



The Dalit Assertion in Telugu Cinema through Non-Dalit Filmmakers' Lens

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ABSTRACT

Caste continues to play a significant role in the Telugu film industry, where upper castes or dominant castes have a monopolistic sway on all crafts of filmmaking and the business surrounded it. Despite this, Telugu cinema, from time to time, experimented with Dalit characters and themes. However, more often than not, the Dalit characters in the films are given inconsequential roles, or a Dalit is at the mercy of an upper caste male to be saved by him/her from the clutches of the caste. This paper explains the phenomenon with a close analysis of seven Telugu films where caste is the central theme. These films are spread over 45 years. The films analyzed are: *Balipeetam* (1975), *Swayamkrushi* (1987), *OseyRamuluamma* (1997), *1940 lo Oka Gramam* (2008), *Palasa 1978* (2020), *Narappa* (2021) and *Love Story* (2021). This paper also reflects on how Dalit assertion (of characters and themes) is handled by filmmakers.

KEYWORDS: Caste system, Dalits, Dalits in Cinema, Dalits in Telugu Cinema, Dalit assertion in Telugu films, *Balipeetam*, *Swayamkrushi*, *Osey Ramuluamma*, *Palasa 1978*, *Narappa*, *Love Story*, Dalits stories in cinema, Dalit identity in films

I. INTRODUCTION

“Though, Dalits were victimized by the process of bondage and servitude, they continued to protest and resist every form of oppression. Especially, with the enactment of Constitutional rights and privileges, Dalits began to demand equality of rights for all. The social ostracism, economic deprivation, political marginalization and cultural subjugation Dalits suffered have augmented and expanded their resolve to counter all forms of discrimination.”¹

The cultural industry, media and cinema, have been a far cry for Dalits. Particularly, in the film industry, caste plays a key role, and the amount of money that involved makes it almost impossible

for the downtrodden sections to enter the industry. It is an uphill task for someone from the marginalized sections to enter the film industry despite having acting prowess and filmmaking skills.

Dalits may spend thousands, if not lakhs, of rupees in their life time to watch movies and print posters or flex banners or erect cut-outs for their demigods, actors, but the industry still refuses to embrace Dalits and do not let them take up acting or any other craft of filmmaking. Irrespective of spouting platitudes by many in the industry that art and talent do not have caste or barriers, caste permeates the film industry.

Until now, the theme of Dalits has been victimized in Telugu films. It is common to see that Dalits – either boy or girl or a group of people – are tortured by antagonists, who are then saved by protagonists belonging to upper caste. Only a few films have had Dalits in lead roles to depict the assertion and identity of marginalized sections.

The Telugu cinema is never known for embracing caste themes. If at all they attempted it, it came only through a reformist angle. Yet, those films depict Dalit assertion partially. As the film makers belong to upper caste or from Non-Dalit communities, they are averse to narrate assertion in its entirety due to their upper caste status, or due to their little knowledge about Dalit lives. Given that Dalit characters have not been portrayed much in Telugu films, a few filmmakers who brought Dalit assertion to the screen have been regarded as messiahs for voicing Dalits even the depiction is in basic manner.

In this paper seven films – *Balipeetam* (1975), *Swayamkrushi* (1987), *OseyRamuluamma* (1997), *1940 Lo Oka Gramam* (2008), *Palasa 1978* (2020), *Narappa* (2021) and *Love Story* (2021) – are analyzed where Dalit assertion is the dominant theme portrayed by the lead roles. The films are explored for their context and text and themes.



DALIT LIVES ON THE SACRIFICIAL ALTER

The 1975 movie *Balipeetam* is based on popular socialist novel written by Muppala Ranganayakamma. *Balipeetam* literally means sacrificial alter. The film was directed by Dasari Narayana Rao.

As for the plot, it is about a Brahmin child-widow Aruna Devi who marries Dalit activist Bhasker Rao – in line with vision propagated by social reformer Kandukuri Veeresalingam. Aruna Devi, who is on a death bed, wishes to die as *Sumangali*. Bhasker Rao ties the nuptial knot to Aruna Devi on hospital bed. This inter-caste marriage forces the couple succumb to the evil of the caste system or break the caste barriers is the remaining story of the film.

