

Bhupen Hazarika: The Minstrel with a Message

Dr. Neeva Rani Phukan

Associate Professor, Discipline of Assamese, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Resham Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022, Assam, India

Email: [neevarani11\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:neevarani11[at]gmail.com)

Contact No: 9365231181

Abstract: *Iconic singer, lyricist, music composer, mass educator, journalist, politician and above all a man who devoted his life towards the cause of humanity- Bhupen Hazarika, needs no other introduction. He is a prominent figure of Assamese and himself the cultural life of Assam. His overall contribution to the greater social life has earned him the status of a global citizen. Above all these he has created timeless songs steeped in humanitarian thought. The initial journey of this artist's entity began with "Zero Identity". The virtuous man was able to identify the energy inherent within his being. With the passage of time that inherent energy expressed itself in a multi facet manner. Born in Assam in the second decade of the twentieth century, he was a representative bridge between two eras. Those times were turbulent, but it helped Bhupen Hazarika to grow and develop his artistic being. He could feel the brunt of the World Wars, the Quit India Movement, the Indo-Pakistan war, the Bangladesh liberation struggle, the Indo China war, the awakening and liberation of national entities under the colonial hammer in Europe, Africa and Latin America, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, etc. The country's scientific and technological development and cultural awakening seemed to give new vision and brightness to Bhupen Hazarika's artistic being. His songs are vibrant with the varied colours of life. The committed artist in Bhupen Hazarika loved people. He had deep faith in people. He believed that the evil may upset people but temporarily. At the end it is truth that prevails. There has always been a conflict between good and evil throughout the development of human civilization. Yet, civilization has developed amidst that conflict. In his view, life is an eternally dynamic entity. That entity continues to rotate in its orbit in a circular motion. The axis of that orbit is human commitment. People can never escape responsibility. The youth is the future hope of the world. They should not be passive or idle in any circumstance. This Research Paper is an attempt to analyze the message imbedded in the numerous songs sung by Bhupen Hazarika. It included those songs also which lyrics have been penned by Bhupen Hazarika himself. The songs are varied and the messages are significant which are relevant to this day.*

Keywords: Humanity, cultural life, global citizen, timeless songs, energy, inherent, multi facet, messages, relevant.

1. Introduction

"Music is the literature of the heart; it commences where speech ends"- Alphonse de Lamartine has expressed the right definition of music. Indeed, it is music which has the right proportion to calm the mind in turbulence. It has the motivational power to motivate the masses even. If seen from this standpoint Bhupen Hazarika can be called the music maestro from Assam whose musical voice has enthralled millions. True to the term he was a "Roving Gypsy" but with a mission. He was an iconic artist with a humanitarian attitude. The songs composed and sung by him indicates towards this aspect of his musical career.

Bhupen Hazarika had a humble beginning. Having passed the matriculation examination, he came for higher studies at Cotton College- the higher education hub of Assam during colonial period. After that he proceeded to Banaras Hindu University. One of his subjects was Philosophy. None other than the formidable personality and educationist Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan was one of his teachers there. Banaras was also the hub of classical music of India in those days. The young and energetic Bhupen Hazarika explored the rich tradition of Indian classical music. Returning back to Assam, he joined the All India Radio, Shillong-Guwahati station. He worked there both in the capacity of an official as well as artist in 1948. Then came the year 1952.

Far away in the USA, in the year 1952, unknown to many and known to only a few, a young and dynamic young scholar from Assam, was awarded the Ph.D. Degree from Columbia University for his Doctoral Thesis "Role of Mass

Communication in India's Adult Education". He was none other than Bhupen Hazarika. After his arrival back to India, he got associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association where he bonded with prominent artists and stalwarts of the stage and entertainment industry such as Hemanga Biswas, Balraj Sahni, etc. He composed some special songs for the IPTA too. (Hazarika,2008, pp.0.4)

He had a short stint as teaching faculty in the department of Education, Gauhati University too. Due to some reason, he left that job for higher ambitions.

