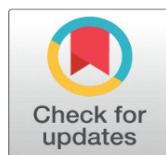


# AN ANALYSIS OF ASSAMESE FILM SONGS: THEMES AND THEIR CHARACTERS

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## ABSTRACT

The journey of Assamese films that started with Jaymoti (1935) has passed over 85 years with many ups and downs. Alongside films, Assamese modern songs also started their journey, though the birth cry can be heard two decades earlier from the release of the first Assamese film. Jyotiprasad Agarwala, the first filmmaker of Assam, emphasised songs in his two films. That legacy was followed by other filmmakers in later decades. Thus, songs became an essential part of mainstream Assamese cinema. A total number of 227 Assamese language films were released between 1935 and the end of that century. Among them, films without songs are few. This paper attempts to discuss the features of Assamese film songs from its inception to 2000 A.D.

**Keywords:** Genre, Lokageet, Modern Song, Devotional

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A song appears in a film riding the lap of the story. It is an essential element in commercial cinema. A popular song without relevance to the story cannot be considered a good filmy song. But it may be a well-liked song by the listeners. A film song has to be relevant to the story. Songs always play a role in commercial films. But the unnecessary presentation of a song hampers the pace of a story. Commercial success is emphasised in mainstream cinema. So producers put all the effort into attracting the audience to watch their film. An added entertainment through song and dance is unavoidable in that kind of cinema. Besides the background music, arranging the songs is an additional responsibility of the music director.

More than two hundred and twenty films were released, from the first Assamese film, Jaymoti (1935), to the last of that century, Morom Nodir Gabhoru

Ghat (1999). Assamese films without songs are few. The importance of songs in Assamese films can be seen in the first movie, Jaymoti. Songs were a strong pillar of the plays and films of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. That legacy was followed by later filmmakers, and thus, Assamese films are mostly musical except for the new trend movies that manifested from the 1970s.

Composing music for film cannot be captured by any strict rule. However, in doing that, the composers have to follow the story of the film. The songs of the movie must be composed in accordance with it. Different genres of music found a place in the creations of the music directors. Thus, Assamese film songs include all the Assamese folk and devotional genres of music. At the same time, a new era of Assamese modern songs began through the new media. There can be seen some changes from the early period of Assamese films to the end of the last century. However, some distinguishing features are apparent among them. Those are discussed below.

## **2. ASSAMESE FILM SONGS GAVE STRENGTH TO THE ASSAMESE MODERN SONG.**

Assamese modern songs got a noticeable shape through the creations of Jyotiprasad Agarwala, who happened to be the producer and director of the first Assamese film. The songs of his two films are merely an addition to his experiment on modern songs, which he started with his play Sonit Konwari. Assamese films gradually became a stage for Assamese modern songs. Rimzim Chetia writes in her unpublished thesis that “Asomiya adhunik geetar parikramat chalacitra geetar jothestya obodan ase. Asomiya adhinik geetar bohi pariskhya nirikshya chalacitra geetar jogedi sambhov hoise.” (Rimzim Chetia, 2021, p. 170) (There was a contribution of Assamese film songs in the journey of Assamese modern songs. Many experiments with Assamese modern songs were done through Assamese filmy songs).

At the same time, Pusutosam Das and Kamalnarayan Chaudhury contributed to the Assamese modern song through All India Radio and films. The compositions of modern songs of Parbati Prasad Baruahh for his movie Rupahi (1947) cannot be seen differently from his other compositions.

Jyotiprasad Agarwala's musical philosophy and objective of art were inherited by Bhupen Hazarika, who was shaped in the initial age by the former. Bhupen Hazarika directed six movies and composed music for more than 30 Assamese movies. Presenting Assamese culture and music was an objective of the films of Bhupen Hazarika. The songs that Bhupen Hazarika created for his films became the face of Assamese modern songs. He included many of his earlier creations as film songs. The first movie song of the composer 'agnijugar firingati moi' was written and composed at the age of 16, which became a part of the movie Siraj (1948). He wrote the song 'sagar Sangamat kotona saturilu', many years back before he planned the film Era Bator Sur (1956). Again the song 'puddar dhumuhai uruai nisile' was composed to sing for the Sur Bahini, which he formed to propagate the message of peace during the days of conflict between Assamese and Bengali people in the 60s. He composed it in the year 1960 and included it in the movie Palashor Rang, which was released in the year 1976. Bhupen Hazarika wrote the song 'buku hum hum kore' during the days of the Chinese invasion of Arunachal Pradesh (then NEFA) in 1962. Later he used it in the movie Maniram Dewan (1964). It is clear that at the time of composing the song the composer did not think about any film in his mind. He used those songs in his films where the song was relevant.

