

**Contours of Dalit Cinema in India: A Study of Pa.
Ranjith's *Kaala* and Anubhav Sinha's *Article 15***

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the M.Phil. Dissertation entitled “**Contours of Dalit Cinema in India: A Study of Pa. Ranjith’s *Kaala* and Anubhav Sinha’s *Article 15***” has been exclusively done by me under the supervision of Dr. Sudeep, Assistant Professor, Department of English & Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh. The work presented in this dissertation is original and references to the other works have been made with proper acknowledgement and complete source of information that is included in the Bibliography.

The manuscript has been checked for plagiarism verification by Turnitin software under Submission ID no. 1671820127. I declare that the work and language included in this dissertation is free from any kind of plagiarism.

I, further, declare that this dissertation has not been submitted to any other institute or University for the award of any degree.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Contours of Dalit Cinema in India: A Study of Pa. Ranjith’s *Kaala* and Anubhav Sinha’s *Article 15***” submitted to Department of English & Foreign Languages, Central University of Haryana, Mahendragarh in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of philosophy in English is a record of original work done by **Ms. Seema** (Roll No. 190911) during the period of study (2019-2021) under my supervision and guidance. This dissertation has not been submitted in part or full for any other award of any Degree/Diploma of this university or any other institution.

I deem the present research work fit for being evaluated for the award of degree of M.Phil. in English.

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Introduction

Cinema has its own way of representing caste practices in the films. They very often represent the problems of Dalit community in a degraded manner. Caste system is among the world's oldest system that divide society. Primarily there are four castes in Hindu religion -*Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishayas* and the *Shudras*. At the top level of caste system were the *Brahmins* who were believed to be originated from *Brahma's* head. After that came the *Kshatriyas*, or the warriors who were supposed to be originated from his arms. The third category went to the *Vaishayas* or the businessmen, who were evolved from his thighs. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the *Shudras* or the labourers, who were originated from the God's feet. These main castes were again divided into many sub-groups and each group have their own specific occupation or identity. Those who were not included in Hindu caste system were the *achoots*, or Dalits. Rural Indian society have been divided in different segments on the basis of caste and class and each group have to live in segregated colonies according to their identity. Basic facilities like water resources were not shared with Dalit community, upper castes would not accept food and drink from lower castes and no one is allowed to marry outside his or her caste. Caste system is highlighted for being discriminatory but it remained rigid for centuries trapping people into fixed social orders from which it was impossible to escape. A person remains a member of that specific caste group into which he or she is born and he cannot change his identity in terms of caste. We can say that caste is main factor that decides a person's identity. In caste system some elderly group members decides the norms of that particular group and when someone violate the group then he or she would be punished accordingly. Dalits and other tribal groups represent near about one-sixth of India's population but they endure complete

ostracization due to lack of unity among them. Dalits are forced to live in segregated colonies and they are not allowed to intermingle with other part of village or town. Even educational institutions follow the footsteps of mainstream society and in most of the school or colleges lower caste children are forced to sit at floor. Caste system can be identified as India's *hidden apartheid* and we can notice that in rural India whole villages are segregated on the basis of caste. It is difficult to define caste because it is a complex term.

According to *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, caste is a system of dividing Hindu society into classes, or any of classes (*Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, 1996). Now these primary castes are further divided into different sub-groups and these are known as *Jati*. *Jati* is identified with some particular rules related to their structure. Each *Jati* have some special rituals and customs and these customs define the identity of that group. *Jati* have an organisation that comprises of highly respected members of that group and this organisation oversees the working of the system and has the authority to exclude someone from the if he or she violate the norms of *Jati*. Caste discrimination has frequently featured in literature, cinema and other media spaces. Cinema is a powerful medium to represent the social, cultural and political reality of society. It plays a great role in bringing the problems or evils prevailing in society in front of masses. It reflects many of the trends, cultural values, current virtues, social struggles and pattern of living in society. In a way we can say that cinema and literature highlight the culture and traditions of society. Culture is the underlying current of the society. A society thrives on its values, rituals, traditions and ideology through the medium of culture. Cinema as an art form not only reflects culture of society, it also shapes culture. Cinema represent the caste issues in the movies from

very beginning but its way of representation is changing with time. In its earlier phase, cinema ended up focussing on the financial problems only and never focus on their culture and traditions. Most often the problems of Dalit masses are solved by an upper caste hero and they are projected as a saviour to ignorant Dalits or lower caste people. As a result, ignorant Dalit masses ended up worshipping these upper caste heroes. In a way we can say that cinema does not show us the real face of society regarding caste discrimination and untouchability, rather it appropriates caste problems according to upper castes. Mainstream cinema shows the cultural aspects like their language, rituals and festivals with a negative image. These works seek to raise the question, “Is there a Dalit cinema?” This question becomes important in the context of negative representation of Dalits in Indian films. Before discussing the role of Dalits in cinema we should understand the meaning and origin of the word Dalit.

Mahatma Gandhi called untouchables *Harijans* (“children of God Hari Vishnu,” or simply “children of God”). This name *Harijan* is now considered derogatory and abusive by Dalit intellectuals. Dalit term is used by politically active intellectuals from the Dalit community itself. Originally Dalit word is derived from Sanskrit language that means toiled or oppressed. Dalit term was first used by Jyotirao Phule in 19th century, in context of the subjugation and discrimination faced by the “untouchables” or Dalits. Now Dalit has become a strong identity for many lower caste groups. Untouchables are known with different names and these names were given to them by upper caste segment of society. These names include: “*Dasa, Dasya, Raksassa, Asura, Avarna, Nisada, Panchama, Chandala, Harijan, Untouchable*”. This naming of lower caste people by upper caste people expresses the two-term contrast of “we- the pure” and “you – the impure”. To answer these derogatory remarks, the lower caste people choose

a single and strong identity and this is Dalit, which refers to the struggles of the whole community. The term Dalit is reminder of exploitation and atrocities committed by upper castes on these subaltern groups. Dalits are forced to live a life of poverty and they are never treated as equal human beings and the upper caste society is responsible for their lesser human being status. Dalits were deprived of basic human and they are never treated as a part of society. Dalits were named “untouchables” which means that they are polluted and impure. They were not allowed to enter temples, schools and many other public places because of their impure status. Caste system is deeply rooted in Hindu religion. The philosophy of caste system is mentioned in Hindu religious and it is treated as an essential part of society. Dalit communities were not allowed to join festivals and religious occasions of mainstream society and they were limited to some menial and polluting tasks such as sanitation, leather working etc. After Independence Indian constitution abolished untouchability. But the reality is totally different, Dalit community continued to remain the most subjugated and exploited section of the Indian society.

Dalit cinema includes movies emphasising the problems and discrimination of these oppressed people. Rather than focussing on romantic angle these movies focus on the basic problems and struggle of Dalit community. Movies like *Kabali*, *Kaala*, *Article 15* focus on the life and struggles of Dalit community. These movies compelled us to think about the role of upper castes in discriminating other lower castes. Earlier these so called “untouchables” were not allowed to join any social or religious functions of mainstream society. Most commonly we can see that Dalit narrative focus on the idea of subjugation and discrimination of lower castes. It also represents the revolt and assertion, since it highlights the lesser human status of Dalit community and it also

show that how they were segregated from the so-called mainstream society. The origin of Dalit writings can be found in the writings of Buddha, Chokhamela, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule and many others. Dalit literature pen down the sufferings and exploitation of Dalits by upper caste society. Untouchables are treated as inferior, stupid, born criminals, lacking in intelligence and good for nothing fellows etc. in reaction to such derogatory remarks some educate intellectuals from Dalit community start writing their sufferings and struggles so that society can realise the pain of Dalit community. They use their pen as a weapon to fight the battle of caste oppression.

In 1958, the term Dalit was first used in Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha Conference, organised at Mumbai. Dalit is a broad term it includes all those who are subjugated and discriminated on the basis of caste, class or any other reason. Babu Rao Bagula who is a famous Dalit writer define the term Dalit as “all those who toil, and are exploited and oppressed are called Dalits”. Most of the intellectuals and educationists agree on the fact view that Dalit literature is not the belonging to a particular community but it somehow relates to all those who are exploited and discriminated. Arjun Dangle in his essay *Dalit Literature: Past Present and Future* says “Dalit literature is not separatist and *Dalit* literature is not restricted inly to Buddhists.”

Dalit literature reflect the experience and struggles of Dalit community and in this way we can say that it is different from mainstream literature. The key feature of Dalit literary scholars or writers is that they use their own mother tongue to express their pain and struggles. We can say that those writers who have experienced atrocities and oppression because of their caste status can be considered as Dalit writers. Dalit literature reflect Ambedkarite philosophy and reject the discriminatory norms of

society. Dalit literature is used as a weapon to fight against the age-old norms and system maintained by Hindu society that result in the oppression of Dalit community.

Bollywood film industry can play an important role in abolition of caste system. But film industry also maintain the caste hierarchy as it is maintained in society. From beginning to till date Bollywood produce films on various issues like economic problems, partition, caste issues etc. Movies like *Achhut Kanya*, *Fandry*, *Masaan*, *Article 15*, *Kaala*, *Kabaali* etc. raise issues related to caste discrimination. However, few directors who belongs to Dalit community represent an insider view on caste issues and represent the trauma and miseries of Dalit community. Instead of hiding their real caste identity they assert their identity and create a unique space for them in society. Movies portray caste issues with originality and depend on alteration in heart and mind-set to erase caste hatred and inhuman practices like untouchability. Now film industry is becoming more inclusive and democratic and start producing films based on lived experiences.

Filmmaking and society are closely related to each other and films act as a mirror to society. Bollywood maintains the myth of open culture but it proves wrong when it comes to representation of caste problems. In earlier movies there is a common issue related to romance between couple in which either the boy or girl belongs to Dalit community. Overall, the representation of Dalit community has been appropriated by upper caste and they are represented either as criminals or victims. But representation of Dalits in films is influenced from Brahmanical ideology. A person from Dalit community would be aware of more aspects of caste discrimination and he could represent his experience without any appropriation. Earlier films related to caste issues have come from upper caste filmmakers and one can easily notice that in most of the

films the representation of Dalit characters is unconvincing and unrealistic. One could easily analyse that representation of Dalit experience in films is influenced from the hierarchy of caste divisions maintained in society. *Achhut Kanya* is the first Hindi film based on delicate theme of untouchability. This film represents the economic problems of Dalit community and intercaste romance between a boy and a girl. Caste barriers prevent intercaste marriage between a boy who belongs to upper caste and girl from lower caste. Instead of focussing on the real problems of victimhood, untouchability, discrimination and exclusion these movies focus on romantic angle. Cinema industry is largely in control of a handful of upper caste elite filmmakers. Bollywood has either been unable to represent the struggle and miseries of Dalit life or has willingly chosen not to do so. When we watch movies by upper caste filmmakers like Karan Johar or Yash Chopra we can easily notice titles like Malhotra, Raichand, Chopra etc., mainly upper caste rich businessmen. But now a days some movies like Pa Ranjith's *Kaala*, Anubhav Sinha's *Article 15* represent core issues of Dalit exploitation. Earlier movies dealing with Dalit issues pass unnoticed because the main hero in these movies is a minor actor but in *Kaala* and *Article 15* the heroes belong to mainstream. Both Rajnikant and Ayushmann Khurana did a good job that's still grappling with disparities. Both of the films deal with Dalit issues but there are still some differences like in *Article 15* Ayan Ranjan who is an IPS officer comes from metropolitan city who does not know anything about caste system but in *Kaala* Kaala who is the protagonist himself is the victim of caste discrimination. In this way in *Article 15* hero is an outsider upper caste person but in *Kaala* hero belongs to same oppressed community. An upper caste person cannot feel the pain of Dalits, he can only sympathise with them. But Dalit community does not need sympathy from upper castes they need a permanent solution for their problems.

As Jiya Rani, a Dalit Indian journalist says, “The mainstream media is not for the poor, not for the oppressed. It has carried its kingdom out of loyalty to the powers, the bureaucracy to domination.” (*The Wire*; n.p.)

Though there are few representations of lower caste in media, they are mostly reflected as Harijan understanding of schedule caste from Gandhian framework rather than ‘Dalit’ understanding of Phule-Ambedkarite perspective. Since the establishment of Indian cinema, the number of movies where Dalit being portrayed as the central character is very less with respect to Savarna as a leading character. During the ‘Parallel cinema movement’ though there have been few movies created on the basis of the Dalit representation inspired by Left-Marxist ideologies, but they remain occasional. Even, the portrayal of the body of a Dalit character, has always been a stereotyped contrast to the body of a Savarna. A Dalit male is always depicted as a shabby thin body, physically untidy emotionally weak and intellectually hollow appearance while, a female attained some sexually attractive and desirable physique so as to be objectified and exploited by the Brahmin-patriarchs. Through the film *Kaala*, one can easily notice the difference in representation of the dressing style of upper castes and lower castes as Kaala who belongs to lower caste wears black kurta and lungi whereas Hari Dada who is a well -known politician wears pure white kurta. In movie *Kaala* Pa. Ranjith use symbols like statues, pictures, names to convey the message of Ambedkarism and communal harmony. *Kaala* highlight binary oppositions like ‘purity and pollution’, natives and outsiders, God and Monster, black and white, good and bad etc. This controversial representation of binary oppositions creates a debate which is ignored by film industry from the very beginning. Director Ranjith tells

the story of Dalit lives through his movies. He himself belongs to Dalit community and he uses his own struggle and experiences as a member of Dalit community in his films.

In Maharashtra an organisation Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) lay stress on the theory of son of soil to provide better employment opportunities for natives of Maharashtra. Nana Patekar played the role of an upper caste Hindu politician, who want to uproot Tamilians settled in Dharavi. We can see that Hari Bhai's character is somehow inspired by real life politicians. Kaala who is not a politician but people of Dharavi seek his help because he himself lives in Dharavi and he wants to fight against these corrupt politicians to save the interest of his people. During a heated conversation with Hari Bhai's goons he expresses his faith in Indian constitution and said there are some laws for empowerment of lower caste people. Ranjith express his own political ideology through the story of Kaala and Jarina who belongs to different religions. Characters use many mythological symbols like black as the symbol of evil or impurity which denotes evil character of Ravan and white as symbol of purity. When Hari Bhai insult black colour and name Kaala as dirty and polluted then Kaala replies that "black is the colour of hard work and colour of God of death." First time a low caste hero is depicted in an assertive and revolutionary role. Hari Bhai who represents upper caste political leaders of contemporary India conceives himself as God Rama. When he visits Kaala's home then Kaala's wife Selvi offers him water but he denied which show his biased mentality. In an another when Jarina who is a Muslim woman visits Hari Bhai's home for her NGO's work then he expects her to worship the idol of Hindu God that represents her bounded mentality regarding other religions. But this incident hurt Jarina and she leaves his home. First time a Dalit protagonist dare to oppose upper caste discriminatory system without taking help of an upper caste saviour. These movies

depict the real issues of marginalised and oppressed masses which are living at peripheries for centuries. This new wave in cinema is the outcome of struggles of filmmakers and these movies represent Dalit community without any appropriation so that audience can develop a comprehensive vision about caste system prevailing in Indian society.

Crime rate against Dalits is increasing day by day. Over the decade to 2016, crime rate against Dalits rose by 25%; from 16.3% crimes per 100,000 *Dalits* reported in 2006, to 20.3% crimes in 2016, according to an India spread analysis of 2016 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, the latest available. But police and judiciary system cannot resolve the cases with an equal rate as government organisations also follow caste system. Sheikh Saaliq and Adrija Bose in their article “Documenting Violence Against Dalits: One Assault at a Time” said that:

“A woman and her unborn child died after she was beaten up all because she touched the bucket of an upper caste Thakur.” (n.p.)

