

Address by the President Kuladhar Saikia

75th Biennial Session, Sualkuchi

February 2, 2020

Asam Sahitya Sabha



My most respected and learned lovers of literature present in this august gathering, honourable president and members of the Reception Committee, delegates and my most revered former presidents of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, other office bearers and inaugurator of today's session/ meeting.

At the very outset, I offer my veneration to you all and I also seek your blessings. I bow gratefully as you have given me a grand responsibility of a nationalist organisation like Asam Sahitya Sabha.

Today I am reminded of the chilly winter evening when I was holding two crumbled pieces of paper where I had composed two of my poems, where words with variations at frequent intervals were rushing in, in front of my eyes in the backdrop of a faint light. I have continually rearranged those words to make them look like a complete whole, the entire exercise was analogous to mending the machines in a factory workshop. The flavours of the words were encircling me, I was shaking with excitement and was also glad to see those who were reciting their poems one after another with pride on the stage. The cool breeze touched my sweaty forehead while I was waiting for my name to be announced, waiting for my turn to walk up to the dazzling podium and read out the melody of my poems in front of the microphone! I recall my school days in Rangiya, where the Annual session of Asam Sahitya Sabha was in progress, and I was waiting for hours together with a bated breath to recite a self composed poem. I am not sure whether I got an opportunity to recite it or not, but I still remember the beauty and glory of the Sahitya Sabha that glued me towards this august organization since then. I had developed a reverence for those scholars who graced the Sabha from that moment onwards, picturing with great respect how Asam Sahitya Sabha has been like the great and decorated *japi*, encircling language-culture- literature within its huge ambit. Sahitya Sabha has emerged as a nationalistic celebration of the Assamese way of life, a parade integrating multi-cultural ethnic groups and becoming a voice unique to Assam. "Who lives if Assam dies, who dies if Assam lives," has become the all-pervading song and the Asam Sahitya Sabha has assumed the course of our Burha Luit, nourishing the priceless civilisations and cultures of Assam with the waves resonating "Jai Aai Asom".

I am immensely grateful to you as you have given me this unique opportunity of being president of this century old, ever-expanding institution. Let us all take a pledge at such a fitting moment to accept all the challenges which might come in the way of our language-literature-culture scenario into our stride, as we march ahead.

In this pageant, our rich history spanning over hundreds of years has become our prime lure, our inimitable community building process through diverse ethnic groups has become our driving force and our multihued language, culture, art along with our new generation have proved to be the unique assets. In the words of Hem Barua, love for one's own culture is a dazzling reflection of one's patriotism, those without love for language and culture cannot be

a true patriot. Such inspirational words have stirred all of us in the Asam Sahitya Sabha reminding us of Bezbaroa's words—"Not sure if there is anything sweeter than motherland and mother tongue. However far a person stays away from his motherland and mother tongue, however much he speaks against his own language and own land, if his heart is really a human heart, he will have an innate attachment and love for the mother land." Such a call has become the centripetal force for the Assamese diaspora that has resulted in setting up of branches of Asam Sahitya Sabha across countries and continents, an effort to honour Mother Assam. On this auspicious day, we remember and take into our fold all such Assamese who are scattered all across the world, with a zeal to promote literature and mother tongue.

Standing upright amidst the icy cold environment the maple tree is a sight to behold. With every step I take, my feet gets stuck in the snow, the chilly wind piercing through my woollen jacket, I hasten my steps, the snowflakes falling all over me like *sewali* flowers and I stop by at the indication of the stranger passing by. I ask him 'what it was?' Before answering he takes out his tablet computer from his pocket asking me from which country, I hail from. I answer him and in that way our conversation progresses – I then come to know that he belongs to some other Asian country, currently in America as a research scholar in my University. But before parting, he expresses how much he is proud of his own mother tongue, literature and culture.

It is impossible to think that there will be any nation or community on earth which does not take pride in its own language, literature and motherland. What Dr Maheswar Neog had said about Lakshminath Bezbaroa, probably hinted at the same fact, "Though Lakshminath spent a long period of life in Sambalpur, yet his mind and spirit was always connected to the hills and plains of the land of Assam like ducks wading in the water."

The most important aspect for the growth and spread of Assamese literature and language is how to create an enjoyable atmosphere so that one can take pride in speaking, reading and writing Assamese and also can be boastful of the ancient history of Assamese language, a language which can stand on an equal footing with any other ancient language of the country. Nowadays, the most deliberated topic is our falling prey to a feeling of inferiority complex over speaking our mother-tongue correctly, creating our own pieces of literature or reading something in our own language and even while expressing our thoughts and feelings in our own language, we tend to often regret it, as if we intend to give first preference to other influencing languages and thereby sounding death-knell of our own language. This is called *linguicide* or language death or more precisely language shift and we are gradually moving towards such a grim probability. Though we often come across such debates and discussions and though globalisation in current times has reduced the geographical boundary and also has comparatively brought about the impression and fear that Assamese is spoken only by a handful, yet at the same time we have witnessed a parallel wave of young writers being attracted to write in Assamese, publishing Assamese journals online, revisiting age old folk songs. It will be right to say that we are competing with the tsunami of some predatory languages, we have not been able to bring forth the knowledge and glory of our ancient language and culture in the right manner to our young generation; the glorious tradition of our language and culture have gradually disappeared from academic curriculum; and the

brilliant chapters of our history, the celebrated journey of our language and literature have begun to lose its sheen; -- As a result of which the stream of pride, which should have emanated from our history has been weakened. It is a proven fact that Assamese language has been in existence since time immemorial among the pantheon of Indian languages, and scholars and linguists have respectfully accepted the fact too. It can be reiterated that while the rich works of great scholars like Hema Saraswati, Madhav Kandali, Haribar Bipra and Sankaradeva had laid strong foundation of our language and literature, the numerous stone and copper plates have stood witness to our deep ancient past; but despite that, we have not been able to achieve much success in projecting the golden past of our Assamese language in the appropriate manner to the rest of the world. The result is that we have to confront with questions regarding the uniqueness and rich history of our language at the all-India level very often. These have created hurdles in the legitimate recognition of our language; one recent example is that our language has failed to get a space at Unicode. From all these we can infer that the glory of the history of our language must be made accessible to the younger generation while promoting it at the pan-India level in a forceful manner.

