

Entertainment Journalism in Orissa

By Dr. Mrinal Chatterjee

Entertainment journalism is an umbrella term used to describe all forms of journalism that focus on the entertainment business and its products. Entertainment journalism covers industry-specific news while targeting general audiences beyond those working in the industry itself. Common forms include film and television show/programme review/criticism, celebrity coverage, event coverage, etc.

Entertainment Journalism in India:

In India feature films comprise of the staple form of entertainment for the masses, besides theatre and musical performances and region specific performing folk forms like *yatra* (a form of open air theatre), very popular in Eastern India.

The Bengali Film weekly *Bijoli* which started in 1920 was one of the earliest film magazines in India. In 1924, India's first periodical exclusively devoted to cinema '*Mouj Majah*' was launched in Gujarati at Bombay by J.K. Dwivedy. Other film journals like '*PhotoPlay*' started in Kolkata in 1926 while '*Movie Mirror*' (Madras) and *Kineena* (Bombay) started in 1927. In 1929 a Gujarati film periodical '*Chitrapat*' edited by Nagin Lal Shah was launched in Bombay. In the following year Shailaja Nanda Mukherejee started the Bengali Film Weekly '*Bioscope*'. Two other Bengali Film '*Weekly Batayan*' edited by Abinash Chandra Ghoshal and *Chitrallekha* edited by Bibhuti Bhusan were launched in 1931. In 1934 the Hindi Film periodical *Chitrapat* edited by Hrishan Charan Jain was launched in Delhi. In the same year another magazine film weekly *Rooplekha* was also started. *Film India*, a very influential film monthly was launched in 1935. In the same year the first Tamil film journal '*Cinema Ulagam*' edited and published by P.S.Chettiar was launched. The *Indian Screen Gazette* was started in 1938. In the following year a magazine titled *Film Industry* was started in Bombay. Sudhansu Basu launched a Bengali Film Weekly *Roopanjali* in 1951. The Indian Express Group started its film based weekly newspaper *Screen*. Published in English, *Screen* became very popular all over the country. The fortnightly magazine *Filmfare* was launched in 1952 and the following year it announced its annual awards which in later year became a rage. The main Hindi film trade paper *Trade Guide* edited by B. K.

Adarsh was started in 1954. Another Hindi film journal *Sangeet* was started in 1956. Chidananda Dasgupta, Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and others started the *Indian Film Quarterly* in 1957. The federation of film society of India launched their journal *Indian Film Culture* in 1962 in Kolkata. The year 1959 saw the launching of film periodicals like *Shama* (Urdu) *Sushama* (Hindi) and *Ras Rang* (Marathi). In 1960 the weekly tabloid *Movie Land* was launched in Madras. *The journal of the CTA, South-India* a Madras (now Chennai)-based monthly was started in 1963 as the first technical film journal in India. The Tamil film journal *Bomma* edited by B. Viswanath Reddy was started in 1966. Next year he launched a Telugu monthly *Vijay Chitra*. The Cine Central Kolkata, started its Bengali film monthly *Chitra Bhikshan* in 1967. 1970 saw the launch of English monthly *Star Dust* which revolutionised the concept of film magazine. The Bengali film fortnightly *Anandalok* was launched in 1975 by Kolkata-based Anand Bazar Patrika Group. Kottayam-based Matrubhumi Group started the Malayalam Film Journal *Chitra Bhumi* in 1978. 1990 saw the launching of 'G' a suave film monthly from Mumbai.¹

Television made its entry in India in 1959. By mid 70s it became popular among masses and film magazines began to write about television programmes. It was after 80s, when entertainment content of television increased and television sets became ubiquitous that publications exclusively on television began to appear.

Film journalism in India, barring few notable exceptions, has largely been non-serious and entertainment-driven. Information regarding films and gossip relating to the heroes and heroines has been the staple of film journalism. Devyani Chaubal (1942-July 13, 1995) was among the first to bring 'gossip' into the centre stage of film journalism. Until her arrival, gossip was at the fringe of Indian film journalism. It was Devyani's vitriolic column titled "Frankly Speaking" published in *Star and Style* that created a trend.

