

SONGS OF THE SELF: IDENTITY, STRUGGLE, AND FUTURITY IN ASSAMESE QUEER MUSIC VIDEOS

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ABSTRACT

*This paper conducts a queer theoretical analysis of two contemporary Assamese music videos, *Aaji Moi Koina* (2020) and *Ore Raati* (2021), examining their representation of LGBTQ+ lives and themes. The study explores how these visual and lyrical texts depict the struggles with familial rejection, societal heteronormativity, and the quest for self-acceptance and identity. It argues that while both works vividly portray the pain and alienation experienced by queer individuals, they ultimately move beyond lamentation to envision possibilities of queer futurity, community support, and inclusive love. Through close reading, the analysis highlights the narratives of transformation, the subversion of gender norms, and the advocacy for empathy and social change, positioning these cultural products as significant interventions in Assamese media that challenge dominant paradigms and foster greater visibility for the LGBTQ+ community.*

Keywords: *Queer Theory, Assamese Music Videos, LGBTQ+ Representation, Heteronormativity, Queer Futurity.*

Introduction

In contemporary Assamese short stories, novels, and even poetry, reflections of the lives of the LGBTQ community have become noticeable. Assamese writers have incorporated many aspects of their lives—love, struggle, tenderness, and problems—into their works. It can be hoped that such efforts will certainly help in viewing the LGBTQ community as ‘human beings’. Such themes have also been powerfully presented in Assamese cinema. Although on a very small scale, recently, depictions of the lives of the LGBTQ community have been artistically portrayed even in Assamese songs. In this context, we can mention music videos like *Aaji Moi Koina* (2020) and *Ore Raati* (2021). Through visual narratives, these music videos primarily depict the problems faced by the queer community, rejection by family, and the support and acceptance from friends and family. Studies on LGBTQ themes in Assamese literature, cinema, and music videos have been conducted by Moran (2020, 2024), Saikia (2024), Dutta (2024-25), Kalita (2025), and Rajbanshi (2025), among others. In the volume *The Queer and the Vernacular Languages in India: Studies in Contemporary Text and Cultures* (2024), edited by Kaustav Chakraborty and Anup Shekhar Chakraborty, Tonmoyee Rani Neog and Rimpi Borah have studied Assamese literature, and Anupam Kumar Hazarika has studied Assamese cinema concerning queer themes.

This study primarily analyzes the visual narratives of the two music videos *Aaji Moi Koina* and *Ore Raati* based on Queer Theory. Queer theory is a socio-cultural perspective whose main goal is to question and deconstruct the prevailing normative notions of gender, sexuality, and identity (referred to as Heteronormativity).

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to analyze, based on Queer Theory, how the themes of problems faced by characters from the LGBTQ community, rejection by family, and support and acceptance from friends and family are presented in the written and visual texts of the two songs *Aaji Moi Koina* (2020) and *Ore Raati* (2021).

Result and Discussion

Aaji Moi Koina

The song *Aaji Moi Koina* (2020) is written by Sarodee Borah. It is sung by Sarodee Borah and Neal. The music video, directed by Neal, features actors Sumi Borah, Rajiv Rag, and Neal. The main theme is presented through Rajiv Rag’s character. Sumi Borah and Rajiv Rag share a friendship. They go shopping for clothes together. Rajiv Rag has been rejected by his family. Despite being biologically ‘male’, Rajiv loves wearing women’s clothes. Once, his father caught him and threw him out of the house. But Sumi accepts him for who he truly is. Neal, Sumi’s boyfriend, helps Rajiv beautifully wear a silk outfit that Sumi bought for him. In this instance, Sumi’s boyfriend Neal also plays a supportive role. He confronts and opposes people who mock Rajiv’s behavior. Through the efforts of Sumi and Neal, Rajiv is able to find a new life. In the final scene, they bring Rajiv, dressed in the silk *mekhela-sador*, out of the room, and Rajiv looks at the world anew. Rajiv Rag has been able to very vividly portray the scene of stepping forward timidly, then gradually spreading both arms and accepting the world with a smile.

Ore Raati

The LGBTQ theme has found a clear place in both the lyrical and visual texts of the song *Ore Raati* (2021). The concept for the music video is by Abhishruti Bezbaruah, who also lends her voice. It is directed and filmed by Raktim Narayan. The audio is produced by Anupam Konwar, and the lyrics are by Kalpana Bhuyan.

Ore raati jolu kiyo bedonat, Uchupe mon dekhi jana ei jatonat
Xeuji sponbur kotenu bisarou, Herale prithivir xonali rongbur
Keninu urile kotnu lukale, Xantijuriya kopouhali

At the beginning of the song, there is a hint of the separation and despair felt by a queer individual for being unable to follow society's heteronormative expectations (such as—traditional marriage, children, a 'normal' life). 'Green dreams' and 'the golden colors of the world' symbolize a future that was shown to them from childhood. But since this is not possible for them, or because they have had to sacrifice it to maintain their truth, they feel a loss. The image of peaceful doves flying away and hiding somewhere conveys the inherent fear, tears, and constant sense of anxiety associated with living as a queer person.

Kiyo aaji jibonore nai dam
Bukur majat dukhor kiyo ei gan

A central theme of queer theory is studying how social structures render some lives less grievable than others. This song directly references this related question. The phrase 'why has life lost its value today' clearly states that in society, some people (undoubtedly heterosexual people) automatically receive security, rights, and dignity. In contrast, the lives of queer people often become subjects of debate, politics, and violence. It is because of this inequality that a song of sorrow is born in the lyricist's heart—'why this song of sorrow in my heart'.

