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BEYOND THE SCREEN: ANALYSING BOLLYWOOD'S DEPICTION OF NORTHEAST INDIA AND THE PROSPECTS FOR CINE-TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Films and movies offer a window into other places, broadening our knowledge and fueling our desire to explore the world. Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing industries. The convergence of two disciplines, 'Cinema' and 'Tourism', leads to a new, specific discipline that studies the impact of cinema in promoting tourism within an economy. Films are one of the credible and reliable platforms to promote a host of items related to a tourist destination, like the destination itself, about the people, society, culture, religion, flora, fauna, and so on. The present paper attempts to understand the phenomenon by studying the mainstream cinema of India and its reflection on Northeast India, its people, and its topography. The realistic and positive portrayal of the region in mass media like movies is likely to minimise the racial divide and enhance the overall understanding of the region. It will further result in the inculcating of a positive image of the region in the world outside, which will conclusively bring an end to the socio-cultural gap between the Northeast and other parts of India. The paper examines the projection of Northeast India and its people and topography in Bollywood movies and explores the prospects of Cine-tourism in the region.

Keywords: Bollywood, North East India, Cine-Tourism.

INTRODUCTION

“While a picture speaks a thousand words, a video speaks a million”. Similar to travel and literature, travel and film provide people with an opportunity to escape from their daily routines and immerse themselves in different situations and realities, thereby expanding their perspectives and understanding (Nicosia, 2015). Movies and films provide us a glimpse into different locations, expanding our knowledge and stoking our desire to travel (Mitta & Anjaneyaseamy, 2013).

According to the WTO and the UN Statistical Commission, "tourism" refers to the activities of individuals who travel for business, pleasure, or other reasons away from their normal surroundings. Many developed countries have actively promoted tourism as a means of stimulating their economies due to the size and economic significance of travel and tourism. As a result, many have succeeded in attracting a significant number of international tourists (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2003). In 2022, tourism ranked as the world's fifth-largest export category, after fuels (first), chemicals (second), food (third), and automotive products (fourth) (World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 2024, p. 15).

Travel and tourism makeup three times as much of the GDP overall as they do directly (WTTC, 2019). The economy of every state or country is recognised to be significantly impacted by tourism-related activities, which also have direct and indirect relationships with all other economic sectors. In the year 2019, international tourism made up 7 percent of total exports and 27 percent of global services trade (WTO, 2024, p-4). Supported by technical advancements, the tourist industry is expanding quickly and adds to economic growth in a number of ways, such as creating jobs, revenue, and foreign exchange earnings (Tankuş et. al 2025).

The market for film tourism was estimated to be worth US\$ 73.4 billion in 2024 and is anticipated to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.1 percent to reach US\$ 136.1 billion in 2023 (Reports and Insights, 2024).

The convergence of two disciplines, Cinema and Tourism, leads to a new specific discipline studying the impact of cinema in promoting tourism in an economy. Researchers from throughout the world have recently demonstrated the beneficial impact that movies have on people's travel choices, particularly about the places and destinations that are portrayed on screen (Mitta & Anjaneyaseamy, 2013). As a result of the combination of cinema and travel, new terminology such as film-induced tourism, film tourism, cine-tourism, television-induced tourism, cinematic tourism, media tourism, media pilgrimage, media-related tourism, and screen tourism was created.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies suggested that on-location filming enhances audience engagement and drives visits to filming sites (Yoo, 2025). Kim (2012), noted that prior research reports support the hypothesis that media exposure has a positive effect on travel intentions of viewers. Evans (1997), defined film-induced tourism as ‘tourists visit a destination or attraction as a result of the destination being featured on television video or in the cinema screen. Riley et al. (1998) used to the term movie-induced tourism in a paper studying the

role of reels in promoting tourism. According to Mitev et al (2024), promotional materials showing media personae at a destination, whether backstage or enjoying tourism experiences, are likely to increase viewers interest in visiting that destination. The significant rise of Korean pop culture has made a significant contribution to the overall development of the Korean economy. Such rise has resulted in growth of entertainment industry, tourism industry and the fashion industry (Jiang et al, 2018). Immense success of Korean TV shows and dramas, movies and songs have resulted to a wave popularly called as Korean wave (Sora, 2014). Beeton, (2004) noted that film induced tourism can bring local community with tourism receipts. Such endeavor could generate receipts throughout the year in all weather conditions there by solving the problems of seasonality in tourism industry. Apart from this film and movies can enhance the destination image and increase the awareness and understanding about the host city (Raj, 2018).

As emphasized by Beeton (2010), Reijnders (2011) and Connell (2012), film tourism is a prime example of an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary field of study that incorporates research from marketing, environmental studies, cultural geography, media and audience studies, psychology, and cultural heritage (Kim & Reijnders, 2018). By understanding the importance of tourist products and attractions stakeholders could assist and use different promotional tools to market the image of tourist destinations. Technology has significantly supported in daily operations and enhancing customer experiences in the tourism sector (Tuyen & Thi-Van Hanh, 2023). Films are one of the credible and reliable platforms to promote a host of items related to a tourist destination, like the destination itself, the community, people, society, culture, religion, flora, fauna, and so on. According to Roesch (2009), there are four reasons why films could be an excellent base for destination promotion:

1. It provides free advertising for the destination.
2. It provides a greater sense of authenticity in contrast-to the hard-selling factors of official media campaigns.
3. Help in reaching out broad target audiences.
4. Assist to address deep, intrinsic feelings and connect them with a real place.

