CHAPTER - III

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA
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Dr. Bhupen Hazarika worked tirelessly throughout his life to create a bond of fraternity and dignity between the people of different communities of Assam and the North-East India. He was the heart throb of all these people. If this bond of love and fraternity does not exist among the various communities living in Assam like the Bodo-Kacharis, Lalungs, Miri-Mikirs, Tai-Ahoms, Rabhas, Hajongs, Deoris, Chutiyas, Morans, Koch-Rajbonshis, Tea tribes and other people belonging to different religions, castes, the state cannot remain a healthy one. Dr. Hazarika had a strong belief that steps have to develop the language and culture of each and every community for building a greater Assamese society, song was a very strong device. Dr. Hazarika simultaneously worked for the progress of the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram. He made serious efforts through songs and visits to make people of the region aware of these issues.

He put a question to himself. “Did we commit a mistake sometime? Did we seek somebody’s sympathy or show sympathy or even criticize someone or sometimes become the servants of unscientific emotions that lay siege to our hearts? Or did we sometimes become the political sidekicks of power hungry politicians and derail from the process of development by a scientific process?” It is a fact which cannot be denied. Every Assamese must realize this; otherwise he or she will lose the right to claim to be an Assamese. Every individual has to be aware of his minimum
responsibility towards the society. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika felt the need of it and wanted that every Assamese should realize it. Keeping these in mind, he contributed to the best of his ability towards the betterment of the society.

CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY THROUGH SONGS:

Br. Bhupen Hazarika made sterling contributions through the hundreds of songs that he composed and sang. His thoughts, his mentality that were expressed through his songs are difficult to find in any other singer. “It may be relevant to quote Dr. Homen Borgohain here who said in Bhupen Hazarika’s vast array of songs, there has been recorded an expressive picture of the hopes and aspirations of a generation of Assam’s history. There is not a single community of Assam about whom he has not sung. No other Assamese poet or singer can claim to have done anything similar.”

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had witnessed the rule of oppression by the British as also the Macarthyism policy which was based on blind opposition to communism. He had suffered from the problem created by thousands of years of poverty, caste-discrimination and unplanned families. Besides, he had either himself suffered or had directly seen corruption, injustice, apathy etc, which had crept into the national consciousness in post independent India. One may see a reflection of all these in his songs. “From his childhood days, he had dreamt of a society where there were no exploiters, no rich or poor, where man displayed only love and affection for another man a moralistic society devoid of things like caste and creed.

He wanted to create and sustain love in the society by removing the disparaging or condescending manner in which the Assamese people looked down on the downtrodden or the tribal living alongside them.” This attempt also got a reflection in his songs.
Dr. Hazarika was successful in giving the voice of the new age to the society through his songs. Issues like labour’s dignity, the rights of people, communism, universal brotherhood, the question of right and wrong were shown by him to the people as novel steps. “The dignity of labour witnessed in the song. Autorickshaw chalaun aami duyo bhai, Gawahati karu gulzaar, BE fail moi saru bhai MA pass, the universal awareness seen in Mahashunyat upagrath haaji eye gan-sanjog korewar jug the timely question raised in Sathor bhora nikha mur hon hoobo baidha ki aboidha ki prashna hobo, or the progressive thoughts reflected in Nohole aamar rajhaar naai buli biswai borke 'haanhibo or Aami biswar usarat pongo anga hole, Biswoi jaanu bhaal paabo, reflect the internal thoughts of a socially, globally aware poet.”

Some of his songs are a critique of the prevalent customs and rules of a society, some of his songs speak about the society’s weaknesses, some paint a vivid picture of life etc. The increasing desire or greed for money or property instead of love for a fellow human being or to bury all morality in the name of getting happiness or pleasure, Dr. Hazarika has expressed through his songs beautifully. Consciously or unconsciously his songs have painted many pictures of a social life or living. Jiyaye thaki ekhoni samaj garhibor mor mon aase, Jot sonotkayoh mamuhor daam olop haleuo besi aase, Meethatelot beeh dhaaliboloi guruye shikha nidile, Samaje sabotibo mahaan manabota, Bigyaane aanibo jowar, Kaal raattrir bukute lukaai aase prabhat bujisaane naai, Bhaakha bhora prithibir, Bidrohi kotha geet, Kaan paati sunibor shakti naai, Raikha kora mok kora raikha, Aaliye galiye nite hejaar binaai kaalrupi jakhmi morahuti haji diye, Baikhor luitkhone baarikha sukaai, ‘Tumi natun purukh, tumi natun naari, anagat dinor jaagrath prahari are some songs in which the social angle is seen to large extent. He contributed in this manner to the society through songs.
CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS SOCIAL HARMONY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:

“The bridge of harmony created between the different communities living in Assam with the efforts of great men like Sankardev and Azan Peer, that bridge was on the brink of collapsing many a time in the post-independent history of Assam when fratricidal clashes due to language, religion, caste, community had turned the land into a communal cauldron, a bloodied earth. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, who breaking the barriers created by caste-community loved the people of this land like his own, could never tolerate this violence. That is why he worked day and night to strengthen that bridge. That became the sole aim of his busy life. He toured the whole length and breadth of the region, from one end to the other, crossing rivers and streams, hills and valleys to build that bridge which could not be broken, eroded and which would remain forever. He tied the people with the string of love, flew the flag of unity.”

