Pandemic, Necropolitics, and Intersectional Feminism:

A Comparative Study of *Homebound* and *Photo*

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of Kerala

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the Degree of

Master of Arts in

English Language and Literature

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Pandemic, Necropolitics, and Intersectional Feminism: A Comparative Study of *Homebound* and *Photo*** is a record of the studies carried out by **PRAVEENA P**, at the Department of English, T.K.M College of Arts and Science, Kollam, under the guidance of **Capt. Liby K S** and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature.

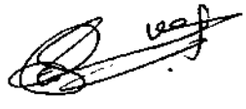
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, **Pandemic, Necropolitics, and Intersectional Feminism: A Comparative Study of *Homebound* and *Photo*** submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature is the original record of studies and research carried out by me during 2024-2026 under the guidance of Capt. Liby K S

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Preface

This dissertation, titled "Pandemic, Necropolitics and Intersectional Feminism: A Comparative Study of *Homebound* and *Photo,* " explores pandemic cinema through a close study of *Photo* (2024) and *Homebound* (2025). It examines how the COVID-19 lockdown affected marginalised communities and how power, inequality, and social structures shaped their lives during the crisis. Using Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics, Neo-Marxism, and Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectional Feminism, the study analyses how the films represent vulnerability, exclusion, and human suffering.

The research is organised into four chapters. The first chapter, "Introduction," presents the background and purpose of the study, introduces the selected films, and outlines the research questions, objectives, scope, limitations, and methodology. It also explains the theoretical framework and shows how these theories help analyse power, precarity, marginalisation, and social inequality in the films.

The second chapter, "Lines That Separate: Understanding Necropolitics and Neo-Marxism in *Homebound* (2025) and *Photo* (2024)," examines how the lockdown affected marginalised communities unequally. It explores how poverty, labour, caste, religion, migration, and state power shape vulnerability, exclusion, and suffering, revealing that not all lives are valued equally during times of crisis.

The third chapter, "Invisible Burdens and Unequal Lives in *Homebound*

(2025) and *Photo* (2024) through Intersectional Feminism," examines women's experiences during the pandemic through the lens of intersectional feminism. It shows how gender intersects with class, caste, labour, migration, and social neglect to create multiple forms of inequality and hardship.

The fourth chapter, "Conclusion," brings together the main arguments of the study and shows that *Homebound* and *Photo* portray the pandemic lockdown as a deeply unequal experience shaped by poverty, caste, religion, migrant labour, Islamophobia, and gender. Through the perspectives of Necropolitics, NeoMarxism, and Intersectional Feminism, the study argues that the pandemic exposed and intensified existing social inequalities. The films also offer a powerful critique of state neglect, economic exploitation, and the unequal value placed on human life. Finally, the study highlights the importance of pandemic cinema in documenting marginalised experiences and suggests further research on pandemic cinema, state power, precarity, and social justice in literature and film.

Overall, the dissertation contributes to the fields of film studies and literarycultural studies by showing how pandemic cinema reflects the relationship between crisis, power, inequality, and everyday human experience.

Chapter One

Introduction

"Film is a very young art that is still developing."

-André Bazin

Films have a strong impact on both individual growth and the progress of society as a whole and are still developing by expanding their horizons. They are not just meant for entertainment or for showing stories about people and their ambitions. They are evolving and providing emotional support to those who feel isolated, helping to ease their sense of emptiness. In addition, movies play a key role in bringing attention to serious social concerns and encouraging meaningful discussions. The world of cinema acts as a powerful medium for sharing information, ideas, and viewpoints across different parts of the world. Whether a film is fictional or inspired by real experiences, it can influence emotions, create happiness or sorrow, and serve as a reflection of society that can lead to positive change.

Cinema has always reflected human life, emotions, fears, and social realities. Films do not merely entertain; they also record the anxieties, conflicts, and transformations of different historical moments. In this sense, pandemic films form an important category within cinema because they portray how disease outbreaks affect individuals, families, societies, and even global systems. By combining elements of fear, survival, isolation, and social breakdown, pandemic films show

how cinema responds to public health crises while also exploring deeper human emotions and cultural concerns.

Pandemic cinema is a type of film that shows the spread of a disease and its effect on people and society. These films often focus on fear, isolation, survival, and human relationships during a crisis. They show how people react when normal life changes suddenly. Pandemic cinema also includes stories about lockdown, quarantine, and social distancing. These films help us understand real-life struggles during a health crisis simply and emotionally. Pandemic films emerge from this larger relationship between cinema and society, as they portray the spread of disease and its impact on individuals, families, and communities.

However, within pandemic narratives, another important dimension becomes visible: the experience of lockdown, isolation, restricted movement, and emotional confinement. This is where lockdown films gain significance. Lockdown films are a part of pandemic cinema. These films mainly focus on life during lockdown periods. They show how people stay inside their homes and deal with loneliness, stress, and uncertainty. Lockdown films often present personal stories, family issues, mental health problems, and social changes. They are usually simple, realistic, and character-based. These films also show how technology, communication, and daily routines change during lockdown.

While pandemic films broadly focus on outbreaks and collective crisis, lockdown films specifically explore the psychological, social, and emotional realities of being confined during such times. Thus, lockdown films can be seen as

a more focused extension of pandemic cinema, shifting attention from the spread of disease to the lived experience of isolation, fear, and survival within enclosed spaces.

This project studies two pandemic-related films, *Homebound* and *Photo*. *Homebound* (2025) is directed by Neeraj Ghaywan and produced by Dharma Productions, along with Karan Johar and others. It is a Hindi drama film based on the struggles of two friends during the COVID-19 period and the lockdown in India. The second film, *Photo* (released in 2024), is directed, written, and produced by Utsav Gonwar under the production banner Masari Talkies. It is a Kannadalanguage film that shows the life of people during the pandemic, especially focusing on migrant struggles and social reality.

These films are not only about isolation; they also show how power operates during a crisis. Lockdowns are imposed by the state in the name of protection, public health, and order, which brings in the idea of sovereignty- the authority of the state to control movement, regulate bodies, and decide how people should live during an emergency. At the same time, lockdown films often reveal that this power is not experienced equally by everyone. Some people are protected, while others, such as migrants, the poor, the homeless, or socially vulnerable groups, are exposed to hunger, abandonment, police violence, and even death.

The concept of Sovereignty, as explained in Thomas Hobbes' seminal work *Leviathan (1651)*, is the absolute, supreme, and indivisible authority within a state, which is designed to ensure order and prevent chaos. The concept is often associated

with democratic ideals, justice, and collective welfare, in which citizens are viewed as equal partners in shaping public policy. According to this traditional understanding of sovereignty, it is viewed as something reassuring-a system that guarantees security, dignity, and belonging. People trust that the state will protect their lives and provide them with fair treatment.

However, Achille Mbembe complicates this theory by showing that sovereignty also affects life and death. According to him, sovereignty isn't just about protecting life; it's about deciding which lives are valuable and which ones can be ignored. Necropolitics is how power is used to decide who gets to live and who gets to die. Rather than solely providing protection, the state can foster environments of hardship where violence, fear, doubts, and insecurity become commonplace, like in war zones, refugee camps, ethnic enclaves, or neglected communities. Within these areas, individuals may not always die suddenly but face a gradual decline due to poverty, inadequate healthcare, financial neglect, and persistent instability. Power functions not just through overt force, but also by regulating living circumstances, mobility, and access to essential resources. Thus, sovereignty functions as a dual force, both preserving and threatening life, demonstrating how political authority can safeguard certain individuals while neglecting or devastating others.

This difference becomes most noticeable in the lives of dispossessed people. They are pushed to the edges of society because of their race, class, or political conflict. For them, sovereignty is not endured as shields but as abandonment. They may live in situations where basic rights are rejected,

movements are confined, and their lives are treated as substandard. Their daily existence reflects what it means to be seen as disposable within a system that claims to be just. Even under such harsh conditions, these individuals persist in resisting, finding ways to survive, and affirming their dignity and humanity. Movies like *Homebound (2025)* and *Photo (2024)* clearly present the hardships faced by the poor and underprivileged sections of society. Through their characters, these films show the reality of people from lower social backgrounds.

Contemporary researchers use various theories to study how movies and television reflect the struggles of marginalised groups. Recent studies by Okadigwe *(2025)*, O'Mahony et al. *(2021)*, and Laxmi (*2025)* show how media can either support existing power structures or act as a tool for social change.

