

Womanhood in Dahan and Antarmahal: A Cinematic Analysis of Family and Society

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Received: 12 April Revised: 19 April Accepted: 25 April

Abstract

Antarmahal and Dahan represent two films at two ends of the spectrum while representing women and their tribulations in different temporal settings. Dahan depicts a contemporary urban Kolkata where the female protagonist faces molestation at the metro station. Antarmahal on the other hand describes the story of two women stuck within the confines of four walls of a zamindari in colonial times. Although women find themselves in different social settings their predicament is defined by the men in their lives. Rituparno Ghosh masterfully explores the inner feelings of his female protagonists in both the films. In Antarmahal, religion is used as a tool of exploitation and suppression and in Dahan, the law is used as a force to dominate and control the women and their right to protest and express their views as the members of a society. It is the women's bodies which is the site of all struggle, a woman has no right over her own self and body. The patriarchal system lays claim over her and she is not allowed to act independent. Ghosh uses the cinematic liberty to establish this truth in light of two distinctly separate settings. Rituparno Ghosh's understanding of the role of women within the confines of her boundaries as determined by the male society is shown in detail in both these films. Women's pain and sufferings are not at all different even if there is a huge difference of time between them. In Antarmahal, the Zamindar Bhubaneswar Choudhury is the only person to decide everything and the others have to follow his rules. Likewise, in Dahan the female characters are dominated by the opposite sex in terms of taking decisions or expressing opinion.

Keywords: Antarmahal, Dahan, Rituparno Ghosh, women, patriarchy.

Introduction

Most of Rituparno Ghosh's films revolved around women and that is why he was often labelled as 'the woman's director of Bangla cinema'. His explanation regarding this is, 'it's just that I feel I understand the inner feelings of women, their passion, agony and suffering.' (Jain and Rai, 2009:18) Rituparno Ghosh is known for his capability to explore human relationship with a rare sensitivity. In all his films he handles human frailties with tenderness and understanding, humour and irony. It is the quality that won the young Bengali director laurels for most of the films he made. In less than a decade, he had acquired a reputation that takes him far beyond his immediate area of creative operation in West Bengal. A simple story line and superb acting makes his films special. As his films revolve around relationship, they are emotionally gripping and do not need the props of songs and dance unnecessarily. Moreover, what gives Rituparno an edge over other directors, is that he wins awards and draws crowds. 'Relationships fascinate me. I was born in a middle class family; so naturally, relationships played a very important part in my life. Even today, relationships are essential to me. So it comes easily to me-it is not a concerted, laborious effort on my part. (Jain and Rai, 2009:18) At the height of his fame stars from the mainstream Hindi cinema would line up to be able to work with him. This essay is based on the comparative analysis of two Bengali films i.e. Antarmahal and Dahan, and looks at the politics of womanhood as portrayed by Ghosh in two different social settings.

Violation and Vulnerability of Human Rights in the Context of Tea Garden Workers in Assam with Special Reference to Social Protection Schemes

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Abstract

The contributions of the tea gardens to Assam's economy are enormous. The tea garden workers also have contributed to the culture of Assam over the period. Yet, there are recurrent problems pertaining to various aspects of the social and economic conditions of the tea garden workers in Assam. In everyday life, most of the plantation workers have a very low income and most of them lead a low quality of life. They are deprived of the basic facilities needed to live a decent life. Despite the existence of many well-intended social welfare programmes of the government, which are meant to uplift them from the vulnerable conditions, these groups are lacking any effective access to those programmes. Through qualitative data, this paper aims to understand the vulnerabilities of the tea garden workers, violation of their rights to have a dignified life and the barriers in having access to various social welfare schemes of the government. The paper explores conditions of tea garden workers through the assessment of their awareness level on various social welfare and entitlement schemes. Finally, this paper explores the possibilities of human rights approach to address the glaring problems faced by the tea gardens workers perpetually.

Key words: - Tea Garden Workers, vulnerability, health, education, estate.

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Introduction

Since the colonial times, many workers were brought in or came seeking work in the tea gardens of Assam, from areas that today form parts of the states of Orissa, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Jharkhand. As the trade in tea grew, the lives of the local people and these outside workers became intertwined with the happenings at the tea plantation or the tea "estate". The tea estates were, and are still, run on a capitalist mode for profit basis. The workers or the labour force forms the last link in this chain. The managers and owners of these estates are incentivized to earn the maximum and keeping the costs of production at the minimum. In most cases, the labour force also lives onsite in the estates; in what are called "Labour Lines", or in some cases, temporary housings. Their non-work life is also part of the tea estate. Children grow up on the estate; they study there; places of worship are built within the boundaries; festivals are celebrated; clinics are built inside the plantations; and in some cases, even funeral processions start from the estate.

When we look into the provisions available for the workers, they are evidently found to be not adequate. They have been controlled and dominated by the tea plantation management. To address their issues, Government of India passed The Plantation Labour Act (PLA) in 1951 with the intention to break the centrality of control and power held by the employers and to provide some semblance of a framework of minimum labour rights to the plantation workers. The Act speaks, amongst other things, of the responsibilities of the plantation owners to provide adequate housing, drinking water and sanitation for all workers, educational and crèche facilities for children, maternity and leave allowances, and guidelines for daily working hours etc. However, as is seen, this Act has remained largely without proper enforcement, or else its requirements have been superficially fulfilled over the years. It may not also be possible for the plantation management to fulfill all the requirements of the act without taking support of the social protection and social welfare schemes provided by the Central and Assam government. It has been reported that,

Violations of the PLA in relation to health care, housing and sanitation are widespread. Workers live crowded together in cramped quarters with cracked walls and broken roofs. The failure to maintain latrines has turned some living areas into a network of cesspools. APPL is failing to provide adequate health care, both in respect of quality and access (Rosenblum & Sukthankar 2014, p. 9)

The tea garden workers and their welfare can no longer be seen as an isolated agenda wherein the tea garden authorities hold the main stake and are obligated to provide for their entitlements. The State and its

Missionaries and Early Press in Assam: The Question of Language and Identity

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Abstract:

The advent of the Missionaries to Assam played a crucial role in establishing a full-fledged press system in Assam and the entire north east. They not only standardized printing practices but in the process worked on language and grammar. The process of recognition to a standard form of language was made after much effort of various groups. Nonetheless, the role of the missionaries was unique not only for evangelical purposes but spread of literacy in the region as well. Orunodoi was established as the first newspaper in Assamese printed by them from Sivasagar in 1846. This was followed by several other newspaper publications and the press revolution had truly started in Assam. The consequent publications not only standardized the language to a great extent but also helped in building the larger Assamese identity that we know today.

