CHAPTER V
LYRICAL REPRESENTATION OF
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5.1 Assamese Song and the Brahmaputra

Songs and music are greatest creations of human kind in the course of history. It is creativity in pure and undiluted form. Being the musical expression of the feelings and emotion songs reach to a large number of listeners. All the literature in the world bears testimony to the themes of nature appearing in the songs. Rivers, flowers, winds, stream are found to have endeared by the imaginative mind. The might and magnanimity of the Brahmaputra River have been inspiring the lyricist and composers to compose songs on the Brahmaputra concentrating on various perspectives ascribed to construction of selfhood. Almost all the songs reflect the attachments of the people on its bank with the river. The experience of the feeling to identify with the vast water body is expressed in terms of beauty, awe, strength, vigour, generosity, life journey, life struggle and especially to identify the feeling of belongingness. The presence of the river throughout the state from the east to the west as well as the easy accessibility of the river from almost all parts of Assam elicits psychological dependence on the river. Out of all the creative works centred on the river the lyrical compositions win the heart of the common folk. The Brahmaputra is a river with strong musical tradition. The river turns out to be a metaphor in the discourse of identity formation of the people living on the two banks.

5.1.1 Experience of self through music

Music making and music listening is best understood as an experience of self in process. The study of music from such a perspective requires deep insight into aesthetic expression of the soul. In music we
express ourselves, our own sense of rightness, and suborn ourselves, lose ourselves, in an act of participation. The familiar postmodern point that we live in an age of plunder in which musics made in one place for one reason can be immediately appropriated in another place for quite another reason, but also that while music may be shaped by the people who first make and use it, as experience it has a life of its own. Marx remarks somewhere that it is easy enough to move analytically from the cultural to the material, easy enough, that is, to interpret culture, to read it ideologically, to assign it social conditions. The difficult trick is to do the analysis the other way round, to show however the base produced this superstructure, to explain why an idea or experience takes on this artistic or aesthetic form, and not another, equally 'reflective' or 'representative' of its conditions of production. After the cultural event, as a historian might agree, we can say why expression had to happen this way; before it there is no creative necessity at all. And if art is therefore, so to speak, originally accidental, then there is no particular reason to accept its makers' special claims on it. The interesting question, rather, is how art comes to make its own claims, in other circumstances, for itself.

The postmodern problem is the threat to our sense of place. What is underplayed in such discussions is the problem of process - not the positioning of the subject as such, but our experience of the movement between positions. This is where music becomes an important area for study. What happens to our assumptions about postmodern identity when we examine a form in which sound is more important than sight, and time more important than space; when the 'text' is a performance, a movement, a flux; when nothing is 'represented'? The broad argument that is wanted to make here, in short, is that in talking about identity we are talking about a particular kind of experience, or a way of dealing with a particular kind of experience. Identity is not a thing but a process - an experiential process which is most vividly grasped as music. Music seems to be a key to
identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective. As Mark Slobin (2011) puts it, “Music seems to possess the quality i.e. the simultaneous projecting and dissolving of the self in performance”. Individual, family, gender, age, super cultural givens, and other factors hover around the musical space but can penetrate only very partially the moment of enactment of musical fellowship. Visible to the observer, these constraints remain unseen by the musicians, who are instead working out a shared vision that involves both the assertion of pride, even ambition, and the simultaneous disappearance of the ego.

5.1.2 Environmental identity through the Songs on the Brahmaputra

In many of the Assamese folk songs as well as the songs of the famous Assamese lyricists the Brahmaputra figures out with its wide ranging connotations. It is also observed that while with some lyrists’ use of the river appears natural with for others it is a conscious effort to impose meaning into the existence of the river through their songs. The way the river is figured out in the articulation of the feelings implies the emotional connection and valued experience with the river. Susan Clayton and Susan Optow (2003) observe that ‘to constitute an important aspect of identity, the natural environment must influence the way in which people think about themselves. The practice to choose the Brahmaputra and its bank as factors of identity appears to be the major theme in most of the songs. The previous chapters delineate how the river’s occurrence in different phases of human activities grows into the heritage of the Assamese people. The feeling of amazement and awe as well as faith on the river finds its articulation through the various forms of folksongs through which a collective consciousness is suggested.

Being with music is not a way of expressing ideas rather it is a living with the ideas of life. By living with this idea music reveals a group of people organizing and involving themselves with their own communal
relationships - a participant-observer's comment, so to speak, on the processes of living together. The aesthetic point of the exercise is not to reflect a reality which stands behind it but to ritualize a reality that is within it. In short, different sorts of musical activity may produce different sorts of musical identity. The focus, in fact, is directed to how the music becomes a platform for expressing selfhood.

The discussion is broadly divided into two sections. The first one deals with the Assamese folksongs and the other with the songs of the celebrated Assamese lyricists.

