



Central Board Of Film Certification , Controversy's And Indian Cinema

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Abstract

The Indian film industry has gone through a vast change according to the demand supplying top class content rich films to the audiences. To control the quality of the content, the Central Board of Film Certification was set up to regulated rules and norms according to which a film is censored. The paper examines the different criteria upon which a film is censored as well as the use of CBFC as a tool of revenge in political terms.

Key words- cinematographic, censorship, tribunal

Introduction

Indian cinema – its history at a glance

The first cinematographic exhibition organized by Lumiere Brothers were held in Bombay (now Mumbai) on July 7, 1896. It brought the Indians cinematographers, photographers, artists, musicians a great enthusiasm and a new scope to portray moving images and sound on a bigger screen that depicted a story, specially Indian myths and content rich folklores. The exhibition displayed live photographic content such as workers leaving factory and arrival of train which continued for four days over a period of two months. Meanwhile in Calcutta (now Kolkata), the British cinema pioneers were displaying similar kinds of exhibition which indicated the beginning of Indian cinema.

Out of the thousands who participated in those exhibition, Harsihchandra S. Bhatvdekar also known as Save Dada ordered a moving picture camera from London, and when arrived one of the first documented video was captured named as *The Wrestlers* in Bombay's Hanging gardens. He further acquired a projector and other processing equipment and took the credit of shooting one of the first Indian news reels, *The Return of Wrangler Paranjpe* which was on a Indian student who had won honors in mathematics at Cambridge, Wrangler Paranjpe. Some other notable works of Bhatavdekar was *The man with his monkey* a comedy genre film. On May 18, 1912 R.G Torney filmed a Marathi stage play, *Pundalik* which was India's first filmed play, and the credit to make first full length film was awarded to Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra* 1913.

Raja Harishchandra by Phalke broke the ground which led to produce as many as 96 full length films, 26 short films among which *Savitri*, *Lanka Dahan*, *Sinhasta Mela*, *Krishna Jamuna* were the notable ones. Directors such as D.G Ganguly from Calcutta, R Nataraja Mudaliar from south India gave a interest in making films related to mythological and religious concerns. Ganguly's *England Returned* (1921), *Barister's Wife* dealt with social issues. Films like *Keechaka Vadha* (1917), *Markandaya* (1922), *Mayil Ravana* (1923) were based on mythological issues made by R. Nataraja Mudaliar.

The silent era of Indian cinema gave numerous films of various genres out of which only few are preserved in National Film Archive of India, Pune. Alam Ara (1931) by Adreshir Irani was the first talky film of India.

Censorship and Indian cinema

Indian cinema has proven to be a great source of influence to the country specially to the youth who deliberately follow their role model and their activities and inculcate in their daily lives. The teenagers are mostly driven by the scenes of action, violence and obscene scenes shown in the film, which they believe is true. Thus cinema impacts a society to a large extent and it becomes mandatory to have a check on what is made and what is shown. The need for ethics in cinema arises from the fear that children are mostly sensitive to harmful contents and negative portrayal of their favourite characters in the film. The usage of cigarettes and alcoholic drinks by the film stars eventually evokes the audience to believe that these substances are not harmful at all. A recent study of WHO titled –Bollywood-a victim or ally? A study of the Portrayal of Tobacco in India cinema, raises serious question on the usage of tobacco products and glamourizing smoking habits within the audiences. The report stated that tobacco consumption is now considered as a normal activity, in both Hindi and South Indian films smoking is done by good guys, there is a strong link between the youth and the content of cinema, therefore a board was established known as censor board.

The film censorship was set in motion in India after the cinematograph act of 1918 was made into power and films were displayed only after strong verification and certification. Major powers were distributed to the district magistrate and the commissioner of the police of respective state or district to cancel the exhibition of the film in the respective province. Before the censorship act of 1918 the full liberty was there with the film makers under the guidance of Indian Penal Code and CRPC act. The early censor boards were set up in today's Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai and Lahore which consisted of commissioner of the police, collector of customs, members from Indian Educational Services and three recognized citizen from important communities. The censor board was sensitive towards nudity, portrayal of women in a drunken state, passionate love making.

The Central Board Of Film Certification

The central board of film certification was set under the cinematograph act 1952 and cinematograph rules 1952 by the central government. The board is headed by a chairman appointed by the central government. Prasoon Joshi heads the current table along with 23 others. The board is headquartered in Mumbai along with its 9 regional offices in –Trivandrum, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati, Mumbai, Kolkata, Cuttack, New Delhi.

How films are censored

The film producer in first has to submit an application for a certificate to the CBFC, with a minimal charge of rupees 100. The film is revised by the examining committee and consisting of the board members and examining officer. As per the amendment act of 1983 the all the previews of the films in respect to certification, the names of the board members are kept confidential.

The CBFC grants four types of certificate according to the nature of the film-

- U certification- the U certification stands for unrestricted, which implies that the film can be viewed by anyone.
- A- the A certification denotes that the film is restricted to adults only.

According to the new amendment act, two more categories were added

- UA-the UA granted films can be viewed to anyone but with parental guidance of children below 12 years.UA stands for unrestricted public.
- S- the S certificate denotes exhibition of film to special audiences such as doctors ,engineers etc.

The board may ban or ask for cut scenes before granting certificate.The board can also offer to grant U instead A on certain conditions.In some cases the producer may re- appeal in regards to certificate granted which is heard by the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (NCAT).