Though Indian constitution have provisioned severe punishment for practising discrimination on the basis of caste and class but it is still practised in India till now. Abhinav Sinha’s *Article 15* also shows us brutal realities of Indian society. This movie is titled after Article 15 of Indian constitution that prohibits discrimination on the basis of caste, class, colour or any other basis. The central plot of movie *Article 15* is inspired from Uttar Pradesh’s 2014 Badaun rape case where two lower caste minor girls were gangraped and murdered by some upper caste group members. The film brings caste-based violence to the mainstream by showing us that three minor girls are raped allegedly because they ask for increment of three rupees in their daily wages. But their

upper caste contractor takes it as an insult and kidnapped all the three girls and raped them. When parents of these girls go to register a complaint in police station then police do not listen their part. Local police try to close the case saying that the girls murdered by their family members as both of the girls were lesbians. This movie comments on the corrupt police department and Judicial administration that still follows the footsteps of caste system. Ranjan, who is an upper caste Brahmin police officer in the fictional village of Lagaon is portrayed as naïve or ignorant about caste system prevailing in society. He cannot disrupt the image of an upper caste saviour who come and save the oppressed Dalit masses. Ayan Ranjan who is an upper caste police officer proclaims it as a war. The film represents it as a war against brutal Hindu caste system and it show that how caste system is still maintained in contemporary society. This film also comments on the political landscape of Uttar Pradesh. The movie shows us that how Dalits are used only as vote bank by different political parties. In movie a political leader Mahant ji tied up Dalit party so that he can use Dalit votes for his political benefits. Ayan Ranjan is portrayed as totally naïve about caste system, but how it can be possible because his girlfriend Aditi who belongs to same class and caste, knows that the mothers of a generation used separate utensils for the domestic help. Assistant to Ranjan told him a story about the villagers choosing to remain in darkness so that Lord Rama's palace can glow more brightly. It's a terrifying reminder of how religion can result in self-effacement, how the glorification of gods can cause oppression of mortal beings. There is an incident in the movie when Ranjan ask his staff about their caste but he left confused with the complex division of each caste into different sub-castes.

The only assertive Dalit character in the movie is Nishad who show some glimpses of political leader and activist Chandrashekhar Azad Ravan. Nishad and his group members were murdered by another Dalit leader in the echo of encounters. Nishad's characters also show glimpses of Rohit Vemula, a Dalit student who committed suicide after being bullied at university. Nishad at the time of his death quote some lines from Vemula's suicide note that he wants to be a writer but he represents his birth as a fatal accident because society never treats lower caste people as equal human beings.

Though the film highlights caste base violence and atrocities but it has some negative points also. This movie fails to disrupt its 'Brahmin saviour' narrative as the protagonist belongs to upper caste. This movie gave some serious message regarding caste oppression and subjugation. Dalit's image, status and role as a social issue in the society are reflected in India and have been presented even in popular Indian cinema almost right from the beginning. Systematic exclusion of Dalits from society resulted in defector hegemony of upper caste in almost every field like government sector, educational institution, film industry etc. From *Achhut Kanya* to *Kaala* representation of Dalits in cinema is changing.

Dalit films have a responsibility towards the society that the mainstream films do not have. Number of films focussing on Dalit issues is increasing as people from Dalit community enter the domain of filmmaking. Dalit films are different from mainstream commercial as they have to raise consciousness in society regarding caste discrimination. Dalit filmmaker cannot follow the footsteps of upper caste filmmakers as they have responsibility towards their own community. They should keep one thing in their mind that their film should give some positive message regarding caste hegemony. Even a single mistake by them in filmmaking can be used by mainstream

political parties as a tool to defame their community. Dalit filmmakers should be realistic and original in portrayal of struggles and miseries of Dalit community. They should represent each and every aspect of Dalit life instead of focussing on some particular issues. They should be conscious about the cause behind evolution of Dalit cinema and Dalit literature. As it is the cinema of marginalised and subjugated; it served as an alternative to mainstream commercial films. Dalit cinema should set some goals for itself and emerge as an alternative option to mainstream cinema. It should criticise the appropriation of caste issues by upper caste filmmakers and try to represent Dalit characters as equal human beings instead of portraying them as helpless and voiceless. Dalit cinema should set some good examples for society so that Dalits can feel proud on their identity instead of hiding it.

Cinema act as a mirror to the society and it should portray both good and bad face of society. Dalit cinema should portray caste issues without any appropriation. Dalit is a constructed identity that represents the assertive side of Dalit movement. In most of the Dalit narratives Dalit characters use language full of slangs but that language represents the identity of Dalit community. The language makes us realise that their miserable condition is the result of their continuous exclusion from educational institutions and other resources. Though there is some improvement in economic status of Dalit community due to reservation and other constitutional rights but that is limited a very small section of Dalit community. Cinema propagate a language of some ethical values and moral standards.

Each caste and class have some encoded notions of language, clothing and other things that direct the material veiling of the body. Clothing is the symbol of a community's image and Ranjith criticise the pattern of clothing in his movie. The practice of

maintaining codes of clothing was criticised in movie *Kaala* through the character of Hari Bhai who represents upper caste and Kaala who represent lower caste. It represents the caste, class and power shifts maintained by society. Clothing is not just a silly question of what to wear rather it is associated with the status and respect of any person. Lower caste communities have no right to look clean and wear attractive clothes as they were treated as impure and lesser human beings. In movie *Kaala* dress codes are different for different castes like Hari Bhai wears pure white clothes and Kaala who is a Dalit protagonist wears black clothes.

Literature and Cinema are interrelated to each other or we can say that cinema is somehow result of literature. We can say that cinema gave life to written literature through characters, music and other tools. Cinema is more effective medium of expression in comparison to any literary work because reading a literary work needs more time and difficult in terms of availability of resources. Now cinema questions different social orders prevailing in society like caste system and other evils. From the very beginning, Indian cinema misrepresented Dalits in its making by appropriating their stories according to upper caste perspectives. Indian cinema has dealt with caste intermittently but they never focus on the real problems of lower castes. Like the emergence of Dalit literature there is a need of Dalit cinema that focuses on the basic problems of Dalits. Dalit cinema is a movement of visual arts that represent Dalit life struggles and resistance. Mainstream Indian cinema has failed to incorporate diversity and inclusion. Mainstream Cinema is product of dominant cultural practices maintained in society. Cinema, from the very beginning creates cultural blocks for Dalits who tried to enter the domain of media and filmmaking. Upper or dominant castes have thrust their

hegemony on the mediums of cultural expression offering a limited space to lower castes.

Dalit cinema should present the experiences of this particular community. These experiences include making of self-identity, revolt against the unfair social system and overbearing religion and traditions and hypocrisy of freedom and democracy. Dalit cinema should spread the consciousness among Dalit community. Dalit movement and legacies of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are the main sources of Dalit consciousness.

Consciousness raised by some prominent Dalit activists later became a part of Dalit literature. Limbale writes, "Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature, it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness." (*Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*, 32).

The main purpose of Dalit literature or cinema is to make the Dalit community aware of the injustice they have faced during their life. In this way, Dalit writers and artists have made a commitment to their society. Portrayal of a Dalit's life on screen should be different from the common life of higher castes. Dalit cinema is the portrayal of the wishes of discriminated and exploited Dalit population. The activist nature of Dalit literature and cinema is inherited from the legacy of Ambedkar's political movement for the empowerment of Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar was the first Dalit writer who not only created literature but also used his writing for the purpose of social, political, cultural and economic awareness among the Dalits.

Dalit cinema can be used as a medium for expressing resistance and emancipation that can be considered as a powerful amplifier to the prevailing awareness in the form of an

audible buzz through the movies focussing on Dalits who have been the worst victims of mindless caste discrimination. Resistance against the unjust social order is the key feature of Dalit cinema. It focuses on the protest and rejection of unjust social practices prevailing in society. Through literature and cinema Dalit activists and writers started revolting against Brahminical hegemony.

The term Dalit is an identity of self-assertion and revolt, a political identity which has been chosen by the community itself. The tradition of Hindu religion did not have any tradition and rituals for the Dalits that they could own proudly. Their culture and traditions are always represented in a degraded manner by upper castes. The difference of powerful and powerless and the absence of Dalits from public space have resulted in increasing identity assertion by Dalit community. The Dalit movements, literature and cinema have played significant role in construction of assertive and independent Dalit identity. Exclusion of Dalits from educational institutions, political parties, jobs, and other basic facilities can be grouped under the major concerns of Dalit activists who equality in every field of life at any cost. Dalit cinema should be aimed at building awareness about Dalit issues in the society.

Dalit cinema can be used as a weapon to raise awareness in society that caste divisions are the root cause of evil practices prevailing in society. Now educated Dalit youths start fighting for identity and self-respect and their search for identity brought a consciousness among educated masses regarding caste discrimination. The Dalit identity does not refer to identity of an individual rather it refers the identity of whole community. Dalit narratives are not about a single person's struggle but it represents the struggle of whole community.

Suraj Yengde in his research paper *Dalit Cinema* defines Dalit Cinema as:

“Dalit cinema has the potential to offer performatory resistance to the interwoven threads of the caste-capital nexus. By critiquing caste, gender, class and other forms of oppression, Dalit cinema could foreshadow a cohesive battle against hegemonic caste supremacy”. (*Dalit Cinema*, pp: 516)

Dalit politics is also shown in films. Through these films we can see that Dalit politics in India has become opportunistic. It has only become a vote game for acquiring power and wealth. On basic grounds we can say that no one is concerned about the real problems of these downtrodden and backward people. Caste and religion are the main factor in deciding the victory or defeat of any political party. The future of Dalit parties is not much bright because Dalit political parties lack influential leaders and the agenda for empowerment if Dalit community. In past decades Dalit parties face a steady decline because of heterogeneity and lack of unity among Dalit community. Major Dalit parties have divided into different fractions that makes them useless in current political scenario. Dalit parties mainly acquire significance into states Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh but their power to influence local people has eroded because of lack of agenda. Though some new organisations like Bhim Army are emerging but the overall trajectory is directionless. On the name of “Dalit politics” we have only local movements, protests and identity assertion cases in response to upper caste hegemony. When we analyse the whole political agenda of Dalit parties then there is nothing that can be categorised the term “The Dalit politics”. The factors responsible for the failure of “The Dalit politics” is the lack of unity among Dalits, where every sub-group want separate representation and share in power structure. Due to this hollow agenda Dalit parties failed to influence their own community.

Dalit political parties and organisations are not sure about their position whether they are part of reform movement, a religious group or political party. Until 1975, RPI (Republican Party of India) was the only influential Dalit political party founded on ideology of Ambedkar about Schedule Castes. But RPI was divided into two groups because of internal conflicts. After the division in RPI, political leaders choose other mainstream political parties as a better alternative where they can gain influential position. Mainstream political parties use Dalit leaders as tool to gain votes because they think that someone from Dalit community can convince Dalit masses to vote in their favour.

Later young and educated Dalits saw a ray of hope in Revolutionary Dalit Panthers Movement. Namdeo Dhasal founded Dalit Panthers movement in June 1972 in Bombay(then). Dalit Panthers movement use peaceful protests, marches, pamphleteering and other activities to oppose biased mainstream political parties. But this movement also lost its way as the Panther leaders joined mainstream political parties for their own individual benefits. Dalit Panthers organisation has divided into three different groups by 1977 due to lack of a coherent structure and difference of ideologies. Later political parties choose the term *Bahujan* instead of Dalit. In 1997 BJP used the BSP to checkmate its rivals in UP. But we can notice that it is an alliance of two opposite poles for the pursuit of power and unabashed opportunism.

Ambedkar focus on the idea of separate communal representation because he thinks that political empowerment can play an important role in the empowerment of Dalit community. Ambedkar work for the upliftment of Dalit masses and advocates reservation in government and private sectors so that Dalit community can improve their condition. But now caste has used as a tool to gain votes and no one cares about

the upliftment and development of the whole community. It has resulted in uneven alliance between totally different political parties for the gain of power and money.

Violence and increasing crime rates against lower caste people is the result of discrimination on the basis of caste prevailing in society. Sen, Sumanti in her article “Four Dalit Women Raped Every Day’: Why Caste Matters in Sexual Assault” mentioned that:

“The gang-rape and murder of two teenage girls were reported in the Katra village of Budaun district, Uttar Pradesh on May 27, 2014. The two girls, cousins from Dalit Maurya community were kidnapped, gang-raped and hanged from a tree in Sadatganj.”(n.p.)

The main reasons of increasing violence against Dalit community are their assertion of identity, improving economic status, education etc. Dalit women are treated as an object and they are targeted for rape, molestation etc. by upper caste person. In most of the cases are threatened and forced to withdraw their cases. According to latest National Crime Record Bureau:

“In the last decade crimes have risen by 37% while the conviction rate in such crimes increased by merely 2.5%.” (n.p.)

Dalit cinema can be transformed into a power to register label against unfavourable and unjust social conditions. It is based on the assertion of their identity and resistance against socially, economically and politically deprived section of society. *Dalit* cinema rejected social injustice, biased Hindu social system and the concept of supremacy of any community within a social system. They have also started their quest for self-respect, identity and an ultimate canon where they can be considered as equal human

beings and can be included in mainstream of human civilization. Dalit cinema depict the humiliation faced by entire Dalit community, the pain of their sufferings and how they protested the traditional Hindu culture, caste system and social injustice.

We can say that Dalit cinema includes movies emphasising the problems of Dalit community. Artists who believe that cinema is an art form do not accept the categories such as commercial film, political film, art film etc. Dalit literature is different than mainstream literature as focus on experience of Dalit life. Dalit literature is fully developed and establish itself as a different segment from mainstream literature but Dalit cinema is new and developing and it will take some time to establish itself with a unique and different identity. Movies like *Kaala*, *Kabali*, *Article 15* focus on the life of Dalit community. When it comes to financial aspect then we can say that it is impossible to establish Dalit cinema as a different segment. We can say that there is a need to include Dalit experiences in mainstream cinema. Earlier movies started praising morals and culture of village life. It then naturally degraded Dalits and women. But now Dalit heroes are projected with the positive note.

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Chapter 1

Assertion of Dalit Identity in Cinema

Cinema often frame the caste issues in economic and romantic aspects and ignore the cultural and social aspects. The language, culture and customs of Dalits were usually projected in degraded manner. Most commonly the problems of Dalit community are solved by a hero who belongs to upper caste. As a result, Dalit masses end up praising these upper caste heroes. Upper caste heroes are always presented as saviour to Dalit community. Cinema has never presented a strong and powerful Dalit hero fighting for their rights. Dalits are either represented as criminals or helpless who need an outsider's help. They are always shown as weak and ignorant who are saved by an upper caste hero. But now cinema has started addressing basic problems of Dalit community. Movies like *Aarakshan*, *Kaala*, *Kabali*, *Article 15* focus on the core issues related to Dalit community. Dalit has been exploited for a long time, living at the lowest strata of Hindu caste system. Dalit's exclusion from social and cultural traditions emerges from their crucial exclusion from Hindu caste system. Dalit is described as "polluted and unclean" since birth. The four main categories of Hindu caste system born from the body of Brahma or the supreme being but the Dalit is "unborn", with no physical link with supreme being or God. It is mentioned in religious texts that even the shadow of Dalits or lower caste people can pollute upper caste people. Due to this notion of "purity and pollution" Dalits are forced to live in segregated colonies outside the village. Their condition has been worse than animals from a long time but now educated Dalit youth have started fighting for their rights. Earlier *Dalits* or lower caste people used to hide their identity but now they have start

asserting their identity. Assertion of identity is the key feature of Dalit literature and cinema.

Dalit activists reject the fictitious world of Hindu religion and condemn discriminatory caste-based practices. Dalit is not limited within the boundaries of a particular caste group. It is an identity chosen by all those who share the experience of discrimination and subjugation. It represents the bitter reality of caste system and it is the reality that cannot be ignored. The subjugated communities that have been exploited for a long time categorised themselves under a common and shared identity as Dalits. They reject the inhuman status imposed on them and start asserting their identity as Dalit. Dalit is a broad term including all those who are toiled or exploited politically, economically and culturally by the Hindu caste system.

Indian cinema from the very beginning concentrated on the various subjects like corruption, scarcity of resources, reservation etc. but it has never represented the harsh reality of the caste system. It has experimented with movies based on caste issues but these movies show the partial reality of the society. Dalit stories are misappropriated by upper caste writers and presented with a negative image. Mostly Dalit people are seen as colourless and poverty-stricken. Mainstream cinema only focuses on the economic aspect and ignores their cultural aspects. But now Dalit people have started asserting their identity instead of hiding it. Assertion of identity through literature and cinema can be noticed easily through their works. In the past there were films that depicted Dalit characters and lives but these films displayed them with sympathy and pity. These movies represent Dalits as helpless and poor people who need a saviour to solve their problems. They never show a Dalit hero fighting for their rights. In these films Dalits always need a saviour who belongs to an upper caste. Earlier Dalits or lower caste

people choose to keep their identity a secret due to the fear of discrimination and exclusion. But now Dalit artists start taking a stand and talking about their identity with pride. The feeling of inferiority is the part of person's life who belongs to Dalit community because their lifestyle is different from upper caste people. They are always devoid of basic facilities like education, shelter, medical etc. When someone has to struggle whole day to arrange food for himself then how can he think about education and other things. Casteism is the bitter reality of Indian society and it prevails in cinema industry also. When filmmakers search for lead role they prefer someone from upper caste and rich family or they will make sure that they do not belong to lower castes. Everyone agrees that caste is not blatant in Bollywood but when we look around in our cinema industry then we find that all the production houses, mainstream actors, directors, singers etc. belong to handful of upper caste peoples. All the power in Bollywood is concentrated in a handful of upper caste peoples. The ratio of Dalit artists, directors, producers is negligible in comparison to upper castes.

