**Live and Let the Handicapped Live:**
The Inspiring Tale of Dhirendra Nath and Kalpana Bezboruah

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The Assam Tribune, an English daily published from Guwahati is the oldest English newspaper still in circulation in the entire North-east. It was established in the year 1939, when most of the present day North-east region was known as Assam. Forty-five years after the establishment of The Assam Tribune, there emerged another English daily in Assam named as “The Sentinel’. The founder Editor of The Sentinel was Shri Dhirendra Nath Bezboruah or D.N. Bezboruah as he is generally mentioned. He brought in a new style and the paper under his leadership was able to attract quick attention from different parts of the North-eastern region. He served The Sentinel non-stop for a long 22 years and retired in the year 2005. The story of D.N.B. and The Sentinel is something about, “products of human resource with a wholesome value system and integrity and commitment to the greatest good of the greatest number.” We hope, a competent hand someday will write the inspiring tale for all of us to read.

This article in Ishani is not written to tell about D.N.B. as an Editor, but to tell about D.N.B., a noble human being, and his wife, Shrimati Kalpana Bezboruah and children. Shrimati Kalpana Bezboruah’s major contribution to society has been the establishment of an organization for mentally retarded and physically handicapped children, Sahayika. The story of Sahayika needs an independent article and we are carrying such an article also in this issue of Ishani. The reading of the present article by Shri Dhruva Saikia and the one on Sahayika by Shrimati Jolly Saikia together only will help the reader to get a fuller picture and understanding of the contribution of this distinguished family to the people of Assam and humanity. There is a reference in the present article to two other members of the family, a son and a daughter. The author has just made a passing reference to them, but the story of their lives also is inspiring.

Shri Dhruva Saikia, the author of this article, has created it after having detailed conversation with Shri Bezboruah. Ishani considers it an honour to tell the highly inspiring story of this family, however brief it may be, to the wider world.

Fortune shines on those who face misfortunes with courage and turn them into opportunities to learn and serve. Mr. Dhirendra Nath Bezboruah, who is held in esteem by people who read English in Assam as well as those who read about Assam in English; the man who shaped Assam’s second major English daily, *The Sentinel* with an uncompromising quest for perfection; a man who creates future journalists, has himself faced great personal misfortune. Yet Dhirendra Nath Bezboruah’s way out of suppressing gloominess is gracefully unique and inspiring. DNB, as we fondly refer to the fatherly figure in journalism, refuses with a wide and plain smile to be trampled under the emotional shocks of a son’s loss of hearing, a daughter getting injured and losing her husband and her son in a horrific road accident, and his wife struggling with paralysis. Rather, the language teacher-writer-orator-editor edits the flaws in his life’s grammar, aided by his better half, Kalpana. DNB and Kalpana’s sorrow indirectly aided in ameliorating the sorrow of a few hundred other people, because Kalpana discovered amidst their sorrow practical means to deal with calamity-like situations. Kalpana’s sorrow gave birth to Sahayika, an institution that has been imparting training and education to children with learning disorders (a detailed write-up on the works of Sahayika has been printed independently in this issue with the title, ‘Kalpana Bezboruah and Sahayika’). The result was that hundreds of handicapped children have grown up to be trained as competent citizens through Sahayika and the Sahayika Rehabilitation Centre.

Reputed photographer Bhaskar, the only son of Dhirendra Nath and Kalpana Bezboruah, was born on December 27, 1968, to a diligent father and a caring mother. Unfortunately, he
suffered from measles when he was six months old, and though not a hearing impaired person by birth, succumbed to auditory impairment eventually. Dhirendra Nath Bezboruah, then an English teacher trained in Phonetics, noticed that Bhaskar as a nine-month old baby uttered vowel sounds spontaneously but had problems with consonants. So the worried father rushed first to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, and then to Dr. Subramaniam, known to be among the top ten ENT specialists in the world, and Bhaskar’s problem was diagnosed as a case of nerve deafness.

The parents reached Mysore to redefine their son’s course of life. In Mysore, Bhaskar received speech therapy at the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing. Mr. and Mrs. Bezboruah began to take a correspondence course specially designed for parents of deaf children by the John Tracy Clinic of California. They met Mrs. Parpia, the American wife of Dr. Parpia, Director of CFTRI in Mysore, who voluntarily accepted the deaf child as a student in her school. Later, Mr. Bezboruah joined the NCERT’s Regional College of Education in Mysore. He became the head of the English Department in 1972. It must be mentioned here that Mr. and Mrs. Bezboruah chose Mysore as their working place with the sole purpose of ensuring therapy for their only son.

Mrs. Kalpana Bezboruah, originally hailing from Tezpur and educated throughout in Banaras, a psychologist by profession and specializing in child psychology, has laudably redirected her academic prowess to fulfil a higher social calling. Sahayika, an institution for the physically handicapped and the mentally retarded children took off in 1986 at Kalpana’s behest. However, the project demanded sufficient finance and as Mr. Bezboruah recounts, she went around with the begging bowl until Assam Carbon Ltd. came forward to pay the house rent. Later, the most significant financial help came from the eminent journalist and MP, Mr. Kuldip Nayar who is also Mr. Bezboruah’s friend. Mr. Nayar as an MP chose Assam and Jammu & Kashmir for utilization of his local area development fund, and made the construction of Sahayika Rehabilitation Centre at Lankeswar near Jalukbari possible.

In course of time, Kalpana Bezboruah realized that the Sahayika endeavour was not comprehensive enough to cater to the entire needs of the physically and mentally handicapped section of the people. Sahayika took care of them till they reached the age of 18, but what about a handicapped adolescent who after leaving Sahayika is ruthlessly exploited by the society? For Mrs. Bezboruah one solution was the Sahayika Rehabilitation Centre at Lankeswar beyond the campus of Gauhati University.

The centre is situated on a narrow strip of land donated by the then AGP government in Dispur. The Rehabilitation Centre provides vocational training to the marginalized section of the people. Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. Bezboruah run from pillar to post to collect a Government of India grant that regularly needs a Government of Assam approval.

The Bezboruah couple’s mission was fulfilled in the sense that Bhaskar has now established himself as a reputed photographer. But another mishap was still in store. Gayatri, their first-born, who is a doctor, was travelling to Guwahati with her husband Dr. Mukul Bhargav and their thirteen-year-old son Abhay, when they had a fatal highway accident at Bokakhat on April 11, 2003. Gayatri narrowly escaped death. However, she lost her husband and only son.
Gayatri has recovered to continue as Associate Professor in the Paediatrics Department in Guwahati Medical College and Hospital, but her tragedy is one more demanding facet of the family’s turmoil.

Mrs. Kalpana Bezboruah, an angel of life for the handicapped, now finds herself restricted to her home after a cerebral stroke leading to paralysis of the right limbs. Mr. Bezboruah, strong, energetic and attentive as usual, attends to her. He also does whatever he can to keep the Sahayika and Sahayika Rehabilitation Centre going, until Kalpana is able to resume her humanitarian work.

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An Inspiring Quotation from the Hadith

Young man, (the Prophet said to Abdullah ibn al-Abbas) hear some words of advice: Be mindful of God and God will protect you. Be mindful of God and you will find Him before you. If you ask, ask of God; if you seek help, seek help of God. Know that if all the people were to gather together to give you the benefit of anything, it would be something that God had already prescribed for you, and that if they gathered together to harm you with anything, this would only be as God has already ordained. -- HADITH OF AT-TIRMIDHI.