

KANOI FAMILY

Rai Saheb (Padmashree)

Hanuman Baxji Kanoi

Jyoti P Kanoi**

In fine morning in the month of Aswin 1885 A.D. a boy (The Kanoi) was born at Jaswantgarh near Sujangarh to Smt Sinagari Devi and Shri Ganeshiram Kanoi of an illustrious family of Jaswantgarh in the District of Jodhpur –Rajputana. Who knew that this boy would grow up to be one of the foremost Indian Tea Planers of Assam in the days to come .His father Shri Ganeshiram Kanoi came to Gauripur (Assam) in 1881 A.D. and after a few years' stay they moved onto Nadwa where he started a shop. The boy was taken there when he was only a baby of six months. Another shop was opened by his father at Mokalbari when the boy was two years old. He passed a few years of his childhood with his parents in Mokalbari whereafter he come back to Rajasthan. There he began to learn his alphabets under the guidance of a Brahmin teacher from Kanpur. As a beginner he showed promise and learnt to write a very

**The author is the grandson of Late Laxinarayan Kanoi, younger brother of Late Rai Sahib Hanuman Bax Kanoi

good hand writing. His Highness Maharaja Dungar Singh of Bikaner was so much impressed by his good hand writing and scholastic tendencies that he awarded him a scholarship of Rs. 3/- p.m. Known to the Raj-family from his early years, he developed friendship with the then Rajkumar Shri Ganga Singhji who later succeeded to Gaddi of Bikaner.

Young Kanoi was married in April, 1899, but unfortunately his wife passed away only after nine months of the marriage and the Kanoi family returned to Mokalbari in the same year. The family had by this time opened another shop at Oakland and young kanoi was placed in-charge of the shop at Dholajan. His mother unfortunately fell sick and passed away only nine days after the death of his wife. Their financial position at that time became rather critical. They had to incur debts. They could not afford domestic help and it was at this and under these circumstances that young Kanoi learnt the dignity of labour. He had to do all the multifarious household jobs with his own hand and he did them diligently and willingly indeed. He would spin yarn, make cowdung cakes, grind atta, prepare papars, cook, plaster walls, clean utensils, engage in ploughing and in gathering fodder for the cattle, help in gardening and shop-keeping. He would go to Dibrugarh off and on from Mokalbari, a distance of about 15 miles on foot and would return from there carrying heavy load for the shop. A conscientious and hard worker, he would not put off for tomorrow what he could do to-day. To him, work conscientiously done was duty to God performed. Feeling uneasy at work halfdone or undone he scrupulously carry to completion every job in hand. This devotion to duty and love of work served as the foundation on which he was to build giant enterprises in years to come. In 1903 he married

for the second time to Smt Manohari Devi, who came of a respectable family of Sujangarh. Shri Kanoi Smt Manohari Devi were blessed with Seven Sons viz. Bhagwan Prasad Kanoi, Hari Prasad Kanoi, Onkar Prasad Kanoi, Jwala Prasad Kanoi, Jaideo Prasad Kanoi, Lelhchand Kanoi, Radheshyam Kanoi and Two Daughters viz. Govindi Bai and Rukmini Bai. No one alive now.

Shri Kanoi continued to look after the shop and manage the same with scrupulous care and kept the surroundings extremely neat and clean. On the outbreak of an epidemic of plague, Mr. P. Berry (after whom the old medical college of Dibrugarh was named) coming to inspect Mokalbari, was highly impressed by cleanliness of Shri Kanoi's shop and surrounding and issued instruction that all purchases should be made from Shri Kanoi's shop. Soon after he got permission to open a shop in the labour lines of the garden. Thus he got his reward for his hard work and cleanness habits. Sometimes later, business got slack and it became hard to pull on with the scanty earnings of the shop. This compelled his father to move to Demchara T.E. in Cachar to open a shop there on the suggestion of Mr. Berry's brother, but matters did not improve. Hard life with meager income at Demchara in a tattered house with leaky roof forced the family to return to Mokalbari. They were already under debts and straitened financial condition. The goodwill of the business was also at a low ebb. At this critical juncture the head of the family, Shri Ganeshiram Kanoi, young Kanoi's father met with an accident in Rajasthan, leaving the family extremely distressed. The business assets at Mokalbari at that time were then valued at Rs. 552/- only whereas the debts amounted to over Rs. 1,500/- including those against the security of ornaments.

