Section IV: The multifaceted genius

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If you remember *Rudaali* that won actor Dimple Kapadia her only National Film Award, you will realise why it is important to tell the enduring love story of Kalpana Lajmi, the director of the dark but brilliant film. Set in a village in Rajasthan, *Rudaali* is a poignant ballad that explores a woman’s heart as she takes the decision that will haunt her for the rest of her life. But the dark melancholy of the professional mourners in the film somehow mutates into an uplifting and inspiring story of personal choice and hope of its auteur in real life.

How do you describe a woman who left her home at 17, an age when most girls are trying to decide between pink and red nail polish and the relative merits of colleges, to live in with a man 28 years older than her? Unconventional? Misguided? Whatever it is, 40 years later, filmmaker Kalpana Lajmi was by the bedside of 85-year-old singer-composer Bhupen Hazarika, her companion of four decades, when he breathed his last.

Ironically, when Hazarika turned 80 he offered to marry Lajmi, who politely turned him down saying if they didn’t realise the need for a piece of paper to seal the bond these many years, what has changed now? Lajmi, 57, said in an interview, her mother until recently kept persuading her to get married to Hazarika. Lajmi, who had Hazarika sing the heart-wrenching number ‘Dil Hoom Hoom Kare’ in *Rudaali*, couldn’t have had it easy in a society that frowns upon such relationships. There are many arguments in favour of and against marriage, and Lajmi must have faced every single one of them in her 40 years of relationship with Hazarika. If she had ever wavered in a moment of weakness, no one would know. But Lajmi, a feminist, once said Hazarika never consumed alcohol or smoked and had remained faithful to one woman for the past 40 years, so what is wrong with staying in a live-in relationship with him? She was 17 when she met Hazarika, 45 at the time. Lajmi herself said in interviews that Hazarika, a tremendously talented but insular and temperamental man, had reservations against their staying together without getting married. Hazarika had separated from his wife at the time and was reluctant to get into another marriage. But Lajmi’s perseverance triumphed. Lajmi was never apologetic or reserved about her feelings for Hazarika. That she loved him dearly was apparent to whoever spoke to her. In a town near Guwahati, tactless reporters questioned her status, while she was shielding Hazarika from them during a video shoot. “Who is she to stop us from meeting Hazarika?” “I’m his wife,” Lajmi answered. That is the truth. No matter what that piece of paper says or doesn’t.

*Courtesy: IBN Live, Nov 5, 2011*
GUWAHATI, Nov 5 : Born to Nilakanta Hazarika, a high school teacher, and Shantipriya Hazarika on September 8, 1926 at Sadiya, Bhupen Hazarika, the legendary musician, gave Assamese music a new dimension with his songs, most of which were penned and set to tune by himself. He also provided the sagging Assamese film industry a new momentum. Besides, Bhupen Hazarika was the pioneer in turning music and cinema making into whole-time occupations in the State. In the process, he emerged as the biggest crowd puller in the public functions of the State. Also a popular writer, journalist and editor, he was elected president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, the apex body of the Assamese litterateurs, in 1993. This honour was conferred on him in recognition to his role as a leading author and poet. He has to his credit nearly one thousand lyrics and over 15 major prose titles.

He was the recipient of the 2001 Padma Bhusan honour of the Government of India, the 2008 Asam Ratna Award of the Assam Government. So far, he is the lone winner of the Dada Saheb Phalke Award (1992) – the highest honour in the country’s field of cinema – along with the Sangeet Ratna honour of the Sangeet Natak Akademi (2009) from Assam. These two honours were conferred on him for his lifetime contributions to the Indian cinema and music respectively. A recipient of the prestigious Srimanta Sankardev Award of the Assam Government in 1988, Dr Hazarika was the architect of the movement that culminated in the establishment of the Jyoti Chitraban Film Studio at Kahlipara in Guwahati. This is the first full-fledged film studio of the State. Practically, it was also for his single-handed efforts that the national recognition to the Satriya dance came in 2001. It thus acquired the status of a major
The multifaceted genius

Indian dance form of the country. The people of the State had been agitating for that recognition to Sattriya dance for about 50 years. Bhupen Hazarika was then the chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. He served the Akademi in that capacity between 1999 and 2004.

The people of the State have been demanding for quite a long time the Bharat Ratna to Dr Hazarika but to no avail. Bhupen Hazarika had his schooling in various schools at Dhubri, Guwahati and Tezpur. He did his matriculation from Tezpur High School in 1940, Intermediate in Arts (IA), appearing in the final examination from Cotton College, in 1942 and then joined the Banaras Hindu University (BHU) to do his BA (1944) and MA in political science (1946).

He then left for America to do his Ph D research in Mass Communication in the Columbia University. In New York, he fell in love with Priyambada M Patel, daughter of a Gujarati family settled in Uganda. They got married in 1950 in New York and their son Tez was born in 1952.

But the couple could not stay together for a longer period. Economic hardship caused by the injustice meted out to Dr Hazarika, which forced him to resign from his teacher’s job in Gauhati University was at the root of his ‘separation’ with Priyambada.

He started composing lyrics (Agnijugar Firingoti Moi) and music (Agnijugar... and Moina Ketiya Ahili Toi) for cinema (Indramaloti, 1939), songs when he was only 13-year-old. Prior to that, he composed the lyrics of Kusumbor Putra Srisankar Gurue Dharichil Namare Taan and set it to tune when he was only 11-year-old. His singing abilities meanwhile started earning accolades for him from the people and it was none other than the doyen of modern Assam literature Sahityarathi Lakshminath Bezbarua, who blessed him with kisses after hearing him singing at a function of the Cotton Collegiate High School. The maestro was only five-year-old then. He sang for the first time for a gramophone record when he was only about 11 year-old. Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rava composed the two songs — Kashate kalashi loi jai oi rachaki bai and Ulahate nachi-bagi holi biyakul — for which the young Bhupen Hazarika rendered his voice in the gramophone record.


The maestro rendered his services as music director of as many as 36 Assamese films, eight Bengali films and five Hindi films.

Dr Hazarika was awarded with the Swarna Kamal as the best music director of the country for his music in Chameli Memsaab at the 23rd National Film Festival of India in 1976. He was presented the Gold Disc by the Gramophone Company of India in 1978 and he is the lone musician from this part of India having a long-playing record of the Japanese version of one’s own songs.

On top of his contributions to the field of music with his creations- lyrics and musical compositions, the maestro leaves behind 15 compilations of his prose works. He has also a published work for the children — Bhupen Mamar Geete-Mate, A, Aa, Ka, Kha and a transcript autobiography — Moi eti jajabor. The book that derived its title from one of his highly popular songs that starts with the same words dwelling upon his nomadic lifestyle. This song was perhaps responsible for his being described as ‘the roving minstrel’. Noted writer, columnist Arup Dutta has a popular book on Bhupen Hazarika with this title.

It needs mention here that Bhupen Hazarika travelled widely as a delegate to conferences on mass communication, music, poetry, performing art and cinema. He edited the 149th-50th edition of the New India, which is the annual journal of Columbia University. He was also the editor of the four editions of the art journal Gati in 1965, eight editions of the mini magazine Bindu in 1970, monthly Amar Pratindhi between 1965 and 1980 and quarterly magazine Pratidhvani between 1983 and 90.

The Asam Sahitya Sabha conferred him the Sahityacharyya title on February 8, 2008. The Assam Government also presented him with a lifetime achievement award at a function held at the Ravindra Bhawan in the city in the evening that day.

Courtesy: The Assam Tribune, Nov 6, 2011.
The “Bard of Brahmaputra” as he was fondly called, the legendary singer Bhupen Hazarika had other names, including “Jajabor” (the wanderer). Indeed, he wandered through all the hills, dales and plains of the North-east, picking up traditional and tribal music in addition to his native Assamese, and interpreted them superbly to the rest of the country and to the whole world. He was a poet, composer, singer, actor, journalist, and litterateur and film director all rolled into one. He was one of the most highly educated musicians of the country, an MA in Political Science, and a PhD in Mass Communication from Columbia University (USA). In USA he met the great singer Paul Robeson and transformed his famous number “Old Man River” into “Bistirno Parore”, a megahit. Dr Hazarika composed, wrote and sang for many Hindi and Bengali films. He described both the rivers Ganga and Padma as “Amar Ma”(My mother) in one of his compositions, bridging both the Bengals. Numerous books, lyrics, essays, poems and children’s rhymes flowed out of his prolific creative brain. He produced quite a few films in which he composed music and sang, such as Era Batar Sur, Shakuntala, Pratidhani, in Assamese, and Rudali, Papaha, Saaz, Mil Gaya Manzil in Hindi. Bhupen Hazarika has now left this world for singing to the gods. The void created by his demise will never be filled. (The writer is a renowned sarod player of West Bengal)

Fond Memories of a Schoolmate
‘He was a Special, Multi-faceted Person’

