

present Assamese film scenario

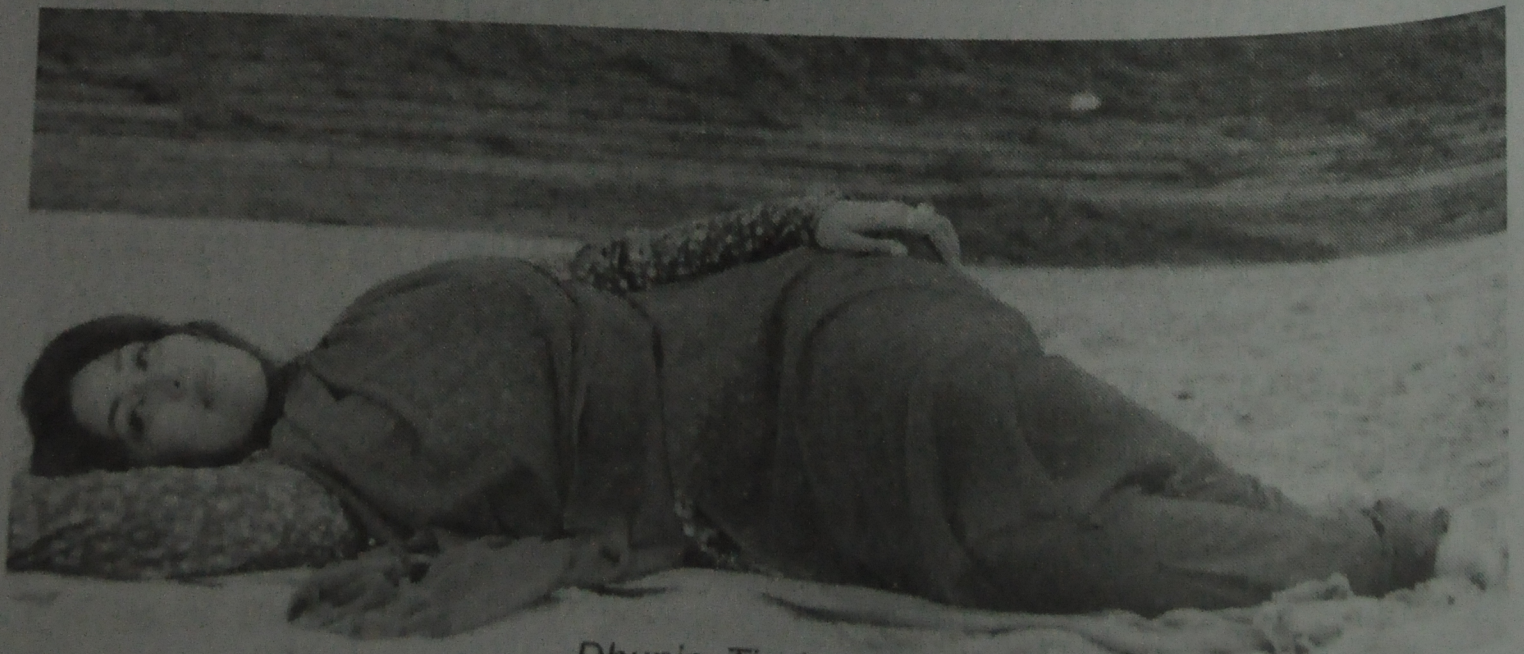
Apurba Kumar Das

After *Joymati*, the first Assamese film by Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala in 1935, Assamese films till date has crossed 300. The Assamese film industry has undergone many crisis during the period and till date. A number of Assamese films and personalities have won national and international recognition. But even after seven decades, the present Assamese film scenario is bleak and the industry is in the process of getting extinct. The condition of the Assamese cinema is not in good shape. In the period from late forties to the early seventies a few Assamese films were released. Only in the late seventies, the number of Assamese films considerably increased. But growth was at a snail's pace. There were 19 films in 2002 and 17 in 2003. In 2004, it came down to 13 films. Meanwhile, of late, 2005 marked the worsening of the scene of the Assamese film industry with just seven films released that year. Then in 2006, there were only six films, as if preparing for the worse. The 2007 had only five films to show, the industry gradually seems to be going to death bed. Incidentally out of five films one was not done in celluloid format. 2007 had the lowest number of films released—that too with very poor run. The audience refused to accept those films with some kind of new themes and experiments.