In this film, the protagonist, Shoban Babu, who played Dalit character, Bhasker Rao, asserts his identity. Before tying knot to Aruna Devi, he lets her know his caste that he is *Harijan* (Dalit) to avoid further circumstances. Reacting to Bhasker Rao's caste revelation, Aruna Devi says firmly, *"I am neither unmarried nor healthy nor even unmarried. Yet, you came forward to marry me. You are not human being but, God. God does not have caste, but has divinity. All I want is your heart and integrity, that's all, that's all. I am nothing to do with caste. I have no regard to caste."*

Aruna Devi is happy with well-educated and job-oriented Dalit husband but when his relatives visit their house she is averse to mingle with them she goes further even to discriminate and humiliate Bhasker Rao's relatives with the help of her maternal aunt and uncle who always pursues Brahmin rituals.

In this film Dalit assertion is seen only in lead role, Shobhan Babu, who played Dalit character, Bhasker Rao. He appears in white *Kurta*, *Pyjama* and a *Coat* over it and asserts his identity. But the other Dalit characters, his sister, Sitamma, his nephew, Gopi, and other relatives seem to be uneducated and poor wearing normal clothes. In some scenes clothes that look dirt. They speak with their village dialect. Whereas other characters from Aruna Devi's family seem to be 'dignified' and follow caste (Brahmin). While little Dalit culture is depicted upper caste Brahmin culture is given high priority throughout the film. As the story moves forward the couple, Bhasker Rao and Aruna Devi, lives separately by Aruna Devi's casteistic ego with her Brahmin family's support.

Eventually, Aruna Devi admits in the climax that, *"I was unable to understand you people's love and humanity. I myself distanced from the people who are dearer to me and I avoided my*

people and allowed the unwanted. I myself stepped onto a sacrificial alter (Balipeetam). My life must be a lesson for that inter-caste couples who spoil their marital relation with their arrogant misunderstanding and keep their lives on sacrificial alter."

Though the Dalit assertion is depicted through the reformist path the protagonist loses his Brahmin wife who regrets her deeds and dies forever in his lap.

For a cinematic climax which leads to resolve the story's line, the arrogant Brahmin woman, Aruna Devi's character may be realized and sacrificed her life which may satisfy audiences at the end but a Dalit, Bhasker Rao's, assertion is too doomed and put to sacrificial alter (*Balipeetam*) in the caste system. In the beginning of the film Bhasker Rao wants to move to Hyderabad for joining job and gives a thought to his marriage. Having imbibed social reformists' principles in him he marries a Brahmin widow woman yet he faces discrimination and forcefully lives separately from her and their kids. When she is reluctant to live with him he goes back to the ashram where is grown and leads jaded life.

As the filmmaker, Dasari Narayana Rao, comes from a Non-Dalit family, he doesn't give much priority to the Dalit assertion. After separating from his wife and kids, why doesn't he live on his own at the same place where he lived and worked earlier? What is the necessity for him to go back to his ashram and live a life of hardship? Why is it assumed that due to filmmaker's casteist attitude, Dalit assertion in the end is projected in such an abject manner or why is it depicted intentionally to attract audience with his 'unhappy ending' in the climax?

SHOULD SHOE MAKER'S KIDS DESTINED TO BE SHOE MAKERS?

Indian caste system dictates that everyone must follow their profession according to their castes destined in Manu Dharma or the caste system. In this 21st century where technology plays its role in every field, India is still struggling due to caste malaises. The modern Indian caste system makes the upper castes reach the skies, while Dalits and other backward communities are drowned in the age old discriminatory and degrading professions.

The film *Swayam Krushi* (1987) directed by K. Vishwanath is about a cobbler and how he rises from rags to riches. The lead role, Sambaiah, a Dalit cobbler character, played by Chiranjeevi, believes that work is worship. For him, the profession is ultimate, and he believes, *"if you work*



hard you will achieve whatever heights you aim at, and wherever you are you must not forget your roots."

Sambaiah lives on shoe-making under a peepal tree which is located near by a temple. He looks after his nephew, Chinna, and Sharada who pursues her higher studies in city. Chinna's father, Govind, kills his mother and goes to jail. Like Sambaiah, Sharada is also an orphan who is taken care of by the former. Sambaiah and his would be wife, Ganga, the female lead role played by Vijayashanti, run their small footwear shop with a bank loan, which is eventually put on fire by his sister's husband, Govind, when he is out of jail for not allowing him to get his son back. Despite losing his livelihood, how Sambaiah toils to get over hurdles and becomes rich is the remaining story.

