

**MEMORY, ALLEGORY AND JUSTICE: ANALYSING THAPPAD AND
ARTICLE 15 AS CINEMATIC AGENTS OF COLLECTIVE REMEMBRANCE**



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in
English Language and Literature*

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March 2025



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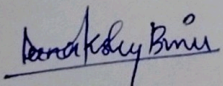
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


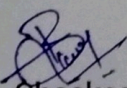
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An Abstract of the Project Entitled:
Memory, Allegory and Justice: Analysing *Thappad* and *Article 15* as Cinematic
Agents of Collective Remembrance

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2023-2025

Supervising Teacher: Ms. Tessa Fani Jose

In an era where social issues are widely debated and discussed through the film platform, this study explores the power of memory in shaping social justice narratives in two impactful Indian films, *Thappad* and *Article 15*. Both films tap into collective memory to explore themes such as caste discrimination, gender-based violence, and the fight for justice. The research introduces the idea of a memory mosaic. The project answers the question of how do *Thappad* and *Article 15* function as memory agents, reactivating collective memory to challenge societal norms while influencing the perspectives of characters within the films, thereby shaping social justice narratives in contemporary India. Chapter 1 titled “The Memory Mosaic: The Interplay of Culture, Media, and Technology” discusses about the theoretical framework of the project and analyses various critical aspects of memory studies. Chapter 2 titled “From Silence to Resistance: The Activation of Memory and the Reclamation of Justice in *Article 15*” deals with the collective memory analysis and memory reactivation of *Article 15*. Chapter 3 titled Memory Reactivation and Collective Memory in *Thappad*: An Analysis of Gender, Power, and Social Justice deals with collective memory analysis and memory reactivation of *Thappad*.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Memory, Allegory and Justice: Analyzing *Thappad* and *Article 15* as Cinematic Agents of Collective Remembrance” is a record of bona fide work done by me under the supervision of Ms. Tessa Fani Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title of recognition.

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St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

March 2025

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Memory, Allegory and Justice: Analysing *Thappad* and *Article 15* as Cinematic Agents of Collective Remembrance”, is a record of bona fide work carried out by Meenakshy B S under my supervision and guidance.

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March 2025

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Meenakshy B S

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Introduction

Contemporary Indian films have often served as powerful platforms for interrogating societal norms and challenging entrenched systems of oppression. *Thappad* (2020) and *Article 15* (2019), both born out of the pen of Anubhav Sinha, exemplify this transformative potential. Films are not just any other cultural artifact but have special representational power that can mold individual and collective memories. This is because film, as a visual medium, can evoke strong emotions and create vivid pictorial images that resonate with audiences, making it a powerful tool for memory formation. Films often present memory in such a manner that it mirrors how individuals consult past events. Historical epics and mainstream cinema often present narratives that influence how societies perceive their past, sometimes prioritizing emotional engagement over factual accuracy.

Another feature displayed by films is countermemory, where they process to fragment established narratives and provide alternative perspectives. Visual techniques in the film help the audience to engage in emotional and sensory experiences. The use of narrative techniques like flashbacks, can redefine how events are remembered. With the power to mobilize strong emotions that can make a lasting impact on viewers, films, through this emotional resonance, help solidify memories, making them part of collective culturalmemory. The capability of film to instigate nostalgia, trauma, or joy influences how memories are formed and shared within a community.

Memory studies is one of the emerging field of study in the realm of English Literature that deals with focusing memory as a tool for remembering the past and manipulating the ideas of the past. Memory studies is an interdisciplinary examination of modes of re-membering and forgetting at the interface of private/psychological and

shared/cultural vectors. It draws on cognitive and clinical psychology, literary studies, cultural studies, affect studies, machine studies, and material engagement theory, among other domains. It thus offers researchers a rich range of materials to examine and theorize, while also staying connected and relevant to the quotidian quality of remembering through food, cultural and domestic rituals, monuments, museums, language, and machines.

In 'Memory as mystery, a tale of losses in *Kishkindha Kadam*', article in Madyamam Online, memory is treated as mystery in *Kishkindha Kadam* (2024), where one struggles with it in different ways and have no control of it. The film, directed by Dinjith Ayyathan, dives on memory loss as a central theme within a mystery thriller structural framework. Memory here becomes an element that explores both as a psychological burden and narrative device. The protagonist, Appu Pilla, suffers from memory loss, making memory loss a central struggle in the film. His attempt to revisit his past becomes a mental struggle where he confronts with not only personal issues, but also his missing grandson and death of his daughter in law along with the fading memories of his military service days. The deteriorating mind of protagonist employs that memory is unreliable and fragmented.

In 'Bougainvillea: A psychological thriller where memory meets mayhem in a loosely scripted plot', article by Bizzbuzz, the film is reviewed as succeeding in its exploration of memory and identity. Through the portrayal of Reethu and her memory lose along with quest for identity, the psychological exploration of her condition takes the limelight. Hence loss of memory and disintegration of one's self becomes a powerful motif in the film. Reethu's struggle is one of persistent confusion, trying to figure out

who she is in the absence of a proper past, and the path she chooses on to regain her identity becomes a literal and metaphorical quest.

In 'Representation of Traumatic Memory in the Film Drishyam: A Barthesian Reading', thesis by Srilekha B. P. and V. Bharathi Harishankar emphasis the traumatic memories depicted on Drishyam 1 and 2. The character of Ansiba that is Anju suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder which is clearly shown through epilepsy and other disorders. She is affected with emotional disintegration due to her remorse of what had happened which largely impacted her memory. Her panicking behaviour when she associate with police officers or vehicles, rainy nights shows that her associative memory is hampered leading to anxiety culminating in seizures. Meena's character, Rani also becomes prey to this condition, restricting her daughter's friendships and finding shelter in spirituality.

The idea of 'Memory Mosaic' is one of the contributions that this paper makes to the field of memory studies, an idea that no prior research has introduced. There exists a concept of 'mosaics of remembrance' which states the fragmented and complex nature of memory, particularly with respect to the experiences of torture. Such fragmentation leads to gaps and incoherencies in the narrative, which can be either deliberately or unconsciously created, reflecting the bodily and psychological impacts of like-minded experiences. This idea suggest that the act of remembering is not straightforward but may include omissions or unintentional silences.

It reflects how memories are fragmented, and how multiple layers of memories are created, mediated, and reactivated through film narratives, especially in Indian cinema. This anchors the idea that cultural memory is dynamic and interconnected, rather than linear and monolithic. The paper aims to address these gaps, thereby expanding the

scope of memory studies beyond historical trauma and exploring its relevance in contemporary societal contexts. It also advances cultural memory theory by introducing 'memory mosaic' as a new analytical tool, enriching the understanding of memory reactivation in film narratives.

Chapter 1 - The Memory Mosaic: The Interplay of Culture, Media, and Technology discusses memory studies as a promising realm of research. It sheds light on what memory studies entails, particularly collective memory and cultural memory. It highlights how memory studies are related to trauma studies, and the relation between memory studies and media is discussed using the concepts of premediation, remediation, and mediation. It also emphasizes memory activation as a prominent theory in memory studies and introduces the concept of the memory mosaic.

Chapter 2 - From Silence to Resistance: The Activation of Memory and the Reclamation of Justice in *Article 15* opens by quoting *Article 15* from the Constitution of India, which prohibits discrimination. The chapter navigates through the concepts of cultural memory and memory reactivation, highlighting the song sung by the lower caste in the beginning of the movie. It describes how the protagonist, Ayan Ranjan IPS, becomes a memory agent, and how the idea of caste hierarchy reactivates the audience's memory to reflect upon the evils that still exist in the country. It also discusses how awakening of collective memory is sparked through the film. The film sheds light on how the established, whitewashed memory of caste in books and mainstream society contrasts with its practical reality.

Chapter 3 - Memory Reactivation and Collective Memory in *Thappad*: An Analysis of Gender, Power, and Social Justice discusses how the film challenges the traditional norms of collective memory and plants in the audience a new perspective on

the usual theme of domestic abuse. It describes how the older women characters in the film are carriers of memories of generational trauma and stereotyped notions about patriarchy, and how the younger women decide to challenge these notions. The entire film revolves around the refusal of the protagonist, Amrita, to erase her active memory of the ‘slap’, which is one of the most trivialized acts in marital life. Memory, here, is equated with a tool of liberation as she seeks divorce and reclaims the agency over her life. Amrita’s act creates a platform for the activation of collective memory of all women characters in the film, as well as that of the audience.

In the conclusion of the project, the ideas presented regarding collective memory and memory activation are summarized, with data from the appendix. The project fills the void in the field of memory studies, of no prominent examination of films based on social issues. Along with it a new concept of memory mosaic is introduced through this study.

In the appendix, the report of an online survey, along with the report of a focus group, is attached. Various newspaper articles revolving around the films and social media posts are presented to support the argument regarding memory activation in the audience. Interviews with Anubhav Sinha, the director of *Thappad* and *Article 15* is included to provide further elaboration from the directors’ perspective.

The project aims to demonstrate the significant role of cinema in shaping and reshaping collective memory, highlighting its potential to inspire social change. By examining these films through the lens of memory studies—particularly concepts like memory mosaic, remediation, and premediation—this analysis investigates how cinematic narratives not only portray social issues but also reactivate historical and cultural memories, urging audiences to confront ingrained societal hierarchies and

injustices. This exploration is anchored in the belief that films can serve as powerful mediums of cultural memory, influencing public consciousness and contributing to social justice dialogues.

