



Comparative Study on the *Jibonmukhi* songs (people oriented songs) of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa Chakraborty

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Abstract

Bharat Ratna and Dada Saheb Phalke award winner Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa Chakraborty from the eastern States of Assam and Bengal in India are well known in the country and abroad for their *Jibonmukhi* (people oriented) songs. Dr Hazarika (1926-2011) carried forward his songs of humanity across the borders to Bengal. He sang in Bengali and stayed in Kolkata to reach out to the toiling masses of Bengal. His songs broke the culture of jatra nad filmy songs in Bengal and introduced a new genre of people oriented song. Singers like Suman and Nachiketa later carried forward the legacy of Dr Hazarika's *jibonmukhi* songs in Bengal. Dr. Hazarika immortal legacy not only enriched Bengali art and culture but also initiated a new *gharana* of music. Legendary artistes like Salil Choudhury, S D Burman, Akhil Bandhu Ghosh, Manna Dey, Hemanta Mukherjee, R D Mukherjee, Sandhya Mukherjee were his contemporaries. Dr. Hazarika redefined modern Bengali music. He uplifted music beyond traditional romanticism.

Keywords: humanity, equality, freedom corruption, values.

1. Introduction

Dr Bhupen Hazarika was a multifaceted personality, He was a singer, composer, litterateur, film-maker, journalist, all rolled into one. His songs speak the language of brotherhood, humanity, tolerance, moral values, and integration in the society. Being influenced by the songs of American Black Civil Rights activist Paul Robson during his stay at Columbia University where he did his Phd. Dr. Hazarika always espoused the aspirations of the poor and downtrodden. Dr. Hazarika spent a major part of his life in Kolkata where he sang his songs in Bengali. He worked closely with Bengali film and music personalities. He introduced a new phase of *jibonmukhi* songs in Bengal. His song '*Manush Manushar jonye ..*' was selected by BBC

as the most popular song of the last millennium.

Nachiketa Chakraborty(1964-) is one of the most influential Bengali singers and songwriters of the 20th century. He was a child of the turbulent sixties. A decade which witnessed the desire of the people to break free from the shackles of traditional customs and man-made boundaries. His life was moulded by his surroundings. He rebelled against the political corruption, professional ethics violations of doctors and lawyers, the inhumanity of man, the decline in social values, the rise of gross materialism in society.

2. Statement of the problem

The songs of both Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa Chakraborty are people oriented (*Jibonmukhi*). Both sang for the people and the

problems and issues they face in their day to day lives. There has not been much comparative study on their songs. This study is a humble attempt to highlight their approach on the common issues of humanity which has not changed much over the years.

3. Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to make a comparative study of the issues of humanity in the songs of the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa Chakrabarty. To highlight the issues of love, humanity, equality, liberty, corruption, decline in social values, the rise of gross materialism in society. The songs of both Dr. Hazarika and Nachiketa carried a message for the people. They did not sing songs for the sake of singing. The content of their songs are rich in depth and meaning of human life and pathos.

4. Methodology of the study

In order to make an objective study of our subject we have taken up an analysis of the popular songs of Dr. Hazarika and Nachiketa reflecting the various themes of humanity in their songs. Dr. Hazarika born in pre-independent India, ruled by the British, sings songs of love, peace, oppression of the poor and weak, of discrimination on grounds of caste and creed, against war and violence and the loss of human values, even as Nachiketa, a child of the turbulent sixties sings of political corruption, violations of professional ethics, inhumanity of man, the decline in social values, the rise of gross materialism in society.

5. Discussion

What Dr. Bhupen Hazarika did for the music scenario in Assam, Nachiketa did in Bengal. The two voices had many similarities. Both learnt from their own surroundings, both of them were highly innovative and both of them were revolutionary without being partisan. Both sang *Jibonmukhi* gaan (people oriented songs). They sang for the weak and oppressed. Their songs carried the message of humanity to the teeming millions caught in the rat race for survival.