5.2 Folksongs picturing the Brahmaputra

Folksongs, as observed by Dr Birendranath Datta (1994) is a most inclusive category and as such, the total volume of material usually lumped together under this blanket category is extremely rich both in variety and quantity. The Assamese term for all such types of songs is either *geet* or *nām*. It is called *geet* when sung with merriment in festivals and ceremonies while songs sung in the religious occasion are named *nām*. Like the folk materials of other societies Assamese folksongs, music of the countryside, too are constituted around devotional content, ceremonies and festivals, enduring passion etc. The folksongs taken for discussion in this chapter are *bihugeet* (songs connected with the festival of Bihu), *biyaanaam* (folksongs connected with the institution of marriage), *dehbisaror geet* (folksongs implying the cycles of birth and death), *naokhelor geet* (folksongs sung during boat rowing competition), *kahinimulok geet* (stirybased folksongs), etc. Many of such songs are replete with the reference to the great river in its local names. The evocation of the river in these songs unveils the spontaneous attachment towards the riverine environment. The association depends upon the role of the river water in different facets of human life as well as the congenial climate which has been attracting the numerous groups of people towards
its bank. It has been elaborately discussed in the chapter entitled Brahmaputra and the Life of the People of Assam. As far as the question of folksong under this study is concerned, the close examination of music within a given social and political fabric, possibilities of understanding the national as well as regional identities present in nation became more comprehensive due to the cultural and traditional ties inherent in artistic expression of thought and emotion. The discourses institutionalize the river water in the cultural and religious front thereby providing a feeling of 'supra identity' transcending the boundary of national or regional identity. The articulation in the Assamese folk songs procreates to conceptualise the understanding of such a concept of selfhood formation to necessitate the value of water as well as the bank of the Brahmaputra. The role that the river water and its bank played in defining and maintain identities work at many level within a community or between communities. Using the river water as a route for communication and the riverbank as places for congregation happens to be the main motivating factor to feel psychologically attached to the river. It reinforces the idea that what links the responses from the listeners to the expression through music is the assumption that music, the experience of music for composer or performer and listener alike, gives us a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it. Musical appreciation is, by its very nature, a process of musical identification, and the aesthetic response is, implicitly, an ethical agreement.

Songs are narrative pleasure. The 'story' with natural as well cultural images in music describes an entanglement of aesthetics and ethics; such a narrative is necessary to any claim that art has something to do with life. A good jazz performance, that is to say (like any good musical performance), depends on rhetorical truth, on the musicians' ability to convince and persuade the listener that what they are saying matters.
Folk songs are the strongest medium of expressing one’s identity. Identity can be defined as the characteristics that individuals use to group themselves with some people and differentiate themselves from others. As observed by Slobin (2011) “folksingers make music to enhance work with animals and crops... ... to give voice to their beliefs, hopes and identities or to signal that they understand their place in society.” (p.3) National identity, thus, includes those characteristics that bring together as well as differentiate those people who live within the borders of a nation-state. Folk music, from the birth of the idea of the nation-state, has been one means of expressive culture used to generate, define, and reinforce national identity. Assam being a multi ethnic state is gifted the presence of multi lingual folk songs. Though only the Assamese folk songs are the centre of study in this chapter it is to be noted that the mention of the Brahmaputra River is found in the folk songs of other communities especially the Mishing. Numal Pegu in his book ‘The Mishings of the Brahmaputra’ has incorporated songs and indentifies the Mishing community as ‘Luitporia Mishing Sokol’ meaning the Mishings who live on the bank of the Brahmaputra. The folk songs define the ancient psyche prevalent unnoticed throughout all generations. As the music of the people, folk music provided a way to understand where we came from, the trials and tribulations of those who came before us, and the good times and the bad.

The tranquility of the Brahmaputra enthralls the inhabitants on its bank to create and recreate art on it. The role of cultural practice in expressing the selfhood is largely manifested through the folk songs. To study how the expression of the feeling of the singer exhibits the discourse of identifying the group of people is supported by the semantic value of such songs. The inclusion of the name of the river displays the self-consciousness for identifying with a higher body i.e. the Brahmaputra. Such self consciousness is reflected in the creation of some individual and is accepted by a group. Mac Edward Leach’s (1949-50) comment asserts
such acceptance: “All aspect of folklore, probably originally the products of an individual, are taken by the folk and put through a process of recreation, which through constant variation and repetition become a group product”.

5.2.1 Bihugeets

Bihu, the cultural festival of Assam, is celebrated by the Assamese diaspora around the world in the onset of Assamese New Year during the Spring season in the mid of April. It is a festival of merriment and joy. The folksong associated with the Bihu is bihugeet. It is sung while performing the Bihu dance by different groups of people of various ages. The Brahmaputra in its various local names shows up in the bihugeets. The beauty of the river as captured by the imaginative mind finds true reflection in the bihugeets:

The Brahmaputra is really beautiful
Nobody can stop him by giving bar. 

... ... ...

The sandbank of Luit is ivory white
The turtles lay their egg by counting.
My body is burning (feeling of love is aroused)
The mustard seeds are blooming
To have seen Dhan (Lover) in the river bank.

The river felt as a witness to the making of Assam’s history is reflected in many of the bihugeets:

The ships of the company roars on the Luit...

Again,
Through the Brahmaputra / the masters from England came

The river being the only route to enter into the land of Assam secures a position in the heart of the people as an agent to enter into the other world. Songs and narratives are recurring belief in personal
coherence, a belief necessarily renewed in the telling of tales. People feel attached because of the emotional support the river carries throughout history. As observed by Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow 'environmental identity is one part of the way in which people form their self concept: a sense of connection to some part of the non-human natural environment, based on history, emotional attachment, and/or similarity that affects the way in which we perceive and act towards the world; a belief that the environment is important to us and an important part and an important part of who we are.' The Brahmaputra is again and again invoked to feel enthralled with the beauty of the river. None is there to prevent its flow.

The relationship between the voice of the musicians and the environment that shapes the imagination finds its expression through different images, similes, metaphors and other figurative devices of language. The river is supposed to have memorized the chronology of events that played active role in making and remaking the history of the land. In ancient times it also serves as the only route to enter into the land of Assam:

The businessman from England have landed through the Bahmaputra

Announcing their arrival widely
Let him land here
Do you have the news?  

The *bihugeets* convey the attachment of the people with the banks in connection with activities that tell about the existence of a person. Music constructs our sense of identity through the direct experiences it offers of the body, time and sociability, experiences which enable us to place ourselves in imaginative cultural narratives. Such a fusion of imaginative fantasy and bodily practice marks also the integration of aesthetics and
ethics. While singing request is made not to wash away those plots on the bank which the people feel attach to:

A big tree named ‘borhomthuri’ on the bank of the Brahmaputra where we collect logs firewoods

Oh god Brahmaputra
Please do not wash away the plot
We cannot offer you oblation.  

