



Assam Foundation of North America, Inc.

President : Satyajit Nath, Secretary: Pinky Pradhan, Treasurer : Pallav Saikia

Address: 2265 Valentano Drive, Dublin, CA 94568

Phone: (415) 297 8319

Email: assamfoundation@yahoo.com Web: www.assamfoundation.net

A non-profit organization registered under section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code with Tax I.D # 61-0994468

Welcome to the April 2013 issue of the AFNA Newsletter

We the people at AFNA greatly appreciate all our donors whose generous contributions make AFNA's work possible. Thank you all and God bless!

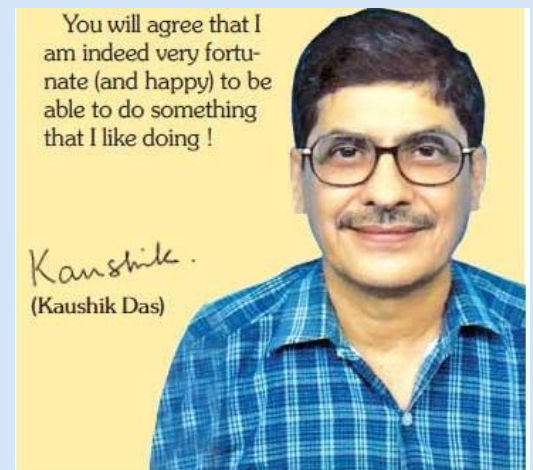
We AFNA family also mourn the untimely passing away of Mr. Kaushik Das, the founder of Atma Nirbhar ek Challenge. This issue of the Newsletter is dedicated in fond memory of Kaushik Das.

A Sunset on a January Morning:

Assam Foundation of North America (AFNA) lost one of its most trusted friend and partner in Assam with the. We had a very close relationship with Mr. Das, not only with the activities around Atma Nirbhar and Spreading Sunshine but also with several other projects of AFNA that he provided his support for – like Support a child, Soles for Tots, Guwahati Walk and Run, Friends magazine and the list goes on.

Our relationship extended far beyond these activities as several of our members developed close friendship with him over the years and felt a sense of fulfillment for being able to be associated with these projects that he almost single-handedly managed with such humility and a selfless attitude. Thus, he not only gave a dignified livelihood to the disabled people thru Atma Nirbhar but also helped able bodies like the volunteers of AFNA to lead a meaningful life by opening up and facilitating avenues to help the disabled people, underprivileged children and to spread joy and happiness among them through the Spreading Sunshine initiative. With his demise on the fateful morning of January 17th, he has left us all in darkness, to fulfill so many of his dreams and plans that he had shared with his friends and well-wishers.

Along with his relatives, the Atma Nirbhar family and numerous friends and well-wishers around the world we deeply mourn his untimely demise and pray that his soul rest in eternal peace. May the memories of the cherished moments that we spent with him, talking to him or reading his inspiring emails give us the strength to bear this insurmountable loss and guide us to work towards carrying on his mission to give a dignified life to the disabled and the underprivileged.





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The 'Atma Nirbhar – Ek Challenge' family on the 16th Foundation Day of the Organization (01. 05. 2012). In October, 2012, they have 41 disabled work persons 21 of them are the 'primary bread earners' in their families. It is a great achievement for them as they have transformed themselves from liabilities to assets for their families.

Kaushik Das: The life story of a Social Entrepreneur

Compiled by Ankur Bora

The world is enriched with unique individuals who are endowed with powerful ideas to cause a positive social change as well as the creativity, skills, determination and drive to transform that idea into reality. Behind almost all important social innovations are social entrepreneurs—people with new ideas for solving problems, who build new kinds of organizations to implement those ideas, who will not take 'no' for an answer, and who will not give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they possibly can.

It takes a special person to leave behind a 22 year long successful career as an industry expert and branch into the role of a Good Samaritan attempting to develop a germ of an idea into a noble venture. It happened in May 1996 when late Kaushik Das got with a small group of like-minded friends and well-wishers, and started Atma Nirbhar – Ek Challenge. Kaushik Das started with a humble beginning and he continued to proceed step by step, over the years, to pursue his visions on an ever increasing scale. His job in tea industry also helped him



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tremendously, by acquiring the knowledge, skills and contacts that enabled him to branch out on his own and improve upon. Kaushik Das also had the foresight to enlist advice from well-connected and experienced allies about how to raise funding, think through strategy, and build a team of supporters and advisors.

Atma Nirbhar is an economic rehabilitation and empowerment project for the disabled giving them an opportunity to work with dignity and to become self-reliant. The project generates income, wherein tea and spices are packaged and marketed under the brand name 'Nav Jeevan' (New Life). This urge to help did not happen overnight. Mr. Das an active Rotarian since 1985, expressed his thoughts in "Outlook India" the following way "During my days in the tea industry, I had everything going for me but the mental satisfaction was missing. Although I did work with the Rotary Club, I always wanted to do something practical which would directly benefit the less fortunate ones. Fortunately by 1996, I was financially secure enough to take the plunge."



On behalf of the disabled, receiving the Helen Keller NCPEDP Award in 2000, for promoting employment of the disabled.

The guiding principles for Atma Nirbhar are simplicity, respect and dignity of labor. The goal is to give the disabled an opportunity to be economically self-reliant and be integrated with normal society. As "Outlook India" commented, Kaushik Das's unique venture for the less fortunate blends with Gandhian simplicity, a tea taster's specialized and professional management skills.

