

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction: Brief History of Assamese Cinema:

It was after four years of the first Indian talkie cinema i.e. *Alam Ara* (1931), when Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1903 – 1951), an icon of modern Assamese literary and performing arts who had abandoned his study in economics at Edinburgh University only to have his training on filmmaking at the Ufa studio in Germany, made the first Assamese film *Joymoti*. This film was about the story of the Ahom mistress Joymoti, who bore tortures to death in order to save the life of her husband who stood against the ruling powers of the Ahom kingdom in the seventeenth century. In one of his essays, Jyotiprasad Agarwala wrote, “I tried to make *Joymoti* following the real cinematic style of direction and acting to be found in English and Russian films....It is pity that even some of the leading directors of Bengali and Hindi films failed to observe the difference between stage-acting and film-acting” (Borpujari 2007, xiii).

The film was privileged to be the fourth talkie film of Indian film history. But due to the poor condition of film industry in Assam at that time, with limited facilities for film - watching and the limitations of film distribution and marketing, the film could not be a success. However, *Joymoti* heralded the beginning of Assamese film tradition.

Thereafter, the immediate followers of Jyoti Prasad made films which were largely made with the historical and mythological themes. The stories of the third and fourth film, *Manomoti* (1941) by Rohini Kumar Barua and *Badan Barphukan* (1947) by Kamal Narayan Chowdhury respectively, were based on historical themes. *Siraj* (1948) by Bishnu Prasad Rabha and Phani Sarma was the first film with a major social issue of inter-religious tolerance and bonding. In this film, the directors had glorified the harmonious relationship of the Hindus and the Muslims in Assam which made a significant breakthrough in Assamese cinema. It was followed by *Parghat* (1949) of Prabin Phukan and *Biplabi* (1950) of Ajit Sen. These films were imitations of Indian popular cinema which were commercially successful. Films like *Era Bator Sur* (1956) by the

recipient of Dada Saheb Phalke Award, Bhupen Hazarika, *Mak aru Maram* (1957) by Nip Barua, *Puberun* (1959) by Prabhat Mukherjee (which was the first film to enter in Berlin Film Festival), *Shakuntala* (1961) by Bhupen Hazarika etc. were some of those films of this period which were made on popular Indian cinema style. *Eto Sito Bahuto* (1963) and *Dr. Bezbarua* (1969) by Brajen Barua were the first commercially successful Assamese films, made with mainstream Hindi cinema's formula of crime story and melodrama.

However, the release of the Bangla film *Pather Panchali* of Satyajit Ray in 1955 is regarded as an important hallmark in Indian film history. This widely acclaimed film by Ray started not only the realist filmmaking but also a kind of film sub-culture in India where cinema began to be relished beyond commercialism. This resulted in the emergence of a kind of filmmaking which later got identified as art-house movies, serious cinema or parallel cinema. For some scholars, these films stand opposite to the Hindi commercial cinema. According to Chidananda Dasgupta,

“The difference between art cinema and commercial cinema in Indian is simply the difference between good cinema and bad- between serious films and degenerate ‘entertainment’. The new cinema in India is a creation of an intellectual elite that is keenly aware of the human condition in India” (Dasgupta 1983, 41).

Same argument was reinforced by scholars like Ashish Nandy (1999), Fareed Kazmi (1999) and Kishor Valicha (1999), and emphasized on the creation of a clear distinction between high art and popular art. By labeling popular cinema as slum's eye view of national politics, Nandy draws a line between high and popular art; while Kazmi has tabled certain characteristics of the innovative cinema to differentiate it from the conventional cinema. According to his scheme of differentiation, innovative cinema deals with ordinary events of the ordinary people; underplays the dramatic; remains open-ended; uses natural lighting and sets; retains ambiguity of reality; remains as window to the world and not the complete world; deals with multidimensional and complex characters; and deploys camera movement from close-up to medium and long shot – moving from particular to the general (Kazmi 1999, 87). Likewise according to Valicha popular cinema is concerned with the effect of the codes, and structures them in a manner calculated to ‘create the maximum effect on the viewer’ while ‘serious film is concerned with effect than effect’ (Valicha 1999, 29).

