

# Letters in support of Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta

6 June 2000

Last January Hindu fundamentalist thugs, with the tacit support of the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP), the main party in India's National Democratic Alliance government, attacked and destroyed Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta's film set in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Mehta, who was about to begin shooting her latest film, *Water*, the last of her Indian trilogy, was accused of insulting Hinduism by the fundamentalists. The BJP state government in Uttar Pradesh claimed Mehta was responsible for the disorder and banned production of the film in that state. Mehta has vowed to make the film and plans to resume filming at another location later in the year.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is campaigning to defend Mehta, insisting that fundamental issues of democratic rights and artistic freedom are involved. We reprint below some recent letters that have been sent to the Prime Minister of India and the Chief Minister of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh protesting the ongoing efforts of Hindu fundamentalist organisations to prevent the film from being made anywhere in India.

We urge all our readers to write letters of protest to the Indian authorities:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee  
Prime Minister of India  
South Block, Raisina Hill New Delhi, India-110 011  
Fax: 91-11-3019545 / 91-11-3016857

Shri Ram Prakash Gupta,  
Chief Minister,  
Uttar Pradesh 5,  
Kalidas Marg Lucknow, India  
Fax: 91-522-239234 / 91-522-230002  
E-mail: cmup@upindia.org & cmup@up.nic.in

Please send copies of all statements and letters of protest to the WSWs at: editor@wsws.org

To whom may it concern,

As a film scholar as well as festival programmer here

in Korea, I find the excellence in one's creative notion whenever I see the films of high magnitude. I see such excellence in films of Deepa Mehta. In my opinion, her expressive nature and its resulting substance makes her one of the world's elite filmmakers. People in India are quite fortunate to have such an outstanding filmmaker as one of their own.

I sincerely believe blocking her creative process is a serious attack on freedom of artistic expression, as well as limiting the democratic rights of both the filmmaker and audiences eager to see her work.

That is precisely why I'm issuing this statement in support of Deepa Mehta and endorsing the campaign for her to continue her latest film, *Water*, in India. I hope other global cineastes will join in the defense of Ms. Mehta.

Sincerely,

KIM Ji-Seok

Programmer, Asian Cinema  
Pusan International Film Festival  
May 20, 2000

To:

1. Prime Minister of India
2. Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

Re: Hindu extremist attack on Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta

As a scientist attached to a leading research institute in Sri Lanka, I wish to strongly protest the attacks being made by Hindu extremists, with tacit support of the government of India, which have forced filmmaker Deepa Mehta to suspend filming her production of *Water*.

Art (which includes cinema) and science are two sides of the same coin. "Like science, art cognizes life. Both art and science have the same subject: Life, reality. While science analyses, art synthesizes; science is abstract, art is concrete; science turns to the mind of

man, art to his sensual nature. Science cognizes life with the help of concepts, art with the aid of images in the form of living, sensual contemplation.” (*Art as the cognition of life*, A.K. Voronsky)

Thus both art and science are engaged in the most central of human vocations: the discovery of objective truth and its social dissemination.

Today the governments of several countries are attempting to stifle freedom of expression and creativity of artists, as well as scientists. They do this by intimidation and coercion, as they feel threatened when religious traditions and practices (as in the case of Mehta, Sarkar/Panikkar and Salman Rushdie) or business interests (as in the case of Dr. Arpad Pusztai who investigated Genetically Modified Food) are examined, investigated or questioned. Such governments hope to cling on to power by making use of caste, religious and communal differences between people.

The Indian government's tacit approval of use of thuggery and vandalism by the RSS and the Shiva Sena to destroy Mehta's film set and to stop production of her film is part of this attempt.

History has however shown that every such attempt to dictate terms to artistic creativity or to free scientific investigation and research has ended in failure. On the contrary it is through such freedom and creativity of struggle for objective truth that every great new invention or scientific advance has been made. In order to defeat such attempts at intimidation it is necessary for intellectuals, professionals and working people to strongly condemn and oppose such actions and threats.

I call upon the scientific community in India to join in condemning these actions, for otherwise such methods of intimidation would soon be used to control free scientific and technological investigation.

J.T.S. Motha  
Sri Lanka

Attention Chief Minister, Shri Ram Prakash Gupta,

I am an artist working in the film and television industry in Melbourne, Australia, and I am appalled at the situation regarding Indian filmmaker Deepa Mehta's recent persecution in regard to the making of her latest film *Water*.

I would have thought that surely a democratic nation such as India would not allow such oppression of its artists, and deny them the right to express and discuss

issues which seem particularly relevant to a range of social classes in Indian society today. If the artist in any society is gagged and bound and unable to express the concerns of the society of which they are members, how else can there be progressive thought and the confrontation of issues which need examination, and action.

It is my understanding that the acts of vandalism by Hindu extremists and other groups have been supported by the BJP, and this is in itself, to me is a travesty that the Indian Government should be very much ashamed of.

Human rights, such as artistic expression, are paramount to democracy, and although the Prime Minister purports to support Mehta, his inactivity regarding taking action to protect this basic human right, indicates to me that his government is not seriously democratic, and therefore is dishonest.

I am registering a strong protest at this behaviour, and fully support all artist's rights and expectations to be able to raise ANY issue—social, political, religious—without persecution and censorship.

Kevin Hopkins  
(Director)  
Melbourne, Australia  
May 27, 2000



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**