

Assamese Film *Siraj* and *Ajala Kakai* Portraying Bihu Dance and Songs as Popular Culture

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I. INTRODUCTION

Bihu dance and songs are folk media forms of Assam. Folk media forms of Bihu are vibrant among people of Assam. However Bihu as represented by Assamese cinema creates popular culture forms which are distinctly deviates from folk forms. Assamese cinema has a glorious history since the first ever film *Jyoti* by Jyotiprasad Agarwala in 1935. Cinema forms the popular culture. At the same time cinema itself is popular culture. In the twentieth and in the twenty first century cinema is the most powerful mass media which can overcome all barriers of boundaries and forms a universal platform for human race. Cinema is inseparable from the living process of modern human society. The voice of a society is represented by cinema. The people, life and living process, thoughts and beliefs, cultural ethos are represented by cinema. Cinema can carry the culture of the society where the cinema is made. The story, theme, characters, settings, costumes, music, dance etc. of a cinema showcase the cultural forms of the representative society. Assamese cinema therefore represents the cultural forms of Assamese society in the broad sense. "Although the word culture is part of everyday vocabulary, it's difficult to define. Culture is part of everything we think, do, feed, and believe, yet we can't point to a thing that is culture. In another words, culture is a very abstract concept that has no single concrete reference and no single meaning. Most simply defined, culture is a way of life. It is a system of ideas, values, beliefs, structures, and practices that is communicated by one generation to the next and that sustains a particular way of life." (Wood,2003.p.95.).

Bihu is representative of Assamese culture. Bihu dance and songs are the integral element of the Bihu culture. The bihu dance and songs have variations of forms across different regions of Assam which are perceived as folk media forms. The folk songs, folk dance, folk musical instruments, folk tunes gives richness to Assamese identity. Gogoi(Gogoi 2010) critically analyses on various aspects of Bihu culture, on Bihu being the folk-culture with its basic root spreading among the life and living of the rural people of Assam. Accordingly the origins of Bihu can be traced back to the ancient days when people started cultivation and did merry making after harvesting. Also, for ensuring productivity of the cultivation, people danced and sang somewhere in the paddy fields. Thus, along with cultivation, the seeds of Bihu germinate into the Assamese culture. With the long turn of history several groups of people come to the land and the process of assimilation results into the various contributive elements entering into the Bihu culture.

Folk media is peoples' media where common folk can participate actively. Folk dance and songs can ensure peoples involvement. The preparation for folk dance and songs performance are not expensive, rather low cost. Costume, make up and necessary utensils are locally available in folk media. Folk musical instruments can be made locally and the folk are expert in playing these. The folk songs are the spontaneous expression of folk lives and planned lyrics and tuning are not required unlike the professional singing. Folk songs bear the tune of spontaneity which is perceived from nature and the surrounding environment. Malhan defines, "These media having roots in native culture, embedded in the local identity and social values besides providing mass-entertainment helped Indian society as indigenous tools of interpersonal, inter-group and inter-village communication for ages."(Madhusudan). Bihu dance and songs with its unique characteristics are rich and living folk forms of Assam.

Cinema when represents the folk culture, it becomes popular culture on screen. Cinema represents popular culture and rather cinema itself is popular culture, as medium is the message. "In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message."(McLuhan,2012.p.7). Bihu dance and songs, which are folk culture transforms to popular culture shaped by cinema when it is represented through films. "The movie, by which we roll up the real world on a spool in order to unroll it as a magic carpet of fantasy,..."(McLuhan, 2012.p.310). The simplicity of performance of Bihu dance and songs as folk media are

produced in cinema with technology blended with diverse artistic discourse. "Film is not really a single medium like song or the written word, but a collective art form with different individuals directing colour, lighting, sound, acting, speaking." (McLuhan, 2012, p.319.). Therefore it is interesting to examine how cinema has represented the popular culture forms of Bihu dance and Bihu songs.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives are;

- (i) To analyse the difference between folk media form and the cinematic popular culture form of Bihu dance and songs.
- (ii) To analyse portrayal of Bihu dance and songs as popular culture in Assamese cinema *Siraj* and *Ajala Kakai*.

III. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive analysis of the phenomena of popular culture formation by cinema is performed. Also the content analysis of two Assamese cinemas *Siraj* and *Ajala Kakai* are done to discuss the portrayal of popular culture form of Bihu dance and songs.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Groups of people from time to time like the Austric, Mongoloid, Aryan and Dravid etc contributed to the formation of the gamut of Assamese culture are creating a process of cultural formation. The pre-Vaishnavite cultural traits and the Ahom reign contributions established the Bihu dance and songs forms as the dominant folk media forms across society. Later the Vaishnavite cultural trends and its impacts on the reformation of Assamese culture are contributed newer elements to the Bihu dance and songs particularly to Husari forms. Likewise the Bouddhists, Muslims, tea tribes etc. contributed in shaping the Assamese culture and the growth and development of folk culture evolves as a culture of unity and assimilation among the grassroots of Assam. Bihu being the most practised folk media form of Assam is enrooted in the agriculturalist rural society. People have their participation in the songs and dance of Bihu. The joys, sorrows, love, separation of day to day life are expressed through the Bihu dance and songs. The verbal as well as the non-verbal communication in the Bihu dance and songs are too powerful to ensure participatory communication. Bihu, as folk media informs, educates and entertains people. The songs and dance of Bihu are performance oriented folk media. Therefore, information is cross-transferred among the participants of Bihu dance and songs and it gives entertainment through its performance. The local costumes are used in the performance. The cost in the performance of Bihu dance and songs is minimal. The communicative approach of Bihu songs and dance is direct as well as carrying retorts.

Folk media is not produced with technology on the other hand technology is the essence for cinema. Cinema and other mass media tools have become the part of individual and social life. Mass media particularly is shaped as an industry. Cinema being mass media also adopts the form of commercial culture in it. The mainstream cinema is directly consumer culture oriented. However the growth of Indian parallel cinema has paved the way for serious movie making. Indian regional cinema like Assamese cinema too faces the phenomena of commercialization. As a medium cinema can represent culture of a society but it definitely deviates from the folk forms and gives shape to the cinematic forms. The popular culture is used as cultural commodity to attract audience to media. Thereby, popular culture is adapted specially by children, teenagers and youths as a direct impact of media which is an important phenomenon of social change. The traditional concept of cultural identity is reshaped by the cinema.

Folk culture is the original form and the mass culture is the adapted form. Bihu dance and songs forms as represented by cinema are the adapted forms. Adaptation on screen is done to suit and adjust the purpose of the thematic relevance, picturization of the song, cinematic adaptability of the dance. According to Adorno, every mass culture is basically adaptation as he says "All mass culture is fundamentally adaptation" (Adorno 67). The adaptation of the mass culture is done by the technical productions. The need to run the film in the market is one important factor which determines the mass culture by creating an omnipresent element which in many a time distorts or corrupts the original cultural form. But no matter how the original folk form is deviated in cinematic form, the culture industry establishes their product as the omnipresent culture itself. Adorno mentions while discussing on how culture industry shapes the mass mediated culture, "The more industry exhausts what has already been perverted into commodities in the very name of culture, the more the omnipresence of culture proclaims itself" (Adorno 91). The analysis of Assamese films *Siraj* and *Ajala Kakai* shows how cinematic representation is different from the folk media forms of Bihu dance and songs.

Bihu in Siraj, 1988:

Siraj is one of the evergreen Assamese films. The *Siraj* was released in the year 1988 as colour film. The script and art direction, music direction, direction are done by Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. *Siraj* film is made

based on the story of Lakshmidhar Sarmah and script of Phani Sarmah. Voices in songs are of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Samar Hazarika, Manima Saikia, Usha Mangeshkar, Lata Mangeshkar.

