

Rethinking the Study of Music: An Interpretative Reflection of Bhupen Hazarika's Songs of the Assam Movement (1979-85)

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Abstract

Sociology has accorded Music/ Songs the status of being 'social'. It has usually been seen as a reflection of a specific social group, organisation, tradition or cultural expression. However, the person who composes the music usually gets subsumed under the vast category of the 'social'. The question to be asked is- does every person in a society think similarly? Even within the same society, no two people would have the exact same biography/social context. The fact that those differences would influence the manner in which both the individuals would view a similar situation seems to be ignored- The same applies in terms of music/art. The composers (the factors affecting them) cannot and should not be taken for granted. What I propose in this paper entailing to the larger topic of 'Rethinking Sociological Traditions' is a unique approach of understanding music- at the convergence of Sociology of Music and Biographical Sociology. The main approach is directed towards the artiste/musician who composes the music as a social individual with all his/her social, political and ideological influences and how the same affect his/her compositions. To elucidate this point, I would be taking the example of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's compositions, mainly from (the Assam Movement time period (1979-85) and attempt to interpret them in light of his individual social location.

Keywords: Music, Social, Sociology of Music, Biographical Sociology

Introduction- Locating Music in the 'Social':

William G. Roy and Timothy J. Dowd in their article: "What is sociological about music?" (2010), write how music is a mode of interaction that expresses and constitutes social relations and that embodies cultural assumptions regarding those relations. Music is not a singular phenomenon. A noteworthy point is the emphasis on the distinction between 'music' and 'non-music', which, scholars in social sciences and humanities have deemed to be a social construct- one that is shaped by and shapes social arrangements and assumptions. As Line Grenier (1990)

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writes, in approaching the field of musical studies, one can refer to Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of the notion of 'culture' in the modern social sciences: "in each case the term, though keeping its form intact, connotes a different concept" (Bauman 1973:6). The same situation, Grenier believes, seems to be prevailing in the study of music: even while researchers seem to be focusing upon what they term as 'music', they might be addressing different issues. The notion of music, much like culture, is related to heterogeneous semantic fields; it designates distinct observable phenomena and stands for diverse if not irreconcilable objects of research (Grenier 1990: 28).

The construction of the meaning of music, as emphasised upon by Roy and Dowd, can be understood by following the conceptualisations of musicologist Phillip Bohlman (1999) who asserted that music can be seen both as an 'object' and an 'activity'. In terms of the former, music is considered as a 'thing' that has a moment of creation, a stability of characteristics across time and space and potential for use and effects (Roy and Dowd 2010: 185). Scholars assuming this position would focus on either the institutionalised system of tonality (as evident in Weber's work) or commodification of music (as lamented by Adorno). On the other hand, when music is seen as an activity, it is seen as something that is always in 'becoming', something that is unbounded and open. The focus on this aspect leads to the emphasis on what musicologist Christopher Small (1998) termed as 'Musicking'.

However, approaching music as merely an object or activity seems to portray it as set apart from social life, rather than being a part of it. Many scholars thus focus on how music is embedded in social life. The embeddedness of music complicates the construction of meaning, as meaning is not solely located in either a music object or activity.

What is of significance here is the realisation that music is not merely an aesthetic inner experience but also a social experience; in fact both the aesthetic and social aspects continuously influence each other. Music, then, is a language or a medium of expressing feelings, ideas, while at the same time it becomes a source of status marker, a mediator in the process of identity negotiation. While the musical experience may be ubiquitous, it is influenced by social relationships. Be it the act of composing music, singing or listening, it is placed in a social context. In fact, the act of performance of music is a two-way social interaction between the performer and the audience; thereby providing it the status of a 'social act'. Both the artist/musician and the audience are guided by the different social situations which surround and bound them. They become reflections of their social groups: caste, class, families and communities which influence their choice and taste (Seth 1996: 7-10).

Swami Prajnananda, an eminent musical historian and musicologist, conceives that the art of music bears a social value and significance to the human beings by dint of being a part of the human society. It is man himself, driven by his own intrinsic necessity of feeling, who creates music on the basis of one's refined sense of intrinsic creativity (SenGupta 1991: 51). Hence, society and music influence each other in an interdependent fashion. The social structure of music is created by the artists/musicians, audience etc. who are located in a social context and this in turn affects their work and also influences music. In fact, a musical performance is a process where a continuous interaction takes place between the artist/performer and the audience/listener. The artist/musician recreates and interprets a composition when he/she performs while the audience/

listener responds to the performance on the basis of his/her creative sense or ability. Thus, a two way interaction takes place and the absence of even a single 'contributor' to this process may lead to a broken communication.