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika worked for the society in this manner. When he went to Arunachal Pradesh, he got assimilated with the local people there. He built a bridge of love between the people of Assam and Arunachal. When he came back from there, he heard his Arunachali friends called him, ‘Hey! Please wait! Go back and tell the Assamese - today the hill has seen the heart of the valley. He created the bond of friendship between the people of the hills and the plains.

To create a bond of friendship between the people of Assam and Nagaland, Bhupen Hazarika imagining himself to be Gadapani proposed love to Dalimi of Tuensang and made her the bride so that Dalimi sang excitedly that she was the daughter-in-law of Assam to which Gadapani responded that he was the son-in-law of Tuensang and in their unison, the hills and dales sang out aloud, “We together are the living symbols of harmony of east and we repeat the songs of old.”
The ties between the Assamese and Khasi people are very ancient. Due to political reasons, the communities have been set apart. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in the following words tried to bind the two societies with the thread of love.

*He he he dhole dogore*  
*Hey hey drums and dogors*

*He he he hiyaar umere*  
*O' with waemth of the heart*

*Nedekha enajarire*  
*With the unseen yarn*

*Baandhi aami pahaar sikhare*  
*Let us vpw for the great*

*Mahaan siemok*  
*Ciem of hills...*

*Khasi aru aami bhedabhedi eri*

*Barhaon Asomir mahan ekotak*...  

He made remarkable contribution towards strengthening the bond of unity between the Assamese people and other communities. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika warned against the attempts of a section of people believing in militant Assamese nationalism to impose Assamese language upon others. He always asked the people of Assam to remember the manifold contributions made by different caste-communities to the social life of the Assamese people.

"In his speech as the president of the Sivsagar session of the Asom Sahitya Sabha Dr. Bhupen Hazarika said, if politics has eroded the bridge of unity which existed for ages between the people of the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys, we must reconstruct that bridge. Both the Brahmaputra and the Barak should flow steadily and happily in the geographical entity called Assam, nobody should feel that there has been cultural and linguistic aggression from the other side. The song *Mahabahu Brahmaputra Mahamilanar Tirtha* (the mighty Brahmaputra is the pilgrimage spot) for great
unification, vividly describes the role played by this great uniting force on the formation of the society in Assam.

Dr. Hazarika was himself strictly against any difference in caste, community or religion. He played a leading part in strengthening the age old ties of friendship and love between the Hindus and Muslims of Assam and he composed the song Ramzanore roza gol (Romjan's rozas have finished) as a warning to those people who tried to harm these relations. He had proclaimed very early in his life that history says that there was an army of Assamese Muslims in the army of Lachit Barphukan, who fought for maintaining the autonomy of Assam intact. History warns when rivers of blood flowed in other parts of the country during communal clashes in Assam there was never any incident of any clash between Hindus and Muslims. Today when some conspirators try to divide the two, they may learn from the song.  

Through the songs, he gave a brilliant exposition of the situation and made the people recollect the bond of harmony and integrity that existed between the Hindus and Muslims of Assam. Even after all these, violence and tensions keep on rising among the people, the string of friendship threatens to break loose. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika kept on working to reconstruct the broken foundation. The songs he sung all his life were songs of unity and harmony. Today he is not present physically but his thought, work, views make his presence felt very strongly. He taught the people to love breaking the narrowness of mind and coming out of the mindset of violence by obliterating the divisions created by caste, community, religion and language. These are among his most notable contributions towards the Assamese society. Every person living in this region should take Dr. Hazarika's views as his own and work accordingly for the betterment of the society.
When we talk about Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s contribution towards Assamese society, it will only be proper to speak about the songs written and sung by him. His songs express his knowledge of the society very forcefully. He speaks about the farmers, the working class, the exploited and the weak and the debilitated in a forthright and forceful manner, through his songs. Protesting against the society’s injustice was his constant and lifelong work. Bishnu Prasad Rabha’s influence is clearly seen on Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s thoughts and work. He fought throughout his life against the exploiters to bring about a change. This fight, this struggle was of utmost necessity in the interest of a healthy society. The revolutionary mindset of Bishnu Prasad Rabha had a profound influence on the progressive mindset of Dr. Hazarika. He constantly endeavoured to lay the base of a communist society. He deeply felt that there is no alternative to Marxism if an equitable society has to be set up.

The socialist leanings of Dr. Hazarika got accentuated when studying for his BA degree in Varanasi, apart from taking lessons in classical music he studied Marxism from Acharya Narendra Dev and came into close contact with several Marxist friends before leaving for America. In America, where he had gone for research work, he got in touch with Paul Robeson, Howard Fasht etc. He had to face many challenges because of his faith in Marxism. Returning from America to Assam after four years of study and research he started working with a revolutionary zeal. His songs against institutionalisation, regressive thoughts and thinking, casteism etc, started getting published. The Government, the opportunistic middle class and the feudalists were not able to digest Dr. Hazarika’s progressive mindset easily.

The Anti-Foreigner’s Agitation launched by the all Assam Students’ Union in 1979 made him to look towards Assam from Marxian viewpoint. Some of the activists
set up the *All Assam Janasanskritik Parishad* in 1982 and elected Dr. Bhupen Hazarika as its founder president.