Okadigwe (2025) studies how queer people are shown in Nigerian (Nollywood) films. She looks at movies like *Hell or High Water (2016)*, directed by Oluseyi Asurf Amuwa, and *Walking with Shadows (2019)*, directed by Aoife O'Kelly. By using the theories of biopower and necropolitics, she shows how queer characters face violence from the state and pressure from society. Her research explains that these characters often have to move or hide to survive. Okadigwe argues that these films reflect real-world problems where society tries to ignore or exclude certain groups. She calls for more inclusive and fair ways to tell LGBTQ+ stories in African media.

In a similar way, O'Mahony et al. (2021) use the idea of necropolitics to study the TV series *The Walking Dead (2010)* developed by Frank Darabont. Most

people focus on the zombies in this show, but these authors look at the human survivors instead. They describe the survivors as being like refugees who are always close to death. The study suggests the show is a metaphor for how leaders act during big crises, like natural disasters. In the show, leaders have the power to decide who stays safe and who is left to die. By looking at how the show depicts power and control over food and safety, the authors show how necropolitics works in a world full of danger.

Both of these studies show that necropolitics is a great tool for understanding modern stories. It works for real-life social issues in Nollywood films and for imaginary worlds like *The Walking Dead*. These theories help us see how power is used to control people and decide which human lives are considered valuable, and the challenges they face when trying to be heard and seek justice in an unequal system.

Vijay Laxmi, in her paper "*Realism, caste, and ideology: A neo-marxist analysis of Dalit representation in contemporary Indian cinema (2025)* applies Neo-Marxist theory to study how Dalit characters are portrayed. For a long time, mainstream Indian films only showed the views of people in power. However, Laxmi points out that modern realist films, such as *Article 15*, are now challenging these old ideas. These movies act as a form of resistance against traditional beliefs about caste, class, and gender. Laxmi's work highlights how cinema can give a voice to social movements and help people fight for social justice.

Staub et al. (2025) use Marxist theory to study how modern movies show the lives of working-class people. Their research compares two films, *Cross Road (2017)* and *Forgotten Love (2023),* a Polish period drama directed by Michal Gazda, to see how they portray workers' rights and labour exploitation. By looking at the stories and characters, the authors examine the struggles of blue-collar workers living under capitalism. The study finds that these films successfully show the daily conflicts and exploitation that workers face. However, the authors also note that these movies sometimes fail to explain the deep causes of these problems or show how to create real change. Staub et al. argue that Marxist theory is still a very useful tool for analyzing films. They believe that by looking critically at how cinema portrays labor and social justice, we can better advocate for a more equal society.

Both Laxmi (2025) and Staub et al. (2025) demonstrate that cinema is a critical site for exploring power dynamics and social exclusion. Whether focusing on caste hierarchies in India or labor problems in a global context, these studies show that movies do more than tell stories; they reflect and shape the way we understand social justice. By using Marxist frameworks, these researchers prove that analyzing film is necessary to uncover how dominant ideologies work and how media can serve as a tool for meaningful social change.

This study explores how modern films show the lives of disenfranchised populations through strong visual storytelling. *Homebound* (2025) and *Photo (2024)* focus on characters who live outside mainstream social and political systems, highlighting themes of exclusion and invisibility. The study helps us

understand necropolitics by showing how power decides whose lives matter and those who do not. It also uses concepts like intersectional feminism to explain more about how gender, class, caste, and social status combine to deepen oppression.

Finally, the study views subaltern characters not just as victims, but as individuals with dignity, strength, and the power to resist.

The main objective of this study is to analyse how *Homebound (2025)* and *Photo (2024)* portray invisible or marginalised people. It aims to understand how power controls life and death through the idea of Necropolitics. It also tries to examine class struggle and economic inequality using Neo-Marxist criticism. Another objective is to explore how gender and multiple forms of oppression are shown through intersectional feminism. Overall, the study wants to compare both films and see how they represent social injustice in different ways.

While contemporary cinema increasingly represents the lives of minoritised communities, there remains limited scholarly attention to how these films critically engage with the lived realities of marginalisation and structural violence. Existing research has not sufficiently examined cinema as a site where marginalised perspectives challenge dominant social, political, and ideological structures. Moreover, there is a lack of studies that analyse recent films such as *Homebound* (2025) and *Photo* (2024) through the combined theoretical frameworks of necropolitics, Neo-Marxism, and intersectional feminism. This study addresses this gap by exploring how these films portray systems of power, exclusion, and

resistance, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of contemporary cinematic representations of marginalised communities.

This study uses a qualitative and descriptive method. It focuses on close textual and visual analysis of the films. It studies scenes, characters, and dialogues in detail. It also uses a comparative approach. It compares the two films to find similarities and differences and examines themes, characters, and representation. This study analyses how marginalised and invisible people are represented in the films *Homebound* and *Photo*, and also looks at their lives and struggles in society. It examines the idea of necropolitics by Achille Mbembe, which shows how power decides which lives are valued and which are ignored. This studies how the state and society control people. It explores intersectional feminism by Kimberlé Crenshaw. It explains how oppression happens through gender, class, caste, and social position. It also uses Marxist ideas from Karl Marx. It studies class differences and economic inequality. It shows how power and labour affect people's lives. Overall, the study tries to understand how films reflect social inequality. It aims to give a clear understanding of how the films present social issues.

The research is formatted in five chapters:

1. Chapter I: Introduction
2. Chapter II: State Power and the Value of Life:Understanding Necro-politics with Neo - Marxism in *Homebound (2025)* and *Photo (2024)*
3. Chapter III: Invisible Burdens and Unequal Lives in *Homebound* and *Photo* through Intersectional Feminism.

4. Chapter IV: Conclusion

This project focuses on how these two films show the impact of lockdown on different people. It studies their struggles, emotions, and social conditions during the pandemic. It looks at how daily life changed, including work, relationships, and communication. The study also examines problems such as isolation, fear, economic hardship, and social inequality depicted in the films. Through these films, the project tries to understand the human experience during a crisis. It also studies how cinema represents real-life situations in a simple and realistic way.

In addition, the project compares the lives of the main characters in both films. It shows how people from different backgrounds experience the same lockdown in different ways. The study also looks at how class, job, and social position affect their lives. It examines how the films show issues like migration, survival, and emotional struggle. Finally, the project explains how these films create awareness about real social problems and help the audience understand the reality of life during the pandemic.

This study has certain limitations. It is limited to the analysis of only two films, *Homebound* and *Photo,* and focuses only on selected theories. These include necropolitics through neo-Marxism and intersectional feminism. It does not include other critical approaches and is based on textual and visual analysis. It does not consider the audience's point of view and also does not include field research or interviews. Therefore, the findings are limited to the selected texts and theories.

does not consider the audience's point of view and also does not include field research or interviews. Therefore, the findings are limited to the selected texts and theories.

In conclusion, this study examines how films show marginalised and invisible people by focusing on the films *Homebound (2025)* and *Photo (2024)*. It draws on different theories to understand power, inequality, and oppression, and examines necropolitics and intersectional feminism. It explains how social structures affect people's lives and also shows how films present real social issues and struggles. Overall, the study tries to give a clear understanding of inequality and representation in cinema.

Chapter Two

Lines That Separate: Understanding Necro Politics and Neo- Marxism in *Homebound (2025) and Photo (2024)*

In a world that constantly encourages us to walk freely, aspire to big things, and live better, we are somehow controlled by power and forced to face the exact opposite of what we are told to aspire to. In this case, the emergence of necropolitics helped to think more actively about the basic rule structure. Necropolitics is a concept coined by AchilleMbembe, a Cameroonian philosopher, in his groundbreaking work *Necropolitics (2019)*. Mbembe, author of *"On the Postcolony"*, was the first scholar to explore the term in depth in his 2003 article and later, his 2019 book of the same name. In the book, he refers to Necropolitics as the politics of death and life, and how mortality is regulated and controlled through power and authority. Mbembe identifies racism as a prime driver of necropolitics, stating that racialised people's lives are systemically cheapened and habituated to loss.

Necropolitics is often seen as a part of biopower. Biopower is a term by Foucault that means using social and political power to control people's livesHe first talked about biopower and biopolitics in his 1976 book, *"The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I"*. He describes biopower as a way to "protect" people, but notes that this often means controlling groups that are different. According to Foucault, creating and maintaining institutions that value some groups more than others is how controlling populations has become normal.

