

# NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS REFLECTED IN THE SONGS OF ZUBEEN GARG

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## ABSTRACT

*ZubeenGarg is a name eternally recognized as a symbol and a powerful voice reflecting Assamese identity, faith, respect, and protest. ZubeenGarg was simultaneously a people's artist, singer, actor, and musician. ZubeenGarg's songs, melodies, thought process, and sense of social responsibility opened a new horizon for the Assamese society. ZubeenGarg was not just an artist; he was a true Assamese nationalist wearing the crown of reasoning and reality. His life and work remain an inspiration for the Assamese people. ZubeenGarg used music as a medium to courageously advocate the interests of Assam and its people. The songs composed by him gained fame not only in Assam but also on an international level. ZubeenGarg's nationalist identity was the main reason for his engagement with Assamese social life through music and in shaping his own life. His songs reflected the actual representation of nationalism and social contexts. The people's artist ZubeenGarg was always respectful and responsible towards his motherland. His songs, filled with hope and revolutionary spirit expresses patriotism. Every song by ZubeenGarg carries an individual social message reflecting his nationalist ideology.*

**Keywords** – Nationalism, ZubeenGarg, Assamese, patriotism, motherland.

## Introduction

A name long familiar as a powerful voice and symbol of Assamese pluralistic identity, faith, respect, and resistance is Zubeen Garg. Zubeen Garg was, at once, a people's artist, singer, actor, and musician. His body of creative work flows ceaselessly through every corner of Assam. His songs, melodies, ideology, and sense of social responsibility opened new horizons for Assamese society. Zubeen Garg was not merely an artist; he was a true nationalist Assamese, crowned with the union of reason and reality. His life and works remain a profound source of inspiration for Assam and the Assamese people. Taking music as his medium, Zubeen Garg stood courageously in defence of Assam and Assamese interests. His compositions did not remain confined to the air, water, and soil of Assam alone; they earned recognition at the international level as well. His nationalist consciousness played a decisive role both in his musical pursuits, deeply rooted in Assamese social life, and in the shaping of his own life. In his songs, nationalism and social contexts found realistic and powerful expression. While remaining in his homeland, he sang nearly 38,000 songs in about 40 languages, thereby clearly demonstrating his boundless love for his country and community, and his deep sense of responsibility towards Assamese social life. In his songs imbued with nationalist thought, sympathy for the oppressed masses and open rebellion against the so-called exploiting classes are vividly expressed. Contemporary social issues, social injustice, national consciousness, unity, and harmony are among the prominent themes reflected in his music. The resounding voice that sought to awaken the marginalized carried within it an inherent sense of internationalism.

During the politically and socially turbulent years of the 1990s, Zubeen Garg, through his music, made earnest efforts to revive and re-energize Assamese identity. This paper, titled "National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg," discusses and analyses the nationalist ideology as reflected in his songs.

## Review of Literature

In *Nationalism in Indian English Fiction* (1978), Gobinda Prasad Sharma does not present a clearly defined theoretical concept of nationalism; however, through creative literature he explores the search for Indian identity and discusses the influence of Indian nationalism. In his *Literature and Society in Assam* (1st Edition, 1987), Sharma reflects on the relationship between the Assamese language and literature and Assamese nationalism.

In *Bhumiputrar Marmabedana* (first published in 1984), Gauri Shankar Bhattacharya highlights various ethnic problems of Assam. The central theme of the book is the challenges faced by Assamese nationalism through the political history of the colonial period.

In *Bhinnaasuri* (1988), Golap Barbaruah does not directly analyse nationalism; however, the work discusses the idea that nationalism was the primary inspiration behind nineteenth-century literature.

