
1st Issue 8th May 2016



Calcutta Bodo Association

CALCUTTA BODO ASSOCIATION

FORMATION OF THE NEW COMMITTEE WAS HELD ON 26TH APRIL, 2015 ON THE OCCASION OF ANNUAL CONFERENCE AND CELEBRATION OF BAI SAGU-2015 AT BODOLAND HOUSE, RAJARHAT, NEW TOWN, KOLKATA.

Executive Committee:-

1	President	Shri Arun Kr. Brahma
2	Vice-President	Shri Indrajit Muchahari
3	Vice-President	Smt. Nirnay Narjinary
4	Vice-President	Shri .Pradip Basumata
5	General Secretary	Shri. Jnanjit Narjinary
6	Secretary (Culture & Media)	Shri Anugra Kr Basumata
7	Secretary (Finance & Communication)	Shri Balendra Karjee
8	Secretary (Organisation & Sports)	Shri Paresh Narjinary
9	Secretary (Counseling & Education)	Smt. Mukta (Narjinary) Wary
10	Treasurer	Shri Sisir Karjee
11	Asstt Treasurer	Shri Anil Karjee
12	Chief Editor (Laijou)	Shri Ujjwol Kr. Basumata
13	Editor (Laijou)	Dr. Sourav Iswarari
14	Editor (Laijou)	Smt. Sushmita Brahma
15	Auditor	Smt Giribala Muchahari`
16	Executive Committee Member	Shri Johnsing Narjinary
17	Executive Committee Member	Shri David Eswarari
18	Executive Committee Member	Shri Manojit Narjinary
19	Executive Committee Member	Shri Mokhen Narjinary
20	Executive Committee Member	Dr. Utpal Brahma
21	Executive Committee Member	Shri Uday Brahma

ADVISORY COMMITTEE:-

1	Chairman	Shri Thomas Basumatary
2	Member	Shri Hira Charan Narjiary
3	Member	Shri Sashinath Iswarari
4	Member	Shri Khalendra Mochari
5	Member	Shri Benudhar Basumatary
6	Member	Shri Debasish Brahma
7	Member	Shri Tarun Sangma



Contents:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ❖ Message | Sri. Kampa Borgoyari, Deputy Chief, BTC |
| ❖ President's Report. | |
| ❖ Secretary's Report | |
| ❖ बिबान | बिद्युत बसुमाता |
| ❖ रावबो मोनथिया | बिद्युत बसुमाता |
| ❖ जेब्लासिम | बिद्युत बसुमाता |
| ❖ INSPIRATION AND DETERMINATION | Aniket Kerjee |
| ❖ Film review on <i>Bodoni Greesti- the lesson of life</i> | A. Narjinary |
| ❖ Hills | Debasish Brahma |
| ❖ Photo | |



Sri Kampa Borgoyari

Deputy Chief

BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL



**Bodofa Nwgrw, Kokrajhar-783370
Bodoland**

Phone : 03661 - 286759 (O)
286707 (Fax)
270804 (R)

E-mail : kampab@rediffmail.com

Ref. No.

Date

MESSAGE

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that Calcutta Bodo Association is going to celebrate Baisagu Festival-2016 at Bodoland house, new Town, Kolkata. In this connection to commemorate this grand event the editorial board is going to publish online magazine named "Laijou-e-Magazine.

I hope this endeavour of launching "Laijou-e-Magazine" by "Calcutta Bodo Association" marks a new beginning of digitized transition of our literary expression and it will act as a platform to highlight and showcase the issues related to education, literature and ethnic culture of the Bodos living in Kolkata.

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to convey my best wishes.

I wish the event a grand success.

Thanking You,

10/05/16

(Kampa Borgoyari)

**Deputy Chief
Bodoland Territorial Council
Kokrajhar**



President's Report.