Keywords: Press, Missionaries, Assamese, Print, Orunodoi, Identity

1. Introduction

I have divided this paper broadly into two parts, the advent of the American Missionaries into Assam, secondly, the arrival of the printing press and the initiation of literary activities, like the first Assamese print journal Orunodoi. Any historical analysis on the growth of the press in Assam cannot be complete without a mention of the contribution of the missionaries to Assamese language and consciousness. I have selected the three epochs to understand the growth of journalism and journalistic activities in nineteenth century Assam to late twentieth century post-agitation evolution of the press.

The American Baptist Missionaries, who made Assam their field of evangelical activity, had an important role to play in the collective life of the Assamese people. It was the role of resuscitation of the Assamese Language from a ban in administrative and educational matters and its culture as a medium of expression. As a result of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, which

Humanizing Alexa: Some Reflections on Recent TV Advertisements of Amazon Echo Smart Speakers

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical discussion on the TV commercials of Amazon Echo smart speakers, currently being aired on Indian TV channels and also uploaded in YouTube. It is a textual analysis of the select contents of the advertisements, especially incorporating the subtleties of emergent Indian domestic space which are represented in them to ensure acceptance of the product in Indian familial consumptions. It is argued in the conclusion that a process of dehumanizing automation is creatively altered in these video commercials to make the product feel like a human.

Key words: Advertisements, Gender Role Portrayal, Anthropomorphism, Consumer Culture.

Introduction

As another wonder from the much-cherished digital technology of the current age, the e-commerce giant Amazon Inc launched its versatile smart speaker systems, branded as Echo, also referred through its conversational agent named which is named as *Alexa*, in the later part of 2017 in India (Malik). In post-liberalization India, after the domestication of smartphones and low-cost internet services, one of the next sensations lined up on the doorstep seems to be the smart speakers, or voice-controlled intelligent personal assistants (IPA). In addition to Alexa from the *Amazon*, other virtual assistants which have already become familiar names to Indian consumers are Google's *Assistant*, Microsoft's *Cortana* and Apple's *Siri*.

Amazon Echo Advertisements

To begin with, there are twelve video commercials which have been uploaded in YouTube by Amazon Echo India in the month of June, 2019. These video commercials, which are the subject matter of this paper, are being aired on TV during high-consumption times, including the live telecast of the ICC World Cup 2019. Whereas the earlier such commercials of the same product, which were uploaded within a year or less, were more about making the gadget familiar to the new consumers in India, this later sequel of the commercials is evidently about internalizing this IPA within the domestic fabric of the affluent urban Indian families. A brief summary of these later sequel is described below to begin the discussion of this paper.

In the clip titled *Party anytime with Amazon Echo*, a couple is seen to be preparing to receive their guests for dinner. While preparing the dinning table, the wife commands Alexa to check messages and it is found the guests are not going to turn up for the dinner. To manage this frustrating situation, the husband asks Alexa to play party music which the smart speaker plays instantly. The wife, though initially reluctant, joins the husband for a dance in tune of a bhangra music played by Alexa. Alexa also dims the light in respond to a voice command from the wife. In the clip *Bedtime Stories on Echo*, a little girl during bedtime asks her father, who is seen to be tired, to tell a story. The tired father asks Alexa to tell a story which the speaker responds instantly by narrating a story of lion. When the father begins to doze, the little girl whispers Alexa to play the sound of lion. The roaring sound of lion played by Alexa shocks the dozing father, to the amusement of the little girl. Similarly, in the other clips of the commercials of this sequel demonstrate a kid getting assistance from Alexa for homework when her father is unable to do it; a young woman making hands-free video calling to her father to find that the old man is eating sweets; a man asking Alexa to change timers during his morning exercise; a woman at home asks Alexa to show the front door as the calling bell rings when her hands are busy in nail

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HISTORY OF PRESS IN ASSAM: AN ANALYSIS OF PRE AND POST AGITATION PERIOD

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Abstract

One of the most important events in the history of Assam was the agitation against the illegal migrants from Bangladesh then known as East Pakistan. Many people argue that the whole plot of the agitation was only an urban phenomenon as newspapers had quite limited reach in flaring up the issues in question. Language was at the center of the agitation. "Two key organizations that play a central role in the constitution of Assamese civil society are: the 'Assam Sahitya Sabha'* and the 'All Assam Students Union'. It was during this period of the agitation that the press took an active role in the agitation. Some of the left leaning publications also had to face the brunt of the agitators; while in general, the press supported the idea of the agitation. Press has been the cornerstone of the essence of Assamese identity. It helped formalizing the idea of a modern language system with proper grammar under the guidance of the Missionaries.

Keywords:

Agitation;
Press;
Assam;
Missionaries;
Language.

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* Assam Sahitya Sabha is a literary body founded in 1917, that works for Assamese literature and culture. It plays an important role in the national life of the state and remains an important voice in matters of national relevance

**ETHNOGRAPHY OF A LOCAL CABLE NEWS CHANNEL:
STRUCTURE, ECONOMY AND ENTERTAINMENT OF THE
NEIGHBOURHOOD**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to understand the anatomy of local cable channels in the context of Assam. Urban centers have long been the centers of cultural dissemination, while the rural has been consumers. Through the example of a local cable news channel and its functioning I try to attempt at an understanding how they are the new nerve centers of an emerging class order which establishes its identity by the content of its own. Barak Television Network is one such channel that records everything from a wedding to a local cricket match to a puja pandal and in the process stays relevant to its loyal subscribers. The economic structure of such an enterprise is not on a firm footing but survival has become synonymous with these channels.