The concept of humanity has been regarded as a virtue through the ages. It has been associated with the basic ethics of altruism and is derived from the human condition. Virtue is a Latin word and is defined as moral excellence. Described as a positive trait or equality, it is regarded as morally good. The opposite of virtue is vice.

On the other hand, ethics is a branch of philosophy. It is called moral philosophy. It involves concepts of right and wrong conduct. Altruism or selflessness is considered to be a traditional virtue in many cultures. It is a vital component of different

religious traditions and secular thinking. The concept of 'others' varies among different cultures and religions. It was the French philosopher Auguste Conte, who first coined the term *altruisme* in French, as an antonym of egoism.

In their book 'Character Strengths and Virtues: A handbook and classification' (2004), social scientists Petersen and Seligman have classified humanity as one of the six virtues that are consistent across all cultures. The concepts of humanity goes back to the development of 'humane' or 'humanist' philosophy during the Renaissance. Their predecessors of 13th century scholasticism stressed upon a concept of basic human dignity inspired by Aristotelianism and the concept of humanitarianism in the early modern period which has given way to modern terms such as 'human rights'.

The study of humanism as a classical antiquity started in Italy. It spread across Western Europe in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. The term classical antiquity (Classical Age) was used for a long period of cultural history and centered on the Mediterranean Sea. The civilizations of ancient Greece and ancient Rome, together known as the Greco-Roman world fell in this area.

Renaissance humanism attempted to form a group of citizens who could speak and write with eloquence and clarity and were thus able to participate actively in public affairs, besides motivating others to virtuous and prudent actions. This was in contrast to scholasticism, a branch of critical thought which dominated the teaching by academics or schoolman of medieval universities in Europe during the period 1100 to 1700.

According to Dr Jyosna Bhattacharjee, the humanist must rise above petty jealousies, vain glory, envy, pride, hatred, passions and narrow parochial allegiances. He should be concerned with all human activities. Sloth, mental heaviness, schizophrenia and irreverence should be avoided and he should yield to activity, dexterity and the cultivation of the balanced intellect. If he does not want to hear the glory of people belonging to different nations and races., he can not be a true humanist. He must not use vulgar and rustic words and he must nourish the thought of goodness and welfare of humanity. He cannot afford to inculcate vengefulness, religious intolerance, perfidy, trickery, deceit, treachery, wrath, rancor, malice and other derogatory feelings. The Bhagavad Gita also recommends working for the welfare of the people without craving for results. (The Philosophy of

Humanism, The Assam Tribune).

6. Historical perspective of humanity

Confucian Theory :- According to Confucius (551-479 BC), a Chinese teacher, editor, politician and philosopher of the spring and Autumn period of Chinese history, 'humanity' or 'Ren', is a 'love of people' stating 'if you want to make a stand, help others make a stand' (Petersen and Saligman, 2004, P40). Infact, the Confucian Theory of humanity exemplifies the golden rule. It is so central to Confucian thought that it appears 58 times in the *Analects*, a collection of sayings and ideas attributed to Confucius and his contemporaries. It is believed to have been written during the period 475 BC-221 BC.

Greek Theory:- Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle wrote extensively on the subject of virtues. Interestingly, both laid great emphasis on love and kindness, two of the recognized strengths of humanity. Plato and Aristotle considered 'courage, justice, temperance and 'generosity, wit, truthfulness, magnificence and greatness of soul' to be the sole virtues respectively.

Abrahamic Theory:- An Italian Dominican friar and Catholic priest Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was an influential philosopher and theologian in the tradition of scholasticism. Aquinas said that humanity is one of the 'Seven heavenly virtues'. Humanity was considered so important in some positivist Christian cultures that it was revered like God. Kindness, altruism and love are all mentioned in the Bible. Proverbs 19:22 states 'the desire of a man in his kindness.'

