

Syllabus

Title of the Course:	How to See the Caste: Hindi Cinema and the Making of Contemporary India	Course Breakdown:	3 + 4 ECTS, 28 hours of online sessions, 60 hours of individual study + paper optional
Name of the Instructor:	Reyazul Haque, Dr. Julia Strutz	Weekly class time:	Wednesdays, 12 – 2 pm (CET)
Language:	English		
Hosted by:	Humboldt-University Berlin, Institute for Asian and African Studies	Certificate issued by:	Humboldt-University Berlin, Institute for Asian and African Studies
min. number of participants:	5	max. number of participants	30

Description of the course

While castes have been around for more than 3000 years, their evolving nature makes it imperative to understand them better, as they play a crucial role in the problems that South Asia in general, and India in particular have been facing. In contemporary India, violence against the Dalits, patriarchy and gender subjugation, communitarian apathy and hatred, national jingoism, authoritarian politics and the persecution of minorities have been rooted in the dynamics of caste. This course provides an overview of the presence of castes in Hindi films, and their approach towards the system by focusing on feature films and documentaries. At the same time, it will provide an understanding of how the films also play a role in the dynamics of castes that inform Indian society today. In each class selected movie clips will be shown and analysed to understand how caste is embedded in the Hindi film and media culture. Participants will be encouraged to choose a sub-theme of their interest in every class and discuss it in their respective groups/breakout rooms and present their findings in the end.

Learning Aims

To provide a general understanding about:

- Indian Caste system in historical perspective
- Hindi Cinema
- Caste and Cinema Culture
- Caste and its relationship to gender

Upon the successful completion of the course students will be able to:

- Understand the changing social realities of the caste system.
- Understand the ways caste is presented in or omitted from Hindi Cinema
- Learn better about the new trends in Hindi Cinema Cultures that address the realities of castes.
- See what happens when the authoritarian regime, caste society, patriarchy, majoritarianism, and cinema fit together.

Course requirements

The final grade for the course will be based on the following:

- Reading and video assignments
 - contribution to discussion in class
1. Assignment: Submit a brief note on how you learn about caste for the first time and where? Words: min 500-600 words. Deadline: in 4th week class.
 2. Assignment: Chose a film that you like, show us 1-2 mins clip of it in the class, and tell us why you chose it and what makes it interesting in terms of seeing the caste. Such presentations will happen in every class from the 2nd week (1st Nov 2023).

3 ECTS	Reading and video assignments, participation in discussions, two assignments during the term
7 ECTS	requirements for 3 ECTS + plus paper (10 pages, double-space)

Syllabus / Reading List

Week 1 -- Oct 25th, 2023: How to See the Caste: History and Methods

- Introduction to caste system.
- The brief outline of the historical evolution of the caste.
- Necessity and importance to understand caste to understand the Indian society and culture.
- How caste shapes contemporary politics and ideology?

Reading materials:

- Gopal Guru, “Archeology of Untouchability”, *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, September 12-18, 2009, pp. 49-56. [8 pages]
- Anand Teltumbde, “Victimhood of Dalits”, *Seminar*, March 2020. [web page]

Week 2 – Nov 1, 2023: Cont. How to See the Caste: History and Methods

- Making of the Hindi cinema
- General tropes around caste

Reading materials:

- Harish S. Wankhede, “Dalit Representation in Hindi Cinema”, *Routledge Companion to Caste and Hindi Cinema*, Edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Oxon, 2023. [15 pages]

Week 3 – Nov 8, 2023: Untouchability and Beyond

- Role of untouchability in the caste.
- Understanding caste beyond the practices of untouchability
- Workings of the system of caste

Reading materials:

- BR Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, Chapter 4-8, & 12-14, [7 pages]
- Sukhdeo Thorat, “Political Economy of Caste Discrimination and Atrocities”, *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*, edited by A. Teltumbde and S. Yengde, Penguin Book, 2018, [11 pages]

Week 4 – Nov 15, 2023 Cont. Untouchability and Beyond

- Cinematic depiction of caste in Hindi
- Untouchability and its role as a marker of the caste
- Anxieties around senses: touching, seeing, smelling, and the body
- Imaginations of the reforms

Reading materials:

- Prem Singh, “The Representation of Dalit Body in Popular Hindi Cinema”, Unpublished, available on *Academica.edu* [14 pages]

Week 5 – Nov 22, 2023: Ambedkar: A Present Absence

- The historical role of BR Ambedkar
- The presence of BR Ambedkar and his thoughts in politics in general and in the anti-caste discourse, scholarship and movement in particular

Reading materials:

- Anand Teltumbde, “Dalit Movement Under Ambedkar”, *Dalits: Past, Present and Future*, New York, 2017 [18 pages]
- Hugo Gorringe, “Ambedkar Icons”, *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections*, Penguin Book, 2018, [7 pages]

Week 6 – Nov 29, 2023: Cont. Ambedkar: A Present Absence

- How Hindi films depict Ambedkar?
- Ambedkar as a framed portrait or a framework of emancipation?

