

Manipuri Film Industry

M Bimolchandra Singh¹

¹Research Scholar (UGC NET-JRF), Department of Journalism and Creative Writing, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh-176215, India.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24321/2395.3810.201805>

Abstract

In this article, researcher critically analyzes the multiple challenges faced by Manipuri film industry. Manipuri film industry, even though a very small film industry it is, has been obviously giving a big contribution to the Indian film Industry, and even to the international scenario since 1972 with the production of its first feature film 'Matamgi Manipur'. The State bagged 57 National Film Awards - 27 for feature films and 30 for non-feature (Short and Documentary) films till 2014. Unfortunately, for the last two decades, Manipuri film industry has been diminishing its prestige of making international and national acclaimed films. Hence, the researcher is very much curious to critically analyze the challenges faced by Manipuri film industry. For this study, researcher conducted a telephonic interview with a senior Manipuri film journalist of *The Poknapham*, a Daily Manipuri Newspaper which has the largest circulation in Manipur and also used the official documents published by Directorate of Film Festival, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Keywords: Challenges, Celluloid and Manipur Film Development Corporation, Manipuri film, National Awards, Prospect

Introduction

Film is the image of the society. Film provides us a way through which we can open our society into multiple worlds. Before the invention of Cinema, the humankind gathered around the campfire and listen to stories. Cinema is a modern campfire. They remind us of who we are, where we have come from, and where we want to go.⁴ Film is an art of audio-visual storytelling. Film plays a significant role in society and we can understand the different expression of different societies through films.

Film is a medium of communication rich with social implications, created within different social, historical and cultural contexts.⁴ Not only does it serve as a platform for presenting rich cultures and traditions and for highlighting the economic, social and political issues, but it also provides entertainment to the people.

There is no doubt in saying that film has an amazing influence on the society. The cultures, tradition and social problems are exposed in film. Children and grownups are spending more and more time in movies. With the

development of new technologies and appliances, film can be easily accessible at home and in public place. Film has better advantages over the other media like print media. It combines both audio and visual thereby appealing to both the eyes and ears.

And Since 1936, Manipur started its contribution to the Indian cinema with the documentation of its first Manipuri Documentary Film, "Hiyang Tannaba".¹² Manipur was part of the vibrant Film Society Movement along with the rest of the country in 1960's-70's. In 1972, for the first time, Manipur could gift a great contribution to the Indian Cinema with officially releasing its first completed Manipuri feature film, "Matamgi Manipur". Manipur has bagged 57 National Film Awards - 27 for feature films and 30 for non-feature (Short and Documentary) films till 2014.¹²

Since 1972 as many as 25 films from Manipur, comprising feature and non-features, were selected for screening as the Best of Indian Cinema in Indian Panorama Section of the International Film Festival of India by the Directorate of Film Festival of India, DFFI, Ministry of I and B, Govt of India.¹² The theme of the Manipuri films is inspired

E-mail Id: chonbimol@yahoo.com

Orcid Id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1618-4161>

How to cite this article: Singh MB. Manipuri Film Industry. *J Adv Res Jour Mass Comm* 2018; 5(1&2): 25-30.

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by the love of the medium and the art rather than for commercial consideration.² Manipuri films give more stress on production of good films thematically and aesthetically.

Aribam Syam Sharma, G Narayan Sharma, K Ibohal Singh, MA Singh, Oken Amakchan, Makhonmani Mongshaba, Lancha Ningthouja, Sunzu Bachaspatimayum, Haobam Paban Kumar, Haobam Ronel, Oinam Guatam, Oinam Doren and Borun Thokchom are renowned Manipuri film makers.¹² Manipuri Filmmaker, Aribam Syam Sharma needs special mentioning for his outstanding achievements. He is creative and multifaceted filmmaker. He has discovered many hidden beauty of different subjects not only from Manipur but also from other parts of Northeast India and made them known to the world.¹⁵ He was conferred 'Padma Shri' in 2006 for his immense contribution to Indian Cinema. He is also the recipient of 'Dr. V. Shantaram Lifetime Achievement Award' (2008) for his unparalleled contribution to Indian Cinema by the Films Division, Ministry of I and B, Govt of India.¹⁵ Besides winning 15 National Film Awards, his feature film 'Imagi Ningthem' (My Son, My Precious) became the first Indian film to win the Grand Prix at the internationally acclaimed, 'Festival Des Trios Continents', Nantes, Frances in 1982.¹⁵

Methodology

This research study is based on both primary and secondary data collected from different sources. For primary data, telephonic interview of Boney Thongamcha, a film journalist of "*the Poknapham*" which is the largest circulated daily of Manipur, is conducted to get authentic and valuable information related to Manipur film industry. For this study, researcher also studied the news or reports related to Manipuri film published in popular local newspapers for the last one year and also used the official documents published by Directorate of Film Festival, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Critically Analyze the Challenges Faced by Manipuri Film Industry

Manipur is one of the extreme bordered States of North East India having the geographical area of Manipur of 22,327 Sq. Km. and the population of Manipur of 2,721,756 with 79.85 percent literacy rate.¹⁹ Manipur, however small it is, is a land of diversity with 34 listed scheduled tribes apart from the Meities, Meitei Pangals and 7 scheduled castes along with their separate dialects and cultures.^{16,17} Apart from problems for being a bordered state, it is also deprived from the mainstream of India due to lack of connectivity.

