

Towards Inclusive Societies: Representation of Agony and Assertion of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

Prof.V.Nirmala¹ and Prof. Y.S.Sharada²

¹Department of English, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, A.P., India.

²Department of English, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, A.P., India.

Corresponding Author: Prof.V.Nirmala

Received: 15-04-2026

Accepted: 05-05-2026

Abstract

Indian cinema has increasingly become a critical cultural space for articulating the lived realities of queer communities, negotiating between marginalization and self-assertion. This paper examines the representation of queer identities in five significant films—*NaanuAvanallaAvalu*, *Aligarh*, *Njan Marykutty*, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, and *Amma's Pride*—to explore how cinematic narratives portray both the agony of exclusion and the assertion of identity within heteronormative frameworks.

Drawing on queer theory and subaltern studies, the paper analyses how these films foreground experiences of social stigma, familial alienation, legal struggles, and psychological trauma, while also highlighting moments of resilience, resistance, and self-fashioning. *NaanuAvanallaAvalu*, *Aligarh* and *Njan Marykutty* trace the deeply personal journeys of transgender individuals negotiating identity, dignity, and societal acceptance, emphasizing the intersection of gender, class, and regional contexts. In contrast, *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* employs mainstream Bollywood idioms to normalize same-sex relationships, using humour and familial conflict to challenge entrenched prejudices. *Amma's Pride*, as a short film, offers an intimate portrayal of maternal acceptance, reframing queer identity within the affective domain of family.

The study argues that these films collectively mark a shift from earlier stereotypical and caricatured depictions toward more nuanced, empathetic, and politically conscious representations. They function not merely as sites of representation but as agents of social change, contributing to the ongoing discourse on inclusivity, rights, and recognition in contemporary India. By mapping the trajectory from invisibility and victimhood to visibility and assertion, this paper underscores the transformative potential of cinema in fostering inclusive societies and reimagining the cultural politics of gender and sexuality.

Key Words: Queer cinema, Indian films, transgender identity, representation, subaltern studies, inclusivity, gender politics.

Introduction

Like any other major streams of entertainment, Indian cinema has also historically mirrored the dominant social structures of the society since its inception. For decades, queer identities were either invisible or caricatured within mainstream narratives. LGBTQ+ individuals were frequently portrayed as comic relief, deviant figures, or tragic anomalies, reflecting the heteronormative and patriarchal values entrenched in society. However, the emergence of what can be called “subaltern cinema”—films that foreground marginalized voices—has gradually opened space for more nuanced representations of gender and sexual minorities. LGBTQ+ individuals can be understood as occupying a subaltern position within heteronormative societies as per Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of the subaltern as those whose voices are systematically suppressed. Indian films in recent years have begun to articulate the anguish, discrimination, and struggles for dignity faced by queer communities, while also portraying their resistance and assertion of identity.

This paper examines five significant films—*Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*, *Aligarh*, *NaanuAvanalla...Avalu*, *Njan Marykutty*, and *Amma's Pride*—to explore how Indian cinema represents LGBTQ+ anguish and assertion as part of a broader subaltern discourse oriented towards their inclusion in the society.

Queer Identities as Subaltern Voices in Indian Society: The LGBTQ+ community in India has historically been marginalized through social stigma, legal oppression, and cultural invisibility. The criminalization of homosexuality under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code until its decriminalization in 2018 reinforced the notion that queer identities were deviant and illegitimate.

Cinema, as a powerful cultural medium, played a significant role in perpetuating these stereotypes. However, the post-2010 cinematic landscape began to challenge these representations, especially after the landmark

Towards Inclusive Societies:
Representation of Agony and Assertion
of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

judgment by the Supreme Court of India in the Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India case. Against this backdrop the following films are critically analyzed.

1. Nanu AvanallaAvalu
2. Aligarh
3. Njan Marykutty
4. Shubhmangal Zyada Saavdhan
5. Amma's Pride

The films discussed in this paper represent a shift from mockery to empathy, from invisibility to representation, and from victimhood to assertion.

1.Naanu Avanalla...Avalu: From Marginalization to Selfhood,the transgender quest for identity and dignity

Naanu Avanalla...Avalu (I am not a he... I am a she) is a 2015 Indian Kannada-language film directed by B. S. Lingadevaru, based on Living Smile Vidya's autobiographical work *I am Vidya*. Based on the life of Living Smile Vidya, a transgender woman, the film revolves around her life as she, growing up as a boy, cherishes her feminine characteristics and begins living as a woman and depicts the life of the transgender community in Indian society.*Naanu Avanalla...Avalu* is a tribute to everyone whose everyday life is a struggle. The film focuses on a transgender woman, who is destined to have a life of neglect and disappointment.

