

Response: Googling Caste in Hindi Cinema: Preliminary Comments

Ravikant, *Centre for the Study of Developing Societies*

Those questions remain, although as I have said, they have acquired dimensions and depths that the early iterations of Subaltern Studies were hardly aware of: we had a very limited understanding of gender and caste...Much of that changed over time, as Gramsci and Foucault, and postcolonial theory and feminist writings and minority histories, emerged as powerful interlocutors – and, at the same time, urgent questions were posed by lower caste and women’s movements in India, and by struggles over minority rights, encroachment on forest people’s lands, state oppression of border peoples, and so on.

Gyanendra Pandey (See Interview)

Shailendra is the most popular Harijan poet after Sant Ravidas.

Jagjivan Ram

Preface

Reading and later teaching graduate and post-graduate courses on global and Indian history, designed mostly in the Marxist-nationalist vein, in the late 1980s and early 90s in Delhi University (DU), was a formidable experience. Some of our naturally committed college teachers and an excellent peer group helped us negotiate what seemed like an endless forest of classic texts covering the entire chronology of human history from the origins of life to the emergence of modernity, touching upon all the major historiographical debates about ancient civilisations, modes of production, socio-economic transitions, cultural-intellectual currents and modern political revolutions. A generous diet of Western history was counterbalanced by a couple of yearlong courses on Asian history and a sumptuous palette on Indian history. Within this curriculum, Modern Indian history stood out as the most happening area, since the Subaltern Studies project had already arrived with a bang, shaking the very foundations of the received modes of history writing.

The History Department in DU had three proponents of this new, non-elitist mode of history writing: Sumit Sarkar, Shahid Amin and Gyan Pandey were already

looked upon by students as inspiring stars, so much so that we did not feel the need to look beyond, not even towards the highly reputed Centre for Historical Studies in JNU. In our enchanted classrooms, we felt privileged to meet in flesh and blood the haloed authors of *Modern India*, *Ascendancy of Congress in UP*, ‘Gandhi as Mahatma’, and such other essays in SS volumes that kept appearing at regular intervals. There were plenty of detractors of the Subaltern Studies in the university and beyond to be sure, but their active distractions were no match to our intellectual enthusiasm, fired equally by post-modernist and feminist readings, coupled with discussions about the brilliant works by Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh Chakravarty, Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, David Arnold and David Hardiman, in the classes and over multiple cups of tea in the Arts Faculty or Teen Murti Library. Those were also the ‘Mandal-kamandal’ days, and the choice of our research topics was very much shaped by the urge to get a handle on the genealogies of some of the urgent questions around caste and religion. Gyan had taught us a theoretically comprehensive course on nationalism, while Sumit introduced us to such exciting texts on the cultural and intellectual history of Early Modern Europe as *The Cheese and the Worms* and *The Name of the Rose* in M. A. Previous, so that opting for Modern Indian history in the Final appeared natural. Some of us went for Gyan’s newly minted course on Communalism where we were absolutely exhilarated to learn that what he taught in *our* class was going to come out as a book, an utterly topical treatise that was to become an instant hit.

It would perhaps be wrong to say that he ‘taught’ us, for neither the teacher nor the taught ever got this sense. Almost invariably, it was more of a collective discussion that he staged by eliciting and paraphrasing our raw outpourings in such elegant and profound terms that we were thrilled with disbelief at ‘our own thoughts’! Unencumbered by fashionable jargons and frozen wisdom in the readings, his class was above all a breezy,

informal, even irreverent, rhizomatic deconstruction that encouraged critical reflexivity and self-worth among early researchers. Together with the excitement generated in the M. A. and M. Phil. classes (Sunil Kumar was a find for 'Modernists' like us), and the fact that Rahi Masoom Raza's *Adha Gaon* was a part of the suggested readings, I decided to write my dissertation on the defining event of the partition on the basis of some of the best Hindi-Urdu fiction on the subject, including this classic novel. This literary encounter with history was as traumatically rich an experience as it was a pleasure to finally present one's findings to Gyan, a non-intrusive supervisor, who was then on his way to the US from where he published his *Remembering Partition*. However, the decisive impact on my early work was created by his SS essay 'Prose of Otherness'. I too left DU to join Sarai-CSDS to pursue an altogether different trajectory linked to Indic language computing. Gyan went on to bring in caste, race and gender into his research agenda, but I must confess I have not been able to keep up beyond what he published in the mid-90s.

Introduction

This essay is a preliminary result – not comprehensive at all, which we normally associate with 'google search' – of a social historian's search for 'caste' in the YouTube film archive of popular Hindi cinema. It must be obvious to any film buff that YouTube has opened veritable floodgates of film content hitherto unknown, unseen and uncared for. Using this burgeoning wealth, the essay questions the oft-repeated observation that Hindi cinema bypassed the question of caste and argues instead that a particular tendency towards canon-formation based on a limited number of 'classic' films by certain auteurs has prevented us from looking at the richness of filmic engagement with caste. Also, I think the commentators discussing caste names or indeed their absence in the names of lead characters miss a lot of other such socially significant signifiers as profession, dress, *tilak* (a coloured mark worn on the forehead), posture, conversation and so on, where caste is visually inscribed on the body, work and location of individual characters. A number of surprises await the historian in this popular archive and we will pick out some obscure films and songs to underline the depth of this engagement. The narrative presented here is not a linear one, and I feel *Didi* (1959, Dir. K. Narayan Kale) offers a wonderful point of departure, not the least because it takes the nationalist pedagogy of the 1950s into a school classroom and examines the fragments and fissures in it. I also wish to suggest that these 'Hindu Socials' which may now be legitimately treated as 'social-historical' do not only belong to the times they were produced and

watched in for the first time, but are very much part of the living archive of YouTube, where contemporary caste and other identity battles are still being sorted out in the 'comments' arena.

Didi: Caste in the School

That *Didi* is a self-conscious project aligned with the agenda of the nation at its extended 'moment of arrival' is obvious from its dedication. It says: 'This picture is humbly dedicated to all those who have striven and are striving for the creation of a New and Prosperous India'.¹ Gopal (Sunil Dutt), a dynamic scion of a reasonably wealthy household, double M. A., Ph. D., chooses to be a teacher in a school to train the collective 'future of the country', a clichéd euphemism for children. He extols the virtues of science after showing a contemporary American newsreel showcasing the launch of the US spacecraft, Pioneer I, in 1958. When his students ask for holiday homework, he asks them to write whatever they want to about the film they have seen. He stakes all of his and his widowed mother's wealth for the engineering experiment his friend (Feroze Khan) has begun for manufacturing steel. The husband of his very dear elder sister, an engineer, is quite skeptical of Gopal's idealism, and brands him 'a crack'. On the engineer's inspection tour of an industrial unit owned by an illiterate person, Lala Daulat Ram (Om Prakash), very much invested in steel production as a profitable enterprise, we are introduced to the industrialist's daughter, Radha (Shubha Khote), who teaches in a girls' school. Everybody thinks that Gopal would be happy to marry a fellow-traveler like her, which he does eventually after several separation songs and a few inevitable melodramatic twists.