Lisa McCormick (2006) argues that music should be taken as a performing art because when one does so, music begins to be seen as "an irreducibly social phenomenon, even when only a single individual is involved", quotes Lisa from Cook. 'Social performance', McCormick writes, is nothing but the social process by which actors/artists, display the meaning of their social situation to others.

Music (and songs), therefore, is a social phenomenon and a potent area of investigation for sociological research. Essentially, the study of the relationship between music and society has been the concern of one specific branch within Sociology- Sociology of Music. It focuses upon various aspects of the music-society relationship: the function of music in society; the societal influence on the growth and development of music; and the ways in which music reflects as well as influences society. There are quite a few philosophers, and researchers from various disciplines who have delved into the relationship between music and society. But, significantly, most of them have been limited to the social history of music, which presumably is viewed in the light of larger sociological concepts and trends (Seth 1996: 18).

Focusing on the composer/artist in understanding compositions;

Sociology, as a narrative, is founded on the basis of 'realisms': the realism of race, gender, caste, etc. as prominent variants. But in the preoccupation with realism, there has hardly been an emphasis on what C.W. Mills deemed significant- the intersection between biography and history. In studying art, there has been very little effort, either by innovation or insight into the beliefs, rites, practices or life of the artist. The real test for sociology of art, therefore, should not be on how much it can fit into the dimensions of realisms, rather on how it can bear what effective understandings of the artist required (Sherwood 2006: 100).

Until now, this paper has dealt with the theoretical orientations regarding song/music and how it is a sociological phenomenon that needs to be looked at in a way similar to any other aspect of the 'social'- both as a product of it and as an entity that exists in relation to it. But, the purpose of this research is not fulfilled in merely acknowledging the fact that music/song is sociological. The main focus here is the composer/artist who creates, composes and shapes an art (songs, in this case) form. It would be wrong to assume that any theoretical stand that talks about the sociological significance of music as a phenomenon equally represents the dynamics of the artist/composer of that composition as a social individual. In fact, more often than not, the composer seems to be an unattended shadow, whose presence is taken-for-granted as an extension of the larger 'social character' of music. But is a composer/artist a tangible entity with no dynamism or individual will? Can a piece of music, a song or any work of art merely be seen in terms of the reflection of the 'social' without analysing how that 'social' interacts with the artist's/composer's interaction with it? Most significantly, the question is, has the academic discipline of Sociology given that significance to composers/artists in understanding their work?

Pradip Kumar SenGupta (1991) states music as a representation of "the inexhaustible magnificence of our creative spirit which spontaneously manifests itself in the style of composition

or improvisation which is unique in its manner and universal in its appeal" (SenGupta 1991: 62). Further, he adds, music is the 'spontaneous artistic creativity of man'. A musician is essentially free to innovate and music:

"is a sort of projection of the musician's own image, his vision upon a canvas which does not exist as such, but exists in his own imaginative feeling according to his own impulsive inspiration (which is almost an imperative) with the help of an orderly and comprehensive sequence of notes" (Ibid: 52).

Music as a genuine art form becomes meaningful by communication and the highest form of communication takes place when a piece of music communicates a musician's spiritual attitude, deeply rooted in the basic experience of his own life and realization. Then, it does become imperative to take into consideration the musician's/ composer's understanding of the social reality, shaped by his/her social and biographical conditions, which, again in turn moulds his/her music. Only then would a study of music be complete.

The only thinker whose ideas on music and art seem to stand close to the approach adopted in this paper is Wilhelm Dilthey. Ironically, Dilthey was never considered as a sociologist.

Nevertheless, for a research work of this kind, his ideas on the social study of music stand more significant than any other noted sociologist. In what he terms 'the Musical Understanding', Dilthey argues that of all arts, music is bound by technical rules the most, yet it is the freest in calling forth emotional responses. And in looking at a musical composition as a means of communicating multiple meanings, the role of the composer or the performing artist should not be overlooked. In fact, for Dilthey, "experiences in life are expressed through musical forms, and consequently, a link between theory of music and the biography of composers need to be established" (Etzkorn 1989:5).

