda viewed cosmology and consciousness as a continuum, unlike modern science’s attempts to compartmentalise these two subjects in very different realms.

In any case, it is clear that Vivekananda anticipates by nearly a hundred years the efforts of other religious figures such as the Dalai Lama to open up spiritual phenomena to scientific examination, thereby enriching both domains. Science today has access to powerful brain imaging tools that can provide neurobiological correlates when subjects try to reach their own mind through meditation. According to Crick, Koch, and others, certain 35-75 hertz neural oscillations in the cerebral cortex seem to be correlated with awareness in a number of different modalities and a mechanism of binding (synchronisation of separately represented pieces of information) has been hypothesised. Davidson’s work with Tibetan Buddhists has demonstrated the ability of Lamas with many years of meditative practices (>10,000 hours) to have a higher ratio of gamma-band

oscillatory rhythm to slow oscillatory rhythm compared to the controls (no meditative experience). According to the subsequent findings, gleaned from scans of each monk's brain during meditation, an increase in activity was found around the frontal region of the brain, in which attention on specific tasks are processed; on the other hand, a decrease in activity was found around the area at the back of the brain, where one's processing of orientation and spatial awareness occur.

These studies show a definite and measurable causal correlations between meditation and certain kinds of brain activity, which may impact both neurosciences and meditation practices.

“Scientific” Religion?

In the burgeoning field of study described as science and religion, there have been several attempts to formulate, even before Gould, a comprehensive taxonomy of the relationship between the two. One of the most respected scholars in the field, Ian Barbour, evolved over time the framework of conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration. When it comes to India's recent interaction with science, we see instances of all four types of response, with a fifth, that of “cooperation” also added. While the spiritualist side is usually ready for a dialogue with scientists, hoping thereby to vindicate their age-old beliefs and new findings, the scientists have been less enthusiastic, afraid of being branded as “superstitious” or “non-scientific.” From dialogue to integration is thus a distant dream, but some sort of cooperation between the two, especially for the larger benefit of society, is seen as desirable.

Such, for instance, is the view of former Indian president and aerospace engineer A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. In all conversations on science and spirituality in the Indian context, the name of Vivekananda figures prominently. It was Vivekananda who, in his whole-hearted endorsement of the scientific approach, set the tone for other spiritual figures in modern India. According to scholars like D.I. Gosling, it was this atmosphere of the co-dependent arising of modern science and spirituality in late 19th century India, that gave Indian science of that period its unique flavour: “What has always been the most distinctive feature of Indian science is a form of integral thought, a kind of intuitive ability to hold together ideas which have

elsewhere remained unrelated.”

In so far as we can extrapolate from his writings, it is clear that Vivekananda wished to “scienticise” religion, thus going contrary to the NOMA hypothesis. In an important “Reason and Religion” lecture given in London on 18 November 1896, he states:

“The physical sciences are better equipped now than formerly, and religions have become less and less equipped... Believing certain things because an organised body of priests tells him to believe, believing because it is written in certain books, believing because his people like him to believe, and the modern man knows to be impossible for him.”

“... The question is: Is there a way out? To put it in a more concrete form: Is religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science justifies itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen.”

From a man of religion, a monk in fact representing a certain order and belonging to an ancient tradition, this is a statement of extraordinary boldness and self-confidence.

Vivekananda does not wish to preserve a religion which is no longer “true”, whose beliefs are easily disproved by discoveries in the sciences, which maintains its hold on its flock only through dogma, superstition, or fear. Vivekananda demands of religion an internal consistency and external, empirical proof. He wants religion to submit itself to the most rigorous interrogation before belief ensues. To what extent can religion be considered another type of science is not clear, nor can we be certain that this is the best or most productive way to understand religion?

Indeed, we may see Vivekananda attempt to explain religion in terms of science as both a strategic defence of religion in a world dominated

(Contd. to Page 23)

‘Brahmaputra Was A Great Natural Highway’

The Brahmaputra was truly ‘the great natural highway between Bengal and Assam,’ during the British Rule, said noted historian Rajen Saikia, quoting from ‘A Statistical Account of Assam’ of noted civilian-cum-scholar WW Hunter. Saikia, author of the widely acclaimed ‘Social and Economic History of Assam 1853-1921,’ was speaking on the sidelines of Namami Brahmaputra festival. He maintained that if the rivers are opened, the people would get new opportunities opened up for them.

In Assam, the river system governed the settlement pattern, farming and crop selection habits. The rivers were the highways of communication and commerce; unifiers of history, men and measures; strengtheners of identity, language and culture. Their broadness was the index of the Assamese mind and the meanders symbolized their self-defeating waywardness.

