CHAPTER VI

DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA AMIDST CONTROVERSIES
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The sun and the moon will always be what they are. This is the eternal truth recognized worldwide. Similarly, in whatever manner we may analyze the sky; it will always remain the sky. Whoever said, “You can like him, you can hate him, but you can’t ignore him. The one man whose life, whose struggle, whose talent nobody can deny that much debated and discussed man is no one else but my mother’s jasmine garden, son of Assam, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika born on the bountiful, fertile land of Assam.” ¹ Controversies never left this man alone. Not only during his lifetime, but even after his death, many incidents concerning him got mired in various controversies. In fact the people and media got him entangled into controversies and debates. This was however normal because the common people could claim to have some right over him as he was very close to all these people. So when a person who is very close to the common public does something or says something which is not liked or not acceptable to the latter, then those people will naturally react or vent their ire at the former. When this happens, the issue gets encircled in a controversy. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika got sucked into various controversies-family centered, political, concerning Dr. Hazarika Trust, regarding his will, Kalpana Lajmi, Lata Mangeshkar, Bharat Ratna, educational, social, cremation etc. All these issues will be addressed in this chapter.
1. **POLITICAL CONTROVERSY:**

Even though Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was known all over the world as an artist par excellence, he was also associated with politics. His political career remained embroiled in controversies. His rise in politics and thereafter the shattering of his political dreams made each one of his followers angry. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika contested twice for the Lok Sabha and once for the State Assembly. Each time there was widespread reaction among the public. In 1967, he contested for the Assam Assembly from Nowboicha LAC as an independent candidate and won. In 1971 as a candidate of the Janganatantrik Party, he contested from the Mangaldai Lok Sabha seat, while in 2004 he contested on a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ticket for the Lok Sabha from the Guwahati seat. He lost both times. Dr. Hazarika who abhorred party politics, who had said that he has nothing to do with party politics, himself got involved in the same. In 1971 he contested against noted parliamentarian and socialist leader Hem Baruah. This move of his to contest against the much respected Hem Baruah drew severe criticism from the people of Assam. Similarly, his decision to join the BJP created a huge controversy. When Dr. Hazarika had contested as an independent candidate from Nowboicha LAC, he got the whole hearted support of the people and won also. But the people had not desired that he should be the candidate of the BJP for the Guwahati Lok Sabha seat and the voters rejected him.

Speaking of a political controversy, Ismail Husain writes “At the age of 78, in 2004, Bhupen Hazarika got enmeshed in a political controversy. He lost as a candidate of the BJP from Guwahati Lok Sabha seat. In reply to questions from journalists, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika gave a light comment that Atal Bihari Vajpayee was in reality a communist. This comment of the artist had angered the left and the regional forces, who
termed Dr. Hazarika as a political ‘joker’ and worked to ensure his defeat. A heartbroken Hazarika realized after his loss that the people of Assam wanted him as an artist and not as a politician.”

The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) had vehemently criticized Dr. Hazarika joining the BJP and contesting the election as its candidate. AASU’s advisor, Dr. Samujjal Kr. Bhattacharyya said, “If Bhupen Hazarika had remained the artist Bhupen Hazarika, and then there was a possibility that he would have been placed after Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. But the present situation has created a doubt in this regard.”

The people of Assam recognized Dr. Bhupen Hazarika as an artist of the highest order and therefore when he stepped into politics, he had to face stringent criticism. “This criticism landed Dr. Bhupen Hazarika into controversy in the media. Even politicians big and small, started commenting on Hazarika’s moves. CPM MLA, Rubul Sarma said Bhupen Hazarika was once associated with a progressive, democratic, cultural people’s movement and had even adorned the post of the president of the Janasanskritik Parishad during the historic Assam movement. That such a person could get himself enmeshed in the vicious exploitative political circle within one night by giving a go bye to tradition, only displayed opportunism. The people of Assam do not want a saffron-clad Bhupen Hazarika.” Many people made scathing comments on him. No one could easily or in an ordinary fashion accept the fact that he had joined politics. Nobody wanted him as a political person. Every Assamese wanted him as an artist only. Dr. Hazarika got sucked into political controversies when he entered the political minefield disregarding the views and the aspirations of the Assamese people. A man
who had publicly announced that he would not enter politics, did precisely that and once in started giving mutually conflicting statements.

2. FAMILY CENTRIC CONTROVERSIES:

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's family life was never free from controversies. His love episodes constantly brought his family life into public glare. His wife Priyamvada Patel was a highly educated girl of a very wealthy family of Gujarat linked to the iron man of India, freedom fighter Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel. Though Priyamvada loved her husband very much, but still their marriage broke down. The moment Bhupen Hazarika started getting involved with the world of cinema and music; cracks started appearing in their married life.

Before marriage Bhupen Hazarika had fallen into love with a girl from Shillong. Their love affair did not culminate into marriage as Hazarika left for the United States of America for higher studies. After many years both bumped into each other at a wedding ceremony in Kolkata. Again the romantic liaisons started. The girl was now somebody's wife and a mother of two children. But still the lady wrote letters to Bhupen Hazarika. The latter even used to tell his wife Priyamvada about this lady. On the other hand, Hazarika started getting close to Lata Mangeshkar also. Priyamvada could not tolerate all this. It is beyond toleration that a man remembers with sadness his former love before his own wife. How could a wife tolerate her husband writing love letters to his former lover? This led to cracks appearing in their marriage.