The National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People awarded Kaushik Das with the "Shell Helen Keller Award" in the year 2000 for his tireless and inspiring work for the disabled. Mr Das is also instrumental in starting "the umbrella advocacy group" called Pragati - Confederation for the Disabled in Assam, which brings together N.G.O.s and individuals as its members.



'Spreading Sunshine' Project: Caring and sharing with the marginalized, sharing a happy moment with the less privileged children in an institution for girls.

Since Atma Nirbhar was designed to provide intensive support to its beneficiaries, late Das was not satisfied merely with a small number of beneficiaries. Being the social entrepreneur that he is, he started the Punya project in 1998 to further help residents of social welfare institutions in a more compassionate and humane level. In his own words, "Most people living in residential social welfare institutions feel very lonely and depressed because they feel cut-off / isolated from active society environment, confined within the four walls of their institutions. It is a sad reality that after a while even their own relatives stop visiting them." Herein, Kaushik Das and volunteers from his



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organization would visit these institutions spending quality time with its residents, carrying delicious snacks and sharing with the them. These visits would always be anticipated with much enthusiasm, as it was done at a very personal level, honoring the privacy and sentiments of these thriving individuals. By consciously avoiding any fanfare and sheltering them media glare, the volunteers give their full focus and attention on the needs and necessities of these residents. The requirements were mostly educational writing materials, school bags, school uniforms, clothes, footwear, recreational materials etc. and the volunteers tried to mobilize and channelize such items from the public.

“Punya” first changed its name to “Reaching Out”, and in 2008, became “Spreading Sunshine”. The primary objective of ‘Spreading Sunshine’ is to build ‘bridges’ between the civil society, and pockets of societal neglect and marginalized people. It is to improve the quality of life of the disadvantaged and marginalized people living in residential social welfare institutions, by providing them with ‘outside assistance’, mobilized from the giving public. Through this program many residential social welfare institutions have received school bags, notebooks, clothes, footwear, furniture, fans etc. In the states of Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland, over 13 residential institutions and more than 850 residents have benefitted from this project. This project has also received support from Assam Foundation of North America (AFNA) among others.



Milon Chakrabarty burnt both her hands / fists when she was 7 years old: all her fingers are fused together into rolled fists. At the age of 50, this is her first job. Shibu (in blue shirt) is speech and hearing impaired, and so is his wife. Atma Nirbhar is generating 43% of the working resources internally through this type of employment.

For those who may ask what they can do to honor Kaushik Das, we simply request that you honor his example of service, accomplishment and modesty. While we mourn the loss of a great man we also celebrate his remarkable life and hope that it serves as an example to our youth to work hard to achieve their dreams, and play their own part in building a better world. The best way to honor Kaushik Das is to emulate his exemplary life. Let’s celebrate this story of triumph of an individual’s: how seemingly ordinary effort, over time, has produced extraordinary results. Let’s encourage more people to try their hand at social entrepreneurship; which would unleash enormous potential, produce great benefits for society and much individual happiness.



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Message from the Managing Committee, “ATMA NIRBHAR – EK CHALLENGE”:

All Friends/Donors/Well Wishers,

It is with profound grief and sorrow, we inform you that Kaushik Das, the Founder of Atma Nirbhar - Ek Challenge left for the heavenly abode on 17th January, 2013 in a tragic accident. We have not only lost a son, brother and friend but most of all a fine human being and dedicated social worker. The light has gone, but the rays will linger on, and now it is for all of us to shoulder the responsibility and put in our collective efforts to keep the light of Atma Nirbhar- Ek Challenge glowing.

Since the tragic demise, the Managing Committee met on 25th January 2013 under the Chairmanship of Mr Bhaskar Barua IAS Retd. The entire day to day operations on overall basis was reviewed and important decisions were taken for smooth and uninterrupted functioning of the society. The Managing Committee would like to assure all the donors, well-wishers and those, associated with the organisation that the good work being done by Atma Nirbhar-Ek Challenge would continue with the same spirit and zeal as was carried out by Kaushik Das.

In this respect, the members, beneficiaries and workers of Atma Nirbhar - Ek Challenge seek your sincere co-operation and support- financial or otherwise, as you have always extended ,to keep the good and difficult work of the organisation going. We are confident that our collective endeavour will not only strengthen the organisation, but we'd be able to encompass in the future more and more of the differently abled persons.

We rely on voluntary contributions from kind and caring well-wishers like you to support the disabled. Your financial assistance will help us to expand our services and enable a few more disabled persons to lead a more fulfilling life.

Gift Options -	
Friends of 'Atma Nirbhar - Ek Challenge'	Rs 100 per month or Rs. 1,200 (\$25) per year.
Sponsoring the Stipend of One Disabled Person for one year (more than one disabled person can be sponsored).	Rs. 2,000 (\$40) per month or Rs. 24,000 (\$500) per year
Sponsoring 1 month's / 1 day's lunch for 32 disabled workers.	Rs. 8,000 (\$160) per month / Rs 1,000 (\$20) for 1 day (special lunch).
Donate to the General / Corpus fund to develop the Organisation.	Any amount you wish.



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You may contribute directly to

ATMA NIRBHAR – EK CHALLENGE,

'MAMATA', 120 Gopinath Nagar, Guwahati –781016. INDIA.

Email ; atmanirbhar@sify.com PH ; 91 0361 2471 668

(* 80 G of the IT Act tax exemption receipts will be provided.)

For North America residents, you may make checks payable to **AFNA** and mark Atma Nirbhar. You may also explore online payment option at AFNA website at

www.assamfoundation.net

Please send your contributions to following **address:**

Pallav Saikia (AFNA)

2265 Valentano Drive,

Dublin, CA 94568

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