
INDIAN CINEMA AS A MEDIUM FOR LEGAL AWARENESS AND RIGHT CONSCIOUSNESS

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ABSTRACT

Indian cinema has gradually moved beyond its conventional role of entertainment and has become an effective medium for developing legal awareness and rights consciousness among the public. Earlier, knowledge of law and constitutional rights was largely confined to legal texts and court proceedings. Today, filmmakers and storytellers play a central role in translating complex legal and constitutional issues into narratives that are accessible and engaging for ordinary citizens. Through films and series, directors have explored significant socio-legal and constitutional developments, including the history of Jammu and Kashmir, the mass displacement of Kashmiri Hindus, the constitutional change brought by the abolition of Article 370, and the Maintenance provided to Muslim women under the Secular law. By presenting these themes through storytelling, cinema helps people understand constitutional values, judicial reasoning, and the impact of law on everyday life. With the support of digital platforms, these narratives reach a wider audience, but the core responsibility of shaping legal understanding lies with the vision of filmmakers and directors. This article examines how Indian cinema, driven by storytelling and creative interpretation, contributes to public legal education by making constitutional principles and rights-based issues relatable and meaningful to society.

Keywords: Cinema, Entertainment, Bollywood, Constitutional rights, Fundamental rights.

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INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema, especially through the creative vision of directors and filmmakers, has increasingly become a powerful medium to influence public thinking and raise awareness about legal rights and constitutional issues. Large-scale releases and well-crafted narratives do more than entertain; they shape the way audiences understand their rights and the functioning of law in society. Previously, law was perceived as something that belonged only in textbooks or courtrooms, understood mainly by legal professionals. Today, visual storytelling has opened new avenues for citizens to engage with complex legal and constitutional ideas in an accessible way. The focus of this article is on how cinema and web series have enabled audiences to learn about various legal and constitutional themes through storytelling. We will examine movies and series that have not only entertained but also educated viewers about the Indian Constitution, fundamental rights, rule of law, and social justice. By presenting legal issues in simple and compelling narrative forms, these films reach a wide audience that might otherwise not engage with such topics. While some films attempt to educate viewers about constitutional history and legal processes, there are also concerns about oversimplification or dramatization of historical events for entertainment or commercial gain. For example, the cinematic portrayal of historical or socio-legal issues sometimes changes or emphasizes certain elements to enhance dramatic effect, which can influence public perception of real events. This article explores how such cinematic representations contribute to legal consciousness, the possibilities they create for rights awareness, and the tensions that arise when entertainment intersects with legal and historical accuracy. The heart of our exploration lies in detailed examination of case studies, where we dissect films that have made a significant impact on social awareness in the Indian context.

But still there are few challenges as not able to keep the facts intact projecting the real scene with entertainment so will be articulating them also.

CINEMA AS A MIRROR TO SOCIAL REALITIES

In the contemporary phase of Indian cinema, the representation of social issues has acquired greater depth and realism, reflecting a conscious engagement with the legal, political, and social fabric of the country. As societal challenges evolve, filmmakers have responded by adopting more grounded and immersive storytelling techniques that bring complex realities closer to the audience. This shift is particularly evident in films dealing with law, constitutional rights, and social justice, where directors strive to recreate the lived experience of

discrimination, institutional bias, and the functioning of courts with authenticity.

Modern Indian directors increasingly focus on presenting the real feel of courtrooms, legal procedures, and constitutional debates by weaving narratives around specific Articles of the Constitution and the circumstances under which they are invoked. Through detailed characterisation and realistic settings, these films illustrate how issues such as caste discrimination, inequality, state power, and denial of rights gradually find their way into the judicial system. In doing so, cinema captures not only the letter of the law but also the human consequences of its violation, making abstract constitutional provisions emotionally accessible to the public.

A notable departure from earlier formulaic storytelling is the emphasis on social conscience and moral inquiry, where filmmakers consciously blur the line between mainstream and independent cinema. Socially relevant narratives are now integrated into commercially viable films, allowing discussions on discrimination, injustice, and marginalisation to reach a wider audience. Directors use their creative influence to foreground marginalised voices, challenge stereotypes, and foster empathy by portraying the psychological and social impact of injustice on individuals and communities.

Furthermore, several contemporary films draw inspiration from real incidents and landmark judicial decisions, which have left a lasting imprint on public consciousness. When such judgments are translated into cinematic narratives, they amplify their impact, enabling legal principles and constitutional values to resonate beyond courtrooms and legal texts. Cinema thus becomes a medium through which society revisits crucial moments of legal and social transformation, encouraging reflection and awareness among viewers.

The emergence of digital platforms has further strengthened this trend by providing filmmakers with alternative spaces to experiment with bold themes and unconventional narratives. This democratisation of storytelling has expanded the range of perspectives represented on screen, allowing cinema to respond not only to domestic realities but also to global developments that shape public discourse. Contemporary Indian cinema, therefore, does not merely mirror society; it actively engages with ongoing social and legal debates, influencing public perception and contributing to a deeper understanding of rights, justice, and constitutional values.

Contemporary Indian cinema has increasingly engaged with constitutional values and social realities by embedding legal principles, judicial processes, and lived experiences of discrimination within its narratives. Directors today consciously recreate courtroom

atmospheres, investigative procedures, and constitutional debates to give audiences an authentic sense of how law operates in society. These films transform abstract constitutional Articles into relatable human stories, showing how issues of discrimination, inequality, and injustice travel from society to courts. By drawing inspiration from real incidents and landmark judgments, cinema amplifies their social impact, ensuring that legal discourse reaches a wider audience and influences public consciousness.

