



A PEEP INTO TWO IMAGINARY EPISTLES OF BHARAT RATNA DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA

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ABSTRACT :

Late Dr Bhupen Hazarika, (popularly known as Sudhakantha) an Indian playback singer, musician, lyricist, singer, poet, non-fiction writer and film-maker, had a good number of imaginary epistles addressed to Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, a noted Assamese playwright, songwriter, poet, writer and film maker. In India's literature and cultural history from regional port it makes a sense through ages. This paper makes a probe into two of Bhupen Hazarika's highly acclaimed and much-talked-about epistles being addressed to the Assamese cultural icon Jyoti Prasad Agarwala.

It also investigates how Dr Bhupen Hazarika, who was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna award, was conscious about the causes of his motherland and his immense love of this great personality. The paper unearths literary and cultural aptitude of Dr Hazarika incorporating a scrutiny on his deep recognition of Agarwala's personality and creativity.

KEYWORDS : Assamese literature, elite suppression, bourgeois domination, modern architecture, subjectivism, creativity.

INTRODUCTION

Imaginary epistles are a kind of work that is based mainly on imagination, even though it may contain factual elements. These are, addressed to any individual of any rank and file, items having a significant purpose. Mostly it serves a literary mission with a target actually containing a lesson derived from history or the present.

Asjad Nazir in *The Guardian* on 6th November, 2011, wrote in obituary that Dr Bhupen Hazarika "was drawn towards India's struggle for independence. He surrounded himself with intellectuals including the Assamese poet and film-maker Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, who had directed *Indramalati*, and soon found the connection between education and freedom." Nazir also quoted in his write-up that Hazarika wanted to attend secret meetings with those who wanted a free India (Asjad Nazir, 2011). This shows, Dr Hazarika had, during his life time, associations with people who had cultural as well as patriotic vision to its fullest form.

A good number of imaginary letters in Assamese by Dr Bhupen Hazarika meant for Jyoti Prasad



Agarwala, Bishnu Rava, Lakshminath Bezbarua (all having literary and cultural contributions towards the indigenous Assamese communities) still bears testimony to Assam's socio-cultural history. Although these imaginary letters show great high regard and affection towards these distinguished personalities, these cannot be treated simply as letters or renderings that contain simple thoughts. (Hazarika Surya, 1996) The whole of the contributions in literary layout has been coupled

with serious subjects of race and the state before and after the freedom movement in India. This paper, under this context, investigates various aspects of two select letters being addressed to Jyoti Prasad Agarwala in the turf of Assamese literature, history and culture. It is therefore probably scholars belonging to literature and culture discipline attempt to treat these epistles as epoch making and highly quoted letters in the history of Assamese literature. Furthermore, the study of these epistles would help the scholars of literature and history discipline take on their proper tracks in the cultural arena of the country's history. It would also help them locate various phases of cultural movements in India before and after India's freedom movement.

In an open "Letter to Jyoti Prasad Agarwala" (Amar Pratinidhi, 1964) Hazarika lucidly writes: "*You led the Assamese society towards searching for truth in all respects as you could not endure the hard actualities of the time. (...) You were born a little ahead of time and born in the trying times of the race. Your qualities have no bounds.*" This shows Dr Hazarika could properly judge Agarwala to be a complete man; and he enjoys the beauty of his personality and creativity. We observe that this is not a straightforward turn of expression on the part of Hazarika just having a customary observation on his life and a simple observation just incorporating a study on his deeds and philosophies. Striding a step ahead Dr Hazarika claims that if a man wants to understand Jyotiprasad and his kingdom of visions, he or she must have idea about his mind and creativity. His struggle for truth and beauty is a selfless struggle waged for the all round uplift of mankind. His cheer optimism of life has been a reflection of his thoughts and ideals. It is known to all that the compassionate feelings he reserved for the under-privileged classes of society and the creative works of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, as Dr Hazarika truthfully exposes, were not accepted and respected by elites of his time; and he was among those neglected few who made untiring efforts to make the society free from elite domination during that period. While regretting it Hazarika is found, in his imaginary epistles, becoming so much critical of the people of his time. We observe that by writing this particular imaginary epistle to Jyotiprasad Agarwala he seems to shoulder a great responsibility of his race.