Sources of assistance were lacking. Mr. Afil the Assistant Manager of Mokalbari came to the help of Shri Kanoi with a generous offer of his full month's salary of Rs. 400/- to meet the situation. Shri Kanoi now augmented his business by starting tailoring with the help of one tailor Ladhuram. He used to make women's garments, blouse etc. actively aided by his wife. Though financially weak, Shri Kanoi had already won the affection and respect of the people around him by his exemplary career. He was very much interested in social reforms and was up against social abuses. Simultaneously he look after his business and rendered social welfare service and also actively participated in the work of Panchayats. He was a member of the jury for five years and discharged his duties conscientiously. He set a practical example to the people in the matter of upholding the dignity of manual labour by cleaning his residence, shop and surroundings with his own hand. The sanctity of religion was uppermost in his mind and he started his devotional prayers and participation in Hari Kirtan in his early childhood. He was throughout his career devoted himself to prayers and Hari Kirtan while assiduously attending to his multifarious worldly duties. He works for the love of work devoted to the ideals of 'Niskam Karma' and absolute surrender and resignation to God and staunchly in 'Geeta' precept "Ma Faleshu Kadachana." He has firm beliefs and lofty ideals and is incapable of being led away them. No wonder such a man would have magnetic personality to quickly attain popularity.

In 1917 his younger brothers Shri Surajmall Kanoi and Shri Laxi Narayan Kanoi wanted to undertake some big business and so a firm under the name and style of Messrs. Hanumanbax Surajmall was started at Dibrugarh.

But this firm did not prosper. At this stage Shri Kanoi had to go to Rajasthan to perform certain religious rites. After completing the rites there he returned and started the cultivation of tea at Goneshbari, the nucleus of the big Tea Empire.

At Goneshbari, then known as Sarupathergaon, lived Sultan and two other migrant labourers who held land measuring 42 acres. They offered to sell their land to Shri Kanoi. Kanoi accepted the offer, got 2 maunds of tea seeds from Oakland and at 2 P.M. on 4th February, 1917, sowed the first seeds from Oakland in his newly secured Goneshbari land. This date stands out as an important landmark in the history of the Kanoi enterprise. Curiously enough at a time when the seeds were being sown of big business, came a man running from Mokalbari to inform that Shri Kanoi's shop there was on fire. Whereas people then thought this was bad omen, Kanoi in reminiscent mood now says, "this was God's grace – a significant auspicious incident, for out of the evil cometh good".

Shri Kanoi was always encouraged in his new enterprise by two good friends – Sri Someswar Baruah, Tea Planter, Tinsukia and Rai Bahadur S. Dowerah of Dibrugarh. Sri Someswar Baruah suggested the name of the garden to be Goneshbari, after the name of Shri Kanoi's late father and Sri Dowerah was mainly instrumental in getting it registered as a private limited company. The Dibrugarh firm of Messrs. Hanumanbax Surajmall had to be closed on account of losses, but the tea nursery was a success and the tea garden enterprise flourished.

In 1925 A.D. Shri Kanoi could raise a crop of 104 maunds of tea leaves and sold the same to Mokalbari Tea

Estate. He gradually improved his works and in 1926, got a wooden roller constructed locally after his own idea for the manufacture of tea. The same year he also purchased a tea drier and manufactured 242 maund of tea which was sold in Calcutta at a good price.

Shri Kanoi then applied for a periodic Patta for 185 Bighas of land. The Deputy Commissioner having rejected the application, he applied to the Commissioner of the Division who allowed the appeal and granted the Patta. Thereafter the Deputy Commissioner came to inspect the garden in connection with 46 bighas of Gov. land which was in Shri Kanoi's occupation. He was so much pleased with the maintenance of the bushes and production and with Shri Kanoi's exemplary enterprise that he sanctioned 46 Bighas of Gov. land to him in exchange of his 48 Bighas of land in the neighborhood.

