

AASHIMA RANA
Dublin City University

MICHAEL HINDS
Dublin City University



Folkloric Filmmaking

Tricksters, Retelling, and Meaningful Violence in Hazarika's *Kothanodi* (2015)

The Assamese film *Kothanodi* (2015) radically demonstrates how film adapts to folklore, rather than the other way around. It actively contributes to the folkloric tradition, notably through its commitment to establishing a thoroughly material sense of premodern Assamese life. This grounds the representation of its folkloric narratives in a tangible ecology, bringing the grain of lived experience to material that might otherwise appear to be fantastical. If things horrify in *Kothanodi*, they do so out of recognition rather than shock. If the film features tricksterish phenomena, as in its account of a woman giving birth to an *ouṭeṅgā*, known in English as elephant apple, it also incorporates such tricksterism into its own methods, querying its own representation of reality and productively disturbing its audience. Similarly, violence takes many forms in the film. It can be customary and ancestral, superstitious or avaricious, intergenerationally transgressive or simply malicious. The audience is left uncertain how to decode all of it, other than to acknowledge that such material contains more truths and problems than might initially be realized. Such an adept appropriation of folkloric uncertainty into cinema not only captured an international audience for *Kothanodi* but also engendered the emergence of further interpretive routes, especially within online fan communities. Rather than reading *Kothanodi* as the auteurist product of its director Bhaskar Hazarika, it can instead be seen as part of an ongoing folkloric enterprise, an expression of the practical magic of a folkloric aesthetic.

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violence

In Ram Venkat Srikar's online review of the Assamese film *Kothanodi* (2015), he cited how the great Italian director Dario Argento paid tribute to the capacity of the horror genre for cultural translatability and radical expressiveness: "Horror is like a serpent; always shedding its skin, always changing. And it will always come back. It can't be hidden away like the guilty secrets we try to keep in our subconscious" (Srikar 2020). We contend that this metamorphic and regenerative power is also definitive of folklore, and that horror and folklore work in confederacy with each other to peculiar effect in the medium of film. Cinema is a particularly effective medium for transmitting folkloric content, given its capacity to reach a broad audience. But beyond its provision of subject matter, folklore also informs the transmissive techniques of film, perpetuating traditions of retelling and generating new audiences. Cinema therefore can be seen as part of the ongoing collective labor of the folkloric domain, rather than a more narrowly circumscribed notion of auteurism. Read in this context, a film such as *Kothanodi* is no longer an end-product but part of a greater concourse of renarration and improvisation, generating further possibilities and continuities of signification.

In *Kothanodi*, director Bhaskar Hazarika adapts and intertwines four folktales from Laxminath Bezbaroa's collection *Burhi Aair Xadhu* (*burhī āir sādhu*), or *Grandmother's Tales* in English.¹ In doing so, the film shows folklore moving through various transmission stages, from its origins in oral communication to literary expression and finally into the new cinematic language. In turn, this generates new forms of transmission through the discussions of fans on internet forums and other kinds of digital media. Online culture has dramatically demonstrated this capacity for the generation of lore, with cyber critics and fan communities fashioning interpretative trajectories of their own: "Fans produce meanings and interpretations; fans produce art-works; fans produce communities; fans produce alternative identities" (Jenkins 1992, 214).

Such activity and renewability will be explored through our analysis of both the aesthetics and the fan-reception of Hazarika's *Kothanodi* (2015),² a film shot entirely on location in Assam, India, with the apparent intention of communicating largely unacknowledged tales from the region to as wide an audience as possible (as indicated by its entrance in international film competitions). The intensely local feel of the production was paralleled by a remarkably transnational experience in post-production, suggesting a peculiar commonality had emerged.

Horror: But of what kind?

Given that infanticide is its most prominent theme, it seems plausible to describe *Kothanodi* under the umbrella term of a “horror” film. According to *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, the genre of horror is categorized as a “large and heterogeneous group of films that, via the representation of disturbing and dark subject matter, seeks to elicit responses of fear, terror, disgust, shock, suspense, and, of course, horror from their viewers” (Kuhn and Westwell 2012, 769). *Kothanodi* represents supernatural elements like ghosts, demons, and oppressive darkness within these generic expectations. Eerie music and wailing sounds sometimes enhance the goriness of the plot. It is possible that the translatable appeal that *Kothanodi* discovered might simply be an expression of the broad appetite for horror films. At the same time, the film combines these generic structures with an engrained sense of locality, which takes the representation of horror out of the domain of the familiarly sensational and into a more implicating and troubling place. Rather than merely screaming “boo” for shock effect, *Kothanodi*’s depictions of violence are grounded in a sense of the proximate rather than the otherworldly, even if strange things still happen, such as a piece of fruit starting to talk. This sense of a credible but terrible world emerges out of Hazarika’s determination to embed the viewer in as much of premodern Assamese culture as possible, so that the tales emerge organically out of what appears to be everyday life.

Two facets of the film that substantiate a sense of the reality of Assam and acculturate the viewer are the characters’ distinctive costumes and use of the Assamese language. They are dressed in the traditional and unique clothing of Assam, which for males is known as dhoti (or *dhuti*)³ and *gamosa/gamusa* (*gāmocā*),⁴ while *mekhela chador* (*mekhelā cādar*)⁵ is for women. Other small details of female appearance communicate the specific identity of women in the film as Assamese, such as the way married women put wide vermilion marks on their foreheads and their own unique application of kohl (*kohal*), a cosmetic powder used as eye shadow. Another stark instance to verify the setting of the film is the depiction of Bihu, a traditional dance of Assam.

The bare realities of life in rural Assam are also shown through how the huts there are made of sawdust, wood, and mud. There are no significant buildings that represent permanency, not least because there are no bricks. Fencing and furniture are made of bamboo. Hazarika also signifies how nature is an integral part of the local social economy when we see a woman offering water to her guest in a vessel made of bamboo.⁶ Another character is shown drinking what might be alcohol (rice beer), pouring it from a bamboo jug rather than a glass bottle. These small details are suggestive of an entire ecology, a way of life in which everything has its part. Nevertheless, this orderliness and ordinariness also contains the capacity for horrifying and traumatizing violence, which demands to be regarded as part of that ecology. The film’s everyday instruments and machines of premodernity are more vital an element here of the storyteller’s art than anything supernatural. Viewers are introduced to the use of locks made of wood used to seal the house instead of locks made of iron or copper with a key. They see a wooden loom used to weave the cloth that becomes a *gamosa*. The absence of electricity and the use of oil-wick lamps

further indicate the premodernity of the setting.⁷ Yet these machines are also torture instruments. Most significantly, viewers of *Kothanodi* come across a machine made of wood that is used to pound rice, known as a *ḍheṅki*, as seen in figure 1. The film suggests how an either demonically possessed or insane stepmother murders her husband's daughter from his first marriage, Tejimola, by aggressively working her harder and harder on the machine.

