



## Language, lyrics and themes: a study on the romantic songs of Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

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### Abstract

Dadsaheb Phalke Award winner Dr Bhupen Hazarika is a well-known name in the cultural sphere of Indian music and films. In this study of the romantic songs of Dr Hazarika, we have tried to explore the different themes of love and romance ranging from the first flush of love to betrayal, passion, unrequited love, ethics, morality, loneliness *et al.*

**Keywords:** Love Life Responsibilities Rejection Society Morality Relationships Separation Loneliness.

### 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 peace, tolerance, humanity, assimilation and integration. 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 aspiration of various ethnic groups of the north – eastern region of India as equal partners in the march towards progress and prosperity of a united India. As a school boy he came into contact with the cultural icons of Assam Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Phani Sarma. He sang songs in the first Assamese film 'Joymati' made by Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla. Dr Hazarika who spent a major part of his life in Kolkata worked closely with Bengali film personalities like Ritwick Ghatak, Mrinal Sen among others. His Bengali songs are very popular in Bengal and Bangladesh. His song 'Manush Manusher Jonye...' was selected by BBC as the most popular song of the last millennium.

### 2. Objectives

The objective of the study is to highlight the different aspects of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's romantic songs in the background of the social and personal

milieu of his life. As a highly educated singer composer his songs always carried a message for the people. He did not sing songs for the sake of singing. The content of his songs are rich in depth and meaning of human life and pathos. Even his romantic songs conveyed the message of human values like love, trust, commitment, responsibility and accountability.

### 3. Data analysis

In order to make an objective study of our subject we have taken up an analysis of the popular romantic songs of Dr Hazarika reflecting various themes in different stages of his multi- hued life.

In analysing Dr Hazarika's romantic songs we have tried to categorise them under three categories: (i) self (ii) others and (iii) humanity. Under the first category 'self', we have taken for analysis the romantic category songs where the self is highlighted. In the second category, we have analysed songs where the theme of 'others' is projected. His romantic songs sung with the theme of 'humanity' at large have been taken up for study under the third category.

### 4. Discussion

Romanticism was an artistic movement in France and Britain in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which continued upto the middle of the century. It was first defined as an aesthetic in literary criticism around 1800. Romanticism laid emphasis on the imagination

and emotion. It emerged as a response to the disillusionment with the values of enlightenment like reason and order in the aftermath of the French Revolution in 1789.

In Romantic art, the uncontrollable power and unpredictability of nature and its potential for cataclysmic extremes offered an alternative to the ordered world of Enlightenment thought. British statesman Edmund Burke in 1757 described Romanticism as “all that stuns the soul, all that imprints a feeling of terror, leads to the sublime.” In the French and British paintings of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the recurrence of images of shipwrecks and other representation of man’s struggle against the awesome power of nature manifest this sensibility. Romantic painters like Gericault probed the extremes of psychiatric patients in his portraits, as well as the darker side of childhood. Such exploration of the emotion extended into the animal kingdom, marking the Romantic fascination with animals as both forces of nature and metaphors of human behaviour. Romanticism defied simple categorization in its stylistic diversity and range of subjects. Charles Baudelaire wrote in 1846, “Romanticism is precisely situated neither in choice of subject nor in exact truth, but in a way feeling.” (*Romanticism, Essay, www.metmuseum.org dt. 14 Jan, 2018*)

The Romanticism movement in Indian literature was originally introduced by Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi by taking up some literary reforms pertaining to correct use of Gujrati language. Indian Romanticism is marked by mysticism, unlike English Romanticism that wants to break free from puritanical shackles by seeking joy in Hellenism.

Sri Aurobindo searched for the divine in man in line with Vedic philosophy. He wrote in English. Tagore on the other hand carried out his quest for the beautiful in nature and man always searching for beauty which was a spiritual quest to attain the final realization that service to humanity was the best form of establishing a communion with God. (*shodhganga. Inflibnet.ac.in*)

In Assamese literature, the characteristics of Romanticism was first seen in the medium of poetry. The introduction of new concepts, imagination, the role of Nature and its relationship with man and use of imagery, symbolism and myth distinguished Romantic poetry from Classical poetry. Contemporary social, cultural, political, economic and philosophical changes also played an important role in shaping the literature of the Romantic period of Assamese literature. The annexation of Assam by the British in the early 19<sup>th</sup>

century brought the Assamese into contact with the outside world. English literature and western philosophy influenced the Assamese literature. Bengal renaissance also played an important role.

Romanticism in Assamese literature was pioneered by Chandra Kumar Agarwala and Lakhminath Bezbaroa. Other writers who made an impact during this period were Benudhar Rajkhowa, Surjya Kumar Bhuyan and Rajanikanta Bordoloi who were the stalwarts of the Romantic age of Assamese literature.

