

Gender Stereotypes and Women's Representation in Assamese Songs: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This research paper titled “Gender Stereotypes and Women’s Representation in Assamese Songs: An Analytical Study” analytically examines how women are depicted and stereotyped through the visual and textual content of modern Assamese songs. Using the qualitative content analysis method, this study based on four Assamese songs investigates whether these songs have empowered women in society or marginalised them. The paper highlights the history of Assamese music, beginning with ancient musical traditions and acknowledging the contributions of eminent artists such as Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, and Zubeen Garg, while also noting the transformation observed in modern Assamese songs. Although extensive literature exists on gender bias and stereotypes in Bollywood and Bodo songs, research on Assamese songs remains limited, demonstrating the significance of this study. The findings reveal that women are often portrayed as passive beings and are objectified to fulfil the desires of men. Furthermore, the study identifies recurring themes such as body shaming, promotion of alcohol and tobacco, objectification, use of salacious language, and lack of consent all of which affect women’s dignity and rights. Through critical discussion, this study shows how these songs reinforce harmful and unfavourable stereotypes, promoting a narrow notion of femininity and negatively shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. The paper calls for inclusive representation of women in the media and encourages discussion, critique, and challenge of these stereotypes to foster a fair and healthy environment for gender equality.

Keywords: Gender Stereotypes, Women’s Representation, Assamese Songs, Visual and Textual Study

1. Introduction

The research paper titled “Gender Stereotypes and Women’s Representation in Assamese Songs: An Analytical Study” aims to identify gender stereotypes and the representation of women in modern Assamese songs. It is essential to examine whether the image of women portrayed in Assamese songs which often glorify Assamese culture is empowering or marginalising. Therefore, this paper attempts to study women’s representation using selected modern Assamese songs as its basis. The structure of this paper begins with a historical overview of modern Assamese songs, followed by a review of literature on gender and music studies. It then moves to the objectives of the study, the methodology section, the findings from lyrical and visual analysis, and finally concludes with a discussion.

The history of Assamese songs is deeply connected to the rich musical traditions of ancient Assam. According to historical records, the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang mentioned that

music and dance flourished during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varman, ruler of the Varman dynasty. The Charyapadas, composed using specific ragas, also reflect the early connection of this region with classical music. In later centuries, the great saints and key propagators of the Neo-Vaishnava movement in Assam Srimanta Shankardeva and Sri Sri Madhabdeva composed Borgeets through which they spread religious teachings. They also shaped important traditional musical forms such as Shankari and Satriya music.

Modern Assamese music began to take shape with the influence of Western music brought by Baptist Missionaries in the 19th century. Initially, many believed that the Assamese language was unsuitable for developing a new musical style, due to which modern Assamese songs struggled for a long time to gain recognition. However, during this period, a significant figure, Satyanath Bora, initiated change by publishing the first collection of modern Assamese songs, "Gitawali."

Later, Jyotiprasad Agarwala sparked a revolution in Assamese music by creating a new style inspired by Kamrupi folk music, blending folk traditions with classical ragas. Subsequently, artists like Jayanta Hazarika contributed to the further development and popularity of modern Assamese songs.

In the following decades, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika emerged as an iconic figure whose compositions integrated socially relevant themes. With his exceptional talent and unique voice, he elevated modern Assamese music to prominence not only in Assam but also across India and abroad. Furthermore, from the late 1990s and early 2000s, the arrival of artists such as Zubeen Garg made Assamese music even more popular. Garg introduced a new genre and brought innovation to Assamese songs, successfully reaching a wide audience especially the younger generation.

2. Review of Literature

Siddiqi (2020) studied the frequent use of language and lyrics in Bollywood songs that highlight women's physical appearance and sexual attractiveness, thereby restricting their roles within narrow and conventional notions, which contributes to gender bias. Shehreen Ataur Khan's seminal work "Bollywood Lyrics: Stereotypical Miss-Representation" (2018) also provides an important framework for this study. He argues that most Bollywood song lyrics have traditionally been written by male lyricists, reflecting a male-centric perspective that strengthens gender stereotypes. These songs often portray women in passive roles. As a result, concepts such as "baby doll", "pink lips", etc., emerged, reinforcing gender inequality and stereotypes by presenting women primarily as sexual objects rather than individuals with strong identities.

