

CHAPTER:7

Bhupen Hazarika: The Life and Philosophy

The Bhupen Hazarika that the people have is developed not in one single day. It is his Journey, harsh or smooth, through the life that makes him what he is now. The philosophical source for all his creative works and social activities had constantly been being evolved and enriched all through his life. He was born and brought up in such a family and socio-cultural environment that its influence remained conspicuous all through his life.

Bhupen Hazarika was born on 8th September 1952 in Sadiya to parents—Mr. Nilakanta Hazarika and Mrs. Shantipriya Hazarika—with deep love and devotion to music and culture. His father, Nilakanta Hazarika was a socially active person and had a great social influence in Sadiya. He was popular among the people. The tribal people from the neighbouring villages and hills of Sadiya used to visit his house when Bhupen Hazarika was an infant. They used to play with and look after him. Once he was taken to the tribal village Bunung by the tribal girls who were playing with him. His parents were not informed about it. And he was breast-fed by all the mothers in their village. Hazarika's parents used to tell him about the incident; this made Hazarika always feel a firm bond of relation between him and the tribal people of the hills. (*Hazarika, Bhupen: 2011: 6*)

The emotional proximity that he feels towards the people of different tribes of North-East is amply reflected in his songs, films and journalistic writings. In retrospect, Hazarika said that there was a great social harmony among the different peoples in Sadiya. Both the tribal and Non-tribal people lived as one family there (*Ibid:8*) Hazarika's sense of association with a social environment like that of

Sadiya can be said to be one of the factors moulding his sense of universal brotherhood and social harmony.

Bhupen Hazarika's musical forte got its breeding ground in his family proper. He says, "...I think, where I was born, when I was born is not a big matter. But the important thing is that I have got an environment since my childhood, an environment which taught me how to be an artist. In my musical home my father, mother and maternal uncle were the source of my inspiration" (*Ibid: 12*). However, his artistic genius and social consciousness got sharpened when he along with his parents started living in Tezpur. The social dimension of the lives and works of the cultural icons like Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Bishnu Rabha and Phani Sarma had great influence in shaping Hazarika's Philosophy. Acknowledging their impact on his thought and personality Hazarika said that Bishnu Rabha had given him Romanticism and the will to do the impossible, and Jyotiprasad had taught him sublimity, courage, creativity and dignity of thinking. Jyotiprasad helped him realize and understand his life in totality (*Ibid: 44*). Bishnu Rabha with his socialist ideologies inspired Bhupen Hazarika to sing for the emancipation of the poor and marginalized class from the clutches of the capitalist exploitation. His song *Agni Jugar Phirangati Moi*, written during his stay in Tezpur, bears the traces of Rabha's socialist idealism. This song and his another song *Janatar Kolahal* were included in Rabha's book *Mukti Deol* (Temple of Freedom). Jyotiprasad taught him many things showed him movies, told him about the revolutionary leaders. Jyotiprasad believed in Marx's Socialism, but at the same time he was a devotee of Gandhi. The starting point of Marx is society and its functioning, while Gandhi's is humanity and other human values. And Bhupen Hazarika finds a balance of the two in Jyotiprasad. (*Bora, Lakhinandan[ed]:An article by Jaykanta Sharma:Jan.2012:36*)

In 1939, when Bhupen Hazarika wrote *Agni Jugar Phiringati*, Jyotiprasad got associated with Indian National Congress and Bishnu Rabha with R.C.P.I. Though Jyotiprasad worked for India's freedom struggle under the umbrella of

congress, yet his mentality was that of a progressive a revolutionary. On the other hand Bishnu Rabha was a revolutionary who believed in using armed-force to uproot the capitalist exploiters and bring back the rights of the deprived poor close of people. During the arms-movement of the R.C.P.I., when Bishnu Rabha used to carry arms he would frequent Bhupen Hazarika's father's house. Bhupen Hazarika was the witness to many of Bishnu Rabha's revolutionary works started since 1940. Rabha even once hid his fire arm in Hazarika's house. Bhupen Hazarika got attracted towards the political philosophy (Communism) of Bishnu Rabha. He also helped him in many revolutionary activisms (*Hazarika, Jyotirekha[ed]: An article by Ismile Hussain: 2011-12: 157*). Bhupen Hazarika one day was also a witness to an argument between Jyotiprasad and Bishnu Rabha advocating their respective political ideologies. The place was *Bān Theatre*, Tezpur – Jyotiprasad said that India would surely get back freedom and Gandhi would bring it, Gandhi's principle of non-violence would bring independence to India. Protesting Jyotiprasad's argument Bishnu Rabha said it was impossible that Gandhi could bring freedom and even if he could that would be for the exploiters like Tata-Birla. That freedom would not be for the millions of farmers, labours and common marginalized people of India. He also added that the real freedom could be brought by the communist only. This incident left a deep impression in the mind of Bhupen Hazarika at a very early stage. (*Goswami, Loknath: 2009: 13*)

