



A sham called film censorship



TRAVESTY: The Central Board of Film Certification in India continues to segregate movies into three categories: Adults, Universal and UA or those that may be watched with parental guidance. But no theatre really cares to implement the Board's diktat.

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

There was a time in Kolkata, when cinemas were absolutely strict about admission to adult films. Anybody not above 18 was not allowed to enter a theatre screening an adults-only movie. There were cases – and many – of those who were 19 or 20 but looked 16 or 17.

No said the usher, and no it was, unless that person concerned brought along a document to prove the age. Of course, there were some girls under 18 who wore saris and high-heeled sandals, appeared tall and walked past the man at the gate, meeting his stern, suspicious look with a sweet smile. Boys were less lucky. They could not grow a moustache or beard overnight to look older, could they?

However, with the passing of years, cinemas fell into bad times. Their profits shrank and they grew desperate for patronage. So, the usher was told to look the other way when even a 12-year old walked into an adult film. In Chennai, where I live now, swanky multiplexes turn a blind eye to Censor Board certificates.

Without exaggeration, I have nearly always seen children accompanied by their parents trooping into violently adult movies. The kids would watch blood and gore, each such screening turning them a tad more insensitive to sadism and brutality and aggression.

Worse, such imagery infuses in them – and I am sure about this – a false sense of bravado, and they begin to imagine, and get convinced as well, that might is right, and that the problems of the world can be tackled and solved through strong-arm tactics. After all, is this not what Salman Khan does on the screen? Is this not what Vijay or Surya do as well? So, why not me, the children would think?

In a scenario such as this, it sounds so ridiculous that the Central Board of Film Certification continues to segregate movies into three categories: Adults, Universal and UA or those that may be watched with parental guidance. I say ridiculous, because no theatre really cares to implement the Board's diktat.

What is even more laughable, we have film directors and producers fighting with the Board when it does not pass their movies with an U. Why do they at all bother? Do they seriously believe that an A or an UA will cut down on the number of admissions? If they do so, how naïve they can get.

There is another equally perplexing aspect to this business of film censorship. The Board – as much as it does not seem to care about its rating rules being implemented by theatre managements – is nearly always playing the nation's keeper of morals.

It is squeamish when it comes to sex on the screen, not bloodshed and pugnaciousness.

David Fincher's wonderful adaptation of Stieg Larsson's *The Girl With The Golden Tattoo* could not be released in India because the director said that his movie could have cuts. But the Censor Board objected to the lovemaking scenes between a computer hacker and a journalist.

What is even more appalling is the practice of not respecting a rating that may have been given in the USA for an American film. The Indian Censor Board invariably uses its own scissors instead of letting the movie in question pass with the American certificate. So, a movie that may have been rated as suitable for adults has to go through cuts in India – because the Board probably feels that an Indian adult is less mature than his Yankee counterpart!

And after all this hullabaloo, young children walk into A films with not a care. They are aided and abetted in this by their parents. What do you say?

Saivam

In these past three weeks, I have seen three Tamil films, each with a remarkably novel theme. *Mundasupatti* scared us with its camera phobia, *Vadacurry* got maniacal with the mobile telephone and, now, A.L. Vijay's *Saivam* pushes vegetarianism. Yes, without sounding preachy, and the message is couched in animal welfare and prevention of cruelty.

Vijay, who also wrote the script, is wonderfully controlled in the way he executes his movie (barring a scene or two). And he has an excellent actor in Nassar, who plays Kathiresan, the benevolent patriarch of a large family in a Karaikudi village in Tamil Nadu.

Agriculture has fallen in bad days there (absolutely true) and members of Kathiresan's family – except for one son, his wife and their delightful little daughter, Tamil Selvi (Baby Sara Arjun, whose role in *Deiva Thirumagal*, also helmed by Vijay in 2011, was just amazing as it is in *Saivam*) – has flown away to far-flung lands.

Kathiresan invites his entire family to the village to celebrate the annual temple festival, and the members have much to exchange and later to quarrel about, meeting one another as they are after three years.

It is in the midst of this revelry and angst that Kathiresan and his wife realise that they have forgotten their promise to the village deity, and they set about preparing to offer their pet rooster in a ritualistic sacrifice. Tamil, who adores the bird, plans to save it.

As much as Vijay needs to be lauded for his remarkable directorial skills in handling a child actor (one other helmer who did this with sheer brilliance was Satyajit Ray) – Sara – he disappoints in sequences where his frames are crowded.

There are just too many characters, and they end up looking lean and clichéd. It is a motley group all right: there is Raja the servant of the household and Senthil, smitten by his cousin, Abhirami, among a host of others, some of whom do not even register.

But, Nassar and Sara get *Saivam* off the ground and manage to keep it flying – despite the distractions of the crowd below.

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