



## From Mahesha to Vidya: A Thematic Exploration of Identity, Trauma, and Resilience in Naanu Avanalla Avalu

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores the psychological themes portrayed in the film *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* through a qualitative thematic analysis approach. The primary objective of the research is to examine how complex psychological and social experiences related to transgender identity are represented through narrative structure, character development, and key cinematic moments. The study focuses on six major themes: gender identity, societal rejection, lived experiences of transgender individuals, coping mechanisms and community support, trauma and recovery, and identity transformation and self-acceptance. A qualitative research design was employed, wherein selected scenes and dialogues from the film were systematically analysed using the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis interprets the psychological experiences of the protagonist, particularly the transition from Mahesha to Vidya, highlighting processes of identity formation, emotional conflict, and resilience. The findings demonstrate how experiences of stigma, discrimination, and social exclusion contribute to psychological distress, including feelings of isolation, shame, and reduced self-esteem. At the same time, the study reveals the significant role of social support and community belonging in fostering coping, resilience, and emotional healing. The results suggest that *Naanu*



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*Avanalla Avalu* provides a realistic and sensitive portrayal of transgender experiences, offering valuable insights into the psychological impact of marginalisation and the process of self-acceptance. The study contributes to the field of media psychology by illustrating how regional cinema can serve as an effective medium for understanding complex human behaviour and promoting awareness of gender diversity, inclusion, and mental health.

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## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Naanu *Avanalla Avalu* is not only a biographical narrative but also a profound psychological and social exploration of gender identity, marginalisation, and human resilience. While the film portrays the life of a transgender woman, it extends beyond a personal story by reflecting deeper psychological themes such as identity conflict, social rejection, emotional trauma, and self-acceptance. The protagonist's transformation from Mahesha to Vidya represents a complex process of identity formation shaped by internal experiences and external societal pressures. This journey highlights the psychological realities faced by transgender individuals and offers meaningful insight into gender diversity.

Cinema is widely recognised as a powerful medium for representing psychological experiences in an emotionally engaging and accessible manner. Films allow audiences to understand complex human behaviour through narrative, symbolism, and character development. In this context, *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* serves as an important cultural text that brings attention to the lived experiences of transgender individuals, a group that has historically faced stigma and discrimination.

### Conceptual Framework

One of the central themes portrayed in the film is gender identity and the internal conflict associated with it. Gender identity refers to an individual's deeply felt sense of being male, female, or otherwise, which may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth (American Psychological Association, 2021). The protagonist's early experiences reflect confusion, fear, and hesitation in expressing a feminine identity due to societal expectations. This struggle illustrates the gradual development of self-awareness and identity formation (Erikson, 1968). The rejection of the name "Mahesha" and adoption of "Vidya" symbolise movement toward self-acceptance and authenticity.



The film also portrays the psychological consequences of social rejection. The protagonist experiences ridicule, discrimination, and exclusion in school, family, and public settings. Such rejection may lead to loneliness, shame, reduced self-esteem, and emotional distress. Minority Stress Theory explains that stigma and discrimination create chronic psychological stress for marginalised individuals (Meyer, 2003).

Another significant issue highlighted in the film is the lived reality of transgender individuals in society. Due to structural discrimination and lack of opportunities, many transgender persons are denied education, employment, and equal participation in society. This often pushes them toward marginalised occupations such as begging or informal labour. According to the World Health Organization (2015), discrimination and exclusion are major determinants of poor mental health among transgender populations.

In contrast, the film also emphasises the role of community support. When rejected by biological family and society, the transgender community becomes a source of belongingness, emotional security, and resilience. Social support functions as a protective factor that reduces stress and improves coping capacity (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

The film further portrays trauma and recovery through experiences of violence, emotional pain, and resilience. Exposure to repeated stress and abuse can negatively influence emotional regulation and self-perception (Herman, 1992). However, the protagonist's journey also demonstrates healing through support, courage, and self-acceptance.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The selection of *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* for the present study is based on its realistic and sensitive portrayal of psychological and social issues related to transgender identity. The film provides rich material for examining themes such as identity conflict, discrimination, trauma, coping, resilience, and self-acceptance. Although cinema has often portrayed transgender individuals through stereotypes, this film offers a humane and psychologically meaningful representation. Therefore, it is highly suitable for thematic analysis.

The study is also relevant in the present social context, where awareness regarding gender diversity, inclusion, and mental health is increasingly important. Analysing such films contributes to academic understanding and encourages empathy toward marginalised communities.



## Significance of the Study

This study is significant in both psychological and social dimensions. Psychologically, it contributes to understanding identity development, emotional trauma, resilience, and self-acceptance among transgender individuals. Socially, it highlights the consequences of discrimination and the importance of acceptance and support systems.

The study may be useful for students, researchers, counsellors, psychologists, and educators by demonstrating how films can be used as tools for psychological understanding and social awareness. It also contributes to discussions on gender equality, inclusion, and human dignity.

## Need for the Study

There is limited psychological research focusing on transgender representation in regional Indian cinema, particularly Kannada films. Many studies examine mainstream cinema, while regional films with realistic narratives remain underexplored. *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* presents an opportunity to understand transgender experiences through a culturally relevant lens.

Hence, the present study seeks to fill this gap by systematically analysing the psychological themes represented in the film using thematic analysis.

## Overview of the Present Study

The present study aims to analyse how psychological themes are represented in *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* through a systematic thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By focusing on themes such as gender identity, societal rejection, lived experiences, coping mechanisms, trauma, and identity transformation, the study connects cinematic representation with real-life psychological concepts.

Overall, the film can be understood not only as a social narrative but also as a meaningful representation of resilience, dignity, and the ongoing journey toward identity and self-acceptance.

## Review of literature

*Dunsmoor and Paz (2018)* reviewed fear conditioning and the psychological mechanisms through which repeated negative experiences shape emotional responses and behavior. Fear conditioning occurs when individuals begin associating certain people, places, or situations with danger because of prior harmful experiences. Over time, these associations may generalize, leading to anxiety even in relatively safe contexts. The researchers explained that repeated exposure to humiliation, violence, rejection, or



hostility can create patterns of hypervigilance, avoidance, emotional distress, and withdrawal. Although such responses may initially serve protective functions in threatening environments, they can become psychologically burdensome when generalized across everyday life. This framework is especially relevant for individuals who experience chronic discrimination or abuse in social contexts. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist is repeatedly exposed to ridicule, verbal abuse, public humiliation, and physical violence. These recurring experiences help explain scenes of fear, helplessness, sadness, and withdrawal portrayed throughout the narrative. The protagonist's emotional reactions can therefore be interpreted as conditioned responses to a hostile environment rather than as personal weakness. Dunsmoor and Paz also emphasized that recovery is possible through corrective emotional experiences, safety, trust, and supportive relationships. This is reflected in the film when emotional reassurance and community belonging gradually help restore confidence and psychological strength. The study further noted that trauma-informed perspectives are necessary when interpreting behavior among marginalized individuals. Actions such as avoidance, mistrust, emotional numbness, or defensiveness may represent adaptive survival responses rather than maladjustment. For the present study, this literature is valuable because it helps explain how the film portrays trauma, vulnerability, and healing. It provides a psychological basis for understanding how repeated rejection and abuse shape emotional life while also recognizing the possibility of resilience and recovery through support systems (Dunsmoor & Paz, 2018).

