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The Politics of Cultural Homogenization and Territorialization: Representation of Northeast in *Tinkle's WingStar Series*

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Abstract

Tinkle, the children's magazine in English in India has been instrumental in shaping the imagination of the young urban Indian child ever since its inception in 1980. No other magazine has the readership and reach that *Tinkle* enjoys with a circulation of more than 3 lakh. The fact that *Tinkle* has survived unlike many other magazines in India for 40 odd years is testimony (marketing strategies aside) of its reach and popularity. *Tinkle*, ever since the days of its founder-editor Anant Pai, has been instrumental in constructing "imagined communities" of national identities for children in India over the decades since the 1970s ever since the *Amar Chitra Kathas*. One such attempt in constructing children's imaginaries is the addition of a series *WingStar* in 2015, scripted by Sean D'mello and inked by Vineet Nair that features Mapui Kawlim, a 13-year-old superhero from Aizwal, Mizoram. While it is empowering that a national mainstream popular magazine for children would feature a female superhero from among the less represented Northeastern states, what is problematic, according to this study, is the manner in which there has been a conscious erasure of all markers of her ethnicity by appropriating her into the larger mainstream homogenised pan-Indian identity of a young female superhero with no specific markers to represent the culture she belongs to. This study will attempt to read this 'sanitised' representation of a Northeastern superhero in the light of the idea of cultural appropriation and deterritorialization and reterritorialization posited by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari that looks at the erasure of specific ethnic and other identities markers. This study will also engage with the implications of how 'sanitised' representations like this in popular narratives would construct and homogenise the imaginaries of the children of a country as they would grow up with erroneous notions of cultural ethnicities and diversity within the country adding to the problematics of marginalisation and hegemonic nationalities.

Keywords: Cultural appropriation, homogenization, *WingStar*, *Tinkle*, Northeast, reterritorialization, identity politics

Introduction

Children's Literature in English in India is a domain that has been immensely popular. Children's magazines have played a formative role in the development of indigenous narratives for children in India. Children's magazines are periodicals published on a weekly, fortnightly, monthly, bi-annual, quarterly or bi-monthly basis and are important sources of education and entertainment for the intellectual development of a child. These publications are targeted at children and preteens around the ages of 4 to 16 years. Children's magazines in India can be loosely classified

as educational and edutainment magazines. About the educational magazines of children, R.E. Abraham writes:

(they focus on) developing the academic and professional skills of the children in terms of knowledge development, domain expertise, self-learning skills, current affairs and enhancing their global perspectives. They attempt to do it through fun and often concentrate on the academic development of the children....The second variety of children's magazines were of the edutainment variety.... These magazines concentrated on the holistic development of the children through developing their creative skills, academic skills, personal, interpersonal and societal skills. (Abraham, 2018, Chapter 3, pp. 23-24)

Ever since the inception of *Chandamama* in 1947, the magazine made a niche for themselves within the Indian households. The English version of the magazine came out in 1955 followed by *Children's World* from Children's Book Trust in 1957. These magazines attempted to engage the children in India with indigenous mythologies and folk tales along with fables and other stories for children. These magazines were followed by *Champak* (1968), *Amar Chitra Kathas* (1969), Pran's Comics, *Lotpot*, *Target* (1979), *Tinkle* and *Gokulam* (1980) and many others like *Children's Digest*, *Magic Pot*, *Chatterbox*, *Thinking*, *Impulse Hoot* and *Toot*, *Heek*, *Mira*, *Active Kids*, *Dimdima*, *Young Bhaskar* and *Brain Tonic*. Over the last few years, some scholarly interest has grown to locate children's literature in India and its representational ethos but almost no research has emerged in the field of magazines for children in India, except for a very few articles on the subject such as "Acculturation and holistic development in children in India: Educative possibilities of children's edutainment magazines in English" (2020) and a monograph on *Children's edutainment magazines in English in India: An overview* (2018) both by R E Abraham. Scholarship has emerged around Hindi children's magazines earlier through the works like Nandini Chandra's *Siting childhood: A study of children's magazines in Hindi 1920-50* (2001).

