CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 OVERVIEW

Sexual differentiation begins at the time of fertilization, continues into early adult life. Members of the society are taught from early years to distinguish men from women in every culture. While gender is socially constructed, culturally and temporally specific, subject to change as Male, Female or Transgender besides multidimensional that refers different roles, responsibilities, limitations and experiences provided to individuals. India considered as a sexually conservative society where many sexual variant identities have existed in the history (Kalra 2012).

However, transwomen culture becomes a most visible minority queer culture in India and further marginalized. Transwomen have been burdened by centuries of prejudice, discrimination, sexual harassment and social bias and barely tolerated in the Indian society. 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. Subsequently, the social institutions such as media particularly cinema in India create a social gender structure that is deeply rooted, extremely influential and hardly questioned.

1.2 TRANSGENDER IDENTITY

In twentieth-century, ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ were the two gender identities prompted by advances in medical treatments, psychology, feminist scholar, liberation movements and media attention. The term
transgender refers to the individual whose gender identity does not match with the sex assigned at birth. In 1965, psychiatrist Oliven of Columbia University used the lexical compound Trans+gender in the transsexualism section of primary transvestism in the second edition of his reference work ‘Sexual Hygiene and Pathology’ (Oliven 1965).

While many identities fall under the transgender umbrella, ‘transsexual’ refers to the people who alter or wish to alter their bodies medically, as congruent as possible with their gender identities. The term transsexual is originated in the medical and psychological communities. Harry Benjamin (1966) defined this term in his seminal book The Transsexual Phenomenon.

World Health Organization (WHO) classified Transsexuality as a mental Disorder in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10) (Belluck 2016). The American Psychological Association (APA) classified as a Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR). Later the new manual DSM-V of APA has replaced the diagnostic term Gender Identity Disorder with the term Gender Dysphoria that provides the affirmative treatment to the transgender people and transition care without the stigma of disorder (APA 2013). Similarly, it is proposed to remove transgender identity as a mental disorder in the ICD-11 expected to be approved by 2018 (Belluck 2016; Love 2016).

The unclear gender presentation or gender nonconformity can result in discrimination, violence, and even death (Whittle 2006) worldwide. The social acceptance and status of gender nonconforming people differ culturally and widely vary throughout history. Few world cultures accept transwomen as a full member of their society. In most cultures, the dualistic view of only two genders has forced transwomen community to ‘make a choice’ of gender,
rather than be seen as a full gender aside from the two accepted genders Male and Female. The social acceptance or non-acceptance of transwomen has shaped the ways in which each member of transwomen community sees himself or herself.

Transwomen generally experience multiple forms of exclusion all over the world. With their unique existence, the life of transwomen community became a story of alienation from their family and the society. Resigned to their fate, they have some support from government and social organizations. Most important issues of transwomen are childcare, domestic violence, family exclusion, education, economy/occupation, housing, immigration, marriage/domestic partnership, health care/HIV/AIDS, drugs, language barriers, racial profiling, hate violence/harassment, affirmative action, poverty, crime, police misconduct/brutality and media representation.

1.3 TRANSWOMEN IN INDIAN CULTURE

Indian religious texts, ancient Hindu law, medicine, linguistics and astrology have the representation of transwomen or third gender identity. The Indian spiritual texts of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism also have the references to the third gender identity according to individual’s nature. The Hindu Vedas (1500 BC - 500 BC) and the Kama Sutra (4th century AD) describe the third gender as Tritiya-Prakriti literally means the third gender or the third nature (Preeti 2012). In Hindu religion, the composite androgynous form of Lord Siva and his consort Parvati is referred as Ardhanarishvara, the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe. Many other equal terms are used in different languages of India for Ardhanarishvara like Ardhanari and Ammaiappan etc. Generally, Ardhanari is identified with the gender ambiguity and worshipped in North India as a patron of transwomen community.
The Hindu epics Ramayana and Mahabharata also indicate the existence of third gender identity. In Ramayana, while the hero Rama heads into exile in the forest, notices that the people of his hometown Ayodhya were following him. He instructs them, "Men and women, turn back". Then Rama returns after fourteen years of exile, he discovers that those who were "neither men nor women" stayed there. He impressed with their devotion and blessed them as they would rule the world one day.

In northern parts of India, this blessing is the origin of ‘Badhai’ in which transwomen sing, dance, and give blessings in childbirth and weddings. They are believed with special powers to be able to bless people with luck and fertility and to hold the power to bring riches and rain (Conner et al. 1997). In Mahabharata, while Arjuna is in an exile, he assumes transvestite identity and performs rituals during weddings and childbirths. Then his son Aravan offers his life before the Kurukshetra battle to ensure the victory. Lord Krishna assumes the female avatar Mohini and marries him to fulfil Aravan’s last wish. During the battle, Pandavas used Shikhandi, a transwoman to defeat Bhishma. Consequently, transwomen of India identify with the avatar of Lord Krishna as he assumes as Mohini in Mahabharata.

Similarly in South India, particularly in Tamil Nadu, transwomen identify with the Mohini avatar of Lord Krishna, consider themselves as the wives of Aravan and refer them as Aravanis. The Aravan story of Mahabharata is enacted annually in the Koovagam festival of Tamil Nadu where transwomen enact the mythical marriage of Aravan and Mohini. Many transwomen of Tamil Nadu prefer to call them as Aravani irrespective of their religion because of this religious tradition. In Karnataka, transwomen consider as Jogappa, the devotee of the goddess Renuka Devi who is believed to have the power to change one’s sex. The similar religious identification exists with the Bahuchura Devi worship of Gujarat.
Besides many religious identities, the closest Indian cultural identity for the western transgender identity is ‘Hijra’. This term is different from ‘eunuch’ and significantly more diverse as transgender. The Hijra community includes not only men who have feminine gender identity, adopt feminine gender roles and wear women's clothing, many sexual identities such as gay, trans men (pre/post-castration), transvestites and true hermaphrodites (rare) fall under Hijra identity (Kalra 2012). Many of them consider themselves of having born in the wrong body with the wrong sex and simply claim to the third sex- the true Hijras (Schultz & Lavenda 2001).