Earlier in the same tale, the wedding invitation received by Tejimola and her stepmother also depicts an appreciation of nature's integral role among the people of Assam. The wedding invitation was not written on a card or paper but rather by placing a *supāri* nut⁸ on two *tāmōl pān* leaves (see figure 2).⁹ This practice has existed in Assamese culture since its beginning; the leaves and the nut represent honor and respect.¹⁰ For centuries, *tāmōl pān* has been used for all significant and auspicious occasions throughout the region. Generally, this culinary item consists of one betel leaf and a nut that together indicate respect and honor, but on the occasion of a wedding invitation, two leaves are used to mark the significance of both bride and groom. Hazarika's precision in respecting these traditional practices again depicts



Figure 1. A rice pounder used in pre-technology times. One end of the *ḍheṅki* is pressed by the foot, and the other end pounds the rice. It is a communal activity where household women gather and pound rice and wheat (*Kothanodi* 00:26:25).



Figure 2. *Tāmōl pān*, made of areca nut and betel leaf (*Kothanodi* 00:37:39).

the real and abiding rhythms of life in Assam, a previously agrarian society far from literacy and modernity, where its inhabitants survived with the help of natural resources. All of this suggests the self-sufficiency and toughness of the Assamese people. These qualities are what would sustain Assamese communities that had to endure the harsh effects of the colonial tea plantation system (Behal 2010). If it remains relevant to describe *Kothanodi* as a horror film, it is only in the sense that trauma is a potential in everything, including the most apparently humdrum details of life. Hazarika's meticulousness in representing material reality indicates his awareness that he too is part of the folkloric ecology of Assam, another element in an ever-evolving experience of the world.

Apart from his only Bollywood film, *Players* (2012), all of Bhaskar Hazarika's films have been made in his native region of Assam and in the Assamese language. In his meticulous approach to all stages and forms of production, including screenwriting, cinematography, and music, Hazarika might appear to be a classic auteur, as Fariddina Hussain (2022, 3) has suggested, imposing his own vision upon both his audience and his material. Yet even as the film manifests his creative control, it also suggests that such creativity must be understood within the larger framing of a folkloric tradition where all stories lead to other stories. Makers of stories are only temporarily intervening to shape events until the next storyteller comes along. Hazarika is a storyteller from Assam, where many storytellers have preceded him. So, rather than a single author, he is demonstrating that he is part of a long and complex tradition. *Kothanodi* translates as "river of fables," apparently living up to its reputation in the broader Indian context as a land of folklore, beauty, and near-occultist mystique. Yet this also is a reminder of how "storytelling" here is intimately connected to a sense of place. Assamese people tell stories because that is what they do, and Hazarika is no different.

Hazarika's obsession was apparently not so much with the emphatic imposition of his own authority but rather putting his creativity to work at generating a sense of the complex world in which the stories circulate. In everything he did, Hazarika was apparently committed to communicating the grain of reality in premodern Assam, a necessarily gritty context to relate his versions of these stories of considerable cruelty and violence. These material realities present another level of story and experience to what is related, emphasizing that the fabulous must always be understood contingently with the materialistic. The stories that are told always relate to how real lives are lived. For example, while a wicked stepmother killing her stepchild sounds like a fairy tale, killing occurs in the daily context of shared labor. When a demon-like character appears in the forest to apparently seduce Tejimola's stepmother into that act of murder, it is not entirely clear whether it is a figment of her imagination or a fictional being in a fantasy world (as it might be related in a fairy tale). On the one hand, if the film is a fable, then the demon has all the reality of a demon in a fable; yet on the other hand, it also seems equally possible that the stepmother has just thoroughly lost her mind, and the film is a portrayal of that psychological collapse. The demon is there and not there at the same time, for it depends upon what you believe.

The supernatural is also contextualized by how the film draws its characters from a cast of common people, indicating the realities of life in rural Assam and refusing

to take the audience to a more fantastical world. It features a stepmother, a father, laborers, a daughter, neighbors, a priest, a fisherman, and village boys. These are ordinary people, and yet they too have their demons. Hazarika's source material, Bezbaroa's *Burhi Aair Xadhu*, is effectively a collection of bedtime stories (Bezbaroa 2012). Yet, Hazarika withdraws from its parable-like tendencies of the literary to intensify feelings of awful incredulity at what can manifest in such apparently ordinary people's lives. Removing the comfort that a moral might provide, Hazarika instead prompts the hazardous work of wondering about what prevails in life, whether with motive or the motiveless.

Folk wisdom in *Kothanodi*

Barre Toelken states that folk wisdom is "a discrete set of actions and expressions that are motivated and directed more by group taste and demand than by the private idiosyncrasies of an individual" (1996, 157). Folklore must be dynamic, reflecting the need for communities to tell and retell their stories rather than keep on repeating the same stories monotonously without modulation or adaptation. Hazarika argues that such retelling is necessary: "This is my cultural heritage, and I can take liberties with it. I like dark and macabre stories, and I changed the endings—for instance, the original elephant apple [*outengā*] story is about a king and his seven queens, one of whom gives birth to the fruit. I made the story about common people" (Ramnath 2015). Hazarika adapts stories of kings and queens to tales of ordinary people to show that such tales are, in fact, applicable to all facets of experience and responsible to the world as it is lived. This revolutionary leveling resists the hierarchical structures of class and caste that have conventionally presided over Assamese culture. Even as it seeks commonality of appeal, however, the film also shocks and disrupts. This also suggests the violence of cultural and political change, the painful birthing of a new reality.

Kothanodi also identifies a particular form of terror caused by custom, or uncritically living by beliefs that in any other context would seem bizarre or murderous. In addition, it raises the question of the abuse of power and the danger inherent in the absolute authority of the mother figure. The film narrates the story of four different families from different class groups, showing how the problem of uncritical belief pervades all sections of society. The film's opening announces four chapters whose titles relate to social ritual, social justice, and social violation: "a wedding," "a rebirth," "an acquittal," and "a murder." These are based on renditions of the stories *Champawati*, *Tejimola*, *Tawoir Xadhu* (Tawaoi's Story), and *Ou Kuwori* (Outenga Maiden)¹¹ from *Grandmother's Tales*. The most evident thread connecting the first three folktales is child-killing, although the third tale pivots into asserting a girl's right to life, which then prepares for the fourth tale's account of rebirth. Infanticide here appears as an inevitable part of life. The killing of a child in each story used in the film is thematically defined, with Hazarika highlighting jealousy, trust, and greed as a motive in each instance. Such acts, even if concealed under tradition and culture, reveal the darker aspects of a community and culture. Doing the work of folklore, *Kothanodi* does not ask the viewer to accept such horrors but rather to question how such unethical acts might happen, to retell the stories, and ask how the world might

be so. It asks viewers to question their responses when they witness such crimes, whether they perversely enjoy it or experience it as crisis. A related question appears around how cultures might take some degree of pleasure (however slight) in hearing or reading a story about the killing of a child, and whether that says something implicating about the nature of a particular place, if the life of a child appears to be so vulnerable. Do such stories manifest in Assam because the harshness of living conditions there—particularly in the tea gardens—had made life seem very cheap, even a child's life?