Influenced by the emerging serious filmmaking tradition in post-*Pather Panchali* times, Assamese director Padum Barua, had broken the prevailing Assamese filmmaking styles with his maiden film *Ganga Chilanir Pankhi* (1976). This film was a realistic portrayal, with impressive cinematic aesthetics and without melodramatic insertions, of the unfulfilled life of a young widow. Before this, Deuti Barua's *Bristi* (1975) and Pulak Gogoi's *Khoj* (1975) were few sporadic attempts to catch the hold of realism and seriousness in Assamese cinema.

However, Assam had to wait till the emergence of Bhabendra Nath Saikia for a more matured and consistent endeavor to blend the realist cinematic aesthetics in Assamese language films. His films carry most of the characteristics of Indian art house/ parallel cinema, with stories of ordinary people, with un-professional actors, absence of song-and-dance scenes, natural settings, etc. After Saikia, a group of young filmmakers attempted to make movies on serious issues. Among them, the FTII graduate Jahnu Barua was the most prominent. His films, *Halodhiya Charaye Baodhan Khai* (1987), *Firingoti* (1991) and *Xagoroloi Bahu Dur* (1995) received national and international recognitions. "He continued to remain in the national focus by regularly bringing out films of substance depicting poignant stories of the deprived and the dispossessed and winning awards and critical attention at the national level" (Sharma 2012, 90). In 1990s, directors like Sanjiv Hazarika, Bidyut Chakravarty, Dr. Swantana Bordoloi, Hemen Das, Manju Bora, Sanjiv Savapandit, Arup Manna, Ehsan Majid, and M. Maniram come up with some films of social importance with greater insights into human conditions and values. Hemen Das' film *Tathapio Nadi* (1990) on the struggle of a boat-man community against the onslaught of modern developments and Swantana Bordoloi's *Adajya* (1997) with a depiction of male domination were remarkable contribution to the Assamese film history.

1.2. Bhabendra Nath Saikia (1932 – 2003): The Filmmaker:

Born at Nagaon of Assam on 20th February 1932, Bhabendra Nath Saikia did his PhD in Physics from the University of London and taught at Gauhati University. He was a novelist, short story writer, playwright, children litterateur, editor of periodicals, cultural activist as well as academician. Despite his entry into the film-world as an actor, playing a role in the film *Sati*

Beula, he didn't continue his career as an actor. After twenty four years of his literary writing, he started planning for directing movie; and in the year 1977 he finally got his first film *Sandhyarag* (Cry of Twilight, B&W) released. After that, he continued to direct six more Assamese films – *Anirban* (The Vigil, 1980, B&W), *Agnisnan* (The Ordeal, 1985, Colour), *Kolahal* (The Turmoil, 1988, Colour), *Sarothi* (The Shelter, 1992, Colour), *Abartan*, (On the run, 1994, Colour), *Itihaas* (Exploration, 1996, Colour) and one Hindi- *Kalsandhya* (1999) films.

His seven Assamese films are the outcome of his understanding of *good cinema* which was developed through his exposure to western cinematic aesthetics, especially neorealism. Inspired by movies of directors like Ingmar Bergman (*Wild Strawberries*, 1957), Vittorio De Sica (*The Roof*, 1956), and Satyajit Ray (*Pather Panchali*, 1955) Saikia embarked into the making of films with realistic flavor. In his autobiography, he mentioned about the watching of the English movie, *Kramer Vs Kramer*, and commented that it was a good movie after a long time for him. In one interview, responding to the question on the particular style of his filmmaking which earned distinction for Assamese audience, he said

“I believe nine persons out of ten are interested in popular, commercially viable films. And you know what popular film [is] in India nowadays. We can only hope that some of these young people who are coming to that arena [of filmmaking] will try to realize, and try to feel, the beauty of our real life and the popularity which are associated with our normal daily life” (Chadha: n.d.).

