

Tezpur University



MC 577 MEDIA IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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*\* Role of Assamese cinema in bringing out the social, political and cultural phenomenon of the region \**

Cinema is a form of art which is enjoyed by everyone, irrespective of their age. Cinema has mostly been used both as a tool for entertainment and as the medium for showcasing different aspects of life, in other words presenting the reel side of the real picture. Cinema transports us to a realm of imagination and away from all the everyday worries and at the same time it is also an influential medium in the society for culture, education, entertainment, relaxation, recreation and publicity.

Initially theatres were the only way to get access to the cinema but with the popularity of television and cable TV, watching movies became easier and with the advent of internet and mobile phones, we now can access cinema on our mobile screens and can watch them just about anywhere and anytime.

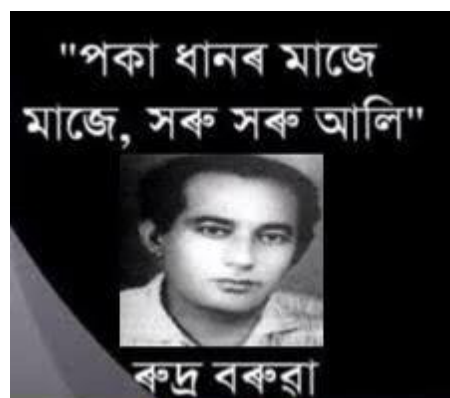
As the film can be said to be the mirror of the society, so with its increasing audience a large number of filmmakers of Assam have highlighted on the broad range of social, political and cultural phenomenon of the region through their films. Their works display the engagement with the local and regional issues which are overtly and sometimes covertly depicted in the films.

The origin of Assamese Cinema can be traced back to the dreams and imagination of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala with his *'Joymoti' (1935)*. The subject of the film is centred around the Ahom princess Joymoti who sacrificed her life for her husband and the kingdom. In the words of noted journalist, Bobbeeta Sharma, Agarwala's work is a cultural reflection that guided Agarwala when he made the first Assamese film Joymoti. Phani Talukdar's critique of 'Joymoti' sheds light on a detailed exemplification of the making of a film that showcases Assamese culture through the shots of the japi dance, the palanquins of noblemen, sarai, bota, canal-digging thieves, bhaona, weaving looms depicting rural Assamese life. The film's aim was to put up the cultural plethora of Assam so that ordinary people could relate their everyday life and understand the importance of their own culture. However the film premiered not in Assam but in Bengal's Rownac Hall in Calcutta as there were no film theatres in Assam to screen the one that heralded the humble beginnings of a film industry in Assam.



*Source : Internet (Jyomoti)*

Assamese Cinema has always been a large green field celebrating seasons where it has distinctly emphasized on the rural scenario of Assam. There are number of songs based on the rural life of the people like "*Xaru Xaru Ali*" sang by *Rudra Baruah*, "*Majuli*" by *Nilutpol Bora* and many such alike. There are cinema's that has shown the life of Assamese people, their traditional dress, the rituals of their wedding, their lifestyle, food habits, dance, song, tea gardens etc highlighting their culture as a whole. We also have instances of Bhaona music in Sattriya music that has been used as a background score in films by legendary musicians to promote and bring out the culture of the region.



*Source : Internet (Xaru Xaru Ali)*

Assam has witnessed numerous socio-political upheavals like China's invasion in 1962, the Assam Movement, uprising of the ULFA, rise of insurgency, etc in the post-independence era. To bring out the struggles of people during this phase, many filmmakers used cinema to spread awareness and give people a glimpse of the past. For instance, Jahnu Barua's film **'Papori' (1986)** is set at the backdrop of the Assam Movement. The film shows how Binod is falsely accused of a murder and later, his wife Papori is raped by a smuggler. The film's aim was to show the President's rule which was imposed in Assam to control the situation at that time and for which thousands of innocents lost their lives in this tumultuous situation; correction of voters' list, illegal settlements are suggestive of the muddled atmosphere of Assam during the Assam Movement. Another example is Dinesh Gogoi's film **'Surya Tejor Anya Naam' (1991)**, is the first one to address explicitly the complexity and predicament, born out of the insurgency.



*Source : Internet (Papori)*



*Source : Internet (still from Surya Tejor Anya Naam 1991)*

Hindi and regional cinemas of the 1960's, 70's helped to promote the idea of Indian nationalism, and the idea of secularism. Scriptwriters and directors were conscious towards promoting the idea of nationalism. **'Siraj'(1988)** is not only about communal harmony but is also about class and caste differences. What is important to observe in the film is that the class of elites represented in the film, that is, the tea-planters, are shown as Hindu upper-castes. This is a point to remember as it also reinforces certain representations that do seem palatable to the sensibilities and taste of the cinema-going public.



*Source : Internet ( Siraj )*

Many Regional films have been quite successful in their attempt of diversifying the whole concept of cross culturalism and glorified the portrayal of ethnic inclusiveness of the various ethnic groups of the region. For instance, "*Era Bator Sur*" which was the first folklore based film of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, reflect the emotional rising of the people of that era. The theme of this movie is based on characters belonging to tea labourers society of Assam. The exploitations carried out by one class of the society also find importance in the movie. Bhupen Hazarika inspires the people to boldly face and to fight off the problems and adversities that life might pose before. Another example is "*Basundhara* "(2009), directed and produced by Hiren Bora. The film deals with a pressing contemporary ecological issue of human-elephant conflict in the region of Assam. Similarly, there are many such films showcasing the social issues of the region.



*Source : Internet ( Basundhara )*

Thus, Regional cinema has come a long way with a pinch of commercialisation, better filming techniques in use of the state-of-art equipments and most importantly, brilliant minds that have taken their creativity of visual portrayal and depictions to a whole new level. With the emergence of young, independent filmmakers in Assam having different mindset, intricacies, perfection, shooting techniques, etc makes the concept of the film more lively and interesting for the viewers at the same time giving out important message to the audience. One such example is '*The Bulbul can sing*' by *Rima das*. Also few regional films have reached international platforms and have successfully spread a constructive and positive message to the audience about the growing Assamese film industry.

#### *References :*

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