

Chapter 1

Between Sedition and Seduction:

Thinking Censorship in South Asia

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Censorship has been getting a lot of publicity in South Asia recently. The mid-1990s alone saw a veritable carnival of controversies over the line between the acceptable and the unacceptable in public culture. By way of example, one might point to the uproar in 1994 over the alleged obscenity of Madhuri Dixit's song-and-dance sequence, *Choli ke peeche kya hai* [What lies behind the blouse?] in Subhash Ghai's film *Khalnayak* [The Villain]; to Shekhar Kapur's *Bandit Queen* (1994) which ran afoul of caste sentiment, the film censor board, and its real-life protagonist, outlaw-turned-parliamentarian Phoolan Devi; to Mani Ratnam's feature *Bombay*, whose dramatization of the Bombay riots of 1992-93 managed to offend Hindu groups, Muslim groups and secular intellectuals alike; to the extraordinary intensity of protest (including one self-immolation) and policing that surrounded the Miss World 1996 pageant in Bangalore; to the Bombay ban on Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995), which, in the wake of the national ban on *The Satanic Verses* (1989), desecrated Indian political idols old and new by featuring a dog named Jawaharlal Nehru and an unflattering, thinly-veiled portrait of Maharashtrian strongman Bal Thackeray; to Mira Nair's feature adaptation of the *Kamasutra*, whose Hindi version was in 1997 subjected to more stringent cuts than its English-language

equivalent; to the public burning of a scholarly article, printed by the *Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1994, that dared to call into question elements of the mythical narratives surrounding both the seventeenth century Maratha ruler, Shivaji and the nineteenth-century proto-nationalist heroine, the Rani of Jhansi, and to the cinema-smashing, legal challenges and extra-legal harassment that greeted Deepa Mehta's *Fire* in 1998, not to mention the direct physical violence that ended the first attempt at filming its successor, *Water*, in Banaras in 2000, before it had even properly begun.¹

And that is just India. In November 2007, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's State of Emergency suspended the 1973 Constitution for a third time. Independent news stations were forced off the air, hundreds of protesting journalists and lawyers were arrested and the Supreme Court was stacked with clients of the regime. But this relatively dramatic move – in some ways reminiscent of the much more extended Emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in India in 1975-77 – was not Musharraf's first experiment with censorship. Sporadic official interference with the media as well as 'disappearances' had marked his rule since its beginnings in a 'bloodless' coup in 1999. As in other parts of the world, the Internet presents wholly new challenges to official regulation. 'Cyber-cops' working for the Pakistan Internet Exchange assiduously filter pornography, blasphemy and 'anti-Islamic' content from online circuits. More generally, as Asad Ahmed's contribution to this volume shows, Islamic orthodoxy is regularly asserted in the form of blasphemy accusations. Popular culture is by no means immune: Islamist parties have been involved in incidents such as the 2003 provincial banning of music by the pop band Junoon. And in the wake of the murder of three journalists in October of that year, self-censorship has exerted a tighter hold on the press.

Bangladesh emerged onto the world map of censorship when Taslima Nasreen's novel *Lajja* was banned in 1993. As with Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*, the banning of *Lajja* only heightened the adulation with which it was greeted in the 'liberal' West. Nasreen's more recent books, *Ka* and *Dwikhandita*, personal memoirs that identify the author's sexual partners in both Bangladesh and West Bengal, have provoked lawsuits and bans in both cross-border regions. In Nepal, two major incidents stand out since 1990 (prior to that year, under the Panchayat regime, strictly enforced press censorship prevailed). First, there was the deafening silence consequent upon the Narayanhiti massacre of 2001, when the editor-in-chief, general manager and publisher of *Kantipur* were arrested for publishing an editorial by Baburam Bhattarai, the second-in-command of the Maoists, alleging that the king's brother Gyanendra was implicated in the deaths (see Genevieve Lakier, this volume). Second, there was the more dispersed regime of press censorship imposed along with the State of Emergency from November 2001 until August 2002. While not as brutal as other Emergencies in the region, it involved comparable restrictions on the press: all pro-Maoist publications were raided and shut down the day before the Emergency was declared. As for Sri Lanka, censorship has generally been a function of the ongoing battle between the state and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. While some aspects of President Chandrika Kumaratunga's media censorship have now been revoked, it is still illegal to report on any proposed operations or military activity by the security forces, or on the acquisition of arms, ammunition or other equipment by the armed forces or the police.

The incidents we have listed here are only some of the best known, most publicized controversies of recent years. By no means a comprehensive list, they nevertheless give some indication of the terrain with which we are concerned in this book. Our intention in bringing

them together under the rubric ‘South Asia’ is to explore their commonalities in terms of a shared history of colonial subjugation, to account for their differences in terms of their locations in distinct national polities, and finally to examine the more recent connections and contestations brought about by regional liberalization in the 1990s and beyond. Even though the primary emphasis of this volume is on Indian materials, our underlying ambition is comparative.

The very fact that these and other similar controversies were taken up and circulated by the cosmopolitan media establishment in South Asia (and often beyond) is itself an important social fact. Superficially, part of what made them compelling as public dramas was the way that they seemed to stage the contradictions of South Asian public culture in an age of globalization, a period that combined effervescent consumerism with surging religious nationalism. From the mid-1980s, and especially after 1991, the deregulation of consumer goods markets joined hands with an explosion in new commercial media. In the 1980s, India saw the expansion of colour television (already established in the rest of South Asia) and the coming of video and cable; in the 1990s, South Asians began absorbing the influence of transnational satellite broadcasting and the Internet.

In this context, the relationship between the public interest and the interests of publicity inevitably became more complicated. Marketers, politicians, cultural producers and social movements all sought to establish a presence and a profile, to realize the value-creating possibilities of these new affect-intensive fields of public identification, as well as to proclaim their dangers (Brosius and Butcher, eds 1999; Kaur 2003; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 2001). Structurally, the lure of what one might call ‘profitable provocation’ meant that the boundaries of public civility and decorum were constantly being challenged. Key areas included the public representation of sex, the supposed irrationality of religious appeals in an

ostensibly secular democracy, and the line between legal and illegal forms of political action – this last paradigmatically represented by the popular rise of hypermasculinized, often violent political organizations like Bombay’s Shiv Sena (Eckert 2003; Gupta 1982; Hansen 2001; Katzenstein 1979).

With so much publicity, many of these controversies actually became less rather than more intelligible. The media reportage quickly imposed a kind of discursive hardening, a sort of dramaturgical standardization. It was the pre-scripted urban drama of cultural globalization, the overdetermined clash between the cosmopolitans and the localists, between modernity and tradition, iconically fungible and ready-made for nightly summary on CNN. At the same time, it would certainly be a mistake to suggest that we might reach the ‘truth’ of these events by stripping away the ‘distortions’ and ‘biases’ imposed upon them by the media. These were struggles that, in a very fundamental way, lived and breathed in the media, found their distinctive forms and their conditions of possibility in the space provided by a particular configuration of media and publics.

