

'Seema resonates deeply with me' – says Sandhya Hazarika

Sandhya Hazarika is a 28-year-old Assamese actress, dancer and presenter. With seven years of experience in the Assamese film and entertainment industry, she has made a significant impact, winning the 7th Assam State Award for Best Debut Actor for her role in "Nodi mathu boi." Sandhya holds a Bachelor's in Acting (B.VOC) from Guwahati University, showcasing her commitment to honing her craft. Her versatile career spans Assamese films, television series, short movies, stage plays, and music videos, demonstrating her range as a performer. She has worked on various channels, including DD Kisaan, Doordarshan, DD Arun Prabha, Jonak, and Rang, participating in numerous television serials and programs. Sandhya is expanding her horizons by working as a dance cover producer on the national platform SAREGAMAMUSIC. Looking ahead, Sandhya plans to leverage her diverse experience and continue pushing boundaries in the Assamese entertainment industry while exploring opportunities on national platforms.



How did you first discover your passion for dancing, and how

has it influenced your acting career?

Discovering my passion for dancing was like stumbling upon a hidden treasure. It all began when my mother first took me to my Guru Doli Thakuria, where I learned the classical form of Assam. Also, during a school talent show, I reluctantly joined a dance group at my mother's insistence. To my surprise, the rush of performing, the rhythm of the music, and the freedom of expression captivated me instantly. In those moments on stage, I felt truly alive, discovering a form of self-expression that words couldn't capture.

As I delved deeper into dancing, I realised its transformative power. It taught me discipline, patience, and the importance of perseverance. Hours spent perfecting a routine translated into a stronger work ethic and a keener sense of dedication. These qualities became invaluable when I later pursued acting.

Dancing not only honed my physical coordination but also enhanced my emotional range. I learned to convey stories and emotions through movement, which seamlessly translated into my acting career. The ability to inhabit different characters authentically and grace stemmed directly from my dance background. Whether portraying joy or sorrow, the rhythmic understanding and body awareness I gained from dancing added depth to my performances.

Moreover, dancing provided a unique perspective on stage presence and audience engagement. The confidence I gained from performing in front of diverse audiences strengthened my stage presence as an actor. It taught me to connect with viewers on a deeper level, to convey narratives through words and the subtleties of movement and expression.

My journey from discovering a passion for dancing to leveraging it in my acting career has been transformative. It's not just about mastering steps or routines; it's about embracing a form of art that enriches every aspect of my life.

Dancing continues to be my muse, guiding me through challenges and fueling my passion for storytelling on and off the stage.

Can you tell us about your experience transitioning from dance to acting? What challenges did you face?

Transitioning from dance to acting presented unique challenges that tested my skills and perseverance. One of the initial hurdles was adapting from physical expression to verbal communication. Additionally, there was a learning curve in understanding the technical aspects of acting, such as camera angles, blocking, and working with directors and fellow actors. These elements were unfamiliar territory from a primarily performance-focused dance background, with different stage dynamics.

However, each challenge presented an opportunity for growth. Through dedicated training, workshops, and learning from mentors, I gradually honed my acting skills and expanded my understanding of storytelling. I was drawing on the discipline and passion for storytelling, tested my resilience, and fuelled my determination to pursue a career that allows me to connect with audiences and make a meaningful impact through acting.

Which film role from a film has been the most memorable for you, and why?

One of my favourite characters I have portrayed is Seema, from a movie named HERO, a young woman navigating the complexities of life in a journey while grappling with her identity and ambitions. Seema resonates deeply with me because her journey mirrors my experiences and aspirations. Seema's character is multifaceted and undergoes significant growth throughout the storyline. She starts as a somewhat naive and idealistic individual, eager to make her mark in the world but unsure how to navigate her challenges. As the story progresses, Seema confronts setbacks and disappointments, which force her to dig

deep and discover her resilience. This evolution resonates with me because it reflects my personal growth in my life and career. What I particularly appreciate about Seema is her authenticity and vulnerability. She's not a perfect character; she makes mistakes and faces moments of doubt. Yet, through these moments, she learns valuable lessons about herself and the world around her. Playing this character allowed me to explore these layers of humanity and to connect with audiences on a deeper emotional level. Moreover, I thank my director and team for helping me introduce myself to the lovely character.

