



Voice of The Voiceless: Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and His Songs of Human Love

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ABSTRACT

Popularly known as the bard of the Brahmaputra, Bhupen Hazarika was the greatest cultural icon of Assam who strode the cultural arena like a colossus. A multi-faceted talent as a singer, music director, poet, film-maker, lyricist, writer Dr. Bhupen Hazarika remained an unsung hero. A born humanist, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika composed many of his songs himself on varied themes and a good number speak of man's brotherhood across boundaries of nation and culture carrying a rousing humanist message. His songs are poignant with love, optimism and humanism. Through his songs he appealed for the down-trodden, oppressed and deprived section of the society and these songs are spontaneous expression of his human love.

This paper is a noble venture to analyse some selected songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika that reflects his humanitarian zeal.

KEYWORDS

colossus, humanism, optimism, oppressed

Popularly known as the bard of the Brahmaputra, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (Bhupen dada) was the greatest cultural icon of Assam who strode the cultural arena like a colossus. He was not only a singer, he was a lyricist, composer, musical director, poet, film-maker, writer all rolled into one. That is why most of the songs he had sung were most often written and composed by him. His highly emotive melodious voice, flawless diction, poetic composition and his parables on varied themes swayed millions for several decades. A born humanist, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika composed many of his songs himself on varied themes and a good number speak of man's brotherhood across boundaries of nation and culture carrying a rousing humanist message. His songs are poignant with love, optimism and humanism. Throughout his life, he strove through his songs to facilitate unity and brotherhood among people beyond the ethnic, community and language diversity and many of his timeless numbers would testify to his liberal ideals of humanity that he sought to espouse. Many of his songs evoke fellow feelings in the heart of masses. Through his songs he appealed for the down-trodden, oppressed and deprived section of the society and these songs are spontaneous expression of his human love. It is crystal clear that for this reason his songs never fail to touch the deepest chords of our hearts. Therefore, he was immensely popular not only in the states of Assam, but in the whole country. Apart from the Assamese language, he sang in many other Indian languages, including Hindi & Bengali. This very sense of belongingness to the society made him *janatar xilpi* (artist of the masses).

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is a humanist. His songs echo the soft feelings of his humanistic heart. Many of his songs evoke fellow feelings in the heart of the masses. Through his songs, he appeals for the down-trodden, oppressed and poorer section of the society. He appeals the world to show human feelings to them. Most of his songs are spontaneous expression of human love. There is none to him in portraying the sufferings, poverty and trauma of human being so fairly and representatively. It is observed that his love for people and the society emanating from his ideas, creative thoughts, value of life and his emotions are well reflected through his songs which have raised his status as the greatest cultural icon of India. With his heart-felt emotions he pours his life's message to the world and also identifies himself with the common masses and their sufferings, which has brought him closer to the people.

This paper is a noble venture to analyse some selected songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika that reflects his humanitarian zeal.

Artist of the masses

Various notable personalities shaped or influenced his broader humanistic approach in various stages of his life. Bhupen Hazarika came into contact with the legendary icons of Assamese art, music and literature Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha in his childhood. They planted feelings of nationalism and class consciousness in him. Jyoti Prasad taught him the aesthetic philosophy that was later to be the stepping stone of his poetic creations. Bishnu Rabha, a communist guided the revolutionary and humanist approach of Hazarika and intensified his love for the ordinary people, thereby making him to become *janatar xilpi* (artist of the masses).

Again, in his staying in the USA (Columbia University) Hazarika developed intimate contact with the African-American revolutionist singer Paul Robson and his humanism got a new dimension. We can have glimpses of Robson in Hazarika, both in his positivist humanistic approach and his works. Bhupen Hazarika wrote, "he was a social singer with the power to change....I too wanted to be a singer with the power to change the society." Robson's *Ol' man river* resonates in Hazarika's immortal composition *Bistimo parore* whose Bangla and Hindi versions are immensely popular as the Assamese one. Robson's another song

His broader humanistic approach was witnessed by the Assamese nationalism during the turmoil period of Assam in sixties and the eighties when ethnic conflicts between Assamese and Bengalis at the peak. Bhupen Hazarika played a pivotal role. During this time he composed song like *Morome bhaxar akhar naikia* (language of love don't have an alphabet). He also formed peace-seeking cultural troop and visited those violence affected areas and met the people.

To say, the Bhupendrian kaleidoscope is comprised of innumerable hues and shades of humanity. Bhupen Hazarika sought, strived and fought for the restoration of a society free from the prejudices and discrimination. He talked of the casteism, rich-poor drift, problem of those who face economic depravity. Hazarika had a plethora of concerns but all have common motive surging behind i.e to let the common human beings come up with a resistance against the hardship of their life. Thus, Bhupen Hazarika, the humanist worked through his composition to tell about those aspects of common human life, which need concern of the society.