I was washing cloth making sound of forcefully slam the cloth (against a flat surface especially rock to bit the dirt out).

Having my glance at the Luit The bihugeets also celebrate the abundance of fishes and other aquatic animals in the Brahmaputra.

Leela Gogoi in his research based work on Bihu entitled *Bihu: Eti Samikkha* (1987) devoted a chapter on the Geography of Assam as depicted in the Bihugeets. He has described in length how the Brahmaputra mostly with its local name Luit is mentioned to refer to the cultural connotation for Assam. Most of the bihugeets celebrate joyous and passionate expression of love in the background of a serene atmosphere. The unsteady mind of the lover towards the beloved finds its true reflection in the volatile sandbank of the river as a result of frequent erosion; the self of the singer becomes one with the flow of the unsteady river water:

The body turns out to be crazy
The body converts into stiff riverbank of the Luit
I become mad with you
Since we have been introduced to each other. 

The beloved is happy to discover the generous quality of her lover which she equates with the generosity of the dearest river:

The firewood from the bank of the river become quadruple when collected
If my lover calls out four ladies will arrive in his front putting their hands across each other's shoulder.  

The misery of a youth who yearns for the love of his beloved finds solace with the Luit which he feels laments when it finds no company referring to the aquatic lives on it:

The red river is dried up being sad for the lack of fishes

Why is the Luit dried up

Oh beloved one, I am dried up yearning for you

Why you have dried up?  

If the wish to own the beloved is not fulfilled the river is taken for the final submission of the self:

If I do not get (you) I will finish myself jumping into the Brahmaputra.  

The bihugeets exemplify the close tie of an Assamese heart to the very existence of the river through multifarious connotation. It is worth mentioning that though bihugeets are being composed in the recent years the conventional ones are being sung during the celebrations. The practice of singing and dancing of Bihu on the bank of the Brahmaputra and its other tributaries was in vogue prior to the culture of stage performances. There is also the possibility of composing the songs instantly while dancing on the banks. Hence, it is inevitable on the part of the participants to feel defined with the environment which generates the opportunity to listen to their own heart. The strong evidence of the effort to feel culturally elevated with the proximity of the Brahmaputra is reflected in many of the bihugeets which are mostly sung collectively thereby ensuring a collective form of selfhood for the people living on its bank.

Invented cultural affinities come with every identity; each is a kind of role that has to be scripted, structured by conventions of narrative to which the world never quite manages to conform. An identity is always already an ideal, what we would like to be, not what we are.
5.2.2 Biyageets

Almost all the rituals of an Assamese marriage (biya) are enriched by biyageets sung on the function and learnt by practice generation after generation. Assamese marriage is purely song based. It is noteworthy that the appearance of the river in biyageets is to show reverence to the existence of the river and an attempt to entangle the river to all basic aspects of life. The following biyageet shows how any location is termed as belonging to the great river:

The bride is falling down as she is grieved by the side of the Luit Raam, the bridegroom extends his arm to hold the bride.\(^{12}\)

Bringing water preferably from the Brahmaputra for the ritual bathing of the bride and the bridegroom is a welcoming practice in Assamese marriages. Songs known as ‘paanitola (fetching water) geet’ feature the river in different names. It is interesting to note that the Brahmaputra and the Jamuna are co-identified in those songs:

Radha, the bride quivers to have seen the wave of the river Jamuna
O, boatman, bring the boat close to the bank.\(^{13}\)

Biyageets are also found featuring the river to show the changes in the society.

5.2.3 Aainaam

_Aainaam_ is religious song chanted collectively to provide relief to the small pox affected patients. It was believed in the Assamese society that the disease is caused by some deity who travels through the water bodies especially through big rivers. The goddess is considered to be an incarnation of Goddess Durga. During the worship the Luit is invoked to help the Goddess in making a downward journey so that the patient gets rid of the discomfort:

Mother, the goddess has made an upward journey
You are my Mother’s Seven sister
Oh my mother please go through the Luit\(^{14}\)
Instances are found in the folksongs that for the common people the Brahmaputra is the Jamuna or the Ganges. Noted folklorist Dr Nabin Chandra Sarma remarks that in ancient time the word ‘Ganga’ stands for all the rivers as opposed to the present knowledge of Ganges being a single river. That is why it cannot be denied that the folksongs refer to the Brahmaputra with the name of Ganga.

5.2.4 Dehbisaror Geet, Tokari Geet, Dihanaam etc

Folksongs related with the metaphysical concept and the journeys of life are termed as dehbisaror git. The saga of life and death happens to be the motivating factor behind these types of folksongs. People found solace for all types of misery in the river. Though the use of the Brahmaputra is relatively less in these folksongs, its mention is found to indicate mostly the role of the river in sheltering the people on its bank and thereby providing a place identity for its inhabitants. The myth found behind the creation of the river is found to have reflected through one of such dihaanaam:

Taking the incarnation of porosuraam you killed the khsatriyo
Holding axe and on the left is the bow
cutting down hills and mountains brought the Brahmaputra downwards to save the people of the land. 15

Again, religious chantings are found to have existed to represent the land by the name of the river:
The religious Guru Sankardeva journeyed upstream and established his abode on the bank of the Luit i.e. the Brahmaputra.16 Sankardeva had close association with the river while he made religious long tour

5.2.5 Ballad

The Assamese ballads hold immense evidence of the mention of the Brahmaputra as the river is considered to have witness the events that are
instrumental in the making of the history of Assam. Assamese ballads based on history include *haradatta-biradattaor geet*, (folksongs on the rebellious hero Harodutta and Birodutta) *badan borphukanor geet*, (folksongs on Badan Barphukan who brought the invaders from Myanmar to Assam) *maniram dewaanor geet* (folksongs on Maniram Dewan who was hanged by the British during the 1857 uprising), *Joymoti kunwarir geet* (folksongs of Joymati Kunwari who had to face inhuman punishment in order to save the lineage of her husband Ahom Prince and late King Gadapani) etc. These folksongs tell about the struggle for existence for the people living in Assam both in the national and regional levels. It is observed that such types of historical narratives are not widely sung. The river is featured in the text of Maniram dewaanor geet to signify how the river provides a collective identity the people of Assam:

When Miriti dies Miriyoni cries
Looking over the sandbank of the Brahmaputra
Maniram Dewan weeps in Kolkata
Glancing over the Rongpur District. 17

Another song under the same category identifies the land of Assam with the river:

Oh! Maniram obstruction is given on Luit/... ... 
Maniram is discharged. 18

Here, the term ‘luit’ signifies the place to which Maniram belonged.