Dilthey's study of music (based on his focus upon German music) can be outlined in a three-fold model of analysis: first, the concern with the technical rules governing the musical expressions and forms of a people's music; second, the concern with the cultural and psychological values (emotions) that are expressed in a given social setting through appropriate (musical) communication; and third, the concern with the mutual interaction among music elements, musicians and social setting. Dilthey's program places equal emphasis to all the three dimensions (Ibid: 5).

For Dilthey, therefore, the formal aspects of music manifest the composer's conception of content or meaning, which inspired his/her composition. Again, the performer's emotional disposition is responsible for the manner in which he/she articulates or succeeds/fails to grasp the composition's total emotive content. It would appear then, that for Dilthey, a proper performance can come about if a performer and creator share their emotive attitudes or better, are united in one person (Ibid: 6).

What requires a clarification here is the point that Dilthey does not eulogise any notion of unrealistic creation of art; he does not believe that artistic imagination invents something that does not exist, or could not happen in reality. Rather, he considers the roots of any artistic process (especially poetry) to be based on the artist's own experiences. It is the artistic talent of the artist, thereafter, that allows him/her to transform those experiences into art. He/she might intensify those experiences, fill them with emotional content, re-arrange them, even choose to omit certain non-essential features or add a few others, and ultimately go beyond the actual experiences.

Nevertheless, the main technique would be centred on the transformation of the artist's experiences into an integral entity, which only kindles the imagination of the listeners/audience (Frank 1957: 477).

Paul Frank (1957) writes how there seems to be two extreme positions adopted by thinkers like Eduard Hanslick and Edmund Gurney on the one hand, representing the point of view that music need not have any references to anything else apart from itself while Richard Wagner, on the other hand, contends that "music as an isolated art had run its course and, from this time on, could be worthwhile only in connection with other arts" (Ibid :479). Dilthey adopts a position between these two extremes. For him, art could not exist in a psychological vacuum; the artist's life experiences influences his/her work which, then, produces significant experiences with the audience. Art, for Dilthey, is an expression of life and that expression, for him, had to be examined in a concrete psychohistorical context (Ibid). This point of view is not very different from what J. W. N. Sullivan attempted to present in his well-known book, "Beethoven-His Spirirual Development"" (1927). Sullivan focused upon the composer in understanding his compositions; he investigated Beethoven's life (based on documentary sources), analysed his experiences and showed how spiritual values in Beethoven's music, based on Beethoven's life experiences, are expressed (Frank 1957:479).

Dilthey's approach to poetic imagination, however, is not psychic/ psychological in the common subjective understanding of the term. He, in fact, constantly links the psychological of the artist with his/her historical context. An artist's experiences of reality are accumulated and ordered in terms of a gradually developing acquired psychic nexus. Past experiences are structured by this psychohistorical nexus which consists not only of contents but also the connections that are established between these contents. The self of the artist, then, relates to the world in terms of this acquired psychohistorical nexus, selects what it chooses to be of significance and establishes purpose. In fact, it shapes an artist's overall response or attitude to reality; carving what Dilthey termed as 'world-view'. This psychohistorical nexus, again, provides the framework for explaining how images are transformed by an artist (Dilthey 1985: 8). Every lived experience preserves the past as a 'presence' in the present; it becomes part of a system of contextually related experiences explicated from it through a process of reflection on its meaning.

Dilthey's claim on psychology, in fact, has to be seen as a break-away from traditional understandings of the discipline. According to him, what traditional psychology does is claim to provide knowledge of the 'psychic' on the basis of a certain fixed elements like sensations, feelings, etc. This portrays life as a mechanical combination of these 'ultimate' units; thus drawing an analogy with natural sciences. Psychology in cultural sciences, for him, must begin with an understanding that knowledge of 'ourselves' in relation to a structural whole ("*Strukturzusammenhang*" as he called it) which is the "articulated totality of the psychic life" (Dilthey 1922, Quoted in Horkheimer 2010: 272). Structural totalities, in fact, exist everywhere; not just in human life but in all forms of life. Life, then, adjusts itself to the different forms of structural totalities, which differ in terms of their natural and social environments. In the process of negotiating with one's environment, an individual too acquires a rigid form (structure); i.e. he/she acquires stable habits, values, perceptions and so on. He, however, failed to see that psychology is not sufficient in reconstructing individual or social life. At most, his notion of the psychic in relation to the 'structural' only seems