Shri Kanoi gradually working patiently, improve the garden. While doing hard work throughout the day, he would not curtail the long hours he would spend at community prayers and Hari-Nam Kritan in the evening along with his co-workers and labours etc. At the initial stages of the business, the financial position was not so his good and some debts were outstanding. He would however, assure his creditors that he was planting a 'garden of money' and that they would be repaid their dues soon. His words, of course, proved pro-phetic and all the debts were cleared soon after.

1927 saw the Company making good progress. A loan was taken by Shri Kanoi at a high rate of interest, and shares owned by outsiders in Goneshbari Tea Company were purchased.

With the onslaught of the trade depression in the thirties, there was slump in the tea market also and average price of tea touched the lowest level. Prices continued to have downward trend. Hypothecation of crops was impossible and a crisis seemed imminent. Shri Kanoi has to pay a heavy sum of a lac of rupees as interest only. During this financial stringency Messrs. Rampat Dass Rameswar Dass of Barbarua gave their timely help. In 1932 Indian Tea Licensing Committee came into existence and signs of improvement were noticeable in the tea market in 1933. Between 1934-36 Shri Kanoi had cleared all his debts including Barbarua debts and prospects became brighter.

In 1934 unfortunately Shri Kanoi's wife Smt Manohari Devi passed away. This bereavement was shocking and the lady who was Shri Kanoi's consort and constant helpmate during periods of weal and woe was no longer to share her husband's prosperity. Her mortal remains were cremated at a beautiful spot in Goneshbari, selected by Shri Kanoi himself, and there now stands a Siva temple in her memory. This distressing personal sorrow, however, could not swerve Shri Kanoi from the path of duty and he strictly stuck to his packed up schedule of work and activities.

The second world war was already on; aerodromes were being made at Mohanbari, Dinjan and Nadwa etc. There was panicky flight of people from Upper Assam to avert the war dangers in the frontier area. The Kanois, however, stayed on. Japanese bombing at Dinjan and Nadwa in October, 1942, did not scare them away. Shri Kanoi courageously continued his work in the State of his adoption. His courage and devotion to duty were rewarded and his business steadily progressed through the war years

and after. In 1947, Shri Kanoi opened an office in Calcutta and placed his nephew Lal Chand Kanoi in-charge of the same.

This wholehearted co-operation and unity in the family have been mainly instrumental in the all round success and progress of the business. The years from 1950 to 1956, saw Kanoi purchasing and expanding tea gardens in quick succession.

Titadimuru Tea Estate, now named Manohari Tea Estate after his wife-then 338 acres, Mokalbari Tea Estate-then 774 acres, Rungliting Tea Estate then 330 acres. Ubhetajan, renamed as 'Sri Krishna', Gillapukri Tea Estate 463 acres, Sapoi Tea Estate 952 acres, Manabarrie Tea Estate 650 acres, Ethelbari Tea Estate 447 acres, and Kamakhya Bari Tea Estate 200 acres came under his direction one after another, during this period. He is at present the biggest individual Indian Tea Planter, beside supervising and advising quite a few Indian Tea Gardens. Shri Kanoi has extended standard facilities as required by Government and I. T. A. to all his gardens. Anyone visiting Goneshbari wonders at the happy employer and employee relations, existing there under the fostering care generous minded Shri Kanoi. Important foreign delegations i.e., from Russia, Yugoslavia, Argentina, America, U.K., Iran and important personalities from Indian and outside visiting Shri Kanoi's gardens invariably pay eloquent tribute to the efficient organizing ability of Shri Kanoi and the excellence of his gardens. Kanoi's fame in the Tea industries has travelled far and wide and beyond the borders of India. In 1953, he visited South India and Ceylon to study the conditions of the Tea industry there.

He was the first president of Tea Association of India. He is a member of Tea Advisory Committee, Assam Financial Corporation. He is also president and active member of many social, cultural and religious organisation, e. g. AssamPrantiya Marwari Sammelan, Assam Rajya Rashtrabhasha Prachar Samiti, etc. His eminence in the Tea industry and the social life of Assam was appreciated by the then Government in the conferment on him of the title of "Rai Sahib" in the year 1945.

