

Locating Resistance in “Hainamuli”: A Bodo Tribal Language Film-series

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Abstract

Amidst a cloud of violence - political, ethnic, and fratricidal, a Bodo tribal language comedy film series ‘Haina Muli’ attempted to provide a unique cinematic endeavour. It offered humour, mimicry, and sarcasm as tools of resistance for the Bodo people in the state of Assam, India. Despite a constrained budget, the series explores the contemporary problems of the Bodoland region in Assam, revealing how its inhabitants negotiate with these problems. This study explores the series’ narrative in the context of the tribe’s social and political location by employing ‘hybridity.’ The study concludes that the series mirrors societal events and experiences.

Keywords: Bodo; Bodoland; Film; Mimicry; Resistance.

Introduction

A film, as a distinct form of art, holds a unique position as a medium and also serves as a reflection of the prevailing social, economic, and political issues of the time by the director (Gandasegui; Gupta and Gupta) books, newspapers, videos and more, on the ProQuest Platform.”;“-genre”：“A submission presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of Glamorgan/Prifysgol Morgannwg for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy”；“language”：“en”；“number-of-pages”：“21”；“publisher”：“University of Glamorgan”；“title”：“(Un. These political, economic, and social issues have been regularly highlighted in cinema produced in various languages worldwide, participating directly in the socio-cultural change. In this process, cinema’s ability to capture these ‘contemporary’ social realities has made filmmaking a powerful tool for both individual artists and communities seeking to share their stories and experiences throughout the world.

Tribals with a long social-cultural history, are one among the marginalized groups whose stories or voices have been denied a space in the mainstream media. Thereby causing significant challenges in securing their 'rightful' space. However, the availability of affordable filmmaking equipment has empowered numerous unheard voices, allowing them to share their stories on digital platforms such as YouTube, and challenge prevailing narratives. This opportunity enables tribal filmmakers to represent their unique perspectives, often overlooked, stereotyped, or misrepresented by mainstream filmmakers. The exclusion of their representation from mainstream media certainly made many individuals from the tribal community take up the making of short films and independent films as a responsibility to share/tell their own stories or versions of stories to the world. This movement signifies a reclaiming of their narratives, a response to the need for accurate representation.

The Bodo tribe of Assam, (India) "... largest tribal (ST) group in Assam" (Daimary and Dey)development, and changing trends of Bodo films. Bodo films are regional level films that express the ethos of the Bodo community in the Bodo language. The Bodo film industry is now 33 years old; however, it is perceived to have developed very little. This paper deals with the history and present status of Bodo films with regards to the human-rights issues and technical difficulties faced by the industry. It discusses the role played by Bodo films in entertainment along with motivating, promoting, and preserving Bodo culture and bringing about socio-economic development. Keeping in view the lack of proper documentation and preservation of Bodo films in Bodo history, this paper also attempts to preserve information on Bodo films and consequently Bodo culture for future generations."

"container-title": "Problems and Perspectives of the Relationship between the Media and Human Rights", "ISBN": "978-1-4438-7832-6", "language": "en", "note": "Google-Books-ID: ExVUDgAAQBAJ", "page": "74-85", "publisher": "Cambridge Scholars Publishing", "source": "Google Books", "title": "A descriptive and Analytical Study of Bodo Films", "author": [{"family": "Daimary", "given": "Rachan"}, {"family": "Dey", "given": "Anuradha"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2017", 3, 7}]}}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"} is one such group that along with many others has struggled to find representation in the mainstream media, resulting in numerous untold stories and alternative versions of their (ours) history and culture. Since the early 20th century, the Bodos have been actively involved in a persistent struggle for self-determination, aiming to establish their unique identity apart from the mainstream Assamese identity. Throughout this journey, Bodo community has been

accompanied by significant challenges and upheavals with the efforts to safeguard their language (Bodo-tongue) and attain self-governance, either within or outside the Indian union (Kumar; Pegu). The Bodo community's frustration with inadequate coverage and perceived negative portrayal finds expression on various platforms, including social media, publications by Bodo socio-political organizations, and video films. However, the emergence of the Bodo language video film series, "Haina Muli," serves as a compelling manifestation of the Bodo community's desire to reclaim their narrative space (from mainstream Assamese media) and express/share their own unique perspectives on or about contemporary cultural and political issues.

