

Portrayal Of Place Attachment Of Protagonists: An Analysis Of Selected Films Of Indian Filmmaker Jahnu Barua

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Abstract

This research paper explores the concept of ‘place attachment of protagonists’ as portrayed in hisselected works spanning from 1982 to 2014. The research study considers a span of 32 years. Thepaper assesses and evaluates the portrayal of place attachment in the Assamese regional languagefilms of Jahnu Barua [Padma Shri (2003), Padma Bhushan (2015) and winner of 12 National Awards]. The research approach undertaken by the research study is qualitative. The sampling was non-probability sampling under which judgmental sampling was used. Twelve films Assamese feature films of Jahnu Barua were identified. The paper considers 12 Assamese featurefilms of Jahnu Barua.

Keywords Jahnu Barua, Assamese cinema, regional cinema, place attachment

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite such huge contributions to mainstream Bollywood and Regional Cinema, very little is known of the work of Jahnu Barua [Padma Shri (2003) and Padma Bhushan (2015)] in the academic sphere. The current body of literature on Assamese cinema and its filmmakers is very restricted and limited. As per the information based on public domains the preliminary observationis that a very less work is existing which deal in detail on the films of Jahnu Barua. While films have been reviewed and decoded extensively very few attempts have been made to decipher the socio-political message by juxtaposing the film’s setting with the realities of the Assamese society. This research paper will be a humble attempt at understanding the inherent message behind one ofthe carefully chosen themes of the films of the film maker –‘place attachment’.

There are twelve films of Jahnu Barua that we

will be taking as the sample of the research paper and try to analyze the concept of ‘place attachment’ of the characters of the films.

1.1. ‘Aparoopā’

Released in the year 1982, the film talks about the plight of women and dared to touch upon the sensitive issues of love outside marriage and live-in relationships.

1.2. ‘Pāpori’

Released in the year 1986, the film touched upon the issues of a woman who has been raped but cannot lodge an official police complaint as the society would look down upon her if the incidentwould be made public.

1.3. ‘Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai’

Released in the year 1987, the film highlights the plight of poor agricultural workers and their fightagainst the capitalist land owners.

1.4. ‘Banani’

Released in the year 1990, the film captures the life of forest tribes and the man-elephant conflict prevalent in Assam.

1.5. 'Firingoti'

Released in the year 1992, the film captures the plight of a widowed woman and her fight for survival.

1.6. 'Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door'

Released in the year 1995, the film talks about the urban and rural divide. It has facets of child psychology.

1.7. 'Kuhkhal'

Released in the year 1998, the film highlights the sacrifices of Kuhkhal Lonwar – a freedom fighter from the state of Assam that many people from the mainland do not know about.

1.8. 'Pokhi'

Released in the year 2000, Pokhi tells the story of a protagonist who is a little girl and how she copes up with her life after being orphaned at a very young age.

1.9. 'Konikar Ramdhenu'

Released in the year 2003, this film is another story with the protagonist as a child who is victim of sexual abuse and his entire story of rehabilitation.

1.10. 'Tora'

Released in the year 2004, this film deals with the psychology of a child in the world of conflict among the elders.

1.11. 'Baandhon'

Released in the year 2012, here the protagonists are 72 year old couple who have filed for a

divorce and how their world turns around with the death of their only grandson in the 26/11 Mumbai attack.

1.12. 'Ajeyo'

Released in the year 2014 it is a benchmark film to highlight communal peace when Hasina marries the Hindu protagonist. It touches upon important subjects of untouchability, widow remarriage and social reforms.

2. THE CONCEPT OF 'PLACE ATTACHMENT'

“Place attachment substance or is subsumed by a variety of analogous ideas including topophilia, place identity, insideness, genres of place, sense of place or rootedness, environmental embeddedness, community sentiment and identity to name a few.” (Altman and Low, 2012). Altman and Low, 2012 cited biological, environmental, psychological and socio-cultural factors

for place attachments.