Filmmaking was not an easy task for a man like Bhabendra Nath Saikia. He was financially not sound to be a typical filmmaker; and at that time Assam was lacking even the minimum infrastructure. He had to borrow money from Film Development Corporation, Banks and friends and relatives to make movie. Even sometime due to shortage of money he had to stop filmmaking process for some days. The second hurdle was lack of proper infrastructural facilities. At that time filmmakers had to go outside Assam for editing and other technical purposes. This was expensive and time consuming. Despite all these impediments, Saikia was able to make seven Assamese movies, each of which could earn accolades from general audience and recognition from critics. His contribution to Assamese cinema is summarized by national film critic Apurba Sarma in the following lines,

“In continuing the task of pursuing film as art, Dr. Saikia’s major contribution, however, lies in putting Assamese cinema firmly in the cultural map of India. It is no mean achievement that all of his seven Assamese films won the Rajat Kamal (Silver Lotus) award for best regional film at the National Film Awards. He tried vigorously to retrieve Assamese cinema from quagmire created by a deliberate downsliding of what goes by the name of commercial cinema in its mad craze for the lucre” (Sarma 2012, 88-89).

As Sarma said, in the development of Assamese cinema Bhabendra Nath Saikia played a major role, who despite the unfavorable socio-economic conditions gifted the Assamese society eight (seven Assamese and one Hindi) films and enriched the cultural repository of Assam. Therefore, proper documentation and study of such contributions is important for the upliftment of a society.

1.3. Objectives of the Study:

This study aims to explore and analyze the distinct characteristics of Saikia as a filmmaker. For accomplishing this task, his seven Assamese films are taken up in this study to scrutinize their thematic and stylistic contents. The thematic contents are being approached through two sub-themes which are found to be particularly relevant in the context of Saikia’s films: a) representation of women and b) representation of the urban life-world. These two aspects can be regarded as overtly visible features in Saikia’s filmography. The stylistic contents in this study include four major aspects of filmmaking: cinematography, sound, editing and mise-en-scène. This four-fold scheme for analyzing the stylistic contents is being taken from William H. Phillip and David Bordwell’s model of studying cinematic techniques (Phillips, 2009; Bordwell& Thompson, 2004).

These thematic and stylistic features are further taken up in the conclusion for understanding Saikia as an auteur. The various issues of the debate pertaining to the auteur theory are being discussed in the context of Saikia’s way of filmmaking.

Thus, the objectives of this study can be summed up as to:

1. explore and analyze the thematic and stylistic features of the seven Assamese films directed by Bhabendra Nath Saikia;
2. engage with the analysis of Saikia's status as an auteur on the basis of the above thematic and stylistic elements in one hand, and the theoretical debates about the *auteur*-ship of the filmmaker on the other.

1.4 Review of Literature:

Works on Women Representation

Due to growing interest on gender issues in society lots of works have been done on gender related issues. Laura Mulvey, Judith Butler, E. Ann Kaplan and Janet McCabe are some of those prominent figures associated with such issues. Judith Butler's book *Gender Trouble* enquires about the representation of women in language and politics and comments that all these are provided and restrained by power structure. Laura Mulvey's famous book *Visual and Other Pleasures* offers a new perspective to look at the Hollywood movies. Her concept of 'male gaze' deconstructs the reality of female subjectivity on the screen. Similarly E. Ann Kaplan's book *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* is a remarkable contribution to decode the way of representation on screen. She opined that idea of women presented on the screen is mere a representation for man not in terms of what she actually signifies.

In India, works on this line have also been done by many scholars like Indubala Singh, Uma Chakravarty, Bina Agarwal, Subeshini Moodley, Snigdha Madhuri, Jyotika Viridi and Brinda Bose are engaging in the exploration of representation of women in Indian cinema. Mantra Roy and Aparajita Sengupta in their article 'Women and emergent agency in the cinema of Aparna Sen' analyzed the representation of women by Indian female director Aparna Sen in her Bengali regional cinemas. Literature on the women as a component in Assamese cinema is not available.

Works on Cinema and Urbanity

Recently cinema and city or cinema and urbanity become a vibrant topic of discussion for researchers. Jude Clark's *Introduction: Urban Culture- Representation and Experiences in/of Urban Space and Culture.* (2003) , Mary Gluck's. "Flaneur" published in *Encyclopedia of*

Urban Studies (2010) and Shiel, Mark, and Tony Fitzmaurice. *Cinema and The City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. (2001) are some of the remarkable works done on the issues like urban space, urbanity and its representation in cinema.

