CENSORIUM

CINEMA AND THE OPEN EDGE OF MASS PUBLICITY

WILLIAM MAZZARELLA

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On a personal level, I would like to think that the demands of this project have encouraged me to try to emulate some of the qualities I most admire in my parents: my father's loving attention to and respect for the material indices of the past and my mother's mercurially incisive gift for critical interpretation. It would only be a slight (yet certainly sobering) exaggeration to say that my children, Amelia and Jacob, grew from toddlers to teenagers during the gestation of this book; I am so very proud of you. Finally, Dianna, my work on this book started not long before I found you. You helped it unfold as part of a dialectic whose other scene is your studio. In love and in work, then: the playful and startling seriousness of beauty.

INTRODUCTION

THE CENSOR'S FIST

There are always reasons to spare for every censoring act, and the inner heart cannot be placed in evidence.
—John Collier of the U.S. National Board of Censorship, 1915 (quoted in Jowett 1999:30)

Acknowledging a platitude does not make it any less platitudinous. On April 13, 1937, the Indian film writer and actor Dewan Sharar addressed the East India Association at Caxton Hall in central London on the topic, "The Cinema in India: Its Scope and Possibilities." Like so many before him and like so many who would follow, he noted that "the immense power of the cinema, either for good or for evil, is so well known that reference to it is a platitude."[1]

Dewan Sharar did not, at least on that occasion, feel moved to inquire into the basis of this "immense power." Such an inquiry has, however, been one of my guiding obsessions while researching this book. Again and again, from the cinema's first appearance in the 1890s through to the time of my fieldwork more than a century later, the unique and inherent power of the cinema, for good or for ill, has been asserted. It is the basic premise

on which the cinema has been mobilized as a means of education, entertainment, nation building, and propaganda. And it is equally the first (and often the last) excuse for censoring it. Being that the claim has so often been made without further elaboration, I decided to pursue the possibility that this bald and repetitive assertion of the cinema's immense power might be something more than a lazy justification for the censors' own authority. Perhaps, I wagered, it is a kind of constitutive symptom at the heart of the discourse of film censorship, a sign of something important about the condition of mass publicity—the broader space in which the cinema breathes—something that the censors must constantly acknowledge and yet for some reason cannot fully explain.

My pursuit of this "something" takes the form of an imminent critique of film censorship. By "immanent" I mean that I explore censorship discourse from within. I take the internal tensions and impasses of what the censors and their critics say and do as my point of entry rather than establishing a stable point outside censorship from which to critique it. Unlike many writers on censorship, I do not, for instance, measure it against a standard of free expression. While my own inquiry has certainly benefited from the rich literature on Indian film audience practices,[2] I likewise do not believe that the social influence of what censors say about audiences can simply be countered or refuted by what actual audiences say about themselves. I start from the by now commonplace assumption that censorship is just as much about making meanings as it is about suppressing them. And yet I do not presume that we can somehow defeat censorship by exposing the internal inconsistencies of its assumptions and claims. Indeed, the ideological tenacity of censorship discourse in the face of—or better, *because* of—its many inner contradictions is one of my central preoccupations in this book. I try to show that the apparent incoherence of the censors' discourse is, in a way, more truthful than the censors themselves have any reason to acknowledge.

My approach is also dialectical. I suggest that the discourse of censorship works by repeatedly staging impasses—that in a way it succeeds by failing. I do not read these impasses only as evidence of the fraudulence or political cynicism of censorship (even as I acknowledge that film censorship is, in practice, often politically cynical). My way into censorship is at the same time my way out to a much broader set of questions. In brief, I argue that thinking through film censorship discloses basic problems in the grounding of political and cultural authority in mass-mediated societies. I develop a

theory of *performative dispensations* in order to show how any claim to sovereign power is also a claim on a particular relation between sensuous incitement and symbolic order. One of my central arguments is that the kind of mass public culture within which we all now live, imagine, and work makes such claims more difficult to sustain and that there is something about the cinema as a medium—and consequently attempts to censor the cinema—that makes this difficulty uniquely palpable.

The project started as an attempt to explain why censorship had become such a burning topic of public controversy in India during the decade that stretched from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s. But I soon realized that in order to make sense of that moment, I would have to go back to the colonial origins of Indian film censorship and, beyond that, to the cinema's arrival in India and, beyond that, to the emergence of mass publics in India. This genealogical excavation eventually allowed me to return to the recent past with fresh eyes and to understand that Indian film censorship is not, as is often claimed, just an inert survival of archaic colonial practices. Indeed, one of my aims in this book has been to rethink the relations of continuity and transformation between the colonial and the postcolonial periods.