On a regular patrol in Bangalore, the night duty police catches few transgender prostitutes who are waiting for customers. An innocent transgender person by the name of Vidya, who was walking towards her home, is also caught. The inspector asks Vidhya about why she is living this life. Then the movie switches to a boy called Madesha.

Madesha is a 10-year-old boy lives in a small village. He exhibits feminine behaviours, and some of his schoolmates bully him. At home, his parents and elder sister support him and want him to study well and become a respected person in the society. One day the enthusiastic Madesha wears his sister's costumes and acts girlish. His father sees him and advises him to be like a man and not play a female role even in dramas. After few years, his sister gets married and moves to Bangalore. Some villagers learn of Madesha's girl-like behaviour and complain to his father to take him to a doctor or a priest. Meanwhile, Madesha fails in his college exams and develops a crush on his friend Govinda who is a boy. Madesha's father scolds him for his failure in education and highlights his girl-like behaviour. Madesha leaves the village and moves to Bangalore to live with his sister's family.

He gets a job in Bangalore and completes his Master of Arts through evening college. He finds it difficult to live like a man and is often bullied by people in Bangalore for his girlish behaviour. One day he befriends someone at the bus stop who is also feminine, who takes Madesha to his house.

Madesha shows total uneasiness living as a man and wishes to become a woman. He meets the head of the transgender community, Danamma, and asks for her help. Danamma send Madesha to Pune to be with her associate Nani; there, Madesha transforms and is renamed Vidhya.

Vidhya is forced to beg to earn her livelihood. She takes Nirvana (sexual reassignment surgery). Vidhya rejects prostitution and wishes to work, but employers discriminate against transgender people. One day she is beaten up and thrown out of a train while begging. Vidhya moves back to her native village, but Vidhya's sister and parents are stunned to see her in the new look and reject her. They force her to come back as Madesha, but Vidhya rejects that by stating she wants to live and die as a girl. She says goodbye to them and leaves.

The movie switches to the present. The police inspector, after hearing Vidhya's/Madesha's story, assures her a job of an assistant to his friend who is a film director. The movie ends with real pictures of Vidhya who becomes successful and campaigns for rights of transgender people.

Within the framework of subaltern studies, the film foregrounds the voice of a community historically silenced and marginalized. By presenting the lived experiences of a transgender individual, the film transforms the transgender subject from an object of ridicule or curiosity into a speaking subject, thus challenging dominant social narratives.

The Subaltern location of transgender Identity can be seen in the title itself—"I am not him... I am her"—symbolizes the protagonist's struggle for recognition. The phrase reflects the internal conflict between biological assignment and psychological identity.

In Indian society, transgender individuals are often pushed to the margins due to rigid social structures that recognize only male and female identities. The film situates the protagonist Vidya within this subaltern space, where her identity is neither acknowledged nor respected. The transgender community fits this framework of subalternity because their voices are frequently suppressed by social stigma, legal barriers, and cultural discrimination.

It can further be connected to her childhood trauma and social alienation as the film begins with Vidya's childhood, where she experiences confusion and alienation because her gender identity does not align with the expectations placed upon her.

Her feminine behaviour becomes a source of ridicule among peers and family members. Instead of understanding her psychological struggle, society labels her as abnormal. This early stage of the narrative highlights how social institutions—family, school, and community—become instruments of exclusion. The humiliation faced by Vidya reflects the broader condition of transgender individuals in India, where gender nonconformity is often met with violence and ostracism.

Unable to endure constant humiliation, Vidya eventually leaves home. Her journey to the city represents a common trajectory among transgender individuals who are forced to migrate due to family rejection. In urban spaces, she encounters the transgender community and learns about their survival strategies. The film realistically portrays the harsh socio-economic conditions faced by transgender people, who are often forced into begging or sex work due to lack of employment opportunities. This segment of the narrative reveals structural marginalization, where the denial of education and employment pushes transgender individuals into precarious livelihoods.

Gender transition as an act of assertion is visualized in Vidya's decision to undergo gender-affirming surgery which becomes a turning point in the narrative. Rather than portraying the transition as sensational or tragic, the film treats it as an act of self-realization and resistance. This transformation represents the protagonist's determination to live authentically despite societal opposition. The act of claiming her identity becomes a powerful assertion against the rigid gender norms imposed by society. Through this narrative arc, the film reframes transgender identity not as deviation but as a legitimate expression of human identity.