Hemendra Prasad Barooah

I knew Bhupen from our schooldays in Tezpur. I was just seven years old and was staying at my peha deo’s (uncle’s) place. Bhupen and I became good friends from school and we were of the same age. I can never forget the first song he sang there, Kaxote kolosi lojai O rasoki bai. I could recognise that he was a special talent. There he was guided by icons Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyotiprasad Agarwala which helped him shape his career.But the Tezpur association was brief, for just about a year. I went to Calcutta and he to Dhaka for higher studies. Our next meeting was in the US, after about two decades. Coincidentally, we were still students. I was pursuing an MBA in Harvard and he was in Columbia University. Those were the early fifties and it didn’t take much time to know each other again as to my knowledge there were hardly any Assamese students in the US at that time.Our next association was in Calcutta where I settled. Bhupen had come over to Calcutta and was residing at Tollygunge. I was amazed by the mass appeal that he had in Calcutta or for that matter, Bengal. Aami ek jajabor was the number that stole many a heart not just in Bengal but in Bangladesh as well.Bhupen, as I knew him, was never inclined to sing songs composed by others. He would never go beyond his songs. I introduced him to writer-composer Parbat Prasad Barua of Sonari. Bhupen later sang two of his creations.He was a filmmaker as well. Once, he wanted to make a colour film. I promised to finance Shakuntala. But I realised that I had made a commitment in haste. So I asked him in jest, “I will help you only if you offer me the role of King Dushyanta.” He was taken aback by the “term” I set and never took the risk. A year later, a businessman offered to finance the film.I had in a way introduced Kalpana Lajmi to Bhupen some three decades back. Kalpana wanted to direct a movie and it was then that I took her to him. The friendship started then. She had directed a film Ek Pal, which I had funded. Their association grew stronger after Bhupen started living in Mumbai.Priyam Patel, who he got married to, was a good dancer. But Bhupen was never the family person. He was out-and-out an artiste.My last meeting was just about a month before he passed away in Mumbai. He wanted to return to Assam but the doctors said he was not in a condition to do so. I still remember how he held my hand in the hospital and how he reacted to the Bihu songs played in the background.Bhupen was a special person, a multi-faceted personality, and I can’t think of anyone replacing him.I have lost a dear friend.

Courtesy: Telegraph, Nov 9, 2011
The multifaceted genius

Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust on them. Dr Bhupen Hazarika was not born great. He was born in an obscure town of Assam in a lower middle class family winning national and international fame hitherto unprecedented in the history of Assam by sheer personal merit and natural talent. Greatness was never thrust on him, for whatever honour, recognition and adulation he received in his lifetime, was what he truly deserved.

When his name came up for consideration for the Dada Saheb Phalke award, the matter was taken up at the highest level. I was looking after the Foreign Affairs Department of the Congress Party when I got a call from PM’s house to meet him. In the meeting, the PM straightaway brought up the subject of giving the Dada Saheb Phalke Award to Dr Bhupen Hazarika and amongst other things, said, “Kirip, is it not right that giving the Phalke award to Dr Bhupen Hazarika will send a positive signal not only to Assam but also to Bengal and even to Bangladesh? I am informed that he is very widely admired amongst the people in those areas as well?” A die-hard Bhupen admirer, I could hardly conceal my excitement and needed no preparation to burst out before the PM, “Sir, there cannot be a better gift to the people of Assam than this. No one deserves it better than Bhupen Hazarika for he is not only a singer but a unique personality who not only sings, but who writes the lyrics and composes the music of his songs as well. Moreover, he is a film maker, a director, writer, a social reformer and a revolutionary thinker who is admired by millions.” The PM had said, “Yes, but is it also not a fact that his leftist past and his revolutionary zeal at times drag him to some degrees of controversy? And there are a section who says that his songs have been a source of inspiration to extremists elements as well?” I had to refute that and said, “Sir, I think in the 50s to 70s, many passed through a phase of leftist ideology. But Bhupenda has primarily been a staunch nationalist and unifier of people. His songs have revolutionary traits but they are always constructive, humane and reformist in nature. His songs do not divide but unite people, the message had forcefully been of universal love and peace for mankind.” The PM must have been little amused by my excited assertions, and may be because of that, deliberately asked me some provocative questions as well. But I was prepared by then and must have made him happy when I ended by saying, “Sir, all geniuses, including you, are also human beings after all!” The Prime Minister with his inimitable dry smile dismissed me and said, “Ok. You may go now. But keep this strictly to yourself.”

But I could hardly control my excitement and wanted to be the first person to give the good news to Bhupenda. I informed the developments to Tarun da, who was then a Central Minister, asking him to take up the case with KP Singh Deo who was then the I & B minister. I also collected Bhupenda’s phone number from my friend Ajit Bhuyan.

Later one evening, when Prime Minister’s Private Secretary Ramu Damudaran called me to come to PM House to tell me that the file has been cleared, my joy knew no bounds. Seeing my obvious exhilaration, Ramu said, “Sir, why don’t you call him up from here and tell him?” The call was made from the PM’s house and the phone was picked by Kalpana Lajmi who did not know me from Adam. I introduced myself and when Bhupenda came on line, he greeted me with his characteristic warmth. After the pleasantries, I immediately went to the subject of giving due national recognition to Bhupenda’s works and Bhupenda in his natural childlike innocent manner started complaining about how he was wronged recently in getting some national level
award. I stopped him short and told him, “Bhupenda, forget all this. How will you feel if you win the Dada Saheb Phalke Award?” Bhupenda disbelievingly said, “Oh, why are you joking like this? Do you think they will consider me for Phalke award?” I said, “Bhupenda, I am not joking. Your name has been cleared at the highest level and I have it from the horse’s mouth. We are so proud of you.” “Hmm. At the highest level! Is it really so?” said Bhupenda and put down the phone abruptly. I realised he was in a state of amazement, not comprehending the significance of the information as it was coming from a most unlikely source! I was, however, happy at getting the honour of being the first person to convey this news to the legend. Anyway, Bhupenda called me back sometime later to ascertain all the facts and I was very happy to see that he was quite thrilled on learning about the award.

The reason for my elaborating on his personal anecdote is because it is relevant to what I want to say about Bhupen Hazarika today. Also because many tend to identify me as a political opponent of Dr Bhupen Hazarika because of one electoral affair and I am at a loss to know whether to accept that incident as one of derision or complement to me!

Life has its own ironies and things are seldom put in its proper perspective, more so when viewed from a single dimensional perpendicularity of set prejudice. Bhupenda’s personal charisma and glamour outshone his contemporaries as well as his predecessors and by the end of the century, he was the tallest distinguishable face of Assam in the national and international arena. His phenomenal mass appeal and the versatility of his multifaceted talent can and will in all probability be rationally diagnosed in a realistic manner only after a thorough scrutiny by serious researchers of future generations. There were other singing legends like S D Barman, Hemant Mukherji, Kishore Kumar etc. who also composed the music of the songs they sang. But in blending the music to one’s own lyrics and then to sing the songs to the multitude in remotest areas, directly man-to-man and in a glamorous style, was the singular forte of one and only Dr Bhupen Hazarika. And how he connected with the people with dramatic interjections and soliloquies in between the songs! I think many loved his mannerisms more than even the melody of his songs!

And what lyrics those were. Be it the patriotic songs hailing a new born Bangladesh or emphasizing the sacrifices of the dying soldiers during the Chinese aggression, be it the pathos of a lost Rongmon in the storm, be it the courage of socially isolated commoners like Sarudoi and Sorukon daring to break caste-barriers, or the description of a Monalisha Lyngdoh of Shillong, of his flight to Tezpur, his gypsy life, his depiction of himself as the Nilakantha who had digested poison, the swan song of the brothers driving autorickshaw, Dr Hazarika simply wove masterpieces after masterpieces after masterpieces after masterpieces. And how he connected with the people with dramatic interjections and soliloquies in between the songs! I think many loved his mannerisms more than even the melody of his songs!

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Bhupen Hazarika was elected to the State Assembly from the Naoboisa constituency in North Lakhimpur in 1967 as an independent candidate. During his tenure as MLA, Bhupen Hazarika was vocal in contemporary issues and his stand truly reflected a visionary’s ideal and agenda. MLA Bhupen Hazarika was a perfect blend of a political thinker, a humanist and a nationalist.

**Warning against extremism**

On May 21, 1971, the Assam Assembly was discussing the issue of unemployment. Bhupen Hazarika participated in it and said: “Honourable Speaker Sir, I won’t say much, nor do I want to repeat. I am happy that honourable member Debeswar Sarma refers to the Assam revolution. Phani Bora says it is not a scientific path. It is time for a change in the socio-economic structure. I fully agree with the view. However, I am not talking about Assamese revolution, Bihari revolution or Bengali revolution. It is a revolution of the deprived, the have-nots. The government must find a connection among these. When I was in Russia, I came across senior citizens who were happy with employment for local engineers in a river dam. This was indeed a positive response. We must be able to realize the logic behind such sentiments. We must see the feeling of being neglected which is acting behind the rise of regionalism, blend with an all-India perspective and pave the way for love of humanity, the world. The path shown by the great men – Gandhi or Karl Marx – are being followed by succeeding generations, yet they make mistakes, they slip way form the path. I agree with Phani Bora that it is time for assessing employment potentiality in an objective manner. National integrity would be bolstered with economic assurance and integrity of regional deficiencies. Dulal Barua says economics is a big issue. Please don’t take it for narrow mindedness, but it impacts national integrity. May be organizations like ONGC, Regional Research Laboratory are of national stature, but they are obliged to ensure local employment. Let me repeat- Assamese revolution, Bengali revolution or Bihari revolution are irrelevant. It is time to change our mindset. A sense of deprivation is the root cause of clashes between different communities. The sense of deprivation manifests in communal violence. Employment quota for the local people is a must to prevent clashes.”

