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**"EMERGENCE OF CINEMA AS POPULAR CULTURE AMONG THE  
BODOS OF NORTHEAST INDIA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:  
AN EMPIRICAL AND HISTORICAL REVIEW"**

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**ABSTRACT**

Popular culture is a set of practices, beliefs and objects that are dominant in a society which are organised by the people. It is the accumulation of cultural objects or products such as music, film, arts, literature, games, fashion, dance etc. which are widely consumed by the majority of a society's population. Similarly, in Bodo society popular culture occupies a prominent place. Cultural objects such as film, music, dance, fashion, games etc. have become dominant in Bodo society. The film has emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century in Bodo society and developed into new popular culture among the Bodos. With the production of Daina, an Indian Bodo Documentary film directed by Amar Hazarika in 1984, the Bodos put their first step in the world of film. It was followed by Jariminni Khongkor in 1985, which was produced under the direction of Garlabata Basumatary. In 1986, Alayaron was produced by Bodo Film Production under the direction of Jwngdao Bodosa at Kokrajhar. It was the first Bodo feature film which won the 33rd National Film Awards in 1986 for the best feature film in Bodo. It gave a new vigour and renaissance to the Bodo culture and society. Thus, from the last quarter of the twentieth century Bodo film had emerged as a part of popular culture in the Bodo society.

Popular culture is a combination of two concepts, viz., culture and popular. In a simple language, it is nothing but a culture that is very popular. It is simply a culture that is widely favoured or liked by many. Here it is related to the quantitative index of approval of many people. But this is not an adequate definition. Popular culture cannot simply be defined by the quantity of selling DVDs or CDs. Henceforth, the second definition of popular culture evolves. The culture which is left behind after

deciding high culture is known as popular culture. The definition of culture suggests that it is a set of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development. The culture which is left out of this frame may be called leftover culture. As it fails to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture, it remains a residuary culture. Texts and practices of this culture are considered a popular culture. Here it may be defined as inferior culture. For example, people of Assam consider the consumption of alcohol as an evil practice in society. But for some group of people, it is a part of their lives. If it is continued as a culture it cannot be accepted in high culture. Hence, it becomes a part of an inferior culture. This view of inferior culture is based on Arnold Mathew's view in his book *Culture and Anarchy* (Mathew, 2001) Anarchy is just opposite to what he meant for popular culture.

Popular culture is often supported by claims that it is mass-produced commercial culture and is also defined as 'mass culture' (Storey, 2009). The theory of mass culture draws heavily on the second theory of mass-produced commercial culture. Those who refer to popular culture as mass culture attempt to establish that it is hopelessly a commercial culture and which is imposed from above. Another theory contends that popular culture is the culture that originates from the people (Storey, 2009). According to this theory, the term should only be used to indicate an 'authentic' culture of 'the people'. It is considered as folk culture: a culture, of the people and for the people.

The fifth definition of popular culture is based on the concept of hegemony propounded by Gramsci (Storey, 2009). The fifth definition is based on the political analysis of Antonio Gramsci, particularly the development of the concept of hegemony. The term hegemony is used to refer to how the dominant groups in society through a process of 'intellectual and moral leadership' attempt to win the consent of subordinate groups in society. Gramsci's political concept is used to explain the nature and politics of popular culture. This approach tends to see popular culture as a site of struggle between the 'resistance' of subordinate groups and the forces of 'incorporation' working in favour of dominant groups. Under such circumstances, popular culture is neither imposed culture of the mass culture theorists nor emerging from below. Thus, it is an exchange and negotiation between the two and can be called as compromised equilibrium. The sixth definition is based on the theory of postmodernism. It defines popular culture as one which no longer holds a distinction between high and low culture. All definitions of popular culture have one feature in common that emerged following the industrial revolution.