Keywords: local cable channel, media, culture, television, news

1. INTRODUCTION

Assam today has around 250 registered Local Cable Operators (LCO) and Multiple System Operators (MSO). Every town has one or more LCO who compete with each other for the share of households. In some case, a single locality has two operators existing. Larger towns generally have MSO's and have many cable operators under them. Cable networks originated in the early 1990's, and ever since have vied for space with the state run DD. The influx of numerous satellite channels in the late 1990's saw the popularity of such network grow and every person of considerable economic and political clout opened a network. Local Cable Channels (LCC) is not a new phenomenon in India, and most cable networks have one. The most popular form of such channels is ones which plays songs and movies.

2. BARAK TELEVISION NETWORK (BTN)

Cachar district is located in the southernmost part of Assam. Administratively divided into two subdivisions viz. Silchar (Sadar) and Lakhipur, Cachar district occupies an area of 3,786 square

Editorial Structures of Local Cable Channels in Assam: Legality of News and Content from the Grassroots

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Abstract – *The cable revolution in India post 1991 was by no means a small achievement in democratizing the viewers ability to demand content from producers. At the click of a remote the audience was at home with global content with a plethora of choices in multiple languages. But what this largesse hid in plain sight was the systematic erasure of the local content from the screens. By local here I mean grassroots content from the communities. In this paper I study the local cable television channels in Assam by taking one such operator base channels called V&S network. This operated within a community or at best within a district for example and produced programming that was relevant to the immediate masses. The system of operation was a highly localized form of cooperative news and content gathering. This sort of media is termed as truly local which caters to the sections of the neighborhood. Despite legal hurdles local cable channels have thrived and survived although precariously.*

Keywords – Channels, Media, Cable, Local, Programme, Community

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1. INTRODUCTION

The increase in digitization process of television channels in the Indian cable space has led to a cartelization of content from urban centers. While the quality of content and signals has gone in the positive direction, what has suffered is diversity. Local cable operators (LCO) and Multiple System Operators (MSO) have long tried to neutralize this by operating channels at the grassroots level. While these channels have mushroomed over the years catering to local content, they have also faced legal and economic hurdles to sustain and survive. In this paper I Analyse these aspects of a local cable channel (LCC) called V & S Cable network based out of Dibrugarh, Assam and how it has negotiated the challenges.

2. V&S CABLE NETWORK

Dibrugarh district covers an area of 3,381 square kilometers in Assam. According to the 2011 census Dibrugarh district has a population of 1,327,748. It has a population density of 393 inhabitants per square kilometer. Dibrugarh has a literacy rate of 76.22%. Dibrugarh city is the headquarters of the Dibrugarh district. It is located 439 km. east of Guwahati. It is the gateway to the three tea-producing districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, and Sivasagar. The Brahmaputra passes by the city as it

emerges from the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh. Dibrugarh boasts of editions of several state dailies like The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, *Asomiya Pratidin*, *Janasadharan*, *Niyamiya Barta*, *Dainik Asom* and *Dainik Jugasankha*.

V&S Cable network is a super MSO registered in Tinsukia with their office in Dibrugarh and reaches almost the entire upper Assam districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Jorhat. With such a vast distribution asset V&S claims itself to be one of the largest in the North East.

3. ORIGIN

As part of my research I had interviewed the Editor Mr. Chandan Jyoti Kalita of VNS cable (constituent channels of V&S network) channel and also observed the functioning of the Local Cable Channels (LCC) that they run, an important constituent of the distribution network, in an effort to understand the equation between these two entities-the channels and the network.

Mr. Kalita says “we started on July 1, 2009. We have four channels VnS News, *Aamar* VnS is an entertainment channel with local singers and artists and VnS *Bangla*.

**Conflicts behind the Spectacle:
The Turbulent History in
Making of the *Karbi Youth
Festival* in Assam**

Maharshi Dayanand University
Research Journal ARTS
2019, Vol. 18 (1) pp.33-49
ISSN 0972-706X
© The Author(s) 2019
<http://www.mdu.ac.in/Journals/about.html>

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Abstract

The Karbi Youth Festival is one of the most visible and important annually held cultural events in Assam. The formation and development of this iconic cultural spectacle of the indigenous community, the Karbi, of Assam are intricately connected to the ethnic identity assertion of the Karbis since the 1970s. This paper delineates the salient historical factors and incidents of the Karbi identity movement in reference to the making of this festival. Drawing on anthropological theorization of ritual by Victor Turner and other later researchers, this paper analyses the Karbi Youth Festival in terms of its instrumental capacity to intervene with the status-quo, by virtue of its liminality as theorized by Turner in the context of rituals, in consolidating a holistic Karbi identity in the emergent socio-political context.

Keywords: The Karbis, Assam, Ethnic identity, Cultural festival, Cultural Spectacle

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Asian Cinema
Volume 30 Number 2

© 2019 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/ac_00004_1

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Cinematic landscapes of Northeast India through an ecocritical lens

ABSTRACT

The exploitation of nature for man's insatiable desires is analogous to the subordination of ethnic minorities in many third world countries. This has also found resonance in the cinematic representations of the natural environment and the ethnic and racial profiling of people of these countries. The Northeast of India has always found little mention in the dominant discourse of the Indian nation. Along with this, the age-old rhetoric of exploitation of its natural resources and the lackadaisical attitude of the Indian state towards its people has led to a growing sense of alienation among the people of this peripheral Indian land. The matter is further aggravated by the region's distorted representations in popular Bollywood films. The article offers an ecocritical reading of two Bollywood films about Northeast India to understand how cinematic landscapes can be used to impart ideas about specific places. We argue that the very landscapes the filmmakers use to present ideas about places can be used to highlight the politics of place-based identities and to attempt a critique of their position in the nationalist discourse.

