

Leenasri Gogoi – Sayani Sarkar

Heritagizing the Maestro

A Study of Dr Bhupen Hazarika Samadhikshetra, a Memorial Site

Dedicated to Dr Bhupen Hazarika

Abstract

Bhupen Hazarika was a multifaceted personality known for his contributions as a singer, songwriter, composer, filmmaker, writer, and social activist from Assam, a state in the north-eastern part of India. To honour his life and works, a memorial site is constructed in the *Jalukbari* area of Assam. The site is called 'Dr Bhupen Hazarika Samadhikshetra'. It is located in Guwahati city, near Gauhati University, in the state of Assam, India. The literal meaning of the Assamese words *Samadhikshetra* is a burial site. Through empirical research, the paper investigates the conceptual framework of heritagization as applied to Dr Hazarika's legacy, focusing on preserving, maintaining, and celebrating his contributions to society. The study emphasises the role of the memorial site, as a tangible example of Dr Hazarika's cultural relevance by delving further into its architectural design, symbolic elements, and commemorative features. Beyond these tangible aspects, the study also addresses the intangible values, identity and collective memories that the site evokes and preserves. The paper also explores the close interaction between the cultural and constructed heritage of the site, emphasising the need for a holistic strategy to protect and preserve the cultural past. Despite controversies and challenges over selecting the last resting place of Dr Hazarika, the *Samadhikshetra* stands as a tribute to his lasting influence and gratitude for his artistic legacy. Through commemorative events and ongoing public engagement, the memorial site continues to serve as a sacred space where Dr Hazarika's spirit can live on and inspire future generations.

Keywords: Dr Bhupen Hazarika, heritagization, preservation, commemoration, memorial site



Introduction

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika was one of the acclaimed persons of Assam born on September 8, 1926, in *Sadiya*, Assam, and passed away on November 5, 2011. He was a singer, songwriter, music producer, poet, journalist, writer and filmmaker. In addition, his writing is a source of immense creative power. When we speak of a composer, we must recognize them as the creator of music or poetry. The individual who crafts original melodies and pairs them with lyrics is known as a lyricist. Moreover, a lyricist who performs their compositions is referred to as both a singer and a lyricist. Dr Bhupen Hazarika embodies this multifaceted role as a singer, lyricist and composer.¹ Dr Hazarika's lyrics are replete with a wide range of emotions and feelings. The main themes of his compositions are revolution, patriotism, feeling for the oppressed and the downtrodden, love, amity, harmony, romanticism and above all humanism.²

Dr Hazarika presided over *Asom Sahitya Sabha* in 1993. He was a recipient of *Padma Shree* (1977), *Padma Bhushan* (2001), *Padma Vibhushan* (posthumously in 2012), *Sangeet Natak Academy Award* (1988), *Dada Saheb Phalke Award* for lifetime achievement in cinema (1993), *Sri manta Sankardeva Award* (1988), Chairman of *Sangeet Natak Academy* (1998), music direction in over 50 films, best music director award by Bangla Film Award Society (1977), by the Bangladesh Film Industry and Bangladesh Journalists Association (1977), Asia Pacific International Film Festival award (1993), it is his life beyond that marks Dr Hazarika as the core cultural icon of not just the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural community called the Assamese but the entire population residing in the North-eastern part of India.³

Through his more than 300 songs, Hazarika addressed issues such as hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression in the region. His compositions tackled political corruption, socioeconomic disparities, and the challenges faced by diverse communities. His songs emphasized the bond between the *Brahmaputra* and *Barak* Valley and the people of the hills and plains. While most of his songs were in Assamese, Hazarika translated many into other languages, notably Bangla and Hindi, expanding their reach to a global audience.

The death of this personality was mourned by countless admirers across India and beyond. Following his death, Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra* was established as a memorial site to honour his lifelong legacy, serving as

¹ Dutta D. 2011.

² Sharma–Gogoi 2018: 20–25.

³ Dutta A. 2013: 443–460.

a tangible embodiment of his cultural significance. Located in *Jalukbari, Guwahati*, in the north-eastern state of Assam, India, this memorial site stands as a tribute to this musical maestro. *Samadhikshetra* is an Assamese term that combines *Samadhi*, meaning burial and *Kshetra*, meaning place or site. Therefore, *Samadhikshetra* refers to the burial site built at the location where Hazarika's cremation took place, signifying the place of his final rest and remembrance.