Social recognition and the struggle for dignity becomes a major challenge in Vidya's post-transition phase. Even after her transition, Vidya continues to face discrimination in employment and social acceptance. The film highlights the bureaucratic and legal challenges faced by transgender individuals when seeking official recognition of their gender identity. Her struggle underscores the gap between legal frameworks and social attitudes. While the law may provide certain protections, societal prejudice continues to deny transgender individuals their rightful dignity.

What makes *Naanu Avanalla... Avalu* a significant subaltern film is its narrative perspective. The story is told from the viewpoint of the transgender protagonist, allowing audiences to experience the world through her eyes. This narrative strategy disrupts traditional cinematic portrayals where transgender characters appear only as peripheral figures. Instead, the film places the marginalized subject at the centre of the narrative.

The film thus challenges the question posed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—"Can the subaltern speak?"—by providing a cinematic platform where the transgender voice is heard with empathy and authenticity. The film employs a realist narrative style that avoids melodrama and sensationalism. Its focus on everyday struggles—education, employment, family relationships—makes the narrative deeply relatable. Through its portrayal of discrimination and resilience, the film critiques the rigid gender norms that structure Indian society. It also exposes the hypocrisy of a culture that claims moral superiority while denying basic human dignity to marginalized communities.

Naanu Avanalla...Avalu stands as one of the most important cinematic texts representing transgender experiences in Indian cinema. By narrating the life of Vidya, the film brings visibility to a community that has long been relegated to the margins. The film ultimately moves from anguish to assertion—from a childhood marked by rejection to an adult identity defined by courage and self-acceptance.

Towards Inclusive Societies:
Representation of Agony and Assertion
of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

As a subaltern narrative, the film challenges dominant heteronormative structures and demands recognition, dignity, and equality for transgender individuals. In doing so, it contributes to the broader project of creating inclusive societies where marginalized voices are finally acknowledged and respected.

2. *ALIGARH*: An exploration of the agony of queer identity and social marginalization

The Hindi film *Aligarh*, directed by Hansal Mehta, is a poignant exploration of sexuality, privacy, and social exclusion in contemporary India. Based on real-life events, the film narrates the story of Ramchandra Siras, a professor at Aligarh Muslim University who was suspended after his private life as a gay man exposed by media. From the perspective of subaltern studies, the film highlights how LGBTQ individuals often occupy marginalized positions within society. Their voices are suppressed not only by legal structures but also by social stigma and cultural prejudice. The narrative of *Aligarh* thus reflects the struggle of a subaltern subject who seeks dignity and recognition in a society that refuses to accept his identity.

The powerful performances by Manoj Bajpayee as Dr. Siras and Rajkummar Rao as journalist Deepu Sebastian further deepen the emotional and political significance of the film.

The film revolves around Dr. Shrinivas Ramchandra Siras, a Marathi professor working in the Department of Classical Modern Indian Languages at Aligarh Muslim University. His life takes a tragic turn when university authorities secretly record a video of him engaging in a consensual relationship with another man in his private residence.

The video is leaked to the media, leading to his suspension from the university on charges of “immoral conduct.” The incident becomes a national controversy, raising questions about privacy, sexuality, and moral policing.

Amidst this crisis, a young journalist named Deepu Sebastian becomes interested in Siras’s case and begins investigating the injustice he faces. Through their interactions, the film reveals the emotional isolation, fear, and humiliation experienced by LGBTQ individuals in a conservative society.

Eventually, Siras challenges the university’s decision in court. The Allahabad High Court rules in his favour, stating that the university has violated his fundamental right to privacy. However, before he can resume his duties, Siras is found dead under mysterious circumstances, leaving behind a tragic reminder of the struggles faced by marginalized identities. In *Aligarh*, Dr. Siras embodies the subaltern subject whose identity is marginalized due to his sexuality.

Unlike many mainstream films that sensationalize LGBTQ themes, *Aligarh* presents a quiet and introspective narrative. The film focuses on loneliness, vulnerability, and the desire for dignity rather than dramatic activism. Dr. Siras’s character reflects the condition described by subaltern theorists: a marginalized individual whose voice struggles to be heard within dominant institutions such as the university, media, and legal system.

The film opens with a disturbing scene where journalists and university officials secretly enter Siras’s house and record his private moment with another man. This scene highlights the violation of privacy and the moral policing imposed on LGBTQ individuals. The intrusive camera represents society’s surveillance over marginalized identities. From a subaltern perspective, the scene demonstrates how institutions exercise power over individuals whose lifestyles deviate from normative expectations.