This is not a history of Indian film censorship.[3] I have, by and large, arranged my material thematically rather than chronologically, except where developing the argument coherently has demanded otherwise. Nor have I taken upon myself the responsibility of granting evenhanded coverage to different periods. Instead, I am most consistently concerned with the relationship between two periods of transition: one colonial (the 1920s–30s), the other postcolonial (the 1990s–2000s). I also beg the indulgence of those readers for whom the analysis of film form is a prerequisite for any serious discussion of the cinema. Although my thinking has benefited enormously from the work of Indian cinema scholars like Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Ravi Vasudevan, and Madhava Prasad, this book is not in that sense a work of film studies. I do, of course, discuss film content at various points in the book, but I have been more concerned to follow an intuition that was present at the birth of this project: that while, at one level, film censorship is certainly about which image-objects can or cannot be allowed to circulate, at another level it keeps returning to the problem of the cinema as a medium that, whether in a register of promise or of panic, makes palpable potentials that exceed any enumeration of contents.[4]

Ultimately, as a contribution to the political anthropology of mass

publicity, this book proposes some new ways to think about old problems. What is the place of affective intensities in modern mass-mediated democracies? What is the importance of the fact that we are called upon to belong at once to concrete crowds and to abstract publics? And what happens to political authority when it can no longer reside in the physical body of a singular sovereign and has to find its feet in the intimately anonymous space of mass publicity?[5]

THE PORNOGRAPHER, THE MAGICIAN, AND THE DEMON-KING

The censor's fist came crashing down onto his desk, startling me and rattling the dainty tea service that had only just been placed between us. It was November 2003. The censor and I were sitting in a small, dark office in the Mumbai seafront suburb of Juhu, a neighborhood that had long been home to many of the big players in Bollywood, the Hindi commercial film business. The man across from me was Vijay "Goldie" Anand, brother of the 1960s matinee idol Dev Anand and himself the director of a series of hits of the period, among them *Guide* (1965), *Teesri Manzil* (1966), *Jewel Thief* (1967), and *Johnny Mera Naam* (1970). Actually, by the time of our conversation, Vijay Anand had not been involved with film censorship for more than a year. In the summer of 2002, after less than a year in the job and amid a flurry of scandalous publicity claiming that, as part of a comprehensive reform of Indian film censorship, he was planning to introduce pornographic movie theaters in Indian cities, Anand had resigned his post as chairperson of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), better known as the Indian Film Censor Board. But he was still furious.

Perhaps I, for my part, should have been better prepared for surprises. After all, only five days earlier I had interviewed the then–Censor Board chief, character actor Anupam Kher. Kher had, during our interview, rather disconcertingly been dressed in a full magician's costume, complete with flowing cape, pigtail wig, and twirly moustache. (In fairness, I should mention that he was at the time in the middle of a shoot for a film called *Abrakadabra*, billed as a kind of Hindi *Harry Potter.*) Our conversation took place in Kher's dressing room at Swati Studios in Goregaon, a Mumbai suburb known for its film lots. Outside, what seemed like hundreds of child extras lined up for lunch at a refectory in their regulation wizarding school robes.

It was hard not to reflect on the aptness of such conjurous trappings for my encounter with the head of an organization that is widely lambasted by Indian filmmakers for spiriting away entire sections of offending movies. In contrast to Vijay Anand's bitter emphasis, Kher spoke lightly, even dismissively, about the anxieties and difficulties of censorship. His was the voice of a man who had been in the job for less than a month, a man convinced that the *hangama* (uproar) around censorship amounted to little more than the champagne-fueled frothing of a hypocritical elite.[6]

In the wake of Vijay Anand's resignation in July 2002, the English-language Indian media turned him into the kind of tragic hero it has always loved best: an enlightened, worldly liberal sacrificed on the altar of political cowardice and cultural reaction. *India Today*'s cover story had the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which oversees the workings of the Censor Board, "recoiling in Victorian horror" at Anand's proposals (Bamzai and Unnithan 2002:57). The claim was clear: in a globalizing age, the government's cultural politics were regressive and outmoded. Its censorship practices were holding India back from the kind of world-class cosmopolitan future it deserved.

As if to confirm the liberals' diagnosis, the government played its part by appointing, as Anand's interim successor, a former member of Parliament and actor by the name of Arvind Trivedi. Here was a man the secular liberals could comfortably love to hate. For starters, he was most famous for playing the mythological demon-king Ravana in the smash-hit late 1980s televisation of the *Ramayana*. Trivedi thus seemed to embody the kind of mass-mediated, affect-intensive mobilization of Hindu mythology that had assisted the cultural right wing's rise to national power in the 1990s (Rajagopal 2001). And as if that were not enough, there were the quotes. Trivedi lost little time in presenting himself as the traditionalist corrective to Anand's irresponsible, immoral cosmopolitanism. Regarding the mooted X-rated theaters, he told the press:

> I am completely against such a suggestion. It goes against our Bharatiya [Indian] tradition. What do we want to prove by having such theatres? That we are modern? What kind of culture are we trying to promote? Following Western countries shouldn't be our aim. What about people who will have to live in the vicinity of such theatres? Is this the kind of landmark we're looking for? *Samaj mein kalank lag jayega.* [It will be a blot on our society.] (Martyris 2002)

Trivedi proceeded to invoke an unstoppable prurient escalation, a spreading stain of infamy: "There will be no end to it. First kissing, then pressing, then whole bedroom. What effect will it have on the kids?" As a concluding rhetorical flourish, he equated films with the very apex of spiritual and physical purity, the source of the river Ganga itself: "Films are the Gangotri of our society. They are something holy. We shouldn't soil them" (Martyris 2002).[7]

CULTURAL EMERGENCY?

