

**AN ANALYSIS OF PROPAGATION OF ETHNIC AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN INDIAN  
CARTOON CHARACTERS.**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the propagation of ethnic and racial stereotypes in Indian cartoon characters designs. Cartoon characters, being the most accessible form of media for children, holds immense power to shape their perception of different ethnic and racial groups. Using Semiotic Analysis, the study qualitatively identifies and examines popular Indian cartoon characters, while also analysing their effects on the audience. This study utilises the evaluation approach of ethnic and racial stereotypes proposed by Ross (1997). The study reveals that Indian cartoon characters frequently reinforce stereotypes that contribute to the perpetuation of negative attitudes and discrimination towards specific populations. The study suggests that animation designers need to become more aware of stereotypes and strive to create more diverse and inclusive depictions of various ethnic and racial groups. The study contributes to the growing body of literature on the impact of media on children's perception of different ethnic and racial groups. The study's findings may help in combating the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and may offer practical recommendations to address ethnic and racial issues and promote greater diversity and inclusion in Indian media.

***Keywords***

Cartoon Characters, Cartoon Design, Children Cartoon Shows, Ethnic Identity, Indian Media, Racism, Racial Stereotypes, Stereotypes, Role Model, Diversity, Inclusion

## INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of stereotyping is a prevalent phenomenon observed in media on a global scale (Shah et al., 2022), and India is not exempt from this trend. Cartoons, being a very accessible medium for youngsters, has significant influence in shaping their perceptions of diverse ethnic and racial groups. The issue of ethnic and racial stereotypes in Indian cartoons is a matter of worry (Sreejitha & M Suresh, 2021), as it has the potential to sustain unfavourable attitudes and biases against these particular groups.

Post-liberalization television, particularly, experienced significant transformations in various aspects such as programming content, approach, reach, and reception. The advent of dedicated children's television channels played a pivotal role in this context. Exclusive children's television channels were a crucial development in this scenario. India's 24-hour children's TV networks have grown during the past 15 years. The Local, Western, Chinese, Korean and Japanese animation content on children's TV channels changes the childhood culture, which is rarely analysed in Indian media studies (Jaggi, 2015).

While television's effect on gender identity development has been studied worldwide, the roles of cartoon and how gender stereotypes are promoted or challenged have also been studied. India is a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Its people come from a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, which make it an interesting and unique place to study the propagation of ethnic and racial stereotypes in cartoon characters. Children in India are exposed to a growing number of cartoon animation channels (25 channels as of 2023 by Ministry of Information & Broadcasting) for entertainment, and shows in these channels are being seen not just as a form of entertainment, but also as a method of learning and developing a respect for a diversity of cultures. However, the way in which some characters are portrayed in these cartoons can be problematic, since it contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and encourages viewers to have unfavourable views towards specific groups. Researchers from Tufts believe that it is troublesome, because an excessive number of children's animated shows continue to reinforce stereotypes, despite the fact that some of these series feature characters from a variety of backgrounds (Dobrow et al., 2018).

Similarly, Leiden (2016) found that certain characters, such as those from the North-Eastern region of India, were portrayed negatively, with accentuated features and stereotypical accents. In addition, characters depicted as South Indian were often shown having darker complexion and being less intelligent than their North Indian characters (Mishra, 2015). It has been discovered that these stereotypes perpetuate prejudices against these groups, thereby contributing to discrimination and

marginalisation. According to (Bajwa et al., 2023), the majority of children in India prefer lighter skin tones and associate them with attractiveness and success. This fondness is frequently reinforced by media, such as animated characters, which perpetuate the notion that lighter skin tones are more desirable.

It is noteworthy to acknowledge that the presence of stereotypes in cartoons is not exclusive to India, but rather extends to several countries and civilizations. However, it is imperative to analyse the dissemination of stereotypes in Indian caricatures in order to understand its societal impact, given the country's heterogeneous population and cultural variety. The portrayal of ethnic and racial stereotypes in animated characters has the potential to foster unfavourable views and bias towards these groups within the context of India, a nation characterised by its rich variety. Despite the increasing heterogeneity within Indian culture, the media, particularly through the portrayal of cartoon characters, persistently perpetuates ethnic and racial stereotypes. As the most accessible form of media for children, cartoon characters hold immense power to shape their perception of different ethnic and racial groups (Witt, 2000). Greenberg et al. (2008), found that the children's exposure to media and entertainment has a significant effect on their perceptions and attitudes towards various ethnic and racial groups.

The aim of this article is to investigate the propagation of racial and ethnic stereotypes in Indian animated characters. By identifying the prevalent stereotypes, society may start to address their detrimental effects on individuals and society. Ultimately, it is essential to create a media landscape that is more diverse and inclusive, and that accurately reflects the diverse cultures and people of India.

The scope of the study is to focus on the semiotic analysis of popular Indian cartoon characters to identify and examine the propagation of ethnic and racial stereotypes. The study qualitatively analyses selected cartoon characters by drawing upon the works of Ross (2019) to identify and understand the propagation of ethnic and racial stereotypes. The study seeks to contribute to the expanding corpus of research on the effect of media on children's perceptions of various ethnic and racial groups.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **DEFINITION OF STEREOTYPING AND MEDIA INFLUENCE**

Stereotyping is generalising about a group based on their categorisation. Stereotypes are mental representations of a group's traits. These unfavourable thoughts and expectations

might cause bias and discrimination. Cartoons can affect our views of diverse populations. According to the cultivation hypothesis, frequent media exposure can affect our worldview. Thus, media stereotyping might reinforce negative views of particular communities. Media stereotypes affect our views of ethnic and racial groupings, according to research. Media may also fight prejudices and encourage diversity, Stacks et al. (2015).