That the Brahmaputra is mentioned in many of the folk songs connected with different activities of Assamese folk life. In most of the songs the different spots along the banks of the river known as ‘ghat’ which are used for different purposes viz. to fetch water, as boat harbor etc. The ghats turn out to be places of congregation not only for human but also for the gods:

Through the bank of the Luit
Through which way Krishna will come? 19
5.3 Assamese Songs of Established Lyricists

Among the major exponents of Assamese lyricists there is hardly any one left who has not celebrated the Brahmaputra in their creation of memorable songs. For almost all of them viz. Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Parvati Prasad Barua, Dr Bhupen Hazarika, Rudra Barua, Anadiram Das, the river turns out to be the main source for the cultural identification of the community living on its bank. The Brahmaputra River reveals significant spatial and temporal variability from the upstream to downstream. The academic study of the popular songs on the river Brahmaputra by the famous Assamese lyricists reflects their conscious effort to connect the river with the psyche of the people. It helps to connect the past of the community with the present and thereby rendering a convincing necessary flow of identification. The way both the physical and psychological experience with the river takes on artistic or aesthetic form reveals its creative necessity. Experiences felt, constructed or created turns into musical or aesthetic experiences of ourselves.

5.3.1 Assamese self mirrored through the past

The songs on the Brahmaputra by the famous lyricists turn out to be one of the major sources to get access into the rich heritage for the people living on its bank. The value of these songs has long been linked to form a sense of connectedness with the heritage. Dr Bhupen Hazarika sings:

What is the great heritage of the Brahmaputra?
The massive Brahmaputra
Pilgrimage of great union
Expressing throughout the long ages
Meaning of concord

This song narrates how the Assamese mind has experienced the phenomena that gave its footing throughout the ages. The beckoning ambience of the river was instrumental in the occurrence of these episodes:
The two banks (of the Brahmaputra) welcome numerous visitors
Something is to be taken
Something is to be given
In order to get accustomed

This specific song of Bhupen Hazarika reiterates the contribution of Srimanta Sankardeva, Teg Bahadur, Lachit Borphukan, Bishnu Rabha who have contributed to the formation of what Assamese self in today’s perspective. Being aware of the past generates the understanding of the collective identity of a community.

An interesting note is observed in the use of the term ‘Brahmaputra’ and ‘Luit’. Though both are synonymous in his songs, the ‘Brahmaputra’ refers to the physical sense of the river with its huge water body. On the other hand, ‘luit’ signifies the connotative meaning of the term. Luit is the strength, vigour, synonym for Assam, synonym for mind, synonym for life, an image for heritage preservation. In this connection reference can be made of Dr Dilip Kumar Dutta (2011) from his book ‘Bhupen Hazarikar Geet Aaru Jiban Rath’ when he says that the view of Assam that Hazarika has offered is not the land Assam politically perceived rather it a far stretched land.

In another song delineating the theme of the present history writing Dr Hazarika feels that the Luit represents the history of the life on its bank. It listens to the weal and woes of the mind whoever hovers around its banks:

In the graveyard on the bank of Luit
Rongmon (anyone possessing a good heart) everyday screams
Narrating the outflow of his heart

With the courage gathered from Time I will go on writing
The Salvation of mankind
Another song which encourages the Assamese people not to get frightened against the ills of society thinking that The Brahmaputra has extend the scope to disseminate the values of the great saint Sankardeva. It is noteworthy that the same song bears both the word ‘Brahmaputra’ and ‘Luit’ to signify two connotation of the same water body; Brahmaputra to mean the watercourse and Luit to suggest the bank of the river:

Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakhetra
Flows through it the Brahmaputra

Again,
Science has brought waves
The banks of the Luit has been illuminating

Rudra Barua whose songs have been enthralling the listeners throughout ages assuredly points out that the Luit is itself a history for the people on its bank:

The Brahmaputra is my history
I am called imperishable
I have washed my sword in this river water for many times.

Time is one of the major factors in the formation of selfhood. The Brahmaputra is best understood as a self contained entity which passes through the knots of time. Rudra Barua observes:

The Luit of Time flows unhurriedly
Erasing the patches of memory leading towards the eternity

5.3.2 Sense of Belonging

One of the most crucial factors in the formation of selfhood with special reference to an element in nature is the sense of belonging. A person’s sense of belonging to a nation or a sense of unity shared with a group of people finds its expression in the artistic forms in almost all the cultures of the world. Most of the songs celebrating or invoking the
Brahmaputra suggest that the priority given by the Assamese people to identify themselves as inhabitants on the bank of the Brahmaputra. Dr P C Das in his article ‘The Brahmaputra and Bhupen Hazarika: An Enduring Romance’ comments that the Brahmaputra and Bhupen Hazarika are two iconic identity markers of the notion of being an Assamese. The strongest metaphor for identifying the existence of the Assamese is taken from the river. The fact that the banks of the Brahmaputra happens to be a congenial place to settle down for numerous races throughout the ages is well reflected in the song:

The storm of Padma river has blown off

... ... ...

