ABSTRACT

Cinema has been a popular form of entertainment and a powerful medium of mass communication for a century in India. The representations of cinema can be reflective and influential in society those generally provide values, ideologies, beliefs and role models and influence the attitudes and behaviours of the audience. Accordingly, cinema evidently targets marginalized groups, spreads stereotypes sensationally through celebrities to contribute to the maintenance of dominant ideologies, and distorts reality.

Many sexual variant identities have existed in the history of India where transwomen culture becomes a most visible minority queer culture and further marginalized. Subsequently, the transwomen of South India generally do not have the cultural role as they have in North Indian states to live the least quality of life. The transwomen of Tamil Nadu, a South Indian state of India face various forms of discriminations and socially excluded.

Since the representation of transwomen has been a part of cinema since its inception, Tamil cinema often criticised for misrepresenting the transwomen and for constructing the deceptive identity about them in the social and cultural system. The greater influence of cinema in Tamil society necessitates investigating the role of cinema in the lives of transwomen in Tamil Nadu.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate the representations of transwomen in forty years of Tamil cinema since 1977 to 2016 and their social exclusion in Tamil Nadu. This research also explores the influence of film representations on the social exclusion of transwomen. This research is grounded on the theoretical conceptions of heteronormativity, social exclusion, representation, stereotype and transgender gaze to understand the ways transwomen are represented, and the interpretations and perceptions of the transwomen community. This research is based on multiple
mixed methods of collecting and analysing data from quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to fulfil the research objectives.

This research clearly indicated the ways in which the representations of transwomen in Tamil cinema have played a role in developing the visibility of transwomen and maintaining the heteronormativity in mainstream society. There is symbolic annihilation for transwomen in Tamil cinema in which they were ignored, trivialised and condemned comparing to cisgender people. The issues and indeed representations of transwomen are largely absent in Tamil cinema. Tamil films have misrepresented transwomen in many forms and stereotyped them in six types of transwomen characters: Transwoman Farce, Transwoman Mother Farce, Transwoman Monster Farce, Transwoman Mother, Transwoman Monster Mother and Transwoman Monster. Particularly, transwoman farce is the most popular stereotype representation of transwomen that disseminates and justifies transmisogyny and transphobia sensationally as humour through celebrity actors and contributes to the maintenance of heteronormativity in society.

The interpretation and perception of the transwomen support the influential role of film representations of transwomen those propagate and maintain the heteronormativity in society and the ways they significantly affect their lives. The misrepresentations of films directly affect the attitudes of viewers and result in the social exclusion of transwomen. When transwomen encounter various social exclusion issues, largely believe that due to the misrepresentations of Tamil films. Thus, this research concludes that Tamil cinema misrepresents and stereotypes the image of transwomen, and played a significant role on their social exclusion. The research provides suggestions and recommendations for appropriate measures at micro and macro levels in various institutional contexts such as film industry, censorship, law, healthcare, police and civil society in order to ensure the fair representation of transwomen in cinema and their social inclusion.