On the face of it, then, it seemed that the furor over censorship was a struggle over the acceptable terms of cultural globalization in which some form of (more or less profane) liberalism faced off against some variety of (more or less sacred) conservatism.[8] From the mid-1990s through the mid-2000s, it seemed that one could not turn around without coming across yet another story about a magazine editor being harassed or beaten by right-wing cultural activists, about cinemas being trashed for showing the films of Deepa Mehta or Mira Nair, about Bollywood starlets or saucy models being summoned to court for obscenity or indecency, about offending books, paintings, and articles being slashed and burned amid saffron flags and TV cameras (Kaur and Mazzarella, eds., 2009). Hindi film director Mahesh Bhatt, ever handy with a sound bite, called it a "cultural emergency" (Bhatt 1998).[9]

On the one hand, the Government of India was being accused of brandishing censorship as a weapon of ideological intimidation and cultural reaction. On the other hand, as I discuss in chapter 3, the very idea of censorship as a state prerogative was being called into question as all manner of activists and enthusiasts, with more or less tenuous connections to formal political parties, competed to capitalize on the spectacular possibilities of the twenty-four-hour news cycle that cable television had brought to India in the early 1990s (Kumar 2006; N. Mehta 2008). To name only some of the most visible controversies during these years: purported lesbianism and Hindu widow sexuality in, respectively, Deepa Mehta's films *Fire* (1996) and *Water* (2005, which was stopped before shooting had properly started and subsequently filmed in Sri Lanka)[10]; ambiguously "traditional" obscenity in the film song *Choli ke peeche kya hai?* (What's behind the blouse?), from Subhash Ghai's action romp *Khalnayak* (1993); purportedly immodest public displays of femininity at the 1996 Miss World pageant in Banga-

lore; sexual explicitness in the 1995 Tuff shoe ad featuring two well-known models naked but for sneakers and a snake; obscenity, defamation, and violence in Shekhar Kapur's feature *Bandit Queen* (1994) and an unseemly reference to the royal "quinny" as well as a beheading in his *Elizabeth* (1998); sympathy for Mahatma Gandhi's assassin in Pradeep Dalvi's Marathi play *Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoi* (1998; originally written in 1984); cultural imperialism in the form of Valentine's Day; injury to Hindu religious sentiments by James Laine's scholarly study *Shivaji* (2003) and upset among Christians following Ron Howard's movie version of *The Da Vinci Code* (2006); alleged incitement to sedition and communal conflict in critical political documentaries like Anand Patwardhan's *War and Peace* (2003) and Rakesh Sharma's *Final Solution* (2004); and so on, and so on.

Many explained the censorship struggles of this period as symptoms of a clash between two formations: on one side, the processes of globalization and economic liberalization that had opened up Indian consumer markets and brought a deluge of eroticized mass communication, and on the other side, the rise to mainstream power of an aggressively conservative form of Hindu nationalism—shorthanded as Hindutva—in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political wing of the larger Sangh Parivar (Family of Associations). The historical conjuncture of these formations seemed too precise to be coincidental. To be sure, economic liberalization had already gently gotten underway in the 1980s, but the decisive reforms in 1991 happened right between BJP leader L. K. Advani's incendiary *rath yatra* of 1990 and the storming and destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992.[11]

Apparently, the clash had produced a new confrontation between a (threatened) liberal politics of tolerance and secularism and a (surging) chauvinist politics of intolerance, of which the intensification of censorship was one outcome. Superficially, a case could perhaps be made linking Hindu nationalist rule to this new politics of intolerant divisiveness (although only by downplaying earlier Congress-led governments' experiments with mobilizing religious sentiments for political ends in the 1980s and, indeed, later Congress-led governments' continued clampdown on political criticism after the BJP was voted out of national power in 2004). Mumbai was, for example, the site of many controversies during the period 1995–99, when the BJP, in coalition with the aggressively chauvinist Shiv Sena, ruled the state of Maharashtra. And some would claim that this coalition, although it lost power at the state level, served as a kind of

laboratory for cultural policing techniques that were then "scaled up" when the BJP led the national government in New Delhi from 1998–2004.