Dr Bhupen Hazarika was greatly influenced by the writers of the Romantic period of Assamese literature. Dr Hazarika’s songs always highlighted the bounties of nature. He delved into history to inspire the young generation. He laid emphasis on breaking the barriers and the shackles of the past. He portrayed a rebellious spirit which rebelled against the *status quo*. (*The Intellectual background of Assamese romantic poetry, Article. April 2014*) dated 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

A dominant theme in the songs of Dr Bhupen Hazarika is love and romance. In one of his earlier songs, he explores the first flush of love. In the song ‘*O kokaiti O*’ the younger brother asks the elder why the young girls were acting strangely towards him. The elder tells him that those were the signs of the first flush of love and it was the time to collect the flowers of love.

Dr Hazarika is an ardent lover. He believes that his beloved should always be by his side. They will face together the travails of life through thick and thin. In the song, *Hu Hu Dhumuha Ahileo*, he hopes his beloved would be by his side through stormy days when the sky is overcast with dark clouds and rains pour in drizzles.

Even through his romantic songs, Dr Hazarika tried to convey a social message. In the song, *Mor gatu dekhun*, he holds up the travails of a village youth whose village has been affected by floods. The youth tells his lover that he would fight back by tackling the floods by cultivating his fields before they are destroyed by floods. He shall then fill his barns with grains and then bring her home as his wife.

Dr Hazarika was a pragmatic person. He was not one who would lose himself in the heady pools of love forgetting his duties and responsibilities of life. He is not one who would grow a beard and pine for his lost love. In the song, *Soihobote dhemalite*, he strikes a chord in everyone who has experienced love and rejection in their lives. In the face of betrayal of his lover for riches, Dr Hazarika declares boldly that his lover would be a fool to believe that he would hang himself for his forsaken love. He resolves to change

the value system of the society where the value of a person is always more than that of money.

Love knows neither barriers nor boundaries for Dr Hazarika. As nature follows its own course, so does love overcomes social mores of morality and ethics. In the song, *Aoi Aoi Akash Subo*, he delves into the ethical complexities of life. If sin is bad, why have we been given desire? If pleasure is bad, why have we been given music? If separation is bad, why there is regret and sorrow. Who will give a solution to those questions? He wonders how long his friend would be able to continue their affair in secrecy in the song, *Gupute Gupute*.

The song *Kije tumar sangha priya.....* highlights the writer's intense love and desire for his beloved. He appeals to her not to leave him alone. They are prepared to break the shackles of society for the sake of their love. In the song, *Snehei aamar soto srabhanor*, he declares the monsoon season as the harbinger of new life and creation. It is the time when youthful desires are aroused and one knows no barriers. It is the time when even the thunder bows to the power of music and songs.

In the highly romantic song, '*O tumi jun ne...*' he compares his beloved to the moon and a flame of gold. He calls her the muse of his creations. He imagines himself with his beloved by the side of the sea. Their love is so intense that he believes that even the sea loses count of its waves due to its distraction.

Dr Hazarika whose personal life in the absence of his wife Priyambada was the subject of much speculation in the song '*Shochostrajone Muk Prosno Kore*' maintains that his relationships do not need the sanctity of marriage under the Vedic rituals for their sustenance. However, issues of ethics, legality and morality confront Dr Hazarika on the issues of love. In the song, '*O Abhimani Bandhu,*' he explores the unruly waters of extramarital love. He tells his lover that being a married man he has problems in pursuing an extramarital affair. Similarly, in '*Dehor Rondhe Rondhe Tulile Shihoron*', the 'wandering minstrel' meets his beloved during a halt. But issues of ethics, legality and morality haunts him and he holds back from taking the final plunge. False commitments and his past life cloud his yearning for his beloved in the song *Etukura Aluhuwa Megh Bahi Jai*.

Dr Hazarika's separation from his wife Priyambada was a big blow to his life. He felt her absence all through his life. No one could fill the void created by her absence. He held firm to his responsibilities and commitments in the face of ridicule and humiliation. In the song, *Kyune koi moi akolhoria*,

he counters such ridicule by saying, 'I am never alone because I have my shadow always with me.' He says that friends may be false, but one's shadow is always true and dependable.

A sense of loneliness always haunted Dr Hazarika's wandering soul. His wife Priyambada's absence left a deep void in his life. The season of Durga Puja festival was a time when he intensely felt the pangs of loneliness. In the song, '*Saradhirane tomar heno naam,*' he pays tribute to the autumn season and hopes to make this season his beloved and place her in the warmth of his bosom. As people celebrate all around him, he finds himself all alone looking out from his window to the glittering lights outside. He feels like an autumn cloud which has lost its way. He confesses that living in a big city (Kolkata) has made him selfish. He is today bound to false promises and false love. He is imprisoned in his past memories.

