

Representation of Caste in Film and Fiction: Texts and Contexts

Abstract

Since the Hindi film industry started making films on caste, it had a tendency to represent caste in a stereotypical manner. It focused on how the Dalits were victimized, exploited or discriminated in the caste-ridden society. From brutal physical assault to subtle discriminatory treatment, the Hindi films always tried to highlight injustice the Dalits are historically subjected to due to caste inequality sanctioned by the Hindu social order. But in the recent past Hindi films have increasingly turned away from such stereotypical portrayal of caste. And the Hindi films are turning towards incorporating anti-caste politics. This stimulates my thinking regarding why this ideological shift in contemporary Hindi films occurs in terms of representing caste questions. In my thesis I attempt to understand what contextualizes this ideological shift. For this purpose I have examined in my study the Hindi films from the early 1930s to recent past which deal with caste questions. In my study I have given special focus on film adaptations and their respective source texts. I have taken resort to multidisciplinary approach in my study. The thesis begins with introducing the recent craze in making films on caste from anti-caste perspective. In “Introduction” I have also discussed caste as an institution and how the idea of caste has been recorded in different historiographies. The introductory chapter goes on to include literature I have reviewed, the unaddressed questions in the previous studies on the subject, aims and objectives of this study, rationale behind undertaking the study, and the methodology I have taken resort to in this thesis. In “Chapter 1” I have discussed how caste has been traditionally represented in the literary works of the high-caste writers, and representation of caste in their works has been interrogated by Dalit writers after the emergence of Dalit Literature. The stereotypical portrayal of caste in Hindi films has also been discussed. The chapter also elaborates how the

Dalit filmmaker and critics' critique of the representation of caste in Hindi films. The chapter also elaborates the how the arrival of Dalit Cinema challenges the stereotypical portrayal of caste with incorporating anti-caste politics in the films. "Chapter 2" critically analyses how caste has been represented in select Hindi films. It shows how portrayal of caste in Hindi films is largely characterized by the portrayal of Dalits as submissive, victimized and oppressed. "Chapter 3" exclusively discusses select film adaptations with reference to their source texts. It shows the representational difference in terms of caste in which the visual politics in the film both adds and undermines certain important aspects of caste. "Chapter 4" traces the ideological shift in Hindi films when it comes to dealing caste. It discusses select contemporary Hindi films and select film adaptations along with their source texts. The chapter substantiates the argument of the thesis that it is the rise of anti-caste politics and the emergence of Dalit Cinema which contextualizes this ideological shift in the portrayal of caste questions in Hindi films as well as film adaptations. In "Conclusion" I have discussed how the Hindi films are turning towards reversing the upper-caste gaze when it comes to represent caste questions in Hindi films.

Keywords: Representation, Caste, Films, Dalit Cinema, Ideological shift, Anti-caste