Dwivedi (2017) also discusses how Bollywood item songs depict women as sexual objects and explicitly describe women's body parts in their lyrics. Similarly, Kamble (2022) examined the role of women in Bollywood songs and revealed a clear dominance of patriarchal, male-centred ideologies in visual representation.

Islary (2025) highlights the representation of women in Bodo item songs and argues that women are often portrayed as passive beings.

Although many studies have analysed Bollywood songs and Bodo item songs, it is evident that very little research exists on this topic in the context of Assamese songs. Therefore, it is crucial to examine gender dynamics extensively within Assamese music.

3. Objectives

- i. To analyse how women are represented and stereotyped in Assamese songs.
- ii. To examine the visual representation of women in Assamese songs.
- iii. To scrutinise the lyrical representation of women in Assamese songs.

4. Research Methodology

Research Design:

A qualitative research method has been adopted, and content analysis has been used as the research design.

Data Collection:

Data for this research were collected from both primary and secondary sources.

- Primary sources: Selected Assamese songs available on YouTube.
- Secondary sources: Research journals, articles, and other e-resources.

Sampling:

The study examined four Assamese songs available on YouTube. These songs were selected on the basis of popularity, each having more than 50,000 views.

Table 1: List of Selected Song with its Singer Name and Views in YouTube

Title of the Song	Lyricist/Singer	YouTube Views
Bijuli Marile Bukut	Ajoy Phukan, Kussum Kailash, Sarodee Borah	4,24,381
Voltage Besi	Diganta Bharati, Zublee Boruah	3,89,071
Bati Bhorai Chira Khabi	Bipin Chawdang, Zubeen Garg, Vitali Das	22,30,458
Lalmohan	Ajoy Phukan, Priyanka Bharali	59,676

Theoretical Framework: Based on Islary's (2025) study on "Gender Stereotypes and Women's Representation in Bodo Item Songs: A Visual and Textual Analysis", this research or analysis has embraced visual and written (lyrics of the songs): these two analyses of representation of women in these four songs.

5. Findings

Although many Assamese songs present the role of women in an acceptable manner to the audience, there are some Assamese songs in which women are observed to be presented in a way aimed at easily attracting male viewers.

5.1 Visual Study

Bijuli Marile Bukut:

In this song, the first scene begins with the display of a woman's body. Initially, the woman's body is captured on camera from her legs up to her face while she is lying down. After that, in the bar scene, the woman is seen displaying her body with the help of various dance steps, where she is shown wearing short and sexually suggestive clothing. Additionally, in the song, other men are observed leering at her and even touching her inappropriately. It raises the question of a woman's self-respect over her own body as well as the issue of consent that another person must obtain before touching a woman, and in the visual narrative of this song, a woman-centric perspective in the aforementioned aspects is felt to be lacking.

Voltage Besi:

In the beginning scene of this song, the camera zooms in on a woman's waist, showing voltage being generated on her waist. In the subsequent scenes, it is observed that the woman wears clothing that reveals parts of her body and there are more scenes depicting her dancing in a way that showcases her body to attract men. Such scenes are extremely unpleasant, and through such scenes, a woman is felt merely as a character presented in an alluring manner for men. It portrays the role of a woman in a passive manner.

Bati Bhorai Chira Khabi:

This song is one of the most popular songs in the Assamese language. In most scenes of this song, both men and women, especially women, are shown performing socially acceptable dance steps in modest attire, although at 3:16 minutes of the song, there is a sexual reference to women's buttocks, and it is observed that the camera zooms in on their buttocks while they are walking. It is seen to violate or harm the bodily privacy of a woman. Songs and films with such presentations also influence a woman's role in society.

Lalmohan:

This song begins with a woman showing her waist, where she displays sexually suggestive lip movements. Moreover, in most parts of the song, it is observed that the woman wears short, skinny clothes that do not fully cover her body and performs dance. It is often seen that the woman in the video song tries to attract men with various dance steps. The camera also sometimes zooms in on different parts of the woman's body. Through this, it seems that the creator is trying to easily attract the male audience. But this conveys the message that a woman is only there to fulfil a man's sexual desires. Presenting a woman in such a way for a man is certainly indecent in front of society.