Swimming we arrived on the bank of the Brahmaputra. 27

That the alluvial atmosphere of the river has been inviting different groups of settlers to live on its bank turns out to be a great honour for the people on its bank. Out of so many associations the river Brahmaputra is considered to be the most fitted alternative to attach to his identity.

My abode is on the Luit
My other is also on the Luit. 28

Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s songs featuring the river with its popular name ‘Luit’ promotes a picture of how a feeling of comfortable stay is suggested through the sense of belonging attached with the river. It is found:

(I have) no companion
So I have come out
To the bank of Luit
Playing on the dear flute 29

The necessity to arouse a group identity was the need of the time. Involvement of Jyoti Prasad in the Indian Freedom Movement enhanced
his creative spirit through which he injected into the minds of people an idea of ‘social psychological tradition’ as coined by Mead (1934). Mead asserted that the self emerges only through the conscious effort of group identification. The Brahmaputra turns out to be the replica for group identification not only for regional and national identity but Jyoti Prasad projected the Luit as an identifying factor for the people living on its bank to step into the greater world. He sings:

We are youth from the bank of the Luit
We don’t have fear to die.  

Proximity with the immenseness and the gorgeousness of the eternal flowing water provides the mental strength to face the difficulties of life. The bank of the Brahmaputra termed as ‘luitpaar’ in Assamese happens to be the location where he attempted to find out the treasure to constitute the self: (p.747)

Village on the bank of Luitpora
I move there
In search of song and rhythm  

Boat on the bank of Luit
boarding there I love to see the delightful wave of the broad river in the evening  

Green helmet on the bank of Luit
Golden boat is anchored there  

Beautiful village on the bank of Luit
Wish to see the beautiful face  

Parvati Prasad Barua, doyen of Assamese culture and literature contributed to the world of Assamese music with more than five hundred of immortal creation out of which more than … songs are found to have composed with
the celebration of the Brahmaputra river. Popularly known as 'gitikabi' meaning lyrical poet his compositions are adorned with the odour of the soil. His songs on the river affirm the congenial entry and assimilation of people from various parts of the world. One of his anthologies entitled 'Luiti' consists of Brahmaputra connected songs. The river is glorified in the poems of other anthologies too. The harmonious feeling with an unknown boatman who prepares his food on the sandbank of the Brahmaputra expresses the attachment with the complacent atmosphere of the river bank:

Boatman from strange land in the sandbank of the Luit
Has had his food cooked in the sand
Sing hymns with the dancing of the wave
The body will move to and fro

To constitute an important aspect of identity, the natural environment must influence the way in which people think about themselves. Susan Clayton and Susan Optow in their book Identity and Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature comment that by allowing people the time and space to think about their values, goals and priorities, as well as, perhaps, providing relief from the usual concerns of self representation, the natural environment play a vital role in the extent to which we define ourselves to ourselves. (2003:60)

Anadiram Das, precursor of Assamese Bongit expresses his attraction towards the river showing his wish to identify as an inhabitant by its bank:

You build your house on the bank of Luit

house on the bank of the Luit

... ...

Out of the glee you build up you house there.
He mourns when he has to stay away from the Luit:

O my lovely Luit
Where have I come leaving you

Grandma lives on the bank of Luit

His song representing the identity issue strongly confirms the lyricist’s faith on the role of the river in unifying heterogeneous groups of people on its bank:

On the bank of Luit
We will also retain
The unity of our hearts
It will disseminate to the world ambrosial sentiment
Of our sweet language

Martin Stokes (1994) observes that music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places and boundaries which engender their group identity. Jyotiprasad Agarwala expresses his wish to search for his musical note in the village which is identified with the Luit and to move by the boat which is marked as ‘luitporia’ meaning belonging to the bank of Luit. His lost musical notes flow through the homes of the Luitporia:

Village of those who live on the bank of Luit
There I move
Searching for songs
Searching for tunes

My lost music and tone
In every household of the Luitporias
Move with merriment
5.3.3 Owning the strength from the magnanimity of the river

The flowing water of the river not only bears great power to carve and shape the landscape but also inspires the inhabitants on its bank to own the strength and vigour of moving stream. An urge to possess the potency and spirit of the gargling waves is visible in many of the songs where the composers inspire the dwellers on the bank of the Brahmaputra to change them at the time of need. A clarion call is always heard from the songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwala to ignite the spirit in the days of agony:

Youth friends on the bank of Luit
You are beyond comparison
You have plunged into the battle of life
Daring Death. 42

When Dr Bhupen Hazarika optimistically thought of the welfare of his motherland Assam, ‘Luitorpaar’ meaning banks of Luit is the common expression:

The banks of the Luit will be illuminated
Breaking the barrier of darkness
Flows in the Pragjyotish
Waves of Light Stream 43

One of the seminal compositions of Jayanta Hazarika another notable Assamese music composer equalizes his life history with the current of the river water:

In the current of the Luit
The saga of my life will be written
In the sandbank (I) will write with sand
Woes of loss even though it was found
My childish smile of boyhood
Is submerged in the Luit. 44
The tendency to generate both physical and psychological strength from the magnanimity of the river is the focal theme of many of the Assamese songs thereby visualising an attempt to unite the people on the banks in the hard days. Lakhyhira Das in one of her popular numbers asserts that the inner strength is gathered by swimming in the river Brahmaputtra:

Swimming in the Luit with playmaytes
I feel strength in my heart. 45

The faith is psychologically verified as the collective conscience realizes the role of the role played by the river course in making and remaking the history of the land. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala’s most of the songs celebrating the Brahmaputtra centre around the river as a source of vigour and propensity. The Brahmaputtra as sketched by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala in his songs possesses revolutionary spirit of vigour and strength. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala’s poetic vision popularized through the body of songs popularly known as Jyoti-sangit defined an important aspect of Assamese literature i.e. its function in the popular culture. Intellectual and revolutionary as he was he wished that his ideas should reach the common folk; the ideas must be felt and heard to be accepted. His immortal works were created at a time when the Indian firmament was burning with the urge of freedom. In order to rouse the emotion and feeling in an era of revolution Jyoti Prasad used the Brahmaputtra as an icon for strength and firmness, and as a source of solace to which man feels attached. Hence an urge is generated to be one with the river; a wish to project oneself with the identity of the river is highlighted:

Who hides where today
Being inactive O’ youth on the banks of Luit
Pouring your palmful blood
Will have to erase the stain
Of your Unlucky Mother Earth 46
The collective identity thus established turns out to be a need of the time. The call to feel inspired and get empowered with strength of the Brahmaputra provides the sense of selfhood that is transitional and generative. As observed by S Clayton and S Optow “the group identity generates an imperative to act in ways consistent with the attributed consensus on issues important to the group’s values and goals”. (2003:277) Another motivating song is found among the Jyoti Sangits which engendered the spirit to fight against death:

We are the youth on the bank of the Luit
We do not fear to face death 47

The same tone is observed in Dr Bhupen Hazarika’s song when in 1980s he composes:

The Luitporia group in 1979-80
Thousands voices declare
Will struggle with non-violence principle
Let the life finish if needed 48

The supremacy of a youth from the bank of Luit cannot be compared to anybody as observed during the days of struggle:

O’ young friend on the bank of Luit, no comparison can touch you
O’ Luitporia young friends

No comparison can touch you
You have plunged into the battle of living life
Taking oath to death 49

While composing songs for the Central University of Tezpur Dr Hazarika feels that the power of the eternal flow of the luit will support to promote development of the institution:

The great Luit flows
Near us
Will illuminate the two banks
Will climb the ladder of dream
With great speed 50
5.3.4 Values attached with the Brahmaputra

The Brahmaputra has imparted to the region a value based centricity which aided many of the artistic creation on the river. The role of the river in religious, social and cultural context brings it close to the heart of the common people. In spite of being the hub of diversified ethnic groups the region experience the some broad cultural paradigm common to the entire valley due to the influence of the Brahmaputra. The river knowingly or unknowingly remains instrumental in shaping the collective self and thereby generating a tendency to accept a common identification with the river. A sense of reverence is generated towards the immense riverbank. Dr Bhupen Hazarika sings:

We salute to the wide ranging banks of the Louhitya
We have been born here
Wish to die here

A larger cultural self is imposed on the river with a wish to experience revolutionary changes. Dr Bhuen Hazarika addresses the river as 'Burha Luit' meaning age old Luit and appeals to take care of the lost values of humanity. The song is regarded as one of the epical compositions of Dr Hazarika and one of the most powerful lyrics ever written in Assamese. It is considered as a clear tribute to the mighty river. The river is personified as an experienced personality and is requested not to remain silent in the days of paralysis of the region:

Of the immense banks
Of innumerable people
Listening silently to the clamour
O' Old Luit
Why do you flow, Old Luit?

The river addressed as the 'Burha Luit' and is questioned if it is the son of Lord Brahma what is the worth of such fatherhood and why it is incapable
of inspiring. This very concept shows the connection with the myth of the birth of the Brahmaputra in Kalika Purana. The myth is described in the chapter on Myths of the Brahmaputra.

Such feelings towards the river justify Conrad Philip Kottak’s observation in Cultural Anthropology that “On the basis of the cultural learning, people create, remember and deal with ideas. They grasp and apply specific systems of symbolic meaning.” (2002:62) Parvati Prasad Barua’s songs in his anthology entitled ‘Luiti’ comprises of the immortal creations replete with celestial values assigned to the river. The sea sends message of continuity through the Luit:
The sea from its heart the unsaid is whispered

To the Luit

The values assigned to the river due to the inability to understand its worth inspires the composers to think that the river possesses the power to shed away the evils from the society and thereby injecting a feeling of blessedness into the hearts of the people:

The gargling wave of the age old Luit which is flowing in front
The big waves inundate the whole paddy field
Please shade away the poisoned hyacinth.

Jyoti Prasad imagines that silvery river water carries the heart of the people. Another heart touching expression is found in one of his songs delineating hard days of Assam during the freedom movement. The starry sky over the Luit provides solace to the bloodshed land on its bank:

Congregation of Star over the sky of Luit
Festival of my blood on its bank

The first song composed on the Brahmaputra beginning with ‘luitor paar duti jiliki uthibo (the banks of the luit will be illuminated... ...) sings of the enthusiastic motive and courage of the people on its bank. The faith that Dr Hazarika bore for the people of Assam is reflected through their
untiring effort for survival during the days of untold suffering of flood caused by the overflowing water current of the Brahmaputra during monsoon. It was written when Hazarika was only twenty one years old.

5.3.5 Fusion of Nature and Culture

The harmonious interdependence of alluvial environment of the Brahmaputra and the people on its bank accounts for vivid experiences which are reflected in the easily recognizable expressions in the songs of many of the Assamese lyricists. It is observed that this construal seems to provide a more reasonable answer regarding the continuity through space and time. Defining oneself as a member of a group is supported by sharing common approach towards natural surroundings and the issues related to our self that arouse emotion and attract attention. What makes people passionate about the Brahmaputra finds its true reflection in Parvati Prasad Barua’s songs. His songs manifest cross cultural experience with the river and lend a sense of immediate solace as well as resource of self relevant beliefs. Those songs very clearly show the experienced social understanding of who we are in relation to, and how we interact with, the natural environment as the self. Parvati Prasad Barua has attached a sense of cultural landscape in the following composition:

So many boatmen
Whistling in the Luit
Sings Bongits

As opined by Pabanath Sarma in his editorial to the Parvati Prasad Barua Rachanavali (The Works of Parvati Prasad Barua) Parvati Prasad tried to grow new leaves on the age old bunyan tree of Assamese literature through his celebration of the beauty and grandeur of natural elements. The rural canvas of his creations is beautified with a fluid natural style. There is no gargling sound of the sea rather the songs carry mild tune of the Brahmaputra and Dikhou. One of the songs of Parvati Prasad Barua envisages the river as the link between the ancient world and the modern
world. Such thought supports people’s concept of identifying with the river at a time when the region has experienced continuous changes in almost fronts related with the activities of the common people. The lyricist imagines:

The great Bunyan tree on the bank of the ‘Bornoi’ (meaning the Brahmaputra)

... ...