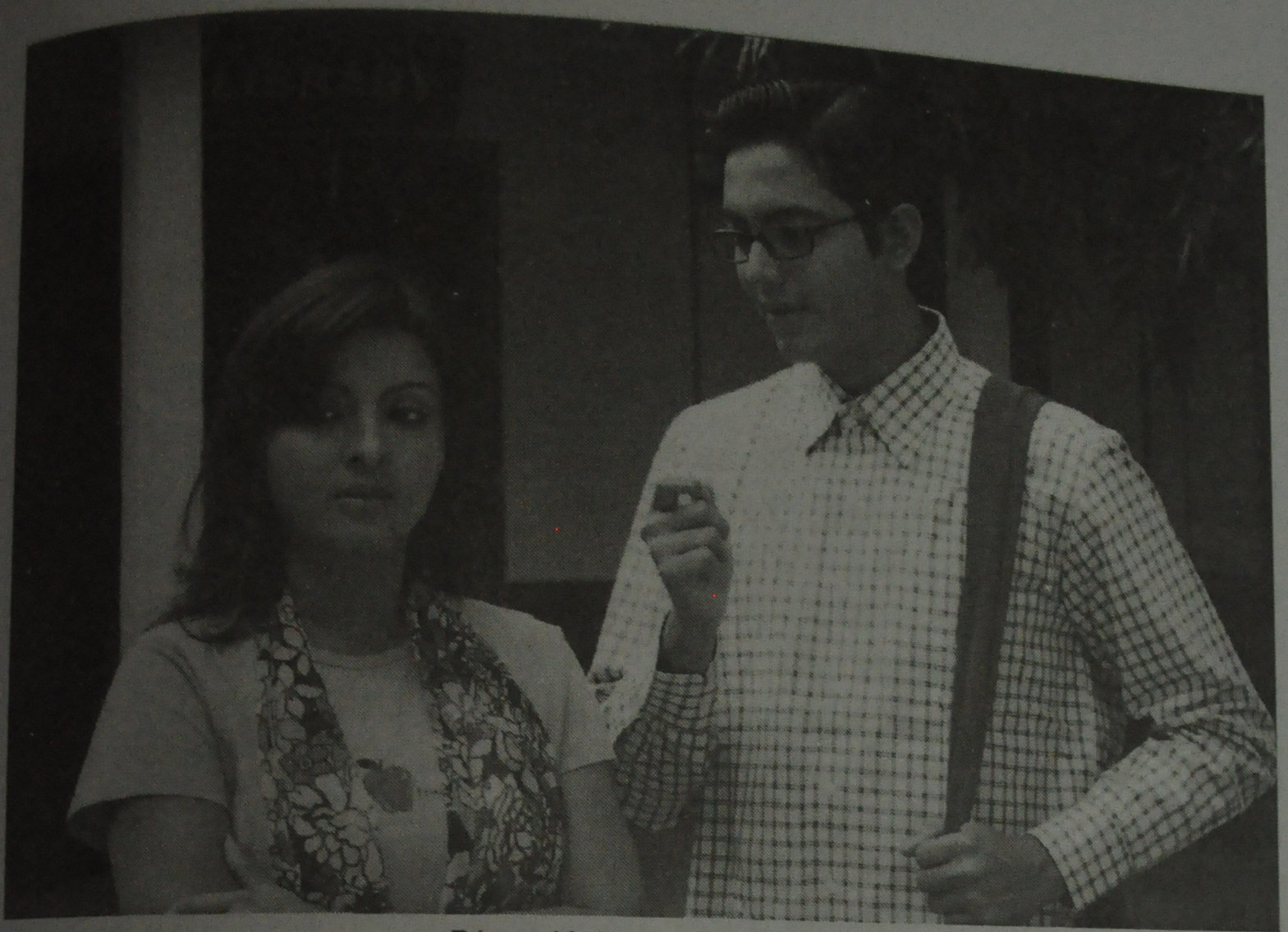
The first film of the year was *Ahir Bhairav*, the first Assamese film to be shot entirely in London. The film resolves round a good story—dealing with Schizophrenia, written by Pankaj Thakur. The second movie in the last year was *Nilakantha*, directed by Rajani Barman and made on a realistic story of the apathy shown to folk artists in the name of modernisation. The third film was *Jonda Iman Gunda* directed by Chandra Mudoï. In the last part of the year, *Tomar Baabey*, a first of its kind film made in Assam was directed by Utpal Das. The film was done in the reverse telelcine method. Opposite of telecine it is the process through which the electronic form of viewing is transferred to celluloid film. The new technology has inspired the producers who want to make good cinema with a low budget. And the last film of 2007 was *Joimoti* by national award winning director Manju Bora. Though the film is appreciated at different circles for its making, it was not able to attract

