

# Oppressors As Heroes

## RED ROSE—The Rapist as Hero

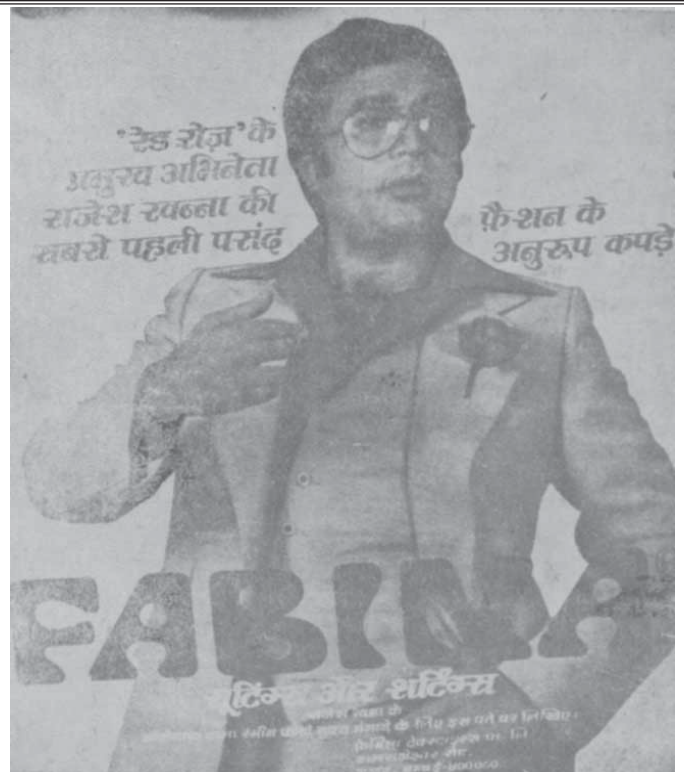
The Forum Against Rape in Bombay brought out a pamphlet calling for the boycott of the film Red Rose, the Hindi version of which is now showing in cinemas the country over. After seeing the Tamil version of this film, and under its influence, two young men in Bangalore raped and murdered two girls aged five and seven.

The film pretends to analyse the psychology of a sex maniac. The hero (Rajesh Khanna) has been insulted by some women in his youth so he sets out to take revenge on woman kind. He seduces or rapes and then kills a number of women. The film tries to make the audience sympathise with the rapist, and glorifies him as a romantic, lonely figure who pitches himself against an unjust world which has failed to understand him.

Do we not need to ask: When a woman is sexually insulted or raped, does she take revenge? No, she is often forced to commit suicide. Such suicides occur very frequently in our society. The hero's youthful experiences are only used as an excuse to put across a very different message. By making out the hero to be a sympathetic figure and inviting the audience to identify with him, the film is in fact preaching a philosophy of contempt and violence against women. The film conveys three messages:

1) There are a few "good women" like the hero's wife, who patiently suffer all the humiliation and abuse inflicted on them by men, but most women are "bad" and deserve to be treated with contempt. 2) The sex act between a man and a woman is a weapon which should be used to humiliate, terrify and degrade women. 3) A man who behaves towards women as does the hero of Red Rose is worthy of sympathy and is an ideal for men to emulate.

So this is not simply another story. It is propaganda against women. It adds to the illusion that all women who are victims of rape and violence, are immoral, provocatively dressed and deserve to be treated with disrespect and cruelty. The film shows virtuous women as immune from atrocities and longing for male domination and protection. Communal propaganda which incites violence against minorities or oppressed castes is banned by law. How is it that films like this which incite men to violence against women are openly and legally shown in this country? Why was this film not banned after the murder of two girls in Bangalore?



**Selling the Cult of Rape**

It was not banned because such propaganda reflects a culture and a collective consciousness which is in itself rapist.

Why else have Fabina Suitings chosen to glorify Rajesh Khanna in the role of a "hero rapist", encouraging men to dress like him and be like him? This is no new phenomenon. Jack the Ripper, the Boston Strangler, Billa, were all in their turn made into male "heroes", the embodiment of what male-dominated society considers "manly", that is, the ability to be violent without hesitation or remorse. The villain in every Hindi film is similarly glorified for his ruthless power and it is often difficult to distinguish hero from villain as far as their blood-thirstiness and violent behaviour towards women are concerned.

Two women of Forum Against Rape distributed pamphlets outside theatres where the film was being screened. They also explained to people why the film should be boycotted. At Oscar cinema, the response was good. At Roxy, five boys sold their tickets and did not see the film. The women of the Forum were struck by the fact that many women were afraid to touch the pamphlet and even refused to take it, while men just grabbed it. This in itself shows how the outside world, so violent and aggressive towards us, often reduces us to a state of pathological fear and passivity—fear of the unknown and the new—above all, fear of our own buried anger which might burst forth if we are exposed to the expression of it by other women. Let us support the Forum campaign!