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2011), four of the top 10 countries in the world for film production are Asian, with India producing the most. Bollywood produced 1200 films in 2009, while the USA produced 694. From a business perspective, Hassan and Paranjape (2010) state that “Hollywood is now ‘Copying Bollywood’, given the huge audiences, growing revenues and associated industries that Asian film production and consumption have established”.

It is important to highlight that as the middle-class grows in several Southeast Asian nations, these countries will become the world's biggest producers of motion pictures and are consequently anticipated to rank among the top destinations for film tourists (Kim & Reijnders, 2018). Bollywood has a strong psychological hold on Indians, and the movies greatly impact their choice of next vacation spots (Cineswami, 2012). In 2024, Indian cinema earned Rs. (Rupees) 11,833 crore (\$1.36 billion) at the Indian box-office (Ormax Media, 2025). As per FICCI (2019) report, India’s engagement in international film festivals and tourist boards sell Indian locales and encourages cross-tourism. Bollywood movies being the fore-front movies production venture, influences the tourism sector as they portray different beautiful locations and sites across the country and in the world (Jana & Goswami, 2024).

In 2024, the Hindi and the Telugu film industries accounted for 40 and 20 percent of the domestic gross box office revenue respectively, followed by Tamil with 15 percent share and Malayalam with 10 percent share (Ormax Media, 2025). Indian cinema has a considerable number of global audiences, and its films have attracted international attention and acclaim throughout South Asia. After having such an impressed achievements and milestones, the industry has not able to showcase the entire country to its audiences.

RESEARCH GAP

After doing considerable review of literature on role of Bollywood movies in promoting tourism, it has been noticed that there is a considerable dearth of research work on the topic. Especially significant gap has been noticed in studying north-east region of India. The eight states of Northeast India are one of the unexplored regions and more specifically in the narratives of mainstream Bollywood movies. The rich biodiversity, flora and fauna, pristine natural landscapes, diverse culture, and festivities barely catch the attention of the prospective mainstream filmmakers as a popular shooting destination. The rich topography, culture, traditions, heritages, and festivities in Northeast India make it a region with immense prospects for cine-tourism. Nevertheless, Bollywood filmmakers, being mainly from mainland India, tend to ignore this vast region in the narrative.

In the backdrop of this idea, the present paper attempts to understand the phenomenon by studying the mainstream cinema of India in other words Bollywood movies and its reflection about North-East India and its people and topography. As we have selected only Bollywood movies considering wide audience acceptance, the paper excludes regional movies. However, the regional movies have also played a significant role in highlighting regional issues in global platforms. In this context, the paper might have certain limitations in entirely addressing the issue of representation of Northeast India in movies on a large scale.

One of the objectives of the paper is to study prospects of Cine-tourism in Northeast India. In this regard, the study attempts to find a link between representation and the prospects of Cine-tourism in the region. The researchers argue that more depiction of a place in mass media platforms lead to dissemination of understanding regarding a place. As such, the research works attempts to examine film industry induced cine-tourism prospects in Northeast India. However, the researcher feels that it is a mammoth task to establish a link between representation of a region in films and that leading to enhancement of tourism prospects in that place.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to present an account of the representation of Northeast India in Bollywood movies. The study aims to connect a distinct link between representation of a region in mass media platform such as films and that leading to cine-tourism prospects of that region. As such, the present study has the following specific objectives:

- a. To have a general understanding and analysis of representation of Northeast India Bollywood movies.

- b. To prepare a database of Bollywood movies depicting Northeast India and movies that have used the region as shoot locale.
- c. To understand how the representation of Northeast India in Bollywood movies have induced cine-tourism prospects in the region.
- d. To analyse further cine tourism prospective places in Northeast India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative, descriptive, and analytical in nature. It seeks to examine how Northeast India has been depicted in selected Bollywood films and how such depictions may influence tourism prospects in the region. The research focuses on the interpretation of visual imagery, narrative structure, and thematic elements. Accordingly, the methodology primarily employs qualitative content analysis and narrative analysis of selected mainstream Hindi films. This approach validates the use of destination image theory using the narratives of Bollywood movies in which Northeast India is portrayed or which have used the region as a shooting location.

The films are analysed in terms of their narrative content, visual framing of landscapes and locations, and the portrayal of characters. They are categorised thematically based on the specific Northeastern states or locations in which they are set or filmed. This categorisation helps in identifying recurring patterns of representation. The study draws upon concepts from film studies and tourism studies. The analysis examines how cinematic representations of space contribute to the construction of a distinct place identity and how such representations influence audience perception. Furthermore, the study explores how these portrayals have contributed to the prospects of cine tourism in the region.

The study is not based on any time-frame regarding the selection of the movies. The study aims to examine selected Bollywood mainstream movies that have used Northeast India either as their shooting destination or the movie is set in the region. For selection of movies the researchers went to exhaustive list of movies released till 2025 in main stream Bollywood movies. The study will also examine selected Bollywood movies where the plot of the narrative is either fully or partly based on the region. Here, the issue of representation of Northeast India is treated as a mandatory criterion regarding selection of the movies.

