

# SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND EXPECTATIONS OF A NEW SOCIETY IN BHUPEN HAZARIKA'S SONGS

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## Abstract

*Bhupen Hazarika was truly an artist of the people. At various times, he tried to express his direct experiences in songs. He was a prose writer, poet, lyricist, composer, singer, film director, etc. This versatile man always tried to stand up for the people. Whenever disasters happened in Assam and the North East, he tried to save people from them and find the right path through his songs. Bhupen Hazarika was an artist who considered the whole world his own. Therefore, the singer, who called himself a nomad, tried to express the feelings of all the people of the world in his songs. In this paper, we discuss how Bhupen Hazarika tried to change society through his songs. It also tries to bring to light the new society envisioned by Bhupen Hazarika. The paper has been prepared using analytical methods. Various books and journals have been used as required to achieve the objectives.*

**Keywords:** Bhupen Hazarika, singer, society, lyricist, Assamese song

## INTRODUCTION

Bhupen Hazarika, a famous musician of Assam and the whole of India, was born on 4 September 1926 in Shadia, Assam. He wrote and performed songs and directed and composed music for films in various languages, including Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi. He became popular with the people by singing songs in different languages of India. This great musician, who was awarded the Bharat Ratna, was truly an artist of the people. While studying in the United States, he was exposed to the world-famous mass artist Paul Bosson and was particularly influenced by him. After returning to Assam, Bhupen Hazarika joined the Gananatya Sangha of India and worked with another famous artist, Hemang Biswas. Bhupen Hazarika composed and performed all kinds of songs, ranging from national life to personal songs. When various problems arose in the society of Assam and the common people lost their way, Bhupen Hazarika tried to find the right path through his songs.

Through various songs, Bhupen Hazarika tried to express his sense of duty and national consciousness towards the country, nation, and land. He urged the Assamese people to make Guru Sankardev their own: 'Asamara akasot dukhor rol uthise, 'aaji sree sankar nai oi moro guru oi aaji sree Sankor nai (Dutta, 2014, p. 57) Bhupen Hazarika tried to revive the Assamese society and nation through his songs. He has inspired the weak and neglected people of society like this: 'sarbaharaar sarbaswa punor firai aanim, notun asom garim, nor congkolor astra saji sangharkarik bodhim' (Dutta, 2014, p. 71).

Bhupen Hazarika was also attracted to Mahatma Gandhi and socialist ideals. With this ideal, he advocated building a non-discriminatory society free from exploitation. He used song as a weapon to change society. His songs such as 'ateetar buronjee lekhoke lekhisil', 'protidhoni shuno', 'ruddh karaar duwar vangi', and 'Dola He Dola' express Bhupen Hazarika's dream of building a new society. Another bright beauty in Bhupen Hazarika's songs is humanism. Bhupen Hazarika's songs are universal because of his sincerity and sense of duty towards people.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE

This paper attempts to achieve the objective by analysing the songs of Bhupen Hazarika in a descriptive and analytical manner. Bhupen Hazarika composed many songs of different emotions, but not all of them are discussed. In particular, songs composed by Bhupen Hazarika for social change or songs whose main theme was social consciousness have been selected for discussion. The scope of our study is limited to the songs of Bhupen Hazarika.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Bhupen Hazarika's socially conscious songs can be divided into songs of sympathy for the poor, songs against corruption and exploitation, songs seeking to build a classless society, songs against religious discrimination and caste, etc. However, this division is not subtle. This is because poverty, exploitation, corruption, and social classification are interrelated. Bhupen Hazarika expresses several emotions in the same song. When we talk about the poor, we also talk about the exploiters, just as when we talk about classification, we also talk about corruption and exploitation. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss the versatility of Bhupen Hazarika's social consciousness. Therefore, this division is not entirely perfect.