to reproduce the positivistic constriction of the “given”; the concreteness of a man’s being in terms of objective “data” of his inner life. As Horkheimer notes, Dilthey seemed to preserve the insights of Greek idealism, particularly abandoning the doctrine of the supra-individual and replacing it with a notion of the empirical. But an individual, Horkheimer continues, can “never be built out of the individual himself” (2010: 274). Although Dilthey’s stand seems to be a promising approach to study art/ music/ poetry and the likes with significant emphasis on the artist/ musician/ composer, the loopholes in it lies too intrinsically imbedded in its understanding of human life in itself. It is important to realise that individuals are not either psychological or social entities in entirety; they are an integration and interaction of both. Also, neither the psychological aspects of an individual nor his/her social aspects remain static and concrete. When I refer to the biographical influences on an artist’s compositions, there are no ‘fixed’ numbers of measurable social relations that can be outlined. A person evolves over time; he/she acquires new perspectives and replaces certain older ones. At most, the recurrently occurring patterns of experiences or the major life events can be taken as primary focal points in terms of drawing certain generalisations. Nevertheless, this is not to say that a person’s entire life, his/her social interactions or influences can be outlined in terms of objective pointers or, in turn, used for a causal analysis of his compositions. The dynamics involved in the life of a person as well as the social situation that surrounds him, both need equal emphasis. It is this dynamism of both the ‘personal’ of the artist in concern and his ‘social’ that provides a real hermeneutical challenge of research, which undoubtedly is its purpose to fulfil.

The singer and his songs- An Analysis:

What has been famously referred to as the ‘Assam Movement’ is a series of events that marked the years 1979-85. It started under the leadership of the All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) as an agitation based on four significant points- a) Against illegal immigration of ‘foreigners’-mainly from Bangladesh and Nepal- into Assam/India, b) Against participation of these ‘foreigners’ in the electoral process of Assam/India, c) Demand for deportation of all the illegal foreigners and d) as an effort to protect the distinct identity of the people of Assam against the threat posed by the ‘foreign’ nationals (Hussain 1993: 7).

Needless to say, the Assam Movement has been the most politically significant event of post-independent Assam and its questions remain relevant even to this date. An added aspect which is significant in choosing the theme for this paper was provided by the factual complement that Bhupen Hazarika was the only artiste who vocally and visibly participated in the Movement along with the students who staged rallies.

Bhupen Hazarika falls within the category of the very few artists/artistes from the North-Eastern region of India who received nation-wide (even world-wide) acclaim for his works in musical compositions and film-making. He was a singer, lyricist, music composer, poet, film-maker, all combined into one. In Assam (and other North-Eastern states), he was, however, much more than just a singer or music composer; he was a cultural icon, often termed as “the singer of the masses.”

As an artiste, Hazarika was deeply moved by the massive upsurge brought about by the Assam Movement. And the most significant aspect of it was that it was not a movement of the political leaders but a demand of justice and recognition by students and the youth. It was initiated by the student leaders as a movement towards defending the ‘Axamiya’ identity- be it politically,

culturally or economically. In this context, there were two observations/reactions that Hazarika deemed significant. First was the need to go back to the roots of what constituted the Axamiya identity, lest the youth get misled and misguided in terms of what exactly they are fighting for or against. Second, as the involvement of the youth seemed like a possible revival of the revolutionary spirit and a hope for a 'change' in the long asleep Axamiya consciousness, it was a matter of great joy and celebration. In line with these observations, two songs need to be invoked here- ***Mohabahu Brahmaputra*** (The Mighty Brahmaputra) **and** ***Aami Axomiya nohou dukhiya*** (We Axamiya, we're not poor).

These songs can be placed within the larger debates of 'Who is an Axamiya?' that ensued during the Assam Movement; conflicts emerged amongst the Axamiya people itself as many began seeing Assamese language as its basis, some even attempting to bring a communal angle to it. At this juncture, Hazarika sought to remind the people of Assam as to how, historically, the banks of the Brahmaputra have assimilated various groups and communities. And how these various communities, though technically from 'outside', form an integral part of the assimilated and heterogeneous Axamiya society; hence the need to distinguish them from the concept of 'foreigners'. The tactic that he adopts in arousing the emotion of 'oneness' amongst the various groups that forms a part of the larger Axamiya society is by citing names of icons- beginning with Srimanta Shankardev to Jyotiprasad Agarwala- that are considered to be the cultural 'forefathers' by the people of Assam.