"Haina Muli" - A Film Series

The comedy film series, "Haina Muli," (English Translation - The Mythical Love Medicine), was originally released as a music video album with an embedded storyline in the year 2009 and has since evolved into a significant cultural and artistic phenomenon. A total of seven episodes of Haina Muli ('Part 1', 'Part 2', 'Part 3', 'Part 4', 'Part 5', 'Part 6', and 'Part 7') have been released to date, each contributing to the development of the narrative and the exploration of themes relevant to the Bodo tribe and their experiences in the north-western part of Assam. However, the film series has proven to be a fascinating blend of entertainment and social commentary. By using humour, sarcasm, and mimicry as a means to both engage and enlighten its audience with 'social messaging' as the major part of the narrative along with features of entertainment cinema.

The story was set in the Bodoland region of Assam; and revolves around two natives called Fwila and Mandela. Both are illiterate, lazy wage laborers, witty in characteristics, and desperate to marry and settle down in life. In the first part, a typical love story happens in a Bodo village where Fwila tries to win over the heart of his employer's daughter by any means, even by using the 'Haina Muli' the mythical love medicine which is popular in Bodo oral tradition. With the help of Mandela, he finds this medicine from an 'oja' (traditional medicine practitioner) and makes the girl fall in love with him. But, when Fwila is eloping with the girl, Mandela informs the girl's father. Fwila along with the "oja" is caught and punished by the villagers. The episode ends with a learned villager calling for an end to such blind evil practices and that young students should be allowed to concentrate on their studies rather than being hoodwinked into loving and running away with someone.

The second part of the film series takes a dramatic turn as it delves into Fwila's pursuit of revenge against the "oja," which ultimately leads him to a jail sentence. He escapes from prison and seeks Mandela's help to hide from the police. Mandela offers to help, only after getting assurance that Fwila must arrange his marriage. Mandela gets married and has many kids but banishes his wife on suspicion of having an affair with Fwila. Mandela also gets Fwila back to jail for cheating him. In 'Part 3' of the film series, the characters become embroiled in a political battle in the BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) area, and tensions escalate, leading to large-scale violence and tragic deaths ending the film on a cliffhanger. 'Part 4' returns to the theme of love and betrayal, much like the first two episodes. This part weaves together elements of romance, treachery, and comedy, adding depth to the characters' emotional journeys. The fifth part takes place against the backdrop of the ethnic violence of 2012 between the Bodo community and Bengali Muslims, where the protagonists take advantage of the situation in trying to make easy money. The part ends with a call for the need for peaceful co-existence in the Bodoland region, highlighting the need for harmony in the face of ethnic tensions. The final two episodes of the film series explore themes of communal relations, love, betrayal, and the pursuit of redemption. Overall, these final two parts interweave social messages throughout the narrative, emphasizing on human relationships and the potential for growth and reconciliation, even in the midst of turmoil.

Contextualising Bodo and Bodoland

The Bodo tribe is recognized as one of the earliest inhabitants of Assam, with a distinct culture and language (Chatterji; Hodgson). The total population of Bodos in Assam is 1,361,735 (Samvaad). Their demand for a separate 'Bodoland,' dates back to the initiation of the "All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) which was founded on the 15th of February, 1967 (*All Bodo Student Union – दुलाराय बर' फरायसा आफाद*). It was a non-violent movement to create a 'Bodoland' state within the Indian Union. This movement resulted in the formation of the "Bodoland Autonomous Council" (BAC) in 1993 following an accord with the government of Assam (George). However, the lack of a demarcated border and postponed elections undermined the council's effectiveness. Subsequently, the movement took a violent turn with the emergence of armed organizations such as the "Bodo Liberation Tigers" (BLT) and the "National Democratic Front of Bodoland" (NDFB) (Behera). The BLT eventually signed a peace accord in 2003, leading to the creation of the "Bodoland Territorial Council" (BTC) (*Memorandum of Settlement on Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)*) under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution, which provides for limited autonomy to tribals in

the north-eastern region of India. In the meantime, the NDFB, which split into various factions, continued their struggle until a ‘comprehensive’ peace agreement was reached in 2020, culminating in the establishment of the “Bodoland Territorial Region” (BTR) “... with enhanced executive and legislative powers” (*Welcome to Bodoland Territorial Region | Portal*).

