

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 measures 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 differences 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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