audience.

Despite the grim scenario, there appeared some positive aspect in last year. *Jatinga Ityadi* directed by Sanjib Sabhapandit censored in 2006 was selected for the Indian Penorama of the International Film Festival of Goa this year. *Aideu*, made on the life and times of the first heroine of the first Assamese film *Joimati* by legendary Jyotiprasad Agarwala in 1935 was screened in different international film festivals and won accolades. The film is directed by Aroop Manna—an upcoming promising director. *Kadam Tole Krishna Nache*—a musical feature film showcasing *satriya* culture and directed by Suman Haripriya got the National Award for Best Picture in the regional language category. The film was screened in several film festivals in the US and South Asia in the documentary and short film category several films made by filmmakers from Assam received national and international recognition. *Let's Rain Dawn* made by Bhaskarjyoti Das was screened at the prestigious Cannes film Festival. In Boston, Anisha Sarma's *Freedom At the Edge* and in New York Sadananda Gogoi's *Darkness of the Century* got rave reviews. Prerana Sarma Barbarah got the National Award for the Best Anthropological film for the year 1905, titled *Spirit of the Graceful Lineage* based on the matrilmonial tradition of Meghalaya. Prerana Sarma Barbarah's another Assamese documentary film titled *Echos of Sunshine* based on the life and struggle of ULFA insurgent turned social activist Jugal Bhuyan has been nominated for the New York International Film Festival, which is scheduled to take place in the month of March this year. The film is first of its kind as insurgents and insurgency in the north-east have always been regarded as a virgin plot for the filmmakers across the country but seldom did the region's age-old problem witness international attention be it through celluloid or any other popular medium. The film depicts the futility of militancy. The film is produced by Bibi Devi Barbarah.



Dhunia Tirotabor 2008



Dhan Kuberor Dhan 2008

Presently there are few films in the making or nearing completion. These include *Dhunia Tirotabor* by debutant director Pradyut Kumar Deka, *Dhan Kuberor Dhan*, a comic film by Dhiraj Kashyap, *Aai Kot Nai* by Manju Borah and *Ajan Fakir Saheb* by another debutant director Asif Iqbal Hussain.

All said and done, to quote internationally acclaimed film director Jahnu Barua—"We are in a dilapidated situation from where it is becoming more and more difficult day by day to recover. Assamese cinema is in the process of getting extinct. The closing of Theatres, unchecked video films, decrease in number of celluloid films etc are the signs of Assamese cinema moving towards the inevitable death—unless some measures are taken right now, ten years later the State will be left with nothing but occasional statements like, 'we also used to make films once upon a time.' "□

The writer is a film critic, journalist and he was a founder secretary of 'Gauhati Cine Club' in 1965.