### SONGS OF SYMPATHY FOR THE POOR

Bhupen Hazarika's songs are characterised by sympathy for the common man. Whenever he talks about the poor masses, he shows tremendous anger towards society. Bhupen Hazarika's heart cried when the poor people around him were starving for lack of food, and he tried to free the poor from the pain of life by any means and build a new society. This song expresses that.

Chokur panibor shukuwai pelalo  
Bhikhaar sanjuli doli ai pelalo  
Eai bar pon loi ronoloi olalo—  
Ponatir mora sh dui hate dangi loi  
Bidrohee paneye notun aasa loi  
Sha sha paneir batti lalagoi  
Prithiwi uthile kopi—  
Hazer paneye siori uthile  
Akasot suruje rongakoi aakile  
Na somajor sobi.

(Dutta, 2014, p. 76)

(Dried my tears/threw away the begging tools/this time went to battle with a bet/lifting the dead body of the child with both hands/ The rebel Panei with new hopes/ took the road of hundreds of Panei/The earth trembles when it rises/, Thousands Panei shouted/ The sun painted red in the sky/ The picture of the new society.)

The song paints a picture of a poor society. In this society, the poor people always face food and clothing problems. These people are exploited by the exploiting class. The wealthy do not have time to think about the lives of these people. These neglected members of society always live in poverty. The song depicts a helpless mother named Panei, who cannot give her sick child food, medicine, etc. and has to spend her days in tears. She is forced to witness the death of her child before her eyes. This mother is a symbol of thousands of mothers in such a poor society. The songwriter observes that these people are faced with such a cruel reality of life that eventually their tears dry up. Bhupen Hazarika realised that there was no alternative without the struggle of these poor people. For change to come, everyone must come out together and struggle for change. Bhupen Hazarika hopes that society will change in the coming days and these poor mothers will be able to give their children the rights they deserve in the new society.

Bhupen Hazarika often observed that farmers are the foundation of the country's economy, but the condition of the country's farmers is very poor. They always have to depend on others. Bhupen Hazarika sought an end to this situation of the farmers and expressed it as follows:

Dhan nidio  
Rinu nolou  
Sud nidio aaru  
Mohajonor nisthur budhi xahon kelei baru?



Bohuto je ghaam saraalo tejoo bukur bohu dilo  
Kachikhonot shaan dilo  
Sahas bhari pore.

(Dutta, 2014 p.77)

(I don't give you rice/ I don't even take loans/ I don't pay interest anymore. Why should I tolerate the cruel wisdom of the merchant? I sweated a lot/I also gave a lot of blood/I sharpened the scissors/ it fills me with courage.)

This song is a revolutionary song. The song depicts the cruel real life of poor farmers. Farmers have always lived through suffering. Despite their hard work, poverty does not go away from the lives of these people. They spend their lives starving and half-eating. They have to take money from the merchant at interest to make ends meet. They are unable to repay the debt due to poor crop production and sometimes die. The peasants themselves must attempt to change this state of affairs, and this attempt will be to resort to revolution. Hazarika expressed that the farmers can no longer tolerate this injustice of the cruel merchant. The farmer's scissors will be their weapon. This scissors will be their courage. Therefore, the sympathy of the society towards the poor peasants and the anger towards the exploiting classes is one of the most attractive features of this song.

Bhupen Hazarika can be truly called a humanitarian singer. His heart was moved by the plight of the people of his kingdom as well as by the suffering of people in the farthest parts of the world. Whether it was the plight of the farmers in Mississippi or the racial discrimination suffered by Negro farmers growing cotton along the Mississippi, this song is a reflection of that-

Misor dekhore  
Neel noir parore  
Fallahine binale  
Koi krishokor bukure betha.  
Misisipir parote  
Kapahor khetite  
Nigrojone binale  
Koi manuhor boronor katha.

(Dutta, 2014, p.12)

(Of the land of Egypt, on the banks of the Nile, Fallahin cried, saying the pain in the chest of the farmer; on the banks of the Mississippi, in cotton cultivation, the negro cried out, saying it's about the colour of people.)