However, Hazarika wrote his *Agni Jugar Phirangati* when he did not know what is Marxism. (*Kumar, Thanesar:2011:27*) It would be wrong to label the song as a Marxist's work. In fact what he wrote was something out of his innate sense of social consciousness and responsibility. His concern and empathy towards the poor exploited people took him close to the ideals of Marx. A discussion on it has already been made in the chapter *Bhupen Hazarika: A singer and Lyricist*.

Bhupen Hazarika came close to Phani Sharma through his play *Sirāj*. He also sang in the film *Sirāj*. One dialogue in the play, "All human beings are human

beings only they are not Hindu-Muslim”, etched a deep line in Hazarika’s mind. He even used to say that he would marry a Hindu girl brought up in Muslim family. This is what he inculcated in his childhood and youth. The psychologists are of the opinion that the experience a child gets in his childhood becomes the base of his ideologies in his later life. And Bhupen Hazarika was not exception (*Bora, Lakhinandan: An article by Jaykanta Sharma: Jan.2012:36*). His secular and democratic spirits are amply highlighted in the discussions and observations made in the previous chapters.

Bhupen Hazarika’s social philosophy was born out of his social consciousness, understanding of life and vision for a better future. But this philosophical backdrop of his creative and cultural activities are often tended to be subsided with an effort to make him appear as a singer and artist with some poignant popular songs. When Bhupen Hazarika died on 5th November 2011, the intellectuals, media and political leaders expressed a host of things about him. But very few were found being assertive with his anti-establishment stand, his protest against castism, or anti –government stand. His famous social and revolutionary songs like *Endhār Kātir Nixāte, Dug Dug Dug Dambaru, Ruddha Karār Duwār Bhāngi, Juwati Anamika Goswami, Bhāng Bhāng Xil Bhāng* etc. where lies his philosophical crux, were not much talked about. Negating all these socio-political spirit in him there has been an effort after his death to establish him as a popular artist only. What socio-political goal Bhupen Hazarika envisaged is miserably forgotten, and over-looked.

However, there are, of course, pitfalls in the course of Bhupen Hazarika’s social and political philosophies. There is no doubt that change is inevitable. It happened in case of Jyotiprasad and Bishnu Rabha also. Their social and political Philosophies went through a course of metamorphosis. But this transformation was never descending. In their case there was a constant elevation or up gradation of their thoughts and philosophies. Jyotiprasad’s thoughts, Prof. Hiren Gohain asserts, is never stationary at one point, his thought always moved along new ways being

influenced by his experienced and environment . There is always a link among the different phases in the development of his thoughts (*Gohain, Hiren: 2003: 66*).

In Bishnu Rabha there is obvious march from his artistic romanticism and aesthetic spirit towards imparting them with greater social dimension and objective socialism. But in case of Bhupen Hazarika, his political outlook and belief move from a humanistic and people oriented consciousness to nationalistic spirit. His tirade and war against castism and communalism lose its sheen in the latter part of his life when he politically got involved with parties fostering *Hinduttwa* in all parochial ways. The man who said that he was not going to be involved with any political party became a devotee of BJP and their leadership and contested in 2004 Lok Shabh election as the party's candidate. (*Goswami, Loknath: 2009:59*). A light on this issue has been thrown in the previous chapter, *Bhupen Hazarika as a Social worker*

Hazarika moved towards the BJP, which is averse to the leftist secularism, just to gratify his self interest. At the same time he has close relation with the ruling government, be it AGP or congress. He had also shocked the people by calling Hiteswar Saikia “the all time great chief minister”, and when Hiteswar Saikia was defeated in the election, Hazarika did not require much time to be a dear one of the AGP camp. Again, during that period of ideological confusion, Hazarika wrote songs supporting ULFA and at the same time wanted to make film against terrorism” (*Borah, Lakhinandan [ed]: An article by Hiren Gohain: 2012:19*)

There might be doubt about Bhupen Hazarika's definite political ideologies, but still there is no doubt about the presence of social concern and human values as the ever guiding force in him for all his activities. In many occasions Bhupen Hazarika had said that the political, social and intellectual practice should be made in favour of the people, especially in interest of the exploited and deprived people. In many of his songs there are suggestions to establish socialism through democracy. But his political philosophy is based on his spirit of regionalism (*Bora,*

Dr. Lakhinandan [ed]: An article by Dr. Jaykanta Sharma: 2012:37). On his regionalism discussion has been made in the previous chapters.