Antique Bunyan antique Earth Ancient blue sky
New buds new tiposi, a bird
Union of Old and the New 57.

Khanjan Nath, noted freelance filmmaker perceives a magical appeal in the bank of the Luit and is inspired to sing. Golden dreams are pursued through cultural activities for a new life because he is a ‘Luitporia’ youth:

I am a youth living on the bank of Luit
Arranging fair of colour on the bank of Luit itself
(with soft sound)
The Luit says I am Assamese. 58

No enigma is found to have expressed with the great river. The assertion that the self of the people on its bank is constituted with the welcoming pleasant surrounding is articulated by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala thus:

The Luit beckons, The Luit beckons, whom does the Luit beckon
Singing songs of the Manas region, it moves on flowing, towards the ocean
Both the banks are vibrant with the fruits and flowers
The luit beckons those whom it loves.

In his poem ‘Silpir Aalok Jatra’ Jyoti Prasad conceptualized the banks of the Brahmaputra as his wandering land. His journey as a poet continues over the sandy bank where he gathers materials for moulding his literary and cultural creation. The flow of the river water is imagined to possess the
optimistic tune by carrying the worthwhile and valuable messages throughout the land it flows through:

Oh the water of the Luit, flow on and on  

It is not known from which place silvery water flows through the Luit

What message do you carry in your bosom?  

Through the close examination of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala’s music within the social and political fabric possibilities of understanding the national as well as the regional, identities present in the nation becomes more comprehensive due to the cultural and traditional ties inherent in artistic expressions of thought and emotions. The acceptance of the river as a gateway for self upliftment is explicitly expressed in the following lines:

Where are you proceeding to tour in the world through the riverbanks of Luit?  

Jyoti Prasad believed that nature plays important role in preserving people’s culture, values, way of life and most importantly their need to determine their own fate as a distinct people and a nation. Thinking of the dearest one as living on the bank of the river conveys the cultural significance attached to the lifeline of the people. The river water does not need a specific time to enter into the psyche of the people’s mind. Again, the proximity of different tributaries in different regions tells the stories of adaptation with riverine environment. An important quality of music, as stated by Frith (1987), is that: “What music can do is put into play a sense of identity that may or may not fit the way we are placed by other social factors” (p. 147). Music therefore not only liberates people from certain social restrictions but allows people the propensity to choose and construct their own sense of identity. It does last only as long as a song.
Anandiram Das inserted the folk tune as well as the ideology of the folk to the natural setting drawing attention to the natural feelings of the community. Along with the other natural elements the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries enthrall his poetic imagination. Here is Anadiram Das’ composition on the assimilation of so many tributaries on both banks of the Brahmaputra:

The stream from the mountain rolls down
It stops in patches
The Luit from the welcomes the stream saying come my dear stream flowing to the ocean of pleasure. 63

That to be on the sandbank physically lets one feel elevated with the soothing wind forgetting the day-to-day activities is found to have expressed in the following:

O Mad why you have counted on the silvery sandbank/ the soothing wind of the Luit64

For Anadiram Das the Luit is generous enough to accept one’s grief letting one free from the misery:

Leave your heartfelt sorrow on the bank of Luit singing the saga of sadness. 65

For all generations whether human or the plants to come it is the Luit which will provide scope for self development illuminating its bank:

O Grandma, the reed will die
O Grandma, it will again grow
Illuminating the banks of Luit 65

Bestowed with the title of Luit Konwar meaning Prince of Luit for his outstanding work in development of music and cinema in Assam Rudra Baruah composes a number of songs on the Brahmaputra as its main
theme. The history of the Assamese people is carried by the flow river. The memory helps in knowing about oneself and thereby constituting the self of its inhabitants. Rudra Baruah composes:

The Luit of the Time will flow gradually
Erasing the memory directing towards eternity.\(^6\)

The prototypical Rudra Baruah’s songs have enthralled people across the valleys and the plains for decades and still continue to bridge the gap between the rural and the urban populace. Centered on the innocence of the rural populace and their humble lifestyle Rudra Baruah’s songs are some of the finest offering in the field of Assamese music. His attachment begins from the banks of Kolong, a tributary of the Brahmaputra. For him the beauty of Assam cannot be experienced without the graceful surroundings of the river Brahmaputra:

The golden paddy field by the sides of the Brahmaputra
That is my lovely (pleasing) Assam
I bear heartfelt love\(^6\)

Attempts to preserve the Brahmaputra will ensure a healthy life for the people on its bank. Such concern is found in Rudra Baruah’s songs:

Reddening the blue water of Luit
Who will send away the enemies\(^6\)

The articulation referred to those days of Assam when historical battles took place to protect the land from foreign invasion. Many of such battles took place through the river. the sacrifice was made to ensure the Assamese identity, an identity on the bank of the Brahmaputra. The lyricist through his composition appeals to preserve the unity of the different groups of people on its bank.

What makes music special - what makes it special for identity - is that it defines a space without boundaries (a game without frontiers). Music is thus the cultural form best able both to cross borders - sounds carry
across fences and walls and oceans, across classes, races and nations - and
to define places; in clubs, scenes, and raves, listening on headphones, radio
and in the concert hall, we are only where the music takes us.

