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Victims of caste and gender culture: the representation of Dalit women's issues in Indian film narratives

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ABSTRACT

"Culture" can be defined as "the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group" (Oxford University Press, 2005). This way of life is shown in their behaviour, habits, and attitudes toward each other. The old-tradition of the caste system has divided Indian society into various sections which has given birth to socio-economic and cultural inequality. The basic features of the caste system are: 'birth-ascription, endogamy, ritual pollution and traditional occupation'. The system has made Shudras and untouchables, the lowest castes, the victims. They are kept to the margins of society and to the majority even access to knowledge is a dream. Dalit is a self-adopted term used by this marginalized section of society. Dalit women are

'Dalits among Dalits' as they are the victims of caste and gender culture, hence, doubly marginalized. Film narratives as the mass media reach a large audience. Hence, these narratives are important cultural documents that present society's problems and influence the audience's perception on a particular issue. Taking this as background the paper attempts to highlight the representation of Dalit women's issues in selected Indian film narratives: *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Sujata* (1959) and *Article 15* (2019).

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Dalit women, caste, gender, culture, film narratives*

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“Culture” can be defined as “the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group” (Oxford University Press, 2005). This way of life is shown in behaviour, habits, and attitudes toward each other among the people of a particular society. Aijaj Ahmad says, “...culture not only as an integral element in social practices but as the determining element” (as cited in Visweswaran, 2010, p. 7). Culture determines the growth and progress of not only society as a whole but also the life of the individual member of society.

Film narratives form an imperative part of literature in today's digital world. According to Film critics like H. Munsterberg, Andre Bazin, J. Cohen, etc., there is a: “...particular experience that motion pictures provide to the film audience and the mechanisms that explain the perception and comprehension of film, and how movies move viewers and to what effects” (Tan, 2018, p. 1). This particular experience arouses empathy, anger, love, laugh, cry and many other emotions among the audience. In short, cinema as a mass medium has an undeniable social impact on the audience: “Cinema is a mass medium” (Vetrimaaran, 2022, as cited in B. Kumar, 2022, p. 1). Therefore, “the film industry is arguably one of the most influential sectors of modern society” (Morris, 2020, para. 1) as it reaches a wide audience. In the words of Nadine Labaki, a Lebanese Actress “Cinema is not only about making people dream. It's about changing things and making people think” (as cited in Hippo, 2022, p. 32). Cinema stimulates and inspires the audience the change by engaging them in thinking through the reflection of society.

Each film is “set and developed in a particular culture” (Morris, 2020, para. 8). Hence, film narratives are important cultural documents that present the problems of society and also influence the audience's perception regarding a particular issue. According to Indian film director Vetrimaaran, “Art is political...Aesthetic beauty is important but art is not complete without people. Art is a reflection of life” (as cited in B. Kumar, 2022, p. 1). Film as an art is also a political tool. It can be used to propagate an agenda or it can also be used to improve society and get rid of its evil. Indian cinema has produced many film narratives which force the public to think about social problems like gender issues, women issues, child issues, dowry, communal riots, environmental issues, political issues, partition, etc. One such problem is caste culture.

There are many film narratives which are an attempt to show how the old caste culture is still affecting Indian society like *Jai Bhim*, *Article 15*, *Super 30*, *Asuran*, *Narrappa*, etc. According to Yogesh Maitreya, Indian cinema is also mainstream and caste-dominated but slowly, “...the identity of Dalit characters in cinema...has become explicit, transcending boundaries of caste and class. These filmmakers have helped to shape visual storytelling that combines “justice with aesthetics”” (Maitreya, 2020, para.3). Taking this as background this paper attempts to highlight the

representation of Dalit women's issues in selected Indian film narratives: *Achhut Kanya* (1936), *Sujata* (1959) and *Article 15* (2019). The paper also traces the perception, changes and development in Indian society related to Dalit women's issues through the study of the mentioned selected film narratives from pre-independent to early post-independent to the digital era.