Additionally, Fiske et al. (2002) believed that the perceived status and rivalry influence stereotypes' warmth and competency. In particular, those with higher status are considered as competent, whereas those struggling for resources are seen as cold. The authors use stereotype studies from many social groups to support their approach. The stereotype content concept accounts for many stereotypes, including mixed or ambivalent ones, and is consistent with other stereotyping theories. The authors argue that stereotypes' warmth and competence affect group dynamics. They recommend understanding stereotype dynamics to build effective treatments to minimise bias and discrimination.

On the other hand, Sammond (n.d.-a) states that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cartoons were saturated with a variety of ethnic and racial stereotypes. Despite the fact that the black/white dichotomy of blackface minstrelsy is an essential component of American commercial animation, blackface minstrelsy is still being used. Because stereotypes are an efficient means of conveying information, providing a sort of economy of stereotype, they were frequently employed on the vaudeville stage, as well as in the animation films that borrowed from vaudeville. This was due to the fact that stereotypes are an effective means of communication.

## **EFFECTS OF MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF GENDER ROLES ON YOUNG VIEWERS**

The influence of media representations of gender stereotypes on young audiences has been a subject of study for decades. Male characters are presented as strong, rough, and dominant, whereas female characters are portrayed as passive, emotive, and nurturing, as demonstrated by numerous studies Koenig (2018). These depictions can contribute to the internalisation of gender roles in young audiences, influencing their perceptions of what constitutes acceptable behaviour for boys and girls. In addition, research indicates that dealing with stereotypical media portrayals can have adverse impacts on children's confidence, body image, and goals, especially among females. In addition, the limited media

representation of non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals can contribute to sentiments of marginalisation and discrimination among viewers who do not adhere to traditional gender norms Grabe et al. (2008)

Furthermore, Witt (2000) in the Handbook of Children, Media and Development chapter gives a comprehensive summary of research on media's influence on children's race and ethnicity perceptions and attitudes. The author suggests that the media socialise children and shape their views on race and ethnicity. The article begins with a historical framework of race and ethnicity in media, noting how stereotypes affect children's ideas and attitudes. The author discovers that the media that perpetuates racial and ethnic stereotypes can lead to unfavourable attitudes towards minority groups, while the media that promotes diversity can lead to positive sentiments. The author stresses that the media's effects on children's race and ethnicity attitudes are diverse and influenced by age, cognitive development, and media context. Finally states that the media variety and truthful representation of varied cultures can help encourage intergroup communication and lessen bias.

Likewise, Signorielli (1990), states the effects of media portrayals of gender roles on young viewers is the focus of the research article. While there are some shows that reflect a more progressive view of gender roles, numerous content evaluations point to the same fundamental finding that there is a lack of female characters on television, and both men and women are shown in conventional roles. Researcher have looked at the ways in which these images affect people of all ages by focusing on four key phenomena; that is how people view gendered behaviours and occupations, how children identify with particular TV characters, the concept of counter-stereotypical portrayals, and how they teach children to view gender roles.

Similarly, Dogutas (2021) mentioned that an infant is born into a culture and acquires knowledge of that culture in order to live in that society. This activity that begins as the child is born and concludes at death, is known as socialisation. Family, school, acquaintances, the media, and other factors contribute to socialisation. Socialisation teaches gender roles to children. Since we live in an age of technology, children primarily interact through media. Television is the most essential socialisation tool for young children. They acquire most of their knowledge from television. This study examined how television affects children's gender roles. 15 school students were investigated at the secondary level. Data was collected via

qualitative document analysis. Participants had to draw a TV-observed female role. The researcher and two professionals examined photos. Student photos revealed six themes. These women appear in contests, films, at home alone, in the workplace, as powerful women, and as victims of violence.

## **STEREOTYPES IN CARTOON CHARACTERS**

Researchers contend that the animated characters have a significant effect on influencing societal beliefs about different communities, particularly gender and ethnic groups. Character designs in animated shows perpetuate gender stereotypes, such as the depiction of female characters as excessively sexier and male as hypermasculine. The researcher also examines how the character designs and plots of cartoons that are animated contribute to the ethnic stereotyping of minority groups (Daalmans et al., 2017).

Correspondingly, Magotra and Kaur (2018), states that the children internalise gender stereotypes primarily through their exposure to verbal and visual media. As a powerful mode of communication, television has a significant influence on the children's mind. In addition, it is actually a form of entertainment exclusively for children, which has educational and social implications. Cartoon shows showcase children with imaginary characters exhibiting behaviours and characteristics that they imitate besides internalise, thus fostering stereotypical beliefs. Gender bias in animation arises from preconceived notions of what a girl or boy should or should not do. Cartoons portray female characters as feeble or inferior, relegated to housework, while male characters are portrayed as powerful or superior.