The inner pathos felt by Dr Hazarika in the absence of his beloved wife Priyambada is brought out in the song *Moi Jetia ai Jibanor*. He says that on his death bed, he would be happy to see her by his side. A tear from her eyes would more than compensate the memorial meetings and false fame. He laments that he lost her as he was busy singing for the people. This loss and sense of remorse haunts him and he feels that only a sorrowful tear of hers will be able to console him. He feels that heavenly bliss was there in her unrequited love.

In his heart, Dr Hazarika always pined for his wife Priyam and hoped that one day she would return to him. In the song, *Chinaki chinaki mor monor manuh*, the singer dwells on the elusive search for the man of her dreams. She looks for him and follows him all over. In her pursuit, she makes lots of mistakes but is determined to follow him. Though separated from him, she wants to go closer by forging links with him.

Dr Hazarika was a pragmatic person with a progressive outlook on life. His songs gave hope to people to achieve their aspirations. He believed that people should cut across the barriers of caste, creed and religion in our society to bring people closer to each other. In the song, *Jubati Anamika Goswami*, he relates the predicament of two young lovers Prasanta Das and Anamika Goswami. As they both belong to different caste, their marriage is opposed by their families. They are finally compelled to solemnise their marriage in a temple with the sacred fire as the witness of their union. When they come to take the blessings of Dr Hazarika, he tells them this is the age of communication by putting satellites in space. This is

the age of harnessing atomic energy for the upliftment of mankind. And this is the age when Prasanta and Anamika should cut across the barriers of caste to be united. This is the age of knowledge. This is the age of reason. He calls upon them to sow the seeds of humanity with a broad outlook on life.

For Dr Hazarika, Shillong, the 'Queen of the Hills' or the 'Scotland of the East' held a special place for him. As a legislator of the Assam Legislative Assembly he was closely associated with Shillong, the capital of undivided Assam. Shillong always carried sweet memories for Dr Hazarika. In the popular song, *Shillongore godhulite*, he recalls an evening in Shillong spent in the company of his beloved. Walking barefoot on the grassy knolls and by the silvery streams on an autumn evening fill their hearts with happiness. As evening descends on the distant Khasi village, the lovers feel that they were being mocked by the fireflies flying around as if they were autumn flowers. Again in the song, *Shillongore Monalisha Lyndoh*, Dr Hazarika recalls the pleasant memories of a beautiful Khasi girl Monalisha Lyndoh, whom he had met during his stay in Shillong. He reminisces the times they spent playing on the guitar on a rainy day at Shillong peak. After the capital of Assam shifted from Shillong to Dispur, it has become difficult for them to meet. So he invites her to come to Nongpoh, the midpoint between Shillong and Guwahati for a meeting of the pining hearts. Similarly, in the song *Lienmakao*, he highlights the natural beauty of the Khasi hills of Meghalaya as Manik Raitong, the hero of the legendary Khasi love story seeks his beloved in the wilderness of his hilly terrain.

A life without any permanent moorings brings in its wake several hurdles. In his song, *Moi Jen Ajiwan*, Dr Hazarika describes the restless life he leads as a wandering minstrel. Even a little rest evokes negative

vibes for him. He feels he is like a honey bee who does not find a place to rest and who does not have an address. Like the bee he has also sucked the sweet nectar of the high profile lotus as well as that of the wild flowers. In his endeavour he has also collected bitter juices thinking it to be sweet. Even though he is like a wandering bee, he believes he has the right to take rest. He asks why others should complain if he wishes to take rest in the lap of his beloved. But his wish is not fulfilled. So he feels that he would go on scattering the nectar all around and one day mingle his self with the distant horizon.

## 5. Conclusion

In this study of the romantic songs of Dr Hazarika, we have tried to explore the different themes of love and romance ranging from the first flush of love to betrayal, passion, unrequited love, ethics, morality, loneliness *et al.*

Our study reveals that all through his life Dr Hazarika's deep commitment to his duties, responsibilities and objectives of his life helps him to overcome the travails that beset his social and personal life. Dr Hazarika was a pragmatic person. He did not allow betrayal and false promises to shake his confidence and commitments in life. He always strived to change the value system of the society where the value of a person is always more than that of money.

For Dr Hazarika love knows neither barriers nor boundaries. His songs gave hope to people to achieve their aspirations. He believed that people should cut across the barriers of caste, creed and religion in our society to bring people closer to each other. He called this age the age of knowledge and reason and appealed to the people to sow the seeds of humanity with a broad outlook on life.

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