Chapter 1

The Memory Mosaic: The Interplay of Culture, Media, and Technology

Memory is the past made present; it is a contemporary phenomenon that, while concerned with the past, unfolds in the present. Additionally, memory is a form of work, involving processes of working through, labour, or action. Memory studies explore the use of memory as a tool for remembering the past and emerged as a new way for critics and scholars to think about past events. It is a relatively new field in literature that analyses cultural phenomena and modes of memory by examining history, literature, and art, a multidisciplinary field that combines intellectual strands from anthropology, education, literature, history, philosophy, psychology, and sociology, among others (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008).

Memory has long been a preoccupation for social thinkers, but it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that a distinctly social perspective on memory gained prominence. This shift began with the use of the term ‘collective memory’ by Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Research of memory is closely linked to many issues at the forefront of contemporary political debate, the politics of how the past is remembered in present, particularly the manipulation of the art of remembrance. Scholarly interest in memory resurfaced in the 1980s. While psychologists were primarily interested in memory from an individual perspective, sociological theorists emphasized the social and cultural bases of shared memories (Pennebaker, 2013).

Memory studies can thus be regarded as a multidisciplinary field that began with an emphasis on individual memory and expanded to focus on broader dimensions of

social memory and the politics of public remembering, especially those mediated through communication channels. The focus has generally been on “how these forms of remembering operate as collective representations of the past, how they constitute a range of cultural resources for social and historical identities, and how they privilege particular readings of the past while subordinating others” (Keightley and Pickering, 2013).

The term collective memory was first coined by Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick and Robbins, 1998), but the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is generally recognized as the founder of research on collective memory. It was in his work *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, which was published in 1925 that Halbwachs proposed the idea of collective memory. He established a connection between social and collective memory. Collective memory refers to idea of coexisting of memories, knowledge and information of a social group, moulding up the group’s identity. According to him, memories of individuals are affected by the social contexts in which they engage with, rather than remembering in isolation. Hence, we can find that memory is deeply entwined in social frameworks and structures rather than treating it as a cognitive process.

“Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon but only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals... it often privileges the interests of the contemporary” (Kansteiner, 2002, p.180).

Cultural memory can be defined as a type of collective memory which is commonly shared by a bunch of people who share a similar culture of their own. Hence

memory can be identified as a collective domain, which influences both future and understanding of the past. It studies how a community preserve collective knowledge and understanding of the past via texts and narratives.

Sturken (1997, 2008) identifies cultural memory as a memory shared outside the formal historical structures and frameworks but infused with cultural meaning. “Cultural memory as a term implies not only that memories are often produced and reproduced through cultural forms but also the kind of circulation that exists between personal memories and cultural memories” (Sturken, 2008, p.76). Sturken (2008) distinguishes between collective and cultural memories, with the latter highlighting how memories are produced and reproduced through cultural forms and the circulation between personal and cultural memories. Collective memories are often ‘cohort memories,’ where members of a specific cohort affected by a large-scale event shape the event’s history and influence the collective memories of future generations (Pennebaker, 2013). “Collective memory sustains a community’s very identity and makes possible the continuity of its social life and cultural cohesion” (Wang, 2008, p.37).

According to Assmann, cultural memory preserves knowledge that defines who a group is, maintaining a sense of unity and uniqueness. This identity can be expressed positively as “we are this” or negatively as “we are not that.” As Nietzsche suggested, this process establishes clear boundaries between those who belong and those who do not. Memory does not preserve the past exactly as it was but reconstructs it to make sense in the present. Cultural memory adapts its stored knowledge to fit the current environment—sometimes embracing, critiquing, reshaping, or preserving it.

Since the turn of the century, novels and films that thematize memory and mimic its form and content have reinforced the idea that we are in the midst of a “memory

boom” (Radstone, 2000). As technological advancements permeate everyday life, memory and practices have come to the forefront of personal and public debate. Consequently, memory scholars now explore the potential of visual media in storing, communicating, disseminating, and interpreting memory.

The connection between film and memory is created and reinforced through daily interactions with media, news sources, documentation with photographs and videos, and the consumption of films for entertainment and knowledge. Kilbourn provides valuable insights into how memory is represented in visual media and articulates the ways in which film engages with memory. Memory is represented through specific formal-stylistic features, such as the use of flashbacks, which create a cinematic vocabulary for representing memory.

Memory studies and trauma studies share common ground in exploring how individuals and social environments handle the past, although they approach it from different perspectives. Both fields investigate the interplay between memory, identity, and cultural narratives, highlighting how societies remember and interpret traumatic events.

Freud was the first to refer to the process of trauma in his work on hysteria, which was further explored by Laplanche and Pontalis. Trauma studies were first developed in relation to individual traumas (child abuse, incest, etc.) and historical traumas like the Holocaust, as well as the recognition in psychology of post-traumatic stress syndrome experienced by soldiers returning from Vietnam.

Janet Walker, in *Trauma Cinema*, is concerned with the primary paradox of trauma: its representation and the ensuing loss of referent. She explores how certain films can “externalize, publicize, and historicize traumatic material that would otherwise remain at the level of internal and individual psychology” (Walker 2005: xix). Aware that aspects of trauma cinema are found in many genres and national cinemas, she defines trauma cinema in relation to its content and structure: “By trauma cinema, I mean a group of films that deal with a world-shattering event or events, whether public or personal. Furthermore, I define trauma films and videos as those that deal with traumatic events in a nonrealist mode characterized by disturbance and fragmentation of the films’ narrative and stylistic regimes... Trauma films ... ‘disremember’ by drawing on innovative strategies for representing reality obliquely, by looking to mental processes for inspiration, and by incorporating self-reflexive devices to call attention to the friability of the scaffolding for audio-visual historiography” (Walker 2005: 19, italics in original). Walker’s words examine her vision to create debates about the representation of history and film studies, aiming to overturn what she refers to as “the roadblocks of positivism and binarism at the intersection of catastrophe, memory, and historical representation” (Walker 2005: xix).

While analysing the intersection of film and memory studies, Alison Landsberg’s *Prosthetic Memory* focuses on ways in which individuals can experience memories they did not live themselves. She writes: “This new form of memory, which I call prosthetic memory, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history... In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a

past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics" (Landsberg 2004: 2, italics in original text).

Marking the transition in the current digital landscape, where social networking platforms have revolutionized practices of production and dissemination of film and memory, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* by José van Dijck examines how individual and shared memories are mediated through technology and its devices. She explains "mediated memory" as "the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technology for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (van Dijck 2007: 21). On another note, theoretical explorations of memory can come directly from media theorists. Alison Landsberg (2004) explores how cinema and memory foster emotional connections between distanced audiences and past events as a kind of prosthetic memory. Andrew Hoskins (2001, 2004) proposed the concept of 'new memory' in his analysis of 24-hour television news and the mediation of war and terror. José van Dijck (2007) provided a paradigm of mediated memory. Mediated events such as celebrity deaths, assassinations, funerals, anniversaries of tragedies, and media representations of conflict "all provide key investigations of media and collective memory" (Garde-Hansen 2011, p. 38).

When viewed through the lens of cultural memory studies, two radical shifts are possible: focusing on popular culture instead of high culture and distinguishing between two types of media. Popular media, such as modern novels, films, and other widely consumed cultural products, play a prominent role in shaping collective memory by reaching large audiences and influencing general perceptions. Three factors highlight the power of media in shaping cultural memory: inter-medial influence, where a medium like

a novel or a film tells its story and engages collective memory; inter-medial connections, examining how representations in one medium interact with earlier or later ones; and pluri-medial context, which refers to the broader media environment in which these works appear and influence audiences.

Beyond internal strategies that transform fictions into significant media for cultural memory, the interplay between different media forms is marked by two dynamics: premediation and remediation. Remediation refers to the repeated representations of memorable events over time and across various media, emphasizing how one medium transforms the content of another. This interconnectedness influences the handling and representation of memory, as stated by Grusin: “The logic of remediation insists that there was never a past prior to mediation; all mediations are remediations, in that mediation of the real is always a mediation of another mediation.”

Premediation examines how existing media structures shape representations of future experiences. It points to the fact that our knowledge of events is influenced and pre formed by media representations, fixing the platform for how we recollect it later. It focuses on the impact of media in creation and dissemination of ideology regarding historical events, deciding how people should consult and remember the past. It throws light on the idea that how earlier events and things get represented, shape and interprets the later events. Hence cultural domain like mythology, art and scriptures serve as powerful areas of premeditation.

Meditation deals with the broader idea of how memories are communicated and shared through different domains and situations. It throws light on the importance of media in moulding how memories are understood and represented. It focuses on the act of remembering which is influenced by cultural practises and technological tools. Hence

it put forth the concept of interconnectedness of different media forms which is essential for realising how cultural narratives get reshaped and evolved by the passage of time.

Memory reactivation can be considered as the process of bringing past experiences back into memory. It includes methods and practices as tools of memory activism. The recalling of past events, imprinting collective identity and cultural heritage is the main idea employed here. The recreation of past events and performances which can be added as re-enactment is the effective method of memory reactivation.

Memory mosaic is one of the new arena of memory studies which this paper puts forth which identifies memory as not a coherent identity but as fragmented like a mosaic. It identifies memory as a complex, partial and emotionally spirited one. Here the idea of memory as a single entity is shattered and considers it as a collection of interconnected fragments.

As discussed in *The Skeptic*, memories can change and are often reconstructed with new information, leading to distortions that affect our recollection of past events. This idea aligns with the memory mosaic theory, where individual memories are seen as fragmented pieces contributing to an overall picture, even if they do not accurately represent the original event. The notion that we remember the gist of events rather than specific details supports the mosaic theory, where dominant themes emerge from fragmented experiences.