(Stedman, 2003) defines place attachment as “one dimension of total place sensitivity and positive emotional attachment that develop between place and individual”.

(Rubinstein, 1993) defines the concept as “a positive experience of place is the consequence of positive beliefs and emotions that individual create in interaction with place and giving meaning to it”.

(Kyle et al., 2004) defines the word as “the emphasis on emotional communication with place based on itself and when interaction took place during facing with place, it is based on attachment theory and belonging to society setting than mere devotion to place”.

(Shumaker and Taylor, 1983) defines the concept

as “positive emotional dependence between place and person in neighborhood units that social groups, physical appropriateness, individual personality and perceived position of place where people live play important role in it”.

3. OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS:

We can find how the characters in the film ‘Aparooa’ - Aparooa and Rana Phukan were attracted to the place as it brought back fond memories of their friendship since childhood and college. The opening sequence of the film is a tracking shot of a village through a window with the background sound of a running train establishing that the subject is looking out at his village through the train window. This shot fades into a tracking shot of the village along with some stationary shots that match the background score which translates as “...I am like the home-coming bird winging to a mother’s warmth nestled in the village....This is not just a village but it is my mother... and I am like that home-bound bird that needs space in the lap of the mother.” The lyrics of the song is very significant as it talks from the perspective of the lead character, Rana Phukan who is heading home after being away for four years. The song acts like his mouthpiece to claim his affection towards the village and the expectation that he has that the village too will provide him with undisturbed peace in its lap. Here, the attachment to the village is highlighted as ‘place attachment’.

In the film ‘Papori’ we can see how the protagonist's life is distraught after her daughter had died after being paralyzed after falling off from a tree, the husband being accused of a murder which might lead to his death sentence and eventually she herself being raped at her home. However, throughout the film Papori’s

life centered around her home where she had vivid memories of her daughter and her husband. Her attachment to the house was so much that no matter what she was dealing with around her, she would always come back home and the film ends with her finally uniting with her husband. Here, the place is the ‘house’ to which Papori was so attached to.

‘Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai’ portrays the place attachment of the land which belonged to the Protagonist - Rakeshwar along with Taru (wife), Mohen (son) and Moni (daughter). The film shows how a local politician Sanatan Sharma breaks the news to Rakeshwar that the deed of the land belongs to the former as Rakeshwar’s father failed to release the field from mortgage making Sanatan Sharma the rightful owner of the land. Rakeshwar protests saying that he was a witness to his father paying back the money with interest and that he had been paying the revenue tax for the land. The entire plot of the film surrounds around the fight that Rakeshwar had to put up to get his plot of land back. In the process he had to mortgage the jewellery of his wife, sell his cattle and also put up his son as a servant at the village headman’s house. Here, the place attachment is that of the ‘land’ of which Rakeshwar was the rightful owner and how he was deprived of it because of the money and muscle power of the rich and powerful.

‘Banani’ is a film where Jahnu Barua has portrayed the place of attachment as ‘the place where one works’. The plot revolves around the life of the protagonist Mr Tapan Barua who has been transferred to a village called Torajuli as a Forest Range Officer where there is rampant wood smuggling. He has come to the village with his wife Ruby. Ruby has been leading a lonely life with a sick son who needs treatment. The treatment has not been possible till now due to dearth of money and frequent transfers of the husband, Tapan Barua. Throughout the film there has been many sequences of her monologue which falls into the deaf ears of Mr.

Barua. She cribs that she and their son deserves his attention and time but Mr. Barua is always silent or reiterates her of his official duties and responsibilities. Frustrated, she finally asks the question if he is always so busy with his work then why did he marry her. The whole film is the struggle of Mr Barua to put the culprits to task ultimately leading to another transfer. Mr. Barua despite his official transfer has finally succeeded in achieving the larger social good as the forest tribes have united together

against wood and trees smuggling. Now, it is not one man fighting against injustice, but an entire village. Mr. Barua's ideals will continue to live on in the hearts of each villager. Hence, Jahnu Barua portrays that the place of attachment can also be with the 'place of one's work'.