Therefore, this study is dedicated to exploring the various aspects of the memorial site, including its architectural design, symbolic elements, commemorative features, public engagement, community involvement, challenges and controversies in the development process held in those regards. This study also explores how the site contributes to preserving Dr Bhupen Hazarika's memory and promoting his artistic and cultural legacy for future generations.

Conceptual Framework

On the day of his demise, the then Chief Minister of Assam Traun Gogoi declared that the Government of Assam would preserve his memories.⁴ Later, Gauhati University, a state university of Assam offered a part of the land to practice the last ritual and the Government of Assam constructed a memorial site dedicated to him. It was later named Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra* in recognizing its long-lasting cultural achievements. This site is a physical monument to Dr Hazarika, demonstrating his importance and influence throughout his life.

This resulted in the heritagization of his memories. Heritagization can be understood as heritage making or heritage formation. The notion of heritage is commonly defined in reference to the past in the present.⁵ It is portrayed as a product of the wider social, cultural political and economic transitions that have occurred during the late 20th century.⁶ The term "heritage" describes the legacy of natural, historical, and cultural resources that have been passed down from generations, preserved in the present, and handed over to future ones. This can include tangible heritage such as buildings, monuments artefacts and intangible heritage such as traditions, language and cultural practices. UNESCO defines heritage as an "outstanding universal value" and "irreplaceable source of life and inspiration" that is built from the past but used contempo-

⁴ Bhagwati 2011: 1.

⁵ Park-Tae-Ok: 2019.

⁶ Harvey 2001: 319–338.

rarily.⁷ This contemporary use of heritage revolves around the idea of preserving the past. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is of opinion that heritage isn't simply lost and found, stolen and reclaimed. Even with all the talk of conserving, preserving, restoring, reclaiming, recovering, recreating, recuperating, revitalizing, and regenerating, heritage produces something new in the present by drawing on the past.⁸ The elements of tangible heritage like buildings, materials, and physical spaces are often seen as the primary carriers of heritage. However, these physical aspects are imbued with intangible qualities such as cultural significance, historical narratives, and collective memory. Laurajane Smith is of the view that heritage is a mentality. She argues that "if heritage is a mentality, a way of knowing and seeing, then all heritage becomes, in a sense, intangible"⁹. Therefore, heritage is not just something physical or tangible. It is a mindset and way of understanding and perceiving things. When one views heritage this way it opens the way to perceive the intangibility of things such as a sense of place, history behind the place and memory. Smith believes that "heritage is a symbolic representation of identity. Material or tangible heritage provides a physical representation of those things from the past that speak to a sense of place, a sense of self, of belonging and community"¹⁰. Heritage also helps shape our identity by giving material form to who we are often tied to national identity. According to Smith, "the representational and symbolic value of heritage is constructing and giving material reality to identity is well recognised although analysis of the way heritage is thus used is often articulated in terms of national identity"¹¹. The architectural design, archiving technique and representation process of the memorial site of Dr Hazarika make him an identity of the cultural icon of Assam.

Following this concept, this paper delves into the heritagization of a person's life and works which encompasses the multifaceted process of recognizing, preserving and commemorating their contributions to society. The process of turning anything into heritage is called heritagization. The process is produced and raised by the more extensive political, cultural, social, and economic processes of contemporary society rather than being created independently. Through heritagization, cultural practices, traditions, sites, and objects are identified, recognized and preserved as part of society's heritage. With his

⁷ UNESCO: 1972.

⁸ Gimblett-Kirshenblatt: 1995: 367–380.

⁹ Smith 2006: 54.

¹⁰ Smith 2006: 30.

¹¹ Smith 2006: 48.