However, transgender or similar gender variant categories have been referred in various terminologies, originated from culturally, religiously and the linguistically diverse Indian subcontinent (UNDP 2010). The Hijra identity is known in different terms in India. Hijra is originated from the Urdu and Hindi linguistics, generally considered as derogatory in Urdu and the word ‘Khwaja Saraa’ is used instead. The Hindi term for Hijra is ‘chhakka’, which is widely used in the central parts of India like Mumbai where Hindi is the primary language. In Bengali, Hijra is called as ‘hijla’, ‘hijre’, ‘hizra’, or hizre, and the term ‘khusra’ is used in Punjabi, and the term ‘pavaiyaa’ is used in Gujarati. In South India, transwomen are referred as ‘kojja’ in Telugu, ‘jogappa’ in Kannada and Aravani or Thirunangai in Tamil Nadu. Moreover, biological males varying degrees of femininity described separately as ‘kothi’ in India, similar to the ‘kathoey’ of Thailand. Kothis are a heterogeneous group where some of them bisexual even married to a woman and some of the Hijra-identified people may identify themselves as 'kothis'. Kothi is identified as ‘durani’ in West Bengal, and ‘menaka’ in Kerala (Naz 1999).

Some members of Hijra community prefer to call them ‘Hijras’ and some other do not prefer to include them under the western term ‘transgender’. Since they feel that, there are a long history and rich cultural tradition for Hijras in India, which might be unnoticed when using the
western umbrella term 'transgender' (UNDP 2010). As Kalra (2012) claims, individual’s own definition of his/her identity and the culturally appropriate look is the best way to understand and identify Hijra in India rather than just labelling them with the western binary definitions of gender.

Many cultural aspects of Hijra community make the community unique subculture in India. They have developed their own language known as Hijra Farsi, a secret language imprecisely derived from Urdu, Hindustani and Persian languages with a unique vocabulary of around ten thousand words (Awan & Sheeraz 2011). These lexicons mix with different native languages and form a new language like 'Kothi Bashai' of South India. The Hijra Farzi acts as a survival mechanism for the Hijra community as the community members alone know the lexicons and usage and secretly communicate through different gestures like typical clapping.

Besides many other cultural identities, Hijras live in the organized communities in North India unlike other subcultures of India. These communities have formed and sustained over generations by adopting young Hijra individuals excluded from their family. This community system is commonly known as Jamaat system across India. The dynasties or houses formed in different areas called Gharanas and each Gharana is headed by the Naayak, the primary decision maker of the house. The Hijra community is composed of a strict hierarchy starting from the Naayak (head)-Guru (teacher)- Chela (follower) and the Guru of Guru referred as Naani (grandmother). Many Chelas work under a Guru and learn about various Hijra customs and rituals. All the Hijras in the community are in the female relationships each other (Nanda 1996; Saveri 2013).

The community members earn through begging by clapping in trains or local markets, dancing at the weddings and at the homes of the newborn male child. This tradition is called ‘Badhai’ (congratulations).
However, these traditional roles of Hijras in India are decreasing with changing Indian social structures and of globalization, and many hijras turn to the sex work (Kalra et al. 2010).

The Hijras of South India who lived in West and North Indian states migrated back to their native place and formed Jamaats. Though their Hijra culture and Jamaat system originated from the western and northern India, the Jamaat system is not more effective in southern states particularly the Aravani Jamaat of Tamil Nadu. When the community members freed to lead an independent life, they live in an insecure life like the transwomen who are rarely attached with the Jamaat community system. The transwomen community has evolved as a distinct cultural group in the Indian subcontinent and has survived for thousands of years, despite being marginalized to a great extent (Kalra 2012).

As the result of trans activism and increase of social and cultural interest, transwomen have begun to attain legal rights globally. The ‘Gender Recognition Act’ (2004) of United Kingdom enables transwomen to change their birth certificates to reflect the gender they identify with and to marry in this gender. Similarly, the supreme court of India granted the legal recognition to the transwomen as ‘third gender’ on April 15, 2014, for the purport of safeguarding their rights under Part III of Constitution. The Centre and the state governments are directed to take steps to treat transwomen ‘socially and educationally backward classes’ of citizens and extend all kinds of reservation in cases of admission in the educational institutions and for the public appointments' (BCC Department 2015). However, the attitudes of cisgender people towards transwomen remain worse and retain the transwomen community socially excluded (Kisha 2012; PUCL-K 2001; PUCL-K 2003; UNDP 2010).
The social exclusion framework of United Nations Development Programme for transwomen community identifies various dimensions of social exclusion of transwomen in India. This framework includes the exclusion from social and cultural participation, exclusion from the economy, exclusion from employment and livelihood opportunities, exclusion from politics and citizen participation, restricted access to collectivisation, restricted rights of citizenship, restricted participation in decision-making processes, lack of protection from violence and exclusion from family (UNDP 2010).

In India, many people deny the existence of sexual minorities and dismiss same-sex behaviour as a Western and upper-class phenomenon. Many others label it as a disease to be cured, an abnormality to be set right or a crime to be punished. While there are no organized hate groups in India as in the West, the persecution of sexual minorities in India is more insidious. Often, sexual minorities themselves do not want to admit the fact of persecution because it intensifies their fear, guilt and shame. The social stigma casts a pall of invisibility over the life of sexual minorities, which makes them frequent targets of harassment, violence, extortion and often sexual abuse from relations, acquaintances, hustlers, goondas, and the police.