His songs preaching brotherhood and human bonding carry messages of protest, compassion and peace. For him, music

carries the spirit of the people that common thread linking men to men. He, throughout his life gave voice to teeming millions of voiceless through his melodies to raise their voice against all sorts of discrimination and inequalities. Many of his timeless numbers are imbued with voice against the hardship of the common masses and destitute. In this paper, some selected songs of Dr. Hazarika have been taken up for discussion.

Bhupen Hazarika's Songs of human interest

Manuhe manuhor babey
Jodihe okonu nabhabee....
Bhabibo konen kowa, xamania.....

(If a man doesn't think of man with little sympathy..... tell me o friend who will....?)

This song is considered to be the most poignant one. It bears the liberal ideals of humanity that he sought to give. This song clearly indicates the need for fellow-feelings and bondage between people in humanistic manner. Throughout his life, Bhupen Hazarika strove for the unity, brotherhood among the people cutting across the barriers of ethnicity, community, language etc. and this song is the most poignant one to testify his those ideals. This song soothes our stressed and bereaved soul with its fine blending of love, optimism and humanism.

In the same song,
Manuh jodihe nohoy manuh
Danav kahanu nohoy manuh
Jodi danav kahaniba hoyei manuh
Laj pabo kunenu kua?

He asks if we human fail to act as a human being...a demon can never be a human being, if a demon acts as a human being, we will be ashamed.

In another song
Xitore xemeka rati
Xemeka xitorev rati
Bastra bihin kono khetiyakar...

Bhagi pora pojatir tuh jui ekurat, umi umi joli thoka, raktim jen eti uttap hou.....

(On a wilt winter night may I be a red glowing warmth of the slowly burning ember from the hay in a cloth less farmer's dilapidated hut). He speaks of and inspires the working masses and suppressed classes with whom he sought to assimilate. Bhupen Hazarika lamented the plight of the oppressed and was against all forms of hierarchy and domination. His songs were strong voice in favour of the poor and the marginalised section of the society and against those in position of power to change the situation. In this line - *Bastra bihin kono khetiyakar Bhagi pora pojatir tuh jui ekurat umi umi joli thoka, raktim jen eti uttap hou...* (may I be in a cloth less peasants' broken hut, of the slowly burning ember from the hay, the red glowing warmth), he describes the plight of the working masses. Dr.Hazarika strived for the brotherhood and emotional integration amongst the humanity of the world.

The doctrine of universalism is best expressed in his *moi eti jajabor* (I am a vagabond).

Moi luitor pora Mississippi hoi vulgar rup salu
Ottawar pora Austria hoi
Peris haboti lolu

Moi lllorar pora puroni rohon Chicagole korhiyallo, moi Galibor shyar dushanber minarot huna palu, Mark Twainor homadhrit bohi Gorkyr kotha kolu, bare bare dekhun bator manuhu apone hoise bor, heiyei moi jajabor.

(He travelled and traversed from the **Luhit** (the river Brahmaputra) via Mississippi to Volga, from Ottawa via Austria to embrace Paris, from Illora to Chicago, heard Galib's *Shayaris* in the Minar of Dushanbe, spoke of Gorky sitting at Mark Twain's tomb and embraced the strangers as his own.) In this song, he identified himself with the common masses of the world. He is a vagabond and wonders with only one intention in mind, i.e unification of human mind. He is without home & family but, embraces the whole world as his own family.

Bhupen Hazarika lamented the plight of the poor and their sufferings and was against all forms of hierarchy and exploitation. So, in the same song – *moi dekhisu onek gogon chumbi ottalikar hari, tar santei dekhisu kotona griho hin noronari.....*

(I've seen many skyscrapers, but also seen countless homeless by the side of those skyscrapers.)

In another song,
Aami ekekhon naore yatri
Xahayatri ekekhon naore yatri.....

(We are in the same boat brother, if you tip one end you will rock the other.....)

He managed to extract a warm and common glow of humanity. His sense of humanism remained open to the world outside his limited political boundaries. But, this recognition of common humanity never takes away his original root but enriched it.

Bhupen Hazarika loved people. Their habitat, life, culture, social security always dominated his philosophy of life. He identified himself with the common masses and their sufferings, which has drawn him much closer to the people. He echoed their feelings and sentiments, pains and sufferings, hopes and aspirations and stood by them through his songs. His songs sometimes become bitter tone of protest and compassion.

In another song,
Prothom nohoi
Dwitiyo nohoi
Tritiyo shrenir yatri aami

(Neither first, nor second....are we the passengers of the third class).

Celebrating the strength of the working mass, he identified himself as a co passenger travelling towards the same destination. In this song we find optimistic expression of human philosophy of Bhupen Hazarika.

Conclusion: Bhupen Hazarika seeks, strives and fights for the restoration of a society free from the prejudices and discriminations. He talks of the casteism, rich-poor drift, problems of those who face economic depravity. Hazarika has a plethora of concerns but all have common motive surging behind i.e to let the common human beings come up with a resistance against the hardship of their life. Thus, Bhupen Hazarika, the humanist works through his composition to talk about those aspects of common human life, which need concern of the

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