



BHUPEN HAZARIKA

TWENTY SONGS AND SEVEN PORTRAITS

Foreword by

Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury

Songs Translated by

Arkupal Ra Acharya

Edited by

Sattyakee D'com Bhuyan

THIS IS A DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA CENTRE FOR CREATIVITY BOOK
PUBLISHED BY THE ROYAL GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

BHUPEN HAZARIKA TWENTY SONGS AND SEVEN PORTRAITS



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OVERTURE FROM THE CHANCELLOR

It gives me immense pride to present “BHUPEN HAZARIKA Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits,” published as part of the Centenary Celebrations of the Bard of the Brahmaputra, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. His music crossed boundaries and his words gave voice to the aspirations and anxieties of our time.

This anthology, edited by Sattyakee D’com Bhuyan, is a tribute shaped by memory and scholarship. It gathers song and reflection to renew our engagement with his vision of humanity, harmony, and hope.

The Centre for Creativity, at Royal Global University that bears his name, headed by noted scholar and artist Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury, remains committed to sustaining and advancing the legacy he entrusted to us.

May this publication stand as a thoughtful archive and a living text, inviting continued study, dialogue, and deeper reflection on his enduring cultural presence.



Dr. A. K. Pansari
Chancellor
Royal Global University

FOREWORD

How do we fathom an enormity? An ocean?

Have you ever heard a response to a ridicule emerging as an ode? As a song of exquisite lyrical and tonal beauty? As a profound work of art? Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the bard of Brahmaputra himself, once blazed such a trail of creativity with consummate ease.

Erythrinas, we all know, are bright red flowers of immaculate beauty. These are, however, barred in all rituals of our temples. Once a detractor mocked Dr. Hazarika by dubbing him as an erythrina flower. Dr. Hazarika responded to the detraction in style, but it was not through counter-abuse. Instead, he drew the response from the depth of creativity. And what finally emerged was an exceptional song. An ode to the creative beauty of flowers and artists. Such was the level of his creativity. An enormity.

Let me share an old memory of mine. This was when I was a student of primary school. During those days I had the privilege of acting in an Assamese film titled *Mak aru Morom*. As expected, this fetched me a sense of glamour. But a section of our society had a very low opinion of people acting in films. Besides, I was extremely weak in my studies. The net result was that a miniscule section of parents didn't like the idea of a "spoilt" boy like me playing with their offsprings. I was accordingly barred from playing football with them. I was totally devastated. It was during such traumatic days that Bhupenda visited my father. I remember, it was a rainy day. The small courtyard of ours was messy with mud. By now, Bhupenda had the halo of a star-singer around him. It would have been enough if he merely mouthed words of consolation. Instead, when he

heard my story, he shouted “Come Bhaity (my nickname), let us play football.”. Football shots and unadulterated joy that now overflowed were mesmerizing to the core. This is still one of the finest pieces of my childhood memory. I still remember how by this simple act, he lifted my spirits sky-high. What shines through all this is his profound magnanimity. Immaculate compassion. The question is: how do we comprehend such vastness?

I decided to begin by looking back at the exotic land of *Axom*. The land where he was born. The land that unmistakably evolved as his creative obsession.

This is the ancient land of the red river and the blue hill, the gurgling streams and golden fields that is replete with its myths and history. This was where once stood Pragiyotishpura, the famed site of astrological scholarship. This was the land where myriads of tribes mixed and fought. Peace was finally restored here by the visionary king Siu-Ka-Pha. It was here that saint Sankardeva and Ajan Phakir preached the idea of social harmony. Later the vision of harmony was further rejuvenated by our icons Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rabha. It was in this scenario that Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had a mesmerising arrival. He captured all the colours, our joys and sorrows, our whispers and cries, our history and modernity in his songs and tunes. Roaming the world like a nomad, he found it worthwhile to rekindle in us our pride and the sense of identity. Deftly he also stretched our elastic sense of self to embrace the entire world. Such was the range of his contributions. An enormity.

An extraordinary blend of personae, Dr. Hazarika was creative mix of a lyricist, a composer, a singer, a performer, a poet, a writer, an editor, a music director, a movie director, a political persona and an activist, all rolled into one.

With immaculate mentorship and overwhelming personal engagement, he took us by storm. That he could repeat the feat for the neighboring Bengali populace of West Bengal and Bangladesh too seemed like magic. Later when he extended this feat to the pan Indian stage, it

reconfirmed the spell of his magic. We are almost forced to seek answers to the creative myth.

His lyrics too scaled the creative zenith in style. True, most of the time, he infused his art with intense personal expressions or ideas. But he was also ever willing to usher in the brighter shades of liberal humanism. His concern for the marginalised too found a strong presence in his lyrics. This resulted in striking originality, depth and emotional resonance of his lyrics

His tunes too radiated pure creativity. The intricate blend of folk with the universal in his music was uniquely creative. Like the space, the geography he inhabited, his creations too accommodated storm and equal grace. The way he negotiated the evolving narrative also highlights his creative mastery. No wonder it had enormous resonance in the adoring populace.

His stage presence was also as creative as the bard himself. More often than not, it was like an exciting classroom. The way he mastered the art of articulation such that his conversations seemed like extensions of his songs was sheer creative magic.

It was here that generations were introduced to the idea of our self-pride. After lucid introduction to these ideas, he would hum songs that are narratives of our community roots, our identity. The idea was to create an ambience where we are soaked with national sentiments. But he would always end his singing with songs that eulogised the entire humanity. I remember that initially we were confused-“Should we nurture our nationalism, or embrace the love for the entire humanity?”

When we approached him with this question, he himself had urged us to go through his lyrics, his creations to understand him. Later as we browsed through his songs, we ourselves found the answer. It clearly said that love for humanity is beautiful and adorable. Yet it gets fully expressed only when we serve and strengthen our own community. Later, in various concerts of him, Dr. Hazarika himself cleared the situation- “I proudly sing songs of Assamese identity. I also hum songs that glorify our love for humanity. I sing songs of both variety because both

are necessary. We need to stand on our soils, yet at the same time we also need to reach out for entire humanity.” Thus, his stage performance too had its sheer magic and excitement in it. In short, his himself had an ocean in him. An ocean of creativity.

How do we fathom such an ocean? This was the challenge that our Centre faced. As we celebrate his birth centenary, we are increasingly confounded by this extraordinary range of his creativity. We realize our understanding of him and his legacy is incomplete. We thus feel an acute need to search for his songs, his tunes, his lyrics, his films, his communications and all related trivia, In short, the entirety that would illuminate his channels of creativity.

In a pragmatic compromise, we look back at his multifaceted personality through the perspectives of seven distinct lenses. We also have a bouquet of twenty selected songs translated into English. The idea is to provide a glimpse of his lyrics to the outside world.

What are the takeaways that we discover in these bold brushes? We realize that the starting point of his creativity was, of course, his persistent curiosity. His obsession with the land he grew up with, its geography, history, the ideas of social harmony and societal equity, issues of identity and universal brotherhood. Often he declared-“I carry my *Axom* wherever I go.” The relentless pursuit of such interests stoked his creativity such that he could artistically mix imagination and flavour even to humdrum reality . Another interesting truth was that he didn’t have to retreat to lonely mountains or rivers to siphon out his creativity. In fact, his creations were conceived and to a large degree completed amidst the noisy humdrum of life.

But what was this creativity for? It was to enthuse us with the ideas that were dear to him, namely, the idea of our identity and universality. It was to promote the concept of social harmony. Thus, his continuous dialogue with our ethnic varieties on the themes that excited him lent unique shades of creativity. The voice of protest in his songs on behalf of the poor and the marginal also added further edge to his creations. The result - Dr. Hazarika continuously

evolved as an artist of exceptional creativity.

“BHUPEN HAZARIKA Twenty songs and seven portraits” is a celebration of his extraordinary breadth of creativity, like that of an ocean. These brushes are indeed bold and bright. We are eternally grateful to them. Our editorial team has been vibrant. Our university authorities too have been extra supportive. To summarize, our mutual journey has indeed been exciting. The question, however, remains-can these seven portraits cover the vastness that is Dr. Bhupen Hazarika?

Yet we have realized that this quest has not been in vain. It has enabled us to creatively appreciate the extent of this vastness in him. That itself is uplifting. If, in addition, it has also taken us a little closer, in spirit and action, to his idea of a just and humane world, it is indeed a huge bonus.



Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury,
Professor Emeritus and Chair Professor
Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Creativity



EDITOR'S NOTE

Some journeys begin with a question. Ours began with a song that never quite left us.

The Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Creativity at The Assam Royal Global University is a young Centre with an old inheritance. Named after Bhupen Hazarika, it was envisioned as a living space for dialogue between song, scholarship, theatre, cinema, and civil thought. A Centre not merely of events, but of reflection. Not merely of applause, but of attentive listening. In many ways, it seeks to hold memory with care and allow creativity to breathe with dignity.

Our first publication, “ZUBEEN Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits”, came to life in a moment of sudden bereavement. The untimely demise of Zubeen Garg left an ache across Assam and beyond. As a new Centre still finding its cadence, we felt compelled to respond with quiet documentation rather than hurried homage. That book gathered twenty songs and seven reflective portraits, preserving voice and memory with sincerity. It reminded us that songs are not only to be sung. They are to be read, translated, archived, and revisited.

From that experience emerged a larger vision.

The idea came from our mentor and Head of the Centre, Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury. With clarity and grace, he observed that the format itself carried strength. Why not build a series on our stalwarts along similar lines. Why not create a continuing archive titled Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits, dedicated to the creative minds who shaped our cultural consciousness.

Who better to begin with than the very name that anchors the Centre.

During the centenary celebration of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the decision felt organic and inevitable. The Centre bears his name. The University honours his legacy. The cultural landscape of Assam continues to resonate with his voice. This second volume therefore returns to the source.

“BHUPEN HAZARIKA Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits” begins, as it must, with his familiar tunes and the memories they awaken.

The architecture of the book remains deliberate and balanced. Twenty seminal songs accompanied by seven substantial portraits that illuminate the man behind the music. The form is modest yet expansive. It allows melody and memory to converse with quiet intensity.

In his foreword, Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury reflects on the challenge of approaching a figure whose creative amplitude defies easy categorisation. Lyricist, composer, singer, filmmaker, editor, thinker, Bhupen Hazarika was not a single stream but a confluence. The foreword sets the intellectual and emotional tenor of the collection and reminds us that humility must precede interpretation.

Our gratitude extends to Dr. A. K. Pansari, Chancellor of The Assam Royal Global University, and Dr. A. K. Buragohain, Vice Chancellor, whose encouragement has enabled the Centre to evolve with purpose and poise. The editorial board and members of the Centre have worked with steadfast commitment, ensuring that the book carries both academic integrity and emotional warmth.

At the heart of this anthology are twenty songs that have shaped the ethical and aesthetic imagination of our people. From *Manuhe Manuhor Babe* to *Xitore Xemeka Rati*, from *Bimurto Mur Nixati* to *Gupute Gupute* and *Asta Akaxore*, these compositions move across themes of humanity, labour, migration, love, dissent, and hope. They are not relics of another era. They remain urgent and contemporary.

To open these songs to a wider readership, fresh English translations have been undertaken by Arkupal Ra Acharya. Translation here is treated as a delicate crossing, an act of carrying cadence and conscience across linguistic thresholds. Care has been taken to retain simplicity, gravity, and lyrical resonance so that the songs may breathe in another language without losing their native pulse. The Seven Portraits deepen the narrative.

Pradip Acharya's *Celebrating Life* offers a reflective and layered engagement with the maestro's personality and intellectual depth.

Dr. Nripen Barkataki's *My Thirty Days With Bhupen Da In The UK* presents an intimate account of the artist in a foreign landscape, disciplined, curious, yet unwaveringly rooted.

Joor Baruah's *77 Golf Club Road, Tollygunge, My Mother's Memories With Bhupenmama* in Calcutta carries rare intimacy. As Bhupen Hazarika was his mother's elder brother, the essay unfolds from within the circle of family. Through remembered conversations, household rhythms, and quiet anecdotes from Calcutta, the public legend gently recedes and the affectionate *Bhupenmama* comes into view. The piece reveals a man at ease in domestic spaces, warm, attentive, and deeply human.

Rahul Karmakar's *The Lyrical Chronicler* reminds us that many of Bhupen Hazarika's songs performed the work of journalism, documenting the pulse of their time.

Mitra Phukan's *Shillongore Monalisa Lyngdoh* reveals how a single song can hold within it the social and political textures of a region.

Mayukh Hazarika for his deeply personal contribution, *The Legend Through My Eyes*, where he reflects on Bhupen Hazarika not as a distant icon but as his father's elder brother and an enduring presence within the family. His warmth and encouragement have lent quiet strength to this initiative. Such trust from the family reminds us that preserving a legacy demands sensitivity and respect.

We are deeply grateful to Dr. Lakshmi Kumari Goswami, for her encouragement and thoughtful contribution. In *Bhupen Da, Tezpur and The Culture We Lived With*, she leads us to Tezpur, the Romantic Capital of Assam, where landscape, companionship, and cultural ferment shaped enduring bonds. Through her reflections, Tezpur emerges not merely as a backdrop but as a living influence in the making of Bhupen Hazarika, a space where memory and milieu converged in formative ways.

Together, these essays form a textured mosaic. They do not attempt to monumentalise. They seek to understand. They offer vantage points rather than verdicts, closeness rather than spectacle.

The photographs included in this volume have been drawn from personal family archives, preserving moments of candour and quiet grace. Additional images have been generously shared by artist and photographer Labu Senapati. The cover design by Champak Barбора carries restraint and suggestion rather than display, an aesthetic that aligns with the spirit of the book.