“A section of people called him once again communist, Marxist etc seeing his involvement with the new organization and its struggle in the progressive cultural field. They started going away from him. Then Dr. Hazarika announced that he would remain committed to the cause and path taken up by the *All Assam Janasanskritik Parishad* without being involved in any kind of political activities. After this announcement, the Parishad under his leadership went to places like Chamaria, Hajo etc. which were devastated by violence during the Assam agitation and spread the message of harmony.” This proves that Bhupen Hazarika remained associated with progressive and communist ideology in addition to his involvement with the cultural agitation.

“The 1949 communist revolution in China under the Leadership of Mao-Tse-Tung had a lasting impact on Hazarika’s mind. In 1962, the Indo-China War took place. Many soldiers on both sides of the border were killed. Dr. Hazarika was at a loss explaining China’s role. At last, he severely, criticized China through the medium of songs. People found a patriotic fervour flickering in the sensitive heart of an artist. Hazarika himself conceded many a time that he was not in favour of aggression of any kind - economic, cultural, lingual geographical or political.”

**INDIAN PEOPLE THEATRE ASSOCIATION (IPTA) AND DR. HAZARIKA**

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika got intimately connected with the IPTA and the IPTA Movement. Through this, he immensely contributed both directly and indirectly to the Assamese society. In 1943 with the birth of the IPTA in Bombay, a new thinking started to take roots in the minds of Assam’s artists and litterateurs. The Guwahati Branch of IPTA came into existence in 1944 when Dr. Bhupen Hazarika took the B.A Degree
from Banaras. He contributed to the Guwahati branch along with people like Brojen Barua. After completing his post-graduation in 1946, he got very actively involved in the social and cultural fields.

Setting foot in India after returning from America he witnessed the IPTA’s anti-government movement, the Revolutionary Communist Party’s war against the nationalistic force. “In front of him he found ideal, moralistic, honest leaders like Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Hemanga Biswas. So, without any confusion in his mind, Hazarika joined the opposition forces. Hazarika shone like a star in the group. Seeing the astonishing rise of a highly educated, intellectually mature and on top of it, a rising star of the ‘backward’ sections of the society who was also a top order popular artist, not only the government forces but also the middle class, which supported the government, especially a section of the upper classes started getting extremely jealous. His doubts were strengthened, firstly, when the organisers of the Latasil Bihu did not allow him to sing from their platform and secondly when his pay was cut when working at the Gauhati University. His doctorate degree was also looked upon with suspicion.”

Bhupen Hazarika kept on working in the social and cultural fields under the aegis of the IPTA. IPTA’s voice was at its loudest against the government’s injustice, subjugation and apathy. They used to take out paddy rice from the godowns of rich businessmen, usurers, agents and those involved in smuggling and distribute it among the poor and the downtrodden. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika spoke continuously against a section of the middle class leaders who had an apathetic attitude towards the poor villagers and common people, through from the platform of IPTA. That he worked for the poor and the down trodden through the communist ideology was not taken easily by a section of the ruling class as well as the public. They could not take it also easily
because in his thoughts and work, there was no narrowness. “Dr. Bhupen Hazarika worked for the people with a large and open mind. He was not allowed to sing at Latasil as he worked through IPTA. The Gauhati University authorities had cut three days of his pay as he had returned three days late from the World Peace Conference held at Helsinki, where he had gone as a part of an all India delegation. Dr. Hazarika resigned from his university job and went away to Kolkata. This is only possible in the case of a confident and courageous person.

The IPTA movement had played a very important role in invigorating the contemporary Assamese society in the social and cultural fields. In the 1950s, two extraordinary personalities straddled the IPTA movement. Hemanga Biswas and Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. Biswas’s organizational acumen and Hazarika’s charismatic personality had managed to attract many persons towards the movement. Hazarika himself said once, An IPTA conference was organized in Guwahati. Balraj Sahni came and the whole of Assam was invited. Everybody came due to our appeal.” 11 “In fact Moghai Ojha, Narahari Burha Bhakat, Pratima Boruah etc. folk artists came to the IPTA platform because of Hemanga Biswas and Bhupen Hazarika. All the artists who came to the IPTA conference like Brojen Baruah, Ramen Baruah, Hiren Choudhury etc. were not members of the Communist Party nor were they admirer of communist ideals. But the concept of humanism and healthy nationalism and the artist personalities attracted all towards it.” 12 In this manner, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika contributed his mite to the IPTA and the people’s theatre movement and in the process made unmatched contributions to the society in general.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIETY THROUGH JOURNALISM:
The incomparably talented artist Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was also associated with journalism. After returning from the United States of America, he wrote in the Assamese literary Journalism *Jayanti and Awahan*. He was the editor of Arts journal *Gati*. He himself published it. In 1960, he got associated with *Aamar Pratinidhi*. He was in-charge of the column *Silpir Prithivi* in the journal. In 1965, he got the editorship of the journal. Under Dr. Hazarika’s stewardship, there was a complete transformation in the journal. *Aamar Pratinidhi*’s stature started getting established in all areas social, cultural and political. Dr. Hazarika played a vital role in popularizing the journals and was an efficient editor. His comments in the editorials were an important part of the journal and were keenly watched out for by the people.