Although the letter is based on imagination and emotional deliberations, Hazarika marches back to make a choice of some memories of the bygone days of the time and indirectly and meticulously comments on his adorable personality. Chronological details of Jyoti's life show that Jyoti wrote the *Ramayan for children* when he was hiding from the sight of the British police during India's freedom movement. Hazarika exposes that Jyoti never forgot to think of the younger generation even in the critical time of his fellowmen. He was purely a patriot and had concerns for the wellbeing of the children community.

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala during his life time vehemently opposed the use of adjectives being used before any names of celebrated personalities. He loved the silent workers who did not pay heed to praise and outcome all the time. Hazarika quotes his speech in his letter: "I shall be highly pleased if people stop using adjectives before my name." Hazarika, in his letter, endorses it and maintains that it is a stand a great man always holds on.

The letter by Hazarika makes interesting reading when he is found more critical of the erring section of the people of his time. The society during Hazarika's time was reeling under crisis of all sorts. Bourgeois domination brought miseries to common people. Hazarika gives a hint of his time just addressing Jyoti as "Secretly I want to tell you, never disclose it as I may be assassinated".

Nevertheless, Hazarika's letter shows that Jyoti was a reformer of society and had faith in humanity and simple life. This letter has been a medium for Hazarika to make inroads to Jyoti's soul.

The letter comes to an end when Hazarika emotionally outbursts "I shall often communicate you in this way. I need no replies. I know, you are now still on prayer for our race."

The second letter, under survey, "A Letter to Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (Amar Pratinidhi, 1965), is more explicit and thought-provoking in comparison to the earlier one. It is a skilled venture, a deep observation on the broad-minded personality, creativity and foresightedness of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. It also advocates for a need of such a great personality at the crossroad of a race. He terms Jyoti as cultural leader of his time. While examining this letter we can simple understand that Hazarika is apprehensive, restless and aggravated about the time when Jyoti joined an intellectual and cultural struggle for his motherland. Hazarika discovers

that Jyoti was a great follower of Sankardev, a 15th–16th century Assamese saint-scholar, poet, playwright, social-religious reformer, in the sense that Sankardev shaped his visions and ideals for reformation of society. Commenting on Sankardev, Hazarika boldly writes in his letter that people can discover Leonardo da Vinci, Abraham Lincoln, Plato, epic figure Arjun and M K Gandhi in Sankardev. But Dr Hazarika regrets that scholars of almost all disciplines access Sankardev from literary point of view only.

Hazarika admits views of Jyoti who said in Sankardev's *namghar* (temple) we can discover the original flavor of the world's modern architecture. In his letter Hazarika informs that Jyoti loved European philosopher and dramatist Adolphe Appia who once said: "Art is an attitude. This attitude ought to be humanity's heritage."

Towards the end of the letter Hazarika highlights to two significant things: it is need of the hour to fight people having vested interests and evil designs and for that we need presence of a person like Jyoti Prasad agarwala. Secondly, Jyoti Prasad Agarwal will be ever sparkling in history as a fire of truth and beauty. People should not place him into oblivion. What he desired for the society and what he did for the common people must be judged in proper way and sense. Actually we understand that the motives behind all of Dr Hazarika's songs are ideals of Jyoti Prasad. (Barooah, 2011)

Exler maintains that "the epistolary treatise has little in common with the letter. Like the epistolary sermon, it serves a didactic purpose, and is often drawn out at great length. (Francis Xavier J. Exler, 2003) We believe, along with the other epistles the present imaginary epistles, under review, addressed to an Assamese distinguished cultural leader Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, serve a didactic purpose being a series of non-fictional prose based on reality. It also emerges as subjective pieces of writing with historical significance. The trouble-torn period before and after India's independence in Assam, elite suppression and woes of people remain as unforgettable episodes in Indian history. Dr Bhupen Hazarika, while taking an epistolary technique, does two things especially: he throws light on personality of a cultural leader like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala; and shows his love and esteem establishing Jyoti's personality to be parallel to global historic figures.

The two present letters show that like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Dr Hazarika is also a humanist; he, through his lyrics, desires to build a model society where brotherhood reigns supreme. As Jyoti Prasad Agarwala dreamt of a society based on truth and beauty, he too, struggles throughout his life to work for a society that is haven for amity and equality. With his imaginary epistles he reminds his readers and listeners of a path towards social progress. He invites his readers to follow Jyoti as their leader in the socio-cultural domain.

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