Rarely a source of worry, every river of Assam was an object of worship. The river was the promoter of urbanization and destroyer of ‘moronic exclusiveness.’ By denying themselves the sight of the beauty and broadness, the later generations may have brought upon themselves the curse of ignorance. “Open the rivers and you open new opportunities,” he said.

Referring to the Mediterranean World of the famous French historian Fernand Braudel, who described the Mediterranean as the greatest document of its past history, Saikia said a study of the rivers of Assam may also provide clues to the understanding of the socioeconomic fabric of the past. For Braudel the sea was everything, it provided unity, transport, the means of exchange and

intercourse among nations. The rivers also played a similar role in Assam, he said.

Similarly, boats also played an important role in the economic activities of the people of Assam in the early part of the British rule, until the introduction of the steamers. The steamer service became regular in the State in 1861. Till then, boats were the only means for carrying goods and passengers between Calcutta (Kolkata) and Assam. Even after the steamers were introduced, the importance of boats did not decline as the steamer service was infrequent and it could not cover all the stations.

Water traffic provided livelihood to a large community in the riverside town of Goalpara. Guwahati, Barpeta and Palasbari were the three important centers of river-traffic in the undivided Kamrup district. The Brahmaputra was the core of the system, which nourished the life-strings of the minor rivers of the district. Though the minor rivers were not navigable by big boats round the year, native crafts were engaged to keep up the flow of import and export. In fact, the bulk of the river-borne trade was carried on by native boats, said Saikia.

Biswanath, Tezpur and Mangaldai were the three riverside towns of Darrang district. In Nagaon, there were only two trading posts connected by river traffic. They were Nagaon and Raha. Golaghat and Jorhat were the two important river traffic stations in Sivasagar district, while Dibrugarh, Sadiya and Jaipur were the notable riverside stations in undivided Lakhimpur district.

It is hence not difficult to assume that boats did play a major role in the economic life of the community, said Saikia.

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(Contd. from Page 6)

The Musings of Brahmaputra

based economy. Lots of revenue goes to outside state for importing fishes. Effective planning, sincere efforts, mechanism, infrastructure, device is required to check the erosion and flood. Otherwise indigenous group will not dare to stay in the bank and their pristine culture will be affected. It is also important to look the char areas and the people as it is a sensitive issue. Various reports reveal that most of the

inhabitants are illegal migrants. They prefer to stay in the char areas to hide from the eye of law. In this way, though Brahmaputra has historical, socio-cultural and socio-economical dimensions, there are various issues and challenges relating to Brahmaputra which needs proper attention and fruitful remedies.

Why We Need A Ram Temple In Ayodhya?

Chetan Bhagat

It has become a fashion in some elite Indian circles to bash Hinduism or issues related to it. It has also been taboo in these same intellectual circles to discuss what I think is a very reasonable request — we should have a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Elites, particularly in the English media, have bullied almost all voices that desire a temple at the sacred site into silence.

Hence, just to be clear I would like to state this: peacefully, but definitely, I support the construction of a beautiful Ram temple in Ayodhya. It is frankly ridiculous that we have to beg to restore a temple at one of Hinduism's greatest sites.

Of course, something needs to be clarified here. Violence of any form, including the kind that happened in 1992, cannot be supported. It was wrong, illegal, unfortunate and should never happen again.

However, this does not take away the reasonableness of the request to restore a temple in one of the holiest sites of Hindu religion. This article seeks to make a case for a temple and debunk the various theories that have prevented the same from happening for all these years.

The first argument against the temple is 'why disturb the status quo?' Its proponents say there is an issue, but it is dormant. So why disturb it and risk destroying the peace? Well, there is no reason why peace should be disturbed in the first place.

Lord's own country: Rama's birthplace is a matter of centuries of faith, and that cannot be shifted

I think the Muslim community, or the various leaders that claim to represent it, should give its blessing to the temple in any case. This is no ordinary site. As per Hindu faith, it is the birthplace of Lord Rama, one of the most worshipped gods in the religion.

Diwali is India's biggest festival. Thousands of mosques stand on erstwhile temples in India, courtesy Mughal rulers. Nobody is asking to restore those. But this is Lord Rama's birthplace, replaced by simply one more mosque. That mosque can be

shifted. The holy site of Lord Rama's birthplace is a matter of centuries of faith. We can't shift that.

The mosque can, and a grander one can be made nearby, or even right next door. Why wouldn't the Muslim community accommodate such a reasonable appeal? Is it because some of their self-styled leaders are politically instigated not to do so? I am sure the general Muslim population of this country will approve of such a request. We just need to approach them directly. In the age of social media, we can.

