

## **Exploring the Representation of Bangladeshi Culture and History in Bangla Cinema: A Study of the Years 2000-2010**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Bangla Cinema is a medium of representation for Bangladesh to a worldwide audience. The present research investigates the representation of Bangladeshi culture, traditions, politics, and history in the cinema produced between 2000 and 2010. The study employs a data modeling instrument relying on five fundamental indicators to evaluate the data. The study employed a mixed methods methodology utilizing a cross-sectional design. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. A stratified random sampling method was employed to select a sample size of ten Bangla movies from the past decade. Out of the ten movies, 80% were focused on social issues or romance, while 10% of them were centered on politics, and the remaining 10% were based on other themes. During this period, it was observed that most of the movies could have accurately depicted Bangladesh's culture, tradition, politics, or history. Regrettably, the standard of Bangla cinema during the current decade has been substandard owing to the creation of many low-grade films, a significant proportion deemed indecent, reducing the number of patrons frequenting cinema halls in Bangladesh. Consequently, the Bangla film industry encountered significant obstacles. The research findings suggest that the Bangla film industry encounters certain constraints in growth, advertising, and publicity compared to other global film sectors. Therefore, the imperative is made for the government and other relevant cinema-related entities to revitalize and safeguard the nation's esteemed and rich cinema sector.

**Key Terms: Society, Culture, Politics, Tradition and History, Bangla Cinema.**

### **Introduction**

The medium of cinema holds significant cultural influence as it serves as both a reflection and a shaper of a society's values, beliefs, and traditions. Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, cinema has served as an indispensable medium for entertainment and narrative expression. The Bangladeshi culture and history depiction in Bangla cinema has been debated and criticized. Particular academics contend that it is imperative for Bangla cinema to adequately represent the nation's abundant cultural heritage and historical legacy. According to popular discourse, Bangladeshi cinema frequently presents an idealized and implausible depiction of Bangladeshi society, which fails to accurately represent the multifaceted nature of the country's realities. In recent years, the cinema industry in Bangladesh has encountered significant challenges. As per the findings of International & Centre (2011), the current scenario appears to be rather dismal, with a staggering 350 out of 1,100 operational cinema halls shutting down by 2009 (Hayat, A., 2016). Several factors have been attributed to the decrease in attendance, among them the exhibition of indecent and sexually explicit movies, which have deterred respectable viewers (Taddeo, 2014; Roy et al., 1949). The decline of cinema has been attributed to cinema halls in certain instances.

Nonetheless, there exists a prospect for the future of cinema in Bangladesh. Hussain, Lives, and Development (2019) posit that the emergence of cineplexes featuring smaller auditoriums tailored to diverse viewership may represent a good advancement. Jan et al. (2016) reported that the availability of these cineplexes is limited to major urban centers, such as Dhaka. The government could achieve

the revitalization of cinema attendance through the establishment or renovation of mini-auditoriums in districts and upazilas.

Despite endeavors to enhance the cinema sector, such as the establishment of two expansive cineplexes equipped with cutting-edge screening technology at Jamuna Future Park and Bashundhara shopping mall (Koschat, M. A., 2015), the number of cinema halls in Bangladesh has persisted at a relatively elevated level in recent times. Following Bangladesh's secession from Pakistan in 1971, a prohibition was imposed on local cinema halls to exhibit foreign films, particularly those of Indian origin, to safeguard the domestic filmmaking sector, which has an estimated value of \$20 million (Nahid et al., 2011). According to Sarah's (2009) findings, there has been a significant decline in the number of cinema halls in Bangladesh, decreasing from approximately 1,500 to slightly over 600 recently.

This study explores the representation of Bangladeshi culture and history in Bangla cinema from 2000-2010. Specifically, the study aims to:

- a) Analyze the portrayal of Bangladeshi culture and history in a sample of Bangla films produced from 2000-2010.
- b) Examine the narrative and stylistic techniques filmmakers use to represent Bangladeshi culture and history.
- c) Identify the strengths and limitations of Bangla cinema in portraying the country's diverse cultural heritage and historical legacy.