KEYWORDS

cinematic landscapes
centre
periphery
nature
ecocinema
geopolitics

INTRODUCTION

The divide between the world of nature – the natural world – and that of man – the cultural world – has been articulated most frequently in our daily exchange of ideas, perceptions and even in various forms of textual representations like literary and cinematic texts. The schism opens up the debate to the constructed nature of the natural world itself. While ecocritics conceive of nature as a self-articulating subject, such a stand is complicated by the paradoxical character of reality where any attempt to overcome the human/non-human divides within the discourse is negated by the undeniable presence of the human subject speaking on behalf of nature (Oppermann 1999: 33). The autonomy of the natural world is further compromised by man's insatiable urge to appropriate it for his own gains. This is evident in modern societies where nature is constructed as the 'other' of human civilization and is positioned in opposition to culture. Therefore, the 'civilized' people of modern societies are identified as those who cultivate and change nature and, in doing so, their right over it is established. In this nature/culture dichotomy, nature is often equated with ideas of crudeness, savagery, barbarism as well as servility that allow men to dictate over its resources. It is in this sense that nature has often been used as a trope in the discussion of racial identities, ethnicities and feminist body politics. This nature/culture divide emerged as a meta-narrative of modern thought and was more so during the period of Enlightenment when science provided men means to exert their control over the natural world. Under the rational model of thought, nature was externalized as an object and social and technological changes justified men's use and control over the servile natural 'object'. This led to it being conceived of either as an object of control or as wilderness to be preserved 'apart' from human society (Lee 2000: 23).

This view of nature draws a parallel to the subjugation of racial and ethnic minorities in many third world countries, who live away from the centre of power and in the periphery of decision making. This divide has also found resonance in representations of the natural environment and various ethnic and racial profiling of the people of Asia and Africa in western literature and films in both explicit and implicit ways. It is not uncommon that many films made in the West or European countries project certain parts of Asia as dark, underdeveloped and uninhabitable. Even in much of the postcolonial literature, where colonizers are indicated to be plundering the wealth and natural resources of poor third world countries under the guise of development, nature finds a prominent place. Long after the independence of these countries, the tradition of exploitation continues, of those rich in natural abundance in the 'periphery' by those rich in technology in the 'centre'; from nature to the man-made centre. But together with this rhetoric of exploitation, there is also a conference of 'otherness' to the people residing in less developed territories in terms of their lifestyle, food and culture and, sometimes, as in the case of certain populations of Northeast India, even in terms of their nationality.

Such a discussion leads us to the reading of our natural environment in films in new terms. In such a reading, the natural landscape does not remain confined to the background of the narrative but becomes a powerful means to broach sociopolitical issues and highlight identity positions. This is where we would like to take recourse to ecocriticism to emphasize the ways in which the less industrialized and peripheral territories are relegated to a position of lesser

importance, which leads them to being considered 'apart' from the imaginary map of the nation. Ecocriticism, which emerged in the 1990s, started looking at the natural environment as an autonomous being existing both apart from mankind (not in conflict) but also as an inseparable part of his existence. Ecocinema then emerged as a way of expanding ecocriticism's horizons to the study of film texts. It has opened up the ways in which important questions of subjectivities could be broached through the study of a film's presentation of landscapes by dissolving the hierarchical relationship between self and nature. In Adrian Ivakhiv's book *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature* (2013b), he writes about how a film's moving images are ecological in their constitution. This is supported by Rust et al. who write that to qualify as ecocinema, a film need not always raise ecological issues directly; it is rather the interpretation of the films that qualifies them as 'ecocinema' (2013: 2–3). Such a definition opens up ecocinema to a wide range of different conceptualizations and appropriations by film critics and analysts alike. It attests to the fact that all film genres can be subjected to an ecocritical reading. Therefore, the natural landscape in film can be used not only to talk about environmental issues but also to bring up issues of isolation, seclusion and discussions of post-colonial ethnic and racial discriminations. The connecting strand in all these diverse areas is the inherent structure of power that seethes deep into our everyday interaction, in the portrayal and representation of nature and various ethnic and minority identities. Therefore, the politics of nature has become the politics of the nation.

By using ecocriticism as a tool, this analysis tries to understand the dominant gaze of Bollywood filmmakers towards the Northeastern part of India through cinematic landscapes. Landscapes provide essential imagery to aid the interpretation of texts. The study of landscapes offers a view of nature emancipated from the presence of human beings or at least one that makes its presence felt (Lefebvre 2011: 62). On the other hand, an ecocritical reading of the filmic text attempts to examine how the environment is portrayed, how actors negotiate and interact with the environment, how they make sense of the natural place and how nature is anthropomorphized. Therefore, while many ecocritical readings pertain to the examination of issues as vast as the representation of nature and natural environment in films, impacts of urbanization, man–nature conflict, etc., this article tries to use ecocriticism to articulate the way in which less industrialized fringe territories such as the Northeast of India, which abound in natural resources, are positioned in the national imagery of the Indian nation. In this way, we try to expand the ambit of ecocinematic engagement to the study of 'otherness' of places and people within the nationalist discourse.

The aim of this article is to critically examine the various mechanisms by which images of natural landscapes can be used to circulate ideas of 'self' and 'other' in films. It interconnects two related yet diverse areas of study: the area of ecocriticism and that of cultural geography. While ecocinema aims to bring out the multifarious meanings men attribute to natural landscapes to broach ideas of oneness and difference, cultural geography opens up the reading of the texts to the geopolitics of the nation. The cinematic landscape here refers to the filmic representation of an actual or imagined environment viewed by a spectator. The findings are based on an ecocritical reading of two Bollywood films made post the year 2000: *Tango Charlie* (Shankar, 2005) and *Bumm Bumm Bole* (Priyadarshan, 2010). Both these films make excellent cases for ecocinema studies because of the inherent meanings that have been

imbued to the natural landscapes to depict ideas of the wild and the civilized, the dominant and the servile 'other'. Both films foreground the role of landscapes to make them not just objects of interpretation but also to give them the agency to narrate a story of 'otherness'. In a way, such a reading shows how filmmakers can use landscapes as an important element of the *mise en scène* in broaching sociopolitical concerns of the day.