'Build a hospital instead' is the second argument made against building the temple. We should make hospitals, yes, but it doesn't have to be at the same site! Hospitals should be located based on criteria like where do people need them most. They can also be made on any piece of land. Why on such a holy site? Frankly, why can't we make a temple at the site as well as a great hospital somewhere else?

The third argument against the temple is the modern 'But God is everywhere, so why here?' Related to this is: 'But what is the proof Lord Rama was born here?' Well, God is everywhere. But we still need places of worship. So that when we go there, we can focus on God and God alone.

As far as proof of Lord Rama's birth goes, there is none. But we do have proof that this site has been known as the birthplace of Lord Rama for centuries, and excavations have shown that there was a temple here before the mosque.

India is a nation that respects all religions. To prove that, sometimes we tend to become extra sensitive to issues related to minority religions, but ignore any issues the majority religion may have.

The Ram temple is just one of them. Previous governments, particularly, had a policy of appeasement for the Muslim community, which took things to the extent that even a reasonable request was made to look like a form of Hindu bullying.

This temple can be a symbol of understanding between the two dominant religious communities of India. Restoring one temple because of the unique nature of the site and shifting a mosque to a nearby

(Contd. to Page 22)

Rattled Nerves at JNU

Arunoday Majumder

In another welcome break from strong-arm tactics at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University, a mainstream political group has now petitioned the Supreme Court. It has contested, among other things, the constitutional validity of the implementation of the much-maligned 2016 UGC notification. The decision to move the apex court comes in the wake of thin response to continued calls for strikes.

Last week – Monday and Tuesday – witnessed yet another strike in JNU. But the call for inactivity by the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) was hardly under observation in libraries and hostels. Reading rooms were full during daytime and so were those hostel beds whose occupants are wise owls of the night.

This writer attended a class at the Centre for Studies in Law and Governance even on the first day of the strike. Attendance was more than 80%. Later in the day, in a general body meeting at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, students with different points of view about the strike had heated debates. At risk are students of MA final year who fear that serial disruptions will delay examinations, results, degrees and promising careers.

What must be emphasized is that there are several disagreements with JNUSU within campus. In most cases, the voices of internal difference are those of many independent students who reject political-party based campus dialogue. Of the more than 8,500 students in the residential university, only 4,865 students had stepped out and cast their votes in the last student election. Among them, 1,077 voted NOTA. So JNUSU's theatrics is not representative of the contemplative silence of several students.

The strike last week was a continued protest of a "seat cut" in research programmes. Clause 6.5 of the UGC notification puts a countrywide cap on

the number of research candidates per university teacher. A group of students took the matter to the Delhi high court earlier. The judge dismissed it as he did "not see any merit in the petition" and termed it "infructuous".

The UGC notification has rattled some nerves on campus for two reasons. First, it will discourage the possibility of seat distribution on the basis of ideological affiliations of candidates – a practice of the Left Front which brought Calcutta University to its knees despite three Nobel Laureates among its alumni. With the upper limit of the number of supervisees now fixed, only the very best from all social sections will gain admission.

Allegations of social discrimination are illogical since there is no revision of reservation quota at any level. Second, a reduced supervisor-supervisee ratio will prevent compromise on academic rigor. This is much to the chagrin of professional activists who "make up" for their puny reading lists with lengthy slogans. But it is likely to improve the quality of research conducted by both teachers and students.

There is an opinion that a decreased intake will affect the quality of research. A poster on campus reads: "Path breaking researches (sic) do not happen (sic) in 'one fit for all' systems (sic)." But research students in JNU, like in most other universities in India, cannot credit themselves with "path breaking" research. Rhetorical sloganeering and pamphlet writing do not comprise good research.

The only indication of excellence in research is publication in peer-reviewed books and journals. Few would disagree that the percentage of published theses to submitted theses in JNU is abysmally low in both M.Phil and PhD. Even a liberal estimate will hesitate to put the number in double digits.

The 2016 UGC Regulation could well be a course correction if it is not browbeaten as "casteist" or "classist" – the ridiculous refuge of the protest industry. If comrades of yore suggested that Rabindranath Tagore won the Nobel Prize because he was "bourgeoisie", the new kids are likely to reduce the pursuit of excellence to "high" birth. But

even globally renowned Indian scholars who lean towards the left, Pranab Bardhan for instance, as well as those who are closer to the centre, Sanjay Srivastava for example, blame excessive intake for the inability of universities in India to make it to the top of world rankings.

Just as progressive schooling must not count kilograms, competitive research must not make way for thousands. Research is a skill in the field of higher education and not part of children's right to elementary education. It must be presented to the public not "submitted" to university storage.