I welcome you all to the “Baisagu” and “Rabindra Jayanti” celebration at the “Bodoland House”, organised by the Calcutta Bodo Association. I extend my gratitude to you all for beating the heat of this scorching summer by responding to the spirit of celebration of Baisagu by attending today's function. Baisagu is the major festivity of Bodos, and individuals with direct links to their villages shall know that this occasion is celebrated even upto four consequent days at a stretch. But for the Calcuttans this one day programme should be able to etch a far reaching impact on our urban lives.

Today's Baisagu celebration is a display of our culture and our identity. Our feeling of belonging to the same culture comprises of similar food habits, wearing the same attire and most importantly by using the same language to communicate. But maintaining a strongly unified Bodo identity in the competition of cultural dominance with other prevailing cultures is taxing and difficult. We are facing a very hard time for, Bodo as a language is neglected and is among the many endangered languages of India. It is high time to decide whether we will step forward to revive our language or be indifferent to its death. The Calcutta Bodo association is putting all its effort to sustain the ethnic individuality of the Bodos and it can be done only if we keep our rituals alive with a determined consciousness. The development of this consciousness takes us back to the colonial era of the British Empire that gave the whole of India a unified identity and it's present cultural consciousness. Then why should we stay behind? Coincidentally, we shall be celebrating the 154th birth anniversary of the great bard of not only Bengal, but the whole of India, Rabindranath Tagore. Let us be inspired by his great creations and his transcending universal ideas of upliftment.

With this idea in mind we have invited the Chhekamari Rongjali Bodo (Mech) Krishti Afat, to present the traditional folk dances on this eve of Baisagu. Ms.Arati karjee and Mrs Mukta Narjinary, talented singers from North Bengal, Salkumar and Alipurduar are here to entertain our auditory senses with echoes of the melodious tunes of our soil that we as the city dwellers have gradually become deaf to. There are various other performances we have arranged for and I hope you all will enjoy the ethnic flavours on this occasion of “Baisagu” and “Rabindra Jayanti” celebration.

Our next big step to promote and strengthen the community is through introduction of an e-magazine that is going to be the first ever e-magazine of Bengal. Therefore, we are going to unveil on this stage, at this event, in Kolkata, the “LAIJOU e – magazine” today, creating

history thereafter. This “LAIJOU e-magazine” is a mouth piece of the unique identity of the new generation of the global Bodos. This quarterly e-magazine shall be a new media of communication and ideas. Therefore, it’s growth shall be extended if only various articles, paintings, stories, poems, photographies and experiences are contributed by it’s readers. We eagerly look forward to your generous participation in this design.

I hope our and all of your effort in arranging and attending this “Baisagu” and “Rabindra Jayanti” celebration will be able to give a greater sense to all of our efforts and pains. May this event be the cause of ignition of the flame of our identity. I extend my gratitude to our Hon’ble Chief B.T.C. Mr. Hagrama Mahilary and Hon’ble Deputy Chief, Mr. Kampa Borgoyary for their ever helpful co-operation towards us. I also extend my thanks to the Liaison Officer, Mr. Dipak Dev and his associates of this Bodoland House, Kolkata, for helping us. I extend my sincere thanks to decorator Mr. Majhi and sound & light system operator Mr. Samiran Pramanick and others.

Thank you. GWJWNTHANG

May the Bodo community be illuminated
May the Bodo language be progressive

A.K. Brahma
President,
Calcutta Bodo Association.



Secretary's Report for the year 2015-16



Secretary's Report for the year 2015-16

A warm welcome to all of the guests, dignitaries general members, Executive Committee members, Advisory Committee members of the Calcutta Bodo Association, all the well-wishers, and the guest artists of Chhekamari Rongjali Bodo (Mech) Krishti Afat. Arati Karjee of Salkumarhat, Mukta Narjinary of Alipurduar and other performers present in the august house. I greet my heart-felt thanks to all of you and place this Secretary's Report under review.

