

The Voyage Of The Downtrodden: A Study through the Lens of Indian Cinema *Article 15 And Jai Bhim*

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Abstract

“This Caste System had grown by the practice of the son always following the business of the father.” -- Swami Vivekananda

Caste system in India is a complex social structure that has been deeply rooted in history and culture of the country. ‘Varnashram’ had been practiced from ancient period in Hindu scriptures. Outside of the four varnas – Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, there is another group known as the ‘Dalits’ or ‘Untouchables’ who are subjugated by so called ‘Superior Castes’. Dalits are deprived and downtrodden people in the society. The main objective of this paper is to focus on the traumatic journey and struggle of the Dalits in the two Indian movies- *Article 15 and Jai Bhim*. This paper also tries to explore the critical analysis of the major and minor characters of these two movies. While mainstream Indian film portrays Dalits as caricatures and ignored their struggles, *Article 15 and Jai Bhim*, represent the Downtrodden community and their powerful depictions of the reality of caste oppression. This paper aims to find out resemblance of thematic elements between these two movies. Movie Analysis methodology is used to frame this paper. From the major findings of the study it explores that *Article 15* presents Dalits as victim and *Jai Bhim* presents them as fighters and revolutionaries. Traumatic voyage of the characters like Nishad and Sengenni is another important finding of the study. Through the lens of these two movies the real scenario of Indian caste system and act of resistance against domination is reflected. Further research can be explored based on class, gender, social system of Indian society.

Keywords: Caste Discrimination, Violence, domination, Downtrodden.

Introduction:

The system of the four classes (*varna*) is fundamental to the views the traditional lawgivers held of society. They specified a different set of obligations for each: the task of the Brahman is to study and advise, the Kshatriya to protect, the Vaishya to cultivate and the shudras to serve. History shows, however, that the four-class system was more a social model than a reality. The inclusion of the Shudra into the four-*varna* system bestowed on them a measure of dignity. A move to accommodate still others not so distinguished led to the rather unofficial acceptance of a fifth class, the *pancama* (Sanskrit: “fifth”), which include the “UNTOUCHABLE” classes and others, such as tribal groups, who are outside the system and, consequently, a *varna* (“classless”).

In modern times, traditional Hindus, awakened to inequalities of the caste system yet believing the four-*varna* system to be fundamental to the good of society, have often advocated a return to this clear-cut *varna* system by reforming castes. Individual castes, in turn, have sought to raise their social rank by identifying with a particular *varna* and demanding its privileges of rank and honour. Yet in these modern times where everyone is demanding their right, some section of our society faces the discrimination and domination just being labelled as Untouchables or the casteless(tribals), the caste-based discrimination still persists in many of our society.

Literature is the mirror of society and film is also a reflection of the same.. The suffering and subjugation of the marginalized communities are shown through the films. It encourages the people to raise voice against the conventional prejudices.

Mainstream Indian film has often portrayed Dalits and downtrodden as caricatures and ignored their struggles, but both these films deal with the issues of caste discrimination and its impact on the lives of those fighting it and it mainly impacts the normal people of marginalized communities.

Suraj Yengde observes: ‘**The Dalit is a universal Global conversation; it is a global narrative of suffering**’ (2018,12).

Both the movies challenge the audience to reflect and act on the realities of the caste system. Caste-based discrimination is a highly prevalent and deeply rooted social issue in contemporary India. Despite being constitutionally outlawed, caste-based discrimination is still prevalent in various forms such as untouchability, social exclusion, and denial of certain rights and opportunities. It is a complex and multifaceted problem that affects millions of people across various caste groups, particularly those in the downtrodden castes. Such discrimination leads to social inequality, low self-esteem, limited opportunities, and poor socio-economic status for those who suffer it. While much progress has been made in recent years to address this pervasive issue, there is still much work to be done to eradicate caste-based discrimination in India.

Article 15 of the Indian constitution is a fundamental right that prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. The article provides for the equality of all citizens and ensures that no person is discriminated against on any grounds. It represents a crucial aspect of the democratic rights enshrined in the Indian constitution and has played a vital role in advancing the country's social justice and equity agenda. The provision serves as a powerful tool in promoting inclusivity and diversity, challenging discriminatory practices, and fostering a more egalitarian society. A range of initiatives and policies, including affirmative action programs and anti-discrimination laws, have been developed to uphold the principles enshrined in Article 15 and ensure that all citizens have access to equal opportunities and rights.

