

The release of the first Odiya talkie 'Sita Bibah' by Mohan Sundar Deb Goswami on 28th April 1936 was a defining moment for ethnic film movement and added a new dimension to the expression of local identity. It had just been preceded by the formation of nationhood in the linguistic lines on 1st April in the same year, after long years of struggle. It was a precursor to the linguistic based nation states in the later years in Indian polity.

Just a week before the historic 1st April, the twelve-reeled first print of 'Sita Bibah' was already completed on 25th March and was shown in the touring cinema in Calcutta on 29th March. However, the film, made with a meager budget of Rupees 29,781 and 10 annas, was formally released in Orissa at Laxmitalkie Cinema in Puri on 28th April.

Today when we look back over the 75 years of film making, things may seem indistinct, yet it gives a clear impression of unique Odiya identity. Broadly, the Odiya film making years can be divided into three equal phases of 25 years each - the first phase was of struggle and growth,

75 YEARS OF  
ODIYA CINEMA *of*  
KAPILAS BHUYAN

Photo : Kapilas Bhuyan

the second was the Golden Age and the third is a time of prolific productions, once in a while compromising the qualitative standards and aesthetics.

The second Odiya film, 'Lalita', was made in 1949 and till the beginning of the sixties only a dozen films were made. If we take a quantitative view of film productions in a single year, the number of films produced was increased from single digit in the earlier years to double digits in the last phase.

In the following two and half decade, spanning from 1960 to 1985, films like 'Manikajodi' (Prabhat Mukherjee, 1964), 'Amadabata' (Amar Ganguly, 1964), 'Abhinetri' (Amar Ganguly, 1965), 'Malajanha' (Nitai Palit, 1965), 'Matira Manisha' (Mrinal Sen, 1966), 'Arundhati' (Prafulla Sengupta, 1967), 'Kie Kahara' (Nitai Palit, 1968), 'Adina Megha' (Amit Maitra, 1970), 'Ghara Bahuda' (Sona Mukherjee, 1973), 'Dharitri' (Nitai Palit, 1973), 'Jajabara' (Trimurti, 1975), 'Gapa Hele Bi Sata' (Nagen Ray, 1976), 'Sesha Shrabana' (Prashanta Nanda, 1976), 'Abhiman' (Sadhu Meher, 1977), 'Chilika Tire' (Biplab Roy Choudhry, 1978), 'Sitarati' (Manmohan Mahapatra, 1983), 'Maya Miriga' (Nirad Mohapatra, 1984) and 'Dhare Alua' (Sagir Ahmed, 1984) were a perfect blend of artistic excellence and commercial appeal, contributing to be called as the Golden Age.

During the eighties, the artistic and aesthetic excellence of Odiya cinema

catapulted itself to national and international arena. In 1984 Nirad Mohapatra's 'Maya Miriga' was considered to be the best film to get National Award, and also qualified to be an official entry in various international film festivals. However, it took one more decade to bask in the national recognition. In 1994, Susant Misra's 'Indradhanura Chhai' received the Jury's Special Mention at the national level, and made it to the competitive section of 'Un-Certain Regard' of Cannes Film Festival followed by its winning of the 'Grand Prix' at SOCHI International Film festival, Russia. Again after a long gap of a decade and half, Prashanta Nanda's 'Jianta Bhuta' won the National Award in the Environment Section last year in 2009. This sums up the position of Odiya film at national and international levels. However, Odiya films have been invariably bagging National Awards in the best regional category almost every year. In this aspect, directors like Manmohan Mohapatra, Sagir Ahmed, A. K. Bir, Shantanu Mishra, Pranab Das, Himanshu Khatua and Subas Das stand out.

Getting entry into Indian Panorama is a touch stone for making the presence felt in the national arena. Manmohan Mohapatra's 'Sitarati' has made it for the first time to the Indian Panorama in 1983 and in the current year, Sudhanshu Sahu's 'Swaymsidha: A Girl on the Red Corridor' has made it to there as the twelfth entry. Other directors those who have made it to the exalted pantheon were Nirad Mohapatra, Sagir Ahmed, Biplab Roy Choudhury, Susant Misra, Bijay Ketan Mishra and Prafulla Mohanty.

When there was a lean period in film viewing during the mid-seventies Prashanta Nanda's 'Sesha Shrabana' (1976) and Sadhu Meher's 'Abhiman' (1977) brought people back to the cinema halls. However, if we consider the singular contribution of any director to the body of Odiya films, the foremost name that comes to mind is of Prashanta Nanda, followed by Nitai Palit. But if we combine quantity with qualitative and aesthetic aspects, Manmohan Mohapatra towers above the rest.

Song and music have had a significant presence in Odiya cinema. In the first cinema 'Sita Bibah' there were a total of 14 songs, all emanating from the native folk singing style, and were sung by the artists themselves accompanied by traditional musical instruments. However, in 'Lalita', the background singing was initiated under the guidance of music directors Gouri Goswami and Suren Pal, and lyrics were specially written by Kabichndra Kali Charan Pattnaik. In the third film 'Sri Jagannath' (1950) there were four background singers with music direction jointly by Ranjit Ray and Balakrushna Das. In 1959 Akshay Monhanty made his debut in 'Maa' as a background singer with music direction by Bhubaneswar Mishra. Another background singer Sikander Alam made his foray under the tutelage of Balakrushna Das in 'Suryamukhi' (1963). Narayan Prasad Singh and Debdās Chhotray made their maiden appearance in 'Nuabou' (1962) and 'Ka' (1967) respectively as lyricists. Until this period, songs and music were totally based on traditional and Deshiya Ragas.