We aim at:-

- Fostering and promoting the social and cultural relations amongst the members and to improve our socio-economic conditions.
- Associating with the organisation to fulfil the general common interests and goals.
- Organising all kinds of social welfare activities for the betterment of our members.

- Financial assistance and other support to our members on the basis of necessity in case of medical treatments and other emergency cases.
- Up-liftment of the education of Bodo students studying in Kolkata.
- Strengthening the literary and ethnic culture of Bodos.
- Counselling of Bodo students for better career.
- Creation of Fund, accommodation and various facilities for our organisation.

We achieved:-

- During the occasion of inauguration of Bodoland House, New Town on 4th Feb, 2015, we had placed our requirement of accommodation in Bodoland House, the Hon'ble Chief, BTC, was pleased and gave his consent to allot two rooms for us. In this regard, a letter had been submitted to his office, subsequently, a reminder had also been submitted accordingly. Now, the case is under process at cabinet level.
- Celebration of Baisagu, 2015 was held on 26th April, 2015 at the Bodoland House, New Town, Kolkata. This was the first ever celebration in the House after it's inauguration. We achieved a grand success. Now, for the second consecutive time we have gathered again on Baisagu-2016. A remarkable co-incident of Rabindra Jayanti-2016 has coincided with our today's celebration. We hope, today's Baisagu stays etched in our collective memories as a grand success and more than a success, if possible, in our individual minds.

Our Activities:-

- "LAIJOU" magazine of the Calcutta Bodo Association, was 1st published in 1975, now we have taken another step towards a digitized evolution of our literary expression through "Laijou-e-Magazine". It will be available on our website at 4.00 pm from today.
- "Laijou-e-Magazine" will be published quarterly in our website.



- For appointment of local bodo youths in various posts at the Bodoland House, New Town, Kolkata, we had resolved the name of ten candidates on 13th September, 2015. The case is under process for appointment.
- Financial assistance had been given to Km. Kaberi Roy Champramary for the purchase of text books for the academic curriculum of class XI standard.
- Financial assistance had been given to the family of Late Biswas Narjinary who died untimely on 22nd May, 2015 at BR Singh Hospital.
- Financial assistance had also been given to Shri Nirmal Narjinary for his wife's medical treatment (Heart Surgery).
- Condolence Messages were sent to the bereaving family of Late A.N. Brahma, who happened to be our pioneer member and chief editor of Laijou magazine.
- Jido November the Bodo Thunlai Shan is celebrated every year on 16th November. We had observed the same on 16th November, 2015 at Bodoland House, New Town, Kolkata, with a successful participation of the general members and staff of the Bodoland House.

Bodo Thunlai Shan



- A get-together is arranged annually through a family picnic at entertaining spots. On 24th January, 2016 at Sukanta Nagar Fishermen Co-operative Ltd, Kolkata, we witnessed gathering of more than 150 people at our annual picnic.

Proposed Activities:-

- “Jaraang Phagla Ni Bihamjw” a matrimonial online website is supposedly being thought of to provide simpler solution to the hassles of match making regarding matrimonial affairs.
- Opening of Training Centre at Bodoland House, New Town, Kolkata for Civil Services & UPSC Examinations.

Conclusion:-

Now concluding this report here, I would like to mention that we had aimed at achieving the various objectives as stated above and have also been able to achieve many. While, there are still many steps to climb on this journey of development. And it could not have been possible without the sincere dedication of the members, the well-wishers’ support and all the guests present here with their enthusiasm. We hope that this Association grows bigger, better and stronger with the participation of the young ones and the experienced ones alike. I pray to all to kindly and whole heartedly keep up their support even in the future.

Once again, I greet my heartfelt thanks to all present in this august house. Hope that our Baisagu celebration and Rabindra Jayanti 2016 will be a grand success.