The caste culture plays an essential role in determining the ways of living and relationships of the persons in India. The old-tradition of caste culture has divided the Indian society into four major castes—the Brahmins (the Priests), the Kshatriyas (the Warriors), the Vaisyas (the Traders) and the Shudras (the Servants)—which “eventually developed into a social mosaic of 3000 sub-castes, with the Untouchables at the bottom of the list...actually outside the list” (Anand, 2005, pp. 4-5) which has given birth to social inequality. According to Bruce LaBrack, “The basic features of the caste system are: ‘birth-ascription, endogamy, ritual pollution and traditional occupation’” (1973, p. 48). The membership “of all these groups is based on birth. They are all ascribed statuses and a change of status is ostensibly impossible” (1973, p. 52). The traditional occupations for the four castes are The Brahmins, “usually priests...are at the top” (Deshpande, 2010). Below Brahmins are Kshatriyas, the warriors, who are “political rulers and soldiers” (Deshpande, 2010). Vaishyas are “the merchants”, their duty is “to ensure the community's prosperity through agriculture, cattle rearing and trade” (Deshpande, 2010). The Shudras are “laborers, peasants, artisans, and servants” (Deshpande, 2010). These caste divisions are on the basis of birth and not on the merit of a person. There is no mobility in terms of profession or social relations in the caste system. The caste culture operates through its individuals by marriage: “All the groups under consideration practice caste endogamy,...In the Indian context this means no marriage outside the sub-caste or *jati* sphere” (LaBrack, 2005, p. 53). Ritual pollution is performed against the Shudras. Touching a Shudra is considered as dirty as they are associated with “the occupations which are considered filthy or degrading” and they “still carry a stigma although the kind of work for which they are looked down upon has not been performed for generations” (2005. P. 54). This caste cultural hierarchical system has made Shudras the lowest caste. Cleaning the debris with their own hands for centuries, they are always treated as dirt and filth in society bearing all sorts of insults and hatred. They are kept to the margins of society and to the majority even access to knowledge is a dream because:

The majority of Dalits lead troubled lives as landless labourers, small-scale farmers, artisans in villages, manual labourers and hawkers working in the informal sector and living in slums in urban areas....Access to quality education is still a distant dream for the Dalits. (Raju, 2022, p. xxix)

Due to poverty, the majority of Dalits are unable to have and provide proper education to their children and the Dalit children who get into schools and universities have to face discrimination and humiliation because of their caste. On July 20, 2022 : “A nine-year-old Dalit boy died on Saturday after he was allegedly beaten up by a teacher for drinking water from a pot in a private school in the Jalore district of Rajasthan” (“Dalit boy”, 2022).

‘Dalit’ is a self-adopted term used by this marginalized section of society. Dalit means “broken, torn, destroyed and crushed” (Sharma, 2009, p. 46). Dalits have remained the most neglected, exploited and marginalized. However, within the caste pyramid, Dalit women lie at the bottom like crushed and wasted ash. Dalit women are “Dalits among Dalits” (Bhoite, 2013, p. vii) as they are the victims of caste and gender culture, hence doubly marginalized. According to Jyoti Lanjewar, “Dalit women are also Dalits in relation to Dalit men within the Dalit community. They are thus Dalits twice over insofar as they bear the burden of both gender and caste oppression” (as cited in Basu, 2002, p. 195). Dalit women besides the caste struggle like social segregation, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, etc., also are the victims of gender marginalization. Dalit woman is marginalized within her own community. The corporeal violence of Dalit women is used as a tool to humiliate Dalit men. Anupama Rao in her Introduction to Gender and Caste states, “...newer forms of violence are often complemented by the sexual harassment and molestation of [D]alit women, pointing to the caste and gendered forms of vulnerability that [D]alit women experience” (2003, p. 11). Indian national and regional newspapers and news channels are filled with the incidents of Dalit women’s beating, rape, burning, naked parade of these helpless women on the streets, etc., not only in rural areas but also in cities by upper caste property-owner and landlords to keep Dalits under control by humiliating Dalit women.

The film *Achhut Kanya* directed by Franz Osten (a German Director) was released in the year 1936. This film narrative holds a crucial place in Indian cinema from a socio-cultural perspective because this film was released in British India, a time when the caste system was very rigid and thinking of a Dalit being in upper caste spaces and occupation was taken as a sin against gods. In Ancient India, the laws of justice were enacted differently for them as compared to the people of the other castes above them:

Though the position of Shudras in all spheres of human life in ancient India was miserable but their legal position was most deplorable. The punishments prescribed for them by the Hindu Law—givers for even the trifle offences and crimes committed by them were so severe and partial that it put a question mark before the idea of ‘Equality before Law’ in judiciary. (R. Kumar, 2003, p. 16)

