

The Island Leisure LAND

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Kolkata

by Derek Bose
The Statesman /ANN

Nandana Sen, the daughter of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, was out to create Bollywood history with Ketan Mehta's Rang Rasiya. As Sugandha, the model and muse of legendary painter Raja Ravi Varma, she became the first Hindi heroine to legitimately go topless for the camera—thanks to the Revising Committee of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) clearing the controversial shot.

Kangana Ranaut could not get as lucky though. In Madhur Bhandarkar's Fashion, she tried to get past the censors with that famous 'wardrobe malfunction' scene, but had to settle for her twin assets being blurred on screen. She took another chance in Mohit Suri's Raaz—The Mystery Continues and this time, the footage of her baring herself in a bath tub had to be snipped off—producer Mahesh Bhatt and her skin-coloured body suit notwithstanding. Nobody outside the film unit (and maybe, the guys in CBFC) would ever know if that footage actually existed in the first place.

But everybody knows how a skin show, however fleeting or suggestive, can provide a career boost to an upcoming starlet. Even a rumour or speculative story in the media of a dare-bare act is enough to give her a head start over other her contemporaries. After all, nothing sells better than sex in Bollywood.

For the filmmaker also, the mileage gained from baiting the censors with 'hot scenes' is huge. From IS Johar (Five Rifles) and Raj Kapoor (Ram Teri Ganga Maili) to BR Chopra (Insaaf Ka Tarazu) to IV Sasi (Her Nights) to Shashilal Nair (Ek Chhoti Si Love Story) to Amit Saxena (Jism), directors big and small have been making commercial capital out of the censor's obsession to play moral police. In fact, for many filmmakers, nothing can be more disappointing than getting a clean chit from CBFC without being engaged in a dispute. For disputes on a subject like sex, generate controversies and regardless of the outcome, the media jumps into the fray. Eventually the film stands to gain from the free publicity that no amount of paid advertising can match.

It is not as though the censors are unaware of when they are being exploited or how they end up indirectly contributing to the commercial prospects of a film. Their job, very specifically, is to certify a film—as 'A', 'U/A' or 'U'—and not sit in judgment, edit, advise or suggest changes. Yet unfailingly, these so-called guardians of society have been exceeding their brief and playing into the hands of wily producers. The worst part is the manner



they choose to focus all their attention and energies on the salacious parts. A film could be provocative enough to promote communal strife, defame a public personality, be contemptuous of courts or perhaps compromise India's diplomatic relations with friendly nations. But that is obviously, none of CBFC's concern. The censorship guidelines (there are no 'codes' or 'rules') lists out as many as 19 grounds on which a film may

be denied certification. Of them, it is only sex that raises the censors' hackles.

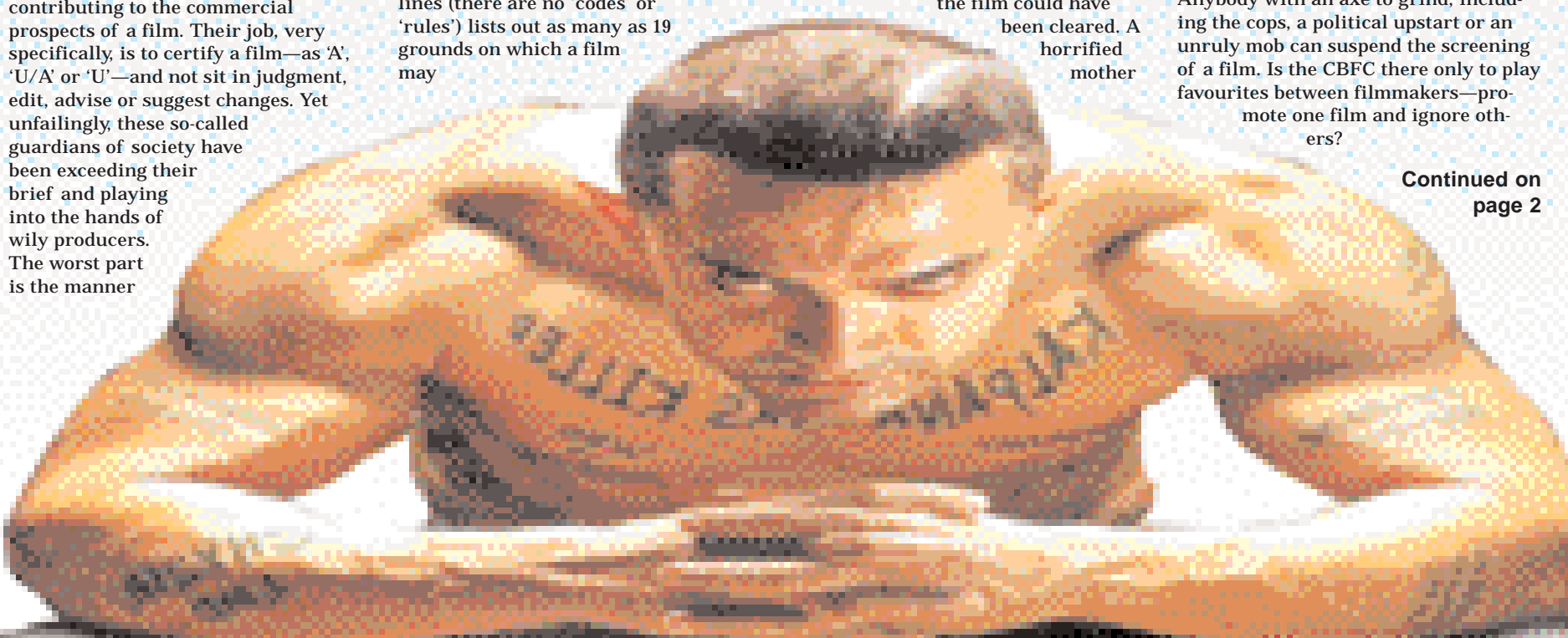
Even violence is no longer the bugbear it used to be. Take the Aamir Khan-starrer, Ghajini for example. It is one of the most violent films ever made in Indian cinema and had the CBFC been true to its brief, there was no way the film could have been cleared. A horrified mother