To surmise that Sahitya Sabha is solely for literary persons is a misnomer and restricts its vast scope. Instead, this behemoth organization should incorporate all those who respect and love the Assamese language and appreciate the beauty of the language earnestly. That exactly is why Asam Sahitya Sabha should create an enabling atmosphere; under its broad umbrella one can take pride in reading and speaking the language. Our day-to-day affairs should be such that they lead us to witness this all-encompassing entity everywhere around us to ensure the usage and the spread of the language. As a part of this strategy, the nameplates and signboards hung around in offices, shops and business establishments and markets can be written in Assamese so as to create a congenial atmosphere. In this regard, the government departments, in collaboration with with the Asam Sahitya Sabha, can bring business establishments on board on the issue of signboards to be written in the local language and make all concerned understand that such a mutually convenient measure can attract local customers and create a positive impact. It is a matter of regret that Assam Government offices do not use Assamese language for official purposes. We must look into that matter too.

When will we create a nationalistic wave of enthusiasm for reading, writing and speaking in Assamese? Speaking a language, reading and writing are the three inter-related aspects which incorporate many things. Everyday words of different influential languages often keep knocking at the door of our dear home called our language; and without even noticing these words gradually get accepted into our day-to-day speech, thus becoming inseparable from our lives and livelihood. We feel that this trend must continue as those words have occupied a permanent place in our day-to-day life before being accepted in our dictionaries.

In reality, we will have to accept the fact that many such words have already become quite powerful in our language; for example, smart-phone, Internet, computer, Wi-Fi etc. In a scenario of such inevitable intrusion, the magic of these new technology-related words has brought a new glow to our language. We do not like to deny that such words have enriched our language, and we have accepted it as a call of the time. But it is also seen that several transliterated words have become an integral part of our daily life and these have been of

frequent use in our day-to-day life. A few examples are – ‘Garkaptani’ for PWD, ‘Urajahaj’ for aeroplane, ‘bus asthan’ for ‘bus stop’, pekshagriha for auditorium, golakiokaran for globalisation etc. We do not have any hesitation while using them. This is because such words are sweet and simple to understand and resonate well with our language. While importing new English or other language words relating to technology, business and commerce, economy, politics, we must keep in mind that before using those words, we must try to find out their equivalent Assamese words too before those words become part and parcel of our language and get wide acceptance; or else, our liking for English words will result in a language shift and in the process our dear language will begin to lose its sweetness and spread. One can think of constituting a committee of experts to identify such new English words and give them Assamese shape with local flavour for widespread use among our people. A combined group comprising of Sahitya Sabha and other people can focus in this area. In this connection, we refer to Assamese transliteration of English words. There are several examples of the same English word being written in various forms in the Assamese script. But it is imperative that such words are written and used in the same form for universal acceptance. For this we need a well-planned method, which requires the involvement of linguists, scholars, journalists and experts, so that the transliteration of those words can be used with a recognised standard. It may be noted here that while writing the word Assam, some are using ‘X’ in the place of ‘dantya-sa’, and some others are using only ‘s’. We have not been able to sort out the confusion arising out of the use of English letters for denoting talabya-sa, murdhanya-sa, pratham-cha, dwitiya-cha etc in Assamese, but we go on accepting the absence of rule as the rule. This should be analysed in an organized manner, and the need of the hour is to find such rules, fit for our time. Sorting out such problems will help us in translating our books in a positive way. Incorrect and inappropriate words and wrong spellings on signboards of business establishments and government and non-government offices, print advertisements and road- side hoardings have often disturbed those who love the Assamese language. Many a times it seems that these intend to demean our language. We must lay a lot of emphasis on this issue. Otherwise, continuous and repeated use of such incorrect words, expressions and spellings would lead to a situation in which the common people will get accustomed to those incorrect words, making it difficult to undo their habit. All those associated with advertisements must give importance to the fact that messages in advertisements are written in correct language and spellings. Asam Sahitya Sabha can take the lead in this respect by organising relevant workshops by involving people from the media, from the advertising agencies and Public Relations professionals.

We were talking about what necessary steps can be taken in order to create a healthy and dynamic environment towards promoting correct practice of speaking, reading and writing the Assamese language. We must keep in mind the fact that Assamese has been fast emerging as a link language among the several linguistic groups and communities of the hills and plains of Assam, whose respective languages have been experiencing a rapid pace of development. The magnificence of the language and cultures of people speaking Bodo, Karbi, Mishing, Rabha, Dimasa, Tiwa have increased the importance of Assamese as the link language in addition to enriching it by being co-travellers in their journey together. The steadfastness with which Asam Sahitya Sabha has moved forward in the propagation of

Assamese language and culture and at the same time the way it is accompanied by the love and emotions of the culture and literature of the glorious history of other linguistic communities is commendable. We must keep in mind that this promise to go ahead should be continued without a stop and that will be possible if we proceed ahead with an open mind and with a feeling of brotherhood. It is right to acknowledge that Assamese language is a link language with other ethnic and linguistic groups and serve as a mutual ground for interaction. And if this unique position of the Assamese language is invaded upon by some foreign language, it would result in language death of many smaller communities.

At this moment, there is a pressing need of designing a multilingual dictionary with words and meanings in English, Assamese and other ethnic languages of our area that can contribute towards the advancement of language and literature. And that should be easily accessible in print and on line, that is available at the tip of a button and at the same time that can enrich our language. These can be conceived as the Assamese language going forward like the *Borluit* carrying with it the tributaries and distributaries of other regional languages and in the process enriching its flow and contributing it to make a strong unifying force. We know that the main forte of Assamese language is the ethnic diversity, which has been prevalent since time immemorial and we can expect that this fact will render greater acceptance of Assamese language. Writing and engaging in different literary activities in Assamese have already been made easy by the advent of Internet. But will it be not possible to develop applications and software under the canopy of a well-devised platform with spelling and grammatical error checks?

This will encourage the use of the Assamese language in computers increasingly. Moreover, the exercise for speaking and writing Assamese correctly from school standard encourages us to go ahead in this regard. It is often noticed nowadays that during summer holidays, several schools make it a point to organise workshops for learning Mathematics and English. If these kinds of workshops are organised regularly in a well-planned way, where the lessons and training on learning Assamese are imparted in a lively and striking way, then that exercise will definitely attract learners for learning their own language and literature. In these workshops, if teachers of both English and Assamese medium schools are involved, it will help a lot in achieving the goal.

