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FOLKLORE IN ASSAMESE CINEMA: A STUDY ON GANGA CHILONIR PANKHI (1976)

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ABSTRACT:

This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between folklore and cinema. How cinema helps to preserve and popularize the folklore material is the main argument taken here to analyze the Assamese cinema *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi* of Padum Barua. In Assamese film history from the inception, filmmakers like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bhupen Hazarika, Padum Barua had taken extra care to include the folklore material of Assam in their films. Apart from entertainment, these attempts automatically preserve the rich cultural heritage of Assam. So, in this paper Padum Barua's contribution in this field will be studied by looking at the folklore materials used by him in his *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi*.



KEYWORDS: *folklore and cinema , folklore material , rich cultural heritage , Assamese Cinema , Padum Barua.*

INTRODUCTION :

In Contemporary Legend, Paul Smith (1999), expressed that "there is perhaps a certain irony in the fact that, while such films as *Candyman* (1992) recognize the role of the folklorist as collector of contemporary legends, very little attention has been given by folklorists to the role of the film and television industry as users and disseminators of contemporary legends" (Mikel, 2008:3). Even he prepared a list of few folklorists who have published their articles on popular film and folklore.

Mikel J. Koven has pointed out that now folklorist at least

recognized number of perspectives to study the importance of popular cinema in folklore. According to him, firstly, folklorists are able to observe and trace the process of homogenizing cultural expressions through the mass media. And secondly, a great deal of folklore scholarship has explored those traditional narrative types and motifs when they appear in popular film and television (2008: 4).

In 1946, Stith Thompson (1977) recognized cinema as both a marvelous channel of tale dissemination and a kind of storytelling event:

The cinema, especially the

animated cartoon, is perhaps the most successful of all mediums for the presentation of the fairy tale. Creatures of the folk imagination can be constructed with ease and given lifelike qualities. Undoubtedly the best of these performances up to the present time [1946] is the Walt Disney production of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [1937]. Many adults who had long ago dropped their interest in the fairy tale unexpectedly found great pleasure in this old product of the folk imagination. (461). According to Thompson, the disseminated stories through film encourage the audience to rediscover the stories. He also

said that in this process one single story could reach large number of people at a single time. At the same time the cinema also preserves the folklore materials for life.

FOLKLORE IN ASSAMESE CINEMA:

The doyen of Assamese Cinema, Jyotiprasad Agarwala had paid utmost importance in the incorporation of Assamese folklore materials in the first Assamese Cinema '*Jyomoti*' (1935). Perhaps, he was quite aware of the fact that apart from its other roles, cinema can become the ultimate preserver of folklore materials. So, in his film he decorates the Royal court with Assamese folklore materials like *Japi*, *Xarai* etc. By using this folk materials Agarwala not only display the items through celluloid, but also preserve it for future generation. Apart from this, by doing so, Agarwala creates a history in the Indian film making tradition. In his movie he proved that the role of cinema is not limited to entertainment, but it can be enhanced for the preservation of culture. In the film when *Jyomoti* is moving towards the Ahom court after receiving their summons, Agarwala used the Assamese *Biyanam*, a genre of folksong, in such a manner that the shot acquired a special position in scholarly discussion.

After Agarwala, filmmakers of later period also try to emphasize on the use of folklore material in the narration of the story. However, extensive use of folklore in film can be found in the films of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the musical maestro of Assam. In almost all his films Hazarika made an attempt to add the age old tradition of Assam. Among others Hazarika's movie *Era Bator Xur* had a remarkable representation of Assamese folklore. Different folk music and dances are introduced in it. They are like '*Bhortāl Nritya*' the tune of '*Sifung*', 'Bodo dance' etc. The magazine *Ramdheni* (9th year, 8th Issue) wrote:

"Erā Bātar Xur has shown that the subject matter for a beautiful film is hidden in Assam's folk-culture and nature. Erā Bātar Xur is just a glimpse of that only; if this glimpse can receive such love and response from outside audience, and if it is presented completely, perhaps Assam's culture will have national and international recognition. Bhupen Hazarika deserves our thanks for drawing the attention of the discerning audience towards this possibility"

So, in this way Hazarika had popularized the folk culture of Assam in the national and international platform. Another remarkable movie of Hazarika in this respect is *Pratidhani* (1964), where he described a Khasi legend. The film explores the Khasi folk culture and tries to establish a relationship between Khasi and Assamese people. After Hazarika we have mentioned about Padum Barua, who in his single creation tried to capture quite a good numbers of folklore materials while describing the narrative.

PADUM BARUA AND GANGA CHILONIR PANKHI:

Padum Barua was born on 11 February, 1924 and in the year 1943 he went to Calcutta for higher studies. During his stay at Banaras Hindu University, he got an opportunity to interact with famous film personals like Ritwik Ghatak, Mary Seton, who offered him the knowledge about filmmaking. He tried his best to apply their techniques while telling the story of *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi*. His aesthetic sense and technical excellence creates a new path for Assamese filmmaker. Apart from that, during this period he could see films made by famous filmmakers like Pudovkin, Victor Flaming and John Ford that gave him a new perspective to look at cinema as an art. However, he got the opportunity to experienced the post World War films of John Ford, William Wiler, Charlie Chaplin, Belly Wilder, Lawrence Olivier, when he joined government services at Shillong in 1948. During his stay at Shillong, he was deeply involved with cinema related activities. Apart from film viewing, he attended various seminars, festivals and conferences held in different parts of India. More than a filmmaker Barua was a researcher of cinema, who wanted to propagate cine literacy in Assamese society. In his article *Bharatiya Chalachitrar Natun Dhara* (New Trend in Indian Film), he expressed his observation about Satyajit Ray's films. He is known not only for starting the new wave trend, but also for the stylistic imposition of folk elements in his film *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi*.