7. Life and works of Dr Bhupen Hazarika

Dr Bhupen Hazarika hailed from the north-eastern state of Assam in India and sang in his native Assamese language, besides Bengali and Hindi. He went for higher studies at the Benaras Hindu University where he tried to achieve a pan-Indian outlook. A scholarship to study at Columbia University in America for his Phd degree brought him into contact with the great Black Civil Rights icon Paul Robson. Dr Hazarika himself belonged to a socially backward community and could very well understand the discrimination of upper caste society. His parents were educated and enlightened people. His father held a senior position in the civil administration. This helped him in coming into contact with the cultural icons of Assam like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Phani Sarma. Agarwala made the first Assamese film 'Joymati' in 1935. He was a staunch nationalist and fought for the freedom of India from British rule under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Bishnu Rabha

belonged to a land owning family and had leftist leanings. Infact, his collection of songs 'Muktir Deul' (Temple of Freedom) jointly published with Dr Hazarika landed the latter in trouble when he went to the USA. Dr Hazarika was held at a detention centre for almost a week by US immigration authorities suspecting him to be a communist. Only an explanation by Dr Hazarika that the songs were written against the oppressive rule of the British in India saved the day for Dr Hazarika who was subsequently released.

Born in 1926, Dr Hazarika was senior to Nachiketa by almost 40 years, who was born in 1964. Dr Hazarika was a child of the freedom movement of India. His family were followers of the Assamese social reformer and Saint Sri Sri Sankardeva of the 15th century. His liberal teachings of equality and humanity influenced Dr Hazarika who composed his first song on Sankardeva at the age of eleven. As a school boy he was taken by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala to Kolkata to sing for his second film 'Indramalati'. His visit to Kolkata exposed Dr Hazarika to the outside world beyond the tea gardens and the mighty Brahmaputra of Assam.

8. Life and works of Nachiketa

Chakraborty (1934-) is a household name for the Bengali music lovers since he broke into the Bengali music world with his debut album *Ei Besh Bhalo Achi* in 1993. He was a student then at the Maharaja Manindra Chandra College at North Kolkata. Popularly known as 'Nachi' he was born in Kolkata on September 4, 1964. Over the last more than two decades, he has been able to give a new direction to Bengali songs. His early days were marked by compositions which were youth-oriented and had a huge fan following among the young generation.

Nachiketa started with a crusade against the so called romantic filmy tradition of songs. He went beyond the soap romanticism and tried to do justice to the social call. He delivered this message through hundreds of songs and through dozens of music albums. Bengal had a rich tradition of songs from the days of Rabindranath Tagore and Nazrul Islam. For the Bengali middle class brought up on Rabindrasangeet and Nazrulgeet, the songs of Kabir Suman and Nachiketa was a big awakening. Both Kabir and Nachi were in turn influenced by Sahil Choudhury in India and Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan from abroad. They started a revolution in Bengali music.

9. Comparative study of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa's songs

The songs of both Dr Bhupen Hazarika and

Nachiketa basically dwell on primary human values of humanity, equality and liberty. Their songs condemn man's inhumanity to man, loss of traditional values, corruption in public, man's greed and craze for material gains of life.

The philosophy of Dr Hazarika's songs is reflected in the song:

*'Moor gaan houk
Bohu asthahinotar biporite
Ek gobhir asthar gaan.....'*

'Let my songs be
A profound assurance
Against the pervading lack of trust....'
(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

Dr Hazarika concern for the plight of the downtrodden is reflected in the song:

*'Hei dola hei dola hei hei dola (palanquin)
Hei eka bekan batere korhiwaon korhiwaon
Bor bor manuhor dola....'*

'The sedan
Through zigzag paths I carry
The grandae's sedan
I have made my own
The tiring life of the labourers....'
(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

Dr Bhupen Hazarika was a man of the masses. His song '*Manuhe Manuhor babe...*' was a very popular and favourite song of his.