On the one hand, then, the essays in this book represent a collective attempt to step back from the clamor, the relentless repetition of assertions and counter-assertions. On the other hand, we recognize, and indeed theorize, the inseparability of medium and message. In part, this means placing the contemporary moment in historical and regional context. To what extent do the contemporary discourses, practices and conditions of censorship echo and/or reconfigure those of the colonial period? The essays by William Mazzarella on the 1920s and Tejaswini Ganti on the 1990s, for instance, suggest striking continuities in the social dynamics of film censorship. Meanwhile, Ahmed describes the present-day adaptation in Pakistan of colonial legal precedents regarding the management of blasphemy. Historical and comparative contextualizations also

require us, in turn, to rethink the very category of censorship. To what extent is it an adequate or relevant descriptor for the kinds of public cultural controversies that we invoked above? In what ways might we re-theorize censorship vis-à-vis a fuller understanding of the cultural politics of publicity in South Asia?

From Censorship to Cultural Regulation

As with many social phenomena, the harder one looks at censorship, the stranger it becomes. At the most elementary level, it quickly becomes clear that the common understanding of censorship as the repressive action of states and state-sanctioned institutions will not get us very far. One might even say that there seems to be something of a correlation between the regulation of cultural production and the proliferation of provocative forms.

Repression first: by attending to censorship only as a matter of silencing and of denial, we risk missing what several scholars have identified as its productive aspects. On one level, we are referring here to the relatively obvious point that any kind of utterance or discourse, indeed the very possibility of language, depends upon a kind of constitutive foreclosure (Bourdieu 1991, Butler 1997, 1998). This foreclosure is, as Judith Butler argues, ‘a kind of unofficial censorship or primary restriction in speech that constitutes the possibility of agency in speech’ (Butler 1997: 41). In this sense, censorship does not act upon a sovereign subject from ‘outside;’ rather, it is one of the very preconditions of subjectivity itself.

In practice, the relation between explicit and implicit forms of censorship is often ambiguous. Lakier’s contribution to this volume demonstrates this through an analysis of the self-censorship at work in the (lack of) representations of the massacre of Nepal’s royal family in the indigenous media. And Tejaswini Ganti shows how, in the world of Mumbai film production,

self-censorship is inextricable from personal dispositions towards controversial themes. An open question – both empirically and theoretically – is the extent to which the positive meanings allowed or encouraged by a certain linguistic or semiotic configuration are ‘haunted’ by the possibilities that they must disavow, but which remain crucial to their intelligibility. By attending to the particular politics of disavowal that structure particular events or sites we may well understand something important about the dialectic of fascination and loathing that seems to characterize so much in the realm of censorship.

On another level, some have theorized censorship as productive according to a Foucauldian schema. Classically, we imagine the censor, as Dominic Boyer (2003) reminds us, as the very embodiment of the anti-intellectual. The endangered word (lively, inventive, poetic) confronts the complacent philistinism of the censor (sluggish, pedantic, literal-minded). But censorship may also be understood as a generative technology of truth. Far from only silencing, censorship can be read as a relentless proliferation of discourses on normative modes of desiring, of acting, of being in the world. Censorship, then, would be not so much a desperate rearguard action as a productive part of the apparatus of modern governmentality (Foucault 1977, 1981, 1985; Burchell, Gordon and Miller 1991). We find, for example, that the discourses on Indian women’s sexuality that emerge out of censorship practices are internally contradictory in interesting ways (Mehta 2001a, 2001b). Moreover, as many recent public controversies over obscenity in the media have demonstrated, these discourses are routinely brought up against equally normalizing but quite different narratives of Indian sexuality –the compulsory invocation, by ‘cosmopolitan’ critics of censorship, of Vatsyayana’s *Kamasutra* and the erotic temple carvings at Khajuraho and Konarak as an integral part of the South Asian civilizational heritage is a case in point (Mazzarella 2003).

Then there is the issue of censorship as the action of states or state-sanctioned institutions. This raises two questions. The first is one of location: *where* is censorship? What are its sites? Where should we look for its logic and its motivation? Should we be examining the utterances and ideologies of those individuals authorized by states to intervene into the public field? To what extent does it make sense to say that the person who enacts censorship is better placed to comment on it than the person who is subjected to it? The Foucauldian commandment would of course encourage us, at the very least, to situate the deliberate utterances of practitioners within a wider institutional field. But what is the best way to discern the play of censorship in the textual traces left by its operation? How should we read the relationship between the carapace of case law and the relatively ephemeral rhythms of public debate?

The second question is: what ‘counts’ as censorship? Are we stretching the term too far if we force it to accommodate not only the operations of official regulatory authorities (the courts, the police, censor boards), but also various ‘extra-legal’ or ‘extra-constitutional’ initiatives and interventions? Some, for example, speak of the ‘silent censorship’ that market forces (or, better, the social relations that are reified as such) exert on the contents of the media (Jansen 1988). Does violent action against the screening of a film count as censorship? Or indeed any of the many ‘non-violent’ tactics by which activists in South Asia often seek to prevent particular events from unfolding – *bandh*, *hartal*, *dharna*, *gherao*, *morcha* and so forth?

What about the connections between legal and extra-legal forms of censorship? Does it matter if violent or non-violent ‘extra-legal’ protests are linked, either by alliance or overt sympathy, to those who in fact do control the official machinery of regulation? Such, for instance, was the case at the time of the Shiv Sena’s agitations against Deepa Mehta’s *Fire* in Bombay and Delhi in 1998. Then recently ousted from political power in the state of

Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena's smashing of theatres and intimidation of actors was greeted ambiguously by the national government. National political leaders deplored the 'lawlessness' of the violence, but regionally affiliated allies at the centre expressed solidarity with and approval of their actions. And the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting was in fact, to the dismay of many, persuaded to return the film to the Censor Board for recertification (a practice that the Indian Supreme Court declared illegal in December 2000).

On occasion, conversely, the Indian Supreme Court has effectively acknowledged the social force of an unofficial ban. In mid-2006, after Aamir Khan, the lead actor in the feature film *Fanaa* publicized his support for the rehabilitation of people displaced by the Narmada dam project in Gujarat, cinemas were subjected to violent, government-supported protests in that state (see Ganti, this volume). Constitutionally-guaranteed freedom of expression was thus pitted against the repressive practices of a state government claiming to be acting in the interests of the people. The deadlock was only partly resolved when a public interest litigation filed in the Supreme Court yielded the verdict that while nothing could be done against the unofficial ban, individual theatres would receive protection if they decided to screen the film. In this way, in the language of the ruling, 'any untoward incident' might be avoided. Certainly, 'extra-legal' or 'extra-constitutional' forms of censorship, particularly when backed by local leaders, often seem to carry more social force than official decrees.

Censorship is not just *in* but also *of* the public sphere. The censor's work is generally figured as semi-clandestine, shy of – indeed perhaps structurally opposed to – publicity. We might imagine a nondescript functionary, seated at an anonymous desk in some minor alleyway of the corridors of power, wielding his pen and scissors with smug pedantry (and, yes, it does seem to us that the censor, despite all evidence to the contrary, is generically imagined as a man).