Bhupen Hazarika delivered an elaborate speech on the education cut motion in Assam Assembly on June 30, 1967. He said: “John Dewey, the realistic educationist, said there are the three aspects of education in the world today – mental, social and physical. Unfortunately we are still experimenting in the field of education, for two decades from 1947 to 1967. Children at a primary school are taught to always speak the truth, whereas the political leaders resort to lie every day. I agree with Madam Pushpalata Das. There should be a monthly meeting between teachers and guardians. I know about the style of functioning in Tolstoy Education Fund, Rabindranath Tagore’s Shanti Niketan and the adult education programme initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. The Education Department ignores psychological and socially analysis, Why can’t we transform the schools in Assam into a Shanti Niketan?”

Opposition MLA Sailen Medhi suggested introduction of oil and tea technology in Gauhati University on July 4, 1967. Bhupen Hazarika eagerly supported him and said: “The university curriculum is a dynamic process always. Unfortunately it has not been so in case of our universities and the Education Ddepartment. The Education minister says the curriculum is technical and human oriented, the finance minister says the curriculum is not job-oriented. The current situation demands an employment oriented education system, that will also help in self-employment. The Assamese people apparently believe that the technical jobs are not for them. The Assamese people think they are not fit for industries. Sir, I would request the Education Minister to include these two subjects of oil and tea technology in our university.”

*Extracts from Nilamani Sen Deka’s book ‘Bidhanxabhar Majat Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Dr Bhupen Hazarika’, published in The Sentinel, 15 Nov, 2011*
Memories of Childhood, Wrapped in a Rainbow
Author Recalls the Formative Years of Bhupenda Under Mentors Bishnu Prasad and Jyotiprasad

GUEST COLUMN
Bhupendrapada shared an intimate bond with Tezpur. It was here that he spent his formative years and completed his school education. How can I not recall the rainbow of memories infused with wonderful moments spent in his company? Is it possible for me to forget my friendship since our school days? The legendary singer had begun his illustrious career in Tezpur. Bhupenda’s house was situated to the south of Polo Ground, which used to be the prime spot for sports in those days in Tezpur. Little Bhupen used to enjoy watching football there. One particular player with shoulder-length hair effortlessly grabbed the attention of onlookers, who used to cheer whenever the ball was passed to him. This was none other than cultural icon Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. While pursuing his education in Calcutta, Rabha had led the Saint Polo Club and, later, the football, volleyball and cricket teams of Ripon College. Renowned player Putul Das, who played for the famed Mohun Bagan, could also be seen practising in this field frequently.

One fine day, two gentlemen — Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Jyotiprasad Agarwala — suddenly arrived at Bhupenda’s residence to meet his father, Neel Hazarika. The eight-year-old Bhupen was awe-struck, even a tad scared to suddenly find footballer Rabha at his home. It was a proposal that had made Bishnu Prasad and Jyotiprasad approach the singer’s father — to allow the child to sing for them. A few days ago, Kartik Chakraborty of the Calcutta-based Senula Company had approached Jyotiprasad with the appeal to include something from Assam in the company’s activities. It was eventually decided that the celebrated playwright along with his friend, Bishnu Prasad, would record two of his plays, Joymoti and Santi Konwari. And they wanted young Bhupen to sing for these two plays. The two icons also came to an agreement with Chakraborty for establishing a music school in Tezpur.

Their joint efforts resulted in the opening of Sangeet Vidyalaya in 1940, which was later renamed as Jyoti Kala Kendra. Then one day young Bhupen set off for Calcutta in the company of Jyotiprasad, Bishnu Prasad, Phani Sarma and Swarga Jyoti Barua. On reaching their destination, they recorded the plays at Calcutta Hotel. Here Bhupenda lent his melodious voice to the song composed by Bishnu Prasad, Kalashi loi jai o rosoki bai. This was Dada’s first recorded song. Bhupenda’s first playback score was for Jyotiprasad’s Assamese feature film, Indra Malot. This was the beginning of Bhupenda’s long musical journey. Bishnu Prasad also introduced Bhupenda to Baan Theatre, the state’s first modern stage and auditorium where Dada sang and acted. He also introduced Dada to Padmanath Gohain Barua and his Banti Press and Banti Publication. Both of them used to wander about on a bicycle, discussing varied topics. When Bhupenda stepped into his youth, Bishnu Prasad not only enlightened him on various nuances of music but also introduced him to the rich ethnic culture of the state. This was how the singer won the hearts of every creed, every community.

It was through Bishnu Prasad and Jyotiprasad that Bhupendrapada got associated with the Indian People’s Theatre Association, through which he got the first exposure to the rich Indian cultural arena. He got to meet film and theatre personalities like Balraj Sahni, Raj Kapoor, Ashok Kumar, Kaifi Azmi, A.K. Hangal and Deena Pathak. Today Bhupenda is no longer in our midst but his memories and immortal compositions will remain forever.

(The writer is the son of Bishnu Prasad Rabha, one of Hazarika’s mentors)

Courtesy: The Telegraph, Nov 8, 2011

Bhupen as a young lad with Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Bishnuprasad Rabha and Phani Sharma (1937)
“He loves music and in his own creative way, his violin has expressed my voice,” wrote Dr Bhupen Hazarika about my first solo violin album, “Dr Bhupen Hazarika’s Voice in Violin”, released on December 11, 1993. Needless to mention the drive that I derived from these words, had become a lifetime treasure for me, indeed. In Bhopen Da’s songs the rendition of his voice in unison with the lyrics and tunes create a uniquely beautiful effect which set them a class apart. With my violin I tried my best to bring about the same beautiful effect of Bhopen Da’s songs. Eventually I ended up recording 27 numbers in the form of three audio cassettes in 1993, 1994 and 2001 respectively. Each of his songs has a different kind of expression. Not only that, within a single song itself, his ways of rendering his voice were varied and were amazingly in sync with the corresponding lyrics that he had penned for that particular song. One apt example to cite would be “Bimurta Mur Nishati…” , one of his greatest creations wherein one can find these variations easily. While rendering the part “Duroir Artanadar Nadi” his voice was distinctly different from the “Kampana Kaatar” part. Again, while repeating the part, “Komal Aghat Prati Aghat”, the variation in his rendering style got highlighted. The unique vocal expressions in his song, “Moi Jetia Ei Jibanar Maya Eri Gusi Jam” make it extremely touching. However, I cannot but make a special mention of his song, “Notun Nimati Niyarare Nisha”, I can never forget those moments of hard toil during which I happily used to try picking up the “Nohoi Nishati…” part of the song in my violin the way it was sung by Bhopenda. I vividly remember how doing that in itself was a challenge.

I believe, one of the striking features of Bhopen da’s songs is the sweet pronunciation of the difficult words used in the lyrics. An example is “Bistime Paraer Asankhya Janare”. In violin, I tried to express the voice of Bhopenda by changing my bowing style and using “meer” and “gamak” wherever necessary. The three most difficult songs at the time of my expressing them in my violin are “Bimurta Mor Nishati”, “Moi Jetia Ei Jibanar” and “Natun Nimati Niyarare Nisha”. I had practiced more than a thousand times for each of the three songs before going for recording. The creative genius in Bhopen Da inspired me to become a perfectionist at my work.

I recorded Voice in Violin in October, 1993. Before starting the project I wanted to have Bhopenda’s permission to go ahead with the idea. My wife insisted upon the same. Accordingly, we went to meet him at his residence at Nizarapar, Guwahati. That was our first personal meeting with the legend. Talking to Bhopenda was itself an inspiration. He blessed me for my endeavour. The magic and ingenuity of Bhopenda’s compositions has touched many a souls. Time and again, I recall the words, “He loves music and in his own creative way his violin has expressed my voice”.

Courtesy: The special supplement of The Assam Tribune, Nov 15, 2011
People who knew Dr. Bhupen Hazarika here in Bollywood are finding it difficult to express their feelings in one slot. On the other hand I consider it as my fortune to pen down this article as it gave me the opportunity to learn and record the kind of respect and affections that our very own Dr. Bhupen Hazarika could command here in Mumbai. This multifaceted legend did play many roles as a singer, composer, lyricist, musician, film director, academician, actor, writer and as chairperson of Sangeet Natak Akademi (1998-2003) who influenced all by some or the other way. His contribution to enrich the cultural stream of Assam, and of the rest of the country can’t be described in few pages. We must appreciate the fact that his journey to Bollywood opened the regional boundary of art for the benefit of music lovers of the entire country.

Farooq Sheikh who worked with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in Ek Paal said: “Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was an extremely talented person who essentially held two spaces very comfortably, one as the most prominent face of entire Northeast and secondly as extra ordinarily talented multifaceted artist who composed, sang, directed, acted with highest degree of compassion. He was full of joy and we knew lot of people in common and attended various functions together. He never fell sort of energy for uplifting the society, not only for Indian society but he had a broad spectrum i.e. the world society. He was an exceptional personality who is going to be missed even more.

Dimple Kapadia, found time out of her tight schedule and conveyed her message over phone. She interacted with the music maestro
closely during Rudaali. This is what she had to say, “Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was a remarkable man who was extremely gentle. He was very compassionate and holding a huge amount of talent within him. He was a lovely human being and his demise is a big loss to us. Along with him we have also lost his extra ordinary talent and his deep insight. In spite of being highly talented he was a very simple and humble human being.”

Similarly Raveena Tandon, the lead actress of Daman candidly showcases her respect and says, “Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was a father figure to me. I remember the moon light nights; where during the shooting of Daman we would all sit around a campfire and he would sing for us in the tea estates of Assam…that will etched in my memory forever.”