Manipur is land of arts and culture. Among them, Manipuri film industry is one of the parts that need to be recognized and need to be carefully studied.

In spite of lacking exquisite infrastructure, organized film

training institution, manpower, connectivity to the mainland India and financial support, many films were produced in Manipur which acclaimed international and national recognitions.

Ten (10) Manipuri feature films have received the National Film Awards before Manipuri film enter the Digital Era which was considered to begin from around 1993. They are namely: Deb kumar Bose's Matamgi Manipur (1972); Aribam Syam Sharma's Saaphabee (1976), Olangthagee Wangmadasoo (1979), Imagi Ningthem (1982); MA Singh's Sanakeithel (1983); Aribam Syam Sharma's Ishanou (1991); K Ibohal sharma's Sambal Wangma (1993); Oken Amakchan's Mayophygee Macha; Aribam Syam Sharma's Sanabi (1995); Makhonmani Mongsaba's Chatledo Eidi (2000) received the Rajat Kamal for the Best regional Film in the National Film Awards instituted by the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Manipur has also bagged national film awards in other categories. RK Bidhur received the 'Best Film Critic Awards' at the 56th National Film Awards, 2008; Master Leikhendra received the Best Child Artiste Award at the 29th National Film Awards 1982 for his role in Imagi Ningthem; Anoubham Kiranmala received Special jury award for acting at 38th National Film awards 1990 for her role as Maibi in Ishanou film; Irom Maipak received the best cinematography award for the film "The Monpas of Arunachal Pradesh" for his fascinating style of framing under uncontrolled situations at the 49th National Film Awards in 2001 and this non-feature film directed by Aribam Syam Sharma was also selected for the Best Anthropological/Ethnographic award; and Leishangthem Tonthoingambi who played the role of Yaiphabee in Phijigee Mani was selected for the prestigious Best Supporting Actress Award at the 59th National Film awards 2011.¹²

Unfortunately for the last two decades, Manipuri film hardly receives any internationally or nationally acclaimed reward or recognitions despite producing 60 to 80 films in a year. Since 1993, films are started making in digital format. Since 1993 till now, more than a thousand films are produced in digital format. Unfortunately, among Manipuri feature film - "Phijigee Mani" (My Only Jem) directed by Oinam Gautam, co-written and produced by Takhelchangbam Ongbi Medha Sharmi, and cast artists including Gurumayum Bonny Sharma, Abenao Elangbam and Leishangthem Tonthoingambi was one and only feature film which was selected for the National Film Award at the 59th National Film awards in 2011 after the Manipur film enter the Digital Era. Leishangthem Tonthoingambi in "Phijigee Mani" was selected for Best Supporting Actress Award.¹³

Here arises the question why it happens and what the main problems are being faced by the Manipur film industry.

Following are some of the primary reasons:-

Lack of Market

“The main problem of Manipuri cinema is its limited audience in spite of having many talented actors, directors and musicians. Audience is the core of any film industry and as a matter of fact it is the determining factor for the success of any film industry. The audiences of Manipuri films, a majority of which are made in Meiteilon language, are screened to audience in the valley area. As a result, the market of Manipur film industry confines to a very tiny limited area” as remarked by Boney Thongamcha, a film journalist of *the Poknapham*. Geographically, the valley area of Manipur occupies only 10 percent of the total area.

In September 2000, Revolutionary People’s Front, an outlawed outfit of Manipur, imposed a ban on the screening of Hindi films in the State since, in their terms, Hindi films destroys Manipuri tradition, culture and language. They called it the “Indianization” of Manipur. This instance of banning of Hindi movies severely affected the theaters of Manipur. Some theaters ceased showing movies and closed. Some of them became shopping malls and educational institutions. During those days, there were very few Manipuri films to screen, and therefore, theaters had only two options either to close the theaters or to screen a few available Manipuri films or English films. According to Meghachandra Kongbam, the Film Critic (National Awardee) and DIPR Director, there were around 58 cinema halls in Manipur of which 10 halls were in Imphal, the state capital being the most populated area. But today, only 10 cinema halls are running in the entire State to screen Manipuri films.²⁰ Surprisingly, “there is no cinema hall in Hill Districts to screen Manipuri film”, as expressed by Boney Thongamcha, a film journalist of *the Poknapham*.

