

## Asom Surjya Kirtinath Hazarika: The tale of a journalist with an indomitable entity

By Bhuban Lahkar

A sprawling, big Assam type house, cement plastered, polished floors, tin roof and supported by heavy reinforced concrete posts. A long veranda enclosed to the front of the house and two boys aged thirteen or fourteen years were engaged in conversation. "Examinations are just around the corner, how is your studies?" asked one of them. "Doing my studies alright should do well in the exams. How are you doing?" spoke the other. "I am doing fine but somehow do not feel too well about the situation, can not concentrate well in studies" replied the other in a negative tone. "Why so?" asked his classmate. Suddenly an aeroplane flew over them with a heavy noise. Th, aeroplane that flew very low left behind a trail of heavy smoke. "This is the reason." The boy said pointing at the sky over which the aeroplane just flew. "What do you mean exactly?"

"I mean the British rule, it is a war situation all over the world. Even Assam along with the rest of India has been compelled to join the war. Independence movement too is still on." "Yes, these things disturb me too. But my father and the rest of my family do not allow me to take part in these discussions. They say it our duty top pass our matriculation examination first."

They talked for quite some time. The verandah where they were sitting and having a conversation was that of Golaghat Government Bezbaruah High School. The chowkidar of the school had just started locking up the classrooms after closing doors and windows. The two friends packed up their books and left the school. It was during the year 1938, one of the two boys talking in the verandah of the school was Kirtinath Hazarika who set a new standard of journalism in Assam and the other was Bholā Hazarika, Kirtinath Hazarika's cousin, and organizer of All Assorts Moina Panjat, a Gandhite, volunteer and a freedom fighter. The prime character of this write up is a renowned journalist, president of the 54th session of Asom Sahitya Sabha and recipient of Srimanta Sankardev award, Asom Surjya Kirtinath Hazarika. Renowned and revered journalist 40 had carved a niche for himself in the minds of co-

countrymen and founder editor of the popular daily Dainik Aram was born on 22nd July 1925 at Amolapatty of Golaghat town to Haranath Hazarika and Krishna Hazarika. Born in a family of freedom fighter, Hazarika's primary education started in Practicing School, Jorhat and later he passed his matriculation examination from Golaghat Government Bezbaruah School in 1st Division. He passed his intermediate examination in science from Cotton College in the year 1942 and obtained his graduate degree in science from Murarichand College Sylhet (Now in Bangladesh). He had the opportunity of coming close to the lives of both Brahmaputra Valley and Surma Valley and that made his horizon broader. He came into close contact with cross sections of people with varied culture, economic status, and geographical situation. Although he was a student of science his mind was attracted towards literature. While a student at Golaghat Bezbaruah Government School, Kirtinath with the assistance of another like-minded student who had an inclination towards literature started a handwritten journal. He was co-editor of the journal. This effort of two young students was highly acclaimed by both teachers and students alike. Kirtinath Hazarika who also had interest in sports was a recognized badminton player who won trophies as champion in both singles and doubles. He played badminton in college days and also during his later life. Kirtinath Hazarika made a mark as an actor too. He was a successful stage actor. There was a time when acting was taboo for women and interestingly enough Kirtinath at times had to take up roles of female characters. The Assamese language is a treasure house of gems with a huge collection of unique words, idioms, and sayings. Kirtinath Hazarika made it a practice to collect these valuable words, idioms, expressions, and sayings since his days and in later life as a writer and journalist applied them in his writings in an appropriate and suitable manner to make his writings superb. As the editor of Dainik Asom, he used special words and adopted an attractive style of expression which made his written matters touch the minds of the readers. To illustrate the point an example or two has been cited as follows. For example, in case of transportation of illicit liquor to escape from the vigilance of excise personnel, there was a time when liquor of this category was filled inside the football bladder. Polythene pouch pack was not in use those days. In the newspaper edited by him, there were regular write-ups highlighting harm caused by illicit liquor to alert the concerned authorities to take necessary steps to curb the menace.

