

August 2016

NEWSLETTER



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## Assam Foundation of North America

### Help AFNA with our Assam Flood Relief Campaign

Half way through the rainy season of 2016 in Assam, flood in the Brahmaputra valley have caused massive disruptions to people's lives and properties. During the month of July, nearly 2 million people were affected. The flood also have devastated the Kaziranga National Park killing wild lives and displacing thousands of animals from their natural habitats.

While AFNA is not directly involved in current flood relief operations, we are working hard to find how we can help to have long-term solutions to the annual flood problems in Assam. The flood situation is getting worst every year. We solicit your generous donation as we identify the opportunities to make a lasting impact. If you are looking to extend immediate help for the flood-affected population, we recommend the following:

**Immediate relief work:** There are a lot of relief works organized at various level. Notable ones:

- **AID** is already raising and disbursing funds to the tune of \$40,000 through various NGOs in India: RVC, Goonj, Jhai Foundation & Center for Equity Studies etc. Interested folks, especially with desire to take benefit of Tax breaks can donate to AID relief fund. Please mention in the pledge that this is specifically for Assam Floods
- **Kalaguru Artiste Foundation** with Zubeen Garg's appeal has made a good traction on relief work. As it is yet to receive FCRA clearance for organizational donations from USA, AFNA is not raising money for this currently. However, many of us in US are trying at personal level to raise fund for the Foundation. You can donate at your personal capacity in one of such at <https://www.gofundme.com/2hf3ywdf>
- **Fund Raising by Omkara in Sacramento, CA for Assam Floods:** The music band Omkara from its Folsom & Austin chapters are going to perform an live on Aug 27th and part of its proceeds will be donated to AFNA for Assam Floods. We invite all our friends to this [event](#). Please attend the event and help them raise funds for AFNA.

**Long-term rehabilitation work & AFNA:** We are just in the mid of the flood season, and once the flood recedes, people need help to regain normal life. And we need to see how to avoid this disaster in first place. AFNA is looking to tie up with a dedicated NGO to focus on few villages to make sure the government initiatives to prevent floods are implemented properly (embankment, drainage etc.), help kick off livelihood & education and other related micro projects to build capacity for communities to withstand flood like adding rescue boats, emergency drills etc. Please donate generously to AFNA Disaster Rehabilitation fund to help us run this initiative successfully.

You can go to our website and donate for flood relief initiative by AFNA at <http://assamfoundation.net/>.

#### Get Involved:

Monthly volunteer call:  
First Sunday, every month,  
10am - 11am PT  
Dial in: 641-7153272  
Access Code - 457920#

*We need active volunteers to run our projects.  
Please reach out to us (contacts above) or join  
our monthly volunteer meetings to know more.*

[Learn about AFNA](#)

#### Donate:

By check (Pay to: AFNA)  
Mailing address:  
SARFARAZ TAHER,  
TREASURER, AFNA  
4391 MCMENEMY ST  
VADNAIS HEIGHTS, MN 55127

# A SUCCESS STORY OF AFNA'S EARLIEST ASSISTANCE

## A letter by AFNA's first president Atul C. Sarma

Dear volunteers,

Soon after IRS approval as a not-for-profit organization, during the early 1980s, AFNA offered small financial assistances to **Guwahati Orphanage, Jonaki Sanga (Jorhat), Shankar Netralaya (Nagoan), Jakhlabandha Weaver Society (Nagoan) and Samalabori Village (Udalguri)**. The fund for the contribution came from personal donations and general AFNA fund. After almost 33 years, today (August 7, 2016) I have received an invitation for AFNA to join in the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Samalabori Primary School to be solemnized from January 26 - 28, 2017. The tale of the Samalabori village and its school exemplifies what a little charity, like those being donated through AFNA, can do for impoverished rural people of Assam.

During the late 19th century, a Maimonshingia Raja (Zaminder from Dacca, Bengal) made tea garden under the British patronage near Kalaigaon Township in today's Udalguri district, next to the Nowa Nadi Reserve Forest. Kalagaon township itself was an outpost created by the British East India Company to develop the tea gardens on the foothill area of the Bhutan Kingdom connected with a so called McKengie Road between then riverport Kharupetia and Paneri Tea growing area; Kalaigaon was midway between the two. After a few decades the heavy flooding of Nowa Nadi, Nonoi Nadi and other Brahmaputra tributaries destroyed the tea plantation converting the area, a part of the Nowa Nadi reserve forest, the dwellers of which were elephant herds, tigers, boars, bears and deer. Unfortunately the laborers of the garden left behind without land, compensation or rehabilitation. Over a period of more than half century, those Santali families (now Adeem Adhibashi) remained as jungle inhabitants around the ruins of the tea-garden bungalow, now developed as the Samalabori Village.

In the early 1950s when my eldest brother returned from Mahatma Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram, he wanted to get involved in social services like developing such identity-loss jungle-living people. As a young school student and later as a college student, whenever I could spare time, I went to live with my brother to experience the first taste of social service. I recall those days how the herds of elephant, tiger, bear, deer and boar routinely roaming around the village even at daytime.

