



AN ANALYSIS OF BHABENDRA NATH SAIKIA'S FILM ANIRBAN

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ABSTRACT :

Assamese filmmaker Bhabendra Nath Saikia made seven movies on different aspects of human life with a realistic flavor. But unlike other movies where he explored the life of human being with a narrative, in *Anirban* he just visualized Alfred Tennyson's famous poem *The Brook* with a simple story of human life. In this paper I will analyze how Saikia represents the poem both in narrative and cinematic composition. The study will be based on textual analysis method.

KEYWORDS : *life of human , textual analysis method , human life.*

INTRODUCTION

Bhabendra Nath Saikia a recipient of Padmashree and Sahitya Academy Award, made films in the last part of the twentieth century. He was a dominant figure in Assamese film industry from 70s to 90s. During these three decades he made seven Assamese and one Hindi movies of national and international repute. Perhaps, due to the grand success of his first film *Sandhyarag* (Cry of Twilight 1977), he was able to acquire the position of a cultural icon especially in his region Assam. Apart from his excellence in cultural field, he is remembered for introducing Assamese cinema in international platform. Despite of being a man from science background, Saikia was intimately connected with the cultural field of Assam. He was the editor of Assamese monthly magazine *Prantik* and children's magazine *Xaphura*. Apart from this, he was closely involved with the Sri Sankardev Kalakhestra. He was also the member of the Sangeet Natak Academy, Indian National Council for Co-operation with UNESCO, Academic Council, Society of the Film and Television Institute of India and National Book Trust. Before a filmmaker, Assamese people have known Bhabendra Nath Saikia as a novelist, short story writer, children's books writer and play writer. During his lifetime he wrote three novels – *Antarip*, *Ramyabhumi* and *Atankar Shekhot*; more than eight short stories; five children's book and more than twenty five plays (most of them are adapted by the Assamese mobile theatre party). Though, people think that Saikia entered into the film

Saikia's seven Assamese films – *Sandhyarag* (Cry of Twilight, B&W) , *Anirban* (The Vigil, 1980, B&W), *Agnisnan* (The Ordeal, 1985, Colour), *Kolahal* (The Turmoil, 1988, Colour), *Sarothi* (The Shelter, 1992, Colour), *Abartan*, (On the run, 1994, Colour), *Itihaas* (Exploration, 1996, Colour). As a follower of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala



and Padum Barua, Saikia tries to utilize the power of cinema for social criticism. Through his films he commented on the disturbing social issues covering from women's exploitation to urbanization. Apart from the realist issue, his films have some specific features like connection between opening and closing shots, open for viewer's interpretation and symbolism. In this article an attempt has been made to analyze the symbolic representation of Tennyson's poem *The Brook* in his second film *Anirban*.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia's second film *Anirban* is thematically exceptional from his other creations. Here Saikia intends to express the philosophical definition of human life. Symbolism is used both in narrative and cinematic content of the film.

I chatter over stony ways,
 In little sharps and trebles,
 I bubble into eddying bays,
 I babble on the pebbles.
 With many a curve my banks I fret
 by many a field and fallow,
 And many a fairy foreland set
 With willow-weed and mallow.
 I chatter, chatter, as I flow
 To join the brimming river,
 For men may come and men may go,
 But I go on forever.

'The Brook' - Alfred Tennyson (1803-1892)

Alfred Tennyson's poem, *The Brook*, nostalgically celebrates the beauty of nature threatened by the growing mechanical and technological culture. The title itself suggests the theme of the poem. It describes about the nature of a river- its origin, movement and final destination. If we look into the background of the poem, we can know that the period, when Tennyson wrote the poem, England was going through the process of industrialization and urbanization. It damaged the natural landscape for the sake of development. As a reaction to such damages poets of that period compose poems celebrating the nature. *The Brook* is also a result of such reaction. The poem says that the river starts from the frequently visited place of coot and herons and it flows downwards by making beautiful sounds. It passes through hills, villages, little towns, bridges, farms and finally joined a big river. Like man, the river never die, it is immortal and goes on 'forever'. When the brook flows through stones it makes sounds because of the pebbles. The brook makes the land fertile to grow beautiful plants on it. Tennyson's poem has a deep connection with Bhabendra Nath Saikia's *Anirban*. Even it will not be an exaggeration if we say that *Anirban* is a visual description of Tennyson's *The Brook*. Selection of Tennyson's poem exemplifies Saikia's vision behind this project. He had tried his best to keep a close connection between the visualization of natural things with the progression of human life. Comparing to his other movies *Anirban* is an excellent example of his directorial quality in respect of visual composition.

Filmmaker Bhabendra Nath Saikia is well known for making films on social criticism. His characters are always discovered within their socio-cultural and economic context. If someone is facing class problem, the next one is a victim of gender exploitation. Social criticism is the main theme of Saikia's films. Exceptionally, *Anirban* concentrates on the personal world of one desperate couple. Here instead of a social system protagonist is fighting with his own fate. *Anirban* is the celebration of individuality. Saikia had experimented a universal issue within a local context. All of us are living the life of the protagonist (Rajani). So, anyone can easily fit them into the narrative, as it is about the flow of life. Despite its thematic variation, the unusual juxtaposition of nature with human life through cinematic tools gives the film its richness. Director's minute observation on human life and trauma of death is beautifully canvassed in *Anirban*. The characters are not from any class or gender, but only a human being with their sorrows and happiness. They are living a normal life without having any outside disturbances.