Here Kirtinath Hazarika humorously described the football bladder filled with illicit as 'modern pumpkins'.

To cite another example; It often occurs that there are cross-fires between police-military and dacoits or lawbreakers. In certain cases, the shots hit the target and at times the target missed completely. Again on certain occasions, it so happens that the shot touches the target and deflects away. The newspaper Dainik Asem described this phenomenon as "the bullet licking the target". In later years many other newspaper and news readers of the electronic media appeared to have borrowed this expression. There are a lot of other such original expression innovated by Kirtinath Hazarika.

Assam Surjya Kirtinath Hazarika set a new trend in Assam's Journalism arena. He started the tradition of non-conformist and fearless journalism. In the matter of creative literature too Kirtinath has a notable contribution. Many of his writings are of satirical flavour. Besides that, Kirtinath Hazarika has contributed to the Assamese literary world with his translated works. He has translated many of the worlds greatest literary works into Assamese. Notable among them is Russian novel Rainbow written by Stalin award winner *Banda Visilieska* which was published by himself in the year 1946 with the title *Ramdhenu*. It is worth mentioning that the book was printed as the second edition due to its popularity.

Kirtinath Hazarika came to Guwahati In the year 1945 on the lookout for an opening. He came in touch with Tarun Kr. Agarwala who was the major shareholder of the daily Assamese newspaper, *Dainik Asomiya*. Tarun Agarwala was impressed by Hazarika's writing skill after reading *Ramdhenu* and offered him a job of sub-editor in the daily and his life as a journalist began. Kirtinath Hazarika took a stand against the conspiracy of the British to bring Assam under grouping system during the Independence period. He through the columns of his newspaper Dainik Asomiya vehemently opposed grouping system. The protest of Hazarika should be evaluated properly and there should be a proper research on the matter.

In 1948 Dainik Asomiya faced closure and a new daily named Natun Asomiya was born. Hazarika joined this paper as a Deputy Editor. During this period the issue of reorganization of Indian States came into the forefront. One anti-Assam lobby started working against the interest of Assam, and here again, Hazarika took a revolutionary stand. An article written with a detailed study of the region and its interest by him came to the notice of state re-organization committee and the commission appeared to have taken note of the facts and refrained from doing anything against the interest of the state.

In Assam, Radha Govinda Baruah is known to be an enterprising, daring, dedicated and person to whose credit goes the continuous and ceaseless publication of a multilingual series of newspapers. Likewise, Kirtinath Hazarika's name is synonymous with Assamese journalism and he will be remembered for his bold tenacious and dedicated contribution to the case of Assam's interest. It was during his tenure as the assistant editor of the daily Dainik Asomiya that the entire staff of the paper had gone on a strike at the instigation of a particular political party. Not to be daunted by the strike Hazarika single-handedly did all the editorial work and in addition, he did the job of proofreading. After working for almost 24 hours without rest he saw to it that the paper reached the Readers in the morning. There are very few dedicated persons in society in present days. During his days as Deputy Editor of daily Nature Asomiya, Debakanta Barua who was the editor of the paper remained outside Guwahati because he was a member of parliament, Kirtinath Hazarika had to do all the editorial duties including the writing of editorials regularly. He became the editor of *Natun Asomiya* in 1949 and remained in the job till 1956. He resigned from the job In 1956 due to a difference with the management over publication of a news item in favor of a particular workers Union. His talent as a dramatist and an actor fetched him a job in All India Radio, Guwahati where he started working as a staff artist. He earned a reputation by conducting programmes like "Akonir Mel", "Gaonalia Raij" and programme for NEFA etc. In the meantime, he composed a number of radio plays and acted in them. During that time the All India Radio, Guwahati started broadcasting regional news and Hazarika joined the news department. His voice and clear presentation of news endeared him to the audience. In 1961 he was selected as a class- I officer of Indian Information

Service and was posted in New Delhi and Guwahati as the Asstt. News Editor.

