

Jaat Baaja Baraat

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Director's Note

'Jaat Baaja Baarat' is a documentary about marriage and its existence in the city of Mumbai, through stories of love that crossed caste boundaries. While love is ceaselessly lost and gained in the bustling city, what often goes unspoken of is the role of caste in determining the direction of these love stories.

We began our conversations on the theme with a simplistic idea of inter-caste marriage- one almost elided with 'love marriage'. But the romantic idea of an oppressive system being countered with just the power of 'love', soon got complicated.

While we hadn't specifically studied caste as part of our course, we began our group-work with creating our own bank of material (academic writing on caste, biographies, news stories, etc.) for a more nuanced perspective.

Simultaneously, we started to seek, and listen to stories of people outside of our familiar spaces. This only led us to realise the plethora of problems that romantic love brings along, if it meant crossing societal lines.

We five filmmakers belong to dominant castes in privileged locations- making our understanding of marriage somewhat homogenous. We decided to address this uniformity and privilege in the film through our own voices.

Our next step was to then look at the stories of negotiation of couples who are now in inter-caste marriages. Our protagonists were Rajesh and Bhavana (who belonged to different regions as well as castes) and Shekhar and Shanti. Through their struggles with familial objections, differing marriage ceremonies, ritual practices, languages, and food habits- they clarified their own stance towards caste identity. It was seen that both couples consciously disparaged the caste system, and held their own struggles as examples of subverting social injustice.

Something that became increasingly clear through the process of interviews, was how gender played a very intricate role within these struggles against rigid notions of caste.

The institution of marriage is inherently structured to uphold patriarchy, which meant that the women seemed compelled to negotiate more- make more compromises- in their marriages across class, caste and regional lines. The burden of a new language, food habits or differences in everyday living was dealt with more explicitly by women.

We also decided to look at two institutions that offer support to those in inter-caste marriages, facing social stigma. The Arya Samaj is a popular institution that supports couples through inter-caste marriages, though it is deeply rooted in the propagation of Hinduism.

The Mumbai wing of the All India Democratic Women's Association- which offers legal and financial support, as well as political solidarity to victims of caste violence- gave us a glimpse of some of the horrific stories that haunt the city today- those of forced separations, honour killings, and of the people who survived them, and bravely, flourished.

By the end of it, we decided it was necessary to include our own distances and discoveries in the film- which is laid out through a fictional parallel narrative, as well as through our recorded, disembodied voices. As the film progresses, so do our anxieties regarding marriage,

partnership, caste, privilege, negotiation and the city, all reflected in the unnamed female protagonist's journey across the city.

While some of us chose to settle for the idea that marriage across enforced distinctions of caste, is a way to confront caste, other wanted to begin the process of reimagining a new system of partnership- something perhaps radically different from marriage.

'Jaat Baaja Baarat' ends on this note - that if we want to question caste, we also need to question marriage.