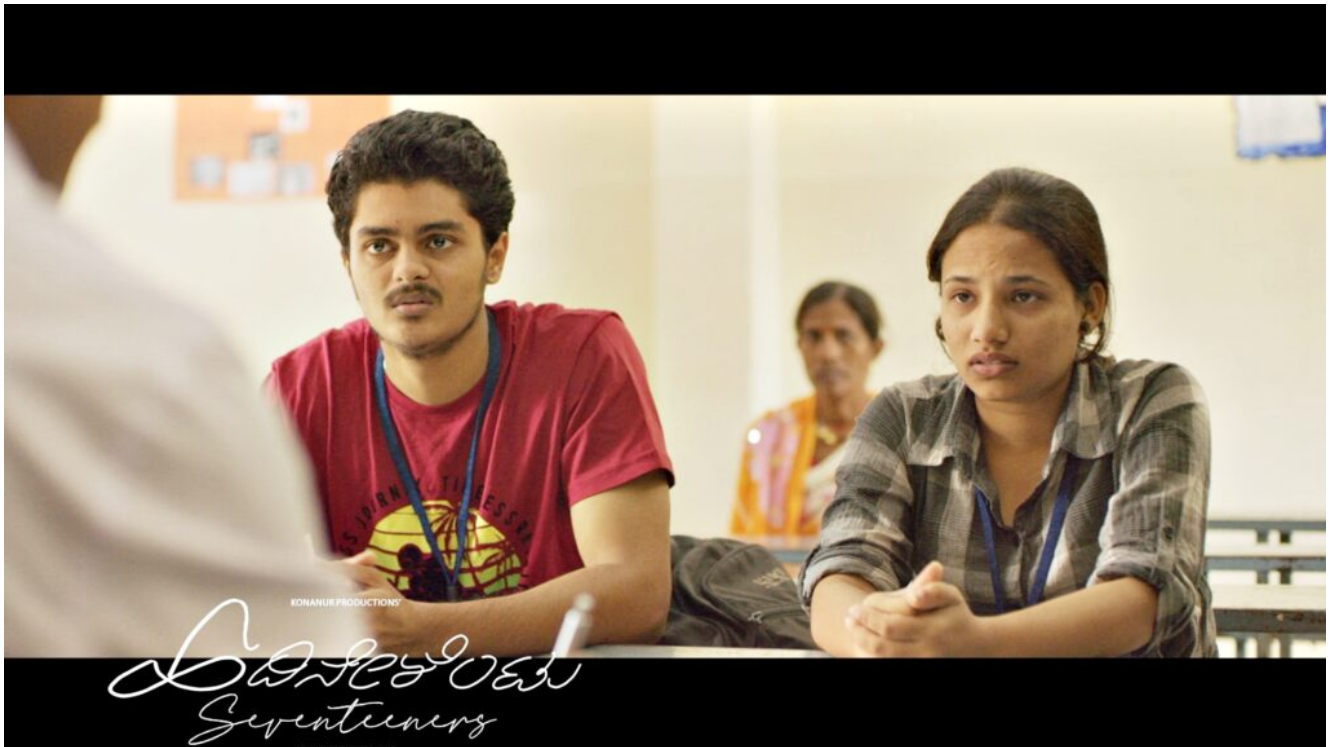
How do you balance your dance training with your acting commitments?

I establish a weekly schedule that allocates specific blocks of time for acting rehearsals, auditions, and dance training sessions. This structured approach helps me prioritise tasks effectively and ensures I dedicate sufficient time to both acting and dancing without neglecting either. I also identify and prioritise essential commitments in acting and dance. This involves understanding the importance of each rehearsal, class, or performance and planning accordingly. Effective communication is one key. I keep open lines of communication with my acting agents, directors, dance instructors, and coaches. They are informed about my availability, schedule constraints, and upcoming commitments, allowing them to support and accommodate my dual pursuits.

Please have a look > <https://cutt.ly/TehtZiaJ>

The Urban tale of caste

discrimination



The Kanada film 'Handineltu', a masterful creation by the talented Prithvi Konanur, unfolds with the closing situation of an elite higher school in the city. Students Hari and Deepa share an intimate moment in a classroom. During that time, Hari gives her a locket engraved with the words 'I love you'. The scene ends with Hari recording a video of their intimate moment on his cell phone. Throughout the film, sporadic title cards are displayed. After this scene, the last title card appears, marking the beginning of the main story.

There is a sports event happening on the school playground. Hari, a student from a privileged background, is among the spectators, showing a video on his mobile to some boys nearby. From their gestures, it seems the video is about the female body. The next scene occurs the following day, with school in session and boys and girls arriving. Hari enters college, and his friend informs him that the Principal has summoned him. Hari goes to the Principal's room, where he is scolded and asked to call his parents. This moment marks the beginning of the central dramatic tension of the film: the school begins

school principal exposes another facade of caste discrimination. The composition of the committee formed to decide the punishment for the accused, with four upper-caste and only one lower-caste teacher, reveals the administration's casteist mindset in the educational institution.

The film is primarily school-centric. As the story unfolds, the families of the two accused also come into the picture. The entry of various characters at different stages has made the film's narrative pacy. The technique of unravelling the story is akin to that of a thriller genre film. The director, Prithvi Konanur, has skillfully created and sustained the curiosity of 'What next?' His portrayal of how caste and economic discrimination permeates different levels of society, getting expressed sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly when opportunities arise, is a testament to his skill in depicting societal issues. He does not advocate for any one side nor show excessive sympathy towards anyone. This self-restrained neutrality and epic detachment lends him the dignity of an unbiased, sensitive artist of society. Earlier, works propagating specific political ideologies under the garb of social awareness were termed progressive by certain quarters. Times have changed now. Artists like Prithvi Konanur prove that a sensitive filmmaker can make a socially aware film without propagating political ideologies. His earlier film 'Pinki Eeli' also depicted the life and struggles of marginalised people.

The film moves thrillingly but doesn't rely on surprising camera angles to create excitement, even though the story provides opportunities. The director's artistic ideology is to depict a picture of society impartially. Arjun Raja's cinematography also aligns with this ideology. Many outdoor school scenes show the verandah, with parallel and perpendicular lines of grills and railings against pale, clean backgrounds, adding complexity to the shots in line with the film's narrative. The cinematographer uses a handheld camera

for some parts of the film, and the resulting slight jerkiness adds another dimension to conveying the mental unrest in the characters and the story. The physical intimacy video is the film's driving force, but the director did not show it to the audience. However, viewers can easily guess its contents. This restraint and decency have enhanced the film's and the director's dignity.

