

## **A CRITICAL STUDY ABOUT THE INDIAN MEDIA AND CASTE: POLITICS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND BEYOND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since its inception, India's media sector has been dominated by dominating castes. Such hegemony has had a significant impact on our daily lives and how we perceive the world. This study claims that Indian media has played a catalytic role in inflicting epistemic violence on underprivileged castes by helping dominant discourses dominate and shaping public beliefs and culture. Following a discussion of journalism, the paper looks at cinema and television as both a weapon for upholding the status quo and a medium for resistance and assertion. An examination of feminist media discourse indicates a linear and rather restrictive strategy that excludes Dalit women's agency from media depiction. Finally, it considers the Internet's influence on new Ambedkarite voices who are regaining their worldview while developing a liberatory framework.

**KEYWORDS: Media, Caste, Gender, News, Bollywood, Ambedkarite, Journalism, Resistance.**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The media, dubbed the "fourth pillar of democracy," is undeniably important in the pursuit of truth and serving as a mirror for a society or a country. The beginnings of Indian media may be traced all the way back to 1780, when the print media was established. The first newspaper, 'The Bengal Gazette,' was produced by James Augustus Hicky in this year. It's no surprise that the sector has undergone several modifications and reached numerous milestones over the years. However, even after two centuries, one thing has remained lacking, or rather suppressed, in what is referred to as the "mainstream" media: the Dalit's voice.

Dr. Ambedkar saw the value of the media and the necessity for Dalit journalism, therefore he founded the Marathi monthly 'Mooknayak' in 1920. Later, as his journalism and politics

progressed toward achieving 'mind liberation,' it manifested itself in the monthly renamed 'Prabdhā Bharat' in 1954. He was concerned about the state of the popular media at the time, and he did not hesitate to express his displeasure with the media's degrading role. Dr. Ambedkar (2014a) made a stinging assessment of Indian journalism in his renowned address delivered on the 101st birth anniversary of Mahadev Govind Ranade in 1943:

Journalism was previously a profession in India. It has now evolved into a business. It serves no more moral purpose than the production of soap. It does not see itself as the public's responsible adviser. Journalism in India does not regard it as its first or foremost duty to provide objective news, to present a particular view of public policy that it believes is in the best interests of the community, and to correct and chastise without fear all those, no matter how high, who have chosen a wrong or barren path. Accepting a hero and worshipping him has become its primary responsibility. Under it, news gives way to sensation, reasoned opinion to irrational passion, and appeals to responsible people's intellect give way to irresponsible people's emotions... Never before has the national interest been sacrificed so indiscriminately in the name of hero worship. Never before has hero worship been so blind as it is now in India. I'm happy to report that there are honourable exceptions. They are, however, insufficiently numerous, and their voices are never heard. (Ambedkar, 2014a, p. 227).

Surprisingly, what Dr. Ambedkar mentioned in the above-quoted talk is still valid today. This so-called foundation of democracy is well-known for its ability to alter reality, promote state interests, spread propaganda, and propagate oppressive ideologies. To analyse this 'other' side of media, it is necessary to look into all parts of it, from its composition and content to how it impacts public perceptions. In this research, I'll look at the numerous aspects of media that revolve around a primary topic that, explicitly or covertly, plays a significant part in this sector – caste. The purpose of this article is to examine how caste plays a role in the media, with a particular focus on journalism, the entertainment and advertising industries, and social media. In the sections that follow, I'll look at representation, the sort of content created, and how different groups are portrayed, as well as the role it plays in moulding public perceptions and culture.