It is clear that the film is a social narrative on the challenges of implementing the Gandhian-Nehruvian vision on the ground. The film embraces many significant parts of that vision which was aimed at achieving national prosperity and scientific progress, but also equally at tackling social issues such as dowry (Gopal refuses to be 'bought' by Daulat Ram), women's education and empowerment (as a role-reversed punishment for mischief, Gopal ordains that boys cook for girls, and girls play football for two hours in the blazing afternoon sun), and of course caste inequalities. Contributing to but also standing apart from the main narrative, Sahir Ludhianvi's two progressive songs in the film sought to address a number of these problems. The *mise-en-scène* of the first one is as follows: a famous image of Gandhi and Nehru in consultation presides over proceedings in a class room, and a map of India hangs in the front corner. The pupils have a series of tough questions for their teacher, who is

also their favourite, and expect him to answer in verse. So this is how it goes²:

Children (in relayed voices):

हमने सुना था एक है भारत, सब मुल्को से नेक है भारत
लेकिन जब नज़दीक से देखा, सोच समझ कर ठीक से देखा
हमने नक्शे और ही पाए, बदले हुए सब तौर ही पाए
एक से एक की बात जुदा है, धर्म जुदा है, जात जुदा है
आपने जो कुछ हमको पढ़ाया वो तो कहीं भी नज़र न आया !

*(We were told India is one and the noblest of all nations
On closer scrutiny however, we see an utterly disquieting
picture*

*Each is on its own, whether as caste or community
Whatever you taught us, teacher, is far from the ground reality)*

The children feel that the idealized portrait of a gentle and united India painted by their teacher was out of sync with the naked reality of disunity and disaffection in the name of religion and caste. The real India was neither 'ek' (one) nor 'nek' (good)! The teacher defends his past lessons by nuancing both 'unity' and 'difference' and makes a case for linguistic, caste and religious diversity in the nation.

Gopal:

जो कुछ मैंने तुमको पढ़ाया, उसमें कुछ भी झूठ नहीं
भाषा से भाषा न मिले तो इसका मतलब फूट नहीं
इक डाली पर रह कर जैसे फूल जुदा है पात जुदा
बुरा नहीं गर यूँ ही वतन में धर्म जुदा हो जात जुदा
अपने वतन में . . .

*(Nothing untrue in what I taught you
Linguistic differences do not amount to disunity
A leaf and a flower on the same tree are not the same
So there is nothing wrong if a country has different religions
and castes)*

But the children remain unconvinced, and they underline the ubiquity of discordant hullabaloo and even bloodbath in the name of religion, even though the founding holy texts like the Vedas and the Quran are propounding practically the same principles:

Children:

वही है जब कुर'आन का कहना, जो है वेद पुराण का कहना
फिर ये शोर-शराबा क्यों है, इतना खून-खराबा क्यों है?
अपने वतन में . . .

*(If the Quran and Veda/Puranas say the same thing
Why is there so much din, so much bloodshed?)*

The teacher takes recourse to a familiar excuse: the policy of 'divide and rule' as the gift of colonial masters to gullible Indians.

Gopal:

सदियों तक इस देश में बच्चों रही हुकूमत गैरों की
अभी तलक हम सब के मुँह पर धूल है उनके पैरों की
लड़वाओ और राज करो ये उन लोगों की हिकमत थी
उन लोगों की चाल में आना हम लोगों की जिल्लत थी
ये जो बैर है एक-दूजे से ये जो फूट और रंजिश है
उन्हीं विदेशी आकाओं की सोची-समझी बख्शिश है
अपने वतन में . . .

*(Foreigners ruled over this country for centuries
And our face is still covered with the dust of their feet
Divide and rule was their time-tested device
And falling into their trap proved our undoing
The mutual distrust and discord that you see around
Is but a parting gift of the foreigner masters)*

We are aware that this was an oft-deployed nationalist trope for explaining away communalism, but Sahir's children shift gears to point to inequalities stemming from birth, pointing to the glaring social hierarchy between the Brahmins and the Harijans, asking why humans are born in one caste or the other, and indeed, why do they get frozen in them.

Children:

कुछ इंसान बरहमन क्यों हैं?
कुछ इंसान हरिजन क्यों हैं?
एक की इतनी इज्जत क्यों है?
एक की इतनी जिल्लत क्यों है?

*(Why are some people Brahmin?
And others Harijan?
Why is one so venerated?
While the other is humiliated?)*

In response, Sahir's teacher delves into the indigenous discursive traditions:

Gopal:

धन और ज्ञान को ताक़त वालों ने अपनी जागीर कहा
मेहनत और गुलामी को कमज़ोरों की तक़दीर कहा
इंसानों का ये बटवारा वहशत और जहालत है
जो नफ़रत की शिक्षा दे वो धर्म नहीं है लानत है
जनम से कोई नीच नहीं है जनम से कोई महान नहीं
करम से बढ़कर किसी मनुष्य की, कोई भी पहचान नहीं

(The powerful have always claimed monopoly over riches and knowledge

While hard manual work and slavery were designated as the fate of the weak

This division of humanity is nothing short of barbarism and foolishness

And the religion that preaches hatred is nothing but a curse

Nobody is low or high by birth

None should have an identity other than their deeds)

Gopal now draws attention to the historical constructions, and hegemonic monopoly, of the rich over power and knowledge, a mythical-ideological device that indexed drudgery and 'slavery' as the eternal fate of the poor. Further, according to him, any religion that preaches hatred is a bane. He then questions the divisive identities ascribed and frozen by birth, and valorises human work and its dignity instead.

Children:

अब तो देश में आजादी है, अब क्यों जनता फरियादी है? ?

कब जाएगा दौर पुराना, कब आएगा नया ज़माना?

(Why do people continue to beg for their rights even after we have become free?

When shall we see the dawn of the much-promised New Age)

The question now shifts to basic economics, to the lack of progress made in the post-independence period:

Gopal:

सदियों की भूख और बेकारी क्या इक दिन में जाएगी?

