

DEVELOPMENT OF NEOREALISM IN ASSAMESE FILMS: AN AUTEUR PERSPECTIVE OF SELECT FILMS

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The films centered on neorealism constantly search for images that will express contemporary society's true meaning and reality, its past and uncertain future, and its gloomy projection in which lie millions of people's perceptions, despair, and hopes. The paper reviews the growth of neorealism in Assamese films while appraising the film text of the select films from an auteur perspective. The paper weighs the representation of place and people, the everyday reality and circumstances of the Assamese masses through the codes and conventions of neo-realism in the selected films. The study explores how films become the medium of social consciousness while depicting the contrasting picture of development, poverty, inequality, anxiety, loneliness, and suffering of villagers and marginalized people. The chosen films represent an endeavor of filmmakers to meaningfully talk about the problems that the average Indian faces; thus, those films could act as a tool for social change. The study assesses how filmmakers use their imagination to express their concerns about the socio-economic milieu and country locales.

Introduction

Neorealism is a film genre, a cinematic style marked by unobtrusive, non-judgmental camera work that picks out images and presents them without too much human intermediacy. The thematic concerns of Neorealism grew from the characterization and the social milieu, as well as the pattern of socio-political trajectories such as poverty, a struggle for justice, and suffering. Robert Phillip Kolker stated that Neorealism reclaims the territory of reality, announcing itself as the beginning of filmmaking and denies the claims of past filmmaking (Kolker, 1988).

The development of the two groups, filmmakers and writers, follows an almost identical pattern. Literary neorealism was formally born immediately after the Second World War (1945) (Armes, 1971). The Neo-Realism movement became well-known after 1945 with the making of several remarkable films in the 1940s and 1950s, with striking similarities in terms of content. Despite the dearth of cross-influences between the literature and cinema of neorealism, both media share a common source to present them as “parallel expressions of the same aesthetic and ideological impulses” (Ibid.). The definition of neorealism is not simplistic, for the stylistic differences among its practitioners are often more significant than their conformity to a given set of rules. Even the neorealist filmmakers never formed a formal group. What one can highlight, however, is the broad convergence of some Italian directors in a particular era around some of the characteristics proposed as the norm.

Under the Fascist rule of Mussolini, the kind of cinema being created was detached from reality and aimed at promoting an excellent image of Italy. The Fascist government had prohibited the portrayal of crime and immorality on screen. Neorealism then owes its origin, in part, to filmmakers' discontent at the limits placed on their freedom of expression. It was a movement against the artificiality of pre-war and fascist cinema. Neorealist films

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were a reaction against the disapproval, called “white telephone films,” which were pretentious and characters talked on white shining phones (Bazin, 2005). Neorealism emerged in response to this genre, which delved into imagination and fantasy and was miles away from reality. Neorealism can also be construed as an attempt to make cinema more meaningful to the audience.

Georges Sadoul views neorealism as a school and lists five features prerequisite to such a designation: delineated geographic and temporal boundaries, a group of masters and disciples, and a set of rules (Marcus, 1986). The rules governing neorealist practice include a nonprofessional cast, location shooting, respect for the continuity of time and space, lengthy takes, natural lighting, unobtrusive editing, a predominance of medium and long shots, use of contemporary true-to-life subjects, active viewer involvement, working-class protagonists, dialogue in the vernacular, an open-ended plot and implied social criticism (Valicha, 1999).

To typify neorealism is, in fact, really complex if a social and aesthetic description were to be tried, in terms of five traits quite generally acknowledged as characteristics—realistic handling, popular location, social substance, historical authenticity, and political commitment. The country's social, political, and economic restructuring in the immediate postwar times was inextricably linked to Italian Neorealist films. Robert Philip Kolker mentioned two kinds of neorealism: firstly, the genre of films in Italy between 1945 and 1955, and secondly, an idea or the concept, an artistic appeal or aesthetics, a politics, a drastic reorientation of films that transformed the perception. Neorealists desired to observe the world without mediations and interferences so that the lives of the poor would unfold themselves (Kolker, 1988).

Italian neorealists employed post-synchronization in which dialogues recorded on location were not used except as a reference in recording the final soundtrack made under controlled acoustical conditions (Armes, 1971). Most Italian films were shot silently and post-synchronized. The process shapes the aesthetics of the neorealist films, informing the filmmaker's high levels of sound recording and dubbing skills, not only perfecting it to a level but also making it free from incongruity. Andre Bazin argues that *mise-en-scene* forms the core of the neorealist film. By *mise-en-scene*, he refers to deep-focus photography and the sequence shot, which allows the spectators to be more involved in viewing the film. Bazin refers to the evolution of deep focus, which is not just a film tool but rather a dialectical advancement in the history of the film language because the depth of focus positions the viewer to feel an intimate relationship with the image, simultaneously contributes to a more active mindset on the part of the spectator (Bazin, 2005). On the other hand, humanists viewed and explained the neorealist phenomenon in terms of its moral content. To quote Andre Bazin, a prominent humanist exponent of neorealism, “Is not neorealism primarily a kind of humanism and only secondarily a style of filmmaking?” (Ibid.). Bazin considers humanism as the key distinctive quality in Italian Neorealism that can endorse a revolutionary tinge in the films without the elements of freight and terror, simultaneously providing the filmmakers a chance to present and appreciate a radical essence in the film (Ibid.).