Chapter 2

From Silence to Resistance: The Activation of Memory and the Reclamation of Justice in

Article 15

Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth

(1) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to-

(a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or

(b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public

(3) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

- ARTICLE 15 OF INDIAN CONSTITUTION

Article 15 (2019) is one such film that opens its eyes to the uncomfortable truths that exist in the country. It confronts the harsh reality of caste discrimination that revolves around India, weaving a gripping narrative that challenges viewers to reflect on justice, privilege, and the urgent need for change. The film unveils the truths of caste bias that exist in the outskirts of Delhi, the capital city, through Ayan Ranjan IPS. The film derives its outline from the Badaun rape case of 2014, which happened in Uttar Pradesh. The case involved two Dalit girls who were raped, strangled to death, and hanged from a

tree. The case is still unresolved, with no arrests, pointing out the harsh realities that marginalized communities are subjected to in the world's largest democratic country. The film opens with the downtrodden community singing in a hut during a horrible monsoon climate. They are singing their toils near Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's statue, who voiced for equality among all Indians. This contrast of the song and statue brings to light the irony existing in Independent India, even after 72 years of her freedom. The excerpts from the song are:

- “You’ll get offended if I tell the truth,

Rich people live in palaces,

With a shining chandelier hanging from their roof

We live in a hut

It’s just a small hut

Just a storm is enough to blow it away

Rich people enjoy delicious food

They even buy mineral water

We make chutney and bread

We drink unfiltered water

Rich people’s kids go to big schools and colleges

They also take extra classes

While our kids toil hard

They say studies won't help them

You'll get offended if I tell the truth" (*Saikia* 00:00:54)

The song at the onset of the film focuses on the main realm where the filmmaker tries to fix the audience's attention: the harshness of the living conditions of the downtrodden. It also rekindles the audience's memory of the caste struggles they have heard about in real life.

In the film, Ayan Ranjan IPS, a new recruit, is transferred to the outskirts of the capital city, where he encounters the caste-based boundaries that exist among the people, dividing them into different hierarchies in society. The camera first focuses on the book *Discovery of India* by Jawaharlal Nehru, then on Ayan Ranjan's face, indicating that, just as the title suggests, he is about to discover a new India—the real India—that has been swallowed by evils like gender disparity, child abuse, caste distinctions, and more.

The entry of the protagonist, Ayan is through a scene where he is briefed in his car about the village where he is posted upon. Constable says to him that the village stood dark upon the return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya to make his palace shine in darkness. The sole story remains the definition of the village serving the upper caste in all its need, to lit their lives with light by remaining themselves in darkness. When he asks to get a water from a roadside shop, constable says that its a Parsi village who are known for breeding pigs hence it is Scheduled Caste inhabiting here. Hence they are not allowed to touch them or cannot let their shadows fall upon them. When Ayan narrates this to his wife, she rebounds him how their mother kept separate plates for their maids.

When villagers came to see Ayan for petitioning their complaint about their girls who were hanged, water was poured into the hands of theirs rather than giving it in a glass. When Ayan enquires about this, the constable explains that they are not supposed to drink in a glass in his presence as he is an upper caste person. Ayan's indifference reflects the widespread upper caste detachment from caste issues, highlighting the collective amnesia surrounding the entrenched caste discrimination in rural India. This initial ignorance symbolizes society's suppression of the memory of caste-based violence.

However, as the film progresses, Ayan gradually grasps the depth of caste discrimination, and his awareness grows. His transformation from the prior indifference to the rigid caste system to taking action against it represents the reactivation of suppressed moral and social conscience, as he begins to question the societal structures that enable such atrocities. For example, when a constable comments, "To be honest, sir, whatever we do for these people...", Ayan sharply responds, "Who are 'these' people? Are they from Jupiter?" (00:28:13)

Ayan's turning point occurs when he encounters the tragic reality of two Dalit girls, who were brutally raped and murdered, and their bodies later found hanging from a tree. This moment marks his first direct confrontation with the harsh realities he was previously shielded from. The discovery of the bodies serves as a moment of memory reactivation, revealing the cruel history of caste oppression and violence that has been forcibly erased or neglected. Ayan's pause and shock upon seeing the hanging bodies signify his realization that such heinous acts are not relics of the past but are happening in the present. His investigation, which uncovers complexities and corruption, serves as a metaphorical excavation of buried histories. His pursuit of the truth symbolizes his

journey from ignorance to awareness, unearthing the corruption and conspiracy that sought to conceal the reality.

When Ayan learns that the girls were murdered for asking for just a three-rupee wage raise at a construction site, it profoundly affects him. When he shares this with his wife, she questions why such cases in rural India do not receive the same attention as the Nirbhaya case. This conversation further emphasizes the societal neglect of caste-based atrocities.

The film also illustrates the underdeveloped condition of the Dalit village through scenes of dead bodies being carried in bed sheets or on bullock carts after post-mortem exams, reminding the audience of numerous incidents in rural India where marginalized communities struggle for basic medical aid.

Those in power determine the narratives in these villages, as shown when a constable forces the lady doctor to change the post-mortem report to indicate “honour killing” rather than rape. His dialogue, “You’re reacting emotionally, Maltiji. I advise you to write a few poems on your Facebook page. You’ll feel better. But don’t write anything here,” highlights the suppression of truth. (*Article 1500:32:12*)

The film further examines societal attitudes through the dialogue, “If you live in slums where you eat and defecate in the same place where animal hides rot, can girls be safe there?” (00:34:17). This statement highlights the appalling living conditions that the marginalized endure for generations.

Ayan’s interactions with local leaders, oppressed community members, and activists deepen his understanding of caste oppression, showing how these communities have normalized discrimination. Nishad, the BSS leader, remarks, “We’re called

untouchable citizens or Scheduled Caste citizens. But we're never counted even as citizens," (1:16:06) underlining the systemic exclusion they face.

As Ayan's awareness grows, he confronts his moral responsibility to reactivate these suppressed memories, bringing them into public consciousness. His investigation not only uncovers hidden truths but also challenges societal norms. When the CBI officer asks, "You can't be neutral, can you?" (1:50:19) Ayan replies, "Staying silent when a fire is raging is aligning with the ones who lit it." (1:50:22) This dialogue encapsulates his role as an agent of memory reactivation, emphasizing his resistance against institutional negligence.

In the closing scene, Ayan's act of eating food handed to him without concern for caste distinctions symbolizes a powerful act of breaking social hierarchies. This moment represents a reawakening of collective conscience, as Ayan and the oppressed community reclaim the narrative of caste violence and demand accountability.

Ayan Ranjan's journey portrays the process of confronting and reawakening suppressed histories, forcing society to remember and act upon the injustices that have long been ignored. The gang rape of the Dalit girls is portrayed in the film to address the staunch reality of discrimination and caste based violence that exists in the societies, especially in a country like India. The image of the two hanged girls is depicted without any editing or blurring portraying it as a visual metaphor for the caste torture happening in the country. This scene of drooping cold in the environment, as well as in the minds of those who see the hung girls, prompts viewers to recall similar historical violence, including the Badaun rape case, against marginalized groups.

Ayan, at the end, says to the CBI officer: “These castes, OBCs, SCs, STs represent 70% of our population, Sir. They’ve been marginalized and regarded as minorities for eons, Sir. And we 30% of the population regard them as lesser in status. We let them do the jobs we don’t want to do. Nowadays, our toilets have jet sprays. But even now, they still go down naked into filthy sewers to clean them, unprotected and naked. We know all this, we see it every day. We just ignore it.” (1:52:32)

The loud honking of the truck with the slogan ‘My India is great’ acts as a reminder of the disconnection between national pride and the harsh realities faced by discriminated communities. This scene reactivates memories which are bound to nationalism and justice, forcing the viewers to think deeply on societal narratives and bonding. The representation casteism in the film is the depiction of a cyclical network of events that appear in news, documentaries and films. This is how remediation comes to play. As the film includes not only social issues but also comment on public ideology, remediated narratives are included here.

The arc of change from written format to visual and auditory platform defines the idea of remediation. It forms a bridge that connects emotions of audience with the issue that is framed. The reminiscent of historical injustices can be maintained in the mainstream domain of the media, instigating discussions and thoughts, through remediation, hence these memories stay fresh in public minds. ..

The film brings to light the issues of marginalized communities who are ill-treated and often overlooked in mainstream narratives. By doing so, the film contributes to the preservation of these cultural memories, ensuring that the experiences they had and the struggles they fought against are always remembered, recognized, and remain in the public realm. This parallels the idea that cultural memory is constructed by the decision

to remember or forget specific histories. The film bears the flag of critique of historical injustices in relation to caste discrimination. Hence, the film bridges the gap for collective memory to empower society to confront its past and acknowledge the ongoing impact of these injustices. This mirrors the idea that cultural memory must accommodate contemporary societies that are hybrid and asynchronous, as discussed in the contexts.

The film shapes cultural identity by underlining the importance of social justice and equality. It reinforces the idea that collective memories are not just about stabilizing identity but also about recognizing the diversity of experiences within society. This is crucial for understanding how cultural memory can be a tool for social change and awareness. The idea of cultural memory influenced by the methods of selection and forgetting is demonstrated by embedding the stories of marginalized communities into the cultural memory of the audience, making them more likely to be remembered and discussed in the future.

The film unfolds a narrative with uncomfortable truths about societal frameworks, aligning with the idea of memory reactivation, where past injustices are brought to the mainstream to encourage reflection and dialogue about current societal issues. Emotional engagement is one of the main features of memory reactivation. This helps the audience connect personal feelings with collective memories of injustice and oppression, fostering a deeper understanding of the past's impact on the present. Just like activists try to re-present the muted histories, the film also tries to dismantle the status quo by underlining marginalized voices and experiences.

