

Cultural Landscapes of Assamese Songs of Bhupen Hazarika and it's Trans-creation in Bangla

Dr. Mrityunjay Kumar Prabhakar
Asst. Professor, Drama & Theatre Arts,
Dept. of Rabindra Sangit, Dance & Drama, Sangeet Bhavana,
Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan, West Bengal

Email: mrityunjay.prabhakar@gmail.com

&

Dr. Rikimi Madhukaillya
Associate Professor, Cultural Studies
Pearl Academy, Mumbai

Abstract

This paper is going to look into the cultural and sociological aspects leading to a civilizational touch in both the lingual communities; Assamese & Bangla, through the musical rendering of Late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. It would be interesting to look into the same songs translated from Assamese to Bangla and observe the similarities and differences which happened during the trans-creation. This has happened because of the changing geographical and cultural landscape, apart from the linguistic nuances of Assamese and Bangla language. This paper would be focusing on few early songs of Late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, which are popular among the people of both the linguistic, cultural and geographical divisions.

Music is considered as the most abstract form of art in the world. Even painting and poetry, which are supposed to be dealing with abstraction, are less abstract than the music. It means that dealing and analyzing a piece of music is much more demanding and if we are talking of trans-creation of the same in other language and culture, this demands much deeper understanding of the same. As, these songs wasn't only translated from one language to another but from one culture to another at the same time. This paper would be looking at the nuances, complexities and other issues related with trans-creation of music in the light of Bhupen Hazarika's music.

Keywords- Bhupen Hazarika, Assamese song, Assamese Culture, Brahmaputra, Trans-creation, Translations into Bangla

Rivers & Seasons always had their niche in creative circuit. Seasonal changes used to give strength in struggle to live. Brahmaputra is the artery of the river civilization of Assam & lifestyle. This river has always been the carrier of the society-culture and economy. In one hand the river is providing livelihood and in another its destructive form harasses people with severe flood.

This paper is looking into the cultural and sociological aspects leading to a civilizational touch in both the lingual communities; Assamese & Bangla, through the musical rendering of Late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. It would be interesting to look into the same songs translated from Assamese to Bangla and observe the similarities and differences which happened during the trans-creation. This has happened because of the changing geographical and cultural landscape, apart from the linguistic nuances of Assamese and Bangla language. This paper has been focused on few early songs of Late Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, which are popular among the people of both the linguistic, cultural and geographical divisions. Music is considered as the most abstract form of art in the world. Even painting and poetry, which are supposed to be dealing with abstraction, are less abstract than the music. It means that dealing and analyzing a piece of music is much more demanding and if we are talking of trans-creation of the same in other language and culture, this demands much deeper understanding of the same. As, these songs wasn't only translated from one language to another but from one culture to another at the same time. This paper is looking at the nuances, complexities and other issues related with trans-creation of music in the light of Bhupen Hazarika's music.

Talking about Bhupen babu first association with Bangla cinema and music Pulak Bandopadhyay, Lyricist & singer, writes in his book *Kothai Kothai Rat Hoye Jai*, with whom he had experienced the composition of a number of his unforgettable songs, writes;

“The ex-supervisor of the Eastern India Motions Pictures of Kolkata K.K. Choudhury started a movie. It was Kodi O Komal. While listening to his script at his house at New Alipur, I asked him- who have you chosen for music? He asked me instead- Who do you think would be a good choice? I suggested Bhupen Hazarika. K.K Choudhury was, actually, a Bengali gentleman from Guwahati itself. At the mention of Bhupen Babu he blurted out- Correct, this is final! Even I was thinking about the same person.”¹

He further writes;

Bhupen Babu, by that time, had directed music in movies like “Erabator Sur”, “Shakuntala” etc. He was at Taliganj then. He already had a good rapport with Lata Mangeshkar. Bhupen Babu said- Convince K.K Chaudhuri, I'll make Lata sing for the lead female role in the songs. Lata Mangeshkar? I was astonished.”²

Then he elaborates Lata Mangeshkar's association with this film and singing Bangla songs in these lines;

¹ <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>

² <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>

*So, I convinced the producer of the film with a lot of zeal! However, the film did not fare well. But the songs in the film became quite popular; especially the two songs sung by Lataji – “Teer bedha pakhi/ ami jege thaki/ ahat ekaki neere” and “Asta akashe diner chita jwale.”*³

Both these songs were made after the two Assamese songs *Jonakore Raati Asomeere Maati* and *Osto Akashare Sopun Rohon Shani*. These two songs were also later dealt in the compositions *Jyotsnar Rati Pisu Tane Smriti* and *Asta Akasher Godhuli Rong*.

