



## **NORTHEASTERN WOMEN IN MEDIA REPRESENTATION: THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SCREEN NARRATIVES**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the portrayal of women of the Northeastern region in modern Indian screen narratives in an intersectional approach. It analyses the influence of gender, ethnicity, culture and regional identity on the representation of Northeastern women in movies and web series. Conventionally, the mainstream Indian media has been inclined to conceal or put the Northeastern women in stereotypical roles, which has led to cultural marginalisation and representation. The paper reviews how stereotypical images have been substituted with more sophisticated and real-world images through the example of *Village Rockstars* (2017), *Village Rockstars 2* (2024), *Paatal Lok Season 2* (2025), *Anek* (2022), *Axone* (2019) and *Kaalkoot* (2023). The issues brought about by these stories include identity, belonging, discrimination, agency and cultural visibility and critique mainstream in Indian society. The paper claims that contemporary cinema and OTT resources have provided new prospects of an inclusive narration through which Northeastern women may be perceived as complex subjects with their voices and experiences. Lastly, the paper demonstrates the diverse media representations that have brought about more recognition, diversity, and inclusion in society.*

### **Keywords**

*Northeastern Women, Media Representation, Intersectionality, Marginalisation, etc.*

### **Full Article**

#### **Introduction:**

Women's representation in the media influences the identity of society, culture and social assimilation. The Northeastern women have played a complex role in the mainstream screen narratives of the Indian context. Although Northeast India is ethnically diverse, in terms of language and cultural background, women residing in the area have been underrepresented or have been painted in fewer and stereotypical ways. These images are not usually representative of their lived experiences, which can be varied and multifaceted. The media is a major site for exploring the ways identities are constructed, negotiated and communicated to the wider audiences.

Intersectionality can be applied effectively to explain the picture of women in the Northeast. Intersectionality highlights that multiple identity factors, including gender, ethnicity, culture, language, and regional affiliation, are intertwined to affect the experiences of people. Northeastern women are negotiating these intersectional identities in both social and cultural settings that are likely to influence their perceptions and representations.

In recent years, the Indian film industry and OTT streaming have increasingly become filled with stories of Northeastern characters and communities. Such categories as *Village Rockstars*, *Village Rockstars 2*, *Paatal Lok Season 2*, *Anek*, *Axone*, and *Kaalkoot* are an indication of a growing interest in the issues of identity, visibility, and representation.

#### **Chapter One: Northeastern Women and Media Representation:**



The media is a core part of the construction of cultural meanings and social perceptions. The films, television programmes, web series and digital platforms inform the audience on various communities and identities. Media representation is crucial in the case of Northeastern women as it determines the visibility, recognition and inclusion in the broader Indian community. The representations of these women on screen not only add to the perceptions of the people but also to the discourse on identity, diversity and belonging.

The Northeast part of India is said to be highly culturally diverse. Eight states make up the area, and it has numerous ethnic groups, languages, customs and social activities. However, despite the diversity, the mainstream Indian media has never had a strong representation of the Northeastern people, particularly the women. Mainstream accounts have been lacking in their lives, experience and opinion in movies and television. Images, characters and narratives are used to generate the meaning in the process of representation. The social attitude can be formed by the manner in which the individuals are represented and reflects the way communities are perceived. So, it is not only a question of entertainment but a question of culture and representation in which the Northeastern women are depicted.

Invisibility has been one of the greatest problems related to Northeastern women in the Indian media. During the last few decades, there were barely any mainstream films with characters from the region. In the few instances that they were featured, they had minor roles that were not narrative. This relative invisibility added to an extended lack of Northeastern experience in the national media.

Intersectionality is a useful concept that can be used to analyse these representations. Intersectionality means that identity is established as a result of a complex of different social factors that interrelate simultaneously. Gender transcends ethnicity, culture, language, region and social background for Northeastern women. Their perception and depiction in the media discourses are influenced by the overlapping dimensions. The intersectional approach to representation can be used to explore identity and visibility in a better way.

Historically, the female roles in Indian cinema have been quite reflective of the societal concepts of femininity, beauty and gender roles. These hegemonic images have tended to marginalise the northeastern women since they do not always conform to the conventional images which are portrayed in the mainstream media. This has led to poor representation of their experiences and a lack of consideration of their cultural identities.

