



Prajnalaya A school set up by an ex insurgent

In late 2006 Mr. Shantikam Hazarika, Director Assam Institute of Management (AIM) invited me to speak at the Epigenesis Assam 2007 organised by AIM at Guwahati. Before I left for India, Ankur Bora, a computer engineer from Assam, residing at that time in Texas requested me to visit Parijat Academy of Pamohi, Guwahati. Uttam Teron, the man behind the Parijat Academy (www.parijatacademy.org) informed me about his friend Jugal Bhuyan who established Pragyalaya, an institution where children of the poor and uneducated parents get opportunities to learn, grow and flourish in a friendly environment. In October 2006, I received mail from Jugal Bhuyan inviting me to visit Pragyalaya. We started corresponding on this topic further. I was very much impressed by his activities. I came to know that Jugal Bhuyan was an ex-rebel. He was also the grandson of the President Medal awardee teacher, Late Sabharam Das.



Late Jugal Bhuyan,
Founder Prajnalaya

In the first week of February 2007 Bidyananda Borkakoty (Rintu), General Secretary of Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters (FASS), took me to Pragyalaya. Together with him and one of his friends, we drove to Saraipani. There we were greeted by Jugal Bhuyan, the founder of Pragyalaya. A host of dignitaries from Titabor were also present. This was the start of my relationship with Jugal and Pragyalaya. On 13th November 2006, the name of Pragyalaya was officially changed to **Prajnalaya**.

Prajnalaya an orphanage is a labour of love built in 2002 by Jugal Bhuyan. This was a year after he decided to bid goodbye to the life of a rebel in the jungles. Jugal Bhuyan had joined the ULFA in 1989 thinking that he would be able to bring justice to the poor and underprivileged. He was a college student then and joined the insurgency bandwagon, like some other students. He and his fellow insurgents thought that they could change the system with the use of violence. It did not take long for him to realize the futility of this approach. He returned back from the jungle to the mainstream to start another crusade – a one man crusade to fight social injustice. He was full of enthusiasm and reformatory zeal. One of his initial projects was a residential school in his village, without any government financing. He further decided to devote his life to work for the community. He established Prajnalaya, a school for the poor and underprivileged children.



Students of Prajnalaya

By establishing Prajnalaya he realized the meaning and purpose of his life. Deviating from a path leading to darkness Jugal chose the path of light and self-fulfillment, with the advice and inspiration of his long-term teacher and mentor, Suresh Rajkhowa. Jugal soon realized that a prosperous society could be created not through the barrel of a gun but through noble work and sacrifice. His dream was to secure a refuge for the poor and destitute children where they could attend school and learn the basic skills and knowledge. Jugal decided to do something tangible for the society by engaging

himself with these children, some of had no parents to look after them. That is how Prajnalaya was born in 2002.

Without relying on a single penny from any government or private agency, Jugal built a bamboo house for the children on his ancestral land. His only capital at that time was a piece of land obtained from his grandmother's property, and a few thousand rupees he had earned through manual labor. He started the school building with that money. His friend Bitu Gogoi, encouraged by Jugal's initiative obtained a loan of Rs. 50,000/ for Jugal to complete the school and the residential buildings of Prajnalaya, now called the "Ashtha". In Ashtha, children get free food, clothing and education. Jugal Bhuyan along with other teachers and volunteers of Prajnalaya, have shown tremendous dedication in working towards the upliftment of the Titabor area in general. In the evening of 15th March 2007 while leading a multi-faith prayer, he became suddenly unconscious and passed away, at a young age of 40. It is a great loss not only to Prajnalaya but to the community as a whole also.

His devotion was towards securing a refuge for poor and destitute children where they could imbibe the best ideals and aspire to become global citizens after passing out of Prajnalaya. He made Prajnalaya a model school in that area. Jugal was a sensitive human being who believed in honesty, sincerity, and hard work. He taught the young students the dignity of labor and their responsibility to the community. He set examples for others by collecting funds and organizing relief camps for the flood victims.



"If everything falls into place and my swimming against the tide bears the desired results, Prajnalaya will become a fully-residential institution to benefit the rural populace. Our students will grow up in pristine and idyllic environs and cherish values and customs which are intrinsic to the Assamese culture and tradition." This was the dream cherished by Jugal Bhuyan, the man behind the rural school, which he established.

The light has passed away. But, the rays linger on. Today Jugal is no more. The students, teachers, members and the well-wishers of Prajnalaya have joined hands and combined their efforts to keep the light fame burning ignited by Jugal.

Mrs. Prerona Borbora, a well known film producer of Assam has made a documentary film with the title "Echoes of Sunshine". It is about the life of late Jugal Bhuyan. This documentary was selected for the New York Film Festival 2008.

Prajnalaya now:

Prajnalaya started in 2002 with seven students. In 2008 it had 275 students (153 male and 122 female) between the age group of 4 to 15. The residential part Ashtha accommodates 85 students, 33 girls and 52 boys. There are 21 teachers (8 male and 13 female) to look after the education of the children. Three office bearers are there to run the school. Some of the students are orphans. Prajnalaya aims for the

overall personality development of these kids, teaching them the rich cultural heritage of Assam along with the regular coursework.

The residential dormitory Ashtha also houses Anamika, a physically retarded girl. The girl, with serious wounds on her body, was found at the Guwahati Medical College Hospital. The parents of that girl apparently left her without any trace. Prajnalaya took charge of this mentally retarded child and named her Anamika, the girl without a name. Anamika now not only has a home of her own with a loving and caring family, but she has also shown remarkable recovery¹.

