

Educate, Agitate, Organize: Ambedkar's Ideals and their influence on Indian Cinema

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ABSTRACT:

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's profound impact on Indian society extends beyond his role as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, influencing various art forms, including cinema. His principles of equality, dignity, and resistance against caste-based oppression have inspired filmmakers to challenge social hierarchies and advocate for justice. This article explores the intersection of Ambedkar's ideology and Indian cinema, highlighting how filmmakers use their medium to amplify marginalized voices and promote social change. Although Ambedkar didn't directly discuss cinema, his views on literature, drama, and art as instruments of social transformation are well-documented. He believed creative expressions should serve as tools for justice and empowerment.

The article delves into Ambedkar's influential slogan "Educate, Agitate, Organize," which emphasizes the importance of education in overcoming caste oppression and generating consciousness among the oppressed. By applying this philosophy to Indian cinema, the article examines how films can educate audiences about social issues, agitate against injustice, and organize collective action for positive change. This analysis provides insight into the significant role Indian cinema plays in promoting social justice and equality, reflecting Ambedkar's lasting legacy.

KEYWORDS:

Equality, Dignity, Resistance, Education, Empowerment, Justice, Cinema, Social.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and a pioneering advocate for social justice, has left an indelible mark on Indian society. His principles of equality, dignity, and resistance against caste-based oppression have profoundly influenced various forms of artistic expression, including cinema. Indian filmmakers have drawn inspiration from Ambedkar's ideology, using the medium to challenge social hierarchies, advocate for justice, and amplify the voices of the marginalized. Although Ambedkar did not explicitly discuss cinema, his views on literature, drama, and art as instruments of social change are well documented. He believed that creative expressions should serve as tools for justice and empowerment. His assertion that "history shows that where ethics and economics come in conflict, victory is always with economics" underscores the economic and social inequalities that many filmmakers address in their works. His seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), continues to inspire films that critique entrenched caste hierarchies and advocate for equality.

Indian filmmakers have adopted multiple approaches to incorporate Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's ideology into their narratives, ensuring his vision remains relevant in contemporary discourse. Biographical films provide a direct portrayal of Ambedkar's life, struggles, and contributions, offering audiences a cinematic representation of his philosophy. These films serve as historical accounts and educational tools, inspiring viewers to understand and engage with his ideas. Another approach is social realism, where filmmakers depict caste discrimination, untouchability, and socio-political struggles that align with Ambedkar's vision of equality and justice. Such films highlight the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities, fostering awareness and empathy among audiences.

Beyond direct narratives, filmmakers also incorporate Ambedkarite thought through symbolic representation, where themes

of social justice, resistance, and empowerment are embedded in characters, dialogues, and settings. This subtle yet powerful method allows Ambedkar's ideals to permeate mainstream cinema, making them accessible to a broader audience. Additionally, the rise of Dalit filmmakers and storytellers has transformed Indian cinema by challenging dominant narratives and asserting their identity on screen. By bringing authentic and lived experiences to the forefront, these films not only reclaim representation but also serve as powerful tools for advocacy and change, reinforcing Ambedkar's enduring impact on Indian society.

1. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (2000)

Directed by Jabbar Patel, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar* is a biographical film that meticulously chronicles the life, struggles, and contributions of B.R. Ambedkar. The film provides a comprehensive portrayal of Ambedkar's fight against caste discrimination, his role in drafting the Indian Constitution, and his unwavering commitment to social justice. The narrative follows Ambedkar from his early struggles as an untouchable in India to his education in Columbia University and the London School of Economics, emphasizing his efforts to eradicate untouchability and establish equality through legislative and social reforms. The film directly addresses caste oppression by depicting key historical moments, such as the Mahad Satyagraha, the Poona Pact, and his conversion to Buddhism. Through these events, the film highlights Ambedkar's ideological battles and his advocacy for the marginalized, making it a direct cinematic tribute to his legacy.

2. Fandry (2013)

Nagraj Manjule's *Fandry* is a poignant social drama that encapsulates the harsh realities of caste discrimination through the story of a young Dalit boy, Jabya. The film follows Jabya's aspira-

tions for love and acceptance in a society deeply entrenched in caste hierarchies. Jabya, belonging to the lowest rung of the caste ladder, dreams of a better life and harbors feelings for an upper-caste girl. However, the deeply rooted caste system continuously reminds him of his 'place' in society. The film's climax, where Jabya finally retaliates against the dehumanizing treatment meted out to him and his family, symbolizes the assertion of self-respect that Ambedkar championed. The film powerfully conveys Ambedkar's message of resistance against caste-based oppression and challenges the notion of inherent social inequality.

