

Fellow

This story reflects my journey as a trans woman and queer youth filmmaker from Nepal who uses cinema as a tool for advocacy and change. It explores how storytelling and visual media can challenge stereotypes, create empathy, and amplify queer voices that are often ignored or misrepresented. Through my work and lived experiences, I aim to highlight the power of representation in shaping public understanding and influencing social attitudes. This story is about reclaiming narratives, resisting invisibility, and using film as a fourth pillar of democracy to push for inclusion, dignity, and equal recognition for queer communities.

Hi, my name is Dia Magar (she/her). I am a trans woman from Nepal, a queer youth filmmaker, and an advocate. For the past four years, I have been actively involved in queer advocacy, using storytelling as my primary tool for change. This article is about my journey of understanding the power of representation in the film and media industry and how it can shape public perception. I began reflecting on this while working on films and documentaries that center queer lives, realizing how rarely our stories are told authentically. Writing from Nepal, where media holds strong influence, I believe representation matters deeply because media is often considered the fourth pillar of the state. It has the power to educate, challenge stereotypes, and build empathy. My journey began with a desire to see myself and my community represented with dignity, truth, and humanity.

For a long time, I have been deeply aware of how invisible queer people, especially trans communities are within mainstream media and the film industry. When our stories do appear, they are often misrepresented, hypersexualized, exaggerated for comic relief, or stripped of their emotional depth and reality. As a trans woman from Nepal and a queer youth filmmaker, this lack of authentic representation has affected me both personally and professionally. I was not just watching these portrayals on screen; I was living with their consequences in society, where such narratives influence how people see, treat, and understand us. Many times, I felt the weight of being misunderstood before I was even heard. One of the biggest challenges in my journey was the resistance to working with queer communities. I encountered hesitation from collaborators, production teams, and institutions that were uncomfortable centering trans stories. Some feared backlash, others saw queer narratives as “too sensitive” or “not marketable,” and many simply lacked awareness. These moments were discouraging and often made me question whether my voice and experiences were considered valid or important enough to be told. Despite this, I continued advocating, believing that the media, often referred to as the fourth pillar of the state, holds immense power in shaping public understanding and social change. A major turning point in my life came when I applied for and was selected for the APTN fellowship. Being chosen and trusted to lead a sole project as a trans woman was one of the most empowering and transformative experiences of my life. The fellowship was not just an opportunity to create a project; it became a space for capacity building, learning, and deep connection with my community. Through this journey, I engaged closely with trans and queer individuals, listening to their lived experiences, struggles, joys, and resilience stories that are rarely spoken about openly. What

struck me most was how often trans lives are reduced to bodies or sexuality, while our emotional realities, identities, and everyday struggles are ignored. This realization strengthened my commitment to creating narratives that are grounded, honest, and respectful. I wanted to move away from sensationalism and instead highlight real, human experiences that reflect dignity, complexity, and truth. This journey reaffirmed my belief that representation is not just about visibility but about responsibility about who tells the story, how it is told, and why it matters. Through my work, I want people to understand that trans people are not stereotypes or spectacles, but individuals deserving of empathy, respect, and space to tell our own stories.

This journey taught me that storytelling is not just a creative practice but a powerful form of resistance and care. I realized that when trans people tell our own stories, we reclaim our dignity and challenge narratives that have long been imposed on us. If I could do anything differently, I would have trusted my voice sooner and allowed myself to take up space without fear. What I want readers to remember is that representation is not about ticking boxes it is about listening, empathy, and accountability. I invite filmmakers, media practitioners, and audiences to reflect on whose stories are missing and why. Imagine a media landscape where queer and trans people are not spoken about, but spoken with and where our stories are told with honesty, respect, and humanity.