Even during the early twentieth century, the position of Dalits was similar to as it was in Ancient India because the British government restricted itself to make any change in the cultural set up of Indian society:

Whether caste was the steel in the mortar or the crack in the foundation, the British Indian government found multiple justifications for not intervening in what they considered to be an ancient social system of bias and injustice. Their 'civilizing mission' had its limits. By the time they intervened – two decades before independence – it was, if anything, a tactic to delay the end of the empire. (Chakrvorty, 2019)

Hence, the caste culture remained an integral and sanctified part of Indian society even during the early modern period because: "The varna and caste system was sanctified by Hindu religion and by Vedic scriptures" (Dhawan, 2014, p. 1272) and the society was following Ancient Hindu law and Untouchability against the Dalits had religious sanction. During this period, Dalit leaders like Jyotirao Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Periyar led a strong movement against caste atrocities. The year of the film's release is also crucial as it is the year when Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had written his most famous speech *Annihilation of Caste*. The film is bold in its era as there was no Indian constitution, and casteism and untouchability were pressing problems in Indian society and the film-maker took the issue.

The narrative in the film revolves around a Dalit woman character 'Kasturi' which is played by Devika Rani who is also known as "first lady of Indian cinema" (Shekhar). In this film narrative, Kasturi (an Untouchable girl) and Pratap (a Brahmin Boy, the role which is played by Ashok Kumar) are childhood friends. Pratap's mother Kalyani does not approve of this friendship, especially when the two of them reach marriageable age. She gets angry at Pratap when she learns that Pratap eats food cooked by Kasturi. She thinks that Kasturi is untouchable and hence the food cooked by her is polluted:

Ideas of purity/impurity were present all over Hindu society for centuries: in domestic as well as public life, in exchange of food and water, in practicing occupations, in kinship and marriage, in religious action and belief, in temples and monasteries, and in myriad different contexts and situations. These ideas played a crucial role in separating one caste from another, and in arranging them in the hierarchy, that is to say, in ordering the basic structure of society. (Shah, 2007, pp. 355-56)

The concept of purity and impurity, that is pollution forms the basis of the ways of living and social relationships in the caste hierarchy. This is further substantiated

by Louis Dumont who in his *Homo Hierarchicus* observes, "...with the Hindus it is a matter of impurity, that is, of fall in social status or risk of such a fall" (Dumont, 1966, p. 49). The relations among people in caste culture are rigid and if somebody tries to transgress the rules or dares to make any sort of social relation through food or marriage with the low caste people are ostracized and their social position falls in the hierarchy.

Kalyani thinks that the tradition of social structures should be maintained. Kasturi, in order to be not a trouble between Pratap and Kalyani, says to Kalyani very politely:

Maa, gusse na ho, ab mae isse kbhi na khane dungi (Osten, 1936, 24:43)
"Don't be angry mother, from now I shall never let him eat cooked by me"
(translation my own)

Kasturi has the realization and awareness of her status and position in the social structure. She says to Pratap:

Hum Achhut thehre, humme sabh bura samjte he (Osten, 1936, 35:15)
"We are untouchable, we are taken as polluted by all" (translation my own)

Kasturi's father persuades her not to be sad and accept the situation as she cannot marry Pratap as Pratap is Brahmin. Pratap according to the culture of endogamy gets married to a girl from his own caste: "Th[e] critical evaluation of the various characteristics of Caste leave no doubt that prohibition, or rather the absence of intermarriage—endogamy, to be concise—is the only one that can be called the essence of Caste when rightly understood" (Ambedkar, 1916). Kasturi, however, never shows her feelings to others for their happiness. However, her internal sad feelings are expressed in the film narrative when she gets emotional and listens to the song: "*Kit gaye ho Khevanhaar*" translated as "Where are you helmsman (God)?" The song is sung by the singer Saraswati Devi. In the film narrative, an old woman (as shown on film scene) is singing this song while carrying firewood on her head. The song expresses the anguish of a wounded individual crying out to the helmsman (God) for abandoning her.