My language is my aspiration. The sweet voice of children carries within it our collective hope. Childhood is a phase that attracts children to listening to stories attentively, which instils in their mind a sense of curiosity, an urge for questioning and a desire for knowing new things. And they intend to have the taste of the world of magic too during this period of childhood. Perhaps it would be difficult to imagine about the moonlit courtyard with the grandmother and her betel stained mouth, autumn wind ruffling her white hair, the soft breeze blowing with the sweet fragrance of flowers from the south-west corner, the beating of the *doba* in the distant *namghar* and children gradually getting drowned in the magic world of grand-mother's stories. This attractive picture is now rare in today's world, which tends to vanish with changing times and changing values. Yet nobody could deny the universal and innate values of story-telling. Several traditional popular usages and values pass on to them by stories. When I was studying in a university of USA, once I had the opportunity to come

across a book called “Throw your tooth on the roof” in a public library. Going through the book, I could realise how the same tradition and belief continues to prevail over more than 150 countries of the world. The themes and subjects in children literature and folk stories have universal values. They contain a lot of social norms and practices as also, various aspects of life. Thus, the magic of the medium of story-telling can impart in children community knowledge and a sense of moral values. In the preface to ‘Burhi Aair Sadhu’, Bezbaroa had pointed to these characteristics and merits of story-telling. As we know, some publishing houses have already taken up the laudable step of publishing children literature. As also, the ‘Kankhowa’ poem which had been written many years ago was based on child’s psychology and such highly relevant children literature highlights the exalted place of this genre in Assamese literature since long. As Hem Barua had rightly stated, the lore of khankhowa and analysis of child’s mind formed the basis of this composition.

Story-telling has the power to attract children to learn their own language; they can be taught about the glorious episodes of our community, thus forming the very basis of their moral values. We have come across such efforts and endeavours in different villages, towns and cities. To bring children close to their own mother tongue, Sahitya Sabha can play a vital role by promoting stories from different ethnic groups of Assam. In this way, the young ones can get accustomed to the beauty and glory of their own language as well as can become a flag bearer of it. Armed with that skill, children can participate in debates and speak in their own language in public forum with clarity and confidence. This exercise would certainly help to cultivate love for their language. Extensive literary activities and workshops in schools and colleges would create an enabling environment. It is a matter of great concern that common proverbs and adages are gradually fading away from our day to day conversations and writing. Gradually we have been drifting apart from the richness of those phrases and idioms and these are getting replaced with words and phrases from other languages. Thus, we need to be aware of this alarming trend. Through elocution and writing competitions, we can familiarise students with the rare treasures of our language. And by doing so, students from different ethnic groups will also get an opportunity to create literature in their own language. It is worth reiterating that we must feel proud to acknowledge the unique existence and gradual development of different ethnic languages and right to promote their own language, we must give up our big-brotherly attitude and be sensitive and compassionate towards their feelings and emotions and give them an opportunity to grow as well as contribute to the continuous growth of Assamese language.

Litterateurs from diverse ethnic background also have helped to enrich Assamese literature with their works and thereby creating an environment for increased readership. It is now time to hasten the process of exchanging literary outputs between the Assamese language and other ethnic languages, as love and respect for one another will strengthen our relationship and establish the Assamese language as a powerful linkage.

There is no doubt that many Hindi, Bengali, Nepali and other writers have been using Assamese language as a medium of expression and have been enthusiastic about it and we also take pride in their contributions; they are also our selfless companions and together we have been scripting our common history. The elements of literature and culture deriving from

those diverse groups have helped in the progress of the present status of Assamese language; and the continuous flow of their artistic and linguistic treasures will also help us to march ahead. Moreover, through the preservation, conservation and spread of the popular usage of folk art, oral literature, unique musical tune, ancient knowledge and wisdom of the communities with small number, will not only give us a loving place in their hearts, but will add valuable inputs to our language and literature. Sahitya Sabha should take the initiative to carry out such work, so that we can help fulfil their aspirations and in the way a feeling of fraternity can also be promoted. Historically, the feeling of social brotherhood in Assamese is well recognised. The generosity and nobility of Assamese people is well pronounced throughout the past era. There are countless examples of how people from diverse religious and cultural background have selflessly assimilated themselves and helped in nation-building.

When Swargadeo Siukapha mingled with the then Assamese society and established his kingdom giving up his own motherland as mentioned in history, he spotted a Chutiya person and appointed him as 'Somchiring' to look after the holy Somdev, Swargadeo Pratap Singha appointed Laluk of Moran as Borpatra. Swargadeo Chandrakanta Singha bestowed the title of Barbarua on Kheremial Kachari Patal and included him in the khel of the Ahoms. Swargadeo Suikapha and his successors took the initiative of the formation of the Assamese nationality by way of tying the various communities of the hills and plains through a process of matrimonial, social and cultural assimilation; they also donated land to temples, devalayas and satras and appointed deoris and paiks. There are references in copper plates of appointment of Muslims too as pikes. Swargadeo Rudra Singha, on the other hand, dreamt of constituting a republic by establishing good will with the neighbouring kings instead of capturing those territories through military prowess. The history of Sankaradeva's concept and practice of equality and brotherhood cannot be forgotten; through this he had flung open the doors of the namghars to all irrespective of caste and creed. The way numerous people have come to Assam since the days of Siukapha and have turned this place into a holy confluence by assimilating with local culture and life; the way Azan Peer had come from a far-away land and had created a new flavour in lyrical literature by mingling with the local land, air and water; the way Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva had spread the message of unity and equality among various ethnic communities through the Bhakti-rasa of his Bhakti movement --- All these prove the point that the people of this province used to embrace with respect those who came from outside, provided the latter had the intention and the resolve to assimilate with the great stream of local life by accepting land, its civilisation, culture and environ as their own.

In present times, when some people attempt to dub us as "anti-outsider" or xenophobic, then it must be understood that these people have little or no knowledge and understanding about the history and civilization of Assam. It is true that those people who have taken a dip in the Borluit, have enjoyed the fresh air that swings between the hills and plains, have lived a life with the produce of this fertile land, yet haven't been able to embrace this land as their own, haven't been able to enjoy the flavour of the language and culture of this land, haven't been able to comprehend the anguish and apprehension of the numerically small linguistic community of Assam, have also found it difficult to enter the heart of Assam.

Asam Sahitya Sabha's protest against Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 is in tune with all other groups of Assam and North-eastern India, who have been dissenting against it. People have raised their voices against illegal migrants residing across the length and breadth of Assam as it has instilled a genuine fear of a threat to our language and culture in the minds of people. Historically, the Assamese people have been struggling to protect their language, putting up a strong fight for the very existence of their language and literature over the years.