But censorship, as we have suggested, often actually courts the full glare of publicity. And its agents are by no means always impersonal bureaucrats. Moreover, the censor's work is, it turns out, curiously dependent upon that which it would silence. Not just structurally – a society without obscenity would no longer require censors – but also sensuously: no one pays the provocative word or image as much careful, detailed, even loving attention as the censor.

We are all familiar with this compulsive dependency from the drama of legal process, where the forbidden word must be aired again and again precisely to establish its unspeakability. And we recognize it in marketing strategies that court bans in order to heighten the desirability of a product by marking it as controversial. Official censors will themselves often dismiss the indignant objections of their 'victims' as nothing but publicity stunts. Shekhar Kapur in the field of commercial cinema (*Bandit Queen*; *Elizabeth*) and Anand Patwardhan (*Father, Son and Holy War*; *War and Peace*) in that of political documentary have both been accused of this in recent years.²

In this age of liberalization and proliferating media the singular centralized authority of government film censorship is increasingly coming to be supplemented by self-regulatory councils and professional advisory bodies, such as the Advertising Standards Council of India (see Angad Chowdhry's chapter in this volume) and the Press Council. Such independent organizations respond to and act upon public complaints against already circulating images and texts. But when it comes to the cinema, there has long been a sense that pre-censorship is necessary. The Government of India's Central Board of Film Certification retains the tradition established in 1920 when the first regional film censor boards were founded: moving images are censored before they reach the viewing public.

Richard Burt (1994) points out that censorship sometimes even becomes quite flamboyant, as keen and as media-savvy a participant in the great game of publicity as its ostensible quarry. In this mode, censorship competes quite keenly for the conviction and attention of its publics. “Censorship not only legitimates discourses by allowing them to circulate, but is itself part of a performance, a simulation in which censorship can function as a trope to be put on show” (1994: xviii). Book burning, then, is not simply about getting rid of the books, but equally about “staging an opposition between corrupting and purifying forces and agencies” (1994: xviii). This publicity-seeking side of censorship is evident across the spectrum of regulatory action. Few cultural protests, whether on the left or the right, whether peaceful or incendiary, commence these days before newspaper and television reporters are in place, and before press releases have been distributed. But the official organs of censorship are equally conscious of the need to perform their efficacy and their relevance. When film actor Anupam Kher took over as Chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification in India in the autumn of 2003, the Board was quick to promote a new clampdown on indecency in Hindi film song remix videos and film trailers on television.

All this points to the fact that any claim to authority or power via regulatory action in the field of public culture necessarily involves some kind of active participation in the poetics and politics of publicity. Calculated interventions into the play of publicity – in the name of protecting the sentiments or cultural integrity of a particular constituency – are a standard feature of contemporary South Asian politics. Such forms of ‘censorship’ – calling for the withdrawal of this or that film, book, or newspaper article – are obviously not just silencing tactics; rather they rely, for their political efficacy, on harnessing and mobilizing the public energy of the very artifacts that they appear to be trying to suppress. That such wagers on mass attention should be a

matter of some ambivalence is not surprising. The ideal of communicative rationality in public debate frowns upon the affective, spectacular tactics of publicity – the performance of this distinction becomes particularly evident during elections, when candidates’ speeches are closely monitored for potential boundary-breachings. Publicity is by definition an affect-intensive game. It touches upon the embodied and the intimate; its mode of persuasion is one of resonance rather than reason. It often seems dangerously close to disorder and chaos, to the nightmare transformation of the enlightened democratic public into the rampaging crowd. But this ambivalent aesthetics is, we are suggesting, the condition of any effective appeal to identification and authority. Public culture may be seen, then, as a field of contest between competing experiments, often improvised and volatile, with the profitable/productive harnessing of this volatile substance. That such experiments, sometimes extraordinarily compelling to their constituencies, are always inconclusive, provisional and even dangerous, goes without saying.

Many of the analyses in this volume deal with the affective intensity of images, that unstable corporeal energy that is captured in Jean-Francois Lyotard’s (2004) notion of the ‘figural.’ But in other chapters, the censored objects are speech acts or texts, closer, perhaps, to Lyotard’s ‘discourse.’ Our aim in these pages is not to pre-judge the relation between image and text in the work of censorship, but rather to offer a provocative juxtaposition of situations that, taken together, might open up new ways of thinking about the libidinal economies of South Asian public cultures.

From one perspective, censorship seems designed to moderate the excessive force or perceived violence that such experiments in public cultural action may involve, as in the case of ‘hate speech,’ ‘obscenity,’ or – and this is an important one in India – incitement to communal violence (Butler 1997; Douglas 1998; Gates 1997; Heumann, Church and Redlawsk 1997; Strum

1999; Walker 1994). But from another perspective, censorship also seems to routinize transgression. Michael Taussig, developing Elias Canetti's aphorism about the secret at the heart of power (Canetti 1984: 290), argues that social orders are based on 'public secrets:' that is, forms of knowledge and/or representation that are generally, even obsessively, known precisely insofar as they must not be overtly acknowledged (Taussig 1999). Everyday social dynamics, then, depend upon the institutionalization or management of transgression, the normalization of a system of taboos and their breaking. In India, this dynamic has recently become particularly evident around the phenomenon of the screen kiss. For the first fifty years of Indian independence, Indian commercial film-makers rigorously observed an unwritten (but nevertheless incessantly discussed) 'ban' on hero-heroine kissing. The prohibition began to be breached with some regularity in the 1990s, but always with a *frisson* that effectively reinstated the power of the prohibition. One film, *Kwahish* (2003), was marketed primarily on the premise that it contained seventeen kissing scenes; meanwhile, critics complained that Indians looked 'unnatural' and 'awkward' kissing in films, and actresses keen to be seen as respectable made much of their visceral dislike of screen kissing.³

Madhava Prasad (1998) has developed an interesting argument about the prohibition on the screen kiss being an index of the impossibility of a bourgeois space of conjugal privacy and intimacy in the context of a social order that continues in large measure to idealize a patriarchal-feudal model of the family and, by extension, of social relations in general. We do think that the question of the intimate and its possible relations to public culture is crucial. But we are also interested in exploring the ways in which the compulsive assertion and foregrounding of a prohibition serves to routinize a pattern of incitement, a relation of desire and transgression. Here, too, censorship is not only or even primarily a mechanism of denial and repression; rather

it serves to articulate a language of the hidden and the sacred in which everything is ‘out in the open’ even if it is not ‘shown.’ We are of course well aware of this dynamic when it comes to marketing or to show business: the strategic deployment of the tease, of provocation as a means of focusing attention, realizing profits, and attracting audiences. However, mainstream politics is no less performative, no less dependent upon a volatile calculus of provocation and respectability, defiance and dignity (Hansen 2001, 2004; Kaur 2003).