Foucault first talked about biopower and biopolitics in his 1976 book, "*The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume I*". He describes biopower as a way to "protect" people, but notes that this often means controlling groups that are different. According to Foucault, creating and maintaining institutions that value some groups more than others is how controlling populations has become normal. Mbembe's idea of necropolitics says that modern government-led killing cannot be fully explained by biopower and biopolitics theories. It suggests that in necro power situations, the differences between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom become unclear.

Mbembe explained that necropolitics is not just about the right to kill. It includes political violence, such as causing social or civil death and enslaving others. It also involves putting people, even citizens, in danger of dying. Cultural theorist Lauren Berlant calls this slow death. Berlant says only certain groups are targeted to be worn out. This wearing out and dying is closely tied to everyday life. Basically, necropolitics spans a wide spectrum of realities. This sphere can be broad. This is a very broad topic, whereas many other topics can be included in touch with necropolitics. I'm here studying this film, *Homebound,* on this basis.

Homebound (2025) is a Hindi drama film directed by Neeraj Ghaywan and produced by Karan Johar under Dharma Productions. The cinematography by Pratik Shah helps present the emotional lives of the characters as well as the harsh realities of poverty and the lockdown in a realistic manner. The film's background score is composed by Naren Chandavarkar and Benedict Taylor, while the songs are composed by Amit Trivedi, adding emotional depth to the narrative. The film is

set against the background of the COVID-19 lockdown in India, a period that exposed the harsh realities faced by the poor, migrant workers, and socially marginalised communities. Rather than presenting the pandemic only as a medical crisis, the film uses it as a social and political setting to explore how deeply inequality shapes human life. Through a simple but emotionally powerful narrative, *Homebound* tells the story of two close friends whose lives are marked by poverty, caste discrimination, religious prejudice, and the struggle to survive in a society that does not treat everyone equally.

At the centre of the film are Shoaib and Chandan, two childhood friends from a poor village in North India. They have grown up together and share a strong emotional bond that forms the heart of the film. Though they are united by friendship and by the common experience of poverty, they belong to two different marginalised identities. Shoaib is a Muslim man, while Chandan is a Dalit, and these identities shape the kind of discrimination and humiliation they face in everyday life. The film shows that their suffering is not only economic; it is also social, cultural, and political. Their religion, caste, and class position place them at the margins of society, making them vulnerable to exclusion, disrespect, and invisibility.

The story follows their desire to build a better future and escape the limitations of the world they were born into. Like many young men from poor backgrounds, Shoaib and Chandan dream of getting a stable job and living with dignity. Their dream is not driven by ambition alone, but by the need to survive and to gain some respect in a society that constantly looks down on them. The film

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presents this longing for a better life in a very realistic way. The story shows how ordinary people hold on to hope even when everything around them seems hopeless. Their friendship becomes a source of strength, and together they try to imagine a future beyond poverty and social rejection.

However, *Homebound* does not present this dream in a romantic or idealised way. Instead, it shows how difficult it is for people from marginalised backgrounds to move forward in life when social structures are already working against them. Shoaib and Chandan are not simply struggling with unemployment or financial problems; they are also carrying the burden of caste-based discrimination and communal prejudice. The film quietly but powerfully reveals how caste and religion affect access to opportunities, dignity, and belonging. In this way, *Homebound* becomes more than a story of friendship; it becomes a reflection on how class, caste, social background, and religious identity continue to shape people's lives in contemporary India.

The film begins by informing the audience that it is based on a true story, which immediately gives the narrative a sense of realism and emotional weight. In the opening sequence, Shoaib and Chandan are seen travelling together to a railway station to attend an examination for the post of police constable. For them, this is not just another job opportunity; it represents the possibility of stability, social respect, acceptance, and a life beyond the humiliation they have always known. Their dream of a government job comes from a deep desire to escape poverty and to gain dignity in a world that repeatedly denies them both recognition and belonging.

When they reach the railway station, they are met with a massive crowd of young men who have gathered for the same examination. This scene immediately highlights the intense competition and the desperation of unemployed youth who see government employment as their only secure future. Surrounded by so many candidates, both Shoaib and Chandan begin to feel anxious about their chances of success. Shoaib, in particular, becomes more tense and uncertain, and the pressure of the situation affects his confidence. The moment captures not only their fear and emotional strain but also the larger reality of how difficult it is for marginalised young men to secure a stable place in society.



Fig.01. Chandan and Shohaib at railway station (*Homebound* 03:29)

The film gains even greater emotional depth when it moves into the period of the COVID-19 lockdown. This historical moment becomes a turning point in the narrative. The lockdown, which was a crisis for the whole country, is shown from the perspective of those who were already living on the edge of survival. For Shoaib and Chandan, the pandemic does not create a new problem but rather worsens the difficulties that were already present in their lives. Their economic insecurity becomes more vulnerable, their vulnerability becomes more visible, and their struggle for survival becomes even more painful and painful. Through their

experience, the film captures the fear and helplessness that many poor and migrant people faced during the lockdown.

A major part of the film focuses on the journey of these two friends as they try to return home during this difficult time. Their journey is not just a physical movement from one place to another; it is also an emotional and social journey that reveals the unequal realities of Indian society. As they travel, the film highlights the hardships faced by those who were left without protection, transport, money, or basic security during the pandemic. The road home becomes a symbol of both hope and suffering. It shows how, for marginalised people, even the simple act of going back home can turn into a painful struggle for survival.

What makes *Homebound* especially powerful is the way it uses simple scenes, everyday conversations, and emotional moments to express deep social truths. The film does not depend on excessive melodrama or dramatic spectacle. Instead, it presents the lives of Shoaib and Chandan with honesty and sensitivity, allowing the audience to feel the weight of their fear, love, frustration, and helplessness. Their friendship is shown with warmth and sincerity, and this emotional bond makes the tragedy of their situation even more affecting. The film suggests that in a world shaped by inequality and exclusion, friendship can become a form of emotional survival, even when material survival is uncertain.

At the same time, *Homebound* is deeply concerned with dignity. Shoaib and Chandan are not portrayed merely as helpless victims; they are shown as individuals with dreams, emotions, pride, and agency. The film is attentive to the humanity of

its characters and to the everyday humiliations they are forced to endure. Their poverty is not treated as a background detail but as a condition that shapes their choices, relationships, and futures. Similarly, caste and religious identity are not presented as abstract social categories, but as lived realities that influence how they are seen and treated by others. In this sense, the film offers a layered portrayal of marginalization, showing how different forms of inequality overlap and intensify one another.

Through the story of these two friends, *Homebound* becomes a powerful commentary on class inequality, caste oppression, communal prejudice, and the violence of social neglect. It shows that the lockdown was not experienced in the same way by everyone. For the privileged, it may have meant inconvenience and isolation, but for the poor and marginalised, it often meant hunger, displacement, uncertainty, and fear. The film therefore uses the pandemic as a lens through which larger questions of power, inequality, and human worth can be examined. It asks who is protected in times of crisis, who is abandoned, and whose suffering remains unseen.

Overall, *Homebound* is not simply a film about the COVID lockdown or about two friends trying to get home. It is a deeply human story about survival, dignity, and the emotional cost of social inequality. By focusing on the lives of Shoaib and Chandan, the film brings attention to the experiences of those who are often pushed to the margins of both society and cinema. It combines personal emotion with social critique, making it both a moving friendship drama and an important political text. Through its portrayal of poverty, caste, religion, and crisis,

Homebound offers a painful yet meaningful reflection on what it means to live and struggle in a world where not all lives are valued equally.

The film is inspired by real-life events that happened during the pandemic, especially the struggles of migrant workers in India. Many people lost their jobs and had to travel long distances to reach their homes. *Homebound* shows these real problems realistically. The director presents the pain, fear, and hope of common people during this time. The film also shows social issues like poverty and inequality. Through its story, *Homebound* helps the audience understand the real situation of people during the lockdown and the human side of the crisis. This is why the film can be meaningfully interpreted through Achille Mbembe's idea of necropolitics, Karl Marx's criticism of class society, and the later developments of Neo-Marxist theory.

Necropolitics, as explained earlier , a concept introduced by Achille Mbembe in his essay *Necropolitics (2003),* refers to how modern systems of power decide whose lives are protected and valued and whose lives are pushed toward suffering, insecurity, and neglect. It is not limited to direct physical death; rather, it also includes situations in which people are forced to exist under different conditions, such as fear, humiliation, deprivation, and reduced opportunities for a dignified life. In this kind of structure, some groups are treated as worthy of care and recognition, while others are rendered vulnerable, marginalised, and disposable.

