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A Study of Stereotyping of Ethnicity in Stand-up Comedy

Abstract : Stand-up comedy is one of the important entertainment sources for the younger generation today. The humour involved in the comedy not only entertains people but also helps to raise issues and sensitise people about several societal problems and many times breaks stereotypes in society. However, few stand-up comedians also reinforce certain stereotypes and one of them is ethnic stereotyping where these stand-up comedians joke on the ethnicity of people from different states and cultures. The paper analyses the portrayal of Bihar in stand-up performances of Priyesh Sinha and Sumit Saurav and finds out how stand-up comics stereotype an ethnicity. Stand-up comedy is performed both on television shows as well as through online video streaming platforms like Prime Video, Netflix, etc. In this paper, the stereotyping of Bihar and the people of Bihar are discussed through textual and content analysis of two different videos, and Dependency Theory are used utilised for drawing the theoretical framework of the study. One video was aired on the SET channel and the other was an online show by Prime Video. Both videos reinforce stereotypes about Bihar and present the state as backward, violent, and underdeveloped.

Keywords : Ethnicity, Stand-up comedy, Entertainment,

Comedy, framework.

INTRODUCTION : Stand-up comedy is not something new in India but in the last two decades, it has become a popular source of entertainment for the country's people. First on television and then through social media stand-up comedians have made space in the minds of the country's youth. Comedy has been an integral part of the Indian entertainment industry, whether circus shows, cinema, or television shows. In the earlier times when the circus used to be a big hit in the country, the Joker used to be the most important part of the circus. As television, shows became important comedians like Mehmood, Johnny Lever, and Jaspal Bhatti rose to prominence in film and television entertainment but in this era, the comedian was merely a sidekick of the lead character. Only a few shows like 'Flop Show' by Jaspal Bhatti were shows where the protagonist was the comic character. Later shows like 'The Great Indian Laughter Challenge' and 'Comedy Circus' introduced and promoted stand-up comedy to Indian television audiences and then the stand-up comedy became a genre in the Indian television industry. The comedians like Kapil Sharma introduced their shows and topped the TRP charts. In the last decade, stand-up comedy became a serious profession for many due to increased audience through video streaming platforms like Youtube and OTT platforms like Prime Video and Netflix, which has given avenues to stand-up comedians to showcase their talent and cash their performance. The internet developed a taste of stand-up comedy in the urban audience, which created a stage for them for live performances in premium cafes and corporate shows. According to Partner and Partner (2018), stand-up comedy is still a phenomenon for the urban niche audience and still, it does not fit in the larger scheme of entertainment.

As the Greek philosophers describe humour it is a 'malevolent behaviour, from which a civilised person should pull back'. As time progressed it developed into a profession and got attached to performers who performed to make people laugh and it is called humour in general and sometimes termed as satire. In, India comedy became an integral part of the cinema, and comedy was essentially added during the filmmaking. In the silent era comedy made space in the world cinema also but its importance in the cinema has been downplayed by film academicians and cinema scholars (Gooptu, 2010).

Ethnicity is often confused with terms like nationality and creed rather it focuses on the culture people share, languages people speak, common ancestry and place of origin, customs, and beliefs. Ethnicity is a complex term, which cannot be defined easily. It is about affiliation towards a particular societal circle, which has a cultural belongingness and a common national tradition. It is transferred to an individual or group by ancestors rather than earned. (Venkatesan et al, 2023)

Comedy as an on-screen entertainment in India : From the beginning of Indian cinema, some 100 years back comedy has been an integral part. The comedy in Indian films has evolved through various forms like satire, slapstick, and dark comedy (Ganjoo, 2020). The films before the 1970s were more slapstick comedies where throwing cake at each other and aggressive and violent physical acts were used to create comic scenes. Slowly and gradually in the earlier stage, it was merely added for a comic relief. In the 1970s, movies like 'Bawarchi' and 'Guddi' focused on situational comedy based on middle-class families in Indian Society. Later in the 1980s 'Jane Bhi Doo yaron' became a cult and directors started taking comedy as a genre for producing movies. In the same decade, 'Pushpak' was appreciated by the audience a lot and established comedy as a genre. The decade of the 90s further saw a lot of comedy films like 'Coolie No. 1' 'Raja Babu', 'Ankhen', 'Welcome', etc. The comedy found its place in the Indian cinema and separate awards for comedians started coming in film award ceremonies.