Notably, Sá and Tavares (2017), analysed female cartoon characters from the alternative girl squad animated show and believe that cartoons still stereotype and constrain female roles, notwithstanding recent progress. The analysis begins with a discussion of the historical portrayal of female characters in cartoons, emphasising that they have traditionally been portrayed as passive and subordinate to male characters. The researchers then discuss the significance of media representation and its influence on the formation of identity and self-esteem among young viewers. They analyse female characters in modern cartoons and talk about clichés including "damsel in distress," "sexy sidekick," and "tomboy". In addition, they examine how the use of colour, clothing, and body language in the design of female characters can reinforce stereotypes. The "girl squad" trend in modern cartoons is also

reviewed. The review also investigates alternative depictions of female characters in modern animation, such as the "girl squad" trend. The researchers examine the characteristics of these alternative female characters, including their diverse body types, abilities, and interests, as well as how they challenge traditional stereotypes.

However, Klein and Shiffman (2006), analyses the signals about being a member of different racial groups in animated cartoons, which young people are exposed to from an early age, regularly, and for many years. The study addresses: (a) How often do animated cartoons depict race and racism? (b) Has prevalence changed? (c) What "types" of traits do Europeans, Africans Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asians have? The Results show that racial minority groups have been underrepresented over time, even as their number has expanded. Since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, overt racism has drastically lessened. Most dimensions portrayed races similarly.

#### **CLASS, RACE AND GENDER IN MEDIA**

Yousman et al. (2020), in the book encourages the students to examine their own media experiences and interests, since it offers them a critical and comprehensive introduction in the area of media education. This book covers radical production economics, literary analysis, and audience reaction. Considering Internet, social media, television, cinema, music, and advertising are key parts of popular culture today. The book investigates the power dynamics that span academic boundaries and are impacted by gender, racism, and social class are examined in many articles on the economic and cultural effects of mass media organisations.

Besides, Roy and Sahharil (2020), in the article states that the animation entertains all ages in popular culture. However, these media shape society's views on race and ethnicity. Long-standing issues of racial stereotypes and underrepresentation in animation need to be addressed. The researchers examined how racial representation in animation has changed over time. The researchers contend that the media has always shaped society's image of race, and America's race past has shaped Western animation's representation of diverse races. The study revealed that while The Simpsons, Family Guy, and South Park use humour and satire, they can also promote racial stereotypes and negative views of specific communities. The

researchers also noted that Western animation underrepresents Black and Latino characters, which marginalises these populations.

A popular book in media and politics, J. Fiske and Hancock (2016), examines the race and gender's influence on US political discourse. The author claims that the media portrayals of race and gender strongly impact political attitudes and behaviour, shaping popular impressions of political issues and candidates. The book analyses the media, racism, and gender's complicated influence on political culture, using empirical studies and critical ideas. Examining as how social and cultural norms impact media depictions of race and gender, reinforcing power systems and inequities. His work helps explain how media depictions of race and gender shape social and political discourses. As well as this work illuminates how political power is wielded and disputed in modern society by evaluating media images of race and gender. In conclusion the book is a work in media and politics emphasises the need to critically examine how media portrayals of race and gender impact political culture and debate in the US.

Similarly, Essed (1991), in his book contends that the racism extends well beyond overt acts of prejudice and is instead ingrained in the relationships and societal institutions that the people have with one another on a daily basis. The term 'everyday racism' is coined by the author of this book to refer to the subtle, widespread, and frequently unconscious kinds of discrimination that occur in everyday life. The author emphasises that everyday racism is not restricted to the views or behaviours of individuals, but is instead maintained by institutional practises and cultural norms as well as by people' attitudes and behaviours. To achieve a nuanced comprehension of racism in day-to-day life, Essed's method takes a multidisciplinary approach and draws from a variety of academic disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies.

Likewise, Glick and Fiske (1996), in the article introduces the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), which distinguishes between intimidating and friendly sexism. Violent sexism is unfavourable towards women who break gender norms, while benign sexism is positive for women who follow them. Previous sexism assessments have confounded these two separate kinds, according to the researchers. The ASI's two subscales—Hostile and Benevolent—address this shortcoming. The researchers use varied population studies in various circumstances to demonstrate the ASI's validity and reliability. The ASI can discriminate



between hostile and benevolent sexism, which have different predictions and outcomes. The researchers describe how their findings explain gender inequity and how to minimise sexism. They contend that helpful sexism is more subtle and harder to spot and fight than hostile sexism. They believe gender equality requires addressing both forms of sexism.

Besides, Greenberg et al. (2008), in the chapter gives a comprehensive summary of research on the effect of children's exposure to the media and their perceptions of race, ethnicity and attitudes. The authors suggest that the media socialise the children and shape their views on race and ethnicity. The chapter introduces historical framework of race and ethnicity in media, noting how stereotypes affect children's ideas and attitudes. They also evaluate empirical studies on media's effects on children's race and ethnicity perceptions, and discover that media that perpetuates racial and ethnic stereotypes can lead to unfavourable attitudes towards minority groups, while media that promotes diversity can lead to positive sentiments. The authors stress that the media's effects on children's race and ethnicity attitudes are diverse and influenced by age, cognitive development, and media context. Media variety and truthful representation of varied cultures can help encouraging intergroup communication and lessen bias.