इस उजड़े गुलशन पर रंगत आते-आते आएगी

(The hunger and unemployment embedded in centuries will not disappear overnight

This wrecked and ravaged garden will take time to get back its natural colours)

Gopal pleads for some patience and is optimistic about the eventual fulfillment of these aspirations. The musical debate is disrupted at this point by an intrusive missive from the governing board of the school. Gopal is called in to be told by a Madan Mohan Malaviya look-alike Brahmin figure to stop his unconventional methods of teaching, in response to which he resigns, and the children witness the proceedings in dismay and return to their desks, crestfallen. Gopal continues with his optimistic sermon about the (Five Year) Plans and other foundational initiatives undertaken by the new government, and throws the ball back into the children's court. The historical injustices, starvation and

unemployment rooted in and perpetuated for centuries cannot be undone overnight, he says rhetorically, and exhorts the children to become the harbingers of the New Age. He argues that it is their duty to fill bright colours in the dull contours drawn up so far:

Gopal:

*ये जो नये मंसूबे हैं, और ये जो नई तामीरें हैं
आने वाले दौर की कुछ धुँधली-धुँधली तस्वीरें हैं
तुम ही रंग भरोगे इनमें, तुम ही इन्हें चमकाओगे
नवयुग आप नहीं आएगा, नवयुग को तुम लाओगे*

*(The new plans and foundations that you see
Are but vague imaginaries of the new dawn
You are the ones to fill colours in these
You will bring the New Age.)*

Bidding his students an emotional farewell, Gopal wishes to leave, but the students won't let him, so he promises to hold informal after-school classes for them in the Shiva temple of the village. True to his promise, he ends up tutoring them in Fine Arts, as a result of which the students win prizes at a prestigious art show. The school management, pleasantly surprised, realizes its mistake in disallowing Gopal's innovative mode of teaching, and restores him to his job at school, thus resolving an existential as well as pedagogic problem in a happy manner. Gopal's engineer friend too finally finds his chemical formula for making steel, and is able to get back the house Gopal had pawned to finance his experiments. Their sacrifices bear fruit and the lead couple finally gets reunited.

We also need to take note of the second progressive song Sahir penned for the film. It is placed just before a clumsy twist in the story wherein Gopal is bitten by a snake and is hospitalized in an unconscious state, swinging between life and death. Just before the snakebite, the two groups of students, one of boys and the other of girls, led by their teachers, converge at a picnic spot by sheer coincidence. The ball kicked by the boys falls into the flour the girls were to make *rotis* (bread) from. When the boys come looking for the ball, the angry girls throw them into a water-filled pit. That is when Gopal, one of the teachers accompanying the students, pronounces the gender-reversed punishment referred to above. The hero and the heroine (a teacher with the girls) rediscover their love for each other, and they sing a song for the children which may be read as an extension of the one analysed above in detail. Here are some excerpts from the lyrics, copied from the [giitaayan®](#) transcription, which follows a particular scheme:

Gopal:

बच्चों तुम तकदीर हो कल के हिन्दुस्तान की
बापू के वरदान की नेहरू के अरमान की
बच्चों तुम तकदीर . . .

(Children, you are the fortune of tomorrow's India
Of Bapu's blessings and Nehru's aspirations)

आज के टूटे खँडहरों पर तुम कल का देश बसाओगे
जो हम लोगों से न हुआ वो तुम कर के दिखलाओगे
(तुम नन्हीं बुनियादें हो) –2 दुनिया के नए विधान की
बच्चों तुम तकदीर . . .

(You will create tomorrow's country on today's ruins
You will do what we could not possibly do
You are the little foundations of a whole new constitution of the
world)

Radha :

नारी को इस देश ने देवी कह कर दासी जाना है
जिसको कुछ अधिकार न हो वो घर की रानी माना है

(This country has called the woman a Devi, but treated her as
a slave
A queen of the house, she is left without any rights).

Both:

तुम ऐसा आदर मत लेना –2 आड़ हो जो अपमान की
बच्चों तुम तकदीर . . .

(Don't take this kind of respect, which is insult in guise)

रह न सके अब इस दुनिया में युग सरमायादारी का
तुमको झंडा लहराना है मेहनत की सरदारी का
तुम चाहो तो –2 बदल के रख दो किस्मत हर इन्सान की
बच्चों तुम तकदीर . . .

(Let the age of Capital wither away from the world
You have to unfurl the flag of the dictatorship of the proletariat
Changing every human's fate is but a mere wish away
Children, you are the fortune of tomorrow's India)

The children are once again appealed to take control of India's fate and future, but the instructive template is as onerous as it is interesting. As inheritors of Bapu's blessings and Nehru's aspirations, they must guard against the fissiparous tendencies, and set up a world free of capitalist oppression under the leadership of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Quite clearly, Sahir here got an opportunity to insert his communist political vision, echoes of which may be found in several films of the time. The most noteworthy layer in the song however,

is the penultimate stanza initiated by Asha Bhosle for Shubha Khote and joined in by Rafi for Sunil Dutt, and Sahir once again surpasses all other lyricists in his radical stance on gender: 'While deifying the woman as goddess, the country has treated her as a slave, as the queen of the household but with no rights whatsoever'. As if responding to the oft-quoted *Manusmriti* dictum *यत्र नार्यस्तु पूज्यन्ते रमन्ते तत्र देवता* (Gods inhabit the place where women are worshipped), Radha asks her students 'to reject such humiliation camouflaged as honour'.

To the Origins: Raja Harishchandra and the Travails of Truthfulness

Didi is not an isolated instance. Popular Hindi cinema has worn its pedagogic responsibility on its sleeves and deployed a range of arguments to attack social evils, traditional and modern. To underscore the point that the anti-caste reformist impulse was present right at the birth of Indian cinema, we only need to recall that Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), an adaptation of the Puranic tale of an upright, gift-giving king, which presented the hero as an accursed slave of a 'lowly' Chandal, placed at the bottom rung of the caste ladder as he presides over the death rituals of his own son at the cremation ghats of Varanasi.⁴ While only a few fragments of the Phalke film are available, film-makers kept returning to the tale in practically every decade of the last century, sometimes twice or even thrice. A search for *Raja Harishchandra* on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) yields more than 25 results, an honour not even the much-remade *Devdas* can lay claim to. It is beyond the scope of the essay to capture the changing contours of this accretionary tale in its long filmic itinerary, but Kshatriya king Harishchandra's tragic downfall to untouchable status does get elaborated and commented upon from a caste perspective. In the 1952 version, for example, we have this conversation between the Chandal's kind-hearted wife and the newly auctioned and acquired Harishchandra:

Lady:

तुम्हारी जाति क्या है?
(What is your caste?)