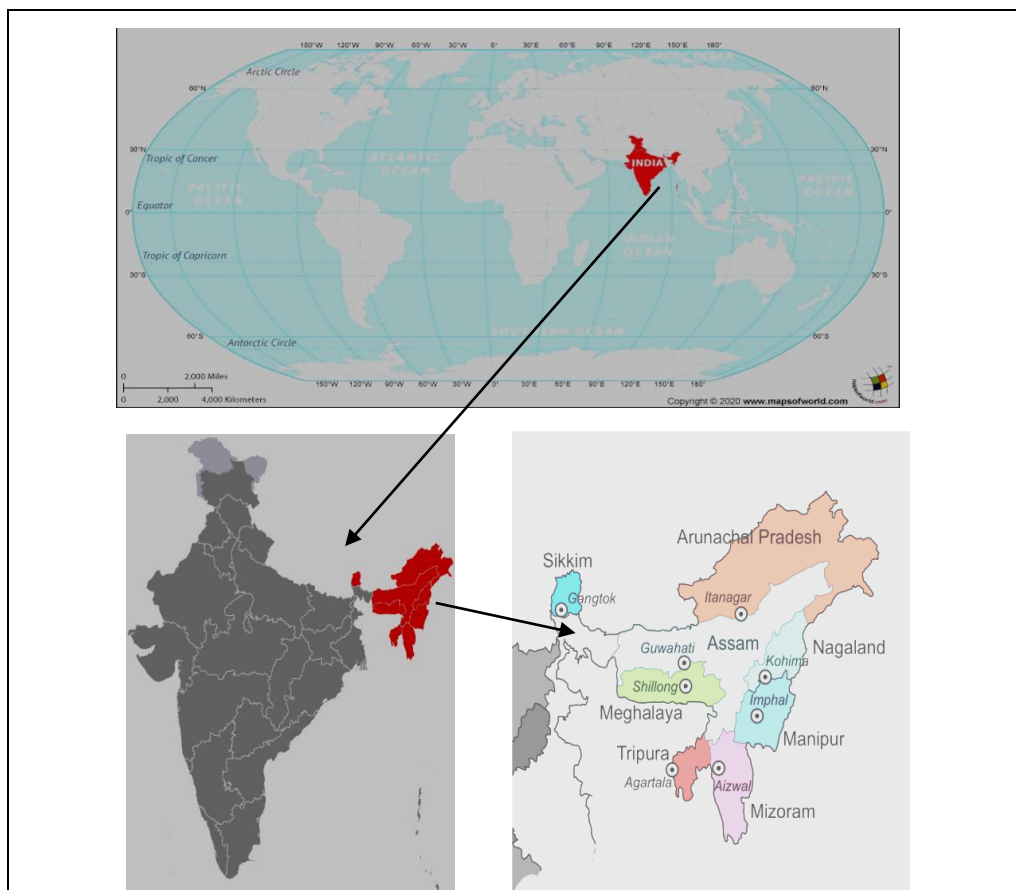
The study will consider films as cultural texts encoded with discourses. The study will not strictly follow any strict codes and conventions of film study methods as such. It will be a general analysis of the projection of Northeast India in all the movies shot in the region through a narrative analysis of the selected movies. For a textual analysis of the selected movies, the research work draws upon David Bordwell's formalist approach to examine the film's narrative structure and stylistic elements. In this regard, the study analyses selected portions of the *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, shot composition, editing, and sound design of the movies in some places.

THE REFLECTION: NORTHEAST INDIA IN BOLLYWOOD MOVIES

Northeast India (NEI) consists of eight states: Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Sikkim. The easternmost region of the country is connected to mainland India with the 'Chicken neck corridor' in Siliguri, West Bengal. The geographically separate region borders several Southeast Asian nations: China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, and Bhutan. The distinct topography with pristine valleys, misty hills, forests, waterfalls, scenic landscapes, cultural diversity, heritages, festivities, and traditions has a delicate charm of its own.

Figure 1

Location of North East States in India and World Map



Source: mapsofworld.com (2020) and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northeast_India

The region (NER) occupies a marginal position in terms of the Indian film industry's engagement with it. There are a limited number of films where the Northeast region appears as the setting, in the plot, and in the narrative. However, a very limited number of films have used the region as a popular shooting destination.

The following tables display the limited number of Bollywood endeavours in the region. The names of the movies are listed in terms of the setting of the movies and the use of Northeast India as a shooting location

in the narrative. The table, besides showing the details of the name of the director, year of release and language, examines the shoot locations of the movies.

Table 1

List of mainstream fiction films based on Northeast India and its people, and shooting locations

Sl. No	Name of the Film	Release Date	Language	Director	Shoot Locations in Northeast
1.	Anek	27 May 2022	Hindi	Anubhav Sinha	Assam and Arunachal Pradesh
2.	Bhediya	25 Nov. 2022	Hindi	Amar Kaushik	Arunachal Pradesh
3.	Rock On 2	11 Nov. 2016	Hindi, Khasi	Shujaat Saudagar	City of Shillong, Umniuh village in Ri-Bhoi district, Cherrapunjee, and Laitlum
4.	Aisa Yeh Jahan	April 2015 (Mexico International Film Festival), 24 July 2015	Hindi, Assamese	Biswajeet Bora	Villages of No. 1 Senchow, Betioni, Bokakhat, Chinatolly, and Aborghat in Golaghat, Assam, and Barapani Lake in Shillong.
5.	18.11- Code of Secrecy	13 June 2014	Hindi	Md. Mohibul Haque	Shillong Golf Club, Meghalaya. Guwahati Brahmaputra River, Dhubri Matchbox Factory, Hajo Powa Mecca (A Muslim pilgrimage centre), Assam.
6.	Rangoon	24 Feb. 2017	Hindi	Vishal Bhardwaj	East Siang district and adjoining Murkong Selek area across the inter-state border in Assam. Siang River locations. Komsing, Rottung, and Kebang villages, as well as Partung and Komlighat areas, of East Siang district. Dipa railway station, Dhemaji, Pasighat, Pangin in Arunachal Pradesh, Borail Hill, Dayang bridge at Halflong, Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, the Ziro Valley of Lower Subansiri district.

