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Title -The Celluloid universe of Jahnu Barua : An analytical study of select films

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Abstract:

Cinema is considered to be the most powerful mass media in the contemporary times. Cinema, with its innovative ways of storytelling and proliferating message, has been changing the ways people think about the life and the world in a very impactful manner. The process of evaluation or analysis of films is also as ancient as the medium itself. Cinema is known as the seventh form of Art. The history of Assamese Cinema started with the movie Joymoti, which was produced and directed by Jyotiprasad Agarwalla. Pioneering figures of the erstwhile Assamese cultural world like Lakshminath BezBaruah, Umesh Barua, Rajanikanta Bordoloi offered their own views about the film. But Assamese cinema, in true sense of the term, gained its real momentum only during the eighties. A good number of filmmakers offered a good number of powerful and entertaining Assamese films in this time. Jahnu Baruah also introduced himself as a sensitive and committed filmmaker during this decade. Till now, Jahnu Baruah has directed a total number of fifteen films, both in Assamese and Hindi Language. The films of Jahnu Baruah stand for his brilliant hold over the medium as well as his hold over the technical and artistic craftsmanship. A movie can be an entertainer as well as an educator. The movies of Baruah very convincingly carry forward those entertaining and educational elements in a minutely crafted aesthetic manner. This paper attempts an analytical discussion of two of the films of Jahnu Baruah - Haladhiya Saraye Baodhan Khay (1987) and Baandhon (2012). The paper will also deal with some of the cinematic techniques of Baruah as a filmmaker.

Main Paper –

“The Cinema has no boundary,it is a ribbon of dream” Orson Welles

Jahnu Barua was born on 1952 in Sivsagar ,Assam .Aparoopaa was the first film by Jahnu Barua which was released in the year 1982.Since then,Barua has been relentlessly associated with filmmaking .Some of the prominent films of Barua are- Papor(1986),Haladhiya Saraye Baodhan Khay (1987),Banani (1990),Sagoroloi Bohu Dur (1995),Kushal(1995),Pokhi (2000),Kanikar Ramdhenu (2003),Tora (2004),Maine Gandhi ko nahi Mara (2005) ,Mumbai Cutting(2010),Baandhon(2012),Ajeya(2014) ,Bhaga Khiriki(2018)etc. Cinema is a melting pot of diverse forms of art like music ,literature ,drama ,architecture ,fine arts,acting ,beautification etc.The movies of Jahnu Barua are perfect examples of aesthetic amalgamation of all these cultural forms and ethos which are simultaneously vocal voices of contemporary as well as eternal issues of human life and world. In his journey of 40 years in the world of cinema, Barua has made many thought-provoking films which have transcended the linguistic, cultural and geographic barriers. Baruah emerged as a filmmaker of note with his seminal work Aparoopaa. The film projected an Assamese woman as breaking the expected norms and values of family and society. As a socially conscious filmmaker, human values are always at the forefront in his films, and Barua believes that the idea of humanity was born in him when he was in the village called Japihojiya of Sivsagar district where he studied for two years. His protagonists such as Rasheswar in “Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai” (Catastrophe), Powal in “Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door” (It's a Long Way to the Sea), and Dandeshwar in “Baandhon” (Waves of Silence) are ordinary human beings with ordinary human emotions and passions but are given ethical and allegorical dimensions. Barua can be rightly called as one of the very proficient artisan of his craft which are well balanced between cinematic grammar and artistic narration. Instead of surrendering himself to the glitz of the Bollywood, Barua created his own world for making his films.

1.1 Objective

Film Studies is an interdisciplinary academic approach where a film is considered as a text and discussion is carried forward. It is grounded on the belief that films are nothing but artistic representations of the socio-cultural phenomena of the human world. Hencefilm studies turn out to be an integral area of the umbrella discipline of Literature. In the context of Assam, films by directors like Padum Baruah,Dr.Bhabendranath Saikia have been proving that films can also speak a lot on social, cultural or economic issue as the literary texts do. JahnuBarua is also a worthy disciple of this school whose movies also turn out to be prolific representations of the contemporary issues ranging from economy ,psychology ,politics to policy making .This paper makes an attempt to explore how such socio-political issues are represented in Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan KhaiandBaandhon by Baruah. Both of these films are critically acclaimed creations of Baruah for which he won many prestigious awards both in national and international level.

1.2 Scope and Methodology –

The paper will delimit its discussion on two of the fifteen films by Barua .The discussion will be analytical and descriptive. The paper is developed under the guidelines of the seventh edition of the MLA Handbook.