Several scenes depict Siras’s isolation in his apartments, sitting alone in his apartment, listening to old Hindi songs and drinking quietly. These moments emphasize the emotional solitude experienced by many LGBTQ individuals who cannot openly express their identities. The cinematography uses dim lighting and minimal dialogue to convey his isolation, reinforcing the idea that the subaltern subject exists on the margins of society.

Conversation between Deepu and Siras reflects Siras’s inhibitive nature. In one of the most memorable scenes, journalist Deepu interviews Siras and asks him about his sexuality. Siras responds calmly: “I like men. That is my personal matter.” This scene is powerful because it normalizes homosexuality without sensationalism. Siras refuses to justify his identity to society, asserting his right to personal freedom. The scene also represents a rare moment where the subaltern voice is heard without distortion.

The Allahabad High Court’s scene in which the verdict says that the university has violated Siras’s fundamental right to privacy, reflects the tension between traditional moral codes and constitutional rights. The judgment symbolizes a moment of institutional recognition for marginalized identities. However, the victory feels

incomplete because social prejudice remains deeply entrenched. Shortly after the court victory, Siras is found dead in his apartment signifying that the ambiguous circumstances of his death highlight the psychological toll of social humiliation and exclusion.

The ending underscores the tragic reality that legal recognition alone cannot immediately transform societal attitudes toward marginalized communities. It is understood that the attitudinal change in the society towards the Queers should also be needed.

Unlike stereotypical portrayals of LGBTQ characters in mainstream Indian cinema, *Aligarh* adopts a sensitive and realistic approach. The film avoids caricature and instead presents homosexuality as a natural aspect of human identity. Dr. Siras is portrayed not as a political activist but as a gentle and introspective individual who simply seeks the freedom to live without fear. This nuanced representation challenges dominant narratives that often marginalize LGBTQ individuals.

Within the framework of subaltern cinema, *Aligarh* represents a shift away from dominant narratives toward stories centered on marginalized identities. The film challenges heteronormative assumptions and exposes the violence of social stigma. By focusing on the personal struggles of an LGBTQ individual, it invites audiences to confront the injustices faced by sexual minorities. By portraying the emotional, social, and institutional challenges faced by LGBTQ individuals, the film exposes the mechanisms through which marginalized voices are silenced. As a subaltern narrative, *Aligarh* emphasizes the importance of dignity, privacy, and human rights. It reminds viewers that the struggle for equality extends beyond legal reforms to include the transformation of societal attitudes.

3. *Njan Marykutty: Claiming the Self and the Transgender Identity*

The Malayalam film *Njan Marykutty* (2018), directed by Ranjith Sankar and starring Jayasoorya, is a significant cinematic text that foregrounds transgender identity within mainstream Indian cinema. From the perspective of Subaltern Studies, the film portrays the struggle of a marginalized individual seeking recognition, dignity, and social legitimacy. The protagonist Marykutty represents a subaltern subject whose voice has historically been suppressed within patriarchal and heteronormative social structures.

The film examines how a transgender individual negotiates family rejection, social stigma, institutional barriers, and personal identity, thereby transforming the narrative from one of victimhood to assertion and empowerment. The film aims to educate the audience on various issues faced by transgender people, highlighting the distinction between being transgender and undergoing surgery to align with one's gender identity. It portrays the emotional and physical trauma experienced by transgender individuals and their families, inflicted by societal and governmental oppression. Through its narrative, the film sheds light on the challenges and resilience of the transgender community.

The story follows Mathukutty, assigned male at birth, undergoes sex reassignment surgery and becomes Marykutty, a transgender woman. She leaves her job in Chennai and returns to her hometown. While her father and sister disown her due to her sexuality, her mother continues to support her. Marykutty lives with her friend Jovi and Jovi's child, Tanu. Determined to set an example in society, she aspires to become a sub-inspector and joins a coaching institute to prepare for the exam. Despite being mistreated by her peers daily, she perseveres and also joins the church's radio programme, eventually becoming the host of the show "Jingle" under the name RJ Angel.

One day, while traveling with her colleague RJ Alwin Henry, they encounter S.I. Kunjippalu, a corrupt police officer who demands a bribe. When Marykutty questions his actions, she is mistreated by the officers, leading to a conflict between her and Kunjippalu.