## **ELEPHANTINTHEROOM:CASTEINSIDETHENEWSROOMS**

It has been highlighted that media organisations that publish stories and information about discriminatory practises, violence, and atrocities sometimes keep institutional brutality and historical injustices a secret within their own offices. Oxfam and NewsLaundry issued a report in 2019 that revealed some (not so) startling statistics about casteism in the media sector. The report, titled *Who Tells Our Stories Matters: Representation of Marginalized Caste Groups in Indian Newsrooms*, found that none of the 121 leadership positions in the newsroom – including editor-in-chief, managing editor, executive editor, bureau chief, input/output editor – were held by a person from a Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), or other backward caste groups – across newspapers, TV news channels, news websites, and magazines. The following are some of the report's other highlights:

- Three out of every four main discussion hosts were from the upper classes. There wasn't a single member of the Dalit, Adivasi (indigenous), or OBC community among them.
- The news stations drew a majority of their panellists from the higher castes for over 70% of their main debate programmes.
- Only 10 of the 972 stories on the cover pages of the 12 publications analysed dealt with caste-related concerns.

Another study research highlighted the significant hurdles that journalists from the SC, ST, and OBC populations experience in the English language media (Harad, 2020). It discussed the experiences of othering, isolation, and prejudice faced by personnel from marginalised communities in newsrooms where the 'upper' castes make up the bulk of the workforce. It highlighted the caste connection, which is an important aspect of their social capital that aids the so-called upper castes in attaining positions and maintaining caste-exclusive media outlets. Furthermore, the small number of journalists from marginalised communities makes it harder to organise them and to combat the discrimination and cultural bias that they encounter in these places (Ibid). The historical oppression of the 'lower' castes by the 'higher castes' can be linked to the excessive overrepresentation of the 'upper' castes in the media houses. While open caste prejudice still exists in India, there are additional ways in which caste presents itself in these areas that are not recognised. The point is that this exclusion does not begin at the moment of employment in the media houses; rather, it is a 3000-year-old historical burden that the excluded have carried since

their birth! In 2017, an Al Jazeera storey highlighted the Brahminical aspect of media colleges, where students from the Brahmin-savarna community outweigh those from the Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi communities. While reserved seats are frequently unfilled, students who do gain admission to universities such as ACJ (Asian College of Journalism) encounter considerable isolation and even hostility toward any 'affirmative action,' compelling them to drop out or keep their identities secret to avoid unfavourable consequences (Mondal, 2017).

The Indian constitution ensures that the SC, ST, and OBC populations are represented in government institutions in proportion to their population size. However, because media organisations are privately owned, they are not forced to follow the reservation policy, and they have not considered voluntarily expanding affirmative action to assure the inclusion of persons from underrepresented groups. While the reservation policy is not in place, job openings are rarely advertised in the public domain (Ibid). Furthermore, many of these privately owned media companies are controlled by extended families (Anand, 2005). As a result, connections and networks are used to fill many of the roles. The so-called upper castes end up benefiting from the social and cultural wealth that has been passed down down the years. It is extremely difficult for Dalits, Bahujans, or Adivasis to get access to these networks, which are by their very nature exclusive. As a result, oppressed people's tales are conveyed by oppressors, who in turn reproduce the very societal institutions they claim to oppose.

## **CONTENT ON CASTE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

Because human people are a part of the society they view and interact with, their position in the society's structures influences how they see reality and, more significantly, how they arrive at knowledge. As mentioned in the preceding section, a huge majority of positions in the media houses are held by social groups who are higher in the caste hierarchy than the oppressed populace. The oppressor castes, who are a numerical minority, end up writing and reporting about the oppressed community. As a result, as many anti-caste activists have pointed out, the tales created by the media reflect a casteist attitude in some way.

To begin with, media coverage of caste concerns is limited or non-existent. In many cases, the topic of caste is purposefully hidden in news stories. Only 10 of the 972 items on the cover pages of the 12 magazines studied addressed caste-related concerns, according to the

