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Portrayal of Dalit Women in Hindi Cinema

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Abstract:

Violence and atrocities against people from lower castes have brought the discourse of subalterns to the forefront. Cinema is one of the mass media through which the issues of social justice have been projected. The portrayal of subaltern voices in Hindi cinema has been a topic of study. The popular cinema is seen by many as a way of entertainment which provides relief to the people from the harsh realities of life. Even if such an issue is taken up it is over-simplified to avoid the problems in the discourse. The portrayal of Dalits in cinema goes back to as early as 1934 with the release of *Chandidas*. Afterwards, films like *Dharmatma* (1935) and *Achhut Kanya* (1936) brought the issues of caste to the forefront. In the post independence era films like *Sujata*, *Ankur*, *Nishant*, *Manthan*, *Damul*, *Bawandar*, *Sadgati*, *Bandit Queen*, *Lagaan*, *Aarakshan*, *Court*, *Shudra: The Rising*, *Chauranga*, *Manjhi-The Mountain Man*, etc have discussed the issues of caste, and the oppression based on it. In our society women are discriminated not only on the basis of their gender but also on the basis of their caste and class. The discrimination and prejudices become harsh if a woman comes from lower caste. The scriptures denied education even to upper caste women. The position of Dalit women was worse. In the nineteenth century, the social reformers like Jyoti Rao Phule opened the first ever school for Dalit girls' education in 1848 inviting the ire of Brahmins, and along with his wife Shavitra Bai Phule who taught in that school, he had to face expulsion from his home by his father. It culminated in Dr. Ambedkar taking up the cause of women for which he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in parliament which the Hindu orthodoxy prevented from being passed and he resigned from the cabinet in protest. He took up women's cause in this bill, giving them the right to property and other matrimonial rights, including the right to divorce. The bill was later passed in bits and pieces. Dalit women face triple suffering, first as Dalits, second as women, and third as class. They face violence, rape, discrimination, denial of education, etc. They are forced to do manual scavenging and become migrant labourers. Some of the films addressed these issues but the focus on their plight as a whole is missing. These films grapple with the problem as the solution to the problem is hard to achieve. The endings of these films are either idealistic or left open ended. Whereas others have simply failed to show the gravity of the issues related to Dalits. This paper tries to analyse the portrayal of Dalit women and the issues related to them in Hindi cinema.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Jyoti Rao Phule, Cinema, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Hindu Code Bill.

Introduction:

Dr. Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar holds imposition of “endogamy” responsible for the creation of caste in India. Its strict implementation enforced ‘sati’, the burning of widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands. ‘Sati’ not being possible in all cases, strict widowhood was the second option: with the imposition of tonsuring of head, white sari, restrictions on food, exclusion from auspicious occasions, etc. Widowers could not be enforced such things. Now, there was a competition among males for younger females. This led to older man marrying girl child, and subsequently to early child marriages. Scriptures sanction them. In such situations there was no question of education of girl child. The scriptures provided the legal cover to the denial of education to women. If such was the situation of women in upper castes, the position of Dalit women could only be the worst, since even Dalit men were denied all those things. Dirty – unclean work such as removing the human excreta, were assigned to them. The dirty works can only lead to the practice of untouchability and human indignity. The fight against all these practices began in the nineteenth century with Mahatma Phule and Savitri Bai Phule taking up the cause of widows and girls, protecting them and opening schools for them against all threats and against all odds. Raja Ram Mohun Ray took up the issue of ‘sati’ and fought for its abolition and for widow remarriages. Ishwar Chand Vidyasagar struggled for education of girls. It culminated in Dr. Ambedkar taking up the cause of women for which he introduced the Hindu Code Bill in parliament which the Hindu orthodoxy prevented from being passed and he resigned from the cabinet in protest. He took up women’s cause in this bill, giving them the right to property and other matrimonial rights, including the right to divorce. The bill was later passed in bits and pieces. Addressing a congregation of Dalit women he exhorted them to send their children to school and instil a confidence in them that they can also become great; he exhorted them to wear clean clothes and change the style of their dress to that as the touchable women wear. Dalit women face tripling suffering, first as Dalits, second as women, and third as class. Gandhi ji fought against untouchability and he himself went on cleaning campaigns but his reforms were within the caste hierarchical order. He gave the name of ‘Harijan’ to them which the Dalits have now spurned preferring to call themselves ‘Dalits’.