Long-standing left-secularists like Anand Patwardhan, the doyen of Indian political documentary film, charged the Hindu right with having "taken our country to the abyss. . . . Let it openly declare that it does not believe in democracy or in the values propagated by Mahatma Gandhi" (Borpujari 2002). His colleague, Rakesh Sharma, warned that the number of attacks on artworks and critical voices would only continue to escalate as long as the Sangh Parivar held the reins of power: "they are hydra-headed, but they all conform to this politics of intolerance."[12] For others, the intolerance manifested itself first and foremost in the right wing's resistance to the new freedoms of style and bodily comportment that liberalization had brought and that deserved to be protected as indices of cosmopolitanism and progress. Ram Madhvani, a director of feature films and commercials, reflected that

> because of Fashion TV and STAR TV[13] and all that has happened over the last ten years, I think that we have a new middle class. We can see it in the hairstyles that people have. We can see it in the cars that people have on the road. . . . What I *do* know is that you can see it on the road. There is a change in the way women are dressing. . . . There is a lot more risqué kind of brazenness to that whole sense of dress.[14]

Others cautioned that the gleaming, ostensibly liberated erotic envelope of satellite television programming and the new Bollywood coexisted quite happily with the stock soap operatic image of the stoically long-suffering devoted wife, the *sati savitri*, complete with *sindoor*—even as ever fewer urban Indian women actually marked their married status by placing a streak of vermilion in their center partings.

At the same time, some members of the liberal media intelligentsia blamed their own class for having allowed the onrush of advertising-fueled liberalization to distract them from their responsibilities as guardians of a critical public sphere. Advertisers had no interest in media stories about poverty, development, or political reform. And the Hindu nationalist right had, in the words of Nupur Basu of NDTV,[15] capitalized on the opportunity: "It was a vacuum, an open canvas. Anyone could step in. Of course, who better to step in than an aggressive Hindutva force, which has filled that gap with all sorts of slogans and orange colours."[16]

Even when Hindutva was not the main bogey, many felt that the main-

stream censorship debate's fixation on the regulation of sexually suggestive materials worked as a kind of smokescreen for the continued, and much less questioned, suppression of properly "political" content. So, for example, I often encountered the argument that the central government was only too happy to have the press wax indignant about Vijay Anand's X-rated theaters proposal because it deflected public attention onto the supposedly trivial area of sex. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting could thus play a comfortable game of cat and mouse with the media—tightening its grip here, relaxing it there—instead of having to address truly awkward points in Anand's plan, like his demand that the government's power to appoint members of the Censor Board and its regional advisory panels be curtailed (Bhowmik 2003, 2009; D. Bose 2005).[17] Political distraction through smut was, after all, a well-established authoritarian tradition. During the height of Indira Gandhi's Emergency in the mid-1970s, her press censors are supposed to have followed the motto "porn *theek hai*, politics *nahin*" (porn is fine, but not politics) (K. Singh 2002:259).[18]

Now of course Anand Patwardhan had every right to ask why, when Vijay Anand was being celebrated as the sacrificial hero of the liberal intelligentsia, hardly anyone tried to hold him accountable for his refusal to support politically sensitive documentaries like *War and Peace* (I return to the Patwardhan/Anand encounter in chapter 3). And it was certainly true that even in those censorship cases that generated some sustained and serious discussion of sexual politics among cultural critics and public intellectuals, for example the controversy over Deepa Mehta's *Fire*, directors themselves often beat an apolitical retreat into neoliberal platitudes about "lifestyle" and "choice" (Bandyopadhyay 2007; Ghosh 2010; Gopinath 2005; John and Niranjana 1999; Kapur 2002; Kishwar 2008 [1998]; Upadhya 1998). Daily newspapers and current affairs weeklies were, to be sure, increasingly choosing to splash sexy celebrity-driven stories across their covers rather than engaging their readers in sustained discussions of government complicity in communal violence or the displacement of indigenous peoples by hydroelectric dam projects (Joseph 2002).[19]

At the same time, the sex-as-smokescreen argument is problematic on at least two counts. First, it implies that there is a "truth" to politics—its "really real" sublime dimension—that always lurks behind the shadow play of ideology (Hansen 2001; Mazzarella 2006). Second, the implicit ontological claim—that "sex" and "politics" refer to entirely distinct kinds of objects—is, of course, problematic. My point is not only that sex is always

already political, but also, as I will be arguing in various ways throughout this book, that the distinction is in fact a conceptual obstacle to understanding the development of film censorship. The regulatory roots run deep here. As an emergent colonial legal category in the mid-nineteenth century, "obscenity" brought together concerns about immorality and sedition. Nowadays, it is often said that colonial film censorship in India between the 1920s and the 1940s was primarily concerned with stopping politically seditious films and that the concern with Indian on-screen sexual propriety was a largely postcolonial invention. (Kobita Sarkar puts the matter tartly: "Along with foreign rule, we banished the kiss from our films as if there were some deep-seated mystical connection between the two" [1982:55].) But as we shall see, the colonial censors' objections to "political" films often had a great deal to do with the sensory erotics of their spectacular appeal. By the same token, the spicy social dramas of the 1920s that the British called "sex films"[20] were not only controversial because of their daring thematic content but, perhaps more profoundly, because of the subtle and unpredictable ways in which they seemed to unsettle the spectatorial and sensorial habits on which the everyday legitimacy of colonial authority rested.