Reading materials:

- Sumit Rajak, “Visualising the Invisible: Decoding Caste Pride and the Casteist Slur in Bollywood Films” *Routledge Companion to Caste and Hindi Cinema*, Edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Oxon, 2023. [11 pages]
- Dr. Vinay P. Raut, “A Remiss ” Indian Cinema On Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar”, *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanity*, Vol. 11, Issue 8, 2020 [3 pages]
- Harish S. Wankhede, “Ambedkar Was Ignored by Indian Cinema For Years. That’s Changing Now”, *The Quint*, 2021, <https://www.thequint.com/opinion/ambedkar-was-ignored-by-indian-cinema-for-years-thats-changing-now#read-more>

Week 7 – Dec 6, 2023: Gendered Anxieties of a Caste Society

- Role of gender subjugation in the structures of Caste
- Feminist perspectives and anti-caste movements

Reading materials:

- Urmila Pawar and Meenakshi Moon, “Dalit Women and the Tradition of Marriage”, *We Also Made History*, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2008 [13 pages]
- Sharmila Rege, “Dalit Women Talk Differently”, *EPW*, 31 October 1998, [8 pages]
- Uma Chakravarty, “The Axis of Gender Stratification in India”, *Gendering Caste*, Sage, New Delhi, 2018, [11 pages]

Week 8 – Dec 13, 2023: Cont. Gendered Anxieties of a Caste Society

- Hindi films and their obsession with love, relationships, and family
- Feminist perspectives and caste/anti-caste movements depicted in Hindi cinema.

Reading materials:

- Jyoti Atwal, “Embodiment of Untouchability: Cinematic Representations of ‘Low’ Caste Women in India”, *Open Cultural Studies*, 2018, [11 pages]
- Farhana Naaz, “The Construction and Representation of Lower-Caste Women in Bollywood Films” *Routledge Companion to Caste and Hindi Cinema*, Edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Oxon, 2023. [11 pages]

Week 9 – Dec 20, 2023: Caste and the Other

- Soumyabrata Choudhury, “From Communal Deadlock to a Communal Emergency: An Ambedkarite Assessment of “Indian Conditions” Today”, *Sabrang India*, 23 August 2018 [webpage: <https://sabrangindia.in/communal-deadlock-communal-emergency-ambedkarite-assessment-indian-conditions-today/>]
- Dilip M. Menon, “Blindness of Insights: Why Communalism in India is about Caste?”, *Blindness of Insights*, Navayana, New Delhi, 2006 [31 pages]
- Anand Teltumbde, “Race or Caste, Discrimination Is a Universal Concern”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, AUGUST 22-28, 2009, Vol. 44, No. 34 (AUGUST 22-28, 2009), pp. 16-18 [2 pages]

Week 10 – Jan 10, 2024: Cont. Caste and the Other

- Maidul Islam, “Imag(in)ing Indian Muslims in Post-liberalization Hindi Cinema”, *Indian Muslim(s) after Liberalization*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2019 [42 pages]
- Pranav Kohli, Prannv Dhawan, “Bollywood: ‘Othering’ the Muslim on Screen”, *Frontline*, 21 March 2020 [webpage: <https://frontline.thehindu.com/arts-and-culture/cinema/article31007504.ece>]
- Dr. Vikrant Kishore, “The Caste Blindness of Bollywood NRI Genre Films”, *Sense of Cinema*, May 2020, [webpage: <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2022/bollywood/the-caste-blindness-of-bollywood-nri-genre-films/#:~:text=The%20analysis%20of%20the%2014,and%20their%20high%20culture%20celebrated>]

Week 11 – Jan 17, 2024: De-brahminising Spectatorship

- Casteist gaze
- Norms of seeing in everyday life
- Who can see and who cannot

Reading materials:

- BR Ambedkar, “Philosophy of Hinduism” Writings and Speeches, vol.3, page 92 [1 page]
- **Soutik Biswas, “Why are statues of Indian icon Ambedkar being caged?” BBC, 2 October 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34399696>**
- Dhruv Gangadharan, “Footprints of Burden – Casteist Gaze of Indian Society”, *Velivada*, <https://velivada.com/2018/06/19/footprints-of-burden-casteist-gaze-of-indian-society/>

Week 12 – Jan 24, 2024: Cont. De-brahminising Spectatorship

- How Hindi cinema is informed by the casteist gaze and how it informs it in turn?
- What new ways of seeing are emerging out of Hindi cinema practices?

Reading materials:

- Jyoti Nisha, “The Oppositional Bahujan Agency”, *Routledge Companion to Caste and Hindi Cinema*, Edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Oxon, 2023. [16 pages]
- Debjani Banerjee, “Historiography and Historiophoty in Anubhav Sinha’s *Article 15*” *Routledge Companion to Caste and Hindi Cinema*, Edited by Joshil K. Abraham and Judith Misrahi-Barak, Oxon, 2023. [11 pages]

Week 13 – Jan 31, 2024: Right to Look: Imagining a Society

- What is the right to look? And how it can challenge the caste’s power?
- Lessons from visual arts, politics, and history

Reading materials:

- YS Alone, “Caste Life Narratives, Visual Representation and Protected Ignorance” *Biography*, Winter 2017, [30 pages]
- Nicholas Mirzoeff, “Right to Look, or How to Think with and against Visuality”, *The Right to Look: A Counter History of Visuality*, Duke University Press, 2011 . [34 pages]

Week 14 – Feb 7, 2024: Cont. Right to Look: Imagining a Society

- Resisting the caste through cinema
- How the new ways of looking are critical to imagining a new society
- A self-reflexive perspective and cinema’s role

Reading materials:

- Suraj Yengde, “Dalit Cinema”, *Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol 11, No.3, 2018 [16 pages]
- Dana Polan, “A Brechtian Cinema?: Towards a Politics of Self-Reflexive Film”, in *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols, Los Angeles, 1985 [10 pages]

Week 15 – Feb 14, 2024 : Film screening, Summing up and Conclusions