Looking beyond technical considerations, the ethical impetus behind neorealism creates more of a consensus among artists of the era and finds enough reason for clubbing them together as supporters of a particular school, style, and tendency, broadly construed. Several critics of neorealism as a moral statement, the purpose of which was to promote true objectivity. In the early seventies, some Italian film critics refused to view neorealism as a movement. They argued that a movement has to have unity, which neorealism lacked (Bondanella, 1993). Neorealist elements were assisted by having artists devoid of

professional stereotyping and unused by acting academies. Historically, it is not the absence of professional actors that is the hallmark of Italian film, but it is mainly the turning down of the star concept and the irregular intermingling of professionals and those who act occasionally (Bondanella, 1993; Kartal, 2013). Neorealism never misunderstood the image of reality for reality itself and desired to create the image as an expressive tool that would be convincing in conveying emotion, behavior, action, and reaction, history, and place. The neorealist desired their images to show a world neglected by conventional cinema and to portray that world unmediated by cinematic stereotyping.

I. The Emergence of Indian Parallel Cinema

In India, the Parallel Cinema movement began to take shape from the late 1940s to the 1960s by pioneers like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Bimal Roy, Mrinal Sen, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Chetan Anand, Guru Dutt, V. Shantaram, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and Girish Kasaravalli. Ray's most famous films were *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956), and *The World of Apu* (1959), which formed *The Apu Trilogy*. During the 1970s and the 1980s, neo-realist cinema entered the spotlight of Hindi cinema to an important wider extent (Rangoonwalla, 1982). Adoor Gopalakrishnan, frequently considered Satyajit Ray's spiritual inheritor, extended the Indian New Wave to Malayalam cinema with his film *Swayamvaram* in 1972. These filmmakers tried to promote realism in their styles; however, numerous of them frequently accepted certain conventions of popular cinema (Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 1980).

The Indian serious film is conscious of its historical role, which is evident in the level of social awareness it displays, particularly in the choice of its themes. Most films reflect a concern with poverty and social and economic injustice rooted in the Indian political and social system (Arth, Ankur, Alberto Pinto Ko Ghussa Kyo Aata Hain, Aakash, Ardha Satya, and Mohan Joshi Haazir ho). Quite a few films are concerned with social discrimination against women, like *Bazaar*, *Subah*, *Uski Roti*, and *Arth*. Some films, such as *Godhuli* and *Sanskara*, are based on conflict centered around caste. In contrast, almost all films are preoccupied with the contemporaneous discord between tradition and modernity (Chakravarty, 1996). The concern voiced in these films is about destroying an age-old Indian village by forces of modernization allied to capitalism. Realism rests in a double vision, showing the village through the eyes of the city people and the city through the perspective of the village protagonist.

The dominant themes and oppositions of the realistic mode are the struggle between the haves and the haves-not, the country and the city, the landlord and peasant, and moneylenders, which enormously found expression in most popular Bengali films. Satyajit Roy uses a camera to present Indian reality with considerable authenticity. He presents to his audience a vivid account of the Indian experience as seen through the cameras, unemotional as well as the philosophical compulsions that make such an eye and the philosophical experience meaningful. He also portrays the conflict between those compulsions rooted in tradition and those part of the value system of a decadent society that not only tolerates injustice but often seeks to perpetuate it.

The nativism of serious cinema is evident in its choice of locales, characterization, and use of language and dialogues. In *Ankur*, for instance, Shyam Benegal uses the topical dialect of Hyderabad and roots his characters in time and space. In *Manthan*, the language used in the film is a cross between simple rustic Hindi and rural Gujarati. In *Maya Darpan*, Kuman Shahani used slow and direct language to deemphasize the contrast between man and machine and to capture the utter lack of excitement in the central character of the girl, who is so much part of her environment (Valicha, 1999).

II. Origin and Evolution of New Realism in Assamese Film

The Assamese film industry has been revered as one of India's most dynamic film industries based on its history and origin under the aegis of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala. He was the visionary who immortalized the story of Joymoti with his 1935 feature that kick-started the Assamese film industry. Jyoti Prasad Agarwala's first Assamese film, *Joymoti* (*Joymoti*, 1935), attempted to create an immediate connection between society and cinema. The European realistic story-telling style influenced him, as reflected in *Joymoti*'s off-the-beaten-track realistic treatment in contrast to the theatrical style of filmmaking in practice elsewhere in India in those times (Mazid, 2021). He then told the story of *Indramalati*, where Bhupen Hazarika debuted as a singer. By the end of the 1960s, the bastion had been carried out by Nip Barua, Promothesh Barua, and Brajen Barua, who came up to make sentimental dramas, following a trend of such cinema in the Hindi film industry. Nip Barua's *Smritir Parash* (1956), *Ajali Nabou* (1980), *Kokadeuta*, *Nati Aru Haati* (1983); Brajen Barua's *Maak Aru Morom* (1957), *Mukuta*, *Dr. Bezbaruah* (1969) are some of the films of this period that became popular among the Assamese audience.

The tradition Agarwala set for sensitive and sensible cinema was maintained later by stalwarts like Jahnu Barua and the late Bhabendra Nath Saikia. All these filmmakers thought of putting the Assamese people's simple and down-to-earth social life on the reel. In doing so, there had been a precise reflection of the Assamese society, culture, and heritage in the films. However, this leaning towards the exclusive Assamese social life did undergo several perceptible changes in the hands of the filmmakers of the 21st century.

1970 to 1980 is known as the Golden Age of Assamese Cinema. It is characterized by the filmmakers' eagerness to experiment with narration and story and their grasp and application of cinematic language. The films of Padum Baruah and Bhabendranath Saikia in the late 1970s and Jahnu Barua in the early 1980s incur a renaissance in Assamese cinematic discourse. In commercial and parallel filmmaking, the 1980s saw the birth of a new generation of directors. Padum Barua's first film, *Ganga Chiloni Pakhi* (*Wings of the Tern*, 1976), was based on a novel by Lakshmi Nandan Bora and marked the beginning of realism in Assamese filmmaking. The film was notable for its significant use of cinematic language and semiotics in conveying the character's loneliness and for introducing parallelism to Assamese cinema. Jahnu Barua's volume of work provided legitimacy to Assamese cinema compared to Indian cinema. Jahnu Barua began his career with *Aparoop* (1982) and propelled Assamese cinema to the international stage with his other film, *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* (*The Catastrophe*, 1987). In discussing realism in an Assamese film, films of Bhaben Saikia and Jahnu Barua are invariably mentioned by critics and industry representatives.