Such questions add depth and darkness to how the film aims to highlight the mysteriousness of the beautiful land of Assam as the so-called "River of Fables." A river's top layer might look beautiful and crystal clean but does not reveal what flows beneath it. Similarly, the film brings previously hidden beliefs among the people of Assam to the attention of the world beyond Assam and encourages the viewers to see how the community's collective wisdom might require the disruption of query. So *Kothanodi* redefines folklore as not merely a set of rules by which communities traditionally live, insisting that communities cannot only rely on tradition and custom but must question it. Folklore here shows how tradition sometimes needs to be resisted and that you should not always obey those who presume to teach you. Above all, you should live by your wits.

Question everything?

The first killing represented in *Kothanodi* is when a mother (Dhoneshwari, played by Seema Biswas) forces her daughter to marry a python, believing that the python is a god in disguise who will furnish her daughter, Bon, with gold and silver jewels (this magical occurrence had already happened to her husband's daughter in a previous marriage). Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly given that it is a python, the daughter is killed and eaten rather than rewarded or decorated with jewels. Solely because of her greed, the mother has offered up her daughter. Despite hearing her child screaming as the python entangles her, the mother ignores everything, waiting desperately to see the jewels. Since the priest and the father's first wife had warned the parents that it could end badly, their refusal to heed such counsel is tantamount to killing: the python killed the girl, but her parents effectively commissioned it to perform the act. This demonstrates a paradox of tradition, and again asserts that folklore is only worth having if it is subject to critical thought. Furthermore, if there was the precedent of the bounty of the previous marriage, there was also the admonitory counsel of the priest and first wife that needed to be considered. Circumstances shift, and all choices should reflect this reality. In this story, the promise of material gain corrals the mother into the dogmatic assumption that all pythons will bring a similar jackpot, failing to recognize the intervention of the divine in the previous wedding. Just because something happened once does not mean that it will happen again.

The film accounts for the wife's greed through the description (by her daughter, Bon) of how she witnessed the marriage of the daughter (Champawati) of her husband's first wife to a python. The village people understandably considered this python a supernatural entity, because it had the power to talk like a human and

showed interest in marrying the daughter. If a python has such divine powers, it is a blessing, and marriage is condoned. The second wife trusted that the same experience would befall her daughter and even willed it to happen, even though the python did not speak and therefore did not promise to be anything other than a poisonous snake. Her most grievous mistake lies in not believing the evidence of her own eyes and ears. Despite the manifest absence of the divine, she arrogantly willed the magic to happen again, even as the python crushed her daughter. Her fantasy of enrichment reveals the monstrousness of her greed, even showing it to be murderous.

The following chapter (“An Acquittal”) sees a couple, Poonai (played by Kapil Bora) and Malati (played by Asha Bordoloi), burying their three children directly after they are born. The couple commits this act upon instruction from the husband’s uncle, who is regarded as a soothsayer. According to him, the first three children will bring bad luck to the parents and cause their destruction. Despite making no rational or practical sense, the couple initially conforms, since they assume they should believe in soothsayers and their elders. The sayings of elders represent the best advice and should be followed without a doubt or question, and such justifications tend to overcome all acts or expressions of resistance. Thus, the three children die. The parents were only doing what they were told, and the soothsayer could rationalize the behavior by claiming to be a protector of the family. Inheritance and deference to tradition are murderous here. The husband (Poonai) trusted the uncle blindly because his father’s “last wish” was to obey his uncle. However, after birthing her fourth child, the mother resists. She decides to save the child from her husband and the uncle’s prophecy. The twist in this tale was that the first three newborns had all been males, while the only child that was allowed to live was a girl. This restructuring of the folktale by Hazarika also throws a dramatic contemporary light onto the tradition of killing a girl child in many parts of India. He asks viewers to understand the tale critically through the character of the wife (Malati), who is enraged with the feeling of resistance and decides to kill the uncle (soothsayer) rather than following him blindly. This spirit of resistance ultimately enabled her to keep the fourth child, which suggests that not all community wisdom is genuinely wise and that it should therefore not be trusted.

The story is remade to indicate how reality itself should be remade. Assam becomes a folkloric ground upon which to enact forms of social revolution. Therefore, the film encourages audiences to view the critical flaws and blind trust that lead to such crimes and makes self-justified pillars of the community, the greedy mother or the soothsayer, no less than murderers who should be punished. This understanding also informs how the wife in the second tale questions her husband about whether they are “happy” with all their wealth and comfort after following their uncle’s guidance. Is his version of human sacrifice the only way to live a good life? Should the idea of a good life only be measured by material wealth? Even as folk beliefs can provide solidarity to a community, folklore also demands that these beliefs always remain in question. Hazarika sees folkloristic material as an opportunity for exploring multiple forms of freedom, from the bodily to the intellectual, the aesthetic to the political. It is where Walter Benjamin’s “liberating magic” remains possible and relevant (1968, 11). *Kothanodi* asks the viewers and people of the community to think about impediments

to justice and freedom and the possibilities for enacting change by removing them. The father's unethical act in acquiescing to the shamanistic ritual of killing his children blurs the wall or line between good and evil. He obeys the sacrificial law of the community but not the natural law of nurturing and parenthood. The film here reminds the viewers of false prophecy, and that if there are soothsayers, there is a possibility of pseudo-soothsayers as well. Yet this logic runs the danger of becoming another form of liberal dogma, which should equally be subject to folklore's scrutinizing force.

Toward the end of the film, Poonai and Malati visit the forest at night to see the graves of their children, and the heads of the dead baby boys rise from the ground and speak of the evil that they would have done to their family. The uncle was right, at least in relationship to the male children; at the same time, Malati was right to resist him when it was time for her daughter to be born. In this, she felt the moment when the uncle's teaching no longer corresponded to reality. The film expresses the uncomfortable view that you cannot always readily know what is right or wrong, and that in moments of real crisis you need to trust something deeper than the reified forms of learning you inherit. The trick lies in knowing when the opportunity to disobey is a good one. The stepmother who assumes that all pythons have a divine potential to dispense good fortune made a very unwise wager. Poonai gambled and won.

The third killing we witness in the film is grossly cruel: a woman named Senehi (played by Zerifa Wahid) kills her stepdaughter Tejimola (played by Kasvi Sharma) with a rice pounder. As in the first killing, greed and envy are shown to be primary motives; the stepmother resents the love, care, and money that her husband offers his daughter. The murder is brutal and shown in sadistic clarity, to the extent that there is no apparent mitigation for this archetypically evil stepmother. Yet the extraordinary cruelty occurs in otherwise ordinary circumstances.