Marykutty rises to fame as a radio jockey in her town, with her program becoming a significant success. However, her application to the Kerala Public Service Union is rejected due to a lack of gender-related certificates. One night, while fulfilling Tanu's wish to buy Al-Faham chicken, Marykutty is harassed by a group of youngsters. SI Kunjipallu intervenes, taking her to the station and humiliating her. Her father visits the station and urges her to leave. Devastated, Marykutty is eventually released with the help of a church father, but her reputation is tarnished by negative portrayals in the local newspapers.

After this, Marykutty moves to a church-run home, where she tutors children. She visits her mother one day, unaware that her sister's engagement ceremony is taking place. Her father and sister disown her, introducing her as an "Unknown" to the guests. Despite being hurt, Marykutty leaves with a smile, telling her mother they will

Towards Inclusive Societies:
Representation of Agony and Assertion
of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

accept her one day. Leveraging her fame as RJ Angel, she befriends the District Collector, who helps her with her application and offers support.

With firm determination, Marykutty diligently prepares for her exam, successfully passing both the written and physical tests. When SI Kunjipallu threatens to defame her, she bravely asserts that "the world is for the talented, not just for men or women." Marykutty assures her sister's fiancé that she will not interfere in their lives and promises to give her share to her sister.

During her interview for the sub-inspector position, Marykutty states her desire to set an example and successfully achieves her goal. In the end, Marykutty is shown as a police officer, returning to the police station, her home, and the church radio station, where she proudly introduces herself as the new guest, "I am Marykutty." Through persistence, courage, and resilience, Marykutty eventually gains acceptance and builds a dignified life, symbolizing the assertion of transgender identity against oppressive social structures.

The film illustrates how society attempts to erase or silence transgender voices, which echoes Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous question in subaltern theory: "Can the subaltern speak?" Marykutty's journey represents the subaltern speaking back to power structures, challenging societal norms that deny transgender individuals legitimacy.

The film portrays family as both a protective and oppressive institution. Mathukutty's father embodies patriarchal expectations of masculinity. His inability to accept Marykutty reflects how gender norms are socially enforced within domestic spaces. This tension illustrates how subaltern identities often face their first form of marginalization within the family itself.

One of the film's strongest critiques lies in its depiction of state bureaucracy. Marykutty struggles to change her gender on official documents. Government offices become spaces where her identity is questioned, mocked, and invalidated. Marykutty's attempt to correct her gender in official documents leads to humiliation from bureaucrats. This represents institutional marginalization, where systems designed to serve citizens instead reinforce dominant norms. The bureaucratic struggle symbolizes the structural barriers faced by transgender individuals in accessing basic rights.

Unlike many earlier films that depict transgender characters as tragic figures, *Njan Marykutty* emphasizes self-assertion and empowerment. Marykutty refuses to remain invisible. Her insistence on living authentically represents the subaltern's transition from silence to speech. The film thus aligns with modern LGBTQ discourse that stresses visibility, agency, and dignity. This moment symbolizes visibility and voice, marking the emergence of the transgender subaltern into the public sphere.

Njan Marykutty stands as a powerful example of subaltern cinema, portraying the struggles of transgender individuals within a rigidly gendered society. Marykutty's journey from Mathukutty to self-realized womanhood represents the subaltern's fight for recognition, dignity, and voice. *International Business Times* wrote "for the first time in the history of Bollywood, a transgender character has been portrayed with dignity and respect"

By highlighting issues of identity, discrimination, and institutional exclusion, the film contributes to the broader discourse on gender justice and LGBTQ rights in Indian cinema. Ultimately, the film transforms the transgender subject from a marginalized "other" into an agent of self-assertion and social change.

4. Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan- Love Beyond Norms: Queer Assertion and Resistance

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan (Be extra careful of marriage) is a 2020 Hindi-language romantic comedy film written and directed by Hitesh Kewalya.. The film tells the story of a Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhanis a landmark film in contemporary Indian cinema that addresses same-sex love and LGBTQ identity within a mainstream Bollywood narrative. From a Subaltern Studies perspective, the film explores the experiences of sexual minorities who have historically been marginalized, silenced, and excluded from dominant social discourse. The protagonists, Kartik and Aman, represent individuals who challenge heteronormative cultural structures, thereby asserting the right to love and exist openly. The film gains further significance in the socio-legal context of India after the historic decriminalization of homosexuality in the *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), which struck down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