Among these edutainment magazines, *Tinkle: Where learning meets fun* was the first all-comic children's magazine to emerge in India and to this day it remains one of the most widely circulated, read and accepted magazines for children in India with content that is original and not traditional in nature. Original, here, denotes work that is written by Indian authors targeted at children and not based on pre-texts like mythologies, folk tales and bowdlerisations of classics or other existing literature. *Tinkle* was the culmination of Anant Pai's vision of a magazine that would aid children's development in terms of cultural and social capital (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's terms) and was the brainchild of Subbu Rao, who was *Amar Chitra Katha's* Associate Editor at the time (Abraham, 2018, Chapter 3, p. 47). Through strategic marketing and word-of-mouth publicity *Tinkle* rose to an almost cult status among urban and semi-urban English-speaking children in the 1980s and 1990s. The magazine was for its time a massive 72-page comic meant to entertain and inform. The magazine targeted the whole-person development of a child through stories of informative and scientific content like the Anu Club series, fun and moral development through the *Kalia* series and the *Tantri the Mantri* series, comic and slapstick through the *Suppandi* series and the like. With the advent of the satellite television and consequent development of television content for children in India, *Tinkle* developed e-media strategies like developing e-content through video games and MUDS (Multi-user Domains) and MOOS (MUDS Object-Oriented) early in the late 2000s and has currently diversified into developing animated content on Youtube and the Tinkle

Online Comics with their flagship characters like Shikhari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri, Suppandi and many others. Over a period of time *Tinkle* has diversified and revamped its characters and content to suit contemporary concerns and developments in society. One such development is the addition of the *WingStar* series to the array of stories stabled in *Tinkle*.

This study, as indicated earlier will examine the *WingStar* series collection, volumes 1 and 2 that were serialized as episodic narratives in *Tinkle* from 2015-2020. *WingStar* is the eponymous title of a female superhero comic series featuring Mapui Kawlim, a 13-year old preteen, as a superhero from Aizwa in Mizoram. The writer is Sean D'mello and the artist is Vineet Nair (who is also the Deputy Art Director of *Tinkle*). While the initiative was praised by the media as being an important move in representing voices from the North East, it also drew flak from a lone voice, in an online feature in *The Caravan* magazine by Sukruti Anah Staneley, "Looking East: *Tinkle's* depiction of its new superhero from the Northeast has a long way to go" (2016). The article clearly pointed out the problematics of universalization, generalisation, lack of research to authenticate identities and information, and tokenism in the name of inclusion. In this study in order to understand the representational politics that is operational in the creation and dissemination of this narrative to the masses in India and why such consciously sanitised narratives could do untold damage in contemporary Indian society given the climate of exclusion and dissidence that is growing in the country, I will extend Staneley's observation and locate it within the academic imperatives of understanding children's literature in the Indian context. Homogenising an ethnic culture through the purposeful erasure of its identity markers will not be inclusive or cater to diversity but rather promote a culture of exclusion and stigmatisation that emerges out of a forgetting that does not recognise differences.

Theoretical Frameworks

While it is empowering that a national, mainstream popular magazine for children would feature a female superhero from among the less represented North-Eastern states, what is problematic is the manner in which there has been a conscious erasure of all markers of her ethnicity by appropriating her into the larger mainstream, homogenised pan-Indian identity of a young female superhero with no specific markers other than her name and facial features to represent her ethno-cultural context. This sanitization and appropriation is examined with the help of E. W. Holland's reinterpretation of the frameworks of cultural appropriation and deterritorialization posited by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and also locating it within discourses of nationalism and nationhood as formulated by Michael Billig. The purposeful manner in which *WingStar* is constructed results in the erasure of specific ethnic, regional and other identity markers that reiterate and specify ethnic and regional identities alongside spatial orientations. This study will also engage with the implications of how conscious 'sanitised' representations like these in popular narratives would construct and homogenise the imaginaries of a nation of children who would then grow up with erroneous notions of cultural ethnicities and diversity within the country adding to the problematics of marginalisation and hegemonic nationalisms. In order to do so the study will also examine the frameworks of nation-building and othering as engaged with in the representational works of Sanjib Baruah and Udayon Misra that emerge from and are firmly rooted in the Northeastern region.

