

Extraordinary book Asom 1864 released

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, Feb 10 – A young liberal German with love for Nature made Assam his second home one-and-a-half century back, chronicling in the process a true account of the State's socio-economic and cultural life in a manner few outsiders had done before or after him. Sprinkled with the milk of human kindness, his narrative is refreshingly free from the bias often associated with colonial chroniclers.

Journalist and author Homen Borgohain observed this at the formal release function of the book Asom 1864 – translated by Dr Salim M Ali from the original German work by Oscar Flex.

"Oscar Flex was a farsighted German who lived his life in close contact with the native Assamese people. He has been faithful in his account of the people, their lifestyles and cultures, and tea cultivation in Assam...among other things, he mentioned the Assamese villages and the Assamese maidens as extremely gorgeous – a fact corroborated by many a chronicler from outside," Borgohain said.

Lauding the efforts of the translator, Dr Ali who had been a teacher at the Oldenburg University of Germany till 2010, Borgohain said that it as an "extraordinary book translated by an equally fascinating person."

Borgohain said that Dr Ali – a vegetarian and a potato specialist who had been tirelessly promoting his ideals across the globe including in Assam spending his own resources and time – added an invaluable asset to Assamese literature through his translation of Flex's work.

Former DGP Nishinath Changkakati who formally released the book said that it would throw new light on nineteenth century Assam, especially on its socio-cultural history and tea plantation.

Scholar and historian Dr Rajen Saikia who was a distinguished guest termed the account by Flex during his three-year stay in Assam as a remarkable one, saying that as an individual Flex stood out from the rest of the colonial tea planter in that he chose to mingle with the motley crowd – something that lend the stamp of impartiality and authority on his narrative.

Dr Ali, in his speech, described how Flex was pleasantly surprised to see the women of Assam an empowered lot enjoying equal rights with men. He also expressed grave concern at the destruction of nature in the present-day context – especially in Assam – and said that this would lead to irreversible and catastrophic consequences, some of which were already manifest.

Dhiraj Kakati, Assam Branch of Indian Tea Association (ABITA), RK Pareek of Prithvi Group (Tea division), and GL Agarwal of GL Publications also addressed the gathering.

The release function was held under the aegis of the 72nd Asam Sahitya Sabha Session, Barpeta Road, and GLP Social Circle.