All the denials of society under various pretexts backed by an enforced invisibility exposes sexual minorities to constant abuse and discrimination. Social discrimination against sexual minorities manifests itself in the production of the ideology of heterosexuality which establishes the male-female sexual relationship as the only valid/possible lifestyle and renders invalid the lives and culture of those who do not fit in. The ideology of heterosexuality pervades all dominant societal institutions such as the family, the medical establishment, popular culture, public spaces, workspaces and household spaces.
1.4 TRANSWOMEN IN TAMIL CULTURE

Transwomen are represented in Tamil culture and literature starting from mythologies, folklores, Thirukkural, Sangam literature, Tholkappiyam, novels, short stories, modern poetry and other contemporary literature (Ayyappan 2012; Munish 2010). Television programmes like soap operas, talk shows represent transwomen. Transwomen writers and television talents present their creative ability in TV shows and literature (Ayyappan 2012). Transwomen are referred in ancient Tamil literature as ‘Pedi’ and ‘Ali’ to identify the third gender identity and impotency of a male individual. The term Aravani was given to transwomen by Mr Ravi of Indian Police Service (IPS) in the year 1997 during the beauty contest organized at Koovagam festival as part of the HIV/AIDS intervention programme for transwomen and MSM (Bharathi 2009). However, the term ‘Aravani’ has religious and cultural significance and largely used to identify transwomen in Tamil Nadu since their resemblance of woman identity.

The state welfare board for the transwomen named with the term Aravani as the most common term used to identify transwomen in Tamil Nadu. However, this regional term is considered as dignified and some of the transwomen of the state accept this term, and it is generally considered as the term of Hindu religion. Since the Periyar ideology of rationalism and anti-religion is stronger in Tamil Nadu, a new religiously neutral term ‘Thirunangai’- the respected woman is derived from Tamil literature and proposed by the famous transwoman classic dancer Narthagi Natraj (Vidhya 2006) and popularized by the chief minister M Karunanithi (DMK 03 March 2016). However, there are different terms used in the mainstream society to refer transwomen, and the transmen are referred as ‘Thirunambi’ and recently the term ‘Thirunar’ has emerged to identify both transwomen and transmen. Based on gender variance and sexual orientation, more than thirty gender
queer terms have developed in Tamil from the western queer terms (Srishtimadurai 2012).

However, there are different religious-cultural terms are in use, the socially emerged derogative terms play an important role to construct a derogative transwomen identity through verbal violence and other forms of exclusion issues. The term Thirunangai is considered as a dignified term for transwomen in Tamil Nadu as compared to derogatory terms such as Ali, Oombothu, Pottai, Kattawandi etc. The term Ali had been represented in Tamil literature to refer transwomen and the term Oombothu- number 9 has been used mostly to abuse transwomen in Tamil Nadu. In the early 19th century, the British referred transwomen as Feminine males, and the transformation of male to female gender is more common than the opposite one in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, some of the semi illiterate people picked up the ‘nine’ in feminine and soon it was then spread it as ‘ombothu’ in the Tamil language. In addition, the number 9 has a unique property that when it is flipped, it becomes 6. Therefore, when looking at 9, it is unsure whether it is 9 or 6. The same analogy is used to describe them. With an assumption that human race can be only classified as male and female, it is considered that transwomen cannot be distinguished whether they are male or female. This is explained with the 9 and 6 analogy.

Accordingly, the Indian Census form 2011, the option of ‘Others’ was enumerated as ninth question followed by Male and Female genders. Therefore, transwomen started to object as it would obviously offending and ridiculing them by relating the derogative term 9-ombothu (Viduthalai 25 June 2013). Another popular derogative Tamil term Pottai (the impotent) means an effeminate man, which is used to refer to the incompetence of the transwomen identity. Subsequently, men are derogatorily referred by this term whenever he has feminine gestures and behaviours and incapable to perform
the things socially assigned to male. Pathetically, transwomen refer themselves as Pottai to identify their gender identity (Tiwari 2014).

Consequently, the terms Hijra and Aravani have a religious-cultural significance unlike the western binary gender point of view of the term transgender. The reports of United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2010) and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO 2011) say that Hijra people of India do not prefer to associate themselves with other sexual variant community and desire to be identified as transgender. However, the Hijra identity still translated into English as "eunuch" or "hermaphrodite", where the irregularity of the male genitalia is central to the definition (Nanda 1999). Indian Hijra and trans activists claimed to discontinue the term 'eunuch' in government documents. The historians and human rights activists have also urged to refer them as transgender (Towle & Morgan 2006).

As the result of series meetings with transgender activists, National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) moved to the supreme court of India for the legal recognition of transwomen in India. The supreme court of India has legally recognized Hijra and transwomen as the 'third gender’ in 2014 (NALSA vs Union of India 2014), and the judgement had given transgender people the right to decide gender and directed the government to treat them as ‘socially and educationally backward classes of citizens’. In addition, the Supreme Court said, ‘Even gays, lesbians and bisexuals are included in the descriptor ‘transgender’ and this has come to be known as an umbrella term’ (BBC 15 April 2014). However, the Ministry of Social Justice of India has sought a clarification on the inclusion of lesbians, gays and bisexuals (LGB) in the transgender category. The ministry argues that the term ‘transgender’ refers ‘a person’s own deep sense of gender identity’, and the concept of LGB was based on the ‘sexual orientation’ of a person. The Ministry also questioned the court’s inclusion of ‘eunuchs’ in the transgender category, said ‘Eunuchs are not transgender, nor a variant of transgender, and it is a different
concept altogether’ (Rajagopal 2014). Yet, the identity discourse turned into social injustice while transwomen who belong to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe are registered as the backward class (Dinamalar 12 September 2014). Hence, Hijra and other transgender identities are still complex in the contemporary queer subculture of India.