Oxfam and Newslaundry poll. While no media outlet was interested in addressing caste-based crimes a decade ago due to a lack of viewership, the amount of reporting on the subject has increased in recent years. The growth of so-called "alternative" media channels run by editors from marginalised areas is credited with this shift in direction (Mondal, 2017). These news organisations are reporting from the ground up and have been successful in attracting readers and viewers to the stories and experiences they provide. Even while caste atrocities and other cases are being covered more than they were a decade ago, the media organisations still have a long way to go in terms of doing honest and relevant journalism. The kind of information created by the 'mainstream' media is a crucial second point to make here. Even when journalists cover topics about caste and the media coverage of crimes, it has been discovered that their prejudices nearly always show through in their work. For example, while journalists travel to villages to report on the details of caste atrocities, all of their narratives remain one-sided, emphasising oppression and oppressed while completely ignoring the oppressor. Dalits, whose faces are frequently not even blurred, are depicted as though they were mere victims of 'victim porn.' Covering caste is equated with writing only about Dalits, usually located in rural areas - their experiences, their socioeconomic position, atrocities such as murders, rapes, etc., according to S. Anand (2005). Because of these irresponsible skewed narratives, the oppressors, the Brahmin-Dwijal communities, have been shielded from examination, and their caste training and pride are rarely questioned.

The recent Hathras incident, in which a Dalit woman was raped and murdered by Thakur (upper caste) men of Hathras hamlet in Uttar Pradesh, received a great deal of public attention. With journalists interviewing Ambedkarite leaders and feminists like KirubaMunusamy, Riya Singh, DivyaMalhari, and others, their strong voices are being heard on news channels and webinars—which is a welcome change, though one must keep in mind that caste atrocities continue to be grossly underreported. Furthermore, despite the numerous incidents of atrocities against the Dalit community, the media has rarely attempted to visit the settlements of the so-called upper castes and study how caste plays a part in their world, as well as probe the mind that commits such horrible acts. For example, in the aforementioned Hathras atrocity, the Thakur caste, which is a powerful caste in northern Uttar Pradesh and has a history of inflicting atrocities on Dalits, received less media attention. This has been true of nearly all media coverage of caste-based atrocities. This approach of viewing caste concerns solely as 'Dalit issues' is harmful to the anti-caste

movement because the image of the 'Dalit' as victim continues to be reinforced, while oppressor castes and their caste pride remain unquestioned. Dr. Ambedkar (2014b, p. 3) summed up this mindset among the upper castes when dealing with caste issues as follows:

It is common to hear all individuals who are moved by the Untouchables' plight unburden themselves by exclaiming, "We must do something for the Untouchables!" 'Let us do something to modify the Touchable Hindu,' says almost no one who is concerned about the matter. The Untouchables are always presumed to be the thing to be regained.

Another equally, if not more, negative consequence of such journalism is that it has contributed to the reduction of caste to a purely rural issue. Journalists visit countryside to cover atrocities in the pretext of exposing caste issues, yet they fail to see Brahminical predominance in urban areas. This is highlighted in S. Anand's (2005) assessment of P. Sainath's reporting. Sainath is a well-known Brahmin journalist who serves as an inspiration to many aspiring journalists. For his piece *A Dalit Goes to Court*, he received the Amnesty International Award in 2000. Sainath's style of "rural reporting" and "developmental journalism" does mention the occasional brahmin block development officer, but it precludes discussing the preponderance of brahmins and other savarnas (similar-ranked castes) in, say, Jawaharlal Nehru University's (JNU) history or economics department, or on the editorial staff of *The Hindu*, *The Hindustan Times*, or *The Times of India*, according to Anand (2005). When historian Romila Thapar or economist Prabhat Patnaik cannot find a single 'competent' Dalit or Adivasi candidate to fill the constitutionally mandated 22.5 percent quota in their respective departments, such journalism ignores caste discrimination and instead focuses on caste discrimination in rural panchayats, where Dalits are not allowed to run for democratically elected posts or are not allowed to function freely even if elected.

Media people's activities, such as doing stories on Dalit and Adivasi bodies, receiving accolades, and adoring them, show to their proclivity to exploit marginalised people's experiences. When you consider the lack of representation and even animosity toward journalists from underrepresented communities, this becomes even more clear. It illustrates how caste plays a role in the media and academia, where the dominant always produces knowledge for the dominated, and never the other way around. The dominated are stripped of their epistemic capacities and converted into bodies/objects with no thinking capacity for the dominant to reflect on in this arrangement (Guru, 2002).