What we are proposing, then, is to resituate the concept of censorship as a particular (perhaps in some ways privileged) variant of a more general set of practices which we are calling ‘cultural regulation’ (c.f. Post ed 1998; Thompson, ed 1997). Cultural regulation comprises a spectrum of public cultural interventions that would, according to conventional taxonomies, be considered quite distinct and, at the extremes, diametrically opposed – as in the case of ‘publicity’ and ‘censorship.’⁴ By placing these practices on an analytic continuum, we hope to make visible the ways in which both rely on specific (more or less conscious) attempts to generate value (commercial and/or symbolic) out of a delicate balancing of incitement and containment. So whereas the term ‘censorship’ to a greater or lesser extent alludes to the institutionalized frames of a legalistic discourse, the concept of ‘cultural regulation’ points to the performative, the productive, and the affective aspects of public culture.

On one level, then, we are interested in calling into question the too-quick equation of state censorship with cultural regulation *per se*. At the same time, we believe that it is crucial to recognize the reasons and social effects of this equation. If we began with the figure of formal censorship, then it was because state-sanctioned censorship has become the most consciously and conspicuously formalized institution of cultural regulation. It brings the burden and force of state power to bear on its public cultural interventions, even as it claims, often rather

complacently, to be acting in the public interest. No wonder it is reviled; no wonder we are tempted to understand the field of public culture as a relentless struggle between the valour of free expression and the cynicism of repressive power.

The fact that state censorship has become such a paradigmatic figure of regulation enables the complementary institutionalization of the discourse of free speech. But the phenomenon of state censorship is also inevitably compelling because of the seemingly self-evident way in which it expresses a claim to sovereignty in matters of cultural production. One result of this is that almost any would-be authoritative intervention into public cultural controversy at once challenges, and is more or less covertly covetous of, this sovereignty (c.f. Das 1995). We are certainly not advocating that the differences between state-sponsored and non-state regulatory initiatives be downplayed. That would obviously be both politically and analytically indefensible. But we are suggesting that it may be analytically productive to examine the extent to which non-state interventions remain entangled in a state-based model of sovereignty and, conversely, the extent to which the state depends on discursive and performative devices whose efficacy is anything but ‘empty and homogenous.’ In this volume, Raminder Kaur, for example, explores how the performance of nuclear politics in India struggles with a tension between authoritarian efficacy and the appearance, at least, of democratic accountability. In a zone such as this, censorship is not so much a matter of outright prohibition or the absence of transparency. Rather, it may take the form of an anxiously measured public revelation of information, narratives and images within the spectacular, performative space of publicity.

Although we are inspired by questions of general theoretical significance, the method we are proposing is one of concrete historical and ethnographic engagement. At the same time,

taking cultural regulation as an ethnographic object means grappling with discourses and practices that themselves almost invariably at once make universalizing claims (in relations to rights and/or duties) and particularizing assertions (often in the name of culture or tradition). We see this combination articulated today all over the world in the name of multiculturalism. But it was forged in the crucible of colonization, and the happy hybridity of the multicultural ideal continues to look rather more problematic from a postcolonial vantage point.

Private Lives, Public Affairs

The distinction between reasoned debate and affective excitability easily gets mapped onto a supposedly constitutive difference between Western and non-Western publics. This understanding has deep colonial roots, of course, but it persists to this day in the self-understandings of South Asian elites (c.f. Haynes 1992; Varma 1998). Foreign scholars of cultural regulation in India will often be told something like “In theory I am all for freedom of speech and expression. But in a society like ours...” Those who staff the formal institutions of cultural regulation (the courts, the censor boards) lean on this combination of cosmopolitan idealism and apparently ‘pragmatic’ particularist vigilance in order to protect an excitable, indiscriminate and ignorant majority from its own worst tendencies.

So far, so familiar. It is hardly necessary to point to the myriad ways in which this is a flagrantly ideological, self-serving and elitist discourse. Instead, we would like to push the inquiry in a slightly different direction. When is public affective agitation ‘good’ and when is it ‘bad?’ When, for example, does it promise ‘commitment’ or ‘patriotism’ and when does it threaten unrest and chaos? What are the mediations and the forms of social action that harness agitation to given social projects, reactionary and revolutionary alike? What are the imagined

locations of the affective as opposed to the deliberative in given public formations? How, in South Asian contexts, have these formations changed from colonial to postcolonial times, and what regulatory strategies have been mobilized to manage them?

We are reminded of Partha Chatterjee's (1993: 6) famous proposition that Indian publics under colonialism were predicated on a constitutive split: between an "outer" or "material" domain of instrumental politics, and an "inner" or "spiritual" domain of cultural identity and sentiment. This split, Chatterjee argues, allowed for the formation of a distinctively Indian modernity under colonialism; one in which Indians could both participate in the public game of power politics, as defined by British conventions and institutions, and yet nurture the sanctity of a civilizational self-identity away from the predations of power. And indeed it was around the time when this inner domain started becoming an important resource for Indian projects of cultural renewal that the British started losing touch with it. As C A Bayly points out, after about 1800, the British were on shaky ground when it came to "affective knowledge" of Indian life; they were "weakest in regard to music and dance, the popular poetry of sacred erotics, dress and food, though such concerns are near the heart of any civilization" (1996: 55).

Bayly suggests that the kind of model of colonial public life that Chatterjee espouses is flawed in that it misses the existence of pre-colonial spaces of public debate and deliberation. And Sandria Freitag, for her part, suggests that we would profit from exploring the debt that contemporary public culture on the subcontinent owes to the meeting between new media technologies and long-standing indigenous practices of display, ritual, and performance pertaining to the public life of royal courts, devotional observance, and theatrical spectacle (Freitag 1996, 2001). It is clear that such performative idioms are crucial not only to an understanding of the colonial period but also to contemporary South Asian public cultures. And

yet it seems to us that this line of argument risks overlooking some of the important implications of Chatterjee's model.

First, Chatterjee is careful to specify that his outer/inner division does not in fact correspond to the European categories of 'public' and 'private' (see also Kaviraj 1997). For one thing, the content of the inner domain in colonial India was much more than a private concern: it was the very substance of a shared cultural heritage. Second, while Bayly is right to point to the pre-colonial existence of deliberative publics and elaborate systems of news reporting, the colonial period introduced a normative concept of publicness that was quite new, in that it rested on the characteristically modern assumption of the abstract equality of all participants in public debate. The fact that Indian colonial publics obviously did not even approximately approach such a state did not, as Jurgen Habermas might argue, invalidate the normative force of the ideal. Instead, it introduced a new and ambivalent political field, which in its doubleness, mirrored that of the inner and outer domains. Claims to justice and recognition could now refer both to the specifics of cultural identity and to the universalizing ideal of human dignity.