critique of the rise of 'heritage industry' in 20th century Britain, Hewison argues that heritagisation is the result of the 'heritage industry' which plays a pivotal role in commercialising and idealizing the past.¹² Therefore, heritagization emerges to preserve and reshape the past. Heritagization is not about the fixation of the past, but it is ongoing progress that makes and remakes that past to fit into the present values and ideas.¹³ In essence, heritagization is the process of constructing heritage from the past to address current needs or issues. It involves activating cultural heritage and discussing how to protect, conserve, and restore it. Since cultural heritage is the result of a collective choice of what is 'heritagizable' which involves discussion, selection, conflict and compromise, heritagization can be thought as the process of value construction. It is a process that places value upon places, people, things, practices, histories or ideas as an inheritance from the past.¹⁴ The process begins with the identification and selection of elements deemed to be worthy of preservation and remember. If heritage is that from the past which groups consider important to remember and re-remember as part of crafting and articulating various identities in the present, then memory and memory work are intrinsic, constitutive properties of heritage.¹⁵ Bendix is of opinion that heritage has two main meanings. First, it is linked to tourism and historical sites preserved for the nation, involving institutions that celebrate and maintain objects, landscapes, monuments, and buildings from the past. Second, it refers to shared values and collective memories.¹⁶ Therefore, this work seeks to explore the heritagization of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, examining how his legacy has been identified, interpreted and commemorated over time through the heritage that is Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadbikshetra* or the Dr Bhupen Hazarika Memorial site. The Site bears the cultural history, memory and past of Assam.

Heritage involves acts or performances of remembering, not just performances of remembering in terms of recounting oral histories, but also in embodying that remembering.¹⁷ Heritagization thus involves the commemoration of a particular event related to that heritage. Commemoration can be defined as the act of remembering someone or something. This act takes place with activities such as honouring and paying tribute to someone or something that has had a significant impact on our lives. Commemorations can be both public

¹² Hewison 1987: 83–106.

¹³ Quyen 2021: 15.

¹⁴ Park–Tae–Ok 2019: 1555–1566.

¹⁵ Wagstaff-Sather 2015: 191–204.

¹⁶ Bendix 2009: 253–269.

¹⁷ Smith 2006: 47.

and private. The primary purpose of commemoration is to create and sustain an understanding of the past. Any commemoration aims to define and perpetuate popular historical knowledge. Thus, the forms commemoration takes are also essentially forms of knowledge that entail different modes of engagement and different objects of knowing.¹⁸ Buckler and Johnson argue that commemorative displays are part of the “Invented Tradition”, termed by Eric Hobsbawm.¹⁹ According to Hobsbawm, ‘invented tradition’ is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both traditions invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and debatable period.²⁰ Therefore, it can be understood that commemoration is an invented tradition because it frequently entails the deliberate development and formalisation of rituals, ceremonies, and symbols to pay tribute to historical occurrences, notable people, or shared memories. For example, the establishment of particular narratives, symbols (like flags or monuments), and rituals (like parades or moments of silence) are commonly used in memorial days and other public remembrance events to foster a sense of shared identity and historical continuity.

Some types of remembrance develop more naturally as a result of grassroots projects, oral histories, and community customs. These commemorations may not have formal recognition but still contribute to a collective sense of identity and memory. The commemoration of Dr Bhupen Hazarika in *Samadbikshetra* exemplifies how ‘invented traditions’ function within societies. It highlights the processes through which commemoration is enacted, serving both to honour him and to reinforce collective identity and continuity within the community. Being a physical representation of Dr Hazarika’s cultural heritage, the *Samadbikshetra* not only commemorates his memory but also represents the principles, traditions, and artistic manifestations that he promoted throughout his life. Commemoration and memorialisation can reflect developments in the political process of peace-making. Acting as a barometer for changing, and emergent, pressures in a society emerging from conflict.²¹ The controversies related to selecting the Dr Hazarika’s last resting place and preserving his memory and the political interference are significant. Political interference is evident in the controversies surrounding the construction of Bhupen Hazarika’s memorial site. Therefore, this work will further explore these controversies, highlighting the complexities and issues involved.

¹⁸ Golburt 2013: 105–131.

¹⁹ Buckler–Johnson 2013: 7.

²⁰ Hobsbawm 2012: 1–14.

²¹ Bort 2004: 3.

This site, dedicated to commemorating his life's work and contributions to Assamese culture and beyond, exemplifies the concept of *lieux de memoire* [sites of memory]. The memorial site, with its monuments, displays, and tributes, serves as a focal point for preserving and passing along his artistic and cultural legacy to future generations. The moment of *lieux de memoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history.²² Nora contends that these sites are intentionally designed to retain a collective memory of the past, usually in response to a perceived threat of forgetting or to shape a specific historical narrative. However, he also points out that these sites might lose their original context or significance with time.

