

## Myths,Legends andHistorical allusions in Dr.Bhupen Hazarika's songs.

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Abstract: Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (1926-2011), the legendary multi-faceted artist is also known as the 'Bard of Brahmaputra.' His contributions through his compositions had been immense. His songs are based on varied themes. It is through his songs that he wanted to awaken the masses towards various social reforms. And often, the tool he used to reach the hearts of the masses is the usage of myths, legends, historical allusions in his songs. He believed that myths, legends, history have a strong hold in the life of the common people and would easily relate to them. This paper is a humble attempt to study the myths, legends, historical allusions in few of the selective songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

Keywords—*allusions, myths, legends, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, songs, Brahmaputra.*

### Introduction

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika (1926 – 2011), the legendary artist, with the most amazing crisp voice had contributed immensely to the literature and culture of Assam. His creative pursuit with music had brought Assamese music, tradition, culture to a global platform. He is considered as the iconic figure of not only Assam but the entire Northeast India. He is acclaimed internationally too for his vast contributions towards music not just as a singer but also as a lyricist and composer.

The Vaishnavite Saint, Sankardev's ideologies had been a great influencer in Dr. Hazarika's life. Jyotiprasad Agarwal and Bishnuprasad Rabha are the other two great personalities who inspired him greatly. It was through his music, he wished to serve humanity. His compositions represented the common people, their pains, sufferings, sorrows, happiness, hopes, aspirations and so on. His songs had been mass oriented and was rightfully called as *Jonotar Xhilpi* (artist of the masses). There was a deep sense of love and reverence for his traditional culture and heritage. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika believed that lyrics based on traditions easily touches the hearts of people. He had great respect for traditions so learnt more about it, included it in his compositions and gave them to the masses to remind them of their roots. Thus, a lot of folklore and folk music form a part of his compositions.

### Folklore

The term "folklore" was coined by William Thom in the year 1846. Dorson, in his work, *Folklore and Folklife, An Introduction* has categorized Folklore into four broad areas - Oral literature, material culture, social folk custom and performing art. Folk literature can be divided into distinct categories like folk narratives, folk songs or folk poetry, proverbs, riddles and folk speech. Folk narratives are then divided into three different sub-genres, myths, legends and folktales.

As observed by Bascom, myths are, "prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are

taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt or disbelief. Myths are embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual..." The definition of Myth by Bascom gives a clear idea that they are stories, often sacred stories associated with supernatural beings, creation of the universe, human beings, animals, nature etc. And Legends, as defined by Bascom, "are prose narratives which, like myths, are regarded as true by the narrator and his audience, but they are set in a period considered less remote, when the world was much as it is today. Legends are more often secular than sacred and their principal characters are human. They tell of migrations, wars and victories, deeds of past heroes, chiefs and kings, and succession in ruling dynasties. In this they are often the counterpart in verbal tradition of written history, but they also include local tales of buried treasure, ghosts, fairies, and saints."

The Myths and Legends form an integral part of a culture. They are not mere stories passed down from generations to generations but are deeply symbolic.

### Myths and legends in a few selective songs

There is an abundance of folk elements in the compositions of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. The socio-cultural aspects of the Assamese people abound with Folk narratives. According to Birendra Datta, these narrative genres are not necessarily in prose form. Though Folktales normally can be seen having the prose character while myths and legends mostly found in the verse form are chanted or sung. Hinduism and Vaishnavism too impacted on the construction of myth in Assam. The sources for the traditional narratives had been the two great epics The Mahabharata and The Ramayana, focus being the epic characters Rama, Sita, Krishna, Hanuman and so on. In the mythical narratives, the influence of Saivism and Saktism are evident. Datta observes that in the medieval works Kalika- Purana, Yogini – Tantra and Hara- Gauri Samvada which were composed in this region contain myths concerning Shiva and Sakti which are of local affiliation. Majority of the Assamese myths and legends are found to be rooted in religious sensibilities, formed on local deities, saints, places, rivers, historical figures etc. The popularity of these myths and legends might have inspired Dr. Hazarika to use it in his songs. He referred to the myths and legends in a new context to make his message via songs more effective and to be noticed.

The mythical figure Krishna has a strong influence on the minds of the common folk. Dr. Hazarika has manifested the mythical figure in his innumerable songs. The image of Krishna as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu was popularized by Sankardev, the Vaishnavite saint. The image of Krishna since then got a strong hold in the folklore and also in the folk life. The impact of Krishna on the Assamese folk society had been immense. The idealization of the marriage between Ram and Sita and between Krishna and Rukmini found its ways in the wedding songs which were composed orally by women. Krishna became a part of oral lore's and is often alluded to criticize anybody seeking the company of woman too much and thus calling him Krishna of the Kali age. Dr. Hazarika in his composition *Kalir Krishna*, sings of such a situation in which the character in the song is called by the name Kalir Krishna to which he objects:

*'Kalir Krishna' bulinujukaba*

*'krishna krishna' buli nujukaba*

*Moitu tumak aaji mata nai Radha buli*

*'Kalir Krishna' buli nujukabamuk muk*

*Kalir Krishna buli*

(Tease me not as 'Kalir Krishna' / Tease me not as 'Krishna Krishna' / I haven't called you Radha today / Tease me not as 'Kalir Krishna')