The second half of the twentieth century marks the beginning of one of the popular cultures among the Bodos of north eastern India. Cinema has emerged as an object of the popular culture in the Bodo society. The Bodos are one of the most important indigenous tribes of northeast India. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family of Mongolian race (Brahma, 2011). They are described as the inhabitants of the country lying to the north of Himalaya and in the western belt of China. They are considered as one of the earliest settlers of Assam. They are found mentioned in the Mahabharata. They were no doubt the Kiratas and Mlechhas mentioned in the Mahabharata (Barua, 2008). It is also suggested that during the Mahabharata war, or before that, the Bodo tribes constituted the bulk of population in the Assam Valley, northern and eastern Bengal and the surrounding and intervening hills (Barua, 2008)

The beginning of the twentieth century marks many changes and development in the Bodo society and their culture. They came under the influence of new cultural activities and it was reflected in the art and culture. There are some cultural objects and arts such as cinema, music, fashion, dance, games and sports that became popular and entertaining among the Bodo people and this led to the emergence of popular culture in the Bodo society like other growing societies and their developing cultures. Among them Bodo cinema is one of the most entertaining objects of popular culture that emerged from the twentieth century. The Bodo cinema depicts the picture of customs and traditions of the Bodo society. The socio-economic condition and common household activities of Bodo society prevalent during the time are depicted in cinema.

The origin of Bodo cinema can be traced back to drama and theatre. Moreover, Pandey, Joshi and Das (2017) consider that origin is found in the traditions of Sri Sri Sankardeva in Assam, called *bhaona*. Although the origin of Bodo cinema is traced back to drama, theatre and *bhaona* by some scholars, the appearance of modern cinema in Hindi, Assamese and other regional languages of India has exercised more influence in the minds of the cinema lovers of the community. But the arrival of cinema was very late among the Bodos.

*Joymoti* was the first feature film made by Jyotiprasad Agarwala in 1935 in Assam (Sarma, 2014). After 50 years from the making of the *Joymoti* in 1935, the first feature film was produced in Bodo language for the first time in 1986. It was produced by the collaboration of 13 producers because at that time the financial condition was not so much developed to produce the cinema alone. The script writers of *Alayaron* were Late Nilkamal Brahma and Late Heremba Brahma, while Late Mahini Mohan Brahma was the music director (Pandey, Joshi and Das, 2017). During the time, there was no technological development, so it was not easy to make cinema. It was very complicated to make a cinema without going to Bombay or Pune as there was no technological equipment and facilities in Assam. Therefore, Jwngdao Bodosa completed the editing process of *Alayaron* in Pune and Bombay lab (Bodosa, 2019).

The origin behind the production of *Alayaron* or the first Bodo cinema was the curiosity of Jwngdao Bodosa to produce cinema in Bodo language. A question raised in his mind was why there was not even a cinema in Bodo language in the Bodo society. So, he wanted to make cinema in Bodo language. Moreover, from the early period of his age, he was interested in all those kinds of entertaining media and works. Therefore, to fulfill his dream of making cinema, he decided to make his first Bodo feature cinema, *Alayaron* (Bodosa, 2019). But it was very hard for the Jwngdao Bodosa to make a full length cinema without any knowledge or study of filmmaking. So, he went to join the Film Direction Course in Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune during the year of 1982. Before that he already completed the one year of Film Production course at Xavier's Institute of Mass Communication in Bombay (Bodosa, 2019). After graduating from the FTII in 1985, he completed his first feature film '*Alayaron*' in 1986 through which he showed the picture of Socio-economic condition of the Bodo people and their common household life or activities of that time. Through this cinema, the constant moving of the Bodo people to the forest area or the habit of Bodo people that how they used to move from one place to another and settled in the forest area in search

of land as well as the household activities of that period of time that how the Bodo people used to lead their life in the village area. Moreover, this cinema also shows the socio-economic practices of how Bodo people led their life depending on agriculture and by giving domestic servants to rich families of villages etc. Though Bodo cinema could not make much impact in the Bodo society, it succeeded in bringing renaissance among the Bodo people. During that period of time Bodo people and culture were neglected or looked down upon by people of other cultures. At that time the Bodo culture and language were underdeveloped but the production of the first Bodo feature cinema, *Alayaron* gave revival to the Bodo people during that time. Bodo people felt proud of their culture as this cinema gave their own Bodo cultural identity and proved as one of the developing cultures.

With the production of *Alayaron* in 1986 by Jwngdao Bodosa under the banner of the 'Bodosa Film Production', Bodo put their first step in the world of cinema. It was the first Bodo feature film which won the Rajat Kamal Award at the 33<sup>rd</sup> National Awards in 1986 for the Best Feature Film in Language other than 8<sup>th</sup> Schedule of Indian Constitution (Gokulsingh and Dissanayake, 2013). It gave a new vigour and renaissance to the Bodo culture and traditions.