The story revolves around Kartik Singh and Aman Tripathi, two men deeply in love. While Kartik is confident about his sexual identity, Aman struggles to reveal the truth to his conservative family. Aman Tripathi is an

advertiser from an orthodox middle-class family in Allahabad. His family consists of his mother Sunaina, a housewife; father Shankar, a conservative agricultural scientist who recently created a new variety of black cauliflowers; aunt, uncle and cousins. Aman lives with his boyfriend, Kartik Singh, in Delhi. One day, Sunaina asks him to attend her niece Goggle's wedding. Sunaina and Shankar intend to have Aman marry a family friend's daughter, Kusum Nigam, and are planning on having Aman meet Kusum at Goggle's wedding. Aman and Kartik board the train "Vivah Express", on which Aman's family is already present. On the train, Aman and Kartik share a kiss, and are caught by Shankar. Kartik suggests that Aman should come out to his father while Shankar asks Aman to stay away from Kartik.

At Goggle's wedding, Shankar tries to keep Kartik and Aman away from each other but fails. Kartik and Aman share a kiss publicly, leaving everyone shocked. Shankar and Sunaina confront Aman, who in turn confronts them but they remain unaccepting of his sexuality. Meanwhile, Ashok refuses to marry Goggle due to Aman's sexuality. Kartik is whisked away by Chaman (Aman's paternal uncle) to the railway station to make him leave while Shankar blackmails Aman into agreeing to marry Kusum. Goggle runs away to the railway station and attempts suicide there, but Kartik stops her. Kartik convinces Goggle that marriage is not the most important thing in the world, and that she has a family who supports her. Goggle, in turn, convinces Kartik to win back Aman and reveals that she knew since childhood that Aman was gay.

While returning to Allahabad, Kusum tells Aman that she is already in love with another man called Rakesh. She proposes that they will marry as per their family's wishes, but continue to live with their respective lovers in Delhi. Shankar and Sunaina decide to re-christen Aman in order to cleanse him of his "sins". Returning to Allahabad, the family is in the middle of rechristening when Goggle and Kartik appear at their home. Shankar beats Kartik up with a stick, rendering him unconscious. Goggle at the same time fights with her parents and protests that she does not want to marry. Finally, Aman agrees to marry Kusum in order to save Kartik. The family starts the wedding preparations. Kartik tries to convince Aman to not marry Kusum, but Aman is unable to fight against his family.

On the day of the wedding, Shankar and Sunaina learn that the Supreme Court is going to deliver its judgment on the decriminalization of homosexuality the next day. They fight over their past lovers and realize that they have been living with each other half-heartedly. They feel that they do not want the same for their son, but decide to proceed with the wedding anyway, thinking that everything will be fine after the wedding. Kartik opens up one of Shankar's black cauliflowers and shows him that it is full of worms. He personifies the cauliflower as Shankar and the worms as his nature. Meanwhile, Kusum steals all of Sunaina's jewelry and runs away, leaving behind a letter in Aman's room. Kartik reads the letter and disguises as the 'bride'. Goggle finds this out and decides to help Aman and Kartik.

During the ceremony, Shankar suspects something is wrong, and inadvertently chases the "bride", when Kartik suddenly reveals himself to everyone's surprise. Goggle then hands over Kusum's note to Sunaina, shocking everyone. Aman confesses his love for Kartik in front of his family, and says that he knew his family was never going to understand him. He asks Shankar if their father-son relationship will change in any way just because he loves Kartik. He tells Sunaina that she had lost her son long before she lost her jewellery. At that moment, the police arrive to arrest Aman and Kartik, they caught Kusum trying to board a bus with the stolen jewellery, who in turn revealed to the police that Aman and Kartik are gay. Chaman steps up and gives a powerful statement supporting Aman and Kartik to the police, it also makes Shankar and Sunaina start reconsidering their beliefs. However the police refuse to leave that night as they are duty-bound to follow the law. Kusum returns the jewellery to Sunaina, who realizes that her son's happiness is more important and gives all of the jewellery to Kusum. Goggle's parents realize that marriage is not the most important thing in the world and give her their approval to stay single if she wants to. Shankar opens up more of his black cauliflowers and realizes that all of them are full of worms, which in turn makes him realize that his beliefs need to change.

The next day, the Supreme Court in its landmark judgement, decriminalizes homosexuality. Aman and Kartik reconcile with the family, and decide to leave for Delhi. Shankar burns all of his black cauliflowers and drops Aman and Kartik at the railway station and tells them that even if he may not understand their love, he does not want Aman to stop living his life to its fullest. The final scene shows that Aman and Kartik will run until they can live their life happily.