Anirban is a story about school teacher Rajani (Bhola Kakoti) and his wife Bhagyawati (Runu Devi), who consecutively lost their new born baby for three times and at one point of time sacrificed all their hope for a baby. In the mean time Rajani is terminated from his job being complained by the guardian of his students for biting them badly. To run his family Rajani sold his ancestral land to a kind man, who, by luck, recruited Rajani as home tutor. Meanwhile, Bhagyawati gives birth a girl child and with their utmost care she attained her

adolescence. Problem arises when Nisha fall in love with her young and studious home tutor, Dibakar and knowing about their affair her father stops the tutorial class. It affects Nisha from within and she stayed calm and quite. But suddenly one ill fated day she becomes sick and died after some days. The old couple once again shattered by death. After few years they were invited to the marriage of Dibakar's bride and Bhagyawati gifted her pair of silk cloth bought for Nisha for her marriage. Director ends the film with their search of Nisha in the face of Dibakar's wife as the last hope of their living and continuation of Rajani's tutorial job.

Anirban is adapted from Saikia's own short story *Prahar* (1960). Story is same, but Saikia's storytelling style is totally different from one another. *Prahar* starts with a critical moment faced by home tutor Rajani, when he failed to solve the mathematical problem given by his own student. Then the writer flashed back the story, where their urge for a child acquires central position. Revolving around their sorrow the story ends with Bhagyawati's relentless tears. Their struggling life along with the story ends with their sorrow. *Anirban*, nevertheless, is a story about the victory of happiness over death. It illustrates the connection between nature and human being. Unlike the short story, *Anirban* ends with the continuation of Rajani's tutorial class at Dibakar's house. This suggestive shot exemplifies the happy ending of the film.

Death as a destroyer of happiness repeatedly occurs in the film narrative. Beginning of the film with a death scene immediately established the hidden fact. A medium long shot of flying vultures, a leafless tree and two men walking with a dead body of a child are some analogous shots used by the director to reveals the overriding role of death in the film. Rajani with his colleague friend is coming towards the river bank to bury his new born baby. Close up shot of Rajani's face is the subtle expression of the effect of death on human being. Three consecutive death of their new born babies is about to stop their life. But Rajani is such a man who is capable of holding the thread of life amidst the catastrophe of death. Death and happiness are adjunct with human life as two sides of the same coin. Freud and Saikia shares similar views on human relationship with death and happiness. Death always interrupts in the path of happiness.

After the death of their third child Rajani try to involve him and his wife in their household works like cropping of vegetable seeds, arrangements of table for remedial teaching to his dull students etc. All these are to convert their sorrow to happiness. Same thing is repeated at the end of the movie where we have seen the devastated couple finding the hope of their life in the face of Dibakar and his wife after the death of Nisha. Thus the continuity of life prevails in the whole film narrative.

Saikia's intension is not to focus on the economic condition of Rajani nor the insensitivity of his school committee, rather the human nature "in a timeless and space less canvas where man is continuously subjected to endless sufferings by the forces of destiny which are beyond his reach and control" (Dutta & Dutta, 2011: 222). Changing nature of adolescent Nisha as projected by Saikia in a detail manner also comes under the ambit of nature. Her age makes her conscious about her beauty, compels her to fall in love with Dibakar, restrained her to introduce her as the daughter of a simple & poor tutor- all these are some major psychological changes observe in adolescent boy or girl. All these changes are quite natural. Saikia spends a long time for visualizing the changing behavior of Nisha to emphasize on the naturalness of her behavior. Though she died from fever, actually at her age most of the boys and girls used to take each and every issue especially love deeply and it affect their psychology in such way that sometimes it can leads to death also. Same thing happens in Nisha's case; she is highly affected by Rajani's disapproval of their affair.

Litterateur Saikia's maturity in cinema making reflects in the composition of suggestive shots in *Anirban*. Juxtaposition of human emotions with nature is one of the pertinent features of this film. Visualization of *Anirban* is highly appreciable. Presence of some shots of natural objects like flower, bird, river etc. automatically established a universal connection between human and nature. The first shot after title cards captures a picture of an arum leaf drawn on the black board. I am not sure how much the director is concern about the connection between this arum leaf and human life; but this arum leaf carries a symbolic meaning in Assamese society as well as in the film narrative. In Assamese there is a saying '*manuhar jiban kasupatar pani*' (human life is just like the water on an arum leaf). It means there is no guarantee of human life; just like the water on the arum leaf that can fall down at any moment; human life can also comes to an end within a single moment. In this way, the saying resembled the arum leaf with human life. So close up shot of arum leaf

is metaphorical. Reiteration of such metaphorical shots reveals the celebration of nature in the human life. When Rajani's second child died camera captured Rajani's face followed by a medium shot of shaking leaves and a leafless tree to suggest the devastation. Same shot of the leafless tree is repeated after the death of their third child. Some mixture shots of small river, floating duck weed etc. in between the narrative clearly reveals the existing connection between human being and nature. The flowing river suggests the permanence of hope or continuity of life. Thus the river is standing just opposite to the leafless tree. One signifies sorrow and while the other carries the hope of life. But unlike the previous situation this time Rajani decided to give up their hope for a child and thought about his wife. Now he realizes that life of his wife is more valuable than their parenthood. Here the director used a jump cut of the hoe taken by his colleague to bury his dead daughter to the hoeing scene of Rajani at his vegetable garden. It reveals Rajani's transition from sorrow to new hope of life. After such constant hit of destiny Rajani and his wife never give up their spirit of living. Their story completed with the adjunct disasters with their blissful life.

Anirban is the celebration of humanity. It inspires human being to adjust with the sorrows and pains they have to face in their life. It is not confined to any specific part of the universe; rather a universal story. Saikia simply localized the universal issue. Linear progression of the story heightens the realistic feature of the film.

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