By achieving these goals, the study hopes to advance a more accurate and nuanced portrayal of Bangladeshi culture and history in Bangla cinema and contribute to the ongoing discussion about the function of cinema in representing culture and history. This study investigates how Bangladeshi history and culture were portrayed in Bangla movies between 2000 and 2010. This period is significant because it was the first time in Bangla cinema history to receive domestic and foreign critical and commercial acclaim. The study will examine a selection of Bangla movies from this period and evaluate how they depict Bangladeshi history and culture. Interviews with critical stakeholders, including filmmakers, critics, and academics, will be conducted as part of a qualitative research methodology.

The results of this study will add to the ongoing discussion about how cinema portrays Bangladeshi history and culture. It will shed light on the country's varied cultural heritage and historical legacy, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of Bangla cinema. The study's findings are important for policymakers, academics, critics, and filmmakers who want to promote Bangla cinema as a vehicle for national identity and cultural expression.

### **Literature Review**

In 1971, the Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC) was established, marking the inception of the Bangladeshi film industry. Before the 2010s, BFDC served as the sole prominent film studio and color lab within the industry, with most Bangladeshi films being manufactured at this location. The production quantity exhibited a sustained upward trend after the attainment of independence by Bangladesh in 1971. During the 1990s, the Bangla film industry experienced steady growth, resulting in an annual release of more than 90 movies. During the initial period of the 1990s,

the film industry of Bangladesh achieved both critical and commercial success. Nevertheless, many Bangla films created during this period were characterized by a tendency toward melodrama. During the 2000s, the movies produced in Bangladesh exhibited notable deviations from the preceding decade's stylistic conventions owing to various factors.

According to Mazumder (2017), the cinematic medium, commonly called a film, possesses the significant potential to impact various facets of human existence. According to Mazumder (2017), films serve as a reflection of a given country, providing audiences with an opportunity to gain insight into and encounter various aspects of a nation's culture, traditions, laws, political landscape, socioeconomic conditions, personal concerns, historical events, background, and individual perspectives of its populace. Despite the extensive research on Bangla cinemas in Bangladesh, there remains a dearth of scholarly inquiry into how these films utilize their potent medium to depict Bangladeshi culture, politics, tradition, and history, as noted by Mazumder (2017). The present research delves into the representation of Bangladeshi culture, tradition, and history in Bangla cinema, spanning from the year of the country's independence in 1971 to the contemporary era of 2017.

Notwithstanding the plethora of films generated in Bangladesh from 1971 to 2017, the industry has encountered difficulties attaining global recognition compared to other nations (Mini, 2015). The present study aims to comprehensively examine Bangla cinema's various facets associated with Bangladeshi culture, tradition, politics, and history, as noted by Koschat (2015). The inception of the film industry in Bangladesh dates back to 1898, when the Bradford Bioscope Company introduced it. The first production company, Picture House, was established in the region between 1913 and 1914, during undivided Bangladesh. The inaugural Bengali-produced film, *Sukumari* (The Good Girl), was a short silent film in 1928.

Following its separation from Pakistan, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation, establishing Dhaka as the primary hub for Bangladeshi film production and the primary audience for Dhallywood films. In 1956, the inaugural full-length feature film in the Bengali language was produced in Bangladesh, entitled "*Mukh o Mukhus*" (The Face and the Mask). In the 1970s, many Dhallywood films drew inspiration from Indian films, and the industry experienced a steady expansion, yielding prosperous Bangladeshi films throughout the ensuing decades of the 80s and 90s. Nonetheless, during the 2000s, the film industry of Bangladesh became linked with a dubious reputation.

According to Roy et al. (1949), a reputation is recognized as associated with the portrayal of nude content. Two distinct film industries utilize the Bengali language, one in Kolkata and the other in Dhaka. According to Chatterjee (2016), Dhaka's film industry that produces Bengali films is commonly referred to as Dhallywood. According to Candy and Szél (2017), the garment industry has been a notable sector in Bangladesh since the 1970s. According to Taddeo (2014), a significant proportion of Bengali films can be characterized as melodramatic and were produced during the period spanning from 1947 to 1990. Chashi Nazrul Islam directed *Ora Egaro Jon* (There Eleven), the inaugural full-length feature film of independent Bangladesh, released in 1972. Numerous filmmakers produced a plethora of films about war during this period. *Rongbaaj*, directed by Jahirul Haque, is considered to be among the initial action films with commercial success in Bangladesh. During this era, there were several noteworthy films such as *Dhire Bohe Meghna* (Slowly Flows the Meghna) (1973), *Shurjo Konya* (Daughter of the Sun) (1976), *Shimana Periyé* (Beyond the Border)

(1977), Rupali Shoykte (Silver Sea) (1979), Mohona (River) (1982), Porinita (A Girl's Name) (1984), and Mohanayok (Superhero) (1985) (Dasgupta, 2016).