Dr. Hazarika’s main focus was on Assam and its problems. He kept on writing about the hopes and aspirations of the common people as also about the threats posed to its security by other countries. In one song, he speaks about the Assamese philosophy.

*Aami Asomiya nohou dukhia*  
*Consoling ourselves by declaring*

*Buli santona lovile nohobo*  
*Assamese is not enough*

*Aajir Asomiyai*  
*If today we cannot properly identify*

*Nijoke nisinile*  
*Ourselves as Assamese, we would be*

*Asom rosatole jabo*  
*doomed. The land of Assam was created*

*Nana jati upajati*  
*with the assimilation of different tribes*

*Rohonia Kristi*  
*and communities and the colourful culture.*

*Akuai loi hoisil sristi*  
*We have to struggle, forgetting our*

*Ei mor Asom desh*  
*difficulties to build up Assam*

*Bibhed porihori*  
*Otherwise we will be perished...*

*Nijhaate shram kori*
The song was an editorial in *Aamar Pratinidhi* and was published in 1968. The editor was aware of the Assamese philosophy and that is why he was acutely concerned over the language, medium and migration issues. He was worried about Assam’s existence, and that is why he was very angry with New Delhi’s policies.

In an editorial titled ‘Voting right should be earned and not taken away’ in the December 1979 issue he said that the immigration problem is a national issue. To him it was a problem of the whole of India, and this has been agreed to by the Centre and seven States. The Bengali speaking people of Assam have actually announced it as a resolution. In fact the question is of earning the right to vote, not to illegally take it away.

During the Anti-Foreigners’ movement, when the Assamese people were passing through a phase of insecurity, Dr. Hazarika thought, “if the people of one area don’t feel secure about their language, culture and economic condition while living with the other communities then it affects both the groups. A famous journalist of Kolkata writes that if we shut down railway services in North Bengal, what will happen to Assam or if local Bengali speaking person of Assam (who has lived in Assam for generations and who has the right to speak in his mother tongue at home or in public) is assaulted then these actions are negative. Can these things be taken forward by an agitation?”  

The above quoted passages do illustrate the type of thinking, the consciousness that Dr. Hazarika tried to spread as the editor of the *Aamar Pratinidhi*. The editorial thought of the journal was very bold based on minute observations on the contemporary
political, social, and economic fields. Dr. Hazarika’s contributions to Assamese society through journalism were manifold and in this manner. The socially aware viewpoint of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was adequately reflected in the editorials and articles of *Aamar Pratinidhi*. The first requirement of journalism to present the truth without fear was very perfectly fulfilled by the journal, in the interest of a holistic healthy society, this much can be expected from a journalist.

“Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s thoughts were not confined within geographical boundaries of the country. His thoughts have spread their roots throughout the world. He was for change. He was not in the group of those who were votaries of status quo. He believed in Marxism which says that there is nothing in the world which is absolute. The only thing which is absolute is change. He appealed to the youth to arrest the decline in thought.”  

Only change and reformation can make a society beautiful. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika felt this very deeply and accordingly worked for change in the society all his life. He spread this message of change through song. As the editor of Aamar Pratinidhi he kept on calling for a healthy change in society through journalism. As a journalist, these contributions of his are unique and revolutionary. These contributions are new and reformatory contributions in the areas of social, cultural, political fields in contemporary society. The Assamese society can move forward by taking these through as the main investment. The only requirement for this is the necessity of an internal urge or longing and the ability to see things with a new vision. Only then Dr Hazarika's contribution through journalism will be fruitful in contemporary Assam. At different times Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's wrote reflective, analytical articles on various issues. The chief qualities of his writings are a strong viewpoint, progressive thoughts lyrical expressions and pleasing sentence construction.

**DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA’S POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Besides being involved with the cultural landscape of the Assamese people, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika also contributed to the politics of Assam. He wanted to contribute politically to the cultural field of Assam. He felt that if one does not get involved himself in politics then for days together many vitally important cultural work will remain undone. He entered the electoral battle once for the State Assembly and twice for the Lok Sabha. In 1967, he was elected to the State Assembly as an Independent candidate. However he lost both the times he contested for parliament, once as a candidate for the Jana Ganatantrik Party in 1971 from Mangaldoi Lok Sabha seat and in 2004 as a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate from Guwahati Lok Sobha seat.
As a background story to his election as an MLA from the Nowboicha LAC, “he said, I had gone to Lakhimpur in 1966 to find out some facts regarding the movie Miri Jiyori. The young boys and girls of Lakhimpur told me, Elections have come. We want a candidate. One who speaks of our problems, our culture, I said to fight an election, one needs a constituency. Where is the constituency for me, they replied, Why, Guwahati or Lakhimpur.

Then I went to Guwahati. Suddenly my father passed away. A day before his death, he asked me, Will you remain a ‘Letters to the Editor’ in the world of art. You should go to the platform of the Assembly, there attract everybody’s attention, then only there will be true revolution. What will shouting from the outside achieve, Then after completion of the funeral rites, Phani Bora told me, you stand up for elections this time.

Bishnu Kakaideu came and said some of our artists should go. I will definitely contest from Tezpur. He lectured me on the topic for near about one hour taking the support of my father’s views.

My father’s words had forced me to think. The opinions of other people instilled courage in me. Then Phani Bora came and told me, Bhupen, the Nowboicha seat is empty. You will have to contest from there.