In the rice-pounder scene, the stepmother summons Tejimola to help her husk rice at night. The stepmother claims that the daughter needs to atone for having spoiled a dress that she had lent her to wear at a wedding. The killing is inexorably depicted as part of the everyday practice of rice preparation. It starts with Tejimola pouring the rice into the bowl of the thresher (*ḍheṅki*) and her stepmother pounding it with her foot. The *ḍheṅki* itself is a risky instrument, requiring the labor of two people: one threshes the rice by using her foot to raise and lower the pounder portion, while the other uses her hands to make the rice move back and forth, which facilitates effective husking. This process presents obvious dangers but has continued for generations. The stepmother asks Tejimola to move the rice back and forth, and she will pound the *ḍheṅki*. The scene becomes subject to a terrifying escalation of rhythm. At one point, the stepmother starts to pound the *ḍheṅki* rapidly, which results in Tejimola injuring her right palm. She begs her stepmother to stop, as she is hurting and will not be able to spread the rice around anymore. The stepmother, however, asks her to use her other hand to continue the process. Next, Tejimola's left hand is compromised as the pounding escalates in speed. Still, the stepmother continues, ordering Tejimola to use her legs. Poor Tejimola, crying in pain and seeking forgiveness, continues to move the rice using her right foot and left, and one after the other is hurt. When both her hands and legs are injured, Senehi asks her to use her head. She also asks her to



Figure 3. Demon with python eyes (*Kothanodi* 00:18:00).

accept her accusation that she stained the dress on purpose.

Now, when Tejimola knows she is going to be killed, she lies to her stepmother and claims falsely that she deliberately soiled her mother's dress as she hates her. Senehi hesitates, disarmed by the idea that Tejimola would acquiesce

in the lie that she has concocted, perversely indicating her own belief in the girl's essential lack of duplicity. The demonic figure (see figure 3) whom Senehi previously encountered in the forest then reappears to assure that the killing will be completed. In the moment this happens, it is almost a form of mercy killing, as Tejimola is already horrifically maimed. More cynically, Senehi would be liable to answer her husband for his daughter's atrocious condition if left in the current situation. Yet as she kills the girl slowly, and Senehi's pleasure increases, her actions no longer appear to be motivated by such a sense of design.

When she starts the process with the idea of hurting and torturing her stepdaughter, it is not clear that she wants to kill her, but she gradually discovers such pleasure in hurting her that it becomes practically inevitable. Like a good obedient girl, Tejimola kept doing her work until her last breath. At the same time, this only fuels Senehi's violence. If Senehi's initial motive appeared to be material envy or revenge, she now appears to be captivated by something more mysterious, possibly of a psycho-sexual nature. In the final act of torture, when Senehi asked Tejimola to use her head to stir the rice in the pounder, Tejimola at last cries out for her father's help as she can sense death approaching. Senehi brutally wrenches her head back and forth, escalating the speed of the pounder until Tejimola's flesh is churned. We see the flesh falling out of the pounder in the reflection on the wall. The stepmother starts to enjoy the crying and wailing of Tejimola to the extent that she forgets to stop and continues pounding with feverish intensity. She might be insane, overpowered by the feeling of jealousy, or she might have been bewitched. Yet, it hardly matters to speak of motivations at this point. The excruciating cruelty of the killing keeps bringing the audience back to the material suffering of the girl rather than what might have made the stepmother do it. What is remarkable is the refusal to mythicize the violence or to allow it to be sublimated into any kind of explanation, whether rational or irrational. It remains in the mind of the viewer as a problem, something that requires rethinking and retelling to find any dimension of peace. In other words, it needs the complicating and discursive energies of folklore.

The audience first meets Senehi when she slaps her innocent stepdaughter as soon as her husband leaves on a journey. From that moment, the viewer's attention is fixed on her sadism, and how far it might go. Thus, viewers tend to forget about Tejimola until we witness her actual killing, which raises a question of whether viewers only see the daughter when she is suffering. Hazarika's choice of storytelling strategy demands the audience to reflect upon its own position relative to the horror of what

is witnessed. The torture and abuse of Tejimola occurs in the presence of neighbors and visitors, yet it is met with silence and avoidance. The design of *Kothanodi* troublingly asks whether this echoes the partial disinterestedness of a film audience, and whether the violence is regarded more as spectacle or entertainment than a phenomenon of reality. Does the horrific killing-scene really horrify? If so, it is not simply because it shows sadistic violence; instead, it is that violence emerges out of a relationship between a stepdaughter and a stepmother in a recognizably ordinary context. If there are demons on show, they emerge out of the ordinary conditions of life, nevertheless. If the death of Tejimola with a rice pounder while working is an act of sheer cruelty, it is also credible. It also draws attention to the greater context of Assamese history, and the reality of the lives of Assam tea garden laborers and the inhuman conditions imposed upon them by plantation owners (Behal 2010). If one asks the question, in what sort of a place can a child be worked to death, the answer here might be a place like Assam under the harsh conditions of the plantations, where being worked to death was not age exclusive.

The last episode of *Kothanodi* does not depict a murder but the abandonment of a child born in the form of a piece of *outenga* (*ouṭeṅā*) by her mother, Ketki (played by Urmila Mahanta), who is then ostracized by her community. This wild fruit, also known as elephant apple, is central to Assamese culinary identity, since it is found in the dense jungles of Assam. Folk beliefs traditionally regard a woman who bears anything other than a human child as either a witch or an outcast, and certainly a bad omen for the family and the community. Ketki's native village follows suit, banishing her because she gives birth to an elephant apple. Yet the rush to condemn her as cursed might be premature. In Assamese folklore, there are infinite possibilities due to divine power and beliefs; science has no bearing on events. It does not matter whether it is scientifically feasible that a woman could give birth to fruit. If the logic of "what happens, happens" is accepted, it is possible that a girl could indeed be born as an elephant apple. This also means that the reverse could be possible, with the fruit turning into a baby girl in the process of rebirth. Confirmation of the possibility of such strange events comes when Devinath (played by Adil Hussain) appears in the story. He is a merchant and traveler who has traveled around the nation. He claims that these phenomena exist in many other parts and that they are magical and mystical but not dangerous. He offers up the generosity and translatability of folklore as an antidote to the accursed codings of the villagers. He says that a bird nurtured and brought up a girl somewhere in some other culture or part of the state: "A woman gave birth to a kitten in Sadiya . . . , a bird had raised a woman, a girl was hatched out of a duck's egg one morning" (see figures 4a, b, c).

Such folkloric tales are active and ever-present, despite their apparent irrationality. Devinath indicates how the world might seem strange or improbable, but that this is no reason to fear things. Yet even if Devinath seems possessed of a worldliness and wisdom that the villagers lack, he is also subject to the nightmarish unpredictability of life. Even as he speaks of accepting the peculiarities and apparent terrors of the world, he is subject to the dramatic irony that his daughter Tejimola is being maltreated and murdered in his absence. Devinath's relative urbanity cannot protect him from the same unpredictable forces he sees as prevalent in the world.