Financial Problems

“It’s only in Assam and Manipur where there is a regular filmmaking culture” as told by Utpal Borpujari, Assam-born capital-based filmmaker to IANS (Indo-Asian News Service). “The big budget Assamese feature films are about Rs.70 to Rs.80 lakhs. They make approximately 15 to 20 films in a year. In Manipur, around 60 to 70 films are made in a year, but the budget varies between Rs.7 lakhs and Rs.8 lakhs” he.⁸

There is less investor and financier in Manipur’s film. As yet, there is no concrete plan and scheme of film financing under MFDC (Manipur Film Development Corporation) Ltd. or the state Government. Boney Thongamcha, a film journalist of *the Poknapham*, also expressed that “MFDC provides financial assistance for film making. But the problem is that it gives finances to the movies which are shot on celluloid. In Manipur, today most of the films are shot on digital camera. In such case, it becomes difficult for film

producers to get monetary help from MFDC as it does not fulfil the criteria for getting assistance”.

Even though, 60 to 80 films are made in a year, only 30 to 35 films are screened in Public theatres as it is necessary to get certification from Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to get film exhibited in public theatres. It is one of the financial burdens to low budget film producers as fee is needed to apply for certification and it is also time consuming.

Lack of Infrastructures

There is no state Government’s plan/policy for giving financial assistance/loan for construction of cinema theatre, so far. There is no enough infrastructure of film production in terms of equipment, money (directly or indirectly given by the state Government) Studio, laboratory etc. (Interestingly, the Manipur government has recently taken up steps to set up a film city somewhere in the State). Most of the Manipuri films, particularly celluloid films which are now very rare, are exposed, printed, processed and re-recorded at Kolkata or Chennai or Mumbai. These make more expenditure in transportation and communication. The overhead expenditure and capital invested become bigger. Besides, most of the theaters are decrepit and lack of good equipments. At times, temporary screenings are organized in community halls.²

However, it is quite encouraging to say that almost all the digital films producing in recent times are processed in the State with domestic infrastructure and expertise.

Lack of Organized Institutions

Manipur needs trained and professional cine artistes. In the current scenario, most artistes are trained by the producers themselves. In case of women artistes, sometimes, they get married even before the completion of the film or they enter the same after acting one or two film(s). Hence, every producer need to train artistes before making a new film.² In Manipur, there is lack of organized institutes that can impart formal training and education in film and creative technologies. Most of the technicians in Manipur film industry are self-trained or lack of formal training.

Lack of Skilled, Trained Persons and Professionalism

The nature of film industry is volatile. It is changing at fast pace. The inventions of new technologies and tools quickened the pace. So, it is highly needed to train with the latest technologies and tools. Most of the crew members do not have training from recognized or reputed institutions. They lack of professionalism. They entered the film industry just for amateur. They have little knowledge of theoretical and practical skill. Even though Manipuri Film industry has been producing many national and international award

winning films, there is not a single well infrastructure film and television institute to give training to the filmmakers of the state. Only a very few filmmakers of Manipur are trained graduate. Aribam Shyam Sharma, the renowned and national and international Award Winner was trained in Rabindra Sangeet and Classical Music and Dance at Santiniketan, Calcutta and graduated in Hindustani Classical Music, Bhatkhande, Lucknow. Haobam Paban Kumar who is the Director of National Award Winning Film "AFSPA-1958, 2005" and a trained graduate from Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute of India (SRFTII), Calcutta, Sunzu Bachaspatimayum who is the director of popular movies: Rude Awakening, 1995; Living in Manipur, 2002; Innocent Guns, Thread of Life, 2000-2001, was trained in Xaviers Institute of Communication, Mumbai can be mentioned. So far, not a single filmmaker who is trained graduate from reputed film or television institute produced a commercial film. It is very expensive and costly that can be afforded by only a few people. In this digital area with the latest technologies and tools, it is highly important for the filmmakers to train with the latest technologies and tools. Unfortunately, in Manipur, only a very few filmmakers, it may be Directors, Producers and Crew member, get training from reputed institutions. Even though in Manipur, nearly 60 to 70 films are produced in a year, only a very few movies are produced by well trained Filmmakers.

Piracy

It is a big threat to Manipur film industry. Due to lack of strict enforcement of Piracy act, most of movies are easily available in market soon after releasing. These movies can be watched in DVDs at home in comfort at free of cost. Producers face a setback due to this problem and they are not able to recover money spent while producing the film.