Is there any respite for a community that is fighting for its sheer survival to carve out a place in the global race for language and literature? Some selfish people have to shed off the desire to portray our image as xenophobic; they must acknowledge that Assamese language and culture is unique and they should not think of injuring its inimitable characteristics of Assamese people, they must inspire us for our growth and development, so that we can take pride in what Bhupen Hazarika had once referred to us with that phrase 'We are good Indians.'

With a view to expand the joy of speaking-reading-writing Assamese, it is important to see how the overwhelming presence of English could be used for the furtherance of our own language. There is the need to emphasise on this scientifically proven teaching process. While Assamese language teachers in English medium schools can be trained well so that they can make their students enthusiastic about Assamese language, similarly English language teachers in Assamese medium schools must be well trained and this is an important aspect to deal with. It is right to say that to reflect the hopes and aspirations of the Assamese people and the glorious history of Assam and its pressing problems outside our geographical boundary, we must develop the proficiency of English writing. Additionally, we must seriously focus on the faculty of delivering speeches in fluent English, so that people from other parts of the country can a glimpse of our history and tradition, understand the challenges to our nationalistic life and can find solutions to it. It is a matter of pride that youth of the new generation have taken the opportunity to project Assam in the fields like media, sports, films etc and have been able to portray the problems and challenges of Assam to a larger audience.

Speaking about English language reminds us of the translation project initiated by Asam Sahitya Sabha. Sabha must examine the pace at which such initiatives are progressing, how far it is able to reach readers of other languages and how to accelerate their process. We must also remember that it is pertinent to translate the literary works of different ethnic groups of the region and vice versa.

Other Indian languages must also be brought into this translation project. Asam Sahitya Sabha must establish links with literary organisations from the other regional languages like Kannada and Malayalam and we can think of mutual exchange of literary works, so that an intellectual link can be formed and we can seek the opportunity to be conversant with other regional contemporary literature. Through the platform of national and international festivals, Asam Sahitya Sabha can present Assamese literature in a new way. Similarly, the volumes of World Encyclopaedia, already published by Sabha can incorporate new information contributed by the public.

In the context of the contribution of different ethnic groups towards the colourful culture, tradition and literature, we often come across the contributions of Assam's tea garden community. Our society is incomplete if we do not take them into account as they are an inseparable entity in the Assamese society. Several litterateurs from the tea community have enriched the treasure-trove of our literature. Through the collective efforts of the tea community, Assamese language has secured a place even in the bottom echelons of the tea community. However, we need to examine to what extent the spread of the Assamese literature has taken place amongst them. An incident that took place sometime back has come to my mind. It was an incident in which over 100 brothers and sisters of a tea-tribe community had lost their lives after consuming spurious liquor. I had the opportunity of meeting several of them as they were battling against death in hospital wards and even on verandahs outside. The silence on the faces of the people writhing in pain asked me – why have we not been able to take any bold step towards including them as indispensable part of the process of shaping our Assamese identity, why they have remained outside the mainstream of Assamese life and have remained disconnected from the process of education and the resources required for a dignified life! We will fail to fully recognise a sizeable section of Assam's talent and human resource if this community remains severed from the mainstream, if we just consider them as a labour supply class. We will have to reduce the mental distance; it is the time to strengthen our social bond by giving them respectable space in the process of building the Assamese identity. Asam Sahitya Sabha can create a new environment amongst the people of our tea gardens by adopting a positive and dynamic approach. Similarly, it is also very essential that Sahitya Sabha expands its activities and influence among the people living in the char areas. As far as my knowledge goes, a couple of branches of the Sahitya Sabha have been involved in such work, but there is still a huge gap and a crying need to work more vigorously among these people in order to generate in them a liking for the Assamese language and a good will towards literature and culture, so that the contribution of many of them towards creative literature is made known to all.

The application of technology has brought the possibility of significant opportunities to literature across the globe. The Sabha's door should remain open towards wider reach and expansion of creative art and literature and related issues by using these facilities.

I clearly remember this sequence of events: it was my turn when the two persons ahead of me in the queue had moved away, I handed over the piece of paper that I was carrying in my pocket. Though he read the words written on it again and again, yet before the expression gradually building upon his face could give me any indication, I step forward towards the right as he pointed out with his finger and landed in front of a number of shelves filled with books under a faint light. I could see that my foot steps have left their impressions on the layer of dust below, pieces of a torn cob web disturbed my eyes and face, my unhindered mind kept moving amid the aroma of old books, I felt readers had not been here in this space for a long time. And I came back to the previous counter, that person told me, I couldn't take the book home, because it was the lone copy, that it could only be read in the reading room, but the clock in front of me reminded – the library door would close in the next half an hour –

it was time for me to return now, empty handed, I gave up my hope of reading the book then and there, because the time had come back for the train in which I would have to go back....

It is desirable that a book becomes a companion during travel, readily available in mobile phones and laptops and whenever you feel the urge, you read two pages from it, if it is relevant you may cite it in your research paper. The moot point is, the book you have been searching for wherever it is, whenever you want is readily available to you. The unique opportunity the digital technology offers must not deprive the Assamese readers too. Electronic literature has ushered in unlimited possibility and opportunity, making literature more democratic. It also contributes to the growth of countless readers, breaking of geographical boundaries and taking literature to each and every region, and thus books have become companion for readers for each moment. If no effort is made to digitalise the use and expansion of Assamese language, culture and literature, then it will amount to encouraging a tendency of remaining a frog in a well.

Earlier, computer was not accessible to all, only rich and wealthy people living in urban areas had the access to it. But now this digital divide does not exist especially after mobile phones have become the medium of taking the rich repository of literature and culture to the public giving way to immense possibility and opportunity. If we do not upgrade according to the times we are living in, the bus of modern civilisation will overtake us and won't we be left all alone in the path? If Asam Sahitya Sabha shies away from its revolutionary journey, there will be high possibility of lagging behind from the mainstream. It is right to say that the beauty and fragrance of printed books enthrall us, the words engraved appeal to us and offering a book to our readers wholeheartedly gives rise to a powerful bond between the book and the reader, which is really fascinating. But it is seen that the real challenge for human civilisation is the transient time span of a book--- war, natural calamities, political instability and the unhindered, decaying power of time are some of the reasons that always create hindrances in preserving valuable books from time to time. On the contrary, several precious books and those with a possibility for further research do not reach the right readers as a result of which, those books get limited readership or get confined either to libraries or to personal collections.

Many such creative works are seen stuck in a limited circle. Digital preservation and expansion have opened new avenues for making world literature easily available to the book lovers. Digitalisation will not only help conserve the literary and cultural resources, but will also make them easily accessible. Moreover, conservation costs will come down. We will be free of a situation where books will be available only in shelves of libraries and bookstores; readers will be able to locate a book faster; as a result research will be intensified and the availability of a book will not be confined to any geographical boundary.