This reading can be strengthened further by connecting the film to the ideas of Karl Marx, especially the arguments found in *The Communist Manifesto (1848)*, written with Friedrich Engels, and in *Capital, Volume I (1867)*. Marx argued that capitalist society is structured around class inequality, where wealth, labour, and the conditions necessary for life are controlled by the ruling class, and the working poor remain trapped in dependence and exploitation. According to Marx, poverty and inequality are not accidental or natural conditions; they are produced by a social system that allows one class to own and control resources while another class is left struggling simply to survive.

At the same time, *Homebound* suggests that oppression cannot be understood only in economic terms. The film shows that suffering is also shaped by caste, bureaucracy, education, religion, language, inherited social identity, and experiences of public humiliation. This is where Neo-Marxism becomes especially important. Neo-Marxist thought expands Marx's original framework by arguing that domination is not exercised only through economic exploitation. From a NeoMarxist point of view, the film shows that oppression is maintained not only through economic struggle but also through cultural beliefs, social attitudes, institutions, and systems that make inequality seem normal.

In this way, *Homebound* shows that class oppression is closely connected with other forms of social power, so the characters suffer because of both material hardship and structural exclusion. Therefore, Neo-Marxism helps us understand the film as a critique of a society where poverty, social stigma, and power work together to keep marginalised people in vulnerable conditions. Therefore, *Homebound* can

be read as a film in which Marxism helps explain material exploitation, Necropolitics helps explain the production of vulnerable and disposable lives, and Neo-Marxism helps explain how caste, religion, bureaucracy, and culture operate together with class power to maintain inequality.

One of the earliest and most important moments in the film is the scene in which Chandan is asked to say his full name by Bharti, the female lead, and he seems hesitant while answering. At first glance, this may appear to be a very small moment, but it carries a strong social meaning. In a caste-based society, a full name or surname is not just a personal identifier; it can immediately reveal a person's caste position, inherited identity, and social background. Chandan's hesitation suggests that he is aware that his identity will not be seen as neutral by others. His fear is not simply about introducing himself, but about what his name may reveal and how that revelation may shape the way he is judged.

This moment can be understood clearly through Achille Mbembe's idea of necropolitics. Chandan's hesitation shows that even saying his own name can become a dangerous act because identity itself is tied to the possibility of shame, rejection, or exclusion. His life is not threatened in a direct physical sense, yet his social existence is made unstable and vulnerable. He cannot speak his own identity freely because he knows that it may immediately place him within a rigid social hierarchy. In this way, the scene can be read as a form of social death, where a person remains alive but is denied the freedom to exist without fear of social injury.

Karl Marx's ideas also help explain this scene because Marx argues that human life is shaped by material and historical conditions rather than by individual freedom alone. In an unequal society, identity is closely connected to one's access to labour, education, and survival. Chandan's fear, therefore, is not merely personal or emotional; it is deeply social and material. He knows that being recognised in a certain way may affect how he is treated in spaces linked to work, dignity, and opportunity. The scene therefore, reflects how identity becomes part of the larger structure of inequality that controls life chances.

At the same time, the scene also invites a Neo-Marxist reading because the problem shown here is not limited to economic exploitation alone. The film suggests that domination works through caste identity, inherited labels, and the internalised fear produced by social hierarchy. Power is present not only in wages, jobs, or economic struggle, but also in the simple act of naming oneself and being recognised by others. In other words, the film shows that oppression operates not only through class but also through culture, social stigma, and inherited structures of exclusion. Chandan's hesitation, therefore, becomes a powerful example of how identity itself can become a site where class, caste, and power meet.

The political meaning of the film becomes even clearer in the recruitment office scene (19:03), which is one of the strongest scenes for analysis. In this scene, Chandan is asked not only about his name but also about details connected to his surname and caste category. What should have been a simple administrative process slowly turns into a humiliating experience. The office does not appear as a neutral public institution that helps citizens equally. Instead, it becomes a space where

authority, bureaucracy, and caste awareness come together to reduce Chandan's dignity.

This scene can be understood well through Achille Mbembe's idea of necropolitics. The violence here is not physical, but it is still powerful and real because Chandan is made to stand before an institution that has the power to decide whether he belongs, whether he deserves an opportunity, and how he will be socially judged. The questions asked in the office do not simply collect information; they expose him, classify him, to place him in a vulnerable position. The scene (21.05) in which the officer was standing shows that he is showing his superiority. This becomes a necropolitical moment because the institution treats lives unequally. Some people can move through such spaces without fear, while others are made to feel ashamed, inferior, or unwanted. In this way, humiliation itself becomes part of the system.



Fig.02. Chandan's encounter with the officer (*Homebound*, 21.05)

The scene also shows that Chandan's vulnerability is not only economic but also deeply social. He comes to the office to inquire about the lag in publishing the

list of Police Constable exam that he attended and was selected for. So, he is already in a position of need and dependence, but the caste-based questioning makes that vulnerability even stronger. In a Neo-Marxist thought, it explains how domination works not only through money and labour but also through institutions, ideology, and state systems. The recruitment office is therefore not just a place where jobs are managed; it is also a place where caste hierarchy is reproduced through bureaucratic procedure. This shows that power not only exploits poor people economically, but also humiliates them socially and administratively by making them feel small before the very system they depend on.

The portrait of B. R. Ambedkar in the house of Bharti makes Chandan proud in the film, and it is very important because it creates a silent but powerful contrast to all the humiliation shown in the story. If Ambedkar appears in the film's visual world, it means the film is not only depicting oppression but also reminding us of the long history of anti-caste struggle and the fight for dignity, equality, education and self-respect. In a necropolitical world, where some lives are treated as less valuable or disposable, Ambedkar's presence becomes a reminder that those lives matter and that caste oppression should not be accepted as something natural. It also shows that marginalised people have always resisted such oppression through political struggle and demands for representation. Even a brief appearance of Ambedkar helps the film move beyond simply recording suffering and instead frames it as a critique of the larger social system that produces that suffering.

At the end of the film, Chandan dies while travelling back to his home village during the lockdown. After walking a long distance under the scorching sun, he dies of heatstroke, making his death one of the most tragic moments in the film. It is only after his death that we see Chandan's full name in the appointment letter that arrives by post, and significantly, he accepts his original identity instead of using "Kumar" as a surname to hide it. This moment is deeply meaningful because it suggests an acceptance of his caste identity, but that acceptance becomes visible to the viewer only after his death. In this way, the film creates a painful irony: Chandan can claim his full identity only when he is no longer alive to live with the dignity and opportunity that the appointment letter promises.

In the same film, Shoaib's experiences take an additional step because of his religious beliefs. It shows that violence does not always appear as a physical attack, but it can also take the form of suspicion, humiliation, exclusion, and the repeated questioning of identity, even through religion. The film uses ordinary situations to show how a Muslim man is made to feel like an outsider in his own country again and again. Through these moments, *Homebound* links Islamophobia with necropolitics by showing how power makes some lives less safe, less valued, and more open to fear and neglect.

At 14:28, a small but meaningful moment appears when Shoaib is told, *"Don't refill my bottle,"* by his own company's HR, who is an extremist. On the surface, this may sound like a casual remark, but within the context of the film, it carries a sense of prejudice and exclusion. The line suggests unease with physical contact and makes Shoaib seem like someone whose touch or presence is viewed

with doubt. In this way, the scene shows how Islamophobia can work through everyday behaviour rather than direct violence. Necropolitics becomes important here because Shoaib is quietly placed in a position where he is not treated as an equal person, but as someone whose body and presence are seen as unwanted or unsafe.



Fig.03. Shohaib at HR Cabin asking not to fill his bottle(Homebound, 14:28)

Another important moment takes place in the office, where HR demands parental details and treats Shoaib's identity as something that must be checked and questioned rather than simply accepted. This scene shows that the workplace is not a neutral space for him. Instead of being seen first as an employee or as an individual, he is placed under suspicion because of who he is and what he believes. The need to prove himself through family background and identity details suggests that his belonging is never taken for granted. In necropolitical terms, this kind of scrutiny matters because it shows how institutions decide who can move through public life freely and who must keep proving that they deserve to be there.

The same pattern appears in the cricket ground scene, where Shoaib is told to *"go play with your people"* by his playmates. This is a clear act of othering because it separates him from the group and pushes him towards an imagined community seen as different from the social and national mainstream. The sentence may sound casual, but it carries the suggestion that Shoaib does not truly belong in that space. It turns sport, which should be a shared and ordinary activity, into a place of exclusion. From a necropolitical perspective, this matters because it shows how even everyday spaces are used to remind some people that they remain on the edge of belonging and can be pushed out at any moment.