FOLKLORE IN GANGA CHILONIR PANKHI:

Ganga Chilonir Pankhi was a remarkable movie during 70s and 80s due to various reasons. For the first time in Assamese film history Assamese woman figure is explored both in narrative and cinematic context (Das, 2015). In the movie the protagonist is able to find a place of her own. Apart from that the movie depicts the real story with the use of real cinematic techniques. However, in this paper I would like to focus on the use of folklore material in his movie.

In the film *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi* Barua has extensively used both folk material art and verbal art to enhance the quality of the film or to give it a local flavor. From the beginning we have seen the use of Assamese folk material like *Kalah, Ghati, Pan Bata, Banbati, Gamocha, Tat-Shal Weaving Loom, Dheki* etc. to create the image of an Assamese society. The film speaks about the pathetic story of Basanti, who falls in love with a homeopath Dhananjoy, but couldn't elope with him due to her family's prestige. Consequently, she married to another rich guy Mathura and try to happy with her new partner. But suddenly Mathura encountered with her past and everything collapsed within a second. One fateful day Mathura died in an accident and her new born baby also left her alone. After few days Dhananjoy again came to her life, but this time he is not ready to accept her; as she is a widow. The film ends with the loneliness of Basanti.

Barua used Assamese *Biyanam* in two sequences – firstly at the mouth of Basanti's siter-in-law, when she tease Basanti for her ongoing affair with Dhananjoy. She sang *Ful Ase Fuli, Kadam ase hali. . . .* (The Flowers are in bloom). Secondly, at the time of her marriage the village-women sung *Biyanam*, as an essential part of marriage. Along with *Biyanam*, Barua used the *Gorokhiyar Naam* to express Basanti's love for Dhananjoy. Due to the impact of changing life style of Assamese people under the influence of urbanization and modernization, the *Gorokhiyar Naam* is gradually extinct from our society. So, in one sentence we can say that by incorporating the *Gorokhiyar Naam* Barua had preserved the song for the future generation. The traditional art form of Assam, *Bhaona* is also showed in the film *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi* at one moment of time.

In the day to day conversation, Assamese people often use proverb to signify certain meaning. The same has been done by director Barua in his film. He used some proverbs like *Aa Jol Jol – Sakota Pura Mas Bhatol Tol* (Still waters run deep), *Mone Khunda Pukhurir pani kimanenu khaboloi pai* (Wishes are never fulfill), *Sok Sokia Manai Sun Nohoi* (All Gliters are not Gold) , *Dhan Manai Sandal* (Money is evil) etc. These proverbs are used at different contexts to express the meaning of the situation.

Ganga Chilonir Pankhi is famous for the elopement shot of Basanti. In this shot the sound of the Assamese traditional rice pounding device i.e has been used to signify the heartbeat of Basanti. By using such innovative technique Barua has acquired a privilege position not only in the Assamese cinema but also in the Indian cinema as a whole. Despite the mesmerizing cinematic visualization Barua's *Ganga Chilonir Pankhi* is rich with its musical elements which are a mixture of western as well as folk musical scores (Dutta, 2015: 14). Apart from other folklore materials Barua has extensively used the natural sounds. In the film he uses the "sound elements of rural Assam- the toads' crackle, the vixens' howl, the clicking of the loom, the pounding of the husking pedal, chirping of birds, hymns from the prayer hall and what not (Borbora, 2007:85).

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, it can be said that folklore played an important role in a cinema, and on the other hand, cinemas are also contributing in the preservation of folklore in this modern age. So, folklorist and film critics and historians should try to analyze different aspects related to cinema and folklore as well. It will definitely help the future generation to understand the reciprocal relationship of cinema and folklore.

Glossary:

The following glossary is meant only to clarify the use of Assamese terms within the context of this article for sake of the readers unfamiliar with their use in folklore studies .

Banbati : Assamese traditional bowl made by brass
Bhaona : Assamese traditional drama
Bhortāl Nritya : Assamese traditional dance form
Biyanam : Marriage song
Dheki : A rice pounding instrument of Assamese society made by wood
Gamocho : Assamese traditional bath towel
Ghati : Assamese traditional pot or bowl made by brass
Gorokhiyar Naam : Assamese Cow heads songs
Japi : An Assamese traditional umbrella made by bamboo and coconut leaf
Kalah : An earthen water pot used in Assamese society
Pan Bata: An Assamese traditional brass material used to serve mouth freshener
Sifung : Flute of Bodo Community
Tat-Shal : Weaving Loom
Xarai: A traditional Assamese materials made by brass

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