In films, Dalit protagonists are rising to assert their voice. However, there are only few instances where Dalit women are projected on screen as the heroines. *Bandit Queen* is an exception. From the above prevailing conditions in the society, we can take up the following issues for investigation in the Hindi cinema:

1. The exogamous or inter-caste marriage which often leads to the couple being evicted from their village and even to the crime of honour killing.
2. The atrocities of violence, rape, burning of their houses.
3. Untouchability and dirty work assigned to them.

4. Denial of education.
5. Forced labour; child labour.
6. As migrant workers.
7. Reservation in admissions and jobs.
8. Denial of entry to the temple, village pond or well.
9. Manual scavenging and removal of night-soil.
10. Human Rights of Dalit women.

Literature Review

Thummapudi Bharathi in her book, *A History of Telugu Dalit Literature* quotes Moleworth's Marathi-English Dictionary, 1831 (reprinted in 1975) to explain the word Dalit “1. Ground and 2. Broken or reduced to pieces generally.... One group of scholars regarded that Jotirao Phule, the social revolutionary and reformer of Maharashtra used this word to describe the untouchables as the victims of the Indian caste-ridden society. Another group claims that it is Dr. Ambedkar who coined this word to refer the oppressed and the exploited in the society. But during the 1970s, the Dalit Panther Movement popularised the word Dalit, not only with the meaning of the oppressed or broken but also with pride and militancy”. (Bharathi)

According to film historian Theodore Baskaran, silent films and early talkies were more committed to espousing the Gandhian principle of anti-untouchability. Later films began to avoid frontal confrontation with caste issues. “Entertainment became important,” says Baskaran. Director of film *Masaan*, Neeraj Ghaywan says, “Cinema is an escapist, aspirational, larger-than-life world. In that sense, it is too Brahminical in its ethos to give good space to caste narratives”. (Joshi)

Namrata Joshi in her article ‘New Voices But Not Enough Noise’ writes, “In the last couple of years, however, there has been an interesting crop of films coming from young, debut directors that has added new layers to the caste narratives. These include *Chauranga* (2014), *Court* (2014) and *Masaan* (2015). Gurvinder Singh’s *Anhey Ghore Da Daan* (Punjabi, 2011), based on Punjabi novelist Gurdial Singh’s novel, captures the humiliation and discontent in the lives of the downtrodden. Jayan Cherian’s English-Malayalam film *Papilio Buddha* (2013) is about displaced Dalits in the Western Ghats who embrace Buddhism and become Ambedkar’s followers in order to escape oppression”. (Joshi)

Since the inception of cinema, various social issues found place in films. Vidushi in her article, “Cinematic Narrative: The Construction of Dalit Identity in Bollywood” in the book *Media, Margins and Popular Culture* edited by Heather Savigny, Einar Thorsen, Daniel Jackson, Jenny Alexander, writes, “... Bollywood films often do not mirror mainstream democratic ideology by admiring the virtues of people belonging to different classes and castes, their social aspirations and their orthodox values. Dalit characters were commonly portrayed as submissive, unable to articulate their needs even when they are oppressed and marginalized sections of society, or as independent but cruel or hard-hearted in many of these films”. (Heather Savigny) She continues, “The names of Dalits traditionally always