As has been extensively documented, British policy grappled at every step with this contradiction – and several of the papers in this volume explore the regulatory antinomies that it generated. But what we want to stress here is that the very fact that the inner domain of cultural substance was, by definition, much more than a private concern meant that the split became unstable as soon as it had been imagined. Insofar as 'Indianness' (the content of the inner domain) would become a resource for public mobilizations in the nineteenth century and beyond – whether reformist, traditionalist, or nationalist – this inner domain would, as it were, have to be 'outed.' In other words, Chatterjee's model foregrounds a problem that is crucial to our project: namely, the ambiguity of identifications and solidarities whose basic substance is marked as

being off-limits to the cut and thrust of political action and yet, at the same time, inevitably become a crucial basis for the efficacy of emergent forms of publicity.

In fact, the whole colonial problem of asserting and, in that very assertion, protecting Indian identities exhibits, in textbook form, the ambivalent dynamic of cultural regulation. Again and again, one sees the struggle to find acceptable ways to harness deep affect in the service of public agendas, models whereby the volatility and erotics of meaning-that-matters might be legitimated by reference to scientific universality, nationalist transcendence, religious sublimation, or the ‘natural’ truth of aesthetic beauty. Thus, the intensity, the affective density of the ‘inner’ domain might be provisionally connected to the public projects of the ‘outer’ domain without either ‘polluting’ the formal requirements of the outer domain with the intimate excesses of sentiment or – even more fatally – indecently exposing the intimate domain to the impersonal gaze of an anonymous public. Small wonder, then, that Woman should have become such a central cipher for this conflicted fusion – woman as nation, woman as embodiment of virtue, woman as aesthetic ideal, woman as locus of dangerous sexual energy (Sangari and Vaid, eds 1990; Thomas 1990; Uberoi 1990). Nor did the end of British rule resolve the tension. Especially with the boom in commercial publicity during the last couple of decades, publicly circulated images of womanhood have become more hotly contested than ever (Bose ed 2002; Bose ed 2006; Chanda 2003; John and Nair, eds 2000; Kasbekar 2001; Kishwar 2001; Mankekar 1999).

One might easily be left with the impression that the agonies of ambivalence were the exclusive preserve of the colonized. To be sure, the project of colonialism set up a situation in which, for the colonized, “the *fact of difference* itself is a constitutive moment that structures the experience of modernity” (Gupta 1998: 37, original emphasis). But it is perhaps too easily forgotten that insofar as the colonies were a kind of laboratory for the norms and forms of a

European modernity (Rabinow 1989), the colonizers, as regulators and as administrators, were not simply attempting to contain eruptions of native sentiment within an iron cage of universalizing reason. The British in India also fitfully and ambivalently understood the importance of mobilizing local “affective knowledge” in the service of empire; theirs was also a complex game of incitement and containment, a constant reaching back and forth across the line that divided the intimate and the affective from the formal and the rational.⁵ One sees how this awkward oscillation pervaded the tactics of colonial rule in the history of Indian censorship, of course, all the way from the first real regulations at the end of the eighteenth century to the elaborate, paranoid machinery of empire’s endgame. But it is also, and by the same token, present in all the halting British attempts at once to suppress *and* to appropriate ‘native’ idioms of performance, ritual and cultural production for their own ends (Cannadine 2002; Cohn 1983).

The field of cultural regulation, then, emerged at once as a problem of administration and a problem of defiance. From the beginning it was defined by a deeply ambivalent relationship to the tension between the sentimental devices of publicity and the instrumental reason of political strategy. This was the ground out of which the legal apparatus of censorship and containment developed. But this apparatus cannot be understood apart from the publics that it was meant to regulate, and thus inevitably also to affirm.

The Birth of Cultural Regulation

As early as the end of the eighteenth century, the potentials of the nascent mass media – at this point the press – were being registered and regulated. One of the very first newspapers in India, James Hicky’s *Bengal Gazette*, was closed down in 1780 after only a few months of operation, on grounds that invoked both the brittleness of decency and the volatility of public discourse.

The censoring order cited “several improper paragraphs tending to vilify private characters, and to disturb the peace of the settlement” (quoted in Jones 2001: 1160).

Looking across the period stretching from the late eighteenth century through to Independence in 1947, we might consider the shifting politics of cultural regulation in several ways. Firstly, there is the question of intensity. When was there more and when was there less regulation? What were the spurs and influences on this alternation? Secondly, there is the matter of regulatory categories and discourse. Why and when did specific markers of excess such as ‘obscenity,’ ‘sedition,’ and ‘blasphemy’ come into play in projects of cultural regulation, and what can we learn from their shifting interrelationships? Thirdly, how should we understand the regulatory politics of the changing importance and availability of particular media, if by ‘media’ we mean not only print (textual and visual), cinema, and radio but also specific idioms of performance and public display? Obviously, we are in no position to ‘answer’ these questions here; each of the papers in this volume represents a set of possible and partial responses. But we do think it is worth, in a very preliminary way, developing some of the implications of asking such questions for the study of cultural regulation in modern South Asia.

British attempts to regulate the press in colonial India waxed and waned to an awkward rhythm, caught between immediate administrative concerns ‘on the ground’ and more distant – and sometimes more liberal – parliamentary opinion back in London (Barrier 1974; Bhattacharya 2001; Jones 2001; Kaul 2003). As Gerald Barrier puts it, “Caught between a tradition that favoured a free press and anxiety over all but the most innocuous criticism, the British swung back and forth from strict controls to virtual freedom of expression” (1974: 4). A formal system of press censorship was introduced in 1799, in connection with the war to annex Mysore.⁶ During the next century and a half, one sees periods of relative liberality, in which the ideal of

the freedom of the press was foregrounded, and periods of panic, in which the power of emergent Indian publics appeared as a threat to the foundations of British rule. Important moments here include the rise of a vernacular press starting in the teens of the nineteenth century, the shock of the 1857-58 Rebellion, and waves of militant nationalist activism in the first decade of the twentieth century, the early 1920s and the early 1930s.

On the basis of a steadily consolidating vernacular press, particularly in North India, the emergent publics of the latter half of the nineteenth century also saw a complex cross-cutting of nationalist, linguistic, communal, and moral-sexual concerns. Publicists, militants, cultural producers and bureaucrats were all becoming increasingly cognizant of the affective efficacy of sexuality and religion as focal points of political mobilization. It is during this period that ‘obscenity’ formally emerged as a category of regulation, and as a category that was understood as implicated in ‘sedition,’ that is, in explicitly political forms of provocation (Bayly 1996; Gupta 2001; Sharma 1968; cf Mazzarella 2009). On one level, the struggle over erotics in the printed matter of this period is a witness to the striking affective power of the press as a mass medium with a rapidly expanding vernacular audience. On another level, printed ‘erotic’ literature also became a site for an internal struggle over the relative acceptability of ‘popular’ versus ‘high’ forms of cultural production. Charu Gupta has, for instance, effectively juxtaposed the movement to establish a *shuddh* [pure] literary Hindi public in the very earliest years of the twentieth century against the backdrop of both the denigration of late medieval, overtly eroticized poetic idioms and a contemporary boom in mass produced sex manuals (c.f. Orsini 2002).