Shri Kanoi is no ordinary industrialist. He has patiently built the industry from a scratch, bit by bit with reliance on God overhead and confidence in his capacity for work and unfailing judgment. Success has not made him proud.

Those who meet him are struck by his firmness and humility at the same time; simplicity in the midst of plenty and devotion to the ideals of plain living and high thinking. His love for children is remarkable and his solicitude for their welfare great. Though without education, his interest in and concern for higher education knew no bounds. He is creating history in social welfare work and charitable donations in Assam and his munificence is rapidly crossing the borders of this state and progressively benefitting other parts of India. His multifarious munificence and charitable donation make a formidable list which is difficult to complete. Objects of his charities are divers and beneficiaries thereof, various institution and association, educational, cultural and religious. His unique patronage of D. H. S. K. College named after him is unparalleled in Assam. He first donated Rs. 10,000/- for equipping the College Library. Later he donated a lac of rupees to

facilitate the opening of the Science Section of the College.

The magnificent new building of the College, inaugurated by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Vice President of India, is a shining monument of his great love for educational progress. His total donations for the College will mount up to lakhs of rupees.

Nobody can miss the body of innumerable applicants for donations and assistance constantly approaching him for diverse purpose. Donations made by Shri Kanoi will surely run into pages.

A man with such qualities of head and heart as Shri Kanoi, is no ordinary mortal. The future historian writing the history of Assam of modern times will have pleasure to write his name and narrate his life in letters of gold. About him we can say, here is a man whose life may be emulated. There is no doubt that he has mastered the secrets of good living for the good of society and that by trying to attain his ideals of plain living and high thinking, unswerving devotion to duty and over-vigilant solicitude for social wellbeing, the present generations will bring about higher levels of material and spiritual prosperity, so much needed in India of to-day.

Shri Kanoi was awarded "Padmashree" in the year 1965 for his outstanding efforts to serve the people and society. Earlier in 1945, as stated earlier he was conferred Rai Sahib title by the then Government for his contribution towards the people of Assam.

Rarely would you find a man with so much to spare and actually sparing so much for others. He never lost an

opportunity to help the needy, even though he had very limited support in his struggle from ordinary to riches. His benevolence knew no bounds. His charitable donations were spread all across India. He believed that God gives to those who give to others.

Even though he could not study much he took it upon himself to see that those who are in need got the assistance through scholarship for higher studies. He donated generously for uplifting facilities in existing colleges. He helped in sitting up educational institution in Rajasthan. Three new Colleges in Dibrugarh – DHSK Commerce College, Manohari Devi Knaoi Girls' College, Kanoi Law College, even the Dibrugarh University was partly built with his generous donation.

He was also instrumental in establishing medical units in and around Dibrugarh for the benefit of the needy and poor patient, showcasing the commitment of a man towards education and social welfare.

When he knew his end was near, he called his eldest son and said 'all of you should live with amity and love and never forget the virtues of humanity' and in the year 1967 on 19th April he breathed his last with following words in his mouth 'O Lord! Why do you play hide and seek? You came near to me and then disappear. O lord why? Have I not fulfilled my task? and he passed away without any prolonged illness or being bedridden. Such was his control over life and death.

He was no ordinary mortal. Personalities like him are rare to find with qualities that few can match in modern times. Living in simplicity when he had plenty. Helping

others when he himself was in trouble. Personal sorrows were set aside for societal service. He exemplified in a refreshing way the determination of the 'native' to stand up and be equal to the 'white' man. His life serves as guiding force not just for a few of us but for the entire Humanity. ●

A personal Note cum Tribute from the Author

I am writing this writeup out of my reverence and gratitude to my elder grandfather.

We the members of Kanoi family consider to be a great honour to identify ourselves as descendants of such a personality who can only be referred as incarnation of God in human avatar. I, in my humble way, had taken the liberty to write a short life history of my elder grandfather based on the stories as narrated by the family members. Although I am aware of the fact that it is impossible to pen down the entire gamut of his life in just a few pages or lines but even then I considered it as my first and foremost duty to acknowledge in public about his immense contribution to mankind.