In Indian context, Brinda Bose, Ranjani Mazumdar, Ashish Nandy, M. Madhava Prasad and some others are some of the prominent scholars, who are contributing their ideas in this field, especially in Indian context. Ranjani Mazumdar's book *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City* is an anthology of multidisciplinary approaches to read Bombay cinema as an archive of the city. In this book she uncovered a post nationalist world while discuss about the social crisis of 1970s to 1990s. Preben Kaarsholm's edited volume *City Flicks: Indian Cinema and the Urban Experience* is a compilation of different articles presented in the seminar on 'Representations of Metropolitan Life in Contemporary Indian Film: Bombay, Calcutta, Madras'. In this volume the 'stars' of Indian film studies and criticism like Sudipta Kaviraj, M. Madhava Prasad, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Moinak Biswas, Ravi S. Vasudevan and Tejaswini Niranjana uncover the issues like cinema and metropolitan city- realism or fantasy, city in Hindi songs, cinematic aspects in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, film style in urban action films etc.

Works on Film Techniques

Since its inception lots of works on film techniques have been done. However, David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's book *Film Art: An Introduction* provides an analysis of film techniques by taking examples from films of various periods and countries. The book helps to understand the basic formula of film analysis in technical terms. *Film as Art* by Rudolf Arnheim is a famous book on film studies. It discusses about the transformation of film from an experimental art to a realist art. William H. Phillips, *Film: An Introduction* talks about different film techniques like mise en scène, cinematography, editing and sound along with different genres of world cinema.

Works on Auteur Theory

With the growing interest on auteur study scholars from different parts of the world started to contribute to auteur criticism. Andrew Sarris, François Truffaut, Peter Wollen, André Bazin and Graham Petrie's contributions to this study are remarkable. Andrew Sarris article *Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962* published in Joanne et.al's edited book *The Film Studies Reader* fixed

the main premises of auteur study and given a base for further study in this line. His three premises are still applied by scholars for analyzing a single director's work. Sarris' another view that signature also underscores the tendency of a director to work with some of the same artist is elaborated by Brian Michael Goss while studying the films of Almodovar, Von Trier and Winterbottom. Therefore his book *Global Auteurs: Politics in the Films of Almodovar, Von Trier and Winterbottom* is followed to analyze Saikia's films in the same line. François Truffaut's essay 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' is a criticism of the works of some French directors whom he labeled as *metteur en cinema* and compares their works with the works of selected auteurs.

Graham Petrie in her article 'Alternatives to Auteur' published in 1973 attacked auteur theory by saying that auteur theory is negating the fact that good directors can also make bad films and bad directors can also make good films. The validity of the auteur theory has been further questioned by several scholars in recent times (Cameron, 2000). Another book by V.W Waxman *Film and Authorship* (2003) also discuss about the development phases of auteur theory. Patricie Janstova's *Empirical Testing of Auteur Theory Via Content Analysis: A Case Study of Jane Campion Films* is an extensive work on the relevance of auteur theory in the present day context where effort has been taken to prove Campion as an auteur in the light of the existing criticisms.

This research work is carried out with an attempt to apply the above-mentioned critical perspectives in understanding an Assamese filmmaker, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, taking into account his entire set of Assamese films. Assamese films and filmmakers have hardly been studied from such perspectives of modern film studies and cultural studies. Further, the auteur theory has not much been applied in analyzing the Indian filmmakers in general, and surely not so far in studying any Assamese filmmaker. Therefore, this thesis may also be seen as a humble attempt to fill up that gap.