Through *Asomiya Madhyabitta Chrenir Itihah* (first published in 1991), Prafulla Mahanta discusses the formative phase of Assamese nationalism. The book examines the construction of nationalist thought through the nineteenth-century linguistic and cultural self-assertion of the Assamese middle class, the national liberation movement, and various socio-cultural awakenings. Among works that discuss the historical context of Assamese nationalism, the trajectory or evolution of nationalist thought, and its limitations, Mahanta's *Sources and Contexts of Assamese Nationalism* deserves special mention. Together, these two works by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta help clarify how Assamese nationalism evolved within the broader framework of Indian nationalism.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology of the Study

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

The research paper entitled "*National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg*" adopts the theory of nationalism as its primary theoretical framework. The nature of Assamese nationalism is somewhat distinct. While discussing Assamese nationalism, Sanjib Baruah, in his book *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, advances the theory of sub-nationalism. This theory particularly explains the relationship between nationalism and linguistic-cultural politics. Similarly, the concepts of civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism proposed by Dhruvjyoti Bora in his book *Historical Thought, the National Question and Self-Determination* have been applied as the theoretical basis of this research. Drawing upon these two perspectives, the study adopts a conceptual understanding of Assamese nationalism. The theoretical ideas of nationalism used in this paper are derived primarily from these two works. While preparing the research paper titled "*National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg*," emphasis has been placed on the linguistic, cultural, and political dimensions of nationalism, with an effort to examine and understand the specific nature of Assamese nationalism.

### Methodology

In preparing the research paper entitled "*National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg*," both analytical and descriptive methods have been employed.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of the paper entitled "*National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg*" is limited. The study analyses only the nationalist perspective reflected in selected songs of Zubeen Garg.

## Main Discussion

*National Consciousness Reflected in the Songs of Zubeen Garg*, the people's artist Zubeen Garg was, at every moment of his life, respectful and responsible towards his motherland. Even while travelling across different parts of the world, he could never detach himself from his love for his country and his people. In the songs where patriotism finds expression, hope and a revolutionary spirit remain deeply embedded. Each song shaped by Zubeen Garg's nationalist outlook carries a distinct social message. Though he travelled far and wide across the globe, he realised that the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Assam, the beauty of its nature, and the harmony between hills and plains cannot be found anywhere else. This realisation finds expression in his songs in the following manner:

Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha aru nga

Patiganit aru Kunhipat

Pahala Pahi aasu

.....

Buranjire Pat Lutiyaale Aamare Marame Dibo Hakiyai

Jadihe Aamar Astitva NaiTene Buranji Koneo Nasai

Shisu ( Lyeics-Tone : Zubeen Garg

In the simple lines—"Ka, Kha, Ga, Gha aru Nga / *Patiganit aru Kunhipat* / *Pahala Pahi aasu*"—Zubeen Garg links the Assamese language and script, along with traditional systems of knowledge, directly to the very existence of the nation.

Further, in the lines—

Buranjire Pat Lutiyaale, Aamare Marame dibo Hakiyai

Jadihe Aamar Astitva Nai, Tene Buranji Kunew Nasai

Zubeen, through the medium of song, conveys that those who have tried to erase or appropriate the pages of Assamese history—from the days of colonial rule to the present demographic crisis—will be resisted, albeit with compassion. At the same time, he delivers a comprehensive warning: if we ourselves are not vigilant, if our existence ceases, then even that glorious history will not be read or remembered with love by anyone. Presenting such a harsh truth through the voice of a child is one of the most powerful artistic strategies in Zubeen Garg’s songwriting.

In essence, Zubeen Garg’s ideology functioned as a protective shield against the cultural erosion caused by colonial rule and against the present crisis of existence. At the critical juncture of a nation’s survival, the demographic structure created during colonial rule underwent drastic changes after independence, as a result of which the indigenous Assamese people have been moving towards becoming a minority in their own homeland. In such a complex and sensitive situation, Zubeen Garg emerged as a symbol of Assamese nationalism.

Through his songs, he called upon the Assamese people not to embrace outsiders uncritically. He urged the masses—even through demands and threats—to drive outsiders out of Assam. His songs also reflect an effort to awaken and alert the Assamese nation against conspiracies carried out by outsiders. For example:

Namota Aalohi Satal Varise  
Anek Kothare tur Khupani Putise  
Thaluwar Parichoy Narabo goi  
Thaluwa Buli tur Sinaki de  
....  
Rajpat Bisari Aalohik nere  
Mati Ghar Pathar Aane Khai oi  
Hihotak tur Dhamakitu De

In this portion of the song *Jonaki Mon*, national consciousness is expressed with great intensity. Through the song, he issues a powerful call for the protection of Assamese existence, cultural heritage, and land—an appeal that is especially significant in the historical context of Assam. Against the backdrop of the influx of outsiders, land encroachment, and the fear of indigenous people becoming a minority in Assam, the song powerfully illuminates nationalist sentiment. In the analysis that follows, it is explained how national consciousness is articulated through this excerpt of the song.