It was after Bhupen Hazarika was done with formal institutional job at the Gauhati University that his tryst with destiny began. Born in Assam in the second decade of the twentieth century, he was a representative bridge between two different eras. Born in 1926, he was a witness to many good and bad events in the world. World War II, the Quit India Movement, the Indo-Pakistan War, the Bangladesh Liberation Struggle, the Indo-China war, the awakening and liberation of national entities under the colonial hammer in Europe, Africa and Latin America, the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. The country's (India) scientific and technological development as well as cultural awakening seemed to give new vision and light to Bhupen Hazarika's artistic being.

2. Objectives

This Research Paper is an attempt to gauge the artistic temperament of the music maestro Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. During the effort we will also try to analyze the universal appeal of Bhupen Hazarika's songs.

Volume 13 Issue 1, January 2024

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

www.ijsr.net

3. Methodology

Bhupen Hazarika's songs have mass appeal. They always have a message to convey. Keeping this in view the analytical approach has been taken into consideration while studying his songs.

4. Results and Discussion: The Minstrel with a Message

There has to be a strong basis of every novel initiative. So also, the path chosen by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika comes close to such a noble idea. He was ordained to be an artist while still a child of five years. In his autobiographical writing he has written how he was made to sing at a school function in Cotton Collegiate School, Guwahati. One of the distinguished guests of the function was Laxminath Bezbarua- the doyen of modern Assamese literature. He was so impressed by little Bhupen's rendering that Bezbaruah showered him with affection and blessings. (Hazarika, 2008, pp.0.3)

Bhupen Hazarika's early association with the then cultural hub of Assam-Tezpur town proved to be a milestone as far as his creativity as an artist or advocate of the mass media for cultural awareness is concerned. Eminent poet, playwright, filmmaker Jyotiprasad Agarwala taught him how to appreciate beauty. Accomplished artist, social cum cultural activist Bishnu Prasad Rabha was his second mentor who taught him the nuances of culture and also how folk culture can be utilized as a powerful medium of mass media. In the long run Bhupen Hazarika used his songs as a tool for transformation of society-

“Mur Gaan Houk, Bohu Asthahinotar Biporite
Ek Gobhir Asthar Gaan
Mur Gaan Houk, Kalpana-Bilaxor Biporite
Ek Satya Proshostir Gaan”
(Hazarika, 2008, pp.0.5)

(Meaning: May my song be a song of hope in the face of hopelessness, let my song be a mirror of truth rather than celebration of illusion)

At times Bhupen Hazarika's songs have been scrutinized critically and comments passed that he was a diehard romantic idealist. Minute observation of his songs nullifies this negative criticism. He was awarded the Doctoral Degree for his Ph.D. Thesis “Role of Mass Communication in India's Adult Education.” The subject matter itself indicates to his futurist bend of mind. For example, we can take this song of Hazarika into consideration-

“Gawore Jiyori Xopun Xundori
Gawote Xopun Rosu Moi
Matite Xorog Rosu Moi
Debotai Ra Lagi Sai”
(Goswami, 2012, pp.4)

(Meaning: I am the daughter of the village, I am the beauty who weaves dream in the village and turn it into heaven, I create a heaven on earth, the Gods of heaven look with awestruck eyes)

These lines indicate to his visionary progressive thinking. Adult education also covers ‘Half of the population’ of the nation, i.e. the women. Educating a woman means educating a nation in the long run. This teaching is not limited to the bookish knowledge only. It also imparts knowledge on expression of creativity and vocational education. Imparting this knowledge will empower the women folk and its practice will help them to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural life of the nation at large. Women are able to accomplish such impossible feats by virtue of their diligence. He spent an important part of his student life abroad and was not unaware of the liberation consciousness of the women there. He was also aware of the women's liberation movement that was spreading abroad. In India too, such a change was coming gradually. Therefore, we can say that this particular song has a message which calls for the empowerment of women of Assam and India at large. There is scope of reappraisal of many of his songs from a new perspective.