Music composers of Assamese filmy songs not only confined themselves only filmy compositions. Except for some composers like Bhupen Hazarika, Ramen Baruahh, and Bhupen Uzir, number of the films directed by other musicians is fewer. They also composed modern songs for All India Radio and the gramophone records that were released commercially. Later from the late 1980s cassettes surpassed the former mediums. Thus the composers composed filmy as well as non-filmy songs at the same time. Therefore there cannot be drawn a strict line between their filmy and non-filmy compositions of modern songs.

Later in the 1970s, Jayanta Hazarika composed music for five Assamese movies through which he added some songs bearing his innovative style. Through his distinguished singing style and melodious compositions, Assamese listeners found a new savor. His compositions show a sign of detachment from Assamese folk elements which have been a feature of Assamese modern song. The contribution of Ramen Baruahh to the Assamese modern song is noticeable. Besides, the compositions of Dr. Upen Kakati in the 1970s and 80s, Bhupen Uzir, in the 1980s and 90s, and Sher Chaudhury in the 1990s had made notable contributions to Assamese modern songs through filmy songs. Thus, the filmy compositions of those composers led Assamese modern songs to a new height. For doing so they took Assamese films as a medium in addition to All India Radio.

### 3. TENDENCY OF BEING FOLK BASED

With some exceptions, Assamese film songs in the last century could not completely make free themselves from the influence of the folk music of Assam. We have discussed the folk elements of the songs of Jyotiprasad Agarwala. But missing the tunes of Assamese Bihunaam is noticeable in his creations. In the compositions of Bhupen Hazarika, all the elements of Assamese folk genres including Bihunaams are found. Besides he used the folk music of the Tea Garden labourers in his award-winning movie *Chameli Memsaab* (1975). As the story was based on the backdrop of the tea estate of Assam, of course, the folk tunes and the dialects of the community found a place in the songs of this movie. Bhupen Hazarika wrote,

“Asom totha samagra Bharatbarshaiu ‘Chameli Memsaab,r geetkeita anedore adori loi ratriyo swrilriti diyar prakrit karanbur ki-seitu moi nizei kobo nuaru. Kintu eta dishot moi khub porikolpit bhabe agbahiboloi jatna korisilu- seitu hoise jihetu chabikhanir kahini asil bagisar patabhumit, sei hetuke moi tat Asomiya jatir abissedyo angaswarup sah sramiksakalar sanskriti jibanar pora butali loisilu geetar bhasa aru paramparagata sur.” (B. Hazarika, n.d., p. 70)

(What are the genuine reasons why Assam and the whole India accepted and recognised the songs of *Chameli Memsaab*? I cannot say myself about that. But I tried to go ahead with a plan. Since the story was based on a tea garden, so the language and the tunes from the cultural life of the tea garden labourers, who are unavoidable Assamese people, were drawn.)

Traditional musical instruments like madal and flute are used to accompany the melody of the song. Except for some composers like Jayanta Hazarika, and Jiten Dev in the filmy compositions of other musicians, the influence of Assamese folk music is clear. Besides them from the late 60s a new genre of Assamese song, which is called as Bihusuriya song became a part of Assamese film music. Those tunes are derived from Bihu songs and accepted by the listeners from the beginning. The influence of this genre is seen more than in other tunes in the compositions of Khagen Mahanta, Ramen Baruahh, Dr. Upen Kakati, Mahananda Mazinger Baruahh, and Ridip Dutta. Other Assamese genres like Nisukani Geet, Dehbisar Geet, and

Biyanaams are manifested in disguise in the Creations of Bhupen Hazarika and other composers.

Thus, Assamese film songs could not able to keep itself aside from the influence of Assamese folk music.