Slave:

जाति कैसी माँ, जैसा समय, वैसी जाति।
(What caste mother? It changes with time.)

Lady:

तुम्हारा नाम क्या है?
(What's your name?)

Slave:

हरिया।

(Hariya)

Lady:

ये तो भगवान का नाम है, मैं तुम्हें हरि कहूँगी।

(This is God's own name. I will call you Hari)

The element of pathos at the precipitous decline in the status of the high-caste royal family of Harsihchandra is retained in the 1952 film as well, and a recurrent theme song dwells on the mood. But the above conversation, in which the original name is suitably abbreviated to hide the true identity of the hero, is remarkable for the opportunity of detachment, and therefore mobility, that it creates. Like one's name, 'caste could change with time', was a relatively open-ended take by the hero. Both the linguistic continuum and simultaneous shift in the name of one person is rife with socio-historical meanings. The kind-hearted Brahmin mistress of Harishchandra subverts Harishchandra's realistic self-description, so much like what Gandhi did in 'Harijan', and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) too, when they invented *Vanvasi* for *Adivasi*. In real diegetic life, Hariya is made to draw numerous pitchers of water from the well; and his suspicious master banishes him from the house and reassigns him a job at the funeral ground, where Hariya remains steadfast to his duty of fee-collection, unmoved by the wailing of an inconsolable and resource-less Tara, who has to perform the last rites of their son, Rohitashva.

In a grueling contest to prove the relative power of *tapa* (meditative *bhakti*) represented by the Brahmin sage Vishvamitra, over that of demonstrable truth enshrined in the alms-giving acts of the Kshatriya king of Ayodhya, we see the former ultimately bowing down to the steely endurance demonstrated by the latter. The excessive, Manichean narrative presents Vishvamitra as arrogant and cruel. His relentless actions in piling up one misery after another on the king's family stands justified only by presenting the proceedings in the garb of a worn-out mythical motif of divinely designed public test, which becomes so unbearable that even goddess Lakshmi is compelled to intercede on behalf of Tara, Harishchandra's wife. Vishnu sends his *chakra* (spinning disc-like weapon) to keep the stone wheat grinder running when Tara collapses from exhaustion, and then the goddess herself miraculously appears, fully armed, to prevent Tara's Brahmin master (Gope) from raping her. True to his ambivalent character, the sage Narada on one hand tells Lakshmi to take pity on Tara, and simultaneously asks Vishvamitra to take the ultimate test by getting his son mortally bitten by the serpent king Vasuki. Vishvamitra

periodically asks Harishchandra to concede defeat and break his vow, but by staying true to his words, the latter denies the former moral victory and ends up a winner.

The arduous virtuosity of *tapa* is a recurrent motif in ancient Sanskrit texts, and we know from the hair-raising debate over the putative responsibility for the death of a Brahmin boy in the *Ramrajya* (literally 'the rule of Rama, meaning an ideal regime) of Valmiki's *Ramayana* that *tapa* to begin with was the monopoly of the Brahmins. We learn that the route to greatness and salvation through *tapa* was only grudgingly opened up for Kshatriyas and Vaishyas and was still not accessible to the rest of the *varnas* (social orders). Heterodox sects such as Jainism-Buddhism in early India, Bhakti-Sufi movements in medieval times and the social-reform movements in the modern period challenged the Brahmin monopoly over Shastra-sanctified knowledge and power. A gradual shift towards this-worldliness led to the erosion of the Brahmin's once unassailable authority; and the Brahmin figure that we get to see in modern cinematic narratives is hardly an enviable icon of reverence. As in fiction and Parsi theatre before, mythologies were reinterpreted for the screen to insert new sensibilities and make room for pre-Gandhian, Gandhian and even Ambedkarite critiques of the caste system. We will return to the themes of exclusion/inclusion, conflicting claims on the means of livelihood and forest resources, and conditions of service by the low-born for the high-born in our discussion of the fictional biopic of *Ramayana's* author, Valmiki, a figure who came to be deified, and identified with, by castes responsible for cleaning up the fecal mess created by all castes, day after day, for centuries. The abiding popularity of the Harishchandra story with the filmmakers is as much a tribute to the ideal of truthfulness as it underlines a vision of social transcendence beyond immutable caste boundaries.

In another Phalke film, *Shri Krishna Janma* (1918), the available fragments of which have been brilliantly analysed by Ravi Vasudevan, we see five family units as representatives of the four *varnas* trooping to Lord Vishnu to pay their respects and offerings, one after another, separated by inter-titles, and the Lord blesses them indiscriminately. In the end, as they all come back as a crowd, Vishnu exhorts each one 'to abandon their diverse faiths and come under His protective umbrella': सर्व धर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज. Another inter-title appears soon after: बहवो ज्ञानतपसपूता मत्भावमागता (O various sons of knowledge and *tapa*, come and become (like) me). In Ravi Vasudevan's delicate reading of the sequence, the broom held high by the Shudra male 'sways in the frame, as if involuntarily disclosing the tension within this composition'.⁵ Elaborating further, Vasudevan writes:

Above all, we need to hold on to the particular imaginary virtuosity, and indeed virtuality, of cinematic fiction: the way an immaterial world of light and shadow can figure forth an image condensing the social world, while holding onto all the iconographies of difference and hierarchy within that frame. The frame of Hindu society is filled to the edges, ready to burst, and the broom that swirls suggests a tangential, centrifugal impetus, underlining the apparently impossible perceptual logistics of maintaining a centripetal orientation for the spectator.⁶

The 'caste problem' continued to destabilise the virtual cinematic frame, both popular and experimental. The steady rise of the social film from the mid-1930s displaced the mythological genre to some extent, mediated as it was by several biopics of Bhakti poets belonging to medieval India, poets whose non-Brahmanical birth, non-sectarian life and egalitarian work embodied a critique of the caste system. In the modern socials as exemplars of genre-mixing, we once again see the *bhajans* (devotional songs) emerging as the space for complaint to gods by offering pathos-laden critiques of adversities caused by the upper caste rich and powerful. Temples as the material space for Hindu prayers remained relatively closed even after pro-untouchable legislation in Independent India, but popular cinema fantasied the end of such discrimination quite early on. Much is still made of eating together as a political gesture of outreach to the Dalits, but such issues were dealt without much ado on the screen. Taking its cue from the long-term literary memory and performance practices, Hindi cinema continued its campaign against the inhumanity of the caste system. In the remaining part of the essay, my analysis will zoom in on some of the obscure social films produced between 1930s and 1940s.