In 1977, noted litterateur Bhabendra Nath Saikia entered the Assamese film industry by reenacting his story "*Banprastha*" as a Sandhyarag film (*Cry of Twilight*, 1977). The film portrays the story of two sisters, Charu and Taru, whom their mother sent to the city as servants. When they attain their marriageable age, Charu, to live in the city, ends up an impotent man. This film shows how both the sisters found it difficult to adapt to the village conditions after living in the city. It gives glimpses of the contrasting urban and rural life and shows the class divisions present in our society. Saikia, being already a celebrated writer, created quite a stir with this film and his later productions like *Anibr* (*The Vigil*, 1980), *Agnisnaan* (*The agony*, 1985), *Kolahal* (*The Turmoil*, 1988), *Sarothi* (1992), *Itihas* (1996), all of which were the realistic depiction of his literary works and were dramatic and character-driven (Borpujari, 2013). With the dearth of good Assamese films, Saikia's films

breathed fresh realism into Assamese cinema.

Bhupendra Nath Sakia's *Anirban*, released in 1985, portrays the story of a couple, Rajnai and Bhagyawti, and their ill-fated life story. Being childless for years, a child was born to them, and upon attaining adolescence, she died of illness as her parents separated her from her lover. Saikia's *Agnisnaan* (1985) is the story of Menaka, whose husband marries another woman and expects her to treat her like her sister. As she realizes that he will not leave his new wife, she starts an affair with a village thief and becomes pregnant with his child. At the end of the film, she tells him that everything in their marriage is equal. Kolahal of Bhabendra Nath Saikia depicts the story of Kiran and her lonely life, inner conflict, sexuality, and struggle for a livelihood. Parallel to him was Jahnur Baruah, who pioneered the creation of realistic and socially relevant films during that period. Baruah's debut film, *Aparoop* (1981), explored the man-woman relationship in the then-typical society. His epoch-making *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* (*The Catastrophe*, 1987) and *Hkhagoroloi Bohu Dur* (1995) represented the Assamese society and its plights (Baruah, 2021).

The stories of the neo-realist films of that time have been restructured based on the intriguing socio-political frenzies that occurred in Assam during the post-colonial period, including China's irruption in 1962, the Assam Movement, the ULFA rebellion and insurgency, the border dispute and so on. Jahnur Barua's *Papori* (1986) was set against the backdrop of the All Assam Student Union agitation during the election of 1983. The political scenario of that period was woven through the story of *Papori*, whose husband was deceitfully detained for murder, her daughter, who was in the hospital, died, and a smuggler raped her. Hem Barua's *Sankalpa* addresses the social disruption during the Assam movement. Films like Jahnur Barua's *Firingoti* (1962), Bidyut Kakoty's *Xhoixobote Dhemalite* (2013), Bidyut Chakarvorty's *Dwaar* (2019), Dinesh Gogoi's *Surya Tejor Anya Naam* (1991), Manju Bora's *Aai kot Nai* (2008) depicts the socio-political narrative of the state (Sarma, 2001).

The arrival of the ULFA in Assam has steered a dramatic shift in the state's profitable and sociopolitical geography. The film *Surya Tejor Anya Naam* (*The Blood Red Sun*, 1991) by Dinesh Gogoi illustrated the dynamics of insurgency in Assam. Manju Bora's film "*Aai Kot Nai*" (Ma, 2008) was made on border disputes between Assam and Nagaland and the implication of disputes on the community near the Nagaland- Assam border. Manju Bora's Bodo film '*Dau Huduni Methai*' (*Song of The Horned Owl*, 2015) represents the Bodo Extremism and Bodoland's intricacy and narrates the social and political uneasiness of the Bodo Community in Assam.

Since 1976, the people have accepted films that address the critical issues of the region. These films address the socio-political and economic conflict of the state, the caste and class divisions, and the social stigmas and portray the region as it is. In 2003, Manju Bora's *Akashitorar Kathare* garnered appraisal at the national level for exploring the theme of gender bias. It was, however, a period dominated by Munin Barua, who created a trend with romantic tear-jerker films like *Hiya Diya Niya* (2000), *Daag*, *Nayak*, etc. This trend later paved the way for more Bihu-themed romantic films, such as the *Jaanmoni* series by Rajesh Bhuyan and the *Anjana* series with a screenplay by Munin Barua.

The last decade, however, saw several changes in filmmaking in the Assamese film industry with the advent of new filmmakers such as Bhaskar Hazarika, Rima Das, Jaicheng Jai Dohutia, Kangkan Deka, Monjul Baruah, Reema Borah and so on. Each had a unique set of approaches and ideas to build their films. Hazarika's *Kothanodi* (2016), *Aamis* (2019); Das's *Village Rockstars* (2017), *Bulbul Can Sing* (2018); Dohutia's *Moran*-Assamese film *Haanduk* (2016) and the other films from the filmmakers have set their style of narrative and have gathered critical acclaim from the audience as well.

Rima Das's *Village Rockstar* and *Bulbul Can Sing* uphold the social stigma present in society. These new emerging trends in filmmaking show a shift from the earlier trends. The industry is standing at a point where more experimental narratives are coming up in the hands of newcomers like Bhaskar Hazarika, Rima Das, Dr. Santwana Bardoloi, etc. Whereas Rima Das and Dr. Santwana Bardoloi adapted the raw theme of rural life with a solid narrative arc that leads with more advanced technological cinematic assistance in *Village Rockstars* and *Maj Rati Keteki*, respectively, Bhaskar Hazarika, with his Metanormal production house, adapted the famous Assamese folklores into a darker narrative in his award-winning *Kothanodi*. Parallel to them is Kenny Basumatary's *Local Kung Fu*, an action comedy that took the audience by storm, and Jatin Bora's Tollywood-inspired action thriller *Ratnakar*. These films have strikingly different themes, yet their reception has been tremendous on their terms.