The Bodos’ quest for a distinct identity separate from Assamese identity and their demand for a separate state, initially known as “Udayachal” (Dash) in the 1960s, shifted to the demand for Bodoland in the 1980s. This desire for recognition was evident as early as 1928, when the Bodos, led by Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, petitioned the Simon Commission to award a separate electorate status to the Bodo community (Basumatary). Post-independence, the “Bodo Sahitya Sabha” (BSS) (*Home - Bodo Sahitya Sabha*), a literary body representing the Bodo community, advocated for the recognition and use of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in schools, leading to the adoption of the Bodo language in primary schools in Bodo-dominated areas in 1963. However, the state government’s resistance to the demand to use the Roman script for the Bodo language in 1974 resulted in a mass movement. The government response to the movement was hard-handed, and this led to 15 Bodo youths losing their lives in police confrontations, fostering resentment among the Bodo community (Sonowal). Eventually, the BSS agreed to use the Devanagari script for the Bodo language in 1975, following appeals from the central government and the state government of Assam as compromise formula.

Between the beginning of the Bodoland movement in 1987 (until the BTR accord), intense negotiations and political upheavals marked the movement. Such scenarios were played out, especially during the ABSU’s movement for Bodoland in the 1980s under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma. Despite attempts by the then “Assam Gana Parishad” (AGP) (Hazarika)-led state government to suppress the movement through force, the ABSU continued to pursue its demands, resulting in a series of tripartite talks involving the Bodo organizations, the state government, and the central government. However, the sudden demise of Upendra Nath Brahma in the midst of negotiations weakened the movement. The subsequent formation of the “Bodoland Autonomous Council” (BAC) (*Bodoland Autonomous Council Act, 1993*) under a state act failed to resolve critical issues, leading to a resurgence of the Bodoland movement and the emergence of the BLT as a formidable armed force.

The fratricidal clashes between the BLT and the NDFB throughout the 1990’s, along with ethnic tensions with immigrant Muslim and Adivasi

communities had resulted in large scale displacements and loss of property and lives. These, further exacerbated the situation, creating a volatile political climate in the region. Despite the relative calm following the formation of the BTC and the subsequent peace talks with the NDFB, ethnic violence resurfaced in 2008 and 2012, triggering the formation of counter-movements by non-tribal communities aimed at resisting the demand for Bodoland (Mahanta). Amidst ongoing conflicts and struggles over resources including indigenous forest lands (Kimura), the government initiated backdoor negotiations with various Bodo groups, including the armed factions of the NDFB. These negotiations ultimately led to the signing of the BTR peace accord in 2020, marking another significant milestone in the region's tireless pursuit of peace and stability (Talukdar).

Bodo Language Cinema and Mediascape

The Bodo language cinema exists within a unique mediascape that differs significantly from the mainstream cinema landscape in India. One notable characteristic is the limited licensing of Bodo language films by the "Central Board of Film Certification" (CBFC) (CBFC), a regulatory body for Indian cinema. Many Bodo language films, including those analysed in this study, often bypass the traditional CBFC certification process. Instead, they opt to produce and distribute their films primarily through mediums like CDs and DVDs. This divergence from conventional distribution methods can be attributed, in part, to the scarcity of cinema halls in the Bodoland region. Unlike in more urban areas, where multiplexes and cinema halls are common, the Bodo-speaking population has limited access to traditional movie theaters. Therefore, distributing films through CDs offers a more accessible means of reaching the native audience. This is apart from screenings in makeshift theatres during film festivals in "cultural events" (Bhuyan) or "local programmes" (Basumatary and Basumatary) in villages among paying audiences. However, the increasing availability and access to digital devices and low-cost internet in rural villages have transformed the Bodo media landscape enabling the emergence of social media platforms as preferred channels for releasing these Bodo language films. The "Indigenous content creators" leverage platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and other digital platforms to express their own identity, educate others, make political gains, and insert indigeneity into the future (McLaurin). Hence, this shift reflects a global trend wherein digital platforms have become essential for independent filmmakers to reach their target viewership.

Although mainstream Hindi cinema is prominent in Assam, it is the As-

samese language media that completely dominates the news media landscape in Assam. It boasts of numerous dailies (newspapers) and satellite news channels in operation that cater to the broader Assamese-speaking population. However, a few Bodo language newspapers have appeared from time to time on the scene to fulfil the needs of the Bodo-speaking population, but have never been able to be in circulation for long. At present, only two Bodo language dailies continue to circulate, underscoring the enduring struggle for linguistic representation within the news media sector. With the advent of the internet, a few Bodo language news channels have cropped up in the digital space, especially on social media platforms. This development represents a promising avenue for the Bodo-speaking community to access news and information in their native language.