Maharshi⁷ Valmiki: Another Biography of the Pioneer Poet

Given that only a few films can be discussed in detail here, let us begin with *Maharshi Valmiki* (1946)⁸, a wonderful instance of a devotional genre in which the received biography of Sanskrit's *adikavi*, first poet, was re-fashioned as a socio-economic conflict over ways of living and control of natural resources between the civilised Aryas and the forest-dwelling tribals (I use the term *adivasi* here). It is not so much of an intellectual journey, but a closer look at Ratna's (later to be Valmiki) life, torn between Aryan rituals and his non-Aryan community habitat. His own community hates the incursion and infringement that the Aryan ashram, and its non-violent *yagya* (oblation ritual) have caused. The violent conflict in the middle is preceded by a discussion of important moral issues about divergent food habits and primary ownership of nature's bounty. Ratna is brought to the correct path of *tapa*, the successful completion of which enables him to write the *Ramayana*. The denouement is

familiar, but a striking biographical twist is provided by the fact that Ratna is not presented as a ruthless fugitive from the inception: he becomes one under circumstances that he believes are created by the Aryas. Directed by Bhal G. Pendharkar, the film remarkably credits 'all the workers of Prabhakar Pictures' as producers, and has Shanta Apte (Bijli), Prithiviraj Kapoor (Ratna) in the lead, and Raj Kapoor in a brief role of Narada, whose sermon accomplishes the task of conversion of Ratna into Valmiki.

The film begins with a panoramic shot of the snow-clad Himalayas, from where the camera descends on an ashram in a forest where its Kulpati (head, played by Baburao Pendharkar) leads his disciples to the morning class amidst recitation of Vedic mantras. He tells them to impart the principles of the great Aryan dharma to the non-Aryas in the neighbourhood. We also get a glimpse of his grown up daughter, Sandhya, feeding the deer and a few birds. The king's messenger arrives with a request to perform a *shanti yagya* (oblation for peace), to which Kulpati agrees, with the condition that no killings be allowed till the *yagya* lasts.

The next sequence has *adivasi* Bijli standing on a tree singing a song with her mates. It is a song in praise of their natural habitat, community solidarity, peace and aspirations, and it also establishes her as the voice/leader of the community. The *adivasis* are all wearing minimalistic attires made from animal skin. In comes Ratna, a member of the community but also a devotee of the Aryan dharma, who lends his manual services to the ashram people, for which he becomes the target of scorn for his community. It seems that Ratna is a lonely figure, almost an outcast, for his unconditional, almost slavish, allegiance to the Aryas. The king's messenger comes to the *adivasis* with the order of observing non-violence during the *yagya*, but Bijli is defiant: 'What shall we eat, if we do not kill?' The messenger threatens them with dire consequences. She lets them know that the Aryas are unwanted outsiders imposing their diktats on a land that belongs to her community. Bijli goes to the ashram and tells Kulpati that they will not obey his unfair orders, and one of them kills a deer seen earlier in the ashram. When asked about who had killed the ashram deer, Bijli takes responsibility, reminding that the deer in fact belongs to the forest. The king's general orders that the *dera* (dwellings of the tribals) be burnt down if they did not evacuate the area by evening. Bijli is forced to shift her community to some other location.

Meanwhile, Ratna is asked to carry the invitation for the *yagya* to several kingdoms, and he asks Kulpati to take care of his sick mother in his absence, but the arrogant guru does not even go to give his *darshan* (visitation) to her, which is the minimal last wish she was craving for. There is an early scene in which Ratna's mother is shown

asking him if he has performed his duties for the ashram. Ratna is back and furious to find his mother's dead body lying unattended, in decay, being eaten by worms. He goes to Kulpati and articulates his fury at the insensitivity shown to his mother. The Kulpati advises him to perform the last rites, but Ratna's anger does not subside. It is the first turning point in his life. Alienated, he joins the king's forces, and tries to implement the royal rules for protecting the forest. Bijli is shown fishing in a pond, where Ratna captures and presents her at the court. As acerbic as ever, she calls Ratna a dog of the Aryas, and herself a free lioness. She is ordered to be whipped by the king, who is incensed at her outspoken demeanour. Ratna protests at such a harsh punishment, but is called a *dasyu* (bandit) by the king.

This introduces a second turning point in the sea-saw narrative of the film. Ratna vows revenge. Converting his community into a trained army, he inflicts large scale arson and killing on the Aryan cities. Bijli, who always derided him in public, now falls in love with him and starts dreaming of a life together. For her marriage, she decides to fetch Kulpati from the ashram. When he refuses to come, she burns the ashram down and Kulpati loses his eyesight.

The king comes to the ashram and says that he will capture Ratna, the robber. Sandhya tries to save him, arguing that he was the only link that could unite the Aryas and the non-Aryas. But the king's men take him away. Sandhya carries the message of Ratna's capture to Bijli and asks her to save him, which she does. Ratna is liberated after a fierce battle in which the king is killed. Shanta and Ratna marry with much fanfare and give birth to a son. In an effort at reconciliation, and for Ratna's salvation, the missionary Kulpati goes to the *adivasi dera* to preach to his former ward. Though Ratna is already assailed by doubts about the attachment demonstrated by his kinsmen, especially Bijli, to their newfound material wealth (for which they hated the Aryas in the first place), Kulpati's sermons sound hollow to Ratna. He orders Kulpati to go away, but the latter keeps laughing back in a patronising manner as he can see Ratna's future turn to asceticism. Egged on by his kinsmen, an enraged Ratna throws several stones at Kulpati, killing him in the process. Enter a voice, singing:

जाग मूढ़ पापी हत्यारे, मौत नगाड़ा बाजे
कौन सहायक अब है तेरा, काल पीठ पर गाजे
भरा पाप घट अब छलकेगा, रोम-रोम अग्नि प्रगटेगा
जिनके तूने प्राण लिए हैं, ये है उनका श्राप . . .

(Wake up, you idiotic killer, hear the Drum of Death,
Who will come for your rescue now, when Time rides your back!