**BAN RED ROSE!  
BOYCOTT FILMS THAT INSULT WOMEN!**

### **YEH KAISA INSAAF—Husband as God**

‘I am educated. You are educated. I earn. You earn. If you look after your family, you’ll be praised. If I do the same, I’ll be condemned. Why these double standards?’ asks Madhu of her husband. These words do pierce the consciousness of the audience who come to sympathise with the woman.

Faced with the choice of either living with her husband or with her dependent family composed of a cancerous mother, a brother just out of school and a young son of the family servant, she unhesitatingly leaves her husband. Upto this point the film shows the struggle of a woman, the refusal of a wife to become her husband’s chattel, as is the Hindu tradition. However, as the audience grow to sympathise with the wronged woman, the director promptly sends this economically independent woman back to a spiritually enslaved position, to assure us that the husband has done nothing wrong, nor are his actions new. Did not Ram do the same to Sita ? Old is Gold. If this husband is wrong, then so was Ram. But Gods are never wrong, you know. Following this logic, we might conclude that poverty is good for it is old and so is dowry ! Perhaps even matriarchy is good since it is old, Only that would hurt male minds !

Ultimately Madhu returns to the husband who had tortured her, who had been indifferent to her, and pleads with him not to leave her again. The audience is assured that she did not try to be independent because it is her right. Oh no ! She did it for duty’s sake. Understandably, the audience felt betrayed, which it expressed by not clapping at such “idealistic” sentiments, not even at the mention of Bhagwan Ram. It was clear that people are ready to think about and question socially accepted values. If you are going to see the film, try to ignore the rich dresses people are made to wear, even when they are on the verge of starvation.

—Anjali

### **SWAYAMWAR—Manipulators as Heroes**

This film presents an extremely distorted version of the age-old marriage tradition wherein a woman was allowed to choose a husband from among several suitors. But here the two heroes—named Ram and Lakshman after the mythological embodiments of righteousness—manoeuvre the two women into accepting them. The question of the women’s “choosing” is made into a mockery because the men have already decided in advance that they will be “chosen” if they lay the trap cleverly enough.

While the male villains are presented as rather likeable clowns, the women are shown as really vicious, especially towards one another. Apart from the brutal stepmother, and the scheming sister-in-law, even the “good girl” turns ferocious only when she is attacking another woman. Women are shown to be lusting after wealth, status and an extravagant lifestyle. When Rupa gets to know that her husband is not a prince as he pretended to be, she is furious and rejects him—not because of the deception but because it would mean a fall in status for her.

He then of course proceeds to tame her into being a *Pativrata* (good Hindu wife) by imposing a series of tests upon her. She passes all these tests, slowly loses her vivacity, pertness and

headstrong tendencies, and becomes as docile as her sister is. She ends up also serving him more of the food (he then kindly gives her a little more from his plate), walking behind him (she literally follows in the footprints he leaves on the beach), and covering her head the moment her father-in-law appears.

Throughout, men are shown as in complete control of the course of events and women mere puppets in their hands. (Even the stepmother is made a fool of by her brother and her servant). So when Ram sings a song in comic vein about women’s liberation: “Women are striding ahead so fast that the ground is slipping from under men’s feet”, the effect is to reassure men: “Don’t feel threatened by this idea. It’s only an absurd game played by women. They’ll come safely back to your feet.” And the weapon of rape is used to bring the wife there. Lakshman tells the recalcitrant Rupa : ‘Remember this, the husband is the only true companion and protector of the wife. To “prove” this, he appears at the right moment to. save her from the inevitable stereotyped film rapist. She then succumbs to sexual relations with her husband which had earlier repulsed her.

The vigorous reassertion of stereotypes and the comic song which talks of “women’s armies marching out in every land” made me feel filmmakers are definitely uneasy. They know their stereotypes are being challenged by women and they want to deny this challenge by laughing at it or threatening retaliation of some kind.

—Geeta

### **SAUDIN SAAS KE—Women as Villains**

Our Bombay film makers heard about anti-dowry protests and decided to make a film of topical interest. Out they came with this over-simplification of a very grave problem.

Instead of focusing on the evils of dowry, the film goes into many digressions passed off as “humour.” There is nothing funny about this gruesome custom. It is even less funny that it is women alone who are shown as responsible for perpetuating the system—one as autocratic mother-in-law, the other as meek daughter-in-law, suffering all cruelties and claiming to draw strength from her husband’s love.

Of course, since everything must end “happily” the mother-in-law repents and the daughters-in-law forget and forgive.

The last scene shows both of them singing the praises of their mother-in-law. The film makes a half-hearted attempt at dealing with the dowry problem but soon loses sight of reality and lapses into irrelevance.

—Nagmani Rao