In addition, Smith et al. (2018), in the Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment analysed the diversity in film, television, and digital entertainment. Women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ persons, and people with disabilities were examined in popular media across platforms. The survey found that these groups are underrepresented both on and off screen in the entertainment sector. The survey revealed that 31.8% of speaking characters in 900 popular films were female and 29.3% in 4,454 broadcast, cable, and streaming programmes were from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. Only 4.3% of directors are women and 3.1% are from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups, according to the report. The report claims that the media homogeneity encourages the undesirable prejudices and social hierarchies, which can hurt individuals and society. The reporters advocate for greater diversity and inclusion in the entertainment industry, including hiring more minority people in creative jobs and telling varied tales. The outcome emphasised the need to overcome systematic disparities in the entertainment sector.

In contrast, Matthes et al. (2016), Numerous studies on gender-role depictions in television advertising lack comparable designs. They analyse television advertisements from

13 Asian, American, and European nations for gender stereotypes. 1755 advertisement were collected in May 2014. They identified the gender stereotypes in TV adv all over the world by looking at the main character's gender, speech, age, product category, home or work scene, and profession. A multilevel model also showed that the gender stereotypes were independent of a country's gender. These numbers show that gender stereotypes in TV ads have nothing to do with gender equality.

Lastly, Eagly and Mladinic (1994), evaluates that the female stereotypes are more favourable than male stereotypes among US and Canadian Universities among students. Goldberg-paradigm trials on women's and men's competence are used to compare these perceptions and stereotypes. Competence judgement research found prejudice against women in masculine domains, like male-dominated occupations, male-stereotypic behaviours, but not in general. This targeted discrimination is consistent with attitude and stereotype research showing that the women are more positively judged than men, because people feel nice, loving, communal traits equip people for the domestic role and low-status, low-paying female-dominated jobs. Women's gender discrimination and feminist protests against a modern reaction against women reflect their breakthroughs into traditionally masculine areas, notably their ambitions to attain high-status, high-paying male-dominated positions, which are perceived to require male qualities.

### **STEREOTYPES AND MEDIA -THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Ross (2019), in the book declares that mass media shapes public opinion about ethnic and racial minorities. Unfortunately, media tropes marginalise these populations. The author argues that the mainstream media stereotypes ethnic minority groups as the troublesome "other" or in narrowly stereotyped positions. This depiction fosters public hatred towards other ethnic groups and lowers ethnic minorities self-esteem. The media can also narrowly typecast and stereotype as well as Complex media production processes, business incentives, norms, and values contribute to these detrimental depictions. The book emphasises the necessity for study to overcome prejudices and encourage good media representations. This is crucial for shaping collective identities and intergroup attitudes and combating bad preconceptions that cause prejudice and discrimination.

Barthes' (2018), Roland Barthes' system of semiotics could also be used for semiotic analysis of animated characters. Barthes describes in this paradigm, how signals such as images or words convey information and how they are understood by the audience. This framework can be used to analyse both the visual and linguistic signals employed by animated characters and how they perpetuate stereotypes.

Ogden and Richards (1927), divides the semiotic analysis process into three components: the sign itself (the analysed visual or linguistic element), the reference point (the thing or idea being represented), and the person who interprets (the significance or image communicated by the sign to the viewer).

S. T. Fiske (2018), the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) is a theoretical model used to understand and explain the social perception of groups and individuals. The model was proposed by social psychologists Susan Fiske and Peter Glick in the late 1990s and has since been used extensively in research on stereotypes. The SCM suggests that people tend to perceive others based on two primary dimensions: warmth and competence. Warmth refers to whether the group or individual is perceived as friendly, trustworthy, and kind, while competence refers to whether the group or individual is seen as capable, intelligent, and skilled.

## **PREVIOUS STUDIES ON ETHNIC AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES IN INDIAN MEDIA**

Indian media has a long historical context to stereotype British colonial authorities utilised the media to depict Indians as inferior and barbarous. This justified their colonial authority and maintained their dominance over the native populace. Indian media maintained the colonial prejudices after independence in 1947. In Indian media, the patriarchal standards have objectified and marginalised women. Media prejudices and biases also affect how ethnic and religious groups are portrayed (Kasturi, n.d.).

In recent years, Indian media stereotyping has been recognised and addressed. There have been efforts to increase diversity and inclusiveness in Indian media to fight harmful stereotypes in popular culture. However, considerable effort remains to overcome the legacy of stereotyping in Indian media and develop good and inclusive depictions of varied communities in popular culture.

Importantly, Laskar and Amir (2022), examines the religious minorities in Hindi cartoons shows. Religious diversity is an important component of India's culture, yet it is often neglected in the media, especially in children's programming. The study examines how well Hindi-language cartoons reflect religious minorities. The researchers examined 15 research articles, publications, and reports on religious minorities in Hindi-language cartoons. Hindi-language cartoons underrepresented religious minorities, particularly Muslims. This underrepresentation of religious minorities in children's programming can lead to negative stereotyping and marginalisation, which can have long-term impacts on children's views of minority groups.

The study also found that Hindi-language cartoons stereotype and demonise religious minorities, reinforcing biases. The researcher claims that such depictions can have major effects, especially for children who may internalise these negative messages and develop religious minority prejudices and discrimination.

Equally, Das and Sharma (2016), asserts in the study that the women increasingly impact and absorb advertisements. Audiences criticise advertisers for stereotyping and decorating women, their perception of commercials changes over time. This study examines the audience perceptions of women in Indian TV ads and how they differ by gender, age, and education. The study randomly selects 104 male and female participants. Surveys with structured questionnaires collect primary data, to compare group perceptions HSD test and t-test was used. As a result, study found that gender, age, and education significantly affect respondents' perceptions. The study found that the men and women have significantly different views on the issue, particularly those of a younger age.

