

## 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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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