The culture of knowledge and assertion of Ambedkarites, like the lack of coverage of "caste concerns" in the oppressor's society, is something that the mainstream media ignores. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's birth day, known as Ambedkar Jayanti, and his death anniversary, known as Mahaparinirvana Divas, are commemorated throughout India and the diaspora. Hundreds of thousands of people congregate at Chaityabhoomi<sup>2</sup> in Mumbai on these days to buy books, particularly powerful Dalit literature, costing millions of rupees. Similarly, every year on Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Divas<sup>3</sup>, which commemorates Dr. Ambedkar's groundbreaking act in the liberation of Dalits — his conversion to Buddhism — By adopting Buddha Dhamma Sangha, many Dalits are able to break away from the Brahminical framework. Hundreds of thousands of Ambedkarite Buddhists congregate at Deekshabhoomi<sup>4</sup> every year on this day. However, the mainstream media, which is dominated by so-called upper caste Hindus, continues to shun these rallies. The upper-caste Hindus' cultural hegemony in the industry translates to media writing, talking, and doing programmes on religious festivals such as KarvaChauth, Lohri, Dhana Laxmi, and others, but complete silence around the birth anniversary of Ambedkar and saints such as Valmiki or Ravidas, who were from oppressed communities (Kumar, 2005). The marginalisation and marginalisation of marginalised and minority groups in mainstream media adds to the upper-caste Hindu hegemony. The following parts will go over this topic in further depth.

Every year on January 1, Dalits commemorate the battle of Bhima Koregaon, in which 500 Mahar (ex-untouchable caste) warriors under the British Army defeated the Peshwa Army of 30,000 men. This conflict is remembered as a historical event in which the oppressed triumphed over their oppressors. These celebrations were disrupted in 2018, which was followed by rioting and the imprisonment of Dalit activists for 'anti-nationalist' acts. The bias of the mainstream media at the time became clear when it failed to cover the initial jubilation and instead began covering only after Dalits revolted against the caste supremacists' violence (Mhaskar, 2018). The attack by caste supremacists on the peaceful celebration, as well as the issue of unjust arrests of Dalit activists, have not been mentioned on television or in publications. Another crucial point is why isn't a proud event for Dalit groups recognised and displayed as part of 'Indian History'?



## POP CULTURE AND THE POLITICS OF PORTRAYAL IN FILM AND TELEVISION

The widespread belief is that "films are a reflection of society," yet the significance of films and television in the construction of social reality is less well known. For starters, it's critical to establish that folks who create films, television shows, write stories, bring characters to life, and so on are not isolated from society. The producers themselves have a specific place in society, see the world through that lens, and, of course, have prejudices that are reflected in the content they generate. As a result, it would be foolish to suppose that films and television shows provide us with a 'objective' representation of reality when what they actually represent is the creator's world view! What's more crucial to comprehend is the role of the media in popularising ideas and bolstering discourses that benefit those in positions of power in society. While Brahmin-Dwija castes have long dominated the entertainment sector, their films and television shows, particularly Hindi daily soap operas, have been exploited for decades to promote Brahminical patriarchal culture. As a result, the Hindu upper castes have cultural hegemony over the mainstream media. Their society, rituals, and way of life appear to represent the epitome of 'Indianness,' while also invoking a utopia for the Dalit-Bahujan masses (Yengde, 2018). As a result, a Hindu upper-caste protagonist is depicted as a 'hero'/'savior,' Dalits and Adivasis as spectators or victims; Muslims as 'gangsters,' and so on. In the popular mind, the term 'Bhartiya Naari' (The Indian woman) conjures up a picture of a Hindu higher caste woman wearing sindoor (vermilion), bindi, jewellery, and a zari sari. Not only has Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi culture been marginalised, but it has also been degraded — mostly through praising the Hindu savarna culture, which the Dalit Bahujan are supposed to aspire to, and never the other way around.