The paper aims to review the origin and growth of neorealism in Assamese films while appraising the film text of the select films from an auteur perspective. Film text comprises working of ideology, selecting practices, and reproducing specific styles and codes. Neo-realistic films became the medium of social consciousness while depicting the poverty, inequality, anxiety, and suffering of working-class people. The paper assesses the film language and narrative strategies used in select films while attempting to find out how neo-realistic films become the tool for social change in alignment with the director's vision.

The paper weighs the representation of place and people typical to the region through the codes and conventions of neo-realism in the selected films. It attempts to answer questions like 1) How do the filmmakers use their imagination to express their concerns about the socio-economic milieu or locale situation? 2) How are the everyday reality circumstances of the Assamese masses depicted in the selected films? Chosen films for the study of auteur revision of codes and conventions include Padum Barua's *Ganga Siloni Pakhi*, Jahnu Barua's *Halodhiya Sorai Bao Dhan Khai*, and Hagoroloi Bohu Dur and Rima Das's *Village Rockstar*.

III. Representation of People and Milieu in "Ganga Siloni Pakhi"

Padum Barua's maiden venture, *Ganga Siloni Pakhi* (*Wings of the Tern*), was released in 1975, four decades after Jyotiprasad's *Jyomoti*. Film critic Manoj Barpujari termed him realistic, the one after Jyotiprasad to inquire about the post-colonial development model through the narrative of a widow in his film.

Shot in black and white by Indukalpa Hazarika, a Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) graduate Directed by Padum Barua, *Ganga Siloni Pakhi* cast Beena Baruwati, Basanta Duarah, and Basanta Saikia. The narrative tells the story of young Basanti, who fell in love with Dhananjay, brother Bhogram's friend and a homeopath. Dhananjay shared a good relationship with Bhogram until the election, when both braced for each other's opposition. During the election campaigning, a fight broke out between the contesting parties, where Dhananjay and Bhogram fought. Basanti could not elope with Dhananjay about her family prestige and married Mathura, a wealthy man as arranged by her brother Bhogram. Her happy married life met a distraught when Mathura came to know about her past. Furious and jealous, Mathura began to distance himself from Basanti, met with an accident one day, and died. To add to her tragedy, her newborn too left her a few days later.

The film *Ganga Siloni Pakhi* portrays the post-colonial socio-economic reality of an Assamese village. The conversation between Dhananjay and Bhogram emphasizes how the money lender (bourgeoisie) earns profit from cultivation and the farmers (proletariat). Moreover, the film highlights the class differences, the suffering of the farmers, and the

people's hopes for an improved condition from the government. Through the character of Bhogram, the film depicts social distress like unemployment, poverty, and the ensuing pressure of looking after a family. The portrayal of the misery of the marginalized, the conflict between zamindars and poor peasants, and the money lender's exploitation of the deprived are post-colonial realities portrayed in *Ganga Siloni Pakhi*. Road construction in the village bears the image of modernity behind which 'the haves' and 'haves not' divided exacerbated as it leads the traders of the town to earn great profit in contrast to the farmers toil in the paddy fields the whole day.

The film beautifully portrays Basanti's emotional conflict. The film presents the gender-prejudiced mindset of society through the central character, Dhananjay. The protagonist, Basanti, is in love with homeopath Dhananjay and wants to marry him, but the marriage does not occur due to her elder brother's clash with him. Basanti's husband passed away, and she became widowed. Being unaided and alone, widowed Basanti desired to settle down with her former lover, Dhananjay. Dhananjay promised to wait for her by the side of the river, and accordingly, she went out of her house in the middle of the night and, unfortunately, found nobody there.

Dhananjay reflects on society, which could not allow a widow to relish her freedom and live a content life. Patriarchal prejudices against women's desires are pierced through the character of Dhananjay and partially through Mathura in the film. The protagonist Basanti, played by Beena Baruwati, was presented as a soft-spoken lady who never raises her voice against anything and has the power to sacrifice her happiness for her loved ones. The film ends with Basanti's loneliness, leaving imprints of her courage.

Mathura's character is depicted as a caring male yet possessive, ingrained by the patriarchal prejudices of having a wholesome female as his wife. He could not accept Basanti's past life even if she had moved along with him. Basanti's truth and honest confession about her past life shatter their relationship. The portrayal of the bird tern in the *Ganga Siloni Pakhi* symbolizes the protagonists' pain. The audience can also glimpse the Assamese culture through certain shots. The visible gender equality enjoyed by the women in Assam in terms of greater freedom concerning their mobility and the absence of certain practices such as dowry and obligatory wearing of burqas, which is most evident in the national public sphere, is most often being talked about in comparison to the context of the Northeast. Even though discriminatory social practices seem to be absent, yet there is intense discrimination against women in reality in the light of tradition and customary practices.

The story of Basanti represents all women's crumpled dreams and desires due to hollowed gender norms in the patriarchal society. The film's narrative probes the universal language of human desires that is not location-specific. Dhananjay comes to see Basanti, which acts like a ray of hope for her; again, Basanti's confession that she is still in love with him cannot sway him. He left her as she was a widow. Basanti's letter to Dhananjay expresses her courage to stand against societal odds, gender norms, and the unsupportive structure. On the other hand, Dhananjay's timidity is reflected in his inability to go against the preaching of society, the existing prejudice, and superstition. Bhogram's wife Toru's concern for Basanti's reputation and marriage shows the bond between the sisters-in-law in the region.

