

Appendix – I

Filmography of Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Sandhyarag (Cry of Twilight, 1977, B & W)

Producer, Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Ramen Choudhury, Indreswar Sarma and Prabhat Sarma

Cast: Runu Devi, Arati Barua, Maya Barua, Kashmiri Saikia, Arun Sarma

Release Date: 5th August, 1977

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1977

Saikia catches a moment of the initial encounter of *the rural* with *the urban* in his debut film, describing the pathetic conditions of two sisters from a poor rural background, Saru and Taru, who were made to work as housemaids in urban households since their childhood. When they attained the age of marriageable young women after successfully coping with the elite families, they were abandoned and sent back home by their urban masters to live with their poor mother in the village. They find it difficult to live in their own home and village life because their entire childhood had been spent on adapting to the highly contrasting urban life where they missed learning the much-needed skills for surviving in their own home-condition and village life, such as, weaving, rice-pounding or collecting harvests in the field. Helpless Saru had to surrender to Moti, who is a driver of the family where she had served in the city and who was abandoned by his wife due to his impotency, to take her back again to the city. Moti promises to bring Saru back to the city to have a new life with him, and the film ends with the collective hopes of Saru's mother as well her sister Taru too to live with Saru and Moti in the city.

Anirban, (The Vigil, 1980, B&W)

Producer: Preety Saikia

Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Akhtar Khan

Cast: Runi Devi, Bhola Katoki,

Sangeeta Saikia, Bobeeta Sarma

Release Date: 6th February, 1981

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1981

Saikia came up with his second film *Anirban* which is about the extremely feeble fate of a rural school tutor Rajani and his wife who get a girl child after three consecutive cases of losing their child during childbirth. The shaken couple begins their life afresh at their late ages through upbringing their daughter, Nisha, who grows up, goes to school and attains adolescence amidst the usual joys and sorrows with them. When the girl falls in love with her young and studious home tutor Dibakar, her father Rajani disapproves the affair and Dibakar's tuition classes end there. Nisha, deeply upset from within but remaining cool and normal to her parents, becomes sick with prolonged fever and finally dies leaving the old couple devastated. Much later, when the old couple is invited to the wedding ceremony of Dibakar, Rajani's wife attends it. The bride tells Rajani's wife that she knew Dibakar's affair with Nisha. Rajani's wife gives in the wedding gift a pair of precious silk cloth which was purchased for Nisha who never got an occasion to wear it.

Agnisnan (The Ordeal, 1985, Colour)

Producer, Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Tarun Goswami

Cast: Biju Phukon, Malaya Goswami, Kashmiri Saikia, Arun Nath

Release Date: 27th December, 1985

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1985

Recognized as an important film on the theme of women subordination, *Agnisnan* opens up a world of little earlier times in contrast to those of Saikia's other films. He has described quiet a lot in most of his films the life and etiquettes of the new rich class of the industrial age, but in *Agnisnan* he attempts a pathology of the old and the feudal. Here, an arrogant Mohikanta who is the rich owner of a rice mill in a village does not ride on motor car but on a horse buggy. The protagonist of the film is his wife Menaka, a rational, dignified and dutiful daughter-in-law and mother of four children. She is liked and respected by all in the family but Mohikanta wants her only on bed at night after his drinks. The story gets momentum when Mohikanta marries Kiran as his second wife. Saikia provides elaborate coverage of the various phases of this event - the preparation, the wedding day and the post-wedding spatial