Another Hindu deity who is revered and holds a significant place is Lord Siva. A number of narratives, folk songs abound in his name which explains his popularity. Dr. Hazarika's songs too abound with representation of this mythical figure. Allusions to diverse aspects of Siva is found. In the song *Natun Nagini*, refers to the name Nilakantha, the one with the blue neck. His throat turned blue after swallowing the poison produced as a result of Xamudra manthan (the churning of the Ocean)

*Nila gorol piya,*

*Moi Nilkantho*

*Oliya boliya moi jadukar*

(Drank the blue poison/ I am Nilkantha/ am a mad magician)

Dr. Hazarika's lyrics abound with the influential mythical characters. Another allusion is to Rama and his Ramrajya in many of his songs. In one of his song *Aah Aah Ulai Aah*(Come, come out you all), he addresses the people as '*xajag jonota*' (awakened masses) and '*puhar aanuta*' (carrier of light) to come together to defeat the Ravana in the kingdom of Rama. Alluding to the mythical state of Ramrajya he wishes/hopes for peace, integrity, unity in the state. Referring to the term '*Ram'ore DEXHOTE THAKA*' (living in the country of Rama) hopes and wishes for the utopian image of Ramrajya in the state.

*Aah aah ulai aah*

*Xojag jonota*

*Aah aah ulai aah*

*Puhar aanuta*

*Ramore dexhote thaka*

*Raavan bodhuta ....*

(Come, come out you all/ awakened masses/Come, come out you all/carrier of light/those living in the country of Ram/slayer of Raavan ....)

In *Agniyugar Firingati* (Spark of transformation) Sage Dadichi's sacrifice comes to the mind when he sings of making weapons of human bones. Sage Dadichi sacrificed his life so that with his bone's weapons can be created to destroy the demon, king Brittasur. The demons were destroyed by god with the weapons created from the bones of Dadichi. Dr. Hazarika voiced his displeasure against corruption, injustice and so on prevalent amongst the society. Through the reference of 'weapons from bones', he hints at the sacrifices required to free the society from social evils.

*Narakankalor astra xaji*

*Xoxankarik badhim.....*

(making weapons of human bones.....)

Another reference from a folk narrative which gets mentioned is of Beula, Lakhindar and the snake goddess Manasha in *Luitate Mor Ghar* (My house is in the Luit). Worshipping of Manasa, the snake goddess is prevalent in some parts of lower Assam.

*Maranxarpai aahi dangxile tomak*

*Beular gun nai je, bhulam devataak*

(The fatal death has bitten you/ But I don't have the skill of Beula to enthrall the gods)

Tribal folk narratives are also incorporated in the songs of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. One such narrative is from the Mising tribe. The characters Panei and Janki, are the victims of the conservative society. They had to finally yield to the orthodox society which led to the character, Panei losing his life. In the song, *Bolo O'Mising Dekati*, Dr. Hazarika had metaphorically used the name of Panei,

*Aajir Panei nomore aaru Janki u nakande*

(The Panei of today won't die and Janki too won't cry)

Numerous songs on the rivers too find allusions to myths in the compositions of Dr. Hazarika. *Bistirna Parare*, (In the wide expanse) is very close to the hearts of every Assamese. In this Popular song, the allusion is to the myth of Brahmaputra. According to the myth, Brahmaputra is the son of Brahma, the creator of the universe. The mythical birth of Brahmaputra is mentioned in the *Kalika Purana*. According to the narrative, Kamrupa, once considered a holy land lost its holy stature due to the curse of Sage Vasistha. Lord Brahma, however wished that Kamrupa gets back its previous stature. This divine wish led to the birth of Brahmaputra. Brahma's son Brahmaputra was given birth by Amogha, the wife of sage Xantanu. He was kept at a place surrounded by four mountains. Brahmaputra took the form of a huge river and flowed down as he was believed to have the capacity to wash off the sins committed by human beings.

Dr. Hazarika in the song, *Bistirna Parare* questions as well as criticizes the mighty river for ever flowing silently since ages even after witnessing so much of injustices, degradation of human values, poverty and so on.

*Tumi e jodi Brahma re Putra*

*Hei pitrito tene naam matro*

*Nohole prerona nidiya kiyoy?*

(If you are indeed the son of Brahma/ that lineage is just a namesake/ Then, why don't you inspire us?)

The mythical river Kapili is invoked in the song *Kapili Kapili* by Dr. Hazarika. The mythical river is personified as a vivacious, temperamental girl. The river had destroyed the crops during monsoon. The singer invokes the river to be kind and salvage the mankind. As per the myth in the *Kalika Purana*, the river was created by Brahma and thus considered as sacred.

*Kapili kapili*

*Rangdhali suwali*

.....

*Kapili kapili*

*Toi hoi bawli*

*Barixhat maarili dhaan.*

.....

