

A Moment That Lives Forever



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Growing up, Bhupen Hazarika's songs were the rhythm of our lives. His music was everywhere—woven into celebrations, quiet evenings, and moments of reflection. Whenever he needed a song, he'd simply write a poem and set it to music. Just like that, something timeless was born.

I wasn't alone in admiring him. He had millions of fans across the globe. I.P. Hazarika, former CMD of MMTC, once told me he met Bhupenda's admirers deep in the Congo, Africa where he went to buy Diamonds.. That's the kind of reach his voice had—universal, magnetic.

Bhupenda could've chosen a life of comfort. He earned a PhD from Columbia University and married Priyambada, niece of then RBI Governor and Finance Secretary H.M. Patel. Her father was a wealthy doctor in Uganda, with a 200-bed hospital and tea estates in Kenya. He even offered Bhupenda two tea gardens. But Bhupenda was a man of conviction. As he shared in Bobbeeta Sharma's documentary *Bhupenda Uncut*, he paid for his own wedding. That was just who he was.

He was a *zazabor*—a wanderer, a maverick. His love for Assam was deep and intoxicating, as my son often reminds me. He returned home, hoping to serve, but the then Chief Minister kept him waiting for three years. Eventually, his wife left for a UN job, and Bhupenda moved to Kolkata. Despite financial strain and the constant noise from critics, he never stopped giving Assam his best—songs, films, literature that still echo today.

After losing the Lok Sabha election to Kirip Chaliha, Bhupenda was visibly disheartened. It may be mentioned that he was once MLA from a constituency called Naoboicha. I wanted to lift his spirits. I told him, "People don't see you as a politician. Just like no woman may see you as a husband. But that's no reason to feel dejected. Your true gift is creativity—stay with that."

At the time, we were building Srimanta Sankaradeva Bhawan for the Assam Association in Delhi. It wasn't just a building—it was a dream. A cultural and educational centre on an 823 sqm plot in Qutab Institutional Area, with 10,000 sqft of built-up space.

I was trying to meet Bhupenda to discuss a fundraising event. Then one day in 2005, Hiranda called me out of the blue: “Manoj, where are you? Get ready—we’re meeting Bhupenda at 6 PM at Hotel Ashok.” I was thrilled. As General Secretary of the Assam Association, I had long envisioned a grand event at Siri Fort Auditorium, with Bhupenda as the star.

We arranged the meeting through the late Hiron Dutta of All India Radio and Ema Gohain, wife of Bhupenda’s dear friend Kanu Gohain. At Hotel Ashok, I greeted him with a *Fulam Gamusa* and a handshake. When I shared the idea, he agreed instantly.

The event took place on October 16, 2005. The hall was packed. Bhupenda sang for two hours, pouring his soul into every note. He was visibly tired, and Kalpana Lajmi stayed close by his side. Later that evening, we took a family photo with him. The next day, he signed our pictures. On mine, he wrote: “Manoj, dine dine unnoti kora jen”—“May you progress day by day.” That moment felt like a personal blessing.

The event was a triumph. Siri Fort Auditorium pulsed with music, emotion, and unity. We raised ₹54 lakhs, and after expenses, had ₹44 lakhs left—enough to complete the Bhawan.

But the moment that stays with me most happened the day before, on October 15th. Bhupenda visited the Bhawan while it was still under construction. Standing among scaffolding and dreams, he smiled and said, “One day, I’ll come and spend the night here in *adda*.” It felt like a promise. But fate had other plans.

After the event, he turned to me and said something I’ll never forget: **“Bapu, tumi mook punor jonom dila.”** “You’ve given me a new lease of life.”

That wasn't just gratitude—it was a benediction.

I still keep the ticket from that night and the autographed photo close. They're more than keepsakes. They remind me of what's possible when hearts unite for a cause. And they push me, every single day, to keep doing good for society.

Manoj Kumar Das

BY MANOJ KUMAR DAS

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