



## Obscenity and Censorship in India: Special Reference to the Stark Depicting Movie Oh My God (OMG) 2

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**Abstract** - Ethics, values, laws, rights- these are the commonly used words in our society as well as in our daily lives. Most of the time, these words are used interchangeably, but they have different and distinctive meanings. The term 'obscenity' is commonly used in Indian society, but it has no definition at all. Other terms like 'morality,' 'vulgarity,' and 'decency' must be mentioned. In India, cinema plays a crucial role in conveying thoughts and messages. Cinema has its own language. Cinema restricts freedom of speech and expression under 'censorship.' However, the grounds on which films have been censored are a matter of question. This paper brings light to the concept of obscenity and how it has evolved over time with the reference to the stark depicting movie Oh My God 2 (2023), which is based on masturbation. This movie also portrays God (Lord Shiva) metamorphologically on the big screen. The myth and shame regarding masturbation among adolescents and youths in India have been addressed here, which created controversy and ended up becoming an 'Adult certificate film.' However, there are several instances where no action was taken regarding obscene or vulgar content. Analysing 'Obscenity' through the lens of cinema.

**Keywords** - Obscenity, Censorship, Indian Cinema, OMG 2, Stark depiction.

### Introduction

India is a country rich in culture, heritage, and diversity. The historical sites and architecture demonstrate this country's advancement in civilization and sex education. There is also a need for conversation regarding sex education between parents and children (Bhattacharjee). When children enter adolescence, it is crucial to guide them in every manner.



Adolescence is usually associated with the teenage years, but physical, psychological, or cultural expressions may begin earlier and end later. No wonder it is also an important time to communicate about physical changes and needs.

The largest democracy in the world, India has a complex Constitution, as the Indian Constitution combines several systems taken from other countries. For example- the concept of the Preamble from the USA, the Speaker in Lok Sabha from the UK, the Five-Year Plan from the USSR, etc. (Madan). The Constitution has several laws based on specific ethics. Ethics help us distinguish between what we should do and what we shouldn't. Ethics are always born out of conflict between values. In the world of theories, the study of values is known as Axiology (Baran et al.). Ethics have a significant role to play in shaping the socio-cultural aspects.

Obscenity in India is a blazing issue that raises questions about ethics. Obscenity Act (Indian Penal Code Sections- 292, 293,294) accords with the offenses of Obscenity. The word 'obscene' has been derived from the French word 'obscenite' or the Latin word 'obscenus' which means abominable. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) does not define Obscenity but has set out specific parameters for obscenity. The obscenity framework relies on a country's structure, culture, and societal norms. With time, the concept of obscenity has evolved (Singh). The Supreme Court of India has defined 'Obscenity' as "the quality of being obscene which means offensive to modesty or decency; lewd, filthy ad repulsive" (Divan).

Cinema, as a medium to communicate feelings, has its language. Cinema has a wide acceptance precisely. It consists of various factors- social, economic, cultural, emotional, etc. (Metz). Cinema uses shots, sequences, and dramatic sequences to communicate an idea like written language uses letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs. India has an extensive audience for this audio-visual medium, which can be the medium and the message. There have been several movies that have faced controversies based on vulgarity and obscenity over the period – "Sagarika" (1956), "Mera Naam Joker" (1970), "Ram Teri Ganga Maili" (1985), and so on. Despite being good content and social reality, several movies have faced the Censor Board's harsh words and trimmed scenes for the 'U/A' certification, allowing a global audience reach.

### ***Aims and Objectives***

The aims and objectives of this research paper are-

To understand how the concept of Obscenity is seen over the period of time in the context of Indian Cinema, specifically in the light of OMG 2 movies.

To analyse how Obscenity became a social taboo.

To understand censorship.

### ***Methodology***

The research methodology used here is mainly descriptive in nature. Content analysis has been used as a part of qualitative research design.

