

CENSORSHIP: FROM OF THE PEOPLE TO BLOCK THE PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT

The difference between a democracy and an authoritarian regime, is not about the problems that they face, rather it is based on their reaction to the problems. A monumental democracy like is said to be primarily premised on the idea of freedom of speech and expression. Recently the graph of censorship has sharply risen, thus prompting an alarming atmosphere. In India, today, censorship has taken the form of surveillance: An individual maybe free to do as they wish but the state is always there, closely monitoring their movements. This has led many theorists such as Curry Jansen to even question the nature of democracies, when she proclaimed that a state which carries out its routine operation behind closed doors is not a democracy.

WHAT IS CENSORSHIP?

"Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear." - Harry S. Truman.

Harry S. Truman is considered to be one of the greatest presidents of the United States and the one behind the biggest Hollywood censorship, of which little evidence exists today.

Censorship, i.e., the control of information and ideas circulated within a society, has been a hallmark of dictatorships within a society. During the 20th century, censorship was achieved through the examination of books, plays, films, radio and television programmes, news reports and other forms of communication in order to suppress or alter the ideas found to be offensive or objectionable.

CENSORSHIP IN INDIA

Ujjwal Kumar Singh presents an account of surveillance regimes in contemporary India wherein he points out how the sophistication of technology has enabled the state to permeate society in unprecedented ways and allowed it to create new and differentiated relationships of power.

The accumulation of surveillance regimes in the aftermath of the "*war on terror*" has raised significant concerns within the nation with respect to state violations of the right to privacy and the freedoms of association and expression.

Singh argues that "*dataveillance*" by the state through legal instruments policing electronic communications reflects how the state regulates what people watch and how they express themselves.

The UAPA is a crucial example: The law (amended as recently as 2019) gives the state the power to designate an individual as a terrorist, also accommodates the provision of admissibility of evidence collected via the interception of electronic communication.

INDIA: THE MODI QUESTION

WHAT IS THE DOCUMENTARY ABOUT?

The 59-minute documentary takes an in-depth look at the 2002 Gujarat riots—one of the worst outbreaks of religious violence in India since the country’s Independence in 1947. It traces how the riots erupted after a train carrying Hindu pilgrims in the northern state of Gujarat was set on fire and killed 59 people. The Muslim community was allegedly held responsible for the incident, leading to heightened retaliatory attacks and the further deaths of over 1,000 people, the majority of whom were Muslim.

The riots took place under Modi’s watch, who at the time was Gujarat’s Chief Minister. Raw and chilling footage in the documentary reveals how the police stood by as Hindu mobs attacked Muslims and religious attacks took hold of the state.

THE INDIAN RESPONSE TO THE DOCUMENTARY AND THE GOVERNMENT’S DECISION

The block will likely appease Modi’s ardent base of supporters, who have decried the documentary and the BBC as “colonial” and “white” propaganda. “The bias and lack of objectivity and frankly continuing colonial mindset are blatantly visible,” Arindam Bagchi, spokesperson for the foreign affairs ministry told reporters at a press conference last Thursday. But according to Roth, the “*principal victims*” of Modi’s censorship are Indian citizens. Therefore, minimizing valid concerns raised about Modi in the documentary as colonial partisanship “*shirks responsibility for his own intolerance of legitimate criticism.*”

This is compounded by the fact that banning a documentary that was not otherwise popular in India has only invited more viewers, says Hartosh Singh Bal, the political editor of Indian magazine *The Caravan*, who also appears in the documentary as a commentator. *“Frankly, the ban has been pretty stupid because it’s attracted far more attention to the documentary than would have been otherwise possible,”* says Bal. He adds that it is now being screened across school campuses as *“an act of resistance”* among teenagers who previously viewed these events as a dated chapter in history.

“In some senses created far more awareness than the government could have expected,” adds Bal, noting that it has brought new relevance to the conflict.

While the events of 2002 catapulted Modi into his current position, Bal says the Prime Minister remains extremely sensitive about his international reputation and still wants to be viewed as a statesman. But clamping down on this documentary in what Bal calls a *“ham-handed fashion”* will only confirm the expectations of his fiercest critics.

CONCLUSION

The difference between a democracy and an authoritarian regime, is not about the problems that they face, rather it is based on their reaction to the problems. A monumental democracy like is said to be primarily premised on the idea of freedom of speech and expression.

Recently the graph of censorship has sharply risen, thus prompting an alarming atmosphere. In India, today, censorship has taken the form of surveillance: An individual maybe free to do as they wish but the state is always there, closely monitoring their movements. This has led many theorists such as Curry Jansen to even question the nature of democracies, when she proclaimed that a state which carries out its routine operation behind closed doors is not a democracy.

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