

## Document Citation

Title	<b>After long fight, filmgoers in India will see 'Kama Sutra'</b>
Author(s)	Dexter Filkins
Source	<i>Los Angeles Times</i>
Date	1998 Feb 05
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	51
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Kama Sutra: A tale of love, Nair, Mira, 1996

# After Long Fight, Filmgoers in India Will See 'Kama Sutra'

LA Times 2/5/98 p. 51

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**N**EW DELHI—"Kama Sutra," whose lavish sex scenes rattled India's censors, will finally hit theaters Friday in the country the film depicts.

A Bombay court has ended more than a year of legal fights by removing the last obstacle to the movie's screening, the film's director said this week. "Kama Sutra," named after the ancient Indian sex manual, is set to hit more than 200 screens.

The dispute over the film became a national debate, with the country's Westernized elite confronting the self-styled guardians of India's traditions. The 113-minute Indian version of the film is shorn of about two minutes of nudity that appeared in the original version.

"We are in business," said Mira Nair, the director, a native of India now living in South Africa. "This is an important precedent."

"Kama Sutra," set in 16th century India, won top honors at the Toronto Film Festival and has already screened in the U.S., Europe and Japan. The film contains several scenes of full female nudity and lovemaking.

The dispute began in October 1996 when Nair tried to have the movie shown in India. The Indian Board of Film Certification, which reviews each of the roughly 700 films produced in India each year, objected to several scenes. Nair trimmed much of the explicit nudity from the English-language film.

But then another panel demanded additional cuts in versions dubbed in India's regional languages. Nair refused.

The English-language version of "Kama Sutra" will be seen mostly

by India's English-speaking elites. Versions of the film dubbed in India's regional languages are expected to be seen by millions more viewers who are not used to Western-style movies.

Nair argued that versions of the film ought to be treated the same, regardless of language. "I thought it was really condescending to say that Indians who don't speak English weren't sophisticated enough to see the same film," said Nair, whose other movies include "The Perez Family," "Mississippi Masala" and "Salaam Bombay."

A two-judge panel of the Bombay High Court sided with Nair. Writing for the court, Judge B.R. Saraf ruled that films must be treated the same by censors regardless of the language in which they are broadcast.

Under Indian law, movies are supposed to "provide clean and healthy entertainment" that are "responsible and sensitive to the values and standards of society."

The effort to block the movie has unfolded against the backdrop of a growing movement bent on preserving traditional Indian values in an era of rapid social change and economic growth. Media mogul Rupert Murdoch was recently brought before a court here by a government lawyer alleging that programs aired on the station he owns, Star TV, are obscene.

The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, favored to win parliamentary elections scheduled for this month and next, promise stricter censorship on foreign-owned media. While the dispute over "Kama Sutra" wore on, the film's Indian distributor was losing money. Madhav Chhabria of Shogun Films says he hopes that will now change.