

A Critical Analysis on Cinematic Implementation in Assamese Cinema

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Abstract

The following study deals with the relationship between Assamese Cinema and its Craft. Assamese Cinema was founded in 1935 when Jyoti Prasad Agarwala released his first film Joymoti. The films that came after followed the slow-paced and sensitive style of filmmaking. Some of the greatest film directors of Assamese Cinema are Bhabendra Nath Saikia and Jhnu Barua. In this research paper, various changes have been studied while describing the history of Assamese cinema. The analysis of the content of films made by filmmakers from Assam gives this research paper its original content. The kind of progress made by the current films on OTT can be understood through the letter. The account of the facilities provided by the Government of Assam and various government machinery is also the main objective of this research paper.

Keywords: Assamese Cinema, Film Studies, Northeastern Film, Culture

Introduction

Assamese Film *Mission China's* outside commercial success and with only one other Assamese film *Village RockStar* from India for Oscar entry shows that Assamese movies are liked open-heartedly by audiences and they are not far behind in getting recognition and winning accolades. What is the vision of the film audience of Assam? What is the main content of the films there? These questions are relevant in the current times when we talk about cinema.

In the year 2017, Director Zubeen Garg (by profession, producer, director, composer, singer, and artist—Zubeen was seen in the Hindi-speaking movie *Gangster's* song *Ya Ali*) directed a film *Mission China* and played a prominent part in taking forward Assamese cinema outside the state of Assam. *Mission China* was made on a budget of INR 2.50 Crore and made almost INR 6 Crore in business. *Mission China* is the story of a retired Colonel who is given the responsibility to save the daughter of a minister (kidnapped by extremists). The theme of the movie is patriotic and was fairly liked by the audience.

The film by independent film director Reema Das, *Village RockStar*, has received the best title of Assamese film and best editor in the 65th National Film Awards ceremony. The same film was selected for the 91st Academy Award Festival (Oscar) for the year 2019. That year, a total of 29 movies like *October*, *Raazi*, *Kadvi Hawa*, *Ajji*, *Hichki*, *Padman*, *Mahanati*, *Padmavat*, *Gali Guleiyan*, *Bioscopewala*, *102 Not Out*, *Gulabjamun*, and *Bhayanakam* had also sent nominations for the Oscars, but the Oscars' jury selected only *Village Rockstar* out of all these nominations. From this whole scenario, it can be ascertained that Assamese movies' popularity is increasing across the country as well as they are right in the race to win the best of prizes in the film fraternity outside Assam.

10-year-old girl Dhunu from Assam's Chhayagaon and the film's focus on the life of her friends is liked by the audience positively. Reema has portrayed a beautiful film depicting Dhunu and her friends' day-to-day lives along with introducing the social and economic situation of the village and its families. Moreover, children's mindset is projected powerfully. Assam's first child artist title has also been given to Bhanita Das, who plays the character of Dhunu in the movie. So far, the film has got 19 awards, including national and international. We are living in a democratic country, and the scene showing opposition to the freedom of fundamental rights to express a view takes all the viewers into ecstasy in the cinema halls. In this scene, some children are returning from school and suddenly it starts raining; seeing the rain, children start singing a song as:

We need to ban the Flood!

We Need to ban the Rain!

This should not be forgotten while referring to the film that here Dhunu's character was added later. The same Dhunu who has a dream of setting up her own band and owning a guitar one day. This film also shows how Dhunu's family is a victim of natural calamities.

Now, when Assamese cinema is available outside Assam and is also receiving accolades, it does become important to know what is the history of Assamese cinema and how it struggled over the years and managed to evolve itself in the recent past?

Starting Ground

Jyoti Prasad Agarwala laid the foundation of Assamese Cinema in 1935. He was also a renowned poet, musician, and freedom fighter. His dreams and fantasies made him script a film *Jayamati* while in prison during the independence struggle. A mythological theme and theatrical film connecting Assamese background and

history. In the 1920s at Edinburgh University during his fellowship, Jyoti Prasad learned intricacies in filmmaking at UFO Studios, so he was quite aware of the detailed filmmaking process. It was the same period when across India many ideologies' regional cinema houses were building films on. At that time, Jyoti Prasad made female his centre point and created the first Assamese film. Film directing, editing, writing, music, dance, set design, etc.—everything was done by Jyoti Prasad on his own. Made at a cost of INR 60,000, even though the film was not liked fully by the audience, equipped with modern technology, the film depicted the true history and culture of Assam. The sad part is that no print of the film is present in India today.

Assam Cinematic History also depicts that filmmaker Prathmesh Chandra Barua, who belonged to Assam, was also the author and collector of stories. In 1935, he made a film based on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel in Bangla language which was liked openly by Bengali audiences. Had P.C. Barua made films while remaining in his motherland, he could have been the first filmmaker in Assam. However, in 1936, he created the film *Devdas* in Hindi and in Assamese in 1937; both the films were well known for their in-depth thinking in the filmmaking process till now.