Thus, the Bodo language film and media landscape reflects a distinctive blend of challenges and opportunities. The film industry has adapted to limited cinema infrastructure by embracing digital distribution through CDs and social media. While, the news media sector grapples with the dominance of Assamese language media but sees promise in the emergence of Bodo language news channels in the digital realm. These developments exemplify the evolving dynamics of linguistic representation and media accessibility in the Bodoland region, driven in large part by advancements in technology.

Cinema as a Site of Mimicry and Resistance

Cinema, being a vibrant and influential medium of art and communication, often provide a platform for the dual dynamics of mimicry and resistance. Within these cinematic creations, diverse techniques such as framing (humour), stereotyping (representation), sarcasm (content), and mimicry (form) are harnessed to interact with dominant ideologies. They disrupt entrenched power dynamics, and question oppressive norms, all within the constraints of limited financial resources. These strategies transcend mere artistic expression, emerging as potent instruments for marginalized communities to amplify their voices and share their narratives through cost-effective production methods.

In the landscape of filmmaking, mimicry emerges as a formidable tool of resistance. Filmmakers strategically embrace conventional storytelling approaches (hero-centric stories), character portrayals (stereotypes), and narrative structures (with songs and fights) employed by mainstream productions. By utilising these familiar cinematic conventions, they convey

their own unique messages and viewpoints. This deliberate adoption of well-known cinematic language into their low-cost productions, allows marginalised groups to subtly challenge and reshape prevailing narratives, thereby allowing audiences to reconsider entrenched perspectives. This process of cinematic mimicry effectively counters the tendencies of erasure and misrepresentation, giving voice to experiences that have historically been marginalised or overlooked. However, by engaging with mimicry and other creative techniques, filmmakers can effectively counterbalance the financial constraints of their productions with a wealth of innovative storytelling approaches. Through this resourceful approach, cinema becomes a catalyst for change, capable of both inspiring reflections and sparking meaningful conversations about societal norms, cultural representation, and the empowerment of voices that have traditionally been stifled. The power of cinema lies not only in its ability to entertain but also in its capacity to challenge societal norms, amplify marginalised voices, and stimulate critical discourse. Through mimicry, humour, stereotyping, and sarcasm, filmmakers can effectively engage with the complexities of their environments, offering both subtle and overt resistance to oppressive forces. As a result, cinema emerges as a potent instrument of change, contributing to the ongoing dialogue around social justice, cultural representation, and the assertion of identities that have long been suppressed or overlooked (Ryan and Kellner).

The humorous framing involves the deliberate presentation of events, characters, and themes in a particular manner to influence audience perceptions. In his work, Pötzsch (2012) suggests that, in addition to initiating processes of framing film narratives, opening sequences also activate specific rhetoric related to memory-making. This reality narrative approach is influenced by the research of Pötzsch the author suggests that, besides initiating processes of framing film worlds, opening sequences also activate a certain memory-making rhetoric that enables potential impacts on historical discourse and memory politics. He subdivides this last function into three rhetorical modes of cultural memory – an objectifying, subjective and reflexive approach. Subsequently, the author provides close readings of the opening sequences of various contemporary war films to exemplify and illustrate each function and rhetorical mode. In conclusion, the author connects a recent surge in films employing a subjective and reflexive rhetoric to changes in imaging technologies.”, ”container-title”: ”Media, War & Conflict”, ”DOI”: ”10.1177/1750635212440918”, ”ISSN”: ”1750-6352, 1750-6360”, ”issue”: ”2”, ”journalAbbreviation”: ”Media, War & Conflict”, ”language”: ”en”, ”page”: ”155-173”, ”source”: ”DOI.org (Crossref on the framing of issues within media discourse. This rhetoric

has the potential to influence historical discourse and discussions surrounding memory politics. His insights are valuable in understanding how the film series constructs its narrative world. The stereotyping, on the other hand, can be both a perpetuator of oppressive norms and a means of dismantling them. Filmmakers often employ stereotypes to subvert conventional expectations and highlight the absurdity of prejudiced assumptions. Kashima's work on the role of stereotypes in collective information processing serves as a foundational cornerstone in our understanding of memory and stereotype recall. It underscores the compelling journey of exploring memory processes and the recollection of stereotypes, where recent advancements in social cognition research harmonize with classical insights from the realm of social psychology. Her research contributes to our understanding of stereotypes' enduring presence and influence. It illuminates the intricate processes governing how we perceive, remember, and perpetuate societal stereotypes, thereby enriching our comprehension of the multifaceted interplay between memory, perception, and societal dynamics (Kashima).

