

FILMS AND CASTE

Rehnamol P R [rehnamol.pr@jgu.edu.in]
Associate Professor

Credits: 4

Credits Type:

Cross-registration:

Pre-requisites: None

COURSE DESCRIPTION (COURSE VISION):

The course primarily aims at understanding the representation of caste in Indian cinema. It seeks to analyse how caste, a social reality of India, is approached by movie makers over the period of time through their storytelling. By reviewing the movies that are primarily centred around the theme of caste and of different time frames, starting from colonial era to contemporary storytelling business in India, the course explores the changing dimensions and depictions of caste in films. The course examines the early Indian cinema and its outlook towards caste within the socio-political context of colonialism and the nationalist perspectives shaped by the Gandhian understanding of caste as a manifestation of untouchability. The course also explores the identity of caste as depicted in the different genres of cinema, especially in the art films. It seeks to analyse how caste is portrayed in parallel movies in varied layers of representation, power differentials, aesthetics, narrative, and symbolism.

The course also aims at analysing the social engagement of caste and its representation in the regional cinema. By including and evaluating the films in different regional languages, the course explores the location and subjectivity of caste in varied cultural contexts across different parts of India. Reviewing some of the predominant movies centred around the theme of caste, the course highlights how caste has been sought to be mainstreamed in the films that are hitherto dominated by dominant caste narratives. The main objective of the course is to provide a comprehensive idea of caste in films by critically examining its different dimensions, including narration of the story, characterisation, visual metaphor, historicism, social context, dialogue, language, resistance, and the intersectionality of gender, class, region, and religion as reflected in movies.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY:

The course begins with a historical reading on caste and a discussion on the scholarly works of different thinkers of both colonial and post-colonial India, which will help the students to have a comprehensive understanding of different contestations and claims around caste. Film screening and visual analysis constitute a primary way to critically engage with caste and its representation in early films in a particular historical framework. Scene analysis will be employed for a deeper and closer understanding of the intricacies of caste and its intersection with other social identities. By using semiotics as a method to understand the representation of caste in films through signs, the course adopts close analysis workshops in which the students would evaluate the set design, costume, and dialogue to make inferences from their visual experience.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES:

COURSE INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES	TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES	ASSESSMENT TASKS/ACTIVITIES
Understand the concept of caste and its evolution	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, and Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams
Analyse the perspective on caste during the colonial era through films	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, and Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams
Understand caste within a specific socio-political and historical context	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, and Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams
Comprehend the intricacies of the intersectionality of caste, class, and gender	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams
Evaluate the representation of caste in regional cinema	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams

Identify the cinematic representation of caste in commercial movies	Lectures, Film Screenings, Structured Discussions focusing on Representation of Caste, Scene Analysis, Engaging with Readings	Film Review, Comparative Film Essay, Class Discussions, Class Exams
---	---	---

READING LIST (up to 10 select readings):

1. Ambedkar, B.R. (1936). *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition* (2015) by Arundhati Roy. Navayana.
2. Dirks, Nicholas B. (2001). *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton University Press.
3. Abraham, Joshil K. and Judith Misrahi-Barak (2022). *The Routledge Companion to Caste and Cinema in India*. Routledge.
4. Chauhan, Vishal (2025). *Dalit Representation in Popular Hindi Cinema*. Routledge.
5. Ingole, Prashant (2023). Anti-Caste Music and Cinema. In Sudha Pai, D. Shyam Babu, and Rahul Verma (Ed.), *Dalits in the New Millennium*. Cambridge University Press.
6. Biswas, Mohimarnab (2025). Shattering Our Idols: Understanding Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Vision for Cinema in India. *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies*, 15(2), 108-133.
7. Pillai, Swarnavel Eswaran, Rutuja Deshmukh & Swapna Gopinath (2025). Intersectionalities in popular Hindi cinema: Regions, Languages and Industries. *South Asian Popular Culture*, 22(3), 333-342.
8. Ingle, Hrishikesh (2017). Fandry and Sairat: Marginal Narratives and Subjectivities in the New Marathi Cinema. *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 15 (2), 175–90.
9. Harish Wankhede (2013). Dalit Representation in Bollywood, *Mainstream*, 51(20), 1-5.
10. Chakravarti, Uma (2011). *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Sage Publications.