'Firingoti' is the film where we can notice the portrayal of 'place-attachment' in three stages of a women's life. The first stage is at her parent's home, the next is at her in-law's home and third is 'at the place of her work' where she finally finds peace and cause to her life after being a widow. Here, the first two stages have both 'attachment' and 'withdrawal of attachment'. It would not be appropriate to use the word 'detachment' here as the protagonist – Ritu keeps on revisiting her memories from the other two places of her earlier attachments.

'Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door' is a film where Jahnu Barua portrays the place of attachment of the Protagonist Powal and his grandson Suman Dihingia from one son who along with his wife died when the boat capsized in the rising flood in the river. Here, Powal's place of attachment is the river on which he ferries passengers on his little boat to earn his livelihood. The entire plot is about how a proposed construction of the bridge connecting the two banks would impact the life of Powal and his grandson. One more perspective that can be derived from the plot is that of the 'place attachment' of Powal's other

son - Hemanta to the city where the son has settled down with his wife and children.

Released in the year 1998, the film highlights the sacrifices of Kukhhal Konwar – a freedom fighter from the state of Assam that many people from the mainland do not know about. In the film 'Kukhhal', the place of attachment is that of the motherland, the state of Assam. The attachment for the freedom of the soil is so much that Kukhhal preferred to go down the gallows to fight against British rule.

'Pokhi' is a film that revolves around the life of the child protagonist – Pokhi. She was born in Lohpohia village on the banks of the Dihing River. Her parents died when she was an infant and her maternal uncle and aunt raised her up. All she knew of her parents was the fact they were cremated near the river and so, she would spend most of her time around it thinking if the river had taken the ashes to the sea. Here, her place of attachment is by the river bank where she introspects and reflects on her thoughts. Her second place of attachment is not any physical place but where her grandmother stays because she is attached to the person. She avoids her grandmother's house because of her initial repulsion to her grandfather who seemed to be a good person; but on a wrong path of unethicality. Later, after her grandmother dies, she eventually, through her consistent efforts, makes her grandfather a better person and gets attached to him as their bond grows. Hence, Jahnu Barua brings out this theme that sometimes human beings get attached to a place where their loved ones stay.

'Konikar Ramdhenu' is a film where Kukoi, a Deori boy who was turned into a juvenile delinquent and Mr. Barua, a Bodo warden seeks peace and shelter in each other's company. Here, the juvenile's place of attachment is his fictitious hometown which he had created in his mind which had zero semblance with the reality of his true life and identity. On the other hand, the Warden's 'place

of attachment' is his hometown where he eventually takes Kukoi to live with. Jahnu Barua has repeatedly reiterated people's workplace as their 'place of attachment'. In this film too, Mr. Barua has a strong sense of attachment with the Juvenile Home where he had spent most part of his professional life.

'Tora' is a film wherein we see a different kind of 'place attachment'. The protagonist – Tora is a child who is attached to an old lady neighbour and the calf of their house. She enjoys that space where there is no demarcation or fence between the two houses. Jahnu Barua brings us into an era where there are no physical fences to demarcate boundaries. It is a society where everyone shares affinity with one another and there are no strict ideas of physical property too. Infact, we can compare Tora's attachment to the neighbour grandmother (Tora) to Pokhi's attachment to her grandmother or to Kukoi's attachment to the warden grandfather Mr Barua (Konikar Ramdhenu). All the three protagonists were attached to the place where their loved one's stayed.

'Baandhon' portrays the bond between an elderly couple who lives alone in the city with one domestic help while their only grandson studies in the city of Mumbai. The couple had already lost their son and their daughter-in-law. One of the initial scenes of the film establishes that the lives of the couple revolves around their home named 'Xaoni Kutir' in the name of the elderly man's wife. In the entire film Jahnu Barua highlighted through the plot that the couple had no friends in the city except for an advocate and his family who once lived as a tenant in the elderly couple's house. Their only 'place attachment' was with their home. Many scenes in the plot reveals that the couple were also not interacting with the neighbours and had no idea who lived around them. His son had died five years back and the daughter-in-law had expired many years before. He has been staying at his son's house for last 18 years.