Siraj film contains *bihu* dance and songs sequence in twenty five minutes and twenty five seconds. The *bihu* song is sung at the background and on screen, the romantic moment of hero and heroine is shown. The voice of the *bihu* song is of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. The intimate scene of the hero and heroine is presented through the *bihu* song on the background and a few dialogues between the hero and heroine. Also, in between the hero-heroine love making shots presentation, *bihu* dance shots are inserted where one boy and one girl perform *bihu* dance intimately. Therefore it can be said that *bihu* dance and songs are presented with cinematic style. The song sung is ;

<i>Piriti piritui piriti</i>	<i>Piriti sua patit pari</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>piriti isat bisat kari</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>ure jiban tupani nai</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>piriti mitha sura doi</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>piriti bua buwati noi</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>ure jiban thakiba boi...</i>
<i>...Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>hal fal karila</i>
<i>Piriti piriti piriti</i>	<i>pisali pariba saba</i> (Hazarika,1988)

(Love love love , do love on sleeping on bed; love love love love, love makes one being restless; love, love, love losses sleep for the whole life; love love love , love is sweet card; love love love, love is flowing river; love love love, love will flow all through the life ...Love love love, become excited with love; love love love, be aware of getting slipped.)



Love scene with Bihu song at background
(Hazarika,1988)



Bihu dance reflecting love scene
(Hazarika,1988)

Bihu song used in the sequence is brought from folk *bihu* song *piriti piriti piriti*. Bhupen Hazarika's creative excellence is added to the lyrics to make the *bihu* song reflective of the picturized theme shown on screen. The originality of the tone, tune, rhythm and musical notes of folk *bihu* songs are maintained in the song. *Tabla* and *Harmonium* are played as music in the song which is not the folk musical instruments used in *bihu* folk performance. However due to cinematic presentation and insert of several shots in between the *bihu* dance, the *bihu* dance shown can be categorized as popular culture.

In the six minutes of the second part of the film, in the scene of marriage of Kandarpa Baruah, the hero, the band party muses the Bihu songs tune using band of modern party instruments.

In the forty three minutes and fifty seven seconds onwards of the second part of the film, there is one *bihu* dance and songs sequence. The dance is performed as stage *bihu* shown to be performed in Kolkata. The girls in group perform that *bihu* dance which is *gabharu bihu* performed on stage. Use of *japi* on hand which dancing, i.e. performing as *japi* dance is done. The costume of *bihu* dance is wear by the dancing girls in the sequence.

The song used is a *bihu* song which can be categorized in the folk song genre of *bihu*. Neither the folk *dhol* nor any other modern drum instruments are played here in this song. Only *Harmonium* is used on background music as the basic instrument. The song's lyrical part is given priority which has similarity with the folk *gabharu bihu*. In folk form of *gabharu bihu* sound of *taka* is usually used and use of *dhol* is rare focusing more on song. In the recent song, voice of the song is sung from background unlike the folk *bihu* where it is used to sing the song by dance performers. Though only female dancers have performed on stage in the scene, but both male and female background voice are used. The song sung is a folk *bihu* song which is ;

Garakar dap dapani sun makur khit khitani
Makur khit khitani sun rati nahe tupani
Rati nahe tupani sun Nitau nu samajikat dekh

Oi senai dhan Kai diya , kai diya manare katha
Oi senai dhan Kai diya , kai diya manare katha..... (Hazarika, 1988)

(*Garakha* and *maku* are two parts of *tatsal* i.e. hand weaving machine. *Garaka* produces gorgeous sound, *maku* produce *khit khit* sound; *maku* produce *khit khit* sound, however cannot sleep at night; see you daily in dream; oh my dear please express the thoughts of heart.)

Bihu in Ajala Kakai, 1988 :

The film *Ajala Kakai* is the colour cinema released in the year 1988. Story, script and direction of the film is of Dwiban Baruah. Lyrics of the songs are written by Keshab Mahanta, Purna Baruah, Babul Ahmed. The music direction was of Ramen Baruah. Voice in songs is given by Dwipen Baruah, Namita Goswami Bhattacharjya, Kokila Goswami and Manjyotsna Mahanta. Music is recorded in Studio Vibration, Kolkata and Jyoti Chitran, Guwahati.