Priyam Hazarika had deep faith in her husband, may be much more than is practical. And maybe she thought that it was easy for Bhupen Hazarika to cheat on her due to her blind trust. Her trust shattered, Priyam went to her father's house on her brother's advice after spending many days without food. This was, however, expected.
Priyam was forced to take such a harsh step after seeing her husband’s actions and knowing that she was not loved by him. Surprisingly, Bhupen Hazarika did not oppose the decision. Everything happened so normally, so easily. Bhupen Hazarika did not reply to a letter written by Priyamvada’s father wanting to know what led to all this. Priyamvada has herself conceded to all this, when she came to Assam after Hazarika’s death. This admission of facts by Priyamvada sparked an intense debate in the local media. Many people did not want to believe all this, which was natural. It troubled the people of Assam, who were very close to Hazarika and had belief in him bordering on the illogical, to accept all these facts. But it is also true that Priyamvada had suffered intensely mentally. She has spent a long long time alone with no one to share her troubles. So the whole issue must also be seen from Priyamvada’s perspective.

Some of Dr. Hazarika’s statements on family-centric controversies can be quoted here. “The human relations which are there. If I had a wife today I will be busy.... You have tremendous quality. I don’t want to make you Mrs. Hazarika. You are an IFS, you will have to stay in America, and I will stay with IPTA. Nobody has to give me a job in London or Paris. I won’t do it also. I have to come back to my country. This separation does not mean that there is a boy or a girl between us. I don’t want to make you Mrs Hazarika, teach you to make a sour curry, cook it for me, no, you will be in international relations, you have an identity. Sex is not very important after some years. You achieve whatever you can with your capacity. I will not stop you. And I will never keep on working in Paris. Even if I get a very good job, I won’t take American citizenship. This I have decided. I have seen many people act like Mr.-Mrs. in the day time and sleep with their backs towards each other at night. I don’t want to do that.
Both of us still respect each other and are good friends. There is no bad blood even if you stay in Canada and I in India. And I will take part in the reconstruction of my country. I am not going to New York, and you also don’t I have to fry brinjals at Nizarapara. If you are an IFS and your wife is an IFS, then you will stay in Canada and I, your IFS daughter will have to stay in Japan. Should not come in the way of someone’s career or personal freedom.” 5 Explaining in details, the main story behind the whole incident, Dr. Hazarika expresses. “I thought: should I keep this very good girl to cook fish curry for me for the whole life. A girl who could become an Ambassador to the nation. She was being invited to work for the Indian Foreign Service. Still I was not able to send her. In a society ruled by men she does not need to do anything else. Here I was feeling bad whether she would remain a cook or whether I would have to stay as a house son in law and work as a manager at a coffee estate, or at the Air India International. Within all this confusion of what to do and what not to do …the earlier girl expressed, my wife expressed we are humans people with feelings, beautiful people. We are not meant to fight, our raw material is human feelings, human beauty. Priyam remained bitter about all this. I thought, thus far and no further.

That was 1963. We were married in 1950. In these 13 years we were together for only three years or so. So let her take her line and let me deal with the whole things. I won’t break anybody’s home. I will leave everything. I will be married to music and arts. Then only everything will be alright. I will be giving her money for maintenance.

Siddartha Sankar Ray became my lawyer. We would be together in adda sessions. I told him one day that both of us want a divorce. He knew a little that the wife of one of their professional colleagues was my former lover. So he thought there must be something. They discussed about the two daughters. I told them “please give me
freedom from all". But I will keep on doing my responsibility. If I have to do something for their security, if her home is not to be broken up, still also I want freedom. I told the girl whom I married (I won't say the marriage was one sided) everything, I had not lied to her. My economic condition, my unsecure life I had told her everything. Still I won't blame her for marrying me. She had to face a lot of problems along with me in these 13 years. So let her be free, let me be free. I thought for around 13 days, didn't tell mother-father anything. Her mother and father were also not told anything. Both of us however went to Calcutta High Court for five minutes laughing and joking. There was nobody around expect for a magistrate. He said- I will charge you, so that the whole thing becomes easy. I will charge you and say that Mrs Hazarika has sought a divorce. Then you only say, 'no objection'. I won't say what you will be charged with. I will just make you an accused. It will be over in five minutes, otherwise, you will have to engage a lawyer.

Like a tornado, I had got married in New York City at the age of 23. After that though she stayed with me for 13 years, we stayed as a married couple for only about three years. It was not for any other reason, except that I wanted to stay on in Assam and she wanted to stay in the foreign service and become an Ambassador. So we went our separate ways in 1963 in a friendly manner." 6 In this way they got divorced one day at the Calcutta High Court. Priyamvada Patel along with her son Tez went away to the far off America and her dream of a beautiful world remained a dream. Thus there came to Dr. Hazarika's life some such events which could not be expected and all this matter became a subject of intense debate.
3. CONTROVERSY AS AN ARTIST:

People of Assam wanted Dr. Bhupen Hazarika only as an artist. He also could feel that. But he got involved in some matters which became controversial.