In case of Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhiksbetra*, the Process of heritagization opened the door to politics of representation. The politics of representation revolve around the idea of selecting what to include, how to interpret and how to display different points of view within the museum exhibitions and collections. Preservation of the life and works pictorially, shows the importance of preserving his memories. Preserving and displaying of selected pictures and objects fixes the memory of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and his legacy. This way the memorial site of Dr Bhupen Hazarika acts as a museum which represents his life and Assam's past. Therefore, museum works as representational system. Like language, as mentioned by Stuart Hall, a museum exhibition or display in a museum or gallery can also be thought of as representational system, since it uses objects on display to produce certain meanings about the subject-matter of the exhibition.²³ The museum acts as a repository for cultural memory, possessing objects, images, testimonials and other media that actively represent the past.²⁴ This also signifies the 'museumification' of a person. Museumification is a process whilst originating in the museum is not confined by it. In the interpretive medium of museumification, everything is a potential 'artefact'-entire villages, or abstractions such as 'ethnicity' and 'nation', or human beings.²⁵

Methodology

The study focuses on the representation of the memories of Dr Bhupen Hazarika at the memorial site located in *Jalukbari*, near Gauhati University in

²² Nora 1989: 12.

²³ Hall 1997: 5

²⁴ Bochantin 2019: 17.

²⁵ Dellios 2002: 1–16.

Assam, India. Repeated visits were made to understand the process of heritagization and the architecture and archival patterns of Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra* and Dr Hazarika's life and achievements. Due to the limited availability of research on heritagization of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, further studies are required to comprehend the process of heritagization of this musical maestro through a memorial site. Empirical data for this study was collected through our visit to the site and semi-structured interviews with Gauhati University students, various individuals from throughout Assam, and the managing staff of *Samadhikshetra*.

To gather primary data, we used observation methods to study the architecture and preservation at the *Samadhikshetra* campus and museum. For secondary data, we reviewed newspaper articles from the day of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's demise and consulted various books and articles about his life and contributions. We used content analysis to understand the controversy over his final resting place by examining newspapers, articles, and documents. Resources such as the Newspaper Archive of Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Library and Gauhati University KKH Library enriched our understanding.

We visited the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Library in Guwahati on April 25, 2024. This cultural institute in Guwahati, Assam, includes a museum with Dr Hazarika's private belongings and furniture from his house. Despite the significance of this museum, which was inaugurated by Dr Hazarika himself, we chose not to focus our research on this location. Instead, our primary focus was on Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra*, established posthumously to honor his memory and legacy. This site offers a unique perspective on the process of heritagization, making it an appropriate subject for our research. Additionally, on April 20, 2024, we visited Gauhati University KKH Library, which has a dedicated section for archiving books and magazines related to Dr Hazarika.

Our initial encounter with the museum was a casual visit spurred by curiosity. However, as we explored the preservation of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's life, we decided to document our findings in this paper. This led us to undertake three additional visits, each lasting at least three hours, dedicated to academic exploration. On April 20, 2024, we conducted interviews with students from Gauhati University, who have been paying tribute to the maestro since his death. People across Assam, including political leaders and artists, pay tributes on his birth and death anniversaries annually. The interviews aimed to understand the commemoration activities and visitors' perceptions.

We made three visits to Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra* for research purposes. On April 19, 2024, we examined the museum of the *Samadhikshetra*

and the surrounding region, analysing the preservation technique and contents of the institution. On April 23, 2024, we revisited the *Samadbikshetra* to learn more about the architecture and the importance of each object presented there. During the visit, we also conducted 20 to 30-minute interviews with some of the managing Staff as well as visitors. These interviews focused on visitors' perceptions, commemoration rites for Dr Hazarika's birth and death anniversaries, and the maintenance of *Samadbikshetra*. The questions were open-ended in nature to allow flexibility. The questions we asked the managing staffs included, for example, the following²⁶: *What types of commemorative rituals are observed at this site? Who are the prime visitors to the Samadbikshetra? How many workers are employed here?* To the visitors and students of Gauhati University, we asked some of the questions such as *How familiar are you with Dr Bhupen Hazarika? What did you learn from your visit to the memorial site?* We conducted interviews with a diverse group comprising twenty visitors and twelve Gauhati University students including passed-out students and PhD scholars, ranging in age from approximately 20 to 45 years old. We asked the university students specific questions about commemorative rites. The question is as follows: *how do you perform commemorative rite on the day of death and birth anniversaries?* On April 26, 2024, we revisited the Samadhikshetra at 5:30 pm IST during the evening to capture photographs of lighting and the ambience of that area that were pertinent to our research article.