Although his debut film *Jayamati* did not receive a good response from the public, he never lost heart. He also created another historical character of Assam, *Indramalati*, in 1937-38. Widely known Bhupen Hazarika, the icon of Assamese music in film, had also acted in the film for the first time. Subsequently, many attempts were made by other filmmakers in Assamese cinema. At the fag end of the fourth decade during World War II, a spark of Assamese cinema also took a hit in its expansion and development. In India, cinema was mostly dependent upon imports from overseas countries in terms of objects such as silver, nitric acid, gelatin, etc. In the absence of these imports, overall across India, cinema took a major setback in the late 40s during World War II. The pre-independence Assamese cinema was able to show lots of things based on our history. Films like Assamese cinema's third film *Manomati*, the invasion carried out by Burmese on Assam; the fourth film *Rupohi*, rural environment in Assam; fifth film *Badan Barphukan*, showed Assam's historical background. But not all these films were given any special choice by the audience. It is also important to know that when Hindi cinema had already entered the age of romantic songs, drama, and melodrama, at that point of time, Jyoti Prasad was emphasizing the cultural background and patriotic screenings projected in his films. He also tried to showcase the fundamental difference between stage acting and film acting through his films.

Cinema of Assam & Independent India

The fact remains consistent that cinema's contribution to the freedom fight has been positive. Nehru was always supportive of cinema despite decline due to war conditions, funding, imports, etc. An author and historian, Ramachandra Guha, in his book *India After Gandhi* explains that Nehru at several conferences appealed to filmmakers to create themes of films based on objective attention. After independence, the Government of India focused on the development and expansion of Indian cinema in a wide way by introducing various schemes. Although many of the required schemes were delayed, cinema was able to establish its identity by then. On one side, Fani Sharma's creation *Siraj* put a clear message on Hindu-Muslim unity in the country, and on the other, Praveen Phukan's films *Paraghat* and *Viplavi* showcased the rural environment of Assam.

It was the same time when films witnessed growth and the announcement of national awards also began. During the same time, the Assamese film *Piyoli Phukan*, which was based on the freedom fighter Piyoli Phukan's life struggle, received the President's Merit Certificate. At the same time, Nip Barua's *Ronga Police* (1958) and Prabhat Mukherjee's *Puberun* (1959) also received praise. *Ronga Police* was the first film that was awarded the Silver Medal for the first time. *Puberun* got its nomination at the Berlin Film Festival. It was the first round of Assamese cinema to stand on its own. But there was no great response from the audience side till now.

Bhupen Hazarika also entered as director for time in 1956 with 'Era butter Sur' , 'Shakuntala' , 'Pratidhwani' like movies and set up his Directorial image, his films also got Presidential Awards. Columbia University, Mass media P.H.D Bhupen Hazarika's 'Era butter Sur' also received a positive response from Assamese Audience. The first time Assamese movie had background scores & playback music composed by Bhupena Hazarika himself. He also received the best Music Director's national award for Abdul Majid's film 'Chameli Memasahab' .

The era of comedy films like 'Ito sito bahuto' (1963) and the crime thriller 'Doctor Benz Barua' (1969) also started in Assamese cinema. Assamese film 'bhagya' (1968) was also dubbed for the first time in Hindi. These major changes were also like A round of audiences' choices in Assamese cinema. Samaredar Narayan Dev's 'Aranya' (1970), Kamal Narayan Choudhury's first colourful film 'Beti' (1972), Fani Talukadar's 'Vibharat' (1972), Manoranjan Sud's 'Utharan' (1973), Palak Gogoi's 'Khoj' (1974) along with 'Mamata' , 'Utran' , 'Kalol' 'Putla' received a fantastic response from the Assamese audience. During the same time, professor of Guwahati University, Dr Bhavedar Nath Sekiya in 1977 created

'Sandhya Rag' and got recognition in Indian Panorama. After receiving a national award for this movie, he also received National awards for his creations like 'Aganisatan' (1985) and 'Kalol' (1988). Afghanistan was based on the story of the wife of a spendthrift landowner who victimizes his wife.

New era of Assamese cinema

Here's the new era does mean the Liberalisation of Assamese Cinema from the old times to current times. Since the cinemas globally have seen the biggest changes mostly in 1990s such as - single theatre to multiplexes introduction, trained directors, cameramen, scriptwriters etc. These parameters mostly resulted in the awareness of target audience towards cinema and the content therein.

FTTI graduates like Jahanu Barua got associated with the growing order of Assamese movies. In 1982 He debuted with 'Aparupa' and got the national award. Later Barua made films like 'Papori' (1986) and 'halodhiya choray bodhan khai' (1987) and received plenty of audiences and reviewer's compliments. At the same time Jahanu with his 10th film 'Tora' moved towards small budgeted Hindi films. Nine times national award winner's decision to enter small budgeted hindi films was surprising for everyone but at the same time he never left his touch with Assamese film making. In 2012 with the film 'Bandhon' he again returned to Assamese movies. During 26/11 attacks an old couple who lost their grandchildren was shown in the movie. The film was introduced as a opening film of the national award ceremony of 2012.