*Tamir (2016)* explored emotional complexity and argued that individuals frequently experience multiple and conflicting emotions at the same time. Rather than feeling only one emotion in a given situation, people may simultaneously experience fear and hope, sadness and relief, guilt and excitement, or anxiety and determination. The study emphasized that emotional regulation involves managing these emotions in ways that support long-term goals and psychological functioning. Emotional conflict is particularly common during major life transitions involving uncertainty, identity change, and social risk. This perspective is highly relevant to transgender identity development, where personal authenticity may coexist with fear of rejection, loneliness, or loss of relationships. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist experiences deep emotional ambivalence throughout the journey from Mahesha to Vidya. There are moments of joy and hope associated with self-expression, alongside sadness caused by discrimination and isolation. Similarly, courage to pursue authenticity coexists with anxiety regarding family rejection and societal consequences. Tamir argued that such emotional complexity is not a sign of weakness but an indicator of adaptive psychological functioning. Individuals who tolerate mixed emotions often develop deeper self-awareness and stronger coping skills. The film realistically portrays this process by showing the protagonist's gradual movement from confusion and emotional turmoil



toward clarity and self-acceptance. Tamir also noted that strategies such as reappraisal, perseverance, and goal-focused coping help individuals navigate distress. These processes are reflected in the protagonist's determination to continue despite repeated setbacks. For the present study, this literature is valuable because it explains the internal emotional struggles shown in the narrative and demonstrates how emotional conflict can contribute to personal growth. It provides a useful framework for interpreting the protagonist's psychological development through the management of fear, hope, grief, resilience, and self-determination (Tamir, 2016).

*Fadjukoff, Pulkkinen, and Kokko (2016)* examined identity development using Erikson's psychosocial theory and Marcia's identity status model. The researchers explained that identity formation is not a single event but a gradual developmental process shaped by exploration, commitment, and interaction with the social environment. Individuals often move through stages such as identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement before reaching a stable sense of self. During identity diffusion, a person may feel confused or uncertain about personal roles and values. In foreclosure, identity is accepted without personal exploration, often based on external expectations. In moratorium, active questioning and exploration begin as individuals seek authenticity. Identity achievement occurs when a coherent sense of self is accepted and integrated into daily life. This framework is highly relevant to transgender identity development, where personal awareness may emerge in conflict with rigid social norms and assigned gender expectations. In the context of Naanu Avanalla Avalu, the protagonist's journey reflects movement from confusion regarding assigned male identity toward active exploration and eventual self-acceptance as Vidya. The emotional distress portrayed in the narrative can be understood as a natural consequence of unresolved identity conflict. The study further emphasized that supportive environments and opportunities for self-expression significantly improve healthy identity outcomes. Conversely, rejection, stigma, and social pressure may delay identity consolidation and intensify psychological distress. From a developmental perspective, the protagonist's eventual assertion of authentic identity represents identity achievement despite severe adversity. Fadjukoff et al. concluded that identity growth is dynamic and often shaped by struggle, resilience, and meaningful relationships. This literature is important for the present study because it provides a psychological framework for understanding how the film portrays self-discovery, inner conflict, and the universal need for authenticity in the face of social pressure (Fadjukoff et al., 2016).

*GLAAD (2015)* reported that inclusive portrayals of LGBTQ characters in media significantly influence public awareness, empathy, and social attitudes. The report found that many viewers develop their earliest impressions of marginalized communities through film and television, making media



representation especially important. Inaccurate portrayals often reinforce prejudice, fear, and misinformation, while respectful and multidimensional narratives can promote understanding and acceptance. The report emphasized that LGBTQ characters should be presented as full human beings with relationships, goals, emotions, strengths, and agency rather than being defined solely by identity labels. This perspective is highly relevant to transgender representation in cinema. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist is portrayed as a central figure whose emotional struggles, hopes, pain, and resilience drive the narrative. The character is not reduced to a stereotype but shown as an individual seeking dignity, love, safety, and belonging. Such representation aligns with the principles of inclusive storytelling identified by GLAAD. The report also noted that meaningful visibility can normalize diversity and encourage broader public conversations regarding equality, rights, and inclusion. In the context of the present study, this literature helps explain why the film may have educational value for audiences unfamiliar with transgender realities. By humanizing the protagonist and depicting the emotional consequences of discrimination, the narrative invites viewers to develop compassionate and informed perspectives. GLAAD concluded that responsible media representation can function as a catalyst for social change by replacing fear and ignorance with understanding. Therefore, *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* may be interpreted as an example of cinema that uses storytelling to foster visibility, empathy, dignity, and inclusive attitudes toward transgender communities within society (GLAAD, 2015).

*McInroy and Craig (2015)* examined how LGBTQ-inclusive media influences audience perceptions, identity understanding, and social attitudes. Their study found that positive portrayals of LGBTQ characters can reduce prejudice and increase empathy, especially among viewers with limited personal contact with sexual and gender minorities. The researchers explained this process through parasocial contact, in which audiences form emotional bonds with fictional characters and thereby reconsider existing stereotypes. Media narratives were also found to be important sources of validation for LGBTQ viewers, who may rarely encounter affirming representations of themselves in everyday life. This framework is highly relevant to films centered on transgender experiences. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, viewers are invited to emotionally connect with the protagonist's pain, resilience, rejection, and search for dignity. Such identification may help audiences humanize transgender lives and question previously held assumptions. The study further emphasized that authentic and multidimensional portrayals are more effective than tokenistic or stereotyped representation. When characters are shown with emotional complexity, relationships, aspirations, and struggles, viewers are more likely to respond compassionately. This principle is reflected in the film's portrayal of family rejection, economic



hardship, community support, emotional trauma, and self-acceptance. McInroy and Craig concluded that inclusive media can function as both entertainment and informal education by increasing understanding of marginalized communities. For the present study, this literature helps explain how *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* may influence public attitudes while also affirming transgender viewers through recognition and visibility. The film therefore represents not only a narrative text but also a social tool capable of fostering empathy, awareness, and inclusive perspectives among diverse audiences through emotionally meaningful storytelling (McInroy & Craig, 2015).

