

Lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika: A Thematic Study

Subasana Mahanta, Ph.D.



Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011)

Courtesy: <http://www.in.com/bhupen-hazarika/gallery-life-in-pics-bhupen-hazarika-19262011-35939-21203894.html#2>

Abstract

Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011) was an Indian lyricist, musician, singer, poet and film-maker from the State of Assam. His songs, written and sung mainly in the Assamese language by himself have been translated and sung in other Indian languages, particularly in Bengali and Hindi. His songs are marked by humanity, universal fraternity and emotional bonding. His songs, based on the themes of communal amity, universal justice and empathy, have become popular among the people of Assam, besides West Bengal and Bangladesh. This paper is an attempt to classify the lyrics of his songs according to the themes addressed

and discuss the significance of the themes. The study has classified the themes of the lyrics as patriotism, humanism, social reform, concern for native land and people and universal thinking. The paper has brought to light his broader humanistic and universal view along with his love and concern for the underprivileged people expressed in his lyrics.

Key words: Lyrics, Humanism, Universalism, Social Reform

Introduction

Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011) was an Indian lyricist, musician, singer, poet and filmmaker from the State of Assam. His songs, written and sung mainly in the Assamese language by himself have been translated and sung in other Indian languages, particularly in Bengali and Hindi. His songs are marked by humanity, universal fraternity and emotional bonding. His songs, based on the themes of communal amity, universal justice and empathy, have become popular among the people of Assam, besides West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Hazarika is also acknowledged to have introduced the culture and folk music of Assam and North East India to Hindi cinema at the national level. He received the National Film Award for Best Music Direction in 1975. Recipient of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1987), Padmashri (1997), and Padmabhushan (2001).

Bhupen Hazarika was a social reformer and a true humanist. For years, he had inspired people young and old, rich and poor, happy and suffering, of all hues and faiths with his music to face life with dignity. He uses his songs as a vehicle to communicate, to talk about the state of affairs prevailing in contemporary society, to put across his thoughts about his vision of Assam, to appeal to the consciences of the masses. He was an iconic persona idolised by millions of North-easterners of India who are inspired by his thoughts and values through his music.

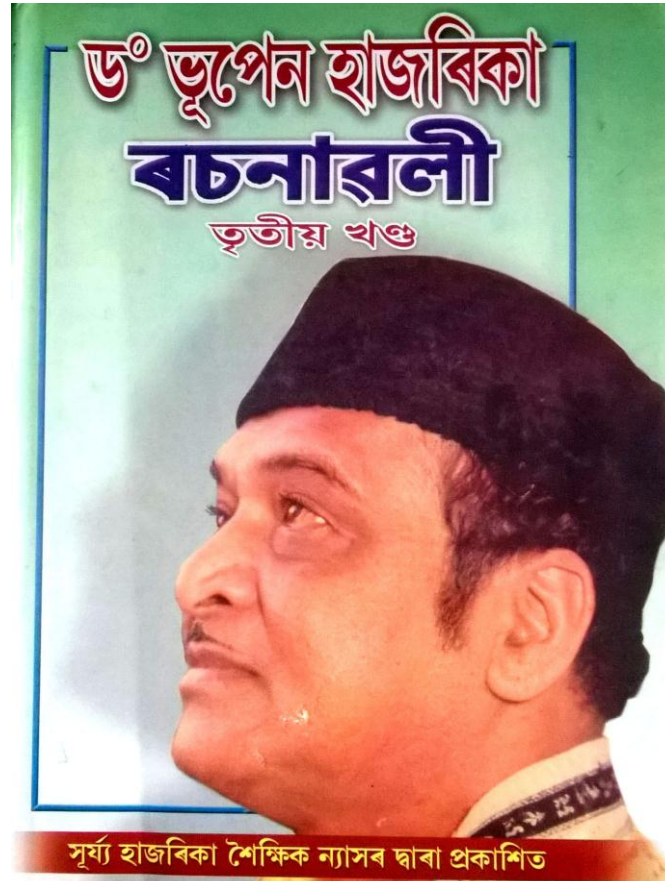
Hazarika's lyrics reveal a person who devoted his mind, soul, and life to the improvement of his native society as a voice for the people who lacked the courage or intelligence to challenge authority themselves. He was in tune with the common man always. In many ways, he represents their psyche, their inner feelings, their joy and anguish, their

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hope and aspirations. He personifies their dreams and struggle through his songs. But, as a soulful wanderer his journey continues in faith, seeking truth and purity of beauty and his appeal is truly universal. His lyrics are characterized by unrestrained passion and exalted imagination. Imagination was his passion through which he explored the whole universe to bring together impressions and associations indicative of his ideals and aspirations.