Loknath Goswami, targeting the artist wrote in very harsh words said, “A section of ‘royal artists’, writers have always been in our midst, they are still there and will be there in the future also. These royal artists, litterateurs have nothing to do with the common people. Even the people don’t want anything from these types of artists or litterateurs. But our criticized artists change their colours from time to time. They sometimes shed crocodile tears for the people, sometimes take adulation from the people and sometimes sensing the opportunity give full support to the government’s anti-people policies.” Bhupen Hazarika would have to be included among the artists targeted by Loknath Goswami here, “as there is proof of Dr. Hazarika changing his colours from time to time. He has given statements, advanced thoughts and views which are conflicting. But the people did not want Dr. Hazarika to do all this and it was not even acceptable.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was once elected the President of the Asom Sahitya Sabha. But the issue here was that he was not made the President keeping in view any intellectual prowess, he was made the President only to decorate.” Even though Dr. Hazarika could not be held responsible for it he should have tried to know the background of his selection for the post, and if he knew it, he should have opposed it.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is even accused of trying to please various people. It was like his second nature to try to please people to get his dues. Loknath Goswami writes receiving the Asom Ratna award from Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi on behalf of the government of Assam Bhupen Hazarika declared, “Jilikise Luitore Paar (The banks of
the Brahmaputra shine). He sang songs praising the Tarun Gogoi government, when on January 29, 2009 the government of Assam felicitated him. This act of his surprised many people. Bhupen Hazarika forgets everything when he gets an award or an honour.⁹ On the other hand, it was the same Bhupen Hazarika who had attacked the Tarun Gogoi government when he contested the 2004 parliamentary elections on a BJP ticket. In this manner, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was involved in a number of controversial issues.

When Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was criticized in an article published in the *Asom Batori*, Natyasuryya Phani Sarma had written in his presidential speech at the musical evening of the Dhing Sahitya Sabha Session “the voice of an actor is more precious than his body. That voice has to be deep but sweet. I have known many such actors with such voices from Dhubri to Sadiya on my acting tours. But unfortunately due to paucity of money needed for developing their talent, many such artists possessing very good voices have died. Not only actors, even singers must have such voices.

The singer of Assam who has this god-gifted voice is now the victim of criticism. Literature is difficult, criticism easy. To construct it is difficult, to demolish it is so easy.

In response to this criticism Dr. Bhupen Hazarika wrote a powerful song to give proof of his healthy mind. The song was---

*Mur gaan houk*

*Bohu astahintar bipareete*

*Ek gabhir ashthar gaan*

*Mur gaan houk*

*Kalpana bilasor bipareete*
This whole incident shows that even though Dr. Hazarika was time and again criticized, dragged into controversies but he always had deep trust on himself. To create is always difficult and creation is the result of extreme labour. The easiest thing to do is to criticize or debate still he got sucked into various controversies.

4. SOCIAL CONTROVERSIES:

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika worked for the society throughout his life. Even though he was involved in social activities, but time and again he got drawn into controversies. He believed that there was no alternative to Marxism, if the society needed to be developed in a healthy atmosphere. He faced opposition from various quarters as he was closely connected to Marxism. After returning to Assam from America completing four years of study, he took to work with a revolutionary zeal. People from the government, the opportunistic middle class and those having a feudal mindset could not accept his views. Many people criticized him.

In 1982 during the anti-foreigners agitation, the ‘All Asom Janasanskritik Parishad’ was formed with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika as the founder president. When through this Parishad, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika got involved in spreading harmony in the society and in progressive cultural works, a section of people started accusing him and the Parishad of being a communist, a Marxist. Saying this many people started distancing themselves from it. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika announced that the Parishad would only work in the cultural arena and not involved itself in any political work. At that time, the anti-foreigner’s movement had a deep impact on Assam’s social life. There was suspicion in the minds of different communities as well as those having different mother tongues. In the tribal-dominated areas, the Parishad under Dr. Hazarika’s
leadership, spreading the message of harmony presented songs and helped in establishing unity. Still the common people could not believe all this.

He was involved with the IPTA and the IPTA movement. Through it, he contributed immensely to the Assamese society. In 1944 a branch of the IPTA was established in Guwahati. IPTA virtually meant 'anti-government', 'anti-establishment'. He was barred from singing at the Lataasil field due to his association with the IPTA. In this manner also, due to his association with the IPTA and the All Asom Janasanskritik Parishad he became controversial unknowingly.

5. CONTROVERSY RELATING TO THE BHUPEN HAZARIKA CULTURAL TRUST:

Different controversies also arose at different times regarding the 'Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust'. Following the trust’s constitution, Kalpana Lajmi was appointed as its president. Before his death, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika had bestowed all responsibility of the trust on her. The trust had even taken up the work of setting up of a “Samalay Kshetra” showcasing the history, traditions of the seven states of the North East according to the wishes of the people’s artist on 2.5 bighas of the 5 bighas allotted to it in Guwahati’s Chachal area.

"On his first death anniversary, a member of the Trust and Jayanta Hazarika’s wife Manisha Hazarika went to Rose’s house (Kavita Baruah) sister-in-law of Priyam Hazarika to invite her to the programme organized by the trust in association with the people of Nizarapaar at late Hazarika’s residence. Manisha Hazarika alleged that Priyam did not even meet her when she went to the Sarumotoria residence of Rose where Priyam was putting up. A section of people had criticized Priyam’s ‘pride’ in this
matter. That various people viewed with suspicion the activities, the discussions of the trust is proved by this incident.