Kasturi enters a loveless marriage because of societal norms. Kasturi's father marries her to Mannu as he feels endowed to him since Mannu gives them a place to live. This incident shows how a Dalit woman loses a choice in life because of her marginalization within her own community as a woman and because of poverty and powerlessness which makes her a sufferer: "Social suffering results what political, economic, and institutional power does to people..." (Kleinman, Das, Lock, 1997, p.

ix). Mannu is already married and when his first wife Kajri protests, Kasturi welcomes Kajri and tells her it is her right to live with her husband:

*aao didi, main tumhari choti behan hu
bdi behan ka haq chhinana paap hoga
aao mae tum dono ki sewa krungi
aao didi, aao. (Osten, 1936, 1:38: 46)*
“Come, I am your younger sister
It is sin to snatch the right of eldest sister
come, I shall serve you both” (translation my own)

Hence, due to social culture and norms as prescribed for a Dalit woman, Kasturi not only has to sacrifice her love but also her right as a wife because the patriarchal culture expects the same from her to be recognized as a ‘good woman’:

Indian women are bred to be selfless. As totems of feminine virtue, we are taught to eternally sacrifice for the sake of family, fraternity, faith. We are expected to give unconditionally, conform to convention and compromise. (Rajasekaran, 2020)

Observing the tolerance of Kasturi, Pratap’s father Mohan comments:

Kasturi ka sabhab hi kuch niral he (Osten, 1936, 1: 41:45)
“Kasturi’s nature is unique” (translation my own)

But nobody asks Manu that why he married Kasturi if he was already married to Kajri. Kasturi has also the realization that Kajri is also a victim of patriarchy:

*woh aapki phli istri he
mae unka haq kaise sheen skti hu (Osten, 1936, 1: 41:59)*
“She is your first wife.
How I can snatch her right?” (translation my own)

Therefore, she also persuades Manu to except Kajri.

The narrative ends with irony when the realization of her sacrifice and her sorrow gets acknowledged only when she gives up her life too to stop the train to save thousands of lives. The final act of giving her life can be seen as an act of rebellion and dignity from Kasturi. She transcends the boundaries of caste and gender and becomes the light of knowledge for others to see the good in every person, and accept and include everyone regardless of caste or any biases.

The constitution of India comes into force on January 26, 1950. Hence, the Indian film narrative *Sujata* holds an important position as it narrates the predicament of Dalit women in Indian society after Independence and when untouchability, and discrimination because of caste and gender is declared illegal by the Constitution of India. The film is released in the year 1959 and is directed by Bimal Roy. The film narrative is about Dalit women and their struggle between their emotions and societal injunctions as they try to come to terms with the caste and gender culture. The film's main character is 'Sujata' which is played by the renowned Indian actress Nutun.

The narrative begins with the first birthday bash of Upendranath Chowdhary and his wife Charu's daughter Rama. At night during the celebration, men from the village come to Upendranath with a baby girl, the same age as Charu. Villagers request Upendranath to take the baby under his care as the girl's parents died because of the cholera pandemic. Upendranath hesitates to take the girl under his custody and gets busy receiving the guests and in the party arrangement. However, the villagers do not go and wait for Upendranath at the door. The party scene in the film is set to show the disparity among the children because of poverty:

Children from lower castes have been shown to have higher rates of infant mortality and lower iron and vitamin supplementation rates, in addition to displaying relatively lower use of public health services, compared to children from upper castes. (Choudhury et al., 2021, p. 452)

The upper caste children are wearing costly cloth, eating ice cream and playing with toys. However, the baby girl at the door does not have milk even. Soon the party gets over and Upendranath with his wife come to his door. Upendranath gives them 10 rupees and tells them to make the arrangement for the girl somewhere else. The villagers inform them nobody in the village will take the girl as she is from a low caste.

Upendranath still hesitates, however, Charu out of motherly compassion asks the maid to take care of the girl for a few days and dress her in the old discarded dress of Rama. Soon the girl makes a place in the heart of Upendranath and he names the girl Sujata means "from a good family origin" ("Sujata", n.d.). Rama mocks that the name is ironic to the situation of the girl as the girl is from a low caste. The name of a lower caste person must reflect her/his status as:

Such nomenclature reflects the caste hierarchy and manner in which language per se is hegemonised. Although upper castes and people belonging to them are addressed using words of praise and reverence, lower castes and people belonging to them are addressed using words of contempt. (Shahid, 2021, p. 703)