Ila Arun, singer-cum-actress who was a part of Chingari recalls the musician as beloved Dada who used to appreciate her singing. She says: “As I have been repeatedly telling it to all, the demise of Dada is a great loss to all of us, especially for the common people. His music was always special as it made difference in the life of common people. He innovated and reinvented Folk Music in India. His music carries the smell of the soil. On November 6 when I went to the hospital to pay my last tribute I was amazed to see the response. He was the folk singer whose lok sangeet turned him to Lok Nayak. He could bring changes to Assam and to the entire north-eastern region through his lok sangeet as he was the Loka Sangitagya of the world class. He was a complete man – he was a lyricist, composer, director, actor, singer, musician, in short he was the reflection of an entire society. Whatever he wrote, he always depicted Assam, even though the social scenario kept on changing but he made it a point to record the transition through his creation. Bhupenda was a special man and the people of Assam treated him specially. I could see the mass gathered to pay their homage in different TV channels and could realize even though he was living like an ordinary man in Mumbai, he was an extra ordinary man, a special man in his native State. He could command three generations to come forward. Personally I was close with Dada and Kalpana and I also acted in Chingari and he used to like me a lot. May his soul rest in peace forever. As token of respect I would love to follow his footsteps so that I can bring changes to common people’s life.”

Nadira Zaheer Babbar the renowned artist and a member of the advisory board of Sangeet Natak Academy, knew the legend very well. This is what she had to say about him. “Bhupenda was one of the most respected persons of our country. He was deeply rooted to the folk culture of Assam and he tried his level best to bring it to the world stage. I was highly influenced by his voice, singing and compositions. Most of his works are inspired by his state, the beauty of his mother land. His song Ganga is immensely popular among all strata of the society. I personally liked all songs of Rudaali composed by Bhupenda. Dr. Hazarika was an ardent member of Progressive Movement of all art, literature which was founded by my father Syed Sajjad and was committed to art and culture. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was the Chairperson of Sangeet Natak Academy where I was in the Advisory Board and I worked in close association with the legend.”

Says Moon Moon Sen, the beautiful actress of the yesteryears, “I did love to work with Bhupenda. He belonged to the friend circle of Arundhati Devi, Chhaya Devi, Debika Mukherjee and I was fortunate enough to be close to him. Specially during the film Deepar Prem which was about a girl who fallen in love with a guy from a lower family, where Bhupenda sang the song Ami ek jajabar, which was such a wonderful mixture of common man and intellectuality. Since then we became very close and did many functions in Assam together. I travelled a lot with him and during our journeys he used to share many stories. He was full of life and jovial. Even though he had a bad temper but he managed to remain calm and lively during his work. We travelled together in many parts of Assam and I thus I met many people who
came to see him often. He was a brilliant artiste. Unfortunately India has not given him his dues. He did not receive the kind of recognition that he deserves.”

Sanjay Suri, who worked in Daman, said: “I had the pleasure to work with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika during Daman, and that’s the first time when I met him and Kalpana. I was a huge fan of him and in the evening after the shoot we used to insist him to sing our favorite song Dil hoom hoom kare, and without any thought he used to sing it for us. He treated us like his own children. I remember one incident, while shooting for Daman, my bhabhi (sister-in-law) came to see me and we all were sitting in his drawing room and enjoying him sing. My bhabhi couldn’t stop her tears. I kept meeting him after that. He was an extremely warm person. We did another film together which is yet to release As The River Flows and we are extremely proud of the fact that Dr. Hazarika agreed to do the voice over for the same. I consider my Daman tenure as the luckiest as I got the chance to work with the legend.”

Raima Sen unfolds her heart, “I was very young when I first encounter the music maestro. I met him during Daman which was the second film of my career. We all went to Guwahati and spent lots of time together as it was long schedule. Even though I was very young at that time still I clearly remember how soft spoken he was! My mom (Moon Moon Sen) was closer to him as they did various stage shows together. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was a thorough gentleman and after the shoot we used to joke together, laugh together.”

Pritam, the music director recalls those days when he worked along with the musician: “I have worked with Bhum and Kalpana Lajmi in Daman. Bhum was a real genius. When he was admitted in the hospital I tried meeting him thrice but unfortunately I could not meet the legend due to certain unavoidable reasons. Demise of Bhum is a great loss to the music world.”

Popular singer Shaan worked with Bhum Hazarika in the early part of his career. He said over the phone, “I spent alot of time with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika during Daman in Guwahati and in the tea gardens of Assam. At that time I was very young. He used to make us feel very comfortable. He never used to showcase his achievement: the position he held as legend. He was a magnificent personality and was compassionate about what was happening around. Personally it was wonderful to learn music from the master himself.”

Correspondingly, Mandhar Sabnis, vocalist-cum-composer considers himself very fortunate to get trained under the legend during Geet Gangotri – a national-level integration workshop where Dr Bhupen Hazarika took part as resource person along with many other eminent personalities like Jagjit Singh and Ila Arun. Similarly he also got the opportunity to meet the music maestro in Nehru Centre along with melody queen Lata Mangeshkar during the rehearsal for live concert. He fondly remembers his stage show with the legend in Imphal where people turned in thousands to see the musician. Also he did the fusion of Yara sili sili with Dr. Hazarika who often encouraged the young stars to come forward. Sabnis points out that in the national anthem, there are only three eminent voices who speaks for the country. They are: Pt.Bhimsen Joshi, ghazal maestro Jagjit Singh and our dearest Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

Even though Madhur Bhandarkar never worked with Dr.Bhupen Hazarika but he managed to influence this young and talented director. “Bhum’s songs always inspired me, especially Ganga tu behti hai kyun... beautiful lyrics sung by in his deep baritone voice. May god rest his soul in peace. Personally I met him thrice and I remember how warmly he used to greet me. He was very warm and gentle human being,” confesses Madhur.

Director Onir opens up candidly, “I met Dr. Bhupen Hazarika for the first time during the initial stage of my career while doing the promo for the film Darmiyan. My association with the legends extends to Daman where I was a kind of assistant to him. Our association
follows and we became very close. I did the music album Ganga which was designed and produced by me and my friend Namrata. This album remains distinct because he crafted it specially. It is an honor for me to attain his trust. Dr. Hazarika was a complete foodie and we dined together on many occasions. He was so warm to notice what we ate and the affection he used to impart I simply loved that person”.

Mumbai-based musician Abani Tanti had started his career with the legend himself. Tanti recalls emotionally, “I did my first recording as sound engineer with Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. I could still recollect the day, it was in November, 1987 and was my third day in Jyoti Chitraban. I recorded a poem voiced by him for a documentary made by Amar Jyoti Agarwala and coincidentally I recorded him for the last time again for a poem voiced by the legend for Bidyut Kotoky’s As the River Flows in Geet Studio in February, 2011.”

It was for the film Gandhi to Hitler where Dr. Bhupen Hazarika sang Gandhiji’s popular bhajan Baishnaba janato…. with his baritone voice. While sharing his experience, Mumbai-based Assamese musician Lyton became emotional, “I used to call him barta and I consider it as our (Arbind-Lyton) sheer luck that we could make him sing the popular bhajan.” Lyton recalls the day when he and his friend Arbind met the legend in his residence and insisted him to sing for them, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in spite of being weak simply smiled and agreed to their wish. “As we all knew barta was not keeping well but still he did overcome physical hurdles and completed the recording in Meet Brothers’ studio,..” said Lyton and added, “Dr. Hazarika was the gem of India. He was the encyclopedia of music. He was the university himself and he deserved the Bharat Ratna without any doubt.”

Bidyut Katoky who worked very closely with the legend in the yet-to-be released film As the River Flows, considers it as a dream come true for him. “During the recording of As the River Flows where the legend lent his baritone voice to a poem, he did look a little frail...but only till the time the microphone was put in front of him. Then suddenly, his age dropped by some 25 years...one by one, through his voice, the cry of Brahmaputra came alive...it was surreal! Inside the recording room, he was like a child recording for the first time... and again enquiring whether he is getting it right, whether we are getting the mood we wanted...Within that short span of time, we got a rare glimpse of what makes him a living legend,” said Katoky. Truly the legend will always remain as a legend in the heart, mind, and soul of each and every music lover. May his soul rest in peace forever.

Courtesy: Melange, Nov 20, 2011
Bard Of The Brahmaputra, Minstrel Of The Masses

MITRA PHUKAN

He lived among the people. In return, throughout his life, and then in death, they gave him their love to the point of adulation. For many in Assam, the man was godlike in stature. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, singer, composer, lyricist, poet, filmmaker, author, one time legislator and editor passed away in Mumbai on November 5. His long-time companion, filmmaker Kalpana Lajmi was at his side. His body was brought back to his native State of Assam on November 7, where it was kept in Guwahati for two days before being cremated with full State honours. The pyre was lit by his son, Tej Hazarika. An unprecedented number of people – lakhs of them – went, disciplined and patient even in their grief, to pay their last respects during those days, to express their love and gratitude for giving them the kind of music, films and poems that he did.