Even though Article 15 of the Indian constitution forbids the caste-based discrimination the domination of the downtrodden castes and subjugation still persist in many parts of Indian society, not only in India but even in South Asian countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Like literature, films also portray a mirror of the society which helps the people to know about the harsh reality of our society through the films it can reach to every corner of our society and helps the people to know how the domination of the lower caste still persist in many parts of the world. Through like films *Article 15* and *Jai Bhim* it encourages people to not treat people like animals and it also encourages the lower caste people to fight for their legal rights which has been given to them by the constitution of our India.

Article 15, a 2019 film, examines the brutal killing of two Dalit girls (Shanu and Mamtha) in rural Uttar Pradesh and exposes the entrenched caste prejudice and systemic corruption that make it challenging for marginalized communities to access justice.

Similarly, *Jai Bhim*, film released in 2021, follows the story of a human rights lawyer who fights to overturn the social injustice of a deep-rooted caste system.

Both films highlight the deeply ingrained beliefs and practices that sustain caste-based discrimination in contemporary India. By using powerful storytelling, realistic characters, and stark imagery, these films have succeeded in bringing these societal issues to the forefront and challenging the mainstream narrative around caste-based discrimination. They have sparked important conversations and debates, provoking audiences to reflect deeply and advocate for social change. By highlighting the lived experiences of historically marginalized communities, movies like *Article 15* and *Jai Bhim* have pushed for greater empathy, awareness, and solidarity among diverse segments of Indian society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- I. To find out how the Downtrodden people of the Indian society has been dominated by the higher class through the lens of the two films.
- II. To analyze the struggles and traumatic journey of the Dalit characters throughout the two films.
- III. To explore act of resistance against domination through proper and legal rights.
- IV. To find out the similar thematic elements between the two films.

SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This research aims to bring attention to the suffering, problems, and injustice that exists towards the downtrodden community of the Indian society .To make younger generations aware of the harsh reality of our society this research

focuses on the legal equal rights for every one which is mentioned in our Indian Constitution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Raj, Kumar, c (2022) in “Jai Bhim protecting rights and providing hope in India’s democracy” Kumar finds that jai Bhim is extra ordinary film that grips the society attention, shakes the human conscience and shackles the faith and hope that we have in democracy, Jai Bhim shows the mirror of our society, it also helps us to work towards seeking social and institutional transformation for protecting the human right of the most vulnerable.
- Singh, Prem, Kumar (2011) in his paper ‘The Representation of the Dalit Body in Popular Hindi Cinema’ explored the subject of Dalit oppression in Hindi cinema. He looks at selected Hindi movies over a period of half-a decade and critiques the cultural prejudices attached to the Dalit body like ‘Acchut Kanya’ (1936), ‘Sujata’ (1959), ‘Lajja’ (2001), ‘Swades’ (2004) and ‘Lagaan’ (2001). The melodramatic representation of ‘lower’ class has obstructed the thoughtful representation of Dalit characters. He says that the oppression of Dalits is not only material but cultural. He says that the treatment of the Dalit body has kept on changing in accordance with the socio-political developments, settings and discourses around Dalit identity.
- Mandade, Pramod, (2018) argues in his paper ‘Newton: a ‘New Dalit hero’ or a new stereotype of Dalit?’ that a single story creates stereotypes. It robs of people’s dignity. He explains his points through the movie ‘Newton’ where social, political and economic conditions of our society do not allow the Dalits to exercise power and authority freely. He explains the new Dalit hero in Bollywood. He talks about the presence of caste in urban spaces where the ‘unknowingness’ helps everyone to believe that it doesn’t exist.
- Patel, Rakesh, (2018) through his paper ‘Unconventional Bollywood: Constructing Cinema of Caste Pride’ explains how caste has become a medium to assert identity in Tamil films however, in Hindi cinema Dalit characters are continued to be sidelined. They are viewed with a lens of pity because they are seen as having less value. He says that South Indian films have started to show stories where voices from below are fighting against the system which is based on discrimination, atrocities and deprivation. These characters don’t need any upper caste to liberate them from thousand years of miseries and discrimination. He argues that

Hindi cinema portrays caste issue in an idealistic form and depends on alteration in mind-set to erase caste-hatred. He also points that Bollywood is gradually moving towards a cinema of 'lived experiences.' It is necessary to represent these 'lived experiences' which will provide a perspective of those who are often muted in the mainstream Hindi cinema.