LANDSCAPES OF NORTHEAST INDIA IN *TANGO CHARLIE* AND *BUMM BUMM BOLE*: AN ECOCRITICAL READING

The study of landscapes reveals interesting facets of man's relation to the world around him. It has now been widely recognized that it is not just the narrative content of film but also the natural landscapes that can play an important role in negotiating ideas about the nation. The screen image becomes an important component of the cinematic landscape as it grounds action and creates a sense of space and time for the audience to locate themselves. Apart from being a site for negotiation of cultural identities where meanings and understanding about groups, people, community and region are exchanged between the audiences, the representations of places and cultures in films through landscapes are an interpretation and a record of the space or place in question (da Costa 2003:191). It is this relationship of the film to the natural world that eco-film critics try to emphasize. According to the ecocritical perspective, our environment is not removed from our existence but it comprises of the whole habitat that surrounds us, where the physical world finds itself entangled with the cultural (Rust et al. 2013:1).

Landscapes therefore constitute a vital segment of a film's representational strategy. The director can make use of the barren earth, the mountains, hills, the water bodies or the landscape of the city beings moving on earth to make strong political statements. *Tango Charlie*, a film based on the valiance of the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) tries to depict the BSF soldiers braving all odds to protect the nation from secessionist and ultra-nationalist forces in the various nooks and corners of India. Here, the reading is limited to the various sequences that depict the Northeast of India. The film begins with an aerial shot of the ice-capped Himalayas. Two officers scour the whiteness of the mountains to look for the bodies of Indian soldiers. The whiteness of the snow symbolizes an emotionally estranged site, which diminishes the boundaries between the self and the rest. The stretches of snow-covered landscape depict the transcendence of nature beyond human existence by erasing all traces of human conceit over its power and superiority. This mountain landscape becomes the ideal set up to picturize the gory battle that takes place in it as it signifies the loss of or threat to boundaries which is so very important to men and for the nation. However, very soon, the markers of boundary become obvious as a conversation takes place between the pilots and they express their relief at not spotting any of their 'own' soldiers. The news of enemy bodies delights the commander and he instructs the pilots to return. This however does not materialize as the pilots spot one of their 'own' in the sea of dead bodies, one who has to be rescued and saved. The white and cold mountains provide the perfect backdrop for the dissociated human sentiments when it comes to protecting the nation, from the enemies. The sentiments here are as frozen as the snow. As the film progresses, the landscape itself becomes a character. The landscape stands out as a spatially expressive form, takes on multiple meanings across spaces, sometimes as a hostile landscape (the

jungles of Manipur) and sometimes as a neutralizing space (the snow-covered mountains). The film's narrative is thus preceded by a dramatic geopolitical theme 'written' in the mountains, which not only lends more meaning to the narrative, but also changes the way the landscape is looked at within this film. In other words, the natural scenery is no longer overshadowed by the dramatic action that takes place in it.

Again, the choice of the Himalayas to begin the film is telling in a number of ways. The Himalayas do not just stand as guards of the Indian territory, protecting it from countries like China, but also exist as a dividing line between two cultures and civilizations, the Aryan and the non-Aryans. The Himalayas therefore may be metaphorically used to show the difference between these races. It has to be mentioned here that majority of the population of the Northeastern states of India share similarities with the south-east Asian countries in terms of looks and food habits. According to Wouters and Subba, what an Indian face looks like sets boundaries that are 'not delineated by markers of territoriality but are based on considerations of phenotypes, drawn on the conventional imaginings of what a co-citizen might look like' (2013: 2). Therefore, the film's use of the Himalayas at the beginning is a pointer to the identity paradox that many in the Northeastern regions have to face in 'central' Indian cities. This discussion is important since immediately after the sequence that takes place in the Himalayan mountains, the film takes us to Manipur, a state in Northeast India. The filmmaker's choice of this mountain range to begin the film is significant; throughout the film, it is seen that the essential polyphony of the Indian identity is reflected in the contrast in the ways of seeing between those residing within Northeast India and those from outside it.

In the next sequence, the soldiers are shown reading the diary of one of their injured combatants Tarun Chauhan alias Tango Charlie. The diary takes the narrative back in time to his posting in Manipur. The first shot of Manipur is a jungle. An ecocritical reading of this part of the film is relevant here.

The choice of camera shots assumes great importance in giving meaning to the narrative. A bird's eye shot for example helps locate the place of action and provides an idea about the site where the film will be set. It also sets the mood and tone of the film. The city, for instance, is mostly established with either the bird's eye view or a wide-angle shot of the buildings or its busy streets. Similarly, a village is established by showing long and sustained images of its vast expanse of land and agriculture. Such stereotypical shots to distinguish the busy urban living from the slow and serene rural life enable the technology of film to show man's growing distance from nature with his economic advances and changing social organization. While the bird's eye view of the urban landscape can show man's distance from nature, the rural landscape can show life at harmony with the natural surroundings. For a modern state, the idea of rural life is strongly connected with backwardness, poverty and a traditional way of living which is not progressive. Interestingly, forests abound the cinematic landscape of Manipur even though not a single frame of the film is actually shot in the state. The audience is encouraged to identify Manipur with the jungle, which opens up the text to serious questions about the filmmaker's knowledge of the place. It etches the Northeast in the national imaginations of the spectators, many of whom comprise of people outside the territories in question, in ways that further deepen the divide within the nation.

In the wilderness that the film depicts, life and death hangs in a balance. The aural and visual landscapes augment the feeling of fear, seclusion and

untamed nature of this place in a remote corner of India. The landscape of the jungle is cinematically appropriate to create the adequate backdrop for locating terror and militancy. Amidst the jungle reside the 'deadly' Bodo militants, who make sounds of birds to communicate with each other, attack and kill the soldiers of the Indian State, and talk in a language unintelligible to an average Indian audience. Ironically the Bodos who are in reality inhabitants of Assam are identified with Manipur and are compared to barbarians who practise ancient ways of hunting down enemies. The jungle forms an ideal site for grounding the rustic nature of the militants.