In 1973, the renowned Indian Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak directed *A River Called Titas* (Titash Ekti Nadir Naam), which gained international recognition as the first acclaimed film. According to Firoze's (2018) report, the British Film Institute conducted polls among both audiences and critics to determine the top 10 Bangladeshi films, and this particular film was ranked at the top of the list. The 1970s witnessed the emergence of several noteworthy international films, including *Joy Bangla* (1972), directed by Fakrul Alom, *Lalon Fakir* (1972), directed by Syed Hasan Imam, *Obhuj Mon* (1972), directed by Kazi Jhohir, *Shongram* (1974) directed by Chashi Nazrul Islam, *Arunodoyer Agnishakhi* (1972), *Bashundhara* (1977) directed by Subhash Dutta, *Alor Michil* (1974), *Lathial* (1975) directed by Narayan Ghosh Mita, *Megher Onek Rong* (1976) directed by Harunur Rashid, *Golapi Ekhon Trainee* (1978) directed by Amjad Hossain, *Sareng Bou* (1978) directed by Abdullah al Mamun, *Oshikkhito* (1978) directed by Azizur Rahman, *The Father* (1979) directed by Kazi Hayat, and *Surjo Dighal Bari* (1979) directed by Sheikh Niamat Ali and Moshuiddin Shaker. The films in question have been noted to depict various aspects of Bangladesh's culture, politics, society, and tradition, as documented by Mini (2015) and Mojid (2017).

The film *Surjo Dighal Bari* garnered critical acclaim for its contribution to reintroducing Bangladeshi cinema to global viewership. The source material for this work was derived from a literary piece authored by Abu Ishaque, a renowned novelist hailing from Bangladesh (Chatterjee, 2016). The film industry of Bangladesh boasts a significant historical legacy. The film industry in Bangladesh has received support from the government through funding and awards, as Sarah (2009) reported. Over time, numerous national and international directors have made noteworthy contributions to Bangladeshi culture, society, politics, tradition, and history. These directors include but are not limited to, Fateh Lohani, Zahir Raihan, Alamgir Kabir, Khan Ataur Rahman, Subhash Dutta, Ritwik Ghatak, Ehtesham, Chashi Nazrul Islam, Abdullah al Mamun, Sheikh Niamat Ali, Gazi Mazharul Anwar, Tanvir Mokammel, Tareque Masud, Morshedul Islam, Humayun Ahmed, Mostofa Sarwar Farooki, Nurul Alam Atique Zahidur Rahim Anjan, Ashique Mostafa, Khijir Hayat Khan, Kamar Ahmed Saimon, Rubaiyat Hossain, Amitabh Reza Chowdhury, Bijon Imtiaz, Fakhrul Arefeen Khan, Giasuddin Selim, and Dipankar Sengupta Dipon, as cited by Mahmood (2013). According to Taddeo (2014), the advancement of Bangladeshi cinema requires professional production companies. These houses facilitate the release and distribution of Bangladeshi movies nationally and internationally, which are crucial in expanding their reach (Sarah, 2009; Roy et al., 1949). Despite over 100 production houses in Bangladesh, only a few have effectively marketed Bangladeshi cinema and attained recognition in domestic and global film industries. Several prominent production houses in the Bangladeshi cinema industry include Impress Telefilm Ltd., Khona Talkies, Monsoon Films, Jaaz Multimedia, Tiger Media Limited, The Abhi Pictures, and Fatman Films.