At 19:03, the film again points to Islamophobia through the attitude that *"these people are all the same."* A statement like this takes away Shoaib's individuality and turns him into a stereotype. He is no longer seen as a person with his own emotions, life, and history; instead, he is reduced to a generalised and suspicious image of Muslims. This is one of the most harmful forms of prejudice because it removes personal identity and replaces it with a collective label. Necropolitics enters here because once a community is reduced to a suspicious category, it becomes easier for society and institutions to ignore their suffering, excuse their humiliation, and treat their pain as something ordinary.

A very strong example appears at 55:27, when Mr Mishra asks Shoaib to bring a police clearance certificate even though he has actually come for a selfemployment certificate in order to apply for a medical loan. He is then asked whether he has committed any crimes. This scene is deeply humiliating because it immediately connects Shoaib's Muslim identity with criminal suspicion. Instead of

being treated as someone asking for help during a difficult time, he is treated as someone who must first prove that he is harmless. The film clearly shows how Islamophobia works through institutional suspicion, where a Muslim man is not trusted even in matters of illness, money, and survival. Necropolitics becomes very visible here because a person in need is met not with care but with doubt, and the institution itself creates insecurity instead of protection.

The most extended and painful example comes at 1:01:25, during the party at Shoaib's manager's house while they are watching the India–Pakistan cricket match. Shoaib is repeatedly teased and insulted because of his Muslim name and background, and people ask whether he is *"from Pakistan,"* as though his religion automatically makes his nationality questionable. His identity, patriotism, and loyalty are all challenged, and he is expected to stay silent and accept the insults. The humiliation continues when Lahori food is mentioned, and the others mock him by saying that, of course, he would know it because he is Muslim and Pakistan is somehow *"his side"*. They even joke that if a Pakistani player loses a ball, Shoaib must be upset because he *"belongs to them"*. This scene is important because it shows Islamophobia in a very open form: Shoaib is not only mocked, but also symbolically pushed out of the nation and placed under suspicion, as though he is always closer to an enemy country than to his own home. Necropolitics appears here through this repeated denial of belonging, because the nation is imagined as a place where some people are naturally accepted while others must constantly prove that they deserve to belong.

The reference to halwa made by Shoaib's mother makes the insult even more personal, because the mockery now enters the space of home, food, family, and memory. What should have been a simple or affectionate mention of food becomes another reason to question his loyalty and nationality. The scene shows how deeply Islamophobia can enter ordinary life: even a mother's cooking is turned into proof that Shoaib is somehow foreign, suspicious, or less Indian. This matters because it shows that the violence is not only public or political, but also emotional and intimate. By the end of these scenes, Homebound makes it clear that Shoaib is not only facing isolated insults; he is living within a larger structure in which a Muslim man is repeatedly made to feel like a second-class citizen. In this way, Islamophobia in the film becomes necropolitical because it does not merely hurt Shoaib's feelings; it pushes him into a life shaped by fear, suspicion, humiliation, and the constant risk of social exclusion.

Photo (2024) can be read as a powerful film about how the lockdown turned the lives of poor migrant workers into vulnerable and disposable lives. One of the earliest important scenes is Durgya's wish to go to Bengaluru and take a photo in front of the Vidhana Soudha. At first, this seems like a simple and innocent dream of a child, but later it becomes deeply ironic because the Vidhana Soudha stands as a symbol of the state and its authority, while that same structure fails to protect either him or his father. The child wants a photograph in front of a building that represents power, yet that very power later leaves him exposed to suffering and danger. In this way, the film quietly introduces the unequal relationship between poor people and state power even before the main crisis begins.

This irony becomes stronger when Durgya comes to Bengaluru to stay with his father, Gynappa, who works there as a daily wage labourer. Gynappa belongs to the working class that keeps the city running, yet he has no real security within it. His life depends completely on daily work, which means that the moment work stops, survival itself becomes uncertain. The film clearly shows that the city values his labour only as long as it remains useful. Once the lockdown is announced, he is no longer treated as someone who belongs there. This is where the film strongly connects class exploitation with state neglect: the worker who helped sustain the city is immediately abandoned by it. Even we can see his master does not pick up his call to get back the pending wages, but enjoys the news by chilling with his family within a well-conditioned, secure home. His poverty is not simply a personal problem but the result of a larger structure in which labourers are needed for work but not protected in times of crisis.



Fig.04. Gnayappa takesDurgya outside during Janata Curfew(*Photo*,23:02)

A very striking moment comes when Gynappa takes Durgya towards the Vidhana Soudha to fulfil his wish, only for them to be chased away by the police during the curfew. This scene is important because it turns a child's simple dream

into an experience of fear and humiliation. The city suddenly becomes hostile, and the police do not see a father and son but bodies that must be controlled and removed. The scene shows how state power enters the lives of the poor not through care, but through force, restriction, and exclusion. Durgya's wish for a photograph is interrupted by a system that denies even the smallest moment of joy or belonging. The child's dream is therefore crushed at the very place that symbolizes public authority, which makes the scene politically very significant.

The most important turning point in the film comes when Gynappa realizes that he can no longer survive in Bengaluru and decides to walk back home with Durgya. This decision is not shown as a free personal choice, but as something forced upon him by the loss of work, the absence of transport, and the complete lack of state support. The city has no place for him once he can no longer labour within it. The long walk home, therefore, becomes a result of structural violence rather than an ordinary journey. It is not simply a father deciding to return to his village; it is a worker being pushed out of the city because the economic and political system has abandoned him. This is where the film clearly shows how power works: decisions taken from above create conditions in which the poor must carry the full burden of survival. The lockdown itself becomes a form of violence because it is enforced without care for those whose lives depend on daily movement, daily wages, and public transport.

The journey on foot becomes the emotional and political centre of *Photo*. As Gynappa and Durgya walk under the burning sun, carrying very little and slowly becoming weaker, the road turns into a space of abandonment. They are no longer

treated as citizens who deserve rights or protection, but as bodies left to endure hunger, heat, exhaustion, and uncertainty. What makes the film especially painful is that this suffering is experienced through the body of a child. Durgya is not merely accompanying his father; he is carrying the consequences of a system that has already failed him. He does not understand the politics of lockdown, labour, or governance, yet he still becomes one of its victims. This is why the final tragedy of the film feels so devastating.

By the end of the journey, Durgya dies from extreme heat and exhaustion, and this death becomes the strongest political statement in the film. His death is not presented as an ordinary accident or as an unavoidable natural tragedy. Instead, it is shown as the result of a chain of decisions and failures produced by larger structures of power. Durgya dies because the state imposed a lockdown without making safe arrangements for migrant workers. He dies because his father, as a poor labourer, had no savings, no shelter, no transport, and no institutional support. He dies because the system treated people like Gynappa and Durgya as expendable, as lives that could be pushed onto the road and left to survive on their own. The heat may be the immediate cause of death, but the deeper cause is the structure that forced a child to walk such a distance in the first place. In this sense, Durgya's death becomes the final result of class inequality, state neglect, and the unequal distribution of protection. The tragedy of the film lies not only in the fact that a boy dies, but in the fact that he dies because power did not value his life enough to keep him safe.



Fig.05. Gynappa and Durga under the scorching sun (*Photo* 1:09:17)

Seen in this way, *Photo* is not only a lockdown film or a migrant story. It is a film about how structures of power decide whose lives are protected and whose lives can be exposed to suffering. Gynappa loses work because he is a labourer with no security, Durgya loses his dream because public space is controlled by state force, and finally, the child loses his life because the system offers no safe path home for people like them. The film, therefore, connects personal tragedy to structural violence in a very clear way. Durgya's death is not separate from the lockdown, police control, lack of transport, or Gynappa's poverty; rather, it is the outcome of all these forces working together. That is what makes *Photo* so moving and politically powerful: it shows that behind the death of one child lies an entire system that allowed it to happen. The film shows how power decides which lives are worth protecting and which can be left to suffer. Gynappa loses his work because, as a labourer, he has no security. Durgya loses his small dream because public space is controlled through force, and in the end he loses his life because the system gives people like them no safe way to return home. This is why the film can be connected to Mbembe's idea of necropolitics, where some lives are left exposed to death-like conditions, to Marx's ideas about labour and class inequality, and to a

Neo-Marxist understanding of how state power and economic structures create vulnerability. Durgya's death is not just a personal tragedy but the final sign of a system in which the poor are denied safety, dignity, and even the basic chance to survive.