Looking from the aspect of agonistic memory politics, where conflicting perspectives on the past are presented, the film propagates that memory politics is not about achieving consensus but rather about acknowledging and engaging with diverse

and often conflicting memories. It also raises awareness about the ever-serious issue of caste discrimination, becoming a powerful form of memory activism that contributes to sparking changes in societal discourses. This parallels the idea that memory activism can take place at different levels, from grassroots movements to mainstream media, public discourse, and policy preparations.



Fig. 1 - Instagram post of drgraveen posted on 5 November 2023



Fig. 2 - Instagram post of rvejmovies posted on 19 November 2024



Fig. 3 - Indian Express article titled “Article 15 movie review: Making the invisible visible” published on 28 June 2019

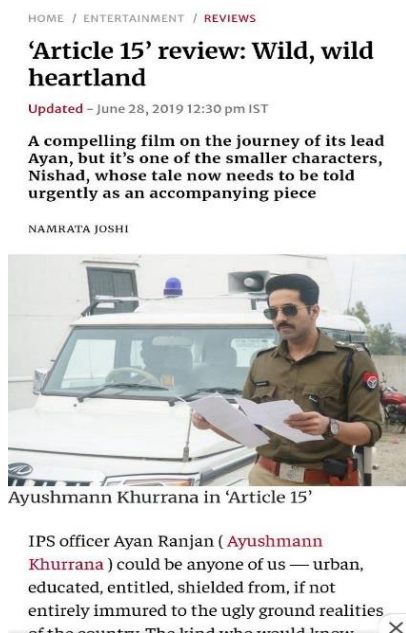


Fig. 4 - The Hindu article titled “Article 15 review: Wild, wild heartland” posted on 28 June 2019

The process of narrative reconstruction, where past events are retold and reshaped, can be seen here by the visual representation of a real-life incident mixed with fictional elements of cinematography. Emotional resonance was achieved through the film, which is proven by the discussions and debates it sparked in the mainstream media. The process of commemoration, where the act of remembering and honouring significant events and figures from the past is discussed, can be employed here as it projects the issue prevalent in Indian society from time immemorial.

The memory mosaic theory, when applied to *Article 15*, presents the memory of caste-based abuse and systemic oppression introduced as fragmented and deeply ingrained in the lives of both the villagers and the officers. Ayan arrives at the village with his own self-assumed ideologies of justice, but when he confronts the ground reality by unveiling the layers of violence, corruption, and inequality, his conception of the circumstances becomes fragmented, like a mosaic. The lower-caste people have been marginalized and oppressed for so long that their sufferings and issues remain unaddressed. Hence, their memories of injustices are scattered, often suppressed and silenced. These fragmented memories of abuse and violence are combined together to form a single mosaic picture through the investigation, exposing a more comprehensible and painful truth.

As the investigation progresses, Ayan's initial knowledge about the caste hierarchy collapses, just like a mosaic getting smashed. His trust in justice and law, along with his viewpoint on police work, gets fragmented as he meets corruption, cruelty, and intimidation. By the end of the film, Ayan has undergone a quantum leap in terms of understanding the churn of events. His memory of what is truth was radically transformed by his experiences and the events he witnessed, and this transformation is

mirrored in how he places together the truth from the fragmented, painful memories of the victims. When the film reaches its conclusion, we can see the memory mosaic nearing perfect completion as Ayan places together the broken pieces by taking into account the systemic corruption and greater violence that caste differences inflict upon. Yet, in another picture, the mosaic is incomplete, as the political power structures remain, the survivors' futures are uncertain, and the larger social system is still deeply fractured. This ambiguity in the ending reflects the nature of memory itself—sometimes, not all the pieces are available to be put together into a clear, coherent picture. Yet, the pieces that have been revealed offer a powerful, transformative understanding of the truth.

Chapter 3

Memory Reactivation and Collective Memory in *Thappad*: An Analysis of Gender, Power, and Social Justice

Thappad (2020), a remarkable film in the history of Indian cinema, unveils the usual theme of domestic violence in an unusual manner. The film captures its own space by creating a poignant and intimate wave of incidents that immerse viewers in the emotional landscape of its characters, blending household narratives with societal critique to emphasize micro aggressions and systemic oppression that shape the everyday lives of women. Ultimately, the film challenges the normalization of violence and the quest for self-respect and justice. It can be identified as a poignant examination of gender violence, analysed through the lens of domestic circuits and societal structures that nurture such violence.

At the onset of the film, Amrita, Vikram's wife, is portrayed as living a life that is repetitive and cyclical in nature with respect to her daily routine. She rises before anyone else in the home, prepares tea for the family, waters the plants, wakes her husband, checks her mother-in-law's sugar levels, and feeds her husband, who is always in a hurry to leave for work. She listens to the maid's complaints about the slaps and abuse she received the previous night and finally sends Vikram off to the office, helping him with all his belongings as he leaves. She seems to be happy doing the chores and pampering her husband and doesn't think of it as a burden. When Vikram hosts a party to celebrate his promotion, he discovers that he was actually rejected for the position that same night by his boss. Overwhelmed by the revelation, he loses control and slaps Amrita when she tries to intervene in the heated argument between him and his boss. This slap becomes the turning point, both in Amrita's life and in the film.

When Amrita gets slapped, we see that she keeps remembering the slap as an act of personal resistance, despite being told to forget and move on, even by her own mother, within the context of her marriage. She is forced to forgive stating it as a one time mistake. Even though slap is considered as a normalised incident in a marital life, it becomes a visual metaphor of deep seated patriarchy that exist even in this century. It symbolises all the adjustments and compromises that she had in her marital life, that she let alone suffer under silence. By refusing to let go of the incident, considering it to be trivialized, she reclaim her identify and narrative as a person not as a wife by equating it to a simple episode. It does not become an isolated event to her, but made her think in different dimensions. It urged her to think from different frames, forcing her to reflect upon all the sacrifices, though invisible that she had in her marriage.

In the scene where they perform religious rituals for their baby, we see Amrita recollecting:

“Everyone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I don’t remember saying I wanted to be a housewife... Then I thought I may not be the best dancer, but I can become the world’s best housewife. I tried very hard, I promise. I was busy keeping Vikram happy. I even forgot blue was not my favourite colour. My favourite colour is yellow, right, papa?” (*Thappad* 2:10:00)

She begins to reflect on her aspirations, desires, and emotional labour. Through these personal memories, she regains her consciousness and questions the dynamics of her marriage. She, like a jigsaw puzzle, tries to figure out every piece of her life where she was devalued and diminished. The act of remembering her sacrifices, emotional submission, and the ways she was taken for granted empowers her to take the step of divorce.

The slap becomes a metaphor for all the ways her identity was submitted—by her role as a wife, caretaker, and daughter-in-law. The maid keeps the extra 2000 rupees on the table, realizing that Vikram paid her more this month as Amrita had been doing the work before leaving him. To the lawyer, Amrita says, “Everyone says it's just a slap. Know what the slap did? Suddenly I became aware of all the unfair things I had to learn to accept.” (1:31:27) When she asks Vikram if she can learn to drive a car, he responds, “First, make parathas without burning your fingers.” (00:23:07) At the end of the film, she is seen driving herself when she arrives for the final sitting of the divorce. This shows how her identity had been revolving around her husband's needs.

From the beginning, we see her tracing a circle of routines each morning: the dawn breaks, a newspaper is thrown onto the front door, soon followed by two bottles of milk. She shuts the alarm, gets up, picks them up, makes tea, waters the plants, and wakes Vikram up for his office. She even carries his things to the car and ensures his life runs smoothly. The only time she is seen doing something for herself is dancing with her neighbour's child. Her entire day revolves around Vikram and his needs, taking the lion's share of her time. Even before Vikram leaves for work—having made himself ‘useful’ in the eyes of society—Amrita has worked for hours, work that will not receive recognition or reward. The film showcases these scenes and repeats them at least half a dozen times to make the audience realize the reality. This repetition of Amrita's domestic routine can be considered one of the strongest narrative devices used in the film. The depiction of this routine, the tempo of the background music, and Amrita's smile indicate normalcy and willingness at first, followed by formidable fatigue post-slap. On the day after the slap, everything appears normal. We see Vikram holding Amrita's hand and saying, “You know how things have been, I was so stressed last night.” (00:53:42) He doesn't say sorry. By acknowledging these suppressed memories of injustice that occurred

throughout her marriage, she confronts the emotional cost of her mute compromises, voicing the pain and frustration she had long buried.

From the slap incident, Amrita undergoes a journey to reclaim her personal memory, which is deeply intertwined with her rediscovery of her identity, independent of her husband and her role within the family. Amrita says to the lawyer, “That slap took me back to the Amrita in college. That Amrita who wanted only two things in life: respect and happiness. You know what? That’s all this Amrita wants too.” (1:37:47) By not erasing the incident from her active memory, she realizes the slap as a manifestation of the deep-rooted issues in the power dynamics of her marital life. By claiming this, she rewrites her own narrative and becomes a woman who values her self-identity and respect over societal norms. Hence, memory turns into a means of reclaiming her individuality and agency.

Memory is also a tool for liberation. As Amrita decides to get divorced, she is empowered by her determination to hold on to the memory of the slap and the injustice she has endured. When Amrita’s husband asks her to return to him, she replies:

“You were so emotionally invested in your company. You couldn’t move on. I invested my whole life in you. How can I move on?” (1:29:00)

By sticking to the memory of the incident and its emotional turmoil, she frees herself from the boundaries of minimization and the erasure of domestic abuse. The act of remembering thus symbolizes not only her pain but also her refusal to subjugate herself to the physical torture that society expects women to endure silently.