In conclusion, the academic literature has been concerned with media stereotyping for many years. Stereotypes are extensively disseminated in various forms of media, such as animations shows, video games, films, and other television programmes. The media has a tremendous effect on children's perceptions of various ethnic and racial groups. Particularly, cartoons have a significant influence on children's perspectives and attitudes towards various groups.

## **THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. Find the most common ethnic and racial stereotypes propagated by Indian cartoon character designs.
2. Identify the steps that can make the design of Indian animated characters more inclusive and diverse.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Using Semiotic Analysis, the study qualitatively identifies and examines the popular Indian cartoon characters, while also analysing the Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes.

Semiotics studies signs and symbols and how they are interpreted. Signs—language, pictures, gestures, and objects—are analysed in semiotics. It has three main parts.

1. Signs are tangible representations of ideas. It can be image, sound, or written word.
2. Signs occur as signifiers. Viewers experience the sign's sensory component, such as a word's sound, an object's form, or a symbol's colour.
3. The signified is the sign's notion or meaning. When we see a sign, we build a mental image of it.

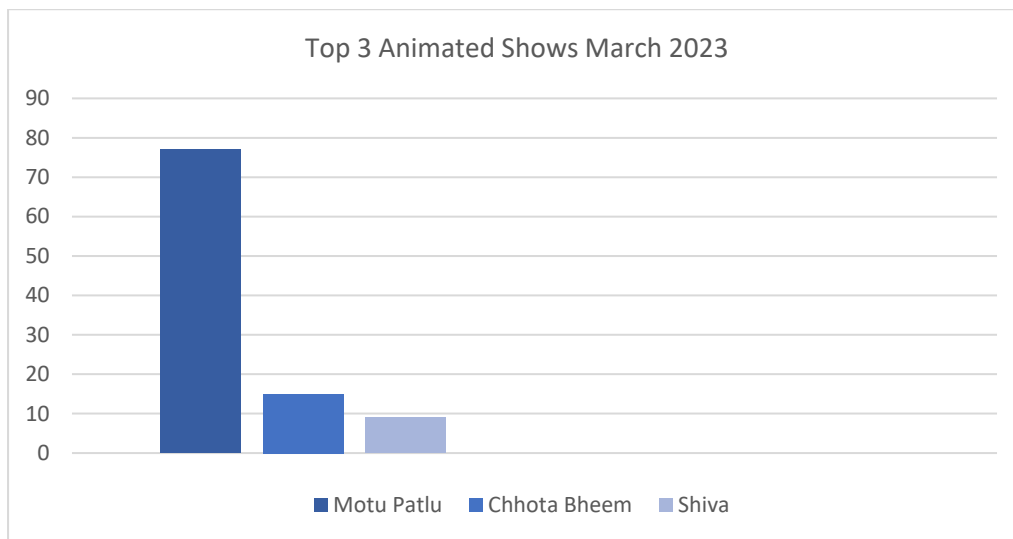
In analysing ethnic and racial stereotypes in Indian cartoon character designs, the semiotic framework may find signals, signifiers, and signified meanings. The researcher uses purposive sampling to select cartoons that have a significant presence and impact on Indian children. The sample for the study was drawn from popular Indian cartoons shows based upon the weekly television ratings from Broadcast Audience Research Council in March 2023. The study qualitatively analyses select cartoon characters by drawing upon the works of Ross (2019) to identify and understand the propagation of ethnic and racial stereotypes.

## **ANALYSIS**

The selection of the lead cartoon characters is based on the Broadcast Audience Research Council's (BARC) weekly ratings of the top five cartoon shows in March 2023 was taken into consideration for the study.

**Figure 1.1**

*Graphical representation of the percentage of Leading animated cartoon shows*



*Source: Broadcast Audience Research Council's weekly ratings of the top animated shows*

As shown in Figure 1.1, the top ratings of the Indian animated television characters, 77% is of the character Motu Patlu, 15% is of character Chhota Bheem and 9% is of character Shiva.

According to the statistics, 'Motu Patlu' is the most popular cartoon character on Indian cartoon television during the weeks of March 2023. As a result, Motu Patlu is taken into consideration for studying the evolution of recent Indian animated television characters.

## **STORY LINE**

The story revolves around Motu and Patlu getting into trouble and overcome by hilarious circumstances. Motu and Patlu live in Furfuri Nagar. The show relies on their knack for getting themselves into humorous situations and then rescuing themselves by blind luck. Motu's favourite snack is samosas. Motu is constantly attempting to steal samosas from the neighbourhood Chaiwala, who makes the city's greatest samosas. Motu is often the pair's black sheep, causing difficulties that Patlu always fixes; occasionally, Ghasitaram, Chingam, and Dr. Jhatka assist them. Once in a while, Ghasitaram deceives them by compelling Motu Patlu to experiment with Dr. Jhatka's strange gadgets, gizmos, and bizarre creations. Motu gets the power by having samosa and fights with the enemies. The show's primary enemy is a thief known as "John the Don," who is constantly followed by his two stupid goons, Number One and Number Two. John aims to become a renowned super criminal, but Motu Patlu's heroic actions, traps and expose him and he aims Tit for Tat, ensuring that his plans fail time and time again.