In this film caste is not mentioned anywhere but the cobbler's (Dait) life is depicted. The lead role, Sambaiah, asserts his profession even after he becomes billionaire and establishes shoe making company. As his principle *Krushito Naasti Durbiksham*, he never ever forgets his roots where he comes from, he even offers prayers to his shoe making tools at his office and arranging his olden days' photograph in which he used to mend shoes. Though he is an illiterate he supports others to get quality education. He leads a dignified life wearing *suit, boot, and coat* to assert himself that he is neither poor nor Dalit. Even after marriage he joins his wife, Ganga, in an English medium school. Not only this, when he sees starving kids of a cobbler, he gets them admitted in a school where his nephew, Gopi, studies. He gives a job to the kids' father in his company.

Even though the Brahmin filmmaker, K. Vishwanath, narrates the story of a cobbler from rags to riches he fails to present the ordeal of cobblers' lives. Through Sambaiah never forgets his roots, he changes his name from Sambaiah to Sambasiva Rao which is against his Dalit assertion and identity, and misleads the Dalit theme. This is sheer upper caste ideology. If the shoe-maker Sambaiah becomes shoe-making company's owner *Sambaiah* in real life, it would have then inspired Dalits to follow his path in their real lives.

After a legal battle, Govind gets his son, Chinna, from Sambaiah and entertains him teaching bad habits. To get Chinna back, Sambaiah agrees to hand over his entire properties to Govind. Since he is a hard worker and believes in *Krushito Naasti Durbiksham* Sambaiah vacates his palatial house he owns and goes back to his occupation under the tree along with his wife, Ganga. However, Chinna learns

that his father, Govind, loves him for the sake of money.

In the climax, Chinna regrets his attitude towards his uncle, Sambaiah. While Sambaiah is busy with his shoe making along with his wife, Ganga on the pavement, Chinna is arranging his tools to make shoes to start his career on the other side of the road. At the school age, Chinna is 12 to 14 in this film according character too. How come it is a resolution for the film when a school going kid is involved in shoemaking in a broad day light while his uncle gives importance to education? If the filmmaker wanted to show the kid, Chinna's remorse, he could have depicted in another way. In the film maker's view, even though the Dalits struggle to be rich, caste follows them, and shoe maker's kids should be destined to be shoe makers.

ARE DALITS AGAINST THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION?

The film *Osey Ramulamm* (1997) directed by Dasari Narayana Rao depicts how Dalits are discriminated and tortured by the upper caste feudalists. The story is about a 12 year old Dalit girl Ramulamma who is raped and impregnated by a feudalist, Jagannayaka Patwari, who rejects her to be his wife but entrusts his henchmen to kill the mother and her child along with her old age parents. While Ramulamma escapes from Dora's men, her child is thrown into forest and her parents are killed.

Ramulamma is given shelter by a Dalit family—Gudisela Ramaswamy and his wife—and she works at Jagannayaka Patwari's son's bungalow after she attains adolescence. Vijayashanti played the lead role, Ramulamma. When she is seen by the Dora who is polygamy, he wants to have physical relationship with her. Ramulamma kills the Dora when she is forcefully dragged to his bed room. No sooner the furious Jagannayaka Patwari makes Ramulamma to drag to his fort than he learnt that she is the one who was raped by him and got a child, and is alive. She asserts her identity that she has morals and she is committed to her husband even he abandons her when the Patwari asks what would have happened if she had slept with his son. The Patwari humiliates her making a bath with the urine of his upper caste people, a dot with cow dung on her forehead, tying shoes on her neck and drags her to the graveyard to kill alive. However she manages to escape into forests with the help of another Dalit. By the motivation of a Naxalite singer Peddanna who is also a Dalit, she becomes the leader of the Naxalite movement. How she revenges against the feudalists and protects her community people is the remaining story.



In this film, the assertion and identity of Dalits are portrayed through extremist or Maoists' lens. Ramulamma becomes Ramulakka and kills the Dora's family members, one by one. Ramulakka makes government officials to come to forests and arrange a people's court (*Praja Court*) to sort out people's issues in which land documents are distributed to the beneficiaries.

Peddanna sings songs to expose the cruelty of caste and its politics.