With the introduction of digital streaming services, this has transformed a great deal. OTT services have opened up more chances to tell a variety of stories and promote the representation of regional identities. Unlike the traditional commercial cinema, diversified the existing web series and independent films are able to focus their efforts on some communities and social experiences. This has paved the way for more accommodating narratives to accommodate the cultural diversity in India.

These transformations are reflected in increasing the presence of Northeastern women in contemporary screen discourses. The characters of the area have a higher chance of becoming a student, a professional, an artist, an entrepreneur, or a member of a community. These portrayals transcend the superficial to portray women as individuals who possess ambitions, feelings, relationships and even personal histories. This transformation shows a changing conception of identity in Indian media.

Identity formation is also an issue of representation. Individuals are likely to employ the images in the media to gain a sense of themselves and their position within society. Positive and cross-dimensional accounts can create a feeling of belonging, recognition, and confidence among underrepresented populations. Conversely, the lack of representations or the stereotypical nature of the representations may contribute to incorrect interpretation and marginalisation.



This transformation has also been enhanced by the involvement of Northeastern actors, writers and filmmakers. Their presence also contributes to storytelling with lived experiences and cultural insight, and makes it more authentic. As creators have more presence in the area in terms of the production of media, the likelihood of more reflective stories of the multi-faceted nature of Northeastern identities by those who are part of the area, rather than foisted by other groups, increases.

The media of contemporary India is in a more diverse cultural setting. Stories that capture wider identities and experiences are in demand by audiences. Content creators and filmmakers are, in turn, responding by making films that stretch the limits and extend matters of representation. The increasing number of Northeastern women in these stories is a good indication of a significant change in inclusivity and cultural awareness.

### **Chapter Two: Stereotypes and Marginalisation of Northeastern Women:**

The representation of the Northeastern women in the Indian media has been affected by stereotypes, misperception and marginalisation of the women. The majority of the descriptions reflect the influence of social assumptions on identity perceptions, even though modern cinema and OTT services have made the Northeastern communities more visible. The relevance of such representations is particularly critical as the media does not merely represent reality; it also adds to the knowledge of the population concerning different communities. The intersectional approach can be used to analyse the interactions between gender and ethnicity and regional identity in the representation of Northeastern women in the current Indian screen discourse.

One of the problems of Northeastern women is the stereotyping that has long existed. Stereotypes make individuals simple classifications, and they also fail to recognise the fact that individuals do not have similar experiences. The female population of Northeastern has been generally stereotyped in terms of their physical appearance, language, way of living, and cultural identities in the popular Indian media. Such a presentation simplifies the complicated individuals and transforms them into easily recognisable images, failing to learn more about the reality of the individuals socially.

Stereotyping can be closely related to the notion of marginalisation. Marginalisation is a situation in which specific groupings are deprived of visibility in the mainstream of a culture. The Northeastern women have been playing a marginal role in Indian cinema and TV for many years. Their lives seldom featured in the middle of stories, and their lives were mostly kept in the background. This deficit led to a lack of knowledge about the region and enforced an idea that Northeastern identities were less prominent in mainstream cultural discourses.

Most mainstream Indian films have traditionally marginalised or stereotyped Northern women living in the Northeast, but *Village Rockstars* (2017) and *Village Rockstars 2* (2024) provide a new and more authentic representation of female identity in the Northeast. The films are under the direction of Rima Das and challenge the mainstream movie discourse, which has a tendency to exoticise the Northeastern women or make them culturally foreign or peripheral. Instead, they foreshadow the everyday existence of a young Assamese girl, Dhunu, whose aspirations, struggles and power are central to the narrative.

The exclusion of Northeastern women in the Indian media has often been due to the lack of high-profile positions and the propensity to portray them as cultural stereotypes. In contrast, Dhunu is a complex character whose agency is not merely determined by her geographical affiliation but also by her ambitions, relations, and personal growth. Her aspiration of possessing a guitar and creating a rock band defies the customary gender roles and illustrates how young females bargain with social and economic limitations and the quest to follow their personal desires.