*Dutta and Roy (2014)* explored portrayals of transgender communities in Indian media and found that representation was frequently shaped by sensationalism, pity, ridicule, or moral judgment. Cinema and news narratives often reduced transgender persons to stereotypes associated with begging, deviance, abnormality, or comic entertainment. Such portrayals were found to reinforce exclusion by presenting transgender identity as socially undesirable rather than as a valid human experience. The researchers argued that Indian media should move toward narratives based on dignity, rights, realism, and social inclusion. They further emphasized that authentic storytelling can help audiences understand structural barriers faced by transgender communities, including discrimination in family life, education, employment, housing, and healthcare. This framework is directly relevant to *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, which challenges many stereotypical conventions commonly seen in Indian cinema. Instead of using the protagonist for spectacle or comic effect, the film presents emotional suffering, identity affirmation, and resilience in the face of systemic rejection. The narrative also highlights economic marginalization and the significance of community support, thereby reflecting real social conditions rather than caricature. Dutta and Roy concluded that when media shifts from stigma to humanity, it can contribute to broader social change by normalizing diversity and encouraging empathy. For the present study, this literature helps explain the cultural importance of *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* within the Indian context. The film demonstrates a movement away from exploitative representation toward socially conscious cinema that recognizes transgender persons as complex individuals with emotions, aspirations, and rights. Therefore, it may be interpreted as a progressive contribution to Indian media discourse on gender diversity and inclusion (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

*Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2009)* examined the relationship between family acceptance, family rejection, and mental health outcomes among LGBTQ young adults. The study found that family reactions during identity disclosure play a major role in shaping long-term psychological well-being. Participants who experienced rejection from parents or close relatives reported significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, substance misuse, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts. In



contrast, those who received emotional support and acceptance demonstrated healthier self-worth, stronger coping skills, and better overall adjustment. The researchers concluded that family acceptance acts as a protective factor, whereas rejection becomes a major psychological risk factor. This literature is highly relevant to transgender individuals because family responses often determine whether identity exploration occurs in a supportive or hostile environment. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist repeatedly seeks recognition and acceptance from family members, particularly parental figures. The emotional pain associated with rejection shown in the film reflects findings from Ryan et al.'s study. Feelings of loneliness, shame, grief, and longing for belongingness are common consequences when familial support is absent. At the same time, the desire for reconciliation demonstrates the continuing psychological importance of attachment bonds. The researchers also noted that affirming behaviors, respectful language, and inclusion in family life significantly improve mental health outcomes. This suggests that even small acts of acceptance can be transformative. For the present study, this review provides a useful framework for analyzing scenes in which the protagonist seeks validation and struggles with emotional wounds caused by family rejection. It highlights how parental acceptance contributes to identity confidence, emotional stability, and resilience among marginalized individuals (Ryan et al., 2009).

*Benshoff and Griffin (2006)* analyzed the historical portrayal of queer identities in world cinema. The authors observed that many earlier films represented sexual and gender minorities as tragic victims, villains, comic figures, or dangerous outsiders. These portrayals reflected broader cultural anxieties and reinforced the belief that non-normative identities were socially unacceptable. However, the study also noted that contemporary cinema increasingly challenges such conventions by presenting queer characters with emotional depth, realism, and agency. This shift from stereotype to complexity is important because cinema shapes public memory, cultural imagination, and social attitudes. The framework is particularly relevant to transgender-centered films such as *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*. The protagonist is not treated as an object of ridicule or threat but as a complete human being negotiating identity, discrimination, and the search for belonging. This humanistic approach aligns with progressive queer cinema traditions that foreground lived experience, dignity, and authenticity. Benshoff and Griffin further argued that representation becomes transformative when marginalized characters are central to the narrative rather than existing only to support dominant characters. In the film, the protagonist's struggles, emotions, and decisions drive the story, thereby granting narrative agency. The authors concluded that socially aware cinema can challenge heteronormative assumptions and open public discussion about justice, identity, and equality. For the present study, this literature provides a useful framework for interpreting *Naanu*



Avanalla Avalu as part of a wider movement toward inclusive queer representation. It demonstrates how the film contributes to changing cinematic traditions by portraying transgender identity seriously, respectfully, and with psychological realism (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006).

*Braun and Clarke (2006)* introduced reflexive thematic analysis as a flexible and systematic method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. The authors proposed six phases of analysis: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. They emphasized that thematic analysis is particularly valuable when researchers seek to understand experiences, meanings, and representations within texts, narratives, interviews, or media content. Unlike rigid quantitative methods, thematic analysis allows deeper exploration of psychological and social realities embedded in language and behavior. This framework is highly relevant to film analysis because movies communicate meaning through dialogues, character development, symbolism, and narrative structure. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist's journey contains recurring themes related to gender identity, societal rejection, trauma, resilience, belongingness, and self-acceptance. Using Braun and Clarke's framework enables the researcher to systematically code scenes, dialogues, emotional expressions, and character interactions to identify meaningful psychological patterns. The method also supports interpretation of latent themes, such as internal conflict, stigma, emotional pain, and empowerment, beyond surface-level events. Braun and Clarke further noted that researcher reflexivity is important, meaning that interpretations should be thoughtful, transparent, and grounded in the data. For the present study, this literature serves as the methodological foundation for examining how psychological themes are represented cinematically. It justifies the use of thematic analysis to connect narrative events in the film with broader psychological concepts. Therefore, Braun and Clarke's model provides both structure and credibility to the present research by enabling a rich exploration of meaning within the film text (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

*Meyer (2003)* proposed minority stress theory to explain how stigma and prejudice create chronic psychological stress among marginalized social groups. According to the theory, individuals who belong to socially stigmatized communities face both external and internal stressors that negatively affect mental health. External stressors include discrimination, harassment, rejection, violence, and exclusion, while internal stressors may involve fear of rejection, concealment of identity, expectation of prejudice, and internalized stigma. Meyer argued that these stressors accumulate over time and can result in anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, emotional distress, and low self-esteem. The theory is particularly relevant to transgender populations because they often encounter persistent exclusion in family, education,



employment, and public spaces. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist experiences ridicule, humiliation, rejection, and marginalization throughout the narrative. These experiences can be interpreted as examples of minority stress that shape emotional suffering and identity struggle. The protagonist's fear, sadness, and isolation are therefore not personal weaknesses but understandable responses to hostile social conditions. Meyer also emphasized that coping resources such as community support, resilience, and identity pride can reduce the harmful impact of minority stress. This is reflected in the film through the emotional support offered by the transgender community and the protagonist's eventual self-acceptance. The theory shifts responsibility from the individual to oppressive social systems, highlighting that mental health difficulties often arise from discrimination rather than identity itself. For the present study, minority stress theory offers a strong framework for understanding the film's themes of social rejection, emotional pain, and resilience. It also explains how systemic stigma influences psychological well-being and identity development among transgender individuals (Meyer, 2003).