symbolized shamed, cursed, filthy or dirty. Often Dalit names were followed by God's name so as to negate the sin, which the upper-caste committed, by calling the contaminated name of an 'untouchable'. In another sequence of the film (*Sujata*), the aunt of the couple mistakes Sujata for Rama, the daughter of the couple, and plays with her. As soon as she discovers that Sujata is an 'untouchable', she literally drops her and gets very angry at the couple for not informing her about the presence of an 'untouchable' child in their house, believing that the house is contaminated as 'untouchables' radiate poisonous gases. The film tries to bridge the gap between castes by showing that the Brahmin man of the family does not discriminate between his own daughter and Sujata. He even feeds Sujata from his plate of food. Sujata is brought up in a Brahmin family yet she's treated as an 'untouchable' because she was born to a marginalised Dalit family. She is not allowed to fall in love with or marry a boy who does not belong to her community. Yet this film ends with a positive message of treating people as equal without any discrimination. This film attempted to mirror something of the political changes in society at that particular time when the Indian constitution passed legislation to abolish the practice of 'untouchability'. 'Untouchability' however, was still practiced, and Dalits were still looked down upon. Members of this marginalised section still could not perform the rites and rituals of other higher castes; and people at that time struggled to accept the equality status given to Dalits by law. The film tried to showcase the reality that caste discrimination still existed in the newly independent India, even after the passing of the legislation" (Heather Savigny). The author observes that, "with the exception of *Bandit Queen* Dalit women are mostly shown in traditional gender roles, being the perpetual victims of marginalisation and socio-economic exclusion, in particular oppressed by higher caste men of the time. Films like *Dahej* (1950), *Gauri* (1968), *Devi* (1970), *Biwi Ho To Aisi* (1988) showcase the Indian woman as a passive, submissive, perfect wife which is constantly repeated in most Bollywood films" (Heather Savigny). Vidushi quotes Blunt in her essay to say that "Many films made in the last decade are based on the issue of jobs and education and focus on the themes of 'politics' and 'reservation' respectively. Soon after independence, a number of socio-political organisations, struggles and various types of activities of the Dalits emerged out of different socio-economic and political conditions in the past, as Dalits sought to ameliorate their wretched condition." "Films such as *Raajneeti* (2010), *Aarakshan* (2011), *Omkara* (2006), *Eklavya: The Royal Guard* (2007) and *Shudra: The Rising* (2012) showcased the mechanics and power of caste politics. These films depicted Dalits as educated and powerful individuals who are now ready to fight for their rights and self-respect. All the above-mentioned films drive home a very strong message; they attempt to make the audience empathise with the Dalit protagonist by way of compelling them to draw parallels with their own lives... If Dalit women have suffered violence to a greater degree than Dalit men in Indian society, this has been prominently showcased in films produced pre and post-independence in part because 'the good, suffering, woman' is a standard Bollywood trope. It is often inter-caste romantic love which has been the subject of Bollywood films involving Dalit protagonists. Whilst such films work to create sympathy for especially 'worthy' Dalit individuals, deserving of (exceptional) social mobility, rather than truly advocating social revolution. Another type of film presents the journey of enlightened upper-caste men (again, exceptional individuals) intent on uplifting their Dalit neighbours. Social justice films, which focus on the plight of Dalits as a whole, from a Dalit perspective, tend to be rare. The brutal

realities of caste, the violence, superstition and ignorance in Indian society have been addressed by Bollywood many times since its inception; however, caste prejudice still continues". (Heather Savigny)

Dr. Shoma A Chatterji in her article 'The Dalit in Indian cinema' observes "These are very low-key films that have neither romance nor action nor suspense nor song-and-dance numbers. Everything is real, raw, straightforward and simple. The understated events, characters and their interaction against an authentic backdrop have a lot of potential drama but the directors have refused to dramatize them". (Chatterji) Continuing her obsevation regarding women she says, "The Dalits are not the sole subjects of oppression among the caste-ridden masses of India, never mind that this oppression cuts across the rural and the urban, language, education and social status. The women, who may or may not be Dalit, are equally or perhaps more oppressed and so are the children from the Dalit community". (Chatterji)

Swati Mehta in her article 'Exploring the Caste in Hindi Cinema' writes, "One could say that since the majority of the stakes in the film industry is held by higher castes, their films portray a very elitist image and way of life. The culture and traditions shown in the films, for instance are very Brahmanical. Or the concept of class has taken over caste in popular cinema. For instance, in Karan Johar's films or films made by Yash Chopra, one comes across titles like Raichand, Mehra, Melhotra etc, mainly high caste Punjabis who are rich businessmen. Their marriage ceremony is based on the Brahminical tradition with the priest given supreme importance. Lavish weddings and related ceremonies are another feature, which reflects the feudal nature of the Indian society. The rich and flamboyance can be attributed to the same". (Mehta)

Chatterji also observes, "But there are been attempts to pay lip service to the caste schism in lavishly-mounted, high-budget and big-star films in recent times where the casteist issue is used as an agency to hit the bull's eye at the box office, to get tax exemption for tackling a socially relevant issue and perhaps, to win brownie points that might fetch some noted awards". (Chatterji)

Sharmila Rege in her book *Writing Caste Writing Gender* argues "caste identity can be transcended by the larger identity of sisterhood amongst all women. This kind of theorization of experiences is problematic because the actual experiences are very different for different sections of women in society. A Dalit woman is doubly cursed as a woman and as a Dalit". (Rege)

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, an architect of the Indian constitution, also makes it very clear in his article titled "The rise and fall of Hindu woman" that the Hindu religious books are the root cause of suffering for women in India. According to *Manusmriti*, women have no right to education, independence, or wealth.

