

Caste Discourses in Popular Cinema in India

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Abstract : This paper will examine the discourse of sense of belonging in popular Hindi language cinema in India to understand how Dalit identities and experiences are negotiated. It will situate such discourse against the emergence of new rhetorical forms of nationalism that seem to contest colonial constructs of nation and identity while clearly envisioning anti-colonial futures through the invocation of a glorious pre-colonial past. While nations have always been 'imagined communities' with the Hobsbawmian invented traditions that leverage national consciousness to establish trust and legitimacy of governance, the concept of ethnic nationalism has been at odds with the idea of India itself as the concept of nationalism in India was born out of anti colonial ideology and not ethnicity. However, in recent times, anti colonial nationalism is transforming into Hindu nationalism and hardening the boundaries around what is Indian-ness and what it means to be Indian. In the past two decades films such as Masaan (2015), Manjhi - The Mountain Man (2015), Sairat (2016), Article 15 (2019) and Vedaa (2024) have gained immense popularity amongst different audience groups across the country. The success of this cinematic genre is interesting when juxtaposed against the reinforcing of a more rigid and exclusionary understanding of Indian-ness. Hence, further exploration of this is essential to gain insights into the anti colonial future of India. In conclusion, studying the discourse of Dalit sense of belonging in film serves as more than mere representation, but rather as a crucial intervention in the comprehension and envisioning of anticolonial possibilities amidst the rise of Hindu nationalism.

Keywords : film studies, identity, sense of belonging, discourse

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