Bhupen Hazarika sang and composed many songs for Bengali film industry, for example- *Sagar Sangame Sator Ketesi Koto* for *Jiwan Trishna*. This was his first Assamese song translated into Bengali. Hemanta Mukhopadhyay *Gumgum gumgum meghe oi garajai* and *aka baka o pother*. Assamese song *Manuhe manuhor babe/ jodihe okono nabhabe* and translated as *Manushe manusher jonnie* and *Porohi puwate tulunga naote* became *Rongila bashite ke dake/ ghum ghum/ nischum/ rater mayai* which was written by Bandopadhyay.

Some Hazarika songs had touched the hearts of common man during the Bangladesh Freedom Struggle. Songs like *Ganga amar ma padma amar ma* (Prasad, July, 1987, page no 13), *Manush manusher jonye*, *Dola he dola*, *Ai ai chute ai*, *Ganga boicho keno* made Hazarika close to the masses.

The range of songs Hazarika has sung, composed or written is a wide spread. Patriotic songs like *Axom Amar Rupohi gunaru nai xexh, bharotore purbo dexot surjya utha dex*. The beauty of the land in the eastern corner of India, Assam Dr. Hazarika praises about the uniqueness of Assamese motherland. Here the researcher noticed that the lyrics of the songs are composed describing each and every detail of Assam. The word Axom has been given more emphasis. In this song the cultural harmony and social condition of Assam has been highlighted. The song was written in 1960 when linguistic conflict started, therefore, Linguistic problem was highlighted in the song. In one of the line Dr. Hazarika has mentioned about it. He describes that with assimilation of the different language of Assam someone can think of a prosperous and peaceful Assam.

Other popular songs like *Buku hom hom kore mor aai* was a part of the film “Maniram Dewan” which was released on 1963, which was originally written by Hazarika himself in 1961. It was the time of political and social upsurge in Assam to restore the dignity of the language. The mother & Son in the song is a metaphor for the patriotic feeling a common citizen had for the land he was fighting for.

Manuhe Manuhor babe is another song which was popular in both the languages, Assamese & Bengali. The note of the song was influenced by a North Carolina Country song called, *Hang down your head Tom Dooley*, based on the 1866 murder of a woman named Laura Foster in Wilkes County, North Carolina, allegedly by Tom Dula. Violence had wreaked Nagaland, Mizoram and

³ <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>

parts of Assam and curfew had been imposed to restore peace in the region. It was his song Manuher Manuher Babe that had struck a chord among the people and brought back normalcy to the states. The same song has now been declared as the song of the millennium by the BBC Bengali Service.

In the song *Bistirno Parore, Oxonkhyo jonore* Hazarika has used phonetically powerful words in this song for the change in the society like “UNMADONA”, “VEER”, “PITRITTO” etc. The cultural, political, economic, social reform of Assamese society has entered through the metaphor into the song. Even it was seen that the people who lives in the village know the lyrics of the Assamese version and considered the song as the regional anthem of Assam. The song has been translated into Bangla with similar words, but the Burha Luit (Brahmaputra’s another name) has been replaced by Ganga.

As we all know, the original river in the song was not Ganga at all, but Luit, the raging, ferocious Red River that carves its tumultuous way through our valley. The only “male” river in India, it is truly the son the Brahma, Brahmaputra, in the ferocity of its power as well as in the all-pervasiveness of its influence over the lives of the people who live here. But the Luit of his song is Burha (old), perhaps with waning powers, impotent as it flows nisobde, nirobey, (quietly) down, even as battles rage on its banks, and injustice piled on injustice breaks the backs of the less privileged. Is the river weary of, or merely indifferent to, the mayhem taking place on its banks? When the song was translated first into Bengali, then later into Hindi, the need to match the universality of the sentiments of the song made the transference of the river, from Luit to Ganga, an imperative. For it is Ganga, not the Brahmaputra, which is the quintessentially “Indian” river.