Thank You,

GWJWNTHANG

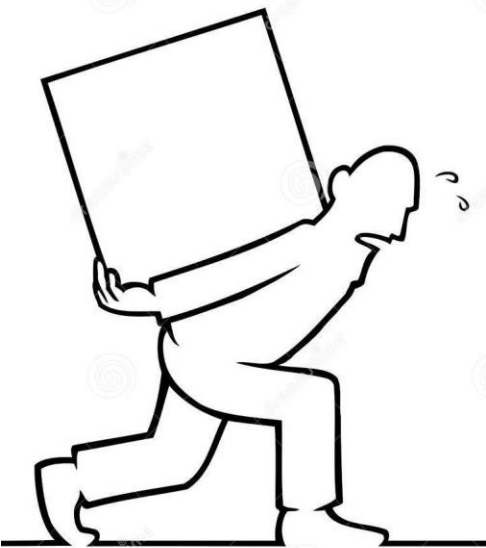
Jnanjit Narjinary,
General Secretary,
Calcutta Bodo Association.



बिबान

बिद्युत बसुमाता
महाकालगुडि

बिबान रुजूनै रुजूनै
ममेंहाबबाय नामा
...रावखौबो दादुसि
निमाहा होदो, आरो'
दानो थां बाजै रानीनि डेरायाव
खुरैथामसो लों खर'नि जुमाई
ग्रद ग्रद,
एदाव जंखाय, आरो मिनिग्लां-
बाजैजों,
बिबान रूजुननो
बोलो थ' मोनफिनगोन दा...



रावबो मोनथिया

बिद्युत बसुमाता
महाकालगुड़ि

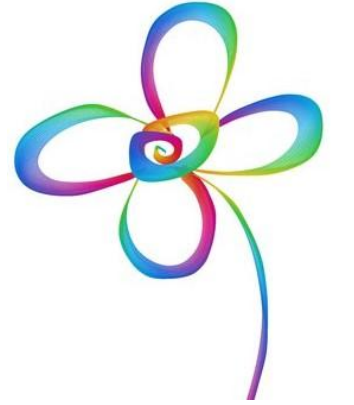
सोहोर गेजेराव मोनसे मुसुखा दं
सासे मुंदांखा सुबुनि-
बिथानि जनम सान आरो
रुंसारी जानायनि सानाव
लोहर लोहर बयबो फैनानै
माला गानहोयो, मान होयो-
नाथाय सासे फागली आईमावसाया
खानाय आईलि जाईलि फैनानै,
मुजुफबफैयो मुसुखाखौ,
खुबैय मोसौखि दाखा, मोखां थांखिनानै,
आरो दसेयैनो गाबो, आरो दसेयैनो मिनियो,
ग्लाब ग्लाब...
बै फागली आईमावसाया रावबो नडा
मुंदांखा मुसुखानिनो थालांनाय बिसि,
नाथाय बेनि मा जादों,
रावबो मोनथिया...



जेब्लासिम

बिद्युत बसुमाता
महाकालगुडि

उनथिं नायालाबा
थाबायबाय थानायावनो
दिसा मोनाखै-
मालाबानो गेथेबोगासिनो दं,
उननि लामा,
नाथाय जिंगासिनांगौ जेबो गैय,
मानोना आंहा, फिननो
गोसो गैखाया;
औरैनोब्लाबो,
दिनैसिम आंखो रावबो
गाबन्निफेराखै, उननिफ्राय...
गेथेयोब्लाबो गेथेथों, उननि लामा
थेवबो आं थाबायगोन,
थाबायलांबाय थागोन
जेब्लासिम लामाया जोबा...



INSPIRATION AND DETERMINATION

-Aniket Karjee
Class-vi,
Ram Mohan Mission High School

One day, like every other day a beggar was sitting in a railway station. He stood up carrying a bowl in his hand to beg for money. Many pencils and pens were there in the bowl which he had collected from scraps and other places. He would pick those pencils whenever he saw them.