Before the release of *Alayaron-The Dawn* (1986), the first Bodo feature film, the name of Jwngdao Bodosa was never heard before. But Rajat Kamal and National Award winning movie *Alayaron* earned him fame and he became a household name. *Alayaron* is considered to be the most popular Bodo film of all times and considered as the founding pillar of Bodo film industry (Bodoland Watch). The film was released on March 13, 1986 at Ganga Talkies, Kokrajhar. The shooting of the movie took 2 years to be completed as it was started on March 13 1984. This film scaled new heights of popularity amongst the Bodo audience and screened for over a month at Kokrajhar. The public demand was such that during the first two weeks, sometimes even 4-5 shows a day were screened (Bodoland Watch).

Before the making of *Alayaron*, there were two Bodo documentary cinemas, i.e., *Daina*, produced by Amar Hazorika in 1984, (Pandey, Joshi and Das, 2017) and *Jariminni Khongkor*, produced by Garlabata Basumatary in 1985. But unfortunately, these are unknown to people. The Bodo filmmakers made many feature films and short films in the Bodo language. Besides, some patriotic cinemas can also be seen in the Bodo language.

After the production of *Alayaron*, another Bodo cinema, *Jiuni Simang* was produced by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika in 1987. After that in 1991, another Bodo feature film, *Khwmisi Lama* and in 1995, *Hagramyao Jinahari*, Rape in the Virgin Forest was produced by Jwngdao Bodosa where he worked as director, script writer and producer. *Hagramyao Jinahari*, Rape in the Virgin Forest was a cinema based on the massive deforestation of Kokrajhar area. It is a direct criticism of government apathy to deforestation (Gokulsingh and Dissanayake, 2013). This cinema was an instinct reaction of the massive forest destruction taking place in Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council area of Assam located in the foothills of Himalaya. The area, inhabited by the indigenous Bodo people is known for its unique floral and faunal composition with many rare species found only in this area. But within the last one decade more than half of the forest area was completely destroyed and inhabited by the people due to deteriorating socio-economic conditions prevailing in that area. This venture is a first independent production effort with very little

budget and shoots entirely in outdoor locations with mostly real characters along with some amateur actors and actresses in the character roles. This cinema had been screened at the International Film Festival of India in 1996. *Hagramayao Jinahari*, Rape in the Virgin Forest also won the National Awards in 1996 as best feature film on Environment.

The following movies were made and released during 1984-2000 (Pandey, Joshi and Das, 2017 & Brahma, 2020). The list includes all types of movies, i.e., feature and documentary.

List of Bodo cinemas (1984-2000)

Sl. No.	Name of cinema	Year
1	Aabo	1995
2	Alaishri	<b>1989</b>
3	Alayaron- the Dawn	1986
4	Asha	NA
5	Beher	1993
6	Boba	NA
7	Basiram Jwhwlao	1995
8	Bathou	1987
9	Boba	1988
10	Borad	NA
11	Dahal	1998
12	Daina	1984
13	Duphangni Solo	1997
14	Enaini Fanjari	1995
15	Golaimwnder	NA
16	Gumur	NA
17	Gwja Gwthang Gwmw	NA
18	Gwrbwnei Mijing	1993
19	Habila	NA
20	Habilasa Mwnse Mijing	1997
21	Hagramayao Jinahari	1995
22	Hasthainai Gwsw	2000
23	Hungma	NA
24	Jariminni Khonkar	1985
25	Juni Simnag	1987
26	Juli	NA
27	Khwmsei Lama	1991
28	Khitherni Or	NA
29	Mohor	NA
30	Mwjwmse Onnnai	1998
31	Mwkhthangkhwr Hajwni Khwnyai Solo	NA
32	Nwngni Thakhai Angni Jwnwm	NA
33	Onnai Mwjang Mwnna	1999
34	Onnaini Radai	1991
35	Pakhon	1988-89
36	Rodainbi Douleng	1989