1.5 Theoretical Framework:

The analyses of the films of Bhabendra Nath Saikia are informed by a range of theoretical frameworks. The two thematic categories chosen in this study are woman and urbanity; and this

necessitates theories pertaining to representation of women and the treatment of the urban world in cinema. While the field of film studies offers a range of insights in studying the technical features like, cinematography, sound, editing and mise-en-scène of a film, the auteur theory provides useful perspectives in relating them as a unity of the works of the filmmaker, particularly in the study of films of a single director. Despite the increasing criticisms on the validity of old auteur theory, this study is particularly inclined to accept Saikia as the auteur of his filmography, which is discussed in the conclusion.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, a group of scholars in the world of cinema tended to confer ultimate authority of the film production to the director; they call him the author of the film. Film is an outcome of collaborative effort of director, producer and other artists. So questions were raised on the issue of its authority - who will be the actual creator of the film. Scholars like André Bazin, François Truffaut, Andrew Sarris and many others were busy with the criticism of Hollywood movies that flooded to France after World War II. They were the regular writer of the monthly magazine Cahiers du Cinema. Naming the policy of criticism as *politique des auteurs* they criticized the filmmaking style of some selected directors. François Truffaut's essay 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' made the difference between *metteur en cinema* (technicians those who translate the script into film without their own inputs) and auteur. Their intension behind such criticism is to overthrow the 1920s thinking, where a tendency for making distinction between high art / low art has been seen, and relate the notion of auteur with the application of mise-en-scène. They established that "style, as in mise-en-scène, could also demarcate an auteur" (Hayward 2000, 21). Alexandre Astruc's notion of *camera stylo* contributed a lot to the development of auteur theory. He explained that camera is just like a pen for the director and they should use it to express their visions and the essence of the text. It helps the Cahiers critics to demand for authorship. Gradually, auteur theory expanded to other parts of world, especially to America. Now style, narrative and theme become the main tenets to study the films of auteur filmmaker. Adding to these, Andrew Sarris in his article 'Notes on Auteur Theory in 1962' mentioned about three premises of auteur theory. These are – (i) technical competence of a director as a criterion of value; (ii) distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value; and (iii) interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as an art.

However, before the engagement of structuralism with auteurism, there was no theory of the artist (Caughie 2007, 7). In late 1960s the auteur debate was taken in the light of structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories (*langue/ parole*) contributed to the understanding of the structure of film narrative. Saussure perceived 'cinema as *langue* and each film as being *parole*' (Hayward 2000, 24). The British film journals introduced theoretically more evolved and scientific auteurism - structuralist-auteurism (Stam, 2000; Wexman, 2003). Auteur-structuralism is looking at the auteur as a critical construct rather than a human being. This new structuralist-auteurism was positively accepted by auteur advocates, as it was believed that structuralism and its empirical approach would bring "an objective basis for the concept and counter the romantic subjectivity of auteur theory" (Hayward, 1998, p. 24). Allan Lovell (1977) talked about the possibility of an analytic apparatus that would force critics to be more objective, and it would uncover the basic structures, and reoccurring themes in the artist's work. Peter Wollen's structuralist – auteurism approach to film analyses was moving toward more systematic and scientific methods to film studies. However, with the rise of post-structuralism in the 1970s, the interests of the critical theories shifted away from this fascinating work of structuralist – auteurism to debates about ideology, gender and the psychological orientations of the spectator. This study returned to structuralist – auteurism and took it a step further with empirical approach to auteurism. In the thesis *Empirical Testing of Auteur Theory Via Content Analysis: A Study on Jane Campion Films*, Patricie Janstova divided the different phases of auteur theory in such: during 1950s as Romantic Auteurism, during 1960s as Structuralist Auteurism and during 1970s as Auteur-Post-Structuralism. During romantic auteurism authors are considered as expressive Individual - producer of meaning and thematic and stylistic properties read from the films. Likewise, in Structuralist Auteurism authors are taken as constructed from the films and set of structures identifiable within a body of films. While in Auteur-Post-Structuralism authors are constructed from the films & a subject position within the film and also the introduction of spectator - pleasure and ideology

Further research added some more principles to the auteur theory. Brian Michael Goss exemplified that signature "also underscores the collaborative nature of film authorship since it may be accounted for, in part, by director's tendency to work with some of the same artist" (Goss 2009, 48). In Indian contexts, a classic illustration of this has been Satyajit Ray who

exhibited such tendency by his repeated reliance on actors like Soumitra Chatterjee in the domain of acting and Ray's partnership with cinematographer Soumendu Roy and editor Dullal Dutta. Likewise, Graham Petrie sets the freedom of the director as the main tenet for the selection of the auteur director. According to him, these directors, "in all or most of their completed films, were able to do all or most of the following: write, choose, or collaborate closely on the script; have a decisive voice in the choice of actors and technicians; direct; produce, or work closely with a sympathetic producer; edit or supervise the editing of the version that was released for public viewing" (Petrie 1973, 30).

