

Sex and violence sells, can't show only fairy tales: Sharmila Tagore

A dash of sex and violence is a sure shot formula for filmmakers to bring in audiences, says censor board chief Sharmila Tagore, who insists she doesn't run the scissors if the scenes gel well with the script.

'Sex and violence sells. Everybody is not Shakespeare, everybody is not a great director or an Imtiaz Ali whose 'Jab We Met' was a clean film and yet worked at the box office,' Sharmila Tagore told IANS in an exclusive interview.

'Some people make a clean film and then put one item song because they feel that will bring in the audiences and it does turn out to be true. They do it for the sake of money. You can't blame them as filmmaking is ultimately a moneymaking proposition,' she added.

Sharmila, 62, who was also on the jury of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival recently, says it's high time the audiences and those who believe in moral policing stopped pretending about the existence of an underbelly in Indian society.

'In every city and village, there is an underbelly and there is a clientele that does go for drinks, gambling and dancing with women in red light areas. So by hiding all that, we cannot pretend it's not happening. If it is happening, it will be shown in movies.

'We can't look away from reality. We don't want to be a state or country of pretenders or hypocrites. But, yes, we have to keep a balance in what is shown; so we censor accordingly,' she said.

A few months ago, gay activist Sridhar Rangayan, who has made movies like 'Pink Mirror' on issues confronting the community, had said that the censor board needs to update its rule book and rid itself of 'antiquated rules'. But Sharmila differs.

'I don't agree with that statement. We do have a set of rules, but it is interpreted by everyone differently. One rule says, 'Don't glorify violence'. Now every individual will be comfortable with a different degree of violence in a film - it's subjective.

'All of us at the censor board know India and Indian sensibilities. I have been involved with media for the last 50 years, my regional officers are sensitised and trained and the panel is good. We know our country and know how regional sensibilities differ - so we censor when it is required,' she said.

Sharmila added that she doesn't necessarily cut a scene if it goes well with the script.

'We don't necessarily cut, but we certify. India is free for all and all sorts of material comes in. Some kind of censorship is absolutely essential. But what we believe is that it must be flexible, has to be aware of the times, have a hand on the pulse of the nation and should be forward-looking. But we won't agree that we are regressive,' she clarified.

In fact, she suggests that filmmakers exhibit the certification of the film prominently on posters and advertisements so that the audience can use their discretion on whether or not to watch the film.

'In our country people take children without bothering to see the certification. A lot of times the

posters and the ads of movies in papers don't have a certification - so people aren't advised properly - that's not our problem,' she rued.

'The audience needs to be advised that a film contains explicit language and sexual scenes and so they should not take their kids along. Personally, I let tolerable adult content pass through with an A-certification. We can't completely protect the audience and just show them fairy tales,' Sharmila said.

Another pertinent point that she keeps in mind while running her censor scissors is the fact that the Indian film industry is competing with the global market in terms of content and quality.

'We are competing with the world market; so we need to come up with competitive films. Then only our industry will grow...We have to make today's films. We have to keep in step with what's happening in the world,' she said.

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