'If a man wouldn't think for man
With a little sympathy
Tell me, who will, comrade....'
(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

He always used to start his cultural programmes with this song. The Bengali version of this song '*Manush Manusher jonye, jibon jiboner jonye....*' was awarded by BBC Bangla as the best song of the last millennium.

In the song '*Bhang sil bhang*', Dr. Hazarika raises his voice against exploitation.

'Break, break the stones, you stone breaker
Your naked sweaty back is scorched in the sun
Red, burning clay cake your soft soles
Yet none there will sing your praise....'
(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

News about the huge loss of human lives during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 greatly moved Dr. Hazarika. In a bid to unite the people of India and Bangladesh, he composed the song-

*Ganga moor Maa, Padma moor Maa.
Moor sokulore duti dhara- Meghna- Yamuna..'*
(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

His spirit of universal brotherhood and humanism is reflected in many of his songs like:

Sitore semeka rati.....
'On a damp winter night
In the sagging hut of an unclad peasant
Let me be the red warmth
Of the shouldering cinders....' (Pradip Acharya)
'Atitor buranji likhoke likhisil...'
'Historians of yore
Recount
Exploit of kings and Queens
But history today
Of liberated humanity.. .' (Pradip Acharya)
*Pratham nohoi ditiya nahoi tritiya
Shrenir jatri aami...'*

'Neither first
Nor second
We are the passengers of third class
In the journey of life...'
(Pradip Acharya)

The river Brahmaputra which is called the Luit and is the lifeline of the people of the North-east finds a prominent place in Dr. Hazarika's songs.

In the song '*Bistirno Parorore*', Dr. Hazarika questions the silence of the river in the midst of the clamour and confusion of the masses.

*'Bistirno Parorore
Asonkhyo Janore
Hahakar Sunio
Nisobde Nirobe.....
Bura Luit Tumi
Bura Luit Buwa Kiyu....'*

'Hearing the clamour of countless masses
In the wide expanse of the vale
O old Luit, mute and quiet
You old Luit, why do you keep flowing?

Dr Hazarika believed in the dignity of labour. During his days in the USA when he was pursuing his Phd studies in the Colombia University, he did all kinds of odd jobs to earn some extra money. His mindset on labour greatly changed when he saw how even the President's son did odd jobs to earn his own money. On his return to Assam, he tried to encourage the educated unemployed to take up jobs without thinking about status etc. Here is one such song on driving autorickshaws:

*'Auto rickshaw chhalao
Ami duyo bhai
Guwahati kori gulzar
BA fail moi soru bhai MA pass
Benkot bohuto dhar.....'*

'My brother and I drive
A autorickshaw in Guwahati
I am BA fail while my brother
Is MA pass and
We have lot of loan
In the bank.....'

Dr Hazarika was greatly influenced during his stay in USA by the great black singer and civil rights leader Paul Robson, who spoke of equality of the blacks and white and against discrimination. Dr Hazarika always ended his programme with Robson's popular song 'we are in same boat brother':

'We are in the same boat brother
If you tip one end you gonna
Rock the other'
In the same boat brother
O' Lord! Look down
From your holy place
O'Lord ! Me
What a sea of space!
What a place to travel
This human race!

Nachiketa along with Suman Chattopadhyaya ushered in a revolution in Bengali modern songs. From romantic lyrics about love and the beauty of nature to lyrics telling stories about the urban daily life in Kolkata. Bengal always had a tradition of committed songs. It includes the nationalist songs of Nazrul Islam, the communist songs sang by Ajit Pandey, but to sing songs in apolitical way, Suman and Nachiketa may be called pioneers.

Nachiketa debut album '*Ei Besh Bhalo Achhi*' (1993) included songs like '*Antobihin Poth Cholai Jibon*', '*Chor*', '*Ei Besh Bhalo Achhi*', '*Jakhon Somoy Thomke Daray*', '*Keu Bole Buro Bham*', '*Kolkata*', '*Mon Diye Lekha Pora*', '*Nilanjona*', '*Sarai Jahan Se Achcha*', '*Sunbo Na Gaan*,' among others. In all these songs he reversed the romantic traditions of the prevalent Bengali lyrics. His songs touched the chord of the Bengali heart and he became a household name in a very short time.