These struggles were further complicated by the increasing significance, from the late nineteenth century, of mass-produced visual media: first, gradual improvements in picture-

printing, from woodcuts to lithographs, and subsequently the cinema, which came to India with a representative of the Lumiere Brothers in 1896 and had grown into a thriving domestic industry twenty years later. The political effects of print were certainly not restricted to the literate alone, since it was – and still is – quite common for printed texts to be read or performed for wider audiences. Nevertheless, the forging of ‘national’ and sometimes explicitly ‘nationalist’ image-making vocabularies profoundly changed both the social relations and the aesthetics of Indian public culture. It also brought about a closer, mutually amplifying and mutually re-mediating, relationship between these new ‘mass media’ and older forms of performance or ritual.⁷ Here, too, we see a complex struggle over aesthetic distinction. There is the ‘high’ nationalist painting of the likes of Abanindranath Tagore, developed as part of a literary and scholarly discourse on Indian cultural particularity, self-consciously opposed to the ‘vulgarity’ of bazaar prints as well as the imitative banality of “company art” (Guha-Thakurta 1992, 1995; c.f. Kapur 2000).

But perhaps the most influential outcome of this historical juncture was the consolidation of a mass-produced middlebrow national aesthetic, typified by the “god poster” lithography of a Ravi Varma or, later, a C Kondiah Raju (Smith 1995; Inglis 1995; Pinney 1997a, 1997b; Jain 2007). These visual conventions were, in turn, definitively influential on the depiction of mythological themes in the nascent Hindi cinema and are still popularly perceived as the ‘correct’ visual rendering of Hindu deities, whether in the comic book nationalist pedagogy of *Amar Chitra Katha* or the sensationally successful TV *Ramayana* of the late 1980s (Hawley 1995; Lutgendorf 1995; Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001). In India, where the devotional gaze is often understood as a medium of grace, this visual veracity is as much a matter of efficacy as of verisimilitude (Babb 1981; Eck 1985). Although their social and political functions may have shifted, the forceful efficacy potentially residing in divine images has obviously not been

reduced by mechanical reproduction, by their translation into calendar art, cinema, video and television programming (Davis 1997; Little 1995; Smith 1995). As Christopher Pinney argues in this volume, it was precisely the colonial desire to divide the (authentic, customary) religious from the (spurious, seditious) political that gave precisely the sphere of religion such particular potency in the transmission of ideas, campaigns and agitation against the British.

Consequently, the mobilizing power of such images has also been a constant feature of regulatory anxiety. Although the Indian nationalist leadership was, on the whole, relatively indifferent to the political potential of cinema, the British certainly took it seriously (Chabria and Usai, eds 1994; Chowdhry 2000). The colonial government instituted a comprehensive commission of inquiry into its political economy, its possible social effects, and the adequacy of existing regulatory measures in 1927-28 (Arora 1995; Jaikumar 2003, 2006; Mehta 2001; Sarkar 1982; Vasudev 1978). In this volume, Mazzarella explores how the colonial censor tried to manage the ‘vital energy’ of Hollywood cinema in this early period. Indeed, post-independence Indian governments have continued this trend. The censorship of film has been rigorously formalized on the basis of the Cinematograph Act of 1952 and the Cinematograph (Censorship) Rules of 1958; as Kumar (1990) points out, the regulation of other media may be just as vociferously pursued, but always on the basis of a much more haphazard and improvisatory legal infrastructure. Of course, the degree of legal routinization is not necessarily a very useful measure of the practical politics of any regime of censorship. As Ganti shows in this volume, the relationship between Bollywood and the Indian state is an ambivalent one, neither dedicatedly adversarial nor straightforwardly complicit.⁸

Independence and Ambivalence

The coming of Indian independence in 1947 was marked by a characteristic ambivalence vis-à-vis public culture. On the one hand, the very fact of an Indian nation-state was supposed, by definition, to mark the historical overcoming of the split between 'inner' and 'outer' domains. On the other hand, the Nehruvian formula for secularism, convinced of its universal validity, imposed a stringent filter on what kind of affect-intensive, embedded representations and practices would be allowed to participate in public culture. These two faces of Nehru are evident in his own writings. There is the Nehru who, with some eloquence, sought in prison writings like *The Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of World History* to fuse a world-historical rapprochement between the commandments of modernity and the density of Indian tradition. But then there is also the Nehru noted by Shashi Tharoor (2003), who exasperatedly writes to a (Muslim) friend that all Indians should be required to immerse themselves in the rationalist atheism of Bertrand Russell.

Freitag (2001) observes that the consolidation of a nationalist visual repertoire around the turn of the twentieth century made patriotism the new mediator between the sacred and the profane. This mediation was, as Arvind Rajagopal (2001) describes, predicated upon a political compromise between the secular nationalist leadership and the custodians of cultural/religious tradition. Its resolution was projected onto the future, onto the moment of independence. For that reason, the actual achievement of independence brought the leadership of the new nation face to face with the need to make good on the promise of integrating prosaic policy with the transcendent truth of the nation.

Under Nehru, Republic Day parades, government craft emporia, official cultural festivals and other government-staging events and spectacles harnessed a state-driven and rigorously secularized understanding of 'Indian tradition' to the great projects of modernization and

development (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1992; Greenough 1995; Singh 1998, Roy 2007). At the same time Nehru famously referred to his monuments of modernism, the hydroelectric dams and the steels mills, as the “temples” of modern India (Deshpande 1993; Khilnani 1997), thus perhaps also acknowledging the potential for a serious affective deficit at the heart of the developmentalist dispensation.

The question was never simply one of whether secularism should mean a complete evacuation of religious commitments from public life or, alternatively, a pluralistic recognition of religious values in political and legal process (Bharucha 1998; Bilgrami et al 2006; Nandy 2002). Rather, as a formally empowered cultural regulator, the state after Independence always struggled with the tension between a recognition of the importance of an affective grounding for any successful polity and a fear of what such an affective grounding might mean in practice for a self-consciously ‘modern’ and ‘developing’ nation, particularly vis-à-vis sentiments and commitments that might be defined as ‘religious.’ After Nehru’s death in 1964, this early dilemma became a justification for both a stream of attacks, from the right, on the supposed cultural inauthenticity and alienation of the Nehruvian model (Nehru as the ‘last Englishman’) and for the increasingly assiduous manipulation of communal ‘vote-banks’ by national-level political leaders.⁹

Much has been written on the stunning expansion of commercial entertainment-based television in India in the 1980s; how it brought together, in a volatile compact around the affect-intensive television image, a range of new middle class aspirations, the blandishments of consumerism and a mass acceptance for an overtly and frequently aggressive religious nationalism (Kumar 2005; Mankekar 1999; Mazzarella 2003; Rajagopal 2001). From a regulatory point of view, these were, in some ways, peculiar days (Farmer 1996). In the form of

the state television service, Doordarshan, the government retained sole proprietorship over this boisterously mushrooming medium, constantly striving to reconcile its habituated “fear of the image” (Ohm 1999) with highly profitable content that was often lustily corporeal. With programming increasingly farmed out to the private sector but control still centralized in the hands of the government, television in the 1980s became a kind of tug-of-war between state and commercial interests (c.f. Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995).