He was walking slowly, shaking the bowl which was making noise to attract people. Very few people gave him money. Though, he earned very little money and most of the times he slept without even eating but today, he earned about five to ten rupees which could serve him a good tea. So he collected the money from the bowl and walked towards the tea shop. From there he drank a cup of hot tea and ate some biscuits heartily. After some time he again went to beg. He waited for someone to give him money. But after a long time a man dressed in a suit threw some coins into the bowl and went. He again came back and picked up some pencils and said “you are a good businessman.” Those words hit the beggar like a lightning. He said to himself “why am I begging here?” .So he put the bowl down.. his mind was agitated at his own question and the answer that the voice inside his head provided him made him shiver and flex his muscles at the same time.

After many years of hard-work, now he is a businessman with his own company. He lived in big houses, travelled by cars and had a luxurious lifestyle. One day, in a business party he saw that man who gave him the idea to become a businessman. He went near the man and said “Nice to meet you again and thank you. Because of you I have a big name now.” “But I am meeting you for the first time sir!” answered the man. “I was once a beggar, begging on a railway station and you gave me the idea to become a businessman like you.” “So you are that person?!” he exclaimed in surprise. Then they both laughed and hugged.



Film review on *Bodoni Greesti- the lesson of life*

A. Narjinary

Congratulations to the Bodos of West Bengal for we now have a movie which we can claim to be the first movie produced and directed, with a crew of actors belonging to Bengal. It is an achievement on its own for it represents our identity and culture which has somewhat suffered a backlash due to our own unconsciousness. But someone has finally opened his eyes and we find a consciousness of the Bodo identity through *Bodoni Greesti- the lesson of life*. It is a Gwather Films production directed by Bidesh Suba and written by Satyendranath Mandal and late Paresh Chandra Mandal. The cast consists of Santi Champramary, Nemesh Suba, Shila Suba, Bidesh Suba, Gloria Saha, Atanu Suba, Lankeshwar Suba, Rani Basumata, Lata Mondal, Babita Mondal, Bhagyashri Brahma, Uttam Suba, Sonali Narjinary, Rathin Suba, and Babusingh Narjinary.

The story revolves around the rural families of Neolai Gwra (Lankeshwar Suba) of Bonkogram, Dalsing Mahajan (Rathin Suba) of Satali and Sangrama (Babusingh Narjinary), a government employee. Neolai Gwra has a family of four wives- Dhansri (Rani Basumata), Sampri (Lata Mondal), Maibari (Babita Mondal), Rupti (Bhagyasri Brahma) and a son Jaising (Nemesh Suba). Alaisri (Santi Champramary) is Jaising's wife and Dalsing's daughter. Dalsing's family is more balanced for he is monogamous with a daughter and a son, Udang (Bidesh Suba), a chief executive of Bharat Electronics. The main plot of the story is based on the dynamics of marriage which has been shown through the contrasts of bigamy and monogamy for the older generation, while the younger generation deals with the complications of a monogamy faced by Jaising- Alaisri and Udang-Rongjali based on their rural and modern ideologies. The main plot also focuses on the the political cunning games of Rupti, the jealous mother-in-law to humiliate Alaisri again and again. Rupti wins the game and the abused and humiliated daughter-in-law is ousted from the house and sent back to her father's place at Satali. The subplot consists of a happily married Udang and Rongjali (Shila Suba) Sangrama's elder daughter and an educated modern woman with a degree of Masters in Arts. Sangrama's younger daughter Anjali (Gloria Saha) too stays up ahead in the game

of romance as she pairs up with the brightest young man of her MA final's class, Sanswring (Atanu Suba). Love, romance, high ideals and prosperity blooms over this part of the story while the main plot shows the darker and beaten down situation of the rural aristocracy of the Bodo Gwra and their uneducated children like Jaising. Neolai Gwra dies of shock and grief, for his aristocracy fades, as his vast property gets forcibly converted into government property. Jaising learns a lesson from his mistakes and takes back Alaisri while Udang and Rongjali make it a point to advise Jaising to raise his awareness on land and property matters. The story ends on a happy note of celebration through the rise of the new middle class educated generation of Bodos.