and material arrangements by Menaka in the house. These effectively reveal the intensity of the pain and humiliation of Menaka. She is hurt, humiliated and made to be angry, but she doesn't lose her strength as the mistress of the house. She continues taking care of her children and her in-laws, but never allowing Mohikanta to sleep with her when he wants it during Kiran's absence. She starts a secret and calculated affair with Madan, a poor thief of the village who is frequently caught by police and is released by Mohikanta. Meanwhile Kiran gives birth a child; and Menaka closes her affair with Madan telling him not to come to her anymore. Menaka becomes pregnant and she lets Mohikanta know about it through an old woman of the village who gives services to pregnant women in different households. Shocked, disgraced and angry Mohikanta could not interrogate Menaka on the issue at home. One day he asks her to go with him to the rice mill on the pretext of explaining her how to manage the mill. Menaka agrees, but she refuses to go with Mohikanta together and gets on a separate buggy. Amidst the noise of the running machines in the rice mill, confirming to the queries of furious Mohikanta that she is indeed pregnant, Menaka asks him why he didn't have the courage to talk to her at home. Silencing Mohikanta's shouting words, she goes on to say that she has been the mother of four children but not the mother of the recently born fifth one to which Mohikanta is the father; that there will be another child soon to which she will be the mother but Mohikanta will not be its father – thus their scores should be understood as equal in the game. In the final scene, leaving Mohikanta muted in the mill, Menaka rides on her separate buggy towards home.

***Kolahal* (The Turmoil, 1988, Colour)**

Producer, Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Mukul Barua

Cast: Runu Devi Thakur, Arun Nath,

Chetana Das, Bidyut Chakravarty

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1988

In *Kolahal*, Saikia tells the story of Kiran who lives with her little son Moti, after her husband Binod leaves home in search of better earnings but never returns. Kiran lives with her hope for Binod's return and runs her home with Moti in precarious

condition. Only trusted man for Kiran in the village is the Master Uncle, a dhoti-clad middle aged man who lives alone, having a set of mixed traits of practicing music and occasionally tutoring children like Moti. Master Uncle gives his support to Kiran and tries his level best to trace Binod's whereabouts but without success. The narrow road in front of Kiran's house is used by the loaded trucks which carry heavy rice bags to and from a nearby godown – a fact which Saikia establishes in the very opening scene of the film. Frequently, lines of trucks get jammed in the narrow road and little kids like Moti and his friends exploit such moments to climb on the trucks and collect the scattered rice from the trailer's floor. The poor households in the neighborhood rely substantially on this mode of rice collection by their kids for their daily meals. On an ill-fated day, several heavy rice bags from a loosely packed truck fall over Moti, causing his immediate death. Kiran, traumatized and bed-ridden by the unbearable catastrophe of losing her only child and support, is attended by her fellow women in the neighborhood but they fail to make her eat any food. Meanwhile the owner of the truck comes to manage the legal cases filed against his driver. During the re-loading of the fallen rice bags, he sends one bag from the heap to Kiran as compensation. Badal, the handyman of the truck comes to Kiran's house to deliver the bag. Kiran cries out her refusal to accept it but Badal places it at a corner of her room. Incidentally it is the same rice bag that fell on Moti's body, and his blood-stain is still visible on one side of the bag. As days move on, Kiran gradually recovers to her life to be spent alone and without any means of survival. She caresses over the rice bag with her hand, seals a hole on the bag that was made by a rat, covers it with a quilt before sleeping at night, and never takes rice from it even when she quenches her hunger by drinking water. But a day comes when she can no longer resist her hunger and starts taking rice from the bag through the rat hole. On the other hand, the handyman Badal begins to feel deep sympathy and love towards Kiran, he leaves his job in that truck and starts to stay with Master Uncle. But Kiran angrily rejects Badal when he comes to her, reminding him that she is the wife of a man whom she loves and for whom she is still waiting. Master Uncle, who wishes that Kiran and Badal should live together, gets out in a fresh mission to trace Binod – this time to his home at a faraway place. Master returns after few days to tell Kiran with facts and evidence that Binod was actually a fraud and smuggler who had left his first wife at his home place before marrying Kiran. In a following scene,

Kiran is shown sleepless on her bed at night, noticing a rat running at the corner of her room. In the closing scene of the film, she freshens herself with a bath, looks bright when she puts vermilion on her forehead, and sends an invite to Badal which he readily complies.