The Film starts with the establishing shot of the river and the trees, followed by a shot of Basanti who went to fetch water from the river with a metal pot and the folk song "Bahor muha, Bogolir ghura, kor pora ahila soku seleuwa bura." The usage of folk songs, Thapona, "thoga" during prayers, the illustration of Assamese marriage, the village roads, prayer halls, paddy fields, shops, and even the "Nongola" (bamboo gate) loom provides a lively account of an Assamese village. Handloom is the backbone of Assam's economy.

The usage of brass metals, “gamusa,” bamboo craft, the showcasing of “bhaona” and wedding rituals with the syncing sound of “biya naam” represents the local culture and place, which reflects that the shot is location-specific.

IV. Representation of People and Milieu in “Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai”

Written and directed by Jahnu Barua, *Halodhiya Choraye Baodhan Khai* (The Catastrophe) was released in 1987. The film is an adaptation and interpretation of Homen Borgohain's novel *Halodhiya Choaraye Baodhan Khai*. It is based on the exploitation of an illiterate farmer, Rakheswar Bora, and his struggle to get back his only farming plot from Sanatan Sarma.

Corruption was legitimized through petty bribery, representing the film's predominant theme. The depiction of overarching corruption that took precedence over other pressing issues like unemployment and the economic well-being of the villagers is authenticated in the film. Browbeaten Rakheswar has been subjugated by every higher official at the office of SDC (Sub Deputy Collector). Sanatan Sarma took away his land, and Mondol misguided him to file a case against Sanatan Sarma. Subsequently, he is trapped in the web of corruption. Addressing corruption was seen as vital if it was shown to contribute to improved social, political, and economic outcomes. Anti-corruption efforts, whether direct or indirect, are seen as potentially legitimizing and stabilizing, successfully implemented with strong, high-level leadership SDC in the film. Anti-corruption rhetoric or efforts to meet public expectations are viewed as delegitimizing, especially when they fail to address the impunity of corrupt actors.

The film ends with a depiction of Rakheswar's anger as he axes Sarma's poster on a tree and curses that after his death, not even foxes or dogs would care to feed on his filthy body. Post-colonial Assam witnessed the feeling of insecurity and depression gripping the agricultural community of the province, which is effectually depicted in the film. The film portrays how Assamese farmers continued to reel under a heavy burden of taxation. Without any recognized principle of fixing land revenue for a definite period, the farmer is constantly perturbed by a feeling of impending enhancement of land revenue.

Rural poverty manifests marginalization and socio-economic-political inequalities, which is effectually shown in the film. Landlessness, or access to land and economic resources for the poor; low returns from agriculture, especially for the land poor or poor farmers who operate with scanty investments; inadequate avenues for remunerative employment; social exclusion and lack of political voice are few of the prominent factors projected in the film explaining poverty in rural areas. Inadequate employment opportunities due to the low level of development of the non-farm sectors is another aspect highlighted in the film. In rural areas, socially persisting constraints on women's economic and political participation subsist, which is prettily portrayed in the film. Yet, the presence of social structures and the rural environment is not entirely supportive.

V. Codes of New Realism

The film depicts the existing socio-economic problems and prejudices caused by the exploitation of Rakheswar and the political disparity caused by office corruption. The exploitation of Rakheswar by the upper class and the caste indicates the caste-class-laden disparity in post-colonial Assam. Gender biases are depicted in the treatment of Moni and Mohan. The cinematic representation of existing gender biases in society covers the scenes when Moni is asked to lay down the plates during dinner, and Mohan is asked to call his

father; then, keeping expectations from the son, Mohan constantly reminds him of becoming Hakim and in the absence of any discussion about daughter Moni's future with a lesser motto of Moni's education is only to be literate.

The film starts with the depiction of a minor villager bathing the cow in the river, reciting, "Dighloti Dighol part, makhi maaru jaak jaak; maar horu, baper horu toi hobi bor bor goru..." Though illiterate, Rakheswar's aspiration for his son's future is high. The resentment of Rakheswar in the initial part of the film is doubled with worries regarding his plot of land, which was the only source of livelihood. Consequently, the proud father who wants his son to be a collector had to keep his son to work at the Gaonburha's house, which connects to the inner conflict of a father, another socio-economic reality of the time.

Toru's character is caring yet fierce. The scene where she removes a safety pin from her blouse and fixes her husband's torn clothes shows her love and concern for Rakheswar. Toru's character is empowered by Toru's woven cloth, which he uses to bribe the Mondol. Toru's desire to work to help her husband and her role as a homemaker portray her underlying power.

Through visual narratives and characterization, the film attempts to portray the general presumption that women of the region are equal partners with their male counterparts in different spheres of life. However, the northeastern region is not free from social evils and women's subordination, which is captured pertinently in the film by exchanging dialogues between Rakheswar and Sanatan Sarma and Mohan and Moni.

Set around 1969, the film represents the socio-cultural dynamics of the time when women were rarely seen making career-related decisions. Rakheswar's decision to cast a vote for Sanatan Sarma on behalf of Toru shot to make a woman stay out of the political decision of the village in a patriarchal society. In the scene where Moni is shown constructing a clay model of a house and explaining the rooms of his parents and brother, as inquired about her room, Moni says that she has none because she will be married off, represents the infusing psychology of a girl in society who is nurtured to believe that a girl does not have a claim in her own house.

The children in the film Mohan and Moni are shown to mature as maturity comes through circumstances and the conditions in which they are born and brought up. Mohan opposed working in the Gaonburha's house because of his dream and keenness for studies, but after realizing the situation, he silently walked away. Even strident Moni, who used to find faults, remained silent and accepted themselves as the victim of circumstances. The characters, Sanatan Sarma, the Mondol, and Gaonbura, represent the society's corrupt socio-political structure juxtaposed with the anti-corruption efforts of the SDC, who helped Rakheswar to get back his land.