Homogenisation and Erasure: Nationalism in *WingStar*

Ideologies operate in constructing and restructuring lives and identities that seem natural and universal. Nations and nationalisms are also part of this ideological constructedness. Billig (1995) writes, "Nationalism is the ideology by which the world of nations has come to seem the natural world - as if there could not possibly be a world without nations." (p. 184). He further adds that national identities are also natural to possess and to remember. Billig writes:

This remembering, nevertheless, involves a forgetting, or rather there is a complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting. ..., this dialectic is important in the banal reproduction of nationalism in established nations...This remembering is simultaneously a collective forgetting: the nation, which celebrates its antiquity, forgets its historical recency. (1995, 185)

Billig points out that this collective and selective amnesia is a complex process where not just the past but the present is also subjective to this deletion. Quoting Langer, Billig gesticulates to the manner in which national identities get established over ages through daily routines that flag the idea of nationhood and that this is often routinized in that they are followed mindlessly to the extent that it becomes forgotten (1995, p. 185). According to Sanjib Baruah, (1999) "the apparent amnesia about identities that compete with official State nationalisms is the legacy of cultural standardisation particularly associated with successful State-building endeavours" (p. 4). One of the parts of this amnesia is also a creation by the intellectuals as Ernest Renan acknowledges in his work, "What is a nation?" (p.251).

Cultural artefacts, like literature, films and other material products, also enable the construction of identities including that of nation and nationalism. In case of children's magazines like *Tinkle*, it has long carried the baton of homogenising ethnic and regional identities to create a pan-Indian identity. This has constructed narratives for children like *Butter Fingers*, *Dental Diaries*, *Shikhari Shambhu*, *Tantri the Mantri*, *Suppandi* and *WingStar* among others where regional and cultural markers are completely absent, or if present, they are non-representational, other than character names and reconstituted location names. Contextualising Billig's idea to *WingStar*, it is interesting to note that this cultural artefact (that of a children's magazine) plays an important role in the collective forgetting of identities and ideas within the nation, especially when it is perpetrated and perpetuated through childhood into adulthood. In the construction of this narrative of history through a children's literary text, what is forgotten is the true nature of diversity, leading to the birth of a sanitised version of diversity that homogenises ethnic and regional identity indicators. This creates a "banal" (Baudrillard) diversity that subsumes the ethnic and regional variations into the realms of a dominant nationalism that prefers to erase and forget difference. Children growing up reading *WingStar* would understand that diversity is actually not so diverse and all cultures are quite like each other. This becomes problematic in the context of a multicultural, multireligious, multilinguistic and multiethnic nation like India.

In order, to be remembered and included in the national imaginary, the categories of its existence have to be reproduced and in the same manner, in order to be forgotten, the categories of erasure too have to be constantly reproduced, which is infinitely possible in an infinite series like that of *WingStar* which is periodised in the fortnightly *Tinkle*. In *WingStar*, all indices of difference except

that of the names of people and the state are erased and the “female superhero from Mizoram” can be dislocated or relocated against the cultural locus of any state within the country as she is presented as generic or universal. She is a ‘female superhero’ who incidentally belongs to a state in India, Mizoram. There has been a conscious effort to equalise Mizoram and the Mizo character, Mapui Kawlim in the name of inclusivity and this inclusiveness operates through erasure and a certain elision. There seems to be an attempt to bring the Northeast into the consciousness of the ‘mainstream’ by representing it as any other state. This elides over ethnic and cultural heterogeneity and homogenises not just Northeastern identities as a whole but also situates it within a larger pan-Indian identity rubric. Throughout the series across various issues of *Tinkle* there is no mention of anything specific that would locate WingStar as quintessentially Mizo or as hailing from Mizoram, a state underrepresented in mainstream children’s literature. Other than the name of the central character, Mapui Kawlim, and the town she is located in as Aizwa, suitably changed from Aizawl to make it sound more generic, and which according to the writer of *WingStar* Sean D’mello is “just a city” (qtd in Staneley, 2016), young Kawlim is just any other female superhero from any part of the country, and for that matter from any part of the world. D’mello comments in an interview, “At *Tinkle*, we never use the original name of cities or towns. This is primarily because it gives us the freedom to do what we want in a story” (D’mello, 2022). With respect to the name of Mapui, in order to be a Mizo name, Mapui should be spelt Mapuii. Her father’s name Tashi and their last name Kawlim are not Mizo names, which in addition to the fact that most Mizos do not employ last names but second names that are indicative of clans, (qtd in Staneley, 2016) which point to a disjuncture. Later in “Strange sightings”, an episode from *WingStar*, the Reiek mountains, a tourist destination of Aizawl, is denoted as Relek mountains. This episode is also interesting in that, the identity of Mizoram as a state is established and reiterated through mythical creatures and Relek mountains, but their protection is dependent on the non-Mizo characters of the Tinkle Toons universe, along with Mapui, of course (Vol. 1, 2018, pp. 42-49). The only distinguishing feature that marks Mapui’s identity as a Mizo is her facial features or rather the representation of her eyes and the eyes of most characters in the narrative. But even this is done in the caricaturish style and not the realistic style, which brings with it the problematics of exaggeration (Fig 1 and Fig 2). Needless to say, every other distinguishing ethnic feature is erased while the eyes become the centre-point of the character’s features and identity, which gets further accentuated when she dons her WingStar power suit which then displays her eyes naturally and prominently. This seems to be a kind of “visual orientalism” (qtd in Baruah, 2021, p. 10) when taken in conjunction with the fact that there seems to be no other identity marker that distinguishes these characters from Mizoram.