*Your pot of sins is filled to the brink, and fire will ooze out from your every pore
All those you killed, this is their curse, this is their curse...*)

In an abusive language, Ratna challenges the voice to present itself as a body. It is then that the sage Narada materialises, introducing himself as an Arya, which angers Ratna, and he calls all Aryas *adham* (ignoble), *neech* (lowly) and *dushta* (evil). Narada retorts by saying that Kulpati and his daughter Sandhya sacrificed their lives to show him the right path, that he has been ungrateful, and that he erroneously holds all Aryas responsible for the evil acts of an individual king and his men. Ratna says he wanted to take revenge for his mother's death and to break social hierarchies. Narada calls him a fool for having been daydreaming about the destruction of the Arya *jati*, which is powerful beyond his imagination: *तेरा प्रत्येक शब्द, तेरा हरेक विचार आर्यों के ग्यान का जूटन है* (your every word, every thought, is the leftover of Aryan knowledge). Narada then talks about how the body is just a means for collecting virtues and sins during a human lifetime, a sum total that ultimately determines the next birth of the soul. He shows him some really dark and scary visions of the torture awaiting a sinner after death, as described in the scripture *Garuda Purana*. Narada also taunts Ratna about whether his family and friends would take responsibility for his sins, and partake in the torture and repentance apportioned to him. Confronted by such a fearsome spectre, all the kinsmen leave. When he goes to ask Bijli, she is telling her injured son that she can't share the pain he is going through: *जो करेगा, वही भरेगा* (Whosoever sows will reap).

Having received his answer, Ratna comes back dejected. Narada tells him that his aim of fighting oppression was laudable, but his means quite deplorable: he should have shown another path, that of godliness, to his enslaved community: *क्रान्ति तो चाहिए, पर शांति से, सदभावना से, पवित्रता से* (we do need revolution, but it must be achieved with peace, harmony and purity). Ratna asks Narada about the path of his own salvation. *आत्मोद्धार का एक ही साधन है: पश्चात्ताप, शुद्धता और तप* (salvation can only be attained by performing repentance, purity and devotional meditation), says Narada, and instructs him to say *mara...mara* (dying... dying), if he can't, in his inhibition for things good, say *Rama...Rama*, so that by default, by uttering the name of Rama in reverse and quick succession, he would get it right. Ratna eventually takes his advice and goes into a long meditative hibernation, a successful *tapasya*, at the end of which the gods descend from the clouds above to bless him. After that we see the sage Valmiki writing the epic, condensed in futuristic terms as an audio-visual song. Interestingly, this abridged version ends on a happy

note with Rama's coronation, leaving out the tragic episode in which a pregnant Sita is exiled to Valmiki's ashram. Like she was in Bhavbhuti's *Uttararamcharitam* and Vijay Bhatt's *Ram Rajya* (1943), and unlike Tulasidas' *Ramcharitamanas*.

Maharshi Valmiki: Critique by Filmindia

A review in Baburao Patel's *Filmindia* found the second half of the film, the part in which all the brisk action takes place, entertaining. Appreciative of Shanta Apte and Raj Kapoor's performances, it castigated the element of theatricality in Prithviraj Kapoor's role and attributed it to Bhal G. Pendharkar's past experience with Parsi theatre. More importantly, the reviewer found ideological debate in the film confusing, and the challenge thrown up by the *adivasis* in bad taste⁹: 'Perhaps because it was a story of an undated past, the writer has given flight to his imagination and tried to create a plausible theme for the story. In doing so however, he has vomited a lot of bile against the Aryan missionaries of civilization and the bile becomes too bitter at times and spoils the taste of the entire dish'.¹⁰

In retrospect, we can say that in retaining only the skeletal plot, including Valmiki's conversion to the Aryan way, *Maharshi Valmiki* was a major narrative innovation, very much in the diverse creative tradition of 'so many *Ramayanas*'.¹¹ That the battle over the ownership, deification and appropriation of the figure of Valmiki continues in contemporary India becomes obvious from the comments of viewers who have chosen to write in after watching the film online in recent times. Comparing the film with many other animation flicks uploaded to educate the new generation of children,¹² one viewer found it closer to what he believed to be the 'true' story of Valmiki, who is venerated as a god, especially by the Valmiki community.¹³ Released on 18 January 1947, the film must have been inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's stay for a few months in what was then known as 'Bhangi'/Harijan Basti', and later Valmiki Colony, in Delhi, a critical account of which has been provided by Vijay Prashad.¹⁴

A certain history of upper caste hegemony, lower caste assertion and periodic adjustments between caste groups in between, may be written on the basis of naming. It has been rightly pointed out that most of the lead characters in Hindi films have either remained unmarked or bear upper caste second names. In this context, *Filmindia's* omission of *Maharshi* from the full name of the film is as significant as its impatience with what it called 'bile against Aryan missionaries of civilisation' in the film. In fact, the magazine continued to demonstrate a lack of patience and insensitivity with films dealing with caste.

Since we often encounter under-researched journalistic generalisations about silence on caste in older films, Patel's remarks below, excerpted from another film review, are worth quoting at length for the simple reason that he enumerates several caste-centric efforts in the 1930s and 40s. The film under review is *Oonch Neech*, a late production from the once famous New Theatres. The review has a tell-tale title: 'Another Achhoot (Untouchability-related) Story':

The theme and subject matter of 'Oonch Neech' would have impressed us definitely – ten years ago! Then, of course, the very selection of such a subject would have been rightly regarded as a progressive and daring step, worthy of commendation. But umpteen different pictures on this theme have appeared since then – Bombay Talkies' Achhoot Kanya, Ranjit's Achhoot, New Theatres' own Doctor, Navyug's Paroo – to mention only a few names. There is no longer anything original or unusual in a theme based on an 'Achhoot' story. It is only by interpreting the theme in an original and striking manner or by giving it a contemporary context that the 'old wine' could have been made acceptable and palatable in 'new bottles'. Not having done that, the New Theatres depended on their trade name to pass off old stuff – and consequently suffered.

'Oonch Neech' is the simple – over simple – story of an untouchable girl brought up as the daughter of a high caste family, the discovery of her real identity and the consequent suicide...(It) remains a goody-goody insipid story in the old Bombay Talkies tradition reminiscent of Jeevan Naiya and Janmbhoomi, and nothing much happens except the suicide right at the end. What is most deplorable is that the theme of untouchability that has been taken up is nowhere supported by dramatic action. We see neither the plight of the untouchables nor the emotional conflict between the two sisters. Everybody seems to be good and kind and the 'problem' is supposed to be presented through processions and a well-meaning but really a re-recorded theme song, karwatein badal raha zamana (time kept changing its colour).¹⁵

There is no copy of *Oonch Neech* (1948) available on YouTube, so we will have to concede that the film might have been aesthetically poor and lacked 'dramatic action' and emotional conflict. However, 'umpteen' in the passage above is definitely a striking exaggeration, so we are tempted to ask how many is too much, since the review mentions only seven. Reviewing *Paroo*, which it labelled as 'untouchable trash on untouchability' a few months later, *Filmindia* went on to argue that we need not continue to dwell upon the theme of untouchability, since the theme is not relevant, progressive or fashionable anymore.