Editor Sivakumar Swamy skillfully weaved shots of different moods into a seamless flow, keeping pace with the story's progressively increasing momentum and adding to the film's appeal. Sherlyn Bhosle delivered a lively and authentic portrayal of Deepa's inner turmoil, remorse, and despair, while Rekha Kudligi convincingly portrayed the role of the school's Vice-principal. Through their authentic embodiment of their characters, all the actors have successfully elicited a strong emotional response from the audience. It is challenging to elicit consistent acting from various actors, and the director has succeeded admirably in this aspect.

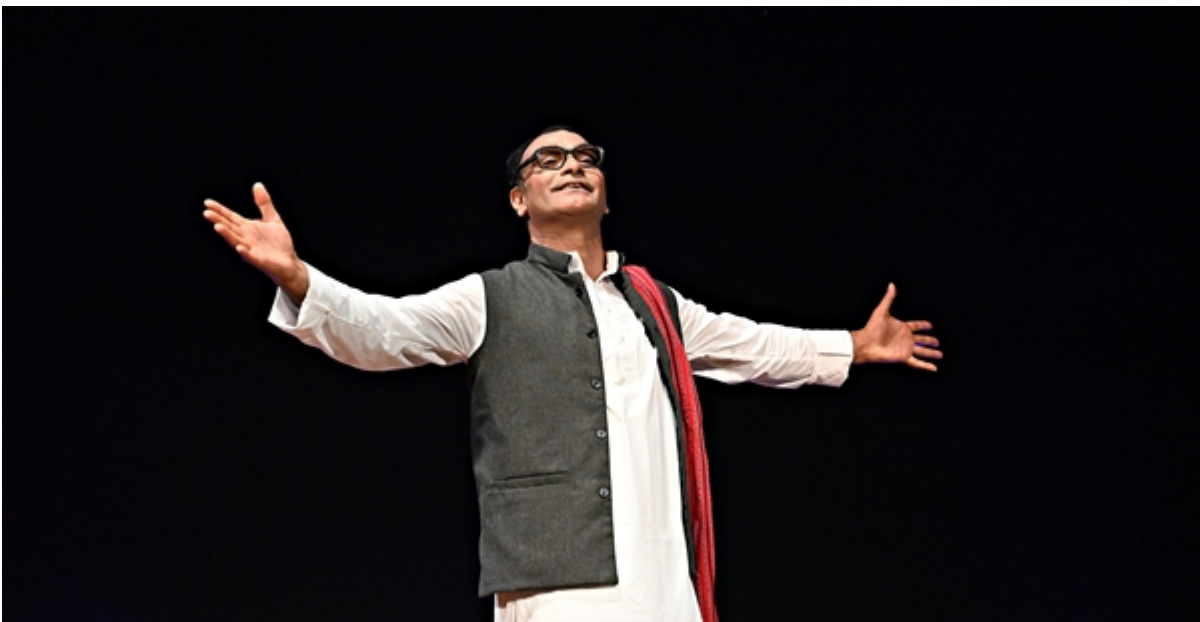
The standout feature of 'Hadinelenthu' is its ability to provoke thought and discussion on the harsh reality of caste discrimination, touching upon various aspects of society through a contemporary issue. The film contains a lot of dialogue; reducing this and giving more prominence to visual images in some scenes could have made the aesthetic aspects more meaningful. The film's thought-provoking narrative and ability to spark discussions on such a sensitive issue testify to its impact on the audience.

“Sankhaninda: An Innovative Ode to Jyotiprasad Agarwala’s Legacy”



Dr Subrat Jyoti Neog’s latest play, Sankhaninda (The Chant of Conch), is not just an experimental endeavour interpreting the life and creative genius of Jyotiprasad Agarwala but a profound tribute to a man who was a renowned Assamese polymath – a poet, lyricist, playwright, composer, thinker, prose writer, music director, producer, and the creator of the first film from North East India. Despite his prolific creative journey, following Mahatma Gandhi’s principles, he plunged into the freedom struggle, faced imprisonment, later changed his stance, and joined the revolutionary group ‘Mrityu Bahini’ (Commando of Death). During the freedom movement days, he penned and composed numerous patriotic songs sung by volunteers, still resonating in the Assamese consciousness. His life and works continue to inspire and connect with us; this play is a testament to that.

Dr. Neog's daring approach to Jyotiprasad's spirit, philosophy, ambition, aspiration, determination, and ability to inspire others towards the noble cause of independence, as reflected in his writings, is a testament to his creative prowess. The play's slender plot thread involving young artists rehearsing a musical based on Jyotiprasad's works presented unconventionally is a masterstroke. The writer-director's initial hesitation, fearing the public might not accept his avant-garde approach that defied prevailing norms, adds to the intrigue. Lost in thought, he suddenly envisioned Jyotiprasad appearing before him, engaging in a dialogue and debate. This discourse led them to explore Jyotiprasad's life, and the playwright discovered his life and works' inherent connection and amalgamation. The drama culminated on a positive note, encouraging creative souls.



Dr. Neog had little dramatic material to use for writing the play, except for a few incidents from Jyotiprasad's life. Most of the dialogues reflected Jyotiprasad's thoughts, which Dr. Neog tried to dramatise. The dialogues were mainly taken from Jyotiprasad's writings, allowing the audience to connect with the essence of the legend. He also added that Jyotiprasad wrote the tragic stories of Manbar and Tileshwari, emphasising that the lesser-known Assamese fighters who sacrificed for India's freedom struggle should get proper recognition. These

two stories injected a few dramatic moments into the play.