For the members of dominant or upper castes it is a matter of discomfort at seeing Dalit people in positions of influence, the disgust at an assertion of equality is not an individual response but a result of the collective conditioning of upper caste populations. It is a superiority reinforced through cultural, social and economic aspect of upper caste Hindu society. The Dalit identity stands for assertion, pride, protest and mobilisation of like groups. Dalit word provides a sense of assertion and self-pride for their own identity. This idea of assertion of Dalit identity emerges from Babasaheb Ambedkar's thought. Dr. Ambedkar has provided Dalit community a platform to express their agitation and anger for caste system. Dalit cinema seeks to transform Hindu society, to bring about change in the heart and mind of upper caste audience. It

helps them achieve a common cultural identity and now they start believing that to be a Dalit is not a shameful thing. Dalits are coming out of their inferiority complex and start praising their culture and values through cinema and literature. Subaltern groups start uniting themselves under the common identity as Dalit. Dalit identity represent struggle and miseries of all the lower caste groups and highlights their common culture and heritage.

Discourse on representation of Dalits in cinema attracted everyone's attention and it resulted in a range of studies. Representation of Dalits in cinema is much debated question among critiques. Dalits were the part of cinema from very beginning but they were used as labourers only. Dalit were never represented in lead roles and they were not involved in filmmaking process. But the success of filmmakers like Nagraj Manjule who belongs to Mrarthi cinema and Pa. Ranjith who belongs to Tamil cinema defines Dalit cinema as revolutionary and asserting. These filmmakers represent Dalit identity with a positive note. The yardsticks and standards related to aesthetics are totally different for Dalit Cinema. Ranjith celebrates language and culture of Dalit community and uses an anti-caste aesthetics. Ranjith in his movie *Kaala* represents assertion among Tamil migrants who settled in Dharavi. Ranjith's movies focus on experience of oppression and angst among Dalits towards caste discrimination and suppression of lower caste people. In his movies Dalit protagonist asserts his identity with self-pride and oppose the caste discriminatory practices. Assertion of Dalit identity with pride is the key feature of Dalit cinema. Rich or upper caste people do not look at the poor as a fellow human being. They ignore the presence of the oppressed and discriminated people.

Bollywood industry refuse to acknowledge Dalits as an important part of filmmaking process, as they are either ignored or stereotyped in the narratives while being largely absent in film production. Caste as a sensorial regime is intrinsically linked with aesthetics, and it affects the sensory experience. Dalit filmmakers are trying to redefine the contours of cinema industry by questioning existing traditions in Indian society. These filmmakers question the discrimination and total exclusion of Dalits, their movements, icons experiences, worldview, etc., through their movies. Dalit filmmakers have been attempting to reject the existing trends of filmmaking regarding presentation of caste structure present in Indian society. While other filmmakers are trying to highlight these institutions as functional for every section of Indian society, the Dalit filmmakers substantiate as to how these institutions are dysfunctional for the Dalits and other marginalised sections. They have also been urging for the quantification and measurement of their labour, which contributes significantly to run society smoothly.

Dalits oppose the subjugation and discrimination through protests and strikes. In some of the cases Dalits use their work as their weapon to fight against discrimination and it is shown in movie *Kaala* and *Article 15* when Dalit community stop working for other communities. Asserting the Dalit identity has not been an easy task, it has been a continuous struggle throughout the ages. Dalit literature and cinema marks a great shift in asserting and establishing Dalit identity in socio-political context. The saga of the outcastes from pariah, whose very shadow was considered polluting, to present day's defiant Dalit, has been troubled and painful. Dalit literature has perceived the notion of Dalit identity and provided critical insights to it. Dalit cinema is also a vehicle to propagate views on Dalit identity and prevailing consciousness. Dalit cinema evaluates Dalit's identity in the backdrop of caste system of Indian society out of which, culture

and traditions, the embodiments of homogenic influence emerge. Presence of filmmakers from Dalit community and use of anti-caste aesthetics in films differentiate them from mainstream films. Anti-caste aesthetics used in films focussing on Dalit subjects takes inspiration from aesthetics and yardsticks used by Dalit authors. Ranjith's films pioneered a certain kind of anti-caste aesthetics in Indian cinema that was previously impossible. Ranjith's films employ aesthetics as a way of being and becoming, an aesthetic of experience rather than mere perception of beauty. The politics of "naming" and "clothing codes" in Ranjith's recent two films exemplifies this. First, the name Kabali, is a lower-caste name in Tamil Nadu. By naming his protagonist and film itself thus, Ranjith gives a new dimension to the name. Possibility of transformation could be seen even in the trailer of the film. Ranjith employs these names to counter an existing discourse on names. He breaks the existing aesthetics and interpretations behind Kabali and brings the name into the language of anti-caste aesthetics.

Similarly, *Kaala*, the title of the film, does the same reversal of meanings. Meaning of the word Kaala in Hindi or Sanskrit refers to black colour which is related with evil or darkness. When Hari dada (the villain) asks sarcastically, "Kaala, what sort of name is that?" Kaala replies that "black is the colour". This movie is a story of urban slum community in Mumbai. Ranjith's movie is different from other mainstream movies as it raises important questions related to exclusion of Dalit community. This movie celebrates the culture, art forms and struggles of Dalit community which is often ignored in mainstream movies. From the act of naming, these films offer an anti-caste aesthetic that is also an oppositional gaze to mainstream Indian cinema. This possibility not only foregrounds the aspirational nature of these films, but also suggests the

implications of art from being to becoming. The “untouchables” have been the “touchy” subject for Indian cinema. But the films like *Kaala*, *Kabali*, *Sairat*, *Fandry* touch the viewers and “pollute” the conceptions of popular Indian cinema. These films otherwise follow popular yardsticks differs in its manifestation of caste- not normalised but effectively presented as an atrocity. These movies disrupt the manifestation of caste in Indian cinema by offering an anti-caste aesthetics- visuals and sound- that is capable of affecting the spectators. These filmmakers act as a catalyst in bringing marginal narratives to mainstream film industry. These film narratives and writings foreground anti-caste aesthetics rooted in artistic experience.

Yengde focuses on Dalit cinema like Dalit literature, as a category that is already available and need to be occupied. On the one hand, Manjule highlights caste atrocities on Dalits through his films, while Ranjith in his movies focuses on resistance and celebrates Dalit assertion as a resistant filmic practice. He does this not as a separate domain or not as an alternative parallel film practice but within the popular domain. Ranjith portrays Dalit characters in his movies as forthcoming, assertive, and capable of fighting injustices with self-respect. Though there are many brilliant documentary films on Dalit lives but the popularity of cinema could affect spectators at a large scale. These films go beyond the autobiographical narratives of Dalit lives and touch the other through affective expressive aesthetics.

Most films on Dalits in India largely focus on the violence committed against Dalits than an affective expression of their lives. Movies like *Article 15* focus on brutal realities of caste discrimination and violence but it is also criticised for its depiction of Dalits as victims. The reason for violence with Dalits is assertion of identity and fight for equality. In the movie *Article 15* three Dalit girls are gangraped and two of them are

murdered, just because they asked for increment of three rupees in their daily wages. But their demand for increment hurt the ego of the upper caste Brahmin contractor and he could not digest their resistant behaviour. Upper caste people cannot digest the upliftment of lower caste people and this is the main reason for the increasing crime rates with Dalit community.

In the film *Article 15* a Dalit activist Nishad shows us the resistant and assertive image of educated Dalit youth who want to change the discriminatory caste system. This movie also shows us the discriminatory practices within Dalit community. In the movie when police do not register the missing complaint for three Dalit girls then Nishad starts a strike of all the sweepers and manual scavengers. He opposes the discriminatory practices of society in every possible way and tries to unite whole Dalit community. But his efforts were crushed by some politicians of his own community for their benefit. He was murdered by same leader because he starts opposing his alliance with an upper caste Brahmin leader Mahant Ji. Assertion of Dalit identity is essential because if one cannot fight for himself or herself than no one can help him. We have to fight for our rights and for this we have to feel proud on our identity. If we feel shame or try to hide our identity than how can we fight for justice and equality.

Though our constitution opposes all the discrimination but it is still followed by Hindu society. Dalits clean or purify the whole society and become polluted in the whole process. Our society needs the Dalits' labour but does not wish to accept them as an integral part of society. Dalits have no right to speak because they could not speak in the tongue of upper caste. Limbale in his work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* writes:

“Having determined that Dalits were impure and polluted, it legislated that they were not to learn or read Sanskrit, the language of gods and, so, the ultimate trope of Brahmanism” (*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, pp: 4).

When we read literature written by upper caste writers then we can notice that they have silenced the untouchable Other or Dalit in their works. A review of Indian literary history would show that the untouchable other or Dalit was absent in Sanskrit and other regional literatures as well. Upper caste writers present Dalits as objects of pity, rather than objects of their own stories. Prominent writers like Premchand and Mulk Raj Anand do not represent Dalits as strong and independent rather they represent them as weak and voiceless who cannot take any strict action against their oppression. The rebellion and anger of new writers created conditions favourable for the rise of Dalit literature. The relationship of Dalit literature to the mainstream literature is conflicted one. In Dalit literature, the Dalit subaltern has now appeared as a speaking subject. Strong and speaking Dalit characters are the centre of attraction of Dalit literature who are treated as outsider in Hindu society. Limbale further adds:

“The central concern of Dalit literature is how best to represent the ‘authentic experience’ of *Dalits*.” (*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature*, pp:10).

Dalit cinema and literature rejects the language, culture, aesthetics of mainstream society as it is caste biased. The Dalit writer will convey the essence of Dalitness by explaining the details of in a language that is used by Dalit community and that language is rejected by mainstream writers. In beginning writings of Dalit authors are not accepted as literary works as they use the language that is not standard one. Authentic representation involves unromanticised and unmodified reflection in

literature of the materiality of Dalit life in all its dimensions. This literature is filled with miserable and humiliating daily reminders of their impurity and pollutedness. They also represent their struggle for survival and self-respect through their works. The main agenda of Dalit literature is to transform or change the caste base divisions of society and liberate themselves from the shackles of purity and pollution. Literature by Dalit writers their strong and assertive identity and heritage. They are no more the ineffectual and helpless figures represented by upper caste authors and filmmakers who needs a saviour from upper castes, rather they are the actors who fight for their own rights and assert their identity instead of hiding it.

The main agenda of Dalit literature is to enable the consciousness and identity among Dalits. Dalit cinema also serve the same purpose as that of Dalit literature. Earlier movies present Dalit as an object of pity who depend on society's goodwill for their survival and silently accept the caste base discrimination but in contemporary movies like *Kaala* the present generation protagonist has attained a level of confidence in its identity that it is ready and prepared to assert itself. The experience of Dalitness represented in these movies is not always pleasant, nor constituted in terms of relations with the upper caste only. These movies are steadfast in representing the insider and core reality of Dalit life.

The relationship of Dalits to the upper caste Hindu society is always conflicting. It is just like the relationship of master-slave, domination-subordination, constituted by religious texts. Upper caste filmmakers have always silenced Dalit voices. In movies like *Achhut Kanya* Kasturi's father Dukhiya depends on Pratap's father for their survival. Instead of presenting strong Dalit characters fighting for their rights they present them as weak and helpless. Though this movie deals with sensitive caste issue

but in this instead of asserting their identity and revolting against caste system the Dalit characters accept caste discrimination as their fate. In the movie there is a scene where Pratap's father sat on the bed whereas Kasturi's father, the untouchable, sat on the floor while having a conversation. It was a custom of that time that an untouchable cannot sit on bed with upper caste people because it is believed that they are polluted and impure. Even the dress codes in the movies are also according to their caste. One can easily notice that upper caste people clothes of white colour as white colour is symbol of purity, on the other hand one can easily notice that lower caste people generally shown as wearing clothes of black colour as black colour symbolises impurity according to Hindu religion. We can see that even the dress codes are decided according to caste in Hindu religion and these minute facts are used as tools to impose caste base division and discrimination.

But now some of Dalit film makers have been trying to define these facts in a different way. In movie *Kaala* when Hari Dada (a politician) asked Kaala why he wore black clothes and also said that black colour was not good and it also signified impurity. Here Kaala defines Black colour in a respectable way and says that black is the colour of labour and hard work. In this way Kaala who is the protagonist of the movie belonging to lower caste tried to reverse caste binaries by defining the black-white binary with a different opinion. These filmmakers used language, dressing, culture, and their traditions as a tool to assert their identity. They also use their so-called menial jobs as a tool to oppose the caste discrimination prevailing in society. In the movie *Article 15* when the police refuses to register missing complaint of three Dalit girls then Nishad who is a Dalit activist calls off all the Dalit community for a strike so that upper caste people understand the importance of lower caste people in running the whole society

smoothly. In the movie we can notice that because of the strike of Dalit workers the routine cleaning works become imbalanced and it disturb the whole society. It shows us that these so called polluted or impure people clean the whole society and make whole society pure and clean. We can see that our so-called purity norms exist just because these lower caste people clean our waste materials. It is a notable fact that the people who are reason for our purity or those who make our society pure how they are presented as impure or polluted by upper caste people. In caste system someone's profession or work is decided by the caste they belong to. Though education brought some changes in deciding one's profession but it cannot change the mentality of whole society. To bring change in society Dalit community has to fight against prevailing caste discrimination and reject the rejection.

Identity assertion by Dalits increase the rate of crimes against Dalit community. But no one pays attention towards these violent activities because in most of the cases crime against Dalit community are committed by upper caste people.

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd in his article *Why Dalit Lives Do Not Matter?* writes:

“A teenaged Dalit boy was shot dead at his home in Uttar Pradesh's Domkhera village in Amroha district ... He was shot allegedly by youths from an upper caste community for visiting a temple in the village, according to media reports.” (Shepherd, n.p.)

These headlines are the harsh reality of India and no one wants to raise question against such atrocities because somewhere in corner of our heart we accept these customs as a part of our culture and our silence on these burning issues prove fatal for coming generation. In most of the states even police whose main duty is to maintain the law and order in society often refuses to file FIR against dominant castes. In many cases

person from Dalit community were killed because they dare to ride a horse, eat with upper caste community or for eating non-veg food. These incidents are pass unnoticed by media and these are not given importance by upper caste persons.

Dalits are the victims of “caste-related crimes”. In the rural countryside, beating, mob lynching, hacking to death, massacres and lopping of heads are the marks of a horrific bestiality inspired by unshakable taint of dirtiness. Though Indian constitution provides equal rights and reservation quotas in jobs and educational institutions to SC, ST and OBC’s but this cannot change the condition of Dalit community in India. Dalitness continues to exist as much as an idea or a permanent image in our minds. Every child born in an upper-caste Hindu family grows up with an image of untouchable Other or Dalit in their minds.

The identity assertion by Dalit community, which is expressed through celebrating birthday of Ambedkar, installing his statues, celebrating culture of Dalit community often results in caste clashes and in most of the cases it results in violence against Dalit community. In contemporary India education and ideas of Baba Ambedkar raise awareness and consciousness among Dalit community about their rights and exploitation which can be termed as Ambedkarisation. The philosophy of Ambedkarism about caste practices followed by Hindu society lead to conversion of Dalits in other religions like Christianity, Buddhism etc. Master Asha Ram of Maithana Inder Singh village shares his experience of humiliation that results in his conversion.

“In 1965, I was a teacher in a school of my village. The school teachers got the invitation to attend a marriage party in the family of a high caste. After we finished eating, among all the staff members, only I was asked to lift my *pattal* (plate made of

leaves). Being an educated person, I felt insulted.” (*Ambedkarisation and Assertion of Dalit Identity*, pp: 2611).

Recently a new web series named *Aashram* also shows the dark reality of our society related to caste discrimination. In the series opening scene there is wrestling (*Kushti*) match going on between the two girls one from upper caste and the other one belongs to Dalit community. Though the athlete from Dalit community is stronger one and wins all the rounds but due to caste conspiracy the girl from upper caste announced as the winner. In the same series a *Dalit* groom beaten up by upper caste man because he dared to sit on a horse in his wedding procession. When Pammi and other youngsters from Dalit community refuses to allow this blatant injustice to happen they are beaten up by them. Even the police also refuse to lodge their complaint and asks them to solve the matter outside police station. In this way Dalit’s assertion of identity is crushed by upper caste society.