WHY PICK ON THE CINEMA?

The question inevitably arises: why focus so tightly on the cinema, when censors—official and self-appointed—frequently take aim at other media too: magazines, artworks, television, books, etc.? Already in 1937, Ram Gogtay, editor of the trade paper *Lighthouse*, protested on behalf of the film industry: "If through the written word in magazines and through the spoken word on the stage immoral impressions can be flung at the public, why should the motion picture be singled out for annihilation?"[21] Am I not artificially isolating the cinema from a broader ecology in which it operates alongside media that are both older and younger?

My answer is yes, I am—but with good reason. To begin with, the cinema is the one medium that in India is thought to reach everybody. The force of this claim rests less on whether people in every part of India really do go to the cinema than on the fact that cinema spectatorship is a way of belonging to a mass public without having to be literate. Ashish Rajadhyaksha points to the Indian cinema's long-standing "role in rendering

publicly intelligible, narratable, the administrative and technical operations of modernity—namely, the modern state, the modern political process (including modern systems of cultural resistance) and the modern market," and "the further role of spectatorship as a process of initiating the filmgoing citizen into the larger protocols of organizing public action in new national spaces" (2009:69, 87; emphasis in original). By the time I started this project, satellite television had already been in India for more than a decade, and the state television network Doordarshan reached many more homes again (Farmer 2003; Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001; Shah 1997). The Internet was beginning to make inroads (Mazzarella 2010d); radio, long a government monopoly, was being opened up to private players; and the Indian-language press had never been so lively (Jeffrey 2000; Ståhlberg 2002).

But nothing could compete with the all-embracing cinema that, as film writer Anupama Chopra remarked, "thanks to the touring cinema and the guys that set up tents in the villages, is everywhere."[22] Here, the sense of general access was crucial, even as urban multiplexes were increasingly sequestering more affluent audiences from the rabble. Journalist Kalpana Sharma argued, "In a way it's a democratic form. It gives access to everybody—a) you don't have to be particularly rich, b) you don't have to be literate, and c) actually the form is such that even if you don't know the language particularly well, you can still relate to it."[23] Perhaps even more important was the sense of the Hindi cinema—despite the regional standing of the South Indian film industries—as the closest thing to a genuinely inclusive and powerfully affective South Asian popular culture. Chopra observed that

> Pakistanis watch Hindi movies, Sri Lankans watch Hindi movies. . . . For non-resident Indians, that's what keeps them linked to the motherland, so to speak.[24] . . . It has an across-the-board appeal. I think songs have a huge part to play in it because it's the only kind of pop music we know. So at weddings, at parties, that's what expresses your emotions for you: a Hindi film song. You know? So it's amazing how completely consumed our lives are, how *drenched* they are in Hindi movies! . . . It's just all-pervasive.

These perceived characteristics of the cinema in India—its reach, its cultural influence, and its affective resonance—help to explain why it has

been hedged around with such an elaborate censorship apparatus and why its regulation continues to generate such impassioned debate. On one level, the introduction of systematic Indian film censorship in 1918–20 crystallized a series of anxieties about the management of the affective potentials of public performance that went back to the second half of the nineteenth century (chapter 1). On a different level, and despite the proliferation of other media during the past couple of decades, cinema censorship remains, in a fundamental sense, the model for Indian public cultural regulation today, the template for how the emergent potential of the encounter between mass publics and mass media is imagined. I choose the cinema as my object for thinking through censorship, then, partly because successive colonial and postcolonial governments' confrontations with the cinema have so profoundly influenced how censorship works and is understood.

By the same token, my aim is actually not really to plead a special case. The more I studied film censorship, the more I realized that the regulation of the cinema had become a way for censors and their opponents to talk about public affect management *in general*. In a sense, the censors' attribution of unique characteristics to the cinema is misleading—not because the cinema is not distinctive as a medium, but rather because the exceptionalist claims made around the cinema and the need to regulate it often have the side effect of making noncinematic publics appear less affect-intensive, less performative, and more symbolically stable than they actually are. What I pursue in this book, then, is a double task: on the one hand, to explore the specific characteristics of regulatory encounters with the cinema during periods of heightened anxiety in colonial and postcolonial India and, on the other hand, through this exploration, to attempt a more general theorization of the problem of public affect management vis-à-vis modern mass media.