In all parts of the world, the ordinary peasantry has been oppressed in various ways. Bhupen Hazarika's heart always cried for these farmers, whether in his own state or country or in other parts of the world. So he tried to awaken everyone against this persecution.

The condition of the peasants is as deplorable as that of other working classes in society. One such category of workers is those who have to work as slaves in the homes of others. Slavery had a devastating effect during the time of Bhupen Hazarika. His heart cries out for the plight of these people—

Bohu dekhe dekhe grihodash dekhi  
Chintit hau bor  
Monor manuh bohutei dekhon  
Ghorote hoise por  
Seye moi jajabor.

(Dutta, 2014, p.127)



(In many countries, seeing house slaves, I'm worried; I see many people of the mind. There are others at home. That's why I'm a nomad.)

Bhupen Hazarika always thought of the common people. He called himself a nomad and had immense sympathy for those who spent their days as slaves in the homes of others. He was concerned about the homeless. These people were considered very dear to him, and their condition upset Bhupen Hazarika. He was saddened by this problem in society everywhere and tried to draw everyone's attention to these people through songs.

### SONGS OF EFFORT TO BUILD A CLASSLESS SOCIETY

There is always a lot of pain in the minds of true artists because of injustice and discrimination in society. Seeing the inequality of society, these people have sometimes resorted to rebellion and sometimes moistened their hearts with tears. Bhupen Hazarika is no exception. This discrimination also had a profound effect on his heart. Bhupen Hazarika saw the potential of immense power in the common people of society like this-

Akakh poroshaa ka'la hilibore  
Jug jug aase unnot shire  
Vabe saru saru manuhor nai shaktti  
Choorna karib hil-shakttir moorti

(Dutta, 2014, p. 79)

(The black rocks reach the sky. There are ages of noble heads. Thinks small people don't have the strength. They will crush the idols of stone-power.)

This song reflects the classification of society. Black stones symbolise the higher powers of society, whose power has touched the sky. These people, who are strong in power, ignore and often look down on the lower classes of society. The exploiters at the highest levels have continued to exploit and oppress the weak throughout the ages and have occupied a prominent position in society. They think that the exploited have no power to stop them. But the psalmist is optimistic that one day it will be the little people who will destroy the mourners and build a new society.

Bhupen Hazarika understood the pain of ordinary people's lives from childhood. He did not see much difference between his contemporary society and that of the past. Discrimination in the previous society seemed to take on a new form. Which he realises in the song titled Dola He Dola as follows-

Okhokoi paharor tingti uthisu  
Bhalokoi khojati mila  
Amar kandhor pora pisolib lagilehe  
Bagori porib dola,  
Roja moharjar dola  
Bor bor manuhor dola.

(Dutta, 2014, p. 79)

(I have climbed the highest mountain peak; match the step well; from our shoulders only if you have to slip, the sedan will fall, the king's sedan, the great man's sedan.)

Sedan is another name for slavery. In the past, nobles had to be carried in sedans. Sedan seems to build a wall between two classes of society, with the exploiters on one side and the exploited on the other. The exploiters climb into sedans and enjoy life easily. The exploited class has to carry sedans according to the wishes of the



exploiters. Therefore, the symbolic application of the sedan presents the relationship between slave and master. The slave class always has to bear the burden. Bhupen Hazarika states, "I wrote the song with this sedan as a symbol of the exploitation of the feudal era. Today, there is no feudal era, no sedan. But has the number of exploiters decreased? That's why the pleasure sedan of today's exploiters seems to be on the shoulders of the exploited." (Hazarika, 2011, p. 139) The poet wishes for the end of this slavery and expresses sympathy for the exploited by saying that one must understand the suffering of another, remove the burden from one's shoulders, and overturn the sedan. This struggle will only succeed if everyone comes forward. So he says-

Sangram jadi jibonor eti nam  
(Sei) sangram hauk tor priyo  
Dui hate choku duti dhaki dhoroi  
Okole ucupano kiyo?