Another filmmaker Manju Bora's contribution is also praiseworthy. The Assamese Cinema's debut movie 'Jayamati' was remade & posed to new generation in 2006. Film also became part of Indian Panorama in the same year.

Directly it can be said that Assamese cinema kept on changing always. Family movie by Nip Barua 'Maram' (1978), Biju Phukan's 'Bhai Bhai' (1989), Munna Ahmad's 'Jan Jole Kapalat' (2000) Jahanu Barua's 'Phirigoti', Manju Bora's 'Jayamti', Love Centeric 'Manumati', 'Shagunlata' 'Tejimola', 'Aviman' 'Shiraz' etc, socio-economic based 'Shiraz' (1988), 'Ramdhenu' (2011), 'Dinobadhu' (2012) and 'Mamtaj' (2013) etc, based on regional issues 'Tula Aas Teja', 'Borler Dhar', 'Maghot Mamonir viya' (2002) 'Devtar viya' (1977) etc were created. Somewhere, the theme of all these films had an object-orientation variety to the audience. The whole Assamese cinema shows up on the thesis view that lots of Assamese films had received national awards & recognitions.

Vernacular 'Bodo' In Movies

There has always been a trend to make better Assamese language films. Another local language Bodo also began a tradition of making films so that its culture and civilization could connect with the concurrent subjects. Films were also built in Bodo in early 80s only, besides the Assamese. The director Jawagado Bodosa's film 'Alayro' (1986) which was based on the revolution in silk industry, got the best Regional film award. Another film of Bodosa which is based on deforestation protest 'Hagramayao Jinahari' (1995), which was completed in 10 days of shooting and editing together has also received the best film award.

Also, movies like 'Annaini Radai' by Parmeshwar Baro, 'Gwrbwini Mijing' by Mala Daimer, 'Nwngni Thakai Angni Jwnwm' by Premchand Mohanti set up the Bodo cinema completely. This was the same round when the new experiment in the Assamese language was happening based on the content and Bodo cinema was also addressing the mass issues closely while film making. It can be said that 1980s, the start of Bodo films, has produced many films to address the issues related to mass protests.

In recent years, thus a group of group film-makers and cine artists has emerged promising future generation as Anshuman Barkakoti, Sasanka Das, Dip Choudhury, Utpal Choudhury, Biswajit Changmai, Jhulan Krishna Mahanta, Dipankar Sarkar, Suroj Duwara, Anubhav Mahanta, Bonti Bora, Deep Kamal Gogoi, Tinat Atifa Masod, Merjur Rahman Barua has received the commonwealth vision award 2006 for his film "Beyond the Zero Line" from the Royal Commonwealth Society, United Kingdom and Best Director's Award at the Hyderabad International Film Festival 08 for his film "Shifting Prophecy". For the same film, he has received Rajat Kamal for best film on Social issues in the 55th National Award 09.

According to Garo film-maker Dominic, "If making a feature film is writing poetry, then short film making is writing Haiku. Both the category demands specific crafts. It's just that the short film is still in its fancy; it still needs to grow, develop and mature." For the rather newer generation, the option of using short film presented itself as a budget-saving digital technology. "We, who believe in digital technology, never stop thinking towards a production of the film in other format and the best part is that it is a total success among viewers."

Contemporary Voices and Achievements

A new generation of filmmakers has emerged: Anshuman Barkakoti, Sasanka Das, Dip Choudhury, Utpal Choudhury, Biswajit Changmai, Jhulan Krishna Mahanta, Dipankar

Sarkar, Suroj Duwara, Anubhav Mahanta, Bonti Bora, Deep Kamal Gogoi, Tinat Atifa Masod, among others. Mejur Rahman Barua won the Commonwealth Vision Award (2006) and Best Director Award at the Hyderabad International Film Festival (2008) for *Shifting Prophecy*, which also received Rajat Kamal at the 55th National Awards. Garo filmmaker Dominic notes, "If making a feature film is writing poetry, then short filmmaking is writing haiku." Digital technology and short films offer an economical and expressive option for emerging artists and are increasingly successful among viewers.

Conclusion

From Jyoti Prasad Agarwala to Jahnu Barua and Reema Das, Assamese cinema has always been artistically rich and innovative. While some films may not have succeeded commercially, they have never lacked in creativity and experimentation. However, governmental support, funding from NFDC and state finance corporations, and local infrastructure like theatres remain inadequate. Additionally, urbanization, lack of media education, and dependency on other states for production have hindered its progress. The scarcity of research and documentation has also affected its reach. Yet, the spirit of Assamese cinema continues to endure and evolve.

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