

FROM THE EDITOR
EGG FIRST OR THE CHICKEN?

"Out of the select Indian films the Doordarshan relayed recently, five were on rape, violence and such so called realistic themes," commented a viewer endowed with a keen aesthetic and critical sense, in an anguished voice.

You ask the producer or the director of a vulgar film — why must he make such rubbish? "The people want it," is the answer you get. You put the same question to the publisher or the editor of a magazine liberally disseminating vulgarity. The same will be his answer. The people are the villain.

"These worthless films and those irresponsible publications are eating into the very entrails of social decency," say the thoughtful people. Their concern sounds genuine.

Whether the films and the magazines are vulgar because people are devoid of decent taste or the people are devoid of decent taste because of the influence of these silly stuff, is like the proverbial question: whether the egg comes first or the chicken comes first. Some people relish vulgarity; most people get accustomed to it. Only a few people continue to reject it, but they matter little.

This is one aspect of the situation. The other aspect is, we project the vices of the society in our cinema and our literature. This ought to be done. Murder, rape and violence of many sorts are depicted most realistically. They are designed to cultivate a social awareness against these vices, it is ostensibly argued. You feel uneasy about them, yet you cannot reject them in view of this argument. You feel uneasy about them because something in you suspects that such depictions perhaps do much more to make murder, rape and other kinds of violence acceptable to the society than the little they do to make the society revolt against such perpetrations. You feel it, but you cannot prove it. You cannot say why such a feeling is there. After all, no film or literature of this kind preaches immorality. They often end with a vote against immorality.

What then is the reason of the uneasy feeling?

The reason is, whatever be the ostensible ideal behind such works, the real motive is commerce. When they show a scene of rape, they do so more to titillate the audience than to create any aversion towards- the happening. The ideal the maker professes may not be totally untrue, but more true is his commercial motive.

Such works, even when they are quite artistic, fail to be positively effective. They may even make the people more cynical and more passive. In the long run they make terrible things tolerable by expanding the climate of consciousness where such ugly things are bred.

A very few works of this nature are really effective—the ones made with real anger against any injustice and not with the motive of cashing in on an injustice.

It is difficult to draw the line between the genuine and the fake. The sense of discrimination necessary in an audience to discern the line is a far cry from the social culture prevailing today.

Perhaps the best the conscientious makers of films or publications can do is to focus on the beauty of life—the beauty that lies in understanding, tenderness, hope, sacrifice and nobility, not as slogans or lessons, but as art. If they are keen to cultivate a social awareness against vulgarity and violence, they cannot do so by showing details of vulgarity and violence, but by invoking the spirit of such qualities in man which are antidotes to these negative passions.

ON THE TIDES OF TIME

WHAT RUNS INDIA...

A General Election is coming. The atmosphere is likely to become charged with tension. Anger and agitation will rule it. We will feel disgusted with the noise pollution, curse its perpetrators and, at the same time, in some part of our being most of us will enjoy it. The truth is, in a society that truly dislikes such nuisance, the nuisance cannot thrive.

The Election time reminds me of a small incident of about twelve years ago. It was a day on the eve of the country going to the polls. I was in Delhi for some urgent work. But an eerie lull seemed to have descended on the Secretariat of the Government of India.

"Here nobody works. That is all. But this is a time when you ought to see how the petty officials work at smaller places. They turn absolutely arrogant and selfish!" said a friend. Like the existence of a "no man's land" between two countries, perhaps many looked upon the time between the end of a five year term and the beginning of the next as no man's time.

From the editor of a daily I heard a joke that was going round, "The other day a delegation from a Communist country was leaving India. At the airport, a reporter asked the leader of the delegation what he considered to be his biggest gain in visiting India. The leader said that he had come as, a non-believer in God; but was going back as a believer! When pressed to explain how this change came about, the leader asked—who is running India if there is no God?"

It was a hot noon and I was walking the Delhi streets, obliged to abandon my taxi because a long procession would not allow any vehicle to cross it and there was no sign of the procession coming to an end. The streets were desolate. Suddenly I developed a cramp in one of my legs and was unable to walk.

A solitary cyclist in long, soiled pyjamas and a turban was pedalling past. "Which way to such and such office?" I asked him.

"You left it a furlong behind you!" he said as he passed by me. He was an old man. I sighed and turned and began plodding in the opposite direction. A minute later I heard a tinkling. "Bhai Saab!" The old cyclist had come back. "You look tired. If you don't mind, sit on the carrier. I will drop you at the office," he said.

His carrier was a flat wooden plank. On it lay an empty sack, folded. Perhaps the old man commuted between his suburban village and a market in the city, selling his vegetables.

I sat on his carrier, because his offer was too sublime to be rejected under any pretext. The old man drove me for ten to twelve minutes in silence. I kept my tears under check while realizing that what drove me was the soul of the eternal India, the spirit that remains inexhaustible in spite of her politicians, bureaucrats and other unworthy children.