The Third Volume of the Complete Works of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika

Dr. Hazarika's style of lyrics is colourful and full of sensuous. Spontaneity and musical beauty marked his lyrics. Nature was highly elevated by Dr. Hazarika where one notices that forces and objects of nature act as vehicles of his new ideas. Some of his lyrics are revolutionist and intends to use nature as expression, personification, and radical thought to provoke a sense of revolution. It is prompted by zeal of reform and frequently sounds a prophetic attitude. This unhappy and far too imperfect world is to be transformed into a

blessed land of freedom, love and absolute joy and he passionately voices his belief that the glorious transformation would come through his songs.

Focus of This Paper

This paper intends to classify the themes addressed in the lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika. It also discusses the implication of the themes for the society, culture and humanity. The themes depicted in the lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika can be classified as follows:

1. Patriotism
2. Humanism
3. Social Reform
4. Concern for Native Land and People
5. Universal Thinking

Patriotism

One of the principal subject matters of Bhupen Hazarika's lyrics has been patriotism. In a number of lyrics his love for native state and the nation is evident. For instance

- “*Agnizugar Firingati Mai* ” (Of the fiery age, I'm a spark)
- “*Asam aamaar rupahii gunaro naai sesh*” (Our Assam is lovely so, her gifts, too, make her glow)
- “*Ranaklaanta nahaõ*”(I won't be battle-weary)
- “*Buku ham ham kare*” (My heart is hammering)
- “*Kata Jowanar mriyu hol*”(So many soldiers met their ends)

At the age of thirteen the lyricist wrote “*Agnizugar firingati Mai* ” which shows his love for his mother land. He wrote ---

Agnizugar firingati Mai

Natun Asam garhim

Sarbahaaraar sarbaswa

Punar firaai aanim

Natun Bhaarat garhim

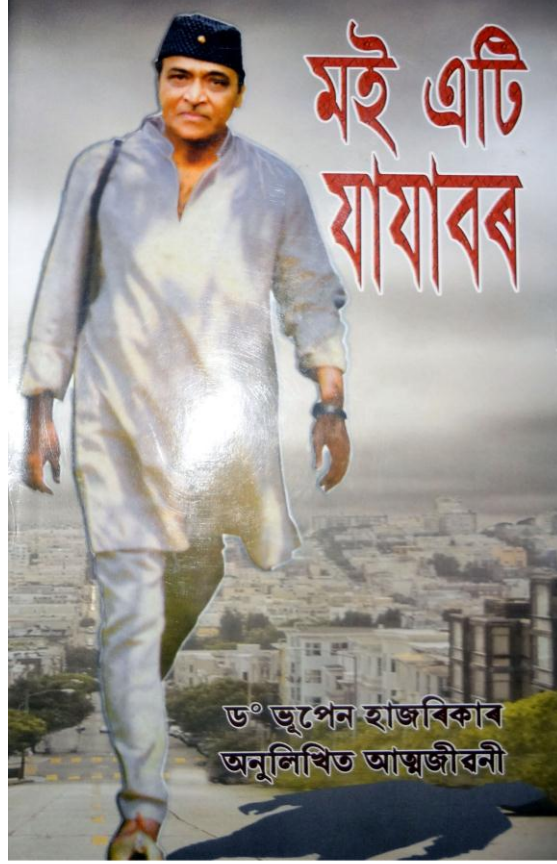
(Of the fiery age, I'm a spark; I will build up a new Assam/ to the have-nots I'll bring back whatever they've lost/ I will build up a new India.)

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'Mai Eti Zaazaabar' (A Transcribed Autobiography of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika)

In the peak time of the freedom movement of India, inspired by the thought of patriotism, Bhupen Hazarika wrote this lyric. His deep sense of love for his nation and the country are expressed in a number of lyrics.

In one of his lyrics Hazarika used to consider his mother land as the pilgrimage of courage in the battlefield of life –“*Jeewn ranaangant tumi saahasare teerthabhumi*” (You’re the pilgrimage of pluck in the battlefield of life). In his lyric “*Asam aamaar rupahii gunaro naai sesh*” (Our Assam is lovely so, her gifts, too, make her glow...) he portrays a unique picture of Assam, the eastern-most State of India where sun rises first, describing its natural beauty and co-existence of various communities of hills and plains. In this lyric the cultural harmony and social condition of Assam has been highlighted.