### ***Morality, Obscenity, Vulgarity and Sex-Nudity***

Freedom of Speech and Expression is included in the Indian Constitution as part of fundamental rights, which are in Part III of the Constitution, often called the Magna Carta of the Indian Constitution. Article 19 (1) (a) guarantees this Freedom of Speech and Expression, which allows Indian citizens to speak or express their thoughts freely (Madan). However, no Right is absolute. There is no exception in this case also. The Freedom of Speech and Expression also has reasonable restrictions under Article 19 (2) of the Indian Constitution. Some of them are ‘morality’ and ‘decency.’ These two are closely related to societal norms and values. One strata of society can accept something morally and decently, but maybe the other strata are not okay with it. Now Obscenity. The Supreme Court of India has defined ‘Obscenity’ as “the quality of being obscene which means offensive to modesty or decency; lewd, filthy and repulsive.” Most people often use the term ‘vulgarity’ interchangeably with ‘obscurity,’ but these two have a clear difference. Vulgar content does not need to be obscene. Vulgarity is a mixed feeling of disgust and boredom but does not degrade morality. There is also a thin line of difference between obscenity and sex nudity. As in a judgment (Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra), the Supreme Court of India clearly stated that in literature and art, nudity and sex cannot be regarded as obscene without something more. The Supreme Court of India clearly mentioned the difference between nudity and obscenity in the case of Bobby Art International v. Om Pal Singh Hoon (Bandit Queen). There was an objection regarding the rape scene in the movie which was quoted as “suggestive of the moral depravity of the Gujjar community”. As mentioned earlier, the benchmark of obscenity is different from other terms (Divan).



### *Censorship*

As a part of the Freedom of Speech and Expression of the Indian Constitution, one can also express his or her feelings through cinema. However, no right is absolute. This also has restrictions in the form of censorship in terms of films. The censorship concept is nothing new. It has roots in the days of the British Raj (Bajwa). In the era of the British Raj, print media or newspapers in India faced several censorships- the Gagging Act, Vernacular Press Act, etc. (Aggarwal and Gupta). After the British Raj, the Indian Government created the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) under the Cinematograph Act (1952). CBFC is responsible for giving certificates to films released in India. A film can be rated “U”, “U/A”, “A” OR “S”. “U” symbolizes unrestricted viewing, “U/A” indicates parental advice for children under 12 years, “A” means for adults only, and “S” denotes restricted to a particular audience (Bajwa). “A” certificate indicates an adult certificate, meaning not anyone less than 18 years old cannot watch this movie publicly.

### *The Idea of Taboo*

Understanding the concept of taboo is a necessity. One often looks at this word as a scandalous one. Taboo is not something that is forbidden. If so, then the question arises: Forbidden precisely by whom? Why? And on which basis? (Levine). It exploits others in the name of societal rules like elites use to spread propaganda or set the agenda- what to think and, most importantly, how to think. People often think about what elites want them to think and how they want them to think (Baran et al.).

Taboo is entirely related to culture, most precisely perspectives. Psychoanalysis of taboo indicates that every century faced the ups and downs of emotions and the sexualization of contemporary times or relatively recent times in terms of romance and touch (Miller).

Obscenity is entirely related to taboo. Sex and Nudity is seen as obscene in India. As a result, when Indian celebrity and model Milind Soman in November 2020 posted a picture of himself running naked on Goa Beach on a social media platform, he was charged with obscenity. It is not an incident of surprise in the context of India (Ferrão). However, there are many countries where people are authorized to roam around naked freely on beaches. It is entirely related to customs, values, ethics, moralities, and, most importantly, taboos.

### *Sex Education: A Need*



Indian society never allows to talk about sex or sexual problems in open forums. In the 21st Century, it is a ‘hush-hush’ thing to discuss. Adolescents (10-19 years) and youths (19-24 years) are the representatives and future of a country, but their mental and sexual health is not being appropriately monitored (Sharma).

An awareness initiative to promote sex education in India in the school curriculum was promoted by NACO (the National AIDS Control Organization) and MHRD (the Ministry of Human Resource and Development). This incident led to a huge controversy in 2007. Many people argue that sex education is a need for the Western world but not for India (Tripathi and Sekher). As per the current scenario of the country, sex education is a necessity. It should be removed from the veil of social taboo and be used for other things- menstruation, tattoos, hair colour, and so on (Bajwa).

### *Indian Movies and Taboos*

The diversified Indian film industry, which produces the maximum number of films annually, has seen many ups and downs. Not only Hindi, it consists of Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, and other language films as its’ assets (Saran).