Controversy over construction of memorial site

Following Dr Bhupen Hazarika's death, a significant controversy developed over his ultimate resting site. On the day of his demise, the residents of *Tezpur* made an appeal that Dr Hazarika had expressed his desire for his eternal resting place to be beside that of *Bishnu Prasad Rabha* throughout his lifetime in numerous gatherings and various public platforms. Given the tremendous significance of his statements, the residents sincerely asked that his last rites should be carried out following his wish.

The All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) appealed for a plot of land similar to *Rajghat* in New Delhi to serve as a centre of faith for all people, irrespective of place, caste, or community. AASU had already constructed a statue of Dr Hazarika on the bank of the *Dighalipukhuri*, a pond located in Guwahati, Assam which the musician himself revealed on February 14, 2009.

²⁶ Chakraborty 2021: 69–88.

The government decided to cremate Dr Hazarika at the *Bharalumukh Sankar Uddyan* in Fancy Bazar. The chief secretary of the state and other bureaucrats met in the evening to decide to remind Dr Hazarika at that park. But the decision was resented by various sections of the people because according to them the place was not a good fit for the great personality.²⁷ Satyen Das, general secretary of the NSUI (National Students' Union of India) Assam State Committee, appealed to the Assam government to create a separate memorial site for Dr Hazarika.²⁸

Controversy over the grounds for the cremation of Dr Bhupen Hazarika came to an end when the state government decided to perform his last rites on the plot of land offered by Gauhati University authorities in *Jalukbari*.²⁹ On November 9 2011, Hazarika's cremation was done in the presence of Assam, the chief minister, the Governor's council of ministers, MLAs, leaders, students and countless fans which was also widely telecasted through media.

The reason for selecting the plot of land in *Jalukbari* is that it is spacious and is located by the national highway. The plot of land is also close to the Brahmaputra River, which was close to the heart of the Maestro. Moreover, it would be a space for travellers or people to sit and relax. Guwahati University family also requested the people and the government of the state to accept their offer as a symbol of respect to this Maestro, who had composed the anthem for Gauhati University *Jhulikabo Luitore Paar* in 1956.³⁰

Plan of the Samadhikshetra, the Memorial Site

The main aim of the *Samadhikshetra* is to preserve Dr Hazarika's creations. The museum stands 30 meters high with three floors. The ground floor of the museum features a gallery showcasing Dr Hazarika's professional accomplishments and his brief but impactful political involvement, as depicted through photographs. The first floor houses another gallery with images from his recording studios and the time surrounding his passing. It also contains a conference hall. Conveniently placed staircases and mirrored elevators allow visitors to access the different floors. Its dome-shaped top, wrapped in transparent white cloth, draws inspiration from the *Kamakhya* Temple located in Assam

²⁷ Baruah P. 2011a: 1.

²⁸ Laskar 2011: 9.

²⁹ Baruah P. 2011b: 1.

³⁰ Baruah P. 2011b: 1.

which is one of the sacred places of India. The museum's design incorporates elements from Dr Hazarika's songs and literary works. The museum includes a gallery, an audio-visual room showcasing his movies and videos, and four music rooms where visitors can listen to his songs. The memorial site has a land area of 9924.76 square meters. The eternal soul fire is placed. There are open spaces for cars and motorbikes parking at the entrance to the *Samadhi*. On the entrance path, the ticket booth is located. There are seats and benches for sitting, and water jets are placed for rest.³¹

The *Samadhikshetra* campus is designed with streams, ponds, flowers, decorative plants, and a hedge garden. A small stream surrounds the memorial, and a water fountain with colourful lights and melodies enhances the evening atmosphere. A platform near the fountain offers visitors a place to rest. The campus features a statue of Dr Hazarika and a platform shaped like an island that holds a replica of a pen and microphone, under which his cremation ashes are placed. An electrical lamp attached to the replica honours him. Dr Hazarika's statue is positioned near the entrance route to the museum, symbolizing his lasting impact. A music system plays his timeless songs throughout the park. There is also a designated area to the right of the museum for a *diya* [an oil lamp] that signifies the daily ritual of lighting a lamp in his honour, creating a reverent ambience and inviting guests to pay their respects. The lighting system features a dark middle space, while the flat posts outside the memorial are illuminated with lights in diverse colours. The museum is open to the public from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM and from 2:00 PM to 7:30 PM, except Thursdays. The *Samadhikshetra* employs a staff of fourteen, including various personnel, an electrician, a gardener, and four security guards.