The sarcasm, with its satirical edge, allows filmmakers to expose contradictions, hypocrisy, and injustices in society, often pushing viewers to reflect on prevailing issues in a more critical light. In the process of memory-making the use of 'sarcasm' resonates with the insights offered by Eslen-Ziya in her examination of sarcasm as a potent discursive practice. This approach not only entertains but also encourages viewers to engage in contemplation and introspection regarding societal flaws (Eslen-Ziya). Sarcasm is also employed as a discursive practice within the film series, where the connotation diverges from the literal meaning. Along with sarcasm, mimicry operates as a form of resistance that deliberately mimics dominant ideologies, values, and practices to subvert the power dynamics of a given situation. However, this strategic approach allows individuals or groups to navigate precarious situations by deflecting attacks, constructing legitimacy, and contesting oppressive systems without facing immediate backlash or delegitimation from those in power.

Homi Bhabha's conceptual framework of 'mimetic faculty' describes the ability of an oppressed group to employ mimicry in order to survive within oppressive environments. Within the context of colonial discourses, he adopts the concept of 'mimicry' as a strategic tool for examining circumvention and resistance. He furthers the argument that although mimicry may seem to be a sign of submission and superficially appears as an acquiescence, it can actually be a tool to challenge the status quo and established norms. This utilisation of mimicry also closely aligns with Bhabha's

assertion that mimicry empowers subjugated subjects to respond to a colonial gaze with a counter-gaze, ultimately disrupting established power structures (H. Bhabha). This application of mimicry strongly resonates with his other argument that mimicry possesses potent capabilities when employed against colonial discourses. This concept finds particular resonance in the context of filmmaking, where mimicry allows individuals and groups to navigate their way around oppressive systems and create their own identity, which in turn can generate greater freedom and agency (H. K. Bhabha). However, in the realm of filmmaking, this phenomenon attains unique significance as marginalised or oppressed groups seize the opportunity to utilize mimicry as a narrative strategy, enabling them to not only survive but thrive within an environment that might otherwise suppress their voices.

Together with this hybrid theoretical framework, this study explores the significance of "Haina Muli," the comedy film series intended not just for entertainment but also as a form of resistance through humour, stereotypes, and sarcasm aimed at the people of the Bodo tribe in the north-western part of Assam. This study also routes to analyse how the films' narratives use mimicry, humour, sarcasm, and stereotyping to address the social and political challenges faced by people in the Bodoland region, and how the film series attempts to provide a platform for the Bodo community to share their experiences and perspectives. By doing so the study sheds light on the power of art and filmmaking in amplifying unheard stories, memories, experiences, voices, etc., this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of comedy films in reflecting and engaging with societal issues, particularly those of communities like the Bodos.

Methodology

The first step in this methodology involved the careful selection of the entire "Haina Muli" film series, comprising all seven parts, for comprehensive analysis. To ensure a thorough examination, each episode was watched multiple times, both with and without interruptions for data collection (Teixeira et al.). This approach provided an opportunity to capture the intricate details embedded within the film series, thus enhancing the depth of the analysis. In addition to the extensive viewing process, the study also encompassed a meticulous review of the social and political issues depicted in the film series. This phase involved a systematic exploration of dialogues, character dynamics, visual elements, and plot developments. Concurrently, relevant literature and contextual information regarding the Bodo community and the Bodoland region were reviewed

to augment the analysis.

The study employs Narrative Discourse Analysis (NDA) to conduct an in-depth examination of "Haina Muli" and its representation of Bodo social and political culture. NDA, as outlined by Gerard Genette in his seminal work "Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method" (Genette), allows for a meticulous deconstruction of the narrative structure, going beyond traditional analyses. By integrating discourse analysis, this method offers a nuanced exploration of how the cultural narrative and language, functioning as semiotics, contribute to the portrayal of culture and society within the film series. Rooted in the foundations of Discourse and Cultural Semiotics, this methodological framework enables a comprehensive investigation into the film's underlying themes. Through NDA, this study delves into the intricate layers of the narrative, dissecting elements such as framing reality, stereotyping, sarcasm, and mimicry as circumvention techniques. This comprehensive analysis, also unveils the subtle nuances of the film's storytelling, shedding light on the intricate interplay between cultural discourse and cinematic representation within the Bodo community.

Analysis

The film series embarks on an exploration of the intricacies of daily life experienced by the Bodo people, reinterpreting these challenges through the unique lens of comedy, while remaining acutely attuned to the surrounding socio-cultural landscape. A thorough examination of the film series reveals the prominence of several key themes, notably the skilful art of framing reality, the depiction of stereotypes regarding the 'other,' the strategic deployment of mimicry as a tool for circumvention, and the pervasive presence of sarcasm seamlessly interwoven into the narrative fabric.

