

Censorship in indian cinema assignment

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Is it a stray case of Board members taking decisions callously, or is it part of a well-thought- UT strategy by which the Censor Board typically functions? Is its existence stifling progressive cinema and freedom of expression? Are we losing more than what we are gaining on account of censorship? On one side we find the State promoting reactionary films like Godard (Turmoil), which deals with the India Pakistan Partition of 1947, or Border, a film about the Indo-Pack war that incites audiences enough to shout slogans of “ Pakistan Murmured” (“ Down with Pakistan!). The State passes Stay (The Truth), which shows indiscriminate killing of “ gangsters” at the hands of police and even makes such films tax free, but it does not allow Patrician’s films to be screened. The fact is thwart and Peace is critical of Indian’s nuclear bomb, which has been projected by the State as a major national achievement, while those other films endorse the State’s point of view. It is a clear case of the Censor Board acting as an institution of the State to direct the public discourse and to safeguard its interests.

The large-scale violence taking place in the world needs the support of the masses. They may not participate in the carnage but support it tacitly. As long as we have films laggard and Border in India, we ill have the class that supports the kind of violence that has recently taken place in Gujarat in which thousands of Muslims were killed and many more made homeless. Cuts in films like War and Peace are made to ensure that any viewpoint other than the State’s does not exist in the public discourse. In this case the State is ensuring that people do not question its ideology of violence.

The film production and distribution system in contemporary India is so tuned that it is difficult for a filmmaker with an alternative view to raise

funds to make a film and show it. If after a lot of struggle, one does make a film with an alternative viewpoint, as in the case of *Patriarchal*, the Censor Board steps in between the people and the filmmaker. All over the world the prime concern of censors is the portrayal of violence and sex. The way the State wants sex to be portrayed reflects on the kind of sexuality that the State thinks should exist, indicating its interest in controlling the private lives of its citizens.

It seems that the Censor Board often represents the view of the existing dominant patriarchy, and cutting any discussion of sexuality out of the public domain keeps it in the four walls of the household, which is also the place of control of women. If the Censor Board's job is to curb the "corruption of mind" and to stop pornographic films, at a time when anyone with access to the internet can see endless amounts of pornography, one wonders how much the State can control it. I am not arguing that pornography should be banned but simply drawing attention to the hypocrisy that exists.

Today, a child with Internet access can see all kinds of pornography by typing three letters, S-E-X, while the Censor Board has elaborate discussions on the permissible duration of a kissing scene. Often the Board looks at a film's scenes or shots in isolation and misses the intent of the film. In the process it might misinterpret or oversimplify meaning. Keeping in mind that terms like vulgar, obscene, indecent, etc. are extremely subjective, the Board might demand a cut or two on account of nudity.

However, a film with characters fully clothed can be "vulgar," whereas one with nudity could look "inoffensive," depending on the intention of the

filmmaker and the context. Taking into account the director's intent and seeing films holistically shows that some of the films, and TV soap operas like *AAAS Bah* (which shows women as sacrificing daughters and dutiful wives), are dangerously reactionary. A look at the reaction to Deep Mehta's *Fire* gives further insight about the concern of the State and other dominant groups toward sexuality.

The right-wing Hindu organization *Shiv Sena* stopped the film from being screened by tearing down the posters and threatening the theatre owners. The Censor Board, acting on their behest, tried to recall the film, an action later repudiated by the Supreme Court. The objection was that *Fire* showed a lesbian relationship, which according to its opponents was against Indian tradition and "distorts" Indian culture. Here it is an alternative sexuality that threatens the notion of "Indian Family." *Fire's* opponents were concerned about the "corruption of the minds of women." The notion that a particular film "can be seen with the family" is often code indicating a concern for protecting women and children. Restrictions on sexual material -?? whether in serious art or commercial pornography -?? are often imposed in the name of "protecting" women. These restrictions do nothing to promote women's equality but rather infantilize them. The concept that ideas, information, or images involving sex are inherently offensive to women only shores up destructive Victorian stereotypes of female purity and sexuality (CB. Marjorie Hein' Feminists for Free Expression group, or FEE).

At times, censorship by terror tactics of various reactionary groups or "thought police" is imposed even before the film is made. Deep Mehta's *Water* deals with the lives of widows, mainly from Bengal, who are sent to the holy
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town of Binaries, where they live in temple institutions and are exploited by the authorities. Water could not be shot despite all clearances. The archaic rule of getting the script approved by BOB ministry for a foreign film and having a government official at the shooting to see whether the script is followed was also taken care Of.

Even the permission of the Indian State could not protect her from a bunch of Hindu right-wing fanatics. Recently, some films about the Gujarat carnage were not allowed to be screened at a college in Bombay. Kill Barbarity Vitality Parish (BABY), the student wing of Barbarity Kanata Party, the Hindu fundamentalist party that rules the Gujarat and at the national level, had complained to the police that the films might disturb the city's peace.

The videotapes were confiscated by the police, who said that they were stopping the screening to maintain law and order. Instead of providing protection to those who want to show the film, which is their fundamental right, the police stopped its screening on the insistence of those who were party to the riots. It is difficult to know how to handle situations like Patrician's. Should we fight the board's decision on a case-by-case basis, try to build a public opinion, or ask for a more sensitive Censor Board?

As long as the State censors films, a handful of individuals, acting on behalf of the State, will be seeing and deciding what we can see. Eventually they will shape the public mind to a certain ideology. In India, the debate around censorship has always been about whether a certain cut was justified; rarely has there been a public questioning of the relevance and existence of the

Censor Board. Seeing certain reactionary and regressive films, one thinks of taking recourse to the Censor Board.

While I Was associated with a Women ' s group there was a discussion of a film that glorified Sati. The group jointly asked the Censor Board to cut those scenes (to no avail). We faced a similar dilemma with Bandier (The Sandstorm), based on a true story of a woman who was raped. The woman on whose life story the film was based had reservations guarding the film. We had thought of taking recourse to the Censor Board, but there was also a concern amongst us about taking recourse to censorship as we felt that it contradicted our belief in freedom of expression.