- Jodhka Surinder, (2012) in his book 'Caste' studies caste covering economic, political and cultural aspects in contemporary rural and urban India. He breaks new grounds by exploring caste in urban spaces. He also admits that due to various sectarian political influences and gains caste system continue to live in the country.
- Bhagat Manoj (2023) in "A change maker movie: jai Bhim" highlights that the theme of Jai Bhim is justice, or more precisely, injustice. It instructs us on the importance of the law and how to use it to build a more just society Jai Bhim longs for a more just society in which everyone is entitled to basic rights. The movie is based on a real-life incident that took place in India in 1995. Sengenni, Rajakannu's wife, filed the Habeas Corpus, which was noteworthy in the history of the Chennai High Court.
- Gupta, Khushi (2020) in "Stereotypes in Bollywood Cinema": Does Article 15 Reinforce the Dalit Narrative? Says that in 'Article 15', released in 2019 is the first mainstream Bollywood film to focus on caste-based atrocities. It depicts several uncomfortable truths about our society and has been successful in sparking conversation about caste disparities that are often unnoticed in our daily life. This article examines whether 'Article 15,' a film which claims to highlight caste realities, nevertheless perpetuates existing stereotypes.
- Yengde, Suraj (2019) a Dalit scholar has analyzed the relation between caste and caste narratives that have led to blatant caste sensibilities in his paper 'Dalit Cinema' as well in his book 'Caste Matters'. He further looked at how social interactions in the films reflect the mainstream communities' attitudes towards issues debated in the society. Continuous portrayal of dominant Hindu upper castes has alienated majority of the country's population. His arguments explain that representation of Dalits to be limited only as victims. As a Dalit himself, he opens up about what it actually means to be a 'Dalit'. He talks about 'Dalit

being', 'Dalit love', 'Dalit capitalism' but most importantly talks about how upper castes continue to preserve and benefit from this system of hierarchy but rarely acknowledge it.

- Chauhan, Vishal (2019) in his research paper 'From Sujata to Kachra: Decoding Dalit representation in popular Hindi cinema' argues that Dalits have been stereotypically and retrogressively represented in line with dominant culture. Popular Hindi cinema which portrays them as meek, docile, shabby and under-confident has naturalized the stereotype in line with Hindu caste sensibilities. However, the continuous struggle of Dalits against caste oppression is usually ignored in cinematic narratives. He suggested that such representations have linkages with cultural politics and power discourses.

RESEARCH GAP

Movie analysis and movie reviews are available in these two films but, there is no single research is found that has done to find out the similar elements in *Article 15* and *Jai Bhim*.

METHODOLOGY:

Ideological, Realistic and Contextual approaches are used to analyze these two movies. This is a qualitative study.

RESEMBLANCE OF THE TWO FILMS:

BOTH TITLES ARE RELATED TO THE CONSTITUTION OF INDIA-

Article 15 of the Indian constitution forbids discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste or place of birth. It applies article 14's general principle of equality in specific situations by forbidding classification made in protected grounds.

As many would know, *Jai Bhim* is a clarion call made famous by Ambedkar, one of the architects of the Indian Constitution and a leader of the Dalits. Therefore, it is no surprise that the film *Jai Bhim* focuses on the trials and tribulations of a couple from the Adivasi Irular community. *Jai* means "Long Live", and *Bhim* refers to Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. So, it's "long live Ambedkar."

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar drafted the Indian constitution in the 1940s, and he spent his life advocating for an independent India Ambedkar comes from a community labelled 'Untouchable'.

BASED ON TRUE STORY-

The movie *Article 15* is based on 'BADAUN RAPE CASE' On 27 May 2014, a gang rape and murder of two teenage girls was reported in the Katra village of Badaun district (also spelled as Badayun), UttarPradesh, India.

According to a post mortem report, it was reported that the girls had been raped and died from strangulation due to being hanged while still alive.

Jai Bhim takes its inspiration from a true story which was happened in 1995 in India, then this event produced the habeas corpus, filled by Rajakannu's wife sengenni and it was momentous in Chennai high court history.

ACT OF RESISTENCE

Article 15 is a movie that depicts the struggle against the caste-based discrimination prevalent in India. The movie showcases how the protagonist, Ayan Ranjan, a young IPS officer from Delhi, investigates the disappearance of three Dalit girls in a small village in Uttar Pradesh. The film highlights the gruesome reality of the caste system in India, where the powerful upper castes suppress and oppress the lower castes, treating them as lowly beings.