But the question is when Ramulakka is offered to have talks with government she asserts that, "*We don't have faith in your police, no trust in your government. No belief in your system, not even in your Constitution.*" The extremism or Maoism may not agree with the present parliamentary democratic system or the Constitution and they may believe that the state's power can be achieved through the bullet than ballet. The film maker utilized this offer to trigger the guns at the state on the shoulders of Dalits. Since Maoism asserts proletariat's rights and welfare, Dalits too get attracted to it. Hence majority of the cadre in Maoism is from Dalit and backward communities. They are the front warriors of the movement. Thus, if at all Dalits benefitted by the Maoism, they also help the movement by becoming part of its cadre in large numbers.

Having right to franchise, get education, employment and political entry by the Indian Constitution, Dalits never ever oppose it. If the Constitution was not there Dalits lives wouldn't transform now and they wouldn't attain assertion and identity whatever they have. And, it was written by a Dalit, Dr BR Ambedkar, Dalits are ought to be bound to it with utmost gratitude. There is no question of challenging the Constitution. Albeit, "*As much as Dalits feel empowered in a Constitutionally mandated democratic republic, any hope of their issues being redressed withers away when it comes to reality. After every gruesome atrocity or everyday humiliation they undergo the workplace or in their shared housing, the promise of Constitution shatters into pieces.*"² Dalits seek the safeguards and rights as per the constitution to be implemented. But the film maker wanted the guns on the shoulders of Dalits. Even in Maoist leadership too there is no Dalit representation in the movement. It is unimaginable to think of a Dalit woman to become a leader in the Naxal movement as the film portrayed and attributed to the leadership of a Dalit woman.

BRAHMIN VS DALIT

It is obvious that as the time passes by and generations transform, the victimized leaves no

stone unturned to revolt against the persecution they faced. According to Manu Dharma, at top of the caste system's ladder is Brahmins, followed by Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras. There was no fifth *varna*, *Panchama* or untouchable or *Chandala* or Dalit, which have been essentially created by neo *Manusrimiti*. Thus, Dalits have been mostly affected people by the caste system. From Dr BR Ambedkar to till date there are many scholars from Dalit communities who have been questioning caste hierarchy through various forms, through literature. The theme of revolting Dalits has been translated into films by the sympathy of upper caste film makers.

1940 lo Oka Gramam (2008) directed by Narasimha Nandi clearly shows that how a *Madiga*, Dalit questions *Brahmanism*, and the origins of the caste system. The plot of the film is a Brahmin, Khandavalli Jagannatha Deekshitulu, marries a young Brahmin girl, Susheela, in his 80s. As Deekshitulu marries her just for cooking food and enjoys having such a young wife at his home for the sake of society. Susheela, like other girls, she also has feelings and wishes including conjugal rights which are not fulfilled by her old age husband. This leads her to fall in love with a Dalit boy, Suri, who helps her to offer prayers at the bank of a river in their village. After their physical relationship, Susheela conceives, leading them to their boycott from the village after undergoing a lot of humiliation. How the couple over comes the hurdles and bring a change in Deekshithulu along with so called upper caste villagers is the remaining story.

In 1940s, the caste system's gruesome rituals against Dalits are depicted meaningfully. While Dalits live in their huts in their abandoned hamlets, the upper castes live in well-organized houses in the main village.

In this film the lead role Suri (Dalit character played by Baladitya) asserts his identity. "*There is no difference between professions. All castes are equal and they are dependent on each other, so all are great.*"

He not only questions the origins of caste, but also proves that anyone can embrace any profession if they practice it with a proper training. He recites Vedas when Deekshithulu and village elders assert caste system's hierarchy.

"*Where are castes in Indian Santana Dharma? In the past, Manu along with seven rishis decided the caste of individuals based on their character and deeds. After Manu, a civilized Shudra became Brahmin, and uncivilised Brahmin was selected to be a Shudra. Thus, castes changed. It is*



the gurus, based on the civilised /uncivilised nature, decided on the caste of the disciple.”

Diksheethulu is regretted for ruining a young girl's life by marrying and marries off Susheela to Suri even his caste Brahmins warn him. Having been exiled by the village elders, the couple, Suri and Susheela, lives far away from their place. Though Suri embraces *Brahmanism* to make both ends meet he is thrown away when his birth caste is revealed.

In the climax towards the resolution of the film Diksheethulu dies due to his old age by writing his assets to the heir of Suri and Susheela. Brahmins and other castes change their minds when Dalits refrain from digging cemetery for Diksheethulu's corpse, provided the village elders bring Suri and Susheela back Dalits perform Diksheethulu's cemetery.