.....

Cahare nogore gawe pothe ghate pothare  
Samadal dekhisi ne nai ?  
Tor dore hejare siori siori souwa,  
Agbarhe prithiwi kopai

(Dutta, 2014, p. 81)

(If struggle is a name of life/ (That) struggle be your favourite/ you cover your eyes with both hands, why cry alone/... /In towns, cities, villages, roads, piers, fields have you seen the parade?/ Thousands like you screaming here/forward shakes the earth.)

Human life is conflicted. Everyone should be constantly struggling in life. Some show courage and accept struggle as part of life, while others spend their lives in tears of pain because they cannot bear the hardships of life. This song says that struggle is an essential part of life. It should be made part of life. The struggling people everywhere must move forward together in the struggle. Therefore, instead of regretting the difficulties of life, we should move forward in this struggle to change society together with other ordinary people.

Bhupen Hazarika saw that human life is like a play. The country is like a theatre. This invisible play has been directed by the rulers and exploiters according to their own wishes. The condition of ordinary people is deteriorating day by day. The harsh reality of life only hurts ordinary people. Therefore, there is a lack of food and clothing for people who are starving. Therefore, the socially conscious songwriter calls as follows:

Raij aaji vaworiya  
Dekhei natghor  
Kone ki bhao la'ba, aaha  
Somoy je takor  
Akhora nalage  
Nelage posak  
Nongotha hoi aaha  
Bhokatur pette gamosa bandhi  
Unmad hoi haha  
Tehe rohon chorib nator.

(Dutta, 2014, p.81)







(People today are actors; the country is the theater. Who will pretend what? Come on. Time is limited. No need for rehearsal. No need for clothes. Come naked/on a hungry stomach/Gamocha tied/Laughing madly/Then the colour will graze the play.)

In this song, Bhupen Hazarika calls on everyone to come out and change the country. Everyone must ignore suffering and act in this drama of life. Bhupen Hazarika wrote, "If we ask what the people of Assam and the North East have gained in the more than twenty-five years of independence of India, the answer is to represent the broad-minded people of Greater Assam, politicians who frequent Delhi, continued to do politics just for politics. The personal interests of many of them were served. However, the common people were trapped within the walls of unlimited suffering. The politicians don't seem to have time to look at the painful faces of their country and their nation. What I used to sing, warning those who sit in the director's seat by making people actors." (Hazarika, 2011, p. 439)

Time educates people. Long-term experience makes people alert and conscious. Bhupen Hazarika was able to understand the true nature of the people. He understood that the people of the country are awake today and they can change society. It can bring light. They just need a leader whose call everyone can come out with. With such hope, Bhupen Hazarika says—

Aah aah  
Olai aah  
Sajag jonota  
Aah aah  
Olai aah  
Pohar aanoota  
Ramre dekhote thoka rawon bodhonte  
Jay jadi jay jibonto jauk aah!  
(Dutta, 2014, p.81)

(Come on, come on /come out/conscious people/ Come on, come on. Come out. Bringer of light. When killing Ravana in the country of Rama. If it goes, let life go. Come on)

This song says that everyone must come out to remove injustice, immorality, and injustice in society. In a country where there is Rama, the righteous force, even if life is lost in destroying the unjust and oppressive force Ravana, everyone must come forward and engage in struggle in society. This is the right way to build a new society. Therefore, the people's singer Bhupen Hazarika is trying to warn the tyrannical rulers and make the common people aware of their duty.

Dhwongsokarik porasto kora  
Shaanti jozor kono khoy nai  
Kal ratrir bukute lukai  
Aasei prabhat bujila ne nai?  
(Dutta, 2014, p.82)

(Defeating the destroyer/ There is no decay of the peace struggle/ Hidden in the darkness of night, There's morning, you understand?)

