



# Banned Novels: A comparative Study on Censorship

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## Abstract

Since ages many books and literature had to suffer the interdiction mainly due to religious, political and social (particularly communal, obscenity etc.) reason. But, though legally prohibited, it was not so in care of the readers. The book which has been more and more controversial had drawn more and more curiosity of the readers in a parallel way. It was not only for the cessation of curiosity but also these types of books were read for legal disobedience.

## Keyword

Banned Novels, Censorship, Forbidden Literature, Obscenity.

## Introduction

The first male Adam and the first lady Eve, in creation had been awarded the first restriction. They were forbidden by the creator to consume the fruit of the wisdom tree. In spite of that, they had been forced to take it only by the instigation of the devil! – it does not seem to be so. In fact, there is another attraction for prohibition. Prohibition is not only threatening, but also a beckon to know the unknown and to feel that what has not yet been felt. With the flow of time, the course of human life has changed, taste has changed and with that the form of prohibition has also altered. Only prohibition has remained unchanged. As the creation of life would have been stopped, had there been no denial of the order of the creator, there would have been no commencement of human-dalliance, so, in the field of literature also, the sterility would have never ended without defying the prohibition of the influential people through ages.

Looking into literature one may recollect the famous statement–

“The pen is mightier than the sword”

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

[Richelieu; or the Conspiracy, 1839]

Sometimes pen becomes sharper than the sword and that is why prohibition is inflicted upon the pen. “Throughout history, censorship has simultaneously served to underscore and to create an interest in the very thing it seeks to repress.”<sup>1</sup>

Among many books that have been prohibited since the ancient age, perhaps the first one is the important book ‘The Clouds’, written by Aristophanes. This book, composed during 423 B.C. is a comedy, which attracted the modern education, the intellectual life style and glamour of Athens. Besides, this drama is reputed or ill-reputed for criticizing the Greek philosopher Socrates and his education system. Seeing that it contained support to the destructive activity, the authority ordered to ban the drama. The first book, prohibited in Britain was ‘Tyndale Bible’ by William Tyndale. The high officials of the church (Catholic officials), especially Thomas Moore complained that the writer purposefully explained or translated the ancient book in a wrong way in order to propagate the anti-religious views. As a result of this complain more

than 2000 Bibles were burnt during 1525–1526 A.D. But it was not only for blasphemy or condemnation of God that these books were destroyed. This had another reason behind it. Henry the eighth, the then monarch of England was famous for his six marriages. In personal life he had undergone divorce for which he had to face a numerable problem. That is why he was too much sensitive about this matter and did not want anything to be written on this particular issue. Though this only could not exempt the writer. After few years he was strangled and then burnt to ashes after putting on a trident. This is really astonishing that the person, whose translation had been the basis of the present approved English translation of the Bible, had to succumb to such cruel and pathetic end.

The 'Da Vinci Code' of Dan Brown is an important novel that was seized due to religious reason. This mysterious novel, published in 2003, revolves around a murder case in Louvre Museum, by Robert Langdon and Sophie Neveu. The result of investigation shows an ongoing conflict between Priory of Sion and Opus Dei, based on the marriage of Jesus with Mary Magdalene and their children. The book became the best seller round the world. Along with Bengali, this book has been translated in around 45 languages, but such a popular book was banned in Lebanon for hitting the Christian religion. Another book 'Women Without Men: A Novel of Modern Iran' (1989) by Shahrnush Parsipur was inspired by the Persian and Islamic mythology and 'Thousand and One Nights'. She had woven the plot of this novel with the lives of five contemporary women of Iran. Immediately after publication, the novel was banned, calling it anti-Islamic.

Erich Maria Remarque's 'All Quiet on the Western Front' (1928) deserves to be mentioned first amongst the prohibited novels due to political reasons. The brave writer criticizes the powerful Nazis of the German Army. The German government seized the novel under the excuse of its attempt to deviate the Nazis from their ideal. Apart from this, Boris Pasternak's 'Doctor Zhivago' (1957), for criticizing the Bolshevik party, Harriet Beecher Stowe's 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' (1852) for unfolding in a naked way the slave system, were banned due to political reason.

Literary works of many famous writers of the world had fallen as victim of the government's anger due to obscenity. Amongst these 'Ulysses' (1922) of James Joyce may be mentioned. This book was printed in Britain but was burnt in America. Vulgarity may differ with reference to time and space. For example, 'Studies in the Psychology of Sex' by Havelock Ellis was not published in Britain, but there was no such prohibition in America. The laws which are so strict about the books, related to sex in Britain are not so in France<sup>2</sup>. 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' (1928) of D.H. Lawrence is one of those perturbing books, accused for vulgarity. In defense of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover' witnesses like Anglican Bishop said that Lawrence was trying to portray the sexual relationship between man and woman as 'something essentially sacred'. Another witness (director of religious education) also suggested that reading the book would help people to grow 'mature and responsible'<sup>3</sup>. "In 1960 Penguin books decided to publish the full text of 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', the text of the private (Florence) edition of 1928, replacing the expurgated (British) edition."<sup>4</sup> Judgement, one after another had passed on this book from 1929 to 1961. With this Marathon judgement a book titled 'The Trial of Lady Chatterley's Lover' by Sybille Bedford was also published. At the center of the controversy also remained 'Lolita' (1955) by Vladimir Nabokov. The book presented the sexual desire of the fatherlike Humbert towards miss Lolita along with various sexual scenes. For this reason, Lolita was denounced as 'filth' and 'sheer unrestrained pornography' and was banned on the following years of its publication. "Author Nabokov claimed that Lolita was a comedy and disagreed with those who considered it erotic writing, yet he argued strenuously to have the novel published anonymously in order to protect his career as a professor at Cornell University."<sup>5</sup> In the world history, John Cleland's 'Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure' (1749) was known as a successful pornography, which was published in form of a novel. This novel is well-known as 'Fanny Hill'. Though prohibited, the most interesting thing is that, even being a book on the art of sex in English literature, it does not certainly contain a single vulgar word.

*“... her lascivious touches had lighted up a new fire that wantoned through all my veins, but fixed with violence in that center appointed them by nature, where the first strange hands were now busied in feeling, squeezing, compressing the lips, then opening them again, with the finger between, till an ‘Oh!’ of expressed her hurting me, where the narrowness of the unbroken passage refused it entrance to any depth.”<sup>6</sup>*

The author uses none of the ‘four-letter’ words that are usually labeled obscene.

Often books and such other things have been destroyed due to the whims of the high officials without any unknown reason. ‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’ of Lewis Carroll was published in United Kingdom in 1865. It was banned in Hunan province in China in 1931 in spite of its immense popularity. It is because, Censor General Ho Shien thought that the emotive feelings of the animals of the novel and the human language of them was insulting for human race. Not only from the perspective of the present time, but the reason seemed to be very ridiculous of all times.

## Conclusion

This study attempts to draw an outline of the prohibited World literature. While doing this, it has been observed that how many authors have suffered a pathetic end for composing literature, which was disliked by either the government or the society. Many writers, whose literary works have been repeatedly seized, those who have been imprisoned or those, who had to run away from their countries after expulsion, but in spite of all these, having defied the rage, they have continued to concentrate on the creative literature in their own way.

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