The trust had taken up all the required work to fulfill Bhupen Hazarika’s dreams and to honour his last wishes. A meeting of the trust was held a few days after his death. Kalpana Lajmi was made the trust’s president in that meeting. The construction work of the ‘Samalay Kshetra’ was also started in this period. The trust had also taken up plans to set up an air conditioned auditorium, living quarters for amateur theatre groups, an open stage for presentation of cultural programme and steps to preserve the local traditional songs, dances and popularization of Bhupendra Sangeet etc.

It did not end there. The trust had plans to set up a music archive and respecting Bhupen Hazarika’s wishes wanted to set up an old age women’s home at the ‘Samalay Kshetra’. The trust wanted to take up all such unique projects but many people did not like this and the main reason behind their dislike was Kalpana Lajmi’s association with the trust. Many felt and even stated that at the back of all this was selfishness. Even his wife Priyam Hazarika was not supportive of these long term projects.

On Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s first death anniversary headlines in the major local news paper were as follows:

Family members absent from Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust organized program at Nizarapaar, Samar Hazarika keeps away from programme locking his house, Sudakshina Sharma also did not go.” 11 Hazarika’s only son Tez Hazarika declared through the media that he will also set up “Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust independently and include representatives of different communities in it.” 12
6. CONTROVERSY REGARDING WILL:

A controversy also arose regarding the will left behind by Bhupen Hazarika. Everyone was extremely curious as to its contents. Many believed that the will was influenced by Kalpana Lajmi. As the latter had looked after Dr. Bhupen Hazarika for a long time till his death, it was but natural that she would get a major share in the will. As Hazarika’s wife after her separation along with their son remained abroad, so it was normal for Dr. Bhupen Hazarika to leave many things in the will for Lajmi, whom he trusted immensely. Hazarika believed that only Lajmi will keep his creations alive for a long time through some long term projects. “The local newspaper Asomiya Pratidin commented regarding the will. Dr. Hazarika will is with the advocate, family did not go to the Kalashetra meet.”

“On November 18, 2011 evening there was a meeting of the Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust’ with the authorities of the Sankardev Kalashetra, Guwahati. Though from Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s family, Nripen Hazarika and others were invited for the meeting, nobody came. The members of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s family viewed the trust with suspicion and this event proved the same. The trust had plans to make top quality audio CD of all songs of the late Sudhakantha. The trust was also contemplating to take legal recourse so that nobody could sing or perform Dr. Hazarika’s song in a distorted manner or do business with CDs containing his songs. But this plan also ran into trouble with a newspaper running a headline, Expert Committee’s permission must to sing Bhupen Hazarika’s songs.”

At the time of his death, a newspaper report said, “According to very close family sources the major share of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s properties will go to the Bhupen Hazarika Memorial Trust to keep his memory alive for all times to come. Even
though the will which has been submitted in the court has not become public as yet, sources reveal that the central part of the ancestral property located at Nizarapaar will be named ‘Bhupendra Bhavan’ and given in donation to the memorial trust. Dr. Hazarika wanted that his fans coming from far-off places and his relatives living outside should use the building as a guest house. Similarly, the five bigha plot donated to Dr. Bhupen Hazarika by the State government at the Chachal area in Guwahati has been given to the Trust. On this land a cultural centre will be set up. Dr. Hazarika’s residence at Andherighat in Mumbai also figures in the will. According to sources, the Mumbai property was bought by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and Lajmi jointly. During his life time, Dr. Hazarika gave the ownership of the house to Lajmi.”¹⁵ So in this way there was a controversy regarding Bhupen Hazarika’s will.

7. KALPANA LAJMI CENTRIC CONTROVERSY:

There was no end to the controversy surrounding Kalpana Lajmi’s relations with Dr Bhupen Hazarika, even though it is difficult to define their relationship. “Some say that Kalpana Lajmi was Dr. Hazarika’s wife, but the former has herself denied that. Some people term her as a very clever lady. And she tried to bring the late artist close to herself to further her own interests. However, another section feels that alcohol would have taken its toll on Dr. Hazarika quite early, if it were not for Kalpana Lajmi who served him, helped him, and tended him till he eventually died. In that case, it is really unfortunate that Kalpana Lajmi has been dragged into a controversy. In her case, the diametrically opposite views of the two sections of people pushed her into controversy. In this regard, Loknath Goswami has written-A fan of Bhupen Hazarika named Kalpana Lajmi uprooted him and took him away beyond Assam and West Bengal by issuing an advertisement in his name. This wily woman for her own selfish interest managed to
control him totally. She knew that if Bhupen Hazarika is not uprooted from among the people and from the land of Assam and Bengal, she would not be able to bring him under her influence. She also managed a section of opportunistic, selfish and shameless people to her side. After that, this lobby took Dr. Bhupen Hazarika under its control. This lobby did not allow anyone from Assam to meet Dr. Hazarika without their permission, even if it was for some very important work. Important letters from Assam for Bhupen Hazarika stopped reaching him. This writer also had many bitter experiences when he wanted to contact Dr. Hazarika for fixing of programmes in Assam, fixing high rates of remuneration, re-recording of his song etc. This lobby started controlling him so much that Dr. Hazarika could not free or save himself from this chakravyuh, like Abhimanyu.”