From his first album, Nachiketa started his iconoclastic music venture with his out-spoken approach and direct criticism. Nachiketa has sung nearly 300 popular *Jivanmukhi* (people oriented songs

so far in 31 albums since 1993, where he has made strong criticism against the existing system that includes education, unemployment, corruption, pseudo romanticism, marriage, dowry system, religious biasness, ethical decline, city life, film industry, environmental issues and such other subjects. Politicians, bureaucrats, corporate personalities, industrialists, doctors, advocates, government employees, religious personalities all got places in his songs for their perverted mentality. His songs express deep compassion for the poor, unemployed, child labourers, sex workers, disregarded elders and victims of exploitation and the system.

Nachiketa as a lyricist really seems incomparable. His aggressive criticism is his unique identity, like the lines '*Pratidin Churi Jai Mulya Bodher Sona, Amader Swapna Amader chetana*', (regular stealing of our ethics, dream, cognition larger than stealing mundane possession). '*Kon Kaje Lage Tin Sutra Newtoner, Durinandin Kaje Ki Khub Prayojaner?*' *Philosophy, Biology, Khub Ki Kajer Kaji Habi To Kerani Nake Chashma Tule*" (where will you use Newton's three laws in daily life? Do you need Philosophy-Biology to be clerk?)" *Prakasye Chumu Khaoa E DEshe Apradh, Ghush Khaoa Khakhonsi Nay* (Kissing in public place is an offence here not taking bribe). '*Purush Manush Du Prakar; Jibito Bibahito*' (Two types of men – alive or married), '*Kashai Jabai Kare Prakashya Dibaloke, Tomer Aachhe Clinic, Chamber o Daktar*' (Butcher kills openly, doctor you have chamber).

Nachiketa's '*Charanker Tumi Manoshi Go Jibananader Priya Kolkata*' reminds Dr Hazarika's '*Ruposhi Ananto Kolkata Naam Jar*'. Nachiketa's truck helper Pagla Jagai smiles, drinks, assesses the interest paid so far to remain alive., '*Jagai Hashe-Nesha Kare Abakashe- Hayto Maner Kone Jiboner Sudh Gone*', somewhat resembles apathy of Dr Hazarika's famous lyrics '*Amader Jiboner Ghame Bheja Sharirer Binimaye Path Chale Dole*' (Dola goes in return of sweat of the lives of carriers. The immortal lyrical expression of Dr Hazarika '*Ami Ek Jajabor*' (I'm bohemian) while Nachiketa says, "*Ami Ek Feriwala Bhai, Swapna Feri Kore Berai*' (I'm a vendor, I sell dream). One of the songs of Nachiketa that sounds really touching is obviously the song written about old-age home.

10. Conclusion

We can see from a comparative study of the songs of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Nachiketa that though both sang in the soil of Bengal in an different

age and era, Dr Hazarika, born in 1926 of pre-independent India, while Nachiketa is a product of modern independent India, both sang about the basic human issues like poverty, unemployment, discrimination, corruption, decline of moral values and the cancer of materialism in Indian society. Dr Hazarika was a trendsetter in Bengali music. His Bengali songs gave melodious utterances to the voice of the subalterns; contemporary issues of turbulent Bengal like plight of refugees, Naxalite movement, rise of communism, sovereign Bangladesh, hardships of city-

life find place in his songs. The arrival of young Nachiketa in the early nineties shook the music world of Bengal with his aggressive and rebellious approach to the issues of the common people and the malaise that affected the middle class society of Bengal. His strong indictment of the hypocrisy of politicians, lawyers, teachers, doctors and the so called educated people of the society exposed their misdeeds before the people and struck a chord among the masses. He spoke directly and in the language of the common man. He did not beat around the bush with sophisticated lyrics.

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