He has contributed some beautiful songs related to love and longing-

“Bulu O' Mising Dekati
Bojali Je Pepati
Xurere Xojali Dekhun
Disang mukhor Nixati”
(Goswami, 2012, pp.8)

(Meaning: O young man of the Mising community, the soulful notes of your flute have beautified the night on the banks of the river Disang)

Its melody brings a sense of excitement, a lively feeling to the body and mind of the listener. It evokes a deep thought. There is a cultural thought, a cultural tradition associated with Mising folk life. The Mishings are an ethnic group of Assam rich in folk culture. Bhupen Hazarika has tried to showcase this rich tradition of an ethnic people in his song. Similarly, he has tried to showcase cultural life of other ethnic groups of Assam through his songs.

“Moi Eti Jajabor
Dhorar Dihinge-Dipange Loworu
Nibisaru Nija Ghor
Moi Luitopora Mississippi Goi Volgarr Roop Salu
Ottawarpora Austriya Hoi Paris Xaboti Lolu...”
(Hazarika, 2008, pp. 1066)

(Meaning: I am a gypsy roaming all over the world, I start my journey from the Luit to Mississippi and watch the beauty of the Volga, then I move from Austria to Ottawa and then embrace Paris)

This timeless song is also being composed by Bhupen Hazarika. The word Gypsy is significant here. When we observe the lines of the song minutely it can be seen that the gypsy self is restless. It doesn't have a permanent address. Yet it cannot be termed homeless or temporary. This is due to the fact that it is intoxicated by universal love, it is dedicated towards world peace and welfare of the world. All the elements of Bhupen Hazarika's academic, mental and

intellectual status that has been mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, actively gets reflected in this particular song.

The story of the hungry and the homeless is the same everywhere. There is no shortage of people who live in ivory towers, pretending not to hear the cries of the humiliated and oppressed. Everywhere around the world can be seen inferno like situation. The people are mentally disabled and cannot save themselves from the inferno like situation. Time has changed. Society is on the path of progress. But the gypsy self feels that the evil has not left the society completely. There is still some remnant of that evil in society. In fact, that evil has appeared in new forms in the new context of the new era-re-stirring society, bringing threats to social life from time to time.

The committed artist loved people. He had deep faith in people. He believed that even if negative thoughts temporarily upset people, in the end it is virtue and truth that will prevail.

In the words of Hazarika himself-

“ManuheManuhor Babe
JodiheOkonuNabhabe
OkoniXohanubhutire
BhabiboKunenuKunwa-Xomoniya”
(Goswami, 2012, pp.12)

(Meaning: People for people, if they don't think with a little sympathy, who will think? Buddy...)

There is the essence of such a positive thought in the lyrics of this song. There has always been a conflict between good and evil throughout the development of human civilization. Yet, civilization has developed amidst that conflict. People has taught lessons of humanity even in conflict torn environments. They have reached out to the weak and the strong have kept pace with them and created the ladder of progress. Civilizations are moving in a positive direction with the keywords Equality, Friendship and Harmony. Hazarika's songs thus call for equality and friendship among the world's human beings.

From his viewpoint, life is an eternally dynamic entity. That entity continues to rotate in its orbit in a circular motion. The axis of that orbit is human commitment. People can never escape responsibility. People have to face situations, whether be it good or bad. Since action is another name for dynamism, no one should sit idle. The youth, specially, the future hope of the world and the country, should not be stagnant under any circumstance. Therefore, the magical power of this innovative vocabulary, which have sprouted in the mind of the unique artist, is like an elixir of life to the younger generation suffering from melancholy and temporary stagnation(in other words depression).

“Autorickshaw Solau Aami Duyu Bhai
Guwahati Kori Gulzar
B-E Fail Moi, Xoru Bhai M.A. Pass
BankotuBohutu Dhar”

(Goswami, 2012, pp.57)

(Meaning: Both of us unemployed brothers, we drive autorickshaw in Guwahati, there is huge amount of loan in the bank, but we don't have any complexities)

The artistic self doesn't stop there. He calls out to the younger generation to show their competence, to showcase their entrepreneurship.

“Notun Purush, Notun Purush
Tumitu Nuhuwa Aru Bhiru Kapurush
Haate KaameAji Jodi Nuhuwa Purush
KaailoiHoba Tumi Purohi Purush”
(Hazarika, 2008,pp.1079)

(Meaning: New man, new man, you are not a timid coward, if you are not an industrious man today, you will be an old man tomorrow.)