*Gross (2001)* examined how media representation influences public understanding of marginalized communities. The study argued that cinema and television play an important role in shaping attitudes toward groups with whom audiences may have limited direct interaction. When minority communities are absent, ridiculed, or shown through stereotypes, prejudice is often reinforced. In contrast, respectful and realistic portrayals can generate empathy, awareness, and social acceptance. Gross emphasized that representation is not only symbolic but also psychological because repeated images shape beliefs about whose lives are valued in society. This framework is highly relevant to transgender portrayals in Indian cinema, where characters have frequently been reduced to comic relief, fear, or social deviance. In relation to *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the film can be understood as a progressive intervention because it centers a transgender protagonist with emotional depth, dignity, and personal agency. Rather than presenting the character as a stereotype, the narrative explores family rejection, identity conflict, resilience, and self-acceptance. Such portrayals help audiences recognize transgender identity as a legitimate human experience rather than as abnormality. Gross also noted that quality of visibility matters more than mere presence. Meaningful representation requires complexity, emotional realism, and narrative importance. These elements are evident in the autobiographical and psychologically grounded storytelling of the film. For the present study, Gross's framework is useful for understanding why the film is culturally significant. The film does not simply show a transgender person; it humanizes the character and challenges exclusionary assumptions. Therefore, media representation theory provides a valuable basis for analyzing how cinema can influence social attitudes and support inclusive understandings of gender diversity (Gross, 2001).



*Masten (2001)* defined resilience as positive adaptation despite significant adversity. The study challenged the idea that resilience is a rare or extraordinary trait, instead describing it as “ordinary magic” that emerges through common protective processes such as supportive relationships, self-efficacy, problem-solving ability, hope, and adaptive coping. According to Masten, resilience does not mean the absence of pain or distress; rather, it refers to the ability to recover, adjust, and continue functioning despite hardship. This framework is highly relevant to marginalized individuals who face repeated rejection, violence, and social exclusion. In *Naanu Avanalla Avalu*, the protagonist encounters multiple forms of adversity, including humiliation, poverty, family rejection, emotional trauma, and social marginalization. Despite these barriers, the character continues striving for dignity, recognition, and authentic self-expression. This persistence reflects resilience in action. Masten also emphasized that resilience is strengthened when individuals have access to affirming relationships and opportunities for growth. In the film, support from the transgender community and moments of identity affirmation function as protective factors. The protagonist’s eventual self-acceptance represents an important psychological milestone because accepting one’s identity can enhance self-worth and emotional stability. The study further suggested that resilience often develops through overcoming manageable challenges, which gradually builds confidence and coping capacity. For the present study, this literature provides a strong framework for understanding how the film portrays courage, perseverance, and empowerment. It demonstrates that the protagonist’s success is not the result of invulnerability, but of adaptive strength developed through struggle, support, and commitment to living authentically despite systemic oppression (Masten, 2001).

*Hall (1997)* explained that representation is the process through which meaning is created about people, identities, and social groups through language, images, and cultural narratives. The media does not merely reflect reality; it actively constructs how audiences understand the world. Repeated portrayals often become accepted as truth, especially when viewers have limited real-life contact with marginalized communities. Hall argued that stereotypes simplify and fix differences, thereby maintaining unequal power relations. This perspective is highly relevant to transgender representation in cinema, where individuals have often been portrayed through ridicule, danger, or moral abnormality. Such images shape negative social attitudes and reinforce stigma. In contrast, alternative portrayals can challenge dominant assumptions and create new meanings around identity. *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* can be interpreted through this lens as a film that reconstructs public understanding of transgender identity. The protagonist is represented not as a caricature but as a person experiencing love, pain, rejection, courage, and self-realization. This narrative complexity challenges stereotypical meanings associated with gender



nonconformity. Hall also emphasized that representation is closely linked to power because those who control narratives influence whose voices are heard. By centering a transgender life story rooted in autobiography, the film offers visibility to an experience often excluded from mainstream discourse. For the present study, Hall's theory helps explain how the film contributes to broader cultural change. It redefines transgender identity from deviance to dignity and from marginality to humanity. Thus, the film demonstrates how cinema can reshape meanings, question prejudice, and promote more inclusive understandings of gender diversity within society (Hall, 1997).

## Methodology

### Aim

The present study aims to explore the psychological themes represented in *Naanu Avanalla...Avalu*, with a focus on the protagonist's journey of gender identity formation, social marginalization, and psychological resilience. The study examines how the film portrays key psychological constructs such as identity conflict, social rejection, trauma, coping mechanisms, and self-acceptance through its narrative and character development. This research seeks to interpret how these psychological dimensions are meaningfully communicated through cinematic representation.

### Research Objectives

- To understand how identity formation and self-acceptance are depicted in the protagonist's journey.
- To analyze the impact of social stigma and discrimination on psychological well-being.
- To examine the role of community support and coping mechanisms in fostering resilience.
- To study the representation of trauma and its psychological effects.
- To explore the process of identity transformation and personal growth.

### Research Questions

- How does the film portray identity formation and self-acceptance?
- In what ways does social rejection influence the protagonist's psychological well-being?
- How is community support represented as a coping mechanism?
- How are trauma and emotional distress depicted in the film?
- How does the protagonist achieve identity transformation and resilience?



## Research Design and Paradigm

This study adopts a **qualitative research design** grounded in a **constructivist paradigm**, which assumes that meaning is socially constructed and interpreted through subjective and cultural contexts. The focus of the study is to understand deeper psychological meanings within the film rather than to quantify observable data.

The research employs **reflexive thematic analysis** as proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns of meaning within the data. Additionally, elements of **qualitative content analysis** are used to systematically examine dialogues, scenes, and character behaviors. This combined approach enables the exploration of both explicit and implicit meanings embedded in the film.

## Sample Selection

The sample selected for this study is the film *Naanu Avanalla...Avalu*. The film was chosen using **purposive sampling**, as it provides a rich and realistic portrayal of transgender identity and related psychological experiences. The narrative is particularly suitable for thematic analysis due to its detailed depiction of identity development, emotional struggles, social exclusion, and personal transformation.

## Data Collection Procedure

Data for the study were collected through repeated viewing of the film over a period of approximately 45 days. The researcher engaged in careful observation of key narrative elements relevant to the research objectives. The **unit of analysis** included dialogues, scenes, and character behaviors.

Notes were recorded focusing on:

- Key dialogues reflecting psychological themes
- Emotional expressions and behavioral responses of characters
- Important scenes illustrating identity conflict, discrimination, trauma, and resilience
- Symbolic elements such as setting, costume, and visual representation

The data were organized systematically using tables that included dialogue excerpts, character names, and timestamps. Repeated viewing ensured depth, consistency, and accuracy in identifying relevant themes.



## **Analytic Procedure**

The data were analysed using the six-phase framework of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006). This method was selected because it provides a systematic and flexible approach for identifying patterns of meaning within qualitative data. In the present study, the film Naanu Avanalla Avalu served as the primary source of data. Dialogues, character behaviour, emotional expressions, interpersonal interactions, and significant narrative events were examined to identify psychological themes represented throughout the film.