Sangeet Natak Academi awardee Gunakar Dev Goswami directed the play, facing a challenge due to the stage's limited facilities and the content's non-traditional dramatic elements. However, his extensive experience helped overcome the stage-related limitations. Goswami portrayed Jyotiprasad himself and gave a believable performance. As a socio-cultural icon revered in Assamese hearts and minds, describing such a sensitive and respected character demanded great reverence from the actor, a quality Gunakar Dev Goswami demonstrated. Nevertheless, he could have added more vocal variation to his dialogue delivery.



The most creative aspect of the direction was the innovative presentation of Jyotiprasad's songs and poems. Goswami, who also composed the music, preserved the original texts and tunes but creatively utilised the songs to enhance the presentation, adding variety. Such creative endeavours inject vibrancy into tradition and encourage the younger generation to explore our heritage curiously. This innovative writing and presentation approach made the production so successful.”

‘This is a dream come true.’

Actor **AUROSIKHA DEY** participated in the Cannes Film Festival, representing the film *The Shameless*, in which she played the character Durwa. I talked to her and wanted to know about the experiences she had gained. Here are the excerpts of that conversation.



Congratulations on representing your film “The Shameless” at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. Could you share your experience and your movie’s reception at the festival?

When I first heard the news from my director and producer, I was numb for a fraction of a second, searching for the perfect expression. This is a dream come true; I feel ecstatic. It is an honour to represent my film on such a prestigious platform and present it to a global audience. I am both happy and humbled by this opportunity. I had a great time in Cannes. It was a privilege to meet many professionals worldwide, learn about new cultures and passions, and discuss ideas and filmmaking. The film was received extremely well at Cannes. The audience's reaction was incredible. They appreciated both the story and my performance in the movie. I am very humbled and honoured by the response.

Please tell me about your character in "The Shameless" and how you felt working with Anusuya.

I am thrilled to contribute to this exceptional project. My director, Konstantin Bojanov, crafted a brilliant script and meticulously outlined the character 'Durwa', which provided invaluable clarity for my preparation. As a primary cast member, Durwa introduces shades of grey and compels the audience to confront the conflict between conventional norms and individual will. She is aggressive and fiercely focused on securing her daily livelihood above all.

I had a great time working with Anusuya. I am thrilled and proud of the global adulation and appreciation the film and the entire team have received.

The Cannes Film Festival is known for its glamour and star-studded red-carpet events. Can you describe any memorable moments or interactions with fellow artists or industry professionals during the festival?

I was extremely excited to be on the Cannes red carpet and present my film. I was wearing a beautiful saree designed by Priyanka Raajiv. Right before walking on the red carpet, I was a bit nervous and jittery but also thrilled. There were so

many photographers ready to take our pictures. I chatted with my co-actors, and they all shared the same feelings. It was my day.

As an artist, how do you view the importance of platforms like Cannes in promoting diverse and thought-provoking cinema worldwide, and what impact do you hope your film will have on audiences globally?

It's an honour to represent my film on such a prestigious platform and present it to a global audience. I am both happy and humbled by this opportunity.

It's a significant achievement to showcase my work on such a grand stage. As an actor, you always aspire to reach a broader audience, allowing your work to be visible and appreciated. Being able to do so on a platform like Cannes, one of the biggest film festivals in the world, not only marks a proud moment for me as an actor but also reaffirms faith and confidence in myself.

With the success of "The Shameless" at Cannes, what are your future aspirations and goals as an actor? Are there any dream roles or collaborations you'd like to pursue in the coming years?

Both the role and the story are integral parts of any project. The role has to be significant enough that one cannot imagine the story without it. It's about the weight of the role. There are so many roles to choose from for my dream role that it is tough to select. I want to do as much work as possible with as many versatile directors in as many complex roles as possible.

‘I went through so many rejections that I can’t remember.’

Mumbai, the city of dreams, beckons ambitious young people, including women, who aspire to conquer the Hindi film industry. These women, like Fermin, face a myriad of challenges: competition, financial struggles, gender stereotypes, and the uphill battle of a male-dominated field. Yet, they persist, honing their skills and fighting for recognition in roles traditionally reserved for men. Like Fermin’s, their journey paves the way for future generations, inspiring others with their stories of resilience and success and proving that dreams can come true.



Fermin

One such girl is Fermin. She is from Goalpara, a small town in Assam. At a very young age, she left Assam, went to Bangalore with her brother, and graduated from Bangalore University. After graduation, she enrolled in the Natya Institute of

Kathak and Choreography to become a choreographer, as I had been into dance since childhood. While pursuing this, she realised that acquiring knowledge of cameras and frames would help her improve her skills as a choreographer. So, after completing the course, she left for Mumbai to learn cinematography. There, she joined ZIMA – Zee Institute of Media and Arts under the guidance of DOP Nadeem Khan. Now, she is working in the Bollywood industry not as a choreographer but as a cinematographer.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when you first moved to Mumbai to pursue a career in cinematography? How did you overcome those obstacles?

Mumbai is the epicentre of India's film industry, and moving there was both thrilling and daunting. When I arrived, I didn't know anyone, neither in the city nor in the industry. It was tough to build a network or get a break. I still remember calling the DOPs and production houses, not for days or weeks but for months, and going to the meetings whenever called upon. I must tell you that navigating in Mumbai is neither cheap nor living; the financial crunches I went through in my starting days were too much. It's not like you go for some meetings, and you'll get a break; I went through so many rejections that I can't remember. But I didn't quit and just went on. So, I started working on some small projects like ads, music videos, short films, and events to make ends meet and create a portfolio. One day, all the planets were aligned. I got my first official project as an assistant Cinematographer in "Gulaab Gang".