The film *Halodhiya Sorai Baodhan Khai* portrays socio-economic and political conditions during post-colonial Assam. Poverty, corruption, disparity, and class and caste divisions are prominent in the film. The film opens with a wide shot of a river and the sky that marks the overview of a village. Torn clothes show conditions such as poverty, the thatched house, and the conversation between Rakheswar and his wife regarding the items needed for the house to run. Caste plays a significant role in the film. The Sanatan, the main rival of the film, is named after the Brahmin caste. Even after being exploited, Rakheswar calls Sanatan Sarma "deuta" (father), which reveals the claim of Brahmin superiority in Assamese society. Poverty is represented by the roof leaking during the rain, torn clothes, and a thatched hut. Farmers' ceaseless wait for rain in the offing to plow their land represents Assam's crucial aspect of agriculture as a source of livelihood and farmers' dependency on it.

The rain finally brings up another binary of happiness and sorrowfulness in passing weariness among Rakheswar and Toru, with Toru's concern about being unable to set up

her loom to build household finance representing empowerment. Again, Rakeswar's reaction that Toru's loom will not feed them represents the gender stereotypical attitude of the male section of society. Eventually, Rakeswar had to bribe Toru's woven piece of clothes to Mondol. He bribed the Mandal with woven clothes and a pot of curd; he had to bribe the clerks and the officers to process his file with money, cigarettes, and betel nuts.

The brass metals, the woven clothes, the folk songs and rituals, and the depiction of the farmer with the Jaapi, barefoot and Gamusa, Khaloi, and Jakoi, the making of curd, the folksongs, the traditional handloom, and the practice of pisciculture in the film form the essence of Assamese culture. Mohan's inability to distinguish the metal of the necklace represents the non-greedy attitude of the poor children.

VI. Representation of People and Milieu in "Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door"

Starring Bishnu Kharghoria, Sushanta Barooah, Arun Nath, and Kashmiri Saikia, Jahnu Barua's directorial Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door was released in 1995. The film won the National Award for Best Director in 1995 and 15 international awards, including the World Peace Prize at the Chicago International Film Festival and Best Director at the International Film Festival of Independent Filmmakers in Brussels, apart from being invited to as many as 42 prestigious film festivals worldwide.

Set in the village of Nemuguri during the 1990s, Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door is a film about Powal, a boatman, and how his life turned upside down with the establishment of a bridge in the village. His elder son's family died in the river, and the family of his younger son settled in the city. Powal, an old man and the only boatman in the village, lives with his grandson Hkhuman and earns his livelihood by ferrying the people of the village. He knows every person in the village and stays by the bank of the river. The film's main characters are Powal, his grandson Hkhuman, his son Hemanto, and his daughter-in-law Runumi. Powal is an innocent villager of Nemuguri who earns his livelihood by ferrying the boat and helping the villagers cross the river. His character is shown as a very friendly old man who knows every customer of his and discusses the problems he is facing due to his old age. He is worried about his grandson Hkhuman, a school-going boy who is innocent, independent, and more mature than his age. He takes care of his grandfather and their home. He lost his parents in a river accident and was brought up by his grandfather.

The Film starts with shots of the trees and the river syncing with the sound of flowing water and birds, establishing the village's setting. It was followed by a drawing of a boat with two people writing "Grandpa and me." Anyone who knows and loves Assam will realize with the first shot of Jahnu Barua's Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door that he will treat an aspect of Assam, which is a part of its very being, the life along its rivers. The moonlight glisters caressingly on the river as it flows placidly but without pause, formed in the greenery, the branches of ancient trees which line the banks soon enough is an old man doing his morning exercise. This Film deals with the adverse effects of development. Set in the 1990s, marked as a period of development, the village of Nemuguri was about to be touched by the contrasting image of development.

Innocent Powal received a letter from his younger son Hemento, a city dweller, calling him to the city and apologizing for their forgoing behavior when Powal was mistreated by his daughter-in-law, Runumi. Being emotional, Powal went to the city with Hkhuman, his grandson. Soon, Powal realized that his son, Hemanta, called him with a selfish motive for taking Powal's signature to sell the plot of land registered under Powal's name. Meanwhile, upon reaching the village from the city, Powal observes that the bridge's construction over the river has started. As days passed by, Powal's agony began to increase, for his only

source of livelihood came to a halt. The film represents two faces of development with contrasting images. Building a bridge improves the village's communication and removes the boatman's livelihood.

The bridge was built, and villagers were happy along with Hkhuman, but the person who suffered most was Powal. One night, he tries to chop down the bridge and is caught by Hkhuman, who tries to harmonize the mental conflict by exposing his grandfather to the threat of leaving him. Eventually, Powal had to accept the consequences and reality of the development. The bridge was built to portray the positive side of development but the adverse effects it incurred on boatmen who lost their daily earnings. The film tries to create a thinking space to care for the feelings of those often victimized by development and make them part of the development process. Even a development process meant to bridge an urban-rural gap has no room to accommodate those affected. The boatman went to the contractor and the engineer, asking for a job as the bridge's watchman. However, neither the contractor nor the engineer could come forward to help him, going by the erroneous discriminatory policy.

Powal's aspiration for Hkhuman's education again represents the dichotomy between poverty and ambition among the villagers, who want Hkhuman to become a great man and break the family tradition of the boatman. There is a scene where Hkuman asks Powal whether he has seen the sea, to which Powal says that he hasn't, but one day, Hkhuman will see the sea and cross it, too. The film portrays the impending effects of modernity and depicts the crisis and dichotomy of modernity in rural-urban setup and how it culminates in family conflicts.