Bhupen Hazarika thought that there was infinite power in peaceful resistance. He had great trust and deep faith in the common people. This resistance of the people will one day bring a peaceful victory. Just as there is a





dawn hidden in every night, no matter how dark it is, peaceful war will one day dispel that darkness. Therefore, the songwriter is able to guide the masses in an effective and sound way to awaken the infinite potential inherent in them.

Every country has class divisions among people. People who are at the forefront of society enjoy all the benefits. Just as there are three classes when travelling by train, he describes the common people as third class compared to the first and second class citizens in society. The unity and cooperation of the working people is the only way of their salvation. In this regard, Bhupen Hazarika says, "I am deeply outraged by Delhi's discriminatory attitude towards Assam and the North East in post-independence India. Are we third-class passengers?" (Hazarika, 2011, p. 450) In many cases, third-class people are deprived of their citizenship rights. Bhupen Hazarika identified himself as one of these people and expressed his sympathy for the exploited and deprived people as follows:

Tritiya shreener  
Shata xahajatree  
Mili dekhim puwab kal ratri  
Ekelge he pam ami goi lakhya ami  
Prothom nohoy dwitiy nohoy  
Tritiya shreener jatree ami.

(Dutta, 2014, p.127)

(Of the third class/ hundreds of fellow travelers/ Together we'll see the morning and the night. Together we will reach the goal. Not the first, not the second. We are third-class passengers.)

Bhupen Hazarika often realised that it was not possible to stop the exploiters, those who propaganda divisions in the name of religion and the representatives of evil forces in society by ordinary peaceful means. They have so much power that the prayers of ordinary people cannot touch their hearts. Harsh measures have to be taken to suppress these people. As mentioned earlier, Bhupen Hazarika was also forced to take extreme measures, seeing the power and prestige of the exploiters of society. Therefore, he threatens the exploiters like this-

Norokongkalor astra saji  
Sosankarik bodhim  
Sarbaharaar sarbaswa punor firai aanim.  
Dhorma bebohayeer thai nai tat  
Jatir ohongkar lay pab tat  
Asprishyatar mohadanowok  
Aapon hatere nashim  
Notun asom garim.

(Dutta, 2014, p.71)

(Making skeleton weapons/ I will kill the exploiters/ I will restore the property of the proletariat/ There is no place for religious merchants/ There is a lot of pride in the nation. The great demon of untouchability/ I will destroy you with my own hands/ I will build a new Assam.)

There is no alternative to suppressing the exploiters with harsh hands in order to build a new society. The exploiters never want a new society to be established. They want to maintain a stable society in order to maintain their rights. Therefore, Bhupen Hazarika wants to re-establish the rights of the proletariat in society by killing the exploiters by making weapons of skeletons. He hopes that there will be no place for untouchability or discrimination in this new society. In that society, everyone will be equal; there will be no place for any exploiters or traders of religion. Bhupen Hazarika wants to build such a society with his own hands.





## SONGS AGAINST RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND CASTE

Conservatism always prevails in a society. In that society, people are divided for the sake of rule and exploitation. Bhupen Hazarika therefore stated, “I started my struggle against the trend of dividing people among religions, castes, languages, and castes that some smoky politicians wanted to create.” (I am a nomad, p. 441) Bhupen Hazarika hoped that a new society could be formed only if unity and harmony could be created among the divided ethnic groups. He expressed his plans for the future of the new Assam and India as follows—

Horijon, Pahari hindu mucholimor  
Bodo Kos Chutiya Kachari Ahomar  
Antor vedi mau boowam  
Vedavedor prachir vangi  
Samyar sarg rochim  
Notun asom garim,  
Notun bharot garim

(Dutta, 2014, p.71)

(Harijan, Pahari Hindu Muslim/ Boro Koch Chutia Kachari Ahom, I will pour honey through my heart/break down the walls of difference/create a paradise of equality/I will build a new Assam/Building a New India.)