Interestingly, those who wrongly call research a right never highlight the lack of investment in school education which is a legal right. After all, children are stakeholders in education but not voters on campus. Affirmative action and deprivation points cannot substitute for lack of primary and secondary education in the country.

It is surprising that the issue of quality research is never raised in JNU. It does not have a publication division, it does not host a journal, the central library is not fully functional as it is under renovation for many months now and departmental libraries lack space and staff. Yet none of these issues ever provoke a chorus on campus.

Sadly, the measure of an individual on this campus has shifted base. It is no longer founded on intellectual achievements but on a particular "historical" discrimination. This systematically excludes mental illness, chronic illness, sexual orientation, gender, race and many other handicaps, including poverty, that also choke access to equal opportunity.

(<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-edit-page/of-force-and-farce-the-rhetoric-of-struggle-in-jawaharlal-nehru-university-hides-its-pervasive-mediocrity/>)

Team Youth Helps Youths

'The Youth' was founded as a voice for the youths of the country. Our sole responsibility is to bring to light the issues which are in the interest of youths, as the mainstream media of the country often neglect and highlight issues which don't matter to us, as well as to the country. Our media often remains busy covering slugfest between political parties, turning a blind eye to a bulk of important issues in the country.

Needless to say, media is the fourth pillar of a democracy; however it is not performing its duty honestly. There starts the role of 'The Youth' to fulfill the gap created by both print and electronic media.

We are delighted to tell you that we are succeeding in our mission slowly. Recently 'The Youth' covered a story of four young engineering students- Rohit Saikia, Abhinav Gogoi, Debankar Saikia and Jiban Dihingia- from different cities of Assam who met at their college (Jorhat Engineering College). When they saw the condition of Indian artisans, smiths, potters, craftsmen, they decided to do something to alter the scenario. Hailing from middle class families, they had no money to help them financially. But they desperately wanted to extend support them in all possible way.

After a well thought-out plan, they established a market by the name of Ethno Shopping, where they buy and sell stuffs made only by local artisans (and

they don't sell stuffs made by foreign companies). Their initiative gave an opportunity to the artisans and craftsmen who had no work left in their life and they had lost all their hopes. But because of these students, they got a chance to earn from their traditional occupation. Many poor artisans are now earning a handsome amount only because of these four students. Above all, they also donate a big chunk of their profit to poor artisans to change their situation. Of course, they haven't changed the life of all artisans of India as they have their own financial problems, but whatever they have done is praiseworthy.

Despite their amazing work, the media did not bother to highlight efforts of these youths, as they were busy with political fights at Delhi University at that moment. We, at 'The Youth', covered their story. When PVSLN Murty- the CGM of the State Bank of India of North East region, read about their dedicated work for the society on our official website, he himself contacted and invited them to the SBI head quarter. When the students met him at his office at Guwahati, he assured them of sponsoring their work. 'The Youth' is now pleased that the financial help extended by the SBI will help them expand their work to help maximum local craftsmen. 'The Youth' thanks everybody for the help and support.

(<http://theyouthindia.com/2017/04/03/this-is-how-theyouth-team-helped-four-youths-who-are-doing-wonder-for-society/>)

Our Guests Should Not Mess Around

Salil Gewali, Shillong

Guests are genuinely respected in India than any other countries in the world. 'Atithi devo bhava"— (roughly translated as —'the guest is GOD'), a sermon from one of the Upanishads, is religiously taught to each individual from early age. The message behind this is to see GOD in every being. Because, none can exist without God, or His all-pervasive divine energy. Every nano-gram of an entity is God. The ancient Indian seers realized this fact in the depth of their meditation, and YOGA being a sure highway for such "realization".

That why more importance is attached to an unknown guest is a very significant question. From the personal relations or known individuals you could have affection, attachment, love but mostly accompanied by a heavy dose of lingering "expectation". But in the case of a strange guest, it is only the one-way service. You serve him or her without any expectation of benefit in return. Well, any action done without any expectation leads to quick purification of the doer's inner being, the "soul". And this gradually grooms oneself for the self-realization. Therefore, serving unknown guests, irrespective of their caste, creed, race, colour, is spiritually sanctifying and self-evolving.