7.	Meri Dharam Meri Maa	1976	Hindi	Bhupen Hazarika	Arunachal Pradesh and Assam
8.	Ek Pal	1986	Hindi	Kalpana Lajmi	Shillong, Guwahati, and Jorhat
9.	Road to Sikkim	1969	Hindi	Ravindra Dave	Gangtok
10.	Romeo in Sikkim	1975	Hindi	Harikrishan Kaul	Gangtok
11.	Pahuna: The Little Visitors	2018	Nepali	Paakhi Tyrewala	Nathang Valley in Sikkim
12.	Daman	4 May 2001	Hindi	Kalpana Lajmi	Guwahati, Jorhat and Kamakhya Temple
13.	Every Day is Sunday	2013	Nepali	Subhendu Ghosh	North and East districts of Sikkim, Gangtok.
14.	Har Pal (Unreleased)		Hindi	Jahnu Barua	Meghalaya
15.	Yeh Gulistan Hamara	26 Jan 1973	Hindi	Atma Ram	Digboi, Margherita, and Ledo in Assam, Shillong, and parts of Arunachal Pradesh
16.	Kalsandhya	1997	Hindi And Assamese	Bhabendra Nath Saikia	Guwahati, Assam
17.	Gangs of Northeast	24 March 2017	Hindi	Rupak Gogoi	Guwahati and Meghalaya

Source: Empirical Study.

Table 2

List of mainstream Indian fiction films partially based on Northeast India and shot in Northeast India or other locations

Sl. No	Name of the Film	Release Date	Language	Director	Shoot Locations in Northeast
1.	Emergency	17 Jan 2025	Hindi	Kangana Ranaut	Bokakhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, and Kaziranga in Assam.
2.	Fighter	25 Jan 2024	Hindi	Siddharth Anand	Tezpur in Assam.
3.	Bharateeyans	14 July 2023	Hindi	Deena Raj	Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim
4.	Sam Bahadur	1 Dec 2023	Hindi	Meghna Gulzar	Tezpur in Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur.

5.	72 Hours: Martyr Who Never Died	18 Jan 2019	Hindi	Avinash Dhyani	Arunachal Pradesh
6.	99 Songs	09 Oct 2019	Hindi	Vishwesh Krishnamoorthy	Shillong
7.	Penalty	19 July 2019	Hindi	Shubham Singh	Imphal City
8.	Tango Charlie	25 March 2005	Hindi	Mani Shankar	Manali and Ooty to recreate scenes in Assam
9.	Mary Kom	5 Sept 2014	Hindi	Omung Kumar	Set in the Northeast but shot in Manali & Dharamshala
10.	Saaya	4 July 2003	Hindi	Anurag Basu	Partly shot in scenic locations of Mokokchung in Nagaland
11.	Dil Se	21 Aug 1998	Hindi	Mani Ratnam	Shot in Himachal Pradesh, Ooty, and Ladakh to recreate scenes in Assam
12.	Jagga Jasoos	14 July 2017	Hindi	Anurag Basu	Shot in Darjeeling Town, Chowrasta, Bhutia Basti, Saint Paul School, Mirik Lake, and Sukna to recreate scenes in Manipur
13.	Bumm Bumm Bole	14 May 2010	Hindi	Priyadarshan	Shooting at Ooty, Tamil Nadu, to recreate scenes in Assam
14.	Rahi	1953	Hindi	K.A. Abbas	Partly shot in Assam
15.	Dansh	2 Sept 2005	Hindi	Kanika Verma	Mizoram

Source: Empirical Study.

Table 3

List of mainstream Indian fiction films using Northeast India as a shooting destination

<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name of the Film</i>	<i>Release Date</i>	<i>Language</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Shoot Locations in Northeast</i>
1.	Koyla	7 April 1997	Hindi	Rakesh Roshan	Tawang, Nuranang waterfall, Paradise Lake, Sangestar lake (Madhuri Lake), Arunachal Pradesh.
2.	Yariyaan	10 Jan 2014	Hindi	Divya Khosla Kumar	Lachen Lake, Changu Lake, Ban Jhankri Falls, and Energy Park, Sikkim.
3.	Kurbaan	31 May 1991	Hindi	Deepak Bahry	Laban, Eastern Air Command Campus, Kendriya Vidyalaya in Upper Shillong and at a bridge on Shillong-

					Cherrapunji Road, now called the Salman Bridge, after actor Salman Khan and other co-actors were filmed here in a song sequence), Meghalaya.
4.	Jewel thief	27 Oct 1967	Hindi	Vijay Anand	Sikkim
5.	Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat	18 Oct 1996	Hindi	Ashok Gaikwad	Gangtok
6.	Uff Yeh Mohabbat	1997	Hindi	Vipin Handa	Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim.
7.	Brunie	2018	Hindi	Suraj Chitre & Saikat Bagban	Shillong city, Cherrapunjee, Omium Lake, Shillong View Point, Elephant Falls, Meghalaya.
8.	Barfi	14 Sept 2012	Hindi	Anurag Basu	Gangtok, Sikkim

Source: Empirical Study.