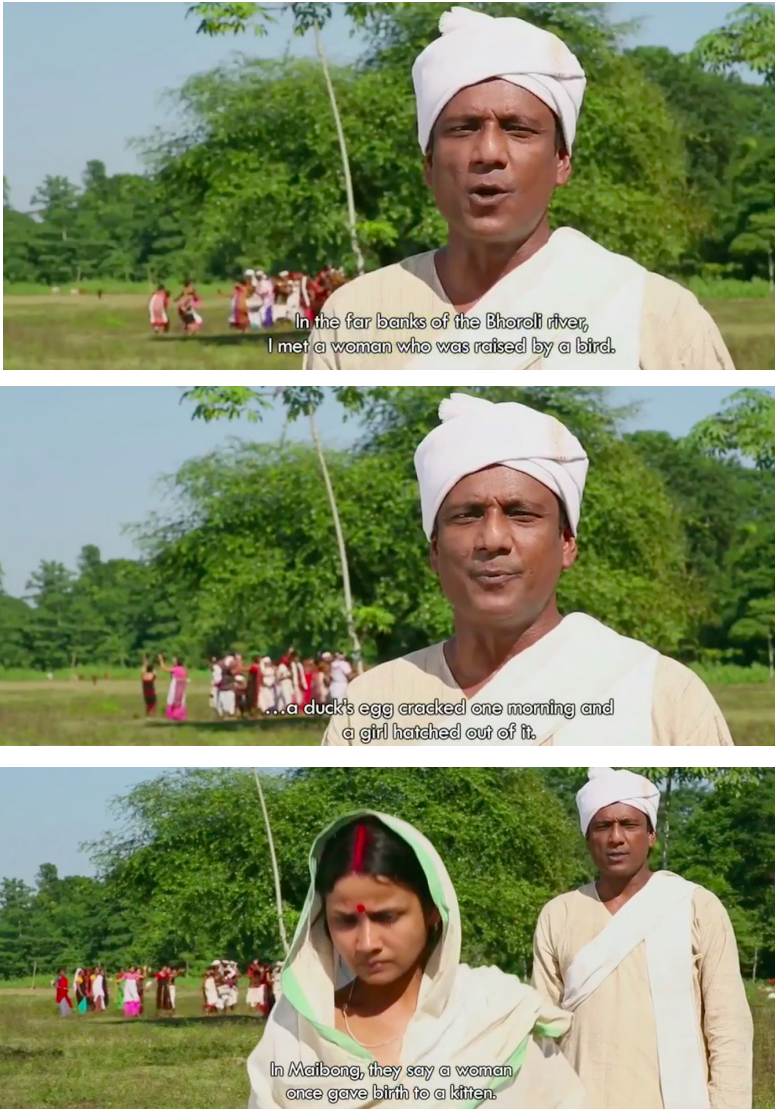


Figure 4 (a, b, and c). In the three stills, Devinath informs Keteki about the phenomenon of giving birth outside generalized norms. He assures her that this magic is directed by divine powers (*Kothanodi* 00:39:50).

Tolerance has to be taught and communicated; otherwise, people might revert to superstition and viciousness. In this, Hazarika also addresses still-prevalent situations where a woman might be ostracized or punished for failing to follow societal norms. In the twenty-first century, a woman bearing an elephant apple would probably face the same hostility.

If the implication is that communities have to be constantly reminded to maintain tolerance and inclusivity, the film might be saying the same about its audience. Hazarika invites the viewers to read and see folktales critically and to apply them intelligently across time and space, to the extent that he blurs the lines between the tales and asks for them to be read as part of a greater continuum. If he has made adaptations of what were once regarded as bedtime stories, he has turned them into

actively and necessarily problematic trickster-texts, or “talking books,” to use Henry Gates’s terminology (2014, 139). Hazarika’s folkloric direction allows for conjuring with time, magical displacement of what appears to be ineradicably established. When the baby girl is reborn from the elephant apple, she appears as if she had lived during the same period in which the fruit had been taking her place. There is no rationality or logical reasoning offered for this appearance and disappearance, since it is more a matter of believing what you choose to believe. The setting appears to be premodern Assam but it is not clear precisely when, and yet the film is full of a material specificity about its location that insists upon the grounded nature of the production. Hazarika’s film locates its audience in a tangible representation of the past, but in such a way that it speaks urgently to the abiding injustices of twenty-first-century life.

Kothanodi’s international success as a film paradoxically lies in its intimacy and modesty of ambition; it tells stories from Assam and spends much of its time giving an audience a particular feel for what life in that setting means. Such a vivid rendering of a particular locality is what opened the door for the film internationally. An audience in Dublin or at a film festival in Bavaria could understand and respect that they were experiencing a culture that was as recognizable and locally coherent as their own. The more clearly defined it is on its own terms, the more one locality can speak to another.

Communication of the film

Hazarika’s *Kothanodi* was a considerable success, reaching many audiences by appearing at international festivals, and inspired much comment and reception online, mostly positive. Film reviewers on YouTube, Korbin Miles and Rick Segall (2021), mention how this film is not about the actors but the storyline, arguing that the film has excellent grasping power and does not let its audience move for a second. Segall and Miles are from California, home of Hollywood, and their interest in *Kothanodi* speaks to the film’s reach at an international level, even with the determinedly local nature of its material. As mentioned earlier, however, this sense of sharply drawn locality generates the film’s translocal and international potential. The folklore of Assam comes alive and, as such, reminds audiences of how other traditions can do the same thing if rendered intelligently and flexibly. In a way that is as flexible and adaptive as folklore itself, Hazarika establishes the unraveling mystery of all four intertwined stories in a sinister, shocking, and implicating way. Even negative reviews acknowledged the terms of what *Kothanodi* was doing. Arcadia Cinema reported that “Hazarika connects the stories together, ‘pushing’ popular children’s folk tales in the direction of horror and witchcraft,” but fails in terms of clarity:

The stories are not clearly separated and the markers of difference among the characters are not clear. It is also unclear if Hazarika is situating the older folk tales in [*the*] contemporary moment, or in a timeless frame? The viewer is engaged in the efforts to place the magic in the context of realist images of village life in Assam, and the issue of separation of narratives adds to the demands. (Arcadia Cinema 2016)

What the reviewer sees as a lack of absolute clarity appears to these authors as a designed refusal of categorization and literary closure. The messiness of *Kothanodi* takes it out of the generic logic of representation and puts it in an alternative zone that we would identify as the productive uncertainty of the folkloric. It is not stepping out of bedtime stories and into horror; rather, it shows that the boundaries between these modes of representation are not safe. Other evident aspects of genre that it conjures with are ethnographic cinema and documentary, not to mention the more melodramatic aspects of Alfred Hitchcock. Again, it does not do this in an authoritative way, but rather as a means of manifesting another dimension of understanding. If *Kothanodi* was a painting, it would not be a smoothly romantic landscape, but a cubist aggregation of multiple perspectives and possibilities. It is a decidedly unbeautiful film. The reviewer argues that Hazarika aims “to construct a seamless narrative of four tales” but “falls short in helping the viewer adapt to unfamiliar context of a distant culture” (ibid.). It is hard to speak of Hazarika’s aims, but if seamless implies smoothness and synthesis, we argue that *Kothanodi* delivers roughness and disconnection. At the same time, the identification of the problem of representing “the unfamiliar context of a distant culture” is alert to the experience of encountering *Kothanodi*, a film that not only promulgates strangeness but does that through “strange” methods of representation. The viewer is continually trying to figure out what kind of a film, and what kind of reality, they are encountering.