Beginning this continuing series with Bhupen Hazarika in his centenary year feels instinctive and deeply anchored. The journey that opened with “ZUBEEN Twenty Songs and Seven Portraits” now returns to the name that inspires the Centre itself. More legends will follow in this evolving series, each approached with the same structure, scholarship, and sincerity.

This anthology is placed before readers as a humble offering in an ongoing journey. A handful of songs revisited. A few memories held gently to the light. If within these pages a reader lingers over a line, hears an old refrain with renewed tenderness, or senses the nearness of a voice that still travels across time, the purpose stands fulfilled. A true song does not end with the last note. It withdraws softly into silence, only to rise again in another voice, another season, another listening heart.



Sattyakee D'com Bhuyan

These translations lean on the foundations laid by Professor Pradip Acharya in *Where Seas Meet*. I have edited, re-envisioned, and rendered them anew, yet their first breath belongs elsewhere. Whatever clarity or resonance they carry flows from the generous labour of those original translations, to which I owe an enduring debt.



Arkupal Ra Acharya



TWENTY SONGS

MANUHE MANUHOR BABE

If man will not think for man
Not even with a little sympathy
Tell me, my friend, my comrade,
Who then will?

If we try to buy and sell mankind,
If we repeat the worn-out histories
Of trading man for man
Will that not be wrong?
Tell me, comrade.

If the weak must cross
Life's fierce and rushing river
With your helping hand
What do you truly lose?

If man does not remain man,
A demon can never be man.
But if ever a demon grows more like man
Who then should feel ashamed?
Tell me, my friend, my comrade.



XITORE XEMEKA RATI

On a cold, damp winter night
On a damp, trembling night
In the sagging, broken hut
Of an unclad peasant,
Let me be the red warmth
Of smouldering cinders,
Glowing softly through the dark
A living crimson heat.

On a cold, damp winter night
For the starving daily worker,
Whose countless hungers
Lie buried deep within the soul,
Ready to flare without warning
Let me be that sudden blaze,
That tremendous, rising power.

On a cold, damp winter night
For some frightened minority,
Whose suppressed cry
Never finds a voice
Let me speak that silent anguish
And become
A gentle, steadfast security.

On a cold, damp winter night
For the throttled master-singer,
Whose immortal song
Could usher in the dawn
Yet remains unsung
Let me be
The pure, nectared voice
That carries it forward.

On a cold, damp winter night,
On a damp and shivering night
In the broken hut of the unclad peasant,
Let me be the red warmth of embers;
For the starving worker, let me be fierce power;
For the fearful and unheard, let me be safety;
For the silenced singer, let me be a clear voice.

On a cold, damp winter night
Let me become warmth,
Let me become strength,
Let me become security,
Let me become song.

MITHA MITHA BOHAGOR

A sweet song of spring I will compose
I thought in my mind
Slow and hesitant, you drew close
Of that sweet song
The words I did find

Your body dipped in the Luit
Fragrant with *maah* and *halodhi*
I found in me that melody
Of that sweet song of spring

Like a long-lost song is my spring
That has returned, all of a sudden
The sudden bursting into laughter
Of a group of young women
A flock of egrets going mad
The passion of Bihu teasing me
And I, became a storm
Of that sweet spring



JIVONTURE KANDON KHINI

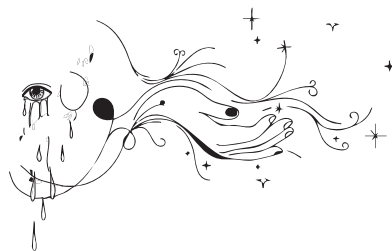
I kept life's tears saved within my heart,
But its smiles I gave away instead.
O my listener, my friend
Come, take a little share as well.

To earn a few smiles, I wept many tears;
And sometimes, through my crying,
I found myself smiling again.
So many tears, so little laughter
Such is the fair, the game of life.
And so I chose to give the smiles away.

Friend, perhaps neglect was all you received;
Then take from me
A small portion of my joy.

I dreamed of happy laughter
On a thousand faces.
Seeing the sorrow of a thousand souls,
I made a quiet promise
With a few tears and many smiles,
I too will play this game of life.
And so I kept the tears to myself,
But the smiles
I gave away instead.

O listener, my friend,
Come, take a little share.



SNEHE AMAR XATA SRABONOR

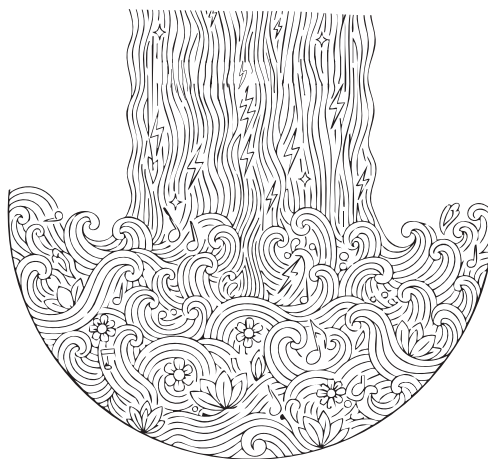
Love alone will come down to us
In incessant torrents of a hundred summers
While frantic floods, overwhelm youth
Emptying itself in desire
In incessant torrents of a hundred summers
Love alone will come down to us

Inundating still, silent darkneses
Tides of turbulent life
The waves of radiant summer
Dance to the tunes of new creations
Love alone will come down to us
In incessant torrents of a hundred summers

Your lightening eyes
Tinged with the frenzy of unspoken words
Breathing out the assurance of hope
Disdain bounds of satiety.

In the horizon of affection
I sing of movement
Drowning the roar of thunder
While thirsty rains pursue the monsoon

Sure, too, is our vision.
While frantic floods, overwhelm youth
Emptying itself in desire
Love alone will come down to us
In incessant torrents of a hundred summers



MOI JETIYA EI JIVONOR

When I'll have gone from this life,
Breaking all ties and bonds of strife,
I hope by my pyre I'll find
Your solicitude, gentle and kind.

I don't want memorial services
Nor false eulogies
A drop of tear from you
And I'll have had my due.

Singing for the multitude,
I had forgotten you,
And lost you in the glare and light
At the very peak of life's cruel height.
That regret hurts even now,
And I know peace I'll never gain
A drop of tear from you
And I'll have had my due.

If I look into
The struggles of my life so true,
I'll definitely find
Heaven was the love you denied
And that I'll seek, when all is apart,
In the final haven of your heart.

JODI JIVONE KANDE

If life draws a blank and wails
If dust beneath your feet turns into grief
When despair eats into your hopes
Sing the song I give

If you see an egret
In lonely flight toward the sea
If trifles stifle what is great
Read the song from me

If you never get what you want
And receive what you'd do without
Pining for what is not
Smile the smile I show

I have seen many hearts lie broken
So I write these songs with hope
If by mistake you meet only darkness
Let these tunes help cope

If you land each time on the thorn
And your blood reddens every road
Wipe them clean with the songs I give
Lightening every load

BIMURTO MUR NIXATI

This, my ethereal night,
Is a blue scarf
Woven of silence -
A blue scarf.
In its sweet folds,
Tender breathing
And living warmth,
A blue scarf.

The silent summer of affection,
Of countless struggles
In the depths,
Glowing with desire -
And in its sweet folds,
Tender breathing
And living warmth.
Woven of silence,
This, my ethereal night,
Is a blue scarf.

Foreseen tears echo
The tender call,
Her tender call,

Disdaining all bonds.
Innocent lips quiver
With intimate longings.
This rule of breaking rules
Is bound to rules
And registers,
Recording tender blows and counterblows,
And the hurt of the blue night.

Immersed in a sea of intimacies,
I do not need the anguished outcry
Of a distant river.
This, my ethereal night,
Is a blue scarf,
Woven of silence.





Surjya Goswami, Bhaskar Das and Bhupen Hazarika in performance

ASTA AKAXORE

Smear'd with dreams of the setting sun
The weary Luit bears crimson waters.
It flows on, and it flows on.

What wondrous artist, in a lotus-blossom boat,
Scatters peacock-feathered hues across the sky?

On either bank are so many people,
so much history,
The breath of so much ancient hope and despair.

If your aim is the horizon, O artist,
Moor your lotus-boat once
And see

Life too has infinite horizons
And the sun keeps moving...



OTITOR BURONJI LIKHOKE

Historians of yore
Recount
The exploits of kings and queens
But history today
Is the living story
Of liberated humanity

The Fallahin by the Nile
Wept, recalling woes
Of a peasant's weary life

Black John of the cotton fields
By the Mississippi
Wept, speaking of man and his hues

Rongmon by the Luit
In the village graveyard
Clamours day after day
Speaking of a free-flowing mind

And I forget
The feudal story
So long recounted by history

With the courage of time
I will write today
The tale
Of human liberation

MOI ETI JAJABOR

I am a wanderer, a wanderer I am
To the ends of the earth, I roam
Never looking for a home
I am a wanderer, a wanderer I am

From the Luit
Through the Mississippi
At the Volga's beauty I marvelled
From Ottawa, through Austria
Paris to my breast, I held

Ancient colours I have carried
From Ellora to Chicago streets
In the minarets of Dushambe
The poems of Ghalib I did meet

Sitting at Mark Twain's grave
I have talked of Gorky
Strangers on the road I find
Soon become friends of mine

And that is why, I am a wanderer
That is why, a wanderer I am

Many wanderers have no aim
Though for me, it's not the same
I do have a pledge to keep
The fount of joy wherever I found
I wish to spread it all around

I have seen, kissing the sky, rows of tall palaces
And in its shadow, I saw, a multitude of the homeless
I have seen homes with beautiful gardens adorned
I have also seen flowers wilt and fall early, out of turn
In many countries, houses being burned, it pains me
no end
To see people becoming aliens in their very own land

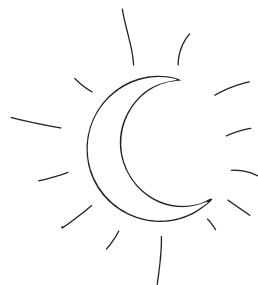
And that is why, I am a wanderer
That is why, a wanderer I am
To the ends of the earth, I roam
Never looking for a home
I am a wanderer, a wanderer I am

NOTUN NIMATI NIYORORE NIXA

A new and silent, dewy night
Brightening life, a moonlit night
And you, so close.

My youth is in a flurry today
In a flurry today is my youth
On the glimmering lake
Flutter lotuses of desire
The night satiates the self
A new and silent, dewy night
Brightening life, a moonlit night
And you, so close.

No largesse, no beauty
No gifts either
Still I offer my love-laden oblations
On my bosom
With tender warmth
And you; trembling, surprised
And life is satiated...
The night.
A new and silent, dewy night
Brightening life, a moonlit night
And you, so close.



AJI JIVON BUTOLIBI

Come, gather life today
Come smiling, come.
Come, forget death today
Come smiling, come.
Bring your flute, bring your laughter,
And step out
Step forth toward the new horizon of the age.

How long will you keep
The bird of your heart confined?
How long will you weep
Over the dark heaps of passing time?
Will you not break open
The closed doors of your cage today?
Come out
Come forth to a new horizon of light.

In the ledger of time
There is no column for loss.
The vast field of life stands radiant
With the harvest of free human beings.
How long will you keep counting
What you gained by holding back?

How long will you go on saving and
multiplying
Only your own store?
Why not give away
All that you have received today?
Come forth
To a new horizon of sacrifice.
Come forth
To the new horizon of the age.
Come forth
To the new horizon of light.

MOR GAAN HOUK

Let my song be
A voice of deep assurance
Against the pervading absence of faith.

Let my song be
A hymn to truth,
Standing firm against hollow imaginings.

Through the craft of my art
Let there emerge a gentle distinction,
A soothing yet radiant strength.
Within that song awaken
The mighty spirit
Of a committed, striving warrior.

Let my song embrace
The conflicts of our time,
The radiant outpouring of life itself;
Let countless voices gather
And rise together in chorus.

My song harbors
No destructive vision,
No discord, no bitterness
Its only aim
Is an unparalleled peace.

Within my melody
Let past and present take living form;
And may the ever-bright future
Come and bathe in its light.

Let my song be
Against towering walls of obstacles
A song of fierce momentum and forward force.

Let my song be
A profound assurance
Against all disbelief
A song of deep and unwavering faith.

GUPUTE GUPUTE KIMAN KHELIM

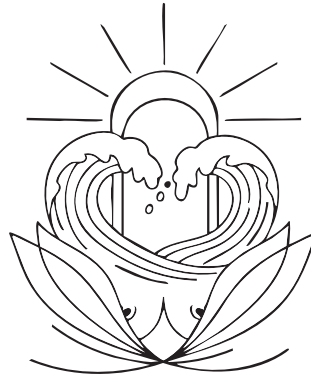
How long shall we play in secret
This game of intimacies
Let's venture out into the open
And spread our joy all around
This game of intimacies
How long shall we play in secret

Come let's show culture and society
Let us no longer hide
Our hearts wide as the sea
In youth, can there any sin be?
Like light can never be shut
And waves always heed the sea

Of your two eyes
And petals of your breast
Every gaze is lovely;
And each touch makes me sigh

Fling the doors wide open
Forsake restraints of civility
Love knows no laws
And storms disdain bounds

Can you ever shame
The dawn into hiding?
How long shall we play in secret
This game of intimacies



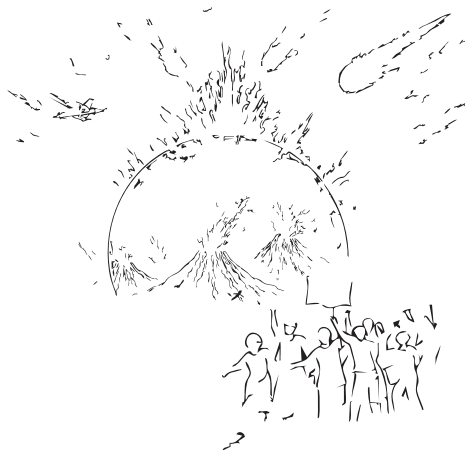
BIKHYUBDHA BISWA KONTHOI

The enraged world clamours day and night
Fierce volcanic fires fly
Why?