Upendranath Chowdhary and his wife Charu's home becomes a microcosmic prism of the Indian society where caste and gender culture conditions the love, emotions and lives of the people. Soon for a few days, Upendranath's *Bua ji*¹ who has strong caste prejudices comes to live with the family. She takes Sujata as Upendranath's daughter and begins to shower love on her saying the girl is very beautiful. However, when coming to know that the girl is untouchable, she throws the small girl towards the maid not even caring that the girl may get hurt. *Bua ji* strongly disapproves an untouchable's presence in the house and a well-educated English teacher *Pandit*² leaves without performing *puja*³. This sows the seeds of sourness in the heart of Charu and she gets torn between motherly love and casteist⁴ mentality. However, she is not able to give up on the girl. The girl soon grows up and Upendranath becomes more attached to Sujata as a fatherly figure. Once, against the wishes of Upendranath, Charu decides to give Sujata to an orphanage. However, she herself does not let Sujata cross the gate and let her live with her family as *beti jaisi*, that is "daughter-like" (translation my own).

Sujata remains "daughter-like" not "daughter" in the house can be seen in the difference in the position and the treatment Rama and Sujata receive in the house, for example dresses, education, etc. Unaware, she is not the real sister of Rama and the daughter of the family, she begins to question why her parents do not let her have the education, go to school, and why there is a difference in dresses, hairstyles, etc., between Rama and her; why there are different utensils used by Rama and her; and why Charu always tells the other that Sujata is their 'daughter-like' and not 'daughter'.

The discrimination in the house is soon reflected in the body language of the two girls: Rama is always happy, carefree and with a smile whereas Sujata is seen with a humble smile and a lot of disturbance in her mind can be glimpsed the way she talks and acts in the difficult situations. This results in her low self-esteem and she thinks she does not deserve the life like Rama:

...lower caste individuals have lower mental health than upper-caste individuals and report social isolation, low self-esteem, low self-confidence, withdrawal, and anger. Higher levels of depression have been found in individuals from lower castes and have the highest odds of hypertension compared to privileged upper caste members. (Johri and Anand, 2022, p. 319)

With a troubled mind and disturbance, Sujata asks Charu about her identity. Charu reveals that she is an untouchable, a low caste and does not belong to their world and she is a burden to them, Sujata decides to commit suicide. According to Suraj Yengde, a Dalit writer, "...distress follows the Dalit... all through his or her like

a mental condition” (2019, p. 52). However, on the riverside *ghat*⁵ Sujata reads the carved quotation on the wall:

Marain kaise? Atamhatya krke? Kbhi Nahi (Roy, 1959, 57:12)

“How shall we die? Why committing suicide? Never ever” (my own translation)

Aawshkta ho toh jinda rhne kae liye marain” (Roy, 1959, 57:12)

“if need be, die to live” (my own translation)

Sujata realizes the beauty of struggle and decides to live. The tension further flares up when *buaji*'s grandson Adhir (role played by the Indian actor Sunil Dutt) enters the stage and falls in love with Sujata and wants to marry her while Charu and *buaji* wish Rama and Adhir should get married. On the situation and suffering of a Dalit woman thinking of and marrying an upper caste man, T. Sowjanya in her article “Dalits and Inter-Caste Marriage” observes:

While many [D]alit ideologues and educated [D]alit men promote and practice inter-caste marriage, [D]alit women on the other hand have voiced their experiences of untouchability and caste discrimination after being married to upper-caste men. Chandra Sri who married an upper-caste man describes her experiences of caste discrimination within her matrimonial home. (Sowjanya, 2015)

Hence, a Dalit woman often ends up marrying a man of no match and has to make compromises. *Buaji* has already arranged Sujata's marriage to a shopkeeper who is much older than her and is a stutter and widower having two children. All in the family agree to the marriage because the man is from a low caste. Therefore, it is a good match.

The family in the film becomes the representation of the hypocrisy of the society which after independence sings the songs of the high cultural and moral values but does not let go of caste culture and cannot accept the equality of Dalits with them in education, status as well as social relationships. The same family which victimizes Sujata and does not allow her to go to school, to sit with them at functions as well as festivals, is enjoying the stage drama in the college titled “Chandalika” in which Mahatma Buddha's one of the principle disciple Ananda does not discriminate against Chandalika on the basis of her caste and asks her to give him water to drink and says to Chandalika, “*Tum bhi hamare samaan ho*” (Roy, 1959, 1: 37: 26), that is “You are just like me” (translation my own). All applaud and praise Lord Buddha.

