



# Fathoming Psychological References In Assamese Cinema

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## ABSTRACT:

Cinema has been a powerful medium for raising awareness and educating the public about various psychological issues and societal taboos. Recently, Assamese cinema has transitioned from a focus on romance to a broader range of genres, such as horror, comedy, action, thriller, satire, and drama. This change has led to the emergence of films that tackle psychological concepts, particularly within the experimental genre. Over the years, numerous filmmakers have produced impactful Assamese films that delve into psychological themes, earning recognition both nationally and internationally and bringing accolades to the state. This research paper seeks to analyze the psychological motifs, references, issues, and taboos presented in Assamese cinema. The findings indicate that filmmakers have explored significant psychological disorders and themes, including empty nest syndrome, vorarephilia, gender dysphoria, schizophrenia, loneliness, hope, resilience, stress, toxic masculinity, suicide, alcohol addiction, gambling, acceptance, conformity, social support, and quality of life, portraying them in creative and thought-provoking ways.

*Keywords: Assamese cinema, psychology*

## INTRODUCTION:

In our multicultural world, cinema serves as a universal language. The connection between cinema and psychology has evolved over time, starting in 1916 when Hugo Munsterberg released 'The Film: A Psychological Study'. In this work, he suggested that films translate the external world into mental processes like memory, imagination, attention, and emotion (Kakkar, S., 2024). With the flickering images on the silver screen captivating audiences, cinema has emerged as a powerful tool to address significant global issues. It transcends mere entertainment, becoming a rich art form. Bhugra (2006) posits that watching movies can provide relaxation, allowing viewers to see their problems in a lighter context compared to those depicted on screen. Cinema has the ability to shape perspectives and influence lives in meaningful ways, reflecting societal truths. Complex themes, taboos, moral dilemmas, and controversies are often portrayed through a cinematic lens. Although filmmakers may not always provide accurate representations, many have explored psychological disorders, societal issues, and stigmas through their work. It is evident that these efforts have sparked thought-provoking and enduring impacts on audiences' minds. Compared to previous years, many more individuals are openly discussing their struggles with mental health without shame or hesitation. People worldwide are starting to understand

psychological disorders and stigmas, prioritizing mental health. The role of cinema in facilitating global discussions and enhancing understanding of psychological issues cannot be overlooked.

In recent years, the Assamese language film industry, often called 'Jollywood', has produced outstanding films exploring psychological disorders, related issues, and societal stigmas. These films represent directorial experiments that have resonated with both the Assamese audience and cinephiles globally. Historically, Assamese cinema prioritized romantic films, seldom venturing into other genres. However, there has been a noticeable shift in Assamese cinema, with directors exploring a variety of genres, including those that focus on psychological themes.

#### ANALYSIS OF ASSAMESE CINEMA AND ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL SUBJECT MATTERS:

##### **Aamis:**

The award-winning film *Aamis*, directed by Bhaskar Hazarika, brings audiences a lyrical exploration of the bizarre. The narrative centers on two characters: Nirmali, a married doctor with a son, and Suman, a PhD scholar studying meat-eating practices in Northeast India. Their seemingly ordinary encounter quickly turns dark. As Dr. Nirmali and Suman connect over their shared enjoyment of various types of flesh, they struggle to maintain their moral boundaries and become muses for each other. Unable to fully express their love due to Nirmali's marriage, Suman offers her his flesh, which Dr. Nirmali eagerly consumes. This behavior is classified as paraphilia, specifically vorarephilia, characterized by the erotic desire to either be consumed by or to consume someone else, as well as an attraction to the act of eating itself. Vorarephilia involves individuals participating in the fantasy communicating openly, establishing consent, and engaging in responsible practices (Dalton, N., 2024).

##### **Anur- Eyes On The Sunshine:**

Filmmaker Monjul Bauah's *Anur- Eyes On The Sunshine* has been adapted from esteemed Assamese author Anuradha Sharma Barpujari's short story 'Bhalpuar Xomoy'. The protagonist of the film, Anupama Baruah, undergoes empty nest syndrome. She is a widow. She has people around her, but not with her.

The latter part of the film explores the evolving friendship between Anupama Baruah and her new neighbor, a recently retired IAS officer. Anuradha finds a reprieve from her melancholy, isolation, and feelings of abandonment through her neighbor's company, sharing her thoughts, fears, and desires with him. Yet, she harbors doubts about the friendship, questioning whether society would view her relationship with a man during her later years as inappropriate. The film underscores that loneliness is a deadly burden, highlighting the vital need for companionship, regardless of age or gender, in today's fast-paced world.

##### **Bulbul Can Sing:**

Directed by Rima Das, the film *Bulbul Can Sing* powerfully embodies the widely recognized notion in Developmental Psychology that 'adolescence is a stage of storm and stress.' It tells the stories of three friends: Bulbul, Bonny, and Suman. While Bulbul and Bonny are girls, Suman is a boy. As they navigate their identities, the teens face tyranny and harassment from those who claim to uphold a well-behaved society. Suman is frequently mocked and bullied by his peers, referred to as 'ladies' for not fitting into traditional male norms and behaviors. The film effectively highlights the belittlement faced by LGBTQAI2S+ individuals, illustrating how their dreams and self-esteem can be profoundly shaken.

The story of Bonny explores the sexual attraction and curiosity experienced by teenagers, as well as their desire for physical intimacy and affection with partners. However, a group of villagers discovers Bonny and her boyfriend in a private moment and reacts violently, beating them and exposing the incident publicly. The resulting humiliation and shame overwhelm Bonny, leading her to take her own life. This tragedy underscores the urgent need for sex education in schools from an early age, fostering open and

supportive communication between adults and youth, and highlighting the need for society to address sensitive issues with care rather than causing further distress.