Earth wouldn't desire disaster
Nor men seek destruction
Yet these flames fly
Why?

Determined resistance
Would deal early death
To the pride of animality
The long expanse of human civilisation
And the volcanic soul of each individual
Make new resolutions everyday

That is why
Fierce volcanic fires fly



KAHINI ETA LIKHA

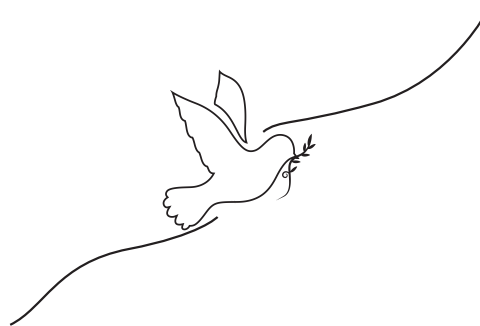
“Write a story of service and grace,”
I had asked you many a time,
My writer friend
But you answered only with pride and disdain.

Did you not once come running to me,
In search of a true hero?
And I, forgetting myself,
Spoke to you of human history
Of its struggles, its sacrifices.

Yet you went on writing
False tales of blind and hollow heroes,
Stories born of empty imagination.

The stories you failed to write
Time itself inscribed them in history.
Within me surged
The rising tide of a thousand battles,
The struggles of countless souls
But you chose not to see.

From your restless pen
Words spilled and ran dry;
Today even your language falters.
And I, too, will waste no more moments
Going in search of you.
No longer will I plead a hundred times
To tell you once again:
My writer friend,
You kept writing falsehood upon falsehood,
While I had only asked
Again and again
For a story of service and grace.



RONG KINIBA KUNE

Who will buy colours?
O who will buy colours?
I've filled my pouch with colours
Come, buy them one by one!

From the golden paddy fields
Where yellow birds flutter,
From the petals of mustard flowers
Blazing bright
They sell me yellow hues
Again and again.
O who will buy colours?

In the lush green stretches
Of tender paddy shoots,
At the blue, blue edges
Of the vast sky
The egret vanished.
Searching for the white of its wings,
I stumbled through the woods
Where did it hide?

From thick and tender shades of green
The hidden egret laughed and said:
"The white of my wings
You will not find it so easily!"
Chasing crimson shades,
I walked along vermilion paths
Hoping to meet Brother Sun.
And the Sun said:
"All colours trade
Through the rainbow."
That rainbow sold me a little,
Pouring into my pouch
Dream-soaked colours,
Measured scoop by scoop.
Who will buy colours?

Just a little, just a little
I am a seller of colours.
My trade travels lands and seas;
I do not stay still.

RUDDHO KARAR DUWAR BHANGI

Come, come, take some colours!
Call everyone along!
For these colours
I ask no money at all.
Only come running,
All of you
And with these colours
Paint the world
With ringing laughter.
Come, one and all
Who will buy colours?
O who will buy colours?
My pouch is full of colours
Come, buy them one by one!

Forcing shuttered prison doors,
Where light dances every day,
Therein devotion, I shall, my voice outpour
And let my melodies ring bright and clear.

The decaying bonds of an old society
Have given me nothing but poisoned air;
With an unstoppable force that shatters walls,
It seeks the fullness of true humanity.

The free wind is my due
Where the source of collective life flows.
On the vanquished tomb of despair,
Hope composes its poetry.

XAGOR XONGOMOT

Much have I swum in the confluence of seas
Yet still I am not tired
The waves of the ocean within my mind
Remain restless, unquiet

In the peaceful ocean of my mind
The tides today never cease
Countless waves rise with renewed vigour
Carrying endless peace

The peace of the Pacific
Stands threatened today
Demons deal death untiringly
And drive that peace away
And hence the waves
Of the ocean of my mind
Remain restless, unquiet

The endless forces of creation today
Put up a brave, fierce fight
Against the blows of rampant destruction
For peace and dawning light

And the waves
In the ocean of my mind
Remain restless, unquiet

The might of the mighty Pacific
Keeps destruction at bay
Countless multitudes move
In search of love's true way
And so the waves
In the ocean of my mind
Remain restless, unquiet





SEVEN PORTRAITS



Surjya Goswami, Shankar Mahato, Bhaskar Das and Bhupen Hazarika in performance

CELEBRATING LIFE

Pradip Acharya

Though routinely profaned, humility refuses to be clichéd for you encounter it in all great creators. In fact, it remains their defining trait. They traverse the seas and scour the land but finally home in and sing hymns at heaven's gate. This is no distant generalisation but a feeling one has when, if one is fortunate enough, comes face to face with the great. It all began with Kamal Kataki calling up to say that Bhupenda would like to talk to me. Bhupenda began with his soothing yet urgent voice to say that he had to come and see me, 'I've written something and you have to see if they add up to anything.'

My immediate response was to tell him that I was coming over. In his place at Nizarapar he began by saying that perhaps at his age one needn't really bother. Like most of us I had a copy of his songs and lost no time in getting to work. The result was *Where Seas Meet* which he had Khushwant Singh release at the Sahitya Sabha session ('93/94) when he was its president. Mr. Singh wanted to know who had translated it and as Bhupenda later told me he was reassured- 'Then it would be good' he had said:

The waves in the ocean of my mind
Are restless still...
Countless multitudes move
In search of love and a peaceful way
And so, the waves
In the ocean of my mind
are restless still

Bhupen Hazarika was a poet of love and he loved, felt for and celebrated the common, ordinary realities often relegated to impermanence. He came to know, became familiar with and championed Moghai Oza, who played the *Dhol*, a folk drum, and carried it to the high echelons of modern art. There are multiple instances but they would only emphasize the sentiment that his creations uphold. As a poet of hope he instils it in those who despair. After all, forcing prison doors he ventures out to where light dances.

Free air is my due
At the fount where life
Quenches its thirst
Hope scripts poems
On the vanquished tomb
Of despair

Bhupen Hazarika is no more alone than the tree that stands on one leg, “the great rooted blossomer” to dispense its magnanimities of sound, for hope alone engenders life. Life with all its joys and fears, its triumphs and tribulations, continues to go its way but it is the abiding human will to create something fresh and universally meaningful that gives the creator all the inspiration he needs; and that is why Bhupen Hazarika wants his songs to be:

A profound assurance
Against the pervading lack of trust

What is written is apprehended by the lettered few but everyone is privy to what is said or sung. That is how he had created a niche for himself in every heart. Yet the waves in the sea of his life are restless still. This hope with its assurance sustains him as it emboldens his verse to that rousing call:

Forcing prison doors
I venture out to where light dances

There will I offer oblations
In adorned numbers

His initial works were for the IPTA of which he was an active member and the songs of that period internalize the struggle of the toiling masses and he continued singing from the “rag and bone shop of the heart.” He doesn’t simply advocate a cause but lives it and fights for it and that may account for the urgency all his numbers have.

I have found many with their hearts broken
So I write these songs so filled with hope
If by mistake you’d get darkness alone
And land every time on the thorn
If your blood reddens all roads
Wipe them with the tunes I give.

It is in the sedan carriers’ song that we find the initial intrepid step of his entire journey work. This recreation of the intent, purpose and rhythm of the struggle comes from commitment and faith and also underlines the contraries and contradictions of life and living. All perform their tragic play but you do not break up your lines to weep for gaiety transfigures all that dread.



Pradip Acharya is an academic and social activist. He translates from Assamese into English and his translations have appeared at home and abroad including *Verse* (Oxford) and *Poetry* (Chicago). He retired as Professor and Head of the Department of English, Cotton College, Guwahati, where he lives.



*Bhupen Hazarika and Nripen Barkataki at 'Angel of the North',
Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, England*

MY THIRTY DAYS WITH BHUPEN DA IN THE UK

Dr. Nripen Barkataki

I had known Bhupen *Da* from my childhood. Our interactions were brief back then, occasional crossing of paths. Later, after I moved to the UK, our meetings became an annual ritual whenever I visited India. But it was only during the thirty days we spent together in the UK that I truly came to know him.

In the mid-1990s, Bhupen *Da* went through a period of deep depression. He stopped performing, stopped composing songs. Invitations arrived from across the world, but he declined them all. In 1999, I wrote to him with an unusual proposal: inviting him to deliver a talk on Music and Mental Health for a Medical Conference; a subject that, back then, still lived on the fringes of public conversation; spoken of with curiosity not confidence. Bhupen *Da* found the idea deeply intriguing. Perhaps it was precisely because the field was so unexplored that it caught his attention.

The conference was held in Slaley Hall, a luxury Northumberland hotel near the Tyne River as it flows towards the North Sea. I was waiting in the Newcastle airport to receive Bhupen *Da* who was flying from Calcutta. As the plane arrived, I was eagerly waiting for him. Suddenly Bhupen *Da* appeared out of the revolving door accompanied by Kalpana Lajmi. Bhupen *Da* had a childlike smile on his face carrying a box. Tucked carefully into a box was his harmonium. Almost immediately after we met, he explained with a smile, “I carried my harmonium myself. The harmonium and the guitar are not married yet. So, I need my harmonium to sing. Since I am here, I cannot go without singing a song.” Thus began my 30 days journey with Bhupen *Da* in the UK.



That was Bhupen *Da*, humorous, poetic and unwavering in his devotion to music. From the airport, I brought him home to my modest place in Seaham. Throughout the drive, he gazed out of the window, quietly admiring the beauty of the landscape, the calm of the coastline and the unfamiliar gentleness of the English countryside. The next morning, he sat cross-legged on the floor and began to practise. He looked up at me and said, with unmistakable pride, “Depression and age have not been able to put a single scratch on my throat or my voice.” At that time, he had been on a hiatus from singing and was returning to his music after a long pause. Yet, once he began, the songs flowed effortlessly, one after another; each carrying the unmistakable depth and authority of his voice. He was genuinely interested in the upcoming talk, not only as a performer but as a thinker. He spoke at length about the nuances and challenges of linking music to mental health and asked me for research materials to strengthen his existing understanding. His curiosity was tireless; age had done nothing to dull his appetite for new ideas. He asked thoughtful questions about the audience who they were, what they expected, what their names were and how they might receive his words and music to eventually compose the song for the occasion which included some of their names. Such was his precision to details, handcrafted and almost perfect.

On the third day after his arrival, I casually asked him if he would consider composing a song especially for the occasion. There was a moment of hesitation perhaps because of his long break from composing. But almost immediately, he agreed. He rose from the bed, asked me to get him a drink and leave him on his own; without ceremony, he began to compose. Within the day the song was written, composed and the very next day it was performed. That song was sung only once in his entire lifetime. And I was there to witness its birth,

“নিউকাচল চহৰৰ
টাইন নৈৰপাৰতে পাতিছো চেনেহৰ মেলা...
টাইন লুইতৰ মিলাপ্ৰীতিয়ে
অমৰ কৰিলে এই সঙ্গীত।”

The song ended with a line that felt almost prophetic; that it would be immortalised by the unison of the Tyne and the Luit. Bhupen *Da* had an inexplicable affinity for the River Tyne. Perhaps it was destiny that, after his passing, I immersed his ashes in its waters, letting the Tyne carry him into eternity.

Living with him, I discovered not the legend, but the man. He never went to bed before two in the morning. His daily rituals were precise, almost sacred. Every meal began the same way: a small morsel of rice, half a spoon of mustard oil and a pinch of salt. “This keeps my throat intact,” he would say. According to him, Lata Mangeshkar herself had advised him to take it in one gulp; and he followed that advice faithfully. Every night, without exception, he gargled with Listerine. Discipline, he believed, preserved the voice and the voice was his offering to the world.

On the second day of practice, his harmonium began to misbehave. He asked if I could arrange a mechanic. Despite numerous calls to music shops across the UK, I couldn't find anyone who could mend a classical harmonium. Then I remembered a friend; by profession a builder, but

gifted with his hands, capable of fixing almost anything. He arrived, quite dramatically, in his Rolls Royce and repaired the harmonium with effortless ease. Bhupen *Da* laughed in disbelief and said, “My man mends my harmonium in Calcutta riding a bicycle and here I am getting it fixed by someone who drives a shiny Rolls Royce!”

We often went to the seaside near my home. The beauty of the North Sea fascinated him. Like a child, he collected colourful cobblestones, delight shining in his eyes. Watching him, I realised how deeply he cherished simple pleasures; the kind that require no explanation. He travelled extensively around Tyne and Wear, visiting Durham Castle, exploring riversides and coastlines. Eventually, we decided to drive to Scotland. Crossing Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, we followed the North Sea all the way. Bhupen *Da* spoke continuously; about life, music and memories. Every time Assam entered the conversation, his face lit up. Two things animated him instantly: Assam and its people; the *Raiz*.

