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LITERAL AND METAPHORICAL PRESENCE OF RIVER IN ANIRBAN AND XAGARALOI BAHU DUR

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"Rivers are extraordinary phenomena, with physical, cultural and psychological expression in human societies; they bring life and death, civilization and devastation, opportunity and risk"
(Sadoff and Grey, 389)

ABSTRACT

River runs through every human landscape, whether mythical or actual. History tells us that the rise of great civilization has always been linked with river. Even, it wouldn't be possible to imagine Egypt without Nile, China without Yangtze, India without Sindhu, the Ganges, Yamuna etc. and similarly Assam without Brahmaputra and Barak. The identity of a community is mostly shaped by the cultural values associated with the river that flows through the place inhabited by it. Perhaps, this might be the reason for claiming affinities between rivers and the communities connected to them by many writers. Say for instance, the Rhine and its people said to be romantic; the Thames imperial; the Rhone, savage; and so on. This anthropomorphizing tendency often appears in patriotic and even linguistic contexts; the qualities of particular rivers are alleged to reflect those of particular nation.



KEYWORDS: Turmeric, Guntur, Farm business income, family labour income, gross income, Net income.

INTRODUCTION

The river in Indian cinema serves as a rich and multifaceted symbol, reflecting cultural, spiritual, and narrative dimensions. From its representation as a sacred and purifying force to its role in advancing the plot and developing characters, the river is a powerful cinematic tool that enhances storytelling and emotional impact. Indian filmmakers have skillfully utilized the river to create compelling visuals and evoke deep emotional responses, making it an enduring and versatile element in the cinematic landscape.

Signifier of Human Life:

The Brahmaputra and its tributaries have been portrayed in the storylines of several Assamese films since Jyoti Prasad Agarwala's *Jyoti*. They have done so in a variety of ways, including as a symbol of human life and its journey, a source of happiness or livelihood, or a part of the scenic beauty. Rivers are frequently used in movies as metaphors to represent the continuity and change of human life under various conditions. An illustration of this can be found in Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia's second film, *Anirban*, which uses a river to represent human life. *Anirban* is a story of Rajani (Bhola Kakoti), the school master and his wife Bhagyawati (Runu Devi), who consecutively lost their new born babies for

three times and at one point of time sacrificed all their hope for a baby. Unfortunately, in the mean time Rajani is terminated from his job being complained by the guardian of his students for beating them badly. Consequently, to run his family Rajani sold his ancestral land to a kind man, who, by luck, recruited Rajani as home tutor. Meanwhile, a girl child (Nisha) came to their life and with their utmost care she attained her adolescence. Problem arises when Nisha falls 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 quiet. 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 the 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.

Since, *Anirban* is the adaptation of Saikia's own short story *Prahari* (1960) which he ended with Rajani and his wife Bhagyabati's mourning attempted to give a totally different message in the film. Rather than a story of misery; *Anirban*, celebrates the victory of happiness over death. It illustrates the connection between nature and human being. Unlike the short story, Saikia ended *Anirban* with the continuation of Rajani's tutorial class at Dibakar's house. This suggestive shot exemplifies the happy ending of the film. Hence, the explanation of *The Book* by Dibakar in his tuition class is not a coincidence, but an intentional inclusion by the director to suggest the continuity of life and continuity of hope. Therefore, *Anirban* can be read as a visual description of Alfred Tennyson's poem '*The Brook*' (1868), where the poet nostalgically celebrates the beauty of nature which is threatened by the growing mechanical and technological culture. *The Brook* describes about the nature of a river- its origin, movement and final destination. Contextually, Tennyson wrote the poem when England was going through the process of industrialization and urbanization. In the name of development the natural landscape was damaged. Poets, litterateurs, filmmakers, artists showcased their protest through their creations. And Tennyson reacted to the situation through *The Brook*. 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. In the film, Saikia's intension is neither 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).

Visualization of natural things like flower, bird, river etc. to suggest the progression of human life is very common in *Anirban*. Rajani's transition from distress to new hope of life, and consequently his realization about the importance of Bhagyabati's health is beautifully depicted by a long shot of the flowing river after the death of Rajani's third child.