A Comedic Lens on Social Realities of Bodo Society

Within the fabric of society, a tapestry woven with diverse beliefs and traditions, blind beliefs often find a place to persist. Such is the case among the Bodo people, where the notion of witches and the resultant incidents of witch-hunting have been regularly documented in the mainstream media (Saikia). While 'Haina Muli' doesn't directly confront the issue of witch-hunting, it engages with the broader theme of unwavering belief in metaphysical powers within the Bodo community. In doing so, it frames this issue as a subject that warrants consideration and

introspection (Pötzsch) the author suggests that, besides initiating processes of framing film worlds, opening sequences also activate a certain memory-making rhetoric that enables potential impacts on historical discourse and memory politics. He subdivides this last function into three rhetorical modes of cultural memory – an objectifying, subjective and reflexive approach. Subsequently, the author provides close readings of the opening sequences of various contemporary war films to exemplify and illustrate each function and rhetorical mode. In conclusion, the author connects a recent surge in films employing a subjective and reflexive rhetoric to changes in imaging technologies.”, “container-title”: “Media, War & Conflict”, “DOI”: “10.1177/1750635212440918”, “ISSN”: “1750-6352, 1750-6360”, “issue”: “2”, “journalAbbreviation”: “Media, War & Conflict”, “language”: “en”, “page”: “155-173”, “source”: “DOI.org (Crossref. The film series deftly portrays individuals who claim to possess the ability to manipulate others’ thoughts and desires. However, it doesn’t shy away from revealing the fraudulent nature of these claims, which are primarily intended to deceive ordinary people. Despite its comical approach, the film series retains a profound sense of gravity of this issue.

Similarly, the film series also delves into the tumultuous political landscape of the Bodoland region during the specified period, with a notable emphasis in its fifth episode. This segment of the film series places culpability for the surge in political violence squarely on the shoulders of both Bodo political parties and the broader civil society. It suggests that this prevailing ambivalence within these spheres fosters an environment conducive to the rise of criminal elements, individuals who are unhesitating in committing crimes and seizing substantial power and wealth for themselves. This portrayal alludes to the notion that such ambivalence can be a breeding ground for individuals with criminal inclinations, exacerbating the complex dynamics of the region.

Reflecting and Challenging Cultural Biases and Unpacking Stereotypes

Stereotypes of cultures are socially shared ideations that are “likely to play a significant role not only in the individual’s cognitive processes but also in the information processing within collectives” (Kashima, 2000, p. 594). The ‘Hina Muli’ film series, though popular among common Bodo masses and provided respite from the prevalent violence and turmoil of its time, exhibits instances where it engages in the act of stereotyping. In the film, though, many images of the “other” (Said) are stereotyped; such stereotypes are originally created by the mainstream media whose narrative the film supposedly challenges. Whereas the ‘others’ here are the

non-tribal communities with which Bodos share the space of Bodoland.

In this film series, “Hanif Ali” (a Muslim character) a common friend of the protagonists, is shown as having many wives and children and still looking for another woman to marry. He is also shown helping the protagonists sell stolen goods, including cows. Another stereotype associated with Muslims in the film series is that they are not trustworthy. The Muslim character in the film series articulates that Bodos cannot be trusted during the day and Muslims can’t be trusted at night. The Bengali Muslim community which is among the largest communities of Assam is also portrayed as downgraded and hindered due to their limited cultural capital. Apart from that, the community is also often shown as “illegal migrants” (Pathan and Jha) or “doubtful Bangladeshis” (Pathan & Jha, 2022) who have come and occupied the indigenous peoples’ land, including that of the Bodos. This baggage of suspicion and marginalization is borne by the Bengali Muslim community, regardless of whether its members are old inhabitants of Assam or not. These depictions subtly reinforce stereotypes which often associated with Muslims, portraying them as individuals with questionable moral character and loyalty.

The film series, with its inclusion of such adopted ‘negative’ mainstream constructed stereotypes, brings in a fresh perspective to the representation of these Muslim characters by adding humour, sarcasm and mimicry while simultaneously challenging cultural biases. Despite its role as a source of entertainment and comic relief, the film series raises questions about the intricacies of stereotyping within society, serving as a source of escapism for its audience. The humourous stereotypes not only perpetuate negative perceptions of Muslims but also align with broader societal biases. It inadvertently mirrors and reinforces certain societal prejudices, shedding light on the deep-rooted nature of these biases even within forms of media that seek to challenge them.