It however does not mean that this will throw spanners in our traditional urge to read and enjoy printed books. On the contrary, these two systems will bring to us new opportunities of reading books and conducting research. It will be pertinent to bring our valuable literary creations to the digital archives and museums, so that they are preserved for a long time – this is necessary because there is also a challenge to preserve the digital format of the books for

the future by keeping with the ever-changing world of technology; because readers and researchers will require them; and evolving technology will not make them ineffectual.

It is not enough to just preserve them as data storage; we will have to classify them subject wise, make them available in a presentable manner and ensure smooth use. This effort will require a well-co-ordinated programme, also services of experts in different subjects and technology too. In this regard, the Sabha should create a common platform. Some enthusiastic members of the new generation have time to time expressed their desire to me to contribute in this area; some organisations have shown interest in providing technology in order to help quality-digitalisation of our important books and making them easily available. In these issues, the Sabha should emphasize on timely analysis, planning and execution of things. Keeping in view the enormity of the work, it will require a series of time frame. The Sabha can definitely expect whole-hearted and open-minded cooperation from the new generation.

It has come to my notice that, of late, a number of on-line magazines have started coming out in the Assamese language – regularly or irregularly like in other Indian languages. Readers have noticed that many a times, these carry essays, fiction, poems and discussions of pretty high quality. A good number of people have started reading in these platforms and the number of readers gradually has been rising. Wouldn't it be like neglecting the new medium if only those carried in traditional printed form are recognized as literature?

A number of new generation writers have taken to social media platform and on-line magazines for creative writing; in the process they have expressed their identity with new literary trends, have established relationship with readers across the globe – which have helped Assamese language and literature break the barriers of geographical boundaries. But it is also a fact that all those written in on-line magazines and social media may not be necessarily up to the mark; the same of course applies to the ones in the print medium too. So, Asam Sahitya Sabha can from time to time consider choosing the quality writings from the digital mediums and bring them out in printed form, so that they can reach those readers who are far away from the digital world and love to read books only in printed form.

I think – a selection of writings published in various printed magazines and special festival issues can also be considered in a similar way. While doing this, one must keep in mind only the qualitative aspects. Such an initiative can become a source of inspiration for those engaged in creative writing. It will not be easy for us to take part in the digital revolution of literature if we do not make writing in the Assamese language easier through computers, laptops, tablets or smart phones. If we do not make reading and writing on the digital platform more result oriented, then we will face hurdles in entering the world of high class global creative literature.

Simultaneously, we will also not be able to take our good ideas and literary works to the outside world in a desired momentum. For example, people across the world have been able to read translations from various languages in their own respective languages through Google translation. This has become possible in most other Indian languages too. But such a facility

has not become effective in case of the Assamese language. Its main reason is that we have not been able to create and provide to google a proper repository of words in the Assamese language; the result being we have failed to take advantage of the auto-translation facility. In this connection, it will be important to proceed with the help of enthusiastic people, who can help create a proper repository of translated words; we must also endeavour to extract the right kind of support from Google. It is also important to keep in mind what technology are we using to write in order to take forward Assamese literature and culture in the area of digital literature. You might be aware that there has been a lot of discussions in the media and other platforms about writing in Assamese and use of Unicode; some of these are highly informative, factual and scientific, while some others are like bubbles of sentiments, which do not last long. It has been rightly held that if we can preserve the resources created in our language in the digital form, we will get the opportunity to present them scientifically and create facilities to present them before the readers. In that scenario, we can definitely strengthen the possibility of widely spreading our language and literature. Because of writing in computer through Unicode, most languages of the world have been able to reach readers all over, and these are easily available in various software and computer applications. Unless our language is being present in Unicode medium, different computer applications will find it difficult to use them; language researchers too find it difficult to work on them.

We can definitely innovate certain essential tools for our language like spell-checker, on-line dictionary, grammar checker, auto-translator etc to make digital writing in Assamese a smooth activity. It is time to deeply think, examine and analyse how much we have progressed in matters of recognition of the Assamese language in Unicode, at what step we are stuck now, what related issues need to be resolved, and so on – so that the Assamese language does not find it difficult to merge forward like various other languages of the world; simultaneously, we may also indulge in research of the language through various new technological applications, widen the scope and expanse of reading and writing the Assamese language.

In one word, it will be appropriate to think that the Sahitya Sabha should emphasise on keeping pace with time by adopting a mindset and an enthusiasm towards putting to use the numerous facilities for development and expansion of language and literature by technology.

The new generation of Assam can play a vital role in the century old organisation's bid to meet the challenges of changing times; it will not be wrong to expect that a lot of young people with experience gathered within the country and abroad are waiting to become a companion in this journey. Additionally, a few more issues too are involved – for instance, given the all-pervading role of social media, the Sahitya Sabha should also make a powerful and efficient presence in them. There is also the question of making the Sabha more people-oriented; – how the numerous branches of the Sabha across Assam and outside are moving forward in enriching our language, whether any lover of Assam has any particular valuable suggestion for development of our language and literature – where the voices of the common people are powerfully resonated, become important partners of the Sabha's role in Assamese national life, and there is a continuous tinkling echo – “We build, with sticky clay of our fields, Taj Mahals that conquer death” (‘On a white wintry evening’ – Hari Barkakati.)

Most of the eminent personalities who have adored the office of the Asam Sahitya Sabha's president, had in their valuable statements while directly or indirectly talking about the process of Assamese nation building, had also thrown light on how the future of literature and culture are interlinked with the economic infrastructure of the state.

Dr Maheswar Neog had very beautifully underlined this by saying "Bhat palehe maat" – "an empty stomach cannot produce literature". Such issues are often raised in various discussions and forums – how much share does indigenous people have in our economy, in what kind of trade and commerce activities are Assamese people involved, have we been able to enter the domestic or international market by taking advantage of globalisation, have we handed over our resources to private entities and have become mere consumers, whether we have distanced ourselves from becoming partners of our economic development and gradually giving away to others our authority and right over our language, culture and literature!