LITERATURE REVIEW : There is a close relationship between humour and language. Humour also needs knowledge of culture. Only language competence will not be able to create a good comedian, as without knowing the cultural aspect of the audience it is not possible to do comedy, as a joke for one culture could be offensive for another culture. Hence, a comedian should have enough understanding of other cultures also. There has been a significant amount of research on comedy, there is a strong discussion of recognition of comedy and its importance in contemporary lives, and comedy has become an important part of human lives (Lockyer, 2016). Stand-up comedy is an integral part of communication. Stand-up comedy could be used as a tool for change in society through storytelling and telling jokes and could serve various other purposes (Karim, 2023). The jokes and storytelling are used as a potent weapon in the contemporary cultural wars in the U.S. Stand-up comedy makes people laugh but it does not promote serious discussions and elevate toxic norms (Friedman & Friedman, 2019). According to Karim (2023), stereotyping should be pondered upon while analysing stand-up comedy because while doing stand-up performances the comedians often use these mental shortcuts to entertain their audiences. Also, there is a question about the extent to which the audience is ready to allow stereotyping as a part of artistic liberty.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To examine how stand-up comedy reinforces ethnic stereotypes.
2. To analyse the portrayal of Bihar and its population in stand-up gigs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS :

1. How ethnicity is stereotyped through stand-up comedy in India?

2. How people of Bihar are portrayed in the stand-up comedy performances in India?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

DEPENDENCY THEORY : In 1976 Dependency theory was proposed by Sandra ball Rokeach and Melvin Defleur and this theory states that "there is an internal link between media, audience, and large social system. The audience learning from the real life is limited, so they can use media to get more information to fulfil their needs. An extensive use of media generates dependent relation in audience. Also Media can able to create dependence relationship with target audiences to achieve their goals by using its media power." This theory states the power of media and shows how Television and online video streaming platforms could affect people and their perceptions. The dependency on media will influence people's behaviour and stereotyped and negative content will establish wrong perceptions in peoples mind. According to (Cameron 2015) there is a "sleeper effect" of humour which has affect on the persuasiveness of the message and the meaning could be contemplated later on the joke after it was heard. this sleeper effect when works with dependency theory it could have long lasting effect on the society.

METHODOLOGY AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY : This qualitative study is done through content analysis and textual analysis to examine two stand-up comedy performances. The first stand-up comedy video was aired on television, while the other was posted on the OTT platform. The selection of stand-up videos from both mediums provides a comprehensive exploration of how ethnic stereotyping is depicted through various mediums. The first stand-up performance, presented by Priyesh Sinha, was broadcast on the SET India YouTube channel. The second performance, performed by Sumit Sourav, was uploaded on Amazon Prime Video's YouTube channel. Both performances are related to the stereotyping of individuals from Bihar and Rajasthan. This research investigates the portrayal of ethnic stereotyping within stand-up comedy. The states Bihar and Rajasthan represent the Western and Eastern peripheries of the country and there is differentiation in both the states' economical, social, and political conditions so this research will give a wholesome sample from these two states. The two videos are also representative of both television and OTT platforms as both have large audiences across the nation. The videos have been selected because the SET channel is one of the popular channels and Prime Video is also an established OTT platform in the country and both videos viewership is sizeable when it comes to Youtube online video streaming platforms. The researcher in this research does the purposive sample selection.

Sr.No	Priyesh Sinha	Analysis
1	"Mai bhi Bihar se hu aur Nahi mai apni samsya nahi bta rha hu."	The stand-up video starts with these words and gets a little laughter from the audience. These words highlight that being from Bihar is often considered a problem. The subtle response from the audience underscores the underlying challenges of a person being stereotyped from a particular state.
2	"Humare yha logo ko ladne ka bahut saukh hai. Agar ladne ko Kuch nahi mile to election hi lad lete hai."	The next sentence in the standup implies that people from Bihar are more prone to violence or conflict. And if they are not able to engage in any fight, then they try to get into electoral fights. This line reinforces the stereotype that people from Bihar are more inclined towards politics even though they do not have much knowledge about it.
3	"Humare yha char log mil kar party nahi karte, Party bna lete hai aur naam rkhte hai jan sailab party."	This line suggest a stereotype related to the political culture more specifically the political parties of Bihar. It implies that political parties are not formed on the basis of ideology or political agenda. But the political party in Bihar is formed on the basis of boredom and the urge to fight something.
4	"Party ke photo me dekh kr hi malum lagta hai ki Shilpa Shetty hai. UP Bihar loot lega. Lekin ye dekhiye Shilpa Shetty bhi kitna nadan hai. Kehti hai UP Bihar loot lenge. Anne ki Jarurat nahi hai is kaam ke liye hmare yha log hai"	The standup video further talks about the leaders of the Bihar. These lines stereotype that the leaders and the people from Bihar are all corrupt. The people from this region are inherently inclined towards criminal behaviour.