This phenomena can also be explained in terms of the post-structural perspective of culture as the meanings that its people create and replicate (Belsey, 2002). Although, in India, the formation of control over words for the purpose of gaining power dates back over 3000 years! Brahmins built their supremacy in society by monopolising the 'shabd shakti' (power of words), knowing that those who control words - and thus their meanings - control the world, as Mani (2014) reminds out. Brahmins created a great body of literature in order to institutionalise the most heinous system of discrimination through the manipulation of meanings. Many sociological research have demonstrated how language shapes power



systems in our daily lives (Ibid, pp. 184-194). Today, the media plays a critical role in repeating the meanings of words and symbols that bring with them concepts of superiority and inferiority. It also contributes significantly to the legitimization and normalisation of Brahminical knowledge. Shri Krishna Janma (1918), one of the earliest films produced in the history of Indian cinema, contains an explicit invocation of varnashramadharma. A section of this film, directed by D.G. Phalke (after whom the highest cinema prize, the Dadasaheb Phalke Award) displays frames of 'Brahmin devotees,' 'Kshatriya devotees,' 'Vaishya devotees,' and 'Shudra devotees' offering prayers to the Hindu god Krishna.

The question of caste has been largely hidden in the history of Indian cinema behind the categories of poor / or 'common man'/ or the hard toiling Indian – for example, *Awara* (1951), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Hum Hindustani* (1960), followed by films from the 1970s – *Gopi* (1970), *Zanjeer* (1973), *Roti Kapada Aur Makaan* (1974), *Deewar* (1975), *Parvarish* (1977), *Khoun* (Yengde, 2018). As a result, rather than opposing the institution of caste, the film industry chose to obscure the issue of caste, effectively normalising it. It has mostly served the status quo in this way. While establishing the context for the angry young guy of the 1970s, Maitreya (2020) highlighted that it was an on-screen expression of the Dalit Panthers' real-life rage. Nonetheless, it was depicted through savarna figures, titillating the masses' imaginations and creating a national hero while erasing the reality behind the rage. That is not to say that Bollywood has never attempted to critically deal with the issue of caste. *Sujata* (1959), *Ankur* (1974), *Diksha* (1991), *Bandit Queen* (1994), and, most recently, *Article 15* (2019) have attempted to present alternative caste histories and communicate a societal message to audiences. However, many of these films fail to transcend beyond a comfortable caste view / savarna lens - which either victimises or romanticises the underprivileged community rather than honestly and ethically grappling with the issue at hand.

Without considering the firmly rising anti-caste debate in the realm of movies, this discussion will be incomplete and worthless. As a result, it's crucial to talk about filmmakers like Nagraj Manjule, Neeraj Ghaiwan, and Pa Ranjith. Manjule's *Fandry* (2013) and *Sairat* (2016), as well as Ghaiwan's *Masaan* (2015), not only depicted the harsh social realities on the big screen, but did so from the oppressed's point of view. Because the stories are based on the storyteller's personal life experiences, they strike a chord with the Dalit community, who respond with, "We've been there" (Yengde, 2018). Pa Ranjith's

Kaala (2018), on the other hand, directly questions the existing quo promoted by a casteist media for a long time – that of victim and saviour. The Discreet Charm of the Savarnas (2020), produced by Ranjith's production firm, Neelam productions, is another YouTube short film worth mentioning. The most important aspect of Ranjith's content is that it challenges the same gaze that has mistreated Dalits in cinema for decades. They present a Dalit worldview, with characters who are forceful but also possessing ownership of their subjectivity. Such films are a step toward abandoning the imposed Brahminical construction of reality, as we have seen the influence of media in social and cultural revolution. Bollywood's mainstream, on the other hand, has a long way to go.

### **CASTE, GENDER, AND THE MEDIA LENS**

Even if 'caste' as a topic has not been extremely overt or 'out in the open' in TV shows and mainstream films, this does not negate the fact that caste society has been reinforced through these mediums. The media sector, as mentioned in the preceding section, plays a critical role in maintaining Brahminical-patriarchal cultural ideals and customs. First and foremost, it is critical to emphasise that the systems of caste and patriarchy are not mutually exclusive. Brahminical patriarchy is not a patriarchy run by or for Brahmins, but it does "include in its basic idea that all persons are given a certain position of privilege and deprivation, and the resulting violence and discrimination against the lower caste groups." (Arya, pp. 217-228, 2020). When sustaining caste borders necessitates control over a woman's body, caste and gender issues become inextricably linked. When Dalit males are emasculated in caste system and oppressed by all 'upper-castes,' including savarna women, patriarchal relations should not be perceived in isolation, i.e. in binaries of men oppressing women (Ibid).