For Bhupen Hazarika was no ordinary singer. For the Assamese people in particular and the Northeast in general, he was a colossus. Born in 1926 in remote Sadiya, he went after his schooling in Assam to Benares Hindu University to study Political Science and later went on to acquire a PhD in Mass Communication from Colombia University. By the time of his death he was beloved of the masses, an iconic figure in the land of his birth. Through his music, films, lyrics and writings, he garnered admirers all over the nation, and the world. Besides his native Assamese, he sang in several other languages, including Bangla and Hindi. He was adored in Bengal and Bangladesh as well. Through his melodies, he built a musical bridge connecting Assam to the rest of the country, and the world. And even though he sang mainly in his mother tongue Assamese, a language spoken by a comparatively small number of people in the country, by the time of his death he was ‘Bhupenda’ to the entire nation. Bhupen Hazarika’s melodic, literary and artistic sensibility was firmly rooted in this land. He took the music out of the region, and showcased its magnificence before the world. And while doing so, he succeeded in heralding a revival of several musical forms of astonishing beauty that were on the verge of dying due to lack of patronage. He took inspiration from the folk songs, the songs from the Sattras, and the songs of the numerous tribes of this land, to create fresh melodies of his own. In addition, he brought in whiffs of melodies of other lands, of more “mainland” music as well as from the West, all creatively blended with his own musical imagination to produce songs of great aesthetic value.

Beginning with his first stage performance at the age of five, he went on to write over 600 lyrics, sing over 1000 songs, make 12 films, and score music for over 70. He authored 20 books and edited a magazine for 18 years. Honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the Assam Ratna and the Padma Bhushan, he was at one time Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and President of the Axam Xahitya Xabha, the premier literary organization of Assam. But honours sat lightly on him. Always compassionate, in his humility and rootedness, he was truly a son of the soil, as he liked to call himself. For decades, he poured his heart out in the Bihu pandals and functions of the land, singing with only a harmonium and tablas and perhaps a guitar as an accompaniment. He was always accessible to the Assamese, their dearly beloved ‘Bhupenda’, and he never held himself apart from the masses of the valleys even when he was extremely busy with his work in Kolkata and Mumbai. Even when his travels took him around the globe, he always made it a point to be home for the Bihu season, visiting the cities as well as remote villages of the land, when people thronged the Bihutolis till late at night to listen to him delight them with old favourites and new songs especially composed for that season.

An intriguing aspect of Bhupen Hazarika’s music was that the majority of the body of his work in Assamese was not film music. Though he sang for films, he did not depend on the machinery of film promotion to popularize most of his songs: an unmistakable pointer to the fact that his music was very much in tune with the pulse of the masses. He composed lyrics that were often about
contemporary events, though they all soared to universal heights. He was a bard, a troubadour, who sang of peace and amity in many of his songs. The land, the beauties of its landscapes, the uniqueness of the tribes and communities were dear to him. But it was of the river, the Brahmaputra, or Luit, that he sang, over and over again. For him it was a metaphor of life. While in the US, he had met Paul Robeson, whose "Old Man River" influenced him greatly. Bhupen Hazarika’s powerful and passionate songs about his own beloved rivers, the Brahmaputra and Ganga, came out of that.

His humanistic bent of mind, combined with his empathy for the sufferings of others, ensured that his singing was always of universal joys and sorrows, of love and longing, of peace and brotherhood. His love songs were delicately evocative, his songs of nature vividly descriptive, his patriotic songs passionate and vigorous. They touched the heart of every listener, no matter what his or her station in life, and remained fresh even after repeated listenings. The rich body of his musical creations in Assamese is known as Bhupendra Sangeet, and is taught carefully and performed as a specific genre.

His unique voice, warm with feeling, a rich baritone that was timbred to a heart-stopping texture, and his musicianship earned him accolades also in Bengal, and later Bangladesh, which took him into its own warm embrace. His song Joi Joi Nobojato Bangladesh celebrated the creation of the new country. Later, his songs in Hindi such as Dil Hum Hum Kare and Ganga went on to become classics. As a filmmaker, he directed, sang in and was music director for several award-winning films such as Era Bator Xur (1956), Pratidhwani (1964), Chikmik Bijuli (1969), Chameli Memsahib (1975). He won the President’s National Award for the best filmmaker thrice: for Shakuntala, Pratidhwani, and Loti Ghoti in 1960, 1964 and 1967, besides getting numerous State and National awards as Music Director. Indeed, he was an award winning music director of many Assamese, Bangla and Hindi films, including Rudaali, Aarop Gajagamini, Daman, etc.

At all times, he had the good of the people at heart. As a member of the State Legislative Assembly (1967-1972) he was largely responsible for installing the first State-owned film Studio. As Chairman, Sangeet Natak Akademi (1999-2004) he brought into focus the need to revive the Satriya dance and music traditions. It was during his tenure that the genre was officially acknowledged to be a major dance form of the country.

Cremated on a site donated by Gauhati University, the Government, taking into account the wishes of the people, plans to convert the place into a Samadhi Sthal, archiving the maestro’s works in its planned library and museum. His ashes have been sent with honour to all the District Headquarters of the State, so that people can pay homage, after which they will be immersed in the main rivers of each district.

**Courtesy: The Melange, Nov 20, 2011**
It was a cold wintry evening at Helsinki in Finland. The occasion was an official dinner reception hosted by the state in honour of the visiting Indian delegation. Present among them were two young artistes with stars in their eyes. As was customary, a toast was raised by the host and the talented guests returned the compliments with impromptu performances. Among the guests, there was a young man who made a beautiful painting on the napkin using the colourful ingredients of the salad that was served on the dinner table. Everyone present was raving about it for its sheer beauty and innovativeness. And then, this other young man stood up and sang his heart out in his rich baritone voice. There was a hushed silence and then suddenly the crowd burst into spontaneous applause, round after round. Both stole the show that day, without any fuss as if it was ordained. The young painter was M.F.Hussain, later regarded as the modern day Picasso, and the singer was Dr Bhupen Hazarika, already regarded as the Jewel of Assam (Assam Ratna came much later). Inherent extraordinary genius and youthful exuberance, flowered later to reach sky-touching heights, were very much in evidence even in those early days which left no one in doubt that history was in the making. I had the good fortune of once finding myself seated next to Bhupen Hazarika in an evening flight from Kolkata to Mumbai when he himself jovially narrated the story to me. A child-like intensity radiated while he recalled the event with the hint of a smile playfully adorning the face while waiting for my reaction. I had never been able to forget the moment ever since and I felt an emotion then which I could not fathom—may be I felt blessed. Also that day my mind flew out to another chance encounter that happened in my childhood, which amply demonstrated the greatness of this extraordinarily gifted man. Those were the days of “Bhupen Hazarika Sangeet Sandhiyas”. Once for one of the ‘nights’ of Bhupen Hazarika at District Library, our group of friends could not get tickets and we were just hanging out at the entrance of the Library. Suddenly Rana, amongst us, saw Bhupen da coming out on some chore, and he shot out from one corner “Bhupenda, we have come from a long distance and we are now to return disappointed for not getting tickets”. Amused, Bhupen Da asked as to where we came from to which we stressed our imaginations and took the name of Chandmari, not having the heart to tell him that we were literally from next door, i.e. Uzanbazar. He told us that people from Nagaon and beyond had to go back as it was ‘house-full’ and asked us to come back the next day as he had decided to perform specially for disappointed people like us next day. Sure enough, he performed the next day and all of us really had a great time listening to him singing. His humility and kindness impressed us even in those childhood days. He could maintain his basic simplicity and humility till this day without letting his ego get the better of him by all the awards, accolades that he got in his chequered journey and the boundless love that he received from his countless fans spread all over the world—this is what, I think, makes him unique and unparalleled. In fact, fondness and love for him seems to grow with every passing day and so is the hero-worshipping. He has become the bright star in the cultural firmament of Assam whose shine has transcended boundaries and has come to represent Assam at the national and international arena. Generations of Assamese have marveled at the beauty and depth of his compositions, lyrics and music they have hummed and whistled along. And all through this near fanatic adulation of his people, Bhupen Hazarika has remained that passionate and simple dreamer pursuing his creative originality. His heart continues to seek the simple joy of life and the inner beauty. Even now, in the midst of the hustle—bustle of a busy city life, he possibly still craves for the mellow moments that he lived in the serene environ of his small home-town—the sight of kalpat through the window-sill, the earthy tones of kuli, keteki, the whispering sound of the cool...
breeze escaping through the wooden door-top, the melodious symphony of the raindrops falling on the tin roof. I was lucky to personally witness his sense of nostalgia at close quarters when he visited our Numaligarh Township in the summer of 2009. The artist in him seemed to be in full bloom despite his failing health. Coming from a city like Mumbai with its fret and fever, he was fascinated by the sight of the virgin rain kissing the half-blown rose on the magical bank of the quietly flowing Kaliyani river, seen through the window frame of the ‘Riverview’ house. Unknowingly the words escaped, ‘I hear the calling of kuli, keteki.’ The hint of a tear remained immobile on his face like the frozen snow on the distant mountain. Standing next to him, I was frozen in mid-stride-mesmerized by the strong resonance of his inner radiance. Perhaps, it is an indication of the pantheist in Bhupen Hazarika, the lover of nature, of silence, of birds and bees, of humanity and even his aloneness.

That Bhupen Hazarika did his Ph.D. in Mass Communication at a time when the subject was relatively unheard of, and not the craze as it is now and that too from an Ivy League University, the University of Columbia, itself speaks volumes about his intellectual acumen, garnered ahead of time. For a person coming from a remote corner of Assam, this was a remarkable achievement. Being born to an illustrious, cultured and musically inclined family, he had the right environment to develop his talents early which was subsequently honed by the close and enriching association with the cultural and literary doyens like Lakshminath Bezbaroa, JyotiPrasad Agarwala, Bishnuprasad Rabha, Phani Sharma et al. and there was no doubt in anyone’s mind that this diamond would sparkle in time.