Except for the market and the bank, they don't have any contact with the outside world. He does not even recognise the next-door neighbour with this explanation that they are from the village and because they do not understand the complexities of the city life, they chose to keep only to themselves.

Through 'Ajeyo', Jahnu Barua brings in a new perspective to the concept of 'place attachment'. Here, too, he brings in multiple dimensions of the phrase. The protagonist, Gajen has an attachment for his motherland resonating Madan's sentiments of freedom struggle. The plot also revolves around the love story of Gajen and the Muslim settler Hasina who later was accepted by Gajen's grandmother to be inducted into the family as the grand daughter-in-law. Hasina's attachment to her place of refuge also portrays a strong sense of place attachment. The story touches on how the Muslim settlers in the alluvial sand bank must submit their application to the Land officer for permanent land settlement. Highland deposited in river by formation of silt is also called as alluvial sand bank or river highland. The teacher, one of the characters in the film, expresses his doubts over their land settlement claim as the highland has no stability of long term existence given the uncertainty of the river. Jahnu Barua portrays the Muslim settlers with empathy as they are not harming the state in any way. Hasina's father is Mansur. On the other hand Mansur is a Muslim settler who Gajen loves and respects because the former is a true Gandhian who respects the nation. Mansur was against going to another country as in his heart they were true Indians. Hence, the 'place attachment' portrayed in the broader sense is that of the 'nation' that Gajen, Madan, Mansur and Hasina were attached to.

4. CONCLUSION:

Tuan (1974) pointed to a factor like root in place that is correlation and integrity of person and place. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) in their study of place attachment found that, "place

attachment deviated from development period memories and communication took place in areas not just a simple mere place. He believes that we remember a place that we experience and favorite adventures and place is part of our experiences and might be a symbol of that experience". These concepts would hold true for 'Aparoopaa' who was attached to the places where she and Rana met and had memories together. It would also be true for 'Papori' who was attached to her home as she had memories with her daughter. The same applies for 'Baandhon' where the elderly couple were attached to the home where they lived with the memories of their son.

Shamai (1991) highlighted different scales to measure the sense of place in which he stated

that sacrifice for a place is the highest form of 'place attachment'. This holds true with how Jahnu Barua has portrayed the characters of Kuhkhal Konwar in the film 'Kuhkhal Konwar' and Madanand Gajen in the film 'Ajeyo'.

Jahnu Barua, through his films has not only touched upon the topic of Internal displacement but also the attachment of the original place of all its major protagonists.

The story plots are different but somewhere a core category is emerging where we can see the 'place attachment' of the protagonists

A few recurring concepts of 'place attachment' that has been observed in the films of Jahnu Barua has been represented in a tabular format below:

| Sr No | Name of Film | Place of Attachment (Concepts) |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Aparoopaa | Village |
| 2 | Papori | Home |
| 3 | Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai | Home, Land |
| 4 | Banani | Place of work |
| 5 | Firingoti | Parent's home, In-law's home, Place of work |
| 6 | Hkhagoroloi Bohu Door | Home, Village, Place of work |
| 7 | Kuhkhal Konwar | Nation, Motherland |
| 8 | Pokhi | Place where loved ones reside |
| 9 | Konikar Ramdhenu | Place where loved ones reside |
| 10 | Tora | Place where loved ones reside |
| 11 | Baandhon | Home |
| 12 | Ajeyo | Nation, Motherland, Place of Refuge |

Hence, we can see a very strong contribution of filmmaker Jahnu Barua to the representation of the concept of 'place attachment' through the characters of his films. And here, the observation is that the portrayal is not only through the protagonists but also the other characters of his films.

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