But these movies instead of focusing on caste issue as a major problem deals it as a minor one. Earlier Dalits are not only shown as economically poor but culturally also. The majority of films show the culture and traditions of upper caste. In Govind Nihalani’s *Aakrosh* (1980), Lahanya Bhiku who is a character from Dalit community was arrested in charges of murder of his own wife. His wife was raped and killed by the rich and upper caste peoples of village. Though he knows everything about the murder and rape of his wife but he did not share even a single detail of the crime with his lawyer. In the end of the movie when he comes out of the jail for last rites of his father he killed his own sister so that she cannot meet the fate of his wife. Though this movie focuses on the evil of caste discrimination but in this movie the hero accepted his fate decided by upper caste people instead of fighting for justice. He remains silent

throughout the whole movie so that audience can feel sympathy with him. The director did not show his asserting and revolting behaviour. Earlier movies did not focus on the caste, in the middle period movies started focussing on the Dalit issues but these movies depicted them as helpless and toiled who depend on upper caste peoples for their survival and now cinema has started focusing on the struggle and assertion of identity by Dalit community.

Humanity is main focus of Dalit literature. Therefore, in Dalit literature no worldly or imaginary object is greater than human being. Same is the case with Dalit cinema. Dalit cinema also focuses on the equality of every human being. It rebels against any literature, culture and society that degrades the human being.

Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* says that:

“Dalit literature will have to be analysed in the context of the Ambedkarite thought system, of which rebellion is an indivisible part”. (*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, pp: 51)

Dalit literature is influenced by Babasaheb Ambedkar’s thoughts and his works. Ambedkar’s thought is not the thought of an individual rather it is the thought of every downtrodden person. As long as there is a caste system and inequality remain, this thought will continue to hold sway. Ambedkarite ideology is the true inspiration for Dalit writers, artists and filmmakers. Dalit society found self-respect through Babasaheb’s ideology. Ambedkarism is a modern idea for ending the discriminatory caste practices prevailing in Hindu society. Dalit society was robbed due to its weakness, poverty and ignorance – causing Babasaheb to talk about building self-respect. Babasaheb said that Dalits must gain the strength to take the reins of power and

enact laws. He wants an equal human status for Dalit community. These were the revolutionary ideas for Dalits, who had been living a life full of humiliation and exploitation, subject to the slavery that was imposed on them. His social philosophy can be briefly explained in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkarite thought is creative thought about fighting against the devaluation of human beings. According to him a writer should remove the darkness of society with the light of his pen. Literature and cinema are not for entertainment purpose only rather it can be used as a weapon to fight against the evils of society.

Considering commercial aspects in mind we can say that full fledged Dalit cinema is not possible but it is possible to accommodate inner perspective of Dalit community in Indian society. *Damul* is one of the movies showing some glimpses of bitter caste politics prevailing in society. In the film an entire Dalit community was deprived from casting their votes, they forced to pay the debts and if someone could not pay the debt then they had to steal the animals for the landlord. Sanjeevana, who belongs to Dalit community is punished to death because he tried to oppose the landlord's cruelty. Parkash Jha's film *Aarakshan* (2011) also revolves around the caste politics prevailing in Indian society. This film comments on the controversies related to caste based reservations in government jobs and educational institutions. The first half of the movie focuses on its core theme of reservation but in second half it seems to narrate an altogether different story. But the weakness of the story is that the issue and its implications are seen through the perspective of its principal protagonist and the narrative lack any broader viewpoint on the national issue.

Dalit identity is very much related to resistance and assertion. The emerging Dalit identity is multi-layered. The term Dalit itself is indicative of the assertion of identity.

One can identify the potency of Dalit identity which represents the strong and independent side of Dalit community who are excluded from society and living a life full of miseries.

The World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa in August-September 2001, clearly and categorically brought the issue of caste discrimination to the centre stage. In Durban conference Dalit discourse has engaged everyone at the local to international level. The issue of subjugation and atrocities has drawn the attention of Dalit activists and intellectuals, human right activists and even the politicians. From beginning to till now Dalit worked as labourers and sanitation workers. In this biased and discriminatory society where the rich and upper caste segment of society steadily imposed discrimination and dehumanization on Dalit community. Due to this constant and continuous humiliation Dalits developed a sense of inferiority in the core of their hearts.

Dalits were bounded in shackles of bonded slavery from the very beginning and they have accepted it as their fate but now educated Dalit population start opposing this discriminatory process. The enactment of constitutional rights and laws, the Dalits began to demand equality. They demand equality in every field of life on basis of laws and reservation provided to them. Dalits have face exclusion, lack of resources and political and cultural marginalisation. They are always treated as lesser human beings. But now Dalits began demand equality on basis of constitutional laws. This demand for equality and assertion of Dalit identity had to pass several measures and standards which are often decided by agents of upper castes.

Violence against Dalit community is somehow related to their identity assertion. Sometimes Dalits oppose their subjugation with the help of protests, marches and asserting their identity. On 11th July 1997 pour out anger on upper castes for vandalization of statue of Bhimrao Ambedkar but later these protests take violent turn in which many innocent peoples were killed. It is not the first case of vandalization of statue of Ambedkar in India. One can identify that the statue Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar as the very symbol of Dalit identity and struggle. Dalit community relates their pride with Dr. Ambedkar and the vandalization means crushing Dalit pride. And when the Dalits protested against vandalism, the administration took to repression culminating the massacre. By this type of repression police administration has not only absolved the crimes of the culprits but it has given them a free hand to commit similar crimes in future. By this type of strict action by police elite political parties gave a message to the Dalit community that they will be dealt with severely if they plan to protest against any suppression or atrocities committed on them. Over the times many unorganised and organised protests helps in construction of strong and independent Dalit identity. All these individual and collective efforts have contributed in the formation of a liberative and assertive Dalit identity which in turn has given a definite direction to the Dalit assertion.

Identity assertion by Dalits and violence are interconnected with each other. Upliftment and identity assertion by Dalit community have resulted in increase in crimes and violence against Dalits by upper castes. The crime rates against Dalits shows a specific pattern, in which Dalits who are well educated and economically stable are the primary targets. Upper caste Hindus cannot digest the empowerment and political assertion by Dalit community. Upper castes use violence as a tool for controlling and conditioning

of Dalit community. When they realise that their philosophy and morals cannot control them then they use violence as a tool for disciplining lower caste people. Indian cinema also focuses on Dalit violence in movies like *Kaala*, *Article 15*, *Kabali*, etc. In movie *Kaala* Pa Ranjith gave a message that Dalits are the mainstream of the society, without them it is not possible to run the society smoothly. In this movie Ranjith represent the subjugated masses who are deprived of basic facilities but they fight against this discrimination instead of accepting it as their fate. The locality and other symbols used in movie like portraits of Marx, Lenin, statue of Bali Raja, small flags of the Oppressed Republican Party etc. focus on the social and political agenda and ideology to oppose caste base divisions through the migrants settled in Daharavi. This movie portrayed Dalits characters as equal human beings. It also focuses on the problems of sanitation, violence and crimes in urban slums. Most of the documentaries focus on increasing crime rates and victimised portrayal of slums but this movie shows the life in slums with an originality. It focuses on the organic realities of Dalit-Bahujans as it shows us their celebrations, traditions, love stories, problems, exclusion, opportunistic politics etc. In *Kaala's* opening scene there is a protest by washermen against authorities who want to crush their workplace on the name of reconstruction and development of the slum. But police tried to crush the protest because they are ordered to do so by some politicians who want that land. In the movie a Dalit woman was slapped by a politician who belongs to upper caste. These incidents focus on the violent atrocities of upper castes against lower castes.

The bitter reality of caste is shown in a scene when Hari Dada who represent Hindu cultural values, comes to meet Kaala at his home did not accept water offered to him by Kaala's wife. In another scene, Hari Dada shows his disgust when Kaala who

represents Dalit community denied when he was asked to touch Hari Dada's feet- a reminder of caste domination mentioned in religious Hindu texts. In *Kaala*, people from Dalit community who are non-existent and voiceless for mainstream society, it is they who celebrate their culture and assert their identity. They are the speaking subjects in the movie who organise protests against upper caste groups. The two important phrases that point out caste hierarchy are Manu reality and Dakdakaranya Nagar that represents cultural hegemony of upper castes. The builders name represents the reality of *Manusmriti* that mention provisions for caste base divisions when all basic facilities and resources are forbidden for lower caste groups. From the very beginning Brahmins decide the punishment for those who violate the rules of caste system. Dandakarnaya refers to Danda kingdom of demons mentioned in Hindu mythology. Hari Dada tried to snatch the land of slum people and he relate land with power. He exploited them on the name of development. In the movie there is scene in the movie when Kaala says to Hari Dada that land is the symbol of life for Dalit community and if any one tries to snatch it from them won't be spared. He says that even if Hindu gods come between them then they won't be spared. These lines criticise the caste system and focus on the need for rejection of caste system that obstructs the upliftment of Dalits.

There is a scene in the movie where Dalit and oppressed masses stop working and organise a protest against authorities reminds us of the protest organised by Ambedkarites for violation of SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act and violence committed against Dalit community in Maharashtra. In the movie it is shown that how media and news channels misrepresent the peaceful protests started by people of Dharavi and criminalise them. There is a scene in the movie when a rich upper caste woman expresses her anger on protesters because she has to travel in train due to these

protests. This scene throws light on difference of opinion and ideology of upper castes towards oppressed masses. For upper castes their luxuries and convenience is more important than the life of Dalit-Bahujans who struggles to earn basic resources like shelter, food, sanitation facilities etc. This movie show that Dalit population plays an important role in sustenance of upper caste elite society if they stop working for a single day then it will disturb the system of whole society. It is the Dalit working class population that makes the existence of society possible. The main focus of the movie *Kaala* is the struggles of daily life of Dalit-Bahujans and the anti-caste politics to oppose the Brahmanical notions of purity, pollution, power and other things. It can be realised after watching the movie that upper caste mainstream is depicted at fringes in the plot of movie. Upper castes are either ignored from the plot or creating problems for the Dalit-Bahujan population.

In the movie *Article 15* one can notice the glimpses of Dalit violence but one cannot digest ignorance of Ayan about India's caste system. It seems strange that how he passed his UPSC exam without hearing about the caste phenomena that befuddles him for most of the film? The other weak point of the movie is that Dalit characters in the movie are shown as weak and toiled. Dalit characters clasp their hands in servile supplication, either begging for mercy or in gratitude. The only asserting Dalit character in movie is Nishad who appears to be modelled on Bhim Army Chief Chandrashekhar Azad. There are some other contradictions on the part of the director that the role of Dalit constable in the was apparently played by a Brahmin actor, the role of Nishad played by a baniya actor but the role of a sanitation worker rising out of a septic tank, covered in black sewerage was reserved for a real worker.

The movie focus on the caste complexities prevailing in Indian society. The title of the movie is inspired from article 15 of constitution that criminalise the discrimination on the basis of caste, class, race, religion, gender and the place of birth. The central plot of the movie is inspired from Uttar Pradesh's Baduan rape and murder case of two lower caste girls. The movie focus on the increasing violence with Dalit community because of their assertion of identity. The girls are raped and killed because they for an increment of three rupees in their wages. But the upper caste contractor cannot digest their demand and murdered them for the same. We can easily notice that how Dalit community have to pay the price for their identity assertion. Though the film focuses on Dalit violence but the weak point is that they are represented background noise. They are represented in minor roles of Ranjan's junior constables or his household staff. In the end of the movie Ranjan who belongs to upper caste group is shown carrying the Dalit girl in his hands and walking through the mud. This scene defends upper castes by representing them as saviour to lower caste groups. In the movie director tries to show that upper caste people should come forward and save poor and helpless Dalit people from the oppression and discriminatory practices of their own castes.

The only strong and revolutionary Dalit character in the movie is Nishad, an activist who believe in Indian constitution and philosophy of Ambedkar. He thinks that the only way for development of Dalit community is education. He raises consciousness among fellow community members through the teachings of Ambedkar. But he was murdered by a leader of his own community in echo of encounter killings. His murder by a leader from his own community highlights the opportunistic Dalit politics and heterogeneity among Dalit community.

Dalit filmmakers have been outspoken like Pa Ranjith whose film *Kaala* focus on the struggles of Tamil migrants settled in Mumbai. In the movie Dalit-Bahujans fight for their land rights as Hari Dada who is an upper caste want to snatch their land on the name development and construction of flats for Dalit community. His retelling of history from Dalit perspective reminds us that how Dalit narratives have to contest the mainstream Hindu narratives and shows us that there is a little scope for such narratives to reach the mainstream.

In *Kaala*, Ranjith focus on the ideology of Ambedkar who works for development of Dalit community and who was instrumental in writing the constitution of India. Although neither the constitution, nor the laws of India support the discriminatory caste system, society still does. Caste-based violence, gangrapes and then murdered, acid attacks- all these things continue to happen in India. It is not that Dalit are asking for total restructuring of society and hence the upper castes are feeling insecure on their demand. But their legitimate demand for equality had led to severe oppression and exploitation. By committing violence and atrocities the upper castes are sending warning signals that any attempt to raise their voice against them would be severely dealt with. Hence, we can say that assertion of identity and demand for legitimate share is the part of their struggle, which would to liberation of the *Dalits* and the downtrodden as well as the restructuring of the social order.

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Chapter II

Dalit Politics and Indian Cinema

Bollywood's representation of Dalits or lower caste communities in film fails to move beyond upper caste perspective. After Independence, a segment of scheduled caste communities empowered themselves with the help of reservation in education institutions and government jobs where reservation system is instrumental. But in arts and cinema industry there is no provision of reservation. Artistic spaces such as cinema industry represent Dalit stories or narratives according to ideology of filmmakers. They never represent Dalit perspectives with an originality. Cinema and artistic spaces are occupied by upper caste groups because they are grown up with all facilities and education and they have time to do creative things. Dalits who have to struggle whole day for food and shelter than how they can think about creativity. In this way the systematic exclusion of Dalit community from basic resources results in the domination of upper castes in film industry. In this chapter we are going to study the Dalit Politics shown in Indian films. Before this we need to understand the meaning of Dalit politics and how it is shown in Indian cinema. Dalit politics include practices such as formation political parties by the members of Dalit community to promote reservation and oppose discriminatory caste system. Ambedkar's views on caste system are essential in understanding the Dalit politics prevailing in India. Ambedkar was not only a great leader but we can say that he emerged as the leader of Dalit community as well. Ambedkar stressed that the basis of caste divisions is not racial or biological and argued that caste is a structure of binary opposites like purity/pollution, black/white etc. and the main opposition is between those who came under caste group and those who are outside of it. He states that the abolishment of caste identities is essential for the

upliftment of Dalit community and in order to abolish caste system Dalits have to oppose the upper caste society that means to oppose the mainstream. Caste is used as a tool to woo voters to vote for the party representing that particular caste. But Dalit politics enhance the limits of caste as they focus on the shared experience of oppression and exclusion. Bahujan segment is the result of Dalit politics. In beginning BSP that is a Dalit political party represent Bahujans segment of society and they focus on shared discrimination and exploitation. Whereas Ambedkar used the term Dalit in context of untouchables only and focus on their exclusion from society, BSP enhance Dalit politics to much larger segment that include tribals, OBC's, economically weaker segment of society etc. Caste politics is often seen in relation to reservation system.

Ambedkar believed that if Dalits do not get their constitutional rights and treated as equal human beings, democracy have no significance for them. His main aim was to gain equality for Dalits through constitutional means and methods. But Ambedkar's ideology is not followed by contemporary Dalit political parties. When it comes to apply the agenda and ideas of Ambedkar in contemporary society than Dalit political parties seems useless as they use their energy preserving the statues and icons of Ambedkar only. Dalit politics turned into opportunistic politics as they do not work for the basic problems of Dalit working class. Dalit working class play an important role in sustenance of society and it comprises near about 40 percent of working class. This 40 percent is the most exploited section of the society. Dalit working class have anger against the authorities for their continuous exclusion and exploitation. These people have to face the most inhumane and naked form of subjugation and exploitation. They are the victims of both economic and caste base exploitation and oppression. The

economic or class inequality between rural Dalits and urban middle-class Dalits change the agenda of Dalit movement.

Now in contemporary India Dalit political parties use the term Dalit-Bahujan instead of Dalit. Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has used the term Bahujan to include tribals, OBC's, economically weaker groups and all those who are oppressed and exploited in society. Kanshi Ram was the leader who is responsible for the origin of Bahujan movement in India. But this movement failed to mobilise the Dalit population broad frame of Dalit-Bahujan politics. Bahujan movement failed to unite Dalit groups and it is centred around those groups which are large in number. It has failed to focus on the problems of Dalit communities that are numerically smaller in number, highly oppressed, subjugated and voiceless. Another powerful reason for the failure of Dalit-Bahujan movement is that it has lack of influential leaders. Dalit politics lost its way as Dalit leaders want to gain power and money in short time period. They do not care about the problems of their community and this led to the failure of Dalit movement. Dalit parties use unfair means to gain power like uneven alliances and it resulted in opportunistic politics.