Adhir becomes adamant that he will marry Sujata only and nobody else. Adhir in the narrative becomes the representation of modern thinking and the modern generation which stands for a social change. Charu blames Sujata for the entire scimmage and does not want to see her face. The narrative ends with a climax when

Charu gets to know that it is Sujata who has saved her life by donating her blood to her. Charu accepts Sujata and calls her “daughter” which is symbolic of acceptance as Nalini Jameela, a Dalit woman, the author of *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* puts it “I believe that what we need is not sympathy or compassion but acceptance” (2007, p. 139).

The film *Article 15* is released in 2019 and is directed by Anubhav Sinha. This film narrative is chosen for the study because this film falls in the present and digital era and analysis of this film narrative will be taken to evaluate the status and condition of Dalit women in the present time. The film raises the question of the female body and violence against Dalit women which still exists in society. Three girls are brutally raped by the contractor and the policemen. Two girls are murdered and hanged from a tree while one girl named Pooja escapes and is hiding in the forest inside a drainage pipe. The reason for this inhuman act is the girls who were working as labourers asked the employer to raise their wages by three rupees. The body of a Dalit woman is taken as “a site for the assertion of caste-based pride and domination” (Singh, 2011, p. 50). They were kidnapped and kept in a school where they were brutally raped and murdered as punishment to transcend the culture of the caste and for their dare to speak against exploitation: “Rape and molestation are the new dimensions of Caste war, used as weapons of reprisals and to crush the morale of a section of people” (R.N. Bhagwati as cited in Singh, 2011, p. 48). Ayan Ranjan (played by the Indian actor Ayushman Khurrana) the police officer takes the charge of the force in this district and investigates the case. To his surprise, everybody in the police station tries to teach him the culture of the caste, telling *ye log* (Sinha, 2019, 27:19), that is “these people” (translation my own) and the victims’ families are even denied FIR of the case by the police.

Supreme Court Judge, Justice Deepak Gupta affirms, “...the laws and legal are geared in favour of the rich and powerful” (“Legal System”, n.d.), hence, a Dalit woman cannot even hope for justice through the legal system. Yashica Dutt in her life narrative *Coming Out as Dalit* (2019) documents several stories of Dalit women who are victims of rape, bodily humiliation and get killed, however, the law in turn questions their character and points out their mistake:

Among the many excuses the police use to not file the report of a Dalit woman’s sexual assault is by declaring her ‘criminal’ or, worse, ‘sexually available’. It’s a catch-22 situation for the woman—no matter how she reacts to her rape, she is to blame. If she resists the rape, then she is ‘violating’ the caste order and must be punished... In early 2017, the National Human Rights Commission sent a notice to the Chhattisgarh state government, holding state police officials guilty for raping, gang-raping and sexually assaulting at least sixteen Adivasi women

in that region between October 2015 and March 2016....Even seemingly credible agencies like the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) appear to side with upper-caste rapists as they did in their shocking report of the death of Dalit cousins in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh. The women were gang-raped, murdered and their bodies were hung from trees in Katra in 2014. (pp. 143-45)

The constitution is implemented by its agencies like the police and court. If the agencies are corrupted and have strong prejudices, there is no question of justice. Through the character, Ayan Ranjan, the corrupted and discriminatory culture of the system in the police and politics gets revealed which is a pointer to why this inhuman culture of caste and gender exploitation and violence still exists in the society. Article 15 in the Indian constitution states, "The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them" ("Article 15", n.d.). The movie titled "Article 15" is itself a call for 'Justice and equality' and a society free from discriminatory caste and gender culture.

Caste and gender culture are a bitter reality of Indian society. Dalit women are victims of caste and gender culture and when the class factor is included, they become thrice marginalized. According to Skye Arundhati Thomas, "Dalit stories need to be told with a layered complexity, and with a deep understanding of ...politics" (2019) and film narratives are the best medium to be aware and educate the masses as these are the mass media. The three film narratives *Achhut Kanya*, *Sujata*, and *Article 15* trace the past and present and represent the issues, factors and norms on the world's stage which affect the lives of Dalit women in Indian society. These film narratives raise the questions of why grim situations still exist in society and as Mass media, these film narratives have been "a potent catalyst of social [and cultural] change" (Sehgal, 2017)

Notes:

1. Bua ji: Paternal Aunt
2. Pandit: a Hindu priest
3. Puja: To worship God or a god
4. Casteist: discrimination against people based on their caste.
5. Ghat: a flight of steps leading down to a river.

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