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Subject: open letter to IFFR

India and Hinduism are tackled at the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR)

With no less than 20 films and documentaries, India had a prominent place at the two-week International Film Festival (IFFR) 2023 in Rotterdam. And there is reason to do so, because in 2022 India celebrated 75 years of independence and the programmers of the festival wonder whether things are really going well in that country. They provide their own answer to this with a program, consisting of both documentaries and fiction stories, that reflect on the socio-political development of India over the past 30 years. The question is whether the institutional success of right-wing Hindu nationalist groups and the persecution of dissenters are warning signals.

The films and documentaries at the festival speak plainly. India has become a right-wing Hindu country and minorities have to suffer. The programmers of the IFFR leave no doubt about how they interpret developments in India. Or are they naïve enough to be advised by anti-Indians to adopt them uncritically? We hope the latter, rather ignorant than know-it-all with a neocolonial touch.

We warmly welcome a neutral and critical discussion about modern India, because we as Dutch Hindus also have our own view of developments there, just like every Indian. But if almost the entire selection of the 20 screenings at a film festival criticizes Indian social developments unilaterally, then we suspect that the programmers of the festival itself have an ideology regarding Hindu developments in India. Showing different perspectives and introducing them to different points of view are hard to find. Why? Why are artistic documentaries and films being programmed around all kinds of countries and cultures and why does IFFR want to be critical of India? Why this selective journalistic interest? We are still looking for answers.

In addition, we would also like to indicate that this festival, we hope without any awareness, imports the Hindu - Muslim controversy from India to the Netherlands in this way. This discussion affects almost 1.3 million Dutch people (the total number of Muslims and Hindus in the Netherlands) and therefore it is important that a festival has sufficient social sensitivity to prevent a wedge being created between communities, because a group of programmers thinks something of politics in India. The IFFR has a social responsibility here in the Netherlands and therefore it is unjustifiable that the money of Muslim and Hindu taxpayers is used to create tensions between the communities under the guise of cultural festivals.

There is an Indian saying that it is easier to tear something down than to build it up. Every tradition has an expression to this effect, but IFFR opts for the easy route. I invite the festival board to enter into discussions with us to enter into a balanced and critical discussion around India in order to speak to Dutch Hindus and Muslims instead of about them. Those days must be over now!

Best regards,



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