The issues related to Kalpana Lajmi became more controversial because of the constant focus it received in the media. But that was not unexpected. If someone felt insulted by Kalpana Lajmi, he cried his heart out before media persons. “Local newspaper Asomiya Pratidin put forth these reports under headlines like, Assamese insulted repeatedly, ‘Bhupen Hazarika sold like cement by Kalpana Lajmi’ etc. The detailed report is as follows: Internationally famous musician, the heart throb of the Assamese people Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is being sold like cement by his long time companion Kalpana Lajmi. The much controversial Lajmi has moved Dr. Hazarika away from his relatives, the Assamese society and Assamese music and many noted personalities from the world of Assamese literature, cultural, media and fans have faced repeated insults from this same Lajmi. This inflammatory comment came from Pramod Saikia the main person behind ‘Heritage-North-East’ a leading non-governmental cultural organisation of Assam. Appealing to the culturally rich people of Assam to save
Dr. Hazarika from the clutches of Kalpana Lajmi, Saikia addressing a press conference said, We have started a *jihad* against the manner in which the people of Assam are being insulted by the so called companion of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

Recounting his experiences, Saikia said that on June 16 last, Heritage-North-East organised a programme, ‘Asadhasya Prathama Divase’ at the Kalakshetra. Before the programme, on the same day, Pramod Saikia went to the Nizarapaar residence of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika to seek his blessings. To wish him good health, I had also taken some flowers along with me. But Kalpana Lajmi asked me as to who gave me permission to meet Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. Simultaneously, Manisha Hazarika told me that I should know that to meet a big person, prior appointment is necessary. They told me that Dr. Hazarika was sleeping (it was 11 a.m.) when I said that I will wait some time for Dr. Hazarika, an incensed Lajmi ordered me to ‘get out from my house’. When I said that it was Dr. Hazarika’s home, Lajmi retorted that it was not Bhupen Hazarika’s but her house and if needed, she can show the ownership documents also, stunned by Lajmi’s words, an insulted Saikia shared his experiences with media personnel today. Saikia who was very close to Dr. Bhupen Hazarika since 1966, said that he had expressed his wish to meet Dr. Hazarika to his co-artist Kamal Kataki four months ago but did not get any reply. May be even Barak Obama would have as a matter of courtesy informed me if an interview was not granted, Saikia rued.

Charging that Kalpana Lajmi was doing business in Bhupen Hazarika’s name, Saikia said that Lajmi was selling Dr. Bhupen Hazarika like cement, but how much money does Bhupen Hazarika need for a living, for his treatment. The Assam government has helped him. The people of Assam on a single call can submerge him...
with money, with love. But the people should analyse, think about what Lajmi is doing. I have nothing personal in it, he expressed.

Educationists Senehi Begum and Bimal Medhi, who were also present in the press meet also came down heavily on Kalpana Lajmi. Recalling that she had received love and affection from every member of Dr. Hazarika’s household at Nizarapaar, Begum said that if any Assamese behaves in the same manner in Maharashtra as Kalpana Lajmi does here, he / she would not definitely have come back alive. Bimal Medhi added that even officials of the Asom Sahitya Sabha and the revered Satradhikars had received this type of behaviour and made a serious allegation that Lajmi has taken all of Hazarika’s wealth and property.

It may be mentioned here that the director of Assamese movies like Sarapaat and Paap aru Prayaschita, Anowar Hussain had a bitter experience at the Mumbai residence of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and had to return after being insulted by Lajmi. When Heritage-North-East came to know that Hussain would be going to Mumbai to receive the Phalke Academy Award last month, then its chief Pramod Saikia gave him audio CDs of Assamese poems to be handed over to Bhupen Hazarika. But Hussain was allegedly insulted by Lajmi even before Dr. Hazarika could receive the CDs. Lajmi told Hazarika that there was no one at the residence who could speak Assamese. If you want to speak Assamese, go to Guwahati, She said. She even refused to receive the audio CDs and told Hussain that he could send those through Kamal Kataki. So an insulted Hussain returned back. He later sent those CDs to Dr. Hazarika through Devasish Sarma, the officer of Assam Bhawan at Mumbai. Hussain narrated his harrowing experience before the media.
Saikia exhorted the media to feel the anguish and the pain that they have suffered keeping in mind Dr. Hazarika and to keep his respect intact, particularly in light of the fact that around 15 years ago, Dr. Hazarika had himself with folded hands sought apology from media persons at hotel Brahmaputra Ashok in Guwahati over an unthinkable behaviour of Lajmi.” 17 In this manner, Kalpana Lajmi became extremely controversial. It is also true that Kalpana Lajmi is not the type of woman to accept these allegations. Pramod Saikia was once very close to Dr. Hazarika. In that case it was extremely shameful that Lajmi behaved like alleged. The people of Assam thought that at least for once, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika would muster courage or be strong enough. But that was not to be. For every person in Assam that remains a point to be angry about.