THE PISSING MAN

The other side of the cinema's universal resonance is the attribution to Indian publics of an excessive permeability to affective appeals and its presumed corollary, an underdeveloped political rationality. Centuries of foreign domination, the argument goes, have beaten ordinary Indians into a state that oscillates between abject servility and overcompensatory assertion. In the words of Pritish Nandy, film producer, journalist, poet, and member of the Rajya Sabha (the upper house of the Indian Parliament):

> Being a colonized nation for something like five hundred, six hundred years—three hundred under the Mughals and a couple of hundred under the British—we lost our self-confidence and therefore all this that you see happening today is an attempt to rediscover a sense of identity and a sense of self-worth. . . . Being a colonized nation actually makes you see the state as a paternalistic figure who you think should decide for you—what is good, what is bad, what is right, what is wrong.[25]

If the British, in particular, had plundered India's resources and retarded her cultural development, then successive post-Independence governments had done all too little to bring enlightenment to the citizenry. Of course, Indians now had the vote. But were they mature enough to use it? Vijay Anand, for one, thought that the larger failure of independent India to educate its people was nothing short of scandalous:

> It is true. That's why some of our very silly mythologies are superhits. But then that is bad! How dare we keep our people illiterate after fifty-one, fifty-two years of freedom? . . . I have an educated vote, but somehow our politicians have kept this country illiterate, saying "this [i.e. the franchise] is not good for the illiterate." How long are we going to do that? . . . Politics has got so much significance here, more than in any other country in the world. And yet we are not a politically mature country. . . . I don't think the voter is intelligent enough to vote.[26]

Naturally, authoritarian censorship was going to thrive amid a servile citizenry. With finely tuned irony, Javed Akhtar—the legendary Hindi film scriptwriter and lyricist—argued that the Indian system was essentially a kind of soft dictatorship that only formally resembled a democracy:

> In India, we have developed a very fine system, you know? In the [Persian] Gulf countries, they have dictatorships. We have *all* the paraphernalia of democracy, and we give freedom of expression as long as it does not challenge the status quo. The moment that the status quo is really threatened, you are [barks] *curbed* mercilessly! These [other countries] are not that discreet. They have constant dictatorships. We don't have that. We don't need it. We are a very discreet people. We know how long we should give this rope of freedom of expression, and when we should pull it in. We are smarter![27]

Such censorial "discretion" was, in turn, necessary because of the assumed immaturity of the vast majority of Indian citizens. Anupam Kher,

whose breezy populism in most respects contrasted with Vijay Anand's troubled liberalism, was nevertheless of one mind with Anand when it came to the helpless vulnerability of the Indian masses, although his illustration was peculiarly graphic: "An illiterate mind is much more prone to getting affected by [provocative images] than a literate mind. If you are an illiterate man, and I tell you that this is where you have to piss, [then] because you are not literate you will go and piss there. . . . But a literate man will say 'no, no—I know where the toilet is.' That's the kind of illiteracy that India has, unfortunately."[28] For Kher—and here he was, as we shall see, drawing on a long tradition of censorship discourse—illiteracy equated not only with ignorance but, more fundamentally, with a lack of autonomous judgment.[29] Vijay Anand complained that such ignorant heteronomy had gotten India stuck in a narrowly identitarian public life: "The considerations for voting," he told me, "are not political judgment, but some other. 'He belongs to my caste, he belongs to my religion.' " In Kher's terms, the ignorant man would piss where he was told because his lack of letters left him with no way to achieve a critical, autonomous distance to the immediately given situation and the immediately given command. And the command "this is where you have to piss" is, in the censor's discourse, a stand-in for the cinematic image that, for the ignorant spectator, is not so much a sensuous provocation as a literal, irresistible commandment.

It is, of course, notable that the figures that my censor informants tended to invoke were almost exclusively male. Does not the pissing man have female accomplices? Does not the censor's discourse, preoccupied as it is with questions of sexuality and decency, thematize the dangers of women's looking? This, it seems to me, is one of the places where the discourse of Indian film censorship remains unreflexively patriarchal. While there is certainly a great deal of discussion of how women may or may not be represented on screen, the regulation of their behavior as spectators is imagined as the primary responsibility of male relatives. According to this line of thinking, male viewers are inherently public and, *qua* pissing men, crowd-edly so. But for the Indian film censors—and this despite several recent female CFBC chairs—women are under the care of men and thus, as it were, private even in public. A "public man" is an actively engaged citizen; a "public woman" is a prostitute. Indian female friends would often mention their discomfort at the kind of salacious attention they would attract if they ventured alone into any Indian movie theater that was not upmarket and urban. Exhibitors occasionally respond by arranging

special "ladies' screenings" of films that women might be embarrassed to view even in the company of male family members—such was the case, for instance, with Mira Nair's *Kamasutra* in 1997. Either way—and, interestingly enough, unlike some other markedly public situations like, for instance, political demonstrations—the censor's discourse does not imagine the public space of the movie theater as a place where women and men can enact spectator-citizenship on equally autonomous terms. I use the term *pissing man* throughout this book, then, not to mask this imbalance but to register its inscription in the censor's imagination.