- **Familiarization with the Data**

The first phase involved familiarization with the data through repeated viewing of the film. The researcher watched the film multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of the storyline, characters, emotional tone, and major events. During this stage, preliminary notes were made regarding important scenes, dialogues, behavioural patterns, and recurring issues related to identity, discrimination, trauma, coping, and transformation. Repeated viewing enabled deeper immersion in the data and reduced the possibility of overlooking subtle psychological meanings.

- **Generating Initial Codes**

The second phase involved generating initial codes from the data. Coding refers to the process of identifying meaningful units of information relevant to the research objectives. Significant dialogues, behavioural responses, emotional reactions, and social interactions were systematically highlighted and labelled with descriptive codes. Examples of codes included identity confusion, rejection, bullying, emotional distress, support, resilience, and self-acceptance. These initial codes formed the foundation for subsequent theme development.

- **Searching for Themes**

The third phase focused on searching for themes by organising related codes into broader categories of meaning. Codes with conceptual similarities were grouped together to form potential themes. For instance, codes related to feminine self-expression, rejection of male identity, and adoption of a new name were organised under the theme of gender identity. Similarly, codes associated with ridicule, exclusion, and discrimination were grouped under societal rejection. This phase helped transform individual codes into meaningful thematic patterns.



- **Reviewing Themes**

The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the preliminary themes to ensure consistency with both the coded data and the overall narrative of the film. The researcher revisited relevant scenes and dialogues to determine whether each theme accurately represented the data. Themes were modified, merged, or separated wherever necessary. This process ensured internal coherence within themes and clear distinctions between themes, thereby strengthening the credibility of the analysis.

- **Defining and Naming Themes**

The fifth phase involved clearly defining and naming each final theme. Once the thematic structure was finalised, each theme was carefully examined to determine its central meaning and relevance to the research objectives. Themes were named in concise and meaningful terms, such as Gender Identity, Societal Rejection, Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals, Coping Mechanisms and Community Support, Trauma and Recovery, and Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance. Relevant psychological concepts were used to interpret and explain each theme.

- **Writing the Report**

The final phase involved producing the written report of the analysis. The findings were presented in a structured and coherent manner, supported by relevant scenes, dialogues, and character experiences from the film. Each theme was interpreted in relation to appropriate psychological literature and theoretical concepts where applicable. The final report aimed to provide a clear understanding of how the film represents identity, marginalisation, resilience, trauma, and self-acceptance through its narrative and characters.

## **Reflexivity Statement**

The researcher recognises that qualitative thematic analysis is inherently interpretative in nature, and therefore personal perspectives may influence the process of analysing and understanding the selected film, Naanu Avanalla Avalu. Since the present study examines psychological themes represented through characters, dialogues, and narrative experiences, the researcher's academic background in psychology, personal interests, and prior knowledge of identity-related issues may shape the interpretation of certain scenes. Individual beliefs, cultural understanding, emotional reactions, and social attitudes may also consciously or unconsciously affect the way meanings are assigned during the



analytical process. Acknowledging this possibility is important to ensure transparency and credibility in qualitative research.

The researcher understands that thematic analysis involves identifying patterns, organising data, and interpreting meanings from the content being studied. During this process, there is a possibility of paying greater attention to scenes that strongly reflect psychological concepts such as identity conflict, discrimination, trauma, resilience, or self-acceptance, while less obvious themes may receive less attention. To reduce such bias, conscious efforts were made to remain open to all relevant patterns emerging from the film rather than limiting interpretations to preconceived expectations or assumptions.

To enhance trustworthiness, interpretations were grounded in observable data obtained directly from the film. Dialogues, character behaviour, emotional expressions, interactions, and major narrative events were carefully examined and used as the basis for coding and theme development. The film was viewed repeatedly to improve familiarity with the storyline and to ensure that interpretations were made within the broader context of each character's experiences. Repeated viewing also helped reduce the risk of misunderstanding isolated scenes or drawing conclusions from incomplete information.

In addition, established psychological concepts and theoretical perspectives were used to guide the interpretation of findings. Themes such as gender identity, societal rejection, coping mechanisms, trauma, recovery, and self-acceptance were interpreted through recognised psychological frameworks rather than unsupported personal opinion. The use of theory provided a structured and academically sound basis for analysing the character's experiences and strengthened the overall credibility of the study.

Continuous self-reflection was maintained throughout the research process. The researcher regularly examined whether interpretations were evidence-based, balanced, and adequately supported by scenes and dialogues from the film. Whenever personal reactions or assumptions emerged, efforts were made to separate emotional responses from analytical conclusions. Reflexive awareness was especially important because the film addresses sensitive issues related to transgender identity, marginalisation, and social exclusion.

Furthermore, the researcher approached the subject matter with empathy, respect, and cultural sensitivity. Care was taken to avoid stereotyping or misrepresenting the lived experiences portrayed in the film. Instead, the analysis aimed to understand the psychological and social realities represented through the protagonist's journey. By maintaining reflexivity, grounding interpretations in observable



data, and applying theoretical support, the researcher sought to ensure that the study remained balanced, credible, and academically rigorous.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study is based on the analysis of a publicly available film and does not involve human participants; therefore, formal ethical approval was not required. However, ethical standards were maintained by:

- Properly citing all sources and references
- Avoiding misinterpretation or unsupported conclusions
- Respecting the integrity of the film and its narrative
- Refraining from making clinical or diagnostic judgments about characters

### **Trustworthiness of the Study**

To ensure the rigor and quality of the research, the following criteria were applied:

- **Credibility** – Achieved through repeated viewing and in-depth engagement with the film
- **Dependability** – Maintained through a systematic and transparent coding process
- **Confirmability** – Ensured by grounding interpretations in data and supporting them with theory.

### **Results and Thematic Findings**

The present study aimed to explore the psychological themes represented in Naanu Avanalla...Avalu through reflexive thematic analysis. The film was viewed repeatedly, and relevant dialogues, scenes, emotional expressions, character interactions, and narrative developments were systematically examined. Based on coding and thematic interpretation, six major themes emerged from the data. These themes are consistent with the conceptual framework, research objectives, and review of literature of the present study.

The findings indicate that the film is not only a biographical narrative but also a psychologically meaningful representation of identity conflict, social stigma, emotional suffering, resilience, and self-acceptance. Each theme is presented below with supporting examples and interpreted using relevant psychological concepts.



## 1. Gender Identity

One of the most significant themes identified in the film is gender identity. The protagonist, initially known as Mahesha, experiences discomfort with the male identity assigned at birth and gradually expresses a feminine sense of self through behaviour, appearance, and emotional preferences. From the early stages of the narrative, the protagonist demonstrates confusion and distress caused by the mismatch between internal identity and externally imposed gender expectations.