From the above three tables, it can easily be referred that Bollywood filmmakers have mostly chosen Sikkim, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Assam as popular destination in setting their filmic ventures. Bollywood filmmakers have seldom shot their films in the states of Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, and Tripura. There is no record of Bollywood films shot in the state of Tripura. Certain sequences in Kanika Verma's film *Dansh* (2005) were shot in the scenic locations of Mizoram. In the year 2003, Anurag Basu's *Saaya* (2003) was partially shot in the Mokokchung district of Nagaland. A picturesque village in the Mokokchung district on the Indo-Myanmar border was selected as the location for a few key scenes in the film. Karan Bhutani's *Kwatha* (2019) was shot in scenic locations of Imphal, the capital city of Manipur.

The state of Arunachal Pradesh came to the limelight with Rakesh Roshan's commercially successful film *Koyla* (1997). Some of the popular tourist attractions the movie captured were Nuranang waterfall, Paradise Lake, and Sangestar Lake. One of the most well-known lakes in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, Madhuri Lake was once called Shonga-tser Lake and was created by a flash flood following an earthquake in 1950. Following the filming of the Bollywood film *Koyla*, which starred the stunning actress Madhuri Dixit, the lake was given a new name. After the song *Tanhai Tanhai* was filmed here, the Sangestar Tso (previously known as Shonga-tser lake) became known as Madhuri Lake.

The state has gotten renewed attention from Bollywood filmmakers in the last few years. The region has been extensively used as a shoot location in Saif Ali Khan, Shahid Kapoor, and Kangana Ranaut starrer *Rangoon* (2017). The film is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. The film, based on World War II, was entirely shot in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang and Lower Subansiri districts, Pasighat, Pangin, Siang River, Komsing, Rottung, and Komlighat areas. A significant segment of the film was filmed in the Jonai

subdivision of Dhemaji district in Assam. In 2018, Bollywood venture Ram Ramesh Sharma's *Khatoon* (2018) was shot in Itanagar. Shiraz Henry's *Little Boy* (2019) was also shot in Itanagar and other parts of the state.

The first Bollywood movie to be shot in Shillong, the state capital of Meghalaya, was Deepak Bahry's *Kurbaan* (1991). The film featured Salman Khan and Ayesha Jhulka in the lead roles. Jahnu Baruah's unreleased film, *Har Pal* (2010), was shot in Shillong. In the last few years, the Bollywood industry has shown significant interest in shooting films in Shillong and other locations. In 2019, Karan Kashyap's *Keh Do Na* (2019) and Akash Singh's *The Destiny Kalchakra* (2019) were shot in Shillong. Other films like Suraj Chitre's *Brunie* (2018) and Shujaat Saudagar's *Rock on 2* (2016), etc., are no different in using such locational backdrops for their scripts. In 2020, Nikhil Allug's *The Maya Tape* was shot in Shillong and Guwahati. Assamese filmmaker Md. Mohibul Haque's first mainstream Hindi venture '*18.11- A Code of Secrecy*' was shot in different parts of Meghalaya and Assam acted by noted actors like Prem Chopra, Gulshan Grover, Asrani and Mukesh Tiwari.

Sikkim has always been a popular filming location for Bollywood filmmakers because of its breathtaking landscape, valleys, snowfall, monasteries, and snow-covered peaks. The state of Sikkim was a popular filming site for Bollywood movies such as Vijay Anand's *Jewel Thief* (1967), Ravindra Dave's *Road to Sikkim* (1969), Harikrishan Kaul's *Romeo in Sikkim* (1975), Ashok Gaikwad's *Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat* (1996), Vipin Handa's *Uff yeh Mohabbat* (1997), and Subhendu Ghosh's *Every Day is Sunday* (2013). The shooting of Bollywood movies in Sikkim has increased in recent years. In recent years, Bollywood movies such as Divya Khosla Kumar's *Yariyaan* (2014), Tanuja Chandra's *Qarib Qarib Single* (2017), and Deena Raj's *Bharateeyans* (2023) were filmed in Sikkim. The state of Sikkim was awarded the title "Most Film-Friendly State" in the 67th National Film Awards in 2021. Some of the spectacular and scenic landscapes of Gangtok city and in locations such as Lachen Lake, Changu Lake, Yumthang Valley, Lachung, North Sikkim, and various monasteries of the state have been attracting Bollywood filmmakers to shoot their films in the state.

The scenic landscapes of Assam were used as the setting and shooting location in Hindi movies such as Atma Ram's *Yeh Gulistan Hamara* (1972), Kalpana Lajmi's *Ek Pal* (1986), and *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (2001). Md. Mohibul Haque, from Assam, extensively captured the verdant landscapes of the state in his Bollywood venture *18.11: A Code of Secrecy* (2014). Biswajeet Bora, another filmmaker from Assam, extensively highlighted the rural landscape of rivers, tea gardens, and paddy fields in *Aisa Yeh Jahan* (2015). In the last couple of years, the region has witnessed filmmakers from Bollywood extensively choosing to shoot their films in Assam. Sachin Karandey's *Nange Pair* (2019) was shot in Silchar. Siddharth Anand's *Fighter* (2024), starring Anil Kapoor, Hrithik Roshan, and Deepika Padukone, was shot in Tezpur, Assam. Kangana Ranaut's upcoming film *Emergency* (2025) is extensively shot in Bokakhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong, and Kaziranga in Assam.