The story is based on very serious and strong social issues of- (1) the evils of bigamy, (2) women's education and empowerment, (3) the reason behind the end of the rural aristocracy of the Bodos of Bengal, and (4) the conscious presentation of the ethnic culture that marks us as different from the rest. These strong social issues are a proof that the film makers are not blind to the problems and a deep awareness is behind the making of the film. But the story and the social issues that could have had been beautifully merged, suffers from an underdeveloped plot. The acting and direction too suffers from inexperience and an improper research that should have had been done before engaging into the making of a film. The issues have not been properly developed through the story and the direction is totally unaware of presenting a story through the perspective of various characters. While, no character is introduced beforehand, making it difficult to follow the scenes and comprehend fully. There are many gaps in the storyline too, for, it is impossible that Neolai Gwra has only one son out of four wives and the family politics that has been stressed over through Alaisri and Rupti is somewhat partially correct. It is expected and a common fact that a family of a rich husband and four wives should offer more family dynamics especially, when we all know that there is always or, must be a huge dispute over property inheritance matters among the siblings. The end of aristocracy of the Bodo zamindars of the past is not only the result of the government policy of the time but also is a reflection of their indifference and unconsciousness towards the future of the coming generation. While, bigamy too has its root in the same

'unconsciousness', but this is on part of both the men and (especially) the women. Modern education has given us a solution to this problem and that is through women empowerment and awareness of the benefits of this empowerment for men too. And the director too tries to uphold this issue but fails miserably as the two empowered women characters Rongjali and Anjali have been given a very minute screen space. Their characters are so flat that even their dialogues do not convey their educated and liberal background. We get to know about them only when the other characters tell us about it or until the director purposefully shows them attending class lectures. This is an absolute injustice to the women characters and again a patriarchal viewpoint unconsciously gets represented in a modern day movie especially when it is trying to preach about women empowerment! These are the issues that are interrelated but due to the inexperience or an undeveloped idea, or both, the direction is unable to relate these issues and weave them into a proper whole fabric. Therefore what happens is, the story and the ideas remain divorced from each other and to convey the messages the characters are forced to give preachy dialogues. Lastly, the dialogues lack spontaneity of the everyday language, stripping it off the naturalness of the scenes. It always rings at the back of our minds that the dialogues are carefully crafted and are falsely accented by the actors mouthing them after the fashion of the '*Ashamarwi Bodo*'. This is a major flaw that the director could have avoided. But, the director chooses to mix the plot with the consciousness of Bodo identity and the common flavour of Bollywood *masala*. The topping of songs and dances, lovey-dovey romance of the couples and the comic relief of Benga, his comically frustrated existence in the subplot along with an overly stressed typical '*saas-bahu*' politics, has created a badly proportioned tasteless concoction of the two, giving us an insufferable indigestion!

However, there are some bright portions in the movie that should not go unmentioned. In spite of a bad plot the story is based on a balanced contrast between the themes and ideas that each couple and the families represent. The bigamous Neolai Gwra and his rural aristocracy is contrasted with the monogamous and middle class families of Dalsing Mahajan and Sangrama. While,

the monogamous couples of Jaising-Alaisri and Udang-Rongjali represent the conventional and modern ideologies of society respectively. And a more modern love story has been shown through Sanswring-Anjali's relationship, contrasted with the comic pair of Benga and Chhamsri. The title of the movie 'Bodoni Greesti' has been rightly justified because the director makes it a point to create every detail possible to present the original rural lifestyle of the people of a '*Bodo gami*' including the use of '*dona*' (containers made out of banana leaves) in one scene and the ethnic dishes of '*shamu kharrwi aarw emphow lathai*' have been mentioned. Rather than the songs and dances, the entertainment doubles up when one of the wives of Neolai Gwra manages to break an earthen pot on his head in a bid to teach him a lesson. Benga too has done an entertaining job with a good comic timing! The songs are good though choreography was not that impressive. It acted as a nice garnish to top off a poorly concocted tale but with all the perfect ingredients. The film had all the flavours of consciousness and entertainment but failed due to a half hearted effort on part of the director. Though, we do expect a more mature work from Mr. Suba in the future.