As the story progresses, the protagonist increasingly rejects the assigned male role and embraces the name Vidya. Dialogues such as “Do not call me Mahesha,” “I am Vidya now,” and “I am not a man, I am a woman” reflect growing self-awareness and identity affirmation. These moments symbolize movement toward authenticity and psychological clarity.

This finding supports developmental theories which explain that identity formation occurs through exploration, conflict, and eventual commitment to a stable sense of self (Fadjukoff et al., 2016). The film portrays gender identity as a gradual psychological process shaped by internal realization and social resistance.

## 2. Societal Rejection

A second major theme identified in the film is societal rejection. The protagonist repeatedly faces ridicule, humiliation, bullying, exclusion, and discrimination in school, family, and public spaces because of gender nonconformity. Statements such as “Why are you dressed like a girl?”, “People are laughing at you,” and “You are a shame to the family” reflect rigid social expectations regarding masculinity and femininity.

These experiences portray how society marginalizes individuals who do not conform to traditional gender roles. Rejection is shown not only through direct insults but also through emotional neglect, isolation, and denial of dignity. The protagonist’s sadness, fear, and loneliness demonstrate the psychological consequences of persistent stigma.

This finding is consistent with Minority Stress Theory, which explains that marginalized individuals experience chronic psychological distress due to prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion (Meyer, 2003). The film effectively demonstrates that emotional suffering often arises from hostile social environments rather than from identity itself.



### 3. Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals

Another major theme emerging from the analysis is the lived experiences of transgender individuals. After rejection from mainstream society, the protagonist enters the transgender community and becomes aware of the daily realities faced by many members of the community.

Dialogues such as “People like us survive by begging,” “We cannot get jobs like others,” and “Society has no place for us” highlight unemployment, poverty, economic hardship, and structural discrimination. These scenes demonstrate that transgender individuals are often denied equal access to education, employment, housing, and social participation.

The film realistically portrays that many struggles are socially created rather than personally chosen. Marginalization is represented as the result of exclusionary systems and prejudice. This finding aligns with research showing that discrimination and inequality are major determinants of poor well-being among transgender populations (World Health Organization, 2015).

Thus, the film offers a powerful social commentary on the everyday survival struggles of transgender individuals.

### 4. Coping Mechanisms and Community Support

Despite repeated rejection, the film strongly emphasizes coping mechanisms and community support. When biological family and society fail to provide acceptance, the transgender community becomes a source of belongingness, safety, guidance, and emotional reassurance for the protagonist.

Dialogues such as “We are your family now,” “Do not be afraid,” “We will protect you,” and “You are not alone” reflect the creation of a chosen family system. These interactions help restore confidence, reduce loneliness, and provide emotional strength.

This theme highlights the psychological importance of supportive relationships. Social support theory suggests that emotional care, companionship, and practical assistance help individuals cope with stress and adversity (Cohen & Wills, 1985). In the film, community acceptance functions as a protective factor against the harmful effects of stigma and rejection.

The findings demonstrate that resilience often develops through collective care rather than through isolated struggle.



## 5. Trauma and Recovery

The analysis also revealed a strong theme of trauma and recovery. The protagonist experiences physical violence, emotional abuse, humiliation, fear, and helplessness throughout the narrative. Dialogues such as “Do not beat me,” “Why are you hurting me?” and “Please leave me” reflect vulnerability and victimization.

These experiences portray the psychological impact of repeated abuse, including anxiety, shame, sadness, withdrawal, and emotional pain. Trauma is represented not as a single event but as the cumulative effect of repeated rejection, violence, and insecurity.

This finding is supported by trauma theory, which states that chronic abuse and victimization can negatively affect emotional regulation, trust, and self-worth (Herman, 1992). Fear conditioning research also explains how repeated harmful experiences can create persistent fear responses (Dunsmoor & Paz, 2018).

However, the film also portrays recovery. Through support, acceptance, and self-recognition, the protagonist gradually regains emotional strength. The narrative therefore presents both suffering and the possibility of healing.

## 6. Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance

The final major theme identified is identity transformation and self-acceptance. In the later stages of the film, the protagonist openly embraces an affirmed identity and expresses the desire to live with dignity, equality, and self-respect.

Dialogues such as “I am a girl now,” “I want to live with dignity,” “Accept me as your daughter,” and “This is my life” reflect confidence, autonomy, and personal empowerment. These moments signify movement from confusion and shame toward self-worth and authenticity.

This transformation reflects resilience, defined as positive adaptation despite significant adversity (Masten, 2001). The protagonist’s journey demonstrates that self-acceptance can emerge even after severe rejection and emotional suffering.

The film concludes by emphasizing that authenticity, dignity, and recognition are essential psychological needs. Identity transformation is therefore presented as both personal liberation and emotional healing.



## Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the psychological themes represented in *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* through thematic analysis. The analysis identified six major themes: Gender Identity, Societal Rejection, Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals, Coping Mechanisms and Community Support, Trauma and Recovery, and Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance. These themes reveal that the film is not only a biographical narrative, but also a psychologically rich representation of identity conflict, marginalisation, resilience, and the search for dignity. The protagonist's journey from Mahesha to Vidya reflects the emotional realities experienced by many transgender individuals within restrictive social environments. The present chapter discusses each theme in relation to relevant psychological literature and broader social contexts.

### 1. Gender Identity

One of the most significant findings of the present study was the theme of **Gender Identity**. The film portrays the protagonist's persistent internal conflict between the male identity assigned at birth and the feminine identity experienced psychologically. From childhood, the protagonist demonstrates discomfort with masculine expectations and increasing comfort in feminine self-expression. This gradually develops into the affirmed identity of Vidya.

The findings are consistent with Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development, which proposes that identity formation is a central developmental task involving confusion, exploration, and eventual commitment. Similarly, Fadjukoff et al. (2016) explained that identity develops through stages in which individuals move from uncertainty toward identity achievement. The protagonist's rejection of the name Mahesha and adoption of Vidya symbolise this movement toward an integrated and authentic self.

The film also demonstrates that identity suppression can produce emotional pain, confusion, and psychological distress. When individuals are forced to perform identities inconsistent with their inner experience, self-esteem and emotional stability may be negatively affected. The American Psychological Association (2021) recognises that gender identity is an internal and deeply felt sense of self that may differ from sex assigned at birth. The narrative strongly reflects this principle.

Thus, the theme of Gender Identity highlights the universal human need for authenticity, self-recognition, and psychological congruence. The protagonist's journey shows that acceptance of one's identity is essential for mental well-being and healthy personal development.



Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
00:10:00– 00:22:00	Mahesha expresses feminine behaviour and gradually identifies as Vidya.	Vidya / Mahesha	<p>“Do not call me Mahesha.”</p> <p>“I am Vidya now.”</p> <p>“I am not a man; I am a woman.”</p> <p>“I cannot live like a boy.”</p> <p>“This is who I truly am.”</p> <p>“I feel happy dressing like this.”</p>	Reflects identity awareness, internal conflict, rejection of assigned gender, and affirmation of authentic selfhood.