The sequel, *Village Rockstars 2*, goes further to develop this image by delving into the experience of Dhunu turning into an adolescent. The film reveals the realities behind the lives of young women in rural Northeast India as she goes through new challenges and social pressures. She is not a victim, an exotic character; instead, the story portrays her as a decision-maker and able to shape her own future. *Village Rockstars* and *Village Rockstars 2* shatter the past stereotypes with their authentic accounts of the cultures and their realities, and contribute to a more inclusive Indian cinema in terms of the Northeastern identity. Their presentation demonstrates that representation can easily overcome marginalisation by recognising agency, individuality and diversity of Northeastern women.

*Paatal Lok Season 2* provides a remarkable picture of the extent to which the marginalisation and stereotyping of Northeastern women can be addressed. The exhibition reveals more of the Northeastern society by placing part of its narrative in the sociopolitical realities of the region. However, it also indicates that women of the Northeast are also viewed through the lens of stereotypes that are based on ethnicity, appearance, language and culture. The female characters tend to be confronted with social expectations that inform them as perceived by other people, and how they are treated.

Through the series, it is shown that Northeastern identities are seen as being different by the mainstream Indian society, which results in feelings of omission and misunderstanding. *Paatal Lok Season 2* brings out the theme of social prejudice, exposing the more secretive forms of discrimination that guide everyday existence. The series encourages viewers to question stereotypes and learn the complexity of the lives of Northeastern women in contemporary India.

One of the shows that provides one of the simplest methods of identity and stereotyping is *Anek*. The movie is based on the problem of belonging, recognition, and representation, particularly with references to the lives of a female character in the Northeastern part. This is indicative of a more general trend whereby the Northeastern women tend to be identified initially based on conspicuous distinctions instead of their uniqueness.

The conflict between self-identification and imposed identity is evoked in the journey of the main character in *Anek*. Even as she struggles to be known based on talent, hard work and individual ambitions, others will be willing to define her based on assumptions that are connected to her ethnic and geographical backgrounds. This is a war that can be used as an illustration of the curtailed opportunities of true understanding because of stereotypes. The film unveils the inadequacy of the representation that is based solely on cultural difference and the importance of recognising the people who do not fit into the existing category.

These portrayals cannot be understood without an intersectional approach. Northeastern women are marginalised not just due to gender reasons but also due to gender-ethnicity-regional identity interplay. The problems of Northeastern women cannot be fully explained by a single type of analysis. Intersectionality raises awareness of the number of identities that affect the representation and social perception.

Symbolic exclusion is another significant aspect of marginalisation. Although Northeastern women can be found in media discourses, they might still be out of the main plotlines, or they do not have valuable agency. Traditionally, most of the characters of the region have been relegated to support roles with little say on the fate of the story. These narratives support the notion that their lives are subordinate to dominant groups. Modern stories have started to defy this trend, but some remnants of symbolic marginalisation are still evident.

*Village Rockstars*, *Village Rockstars 2*, *Paatal Lok Season 2*, and *Anek* are examples of how stereotypes and marginalisation still pervade the portrayal of Northeastern women. These stories, through their representations, depict the social presuppositions that dictate identity and visibility.



### **Chapter Three: Reimagining Northeastern Women: Identity and Representation on Screen:**

The depiction of Northeastern women in Indian screen stories has been slowly transformed from stereotypical and peripheral characters to more complex and multidimensional characters. The contemporary film industry and OTTs are beginning to think of the importance of depicting various identities and experiences. This is an especially meaningful change to Northeastern women, whose identities have typically been reduced or disregarded in popular culture. The modern screen discourses, in the form of movies such as *Axone*, and series such as *Kaalkoot*, offer new resources of understanding Northeastern women as an agency, aspiring, emotive, and socially diverse group.

The concept that transcends the traditional planes of imagining the people as cultural symbols or stereotypes is known as the reimagination of representation. In the case of the Northeastern women, this would mean creating characters as active participants in their lives rather than passive subjects that are merely defined by their ethnicity or geographical origin. Such pictures are in line with the ideologies of intersectionality that recognise that identity is constructed by many factors, some of which include gender, culture, ethnicity, occupation, class and experience, among others.