In the thirty six minutes and forty two seconds of the second part of the film *Ajala Kakai*, there is *bihu* dance sequence. The sequence represents a situation where the husband of the main deceased female character discusses with his friend about the coming of *bihu* and laments the absence of his died wife. Their girl child is too small to understand what death is. She says about her wish to go for joining in *bihu* dance with friends. She then dances with friends. For the dance *gamosa* is wear as *sadar* for her. The dance and the song of *bihu* is shown here in this sequence of the film represents folk *bihu* dance gestures and folk *bihu* songs. It represents the little children performing of *bihu* dance and songs in home front yard of the household. The sequence has shown the use of *dhol* and *tal* by the boy child and the dancing of *bihu* by the girl child. The *dhol* and the *tal* are shown to be played on dancing and singing. The music, though is mixed technically in studio, is of *dhol* and *tal* and no modern music is added. Rather folk rhythm, tone, tune of *bihu* is used. The song is shown to be sung by the performers, though cinematically it is recorded and added separately. The costume of the boys is traditional *dhuti* with traditionalized *banyan* with *gamosa* wrapped round the head. The girls costume used are *muga* dress and in one child the *gamosa* wear as *sadar*. The *bihu* song sung is of folk *bihu* pattern and performed as pentatonic folk *bihu* with slow rhythm where *swargam* is not added to the *bihu* song. There is the probability that the lyric of the *bihu* song sung is composed plan fully for the film; however the lyric represents folk lyric in language and wordings, folk lyrical pattern of *bihu* songs is not violated. The *bihu* song is;

Kapau ful fulile o voni tarai mate jon ae hahe
Keteki fulile o voni tarai mate jon ae hahe
Nahar ful fulibar batar bhani tarai matae jona hahe
Aha bani lahe lahe Nasa bhani laylasae
Saba bhani ujuti khaba... (Baruah, 1988)

(As the *kapau* orchid had gloomed, the stars give voice and the moon smiles. When the *keteki* blooms, stars give voice and the moon smiles. In the season of the blooming of the *nahar* flower, stars give voice and the moon smiles. Oh sister come slowly, o sister dance smoothly, be careful so as not to slip)

Dholar mate suni o bhani tarai mate jon ae hahe
Nasanir tat nai o bhani tarai mate jon ae hahe
Gasakat bhangi jau jatar bhani tarai mate jon ae hahe
Aha bhani lahe lahe nasa bhani laylase
Saba bhani ujuti khaba. (Baruah, 1988)

(On listening the beats of *dhol*, the stars give voice and the moon smiles. The dancers loss patience; the stars give voice and the moon smiles. The spinning wheel *zatar* is broken on footsteps. Oh sister come slowly, o sister dance smoothly, be careful so as not to slip)

Cinematic presentation is clear in his sequence of the film *Ajala Kakai*, as the growing up of the small girl on dancing is shown through the dance sequence. The last part of this sequence shows that that *gamosa* wearing girl is now dancing on wearing a cotton *sadar mekhela* with faster rhythm of *dhol*. Subsequently love of the girl with a young boy is shown through the *bihu* dance and *bihu* song in background with faster rhythm. Cinematic presentation of the *bihu* dance and songs is thus done in the film *Ajala Kakai*.

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the films *Siraj* and *Ajala Kakai* shows how the need of the screen causes the director to shape the songs and dance. Folk form of *bihu* songs are pentatonic. There are only five tones as *sa re ga ma pa* only in the folk *bihu* songs. *The dha* and *ni* are not used in the folk tones. But in the cinematic representation of *Bihu* songs all the seven tones i.e. *sa re ga ma pa dha ni* can be used. Likewise costume as used in folk *Bihu* are replaced by creative costumes. Therefore the cinematic representation of *Bihu* dance and songs are the portrayal of popular culture.

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