Sarothi (The Shelter, 1992, Colour)

Producer: Doordarshan

Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Prabhat Sarma

Cast: Bidya Rao, Mridula Barua Arun Nath

Release Date: 29th May, 1992

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1992

Sarothi is the only film of Saikia where the protagonist is a man, instead of a woman. It is about a retired man who takes up the task of completing the construction of his house. He has been an honest man in his life, caring and responsible for his wife and children. But he is not reciprocated by the same sense of sensitivities by his family members for which he, however, never complains. Looking after the construction works of his house, he indulges himself in a fantasy about a woman whom he had been attracted to in his past but couldn't express his feelings to her. Living with the insensitivities of his wife and the acts and responses of his children, which are not of his tastes but which he coolly accepts, he begins to speculate how things could have been better if he had been married to the other woman. He begins to pass his times through switching between his fancies about a happier life with the other woman and the contrasting reality in his actual life.

Abartan, (On the run, 1994, Colour)

Producer, Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Debeswar Sarma, Narayan Barua and Dilip Roy

Cast: Mridula Barua, Jayanta Das, Tapan Das, Lakhi Borthakur

Release Date: 1996

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1994

Abartan is a vivid depiction of the struggles and sufferings of the women actors in professional mobile theatre groups of Assam. The film focuses on the life and experience of Jayanti who is a popular actress of one theatre group. She is talented and popular enough to be sought after by other theatre groups as their brand actor. From her conversations with Parimal, an Engineer whom she meets as a co-passenger in a bus journey, and from her exchanges with her family member - all of whom are solely dependent on her earnings, it is made evident that she had a 'dark past' involving socially unsanctioned affairs which had stamped on her an image that keeps her family and herself away from thinking about her marriage. Problems arise when Parimal comes with the proposal of marrying her. This expected but apparently unrealistic step from someone like Parimal is tried to be legitimized by referring to the 'dark and wild past' of Parimal too. However, the owner of the theatre group warns about legal action against Jayanti if she breaks her signed contract with his group; and Jayanti's parents, brother and sister all oppose her marriage for their own interests. Meanwhile Jayanti becomes pregnant and Parimal makes a bold declaration to the owner of the theatre that he had started 'forming his family first and would think of the issues about marriage slightly later'. The story concludes with the rescue of Jayanti by Parimal but not after having a battle with the owner of the theatre group.

***Itihas* (Exploration, 1995, Colour)**

Producer: Rupkamal production

Director and Screenplay: Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia

Music: Indreswar Sarma

Cast: Nikumoni Saikia, Mridula Barua, Biju Phukon,
Jayanta Das, Tapan Das

Release Date: 5th January, 1996

Award: Rajat Kamal Award, 1996

In his last film *Itihas*, Saikia takes up the issue of displacement of the rural masses from their land in the aggressive extension of the urban settlement areas. Here the central character is a woman, the young Lakhimi. Her elder brother sells his land, like all other village families who could not withstand the pressure to do so, to the

rich builder who is going to construct multi-storied concrete buildings in the village land for city dwellers. Her younger brother, who refuses to sell the land, has no option but to agree to a different deal with the builder that they will not move from their land but they will be provided an apartment to live, in the building which will be constructed on their land. After the agreement, the younger brother leaves home to work in a rice mill of the builder at a distant place. He starts to enjoy his life there and never returns home. At home, after the construction is over, the builder was not in the mood to smoothly execute his agreement, but with the support of her fiancée Madhu, Lakhimi manages to get the apartment to live with her mother and younger sister, but without electricity and water supply. For them, a nearby water-well of the village remains as the source of water. After that, the younger sister elopes with a construction overseer and Lakhimi accepts part time domestic works in various apartments of the buildings occupied by the rich and elite peoples. A resident of one such apartment makes repeated advances to touch her body and Lakhimi's resistances and protests only earn annihilation of her own character in that society of the elites. She gets more angry and frustrated when her fiancée Madhu too blames her for all these. One night on her way to fetch water from the well, she is teased by a group of drunken men whom she fights. But she is easily overpowered, caught and then raped. After few hours, her body was seen in the deep well. Madhu, with the help of few other villagers, lifts up her body. Later, as a part of the police investigation, municipality staffs come to lift the mud from the well. In the closing scene, an old resident is seen to pour potash into the turbid well to clean the water.