The act of resistance against such domination is portrayed in the film through Ayan's character. He champions the cause of justice for the Dalit girls and interrogates the corrupted police officers and upper-caste members. He remains committed to his duty to fight against the injustice and oppression faced by the marginalized communities. Ayan's beliefs in forming a society that functions on principles of equality, justice, and human rights, ultimately lead him to resist against the existing caste system.

Similarly, the movie *Jai Bhim* (2021) portrays the story of the struggle of the oppressed community against caste-based discrimination. Chandru fights against this discrimination by educating himself and others around him about their rights.

The act of resistance against domination is portrayed in the film through Chandru, Perumalsami and Sengenni character. He uses the law to challenge the existing caste-based system and fights for justice and equality. The movie highlights how Chandru determination and resilience inspire the oppressed communities to stand up against the caste-based discrimination and demand their rights.

both movies showcase the systemic discrimination and oppression faced by marginalized communities in India and their resistance against domination through their heroic characters. The movies inspire the need to create a more equitable society where every individual is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their caste, gender, or religion.

LEGAL ACTION INSTEAD OF VIOLENCE-

Article 15 and *Jai Bhim* are two bollywood films that revolve around social issues and the legal action instead of violence to bring about change in society. Both these films showcase how powerful law can be when it is used to fight against social injustices and inequalities.,This section discusses how the use of law has been depicted in both movies instead of violence.

Article 15 is a movie that highlights the caste system in India and how it affects the lives of people living in rural areas. The movie is set in a small town in Uttar Pradesh, where Ayan Ranjana,IPS officer, is posted. Ayan is determined to bring about change in the system and fight against the corruption that is prevalent in the town.

The use of law to fight against the injustices in society is highlighted in the film as Ayan Ranjan uses his power as an IPS officer to enforce the law and bring the culprits to justice. Ayan Ranjan is shown to be a dedicated officer who is not afraid to face any challenges that come his way.

One of the most significant scenes in the movie is when Ayan interrupts a political rally to talk about the issue of caste discrimination. He uses his power to educate the people about the constitutional provisions of article 15 which prohibit evils of the caste system and he also teaches people why it needs to be eradicated. This scene shows how law can be used as a tool to bring about change in society without resorting to violence.

Similarly, in *Jai Bhim*, the lawyer protagonist Chandru (played by Suriya) uses his knowledge of the law to fight for his clients, who are Dalits or scheduled caste tribals discriminated against by

the upper-caste society. He believes in non-violence and uses his legal expertise to challenge social norms, practices, and laws that perpetuate caste-based discrimination.

The above dialogue was said by justice Chandru that he doesn't believe in luck but rather he believes in truth, and the truth is that he believes in law of our country, *Jai Bhim* film revolves around the use of law instead of violence to bring about change in society.

Here justice Chandru states that, seven or seven thousand it doesn't matter to fight for the justice everyone has right which has been given to us by our constitution and the court has the law to give justice to this innocent people from this we can see how much justice Chandru believes in the law of our country.

In both movie *Article 15* and *Jai Bhim*, the use of law has been emphasized over violence.

Both movies highlight the power of law and how it can be used to bring about change instead of violence. They showcase how a fair and efficient legal system can uphold justice and provide for the weak and marginalized sections of society.

Both *Article 15* and *Jai Bhim* showcase the power of law and how it can be used to bring about change in society instead of resorting to violence. Both movies highlight the importance of education and awareness in fighting against social injustices and inequalities. These movies serve as a reminder that change can be brought about in society if we use the power of law and education to fight against discrimination and promote equality.

CASTE BASED DISCRIMIATION-

Article 15 is a crime thriller film that tells the story of a police officer who investigates the disappearance of three girls from a local village in Uttar Pradesh. While investigating the case, he uncovers a corrupt and brutal system of caste-based discrimination and violence that is prevalent in rural India. Two Dalit girl shanu and Mamtha were raped and hanged to a tree just because this girl asked for a price hike of three Rs, this scene shows how caste based is portrayed in the film. The film highlights the caste-based discrimination faced by Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables") in India and exposes the brutal reality of the caste system.