## CHARACTERS FROM THE SHOW



**Figure 1.2**  
Motu



**Figure 1.3**  
Patlu



**Figure 1.4**  
Dr. Jhatka



**Figure 1.5**  
Chingum



**Figure 1.6**  
John



**Figure 1.7**  
Ghasitaram

### Motu

Motu is the main protagonist of the show (Refer Figure 1.2). Samosas give him superpowers. Motu's antics regularly cause issues. Even if it put him in trouble, he sought for the quickest ways to make money, have fun, and eat samosas. His success occasionally makes him say stupid things. He is 40-year-old short, fat guy. He wears a knee-length red kurta, yellow traditional pyjamas, a black jacket, and shoes. He is bald with hairy ears but has a styled handlebar moustache. Motu wants fame, fortune, and samosas. He chases and flies even if he smells them. He irritates and annoys others in the show. Motu is egotistical since he follows many things without actually knowing them.

Motu is kind and selfless. His naivety and hastiness may be considered unskillfulness. Motu seems pleasant yet uninformed, his looks may also reinforce preconceptions. Since he is overweight, people may think he is lazy, greedy, and self-centered. But he is pleasant and sympathetic despite his weight. Motu's bald head and well-kept moustache may foster the image of Indian men being overly concerned with their looks and maintenance. His actions and ability may promote preconceptions, but

his appearance does not. Motu is also a loyal, empathetic person who occasionally shows strength and chivalry. Motu's character design reinforces Indian ethnic and racial prejudices.

"Khushbooooo!"

"Nahiiiiiiiiin!"

"Khaali pait mere dimaag ki batti nahi chalti tum he kuch karo!"

"chalo samose kahte hai"

The dialogue "Khaali pait mere dimaag ki batti nahi chalti tum he kuch karo!" ("Do something, I am unable to think on an empty stomach!") And "chalo samose kahte hai" perpetuates the stereotype that people from certain cultures cannot function without food. Also, the reference to Samosa may contribute to the misconception that North Indians consume nothing but fried snacks such as samosas.

### **Patlu**

Another protagonist is Patlu, he is smartest and thinnest (Refer Figure 1.3). He's Motu's best friend. He saves Motu every time. He carries a newspaper and consumes tea but not samosas, and he is not literate. He is a lean character in his 40s and wearing glasses. Even he is bald and back of his head he has few light brown hairs. He usually sports Yellow kurta, orange pants and brown shoes. He always saves his friends. He guesses John's evil motives. He can even stretch his hands like a rubber band to catch John and his goons or dodge objects thrown at him.

Patlu, solves problems and is quick in generating ideas. He also seems apathetic and emotionless, which might indicate a lack of affection. He is neither arrogant or plays superior to Motu. Instead, the two characters are equal partners with complementary talents and shortcomings. His actions and ability may promote prejudices, but his appearance does not. The show contains implicit ethnicity and racial prejudices. Firstly, Patlu's choice for tea over samosas may reflect Indian culture's love of tea. Tea is enjoyed worldwide and is not limited to any ethnicity or race. The show also labels Patlu the wisest, most reasonable, most cautious of the two main characters. This may reinforce Indians' clever, nerdy image.

"Hmm... hmm.... hmm...Idea!"

"Motu kuch karo!"

"Idea!"



These dialogues contain no explicit references to racial or ethnic stereotypes. Therefore, it cannot be assessed against those norms.

### **Dr Jhatka**

Dr. Jhatka is a brilliant scientist and inventor who is always inventing (Refer Figure 1.4). His innovations are nice but useless to people. He too stands out with his bald head with green shirt, purple tie and denim pants. He can also talk in English, also courteous and helpful. He gets furious when Motu tamper with his experiments. He is Motu and Patlu's friend but he won't help them in difficult times. He often uses the phrase "ooppor wale" which shows his religious beliefs. He is often thrashed by Motu, Patlu, Chingum, and Ghasitaram for forgetting his enormous inventory on vital missions.

He appears calm and reasonable even in difficult situations, which may be regarded as uncaring. His look and actions may reinforce preconceptions. He uses stereotyped Indian accent while speaking in Punjabi English. This may reinforce the stereotype of Indians as clever, proficient in science and technology. His character is clever, inventive, and resourceful, which may reinforce Indian stereotypes of intelligence and resourcefulness. His image as awkward and prone to mistakes may reinforce the stereotype of Indians as inept. His Punjabi accent fosters racial and ethnic prejudices. This assumes all Punjabis speak the same dialect, which is incorrect. His inventions are sometimes presented as dangerous, reinforcing the scientific stereotype.

"Mere pai mere yaar"

"Maar suttia pappar wale doo"

"Kasam meri marizun ki"

"Yaareen"

"May all the bitter medicines fall into your mouth"

The use of these dialogues appears to be reflective of Punjabi's colloquial language, as it depicts how Punjabis' people may converse in ordinary life. Among variety of expressions, some of which may perpetuate stereotypes and cultural norms.