In another sequence, the landscape of India is anthropomorphized when it is compared to Meneka, a Hindu mythical figure. Such an attempt to attribute human features to the natural landscape robs nature of its autonomy and visualizes it as subservient to man. However, this sequence relays more ideas than evident on the surface. The association of the nation state with the Hindu enchantress takes us back to the nationalist discourse where the nation state is likened to a female body and like the female body, it becomes a site for the various struggles that are waged over its meaning and ownership (Datta 2000: 73). Much like the female body, the Indian state is sought after by those who, enchanted by its beauty, wants to lay claim on her. This is akin to the colonization of Asian and African countries, where attracted by the abundance of nature and natural resources, rulers from the colonial nations waged for the control of power over their territories. Although these states are now decolonized, the cycle of exploitation continues in the same manner, of the less powerful by the powerful within the nation state. Therefore, the fight between men has always been a fight over natural resources, where nature is reduced to a major object to be negotiated, sold, owned, pawned and sometimes erased from existence. In this anthropomorphic description of the Indian landscape, Manipur and the Northeastern states are placed in the periphery.

Just like the ice-capped Himalayas, the film uses landscapes metaphorically in a number of ways. After the platoon of BSF soldiers are killed by the Bodo militants, the surviving Indian soldiers, Tarun Chauhan and Mohammad Ali, swear to avenge the death of their comrades. They launch their attack on the Bodo militants and succeed in killing them. In this battle, the climactic fight sequence is fought out in the sea. The landscape of the sea is highly suggestive. As the vast waters of the sea changes its contours through the day, the use of the sea also comes with its multifarious meanings in a film. While in some cases, it represents life and hope, in others, it represents devastation, wreckage and a sense of loss. The shift of locale from the jungle to the sea also comes with its own host of associations. The fight ensues at night at a time when the sea becomes the most treacherous. This provides the perfect backdrop for the BSF soldiers to avenge the death of the Indian soldiers by killing the Bodo militant leader. However, in this fight they discover a young boy, a member of the Bodo contingent who is barely 13 years old. Armed with weapons, he is a member of an outfit at war with the Indian state. Tarun Chauhan hesitates to kill the young boy but Mohammed Ali shows no mercy. The next shot shows Mohammed Ali deep in his *namaaz* ('prayer') with the calm morning sea in the background as Tarun Chauhan stands near him, his gun pointing at the young boy. It is here that Tarun Chauhan prays for a land that is free from internal strife and innocent killings. Therefore, it can be observed that in the part showing Northeast India, the film begins with the image of the Himalayas, which stand as a giant unmoving block between two countries and on the other hand, it ends in the sea. It is in the shore of the sea that

the actors dream of a land where there are no killings. While the Himalayas signify separation and difference, the calm morning sea signifies unity, peace and cohesiveness, where the boundaries between 'ours' and 'theirs' blend. Nature here is shown not just to nurture life and hope but also to destroy the differences.

The landscape foregrounds the narrative and emerges as a prominent actor in the negotiation of identities in both *Tango Charlie* and in *Bumm Bumm Bole*. Chris Lukinbeal, in his article 'Cinematic landscapes', attributes certain functions to landscapes in film. For Lukinbeal, a cinematic landscape could be used to suggest space, place, spectacle and metaphor (Lukinbeal 2005: 7). In *Bumm Bumm Bole*, the landscape is used to suggest place, to refer to the location where the film is set: in this case Assam, which is another state in the Northeastern part of India. *Bumm Bumm Bole* is a children's film that shows the struggle of a worker family against the oppressive tea garden authorities. Lukinbeal writes that, in certain films, the narrative unfolds in such a way that it allows the viewer to understand the various geographical scales negotiated in its production. This in turn allows the viewers to be never displaced or be lost in narrative space (Lukinbeal 2005: 7). For ecocritics, the natural environment is inextricable from human existence and any fabrication of human reality is incomplete without showing its relationship with the natural surroundings.

The film begins with the landscape of a busy marketplace where a young boy is shown selling colourful balloons to a customer. He is then called by a suspicious looking man who hands him a tiffin carrier. Minutes later, the boy knocks at the window of a police vehicle and then the sound of a huge blast reverberates in the air, killing innocent people, including the boy. The filmmaker does not keep the audience in the lurch but takes them directly to where the story is situated: the lush greenery of a tea garden, to represent the state of Assam, which is famous for its tea. The subsequent shot after the blast is that of a bus driving through the meandering garden lanes of the tea garden, carrying workers for their daily chores. The bus signals the presence of industrialization in the region and so does the visual of the factory. To represent Assam's cultural landscape, the film time and again shows the roadside sellers wearing the *japi* ('traditional Assamese headgear'), the symbol of Assamese agrarian culture worn by farmers while sowing and reaping fields. The film projects nature as an inseparable part of the land by showing repeated shots of the tea gardens and the vast green fields from various angles. The landscape reflects the simple lives of the people who live there, removed from the hum-drum of the big cities, in direct contact with nature. The tea factory on the other hand represents industrialization. It functions as a symbol of exploitation of the region by the 'Indian state' through its control over their natural resources. This becomes more evident as the film progresses.

The film revolves around the family of Khogiram Gowala who, along with his wife, works in the tea garden to sustain their family. Khogiram sends his children Pinu and Rimzhim to missionary schools in order to secure a good future for them. However, as fate would have it, both Khogiram and his wife have to leave their jobs after a brawl with the garden manager, who tries to molest the wife. As the story progresses, Khogiram is also accused of murdering the manager of the tea estate and faces the ire of the police. Due to lack of evidence, he is eventually released but the tag of a terrorist sticks to him costing him his new found job. Amidst the despair and militancy, the lives of Pinu and Rimzhim marked by their innocence, comes as a ray of hope, the

essence of which is matched by the greenery of the land. The wide angle shots of the alleys, the fields and the tea gardens where the children are mostly seen wandering around are used to reflect this innocence, which is as delicate and vibrant as the greenery that surrounds them.

The terror plot against the backdrop of the serene tea gardens is used to reflect how the peace of the land is disrupted by man-made conflicts. In films, it is not uncommon to see reproduction of places in alternative locations by transferring the characteristics of the territory to a different location that is judged to be sufficiently adequate to represent that place. Such duplication of real geographic places limits variety to a few stereotypes like the tropical jungles, deserts, fields, etc. (Orueta and Valdes 2007: 14). Filmed in Ooty, the structure of human settlements, the missionary school, church and market-place all act to transport the audience to a different geography similar to but mostly removed from those found in Assam. This can create misleading ideas about the region.

