



Sex in Bollywood

THE whole rumpus was caused by a judge who, in his rational, urbane and balanced manner wrote a report on the film industry of India. In his quiet way he suggested that if the integral situation in a film demands it, then there is no reason why a kiss should not be introduced into it, or the body shown naked.

I suppose he had in mind the fact that often the Indian film maker actually shows the hero and the heroine coming close to kissing by bringing their faces near each other, and then dissolve into a new scene, leaving the audience to guess what the censor will not allow—that the couple did kiss each other. And, invariably the female is shown in the bath-tub with soap suds, almost begging the audience to probe further with their minds. If these temptations are freely offered then why not honest sex.

The judge may not have expected the censors or the big-wigs, or the orthodox fathers and mothers of the middle-class society girls, to like his suggestion. But I am reasonably sure that he never thought that the actresses of Bollywood would be so vociferous in their protests, against possible kissing and display of the body beautiful in Indian films.

Everyone knows that Bollywood actresses are not very different from Hollywood actresses. To be sure, our local variety do not have as many divorces as those in Beverly Hills. But, from the very nature of their profession, they have to expose their charms to a variety of male onlookers, because dressing room facilities in the Bombay and the Madras studios are not too plentiful and whatever there is in the way of privacy is semi-public.

In spite of their demureness, the Indian actresses have to contend with the fact that it is not for their tremendous skill in filmcraft, but mostly for their sex appeal that the producers pay them four lakhs black and one lakh white. And, at private parties, when Dimple Scotch flows like water in the bungalows in Andheri, Juhu and Bandra, till the early hours of the morning, one has witnessed no less kissing and cuddling than in any

bottle party in London, New York or Paris.

The judge, and those who think like him, must, therefore, have been very surprised when one dame from Sunset Boulevard, a second from Dadar, and a third from Turner Road, protested vehemently against the suggestion that kissing might be allowed in the films, if found appropriate, and the body revealed if necessary. We are not unconscious of the danger that the producers and directors will exploit kissing and display of the body for commercialism and vulgarity. But don't they already use the bosom of every actress, with the falsies on, for box office gains.

Of course, we expect the males, who are the guardians of female chastity in India for generations, to hold up their hands in holy horror against the lips of the hero and heroine getting nearer. But imagine the talented author of the opera Heer-Ranjha holding up her hands in horror against kissing. Did Rangia never kiss Heer or hug her?

At any rate, none of these responses was really unexpected, but the surprising thing was that most of the defenders of the purity of the Indian film spoke in the name of Indian culture.

Some of us have been asking in the name of which Indian culture has this defence been offered? Is it in defence of the culture of the Vedas when love philtres and magical potions for making oneself irresistible to the opposite sex were prescribed by the priests and amulets freely given by them to lovers? Is it in defence of the Dravidian culture in which mithuna couples were portrayed in terracottas in every village of India? Is it in defence of the Mahabharata, in which five brothers could marry one woman? Is it in defence of the culture in which the cowherd hero king, Krishna, came to be celebrated as a love god? Is it in defence of the culture which catalogued over two hundred ways of kissing in the Kama Sutra?

Is it in defence of the culture of the poets Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti and Bhartrihari, who wrote nothing without mentioning the unashamed love of men and women and commended Gandharva marriage? Is it in defence of the culture of the early mediaeval temple carvings of Ellora and Badami and Khajuraho and Konarak, where the phallic cult

was exalted as the highest worship of sun energy and handsome couples were shown in tender embraces, lip to lip, bodies and souls intertwined? Is it in defence of the culture of tenderness between the male and the female, which persisted in the customs and conventions of the people, and which were written about in the poetry of mediaeval bards like Waris Shah? Or is it in defence of the Indian culture which arose out of the fear of rape and torture by the invaders, and under the influence of Christianity from the west, and which has been preserved as a form of barbaric taboo against which the new generation is protesting?

I suspect that the whole hullabaloo is in defence of the vulgarity of Indian film culture, where titillation of the audience is offered in the near kiss, that the pure actresses and actors are shouting about. The thrill of being about to be kissed, and the frustration of not kissing, is the producer's technical device for evoking those cat-calls, rude noises and excitements, which actually draw the type of audience which, as Nirad Chowdhury has rightly said, has 'sex in their minds' and 'fear in their hearts'.

The protests are, indeed, in defence of hypocrisy. The parents of boys and girls, who go to cinema four times a week, will not be able to complain about the near kiss that it is corrupting the morality of their children, but will get rattled if their children see the full kiss. The professors can now maintain their double standards. They can recite the poems of Shelley and Byron in the classrooms and go and see the latest Bollywood, Mollywood, Collywood product with their demure wives in tow. The lovers can go on holding hands in the dark and go so far and no further. Only debilitate their minds and bodies in poetical yearnings or masturbation.

And yet the same Indians go to see western films, where the censor's scissors have not been able to cut out all the intimacies. And the heavens don't fall. Morality is not corrupted. Society does not break up. Except that the restaurants are full of young people dancing the mystic twist without touching each other. There is no corner of an open ground in cities like Bombay, where young boys and girls don't go holding hands. As biology will

out against imposed good manners, there is no dearth of motor-cars on the side roads and by the seaside where gentlemen and ladies sit or lie in sweaty embraces, even if a trifle sheepishly. And the trains to the hill stations bring the new young male and female in droves to wander across the countryside. It is better this is so, than the riots in which suppressed sex is an important stimulus.

The truth is that we have only got to withdraw for a moment to ourselves to find that, in moments of genuine expression of our deepest longings for a woman, we do, in spite of the denigration of Kamaloka by the Vedantists, wish for contact with the mate; that, in the secret moments of desire, the body-soul is innocent of all taboo.

Unfortunately, the arranged marriage, which often leads to the atrophy of the woman's soul on the first night, because of the lack of psychological preparation for togetherness, has imposed the hypocritical customary shame against genuine desire. The result is that we have sanctified, perhaps, the most barbaric kind of assault, amounting to rape, in the relations of the newly wed.

Not surprisingly our commercial cinema is no better and is shot through with a hypocrisy which fights against the expression of sincere feelings. That is why the Indian film is so full of absurd situations, false glamour or semi-naked bodies, of crude temptations and the sentimental celebration of marriages, all of which arouse the audience, but cheat it of the real symbolism of contact.

Behind every art expression there is the soul. The soul is bound up with the body. In a tender moment both are naked. Real love is not to be found in the Bollywood film, but in the works of the great masters from Kalidasa to Lawrence.

If there is a distinction between the obscene and the pure, it must then be between the dirty-minded, lying conventionality of most Indian films and the spontaneous expression of tenderness in the art film of the Indian avant garde, of Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen and Jean Bhowmragy.

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