In the year 1965, a new Assamese daily Dainik Asom started being published by the Assam Tribune group of Newspaper. The person who envisioned a new Assam, Singha Purush Radha Govinda Baniah wanted to entrust the responsibility of the editor to Kirtinath Hazarika since the day he conceived the idea of starting a new Assamese daily. Accordingly, Hazarika resigned from his job in the All India Radio and joined as the editor of the new Assamese daily. R. G. assured the newly appointed editor that the management would under no circumstances interfere with the editorial policy of the newspaper. The golden age of Assamese journalism started with the advent of Dainik Asom. R. G. was true to his words and till 31 st December 1986 when Kirtinath Hazarika retired from the great responsibility neither R. G. nor anyone from the management interfered in editorial matters of the newspaper. To Hazarika, Dainik Asom was as dear as his child. Assam had seen stormy days between 1965 and 1986 so far as its social, political, economic and cultural life was concerned. Be it in generating public opinion against the federal structure, language movement, refinery movement and finally foreign nationals movement all these issues had swept the state. During these movements, The Dainik Asom succeeded in peacefully giving rise to public opinion and in offering a successful leadership in fighting for all the justified issues of the state. There was a time when at the behest of the central Government censorship was imposed on the newspapers of Assam. As a protest, Kirtinath Hazarika on many occasions kept the editorial column blank. Later, when the self-censor system was promulgated Dainik Asom refused to abide by this order. As a punitive measure, Assam Tribune group of newspapers were deprived of Government advertisement. Despite that, the Tribune Group stood behind editor Hazarika in opposing censorship and free journalism. There were occasions when there were even threats of life from anonymous telephone callers but Hazarika remained unfazed. During the time of emergency, Dainik Asom had to face a lot of harassments from the Government authorities but the paper came out victorious in the final battle.

Most of his time was devoted to creative literature after he retired from Dainik Asam in 1986. He wrote an autobiography titled *Jibanar Digh Bani*. His translation of Russian novel Rainbow has been mentioned earlier. Another translated work of his *Ahejar Enishar Sadhu* and Gautam Buddha. Translation of the original "The Day the River Spoke" into Assamese *Noi Khone Katha Kowar Dina* and "*Kitapar Bichitra Prithibi*" are two of his translated books. He has written few books for children *Husari E Hao*, *Phutukar Phen* and *Allou Gutu Tallou Gutu* are for the children. *Naradar Diary* is an example of satirical literature. *Akorshan Bikarshan* and 1919 are two of his radio plays. *Bhaluka Gaonwar Kukur* is another collection of short stories with political satire. Dainik Asam has two very popular columns, one is *Kanhudi* and another is *Samayar Sar*. These two columns are said to be very popular and these two columns are noted as a valuable contribution of Kirtinath Hazarika to the newspaper readership.

His editorials in Dainik Asam are recognized as a remarkable contribution to the Assamese life and literature. His selected editorials deserve proper collection and compilation in form of a book. It is learned that before his death he engaged himself in writing a book about his days as a journalist from 1946 to 1986 but nothing is known' bout the venture.

Kirtinath Hazarika was a man of extraordinary personality. His elders used to call him "Arun". Perhaps it was pre-destined that the loving boy Arun from Golaghat would be the Aeon or Sun and would shine in the sky of greater Assam. Dressed in spic and span white dhoti and white kurta and immaculately polished black pump show spoke about the neatness and tidiness that he believed in. Personally, our family had a dose relation with this great person. His loving wife Debala Hazarika (Mahideu) was by our side whenever we were in trouble or distress or in need of guidance and advice. Kirtinath when in office was a stern personality but when in the homely and informal environment he was an accommodating and friendly person. His stem attitude in deciding newsworthiness of the matters received for publication can be judged by an incident when few student leaders approached him with a news item and requested him to publish it in the next day's paper. Hazarika in his usual way told the boys that after going through the item it will be decided whether or not the matter would be published. At that point, one

of the students told him little harshly that the matter must be published and that too on the next day. Hazarika rose from his chair and offered the boy his chair and said: "come sit here, take responsibility of the editor and decide what item should be published and what should not be". The student was dumbfounded and apologized for his audacity by touching his feet and left his office.