Fig 1. *WingStar: The reluctant superhero*. Vol. 1, 2018, p.9. | Fig. 2. *WingStar: The reluctant superhero*. Vol. 1, 2018, p.5

In another instance of elision, the episode "Stranger sightings" (a metafictional narrative) features the *pheiccham*, a one-legged mythical forest being, belonging to Mizo folklore, that is purported to bring good fortune to those who seek and catch it (Pheiccham: The story, n.d.). But even in this instance of the *WingStar* narrative which is set in Mizoram, they get subsumed in the story under the other Tinkle Toon characters featured, such as Shikhari Shambhu, Tantri the Mantri and Billy the fangless vampire as it is they alongside Mapui who seek to rescue these mystical creatures from the clutches of the villain Rasha. There is no description of what a *pheiccham* is with respect to Mizo culture and lore and at one point, Mapui herself dismisses them as "the so-called pheicchams are just a new species" (*WingStar*, Vol.1, p. 46).

These interventions were purposeful, and according to D'mello and the editor of *Tinkle* at the time of *WingStar's* inception, Rajni Thindiath, they "did not want to directly represent or misrepresent a particular clan" (qtd. in Staneley, 2016). When D'mello was asked why specific aspects of the Northeastern identity do not come through in *WingStar*, he indicates that while presenting a character from the Northeast was an aim, "WingStar is a superhero who doesn't want to be a superhero. That was her fundamental purpose, to find a way to balance expectation and her own desires. It was this aspect of the storyline that we chose to focus on when writing her stories" (D'mello, 2022). D'mello also responds to why Mizoram was chosen for *WingStar's* setting saying, "Tinkle Toons do not only live and have adventures in their place of birth. They travel the country and in *WingStar's* case internationally to complete a variety of missions" (D'mello, 2022). All these strategic decisions by the makers of *WingStar* result in a cultural product where all specific ethnic identity markers are erased and elided over as if they do not matter or exist and will thus not

introduce the children to anything specific to Mizoram or Mizo culture. It becomes a generic story of a superhero who incidentally is female, hails from India and more specifically Mizoram, a state in India. Erased in this process is the history of marginalisation and under-representation that Mizoram along with other Northeastern states are subjected to within the mainstream literature and media, particularly with respect to children's literature, television and film in India.