5	"Khud hi election time ghar ghar ja kr ghum kar keh reh hote hai, namaskar, Sewa krenge mauka dijiye. Samne se kehti hai, Nahi abhi mauka nahi de skte hai abhi babu ji ghar par hai."	This part of the standup video talks about the door to door campaigns of party politicians. However when they ask the women to give opportunity to them, the women of the Bihar could not understand it. The response from the girl mentioned in the video highlights the stereotyping related to women in Bihar. This line suggests that women in Bihar could not comprehend simple Hindi and they take these responses in much different way.
6	"Humare yha logo ko padhne ka baht saukh hai. Parents humesa apne bccho ko kehte hai beta padho. Padha likha rhega to kahi bhi ricksaw chla kr do paisa kmaega."	After women, the comedian talks about the education system in Bihar. He mentioned that the children and the parents from Bihar want to get good education. However, the comedian further stereotype Bihar in terms of employment. He mentioned that parents motivate their children that they should study so that they can be a Rickshaw puller. This promotes the narrative that people from Bihar, even though educated can only be Rickshaw puller and the people of Bihar does not have bigger ambitions.
7	"Hmare yha ka tourism bhi bahut khaas hai. Hmare yha ke 75% tourists Bihar se hi hote hai. Self Dependent hai hum is maamle me".	The last part of the video mention the issue of tourism in Bihar. The comedian states that 75% of tourists are from Bihar stereotyping that no one from outside wants to visit this state and only the people from Bihar wants to visit this state.

The analysis of this video highlights the prevalence of stereotyping of Bihar and its people in the stand-up video. Bihar and the residents of Bihar are portrayed as more familiar with violence and political aggression. This video underscores deep-rooted biases and stereotypes in the minds of the audience for this state. The projection of political parties formed out of boredom and political leaders being corrupt reinforces the stereotype related to the political culture of Bihar. The video further perpetuates gender stereotypes in Bihar. It describes that the women in Bihar do not have basic knowledge and cannot comprehend simple language. In the end, the video targets the education system and tourism of Bihar. Overall, this stand-up video serves to highlight stereotypes about Bihar and its residents.

Sr. No	Sumit Saurav	Analysis
1	"Aur Problem ye hai ki meri girlfriend 27 saal ki Marwadi ladki, single Bachelor. Basically Marwadi calendar ke hisab se, She is dead."	This statement by the comedian presents the stereotype related to women belonging to the Marwadi community. It implies that the women of this community are supposed to be married at a young age. And if that does not happen then they are supposed or equivalent to dead. These words in the video indicate stereotyping related to early marriage in Marwadi culture.
2	"Mera jab college placement hua that to mere fufa logo ka call aane lag gya tha ki delhiye ab to apko ladki deni pregi aur 20 lakhs bhi"	These words by comedian perpetuates the stereotype that people from Bihar are treating women like commodity. And further he stereotype Bihar and its people that they practice giving and receiving dowry as a part of marriage. It highlights the stereotype that groom's family will receive monetary gifts as a part of cultural norms.

3	"Kaun sa Vansh. Dada Gareeb, Baap Gareeb, Mai Gareeb"	After that the comedian states that all his ancestors including his grandfather, his father were all poor. These statement highlights the stereotype that Bihar and People from Bihar are poor people. The older as well as the younger generation every one is living under poverty.
4	"Mai jab 25 saal ka hua to mere baap ne mere par loan de diya tha. Bola tumhari education ke liye liya tha."	At the end, the comedian further states about the economy condition of people of Bihar. He states that his father gave him a education loan which was taken for his education. These words further strengthen the stereotype that people from Bihar are economy not well. It highlights the thinking that even for education, people have to take loan.

This video stereotypes people from Bihar as well as from Rajasthan. It emphasises that women in Rajasthan are expected to get married at an early age. And if they do not get married at a certain age then they are supposed to be dead. The video further stereotypes Bihar in terms of gender inequality. It stresses that women are treated as commodities in Bihar and the people are still practising the dowry system. In the end, the comedian talks about the economic conditions of Bihar. The video also stereotypes the financial condition of the residents of Bihar.

CONCLUSION : The study found out that stand-up comedians reinforce stereotypes and joke about some serious issues that are not to be made joke of. The residents of Bihar are often portrayed as violent and aggressive and the people of Rajasthan are represented as rich and mean. The early marriages of girls are joked about in these videos which could sound distasteful to many girls who are career-oriented and work day and night to achieve excellence in their life. The study recommends that comedians should be more sensitive about ethnicity of people.

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