Examining the concept of 'honour' in television and film reveals this consideration. It can be observed in the portrayal of the 'pure, ideal' upper-caste woman who adheres to social ideals and behavioural norms vs the "loose" woman who is free to express her sexual agency. Such a binary, which is particularly prevalent in Hindi television dramas, serves to legitimise gender roles and even laud women's unpaid labour and suffering. Furthermore, we get to see a 'alpha male' saviour, who embodies the qualities that are considered noble in a guy. It's basically a (hyper) macho, upper-caste patriotic hero who 'protects' those who are apparently less endowed than him, such as 'his woman' or the defenceless masses. Gupte (2013) claims that in a caste society, caste groups' prestige is linked to women's

behaviour, allowing men to define 'proper behaviour' for them and, in particular, power over their sexual autonomy and wants. She goes on to say that, unlike upper-caste men, all women and lower-caste men lack innate honour, and the nomenclature itself has come to symbolise their 'inferior' status (Ibid). When viewed through the lens of caste and gender, such media portrayal demonstrates the operation of Brahminical patriarchy in social interactions and how it continues to get legitimacy from it.

Art is a political statement. More importantly, it has the potential to be a critical medium for social change. 'Every production of art by which you are able to concur with public opinion is a weapon in social and political fight,' as the famous passage from the film *Party* (1984) goes. True, the entertainment industry has produced films with strong female protagonists who have agency and sexual freedom. *English Vinglish* (2016), *Queen* (2014), *Pink* (2016), *Veere Di Wedding* (2018), and more are current examples. While these films have done a good job of avoiding the male gaze and dispelling prejudices about women, the image of the so-called progressive 'modern Indian woman' has remained limited to Brahmin-Dwijia women. Dalit women have been marginalised in Indian cinema, with neither themselves nor their issues being depicted in these ostensibly female-centric films. Dalit women's challenges and perspectives have been marginalised in India's mainstream feminist discourse. Getting out of the traditional 'ghoonghat' (veil) and into modern clothing, as well as crossing the bounds of house to go outside to work, are two of the empowering activities that media presents to us. However, because such an approach is linear in nature, it misses out on a variety of facets of the problem. For example, it makes Dalit women invisible, who have historically (a) worked outside their houses in fields, streets, and workplaces; and (b) struggled to keep their bodies covered in caste society. 5

In terms of gender relations, Ilaiah (2002) highlights the cultural contrasts between the majority Hindu castes and the Dalit Bahujan people. In Pa Ranjith's *Kaala* (2018), aggressive underprivileged women characters of Dharavi contrast with the scenario in Hari Dada's Brahmin Hindu household, illustrating this distinction. Ilaiah also points out that their books on women attaining sati<sup>6</sup> did not include any anecdotes about Dalit Bahujan women who lived after their spouses died, or divorced, remarried, and worked to support themselves. Another issue to consider is how the entertainment industry, ads, social media pages, and other outlets portray 'sexual subjectification' and 'sexual autonomy' as empowering. Media midriff advertising, according to Gill (2007), adds another layer of