Now let us look at an unfeeling episode of our poor Nigerian guests (Atithis) that occurred in Noida recently. This is doubtlessly very unbecoming. We should condemn it totally. Meanwhile, lots of articles and editorials have been churned out and published in the media which were quite unwelcome. Most of those write-ups have deliberately shown India in a bad light, as if Indians habitually hate the outsiders. The incident has received too much prominence unlike any other countries as if every foreigner in India is looked down. So, visiting tourists in India are hardly safe. Even the reporters of certain channels have been seen goading the tourists to speak out in negative tones against India. It all meant that Indians might, without rhyme or reason, beat any visiting foreigners black and blue. On the flip side, hardly any newspapers have ever discussed or brought to the light other side of the stories which

are equally spine-chilling.

Till about two years ago I too was not at all aware of such things. It is all about how some of our guests from certain countries, I don't mean all, visit India and involved in creepy activities in the name of pursuing education. I could not believe my ears when one of my friends of Kailash Colony, New Delhi, narrated the various kinds of wrongdoings that are unabashedly committed by our foreign "guests". Besides other illicit activities, drug, prostitution and sleazy fun are what they love to spread, I was pointedly told. So far as drug trade is concerned they



have a very special modus operandi which is like generously throwing the "baits" first into the river to catch more fishes later. Lots of young newbie's are thus dragged into the drugs net. My Delhi based anxious buddy didn't mince words to share another outrageous incident that is too scary but fast catching up with the roar of modernity. Well-built black hunkies easily get after urban local folks, more females, and lure them into immoral indulgences in the name of

naughty fun. About 2 years back Aam Admi Party leader Somnath Bharti's midnight raid was totally a right move but the media portrayed him as an uncompassionate evildoer.

Dear all, if above things are true then what is in store for those youths and their parents who all are already bearing the brunt. Sadly, media eyes can't see what truly rotting the society and corrupting our youths. Nevertheless, one strongly feels, before painting the NATION and its people black the media should make sure that none of our guests from abroad mess around with our children. I have heard enough from many parents who are sorely enraged that their young children are being pulled into the whirlpool of drugs and sleazes. So, let's be sensible before we regret. Yes, I guess, before stretching the ambit of hospitality too much let's thoroughly find out what kind of guests we are inviting in our neighborhood, nay, our country. Atithis should not be our "liabilities".

Folk Music of The Northeast Has Greatly Influenced Me: Singer Adnan Sami

England-born singer-composer Adnan Sami, who was granted Indian citizenship more than a year ago, says he has been greatly influenced by the folk music of the northeast and by maestros like Sachin Dev Burman.

“North-eastern folk music influenced me from a very young age. Sachin Dev Burman is one of the inspirational musicians in Indian film music. The way he fused folk music with his signature style... is amazing. So, I am aware of the beauty of northeast folk music,” Sami told IANS in an interview at his suburban Andheri residence soon after returning from shows in Johannesburg, Durban and London’s Wembley Stadium, where he performed for the eighth time. “Apart from the music, the natural beauty (of the northeast), its diverse cultures, the people and their hospitality... mesmerised me. I have gone to many beautiful places across the globe, but I must say that the northeast of our country is the best-kept secret in the world,” said the “Lift Kara de” hit maker, who is of Pakistani origin.

Trained in Indian and Western classical music and known for rapid playing on the piano, Adnan is popular for hit non-film songs like “Kabhi to nazar milao”, “Bheegi Bheegi raaton Mein” and “Tera chehra”. He also sang for Bollywood films like “Ajnabee”, “Saathiya”, “Joggers’ Park”, “Lucky: No

Time for Love” and “Bajrangi Bhaijaan”. He received his certificate of Indian citizenship from Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju in 2016 — a step that resulted in a barrage of criticism from Pakistan. Asked if that bothered him, he said: “I know people criticised my decision, but honestly, I don’t care. And why should I? I am a singer. You love me or hate me based on my music. If you are judging me based on my nationality and religion, you are a racist. This is very offensive. I cannot encourage that.” Last year, he even hailed the Indian Army for conducting surgical strikes on terror camps across the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir. As a result, he got trolled on Twitter by some Pakistanis. How difficult is it to be in people’s good books if you are a celebrity who likes to share his opinions without fear? “Being a public figure, you cannot make everyone happy. Some people will criticise your actions and I cannot stop expressing my opinion based on that. As far as my opinion on surgical strikes is concerned, I explained it to the media clearly. “I always stood by my opinion and will do that in future as well. I have never made any frivolous comment and never will,” said Adnan, who once weighed some 230 kg, but inspiringly shed well over half of that through a combination of diet and exercise.

(The Sentinel, 20/04/2017)

(Contd. from Page 18)

Why We Need A Ram Temple In Ayodhya?

location (and making it grander) does not tarnish the glory of Islam in any manner.

In fact, the surge in tourism it will create in Ayodhya when this project is complete will bring jobs for both Hindus and Muslims.