Amrita’s resistance also resonates with other women in the film who have experienced similar oppression in varying degrees but have remained silent. The

situation of her maid is a perfect example. She was slapped by her husband almost every time they met for no reason. At first, she remained silent and endured it. Her very entry into Amrita's home is marked by the dialogue, "Madam, my life is ruined." (00:12:42) She narrates that her husband kept her awake all night fighting. He took her to the hospital to check why she didn't have a child and complained that he never checked himself. He left her in the middle of the road at night and hit her when she reached home. She also adds, "He's a man, he grabs me. And when he does, he hits me hard. But I'm smart. If he slaps me, I scream. The neighbours stop him." (00:13:30) On the day when Amrita was slapped, the maid again gets slapped by her husband. When she asks him why he slapped her, he replies that he doesn't need a license to slap her. At the end, when she tells her husband that she won't work anymore, he starts to slap her. After being slapped several times, she hits him back and exclaims, "You think you are a real man." (2:08:58) We can infer this act of the maid as drawing courage and inspiration from Amrita's act.

The same can be seen in the case of Netra, the lawyer who advocates for Amrita. The first glance of her is shown in the film with her lover, Priyan. From their dialogues, it's clear that she is having an extramarital affair, from which the audience can understand that there are some problems in her marriage. Her husband portrays all her hard work in securing high-profile cases and winning them as just because of the fact that she is the daughter-in-law of Justice Jaysingh and the wife of Rohit Jaysingh. He even asks her to use the privilege and be successful like him. When he says that he wonders back to when he used to go out with his father and people took photographs, that's what he was doing there. Netra also feels the same when she goes out with him and people photograph them, and she asks him about it, to which he doesn't give a reply. Here, Netra as a lawyer is losing her identity, and her only identity is the wife of Rohit Jaysingh.

When she won a top-notch case, her husband “appreciated” her by saying that the defence lawyer had lost on purpose and added, “I am proud of you,” (1:14:02) along with it. He then continues to say that she looks beautiful on TV and adds that she reminds him of his dad, who often looked down and rushed to the car when he won a top case as if it was not a big deal. He addressed him as a big man. He then goes on to point out her walk, smile, and says that her eyes are filled with victory, as success is different for different people. Here, we can see him diminishing her as a person, even though she added a feather to her cap. He isn't even concerned about her hard work but tries to connect her with his dad. She is losing her identity as a person here. He then goes on to discuss sexual practices, even though she responds to him negatively, as she is exhausted. This points to the fact that she was treated merely as an object in her marital life.

The intensity of the physical and mental suppression she faces is reflected when she says, “Every relationship is flawed; one has to mend it,” (1:19:17) to Amrita. When Amrita asks her what she would do if she were in Amrita’s shoes, she replies that she would forgive him. When Amrita asks whether she is taking the wrong path, Netra gives a “no” to it. On the conclusion of the film, where Netra is found to take a bold stand, maybe inspired from the act of Amrita, to leave her father in law’s law firm and started one by herself, reclaiming her identity. She says that she is in no need of the privileges that she attain as the wife or daughter in law of someone and declares the establishment of her own image and space in her life. She even deletes the existence of Priyan, her lover from her life to exit from all forms of influences in her life so that he doesn’t make her a priority.

Film also portrays some minor characters like Amrita's mother who is orthodox in nature. She is depicted as someone who thinks that its parental responsibility to educate their daughter and marry her off to a good family. The bond of girl and her own family is broken after marriage, as she now became the member of another family and should take care of them from now on.

She is of the opinion that "Women have to learn tolerance and suppress their feelings to keep the family together." (1:09:55) She talks with much pride about sacrificing her desire to sing and her ambition to sing on All India Radio because she wanted to bring up her home and children. When her husband enquires about what was the hurdle that exist between her and her passion, she replies that her mother told that it is home which is important than anything else. When Amrita returns back to her native home after deciding to divorce her husband, her mother forced her to return back to home while her father consoled her. This shows how women become the inter generational carriers of the ideology of patriarchy.

Other character which is noteworthy is Vikram's mother who asked her to let go of the incident on the night when the incident took place. When asked whether she is happy being tolerant, she replies, "My sons are happy, so is my husband. We women don't matter. Our happiness is in their happiness." (1:34:31) Her husband asks her to come with him when she is found unconscious due to low sugar levels, but she refuses to leave Vikram behind alone. This shows that she prioritizes her sons over her health. She didn't even stand by her side as her mother in law, but supported her son. In the religious ritual which take place for their baby at the end. Amrita states boldly that Vikram's mother only loved Amrita as Vikram's wife, not Amrita as a person. At the end, as a

positive note, we could see the mother telling Amrita that the mistake was on her side to not teach her son not to slap a woman and forcing Amrita to stay silent.

Amrta's brother is one of the character that shows the parabola of change in the film. As one who stood by Vikram's side during the incident of slap and who scolded her girlfriend for taking Amrita to Netra, he suffers a change at the end when he understands his mistake and apologizes to his girlfriend. He is even portrayed as ready to reboot himself to deserve his lover.

Hence by holding on to her decision and ideology, Amrita awakes the collective consciousness of resistance to patriarchy of those that surrounds her. A collective reawakening is instigated on those who are the victims of patriarchy. Her decision of not letting go of the incident and challenging the act, not only provokes her own erasure of memories of the act, but also of those that suffer similar form of abuse and violence.

The challenging of those wrong doings in her marriage questions the societal frameworks that suppress the voice of women when it comes to their experiences of abuse. This can be connected to the idea of cultural memory that can be described as selective remembering and forgetting. The main feature of cultural memory is to portray how memory influences the formation of identity within communities. The evolving identity of modern women can be traced through the footsteps of various women portrayed in the film, who stands up for their own good. A collective reactivation of memories and collective memory can be seen through Amrita's traumatic experiences and her journey of resistance, which spark debates and discussions of gender and social justice. She reactivates the ideology of resistance on those women around her, hence sparking debates and discussions about the normalisation of abuse in marital life.

The film throw light on to significance which is recently bonded to the collective memories with gender and social justice firms. The film brings in the injustices from the past scenarios to the forefront, which springs up the ideology that register that violence against women is systemic and can be normalised. Amrita becomes the torch bearer, along with others, calling out the patriarchal acts to liberate them from the chains of constraintment and to make their voice matter. Hence the film act as domain where both individual and collective memory come in forward to cause memory activism and to execute the idea that facing the past id necessary to establish social justice.

Thappad when connected with remediation of the normalised and stereotyped narratives, challenges the ideology that normalises domestic abuse and the societal tendency to overlook on these issues. Hence reconstruction of collective memory is done through the film which is related to women's right and her agency in a relationship. The viewers are forced to think and reflect the experiences and social realities that they confront in their real life by watching the film. This active involvement of the audience increases the depth of understanding the social implications of domestic violence and importance of consent and mutual respect that one should keep in a marital relationship.

In online media and offline platforms, the cinema had fired discussions and debates, which introduces the role of media in shaping the colecrtive consciousness of the community. By bringing to forefront the crisis of domestic violence, the film becomes the catalyst for igniting talks and thoughts about women' rights making it a relevant artefact.

When looked through the lens of remediation, the presentation of struggles of woman in attempting to gain her own space in her domestic arena against societal expectations make the film, the advocate of reshaping collective memory regarding

rights of woman in society. The cyclical process of remembrance and forgetting, which is the fundamental feature of cultural memory can be connected here where the new story erases and establishes its position above the old one that no longer bind themselves in the current scenario. The platform for the audience to reconnect with their past memories and experiences is brought in through the film.

Premediation refers to the idea of structuring the understanding of domestic violence through existing cultural stories and media representations. Hence, this film produces the platform for the audience to dismantle the existing ideas and norms regarding patriarchy. The plot line discussed in the film is not out of vacuum, but intertwined by the stories of several women that exist in reality. By the deconstruction of the previously established narratives, the film creates a platform to understand how these portrayals have influenced the attitudes of society against women abuse. .



Fig. 5- Instagram post of the.poetrymeoldies posted on 21 November 2022



Remember Kabir Singh &
how it normalized violence in love?

Thappad in contrast,
gives the most perfect reply to that belief
saying that "No, not even for once."

Fig. 6- Instagram post of mycinemastory posted on 26 September 2022

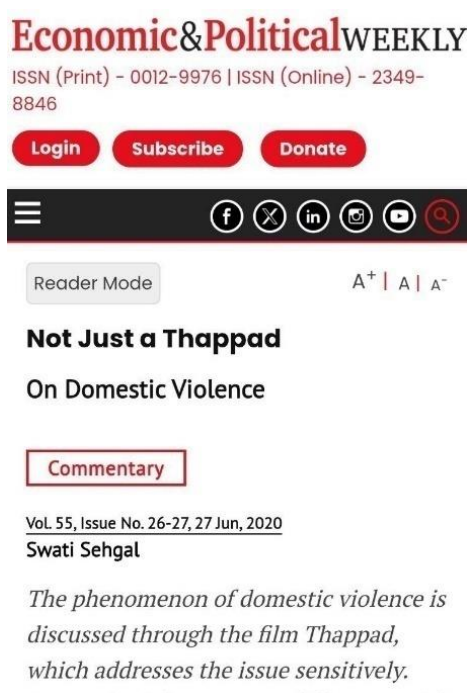


Fig.7- Economic and Political Weekly article titled “Not just a Thappad”
published on 27 June 2020



Fig. 8- Open Magazine article titled “Thappad: A Slap on Patriarchy” published on 11 March 2020

The film prompts the audience to reflect on their own memories and experiences related to gender norms by focusing on a single incident of domestic violence, thereby reactivating collective memories of injustices and oppression faced by women in society. Memory activism had emotional engagement as one of its important and striking factor. By involving strong emotional scenes in the film, the film pricks on to the emotional consciousness of the audience, thereby reactivating their collective memories, and planting a deep seated knowledge on the area of domestic abuse happening in families. it becomes a platform for memory activism as it raises concern over gender violence and the act of normalising. Hence the film itself becomes and advocate for women’s rights and equality. The discussions happening in the online platforms like Instagram and Face book along with news reports says the extent to which the film had influenced the audience. The film incorporates narrative reconstruction, which is a tool of memory activism where retelling and reshaping of past events is done yo create new meanings

and understandings. The idea of reconciliation in memory reactivation where past injustices and trauma are healed and hence marched forward can be seen here. Memory activism has another feature known as commemoration, which can be defined as act of remembering and honouring significant events or figures from the past. The film portrays a social evil in a wider lens, where the concept of commemoration is satisfied.