The narrative unfolds through comic yet poignant moments where the couple challenges the family's beliefs about masculinity, morality, and social respectability. Ultimately, the film advocates acceptance of queer love and the dismantling of rigid social norms.

Towards Inclusive Societies:
Representation of Agony and Assertion
of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

Within the framework of Subaltern Studies, LGBTQ individuals can be seen as a subaltern community, marginalized by dominant heteronormative culture. The film foregrounds queer identity as a voice emerging from the margins. Kartik's character refuses to remain silent and confronts societal prejudice directly. This echoes the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who questioned whether marginalized groups can speak within dominant power structures. In this film, the queer protagonists not only speak but demand recognition.

Aman's family represents the traditional Indian social order, where heterosexual marriage is considered the only acceptable form of love. The insistence on arranging Aman's marriage reflects the disciplinary mechanisms of heteronormativity, where society seeks to regulate sexuality through family structures. From a queer theoretical perspective, scholars such as Judith Butler argue that gender and sexuality are socially constructed and enforced through cultural norms. The film exposes these mechanisms by showing how family members attempt to "fix" Aman's sexuality.

The Tripathi household functions as a microcosm of Indian society. The father represents patriarchal authority, while other family members embody varying degrees of prejudice and curiosity. The conflict between Kartik and the family symbolizes the struggle between dominant social ideology and marginalized sexual identity. In subaltern discourse, such institutions often act as agents of cultural hegemony, suppressing alternative identities.

Unlike many earlier queer narratives that rely on tragedy, the film uses comedy and satire to challenge homophobia. Humor becomes a subversive strategy through which the protagonists expose the absurdity of social prejudice. This narrative technique makes the film accessible to a wider audience while still addressing serious issues of sexual discrimination and identity politics.

From the standpoint of queer theory, the film challenges rigid binaries of gender and sexuality. The narrative demonstrates how heteronormative culture constructs homosexuality as "deviant," while Kartik's character challenges this assumption by asserting that love is universal and natural. The film also contributes to the normalization of queer relationships in mainstream cinema, which historically marginalized or caricatured LGBTQ characters.

Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan represents an important shift in Indian popular cinema by placing queer love at the center of a mainstream narrative. Through humor, confrontation, and emotional dialogue, the film challenges heteronormative assumptions and advocates acceptance.

5. *Amma's Pride*: Advocating the Maternal Acceptance and Queer Identity

Amma's Pride (2024), directed by Shiv Krish is a poignant short film that foregrounds the emotional struggles and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals within the intimate space of the family. Through a simple yet powerful narrative, the film challenges social stigma surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation while celebrating maternal empathy as a transformative force. From the perspective of subaltern studies, the film becomes a narrative of marginalized voices—particularly queer identities—seeking recognition within traditional social structures.

The film centers on a mother who gradually comes to understand and accept her child's queer identity. Initially influenced by societal norms and prejudices, she struggles to reconcile her love for her child with the rigid expectations imposed by family and community. As the narrative unfolds, her emotional journey moves from confusion and denial to understanding and pride. *Amma's Pride* chronicles Valli's unwavering support for her trans daughter, Srija, in Thoothukudi, a traditional small town in Tamilnadu, the first transgender woman in Tamil Nadu to legally register her marriage. Where life for an openly queer person in India is challenging, the film underscores the significance of family acceptance and the result of it when a trans person like Srija receives unwavering support from her mother, sibling, and local community as she navigates the trials and tribulations of falling in love, getting married, and fighting for state recognition of her marriage. When societal pressures push Srija's marriage to the edge, Valli clings to the hope of a miracle. The title itself becomes symbolic: the mother's transformation reflects the possibility of social change when empathy replaces stigma.

The reason why this film is so important is that it captures the persistence of a mother's love and pride for her child, which challenges the shame that results from transgressing societal expectations and roles. The film wants to bring out the contribution of family in the success of Arun and Srija's legal fight without which no change is possible. As director Krish spent time with Srija and her family, the story began to reveal another, deeper truth. Beyond the limelight was the quiet strength of Srija's mother, Valli—the steadfast force who made the legal victory possible from within her own home. Krish found himself most moved by Valli's presence—the way her love carried both fierceness and tenderness, turning the personal into a silent revolution. In many cases the

approval of the family will be missing there by leading to the psychological distress of the trans-people but in this case the mother's love and determination to hold the hands of her daughter throughout her transition is highly remarkable and this is wonderfully captured in the film.

