

Critique

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Akoman: Art Coincides with Realism



There was a time when the cinema of Northeastern India was segregated from mainstream Indian Cinema. With the growing maturity of critics and audiences watching good cinema, Indian cinema is not confined anymore to one superior '-wood'. Though far from technological advancement, our regional cinema has advanced in cinematic techniques, content and independent filmmaking. One such independent filmmaker is Pranjal K. Saikia hailing from the state of Assam, who has recently received critical acclamation for his film 'Akoman - colours of a rebel sprout'.

Team Indipity and Norman Studio Works' film 'Akoman' produced by Narendra N Sinha and Bhaskar Dutta, is a ride through the narrow passages

of the dark truth hidden in the woods of Assam. The story follows Akoman, a country boy driven by an emotional attachment to his country's flag and wonders what absolute independence means after he finds a flag of an illegal insurgency group buried under the grains of their storehouse. Instantly, the film plays with the boy's innocence and love for his country and his family's dark past. The character of Akoman's father represents the insurgents that have long been driven to the forest for freedom-seeking operations. These insurgents never came back home and vanished like nightmares. The father's character is absent throughout the film; it metaphorizes the real absence of these folks and their alienation from family and loved ones.

It portrays childhood innocence and how easily they find things interesting or make the colour themselves. The film very precisely but keenly frames the boy's love for his country through his attempts of colouring the Indian National flag. He paints it with turmeric and mustard greens when he fails to afford it. The story has another dimension of self-reliant youth through the character of Bamla. While some folks have chosen the way of illegal operations for a freedom that is merely a muse, Bamla denies going into the woods. Instead, he picks his way of earning money and proves himself deserving enough for Niku. Again, this is a pathetic truth of various unemployed youths who struggle daily to have a secure life.

The film is successful in framing the nature scape of Assam. It is filled with the greenery of paddy fields, the yellow blooms of mustard cultivation, and the rugged site of flooded lands. It picturises young children travelling by rafts to school as the entire region is flooded. It is ironic how the film possesses a normal outlook for such situations, as if the characters are much more familiar and have accepted the fangs of nature. Though in reality, the lifestyle of these people is a curse in the name of civilisation, in the movie, it has been showcased in a much-smoothened way that anyone is to believe how normal it is for them to live such a life without electricity or luxuries.

Also, the story is plotted when the nation was celebrating the 55th Republic Day, which means 2004. The film doesn't reveal any real-life insurgent group, yet the propaganda name the filmmaker has chosen for his reel insurgent group demonstrates real causes and facts of the time. Assam saw the rise of insurgencies at their peak in the twentieth century and early twenty-first century. Frequent murders, kidnappings, and bomb blasts were reported, and the insurgency that had begun in the name of seeking freedom turned out to be a curse for the innocent native people. However, the film fails to portray the lifestyle of insurgents or their various operations. Though the film's prime theme deals with insurgency and terrorism, the maker has chosen not to film the prominent persons relating to it, their families living far away from them. The film only glimpses the

operations through patrolling vehicles in the fields at night. Night has a more significant role to play as a metaphor. All the illegal operations have been carried out at night, which is a fact and also an allegory of the darkness that it bears. None of these scenes has been shot from a close angle. All these scenes have been framed in single-wide shots and rare camera movement. Akoman's mother plays a vital role in the story and portrays the plight of the insurgents' families. His father left home long back, but the thirst for seeking freedom, in turn, made the life of Akoman's mother a hell. The insurgents suffer physical pain in the woods, and their families suffer mental burdens daily. However, as a responsible mother, she's determined enough to prevent Akoman from thoughts such as his father.

The filmmaker is successful in shot composition, and cinematographer Navnit Nilavh equally owes the credit. The wide shots of the fields and the river bear many ambiances that beautifully deck the scenes. Close shots have been utilised wisely, only used when necessary for the scenes to express. The last scene holds eye-catching metaphors that the audience can easily be reluctant to use. For instance, the shot framing Akoman, the tiranga behind him, and the fire from below give the movie meaning. The film's scripting is also good enough to keep hold of the audience's mind, and the end is unpredictable. Using fewer dialogues and more experiments with shot compositions and craft has made the film a must-watch. One can easily imagine the beauty of Assam's flora by just looking at the craft of the movie. The filmmaker and art director here deserves credit for choosing live locations rather than going for expensive settings. As an independent film demands, the filmmaker has tried to cover up the best way possible in whatever the small budget they possess. Clever editing by Diganta Bora and smooth sound design by Debajit Gayan deserves appreciation; also, the colour grading of the movie is much more satisfying. The film's last few minutes, covering the silent and tranquil nature in various images, is very rare in Assamese cinema. The sound design is simple. The best part is that the background music isn't iconic enough to capture our minds more than we need to view.

Regarding acting, most of the characters have been played by non-professional actors. Bhupen Gogoi, aka Akoman, the little boy, has done his best, or the director is successful enough in moulding his characters. Sandhya Hazarika has played Akoman's mother; she has done her part flawlessly. The characters of Bamla and Niku, played by Biswajit Handique and Austriyana Dihingia, were a romantic relief in the film. The maker has not given much emphasis to Niku; throughout the movie, she can be seen doing the same activities without speaking much, barely a word. Both the actors have been trained well for the purpose. The filmmaker has not left any clue for the audience whether they are professional actors; Bamla especially has done his part with zero artificiality.

In a nutshell, Akoman is one of the finest movies Assam has to offer to the audience worldwide. If Assam is a paddy field, then Akoman

portrays the greens on one side and the naked on the other. The film has already received acclamations in film festivals nationwide, including the prestigious Kolkata International Film Festival, and is expected to see more rises. As a lover of cinema, I wish this film to get screenings not only in festivals but also in theatres because it is a film that is a mixture of art and reality, and it deserves acclamation not only from critics but also from audiences from all sections, from the natives to the intellectuals.

Film Name: Akoman-colours of a rebel sprout

Film Director : Pranjal K. Saikia

Year: 2022

Language: Assamese

Duration: 1 hr 16 mins 24 secs

Producer : Narendra N Sinha, Bhaskar Dutta

Premiere Show: Kolkata International Film Festival, 2022

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