Mumbai, the heart of India's film industry, is renowned for its cutthroat competition. As an outsider from Assam, how did you break into this fiercely competitive field?

When I graduated, I had yet to learn where to work, whom to assist, and how to move forward. But one thing was crystal clear in my mind without a shadow of a doubt: for me, there

was no other option. No matter the problems, I had to face them and move forward, as filmmaking was the only thing I knew and wanted to do. So I did everything: working as an intern, as an assistant for a much longer time, working 12-15 hours per day in extreme weather, or lifting the lights. After a long time, I got my first independent project. It's just because I never quit; I went through all the hoops to get where I am.

Can you describe your journey and some essential projects/films that helped establish you as a respected cinematographer in Mumbai?

My journey as a cinematographer in Mumbai has been slow but fulfilling. One of my earliest milestones was working as an intern for the movie "Anjaan" alongside the visionary Santosh Sivan, whose guidance and expertise shaped my understanding of visual storytelling.

Following that, "Gulaab Gang" "Hero," "Arranged Love," and "Katti Batti" provided another significant platform for me. Assisting on "Zid" with the esteemed Yash Bhatt elevated my mindset further. In addition to mainstream cinema, I've also delved into regional films, contributing to Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Marathi films.

Recently, I had the privilege of working on a documentary with Emmy Award-winning director Erika Cohn.

Currently, I'm immersed in my second documentary endeavour, collaborating with director Svati Chakraborty Bhatkal, known for her work on the ground-breaking "Satyamev Jayate" TV series. This new project promises to be another milestone in my journey.

What advice would you give aspiring cinematographers, especially those from smaller cities/towns, who dream of making it big in the Indian film industry?

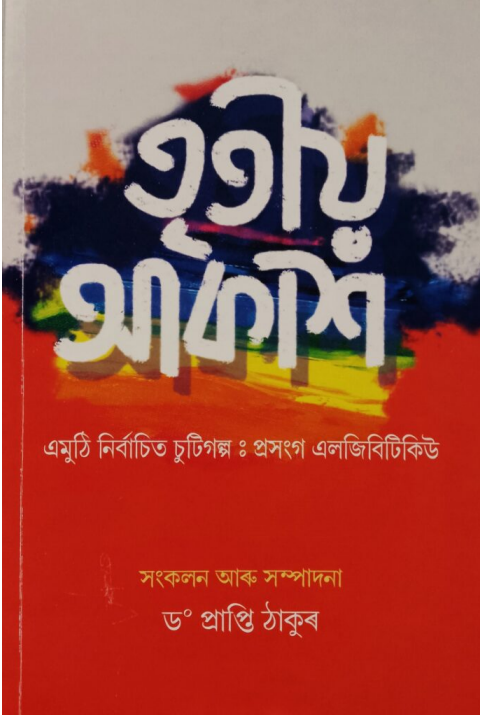
I don't think that I have achieved my goal or I am the right person to give advice, but I'll share some small things that can help if anyone wants to pursue anything, not just this. Formal education and training are the foundation for anything, without which it would be very hard to achieve anything. Secondly, if you want to be a cinematographer, make small short films as it's something you can learn by doing. Most importantly, you cannot be lazy if you want to work in this industry.

Always stay true to your vision while adapting to industry demands and maintain your unique perspective and style; authenticity can set you apart in any field.

Would you love to work in your state, Assam, in a regional film with a budget comparatively low to Bollywood's?

I would love to work in Assam. In my home state, the budget will not be a constraint for good creative work.

A Fresh Perspective on Queer Studies in Assamese: 'Tritiya Akash'



“Tritiya Akash,” translating to “the third sky,” is more than just a title; it represents a bold venture into uncharted territories. Dr. Prapti Thakur compiled and edited this anthology of short stories in Assamese, delving deep into the lives, struggles, psychology, and obstacles faced by the queer community. While Queer studies are gaining traction in various writer and researcher communities, this anthology stands out for several reasons. In Assam, Queer studies in the academic field and other creative pursuits are in the infant stage. Unlike most academic institutions that confine their publications to the prescribed syllabus, our educational institution has dared to publish such a book as part of our academic endeavour. Additionally, this anthology challenged the prevailing norms by openly discussing a taboo topic for many.

It’s noteworthy that Sarupathar College isn’t nestled in the bustling city but rather situated in upper Assam, distanced from the state’s intellectual hub. Dr. Prapti Thakur, the college’s principal, deserves commendation for advocating such a radical academic approach.

This anthology comprises thirty-one short stories penned by

writers from across the state, spanning various age groups. However, it's noticeable that only two senior writers contributed: Sneha Devi (1916-1990) and Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma. Sneha Devi, primarily a homemaker, wasn't extensively involved in literary social circles. Hence, witnessing her empathy toward such a significant topic is surprising and heartbreaking, especially amidst limited discussions. On the other hand, Dr. Gobinda Prasad Sarma, a former Professor of Guwahati University, known for his scholarly creative works and openness, bravely tackled the social taboo by addressing the theme of lesbians in his story. While the other writers explore diverse themes and social issues, delving into such a topic is not unusual for them. Not all stories have high literary standards, yet they should be applauded for their theme and creative openness.