Still from *Bodoni Greesti-The lesson of life*

Hills

Debasish Brahma

The hills are alive with the sound of music.... To many of us, the mountains hold a magical charm and we eagerly long to spend our holidays in the hills away from the heat and dust of the plains. I was fortunate enough to have spent my formative years as a boarding school boy in Darjeeling then known as the Queen of Hills. To those of us who studied in boarding school, the winter holidays were something to which we expectantly looked forward. It provided students and staff a break from November to February in the winter season.

It was in the year 1974, during one of these winter holiday breaks that I got the opportunity to visit one of the most mystical places nestled in the far wilds of Bhutan, known as the Black Mountain Range. My father was then posted at Pheuntsoling the Gateway to Bhutan as the Zonal Head of the Medical Department. Towards the end of December 1974, my father was assigned by the Directorate of Medical Services to visit the Black Mountain Range where a form of epidemic disease was reported to be spreading. It all happened on the spur of a moment. My father came home for lunch on a normal routine weekday and shared the news with us. He would be proceeding on a week's expedition to the inner most reaches and unexplored terrains in the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and I was to accompany him. The next day was spent by the medical team organizing medicines, equipment, ration and all kinds of provisions necessary for the trip.

On day one, we departed for Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan at 8.00 am in the morning. The team comprised of my father, a Bhutanese local paramedic whose name was Ugyen and Deomani our Nepali driver. We began our journey in a 4 wheel Nissan ambulance. As the journey unfolded, in about an hour, we reached Sorchenbend, a steep climb of six hairpin bends. We were then looking down into the plains of North Bengal with the Toorsa river flowing past Phuentsoling and snaking away into the distant horizon through the Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary. Gradually, the plains disappeared behind us and we began to feel the cold breeze flowing in through the windows. It was a six hour long drive through thick deciduous forest in the lower reaches intercepted by fresh springs and gushing waterfalls at several points. As the vehicle began its climb into higher altitude of five thousand feet, the pine trees began to emerge and we were at times looking down over two thousand feet deep gorges. Deomani, the man at the wheels was absolutely at home negotiating the steep and dangerous bends with calm and confidence. At about noon, we began the descent from Chepcha at an altitude of around nine thousand feet towards the valley of Thimphu. We finally reached Thimphu around 2.00 pm. The town was nestled in a beautiful valley sprawling with apple orchards and barren paddy fields covered by snow. The valley was surrounded by rocky snow peaked mountains partially covered by dense conifer trees. As we wound our way into the township, the most striking view was that of the Tashichho Dzong (the palace of the King of Bhutan) standing on the Western Bank of the Thimphu river.

On day two, we headed towards Tongsa. Tongsa is approximately 200kms from Thimphu. The drive to Tongsa was long and arduous. Only the initial stretch upto Wangdue Phodrang was metallic. We started our journey around 6.30 am. accompanied by an Officer of the Royal Body Guards. The drive from Thimphu to Wangdue Phodrang was very scenic. The weather was cold but it was bright and sunny with deep blue sky. We wound our way up along the blue mountainsides filled with pine woods. After sometime, probably an hour's drive later, we found ourselves surrounded on both

sides of the road with rhododendron trees. The hills were covered with a sea of red rhododendron flowers in full bloom. We reached Wangdue Phodrang about three hours later. The scene which emerged before us was amazing. We were surrounded by hills as the vehicle cruised along, and suddenly with one long winding turn we were looking down upon miles of flat green land with a river calmly meandering its way. The road after Wangdue Phodrang became more and more difficult as it was rough terrain. We continued the journey towards Tongsa with breaks at several points. We came across herds of Yak along the way. As we climbed towards Pele La Pass, an altitude of over 10,000 feet above sea level, it was snowing heavily. The road became muddy and was laden with thick layers of snow.