The only thing we have to bear in mind is keeping a lid on any form of violence or communal incitement this project may create. Today, in the age of better

digital communication, the risks are minimal. These are a request from the Hindu community at large to the Muslim community at large, the elites and the intellectuals — let us have our temple. Bless its restoration and the building of a grander mosque nearby, so that we can, peacefully, create one of the greatest sites of religion and cooperation in the whole world.

(Times of India, 02/04/2017)

(Contd. from Page 16)

The Monk Who Saw Religion Through The Prism of Science

by science and an attempt to focus on the more rational aspects of faith.

Before closing, it would appropriate to briefly point out that an assessment of Vivekananda contribution to growth of modern science cannot be confined to a study of his writings. The latter may be somewhat bounded by time and context, but his personality, dynamic and boundless as it was, was perhaps even more influential.

On the way to the Parliament of Religions in July 1893, Vivekananda met Jamsetji Tata on board the steamship Empress of India from Yokohama to Vancouver. In his Complete Works there is no mention of this meeting or of any communication between Vivekananda and Jamsetji. Our only source is the letter Jamsetji wrote to Vivekananda on 23 November 1898 more than five years later, a copy of which is in the archives of Indian Institute of Science. Jamsetji was already a prominent industrialist and businessman, while Vivekananda was a virtually unknown monk. Jamsetji was on his way to the US to acquire the technical knowhow to make steel in India, something that the British steelmakers did not want to part with.

Exactly what transpired between the two great Indians, one a leading tycoon, the other a spiritual visionary, is a matter of speculation. Did Vivekananda suggest to Jamsetji that an Institute of Science (IISc) should be set up? Certainly Jamsetji's letter does not say so. Indeed, as B.V. Subbarayappa's painstaking history of IISc shows, the idea was mooted as early as 1892, the year before Jamsetji and Vivekananda met. But after the Parliament of Religions and his triumphant return to India, Vivekananda became a national figure. Jamsetji did not forget their meeting, but went on to ask for Vivekananda help in promoting science in India by harnessing the energies of asceticism and tradition for this cause: "I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda. Do you think you would care to apply yourself to the mission of galvanising into life our traditions in this respect?" Tata asks Vivekananda to write a "fiery pamphlet rousing our people in this matter"; he even agrees to "cheerfully defray all the expenses of publication". Vivekananda did not write such a

pamphlet, but the publication that he had started, Prabuddha Bharata, issued an editorial the following year, in April 1899, lauding and endorsing Jamsetji's project:

"We are not aware if any project at once so opportune and so far-reaching in its beneficent effects was ever mooted in India, as that of the Post-graduate Research University of Mr Tata. The scheme grasps the vital point of weakness in our national well-being with a clearness of vision and tightness of grip, the masterliness of which is only equalled by the munificence of the gift with which it is ushered to the public. ...Mr. Tata's scheme paves the path of placing into the hands of Indians this knowledge of Nature—the preserver and the destroyer...—that by having the knowledge, they might have power over her and be successful in the struggle for existence... We repeat: No idea more potent for good to the whole nation has seen the light of day in Modern India. Let the whole nation therefore, forgetful of class or sect interests, join in making it a success."

At Vivekananda behest, his key disciples, Nivedita and, later, Josephine Macleod also met Jamsetji. As a tribute to his contribution, a statue of Vivekananda proudly stands in the main building of IISc.

It is clear therefore that Vivekananda not only supported the foundation of IISc, but also welcomed the spread of modern scientific education and research in our country. From our earlier account it is evident that his support of modern science was not only for its manifold material benefits to a backward and underdeveloped India, but also for its capacity to understand and appreciate truth, which to him was also the goal of spirituality. The Institute finally began to function only in 1911, seven years after Jamsetji's and nine years after Vivekananda death. Today if India is one of the few nations in which the Constitution itself enjoins upon each citizen to cultivate and promote the scientific spirit, it is not only because Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, was a votary of modern science. Much before him there were many others, including spiritual leaders and men of religion such as Vivekananda, who also welcomed the spread of modern science in India.

Bangladeshi-Muslims Will Over Run Assam – A Report

Experts have stated that the complete sealing of Assam's 272 km border with Bangladesh was virtually impossible. They have advised the state against "wasting time and resources" on sealing the border and instead focus on other methods that would stop the influx of illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants into India. According to them, if the current trends continue, Bangladeshi Muslims immigrants will become the majority in Assam by 2040.

The sealing of the Assam-Bangladesh border was one of the main election planks of the BJP during last year's Assembly elections in the state. Recently, Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh, while speaking at a BSF programme in Madhya Pradesh, claimed that the government would be sealing the entire Bangladesh border by the end of 2018.