Such experiences have become common in our daily life – I step into a huge shopping mall in the city, I am shown the various items on display, I ask a salesgirl about a particular item I am looking for, she replies in Hindi to my queries, tells me various aspects of the items, I come to know that she is a local girl, I ask her – why are you finding it difficult to speak in Assamese, she hesitantly tells me that she has directions to speak with customers only in Hindi and that she might lose her job for speaking in Assamese. I hope you have been able to understand the gravity of the matter. Control over economic platforms can snatch away our language, our tongue. I may not be bothered about what language she uses with other customers. But should we not consider it significant that the right of the salesgirl too has been taken away to converse in her local tongue with Assamese and other indigenous customers? Hasn't the time come to convince ourselves that the need of the hour is to take some steps in view of the fact that language and literature has a close relation with the economy? It is necessary to discuss this issue and find ways about how to proceed in this matter. Many want to say that there is no place in the Assamese psyche for a topic like commerce and business. But such ideas are not based on facts; in olden times Assam had strong business relations with Tibet. Assam's history tells us about how women vendors (pohari) moved around from village to village and had tremendous awareness about the community. Remember as Jayadhwaja Singha was fleeing, he came across such a 'pohari' who told him – "Swargadeo, you have so long remained busy only in merry-making; oh, if you had put even fifteen lumps of earth in the right place in the past fifteen years, things would have been different!" Our folklore is replete with stories about merchants; doyens like Laksminath Bezbaroa and Bholanath Borooah were involved in timber trade outside the region; Maniram Dewan was a pioneer tea planter of India; -- there are several such instances of how industry and business have remained inseparable from the Assamese national life. As such, please do not think that we have any indifference towards commerce and business. On the contrary, there will be a visible impact on the economy if we can ride on the currently available technology and enter the field of business and economy in a strong manner. Similarly, we should also take a leading role in industries based on the unique resources of Assam. I think we should consider a unique 'Assam growth model', which while making sustained use of our own resources also proceed without causing any harm to our natural bounty, green environment, water

bodies, hills and plains. We should reject those development models which can destroy our unique natural balance. We should emphasize on our traditional and spiritual relationship with the environment of the state, and that exactly should be the alternative Assam model for development. We can prepare an 'Assam Agenda' for all-round economic development of Assam. On its universal backdrop 'Brand Assam' can be created! One issue commonly discussed amongst us is that the Assamese people suffer from aversion to work. But, even if we consider that there is some truth in it, we can also point at another aspect – a number of people from the state are currently working in various parts of the country. Many of them are engaged as daily-wagers in such work which they generally would not do within the state. From this we can deduce that creation of an appropriate environment and condition would probably deliver us from our aversion to work, and bring about a situation of appropriate work culture. There have been valuable studies on how cultural values influence economic change and enlargement; those have revealed how traditional mentality and belief towards work immensely impact the economic advancement of a place, and how such ingredients can cause positive interventions in the development process. There is another reason for touching on such kind of discussions. It is about laying emphasis on fact-based analysis and study of issues related to the economy, society and environment of our state. It is a fact that these will increase the glory of Assam, and attract the attention of outside world towards Assam. One cannot deny the contribution of eminent scholars, influential public speakers, politicians, economists, litterateurs or scientists in projecting Assam at the all India level. When speaking about the role of the Assamese people in the economic field, one familiar name that repeatedly knocks at the door of my mind – Sualkuchi. Here, on a huge open field by the bank of the mighty Brahmaputra, we, literature lovers and Assam lovers numbering more than one lakh, are creating waves in the sky and the wind by singing together “Chira senehi mor bhasa janani”, drawing a rainbow of the art and culture of several ethnic communities. It is this place, which has brightened the name of Assam across the globe, this holy place Sualkuchi, whose air is ranted with the echo of the pride of self-reliance. Sualkuchi has projected through the fusion of old and new, an alternative model of our development. Here, the traditional batten of the loom moves in consonance with the modern-day bobbin; the union of modern and the traditional resources have given birth to silken fabrics that touched the heart; keeps afloat the flag of Assamese pride. The produce of Sualkuchi's artisans has won hearts across the globe; modern technology has not only increased production, but has also helped in expanding the market and increasing the income of the people here. The indomitable spirit of Sualkuchi in taking part in industry and business is probably trying to prove that it is not impossible to break the cycle of a culture of aversion to work; provided we create a wave by saying work itself is my religion. I take the opportunity of expressing my profound gratitude to the people of Sualkuchi, for embracing me with their unswerving love and affection; I also express my gratitude to the people of Assam, particularly to all those members of the Sabha working day in and day out selflessly in the interest of our language and literature, and for giving me this opportunity to walk up to this hallowed pedestal. The history of religious coexistence of this place has definitely inspired the people of Assam; this is a glowing tribute to the unique culture of Assam.

We were talking about the relationship between literature-culture and a strong economic foundation, as also about how a mindset of work culture is related to economic development. Many a time, a strong economic foundation determines the market of books, capability of art and culture. A book the reader is looking for, a painting or a sculpture an art-lover wants to collect, a publicity campaign a singer wants to mount for his/her new song --all these in reality require money. The above desires can be fulfilled only when the foundation of a strong economy is in the hands of the local people. It should be the responsibility of the government and the society to bring to the path of development all those young people who had dropped out from school. There is a demand in our state to exclusively reserve jobs for the local people as is done in several other states. We the people should also recognise the dignity of labour of people working at various levels. It is time to organise special job-oriented training for our young people, which in turn can contribute towards strengthening the economy, which will positively impact upon our language, culture and art. It will be pertinent for the Sabha to work with like-minded organisations to create a platform where indigenous entrepreneurs and young managers can share their success stories with members of the new generation. People whose experience can positively impact upon our daily life can write books in the Assamese language. These books may be small in size, but if well written can immensely help the people; moreover, one will not have to look for such books written in English or other languages. This may appear to be a minor issue, but availability of such a book in Assamese can also inspire people to read books in their own dear language.