Kothanodi’s success at international film festivals led to its release on digital platforms worldwide, such as the worldwide film-screening platform MUBI, where the film received a rating of 8.2/10 from its viewers (MUBI 2021b). Several viewers posted reviews of the film on the MUBI website, and their comments demonstrated the transglobal resonance that people discovered in the film’s representation of folklore. One reviewer mentioned how they learned about the elephant apple and the abundance of herbs and fruits they subsequently associated with it, adding that it reminds them about the wood apple jam tucked in their cupboard (MUBI 2021a).¹² Another reviewer, named Maya, commenting on *Kothanodi*, looks at it through the dual lenses of black magic and motherhood, a mostly unidentified or untouched cultural connection, taboo because the mother figure is always associated with love, tenderness, and care (ibid.). However, such automatic associations are precisely what the stories of *Kothanodi* question, and Hazarika’s particular daring lies in showing that real folk wisdom lies in questioning everything. To live, nothing should be assumed; everything must be tested. To manifest this, he summons a tricksterish refusal of piety and of custom for custom’s sake. Viewers on MUBI remarked on this quality of the impious, identifying it adeptly both as a local and broadly human phenomenon:

“Diabolical and mysterious, mixing the real with the ethereal . . . this film digs deep into the nether regions of the human psyche.”

“. . . mercilessly pulls up a mirror, showing society its dark underbelly.”

“. . . digs up the sinister undercurrent from the depths of each text of the Assamese folktales.”

“It’s dark, greasy, set in the mystic perpetual miseries of Majuli islands.” (ibid.)¹³

Hazarika's storytelling shows the world the kind of crimes that happen in the house's backyard, behind the veil of unquestioned beliefs and moral codes. He also establishes an ecological perspective on the codependence of humans, plants, and animals. This then is turned again to indicate how the natural domain is further entangled with the supernatural, and that fear is as necessary a part of everyday life as cooking rice or going for a walk. The use of subtly eerie music and soundtrack noise enhances the feeling of implicit terror in Assam among the viewers. There are no songs, for this is far from Bollywood. Wailing sounds and cries of babies are deployed to acknowledge the dire fates of the children depicted in the film. At the same time, this asks the audience to reflect upon how such an amalgamation of miseries might relate to the history of Assam, and what other things might be audible or visible if people could only remark them.

Hazarika works insistently in sight and sound to communicate the authenticity and rawness of folk life, whether through the violent threshing of the rice pounder, the weaving of the cloth, or the graininess of the sound of the elephant apple rolling on the dirt. Curiously but very effectively, the film also gives voice to the fruit; in part, this adds to the strangeness of what is happening and generates a sense of the supernatural, but it also serves to naturalize the transformation of the elephant apple into a girl who is seeking love and acceptance from her mother. What seemed absurd or ridiculous metamorphoses into organic and revitalizing reconciliation, the transformation that folklore often promises. Devinath understands this, and it represents his only hope, given what he must surely find out about the fate of Tejimola.

Hazarika carefully chose the tales to reflect upon motherhood and its responsibilities. He then develops a related query within that exploration into the maltreatment of children, sometimes even to the point of murder. The story of the stepmother killing Tejimola shows that taking on the role of a mother is not necessarily the same as being one, and that it is dangerously impractical to assume that a woman will naturally mother a child with love, especially if that child is not her own. As soon as Devinath leaves on his journey, the stepmother shows her real anger and jealousy toward Tejimola, which manifests as escalating cruelty. The worse her rage gets, the more it seems the stepmother cannot help it; she is in a form of mania that has no cure. Despite her cruelty, the stepmother is represented by Hazarika as wretched rather than demonic, someone apparently beyond help. The radical conclusion is that even she requires the compassion of the audience, such is the volatility and the unfathomability of being human. The force of the death instinct that overtakes Senehi is not something that anybody would welcome.

Helplessness and helpfulness necessarily coexist here. Devinath cannot protect his daughter from his second wife, but he can help the woman who birthed the fruit, advising that she should accept it as her child. Furthermore, he offers up the folkloric wisdom that he has seen that such strange things might and do happen in the world. Strangeness is unavoidable, a phenomenon that attaches itself to life with remarkable tenacity. Prior to her murder, Tejimola had led us to the girl who was forced to marry a python by her mother for the greed of jewels. That natural mother's covetousness relates to the envy that apparently motivated the stepmother, and both culminated in killing. Both deaths were evidently avoidable and yet feel equally inevitable, given

the psychopathologies of the respective characters. The wedding preparations also interconnect to the successful fisherman who has been burying his newborn babies on his uncle's advice. As previously noted, the fisherman's wife finally rises to resist the cyclical sacrifice of her children and resolves to take justice into her own hands by planning to kill the uncle and protect her fourth-born child. In doing this, she refuses to accept the patriarchal teachings of her husband's family line, but she also rejects the superstition that her husband's success in business depends on anything other than his ability to fish. This is a matter of ecology rather than theology. Multiple explanations coexist and contend in Hazarika's concourse of retellings and readings. If *Kothanodi* presents stories, it also implies that we should tell them again, and that in our constructions of what we think is happening in these tales, the fungible work of folklore is still occurring.

This last story affirms the film's particular location on the river island of Majuli. This island enjoys a reputation in the Indian context as an island of mysteries and stories. Hazarika, to a degree, fulfils this reputation and plays with the apprehension that it creates. However, he also eradicates clichés, destroys assumptive models of righteousness, and dives deep into the darkness to bring out a more implicating version of reality. The film reflects the abiding presence of horror and historical injury in Assam. Heinous acts occur in the darkness (the man burying his newborn children) but also in plain sight (the torture and death of Tejimola). However, redemption and kindness are also shown as equally possible and present. The portrayal of greedy and evil motherhood in two stories counters the protective courage and caring manifest in the other two stories. Hazarika addresses the binaries of good and evil, destruction and protection, and jealousy and caring, showing how the art of storytelling is the necessary way of negotiating a path between these extremes. In this, he can be seen as a trickster-artist, raising hell and disrupting reality, making folklore how it should be made. Lewis Hyde asserts, "trickster embodies a large portion of our experience where good and evil are intertwined," and he further mentions Paul Radin's take on the trickster: "He knows neither good nor evil, yet he is responsible for both" (Hyde 2017, 10). *Kothanodi* ends with the elephant apple being reborn as a girl. This can be read as Hazarika's attempt to restore faith in human survival, but the strangeness of the event remains to prevent any oversentimentalization and false closure. The survival of some girls does not erase the memory of the accumulated killings of others. Only a cautiously optimistic awareness of how magic destroys and protects can remain.