1.3 Review of literature

Analytical or scholastic discussion on Assamese Cinema is still in a very nascent stage .Most of the discussions on Assamese Cinema are available in the form of articles or discussions published in newspapers ,magazines or in selected books on cinema.Only a few books are available which are specifically discussing Assamese Cinema.Among them mention must be made of Chalachitra by Utpall Dutta, Anweshan aru Anubhab edited by Manoj Barpujari ,Asamiya Chalachitrar Sa-pohar by Apurba Sharma ,Jyotiprasadar pora Jahnu,Jangdao aru Ananya by Manoj Borpujari etc. Similarly a few numbers of articles ,interviews or discussions are available in news papers and magazines like Gariyoshi ,Satsori ,Prantik,Sadin etc.Spetic discussion on the movies of Jahnu Baruah are only done by selective authors like Manoj Borpujari ,Munin Bayan ,Manoj Kr.Nath.Therefore ,it is an urgency to initiate an analytical discussion on the films of Jahnu Baruah .It will be helpful to explore undiscovered horizons of the celluloid universe of this relentless filmmaker .

1.4 . Discussion on Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan Khay-

Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan Khay was the third film by Jahnu Barua. The film is based on a short story of Homen Borgohain .It can be called as a celluloid adaptation of the story of Borgohain, though certain compromises are made for the sake of the artistic development. The story revolves around a rural folk named Rasheswar .Rasheswar is a poor farmer whose sole property was a small amount of land .But the Mahajan(landlord) of his village took the rights of the land away from him .The protagonist filed a case against the landlord and went to the court. But due to the lack of adequate evidence and documents Rasheswar hardly got justice. Rather the poor farmer had to face the ugly network of corruption, betrayal and indifference in the name of law and justice.

This movie is a brilliant portrayal of the eternal clash of the bourgeois and the proletariat- the clash between the rich and the poor. The movie is set on an Assamese village .The cinematography of the movie very beautifully captures the real image of an Assamese village and the life of the common Assamese men. It beautifully captures the beauty of rural Assam. Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan Khay is a very strong allegorical representation of the exploitation over the rural poor by the landlords. The characters of Mahajan and Rasheswar transcend the boundary of their specific role and emerges out to be the symbolic figures of the rich and the poor .Barua has beautifully revealed how justice or law are nothing but farcical myths for the helpless folks like Rasheswar. It is a tragic saga of the every poor farmer, every poor man who

always has to be the victim of a rich owner .Thus the movie turns out to be a universally fitted artistic portrayal of the war between the voiceless and those who are in power.

In conveying this socio-economic story, the filmmaker has brilliantly used different cinematic motifs and symbols in the film. The moments like Rasheswar postering for the Landlord or his son postering for the landlord are wonderful cinematic visuals to expose the helplessness of the subalterns like the protagonist and his family .It reminds us the very famous question of Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak –Can Subaltern Speak?Rasheswar is running after justice. He even snatched away the jug of curd from his son and offered it to the lawyer with the hope of getting justice. Such suggestive cinematic moments make the audience compelled to feel the helplessness of the poor in a chaotic socio-political process where equality or justice are nothing but written codes.

Though at the climax, the protagonist gets his land back, the entire narrative stands for the naked reality of the hollowness of democratic justice and the condition of the common men like Rasheswar. Haladhaya Saraye Baodhan Khay is an epic narrative of the reality of rural Assamese mass where suffering and dilemma is the only reality .The oppressed ones do not even get a justified platform to raise their voice .The last scene where the protagonist stabs on a tree in a paranoid manner is one of the very artistically curated cinematic visual of the rebellious voice of the hero.The film has a good number of allegorical and symbolic shots and moments which provide artistic beauty to the audience.The director is successful in capturing the beauty as well as the brutal poverty of the rural Assam. The character of the sub deputy collector stands for a ray of hope. It seems ,through this character ,Baruah indirectly spread the message of the importance of education. The director is successful in extracting natural and quality acting from his actors .There feels more effective use of music and background music in the movie.

1.5. Discussion on Baandhon

Baandhon was released on 26th October ,2012.This movie was produced by Assam Film Finance and Development Corporation. This was the first movie of the director where digital camera was used.Baandhon was also the first Assamese movie to be released nationally. Baandhon, a Rajat Kamal winner at the 60thNational Film Awards and a special mention award-winner for for its leading man Bishnu Khargoriya, became the first Assamese film to be premiered outside Assam.