#### **4. ASSAMESE FILM SONGS INCLUDED ALL THE GENRES OF ASSAMESE FOLK AND DEVOTIONAL MUSIC IN ITS ORIGINAL FORM**

Music directors of Assamese films used almost all the genres of Assamese music in its original form in Assamese films. The tradition can be seen from the 50s which was the 3rd decade of the journey of Assamese film. Jyotiprasad Agarwala did not directly include any Bargeet or folk song in his two films though tunes of the songs were based on Assamese folk music. But from the next decade, composers started using specially Bargeet, and Bihu songs in the films. Inexorably following the dramatic scenes those genres found a place in Assamese films as most of the films were made on the backdrop of Assamese society. Among them Bihu songs and dances are common. Besides, Kamrupee and Goalpariya Lokageet, Dehbisar Geet, Ainaam, and Biyanaams in their original form were found place in Assamese films though the number is much less.

#### **5. SOME GENRES GOT RECOGNITION THROUGH ASSAMESE FILMS**

Some genres of Assamese folk music could not reach the mass listeners because of abhorrence by the noble Assamese people and lack of mediums and propagation. Guwahati station of All India Radio was established with the aim of preserving and spreading the local music through it. Pioneers of that mission like Purussotam Das, Birendra Kumar Phukan, Kamal Narayan Chaudhury, and Bhupen Hazarika did this job with enthusiasm, and many folk genres were brought to light. Later those musicians cuddled the newly growing film media to present those genres to the masses. Maniram Dewanar Geets were almost wiped out because of less prevalence and lack of interest by Assamese people. Bhupen Hazarika used Maniram Dewanar Geet in the movie in the movie Maniram Dewan and the audience liked the pioneering presentation of it in an appropriate scene in the film. Thus other two genres that got propagation were Kamrupee Lokageet and Goalpariya Lokageet. Those songs were used to be sung locally in some places of lower Assam. Bhupen Hazarika presented two Goalpariya Lokageet in the movie 'Era Bator Sur', sung by him and Pratima Pandey Baruah. In his next film 'Mahut Bandhure' (1958), six numbers of Goalpariya Lokageets were presented which shows the desire to uplift the genre by the singer. Sangeeta Dutta writes,

"Goalpariya Lokgeet has thus travelled out of Goalpara. In those days, very few Assamese films would have been produced and inclusion of these songs in two films by Bhupen Hazarika resulted in the transformation of this folk song genre into a popular one. Goalpariya Lokgeet started receiving recognition in the cultural identity of Assam." (Dutta, 2019)

The same can be said about Kamrupee Lokageet also. About the aesthetic beauty of those folk songs manifested through the films. Lakshyahira Das writes,

"Tenekoiye Asomiya paramparagata geetar prayog obhinava saundhyajare Asomiya bolchabit Pratibhata hoisil. Maniram Dewana t 'he mai Jashowa', Fechuwe korile neu mor deuta', 'sonar baran pakhi' Bhakta Prahladar ' hari saran diya he ,

'Mukuta' (1970) t' he pran Gopal' ityadi geetar majedi Asomiya chalacitrar geete Asomor raijok mughya korar karan asil seiburor majot sarthak ropat hoa geetikaar,surakaar aru konthashilpir tribeni sangam"(Das, 2004)

(Thus the use of traditional songs of Assam was reflected in the Assamese films with innovative beauty. The fascination with songs like 'he mai Jashowa' by Maniram Dewan, 'fesuwe korile neu mor seuta', Sonar baran pakhi, Ye Hari saran diya he, 'he pran Gopal 'of 'Mukuta', was for a perfect combination of lyricists, composer, and singers.)

The effort of Bhupen Hazarika to establish those folk genres in an Indian scenario can be seen in his compositions for Hindi films also. Bhupen Hazarika composed songs for the movie Aro', which was released in the year 1974. In that film, he presented a Kamrupee lokageet in Hindi language. That song 'jobse tune banshi bajai re' was sung by Lata Mangeshkar. The song follows the tune of the Kamrupee lokageet 'He mai jashowa amako lagiya' which was a part of the Assamese movie Maniram Dewan.