Netlore: Connecting with the audience

Kothanodi was not a cosmopolitan product with Bollywood appeal, but a film created to address the mystery and traditions of Assam. In addition, however, it sought to communicate these aspects of folklore to an audience beyond India. In this, it succeeded. *Kothanodi* was not necessarily a massive hit at the box office, but it succeeded in raising awareness on a global level and generated new connections and readings. Unanticipated relationships with other films and other folktales began to emerge through interpretative communities online. A reviewer on MUBI

compared it to the Japanese horror genre of *kwaidan geki* (mysterious, tragic), made famous cinematically by director Masaki Kobayashi's *Kwaidan* (Ghost Stories, 1964), also an adaptation of four folktales (Dionysus67, comment on *Kothanodi*).¹⁴ Other reviewers remarked on possible comparisons with Bengali stories from *Thakurmar Jhuli* (Grandmother's Bag [of Tales]), while Americans expressed their gratitude over learning about the folklore of Assam and the benefit of thinking about folklore as a network of translocal and transglobal connection. In its own way, folklore might be directly connected to the phenomenon of the internet itself. These responses demonstrate how folklore is present in every culture, religion, and country; it also shows how quick people can be to recognize this. They express the potential for commonality that such tales and structures manifest. It can be argued that Hazarika's implicit audience was neither the consumer of Bollywood nor the Assamese community but an international audience literate in the transglobal possibilities of folklore. More overtly, it can be claimed that the audience Hazarika sought was *any* audience, to break out of the self-imposed limitations of local and national culture into the chaos of everywhere. As the director aimed to talk about the folklore of Assam globally, he put the film into the global network of the international film festival circuit, where it prospered. It was first screened in October 2015 at Busan International Film Festival from October 1–10, 2015, followed by the London Film Festival in the same month, according to an interview with Hazarika (Chopra 2019).

Networking had already helped the film in other ways. Interestingly, due to budget constraints, Hazarika had gone ahead with crowdfunding to meet production costs for the film. He raised INR 2,100,000.00 (26,334.73 euros) from a community of ninety-seven backers,¹⁵ which was rewarded when the film won the National Film Award for Best Assamese Feature Film (2015). According to Hazarika, the main idea behind screening the film at a film festival was to approach where a market is attached; you get your foot into the sea and see if you can make a sale internationally (Chopra 2019). In this way, the subject-to-hazard mentality of a trickster comes into necessary focus: the film had to go where the money could take it, or where the money lay in wait. This is another aspect of emergent folklore, that of negotiating the uncertainties and crises of late capitalism, where money provides chaos and order at the same time. Furthermore, crowdfunding is not only about helping the filmmakers but also supporting the film and the story to reach a broader audience, to promote the culture and heritage of such a film through a medium that is easily accessible and appreciated by everyone. The film form is inherently translatable and adaptable in the digital age, an especially adept messenger between diverse realities. As crowdfunders, people from Assam and elsewhere formed a community to support the film and showed the initiative and constructive creativity that folklore itself cultivates.

CineTrickster

Hazarika philosophically plays the role of a trickster in highlighting the possibilities of folklore in the modern world and raising a question about things subtly accepted or hidden in the culture. As Hyde mentions, "trickster *creates* a boundary or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight" (2017, 7). As a director,

Hazarika also acts as a trickster, for he depicts the character of a “boundary crosser,” “creative idiot,” and “doubleness and duplicity” (ibid.). What might look like ruptures or disjunctions become moments of productive query. Hazarika retells the folktales and modifies them radically. He deliberately eliminates the pretext from all the tales and finds new forms for the depiction of what previously appeared as binary portrayals of good and evil in folklife. He can be understood as both a creator and destroyer. He creates a world that highlights the possibilities of restoring blind faith and hopes with rationality and the pragmatic magic of living accountably to circumstance. He destroys beliefs that have become bland assumptions and ideas that have become dogma.

The ultimate reincarnation of Tejimola into a plant provides a final confirmation of the fluid nature of a trickster, but again Hazarika does not tell the complete folktale. Like a “trickster who relies on his prey to help him spring the traps he makes” (Hyde 2017, 19), Hazarika traps his viewers. He makes them question their instincts and morality and the true nature of their enjoyment. He proficiently eliminates the pretext and subtext from the original folktales to deconstruct horrific events, demanding that the audience should seek to find their own understanding of what has happened, and what continues to happen.

The elephant apple is yet another trickster, a piece of fruit with human faculties of hearing, thinking, and listening that keeps following its mother.¹⁶ Folklore holds that no matter what a woman gives birth to, there is life present in it, be it a fruit or an animal. When Ketki starts treating and caring for the fruit as her own child and worries about when it went missing, Devinath practices a ritual to release the human child entrapped in the fruit and shows his own tricksterish aspirations. His first attempt to liberate the human child fails, as the fruit hears him talking about the plan and avoids his trap. He then prepares another scheme to liberate the human child but successfully conceals it from the *outenga*. One trickster outdoes another, and reincarnation occurs.

Significant violence in *Kothanodi*

Kothanodi points out the unique position of folklore in the discourse of modernity’s racialized capitalism, witnessing how the tea garden community experienced exploitation and how stories evolved to express their impact. The plantation is not visible here. It is not the apparent setting of any of the stories, and yet it is the essential background to all that happens in the film. The evident violence and cruelty on show must be understood within the context of populations being displaced and cultures unmoored in the cause of cultivating tea. Slavoj Žižek describes the problem of defining violence and understanding its essential relationship to the apparently “peaceful” ground against which it must be understood. There is an immediately recognizable “‘subjective’ violence, violence performed by a clearly identifiable agent,” which can be seen in the killing of Tejimola (Žižek 2009, 1). However, Žižek contends that such “subjective violence is just the most visible portion of a triumvirate that also includes two objective kinds of violence” (ibid.). The first of these is the “‘symbolic’ violence embodied in language, and its forms, and the other is

‘systemic’ violence, or the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems” (ibid.). So the economic system of nineteenth-century capitalism delivered tea to consumers in London and elsewhere, mostly indifferent to the human cost of that crop in Assam. This implacably rational violence produces the subjective explosions encountered in narratives such as *Kothanodi*. These texts call upon folklore because they can warn about the damage that such “systems” might generate. The uncle-soothsayer recommends human sacrifice, but he does so to preserve prosperity; as such, his superstition is founded upon the idea of a profit margin. His “beliefs” are fundamentally identical to those who believe that shareholders’ dividends are worth more than workers’ lives or safety.