Dalits thrive at the margins of the society. Moreover, the state and political society create immense divisions among them for their own narrow interests. They do not enjoy political, economic and cultural power to cause paradigm shift in the society. The greatest challenge for Dalit political parties is to unite, if not homogenise the Dalit community. Dalit political parties have to work hard to hard to unite all smaller or larger groups under same identity. These groups want a separate political party to represent the interests of their community and their demand for separate representation have weaken Dalit movement. Dalit community have further divisions like Balmikis,

Khatiks, Badhiks, Nats, Kanjars etc. and each of the group is extremely backward. These groups survive in society by doing menial jobs but now these groups want separate political attention. The unity among these castes will strengthen Dalit movement and provide a strong base to Dalit political parties in terms of votes.

The contemporary Dalit-Bahujan movement needs to revise its agenda and include social issue that can relate with each group of Dalit community. They have to be more inclusive in terms of diversity so that every smaller or larger group can relate with common experience of exclusion and oppression. The political parties need a strong and powerful leadership so that Dalit communities can relate their oppression with them. They need to expand among the most marginalised section of the society and their views related to empowerment of the community. Dalit political parties should organise meetings in Dalit community to raise consciousness regarding their exclusion and oppression. Dalit leaders should communicate with Dalit masses so that people can relate their experiences with them. But with passage of time these political parties move towards opportunism and forgot main agenda behind formation of Dalit parties. BSP whose main aim was to work for emancipation of Dalit community has failed to achieve its goal. BSP which is Dalit Political party is formed with main agenda of opposing Brahmanical ideology and the parties that support Brahmanism has chosen to form government with them. the Bahujan movement is committed to achieve traditional system of caste and class divisions and presented itself as an alternative to mainstream political parties has failed as it represent the interests of powerful and rich people from Dalit community and OBC's and want a powerful representation in current political scenerio. This political opportunism has almost unwittingly, opened up new space for revival of Left-oriented and class-based secular politics. The ideological

bankruptcy of Dalit political parties had initiated a debate which is revolving around the need for a genuine alternative.

In earlier films Dalit characters are based on Gandhian understanding who accept caste system as a part of society and they want some reforms in it instead of fighting for its abolition. But now Dalit filmmakers present Dalit characters based on Ambedkar's ideology who want complete abolition of caste system. *Achhut Kanya* is the film based on Gandhian philosophy whereas *Kaala* is based on Ambedkar's ideology. Cinema is an important tool that can be used for building, shaping, reinforcing public opinion and perception. Filmmakers like Pa. Ranjith and Nagraj Manjule depict Dalit concerns through lens of Ambedkar's ideology and present strong Dalit characters. These filmmakers play an important role in creating space for authentic representation of lived realities of Dalit community in cinema industry.

Indian cinema and media is biased in representation of Dalit issues as most of the resources in film industry are in control of upper caste rich people. Indian films show the glimpses of Brahmanical culture and support the idea of discrimination of society on basis of caste. But now there are some positive changes in film industry and it is moving towards more inclusive cinema that represent the realities of society without any appropriation. Now Indian films start representing the lived realities of a much wider spectrum of society. Indian films are receiving appreciation from artists and critics who set the benchmark of global cinema. In 1990's there was the gradual emergence of a small, but influential, young, educated and politically aware Dalit middle class. M.K. Gandhi labelled untouchables as Harijans to suit politics in 1930's. Gandhi ji tried to pursue a course of social reform without rending the social fabric of caste system prevailing in Indian society. But Dr. B.R. Ambedkar demanded separate

identity and separate representation in the form of communal representation in 1919. He demanded for communal representation of untouchables, believing that there will be no protection for the rights of Dalits in Hindu majority. But Gandhi opposed their separate identity and labelled them as Harijan as part of his political strategy to strengthen the hands of Hindus and swell their political majority.

Dalit Panthers movement that emerged in 1970's brought a wider currency to the term Dalit. Dalit Panthers movement widened the definition and scope of the term Dalit. Now term Dalit has moved beyond the boundaries of single caste and include all those who share the common experience of oppression and exploitation. The term Dalit represent the struggle, fears and hope of whole class of oppressed masses. The Dalit Panthers movement produced Dalit literature which focuses on Dalit consciousness and indicating a theory and direction to Dalit movement in India. Identity assertion of Untouchables and other backward classes under the common designation of Dalits strengthened Dalit movement in India and liberate Dalits from their inhibitions associated with caste stigma. It also helped in mobilising different castes under the umbrella of Dalits uniting SCs, STs, BCs and other minorities.

Bahujan Samaj Party demands separate representation in politics and reservation system in various sectors according to their proportion in population. This demand for separate representation strengthen various sub-caste movements in India and people start mobilising under single caste identities such as Chamar, Mahar, Jatav, Madiga etc. Chamar Movement of UP, Dandor Movement of Madigas in A.P. Mahar Movement of Maharastra and many others could mobilize masses in large clouds as they are basically sub-caste movements against dominant castes. There is a need for empowerment of various sub-castes in terms of intellect and wealth and it is necessary to remove

negative beliefs like caste identities led to reputable existence of caste. Dalit-Bahujan identity seems more inclusive and democratic as is based on ideas of equality and unity among various exploited caste groups. Dalit and Bahujan should not merely be treated as identity but they should be developed as ideologies. In context of growing sub-caste identity movements, it is necessary to develop Dalit and Bahujan identities as Dalit and Bahujan ideology with protective measure for weaker castes within Dalits and OBCs and to democratize Dalit and Bahujan movement.

Dalit movement put question on discriminatory practices that results in cultural, economic, and political exploitation and exclusion of Dalit masses. Dalit politics is guided by ideology of Ambedkar and oppression of lower caste communities. But the main reason behind the failure of Dalit politics is the heterogeneity among Dalit community. It is difficult to unite each group under a common identity because of difference in ideologies and agenda. But all of these heterogeneous groups have a common enemy that is responsible for maintaining hierarchy between each group. Dalit communities with a large part of population constitute a strong political force.

Dalits are often accused of indulging in identity politics. Identity Politics was coined by a group of scholars and activists Combahee River Collective in 1977. Identity politics is often used to promote the interests of a particular group. Identity politics is used as a political activity to organise people belonging to a particular identity to promote the concerns of that group.

Identity politics starts from analysis of social injustice to suggest the changes in previous rules and system of any particular group. Identity politics is collection of projects that highlights the concerns of a particular group which are ignored from a

long time. In beginning it is used by oppressed and marginalised groups to promote their interests. Identity politics is not a new concept in Indian society. The issues like honour killings, rapes, mob lynching, division of society on the basis of caste, class, religion are somehow the result of identity politics. It is important to understand that Identity politics is mainly debate between two ideologically different groups where one group represents Brahmanical ideology or Hindutva and the second group represents all those who are exploited and excluded from society because of the discriminatory caste system prevailing in society. Both of the groups are different in ideology because untouchables and other subjugated groups are excluded from society.

Dalit political parties used Identity politics to promote the concerns of their community. But mainstream political parties represent identity politics as derogatory as present a threat to them. Identity politics is not a new concept and we can note a lot of instances in Indian politics before independence and during the time of partition. When Ambedkar demands separate communal representation for Dalit community then it opposed by Gandhi because he said that it will divide the Indian society. In contemporary times whenever any marginalised group demands separate representation then it is opposed by mainstream political parties and represented as divisive and a threat to unity of nation. Dalit movements and political parties are accused of identity politics. Dalit assertions are crushed by upper society because they do not want to give them an equal human status. Their struggle for identity is often represented in a derogatory way. Dalit leader Kanshi Ram used identity politics as a base to form Bahujan Samaj Party. Identity politics used caste identities as a tool to mobilise people under a single identity. Whenever any political or social group raise the matter reservation and recommendations of Mandal Commission then Identity politics is often

marked as a factor responsible for that. Dalit political parties like BSP is formed as an alternative to mainstream political parties. Mainstream political parties promote Hindutva and Brahmanism that is responsible for exploitation of lower caste groups. Caste based discrimination in Indian society and the promotion of Hinduism as the only religion in India provide enough space to lower caste groups to assert their identity as Hindutva act as binary opposite to Dalit community. Kanshi Ram analyse this bitter truth of society and used the ideology of Ambedkar and other Dalit intellectuals. He reinvented the subaltern myths and narratives to counter the Ram Janmabhoomi Movement and other myths of mainstream political parties. He used several minor Dalit characters from Ramayana and Mahabharata like Shikhandi, Eklavya etc and gathered Dalit narratives from folk and oral literature like Rabidas, Uda Devi, Jhalkaribai etc. to develop counter Hindutva discourse. These counter-Hindutva narratives unite the Dalit-Bahujans population in U.P. and BSP rules in UP four times as a result of these counter-Hindutva narratives. Dalit myths and narratives questioned the hegemony of Hindutva narratives that rule over the society for a long time.

But now Dalit leaders like Ms. Mayawati who used the myth of Lord Parshuram give rise to a debate as Parshuram represents Hindutva base. Her effort can spoil the whole Dalit movement. It may blur the effort of building a radical Dalit consciousness as it can be used as a tool to counter Dalit narratives by mainstream political parties. Though she can defend her foolish step as a result of process of reinvention but it can change the direction of the movement as Dalit masses cannot identify with Lord Parshuram. This type of shallow politics never serves the real cause behind the emergence of Dalit political parties because one can identify easily that it is a dirty game for votes only. Kanshi Ram's step of reinventing Dalit icons and myths from oral and folk Dalit

narratives to counter Ram Janmabhoomi movement launched by Hindutva forces raise a consciousness among Dalit community about their own culture and traditions but Mayawati's step of using Parshuram's myth can blur his efforts. Ms. Mayawati want to use Parshuram's myth to gain votes from Hindutva base as she is failed to mobilise Dalit communities under a common identity.

Now Dalit movement is facing a stage of degeneration and decline as Dalit leaders are unable to represent the issues of whole Dalit community. The reasons for the failure of Dalit movement are identity politics as each larger or smaller group want a separate representation for their group instead of a common representative for whole Dalit community and the second reason is division of Dalit community into middle class and marginalised section. The other reason of failure of Dalit movement is lack of influential political leaders and the cultural inclusion of Bahujans. BSP promises economic development of Dalit-Bahujans to attract lower castes and oppressed working class and it resulted in division of Dalit in Ambedkarites group who want complete abolition of caste system and the second group have somehow accepted this discriminatory caste system and want some improvement in existing system. But education have changed the scenario of Dalit politics as educated Dalit intellectuals focus on the financial empowerment of Dalit community through new means. They have argued that under traditional ways of protection and avoid discriminatory practices cannot empower Dalit community because it cannot provide them jobs and other means by which they can improve their economic status.

Dalit activist Chandra Shekhar Azad formed Azad Samaj Party (ASP) gave rise to wave in Dalit movement. Azad follows Ambedkarite ideology of complete abolition of caste system and he emerge as an alternative for traditional Dalit political parties. He

wants to raise consciousness among Dalit community by opposing traditional ways of mobilising Dalit community. Now the traditional ideology of Dalit parties seems useless as they cannot provide resolution for the basic issues of Dalit community. Dalit leaders like Azad, Jignesh Mevani, Prakash Ambedkar are result of Ambedkar's ideology and represent an assertive and revolutionary form of Dalit politics. They were popular among Dalit community because of their instant response to the crimes and violence committed against Dalit community. The declared aim of these new organisations is "direct action based on confrontation to preserve or restore the dignity of Dalit." While the earlier political parties devoted their effort to electoral politics, these organisations have tried to address the community's basic issues like providing security against violence and crimes. Sudha Pai in her article *Future of Dalit Politics Swings Between Decline and Regeneration* comments:

"One of the most important action was the rally against violent atrocities on Dalits by Thakurs at Saharanpur, in April 2017. At least 50 thousand Dalits gathered to show their solidarity at Jantar Mantar ... action against removal of a Dalit groom from his horse by Thakurs; agitation in February 2020 against demolition of a temple dedicated to SantRavidas in Tughlaqabad Delhi, all of which receive huge support." (n.p.).

These new organisations by Dalit intellectuals and activists are more effective than traditional political parties as they want to change the narrow and traditional ideology of Dalit politics and address the basic issues of Dalit community. One of the important feature of these organisations is that they relate the basic issues of Dalit community with the broad issues of national importance.

Now Indian cinema has also started addressing caste politics in films. Pa Ranjith is one of the few Dalit filmmakers who have incorporated strong political messages in their films. Ranjith has given a completely new definition to the colour black and the film itself is likely to talk about story of oppressed and exploited section of society. From the trailer of the movie, it is quite evident that *Kaala* will touch upon several socio-political issues such as casteism and classism. *Kaala* is a film focussing on current political scenario of India and it touches upon just about every issue facing the country today. This movie focuses on almost every issue from communal polarisation to land acquisition to *Swachh Bharat* to the rich-poor divide. This movie shows that how slum people are exploited in the name of development and beautification. Pa Ranjith gave a message through movie *Kaala* that Dalits are also the part of so-called mainstream society. In the movie Ranjith use the names like Buddha Nagar, Bhim Wada, Lenin etc. and pictures of Dalit intellectuals like Ambedkar, Phule that visualise Dalit-community without any appropriation. Ranjith criticise mainstream politics through the character of Hari Dada who represents the interests of upper caste community. *Kaala* passes bitter criticism over the political and social system prevailing in mainstream society through the creative representation of struggles of Dalit-Bahujan community.

Kaala represents the basic life struggles of Dalit community with as insider perspective as this movie is product of a Dalit filmmaker. In the movie Ranjith depicts struggles, love relationships, agony, festivals and the structure of Dalit-Bahujan politics. From the very beginning, Bollywood films depicts the life of upper caste society. The theme and plot of the films are changed or appropriated according to viewpoint of upper caste filmmakers and characters. In Indian film industry most of the filmmakers, artists and other workers belong to upper caste society and Dalits are not allowed to enter the

domain of filmmaking. Indian films praised the assembled history of upper caste society which ignore the struggles, labour, exploitation and inhuman status of lower caste people. The cruel reality of caste is visualised through the character Hari Dada who vulgarly displays caste Hindu values. *Kaala* movie depicts life and struggles of Dalit-Bahujans at the centre and criticise the notions of purity, pollution, caste, class which is responsible for the division of society.

Ranjith uses Dharavi as a model to comment on the social and political condition of India. *Kaala* is a political and social commentary on the caste and class divisions prevailing in Indian society. In this movie it is shown that Dalit is not restricted to some particular castes rather it is shown that all those who are discriminated because of caste, class and religion can be included in broader canvas of Dalit-Bahujans. In this movie it is shown that how politicians try to further divide these oppressed people for their political benefit. In this movie when people of Dharavi oppose Hari Dada and his goons then he tried to divide them in name of religion. This movie questions so called Hindutva politics of contemporary India. It also criticises the dispossession of lower caste people from their lineal colonies and the failure of law and government to protect the concerns of Dalit community. *Kaala* unveils the cruel face of political leaders and industrialists who on the name of development and other government policies snatch the land of Dalit-Bahujans. Hari Dada, the villain of the movie is the true representation of present-day leaders and industrialists. The Villain use political support, police and other government organisations to snatch the land from poor slum people. This film shows that all the power and resources are concentrated in handful of powerful people who use it for their own profit.

Ranjith portray Kaala as Ravan that shows that Dalit are always linked with evil forces in Hindu society. He uses strong dialogues and symbols to criticise Hindutva politics of Indian society. In the film when Dalit-Bahujan working class stop working for a day then media represent their peaceful protest as a criminalised activity while the upper caste rich people pour out their anger on them. This movie shows us the difference in opinions of working class and ruling class people where ruling people want their convenience and facilities and they never care about the working class that makes it possible for them. it also shows us that Dalit working class plays the most important part in sustenance of society.

Dalit politics is often criticised for its shallow agenda and its opportunism. The bitter reality of political opportunism is unveiled by Anubhav Sinha in his movie *Article 15*. In the movie it is shown that how two ideologically different political parties join their hands in elections for vote-bank only. In the movie a Dalit political party whose main agenda is to fight against the dominant caste for their discriminatory practices. But instead of representing their community and fight for equality as an equal human being they join hands with an upper caste brahmin political leader. The ideology of both the parties is totally opposite to each other and these parties represent two opposite sections of the society. The Dalit leader allies with an upper caste mainstream political party that uses Brahmin-Dalit unity as an opportunity to win elections. This alliance reminds us of the times when BSP in Uttar Pradesh entered join hands with BJP to gain political power. Dalit leaders like Ramvilas Paswan, Ramdas Athawale enter into alliance with BJP for their individual profit. This shows us the real face of contemporary Dalit politics whose one and only aim is to gain power.