To place this problematic of homogenisation and monolithic nationalism in perspective it is important to look at this issue through writers and political scientists who write about the centre-state politics in the Northeast. Udayon Misra, a writer and critic from Assam, while talking about the national imaginary about the North-East and its identities, states, "such monolithic conceptions about a region which stands out for its diversity of cultures and civilizations would only help to nourish the biases and prejudices..." (2013, p. 3). According to Misra in his book *India's North-East: Identity, movements, state and civil society* (2014) such a construction of nationalism has a historic lineage that goes back to the immediate months and years in post-independence India. Misra writes:

Those who had taken over power from the British at Delhi and were immersed in the streams of Indian cultural nationalism, were, therefore, not in a position to acknowledge, let alone try to understand and appreciate the different strands of alternate nationalism that were present in the northeastern part of the country... (2014, p. 9)

He points out that the nascent Indian nation may have been ill-equipped and unwilling to tackle the "demands of pluralism and the multi-ethnic nature of our polity" due to their tendency to gauge things through "a highly centralised focal point" (Misra, 2014, p. 28). The tendency over the years, as a result, is to attempt to integrate the states in the Northeastern region of India into the 'Indian mainstream' or to make them part of the 'great Indian tradition' (Misra, 2014, p. 74), as can be seen in the attempt to situate certain communities from Northeast India within ancient scriptures (2014, p. 79). *Tinkle* through *WingStar* seems to fall prey to this politics of integration, not by situating it within the larger discourse of "Hindu cultural nationalism" (Baruah, 2021, pp. 16-17), but by ignoring all cultural and regional specificities in order to 'integrate' it into the larger national imaginary. Though it is to be noted that the magazine is egalitarian in erasing all markers of ethnicity or regional specificities within its pages, however, what is problematic, is that it seems to have for the first time posited a specific geographic and cultural marker for one of its series to mark the 'inclusivity' the editors have aimed at and then have proceeded 'naturally' to erase all identity and cultural markers of the region.

Sanjib Baruah in his evocative accounts of the history of the Northeast, refers to the 'othering' of the states in the Northeastern region of the country. He points out that the language of 'other'ing that permeates the official central government documents, national media accounts about what happens in the Northeastern part of the nation and popular culture references that further otherises the states in the Northeast. Baruah points out the vocabulary in government documents that state that the region in time will "catch-up and become part of the 'national mainstream'" (2021, p. 44) indicating that in the national imagination the states of the Northeast "appear as a periphery" that are to develop and "catch-up" with the 'mainstream' (2021, p. 188). Quoting Mrinal Miri, Baruah states that, "the metaphor of the mainstream is a powerful hindrance to the understanding of India" (2021, p. 180). The arrival of *WingStar* within the Tinkle Universe serves

as a moment for the Northeast to 'catch-up', it has now arrived in the living-rooms of children and *Tinkle* has become an agent to facilitate that moment. This moment is important considering the three lakhs per issue (as in 2019) circulation of *Tinkle* across 400 towns in India. Therefore, arriving in the Tinkle Universe would metaphorically herald an arrival into the psyches of the young Indians, for many among whom this would be their first cultural introduction to Mizoram or any of the states in the Northeastern region for that matter. In contextualising the *WingStar* within the larger Tinkle Universe imaginary, the diversity, plurality, multilingualistic and multiethnic identities of the region are levelled out, appropriated and erased to serve the 'national mainstream' and a rhetoric is established that tells the young reader that the people of the Northeastern regions in India are the 'same like you'. Extrapolating from Baruah and Misra's histories of the Northeastern regions, it is interesting to note that *WingStar* does not touch upon themes of insurgency or separatist movements that are part of the dominant discourses and cultural history of the region. It is interesting to note that Mapui Kawlim as *WingStar* is a vigilante superhero in a state which has cracked down hard on vigilantism. But Mapui is redeemed in that she along with her father and mother, Tashi and Kyati Kawlim work hand-in-hand with the State, through the state agency of the police forces of the region. Effort is made by the makers of *WingStar* to situate and locate her identity within the boundaries of the state machinery, with the police time and again turning to her for help, which validates her position. It is reiterated that Tashi Kawlim is an innovator who refused to sell his inventions to the "private arms manufacturer" Baik Sailo (Vol. 2, 2020, p. 1) but at the same time assists the police through his inventions. The State, in this narrative, takes on a glorified and glorifying position.

The cultural forgetfulness that is generally associated with successful state-building seems to be receding (Baruah, 1999, p. 4) and this brings in its wake a resurgence of memories and the need to imprint them into the national consciousness. *Tinkle* via *WingStar* joins the bandwagon to culturally represent the nation and its diversity but it still constitutes Mizoram within the larger amnesiac history of nation-building. All constructions of nationhoods involve projects of cultural hegemony and a pan-Indian national identity that is achieved through differences being 'assimilated or destroyed' (Baruah, 1999, p. 9). In all this, we can observe the creation of a banal nationalism that subsumes all differences and seeks to establish a non-heterogenous notion of identities and nationhood and in which *WingStar* becomes a part of this project of nation-building.