Amma's Pride certainly represents queer subaltern identity. Within subaltern discourse, marginalized groups often lack a voice in dominant narratives. Queer individuals in many South Asian contexts occupy such a space, facing invisibility, discrimination, and social exclusion. In this film, , the queer protagonist embodies this subaltern subject and the character struggles with self-expression in a conservative environment. Silence and hesitation in dialogues reflect the internalized fear of rejection. The domestic space becomes a site of both oppression and potential liberation. The film highlights how heteronormative expectations shape family dynamics and push queer individuals into emotional isolation.

The Mother as an Agent of Social Change: One of the most compelling aspects of the film is the transformation of the mother figure. Traditionally in Indian cinema, the mother is portrayed as the guardian of cultural norms. However, *Amma's Pride* subverts this trope by turning the mother into a symbol of resistance against social prejudice. Her journey reflects three stages:

- Denial and Anxiety – Fear of social shame and misunderstanding of gender identity.
- Realization – Emotional recognition of her child's suffering.
- Acceptance and Pride – Public acknowledgment and support.

This transformation signifies how familial acceptance can dismantle societal stigma.

Subaltern Assertion and Identity Politics: From the perspective of queer politics, the film represents a movement from invisibility to assertion.

Key themes in this film include visibility of marginalized identities within the family sphere. Reclaiming dignity and self-worth despite social prejudice, and the maternal solidarity as a form of resistance. By the end of the film, the queer protagonist is no longer portrayed as a victim but as a person whose identity deserves respect and pride.

Social Significance of this film lies in its humanization of queer experiences. Instead of portraying LGBTQ+ characters through stereotypes, the film emphasizes Emotional vulnerability, Family relationships, the possibility of social transformation through empathy.

Just as the saying goes, "Charity begins at home", it reminds audiences that acceptance often begins at home, and when families embrace diversity, society can move toward inclusivity. *Amma's Pride* is a significant contribution to queer representation in Indian short cinema. By situating the story within the intimate relationship between a mother and child, the film illustrates how love can challenge entrenched social prejudices. From a subaltern perspective, the narrative amplifies marginalized voices and affirms the dignity of queer identities. Ultimately, the film becomes a testament to the power of empathy, acceptance, and the transformative potential of familial support. It is an eye-opener to all the parents who abandon their children unable to accept the queerness as seen in *Naanu.Avanalla.Avalu* and *Njan Marykutti*.

The beauty of this film lies in the way the mission of this film is promoted by the film makers as they state "Our vision for *Amma's Pride* is to create a more inclusive world for trans and queer folks by fostering family and community acceptance. We believe change begins in living rooms, classrooms, and local communities—where love, empathy, and understanding can rewrite the future. Through storytelling, dialogue, and on-ground impact, we aim to shift hearts, challenge stigma, and build a world where every person is seen, supported, and celebrated for who they are." Undoubtedly, they are the true agents of social change.

Conclusion

The films discussed in this paper are the testimonials of the pain, agony and suffering of the individuals and their exclusion from the societies at the cost of their identities as queers. Through these films the trials and tribulations of the LGBTQ are revealed in a very fascinating manner with the prime motto of their acceptance and to make the societies inclusive and empathetic towards achieving social transformation. The analysis reveals that recent Indian cinema has begun to challenge stereotypes and create empathetic narratives around queer identities. However, representation still remains limited, and many stories remain untold.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge that the funding for this publication was provided by the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), under Multi-disciplinary Education and Research Universities

Towards Inclusive Societies:
Representation of Agony and Assertion
of Queer Communities in Indian Cinema

(MERU) Grant sanctioned to Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India.

References

1. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. University of Illinois Press, 1988.
2. Guha, Ranajit, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Oxford University Press, 1988.
3. Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. *Indian Cinema in the Time of Celluloid: From Bollywood to the Emergency*. Indiana University Press, 2009.
4. Dissanayake, Wimal, and Moti Gokulsing. *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*. Trentham Books, 2004.
5. Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. Routledge, 1994.
6. Solanas, Fernando, and Octavio Getino. "Towards a Third Cinema." *Tricontinental*, 1969. Filmography

Web Sources

1. *Amma's Pride*, 2024. www.youtube.com
2. *Shubhmangal Zyada Saavdhan*, 2020, Netflix.
3. *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, (I am Not He, I am She), www.youtube.com, 2021
4. *Njan Marykutty* (I am Marykutty), Sun NXT, 2018.
5. *Ardhanaari*, MG Sound & Frames Company, 2012. (OTT, Jeo Hotstar)