Though the movie focuses on Ambedkar's ideology and tries to project Dalit characters in its real Ambedkarite spirit but the director cannot avoid the Gandhian influence. For instance, one scene in the police station where the lead actor Ayan, who is playing a police officer, is very clearly shown moving his chair and looking towards the portrait of Mr. Gandhi, on the other hand Ambedkar's portrait was also shown to his right which has not given any visibility and attention. Giving more visibility to Gandhi than Ambedkar is contradicting and unjust with the very topic of the movie which centres around the issue of caste violence. Putting both of the ideologies together or adjusting Gandhi in Ambedkar's philosophy and world is contradictory and not easy to digest. We hardly find any Ambedkarite who accept Gandhian philosophy related to caste system.

The director tries to incorporate multiple ideologies in a single character. In the movie Nishad, who somehow represents the Dalit leader and activist Chandrashekhar Azad. At the very first, he is shown as an Ambedkarite who is very much conscious about the caste atrocities, then he is shown as communist who does revolutionary activities and finally, he becomes Rohit Vemula as he read some lines from his suicide note. Some incidents in the movie have been nicely portrayed and can be considered as conventional to the Dalit politics today. The movie also show that how upper caste political leaders make use of Dalits and other minorities for the vote bank merely to serve their own political interests. This bitter reality of current political scenario is shown in the movie in the form of fake "Dalit-Brahmin" unity, where the MLA (Member of Legislative Assembly) from the Hindu upper caste uses local Dalit leader as a means to woo Dalit voters. To serve this purpose the MLA organise a press event and goes to the village to inter-dine and exchange food with Dalits as a mark of

affection and concern for them. But the movie has nicely captured the real face of the Brahmins and the uncomfortable expression of the MLA while eating with Dalits. In real life situations also, this discomfort is deeply rooted in the upper castes when it comes to sharing an equal platform with Dalits. upper caste people do not want these Untouchables to be at their level. The greedy and hypocrite approach of the Brahmins is revealed by the Dalit character Gaura when she said; the leader brought his food and plates from outside. In this way the movie undoubtedly depicts the Dalit-Brahmin political unity in the hands of Brahmin as fake. They play the whole game merely to make Dalits as Hindu majority voters to use them for their own political benefits.

In movie *Aarakshan* Prakash Jha talks about the issue of reservation and caste politics. This movie shows that how reservation is essential for Dalit community. *Aarakshan*, which means reservation explores quotas for lower castes in the government institutions for jobs and education. Reservation is often opposed by upper castes and wealthier Indians as it provides more opportunities to Dalit communities. *Aarakshan* is a commentary over caste based reservation or quotas in government organisations for education and jobs. In the movie when Susanth who is an upper caste kid cannot secure admission in a government college of his choice. He feels he has failed because of quota-system. In the beginning movie focuses on the reservation issue but later it lost its real agenda. The role of Dalit protagonist is played by Saif Ali Khan who belongs to a royal family and has no connection with the Dalit movement. Overall, all the lead roles are played by upper caste mainstream heroes like Amitabh Bachchan, Deepika Padukone, Saif Ali Khan. We can hardly find a Dalit actor playing an important role in the movie. Opposite to its name the movie turns into a common commercial movie and it fails to deliver its original message.

Reservation or quota system reserved seats in educational institutions and government jobs for socially disadvantaged groups. This system open doors for higher education for the people who have long been denied access to higher education and respectable jobs. It provides equal opportunities to the poorest and most marginalised people in India. But some critics of the reservation or quota system say that it promotes mediocrity and divides people on the basis of caste and religion. Dalits who were deprived of education and other basic facilities have improved their condition through reservation in education institutions and employment.

Newton film unveils the issues of Indian election and shows the social system in which voting look purposeless. This movie is important from Dalit perspective as the hero belongs to Dalit community, but the filmmaker refers to his caste so briefly that audience could hardly notice it. The first reference is picture of Ambedkar hanging on a wall at Newton's home. The other reference is the conversation of Newton regarding inter-caste marriage or having an upper caste bride. In the film *Newton* Dalit protagonist is shown as an ordinary human being. Newton is shown as an honest election officer sent in tribal area for conducting elections. Indian films portrayed Dalits as victimised or helpless people living a miserable life.

It seems that cinema industry has overcome its earlier stereotypes and ready to portray strong Dalit characters. Some Dalits move towards empowerment and development with the help of reservation, job, education and politics. But they are ignored in Hindi movies from the very beginning. Actors from Dalit community are not accepted by audience and filmmakers belonging to mainstream society. Chirag Paswan who is son of Ram Vilas Paswan want to become an actor and made his debut in the *Miley Naa Miley Hum*. His debut turned into his farewell movie as with no offers, Paswan joined

politics. The inclusion of Dalit as a hero or protagonist in films is a very touchy issue. There are about one thousand films produced every year but there are only a handful of films that represented Dalit issues or brutal realities of caste.

According to our constitution every human being is equal but our social and economic life is full of inequalities. Ambedkar says that there is a relationship between politics and religion and morality is the common factor in both. He states that religious system of should support the idea of equality, liberty and secular politics. Religion should celebrate common heritage and culture and give equal opportunities to every individual for development. Though Indian constitution prohibits discrimination and granted equality and liberty to every human being but Hindu religion follows the discriminatory caste system. Ambedkar Christian religion and western culture because it granted equality to every human being and follows scientific methods for progress of society. He also relates these morals with teachings of Buddha. Ambedkar accept Buddhism and choose it as a belief system to establish morality. Ambedkar advocates different communal representation for Dalit community and want to mobilise Dalit masses under a shared and common identity to change political and social order of society. He formed Republican Party of India, a separate political party to represent the interests of Dalit community. He wanted to see Dalit as strong and empowered citizen who is conscious about his culture and basic rights. RPI was formed for empowerment of whole Dalit community but as the time passes it starts representing the interests of Mahar group only. RPI is currently divided into different segments and each section is dominated by Mahar leaders. RPI turned into an opportunistic Dalit party forged alliance with Congress Party to gain influential position and power. They advocate conversion Dalit community to Buddhism but they ignore the basic issues like

economic and cultural empowerment of these deprived sections of society. In 1972 the Dalit Panthers emerged as an alternative against the opportunistic and corrupt RPI leadership. This was an intellectual movement which raised consciousness among Dalit masses and established an assertive Dalit identity. It celebrates the cultural legacy of the Dalit community and follows Ambedkar's ideology to change the existing social order. But the organisation split into two segments: one group follows Dhasal's Marxist agenda and the other group follows Dhale's Ambedkarite Buddhist ideology to change the social of India. The Dalit Panthers movement died because of the difference in ideology and agenda of its leaders but it left behind a bulk of revolutionary literature that raised consciousness among the Dalit community.

Babasaheb Ambedkar realised that Dalits are not only oppressed, exploited, economically backward but they were ignored and excluded from the domain of political power. He suggested that Dalits should secure political representation and power for the empowerment and emancipation of the whole Dalit community from the elite domination. It is important that the Dalit community should grab powerful and influential positions in the power structure. Mainstream political parties ignore the aspirations and concerns of Dalits and lack an effective agenda to change the discriminatory social system. The Dalit movement for the empowerment of oppressed castes is based on three major points: first it should investigate about the root cause of oppression, secondly it challenges the upper caste hegemony and thirdly it should suggest an alternative model for social transformation. BSP as a propagator of the Dalit movement started its public activism as a campaigner against the discriminatory social and political system which established its morality and ethical narratives as standards of

political tactics. BSP's new strategy decided the minimum capability of every smaller or larger group according to its political representation.

Now Dalit politics in India has used caste identity as a tool to mobilise people according to their caste and casting alliance between parties to gain power. Dalit politics start using the same caste identity to oppose the discriminatory caste system it wanted to oppose. Dalit politics uses the identity in terms of caste to oppose the hegemony of other but instead of its abolition of caste system it established the superiority of the other one. Brahminism as a philosophy will remain working if caste is used as an identity with its notions of purity and pollution. BSP, start its struggle for the empowerment of Dalit community but instead of establishing equality it replaced one group of political elites from upper caste society with the group of Dalit elites. BSP has lost its way and agenda of social transformation and start focussing on the ways to gain power by fair or unfair means. BSP has sacrificed its original radical agenda of building a *Bahujan samaj* uniting Dalits, OBCs (Other Backward Classes), adivasis and the religious minorities at the altar of electoral expediency. Contemporary Dalit politics is directionless as they lack a concrete ideology. The tragedy of Dalit politics is shown in films like *Article 15*, *Kaala*, *Aarakshan* etc. The Ambedkarite politics centred on hollow symbolism, can, in no way, deliver genuine rights since it fails to raise the genuine issues. Contemporarily the entire Dalit identity politics serves the capitalist system itself. In movie *Article 15* we can easily notice that how political leaders from Dalit community manipulate and ignore them for their personal profit. This movie also unveils the difference of ideology and agenda within the Dalit political parties as Nishad who is a Dalit activist opposes the alliance between Dalit and Brahmin political party. In this way we can easily notice the difference in ideology within Dalit political

parties. These types of contradictory approaches weaken the Dalit movement and divide Dalit masses. Instead of discussing the issues of discrimination, lack of opportunities for oppressed classes, rich and poor divide, caste and class discrimination we should work on practical levels to eliminate the discrimination. The contemporary Dalit politics needs to be transparent and practical and it should work in the direction of liberation of Dalit masses from the chains of social discrimination.

Pa. Ranjith in his movie *Kaala* represent a revolutionary and assertive form of Dalit politics. In the movie people from different religion and different states mobilise under a single group or identity and oppose the structured and saturated form of social discrimination. *Kaala* represent the life and struggles of Dalit -Bahujans. The plot of the movie revolves around the anti-caste politics. The movie opposed the discrimination on the basis of caste, class, religion or any other identity. It embodies the confusion and contradictions of the contemporary Dalit-Bahujan politics. The film shows land as a central point of human civilisation and it also shows that how elite leaders and industrialists use unfair means to snatch the land of oppressed people. The film unveils the corruption and prevailing in government organisations and shows that there are no laws and rules exist for powerful people. Powerful people use the laws and rules according to their convenience and the state has lost its sense of judgement. The film expresses some faith in democracy and election system and it suggest a way to oppose Hindutva forces and capitalist system.

The film has a repressed desire for a revolution to bring change in society, which is expressed symbolically through ideologies of Ambedkar, Buddha and Lenin. It does not have any faith in mainstream political parties and left and it is mocked through the character of Kaala's youngest son Lenin. The film focuses on the new and emerging

stream of Dalit-Bahujan politics by mobilising multiple subaltern identities to fight against the discriminatory and oppressive traditional politics. In the film the working class organise a protest and mobilise the whole working community for the strike with the help of internet sources. Kaala who is the protagonist of the movie unite multiple subaltern identities like Muslims, Tamils, Buddhists, Hindus etc. to oppose the discrimination and oppression. The film explores the idea that only united oppressed classes will be able to resist the mainstream political parties. The film desires a revolutionary form of Dalit politics to bring change in society and collapsed the shallow and opportunistic mainstream politics. But the film keeps the hope of a resistant and fair Dalit movement alive through the organised resistance and unity of working class and reshaping Dalit-Bahujan identity. Ranjith's *Kaala* and Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* are different from earlier movies because these movies are directed by Dalit filmmakers. It's the assertion of their identity that separates these filmmakers from the one's who have come before. They are all self-confessed Ambedkarites and that makes their films different from earlier ones.

Despite their evident marginalisation in cinema industry, Dalits have been portrayed in both stereotypical (*Aakrosh*, *Rajneeti*) and contextual ways (*Masaan*, *Newton*, *Kaala*, *Fandry*), especially in the last decade. The long shadow of Gandhian thought is distinctly recognisable in films like *Achhut Kanya* because these films actually defend the social division prevailing in our society. These movies situate a Dalit character amid fundamentally decent, albeit, conservative Brahmins, and individualises their story. There is a politically poignant scene in Bimal Roy's 1959 classic film *Sujata*, when the protagonist who is a lower-caste orphan, attempts suicide after she learns that she was actually adopted by an upper caste family. She is about to jump into the river

but stop suddenly when she sees a statue of Mahatma Gandhi. This scene clearly reveals the director's guiding philosophy and political ideology. After a long time, Tamil film *Kaala* by Dalit director Pa. Ranjith has brought a defining moment of Dalit portrayal in India's cinematic history. The major difference between the earlier movies and movie *Kaala* lies in the journey of India's anti-caste politics -between 1950's to 2020. Ranjith's movie is totally different and unusual because it comes from an insider's perspective. Although *Kaala* made within the boundaries of a star-vehicle entertainment film, Ranjith bathes it all in anti-caste and Ambedkar symbolism. Ranjith's subtle use of motifs symbols, colours and dialogues represent Ambedkarite and communist ideologies that pertain to the rights of selfhood, dignity and freedom. It provides the audience an insight of reformation in the way of approaching oppression and leaves the audience with the choice to either submit to the suppression or rebel, thus transforming social structures that reinforce discriminatory practices.

Unbiased representation of caste issues in films is a revolutionary act in India. The filmmakers must be praised for accepting the caste as an evil prevailing in society and representing caste issues with an insider perspective. We cannot imagine any kind of social and political empowerment of whole Dalit community unless the abolition of caste system. Movies like *Article 15*, *Kaala*, *Fandry* expose the atrocious face of caste system and unveil the realities of discriminatory caste system. Anubhav Sinha's *Article 15* represents the horrific face of caste system and raise the issues of Dalits living in rural India. In the movie the lead character Ayan is portrayed as Caste-blind as he is unaware of division of society on basis of caste. Ayan do not know anything about caste system because he was born in a rich Brahmin family. All other policemen are aware of their caste because they have faced the brutalities of caste because of their

lower caste status. In the movie one can notice that to be caste-blind is not possible for lower caste people because upper caste society make them realise about their caste status at every step. Caste system is a curse for lower castes but it is a plus point for upper castes. Upper caste people can ignore caste system because no one make them feel bad for their caste status.

Caste system is rude and easily recognisable in rural India but it is maintained in urban settings also with some different but equally potent form. The caste system is equally crude in metropolitan cities and it is shown in movie *Kaala*. It is a noticeable fact that caste has spread its limits and prevails in educational institutions, government jobs, private sectors etc., as in the case of Rohit Vemula. Caste system resides in judiciary system also because of judges from lower castes are missing in higher courts and lower castes lack representation in bureaucracy, media etc.

Caste is represented in Indian cinema from 1960's but the number of movies representing caste issues is very less in number in comparison to commercial movies. In movies like *Achhut Kanya*, *Sujata*, *Aakrosh* Dalit politics is shown with Harijan philosophy and they don't represent assertive Dalit characters who fight for their rights. Dalit characters in earlier movies are shown with a lens of pity who need an upper caste saviour for their peaceful survival. But Dalit film directors like Pa. Ranjith, Nagraj Manjule reject this common idea of Dalit representation and raise genuine issues related to caste atrocities in their movies. They represent Dalit characters who fight for their rights. These movies show the real face of shallow and opportunistic Dalit politics.

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Chapter III

Comparative Study of Films *Kaala* and *Article 15*

Cinema can play an important role in building a public ideology or opinion on any issue. Cinema and media can be used as a tool to perpetuate culture, values and tradition of society. We can hope that Indian films start representing the issues prevailing in society without any appropriation and biasness. Caste system is the bitter reality of Indian society. Indian cinema dealing with caste issues should not come as a surprise. The representation of Dalit life and concerns in Indian cinema has been a major issue of debate among film theorists in India. In 1970's Indian Cinema developed a more socially aware and politically oriented form of cinema known as Parallel Cinema. The mainstream Indian cinema maintains dominant caste hegemony by focussing on upper caste society. Lower castes have been ignored from mainstream films from the very beginning. Indian cinema focuses on the commercial aspect only and most of the audiences watch movies for entertainment purpose only. But now people from Dalit or lower castes demand a separate cinema to address caste-conscious issues of society. A collaborated approach by Dalit artists and filmmakers can bring a positive change in representation of caste differences. The cinematic experience can become a transformative moment whereby the audience propels the dialects of social transformation.

Suraj Yengde in his article *Dalit Cinema* elaborate the idea of Dalit cinema as a tool of resistance. He defines Dalit Cinema:

“Dalit Cinema has the potential to offer performatory resistance to the interwoven threads of the caste-capital nexus. By critiquing caste, gender, class and other forms of

oppression, Dalit cinema could foreshadow a cohesive battle against hegemonic caste supremacy” (*Dalit Cinema*, pp: 516).