Hazarika stresses in these songs how Assam has never been a land of homogeneity. It is through the union of various tribes, languages, religions and cultures that the Axamiya society had come into being. That historical significance of accepting the differences has to be remembered. And this he emphasises upon very strongly when he sings:

"Myriad races and faces

colourful, many cultures

Embracing them all

was my land born"

Again, he seeks to present an answer to the age-long question of 'Who is an Axamiya?' in a very blatant way by singing:

"... traversing through distances,

Resting on the Luit's banks

Every Indian, we embrace

in a new garb, as a new Axamiya.

Acceptance, a virtue to favour"

As Kamal Kataki says', Hazarika always lived in the memory of an undivided Assam where all the tribes co-existed. That was the essence of Assam for him. If the differences culminate into conflicts then the hearts of the people that have co-existed for centuries would collapse. And unity being the prime force of Assam, if it is broken then the negative forces would further invade the

minds and lives of the people. Assam would not be saved. Whatever cultural heritage Assam has carved out for centuries would be destroyed. Axamiya in Assam itself would be impoverished and robbed.

Bhupen Hazarika used the language of his songs to draw the landscape of Assam's situation during the agitations of the Assam Movement. And he was happy that the previous situations of neglect, poverty, unemployment were taken up by the youth as an attempt to bring about a positive change to the society. He praised them and sang songs of their glory. But then the Movement took a violent turn. A number of youth lost their lives while the communal angle of it became apparent with the intrusion of forces like the RSS and the distinction drawn between the 'Hindu Refugee' and 'Muslim Immigrant'. This put Hazarika in a dilemma. What he always glorified to be a youth-led-non-political agitation began showing its latent political colours. Moreover, it became a reflection of only a specific section of the Assamese-speaking caste Hindus. Following 1982, therefore, the nature of his compositions began to change. He got closer to the people who were not represented anywhere in the movement- the peasants, the lowest sections of the society and the poor. While doing so, he did not look at them through the lens of any language or religion, rather classified them all under the category of the 'oppressed' and 'neglected'. The remarkable shift in Hazarika's emphasis, as Loknath Goswami expressed, is clearly reflected in the song *Meghe gir gir kore* (The clouds, they mumble!). Influenced by Hemaga Biswas' song *Kashte Taare sangui jure bhai* that was written for the Gana Sanskriti Movement of 1941, this song draws in the concerns and longings of the peasant class that largely remained unrepresented in the Movement for the so-called safeguarding of the Axamiya identity.

The Movement began with a real cause following the Gandhian principle of non-violence but as time progressed it became more and more coloured with narrow political interests and violence. The aspirations of the Axamiya people were no longer given primacy. In the battle of power equations, the Axamiya society was left in pieces. And for any artist/artiste, who is deeply embedded in the realms of the society, such developments would be nothing less than thought-provoking and disturbing. Bhupen Hazarika was no exception to this. His song *Shohid pronaamu tumaak* (Salute to you, O Martyr) is a clear reflection of the thoughtfulness that surrounded him as an artiste and a social individual in that scenario. What is noteworthy is that when he uses the term *Shohid* (martyr), he refers to people from all the sections regardless of language and religion who laid down their lives in the course of the conflict and not to any one section of the Assamese society. In similar lines to his other songs mentioned in this chapter, this song too, therefore, adopts a very subtle stand on who constitutes the Axamiya for him.

Almost like *Mohabahu Brahmaputra* and *Aami Axamiya nohou dukhiya*, he resorts to reminding the youth of their original stand of carrying out a non-violent, non-political movement for the constitutional right of having a foreigner-free state. The *Notun Punish* or the youth, he believed, had the future in their hands and they alone could save the Axamiya society from disintegrating. What is noteworthy is the meaning of *Notun Purush* that Hazarika had in his mind. It was not gender specific, nor class/language/religion specific, it symbolically entailed 'a person of significance'. But a striking aspect that comes forth in the lines of the fifth stanza is the subtle manner in which he indicates that the death that were caused by the violence were highly unwanted and unnecessary.