Unveiling Bodo Society and Politics through Sarcastic Reflections

Within the ‘Hina Muli’ film series, sarcasm emerges as a potent discursive tool by delivering incisive commentary on the negative traits of the Bodo society and politics. The linguistic practice of sarcasm, as elucidated by Eslen-Ziya, involves employing connotations that starkly contrast with the literal meanings of words or phrases (Eslen-Ziya). Throughout the film series, sarcasm is adroitly wielded to the negative traits associated with the Bodo community.

One striking instance of this is the film series' portrayal of democracy. A character within the narrative takes a sardonic approach to explain the concept, in a very sarcastic manner abbreviates the BTC (Bodoland Territorial Council) as "Butharlainai, Thwilainai arw Detharlainai," which translates to "killing, dying, and slaying each other." This acerbic jest poignantly underscores how democracy, in the context of Bodoland, has seemingly devolved into a relentless pursuit of power through any means necessary. It serves as a commentary on the erosion of the core principles of democracy within the region. The film series also delves into the deeply ingrained perception of violence within Bodo culture and history. One of the protagonists boldly states that violence has always been an integral part of the Bodo community's heritage, while another character humorously deconstructs the term 'gonotontro' which translates as democracy as 'gono' (people) and 'thontro' (recoil) instead of the original suffix of the word 'tontro' (system) in the Bodo language, implying that people recoil in fear within this so-called democracy.

This liberal use of sarcasm serves to accentuate the negative aspects of Bodo societal practices, inviting viewers to critically examine these elements. In the narrative, sarcasm is employed to highlight the presence of violence within Bodo culture and history, serving as a form of societal self-reflection. It is also used to underscore the culture of violence within the Bodo community's history, highlighting its continuous presence. However, by employing this discursive tool, the film series not only entertains but also encourages viewers to engage in introspection, shedding light on the nuanced societal dynamics and governance in the region.

Mimicry as a means of Resistance and Circumvention

Drawing inspiration from Bhabha's concept of mimicry and its role in creating an "in-between" (H. K. Bhabha) -ness for subjugated subjects, the film series employs mimicry as a powerful tool for challenging prevailing structures of discourse and power. It enables the subjugated to react to a colonial gaze with a counter-gaze. This strategic use of mimicry provides the subjugated Bodo community with a means to engage in a counter-gaze when confronted with a colonial perspective, effectively disrupting established power dynamics.

One particular compelling scene in "part 5" of the film series depicts Assamese media representation of Bodos as "absurd." The scene highlights the emergence of an organization of non-tribal communities, primarily to oppose the Bodoland movement and led by mainstream Assamese com-

munity members. Here, the two protagonists cleverly taunt Assamese journalists covering the Bodo-Muslim violence. In response to the journalists' query about the animal they are carrying, they facetiously claim to be transporting a 'non-cow animal' instead of simply stating that it's a goat, which it actually is. This was their way of mocking the Assamese media which uses the term "Ona-Bodo" (meaning - non-Bodo) to collectively refer to communities that are opposing the creation of the Bodoland state instead of taking the name of the specific communities involved. This is in spite of the fact that many communities are not involved in any protest against Bodoland and some openly support the creation of a separate state.

In another scene, a mainstream Assamese character talks to the protagonists, where he complements and praises the Bodos for causing extensive damage to Muslim villages while assuring the moral support of his community for Bodos. To this, one of the protagonists reacts and declares that such tricks of instigating Bodos to indulge in violence are well known to them and that the trick is being played as part of a wider conspiracy to defame Bodos in front of 'others' to keep the community politically weak. He further extols that despite such attempts, Bodos will overcome all odds and rule Assam one day with the support of the others, upon which the Assamese character is shown to be running away without responding anything. The film series also posits that negative Assamese media portrayals of Bodos are intended to demoralize and degrade Bodo people and their struggle, which is ludicrous. Additionally, the film series also doesn't spare the educated Bodo elites, mocking them for leaving the illiterate population to engage in conflict at the behest of politicians. Instead of mediating among conflicting parties, the elite are shown to be lenient, silent, and escape to safer destinations. This aspect of mimicry highlights the film's critique of the educated elite's abandonment of their societal responsibilities.