THE IDEOLOGICAL LOOP OF CENSORSHIP

A circular logic thus begins to emerge: First, one acknowledges that censorious, repressive governments and a lack of education have kept the masses immature. Then, one proceeds to insist that, for this very reason, further censorship is necessary in order to protect these illiterate unfortunates from their own worst instincts.

A classic example of this ideological loop appears in the *Report of the Working Group on National Film Policy* (1980). The report defines Indians as vulnerable and thus in need of censorship: "Particularly in the context of a hyperconservative society like India, which has rigid social and religious norms of behaviour, where the political consciousness has still not matured and where harsh economic conditions inhibit individual growth, there are bound to be serious limitations on the freedom of expression" (quoted in B. Bose 2006:3). From there it is only a short step to insisting that Indian cultural policy must, therefore, not get ahead of itself: "Censorship can become liberal only to the extent [that] society itself becomes genuinely liberal" (quoted in B. Bose 2006:3).

Certainly, a handful of my informants unequivocally and absolutely rejected censorship. The late great playwright Vijay Tendulkar was one:

> My experience with censorship tells me that censorship *per se* is absurd. I have yet to come across a single example where censorship has been responsibly and wisely used. The things that probably deserve to be stopped are let loose. The things which probably are different, which have a serious purpose, which are trying to tell something, are stopped. And even by banning something you don't finish the thing. You create a wrong interest in the whole thing. That does a lot of damage.[30]

When it came to the cinema, however, no one believed that commercial filmmakers could put aside their petty rivalries so as to regulate themselves. Many advocated an American-style ratings system on the principle that it would allow both filmmakers and viewers to make their own decisions rather than be bossed around by a paternalistic state agency.[31] But many more expressed some version of the ideological loop: in principle, they were opposed to censorship because it stunted the development of mature democracy, but in practice India was simply not ready for a more liberal regime.

For Anupam Kher, censorship was one of the necessary restraints that kept India's multitudes from each others' throats: "India is the only democratic country in the world where every five hundred miles the food habits, the cultural habits of the people change. And yet we have been managing to live for the last fifty-seven years together." This sense of a volatile diversity, perpetually on the brink of combustion as a result of stray cinematic sparks, goes back to the colonial period. An editorial in the periodical *Chitra* satirized it in 1935:

> A clean-shaven Hindu hero may unknowingly offend the Sanatanis [neo-orthodox Hindus], a kiss on the screen may incense superannuated spinsters, and fighting may rouse the righteous wrath of pacifists. History is in danger too; [sixteenth-century Maratha warrior-king] Shivaji's beard may not be liked by Muslims who might object to that Kaffir disguised as a Mussalman and rabid Sanatanists may be sore at [sixteenth-century Mughal emperor] Akbar and his Hindu wives.[32]

Kher, notably, emphasized that this was not a peculiarly Indian problem: "Religion is the basic problem all over the world today. . . . It's important not to let the violence erupt, riots erupt, problems erupt. . . . You can make fools of people anywhere in the world in the name of religion." But most of the people with whom I spoke felt that India exhibited an unusual—and unusually explosive—blend of democracy, religious/cultural diversity, and underdevelopment. Actor Rahul Bose, a vocal critic of film censorship in principle, nevertheless also argued that this blend had produced a kind of overheated public sphere in which filmmakers needed to tread with tremendous caution. Having been left without the education that was their due, the Indian masses remained ignorant, oppressed, and frustrated and, as such, "in a morally and physically weakened state. At that point you can use any stick to drum up frenzy."[33]

From this standpoint, then, India was a country of pissing men, incapable of the kind of critical reflexivity that was the sine qua non of coolly deliberative public reason. Qua citizen, the pissing man was at once passive and hyperactive: easily duped by any passing demagogue and constantly on the brink of violence. Again, for this reason, even some of the most tireless critics of the CBFC nevertheless stopped short of demanding an abolition of censorship. For example, Anand Patwardhan—a man who had turned the act of taking censorious state agencies to court into a kind of public art practice—felt that someone still needed to regulate the "hate speech" disseminated in Hindu nationalist propaganda.

Prefiguring my argument in chapter 2, I want to suggest that the legitimation of censorship—whether in the regretful liberal mode or the less apologetic conservative mode—depends on a diagnosis of being in a historically liminal state of transition. In the past, the argument goes, face-to-face communities regulated themselves organically by means of tradition. In the future, mass-mediated societies will once again regulate themselves, either by means of mature democratic civility or through the strength of moral community scaled up to the nation. In the liminal present, though, Indians are adrift in a rudderless mass society, buffeted by provocative image-objects and solicited by all manner of shrill mass moralizers. Under such conditions, many justify censorship as a pragmatic, albeit lamentable, way of preventing things from spiraling into complete chaos.