Politics of Preservation in Samadhikshetra

The entrance, designed like a home, represents the eternal resting place of Dr Bhupen Hazarika. Visitors must remove their shoes before entering the main museum after ascending to the *Samadhi*. This activity resembles with the sacredness of *Kamakhya* Temple as the dome construction of the museum is influenced by the same. Immediately upon entering the gate, a replica of a pen and microphone can be observed, demonstrating his creativity as a musical and vocal artist and his role as an advocate for social change. The water fountain, representing his love for rivers, is symbolic of his expressive voice

³¹ Baruah G. 2015: 53–56.

and impromptu poetic writings. Furthermore, the fountain embodies a sense of peacefulness and provides a conducive atmosphere for visitors to relax.



Pic. Nr. 1: *The entrance of the Samadhi kshetra*
Photo: Leenasri Gogoi



Pic. Nr. 2: *The Museum (Dome Shaped)*
Photo: Leenasri Gogoi



Pic. Nr. 3: *The replica of the Pen and Microphone and attached electrical lamp*
Photo: Leenasri Gogoi

The museum honours Dr Hazarika by addressing a different aspect of his life and career on each floor, with its design modelled like two hands in *Namaskar*. Various photographs of his life and works are kept and illustrated within the museum. Archiving Dr Bhupen Hazarika's photos with titles that refer to songs that are pertinent to them is one of the innovative ways to contextualize and preserve his legacy. The archive's arrangement of the collection and the addition of song titles to each image provide viewers with a deeper insight into Hazarika's life and creative output.

His early years, childhood, family, cinematic career, political career, and singing career are all featured on the ground floor. One of Dr Hazarika's songs, *Xaibatae Dbemalite Tumare Umola Monot Ase*, is labelled on his childhood photo. The meaning of the lyrics is, "I remember playing with you when we were kids". Pictures from his cinematic career, political career, and interactions with filmmakers are preserved. Hazarika is featured in multiple photos alongside well-known musicians and celebrities, all of whom are identified by the song *Ami ekekboan naore jatri*. The lyric meaning carries that we are the passengers of the same boat. His musical journey is detailed in another section, along with images of him playing at various musical gatherings under the heading *Mor gee-tor bejar srota Tomak Namaskar*. My greetings to the thousands of people who have listened to my music are conveyed in the lyrics. The song *Prithivi nokoba moi akalxaria* is labelled on the photos of him in various moods and situations. The meaning of the lyrics is "the world, don't say I'm alone".

Ascending to the next floor, photographs kept are of his accolades and accomplishments by the stairs, signifying the advancement of his career. Placing photos of his honours and accomplishments on the wall beside the staircase is located not only improves the room's aesthetic appeal but also narrates the tale of his ongoing development, success, and inspiration. The staircases evoke the idea of progress. Each step represents a stage or milestone in his journey.

The initial photo depicts his death upon arriving at the first floor. The picture's placement symbolically signifies the start of a new era rather than the conclusion of his voyage. His song *Moi jetia ei jibanar maya eri gusi jam / Axa koru mor sitar kaxot tomar Xohari pam* is the caption on the photo on the day of his death. The meaning of the lyric conveys that "I want to receive your response near my eternal resting place when I leave this life". The additional archives in this section feature Dr Hazarika at meetings and social occasions, replicas of CD and book cover pages by him, images of Hazarika with various people, and portraits drawn by artists. Another section includes news items about Dr Hazarika, photocopies of his handwritten letters, self-composed poems and lyrics, and pictures of him with members of various ethnic communities

in Northeast India. Dr Bhupen Hazarika considered all the ethnic groups, as well as the tribal communities, as the pure son of the soil, and it gave him immense pleasure to see the unity among people.³² His song *Moi eti jajabor Dhorar dibinge dipange louru nibisari nija ghar* is captioned with a picture of his travels and experiences around the globe. The meaning of the lyrics is, “I am a nomad who travels the world without looking for a place to call home”.

His final rituals’ ashes and the items he used such as shoes, glasses, garments, *gamosa*, hat, etc.—are preserved on the second floor of this museum. There is a wooden statue of him kept in one of the sections. Artworks of Hazarika’s picture painted on pipal leaves by artists are kept there.