At the resolution scene, Suri is seen teaching *Vedas* to Brahmin kids at his home while mending shoes at a time. This is the ultimate invading jolt against the caste system, particularly *Brahmanism* which orders one should be in his limits. One of the scenes, Suri says, “I do what I wish. I live as I wish. It is clearly mentioned in *Vedas* that whoever shows perfection in his profession can attain or continue that profession.”⁸Suri proves his skills in the profession he embraces.

In this film, the filmmaker, Narsimha Nandi, attributes the assertion of Dalit character and identity, but in real life it is impossible to live in both the caste professions, making shoes and enchanting *Vedas*, at a time.

KILLING POLITICAL ASSERTION OF DALITS IN FILMS TOO

Dalits believe what Dr BR Ambedkar said, “Political power is master key which you can open all the doors of progress.”³ Since the lives of Dalits are dependent on the politics and the state's power, unless they enter and represent themselves, there is no guarantee of their welfare in all spheres. The political assertion of Dalits is portrayed in the film, *Palasa 1978* (2020). The film is about a two Dalit brothers; Mohan Rao and Ranga Rao fight against upper caste brothers, Lingamurthy and Gurmurthy who rule with their hegemony with separate political entities in a small town, Palasa in Srikakulam district of Andhra Pradesh. The caste discrimination and atrocities against Dalits have been depicted significantly. When Rangarao asks Gurmurthy under whom he takes shelter for a party ticket in the panchayat elections. The former is humiliated by the later that leads to revolt the caste and political

hierarchy. For political assertion, Dalit unity and self respect, the brothers; Mohan Rao and Ranga Rao have to face the two upper caste brothers rigorously. Till the climax of the film, the Dalit brothers struggle to live and revenge against upper caste brothers who tortured them. Ranga Rao's life is sacrificed to the upper caste hegemonic politics and Mohan Rao ends his life in jail for vengeance of his wife and brother's killings.

Despite depicting Dalit unity and identity political assertion is a far cry for them. And without achieving it they sacrifice their lives to the evil of caste. The film is directed by Karuna Kumar, a Non-Dalit it is compromised in achieving Dalit rights in political arena.

SETTING UP ASSERTION NO PAY OFF

In every film there is *Set-up* in the story line which the protagonist life is set to achieve or lose his / her goal, to meet its *Pay-off*. But when it comes to the Dalit characters in the Telugu films are used just as fuel to run the machine of the story forward. Though there is a Dalit character is portrayed in the lead role it cannot achieve its aim and objective, in other words assertion and identity of Dalits.

It is observed that the film, *Love Story* (2021) directed by SekharKammulaDalit assertion is sidetracked. The story is about a Dalit Christian, Revanth (Naga Chaitanya), loves an upper caste girl, Mounika Rani (Sai Pallavi). Overcoming caste barricades do they get married or not is the remaining story. Though they belong to same place there is a clear division between Dalits and upper castes living habitations, while formers reside in a low area of the village where later live.

Though Revanth's family embraces to Christianity there is no freedom from the untouchability by which they were victimised for ages. Having experienced the caste discrimination Manemma, the mother of Revanth, teaches him how to overcome the differences, “*Our hand should be on the top. You have to work really hard for that. House, land, job, mindset...whatever it is we have to lead a better life. Our hand must be a giving hand, not a begging one.*”

Grown Revanth to be financially fit he starts a *Zumba Centre* (fitness centre) in Hyderabad while residing in a rented house where Mounika Rani meets him and eventually the duo fall in love. To marry Mounika Rani he faces hurdles by her landlord parents. In this process he sells out his *Zumba Centre* which is not only feeding him but also helped him earning honor. And that is established with the help of his mother's land



documents mortgaged in a bank. With the money he wants to marry Mounika Rani and settle in Dubai or somewhere else for protecting themselves from her family.

At the resolution of the film Revanth kills Mounika Rani's uncle to protect her and is arrested and get released for not committing the murder intentionally.