3. Sairat (2016)

Directed by Nagraj Manjule, *Sairat* is a powerful romantic drama that tackles the rigid caste divisions in India. The film narrates the inter-caste love story of Parshya, a lower-caste fisherman's son, and Archi, the daughter of an influential upper-caste politician. Despite their love, the couple faces severe backlash from the girl's family, leading to a tragic and violent end. *Sairat* exposes the brutality of honour killings and the deep-seated prejudices that still persist in Indian society. The film resonates with Ambedkar's belief in annihilating caste through inter-caste marriages, as he famously stated, "I am convinced that the real remedy is intermarriage."

4. Article 15 (2019)

Anubhav Sinha's *Article 15* is a hard-hitting crime drama that draws from real-life incidents of caste-based violence in India. The film follows Ayan Ranjan, an upper-caste IPS officer, who is posted in a rural town and soon discovers the rampant caste discrimination practiced in the region. Investigating the rape and murder of two Dalit girls, Ayan gradually becomes aware of the systemic oppression and injustices embedded in society. The film

explicitly references Ambedkar's ideals by showcasing how constitutional safeguards are crucial to protecting marginalized communities. By depicting the continued relevance of Article 15 of the Indian Constitution, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of caste, race, and religion, the film underscores Ambedkar's legacy in modern India.

5. Kaala (2018)

Directed by Pa. Ranjith, *Kaala* is a politically charged film that presents a strong anti-caste narrative. The protagonist, Kariikaalan (played by Rajinikanth), is a powerful leader of the oppressed who fights against a corrupt politician trying to displace the residents of Dharavi, a slum predominantly inhabited by Dalits and marginalized communities. The film heavily incorporates Ambedkarite imagery, with references to his famous slogans and the predominant use of the colour blue, symbolizing Dalit resistance. The struggle for land rights in the film mirrors Ambedkar's vision of economic empowerment as a means of true social liberation. The film portrays the oppressed rising against systemic exploitation, embodying Ambedkar's principle of "Educate, Agitate, Organize."

6. Pariyerum Perumal (2018)

Mari Selvaraj's *Pariyerum Perumal* is another significant film that reflects Ambedkarite thought. The story follows Pariyan, a Dalit law student who faces discrimination and humiliation in an educational institution dominated by upper-caste students and faculty. His friendship with an upper-caste girl, Jo, invites hostility from her family, leading to violent consequences. The film starkly portrays the socio-psychological trauma faced by Dalits in their pursuit of education and dignity. It aligns with Ambedkar's emphasis on education as the tool for social upliftment, as he famously declared, "We must stand on our own feet and fight as best as we

can for our rights. So carry on your agitation and organize your forces. Power and prestige will come to you through struggle.” The protagonist’s journey from humiliation to self-awareness mirrors Ambedkar’s call for self-respect and empowerment.

The integration of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s ideology into Indian cinema plays a crucial role in raising awareness about caste oppression and social inequalities. Films inspired by his philosophy serve as educational tools, shedding light on the struggles of marginalized communities and challenging dominant narratives. Beyond mere storytelling, many of these films become powerful catalysts for socio-political change, inspiring audiences to question and resist systemic discrimination. By portraying the realities of caste-based injustices, such films encourage critical discourse and activism, reinforcing Ambedkar’s vision of a just and equitable society.

Moreover, Indian cinema has provided a platform for Dalit filmmakers and actors to assert their voices, reshaping representation in mainstream media. By bringing marginalized narratives to the forefront, these films empower communities that have historically been silenced. While some movies explicitly highlight Ambedkar’s legacy, others subtly embed his principles of equality and social justice, making his ideas more accessible to a broader audience. This mainstreaming of Ambedkarite thought ensures that his vision continues to influence contemporary discourse, using cinema as a powerful medium for education, resistance, and social transformation.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s influence on Indian cinema is both profound and enduring. His ideals continue to shape narratives that challenge caste discrimination, advocate for social justice, and inspire activism. Filmmakers, particularly from Dalit communities, have embraced his philosophy to create powerful stories that reso-

nate with contemporary struggles for equality. Whether through direct biographical portrayals or subtle thematic explorations, Indian cinema remains a potent medium for carrying forward Ambedkar's vision of a just and egalitarian society.

As Ambedkar famously proclaimed, "Educate, Agitate, Organise" – Indian cinema has echoed this call, using the visual medium as a force for social transformation. By amplifying Ambedkarite thought and providing a voice to the oppressed, films continue to serve as a bridge between history and contemporary struggles. In doing so, they not only preserve Ambedkar's legacy but also push society toward greater awareness, empathy, and change.

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