Hazarika's patriotic feelings are evident in other two significant lyrics "Ranaklaanta nahaõ" and "Buku ham ham kare" written in the context of Indo-China War of 1962. In the lyric "Ranaklaanta nahaõ" he said – *Ranaklaanta nahaõ/Ranaklaanta nahaõ/Ranaklaanta nahaõBhaarat-Singha aaji jaagrat hay/ prati rakta bindute sahasra swahiidar saahar citijya ujjwal hay.....* (I won't be battle-weary, I won't be battle-weary, I won't be battle-weary Today a leonine India is awake, in each drop of martyr's blood glows the heritage of valour.....). In his lyric "Buku ham ham kare" he sang —

*Buku ham ham kare ----- mor Aai
Kone nidraa hare ----- mor Aai
Putra hõi mai kimate tarõ?
Aai, tore hõi mai marõ.*

*Deshare chandramaa
Kaal endhaare aaware
Agani kaalika
Dehar randhre randhre chare*

*Bajra-sama drirh Aai
Chõupashare garh
Chõupashare garh bhedim
Kinchito naai par*

*Zããchim saantwanaa
Aai mukti-prabhaatere
Thaapim thaapanaa
Aai shonit tiyagere*

(My heart is hammering, o mother! Who takes away my sleep, o mother? How can I, your son, tide you over? I feel like dying for you. The moon of our land is lost in the menacing dark; ghastly flames spread over my body's every pore. The rampart hard as thunder runs all

around, o mother! In no time I'll break apart; O mother! All around the rampart. With a liberated morn I'll console you, o mother! With the sacrifice of blood I'll build an altar.)

In memory of the sacrifice of the martyrs of Indo-China War of 1962, he wrote –

Kata Jowanar mrityu hól

Kaar jeewn-jouwan gól

Sei mrityu aparaajeya

Tene mritak nõhõlo mai kiya

.....

Kata Pitri Putrahaaraa hól!

Kon Maatrir buku suda hól?

Rangaa sendur kaar machaa gól?

Kaar baasanaa apurna ról?

.....

Prati Jowaan raktare bindu

hól saahasar ananta sindhu

Sei saahasare durjeya lahare

Zächile pratijgyaa jayare

(So many soldiers met their ends/ Lost their lives and youths/ Their deaths are invincible/
Among them had I been one ... Many a father has lost his son! Which mother's bosom has
been emptied? Whose forehead vermilion got wiped off? Whose desires remained
unfulfilled? drops of blood of a soldier/ Are an eternal sea of courage/ The invincible
waves of courage/ Offer their pledge of victory.)

This lyric is a unique example of his great sense of patriotism. The lyric expresses his concern for the life of the soldiers and their parents and wives.

Humanism

Humanism is another theme of Bhupen Hazarika's lyrics which gives his songs universal acceptance. In a number of lyrics of the legendary singer of Assam, his concern for

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the humanity and the underprivileged sections of the society are evident. His love for humanism can be seen in the song –

*“Manuhe manuhar babe
Jadihe akono nevaabe
Akani sahaanubhutire
Bhaabib koneno kowãã, Samaniiyaa ?*

(If human do not care/ about humans at all/ with a bit of sympathy/ who else will care? Say o mate!)

For the people deprived of social, economic and political justice Bhupen Hazarika sang ---

*“He Dolaa He Dolaa He Dolaa He Dolaa
He ekaa bêkaa baatere karhiyaaõ karhiyaaõ
Bar bar maanuhar dolaa
He Dolaa*

*Dolaare bhitarat tirbir k̄riche
Chahakii paatare paag
Ghane ghane dekhichõ larchar kariche
Sukulaa chõwarar aag
Morhe l̄raaṭik eibaar bihute
Nidilõ sutaare cholaa
Chakulo olaaleo manṭi nebhaañõ
Karhiyaaṭi l̄oi jaaõ dolaa”*

(We trudge along winding paths and carry the grandee’s palanquin; within the palanquin is sheening the richly silk turban... It is for my son that this “Bihu” festival I could get not even a cotton shirt. Although tears well up, I do not lose heart; I trudge and carry on the palanquin.)