A sociological study of Bhupen Hazarika's songs is significantly based on an understanding that he was not merely an imaginative artist attempting to portray the world around him in poetic verses. Rather, he was a socially conscious individual whose every composition was deeply rooted in a thorough study and observation of the society/social. For the purpose of reading and understanding the songs that Hazarika composed during the Assam Movement, I interacted with a few people who were closely connected to him in terms of his musical compositions- be it as co-musicians, a discussant, journalist or a critic. And, significantly, the common point that came out from all of them was the richness of Hazarika's songs in terms of the latent meanings in them. Hazarika was a keen observer, a socially conscious artist/artiste, whose compositions came out from his deep engagements with people from all walks of life. For Hazarika, the society and its problems had to be catered to through music. And following what Paul Robeson's revolutionary ideals instilled in him, he sought to use -music as a tool of social change. He believed in raising his voice against injustice but with a firm stand on peace. Though the world knows Hazarika as a musician, singer, lyricist and film-maker, he was in reality what we term as a 'scholar'. He was a man of knowledge and that reflected in the subtle meanings his songs conveyed. Those were derived from the social realities around him and the ones that were underneath the surface. And not just the social dilemmas, problems and inconsistencies, Hazarika's songs also played an active role in making the people aware of the various facets of one's own society. Words, for him, played a very significant role and he emphasised on their proper usage. Perhaps this was also due to his belief that every song was a historical entity/ material. He wrote most of his songs in the manner of history writing and as Samar Hazarika (Bhupen Hazarika's brother) pointed out, his songs were almost like historical pieces, written with an intention to record something in the memory of a society/ nation while at the same time bringing in the scope of re-assessing or introspecting upon it. The songs of the Assam Movement period follow the same thread. Being deeply rooted in the dictum of 'An artiste has no religion'. Hazarika's songs have to be read in the light of poignant re-thinking, questioning and even celebrating 'youth determination' that, according to him, seemed to be the need of the on-going hour of chaos and conflict.

But the main question to be addressed here, after a thorough reading and interpretation of his songs is: how does Bhupen Hazarika's biography assume significance in a sociological study of his compositions? Let me attempt to answer these questions by taking this process of analysis step-by-step.

To begin with, having read Hazarika's songs in direct relation to the context in concern, a significant number of standpoints seem to become visible. First, for Hazarika, the definition of 'Axamiya' is not that of a community formed on the basis of language or religion; rather on the grounds of a common cultural ethos. The question of 'who is an Axamiya' that the Movement brought forth was a constitutional one and had to be looked at in terms of constitutional rights. It wasn't an issue of drawing clear-cut demarcations amongst people cohabitating in Assam for centuries. Second, he was against any political interest attempting to define the 'Axamiya' identity on the basis of a single dominant language (or religion or tribe). The Movement was not about Assamese vs. Bengalis or Hindus vs. Muslims and he refused to support any strand of thought that sought to portray the Movement in those lines. Hazarika believed in the unity of all the sections that formed the larger 'Axamiya' community and always attempted to safeguard that. Third, the Movement

was a reflection of the needs of the common Axamiya society; the common Axamiya people were to be the prime focus of its developments. And any deviation from this core cause into narrow political interests was hugely abhorred by Hazarika. Fourth, he was strongly against the use of violence in any form. The youth, for Hazarika, were the future stake-holders of the Axamiya society and he expected them to be more sensitive in terms of leading a revolutionary movement. Non-violence, he believed, was the best possible way of making a voice heard with respect. . .

Now, a revelation of these points leads to another question- are these standpoints an immediate outcome of the upheaval that marked the Movement or are they reflections of something deeper in Hazarika's world-view? Though there are no theoretical references that I could cite here supporting my statement, it is undoubtedly clear that these songs cannot be seen as merely coloured by the Movement's developments. His life-long perceptions, his ideologies shaped by his 'social network' have a role to play in the way he perceived the Movement, which ultimately got reflected in the manner in which he composed songs about its various factors at its various stages. These 'influences' are usually relegated to the domain of the 'social' context of the artist/artiste in terms of reading any work of art and taken-for-granted. But in my belief, this attains a prime focus.