Taken together, *Photo* and *Homebound* show that the lockdown was not experienced in the same way by everyone. Both films focus on people who already live at the margins and show how a crisis makes their lives even more vulnerable. In *Photo*, Gynappa and Durgya represent migrant workers who are left without work, transport, or protection, and are forced into a painful journey simply to survive. In *Homebound,* this suffering appears through Chandan and Shoaib. Chandan's life shows how caste continues to shape dignity, opportunity, and selfworth, while Shoaib's life shows how religion can turn ordinary spaces into sites of suspicion and humiliation. Read together, the films make it clear that the lockdown was not only a health emergency, but also a moment when class, caste, and religion made some lives far more fragile than others. They suggest that the crisis did not create these inequalities, but exposed and deepened social divisions that were already present in everyday life.

This is why both films can be read through necropolitics, Marxism, and Neo-Marxism. *Photo* shows necropolitics through the abandonment of migrant workers who are pushed onto the road without safety or support, while *Homebound* reveals it through the everyday fear, exclusion, and insecurity faced by Chandan and Shoaib because of caste and religion. At the same time, both films connect suffering to labour, class, institutions, and power. Gynappa is valued only as long

as he can work. Chandan's struggle for dignity is shaped by caste-based inequality and poverty, and Shoaib's humiliation shows how communal prejudice continues to deny full belonging. A Neo-Marxist reading is especially useful here because it helps us see that oppression works not only through labour and wages, but also through state power, social institutions, ideology, and prejudice. In the end, *Photo* and *Homebound* present the lockdown as a deeply unequal experience in which class exploitation, caste discrimination, and Islamophobia together decide who receives care, dignity, and protection, and who is left to suffer.

Thus, *Photo* and *Homebound* show that the lockdown exposed the deep inequalities already present in society. Through Gynappa, Durgya, Chandan, and Shoaib, the films reveal how class, caste, and religion shaped vulnerability, deciding who received care and who was left to suffer. Read through Necropolitics, Marxism, and Neo-Marxism, both films present the lockdown as an unequal experience that turned personal suffering into a critique of state power, social prejudice, and the unequal value placed on human life.

Chapter Three

Invisible Burdens and Unequal Lives: *Homebound (2025)* and *Photo (2024)*

Intersectional feminism is a theory that explains how different forms of inequality affect women at the same time. This idea was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who argued that gender discrimination cannot be understood separately from other social factors like caste, class, and race. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in her legal essays rather than a single book. She first coined the term in her 1989 paper, *"Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics "* and expanded on it in her 1991 essay, *"Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color"*. According to her, women experience oppression in overlapping ways, and these cannot be studied as separate issues. This concept is very important in understanding Indian society, where caste, poverty, and patriarchy are deeply connected. In the film *Homebound*, intersectional feminism can be clearly seen through the lives of different female characters. Their struggles are not only about being women, but also about their caste identity, economic condition, and social position. The film shows that inequality is complex and layered, and it cannot be reduced to a single cause. By applying Crenshaw's theory, we can better understand how these multiple systems of power shape the lives of women in the film.

Feminism is the idea that women should have equal rights and opportunities in society. However, different feminist theories focus on different aspects of inequality. The development of feminism is often discussed in "waves." The first wave focused mainly on legal rights such as voting rights and property ownership. The second wave expanded to issues such as workplace discrimination, reproductive rights, domestic labor, and family structures. The third wave introduced more attention to diversity and challenged the assumption that all women experience oppression in the same way. This later developed into intersectional feminism, which studies how gender intersects with caste, class, religion, race, and sexuality.

One important theory is Marxist feminism, which is based on the ideas of Karl Marx. Marxism explains how economic systems create inequality between people. It argues that society is divided into classes, and the working class is often exploited. Marxist feminism connects this idea with gender and shows how women are also oppressed because of economic conditions. Marxist feminism studies how women are treated unfairly in a capitalist system, where money and property are owned by individuals. It argues that women's freedom can only happen if this system is changed or removed, because much of women's work, especially at home, is not paid or valued. Marxist feminists also expand on basic Marxist ideas by looking at unpaid housework and relationships between men and women. In his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels explains how family systems, social classes, and ideas of wealth began. He says that in early societies, women had a higher status and were equally important

in work. He also points out that family identity was connected to women, because only mothers were certain of their children. Since men were unsure about their children, they did not pass on property or family names at first.

Feminism and Marxism are two important theoretical approaches used in literary and film studies to understand social inequality and power structures. Feminism alone explains gender inequality, but Marxism helps explain why these inequalities are intensified under poverty. Similarly, Marxism alone explains class struggle, but feminism shows that class oppression is experienced differently by men and women.

For example, while male characters in the film struggle with unemployment, aspiration, and social mobility, female characters often carry additional burdens. They must manage domestic expectations while also navigating economic hardship. Their dreams are often secondary to family needs. Both theories focus on oppression, exploitation, and the struggle for justice, but they examine these issues from different perspectives. Feminism mainly focuses on the oppression of women and the unequal social, political, and cultural treatment they receive in patriarchal societies. Marxism, on the other hand, focuses on class struggle, economic inequality, and the exploitation of the working class under systems of capitalism. When these two theories come together, they provide a deeper understanding of how gender and economic conditions shape human life. This combined perspective is especially useful in studying films like *Homebound*, where social realities are presented through characters who experience multiple forms of marginalisation.

In the Indian context, feminism cannot be studied separately from caste and class. Women from privileged backgrounds and marginalised communities experience patriarchy differently. A poor Dalit woman, for example, may face oppression not only as a woman but also because of caste discrimination and economic exploitation. This is why intersectional feminism becomes important while analysing films like *Homebound*. The female characters in the film are not simply struggling against patriarchy in an abstract sense. Their lives are shaped by material realities such as poverty, caste hierarchy, restricted mobility, lack of education, and family responsibilities.

In *Homebound*, this is clearly seen in the life of Shoaib's mother, who works hard every day just to survive. Her struggles are not only because she is a woman, but also because she belongs to a poor class. This shows that economic inequality plays a major role in shaping women's lives. The film reflects Marxist ideas by showing how poverty limits opportunities and forces women into difficult situations. It also shows that without economic equality, gender equality cannot be fully achieved.

In the Indian context, caste is one of the most important factors that shape social inequality. B. R. Ambedkar was a great thinker who fought against caste discrimination and worked for equality and justice. He believed that education is the most powerful tool for social change. His ideas are very important in understanding Dalit feminism, which focuses on the struggles of women from marginalised castes. In *Homebound*, Sudha Bharti's character reflects these ideas. Her surname itself shows her caste identity, and this affects how society treats her.

She values education, and it will help her to get respected in a society where people judge others based on their last names. Even though she is educated, she still faces discrimination. This shows that caste and gender together create a double burden for women like her. From an intersectional feminist perspective, Ambedkar's ideas help us understand that caste oppression must be addressed along with gender inequality.

Sudha Barti's character is a strong example of intersectional feminism. Her identity is shaped by both her gender and her caste. According to Crenshaw's theory, this overlapping identity creates a unique form of oppression. Sudha is educated and confident, but she cannot escape the social reality of caste discrimination. Her pursuit of a PhD shows her belief in education as a way to gain freedom and independence. This idea connects with Ambedkar's belief that education is a tool for empowerment. However, her journey is not easy because society continues to judge her based on her background. This shows that empowerment is not equal for all women. Some women have to struggle more because of their social position. Sudha's character reflects both resistance and resilience. She challenges social norms, but at the same time, she is affected by them. This makes her a powerful representation of intersectional feminism in the film.

Chandan's mother represents the struggles of working-class women. Her life is defined by hard physical labor, poverty, and responsibility. From a feminist perspective, her oppression is connected to the economic system. She belongs to the working class, and her labor is necessary for survival, but it is not valued. As a woman, she is also expected to take care of the family, which adds to her burden.

This shows how class and gender work together to create inequality. Marxist theory explains that people in lower classes have limited access to resources and opportunities. This is clearly seen in her life, where survival is more important than dreams or personal growth. Intersectional feminism helps us understand that her struggles cannot be explained by gender alone. Poverty plays an equally important role. Her character shows that feminism must also address economic inequality to bring real change.