Tamil Nadu, the southern state of India was the pioneer in the country for setting the Transgender Welfare Board (TGWB) in 2008 under the state department of social welfare to implement schemes for the socio-economic progress of transwomen community. Tamil Nadu government also added the option of the third gender in the application forms of state-run schools and colleges for unhindered admission of transwomen in educational institutions, and the Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) is performed at free of cost in district government hospitals of the state. However, the former members allege that the board is completely inactive over seven years after its formation (Zubeda 2015). Transwomen are disseminated across the country for the livelihood that makes them hidden (UNDP 2010; Bhugra et al. 2011).

Governing and policy making towards family exclusion, social stigma, widespread discrimination and deprived property rights of transwomen community are remain impossible in India. Hence, the transwomen community is literally the ‘uncounted’ in many ways, and it is impossible to map the population of transgender people in India. However, there is a huge gap between the government policies and the empowerment of the transwomen community. They are scattered and the population of transwomen coupled with social stigma and widespread discrimination serve to make them hidden. It is more important to have estimates of the size of the transwomen population to serve not only important purposes as far as advocacy and human rights are concerned, but also allows those charged with program planning and priority setting to make evidence-based decisions and to allocate resources more equitably.
Studies of non-governmental organizations of India across the last decade have documented discrimination, prejudice and violence against transwomen in India. These reports, case studies and field studies on transwomen clearly state the attitudes of cisgender people towards transwomen are worse (PUCL-K 2001, 2003; UNDP 2010). The attitudes of society make transwomen community to face multiple forms of oppression and social exclusion. A troubling array of difficulties was reported, including experiences of harassment at home, work, school and from the public and discrimination from government agencies, medical professionals and other service providers. Transwomen described being shunned, verbally harassed, economically discriminated against, and physically assaulted. In the extreme cases, some transwomen have even been murdered (PUCL-K 2001). Consequently, the insensitivity of social institutions such as media, family, government agencies and the attitudes of cisgender people towards transwomen keep them socially excluded in various domains.

1.5 CINEMA

Cinema has been a powerful medium of mass communication and popular form of mass entertainment of the twentieth century. The aesthetic arrangement of audio-visual elements along the performance of actors in cinema provoke various emotions of the audience and make them believe that what they see on the screen is real. This distinctive nature of cinema keeps it as a unique art form and a marvel for more than a century. As the film theorist Pudovkin (1960) states, cinema is a synthesis of the aural and visual elements and an opportunity to translate the world into a new art form that has succeeded all the older arts in which today and tomorrow can be expressed. Since Lumière Brothers started their tour, cinema has been a scientific invention, a modern art form, a tool for the political propaganda and a business of entertainment across the world.
People gather information from cinema and the messages of cinema influence their values, ideologies, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours and affect their perceptions of reality (Gamson et al. 1992). However, the needs, nature, personality, socio-cultural and economic background and other personal and social attributes of the viewer decide the level of the impact (Albrecht, 1954; Considine, 1985). Cinema to be produced within a set of apparatuses and becomes a cultural institution that persistently holds and dominates the popular psyche as a simple form of entertainment.

The entertainment and catharsis are the primary factors of cinema, which manipulate emotions and relax the audience inside the imaginary world set inside the theatre. The education and reinforcement of values are the additional factors of cinema. These factors provide a positive role to the cinema in society. Subsequently, cinema disseminates wrong values, violence and offers an escape from reality instead of encountering the consequences of life and inspires adopting negative role models and pessimism about society and its institutions.

The extent of influence on the audience is remaining controversial since the emerging of impact and effects studies of cinema. One school of thought claims that cinema has short time influences and it does not cause the radical change in the fundamental attitudes of the audience. Alternatively, the other school argues that the influence of cinema is permanent and provocative. Since the influence and effect of cinema vary on each individual as the thought process and behaviour patterns of everyone are different by nature and by experience. However, it is very important to examine the role and responsibilities of cinema on the attitude and the behavioural changes of the audience in a specific context. Analysing and understanding the ways cinema interacts and influences the everyday lives of people are important in the study of cultures. As Bordwell (1996) states studying cinema is indeed a contribution to the political struggle for the disadvantaged and it is equivalent to active political resistance.
1.6 CINEMA IN INDIA

Cinema has been a most important entertainment and the largest business in India. It was only a few months after Lumiere brothers introduced cinema in Paris in 1895, they introduced cinema in India on July 7, 1896. Cinema has become a most popular culture and simple entertainment for a century in India. Indian films are marketed in over 90 countries for commercial and festival screening to become a global enterprise.

The top foreign studios have been investing in the film production in India as the result of 100% foreign direct investment policy of the Indian Government. As Gokulsing & Dissanayake (1998) note that, the Indian-ness can be found from the unique genres and the themes of the films, which are produced in India. The primary difference between Indian films and the films of other countries is that Indian films are mostly melodramatic and circular narratives accompanied with song, dance, fight, exaggerated humour and three hours long. The songs are sung by professional playback singers and synchronized by the actors.

More than 1500 feature films are produced per year in 24 different languages/dialects (CBFC 2015) in the country. The largest number of films are produced in Hindi (Bollywood) followed by Tamil (Kollywood) (CBFC 2015) make Mumbai and Chennai are the two main regional production industries representing north and south regions of India. South India alone consists of four states, each state has a different official language, and films are made in all the four languages and are dubbed from one language to another as the result of commercial success. Films are produced, censored and screened independently in each region in the country. Therefore, the film production across the country is not controlled by single production centre.

Conversely, Indian cinema is profoundly determined, reproduced and articulated through the lens of Hindi cinema popularly known as
Bollywood, and the academic study of Indian cinema has focused primarily on Hindi cinema (Velayutham 2006, 2008). However, Pandian (2013) questions the notion of ‘Indian cinema’ as the linguistic diversity of India constructs the Indian cinema industry to be regional and each region has its own distinctive cultural identity even the mainstream cinema is similar in form throughout India.