Manu VIII.416

"A wife, a son, and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong."

Manu V.148

"In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent."

Manu IX.25

"A Brahman, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any shudra woman."

Women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskaras are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda Mantras, they are as unclean as the untruth. (Manusmriti IX.18)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his book *Annihilation of Caste* writes, "Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot and has not improved the race. Caste has however done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus." He observes, "A caste is ever ready to take advantage of the helplessness of a man and insist upon complete conformity to its code in letter and in spirit... Caste in the hands of the orthodox has been a powerful weapon for persecuting the reforms and for killing all reform". (Ambedkar)

Simon De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* writes, "Women's actions have never been more than symbolic agitation; they have won only what men have been willing to concede to them; they have taken nothing; they have received. It is that they lack the concrete means to organize themselves into a unit that could posit itself in opposition. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labourer interests; they even lack their own space that makes communities of American blacks, the Jews in ghettos, or the workers in Saint-Denis Renault factories. They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests, and social conditions to certain men—fathers or husbands—more closely than to other women. As bourgeois women, they are in solidarity with bourgeois men and not with women proletarians; as white women, they are in solidarity with white men and not with black women". (Beauvoir)

Content Analysis

Chandidas

Chandidas was the remake of the Bangla film of the same name and one of the first films to deal with the theme of untouchability. Sangita Gopal in her book *Conjugations: Marriage and Form in New Bollywood Cinema* writes, "The film's account of the romance between the eponymous fourteenth-century Vaishnavite poet and a lower caste washerwoman, Rami, becomes the occasion for figuring a more democratic future for India, but the most memorable aspects of this film are its romantic duets, including the famous 'Prem Nagar Mein Banaongi Ghar Main' (I shall build our abode in the city of love), featuring the legendary singer-actor K.L. Saigal and Umasashi... Rami desires a household

made entirely of love, while Chandidas imagines love as taking the place of friends and neighbours. We encounter here a couple using the romantic duet to imagine a form of nuclear conjugality that is as yet only a potentiality. *Chandidas* concludes with Rami and Chandidas forsaking the social because it is not yet ready for the transformation symbolized by their union...". (Gopal) Chandidas is an apprentice in a temple and a good hearted fellow who romantically gets involved with Rami. This irks the antagonist Gopinath who has lust for Rami and assaults her. But Rami is saved by Chandidas. Her outspoken behaviour angers Gopinath who sets fire to her brother, Baiju's house. Chandidas leaves the village with Rami, Baiju and his wife as the song "*prem ki ho jai jai, jeevan hai ab sukhmaye*" (victory to love, the life is now happy) plays on. Chandidas and Rami had to leave the village as the society in which they live had refused to accept their relationship.

If we look at the character of Rami, she is outspoken and not submissive in nature. She questions Gopinath when he expresses his feelings for her. She asks "*kya aap Bhrahman nahi hain, kya aap samaj ke manyavar purush nahi hain, kya mujh jaisi ek shudra kanya ke saath prem karna apke dharm aur samaj niyam ke virudh nahi hai?*" (Aren't you a Brahmin? Aren't you a respected man of society? Is it not against your religion and society to love a Shudra girl like me?) He replies, "*Jati ki zanjeeren prem ko nahi jakad sakti aur samaj... who meri muthi mein hai.*" (The chains of caste cannot bind love and society...that is in my grab.) It shows how the upper castes manipulate women and society.