Anirban is the celebration of humanity. It inspires human being to adjust with the sorrows and pains they have to face in their lives. It is not confined to any specific part of the universe; rather a universal story. The flowing river suggests the permanence of hope or continuity of life. Thus the river is standing just opposite to the leafless tree signifies sorrow and while the other carries the hope of life.

CAUSE OF RELIANCE AND DESOLATION

Jahnu Barua in *Xagaroloi Bahu Dur* projected the river in a totally different context with the mixture of both allegory and reality. He put forward the same river in the context of development. River is manifested both as a source of livelihood and a root for development at the same time. The film exemplifies Powal's (Bishnu Kharghoria) a boatman of Nemuguri village response to the newly constructed bridge on the Dihing River (a tributary of the Bhahmaputra). Powal's forefathers have been

ferrying people to and from the village from ages. Life goes on smoothly until Powal begins to hear persistent reports about a bridge to be built across the river.

Xagaroloi Bahu Dur represents a very familiar picture of a developing society. A section of the society has to sacrifice a lot for the sake of development. The meaning and definition of development is always a subjective idea. The conventional meaning of development always lies in the improvement of living standard, well being and opportunities in every sphere of human life. The history of development literatures throughout the ages encourage to rethink the meaning of development. Many have discussed it as confusing term. Therefore the discourses of development become a political term. It is always adjunct with power. *Xagaroloi Bahu Dur* is a thought provocative film by parallel filmmaker Jahnu Barua, where an old boatman encountered with such development. It is noticeably a serious movie, an intelligent response to the developing society in the context of individual, social and communicational spheres. In a developing society how a bridge becomes a curse for a boatman is the main question raised by the director in this movie. It is a candid recognition of the reality hidden behind each and every developed society. Similar attempt is made by Hemen Das in his film *Tothapio Nodi* (Yet the River, 1989) where he covered the predicament of boatman Nareswar, Purneswar and others after the construction of a bridge over the river Brahmaputra. "The film had a clear emphasis on the background music rather than dialogue., backed by a stylized documentation of conflicting social trends, while the river in differing moods became a metaphor of desolation in the community"(Borpujari, 2013).

In Thoraval's word in *Xagaroloi Bohu Dur* "situated in the luxuriant Assamese back country, there are two 'heroes': the undulating river which is unconcerned with what men do with it nor about what it brings to them- blessings or disasters- and Powal." And the bridge can be assumed as the 'villain' of the film who come and ruined Powal's livelihood. Therefore, in one shot beating the bridge, drunker Powal uttered- 'Why did you have to come here; you have destroyed me; how dare you take away my livelihood; I will see how you stay here.' This is how the helplessness of a victim amidst the process of development is expressed.

In addition to Powal's responses to the upcoming bridge, director Barua unfolded the emerging hypocritical urban mindset with his visit to his son's house who invited his father for a signature to sale his property. *Xagaroloi Bahu Dur* represents two different society reside in two spectrums. Or we can say two stages of the same society: one is about to touch by development; while the other is at the developed stage. Despite its unacceptable changes, development is unavoidable. This might be the reason for summing up the film narrative with Powal's acceptance and hope for a new beginning.

In this way, both literally and conceptually, many Assamese films examine the multifaceted character of the river. Additionally, upcoming directors contributed a few more movies to this genre in which rivers are used to illustrate either practical or real-world problems or allegorical meanings. Many movies, such *Kothanodi* (2015), *Bridge* (2020), *Noi* and *Boroxun* (2022), have gorgeously portrayed rivers in various settings. While Kripal Kalita's *Bridge* depicts the river *Charukuriya* as a curse in the form of flooding for the people of Assam, Bhaskar Hazarika's *Kothanodi* depicts the river metaphorically as a storyteller. *Bridge* tells the story of Jonaki, a country girl, and her tenacity as she toiled away to build a bridge while telling the tale of loss, hopelessness, disappointment, and pain. Here, the river acts as a barrier between Jonaki and other village girls who are ready for marriage and their future spouses because no one from outside the village wants to cross the river without a bridge.

CONCLUSION:

Through its depiction in various genres and eras, the river continues to hold a significant place in films, symbolizing the flow of life, the passage of time, and the interconnectedness of human experiences. Its role in Indian cinema not only reflects cultural reverence and artistic innovation but also underscores the river's timeless and universal appeal as a symbol of nature's enduring beauty and power.

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