### **Depiction of Influx of Outsiders and the Crisis of Existence**

“Uninvited guests have filled the courtyard / With many words they lull you into false comfort”—here the term “uninvited guests” refers to outsiders who have filled the “courtyard” (symbolising the household or society of Assam). This imagery reflects the demographic crisis in Assam caused by the influx of Bangladeshi and other outsiders. The indigenous Assamese have been “lulling their grievances to sleep” (suppressing their pain and complaints in their hearts), but now the time has come to express them openly and become vigilant. This is essentially a call for awakening that prioritises the protection of the nation’s existence.

### **Protection and Pride of Indigenous Identity**

“Do not let the identity of the indigenous fade away / Prove your recognition as an indigenous person”—the word “indigenous” signifies the core identity of the Assamese nation. Here Zubeen Garg urges that, under the influence of outsiders, indigenous people should not lose their identity; rather, they should assert it with pride. In this segment, national consciousness is expressed through self-respect and self-identity. The song challenges the fear of erosion of indigenous culture caused by cultural amalgamation after the colonial period, thereby strengthening nationalist consciousness.

### **Opposition to Conspiracy and Land Encroachment by Outsiders**

“Seeking power, the guests do not leave. They consume land, homes, and fields give them you’re warning as well”—here “seeking power” symbolises the political and economic conspiracies of outsiders. They are portrayed as occupying Assam’s “land, homes, and fields,” reflecting real issues such as land alienation resulting from illegal infiltration. National consciousness here is articulated through the call to “issue a warning,” which carries a revolutionary tone. This is not merely a complaint, but a directive towards action—urging Assamese people not to embrace outsiders, but to expel them through demands and resistance. It reflects a consciousness of freedom and self-determination of the nation.

Overall, this excerpt of the song expresses national consciousness through vigilance, revolutionary spirit, and cultural protection. Through the language of song, Zubeen Garg inspires the Assamese people to unite and struggle against outsiders, a sentiment closely linked with Assam's nationalist movements. This consciousness transforms the song from mere music into a powerful social message that continues to remain relevant in contemporary Assamese society.

At the same time, Assam is a confluence of many communities and sub-communities. At different points in history, people from various parts of India came to Assam and gradually became Assamese by adopting the Assamese language and culture whole heartedly. Acknowledging and respecting the love and patriotism these people hold for Mother Assam, Zubeen Garg's songs also clearly express a vision of harmony—of embracing them as stakeholders in the larger Assamese nation through a message of integration and unity. For instance, this inclusive sentiment is evident in Zubeen Garg's *Jonaki Mon*.

From the album *Mon*, the following song may be cited—

Kun ba Konch, Kunjon Bhoiyam

Kun Aadibashi ne Paharia

Dhori law Jurkoi ekedal Jori

Khilanzia Asomiya

Rajaghariyako Janadesh Lage

Assam has never been a land of a single race, a single language, or a single religion. It has been, for centuries, a confluence of diverse ethnic groups and communities. From the Tai-Ahoms to the Koch-Rajbongshis, Bodos, Karbis, Misings, Rabhas, Dimasas, Nagas, tea-tribe communities, Marwaris, Nepalis, Bengalis, Biharis, and many others, numerous groups have come together organically to shape a broad and inclusive Assamese identity. Zubeen Garg deeply understood this historical truth, and through his songs he presented the dream of this larger Assamese nation in a remarkably beautiful, liberal, and mature manner.