But senior Supreme Court lawyer Upamanyu Hazarika, who was appointed by the Supreme Court as a one-man commission in May 2015 to look into the India-Bangladesh boundary issue and the influx of illegal immigrants, said the task was impossible.

"The borders can never be sealed. The slogans raised by the BJP were for the purpose of election sloganeering. Out of the 272 km long Assam-Bangladesh border, 95 km is riverine and out of that the 55 km stretch in Dhubri is virtually unmanageable," Hazarika said.

P.K. Mishra, retired Additional Director-General of the Border Security Force, who worked extensively in Assam, seconded the view.

"It is an unmanageable terrain and after every monsoon, new islands come up. The fences are washed away due to the change of course of the rivers. Sometimes our land gets submerged, sometimes their land gets submerged. And those who can swim can easily cross over," Mishra, who is now associated with the strategic think tank Vivekananda International Foundation, said.

According to Hazarika, the right question was not whether illegal immigration can be stopped or not. "By 2040, the indigenous people are going to become the minority and the illegal Bangladeshi Muslim migrants will become the majority and it may happen that in 2040 the CM of Assam is likely to be an illegal immigrant. As per the government's

own admission in 2001, out of the 2.61 crores population of Assam, 50 lakh were illegal immigrants. In other words, every 5th person in Assam is an illegal Muslim outsider. The entire demography of Assam has changed. In 1901 only two out of the then eight districts had Muslim population of more than 25%—Goalpara and Cachar. In 2001, out of the 23 districts, six had become Muslim majority. Dhubri has a mind boggling 74% Muslim population and the total percentage of Muslims in the state is now 35% and if you go through the data, the border areas are the regions which have seen exponential growth of Muslim population. In the last 20 years, in many bordering villages of Assam, the number of Muslim voters has increased by more than five times. In recent years, fewer than 2,500 illegal immigrants have been deported. No serious detection and deportation of illegal Muslims was done in all these years due to minority appeasement policy and since identification and deporting them has failed, the only remedy is to reserve lands and jobs for only those Assamese who were a citizen before 1971. That will stop more migrants from coming to Assam," Hazarika said.

Mishra said that the corruption among the BSF personnel who were stationed at the border was also an issue that needed to be tackled very sternly.

"38 battalions of BSF, which were kept in reserve for emergency situations, are being used in North East, in Left Wing Extremism affected areas and for election duty due to which our operations guarding the border have suffered. The minimum strength that is needed to guard the border is not there. We need more than 50 existing Long-Range Reconnaissance and Observation Systems or LORROS (a sensor system to provide long-range daytime and night-time surveillance) that we presently have. Assam Police Border Organization (the only border patrolling force which is under the state government), which has 4,000 personnel should be given more importance. We need to give drones, satellite imaging equipment to the forces to guard the border effectively. Until and unless these things are done, illegal immigration cannot stop," opined Mishra.

(<http://thenortheasttoday.com/assam-bangladeshi-muslim-immigrants-will-be-majority-in-assam-by-2040-if-influx-continues/>)

India Never Used Me Against China: Dalai Lama Amid Chinese

Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama today emphatically said India has never used him against China, remarks that came amid loud protests by Beijing against his ongoing visit to Arunachal Pradesh. The Dalai also urged China to give Tibet meaningful “self-rule” and “autonomy”. The remarks by the 81-year-old Nobel Laureate came on a day when China alleged that India in disregard to its concerns “obstinately” arranged his visit to the “disputed part” of the eastern part of China-India border, causing “serious damage” to its interests and bilateral relations. “India has never used me against China. I am a messenger of the ancient Indian thought and I talk about ahimsa, peace, harmony and secular ethics wherever I go,” he said talking to reporters here on the second day of his week-long visit to the remote northeastern state.

His remarks also came against the backdrop of criticism by the Chinese state media that India is using the Dalai Lama as a diplomatic leverage to challenge China’s “bottom line”. Unfazed by Beijing’s objections to his visit to Arunachal Pradesh, the Dalai said, “Many Chinese love India but there are some narrow minded politicians as I have mentioned, they consider me as a demon.” Articulating the Tibetan stand, the Dalai said, “We are not seeking independence. we are willing to remain within the Peoples Republic of China.” “I always admire the spirit of the European Union. Individual nations sovereignty is important but that’s not so important. What is important is the common interests. “So for material development to remain with the Peoples Republic of China is in our interest. So, the Chinese government also should feel ok. At

the same time the Chinese government should give us meaningful self-role/autonomy,” he said. The Dalai thanked Indian government for letting him visit the frontier state. He spoke fondly of Arunachal Pradesh and said he had a special connection with the state as it served as his point of entry when he arrived in India in 1959.