Dr. Pori Hiloidari contributed a comprehensive critical preface, dissecting the short stories' thematic and structural nuances. This preface serves as a guiding light for writers, enabling them to grasp the theme's essence and craft more impactful narratives from varied social perspectives.



This collection has sparked numerous questions, prompting us to seek insights from the Editor and the college's principal, Dr. Prapti Thakur.

What inspired you to edit and publish this anthology?

The inspiration behind curating this anthology stemmed from the recognition that queer subjects, despite being

incorporated into the English literature curriculum of Delhi University, remain largely unaddressed within the Assamese literary syllabus. Consequently, this project aims to bring these narratives to the forefront, fostering a broader discourse on queer representation within the academic landscape.

Considering that the Queer subject may not be part of your college syllabus, how do you anticipate this collection contributing to academic discourse?

Although the queer subject matter may not currently be a part of the prescribed college syllabus, this collection holds the potential to enlighten our students about the diverse content of Assamese short stories. The content of this anthology is socially significant, and I think our students will become aware of a social issue that is still regarded as taboo. From an academic point of view, it can be said that presenting a diverse array of narratives that explore queer experiences prompts critical engagement and encourages intellectual inquiry into the multifaceted dimensions of gender and sexuality in the Assamese context. This anthology provokes scholarly discussions, challenging existing paradigms and enriching the philosophical landscape.

How have your colleagues and students responded to this anthology?

The reception of this anthology among colleagues and students has been overwhelmingly positive. They were very enthusiastic from its inception as they felt that our college would do something radical. Without the support of my colleagues, it would not have been possible to publish a book on such a topic from an educational institute.

Could you share the reactions of both readers and writers to the collection?

The reactions from both readers and writers have been equally

commendable. During the anthology's release on January 7th, 2023, in the presence of several esteemed writers, noted gender activists, and readers, the project garnered widespread acclaim and appreciation for its significance in amplifying marginalised voices and promoting inclusivity within the literary norm from an academic institution.

Were there any obstacles encountered during the production process?

Remarkably, the production process was devoid of any substantial obstacles. All the writers participated in the project with excellent support for the cause. Dr. Pori Hiloidari, a leading literary critic of the state, wrote the anthology's preface at my request. I am sure this preface will stand as a significant work in Queer studies in the Assamese language.

What are your plans regarding publishing books on this topic and others?

Our Sarupathar College is very excited to publish more books on this queer topic and other important, socially significant, and literary themes. We are committed and determined to work on projects that benefit our students' community and society.

“The 1st Issue: Innovative Storytelling Journey”



Biswajit Das, a filmmaker who has not only revolutionised storytelling in the film industry, mostly documentary films, but also continues to make a profound impact on the creative

community. His film 'March' a testament to his innovative style, captivated audiences and earned him the prestigious Best Director award at the Chalachitram National Film Festival. This recognition is not just a testament to the power of his unique approach, but also a source of inspiration for all of us in the creative community.



Biswajit Das's latest venture, 'The First Issue, March 24,' is not just a monthly publication, but a groundbreaking platform that breaks new ground in storytelling. This innovative magazine is a treasure trove of one-page graphic stories, with the first issue boasting twenty-seven tales that span a diverse spectrum of themes and tones. From heartwarming to thought-provoking, there's something unique and intriguing to pique the interest of every reader.

Within graphic fiction, visual designs play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative experience. The illustrations' content, design elements, placement, and skilful use of various tones all contribute to developing and enhancing the central theme and narrative pattern. Biswajit Das curated a selection of one-page stories for the magazine, allowing readers to immerse themselves in a dynamic interplay of words and visuals. This unique approach to storytelling promises to take the reader on a journey like no other.



While most of the stories seamlessly blend graphics and narratives, creating a harmonious synergy, some stories in the magazine embrace a more poetic form, transcending traditional storytelling conventions. Additionally, the publication features an Assamese tale, adding a touch of linguistic diversity to its pages.

However, there are a few areas that could benefit from further refinement. The typography could be more prominent and visually appealing in specific stories, enhancing the reading experience. Moreover, the author's names could be displayed more prominently, ensuring due recognition for their contributions.

'The First Issue, March 24' is not just a milestone for

Biswajit Das but also a testament to the collaborative spirit and unity of the creative community. This groundbreaking project has brought together the talents of Hrishitonooy Dutta, Bulbul Das, Raghu Sinha, and Biswadeep, each contributing their unique artistic and creative expertise to the magazine's diverse content. Their collective efforts have truly made this magazine a masterpiece, reflecting the strength and unity of our creative community.

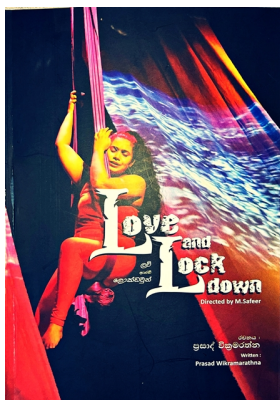
'Manjula and I have a dream of performing the play in ten languages' – Md Safeer.



Jahnabi Bora / Reharshal photo by Utpal Datta

Guwahati is about to experience an International Drama Production, likely the first of its kind, a play that brings together theatrical talent from several countries worldwide. Gathering such talent in one place for a purpose is incredibly challenging in terms of communication, time, money, and the arduous labour required. The point is that such plays impact the intellectual and cultural environment of the time, stirring the minds of creative individuals. This impact may initially be small, but it delves deep, illuminating the realm of creation with new possibilities. Creative individuals from different countries come together for work and reach a consensus after discussions—this creative process is challenging. However, these challenges give rise to new possibilities and experiences. It's not just the creators who experience this but also the audience. Many such experiments are underway worldwide, but this will be the first artistic

experiment of its kind in Guwahati, which is exciting news for the cultural community.