I had never ever gone to Nowboicha. Who will recognize me there? When I went to Lakhimpur again, all these people gathered again. I heard the demand made with love and affections by thousand of boys and girls and thought, Ok, let me see five years. How does the government run. At least there will be some addition to my knowledge, The ADC there, VP Singh (IAS) said, Dada, Kheliye Naa, Natak to Bahut Khele Hai. Aap Nomination Paper De Dijiye, Uske Baad Phir Withdraw Kar Lijiye. Deto Dijiye I signed up the nomination paper in a jest at Lakhimpur court. Then the
news spread all over India. On *The Statesman*’s front page, Bhupen Hazarika to stand in elections this time. The news became a sensation. I had made up my mind that on the day of withdrawal, I will withdraw. That day, after taking a bath I started on my way to withdraw the nomination I saw behind me there were thousands and thousands of people. Everybody’s demand was, you cannot withdraw. And that VP Singh added, You cannot withdraw. *Natak Kheliye Naa*. Then the public of Nowboicha called out. You will have to contest. And you’ll win. We are there for you. People from every linguistic group will help you. I could not withdraw. Addressing a massive meeting at Nowboicha, I said, if I lose, I will say the public did not understand me. And if I win, I will say I won’t go and become a Minister. I will project the travails of the people from the opposition benches as Bhupen Hazarika before the Government. This is because I am not confined to party politics. How much I will bring I cannot say, because I won’t be in the seat of power,”

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika won from Nowboicha seat. That was in 1967. Dr. Hazarika had never even dreamt of going into politics. He was a PG in political science. He could never think of going for his personal gains at the cost of killing the society like many politicians. He had some different agenda to fulfil while working as an MLA. The speeches he gave in the Assembly as an Independent MLA and the work he managed to accomplish give a glimpse of his objectives.

“Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had got strong opinions on supporting Dulal Buruah’s ‘No Confidence motion’ against the Government and on making Guwahati the state capital instead of Shillong. He said, the imperialist British to exploit the people had set up the capital at a place not easily accessible by the latter. The ruling classes areas were transformed into ‘heaven on earth’ while those of the toiling masses resembled cow
Shillong is very far for the people of Assam. Here farmers, forest dwellers and the people of the lower middle class will have to spend Rs. 150 to secure a loan of Rs. 100 and still they only manage to enter the maze of red tape and their work doesn’t get done. The arrogant attitude of the Secretaries brought from outside Assam and the luxurious lifestyle of the Ministers only makes the common people look lost. This is anti democratic. In a democracy, it doesn’t behove a minister to refuse to meet the public.”16

On March 30, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had given a lot of arguments while opposing the demand to give additional grants to the Police department in the following way.

"Dr. Bhupen Hazarika: Hon’ble Speaker sir, I oppose the Police budget and want to tell that the people want to live in peace. But the Police in the name of bringing peace- create unpeaceful atmosphere. So the Police deserve condemnation. All the people say that art should be realistic. Then why some people object to my singing of Ramore deshote Ravon janma hole (Ravon is born in the country of Ram). The Ravon like congress rule started in 1947. That is why, the other day at Lakhimpur, in broad day light a teacher was moved with hand cuff in presence of the students. Even the teacher is released afterwards, there will be negative impact on the minds of the students, and they would lose respect for him. It was regarded as a fault on my part when I sang Sagar Songamat Kotona Saturilo at Gananatya Sangha. Thereafter when I was trying for a job- a Minister of Sri Medhi Cabinet remarked- It is not easy to get job...His shoes would be torn out for walking from pillar to post. If a Minister can have such attitude why cannot be such the same attitude of the Police? It happens that when a truck carries ninety bags of cement, it allowed to carries sixty bags with permit but there was no
permit for another thirty bags. Police will first captivate them- will go to DDS office-
After sometime the truck leaves with all the bags. Meanwhile Police take bribes. So they
like the permit and prohibition system. We know about the salary of a Dy.SP. But his
wife goes marketing in a car, children study in costliest school. The obstinate office
rounds around the central place of Laban in Shillong. His father in low is not so well to
do. He stabbed a boy from Mising community in my constituency. But Lakhimpur
Police have failed to nab the culprit even in last six months. Is that promptness? Then
why should we sanction so much money for a demoralised department.” 17

Since 1968, he put up several questions to the government on various issues
ranging from setting up of a separate department of ‘Oil Technology and Tea, at the
Gauhati University and discussion regarding appointment of individuals, arrangement of
meals for the Assamese students at the Film and Television Institute of India at Pune,
electrification in North Lakhimpur, promotion of 1st class ACS officers, setting up of a
Rabindra Bhavan at Guwahati etc.

The fact that the Offices of the Inspector of Schools was situated at Dibrugarh
was giving rise to many problems. He drew the attention of the Education Minister
towards this problem. He also demanded extra funds for Telahi Kamalaboria School of
Lakhimpur district.

“On November 7, 1967 when the attention of the House was drawn to the
allegation of widespread anomalies in the transfer of the officers, employees by Dulal
Baruah and Bhubaneswar Barman, Bimala Prasad Chaliha had responded in the
negative. There was news supporting the Congress also. However, he informed the
House that Government employees should not get involved in this campaign which was
punishable. If there is such a complaint the Elections Commissioner should be informed.

