

Humanism And Songs Of Dr Bhupen Hazarika: An Appraisal

Dr. Sanchita Bora

Asstt. Professor,
Dept. of Philosophy,
Nowgong Girls' College, Nagaon, Assam

Abstract: *Humanism asserts the centrality of human being and recognizes the dignity of man. This world-view seeks the uplift of human beings. The foremost intention of humanism is to attain human freedom, joyous life with progress and prosperity without any kind of discrimination among men.*

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011), an artist of multi-faceted talents and an epoch-making singer is the creator of a good number of significant songs. Primary subjects of such songs are man and society. Bhupen Hazarika has used his songs as an instrument for social change. His songs articulate communal amity, universal justice and empathy. Through his songs, Bhupen Hazarika tries to ascertain the rights, freedom and justice to the common people. His humanistic thoughts and creations stand for the building of a more humane society.

Keywords: *Humanism, Bhupen Hazarika, man, society, social harmony, freedom*

I. INTRODUCTION

Most commonly, 'humanism' is the general love of humanity. It is a philosophical and ethical perspective that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings. Humanism recognizes the dignity of man and asserts the centrality of human being. It seeks to enrich man's aims, values and goals. Any form of humanism tries to bring intimate harmony of the life of an individual and society. The supremacy of man and the welfare of mankind is the central theme of humanism. It is a philosophy of compassion that is exclusively concerned with meeting human needs and answering human problems for both the individual and society.

The magnificent personality *Asam Ratna* (Jewel of Assam) Dr Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011), is indeed a cosmopolitan in outlook. He has brought Assamese culture to the international podium. People across the world come to know about Assam and its culture through the songs created by the legendary singer Dr Bhupen Hazarika. He is a complete man- lyricist, poet, composer, singer, director, actor, literateur, journalist, editor, social worker and what not. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the greatest cultural icon of Assam has realized that humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. He is a sincere humanist only one of its kind.

II. THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS PAPER ARE

- ✓ To give a brief introduction of Humanism
- ✓ To evaluate Dr Bhupen Hazarika's evergreen songs in the light of humanistic dimension

III. METHODOLOGY

The method used in this paper is descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly review based. It is supported by secondary source of data, i.e. books, journals, magazines, news papers and articles. This paper intends to relate Dr Bhupen Hazarika's songs with the basic notion and design of humanism.

'Humanism' is a generic term which implies a viewpoint centered on humankind. It is not a school of thought, not a philosophical doctrine; rather it is a dimension of thought. The term 'humanism' is linked with terms like *humus* (ground, earth), *humanus* (human, earthy), and *homo* (earth being). But, popular view is that the word 'humanism' is derived from the Latin word '*humanus*' which means 'human being'. Humanism means a system of thought concerned with human affairs in general. From the chronological perspective, roots of

humanistic thought lie far back to ancient Greece. The Sophists and Epicureans of Greece were perhaps the first among the humanists in history. In the course of Classical, Renaissance and Enlightenment period humanism has taken different dimensions.

Humanistic elements were very much present in the ancient Indian thought also. The essence of Indian humanism is 'Ayam Atma Brahma' (I am Brahman or ātman and Brahman are the same). The central purpose of the Upanishads was the uplift of human life from the level of mere biological existence to a status of self conscious spiritual being. The Bhagavad Gītā, through its concept of the union of the empirical self with the Divine self or Brahman laid down the norm of Indian humanism. Cārvākas were thinkers who were exclusively concerned about man's life here and now. They even denied existence of God, Soul, and life after death. In this sense, they were also humanists. Jainas also had firm faith in man and his powers and asserted that without any supernatural assistance, man can work out his own way to the final bliss. On the other hand, the only concern of Buddha was man and his sufferings. So, Buddhism is also significant form of humanism which believed in the ability of individual to realize human values.

The word 'humanism' is coined in the early nineteenth century. In 1808, Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, Central Commissioner of Education of Bavaria (Germany) introduced the term Humanismus to describe the new classical curriculum he planned to offer in German secondary schools. By 1836, the word 'humanism' had been immersed into the English language and in 1856, the coinage gained universal acceptance. In the modern age, the spirit of humanism has been gradually awakening in a more explicit and comprehensive manner. Moreover, European Renaissance recognized human reason, passion and values. It also asserted the intrinsic worth of man's life and the vastness of his potentialities. Humanistic thinking took different shapes such as Marxism, Existentialism, Pragmatism and so on in the course of time. Today various designations like scientific, political, naturalistic, romantic, liberal, secular, religious and so on are conjoined with the term 'humanism'.

Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the artist of multi-faceted talents is an epoch-making singer who has depicted pieces of bright pictures of love, nature, man, country and nation in his songs. The incredible combination of words, tune and voice has made Bhupen Hazarika exceptional. He is an artist from soil to soul. He was sincere enough to use his songs as an instrument for social change. Bhupen Hazarika is the rhymester of mighty Brahma Putra. He wrote his first song in 1937 at the age of eleven acknowledging the priceless contribution of Sri Sankaradeva. In his second song, Agni Jugar Firingati Moi-Of the fiery age; I'm a spark (1939) the spirit of social reformist was honestly expressed. Bhupen Hazarika is a mass communicator. His songs become the 'weapon of the weak'. His dream is to build a modern Assam in which all communities like Harijan, Pahari, Hindus, Muslims, Bodos, Koch, Kachari, Chutिया Ahom and other communities have equal status.

