

ROMANCE NOW

It's a story so taboo, a new film about it — 'Indian Summer' — is being censored. So what is the truth behind the love triangle between Nehru, Lord Mountbatten and his sexually voracious wife Edwina?

By **Archana**
in New Delhi

LITERARY circles in India are abuzz with news about the government applying brakes on the filming of *Indian Summer*, being made by the acclaimed Hollywood director Joe Wright (of *Atonement* fame).

Ironically, when the book on which the film is based — Alex von Tunzelmann's *Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire* — first came out in 2007, no one in India bothered to show concern at the revelations it made on Jawaharlal Nehru's relationship with Edwina Mountbatten.

The debut book of the British author was published in the summer of 2007 to coincide with India's 60th year of independence and the creation of Pakistan.

So, the sudden outburst of puritanical zeal on the part of the government comes as a surprise, but the reason is not hard to find.

With the Nehru-Gandhi family continuing to control the levers of power in the country, the government, showing a poor sense of history, wants to avoid one of India's most open secrets getting exposed to the world via the silver screen.

The UK newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, quoting production house sources, said a few days back: "Film-

'I have written about it sensitively'

ing of *Indian Summer*, starring Cate Blanchett and Hugh Grant, has been halted as Indian government officials assess the portrayal of Nehru's 'friendship' with the last vicereine. They are thought to have asked to see the script to ensure the plot is not too salacious."

For the young British historian, there couldn't have been a better way to become famous worldwide.

For starters, Joe Wright, who's famous for films such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Atonement*, is adapting her words for the big screen.

The author, however, is not involved in the project, and is watching the drama unfold from the sidelines.

"I'm delighted that a film is in the works but I'm not involved with the script, nor have I seen it," the London-based author says.

About the controversy brewing on the film's content, Von Tunzelmann says, "I know some people are worried about the handling of the relationship between Pandit Nehru and Lady Mountbatten. But if you read the book, I hope you will see I have written about it sensitively. The small glimpses of their relationship I was able to put together are, to my mind,

Whiff of cheap scandal worries book's author



British actor Hugh Grant and Irrfan Khan will play Lord Mountbatten and Nehru in the movie, while Cate Blanchett will be in the role of Edwina.

very moving, but dignified. I am not interested in cheap scandal."

The author says that she carried out the archival research for her book at the India Office in London, the Mountbatten Archives in Southampton, UK, and the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Museum & Library in Delhi.

"There's a huge amount of information available, but my job was often to read between the lines — to try to understand someone's character and motivations, not just to rehash the same old facts that have been published hundreds of times. I used diaries, letters, photographs, newspapers, old news film reels, and interviews with people who knew the personalities involved. I also visited as many of the places mentioned in the book as possible," she says.

Von Tunzelmann dismisses as "idle gossip" much of what is being said and written about the subject ever since the report on the "assessment of the script" made it to the headlines.

"I can only speak for my book, not for the film," she says.

"The main figures in the book are Gandhi, Jinnah, Nehru and the Mountbattens. Personally, I have great respect for all of them. While writing the book, I found that almost getting to

know them as three-dimensional personalities, rather than just as cold, historical figures, actually increased my respect for them. The burden each of them carried during 1947 was tremendous."

Given the puritanical streak of the country's decision-makers in matters concerning larger-than-life public figures, it is surprising how *Indian Summer* escaped the first flush of controversy. As past instances have shown, the government doesn't take kindly to what it perceives as attempts at shredding the image of our popular public figures, especially by foreigners.

Dominique Lapiere and Larry Collins courted trouble with their 1975 book, *Freedom At Midnight*, because it detailed the Mahatma's experiments with celibacy. Similarly, American historian Stanley Wolpert's 1996 book, *Nehru - India's Tryst With Destiny*, created a furore because it had a couple of pages on Nehru's alleged experiments with homosexuality during his early years as a student in England.

Strange are the ways of the land of Kama Sutra, where politicians are expected to be above love — and sex.

Alex Von Tunzelmann



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