Hiteswar Saikia who was the Chief Minister of Assam during the turbulent days of the state had high regards for Kirtinath Hazarika, despite the fact that Hazarika was critical of Saikia's policies and political activities. Hiteswar Saikia would visit Hazarika on every new year's day, pay his respect and interact with him. Once Kirtinath Hazarika pointing at the posse of policemen accompanying him requested Saikia not to bring them along on his next visit. Saikia respected his request and came to meet him with his PSG. and two policemen only on the next occasion. There were times when Hiteswar Saikia would visit him for his advice on certain critical matters. Once I remember seeing an American Consulate General stationed in India visiting his residence and having breakfast with him. However, it was a courtesy visit and nothing political was involved.

Daring and strong was Kirtinath Hazarika's character. He was averse to publicity and avoided meetings or discussion as a matter of rule. He refused many invitations for such meetings. I remember witnessing him taking part in meetings only twice: once in the meeting of Madhya Pub Guwahati Bihu Sanmilani and the other in memory of Singha Punish Radha Govinda Baruah at Nabin Bordoloi Hall where he spoke with emotion about R. G. Kirtinath Hazarika was not someone who would look for recognition of his service or his deeds. But recognition and honor came to him bountifully. His one-time colleague orientologist Sahityacharya Dr. Pramode Ch. Bhattacharya conferred on him the title Asom Surjya in a public meeting attended by a massive crowd in Guwahati. In 1986 he was awarded the Best Asian Statesman of the year by an organization from the Philippines. The same year The Indian Express group of newspapers conferred upon him the B. D. Goenka Award and in 1987 Durga Ratan Trust of Delhi Awarded him the Durga Ratan Award. Next, He was awarded the coveted Shankardev Award for

1987 which was handed to him by the then President of India Sri Ramaswami Venkataraman. Notably the first recipients of this award were Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Kirtinath Hazarika jointly. In 1988 he presided over the Hailakandi Session of the Asom Sahitya Sabha. Prior to that during the Pathsala Session in 1987 Hazarika was felicitated as a renowned journalist. There was an offer from Radha Govinda Baruah Smriti Rakhya Samiti to felicitate him on one occasion but he declined the offer because he was holding the office of editor of Dainik Asam during that period. This is a clear example of his attitude towards his profession. Asom Sahitya Sabha on his death termed him as the chieftain of the nation in crisis.

Debala Hazarika, his wife was a learned lady. She took part regularly in various programmes of the All India Radio. She was also active with Mahila Samitiies and Lekhika Santhas. She was a well known writer and her writings were published in various Assamese newspapers and journals. She had two books to her credit - *Kako Nokobo* and *Bhakut Kut*. As an ideal wife Srimati Debala Hazarika assisted her husband in all matters relating to the household and other important matters besides offering her husband moral support in all his noble deeds. 'Behind every successful' man there is a woman" and Debala Hazarika is the woman behind Kirtinath Hazarika's success.

While in the process of working for Assamese society, literature and culture Kirtinath Hazarika left for his heavenly abode in May 3, 2002. He left behind his dear wife, two sons, daughter-in-law, two grandchildren and many relatives and admirers. People thronged his Chandmari Colony House to have a last glimpse of him - their beloved Assam Surya. His house turned into a shrine. Putting entire Assamese population and many others in different parts of the country and the world in great grief Kirtinath Hazarika's soul left for his heavenly abode. Only his memory remained with his invaluable, literary works.

The seed named Arun sown on the soil of historical Golaghat grew up to be a banyan tree and spread its branches all around the country. Like other illustrious sons of Golaghat namely Nalin Duara, Nityananda



Tamuli and Munin Baruah, Kirtinath Hazarika by his deeds made  
Assam proud. Long Live Asom Surya!

(Translation : Bhaskar Phukan)