

Tale of Fishes



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On a Saturday afternoon I rushed to watch a much-awaited film called *Emuthi Puthi* in Guwahati. The best part was that it was running in the nearest movie theatre for a reasonable price of Rs. 100. I had already met the whole team of actors and directors at Tezpur University council hall when they came for their promotions. The film had hilarious moments of fun and entertainment throughout. It was a journey of salvation through fish for one generation, while it was a way of getting out of the country to fetch an American dream for another generation. Women are the protagonists whose trials and tribulations compel them to move into this journey of life and death. The travels around the trajectory of Assam from the borders of Srirampur to Majuli in the heart of the Brahmaputra was indeed a fascinating one. The fishy punches made by the older woman were refreshing and humorous. The role of the responsible policewoman as the mother and the daughter also depicts the life of a middle-class working woman whose life revolves around her family's birth and choice. The diversity of Assamese accents through various characters in the film also plays a significant role in reflecting the linguistic diversity of Assam. The women and the age specific differences are key ingredients in this fishy tale of substance. Fish are indeed a staple in the Assamese homes especially for women, as they can be easily cooked with almost no spices at all.

The role of women as healers in the forests of Assam also gets reflected in one of the scenes when the family of grandmother and granddaughter takes refuge in a forest hut. The magical healing practises of the sacred groves of Assam are depicted well in this way. Women's ecology of healthcare lies within the deep forests which have magical powers of hope and health. The livelihoods of women as thieves and as a piggery owner shows the survival strategies of people in this part of the world. But all said and done, the goodwill, community strength and collective support from each section of society has been well reflected throughout this film. *Emuthi Puthi* is indeed a fantasy churned out of the love for fish by the granny who was ready to die for her love for fish. This film also shakes the conscience of intergenerational differences which compels the older persons to move away from their home which at times confines their free will for their safety and sanity. In the same light the working women in Assam are sandwiched between their job needs and family needs which they fail to balance many times and land up in difficult conditions like that of the mother in the film. Some of the crucial issues of single motherhood, teenage pregnancy, women's aspirations are skilfully depicted within the characters of *Emuthi Puti*.

Puthi fish are rich in minerals, iron, and vitamin fish on the verge of becoming endangered in the river, pond, and wetland ecosystem of Assam. People going for other foods which are not locally available are also leading to such dearth of *puthi* fish. More importantly, the *puthi* fish are losing their habitats as well due to rapid shift in the ecosystem diversity. Hence the blessings of the magical powers of Matsyakarma of the God of Fishes got depicted in the film. Fish diets in different forms are extremely crucial for cure of terminal diseases like cancer which were shared by the grandmother during the entire journey of searching for her most precious *puthi* fish. Fishing has been a sport for many communities in the Northeast India mostly for subsistence and survival but it's a seasonal activity. But in today's context fishes are mostly imported from outside Assam, especially from southern India. Only the imported or challan fishes are affordable for common people as the local fishes are exorbitant. Hence the film promotes the local fish abundance through the mythological twist in the end. The film is shot in an iPhone which is another milestone for the Assamese film industry. The film also has age diversity in terms of the characters and their prominence in the film. Guest appearances and star actors make the film interesting. In my own wishful spirit, I would have liked Aita to be healed and living back with her daughter and grand daughter as far as the ending goes. Overall, it was a hilarious tale of fish from the beginning to the end.

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