Entertainment Journalism in Orissa

The first Oriya feature film *Sita Vivah* was screened in 1936. It created a splash in the media world of Orissa. Several reports and features were written on this new art form. But it took three more decades for the first Oriya film magazine to be published. The first Oriya film magazine *Cine Orissa* was published in 1951 from Berhampur. The second film magazine in Oriya titled *Cinema* was published from

¹ http://www.culturopedia.com/cinema/film_journalism.html

Calcutta (now Kolkata). Jatindra Mohan Mohapatra and Dukhyshyam Mohanty published it. Basanta Mohapatra published *Chitrapuri* from Bombay (now Mumbai) in 1952 in litho. *Chitrapuri* was published from Cuttack in 1965. Parikhita Jena published *Banichitra* from Cuttack in 1968. Randhir Das published *Jiban Ranga* from Cuttack. It is still around, but it has adopted a different genre. It has become more of a literary magazine now. Cuttack based daily *Prajantra* used to have a separate weekly page on film, entertainment and culture titled *Roopa Rasa Chhanda*, which was very popular. By 80s there were about 20 film magazines published in Orissa. Few of them are still surviving. Here is a list of film magazines, published in 70s and 80s. *Chitrakatha* (published by Chatrasathi Prakashan, 1972), *Chalachitra Jagata* (Editor: Adikanta Rout, Cuttack, 1976), *Chitradhara* (Editor Saral Das, Bhadrak, 1977), *Joy* (Asantakali, Kolkata), *Chitra Taranga* (Pradeep Mohanty, Cuttack, 1977), *Chitra Pari* (Binod nanda, 1977, Cuttack). *Chayachhabi* (Sidhartha Das, Cuttack, 1978), *Chitra* (Girish Kumar, 1978), *Nayika* (Bansidhar Bhuian, 1978) In 1979 Susama Samanta published *Alokchitra*, cine actor Mihir Das published a film magazine titled *Chitra Lahari*, Srikanta Mohanty published *Manoranjan* in 1979 from Puri and Indrajit Ghosh published *Chayachitra* in 1979. Kamal Pattanaik published *Chitra Samikha* in 1983. Asok Palit published the first tabloid film magazine in Oriya titled *Cine Darshan* in 1985. Among other film magazines published during this period were: *Film Duniya* (Editor Tapan Baral, Bhubaneswar), *Banichitra* (Editor: Parikhita Jena), *Chhaya Chitra* (Editor Prasanta Mohanty, Cuttack), *Cinema Sansar* (Murali nayak), *Chitra Kirti* (Publisher: Satyanarayan Press), etc.

Film Journalism in Orissa had never been taken seriously by the intelligentsia. There had been hardly any serious discussion or deliberation on cinema in mainstream media in Orissa. Information regarding new film projects and juicy gossip about the actor and actresses had been the staple in Oriya film journalism. Therefore although the first Oriya film was released in 1936, there had hardly been any serious film journalism in Orissa. Serious, incisive articles, reportage on films had hardly appeared in mainstream media. There had been, however, some articles in alternative magazines.

Film journalism in Orissa came of age with *Cine Sambad* (late 80s), edited by Sampad Mohapatra and published by Eastern Media, publisher of *Sambad*. It was Mohapatra, an immensely talented writer and artist (he was the hero and art director of critically acclaimed film *Maya Miriga*, which his brother Nirad Mohapatra directed), who set a bench mark in film journalism in Orissa. With

innovative lay out and design and interesting and entertaining articles and features, *Cine Sambad* soon became very popular in Orissa. However, financial crunch forced the magazine to fold in mid 90s. Later, there were attempts to revive *Cine Sambad* for a couple of times, but the old magic could never be rekindled.

Ashirbad Prakashan, publisher of daily *Samay* published a monthly film magazine called *Cine Samaya* with Asok Palit as the editor.