The activities of Prajnalaya are interesting and innovative for a small town like Titabor. The principal objective of Prajnalaya is enhancing the zeal and devotion of people to their culture, language, heritage and literature. Prajnalaya tries to lay emphasis in the goodness in human being. Prajnalaya will try to restore the social values, which have been gradually lost. With deep optimism, Prajnalaya will try to influence its learners by taking sturdy steps towards guiding them to a more secured and self-reliant future.



Ankur Bora from Texas. Running for a cause to raise funds for Pranjalaya.

Prajnalaya emphasizes the teaching of knowledge of self-reliance through manual labor and knowledge of native art and culture. They also teach the children to be responsive to society and serve their neighbors at the times of need such as during natural calamities.

Well wishers of Prajnalaya:

In 2006, Texas-based Ankur Bora, a native of Nagaon, Assam, heard about Prajnalaya and its sorry state when he was visiting the state during a vacation. Bora was moved by the plight of Prajnalaya. His visit to Prajnalaya was a godsend. Bora promised to help Prajnalaya by mobilising funds from Assamese NRIs, which he did. Thanks to his untiring efforts Prajnalaya has now a number of supporters and well-wishers².

Prajnalaya had the honour of welcoming many visitors both from within and outside India. Some of the visitors from India who visited Prajnalaya are:



Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi visiting Prajnalaya

Chief Minister of Assam Mr. Tarun Gogoi, Education Minister of Assam Mr. Ripun Bora, Dr Kanak Sen Deka, President of Axom Sahitya Sabha, Gyanpith laureate Dr. Mamoni Goswami, Garvin Brown of Australia, etc.

¹ http://www.telegraphindia.com/1050924/asp/guwahati/story_5272600.asp

² http://www.telegraphindia.com/1060805/asp/northeast/story_6568945.asp

Some of the present activities of Prajnalya are:

1. To generate income Prajnalya has started some innovative schemes such as organic fertilizer (vermiculture), aquaculture, poultry farming, piggery, weaving and handlooms etc.
2. In cooperation with local medical doctors Prajnalya runs medical camps. When possible the medical camp facilities are extended to the villagers.
3. On the subject of preservation of food and preparation of pickles, jams etc., Mrs. Meghali Bora of the Meghali Food Production Centre has given a three days training to students of 9th and 10th classes. This would help the students to help their families to generate extra income.
4. The District Agricultural Department of Assam has put a scheme to plant trees in the compound of Prajnalya. 100 trees were already planted.
5. In 2007 Prajnalya also arranged accommodation for a 30 years old widow and her two daughters aged 3 and 7.
6. On 23rd August 2007 at Prajnalya a Science Workshop was organized for the Science Teachers. 30 science teachers from seven nearby schools participated in this workshop. This was financed by Assam Science Society Guwahati.
7. In order to provide milk to the school children, in 2008 at a cost of Rs. 21,000/- Prajnalya bought a cow with a calf. In the coming month depending on availability of funds they intend to buy another 4 cows.
8. On 19th January 2008, Ankur Bora, Executive Vice Chairman of Friends of Assam & Seven Sisters, USA laid the foundation stone of the girl's hostel. It will accommodate 20 girls.
9. In February 2008, Mr. Utpal Kumar Sarma of Assam Agricultural Service rendered free consultancy to the villagers in and around Titabor. This consultancy on agriculture, veterinary & fishery projects was sponsored by Friends of Assam & Seven Sisters [FASS], a NRI/NRA group in association with Prajnalya.
10. From February 2008 students of Prajnalya started appearing the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examinations.
11. From January 2008 started planting banana trees (Jahaji kol), orange and pumpkins.
12. From June 2008 Prajnalya started to teach two new subjects. One is the Satriya dance and the other is computer course.



Gyanpith laureate Mamoni Goswami at Prajnalya. At the middle late Jugal Bhuyan

For its existence Prajnalya needs help. Help is needed in order to continue the work. Their plans are capital intensive but in the end, they will be self-sustained. Any amount of generous monetary help from well-wishers will surely help them. Their success will inspire other Assamese youth to come forward for such noble efforts.

Today, Prajnalya, with its 275 students, out of which 85 are staying in the dormitory, requires about twenty-four thousand rupees per month on average for its expenses. The school also needs filter for clean drinking water, mosquito nets, mattresses, bed linen, towels, utensils and school uniforms.

The contact details of Prajnalya are:

<p>Prajnalya Charaipani, No 56 Grant P.O. Mohimabari, Via-Titabar, District-Jorhat, Assam – 785630 Tel: +919864653289 (Mr. Prabudh Basak) E-mail: pragya_laya@yahoo.co.in Web: www.prajnalya.org</p>	<p>Name of the Bank – State Bank of India, Titabor Branch Code No – 4378 Phone +91377-225-2425 Secretary, Mr. Prabudh Basak +91 9 8646 53289 P.O. Titabor Pin Code – 785 630 District – Jorhat Assam (India)</p> <p>Account Holder: Prajnalya General Fund Account No - 01170062946 Village – Saraipani, No. 56 Grant P.O. – Mohimabari (Titabor) District – Jorhat, Assam, India</p>
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1. For images, please visit <http://picasaweb.google.com/prajnalya.titabor>
2. For an audio/video presentation, please visit - Google video <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-4963623223421174374>