However, debate on the directorial authority is still going on and auteur theory has also been criticized on several grounds. A well-known counter-perspective on auteurism is that "by privileging the auteur it erases context (that is, history) and therefore side steps ideology. Equally, because film is being looked at for its formalistic, stylistic and thematic structures, unconscious structure (such as the unspoken dynamics between film maker and actor, the economic pressures connected with the industry) is precluded" (Hayward 2000, 22). Thus auteur theory isolated both the film and the filmmaker from its context. Similarly, film is a product of teamwork. It is not possible for a director to control all aspects of film production - from screenplay to cinematography. Therefore he has to depend on other artists like art director, cinematographer, editor, sound designer, music director, choreographer, singer and male-female actors to make a film. But by demanding the single authority for the director, auteur theory rejects the role played by other artists.

Another criticism is posited for giving canonical status to American filmmaker by rejecting the greatness of other filmmakers. These kinds of criticisms limit the popularity of the theory. The great weakness of the auteur theory is its rigidity; the theory is totally committed to the cinema of a single director (Cameron 2000, 65 & Petrie 1973, 30). According to Petrie, 'personal style' as the auteurs are talking about is nothing but "the result of working within a certain genre, or for a particular studio" (Petrie 1973, 30). Even the theory does not allow us to think about the possibility of a good director making a bad film or a bad director making a good film.

Film critic Pauline Kale pointed out Andrew Sarris' theoretical weakness of the three premises of auteur theory and claimed that Sarris' premises are unable to give a clear picture about the ongoing tension between the director and a script (as Sarris mentioned) and by reformulating the theory she mentioned about the 'creative tensions between the director and his or her prevailing social climate (of which the script and the industry are constituted parts)' (Goss 2009, 48). Directors are not isolated from their social settings and hence their cinematic corpus should be studied by taking into account the conflicts going on in the prevailing social climate.

Till now the debate on the principles for auteur selection is going on. Scholars are unable to come to a definite point of convergence. J. Caughie commented that "the auteur seems to have disappeared from the centre of theoretical debate in Film Studies" (Caughie 2007, 1) but at the same time capturing all other areas like publicity, journalistic review, television programs, marketing of cinema etc. The function of an auteur is changing due to the commercialization of film media. 'In the post war era the auteur was the strongest tie linking cinema to the literary function: the auteur proved that film could be an art' (Andrew 1992, 82), whereas in present day situation auteurs are transformed into a sign for the production companies.

In this situation question may arise - what then is the functional necessity of auteur theory? Answering to this question, Edward Buscombe, exactly eleven years after Sarris' auteurist statement, said that "what is needed now is the theory of the cinema that locates directors in a total situation rather than one which assumes that their development has only an internal dynamic" (Goss 2009, 53). Auteur theory undoubtedly creates a platform for the researchers to study the films of great directors with artistic value. It concentrates on the study of film as a material of art. Conferring too much importance on director auteur theory challenges the capitalist formula of studio system.

Indian filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Guru Dutt, Govind Nihalani, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, Bimal Roy, Ram Gopal Verma and others are labeled as Indian auteurs (Thoraval, 2000; Vemireddy 2011, 196). They have their own styles of filmmaking which are manifested on their respective thematic priorities: conflict of tradition and modernity in Ray's films, class and caste discrimination in Benegal's films, social exploitation in Nihalani's films,

crime-worlds of the dark city in Ram Gopal Verma's films - are some of the recurring thematic features of these directors, on the basis of which they can be called auteurs.

In this thesis, an attempt has been made to study Bhabendra Nath Saikia's films by taking into account the basic principles of auteur theory i.e. the stylistic and thematic elements of his films in the context of his historical conditions.