In this lyric the pains, troubles and anger of the exploited labour-class of the society are expressed. The troubles and deprivation of the poor and the exploited are same across the

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countries of the world. In the lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika, pains of the poor farmers of the bank of the river Nile and the plight of the Negro farmer of the bank of Mississippi are also seen. For example,

Michar deshare Niil Ncir paarate
Faallaahiine binaale
Koi krisakar bukure bethaa
Michichipir paarate kapaahar khetite
Nigro Jone binaale
Koi maanuhar baranar katha

(On the banks of the Nile in Egypt Fallahan cried his heart out for the peasants sorrow./ The Negro John sobs on the bank of the Mississippi in the cotton fields talking of the discrimination of colour.)

Hazarika wanted the elimination of feudal exploitation in the society. He sings in the interest of freeing few oppressed down-trodden class from the clutches of the feudalist.

Social Reform

In the lyric of the song “*Bistiirna paarare asangkhyā janare hããhaakaar sunio nihsabde niirawe burhaa luit tumi burhaa luit bowãã kiya ?*”, Bhupen Hazarika speaks about the cultural, political, economic and social reform of his native Assamese society. *Luit*, the raging, ferocious river that carves its tumultuous way through Assam valley. The only “male” river in India, it is truly the son of Brahma, Brahmaputra, in the ferocity of its power as well as in all-pervasiveness of its influence over the lives of the people who live on the bank of it. But the *Luit* of his lyric is “*Burha*” (old), perhaps with waning powers, impotent as it flows “*nihsabde*”, “*niirawe*” (quietly) down, even as battles rage on its banks, and injustice piled on breaks the backs of the less privileged. Is the river weary of, or merely indifferent to, the mayhem taking place on its banks? He questioned the old *Luit* “Morality is going down, humanity is losing ground; lazy and brazen, why you keep flowing? Having seen the unlettered devoid of knowledge, masses with hungry faces why you are silent about their indirection?” (*Ncitikataar skhalan dekhio/Maanawtaar patan dekhio / Nirlajja*)

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alashhawe bowãã kiya...) He addressed the river Brahmaputra, the son of Brahma, “If you are the son of Brahma, that lineage is just in name; why don’t you awake countless heroes like old Bhisma laid in the bed of arrows in the raging battle at Kurukshetra?” (*Tumi zadi howa Brahmare putra sei pitritwa tene naammaatra*)

Hazarika’s idea of changing contemporary society, liberating the downtrodden working class from exploitation are echoed in the following lyrics:

- “*Dhaak dhaak dhaak dhaak*”
- “*Raaij aaji bhaawariaa*”
- “*Aah aah olaai aah sajaag janataa*”

In the lyric “*Dhaak dhaak dhaak dhaak*” he calls the exploited working class to revolt against the privileged classes. He says, “Thump is not merely an instrument, thump is your weapon; strip naked your exploiters by snatching their clothes. To build a new society is your pledge; awake, awake, awake..... (*Dhaakto maathõ baajanaa nahay/ dhaak tahãtar astra/ shosakhãtak naan̄th kar/kaarhi si tahãtar bastra*). In the lyric of the song “*Raaij aaji bhaawariaa deshei naatghar*” he said people to be a worthy hero and braving the evil with their conscience (*dustajanke chetanaare zũji biirar zogya howã*).

Concern for Native Land and People

In a number of lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika, one can feel his heart-felt concern for his native land its people. For instance, in one of his great creations he sings ---

*“Aami Asamiyaa nahaõ dukhiyaa
Buli saantwanaa labhile nõhõb”*

This lyric retaliates against the conservative and complacent attitude of the people of Assam that they are self-sufficient, that they do not have any wants. He warns the people against such illusory notion which in future will prove to be major deterrent in the path of progress. Further, Assam will be in the doldrums for sheer lack of awareness of its inhabitants of their duties and responsibilities. He reminded the people of Assam that irrespective of caste, creed and religion they should safeguard their land against all dangers --

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- internal or external. He sang if it is not done, in their own land they will be living like aliens.

Bhupen Hazarika was very much concerned to see the separatist attitude of people of greater Assam. He was keen to unite various ethnic and religious communities living in Assam. His concern for assimilation of various ethnic and religious communities has been evident in the lyric of the song “*Mahaabaahu Brahmaputra mahaamilanar tiirtha*”. This lyric says the mighty Brahmaputra rolls on the pilgrimage of the great meeting and showing the meaning and worth of harmony.