In the last decade, Northeast India has experienced a renewed interest from Bollywood filmmakers. The region has witnessed the shooting of twenty-seven Bollywood movies in the last decade. In these movies, Northeast India has appeared as the setting of the narrative. In some movies, the scenic locations of Northeast India have been used as filming sites. Omung Kumar's film *Mary Kom* (2014) has been able to give a realistic depiction of the struggle of a woman from Northeast India. Biswajeet Bora's *Aisa Yeh Jahan*

(2015) was another Bollywood venture in the region. Certain sequences of the film were set in the rural landscape of Assam. The Assam sequences of the film were shot in the Golaghat district of Assam. The film could beautifully highlight the scenic landscapes, tea gardens, and the beautiful Brahmaputra River. Anurag Basu's *Jagga Jasoos* (2017) had Manipur as the partial setting of the narrative. The film recreated the scenes set in Manipur in Darjeeling. However, the film could highlight the picturesque landscapes and mountainous terrain of Manipur.

In 2019, the Bollywood film industry witnessed the release of *99 Songs* (2019) and *Penalty* (2019). These two movies are also set in Northeast India. A significant portion of *99 Songs* depicted the picturesque landscapes of Shillong and featured tribal characters from the region. The movie *Penalty* had Manipur as the partial setting of the narrative. Shujaat Saudagar's *Rock On 2* (2016) had Meghalaya as the setting of the entire narrative. The film was entirely shot in Shillong. The movie had an extensive cast of Bollywood superstars and featured a significant number of indigenous actors and characters. The film was extensively shot in the verdant landscapes of Shillong. Tanuja Chandra's *Qarib Qarib Single* (2017) had a protracted sequence set in Sikkim's capital, Gangtok. The film stars Irfan Khan and Parvathy Thiruvothu in the lead roles. J.P. Dutta's action-war drama film *Paltan* (2018) depicts the conflict between the Indian army and the Chinese army in Nathu La Pass in Sikkim in the year 1967. Avinash Dhyani's *72 Hours: Martyr Who Never Died* (2019) is a war drama film depicting the China-India war in 1962. The film used Arunachal Pradesh as a partial setting for the narrative.

In the year 2022, the industry witnessed the release of two big-budget Bollywood movies based on Northeast India. Amar Kaushik's *Bhediya* (2022), starring Varun Dhawan and Kriti Sanon, was entirely set in Ziro, Papum Pare, and Pakke-Kessang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The film was one of the first Bollywood endeavours to be entirely shot in Arunachal Pradesh. The film featured more than sixty percent of the local actors. Anubhav Sinha's *Anek* (2022), starring Ayushmann Khurrana, was entirely set in an imaginary "Northeast" region. It was filmed in different parts of Assam and Meghalaya. This film also featured a significant number of actors from Northeast India in the lead roles. The film addressed the insurgency, political turmoil, and identity issues in Northeast India.

The biographical drama film *Sam Bahadur* (2023) features certain sequences set in Tezpur in Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. The film is based on Sam Manekshaw, India's first Field Marshal and Chief of Army Staff. In the film, Bollywood actor Vicky Kaushal played the role of Sam Manekshaw. All these big-budget Bollywood movies, which are fully or partially set in the Northeast, are playing an important part in improving the visibility of the region. The movies have also been able to address the myriad issues in the region from time to time. As such, a paradigm shift is happening in the way Bollywood movies are starting to depict Northeast India in the narrative.

Northeast India is also witnessing the shooting of popular Indian TV series or web series that have been released on OTT platforms. For instance, Oni Sen's web series *Asur* (2020) had several sequences set in Dimapur, Nagaland. Kabir Khan's Indian TV series *The Forgotten Army- Azaadi Ke Liye* (2020) had certain sequences set in Manipur. The setting of Amit Kumar's *The Last Hour* (2021) was Sikkim. The series features Bollywood actors such as Sanjay Kapoor, Shahana Goswami, and Shaylee Krishen, along with a host of actors from Northeast India. Raj and DK's web series *Farzi* (2023) also incorporated several sequences set in Nagaland. A significant portion of the Indian TV series *Jaanbaaz Hindustan Ke* (2023),

directed by Srijit Mukherji, used Shillong as the partial setting of the narrative. Raj and DK's web series, *Family Man 3* (2025), was partially shot in Northeast India. Some important scenes of Gaurav Shukla's TV series *Saare Jahan Se Accha* (2025) were shot in Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Northeast offers stunning landscapes that are perfect for film shoots. The mainstream filmmakers refer to logistical issues of connectivity and infrastructural lacks in the region as a deterrent to making the region a popular shooting locale. The logistical issues are accompanied by certain misconceptions associated with the region as another region in the margins of the nation-state. Since independence of the nation, the entire region has been viewed as a strategically important region due to its proximity to a few Southeast Asian nations. Acclaimed national award-winning filmmaker from the region, Jahnu Baruah, feels that what matters more is the mindset, rather than the logistics. Barua expresses it in the following terms: "People need to understand the region. They need to know about the area. Due to the Mongoloid physical features of the people, they are considered to be different from the rest of the country". Most of the mainstream Bollywood filmmakers from mainland India prefer to go to other regions in the country and foreign locales. This lack of imperative of the Bollywood industry in capturing the region as a shooting destination has resulted in a smaller number of movies portraying and projecting the rich cultural diversity, heritages, and pristine landscapes of the region.