Sahitya Sabha has a huge responsibility in the field of academic research on various aspects of language, literature, art and culture of Assam. The Sabha can inspire research in issues relating to the history of Assam's languages, literature of olden times, the history of social evolution in Assam etc by cooperating with the Universities with new ideas and concepts, publications and seminars. There is an urgent need to conduct in depth discussions on hitherto unexplored aspects of Assam's history; for instance the military acumen of Lachit Barphukan in the Battle of Saraighat, the history of naval battles in Assam can be interesting topics. Important episodes of Assam's history, social values and evolution of Assam, the uniqueness of different communities, their contribution to shaping the assamese identity – such issues need to be told not only in Assamese, but also in various tribal languages, Indian languages and in English, so that people across the country become familiar with them; these also should find in place in text books. It is also important to take stock of the kind of research and research-based studies on society, life, art, culture and literature of Assam in various universities; the people of Assam also need to know how various 'Chairs' set up in different universities in the name of Assam's eminent personalities are functioning, so that we do not digress from the original goals and objects behind setting those 'Chairs'. Writings emanating from research in such institutions have to be made available to readers in Assam as well as outside. The Sabha can set up a regular contact with Universities and colleges of Assam and organise discussions on various academic topics as also on creative literature in order to embrace the new talents. The Sabha should give priority to upcoming writers in such efforts, because it will be from among them who will through their creative work earn name and fame across the country and abroad for our language and keep Assam connected with global literary trends. It is very important for the Sabha to involve young writers in its various

activities and programmes including in organising them; the Sabha can forge ahead only by keeping its doors and windows open for new waves of thought, ideas and creative activities. The Sabha should also facilitate contact and exchange of ideas between young writers of Assam and those of other states; it should also facilitate publication of their works, and their translation into other languages. The people know that the Sabha has set up various forums like Ramdhenu, Akash, Yuva-sansad, Kunhi etc for women, youth and children; it is important to uphold the activities of these forums before the people, so that the latter also have a sense of ownership in their successes and failures; it will also bring in new ideas. The Sabha can also consider partnering with those organisations and NGOs which are involved in creative activities and development of children, youth and women.

It has been already stated that the Asam Sahitya Sabha's activities are not confined only to language and literature; art and culture too have found place in it. When talking about culture, I am reminded of what well-known scholar Will Durant had said –that culture is of something which one just carries around inside one's head, it is something to be celebrated in one's life; it is not just saving of knowledge, but for increasing sensitivity of life, for reducing conflict for gaining experience and education; it is about raising one's knowledge to a certain level of good etiquette and sympathy. In this basic definition of culture is available the role Sabha can play in the context of culture. Every literary and cultural worker has a role to play in reflecting in the outside world the culture of our social life. The importance and prestige of Satriya dance has increased at the all India level since its national recognition. Efforts are also on to popularise and propagate the colourful folk dances and folklore of our tribal communities in forums outside. Certain folk dances of India – Sankirtan of Manipur, Chau Dance of Jharkhand, Kalbelia dance of Rajasthan etc – have been recognised as Intangible Cultural Heritage by Unesco. It is necessary to work for a similar recognition to our Bihu dance; this requires solid documentation. There is also need to conduct deep research on the agrarian festivals like Bihu, which our various ethnic communities observe. Similar steps can also be taken for inclusion of the mask tradition of Majuli and handloom tradition of Sualkuchi. The Sabha can play a pivotal role in these efforts. The people of Assam are also very eager in knowing about the progress of efforts to get Majuli a World Heritage Site tag. Writing research-based books in Assamese as well as in English about our traditional musical instruments, Bihu dance and Bihu songs will also be a valuable contribution to our cultural literature. The Sabha can also encourage the government archaeological department, and scholars and organizations involved in activities related to Assam's rich archaeological heritage to bring out books in English and Assamese.

It is pertinent to note that the Asam Sahitya Sabha has brought out a very lucidly written book on its more than a century old relentless journey towards development and growth of Assamese language and literature in order to tell the people about its various achievements and milestones. The documentation of the various activities, the wonderful projects it has undertaken, the way it has overcome various challenges etc will not only enlighten the younger generation, but also tell the story outside once brought out in English. I am sure all of us know about the glory of the French Academy of the 17th century; I think we will also have to tell the story of such a glorious national organisation of North-eastern India to the rest

of the world. We should seriously think about earning for Asam Sahitya Sabha too an Intangible Cultural Heritage recognition from Unesco.

It is fact that it requires a lot of funds to implement various schemes taken up by the Sahitya Sabha. It is meaningless to take up schemes without having the requisite funds, otherwise the Sabha will lose the confidence and trust of the people. That exactly was why several past presidents had, in the presidential speeches underlined the need to strengthen the financial position of the Sabha. Despite that this crisis has not yet been appropriately solved. Implementation of the various schemes will become impossible if the financial aspect is not taken care of. This issue has been discussed for long from two angles. There has been a long-pending demand for government grants with suggestions that there should be a permanent policy for providing regular financial grant by the government to the Sabha. A section of well-wishers however occasionally say that this will bring unnecessary indirect pressure on the working of the Sabha. What I feel is that no political influence can deter the Sabha if its office bearers are determined to preserve the independence of such a hallowed organisation; in fact extending financial support to a national institution like Asam Sahitya Sabha is a responsibility of the government. Moreover, such funds are not going to any individuals. Government funds are people's money collected from the people as tax, and as such the people can rightfully demand a portion of it for the uplift and development of the state's language and literature. There cannot arise any question of imposition of pre-conditions whatsoever as is done in case of loans; and if any such thing occurs, then not only the Sabha, but the people too should protest. Secondly, since Asam Sahitya Sabha is a national institution of the people of Assam, as such we cannot brush aside the issue of raising donations and grants from individuals who have love and respect for the language and literature. The people can also strengthen the coffers of the Sabha by providing financial support as life members and various other means. We can also probably popularise a concept where various puja and bihu committees, as also other such bodies, can donate a portion of their surplus funds to the Sahitya Sabha; this will also fulfil desires of many people to do something for the development of our language and literature. Many a time it has been observed that questions are being raised about proper utilisation of the Sabha's funds; some also raise the issue of transparency in receipts and expenditure. Keeping in mind such experiences, there is a need for the Sabha to maintain maximum possible transparency in its financial transactions. It is time to consider online payment in receiving any and all kinds of payments including that of membership and so on. It is desirable the various contributions coming from the people and other sources honestly utilised; informing the people about those will increase the trust and credibility of the Sabha. As has been mentioned in some earlier presidential addresses, various industry of the state can come forward to jointly implement Sabha's various projects; the Sabha should discuss with them about providing funds under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Involvement in the Sabha's schemes will only help in increasing social relations of the corporate sector – because such schemes will protect the interest of various ethnic communities of the state apart from building better relationship among the communities.