The cinematic landscapes or the cultural and physical representations of space shown in films carry strong connotations that are deeply ingrained in the minds of the viewers. When particular types of images are circulated by films, it can register strong images about the culture, community and people of that place. Landscapes have been put to various uses in these two films. The use of landscape in *Bumm Bumm Bole* differs from that in *Tango Charlie*. While in *Tango Charlie*, the landscape helps in supporting the narrative in creating a wild space, in *Bumm Bumm Bole*, the landscape helps in indicating the place where the story is set.

LOCATING THE DIVIDE

The above reading of the two films highlights how natural landscapes can also act as a prominent actor in the understanding of our place in the world and in negotiating our identities in the complex fabric of the national space. By providing autonomy to the landscape, even if unintentionally, filmmakers can reveal as well as distort imaginations of the people about the material world. In the above discussions, the sense of otherness pervades throughout the length of the films in the form of dialogues and the political use of natural landscapes. The landscapes here have been used to define the ethnic, racial and perceptive divide among men, the people of the plains and the hill dwellers, which is similar to the divide in the perceptual boundaries between man and nature. Whatever be the light in which the landscape is described, be it the sea, or the wilderness, the reading enables us to associate it with human characteristics and human fate. Despite that, the landscape in these works does not fail to speak for itself. It is not present as a passive, inanimate background for the stories to unfold but as a living and vibrant component that conveys emotions and the ideology of the filmmaker as well as that which transcribes ideas in the popular imagination of the people of the rest of India about the region.

Adrian Ivakhiv in 'An ecophilosophy of the moving image' exalts the power of film by calling it an anthrobiogeomorphic machine which is capable of producing and disclosing worlds of both subjects and objects and thereby radically altering our perception of the world (Ivakhiv 2013a: 88). Here, it is through the cinematic landscapes that the stereotypical notions about Northeast India, which are a vestige of the colonial discourse of binaries between hills/plains dwelling people, are echoed once again in the films. In the readings of both

these films, *Bumm Bumm Bole* and *Tango Charlie*, there is a friction – in the perceptual mapping of Northeast India among ‘outsiders’ (filmmakers, audiences) and in the reading of the authors as ‘insiders’ of this region.

An ecocritical reading of the landscapes provides the authors with the means to dig deeper into the ideological ‘anthrobiogeomorphic’ machine that churns out images imbued with ingredients that make up for the dominant gaze of the mainstream Indian population towards the region in ways that are both resistant to this gaze as well as one that is more aligned to the non-coercive nature of ecocritical interpretation. It focuses on the agency of the natural landscapes in the films to speak up for the geopolitics of the region. Nature is presented in all its rawness to denote the simple lives of the people of Northeast India. In *Tango Charlie*, the dense jungles of Manipur not only enhance the raw appeal of this region but also impose a sense of eeriness which marks the land as a terror torn, wild territory located in one extreme corner of the country. On the other hand, *Bumm Bumm Bole* provides a glimpse into the simple lives of the people residing in natural abundance and how the repressive powers of the state forces such as the police, and the exploitation by industrialists such as the tea garden owners, lead to rise in sub-national sentiments among the natives. It tries to tap the root cause of the conflict between the state and the people in the ‘fringe’ territories. Stereotypical notions about life and the people of the region circulated through popular media like films and literature continue to foster a sense of distance between the people of the region and the rest of India.

Eminent social scientist Sanjib Baruah (1999) writes that the root of this imagination of Northeast India as an uninhabitable crude way of life dates back to the British colonial period when all aspects of the lives of the colonized masses were objectified. While preparing a case for the neglect and domination of Northeast by the colonizers, he points out the case of Assam and writes,

The logic of British attitudes towards the hills of Assam was the same; however, they considered most of the peoples living in these hills as ‘primitive tribes’. Even in the narrow confines of the hills, there was therefore no pretension of recognizing their independence. They were kept in reservation-like territories called ‘backward’ or ‘excluded’ tracts. The experience of colonial rule in these areas, to say the least, was profoundly different from that of the regular administered parts of British India.

(Baruah 1999:28)

This divide between the plains dwelling mainlanders and the hill dwelling people, who differ from each other in terms of both physical features as well as in their habits continued and the colonial perspective about the land and its people was sustained in the literature, arts and political and government policies towards this region. This is echoed in the popular films that project the region mostly in terms of a homogenous block where differences in habits, cultures, terrain as well as physical features are overlooked. Bhattacharjee (2011) writes that two kinds of colonialism inflict the people of the Northeastern region of India, ‘settler colonialism’, which, she writes, ‘involves a large number of colonists who came to the colony seeking fertile land to farm and turned indigenous people into minority in their own land’ and indulged in ‘exploitation colonialism’. This, she writes, involves ruling the indigenous

people who continue to be a majority in their lands by capturing administrative machineries. This extends the colonial exploitation at the economic and political levels to the psychic and the spiritual life of the people, which led to what is called the 'colonization of the mind' (Bhattacharjee 2011: 2). Indeed, the story of Northeast India is a culmination of both these forms of colonialism – settler and exploitation colonialism.

Stereotypical notions of the Northeast as a piece of under-developed territory known for its rustic ways of living are circulated in mainstream Hindi films by using the landscapes of the forests, jungles, mountains or the tea gardens. This sanctions the use of force and violence to control and domesticate them. The presence of BSF soldiers in the Manipur jungles in *Tango Charlie* is an indicator of the same. This is similar to many developed countries of Europe who colonize the territories of various Asian and African countries under the garb of peace and development and extract resources from them. This is often complemented by military coercion. The cases of the United States' engagement in Syria, Iraq and many of the Gulf countries is also a way of providing her easy excess to their rich fields of mineral resources and oil, although much of such exercises are done under the pretext of maintaining peace. Most of the great wars across the world have been caused by the quest for resources, mainly from the less developed countries by the more powerful ones. The less developed ones are forever kept under a state of dependence on nations who first plunder their wealth and then provide aid for their reconstruction. Similar is the case within nation states. The subservience of fringe territories is maintained sometimes through diplomatic channels, while at other times, with the might of weapons; as is evident in the case of the existence of Special Acts like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958), which is implemented in certain pockets of Northeast India.