In the last decade, the Northeast region has garnered the attention of filmmakers from other film industries in mainland India. There is an increasing inclination among the Tamil and Telugu film industries to shoot their films in the scenic mountainous regions of Sikkim. Some of the prominent Tamil-language films being shot in Sikkim in the last few years include *Neelakasham Pachakadal Chuvanna Bhoomi* (2013), *Aal* (2014), *Yennai Arindhaal* (2015), *10 Endrathukulla* (2015), *James Pandu* (2020), and *Plan Panni Pannanum* (2021). The Telugu-language films that are shot in Sikkim include *Raahu* (2020) and *Uppena* (2021). Acclaimed Malayalam language filmmaker Bijukumar Damodaran shot the English movie *Painting Life* (2018) in Sikkim. Furthermore, Bollywood film producers are showing keen interest in producing films in the Northeast. For instance, Priyanka Chopra produced the Nepali film *Pahuna* (2017), which was extensively set and shot in Sikkim.

Consequently, the Indian film industry has been displaying a keen interest in shooting its films in the scenic landscapes of the Northeast. This is mostly because of the region's improved infrastructure development over the past decade. Furthermore, the fear psychosis associated with insurgency in the region has diminished significantly over the past decade due to the peace initiatives of the government. All of these are driving mainland Indian filmmakers to select the Northeast region as a filming location.

Social media's introduction and the growing number of tourists visiting the Northeastern states have finally made the nation aware of the rich cultural diversity, ethnic diversity, and cuisine of the eight states in the region. The captivating natural beauty of the states has also awakened the filmmakers, who have discovered that it can be leveraged to create captivating big-screen spectacles that rival even the most sought-after locations in Europe (Chatterjee, 2022).

All these paradigm shifts are contributing to more visibility of Northeast India in mainland India. The Bollywood movies, movies from other Indian film industries, and web series set in Northeast India are enhancing the visibility of the region on mainland India. These movies and web series are fostering a sense

of inclusivity about the unique land and culture of the region. Furthermore, the local actors in such movies and web series are playing a significant role in highlighting the diverse culture and traditions of the region. Despite the absence of more nuanced and realistic portrayals of Northeast India in the mainstream film industry, it is the representation that matters. Bollywood films, one of the most popular forms of mass media from mainland India, can be a catalyst for cine tourism prospects in Northeast India to a greater extent.

PROSPECTS OF CINE-TOURISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

Tourists seek to visit locations showcased on screen, developing a unique form of cultural tourism (Reports and Insights, 2024). The rise of new destinations in global markets, together with dynamic social, economic, and ecological variables, all influence the competitive environment (Khelashvili & Okroshidze, 2025). The Indian tourism industry has experienced a phenomenal growth rate over the past one and a half decades. Considerable increase in the figures could be attributed to extensive promotion of Indian culture and flora and fauna across the world, increased purchase value of money, easy accessibility, and improvement in safety and security concerns in comparison to late 80's, up gradation in the infrastructural facilities and increase in private-sector participation in recent times of economic development.

Tourism in North East India (NEI) and its potential is undoubtedly still an unexplored paradise for visitors and nature lovers. Its captivating hills, flowing rivers, thundering waterfalls, and abundant monsoon rains create a landscape rich in natural beauty. The region is home to an incredible variety of flora and fauna, with countless species of wild animals and plants. The ever-shifting clouds, soulful music and dance traditions, intricate handlooms and handicrafts, and the lush green environment have long drawn people from around the world (Khargharia, 2011). For its natural flora and fauna, NEI has been identified as one of the 34 hot spots of the world, identified in India, the other being the Western Ghats (Pai, 2008).

North-East is also considered as one of the 'Paradise of the Earth', yet the potential of the region is still to be explored by both domestic and foreign tourists. This part of mainland India consists of Arunachal Pradesh, also called 'Land of the Rising Sun' and is rich in its diverse flora and fauna. Manipur is covered with 90 percent of its land filled with hills and forests, and is inhabited by a unique floating island named 'Loktak Lake' (*Meitei: Loktak Pat*). Meghalaya is rich with spectacular valleys, rivers, streams, caves, and rich biodiversity spots, which make it unique in itself. Mizoram, with breathtaking natural beauty, is famous for woven *puans* and exquisite bamboo craftsmanship. Nagaland has a rich cultural heritage and has recently come into the limelight because of its unique cultural festival named 'Hornbill Festival', which is generally organised towards the end of every year, drawing large numbers of domestic and foreign tourists to the region. Tripura has its glamorous historical background with some magnificent palaces, temples and buildings, which talk about its rich cultural history. Sikkim is nestled in the lap of the Himalayas and is characterised by its mountainous terrain, also known as 'Scotland of the East'. This state is renowned not only for its Buddhist monasteries but also for being India's leading producer of cardamom, ranking second globally after Guatemala. While Assam serves as the gateway to the Northeast, this distinction is shared by Sikkim, which plays a vital role in the region's connectivity and cultural significance. The beauty of the state is blessed with serenity and divinity. This state not only holds a wide-range of linguistic and cultural diversity but also possesses pristine freshness of nature, tea gardens, mystic Brahmaputra, religious monuments and structures, and so on. The area has a variety of tourism attractions, with each state

exhibiting unique characteristics, which make each one of them a jewel of North East India. A wide-range of academic and non-academic works has considerably highlighted different facets of tourism in North East India. Some of the well documented tourism prospects of the region are community-based tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, golf- tourism, health tourism, eco-tourism, pilgrimage tourism, river tourism, Ethnic tourism, rural tourism, wildlife tourism, tea tourism, art and craft tourism and many more (Bora, 2011; Handique, 2011).