Harassment and Extortion

In Manipur, Film industry is frequently attacked by state and non-state elements. Film industry has been persistently attacked and pressurized to become their mouthpiece. This industry is mistakenly considered as financially sound in comparison to other industries. Non-state elements of society try to extort money from them.

"All activities related to Manipuri movies have been suspended following monetary demands made by some armed groups", L. Surjakanta, Chairman of Film Forum Manipur, expressed to the media persons that "KCP (Kangleipak Communist Party) - MC (Paikhomba), NRFM (National Revolutionary Front, Manipur) and URF (United Revolutionary Front) allegedly served huge monetary demands to FFM and guilds and associations which have been working together with FFM".⁶

Above all, Manipuri films face difficulties while filing nominations for the national awards. The films are prepared

in low budget but eligibility for national awards put a condition to preserve the negative of films. The eligibility documents states that 'the negative should be available with the right holder in India to strike prints'.⁹ Manipuri films are shot on digital cameras because of their budget issues. Shooting films on celluloid will increase the budget making it difficult for the producers. That is also one of the biggest reasons that Manipuri films are not able to file their nomination for national awards. In this way, films are not able to make their presence on national level.

Suggestions

- To initiate a system that enables producers to screen movies in different states: Manipuri films are confined to Manipur region only. So, its market is limited to the Manipur only. The solution is to reach out beyond the Manipur. The same problem is faced by many regional film producers in India. Such an accessible system is needed to get initiated that enables producers to screen movies in different parts of the region thereby enlarging the film market collectively. "We should also start a system that allows us to screen movies in different parts of the region. For instance, films from Mizoram or Manipur should be shown in Meghalaya and vice-versa. This will open the market for everyone. We can't depend on other parts of the country only. If this happens, there will be chances of positive growth" expressed by Pradip Kurbah, Meghalaya – based Director.⁸ Manipur films can also follow the steps of South Indian cinema where they dubbed their movies into the Hindi language so as to catch the larger number of audience.
- To organize well structured film promotion: To make film successful in market, Film promotion plays a significant role in making a movie popular in market and to make mass awareness of the movie. Film promotion consist of advertising campaigns, merchandising and media, press releases, and interviews with the key people involved with the making of the film, like actors and directors. Marketing and awareness of the film has become the paramount factor of its success. In Manipuri film industry, due to lack of brand promoter, investor and new technology, grand film promotion is not practical.
- Establishment of standard and organized institution: Manipur is very much rich in terms of talent, artistic resources and the talent too. Excellent movies can be produced if they are utilized at full. But those talent, artists and resources are difficult to bring at the same platform because there is lack of film institute and organization. Establishment of a Film and television institute can solve this problem to one level. As it will help as a centre point to bring all at one platform by infusing formal knowledge, skills and professional. So far Manipuri films are yet to evolve its own identity in

Film Arts, primarily due lack of formal and theoretical. "Once the proposed FTII is set up in Manipur, it can play a vital link with immediate neighbors like Myanmar through exchange programs and thus help in taking forward the Government of India's 'Action East Policy', and "it will also replicate the well known success of Manipur in sports that came after setting up of the regional centre of Sports Authority of India in the state" as resolved by Film Convention on 3rd film and Television Institute of India in Manipur on 9 Nov 2014 at MFDC organized by Television and Cine foundation, Manipur.²¹

- To establish separate film financing agency: Manipur film industry demands a separate film financing agency that can grant loan to film makers, film exhibitors, film distributors and any other concerns/films. In keeping view with the value, contribution of Manipur film industry, the government should establish separate film financing agency in Manipur that can grant loan to film makers, film exhibitions, film distributors and any other concerns.
- Due to lack of opportunity in film industry and good paid salary: youth and students are not interested in subject related to film industry. Many artistic institutions are closed due to financial problem thereby affecting the production of trained and talented artists.

Conclusion

Even though there is easy availability of applications such as digital camera, audio recording and editing tools, there is still lack of beauty and aesthetic value in films mostly due lack of professional and skilled persons. In addition, small digital devices are not able to produce the quality movies. As a result, in spite of giving big contribution to Indian Film Industry, Manipuri film industry is neglected by the authority concerned. Artistes and filmmakers do not get the rewards and the price they deserve. On academic level also, film studies are not promoted well. Due to lack of awareness, shortage of organized media industries and opportunities in film industry in this region, majority of the students are not interested in media studies. For the last ten years, the term Digital film used in Manipur film industry has been debated. There has been a long debate on the word Digital film that Manipur films are really suitable to be called Digital film and if they possess the qualities or properties that match with the international standard definition. Even though Manipur films commonly known as digital films are not up to date with the international standard definition, the Central Board of Film Certification uses the term Digital Video in place of Digital film while referring the Digital films produced in Manipur.

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Date of Submission: 2017-10-23

Date of Acceptance: 2017-12-19