The film combines the experiences of Amrita not in a linear manner, but fragmented approach. There are fragmented pieces from the lives of another women along with portrayal of journey of Amrita. Hence these pieces can be treated as pieces of memory mosaic, where each individual experience and moment constitute its own importance in making a bigger larger picture which resembles a mosaic. Each becomes emotionally important in wider connotation, establishing its unique role. Amrita's memory mosaic included pieces of submission, domesticity but finally culminates in empowerment. By the time the film culminates, Amrita succeeds in joining these fragments to get a better view of life and understands what she deserves in life not just in marital life but as an individual. The end of the film, where she does all those she once wished to do when she was under Vikram can be seen as claiming the authority upon her life and an attempt to reconstruct her own memory mosaic.

Conclusion

The aim behind this project was to do a collective memory analysis of both the films *Thappad* and *Article 15*, and the memory activation aspect of both these films. The study demonstrated that both these films effectively utilize memory reactivation to confront social issues deeply rooted in Indian soil. Through strong narratives and impactful visuals, both films compel audience to refresh those memories which are suppressed within them – whether linked to gender based violence or caste discrimination. By connecting dots with collective memory, these films take the place of cultural interventions and challenge societal norms and turn on the conversations with respect to inequality, violence and oppression. Film as a powerful medium for social reflection and change can be witnessed through their ability to revive public consciousness. Hence cinema can function as a potent tool for preserving, reinterpreting and transmitting collective memory, hence they act as serve as powerful cultural texts that reactivate suppressed memories and challenge dominant social narratives. By refreshing the forgotten narratives, both the films emphasize the power of memory in fostering awareness, resistance, and change

In the interview with Anubhav Sinha, which is attached as Appendix -1, he commented that films can restock conversation. He addresses that his friends said that their behavior with their housemaids changed after viewing *Article 15*, which he notifies as a great achievement. He don't expect anything more than that. According to him the intention behind constructing the film makes it controversial or sensational or make the audience carry a bite of thought along with them after watching the film. He doesn't think that films spark real life policy changes or influence public opinion but states that in personal level, it can influence the behavior. He was addressed by a woman who made out a decision to walk away from a bad marriage after watching *Thappad*. In most cases

people appreciate the manner of portrayal of issues not what is said actually. He had used slow motion technique in the scene where human scavenger comes out of the manhole to provide a real life experience and memory of the scene that stays for a longer time.

From the 50 responses of the online survey conducted as a part of the project, which is attached as Appendix - 2, it is clear that films act as memory agents in the society and it leads to memory activation, especially when it is linked with films portraying social issues like *Thappad* and *Article 15*. The audience were able to relate the incidents shown in the big screen, hence contributing to memory reactivation. This shows the power of memory in shaping social justice narratives in two impactful Indian films, *Thappad* and *Article 15*. The survey presents the idea that these films bring memories of the past into the present, challenging audiences to reflect on their role in maintaining or changing the status quo.

In the Focus Group Analysis, which is attached as Appendix – 3, we could see different opinions of the evolving female generation about the films. From their conversations, we could analyse how films refresh the ideas in the minds of audience contributing to memory activation. They were able to relate the findings in films with their real life suggesting that those ideology still remains with people in this era in a different intensity. They were able to quote such real experiences too. The discussion revealed that both films were successful as catalysts for memory activation, compelling audience to confront social injustices that they viewed in normalized perception. They were able to resonate with the gender discrimination that Amrita experienced and were able to locate themselves with the caste discrimination even though not that deep.

From these experimental works, we could say that films contribute to memory reactivation and affect the politics of remembering a social incident after they witnessed

it in the screen. In *Thappad*, audience according to the output of survey, the opinion of those who saw the film altered from the stereotypical mind set. The arc of changing of opinions can be witnessed from the replies of the people who addressed the survey. Focus group provided a clear picture on how people perceive such issues in big screen.

Memory studies suggest that recollection is not merely about recalling the past but also about reshaping collective understanding in the present. In this way, both *Thappad* and *Article 15* can be labelled as successful as they activate memory to foster awareness and inspire resistance against social injustices.

The future scope of the project revolves around investigating how regional Indian cinema engages with memory activation, particularly those that address marginalised communities, indigenous ones and socio political issues. Exploring various films in different languages that present similar issues and themes gives a wider perspective on how memory functions across linguistic and cultural genres. Following up with contemporary digital spaces like web series, social media campaigns and documentaries reveal how memory narratives are reshaped and adapted in those domains. As digital media provides a platform to voice their opinions, studying those responses could unfold how they connect their personal memories to collective memories portrayed in visual storytelling. Wider study could examine how such issues discussed in film platforms could influence public discourse, policy reforms and grassroots activism.

Ultimately, both the films stand as poignant reminders that memory when activated, could disrupt silence, challenge injustice and influence social transformation. By refreshing memories of personal trauma and systemic oppression, such films force the audience to confront the realities that often remain hidden under social conditioning and cultural amnesia. Through their captivating narratives and evocative picturisation, both

the films were able to invite the audience not only to remember but also to reflect, question and respond, which is the greatest success that a film to achieve. Hence both the films crossed the boundaries of mere storytelling to become advocates of remembrance, resistance, and reparation.

Memory studies often emphasise the idea that act of remembering is not passive but a powerful form of action that can mould collective behaviour and consciousness. By highlighting those voices that are silenced and oppressed, these films contribute to a larger cultural effort to reclaim marginalized narratives and demand accountability for historical and contemporary injustices. Hence, *Thappad* and *Article 15* becomes the flag bearers of representing the transformative potential of cinema as a memory-making medium — one that does not merely reflect society but actively challenges it to evolve.

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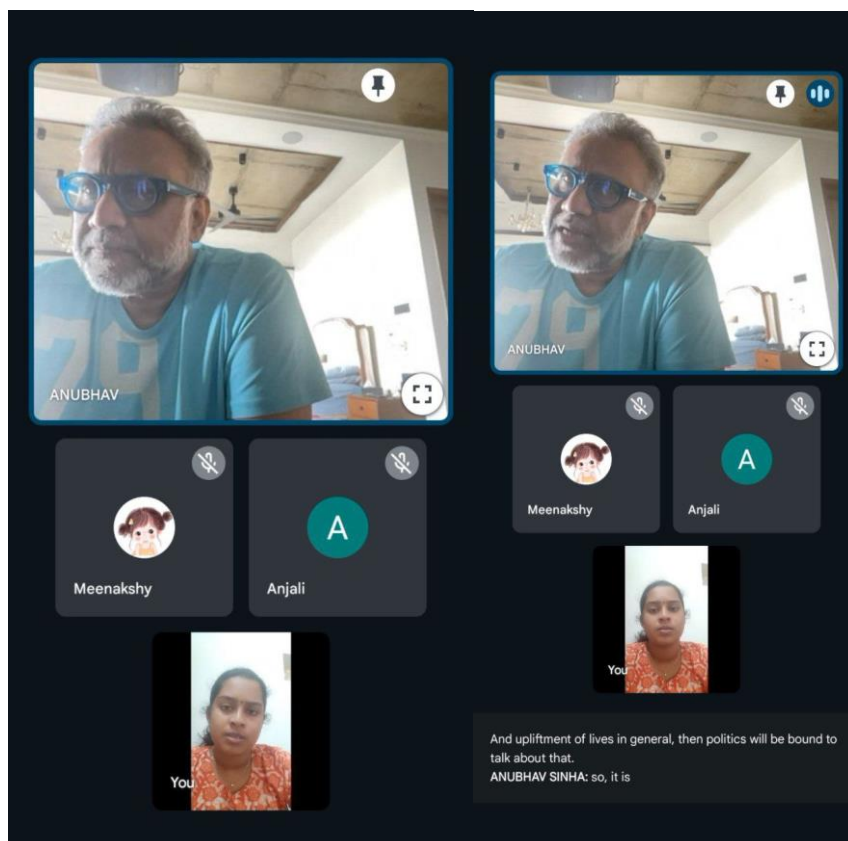
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Thappad. Directed by Anubhav Sinha, hindi, AA Films, 2020.

Appendix - 1

Transcript of Interview with Anubhav Sinha

Anubhav Sinha is an Indian film director, producer and writer known for his work in Hindi film industry. He had directed popular films like *Tum Bin*, *Dus* and *Ra.One*. He also directed a series of socio-political films *Mulk*, *Article 15*, *Thappad* followed by *Anek*, and *Bheed*.



Meenakshy: Good afternoon sir

Anubhav: Good afternoon.

Meenakshy: Sir, my name is Meenakshy and I am a PG student at St. Teresa's college, Ernakulam. And this interview is done in relation with my PG project, which is based on memory reactivation in Thappad, Article 15 and Delhi crime.