There is no aspect of life that has not been touched by the themes of Hazarika's songs. In that sense he can be described as a life artist.

If we call life a multicolored, multi-angular prism, one of the colorful corners of this multi-angular prism is love. Any discussion of Bhupen Hazarika would be incomplete without taking this aspect into consideration. Moreover this eternal feeling of love, which stirred the heart of the artists, often gives life to the souls of the artists. That pure, warm feeling is incomparable. However, the nature and type of love can vary. The thirst of the artist who fell in love with life also focused on revealing the mysteries of the female heart. Interesting examples of this aspect gets revealed in some of his timeless lovesongs-

“Akashi Ganga Bisora Nai
Nai Bisora Swarna Alangkaar
Nisthoor Jivonor Sangramot
BisaruMoromor Maat Exaar”

(Meaning: I don't want the celestial Ganges, nor do I want gold jewelry, the only thing I want in this mundane world is your sweet words of love.)

Love has a special place in personal life. The nature of love can vary from person to person. In the lyrics of this particular song, the man seeking love wants to be close to his beloved, wants to hear her loving voice. He has nothing else to ask from her. It is worth to be noted that the lyrics of this song have a distinct appearance in the words played with by the composer. “I don't want the celestial Ganges”-it involves the consciousness of the earth. The celestial Ganges gives us the aura of the extra-terrestrial world. “Nor do I want gold jewelry” directs our attention to the ground. In other words, it refocuses our attention on the delusions of the earthly world. But the artist's purpose is not to attain the earthly world. He wants something that seems ordinary-his beloved's sweet voice. His weary soul finds peace in that sweet voice.

His notable songs about physical love also celebrates life. His mind is deeply immersed in the love of life. This is life craving that motivates the artist in him to create new creations and to encourage himself. In fact, Bhupen

Hazarika was an exceptional artist who celebrated life at all times and taught people to love life, to realize that the battle of life is necessary also for their sustainable existence.

5. Conclusion

It is difficult to analyze the life of an artist with such deep insight as Bhupen Hazarika on a small scale. To find the source of the philosophical thought in his songs, one must examine him from a deep theoretical perspective.

Therefore, in this new era, Bhupen Hazarika needs to be re-evaluated with a new perspective because the acceptability of his songs and the mystery inherent in them are still prevalent. Therefore, Bhupen Hazarika's artistic identity is still relevant.

References

- [1] Bora, Papul (Edited): Bhupendra Sangam; Nagaon, KishalayaGosthi, 2014
- [2] Dutta, Dilip Kumar: Bhupen Hazarika Geet aru Jeevan Rath; Kolkata-7, Shribhumi Publishing Company, 1982
- [3] Dutta, Namrata (Edited): Bhupen Da;Guwahati-1,Jyoti Prakashan, 2011
- [4] Goswami, Parinita (Edited):Bandita BarenyarSanditaXubax;Guwahati-24,Shruti-The School of Music, 2012
- [5] Hazarika,Surjya Kanta (Edited): Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Rachanawali, Volume 1, Guwahati-3, Bani Mandir, 2008
- [6] Hazarika, Surjya Kanta (Edited): Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Rachanawali, Volume 2, Guwahati-3, Bani Mandir, 2008
- [7] Hazarika, Surjya Kanta (Edited): Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Rachanawali, Volume 3, Guwahati-3, Bani Mandir, 2008
- [8] Hazarika, Surjya Kanta (Edited): Geetawali: Collection of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's Songs; Guwahati-3, Bani Mandir, 2008
- [9] Hazarika, Manasmrita: Bhupen Hazarika Jaoutijugiya Geet;Guwahati-3, Bani Mandir, 2012
- [10] Konwar, Arpana (Edited): ChirajogomiyaByoktitwa: Dibrugarh, 2018
- [11] Sharma, Shailendrajit (Edited): Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Geet aruKobitarBislekhanatmakAlochana; Guwahati-1, Chandra Prakash, 2012
- [12] Borgohain, Homen (Edited): Amar Asom, Guwahati-1, 2011