Hkhuman playing with the power switches describes the child's curiosity about new possessions. Here, the newly introduced electricity infused Hkhuman's interest, which simultaneously provides an overview of the background he belongs to. Materialism contextualized the social milieu that compelled it to change the people's psyche. Powal's younger son Hemanto and his wife Runumi live in the comfort of urban life. They are portrayed as selfish, yet looking beyond it, they are found to be the prey of the materialistic world. Runumi is perceived to be holding the upper hand in Hemanto's family, and she nags Hemanto to call his father to the city so they can get his signature and sell the plot of land.

VII. Representation of Realistic Milieus in "Village Rockstar"

Village Rockstar (2017) by Rima Das, acclaimed for many awards, is the first film submitted for Oscar, India's official entry for the Academy Awards 2018 in the Best Foreign Language Film category. The self-taught director, who hails from the village of Chaygaon, has inspired many upcoming filmmakers in the region.

Without prominent male characters, Dhunu's mother and Dhunu face harsh calamities. Dhunu, the story's main protagonist, is a girl brought up fearlessly by her widowed mother. She is the protagonist, but it is her mother who shapes her. She helps her mother sell snacks and harvest beetle nuts. She sleeps in the trees with the boys and dreams of owning a guitar and forming a rock band. She reads comics and goes to school. She is a child with dreams and aspirations. Dhunu makes a guitar out of thermocol for herself, which shows her interest in the guitar. When she is slapped by one of the village boys, she cries, yet she confronts him. With a voice of authority, she seeks his apology for giving him a space in their gang. Dhunu's mother is strong, although poor and a widow, as circumstances make it challenging to deal with everyday struggles. She trained her daughter, Dhunu, in swimming skills to incapacitate and self-reliant herself to manage riverine scuffles. When a few of the village women scolded Dhunu for roaming around with boys and tagged her as a spoilt brat for being a self-governing child, Dhunu's mother's antagonism shows the rebellious

character in them to address the ill-fated societal order.

Dialogues that “I am suffering after her father’s death. I do everything myself. I am in trouble. I do not want my girl to suffer like me. Therefore, I am teaching her everything,” reflects how the mother is bringing her child up against all societal odds. The other characters include Dhunu’s brother and her friends, who never leave her alone. The character of the women who have scolded Dhunu for climbing the trees represents gender gender-laden mindset of the people that divides the labor, draws a sacrosanct line between male and female labor, and forbids women to do the manly tasks and mingling with boys. Shot in an actual location using natural lights, the Film Village Rockstars tells the story of Dhunu while portraying the reality that the village people of Assam witness. The clothes and the house of Dhunu, which eats just rice and salt, depict their poverty.

Dhunu expresses to her friend the significance of constructing an embankment that could have saved her father. Dhunu asks her mother why she cultivates yearly as their crops are smashed by floods yearly. Her mother answers, “Our work is our religion. Working hard is all we know.” The expressions categorically reveal that the state economy is not poor-centric, and the state fails to instrumentalize any benefit to the deprived section. The beauty and the wrath of nature on the villagers living in riverine areas of Assam have been effectively represented in the film. The perennial flood in Assam destroys crops, takes lives, and sinks houses.

Dhunu attains puberty is trailed by a scene of her swimming with the boys and her mother watching her with a smile, added to poetic liberty, the liberty the poor used to have in society compared to the rich that shambles with stereotypes prevailing in the society. The film ends when Dhunu gets a guitar, but in reality, getting a guitar is not that easy. A girl’s obsession with a guitar who belongs to a recurrently flood-driven, poverty-stricken interior village is not unusual. Instead, it adds the flowing liberty to the character.

VIII, Neo-Realism from Auteur’s Perspective

Vasant Palshikar has suggested three levels at which nativism can operate in literature. In films, however, filmmakers could embrace three distinct attitudes.

Firstly, the filmmaker could depict the site as an outside observer and then draw the minute details about the situation as faithfully and graphically as possible.

Secondly, a filmmaker can use his language and intimate knowledge of the milieu to give the audience a deeper insight into the situation. While remaining relatively objective and neutral, the filmmaker may express sympathy for a particular character or take sides in the drama or conflict he is delineating. He speaks of intimate knowledge of the characters with a deep empathic understanding of the situation. The third kind of attitude consists of picking out a theme that has an economic, political, or moral philosophical significance. The filmmaker can generalize about the social structure or the moral conventions within which he and his audience presumably live (Palshikar, 1999).

The craving for authenticity in neo-realist films heightens the documentary effects, which is evident in the filmmaker's attitude. Regarding the connection between Neo-Realism and Auteur Theory, it can be claimed that the filmmaker looks at the poor and emaciated peasants and finds a historical truth in that image; he perceives the stranglehold of caste and gets horrified. He observes exploitation in its various forms, some so subtle that they call for deciphering and react violently. He sees the corrupt officials and is moved to fight against authority. He sees victimized women and prays for her redemption. He looks at the rain, the sun, the Brahmin, the sweeper, the wealthy businessman, and the struggling housewife and is overawed by their relevance and the new meanings he finds in them.

The Auteur theory argues that a film reflects the director's artistic vision; a film directed by a given filmmaker will have recognizable, recurring themes and visual cues that inform the audience who the director is and show a consistent artistic identity throughout that director's filmography. *Auteur theory* is a term that refers to the idea of an authorial voice coming through in their work. The filmmakers are the film's authors who beautifully craft stories around the chosen realistic themes. Born and brought up in a remote village, Bokota of Sivsagar District, in upper Assam, Jahnu Barua's connection with the village became stimuli for the portrayal of the village story. However, the film is the product of the director's artistic affluence and imagination. Although not destined to change society through his Film, Jahnu Barua mentions that sound creative work can benefit society. Jahnu Barua believes that he is a humanist, and he never compromises on his humanitarian ideology, and his films reflect his concern for humanity.