Science literature plays an important part in strengthening scientific temperament. It is well known that like in different countries and different other states, superstitions prevalent in certain parts of Assam have caused death and grievous injury to a number of people every year. In most cases the victims are women. Such stories occasionally appear on front pages of our news papers. Such incidents are not only worthy of condemnation; but also bring a bad name too Assam. Moreover, it does not go well with contemporary times that people are being killed in the name of mass superstition. In order to make the people aware against such superstitions and medieval beliefs, we had in 2001 launched a project called 'Prahari' on behalf of Assam Police. Through this efforts were made to generate mass awareness against such practices by way of involving socially conscious individuals, doctors, social workers, science clubs and mahila samitis. It is a matter of satisfaction that a strong public opinion has build up against such social evils in our state because of this initiative. The voices of the people have also been rightfully reflected in the mass media. There is a need to create an environment driven by scientific temperament against such social maladies by promoting science literature in our state. There is a need for writing books for the common people in simple scientific parlance; such an effort will increase the urge among the people to know new things, initiate them with the use of basic science in daily life and also reduce the tendency of looking for such books in other languages. This way one can hope to interconnect our language with our daily life and inter-relate our adolescents to science. The active participation of Assam Science Society and academic institutions in this regard will be always welcome. It is also important to take discussions related to Assam's environmental conservation, tea industry, flora and fauna etc to the mass people, so that proper knowledge about our resources will generate a sense of pride among the people. We can also inspire young writers in the field of writing science fiction; this will increase the interest of our students towards science literature. Books of the famous 'Pa-phu' series or the 'Dasyu Bhaskar' series are even today very close to the heart of the Assamese reader. There was a time when we used to eagerly look forward to the next book of those series, readers used to be carried away by those books, and these books used to strongly compete with similar kind of stories in other languages coming from other states. But we haven't noticed such kind of popular books in our language in the past several years. I think there is enough scope for our old and new writers to contribute to this area of literature.

It is often heard that the majority of our younger generation do not want to join the Sahitya Sabha platform, and are disinterested in getting involved with the activities of the Sabha; the blame again is generally put on them. Officials of the Sahitya Sabha and its various branches should analyse this issue with an open mind. It has been noticed that many talented young people have been deeply engaged in creative work; many of them are silently, individually, and through smaller groups and organisations regularly writing in different magazines and newspapers, and are endeavouring to take forward the Assamese language and literature with the help of technology. One has to conduct a realistic and objective analysis to find out why the glorious light of Asam Sahitya Sabha has not been able to touch them, why they have developed a mentality to keep away from the Sabha, and why this artificial gap has been created if their intentions of enriching Assamese literature is the same as that of the Sabha. Is it so that the doors of the Sabha have remained closed to the winds of new ideas and concepts

befitting contemporary times, which has stood in the way of the younger generation embracing the Sabha? In this regard, all office-bearers of the Sabha should think afresh, each branch should understand the hopes and aspirations of these young people and develop a mindset to sit down with them and welcome them; only then will the younger generation become powerful partners stakeholders in providing a tremendous energy to the Sabha and make it more vibrant.

It is a welcome trend that in present time a lot of prose literature has been written about the history of Assamese people, about the community life of the tea tribes, about the tradition of other ethnic groups in our language. This is a new trend of social consciousness in Assamese literature. As Hem Barua had said -- this is a call of the age, it is not easy for any poet-litterateur to deny this. He had also said that literature has an inseparable relationship with the characteristic of an age, literature draws its light from the rays of contemporary times, and literature in reality is a reflection of life. This saying has attained more importance during the present times; literature is like a documentation of social evolution and development. I think, there is a need for fact-laden, deeply analytical prose writings on various aspects of contemporary social life and developments. It is seen that such prose writings carry a lot of weight while evaluating various aspects of a society from a historical perspective. As Banikanta Kakati had said, every national and universal ascent is supplemented by literature as wind does to a forest fire, such an ascent does not become long lasting unless based on a strong foundation of literature. These words once again remind us of the all-encompassing function of literature. Some of the most important ingredients for creation of great literature include a repository of experience, co-ordination of head and the heart and the ability of a writer to look deeply into life keeping these aspects in mind. The writers of Assam have also, being driven by these ingredients, reflected the picture of our social life in their works, and put forward those issues which are inseparable from our national life. If taken to various forums outside the state, these creative works will trigger off interesting discussions about the current aspects, issues, problems and possibilities of Assam's social life, simultaneously also contributing to establishing us beyond the geographical boundaries. It is we who will have to create such people who will be able to project outside in an assertive manner issues related to the people of Assam, their colourful treasure trove, and their hopes and aspirations; also people who will be able to project our issues at the all India level; people who would shine in fields of economy, politics, social sciences and science, – so that Assam's name is often mentioned at the national perspective, and gets wide recognition. It will be like living in a fool's paradise if we just keep indulging in an exercise driven by an inferiority complex and create a meaningless furore that others do not give us our due respect and do not let us forge ahead. It has become a challenge for us as to how we can take our language and literature forward by enriching them, and compete equally with other languages. There is a need to engage ourselves in regularly and increasingly use our own language and read and write in it; also to protect it from the threat coming from other languages; and also creating mutual trust, confidence and a strong bond among every linguistic community of Assam. Our destination in this journey has to be clearly marked; my dear language has to occupy a position in the front row among other competing languages – and this has to be our resolve. In this context I am reminded how - in Lewis Carrol's 'Alice in Wonderland' – Alice was trying to identify

her way to with the help of a cat; the cat tells her –you first set your goal, and then look for the path. This kind of a direction has come to us from each and every lover of literature who has an unconditional love for Assam, as also from every linguistic group. Creation of literature has provided inspiration to it, has announced that none other has the kind of strength that literature has in raising the desire of a community; but to achieve that goal, literature has to be courageous. This was what Suryya Kumar Bhuyan had said. The indication of approaching the goal of a society also depends upon the number of dauntless, socially aware intellectuals the society has. I had read somewhere, French’s president De Gaul had once told John F Kennedy that when a nation rises, no other force, however powerful can suppress it. About the Assamese mind, I am tempted to borrow from Bezbaroa, who had said, my language is my heartbeat, the language of my country is for me like the sweet sound of the cuckoo.

Every morning, we face the challenge of new ideas and concepts of fear and doubt thrown by the present time. It is amid the flow of this current of seeking the truth and singing the victory song of humanity that we have to glorify the journey of life of invincible humans and provide the right document and an appropriate roadmap to the society. I pray, the human foundation of literature is not obstructed at the crossroad of trust, confidence and doubt; let the simplicity of truth be the exploration of literature –

With this trust and conviction, I beg to seek from you unflinching support and cooperation to proceed forward. Come, let us all become responsible stakeholders in the victory march of Asam Sahitya Sabha –

I once again pay my obeisance to all of you.

Namaskar!

Kuladhar Saikia

President, 75th Biennial Session
Sualkuchi, Assam
Asam Sahitya Sabha

(Translated into English from the original Assamese speech. Courtesy: Tapati Baruah Kashyap)

+++++