Hearing Chaliha’s response, Hazarika remarked, The DI of North Lakhimpur has also become famous. In a vast area from Dhakuakhana to Bihpuria he gets up to Rs 500.00 for the appointment and transfer of teachers. He has remained posted there for the last 10-15 years. On and off there is an order, but he refuses to budge (laughter all around). The Chief Minister had wanted an example of a concrete case. I have brought it to his notice, so that he is transferred from there.”

The above example will vividly illustrate how intelligently Dr. Bhupen Hazarika spoke. He spoke on various issues confronting the society from the miniscule ones to these having huge ramifications. He realized that for a healthy society to grow, it was important that we solve every problem and as legislator he took pains to collect information about all these problems. He kept track of the progress and development of the Khadi Board, various facts and production related accounts.

“On 6th November 1969, he had demanded time to discuss the disturbed situation of Nagaon and the alleged police tortures there. Giving his support to the ‘no confidence motion’ in the Assembly, Dr. Hazarika had reasoned, Respected speaker Sir, I request Pushpadhar Chaliha, I respect his age. He speaks of culture. I have respect for all that. Besides I don’t know how to make speeches. I am hearing their speeches since last March. Especially when the Finance Minister speaks about demand and supply, I am instantly reminded of the lectures we had in economics in our college. I won’t say many things, don’t know how to make a speech. The no confidence motion that we have brought today is people’s no trust. In the meantime, the public has shown its no trust. We are not cheats, so we have just brought the no confidence motion.”
Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had opposed the rebate given on entertainment tax to a commercial film *Aman*. He brought up the issue of *Aman* when taking part in a discussion on reducing government expenditure and increasing its revenue. Dr. Hazarika had given a long speech in support of the no confidence motion brought by the Opposition parties due to the conditions then prevailing in the state, the insult and burning of the National Flag at Guwahati on 26th January 1968, the working of the Lachit Force and the inter-community clashes on March 1 1968. “Dr. Bhupen Hazarika gave a speech in response to the Motion of Thanks on the Governor’s Address to the Assembly.

1) He had protested that in spite of funds to the tune of Rs 1 lakh 25 thousand being sanctioned for setting up a memorial to Kanaklata, nothing had been done yet.

2) I heard that the government will provincialise the tea garden schools. However the government has not yet taken the Harmoti Tea garden School and may be the school doesn’t exist. There the students of the minority classes and the forest people study. See the dilapidated condition of the high school of the Mising hostel has not been provided to Vyanimah High school. If the government does not look back on the condition of the backward classes and those dwelling in the forests can the society and the country move forward. Look towards culture.

Krishna Shyam of Shyam village of Cholapathar in Sivasagar District. He studied at Bhatkhande School in Lucknow but has got frustrated by visiting the DPI’s office again and again for his due scholarship.”

Dr. Hazarika intervened in the discussion of an opium scam in Dibrugarh district, the recovery of inedible pulses in a godown at Golaghat etc. That the Assam
Publication Board should take up serious the matter of translation of Hindi books into Assamese and vice versa, he had given much stress. He took part in the discussion on transfer of land in tea garden areas.

"On March 13, 1969 he put up some valid arguments whole opposing the Finance Minister’s plea for a grant of Rs. 34 Lakh to the Police Department for their security purposes.

One hears that our youth are going astray. But what opportunities do they have to get busy with good activities or even for their entertainment. So, I stress that if these youth are to return to the good path, a drama stage should be set up immediately." 21

"On March 13, 1969 at the Budget session of the Assembly Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had said, our government has not been able to do anything on the cultural front till now. For the last five years, we have been demanding the setting up of an art gallery. We even suggested that the art gallery may be set up at Kanoi College. But even that was not accepted, a theatre hall did not come up. For the last five years, we kept on shouting for the setting up of Jyoti Chitraban. But was it set up? Bimala Prasad Chaliha had given an assurance in that regard in 1968 itself. But did it happen?" 22

The issues that Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had raised in the Budget session were people’s issues. If there is no strong social consciousness then it is not possible to speak up on these matters. As an independent MLA, he tried his best to do whatever he could.

"Politicians get embroiled in various controversies which is quite normal. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was also no exception. Once a daily newspaper of Assam asked him. There have been newspaper reports and many people are also saying that you are considering contesting for the Lok Sabha from Assam. What is the truth?"
Dr. Bhupen Hazarika: You have heard these things from newspaper reports and the people. Now hear from me. Now you listen to me and write in the newspaper that Bhupen Hazarika does not do party politics. Not only now in the future also.

I will not do party politics. I do not have any such will nor planning and I do not even have the possibility of winning. I will keep above party politics and serve the people here through my songs, my pen and do whatever my conscience asks me to do.

Once I was in politics. Bishnuda (Bishnu Prasad Rabha) had asked me to. I was in the Opposition camp. Then we did not have the power. Shouting from the Opposition benches may have helped in setting up of Jyoti Chitraban; and in my Nowboicha constituency. I got eight roads constructed, repaired the buildings of eight schools, made some buses operative. Then Nowboicha was steeped in darkness, I brought electricity to some homes. These were some things that I did. Now, I have found many wonderful artists at the Janasanskritik Parishad and they are working. I will contribute my mite to their efforts and continue to serve the society in this manner.