This production is organized by a theatre group titled AANK, led by Dr Mrin

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Safeer combines various elements in drama production, transforming the play into a unique experience. He has been invited from various countries worldwide to showcase the achievements of his art. He is also an established book publisher and has made his debut as a film director. The film has already been screened at several film festivals.

Witnessing the first performance of a play, movie, exhibition, etc., is a satisfying and often rare experience. We will witness the first performance of Safeer's latest production here in Guwahati. I had the opportunity to witness a rehearsal of the production and engage in a brief discussion about it.

'The author of the play, Manjula Wedivardhana, originally from Sri Lanka but now living in France, is a renowned novelist and poet. I had a concept like this: there will be five scenes—five different colours, representing five men—and there will be one woman. She will be the last woman on earth, acting in front of the five men, her final act. He wrote a play based on this concept, a poetic play written in Sinhalese. The play was translated into English by the Australian author Dilini Areawala. In 2016, I met an Italian actress named Julia Filippo at the Colombo National Theater Festival. She was seeking an opportunity to work with an Asian director, having already worked with many European directors and wanting to gain new experiences and knowledge. We began working on the play, which premiered in Dubai at the Foreza Monodrama Festival. The festival is attended by thousands of theatre professionals from different countries worldwide. The play was well-received by audiences worldwide. The main feedback was that monodrama is usually centered around the actor, but this play incorporates a combination of set design, lighting, dance, music, and acting. The play received invitations from many countries, and we performed it in several, including Korea and Azerbaijan. I also staged the play in Pune, India, and in Sri Lanka. My friends expressed the need for a Sinhalese version of the play, so I staged it in Sinhalese with a Sinhalese actress. Then came COVID, and the play was put on hold. Last year, I spoke to Mrinaljyoti Goswami, and finally, we are here. Mrinal translated the play into Assamese, and we will perform it with an Assamese actress,' Safeer said.



Safeer directs Jahnabi Bora. photo Utpal Datta

“How will the play continue after this, and what are your plans?”

‘Manjula and I have a dream – we will perform the play in ten languages. It has been performed in English and Sinhalese, and it’s currently being performed in Assamese. Next year, it will be performed in French. The initial plans to perform the play in Hindi and Korean have been completed.’

“A play, not just a play, any artwork, has its roots in the soil of its place. How can the context of those roots be preserved during such phases of transformation?”

‘It’s quite simple. In this Assamese play, we have incorporated elements that evoke the essence of Assam. As a director, I don’t rely solely on the text of the play. I take the dialogue, and the rest is my own interpretation. Manjula wrote many things, and I have selected only certain parts. We have created several versions of the play, which means we have interpreted it in various ways. Each production is an interpretation.’

“You are an advocate and practitioner of physical theatre. How

do you view physical theatre? 'Many people consider gestures alone as the essence of physical theatre. However, I believe and practice differently—physical theatre is not just about gestures. It encompasses dance, music, lights, sets—all components contribute to physical theatre.'

The play is translated by Dr. Mrinal jyoti Goswami and will be staged on April 28 and 29 at the Madhavdev Auditorium of Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra. 'Premar Dolna (Swings of Love)' introduces Jahnabi Borah, a promising talent and National School of Drama, Sikkim Centre alumnus, to Guwahati's theatre aficionados. Under the guidance of director M Safeer, Jayadewa Upeksha Sandeepani, and H.M. Pasindu Nirmal Perera from Sri Lanka contributed as associates, with Dhruvajyoti Deka from Assam serving as the production manager.

Divine Evening of Music and Dance at 'Shakti Mahapith' Kamakshya'



The time was just evening, the place was the courtyard of *Shakti Mahapith Kamakshya*, and the air was filled with the *Shabda Brahma* created by Pandit Ram Kumar Mallick and his team. Pandit Mallick ji, a Padmashree awardee for his contribution to the Darbhanga Gharana of Dhrupad, orchestrated the musical tapestry. The architect of that great moment was Sangeet Natak Akademi, which initiated a festival of Music and Dance titled '*Shakti*', set to resonate across all the *Shaktipiths* of India. This was the inaugural event of this series.

Listening to Dhrupad by Mallick Ji live is a rare artistic experience, and Sangeet Natak Akademi receives heartfelt gratitude from the audience for curating such a program in Guwahati. Dhrupad, a genre of Indian classical music, is practiced by a select few artists, and public recitals are comparably infrequent. Pandit Ram Kumar Mallick, renowned in this field, is one of the prime representatives of the Darbhanga Gharana. In this concert, he was accompanied by Dr. Samit Kumar Mallick on vocal and Mr. Rishi Shankar Upadhyay on

Pakhwaj.



Pandit Ram Kumar Mallick

In this concert, Pandit Mallick performed Aalap and Chautal in Raag Yaman and a Durga Vandana 'Jaya Mangala Sarba Mangal Kar Nihari'. His baritone voice, infused with the ritualistic sensitivity of prayer, transcended the earthly realm, captivating the audience. The melodious utilization of Gauhar Vani and Khandar Vani was evident in his singing. Alongside his gorgeous vocal delivery, the harmonious blend of detailed Aalap, Meed, Gamak, intricate rhythmic patterns, clear pronunciation of Bandish's verses, and other layakari, made his recital an extraordinary auditory experience. His rendition of Durga Vandana paid homage to the *Shaktipith*, his voice echoing the strength and aesthetic beauty akin to a philosophical interpretation of a forceful waterfall on a hill, retaining its melodious appeal even after it falls on the ground. Pandit Ram Kumar Mallick's performance elevated the recital into a spiritual pilgrimage through resonant melodies.