## 2. Societal Rejection

Another major theme identified was **Societal Rejection**. The protagonist experiences ridicule, bullying, humiliation, exclusion, and condemnation in educational settings, family life, and public spaces. These experiences portray the damaging effects of rigid social norms on individuals whose identities challenge conventional expectations.

This finding strongly supports Minority Stress Theory proposed by Meyer (2003), which explains that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create chronic psychological stress among marginalized populations. Such stress may lead to anxiety, depression, fear, shame, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal. In the film, the protagonist’s loneliness, sadness, and vulnerability can be understood as responses to persistent rejection rather than as personal weakness.

The findings also align with Ryan et al. (2009), who found that rejection from family members is associated with poorer mental health outcomes among LGBTQ individuals. Family rejection in particular may be deeply painful because the family is normally expected to provide love, security, and acceptance. In the film, the protagonist’s desire for parental recognition reflects the enduring psychological importance of attachment bonds.

Hall (1997) argued that stereotypes and repeated cultural messages construct public meanings about marginalised groups. When transgender identity is represented as shameful or abnormal, prejudice becomes normalised in everyday life. The film effectively portrays how these social attitudes are reproduced through mockery, insults, and exclusion.



Therefore, the theme of Societal Rejection demonstrates that much of the protagonist’s suffering originates in hostile social environments rather than in identity itself.

Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
00:22:00–00:40:00	Vidya faces ridicule, bullying, and exclusion in school and public settings.	Classmates / Society	<p>“Why are you dressed like a girl?”</p> <p>“People are laughing at you.”</p> <p>“Do not come to school again.”</p> <p>“Walk properly like a man.”</p> <p>“You are a shame to the family.”</p> <p>“Stay away from us.”</p>	Illustrates stigma, discrimination, humiliation, and rigid enforcement of social gender norms.

### 3. Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals

The theme **Lived Experiences of Transgender Individuals** reflects the structural and daily realities faced by transgender persons in society. After leaving home, the protagonist encounters poverty, unemployment, lack of social respect, and dependence on limited forms of survival. These experiences show that discrimination is not limited to attitudes, but extends into access to opportunities and basic dignity.

This finding is consistent with the World Health Organization (2015), which identified social exclusion, unemployment, and discrimination as major determinants of poor mental health among transgender communities. Chronic economic insecurity may intensify stress, helplessness, and emotional burden.

Dutta and Roy (2014) similarly observed that transgender individuals in India are often pushed toward begging or informal labour due to structural barriers in education and employment. The film realistically reflects this pattern by showing survival shaped more by exclusion than by personal choice.

Gross (2001) argued that meaningful representation is important because media often shapes public understanding of groups with whom audiences have limited direct contact. By portraying everyday hardship with realism and empathy, the film challenges ignorance and encourages awareness of systemic inequality.



Thus, this theme reveals that transgender experiences must be understood not only psychologically, but also socially and economically. The protagonist’s struggles emerge from unequal structures that deny inclusion and opportunity.

Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
00:40:00–01:05:00	Vidya enters the transgender community and learns realities of survival shaped by exclusion.	Community Members	<p>“People like us survive by begging.”</p> <p>“ We cannot get jobs like others.”</p> <p>“Society has no place for us.”</p> <p>“This is how we earn money”</p> <p>“ Nobody gives us respect.”</p> <p>“We survive one day at a time.”</p>	Highlights poverty, occupational exclusion, marginalisation, and daily survival struggles.

#### 4. Coping Mechanisms and Community Support

The findings also identified **Coping Mechanisms and Community Support** as a major theme. When rejected by biological family and mainstream society, the protagonist finds belongingness, emotional reassurance, guidance, and protection within the transgender community. This chosen family becomes an important source of stability and resilience.

These findings support Cohen and Wills’ (1985) buffering hypothesis, which states that social support protects individuals from the negative psychological effects of stress. Emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and acceptance may reduce distress and improve coping capacity. In the film, supportive community members help the protagonist regain confidence and emotional strength.

Masten (2001) described resilience as “ordinary magic,” meaning that recovery often develops through ordinary protective factors such as supportive relationships, hope, and adaptive coping. The protagonist’s ability to continue despite repeated hardship reflects this process.

The findings also align with McInroy and Craig (2015), who noted that affirming communities are especially valuable for LGBTQ individuals who may lack acceptance in family or society. Community belonging may strengthen identity pride and reduce internalised shame.



Therefore, the theme of Coping Mechanisms and Community Support highlights that healing and survival are rarely individual processes. Acceptance, solidarity, and shared understanding function as powerful psychological resources.

Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
01:05:00–01:25:00	Community elders provide emotional reassurance, practical guidance, and belongingness.	Community Elder / Members	“We are your family now.” “Do not be afraid.” “Nothing will happen to you.” “Stay with us.” “We will protect you.” “You are not alone.”	Indicates that chosen family systems foster resilience, emotional security, and adaptive coping.

### 5. Trauma and Recovery

Another major theme identified in the present study was **Trauma and Recovery**. The film portrays experiences of physical violence, emotional abuse, fear, helplessness, shame, and repeated victimisation. These scenes demonstrate the psychological harm caused by persistent abuse and marginalisation.

This finding is consistent with Herman (1992), who explained that trauma can damage emotional regulation, trust, self-worth, and a sense of safety. Individuals exposed to repeated abuse may experience anxiety, hypervigilance, helplessness, and emotional pain. In the film, the protagonist’s distress and vulnerability strongly reflect these trauma responses.

Dunsmoor and Paz (2018) further explained that repeated harmful experiences can create conditioned fear responses, avoidance, and heightened sensitivity to threat. Such reactions are adaptive in dangerous contexts, but psychologically burdensome when prolonged. The protagonist’s cautiousness and emotional suffering may be interpreted within this framework.

However, the narrative also portrays recovery. Healing gradually becomes possible through support, belongingness, perseverance, and identity affirmation. Herman (1992) suggested that recovery often requires safety, reconnection, and empowerment. These elements are visible as the protagonist receives care and regains self-worth.



Thus, the theme of Trauma and Recovery demonstrates that although violence may leave deep emotional wounds, healing remains possible when dignity and support are restored.

Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
01:25:00– 01:45:00	Vidya experiences physical abuse, emotional distress, and receives comfort after victimisation.	Vidya / Abusers	<p>“ Do not beat me.”</p> <p>“Why are you hurting me?”</p> <p>“ Please leave me.”</p> <p>“I begged you not to harm me.”</p> <p>“I feel ashamed.”</p> <p>“I feel scared.”</p>	<p>Reflects vulnerability to violence, psychological trauma, helplessness, fear, and movement toward recovery through care.</p>

### 6. Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance

The final theme identified was **Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance**. By the later stages of the narrative, the protagonist embraces the affirmed identity of Vidya, demands respect, seeks recognition, and expresses the desire to live with dignity. This transformation reflects movement from shame and confusion toward pride, autonomy, and psychological integration.