The same can be said about the folk music of the Tea Garden laborers. Some of the stories of Assamese films that were released in the last decade were based on the society of Tea Garden Laborers. It is noticeable to see the inclusion of Jumur in films like Kesasun which was released in the year 1959. Tunes of that genre were the essence of the songs of Chameli Memsaab, for which the first national award for Best Music Director came for an Assamese director. Besides, composer Nirmal Chakravarty tried to present the Jumur 'ke toke bandhidelai hilaki dilaki khopa haire', where he didn't make any change in its folk tune.

Thus, an endeavor was taken by the composers to expose Assamese music genres to the masses through the films. In that task, the composer successfully presented all the genres including the Assamese devotional genre like Bargeet, folk genre like Bihu, and region-based folk songs like Goalpariya Lokageet in Assamese films.

It may be said that the genre Bihusuriya geet was given birth through film songs. Manifesting in the late 1960s it became an unavoidable part of film music in the 70s and 80s. The simple notation pattern and the allure of the Bihu tune were the basic reason for its acceptance by the listeners.

## 6. SONGS HELPED IN SUCCESS OF THE FILMS

From the above discussion, it became clear that songs were given importance in Assamese films from the beginning. The sensible use of songs was seen in the two films Jyotiprasad Agarwala, where Jaymoti was the only 4th sound cinema in the history of the sub- continent. To furnish a melodic ending he added an extra song after the completion of the shooting of the movie. Thus in the last scene of Jaymoti, the song 'luitotr pani jabi o boi' was played in the background. The sound quality of the film was very poor. Therefore, Jyotiprasad re-edited the film again in 1948. Saying about its songs, Atul Chandra Hazarika writes,

"Ji ki nohouk obhinayar antarat thaki Srimati Leela Deviye madhur konthare Lutoor jilmil panir lagat sur milai goa 'Luitor pani jabi o boi' buli Asomor jiyari boarisakalak sati Jayar punyasmritit etupi dutupi sakalu eri jaboloi janoa karun abedone ajiu jen pratijon Asomiyak Jyotir punya smritit etupi dutupi sakalu tukiboloi nibedan jonaboi lagise". (A. C. Hazarika, 1995, p. 320)

(However, behind the story the song 'luitor pani jabi o boi' with the melodious voice of Srimati Leela devi, appeals to the womenfolk of Assam to make a tribute to the memory of Jaymoti and like that it also appeals to pay tribute for Jyoti prasaad .)



Recently developed Assamese modern songs found a place in the films of the 40s. But the remarkable use of songs is seen in the movie 'Era Bator Sur', where the songs surpassed the success of the movie. The name of the film indicates the dependability of the story on its music.

"Ye je thalua geet matere paripurna ekhan sangeetmukhar chabi naamttei tar chinaki poa jai. Sei karanei kahinibhagatkoi nana bidh geet matar prati adhik manojog diya jen anuman hoi" (A. C. Hazarika, 1995, p. 313)

(The name of the movie suggests that it is a musical movie, full of indigenous songs. Therefore it seems that attention is paid to the music more than the story.)

As far as the role of music is concerned some films are called as musical films where the films cannot be imagined without songs. In that sense, the movie "Era Bator Sur" is a musical movie. Utpal Mena writes,

"Mukali monere kobo pari je Era Bator Sur bisuddha musical cinema. Bishaybastur kotha monot rakhi sangeet parichalak Bhupen Hazarikai geet aru abah sangeet byobohar korisil." (Mena, 2021a, p. 35)

(It can be frankly said that Era Bator Sur is a purely musical cinema. The music director Bhupen Hazarika used songs and background music keeping in mind the theme.)

Through the movie, Era Bator Sur Bhupen Hazarika tried to describe his journey. Songs were given focus since the composer took music as the medium of his expression. Saying about its musical quality Hemanga Bishas writes,

"Era Bator Sur – Era Bator kotha nohoi, sangeetdharmi kathachabi hisape iyar mulya nirupan koribo lagibo. Seifalar pora 'Era Bator Surak Bharatar pratham srenir sangeetpradhan cinemaburar pratham sart thiya dibo pora Jogyata ase." (Majumdar, 2008, p. 220)

(Era Bator Sur must be valued as a musical film. In that regard 'Era Bator Sur' deserves to be among the first class musical films of India.)