37	Rwikhathi	NA
38	Sandi Asan	1988
39	Swrangni Lama	2000
40	Udkhari Parla	2000

The Bodo movies were very popular among the people from the time of its inception. The mass was enthusiastic and accepted the movies generously. Although the producers had their own zest and zeal to produce movies, in fact, those movies were produced for mass entertainment and consumption. There were only a few cinema halls to screen Bodo movies in Bodo inhabited areas, especially in four districts of present B.T.A.D. Those movies could not be screened in other cities as there were less movie goers for regional movies in big cities. Therefore, the market of the Bodo movies remained only in the Bodo inhabited areas. But this obstacle did not stop the popularity of the Bodo movies. These were shown in different villages of the Bodo inhabited areas as mobile videos. These were shown during the festivals and in social ceremonies of the wealthier class of people of the community. Thus, it became a part of popular culture in the last decades of the twentieth century.

#### **CHALLENGES:**

The number of productions of Bodo cinema increased with the passage of time and advancement of new technologies. In the beginning, it was very complicated and very difficult to make feature films. There was a lack of required technologies and this was coupled with financial problems. The materials or the technologies which were used in the filmmaking process were very expensive. The Bodo cinema producers used Celluloid and reel system which was very difficult to use and expensive. Moreover, there were no laboratory facilities for the process of editing and sound recording. Though few numbers of sound recording studios emerged during the time in the locality, it was countable. They had to go far from Assam such as Mumbai, Pune, and Calcutta etc. Despite all these problems they made cinemas which proved to be successful one and received effective consequences in society.

There are many drawbacks in the process of film making in comparison to others. Many Bodo movies are produced but they are all still unknown to the other people. This is because of a lack of agencies to publicise the Bodo cinema. The Bodo society does not possess suitable platforms or media, TV channels through which movies could have been promoted.

The institutions of acting and direction are important necessities in film making and its development. There are no institutions to learn the art of filmmaking and acting in the region for which Bodo cinema is still in its nascent form.

Finance is one of the greatest problems in making Bodo cinema. The Bodo cinema makers have to face financial difficulties for making Bodo cinema. There are no investors or any company who can assist the fund for the production of cinema due to its market condition. In this way, high budget cinemas in Bodo language are rare to be seen.

Story-telling is another important drawback that Bodo cinema makers possess. The Bodo cinemas are mostly produced with the concept of socio-economic status of Bodo people; their household activities and a story of a villain and a hero where at

last the hero wins over the bad or villain. With the passage of time some patriotic Bodo cinemas can be seen, but it is countable. In the Bodo society, there is also a lack of documentary film or cinema (Bodosa, 2019).

According to some directors, they make Bodo cinema to uplift the Bodo society and to modernise it. But according to some producers and directors, they produce Bodo cinema just to fulfill their desire and for the purpose of entertainment. But along with entertainment it also contains information. In this way Bodo cinema plays a role in the society in its transformation. The production of 'Alayaron' helped in bringing consciousness among the people. Moreover, movies were also made on superstitious beliefs of the community. This brought some changes in the society. The blind belief has been widely practiced in Bodo society since long. But in the last few years, many actions and regulations are taken by the Bodo people and some organisations against those activities and these were shown in the cinemas which have brought changes among the Bodo people. However, the storytelling of Bodo cinema has not improved and there are only household activities or life or socio-economic status concepts of Bodo cinema in Bodo language. Moreover, cinema is an effective and influential medium by which the picture of real life can be depicted. From the early periods, cinema is considered as an instrument of revolution in Europe. During the movement for Indian independence the activities of revolutionaries of other countries were shown to imbibe the spirit of revolution and to provide information. Unlike in other societies, the Bodo cinemas are hardly seen imbibing the spirit of revolution and nationalism. But it has become popular among the mass as a medium of entertainment.

### CONCLUSION:

The making of Bodo cinema began in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Thus, till the end of the century it remained in its infancy. There were numerous movies made during the period. Those movies dealt with mainly the societal issues of the community. It is a known fact that there was a lack of cinema halls in the Bodo inhabited areas (town) where movie goers could enjoy movies. On the other hand, movies were shown in festivals or local programmes of the villages. Despite those hindrances, there was large scale popularity of the Bodo cinema in the last decades of the twentieth century.

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