Ahibone ghuri notun prohbat
Pohorole mali diya duhat
Kowa kowa kowa ahibone

The song searches for a Queer Futurity. The outstretched hands seeking a new dawn and light make clear the intensity of both fear and aspiration.

Xomoy aaji notun dhora ghorar
Nomai ana moromore jowar
Gane gane rodor hai bilai
Prane prane notun spon xojai
Diya diya diya bilai

This song is not just a lament. The lyrics call for building a 'Queer alternative'. Instead of reconstructing heteronormativity, it speaks of weaving a new garland of thought and recognition. Through 'a tide of love' and 'distributing sunshine smiles through songs', a queer community is imagined. Where there will be reciprocity, and there will be love-joy. The line 'building new dreams from soul to soul' indicates an important aspect of queer theory.

The song is based on the lived experiences of third-gender people. The main character, Janvi Borkakoti (biologically male; birth name—Jubaraaj), is herself an individual from the LGBTQ community (a trans woman). Janvi, originally from Guwahati, currently works at a London-based global IT consulting company in Gurgaon. Before this, she worked in Europe for ten years. It was during her time in Europe that Janvi underwent breast augmentation and transitioned from a man to a woman. According to her, the experience gained from working in Europe gave her the strength and mental fortitude to change her identity and live with the truth. Her family has also accepted this transition of Janvi. In this regard, the role of her mother, Biju Borkakoti, is particularly noteworthy.

Other actors/performers in the music video are Malaya Goswami, Bijit Kumar Das, and Abhishruti Bezbaruah. It is noteworthy that this music video is supported by the Cultural Affairs Department of the Government of Assam and the YPO northeast chapter.

The visual narrative shows that a 'male' character (played by Bijit Kumar Das) is present everywhere, mocking Janvi's identity. Through this character, the nature of society's gender psychology is actually revealed. Finally, Janvi burns a photo from her childhood, and simultaneously, the character who was bothering her also disappears into grayness. That is, Jubaraaj has fully accepted his self-identity, and this acceptance has given him the courage to live with his head held high in society. The music video shows that with the help and efforts of a friend (Abhishruti Bezbaruah), the mother (Malaya Goswami) embraces Janvi. Through this, an attempt has been made to send a positive message to society. The scene where the mother gently touches Meredith Russo's novel *If I Was Your Girl* (2016) in Janvi's room is very powerful. This novel centers on the identity and challenges of Amanda Hardy, a transgender girl. There, Amanda moves to a new city to hide her past identity (Andrew) and

start her senior year of high school. There she befriends a boy named Grant, and it turns into love. During this time, she is gripped by a fear—the fear that if the truth is revealed, the people who have become dear might walk away. Notably, Janvi decided to live away from Guwahati precisely because she saw people paying her undue attention.

The visual narrative of this song also talks about the need for Gender-Neutral Bathrooms. The lyrics and visuals of the song clearly articulate the internal struggles of third-gender people and express that every individual in society must possess the mentality to accept every other individual regardless of their gender identity. The song is a special dedication to the lives of third-gender people across the world and certainly a constructive effort. The song calls on society to embrace third-gender people, to educate themselves, and for third-gender people to become strong. In an interview with VibesMojo, Abhishruti Bezbaruah said, “As an artist, when I spoke with transgender folk in Assam trying to understand and gain a perspective, I understood that they long for family acceptance and they want to be able to live in our society without being judged. Gender dysphoria is first noticed at home, and parents are the first witnesses. While some parents and families are accepting, for others who aren’t, they struggle very hard.”

From a queer theoretical perspective, it can certainly be said that this song clearly expresses the pain, separation, and inequality often experienced by the queer community in the world. But the scope of the song’s lyrical and visual texts is not limited to that. Both texts also emphasize creating a new and more inclusive reality through queer love, community, hope, and joy. This reality actually exists among us. We can give it a living form through hope, light, new dreams, and reciprocity.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed the narratives of LGBTQ lives through the visual texts of two Assamese songs, *Aaji Moi Koina* (2020) and *Ore Raati* (2021). Analysis based on Queer Theory has revealed themes such as the relationship of characters from the LGBTQ community with family, conflicts of self-identity, and living again in society.

Both *Aaji Moi Koina* and *Ore Raati* have initiated a new horizon in the world of Assamese music, where the emotions, struggles, and hopes-aspirations of the LGBTQ community are depicted with great subtlety. Through the character of Rajiv Rag in *Aaji Moi Koina*, although faced with societal rejection, the importance of self-establishment and self-acceptance with the help of friends is shown. On the other hand, *Ore Raati* reveals the conflicts in Janv’s life, self-transition, and aspects of family support. These two songs not only express lament and torment but also present the search for a queer futurity, calling for building a new society with reciprocity, love, and an inclusive perspective from society.

Findings

Aaji Moi Koina and *Ore Raati* have laid an important foundation for the representation of the LGBTQ community in Assamese music. These songs clearly express all the main themes of queer theory; such as—questioning the ‘normal’ notions of gender and sexuality, standing against social inequality and rejection, and dreaming of an inclusive society. Through this, the artists associated with these two songs have emphasized bringing positive change to society, focusing on equality, love, and human values. The two songs have not only served the purpose of entertainment but have also acted as a powerful medium for increasing social awareness. It can be hoped that such songs will serve as a guide for the rights, recognition, and respect of the LGBTQ community in the future Assamese art and culture.

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