But it also doubled as a laboratory for new experiments in cultural regulation. By this we mean not only the often heavy-handed blackouts that Doordarshan imposed on particular news items or on the doings and sayings of political critics. We are also thinking of experiments in the profitable mass mobilization of affect, whether commercial, religious, or political. Indeed, one of the defining features of this period, as many have noted, was the increasing televisual interpenetration of devotional viewing, political propaganda, and consumer goods advertising.

These developments laid the foundations for the media scandals with which we started this chapter. Today the dawning consumerism and televisual politics of the 1980s are almost invariably read as a prequel to the full-tilt tryst with liberalization that started with the reforms of 1991. In subscribing to this teleology, however, we may miss something equally, if not more important about the new televisual dispensation: namely, the ways in which it was a response to the failure of Indira Gandhi’s experiment with dictatorship during the Emergency of 1975-77. In histories of the media, the Emergency has come to stand as the exception that proves the rule of Indian democratic freedom, and an object lesson in the political dangers of censorship. After all, the story goes, was it not precisely Mrs. Gandhi’s totalizing approach to information control that isolated her from ‘public opinion’ to such a degree that she mistakenly believed that she would have no trouble winning the national election in 1977?

The style of information management that prevailed during the Emergency was exceptionally heavy-handed. Press materials generally had to be submitted for pre-screening under official categories such as ‘pre-censorship,’ ‘news management,’ and the starkly simple ‘banned.’ As Soli Sorabjee (1977) notes, although overt political critique was of course almost impossible, the restrictions also extended to such topics as strikes, the nuclear program, reports on family planning/vasectomy follow-up centers, and even the arrest of legendary actress Nargis for shoplifting in London. Under the Defense of India Rules and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, thousands were jailed and silenced, and – in a kind of perfect sovereign recursivity – any reference to censorship in the media was itself banned. Troubling bodies were incarcerated (political opponents, editors, activists) or physically moved (recalcitrant judges), power to newspapers was cut, a comprehensive range of ‘directives’ were issued to the media from Samachar, the central government news agencies. Mrs. Gandhi’s heir apparent, Sanjay, is said to have personally demanded substantial cash ‘contributions’ in return for permission to premier new films in the capital.

To be sure, although Mrs. Gandhi’s second period in office (1980-84) did see some highly controversial blanket bans on media reportage during localized episodes of political turmoil (for example in Punjab and in Assam), the crudely repressive measures of the Emergency were not repeated in India. But by identifying these crude tactics with censorship *per se*, there is a risk of losing sight of some of the subtler forms of cultural regulation that were developed in tandem with the expansion of the commercial media in the early- to mid-1980s. As Shiv Visvanathan puts it, the Emergency was not so much an embarrassing aberration as “a pilot plant, a large scale trial for the totalitarianisms and emergencies that were to come later” (Visvanathan and Sethi, eds 1998: 45). One could argue that cultural regulation under the sign of

liberalization, particularly after Mrs. Gandhi's assassination in late 1984, required a rapid re-interpretation of the kind of state-centric authoritarian populism that the Emergency had come to typify.

Emphatically consigning Mrs. Gandhi to a superseded past, mere months after her death, was of course never going to be an easy or an uncontested process.¹⁰ As a project, it involved something far more comprehensive than the dismissal of the Emergency as a historical anomaly, a dismissal that she herself had already propounded during her last years in office. Rather, what was required was the impression of a more dispersed affective field, one not so tightly cathected onto the singular image of the charismatic leader. The new, liberalized mode of citizenship was one in which the energies of public participation should be seen as coming from below rather than from the 'commanding heights' of the Planning Commission. It located the nation's destiny less in the heroic agency of a leader and more in the embodied and embedded impulses of everyday life. The language of faith and tradition, of consumerist desire, and of regionally chauvinist identifications might still at times trouble the sovereignty of the national project, but they attained, in this period, a new image of authenticity, the dignity of affective truth as compared to the alienating abstractions, the grand schemes of the Nehru years.

Our point is certainly not to suggest that liberalization in fact brought about some kind of authentically democratic revival. Rather, what is visible in debates over the media from this period is a diffuse consciousness, expressed in many different idioms by many different interest groups, of a tension between sovereignty and control in public communications and an increasingly complex set of claims on representation and recognition in public culture. At times, the government clamped down and silenced dissent in the old, crude way. At others, however, the myriad voices emerging from inside and around the government seemed to be advocating the

possibility of a more subtle co-optation, one in which consumer choice, religious assertion, and regional pride might perhaps still be harnessed to a collective national project. By the same token, of course, the legitimacy of the state as the final arbiter in public cultural matters, in matters of value, identity, and desire was increasingly being called into question. When Hindi movie star Manisha Koirala decided that she had been deceived by director Shashilal Nair in the making of *Ek Chhoti Si Love Story* (2002) after he had inserted provocative, partially undressed scenes featuring a body double, her actions reflected a perfect understanding of the ambiguities of the new dispensation. Hedging her bets, she appealed in quick succession to the Censor Board, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray for justice.

We are now in a very different situation from that which prevailed in the 1980s. Strategies of regulation have diversified in proportion to the proliferation of new media. The coming of commercial satellite television in the early 1990s has shifted television away from state control. In response, government has sought to reassert its authority. In addition to making regular – if relatively ineffectual – noises about bringing television directly under the authority of the Central Board of Film Certification, a 2006 decision of the Mumbai High Court made it illegal for any television station broadcasting in India to screen films with ‘A’ (for audiences 18 and over) censor certificates. The liberalization and globalization of consumer markets has intensified competition in the field of visual publicity, requiring Indian advertisers to ‘keep up’ with international benchmarks in profitable provocation. And the increasing regionalization of both television and the press has allowed a far wider range of local identities to find their aspirations and their reification in the mass media.

At the time of the TV *Ramayana* in the late 1980s, controversy raged around the fact that Doordarshan, the broadcast medium of a self-avowedly secular state, was both presiding over

and profiting from such blatantly ‘religious’ content.¹¹ In response to this accusation, Philip Lutgendorf (1995) reminds us that recitations and performances of the epics have always enjoyed and depended upon political patronage in India. And one could even add that from a certain perspective, the landscape of the 1990s and after might even look like a return to something like a pre-modern diversity of cultural patrons and publics, each presiding over their own regional turf, their own chosen ‘traditions.’ But what such an analysis would miss, in its neoliberal enthusiasm, is the tension that persists between a diversity of claimants to cultural sovereignty and the singular regulatory authority represented by the state and, in particular, by the language and institutions of the law. We are all familiar with this tension as it pertains to the antinomies and limits of liberalism. One thinks, for example, of the Shah Bano case of 1986, which pitted a particularist appeal to Muslim Law against the putative universalism of a Common Civil Code.