The CBFC before granting certificates ,takes care the different norms laid down by the governing body-

- Anti social elements such as violence are not to be glorified
- Scenes showing children involved in violent scenes,subjected to labour,cruelty to animals need to be checked
- Scenes encouraging drinking,smoking,drugs and other addictive substances are not to be glorified
- Scenes degrading women in any manner is prohibited
- Visuals or words hurting sentiments based on religious grounds are taken care
- The sovereignty and integrity of the country should not be questioned in any means
- The security of the state should not be jeopardized, as well as friendly relations with neighbor state should not be hampered

Research methodology

The study of CBFC and Indian cinema was done based on qualitative method examining secondary data available in the form of books, journals ,research papers and articles etc.

The primary objective of the research was to find how the censor board works and in what norms are films denied certificates controversies, along with how the powers of the cinematograph act are utilized according to the situation and political pressure.

Review of relevant literature

Indian cinema and the censor board have its history and known for its clashes from the past.Many a times the clashes occur due to the grant of unwanted certificates.As per an article in free press journal there were several films upon which severe censorship was examined.

- Padmavat- Bansali's film which starred Deepika Padukone,Ranveer Singh and Saheed Kapoor faced a lot of criticism from the Karni Sena country wide.The film was supposed to get released on December 1,2017 but the censor board denied its exhibition due to some lack of documentation.Finally the film was released on January 25,2018 with a cosmetics change in the song Ghoomar and the change in the name of the film.
- Uda Punjab-The film faced controversy from the CBFC ,which asked the producer to cut 94 cut and 13 suggestions for the grant of A certificate.

- Lipstick under my burkha-In 2017 the film was denied from getting A certificate from the board because it was lady oriented and abusive.The film finally got A certificate after changes done
- Bandit queen-The film is based on life of Phoolan Devi,which faced censorship because of sexual content ,nudity and abusive expressions.The film was made in 1994 and released in 1996.
- Gooliyon ki Rasleela Ram-Leela-Bansal's film faced controversy from the board as its original name Ram Leela was sentimental as per a petition filed against it by Prabhu Samaj Dharmik Leela Committee.
- Panda (2017) in Case study:Film Censorship in India stated that potraying a personality in a wrong way can bring harsh consequences by the board.Bandit Queen a biography of Phoolan Devi was banned by Delhi High court as Phoolan Devi sued a case against it's authenticity,similarly Mai hoon Rajnukanth a comedy film based on Rajnikanth was stopped as Rajnikanth believed that it could hamper his image.Jodha Akhbar was banned after a protest over Jodha Bai's portrayal in the film ,afterward it was released.
- Vijay G,Sreelatha(2018) reveals the unwanted use of power of the CBFC board .The contracdictory part highlighted was the release of Mohenjodaro which had multiple intimate scenes without a single cut,whereas Unindian demanding cuts of intimate scenes.Even documentary on Amartya Sen ,the board asked to beep the words like cow,Hindu India ,Gujrat as it was the native place of the PM.The special powers to the state and the district magistrate to ban a film is now used as a weapon against those actors who do not standup for the ruling party of that region.
- Similarly Narahari,Garasiya(2019) in CBFC-spectators perspective in censorship process of India stated that CBFC is not fully autonomous and works under pressure of hierarchy and political influences according to the situation and the censorship hampers the freedom of expression of the film makers.
- Film maker Ashvini Kumar questioned CBFC on the grounds of granting A certificate .He laids down that his film No Fathers in Kashmir was granted with adult certificate in which didn't had any adult scenes in contrast to Haider which had even more sentimental scenes.Kumar said that CBFC creates obstruction to low budget independent films.
- Dhupdale (2015) in the role of CBFC with reference to freedom of expression and speech in Indian Film Industry stated the PK controversy which was protested on grounds of hurting sentiments,but it became a huge hit.
- Another controversy stated by Dhupdale was MSG (MESSENGER OF GOD) based on Dera Saccha Soudha chief Ram Rahim .The filmed got a stop because of the guru who projected himself as a godman.

Findings and conclusion

Findings 1

CBFC certifies a film according to its nature after verifying and examining all the criteria carefully-

The boards after the producer submits the film for certification ,it's the duty of the board to revert back with possible changes ,cuts or a certificate of U-unrestricted allows exhibition to all ,A- which stands for adult category,UA –unrestricted public exhibition subjected to parental guidance for children and S certificate that denoted special group such as doctors.

The board examines any film on the grounds of

- Nudity
- Sexuality
- Slang and abusive languages
- Derogative image of women
- Violence in any form
- Hurting religious sentiment
- Cruelty to animals
- Children forced to labor and child trafficking
- Security of the country as well as the integrity and sovereignty of the state
- Any derogative statement against the constitution
- Disrespect to any community ,caste and tribe
- Lowering down the image of any citizen or defamation

Finding 2

Partiality on examining films by the board

The CBFC is often seen in the headlines displaying partiality among small budget films in respect to large budget films.Mohenjodaro and Unindian,Ram leela and Shadid are to kept on top when to see how the board differentiates.Most of the large films escapes the boards jurisdiction ,while the small budget films are unleashed to the wrath of CBFC(Vijay G,Sreelatha,2018).

Finding 3

Powers of the ban are used as political weapons

The power to the state and the district magistrate of a district is provided to regulate under circumstances occur when the peace of the state or the district my get hampered.But the power of ban seems to utilized in a different way by the political leader and officials in a way to demonstrate their power .the film Kamal Hasan's Viswaroopam is a noble example of policitcally influenced film which faced a ban by the then Jayalalitha's government in the state of Tamil Nadu.

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