5.2 Textual Study

Bijuli Marile Bukut:

This song mainly describes the beauty of a woman. In the song, the woman describes her own beauty and says, “If you touch me, if you see me, there will be objection” (Muk Sule, Muk Sale, Lagibo Jogor), which reveals a powerful aspect of a woman. Furthermore, in the middle of the song, the woman says, “The world will dance at my command” (Duniya Nasibo Mure Isarate), which also reflects the active role of the woman, clearly showing that a woman, if she wishes, can take on a leadership role and shape everything in her own way.

Voltage Besi:

Through this song also, the lyricist is trying to describe the beauty of a woman. The lyricist is seen comparing the woman’s body in this video song to voltage. The woman in this video song mentions keeping distance and says, “Don’t come closer, I have high voltage” (Kakhole Nahiba, Mur Voltage Besi). It conveys the message that a man should show respect to a woman by maintaining a courteous distance always.

Bati Bhorai Chira Khabi:

In this song, both the lyricist and the singer describe the beauty of a woman. In most parts of the song, the lyricist focuses on describing the beauty of Assamese women using pure Assamese words by reflecting the essence of Assamese rural life, although at 3:16 minutes into the song, it refers to the girls’ buttocks being joked about by the men. In this part, it says, “Bring girls by looking at big buttocks, brother” (Suali Anibi Kokai, Topina Dangor Sai), which gives an impression of objectifying the girl’s body. This may create negative stereotypes of women.

Lalmohan:

In the song titled “Lalmohan,” the lyrics describe the beauty of a woman. However, some of the words used to describe the woman’s beauty are of very low standard. In this song, the woman’s beauty is described through sweets like gulab jamun (lalmohan), which symbolises the respect and status of a woman in society being diminished. The lyrics of such songs created for women can create obstacles for a woman in maintaining respect in front of men.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

After the visual and textual study of these Assamese songs, some themes are found from the lyrics as well as the visual representations, such as body shaming, promotion of alcohol and tobacco, objectification, use of salacious language, and lack of consent.

Body Shaming:

When someone’s physical appearance is commented on or criticised in a derogatory way, it is called body shaming. In the songs mentioned in this research paper, women’s bodies are seen to be shamed. These songs and videos show the structure and shape of women’s bodies more than necessary for the pleasure of men. For example, in the song “Bati Bhorai Chira Khabi”

used in this paper, it can be seen that a woman is body-shamed by a man, referring to her buttocks.

Promotion of Alcohol and Tobacco:

In the songs and videos used in this research paper, alcohol, cigarettes, etc., are often depicted excessively, which can have a negative impact on the upcoming or younger generations of society. These video songs openly showcase the consumption of alcohol, promoting it among the younger generation. Additionally, in some of these video songs, women pouring drinks for men and serving them clearly reflect gender stereotypes.

Objectification:

In these songs, objectification is evident, portraying women merely as tools capable of attracting men. The powerful form, autonomy, freedom, and human qualities of women are overlooked, and they are limited only to their physical appearance. Sexually suggestive dances, revealing clothing, and unsolicited touching of women in scenes of these songs highlight women as objects created solely for the male gaze.

Use of Salacious Language:

In many songs mentioned in this research paper, salacious language is evident. The lyrics and visuals of these songs depict and present the female body in a sexualised manner. The woman's body is compared to various sweets such as gulab jamun, and very low-standard language is used, including references to the woman's private parts, such as their buttocks. Additionally, the language or words used in these songs often portray women as a means of entertainment for men.

Lack of Consent:

The lack of consent is depicted in many scenes of these songs, where a man has touched a woman voyeuristically without her permission. For example, in many scenes of songs like "Bijuli Marile Bukut" and "Voltage Besi", the woman is observed being touched and kissed by men as they please, and this normalises non-consensual touching, undermining the woman's rights. Such scenes can send a message that a man does not always need permission or consent before touching a woman, which can have a negative impact on women in society.

In the end, although all the songs selected for this research are composed solely for the entertainment of the audience, it is observed that these songs have a considerable impact on society to some extent. The visual and textual study of this research emphasises the necessity of critically examining media presentations. Finally, it is necessary for the media to discuss and critique or challenge the stereotypical images related to both women and men in society to create a fair and healthy environment for gender equality.

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