Another instance of the role of the songs can be imagined through the song 'buku hum hum kare', which was a part of the movie Maniram Dewan (1964). The song was written by Bhupen Hazarika during the Chinese invasion of Arunachal Pradesh in 1962. In the film, the song was given on the lip of protagonist Maniram Dewan. Seeing the influence of the song its producer Apurba Chaudhury planned to make a film with it. Hemango Biswas writes about the songs of this movie as,

"Maniram Dewanat Bhupen Hazarika keitaman geete natakiya parishtit ane elevation anise je ami sei geetbur bad di Maniram Dewanar safalyar kotha Bhabiboloi tan pau." (Majumdar, 2008, p. 982)

(Some of Bhupen Hazarika's songs in Maniram Dewan have such elevation to the dramatic situation that we find it difficult to think of the success of Maniram Dewan without those songs.)

Utpal Mena says about the influence of the song in the movie, "Cinema ekhan prajanmar pasot prajanma jiai thake geet, geetar citrayanar babe. Asomiya cinema kshetrat tene udaharan- Maniram Dewan." (Mena, 2021b, p. 22)  
(There are many examples that a movie is passed down from generation to generation because of its song, and portrayal of it. One such example in the field of Assamese Cinema is Maniram Dewan).

The songs of the movie Dr. Bezbaruah can be placed behind the commercial success of it. The gramophone record of the songs broke the record of its kind. Some of the films, that Ramen Baruah, directed music have to face commercial failure. But his compositions always thrilled the audience. Thus the main fulcrum of the movie

Aranya (1971) was its songs. It cannot be denied that songs were the prime factor for the success of the movie Bowari (1984). The movie started with the popular song 'mon hira doi cycle nohoi tingilinga', on the lip of Biju Phukan. Pradyut Kumar Deka writes about the importance of the song in Biju Phukan's career as,

"The songs of Bowari especially 'mon hira doi' pictured on him in a cycle chasing the girls seem to become his trademark for years to come." (Deka, 2021, p. 24)

Adding further the role of songs in Assamese films he writes,

"However the song 'tumi janu jana ne nai', from Ghar Sanshar, with Bidya Rao was his all-time hit romantic number. Bidya Rao says that when the song was cited in Kolkata studio,

the technicians liked the song so much that they compared with a similar song pictured on similar song their favourite Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen pair." (Deka, 2021, p. 25)

The Bihusuriya songs of the 80s attracted the audience to the theatre. Songs of the 90s couldn't cope with the films because of the imitation of Hindi commercial movies, where the indigenous elements were absent. The decade of the 1990s can be called the years of degradation of Assamese film songs. But side-lining the poor commercial results of the films, songs continued to touch the graph of popularity. An increasing number of cassettes of movie songs that sold in the market show the same.

An attempt was made to examine the characters of Assamese film music through the above discussion. Assamese film songs of the seven decades of the last century were a combination of different genres, and styles and filled with varieties. The variety comes from the creations of different composers. Ninety-two music composers composed music for a total of 259 films in the last century. Among them, some pairs compose music jointly. Names of the pairs like 'Jitu-Tapan, Kula -Atul, Basanta- Manik, may be mentioned in this regard. Basanta Bardoloi composed music for the movie Sewali (1989) individually. Again Atul Medhi composed music for the last movie of the last century Morom Nadir Gabharu Ghat. There were five music directors in the movie Jaubane Amoni Kore, where the job was done by Brajen Baruahh, Khiradakanta Bishaya, Bhupen Uzir, Jayanta Das and Jitul Sonowal. Brajen Baruahh and Khiradakanta Bishaya jointly composed the song 'Jaubane Amoni Kore' for the movie Lachit Barphukan (1961) which was again presented in the movie Jaubane Amoni Kore (1998). The trend of more than three music directors in a movie was followed in Bukur Majot Jwale (1999). Earlier Bishnu Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika, and Siba Bhattavcharya

composed songs in the same movie which was Siraj (1948). The above-mentioned characters are common in all earlier and later music directors of Assamese films in the last century.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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