of a nine-year-old complained to a Mumbai daily, soon after watching the film: "I was appalled at how Aamir Khan goes about breaking necks at random, complete with bone-crunching sound effects. One man's body has the head in a 90 degree turn after Aamir is through with punching him. A water pipe is pushed into another man's stomach in a tight close-up, with blood dripping from the tap lodged in his body. People's heads are bashed with crow-bars, skulls open up and spout blood..." Pleading for a ban on the film, the agitated woman added: "The Censor Board makes much ado about sex, but as a mother I would much rather have my child watch a sensual kiss or bedroom scene than so much violence." Ghajini could run its course and emerge as one of Bollywood's biggest box office grossers of all time.

Encouraged by the appetite audiences demonstrated for all the mindless violence in the film and more importantly, the role CBFC has played as its principal benefactor, at least 40 titles have now been registered by filmmakers on Mumbai's 26/11 terror attack, one promising to be more violent than the other. The titles include B Subhash's Taj Terror, Viraj Kumar's Total Ten, Kumar Mangat's 26/11, Wild Water Entertainment's Woh 60 Ghante, Razor Edge's Operation Black Tornado, Future Pictures' Ultimate Hero and Cine X Company's Shootout At CST. All these films are currently on the floors.

Significantly, around the time Ghajini hit the screen, there was another film awaiting release—Deshdrohi by one Kamaal Rashid Khan. It was not much of a film. But it was on a politically sensitive subject—about the hostility north-Indian settlers face in Mumbai. The CBFC, in its infinite wisdom, cleared the film. And then, the Mumbai cops clamped the Bombay Police Act of 1951 on the film, citing reasons of "breakdown of law and order". Effectively, Deshdrohi could be released all over India, but within the state of Maharashtra, it was banned. The producer went into appeal and after prolonged litigation, on January 23 the Supreme Court lifted the ban. Yet, to this date, the producer is unable to release the film because no exhibitor in Maharashtra is prepared to screen it fearing police reprisals, if not from political goondas. The question that arises here is obvious: Of what use is a censor certificate when no filmmaker can ever be sure of exhibiting his film? Anybody with an axe to grind, including the cops, a political upstart or an unruly mob can suspend the screening of a film. Is the CBFC there only to play favourites between filmmakers—promote one film and ignore others?

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Censorship And Beyond

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LUCKIEST, LUCKY, UNLUCKY: Indian actor Aamir Khan (left) in Ghajini. Despite violent scenes in the film, Indian censors approved the showing without cuts. Nandana Sen (top) in the film Rang Rasiya also got the thumbs up even after she went topless in a film while Kangana Ranaut (right) didn't get lucky. In her movie Fashion, she tried to get past the censors with that famous 'wardrobe malfunction' scene, but had to settle for her breasts being blurred on screen.

Run for your wife: Couple marry while taking part in London Marathon

By Alastair Jamieson

detour from the route to become the first couple to tie the knot in a Christian ceremony during the race.

The pair managed among 35,000 runners battling warm temperatures of up to 68F (20C) over the 26.2 mile course.

The pair managed a quick wash before taking their vows at 3.15pm in front of 50 guests at St Bride's Church on Fleet Street. Mr Keates, a fireman, carried his bride over the line at 4.50pm, seven hours and five minutes after the start.

"It had been the best day of my life but I'll never do it again," said Miss Pitt, who flung her bouquet into the crowd after finishing.

Nell McAndrew, the model, was the first celebrity over the line, with a time of 3 hours, 10 minutes and 20 seconds, followed by former glamour model Katie Price, her husband Peter Andre, celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay and Keith Duffy of Irish band Boyzone.

Many competitors were dressed up for the race, which is expected to raise millions for charity. Paul Simons, 45, from Edgware, north London, set a new record for the fastest Father Christmas by finishing in 2 hours and 55 minutes.

A long way behind him was Major Phil Packer, a paraplegic who plans to complete the course in two weeks.

Major Packer, of the Royal Military Police, was injured in a rocket attack in Basra in February last year. The 36-year-old, who is raising £1m for Help for Heroes, will stay at his specially adapted home each night before returning to continue the marathon.

Kenyan Sammy Wanjiru won the men's race with a course record time of 2 hours 5 minutes 10 seconds, beating Ethiopian Tsegay Kebede by 10 seconds.

British runner Mara Yamauchi gave the best performance of her career as she claimed second place in the women's race, beaten by Irina Mikitenko of Germany.

The men's wheelchair race was won by Australian Kurt Fearnley, with double Paralympic gold medallist David Weir a close second.

Olympic gold medal-winning cyclist Chris Boardman, who was running for the National Autistic Society, described the experience as "horrible". After finishing in three hours 19 minutes and 27 seconds, he said: "I just wanted to pace myself and to see what happened. Towards the last three or four miles I just couldn't care less. I just wanted somebody to shoot me but since they wouldn't I had to keep going."

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Rachel Pitt and Garry Keates took a half-mile detour for their wedding Photo: PA