The Indian film industry has witnessed the Silent Era, the first Talkie- Alam Ara, and the Indian New Wave- when masters like Satyajit Ray, Rittick Ghatak, and Mrinal Sen worked for the realism in Indian cinema and the rising film industry (Guru et al.). With the ever-evolving time, the notion of taboo, obscenity, and vulgarity in Indian cinema has changed, rather it would be appropriate to use the term metamorphosed. The concept of obscenity has been metamorphosed over time. Now, the million-dollar question is how?

Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen- the remarkable duo of Bengali rather Indian cinema, had their magic on the big screens for almost 25 years (1953-1978). They gifted the audience a bunch of romantic movies that are immortal (Panda). However, at that time, their 1957 Bengali cinema, “Sagarika,” was different as it featured a triangular love story between the protagonists of the film. Contemporary society does not even want to think about such ‘obscene’ love stories. Coming back today, Shakun Batra’s 2022 film “Geharaiyaan” showcases the depth of relationships and cheating, which many people find unpleasant, as addressed by the director himself in an interview after the movie was released.

Raj Kapoor’s 1970 film “Mera Naam Joker” was a complete box office failure as the Indian audience had a connotation of Joker as a comedy. No one ever thought that a filmmaker could have portrayed Joker this way. People were not interested in the backstory of Joker’s

life, struggles, grievances, and feelings. Along with this, people could not comprehend such an unusual relationship between a teacher and a student, even not the depth of the movie (Kapoor).

Another Raj Kapoor film that shook the nation was “Ram Teri Ganga Maili” (1985). The heroine of this movie (Mandakini) became quite bold for the script's demand and, no wonder, fueled controversies with the tag ‘obscene’ (Tiwari and Sanskrit). Most of the time, Indian audiences fail to understand the emotion of the movie or the visual language.

### *Oh My God (OMG) 2: The Stark Depicting Movie*

Religion is one of the most critical factors that help people take a breath in India. Religion plays an important role not only in real life but also in movies. Many movies have used God as a metaphor to communicate to audiences (Bergesen and Greeley). From Jessica Lagne as an angel of death in “All That Jazz” to Amitabh Bachchan as God in “God Tusi Great Ho” and Akshay Kumar as Krishna Vasudeva, an avatar of Hindu God in “OMG- Oh My God!”, the portrayal of God in the big screens have become surreal.

The 2023 film “OMG 2” is based on a crucial and hyped topic- masturbation. What is it? How do pupils make fun of each other regarding this? How does it affect today’s youth? Why is it important? These are the questions the film raises. This film points out another significant aspect- the conversation between parents and their children regarding sex education. This film points out why it is necessary. Adolescence comes with so many lessons. Children often get confused about what path to choose. It is crucial for parents to look after their children- their knowledge, their needs, their curiosity, and their physical and mental health. However, the Censor Board provided the “A” certificate to the movie.

However, CBFC did not raise questions against an item song, “Fevicol Se,” from the Bollywood movie “Dabangg 2” (2012), where a woman has been objectified as a “tandoori murgi” (grilled chicken). Not only this, objectifying women in different item songs and films has not been an issue for the Censor Board to look after. The definition of obscenity has not been codified over the years.

### **Conclusion**

The majority of people seek emancipation. Emancipation from elite domination. The taboos about minor things should be emancipated from society for its own good. The Critical theory seeks emancipation and change in the dominant social order. Some aspects of society



are deeply flawed and must be changed (Baran et al.).

The dimension of living life has been completely changed. People are now being developed in every manner. Then why not in this aspect. Understanding the concept of obscenity and the need for sex education is crucial. Society must understand the Freedom of Speech and Expression. The Censor Board needs to grant films like this with “U/A” certificates that have the guts to talk about or portray such restricted topics (as per the Indian society). History has evidence that restricting publications has become the primary fuel in the independence war that India conquered. Restricting films, paintings, and writings under the veil of ‘obscenity’ rather than trying to understand their importance generates more curiosity and interest among audiences. Today, the masses are living in the ear of the Internet. The traditional barriers have been fragile, and westernization or modernization changed the scenario. Films that deal with sex education, masturbation, menstruation, infertility, and surrogacy need to be released in the open forum to increase awareness among the general public (Divan).

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