Near the England-Scotland border, we stopped at a small town called Eyemouth, where the River Eye meets the sea. As I described the place, he suddenly asked, “Is it like our Bharalumukh?” Everything he encountered found its echo in Assam. Later, stopping at another small town, he said, “I can imagine Nazira here.” His homeland lived within him, colouring every landscape he saw.

We reached Edinburgh in early September, when the city buzzes with the Edinburgh International Festival; one of the world’s largest art festivals. As we walked down the Royal Mile, stretching from Edinburgh Castle to Holyrood Palace, Bhupen *Da* said thoughtfully, “Do you know every inch of this cobbled road tells a history?” His knowledge was as vast as his music.

One evening, he insisted on trying Chinese food. At the restaurant, a Chinese waitress served us. He smiled and asked me, half-jokingly, “If I call her Dalimi, will she respond?”

During our stay, he wanted his eyes examined. We took him to an optician, where the check-up was provided free of charge. He was visibly pleased and asked me, “Is it free because Bhupen Hazarika has come for an eye check-up?” I gently corrected him: “No, it’s because in the UK, people above sixty aren’t charged.” He looked genuinely disappointed.

We travelled through the Highlands, admired their stark beauty and stood by Loch Ness as he recalled stories of the legendary monster. Eventually, we returned to Newcastle.

After this long journey, Kalpana Lajmi placed her trust in me. She requested that I look after Bhupen *Da* for a week while she visited her brother Devdas Lajmi, who lived nearby. She set two conditions: no guests at home and no more than two drinks in the evening. She also asked me to conduct ECG and blood tests at my clinic. Before leaving, she handed me seven envelopes; one for each day; each containing carefully segregated medicines with precise instructions. Her attention to detail and care were extraordinary.

During those seven days, one day Bhupen *Da* decided to cook for us. He insisted on choosing the ingredients himself at the departmental store; vegetables, tomatoes, shrimps and everything else. In the kitchen, he laid out each ingredient separately on a big pan and then called me to have a look. “Do you see how I am cooking?” he asked. “Each ingredient keeps its own identity. But when we mix them together, we get a beautiful curry.” That, he explained, was how he saw Assam and the seven sisters; diversity held together in harmony, each culture distinct, yet inseparable.

Once, a visitor complained about Assam; its dust, broken roads, open drains. Bhupen *Da* listened quietly, then said firmly, “Despite it all, isn’t Assam adored? No matter how ugly your mother is, she is still your mother. And you love her endlessly.”

When Kalpana returned on the seventh day, she asked about the medical reports. As a doctor, I was astonished; she remembered every detail of his previous blood tests and ECG results from

a year earlier. I truly believe Bhupen *Da* lived ten extra years because of her care. She ensured he never drank before performances, carried home-cooked food to hotels and devoted herself entirely to his well-being. Joining his life at the tender age of seventeen, she sacrificed everything for him. She remains deeply misunderstood by many, but having witnessed her devotion, I owe her my deepest respect.

We later travelled to London, where Bhupen *Da* spoke openly about his life; his philosophy, his family, his joys and sorrows; stories later captured in *Bhupen Da Uncut*. We attended performances at historic theatres like The Phantom of the Opera and recorded “Manuhe Manuhor Babe” on the banks of the Thames.

One day, a man stopped him on the street. “Are you Bhupen Hazarika? I am from Pakistan. I love your songs. Music crosses borders.” It was a moment that perfectly captured his universal reach. There were many incidents as such. I also invited him to speak at a Rotary Club meeting, to welcome two students who were selected to visit Assam. Bhupen *Da* spoke warmly of Assam’s autumn, its full moon and the reverence we hold for our elders. He sang:

“এনেনো ভাল লাগে আইতা
এনেনো ভাল লাগে
মুখলৈনো কিনো চাবা
পুৰ্ণিমাৰে জোলে ...”

At a race relations meeting in Trafalgar Square, he sang, “We are on the same boat, brother...” The priest who followed him said he had little left to add after Bhupen *Da*’s song.

After a month together, Bhupen *Da* and Kalpana left for Mumbai. I remained behind, carrying a lifetime of memories; of an affectionate, profoundly kind man with an ocean of knowledge, immense love for Assam and deep compassion for humanity. He shared with me the meanings of his songs, recited unpublished poems and offered me the rare privilege of his presence.

And Kalpana- born into one of India's most illustrious families, with celebrated uncles and a renowned painter as a mother; chose a life of quiet sacrifice. Her love and care for Bhupen *Da* remain unfathomable. What a sacrifice!

That story, perhaps, is for another day.

For now, I cherish these memories; again and again.



Dr Nripen Barkataki, MBBS., MD

General Practitioner NHS with special interest in respiratory medicine. Presently lives in Bristol UK. Former police surgeon in Durham Constabulary UK. Former General Secretary of United Assam Association, UK. Former Vice- President of Rotary Club, Seaham in Durham, UK. Visiting consultant in Deepsikha foundation, Guwahati, Assam. Founder member of Assam HealthCare Coop Society.

77 B, GOLF CLUB ROAD, TOLLYGUNGE

My mother's memories with Bhupenmama

Joor Baruah

We were in the city only briefly, for work at the American embassy-passing through, our lives anchored elsewhere-Ma's in Assam, mine in America. After the meeting, as we stepped out of the embassy, Ma paused. In a voice so soft it almost disappeared, she asked if we could go and see their house. She didn't say which one. She didn't have to. Some places live long before they are spoken. We got into a taxi and settled in.

The black-and-yellow taxi carried us through Kolkata, from *Ho Chi Minh Sarani* toward *Tollygunge*. An old fare meter hung ahead of us, its glass clouded with age, catching and warping our reflections as the road curved-faces briefly visible, then broken, then reassembled into something unfamiliar. It was a hot August day.

As the car moved, the word-house-lingered with me, unsettled, hovering like the reflection in the meter-present but refusing to come into focus. It pulled me back to the last time I had seen Bhupenmama, in Mumbai.

A friend and I had brought *sorshe bhapa ilish* from *Oh! Calcutta* in Andheri-steamed hilsa in mustard sauce. Bhupenmama loved Assamese food, but in our rush we trusted Bengali food to pass as a close second. He relished it. What delighted him most was speaking in Assamese as he ate. The language steadied him, anchoring him briefly in something familiar and whole. He asked after everyone in the family, carefully, deliberately. He ate slowly, talking between mouthfuls, stretching the night as if time might still yield to patience. We stayed late. His hands grew dry. His body seemed tired, while his mind seemed to wander into the hills and valleys of Assam.

The next time I was near Bhupen*mama*, we were standing on the back of a truck carrying his body from Guwahati airport to the Hazarika ancestral home at Nijarapar. Millions had gathered to pay homage. The house waited-not as refuge or return, but as final measure-a house where Ma and her siblings had lived years that threaded them together with him, their eldest brother.

For Ma, the last time she met him had been earlier that year, when she travelled to Mumbai with her younger brother, Samar, to see an ailing Bhupenda during his treatment at *Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani* hospital. He was very happy to see them.

The next time she was near him, his body was silent, carried through a sea of people and flowers into his bedroom at Nijarapar. It was November 5, 2011. Those days remain etched in our memory, with a clarity time has not softened and with a sadness, yet to heal.

As the taxi reached 77B Golf Club Road Tollygunge, the meter's clouded glass caught us one last time-our faces bent and blurred within it-and I felt that Ma was not asking to visit the house so much as to see what still stood, what could still be entered, and what-like a reflection-would never quite hold its shape again.

I caught Ma's eyes in the rear-view mirror, distant and



Golf Club Road. 77B—the second floor of the white building at the end of the lane—was Bhupenda's place.

dreamy, as the taxi turned onto Golf Club Road. She was taking everything in through the open window-the curve of the street, the familiar corners, the quiet persistence of buildings that had not entirely changed. The car slowed near the old two-storied structure at the corner, its presence steady, almost expectant.

This had been Bhupenda's residence, and once, Ma's as well (Rose Hazarika then, later Kavita Baruah) during the years she lived here with her brother. Kavita was the name Bhupenmama had given her when she entered high school, a name that stayed, quietly claiming its place in her life.

Ma spoke to the driver in fluent Bengali as we approached, her voice easy, practiced. When we stepped out of the taxi, she said softly, pride and sadness braided together,

“Eta amar dada Bhupen Hazarika'r bari.”

This is my elder brother Bhupen Hazarika's house.

As we stood there, I noticed Ma drift toward the letterbox marked 77B, as if drawn by habit rather than intention. It was something she had always done when she lived here, I would later learn-a small, ordinary chore that had survived the years, waiting patiently for her return.

I stayed with Ma quietly for the rest of the time we spent there, keeping her company without words. I did not want to interrupt her thoughts or hurry her through them. I doubt I could ever fully gather the emotions her eyes held during that visit to Tollygunge-recognition, loss, tenderness-feelings that rose and passed without asking to be named.

I was to fly back to the U.S. after another week, once I finished filming the documentary I was working on, in Arunachal Pradesh. Filmmaking-an art I was drawn further into while working as an assistant director with Bhupenmama on *Glimpses of the Misty East*, a documentary series that sought to capture the cultural richness of Assam and the Northeast on the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence. Before leaving, I made a quiet promise to myself: that

the next time I returned to India, I would spend time with Ma, listen more carefully and learn about her years in Kolkata-and about her involvement with Bhupen*mama's* creative life. It was between Assam and Kolkata, after all, that his life and work took their shape-long before he was persuaded to move to Mumbai.

What remained untold then would return later, in Ma's own remembering.

"I remember my first flight from Guwahati to Calcutta. The fare was around Rs 75, and it was a small Indian Airlines plane. Bhupenda's wife, Priyam, and their son, Tej, were with him in Tollygunge. Priyambou's brother, Kailas*bhai*, was also there. He was studying at Jadavpur University then.

77B was a full house. Bhupenda had asked me to come and record the duet *Prothomo Prohore Ratri* with the famous Ila Bose for his film *Sakuntala*. Shashanka Shome was managing Bhupenda's affairs at the time. Our brother Rana-Jayanta Hazarika-used to visit often to perform with Bhupenda at concerts and recording sessions. He was gifted. He played many instruments, and Bhupenda loved performing when Rana accompanied him.

Pabitra Borkakoty, Kulada Bhattacharjee, Krishna Das Nath, and others from the *Sakuntala* crew were also in Calcutta then. Bhupenda took me to *Radha Studio* (which later became Calcutta Doordarshan) for the recording with *Iladi*. Satyen Chatterjee was our recordist. Ravi Shankar was recording in the adjacent section of the studio.

I remember being very nervous, but the recording went well.

"The rest of my stay with Bhupenda was very eventful. I got involved in all kinds of production work. Evenings were filled with *adda*-just talking for hours-and trips to *Victoria Memorial* for *kulfi*, or going out to eat along Park Street or in Chinatown. It was 1961. I was twenty-one then," Ma recalled, with a sense of nostalgia.

"Bhupenda was working on many projects then. We travelled to Kolkata often to help him.

During one of those trips, Kailas**bai** flew back with me to Guwahati to visit our family. That was when he first met our sister Ruby (Stuty Patel), who later became his wife. Bhupen**mama** was very fond of Kailas**moha**, and so were all of us. Over the years, he anchored countless get-togethers of the extended family at Nijarapar.

Starting with the children's programme *Akoni'r Mel*, I became more involved with All India Radio, Guwahati–Shillong. I did women's programmes like *Aidew Buloni*, various radio plays, and worked during the time when Ubedul Latif Baruah was the station director.

It was around that time, in 1962, that I moved to Calcutta, to Bhupenda's house. He set me up in the only other bedroom, next to his famous semicircular corner room, and helped me enroll in a Library Science course at Calcutta University. I already knew the house and the people around, so I felt at home immediately."

I remember Bhupen**mama**'s place distinctly: the library stacked with books beside a living room heavy with awards; the balcony overlooking the lane; the armchair in the dining room where he would sit for hours, writing songs on loose sheets, reading the papers, talking on the phone kept close at hand. Beside it was a smaller balcony where we kept a parrot and three pigeons, feeding them often. Near the dining table stood the big, old refrigerator, where after dinner he would sit with his legs crossed, delicately peeling his favorite Alphonso mangoes.

"I met so many people from the world of art and culture who spent time with Bhupenda-O. C. Ganguly, Pahari Sanyal, Anil Chatterjee, Tarun Kumar, Aparna Sen, Dilip Mukherjee, Ruma Guha Thakurta, Hemango Biswas, Utpal Dutta, Aparesh Lahiri, Basuri Lahiri, Jahar Roy, Nipoti Chatterjee, Satinath Mukherjee, Utpala Sen, Sandhya Mukherjee, Salil Choudhury, Hemanta Mukherjee, and so many others.

His close friends Samar Sinha and Alodi were often in the house. Nirod Choudhury, Pratima Pandey, Arup Baruah, Nilima Baruah, Ratna Ojha, and many friends and family from Assam would drop in regularly. Shashanka Shome was managing his affairs, and Mintu Mukherjee

was also around, helping Bhupenda with various things.

I took care of the house and the kitchen, with the help of Kamaladi and Sureshbhai, and did my best to host his never-ending stream of guests. Our youngest brother Konbhaity (Samar Hazarika) visited when Bhupenda was filming *Loti Ghoti* at *Indrapuri Studio*. Kon had grown into a good-looking teenager by then, and I encouraged him to act in the film. He ended up playing a gangster, along with Munni's (Bidya Rao) brother, Chiku.

Apart from our house, *Film Service* was another regular meeting place, since Bhupenda often edited his work there. I would join the *addas* whenever I could—after my university classes, either at home or at the studio,” Ma said, with a slightly guilty smile, as if admitting that her studies were not always her highest priority then.