WEEKLY READING PLAN (WEEKLY OUTLINE):

A weekly plan is provided below:

Modules	WEEK(S)
MODULE 1: UNDERSTANDING CASTE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This module introduces students to the idea of caste and its evolution. It examines the major contestations and debates around the concept of caste in pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial India. By reading the important works that reflect upon the various interpretations of the caste and by using some visual representations of the practices of caste in different time 	Week 1

periods, the students will learn the complexities of the reality of caste, which will help them to unlearn the pre-conceived notions of the phenomenon and decode the mainstream negligence of caste as a reality.	
MODULE 2: FILMS AND CASTE REPRESENTATION IN COLONIAL INDIA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This module examines how caste was represented in Indian cinema, especially during the colonial times. Analysing the historical portrayal of caste in early Indian cinema, the module analyses the subjective understanding of caste in that particular historical context. Through the analysis of the movies made in British India, the module sheds light on how caste was predominantly understood in the matrix of nationalism, colonialism, and democratic resistance. <i>Movies: Mala pilla (1938), Achhut Kanya (1936)</i> 	Week 2
MODULE 3: CASTE AND ART FILMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This module provides an understanding of how art films that transcended the boundaries of mass entertainment reflect upon caste by probing social realities and critiquing the dominant structures. The module examines the themes and aesthetics with which art cinema depicted caste in realistic settings and nonlinear narratives. <i>Movies: Sujata (1959) Antarjali Jatra (1987), Ankur (1974), Samskara (1970)</i> 	Week 3&4
MODULE 4: REGIONAL CINEMA AND ANTI-CASTE REVOLUTION IN TAMIL FILMS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This module reviews the conspicuous changes reflected in the Tamil films through the movies of the director Pa Ranjit and Mari Selvaraj. Based on the review of their films, the module explores the complexities of caste and its interaction with different elements, including the emotion of love, gender, and other identities. The module also provides a critical understanding of how these movies subvert the dominant narratives through characters, visuals, and storytelling. <i>Movies: Pariyerum Perumal (2018), Sarpatta Parambarai (2021), Natchathiram Nagargiradhu (2022)</i> 	Week 5&6
MODULE 5: CASTE IN MARATHI CINEMA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This module provides an insight into the representation of caste in Marathi cinema. It examines how structural oppression, social hierarchy, daily humiliations, forbidden inter-caste love, Dalit subjectivity, assertion, and caste-based stigma have been 	Week 7&8

<p>depicted through different visuals and characters in the selected Marathi films.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Movies: Fandry (2013), Maati Maay (2007), Sairat (2016)</i> 	
<p>MODULE 6: SPORADIC REPRESENTATION OF CASTE IN MALAYALAM CINEMA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This module critically analyses the patterns and trends of representation of caste in Malayalam films. By analysing some of the prominent films on caste of different time periods, the module provides insights into the changing manifestations of caste in modern Kerala. It also analyses the intersection of caste, class, and gender in the state through the review of some of the selected films. • <i>Movies: Neelakuyil (1954), Kammattipaadam (2016) and Ee.Ma.Yau (2018)</i> 	Week 9
<p>MODULE 7: CASTE IN HINDI CINEMA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This module reviews the representation of caste in the changing landscape of Hindi cinema with a primary review of films like <i>Masaan</i> and <i>Homebound</i>. This module shows how caste shapes identity, aspirations, and relationships of people from marginalised sections, along with an emphasis on institutional and structural barriers that validate and reinforce the constraints of caste. • <i>Movies: Masaan (2015), Homebound (2025)</i> 	Week 10&11
<p>MODULE 8: CASTE IN THE LANDSCAPE OF COMMERCIAL FILMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This module locates the representation of caste in the terrain of mass entertainment beyond the realm of art/parallel cinemas. It shows how some of the films have carved out the spaces of commercial films and presented an explicit critique of caste crimes, state apathy, institutional failure, and caste prejudices. • <i>Movies: Aarakshan (2011), Article 15 (2019), Jai Bhim (2021), and Dhadak 2 (2025)</i> 	Week 12&13
REVISION WEEK	Week 14