The contributions of the regional cinemas of India and their relationships are often overlooked in academic scholarship (Velayutham 2008). Acknowledging cinemas in India as Indian cinema and approaching from a national perspective is problematic while there is no homogeneous film production industry in India (Velayutham 2008; Rajadhyaksha & Willemen 1994; Devadas & Velayutham 2008). Hence, the heterogeneousness of film production of India to be recognized and determined as ‘cinemas of India’ by the way the film industries function across India rather than the notion of Indian cinema.

1.7 TAMIL CINEMA

Tamil cinema is one of the largest film industries in India in terms of quality, technology, popularity and productivity, and the market range of Tamil cinema is extended to worldwide. Tamil cinema is popularly referred as Kollywood. After two years of the introduction of cinema in India, R Nataraja Mudaliar made the first South Indian film Keechaka Vadham, a silent film in 1916. The inter-titles of the silent films were written in Tamil, Hindi and English to explain the story to the viewers of India and the British people live in India.

The silent films made in Tamil Nadu were screened across the country and in the neighbouring British colonial countries such as Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma (Myanmar). Madras (Chennai) became the centre of the
south Indian film industry at the end of the silent era where studios were available and marked the emergence of the new cultural entity ‘South Indian cinema’ comprising the Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam cinema (Thoraval 2000).

HM Reddy directed South India’s first talkie film Kalidas released on 31 October 1931, which is produced by Ardeshir M Irani after directing the country’s first talkie, Alam Ara. It is notable that a woman TP Rajalakshmi played the lead role in Kalidas and the dialogues were in both Tamil and Telugu languages. While mythological and folklore stories were filmed, K Subrahmanyam (1904-1971) used film as a tool of social protest and change, and he was the pioneer of South India for the social films. He criticized the social issues in society during 1930-1940's.

The first full-length colour film in Tamil Alibabhavum Narpathu Thirudargalum was produced in 1955 by Modern Theatres, and the first cinemascope film in Tamil Rajarajacholan was produced in 1973. The first three dimension film in Tamil Annai Bhoomi was made in 1985, and the first 70 mm Tamil film Maveeran was released in 1986. The most significant social change that the arrival of cinema made in India and in Tamil Nadu is the equality inside the theatre hall. People of all the castes were happened to sit together at the first time in the history of India, while the lower caste people were denied to watch dramas along the people belong to upper castes (Baskaran 2004). Cinema has become a simple medium of entertainment and an integral part of the life, culture and politics of Tamil people.

1.7.1 Timeline of Tamil Cinema

According to Shanmugasundaram (1997) the first four phases of Tamil cinema based on the timeline of the director and the content of the stories were: The mythological and folklore stories period (1931-1950); The
melodramatic stories period (1951-1975); The partly realistic and anti sentimental stories period (1976-85); The violence and sex oriented stories (after 1986). Similarly, the film director and writer Srinivasan (1993) classifies Tamil films between 1931 and 1993 into 4 phases by the development of stories. They were: Hindu mythology and folk stories (1931-1950); high melodrama (1951-1975); rise of realism, anti-sentimentality and anti-establishment films (1976-1985); gratuitous violence and sex (1985-1993).

In the earlier period of Tamil cinema, most of the films were made up with known mythological stories. As an exception director K Subrahmanyam had represented social issues like superstitions, dowry, feminism and patriotism in his films Balayogini (1937), Seva sathanam (1938) and Thiyagaboomi (1939). Particularly Thiyagaboomi had represented the social status of women and lower caste people in Indian society. After independence, the touring theatres were increased in rural areas due to the access of electricity.

Subsequently, the Dravidian writers CN Annadurai and M Karunanidhi were entered to Tamil cinema as dialogue writers and their dialogues questioned the national identity and strongly represented and insisted the Dravidian identity. Notably, CN Annadurai and M Karunanidhi have used cinema as a medium for the propaganda of Dravidian ideologies and they became chief ministers of Tamil Nadu consecutively. Notably, the dialogues of M Karunanidhi in the film Parasakthi (1952) directed by Krishnan-Panju powerfully expressed the rationalism and Tamil identity, and the film brought controversies. As the result, some of the politicians were petitioned to the government to ban the film but the chief minister Mr Rajaji allowed it to be screened although he was unhappy about the film.
Simultaneously, director Sridhar had introduced the genre of ‘love stories’ in Tamil cinema. He had changed the existing trend of mythological, social and political stories and set the trend of love stories in Tamil cinema through many dimensions of love. The attitude and ideology that ‘the director is the sole responsibility for a film’ has emerged at the end of the 1950’s. Notably, Sridhar was the key person to create the ideology that the director is the real star of a film.

The new wave cinema took over the Tamil cinema in the late seventies. The pioneers were K Balachandar and Bharathiraja. Balachandar mainly portrayed the middle-class lives and their problems. Most of his films were dramatic, and his women characters were ideal. He portrayed women as struggling characters to overcome the family problems and survive. Notably, Balachandar had portrayed the water problem of a village in the film Thanneer Thanneer (1981) based on a drama of Komal Swaminathan.

When dramatic stories filmed inside studios, Bharathiraja had set a new trend by portraying the real villages and the real village people in 1977 by the film 16 Vayathinile. There is a pattern in his films as the villages are alone and get change by the arrival of a new character from other areas and get a relationship with a villager then some problem starts to continue the relationship and leave the village at the end. Notably, he had represented the ways Indian women struggle to empower by trapped with the family system in Pudhumai Penn (1984), and he had criticised the caste differentiations in Vetham Pathithu (1987), and the killing of new-born female children in the villages of southern Tamil Nadu in Karuthamma (1994). Bharathiraja has received six national awards and the award of Padmashri from the Government of India.