To promote tourism in the region, the media and other associated sectors could play a vital role. Films and movies open a window to different parts of the world, expanding our understanding and often sparking a desire to explore new places. Beyond entertainment, cinema plays a role in regional growth by contributing financially, both directly and indirectly, to the local economy. It also supports the development of tourism-related services and infrastructure (Mitta & Anjaneyaseamy, 2013). As media content, films can shape how viewers think and feel. When they inspire audiences to visit the locations they see on screen, this influence gives rise to what is known as film tourism. Film tourism refers to travel that is either directly or indirectly influenced by audiovisual productions (Araujo, 2012). With such enormous possibilities, the industry could lift the whole economy to a greater extent in all terms.

In recent decades, the states in Northeast India have been devising favourable film policies to promote filmmaking. The state governments of Assam, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh are making provision for financial support for filmmakers producing socially responsible films. In 2018, the Assam government introduced the new tourism policy “Awesome Assam.” In this policy, there is a substantial cash incentive for the shooting of films in the state by filmmakers from other states. In March 2023, the Assam Tourism Government Corporation and the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation signed a Memorandum of Understanding for promoting film tourism in the state. The states of Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh have also introduced such policies, where there are provisions of incentives for filmmakers for selecting them as shooting destinations. All such initiatives are leading to renewed interest from production houses from mainland India to shoot their films in the Northeast. In this way, governmental initiatives are essential in promoting film tourism in the region. Such government initiatives are vital in promoting the culture of filmmaking, film appreciation, and reception in the Northeast region. These changes in the film industry in the Northeast region are also contributing to a paradigm shift in terms of the visibility of the region. The Bollywood actors have recently been nominated as ambassadors of the tourism industry in different states of the region. In addition, the Ziro Festival of Music in Arunachal Pradesh, the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, the Majuli Music Festival in Assam, the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival, & so on, are attracting tourists from mainland India to the Northeast region. All of these are contributing to the increasing visibility of the Northeast region in mainland India. This is, in turn, promoting cine-tourism in the region.

In the last decade, the Northeast region has experienced an upsurge in the efforts of the central government to promote peace and progress. The central government has renamed the Look East Policy as the Act East Policy. There has been a renewed emphasis on regional development initiatives in terms of connectivity and infrastructure in the region. Besides, in the last decade, Northeast India has experienced a paradigm shift in terms of its representation in mass media forms and the entertainment industry. Bollywood and other film industries are displaying a strong fascination for shooting and setting their films in the scenic landscapes of the region.

There has been a paradigm shift in terms of the visibility of Northeast India in Bollywood movies. It is the depiction that matters, regardless of whether it is favourable or biased. Bollywood movies depicting Northeast India enhance the visibility of the region. In addition, the production of more Bollywood films in the Northeast would provide more opportunities for actors from the region. It will contribute to the visibility of Northeast India in the Indian entertainment industry. Furthermore, the shooting of more Bollywood films in the region will play a substantial role in promoting an authentic and positive portrayal of the region which will help to more cine-tourism prospects in the region. Therefore, the Northeast region needs more Bollywood films incorporating stories from the region into the narrative which will lead to film induced tourism prospects in the region.

CONCLUSION

The North-eastern part of India has enough prospects and potential to be a shooting destination because of its scenic landscapes, unblemished locales, pristine scenery, diverse culture, and festivities. The rich topography, biographical hotspot, flora and fauna, hills, misty mountains, streams, rivers, and waterfalls attract thousands of tourists annually from all over India to this region. This makes the region a potential hub for cine-tourism. However, Bollywood filmmakers have failed in taking advantage of this, and most of the time, they opt for foreign locales in search of better shooting locations.

Shooting of more Bollywood movies in Northeast India will boost the economy and tourism industry in the region. If Bollywood filmmakers shot their films here, they would be able to curb the cost of their travel expenditure incurred for shooting movies in foreign locales. The production cost will be reduced, and further, it will cut down the time they need to travel to foreign destinations. Further, the North-Eastern part of India will have more employment generation, and business will grow in our country. The infrastructure, resources, and local tourism will get a boost if films are shot here. The revenues earned will remain in our own country, and the economy of the region will grow to a certain extent.

The Bollywood movies shot here will strive to showcase the real Northeast with all its infrastructure, culture, festivities, diversity, and heritage. Further shooting of more and more Bollywood movies in the region will result in the realistic portrayal of the region in the narrative. It will further result in the inculcation of a positive image of the region in the world outside. The realistic and positive portrayal of the region will enhance the understanding of the region. For that, initiatives should be taken not only by filmmakers but also by other stakeholders so that there are more and more stories from the region reflected in the narrative of Bollywood movies.

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Konwar, J. and Morang, L., conceptualised the entire study. Data collection, data analysis and interpretation are done by Dr. Morang and review of literature, theoretical framework, paper writing and editing are done by Dr. Konwar. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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