At the beginning, Samalabori village was a disaster: men and women all took moonshine and drugs; children did not have a school to go to, and no decent home to live in. The nearest school was at 2 to 3 miles away; and the road was simply a path inside the jungle full of animals. Occasionally, wild animals killed people, cattle and goats.

Initially, nobody in the village wanted any change nor they accepted outsiders like us who wanted to help. One of them was Dhaniram Rajak, who first accepted the idea of cleaning the village from mess and drug-abuse and to create livable housing for the villagers. His initiatives started moving and people started accepting a change.

At a later date, the Gandhian organization, Kasturaba Nidhi granted a simple welfare center at Samalabori Village; and the pages of life of the villagers started changing. I could not forget those memories even after I moved to the USA. Occasionally, I used to send a few dollars from my meager earning as a graduate assistant, later on as a post-graduate fellow to my brother for doing something there. The school set up was a thatch house without wall or academic immunities.

In 1980s while AFNA was formally chartered, I proposed a project to AFNA's Board Of Directors for providing assistance to this village. From the small fund we had, we provided them a few hundred dollars for improving the school infrastructure. It contributed to changing the jungle settlement into a normal looking Assamese village. However, it was not the amount of money, it was the compassion that AFNA conveyed to that remote village that inspired the villagers to continue the movement to fight for a better life.

**One of the first students of the school, Mr. Sanjoy Tani, graduated with a MA degree in Economics, worked as a manager at the State Bank of India and he retired now. Recently, his son, Kamal Tanti, earned his Ph.D. degree in Astro-Physics now teaching at NEHU University in Shillong. As of the collective gratitude of the village, now they invite us to join in the golden jubilee celebration of the school.**

If you visit Samalabori now, you will not find the village as I described above. Last January when I visited, I felt that an impossible dream of so many have become a reality and thought I must share this with you all.

Atul C. Sarma, Louisville, Kentucky

## AFNA's First Essay Competition results

AFNA launched our first ever essay contest this summer as a part of our new initiative "To promote global cooperation and collaboration among young people of Assamese origin to work for the betterment of Assam". This initiative is now called our YLCA: Youth Leadership Circle of AFNA and we have young volunteers working on making this group active among all the young people of Assamese origin in United States. You will hear more from our YLCA group soon. We started our essay contest this year with a decent number of participants and we are very happy to see the inspiring ideas of our youths. The topic for the essay was "How can the North American youth of Assamese origin contribute to Assam?" The winners of the contest were announced at the Assam Convention of North America in Seattle, July 2016. The first place winner is Krishangi Kaushik from Michigan and the second place winner is Sabriyah Taher from Minneapolis. The first prize was \$250 and the second prize was \$150. We want to congratulate our winners and thank all our participants in the first essay contest organized by AFNA. All of the participating essays including the winning essays will be published on our AFNA website. The first and second place winning essays will be also published in Pronaam's next volume.

Three volunteer judges evaluated all the essays we received independently using the same rubric. We are grateful to our wonderful judges for their hard work to evaluate our essays. AFNA will continue this tradition of annual essay contest and if you would like your young ones to participate next time keep an eye for our next contest that will be announced in early summer of 2017.

## Summary of AFNA's participation at Assam Convention, 2016 at Seattle

AFNA had a productive presence in the Assam convention in July. The AFNA booth was very well received at the convention and we were able to recruit about 30 new volunteers/donors at the convention. We received about \$4000 donation from our donors and we made some good connections that will help us continue our fund raising for this year. Among our many volunteers who attended Assam convention we had Pallav Saikia, Lipika Deka and Krishanu Kaushik represent AFNA officially. Our General Body meeting was very well attended and several productive conversations took place. We were inspired to see the passion in many to help promote AFNA's work. We look forward to working with our new volunteers and donors. Our new officers (President, Treasurer, Secretary) were elected during the BOD for coming year, all the officers are continuing members Pallav Saikia as president, Sarfaraz Taher as Treasurer and Dr. Lipika Deka as Secretary.

## Volunteering opportunities for AFNA

As AFNA takes on new projects and works hard to continue our current projects and expand our work to have bigger impact we need immediate help from our new and continued volunteers. Our dedicated volunteers are working very hard, but it is getting challenging to make everything work on time with our current number of active volunteers. We need you to come forward and help us with some of our immediate needs:

- Help with bookkeeping: This will be working as a team with our treasurer to work on our financial bookkeeping. We need at least two more volunteers here.
- Website/Newsletter: We need couple of volunteers to help with our newsletter team and tech team.
- Projects exploration and stewardship: We need at least three or four volunteers to take active role in helping run our projects and doing project evaluation, project reports and starting off new projects.

If you are interested please email [lipika.deka@gmail.com](mailto:lipika.deka@gmail.com) and we will get back to you with more details. Even if you can volunteer couple of hours a week will be a great help for our hard working team.

### Volunteer Email DL:

Subscribes to  
[afna-vols@freelists.org](mailto:afna-vols@freelists.org)  
at  
[freelists.org/list/afna-vols](http://freelists.org/list/afna-vols)

### Newsletter team

Editors: Dr. Lipika Deka, Chandan Talukdar

### Contributors of articles in order

Flood Relief: Pallav Saikia  
A success story: Atul C Sarma



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