

Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC): Notes for IAS Exam

The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), commonly known as the **Censor Board**, is an important body that handles film certification in India. The CBFC is often in the news because of censorship issues. In this article, you can read about the CBFC, the Cinematograph Act, and the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal for the [IAS exam](#).

CBFC

The CBFC handles film certification in India.

- It is a statutory body under the **Information and Broadcasting Ministry**.
- It regulates the public exhibition of films under the provisions of the Cinematograph Act 1952.
- Films can be exhibited to the public only after they have been certified by the CBFC.

The Central Government enacted the Information Technology (Guidelines For Intermediaries And Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 in February 2021. The Rules largely cover OTT platforms and social media. The new Rules have been passed under Sections 69A(2), 79(2)(c) and 87 of the [Information Technology Act, 2000](#). These new rules supersede the previously enacted Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines) Rules 2011. Read about [the New Digital Content Rules 2021](#) on the page linked here.

History of Film Certification in India

The first film made in India was Raja Harishchandra, which was released in 1893, and produced by Dadasaheb Phalke.

- The Indian Cinematograph Act was passed in 1920 and it created Censor Boards in a few cities. These boards (which were autonomous) were placed under the city's police chiefs.
- After independence, the regional boards' autonomy was abolished and they were brought under the Bombay Board of Film Censors.
- In 1952, it was reconstituted as the Central Board of Film Censors.
- In 1983, the name was changed to Central Board of Film Certification.

How does a Film get Certificates in India?

The certification is given by the CBFC which is situated in nine regional offices in India, Mumbai being the prime regional office. The film has to be applied for clearance at the regional office and then, an examining committee views the film to grant it the relevant clearance. If the applicant is not satisfied with the clearance, he or she can go to the head office of the CBFC which is in Mumbai. If the applicant is not satisfied even with the head office's order, an appeal can be made to the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal at New Delhi.

Film Certification in India

Films are certified into four categories in India. They are:

1. U – unrestricted
2. UA – unrestricted but with a parental discretion advisory for children under 12 years
3. A – adult
4. S – only for a special class of persons

Film certification is frequently in the news because of the tussle between the Censor Board and filmmakers. While filmmakers want absolute freedom while making and exhibiting films to the audience, the Board sees it as its duty to recommend suitable edits and cuts to the films and make them appropriate for viewing for the public.

CBFC Vision

“To ensure good and healthy entertainment in accordance with the provisions of the Cinematograph Act 1952 and the Cinematograph (Certification) Rules 1983.”

CBFC Mission

- Ensuring healthy entertainment, recreation and education to the public.
- Making the process of certification more transparent and responsible.
- Creating awareness among advisory panel members, media and filmmakers about the guidelines for certification and the current trend in films through meetings and workshops.
- Adopting modern technology for the certification process by computerisation and technology infrastructure.
- Maintaining transparency about CBFC's activities through voluntary disclosures replies to [RTI](#) queries, implementation of e-governance and annual report publication.
- Developing CBFC as a centre of excellence.

Criticism of CBFC

- CBFC is a certification board and not the censorship board anymore with wider intervention by the judiciary.
- Their job is to certify films based on this and the guidelines are fairly wide.
- It is in consonance with Article 19 of the Constitution and Section 5(b) of the Cinematograph Act.

What is Section 5(b)?

- It states that a film shall not be certified if any part of it is against the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or involves defamation or contempt of court or is likely to incite the commission of any offense.

The Cinematograph Act

The Cinematograph Act, 1952 is an Act to make provision for the certification of cinematograph films for exhibition and for regulating exhibitions by means of cinematographs.

- The Act states that a film will not be certified if any part of the film is:
 - Against India's sovereignty and integrity
 - Against the State's security
 - Against friendly relations with foreign nations
 - Against public order
 - Against decency
 - Involves defamation or contempt of court
 - Likely to incite the commission of any offence
- A film is judged based on the overall impact and is evaluated in light of the film's period depicted and contemporary standards in the country, also in light of the people whom the film relates to, and that the film does not deprive the audience's morality.
- While certifying films for **unrestricted public exhibition**, the CBFC shall ensure that the movie is suitable for family viewing, indicating that the film shall be such that all the members of the family including children can watch it together.
- Even the film's title will be scrutinised as per the rules and guidelines.
- Objectives of film certification:
 - The film medium is and continues to be responsible and sensitive to the standards and values of society.
 - There is no undue curbing on the artistic freedom of creative expression.
 - Certification should be responsible for social changes.

- Film medium offers a healthy and clean environment.
 - As far as possible, the film has aesthetic value and is of good cinematic content.
- Generally, although there are several minor details in the rules, scenes showing extreme violence, obscene language, vulgarity, contempt of court, an insult to the national symbol, the incorrect portrayal of personalities, religion, etc. are not permitted.

Film Certification Appellate Tribunal

The Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) is a statutory body constituted under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting as per Section 5(D) of the Cinematograph Act, 1952.

- The FCAT hears appeals filed by applicants aggrieved by any order of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC).
- The FCAT was established in 1991 and is headquartered in New Delhi. Generally, an appeal against a CBFC order to the FCAT would be followed by a second review of the film by the Censor Board.
- An aggrieved person has to file an appeal within 30 days from the date of the CBFC order.
- An appeal against a decision of the FCAT can be made to the head of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or through the country's legal system.
- The FCAT is headed by a Chairman who is generally a retired Supreme Court judge. He/she is assisted by other members of the Tribunal.
- The Government of India through the **Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation And Conditions Of Service) Ordinance, 2021** has abolished the Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal (FCAT).
- Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation And Conditions Of Service) Ordinance, 2021 which aims to amend a few provisions of the Cinematograph Act, 1952, came into effect in April 2021.
- As per the Ordinance the term "Tribunal" has been replaced with the term "High Court" in various sections of the Cinematograph Act. Therefore, the filmmakers are now required to approach the High Court whenever they want to challenge a CBFC certification.
- However, critics have expressed displeasure with the move as they believe that the abolition of FCAT is arbitrary and restrictive.
- They have further questioned if the High Courts have sufficient time to address film certification grievances

UPSC Questions related to the Central Board of Film Certification

Q. Who is the chairman of the Central Board of Film Certification?

Ans: The chairman of the CBFC is Prasoon Joshi.

Q. What is U A certified film?

Ans: U/A indicates unrestricted but with a parental discretion advisory for children under 12 years.

Q. What is an S rated movie?

Ans: S-rated movies are restricted to specialized audiences such as doctors or scientists.