Rubymahi (Stuty Patel) married Kailasmoha in 1965, in Guwahati.

“The Madhusayanika team came to see them off at Guwahati airport,” Ma recalled. “Our brothers Nripen and Balen Hazarika accompanied them to Calcutta, where Bhupenda and I joined them to say goodbye. They were moving to Uganda. Our brother Prabinda was already working there.”

Madhusayanika was an important socio-cultural organization in Assam during the 1960s. Ma was one of its co-founders, along with Balenmama, Rubymahi, Dudulaunty, Bhutuuncle, Ambikauncle, Zuluuncle, Kalyanuncle, Aniluncle, Sachinuncle, and a few others. “*Madhusayanika* and the *Indian People's Theatre Association* (IPTA) were very important platforms for me—culturally and socially,” Ma said.

“Bhupenda was filming *Pratidhyoni* then. Although it was mostly shot in Guwahati, a lot of the work was done in Calcutta. I was given many production responsibilities. Bhupenda also asked me to sing *Bihu* with Moghai Ojha and to narrate the opening sequence—‘*Xurja Jetiya Kesua Asil...*’” Ma recalled.

She completed her studies at Calcutta University in 1966. A few months later, her father, Nilakanta Hazarika, passed away, and she returned home to be with her mother, Santipriya.

Bhupenmama filmed *Chik Mik Bijuli* in 1968. It was, Ma said, perhaps the first Assamese film to feature actors from Bollywood. “Bhupenda made Shashankada ask me if I would act. I agreed. It was a lovely experience-acting alongside Bidya Rao, Bijoy Shankar, and Prashanta Baruah,” Ma recalled, with fondness.

“During one of my visits to Calcutta, an Assamese architect came to our Tollygunge house to meet Bhupenda,” she said. “He was on his way back from Tezpur to Chicago, where he was working. He was also involved in the civil rights movement, supporting Martin Luther King. Bhupenda was at the studio that day, and Upen waited for a long time. I served him tea and kept him company,” Ma smiled.

That was how she first met my father, in 1968.

He was a Brahmin, and Ma was from a *scheduled caste*. Most of his family did not approve of the match, so they decided to marry in Delhi. “Bhupenda wanted to come with me,” Ma said, “but since Upen would be there alone, without his family, I told Bhupenda that I should go by myself. He agreed, and made calls to his friends in Delhi, asking them to look out for me in case I needed help.”

She married Upen at *Birla Mandir*. Soon after, he left for America, and she returned to Calcutta. A year later, she joined him there.

“Bhupenmama, along with Nripenda and Balenda-who had accompanied me from Guwahati-came to see me off at the Calcutta airport. It was my first international journey,” Ma said.

“Our daughter Heea was born in Maryland. She was seventeen months old when Upen took up a World Bank assignment, and we returned to Jorhat. Soon after we settled in, Bhupenmama called me back to Kolkata to sing in a chorus for his film *Siraj*. I was pregnant. I completed the

recording quickly and flew back,” she grinned.

I was born the very next day, in Guwahati.

By the time I turned one, Ma was back in Tollygunge again, helping Bhupen*mama*. By then, Tollygunge had become her *second home*.

“*MonPrajapati*, directed by Bhupenda and co-produced by Upen Baruah, was being filmed at Titamoragaon, near Chandrapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati. I was responsible for much of the production work. Upen and I used to travel down often from Jorhat. Bhupenda loved shooting in Assamese villages.

My friend Xador (Gayatri Borgohain), and Bhabesh Baruah were the lead actors. It was a lot of fun on the set, until we received heartbreaking news. Our *Ranabhaity* had passed away.

At the time, Upen and I were staying at Queen*baidew*’s (Sudakshina Sharma) house, along with Dilip*da*. Amarda and I went together to break the news to Bhupenda. We were all in a state of shock and grief.

The gathering of people when *Ranabhaity*’s body reached Nijarapar was very similar to what we saw later, when Bhupenda passed. It was the first time the rules were broken, and women went for the cremation. I wish he had lived longer,” Ma said softly.



Prabhat Sharma, Bhupen Hazarika and Kavita Baruah (Rose) performing in Kolkata



Shabana Azmi, Bhupen Hazarika and Kavita Baruah (Rose) at Nizam’s, Kolkata

“It was around 1977 when I visited Tollygunge again. Bhupenda was to receive a prestigious award and also perform, and he asked me to come and sing with him. Flautist Prabhat Sharma also travelled to Calcutta to accompany Bhupenda, along with the local musicians.

It was a wonderful evening. I remember that after the award ceremony, Bhupenda, Shabana Azmi, and I went to the old restaurant Nizam for rolls. Nizam’s Chicken Roll and Thums Up were among Bhupenda’s favourites,” Ma said, smiling.

“Over the next few years, things gradually changed. For many reasons, 77B Golf Club Road stopped feeling like my *second* home. I wish Bhupenda had not left Calcutta for Bombay,” she sighed.

As she spoke, I realized how deeply emotional her time in Kolkata still was. It had been her brother’s home, then hers too for a while, and later a *second* home she returned to often-until, slowly, that also changed.

In the end, they sold his house.

There were no letters for them in the 77B letterbox.

Ma began to climb the stairs, slowly. She was seventy-five then. I followed a few steps behind, stopping when she reached the front door. She rested her hand on it, almost tentatively, as if testing whether it would still recognize her.

I saw the tears before they fell.

“This is where Bhupenda’s Ambassador was parked,” Ma said, pointing to a space next to the entrance as we came down the stairs.

I remembered his old white Ambassador with a stylish wooden dashboard. The car that took us to Chinatown on late summer nights. The same car that inched its way through crowds that gathered whenever Bhupenmama was recognized.

And I looked up at the balcony – so many of my own memories there, with them.

As we started walking back towards the taxi, a window on the ground floor opened. An elderly man leaned out and smiled at Ma. They spoke in Bengali. She asked after the neighbors. She remembered every name.

When they finished talking, I asked him—in English—if he knew who had bought Bhupenmama’s house. He nodded grimly, disappeared from view, and returned a moment later with a small diary from the table beside him. As he passed me the details of the new owner, his expression seemed to ask—without words—whether the house and its legacy might still be saved.

The taxi ride back was long. Ma was quiet. I let her be.

The driver hummed softly, almost to himself:

“Manush manusher jonye, jibon jiboner jonye...ektu sahanubhuti ki,
manush pete pare na, o bondhu...”

“মানুষমানুষেরজন্যে, জীবনজীবনেরজন্যে... একটুসহানুভূতিকি,
মানুষপেতেপারেনা, ওবন্ধু...”



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THE LYRICAL CHRONICLER

Bhupen Hazarika often did a journalist's job, musically

Rahul Karmakar

A journalist's life is rarely as adventurous or glamorous as it is imagined to be. On most days, the work involves writing routine accounts of events -he-said-she-said statements, accident reports, one-killed-two-injured stories -the kind of material that fills columns but seldom stirs memory beyond the day's edition. It is a 24x7 profession, often without fixed hours for meals or sleep. Yet the job has its quiet rewards for those willing to go the extra mile: journeys to places untouched by tourism, access to people and spaces beyond the reach of ordinary citizens, and the chance to document everyday moments which, however insignificant they may appear, eventually settle into history.

It is this less-remembered calling that defined Bhupen Hazarika the journalist -a figure often overshadowed by Bhupen Hazarika the musical genius. Unlike most scribes, he did not rise through the newsroom ranks as a cub reporter or sub-editor before becoming editor of Assamese magazines *Goti* and *Amar Pratinidhi*. Yet his contribution to journalism surpassed that of many who spent entire careers in newsrooms. His reportage for *Amar Pratinidhi* from the Kameng Frontier (now in Arunachal Pradesh) during the 1962 Chinese aggression remains among the finest examples of Assamese journalistic writing.

Dr Hazarika's editorial writings reveal a dimension of his personality that admirers of his music rarely encounter. To most, he is inseparable from his timeless, haunting melodies -songs of philosophical depth and emotional reach-rather than from the relentless labour of newsroom soldiers armed with pens, cameras and microphones. What is often forgotten is that he earned a PhD from Columbia University on "Proposals for Preparing India's Basic Education to Use



Bhupen Hazarika, Abdul Majid and Anju Devi during a recording session in Calcutta (Kolkata)

Audio-Visual Techniques in Adult Education”, a subject rooted in mass communication, of which journalism is an integral component.

The range of his articles and editorials was expansive. He wrote on Assam’s flood crises, the impact of the China war, and figures as diverse as American singer-actor-activist Paul Robeson, Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, and Assamese cultural icons Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rabha. As Paramananda Majumdar noted in *Bhupen Hazarika: Gotir Pora Amar Protinidhilo*, these writings allow readers to peer into the evolving mind of a man who would later become a legend.

That mind was deeply shaped by place, and few places influenced him as profoundly as Shillong. The Meghalaya capital has a way of seducing the ordinary and beckoning the extraordinary - those rare souls who turn geography into poetry and terrain into conscience. To Dr Hazarika, Shillong was never merely a hill station. It was a muse with many faces: sometimes a woman, sometimes a tune, sometimes an idea drifting through mist.

Long before him, Rabindranath Tagore had responded to the same summons. Between 1919 and 1927, Shillong became Tagore's refuge and creative spark. In its quiet hills the post-Nobel novel *Jogajog* (Connection), the drama *Raktakorobi* (A Blood-Red Flower), and poems such as *Susamay* (Good Times) and *Shillonger Chithi* (Letters from Shillong) were born. While *Shillonger Chithi* celebrated the town's physical beauty - the 'Scotland of the East' - Shillong also entered Tagore's emotional landscape, shaping moments in *Shesher Kobita*, where a fleeting romance between Amit Ray and Labanya breathed with Shillong's mist, though written far away in Bangalore.

Dr Hazarika's bond with the town was no coincidence. He returned repeatedly to the then capital of Assam, drawn by its hills, its people and its eloquent silences. From Shillong, he gathered songs that would outlive both the singer and the city. "Shillong will always be a sweet memory to me," he wrote in 1968 while introducing *Shillongore godhuli* (An Evening in Shillong) - a song that, for generations of Assamese and Khasi listeners alike, carried the golden ache of autumn evenings and half-remembered dreams.

Yet it was *Shillongore Monalisa Lyngdoh*, written three years earlier, that deepened the mystery. Was Monalisa a woman of flesh and breath, or Shillong itself in human form? As Hazarika urged her to keep strumming her carefree guitar - *Tumaar haator guitar khoni / Hilibili music bojai joa* - he wandered musically from rain-soaked Shillong Peak to Laban, wondering if their paths might cross at Nongpoh. Love song, travelogue, meditation on beauty - it was all of these at once.

Before Monalisa came Lienmakao, another Khasi woman transformed into song. In *Pratiddhwani*, inspired by the legend of Manik Raitong, Dr Hazarika painted the sorrow of the jainsem-clad Lienmakao waiting on a peak for a lover who would never return. Real or imagined, these women became vessels of longing - for love, for loss, for place.

Shillong, however, was only one note in Meghalaya's vast symphony that moved him. Flying over the Garo Hills in 1963, he sang *Akashi jaanere uraniya monere*, describing the land below as a sea of green with wild waves. His imagination painted the Northeast - Kanchenjunga, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam - at a time when Meghalaya's forests were still intact, before coal mines and limestone quarries scarred the emerald vision of the minstrel.

His own life-song, however, was forged in fire. In 1942, amid the Quit India movement, a 16-year-old Bhupen sang *Agnijugor firingoti moi*, which translates to spark in an age of flames. Fire followed him through World Wars, independence, ideological storms, wars, riots and reckonings.

Some liken him to Bob Dylan. But Dr Hazarika did more than announce that times were a-changing; he chronicled those changes, shaped by mutinies and revolutions, holding on to the hope that fire could one day warm instead of destroy. Briefly enchanted by Mao Zedong's China, he composed *Pratiddhwani* in 1953. The dream was shattered in 1962, when he witnessed on the Kameng Frontier what he called *shatrur pashuttwa* - the enemy's barbarism. He rewrote *Pratiddhwani*, turning it into a howl of rage.

Yet, bitterness never defined him. At heart, Hazarika remained what Shelley called an "unacknowledged legislator of the world", roaming continents with songs of peace and coexistence. His music bridged communities and borders, from *Maanuhe maanuhor baabey* (If man cannot feel for man, who will?) to *Moi eti jajabor* (I am a nomad), from *O Ganga baheti ho kyun* (Why do you flow, O Ganga?) to *Aami ekekhon nawore jatri* (We are in the same boat, brother).

His music traced Assam and India's emotional journey. If the 1965 Indo-Pak war made him ask Ayub Khan and Bhutto *jaan* who was the *xiyaal* (fox) and who was the *xingho* (lion), the cooperative movement of the 1970s made him tell *Emuthi chaulor kahini* (Story of a fistful of rice). He also documented the change of mood during movements such as the anti-foreigners' Assam Agitation from *Meghe girgir kore* (The clouds are rumbling) to *Mahabahu Brahmaputra*, espousing assimilation of people from across the Indian subcontinent. Even insurgency drew introspection: *Saraipungor kopou sorai* (The doves of *Saraipung*, a jungle in eastern Assam where the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom had its headquarters in 1991) softened into *Suryoday jodi lakhya amaar*, asking why the search for sunrise - a reference to the outfit's symbol - was ending in sunset.

These are not just songs to hum or play on a music system. These are ethereal pieces of lyrical journalism, which chronicled the changing times.