Anubhav: Regarding what?

Meenakshy: Thappad, Article 15 and Delhi crime

Anubhav: Okay

Meenakshy: This interview is done for that, so can we start sir?

Anubhav: Yes, sure.

Meenakshy: As a filmmaker, how do you balance the creative aspects of storytelling with the responsibility of addressing social issues like caste injustice (Article 15) and gender violence (Thappad)?

Anubhav: I think that job gets hold by time, pretty much over by the time you finish writing. So whatever interaction that story has with a socio political discourse as a part of the story itself, like in Article 15 - the story is about three Dalit girls being assaulted and killed and one escapes. Now, this a part. This is the story. Now everything else about gender discrimination, caste discrimination is inside the story. So there is no really hard work on balancing it then you're telling the story and the problem is inherently in it. So it will play out on its own. It's not. Yes, there is a bit of a balance to be created. In the way you tell that story. So, then there is a choice, whether it's supposed to be the social, socio political discourse and story are two liquids that you have to mix. You have to make sure that it doesn't become a documentary, remains an engaging and entertainment story telling. So if it's not engaging and entertaining then lesser fewer people will watch

it and then the entire purpose of making that film is defeated. So there is a balance to be found otherwise, in terms of content, it is inherently existed in the story itself.

Meenakshy: How do you see cinema as a medium to resist state-sponsored amnesia, especially in films like Article 15 and Thappad?

Anubhav: Please repeat the question. Your voice wasn't clear.

Meenakshy: How do you see cinema as a medium to resist state-sponsored amnesia, especially in films like Article 15 and Thappad?

Anubhav: state sponsored what?

Meenakshy: Amnesia

Anubhav: Amnesia. So I don't know a lot of amnesia is not really state sponsored. The state can add the most utilize it in an answer. But it is actually the society and if this did not exist, if this fissure whether it is gender discrimination or caste discrimination if it did not exist nobody knows, state no political agenda will ever be able to exploit it. So the political agendas enhance it. Enhance the fissure utilize the fissure. But let's admit that fissure exists.

Meenakshy: What role do you believe your films play in keeping collective memories of social injustices alive?

Anubhav: I think they can restock the conversation, films at best. So after Article 15 there is a whole lot of friends of mine who told me that my behavior with my house help has changed. Now that's my big achievement already. And I don't think you can expect anything more than that. It can only, you know, when you tell your brother that you have become very arrogant. He did not realize he had become arrogant. Suppose your brother becomes a big cricket star and he becomes arrogant and it's something he is doing as a part of his job. But he is not aware. But a good sister goes and tells him that brother you

became very arrogant. Now it is for him to take that information from a sister, sincere sister and either work on it or not. He just might think that she is stupid and I am not. Or he might think that why she is saying that, she never said that to me before. Am I doing something differently. And then he goes into introspection and figures out yes she is right. And he makes amendments. So a film is only that sincere sister who can tell the society that you know, this is what we are doing wrong. And then it is for the society to either reject it or forget about it. It was a film and it was just a story or thing that no there is maybe there is something for me in it and then do something about it, but beyond this a film cannot play a role. And this is the best a film can do.

Meenakshy: How do you approach storytelling to ensure these narratives advocate for accountability and justice without sensationalizing trauma?

Anubhav: I think it just largely to do with who you are as a person. So if you are and what is your intention behind telling that story? So if you doing it to sensationalize something, whether or not you know about it, it will happen. At least even if it happens unsuccessfully show in the film. And if you are, if you really sincerely do it, make sure that people going back home after watching the film will carry a thought with them and talk about it, then the film will be different. So I think it is entirely dependent on, largely dependent on who you are and to what you are trying to do with the film. Your intention decides how you will do it.

Meenakshy: How do you believe films like yours contribute to holding the state accountable for its role in perpetuating social inequalities? What is the filmmaker's role in this kind of advocacy?

Anubhav: Of the films I have made, the socio political ones, in the past seven years, I think Anek is the only film that talks to the state and not the state of the time but the state

that over stretched history. But if you see Mulk, Bheed or Article 15 or Thappad, these films actually only talk to the society and not to the state because, you know politics is such a beast that it will exploit everything that is available to it. It is the society that has to make the change. It is a society which will decide what discourse I will consume or not. So, its way more effective stop talk to the society because politics worldwide and across timelines, plays out like that. There is no idealistic politics, you know, there can be a little more of idealism or propriety or less but politics has a purpose. Whereas the society and you know, depending on what the society consumes through a political discourse, the political discourse changes. So if you start consuming, then you will get more of it. But if you start responding to social justice and if you start you as a society start talking about social justice and upliftment of lives in general, then political will be bound to talk about that. So it is largely to me, the culprit is the society and not the state

Meenakshy: How do you see Indian cinema evolving in its portrayal of justice and accountability in recent years? Are there particular changes you would like to see in how Indian cinema handles these themes?

Anubhav: So, you know, like when I started writing Article 15 , I realized that I didn't know much about it. So, then you read books and then you meet people and then you try and have people in your team that will know more than you. So, that's the reason why I hires Gaurav Solanki to co-write Article 15 with me because I believed he will. He had been a journalist and he has written books and he's a good storyteller. So I hired him and then both of us went to Delhi and we lived there for a few days and we met as many journalist as we could who were working with marginalized communities for years. And we, spoke to them and then we recommended books to each other and that's how, because you know unfortunately or fortunately I do come from a space of privilege. Though the caste that I am from is not categorized in one of the four varnas. But we have

always been treated as an upper caste. So, there's a caste in UP called Khayas. So we are not Brahmins, we are not Kshatriyas, we are not Shudras. None. But we are treated as upper caste because mythologically, we are the descendants of the chief accountant of Yamraj. So he was the accountant and he was close to Yamraj. So he was a literate man. The moment you become literate, you are privileged. You are upper class. So I hadn't experienced any of it and that's why for the longest time, I made Article 15 when I was 52. So imagine it took me 34 years of adulthood to realize that Oh, there is something to be said about this because I never faced it. And when you don't face it, you're blind to it, you get color blind. And when you face it, you face it at 45, 67, 89 and then you know about it and obviously someone like me with my kind of background, I would never be able to do the full justice to a subject matter like Article 15. That's the reason why Pa Ranjit and Vetrakaran, those film makers, they have a better understanding of the material. Because thankfully in southern part of India, film makers are still closer to their lives that they come from whereas we are immigrants. I have travelled from Banaras to Aligarh to Delhi to Bombay and I've lived in Bombay for 30-33 years and I still don't know where I belong. Because the metropolitan city is a metropolitan city, where everyone around you is an immigrant from one state or the other. So there is no sense of belonging but in south India, in all the five languages, the film makers and the actors they are still living within their closed roots. So they understand the socio political canvas better than we do and that's why their films are more effective.

Meenakshy: Have you ever seen your films spark real-life policy changes or influence public opinion on social issues like how Thappad influenced conversations around gender in India?

Anubhav: I don't think film cause change. No art form cause change. What it can add the best is to start conversation amongst people who may cause the change. But cinema

directly doesn't cause any change because you know, you go in for an entertainment. Mostly and unless it's an art, the people you are talking to are already on your side. So they have just come to appreciate the manner in which you have told the story. And not exactly what you are saying. But, people say things like I told you. After Article 15, I heard a lot of friends tell me that my behavior towards my house help has changed. After Thappad, you know, I received innumerable anonymous phone calls from crying people. And they would cry like children and wouldn't tell me who they were and just thank me and there was one lady who told me that I was in a bad marriage and I was not able to get out but after seeing this film, I could make my decision. And I said, I don't know if that's a compliment because if it's breaking her marriage. But if you were good, feeling good about it, then good for you. So, you know, but these are sporadic, inconsequential numbers. If you are really talking about societal change, then it has to be a large number and I don't think films have the power to do that.

Meenakshy: What are some of the specific cinematic techniques you use to make viewers confront uncomfortable truths or memories of social injustice?

Anubhav: You know, then there are in films like these, there are scenes and there are moments where you are supposed to be sort of inside it feeling and then there are you know, sometimes it's in the writing. Sometimes it's a bit of technique of the craft of film making like in Article 15, the human scavenger comes out of the manhole in super slow-mo. And I saved a slow motion shot only for that shot. I did not use slow motion anywhere else so that when it appears once in the film and the camera is close up to his face as he's coming out of that filthy water, I wanted people to experience it almost as much as much as that person was experiencing at the time. So there is, you know, come craft that you can use but a lot of time it is in the writing that more often than not, it is in the writing and the performance.

Meenakshy: How do you decide the balance between factual accuracy and creative liberty when addressing issues like gender, or state violence in your films?

Anubhav: You can. You have to be within a permissible radius of the fact. You can't put the fact on its head unless you have an evidence. Suppose, you know, you and I believe that there are 52% men in this society and 48% women and suddenly, I have an evidence that no, there are actually 43% women and 57% men or 52% women and 48% men but then I have to have an evidence. And otherwise, you cannot turn facts on their heads. You have to dramatize it, you have to make the event or the fact more interesting and engaging. But no, you can't twist the fact

Meenakshy: Thank you sir, those were the questions I intended to ask to you. Thank you so much

Anubhav: Thank you

Appendix – 2

Survey report of Cultural Memory Analysis and Memory Reactivation in *Article 15* and *Thappad*

The survey done on online features the general response of those who had watched both the movies. The response sheet on analysis gives a complete picture of the collective reactivation of the memories of those social issues portrayed on the film, which adds to the output of the project.