The findings are consistent with Fadjukoff et al. (2016), who described identity achievement as the stage in which individuals commit to a coherent and authentic sense of self after exploration and struggle. Vidya’s self-assertion reflects this process of identity consolidation.

Masten (2001) also noted that resilience is evident when individuals adapt positively despite severe adversity. The protagonist’s growth after repeated rejection and trauma illustrates resilience rooted in courage and persistence.

Tamir (2016) argued that emotional growth often follows emotional complexity, where fear, grief, hope, and determination coexist. The protagonist’s transformation reflects this process, as painful experiences gradually contribute to wisdom, strength, and self-awareness.

Therefore, the theme of Identity Transformation and Self-Acceptance suggests that living authentically can be psychologically liberating. Self-acceptance becomes an act of empowerment in the face of social stigma and oppression.



Time Frame	Scene Description	Character(s)	Representative Dialogues	Interpretation
01:45:00– End	Vidya embraces her identity, dignity, and requests recognition from family and society.	Vidya / Father	“ I am a girl now” ”I want to live with dignity.” “ Accept me as your daughter.” “This is my life.” “ I chose this path.” “I am proud of who I am.”	Signifies self-acceptance, empowerment, resilience, autonomy, and the desire for dignity and recognition.

### Summary of Findings

Overall, the findings indicate that *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* presents transgender identity not as pathology, but as a deeply human experience shaped by social context. Emotional suffering in the film emerges largely from rejection, violence, exclusion, and inequality, whereas healing emerges through acceptance, community support, resilience, and self-recognition. This supports Meyer’s (2003) argument that distress among marginalised populations often results from discrimination rather than identity itself.

The film is also culturally significant because it challenges stereotypical portrayals commonly seen in media. Instead of reducing transgender identity to ridicule or spectacle, the narrative portrays the protagonist with emotional depth, agency, dignity, and realism. This aligns with the inclusive media perspectives discussed by GLAAD (2015) and Gross (2001), who emphasised that respectful representation can foster empathy and positive social change.

From a psychological perspective, the film demonstrates how identity development, trauma, coping, resilience, and self-acceptance are interconnected processes. From a social perspective, it highlights the importance of family acceptance, equal opportunities, safety, and human dignity for transgender individuals.

### Implications

*Naanu Avanalla Avalu's* thematic analysis delivers transformative implications for transgender psychology, Indian social policy, and regional cinema. The protagonist's identity moratorium-to-achievement trajectory validates psychosocial development theory (Erikson, 1968; Fadjukoff et al.,



2016), demanding gender-affirming therapies that accelerate self-acceptance while addressing minority stress-induced shame (Meyer, 2003; American Psychological Association, 2021). Clinical practice must prioritize narrative therapy using films like this to normalize emotional complexity (Tamir, 2016).

Familial rejection and economic marginalization themes mandate urgent implementation of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 through mandatory workplace sensitization, subsidized skill development eliminating begging dependency, and family mediation programs (Ryan et al., 2009; World Health Organization, 2015). Community resilience findings (Cohen & Wills, 1985) justify government funding for transgender resource centers as public health infrastructure (Masten, 2001).

The film's parasocial empathy mechanism (McInroy & Craig, 2015) positions it as compulsory viewing in psychology, social work, and teacher training curricula, replacing stereotypes with multidimensional humanity (GLAAD, 2015). Kannada filmmakers gain an authentic representation blueprint, challenging Bollywood's exploitative conventions (Dutta & Roy, 2014).

These findings reframe transgender distress as systemic failure, not individual pathology equipping clinicians with culturally resonant tools, policymakers with evidence-based interventions, and educators with empathy catalysts. The film becomes a psychosocial intervention, converting cinematic realism into measurable societal equity and human dignity restoration.

### **Future Research Directions**

This study launches an ambitious research agenda transforming film-psychology intersections:

1. **Multi-Film Corpora Analysis:** Compare *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* with *Njan Marykutty*, *Super Deluxe* using computational content analysis to quantify representation evolution from caricature to complexity (Dutta & Roy, 2014).
2. **Experimental Audience Impact:** Randomized controlled trials measuring implicit bias reduction via Implicit Association Tests pre/post-viewing, targeting Indian college students to validate parasocial contact theory (McInroy & Craig, 2015).
3. **Lived Experience Validation:** Phenomenological interviews with 50 Kannada-speaking transgender individuals mapping cinematic themes against real trajectories, testing resilience factor interactions (Masten, 2001; Cohen & Wills, 1985).



4. **Neurocinematics:** fMRI studies examining viewer brain activation during identity transformation scenes, linking emotional complexity to empathy circuits (Tamir, 2016; Dunsmoor & Paz, 2018).
5. **Policy Experiments:** Cluster-randomized school screening interventions measuring longitudinal attitude shifts toward transgender inclusion, informing curriculum policy (GLAAD, 2015).
6. **Intersectional Expansion:** Examine caste-class-gender dynamics in South Indian trans cinema, addressing multiple marginalizations (Benshoff & Griffin, 2006).
7. **Participatory Action Research:** Co-create films with transgender communities, evaluating psychological impact on participants and audiences.
8. Mixed-methods triangulation, diverse sampling, and community partnership will convert theoretical insights into equity-driving interventions, establishing regional cinema as a legitimate psychological research domain.

## Conclusion

From Mahesha's anguished mirror-gazing to Vidya's triumphant self-naming, *Naanu Avanalla Avalu* masterfully thematizes the transgender odyssey identity conflict yielding resilient authenticity through communal fortitude (Fadjukoff et al., 2016). This reflexive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) illuminates how minority stress (Meyer, 2003) relentless familial expulsion, economic precarity, public humiliation breeds shame not from inherent pathology but societal toxin, while "ordinary magic" of peer solidarity births extraordinary resilience (Masten, 2001; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Filling Kannada cinema's psychological void, this study validates regional films as rigorous data sources, modeling empathetic representation that dismantles stereotypes through multidimensional humanity (GLAAD, 2015; Dutta & Roy, 2014).

Clinicians gain culturally anchored affirmative therapy tools; policymakers receive evidence for Act implementation; educators acquire empathy pedagogy. The film transcends entertainment, becoming psychosocial intervention catalyzing attitude reconstruction (McInroy & Craig, 2015).

*Naanu Avanalla Avalu* heralds cinema's justice imperative replacing binary constraints with dignity's spectrum. Living Smile Vidya's journey proclaims: authenticity endures oppression; resilience redefines normalcy; community conquers isolation.

This research equips stakeholders to convert cinematic testimony into policy revolution, classroom revelation, and clinical compassion. Future scholarship, pursuing identified trajectories, will



harness the media's latent power for transgender equity. Ultimately, Vidya's victory affirms every marginalized soul's right to self-authored existence, transforming regional screens into national conscience, one authentic narrative at a time.

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