Primary subject of a good number of songs of Bhupen Hazarika is 'man-in-society'. He projects individual as the center of society. He considers inhumanities, injustice,

oppression, exploitation etc. as social evils. Bhupen Hazarika has announced the essence of social change and tried to ascertain the rights, freedom and justices to the poor exploited working people through his songs. He is against casteism and untouchability. Bhupen Hazarika wants the elimination of feudal exploitation in the society.

He sings-

*Narakangkālar Astra Xāji loi
Shosankārik badhim
Xarbahārār Xarbasva punara firāi ānim
(Making arms of human bones
The exploiters I'll kill
To the have-nots I'll bring back
Whatever they have lost).¹*

Bhupen Hazarika always keeps in his mind an honest desire to guide the society towards love and brotherhood. He has been always in the side of the exploited and oppressed. Bhupen Hazarika propounds secular humanism in his songs. He wants to expand personal love to love of humanity. In the evergreen song Mānuhe Mānuhar Bābe (If humans do not care) he urges people to extend their helping hands to the weaker section of the society...

*"Durbal Mānuhe Jodi
Jiwanar Kobāl Nadi
Pār Hoi Tomāre Xāhot
Tumi Heruwābāno Ki
(If any weakling fords
The ragging torrents of life
Clinging to your pluck
What will you lose? Say o mate!)²*

Manuhe Manu har babe becomes an anthem of humanity. The lyric of the song contemplates the need for fellow-feeling and bonding amidst humankind. Another song "Agni Jugar Firingati Moi" reflects the sense of humanism as well as echoes his patriotism, the love for Indian Nation. His association with the 'Bhāratīya Gana Nātya Xangha' (Indian People Theatre Association) took him close to the common people. At that time he has been enriched with a new spirit of social work for the sake of justice and equality-

*Mukti kāmi laksh janor
Mouna Prakāsh Shunisāne Nai
(Have you not heard the mute expressions
Of the freedom loving millions?)³*

Bhupen Hazarika's social consciousness and responsibility may be called innate. He has tried to reconfigure society. Bhupen Hazarika was intensely stimulated by Paul Robson's words that music is a weapon for social change. He himself said, "If I can do something for society through music, I will hold this life of mine to be successful."⁴ Bhupen Hazarika bears a secular democratic spirit in him. His love for human society can be interpreted as comprehensive humanism. His sincere hope is-

*"Mor Gān Houk Bahu Āsthāhinatār Bipartite
Ek Gabhir Āsthār Gān
Mor Gān Houk, Kalpanā-Bilāxar Bipartite
Ek Xatya Praxhastir Dhyān"
(Let my songs be
A hymn to truth
Against false imaginings)⁵*

Sankar-Madhav, Jyoti- Bishnu, ⁶ had constructed the foundation of Assamese society and culture and Bhupen Hazarika reconstructed it through his songs. He wanted to eliminate the evil and corruption in society. In this venture, he projected his songs as a force to protest against injustice. His songs took him close to the common people of the society.

Bhupen Hazarika's humanism is spontaneous. For him the language of joy and sorrow is same for all. The essence of humanism and universal brotherhood elevate his songs to a momentous height. His songs are marked by humanity, universal fraternity and emotional bonding. The prominent themes depicted in the songs of Bhupen Hazarika are love, humanism, nature and its beauty, patriotism, social reform and concern for native land and people. Humanistic elements and dimensions give his songs a universal acceptance. His universal thoughts are best expressed in his classic lyric "*Moi Eti Jājābar*" (I am a wanderer)-

*"Moi Luitarparā Michichipi hoi Bholgār rūp chālo
Aṭowārparā Aṣṭriyā hoi Paris sāwaṭi lolo
Moi Ilorārparā puraṇi rahaṇ Chikāgole karhiyālo
Gālibar shwer Dushwamber minārat sunā pālo
.....Bāre bāre dekho bātor mānuho āpon haiche bor"*

(From the Luit through the Mississippi
I have seen the Not first
Nor second Volga's beauty
From Ottawa through Austria
I have given Paris an embrace hearty
From Ellora I've carried to Chicago antique hues
In the minarets of Dushambe I have heard Ghalib's lays
.....Time and again people in my journey
Have become to me so dear)⁷

The doctrine of universalism is best expressed in another song-

*Āmi ekekhon nāore yātri
Xahayātri ekekhon nāore yātri.....* (We are in the same
boat brother, if you tip one end you will
rock the other.....)