In the song of *Jonaki Mon* album, the following lines express Assamese national consciousness with striking clarity: “Who is Koch, who from the plains / Who is indigenous or from the hills”—through this naming, Zubeen excludes no one. By proudly mentioning all communities of Assam, he asserts that this very diversity is what makes Assam what it is. This is the first sign of a healthy national consciousness—one that does not feel ashamed of diversity, but celebrates it with pride.

*Second, the reconstruction of the idea of 'indigenous Assamese'*—“Hold tightly the same rope/ Indigenous Assamese”—these lines symbolise the maturity of Assamese nationalism. Here, Zubeen liberates the term “indigenous” from narrow birth-based definitions and transforms it into a heart-based identity. Anyone who embraces Assam's land, language, culture, and history with sincerity, who binds themselves emotionally to this soil, regardless of ethnic origin, becomes an indigenous Assamese. This reflects a highly liberal, integrative, and future-oriented nationalism.

*Third, a clear assertion of democratic values* - “Even the royal lineage needs the people's mandate”—with this line, Zubeen rejects any possibility of dominance by one community over others within Assamese society. He reminds even the descendants of Ahom royalty that in today's democratic era, legitimacy flows from the people. Historical pride cannot justify unilateral authority; collective decisions must be taken through popular consensus. This firmly establishes democratic consciousness within national identity.

*Fourth, a call for active integration* - “Hold tightly the same rope”—this phrase goes beyond mere tolerance and calls for active participation and inclusion. Through his song, Zubeen conveys that instead of excluding others, Assamese society should firmly embrace those who love Assam and willingly adopt Assamese language and culture, binding everyone together with a shared commitment.

Through this song, Zubeen Garg frees Assamese nationalism from narrowness, hatred, and exclusion, and reshapes it into a liberal, integrative, democratic, and heart-driven ideology. Therefore, this portion of *Jonaki Mon* is not merely a lyrical expression; it stands as an enduring mantra for the Assamese nation. It declares: we may come from different ethnic origins, but bound by the same rope, we are now one great indigenous Assamese community. Through this powerful articulation, Zubeen Garg has shown the path to building Assam as a truly strong, diverse, and united nation—representing the highest, most mature, and most noble form of his national consciousness.

Immersed in the cultural legacy of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha, Zubeen Garg envisioned the dream of a “Golden Assam,” where every Assamese person would remain bound together by the bond of unity, irrespective of caste or colour. He raised his voice, in clear and uncompromising terms, against threats to the Assamese nation and language across social,

cultural, and political spheres, calling for the welfare of his land and people. Zubeen Garg stood as a powerful messenger of an Assamese society united beyond caste, religion, and linguistic boundaries—where the rich and the poor are bound together by a common thread. He could not accept the caste-, religion-, and language-based stratification present in contemporary Assamese society. As an illustration, one may refer to the song “Hur–Hur–Huraide” from the album Jonaki:

Charijon Loge hoi dall eti Gahise

Jati ek buluta Homazkhon jwalise

Kar ki aahe Jai

Manthu tur Mur

Boise tez rongakoi tez

Tukura Tukur Asomkhon Vangise

Khuwa Kemorkoi Aapunjan Marise

Asomiya Khilanzia

Jonaki Mon Album (Tone – Zubeen Garg)

Taking as his foundation the dream of building a new Assam envisioned by Jyotiprasad and Bishnu Rabha, Zubeen Garg elevated Assamese music to an expansive new dimension. In shaping both his musical practice—deeply rooted in Assamese social life—and his personal life, the influence and contributions of Jyotiprasad and Bishnu Rabha were decisive. His efforts to build a peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous Assam through music bear the clear imprint of their inspiration.

In Zubeen Garg’s albums Rumal and Mukti, the songs “Joya Joya” and “Sonere Xojowa Poxa” respectively reflect the nationalist thought of Bishnu–Jyoti in the following manner:

Hundarar Puhore Aaji aamak Jaguwa O’

Hunor akhom Garhibole path dekhua o’

Junaki Dekhare Hadhu Aako aamak hunuwa

Tumar Pathei Path aamar Chirajugamiya

Tumi Guru ...Kalaguru

Album – Rumal (Lyrics – Zubeen Garg)

Swadhinatar Buj Loutei ekho Basar gol

Bishnu –Jyotir Jonkir dekh etiao Nahol

Manabor Majote Aaji Danabor Hunkar

Poha Huna Swanskriti Hakalu Aokhar

Eaiyai Janu Hopun asil Kuri Hatikar

Hakalute Mathu Prashna Aniyam Anachar

Hunere.....

