

Critique

**Dipsikha Bhagawati**

***Sandhyarag: The Tale of Paradoxical Surrender***



The eldorado of the silver screen has always been invested in its contemporary societal concerns - in a broader sense - and might include socio-political, historical, economic, or other crucial and critical junctures of the tour de force of life. The incessant odyssey of civilisation records the multifold territory of humans, coined as history. The history of every braveheart that holds the happiness and suffering of every human being is life. Films are a medium, a massive laboratory of applied and analytical psychology, where societal concerns and relationship issues are established in multiple dimensions, emotions, sometimes with all its states of their conscious and subconscious identity in different parts of the world and the visible organic bondings, where various styles and subjects are tested,

celebrated, rejected and replaced. Themes, connected to the squares of life, are the major concerns of the directors with nuanced psychic lenses, examining and establishing life as "what it is" and how situations become the vital capacity of some unpredictable outcomes born to their organic origin.

Dr Bhabendranath Saikia, an avuncular director with all his unfiltered humane sensitivity, established the issues of the middle class and lower-middle-class stratum of the native society through their flowing non-fixations but never offered any magical deus ex machina to project himself as either authentic or preachy. His debut film, *Sandhyarag (Evening Melody, 1977)*, produced by himself, highlights the confused conflict between urban and rural life, the

outcomes of dire poverty and the multidimensional phases of life of the two parallel protagonists - Charu (Kashmiri Saikia Baruah) and Taru (Runu Devi) in chronographic order. The avant-garde genre, the montages of Neorealism ethically executed by a man of physics decoded the inexorable agony of situational surrender, essentially never advocating any portico theory of patriarchy or so, no one is compelled by anyone. The exploitative attitude of the lecherous son of Taru's employer is set in the circle as a typical example of mediocratic exploitation that can't exactly be set as a paradigm of a generic character of a concerned class.

Post-independent Assam had to experience a lot of socio-political disruptions and changes, such as the Assam movement, border conflict, the 1962 China invasion, and the strategically spontaneous, nonchalant grip of urbanisation. The civil narratives, though, sometimes fail to justify these sensitive societal concerns; it's also noteworthy that directors like Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia depicted the issue of urban migration with such mastery in two of his films that the issue became a collective "humane" problem, rather than being either individualistic or customised, established in a timeless timeline. The films are *Sandhyarag* (1977) and *Itihas*. *Sandhyarag* (adapted from the director's own short story *Banaprastha*, 1969) depicted the typical characteristics of the safely uprising middle-class community in a social hierarchy of the seventies through the Das family and through the psychic lens of Charu, the protagonist and her sister Taru, who too worked as a housemaid in another middle-class family. The film portrays two phases of

their lives - the comfortable one in their employer's household and the utterly miserable one after they return to their village. Charu and Taru were so merged in their urban flow, though in a restricted way, that they found it difficult to cope with their poverty-stricken life once again, as habit becomes second nature. Being exhausted, Charu finds security by surrendering to an impotent man - Moti. Charu, her sister, and her old mother wanted to get rid of the dire crisis. Their Surrender to a sterile person is an allegorical symbol of the void of their trial - how the habit of an urban lifestyle for a few years had turned out to be a lifetime challenge to sustain the rest. Almost in a parallel way, Kiron, the starlet of Saikia's other film '*Kolahal*' surrenders to Badal for security after her husband's demise, as some males of her locality constantly harass her. Here, the director's focus is centralised on a particular area of society, termed an "unintended city", as coined by Jai Sen in his essay "The Unintended City: An Essay on the City of the Poor" (1975). Saikia looks at the logic of the City-Village binary to realise that the rural element in the city is indispensable to the development and progress of the city because the people in this category are the ones who provide services to the middle class and the wealthy. The village has slowly become a utopia, and in this dichotomic process, the city is indeed parallelly dependent on them rather than on the city. This issue is also established with all its finer craft in the Academy Award-winning '*Parasite*'.

The pervasive mediocrity of *Sandhyarag* is well explained by Utpal Dutta, a national figure in film criticism, in his write-up, *Filmmaker Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia*

that 'through his stories, Dr Saikia portrayed the humane face of the middle class in our society, the manifold emotions of this class – their happiness or sadness, rights and wrongs, fulfillments and losses-all came through his lucid writings in a broad perspective, with a unique style solely belonged to him.'

Usually, women held a special configuration in his films - they may be fragile or strong. They're not preached as 'superwomen' but either as rebels or as silent acceptors. In *Sandhyarag*, Charu's surrender to Moti doesn't really seem pitiable or something that "she shouldn't do", but something very normal, scrutinising their collective state of life. It happens, and so it did. Saikia didn't try to show anything that could sound that heroic, instead the seeds of life from where another journey begins. Poor finances are the root of all unfairness, and the middle and its complementary inferiority are prone to it in every turning of civilisation - producing powerlessness. The self-contradictory facets of contemporary mediocrity are reflected through the Das family, as they never contact Charu once she's off her employment. The public lecture of Mr Das is a clear reflection of the paradox existing between his words and activities. After the demise of the head of the family, Putuli is thrown into the dark with two young daughters, and there's no comparatively easy way left except sending them for manual work in the bourgeois families of the city. In Federico Fellini's timeless couture *La Strada*

(1954), when the protagonist Gelsomina is forced by her mom to go with Zampano for livelihood, the situations share a proximity, which might be their social canvases are different.

Charu's marrying Moti and his impotence are not extraordinary. All associative pleasures and necessities take a rear seat when confronted with hunger. Moti might have sexual pitfalls, but he's simultaneously ambitious, dresses up well, and wants to have a taxi of his own - in other words, he wants to uplift his long-time status from an employee to an independent master of his finances. Marriage is here devised as a symbol of financial and social security, the redemptive measure of "abolishing the label of slavery" beyond the generically analogous carnal goals.

The suggestive mise en scene, executed through B. N. Saikia's aesthetic filmic lenses vividly frame up the collective mediocrity of *Sandhyarag* through close-up and medium-long shots. The parent source of the screenplay of *Sandhyarag* - 'Banaprastha'-loosely means to become detached from material concerns and devote time to quietness. The picturesque visual imageries not only explore the nuances of the paradoxical paradigm of a society at its volatility but also the essential theories of human survival with all its struggle and strength, compulsion, and surrender beyond any commissioned definition of social laws.