oppression by re-sexualizing the female body while portraying this new objectification as joyful and 'self-chosen.' In the Indian context, such portrayal also reproduces specific savarna-beauty criteria, such as fair skin, tall stature, and a slender body, which are thought 'attractive.' The sentence 'doodhjaisi gori hai, zaroor Brahmin hogi' from the film *BajrangiBhaijan* (2015), which translates to 'she is as fair as milk, must be a Brahmin,' exemplifies such a norm. Not only Dalit women, but also transwomen, disabled women, and dark-skinned women are left out of this ostensibly powerful representation. Furthermore, as Gupte (2013) points out, caste and gender hierarchy create a divide between the dominant and subordinate women, with the dominant woman's asexuality [seen as 'purity'] distinguishing her from the sexualized [and thus 'available'] lower woman. The body politic around the portrayed 'sexual freedom' ignores the challenges that Dalit women face as a result of their triple weight of caste, class, and gender. Caste, sexuality, and labour are intertwined in ways that have resulted in women from specific communities undertaking various sorts of sexualized labour and the public availability of this labour (Gopal, 2012). When evaluated from the perspective of a Dalit woman, the 'empowering' media portrayals demonstrate the unidirectional and exclusive trajectory that mainstream feminist rhetoric tends to pursue, reducing intersectionality to a simple lip-service. The idea is that Dalit women's agency has been absent from media representations. Dalit women, in contrast to misconceptions that portray them as malevolent kutnis (vamps) or impotent victims, have been speaking up and battling for generations (Gupta, 2007). They have been relegated to mere objects of others' gaze and never the subject taking control of their personalities, especially in media projections, due to structural inequities and epistemic violence.

We find a similar narrative when we look at the portrayal of Dalit women in anti-caste cinema, which includes films like *Masaan* (2015), *Sairat* (2016), *Fandry* (2013), *Periyerum Perumal* (2018), *Kaala* (2018), and others. With a few exceptions, the majority of the films have centred on inter-caste love from the perspective of a Dalit male. Furthermore, the Dalit guy frequently falls in love with and seeks a fair-skinned upper caste woman. While it is true that most films with anti-caste discourse have failed to be inclusive of Dalit women's worldviews, subjectivity, and desires, and to do justice to their personhood, it is also true that most films with anti-caste discourse have failed to be inclusive of Dalit women's worldviews, subjectivity, and desires.

## THE INTERNET'S INFLUENCE

The entertainment industry, like practically every other area of Indian society, is dominated by networks of upper-caste (across religions) individuals and families who have accrued generations of advantages and social capital. It takes a lot more than aptitude and abilities to break into an industry that has been unofficially reserved for the aforementioned privileged groups since its inception. The nepotism question has sparked controversy in the business in recent years, but there has been little discussion of what lies at the root of nepotism—caste privilege. While filmmakers like Ghaywan and Pa Ranjith are actively fostering debates about caste and anti-caste discourse in the business, there is still much more to be done. Meanwhile, the accessibility and reach of social media has offered a platform for disenfranchised people to express themselves and assert themselves. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram have proven to be quite beneficial to the Ambedkarite cause. Through the media, artists and makers such as The Casteless Collective, Neelam Productions, Somnath Waghmare, Sumeet Samos, and others have asserted Ambedkarite voices and built an anti-caste discourse. Social media has also played a key role in bringing Ambedkarite Shahirs<sup>8</sup> into the homes of a huge number of people. Tiktok, the recently banned app (because to a dispute with China), was extremely popular among the marginalised community, who utilised it to express themselves and obtain a large number of 'followers.' Aside from that, the app was widely used by Ambedkarite youth to create an online social movement. They achieved this through raising awareness about religious superstitions and mental slavery, as well as using technology to register protest, express their thoughts, and present their ideology and narratives in innovative ways (Chaudhari, 2020).

True, social media can be a tough arena for oppressed people, especially those who have faced nothing but violence and hatred in the past. However, history shows that, despite all difficulties, this population has resisted persecution, struggled, and asserted its identity. As Ambedkarite people claim their agency on social media, it has also been useful in bringing out liberating narratives and discourses from a liberating framework.

## CONCLUSION

There has been hegemony of the historically oppressive castes in the sphere of media, whether in the newsroom or in the entertainment business. Of course, such predominance

has influenced the material generated by the industry. More importantly, this material is not an objective portrayal of social reality, but it does play an important part in the production of meanings, discourses, and cultures. One thing becomes clear: the 'Dalit' has mostly remained an object of oppressor subjectivity, which has failed to turn inwards to face the issue of caste. However, we are already witnessing Ambedkarites actively establishing their voices through the medium, particularly social media, resulting in an ontological change.

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