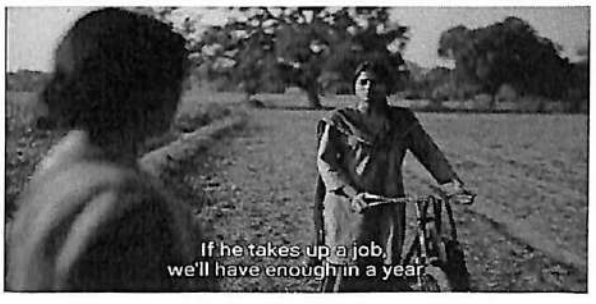


Fig.06. Vaishali and her mother discuss their monthly budget (*Homebound* 35:00)

Chandan's sister represents the impact of patriarchy within the family. She is a symbol of silent sacrifice. She is denied education because her parents believe that investing in a son is more important. This reflects traditional gender roles, where women are expected to sacrifice their dreams. From an intersectional perspective, her situation is influenced by gender, class, and cultural norms. She does not have the power to make decisions about her own life. This shows how patriarchy operates at a personal level, within families. Crenshaw's theory helps us understand that her oppression is not just about gender, but also about her social and economic position. Her silence is very powerful because it reflects the reality

of many women who are not allowed to express their desires. The film presents her story in a subtle way, making it more realistic and impactful.

The scene at 35:00 shows the emotional consequences of these social structures. When Chandan does not go to college, his sister feels sad because it reminds her of her own lost opportunity. This moment highlights the hidden pain of inequality. From an intersectional feminist perspective, her sadness is shaped by multiple factors. She is a woman, she belongs to a certain class, and she lives in a system that does not value her education. This scene shows that discrimination is not always visible, but it has strong emotional effects. It also shows how women internalise their struggles and accept their situation without protest. This silent suffering is an important aspect of intersectional feminism.

In the 48:20 scene, Sudha reacts strongly when she faces an insult. This moment represents resistance against oppression. According to feminist theory, speaking up against injustice is an important step towards equality. Sudha's reaction shows that she is not willing to accept disrespect. From an intersectional perspective, her resistance is shaped by her experiences with caste and gender discrimination. She understands the importance of dignity and self-respect. This scene shows that feminism is not only about large movements but also about everyday acts of courage. Sudha's character reflects strength and awareness, which are essential for challenging social inequality.

The presence of B. R. Ambedkar in the film is very meaningful. He represents the fight against caste oppression and the importance of education. His

ideas are closely connected to intersectional feminism because they focus on equality and justice for marginalised communities. The film uses his image to show that awareness is the first step towards change. It suggests that people must understand their rights to challenge inequality. This connection between Ambedkar's ideas and feminist theory strengthens the message of the film.

Vaishali's character shows how women often lose control over their own lives at 55:00. She explains that everything in her life revolves around Chandan, and she does not have the freedom to make her own choices. This reflects the deep influence of patriarchy. From an intersectional feminist perspective, her lack of agency is shaped by gender roles, family expectations, and social norms. She is not encouraged to think about her own desires or ambitions. This shows how women's identities are often defined in relation to men. Her story highlights the emotional impact of living without independence. It also shows that inequality is not only about external conditions but also about internal feelings and experiences.

The film *Homebound* is a strong example of intersectional feminism in practice. By applying the theories of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Karl Marx, and B. R. Ambedkar, we can understand how different forms of inequality are connected. The film shows that women's struggles are shaped by caste, class, gender, and social expectations. Each character represents a different aspect of this intersection. Sudha shows resistance and the importance of education, Shoaib's mother represents economic struggle, and Chandan's sister shows silent sacrifice. The film uses simple storytelling to present complex ideas, making it both powerful and realistic.

Intersectional feminism helps us see that true equality can only be achieved when all forms of oppression are addressed together. This makes *Homebound* an important text for understanding contemporary social issues.

The idea of the mother's body as a sign of caste and labour. It becomes very important in Chandan's mother's statement, "*These cracked feet were all I got inherited from my mom.*" This is one of the strongest moments for an intersectional feminist reading because it brings the mother into the film through the image of her cracked feet, which symbolise a lifetime of hard labour, poverty, hunger, and castebased suffering. Chandan's, along with his mother's, show that what he inherits from his ancestors is not wealth, safety, peace, or comfort, but the visible marks of exhaustion and deprivation. From an intersectional feminist perspective, this is significant because the mother's suffering is shaped by gender, caste, and class at the same time; as a poor lower-caste woman, her body becomes the place where labour and social inequality are inscribed. Her cracked feet suggest unpaid domestic labour, physical hardship, and a life spent carrying burdens without recognition. Even though she does not appear directly in the scene, the film brings her suffering into the narrative through Chandan's memory, showing how women's pain is often silently inherited by the next generation.

In the film *Photo,* there is only one main female character, that is Gangamma, the mother of Durgya, the boy. The role of Gangamma can definitely be analysed through intersectional feminism, even though *Photo* does not give her a very large screen presence. In fact, her limited presence itself is meaningful, because it reflects how women from poor working-class families often remain in

the background even when the emotional and material burden of survival falls heavily on them.

Although Gangamma is not the main character in *Photo*, she is still very important when the film is read through intersectional feminism. She represents the life of a poor rural woman whose suffering is shaped by gender, class, and economic hardship at the same time. She lives in the village with Durgya while Gynappa works in Bengaluru as a daily wage labourer, and this already places her in a difficult position. She has to manage the home and care for her child without the support of her husband. The film does not show her pain in a dramatic way, but through her everyday life, her responsibilities, and the quiet emotional burden she carries. From an intersectional feminist perspective, this is important because women like Gangamma often carry the hidden weight of poverty, household chores, care, and worry, even though they are not treated as the centre of the story. Her character shows that the suffering caused by the lockdown and migrant crisis was not limited to men travelling on the road, but also affected the women who stayed behind and struggled to hold the family together.

One important scene is at the beginning of the film, where Durgya lives with Gangamma in the village and keeps asking to go to Bengaluru to see his father and take a photo in front of the Vidhana Soudha. Gangamma is the one who listens to his wish, comforts him, and finally agrees to send him. This may look like a simple moment between a mother and son, but it becomes more meaningful when seen through intersectional feminism. Gangamma cannot give her son a secure or easy life; she can only respond within the limits created by poverty and by her husband's

absence. Even a small wish like travelling to see his father becomes difficult because the family does not have comfort or stability. This shows how motherhood in a poor family is shaped by sacrifice, helplessness, suffer, and emotional labour. Gangamma has to carry her son's wishes and sadness, even when she does not have the power to change his situation.

Gangamma's suffering becomes even clearer when we remember that Gynappa has to live away from the family in Bengaluru for work. This is not simply a personal family decision, but the result of poverty and labour migration. From an intersectional feminist point of view, this matters because women often carry the heaviest burden of such separation. Gangamma has to continue life in the village, care for Durgya, and manage the home while also living with uncertainty about money and survival. The film does not give her a dramatic speech about this, but her position itself says a great deal. She becomes a woman who silently carries the emotional and practical consequences of a system that separates families for the sake of labour. In this sense, her suffering is not only personal but also social and economic.



Fig.07. Gangamma waiting for her son and husband (*Photo*, 59:14)

Gangamma can also be seen as a figure of silent maternal pain because once Durgya leaves for Bengaluru, she is pushed out of the main action of the film, while the father and son's journey becomes the centre of the story. This absence is important. Intersectional feminism reminds us that women's suffering is often left unseen, even when they are deeply affected by the crisis. Gangamma does not walk on the road like Gynappa and Durgya, but she is still part of the same violence because she is the mother left waiting, with no control over what will happen to her child. The film does not directly show her grief, fear, or anxiety, but this silence can itself be meaningful. It reflects how women's pain is often hidden behind the visible struggles of men. Her suffering remains in the background, yet it still forms an important part of the emotional world of the film.

Gangamma's character becomes even more significant if we think of her as representing poor working-class women more generally. She is not only a mother waiting at home, but also a woman whose life is shaped by economic struggle, care work, and social neglect. Through her, *Photo* suggests that the lockdown and migrant crisis affected women not only through physical movement or public suffering, but also through waiting, worrying, caregiving, and emotional pain. An intersectional feminist reading helps us see that Gangamma is not just a side character. She stands for the hidden burden carried by women at the meeting point of poverty, gender, and social inequality.

