



Contribution of Bengalis in film journals and journalism of India.

Author :Dr. Jyotirmay Deb, Faculty of Techno India University Department of BFA-Digital film making –VFX

ABSTRACT

While analyzing the contribution of the Bengalis in film journalism of India, it is important to know about the timeline of the Indian films. Here, we are going to discuss about two aspects, - firstly, the history of the film magazines and secondly, the nature of the articles (structure pattern & content) in those magazines and their evolution.

There had been developmental changes from the pre-independence silent films to post-independence golden era of films. With the developmental changes, the film criticism, too, changed with advancing time. Film journalism was not limited to magazines anymore, it made its presence felt in television as well as internet.

This paper attempts to discuss the transition of film journalism from the first Indian film magazine, 'Bijoli' to the present times in context of Bengal.

Key words: *Bengalis in film journalism; Indian history of film journalism ; Bengali Film Magazines.*

The history of evolution of the film magazines in India :

If we consider 'Raja Harishchandra' (1913) (Chatterjee, 2012) by Dadasaheb Phalke as the first Indian film (most of the film scholars refuse to accept Hiralal Sen's 'Prince of Persia' or 'Alibaba' as first Indian films because they were the recorded versions of the theatres), Indian Cinema has completed 100 years. While searching and simultaneously recording the history of Indian film journalism, it was concluded that 'Bijoli' published from 1920 onwards, was the first Indian film magazine. Although it is difficult to say whether other film magazines existed before Bijoli's launching year due to lack of evidences. Bijoli was published as a weekly magazine. (B. N. Ahuja) Although before Bijoli, there were other Bengali magazines that published film related articles. For example, in 1913, the first issue of Jaladhar Sen and Amulyacharan Vidyabhushan's 'Bharatborshiyo' had an article titled 'Bioscope' written by Pramath Nath Bhattacharyya. 'Bharatborshiyo' also published Narendranath Deb's article 'Chhaya Mayar Bichitra Rahasya' (The Strange Mystery of Shadow and Illusion) that explained various film making techniques. In 1948, Gour Chandra Chattopadhyay launched a monthly film magazine, - 'Chitrabani'. Thought provoking articles on Cinema were published in 'Chitrabani' making it one of the most significantly read magazines by the then elite society. (Manna)

It cannot be stated that Bijoli magazine acted as the start of Bengali Film Journalism only. For a long time, Bijoli continued to be a platform bringing together best reading materials on Cinema for its patrons. Bijoli was launched by Nalinikanta Sarkar, Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Sacchidananda Sengupta, and writer

as well as film maker Dinesh Ranjan Das. Just right after Bijoli, Maju Maja, a Gujarati film magazine started getting published from Bombay (now Mumbai). Maju Maja was started by Dr. T.W. Trivedi. In the year 1926, another Bengali film magazine, - 'Photo Play' started getting published. A year after Photo Play's launch, 'Bioscope; magazine started by Shailajananda Mukherjee got a huge popularity among the patrons. Then came 'Chitralekha' in the year 1934. This magazine had a high literary value that kept the readers mesmerized. The editor of 'Chitralekha' was Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (not the famous Bengali novelist of Pather Panchali.)

During the time period i.e., 1920 – 1934 that we are discussing here, Calcutta (Kolkata) was the heart of Film making in India. Therefore, its quite natural that the number of published Film magazines will be more in Calcutta. A few years later, in 1938, another film magazine called 'Indian Screen Gadget' started circulating. From that year, film productions also started in Bombay (Now Mumbai). During 1951, the Indian Express Group started publishing film magazine 'Screen'. However, in 1952, a path breaking event in the history of film journalism occurred with the launch of the 'Film Fare' magazine. A year after, the 'Film Fare' magazine started organizing the 'Film Fare award' which is still considered as one of the prestigious awards in Indian Cinema. Around the same time, The Calcutta Film Society, started by eminent critic Chidananda Dasgupta, directors like Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen, launched a quarterly film magazine. This film magazine contained quality articles on Indian Cinema

A commentary on the writing style of film articles.