Another significant performance was *Suknanni Ozapali* (a traditional religious song from Assam with rhythmic body movements resembling dance) and *Deodhani Nritya* by Drona Bhuyan and his ensemble. Drona Bhuyan, a leading artist of *Ozapali* and *Deodhani*, was honoured with the Padmashree by Govt of India. The presentation comprised *Ozapali*, involving singing, and *Deodhani* Dance, with Bhuyan playing the lead role in both performances as a singer and drum player in the dance. The team's performance paid tribute to Shakti through song and dance, resonating with the energetic beats of traditional drums, dynamic movements with war-fighting props, and spirited choreography, crafting a soul-stirring reverence to the Devipeeth, the eternal Shakti.



Two other performances in the evening included the Kathak Dance by Dr. Ruchi Khare and her team and Garva Dance by the Sanskar Group of Bhabnagar.

In closing, as an enthusiast of music and dance, I fervently urge Sangeet Natak Akademi to arrange another enchanting concert featuring Rudra Veena in this sacred Shaktipith.

Photo **UTAPL DATTA**

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=search&v=795010365395664>

A sensitive attempt to hear

the unheard 'third voice'

"I learned about sexuality when I was in high school. I wanted to know if I was such a person or if there were other people like me. I thought I would tell my parents when I mentioned my marriage. I thought I would die if I married a man. After passing high school, I was angry when my mother told me about marriage. I met 'A' in the first semester of my BA. After talking, I realized that she was probably like me."



Queer Voices from the Periphery

A Collection of Perspectives from Northeast India



Editors

**Kaustav Padmapati
Prateeti Barman**

In exploring the Assamese language, one inevitably confronts an obvious gap: the absence of a recognized term to encompass individuals beyond the traditional dichotomy of male and female. Within this framework, the term 'third gender', often equated with 'queer', remains an elementary construct, lacking the nuanced depth required for full comprehension. Its acknowledgement in ancient Indian literature and portrayal in artistic depictions of sexual activities serve as examples of historical acceptance, countering prevailing narratives of deviance and abnormality.

Yet, despite this deep-rooted socio-cultural tradition, the contemporary discourse surrounding the third gender has, regrettably, been relegated to the periphery. Social taboos and deeply ingrained prejudices have conspired to throttle open dialogue, relegating the experiences of this marginalized community to the shadows of society's consciousness. However, amidst this prevailing silence, there exists a glimmer of hope – an increasing recognition and acknowledgement of the inherent rights and dignities of third-gender individuals.

Recent shifts in societal attitudes, coupled with governmental initiatives aimed at addressing the needs and concerns of this oft-overlooked demographic, signify a slow departure from the status quo. Concurrently, scholars and researchers are embarking on a journey of discovery, exploring the psychological intricacies and socio-cultural dimensions of third-gender identity. Through their nuanced analyses and empathetic inquiries, they seek to illuminate the lived experiences of this community, thereby amplifying their voices and advocating for their rightful place within the fabric of society.

Edited with meticulous care and scholarly acumen by Dr. Kaustubh Padmapani and Dr. Prateeti Barman, the book **'Queer Voices from the Periphery- a collection of perspectives from Northeast India'** serves as a beacon of enlightenment amidst the prevailing darkness of ignorance and indifference.

Centered on the portrayal of 'queer' identities in the vibrant landscape of North East India, its pages offer a comprehensive exploration of the complexities and challenges faced by this marginalized demographic. While awareness of queer issues may be blossoming in the region, the dearth of literature serves as a poignant reminder of the pressing need for greater social engagement and discourse.

Comprising an anthology of contributions from researchers and scholars, each chapter endeavours to navigate the undiscovered alleys of queer identity with sensitivity and shades. From probing examinations of cultural nuances and identity dynamics to insightful critiques of general homophobia within Assamese society, the book offers a rich compilation of insights and perspectives. Through rigorous research and empathetic inquiry, the authors seek to peel back the layers of societal prejudice and misconceptions, offering readers a deeper understanding of the lived realities of queer individuals.

Namami Sharma's compelling discourse on homophobia in small-town Assam serves as a stark reminder of the entrenched biases and systemic inequalities that continue to infuse our social fabric. By shining a light on these injustices and advocating for greater awareness and inclusivity, Sharma underscores society's collective responsibility towards nurturing a more equitable and accepting environment for all its members. It is through such concerted efforts and unwavering commitment that we may begin to dismantle the barriers of prejudice and discrimination that have long hindered the full realization of human dignity and equality.

In intertwining together these diverse narratives and perspectives, the book offers readers a panoramic view of the lives, struggles, and triumphs of queer individuals in the unique context of North East India. From the emergence of queer identities within the cultural landscape to the challenges of navigating societal expectations and prejudices, each chapter serves as a testament to the resilience and

courage of those who dare to defy convention and embrace their true selves. Dr. Bibhuti Patel's commendation of the book as a critical catalyst for encouraging dialogue and understanding among diverse identities speaks to its profound impact and enduring relevance. Grounded in evidence-based research and filled with a deep sense of empathy and compassion, the book stands as a testament to the power of scholarship and advocacy in advancing the cause of equality and justice for all.

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