### **Chingum**

Chingum works as a friendly police officer. He appears to be South Indian and Tamil in origin, who is a fan of South Indian superstar Rajinikanth (Refer Figure 1.5). He believes that no criminal will be able to get away from him at any time. He usually arrests the crooks by chance alongside Motu and

Patlu. Constables Hera and Pheri assist him occasionally. Furfuri Nagar residents call him 'Chingum Sir' even though he cannot capture criminals. Motu and Patlu outwit Chingum, a well-meaning but inept police officer. He also shows devotion by worrying about his town's safety. His looks and actions may reinforce preconceptions. He is depicted as a South Indian character with dark skin, jet-black silky styled hair, and a slightly lean body and wears a fitness tracker watch. He has an exaggerated South Indian accent, which may reinforce South Indian stereotypes. He is often portrayed as clumsy and incompetent, which may perpetuate the Indian Police force reputation. He is also shown as vulnerable to bribes, which may perpetuate India's perception of corruption. The show characterizes Chingum as polite and helpful, yet he can be harsh when pursuing criminals and may arrest his friends if he finds proof. The character design is defined by ethnic and racial stereotypes, which might perpetuate biases.

"The name is Chingum, Inspector Chingum! Chingum ke Changul se bachna yampossible/yampossibola, bole to yampossible/yampossibola!"

"Amma! Abba! Idli! Dosa!"

"Mard ko dar nahin hota"

Numerous occurrences of the dialogue that perpetuates ethnic and racial stereotypes can be found in the Chingum's popular liners. The use of "yampossible/yampossibola" instead of "impossible" is how South Indian English is portrayed as fractured or incorrect. This reinforces the stereotype that South Indians do not speak English fluently. The use of the word "Changul" in the phrase "Chingum ke Changul se bachna yampossible/yampossibola" is a portrayal of the Indian language as peculiar. The name "Chingum" itself is a variation on the term "chewing gum," making it an unusual choice for a character's name.

### **John the Don**

John is the main antagonist of the show, he is short and overweight (Refer Figure 1.6). He is a hunted criminal who plots crimes on a regular basis to hurt Motu, Patlu in Furfuri Nagar. However, his evil plans are spoiled by Motu and Patlu. He makes money by robbing finance companies, merchant banks and gold stores. Not having enough money, he does not have house to live and hides in the outskirts of the town. He wears a flower-themed clothing, generally blue and a bright yellow shirt tucked beneath a brown belt, dull blue pants with shoes, sports eight rings on his fingers, and three gold chains with the letter "J," mostly stolen jewellery. John is a smart don, but Patlu ruins all his plans. He hates Motu and Patlu and steals devices from secret scientists to hurt them, but he is not as intelligent as Patlu. He is also physically weak and has little to no experience in hand-to-hand combat.

John the Don is portrayed as a sly and wily character who is constantly looking for ways to rob and cheat others, this portrayal could be interpreted as a sign of coldness. And can be viewed as a common media stereotype in which members of certain ethnic or racial groups are frequently portrayed as villains. His appearance, which is diminutive and overweight, may reinforce negative stereotypes about individuals who do not adhere to conventional aesthetic standards. In his plans, he also demonstrates intelligence and resourcefulness, which could be interpreted as an indication of high competence. John's appearance and behaviour may contribute to the formation of stereotypes. The show's depiction of John may be deemed problematic because it reinforces negative stereotypes.

"John banega Don, John Banega Don hehe"

"Ye cheating he!"

"Mere shaitani dimaag hai ek toofani idea araha hai!"

"Chingum sir, mujhe arrest kardo! Lock-up mein daalo"

These dialogues contain no explicit references to racial or ethnic stereotypes. Therefore, it cannot be assessed against those norms.

### **Ghasitaram**

Ghasitaram, one of the important characters in the show (Refer Figure 1.7). He is 20 years old and claims to have 20 years of expertise in several fields. This depiction may be interpreted as an indication of high competence. He frequently lends an assisting hand to those in need, which could be interpreted as an indication of his high degree of compassion. Ghasitaram is a complex and multifaceted character who possesses both strengths and weaknesses.

The show reinforces several ethnic and racial stereotypes through the character of Ghasitaram. He is from West Bengal can be interpreted as a stereotypical attempt to cultural or ethnic stereotyping. By identifying his place of origin, the show may perpetuate the notion that people from West Bengal share particular traits or behaviours. Ghasitaram's attire is indigo blue kurta, violet pancha (an old-fashioned garment worn by men in India), burgundy colored jacket, brunet shoes, and eyeglasses, appears to represent traditional Bengali attire, which can be interpreted as a stereotypical representation of Bengalis. In addition, Ghasitaram's character reinforces the stereotype of the clueless and useless Bengali, who professes to be knowledgeable in multiple disciplines but is unable to provide practical assistance. This depiction is further emphasised by the fact that Ghasitaram's actions frequently get Motu and Patlu into trouble and that he is constantly evading

inconvenient situations. In addition, Ghasitaram's character reinforces the preconception of Bengali people as timid and infantile because he occasionally displays childlike behaviour.

"Hoorri Baba! Mamoonii bachaaa!"

The dialogue, "Hoorri Baba! Mamoonii bachaaa!" does not directly refer to ethnic or racial stereotypes, it is important to consider the broader context in which it is used. The dialogue itself does not perpetuate ethnic or racial stereotypes, it is important to consider the broader context in which it is used and the ways in which the characters are portrayed in the show as a whole.