Yes, we are in the same boat brother. So, identified himself with the common masses and their sufferings. Celebrating the strength of the working mass, he identified himself as a co-passenger travelling towards the same destination. He sings-

*Prothom nohoi
Dwitiyo nohoi
Tritiyo shrenir yātri āmi
Jiwan relor dabāt āmi
Prothom nohoi
Dwitiyo nohoi
Tritiyo shrenir yātri āmi*

(Not first
Nor second
We are third class passengers
On the train of life
Not first, nor second
Third class passengers are we.)⁸

Bhupen Hazarika is a people's artist because his lyrics show concern for the down-trodden and the underprivileged sections of the society. The lyric of the song "*Dolā* (palaquin) *Ho Dolā Ho Dolā He Dolā*" is a blow to the feudal superstructure. Similarly, in the song "*Rāj āji bhāwariyā*

deshei nātghar" (The people are the players today), he asserts his love and concern for the people. Bhupen Hazarika, the *Janatār Shilpi* (artist of the masses) says *Moromor bhāshār ākhar nāikiā* (language of love don't have an alphabet). A good number speak of man's brotherhood across boundaries of nation and culture carrying a rousing humanist message. His songs are soaked with emotions like love, optimism and humanism.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

Throughout his life, Bhupen Hazarika strove for the unity, brotherhood among the people cutting across the barriers of ethnicity, community, language etc. and his songs are competent enough to testify those ideals. Bhupen Hazarika was an ardent propagator of humanism. He believed that only humanist approach could bring positive change in the world. Humanism, social consciousness and beauty glorify his songs. The optimistic expression of humanism of Bhupen Hazarika embodies the following distinctiveness-

- ✓ Humanism of Bhupen Hazarika is natural. It does not put importance in some belief of the supernatural. His humanism does not focus on religion.
- ✓ Bhupen Hazarika's humanistic approach prefers to focus on life on earth. Meaning of human life is everything for him.
- ✓ His songs promote individual freedom and human rights. *The dignity of the individual person is the central value.*
- ✓ Open-minded pursuits of the truth, tolerance, mutual respect are the ornaments of Bhupen Hazarika's humanism. Cultural, literary and philosophical elements enrich his humanism.
- ✓ Humanism of Bhupen Hazarika regards humans as having greater ability and responsibility.

V. CONCLUSION

Though humanism continues to have a variety of meanings, philosophically it is a way of life, centered on human need and interest. British Humanist Association declares humanism as an approach to life based on reason. Humanism is an ongoing process. It encompasses atheist, rationalist, naturalist, ethicists and secular view points. What humanists have common is the vision of the dignity of the human beings. Humanism has no creed but many convictions. It involves a commitment to the existence and importance of moral values.

Bhupen Hazarika, an institution in himself is a world citizen. His evergreen songs articulate communal amity, universal justice and empathy. His mission is strengthened by the elements of universal humanism. In his musical journey Bhupen Hazarika questions the *Burha Luit* (old Brahmaputra)-when morality is going down, humanity is losing ground; lazy and brazen, why you keep flowing? This question has been increasingly becoming relevant day by day to each and every member of society. He is a born humanist. The spirit of humanism in Bhupen Hazarika's songs, his voice against injustice will continue to inspire people.

NOTES:

- ✓ Deka, B (ed). *Dr. Bhupen Hazarika- A legend*. p.32
- ✓ *Ibid*. p.132
- ✓ *Ibid*. p.259
- ✓ Hazarika, S. (ed). *Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Rachanawali*. Vol.1. p. 490
- ✓ Deka, B (ed). *Dr. Bhupen Hazarika- A legend*. p.186
- ✓ Sri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhavdeva and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha
- ✓ Deka, B (ed). *Dr. Bhupen Hazarika- A legend*. p.176
- ✓ *Ibid*. p.146

REFERENCES

- [1] Das, H. K. (2004). Mahakash Mahasagar Aru Bhupen Hazarika. Gaziabad: Mano Publication.
- [2] Deka, B. (2011). Dr. Bhupen Hazarika- A legend. Guwahati: Saurabh Deka, Orchid Publication.
- [3] Durkheim, E. (1965). Sociology and Philosophy. Translated by D F Pocock. London: Cohen & West.
- [4] Dutta, A. K. (2002). Bhupen Hazarika, The Roving Minstrel. New Delhi: Rupa & Co.
- [5] Dutta, D K. (1982). Bhupen Hazarika Geet Aru Jiwan Rotha. Kolkata: Sribhumi Publication.
- [6] Fowler, J. D. (1999). Humanism: Beliefs and Practices, Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press.
- [7] Goswami, L. (2009). Bandita Bhupenda Nindita Bhupen Hazarika. Guwahati: Aank baak.
- [8] Hazarika, S. (ed). (2008). Dr. Bhupen Hazarika: Rachanawali. Vol. I-III. Guwahati: S.H. Educational Trust.
- [9] Kalita, P., Jalan, G. & Parasar, A. (2007). Biswanagarik Bhupen Hazarika. Guwahati: Chandra Prakashan.
- [10] Law, S. (2011). Humanism: A very short Introduction, New York: Oxford University Press.
- [11] Parashar, A.(ed). (2011). Mrityunjoyee Duronta Tarun Bhupen Hazarika. Guwahati: Saaraswat.