A singer, composer, lyricist, litterateur, poet, writer, journalist, music director and filmmaker, he even dabbled in politics. It is truly amazing and a rare phenomenon to find such varied qualities imbibed in one single person. But essentially he remains a people’s hero who has the intuitive knack of unraveling the nuances of language with his golden voice and in this process of demystifying, liberate the minds of the people to rediscover their inner selves. I often wonder as to why people hear Bhupen Hazarika over and over again. Is it that he sings the songs of their lives and makes them feel more connected and wanted? When people hear him sing samayar agragatit, it takes them out to a sublime horizon where time travels at its own pace or when he sings moijetia ei jibonor maya eri gusi jam, he poses the question of the very essence of life which makes one wonder why one cannot take life as it comes and why people waste time fighting for the small things in life. Once, in 1967 when I was studying in Cotton College, I had seen a very old man, wearing a dhoti upto his knee and an endi sadar draped over his shoulders, buying the whole range of audio cassettes of Bhupen Hazarika from a Guwahati music shop. The old man, hailing from Dhemaji, a tiny hamlet in the Lakhimpur District, was a small cultivator who spent all his leisure time playing only Bhupen Hazarika’s songs on his tokari+. This is the kind of response he gets, the unfailing devotion and complete surrender that he evokes in the common people of his homeland. A legendary singer and one of the greatest living cultural communicators of South Asia, he has swayed millions of us with the power and passion of his voice. That is why people all over want to hear him again and again, and even today he remains the most widely heard, read and talked about person. I think this is what makes Bhupen Hazarika a Bhupen Hazarika.

Yet above all, he is a social reformer and a true humanist. For years he has inspired people young and old, rich and poor, happy and suffering, of all hues and faiths with his music to face life with dignity. His following transcends generations. In fact, he provides the link and emotional connect between generations of Assamese, never ever wavering between the folk and classical form of music thereby defining greater Assam’s cultural identity. Through his songs, films, poetry and writings, he has unified the hearts of people living in hills and plains, in towns and villages, in huts and palaces. In fact, he does not even require to sing. Millions of fans throng to his live performances, whether on stage or at Bihutolis++ from distant places, walking miles braving howling rains or scorching sun, just to hear his melodious voice. Such is his magical persona. Dr Hazarika uses his songs as a vehicle
The multifaceted genius

to communicate, to talk about the state of affairs prevailing in contemporary society, to put across his thoughts about his vision of Assam, to appeal to the conscience of the masses. He is more of a cult figure, an iconic persona idolized by millions of North-Easterners who are inspired by his music, his works, his thoughts, his life values and his personality. In a sense, his songs are akin to ballad, a lyrical chronology of passing events which spread the message of universal fraternity, brotherhood, camaraderie and emotional binding like that of Paul Robeson, the legendary Afro-American singer and social reformer with whom he bonded well, 'the same boat brother', and whose crusade for social justice and black pride permeated Bhupen Hazarika’s world view.

Understandably Awards, rewards and accolades-regional, national and international came aplenty, some in time and some much delayed and sometimes even grudgingly. But the best reward for him was the people’s unfailing love that is bestowed on him everywhere that he went. From Padmabhushan to Dada Saheb Phalke lifetime achievement award, from Assam Ratna to Honorary citizenship of New Jersey, he got them all. Predictably, he has occupied many prestigious positions, nationally and internationally and participated in numerous international festivals, seminars and conferences, sometimes individually and sometimes as a part of national delegations. Quite unique is the fact that he was given the honour of heading the most prestigious ‘Asom Sahitya Sabha’, the highest literary institution of Assam, as its president and he did remarkable work during his tenure. Proud we are that during his tenure as Chairman of Sangeet Natak Academy, satriya+++dance of Assam got the recognition as Indian classical dance form. A living legend, he is the cultural ambassador of Assam exhorting people through his music to live life fully despite struggles and challenges and to look at the future with hopes and anticipation. He is in tune with the common man always. In many ways, he represents their psyche, their inner feelings, their joy and anguish, their hopes and aspirations. He personifies their dreams and their struggle-their sense of being itself. So he is their icon as well as their voice. And they give him their love, wholeheartedly and overwhelmingly.

A champion of masses, his fan following runs across the societal classes, from the rural poor to the urban elite, his appeal is truly universal. And he remains the poor man’s God. Yet he is not the perfect God. He has failings, like you and me and has also struggled in life. Thus people find it easy to identify with him. And he earns people’s implicit trust. This is what marks him out. In a way, he is the object of envy even among his contemporary luminaries in their chosen fields. Maybe they all echo the feeling as once Rabindranath Tagore sang ‘How do you sing, oh gifted one. I listen spellbound…’ He is the soulful wanderer (jajabor). And his journey continues in faith, seeking truth and purity of beauty. While we stand in awe and in admiration, let Assam rejoice as he is born in this land and as he is ours first though he has gone on to become the pride of India.

*banana leaf  
**cuckoo  
***a local bird  
+ a stringed indigenous musical instrument  
++fields where bihu festival of the Assamese is organized  
+++indigenous classical dance.

Courtesy: Dr Bhupen Hazarika, a legend, edited by Professor Basanta Deka, published by Orchid Publication.

With Parbati Prasad Baruah

Special issue of Ishani on Dr Bhupen Hazarika
To speak about the man, is to count the stars in the sky, to measure the water in the sea. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, the name itself is an identity of this legendary figure in the world. His is a personality, that can’t be finished talking, can’t be finished writing- a piece of diamond that enlightens the society that bears him. When I sit and think over my last 25 years of association with him, his works reveals the legends. He is the person down to the core sample, with a crystal clear mind, a personality that transmits the inner brightness in his walks, in his talks, in his writings. He speaks a word and the world gets a thousand messages and live with them.

He was a man of the masses, an epitome of love and had concern for people that comes out of his heart and never fails to live a indelible imprint in other’s heart. He is the passionate lover, a responsible guardian of his generation of generations next, a revolutionary to break the walls of orthodoxy, inequality and inhumanity.

Dr Bhupen Hazarika’s creations have the magical effect on everybody from a non-entity to the greatest. Be it Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru getting spell bound to listen and watch his Mahut Bandhu, be it Nelson Mandela getting emotional at his “Jindabad Mandela” at Kolkata, be it world famous artist MF Hussain who said “I want to sing with colours and Dr Hazarika paints through his songs”. Jyoti Basu waits for his “Sagar Sangamat” sitting in the audience in Kolkata, Rajib Gandhi craves for “We are in the same boat brother” in his visit to Bangladesh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee sits and waits for the “Ami ek jajabor” at Ramlila Maidan in Delhi, sitting at GNRC, wishing for his recovery, George Fernandes wants to listen from him “Bistirna Parare”, a Kashmiri aficionados hug him emotionally in Dubai when he listens to his “Bimurte mur nixati jen” though he couldn’t understand the language and felt the feelings. Lakhs of people at one of the tribal areas of Orissa wait for his “Ek kali do pattia”. His “Arun Kiran Sirir Bhusan” has become the national song of Arunachal Pradesh translated into the Arunachali language – aand in our Assam, people wait in chilling winter till midnight to listen to his “Sitare Semeka Rati”. This is the magic of Bhupen Hazarika. His songs create revolutionary thoughts in minds – “Tapta Tikhare Agni Sakti Rakta Barne Jwale…” His words like a fire can burn the vils into ashes. This is the success of his works.

A man of soil, Bhupen Hazarika knew no division-either in work, culture or caste. He’ll shake hands with the President of India one day and the next day, he will sit with the rickshaw driver and together sing “Manuhe Manuhar Babe...” A vagabond, his home was spread from Luit to Thames. He could find his motherland in everyone’s land. In his wandering, where he takes rest in some bungalow, a girl kisses him full of her heart and he writes, “Dehar Randhe Ranhe Tulile Xiharan Tumar Uthat Paraxe “, some beautiful girls return home at the dusk with the ehrd of cattles and he writes, “Phut Gadhulite Kapili Khutit”, blessed at the warmth of someone’s love he writes,”Bimurta Mur Nisati Jen”, - the tough rules of the society couldn’t bind his lover’s mind, he writes “Gupute Gupute” he wants love of two hearts to overpower the differences of two castes, two religions, two nations. He is a man made for songs, every moment his emotions take form of song to reach the people.

Bhupen Hazarika-an angry man with a feather soft heart. I cherish the moment when one day he was lying on his bed at his home at Nizarapar and I was sitting near him on the floor had to make him practice one of my compositions. I was running my hands over the harmonium, and suddenly to my utter surprise he jumped out of the bed, sat on the floor with me. I asked,” Why have you come...
“down” and he said: “At this very moment you are my Guru and I am your student.” That is the greatness of this legendary figure and in the evening, he recorded the song: “Luitor Parotei Umoli Jamoli Karilu Par Koisure”.

Bhupen Hazarika-is a devotee of beauty, he searches for beauty everywhere. Once he was asked to select a photo of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala for his album “Jyotir jyoti”. One photo was of the young stage of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and the other one of his later age. Hazarika selected the previous one and said “Always give preference to beauty, always project something is the good form because it remains forever.” He is a man of style. He has a style in everything whether in his cap or in his dress that he wears according to the objectives of the meetings.

He never realized how great a person he was. Like a bird he flew from place to place, flew to the infinite but never forgot his nest on the earth. During his life he kept on working only, never waited or expected the fruit in return. Every ordinary person, and all the giants of wisdom and humanity were enthralled by his lyrics, by the tone of his songs, by the sense of feelings.