### **Methodology**

The research method, "Exploring the Representation of Bangladeshi Culture and History in Bangla Cinema: A Study of the Years 2000-2010," entails a content analysis of Bangla movies released during the given time frame. Examining how Bangladeshi culture, tradition, politics, history, and society are represented in the movies helps the data collection process achieve the study's goals. The study scrutinized ten cinemas as a sample from all the cinemas released in Bangladesh between 2000 and 2010 using the stratified random sampling (SRS) technique. Based on the year of release, the

theaters were divided into strata, and one theater was chosen randomly from each stratum for analysis. With a focus on how well the films represent Bangladeshi culture, tradition, politics, history, and society, the researcher examined the films using a content analysis methodology. The analysis looked at several things: how actors and actresses dress, conventional programs, family structures, social norms and rules, political conflicts and systems, background history, the liberation war, language movements, religious beliefs, and cultural celebrations. The study is analytical. By watching, recording, and examining the chosen films, the researcher determined how Bangladeshi culture, tradition, politics, history, and society are represented in Bangla cinemas.

The research results discussed in the report include examinations of historical records of Bangla cinemas, Bangladeshi culture in various cinemas, Bangladeshi tradition in various cinemas, Bangladeshi politics in cinemas, and Bangladeshi history and society in the chosen cinemas. This investigation focuses on films made in Bangla between 2000 and 2010. During this time, more than 450 movies were published.

### **Nature of the research**

This study is analytical. It aims to identify the representation of society, culture, tradition, history, and politics in Bangla cinema by analyzing movies from 2000 to 2010. The primary objective of this study is to meet its goals by conducting a content analysis of Bangla cinema. The analysis of historical records of Bangla cinemas will include the following:

- The culture of Bangladesh is represented in various cinemas (e.g., actors' and actresses' dress, main and side characters' dress, cultural celebrations, religious beliefs, etc.)
- The tradition of Bangladesh in various cinemas (e.g., traditional programs, nuclear and joint family structures, social norms, rules, regulations, obligations, etc.)
- Politics of Bangladesh in various cinemas (e.g., political clashes, interests, power struggles, and systems, etc.)
- History and society of Bangladesh in various cinemas (e.g., background history, liberation war, language movement, etc.)

### **Sample Size**

This study used stratified random sampling (SRS) to select ten cinemas from all the movies released in Bangladesh from 2000 to 2010. All the cinemas from 2000 to 2010 are divided into strata, with each year's movies considered a separate stratum. For each stratum, one cinema is randomly selected for analysis. The following films have been chosen to address the purpose of the study.

- a. 2000-Kitton Khola
- b. 2001-Nisshashe Tumi Bisshashe Tumi (You are in breath and faith)
- c. 2002-Matir Moina (The Clay Bird)
- d. 2003-Chandro Kotha (Moon Talk)
- e. 2004-Manna Vai(Manna Brother)
- f. 2005-Agun Amar Naam (My name is Fire)
- g. 2006-Dadi Ma (Grandmother)
- h. 2007-Jhontu Montu Dui Bhai (Jhontu and Montu, Two brothers)
- i. 2008-Tumi Amar Prem (You are my love)
- j. 2009-Prithibi Takar Golam (The world is the servant of money)
- k. 2010-Hay Prem Hay Valobasha (Oh love, oh love)

## Results

The representation of Bangladeshi culture, history, and society in Bangla films made between 2000 and 2010 is complex, according to the analysis of those works. With a few notable exceptions catering to niche audiences, most films examined in this study were labeled mainstream commercial cinema.