But as veteran filmmaker Shyam Benegal noted with characteristic perspicacity, such a justification would never lend censorship a sense of popular legitimacy. He offered me a story of the end of tradition and the modern predicament of incomplete reflexivity:

> This is why censorship is so hypocritical, see? Because there *is* a censorship. That censorship has to do with society itself. Each society, depending on what its own cultural values were, would practice an ideal. Create their own rules. And most people function within those rules. And if they start to function outside those rules, that community will automatically keep them out. They'll throw them out. Once [this organic system of rules] is displaced, it becomes an object of questioning. Otherwise [i.e., earlier] it's not. Because it's contained. It can be contained within that system. There are many diversities within India. All of them have many unspoken rules. The way it is managed is that when somebody else has a rule, you don't step into that and proclaim your rule. It's

> flexible; there's a certain ease to the process. There is not fundamentalist fanaticism in this process. But the moment you get somebody who becomes fundamentalist, then you know you're not going to be able to manage anything. Because you're going to get people's backs up. And suddenly you go out of that area of self-restraint into something else. Then unspoken rules have to become spoken rules. And when they become spoken rules they become a) exterior to you, and therefore punitive in the manner in which they function, and b) something that you will rebel against. You will fight against that because it is not part of you. It's from outside now, it's on top of you. It's not part of you. It's no longer a participatory process.[34]

Between the vanished organics of "unspoken rules" and a distant future civility, in the face of "fundamentalist fanaticism," modern state censorship attempts, without much credibility or success, to enact a kind of preemptive mass judgment. Benegal's reflection points to a central concern of this book: the grounds of the censors' judgment and legitimacy. But in his version, the question of media and their role in making publics is absent; the change happens because of the sudden appearance of an intolerant type of moralism that demands that previously tacit norms be spelled out and externally codified as rules. Starting in chapter 1, I attempt to explain this shift as a function of the rise of mass-mediated publics. One of my arguments will be that the condition that my informants so often imagined as a state of transition between vanished tradition and future civility is a permanent symptom of the structure of modern mass publicity.

THE ENUNCIATOR'S EXCEPTION

How is it that the censors, or even just the persons dispassionately discussing the problem of censorship, are able to exempt themselves from the condition of the pissing man whose consumption needs to be regulated? For the ideological loop of censorship does not only say "censorship should be abolished—but not yet." Its enunciator also—almost invariably—says "censorship is, for now, necessary—but not for me."[35] This is the gesture through which the censor differentiates between public and crowd at the movies. As S. V. Srinivas (2000) remarks: "The cinema hall was perceived as a space within which the respectable member of a 'public' came face-to-face with a collective, a mass, which was an object of curiosity/contempt. The

distinction that emerged between the audience at large and a section of 'enlightened' viewers who constituted themselves as a public is critical for discussions of the nature of cinema's audience." This kind of split, whereby a temperate public sets itself off from a rampant mass, had already taken place in India during the second half of the nineteenth century around literature and the theater. But for reasons that I will explore in chapter 1, the coming of the cinema brought regulatory anxieties that had been emerging vis-à-vis print and the stage into a most explosive juxtaposition.

It is not as if the enunciator's exception went unnoticed by the enunciators themselves. Pioneering film journalist B. K. Karanjia, who started writing about the industry in the 1940s and who had on many occasions held up the censorship regime to ridicule, reflected: "If you ask me 'do you believe that there should be no censorship?' then for myself I would say 'yes.' But I would not be able to say so much for the illiterate man who has never seen a woman naked because society is so conservative."[36] (Parenthetically, it is important to note here that Karanjia, like many of my informants, also suggested that subaltern Indians, whether those city dwellers whose families lived in cramped single rooms or those whose rural ways did not impose bourgeois conventions of female sartorial modesty, were far more likely as youths to have seen naked women in the course of everyday life than most of the "educated" people who were otherwise thought to be more immune to the provocations of the cinema. The naked woman at issue here, then, is a publicly visible nonsubaltern woman.)

The standard "critical" reading of the enunciator's exception is to mark it as symptomatic of the double standards of a middle-class intelligentsia that insists on granting itself different rights of citizenship than it will allow to the majority of its compatriots. First a nationalist avant-garde during the closing decades of the colonial era, then a developmentalist elite during the first few decades of the post-Independence period, this intelligentsia emerged embattled into the post-liberalization period. From the 1960s on, a panoply of subaltern movements challenged its claim to public cultural hegemony. By the 1980s and 1990s, it also had to find its feet within a consumerist public culture in which the affect-intensive, sensuous languages of advertising and performative spectacle were increasingly competing with properly "civic" deliberative discourse for recognition as a plausible idiom of citizenship (Mazzarella 2003, 2005a).

On the one hand, liberalization returned upper-middle-class desires to a place of public prominence that they had not enjoyed since the earliest