Achhut Kanya

Franz Osten's *Achhut Kanya* is another reformist film released in pre-independence era. The film begins as a couple stands at the gate of railway station and the gatekeeper refuses to open the gate before 1 o' clock. He says that a ghost comes there during this time. The husband gets down from the car and comes near a statue. The wife sees the dagger on the seat. She comes near her husband and gives it back to him. There is a statue of a lady and below it is written "*isne apni jaan di dusron ki jaane bachane ke liye*" (She sacrificed her life to save the lives of others). The wife asks if she was a *devi*? An old man comes there and says, "*haan devi... janm se achhut lekin karm se devi*" (yes, a *devi*...untouchable by birth but a *devi* by her deeds). And the film starts in flashback. The girl, Kasturi was untouchable and Pratap, the boy was a Brahmin. However, their parents were friends. Kasturi's father saves Pratap's father from snake bite. This resulted in a close bond between them. Pratap's father, Mohan is a representative of Gandhian ideals. He is ready to face exclusion by the members of his caste for helping Dukhiya, Kasturi's father. Childhood friendship between Kasturi and Pratap resulted in affection between each other but they could not marry because both were from different castes. Both of them had to marry into their respective castes because of the pressure from their family and society. Pratap is not happy with his marriage. On the other hand, Manu, the boy whom Kasturi marries already had a wife, Kajri. Kajri finds out that Kasturi doesn't love Manu and she also finds out about her affection towards Pratap. She poisons Pratap's wife Meera's mind and hatches an evil plan. Here, we have to note that though Kajri and Kasturi belong to the same caste, Kajri plots against Kasturi. Kajri and Meera take Kasturi to the *mela* and abandon her there. Pratap also had a food stall there. Kasturi was at an unknown place and therefore she had no choice but to ride with Pratap.

Meanwhile Kajri and Meera tell Manu that Kasturi is with Pratap. Enraged Manu comes to the railroad crossing and attacks Pratap. To save them, Kasturi runs towards the train signalling the driver to stop the train but she gets killed in the process. She becomes a martyr in the eyes of the villagers. The flashback is over and the old man says, “*isne apne jeevan aur maran se yeh dikha diya ki mahan atmayan sab mein ho sakti hain*” (She showed by her life and death that great souls can reside in all). The wife says, “*aur inke balidan ne meri himmat badha di... ab mein shanti se maut ka mukabla kar sakongi*”. (And her sacrifice has given me courage...now I can face death peacefully.) Husband asks her “*toh tumhe malum tha ki...*” (Then you knew that...) The wife interrupts and finishes his sentence “*ki aap mera khun karna chahte hain*” (that you want to kill me). It startles the audience. This is in accordance with what the old man just said. If good people can be in any caste, evil people can also be there in any caste and it is your deeds what makes you a good or a bad person.

Akrosh (1980)

In Govind Nihlani's *Akrosh*, low-caste and illiterate tribal, Lahanya Bhiku's wife Nagi is gang-raped and murdered by the bigwigs. Lahanya was falsely accused of the murder of his wife. A social worker who works for the villagers says, “*...uska sabse bada gunah yahi hai, usko sabak sikhana tha toh uski biwi par balatkar kiya inn logon ne... Yeh uski khuddari kuchalne ka bada shadyantra hai...uske virodh ki kamar todna chahte hain yeh log ...*” (...this is his biggest crime, he was to be taught a lesson, therefore they raped his wife...this was a big conspiracy to crush his self-respect...they wanted to break the back of his resistance...) After the death of Lahanya's father, his sister is left alone. Bhaskar, the Lawyer, gets the permission for Lahanya from the court to attend the funeral. At the funeral ground he kills his young sister fearing that she might also be raped by those criminals. But the ironical part is Dusane, Public Prosecutor, despite being from the same backward and oppressed community, in the end, does not support Bhaskar's views to get justice for Lahanya.

Sujata (1959)

The Brahmin couple, Upen and Charu, takes pity on the child and gives her shelter when her parents die. Upen names her “Sujata”. The name Sujata means “from a good family origin”. Even Charu says, “*neech jaati ki ladki aur apne naam rakh diya Sujata*” (the girl of low caste and you named her Sujata). The aunt of the couple comes to meet them and mistakenly starts playing with Sujata. She tries to find out about Sujata and asks, “*yeh kisi achche khandaan ki toh hai na*” (Is she from a good family)? When she gets to know that she is *acchut* (untouchable), she almost drops the baby. Ironically in order to be from decent family one has to be from an upper caste. This was the notion in the society. She wants to study, and love from the family. However, Charu never accepted her completely. Years later, when she grows up and starts understanding the discrimination done to her, she asks Charu about her identity. Charu tells her that she is untouchable. She asks, “*main itni neech jaat kisliye hoon*” (why am I so low caste)? Charu says, “*tera janm neech jaat mein hua... tere maa-baap acchut the*” (you were born in low caste...your parents were untouchables). When she finds out that she is a burden on the family, her world is shattered. On a rainy night, she stands underneath the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. She tries to commit suicide but stops when