1.6 Methods & Methodology:

As articulated in the objective above, this study endeavors primarily to sort out and analyze the identifiable characteristics of Saikia as a filmmaker; and then to analyze him with the perspectives of auteur theory. For the first part, the study is being carried out through textual analysis of his films where the thematic and audio-visual compositions by Saikia in his films are analyzed as meaning-making texts. These characteristics are then taken up in the concluding part to analyze them as the credentials for Saikia as the auteur.

In engaging with the first thematic category on representation of women in Saikia's films, the gendered texts of the narrative contents are analyzed from the perspectives on Indian social realities. In addition to the works of a number of Indian scholars, this segment has also been informed by the well-known works of Judith Butler and R.W. Connell. Judith Butler's notion about the operation of gender division within political and cultural intersections (Butler 1990) is taken as the base for studying the gender representation in Saikia's films. Likewise, Connell's idea about gender (especially masculinity) as social practice rather than two concrete social or biological divisions is used as the main argument of my study (Connell 2005). However, in contrast to the common western criticisms on representation of women in cinema which illustrate the politically undemocratic representation of women on the screen, it is argued in this study that Saikia's films demonstrate critically informed attempts in handling the gender question. Saikia's achievement in articulating women's agency and subjectivity is an important concern in this segment of the study.

The second thematic category in this study that deals with the recurring theme of urbanity in Saikia's films is guided by the reading that Saikia's films are an important critical take on the expansion of the urban lifeway in Assam. It is argued in this thesis that, in his critical depiction

of the various historical moments of the urban experiences in Assam, Saikia neither celebrated the coming of urbanity in Assam in the way it emerged and began to expand nor he, like his contemporary filmmakers in Assam, called for an undoing of urban expansion by invoking the virtues of pre-urban cultural life. For Saikia, the urban phenomenon was inevitable and he didn't want to run away from it. Yet, that didn't stop him to take a critical stance towards the urban experiences and to question about their inherent flaws and contradictions.

The auteur theory has been taken as a theoretical tool for the study. For that purpose, works of Andrew Sarris, François Truffaut, André Bazin are taken in this study for the essential perspectives on auteur theory. In this connection, the argument of this thesis is that Bhabendra Nath Saikia fulfills to be called as the auteur of his entire filmography – which is being defended and illustrated in the concluding chapter

While the seven Assamese films of Saikia is the primary resource for this study, the various writings by other authors on Saikia's films in particular and on the Indian Cinema in general are surveyed, and used as secondary resources as and when it is necessary. Saikia's autobiographic notes and his couple of interviews are also being studied.

1.7 Overview of Chapters:

This first chapter of this thesis, which has been an outline of this study, is followed by five core chapters. The second chapter *Representation of Women: Menaka's Revenge, Kiron's Negotiations and Other Schemes* is an attempt to analyze the first thematic element i.e. representation of women in Saikia's films. The chapter examines Saikia's women characters and their activities as the reaction of their specific socio-economic and cultural situations.

In the third substantial chapter *From Sandhyarag to Itihaas: A Critical Trajectory of the Urban Life-world* delineates the second thematic element of Saikia's films – representation of urban life-world. It engages in a discussion of Saikia's films as critical comments on the different stages of urban development.

The fourth chapter *Tracing the Elements of Cinema Proper: Cinematography, Sound and Editing* deals with the recurrent stylistic elements of Saikia's seven films. It includes a detail analysis of different film techniques applied by Saikia in his films with shot by shot analysis. How with

minimal application of cinematic tools Saikia able to create a real world for the audience is minutely observed and discussed in this particular chapter.

Mise-en-scène is another important element of cinema proper; so in the fifth chapter *Visual Contents in the Frame: Mise-en-scènes of the Literary Filmmaker*, a detail analysis on the application of mise -en-scène in Saikia's film is included. The chapter finds out Saikia's application of mise -en-scène in the expression of his narrative content.

Finally, the concluding chapter titled *Making Sense of the Auteur* attempts to project Saikia as an auteur director on the basis of his thematic and stylistic elements explored in other core chapters.