



Most people in Goa are only too aware of the great many problems resulting from Goa being a tourist destination and the host of all kinds of international events. But one cannot miss the possibilities of leveraging the wide reach that this brings. The amount of discussion generated by the statement of Nadav Lapid, head of the Jury of the International Film Festival of India 2022, is a case in point.

As most readers now would know, Lapid's public statement, at the closing ceremony of the festival, was that the jury felt that the film 'The Kashmir Files' was like a vulgar and propaganda movie, and inappropriate for the artistic competitive section of such a distinguished film festival. This statement has generated discussions on a variety of issues. One set of issues are about the film festival adjudication, a second set of issues about the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, while a third set of issues is around the question of what informs the selection of films for a film festival.

The first set of issues around adjudication are: Is a film to be judged by the issue it is portraying, irrespective of its artistic content? Even if the facts portrayed are accepted as true, is it all right to package these any which way? When do facts become propaganda? Is the film in question misleading on the facts themselves? Given that feature films claim to be fictional, what are the freedoms and limits of fictionalisation?

Another kind of discussion that the statement has generated is on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir, which is the central storyline of the film, and the attention that this issue gets or does not get. Television panels can be seen discussing how a 32-year-old issue found a medium for being aired through the film, and also comparing it with the Jewish Holocaust which, according to them, the Jury Head should have well understood, being presumably of Jewish background since he is from Israel. Still others are wondering how it would have been if the film had portrayed a situation where Muslim people were the victims.

A third set of issues on which the statement has generated discussion, is around the process of selection of films for the festival: Do they have to be films that appeal to the political palette of the ruling dispensation in the country? Is the artistic value of the film not supposed to be the criteria? Where does factual or artistic portrayal end, and propaganda value begin?

Lapid has rightly and very sharply said, "I feel comfortable to share open disfeelings with you since the spirit of the festival can truly accept critical discussion". In fact, the organisers of the Festival proclaim that the festival is organised with the intention of understanding and appreciating the global cultural ethos represented through film. However, the State does not seem to have taken kindly to the statement of the Jury Head, with the Chief Minister of Goa

stating that he is taking up the matter with the National Film Development Corporation



(NFDC). The NFDC is a coorganiser of IFFI.

This time Kashmir flies high

Not long ago, during an earlier and memorable IFFI, protesters had used the occasion to highlight the mysterious and unnatural death of Fr. Bismarck Dias. It may be recalled that investigations into the death of Bismarck Dias had been opaque and even deliberately slow. Bismarck Dias was known to be challenging various powers-that-be, and had a large fan following. He had even in fact been threatened because of his involvement in environmental struggles. But the Police had at the outset itself dismissed his abrupt death as a drowning and an accidental death case.

This is not the only instance of IFFI being used to seek attention for a cause. Another set of people also used the occasion of IFFI to highlight the situation obtaining at Film and Television Institute of India (FTII). There was a case booked against the FTII student leadership who unfurled a poster that raised the issue at the fag end of the IFFI opening ceremony. Did such a protest deserve the registration of a case against the protesters? Certainly not. But that is the order of things. Fortunately, the Goan judiciary came to the rescue of those students and they were released on bail, after which the case against them was also discharged. The Government of the day had even introduced section 144 Cr.P.C. during the occasion of IFFI, but repression begets revolt.

One is also reminded of another kind of leveraging of the fact that Goa is a tourism destination, where it was not so much about generating discussion on an issue, but using the 'nuisance value' of protests to achieve demands. The late Matanhy Saldanha, as the Convenor of Goa Movement Against SEZs (GMAS), leveraged the tourist destination value of Goa, to threaten mass protests against Special Economic Zones (SEZs) during the tourism season in Goa. The GMAS stated that it would let the Christmas celebrations happen, but would dampen the New Year celebrations for which thousands of tourists throng to Goa, if SEZs are not scrapped forthwith. It may be recalled that it was claimed on the SEZ website of the Government of India that SEZs are a foreign country within the country, and were supposed to be like townships over which the local self Government bodies would have no say. That was also the time when gram sabhas had been activated by various movements in Goa. All of this, along with the traction that the concerns raised had got, resulted in the then Chief Minister Digambar Kamat announcing the scrapping of the SEZ Policy, along with the 12 SEZs proposed in Goa.

Goa's potential to reach a wider audience in this manner needs to be recognised by Goans ourselves. It is about time we harness the same to raise all the critical issues facing Goa, ranging from its imminent destruction through megaprojects that threaten the ecosystem

and also the livelihoods of people, to the distortion of history, to the increasing crimes against women due to inappropriate redressal, and persistence of discrimination against marginalized sections of society.



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