Simultaneously, Balu Mahendra and Mahendran were emphasised aesthetic elements in their films along the pioneering attempts of K Ramnath,
A Bheemsing, Sridhar, K Balachandar and Bharathiraja (Narayanan 1981). The films of Balu Mahendra and Mahendran were focused on the emotions of the people from various social, economical, geographical backgrounds and from all ages. Being a cinematographer Balu Mahendra has played an important role to Mahendran to capture the visuals aesthetically, and himself started to write, shoot, direct and edit his films and presented highly aesthetic and critically acclaimed films.

Notably, he has awarded as the best cinematographer by national awards given by Indian government for his debutant directorial film *Kokila* in 1977. Balu Mahendra was inspired by the British director David Lean and left his job of Draughtsman in Sri Lanka and joined in the Film and Television Institute of India at Pune to pursue his cinematography course to fulfil his cinema dreams. His style of filmmaking was inspired from the French new wave cinematographers and realism of famous Indian director Satyajit Ray and Vittorio De Sica of France. His notable films as director are *Kokila* (1977), *Moondram Pirai* (1982), *Veedu* (1988), *Sandhya Ragam* (1989), *Vanna Vanna Pookkal* (1991) and *Thalaimuraigal* (2013), those were brought him national awards for both cinematography and direction.

Initially, Mahendiran was a journalist and film critic in Tamil print media and started his cinema career as a screenwriter, and he wrote scripts for nearly 26 Tamil films. Then he started to write and direct films independently from the film *Mullum Malarum* (1978). He accompanied ace cinematographers such as Balu Mahendra and Ashok Kumar and directed aesthetically appealing films such as *Mullum Malarum* (1978), *Uthiri Pookkal* (1979) and *Johnny* (1980). He is acclaimed as the master of the directing scenes by rendering human emotions through minimum dialogues, gestures and unique performance to express the sub consciousness of the characters to convey the story aesthetically.

Mani Ratnam had aesthetically portrayed the emotional search of a child towards her mother involves in Sri Lankan civil war in *Kannathil Muthamittal* (2002), and this film was critically acclaimed and won six national awards. His *Aaitha Ezhuthu* (2004) has represented the importance of the political involvement of the student community. Director Shankar has portrayed a series of films based on social issues like anti corruption and bribe in *Indian* (1996) and *Anniyan* (2005), political issues and problems of black money in *Muthalvan* (1999) and *Sivaji: The Boss* (2007). However, all of his films were identified by its fantasy and commercially successful.

Director Cheran has also portrayed social issues like caste differentiation in *Barathi Kannama* (1997), unemployment in *Vetri Kodi Kattu* (2000), urbanization in *Pandavarboomi* (2001) and the state of the family in the modern world in *Thavamai Thavamirundhu* (2005). In addition, his film *Autograph* (2004) rendered the nostalgia of love since childhood to marriage from the perspective of a man, which was acclaimed critically and commercially. He has won national awards for four times and pursues his career as an actor in Tamil Cinema.

Then the waves of caste representations have started in Tamil cinema in which the southern villages of Tamil Nadu were represented as riot

The contemporary directors such as Balaji Sakthivel, Vasanthabalan, Mysskin and Vetrimaaran give hope to reach international attention by their films. Balaji Sakthivel represented the caste violence based on love between lower caste boy and upper caste girl in his film *Kadhal* (2006), and the violence and bias of judicial system on poor people were emphasized in *Vazhakku Enn 18/9* (2012) which won national awards for him. Vasanthabalan portrayed the love, family bond of a theatre projector operator and the characteristics of a small town of Tamil Nadu due to globalization in *Veyyil* (2006), which brought him a National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil.

His *Angaadi Theru* (2010) also emphasised how the globalization affects the lives of ordinary people to migrate from village to metropolitan cities for employment and ends them on the streets to suffer. Mysskin becomes one of the most aesthetic filmmakers of the contemporary Tamil cinema. He is more determined and conscious to make films aesthetically appealing and represents the love, hope on life and humanity. He portrayed the painful search of a mentally ill man towards his abandoned mother suffering at his native village in *Nandalala* (2010), and the humanity of a paid killer was represented in his film *Onaayum Aattukkuttiyum* (2013). Notably, all his films are acclaimed for visual aesthetics and unique plots.

The contemporary Tamil cinema has been upgraded completely into digital from filming, processing and projection as the result of
technological development. The emergence of digital cinema has reduced the budget of the production and has democratised filmmaking as anyone has a digital camera can make their independent film. While digital filmmaking provided an opportunity to the aspiring filmmakers to express their stories and skills on screen in a very easy way, the lack of technical experience in scripting and filmmaking result in tedious to watch and end at the failure in commercial success and critical appreciation. Some of such films often stagnated at the level of business, and the films distributed create a bad image to Tamil cinema (Joseph & TNN 2017). However, while the production of such films with the lack of quality and failure is more, their influence is not to be ignored.

Simultaneously, films highly influenced by world cinema are made by young directors, which often not claim any significance to the development of Tamil cinema, even such films attain commercial success for a lesser time. However, the representations of family, caste system, religion, culture, gender, class and political identities in Tamil cinema play a highly influential role in society and in the daily lives of the people of Tamil Nadu.

The contemporary Tamil cinema often criticised for problematic representations of social institutions and identities such as religion, caste and gender. The objections arise from the specific social group, get news value, lead to crises in society and rarely end in partial edit or ban of the film. The most often criticisms of contemporary Tamil films are about the misrepresentation of caste and transwomen.

1.8 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The transwomen commonly considered as objects of curiosity, ridicule, exploitation, abuse and cruelly neglected groups in society, besides hardly researched in India (Anitha 2015; Nanjundaswamy 2014; Kalra 2012).
However, transwomen in Tamil Nadu face multiple forms of discriminations, prejudice, violence and psychological distress (Suguna 2013; Kisha 2012). The attitudes of cisgender people towards transwomen are worse to socially exclude transwomen community.