*Kapili kapili pagoli suwali*

*Manuhok koribi traan.*

(Kapili Kapili /vivacious girl/ kapili kapili/ you became mad and/ in monsoon destroyed the paddy/ kapili kapili you are a mad girl/ salvage the mankind)

*Bardaicila* – the folk belief of the tribal as well as non-tribal community of Assam resonates in the composition of Dr. Hazarika. It is believed to be the goddess of wind and rain. The wild fierce wind accompanied with rain and thunderstorm literally destroying nature on the onset of Spring is termed as *Bardaicila*. As per the lore, she was married off to a distant land but she promised to visit her maternal home once in a year. She visits her home on the onset of spring each year. She is in such a hurry that whatever comes in her way as an obstacle she just destroys it.

*Boror bhaxhare baar maane botaah*

*Dwi maane paani*

*Aaru sikhla maane ho'l goxhani joni*

(In the Boro language baar means wind/ dwi means water/and sikhla means the goddess)

Allusions to several legends too are found in a significant number of Dr. Hazarika's compositions. According to Kishore Bhattacharjee, "the legend is a genre that occupies an important place in the Indian folklore system, because it interconnects high and popular religion and describes popular views about nature, social heroes and saints."

The seventeenth century saint, Ajan Fakir is mentioned in several compositions – Ramjanare Roja (King of Ramjana), Mahabahu Brahmaputra, Axami Aire and so on.

Names of some places too form a significant part of legends. Bhattacharjee explains that "these legends are diverse and contain elements of mythology, epic and folk etymology, and they create a construction of locality and usually people glorify their place." Dr. Hazarika's composition *Mangaldoi Tumar Naam* (Mangaldoi is your name) have brought to the fore, narratives which were popular regarding this place. Mangaldoi had been named after a Koch princess, Mangala.

*Koch rajar jiyori Mangala jaar naam*

*Hehi naame naamkoron mangaldoi dham*

(The daughter of Koch king whose name is Mangala/ with her name the place is named)

Another legend which is mentioned in the song is of Kendukalai. He was a great devotee of Kamakhya and could vision her. But was beheaded for an act of treachery by the goddess. His head was found in a village and that place was named after Kendukalai as Kalaigaon.

*Bishwa bimuhini rupor, ji devi'r dorxhan loi*

*Hei Kendukalai'r jonmo Kalaigaon't hoi.*

(The universal enchantress/ who got visions of her/ that Kendukalai was born in Kalaigaon)

References to several other legendary characters has been referred in this song – king Arimatta, Chilarai, Xati Beula and so on.

The ancient name of Assam, Pragjyotishpur has been referred in several compositions. One such composition is *Jilikabo Luitore paar* (The banks of the Luit will shine). It was sung at the inaugural function of Guwahati university and became the anthem of the University.

*Jilikabo Luitore paar*

*Endharor bheta bhang*

*Pragjyotishot boi*

*Jeutir nizarare dhaar.*

(The banks of the Luit will shine/ breaking away from the shackles of darkness/will flow in Pragjyotish/ the stream of light)

### **Historical allusion**

Influential historical figure, Lachit Barphukan, the great Ahom general is evoked in several of Dr. Hazarika's compositions. He was a true Patriot who didn't deter from killing his uncle as he had neglected his duties towards the motherland. S.K Bhuyan comments on the heroic stature as, "Lachit Barphukan has not travelled beyond the frontier of his country. But, in Assam his native land; the recollection of his patriotism has offered the same inspiration as that of Lord Nelson and Wellington in England. Lachit Barphukan brought the Assamese to the highest pitch of efficiency. Nowhere in the recorded history, had the Assamese nation shown such capacity for organization, discipline and combined actions, as in Lachit Barphukan's war against the

Moghuls....For lessons of disinterested patriotism and leadership one should turn again and again to Lachit Barphukan's conflicts with the Moghuls."

In *Mahabahu Brahmaputra*, patriotism, unity, loyalty towards one's motherland is evoked in the following lines,

*Duror Lachite xaraighatat xotoru aagosile*

*Jaati dhormo bhaxha xobokey swadexh premere baandhile*

("Lachit fended the enemy at Saraighat itself/ bound one and all in a veil of patriotism merging the lines of community, faith and tongue into one")

In *Ami Axamiya*, the past is evoked thus,

*Prati Axamiyai ki kara uchit*

*Upadex diboloi nai Lachit*

*Dangor nohoi dexatkaio mor....*

(what is required of each Assamese to do? / Lachit isn't there to advise/ nothing is greater than my motherland...)

### Conclusion

The songs of Dr. Hazarika are often found to be interspersed with the past, educating, sharing, evoking, inspiring the masses with social messages. Allusions to myths, legends, folk characters, historical places in his compositions have not only glorified the characters, the historical past, the origin of the places but also imparted knowledge on the socio-cultural background unifying the ties amongst the diverse communities of Assam. He has creatively intermingled the past with the present, the folk with the modern. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika has drawn an interesting picture by incorporating the local beliefs, the significance of a particular culture, history. Through his songs, people have learnt about the local myths, beliefs of a particular area, community, tribe which otherwise would have remained confined only locally. His contribution has been immense and impactful.

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