The semiotic analysis involves critically analysing the Ethnic and Racial Stereotypes of cartoon characters. The show's popularity may be due to its genre 'slice of life' filled with slapstick comedy, friendship and action. Internet Movie Database - IMDB's Parental guideline certification is at 7+ category, also points that there is no 'sex and nudity' in the show, 'violence and gore' are at a moderate level. No scene or frame to be seen using alcohol, drugs or smoking and show doesn't have frightening or any intense scenes. Listed in animation, adventure, comedy, family and fantasy genre. (Ashby,2012) states that the show has "violence and iffy messages for children with absurd adventures". The unfavorable aspect of the show is effectively represented by the fact that the title / theme of the performance itself is objectifying or Body Shaming. Motu means 'fat' and Patlu means 'lean or slim' in Hindi language.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Avoid designing characters with darker skin tones to represent characters as antagonist, or subordinate for the protagonist. Avoid designing characters with distorted physical features, such as Bald head, Obese, thin, or exaggerated facial structures such as nose, eyes, lips. Taking utmost care in designing the attire of Characters reflecting traditional wearing such as dhotis, long skirts, bindis, turbans or burkhas or characters covering their heads. Avoid characters with accents imitating the native style of specific region, depicting literate and illiterate sections. And not all the characters represented are stereotypes, efforts are made to have inclusive representations of characters.

A diverse team of character designers, writers and producers can add their perspectives while designing the characters. Exaggeration of character features can be offensive and would continue stereotypes, creating awareness among character designers would ensure stereotypes are avoided. Conducting mindful research on culture, race and communities

would help in accurately representing the characters with respect. Gender representations with unique traits can help breakdown stereotypes and bring in more diverse and inclusive representations.

Drawing upon the findings of the aforementioned study and the scholarly contributions of Tara Ross (2019) regarding the educator's duty, the subsequent recommendations might be proposed to foster diversity and inclusivity in the design of Indian cartoon characters:

1. Educating character designers about the impact of various stereotypes and their effects on the audience.
2. Promoting inclusivity by encouraging the use of diverse characters in Indian animation.
3. Developing characters that are more complex and multidimensional and do not rely on simplistic stereotypes.
4. Promoting cultural comprehension and awareness to prevent cultural appropriation and misrepresentation.
5. Incorporating audience feedback to ensure that characters are inclusive and respectful.
6. It is advisable to promote the utilisation of affirmative depictions pertaining to various ethnic and racial collectives.
7. Cartoonists and other people involved in the production of media should be conscious of the potential damage that may be caused by racial and ethnic stereotypes, and they should take steps to prevent furthering the spread of these stereotypes.
8. Conversations with children about the possible damage caused by stereotypes can be encouraged to take place between educators and the parents of children.
9. Policymakers to take into consideration the possibility of enacting laws or criteria for content creators in the media to follow in order to prevent perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Additionally, policymakers might give training and assistance for media workers in order to encourage more varied and inclusive portrayals in their work.
10. Audiences need to be motivated to be more critical of the media and to actively seek for varied and inclusive portrayals of characters in the media they choose to engage with.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study demonstrates the pervasive influence of the cartoon characters on moulding the attitudes and beliefs of society. The research indicates that Indian cartoons are rife with ethnic and racial stereotypes, spreading negative and discriminatory attitudes towards certain sections. Clearly, cartoons can have an enduring impact on how children perceive various cultures and ethnicities.

First and foremost, young audiences frequently adopt stereotyping connecting to character design, inherent culture and traditions in a wide range of animated programmes. In reality, the children slowly may have established conceptions and would not be able to clarify in detail the reason they believe a certain character is either stereotyped or not. This sometimes appears to be found on the assumption that one media character is similar to another. It is not astounding, given the dearth of variety in children's television, that the children form relationships with so little information. Considering the prevailing understanding of the ubiquity of stereotyping, it is somewhat disconcerting that children do not possess an innate ability to discern instances of stereotyping. It is acceptable for fictional characters to have disjointed dialects, but respectable individuals can also have them. A protagonist can be either male or female, and dark-skinned characters do not have to be confined to supporting roles; they can play prominent roles.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to educate the people, particularly children, about the adverse consequences of ethnic and racial stereotypes in the media. Creators of media should be accountable for accurately depicting diverse cultures and identities and avoiding the perpetuation of detrimental stereotypes. Parents, educators, and policymakers should be aware of the role that media plays in shaping children's minds and promote critical media literacy to assist children in interpreting and evaluating the messages they receive.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study includes certain limitations that need to be considered.

The research is mainly concerned with Indian animated characters and the ways in which they portrayed various racial and ethnic stereotypes. The impact of other forms of media, such as OTT contents, films and video games, on the audience's impression of Western

cartoon characters and other variety of racial and ethnic groups was not investigated in this study.

### **SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study can explore the influence of cultural factors, such as the region, religion, and language, on the portrayal of racial and ethnic stereotypes in Indian cartoon characters. Compare the portrayal of racial and ethnic stereotypes in Indian cartoon characters with those of western and Japanese characters, to identify similarities and differences. Investigate the impact of racial and ethnic stereotypes in cartoon characters on the attitudes and perceptions of children and adults towards different ethnic and racial groups. Examine the role of media literacy and education in promoting awareness and critical thinking about racial and ethnic stereotypes in cartoon characters. Conduct qualitative studies, such as focus groups and in-depth interviews, to gather more detailed and nuanced perspectives from cartoon creators, animators, and other stakeholders involved in the production and dissemination of cartoon characters.

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