Transwomen community continuously objects the misrepresentations of transwomen in Tamil cinema and protests for insulting transwomen identity under the pretext of freedom of speech (Junior Vikatan 18 October 2006; Malika 2008; New Indian Express 09 March 2010; Dinamalar 25 June 2013; The Hindu 20 January 2015; Agnihotri & PTI 2015). They often protest against film directors (Naig, 2015), demand the Central Board of Film Certification (Webdunia 19 January 2015) and file case at the court for legal measures (Times of India 18 June 2015) whenever Tamil cinema misrepresents the transwomen. Social activists, transgender activists, writers and scholars often criticized Tamil cinema for misrepresenting transwomen as objects of fun and spreading stereotypes and it significantly affects the lives of transwomen (Anirudhan 2006; Arasu 2006; Vidhya 2007; Velayutham 2008; Mangai 2009; Vidya 2017). Hence, this study intends to critically examine the representation of transwomen in Tamil cinema.

1.9 NEED FOR THE RESEARCH

Transwomen have been burdened by centuries of prejudice, discrimination, sexual harassment and social bias in India. Studies state that the transwomen are more vulnerable than other sexual minorities of India (Suguna 2013; Saveri 2013; Kisha 2012; UNDP 2011; PUCL-K 2001; Chakrapani et al. 2007). Most of the transwomen of Tamil Nadu are excluded from the family with social stigma and widespread discrimination forced them to be disseminated across the country for livelihood opportunities (Nanda, 1996). They live a life of abandon, wandering like nomads, resorting their body to save their soul for another day, lead to being significantly affected by
HIV and have been a very high HIV prevalence (7.4%) compared with the general population (0.31%) (NACO 2008; NACO 2010). Subsequently, they are considered as the object of verbal and sexual violence, hate crimes and various forms of discriminations and socially excluded from fundamental rights of society. However, there is no comprehensive study that documents the prejudice against the transgender people across various domains.

Since, the transwomen recognized as ‘third gender’ legally and scheduled as ‘socially and educationally backward classes’ by the Supreme Court of India (BCC Department 2015), besides socially excluded (NDTV 25 October 2015; Vijayalakshmi 2015). Subsequently, transwomen filed the plea for mercy killing as their gender identity had affected by begging and commercial sex work, generally associated with transwomen community (Agnihotri & PTI 2015). Since the legislative developments of transwomen community suggest the modes of transwomen visibility, yet the conflicts with their social and cultural issues necessitate social and cultural inquiry of transwomen community in contemporary Indian society.

Cinema often targets marginalized groups, distorts reality by spreading stereotypes sensationaly through celebrities to contribute to the maintenance of heteronormativity and the spread of Transphobia (Miller 2012; Shakerifar 2011; Ryan 2009). Studies analysed the transwomen community in Indian society on human rights and community tradition evidently identify that the popular culture does not offer any positive representation of transwomen (PUCL-K 2001; UNDP 2010). Besides, transwomen constantly question the misrepresentations of Tamil Cinema and protest for insulting transwomen identity and other sexual vulnerable minorities (The Hindu 07 October 2015). However, there is a resounding silence on the issues of transwomen relationships, lives and culture.
conversely representing only as objects of fun and spreading stereotypes (Velayutham 2008).

Hence this study intends to explore the representation of transwomen in Tamil cinema to understand the ways that audiences have been encouraged to perceive transwomen identity and understand transwomen issues in order to include the transwomen community of Tamil Nadu into mainstream society with equal rights and recognition.

1.10 SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Transwomen have the rights to live equal to the people belong to male and female. In reality, they are socially excluded and longing for a place under the sun with equal opportunities in education, employment, shelter and healthcare and for authorization to choose their own representatives to save them. The various dimensions and aspects of the social exclusion issues of transwomen must be studied carefully to include them into mainstream society.

However, it is very recent that academic studies start to notice and focus on the gender diversity and the publications reflect the global interest of social scientists on transwomen subjects. While studying the social exclusion of transwomen, it must be studied the role of social institutions such as media in particular cinema as an influential mass medium that represents the transwomen to encourage the audience to understand the lives of transwomen. Tamil cinema produces a large number of films every year and the representation of transwomen are also increasing accordingly.

The analysis of the representation of transwomen in Tamil cinema could re-conceptualize the way transwomen were represented in cinema to understand their issues. This study could suggest the necessity of the equal, fair and neutral representation of transwomen in Tamil cinema. This study
intends to discourse the relationship between Tamil cinema and social exclusion issues of transwomen community of Tamil Nadu to include them into mainstream society through acceptance with equal rights and recognition. Examining the various forms of representations of transwomen in Tamil cinema over a period could sensitize and create awareness about transwomen and their issues among filmmakers.

Discovering the influence and impact of transwomen representations on transwomen could lead to a reconceptualization of transwomen community in society, censorship and film industry. Exploring the relationship between representation and impacts could bring a change in public attitudes and increase the level of social inclusion towards transwomen. Hence, studying the relationship of Tamil cinema and social issues of transwomen, make this a significant study within the context.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

In order to narrow the scope of this study to a performable task, the mainstream films are only considered and other films such as short films and documentaries were excluded as they are relatively smaller, less mainstream viewing audiences and hard to track and obtain. There was a lack of availability of films, which were represented transwomen in any mode to view.