To the question, does *Thappad* portray domestic violence as a normalized part of cultural memory, 54% had answered yes, suggesting that even in this 21st century, there exists the stereotyped notion of oppression in marital relationship. 70% had answered yes to the question, does Amrita's decision to leave her marriage challenge collective memory regarding women's roles in Indian society, showing the breaking of the prior mentioned stereotype. Does the film activate memories of similar personal experiences for its audience through Amrita's story gained 62% yes, suggesting memory reactivation happening within audience. 62% people responded positively to the question, does *Thappad* use visual or symbolic elements to emphasize patriarchal norms embedded in cultural memory.

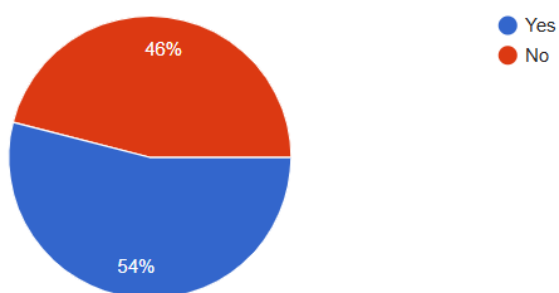
64% people responded yes to the question, does *Article 15* depict caste discrimination as deeply rooted in India's cultural memory, suggesting that the intention of the film had deeply seated in the minds of the audience. To the question, do you feel that *Article 15* helps raise awareness about caste discrimination by reminding people of past injustices, was responded positively by 64%. 60% acknowledged that the protagonist's investigation challenge the prevailing collective memory of caste dynamics in rural India, proving him to be a memory agent. 66%

answered yes to the question, does the film rely on imagery and dialogue to evoke memories of historical social injustice. The question, does *Article 15* encourage the audience to reflect on their personal memory of caste and privilege was answered positively by 60%, suggesting that memory reactivation happened within audience.

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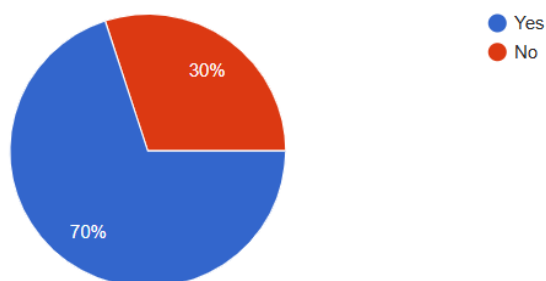
1. Does *Thappad* portray domestic violence as a normalized part of cultural memory?

50 responses



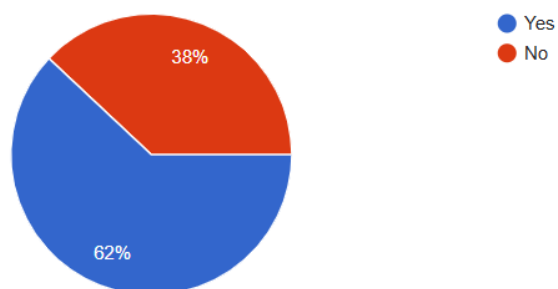
2. Does Amrita's decision to leave her marriage challenge collective memory regarding women's roles in Indian society?

50 responses



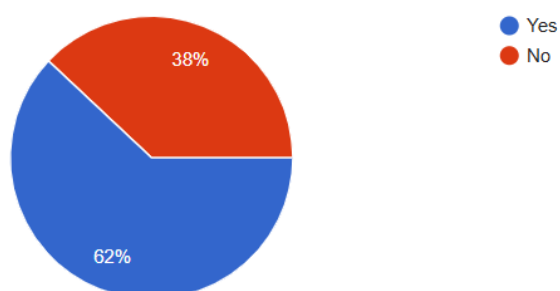
3. Does the film activate memories of similar personal experiences for its audience through Amrita's story?

50 responses



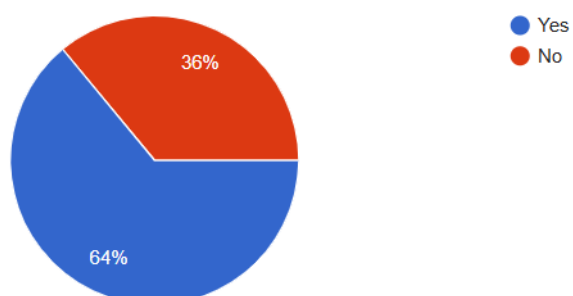
4. Does *Thappad* use visual or symbolic elements to emphasize patriarchal norms embedded in cultural memory?

50 responses



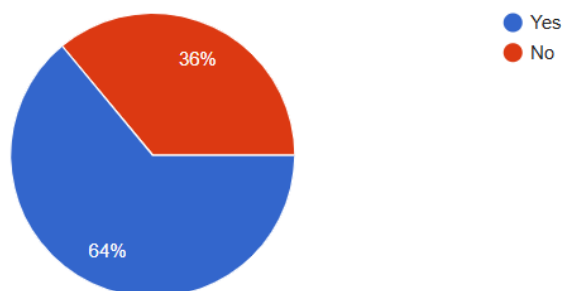
5. Does *Article 15* depict caste discrimination as deeply rooted in India's cultural memory?

50 responses



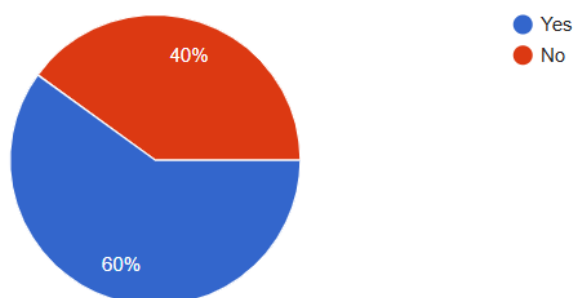
6. Do you feel that *Article 15* helps raise awareness about caste discrimination by reminding people of past injustices?

50 responses



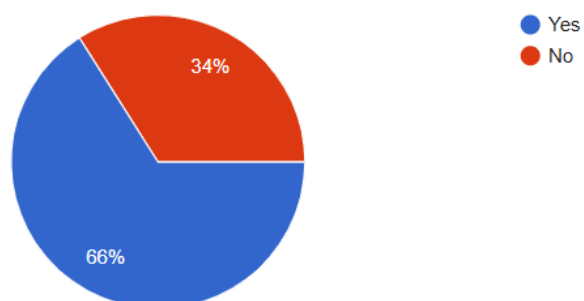
7. Does the protagonist's investigation challenge the prevailing collective memory of caste dynamics in rural India?

50 responses



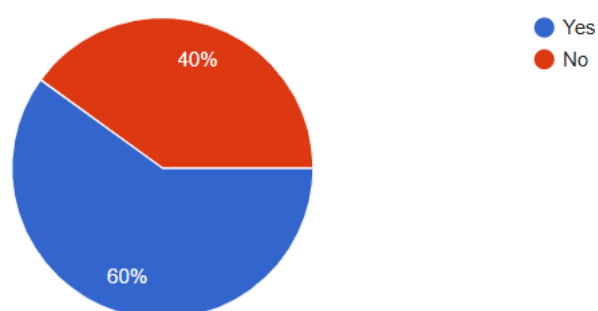
8. Does the film rely on imagery and dialogue to evoke memories of historical social injustice?

50 responses



9. Does *Article 15* encourage the audience to reflect on their personal memory of caste and privilege?

50 responses



Appendix - 3

Focus Group Report

A group of 15 girls, aged 18-23, who saw both the films was taken as a focus group and was interviewed with the following questions. The rationale behind choosing such a group was that fact that the sample group was readily available being in a women's college and one of the film revolved around gender violence. The aim was to engage with the themes of memory activation in *Thappad* and *Article 15*. 15 students were asked to watch the film and questionnaire, which is attested below, was provided to them to answer.

Questionnaire

1. How did the portrayal of domestic violence in *Thappad* influence your understanding of similar real-life incidents?
2. Which media platform (social media, news, OTT) do you think played the biggest role in shaping discussions around these films? Why?
3. In *Article 15*, the use of caste discrimination as a central theme: Helped me understand systemic issues better, Reinforced what I already knew, Did not affect my understanding of caste issues
4. Do you feel these films offered a more impactful narrative compared to traditional media coverage of similar issues?
5. After watching *Thappad*, did you reflect on or recall any incidents of domestic violence that you or someone you know experienced?
6. Did *Article 15* evoke memories or awareness of caste-related discrimination in your community or elsewhere?
7. How do you think these films can contribute to social change?

8. Do you believe that films like *Thappad* and *Article 15* empower women by giving them a platform to voice their concerns?
9. Would you say these films helped in creating awareness or sparking conversations about gender and caste inequalities?
10. Have these films influenced your perception of justice and accountability? If yes, how?
11. Do you think audience discussions and social media activism can sustain the memory and impact of films like *Thappad* and *Article 15*? Why or why not?

The focus group analysis bring to light that majority of the girls that I interviewed had undergone memory reactivation by watching both the films. They were reminded of the past experiences of themselves or of those surrounding themselves which showed the shades of caste discrimination and gender violence. They were of the opinion that, though they were aware about the caste violence happening in the remote areas of the country, they were shocked to witness such atrocities like that depicted in *Article 15*, underlining the fact that it is based on real event. They had encountered caste discrimination in their real life, when parents ask them about the caste of their friends and schoolmates. They also opined that their families had asked them to adjust at different levels of their life for being a woman. They pointed out that the lack of confidence to let go off a toxic marriage as the prime reason for the flourishing of such events. They were quite happy to see such portrayal in big screen, as such events were always a nightmare for them and made them confuse about the next step. People had mentioned about the movie *Valsalyam*, where slap is normalised and is erased when husband consoles his wife. Both the film gained popularity through clubhouse, Instagram and Youtube, and influencers had played a major role in doing so.