Mukti (Lyrics & Music: Zubeen Garg)

Through these songs, Zubeen Garg carries forward the nationalist, humanist, and progressive vision of Jyotiprasad Agarwala and Bishnu Rabha, transforming it into a living musical force aimed at unity, justice, and the collective uplift of Assamese society.

Remembering the glorious past of greater Assam founded by Sukaphaa, Zubeen Garg sought, through his songs, to awaken national consciousness within a contemporary Assamese society that often sits idle with folded hands. His music reflects how the strong foundation of greater Assam—once bound together in unity by diverse ethnic groups—gradually disintegrated into fragmentation. He realised that the national identity of Assam, a land of ethnic convergence, is deeply rooted in peace and

harmony between the hills and the plains, and that without this harmony, Assamese identity would face a serious crisis. With this understanding, he sang in his album Rupal, in the song titled “Sukaphaa,” as follows:

In 1228 he arrived,

1228 sanat aahisil oi  
Akhomre Borveti Bandhisil oi  
Khamti Borahi Moran Kacharike loi  
Haturaje Karisile Maramere oi  
Swargadeu Sukufai Aankisile oi  
Bor Akhomre Sobi Jatanere oi  
Tukura tukur aaji hei sobi oi  
Bor Akhomkhani rol Hate voni hoi

Through the lyrics of this song, Zubeen Garg presents a glimpse of the thousand-year-long historical process of Assamese nation formation and offers a clear definition of Assamese identity.

Zubeen Garg envisioned a peaceful Assam—a liberated Assam. He firmly believed that no one has ever gained, nor can anyone ever gain, anything by letting rivers of blood flow. He realised that dreaming of a “golden Assam” through gunfire and explosives, by making innocent children and mothers weep and turning every household into a site of death rituals, is impossible. Those who nurture such dreams are merely chasing mirages.

Witnessing the growing injustice, violence, and exploitation in Assam and across India, Zubeen Garg burned with anger. Yet, in the light of tradition, he perceived the deeper currents of Assamese social life. Against misrule and oppression, alongside the clamour of public protest, he also perceived the colours of hope. Through his songs emerges a vision of striving to build a new society and a new nation—one that seeks to keep Assam alive even in terrifying circumstances, and to construct a disciplined, harmonious, and beautiful society through the eyes of the new generation. This aspiration is powerfully reflected in his music in the following manner:

Hanti Diya, Mukti Diya  
Hunor Akhom Rchibole  
Heuz Diya, hoshya diya  
Chirakal Fulibole  
..  
Kotha kowar Adhikar Aamar  
Nijok suwar Adhikar Aamar  
Tezar noi buwai kinu pam oi  
Natun Gohar Adhikar Aamar  
..

Shishu (Lyrics & Music: Zubeen Garg)

## Conclusion

Just as Bhupen Hazarika, through his songs and philosophy, raised questions about the very existence of the Assamese nation, exposed the ill effects of colonialism, and awakened the masses, Zubeen Garg has continued that tradition in his own distinctive style. The joys and sorrows of Assamese society, love and separation, struggle and dreams are vividly reflected in his songs. His compositions reveal a selfless love for his motherland—Assam, the Mother—along with an undercurrent of hope that dreams of renewal and a better future.

During the politically and socially turbulent years of the 1990s, Zubeen Garg sought, through his music, to revive and re-energise Assamese identity. His songs clearly evoke the fragrance of Assam’s soil, the grandeur of the Brahmaputra, the uniqueness of Assamese folk culture, and an unadulterated portrayal of Assamese life. They mirror the hopes and aspirations,

love and struggles of the Assamese people. In this way, Zubeen Garg's music stands as a powerful testament to national consciousness, continuity, and cultural resilience.

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