Hazarika draws inspiration for his direction from Japanese horror films such as *Onibaba* (Demon Hag, 1964) and the aforementioned *Kwaidan* (1964), which explore folklore’s capacity for blurring the line between human and nonhuman. He also shows how society is conventionally incapable of processing such blurring. Women in *Kothanodi* struggle to escape the binary categorizations of Assam’s social structures and are, therefore, especially susceptible to social condemnation, as when the community denounces Ketki as a witch. They do so principally because they do not know what else to call a woman who has given birth to a fruit. Hazarika refuses to indulge in such confident judgments. Senehi might appear thoroughly evil, yet she also might be understood to be deranged or mentally ill; one online observer concluded that she was “schizophrenic” (MUBI 2021a). There is insufficient evidence to diagnose what motivates Senehi’s actions, because it remains sufficiently obscure to resist definition. This makes it both more terrifying and fictionally powerful. For Malati to save her daughter, she must break out of the submissive role that society demands; in resolving to disobey her husband’s uncle, she also resolves to kill him. Effectively, the two things amount to the same thing for her, with the same amount of risk. If she disobeys the men in her family, she may as well have done away with them; such would be the condemnation she faces. To break out of the nightmarish cycle in which her husband acquiesces, which currently means her children must be buried alive, she must contemplate an act of violence that will turn the order of things on its head. To change things, she must not only disobey her husband and her uncle but also confirm that resistance by undertaking to break the law and the objective violence it sustains.

However, toward the film’s end, we see that the uncle protected Poonai from the first three evil children. The buried children reveal their evil plans to kill their father:

Boy 1: “My plan has been destroyed by the uncle; I would have strangled father to death at the age of fifteen.”

Boy 2: “At the age of fourteen, I would have hacked father to death.”

Boy 3: “I would have taken all the wealth and poisoned him.” (*Kothanodi* 01:34:57–01:35:12)

As discussed earlier, this raises potential for conflict among the viewers and appears to indicate that the uncle’s authority should have been maintained. Yet Malati was not wrong to refuse to kill her daughter, even if she and her husband did right by following the uncle’s instruction to kill the boys. In taking the radical

decision to kill the uncle if necessary (she hides a knife in her sari), she already ended the vicious cycle of fortune and protection, and took decisions about her life into her own hands. She refused to accept the shaman uncle's authority and was thus prepared to go to any limit to protect her child. Her act of revolutionary violence did not require physical expression but was practically divine in that it remade the coordinates of how she would live. The muttered threats and maledictions are the sound of a masculinist hegemony that is fading.

Conclusion: Film to folklore

Kothanodi is a folkloric film because it adapts film to folklore, rather than the other way around. It emulates folklore's querying of the world and conventional representations of it, finding ways to communicate and complicate at the same time. Hazarika also communicates the adaptive power of folk myths and how they can discover significance over time and in different locations. The global reach of *Kothanodi* was ironically achieved through its intensely local feel, its confident aura of what folkloric Assam felt like. Out of this viewing experience, audiences could notice recognizable and tangible aspects of other local traditions, as well as their ability to offer necessary resistance to the blandly brutal demands of modernity. Its promotion of folklore as a mode of enquiry challenges viewers ethically and existentially, leaving them contemplating the relationship between lived reality and the world of folk imagination.

The comprehension of violence is vital to this film. What might appear fantastic and impossible ultimately becomes comprehensible, even if it also comes with a sense that not everything can be controlled or rationalized. The film summons folk culture and ghosts and asks the audiences to learn from them. The world of folktales, if viewed critically, produces an instructive awareness that communities need to change and reshape according to the exigencies of reality. It exposes the cruelties and perversions that can be protected under cover of beliefs and tradition and demands that they be dismissed. Against this, *Kothanodi* offers the ability of folklore to retell and renew as the only tolerable and productive code to live by. This is a practical lesson rather than a moral one. Nothing ever dies if it is recreated and retold.

NOTES

1. The film talks about four different folktales from Assam. The director interlinks them with each other and in doing so arguably forms a new folktale altogether. The film reflects on the tribulations and afflictions of a range of mother figures, and shows them dealing with their own demons.
2. *Kathā* means story and *nadī* means river. Hence, the title translates as River of Stories.
3. A lower garment for males, a type of sarong wrapped around the waist and legs, that resembles loose trousers made out of a long rectangular piece of cotton cloth.
4. A white-colored piece of rectangular cloth with red embroidery at the ends significant to Assamese culture that is wrapped around the neck.

5. A traditional Assamese sarong worn by women.
6. Assam forests are richly stocked with bamboo canes of various sorts. Bamboo is a hugely significant economic and existential resource in South Asia. Over the years, Assamese people cultivated bamboo for commercial purposes. It represents a large part of household industries.
7. A type of lamp made out of a wooden bowl filled with oil that fuels a wick.
8. Areca nut.
9. Betel leaves.
10. Areca nut and betel leaves are symbols of devotion, respect, and friendship, offered on auspicious occasions.
11. *Outenga* (*outēngā*) is an apple-like fruit mostly eaten by elephants, which is why it is called Elephant Apple in English. Its botanical name is *Dillenia indica*.
12. Mis Marg, comment on *Kothanodi*, directed by Bhaskar Hazarika (MUBI 2021b).
13. Majuli (*mājuli*) is an island in the Brahmaputra River, located in Assam.
14. It is based on Lafcadio Hearn's collection of Japanese ghost stories, most of which are found in his 1904 publication titled *Kwaidon: Stories and Studies of Strange Things*.
15. The people who supported and funded the film.
16. The *outenga* sings a song when it gets lost and feels abandoned.

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AUTHORS

Aashima Rana holds a PhD from Dublin City University in Ireland. Her research interest explores connections between the United States, India, and Ireland, emphasizing folk cultures in these places. She aims at walking down the lane of transcontinental, transnational, transcultural homogenization through orality. She looks at how folklore and its performance critiques the perpetuation of violence and reflects on the novel ways of engaging with history offered by women folk orally, then later in writing. An aspiring folklorist, her interest lies in twentieth-century African American literature, Indian literature, folklore studies, and comparative literature.

Michael Hinds was born in Omagh, Northern Ireland in 1968, and is an associate professor and senior lecturer in the School of English at Dublin City University. He co-edited *Rebound: The American Poetry Book* (Rodopi, 2007) with Stephen Matterson. He also has a particular interest in the poetics of American music culture, and published a book in 2020 (co-authored with Jonathan Silverman) on Johnny Cash's fandom titled *Johnny Cash International: How and Why the World Loves the Man in Black* (University of Iowa, 2020). His most recent publications include essays on cheating scandals in baseball, tricksterism in Seamus Heaney, and the significance of money in the work of John Berryman and Randall Jarrell.

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