The sun of Bhupen Hazarika set in November 2011. But like Shillong's mist that returns with every dawn, his songs endure - drifting across hills and borders, across India and Bangladesh, across memory itself. In every autumn evening, every restless nomad, every question sung into the wind, Bhupenda still shines.



Rahul Karmakar has a fancy designation, Deputy Editor, but is essentially a reporter primarily covering the eight northeastern states for The Hindu. He has been writing for a living since July 1989 and is arguably the only journalist to have worked along the Tropic of Cancer - from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat.

SHILLONGORE MONALISA LYNGDOH

Mitra Phukan

Dr Bhupen Hazarika, besides being the highly acclaimed singer, composer and lyricist whose renown spread all across the country, was, in addition, a chronicler of the life and times of the common man. He was also a balladeer, and a person who, through his lyrics, music and stage presentations, documented the changes that were happening at a fast pace not just in the valleys and plains of Assam, but also in the hills of India's North East. This documentation is a strong chord running through the chronology of his songs. Through it all, his has always been the voice of moderation and reason, advocating the humanist's way, even though many of his songs deal with chapters in the recent history of this region that are nothing less than bloody and disturbing. For the times that he lived through were some of the most momentous in the history of India's NorthEast, with fragmentation and gory, long drawn feuds being a part of the chronicles of the times.

"Shillongorey Monalisa Lyngdoh," is a bright, peppy song that narrates one such political and social struggle, and its outcome. The amazing thing is that this song manages to convey so much in just a few short sentences. Its subtext, its melodies, convey much more than what the words seem to say on the surface. It is, at first listening, a love song, performed by two male voices, whose tenor and tone mark them out to be young men. The whistling that precedes the actual song successfully evokes a particular atmosphere. Jayanta Hazarika's voice adds a choral quality to the song that makes it, one would say, the voice of an entire generation of people who were displaced, suddenly, from the Khasi and Jaintia hills when it became Meghalaya. Most were not political, but they found themselves caught up in a politically fraught situation.

The song is brief, much shorter than many of Hazarika's own songs. A rough translation of the song would be,

*Monalisa Lyngdoh, you who live in Shillong,
Keep playing hillbilly music on
The guitar in your hands...
Monsalisa, Monalisa, who is the Leonardo who fashioned you?
How can you be possessed of such surpassing beauty?
Do you remember those two cowherds,
On a soft, rain soaked Sunday morning,
At Shillong Peak...and the melody
Of the sharati flute they played...?
Today, you are somewhere in Laban,
And I, after the shifting of the capital,
Have become a Dispur man...
My memories of you
Blush, glowing, like the chrysanthemum.
Monsalisa, just once,
Come down to Nongpoh,
And I too, when I get some leave,
Will go up there,
And together, to the tune of the guitar,
We will sing, and give and take our hearts',
And gaze towards a sweet, faraway dawn.*

In opposition to the wistfulness of the lyrics, the song is set to a lively beat...because it is a young man's song, a person who will not pine away in the face of adversity, but will hope, till

the end, for a better tomorrow, and try to achieve even the impossible.

This song was written around the time Meghalaya was created, in 1972. For some reason, Dr Dilip Dutta in his book “Bhupen Hazarika: Geet Aru Jibon Roth” puts it at 1965, but this must be a mistake. For Dispur as the capital of divided Assam did not exist in 1965. Both Monisha Hazarika, wife of the late Jayanta Hazarika, and Samar Hazarika, his brother, agree that it was penned sometime in 1972 or 1973. Monisha Hazarika has this to say about the way it was actually created. “Bhupenda (Bhupen Hazarika) wrote the lyrics, and told his brother, Jayanta, to tune it. Yes, the song was set to tune by Jayanta Hazarika. Soon, they were ready to record in the HMV studio in Guwahati...” And indeed, much of that freshness and spontaneity is apparent in the recordings of the song. She adds, “Monalisa is a symbol, not a real person, though many have asked this question about her identity. Bhupenda hoped that there would be amity and goodwill again among the people of the new state of Meghalaya and the divided Assam.” Over the years, it was performed by the two brothers in many functions of the region. It was almost compulsory to perform it in Shillong, for obvious reasons.

On the face of it, this is a love song, a song of separation, of young love sundered. It is in fact a song about an incident, a history that could actually have happened, and frequently did in those times. Inter-community romances were not uncommon in the Shillong then. True, the two communities were always wary of each other, politically as well as socially. The cultures of both communities were strong, but not at all alike. But when has youth gone according to the mores of the older generations? Attractions between the two communities happened. Often these were clandestine affairs, culminating only sometimes in a marriage. But there was the deliciousness to these love stories that perhaps came from the fact that this was a forbidden love.

Many of these loves did come to an abrupt end when the capital suddenly shifted. There was heartbreak as well. It was not possible any more for the boys of the plains to go up to Shillong

frequently enough to nurture the romance. And for the girls, it was practically impossible to come down to the hot and dusty plains to pursue their love.

Kamal Katakya, who was a close confidante of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, his associate, stage manager and guitarist for many years, has this to say regarding the maestro's words about this song. "I asked him (Dr Hazarika) about the genesis of this song once. He told me that he wrote it keeping in mind the stories of all those youths who had given their hearts to beautiful young Khasi women, but who now had to come down to the plains...it was written right after the shifting of the capital, when great upheavals took place in the lives of many people who lived there."

In many ways, this story of the sundering of romance between pairs belonging to the different communities also mirrors the political and social developments of the time in what is now known as "undivided Assam". Within this narrative is the story of individual heartbreak, a subaltern perspective on momentous happenings of State that the common person often does not understand, but which affect him, nevertheless.

But there is so much more to the song than would be apparent at first listening that one can only be amazed that the lyricist could pack in so much into a single short song. An entire political history of a region, its turbulence and its quest for an identity, is encapsulated into the song. Beginning on a personal note, wondering, in the age old fashion of lovers everywhere, at the surpassing beauty of the beloved, the song tunnels into a phase of history that left upheaval, turmoil and heartbreak in its wake.

The images used in the poem are layered, and were doubtless carefully chosen. The Sunday outing is so quintessentially Shillong that it immediately evokes a particular cultural custom. And can anything be more evocative of Meghalaya, the Abode of the Clouds, than the description of a misty, drizzly morning in Upper Shillong? And of course the cowherds, who play the *sharati*. It

is important to recognize that the flute they play is not the *beslie*, which is more associated with cowherds and pastoral tranquillity. It is noteworthy that the melodies that the lovers hear on this misty Sunday did not come from Monalisa's guitar, but from this bamboo flute, the *sharati*. This instrument plays music that brings to mind mourning, for traditionally, the *sharati* is used during ceremonies of death. Therefore, even during the sweetest and most hopeful hour of their romance, there is the shadow of an end, a dying foretold in the melody they hear. The sweetness of the pastoral scene is therefore deceptive. The evocation of this particular recollection, this particular aural memory, suggests more than it actually says.

And of course the upheaval, the trauma that leads to the shifting of the capital too is condensed into a few matter-of-fact lines. Monalisa remains in Laban, that middle class neighbourhood where many Assamese people also lived, while the narrator has come to Dispur, to which place the new capital of divided Assam was shifted. Here, too, a story is cocooned – for Laban, with its mixed population of Khasis, Bengalis and Assamese then, could perhaps be one of the few places in those turbulent times when a multi-racial love story like theirs could even happen, and grow.

And then, the yearning of the last lines. He will go up to that halfway point between Shillong and Guwahati, Nongpoh, that little town which was always a stopping point for travellers. This image of meeting each other halfway takes the entire lyric to the level of a symbol. Monalisa with her guitar on the one hand, and the narrator on the other, symbolise an entire past, now sundered. Two different communities, living together uneasily for decades, are now separated.. And yet, the singer says, is it not possible that the people can meet up again, in some new dawn when there is a harmonious mingling?

“Shillongore Monalisa” was always a very popular song in the *Bihutolis* and concert halls of this region. It awakened a longing in listeners, whether they ever lived in Shillong or not, or were even familiar with the life there. It is different from that other “Shillong Song,” “Shillongore

Godhuli,” with its dreamlike quality in rhythm and tune, or the haunting “Lienmakao” from the movie “Pratiddhwani” Monalisa, of course, is a symbol. Her guitar brings an apt image of the musicality of the Khasis, whose beautiful singing is accompanied by the strumming of a guitar. And hillbilly music also shows the Western cultural influences that shaped that town in the hills, unlike that other place, Dispur, a suburb of Guwahati, to which the narrator has had to shift. Monalisa, with her guitar, also symbolises exoticness, and conveys the image of the unfettered freedom that Khasi women often embodied in the minds of men from the plains of Assam.

The use of harmony in the song also reinforces this, for harmony is an alien concept in the traditional music of Assam. Jayanta Hazarika’s voice has that tinge of melancholy, as always, contrapuntally to his elder brother’s open sonorous tonal quality. Besides, the melody itself and its pace are reminiscent of the hillbilly music that is mentioned many times in the song. Why hillbilly music? Perhaps because it originated in the hills, though of a different continent, and in the lyricist’s eyes, the two mountain regions merged to become a musically harmonious entity?

The song encapsulates, in a few brief sentences, the entire troubled relationship between two peoples. Love stories between them were common, but the fallout was often tragic. These unions were never looked upon kindly by the elders of either side. And hence, even if the capital had not shifted when it did, it was quite likely that this particular love story would have had a tragic ending. It is a song of separation in more ways than is immediately obvious, for the separation of the lovers is an allegory for the separation of a much more political kind. On the other hand, it is also, at the same time, a song of harmony, of hope that the separation between the communities will end one day.

And yet all this strife, all these complexities, only become apparent when one peels away the layers, one by one. Monalisa’s “Otherness” is reinforced by her quintessentially Khasi surname, Lyngdoh. On the other hand, those who have even a fleeting acquaintance with contemporary

Western music cannot fail to be reminded of that iconic song of Nat King Cole, “Monalisa”...Some of the words of that song seem to fit the narrative of the Khasi-Asomiya relationship beautifully. “They have blamed you / For that Mona Lisa strangeness in your smile...” cannot fail to evoke the situation in the last few years before the idea of “Undivided Assam” lay in fragments across the map of India’s Northeast. Does Bhupen Hazarika’s Monalisa play her guitar to tempt a lover? Or is this her way to hide a broken heart? The parallels are indeed surprising, and they are perhaps embodied in the choice of that name.

Is it only cause you’re lonely /They have blamed you /For that Mona Lisa strangeness in your smile /Do you smile to tempt a lover, Mona Lisa /Or is this your way to hide a broken heart /Many dreams have been brought to your doorstep /They just lie there, and they die there /Are you warm, are you real, Mona Lisa /Or just a cold and lonely, lovely work of art

Certainly Bhupen Hazarika’s Monalisa is neither cold, nor merely a lovely work of art. She is a living, breathing entity, a lifelike presence that moves through the song and colours it from beginning to end.

But in spite of this, we know nothing of her, except her name, her beauty, and the fact that she carries the guitar. It is an ode to a Khasi girl, but her thoughts are not given. True, she has certainly shown her liking, maybe even her love for the Dispur boy. But that’s about it. What does she look like, what is her voice like, does she sing to her guitar, or does she only play it? There is no mention of any of this. She, like the landscape that is evoked, and the land she comes from, is seen



Bhupen Hazarika performing Shilongore Monalisa Lyngdoh accompanied by Bhaskar Das during a stage performance

through the Assamese gaze. Shillong was a glamorous place in the eyes of many middle class Assamese in those days, and its loss, like the loss of Monalisa, is tinged with sadness. The song is as much about love and politics as it is about reminiscence. For like the melody of the *sharati* it marks an ending. Already, the narrator is looking back with nostalgia, even as he settles down, as he must, in his new hometown, of Dispur. He will go up halfway to Shillong to meet her – but here’s the important thing – *if* he can wrangle some leave. He recognizes that theirs is not a Heer-Ranjha or Romeo-Juliet kind of relationship, with high drama. So though there is loss and longing in the song, in the end, it is also a pragmatic way of looking at a relationship that was always a little uncertain to begin with.

Just as the relationship between the people of the plains and the dwellers in the hills were.



Mitra Phukan is an award winning writer, translator, columnist and trained Shastriya Sangeet vocalist. Her eighteen published volumes include children’s books, biographies, (including on Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika,) three novels, “The Collector’s Wife,” “A Monsoon of Music” and “What Will People Say”. A collection of short stories, “A Full Night’s Thievery”, all brought out by international publishing houses. She has translated major Assamese authors into English, including Jyanpeeth awardee Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee’s, “Blossoms in the Graveyard” Sahitya Akademi Awardee Harekrishna Deka’s, “Guilt and other Stories” Arupa Patangia Kalita’s “The Owl, The River and the Valley” etc. She has selected, partly translated and edited “The Greatest Assamese Stories Ever Told”. Her column “All Things Considered” in the Assam Tribune is widely read. She writes frequently on Indian music.

Mitra Phukan’s works have been extensively anthologized and she herself has been translated into several other languages. Her fictions are taught in colleges and universities across the country, and there are many research papers on them.

THE LEGEND THROUGH MY EYES

Mayukh Hazarika

Souls that stand apart from the usual and the conventional, often intrigue us all. They walk the earth once in many centuries. Seldom does one come across an enigma for whom rarely used adjectives like ‘multifaceted’ fall short and get shadowed by the name itself. That enigma was Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, creator extraordinaire!