As, I have mentioned earlier in the paper, Music is supposed to be the most abstract art form available in the world. If, we look at the very simple meaning of abstractness, it denotes its farness from the actuality or reality, a thing that never follows any chronological time and space. It’s like the myths which covers large time span of a society but always remain fresh in the mind of the inhabitants of that place without any sense of time and space, as we walk into our dreams leaving all the questions regarding time, object (including human) and space. Music travels in the same way. It would be amazing to know that still we could be singing the tunes invented by our forefathers of nomadic ages. But it is true that as like myths music also comes to us generation by generation varying, verifying and re-evaluating itself, molding easily by the need of the people and circumstances. And, as Dr. Mrityunjay Prabhakar writes in a paper ‘Denoting Cultural Significance in a piece of Music of Bhupen Hazarika’ writes;

*Through a certain piece of music, we can identify its genesis and the development that society has gone through during a larger span of time.*⁴

⁴ Prabhakar, M. K., *Denoting Cultural Significance in a piece of Music of Bhupen Hazarika*, Sangeet Galaxy, Vol. 4, No. 1, Jan 2015.

Bhupen Hazarika, the legend of Hindustani music tradition from Assam, is very much a part of those nuances. Listening him is like taking a dip into the cultural, sociological and civilizational life of a particular society, and their human species. His music takes us back to the roots, where the relationship of man and nature is unbreakable. In his music nature is present with its species, trees, mountains, breeze and rivers. The music and voice of Bhupen Hazarika is not just a creation of an individual but it becomes the representative voice of the nature, culture and society of that particular area and thus even the last person of that very civilization got his space in his music and songs. He is a musician and singer who have recreated the magic of folk songs of Assam. But I don't think that the music he has created and songs which he has sung remain the folk songs. He brought them into a new category called popular music, although, very much near to the old form and that's why so distinctive from the other music of popular category. His music and songs are fresh, airy and gives a new experience as a whole.

His music which he has recreated by using the tunes of the folk music of Assam for singing new lyrics and poems become voices of the speechless persons. The soul of the tunes/music remains the same but the content of the song changes in a focused manner. This is the type of change human being always experimenting with the civilizational change in the society by adding new experiences of life into the traditional tunes or music. It is why it looks so natural. Several highly appreciated and popularly accepted songs of Bhupen Hazarika are the instances of such experiments including, *Dola re Dola*, *O Ganga*, *Us Din ki Baat Hai* and others.

Songs and melodies like these poses challenge to translations and trans-creations. Translation or trans-creation of such songs and melodies are really tough, as you can't translate the whole social-geographical-cultural background of the same. The experience of rivers and fishing communities may be the same for the whole world but the feel and ambience will always be different. It's the 'Locale', which moulds the human beings and species in a different way. It gives them a different identity, which is cosmic in its nature. Our rendering of the heart and touch has been shaped differently through the nature grown in a 'Locale'. You can translate a song (words) not the 'Locale'. That's why 'Luit' becomes 'O Ganga' when translated from Assamese to Bangla.

These songs and melodies also let us understand and learn that any civilization, how much advanced it may be, has to deal with the natural calamities. So, it is better for the human beings to respect the grievances of the nature and rebuild the same organic but dialectical relationships with it which earlier human species have developed with their own experiences. Music, one of the most ancient art forms, can help us in this direction, especially, the indigenous music based in its cultural roots whether in original or translation or trans-literation. And to explore those possibilities legends like Bhupen Hazarika has already shown the path.

References:

1. Baruah, Bhabesh, *Asomiya samajoloi Bhupendar Abodan*, Guwahati, Koustuv Prakashan (1st Edition), 2002
2. Das, Hiranya Kumar, *Mahakash Mahasagar Aru Bhupen Hazarika*, Gaziabad, Mano Publication (1st Edition), 2004
3. Dutta, Arup Kumar, *Bhupen Hazarika: The Roving Minstrel*, Guwahati, Rupa Publication. (1st Edition), 2002
4. Dutta, Dilip Kumar, *Bhupen Hazarika Geet Aru Jibon Rotha*, Kolkatta, Sribhumi Publication (1st Edition), 1982
5. Hazarika Bhupen, *Dhinge Dipange*, Dibrugarh, Bani Prakashan(1st Edition), 1993
6. Majumdar, Pavitra, *Bhupendar Hote Eri Oha Dinbur*, Bongaigaon, Santyamani Majumdar (1st Edition) 2002

Webliography:

1. www.bhupenhazarika.com
2. www.onlinesivsagar.com
3. www.goldenvoiceofassam.com
4. <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>
5. <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>
6. <http://www.enajori.com/?p=524>