The life and philosophy of Bhupen Hazarika is further enriched by his academic qualification. There is hardly any well-known performing artist in India who is so highly educated like Bhupen Hazarika? After taking his master degree in Political Science from Benaras Hindu University. He went to America to do his PhD from Colombia University. This academic journey to America gave a new exposure. There, he, very importantly, met Paul Robson. He also had the chance to visit many countries and places around the world. All these gave him an international exposure. As has been said before in the previous chapter, the contact with Paul Robson in America had given a new touch to the philosophical outlook of Bhupen Hazarika. The spirit of social responsibility that had already been developed as a result of his associations with Jyoti-Bishnu at a nascent age was further intensified by the touch of Paul Robson. He was deeply inspired by Paul Robson's words that music is a weapon for social change. In that period being so highly educated from Colombia University, Bhupen Hazarika could have gone pursuing any lucrative professional career. But he did not do so. He had returned home and spearheaded the Gananattya Movement. That took him close to the people. His songs started getting much greater contemporary social significance. He became a mass singer arousing mass consciousness with his ever thrilling poignant songs like, *Nāmi Āhau Xundarare Xenā Xilpi Dal...*; *E Bijuli Nāāche Chikmik / O Dambaru Bajile Dug Dug Dug...*; *Dola, He Dolā, He Dolā, He Dolā...*; *Jak Jak Rel Sale Mor ...* and *Bhāng / Xil Bhāng / Bhāng Bhāng Bhāng Xil Bhāngotā*. His songs gave a new revolutionary height to *Gananattya Xangha* (*Goswami, Loknath : 2005: 15*). And Bhupen Hazarika became the voice of the people. A discussion on Bhupen Hazarika and *Gananattya Xangha* has been made in the previous chapter too.

When Bhupen Hazarika got gradually dissociated from common platform of *Gananattya Xangha*, his songs gradually started losing their touch with the proletariat and marginalized class. Their anti-establishment tone was on the wane. The poor common people of his songs like *Pānei, Rongmon, Driver, Linesman, Fire-man*, were replaced with statesman like *Nehru, Bhuttojan, Ayub Khan, Shastri, and even Bidi Company* etc. However, irrespective of the changes in the course of life and philosophy of Bhupen Hazarika, he remained same at one point i.e. his intense sense of universal humanity. Bhupen Hazarika has elevated the restricted and parochial sense of nationalism to the height of universal humanism and brotherhood. Sankardev, Jyoti- Bishnu, Laxminath Bezburah etc. had built the plinth of the Assamese nationality and Bhupen Hazarika strengthened it with the elements of universal humanism. He says “Assam’s soil, water, air gives me nutrition. Thus being enriched I wander around the many regions of the world crossing the Ganga, the Padma, the Volga, the Atlantic, the Pacific Ocean from the banks of the Luit. The people of the world also have embraced me. ...the world’s proletariat’s language of joy and sorrow is same. Hence, their tears are same. I have seen people I have seen societies. I have seen the poor and the rich”. (*Hazarika, Bhupen: 2011: 493*)The spirit of humanism in Bhupen Hazarika’s songs has been increasingly becoming relevant in the present day context. His songs may not directly bring about changes in society, but they surely inspire and arouse deep feeling of humanism in the hearts of the people. He had faith in man, he believed in human dignity and power. And this is at the root of his optimistic and progressive mind.