Jai Bhim showcases the harsh reality about caste discrimination. The very first scene draws you into caste injustices – of then and now. Prisoners are divided into two: ‘dominant’ castes, who are set free, and the ‘oppressed’ castes, who are easily implicated in false cases. Right from the beginning, we learn about the deeply embedded bias within institutions, and how it destroys the possibility of justice. The dominant castes are traditionally affluent and with that historic advantage, can oppress and exploit the oppressed castes. In *Jai Bhim* Rajakannu was arrested for stealing case in reality he has not stolen anything, just because he belongs to lower caste he was suspected and later in police custody Rajakannu dies. even though the police inspector had already taken the bribe from the real thief, the police kept on beating and torturing Rajakannu until death he was beaten to death just because he didn’t accept the false case.

IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS IN THE CHARCTERS OF THE TWO FILM–

When Rajakannu was suffering the pains caused by the policemen, his brother suggested that he tell a lie and admit the crime to be free after a while. Perhaps Rajakannu suggests that this is the easiest solution, but not the right one. And Rajakannu reminds his brother that the wounds will heal, but the stamp as thieves will remain forever.

Likewise, when the police offer Sengenni money in exchange for silence, she proudly refuses, risking everything, in the name of her husband and justice.,but also, to provide a genuine model role to her daughters. Chandru awakens souls during the movie, and we hope even after. At the same time, ethics is what makes our heart beating, leaves our mind dreaming and fill our eyes with hopes.

Article 15 movie highlights the importance of ethics in the characters and society as a whole. The movie portrays the harsh reality of the Indian caste system, where individuals belonging to a particular caste, particularly the marginalized communities face discrimination, brutality, and injustice.

The protagonist, Ayan Ranjan, is an idealistic police officer who believes in justice and fairness. He faces numerous obstacles, opposition, and criticism for wanting to bring justice to three missing girls who belong to the lower caste. The movie highlights not only social inequality and corruption but also the conflicts present in our society.

Throughout the movie, the characters struggle to do what is ethically correct while facing obstacles in every step. Ethics plays a vital role in the decision-making process of the characters, particularly Ayan, who faces a moral dilemma throughout the film whether to register the case or to shut it but he chooses to register the case he goes on to choose what is ethically correct. The movie highlights how unethical behavior and prejudice contribute to the suffering and injustice faced by individuals belonging to lower castes.

Article 15 movie highlights the importance of ethics and moral values in society, particularly in the Indian caste system. The characters' ethical choices shed light on the harsh reality of the inequalities and injustices that exist in our society

Based on my objective both the films were successful in portraying how the downtrodden or marginalized communities of Indian society has been affected by the caste-based discrimination, and how the superior caste people have been dominating the downtrodden communities. In both the films it has been reflected how higher caste people has been dominating the deprived whether be it the two Dalit girls who were raped and hanged to a tree or be it the Rajakannu who were tortured and was beaten to death, all this ill-treatment just because they were from the downtrodden communities.

Both films have highlighted how the downtrodden communities of Indian society can fight for the right of their own which has been given to us by our constitution, both films make has shown an act of resistance against domination through the characters of the two films .it also inspires and gives hopes to the marginalized communities to fight for their rights. Both article 15 and Jai Bhim may have become the most socially-relevant films of recent times because of how it strips away the mask of a so-called equal and just society by mirroring the deep-rooted caste system that thrives underneath. Although the movie brings up the harsh realities of caste dynamics present in our society, what it terribly couldn't do is to vouch for who I think is the protagonist, Nishad and sengenni, who is not 'mainstream oriented', and who is not an upper caste saviour. Nishad and sengenni, Yet the one who stands close to the reality of caste politics, who knows the taste of being the 'other', who I feel should be the real heroes of the films.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTION:

- To comprehensively address the intricate issues raised in these films, further research should explore the intersections of caste, gender, and region within the context of marginalized communities in India.
- A deeper understanding of the historical, cultural, and political dimensions surrounding caste-based discrimination is crucial to devising effective strategies for a more inclusive society.
- Additionally, research could focus on evaluating the impact of policies and initiatives aimed at promoting social justice and equality in India.
- By analyzing the enforcement and implementation of laws like Article 15, researchers can assess their effectiveness, identify gaps, and propose necessary improvements to ensure equitable outcomes for all.
- Furthermore, examining the portrayal and representation of Dalits and other marginalized communities in popular media, including movies and television, can provide valuable insights into the influence of media on perpetuating or challenging caste-based discrimination.
- By analyzing the narratives and responses to films like "Article 15" and "Jai Bhim," researchers can assess the role of media in shaping public opinion, promoting social awareness, and fostering transformational change.

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