Singer, songwriter, social commentator, filmmaker, columnist, cultural ambassador, and a musicologist, all packed into one mighty personality. Each profile, equally fine and of the highest standards. And yet, to me, he was a simple man. My *Bordeuta* (uncle), and I, his nephew, with whom I could have regular conversations on just about everything. From playing a game of cricket or carom to taking me out for a film, from political discourses to sharing his thoughts on the media of the day, from explaining the finer nuances of songwriting to performing, he played his part with ease and put me at ease too. Simply put, he was someone who was so completely unassuming of his own stature.

But, today when I immerse myself in the words of his songs in the loneliness of the night and in his physical absence, I realize he was so distinctly different, unique, avant-garde and was probably an ‘elevated soul’ who merely lived amidst us but had a predestined mission to serve ‘all of humanity’, through his creations. To describe what set him apart from others is a daunting task and what I write is only a mere preface.

He symbolized our cultural identity in its entirety, and his creations represent every single human emotion – happiness, joy, sorrow, agony. Cutting across color, creed, occupation,

position, privilege, economic standing, ideologies, and affiliation, he had a song for EVERYONE. Songs that touch the heart of the listeners and compel them to question as well as reconcile in equal measure. It was probably this ability to assimilate the entire gamut of human emotions and translate them into songs with lyrical beauty and soulful melody that set him apart from everyone. Then there were the multitude of socio-political events that he chronicled through his creations, like no other. To the world, his are songs of love, integrity, liberation of the human mind, social unification and much more. For me, they are also representative of an “intellect” that is all-encompassing.

How do I define his genius? Why is he such an integral part of our being, our society? How does he represent each one of us? Why are his songs a lifeline for all of us?

The first probable reason is, **“his poetry and songs are meant for EVERYONE.”** They are for the uninitiated, inexperienced, and downtrodden as much as they are for the intellectual, the well-versed and the affluent. Each creation is universal. They are saddled with deep meaning, philosophy and are an incredible exploration of literature. Yet, they are relatable to everyone in the audience. Filled with everyday tales of people and the society, they are a vehicle to express our views. They are diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies of ordinary people.

He was always **“direct in his messaging”** and could use different styles - LYRICISM, COLLOQUIALISM, and ABSTRACTION with equal strength in all his writings. For instance - *Bistirno Parore*, an example of a heightened expression of ‘lyrical-poetry’. - *Autorickshaw Solau* or *Shillongore Monalisa Lyngdoh*, as instances of ‘colloquialism’ with their use of everyday words and, - *Bimurto Mur Nixati*, an ultimate showcase of ‘abstract-poetry’.

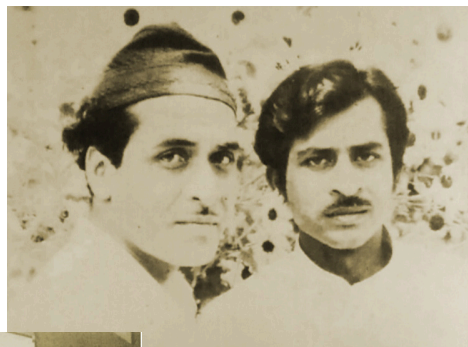
This wide spectrum of being able to write in different poetic languages makes him rare.

“Most of his songs paint a picture.” They can be used as a spoken word and don’t necessarily have to be sung to exude meaning. Each phrase is a painting that is complete in itself. For

example: *Moy eti jajabor*
– One can see a wanderer.
Dhorar dihinge dipange
loworu nibisari nija ghor –
One can imagine a sense
of wanderlust restlessness
in an explorer. *Moy luitor*
pora Mississippi hoi Volgar
roop saalu – One can
visualize a global citizen
and sketch the places.

All the lines above
are equally effective,
irrespective of whether
you recite or sing them
out. They all stand strong
on their own like picture
postcards. And all of
them eventually add up
to navigate you towards a
central meaning.

**“Expression, eloquence,
and enunciation.”** These
are attributes where he
probably was inimitable.



Jayanta Hazarika and Bhupen Hazarika in performance

From the time I remember, he could put people in a spell within minutes, whether they were visitors at home or an audience in a show. Someone who could engage everyone for hours on end, as if he were reciting sonnets in melodic rhyme. Each word, sweet and soothing to the heart.

“He was an evocative songwriter.” Writing is not just a medium of self-expression. That’s one part. It should also stimulate the senses and awaken a range of feelings in the reader/listener –triumph, bliss, despair, pain, a sense of patriotism, ecstasy, angst, and love. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s writings did that in abundance!

“A singer and composer par excellence.” As a vocalist and a composer, he could weave magic. Barely does one find someone who could play around with words and tunes with such expertise and artistry. And then, embellish it with a phenomenal vocal range and clarity of diction. Every word and phrase sung, so very rich in “INTENT and CONTENT.”

“He was a humanist.” At the end of the day, that’s what he was. Someone who used his craft for humanity and for the welfare and dignity of every fellow being.

To write a personal account of such a legend is an arduous undertaking, and it is truly not possible to realistically unravel his life and times, because every facet is a compelling narrative. In conclusion, one can only say that his creations are a chronicle of time –past, present, and future. They are a portrayal of the human psyche, of all its moods and emotions. They are testimonials, biographies, stories, events, and incidents that all of humanity goes through. His name will be written in golden letters in India’s literary and musical tapestry. As long as the mighty Brahmaputra flows through the veins of Assam, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s musical legacy will live on. It will continue to define and unite us in a bond of universal brotherhood. He remains the biggest confluence where different identities of the people of the northeastern states of India meet and find a voice. One often speaks of integrating the Northeast with the mainstream and putting them on the map for the world to see, but I say, he brought the

world down to this beautiful corner of India called the Northeast by being its most celebrated ambassador for all times to come. It is only apt that we celebrate him. Like the rays of the sun forever bestowing its blessings on all of us, Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika will shine on for the whole world to see.....till eternity.



Mayukh Hazarika is a media professional and singer-songwriter. He started his career as a Video Journalist with NDTV and has worn several hats in his long tenure of three decades in the media industry. At present, he serves as the Director of Operations and Events for India's first Lifestyle channel, GOODTiMES. Mayukh made his foray into music in the early nineties and soon gained recognition in musical circles for his baritone voice, a characteristic inherited from the famed legacy he represents.

He is the nephew of Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and the son of Jayanta Hazarika, two of the biggest cultural icons of Assam.

Over the years he has released several albums and has created music for numerous media platforms. Some of Mayukh's self-penned poems and songs, like the very popular *Sokue Jodi Kotha Koy*, are a representation of his career as a journalist and are often a commentary on current times.

BHUPEN DA, TEZPUR AND THE CULTURE WE LIVED WITH

Dr. Lakshmi Kumari Goswami

Tezpur has always been generous with affection. Perhaps that is why Bhupenda felt at home here almost instinctively. People call Tezpur the romantic capital of Assam, but to me it has always been something quieter and deeper. It is a town that listens before it speaks, that offers space for thought, music, friendship, eccentricity and long silences. Bhupen Hazarika understood this quality very early, and over time Tezpur became one of his most comfortable resting places, not merely a stopover but a living presence in his creative life.

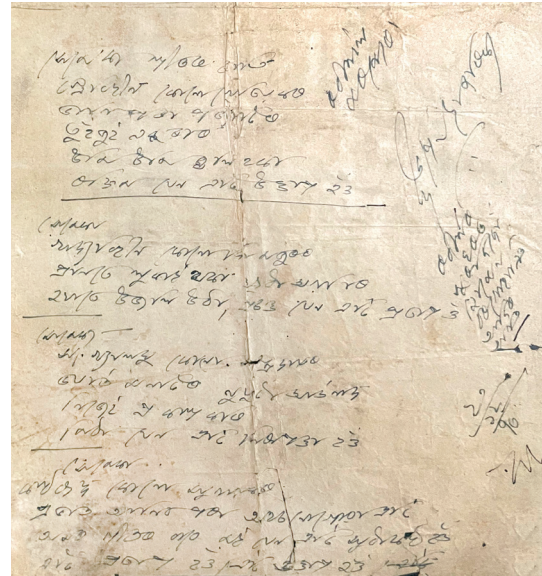
When Bhupenda came to Tezpur, he never arrived like a guest. He came like family. Our home was never formal for him. Shoes forgotten somewhere near the door, books and papers spreading themselves naturally across the room, music finding its way into conversations without effort. He would laugh easily here, laugh the way one does only when the heart is unguarded. I think that comfort mattered to him more than anything else.

He loved the pace of Tezpur. Mornings that began slowly, with mist rising from the Brahmaputra and the hills watching quietly from a distance. Afternoons when the town rested under trees that had seen generations pass. Evenings that invited music without demanding it. Bhupenda often said that Tezpur reminded him of how life should breathe, not hurried, not anxious, but aware of its own rhythm.

He would often spend days with us, sometimes weeks, and those days never felt heavy. They flowed like the river itself. There were endless conversations about music, literature, politics, humanity and the small ironies of everyday life. Bhupenda was deeply curious, and yet never intimidating in his curiosity. He listened as much as he spoke, and when he spoke, it was never to dominate but to connect.

One of the things that people find most surprising is how much Bhupenda enjoyed cooking. In Tezpur, he would often take over the kitchen at times with the enthusiasm of a child discovering a playground. He was particular about ingredients, about balance, about taste. With quiet precision, he chiffonaded and julienned the greens, each cut deliberate and exact. Cooking for him was another form of composition. Just as he arranged notes in a song, he arranged spices in a dish.

I remember him standing near the gas stove, humming softly, sometimes breaking into a tune mid sentence. When the meal was ready and we all sat together to eat, there was always laughter. After a particularly satisfying meal, he would smile and say that when he eats well and eats with people he loves, his creativity enhances. He believed nourishment was not just about food but about companionship. Good food, shared sincerely, opened the mind and softened the heart. Many songs took shape in our Tezpur home, sometimes fully formed, sometimes only as fragments floating in the air. However, his iconic song, *Xitore Xemeka Rati* was composed in our house. He never announced that he was composing. It happened naturally. A line would



Ink, Paper and Iconic Words

Original handwritten lyrics for *Xitore Xemeka Rati* by Bhupen Hazarika in Tezpur



Bhupen Hazarika and Dr. Lakshmi Kumari Goswami in Tezpur

emerge during a conversation. A tune would appear while the evening grew quieter. Often he would ask what we thought, not seeking validation but enjoying the exchange. He respected the intelligence of the people around him, and that respect made collaboration effortless.

Tezpur itself often entered his songs without naming itself. The river light at dusk, the old roads shaded by trees, the warmth of people who carried culture without displaying it loudly. Bhupenda noticed the dignity of ordinary lives. He noticed how Tezpur held its history gently, from ancient ruins to modern classrooms, from legends whispered to students debating ideas late into the evening.

He admired the people of Tezpur for their balance. There was pride without arrogance, learning without pretension, creativity without restlessness. He often spoke about how towns like Tezpur sustain civilisation quietly while cities chase recognition noisily. In Tezpur, he felt no need to perform his greatness. He could simply be Bhupen, a friend, a brother, a fellow traveller.

Our home became a meeting place of sorts. Many conversations unfolded there, involving writers, musicians, thinkers and young students. Bhupenda enjoyed these intersections. He believed ideas grew stronger when they encountered other ideas respectfully. He would encourage the young to speak, to argue, to question. He never dismissed dissent. He believed disagreement was also a form of engagement.

Even late nights were gentle in Tezpur. Music would stretch into silence, silence into thought. Sometimes Bhupenda would sit quietly, lost in reflection, looking out at the darkness beyond the window. Those were moments when you knew he was listening to something within. He once said that silence teaches a song where to stop.

The old Tezpur he loved was deeply cultured, not because it tried to be but because culture lived naturally in its people. There were teachers who treated education as a responsibility, artists who created without craving applause, neighbours who knew each other beyond greetings. Bhupenda valued this intimacy. He often said that creativity needs trust to grow, and Tezpur

offered that trust abundantly.

He also cherished Tezpur's connection with other legends. The town had absorbed so many minds over time, each leaving behind something intangible yet enduring. Bhupenda felt he was part of a continuing conversation rather than a solitary voice. That sense of continuity mattered to him. He did not believe in isolated genius. He believed in shared journeys.

Sometimes during walks, he would point out how the landscape shaped temperament. The calm river, the open skies, the steady hills. He felt that such surroundings prevented extremes, encouraged reflection. Perhaps that is why Tezpur suited his restless yet rooted spirit so well.

For us, those days with Bhupenda remain priceless. Not because of who he was to the world, but because of who he was with us. A man who laughed easily, cooked generously, spoke thoughtfully, and listened deeply. A man who found joy in shared meals and shared silences.

When he left Tezpur, there was never a sense of finality. He always said he would return, and in many ways he still does. In the songs composed here, in the conversations remembered, in the warmth that lingers in the rooms he once occupied.

Tezpur remembers him not as a legend passing through, but as a beloved presence who belonged. And I remember him not as Dr. Bhupen Hazarika the icon, but as Bhupenda, who believed that a good meal, honest conversation and a loving home could make creativity bloom. Those memories remain alive, gently breathing, much like Tezpur itself.

Tezpur had prepared itself for minds like Bhupenda long before he arrived. I often felt that the town already knew how to host genius with humility. Long before our home echoed with Bhupenda's laughter and music, Tezpur had opened its arms to Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. Poki, the Agarwalas' home, was not just a house but a crucible of ideas which later on became an extension of our clinic. It had welcomed Mahatma Gandhi, witnessed the first bonfire of foreign goods in Assam, and nurtured a young Jyotiprasad as he absorbed art, politics and the urgency of a modern Assamese identity.