“Kalpana Lajmi says this about the different issues which dragged her into controversies. ‘When I was 25, Bhupenda was about 52 or 53, an artist who did not know his worth. For a function if somebody gives money, takes it and if not, then also there is no complaint. It is sufficient if he has a few rupees to buy a drink, a solitary life. Wife has left, no relative lives with him. Only companion is alcohol. I live with this kind of an artist. Whenever I came to Kolkata, everyone was surprised. At that time marriage proposals from many rich persons came. But I was so enamoured by the simplicity and personality of a genius like Bhupen Hazarika that I simply could not leave him. I could not myself understand what sort of a relationship germinated between us. It was a nameless relation, which was at once that of a father, a friend, a loved one and a child or mix of all those. I tried to make him return to his fold. As he did not know that he had a commercial value, he was on the verge of losing everything. If his voice was to have a price then it was absolutely necessary that he had a settled lifestyle. He had the need of money also. I had seen with my own eyes many genius artists and
actors, spending a life without a home to call themselves, having made alcohol their only companion and wasting their lives. I liked Bhupen Hazarika. So with this feeling, I started living with him. This relationship was not acceptable to anyone.”

“At first, even Hazarika found it difficult to accept a live in together relationship. But Lajmi was determined. I had left my home. I told my parents that I am going to stay with Bhupen. At that even Bhupen did not know what to do and what not and after some days advised me to go back home. But I was determined not to go back.

After a year my parents came to Kolkata and stayed with us for some days. They knew that we were almost like a married couple. That was a complicated time for me. But I did not get weak.

As if the pressure from the parents on them was not enough, many known or unknown factors also started obstructing their life. Bhupen Hazarika’s wife Priyamvada and their son were elder to Lajmi in age.

But these factors could not put a spanner in Lajmi’s path. I was not Bhupen’s wife. We both had decided not to get married. Astonishingly, after I came to Bhupen’s life, Priyamvada and Bhupen got back to talking terms, Lajmi said.”

Lajmi’s statements quoted above are also not without logic, but still there was widespread controversy. The reason was that Kalpana Lajmi was not Dr. Hazarika’s wife. But still she exercised all rights on him, and that too with the full authority at her command. Therefore, the people of Assam had a lot of disaffection and anger against Lajmi, even though she had got Dr. Hazarika’s life organised.

8. CONTROVERSY REGARDING LATA MANGESHKAR:

There was some controversy regarding Lata Mangeshkar also. It was thought that there was a love affair between Bhupen Hazarika and Lata Mangeshkar. This was
admitted by Priyam Hazarika. That Lata Mangeshkar had close ties with Dr. Hazarika would have to be accepted. But was that relationship that of love is not known. On the first death anniversary of Bhupen Hazarika, Priyamvada came to Assam and gave some controversial statements regarding Lata Mangeshkar. Hearing those, Lata Mangeshkar threatened to file a defamation case against Priyamvada.

"Lata Mangeshkar to file defamation case against Priyamvada' was the headline under which news reports were published. Priyam Hazarika told a news channel in an interview- 'Our relationship had a crack because of Lata Mangeshkar.' One Bengali newspaper quoting Lata said, I am deeply hurt. I had never even imagined in my dream that I will have to listen to all this at this age. Nobody should talk in this manner without knowing the facts. He was a very respected composer. I don’t want that anybody should disrespect him in this fashion. That Lata Mangeshkar was thinking of filing a defamation case against Priyamvada, was not mentioned by the former herself but by her niece Rachna who helps her in all her work, the newspaper said. Quoting her, the newspaper further said that to file the case, Lata has asked for having a discussion with her lawyer. Rachna said that they were thinking of serving a legal notice on Priyamvada, adding that the insult of Lata Mangeshkar in this manner cannot be tolerated.” 20 No follower of Lata can ever think of insulting her.

On the other hand on the first death anniversary of Bhupen Hazarika, coming to Assam from far-off Canada, Priyamvada had spoken of the closeness between Bhupen Hazarika and Lata Mangeshkar. She said, “After this Bhupen Hazarika got close to star artist Lata Mangeshkar and that led to cracks appearing in our marriage. Loneliness was killing me. I spent days together without food because I loved him only, I did not go in for another marriage. My love for him never got reduced.
After hearing this interview Lata Mangeshkar said, this is extremely insulting. It is more of an insult of Bhupenbabu than myself, whatever is necessary for me to do in this matter, I will do.” 21

It is difficult to say as to how far these allegations brought against Lata Mangeshkar are true but it was normal for a wife to act like this.

Of course, the close relationship that Dr. Hazarika had with Lata Mangeshkar can be gauged by some words. In this context, “It may be stated-Kulkul Goswami Rahman says this of their relationship-After singing songs with Lata, Bhupenda spoke of her in our house, if I listen to her songs closing my eyes, it feels like that she is the most beautiful girl in the world. Bhupenda was supposed to marry this very Lata Mangeshkar. But later the marriage between the two did not happen.” 22 In this way, there was this Lata Mangeshkar centric controversy of Bhupen Hazarika.

9. EDUCATIONAL CONTROVERSY:

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was involved in an educational controversy also. There was a controversy when his salary was cut when he was working in the Gauhati University and there were doubts over his Ph.D degree. The Gauhati University authorities had once cut his salary for three days when he reached three days late from an international peace conference held at Helsinki. But Dr. Hazarika had no regrets about the pay cut. He resigned from his job at the University and went to Kolkata.

Some people doubted his Ph.D degree also. This also triggered a controversy. He got a Ph.D degree from the Columbia University of New York in 1952 on the thesis, ‘Role of mass communication in India’s adult education’. A section of people in Assam even wanted to publicise his degree as fake. “Loknath Goswami has written Bhupen Hazarika had very ably led a delegation of Gauhati University to the Youth Festival and
Dr. Bhupen Hazarika Amidst Controversies

the Gauhati University had earned a name for itself – still the University authorities had cut his salary for three days.” In this way Dr. Bhupen Hazarika got involved in a controversy.