Taken together, *Photo* and *Homebound* show that women's suffering cannot be understood only through gender, because their lives are also shaped by class, caste, religion, and economic hardship. In the *Photo,* Gangamma represents the

quiet burden carried by poor rural women during the lockdown. Although she is not the central character, her life illustrates how women are expected to hold families together while navigating separation, uncertainty, caregiving, and emotional strain. In *Homebound*, women appear less directly, but they are still important, especially through Chandan's mother, whose cracked feet become a strong image of inherited labour, caste oppression, and female suffering. His sister, who was denied education for the sake of her brother's better future and dreams, Sudha Bharti, who wants to upgrade her social status through education, works hard day after day. Together, the films suggest that women from poor and marginalised communities often remain at the edges of the story, even though their pain is deeply tied to the social world the films present. Their suffering does not always appear in dramatic ways, but is visible through waiting, sacrifice, tiredness, caregiving, and the physical marks left by labour.

An intersectional feminist reading helps us understand that these women are not simply shown as mothers or family members, but as people whose lives are shaped by several forms of inequality at once. Gangamma's life is marked by poverty, migration, and domestic responsibility, while Chandan's mother becomes a reminder of how caste and labour leave lasting marks on the female body. In this way, both films show that women's suffering is often hidden behind the more visible struggles of men, even though women carry some of the hardest burdens of survival. *Photo* and *Homebound* therefore make it clear that crisis does not affect all women equally; it falls most heavily on those who are already socially and economically vulnerable. Through intersectional feminism, the two films show that the pain of

poor and marginalised women cannot be separated from larger structures of caste, class, labour, and social neglect.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

This study has examined how *Photo* (2024) and *Homebound* (2025) portray the lives of marginalised people during the lockdown through the ideas of Necropolitics, Neo-Marxism, and intersectional feminism. Both films show that the lockdown was not experienced in the same way by everyone. For some people, it was a time of staying at home and adjusting to a new routine, but for poor and marginalised people, it became a struggle for work, food, dignity, belonging, and survival. Through the lives of migrant workers, lower-caste characters, Muslim identity, and women's hidden suffering, the films make it clear that the pandemic was not only a health crisis. It was also a social and political crisis that exposed the inequalities already present in society. In this way, *Photo* and *Homebound* show that not all lives are treated with the same value, and not all people receive the same care or protection in times of crisis.

One of the strongest ideas that comes out of this study is that both films present the lockdown as a deeply unequal experience. In *Photo*, Gynappa and Durgya represent migrant workers and their families, who are left without work, transport, or support when the lockdown begins. Gynappa loses his job as a daily wage labourer, and the city that once depended on his labour no longer has space for him. This forces him and Durgya into a painful journey home, which finally leads to Durgya's death. His death is not only a personal tragedy in the film; it becomes a symbol of how poor people were abandoned during the lockdown. In

Homebound, suffering appears in a different but equally powerful way. Through Chandan and Shoaib, the film shows that hardship during the lockdown was shaped not only by poverty, but also by caste discrimination and Islamophobia. Chandan struggles under the burden of caste and class, while Shoaib is repeatedly made to feel like an outsider because of his Muslim identity. Together, the two films show that the lockdown did not create inequality, but made already existing inequalities much more visible and painful.

Necropolitics is one of the most important ideas in this study because it helps explain how power decides whose lives will be protected and whose lives can be left to suffer. In *Photo*, this can be seen in the way migrant workers are abandoned by the state and by the economic system that once depended on them.
Gynappa and Durgya are not treated as people whose lives matter in a time of crisis. They are pushed out of the city and left to face hunger, heat, and exhaustion on their own. Durgya's death shows the cruelty of this system very clearly. It is not simply an unfortunate event; it is the result of a situation in which poor lives are left without safety or care. In *Homebound*, necropolitics appears in a different form. Chandan and Shoaib are not left on the road in the same way, but they still live under systems that reduce their dignity and security. Chandan's caste affects his opportunities and sense of self, while Shoaib's Muslim identity makes him face suspicion, humiliation, and exclusion. The film shows that violence does not always happen through physical attack. It can also happen when people are made to live with fear, shame, and the feeling that they do not fully belong.

A Neo-Marxist reading helps us understand that this suffering is not only personal but also connected to labour, class, institutions, and social power. In *Photo*, Gynappa's life shows how the city values migrant workers only as long as they can work. Once work stops, they become disposable. His labour is useful, but his life is not treated as important. This is where necropolitics and Neo-Marxism come together very strongly, because the system keeps poor people alive only when they are economically useful and abandons them when they are no longer needed. In *Homebound*, this idea becomes more complex because class is closely tied to caste and religion. Chandan's poverty cannot be separated from caste humiliation, and Shoaib's insecurity cannot be separated from communal prejudice. NeoMarxism is useful here because it shows that oppression does not happen only through money or work. It also happens through institutions, social attitudes, and unequal structures that decide who gets dignity, safety, and belonging.

Chandan's role in *Homebound* is especially important because he shows how caste and class work together in everyday life. His wish to get a government job is not only about finding work; it is also about gaining respect, stability, and freedom from humiliation. The film makes it clear that caste continues to shape his life, his confidence, and his future. Shoaib's story adds another strong layer to the film because it shows how Islamophobia works in ordinary life. He is mocked, questioned, and treated with suspicion in different situations, including the cricket match scene and the police clearance certificate scene. These moments show that Shoaib is not simply facing a few personal insults; he is living in a social world where a Muslim man is constantly made to prove that he belongs and that he is not

dangerous. In this way, *Homebound* shows that religion, like caste, can also become a reason for insecurity and exclusion.

Intersectional feminism helps this study look at women's suffering in both films, even though women are not always at the centre of the story. In *Photo*, Gangamma represents the quiet burden carried by poor rural women during the lockdown. She stays in the village with Durgya while Gynappa works away from home, and her life is shaped by waiting, caregiving, emotional strain, and uncertainty. Her suffering is not shown through dramatic scenes, but through the ordinary work of holding the family together in difficult times. In *Homebound*, the image of Chandan's mother's cracked feet becomes one of the most powerful signs of female suffering. It connects the female body with caste, labour, poverty, and inherited pain. Through Gangamma and Chandan's mother, sister, and Sudha Bharti, both films show that women's struggles are often hidden behind the visible suffering of men, even though women carry some of the deepest burdens of survival, care work, sacrifice and social neglect. Intersectional feminism is therefore important because it helps us see that women's suffering is shaped not only by gender, but also by class, caste, labour, and poverty.

When *Photo* and *Homebound* are read together, they offer a fuller picture of lockdown life in India. *Photo* focuses more on migration, labour, hunger, and death, while *Homebound* widens the discussion by showing caste humiliation, Islamophobia, and the emotional pain of exclusion. One film shows the physical suffering of being abandoned, while the other shows the social suffering of living under prejudice and insecurity. Yet both films are deeply connected because they

focus on people who are pushed to the margins of society. They show that the lockdown was not just a medical emergency, but also a moment that exposed the unequal structures of class, caste, religion, and gender already present in everyday life.

This study also has its limitations. It focuses only on *Photo* and *Homebound* and uses mainly textual and visual analysis. It does not include audience responses, interviews, or field research, and it works only through selected theories such as necropolitics, Neo-Marxism, and intersectional feminism. Even so, these limits do not weaken the study. Instead, they define its scope. The purpose of the project was not to explain every lockdown film, but to closely study how these two films represent invisible and marginalised lives. Within that frame, the theories used here help show that the pain of these characters is never only personal. It is always connected to larger systems of inequality and power.

In the end, this study argues that *Photo* and *Homebound* are powerful films because they make invisible lives visible. They do not present poor and marginalised people simply as victims, but as human beings with dignity, pain, hope, memory, and the will to survive. Durgya's dream, Gynappa's struggle, Chandan's search for respect, Shoaib's experience of Islamophobic exclusion, Gangamma's silent burden, and the inherited suffering of Chandan's mother all come together to create a moving picture of lockdown India. Read through necropolitics, the films show how power decides whose lives are protected and whose lives are left exposed to suffering. Read through Neo-Marxism, they reveal how labour, class, caste, religion, and institutions work together to produce

whose lives are left exposed to suffering. Read through Neo-Marxism, they reveal how labour, class, caste, religion, and institutions work together to produce inequality. Read through intersectional feminism, they show that women's suffering and marginalised identities cannot be separated from the larger structures of oppression around them. Together, *Photo* and *Homebound* present the lockdown as a deeply unequal human experience and turn personal stories into a wider criticism of the social and political systems that decide the value of human life.

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