The spirit of Poki seemed to travel across Tezpur, settling into places like the Ban Theatre, where Jyotiprasad staged Sonit Kunwari as a young boy and later shaped music and performance with a visionary's patience. That same Ban Theatre energy lingered in the town when Bhupen Hazarika came. He often spoke of Jyotiprasad with reverence, as someone who taught Assam how to dream responsibly.

I remember one particular evening when Bhupenda spoke not of Tezpur, but of a distant shore. He told us about a moment that stayed with him deeply. While returning from New York to Assam, he had stood quietly along the shores of Southampton. The sea was vast and indifferent, and he was far from home. In that silence, he said, he made a promise to himself. He told himself that when he returned to Assam, he would change the scenario of modern Assamese songs. He spoke of it not with arrogance, but with resolve. "We must give our people songs that reflect their time," he said softly.

When he shared this memory with us in Tezpur, there was no drama in his voice. It was a simple recollection. But looking back now, I realise that promise shaped an era. He did return, and he did transform the soundscape of Assam. The themes grew bolder, the melodies travelled farther, the language carried both earth and sky. In our small drawing room in Tezpur, that quiet vow taken on a foreign shore felt complete. We were listening to the fulfilment of a promise made across oceans.

Our home in Tezpur slowly became a meeting ground for many luminous minds. Dr. Birendranath Datta, Homen Borgohain, Arun Sarma, Dr. Kishori Mohan Pathak, Purneswar Nath, Dr. Amarjyoti Choudhury, Kirti Kamal Bhuyan and several other scholars, writers and cultural thinkers would gather frequently. Conversations moved effortlessly from folklore to politics, from theatre to identity, from literature to the future of Assam. During my association with the Board of Management of Tezpur University, and through my closeness to its Cultural Studies Department, many academic and artistic discussions found their way into our living

room. It never felt formal. It felt necessary.

Our home celebrated the arts naturally, without ceremony. Those evenings reminded me that Assam's creative journey was never solitary. One voice sparked another, one idea warmed the next. Bhupenda fitted seamlessly into this continuum. He was not arriving at a cultural vacuum but stepping into a town that had already learnt how to listen, argue, nurture and celebrate. Perhaps that is why he felt so at ease here. Tezpur did not ask him to explain himself. It simply offered him space, history and companionship.



Dr Lakshmi Kumari Goswami, fondly known as Deep Baideu by many, is a reputed Gynaecologist (MBBS, MRCP, DRCOG)and Social worker of Tezpur. Born on the 6th of September 1936, in the village of Ketekibari in Tezpur, Assam, she did her MBBS from Assam Medical College Dibrugarh, where she met her late husband Dr Rabindra Kumar Goswami. She is the first woman from Assam Medical College to receive the University Gold Medal for topping the final MBBS examination in 1959. They then went on to Edinburgh to do their further studies and came back to Tezpur in 1965, where they started their private practice. Dr Lakshmi Kumari Goswami was the first woman to start her own private nursing home having rented the residence of none other than Jyoti Prasad Agarwala which is called The Poki. Dr Lakshmi Kumari Goswami is a highly capable and influential social worker. She has been the President of the Indian Council of Child Welfare Sonitpur, Assam, Vice Chairman Tezpur Environmental Society, Sonitpur, Assam, a five term member in the Board of Management Central University Tezpur.

The Goswami's association and friendship with Dr Bhupen Hazarika dates back to 1965. Now at the ripe old age of 90, she resides in Tezpur with her family and books and memories to keep her company.

STHAI

110 5 9 13 17

1ST ANTARA

21 25 29 33 37 41 45 49

SANSARI

53 57 61 65 69 73 77



Rupam Talukdar is an Assamese musician. He uses a wide range keyboard, Piano Accordion and Harmonium. He has worked as a music arranger and music director for many Assamese films and various musical albums in several Indian languages. He worked as a music arranger for Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in numerous films and albums. He has also performed with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika at many places in India and abroad. He accompanied keyboard with Anup Jalota at many places. He has a professional recording studio named Sabdarupa at Rehabari, Guwahati.



EPILOGUE

THE WAYFARER OF CONSCIENCE AND SONG

Sattyakee D'com Bhuyan

There are voices that outgrow chronology. They travel beyond their own time and begin to inhabit ours. The voice of Bhupen Hazarika was one such phenomenon. For many who grew up listening to that resonant baritone, textured with a distinctive nasal timbre he mastered with rare control, his songs were never mere compositions. They were moral documents. They were public meditations set to melody.

Technically, one may speak of range, modulation, tonal density, and lyrical clarity. Yet scholarship alone cannot explain his impact. What distinguished him was not virtuosity in isolation, but the capacity to transform performance into intimacy. Where many artists sought perfection, he sought participation. His timbre carried longing, dissent, compassion, and collective memory in equal measure. Each rendering felt less like entertainment and more like an ethical encounter.

Growing up in a household where art and conversation carried equal authority, these associations never felt distant or ceremonial. They were part of family memory. Much of what I know about those intimate years with the Hazarika family came to me through the stories of my father, Dhiru Bhuyan, and my mother, Reeta Bhuyan, whose Shillong home in Laban often became a quiet meeting ground for artists and friends.

My father shared a deep bond not only with Jayanta Hazarika but with the entire Hazarika family. Their relationship went beyond professional camaraderie. It was rooted in trust, warmth, and shared conviction about art and society. My mother would often recount how *Bordeuta* as I would fondly address him, would visit our Shillong home without any sense of ceremony. There was no entourage, no aura of stardom. He arrived as family. Ritual sundowner would be served, conversations would unfold, and the evening would slowly gather its own music.

One story that remained vivid in our household was of his visit while searching for a suitable

face to portray Shakuntala for one of his film projects. My mother remembered how observant he was, how quietly he would watch people speak, move, and react. Cinema for him was never superficial casting. It was character, depth, truth. For me, hearing these anecdotes as a child made filmmaking feel less like spectacle and more like a thoughtful craft.

Both my parents would speak of how, after a meal, he would often sit quietly for a while, almost withdrawn, as though listening inwardly. My mother described those silences as “his thinking time.” My father would say that even when he appeared quiet, something within him was always composing. There was a stillness about him that did not feel empty. It felt charged.

What struck my parents most, and what they impressed upon me repeatedly, was his uncompromising stand against discrimination of any kind. Caste, creed, religion, region. He rejected these divisions instinctively. Conversations at our dining table often drifted toward questions of social justice, dignity, and responsibility. For him, humanity was indivisible. He believed that art must rise above prejudice and speak for those left unheard. My father would often say that this conviction was not rhetorical. It was lived.

Another cherished strand of memory belongs to our humble home at 6 Bhuyan Howely, Uzanbazar. My parents would often recall the intimate jalsas that unfolded in our modest drawing room, where music travelled unamplified yet immense. On some evenings, Pratima Barua Pandey would sing deep into the early hours of the morning, her voice carrying the fragrance of Goalpariya folk across the quiet lanes of Guwahati. There were no grand stages, no elaborate arrangements. Just a few chairs drawn close, a *patti* spread on the floor, a harmonium, attentive listeners, and the kind of stillness that only true music can command.

Pratima Pandey Barua shared a warm and artistic closeness with Bhupen Hazarika, and in those gatherings their shared commitment to the folk soul of Assam would often surface in conversation. My father would speak of how those nights were less about performance and more about communion. The songs were not rendered for applause but for understanding. In that small room, one witnessed how legends did not stand apart from people. They sat among them. They listened. They responded. And in doing so, they affirmed that the true strength of

Assamese music lay not in spectacle, but in shared breath and shared belonging.

Through these recollections, *Bordeuta* became more than a public figure to me. He was a presence shaped by thought, warmth, and moral clarity.

Those stories shaped my understanding of art long before I could analyse it. They taught me that greatness is not volume but depth. Not display but conviction. And in the gentle cadence of my parents' voices, narrating those evenings in Laban, Shillong and in Uzanbazar, Guwahati, I learned that the truest measure of an artist lies in how deeply he belongs to people beyond the stage. There was a striking paradox about him. At one point, with disarming candour, he remarked that he had failed as a son, as a lover, as a brother, and succeeded only in being welcomed into every home of Assam. The kitchens, he said, were always open to him. In that confession lies the duality of artistic life. Public adulation often coexists with private sacrifice. Greatness demands an offering, and the offering is frequently personal.

His was not a domesticated existence. It was expansive, itinerant, dialogic. When he sang, "Moi eti jajabor," he was articulating not merely geographical wandering but intellectual and emotional mobility. His journeys were measured less in miles and more in solidarities. From the Brahmaputra to the Hudson, from Assam to global platforms, he carried with him the sediment of his homeland.

His academic years at Columbia University exposed him to the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights Movement. The influence of Paul Robeson was not imitative but catalytic. When he re-imagined "Ol' Man River" as "Bistirno Parore," the river became more than geography. It became history in motion. A metaphor for endurance, injustice, and resilience. In that translation of spirit, the Assamese bard emerged as a global humanist.

"Manuhe manuhor babe" was not a slogan. It was an ethical plea. His songs persistently returned to one fundamental proposition: humanity must remain answerable to itself. Progress without empathy is vacancy. Achievement without compassion is erosion.

The lineage of Assamese cultural modernity cannot be discussed without invoking Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. Together with Bhupen Hazarika, they constituted

not merely an artistic triad but a pedagogic movement. Through lyric and stage, cinema and song, they cultivated values long before policy language began to articulate them. Inclusivity, dignity of labour, cultural plurality, social justice. These were not theoretical constructs. They were sung into consciousness.

In those decades, radio waves were classrooms. Verandas were auditoriums. A melody could initiate introspection more effectively than a lecture. Education was not fragmented from emotion. It was suffused with it.

Today, we inhabit an age of astonishing access. Knowledge travels at the speed of light. A song recorded decades ago can be heard instantly across continents. A lecture delivered in one corner of the world can inspire a classroom in another. The question before us is not whether technology is powerful. It certainly is. The real question is how we anchor that power in value. Technology has widened our reach and deepened our possibilities. Young minds today inherit an immense archive of ideas, sounds, and stories. In my own classrooms, I have seen how a carefully played clip of Bhupen Hazarika's song on a smart screen can silence an entire room into attentive listening. I have seen students look up the history of "Bistirno Parore" within minutes and then return to the discussion with renewed insight. The screen becomes meaningful when it leads back to reflection. The device becomes valuable when it leads back to dialogue.

If there is a lesson in the oeuvre of Bhupen Hazarika, it is that art and education flourish together when guided by conscience. A melody can awaken sensitivity. A lyric can widen civic imagination. He showed us that culture is not decoration. It is direction. When we hold technology with that same clarity, when we walk with it rather than run behind it, it becomes an ally in nurturing empathy, memory, and shared understanding.

Simplicity was his most rigorous discipline. There was no excess, no decorative flourish. Only clarity. He sang of boatmen and tea garden workers, of migrants and mothers, of injustice and longing. In that clarity lay his immortality.

As these reflections conclude, he appears once more in the mind's quiet theatre. The harmonium rests before him. A pause. Then that unmistakable voice rising, unforced yet commanding. Not

projecting dominance, but inviting participation.

The bearer of humanity in song continues to walk. His footsteps have not receded. They have converged with ours. His melody has not dissipated. It has entered memory and become conscience.

He taught us that melody is not escape. It is return. Return to empathy. Return to moral clarity. Return to the courage of feeling in an age that often prefers distraction.

And somewhere beyond the visible horizon, the river still carries his cadence. Not loud, not fading, but steady. Like a current that refuses exhaustion. Like a refrain that endures because it speaks not only to the ear, but to the enduring work of being human.



Sattyakee D'com Bhuyan is an artist, writer, actor, director, playwright, and columnist whose work engages deeply with theatre and literature. As founder of D'Passion Collective, he has conceived and led more than twenty five acclaimed productions shaped by a distinctive creative vision.

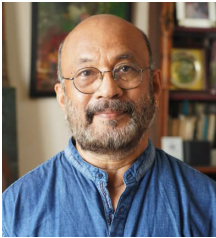
A TEDx speaker and former member of the IFC-World Bank Group's South Asia Communications Team, he also facilitates workshops in creative writing and communication studies. Recognised as India Today's Youth Icon in 2010, he continues to mentor emerging voices and contribute thoughtfully to the nation's cultural discourse. He serves as Deputy Dean (DSW) at Royal Global University and as Resource Person for Performing Arts, Design, and Outreach Programmes at The Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Centre for Creativity, The Royal Global University.

CONTRIBUTORS



Labu Senapati

A former All India Radio announcer, Labu Senapati is a multifaceted creative personality. He is a discerning curator with a keen eye for detail and narrative, a passionate photographer who captures moments with depth and sensitivity. A bonsai expert known for his patience, precision and aesthetic balance.



Champak Barbara

Champak Barbara is a renowned painter and senior cartoonist based in Guwahati, Assam, best known for his long-standing career with The Assam Tribune and his signature “Jocoserious” cartoons. With over two decades in the art field, he creates dynamic, spiritual paintings and satirical, witty cartoons. He has held leadership roles in the Gauhati Artist Guild and exhibited his work internationally.



Arkupal Ra Acharya

Arkupal Ra Acharya holds a Masters degree in English Literature from the University of Delhi and is an English teacher by profession. He translates from Assamese into English and his interests include poetry, looking at birds and trees, Test Cricket, Rock Music, and cooking more than palatable food.



Surjya Goswami, Bhaskar Das, Rituparna Sharma and Bhupen Hazarika in performance