It would have been progressive enough to advocate such a marriage between the extreme ends of society on screen fifteen years ago when untouchability was rampant but now with Harijans backed by state legislation it is hardly fashionable even to flirt with the idea or attach any new discoveries to it.¹⁶

Once again, the film's print is not available, so we have

no means to quarrel with *Filmindia's* aesthetic judgment on the film. But notice how, within a span of eight months, the magazine reviewer's temporal perspective takes a leap of five years! That the issue was not merely aesthetic is proven by the magazine's take on *Vidya* (Girish Trivedi, 1949) in the same issue. As if to draw legitimacy for its own disparaging caption, "'Vidya': A Boring and Amateurish Effort!", the reviewer, probably Baburao Patel himself, begins by describing how a polite person like Premier B. G. Kher, who came to see the film with his wife, had to leave the hall during interval. Patel then presents a rather violent summary of the plot and declares it a dud even though 'the main design behind it is purposeful'.¹⁷ The only saving grace he could find in the film had to do with Dev Anand's improvement as an actor, though that too is marred by the fact that 'Suraiya Fails Miserably'. Watching *Vidya* on YouTube was quite an engaging experience for me, for it weaves several strands of the times in its well-paced narrative, with a modernist twist in the end. It is a courageous narrative of a young Chamar man, once a school dropout and then again humiliated by some of his upper caste, stiff English-medium schoolmates, beaten up by his teacher, but eventually ending up marrying the only daughter of a wasted upper caste zamindar, after she gets her reformer uncle to support his education. The film opens up with a cobbler (Bhola) doing his job on the pavement, as his son lends him a helping hand. A rich customer arrives in the form of a school girl to get her sandals repaired. The conversation, in translation here, is interesting:

Bhola:
Which class are you in?

Vidya:
1st English, and you?

Bhola:
I gave up after 4th Hindi.

Vidya:
Why?

Bhola:
With everything else, the cost of education has also gone up.

The girl insists on giving him four paise instead of one, by way of her contribution towards the boy's education, telling his father that he must send him to school. At school, Bhola is marked out for his caste: some children scoff at him and his would-be desk-mate leaves as soon as he goes to sit next to him. Harish (who grows up to be the US-returned villain) the third, unwanted angle in the love

story that blossoms between the lead pair, does not like young Vidya eating with Bhola during recess. He says, *तुम तो उस चमार के साथ खाओगी, क्यों?* (you will of course eat with that Chamar, won't you?), to which she says, *हाँ, खाऊँगी, तुमसे मतलब!* (yes, I will, and it is none of your business!) This angers Harish and he picks a fight with Bhola. But the latter gives him a good thrashing, for which he receives his own share from the teacher, in spite of Vidya's protestations. Both Bhola and Vidya decide not to go to the English-medium school. Her reformist uncle sets up a Hindi-medium school with the help of Bhola (whom he always calls Bholaram), where the two get educated, and start teaching as well, when they grow up.

We have tell-tale visual signs of the film being ideologically aligned with the mainstream nationalist ideals: Gandhi adorns the walls of Vidya Bhavan, of Vidya's own house, Bhola reads Nehru's *Discovery of India*, and their reformed co-worker redecorates the walls of her houses with paintings of several other leaders as well. Apart from the main thrust of Dalit education, there is a clear emphasis in the film on *swadeshi*, imparting education in Hindi, and finally bringing Vidya's father, lost to drinking and prostitution, back to reformed ways. An enterprising Vidya achieves this by 'supplying' herself to her father, after his suppliers' attempt to abduct a girl from Vidya Niketan for his insatiable appetite for 'new' pleasures is thwarted by Bhola and other volunteers. The encounter sends her father into a shock, and having broken a few bones, he repents and recovers to finally accept Bhola as his son-in-law, providing the realist story with an idealist, happy ending.

A similar theme of Dalit education, a tale of an elder Chamar brother's financial struggles to educate his younger one, was picked up in *Tel Maalish Boot Paalish* (1961), which starts with the following Nagri preface read out loud:

The story goes back by several years: Santa's father, though raised as a respectable man, fell from grace because he embraced the Harijan movement and decided to break caste ties by marrying an untouchable girl. This bond of humanity became a social eyesore and the gods of the time pushed him downhill into a life of dishonour, closing all doors of opportunity on him. He was cast so far away from the changing tide of time that he could not even provide the light of education to his son. On his deathbed he told his son that his life was but a template of defeats: but you must enable your brother in such a way that he wins the game that you and I lost. Since then Santa has been racing against time by working as a masseur and shoe-shine man in order to educate his brother. The world calls him disdainfully a mochi (cobbler), and a masseur, but he does not care.

The elder brother, played by Sheikh Mukhtar, works overtime to demolish the villain's assertion that *मोची का बेटा तो मोची ही बनेगा* (a cobbler's son will be a cobbler). The title song *एक आना बूट पालिश, दो आना तेल मालिश / गाढ़े पसीने*

की ये अपनी कमाई है (6 paise for boot polish, and 12 for oil massage/this is what our sweat and toil amounts to), sung in chorus with fellow shoe-shine youngsters, is an argument for dignity of low-paying labour, like the educated brother's decision to take to the same job after facing serial rejections at white-collar offices. Since his brother is upset at the choice, he takes up another job at a garage, which is owned by a wealthy Brahmin. The man's daughter falls in love with the younger brother and they manage to marry eventually, battling stiff opposition. Unexpected help creates a melodramatic twist when the Brahmin patriarch is down with plague and he finds that the elder brother is the only one prepared to risk his life in looking after him. It is the same elder brother whose touch had once been considered polluting.

Similar narratives were woven into the films produced throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and beyond. In *Apna Hath Jagannath* (1960), Kishore Kumar, about to commit suicide for the humiliation of educated joblessness, falls flat on the village washerman's feet, calls him his guru for teaching him the dignity of labour. Even more interestingly, he goes on to open a dry cleaning shop in the city! Bimal Roy wove the story of untouchability in his wonderful film on electoral corruption and booth-capturing – *Parakh* (1960). Khwaja Ahmed Abbas presented us with the possibility of several inter-caste and inter-religious love marriages in *Char Dil Char Rahein* (1959), with Meena Kumari, Raj Kapoor, Shammi Kapoor and others in the lead. Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Satyakam* (1969) is as much about an honest engineer's (Dharmendra) fatal struggle against institutional corruption as it is about his ultimate victory over an orthodoxy that would not allow marriage with a sexually violated woman (Sharmila Tagore) whose antecedents are unknown.¹⁸ In another Hrishikesh Mukherjee film, *Aashrivad* (1968), we see the noble-hearted zamindar practicing music with an outcaste, with whom he also goes out for dance performances. Or, let's take the instance of a lot of the dacoit films, going beyond *Bandit Queen* (1994) and *Paan Singh Tomar* (2012), which have already been listed by a number of web essayists.¹⁹ These commentators have rightly pointed out that in the recent spate of films starting with *Eklavya* (2007), and more recently *Fandry* (2013) and *Kaala* (2018), lower caste assertion is more upfront, and that tells us about the changing perspective on caste representation and caste politics in India.²⁰