In this interview Bhupen Hazarika did not mention one thing. May be it slipped from his memory. That was his participation in the 1971 Lok Sabha elections from Mangaldoi. That year he had contested as a candidate of the newly formed Janatantrik Party against the famous Parliamentarian a socialist Hem Baruah. In this elections both Bhupen Hazarika and Hem Baruah tasted defeat while a third candidate, Congressman Dharanidhar Das won. That he stood against a famous socialist leader like Hem Baruah was not taken friendly by many people. On the other hand, Hem Baruah broke down physically and mentally after losing this election.

Bhupen Hazarika did not take much time to forget his promise of not getting involved in party politics. Earlier he listened to the opinion of one time communist and
politician Gouri Shankar Bhattacharya. Now He was in the loop of veteran politicians like Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Sushma Swaraj. In this regard, Bhupen Hazarika explained his stand thus. “I have never done party politics. I am always with the people. Vajpayee, Advani and Sushma Swaraj asked me to join the party”. So he joined the party on a Rs.5 membership and came to Guwahati to contest elections. That was in February 2004.

Bhupen Hazarika’s joining the BJP shook Assam like the earthquake of 1950. Next day it was the headline in newspapers all over India.

‘One time people’s theatres activist takes Ram name’.

‘Bhupen Hazarika now a circus clown’.

‘Bhupen Hazarika now a BJP man’.

‘The shameless selling of soul by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’

‘Fall from the Pacific Ocean to a dirty ditch’

Bhupen Hazarika now a flower for Assam etc.

The conscious people of Assam did not spare any bones in flaying Hazarika for this decision. Bhupen Hazarika once again lost. This loss broke the artist severely.

Some people however had the gumption to criticize the people of the constituency for not voting Hazarika to victory. These Bhupenda lovers think that whichever way Bhupenda goes, people should follow him. However the people the state do not think like these people The Assamese people of Assam will never follow the example of Vajpayee or Advani riding a chariot in the name of Hindutva to break down a mosque.”

Bhupen Hazarika knew that if one wants to do something to preserve and propagates Assam culture, then it would not suffice to stand on the outside and shout.
Things will only start moving when some progress is made in the Assembly. Only then in the cultural area, things will start moving as desired.

“A deep and pure consciousness about the democratic process enriched his work. In this democratic thought process, on the one hand there was a feeling for the exploited man and how to free him from his chains and also for freedom and on the other removal of all the artificial barriers and walls constricting the thinking capacity. Normally such a person is bound to treat his chosen path alone, he is forced to form his own way out to give justice to his talent. It is a very good feeling to know that Bhupen Hazarika was able to continue working in this manner through his unbelievable talent.”

“At the age of 78, Bhupen Hazarika got involved in a political controversy. In 2004 he as a BJP candidate for Lok Sabha from Guwahati constituency lost. Faced with a barrage of question from newsmen, he gave a flippant comment that Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a communist. At his comment, communists and socialists worked to ensure his defeat. After his loss, Hazarika consoled himself by saying that the people of Assam want him only as an artist, not as a politician.”

He was a lifelong believer of Paul Robeson’s song, *We are in the same boat* breaking the barriers of white - black, high and low. Later his songs were full of common people’s lives, their struggles, exploitation and deprivation. Along with Hemanga Biswas, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Jyotiprasad Agarwalla etc. he got involved with the IPTA movement. “Dr. Hazarika was deeply distressed by the situation in Assam, exploitation by the Centre, the feelings of frustration felt by the unemployed youth and all these found a reflection in his songs. In the later stages, the limits of progressive thinking were realized by him and he wished for the development of the
state through the democratic process. His heart ached for his people and their problems. The people knew that it is not possible to change their situation through songs or spark a revolution through them. So he started looking for a different platform through which these could be addressed. He contested in the elections thinking that the floor or the House could be such a platform. May be he could have sat on the Treasury benches, by sacrificing all like today's artist and literary personalities. But not only did he not do this, he won as an Independent candidate.”  

The world acknowledges with gratitude the role played by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in the process of reformation and progress of the society after getting involved in the political system. In this context Lakhyadhar Choudhury has written, “Bhupen Hazarika did politics also. I was also involved in politics through the political party system. Dr. Hazarika entered the Assam Assembly from Nowboicha LAC in 1967. I also became an MLA from Kamalpur LAC. Then the state capital was in Shillong. We came together at Pinewood Hotel as opposition MLAs. In the Assam Legislative Assembly Bhupen Hazarika spoke for the progress of art and culture of Assam. He stunned the ruling party with his logic and reasoning that could not be opposed.”

Dr. Hazarika could establish his view very forcefully in politics. He respected politics alright but could not tolerate the bad elements associated with it. He has himself accepted this. The common people should be actively aware of every move of the government. He himself was such a person. ‘Went as an MLA to the Assembly, during his five years as an MLA, Bhupenda learnt one thing that the Assembly was a mask for delaying the rightful dues of the people.

In a speech in the Assembly, he had fearlessly said, “Many of us MLAs are not worthy of respect. Even though I am not an active politician, how can we live without
politics? If the tax-paying public asks the MLA, why has the road not been repaired? That is not politics. That is public consciousness. I was born with that public consciousness, I will keep on creating with that consciousness and shut my eyes with that public consciousness.