The film series uses mimicry to mock non-tribals, who purportedly look down upon tribals for selling liquor, while they themselves indulge in the same activity. The filmmaker uses this film series to challenge the presumed superiority complex of the mainstream communities. The filmmaker's use of mimicry in the film series, disrupts and challenges this discourse as well as its associated power structure that tries to undermine the Bodoland statehood movement which is deemed by Bodos to have racist undertones. However, it can be understood as a reaction to a colonial discourse that attempts to denigrate the "other" (Said) by calling their practices or beliefs as 'nonsense.' Thus, the Bodo film series mimicked

'nonsense' to disturb, confuse, invoke fear, and challenge structures of power. It is also important to note that the film series predominantly concentrates on ethnic identities, often avoiding a deeper exploration of the economic realities faced by those involved in such businesses.

Discussion

The primary results of this study illuminate the multifaceted hybrid strategies employed within the 'Hina Muli' film series to address the socio-political concerns of the Bodo community in Bodoland, Assam. These results underscore the pervasive presence of mimicry, sarcasm, and stereotyping as narrative tools that enable the film series to navigate and respond to the complex socio-cultural and political landscape. Through mimicry, the film series disrupts established mainstream narratives and offers counter-gazes, particularly evident in its depiction of Assamese media representations and the responses of the protagonists. These actions serve to confront and undermine prevailing stereotypes and discourses, in alignment with Bhabha's framework. Drawing upon his concept, the study found that the film series cleverly uses mimicry to disrupt mainstream structures of discourse and power. This study also provides the literature on mimicry as a strategy for subjugated groups to challenge dominant narratives and successfully presents a counter-gaze, subverting stereotypes and offering an alternative perspective.

Stereotyping is another salient theme apparent in the study, with the film series acknowledging and, in some instances, perpetuating stereotypes about 'other' communities in Bodoland. These stereotypes, while challenging mainstream narratives, also reflect certain societal perceptions, echoing Said's notion of 'othering.' The film series confronts stereotypes related to the Muslim community's lifestyle and the broader perception of trustworthiness, highlighting the marginalized status of the Bengali Muslim community within Assam, underscoring the complex interplay between representation, identity, and cultural dynamics. Meanwhile, the sarcasm appears as a powerful discursive tool within the film series, enabling a critical commentary on democracy, violence, and societal practices within the Bodo community. This form of linguistic subversion, as discussed by Eslen-Ziya, serves to convey poignant critiques while maintaining a humorous veneer. In the film series, sarcasm operates as a means to stimulate reflection on the negative attributes of contemporary Bodo society and electoral politics, consistent with the film series' goal of addressing the societal challenges. However, the use of sarcasm in the film series also aligns with the literature on sarcasm as a form of language use

with non-literal meanings by showing that sarcasm effectively conveys critical commentary while using humour.

To summarise, the 'Hina Muli' film series effectively utilizes narrative strategies such as mimicry, stereotyping, and sarcasm to address socio-political issues within the Bodo community. These strategies are in line with the existing literature on mimicry as resistance, stereotyping, 'othering,' and sarcasm as a critical discourse. However, it's important to note that while the film series employs these strategies to challenge dominant narratives, it also sometimes perpetuates stereotypes about 'other' communities. These strategies collectively amplify the voices of the Bodo community, providing a platform for dialogue and self-reflection while engaging with the region's inhabitants' perspectives.

Conclusion

The film series, created primarily for entertainment, has many elements that depict a society besieged with various problems. In its pursuit of balancing entertainment with the portrayal of reality, the film series employs various discursive tools, including sarcasm, humour, stereotyping, and mimicry. These tools serve as vehicles for framing the narrative, sometimes influenced by mainstream stereotypes rooted in orientalist perspectives. At the same time, mimicry has been used to disrupt and challenge dominant structures of discourse and power pitted against the subjugated. Thus, the film series, on many fronts, has been successful in both entertaining the audience and simultaneously conveying messages related to society and politics in the Bodoland region of Assam. It navigates the delicate balance between humour and serious commentary, offering viewers an engaging experience while prompting critical reflections on the issues it portrays. Through its skilled use of discursive tools, 'Hina Muli' transcends the boundaries of mere entertainment, emerging as a medium that both captivates and enlightens, all while spotlighting the intricacies of a society in transition. The film series' ability to amalgamate entertainment and social reflection underscores the transformative potential of storytelling, especially when it resonates with the lived experiences of its audience. In the context of Bodoland, 'Hina Muli' serves as a unique and valuable narrative that mirrors the complexities and challenges faced by its people, advocating for both laughter and contemplation as essential components of societal discourse.

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