*Axone* can be cited as one of the biggest instances of such a transformation. This film focuses on the lives of a group of Northeastern friends living in Delhi, and their lives are shown through a tale of ordinary life. Unlike the previous characters, which were largely different, *Axone* undercuts its characters through demonstrating their friendship, profession, relationships and aspirations. The film demonstrates that the women of the North East region are not just the representatives of the region, but also individuals with their own personalities and aspirations.

The women characters in *Axone* take centre stage in the story. They make decisions, solve disputes, bargain and support one another, and all this goes on throughout the story. They are defined by different experiences and not one cultural identity. This method indicates a significant change in representation, with the characters being provided with agency and narrative importance. They are not mere spectators but actors whose actions determine the direction of the story.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of *Axone* is its portrayal of everyday life. The film mainly revolves around the preparation of the traditional dish during a wedding party. This may appear to be a shallow storyline, but it is an effective exploration of identity, belonging and culture. The film brings to the fore the reality of migration, friendship and community through the mundane interactions and everyday experience.

The tendency to exoticise other Northeastern women is also challenged in the movie. Rather than centre on cultural difference so as to produce the drama, *Axone* treats cultural practices as events of day-to-day living. This is a form of normalising diversity and inviting the audience to associate with the characters as a person and not a stereotype. The film will contribute to a more inclusive understanding of Indian identity and the plurality of cultures.

Some of the key transformations that can observe in *Kaalkoot* include the emphasis on individual agency. The agency is the capacity of a person to decide and impact their situation. There were common stereotypes that were likely to hold back the place of women; they portrayed women as being subject to the external circumstances or the heroes. Conversely, modern stories show women as decision-makers who engage in making their futures. This change is especially significant to underrepresented populations such as women in the Northeast due to the fact that it breaks the assumptions about passivity and dependence.

A second important aspect of reimagining representation is the portrayal of identity as a process and multi-layered. Modern screen narratives recognise that various identities of people overlap with each other and change with time. The women living in the northeast are not characterised only by ethnicity or region of origin, but they are also professionals, daughters,



friends, students, artists and members of the community. With the discovery of these different dimensions, films and web series build up more truthful and more advanced characterisations.

Additionally, contemporary images are increasingly centred on the mundane human experiences, in addition to cultural specificity. Characters act in terms of friendship, relationships with peers, career and family, ambitions and personal problems that are close to any viewer regardless of their background. This equilibrium enables narratives to embrace diversity as well as emphasise the commonalities. As a result, the Northeastern women are not portrayed as foreigners, but as belonging to the greater social system.

These developments are not only important in the entertainment arena. The representations in the media affect the cultural information, socialisation, and attitude. Through portraying Northeastern women in a multidimensional way, the viewers are able to comprehend their identities and experiences. Such portrayals are not stereotypical, build compassion and create a more diverse consciousness in Indian society.

Both *Axone* and *Kaalkoot* add to the current re-orientation of the image of women in the Northeast in the current Indian screen narrative. These texts surpass previous stereotypes by focusing on agency, individuality, community, and cultural authenticity and providing a more inclusive depiction.

### Conclusion:

The image of women in the Northeast in contemporary Indian screen narratives represents a crucial shift of invisibility and stereotyping towards a much more visible, self-agency and culturally true image. Conventionally, the mainstream Indian film actually marginalised the Northeastern women by portraying them with few and stereotypical images of their appearance, ethnicity and the regional identity. These representations never reflected the diversity and complexity of their lived experiences and helped to exclude them from the mainstream cultural discourse.

But recent movies and web shows like *Paatal Lok Season 2*, *Anek*, *Axone*, *Kaalkoot*, *Village Rockstars* and *Village Rockstars 2* have started to question these stereotypical images. These stories address the crossroads of gender and ethnicity as well as culture and regional identity, giving multidimensional images of Northeastern women. The characters are being portrayed as people who have ambitions, feelings, agency, and social importance as opposed to symbolic figures or stereotypes.

Intersectional approach demonstrates that various aspects of identity influence the experiences as well as representations of Northeastern women. Though traces of marginalisation and stereotyping still exist, newer screen narratives have demonstrated an inclusivity and diversity trend. These works aid in an expanded understanding of Indian identity and cultural plurality in anticipating the actual voices and experiences. Lastly, the evolving image of Northeast women demonstrates how media can change to attain acknowledgement, break bias and social acceptance in the contemporary Indian society.

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