10. FUNERAL CONTROVERSY:

The moment Dr. Bhupen Hazarika passed away, there was a controversy regarding his final resting place. On the day of his death i.e. on November 5 itself residents of Tezpur appealed to the people that Dr. Hazarika had during his lifetime in many meetings and at various public places said that his final resting place should be besides that of Bishnu Prasad Rabha and so the Tezpur residents urged that Dr. Hazarika should be cremated there.

On the other hand, even two days after his death, the State government was not able to decide where to cremate Dr. Hazarika. This also created a controversy. Many organisations including the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) had demanded that a plot of land be allotted for the purpose like Rajghat in New Delhi and the place be turned into a place of faith for people irrespective of place, caste and community.

But the government decided that the place for funeral would be the Sankardev Park in Fancy Bazar area of Guwahati. The decision to cremate Dr. Hazarika at that park was taken that evening in a meeting presided over by the Chief Secretary of the State with other bureaucrats. But there was resentment among the people who were of the opinion that the park was not a fit place for finally laying to rest a person like Dr. Bhupen Hazarika who had brought national honour for the state. To cremate him in a commercial area like Fancy Bazar would be tantamount to demeaning his memory, people felt. The place was unhygienic also. So other places like Basistha, Sati Radhika Udyan at Uzanbazar, Jalukbari, Bhuotnath, Nabagraha etc. were also given a
consideration. Finally the government decided to have the cremation at a vacant plot of land in the Gauhati University Campus near the Jalukbari Police Outpost. On November 9th his funeral rites were done, with this the controversy regarding his funeral also came to an end. His cremation was done in the presence of Assam Chief Minister, Governor, Council of Ministers, MLAs, leaders and members of various organisations, students and countless fans.

11. CONTROVERSY REGARDING PRIYAMVADA PATEL:

The man who was able to unite the people of Assam and India, even the world, could not unite his own home. This also became a subject of debate in the newspapers. On his first death anniversary his home was divided a lot. Everybody was hoping that Priyamvada Patel and Kalpana Lajmi, forgetting all their past bitterness, would at least meet at the Sudhakantha’s first death anniversary. But even on that day, their pride did not melt. Moreover, no one from his family, like his brothers or nephews etc. except the family of Jayanta and Amar Hazarika, took part in the rituals, even Samar Hazarika who lived nearest to Bhupen Hazarika’s house did not come nor did wife Priyam or son Tez. One of Dr. Hazarika’s sister Rose Hazarika alias Kavita Baruah helped the former’s sister-in-law and nephew in the rituals. Brother Prabin Hazarika did not come from London nor did niece Stuti Patel from Canada. Even Sudakshina Sarma was not seen even for once that day.

Even though there were rumours that after 1991, Priyam Hazarika and Kalpana Lajmi would have a face-off for the first time that also did not happen. Priyam Hazarika did not even attend the last rites of ‘Sudhakantha’. She did not even step inside her late husband’s house till his death anniversary nor did Tez Hazarika. They stayed at Rose Hazarika’s house. The Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust with the help of the residents of
the area organised the whole programme. The secretary and Jayanta Hazarika’s wife Manisha Hazarika had gone to Rose Hazarika’s house to invite Priyamvada, but the latter allegedly did not even meet her. The people of Assam wanted that whatever be the extent of the quarrel inside the house, it should not be shown outside. Fearing that she will have to face Kalpana Lajmi, Priyamvada did not even go to her husband’s final resting place in the first instance. The media intensely discussed this topic.

12. CONTROVERSY REGARDING BHARAT RATNA:

Different sections of society had discussed the issue of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika getting the Bharat Ratna posthumously. Another section said that Dr. Hazarika’s stature was much more than that of a Bharat Ratna. This issue also kicked up a storm.

Senior leader of the BJP, its past president and a former Human Resource Development Minister Murli Manohar Joshi had demanded of the Centre to honour Dr. Hazarika with the Bharat Ratna. BJP leader Sushma Swaraj had also demanded that the people’s artist should be given the Bharat Ratna. But some people said that it was insulting that Dr. Hazarika did not get the award during his lifetime. After this insult, there is no use giving him the award after his demise. Many people felt that there was politics involved in the whole issue.

“Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi demanded of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to honour Dr. Bhupen Hazarika with the Bharat Ratna. On the other hand Gandhian and social activist Anna Hazare demanded that star cricketer Sachin Tendulkar be selected for the rare honour. The headline in the newspaper Niyomiya Barta was-Chief Minister of Assam demands Bharat Ratna for Sudhakantha and Hazare for Sachin.” 24
"In 2003, the then Dhemaji MLA Dilip Kumar Saikia had raised the matter of Bharat Ratna for Bhupen Hazarika on the floor of the Assembly. The Assam Assembly unanimously supported his proposal. The former MLA also sent a letter in this regard to the then Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee which were duly received. Bhupen Hazarika also had close relations with both Swaraj and Vajpayee. Still the BJP- led NDA Government did not honour Dr. Hazarika with the award. And now the central leadership of the party is shouting from the rooftops about honouring him with the award.