Wangdue Phodrang

The vehicle was now on four wheel drive. At one point of time on the dirt road track, as the driver was negotiating a bend, the vehicle began skidding and we were heading towards the edge of the road. I was panic stricken and froze in my seat. My father took charge and instructed the driver to hold the steering firmly and not to slam the brakes. The vehicle came to a halt and we all heaved a sigh of relief! That was my first learning lesson in hill driving. During the drive we were also lucky to get a glimpse of the snow capped Mount Jumolhari standing majestically over 23,000 feet above sea level. We reached Tongsa in the evening after a long and tiring journey. We spent the night in a Government Guest House at Tongsa.

Next morning we woke up relaxed and refreshed. While my father had a brief meeting with the medical team after breakfast, I took a walk around the rest house to enjoy the view of Tongsa. It appeared more like a village than a fully developed town. The most spectacular view of Tongsa was the Tongsa Dzong, the palace perched upon a hillside with a sheer drop to the southern edge. I gazed at it in awe, wondering how such a beautiful piece of architecture was constructed in the 16th century. It was time to move on towards the interiors of Black Mountain. The last leg of the journey on motorable road was an hour's drive down to the mountainside to Mangde Chu river. We reached the end of the road alongside the rapidly flowing river. We were greeted by two Bhutanese porters at the river point. There were two others who waited with their mules across the river.

The only lifeline that existed at that point of time between the villages in the interiors of the Black Mountain Ranges and Tongsa was a hanging rope bridge. This was the beginning of our two day trek into the Black Mountain Range.

The luggage was carried in turns by the porters across the hanging rope bridge. The job seemed so effortless and easy for them. We followed in turns to cross the hanging rope bridge one by one. The bridge was about 50 yards in length. It was my turn and I took the initial steps on the wooden planks. The bridge swayed from side to side as I took each step. The roar of the river was deafening and I could barely hear the shouts of the porters and the Royal Body Guard who tried to give me confidence and guide me forward. On reaching towards the middle, I was panic stricken because I

found myself gaping through several broken planks into the green foaming rapids thundering down on the rocks. I was so scared that I froze and glanced quickly ahead of me and behind trying to gauge which was the shorter route to safety. It was a momentary lapse of concentration. I looked towards Ugyen the paramedic ahead of me beckoning me. Somehow, I pulled myself together by trying to ignore the frightening noise and sight of the treacherous river below. The crossover seemed the longest and most challenging journey of my life even though it may have been only 50 yards of plank walking.

The next hair raising experience was when we had to pass over a rocky gorge after about a trek of two hours. There were rocks stretching from a few hundred feet above us down to at-least a thousand feet or more below. The path to cross over was barely five feet across in width. There were hoards of beehives above us and we were confronted by a swarm of giant bees which refused to let us pass. We patiently waited for the bees to settle down. It took sometime till the swarm of bees flew up high into their hives. Few of these giant bees hovered around. We decided to cover ourselves with our overcoats and take protection under some blankets and run across the cliffs till we left the bees behind. The option was to choose between an onslaught of giant bees or leap down the cliffs. We ran for our lives and got away from the bees. The porters managed the mules and we moved on. We trekked throughout the day sometimes engaged in conversation and at times in silence deeply engaged in the natural beauty which engulfed us.

We had numerous interesting experiences along the trek. The beauty of the journey was the physical endurance we underwent, people we met and places we traversed to reach the final destination.

We are now in the 21st century when the landscape in the regions we visited in Bhutan would have undergone a sea change. I am apprehensive that if we ever made a trip to those places again, the experience would not be as exhilarating as it was about 38 years ago. That experience of my lifetime was a gift from God!



Trongsa-dzong

Calcutta Bodo Association Picnic 2016