In one of his last addresses at the Assembly he had thundered, There is nothing honourable about honourable members—there is nothing august about this august house and parliamentary system in the country where there are a lot of people who are illiterate—it is nothing but a delaying technique for getting what the people need.”

He had the powerful public consciousness that a political personality should have. He left the Assembly with the same sense of responsibility with which he had entered it.

“In 2004 India’s Lok Sabha elections, everywhere there was the wind of elections. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was a friend of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. During his tour to Bangladesh as P M, Vajpayee had taken Dr. Hazarika along.

At that time, an oil installation at Digboi was getting sucked under loans of crore of rupees. The Union Government had decided to close down the industry as its losses were mounting. The workers had repeatedly pleaded with the Centre to save their industry but to no avail as the latter was firm on its decision.

The workers then approached Dr. Hazarika. He promised to help them by meeting the Prime Minister. He accompanied a delegation of the workers to meet the PM. A senior editor of the Indian Express was also present in the meeting. Even though the delegation pleaded with Vajpayee to help them out, Vajpayee was firm. The Centre’s decisions was final, he said. The workers were surprised that Dr. Hazarika had not said a
single word on their behalf. After a moment, Dr. Hazarika in anger rose from his seat started singing the Hindi version of his signature song *Bistirno Parore, Asonkhya Janore*.

Vajpayee listened to the song, his eyes closed. As the song ended, Vajpayee got up from his seat, embraced Dr. Hazarika and said, Hazarika Sahab! Let’s have samosas.

Then the journalist of the *Indian Express* asked Vajpayee, Sir–what decision will you take in the Digboi industry workers problem.

I won’t give an answer to the Press. I will tell my friend…….

Vajpayee went out holding Dr. Hazarika by his hand. The Centre’s decision on the oil industry was then cancelled by Vajpayee.”

In this manner, Dr. Hazarika shouldered the responsibilities of the society, its people. His humanism is evident from the way he responded to his responsibilities.

In an interview to Mihir Deori, he said, “Politics according to me is a process to run a country, to go near the people. That is called a manifesto. It is not necessary whether it results in votes or not, that is a process. Democracy-Sahitya Sabha should remain above politics. So the story of my past life, my achievements–these have all be swallowed by party politics. I cannot say everything as I am now the President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha. It is written in the constitution that every registered Sahitya Sabha will get Rs 15000.00. That should be made from fifteen thousand to two lakh. I will have to go the Finance Minister. That may be Hiteswar Saikia, Congress or non-Congress, Prafulla Mahanta or anybody else. Don’t have the time to see all this.”

Manjula Hazarika has written, “Bhupen Hazarika got quite close to the people of interior villages of Nowboicha LAC by visiting those areas. In his five year term, he took up the problems of schools, roads, lights etc. in his constituency as also some steps
for the cultural arena of Assam, especially a film studio, an art gallery, a drama school etc. As a result, the foundation stone of the Jyoti Chitraban Film Studio was laid at Kahilipara in Guwahati when Dr. Hazarika was an MLA." 31

"I am not a professional politician. I don’t belong to any political party. I am only a representative of the people of Assam in this august House. I cannot tolerate that someone from outside should kick the Assamese community as third rate people. It is incredulous to hear anything like this from a political personality. from the above statement, Dr. Hazarika’s mentality is evident. From the innumerable speeches he gave in the Assembly, his strong consciousness for the society comes to the fore. Central Minister Trishna Sen had said that Assam cannot have a refinery. In response to that supporting a Calling Attention Motion, Hazarika had said. Even if gold is tied to crow’s beak, pearls to its feet and other gems to its feathers, it will remain a crow and not change into a golden swan. You all are like crows and therefore you have brought this motion." 32

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika joining the BJP had brought about a strong reaction from the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU). At that time the headlines of newspapers were like the following. “Bhupen Hazarikar BJP Gamonat Aashahat AASU, AGP, Asomiar Iccha Akankhak Asanman. Flaying the act of Bhupen Hazarika joining the BJP, AASU adviser Samujjal Bhattachariya had said. It is not only unfortunate that Bhupen Hazarika had joined BJP, is even amazing. If Bhupen Hazarika had remained the artist, the artist Bhupen Hazarika, his place would have been assured after Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, but now there is doubt.” 33

“The then president of AGP Brindaban Goswami had remarked that in this time of crisis for the Assamese community if Bhupen Hazarika had given leadership to
various communities by staying within the secular camp, the AGP had desired it. And that is why it offered him the Tezpur seat.” 34 But time changes and how, at one time the party, which castigated Dr. Bhupen Hazarika for joining hands with the BJP, in the next elections, the same party did not hesitate a moment to form an alliance with the same party to strengthen its position to form a government. And what did the AASU do. It honoured the same Bhupen Hazarika with full honours terming him as incomparable, and the second great man. In his life time, a statue of the artist was set up by the AASU so that people can pay their respects to the person daily as a great man. All this was done during the period when the AGP was also trying to get close to the BJP, a party which it had termed communal.

“Bhupen Hazarika had every right to pursue his democratic dreams by becoming a member of any political party he wanted. A regional party is good and national party is bad this thing cannot be true, a regional party only can secure the regional aspirations is not true at all.” 35
REFERENCES


11. Ibid, page, 68.