The central leadership of the Congress too displayed the same vacillating attitude. In 2010, the proposal to confer Bharat Ratna on Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was again brought up in the Assembly. Nagaon LAC’s AGP MLA Girindra Kumar Barua and Congress MLA of Bihpuria, Bhupen Kumar Bora along with several others raised the matter in the Zero hour in the Assembly. The Assembly again sent a proposal to the Centre in this regard. But like in 2003, in 2010 also the Centre did not discuss the proposal. In 2010, the Congress led UPA government with Dr. Manmohan Singh was at the helm. Even though Dr. Hazarika shared a special rapport with Dr. Manmohan Singh, the latter did not do anything in this regard. Nonetheless, after Dr. Hazarika’s demise, the top leadership of the Congress started clamouring to honour Dr. Hazarika with the award."25

Tabiul Hussain writes, "Everything required for someone to be considered for the highest civilian honour, ‘Bharat Ratna’ was clear as crystal in Dr. Hazarika-All the qualities, all the facts and figures, everything. In fact, it can be stated very clearly that he had much more than the criteria set for the award. His life was decorated and polished with much more quality, talent and importance. I have not been able to forget
the pain that I had suffered due to the injustice that the Indian Government did to him by not honouring him with the Bharat Ratna when he was still alive." 26

The letter written by Kumar Deepak Das MP demanding the awarding of Bharat Ratna to Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is reproduced below.

"H.C. has permitted Rajya Sabha Notice under rule 180(A) for mentioning a matter for urgent public importance in the house (Special Mention)

From: Kumar Deepak Das, MP Date 10-08-2011

To,

The Secretary General

Rajya Sabha, New Delhi

Sir / Madam,

I request the Chairman to permit me to mention the following matter of Urgent Public Importance in the House on 10-08-2011.

Sub: Honour Dr. Bhupen Hazarika by conferring ‘Bharat Ratna’.

SPECIAL MENTION

Dada Saheb Phalke award winner Padmashree Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is one of the pioneer cultural activists of the country and awardees of various National awards and honour. He is a great music composer, singer and lyricist and film maker. Since 1950 he has been promoting communal harmony and empowerment of the poor using music as an instrument of social hope.
He has been promoting national integration by his intensive tours in the troubled time in Nagaland and remotest areas of then N.E.F.A. now Arunachal Pradesh bordering China.

He has been involved in the conservation and spread of folk and traditional culture of the North-Eastern region, showing the century old link with the Indian subcontinent. He has been an ambassador of Indian culture throughout the world and making the world aware of the glorious tradition of Indian culture.

He has been relentlessly pursuing the cause of the NE states in the national platform and Indian culture in the world stage, thus achieving emotional integration of Indian to the NE region for the last seventy years.

Now, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is ailing and bed ridden.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika is a fit person to be conferred the ‘Bharat Ratna’. Therefore, I request the Govt. of India to recognise the great service rendered by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika to our nation by conferring ‘Bharat Ratna’ in the honour of this great soul.

KUMAR DEEPAK DAS”

Journalist Mrinal Talukdar had commented thus on the issue, “There is total ambiguity on the issue of awarding the Bharat Ratna to Bhupenda. Daily a dozen bodies make the demand. Who is not behind this? May be only the ULFA and ABSU have not made a demand which could be seen. Everyone else has done it. Bharatiya Janata Party has made the demand. Asom Gana Parishad has done it. There is politics there also. According to his nature, the Chief Minister has pointed a finger at BJP’s Sushma Swaraj. BJP has remembered it now. Our Assam government has demanded Bharat Ratna. In reality, the demand for Bharat Ratna is in no way smaller than the solution to
the illegal migrants’ problem or demand of big river dams. What’s on! You keep on blabbering on TV. Can respect, devotion etc. be demanded.” 28

Three months before Hazarika passed away, Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi had written to the Prime Minister demanding award of the Bharat Ratna. And that the Prime Minister had taken up the matter seriously, the Chief Minister was informed. The AJYCP had taken up a signature campaign throughout the State on the matter. Rajya Sabha MP Kumar Deepak Das opined that in spite of being fully qualified for the award, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was not considered for it. With the denial of this award to him, the entire North-Eastern region was once again neglected. So, in this manner the issue of Bharat Ratna to Dr. Hazarika turned controversial. So Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s life and career always sparked a huge debate. He always remained in the news. In his lifetime and even after his death, he continued to remain mired in controversies-political, social, family-centred, trust related, Kalpana Lajmi-centred, Lata Mangeshkar issue, educational, concerning Priyam Hazarika, Bharat Ratna issue etc. These issues were hotly debated in the news media, and still now and then a debate crops up. There were some healthy debates also.

“For some decades Dr. Hazarika has been with a woman named Kalpana Lajmi. She has looked after him in every respect from health to creativity aspect. But it was seen that, during his lifetime, this woman was hotly discussed, which did not benefit either Dr Hazarika or the society. What I understand from the debate is that we should decide as to with which woman Dr. Hazarika should stay, Dr. Hazarika himself cannot decide that. Where will Dr. Hazarika stay, who will he will his property to will be decided by us, not by him. Can there be anything more amazing than this anywhere?” 29
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6. Ibid, page, 155, 156.


22. Rajguru, Prasanta, Executive editor, *Aamar Asom*. Published by G L Publication Ltd, G.S. Road, Ulubari, Guwahati-7, Nov 5\textsuperscript{th} 2011.