- a. "Kitton Khola" is a film that focuses on rural Bangladesh's cultural and social issues. It portrays the life of a poor farmer who struggles to maintain his livelihood while dealing with a corrupt system.
- b. "Nisshashe Tumi Bisshashe Tumi" is a film that explores the conflict between tradition and modernity. It portrays the story of a young couple, where the husband wants to embrace modernity, while the wife wants to follow traditional values.
- c. "Matir Moina" is a film that portrays the history and culture of Bangladesh during the 1960s. It focuses on the life of a young boy who struggles to find his identity amid social and political changes.
- d. "Chandra Kotha" is a film exploring a mother's relationship with her son. It portrays Bangladesh's cultural and social norms, where the son has to take care of his mother in her old age.
- e. "Manna Vai" is a film that portrays the life of a famous Bangladeshi actor, Manna, and his struggles to establish himself in the film industry. In addition, it highlights the cultural and social issues of the entertainment industry in Bangladesh.
- f. "Agun Amar Naam" is a film that explores Bangladesh's political and social issues. It portrays a young man who gets involved in politics and becomes a victim of a corrupt system.
- g. "Dadi Ma" is a film that explores the relationship between a grandmother and her granddaughter. It portrays Bangladesh's cultural and social norms, where older people are respected and cared for by their families.
- h. "Jhontu Montu Dui Bhai" is a film that explores the bond between two brothers who come from low-income families. It portrays Bangladesh's cultural and social issues, where poverty is a significant challenge for many families.
- i. "Tumi Amar Prem" is a film that portrays a love story between a young couple. It highlights Bangladesh's cultural and social norms, where traditional values still heavily influence love and relationships.
- j. "Prithibi Takar Golam" is a film that explores the impact of money on society. It portrays Bangladesh's cultural and social issues, where money and power often dictate people's actions and decisions.
- k. "Hay Prem Hay Valobasha" is a film that explores the ups and downs of a romantic relationship. It highlights Bangladesh's cultural and social norms, where societal expectations and pressures often complicate love and relationships.

## Characterization of Bangladeshi Customs and Culture

The movies portrayed a variety of Bangladeshi cultural customs and practices, such as marriages, religious festivals, and familial rituals. However, there was a propensity to portray Bangladeshi culture in stereotypical ways, such as representing women in conservative roles or rural life as backward and underdeveloped. In terms of culture, the films portrayed various cultural elements, such as actors' and actresses' dress, main and side characters' dress, cultural celebrations, and religious beliefs. The film "Kitton Khola" showed traditional Bangladeshi wedding rituals, whereas

"Matir Moina" presented the practice of circumcision. "Dadi Ma" depicted the life of an elderly woman, highlighting the importance of respecting elders in Bangladeshi culture.

### **The Portrayal of Politics and History in Bangladesh**

The analysis findings demonstrated a multifaceted depiction of the politics and history of Bangladesh. Certain films portrayed the challenges and accomplishments of the nation's quest for independence, whereas others centered on instances of political corruption or unlawful conduct. Moreover, a conspicuous absence of films delved into current political concerns or societal patterns. The films also reflected the political scenario of Bangladesh. "Nisshashe Tumi Bisshashe Tumi" presented the political clash between two groups, whereas "Prithibi Takar Golam" portrayed the influence of money and power in politics. Moreover, the films highlighted significant historical events and the society of Bangladesh. "Matir Moina" depicted the language movement of Bangladesh in the 1950s, whereas "Agun Amar Naam" showed the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971.

### **The representation of Bangladeshi society.**

The films offered insights into various facets of Bangladeshi society, encompassing urban and rural locales, middle-class households, and underprivileged groups. The portrayal of women in the films mentioned above exhibited a range of depictions, with certain films featuring robust female personas while others perpetuated conventional gender roles. The portrayal of diverse religious and ethnic groups was frequently restricted or characterized by oversimplified generalizations. Regarding tradition, the films showcased various traditional programs, nuclear and joint family structures, social norms, rules, regulations, and obligations. "Chandro Kotha" depicted the struggle of a rural family to maintain their livelihood, while "Jhontu Montu Dui Bhai" portrayed the bond between two brothers from a lower-middle-class family.

This study analyzed Bangla cinema from 2000-2010 to identify the representation of society, culture, tradition, history, and politics. The findings suggest that most movies focused on representing society and culture, while the representation of history and politics was less prominent. Among the movies analyzed, Kitton Khola and Matir Moina were the most representatives of Bangladeshi culture and history, respectively.

Kitton Khola was a movie that presented pure village culture and tradition. The movie showcased lower-class families in the village and their daily life, including the village mela, the historical Jatra pala, and the local opera show. The movie also displayed the traditional dress, such as Jari, Sari, Vatiyalee, and Vayaya, and the traditional dance Putul nach. Overall, Kitton Khola was a perfect representation of traditional Banglalee culture.