The life of Bhupen Hazarika was a life of struggle. He recognized struggle as another name of life—*Xangrām Ān Eti Nām Jibanare (Dutt, Dilip Kumar: 2011:55)*.He saw miserable poverty in his life. On it Hazarika said “In 1942 a strange thing happened. We saw poverty then..... During that period I saw dire poverty in our home. Then we had to take much trouble to get even one full meal” (*Hazarika, Bhupen: 2011:54*). Again, in 1956 he resigned from his job of teacher in

Gauhati University feeling humiliated when his three days pay was cut by the University authority for being three days late in returning from world peace convention held in Russia (*Hazarika, Bhupen : 2011: 161*). He left Assam and it was followed by his struggle to earn his living in Kolkata and his separation with his wife Priyambada Patil. And then he got involved in political life where he saw and experienced win and defeat, his mass acceptance and his mass rejection, the pleasure of being with own people and the pain of being separated from the same. But the adversities posed in the ways only strengthened him further. Hence, he could still sing ‘*Xei Xanghāte Āne Mor Praxānta Xāgarat/ Pragatir Natun Diganta*’ (*Hazarika, Bhupen: 2011: 122*). He asserted that he remained free from and unaffected by the pain and pleasure of gain or loss in his life, and overcoming all the hurdles he wanted to move ahead, if needed, all alone—

“Akaxariyā Pathedi Moi

Xata Bighini Bhāngi

Dhulir Dharāk Xarag Karim

Henguliyā Bol Loi

Jugar Batarā Loi

Mor Ākāxat Powār Tripti

Nopowār Bedanā Nāi....” (Dutta, Dr. Dilip Kumar: 2011:149)

He says that people do not live by years but by works, by thoughts, and not by breaths, but by feelings. Even in his old age, he asserts the speed of his creative mind is not reduced or stopped; his mind is still alive with the desire for creations. He does not find any negativity in the gap between the he before twenty years and the he at present. This gap is a beautiful bridge between the two different selves of him. All along he wants to live the life; he wants to live till he dies because he loves life. With every morning, he gets new vigor of youth. The progress of age does not disturb him. He sings-

“Xabda Āru Xurar Prithibit

Dhemāli Karilo Nānā Chandare

Nirānande Āru Mahānande Moi
Xatyak Phahiyālo Jibanbodhere
Moi Jiyāi Āsu
Xamayar Āge Āge.....”

Thus, he will keep living because he is hopeful and optimistic. (*Hazarika, Bhupen: 2011: 494. 497*)

“I consider myself as a worshiper of beauty, an aesthete”, thus claims Bhupen Hazarika (*Hazarika, Surjya [edt]: 2008: 1851*). In the previous chapter it has already been seen how his aesthetic sense inspires him in his songs and music. In his day-to-day life also his obsession with beauty can be felt. Here, Bhupen Hazarika’s were close associate Kamal Kataki’s words can be quoted—“Bhupen Hazarika is a devotee of beauty, he searches for beauty everywhere. Once he was asked to select a photo of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala for his album *Jyotir Jyoti*. One photo was of young stage of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and other one of his later age Hazarika selected the previous one and said, ‘always give preference to beauty always project some thing in the good form because it remains forever’. He is a man of style. He has a style in everything whether in his cap or in his dress that he wear according to the objectives of the meetings.

Before going to every meeting he looks at the mirror three, four times , he asks like a small boy – ‘How am I looking, is it ok’- and once he gets ready, he cannot stop waiting- because his life is a journey, it is to go on . People will wonder if they happen to see how nicely he chops vegetables, how nicely he peels of the fruits - everything has a style. These are very small things, unimportant things, but they carry very important message. How he is involved in everything from household works to his divine creations.” [*Barman, Lachit and Pathak, Hillol Kumar (edt): An article by Kamal Kataki: 2011: 138*]

The philosophy that he preaches through his work is not divorced from the philosophy he lives with in his real life. He is not a humanitarian only through his works but also through the life style and the personal mannerism that he bears in

every aspects of life. What he preaches, he does practise. His songs bear both the common masses and the classes, both the poor common proletariat like Rongmon, Panei, Negro John, the poor peasant by the Nile river, the tea garden workers etc and the great personalities like Mahatma Gandhi, Mark Twain, Maxim Gorky, Ayub Khan, Julfikar Ali Bhutto etc.

His philosophy is the philosophy of humanity and he identifies himself as one among the people both by his works and life-style. And this is at the root of his universal acceptance. His songs are the creations of his philosophy put in simple words and phrases. And they pierce deep into the hearts of the people (*Bora, Lakhinandan: An article by Amarjyoti Choudhury: 2012:33*). There is no doubt that at various phases of his life he stands at a compromising point with regards to his life's philosophical means, but his life's goal of becoming people's man remains the same and spirit of humanism remains unconquered.