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REPRESENTATION OF CASTE IN INDIAN CINEMA: A REVIEW

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Abstract

India is home to one of the world's largest and oldest film industry. Around the start of 1913, a public screening of an Indian film took place. *Raja Harischandra* was the name of it. The film industry has presented a lifetime achievement award with Dadasaheb Phalke's name as its director. The first Indian movie to be recognised internationally was *Sant Tukaram* (1936), a Marathi film directed by Damle and Fatehlal. social films paved the way for a new generation of filmmakers who took it upon themselves to critically examine not only the customs of marriage, dowry, widowhood, serious injustices brought about by caste and class. Contemporary regional film from the fringes, especially in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, is becoming more significant due to their ubiquitous cultural anti-caste politics. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr.Babsaheb Ambedkar, and Periyar radicalised the social issue of caste, caste discrimination is shown in Marathi and Tamil films by new age directors like Nagaraj Manjule and Pa.ranjith. Nagaraj Manjule and Pa Ranjith a notable filmmaker their movies like *Fandry, Sairat, Pistulya Jhund*, representing the marginalised with background of caste discrimination and inequality in society. This paper is sincere attempt to overview Indian Cinema through the representation of caste and racial struggle from *Achuut Kanya* to *Sairat*.

Key Words: Cinema, Society, caste, Marginalised, Representation etc.

India is home to one of the world's largest and oldest film industry. Around the start of 1913, a public screening of an Indian film took place. *Raja Harischandra* was the name of it. The film industry has presented a lifetime achievement award with Dadasaheb Phalke's name as its director. Finding someone to play female roles at the time was really challenging. The middle classes' continued association of acting with a deterioration in virtue, female modesty, and respectability has only recently been called into question. Early in the 1930s, when a number of other filmmakers working in a range of Indian languages contributed to the growth and development of Indian cinema, the studio system

began to take shape. *Devdas* (1935), in which P.C. Barua directed and also starred, was the most popular of its early films. Around this time, The Prabhat Film Company, founded in 1929 by V. G. Damle, Shantaram, S. Fatehlal, and two other persons, also experienced its initial success. The first Indian movie to be recognised internationally was *Sant Tukaram* (1936), a Marathi film directed by Damle and Fatehlal. More than anything else, V. Shantaram's social films paved the way for a new generation of filmmakers who took it upon themselves to critically examine not only the customs of marriage, dowry, and widowhood, but also the serious injustices brought about by caste

and class divisions. Some of the societal difficulties were most vividly depicted in the 1936 movie *Achhut Kanya*, popularly known as "Untouchable Girl," which was directed by Himanshu Rai of Bombay Talkies. The film depicts the tribulations of a Brahmin boy (Ashok Kumar) and a Harijan girl (Devika Rani). This is the first introduction of caste struggle and love depicted on the screen of Indian Cinema.

Contemporary regional film from the fringes, especially in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, is becoming more significant due to their ubiquitous cultural anti-caste politics. This has been communicated not only via written works but also by appearing in movies. Similar to how Phule, Ambedkar, and Periyar radicalised the social issue of caste, caste discrimination is shown in Marathi and Tamil films. It is referred to as "Dalit cinema" by Suraj Yengde, who claims that it has the potential to "be among the pioneers of modern artistic opposition." Students from the American College of Madurai were questioned for the documentary *The Invisible Other: Caste in Tamil Film* to learn their thoughts on how caste is portrayed in that language (Suresh E T [2014]). The varied viewpoints unmistakably show that the fringe castes are uncomfortable with the mainstream Tamil films. Tamil cinema (in general) lowers the lower castes to non-existence or objects that are concealed beneath the grandeur of the more politically entrenched caste by mainly relying on the heroic and iconic characters of the intermediary castes.

In Marathi cinema especially *Saamna* paved a landmark to focus the struggle between a dalit and upper caste politician. *Saamna* was an invention of its time. The film's plot, narrative, and screenplay were all influenced by the prevailing socio-political climate, which had fueled animosity and unhappiness in rural communities. We were introduced to rural Maharashtra politics through *Saamna*, and the political unrest in Bombay was revealed through *Deewar*, another 1975 film. *Deewar* pitted a law-abiding, disobedient police officer against the honourable chairman of the sugar cooperative and a Gandhian hobo.