1999 super cyclone almost broke the backbone of the Oriya film industry as most of the cinema houses in coastal districts were badly damaged. However, it was television industry which sustained the technicians and actors in this critical period. Oriya film Industry is slowly picking up. Recent years saw some robust development in Oriya film industry. Films are drawing crowds to theatres again. Number of films on the floor is also increasing. Critics point out that the development is quantitative and not qualitative. There is hardly a parallel cinema movement in Orissa. The mainstream films, which often are cheap copies of Hindi, Bengali, Tamil or Telegu blockbusters are loud, melodramatic and lack the technical finesse. All these are true to a large extent. But the silver lining is that the industry is definitely picking up its threads- financially.

With the film industry picking up threads, film journalism is also picking up. More magazines are being published. But the problem of quality faced by the film industry also faces the film magazines. It focuses more on the entertainment aspect with emphasis on juicy gossip. So does entertainment journalism on Television. The situation is not much different from what Rick Ellis writes in his blog on 26 June, 2009 on entertainment journalism in the West: "While print and web entertainment journalism is often shoddy, 90% of the TV entertainment journalists are beyond laughable. Watch the typical entertainment "news magazine," and you'll find almost no actual "news" included. And despite the "journalist" tag, no one really believes any journalism is taking place on the premises. It's common for the shows to pay for exclusive photos, footage and access. Or to craft quid-pro-quo tradeoffs to get some one-on-one time with a star. It's not unusual for stars to stipulate which questions they don't wish to be

asked. And everyone goes along because it makes for a nice, profitable business for all sides².

Among the film magazines published in the first decade of the new millennium, *Chitralipi* published from Balasore by Samarendra Mohapatra is very popular.

Besides films and television, opera or *jatra*³ (an outdoor theatre performance) is very popular in Orissa. Its popularity has increased many fold from early 80s, when there was a gradual shift in its content and presentation. Opera artists now enjoy cult status in public. According to Kapilash Bhuyan, Journalist and Filmmaker who has won National Film Award for his film '*Jatra Jeevan Jeevan Yatra*' as the Best Non-Fiction film in Art/Culture category, *jatra* in Orissa has an annual turn over of Rs 150 Crore. As Bhuyan writes, "While various popular folk mediums like *Tamasha* in Maharashtra, *Nautanki* in Uttar Pradesh, *Yakshagana* in Karnataka and *Bhavai* in Gujarat are languishing due to lack of popular support and *Jatra* in Bengal has lost its earlier glory, and while various state run theatre institutes in India have never been able to be self-sustaining, *Oriya Jatra* is no doubt exemplary for it has been a roaring success and still continuing to be so despite the Government apathy." Magazines exclusively on *jatra* for example, *Jatra Duniya*, *Jatra Jagata*, etc are being published regularly.

Like on films, there has been hardly any serious journalism related to art and culture. Though Orissa has several performing and plastic art forms, there has been hardly any serious journalism on that subject. Books have been written, but it has never come down to the mass level. With some exceptions, there has been hardly any attempt by the mainstream media to talk about the finer nuances of art and culture to common people. There have not been many journalists active in this field. One such committed journalist was Harihar Pradsad Mahalik who used to write on films, art and culture in *Prajatantra* and *Eastern Times* from 60s onwards. *Samaja* never took entertainment segment, especially

²http://www.allyourtv.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=346:sadstatecelebrityjournalism&catid=78:featurescoveringmedia

³ *JATRA* (a linguistic perversion of the *Sanskrit* '*Yatra*') is one of the oldest forms of theatre in Orissa. Some scholars trace it back to 2nd century B. C.; to the time of *Kharavela*, the emperor of *Kalinga*. In spite of such assertions, the origin of '*Jatra*' is still surrounded by controversy. However, it would be pragmatic to trace back to its existing format to around 135 years ago, which roughly coincides with the emergence of modern *Odiya* drama.

films- seriously till late 80s. Competition forced it to publish news, reviews and features on film and opera, etc, in its Sunday edition and its weekly magazine.

It was only from 80s that professional journalists began to write about art and culture regularly in mainstream media. It was Bibhuti Mishra (1959-2003), Ashok Palit, Shyamhari Chakra, Kapilash Bhuyan and journalists like them who wrote about art and culture. Radhanath Mohapatra used to write regularly on Oriya films in *Sambad*. Tapan Ghosh writes regularly on Television.

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