Pic. Nr. 4: *The presentation of his life and works*
Photo: Leenasri Gogoi

The museum specifically archives the different artists’ paintings based on some of the most well-known melodies through canvases. Such as his song *Koto Jomanor mrityu hol* [so many soldiers are dead], which is based on the Sino–Indian war of 1962 is placed on the ground floor. Durlabh Bhattacharjee is the one who drew the paintings. His love and care for the nation’s military are demonstrated in the song. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s works are influenced by Srimanta Sankardeva, a saint, scholar, dramatist, rural entrepreneur, and social and religious reformer in Assamese culture and history. *Sankardeva*, considered by some Assamese people as an incarnation and a foremost worthy son

³² Dutta D. 2011: 176.

of God, significantly impacted Hazarika's creations.³³ Dr Hazarika derived his inspiration from Srimanta Shankardeva and started his musical career with his first song *Kusumbar putra* in his school days. The painting themed on this song is done by Debananda Ulup. The museum has another painting by Debananda Ulup that is based on the song *Ami Axomiya Nabau Dukhia* [We, the Assamese are not poor] by Hazarika. Hazarika calls on the Assamese people to take action in the song. Another song of Hazarika which is about his call to people to come out to fight the evil forces in society named *Aah Aah olai Ab Xojag Janata* [Come, come outside the conscious people] is illustrated through a painting by Durlabh Bhattacharjee. We can say that those songs by Dr Bhupen Hazarika, which reflect communalism and political indulgence, can be labelled as “protest songs”³⁴. The picturisation of his song *Moi eti jajabor* [I am a Nomad] is done by Atul Baruah. The picturisation of his song *Bistirna parore* [the extensive shores] is done by the artist Aminul Haque. The song is a reflection of the ways he addresses the mighty Brahmaputra.



Pic. Nr. 5: *The picturisation of Dr Hazarika's Song*

Photo: Sayani Sarkar

³³ Hazarika 2019: 752–756.

³⁴ Dutta D. 2011: 44.

Bhupen Hazarika's work characterised by a sense of empathy and humanistic values has led some scholars to argue that he merits recognition as a great humanist as well as a cultural figure. Hence some scholars compare him with Mahapurush Srimanta Shankardeva and Madhavdeva in Assam. These two saints and literary figures of Assam reformed the minds of the people during the *Vaishnav* period, and it is now Dr Bhupen Hazarika, who in the era of human love, tried to spread the feeling of love, unity, and national integrity amongst the people.³⁵ His song *Manube Manubor babe* [Human is for human] is a reflection of the humanistic approach which was the primary characteristic of his creations. The picturisation of this song is placed in the archive is done by Atul Barua. Picturisation of his song *Asom amar rupobi* [our Assam is beautiful], a song of patriotism, done by Naren Das is placed in another section. The picturisation of his song *borodoisila ne borudoisila* [Bordoichila is a storm occurs during the springtime in Assam] is done by Durlabh Bhattacharjee. The song reflects the social consciousness of Dr Hazarika. The picturisation of his song *Mahabahu Brahmaputra* [The almighty Brahmaputra] is done by Dadul Chaliha. The song explains social harmony and integrity.



Pic. Nr. 6: *The Statue of Dr Hazarika*
Photo: Sayani Sarkar

³⁵ Dutta D. 2011: 124.



Pic. Nr. 7: *The area where diya is placed.*

Photo: Sayani Sarkar

Commemorative rites

In India, commemorative rites have their roots in both religious and cultural customs. These rites frequently entail practices such as offering food, flowers, and prayers to the departed or one's ancestors. Every family or group may have customs specific to their background and cultural history. While the commemoration of an ancestor is typically a private, family-oriented affair, the commemoration of a public figure transforms into a communal event, often supported and organized by institutions, media, and public ceremonies. Being a public figure, the commemoration of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, at the *Samadbikshetra* is a prime example of such a community event. Public commemorations at the *Samadbikshetra* serve to legitimize cultural narratives and keep his legacy alive.