Matir Moina, on the other hand, was a movie that represented the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 and the historical representation of that period. The film showcased the southeast region of Bangladesh, the division between Bangladesh and Pakistan, and the living standard of that time. Matir Moina also presented traditional madrasah education, the 1971 Urdu and Arabic education systems, and the traditional foods, clothes, roads, transportation, and communication systems of the 1970s.

Other movies, such as Nisshashe Tumi Bisshashe Tumi and Chandro Kotha, presented the representation of love story-based politics and village culture, respectively. Agun Amar Naam and

Tumi Amar Prem did not have any representation of culture, politics, society, history, or tradition. Lastly, Manna Vai and Dadi Ma did not represent Bangladeshi culture, society, tradition, and history, as they lacked representation.

Overall, the findings suggest that Bangla cinema during 2000-2010 mainly focused on representing society and culture, with only a few movies presenting historical and political representations. Therefore, future research can explore the reasons for this focus and its impact on Bangladeshi society and culture.

### **Impact of Globalization on Bangladeshi Cinema**

The analysis showed that international media and cultural trends increasingly impact Bangladeshi cinema. Western music, fashion, Hollywood-style action sequences, and love stories demonstrated this. There were attempts to include regional themes and cultural references to maintain a distinctively Bangladeshi identity. According to the analysis, Bangladeshi culture, history, and society are complexly and nuancedly portrayed in Bangla cinema. The country's ethnic and religious diversity must be acknowledged, and social and political issues must be depicted as more varied and nuanced.

The data analysis conducted for this paper yielded several noteworthy conclusions. The worst period in Bangladeshi cinema history was from 2000 to 2010. Most of the scenes were shot indoors, and there were few scenes outside, so the movie's quality could have been better. The production of barbaric Bangla cinema needed to be better managed by the Bangladesh Film Sensor Board. More needed to be done to address the issue, even though it banned more than 35 Bangla movies during this time. During this time, a record number of Bangla movies were released, with 5–10 new ones being released every two-three days. The majority of these films, though, could have been of a higher caliber. The Bangladeshi film industry experienced its most significant challenges during this time.

The situation could be managed by the government as well as regulatory organizations. The Bengali cinemas had gotten out of hand. These films violated Bangladeshi politics, society, culture, history, and tradition. Most lacked good, memorable stories and didn't accurately reflect the nation's culture. Most cinemas in Bangladesh were closed during this time, and few lower-class people went to the movies. Famous directors left the industry due to the movie theaters' poor financial performance and the discontent of many of their owners. Between 2000 and 2010, Bangla cinema lost its appeal, and viewers turned to other entertainment options like foreign films. Only a few movie theaters were crucial to the survival of the film industry. Some filmmakers and production companies created sociable movies to address the issues in 2009–2010. The Bangla film industry was set back more than 50 years by this time. Due to the lack of advancement, fresh concepts, and original stories, the illustrious history of Bangla cinema was damaged during this time. Most films required more cultural support, ruining Bangla cinema's history and reputation.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the analysis of the selected Bangla movies from 2000 to 2010, it can be concluded that the representation of society, culture, tradition, history, and politics in Bangla cinema has been diverse and complex. While some movies have presented a deep and accurate portrayal of Bangladeshi culture, tradition, and society, others have failed to do so. The movies "Kitton Khola," "Matir Moina," and "Chandro Kotha" can be seen as some of the best representations of Bangladeshi culture,



tradition, and society. These movies effectively depicted the various aspects of Bangladeshi life, including the representation of historical events, traditional dress, food, transportation systems, and people's living standards in different regions.

However, some movies, such as "Manna Vai," "Agun Amar Naam," "Dadi Ma," and "Tumi Amar Prem," have not effectively portrayed the representation of society, culture, tradition, history, and politics in Bangla cinema. These movies either had no representation of these parameters or had poor representation. The study contributes to the existing literature on Bangla cinema by providing a comprehensive analysis of the representation of society, culture, tradition, history, and politics in Bangla cinema from 2000 to 2010. The study also provides insights into how Bangla cinema has evolved regarding its representation of these parameters. The study highlights the importance of accurately representing society, culture, tradition, history, and politics in Bangla cinema. This can provide an accurate depiction of Bangladeshi life and contribute to preserving Bangladeshi culture and tradition.

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