“I would like to thank the government of India. I have been in this country since 1959. India has taken great care of me. I am their longest staying guest. I am thankful to them.

“When I got freedom, when I first reached India, I entered through Arunachal Pradesh. I have an emotional connect with the state. It is a special place for me.” He gave a discourse at Buddha Park here this morning.

The spiritual leader had arrived here last evening from Guwahati accompanied by state Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

Tomorrow, he would impart teachings at Dirang and confer the Avalokiteshvara Permission at Thupsung Dhargyeling Monastery in the morning.

From April 8 to 10, the Dalai will deliver discourses in Tawang. Owing to the rescheduled visit, he would not be able to go to Itanagar. “I am a Buddhist. The entire Himalayan range had been traditionally following Buddhist dharma and modern physics is based on Buddhist philosophy.”

(<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-never-used-me-against-china-dalai-lama-amid-chinese/1/921213.html>)

(Contd. from Page 7)

The Brahmaputra and tourism

experienced artistes with the support of India Tourism, which has 22 offices all over the world, besides the Indian embassies, with brochures written in several foreign languages, apart from English, should also be done in right earnest. For presentation of films as mentioned above with touring of cultural groups in four countries will not cost more than Rs 50 to 60 lakh per annum but it will create a tremendous response from abroad.

We must be committed and dedicated to explore our heritage in our country and abroad. If we do so, surely Assam will flourish in all count. The public in general and the State administration in particular should look into the matter for the growth of our land in all fronts.

(The Assam Tribune, 03/04/2017)

Frogs That Rode a Snake

There was an old snake named Mandavishya, who lived near a mountain.

Due to his old age, he was unable to prey on frogs. He thought, "I am too old to hunt for food. I will not be able to live long without food, and it is only going to make me weaker to hunt, as well. I have to think of something".

Suddenly, an idea struck him. As planned, he went to a nearby pond, which was full of frogs, and relaxed on the bank of the pond without any intention to hunt. He behaved as though he had nothing to do with the frogs.

At first the frogs ran away, but as he was not hunting, the frogs gathered some courage and approached him. One of them asked, "O Snake! Why do you not hunt, as is your behaviour?"

The snake replied casually, "I have no desire for food, as I am unfortunate. I'll explain to you. Last night, when I was wandering about in search of frogs, I bit a Brahmin's son in frustration of not finding any prey. The Brahmin cursed me. He said, 'From now onwards, you shall be able to do nothing but serve frogs. You will have to live off what frogs offer to you!' And so, I lie here, to serve any frogs who wants my services. I can give a ride on my back to any frog who wishes for a ride"

When the news reached the king of frogs, he visited the snake along with his ministers. On being assured by the snake that he means no harm, the king decided to take a ride on the snake's back. The snake rode him around the pond, and the king was very entertained. Even the ministers and other snakes took turns to ride the snake, and they were very entertained, too.

The snake, too, proved himself a good entertainer by exhibiting various styles of crawling. The frogs, especially the king of frogs, were delighted. The frogs jumped and hopped all the way.

The next morning the snake pretended to be weak and crawled slowly on purpose. The king

of frogs, on the other hand, was excited to start the morning with a ride on the snake's back. He observed the snake's behaviour and enquired.

The snake replied, "I am too weak to crawl. I have not eaten for so long, and must eat something to be strong to give you a ride."

The king of frogs thought for a while, consulted his ministers, and decided that they must serve the snake one frog a day to keep him strong. This was what the snake had planned for. He praised his kindness, and gave him and the other frogs a ride on his back.

From then onwards, the snake gave ride to the frogs, and got to eat one frog every day. In a short time, he regained strength. On the other hand, the king of frogs was too excited to realize the frogs were rapidly decreasing in numbers and there were only a handful of them that remained.

The frog king was so completely taken in by the snake's talk that he did not understand his real motive.

One day, a big black snake arrived at the bank of the pond. He was very surprised to see the excited frogs hopping in joy, and riding on the snake's back.

The black snake enquired, "O friend! Why are you carrying frogs on your back? They are our food!"

The old snake explained everything to the black snake. He continued, "I have discovered many different tastes after eating many different frogs here. I have this easy way of life, and enjoying it here."

Over time, the snake had eaten even the larger snakes, and started eating the ministers and the king's relatives. Finally, one day, he ate the king also and thus, the entire frogs in the pond perished.

The wise indeed say:

Beware of deception from all quarters including your friends.



Shad Suk Mynsiem Festival of Khasi Tribe of Meghalaya