Dalit cinema can be used as an effective tool to eternalize the lived realities of the marginalised section of society by including formerly ignored masses. By refusing to focus on entertainment purpose only, it could generate a critique of mainstream films. The production of films focussing on Dalit issues are result of struggles of Dalit filmmakers and artists and not of the mainstream filmmakers who celebrate culture and morals of Brahmins and other castes who are part of Hindu religion. Indian cinema is focussed in appropriation of caste issues in films by falsely connecting the myths with reality. Most of the films produced in cinema industry represent issues like globalisation, the interrelations of culture, class dynamics but we can rarely find a film presenting internal divisions and issues related to caste.

Achhut Kanya (1936) is the earliest movie that represent the dark side of caste atrocities. Earlier movies such as *Devdas*, *Achhut Kanya* plotted the intercaste love relationship between a couple in which one of the lovers belongs to Dalit community. The movies produced at that time were influenced by Gandhi’s ideology about caste. Most of the filmmakers of that time were strongly influenced by Gandhian vision of caste and social reform movements. Gandhi was a national leader he launched many reform movements and anti-untouchability programmes for empowerment of lower castes. His philosophy related to caste system seems unprejudiced because it suggested many reform in caste base divisions and focus on human status of lower castes instead of advocating complete annihilation. The blend of gender and caste is plotted in Indian films in which caste identity of woman is much problematic than a man. In mainstream films, the blend of caste and class bias can be seen in films, with the hero of the film

belongs to upper caste. Dalits or lower caste are ignored in mainstream films as no specific reference is made to their identity and their caste is represented as the only reason for their subjugation. Dalits are often presented as violent or criminals. The Indian film industry fails to present Dalit cultural traditions, music art, literature or their food because most of the filmmakers and actors belong to upper castes.

In this chapter we will study two films first one *Kaala* by Dalit filmmaker Pa. Ranjith and second one *Article 15* by an upper caste filmmaker Anubhav Sinha. Both of the movies focus on caste discrimination prevailing in Indian society. But the ideology and approach of Pa. Ranjith and Anubhav Sinha is totally different and one can easily notice it after watching the movies. *Kaala* is an Indian Tamil-language film written and directed by a Dalit filmmaker Pa. Ranjith. The film is set in Mumbai's slum area Dharavi and highlight the problems of the people who had migrated from different parts of country. It mainly focuses on the problems and issues of Dalit population living in urban parts of country. It incorporates the contradictory issues of contemporary subaltern politics. Ranjith's portrayal of caste issues seems real because it comes from an insider's perspective. But in *Article 15* there is a scene where Ayan who is an IPS officer express his ignorance about caste base divisions. It is not easy to digest that how someone can qualify UPSC exam without knowing about history of Indian society. Even Aditi who is friend of Ayan knows that their mothers used separate utensils for the domestic help. In this way one can easily notice the differences of perspectives in the portrayal of caste issues in the films *Kaala* and *Article 15*. In his films Ranjith portrays Dalit characters as independent and strong enough to fight for their own rights. *Kaala* is not only an entertainment film but it is a film about revolution for bringing change in society. Bollywood ignores the endeavours of Dalits and misrepresent them

by appropriating their stories according to upper caste perspective. This is because of the difference in opinions regarding caste discrimination prevailing in society. But the scenario regarding portrayal of caste identity in films is changing as Dalit artists enter the domain of filmmaking and start presenting basic issues of caste system. Dalit-Bahujan filmmakers like Pa. Ranjith create a new form of cinema that incorporate issues of every section of society without any partiality. From centuries Dalits are deprived of land and other resources from where they can earn their livelihood. They work as workers in the fields of upper caste landlords and do other menial jobs in their households. Their exclusion from resources forces them to live outside the village and bound them to a lifelong servitude towards upper caste landlords. Land is a metaphor of life for Dalits and this is shown in the film *Kaala*. Pa. Ranjith in his film reminds us of caste discriminatory practices where Dalits were forced to live in isolation from other castes. It also reminds us how land and other resources belonging to Dalits were snatched. Ranjith's protagonists have increasingly been more outspoken in asserting their Dalit identity and it can be seen in the film *Kaala*. He is an Ambedkarite and his film *Kaala* was deeply political though the politics was represented symbolically and kept under the surface.

Ranjith in his film *Kaala* has mainstreamed and humanised the portrayal of Dalit and other oppressed characters and their stories. *Kaala* is different from earlier movies because earlier Dalit characters were often victimised, criminalised or exoticised. This is not the first film raising caste issues but none of the other films asserted Dalit identity the way *Kaala* does. In film *Article 15* Dalits are shown as victims who cannot fight for their rights. In this film Dalit characters are shown with lens of pity who need help of some upper caste person to fight for their rights. Only a few Dalit characters

like Nishaad and Guara assert their identity and want to change the discriminatory caste system but their efforts are crushed by a Dalit political leader for his individual profit. Nishaad who is a revolutionary type of person wants to change the society so that Dalit people can live with respect without any discrimination and oppression. This film is somehow influenced with Gandhian philosophy and we can easily notice in one scene in the police station where the lead actor Ayan, who is playing a police officer, is very clearly shown moving his chair and looking towards the portrait of Mr. Gandhi, on the other hand Ambedkar's portrait was also to his right which has not given much visibility and attention. In this scene we can notice the selective representation of the icons where Gandhi is more visible than Ambedkar, despite the fact that movie's subject centres around the philosophy of Ambedkar. Though Gandhi worked for social reforms but he did not work in the direction of annihilation of caste rather he wants to include Dalit or untouchables in Hindu society. Introducing a Brahmin police officer's character to save the helpless Dalit people is somehow influenced with Mr. Gandhi's philosophy. In film the symbolic presence of Gandhi in different forms was very political and show the filmmaker affection towards Gandhian philosophy. Director have mixed both Ambedkar's and Gandhi's ideologies together and it is very contradictory and not easy to digest because Ambedkar wants complete annihilation of caste while Gandhiji wants reforms in the existing social order. The film unveils the bitter face of caste atrocities and appeals larger audience about the current scenario in the country, where still Dalit women are raped and harassed at every corner of the society. In movie *Article 15* Anubhav Sinha unveils the problems and issues lying within Dalit community through the character of a Dalit political leader and Nishaad who is a Dalit activist. Nishaad who is influenced by Ambedkar's ideology opposes Dalit-Brahmin union rally organised by Brahmin leader because he knows the bitter

reality of that uneven alliance. Later Nishaad was killed in a fake police encounter because he opposed the alliance between Dalit and Brahmin political parties. In this film Sinha comments over the current political scenario of our country. Nishaad who is an educated and aggressive Dalit activist reflects the new aggressive form of Dalit politics. Dalit political parties are suffering from current internal fragmentation and decline. The young and educated Dalit middle class focus on the need for economic empowerment.

Pa. Ranjith in his movie *Kaala* uses Dharavi as a model to unveil the current political and social order of our country. It is a political and social treatise hidden in a commercial format on the rich-poor divide. This film shows us that how a handful of powerful political leaders exploit the poor and ignorant masses for their personal profit. For these greedy political leaders money and land are symbols of power and for poor people land and money represents survival. Through the character of Karikaalan Ranjith represents an assertive and revolutionary form of Dalit-Bahujan politics. He criticised Hindutva politics and its corporate distributors. The Hindutva villain Hari Dada represents selfish leaders and industrialists who with the help of political power exploit the downtrodden masses. This film shows Dalits dispossession from their colonies by industrialists who use government authorities to snatch their land. It also shows the failure of laws to protect the rights of oppressed and exploited working class of society.

Though both *Kaala* and *Article 15* shows the bitter reality of caste discrimination prevailing in society but the approach of the filmmakers is totally different as *Kaala* focus on the caste problems prevailing in urban parts of country and *Article 15* focus on the caste problems prevailing in rural parts of country. Another point to be noted is that

Ranjith represents assertive and aggressive side of Dalit community whereas Sinha represents Dalits as meek, voiceless and ignorant who depend on an outsider for their peaceful survival. This difference in representation lies because Ranjith belongs to Dalit community and has real experience of caste discrimination whereas Sinha belongs to upper caste. Ranjith exhorts the people from Dalit community that their body is the only their only weapon to fight against caste discrimination. He suggests peaceful protests instead of violent activities to oppose the caste discrimination.

Sinha in his movie *Article 15* shows the violence committed against Dalit community because of their lower caste and portrays Ayushman Khurrana as a Brahmin Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who comes as a saviour of Dalit community. The film ignores the complexities of caste structure prevailing in urban part of country. The film shows that how Dalit assertion is crushed by upper castes because they think that lower castes have no right to live a respectful life. In the film three Dalit girls are gangraped and murdered because they ask for an increment of three rupees in their daily wages. The girls were raped and murdered because they dared to ask for three more rupees in their daily wages, and, Ayan, at one point tells a haughty CBI officer that this money is equivalent of a few drops of the mineral water he is drinking.

Ranjith in his films give a message to exploited and oppressed and says “Don’t let this shit happen to you” but Sinha in film *Article 15* talk to the privileged and say “Don’t let this shit happen if you are in a position to stop it or to do something about it.” The film has a Dalit character named Nishad who is an activist belonging to Bhim Sangarsh Sangh. He orders Dalits to stop working for upper caste after a lynching incident, and this what-if scenario opens Ayan’s eyes (and ours) the dystopia that would result. The streets would be overflow with garbage and other waste material and there is no one to

pick up the trash and clean the drains. This type of incident is shown in movie *Kaala* also when Kaala appeals all the Dalit workers in Mumbai to stop working for the upper castes so that everyone can realise the importance of Dalit community in society. He points out that if Dalits stop working for upper castes than it will disturb the complete cycle of society and complicates everyone's life.

Kaala shows the corrupt face of government authorities and shows that how some powerful people appropriate law and order for their own profit. The film revolves around Dalit movement and delivers a beautiful message to society. *Kaala* unveils the complexities caste and class base divisions and shows that there is no implementation of laws for sake of Dalit community. *Article 15* also shows us the corrupt face of government authorities. The film narrates the story of three Dalit girls who were raped and murdered by a contractor and some police officials. When the parents of Dalit girls file a missing complaint than those criminal police officers said that the girls will come back after some time and there is no need to file a complaint. But when Ayan asks them to file a register complaint and start a search operation for them than those police tried to convert the case into an honour killing case and arrest the parents of Dalit girls. But Doctor of government hospital prepare a report of brutal sexual assault and gang rape then the criminals tried to blackmail the doctor so that she will change her statement. Even the CBI officer is not much interested in a fair search and orders Ayan to leave the case so that he can appoint some other one who will hide the reality of case. In this way this film shows the unjust and cruel face of government authorities. The film shows that how caste decide the right or wrong in Indian society. The girls were raped because the criminals think that any Dalit have no right to raise their voice against them and they said that they want to teach a lesson to the whole community so that no one

from their voice against them. This type of narrowminded people do not treat Dalit and other subaltern communities as equal human beings. They do not want any change in social order for their own profit. And when some Dalit educated person questions these evil practices then their efforts were crushed by upper castes. In the movie the murder of Dalit girls and fake encounter of Nishaad points that if someone try to oppose the unjust social order than they have to pay a price for their identity assertion in Indian society. Though the approach of films *Kaala* and *Article 15* is different but both of the films focus on the unjust caste practices prevailing in Indian society.

Both of the films show the violence and brutal crimes committed against Dalit community because of their identity assertion. Ranjith in his film *Kaala* shows that how law fails in solving problems of Dalit community. In the film when municipal corporation cut the water connection of the whole slum then Lenin who is the youngest son of Kaala files a written complaint for the same but the authorities pay no attention towards his complaint and later the problem is solved by Selva who make an unauthorised or illegal connection in the water pipeline. Though Selva's approach is wrong and illegal but it solved the problem of community. Simultaneously what is the profit of Lenin's lawful and correct approach that cannot solve their problem. This unveils the blind and deaf side of government authorities who cannot see the problems of poor Dalit community.

For a majority of the artists from Indian cinema, art is beyond caste and it is true also but definitely there is caste among those who practice it. It is not true to say that Dalit issues were never represented by cinema but they were represented with a lens of pity and sympathy. Mostly Dalit issues have been spoken of and discussed at Dalit meetings only and they are rarely discussed by other part of society because no one from upper

caste is interested in the problems of Dalit community. But filmmakers like Ranjith, Manjule and many others take these issues to a common stage by representing them in movies. They want to communicate the pain of Dalit society through their movies. Ranjith in his film *Kaala* has creatively visualised the social and political flows rising as a result of anti-caste struggles of Dalit-Bahujan settlers in Dharavi. The movie also comments on the social and political order of Maharashtra. Most of the times urban slums are portrayed with the problems of sanitation and crime but Ranjith represent the slum of Dalit-Bahujans with a totally different perspective. In the movie Dalit are represented as equal human beings and they are represented with an originality. Ranjith himself belongs to Dalit community and we can notice the influence of his insider perspective in representation of Dalit community. He visualised the festivals, culture, art forms, family relationships and the political framework of the historically segregated Dalit community.

Indian cinema has presented the life and journeys of the upper caste society, fitting them into different plots and themes. Mainstream films are tragedies, comedies, romance, historical narratives, victories and the ghost stories of the upper caste society. This appropriated and fabricated history of upper caste society is result of the biased perspective of upper caste society because they praise their social structure and ignore the existence of Dalit community. Dalit community have no right to study and gain knowledge and this is the result of strategy of dominant society. *Kaala* oppose this fabrication and appropriation of history by showing the history and culture of Dalit-Bahujans with an originality. Ranjith in his movie shows that even now the shadow of Dalits is treated as polluting and their culture, traditions, food habits, dressing style are treated as derogatory and disgusting. Those who are born in upper caste society ignores

the presence of caste system as it never resulted in bitter experience for them but those who stay outside of it have to face new forms of oppression because of their outsider status. The biased ideology of caste is represented in a scene when Hari Dada who is corrupt political who show Hindu values, come Kaal's house and doesn't accept water offered by Selvi. When Kaala goes to meet Hari Dada then he expects Kaala to touch his feet but Kaala denies. The act of touching feet of upper caste people is result of the philosophy that upper castes are evolved from body of Hindu God Brahma. But Kaala's denial from touching Hari Dada is an act by which Ranjith criticise the upper caste morals and give a voice to the ignored and voiceless Dalit masses. In *Kaala*, Ranjith portray strong Dalit characters who celebrate their culture, art forms and assert their identity against upper caste society and fight for the rights of whole Dalit community.

Anubhav Sinha in his film *Article 15* shows that Dalit community is looked down upon with hatred and disgust by the upper caste society. There is a scene when Ayan want to eat some snacks from the plate of a fellow police officer but that officer said that he cannot eat from his plate because of caste restrictions. In rural India Dalit are conditioned in such a way that they accept all of the caste atrocities without any question. They accept the unjust system of society as their fate and if someone tries to oppose it then he or she have to face the consequences. There is a scene in the film when an upper caste political leader goes to Dalit community and try to show that he does not believe in unjust caste system of society and join them when some Dalit person are taking their food. But this is not the reality because he carried the food and crockery along with him and all this is just a part of his agenda to gain votes from Dalit community. Dalit people are always treated as an outsider in the community and people from upper castes never call them with their names and one can easily notice it in the

movie. This movie is a beautiful attempt to unveil the discrimination and humiliation face by Dalit community due to the exploitative caste system prevailing in our society.

There is a scene in the movie where one Jatav (Dalit) police officer shown slapping an upper caste senior officer who is a culprit in the gang rape and murder of Dalit girls. That slap is very symbolic because it is not a slap to an individual Brahmin officer rather it is a slap to all those who has been exploiting them since history. That slap is a sign of assertion of Dalit identity and consciousness. Though this movie is an attempt to show the caste atrocities and subjugation by upper castes where Dalits are not merely put as subjects but challenging the exploitative social structure. There have been some debates from the marginalised and Dalit sections on how can the upper caste Brahmin hero be investigating the Dalit issues and becomes the saviour for Dalit community as these Brahmins themselves are the main oppressors who exploit them and treat them as slaves. We can say that this film is an attempt to socialise the Brahmins by the Brahmin character. The filmmaker tried to show that it is equally important to allow a privileged upper caste person who should come forward and socialise his community and question their supremacy. The filmmaker tried to make the upper castes accountable for their discriminatory practices. The film shows that the upper castes should challenge the other upper caste because they have created this caste system for their own profit. It is true that India have been fighting against the caste system before independence, there were times in which we tried to eradicate it but we are unable to do it. So, it is equally important for upper castes also, who created this discriminatory caste system, to question it and challenge caste organisations themselves. Though the movie is unable to portray the Ambedkarite discourse, the director has done well in a way to make the larger audience aware, those who have least understanding about real life incidents of

caste oppression and subjugation. There is some misrepresentation of Dalit characters and appropriation of Ambedkarite philosophy by putting Ambedkarite, Gandhian and Marxist philosophy together, but overall, this film challenges the Brahmin supremacy over Dalits and other marginalised communities.