Mainstream Tamil cinema industry has produced more than 5000 films since the first talkie Kalidas released in 1931 and an average of 120 films per year. It’s not possible to view all the films and identify which are representing transwomen. Hence, the films analysed were limited to those released between 1977 and 2016, and the study considered only 59 films produced within that period, which are identified from both the literature and by the researcher as notable films representing transwomen.
As the focus of the study was to analyse the representation of transwomen in films, other representations, the narrative, the construction and the totality of the film that are not related to the representation of transwomen were ignored. Finally, the opinions of heterosexuals or cisgender about the representation of transwomen are not studied as there are enough multiple and mixed methods were carried out to study the research problem.

1.12 AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to examine the transwomen representations in Tamil films and to explore the impact of the transwomen representations on their social exclusion.

1.13 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The objective of the research is to examine the representations of transwomen in Tamil films. The objectives are:

1. To identify the Tamil films representing transwomen from 1977 to 2016.

2. To find out and analyse the narrative conventions used to construct transwomen identity in Tamil films.

3. To explore and analyse the overall evolution and trends occurred in the representations of transwomen in Tamil films in forty years between 1977 and 2016.

4. To find out the ways the transwomen interpret the representation of transwomen in Tamil films.

5. To find out the impact of the representations of transwomen on the social exclusion issues of transwomen.
1.14 DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS

**Aravani**: The Hindu religious term in Tamil used to refer Transwoman/MTF, which is originated from the Aravan sacrifice of Hindu mythology Mahabharata. Transwomen of Tamil Nadu consider themselves as the wives of Aravan and refer them as Aravanis by identifying with the Mohini avatar of lord Krishna.

**Cisgender**: Cisgender refers to the person whose gender identity, expression, or behaviour match with the biological sex assigned at birth. This term used to describe the individuals from male and female gender.

**Gender Dysphoria**: The psychological condition of discomfort or distress that is caused by a discrepancy between a person’s gender identity and that person’s sex assigned at birth.

**Gender identity**: Gender identity refers to a person’s internal sense of being male, female, or something else.

**Heteronormativity**: The punitive rules (familial, social and legal) that require individuals to conform to hegemonic, heterosexual standards of identity.

**Hijra**: The biological male who rejects his masculine identity in due course of time to identify either as women, or not-men, or in-between man and woman, or neither man nor woman.

**Kothi**: Kothi refers the biological males who express the varying degrees of femininity. Kothi’s are a heterogeneous group.

**MTF**: MTF refers a person who was assigned as a male at birth, but identifies and lives as a female. Also known as a transwoman/transgender woman.
**Representation:** The process of presenting an image of something in order to communicate ideas or to tell a story (Benshoff & Griffin 2004).

**Sexual orientation:** A term describing a person’s attraction to members of the same sex and/or a different sex, usually defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, or asexual.

**Social exclusion:** The process of whole or partial exclusion of individuals or group from full participation in the society they live (Haan 2001).

**Stereotype:** The superficial beliefs about a specific group within a given society (Kanahara 2006).

**Tamil cinema:** The term Tamil cinema refers the film industry of Tamil Nadu.

**Tamil films:** The feature films produced in Tamil language and in Tamil Nadu for theatrical release.

**Thirunangai:** The contemporary Tamil term used to refer transwoman/MTF to mean respected woman. While religious and derogative terms were in use, the term Thirunangai is considered as a dignified term to refer transwoman in Tamil Nadu.

**Transgender gaze:** The ways in which audience look at the transwomen characters in cinema or any other art form.

**Transmisogyny:** Transmisogyny refers the ridicule or dismissal of a transwoman for her expressions of femininity, and the inferiority of femininity and its existence for the benefit of masculinity.

**Transgender:** The term transgender refers to the person whose gender identity, expression, or behaviour is not traditionally associated/match with the biological sex assigned at birth. However, transgender refers to many
gender variant self-identifying labels. Transgender is an adjective, not a noun, thus ‘transgender people’ is appropriate, and the usage of ‘transgenders’ is often viewed as disrespectful (APA 2013). Transgender people may identify as female-to-male (FTM) or male-to-female (MTF). ‘Trans’ is shorthand for transgender.

**Transphobia:** The emotional disgust, fear, anger or discomfort felt or expressed towards transgender people.

**Transsexual:** The individual who experiences a profound and persistent cross-gender identification and transforms physical characteristics through hormonal and/or surgical processes in order to live permanently in chosen gender. The term transsexual is originated in the medical and psychological communities. However, transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically.

**Transwoman/Transgender woman:** A term refers a transgender individual who currently identifies as a woman. Transwoman is also known as MTF transgender.

### 1.15 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis structured into five chapters.

**Chapter 1:** The first chapter provides an introduction and the significance of the research. This introductory chapter gives the origin of cinema and the origin and developments of cinema in India and in Tamil Nadu, and the historical, cultural and contemporary contexts of the transwomen in world culture, in Indian culture and in Tamil culture. This chapter states the need for the research, scope of the research, limitations of the research, statement of the problem, aim of the research, objectives of the research and definitions of key words.
Chapter 2: The second chapter presents the review of relevant literature on the representation of transwomen in cinema and the social exclusion of the transwomen. The review of literature defines and develops a valid argument from the implications of studies and establishes the context and rationale of this research to confirm the choice of research focus and questions.

Chapter 3: The third chapter states the research design and appropriate methods to investigate the research problem. The multiple and mixed methods which are comprised of the quantitative and qualitative phases of ethnographic content analysis, survey, and in-depth interview are clearly defined. This chapter also establishes the theoretical framework of the research. The theoretical framework determines interrelated concepts and theories of heteronormativity, social exclusion, representation, stereotype and transgender gaze and provides a conceptual understanding of the problem, the measurement and the theoretical relationships of research.

Chapter 4: Chapter four presents the results and discussion of the ethnographic content analysis of the representations of the transwomen in Tamil films, the survey of transwomen and the in-depth interview of the experts from transgender activists, writers and film directors.

Chapter 5: Chapter five presents the findings and conclusion of the research, suggestions and recommendations for future research.