Years, months, days may not be sufficient to speak and cherish the works of Bhupenda. We salute you for raising us above the soil and nurture us to speak to the world. His was the person to whom Missile Man APJ Abdul Kalam said: “How can I be like you?”

(Translated from original Assamese by Hillol Kumar Pathak)

Courtesy: The special supplement of the Assam Tribune, Nov 15, 2011
The multifaceted genius

Spanning the centuries, Dr Bhupen Hazarika has taken his place among the handful of visionaries and revolutionaries who have sustained Assam even in the worst of times, brought joy in times of sadness and pain, bolstered our spirits and shared their creative genius with millions, not only at home but across the world. He joins that tiny band of Assam’s truly great-Srimanta Sankardeva, Lachit Barphukan, Lakshminath Bezbarua, Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwalla, Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha and Gopinath Bardoloi.

There may be others, unsung, unheard and unknown—but for us these remain the icons, the legends of the past and today. And it was because of his persistence as head of the Sahitya Kala Parishad that Srimanta Sankardeva’s Satriya is today recognized as one of India’s national ‘dance’ forms.

To millions he was simply ‘Bhupen da’, including those of the younger generation. Who have never seen him barring on television and the small screens nor heard him live—but on CDs and DVDs. I was privileged to call him ‘khura’, partly because of his closeness in the 1960s to my parents, the late Chaitanya Nath Hazarika and Maya Hazarika of Shillong, and their mutual respect and affection.

Those millions paid their respects at Guwahati and every town and village of Assam, it appears. In Guwahati, lakhs of people, young and old, the rich and the poor, the fit and the fat, the infirm and the healthy, stood in line patiently for hours through the day and night to pay homage. Many wept but many more were singing his songs of humanity and equality, his political signature tunes, which have become part of our folklore and history. They came not just from every corner and isolated village of Assam but from towns and hamlets across the North-east and further. As we know, songs were played through day and night over public address systems on every street of Guwahati and other parts of Assam from the time of his death.

It was as he had sung, in his unforgettable Sagar Sangomot or ‘At the confluence of the seas’, where he was never tired of swimming. I was especially privileged to work with him and Kalpana Lajmi, who took care of him with fierce affection, in a documentary series on the north-east where my collaboration developed when the great man called and asked me to help. Could anyone say no to him?

His haunting melodies torment yet inspire us. They flow across the world, on our mobile ring tones, our personal collections, our memories and experiences. Many of us called him the Bard of the Brahmaputra. But he was more than that—he was a passionate fighter for rights, for the poor (notice how both his early and also the later songs drive home the messages of equality, humanity and brotherhood even in times of pain and tragedy) and who believed in the importance of means over ends. But he was also an incorrigible optimist and even a prankster. Let me recall a wonderful evening, some years back in Tezpur, where a small group gathered in the elegant drawing room of the (now late) Dr Robin and Dr Laksmi Goswami (Baideau), a couple who were very close to Bhupen Hazarika, sipping drinks and listening to a long-time politician recount one of his favourite anecdotes in the Assam Assembly.

The politician spoke of how a mischief-making MLA had got another opposition member, who was quite easy to sway, to challenge the then leader of the opposition, Dulal Baruah, in the House on a point of order. An outraged Baruah thundered at his backbencher to shut up, but the instigator was not done yet. ‘Press on a point of order’, he hissed at his wavering colleague.

‘Point of Order!’ yelled the now defiant member, who once again stumped when the Speaker asked him, quite legitimately, ‘on what grounds?’ He fumbled, but when his friend whispered again, ‘Say, bad grammar.’ ‘Bad grammar, sir,’ suggested the legislator.

The House dissolved in laughter as Dulal Baruah turned purple with rage and gazed balefully at his two tormentors.

The name of the questioner is not important, but there is much to be said of the mischief maker, who was no other than Bhupen Hazarika.

His internationalism (or regionalism) went further than the brilliant velvet baritone that captured all who listened in a magical embrace. His signature Nepali cap and the khukri pin that adorned the topi were other symbols of his South Asianness—indeed the first South Asian figure that the magazine Himal,
The multifaceted genius

published from Kathmandu, wrote about in its first issue in its new avatar as a ‘South Asian’ magazine was Bhupen Da and I was privileged to write it. There is a demand for the Bharat Ratna for Dr Hazarika. But as one of my relatives recently blogged, “Let the mandarins of Delhi keep their awards and wear them round their necks, if they so wish”. They have missed the opportunity to share respect, failed again to move in time to accord him the dignity that the people of the region and I include the larger region here, of the NER, Bangladesh, West Bengal and Nepal-have always given him. Everything will be too little, too late—as usual.

In contrast, Dhaka’s recognition of Bhupen Hazarika by honouring him with the country’s highest civilian award shows how misconceived and prejudiced have been Indian comprehensions of our neighbouring country. We have failed to distinguish between the agendas of government security agencies and the goodwill of people. But why Bangladesh? Bhupen Hazarika was cherished in Dhaka as much as he is in Guwahati. His song on the war of Bangladesh’s freedom, Jojoi Naba Jata Bangladesh (hail the newborn Bangladesh) is a striking marching tune, which was on every Bengali’s lips during those harrowing days as that momentous struggle for liberation gathered strength and inspired the battle for freedom. And when Bangladesh was born, he was welcomed there like a hero. As we all know, his songs were not limited to Assamese and Bengali, and his rich baritone was equally at ease in Hindi, Urdu and English.

He was without doubt one of the greatest living cultural communicators of the region, swaying millions with the power and passion of his voice, and the message of universal brotherhood and humanism. His genius for weaving a magical tapestry out of traditional Assamese music and lyrics, breathing new life into the language, synthesizing old and new strands of music, and instilling a sense of pride among the inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley. The waterways of Assam were the source of inspiration for his lyrics all these years. ‘The Brahmaputra is the lifeline of Assam,’ he said. One of his notable collaborators for Doordarshan was Luit Kinare (by the banks of the Luit), a mosaic of ordinary tales that remains among us through his songs, his music, his films, his convictions and his love for Assam.

The Bard of the Brahmaputra has fallen silent but he will that not make us less human? That is what we need to hear in Assam at a time of strife and a crisis when our diversity threatens to overwhelm, not unite us. Therefore, at such a time, it also behoves us to remember others who were far less known but who also struggled for the language and the people, such as the late Dipika Chakravarty of Jorhat who recently died at the age of 80. This ‘silent worker’ in the literary field, as she has been described, translated some of the truly great Bengali novels into Assamese.

Like many others, I have spent these days lighting lamps, listening to his music and songs and realizing how mighty a figure has fallen; the comprehension is sinking in that he is irreplaceable. Such a person may not come again for centuries.

Elsewhere I have written that while Srimanta Sankardeva brought value, equality and a touch of the divine into the lives of ordinary people; Lachit Barphukan embodied the spirit of valour and determination to fight for our country; Lakhminath Bezbarua brought music to the language and restored it to vibrancy; Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha brought energy and humanity while Gopinath Bardoloi fought for unity and Assam’s survival as well as her role in free India. Bhupen Hazarika was at the confluence of these great streams, bringing them together in his unique way, spanning five centuries in a lifetime, endowing humanity and equality as his principles and symbols. The Bard of the Brahmaputra has fallen silent but he remains among us through his songs, his music, his films, his convictions and his love for Assam. Just by being amongst us, he enriched us—and single handedly did more for Assam and the region than all politicians, agitators and underground groups, media and all of us collectively.

To paraphrase Nehru’s tryst with destiny speech: ‘The song and music have gone out of our lives and there is silence everywhere.’

The Lohit still flows but where is its singer, the interpreter of maladies? Perhaps, the jajabor has finally found a resting place.

Courtesy: The Assam Tribune, Nov 16, 2011
Growing up in the US, when I said I was from Assam, inevitably the most frequent response was, “Where’s that?” But every now and then, I’d hear: “Like Bhupen Hazarika?” When my mom gave me the news of his death, I was flooded with memories of his music playing on weekend mornings as she fried lucees, during long car rides to family friend’s homes, as I learned to awkwardly dance and sing at Indian functions. Suddenly, as it must have been for so many fans, especially for those of us with Assamese roots, the soundtrack of my life flashed before me.

I was also lucky to have known Bhupen uncle, as I called him, in a personal capacity. He met my father, Mohesh C. Kalita, during a visit to the US in the late 1970s, and as often happens in immigrant groups, they forged a friendship over my banker father’s ability to help with money transfers.

My father’s was not surprised they became fast and close friends. Both were born in Sadiya, a rural and remote pocket of the already remote North-east. Both attended Benares Hindu University, although more than a decade apart. Both loved to read, watch foreign films and listen to music from everywhere, to discuss politics and the state of the world. Back then, both liked to drink. And so during the US legs of Bhupen Hazarika’s frequent tours in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, our house, first in Long Island, later in New Jersey, became the dumping ground for his suitcases, lyric books, harmonium, plaques and gamochas. Ours became the phone number people were given as they tried to book him for concerts, in high-school auditoriums and temples, veteran’s halls and restaurants. At first, I was starstruck by this man whose face adorned so many of our records, now sleeping in my bed. But among Bhupen Uncle’s best traits was his ability to put people at ease. In our house, he wore a lungi. He joined my mother in the kitchen and made an amazing shrimp curry. He also loved adventure, so we would pile into our brown Oldsmobile and go on long drives of serendipity.