The commemorative rite at the *Samadbikshetra* began with offering a lighting *diya*, an oil lamp from the day of Hazarika's demise. Since his final rites were performed at the site, the lamp offered to his departed soul has been kept continuously lit since 2011. Mr Dulal Talukdar is in charge of maintaining this daily ritual at a place where a lamp has remained since Hazarika's death. Talukdar claims that he has committed to this work and cannot leave until a family member or a selected person takes over. The *diya* was originally placed where

Hazarika was cremated, but a separate location was selected for it during the construction of the replica of the pen and microphone in the area. The electric *diya* in the replica is only lit on certain occasions to save electricity. Talukdar considers it an honour to carry out this work, viewing it as a responsibility and an opportunity to pray for Hazarika daily. He ensures the lamp remains continuously lit by using a method where he lights a temporary lamp from the original flame when the wick is nearing its end. This allows him to clean the main *diya* and replace the wick without extinguishing the flame. The *diya* is housed in a glass box to protect it from the wind. This shows the significance and commitment involved in maintaining the daily commemorative ritual at the *Samadhikshetra*, through the personal dedication of Mr Talukdar in keeping the lamp burning continuously in honour of the deceased. Talukdar provided insights into visitor engagement at the site, noting that they receive a diverse range of visitors from across Assam and India daily. He mentioned that the number of visitors significantly increases during weekends and the summer vacation period in Assam (July 1st to July 30th). During this time, families often visit with their children to learn about Hazarika's legacy.

Some of the important commemorative ceremonies and cultural events are held on significant occasions in Hazarika's life, such as his birth and death anniversaries. The Guwahati University community, student unions, various political parties from Assam, cultural institutions, notable artists, and people from across Assam visit the site to offer their prayers. Sajag Bora, a student of Gauhati University, Himanjit Deka, General Secretary at Post Graduate Student's Union (2023–24) of Gauhati University, says that "the ritual primarily involves offering flowers and lighting the *diya*. Additionally, informal and formal cultural programs are organized, where participants discuss Dr Hazarika's creations and selectively perform his songs". On these occasions, fans bring imaginative, hand-drawn drawings of Hazarika, which the museum administration preserves and archives. These drawings highlight Hazarika's lasting impact and his ability to connect with people of all ages.

These events honour his legacy and provide an opportunity for the general public to become aware of and recognize his accomplishments and services. Therefore, such commemorations are purposive, aimed at educating the public and honouring Hazarika's influence on society and the nation. Commemoration in *Samadhikshetra* hence is about maintaining his legacy and impact.

In addition to such commemorations, notable individuals from across Assam gather at *Samadhikshetra* to offer their prayers to Bhupen Hazarika during *Bobag Bihu*. It is a festival, that marks the beginning of the Assamese New Year. The love and offerings dedicated to Hazarika on this particular day affirm that

the Assamese masses recognise and cherish his love for the nation. This love is beautifully encapsulated in Hazarika's own words through his song: "Bohag is neither a season nor a month; it is the lifeline of the Assamese nation, the courage of the mass life".



Pic. Nr. 8: *The commemorative rites by Students of Gauhati University*
Photo: Sajag Bora



Pic. Nr. 9: *The tribute to the Maestro*
Photo: Sajag Bora



*Pic Nr. 10: The garland offered
on statue by a student of Gauhati University
Photo: Himanjit Deka*



*Pic Nr. 11: The prayers offered by students
Photo: Himanjit Deka*

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that the whole preservation process results in the heritagization of a person and his memory. The heritagization of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's life and works, as embodied in the memorial site, serves as a process of preserving, maintaining and commemorating his cultural significance. Through detailed architectural design, symbolic representation and commemorative features, the memorial site is more than just a physical monument. It is a living tribute to the musical maestro and thus illustrates the close interaction between cultural and constructed heritage. The site's incorporation of natural elements such as streams, fountains, gardens, etc., not only improves its aesthetic appeal but also honours the sources of inspiration for Dr Hazarika's creative endeavours. This holistic approach emphasises the fundamental link between cultural heritage, artistic expression and the natural environment. Despite controversies and problems during its development, including difficulties over the final resting location, the *Samadhikshetra* currently serves as a beacon of togetherness for Dr Bhupen Hazarika's supporters and the larger community through annual commemorative events and continuous public engagement. The memorial site exemplifies his existence in people's hearts after many years of his demise. Visitors from all over Assam and beyond converge to pay tribute to the. In essence, Dr Bhupen Hazarika *Samadhikshetra* serves as a sacred place for preserving the legacy of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, ensuring that his spirit lives on in the hearts and minds of future generations.

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