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## The Caste of Cinema and the Cinema of Caste: Shooting the Dalit 24

### Frames Per Second

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#### Abstract

Even though Bombay has been hailed as the capital of Indian Cinema, film enthusiasts and connoisseurs would agree that it is South Indian Cinema that deserves the honour. It was 1936 when the 'social' films tainted with politics infiltrated the sphere of Tamil Cinema and since then, it has become extremely pervasive in all spheres of life, particularly political life. During the first phase of Tamil Cinema, that is in the pre-1950s, films such as *Sevasadanam* (1938), and *Sabapathy* (1941) were an instrument to represent the upper caste communities with upper caste protagonists revelling in their privileges. The recent phase not only addresses the caste issues explicitly but lets the Dalit occupy the centre stage. This was initiated by director Pa Ranjith in his films *Madras* (2014), *Kabali* (2016), *Kaala* (2018), *Sarpatta Parambarai* (2021) and as a producer for *Pariyerum Perumal* (2018). The film industry of Tamil Nadu is as heterogenous as the Indian society and has metamorphosed into an instrument incumbent for understanding the battleground of the caste system of India. My paper attempts to analyse the ways in which caste-based films are affecting the politics of Tamil Nadu and vice versa. My paper intends to reflect on how the caste-based cinematic themes have created class consciousness on one hand, but have given rise to caste-based narcissism among the people of the same caste on the other. Among this chaos and dichotomy, the enormous popularity, as well as the commercial success of films like *Pariyerum Perumal* and *Asuran* (2019), and *Karnan* (2021), deserves a detailed study that would enable us critically assess the cinematic representation of Dalits and their perils in the quest for social identity and acknowledgment.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Politics, Tamil Cinema, Identity, Caste.