Bulbul feels the weight of upholding her father's musical legacy and his dream for her to be a singer. However, her teacher discourages her aspirations due to her weak voice. The film concludes with a prominent theme of Positive Psychology, hope. Near the end, Bulbul looks for emotional support from Bonny's late mother, who in turn becomes a source of strength for her. Ultimately, Bulbul chooses to pursue her passion for singing and to live life according to her own terms.

### **Bulu Film:**

A wide range of psychological aspects is conveyed through Himangshu Prasad Das's directorial film, 'Bulu Film.' Set during the COVID-19 pandemic, the film displays unemployment and economic struggles primarily faced by the lower middle class. The central theme explores how unemployment can coerce individuals into engaging in morally questionable pursuits. Strained family relationships due to financial crises are portrayed, and alcohol addiction is addressed, emphasizing its severity with dialogues such as 'people will even sell their land to buy alcohol.' The film also depicts individuals resorting to gambling due to the COVID-19 crisis in an attempt to earn money.

Schepke, R. (2023) stated that phone sex, sex chat, and masturbation saw a rise during COVID-19, mostly among men as a form of relaxation and stress relief. Various instances have been shown in the film where men engage in phone sex and masturbation to relieve their stress. Toxic masculinity is displayed in a scene where one of the lead characters, Prasanna, does not accept that he has certain medical issues and has failed to impregnate his wife, Bina, for the past three years.

The character of Bulu Bai exemplifies how social inequality and oppression impact women's mental health. Bharat, a Brahmin man, sought sexual relations with Bulu Bai but refrained from marrying her due to her lower caste status. Alongside selling tea to survive, Bulu Bai, pushed by her family's circumstances, is compelled to engage in sexual acts for money. She suffers mistreatment from villagers for her choice to sell sex, while no one holds the men accountable for their actions. Instead, she faces blame for tarnishing their moral character, labeled 'characterless.' This harsh treatment gravely affected her mental health, leading her to feel helpless, guilty, and dishonored by society. Eventually, when she could no longer maintain her composure, she tragically took her own life.

### **Fireflies- Jonaki Porua:**

Directed by Prakash Deka, the film Fireflies- Jonaki Porua offers a sincere depiction of LGBTQAI2S+ experiences. Centering on the theme of gender dysphoria, it thoughtfully portrays Jahnu's daily struggles as a person assigned male at birth who identifies as female. Jahnu faces ridicule and humiliation daily from the villagers due to his feminine traits and behaviors. They often refer to him in derogatory ways, using terms like 'ladies' and 'Madhuri Dixit.' Jahnu endures both verbal and sexual abuse from peers and villagers alike. Despite his challenging circumstances, the film illustrates Jahnu's resilience as he chooses to embrace his identity as a trans woman and strives to create a fulfilling life.

### **Kothanodi:**

The film Kothanodi, directed by Bhaskar Hazarika, picks up four prominent and dynamic folktales from 'Burhi Aair Xadhu', the popular collection of children's short stories in Assamese literature written by one of Assam's eminent writers, Lakshminath Bezbaruah. The film skillfully interweaves the four folktales, namely, 'Ou Kuwori', 'Tejimola', 'Tawoir Xadhu', and 'Champabati', into one narrative without losing the authenticity of all four stories. In the film, Senehi, who is Tejimola's stepmother, exhibits one of the major symptoms of schizophrenia, namely, hallucinations. The director creatively showcases Senehi's hallucinations in the form of a male demon who guides and instructs her to kill her stepdaughter, Tejimola. Two scenes in the film stand out where Senehi is seen hallucinating. The first scene occurs

when Senehi rows a boat to the middle of a pond at midnight, and the demon appears out of nowhere. The demon urges her to kill Tejimola, as Tejimola's father is away on a commercial trip. In the second and final instance, Senehi approaches the immoral. She brutally punishes Tejimola by breaking her hands and legs with a wooden rice pounder. She also inflicts serious injuries on Tejimola's head, and when she is about to abandon her stepdaughter at death's door, she hallucinates yet again. The demon reappears and commands Senehi to murder Tejimola. Senehi then strikes Tejimola's head with the wooden rice pounder and kills her.

### **Satya- The Truth:**

Director Rupjyoti Borthakur made a commendable effort to challenge the taboo surrounding homosexuality in Assam with the film Satya- The Truth. The story revolves around Satya, a college student, and Amar Baruah, a successful businessman, who are in a romantic relationship. When Satya's family learns of his same-sex attraction, they suspect Amar's influence and believe black magic is involved. Misunderstood by his family, Satya's sexual orientation is viewed as an abnormal behavior that society condemns. Satya's mother treats homosexuality as a disease, even going so far as to give him a sacred thread and an amulet to supposedly cure it. Meanwhile, Amar feels compelled to marry a woman due to the pressure from his ill mother and societal expectations. He struggles to reveal his true sexual identity to his family and the outside world, forcing himself into a life of deception. The film primarily explores themes of acceptance and conformity. Although Satya ultimately embraces his sexual orientation and with time his parents do as well, Amar chooses social acceptance over honesty, resigning himself to a life lacking purpose.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The conjoining of psychology and cinema illustrates a rich interdisciplinary field that amplifies the understanding of human cognitive processes and behaviors and the art of storytelling. It can be summarized that Assamese cinema serves as a powerful tool to provide profound insight; it is a medium of edutainment, availing a lens to the general audience through which psychological truths are understood.

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