Baandhon, one of the latest movies by Barua, moves out of Assam. It opens in a modest home of an elderly couple played by two veteran actors, in Guwahati. They are misfits in the big town, and the village they left long ago is part of their conversations and skirmishes. Their grandson, who studies at IIT Mumbai, is their only kin and hope for the future, their son having died five years ago. Their local help is a former tenant of the son's house in which they now live—a lawyer .The lawyer has adopted them as his own uncle and aunt. Every now and then, they meet him for a divorce, which the busy, young lawyer find amusing and endearing. Because, as he says, they will never live apart. Through this process, backed with a couple of flashback scenes,

the audience is fed with the life history of the couple. Then, on advice from Jatin the couple decides to live separately in the two different bedrooms of their bungalow.

And in the backdrop of the divorce drama, the couple is also concerned about transferring their property to their grandson, Pona. Simply because he is their only living kin, as the couple had lost their only son and daughter-in-law in an accident some years ago. "Pona is the reason of me living," Dandeswar once states to the bureaucrat in-charge of the transfer deeds. While the audiences are engrossed with the lives of the old couple, the film takes a wild twist when their grandson goes missing in the attacks of 26/11 in Mumbai. On the day of the November 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai, the telephone line with their grandson snaps. They arrive in Mumbai looking for him. The film captures the turmoil and the upheavals the couple goes through in trying to come to terms with the void that has been created in their lives forever.

Baandhon focuses on the naked realities of terrorism. Though the filmmaker leads the story with a loaded amount of comedy, it simultaneously reveals how the lives of the common men get shattered by the unexpected burdens of terrorism and insurgency. Common men do not have any role in such activities, but they are the ones who always get affected the worst in such instances.

Baandhon is a director's movie. Jahnu Barua is successful in developing and leading the story in the manner he wanted to tell. The movie aesthetically exposes the helpless tragedy of life which has been symbolically conveyed by the last scene where the plightful couple sits on a lonely bench facing the sea. The sea always plays a fascinating role in the celluloid universe of Jahnu Barua. Here too, the width and depth of the sea is used metaphorically. Similarly the camera works used for the representation of the urban life are also really very attractive. It seems Barua has really succeeded in learning the language of camera and to reflect the reality by the lens. The contradiction of the fast and hurried lifestyle of the urban world and the simple, straight life of Dandeswar, and Shaoni, adds aesthetic, cinematic, beauty, to Baandhon.

Conclusion:

Movies are audio-visual mediums of art and aesthetics. They are reel versions of the realities of the numerous aspects of human life. The directors try to represent the diverse issues of human life in an artistic manner through their films. The movies of Jahnu Barua are honest attempts to represent such numerous ins and outs of the life and the world. The trajectory of the journey of filmmaking of Jahnu Barua prove that the director has been very gradually but convincingly acquire his grasp over the medium to reflect his views on the social, political, economic or cultural happenings that affect the collective and individual lives of the human beings. His controlled handling of imagination and reality adds a unique flavour to the movies. If can be termed as a staunch document on the plights of the subjugated common men, Baandhon can be called as a sensitive portrayal of the tragic impact of terrorism on the common mass.

On the basis of the discussion of the two movies, the following points are found to be worthy to be highlighted-

1. Halodhiya Saraye Baodhan Khay and Baandhon—both these movies very sensitively portray the simplicity of the common men of Assamese society. The movies also expose how these simple folks get trapped in the complexities of the corrupt official procedures. The most common factor in the films of Jahnu Baruah is perhaps the demography of his protagonists, who are the proverbial common man. Baruah often places these characters, and their families, in situations beyond their control, examining what happens when their self-contained, small world is struck by bigger external forces.

2. While portraying the clashes between Dandeshwar and Shaoni in Baandhon, the director could have opted for more metaphorical, deeper cinematic techniques. It results in flat, dull mechanical visuals which fail to provide other artistic pleasures to the audience. But the element of humour is cleverly added in the narrative which helps saving the film from the aforementioned loophole.

3. The effective use of symbols help intensifying the cinematic appeal of the movie Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan Khay. In comparison to Haladihaya Saraye Baodhan Khay, Baandhon is more direct and less symbolic. But the author could have utilised effective symbols as the movie deals with sensitive issues like terrorism, dilemma of human relationship, insecurity etc.

4. Baandhon is found to be quite weak in the segment of background music. Though the story or the content of the movie is strong, the film is found to be weaker in creative, artistic aspects. This artistic absence is felt throughout the movie, especially in the editing part. The visuals are straight and direct resulting in a monotonous cinematic style.

5. A certain section of higher officials are presented as honest, helpful, human beings in both of the movies. It seems that the filmmaker still has hopes on humanity and the existence of goodwill and selfless service.

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