I am hopeful that with this little gesture we can in our small way express our respect to the great man and try to emulate the path shown by his toward contributing something for the well being of the downtrodden members of the society and also to atone ourselves if we have faltered in our journey to follow the path shown by Him. ●

AUTHORS



কৰ্মসূৰ্য ড° শশীকান্ত শইকীয়া

ডি.এইচ.কানে মহাবিদ্যালয়ৰ অধ্যক্ষ, ডিব্ৰুগড় গান্ধীপথ, গান্ধীনগৰৰ বাসিন্দা, কৰ্মসূৰ্য, সেউজৰত্ন উপাধিৰে সন্মানীত ড° শশীকান্ত শইকীয়া এগৰাকী নিয়মীয়া স্তম্ভ লেখক, সাহিত্যিক, কবি আৰু সমাজ সংগঠক। সমগ্ৰ পৃথিবীৰ বিভিন্ন দেশত সঁচৰতি হৈ থকা অসমীয়া মানুহখিনিক একেখন মঞ্চলৈ আনিবলৈ যত্নপৰ হোৱা, 'মেহেবন্ধন' (A Global Assamese Community) নামৰ অনুষ্ঠানৰ সম্পাদক, স্বচ্ছ ভাৰত মিছন (নমস্কে) ৰাজ্য অসমৰ ৰেণু এম্বেছেদৰ, হাচান শ্বৰিফ আহমদ সমন্বয় বঁটা, শ্ৰেষ্ঠ অধ্যক্ষৰ দক্ষতা বঁটা, প্ৰণৱানন্দ মানৱসেৱা বত্ন বঁটা, শ্ৰেষ্ঠ সাংবাদিকতাৰ বঁটাৰে সন্মানীত, ঐতিহাসিক ডিব্ৰুগড় সাহিত্য সভাৰ সভাপতি, ডিব্ৰুগড় চেছ ক্লাবৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠাপক সভাপতি, ডিব্ৰুগড় প্ৰেছ ক্লাবৰ প্ৰাক্তন কোষাধ্যক্ষ, বৃহত্তৰ ডিব্ৰুগড় প্ৰেছ ক্লাবৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠাপক উপ-সভাপতি, ডিব্ৰুগড় জিলা সাংবাদিক সন্থাৰ প্ৰাক্তন সম্পাদক, কলেজ শিক্ষক সংস্থাৰ ডিব্ৰুগড় মণ্ডলৰ প্ৰাক্তন সম্পাদক, ইণ্ডিয়ান কলেজেচ ফ'ৰামৰ কাৰ্যনিৰ্বাহক সদস্য, অসমৰ নামঘৰ একত্ৰীকৰণ সমিতিৰ প্ৰতিষ্ঠাপক সভাপতি।

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CA JYOTI P KANOI

A Chartered Accountant with over 46 years of specialization in the field of income-tax and Corporate matters, in 2021 took leave from the active profession. He continues to be a regular speaker at professional seminars/conferences and has contributed various articles on his subject.

He represents the Kanoi Family. From very early, Shri Kanoi was recognized for his keen sense of responsibility and his devotion to duty. He was commended by the than Principal of DHS Kanoi Commerce College, Dr. N.K. Basu as having ably supported the Institution as Assistant General Secretary (1968), Welfare and Cultural Secretary (1969) and Vice-President (1970) of the Student's Union of the College.

Jyoti is actively involved with several social organizations in Dibrugarh. He is on the Governing Body of DHS Kanoi College, Manohari Devi Kanoi Girls' College and Vice President of the Governing Body of DHS Kanoi Law College. Jyoti is the Founder Trustee of the Dibrugarh Gymkhana Club, Elected Ex-President (Two Terms) of Shree Vishwanath Marwari Databya Ausdhalaya and Marwari Arogya Bhawan Hospital.

Jyoti is married to Lalita, a social worker and crafts expert and blessed with two sons, Abhisek, a CA and an MBA from the University of Oxford (UK), and Dr Aditya, a M.Ch. in Plastic Surgery and Fellow in Plastic & Reconstructive Microsurgery. Abhisek is married to Dr Swati, a Doctorate (PhD) in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford, and presently working with the said University. Aditya is married to Dr Pooja, who is a Dentist.