Bhupen Uncle loved New York City and he regaled in the throngs of fans who gathered around him, during shopping trips to the Indian enclave of Jackson Heights. But he was also just as happy being anonymous and roaming his old uptown haunts or Chinatown. It was with him that I first ate Thai food, a place called Pongsri on Bayard Street that I still love and frequent. He and his partner, director Kalpana Lajmi, took my elder brother and me to see Dear Poets Society, a movie that sparked a discussion about the role of teachers and following one’s own dreams over one’s parents’. Through his eyes, I realize now I was seeing America and all its plurality and possibility anew.

Yet, I didn’t know it then. My appreciation of Bhupen Hazarika, like many Assamese, was perhaps too parochial, too rooted in our common home. And perhaps knowing our needs, he pandered to that role. Translation do not do his lyrics justice, but a song like Aami Asomiya nohou dukhiya, which means “We Assamese are not poor,” helped us stand a little taller. He also connected with the Assamese countryside intimately, despite his fame. During a visit to his native Sadiya in the 1980s, he tracked down my grandparents and visited them. My illiterate grandmother lectured him and an accompanying politician on all the ways Sadiya and its roads and schools remained too backward—and he was only too happy to listen, just as her own son might have. To us, he remained accessible, simple, common.

When I travelled to Mumbai in my early 20s, we would amble down Chowpatty Beach and not a single vendor charged us for anything. My father’s scratchy records now gathering dust in the basement, I turned to different translations of Bhupen Hazarika’s songs through YouTube and other sites. I came to appreciate a song like Bistirno Dupare, (a version of Old Man River) as so much more masterful in the Bengali. In 2007, as my daughter and I settled in to watch Chak De India in New Delhi, suddenly a special 60th anniversary rendition of the Indian national anthem came on—and there he was. My daughter, then almost three, yelled out: “There’s that Assamese guy.” He was joined by fellow luminaries such as Lata Mangeshkar, Jagjit Singh and AR Rahman. As a child, my interpretation of many of Bhupen Hazarika’s songs were literal: about Nature, rainfall, our mighty Brahmaputra. As an adult, I hear them anew with strains and themes of revolution, suffering, longing, the search for love, the endless hunt for home. Rooted perhaps in our “remote” North East, they remain universal.

(The writer is the author of My Two Indias and Suburban Sahibs and is a senior writer with The Wall Street Journal where the write-up was published earlier.)

_Courtesy: Special supplement of AT, Nov 15, 2011_
My father (late Dr Maheswar Neog) was assigned by the Gramophone Company of India in 1977 to write a few lines for the 12 captivating songs which was an attempt to convey Bhupenda’s passion for music to the people. My father scribbled for the album: Bhupen to many is just a mellifluous voice, a mystery. To many others he has grown to be the very desire of the eye and the ear. A tiny tot of five or six, he charmed Lakshminath Bezborooa with his song at a public reception, clambered into the lap of Sahityarathi, and earned a loving kiss as reward! That was in 1930. Tezpur of Jyotiprasad and Ban Theatre gave this precocious musical prodigy a great facelift when he was commissioned to sing on the stage and gramophone disc. When Asam Sahitya Sabha held its conference in 1937, Bhopu made his real debut and sent a thrill around with idyllic sonority. Still a stripling in the school, he sang for the Assamese film, *Indramalati* (1940) and wrote his first lyric and composed its music—“Agnijugar Firingoti moi”.

I was then a seven-year old boy. It was in 1954 and Bhopu had joined Gauhati University’s Faculty of Education. That time as I remember, three families of the University community became very close. Our family, the family of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Priyam Hazarika and the family of Professor Hilton Francis and Iris Francis who was appointed by the University for coaching the Assamese students for IAS. These three families used to assemble on rotation at respective residence—we were then residing in PD Chaliha Road. Dr Hazarika’s wooden bungalow was at Chenikuthi and Professor Francis’s bungalow at American Baptist Mission Compound. I still remember how Priyam aunty used to help my mother in the kitchen and Iris aunty taking notes how to make pickles. Those days are still vivid in my mind.

Once we went for a picnic to Ghogua and Bhopu Da took me in his lap and started singing. But this happy union did not last long except by means of communication through letters. Probably in 1955, Bhopu Da resigned from the University job. So did also Professor Francis. They left for United Kingdom. I had the pleasure of meeting Bhopu in various functions. In 1966 he presided over the Cultural Session of Asom Sahitya Sabha, my bordeuta Dimbeswar Neog preside over the Poet’s Conference that year and my father was the general secretary of the Sabha. We the entire family had an enjoyable time at Nazira which I will never forget.

I took up a company’s job in 1968. And quite a number of time I had the pleasure of travelling with Bhopu in the air. He would ask me to take my seat with him and sometimes instruct the Traffic Assistant of Indian Airlines to give us our seats together. However, he was not very happy that I took the job in Marketing and did not go for academics like my father.

In the year 1993, my father was quite sick and was asked to release his 15th number of publications. It was February 9, 1993. Releasing the book my father observed: There is a power in prose. A prose could be a powerful image of music.

In 2000, Bhopu was elected chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi. I wrote him a personal letter with some of the old records on the issue of Sattriya dance from my father’s file to say that time has come to recognize Sattriya as a classical dance form and, fortunately, he was successful. When I congratulated him, he strongly paid tribute to my father and others from the sattra and opined that the recognition is the culmination of long drawn efforts first undertaken in 1958 by Dr Neog in association with the Akademi.

I met Bhopu da for the last time at a function of Rabindra Jayanti in the Guwahati Bengali Boy’s School in 2009. Bhopu Da was weak. I took a seat near him but he could not recognize me. He was not the Bhopu Da I knew. When I gave my introduction he took his hand around my face to pet me and told me that he is now only 20 per cent of exactly what he was.

On February 21, 1954, the first University building (Teaching Block) was opened by the President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad at 8-45 am. Bhopu was assigned to compose a song for the occasion. Yes, he composed *Jilikabo Luitore Par*. Bhopu had the vision that hundreds of lights would bring light of knowledge. I met Bhopu on November 8, 2011 at 3-45 am with my wife Ankita at Judges Field. Bhopu was in his eternal sleep. I consoled myself. There is no death for Bhopu.

*Courtesy: Special supplement of The Assam Tribune, November 15, 2011*
My Last conversation with Bhupen Hazarika

Rashmi Sarmah

“I want the people of Assam to look towards the new dawn, I want them to unite and believe in universal brotherhood. I feel like singing the song, ‘We’re in the same boat brothers. And yes, I feel like eating all my favourite Assamese dishes on my birthday,’” said Bhupen Hazarika with his frail, yet mesmerising voice on September 8, 2010. It was the last time I wished him on his birthday. As he spoke, he seemed like a majestic river that holds its turmoil within and tries to give a calm atmosphere to those on its banks. My association with the Times of India in Guwahati gave me the opportunity to call up the music maestro at his Mumbai residence for four consecutive years on his Birthday. With the years, I realized that he was losing his grip on his memory, yet no matter what, he definitely valued the Birthday wishes he received over the telephone from the people of his homeland.

And yes, his long time companion Kalpana Lazmi would make sure that his birthday remains a special affair. But something within her kept saying, that the celebrations might come to an end any day. The strong lady somehow laid bare her softer side in front of me over the phone on September 7, 2010, a day before the Maestro’s second last birthday. I called up in advance to find out the plans for the celebration. Though she did not know who I am, as we had met each other only once at a function organized by the ‘Times of India’ in Guwahati in 2009, yet she did not hesitate to reveal her deep concern over the fading health of her beloved. That day as I called up their Mumbai residence, the domestic help handed the phone to Kalpana Lazmi instead of Bhupen Hazarika, unlike the previous years. Every year it was the maestro I wished directly over the phone hence I was not really prepared to talk to Lazmi and I was a little taken apprehensive. I wondered if she would let me talk to him. After introducing me, I confessed that I would like to wish her beloved for his birthday in advance since I would then be able to file my news story ahead of others this time. She said, “Rashmi, I want you to call him up tomorrow and wish him for his Birthday, he will really be happy. He is sleeping right now. I would not want to disturb him. But yes, I can definitely share my plans for his Birthday celebrations tomorrow.”

I listened as she spoke. “I have prepared a menu with his favourite food items and have asked some close friends in Mumbai from both Assamese and non Assamese communities to join him on his special day. But yes, when you reporters and other friends call up from Assam every year he is very thrilled. But I am somehow very sad today. I feel he is withdrawing. He is in pain from within. It pains me to see him like this. I want all of you to pray for him. I want him to keep smiling and to be happy. I want him to enjoy good health. I want him to live life to the fullest. I want to celebrate his Birthday with him for many years to come,” said the lady with a shaking voice that said a lot more about her deep devotion and love for this man.

The child within this strong and sometimes, arrogant lady, could not hide its agony as it desperately hoped to save its most prized possession. The next day I did call up Bhupen Hazarika and spoke to Lazmi before she handed over the phone to him. I could feel the joy in her voice more than his. The following year I could not call up the maestro and his companion on September 8, but indeed saw his lady love sit and mourn his demise with much dignity, two months after his last Birthday in 2011. At that moment I could possibly understand better, the pain behind every word of hers that she conveyed to me, the last time I spoke to her. And above all, I could value in the true sense, every conversation that I had with this legend called Bhupen Hazarika.

(This article has been specially written by the author for this special issue of Ishani)