Although, English film magazines have spearheaded recently, Bengali was the language in which film articles were first written. It was the same language in which film magazines were first started in India. Presently, there are a few Hindi, Malayalam and Bengali film magazines in circulation with the English ones. Films took a prominent position in the entertainment scene in post-independence India. Before 'Bijoli', around the year 1913, a few magazines had separate sections where films were discussed

However, the present approach to film reviewing and analysis is different from the approach of the film journalists who wrote in Bijoli and other film magazines during 1920s. The then film essayists and critics like Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay or Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (neither of them the respective namesake Bengali novelists) stressed on discussing about the film making techniques, essence of Cinema, the reasons that would attract audience to watch particular film and etc while they wrote in different film magazines. It might be because during that time there were no concepts of super star, star, matinee idol. The critics concentrated on the content of the films rather than the actors. There were informative articles on the then actors which got popularity among some readers. The readers were interested to read about the then screen actors like Devika Rani, Ashok Kumar, Pramathesh Barua. During the Post-independence period, we can notice the increase of articles on matinee idols in different popular film magazines like Ulto Rath and Film Fare. So, around 1957, two different approaches came into existence – serious film articles by Chidananda Dasgupta, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and the likes on one side and on the other light hearted popular writings on matinee idols and super stars by other writers. Chidananda Dasgupta is considered to be an eminent film critic and journalist in the Indian film journalism. He had written over 2000 essays and articles on World Cinema or Serious Cinema in different magazines. His 'The Painted Face – Study in Indian Popular Cinema' was a well appreciated film essay of that time. (Gupta, 1991)

A new horizon dawned upon the Indian film journalism in 1984 with the inclusion of the award for Best Film Critic in the National Film Awards. A Swarna Kamal medal and Rs. 75000 prize money is given away to the Best Film Critic every year. Swapan Mallick won the first ever award for Best Film Critic on the 32nd National Film Awards held in 1984. His medium of writing was English. In 1986, as a Bengali, Chidananda Dasgupta received this prestigious award. This article has already mentioned about him but there is a need for elaboration on Dasgupta's style of writing on films. Cinema was never a separate entity in his articles, instead, he expressed Cinema as an expression of art forms. He presented films as a

conglomeration of all existing art forms. For this particular perspective, Chidananda Dasgupta's writings gave an essence of deep Cinematic understanding and continuously communicated with social, psychological and historical changes. After Dasgupta, eminent film critics like Brajeshwar Madan (Hindi), Manmohan Chadha (Hindi), K.N.T Shastri (Telugu), I Sanmugadas (Malayalam) won the National Film Award for Best Film Critic. They created lasting impressions on the minds of their readers for writing on films in their own respective native languages (Society, 2011)

We will discuss about Dr. Shoma A Chatterjee's work next. Her contribution as a film journalist is so immense that without a description of her nature of work, the chronology of Indian film journalism won't be complete. She received the Best National Film Critic Award twice⁵. Her style of film journalism was always different from the well-trodden path of film journalism. Her selection of topics to write on and interviews – both were different from others. (Chatterji, 2021) In later years, names of Sudhir Bose, Deepa Gehlot, Saibal Chatterjee, V.K. Joseph and a few others can be counted as eminent film journalists. Although, all these critics who had been named here are known for their brilliant film journalism, many feel that there has been a qualitative downfall in recent film journalism. In a press conference held in New Delhi (PTI, 2002) Sudhir Bose, eminent film journalist said, "In recent times, the central theme of film journalism revolves around film gossips and light but attractive trivia on films instead of intense discussions". He also mentioned, "The journalists are shaking off the responsibility of enriching the people on films through mass media". In most cases, this psychological change depends on the editorial board. He sadly remarked that many a times, in order to write a crisp copy for news desk, he too needs to shorten up his articles and that results in a less-detailed film analysis. As a cure to this incompleteness, every newspaper should start giving more prominence to film journalism.

During the 1950s, the then editor of Times of India, Shyam Nath, wrote a complete analytical film review where he discussed on Satyajit Ray's 'Pather Panchali'. The article can be deemed as a precious jewel which cannot be easily found these days. Everything changes with time, so does film journalism. In recent times, many film directors dislike film critics and film journalism. These directors feel that it is difficult for any journalist to assess the film on the aspects like content quality, development and progression of protagonist-antagonist-narrative, set design, costume etc. by watching the film only once. But many film journalists are bound to do so due to the nature of their duty. Cinema had been perceived as a low-grade art form in India and the educated people who worked as film journalists were not given high regards. For instance, in Chitrapat magazine, an advertisement wanting Women Film Journalists said 'Wanted cultured lady only', which clearly explains the status of film journalism in India. (Jain, 1934;) (Majumdar, 2009)

Conclusion:

Cinema has a unique language of its own that cannot be expressed always in a written form. (Daniel Arijon, 1991) There will be an influence of the present social structure and lifestyle on journalism. But the journalists need to give importance to the films and their language while writing film related articles (Tim Bywater, 1989). That's a significant message from the essence of film journalism.

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