A film is always a personal creation. It is a result of the filmmaker's imagination. Sometimes, the film might adopt a novel or someone else's story, but the filmmaker gives life to it. Padum Barua's "Ganga Siloni Pakhi" and Jahnu Barua's "Halodhiya Sorai Bao Dhan Khai" are both adaptations of novels of the same name by Lakhinandan Borah and Homen Borgohain, respectively. However, the filmmakers gave their personal touch to the story, making it livelier with an intent to connect the audience to their real-life experience. Jahnu Barua expresses his concern about corruption. It is not the corrupt government but the people in the system who must be changed. For instance, in the original book of Halodhiya Sorai Bao Dhan Khai, the officer's character, Sub Deputy Collector (SDC), is not present; it is the filmmaker's creation to help the protagonist fight against the corrupted system.

The films of Jahnu Barua portray the issues of the ordinary person. Any wave does not influence him. Jahnu Barua has his filmmaking style and unique thought process reels in the film. He said, "The wave is not made by the filmmakers but by the people who watch the films." Likewise, the wave of neorealism in Assamese film was created by the people who embraced the new trend in Assamese cinema initiated by Padum Barua's Ganga Siloni Pakhi.

The chosen films for the analysis are neorealist in their characteristics and approach. The film lacked dances, songs, and romantic situations, and it was uncompromisingly realistic and often condemned as a documentary. Nevertheless, the films of Jahnu Barua lack many faces of neo-realism. Indra Bania, the protagonist of Halodiya Choraye Bao Dhan Khai, and Bishnu Kharghoria, the protagonist of Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door, are not "non-actors." Instead, they are professionals. Regarding the location of the shoot, the filmmaker prefers a natural location for the outdoor shoot. However, for indoor shoots, a replica is made inside the studio where the shooting takes place. However, to enact the rainy scene in Halodiya Soraie Bao Dhan Khai, the filmmaker Jahnu Barua had to wait seventeen days for rain.

Neo-realistic cinemas are considered low-budget. Therefore, the filmmakers employ local settings and non-actors. Both Jahnu Barua and Rima Das's distinctive narration style rejected the dramatic and superficial way of telling a story and emphasized the quasi-documentary mode of storytelling. Jahnu Barua chose the novel for its qualities of humanism, lyricism, and close identification with the reality of daily life. More than poverty in a village set up, the film Village Rockstar exhibits confidence in the marginalized village child, Dhunu. The theme of the chosen film is neorealist as it deals with the lives of the poor who were struggling for survival. It was a departure from the artificial world of impractical situations.

Jahnu Barua expresses, "Constructing a road, building skyscrapers, and so on are considered development without the sense of equilibrium. No development process is complete unless you care for the people, area, or anything that has become victimized. The

author of this paper has tried to analyze a universal problem through an old-style individual in a localized society. When looking at the Assamese society today, the author finds the situation alarming, and the next generation is forced to behave responsibly before being decisive in life.” Without being polemic, Jahnu Barua’s film shows the menace of development, the threat that does not consider those affected by it. *Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door* is a film that shows broken family bondage and how the materialistic world is taking a toll on our inherited roots. Jahnu Barua said, “Runumi, the wife of Hemanto, is a slave to materialism, yet her concerns are not inhumane. The character of Runumi is not deliberately created inhumanly, but she becomes the villain as the audience look at the film emotionally.” The portrayal of the Assamese culture, the social evils of the society, and the depiction of the dreams of the children in a village in every film are born out of the filmmakers’ imagination.

Child characters are an integral part of many Assamese films of neorealist characters. According to the filmmaker, the children's maturity depends on many factors, including struggle, poverty, etc. Education is a pivotal depiction in both films. In *Hagoroli Bohu Door*, Boatman aspired for their grandson and wished him a deserving life. During that time, hakim was perceived as the most influential authority in the government, and Rakheswar wanted his child to be the hakim.

With her unique cinematic approach, Rima Das addresses the region’s problems in her films. While influenced by Majid Majidi’s storytelling style, the local is not missing in Rima Das’s films. The film portrays the landscape, the sights and sounds of an Assamese village, and the ordinariness of village life. The camera in Rima Das’s film spins toward long shots, revealing much about the character’s living conditions.

The filmmaker gives an authentic feel to the audience of rural Assam. The sowing of paddy by Dhunu’s mother, followed by Dhunu carrying food and then helping her to sow, represents the role of Assamese women in cultivation. The filmmaker beautifully turned the plot of Dhunu’s mother training her to swim into an elementary occasion to narrate the story of her father’s death triggered by the flood. The underlying circumstance exposes the fear and enormous distress fermenting from the loss of life and property every year due to floods and the inability of the state authority to implement a solution.

Rima Das does not clench to the dominant linguistic tastes in her films. Without resorting to standardized Assamese language, she creates and edifies a cultural space using the distinctive Nalbariya dialect of her native place. Jahnu Barua, too, used language as a tool to emphasize the locale. He makes a deliberate effort to make the dialogue sound as plain as possible to stress the tedium of rural life.

Conclusion

Cinema has been a very powerful and attractive medium. It is a medium to highlight human social issues and emotions. These filmmakers coin the historical narratives by apprehending the locales, the soil, the man, and nature. These filmmakers experienced the politically tumultuous days of post-colonial Assam and sought to enact conscious raising themes. The film crosses classes and cultures and permeates many aspects of our consciousness. The ideas and perceptions that underlie the thematic structuring of somber cinema reflect the filmmaker’s desire to articulate problems and probe issues that help define the context in which he finds himself and about which he can take a socially relevant stand. These films also represent an endeavor of filmmakers to meaningfully talk about the problems that the average Indian faces and ordinary people of Assam face and to represent them in aesthetic forms without distorting and detracting them from the pathos and depth of suffering

involved. The search for a more authentic and contemporary reality is commensurate with a conscious search for those images that are truly native to the regional and Indian soil, its ancient past, its uncertain future where lie the perceptions, despair, and hopes of millions of people.

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