The Politics of Deterritorialization: Situating *WingStar* within the Tinkle Toons universe

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their seminal works ranging from *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) to *A thousand plateaus* (1980) re-examines Lacanian notions of territorialization and extends its use from within the psychological milieu and register to the social. This discussion will adopt E. W. Holland's response to Deleuze and Guattari's work in the 1970s and '80s to examine *WingStar*. It will concentrate on the social deployment of the notion of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization extending its use from the purview of the libidinal to human investment of energy in all kinds of activities ranging from the perceptual, cognitive, artistic, productive and physical (Holland, 1991, p. 57). According to Holland, Deleuze and Guattari, while examining the

rhizomatic relations of power in society, argue that capitalism is not the only power that deterritorializes but that all operations of power in society do so. (Holland, 1991, p.57). In *A thousand plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari re-examine the notions of deterritorialization and reterritorialization not as binaries but as immanent structures within diverse semiotic processes (Holland, 1991, p. 59). Capitalism for Deleuze and Guattari is a prime agent for deterritorialization (Holland, 1991, p. 64). In the context of *WingStar* and Mizo ethnic identities for the establishment of a certain pan-Indian identity, one can argue that nationalism is an agent for deterritorialization and a problematic reterritorialization through a process of cultural erasure of ethnic markers, in that, all specific Mizo identities are deterritorialized and reterritorialized as an absence/presence in *WingStar*.

Northeast is often "imagined as an internal other" (Baruah, 2021, p. 12). This internal "othering" is evident in the manner in which the state machinery has designed policies for the Northeast. And as Baruah, mirroring Miri, points out, "human beings do not have a policy toward family members or friends (Baruah, 2021, p. 13). In *WingStar* one can see a duality at work, a recognition of the 'other' and a fear of the same 'other'. This gets expressed in the recognition of the need for narratives from the Northeast. The fear is manifest in the attempt to homogenise ethnic and cultural differences into a "just like any other" structure. The desire to recognise the 'other' manifests itself in the fact that these narratives are written and illustrated by people who do not culturally belong, who invest in themselves the power to represent this 'other' they feel requires representation. But this recognition does not at the same time extend to representing the cultural and ethnic markers specific to Mizoram and the Mizo community in which the narratives and characters are set. There is a deliberate way in which racial discrimination against the people from Mizoram and other Northeastern states are glossed over in order to not "offend people" (Staneley, 2016). The narrative turns into another Enid Blyton-esque adventure fantasy where Mapui fights against the modern-day crime using technological interventions that grant her an edge over all other characters. It is interesting how her superhero powers are all because of the power-suit and extensions her father customises for her and not because she has something inherent within herself that enables her to be a superhero. She is not represented as a character who has a sense of justice, but she is portrayed as a young girl who is frivolous and boastful, not in the least accommodating of other's opinions and full of herself. In this sense, she seems not in the least a superhero material. The sense of heroism and valour that ideally characterises a superhero is constantly demystified by her representation as a young girl who can lie to get out of doing her homework, who does not want to save the world but would rather have sleepovers and watch a TV series. She seems to be full of false bravado as she faces a temperamental villain and declares, "Come at me! Let me show you what I can do" (Vol 1, 2018, p. 19). She is visualised in this scene with her arms folded across her chest and it is also striking that she has come to face this villain ignoring her father's instructions to stay at home. She seems narcissistic when she tells her friends that they could pass their time during their sleepover by watching news reports documenting "all her heroic acts" (Vol. 1, 2018, p. 23). She is portrayed as unwilling to change and experiment when she attempts to persuade her dad to give her the same power-suit rather than a revamped version. Through these and other instances in the narrative we see that Mapui Kawlim is deterritorialized from the normative superheroes of fictional worlds and reterritorialised in peculiar ways within the Tinkle Toons universe.

