

Dr Shyma P

Ambedkar in/on Films and Possibilities of Reconstituting the Cinematic

Ambedkar as image or thought was absent in Bollywood and regional films of India until late. The earliest visualization of Ambedkar is arguably as a framed photo in Jabbar Patel's Marathi film *Sinhasan* in 1979. His absence in the three hour long internationally produced biopic *Gandhi* (Attenborough 1982), is particularly conspicuous given that the visual document covered the period of Indian nationalist movement up to 1948, a period which had witnessed the emergence of Ambedkar as an indispensable political and social reformer with a vision towards an alternative, non – Hindu, anti – caste modernity. The period post 2000s however has witnessed the production of films which represent Ambedkar in various ways. Ambedkar figures in dialogues, graffiti, photos, memories, slogans, etc. Both realist and popular traditions in cinema engage with the image of Ambedkar, although in disparate ways. In this paper, I intend to trace the trajectory of Ambedkar representations in cinema and analyse how it imagines a Dalit popular which transcends nationalistic understandings of caste and modernity. Caste is deconstituted from the frozen frames of nationalist conceptualization which restrains it to tales of despair, pasts of humiliation or of upper caste reformist zeal. Ambedkar appears as a determining presence in visualizing a Dalit popular that reconstitutes a parochial concept of caste and its representation in cinema. These films imagine a Dalit popular of hope lived in by communities of outcastes bought together not by a shared past, but by a common present in a transnational world. The concept of cinematic is expanded to incorporate the everyday of caste lives determined by heterogenous forms of global transactions, the manifestations of which would be analyzed in the paper.