The realization of the unjust exploitation of these lands for its rich resources, has provided fodder to the sense of alienation festering among the native population of these states. Misra (1980) writes that the cause of the various ethnic struggles within the Northeastern states, emergence of insurgency and armed conflicts as well as revolutions like the Assam movement, etc. were caused by the differential treatment of the centre towards the Northeastern part of India in terms of policies and the rampant exploitation of resources. Some of the core concerns of the armed groups fighting for secession are the exploitation of the region's rich mineral resources without benefitting the local populace as well as the growing number of migrant settlers in the region whom they accuse of vitiating the culture and traditions of the indigenous people of these states. The realization of such exploitation also leads to dissidence within such territories. An example can also be cited of the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Power project, which had met with vociferous protests by various groups residing in the Assam–Arunachal Pradesh borders due to the uncertainties that surrounded its implementation. The project is touted to tap the immense hydroelectric potential of rivers in the sub-Himalayan belt of Arunachal Pradesh and Bhutan, produce large amounts of electricity, which many believe will be of little use to the states in question and will mainly fulfil the centre's electricity requirements. This, according to many, is in total disregard of the perils that the inhabitants of these areas will be confronted with as the project materializes (Gohain 2008:19). This instance highlights that the fight among men has always been a fight over natural resources.

In the films, the jungles, the vast green fields as well as the tea gardens attempt at justifying the presence of the Indian state to control the spate of

terror in the region as well as to 'develop' it through industrialization. While *Bumm Bumm Bole* shows how the exploitation of the poor lead to the rise of insurgency in the region, *Tango Charlie's* depiction of the militants amidst the dense jungles associates them with the likes of inhuman beings who are as wild and ominous as the forest in which they reside and hence need to be controlled by the state. Such labelling only widens the already existing grievances of the people of Northeast India. Therefore, what emanates from this distancing is recourse to mass movements, insurgency and violence, and various modes of protest against the dominant section who apes the colonial ways of governance by subjugating the people in the 'fringes'. Moreover, the above assessment of the region and its people in the films also reveal that a boundary indeed lies within the nation, which, analogous to the role of the Himalayas which separates two cultures, divides its own people. The presence of the BSF *jawans* in the jungles of Manipur is meant to give a glorified image to the soldiers who brave through all odds to 'manage, control and erase' the 'wild' militants in the Northeastern state of Manipur. Such a discourse reflects the colonial mindset within post-colonial countries. The way places and geographies are interpreted in Bollywood is also an offshoot of such a discourse.

CONCLUSION

Popular films serve as a battleground where such politics of identities are given its naturalized meanings; where the audio-visual technology of film attempts to produce a dominant gaze towards the socio-cultural landscapes of certain places. There is no doubt that the movement of images in films influences the perception of the viewers towards themselves as individuals and groups and also frames the world around them (Ivakhiv 2013a:100). As Ivakhiv writes,

The worlds constituted through film relate in various ways to the extra filmic world, in that, they mirror that world, refract and diffract its meanings and infuse or diffuse meaning and aura into or out of the people, objects and places portrayed.

(2013a:100)

Therefore, films form a site of continuous negotiation of the self whereby the cinematic place is not limited to the world represented on the screen (a geography in film) but also to the meanings which are constructed through the experience of films (Hopkins 1994: 50). An ecocritical reading of the films under study enable the authors to provide a resistant reading of the text and show how the very natural landscapes that filmmakers use to broach ideas about places can become a means to expose the skewed projection of Northeast India in the national imagination of people.

The above analysis of the films provides a window to assess the broader questions of the oft quoted ideas of alienation that people from Northeast India experience in 'mainstream' India and how that is reflected in the films under study. Secondly, an ecocritical analysis enables us to understand the divides between organic and mechanical ways of living, and in narrating how the story of the less developed is mostly told using existing stereotypes with very little attempt to reverse it. Most importantly, the two examples expand the field of ecocinema studies to the study of territorial conflicts in films. Although there are no overt references to nature as a central theme

of discussion in the films, it is through the landscapes that the story of differences, the demarcations between self and the other, is told. Perhaps, while showing confused boundaries, homogenized cultures and imaginary geographical landscapes such as the sea in *Tango Charlie*, the filmmaker tries to make a conscious attempt to obliterate the divides of the mind and the discrimination between 'our' space and 'their' space. It is in the constitution of these underlying meanings, that the cinematic landscape can play an important role. The landscapes here not only provide rhyme and rhythm to the pace of the film or enable it to ground the action but also make it a prominent actor in the film narrative with its metaphorical use. It acts as a *mise en scène* to embed an alternate story that accentuates the narrative of alienation.

Amidst the entire rhetoric of neglect, which is so elaborate in the discussion of the above films, what also surfaces is the agency that is imparted to the natural landscape to depict the man/nature conflict which is analogous to the domination of the rural and hill territories by the more industrialized ones. Just like man domesticates nature for his own benefits, these territories are also domesticated to serve man's multiple needs. As civilization grew more aggressive, man began to exploit nature for his self-aggrandizement and self-indulgence. Ecocinema helps in untangling man from the self-made cocoon of superiority and comfort to confront directly with the realities of the natural world. Analyses of films like *Bumm Bumm Bole* and *Tango Charlie* help to problematize our understanding of Indianness. Quite obviously the naïve and parochial anthropomorphic and geopolitical understanding of Indianness that these films propagate only help to establish the folly of man trying to subjugate nature. Man can never establish absolute control over nature. Just as the people associated with nature keep striking back in various forms and guises, nature herself keeps growing back, posing a threat to 'civilized' man's neat boundaries of nature/culture.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

- Dowerah, S. and Prasad Nath, D. (2019), 'Cinematic landscapes of Northeast India through an ecocritical lens', *Asian Cinema*, 30:2, pp. 205–218, doi: 10.1386/ac_00004_1

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