she reads the writing beneath the statue which says, “*maren kaise? Atmhatya karke? Kabhi nahi! Avashyakta ho toh zinda rehne ke liye maren*” (how should we die ? Commiting suicide? Never! If necessary die to remain alive)! The film preaches Gandhian ideals. Charu wants to fix her daughter, Rama’s marriage with well educated, Brahman boy, Adhir. However, Adhir falls in love with Sujata. Upset by this development she falls from stairs and requires blood transfusion. In the family only Sujata’s blood matches her blood group. Charu finally learns her lesson and accepts Sujata as her daughter.

Ankur (1974)

In the film *Ankur* zamindar’s son, Surya comes to the village to look after his father’s farm. Lakshmi and Kishtiya are servants in his house. Surya has an eye on Lakshmi. He makes advances towards her but she spurns them. Very tactfully Surya removes Kishtiya from the scene. Due to her economic condition Lalshmi yields to Surya. When she gets pregnant with his child he tries to persuade her to abort the child but she refuses to do so. Meanwhile, Kishtiya comes back thinking that Lakshmi is pregnant with his child.

Damul (1985)

Damul is about bonded labour. The protagonist, Sanjeevan is going to be convicted and sentenced, perhaps to death. His illiterate wife, unsure of what is unfolding before her, can only attempt to grasp the situation. In *Damul*, the village is divided clearly along caste lines among Brahmins, Rajputs and Backward Classes (including Dalits). The lower castes are manipulated and charged with false accusations. In the film when Mahatmayin who knew the things decides to come out openly and make a statement before the authorities, she is killed and Sanjeevan is accused of her murder. The wife of Sanjeevan could not do anything. In anger she attacks Mukhia (the village head) with a huge knife. The *mukhia* collapses and writhes in pain while the others in gathering try to hold back the agitated woman with all their might. The film shows the oppression of people of lower castes by upper castes and how the later manipulate the former. Apart from this the film also shows that women, whether they belong to upper or lower caste, have no power and get manipulated easily by men.

Shudra: The Rising (2012)

The film is set in a medieval era and shows the discrimination of the lower castes by the upper castes. It shows how the *chatur varna* system works. The first scene of the film shows a young *shudra* girl, who sees a fruit lying in an *ashram* (hermitage), tries to go near it and the *pjari* (the priest) stops her accusing her of polluting the *ashram*. He also tells her that her entry to the *ashram* is prohibited. There is an incident in the film where an old man is on the verge of death and his son tries to get water from the pond but he is not allowed to take water by the upper castes. The old man dies thirsty. The village landlord sets an eye on a pregnant *shudra* woman. He sends his men and asks her husband to send her to his house. There are various references in the film which suggest that the landlord and the upper castes sexually exploit the *shudra* women of the entire village. The *shudra* men cannot protect their women as upper castes would beat them to death. Another scene of the film shows that a five-year-old Dalit kid is harshly punished and his tongue is chopped off for chanting “Om Namah

Shivaya". The film shows inhuman behaviour towards Dalits. They are denied basic necessities, water, food, education, even their right to lead their lives with dignity. They had to wear visual symbols so that they could be identified as Dalits. Upper castes could sexually exploit Dalit women but if they enter their territory it gets polluted!

Conclusion

In the films Dalit women were shown as meek and submissive. Films released till 60s were heavily influenced by the Gandhian ideals. These films hardly showed the sufferings of Dalit women. Films of the parallel cinema like *Ankur* and *Damul* have dealt this issue realistically. However, women protagonists were not given adequate space. In all these films women are uneducated yet they try to raise their voice against the injustice done to them. The above mentioned films have fictional elements having a touch of reality here and there. However, films like *Bawandar* and *Bandit Queen* are based on the lives of two women who suffered because of lower caste origins and stood up to get justice for themselves.

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