The concept of ‘dialogic self’ as discussed in the Chapter II is found
to have expressed in Dr Bhupen Hazarika’s songs. Introducing the songs of
Dr Bhupen Hazarika with a view to search for a dialogic self is a humble
attempt to observe his will to position himself in different roles suited
according to situations. Most of his songs either celebrate or wake up the
conscience of the people living on the bank of the mighty river
Brahmaputra about our responsibility being an inhabitant of this part of
land. Members of any community are affected by different local factors.
These changes require the participants to develop a multi voiced self that is
able to move flexibly from one position to another with attention to
coherence of these positions. The coherence of sentiments brought about
by his song provokes the listeners to bear his words in the heart as a
permanent asset. Being the composer of songs of other languages too Dr
Bhupen Hazarika penned his Assamese songs as an instance of his love for
the motherland, liberty, justice and above all a campaign to raise the
consciousness of the people of his land to feel attach to it. The striving self
of the composer looks for the meaning of society as a discourse for the
existence of humanity. When he says, ‘ei prithibi ek kriraangan...’ (this
world is a playground) he might have appealed to people to be constructive
in our action which will sing for brotherhood and fellow feelings. The
composer takes a ‘promoter position’ as coined by Hubert Hermans (p-13)
by its relevance to the future development. The song beginning with
‘prasanda dhumuhaii prasna korile muk... ...’ (Severe storm questions me)
exemplifies the presence of multiple voice raising an awareness for the
perennial conflict of good and bad. The concept of positive disintegration
is introduced referring to the existence of crisis as a possibility of
progressive or regressive movements of self. The songs on the
Brahmaputra are the best examples of the movements of the self. The course of his whole life was desired to be rolled around this mighty river: 'louhityore bohol paarok pronipaat koru, janma lolu iyaatei, iyaatei jen moru' (I pray the wide banks of the Louhitya, was born here and wish to die here).

But for Dr Bhupen Hazarika 'Luit' was the medium for expressing his emotion and feeling. His songs elevate the fact that the river straddles numerous people and cultures and can be harnessed in strengthening the cultural mosaic of the state. The river is the mirror of the nation. There is nothing left on the bank that is unknown to the Brahmaputra. Out of so many associations the river Brahmaputra is considered to be the most fitted alternative to attach to his identity.

Liutote mor ghor
Liutote mor por

(Luit is my residence and luit is my outer world too)

For Dr. Hazarika 'Luit' is both the self and the other. The first song composed on the Brahmaputra 'liutor paar duti jiliki uthibo (the banks of the luit will be illuminated... ...) sings of the enthusiastic motive and courage of the people on its bank. The faith that Dr Hazarika bore for the people of Assam is reflected through their untiring effort for survival during the days of untold suffering of flood caused by the overflowing water current of the Brahmaputra during monsoon. It was written when Hazarika was only twenty one years old. In his later composition also it is found that the land we inhabit with the name 'Assam' is identified as 'liutor paar' (bank of the Luit). The same terminology also abounds in the songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwalla.

What Dr Hazarika finds and what he wants the people to carry out is the stamina engendered by the river. Since time immemorial the river has been the source of so many diverse inhabitations on its bank. The
reverence that is generated for the Brahmaputra makes the composer sentimental in inquiring how it can flow incessantly after witnessing the heartbreaking suffering of the people on its bank. ‘Burha luit tumi/ burha luit bowaa kiyo?’ Who will preserve the rich socio-cultural heritage accumulated throughout the ages? It is the broadened mindset empowered by the strength of ‘burha luit’. Arup Kumar Dutta in his article ‘Renaissance Man’ in the book Mor Samadhit Tomar Sahari comments on his connection with the river:

Their home was situated near the Brahmaputra, and carefree days of childhood spent upon its bank, or swimming in its waters, forged an eternal bond between Brahmaputra and Bhupen. (2011:128)

The self of ‘Luit’ is elevated to a dialogic self. According to the concept of the dialogical self, the individual self is social in origin and dialogical in function. The self reflects and appropriates the voices of society and significant others, and within the functioning of the self we find these voices in dialogue. Though the words ‘Brahmaputra’ and ‘luit’ are used almost synonymously it is noteworthy that the word ‘luit’ connotes for the cultural as well as the socio-political identity of Assam while ‘Brahmaputra’ mostly refers to the physical identity of the river, a personalised identity. It will be very difficult to judge the question of authenticity on the superiority of any one of these multiple voices. All overlap upon each other. In this connection reference can be made to Hubert Hermans and Agnieszka Hermans-Konopka when they mention in *Dialogical Self Theory: Positioning and Counter Positioning in a Globalising Society*:

In the ‘dialogic self’ both multiplicity and unity are central concepts. Therefore, it is our concern to make the notion of unity and continuity fit with a conception of self that acknowledges the existence of difference, multiplicity, contradiction and discontinuity. (2010:9)
The entire range of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika’s songs addresses the people of Assam through different voices compelling history to record its fundamental events. A Renaissance man as termed by Arup Kr Dutta in his article ‘Renaissance Man’ acquired vision from the sky and resounding voice from the thunder. The same is disseminated through different voices to reach the heart of the people of Assam.

Through the closer examination of music within a social and political fabric, possibilities of understanding the national, as well as regional, identities present in the nation became more comprehensive due to the cultural and traditional ties inherent in artistic expressions of thought and emotion. In Assamese music national self awareness and customs play a significant part in the lives of the people and their understanding of their personal and ethnic identities. These varied aspects of life have, since the arrival of the Slavs, played an important role not only in politics and the countless struggles for the creation of an independent Assamese state, but relative to the preservation of the people’s culture, values, way of life and, most importantly, their need to determine their own fate as a distinct people and nation.

The above discussion shows musical expression of both conscious and unconscious mind of the Assamese who care as well share their oneness with the dearest Luit. Songs have a life of its own. The spontaneity of its expression is an innocent expression of the people who create and sing and listen to it. The songs where the Brahmaputra appears with its multifaceted qualities describe the inner most soul of the Assamese people.