In the movie *Kaala* the use of colour blue and the paintings Buddha, Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar to signify triumph of Ambedkar's ideology. The name of the colonies like Gautam Buddha Nagar, Periyar Chowk are symbols that represent the ideology of Dalit community. We can identify other references also like name of Kaala's youngest son Lenin represent the Marxist ideology and flags of Oppressed Republican Party represent the current political interests of Dalit-Bahujan community. Dalit-Bahujan identity focus on the shared oppression and exploitation of poor marginalised population. The localities and symbols used in the movie are representation of social and political ideology emerging out as a result of struggles of Dalit-Bahujan community. The film uses mythological references from Hindu scriptures like *Manusmriti*, *Ramayana* and other Brahmanical texts. By referring to Kaala as Raavan and Hari Dada as Ram, Pa Ranjith builds an allegory on the social system prevailing in our society. The mythological references don't stop with Raavan and Rama, there are also some reference of Balit Raja, KaalaKarikalan- a regional god who guard village boundaries. First time a hero from untouchable community dare to confront a powerful upper caste man in a Bollywood film. Kaala who is the hero of the film feel proud on his Dalit identity and assert his identity in public instead of hiding it. Hari Bhai who is follows strict Hinduism present himself as incarnation of Rama who will kill the 'Kaala' who is treated as Raavan and clean the dirty Dharavi.

Jarina who is a Muslim woman and ex-girlfriend of Kaala visits Hari Bhai's home with a good intention of constructing houses for the people of Dharavi with the help of her NGO but Hari Dada shows no interest in her project because of her religious identity. He expects that she would touch his feet and adore Hindu religious morals. But Jarina disappoints him by rejecting his expectations and leaves his home with high frustration. Ranjith through his movie shows that how a Muslim woman is treated by society. There is another incident in the movie where a Dalit woman was slapped by Hari Dada's goons during the protest at *Dhobi-Ghat*. But later the same person was slapped by another female character in the film. This slap by a woman to man is a sign of rejection of male dominance over females. In this way this film also comments on the gender discrimination issues prevailing in our society where woman is treated as property of a man. Before marriage she belongs to her father and after marriage she belongs to her husband, she never treated as an individual who have her separate identity. A woman has to change her identity at every step of her life according to the needs of her family. The film *Article 15* also highlights that caste and gender issues could not be separated in India. This is the fact that these two girls were raped because they belong to lower caste and the criminals think that they could escape punishment easily. A Dalit women's life in India is full of complexities because of her triply marginalised status. Firstly, they have to face subjugation because of their gender status, second because of their caste and thirdly because of their economic status. The Dalit girls in the movie are the easy victims for upper caste criminals because of their caste, gender and poor economic status. This movie shows that caste system is violent by nature and the assertion of identity by Dalits result in the act of violence committed on Dalit community. Indian cinema has hardly focus on the planned violence committed on women from Dalit community. Caste, class and gender are interrelated in

case of Dalit women and their intersectionality is ignored in mainstream films. Whenever a Dalit woman have to face molestation and violence then it becomes that the maintained hegemony of caste status and her triply marginalised status in society is responsible for violation of basic human rights. In the film *Article 15* the two teenage girls were raped and murdered because they had asked for an increment of three rupees in their daily wages. But their employer who belongs to upper caste cannot digest the boldness of Dalit girls. The girls were raped not only because of their gender status rather it is a heinous act of maintaining caste hierarchy. From ancient times the body of Dalit women is treated as an object and they were subjected to violence because of their inferior status. Dalit women are positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class and gender status and they remain uneducated and exploited by upper caste society. Violence and sexual harassment are the tools used by upper caste males to humiliate lower caste women and show them their inferior status. Our society needs proper implementation of constitutional rights for the empowerment of Dalit community.

Ranjith also uses black and white colour to address the caste issues prevailing in society. Kaala who belongs to Dalit community wears black clothes while Hari Dada who is an upper caste leader wears white clothes. Generally black colour is treated as sign of evil and white is treated as sign of purity. But in this film Ranjith defines the black colour with a new definition and there is a scene in the film where Kaala says "Black is the colour of labour". Ranjith gives a spin to the traditional white-is-pure and black-is-evil logic. He shows the black or evil face of the upper caste political leader who wears white clothes. In the film Ram is bad and Raavan is good. Ranjith uses symbols and icons to propel the ideology of Ambedkar and Buddha. It is a story full of

binary opposites like black and white, good and bad, rich and poor, insider and outsider etc.

In the opening scene of the film washermen of Dharavi were protesting against authorities and land Mafia to stop construction at their workplace. Mafia have start housing project in Dharavi with the consent of ruling party politician Hari Dada who want to uproot these poor people on the name of development. They make fake promise of schools, hospitals, parks, playgrounds, community toilets and many other facilities. However, the slum dwellers want all these facilities but they do not accept this offer because of their leader Kaala know the intentions of land mafia. Actually, Kaala understands the full plans of Hari Dada and land mafia who deceive the poor immigrant people on the name of development.

The film also propagates message of Dalit-Muslim Unity and gave the message that Dalits adopted other religion because of discriminatory caste system prevailing in Hindu society. There is a scene in the film where Kaala visits Hari Dada's home after the death of his wife and son to warn him. But Hari Dada does not feel guilty for his crime rather he asked Kaala that he will forgive him if he will touch his accept and accept his superiority. But opposite to his expectations Kaala put his legs in front of Hari Dada and ask same thing to Hari Dada. Kaala leaves the room in anger after warning Hari Dada of serious consequences. First time a Dalit hero show the courage to talk at equal level an upper caste villain, irrespective of his position in caste hierarchy. This film is a part of the cinema of the oppressed, by the oppressed but for the audiences from every section of society so that they could understand the bitter and complex realities of caste system prevailing in India. Films like *Kaala* depict the harsh realities of exploited, oppressed and subjugated masses which are subjected to

atrocities for centuries. Filmmakers like Ranjith, Anubhav Sinha, Nagraj Manjule are creating a new wave in cinema industry by representing caste issues with originality.

In the film *Article 15* Anubhav Sinha criticise the opportunistic and shallow politics of contemporary India. After sixty years of independence, lower castes have now established themselves as powerful voting blocs and every wanted to gain these votes for their party and this leads to opportunistic political practices. Lacking coherent structure and organisation, the Dalit political parties have different goals and agenda in their manifesto. These political parties highlight the further divisions and problems of Dalit community. As Dalit is a political term and include all the marginalised and oppressed masses who are treated as untouchables in Indian society. The alignment of various political parties to caste categories was a particular moment in the mutual adaptation of caste and politics. In India Dalit politics has unfortunately become all about merely more representations. With representation as the only symbol for Dalit-Bahujan assertion, Dalit politics lost the velocity of offering a fresh agenda of leading the opposition with Various political and ideological formations. Dalit politics is caught in the evil game of extending representation by joining hands with different parties.

Both *Article 15* and *Kaala* shows us that how social media can be used as a tool for protest and any movement. It provides a common stage to propel the idea of social transformation. Social media help users to share their opinion about any particular event, protest or movement. Users can upload their recorded clips of any event or protest on media platforms and use it as a tool to criticise corrupt government authorities and unjust social system. Social media shows us the core reality that has been entirely visible to some people and invisible to other group that intentionally do not want to face reality. In film *Article 15* Nishaad uses social media as a tool for

protesting by spreading awareness about caste discrimination prevailing in society. He asks people of his community to stop working for upper caste society so that they can realise the importance of Dalit community in society. In movie *Kaala* also social media was used as a tool for initiating Dalit movement. With the help of social media all like-minded people come together and join hands for same cause. These films show us that how socially and culturally subjugated and economically weaker section of society such as Dalits can use internet resources as a tool to share their experiences and strengthen their struggle for equality and visibility. P.K. Nayar in his work *The Digital Dalit: Subalternity and Cyberspace* argues: “the internet has provided an online space for the expression and negotiation of a subaltern identity.” (n.p.)

These films show us that social media help Dalit movement by providing Dalit community a platform where they can express their bitter experiences of oppression. It can be used as tool to give more visibility to Dalit and oppressed masses. Mainstream media platforms like news channels, cinema industry, printing media are controlled by a handful of powerful people of upper caste society. These traditional media platforms represent biased perspective on Dalit issues and they criminalised the protest or any other social movement initiated by Dalit community. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, You Tube have become a weapon in hands of marginalised community to unite and provides them a stage to communicate with one another. Social media brings a new revolution in Dalit struggles as it provides a space to historically excluded and ignored masses to share their own stories without any biasness. In this way these movies focus on the role of social media platforms as a tool to maintain equality and democracy.

Though the film *Article 15* uncovers several uncomfortable truths about our society but this film represents Dalits as voiceless and meek. Although the film is created with an objective of representing struggle of Dalit communities but failed to move beyond an upper caste perspective. But in movie *Kaala* the hero who belongs to Dalit community itself fight against the system which deprived them of basic human rights. In the movie Dalit characters don't seek help from upper caste community to rescue them from subjugation and exclusion. This film represents the lived experiences of Dalit characters who are often represented as weak and voiceless in mainstream films. In this way the approach and method of representation is different in both of the movies but both of the movies show the grim reality of caste discrimination prevailing in Indian society. *Article 15* represent Dalit characters with a lens of pity while *Kaala* represents Dalit characters as strong and assertive who fight for their own

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Conclusion

Mainstream Hindi films appropriate the conventional idea of division of society on the basis of Hindu caste system. The struggle of Dalit community for equality and abolition of caste system is ignored in Hindi films. The depiction of Dalit issues and their exclusion is largely appropriated by dominant castes, which obstruct the authentic portrayal of grim reality of caste system. Most of the artists like heroes, script writers, producers, directors belong to upper caste elite families and it results in hegemony of upper castes in process of filmmaking. The bitter experiences of Dalit community are ignored in film industry as their sub-human status is treated as rational in upper caste society. Dalit individuals are neglected in society as they are not a part of society. Dalits do not play any part in creation of cultural and historical narratives of mainstream society. Dalits who constitute near about 200 million in India, were neglected in cinema industry. On the other hand, regional cinema like Marathi and Tamil cinema represents Dalit stories with an insider perspective. Bollywood films show themes of marginalisation but it only revolves around small farmers, poverty, corruption, cruel landlords etc.

Movies like *Aarkshan* and *Achhut Kanya* talk about caste discrimination but within the upper caste political discourse. These movies talk about issues related to quotas and upper caste perspective on merits while need of waging a war against the social evil is not examined beyond upper caste perspective. The caste representation in Hindi films is stereotypical as they are represented as dumb and foolish who survive on the benevolence of upper caste society. Dalits are always represented as victims who survive on the leftovers of upper caste community. Most of the times Indian cinema represented the financial problems of Dalits and ignored their social and cultural

exclusion. Mainstream films portray gentle side of upper caste community by plotting an upper caste saviour who fight on the behalf of Dalit community. In the end Dalit community accept these heroes as their saviour and start worshipping him. We can say that cinema does not show the real aspect of Dalits and they represent the traditions, art forms, cultural practices and language of Dalit community as uncivilised and degraded. This work tried to explore the possibility of Dalit cinema as an alternative to mainstream cinema. It also shows that how films transform the language of cinema with the help of their way of representation. It is important to explore the reasons behind the total absence of Dalit community from media resources.

Dalit cinema includes movies emphasising the problems of Dalit community without any appropriation. Rather than focussing on the romantic aspects these movies focus on the issues related to Dalit community. Intellectuals and artists who believe that cinema is an art form refuse to accept categories such as commercial films, art films, political films etc. It seems impossible to establish Dalit cinema as a totally different segment but we can incorporate Dalit cultural elements and their problems in mainstream movies with an insider perspective. Dalit cinema includes the core experiences of Dalit life with an insider perspective. But considering commercial aspect, it seems impossible to establish Dalit Cinema as a separate domain of filmmaking. Some of the recent movie has tried to represent Dalit cultural and social elements without any appropriation. Movies like *Kaala*, *Kabali*, *Article 15*, *Asuran* etc. focus on the life and struggles of Dalit community. These movies compelled us to think about the role of upper castes in discriminating the lower castes. There is a need for including Dalit struggles and cultural elements in cinema so that other caste audience can understand the grim reality of caste atrocities.

In the present context of culture studies and film studies, the language of cinema has widely been discussed accommodating Dalit perspectives. Earlier movies started endorsing the values and culture of village and as everyone knows that caste is deeply rooted in rural areas these movies naturally represent Dalit community with an upper caste perspective. In most of the mainstream Dalits are portrayed as voiceless people who are victims of unjust social system. They are represented as people who need sympathy and goodwill of upper caste society for their survival. But now the scenario is changing and Dalit characters are projected with originality without any appropriation. Now movies start focussing on the basic and core issues of caste discriminatory practices. Most of the films are inclined to represent upper caste system society, giving a limited space to marginalised population. Dominant castes have actively thrust their hegemony on the medium of cultural expression. The social interaction depicted in films reflects the mainstream community's unjust attitude toward the brutal realities of society. Most of the Bollywood celebrate upper caste traditions and culture that is not related with Dalit-Bahujan culture. These films represent an ideal state that do not care about the concerns of poor Dalit population.

Indian screen personalities often talk about street dogs, education for poor students, medical facilities, sanitation, electricity and many other social evils but they rarely talk about Indian caste system. Dalit characters are portrayed either as criminals or victims and most of the times they are played by actors from upper castes. Indian film industry not only portray them as criminals rather they failed to represent Dalit art forms, food habits and culture of Dalit community. Art forms such as Dalit theatre or their folk drama or songs receive no recognition in mainstream film industry. Art forms produced by so called lower castes were not acknowledged by mainstream society. Dalit folk

theatre and oral songs and narratives remain anonymous as they criticise discriminatory Hindu caste system and other social evils prevailing in society. The unique and sonorous beat of clapping and stomping, the banging of a drum, hymns recited humming in a peculiar tone, Dalit speech- characteristic of survival and protest do not fit into Brahmanical music tonality, nor does the colourful pattern of clothes in the articulation of self-identity surrounding the spiritual embrace of community politics. Dalit culture, traditions, art forms, food habits, their rituals, festivals etc. remains marginal to the mainstream.

Dalit filmmakers like Manjule, Ranjith play an important role in establishment of Dalit cinema as their movies raise serious question on caste system prevailing in Indian society. The stories portrayed by these directors are inspired from their personal experiences as a Dalit. They narrate their story through finely constructed narratives and celebrate their culture, locality and art forms. *Kaala* shocks audiences by portraying strong Dalit hero who fight against the Hindutva villain and answer him in his own language. There is a question that why Dalit assertion in mainstream cinema remains deceitful? The reason for escaping strong Dalit characters is the biased nature of Central Board of Film Certification which categorised caste as sensitive issue. Films representing strong Dalit identity and anti-caste struggles against dominant upper castes are rejected by CFBC for highlighting sensitive issues. These films have to undergo the changes suggested by CFBC to get certificate. In this way CFBC maintains its caste biased nature and work as a puppet in hands of powerful people.

The collaborated efforts by Dalit filmmakers and artists can led to production of effective Dalit films that raise consciousness regarding Dalit issues in society. Dalit movies can strengthen Dalit movement by highlighting caste atrocities and exploitation.

The cinematic experience of oppressed communities can initiate social transformation by highlighting inhuman status imposed on Dalit community. Dalit cinema can be used as a tool in fighting the battle against discriminatory caste system. The production of Dalit centred movies is result of continuous efforts of filmmakers, artists and intellectuals belonging to Dalit-Bahujan segment, and not of the mainstream filmmakers who inherited everything from their ancestors and use their creativity and resources for production of films that praise their culture and values. Here, creativity can be used as a tool to unveil the oppressive caste system maintained by powerful people.

Indian cinema is involved in appropriation of caste issues by misdirecting reality into myth. Here the bitter social realities of the caste system are hidden beneath a narrative of discomfoting, self-effacing experiences. Almost every commentary on the Indian film industry talks about diversity, globalisation, the interrelations of culture and values, class dynamics and other issues. What is missing is an open discussion about the internal structure and relationships of caste. But now Indian cinema has started including Dalit issues in films without any appropriation. Though Dalit-centred films have long been in the market, Dalit-directed films are yet to become prominent in Indian cinema.

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