Interestingly, this would echo what Gyan Pandey has called 'historian's history' as well.²¹ However, the cases of uproar over using caste names in a film like *Billoo Barber* (2009) and *Aaja Nachle* (2007) may complicate our assumption about why Hindi films have refrained from naming lower castes, and that social censorship was an

issue as well. However, it must have become clear from the above that there was a time when it was considered neither improper nor offensive to give the lower caste character his/her caste name, and sometimes it was invoked by *savarna* (upper caste) characters as a label of humiliation. It is a reflection of changing times indeed that all of us have become curious about the caste status of somebody like Shailendra who, as a left, progressive poet, might have believed in a 'casteless utopia' quite like the films of the Nehruvian age he wrote for.²² That those in the business of 'Dalit politics' always knew this is corroborated from a birthday message Shri Jagjivan Ram sent to him on 30 August, 1966: 'Shailendra is the most popular Harijan poet after Sant Ravidas'.²³ Ravidas' *nirguna*²⁴ poetry, as we know, presented a scathing critique of caste inequality and Brahmanical orthodoxy, very much like Kabir's. But not many people know that there was a feature film – *Sant Ravidas ki Amar Kahani* (1983) – made on his life as well. As noted earlier in the context of *Chandidas* (1934), biographies of medieval Bhakti poets were adapted into films in large numbers, and a critique of the caste system is part of practically every story retold. We also find that caste is very much an issue even in the film genre known as 'Muslim Social', and that is way before academics began talking about 'pasmanda' or oppressed Muslims. I would like to close the essay with an invitation to the readers to watch two such films: *Saudagar* (1973) and *Neend Hamari Khwab Tumhare* (1966).

Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence presented above, it may be argued that those in the film business have not been as averse to portrayals of caste issues as some contemporary critics making quick-fire judgments about the entire history of Hindi cinema would have us believe. Our limited search for films not yet indexed as 'caste films', and even a more limited discussion of past journalistic reviews show that there are interesting surprises in the YouTube film archive. If we search deeper and beyond the existing canon, I am sure we will discover many more popular-commercial films dealing with caste as shastric discourse and living practice, the resistance against caste atrocities and myriad manifestations of the vision for a casteless utopia, films that we can then critically analyse using new perspectives and insights. The familiar in Hindi cinema might have served fantasy flicks as high-class/high caste/casteless-upper-caste life-styles, but there is considerable anti-caste criticism there too, to demand a review of certain presentist assertions.

Notes

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4rFyHHvPgs>.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jraa61w8GXw>. Neither song figures in the song collections available in print.
3. <http://giitaayan.com/viewisbsong.asp?id=11273>. Giitaayan is a public domain song repository, attached to a discussion list focused on Hindi film music: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/rec.music.indian.misc>.
4. For a finely researched Freudian reading of the issue of untouchability in Hinduism see Alan Dundes, *Two Tales of Crow and Sparrows: A Freudian Folkloristic Essay on Caste and Untouchability* (Oxford: Lanham, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997). Since the dead body is considered a source of defilement, all agents who are related to rituals connected with the dead are placed at a ladder lower than other castes in the same broad category. It is significant therefore that Kabir, who is celebrated so much in secular discourses, in matters spiritual is embraced only by non-upper castes, and his *nirguna* poetry is invoked to provide solace only at the time of death in upper caste households.
5. Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 139.
6. *Ibid.*, 141.
7. *Maharshi* meaning 'Great Sage'.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Baburao Patel wrote most of the pages of *Filmindia*, including the reviews. Amrit Mathur informs that this most powerful man of Indian film industry originally belonged to a Vanjara community, classified later as OBC. Siddharth Bhatia, *The Patels of Filmindia: Pioneers of Indian Film Journalism* (Mumbai: Indus Source Books, 2013), Chapter I.
10. 'Our Review: Second Half Of "Valmiki" Entertains! Brilliant Performance by Shanta Apte', *Filmindia*, 1 March 1947, 57 and 59.
11. A. K. Ramanujan, 'Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation', in Paula Richman, ed. *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 22-49. Also, Paula Richman ed. *Ramayana Stories in Modern South India: An Anthology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 2008).
12. See for example the first page of results for 'maharshi valmiki': https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=maharishi+valmiki. There are several stories in which the story is presented as 'from robber to rishi'. Several viewers have found one such upload of 'Maharishi' fake and offensive, and wanted it to be removed: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDke2Uayae8>.
13. For example, a user Vikrant Tank Crime Reporter said: *sach ke bahut karib hai* movie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vba5EjHoxxA&t=181s>.
14. Vijay Prashad, *The Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), especially Ch. 5: Harijans.
15. 'Our Review: Another Achhoot Story', *Filmindia*, 1 July 1948, 51-52.
16. 'Our Review', *Filmindia*, 1 March 1949, 55.
17. 'Our Review', *Filmindia*, 1 March 1949, 56.
18. For a book length study of Mukherjee's oeuvre, see Jai Arjun Singh, *The World of Hrishikesh Mukherjee: The Film-Maker Everyone Loves* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2015).
19. 'What are some good movies about the evils of caste system in Indian cinema?': <https://www.quora.com/What-are-some-good-movies-about-the-evils-of-caste-system-in-Indian-cinema>.
20. Amit Upadhyay, 'How Bimal Roy's Sujata and Pa Ranjith's Kaala show changing Dalit politics in 60 years': <https://theprint.in/opinion/how-bimal-roys-sujata-and-pa-ranjiths-kaala-show-changing-dalit-politics-in-60-years/71333/>.
21. A glance at a recent two-volume collection of essays, *Caste in Modern India*, eds. Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2014), will reveal that most of these histories were written in the post-1980s.
22. For a Forward Press list of Dalit-Bahujan performers go to: <https://www.forwardpress.in/2015/10/how-inclusive-is-indian-cinema/>
23. Shankar Shailendra, *Andar ki Aag*, ed. Dinesh Shankar Shailendra and Rama Bharati (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2013), Flap. It is very interesting that no other Shailendra biography mentioned his caste. For example, see Prahlad Agrawal, *Kavi Shailendra: Zindagi ki Jeet mein Yakeen* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2005).
24. Commonly, one of the two types of *bhakti*. Literally 'attribute-less'.