Bhupen Hazarika was truly a progressive singer. The song was composed in 1939. Untouchability, one of the problems in society at the time, divided everyone, and the common people felt helpless under the influence of discrimination. He encouraged thousands of people to come out of this weakness and build a new society. This path of society-In the song, he therefore states that he will build a new India and hopes that a new society without discrimination will be built across the country. Building promised by Bhupen Hazarika is not only for Assam; it was a way to build a new society applicable to the whole of India. In the song, he therefore states that he will build a new India and hopes that a new society without discrimination will be built across the country.

Caste judgement in Assamese society was not very serious but not easily ignored. In general, marriage between different races was not easy. Harmony can never be expected in a conservative society with caste judgments. Bhupen Hazarika was mentally disturbed by the caste discrimination in society. So he expresses his attitude as follows—

Juwati onamika goswami  
Aaru juwok prosanto dase  
Biat heno kisu badha pale  
Ram badha pale  
Seye kako nojonai kamakhya dhamot  
duyo duyoke aaji mala pindhale  
Ram mala pindhale.

(Dutta, 2014, p.106)

(Anamika Goswami and Prashant Das/There were some obstacles to the wedding/stopped them/ So they gave each other garlands today at Kamakhya Dham/without telling anyone/put on a garland.)

This song criticises casteism and conservatism in society. Although the caste is not directly mentioned, the surnames of the young woman and the young man are mentioned to indicate that society prevents marriage between upper and lower castes. The title Goswami mentioned in the song indicates the Brahmin community, and the title Das indicates the Kaivarta community. The couple are said to have crossed caste barriers in society and got married. Thus, by avoiding caste in society, marriage is an indication of changing society. Bihu songs





also mention the social obstacles to marriage between different castes. (Biswas, 1358 Shaka, p. 196) Although the judgement of caste has become quite relaxed in the present Assamese society, it has not disappeared completely. Moreover, even if this caste is violated by marriage, it is not easily accepted by society after the marriage. Even if society does not recognise this relationship or somehow recognises it, the lower caste person suffers humiliation from time to time in front of those who consider themselves to be of higher descent. In the latter part of the song, Bhupen Hazarika said that this is the era of putting satellites in space; this is the era of mass communication; this is the era of breaking boundaries. (p.107) Therefore, in order to move forward in all aspects, the mentality of society must change. In this song, he expresses that science has made immense progress and how this science must be applied to help human beings; therefore, it is necessary to abandon the pride of caste and clan and move forward together to establish a new society. We must abandon conservatism and truly modernise our minds to cross boundaries and build a society full of human kinship. A new society can only be established if the minds and mentalities of all people change.

## CONCLUSION

Bhupen Hazarika's social consciousness was shaped by the characteristics of the society of the time. Bhupen Hazarika's writings expressed his strong protest against injustice in society. Most of the songs express social consciousness, sympathy for the poor, and motivation to change the social system. However, Bhupen Hazarika must have had some limitations as a singer. Making a difference in society is not easy. The importance of writers and literary men is that although they cannot directly change society, they can act as catalysts in awakening the power of the common people. This also applies to Bhupen Hazarika. He was a versatile man. His songs are likewise multi-coloured expressions. If his songs are compared to a rainbow, then we must assume that it is one of the colours of his songs to change society. If this colour can speak to the hearts of thousands of admiring listeners, then Bhupen Hazarika must be called a meaningful singer. There is no doubt that the present society has changed much from the various problems or ideologies mentioned in Bhupen Hazarika's songs of social change. Therefore, the relevance of these songs has not ended. Therefore, these songs written back then can still provide a path to society or inspire the neglected poor people to survive. Therefore, it can be said that Bhupen Hazarika is still alive among us through these songs and will remain relevant as a tremendous positive force to guide society in the future.

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