In the western Maharashtra regions where sugarcane is cultivated, cooperative sugar businesses began to proliferate in the 1970s. The government-sponsored and seed-funded approach for rural development began with the establishment of the Pravara Sahakari Sakhar Karkhana in the Ahmednagar district in the early 1960s. The model's exploitative underbelly had become known by the 1970s. The main driving force behind the rural economy's all-encompassing conquest was the establishment of sugar plants, poultry, vineyards, cooperative banks, schools, and colleges. In the media, sugar barons—chairmen of sugar corporations—often appeared to be Congressmen dressed in Gandhi dhotis and hats but not following his principles. Tendulkar portrays this group in *Hindurao Dhonde Patil of Saamna*, a legendary performance by Nilu Phule. Dhonde Patil, who presents himself as being soft-spoken and meek, controls his empire with a combination of cunning, pride, and a barely restrained display of force. He brutally disposes of everyone who defies his intimidation. He bribes potential rivals. Brother Sarjerao is always available to do the task. Maruti Kamble, a jawan who lost his leg in battle and returned home with crutches, was a problem for Dhonde Patil.

He is from a group known as Dalits, who have little interest in the new economy. The only beneficiaries of sugar cooperatives were large-scale growers, primarily Marathas. Dalits owned relatively little land, if any at all. They had been socially excluded in the prior rural economy because of their caste. They were economically marginalised by the sugar cooperatives, which made such enormous promises to so many. Kamble challenges Dhonde Patil's predatory tactics before being eliminated. Contrary to rumours, no one had the courage to address the boss about the mystery surrounding his disappearance. The person who eventually succeeds in doing this is a hobo who wanders into Dhonde Patil's kingdom, hears the locals whispering, and then begins to investigate and inquire.

In the film *Ankur*, the rural members of the potter caste are shown to have their own distinctive celebration. This caste-based seclusion is also shown towards the end of the movie when Kishtayya takes

Lakshmi to the temple of their own village god to request the blessing of having a child. The villagers' refusal to purchase mud- or clay-based containers led to Kishtayya, Lakshmi's deaf and mute husband, losing his job. This demonstrates that industrialization, which made capitalism possible, was the only thing that allowed the working masses to be exploited. Although Surya has publicly denied the existence of the caste system, his beliefs and behaviour strongly imply otherwise.

Although Surya has publicly denied the existence of the caste system, his beliefs and behaviour strongly imply otherwise. Consistently, the people are seen to be under him. They constantly salute him, and the neighbourhood police chief, Sheikh Chand, also lights his cigarette. It is evident that the roles of the farmer, the priest, and the barber are distinct from one another. When he asks Lakshmi of the potter Dalit caste to make his meals rather than the priest, he breaks the rules of the system only once. But, he also consistently exerts dominance over her in this situation, and it is obvious from his male gaze that he is attracted to her sexually. He ultimately takes advantage of her based on her gender and caste as a result.

Nagraj Manjule and Pa Ranjith a notable filmmaker their movies like *Fandry*, *Sairat*, *Pistulya Jhund*, representing the marginalised with background of caste discrimination and inequality in society. With reference to the well-known Marathi movie *Sairat*, Jyoti Punwani writes for rediff.com on the subject of caste issues and cinema. Tragic tales of hopeless love have always been common in literature and film, the article's conclusion states. Yet, caste has never been brought up in India. The offender has always been class. But, as you will read in the press every day, it is intercaste love that is still illegal and causes the worst retaliation and deaths. Dalit stereotypes that are visibly ingrained in popular culture focus on their physical characteristics, dress, and distinctive characteristics. In most of Indian movies, every Dalit character has a dark complexion, is filthy, feeble, and insecure. In more recent years, upper-caste performers and stories have remained a mainstay of popular Hindi cinema. Productions like *Article 15* have shown the implicit upper-caste mentality motivating these films, despite their

attempts to confront caste. In the film, violence against Dalit girls is clearly depicted. Thus, the above discussion reflects that caste being the most dominantly neglected or sidelined aspects of Indian cinema.

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