One of the most significant examples is *Article 15* (2019), directed by Anubhav Sinha. The film takes its title directly from Article 15 of the Constitution of India, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Through the perspective of an IPS officer investigating crimes against Dalit girls in rural India, the film exposes the deep-rooted caste hierarchies that persist despite constitutional guarantees. Sinha's realistic storytelling, combined with institutional critique and morally charged narrative, highlights how discrimination becomes a matter of legal intervention only after severe social injustice. The film left a strong impact on audiences by forcing a confrontation with uncomfortable realities and the gap between constitutional ideals and social practice.²

The constitutional promise of life and liberty under Article 21 is explored in *Jolly LLB* (2013), directed by Subhash Kapoor. The film revolves around a struggling lawyer who challenges powerful elites in a hit-and-run case, exposing flaws in the justice delivery system. Through courtroom proceedings, witness examination, and judicial reasoning, the film demonstrates how access to justice is often influenced by power and class. By blending satire with legal realism, *Jolly LLB* makes the audience aware that Article 21 is not merely a textual right but one that must be actively protected through fair legal processes.³

Another important cinematic engagement with constitutional change is seen in *Article 370* (2024), directed by Aditya Suhas Jambhale and starring Yami Gautam Dhar. The film dramatizes the political and administrative developments surrounding the abrogation of Article 370, which granted special autonomous status to Jammu and Kashmir. Through intelligence operations, strategic meetings, and constitutional interpretation, the film presents how a constitutional provision shaped regional identity and governance. By translating a complex constitutional event into an accessible narrative, the film brought constitutional discourse into

² Anubhav Sinha, *Article 15* (Zee Studios 2019) (India) (based on Article 15, Constitution of India), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_15_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_15_(film)).

³ Subhash Kapoor, *Jolly LLB* (B4U Films 2013) (India) (engaging the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21, Constitution of India), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jolly_LLB.

mainstream public discussion.⁴

Socio-economic exclusion and the dignity of life — central to Article 21 — are powerfully portrayed in *Homebound* (2025), directed by Neeraj Ghaywan. The film follows two young men from marginalized communities navigating caste and religious discrimination while aspiring for stability through government employment. Although the film does not explicitly cite a constitutional Article, its narrative strongly reflects the right to live with dignity. Ghaywan's restrained and realistic direction focuses on everyday injustice rather than courtroom drama, demonstrating how constitutional promises often remain distant for marginalized groups. The film's international recognition further emphasizes cinema's role in globalizing India's socio-legal realities.⁵

Freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) finds cinematic articulation in *19(1)(a)* (2022), directed by Indhu V. S. The film takes its title directly from the constitutional provision and explores how expression, literature, and dissent interact with social constraints. While not set in a courtroom, the narrative symbolically reflects how constitutional freedoms are negotiated within society. The film reinforces cinema's role as a democratic space where constitutional values are debated beyond formal legal institutions.⁶

Finally, the courtroom drama *Haq* (2025), directed by Suparn Verma and starring Yami Gautam Dhar, further illustrates cinema's engagement with justice and constitutional ethos. The film delves into legal battles, evidentiary challenges, and institutional power structures, offering a realistic portrayal of litigation and judicial reasoning. Although not titled after a specific constitutional Article, *Haq* strongly resonates with Article 21, particularly in relation to access to justice, procedural fairness, and the right to a fair trial. By recreating the emotional and institutional realities of courtroom *संघर्ष*, the film contributes to public understanding of how constitutional rights are defended within the legal system.

CONCLUSION

The evolving landscape of contemporary Indian cinema demonstrates its growing engagement with social realities and constitutional values, positioning it as a significant cultural medium beyond mere entertainment. Through realistic portrayals of discrimination, judicial processes,

⁴ Aditya Suhas Jambhale, *Article 370* (Indian Motion Pictures Producers' Ass'n 2024) (India) (depicting the abrogation of Article 370, Constitution of India), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_370_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_370_(film)).

⁵ Neeraj Ghaywan, *Homebound* (Netflix 2025) (India) (addressing socio-economic exclusion and dignity under Article 21), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homebound_\(2025_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homebound_(2025_film)).

⁶ Indhu V. S., *19(1)(a)* (2022) (India) (based on Article 19(1)(a), Constitution of India), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19\(1\)\(a\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/19(1)(a)).

and constitutional debates, cinema has increasingly translated abstract legal principles into accessible and emotionally resonant narratives. Films discussed in this article illustrate how constitutional provisions such as Articles 14, 15, 19, 21, and 370 are not confined to legal texts or courtrooms but are deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of individuals and communities.

By recreating courtroom environments, investigative procedures, and social conflicts, filmmakers provide audiences with an understanding of how injustice reaches the judicial system and how rights are asserted, contested, and sometimes denied. The depiction of caste discrimination, socio-economic exclusion, political transformation, and freedom of expression allows cinema to reflect the constitutional promise of equality, dignity, and justice while simultaneously exposing the gaps between law and reality. In doing so, films serve as informal platforms of constitutional education, fostering legal awareness among sections of society that may otherwise remain distant from formal legal discourse.

Moreover, the influence of cinema lies in its ability to shape public perception and stimulate dialogue. When narratives inspired by real incidents or landmark developments are presented on screen, they leave a lasting impact on collective consciousness, often influencing how society understands rights, justice, and governance. Filmmakers, therefore, emerge not merely as storytellers but as cultural intermediaries who mediate between law and society, enabling critical reflection on social structures and institutional practices.

In conclusion, contemporary Indian cinema functions both as a mirror and a catalyst — reflecting societal realities while also contributing to the evolution of social and constitutional consciousness. Through its engagement with law, rights, and justice, cinema continues to play a vital role in shaping public understanding, encouraging introspection, and reinforcing the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution of India

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