Bhupen Hazarika’s concern for harmonious co-existence of various ethnic and hill tribes of North East India are echoed in the lyrics of the following songs:

- “*Aurn Kiron Shiror Bhusan.....*” (The sun-light of dawn is the ornament for the head.....)
- “*Tiraap siimaanta*” (The Tirap frontier
- “*Mai Kahimaare aadhunikaa Daalimii*” (I am the modern Dalimi of Kahima.....)
- “*ᵐ Miching dekaati*” (The Mising youth)
- “*Kaah manaaiah cheh Mijoraam....*” (I love you Mizoram
- “*Diphu hᵓl tomaare naam.....*” (Diphu is your name
- “*Swiloyre Manaalichaa Lingᵓ.....*” (Monalisa Lyngdoh from Shiilong.....)

Universal Thinking

We should not limit Bhupen Hazarika’s thoughts to Assam or India – he was a world citizen. The sobriquet of Zaazaabar (wanderer) that he took on for himself speak of his restlessness and utter disregard for geo-political restraints. His universal thoughts are best expressed in his classic lyric “*Mai Eti Zaazaabar*”--

*“Mai Luitarparaa Michichipi hᵓi Bholgaar ruup chaalᵓ
Aᵓowaarparaa Aᵓᵓriiyaa hᵓi Parich saawaᵓi lᵓlᵓ
Mai Iloraarparaa puraᵓi rahaᵓ Chikaagole karhiyaalᵓ
Gaalibar shwᵓer Dushwumber minaara sunaa paalᵓ*

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*Mark Toweinar samaadhrit bahi Garkiir katha kōlō
Baare bare dekhō baatar maanaho aapon hoiche bar
Seye mai zaazabar”*

(From the Luit through the Mississippi I have seen the Volga’s beauty/ From Ottawa through Austria I have given Paris an embrace hearty/ From Ellora I’ve carried to Chicago antique hues/ In the minarets of Dushambe I have heard Ghalib’s lays/ Squatting at Mark Twain’s grave I have talked of Gorky/ Time and again people in my journey / Have become to me so dear/ So I carry on as a wanderer.)

This sense of belongingness to the entire world while retaining his roots is quite rare. His universal thoughts are evident in other two significant lyrics written in the context of Chinese Revolution (“*Pratidhwani suno mai pratidhwani suno*”) and at the time of liberation of Bangladesh (“*Jaya jaya nabajaat Baanglaadesh*”). For instance he sang –

- “*Maanab Saagarat kolaahal suno/ natun Chiinar mai pratidhwani suno*”

(I hear the roar of the human ocean / I hear the echo of New China.)

- “*Jaya jaya nabajaat Baanglaadesh/ Jaya jaya Muktibaahinii/
Bhaaratiiya soinyar sate racilaa moitriir kaahinii*”

(Salute to newly born Bangladesh, Salute to liberation army; you wrote story of friendship with Indian Army.)

Summing Up

The forgoing classification of the themes addressed in the lyrics of Bhupen Hazarika, the legendary singer and lyricist of Assam, is not exhaustive. Apart from the five themes discussed in this paper, Bhupen Hazarika also wrote love songs, songs based on nature and its beauty and historical songs. The thrust of this paper is to bring to light his broader humanistic and universal view expressed in his lyrics.

The various themes addressed in his lyrics have revealed different shades of Bhupen Hazarika’s artistic personality. The lyric “*Agnizugar firingati Mai*” reflects the sense of humanism as well as echoes his patriotism, the love for the Indian Nation.

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Hazarika was a people's artist because his lyrics showed concern for the down-trodden and the underprivileged sections of the society. The lyric of the song “*He Dolaa He Dolaa He Dolaa He Dolaa*” was a blow to the feudal superstructure whereas the lyric of the song “*Manuhe manuhar babe*” contemplates the need for fellow-feeling and bonding between people in a humanistic manner. Similarly, in the lyric “*Raaij aaji bhaawariaa deshei naatghar*”, he asserts his love and concern for the people.

A good number of lyrics of Hazarika expresses his concern for the pluralistic nature of Assamese society and its relation with its neighbours. Hence, he wrote many lyrics to express a feeling of bonding and shared heritage between different ethno-linguistic identities of North East India.

Hazarika wanted to reform the society to make it free from exploitation and oppression. His lyrics are mostly written to address these social issues. He felt that this unhappy and far too imperfect world is to be transformed into a blessed land of freedom, love and absolute joy and he passionately voices his belief that the glorious transformation would come through his songs.

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