This is also a question of publics and the forms of media that constitute them. It has become *de rigueur* to insist that we have transcended the age of ‘the masses,’ that the diversification of markets and media have consigned the age of standardization and massification to the dustbin of history. But in South Asia, such a diversification continues to coexist with a developmentalist narrative which constitutes precisely ‘the masses’ as the prime beneficiaries of state action, both redistributive and regulatory. It is the masses that are the objects (and intended future subjects) of the process of modernization. And it is the masses that may most typically be injured or misled by provocative, obscene or seditious public communications. On the one hand, we may sympathize with Ashis Nandy’s (1995) call for an approach to Indian politics that captures the messiness, ambiguity and unpredictability that a more rationalist *Realpolitik* elides. And certainly an ethnographic approach would seem to be ideally suited to such a pursuit. On the

other hand, we would suggest that the politics of cultural regulation are played out at the intersection between such a politics of the concrete and the reified terms of administration.

This tension also plays itself out as a crisis of temporality. Against the perpetual ‘not yet’ of Third World Time, the permanent deferral of the full realization of modernity, the big movements of the last couple of decades have all been premised on a big immediacy, on a sensuous immersion. This dream of immediacy is present in the often violent identitarian politics of regional and religious chauvinism, in the promise of instant consumerist gratification, and in the fullness of devotional absorption upon which contemporary political spectacle is so often premised.

We began with the juxtaposition of censorship and publicity, in order to ask what it might mean that practices of cultural regulation seem to have become so central to contemporary South Asian public cultures. We hope to have suggested that this is not only a matter of what does or does not ‘go into’ public circulation, but also points to the political centrality of discourses on and around practices of regulation. Regulation is self-reflexive: it cannot help but articulate the terms and foundations of its own legitimacy. For this reason, regulation is performative too: the silencing gesture is not only often quite public, but also simultaneously invokes an entire socio-cultural dispensation.

The conventional language that attaches to censorship and its refusal – ‘security,’ ‘freedom of speech,’ ‘diversity,’ ‘choice’ and so forth – must itself be read as a political technology that helps to negotiate what we referred to earlier as the tension between the public interest and the interests of publicity. Naturally, in an era of globalization and rapidly exploding commercial media networks, the stakes of profitable provocation are immeasurably heightened.

But it is absolutely crucial that we understand the politics of the relationship between a generalized discourse on censorship and the specificities of long-standing local histories of media and performance. This is never simply a matter of ‘localizing’ abstract or universalizing claims. Rather, as the essays in this volume show, in their various ways, cultural regulation *is* in some sense the attempt to forge an authoritative relationship between the energy of embedded and embodied phenomena and trans-local normative categories.

Typically, mainstream discussions of censorship in South Asia, as elsewhere, are stolidly steadfast in declaring censorship a ‘bad thing.’ We would agree that the repressive aspects of censorship do need to be noted. It is perfectly possible to acknowledge, in a Foucauldian mode, the perverse productivity of various forms of cultural regulation while still recognizing that censorship *does* silence even as it speaks. But the interesting question is not ‘*Censored ke peeche kya hai?*’ [What lies behind the censored?]. Rather, what we hope to show with this collection is that there is nothing self-evident about censorship, nor about the worlds it makes. Censorship is not merely a constant forge of discourse nor is it only a ruthless mechanism of silence. As a gamble on publicity, cultural regulation is, for all its apparently routinized banality, an uncertain and open-ended venture. In that lies its fascination and its importance for cultural analysis. We hope that the papers in this volume, taken together, will encourage readers to dwell with the censors, to look twice, and to refuse to grant them the obviousness to which they aspire.

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Notes

¹ *Water* was eventually filmed, under the false name *River Moon*, in Sri Lanka in 2003 and released in 2005.

² However, as shown by a recent Supreme Court verdict with regards to the documentary, *Father, Son and Holy War*, to be aired on Doordarshan after a period of ten years, some of these contestations may simply be a case of government reticence driven by personal politics.

³ Film critic T G Vaidyanathan once remarked, in a commentary on Aparna Sen's *Paroma* (1985), that "Indians look far more convincing when they are not making love. When they are, the whole business looks forced, contrived, and bloodless" (1996: 116).

⁴ Sanford Levinson writes: '*regulation* is an ambiguous term. We often speak of '*a regulation*' in the sense of a mandatory requirement or prohibition. Yet we also refer easily, especially if we have been influenced even in the slightest by Michel Foucault, to an unarticled '*regulation*' as a means of defining what is 'regular' or, ultimately, 'normal', within a given political-cultural order' (1998: 197). We extend this insight to accommodate the performative and the affective consequences of regulation.

⁵ Bose and Jalal note of the century of 'Company Raj' (1757-1857): "...since the colonial state could establish a semblance of cultural legitimacy only by appropriating symbols and meanings that commanded authority in indigenous society, the distinction between public and private law was never an easy one to maintain" (Bose and Jalal 1998: 74). And for the post-company period: "Although in 1858 the colonial power had announced its intention not to interfere in the private realm of 'religion' and 'custom,' its policies in the late nineteenth century ensured that precisely these concerns had to be bandied about in the 'public' arenas of the press and politics" (108).

⁶ Roy (1995) stresses the 1840s in Bengal as the moment when, under the eagle eye of the Irish missionary James Long, the colonial government began to classify all published materials in a

synoptic manner. By 1867, in the wake of the 1857 Rebellion, all books in India had to be officially registered.

⁷ Roy (1995) notes that this amplification occurred between print and performance as well. In Bengal, the growth of the press did a great deal to expand the popularity of the *kathakata* genre, as well as the burgeoning ‘modern’ theatre. Hansen (2001) shows how important emergent forms of print publicity – flyers, handbills, newspaper advertising – were to the marketing of the traveling theatre troupes (initially predominantly Parsi) that began traversing the subcontinent in the 1850s.

⁸ In the interests of space, we are not taking up the issue of audio-only media here. But much remains to be said on the relation between the ‘official’ culture promulgated by All-India Radio (Lelyveld 1995) that doubles as a border-policing device vis-à-vis Sri Lanka and Pakistan. In addition, cassette technology has of course made possible forms of grass-roots mobilization that few other mass media technologies can equal (Rajagopal 2001; Manuel 1993).

⁹ Rajagopal (2001) reminds us of a practice that seems to straddle the Nehruvian and the communal political strategies: during the Emergency, AIR (All-India Radio) would broadcast readings from the *Ramcharitmanas* on the grounds that it was “folk culture.”

¹⁰ In some sense, it was of course this tension that eventually sullied Rajiv Gandhi’s ‘Mr. Clean’ image – namely, his inability to transcend the compulsions of the party machinery that had been established during his mother’s rule. More immediately, the conflict expressed itself in several incidents of sudden censorship. For example, the sudden cancellation, in February 1986, of a Doordarshan screening of Jack Anderson’s documentary *Rajiv’s India*, which some members of the Party old guard apparently felt was insufficiently respectful of Mrs. Gandhi’s political legacy.

¹¹ As Rajagopal (2001) points out, part of the contested politics of secularism around the televised epics took the form of arguments about whether the material should be understood as ‘religious’ or ‘cultural.’