But the set up line of Dalit assertion, "*Our hand should be on the top. You have to work really hard for that. House, land, job, mindset.....*" is not meeting its pay off. The Non-Dalit film maker's intention is only to focus on meeting his commercial formula *-boy gets his girl-*only but not on the Dalit assertion and their identity which is sidetracked in the film. For expanding his *Zumba Centre* Revanth mortgages his mother owing piece of land in bank for a loan. At the time getting land documents from his mother, she says, "*Land is our strength,*" which is an assertion of Dalits to have at least a piece of land. But there is no scene or shot or dialogue showing that they get their land papers back from the bank when Revanth sells out his dance centre and gets money.

Before five years of making this movie, *Love Story*, the film maker, Sekhar Kammula once said in an interview, "The stories from Dalits or backward castes must come to the fore. They have to narrate their stories from their perspective, what is their lifestyle and culture, what they wish for, what they need, we need that kind of stories now. That will come. The Tamil film industry the way forward where the alternative stories are told comparing with Brahmin culture. The industry has grown."⁴ However, when he got the opportunity to depict Dalit lives through Dalit perspective, he failed to narrate from the Dalit lens which means the upper caste film makers use the Dalit theme merely for their commercial success, though there are plenty of chances to foster Dalit assertion.

Upper caste influence on cinema

Since the politics with power, business, media are in the hands of upper castes' film industry too monopolized by them in Telugu states, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. If it is observed the Telugu film *Narappa* (2021) the lead role played by Venkatesh which is remake of Tamil hit film *Asuran* (2019) it can make us understand easily that how upper caste dominated Telugu film makers turns the theme of the story as per their wish. In the original *Asuran*, it is a story of a Dalit, Sivasamy and his family who have small piece of land-3 acres. When upper caste landlord tries to grab it, the clash begins that leads to killings of both sides. In revenge

Sivasamy's second son, Chidambaram, kills the landlord who murders his brother Murugan. To assert his identity and protect his son from the landlords' family members what Sivasamy does is the remaining story.

Narappa, the remake of *Asuran*, has no difference even between shots and frames in most of the scenes. To escape from the police and landlords' family members Narappa takes his son, Sinnappa, to forests for hiding. Now the film makers' narration point of view begins with 'what happened and why they escape', it goes like this, "*Because of a poor man no caste or religion. A rich man has no good will or humanity.*"

But when Narappa narrates his past to his son, Sinnappa, he lives in a hamlet with his family where Dalits are denied to wear slippers –Manu Dharma is strictly implemented. However, the film producer, actor and the director belong to upper caste and having Non-Dalit orientation except a couple of dialogues by characters, caste is not mentioned in the film, but indirectly and with the help of mass –en scenes the caste system is understood. Contrary to film makers' point of view, because of Dalit caste Narappa and his family are targeted by the upper caste landlords. Narrating through upper caste lens the direct mentioning of caste and discrimination is avoided. "Historically, Indian cinema exploited the labour of Dalits in its making, whilst erasing or appropriating their stories. This was not an accidental practice. When their stories were told on screen, it would be by savarnas..."⁵ they portray Dalit characters only to meet their mottos and making money on their 'success formulas'.

II. CONCLUSION

Observing the seven films that have Dalit characters in lead roles and analyzed in this paper, with a few exception of *1940 Lo Oka Gramam*, in which a Dalit proves he can achieve whatever he wishes, one can concluded that since filmmakers come from upper caste and have Non-Dalit orientation they have no empathy but have sympathy towards Dalits and Dalit identity. The film's ultimate goal is to make money with its 'unique' story; the film makers might have had the Dalit themes with Dalit characters. However they failed to portray the Dalit assertion and identity, and other aspirations of Dalits satisfactorily. Even if they depict Dalit assertion, it is either sidetracked or diminished at the end of the films. While a filmmaker depicts Dalit character without discussing caste and its discrimination, others portray Dalit assertion by sacrificing their lives in the caste



system. They do not hesitate in turning stories or themes for their benefit from original stories. Thus, it may say so, "People always have been the foolish victims of deception and self-deception in politics, and they always will be until they have learnt to seek out the interests of some class or other behind all moral, religious, political and social phrases, declarations and promises."⁶

Until Dalits enter the film industry where they are used even as tools and narrate their stories through their perspective the upper caste hegemonic cinema minds cannot change. It is the need of the hour for Dalits to upset the balance of caste dominance. However, it may not be easy to enter the caste based industry but with advent of new internet era, digital media, OTTs such as *Netflix*, *Amazon*, *Hotstar* owned by foreigners, who don't gauge human beings based on caste but on talent and creativity, there are plenty of opportunities for young and creative Dalit minds.

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