For instance, if the artistic imagination and endeavours of Hazarika were to be looked at in terms of his association with his close mentor, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, a number of Hazarika's songs become clearer; particularly his emphasis on perceiving his music as a tool of his social responsibility. Agarwala was one of the musical mentors in Hazarika's journey as an artiste. A close reading of his songs, nevertheless, reflects how at most places Agarwala assumes a latent influential force, going much beyond a mere 'mentor figure'. Particularly in terms of perceiving his role as an artiste, Hazarika seems to be very strongly guided by Agarwala's definition of the same. Why would he, otherwise, go down to the actual rallies and demonstrations and fearlessly become a part of the mass upsurge while the other artists chose to safeguard their individual careers. Indeed, it was a Movement against the State and it could have hampered Hazarika's music career permanently. Yet, believing in the revolutionary prowess of the youth, he contributed for its cause, first-hand. Perhaps, Agarwala's dictum that artists should shun fear, weakness and be midst the people to champion their rights appeared like an internalized 'necessity' for Hazarika.

Agarwala asserted that an artiste had the responsibility to build a new social order; he/she had to awaken the strength that lies dormant in the minds of the common people by becoming their voice and at the same time act as the 'conscience-keepers' of the masses. If closely examined, Hazarika's songs seem to carry these ideals in more or less a constant fashion; Agarwala's ideals become like some invisible mould lurking in the background. They echo the voice of the common people, not the ones who led the Movement or passed laws and orders relating to it. Rather, it is a voice of the citizens who were a witness to the changes that the Movement brought about as well a part of its huge tide. This persists even as he changes his tone from praise to scepticism post 1982. Had Hazarika been guided by narrow interests of being in the good books of the power-holders or Movement leaders, he would not assume this shift and end up inviting criticisms. It can be inferred that his support and participation in the Movement was probably a direct outcome of his belief in the 'power' of the youth to bring about positive changes in Assam. He only attempted to spread their message across the length and breadth of the state through the medium of songs.

It wasn't a persona) prerogative anymore; his songs were directed towards the 'Axamiya' to get united and realise the 'revolution' that was underway. He acted as a strong 'Conscience-keeper', reminding the people of what was 'just' as against the temptations of being led by the otherwise.

If one reads Hazarika's autobiography, it becomes clearly established how he continuously sought to learn, introspect as well as critically analyse Agarwala's ideologies throughout his lifetime. At places, he also subtly draws similarities between Agarwala and other influential figures he met all across the world; mainly in terms of their artistic determination and meaningful usage of the language of art. But what cannot be denied is Agarwala's constant presence throughout the narrative. But, to repeat, it is not possible to point out specific words or expressions and label them under the title of Myotiprasad Agarwala's influence'. There can be no cause-and-effect kind of relation established; it is only to be inferred.

At one level, even the latent connections between Hazarika's songs and Agarwala's constant presence in spirit might seem an overs implication of analysis. But the realisation that these influence(s) (no matter how latent or manifest) might remain unknown or unacknowledged if Hazarika's biographical trajectory is not examined is significant. Possibly, ignoring Hazarika's biography and Agarwala's strong presence in it might lead anyone believe that the songs Hazarika wrote were his reactions to the immediate dynamic social reality. Indeed, the immediate context did influence him; he was fascinated, encouraged, amazed and at the same time disturbed and disillusioned by what was happening around him. But he was not the only one witnessing the events in that objective lens. The fact that he chose to represent those emotions in a specific manner, assume the voluntary 'responsibility' of recording it in history through poetic compositions, reach out to people and remind them of their historical unity; all of these are his unique biography's disposition. It is a result of certain level of internalisation of ideals and a culture of resistance- Bishnu Rabha and Jyotiprasad Agarwala in terms of the Independence Movement and Paul Robeson at the heights of the Black Agitation in America-that set the basic infrastructure of Hazarika's life as a social individual which he then modified and used according to his own understanding and subjectivity. And it is in reading his biography with special emphasis to these factors that his songs become sociologically more meaningful.

Conclusion

'Songs', therefore, are not isolated, creative compositions meant solely for purposes of entertainment rather they are to be read as a social phenomenon. And the usage of the term 'social' for songs is not merely in reference to the contextual framework in which they are composed, rather to the subjective experiences of the one who composed them as well. Indeed, in that 'social', the socio-historical factors that influence the one who writes, composes and sings those songs form an important aspect and cannot be side-lined as irrelevant, The 'context' of the songs involves the contextual of the composer as well. Reading songs/music, or any form of art, in that light makes it sociologically much more contextualized and meaningful.

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