Within the Tinkle Toons universe, all ethnic and cultural markers and differences are wiped out, nothing differentiates the characters in terms of specific cultural or regional identities. Within this Universe the characters are reduced to a pan-Indian Tinkle toon character with idiosyncrasies and not so likeable traits. This is symptomatic of the Tinkle Toons universe, take for example Tinkle Toon characters like Shikhari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri, Suppandi and others. None of them have any specific identity or cultural markers and neither are they like the conventional heroes or central characters of children's narratives. Shambu wins against villains through sheer force of circumstances and not through his intelligence or efforts, Tantri fails in all endeavours not for want of intelligence or cunning but through a set of circumstances, Suppandi is a hero for his witticisms that are more stupid than witty and there is Mapui Kawlim who wins only because of her power-suit, without which often than not and even despite it many a time her friends have to step in to save her from the clutches of the villains (Vol.1 & 2). The reterritorialization of Mapui Kawlim within the Tinkle Toons universe becomes apparent in the episode titled "Strange sightings" (Vol. 1, 2018, pp. 42-49) where Mapui is situated within the Tinkle Toon universe as a foil to Shikhari Shambu, Tantri the Mantri and Billy, the Fangless Vampire. All of these Tinkle Toons characters are involved, in their own bizarre and slapstick styles, in solving the case of the *pheicchams*. In the regular schema, this homogenisation then would not seem problematic unless one examines the avowed reason for the introduction of a narrative based in the Northeast. According to D'mello, the major reason for introducing *WingStar* set in Mizoram was "to showcase Northeastern culture, backgrounds, people—how they talk, how they look, they behave" (qtd in Staneley, 2016).

In *WingStar* we see deterritorialization and reterritorialization at work. Mizoram, as a state from the Northeastern region, which is under-represented in literature and children's literature, is problematically 'redeemed' from this under-representation in a quintessential *Tinkle* manner through its appropriation into the Tinkle Toons universe. Aizawl is reterritorialised in this process as Aizwa, Mapui as Mapui, Kawlim, a non Mizo surname attributed to her and all other social, cultural, ethnic and geographical markers which are obliterated in the process of this reterritorialization. According to D'mello, "Tinkle Toons are written with a universal narrative in mind. We want every reader to see themselves in the characters" (D'mello, 2022). In this process of recontextualization the narrative loses credibility with respect to its avowal to represent and showcase the Northeast and privileges a certain homogenisation that is the dominant ideology of nationalism. Mapui and her world gets recoded in this process into "just a female superhero from the Northeast" and her specific locale as "just a city", both now almost ahistorical entities that exist 'harmoniously' within the Tinkle Toons universe.

Conclusion

One of the major problems that could possibly arise from this scenario would be an indigenization that is pan-Indian, an Indianization over Mizoization, that could lead to the erasure of ethnic and cultural specificities of Northeastern states and identities among children who read and engage with only mainstream media. The banal nationalism that gets enacted in the pages of *WingStar* is just another in a long chain of cultural and political hegemony enacted upon the body of a state located in the Northeastern region. In the case of *Tinkle*, Mizoram joins the long list of such homogenisation and cultural decluttering that guides the editorial policy of the magazine, which

is to represent diversity but to not make it seem very diverse. In *WingStar*, *Tinkle* continues its history of recognising unity as a subsumption of identities into a pan-Indian and ubiquitous entity and generalising differences as present in every state and not touching upon specifics, in order to not disengage its readership. This positionality mirrors what Misra talks about when he says that the Indian middle class are yet to change from their narrow equations into a “truly liberal urban space. ... Therefore, old mindsets and perceptions continue to hold sway and there seems to be little space for plurality of cultures and alternate nationalisms” (2014, p.6). In this process, a breed of young minds would develop who do not recognise differences and would confront differences with suspicion and fear. But, “social, linguistic, and regional plurality must be seen as essential to the task of nation-building.... The perception of India as a country must be broadened to include nationalities which have been at the periphery, culturally, politically, and economically (Misra, 2014, pp. 82-23). What is important is not an ethnic nationalism which is a “commodified surplus” (Billig, 1995, p. 195) but an inclusive nationalism that acknowledges and respects differences of culture and ethnicities “without being integrated” (Misra, 2014, p.6) that can be built in the minds of children through inclusive narrativization that does not purposefully erase differences and ethnic markers.

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